

Tolerating Difference: Japanese experiences with difference and multiculturalism

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Abstract

Post-Modernity, Globalization, Neo-Liberalism, many words come to mind to describe the contemporary world, but there is one type of discourse that seems to be gaining hegemonic position regardless of how we describe the present era: Multiculturalism. Particularly in Japan, a country that has since long constructed its identity under the idea of homogeneity, the adoption of the multiculturalist discourse by significant part of the academia, politicians, businessmen and the civil society become even more interesting. In the same context, as Japan's recent cultural export, the Visual Kei groups, gained notoriety in the international scene contesting many views on Japanese identity with their subversive aesthetics and performances, it bear the question: is Japan changing that much into a society of diversity? As this paper further investigates the question, it becomes clear that ideas of homogeneity and uniqueness, and the rigidity and essentialism of Japanese identity discourses remain unchanged or even worse. So the new question that appears is: How can a country in which multiculturalism discourse is on a rise and Visual Kei bands thrive be experiencing at the same time a rise on nationalism and have its rigid notions of Japaneseness remain unchallenged? This paper argues that what lies under the phenomena of multiculturalism and apparent subversive subcultures is the same ideology, the ideology of tolerance. Through such an ideology, difference is respected and tolerated, it is not made to be interacted with, rather, the concept of heterotopias works well to explicit how such ideology works towards difference in Japan.

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Introduction

Many authors have defined our contemporary times by different terms. Giddens (1991a, 1991b) and Beck (1992) make use of terms such as *Late Modernity* and *Reflexive Modernity*, Lipovetsky (2004) prefers to use the term *Hyper-Modernity*, Bauman (2000) coined the term *Liquid Modernity*, and Lyotard (1984) popularized the term *Post-modernity*. One common characteristic from this era that these authors point out is the lack of credibility in modern institutions like the church, the nation, the state, the party, the science, and so on, which leaves societies victims to a kind of permanent *malaise*. Whereas Baudrillard (1998) points out the raise of *Consumer societies* and Lipovetsky (2004) and Bauman (2001) points to the *will to freedom* that leads to uncertainty as the consequences of such times, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 2009) saw this era as a *Schizophrenic* one, in which both the apparent freedom of the market and the rigidity of the State controlled the minds and bodies of societies, serving as major producers of subjectifications.

When the literature on post-fordist societies, such as Gorz (2010), Berardi (2009), Stiegler (2011, 2013), Marazzi (2008, 2011), Virno (2004), and Negri and Hardt (2001, 2011), is analyzed, it becomes clear how pervasive that logic of the market became, determining the way people make decisions, value things, and describe themselves. Thus, one cannot leave the influence of the market outside of any societal analysis done in contemporary times. It is in this new schizophrenic order that this article positions the subject of the Japanese youth, since work, argues Negri and Hardt, has become biopolitical, which means that “living beings as fixed capital are at the center of this transformation, and the production of forms of life is becoming the basis of added value” (p. 132, 2011).

Through this new logic, capital has not taken only control of the physical labor, but also of the affect labor and the cognitive labor. Through the process of this immaterial forms of production (Gorz 2010), knowledge and affect become valued by the market in as much as it produces commercial value. This not only alters the logic of production, but alters the very logic of knowledge and information. Knowledge now is no longer a matter of acquiring culture, nor is it aimed as means of understanding the societal and political relations that surrounds us, rather, knowledge now has become a matter of adding value to yourself as a workforce.

As capital becomes semiotic, immaterial, affective, it becomes a force of individuation, shaping people’s subjectivities and, consequently, their goals in life. When the shift from physical labor to knowledge labor happens, the working hours, although officially decreasing in most of the world, actually increases in the sense that it now takes place outside the work place as well. Through the idea of constant formation (Deleuze 1992), individuals are encouraged to be constantly adding value to themselves by training, courses, and the like, making learning experience something related to work. Also, friendship becomes network, and opportunities to make friends are now considered events for contact building (Bauman 2003). Besides, the introduction of the E-mail, and more particularly the *Smartphone* has produced an individual that is permanently connected to the workplace, one call or message away from his/her boss. The work invades the leisure and the resting time.

That is not to say, of course, that the State is no longer an actor of individuation, since it still produces narratives of national identity, especially through its social institutions,

namely the school system. In the case of Japan, the national identity narratives, that can be traced since the Meiji period (Kinmonth 1982), and perhaps peaked during the phase of *nihonjinron* (Befu 2001), are rigidly emphasized throughout the schooling experience, passing on an ideology of homogeneity that is perpetuated in the schools through various techniques (Okano 2009; Sugimoto 2010). As Hansen and Guarne (2012) and Yoshino (1998) demonstrated, the populist dissemination of selectively picked narratives from *Nihonjinron*, specially by the market through the means of *cross-cultural manuals*¹, helped sediment the dominant and pervasive ideology of homogeneous Japan. It is this very illusion of homogeneity that we can find at the core of the narratives of *Japaneseness* collected and to be presented in this paper.

In parallel to that, also in recent years, the European and American continents have served as the stage for a growing appreciation for *Visual Kei* groups from Japan. A difficult genre to systematize with any simple description, *Visual Kei* appear as a nomadic assemblage of visual, musical, performative, and lyrical themes that goes beyond those of the rigid *Japaneseness* that has been produced to be what Befu (2001) called the *Hegemony of Homogeneity*. If the problem seems to be a semiotic impoverishment, a symbolic misery that in the case of Japan has been perpetrated both by the market as well as by the State (Munia 2014), *Visual Kei* seems to be the perfect antidote for such predicament, with its explosion of deterritorialized symbols that don't seem to obey any particular organization, but appear in constant change not only amongst the different bands in the genre, but within those bands themselves. In this sense, *Visual Kei*, with the popularity it has developed amongst the youth, could have served as a source of alternative *Japaneseness* that allows to break the symbolic misery of homogeneity and create a Temporary Autonomous Zone (Bey 2007) that, in turn, creates the semiotic apparatus for diversity and difference, empowering the youth to contest the official hegemonic project of homogeneity

It is in this background of a neo-liberal, globalized, post-modern age that the subject of this paper takes place. How has Japan engaged in a discourse of *multiculturalism* and *internationalization*, so frequently heard in the author's ethnography, while at the same time, reified and rigidified the idea of *Japaneseness* as something unique and homogeneous? How has Japan managed to reinforce nationalism, while the State engages in narratives of internationalization and multicultural society, and its market engages the narratives of global human resources and global talents? Why have the potential of *Visual Kei*, with many of its lyrics, videos, visuals, and body performances potentially understood as challenges of a status quo static identity of being-Japanese, dwelling into more flexible notions of gender, sexuality, self-perception, lifestyle, etc., failed to have produced a substantial counter-narrative to the rigid model of national-identity that would have made more flexible perceptions about *Japaneseness*, despite the national and international success of the genre?

Methodology

To help answer this questions, the author collected some narratives through an ethnographical research that used his position as an university student to collect narratives during classes, presentations, and lectures, as well as one on one informal conversations that provided many relevant data of how the notions of homogeneity

¹ Yoshino (1998) calls *cross cultural manuals* things like handbooks, English-learning

and *majority* discourses from Japan are incorporated and decoded by students and professors.

In addition to that, narratives from other studies were also collected, and then analyzed under the perspective of symbolic misery and neo-liberal subjectivities. Narratives found in the Japanese media, as well as in internet forums and social networks were also accessed in order to obtain perspectives from different forms of narrative production, since the things one will say to the media, won't be the same they would say to a colleague, a researcher, a Japanese, a foreigner, and so on.

Through these narratives the author found in which ways those students, professors, and even politicians and the media, accessed ideas national-identity and homogeneity, as well as of multiculturalism and internationalization, and how they used these ideas to justify actions and perceptions of self and Japanese society. Understanding the discourses of Japaneseness and multiculturalism as a *Machine* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 2009) that can be operate differently according to whose using it, one is able to understand better how such apparent paradoxical uses of an internationalization and a multiculturalism that are capable to produce nationalism and rigid *Japaneseness* could have been operated.

Some participatory observations were also done from the period of 2010 to 2014, in venues in which Visual Kei was performed. To further explore this analysis, lyrics, videos, and interviews from the performers were also analyzed, as well as informants and other researchers of Visual Kei performances were also consulted. Through this, it was possible to understand the political potentials and limitations of Visual Kei.

Thus, accessing the way the discourses on multiculturalism are being recuperated and operated through what this paper calls the *ideology of tolerance*, it was possible to come up with some hypothesis on how this ideology produced a view of difference as a matter of tolerance, and not as a productive category to be engaged with. The following argument is further presented in the next section.

Links Between Theoretical and Ethnographical Dimensions

Arriving at a Japanese university for the second time in 2012 in order to conduct what at the time was a research about the dichotomy of Westernization and Tradition in the critique of *Japanese Culture*, the theme that rapidly got the attention of the author was how in a department supposedly aimed at the interaction between Japanese and International students for the creation of a multicultural environment, so few interactions occurred between both groups and how the narratives produced such rigid barriers between a Japanese Culture and another cultures, both from Japanese students as well as the international ones.

This soon become a bigger theme constantly present in the everyday life of the author as a foreign researcher in Japan. On one side, the contact with Japanese students produced rigid notions of *Japaneseness* and of other nationalities, even among the ones with international experiences. On the other, words like internationalization, multiculturalism, globalized era, all frequently appeared in any imaginable context. The two themes didn't seem to fit. What was, then, the reason behind such a failed attempt at internationalizing and multiculturalizing Japan, the author thought at the beginning, that resulted in the very opposite of what it aimed at, a reinforcement of

rigid identities, of Otherizations, of *heterotopias* (Foucault 1984), of national pride, etc. Yet, it didn't seem to be a feeling of failure, since the narratives did not usually presented a sense of contradiction between the nationalist observations being made, and the sense of internationalization being defended, in fact, it was the Japanese students who have had international experiences that were spear-heading the nationalist revival, albeit a new kind of nationalism, a nationalism that appeared as progressive and liberal, and that were not in the same box with the old conservative, militaristic nationalism of the anti-foreign movements in Japan.

The narrative from a graduated Japanese student, with international experience, that after graduation became an entrepreneur, can help illustrate the case:

I'm an entrepreneur and a brand manager. My mission is to carry on authentic Japanese culture both traditions and pop culture. I want to assist enterprises, which want to spread their values and passions all over the world, through branding, web-strategy, and management consulting. (Japanese Student A)

Proceeding with the same narrative, the student continues her self-description:

Traveling is another passionate thing for me. I've been to Seoul, Taipei, Beijing, Bangkok, Singapore, the south part of England including London, Germany, Paris, Switzerland, Austria, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. The way I travel is to go to a local supermarket and observe people's action. And the most fun thing is to go to a local bar or restaurant and talk to many people there. To share beer or whiskey with strangers works for communicating with local people. (Japanese Student A)

What we see here is not the trope of the Japanese nationalist often shown on the media and in everyday discourse as a conservative anti-foreigner proud to have not left Japan. Instead, what we see is a student with international experience, proud to be in contact with the local people in different parts of the world and to have contact with strangers and their difference, the prototype of the globalized multicultural person. Yet, the self-described motivation of this same person is to “carry on **authentic Japanese culture**”, both traditional and popular.

Another narrative from a Japanese graduate with international experience that currently works in a NPO, constantly posting about Japanese culture in English, serves to give more colors to this new nationalism. While promoting a visit to two exhibitions (Kome and Sekai-ichi), the following narrative was produced:

In Kome you get to learn in depth about Japanese traditions and culture behind rice. Each description is beautifully written and the translation is impeccable. Sekai-Ichi takes you through all the great innovations made by Japan; you'll be surprised to see how many you use every day. Please go and have a look, they were both a lot of fun. (Japanese Student B)

In another narrative from the same student, an explanation in English for Iwate was given:

Back in the days, people in the Tohoku region were very poor. When their clothes became old, residents of southern Iwate

prefecture reused them by cutting apart the fabric and weaving them into new clothes or items. Though the fabric itself is old, the finished product gives off a comfortable, homelike, nostalgic feel. It can sometimes even remind us of where the fabric came from, whether it be your childhood clothes or your late mother's gown. This traditional textile weaving, "saki-ori", reminds us of the precious eco-friendly culture of Japan that cherishes the old and passes onto the new, telling the story of one's life to another. (Japanese Student B)

In these narratives, the international experience given by studying abroad and graduating from international universities, not only failed to prevent nationalism, but actually empowered nationalism, allowing the student to serve as a machine to produce cultural imperialism and fabricate a pride in Japanese culture. In fact, everything becomes Japanese culture, allowing the anti-nuke protests after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the anti-whaling protests due to Japan's whaling practices, the protests against the movie *The Cove* who denounce the massacre of Dolphins in Japan, and all other issues to be ignored in the name of calling Japanese culture "eco-friendly". Again, what we see here is not the face of a nationalism that is anti-foreign, but a nationalism that talks about spreading the goodness of Japan to the world.

This new form of nationalism can be well understood when we take into the consideration the words of Abdallah-Preteille (apud Campos and Lima 2011):

There is no evidence that the experience of contact is enough to erode prejudices. Instead, the experience also serves to reinforce ideas and false representations in the name of the 'lived' ('I saw', 'I was there'). It is not uncommon to come back from a trip with more xenophobic ideas than before. It has developed an utopia of exchange and encounter as a remedy for the deterioration of inter-individual or inter-group relationship.

As demonstrated, the contact with the international is not a guarantee of a nomadic assemblage, in which those students produce assemblages that are nomad, in constant seeking, rather than sedentary, of those who already "know". What can be seen both in the quote from Abdallah-Preteille as well as in the narratives from the students, are precisely this sedentary assemblages, in which one is "known" to be Japanese, and therefore judges the encounters "as a Japanese" and interprets them "as a Japanese". This way, these international interactions are not a form of creating Body without Organs (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 2009) capable of nomadic assemblages, but rather, as citizens-organs, organized by the Japan-body in order to be machines producing cultural imperialism.

This new cultural imperialism is not produced in the same way as the Cool Japan project, however, but in a way that resembles a passage from societies of discipline to societies of control (Deleuze 1992). Here, an instruction is no longer needed in order for one to produce cultural imperialism, but rather, it is the very students that see the spread of Japanese culture to the world as a moral imperative of an international Japanese person.

On this, Yoshino (1998) argues that it was precisely when Japan began to increase its contact with the international that nationalism began to be revitalized as a form to speak of oneself to the Other. An interesting observation to be made in Yoshino's argument is that this *new nationalism* takes place with the addition of an interesting

new author: the market, which in the neo-liberal era is more preeminent than ever. In fact, a news report from Mie (2014) can further elucidate this argument.

Mie (2014) begins by framing Japanese current young generation as the *Generation Resignation*, a generation in which the hopes of the youth in Japan has been crushed due to the economic stagnation. The author goes ahead to say that Critics say youths in this generation are unambitious, averse to risk and reluctant to engage in romantic relationships, have little appetite for luxury goods and generally are not willing to go the extra mile to achieve goals. What can be noted in the way such critiques are posed is that what is going wrong with today's Japanese youth is their refusal to embrace the neo-liberal project, which while proceeding to read the news, gets even more explicit. She presents first the case of 16 year old Japanese Rika, whose big feat according to the news was to set up a company aiming to introduce female high school trends otherwise, adding to the description that since 12 she has dreamed of starting her own company. Another of her achievements included an app for smartphone aimed at female high school students, according to her, which allows them to register voices of handsome boys to work as alarm clock sounds. The segment on her ends quoting her phrase: "A sudden chill ran up my spine at the thought that I had not taken action and was just going to die without achieving anything. I wanted to leave a mark that I existed".

What Rika seems to be doing is not exactly subverting a generation of apathy, as the reporter suggests, rather what she is doing is, on one hand, replicating what Yoshino (1998) and Iwabuchi (2002) already discussed as a form of Cultural Nationalism present in Japan. Rika wants to use the ready-made subjectivity of the high school girl and make it global. On the other hand, Rika's phrase about her perceived lack of life unless she could have an achievement while still a teenager represents nothing but a representation of the Neo-Liberal self, the marketed subjectivities already well analyzed through the works of both Deleuze (1992) and Gorz (2010).

Also akin to this neo-liberalization of the self, discussed by the two authors as the invasion of the market into the production of subjectivities in the individuals, is the story of Yoichiro, also 16 years old, mentioned in the news (Mie 2014) as having a company that targets junior high and high school students with business ideas. The experience of Yoichiro is also far from revolutionizing Japan, rather, some of his narratives such as "many Japanese companies wouldn't give me enough hands-on job experience in a short time so that I could move to other companies, so I decided to hedge my risk by launching my own company so that I can at least control and take responsibility for my life" are symptomatic of a bigger trend going on in Japan, mainly in its youth: the Neo-Liberalization of Self.

Yuji (2007) in his explanation of the current mismatches between the reality of Japanese youth and the Japanese companies system has demonstrated the rigidity with which Japanese companies behave. Very resistant to change, those companies have failed to cope with the reality of contemporary times. Japanese companies operate according not to the logic of the neoliberal global companies, rather, it still constantly refuses to hire *global human resources* arguing that having to train international student would be troublesome, and it would be easier to rely on Japanese students who have already embodied *Japanese customs*, and therefore, know how to operate in a Japanese company. What we can see here is also a form of biopolitics; however, it is

one form of biopolitics that relies much more on the national identity discourse than on the discourse of the capital. The idea of a cultural capital (Bourdieu 1998, 2004) of *knowing how to act Japanese*, relies on a certain model of Japaneseness. A model shaped especially during the Meiji Era (Kinmonth 1982), and which model of essentialism and homogeneity was further shaped by theories known as *nihonjinron* (Befu 2001).

From these cases, we can see another characteristic brought about by neo-liberalism in Japan, the idea of the *escape*. The critique many students do to the Japanese companies are not intended as a way to change Japanese companies and engage themselves in this change, rather, it is a way to put Japanese companies in an oppositional category to the international companies, thus, making the latter their option to be engaged with. In this case, internationalization is not being used to internationalize Japan, but rather, as an alternative to Japan.

Ueno's (2013) analysis further contributes to see this neo-liberalization of the Japanese youth with her study of Japanese female graduates in elite universities. The female students interviewed showed a preference to work in international companies. When asked the reasons for such preference, the students seemed assured of their motivations. They associate International companies with freedom, Japanese companies with rigidity, International companies with equality, Japanese companies with sexism, International companies with mobility, Japanese companies with hierarchy, International companies with meritocracy, Japanese companies with seniority. The point here is not to attain to whether such descriptions of international companies and Japanese companies are accurate or not. Rather, it is to show the shaping of perception and affects of those female students towards what is presented to them as legitimate means to achieve success.

These students self-narratives seems to incorporate the tenements of neoliberalism quite well, the idea of knowledge and cultural capital as added value (Negri and Hardt 2011) to self in the pursuit of a place in the company, which itself adds value to the individual in society. To understand this, the description of Negri and Hardt (2011) of biopolitical capitalism as a shift for producing not only material products, but also life forms, is crucial. When capitalism begins to function as a life form, due to its new form of affect and knowledge labors, the process of individuation begin to be shaped by the logic of the market. People themselves become products that should be marketed, ironically, to the market. And if on one side companies advertise their products in order for individuals to buy it, individuals advertise themselves in order for companies to hire them. It is in this sense that some narrative patterns appear in the work of Ueno (2013).

But there is another aspect worth discussing in the narratives of Ueno's (2013) informants, which is the idea that Japanese companies are simply the way they are from being Japanese, and that their internationalized selves are not to be used in ways to internationalize Japanese companies, but to allow them the chance to work in already international companies. Once more, the international experience of these graduates does not act as a way to change their perception about Japan, on the contrary, their contact with the international only reinforced the borders between *what Japanese things are* and *what international things are*, as made explicit by the comparisons between Japanese and International companies they used to justify their

choices. What could be used to allow nomadic assemblages to take place, once again only produced a reification of Japaneseness as a homogeneous category impossible to be changed, allowed only to be adapted to or escaped from. Clavel's (2014) news report on the Japanese returnees is clear about this:

Upon their return to Japan, because they have typically picked up behavior, languages and even values that may be at odds with those traditionally practiced here, *kikokushijo* often face an intense re-acculturation period, during which they are expected to fall into line with Japanese societal norms.

Clavel (2014) goes on to report that despite the recent government push to develop *global human resources*, the existence of those returnees has been largely ignored by policy makers. Interestingly, in his report, a business consultant from Tokyo by the name of Noriko Suzuki comments on the returnees experience coming back to Japan:

The Japanese way of doing business is totally different from Western and global ways of business. [...] The American, Chinese, Korean and many European management styles are becoming more globalized now, so once you have the skills of doing business in, let's say, an American business environment, the skills are transferable. But the Japanese way of doing business is very particular.

Here it can be seen how the myth of Japanese particularity, proud of being *pure* in comparison with the *contaminated* globalized countries, lives on and is used as a legitimization of the countries rigidity and lack of opening towards returnees students. The author of the report also talks to Yoshi, who he presents to the readers as a returnee viewing Japan through the international lenses. Yoshi says:

If Japan stepped into the world more and interacted with other countries more, I think a lot more students would want to learn English because they would understand it's a necessary tool in order to expand Japan.

Here, once again, we see the international experience being used as a way to expand Japan through the acquirement of international skills. Internationalization being used as a way to empower the nation. Nationalism empowered with international skills. The conclusion of the news report shows all the pragmatism with which is viewed the returnee's situation:

Ultimately, for the *kikokushijo* to be a driving force in Japan's stuttering effort to globalize, society will have to meet multiculturalism halfway. This narrow mind-set is of particular concern considering the shrinking population at home, which will inevitably force Japanese firms to increasingly look overseas for opportunities to expand. This in turn strongly suggests that the proportion of *kikokushijo* in the Japanese school system will continue to increase even as the overall number of students declines. In a nutshell, the JFTC's Ichimura asks rhetorically, "Aren't those who actually experienced living overseas better candidates for globalization than those who have never left Japan?" Goodman concurs: "It's a missed opportunity. You have this particular group of people who could be taken advantage of and the state should be mobilizing them far more effectively."

Thus, so far, it can be seen how the rhetoric of internationalization have been used as a way to empower a new type of nationalism, a nationalism that has a different face than the anti-foreign nationalism of the Japanese who protested against Koreans in the Korean Town of Shin-Okubo, in Tokyo. Perhaps the event occurred in March of 2014 in Japan² is a good way to mark this change. In a protest made that month by the members of the ultra-right nationalist group *zaitokukai*, they got outnumbered in a three to one proportion by anti-racist protesters shouting them down as they marched. As Japan moves into efforts of internationalization and multiculturalism, nationalism does not die, but it merely changes its format.

Another point of contact that has been used to operate a process of Otherization that further rigidifies the frontiers between Japan and the International has been the ways the ideas of multiculturalism have been used in the Japanese context. In order to exemplify such usages, the same Shin-Okubo region can be used. In a visit guided by an official from Shinjuku Multicultural Plaza, a space created by the Shinjuku City office, the author and other international and Japanese students visited the Shin-Okubo region. The focus of such visit, said the guide, was to show how the region concentrated many different foreign citizens in Japan, mainly exemplified by restaurants and stores of *non-Japanese products*. Thus, Shin-Okubo region was deemed as the living proof of Shinjuku's (and by extent Tokyo and Japan) acceptance of foreign culture in its territory. Yet, the interpretation to be taken out of this should be precisely the opposite.

Shin-Okubo is a good example of what Foucault (1984) called *Heterotopia*, a space for difference that act in ways to make clear the distinction between the Other and the hegemonic (the latter allowed to have all the rest of the space). Isn't this how Shin-Okubo acts towards the foreign, as a living zoo for other cultures, all putted in one region of the city in order for the Japanese to appreciate difference from a safe distance? All along guaranteeing that such differences stay localized in one specific reason, so that the boundaries between what is Japanese and what is foreign are not blurred. No wonder Shin-Okubo is a favorite place for anti-foreign right wings to do their protests against the non-Japanese.

In another narrative collected by the author, a Japanese student presenting the intended research proposal, claimed to be wishing to study *multiculturalism in Yokohama*. When asked about what the multiculturalism observed was, it was explained that it was understood as the presence of many foreign restaurants in the area, in a similar multiculturalism as the Shin-Okubo area in Tokyo. Besides the usage of this spaces as *heterotopias*, the multiculturalism going on in these places are merely cosmetic, being nothing more than a consumer act of consuming the different, the *ethnic*, the *exotic*. In fact, the same student confess that most of this restaurants have to adapt their food to the Japanese taste, which means that rather than the Japanese experimenting with the new, what happens is an adaptation of a foreign cultural trait to appeal to Japanese palate, deterritorializing a cultural good from one country, and reterritorializing it in another. So in the end, what we have is not exactly

² For more about the protest, access: <<http://tokyodesu.com/2014/03/17/pictures-ultra-nationalist-demonstrators-overwhelmed-by-anti-racist-counter-protest/>>

a multi-cultural experience, but rather, a *recuperation*, in Debord's (in Knabb 2006) sense of the term, in which the difference is defused, neutralized, and commodified within the mainstream culture, robbing it of any element that can produce change and disrupt the hierarchical balance between the *majority* culture and the *minority* ones.

Japan also have its version of a multicultural society in the way that was criticized before by Campos and Lima (2011), to whom multiculturalism is a discourse used to mask the estrangement that the presence of the foreigner causes in us, preferring safe encounters, with no surprises. As Campos (2009) himself points out, the politics of multiculturalism is constructed through the idea of *tolerance*, which is only possible through the assumption of a privileged position of that *majority* culture that can **tolerate** the *minority* ones, thus enabling the Other to be exoticized and commercialized. In this sense, Japan can already be seen as a multicultural society, given that Japan *tolerates* immigrants and minorities in their own spaces, proliferating Korean Towns, China Towns, Brazilian Towns, Gay Neighborhoods, Punk Neighborhoods, Otaku neighborhoods, etc. All minorities carefully maintained in its own space of Otherness, in order to be consumed as difference, tolerated and recuperated devoid of its challenging aspects to the rigid ideology of *Japaneseness*.

It is in this sense that Campos and Lima (2011) argues for replacing the idea of *multiculturalism* to that of *Interculturalism*. To them, while multiculturalism suggests the idea of a society constructed as a mosaic, formed by distinct static cultures; Interculturalism, on the other hand, suggests the existence of dynamic interrelations between cultures. They claim that while multiculturalism presupposes a dominant culture that accepts, tolerate, or recognize others in the cultural space that it dominates; Interculturalism presupposes the reciprocal recognition and the availability to mutual enrichment between various diverse cultures that occupy the same cultural space.

However, through the usage of multiculturalism in the very way criticized by Campos (2009) and in his further work together with Lima (2011), Japan managed to reify its position of privilege as that which tolerates the other and allows them to leave *in its land*, as long as the structures of power and domination, nor the clear frontiers of distinctions created between *Japaneseness* and the *International Other* are challenged. One of the narratives collected can help to exemplify the consequences of such reification of *Japaneseness* as the only game in town.

It comes from Japanese Student C, also with international experience, that has been through *Relaxed Education* program during public elementary and junior high school. Although describing her experience with such pedagogical style as being free and with no constraints to what she wished doing, she does mentioned that during that time she felt troubled by her relationship with the children around her, not being able to made many friendships because of her *stubbornness* and *assertive personality*. The justification for such outcome, she says, is that, after all, Japanese are a race in which you cannot go on without *reading between the lines*.

Here what first draws the attention is how this difficulty to get along with the Japanese around is not being considered a problem regarding the school, but rather, just the way Japanese are. This normalization of Japanese traits as natural goes on when she says that Japanese culture is the culture of finding virtue in the beauty of

harmony and co-operation rather than individuality, in a way to explain why, according to her, pedagogical programs that take into account the introduction of diversity would have little to none effect in the domestic reality. Many aspects in such narrative are worth discussing. First, how the interviewee considers Japan and the Japanese so *naturally* prone to reject diversity and individuality, even though she herself, Japanese, have embraced it.

The rigidity of Japanese discourses of national identity and what it means to be Japanese has resisted the changes in the society itself, ignoring the minorities, the globalizing effects of interconnectivity and mobility and the development of *liquid identities* (Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2011). Given that, the youth individual is quite aware of the discourse on Japanese identity, and sees how surrounded one is by such norms; however, the individual does not necessarily share such characteristics. Since the idea of Japaneseness in Japan suffers from what Stiegler (2011, 2013) called *Symbolic Misery*, it can be argued that alternative modes of Japaneseness are difficult to be imagined, so that the inability to cope with such model does not necessarily reflect a consciousness of difference, but rather, it can reflect an inability of *being Japanese*. When one does not feel one share the characteristics of what is framed as *Japanese*, but at the same time is not able to imagine oneself as being part of *alternative modes of Japaneseness*, what is left is to imagine oneself as not being able to be *Japanese*. Thus, the rigid notion of *Japaneseness*, rather than comforting, actually produces uncertainty as well.

Similar conclusions can be drawn for the narratives present in Mie's (2014) report. As she herself comments, "the young people interviewed for this story said they still face unique challenges. With the rise of social networking tools, they feel pressured to keep presenting their everyday life on those platforms", and that "when they post comments on their political and business activities, they are sometimes perceived as "itai," or not cool — as many of their peers do not favor competing with others and sticking out in showy ways." "When the proactive types stick out too much, they run the risk of being ostracized by others both online and in the real world". In addition to this, Ayaka, 18 years old, tells the reporter that "One of her male teachers said she was "arrogant" to even consider running for the post [of president of a student council in high school]". As it can be observed, no matter how far into neo-liberal subjectivities these young Japanese goes, they are never able to escape the traditional institutions and their rigid notions of what it means to be Japanese.

In one case, the fact that the student could not thrive in school and work was related to a perceived lack of *Japaneseness*. The perception that the source for not being able to succeed in the study and work life is a lack of a certain cultural capital of knowing how to behave as Japanese leads to self-blaming. It reflects the same logic of some of Ueno's (2013) interviewees: if the other Japanese friends can do it, why can't she? She must not be Japanese enough. The fact, of course, is not a *lack of Japaneseness*, but a more than natural presence of a different form of Japaneseness that is not recognized in its difference. Another narrative of a student with international schooling background, complained about friends who, during a reunion of past school colleagues, had commented on some of her behaviors as not proper *for a Japanese*. Another interviewee frequently mentioned how her family usually told her "but you are Japanese" as a response to some of her behavior.

The fact that many Japanese, even when in contact with different forms of Japaneseness, still rely on the argument of it *not being Japanese* can be better understood by the concept of *heteronomous societies* from Castoriadis (1997). According to him, heteronomous societies attribute their imaginaries, and national-identity is an imaginary as Anderson (2006) shows us, to an extra-social authority. Not only Befu's (2001) work show us how the narrative of national identity often relies more on essentialist views rather than on socially constructed ones, the narratives presented also show such ideas. It also shows how some Japanese detach themselves from their access on Japaneseness. The narrative is not constructed within the argument of how they represent a form of Japaneseness and I represent another, something that the work of Lourenção (2010) also shows, but rather that such characteristics are the characteristics of Japan, and I am simply exposing them. In Lourenção's study of the *machines of Japaneseness*, he argues that the construction of Japaneseness requires machines that can activate something he calls *becoming-Japanese*. Since such becoming could be activated by different machines, each machine can, thus, produce different forms of Japaneseness. However, even throughout his argumentation, Lourenção is aware that this is not how the idea of Japaneseness is often seen by both the "Japanese" as well as by the "non-Japanese".

As Hansen and Guarne (2012, p. iii) points out:

Although recent years have registered a significant shift away from such essentialist depictions [of *Japaneseness*] in the academia, there remains a persistent social agreement that sustains as irrefutable "common sense" in regard to reified ideas of Japaneseness and Japan itself. This ubiquitous and resilient characterization is a means by which being Japanese, both personal and national, is informed, or indeed for some formed, via macro pressures encountered in one's daily social life.

The continuation of the narrative from Japanese Student C takes a turn after the interviewee refers to her experience in high school. Now, she says that, when facing high school, she noticed what the author has framed to her as *Education aimed at building the 'ideal Japanese'*. At this moment she says that the education has shifted towards a single objective, to get the students inside famous universities, usually Tokyo University. She proceeds to explain that this happens because Japan *is still* a society that relies on educational background in which more than the grades obtained or the content learned, what matters is which university you attended. Here she gives her version of what is the Japanese model of success: you go to a good university, you get in a good company; this is the way. Her experience with such ideology is explained next, when after an open campus visit she felt inclined to join another university, an international oriented university, after being confronted by some questions after such visit. However, the new decision to take such university as her goal did not please her teacher who obliged her to take the National universities and the famous private universities as priority, since, according to her, the university she intended to take was not famous enough. At this moment she described her feelings as taking a test not for herself, but for the sake of the school's reputation.

Again, some conclusions can be taken from this. First, the conceptualization of Japan as *still* a society that relies on education background as the most important form of cultural capital can be argued to show a certain feeling of anachronism in such a characteristic. To say it is *still* something means it *still* hasn't changed, and it can be

argued that it also demonstrates a desire for such a change to happen, or an expectation that it already should have. The other conclusion that can be taken comes from the final part of such narrative, when the conclusion reached is that the test was taken for the school, and not for the student. Here it becomes explicit the idea of how the individual refuses to take it as its goal, framing it instead as the institution's goal, thus, differentiating the two categories and already pointing out to some of the limitations felt. Here again, as in the case of the narratives collected by Ueno (2013), the rigid Japanese institution acts producing the limitation, and the more international university, as the international company, acts as an escape opportunity from Japan. The same student talked to the author in a later period after the first interview, and when confronted by the topic of internationalization in Japan, replied:

I feel ashamed this is partly true in Japan. [...] Japanese people are abusing vague words such as "global" or "*kokusai ka*", but I'm always wondering how many people in this country truly absorbed the meaning. [...] We're still in a chaotic state in terms of *global-ka shakai*. (Japanese Student C)

In all these cases, another point to be made is that of *difference* and the *international* as escape. *Difference* and *internationalization* are either to be tolerated, or to be utilized as cultural capital to escape Japan. Japan itself is immutable, and looking at how students narrate their views on it makes it very clear the *symbolic misery* in place that does not allow imagining “*an other Japan*”.

If this is the case of how the ideology of tolerance operates in regards to the *difference* as a category of multiculturalism, then it can be argued that this is the same ideology working to neutralize the potential subversion of Visual Kei in Japan. By making it being seem as a *difference* to be *tolerated*. Yet, it is important to say that, in the case of Visual Kei too, the performances of subversion are subject to the creation of *heterotopias*. Since the purpose of creating heterotopic spaces is to make difference visible and localized as a delimited action, through this apparent tolerant environment towards difference, in which no one is banned of having their space, the control apparatus is actually more efficient, since now all the difference is located in particular places, easier to control, and with the semiotic effect of showcasing difference as a wild animal in a zoo's cage: It is ok for it to be in a cage, but if released and allowed amongst us, it would only wrack havoc and produce danger and instability. Here, too, the ideology of tolerance does its work to neutralize the presence of difference as a possible subversive element to the rigidity of *national identity discourses*.

Final Considerations

It can be argued, after the theoretical consideration and the analyses of the narratives presented, that the escape strategy used by the Japanese youth to cope with the uncertainties presented to them have political consequences. The *symbolic misery* (Stiegler 2011, 2013) produced by Japanese schools regarding the models of Japaneseness, that fails to see the *becoming* aspect of Japaneseness (Lourenção 2010) and its multitude of modes of individuation, ends up transforming the Japanese society in a *heteronomous society* (Castoriadis 1997) that sees its characteristics not as being socially constructed, but rather, as being natural and immutable. If such

categories are considered to be immutable, the consciousness and desire to change them are unlikely to be produced. On the other hand, the new forms of labor that demands affects and knowledge to be at the service of the market (Berardi 2009; Marazzi 2008, 2011; Virno 2004) produces a biopolitical capitalism that produces life forms (Negri and Hardt 2001 2011), and that makes individuals and their knowledge to be valued according to the values that are given to them by the market (Gorz 2010). Internationalization is, as well, only valued to the extent that it can produce either cultural capital to become a *global talent*, or in as much as it can help Japan expand its culture and power towards others. When it does not promote any, international students are framed as social pariahs, rejected by Japanese companies that prefer already domesticated Japanese students, ignored by policy makers as returnees struggling to conform in schools, or too different people forced to take the path of international schools, international universities, and international companies. With multiculturalism the same happens, difference is only promoted to the extent that it allows Japan to pose as a liberal country, capable of the grandeur of *tolerating* different people in its territory, as long as they remain in the spaces allocated for them. If it is neutralized, exoticized, and commodified for consumptions by the Japanese, multiculturalism is welcomed; but if it becomes a source of challenge to the rigid model of Japaneseness and its ideology of homogeneity, then the theories of Japanese uniqueness is reinforced and rigidified.

When we look to the migrant *minorities* in Japan, we can see the same tolerance strategies, and the consequences of the politics of escape. The fact that one can make a trip to the small neighborhood of Shin-Okubo to see the *ethnic diversity* within Tokyo is not a point towards multiculturalism, is a point against it, since ethnic diversity is localized, separated, easily identifiable and dislocated from the mainstream. *We let you be yourself, as long as you keep it to yourself. We encourage your ethnic schools, the more you get all Brazilians to be with Brazilians instead of showing their difference in Japanese school, the best for us.* Again, the apparent tolerance makes it a more effective form of control: since ethnic communities can be formed and be dependable on their own institutions, the demand for changes in the mainstream Japanese institutions to deal with diversity are lesser and lesser, thus, Japanese institutions no longer have any barriers to further the project of a single homogeneous *Japaneseness*.

With Visual Kei, similar things happen. What makes it (and sub-cultures in general) so localized, both on space and time, is precisely what makes it available in a country with so much restraint to diversity without jeopardizing any identity construct enforced in Japan. Everyone gets their time off on Sunday to dress as different as they like, but on Monday, is back to black suits and school uniforms again. Here lays, perhaps, the biggest limitation of multiculturalism and the ideology of tolerance towards diversity and difference: A subversion that is 'allowed' cannot subvert.

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