Youth, Intimacy, and Blood: Media and Nationalism in Contemporary Japan

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Japanese history has become an explosive political issue in the media today, particularly in the journalistic coverage of politicians' statements and of recurring questions of textbook whitewashing. But as scholars of Japan and Asia are aware, these perspectives constitute only a portion a much wider public debate surrounding historical reconciliation in Japan. As an anthropologist who studies youth culture and media, I have been disturbed by the narrow range of examples that tend to be relied upon in coverage of nationalism in Japan. I offer as a contrast examples from my own research on Japanese rap music and anime.

Although these minor media forms tend to attract smaller audiences, I would argue they exhibit certain characteristics, notably a sense of in-group intimacy, which may be increasingly important in today's digitally networked era. While it is worth attending to the size of media audiences in determining a message's significance, we shouldn't neglect questions of how and why some media forms, even if they are more limited in reach, can be extremely powerful because they are engaging, persuasive, and familiar. This intimacy which fans feel towards certain media forms is likely to become an increasingly crucial consideration as media migrates to "narrowcast" channels modeled on ideas of socially networked communities (Mixi, 2ch., YouTube, the blogosphere, etc.).

Importantly, this sense of intimacy can in some situations reinforce a notion of an imagined community that can be transnational, and hence, draw into question key assumptions of nationalist arguments. To illustrate these points, I focus two nationalist authors – Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarô and manga artist Kobayashi Yoshinori – and compare their works with a recent anime TV series Blood+ and a song by the Japanese rapper Hannya about the sinking of the Yamato battleship. This is not to deny that Japanese nationalism may well be on the rise. Indeed, variety of media events in 2006 can be viewed as symbolic of a rising nationalism in Japan. Examples include Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, Tokyo governor Ishihara's call for the teaching of patriotism in Japan's schools, and recent manga books by Kobayashi Yoshinori which celebrate Yasukuni and aim to exonerate Japan's convicted war criminals. In March 2007, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo came under fire for denying there was military coercion in the sexual slavery of "comfort women" during the Pacific War. A comic strip by Japanese-American artist Tak Toyoshima and which appeared in the Boston-area free paper The Weekly Dig illustrates the outrage felt in the US, and draws attention to the heightened tensions with China.

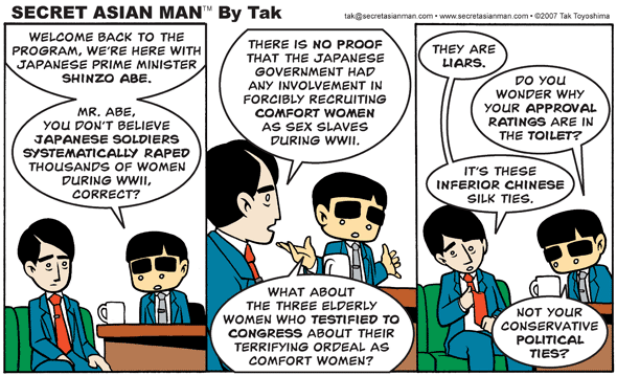

Figure 1: © Tak Toyoshima, March 27, 2007, http://secretasianman.com

Meanwhile, Norimitsu Onishi of the New York Times reports that the US House of Representatives considering a non-binding resolution "that would call on Japan to unequivocally acknowledge and apologize for its brutal mistreatment of women" (Onishi 2007).

But this "Japan" is not all Japanese, and herein lies some of the danger of distortion in the coverage of Japanese nationalism. It is becoming almost a truism to regard Japan's younger generation as emblematic of a rising Japanese nationalism, but when scholars and reporters highlight such nationalist messages, even when portraying them in a critical light, we risk reinforcing the impression that progressive, or at least alternative voices, are largely absent from youth-oriented media. I might add that part of the impetus for this essay comes from contacts from reporters in the summer of 2006. One British reporter wanted examples of "right-wing, nationalist Japanese rap." When I said that most (though not all) Japanese rap tended to espouse progressive politics, the reporter expressed disinterest, saying in effect, "That's not news." An American reporter in Tokyo contacted me for comments on right-wing manga, and she too was uninterested in other examples of left-leaning manga.

It seems difficult to deny that the volatility inherent in global media appears to be increasing. Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, digital camera photos of torture at Abu Ghraib, cell phone video of Saddam Hussein's hanging are just some examples of how the circulation of media images often exceeds traditional boundaries of editorial restraint, such that border crossing scandals seem likely to increase in the coming years. How then can we interpret these flows? One step is to widen the scope of media channels considered, we can observe a more complex relationship between transnational media flows and ideas of nationalism. By comparing nationalist authors with Japanese anime and rap, I hope to illustrate parallels and differences between these media forms provide touchstones for analyzing the increasingly complex relationship between popular culture and national identity. In particular, I propose that we should pay greater attention (1) to the ways that Japanese national identity is increasingly blurred with transnational identities, and (2) to differences in media influence that relate not only to the size of the audience, but more importantly to the intimacy between message and audience. By highlighting "intimacy" rather than "audience ratings," I want to suggest that the mass culture/subculture divide is about much more than numbers, but also about affect.[1]

Put simply, we are witnessing a shift from an age of Nielsen ratings to an age of Google relevance. In the world of Google, value is measured not by "how many view," but by "who is linked to whom." We see this shift in the explosion of uses of the digital technology that have not, contrary to some initial predictions, replaced mass media, but which continue to evolve in often unpredictable ways as part of emerging communities of communication.

The Internet era is still in its infancy, yet even so we are witnessing the rapid growth of alternative communication channels, including in Japan, blogs, BBS sites such as 2 Channel, social networking online spaces such as Mixi, and the viral video site YouTube, used widely in both

Japan and the US. With these, and with peer-to-peer software that enables unauthorized file sharing of media including music albums and anime programs (often translated by fans), it is increasingly important that the value of media should not be associated solely to the number of people a particular message reaches, but perhaps more importantly, in terms of the sense of social connection which media messages generate. The idea of social intimacy is meant as a shorthand to acknowledge that the attitudes of close friends are likely to carry much greater weight than a newspaper article, essay, or editorial. Now that media companies themselves aim to mimic the social networks of friends, might this alter the relationship between media and nationalism?

Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1991: 6) offered a definition of the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." He goes on to say that communities are to be distinguished "not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Ibid.). In Anderson's historical analysis of nationalism, it was print media, travel, and civil bureaucracy that reinforce the specific character of such imagined communities, and thereby lay the groundwork for thinking about the relationship between media and nationalism. The intervention I propose is that global media introduces the widening possibility of imagining communities across national and ethnic boundaries in ways that conflict with more traditional notions of nationalism. At one level, with the expanding nature of global capitalism and the ways security threats (and responses) are increasingly conceived in fluid, transnational terms, the "sovereignty" element of Anderson's equation is shifting. While some media messages aim to consolidate the sovereignty of Japanese nation through the reinforcement of a particular view of history, as we will see in the right-leaning essay and manga discussed below, other media forms draw attention to transnationally imagined communities, for example, as artist-fan groups surrounding particular cultural styles, of which anime and hip-hop are just two of the many possible examples, but also in terms of transnationally related social categories, such as "victims of war." To explore these issues, I begin with a brief discussion of Ishihara and Kobayashi as two self-consciously nationalist authors, then discuss some recent scholarship on Japan pointing to fractures in the imagining of the national community. I then describe some alternative perspectives from anime and rap before concluding with a discussion of media, intimacy, and national identity.

War, Ignorance, and Youth – A View from the Right

An essay by Tokyo governor Ishihara (2006) offers a place to begin because he offers a paradigmatic example of a Japanese nationalism that begins with a kind of historical revisionism related to World War II. Published in the 1 July 2006 issue of the journal Bungei Shunju, the article makes a case for revising Japan's law on education. Ishihara blames the Allied Occupation Forces for distorting Japan's educational system, and argues that now, 60 years later, is the time to revise the educational system to incorporate policies aimed at producing "patriotism" or aikokushin (literally, "feeling love for the country") in Japan's youth. In his words,

> One could say that the lack of knowledge that children and today's young people have towards Japan's modern and recent history, and the failure to attend to the affliction and losses suffered due to Japan's defeat at the hands of America and other nations, has produced a kind of masochistic attitude. (Ishihara 2006: 116)

Ishihara places blame directly on "media" for failing to teach the ways Japan was crushed by America. Ishihara thus sees schools as a necessary antidote to the media's failure to teach.

Governor Ishihara zeroes in on the ignorance of

youth as a particularly worrisome feature of contemporary Japan. He relates a story told to him by a WWII pilot. The pilot, while standing on a commuter train, overheard a couple of young people talking:

> "Hey, did you know that 50 years ago Japan and America were at war?"
> "What? No way."
> "Idiot. It's the truth."
> "Are you serious? Who won?"

As Ishihara relates it, the pilot, hearing this, experienced such a shock that he had to get off the train and sit down on a bench on the train platform to recover. Here the victim is the pilot, and the countless other Japanese who suffered as a result of WWII. For Ishihara, the source of the problem is the lack of historical knowledge that leads to such confusion on the part of young people. What is striking about Ishihara's logic, however, is the limited way in which he portrays militarism, nation and youth. Rhetorically, it's quite powerful, but logically, it ignores as much history as the youths on the train. Because Ishihara highlights the moment when Japan is already at war with the US, he ignores the decisions that went into Japan's imperialist expansion prior to being "smashed by the US."

Governor Ishihara relies on more than simple hyperbole, however. He also aims to instill a sense of intimacy through a logic of "patriotism" or, literally, the feeling of love for one's country (aikokushin), that begins with "affection" (aichaku).

> To explain this abstract word "love" (ai) in easy to understand terms, we can say it relates to "affection." For us, we live by embracing our affection for our families, the homes we live in, the things we use, or the towns we belong to, and our society. That means that of course the nation itself (kuni sono mono) is something we can feel affection towards. That's the meaning of "love of nation" (aikoku). (Ishihara 2006: 112)

In a striking rhetorical flourish, Ishihara uses the example of kamikaze pilots, and their desire to protect their families, as an example of how love for one's family naturally entails love for one's country. As Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002) shows in her book about cherry blossom imagery, this ideological short-circuit helped produce the tokkôtai suicide pilots among the country's elite youth. Here was see an especially extreme notion of sovereignty, following Anderson's terminology, for the imagining of community, romanticizing suicide missions as the pinnacle of love for one's country.

In proposing that we consider more carefully intimacy in media, I would argue that intimacy operates on two levels: in terms of the media form (email being more intimate that a monthly paper journal, for example) and also in the narrative structure of the message, that is, in form and content. Here Ishihara illustrates the latter in his skill at arguing for a kind of affection towards the nation that arises naturally out of affection for one's family, home, and hometown. Although the media form—thick, serious monthly for intellectually-oriented adults—is not terribly intimate, the political message neatly erases history while attempting to convey an intimate relationship between the readers and the nation.

Manga, arguably, provides a more intimate media form, given its visuality. The manga artist Kobayashi Yoshinori whose right-leaning polemics are aptly subtitled "Declaration of Arrogance" (Gomanism sengen) uses the visuals to place himself in his comics as the outraged, screaming artist, face-to-face in a sense with the reader. In the past couple years, he published comic volumes defending the Yasukuni Shrine

and the "so-called A-Class war criminals" (iwayuru A-kyû senpan) (Kobayashi 2005; Kobayashi 2006). In the volume about the war criminals, he too singles out the ignorance of youth, using a young woman who blithely equates General Tojo with Hitler. To this schoolgirl who knows nothing, Kobayashi presents his own screaming, comic likeness to set the record straight: Tojo was just a military man, following orders, and was not nearly the most reactionary of the military leaders. Tojo was just in the wrong place, at the wrong time, doing what any self-respecting person would do if called upon by the emperor at that time. Koboyashi depicts Tojo's rise to political power, arguing that the general was far less extreme than many in the military at the time.

While Kobayashi does take a more detailed look at the steps leading up to the conflict with the US, he offers above all an apologia that aims to exonerate those caught in difficult circumstances. I should underscore that the popularity of both Ishihara and Kobayashi is considerable, and their arguments resonate with the many Japanese who feel that Japan "has already apologized enough" (a line I hear from some of my Japanese friends) and who argue that China is cynically using opposition to visits to Yasukuni shrine as a pretext for disguising the Chinese government's own failings and to press for further concessions from Japan. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that the Japanese have not achieved a national consensus on this issue, and, moreover, are struggling with the very idea of what "national consensus" means today.

Fractures from Within, Pressures from Without

At the same time that some commentators see a rising nationalism in Japan, others draw attention to growing contradictions in Japan's postwar system, a system that had been successful in generating a broad consensus about national direction, but which seems less compelling today. Anthropologists William Kelly and Merry White (Kelly and White 2006: 65) point to a combination of global and national changes that are forcing a re-organization of social institutions such that Japan is at "a moment both of residual dysfunction and of emergent understandings and arrangements." The "lost decade" of the 1990s, which meant not only a prolonged economic recession, also a called into question of notions of Japan's national order. The idea that all Japanese are middle-class is waning as more people talk about the growing divide between Japan's "winners and losers" (kachigumi makegumi). Kelly and White key in on other harbingers of change in Japan's national order in terms of the "5 S's": students, whose increasing reliance on private cram schools has distorted the concept of a meritocratic education system; slackers, the freeters and NEET [2] who either can't or won't find stable careers; singles, the young people who delay marriage and threaten the safety net of the family that the state has relied on to cushion "restructuring" layoffs; seniors, who represent a growing proportion of the population, and whose contributions to, and drains on, society remain uncertain; and strangers, Nikkeijin and other foreign laborers who bring alternative sensibilities and disrupt the notion of a homogeneous Japan.

John Nathan (Nathan 2004) argues that is experiencing "a national identity crisis," exemplified by reactionary struggles to edit history textbooks, and also by the prominence of new entrepreneurs who shake up long-held corporate practices (Nathan 2004: 9). Nathan's book is a fascinating and valuable overview of some of the pivotal changes in contemporary Japan portrayed through the words of a number of key players. My objection, however, arises from the idea that contests between people like governor Ishihara on the right and left-leaning novelist Oe Kenzaburo represent, as Nathan concludes his book, "the poles of ambivalence that continues to be a troubling condition of contemporary Japanese life" (p. 253). The idea of "ambivalence" risks giving the image of an

internal debate that can be resolved by overcoming such two-mindedness. Rather, the issue is how these alternative visions play out in contemporary politics and society. Thus, identifying the tensions between social categories in Japan, as Kelly and White have done, is a more productive avenue for unraveling the shifting character of today's Japan. The reason is simply that while individuals may struggle with the notion of who they are, the struggles over national identity tend to be more socially specific and politically motivated, that is, largely opaque unless explored as contests between specific groups of people. Moreover, consideration of media messages that contrast with Ishihara and Kobayashi offers a window on how debates about national identity are intimately connected with a transnational imaginary and not simply a national ambivalence.

Schoolgirls, Monsters and War in Anime: Blood+

The weekly, primetime anime program Blood+ (2005) presents a sharp contrast in comparison to both Ishihara and Kobayashi for the way the show represents the threat of outside influences and the importance of family with respect to national identity. Of particular interest is the way the program offers visions of family whose blood ties do not map easily onto the strength of relationships. The heroine of the story, Otonashi Saya, at first appears to be a normal high school girl, living with two brothers and her father. It turns out, however, that she and her brothers are all adopted, and Saya's real sister is a murderous monster with superpowers, whom Saya must hunt down and eventually kill. Both Saya and her sister Diva become caught up in a murky transnational conspiracy involving major pharmaceutical corporations and cover-ups by the American military. Intriguingly, a central plot element is Saya's gradual awakening to her own checkered and bloody history which forces her to reflect on the violence she has caused in the past, and raising questions of how to deal with that past while working towards peace in the future.

The weekly half-hour series, broadcast on Saturdays at 6:00 pm, began airing in October 2005. The 50-episodes of the series follow the adventures of Saya, her chevalier protector Hagi, and her two brothers, Kai (older) and Riku (younger). As the series begins, Saya is portrayed as athletic and smart but insecure. Her everyday high school world, however, is transformed when she learns she has the unique ability to kill bloodthirsty, winged, fanged monsters known as yokushu ("chiroptera" in the English translation). She experiences mysterious visions of the American military in Vietnam shooting at monsters, and the slaughter of innocents, including women and children, possibly at her own hands. Given the opening reference to the war in Vietnam, this anime offers an interesting contrast to Ishihara's image of young people who know nothing about the world's military past. Blood+ presents war as something that torments youth living today.

Figure 2: Blood+ poster with Saya and her chevalier Hagi © Production I.G.
The poster reads "I don't want to hurt anyone every again"

Like many Japanese anime, Blood+ deals in part with loyalties and the violence of war. Although some anime, such as Space Battleship Yamato, offered fairly black and white portrayals of "good guys versus bad guys," since then we find more often the elaboration of gray areas in battle. The original Mobile Suits Gundam series (1979), for example, produced as many fans of Char Aznable, the warrior for the Zeon rebels, as for Amuro Rei, defender of the Earth Federation. That pivotal series stood out for the "reality," as the creators and fans viewed it, in the portrayal of fear, anxiety, and moral dubiousness of war (Otsuka and Sakakibara 2001: 204-207). The heartbreaking classic film Grave of the Fireflies directed by Takahata Isao (1988) also suggests that a proper historical understanding of war is not "who fought whom," but how the suffering was extraordinary, and meted out on civilians as well as soldiers. Since Gundam, one of anime's attractions has been this willingness to explore the multiple dimensions of war's brutality.

In Blood+, the mysterious "chiroptera" monsters – blood-thirsty, red-eyed demons with wings – are symbolically linked with American military violence. In episode six, for example, a group known as "Red Shield" and led by some civilian Americans who show a deep interest in Saya's abilities, break into an American military lab in Okinawa and crack the database. Accessing some secret computer files reveals a disturbing trend, which David, the blonde-haired American man explains to Saya: the secret lab they found was used by the US military in experiments to create the monsters. He continues,

> Until the Vietnam War there weren't many incidents involving Chiroptera. In the entire world, one case every few years. But with that war, news of Chiroptera appearances increased dramatically. And in almost all cases, these occurrences took place in areas of international conflict: Vietnam, Central America, the Gulf War, African civil wars . . . And in those areas, either the US military or US military-led international forces were deployed. . . . Peacekeeping, retaliation, justice – there were many reasons, but it's safe to say that their real goal was the military occupation of the area. (Adapted from Shinsen-Subs translation, a fan group that made subtitled broadcasts for download)

This representation of America and Americans carries a distinctly transnational flavor. An American is attempting to uncover the secret of the trail of dead following in the wake of the US military's foreign adventures. Several Japanese fans of the show whom I spoke with in the summer of 2006 mentioned this anti-war aspect to the show as a key element of its appeal. I would also draw attention to the unwillingness to condemn "America" as a national whole, but rather distinguishing between the military and those (Americans and others) opposed to the military's excesses. The imagined communities (and conspiracies) are defined less by national or racial features, than by commitments to particular ends. Whether everyone viewed the program in that light is something I cannot prove. We can say, however, that the narrative structure of the show militated against simple equations of family, nation, and identity that were highlighted in Ishihara's writings. Instead, the series portrays the centrality of transnational alliances, both in terms of military and big pharma conspiracies, and in terms of the efforts of Saya and the international group Red Shield to combat them.

As the series progresses, we learn that the blood of Saya and her evil sister Diva has unique powers to create and to kill the monsters, which come on several varieties. The US military and a shady multinational corporation aim to use the blood, and the monsters they produce, to create both monsters that run amok and genetically engineered monster-soldiers to defeat them. The military-industrial complex, along with

American politicians in the White House, are pleased by this business model of creating fearsome enemies while also maintaining a monopoly on those blood-derived soldiers that can defeat them. Saya, her brothers and the Red Shield must somehow undercut this scheme. In the end, solution to the violence in this anime does not lie in understanding national history, but the more personal histories related to family, and the conflicts between transnational conspiracies (both military and corporate), and ultimately the failure of national governments to stem atrocities.

In other words, the content, or narrative structure, of the show portrays a kind of transnational intimacy that rejects simplistic notions of "family" that define social relations in terms of "blood." At both these levels, the nation and the family, the world-setting (settei) of Blood+ contradicts the premises of affection and action that characterize Ishihara's notion of the national sacrifice. In an intriguing way, all of the monsters are related, quite literally, by "blood," yet their goals, and moral standing, vary dramatically. A poster for the TV series shows Saya, and her protector Hagi, along with the tag-line "I don't want to hurt anyone anymore," clearly Saya's voice. [3] In this sense, the anime plays at a symbolic level with the kinds of social restructurings Kelly and White highlight in their article. As the notion of a national "family" weakens, many Japanese youth are questioning their location in the larger social world. Blood+ represents that social world as one that is dangerous, full of corporate and military malfeasance, but with the potential to be repaired if close friends and emotionally attached siblings can work together.

The use of schoolgirls and transnational monsters as core characters can also be intriguingly related to a recent book by political scientist David Leheny (Leheny 2006). In the book, Think Global, Fear Local, he analyzes the ways popular media representations have been used to justify enhanced powers for the state. In addition to examining the "war on terror," he links it with the media sensationalism surrounding Japanese schoolgirls who go on paid dates (enjo kôsai) with middle-aged men.

> Japan's newly demonstrative schoolgirls and murkily defined foreign threats (in particular, presumptive Chinese criminals and North Korean spies) became crucial symbols of a nation under attack. Both seemed to threaten the nation's security, the former by destroying Japan's social fabric from within, the latter by invading it. (p. 3)

Although these views were contested by Japan's progressives, the right-wing government received help from international efforts to protect children from sexual exploitation and to stop terrorism. What makes Leheny's argument particularly useful is his effort to show that media representations, even when they prove to be sensational in the sense of overstating the risks, nevertheless can be extremely efficacious both in terms of building media audiences and in generating support for dubious state policies. In other words, dismissing fears of the "paid dating" (enjo kôsai) as a tawdry effort by the press to increase readership risks ignoring the broader feedback loops surrounding fear, political control, and cynical uses of transnational alliances. Leheny draws attention to a flip-side of "foreign pressure" (gaiatsu) by showing that international political efforts, such as counterterrorism and policies against sex trafficking, become articulated with national efforts to expand state powers, in particular, as Leheny shows, those of the police. Although not directly related to anime, Leheny's work highlights the multiple meanings of the figure of the Japanese schoolgirl in a way that links it to government policies.

In contrast to the "paid dating" media coverage which places blame on the young women, the

anime series Blood+, however, illustrates how other media messages place agency for saving the world literally in the hands of an empowered schoolgirl. Saya comes to see how her dilemma of dealing with her past and working towards the future is echoed in the lives of other girls living overseas. In one of the more moving plot developments, Saya meets a young girl in Vietnam, who, though having lost a leg to a landmine, supports her family by searching fields for explosives. Isn't it possible that this primetime animated action-drama can provoke alternative understandings of threats and responses among Japanese youth?

An additional way in which intimacy operates in the relationship between the anime series and the community of anime fans. The Blood project involves not only the TV series, but also video games, manga, novels, and a website that includes fan discussion of the show, all of which contribute to an immersive aspect of this show, such that it is more than simply a TV program but more generally a world. Fan activities surrounding anime, such as cosplay (costume play, i.e., dressing up as anime characters), anime music videos (remixing anime clips to create music videos) and other fan-made works, point to the centrality of ideas of participation and active interpretation as part the attraction of anime. Of particular are foreign (non-Japanese) "fansub" groups that digitize, translate, and make available online anime programs broadcast in Japan. (For example, check http://animesuki.com/ for a listing of recent releases.) These fansub groups recognize that what they do is illegal, but they tend to view their work as a service to make up for the lag time between broadcast in Japan and release in the US. Most fansub groups remove links to their fansubs once a show has been licensed or released in North America. That fans would take on this time-consuming project, and at the same time firmly reject the idea that they should be paid for it, symbolizes the kind of devotion that some fans have towards anime.

These fansubs can also be vehicles for teaching about history and even US foreign policy. The fansub group Live-Evil provided one of the early translations of the first episode of Blood+ and in the downloaded file, the show begins with translation note. Because translation notes like this are common tools for expert overseas fans of Japanese animation to educate their fellow fans, I quote the translation note at length to give a sense of both the tone and content.

> Later in this episode, a few characters mention the Status of Forces Agreement. Since most of you probably aren't up to date on all United States foreign policy, it needs some explanation. The Status of Forces Agreement is essentially the United States government's shield for military personnel in a foreign country. It protects military personnel from being tried in a foreign country subject to that country's laws; instead what usually happens is they are tried by court martial (US law). The Status of Forces Agreement in Japan has been in effect ever since the peace treaty was signed after World War II, and it's viewed as a one-side agreement by the Japanese. Feelings are incredibly strong in Okinawa where approximately 17,600 Marines are stationed, and tensions between the US military and the civilians there are especially high. The US military has had a pretty bad reputation there, where Marines have not been tried by Japanese law for charges ranging from rape to murder. (Translation notes by the fansub group Live-eviL, Episode 1, Blood+, 2005)

This too extends the transnational aspects of Japanese anime. Not only does the TV series plot explore fantastic representations of US military violence, but also, through fan efforts to explain the significance of the plot, American fans educate and are educated about brutalities of American foreign policy related to Okinawa.

Such fansub translation notes reveal another level at which youth themselves are playing a role in global media at a fan-to-fan level of intimacy. In other words, while an anime program like Blood+ does not carry the official authority of the government official, it can convey a greater intimacy. Anime remains fairly marginalized as a media form, even this show airing in prime time, and yet it also is connected to an international audience, driven by overseas fans who take the initiative in digitizing, translating, and uploading the show for other fans. In this sense, the show is transnational not only in its portrayal of military conflict, but also in its reach. It is in this sense that some media are both "more subcultural" and "more transnational." Quite a few global, progressive movements share this characteristic, and I would argue that Blood+ aims to capitalize on a simmering unease with military interventions and multinational pharmaceutical companies – the bad guys in this show – especially those of the US. Nevertheless, a caveat is in order. Do fans actually take these messages from the show? Clearly some do, at least those who wrote the Live-Evil fansub group's translation note. Reading through the discussion forum of Blood+ on the website of the fansub group Shinsen-Subs, however, shows that US military injustices are less discussed than the workings of the conspiracy and the uncertainties surrounding how the blood of Saya and Diva in fact works. One of the dangers of analyzing messages into anime series like this is to conflate a single person's interpretation (mine) with that of all fans. Even so, I would argue it is worth considering anime programs like Blood+ as a means of assessing some of the wider contexts in which debates about history, nationalism, and violence are portrayed. The participation of anime fans worldwide in activities beyond simply viewing suggest a kind of engagement with the media that indexes certain kinds of intimacy as well.

War Film Otokotachi no Yamato **vs. War Rap** Oretachi no Yamato

The live-action feature film Otokotachi no Yamato (2005, Dir. Sato Jun'ya) offers a quite different portrait of bravery and war. Using state-of-the-art special effects to depict the bloody sinking of Japan's largest battleship in the closing days of World War II, the film aims for a visceral reformation of historical memory in line with Ishihara's vision. The film was also the inspiration for a rap song by an artist who calls himself Hannya. The song offers a contrast to the film in the way it portrays of the lessons of war, namely, not as a story of national bravery, but rather as an indictment of the "great men" of all countries who use youth as pawns. In this, the song highlights the transnational character of "victims of war," and questions the nationalist perspective that dominates the film. The titles of the two works symbolize the difference between the film's "men's Yamato" and the song's "our Yamato," in which "our" refers to today's younger generation of Japanese

The film begins in present-day Japan and follows Uchida Makiko, a woman seeking to visit the final resting place of the Battleship Yamato on the 60th anniversary of its sinking. A fisherman finally agrees to take her after she reveals that she is the daughter of a seaman on the battleship who survived the battle. The fisherman too was on the Yamato, and the story cuts back and forth between the present-day and the fisherman's reminiscences of the war. Like the American action-film Pearl Harbor (2001, Dir. Michael Bay), Yamato (as its English title reads) focuses on portraits of bravery and brutality in the midst of battle, as well as on the brief love stories among the protagonists. As the Japanese language title—"the men's Yamato"—indicates, the film focuses on the emotional struggles of young men, teenagers really, caught in the pressures of war. When they first arrive on the ship, they are smiling and excited, with the emotional atmosphere underscored by cheery marching music. The film is characteristic of the historical

revisionism proposed by Ishihara, clearly echoing his point that love for one's country emerges from love for one's home. We see scenes of the sailors on the boat, facing their last battle, crying out for their mothers as they prepare for what they recognize will be a devastating fight. The intimacy provoked by the young men crying out for their mothers, knowing that they face almost certain death, thus emphasizes the workings of fictional re-enactments of war, bringing us face-to-face with the blood, gore, and dismemberment as the faceless enemy ruthlessly sinks the ship. It's a gruesome portrayal of doomed youth courageously meeting death. In the present-day, the sailor's daughter and the high school-age boy who helps pilot the fisherman's ship come to understand the heroism of the Yamato sailors, and, in the end, salute them at the site of the great ship's demise. Here we see the perfect image of three generations coming to respect the sacrifice made by the sailors.

Figure 3: Scene from Otokotachi no Yamato (2005, Dir. Sato) in which three generations unite in saluting the fallen dead of World War II

But how effective is the graphic portrayal of the Yamato's demise as an argument for Japanese patriotism? Hannya's song, which explicitly invokes the film (e.g., using the same digital image of the battleship for the cover of his single) suggests that the lessons can in fact run counter to the kinds of interpretations that Ishihara and other nationalists would expect.

I would argue that this distinction arises in part because of in-group/out-group differences related to a genre's fan base. Like anime, Japanese hip-hop music is a media form that speaks with a particular intimacy to fans, that is, an insider feeling that contrasts with a mainstream genre like action-movies. There are still many people, both in the US and Japan, who express distaste or ignorance when it comes to rap music. Yet for those who do understand, the idea that hip-hop should generally support progressive politics is natural. Hip-hop originated in largely African-American communities in New York City in the 1970s, though with roots in Jamaican DJ styles, and connections to Latino and white participants as well. Given this starting point, hip-hop has been taken up in Japan as "Black culture," and thus is another example of the ways imagined communities may tied to categories other than nation-states. Those who participate in "a global hip-hop nation" share a sense the intimacy through rap, or at least, the hip-hop music we find appealing. The intimacy arises artists and fans share an interpretive space, where expectations of what counts as music and lyricism intersect with ideologies of speaking out, flipping the script, and in-your-face bravado (Condry 2004). Hip-hoppers speak in a musical language, a dialect different from, and hence carrying a different weight than, Ishihara or Kobayashi's writings. This is similar to the way blogs with their informal (some would say chatty) writing style can help construct an in-group atmosphere. Yet the world of hip-hop is also less exclusive than other types of social networked groups such as Mixi (in Japan) that require an invitation from an in-group member to join. It seems to me that this layering and intersections of mediascapes poses a central challenge for grasping how it is that we live in the most information-saturated moment in our planet's history, yet the noise-to-signal ratio seems to worsen with each new technological advance.

Hip-hop illustrates both the opportunities and

dangers of media, exemplifying both progressive protest and commercial hedonism, but also notable for the ways that sampling and rapping provoke an interrogation of the pieces of history we use to construct ourselves and our expressions. As I discuss in the book Hip-Hop Japan, Japanese rappers explore issues of Japanese history text books, the similarities between Hiroshima and 9/11, and the tragedies of the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Condry 2006). Hannya's song "Oretachi no Yamato" (our Yamato) was written as a tribute to the film Otokotachi no Yamato. What makes Hannya's song so interesting is the way it uses the sinking of the Yamato as an opportunity to examine not the masculinity of military sacrifice ("the men's" or otokotachi of the film's title) but what the sinking means for "us" (oretachi), that is, today's Japanese youth.

Hannya (2005) Oretachi no Yamato (Avex, Japan [single release])

Hannya's moving lyrics dispense with sentimentalism and focus instead on the contradictory emotions evoked. While he acknowledges, that he "loves Japan" (kono kuni ai shiteru) and that probably he too would have taken that "one step forward" to volunteer (ippo mae ni deru), he ultimately places blame for murderous military adventures on the "great men" who start wars.

> our generation, born after the war [sengô ni umareta orera no sedai]
> this world, where there's still war [imada ni sensô shiteru sekai]
> somewhere idiots discovered them [dokka no baka hatsumei shi mata]
> somewhere idiots have them: nukes [dokka no baka ga motsu kakuheiki]
> you big men of other countries [otaku no kuni no oerai san to]
> should get with other big men [otaku no kuni no oerai san de]
> and fight it out by yourselves [sashi de kenka shite kuremasen ka]
> all I really hope for is peace [kocchi wa honki de negau yo heiwa]
> . . .
> before winning or losing, think life, [kachimake no mae no inochi sae]
> think what it means to be human [hito to shite no kimochi sae]
>
> Hannya (2006) "Oretachi no Yamato" from the album Naibu kokuhatsu
> Avex Rush (Tokyo), AVCF-22605

Hannya reverses the equation of historical ignorance proposed by Ishihara and Kobayashi. The right-wing commentators see in youth an ignorance of the past, but for Hannya, it is the grown-ups' nationalist interpretations of the past that are mistaken and stupid.

As these lyrics make clear, the social grouping being highlighted is not one of nation, but of generation. The "us" of the song's title is clearly Hannya's generation of youth, a generation where many are devoted to foreign genres of culture like hip-hop, yet which can be used to speak to intimately local concerns. Hannya distinguishes between youth and the great men who have nuclear weapons. He argues that if

great men feel it's necessary to fight, they should fight among themselves, because all he hopes for is peace. Hannya sees victims in the dead who were on the Yamato battleship, and he sympathizes with the families who were hurt by the tragedy. Again, the simple equation of family and nation proposed by Ishihara is turned on its head: If you care about family, then you have to realize that any military fighting will hurt other families, regardless of national origin. This is a proposal for rethinking the dangers of the world in transnational terms, as Hannya says, in terms of what it means to be human. Of course, it's conceivable that some fans could interpret Hannya's song as a call for renewed nationalism, but in my opinion, this would be reading against the grain.

The presence of this kind of political critique in a rap song means two things for our understanding of media and nationalism. First, many adults are unlikely to be aware that these perspectives are circulating among youth. They are quite literally out of the loop. At the same time, youthful rap fans who hear the song are already attuned to the transnational character of hip-hop as a cultural form. So the idea of an "us" that is different from an older generation, that sees in media a personal and expressive form of protest (at least in some rap), can reinforce a kind of intimacy, an in-the-loop feeling, that gives more weight, both rational and emotional, to Hannya's words. Hannya's lyrics likely reach a smaller audience than governor Ishihara, but the lyrics are also likely to speak with a greater intimacy, and seem more relevant to a younger generation.

Conclusion

It may be that Japan is becoming "more nationalist" recently, but whether Prime Minister Abe's remarks reflect a growing confidence on the part of historical revisionists, or the last gasps of an ideology under siege remains to be seen. Prime Minister Abe's sinking approval ratings may or not prove lasting, but it could suggest that the rants of Ishihara and Kobayashi, then, perhaps should be seen less as evidence of nationalism and more as reactions to a shifting ground in which nationalist interpretations of Japan's military past are giving way to more transnational and intergenerational interpretations of difference. If Kelly, White, and Nathan are right, the fractures within Japanese society are still being worked out. I hope I have shown how popular culture is one arena in which these debates are being waged. The thinking about the transnational dimensions of military conflict, and the suffering of wars' victims regardless of nationality, is a theme that appears prominently in some corners of Japan's media culture, such as in the examples I gave from anime and hip-hop.

My aim in this paper has been to suggest that we think more carefully about how we interpret different media representations in relation to ideas of national identity, particularly in terms of the ways channels of media that are often off-the-radar of scholarly analysis be considered in terms of the intimacy in which messages are conveyed and in terms of the ways transnational imagined communities are developing. Naming current changes in Japan an "identity crisis" is perhaps a convenient short-hand, but being more specific about audiences and the channels by which messages circulate and alliances form seems to me to be a more productive way to understand how being Japanese, politically and culturally, is different in today's world. To that end, I would encourage us to think more broadly about the diverse channels by which media messages circulate. As young people increasingly ignore, or downplay the importance of, mainstream media outlets, the "Google relevance" that arises from socially networked media is likely to increase. It seems to me that we scholars of Japan can learn a lot about the political power of media by considering how these "entertainment" media are also sources of political education. Judging

from the influence of YouTube clips in the recent US elections, the authority Jon Stewart's media analysis through satire on The Daily Show, or students' attachments to MySpace and FaceBook, we should not be surprised that the keitai generation in Japan is necessarily re-evaluating, in practice more than in theory, the touchstones for their own media political futures. This essay has aimed to suggest that we consider the dynamics of social networks and intimacy in thinking about the power of media. Media forms that were once marginal (or "subcultural," or "minor") nevertheless can achieve substantial influence thanks to the viral character of social networks and new technologies. I also believe that we are seeing more transnational dimensions of these networks, which in turn affect the ways nationalism and globalization interact in today's world.

Ian Condry has been teaching at MIT since 2002, where he is Associate Professor in Foreign Languages and Literatures. During the 2006-07 academic year, he is also an advanced research fellow at Harvard University's Program on US-Japan Relations. He is the author of Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization (2006, Duke University Press) and organizer of the MIT/Harvard research group Cool Japan: Media, Culture, Technology. He is currently working on a book project about the making of Japanese anime. Website: http://iancondry.com.

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Notes:

[1] I should add that my work builds upon other scholars' work on public spheres and intimacy, including Giddens (1992), Habermas (1989), and McGuigan (2005) as well as that of Japan scholars who have considered intimacy in unusual contexts including religion (Kasulis 1990) and education (Rohlen 1989).

[2] Freeter is a term used to refer to part-time workers, often in the service industry, who tend to move from job to job. NEET refers to those "not in employment, education or training."

[3] Image downloaded from here (accessed October 29, 2006): http://www.productionig.com/contents/works_sp/data/p>

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