

Pittsburgh Enka: Jero, Cultural Nationalism, and Japanese Music

Shawn M. Higgins, Temple University, Japan Campus

Enka is a Japanese pop music that began in the post-war era and was popularized in the 1960s. In the homegrown genre's fifty year history, a few non-Japanese have broken out as stars. Chinese-Taiwanese legend Teresa Teng, among the list of her singing awards, garnered the 1974 Kūkō New Singer Award in Japan, going on then to become the first triple enka Grand Prix winner for singles produced in 1984, 1985, and 1986. Indian Sarbjit Singh Chadha, known as "Chada," sold over 150,000 copies worldwide of his breakout 1975 song "Omokage no Hito". However, perhaps no foreign enka singer compares to the recent success of Jerome White Jr. from Pittsburgh. Better known in Japan as "Jero," he is the first African American enka singer in Japanese history. Jero comes from a racially-mixed background: he is three-quarters African American and one-quarter Japanese. The Oricon music charts, Japan's weekly chart which normally tracks the Japanese superstars of pop and rock such as Hikaru Utada, B'z, and Glay, placed Jero's first enka single "Umi Yuki" at #4 in 2008, a feat no other enka artist has accomplished since the 1970s. To compare, Misora Hibari's canonical "Kawa no Nagare no You Ni" (1989), arguably the most beloved enka single by the most beloved enka singer of all time, only peaked at #8 on the Oricon charts. From there, Jero went on to win the Japan Record Awards Best New Artist award in 2008 and has had a steady career as an enka superstar since.

Jero and his family have a long history of struggling against culturally oppressive powers. Jero's late grandmother,

HR

The Humanities Review
Volume 10, Issue 1
Spring 2012 pp 111-126.
St. John's University

Shawn M. Higgins

is currently a lecturer in the Departments of Law and of Letters at Keio University in Japan as well as an instructor at Temple University's Japan Campus. He received his MA in American Studies from Columbia University in 2011, and will begin his PhD in English at the University of Connecticut in August 2012. His research interests include American literature and intersections of identity, geopolitics, cross-cultural communication and popular culture.

Takiko, met his grandfather after World War II while he was stationed at the naval base in Yokohama. The couple resided in Japan, raising their daughter Harumi (Jero's mother) together until she was thirteen. However, due to students teasing Harumi so violently about her mixed-race parentage, the couple decided to leave Japan and relocate to Pittsburgh. When Harumi had Jerome in 1981, she decided to raise him without Japanese language, rather preferring to speak it only with her mother and to help Jerome avoid the teasing that traumatized her as a child. Growing up as an African American/Asian American in Pittsburgh proved very difficult for Jero as he found no outlet to explore his cultural identity in a "sometimes-un-easy mix of African Americans and Eastern European immigrants" (Lah). Jero's high school Japanese language instructor, Isabel Valdivia, explains that "the dynamics of the neighborhood, a passionate interest in singing enka music -- and speaking Japanese -- does not offer a small, skinny, shy African American kid a smooth path to popularity" (Harden 2). Feeling pressured by his surroundings to subvert his Japanese American identity, Jero never revealed his passions to his friends while growing up. Jero explains: "[my friends] knew my grandmother was from Japan," but "my friends in Pittsburgh didn't know about [enka] until my debut single was released. I called them and told them I was a recording artist in Japan. I explained that enka is a form of Japanese blues" (Harden 3). Throughout high school, Jero studied Japanese ferociously, visiting the country once when he was fifteen to enter into a speech contest, then again at twenty to participate in an exchange program at Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka. Jero attended the University of Pittsburgh where he studied information sciences, landing a job teaching English in Japan upon graduating in 2003. While living and working in Japan, Jero frequented karaoke clubs and contests, honing his skills as an enka singer and exposing himself to always intrigued audiences. A judge at one of the contests Jero entered was from Victor Entertainment (JVC in the United States), who upon seeing Jero's skill, offered him two years of vocal training and an eventual record deal for "Umi Yuki."

This essay argues that Jero's transnational identity as a mixed-race enka performer from Pittsburgh both elucidates and challenges the traditional paradigms of music culture in both the United States and in Japan by forcing consumers to confront their own stereotypes about cultural identity. These stereotypes, I will argue, stem from nationalistic notions about cultural identity. Following the popular political science discourse of negating approaches to territorial exclusivity, I will assert that Jero's hybrid form of "urban enka" disrupts the continuum of social collectivities such as ethnicity and replaces it with innovative performance that, in turn, transforms identity. Jero's use of language and symbols of culture, both on and off the stage, complicate the perceived notion of performance and persona by asserting that the nationalist's view of the performer and the culture being

performed do not hold true in an increasingly transnational world. This essay will closely examine "Umi Yuki," his first single which launched his career, as well as a subsequent track "Hisame" in order to understand how his challenge to the identity of enka was introduced, nearly compromised, and eventually solidified.

My reasoning for connecting nationalism, identity, and enka music follows along the same path as scholars such as Christine Yano, David Knight, Debra Occhi and others who have explained numerous ways in which music simultaneously shapes and is shaped by both political and cultural versions of nationalism. The addition this essay offers is a close-reading of Jero's career, a mixed-race enka performer who, as John Russell explains, necessarily must deal with his Other's Otherness as an African American man in contrast to the perception of America as a white country. Christine Yano and others have explained that some non-Japanese enka artists have been able to "hide" their ethnic origins in hopes of simply being accepted on the merits of their ability while others like Teresa Teng and Chada have acknowledged and embraced their cultural Otherness as ambassadors. However, I assert that, because of the history of race relations between whites and blacks in the United States, and because this history is and has been interpolated onto the Japanese public by a dominant white soft power over the last hundred years, Jero's experience as a non-native Japanese enka performer provides a sharper lens through which we can examine the relationship between nationalism, identity, and music.

Nationalism and Identity

It is neither possible nor desirable to summarize the entirety of arguments about nationalism in this single article. However, an explication of canonical theories pertaining to what constitutes cultural nationalism in regards to ethnicity and race is especially helpful before analyzing Jero's effect as a transnational performer of enka music. We will see that arguments for and against the inclusion of ethnicity in the construction of and maintenance of a nation and its creation myth are contested and inconclusive. What these arguments do show is that ethnicity is undoubtedly a factor which is visible to the general population and, even if it goes dismissed by some scholars, it should be considered when judging the "nation" from the eyes of a national (and especially a nationalist). We should also make the brief yet important distinction between a state (a legal body) versus a nation (a collective), noting that this essay will focus mainly on the nation and areas of belonging. This essay will also focus on "cultural nationalism" as opposed to "political nationalism" by following along John Hutchinson's assertion that, while political nationalism aims for "autonomous state institutions," cultural nationalism "seeks a

moral regeneration of the community," although often on a much smaller, transient scale (Hutchinson 41).

As Ernst Renan classically posited in his 1882 essay "What is a Nation?" shared collective consciousness about the past and a continuing value of current heritage are two principle concepts that define the nation and its members. The myth of a nation's creation is as central to the health of a nation as are the languages and cultures that define it. A creation myth encompasses two very important things: the semi-fictional story of how the nation came into being and the forgetting of peoples/events/ideologies that are counter to the current national dogma. Benedict Anderson, Professor Emeritus of International Studies, Government and Asian Studies at Cornell University and pioneer of nationalism studies, asserts in his canonical *Imagined Communities* (1983) that "nations [...] have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural" (Anderson 205). In the case of the United States of America, the birth of the nation cannot be directly traced to the drafting of the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution because these events are more political and based on state foundation than they are cultural or philosophical. However, the deaths of British and American soldiers during the Revolutionary War and, more importantly, the genocide of native American Indian tribes, are real moments where we can begin to define the American nation as opposed to the willingly forgotten left behind. For the Japanese nation, its modern birth cannot be traced to political events such as the Meiji Restoration or the Potsdam Conference of 1945. Rather, as New School of Social Research professor of sociology Eiko Ikegami suggests, cultural practices such as art and music as well as shared printed language helped to define what cultural "Japaneseness" was and not the political whims of the Tokugawa shogunate or other sociopolitical strata (Ikegami 20). These cultural practices also involve two forms of forgetting: dismissing the rigid social classes which separated the nation under the shogunate system and actually hindered the building of a nation-state, and the ignoring of social outcasts at the bottom of that ranking system (the burakumin) as well as the forgetting of the histories of the native tribes that inhabited the islands of Japan and were destroyed in the process of nation-building.

As we construct the nation, the confusion between patriotism and nationalism becomes a central issue in the evaluation of a cultural identity. Anthony Smith, Professor Emeritus of Nationalism and Ethnicity at the London School of Economics and one of the founders of nationalism studies, asserts that we must always differentiate between "national sentiment" and "nationalistic ideology." The main switch between the two is when a majority begin to associate the "nation" with the "people," thereby distinguishing and differentiating between who belongs

and who does not (Smith 171). John Armstrong, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, highlights that, instead of seeking “permanent ‘essences’ of national character,” scholars of nationalism should instead focus on the fundamental yet shifting significance of boundaries for human identity (Armstrong 4). Armstrong’s work, profoundly influenced by Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth, focuses on language and how groups tend to define themselves “not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion, that is, by comparison to ‘strangers’” (Armstrong 5). Barth reveals that, since primitive man, language and the ability to verbally communicate first distinguished between “real men” and those incomplete barbarians speaking inferior, alien languages. However, over time, as empires and means of communication grew, language ceased to be the sole definer of difference between groups. The important component of these varying boundaries between who is “in” and who is “out” is their shifting significance which is contingent upon constantly shifting paradigms of belonging. Similarly, Liah Greenfeld, professor of political science and sociology at Boston University, argues against particularisms such as common language in the definition of nationalism by negating the inevitability of exclusion simply based on relationships such as language, race, or others. Rather, she suggests that multiple forms of nationalism exist and that national identity is only formed (and often forced) by the emergence of competing national identities (Greenfeld 14-15). Therefore, we should consider that, while paradigms for discrimination do exist from time to time, these boundaries of the nation fluctuate and morph over time depending on numerous, often political yet sometimes cultural, factors.

It is not enough to rely solely on an English-based Western paradigm of nationalism, however, to explain such sentiments globally. Peter Perdue, professor of Chinese history at Yale University, has poignantly explained that the often Eurocentric views of nationalism and nationalism studies are not always apt to explain nationalist ideology in Asian countries. In his explication of the popular claim that nationalism is a product of Western industrialization and of imperialism, Perdue highlights that it forces a reading of Asian nationalism as a simple strengthening response to Western power, taking agency away from nations which had “print capitalism” and cultural integration far before many European nations (Perdue 184-185). Even excellent theorists such as Eric Hobsbawm, Professor Emeritus in The New School for Social Research, have made the fatal mistake of claiming that using ethnicity to exclude members of the nation is irrelevant in countries like Japan which are historically “almost or entirely homogeneous,” overlooking the domination and oppression of such ethnic minority groups such as the native Ainu, the Ryukyans, and the burakumin (“untouchable”) class, as well as zainichi groups

(other ethnic groups born/living in Japan) such as Koreans and Chinese and nikkijin ethnic returnees from Brazil and other areas (Hobsbawm 66). Anthony Smith also notes this neglect of Asian and African nations in the work of Hugh Seton-Watson, another pioneer in the field of nationalism during the 1970s, exposing how some scholars have treated these continents and the actions of their various nations as simple reactions to the "imposition of European ideas through imperial state institutions" (Smith 174). While we can be certain that many colonial regions of Asia and Africa did yearn for revolution in the form of creating their own independent nation-states, reducing collective groups outside of Europe to simple reactionary units is problematic on many racial and sociopolitical fronts.

Enka: Music of the Japanese Soul

If country music speaks for the "heartland" of America, then enka speaks for the heartland of Japan. Just as the subjects of country music are supposed to be the "salt of the earth" with "real home values," enka music rescues Japan from hyper-modernity and swoons its people with traditional themes of doomed love and painful separations, all the while bucolically praising the countryside as the cure for what ails you. Christine Yano, professor of anthropology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, is the authority on the culture of enka that most prominently informs my analysis. No analysis of enka music could do without the extensive research and analysis of Christine Yano's *Tears of Longing* (2002) which, at one point, even calls enka a form of "self-orientalism," as the music "[exoticizes Japan] for its own consumption, synoptitized in its own stereotype" (Yano 2002; 9). Yano's deep explication of enka in all its forms is too dense to cover here. Rather, I would like to draw focus to a few of her key arguments which this essay will highlight. Firstly, enka as it was reinvented in the 1970s in a sociopolitical atmosphere, served and continues to serve as a site where culture is situated using a popular music frame that is able to tie national sentiment and consumerism together (Yano 2002; 44). Secondly, artists like Jero complicate stereotypes or perceptions about enka because, as Yano explains, enka is both a commercial item as well as an essence. Jero is one of the most successful enka artists of all time, and he shares a partial Japanese heritage as well as a near-fluent command of the language, but he is not from Japan and is not full-blooded Japanese, therefore complicating what constitutes a "real enka artist." Jero's identity as an African American enka artist begs for analysis concerning his current and possible future effects on the cultural identity associated with enka and, in turn, the perceived cultural identity of Japan itself.

Performance consultant David Knight, as well as Christine Yano and others, have explained how deeply tied nationalism and music are by highlighting moments in history where the two collide. In Japan before and during World War II, not only

were English words forbidden from imported games like baseball, but “enemy music” was prohibited and replaced with militaristic marching band style tunes. Here, music is seen as having a direct effect on both the creation of the nation as well as the possible disintegration of it. In creating a nation, composers look for specific elements of sound and thought to help localize their art such as incorporating myths, rhythms, and melodies that might go underappreciated or misunderstood by non-members of the nation (Knight 1444). Maki Okada, in her analysis of enka music’s form, explains that the pentatonic scale it uses called “the yonayuki scale” differs from others in that it has no fourth or seventh degrees, thereby creating a unique Japanese pop sound by forcing it to correspond to the tetrachord of traditional Japanese shamisen music (Okada 284-286). The rhythm of enka differs from Western music in that, “even songs in 4/4 time – the strength of a beat stands in no specific relation to the position of the beat within a bar,” further alienating non-Japanese listeners who might expect a powerful beat on the front or a break-beat on the end (Okada 290). Enka, described by many as the “blue-collar music of Japan,” performs the same sociopolitical function as other heartland sounds such as country music in the United States of America. Enka is obsessed with glorifying the furusato (hometown) which is often located outside the metropolises of Tokyo and Osaka in more rural areas such as fishing villages or farming communities. Some legendary performers such as Saburo Kitajima even change their names to fit a more bucolic image (“Kitajima” means “north island”) (Occhi 167). Debra Occhi, professor of linguistic anthropology at Miyazaki International College in Japan, and others have shown how, by connecting this music form to traditional values that speak to an “essence” of Japanese character at a time when many move out of the countryside and in to the cities, enka helps synthesize and reinforce what it means to be “Japanese.” This, in turn, is not dependent on Japanese people needing the empathy of having experienced the hardships of sailing out to sea or working in rice field but rather focuses on a Japanese sentiment which aims at bringing the nation together sympathetically (Yano 2003; 87).

Enka music has also had an effect abroad through the Japanese diaspora. Enka music played a particularly important role in the Japanese American internment of 1942-1946, especially for the issei who listened to and sang enka music as a way of remembering home and overcoming grievances by “[deeply connecting] to the sights and sounds” of Japan (Yano 2002; 125). Enka is listened to in order to relieve stress (ストレスを開放する - sutoresu o kaihou suru), to reconnect with something that is “of, by, and for the Japanese people,” and as a restorative device (Yano 2002; 125-126). Enka is a music that “is part of people’s lives and helps them to persevere, especially through difficult times (悲しい時も、辛い時も - kanashii

toki mo, tsurai toki mo) (Yano 2002; 126). For Jero's family, enka came as a relic of home that helped them persevere through trying times abroad in Pittsburgh. For Jero himself, it became the window through which he was able to connect with his Japanese cultural identity and create his own hybrid interpretation of enka that I would term "Pittsburgh enka."

Jero's Pittsburgh Enka

Jero's first single, "海雪" (Umi Yuki - Ocean Snow) asks the eternal enka question of whether or not life is worth living if one cannot be with their lost love. The lyrics make a comparison between the snow that dissolves in the ocean water, leaving no trace behind, with his tears that will not so easily combine, leaving them visible and apparent. The first words Jero sings illustrate this beautiful image:

凍える空から	Kogoeru sora kara	From the frozen sky,
海に降る雪	umi ni furu yuki wa	the snow falling into the ocean
波間にのまれて	namima ni nomarete	is swallowed among the waves
跡形もなくなる	atokata mo nakunaru	leaving no traces.

This image of water in its different chemical forms (solid to liquid) shows how cyclical nature is, absorbing water from the land and sea to freeze it in the sky only to return it to the ocean. The water here seems to belong only to mother Earth, and will continue its cyclical motion regardless of human interference. Songwriter Ryudo Uzaki juxtaposes this combined image with another immiscible liquid:

あなた追って出雲崎	Anata otte Izumozaki	I followed you to Izumozaki:
悲しみの日本海	kanashimi no Nihonkai.	Japan's sea of sadness.
愛を見失い岸壁の上	Ai o miushinai ganpeki no ue.	I lost sight of love on the wharf.
落ちる涙は	Ochiru namida wa	The tears that fall
積もることのない	tsumoru koto no nai	do not combine
まるで海雪	marude umi yuki.	like snow in the sea.

By choosing this song as his first released single, Jero captivates the traditional enka fans by invoking classic tropes that are familiar and accepted in the culture. The lyrics present the singer as a vulnerable man who opens up in song, expressing his deep lament for lost love. By presenting himself in such a way, Jero works to break many stereotypes the Japanese have about African Americans being overly aggressive and desensitized to real love, replacing it with lust. John G. Russell, professor of anthropology at Gifu University in Japan, as well as many other scholars have recognized that, in the way of Gramsci's explanation of how hegemony is self-subjugating, Japanese society projects western notions of race relations and racism onto Africans and African Americans in Japan as Others of the White Other, adopting western stereotypes of black hypersexual masculinity in the process (Russell 110). While Japan has definitely had its own news stories involving Africans (particularly Nigerians) or African Americans being involved in questionable activities or physical crimes, these stereotypes come unfounded in any local historical base but rather are imported. The effect of these stereotypes is widespread and difficult to overcome for many new foreigners arriving in Japan, even performers like Jero. Therefore, Jero trying to overcome these stereotypes was a primary obstacle from the beginning. The refrain of the song pushes this boundary one step further, questioning the worth of life without true love:

ねえ、愛してても Nee, aishitete mo My dear, even though I love you
 ああ、届かぬなら aa, todokanu nara ah, if my love never reaches you
 ねえ、いっそこの私 nee, issso kono watashi my dear, then I would rather
 身を投げましょうか mi wo nagemashou ka just throw myself into the sea.

This hypothetical goes back hundreds of years in Japanese music and poetry, and by invoking it, Jero places himself within the traditional boundaries of the culture, giving him the opportunity that many foreign singers/performers are never given -- a real place in "Japanese" culture and society.

The image that Jero presents both in his physical presence and in his music video yokes together such heterogeneous genres and styles that it forces both young and old, Japanese and non-Japanese, to question where boundary lines can successfully be drawn. While the lyrics and content of "Umi Yuki" are traditional, the music video is a mix of graffiti urbanity, hip hop dance, contemporary recording studios, and transnational relationships. Jero's version of the song begins with old-school "808" hip-hop synthesizers, shuffled beats, and African drums that usher

in the image of baggy clothes-wearing Jero, pop-locking and dancing in a dank alleyway of an anonymous city. However, ten seconds into the song (an assumed amount of time that judgmental listeners who reject hip-hop might change the channel), the screen fades to black as the music is silenced by a Japanese flute. The song quickly switches to a pop drum kit and electric guitar riffs playing traditional enka licks, as the image of Jero's face emerges from a bowing position, introducing himself to his audience already in three variations: African American, hip-hop, and enka. The scene returns to the tagged alley where Jero is met by two Japanese male dancers dressed in similar hip-hop attire. They exchange fist-bumps and walk down the alley side-by-side in synchronized choreography with the music. This cultural statement necessarily brings Jero out of the dichotomized west/east and as he is seemingly accepted by these Japanese men, and also by the fact that Jero does not bring an entourage of other African Americans; he seems to be connecting with Japanese and, consequently, with his Japanese-American identity. Thirty seconds into the video, the Japanese dancers break away from Jero as he dips down into the camera, staring his audience directly in the eye. This powerful statement suggests that, while he has Japanese roots and is proud of his connection to Japan, the audience must learn to accept him without such blatant affiliations; take him for what he is, not for what he looks like.

The next scene takes us to an imaginary stage where Jero is backlit by spotlights. He stands alone on the stage, still dressed in his hip-hop attire, but no longer performing the dance moves. Jero begins singing the sad enka song with unexpected fluency, enunciation, emphasis and emotion. His more subtle yet powerful performance here again forces his audience to reevaluate their previous judgment of him in the beginning of the video, as younger crowds might have only been attracted to him as an African American hip-hop dancer. At close to one minute in, the camera takes a side angle view of Jero, singing off into the distance as if he is remembering a specific object of his affection, connecting emotion to the lyrics. By not relentlessly staring at the camera and the audience, Jero suggests that he sings these songs for himself and that he fully understands the weight of his words. The video then begins cutting to a montage of Jero's concert performances, recording events, and guest appearances. These cut scenes work to show us Jero the superstar on stage, but also Jero who works endlessly to perfect his craft in the studio with Japanese sound engineers, immersing himself not only in the stage but in the people of Japan. This reflects Jero's real experiences, as Victor Entertainment rigorously trained him for two years in preparation for his debut to a Japanese audience.

Jero brings us back to the alleyway with a smile after his nostalgic and lamenting chorus, sharing in a few more dance moves against a backdrop of intelligent and powerful African American images painted behind him. Interspersed throughout the rest of the video are scenes from the black solo stage, the urban alleyway, and concert footage, with overlays of popularized Japanese nihonga ink paintings in the style of Hishida Shunso, linking his art back to traditional Japanese forms (Stanley-Baker 196). The video works on different levels, aimed at affecting audiences in various ways. The hip-hop dance moves and scenery open up the demographic to younger Japanese who shy away from the music of their grandparents. Jero mentions in an interview that he is worried that enka will die out completely, and it is one of his main goals in performing that he might keep the tradition alive longer (Lah). The second audience attracted to his work is mature Japanese from the war generation who can make real “connections between the situations depicted in the songs and their own lives” (Yano 2002; 125). This audience can also be extended to the children of the war generation who grew up in difficult conditions as the reconstruction of Japan began in the late 1940s and 1950s. However, unintentional third and fourth audiences which I offer for consideration are the young J-pop fans of the United States and the African American population of Jero’s hometown in Pittsburgh who undoubtedly would have heard about him via blogs or newspapers and thereby would be introduced to a music they would not normally consume at other times.

Another released single titled “氷雨” (Hisame - Hail) off of Jero’s record-breaking album “Covers” stays in line with themes present throughout enka. “Hisame” is a bit darker than “Umi Yuki” in that it does not seem to offer any reconciliation for the narrator of the song; he will drink and drink habitually until he forgets his lost love. The lyrics here show a rejection of emotion that aims to heighten his masculinity, but ultimately makes him seem weak and vulnerable:

酔ってなんかいないわ	Yotte nanka inai wa	I’m not drunk
泣いてない	naitenai	I haven’t been crying
タバコの煙り	tabako no kemuri	It’s just the cigarette smoke
目にしみただけなの	me ni shimita dake nano	has gotten into my eyes.

The narrator refuses to take responsibility for his drinking addiction, drinking to drown the pain in his heart. The narrator finally does break down and admit his pain and sorrow:

この胸を濡らすように Kono mune o nurasu you ni It's as if my breast is soaked
 傘がないわけじゃない kasa ga nai wake ja nai But it's not because I don't
 けれど keredo have an umbrella.

Again, by singing song lyrics like these, Jero expresses himself emotionally and sympathetically in a Japanese way that is not often seen in African American artists, according to some popular Japanese opinion and as explained in the work of Christine Yano and of John Russell. However, because he can sing in Japanese and knows the culture behind the songs, he is able to connect with the audience on a much deeper level than other foreign performers. One doleful line of the song that particularly touches the Japanese audience is when Jero sings of the person lost and hints toward his recently deceased grandmother:

歌わないでください Utawanaide kudasai Please don't sing,
 その歌は sono uta wa not that song.
 別れたあの人を Wakareta ano hito o It reminds me of that person
 思い出すから omoidasu kara who has left me behind.

While this could clearly just be used as a generic enka song lyric, it has more weight coming from Jero who has publicly expressed so much love and affection for his Japanese grandmother. By asking not to hear “that song,” he reminds his audience that he was exposed to enka by his grandmother and that part of him is gone with her passing. This ethos draws listeners in who could assume the singer is Japanese, relating similar stories to his as enka traditionally invokes. However, once listeners realize that he is foreign and they learn his story, they see a foreigner with strong connections to Japan, giving him extra credibility in a way that even other enka singers are not privileged to. This is one of the saddest songs on Jero's album, but one that touches the audience in a deep, nostalgic way, making it a perfect follow-up to his more upbeat single “Umi Yuki.”

While the song “Hisame” is tragically beautiful, the opening scene displays a graphic titling this video as a “Jero Promotion Video” with the outline of the image

resembling an American dollar. While it is easy to make a connection between the cash-money imagery of American hip hop and this image, it presents a problem for an artist who is at risk of being “torn down by his public” for making the slightest error in judgment (Lah). The Japanese public could quickly turn on Jero if they believe he is only performing enka in Japan for money. The xenophobic older generations would not endorse a young African American man if his intentions were capitalist in that sense. In fact, one of Jero’s most important characteristics is his politeness and humility, which are highly valued in Japanese culture. Shown in public interviews, Jero’s fans in their fifties and sixties constantly compliment him on both his Japanese and his humble demure. However, by flashing this graphic dollar in the beginning of a video that has nothing to do with money, it sets a negative cloud in motion over the production. But the rest of the video is productive and follows along acceptable guidelines. The black and white imagery paints a pastoral Japanese scene, paired with Jero’s aimless walking across screen, trying to escape from his feelings. Questions come into mind concerning how much artistic license Jero has over his video image. Does he have creative control over how he is presented, or is it up to marketing? In order to fully reach his intended audience, Jero must make sure that his image as an African American is not being exploited and that his goals in expressive art are of the highest importance. Thankfully, since his debut in 2008, Jero has remained nearly flawless in the public eye and has continued to share his art with four subsequent albums, a United States live tour, and numerous television, film, and commercial appearances.

Conclusions

Navigating the contours of national identity within the parameters of the United States is a difficult enough endeavor. Considering how a national identity is translated when received abroad, especially in a country which might be considered a “host country” for emigrants to America, the process and its impacts morph and complicate even further. The term “national identity” carries unbelievable weight and responsibility especially in instances which claim authority based on history or those which strive for revolution from the constraints of oppressive powers. The United States of America has promoted itself as a free-thinking, explorative, independent nation of individuals comprised of peoples and cultures from all around the globe. This multiethnic, democratic sense of identity has been celebrated by presidents and figures of authority while, at the same time, denigrated as a downfall of current United States demographics. Those who hold onto antiquities of the past or of their youth often despise the change that alienates them from the surroundings they used to find so familiar. This sort of rhetoric is a staple of the argu-

ments that nationalistic parties use in bemoaning the changing face of the United States (or any other nation-state).

Amílcar Antonio Barreto, associate professor of political science at Northeastern University, has recently showcased how Haunai-Kay Trask, a Hawaiian nationalist, recently claimed that modern haole (white) and Asian immigrants cannot truly understand the concept of *mālama 'āina* [care for the land] which requires “two thousand years of practicing a careful husbandry of the land and regarding it as a mother” (Barreto 44). The Know Nothing Party of the 1850s claimed such rights to a motherland against poor Catholic immigrants and others from Europe while simultaneously dismissing and insulting the tribes of America and their histories with the land. Nationalism serves the sole purpose of excluding those who do not belong, or more specifically, those who do not belong to a particular mindset about the ideal national character. As nations grow larger and more diverse, the tension amongst nationalistic groups grows with the increasing danger that the country they know will be forever changed.

Culture is maintained as a method of actively identifying ourselves both as individuals and as part of a collective group that either voluntarily or involuntarily functions under the parameters of a legal state, a nation, an empire, or many other types of governing powers. While the nation, tribe, ethnic group, or other community we belong to often helps to form an identity, culture and cultural diffusion under the parameters of these domains of space and time is often an area of contest. While one's birth place can often give one acceptance into the collective consciousness, other times it can act as a burden when the individual's culture goes against the popular trends of the nation. The infamous American ultimatum “love it or leave it” speaks to this notion of disagreement equaling betrayal. As the culture of a minority group which begins to spread out from its enclave, it naturally follows three paths: it either dies out immediately under pressure from the majority, it cohabitates with the majority culture in a limited space, or it alters or replaces the culture of the majority.

Jero's form of enka is not easily categorized, as he insists that his version of the style is “a bit different, with more of a rhythm to it,” stemming from his American hip-hop-influenced background (Lah). Just as labels like “Chinese music” and “African American jazz” help to locate the “specific sites of cultures and peoples,” enka should be adapted to embrace its new foreign king (Lam 39). Perhaps a title such as “urban enka” would better lend itself to Jero and any others that might someday follow in his wake. In doing this, Jero's music could be classified as a new type of

Asian American music with a Pittsburgh twist. Ethnomusicologists have suggested that these categories are useful when looking at the particulars of a music form and what makes it different from other versions of the same genre (Lam 39). For Jero, this “urban enka” is a transnational music form incorporating rhythms from the urban center of Pittsburgh with guitar power chords popular throughout the rock world in the 1980s and 1990s and the classic warble and doleful crooning of Japanese enka singers. Overall, Jero’s career has and will continue to revolutionize the enka industry through his challenges to cultural perceptions of identity and, in the process, might open the doors for reevaluating what it means to be “Japanese” in this era of a declining birth rate, increased international migration, and cultural hybridization.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. Print.
- Armstrong, John. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982. Print.
- Barreto, Amílcar Antonio. *Nationalism and its Logical Foundations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Greenfeld, Liah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. Print.
- Harden, Blaine. “A Far Cry From Home: An American Puts a Fresh Spin On Japan’s Saddest Pop Songs.” *Washington Post*. 28 May 2008. Web. Accessed 9 January 2011.
- Hobsbawn, Eric. *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.
- Hutchinson, John. *Modern Nationalism*. London: Fontana, 1994. Print.
- Ikegami, Eiko. “The Emergence of Aesthetic Japan.” *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*. Ed. Joshua A. Fogel. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 11-45. Print.
- Knight, David B. “Nationalism and Music.” *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview*. Volume 4: 1989 to Present. Eds. Guntram H. Herb and David H. Kaplan. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2008. 1430-1444. Print.
- Lah, Kyung. “Jero: American Enka Singer.” YouTube. CNN talkasia. 27 October 2008. Web. Accessed 28 December 2010.
- Lam, Joseph. “Embracing ‘Asian American Music’ as an Heuristic Device.” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2.1 (1999) 29-60. Print.
- Occhi, Debra J. “Heartbreak’s Destination: Tōhoku in the Poetic Discourse of Enka.” *Wearing Cultural Styles in Japan: Concepts of Tradition and Modernity in Practice*. Eds. Christopher S.

- Thompson and John W. Traphagan. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. 151-170. Print
- Okada, Maki and Gerald Groemer. "Musical characteristics of Enka." *Popular Music* 10.3 (1991): 283-303. Cambridge University Press. Print.
- Perdue, Peter C. "Where Do Incorrect Political Ideas Come From? Writing the History of the Qing Empire and the Chinese Nation." *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*. Ed. Joshua A. Fogel. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 174-199. Print.
- Russell, John G. "The other other: The black presence in the Japanese experience." *Japan's Minorities: The illusion of homogeneity*. Second edition. Ed. Michael Weiner. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. 84-110. Print.
- Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and Modernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Stanley-Baker, Joan. *Japanese Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000. Print.
- Yano, Christine R. "The burning of men: Masculinities and the nation in Japanese popular song." *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salaryman doxa*. Eds. James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 77-90. Print.
- . *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.