On Cultural Otherness in the Era of Globalization 3.0: Israeli Fans of Japanese Popular Culture and "Japan"

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Abstract

This article explores the effects of the merging of two cultural processes, one local and the other global, on the production and meanings of cultural Otherness in an era characterized by revolutionary developments in technologies of communication and cooperation to the point it was dubbed the Globalization 3.0 Era. The first local cultural process is the emergence of a community of Israeli fans of media-centered Japanese popular culture, who exhibit a new paradigm of cosmopolitans. Fans belong to a highly inclusive semivirtual imagined community, they appropriate and reproduce without reservations foreign products and practices, and they perform as cultural specialists, often without ever going abroad at all. We see them as neocosmopolitans. Another global cultural process we refer to is the one through which the media-centered Japanese popular culture fans appropriate, has become in recent years a transculture rather than a national culture; a culture with which the identification is supranational, that is, not in-between but above. Nevertheless, Japanese popular transculture has not disintegrated into free-floating deterritorialized products because of its structure and its participatory and interactive qualities. Furthermore, non-Japanese fans have an

important role in the semiotic construction of the meaning and imagery of this transculture. We argue that among Israeli fans, the Japanese Other is reproduced as a stylistic point of reference. This Otherness is maintained and used as a tool for creating subject and group representations in a cultural environment that generates a more fluid sense of identity and encourages the constant reinvention of images and the playful production of simulacra.

INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, contemporary Japanese media-centered youth popular culture has been proliferating in East and Southeast Asia, and then also in the Euro-American West and beyond.[i] The growing intensity of this process of cultural dissemination has earned for contemporary Japanese culture the epithet of "Cool Japan" (Daliot-Bul 2009). Starting with consumer products such as anime (Japanese animation), manga (Japanese comics), computer and video games, collectibles, pop music, TV dramas, and street fashion, and moving on to complex and sophisticated fandom practices such as *dōjinshi* (fan-drawn self-published manga), *cosplay* (an amalgamation of "costume play," a performance of fans as their favorite characters), subbing (fan-produced subtitles for anime and TV dramas) and scanlation (fan-translated manga), Japanese popular culture has created around the world a new *transnational culture* with many local communities of "committed fans."[ii] The latter are hardcore fans who consume, appropriate and embody enthusiastically Japanese popular culture and become agents in the further distribution of this culture

through the Internet, in fan-organized for-fans conventions and through small-scale businesses that import and sell Japanese popular culture goods.

In Israel, where Japanese culture has been drawing considerable attention in the past three decades, it is possible to observe the emergence of a community of fans since the beginning of the new millennium. Early fans were usually young people in their early and mid teens. Starting from a personal interest in one of the typical Japanese popular culture forms like anime series, these people later formed groups centered on Internet forums. Israeli fans see themselves as performing on a par with other communities around the world; their main groups of reference are located in the United States and Japan. They also refer to English-speaking international Internet forums. This popular culture that Israeli fans have been appropriating and reproducing seems to have all the necessary attributes to be regarded as a "transnational culture": a culture in which "the identification process is…mixed or supranational, that is not in between, but above" (Friedman 1995: 78). But for Israeli fans, this popular culture remains resolutely "Japanese."

How can we analyze and interpret the relations between the complex and multidirectional trajectories of cultural flows of Japanese popular (trans)culture and the local Israeli fan culture? What is so "Japanese" about Japanese popular (trans)culture, with its many different mediums, genres and styles? Why does a transnational culture remain associated with a specific national tag instead of disintegrating, similarly to other global popular culture products, into free-floating deterritorialized products? And why and how are Israeli "committed fans" maintaining and reproducing the "Otherness" of

Japanese popular (trans)culture? These are some of the questions that we explore in this article.

The case at hand of local Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture highlights the crucial influence of the contemporary technological annulment of spatial and temporal distances (see Tomlinson 1999) on the production of new social images of Otherness and similarity. This new era of globalization, which is characterized by an empowerment of the individual made possible by new information and communication technologies and the consequent weakening of imagined national-cultures entities, has been termed the "Globalization 3.0" era (Friedman 2005: 9–11). Electronic media has been described as causing placelessness and as having the potential of creating communities with "no sense of place" (Meyrowitz 1985). Moreover, computer-mediated electronic communication has also long been associated with a certain fluidity of identity (Poster 1995: 90). We believe that these circumstances have been influential in transforming the Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture into a new kind of "cosmopolitan" (see Hannertz 1990, 1996) that we suggest terming "neocosmopolitan."

This article focuses on the processes of the construction of cultural Otherness in the Globalization 3.0 era. We argue that in the case of Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture, former insider/outsider divisions are disintegrating and that the Other is produced mainly as a stylistic point of reference. Moreover, the Other is being used as a tool for creating subject and group representations in a cultural environment that produces a more fluid sense of identity and encourages the constant reinvention of images and the playful production of simulacra.[iii]

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MULTIPLE GLOBAL CENTERS AND PERIPHERIES: THE "FIRST JAPAN CRAZE"

When discussing the appropriation, consumption and reproduction of Japanese culture and images in Israel, two fundamental conditions must be taken into consideration. First, the popular interest in Japanese culture has taken place in Israel within a context nearly devoid of Japanese agency.[iv] Second, the relations between Japan and Israel cannot be analyzed with any of the theoretical frameworks, developed over several decades, that are used for describing the economic, diplomatic and cultural relationships between Japan and its main Others, East Asian nations and the Euro-American West. Israel as a political and cultural entity has had no part in the historical traditions and the discourses of power that have shaped the relationship along these two general axes. In that sense, rather than an interpretation that assumes a colonial, near-colonial or postcolonial context, the relationship between Israel and Japan offers a perspective on the relations between cultural centers and peripheries in a rapidly globalizing world.

Like in other parts of the "globalizing world," the cultural imagery of Japan in Israel reflected for many years views imported from the United States. Following World War II, the global dissemination of American popular culture and media products has entailed a distribution of Orientalist images of Japan to cultures that are peripheral or even irrelevant to the shared history of the "West" and "Japan." However, this process of dissemination does not necessarily imply a passive consumption reflecting a "cultural imperialistic" takeover (see Tomlinson 1991). In the Israeli case, the Israeli media in

particular has been active in the reproduction of Orientalist images of Japan that have reinforced a commonsensical consent on a world division in which Israel belongs with the rational, democratic, virtuous and humane "West" (Daliot-Bul 2007: 187).[v] The nearly exclusive intermediary role of the United States in shaping the images of Japan in Israel was to change in the mid-1980s, when the popular interest in Japanese culture turned into an outright "Japan Craze" (Goldstein-Gidoni 2003: 366). We have dubbed this Japan Craze the "First Japan Craze."

The First Japan Craze in Israel should be understood as a local expression of a historical momentum that was described in the literature as the ongoing formation of multiple global cultural centers and their peripheries that move and overlap, producing ever more complex and disjunctive economic, cultural and political intercultural flows (Appadurai 1990; Befu 2001). The end of the Cold War led to the weakening of the economic and cultural hegemony of the United States around the world. Furthermore, the last quarter of the twentieth century saw a larger number of people moving around the globe using better and more available transportation infrastructures for immigration and tourism, the integration of markets and capital by powerful transnational companies, as well as the development of advanced communication technologies (Iwabuchi 2002: 36).

One of the characteristics of the First Japan Craze was the high and visible involvement of Israelis in the reproduction and promotion of Japanese culture in Israel (Goldstein-Gidoni 2003). Motivated by their deep interest in Japanese arts and culture, most of these aficionados of Japanese culture spent some time in Japan, gaining certain expertise in a Japanese art or craft.

Returning from Japan, they became local cultural brokers of Japanese culture. In other words, they became self-proclaimed intermediaries, conveyers and interpreters of Japanese culture to local Israelis mainly by way of producing "Japanese culture" in various venues such as workshops, shopping malls and festivals (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005). Providing audiences with a selective version of an objectified culture, as seen in flower arrangements and origami, or in representations of Japan such as Japanese traditional dance and kendo demonstrations, they in fact reinforced the already prevailing image of Japanese culture as an exclusive, enigmatic, timeless essence that can only be approached with the assistance of a cultural intermediary. [vi] The first generation of brokers of Japanese culture in Israel could be characterized as acting solo while maintaining an actor-audience relationship with locals by reproducing images of the Other for the nonexperienced onlookers' pleasure or by framing and offering small-scale immersive temporary experiences.

These Israeli brokers of Japanese culture attested to being attracted to Japan because it provided them with a special kind of "mirror" that offers self-discovery and self-reflection, and which has eventually allowed them the appropriation of a private, self-defined alternative cultural identity (Goldstein-Gidoni 2003). The dialectical attitude of Israeli brokers of Japanese culture toward Israeli culture and society that they excluded themselves from and sometimes included themselves in, the way in which they often presented themselves as "citizens of the world" and their reflection of themselves as a vessel carrying the culture of the Other are very characteristic of Hannertz's "cosmopolitans" (1990, 1996).

Cosmopolitans (as opposed to locals) have been described by Hannertz as people with an advantageous perspective or state of mind, an expansionist orientation in the management of meanings, which allows them to explore other cultures while avoiding using an ethnocentric view of progress. Cosmopolitans present themselves as having a competence in other cultures and thereby often become interpreters of cultures, packaging amazing places and exotic traditions for audiences who are happy to be satisfied with commodified reproductions of an "authentic" Other that is far away from home (Featherstone 1995: 99).

FROM GLOBALIZATION 2.0 TO GLOBALIZATION 3.0: THE "SECOND JAPAN CRAZE"

The downturn of the Japanese economy during the 1990s cooled off some of the excitement about Japan in Israel. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, a global Cool Japan wave reached Israel. This wave, which has been driven by the global success of Japanese popular culture, and was excitedly portrayed by the global media (e.g., McGray 2002, Faiola 2003), has since contributed to the production of a new kind of complex imagery of Japan in Israel. It has been argued that in investigating the global success of Japanese popular culture, particular attention should be given to anime (Choo 2009). Anime has not only gained much higher commercial success than other forms of Japanese popular culture that have remained mainly niche products,[vii] but also, owing to its widest global exposure, has actually turned Japanese popular culture into a part of kids' culture in many countries around the world.

Likewise, in the Israeli case, TV has played a major role in introducing kid-oriented hit anime series. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, series such as *Pokemon* (since 1999) and *Digimon* (since 2000), which were bought from U.S. distributors after being heavily edited and dubbed, were marketed for the first time as "Japanese." These hit series started a merchandizing boom of anime-related goods, such as toys, cards, books, VHS tapes and later DVDs, and computer and video games. Since the beginning of the new millennium, kids' channels and even a newly launched Anime Channel (2004–2008) broadcast a growing number of anime series, which were often bought directly from Japan. Many of these anime series were broadcast unedited in their original Japanese versions and often with their original Japanese soundtrack (e.g., *Sakura*, *Inuyasha*, *Fruits basket*, *Hikaru no go*). Nowadays, anime director Hayao Miyazaki's feature-length movies are broadcast regularly on Israeli television in Japanese or in Hebrew. The cable television video-on-demand service provides, on top of Miyazaki's blockbusters, several lesser known anime titles for the refined viewer. Japanese anime industries have been booming in Japan since the 1960s (Napier 2001: 16–18); their popularity around the world since the late 1990s, therefore, did not reflect a contemporaneous production of a new and enchanting media, but the increasing integration, networking and cooperation among transnational media industries (Iwabuchi 2002: 36).

The Cool Japan wave in Israel initiated the production of new forms of Orientalist imagery of an urban, postmodern, futuristic and often decadent Japanese culture (Daliot-Bul 2007) that have come to join, though not replace, the "older-style" Orientalist portrayal of the Otherness of Japan. The latter have tended to objectify "Japan" through commodities and representations and

consequently to reproduce Japan as a unique site of a harmonious coexistence of "tradition" and "modernity." It is thus that the consumption trajectories of Japanese culture and images in Israel have become much more diversified, suggesting the beginning of the "Second Japanese Craze."

The Japanese popular culture wave was initially the result of an upscaled global distribution of Japanese popular culture products (Iwabuchi 2002: 37–38), but it would have never reached its high level of popularity in Israel had it not taken place in an environment referred to by Jenkins (2006) as an environment of media convergence. In this environment, information and communication technologies shape nearly every aspect of contemporary life, including how people create, consume, learn and communicate with one another. Traditional means of distribution of Japanese popular culture products are currently expanded and even challenged by newer means. Broadband connectivity and not national borders, customs or copy rights determine today's cultural flows.

Like the First Japan Craze, the Second Japan Craze in Israel is also characterized by a high involvement of local brokers in the reproduction and promotion of Japanese culture. However, unlike the first generation of brokers, who were captivated by the traditional, exclusive Japanese arts and crafts, the new generation of cultural brokers is fascinated by a contemporary Japanese popular culture that offers relatively accessible cultural commodities as well as highly inclusive cultural practices. The high accessibility and the technological and interactive nature of these second-wave popular culture products have been enhanced by global transformations that Thomas Friedman (2005) has termed "Globalization 3.0" as a pun on the futuristic resonance of "Web 3.0." Whereas

Web 2.0 was coined in reference to the revolutionary interactive and social Web that facilitates collaboration between people, Web 3.0 is a term used to hypothesize about a future wave of Internet innovation. According to Friedman's periodization of the globalization process, Globalization 3.0 began in the year 2000 and is characterized by groundbreaking developments in software and the installment of a worldwide fiber-optic network. Rather than by states or companies, as in Globalization 1.0 (1492–1800) and Globalization 2.0 (1800–2000), today's Globalization 3.0 is to a large extent driven by private players.

Although there are contesting formulations to Friedman's historical periodization of globalization (e.g., Appadurai 1990; Robertson 1992; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 1999; Lemert, Elliott, Chaffee, and Hsu 2010, xxii), what is nevertheless undisputable is that the recent developments in information and communication technologies have been providing the private player with more information, better social networks and greater power to act, interfere, critique, initiate and produce than ever before, in ways that are contesting older sociopolitical power structures (see Rheingold 2002). Combined with these new technological means of media convergence, the result for Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture, like for their counterparts in other parts of the world, is an inviting open-to-all playing field.

Similar to the first generation of Israeli brokers of Japanese culture, current Israeli fans may also be regarded as cosmopolitans. Well over a decade ago, Hannertz wrote that "what McLuhan once described as the implosive power of the media may now make just about everybody a little more cosmopolitan. And one may in the end ask whether it is now even possible to

become a cosmopolitan without going away at all" (1996, 111). Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture may be exactly that, cosmopolitans without ever going away at all: "neocosmopolitans." The cosmopolitans described by Hannertz (1990, 1996) were criticized as participating in many worlds without ever becoming part of them; they are cosmopolitans who can only play roles, participating only superficially in other people's realities (Friedman 1995: 78). As we will show, by comparison, fans appropriate the highly inclusive Japanese popular culture as their own, without inhibitions or reservations. Moreover, it is easy to become a fan. Fans thereby embrace a rather more sophisticated kind of cultural cosmopolitanism that emphasizes the possible fluidity of individual identity, or "people's remarkable capacity to forge new identities using materials from diverse cultural sources, and to flourish while so doing" (Held 2002: 12–13; also see Scheffler 1999: 257).

THE DIALECTICS BETWEEN A TRANSNATIONAL VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND A LOCAL PHYSICAL COMMUNITY

The new generation of brokers of Japanese culture started with a small group of local fans who discovered anime in the late 1990s when it was first broadcast on Israeli TV and they were in their early and mid teens. These enthusiastic viewers, who were also early adopters of the Internet and well versed in using their home computers, started to watch and download anime even before the turn of the twenty-first century, when search engines were in their pioneering stages, using the very early prototypes of chat clients and file-sharing programs. In doing so, they joined a growing virtual transnational community of *otaku*. *Otaku* was originally the Japanese term for hardcore fans

of anime, manga, *dōjinshi*, computers and video games; these people were criticized in Japan as being nonsocial geeks (Takarajima 1989). Although the Japanese *otaku* have come a long way since the term was coined in the 1970s in terms of social recognition, the term still carries in Japan some of its earlier negative connotation. However, in the Euro-American region and by extension also in Israel, the term *otaku* has been adopted by local fans of contemporary Japanese popular culture as a rather cool denotation. As a matter of fact, as we have been told by many of our interviewees, many of the Israeli fans do not deem themselves knowledgeable enough to be called *otaku*.

Fans who discovered anime in those early days like to tell today how during those "hard times" they got copies of anime series through "devious paths" and almost "clandestine connections," meeting strangers on street corners and exchanging floppy discs. Anat,[viii] a twenty-five-year-old Japanese Studies student and a pioneering member of the fan community, recounts the appeal of being an anime fan during those early stages of Internet penetration and anime boom. As she nostalgically recollects, people were often boasting about how they knew people from all over the world and how they chatted with these new "friends" on the Internet until the early morning hours. Notwithstanding, the first Israeli anime forums on the Internet, such as Pokemon, Tapuz Anime and Manga forum, anime.co.il and Hydepark, have become attractive alternatives to international chat rooms and forums, which can be joined only by people with a good command of English.

For Israeli fans, a command of English seems to have always been a practical means to acquire more knowledge and gain significant cultural capital. The Israeli fandom environment is rather limited, and Japanese forums are

obviously out of the way because of language barriers. According to Alex, a twenty-four-year-old blogger and a self-proclaimed Israeli *otaku*, the ability to juggle between Hebrew-speaking Israeli forums and English-speaking international forums provides a way to differentiate and position oneself "snobbishly" within the "upper class" of the Israeli anime and manga fan community. In other words, the seemingly borderless world of global online fan communication is in fact restricted by language barriers. The United States' long protested "global cultural hegemony," which has often been referred to as "cultural imperialism" (see Friedman 1995: 70), is presently being contested by other cultural centers; nevertheless, the global lingua franca is still English, and it is English that provides a linguistic infrastructure that parallels the technological infrastructures of the era (see Held 2002: 2).

At the first stages of the formation of what has later become the community of Israeli anime fans, the forming community was not a physical community. Rather, it was a local "virtual imagined community" built of smaller subgroups with a strong affiliation to a larger transnational "virtual imagined community" of Japanese popular culture fans (on "virtual communities," see Rheingold 2000). The logic of these communities strongly resonates with Anderson's idea of an "imagined community" as a community that is distinguished by the style in which it is imagined and whose members will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991: 6). Whereas Anderson focuses on "nations" and the "national" and our concern is with the "transnational," his lucid observations with regard to the convergence between capitalism and print technology may prove revealing also

in the case of the convergence between late capitalism and advanced technologies. It can be argued that in the same manner that innovative print technology has laid the basis for national consciousness by creating a unified field of exchange and communication among the masses overcoming class and education differences (Anderson 1991: 44), the innovative technologies of the 2000s have created a unified field of exchange and communication among global masses overcoming national differences.

Israeli fans are involved in a kind of cultural cosmopolitanism that thrives in innovative ways through cutting-edge technological means of communication and cooperation *underneath quarreling nation-states and governments*. In fact, fans of Japanese popular culture in Israel are often proud of having "virtual friends" around the world, even in Muslim countries with no, or limited, political liaisons with Israel, such as Morocco and Indonesia. As put by Yael, a twenty-three-year-old Japanese Studies student and a fervent cosplayer as well as J-pop enthusiast:

When you speak with someone in a forum…for example,

when I discuss Arashi [a J-pop band] and then someone

replies, it is hard to notice nuances affected by [a local]

culture because we speak more or less about the same

thing. I have many friends from the United States; I don't

feel that they are more American or that I am more

Israeli.…It really doesn't matter if you are Jewish,

Christian or Muslim.

At the turn of the century, members of different forums started to meet regularly, in intimate social gatherings in outdoor parks or private homes.

From the beginning, the forums maintained competitive differentiated identities, each forming a self-contained subcommunity. Moreover, there has always been a well recognized and acknowledged social hierarchy at play within the smaller subcommunities and within the larger community, reflecting the fact that some members have become more dominant players. Today, in ways that cut across all groups, older fans (who are in their mid twenties and up) keep shy of younger fans (who are in their early and mid teens). But notwithstanding the differentiation between the groups within the larger fan community and the commonly dubbed "social dramas" erupting between different groups and players, the larger community as a whole is arguably very inclusive. Anyone who shows an interest is welcome to join. One of the early members has put it in the following manner:

> Since most members meet for the first time online,
>
> physical appearances don't matter, it is only the "head"
>
> that counts. When you meet the person face-to-face a few
>
> months later, and you are already friends, you don't mind
>
> so much if they don't look too good, or even if they are
>
> physically challenged.

Ron, a twenty-two-year-old "lover of the community" was maybe more honest when he said:

> The truth is that at first it [meeting Internet acquaintances
>
> in real life] is weird, like with everything else, a person
>
> with whom you are used to chat[ting with] and with whom
>
> you chat a lot, and you think you know him or her,
>
> suddenly you see that person in reality…it is a little

different, but eventually these are the same people, and

within a second you connect.

Technologies of cooperation allow for new collective action and enable the grouping together of people with rare or unusual interests. However, the communication in the anime forums, like in other Internet forums, is not only about sharing information and intellectual insights. As astutely described by Rheingold (2002: 30), people can put little of what they know and how they feel into the online network and draw out much larger amounts of knowledge and opportunities for sociability than they put in. It is of no surprise that quite a few of our informants have reached anime-related forums after being members of other Internet forums. Japanese popular culture–centered virtual communities provide their members with social network capital, knowledge capital and communion. Internet forums are a haven for many lonely souls, no doubt also because the potential for constructing alternative identities is one of the most salient features of Internet use (Baker 2001). The disembodiment of participants in virtual communities affords users a great deal of scope in contributing towards the construction of the online identities of themselves and those of others.

The case in hand offers a fascinating glance at an online community that in fact extends to real life, merging in seamless ways the social capital acquired in the virtual world with the physical reality. Extension of virtual communities into real life goes against the concept of Internet anonymity and is undermining the construction of alternative identities. However, as we have been able to witness in the case of Japanese popular culture fans in Israel, the virtually invented identities flow seamlessly into real life. An obvious example

of this flow is how virtual pseudonyms are often kept in real life. In merging

virtual reality and media images with their daily reality, the former are no

longer mere liminal leisure pursuits. Fans' virtual identity becomes one facet of

their identity, and fans' communion with other members of the community,

which is based on a shared fascination with fictional worlds, becomes their

favorite reality among multiple realities. The fan community becomes the most

significant sociocultural affiliation for many of the fans—their preferred way of

being. This blurring of boundaries between realities is in fact characteristic of

the *otaku* culture in general, starting with Japan, where fictional anime and

games form the seed of the principle determining human relations among *otaku*

(Daliot-Bul 2009: 20; Azuma 2009: 26).

FROM TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL FLOWS TO A
TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE

At the early stage of the formation of the Israeli fan community, American

fandom was the primary mimetic prototype. Fans used to look at the American

Anime Expo as a "holy grail." As veteran fans recall, "people were fantasizing

about saving one day enough money to attend it [the American Anime Expo],

and about future days in which we will have our own Anime Expo in Israel."

According to Mor, a twenty-five-year-old fan who works in a comic and manga

shop, "the ambition in Israel is to reach [the sophistication and level of] the fan

community in the United States." According to Alex, even in 2010 "the Israeli

community of fans should be compared and paralleled to the American one."

In reality, practices appropriated by and within the Israeli fan scene exhibit the

expected processes of cultural domestication.[ix] But from the point of view of

many fans, Israeli anime conventions, which started in 2005, center on cosplay and anime-screening events like their American model, and the highlight of Israeli cosplay events are masquerade and cast performances like in the United States.[x]

Nevertheless, although all eyes have been set on the West, anime and related merchandizing have always been consumed as *Japanese* products. Viewing anime in Japanese with subtitles and later even without subtitles became another avant-gardist practice among Israeli fans of anime and of other forms of Japanese popular culture.[xi] Cosplaying, drawing *dōjinshi*, wearing Lolita-style street fashion, and identifying with Visual-Kei pop music and idols are often learned by emulating American practices and by gathering information from English-speaking Web sites, but they are appropriated and performed as *Japanese* practices. This is another expression of the contemporaneous complexities of cultural flows, of the position Israeli culture holds as a cultural periphery to more than one global cultural center and of the high symbolic value of cultural Otherness in late capitalist societies (see Friedman 1999). This may also be an expression of the deterritorialization of Japanese popular culture. Fans all over the world appropriate and thereby participate in the consumption and reproduction of Japanese popular culture. Japanese popular culture has become a *transnational culture*. The identification process with Japanese popular culture is supranational; it is not in between, but above. "Japanese" in this case has become something different than a simple national denomination.

WHAT IS SO JAPANESE ABOUT JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE?

Part One: Remediation and Intertextuality

Fandom in general, and in Japanese popular culture in particular, has been described as active and highly productive.[xii] Liberating the image of fans from its passivity, Jenkins (1992: 208) has shown how fans can be consumers who also produce, readers who also write and spectators who also perform. And Fiske (1989, 1992a) has described the semiotic productivity of fans, whereby new meanings, knowledge, texts and identities are produced, accumulated and circulated as cultural capital. Japanese popular culture, with its many different mediums and genres, has been offering in the past two decades innovative thematic ideas and visual styles to growing cohorts of passionate consumers around the world. Moreover, resulting from a dynamic postwar history of cross-pollination between Japanese producers and consumers, Japanese popular culture has, as Kelt (2006: 47) has put it in reference to anime and manga, an enchanting "do-it-yourself" factor. It is participatory and communal.

As early as the 1970s, fans of anime and manga in Japan have been engaged in inventing interactive fan practices. These practices, which are often based on intertextual play and "derivative works" (Azuma 2009: 25), including costume play and the drawing of *dōjinshi*, have allowed fans experiences of immersion, participation and communal interactivity with their object of desire and passion (Yonezawa 1990). Other immersive and communal fan-generated practices that evolved through intertextual play developed during the 1990s around J-pop and street fashion.[xiii]

Japanese popular culture fandom practices highlight how in postmodern fandom the line between production and consumption sometimes actually blurs. Fans are enabled and actually encouraged to produce endless simulacra as their

favorite mode of consumption. While cultural production has been transferred at least partially from the monopolistic grip of corporations and professionals into the hands of nonprofit "smart mobs" (see Rheingold 2002), the logic of late capitalistic cultural production (Jameson 1991) still prevails. The result is a seemingly contradictory expression of subversive thought that enthusiastically embraces consumer culture. Based on a fetishism of commodities, images and brands, this logic revolves around commodification, the recycling of images and the random cannibalization of all past styles in order to produce new styles. It is a cultural production of depthless images and simulacra, in which various "depth models" (i.e. the construction of ideological, artistic or philosophical meanings, as privileged knowledge) are to some extent replaced by practices, discourses and textual play (Jameson 1991: 12).

Kelt (2006: 147) argues that participatory anime and manga fan practices are not unlike some forms of American fandom. We would like to argue that what sets apart the object of desire of fans of Japanese popular culture from that of fans of American or other globally circulating popular culture products, such as fans of science fiction, fantasy, heavy metal bands, Harry Potter or Madonna, are the ways many genres and products of Japanese popular culture are closely interwoven, either thematically or on the production level. Like other fans, Japanese popular culture fans specialize in specific genres, products and practices; however, they also often attest to being fans of something much more general, which was described by one informant as "Japanese contemporary entertainments."

In ways that may have triggered, and have certainly reflected as well as enhanced, the production of simulacra among fans, the relevant cultural

industries in Japan have been developing systematically over the years a marketing/production strategy of "remediation": the reproduction of successful titles in a diverse range of media. This strategy was implemented with the first TV anime adaptation of Tezuka Osamu's popular manga titled *Tetsuwan Atomu* (1963). It has developed over the years to encompass a creative remediation and subtler intertextuality among anime, manga, toys, video games, cards, collectibles, the music industry, fashion and more. To be sure, the remediation of successful titles is not a Japanese invention; however, it reached high levels of sophistication and became a systematic production method in Japanese popular cultural industries long before it became the mainstream game of action in cultural industries elsewhere. This marketing strategy resulted in a rather interesting construction of pleasure, which Allison has called "polymorphous perverse play" (2006: 9–10) in reference to how producers cut across new borders, media and technologies in making and selling fun and kid-oriented fantasy.

Israeli fans we interviewed often related to this interconnected nature of Japanese popular culture products, which urges them to be "total consumers." Yael described this interconnectedness as follows:

Take, for example, Arashi [a J-pop band]: their music is interesting but so is everything beyond the music. Everything *they do*…their interactions [on TV shows] with each other or with guests.…They are also something of comedians, kind of actors.…They make television shows, concerts, television dramas and theatrical plays. When you are a fan of a J-pop band, you actually *live* it every day. There is always something to download, everyday something to watch.

Another fervent fan even went further to suggest that this interconnectedness of genres and artists in fact dictates the manner of fandom-ship,

> It is impossible to separate between bands, anime, manga, computer games and the rest. If, for example, you like a certain actor for the way he did the dubbing of an anime—and I personally am a huge fan of certain voice actors—you soon realize that he is also doing video games, movies, OVAs,[xiv] and that he is also in a band…and then you realize that the other band members are also into voice acting or that they are singing a major anime theme song which has become a hit….So you really *cannot stay* in just one area.

Part Two: Fans' Active Separatism

The "Japaneseness" of Israeli anime and manga fans has been an integral part of their fan identity since the early days of the creation of their community. While being one of the defining factors of Israeli fandom of Japanese popular culture, this particular attribute naturally marks a difference between non-Japanese *otaku* and Japanese *otaku* who have no issue in defining the whole of Japanese popular culture products as a unified "Japanese" culture. This yearning for "Japanese" identity has undoubtedly had an impact on the forms of participation of Israeli fans.

The first Israeli fans still remember the days when they were able to participate only in general popular culture events such as the "Icon Festival for Science Fiction, Fantasy and Role-Playing Games," the flagship event of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. Although they did not feel utterly part of the scene, they still participated, hoping for a screening of a new

anime they had not yet watched. Nevertheless, their own feeling of being "different" echoed clearly, and they were often referred to by other participants who frequented the Icon Festival, like sci-fi fans or fans with a more specific palate such as the Trekkies and the Tolkienian, as the "Japan freaks." This naming should not be surprising as the manga and anime fans were often careful to stage a perfectly "Japanese" presentation-of-self (Goffman 1976) by wearing outstanding costumes in a Japanese street-fashion style.

The separatist identity of the "Japanese" fans received a formal affirmation when in 2007 they established their own organization. For lack of financial resources and experience, the nonprofit Israeli Anime and Manga organization (AMAI) was established as an affiliated daughter organization to the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. Regardless of the affiliation, AMAI's management has always declared that it would keep its autonomy and independence. Thus, for example, rather than merging within the larger media genres of animation, comics and role play, at the Icon Festival 2009, AMAI had its own separate anime convention, with anime screenings, community activities, cosplay, original cosplay cast performances, an all-night J-Rock party, etc.[xv]

This insistence among fans of the uniquely distinct Otherness of their objects of fascination is consistent. When asked, for example, if they can tell the difference between Japanese anime and anime-inspired American or European cartoons (e.g., *Power Puff Girls* [1998], *Teen Titans* [2004], *Puffy Ami Yumi* [2004], *Ben 10* [2005] and *Winx Club* [2004]), many insist fervently that they can tell the difference "in just one glance." As explained before, the two common attributes of all the various and often very different products of

Japanese popular culture are that they are made in Japan and that they are interrelated thematically or on the production level through remediation or intertextuality. But for fans, they offer collectively something else, which they find hard to define, "a different style." Tomer braves an explanation of the "Japaneseness" of Japanese popular culture:

> Many of the elements that together produce the charm of anime and manga are things derived from Japanese culture. Since they are written by Japanese artists, many anime and manga have crazy references to Japanese culture—to *yukata* [the casual Japanese summer kimono], *hanami* [flower viewing], festivals. Thinking about it, the music in anime is ultimately also part of Japanese culture and is not really "anime" or "manga."

In other words, Tomer starts his explanation by pointing to references in anime to real Japanese culture, hence, according to him the Japaneseness of anime. It is certainly true that since the time *Pokemon* was released to the international market, there has been a noticeable shift from the postwar policy of culturally "neutralizing" exported anime to assure their marketability (Allison 2003: 383). While only a little over a decade ago, anime series that were deemed too "Japanese" were not considered for exportation, today, exported Japanese anime are often "fragrantly Japanese," with clear references to a Japanese way of life (Daliot-Bul 2007: 184). Fans often tell how they would love to see with their eyes the settings of their favorite anime series. Just as some Hollywood movies and American TV dramas offer a distorted yet believable image of the American way of life, Japanese media products offer sometimes a "mirror image" of Japan.[xvi]

Moreover, *otaku*-oriented anime, that is, anime that have an *otaku* protagonist or protagonists (e.g., *Genshiken* [2004], *Lucky Star* [2007]) and are today either broadcast on TV or accessible online, often introduce, enhance and promote the complexly interrelated *otaku*'s fandom pursuits. Thus, whereas some fans have learned first about cosplay from anime, others have expressed their desire to see the site of action with their own eyes. For example, Ron zealously talked about how he would love to go to the anime quarter in Tokyo that he saw in anime, "where all the *otaku* go" (i.e., Akihabara).

However, how can we explain the "Japaneseness" of anime and manga that are not set in Japan and are sometimes even set in an imagined "West" or in completely fictional worlds? What is so "Japanese" about Gothic Lolita street fashion, J-pop and collectible figurines? Do they actually have a common style? Can it be again that imagined "distinct and unified" Japanese culture, which has been used in other cases of the invention of "things Japanese" (see Vlastos 1998), that acts as an umbrella to unite them all? Even Tomer, quoted previously as relating to this option, finally has to admit that it is actually hard to find the traces for this imagined entity in the details and that it is rather merely the fact that Japanese popular culture products are produced by Japanese artists (e.g., manga artists, animators and musicians) and the way they are woven together (e.g., anime and music) that make the whole of Japanese popular culture stand for more than the sum of its parts. It seems that the alleged common "different style," the "Japaneseness" of all Japanese popular culture products, is more than anything else the result of a semiotic construction of meaning by fans.

But, maintaining this unique Otherness also plays an additional role in the construction of fans' identity. The highly active process of consumption of (sometimes by way of [re]production) Japanese popular culture in which fans are involved is in fact a theatrical play with identities, a process in which fans are choosing, making and remaking their identities (see Kellner 1992). By differentiating themselves from other groups and from the mainstream society, Israeli fans mark themselves as belonging to a (youth) subculture. Fans, as individuals and as a community, perform their subcultural identity as style(s), for style is a practice that constructs and reproduces social meanings (Hebdige 1979). Although belonging with Japanese popular fandom did not evolve from a sociopolitical ideological conscience, it can nevertheless be interpreted as a form of refusal, since it goes "against nature" by interrupting the process of "normalization," challenging the principle of unity and cohesion and contradicting the myth of consensus (Hebdige 1979: 18). Japanese popular culture has not only become a transculture, it has come to represent a genre or a style, much like rock or punk music.

THE PRODUCTION OF A "JAPANESE" SUBCULTURAL IDENTITY

Fans of Japanese popular culture often develop an avid interest in Japan and in Japanese culture—an unsurprising attitude since their subcultural affiliation is actually defined by its "Japaneseness." Many fans express a longing wish to go to Japan or have already been to Japan on one or more occasions. Some of the fans seek further education in Japanese Studies programs at leading universities in Israel. However, unlike the first generation of Japan admirers, who became

missionaries and active local brokers of Japanese culture, current Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture have no interest in addressing or reaching out to Israelis wherever they are. They are interested in reaching out to their own peers. Many of our interviewees, and especially those who have been fascinated by Japanese manga and anime for more years, have recognized their failed initial attempt to fervently urge people to "absolutely" watch certain "*really good*" anime series. As they recall, they often soon realized, as one of them put it, "that this stuff is interesting for me and not necessarily for them, and that it may never be interesting for them, so I stopped."

When we asked other interviewees whether they actively brought outsider friends into the community of fans, the replies were surreptitiously unenthusiastic. The Israeli fans are interested in enhancing and celebrating their object of fascination within themselves and for themselves by ways of creating, enhancing and maintaining their "[partly virtual] imagined community." Also unlike the first generation of cultural brokers of Japanese culture in Israel, rather than acting solo and maintaining an actor-audience relationship with locals in order to keep the exclusive monopoly on knowledge within the hands of the cultural broker, current fans share and learn together in a relatively egalitarian fashion, as well as reproduce and reinvent together their object of desire.

Committed fans characteristically look for every possible outlet to celebrate communally their love for anime, manga, J-pop and other Japanese popular culture products, and they are driven in their efforts to spread and promote among their peers information about and knowledge of Japanese popular culture and Japanese culture in general. In order to enhance their

inclusive community, committed fans have been initiating and producing anime and manga conventions in Israel. A few fans with a more entrepreneurial esprit have even started small shops catering to Israeli fans of anime and manga.[xvii] Some of the community members have been particularly influential and dominant in enhancing and promoting certain practices, such as Internet forums, conventions, blogging and costume play, by supporting and guiding newcomers, and even by appearing in traditional media for public relations.[xviii]

The common aspiration to spread the knowledge of Japanese culture among fans has found its formal version within AMAI. AMAI's home page openly declares that the organization has taken upon itself the task of "becoming a warm house that will break the boundaries between forums and subcultures and will bring together fans of anime, manga and *Japanese culture* [our emphasis], wherever they are."[xix] AMAI's Web site publishes advertisements for Japanese language classes and for manga classes complemented by karaoke singing practice and spoken Japanese classes. Conventions organized before AMAI was established and later by AMAI have been regularly boasting not only anime screenings, cosplay masquerade and cosplay contests, but also popular lectures on Japanese culture, art and history. Recently, when an Israeli professor who specializes in Japanese popular culture was approached and invited to deliver an unpaid lecture at a fans convention, she was encouraged to do so because "the convention attracts people who are not familiar with Japanese culture and this is a unique opportunity to introduce Japanese culture to them."

CONCLUSION

This article explored the intricate relations between the deterritorialization of Japanese popular culture into a transnational culture and the formation of an Israeli fan community of this culture. The particular economic and cultural structure of Japanese popular culture—that is, the ways different products are closely interwoven and the culture's enhanced participatory and interactive fandom—together with innovative global technologies of communication and cooperation have turned Japanese popular culture into a highly inclusive transculture. For Israeli fans, this culture offers cultural capital, knowledge capital and communion. As it merges with real life, it offers new potential for a differentiated collective identity, constructed vis-à-vis the mainstream general culture. Japanese popular transculture has become for Israeli fans a youth subculture affiliation performed as a meaningful style.

Popular culture has typically been considered in postmodern theories as the site of the implosion of identity and the fragmentation of the subject (see Baudrillard 1983; Deleuze and Guattari 1977; Jameson 1983, 1984). However, similarly to Kellner's (1992) systematic research of postmodern image culture, our research of Israeli fandom of Japanese popular culture has suggested that rather than identity breakdown in a postmodern society, the postmodern condition is offering new possibilities, styles, models and forms. Kellner and others (see Bauman 1996) have also acknowledged the propensity of the postmodern identity for play. Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture are showing high tendency for theatrical play with identity. Cosplay may be the ultimate example of such playfulness of identity, most particularly a play with Otherness.

Postmodernity has been associated with a fascination with cultures and the Other, and the tendency for these to be broken down in a relentless search to discover yet more formulations of Otherness (Featherstone 1995: 99). But, postmodernity as a contemporaneous, ongoing historical period defined by economic and sociocultural transformations is constantly evolving. With Israeli fans of Japanese popular culture we are witnessing how Globalization 3.0 has greatly enabled expanding the postmodern fascination with the Other. Fans as neocosmopolitans are not only discovering more formulations of Otherness, they are also appropriating and performing them as multiple and temporary styles in an era that promotes a sense of unstable, multiple and diffuse "subject constitutions" (Fiske 1992b: 288).

NOTES

[i] For convenience, we will henceforth refer to "contemporary Japanese media-centered youth popular culture" as "Japanese popular culture."
[ii] The term "committed fans" was also used by Allison (2000: 84) in reference to a new kind of spectatorship that developed among anime fans and transcends issues of national boundaries.
[iii] This study is based on qualitative research including in-depth interviews, participant observation and a survey of internet forums.
[iv] According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, only 804 Japanese lived in Israel as of 2009, including temporary and permanent residents (information available at: http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/10/pdfs/1.pdf (Accessed August 9, 2010).
[v] On such attributes of the West in the Orientalistic discourse, see Said 1978, 40, 300.
[vi] See Raz and Raz (1996) on the portrayal of cultural intermediaries to Japanese culture in American blockbuster movies reflecting a complicit production of Japanese images between the *nihonjinron* discourse in Japan, which explores the "uniqueness" of Japanese culture and society, and similar discourses in the Euro-American West.
[vii] The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) reported that the anime-related market in North America in 2007 was worth US$2.829 billion (AnimeNewsNetwork 2009).
[viii] All names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.
[ix] Israeli cosplay provides many examples of cultural domestication. The first cosplay events in Israel were planned for Purim, a Jewish holy day during which it is customary for kids to wear costumes. Cosplay started in Israel as a very casual practice, with cosplayers throwing over themselves last-minute, improvised costumes. The quality of the costumes, however, has since improved immensely. "The standards are higher today," said one of our informants. According to our informants, this may be because of more exposure to American cosplay practices, but

also because many Israelis (particularly recent immigrants of Jewish descent from Russia) own a sewing machine. One notable contribution of the Israeli cosplay scene is the production of cosplay musicals.

x Anime conventions in Israel grew over the years to attract over one thousand patrons during one convention day.

xi For many fans the visual aspect of the anime probably holds a more important function than the linguistic aspect, as must be inferred from the fact that many fans were introduced to anime in languages they could not understand (often English with no subtitles, but one informant told us that her first encounter with anime was when she watched *Cardcaptor Sakura* in Turkish, another when she watched *SailorMoon* in Arabic).

xii See Robertson (1998) for a fascinating and detailed study of Takarazuka Revue fans in Japan.

xiii For example, Visual Kei J-pop and street fashion have been influencing each other at least since the late 1990s, with singers becoming fashion designers (e.g., Mana from Malice Mizer), and bands have been emulating street-fashion styles. Completing this circle of inspired creation, fans have been cosplaying as their favorite singers in cosplay events.

xiv Original video animations made especially for release in home-video formats.

xv See http://www.icon.org.il/2009/anime_con (accessed June 30, 2010).

xvi On "mirror images" as a metaphor for the complex relations between popular culture and culture, see Silberman-Keller, Bekeraman, Giroux, and Burbules (2008.

xvii None of these entrepreneurial projects have done very well, probably because the targeted market in Israel is not big enough.

xviii Ron, for example, has been involved in the past six or seven years in the creation of anime-related Internet forums, with the ultimate goal of "helping the field, which is still small and weak…and ultimately expanding the community." All of our informants have mentioned as another example Vered, a twenty-eight-year-old art student and a very prominent costume player and member of the community, who has played a key role in promoting and upgrading cosplay in Israel, by advising and actively helping other players voluntarily and also professionally when she worked in Otaku, a shop catering to Israeli fans of Japanese anime, manga and collectibles. She appeared with other fans on the Israeli TV kids' channel, Arutz Hayeladim, to promote the summer anime and manga convention Gakkon 2008, wearing a costume and explaining the essence of the practice and its relation to Japan. Vered has participated and won prices for best costume in the American Anime Expo and has appeared in Japanese cosplay magazines.

xix See the AMAI home page at http://anime.org.il/amai/ (accessed June 15, 2010).

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