

Article

Reimagining Caribbeanness in The Japan Soca Community: At the Intersection of Blackness, Orientalism and the Other

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Abstract

Soca music began as a genre of music indigenous to the islands of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1970s and has since spread to the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean and the diaspora through various Carnival events in areas with Caribbean populations. In contrast, Soca music in Japan has flourished as a subculture through its members who are largely of Japanese nationality and descent. This paper is part of a wider research on Japan's Soca music subculture, referred to as the "Japan Soca community." It examines how Caribbean culture is recreated and represented through narratives of bodies and physical space. With aspects of Caribbean culture being adapted within the framework of Japanese culture, this paper explores how the idea of a "Caribbean body" is reimagined through case studies of two music videos, "Personal" by Trinidadian artist 5Star Akil which was filmed in Japan and "Asian Wine" by Japanese artist Moët. Using theories of myths, Orientalism, Blackness, the concept of the male gaze and the Other, I analyze how imagery and lyrics within these videos reflect these theories as well as the implications that they may have when considering the effect of marketing the Japan Soca community to the global diaspora. I conclude that the reimagined Caribbean body within the Japan Soca community largely aligns with narratives of the body that are typically found in Soca music but this desire is complicated by narratives of the Other and can easily fall into the traps of fetishization of Blackness and Orientalism.

Key words: Soca music, identity, culture, Japan, the Caribbean, music, narratives, Blackness, gender, orientalism, othering

Introduction

This paper is part of a wider research project that explores and analyzes the narrative of the Caribbean and the concept of “Caribbeanness” as it is reimagined, represented and acted upon within the Soca music subculture in Japan, which I refer to as the “Japan Soca community.” The music central to this subculture is Soca, a genre indigenous to the Anglophone Caribbean (hereafter abbreviated to “the Caribbean”) that originated in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1970s. This genre came from mixing East Indian music from the Indo-Trinidadian population and calypso music from the Afro-Trinidadian population of the islands, and has since become a genre emblematic of various Carnival celebrations across the Caribbean. My overall research explores the reimagined Caribbean through Soca in two dimensions: the dimension of the body which includes physical representation, language and speech, and the dimension of space which encompasses locations and events. This paper focuses on the body and looks at representations and narratives as depicted in two music videos which have been selected for their significance within the Japan Soca community. These videos will be analyzed together and against various theoretical frameworks. In using media that is readily available and accessible to the public online via the popular streaming website YouTube, the aim is to center media that can be considered in confidence as “official” representations of the Japan Soca community. This then presupposes that these depictions are how the community chooses to be seen by the wider viewing public.

My idea of a Caribbean body within the context of this work is not one that necessarily has to be tied to the Caribbean region by way of birth, ancestry or even nationality. Within the Japan Soca community, the majority of participants are ethnically Japanese with Japanese nationality. Thus, the Caribbean body (or bodies) that I wish to analyze is one that is presented within the narrative of the media that I am focusing on. Within this narrative, I will examine them through the lens of Caribbeanness. The “-ness” here allows for a more flexible reading of what can be considered as belonging to or categorized within the Caribbean region. My efforts to allow for this level of flexibility is made possible due to the way that Soca music is framed as a global, multiethnic, multiracial genre that unites listeners as “one family”. The 2019 hit song “Famalay” (dialect for family) which was a collaboration between top soca music artists Skinny Fabulous, Machel Montano and Bunji Garlin highlights this mindset of absolving conflict and differences through soca music.

We don't see skin

We don't see color

We see strength

*We see power
We don't see race
One or the other
Once he is breathing on this earth he is my brother
(Fabulous, Montano & Garlin, 2019, 0:44)*

While much can and has been said about the harmful implications of choosing not to see race or skin color, the narrative of a family that anyone can be a part of is a romantic ideal that can be seen as a broad reflection of the diverse nature of the Caribbean region. It is also undoubtedly easier to appreciate this ideal in a party setting meant to free one of their worries and cares, which is one of the main features of Soca music as a genre. This sentiment of unity is bolstered and enhanced by the Carnival festival and its role as a major tourist attraction, artistic innovation and source of national income in several Caribbean islands such as Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Barbados and more. Thus I recognize that what can be considered Caribbeanness in this specific setting of Soca, and by extension Carnival, may not (and in some cases should not) be taken to represent Caribbeanness in another setting or across the board. In this sense, my analysis of a reimagined Caribbean body takes advantage of this idea of open membership into a Caribbean family to consider depictions of the body in the Japan Soca community and see how they connect (and perhaps disconnect) with established histories and narratives. More specifically, I want to analyze how these representations brought forth in a relatively new subculture in Japan intersect with existing theories of Blackness, gender and the Other which are inextricable from Caribbeanness.

I wish to stress that I am not interested in how this reimagined body reflects upon the individual or individuals themselves. Rather I want to explore and highlight how the centering of certain bodies creates space for specific narratives and disallow others. This is based on the premise that as the Japanese Soca community seeks to recreate specific Caribbean experiences through its events and operations, it also recreates and reinforces the narrative of a specific Caribbean body to exist within that space.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to note that while Soca is a relatively new addition to the subcultural spheres of Japan, the adoption and appropriation of Blackness and island-ness through the medium of music and dance is something relatively uncommon when looking through Japan's history. Extensive work has been done on the adoption of similar music genres and how they function both as a means of transcending the "normal" of Japaneseness as well as serving to further reinforce particular narratives of Blackness.

Some examples include the adoption of hip hop as a means of identifying with and possessing Black phallic power (Cornyetz, 1994) or the pursuit of Reggae music and Rastafarian idealism as a means of rejecting the “modernity” and “superficiality” of modern Japan in favor of a “natural” and “simple” Blackness (Sterling, 2002). In mapping out the appropriation of Blackness within Japan, scholar John G. Russell states:

Black culture is constructed as “liberating,” as emancipating not only the soul but the body and libido as well. Blackness is constructed as both sacred and profane, allowing its practitioners to climb to heights of spiritual release and to explore the depths of unrestrained sensuality and physicality. It is constructed as a venue through which nonblacks are able somehow to “find” and “realize” their “true” selves. (Russell, 2012, p.60)

With Caribbeanness, this adoption is made more complex by additional pre-existing fantasies of tropical locations and island life. These narratives are molded to align with the needs of those who adopt them, irregardless of their actual nature or significance. A prominent example of this is hula. Hula is “an ancient form of dance with deep and complex religious meaning” (Trask, 1999) that represents a cornerstone of traditional Hawaiian culture. Yet despite this cultural significance, Kurokawa (2004), found that pre- and post-war reasons behind the popularity of hula and Hawaiian performing arts in Japan reflected the desires of the time through yearning, whether it be for the sensibilities of American popular culture or for that of a spiritual connection devoid of European influence. Japan’s history as a colonial power in the Pacific further colors this narrative where it can be argued that the power imbalance allows for even more of a liberal hand when choosing how and what to adopt.

Crucial to my analysis is the idea and application of “myths” as theorized by Roland Barthes in his work *Mythologies* (1972) and Michel Foucault’s theories of the body, both of which are expounded upon by Stuart Hall in “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” (1997). Hall’s overall work in decoding and contextualizing the interplay of race, racism, Otherness, stereotyping and difference in media is the basis of which my analytic method is based upon. My interpretation and application of his theory of the Spectacle of the Other will be largely interwoven throughout my discussion and any additional literature and references are also threaded into the bulk of the analysis itself for better relevancy and clarification. As this research is meant to pick apart the creation of narratives of the body within the sphere of Japanese culture and how that also translates to being viewed by others outside of Asia, the framework of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) and the theories surrounding it is another major lens through which I conduct my analysis.

Constructing 'Myth'

From the very first page of *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes introduces the idea of the “spectacle of excess” when decoding the ways in which the roles of wrestlers during a match are dictated through their physical appearance and behaviors. The nature of their appearance also determines the audience’s attitude towards them and guides the expectations of the outcome of the match. “The physique of the wrestlers therefore constitutes a basic sign, which like a seed contains the whole fight” (Barthes, 1972, p. 15). Thus in the spirit of performativity and living up to the visual symbolism that is expected, wrestlers are known to go above and beyond with their appearance, making their roles as the hero or as the hero’s foil, all the more obvious and easily discernible by the audience.

In further breaking down the definition and construction of a “myth,” Barthes describes it as “a type of speech”. However, his conceptualization of the term “speech” extends beyond words and language and enters into the realm of images, multimedia and further. The idea is that almost anything that can be “read” beyond its initial form or appearance to get to the underlying social significance, meaning or assumptions is operable as a myth. In my analysis I’m hoping to find the meanings or assumptions behind the myth of “Caribbeaness” in the Japan Soca community. I expect that not only are there several, but that my own interpretation is in no way the be-all and end-all of what these myths can mean.

The Spectacle of the Other

According to Foucault, the body throughout history is often divorced from actual physicality and instead is directly linked to narratives that coincide with the distribution of power and the production of knowledge. Foucault theorized that the construction of a specific type of body, whether it be “the homosexual” or “the madman,” says little about the individual that this label is being placed upon themselves. Rather, it gives a much clearer picture about the sociopolitical circumstances from where this label came about. The body then functions as a vessel for specific narratives at different points in time and in different contexts. Because of this, Foucault stresses that meanings as a whole are never fixed and always carry historical and cultural specificities that cannot be overlooked (Hall, 1997). Thus, when looking at the Caribbean body within the Japanese Soca community, not only is it important and imperative to give shape to the idea of the body itself but also to draw out the discourse that surrounds the nature of its production and representation.

Just within the framework of Caribbeaness, Caribbean women, Black Caribbean

women in particular, have constantly clashed against the narratives and imaginations that have surrounded them throughout history. These narratives are constructed usually without their consent. Widespread narratives that speak on and about women's bodies in the Caribbean have typically remained outside of their control and instead are governed by the unfair rules of colonialism, heteropatriarchy and religion. The bulk of Caribbean history and identity has revolved and continues to revolve around politics of the body. Slavery, colonization and indentureship in the Caribbean took away much of the freedom and autonomy of Black bodies and other bodies of color and it is through the avenues of music and dance that much of this autonomy has been regained. Even so, within the realm of music and dance in the Caribbean, the idea and the representation of the female body continues to be contested, ridiculed, desired, exoticized and celebrated in turn.

Trinidadian feminist and queer scholar MJ Alexander talks about the demonizing and policing of queer women's bodies and non-procreative sexual activity in her own home islands, Trinidad and Tobago. She discussed how the top-down enforcing of heteropatriarchy and punishment of women who exercise autonomy over their sexuality is ironic when the government works to mediate, "a political economy of desire in tourism that relies upon the sexualization and commodification of women's bodies" (1994, p. 6). This commodification is no more apparent than during Carnival where the costume-clad bodies of Caribbean women serve as one of the main attractions of the festival. I also pay attention to the theoretical ideas of the gaze since a significant portion of the activities of the Japan Soca community are in the forms of videos and photos which are created with the express purpose of being displayed and viewed by an audience. Thus, the idea of the "male gaze" will be tied in throughout my analysis when considering the power and dynamics that are brought into play with the added elements of watching and being watched. The male gaze refers to the phenomenon where the act of looking at something is framed so that the active looker is "masculine" and the object of the gaze is "feminine" (Korsmeyer, 2020). This is most commonly found in film theory in regard to the writings of Laura Mulvey who discusses how women in film are framed by the camera as passive receivers of the active masculine gaze. She states that, "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (1999, p. 837).

Building upon Barthes' conceptualization of a myth and the practice of reading images in order to deduce their overt and covert meanings, Hall uses the creation of myths to examine the depictions of Black people and Blackness as Other and introduces the concept of the "politics of representation." As a definition, the "politics of representation" refers to the difficulty and complexity over affixing meaning. It is defined as "a struggle over meaning which continues and is unfinished" (Hall, 1997, p. 277). In every aspect of decoding meaning whether linguistically, culturally or historically, the meaning itself can

never be truly fixed. Working off of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of meaning being dialogic where all that is said is continually altered by the interaction with another, Hall gives the example of defining nationality by the notion that what it means to be a certain nationality never remains fully dictated by the country itself. Rather, it "is always up for grabs, always being negotiated, in the dialogue between these national cultures and their 'others'" (1997 p. 236).

Orientalism

Moving and adapting a portion of culture from one side of the globe to the other comes with its own challenges and questions of authenticity as well as context. As I try to examine the specificities of narratives that are created when maintaining a subculture that centers Caribbean identity by non-Caribbean people, I also recognize the need to be attentive to the narratives that already exist for the participants and how these can affect representation when looking in the opposite direction. To be more specific, if bringing Caribbean culture to Japan carries the concerns of repeating narratives that fall into the traps of stereotyping, essentializing or Othering Black and Caribbean identities, I also want to be observant of instances of Orientalism and Othering that can be applied to the Japan Soca community and its Japanese participants. The term Orientalism was coined by Edward Said in his book of the same name in what he referred to as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said, 1979, p. 1). While Said was referring explicitly to the relationship between Europe and the Middle East, the concept of Orientalism has become a succinct way of categorizing and unpacking the fallout from stereotypes and prejudices that come about from the West's view of the East. Orientalism for Said had several applications but primarily served as a way of naming the relationship between power, discourse and hegemony. Hegemony here takes the meaning of cultural hegemony as defined by Antonio Gramsci, wherein the ones with the power have the ability to create ideologies that govern the discourse and narratives surrounding those with less or even no power (Said, 1979). The key here is the notion that the Orient did not exist in a physical sense but was rather constantly reimagined and reiterated in the imagination of the imperialist and colonial Occident (Europe) as a means of signaling their difference and superiority to the colonies of the Middle East. Largely, this meant signaling the difference between the "advanced," "rational" and "superior" cultures of the West to the "backwards," "irrational" and "inferior" cultures of the East. Said states that the effect of hegemony gives Orientalism "durability and strength" which allows it to be continually reiterated based on the imagination and the needs of the Occident. At the same time, his theory has been

criticized time and again for stressing a binary, one-directional relationship and ignoring the dynamics that can allow for a more nuanced and fluid reading of the relationship between East and West (Kobayashi et al., 2017).

In this research, I also want to pay attention to how Orientalism may emerge in the Japan Soca community in instances of what is referred to as “self-Orientalism.” Self-Orientalism is “the wilful (re-)action of non-Western individuals and institutions to ‘play the Other’ – that is, to use Western portrayals of the non-West – in order to strategically gain recognition and position themselves within the Western-dominated global economy, system and order” (Kobayashi et al. 2017, p. 161). Self-Orientalism affords the participants their own agency and does not reduce the relationship to something that is simply one-sided. The most visible members of the Japan Soca community are young Japanese women and for most of them, their participation is simultaneously a business endeavor as it is for personal enjoyment. Thus I encounter potential cases of Orientalism with the expectation that these can also be intentional and active acts of knowing how to leverage the preconceptions that surround them as Japanese women in a way that can work to their benefit.

Analysis: Japan Soca Music Videos

The activities and events of the Japan Soca community has functioned, for the most part, as a branch to the main body of Soca culture in Trinidad and Tobago as well as the wider Caribbean. While work has been done and continues to be done to make Japan into its own autonomous space where Soca and Carnival lovers across the diaspora can travel to and enjoy, most of what has been done up till now tends to center music, dances, speech and mannerisms that have originated in the Caribbean. This is understandable when the grassroots nature of the Japan Soca community, which is still relatively new, is compared to Soca and carnival in the Caribbean, which is funded from the top-down. As a result, original productions on a large-scale are still infrequent but are gradually being worked towards. Where it stands, anything that is done within the community is part of a new cultural endeavor that is worth examining as such.

The videos chosen for my analysis were both released in late 2018. These were filmed and set in Japan and were chosen for their significance to the current iteration of the Japanese Soca community. They are pioneering representations of the growing independent Soca scene in Japan and either showcase or were produced in conjunction with many of the key members in the community. The featured members are primarily dancers but also artists and designers who have been heavily involved in the crafting, promotion and execution of major events. I must clarify that I am approaching these videos

from an aggregated humanities perspective rather than a musicology or film studies perspective. I am conducting a deep analysis of these videos as “text” and reading them for narratives, archetypes and representations of the Japan Soca community.

5Star Akil - “Personal” Music Video

The first music video, “Personal” by Trinidadian musician 5Star Akil, was released in late 2018 as part of the annual media promotion blitz that led up to the 2019 Trinidadian Carnival season. The video serves as promotion for the artist’s song of the same name but also marked a series of firsts within the Japan Soca community and the wider Soca music scene on a whole. It has the distinction of being the first Soca music video shot on location in Japan by a Trinidadian Soca artist. In addition to this, it is also the only video directly linked to the promotion of the Japan Soca Weekend, which is the first event of its kind to try and replicate a Caribbean-style Carnival in Japan including events like Jouvert, playing mas’ (the local term for masquerading during Carnival) and live shows from popular Soca artists. Certain scenes of the video were filmed during one of the weekend’s flagship events, “Mas’ in the City”. “Mas’ in the City” was conceived as the first iteration of a fully Trinidadian-style Carnival celebration where revelers in costume traverse through the streets dancing to music. Unlike the usual Trinidad Carnival celebrations where the entirety of two days are dedicated to the festival, this was a smaller scale event held at night. The main party took place in a rented party bus equipped with a bar where the revelers could drink and dance. The event began with a brief parade through the back streets of Shibuya after which the bus was boarded and proceeded to drive through the streets of Tokyo.

The riddim used for the “Personal” song was dubbed the “Osaka Riddim” in direct reference to the Soca community in Japan. The term “riddim” is the patois (most prominently Jamaican patois) pronunciation of the word “rhythm” and refers to the instrumental backing of a song. This term originated in Reggae music production in the 1970s and is used in several local Caribbean music genres such as Reggae, Dancehall, Dub and more. A single song, often referred to as a “tune,” consists of the riddim (instrumental) and the voicing (vocals), which in the context of Dancehall culture and early iterations of this system was done by a deejay. A riddim is not exclusive to one tune or voicing. Rather, a riddim is made by a separate production team with its own separate ownership and can be used by any artist or group as the base of their own voicing and lyrical arrangements (Manuel & Marshall, 2006). The producers of the Osaka Riddim, Precision Productions, is a group based in Trinidad and Tobago. They had this to say about the Osaka Riddim on their official Youtube page:

Earlier this year the team was fortuitous enough to experience such an instant. It came from hundreds of radiant faces dancing delightedly to Precision's music in Japan. Two things immediately occurred. Firstly, a deep swell of gratitude encompassed everyone in studio, and secondly, the team was inspired to pass that feeling along to the world in music and songs. That flash of motivation spurred this new riddim to life. So guided by the enthusiasm of fans in Japan and hope filled hearts, Precision Productions would like to invite the Soca loving world to say, Kon'nichiwa to the Osaka Riddim (Precision Global Music, 2019).

The music video was initially uploaded by the popular Soca music channel "Julianspromos TV," which is one of the primary sources for Soca music videos and new Soca music releases on the internet. While artists and musicians also use their own official YouTube accounts to promote and share their music, Julianspromos TV markets itself as the "Official source for Soca Music on YouTube" and describes its mission as one of showcasing Caribbean musical talent in the best way possible. Unlike the song lyrics which can be generalized to most Soca parties across the Caribbean diaspora, the music video for "Personal" firmly establishes that we have moved beyond the diaspora and situates the story in Japan. The video opens with a shot of everyday life in Tokyo overlaid with the words:

Soca Music transcends age, cultures, and borders, no one is immune to its captivating energy. Watch the world fall in love with this euphoric music (JulianspromosTV | Soca Music, 2018).

It switches to the artist, 5Star Akil, as he walks through the narrow alleyway of a Tokyo shopping area. The initial shot of his back as he moves forward suggests that he is entering or forging ahead, aware of his actions as a pioneer. He is dressed in all black, with a black mask. This all-black outfit, which normally connotes anonymity and stealth, is brought to the forefront when considered together with his own Blackness in a space where Blackness may not necessarily be expected. He glances at the camera, now next to him, in shared acknowledgement of his own Otherness within the space and his defiance by being in a space that is different from the norm. If we consider the intended audience of this music video as Caribbean people looking for the latest Soca videos, then in this moment both the presumed viewer and 5 Star Akil have established that they've moved into the space of the "Other". As the music increases in tempo, the pace of the video increases as well to incorporate brief moments of people in Tokyo. As commonplace as these scenes can be to anyone living in or knowledgeable about daily life in Tokyo, drawing upon Roland Barthes' conceptualizations of myths, the subjects and framing of these scenes are representative of the myth and narrative of the "Oriental East". The visual narrative evokes a sense of mystery and unfamiliarity while simultaneously reinforcing

common ideas of what a visitor might expect to see in Tokyo with its well-known blend of the “modern” and the “traditional”: temples, people praying, trains speeding by, women in yukata at a festival, traffic and shopping areas. Toward the end of this montage however, is something unexpected. Moving away from the wider, landscape clips of Tokyo we begin to see closer clips of bodies in motion. There are snippets of women dressed in carnival costumes dancing and “wining” (movements focused on rhythmic gyrations of the hips and pelvis). They are presumably Caribbean, judging from signifiers like their brown skin and the quick flashes of a Jamaican flag tied to the waist of a dancer. The video once again switches to a landscape shot overlaid with 東京、日本 (Tokyo, Japan) as if to remind the viewer again where they are located. The audio that plays here is pulled from the player selection menu of the classic video game *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* when the user selects Japan on the world map. It serves as another nod to the “global” nature of the video but also to the ubiquity of Japanese video games across the world. The title card appears and the title of the song displays across the screen translated to Japanese katakana as “パーソナル (*Pāsonaru*)”. The previous shots of Tokyo and the scenes of revelry are now jumbled together, signaling a merging of these two seemingly contrary scenes.

In keeping with the tradition of storytelling and narrative that is ever-present in Soca (however loose the narrative threads of the story may be), the song is sung from a man’s point of view prompting a woman (presumably at the beginning of or just before a Soca event) to hurry up and let him know when she’s ready to begin partying. Although it varies based on the sub-genre of Soca, Soca music in general strives to get the body moving and have the listener get lost in the rhythm, forgetting the worries and stress of everyday life. To facilitate this, the majority of lyrics include prompts, commands and calls to action which let the revelers know what to do and when to do it. With the vast majority of Soca singers being men, they are often the ones dictating actions and commands to the women in their space, letting them know how best to show themselves off. Although Soca music attracts a wide range of listeners and aficionados, the dynamics within the song lyrics themselves can be limited. Even in songs where the Soca artist is a woman, she often falls into the role of narrating her own actions to a man and/or instructing other women to do the same. In “Personal,” he lets her know exactly what she needs to do to get things started, and above all, implores her not to overthink anything. The chorus references the title as he asks her not to take anything personally.

*Doh take it personal
It’s just a one-night jam
(5 Star Akil, 2018, 0:18)*

“Jam” here is a term that describes a common way of dancing to Soca at parties, where

two or more people (often a man and woman) dance while “jammed” together at the hips. While there is opportunity for the partners to move together however they see fit, it is commonly a way for the woman to show off her dancing (and implied sexual) prowess by the way that she moves against her partner. In a regular party setting, the actual act of sex is not something that is expected and the unspoken agreement among dance partners is one of casual frivolity with no obligation to take anything further than the dance floor. Furthermore, it is normal and encouraged for party-goers to switch between multiple partners and is often considered poor party etiquette if dancers are staunch about sticking to one partner the entire duration of the event.

We cut to a scene of 5 Star Akil and a Japanese woman in yukata as they walk hand-in-hand through a temple. The woman is dancer Chiaki Iida, one of the most prominent and active members of the Japanese Soca community. Although she is listed in the credits and in the description of the video on YouTube, she is not named in the video so without any additional information, the audience can only assume from their body language that perhaps they are a couple or at least familiar and comfortable with each other. She leads him through the temple, pointing out various objects, reading through the text of an omikuji (fortune-telling paper) and showing him how to waft the smoke from the incense burners over himself as a means of spiritual purification. We come to understand that she is also his guide to this unfamiliar world that he has found himself in. She initially dances in a demure way not normally done for Soca but as the music progresses, she sheds her yukata and transforms into the typical image of a woman during Carnival, wearing a two-piece bikini-style costume and dancing confidently in the streets. The act of transformation from traditional Japanese wear to Carnival costume is one that carries significance in several dimensions. Although a yukata does not have as much international familiarity as a kimono would, the effect it has of signaling an idealized image of a Japanese woman remains the same. It is also a form of traditional wear worn during the summer which parallels a Carnival costume worn in hot island climates. Goldstein-Gidoni (1999) discusses how the wearing of kimono or traditional Japanese attire (wafuku) for women has been a means of constructing national identity and specifically the myth of Japanese femininity. This myth ties together with the traditionally expected role of women as “*ryōsai kenbo*” or “good wife, good mother,” which stood in opposition to the constructed role of men as “active” and “rational” and thus free to engage with the West. (1999, pg. 351) In changing her clothing, she metaphorically sheds her traditional restraints and moves from occupying a space of idealized Japanese femininity and sexuality to one usually occupied by Caribbean women. Her mannerisms change as well from more reserved movements to bolder and more brazenly sexual. Through this physical transformation, she is now able to assert her desire for 5Star Akil alongside the other women dressed in

costume. These undercurrents of desire, Othering and even fetishization have a tendency to be entangled in the framing and adoption of subcultures of “Black music” and more specifically the image of Black men within these subcultures as situated in contrast to the image of Japanese-ness. As mentioned earlier, this has been the case for similar subcultures in the context of Japan such as hip hop or Reggae, which have a much longer history of engagement. Nina Cornyetz, in her noted essay “Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan,” looks at the interwoven threads of gender, desire, power and identification that make up the adoption of hip hop subcultures among Japanese youth in the 90’s. The act of adopting these Black subcultures not only served as a means of rebellion against authority and expected societal roles in Japan but also as a means of sexual empowerment. In the case of Japanese women, “hip hop style includes the acquisition of male African American lovers, bound to the same subtext of phallic empowerment, but transgressive of assumed (racially exclusive) Japanese male access to their sexual bodies and belittling of Japanese masculine identity” (Cornyetz, 1994, p. 115).

At the same time, if we consider the presence of the male gaze and the fact that the audience is Western, then the historical precedent of the racialized image of an “Oriental woman” means her initial appearance can simultaneously be read as a means of objectification. While a yukata is a common clothing choice for visiting shrines and festivals in the summer, her role as both 5Star Akil’s guide to an unfamiliar place and his love interest entangles with persistent depictions of Asian women in relation to non-Asian (specifically Western) men. Narratives such as these have been solidified in popular works such as Giacomo Puccini’s play *Madama Butterfly* (and its derivative *Miss Saigon*) as well as Arthur Golden’s book *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997), which objectified Asian women simultaneously for their perceived submissiveness as well as perceived hyper-sexuality towards (white) Western men. Within this narrative, traditional wear such as kimono serve to cement these women in their “traditional” roles via the lens of Orientalism as opposed to that of the “progressive” West. In 2019, celebrity Kim Kardashian-West sparked additional discussion and outcry about the sexualization of kimono, and by extension Asian women, when she launched an underwear brand of the same name. Kardashian-West eventually changed the name of her “Kimono” brand, but her actions were just another indicator of the distorted and sexualized way that traditional Japanese wear has been viewed by the West. Scholar Akemi Johnson, who has written about US-Japan relations and specifically about women in Okinawa, wrote in a *Guardian* opinion piece that for Kardashian-West, “maybe the word seemed to offer up the exoticism, the sex appeal, she was looking for” (Johnson, 2019).

Once the woman in the video makes the change to her Carnival wear however, all at once the unfamiliar streets of Tokyo become more readable and accessible to Caribbean

viewers. As the women use their bodies, dress and dance to signal their affinity with this aspect of Caribbean culture, their separation from the daily life happening around them becomes more apparent. Throughout the video, bystanders are shown stopping and staring and taking photos and videos with their phones. However much a spectacle they become is irrelevant to them as their focus stays primarily on either the camera (audience) or 5Star Akil at all times. Although the video hints at a larger party taking place in some of the scenes, 5 Star Akil remains the only male figure made visible in these scenes. This is not only because he is the singer and star of the video but it also reflects a common expectation that the number of women at a Soca event should vastly outnumber the number of men since a man at a Soca party should have several choices of women that he can dance with as well as look at. One of the most popular Soca acts, Kes (also known as KES the Band or KTB) references this expectation in the chorus of their popular song, "How We Like It," saying:

Meet me in the islands

Wining down in a band

Woman man 10 to 1 just how we like it

(KES the Band, Precision Productions & Badjohn Republic, 2017, 0:43)

Song lyrics and performances commonly iterate that women are performing for men and that the bodies and actions of women within the sphere of Soca music, parties and carnival exist for their pleasure, whether viewing or otherwise. Of course this gender disparity and heteropatriarchal mindset does not go without contest and while they are fairly ubiquitous themes in Soca music, they do not necessarily paint an accurate picture of various Caribbean societies from which they come from. There are several instances of women in Soca who subvert these common tropes and gendered expectations through their own music and those who use their agency to turn that objectification into a means of self-empowerment. Even so, it remains a common theme in the way that these events and songs are framed and imagined.

Returning to the video, 5Star Akil has traversed through the unfamiliar space that he has found himself in and settles in an area of comfort, one in which he is able to benefit from the gender roles that are set in place within Soca music. Together with the messages of cultural unity, reveling and stepping away from the monotony of everyday life, there is also the message that there will always be women that are available with their bodies to facilitate this escape and create the atmosphere that Soca music is known for. Once he is surrounded by local women who know the rules of Soca, his role shifts from being a stranger in a strange land at the beginning of the video to a man confident in his surroundings. The majority of the video shows the dancers making their way throughout various locations within Tokyo. During Carnival, this sight of women in costume is an

expected part of the festival. As Alexander (1994) points out, there is an inherent gender disparity in this expectation when considering that the burden of being looked at on a national and international scale does not usually apply to men. However, even if they are not the objects of the gaze, men during carnival are also dressed in revealing costumes and the general protocol of the festival means that between the revelers and spectators, there is an overarching agreement of consent to be on display. Throughout this video, 5Star Akil remains fully clothed as the women dance with him. This arrangement deviates from the norm of Carnival and as a result, their lack of clothing is the point of confusion. Other pedestrians take photos and look on in varying degrees of surprise and confusion as it becomes apparent that the dancers are not expected and are a spectacle to the viewers both on and off screen. By remaining fully clothed, this objectifying gaze avoids him entirely and he is able to then participate in the activity of watching the women for his own pleasure throughout the video. As mentioned previously, the song itself touches on the almost serendipitous nature of liaisons when dancing at Soca parties where the unwritten rule is that dancing does not imply or lead to the initiation of anything further. However, taken together with the video, the narrative changes to one where 5 Star Akil is able to come into a foreign land, find his pleasure with the local women and take his leave once he sees fit. Within the rules of this engagement, the women are discouraged from reading further into the relationship and give him the freedom to leave. At the end of the video, he returns to the original woman in yukata as the video fades out.

The Invisible/Hyper-visible Black Woman

When analyzing the periphery of the video, in several scenes there are glimpses of Black women who are not featured among the main cast of dancers. These women were all participants of the Japan Soca Weekend events who travelled to Japan from the Caribbean and across the diaspora. Within the video, they provide an additional sense of familiarity and predictability to the viewer as theirs are the bodies that viewers of Soca music videos are used to seeing. Thus, even as the video seeks to introduce Tokyo as a previously unseen Soca destination, these women provide a thread that connects the rest of the diaspora. As background participants, these women are not allowed the same narrative or autonomy within the video, serving only to enhance the party atmosphere. In the context of a single music video, this is understandable, but taken as an introduction to the Japan Soca community and an emerging destination for the extended Caribbean diaspora, it warrants a deeper critique. The reduction of Black Caribbean women to the periphery while still emphasizing their physicality treads a complicated line of being both

representation and a reinforcing of the invisible/hyper-visible bind that Black women have historically found themselves in.

Going back to Barthes' analysis of the wrestlers and their "spectacle of excess," this experience and representation of excessiveness is frequently tied to the Black body and the way that it is framed and presented in media. Hall explores this excessiveness through what he describes as "marking difference," which is a key component of fetishism. The act of fetishizing a person, according to Hall, involves the act of reductionism, or reducing them to parts (1997). Focus is placed on specific parts and features which in turn dehumanizes the person of people who are being reduced, thus creating the bind of being simultaneously invisible due to the act of being denied one's full personhood and autonomy and also being hyper-visible due to the laser focus on specific aspects of that self. In the context of Blackness, perhaps the most prominent description of this reduction is Fanon's experience of himself as being stripped down and reduced by the gaze of the white child in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008). The existence and reality of Blackness is only made tangible in contrast to whiteness. In other words, the color of skin becomes the marker of difference. When it comes to Black women, the reduction of self into the sphere of both invisible and hypervisible is exemplified through the fetishization of Saartje Baartman, also known as the "Hottentot Venus". Her physical characteristics were Othered in a way that Hall described as an "extreme form of reductionism". This extreme reductionism is one that is often reserved for representing the bodies of women as objects in a sexualized manner with pornography being used as the main example (1997, p. 266). The objectification of her body parts whose physical depiction according to Black studies scholar Nicole Fleetwood "casts a broad shadow over both cultural production and scholarship on the black female body: representation as excessive and degenerate, as well as the body's commercialization" (2011). Within the "Personal" video, both the Black and Japanese women are at times reduced to body parts. However, the Japanese women have more opportunities to retain their autonomy and be active agents of their desire. If 5Star Akil embodies the Caribbean man coming to experience the Soca scene in Japan, then through this video he is reassured of his power and gender dynamic regardless of the new location. However, what space there is for Caribbean women beyond additional sources of pleasure for men still remains to be carved out.

Moët - "Asian Wine" Music Video

The second music video for my analysis is the video "Asian Wine" by Japanese Soca artist Moët. It was released on the artist's official YouTube channel on November 4th, 2018. The timing of the release meant that it came after the events and festivities of the Japan Soca

Weekend had already ended and the promotion blitz had settled. Even so, the video, which is the artist's debut single, served as a continuation of the Japan Soca community's momentum and outward reach to the Caribbean diaspora. The song is sung almost entirely in English, specifically Jamaican Creole English (JCE), with only a few Japanese words and phrases mixed in. It features some of the most prominent dancers of the Japan Soca community, including dancer Chiaki Iida who was the featured dancer in the previously analyzed video, "Personal" by 5 Star Akil. The video opens with a shot of the singer Moët smoking a hookah in a room dimly lit with hanging Arabic-style stained glass lamps. The title of the song is overlaid on the screen and we see her blow out a languid stream of smoke. She is wearing a kimono hanging loosely off her shoulders and her back is turned to the camera. As the camera settles on her, she turns to the viewers, eyes downturned and head tilted as she sings in a trilling acapella:

*If you want it
You can take it
If you're waiting
I'mma ride it
I can show you the Asian wine wine
Wine pon di cocky like dat
(Moët, 2018, 0:00)*

There is a brief moment of dissonance that occurs with the gentleness of her voice and the vulgarity of her words before the beat comes in and the song begins. The room is now filled with similarly dressed women playing karuta (traditional Japanese playing cards). Just before she begins to sing, Moët can be heard calling out "Sushi Body Gyal," a term that flashes on a mobile phone as caller ID overlaid on the image of a traditional ukiyo-e drawing of a woman.

The use of JCE or Jamaican patois is an uncommon occurrence for a Soca song considering that the majority of Soca music comes from Trinidad and Tobago along with the rest of the Eastern Caribbean islands. Trinidadian identity is the default and Trinidadian Creole English (TCE) can be considered the lingua franca of Soca. Meanwhile, Jamaican patois remains a cornerstone of genres such as Dancehall and Reggae. There is a tension between Soca and Dancehall as popular genres of party music in the Caribbean and the diaspora, and they're known to attract different crowds of revelers based on their perceived energies and their entanglements with various sociopolitical issues within and between islands. When examining the participation of diasporic youth of Toronto in various Soca and Dancehall parties, Hernandez-Ramdwar (2008) found that there was a perception of Dancehall and the people who frequented Dancehall as having a more "aggressive" and insular attitude versus a more "cosmopolitan" image of Soca partygoers. This

ideology has taken on an additional layer of meaning when considering that Jamaican identity is one that is very much rooted in African Blackness, which is not the case of Trinidad. The use of Jamaican patois in Dancehall is an active and deliberate choice that serves the purpose of “keeping outsiders out, and of offending the ‘powers that be’” (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2008). As a result, Jamaican patois is uncommon in the wider sphere of Soca music but makes sense within the context of the Japan Soca community. This is a product of the deep ties that members of the community have had and continue to have with the ever-prominent Jamaican Reggae and Dancehall scene in the country since Bob Marley visited Japan in 1979. In addition, most, if not all, of the dancers featured in the video are linked to the Reggae and Dancehall scene in Japan, which is an integral part of the Jamaican immigrant population in the country, which makes up a major percentage of Caribbean immigrants to Japan. The dances that are done within the video are also moves and steps made popular specifically within the Dancehall scene. The rest of the video is fairly straightforward in presentation and shows various shots of Moët singing and dancing together with the other dancers as well as solo shots of the dancers in various locations. Apart from a few stray bystanders that sneak into the street shots, the focus remains on Moët and the dancers only. Simple as this may be, it brings a sharper focus to Moët and the dancers and the ways that they are represented in the video. All the women wear outfits with a combination of the colors red, black and white. These are the colors of the national flag of Trinidad and Tobago and remain a common way of signaling affiliation to Soca music even when the flag is not explicitly shown. At the same time, the colors red and white gain an additional layer of significance when considering the link to the Japanese national flag as well. Thus, their bodies become a site of cultural hybridity capable of embodying both countries at the same time.

Self-Orientalism and Othering

From the very beginning, there is a strong theme of self-Orientalism and it can be said that Moët is leveraging the act of “playing the Other.” This is perhaps to emphasize the “Asian-ness” of “Asian Wine” and it is clear that she is not speaking to someone familiar with what that may entail since she offers to show them. Her loose kimono, coquettish attitude and invitation to the viewer/listener to take what they want plays into the previously discussed Orientalist stereotype of Japanese women as sexually available for Western men. However, unlike the usual expectation of whiteness and white men being the expectation of the “male” and “domineering” West, her use of Jamaican dialect troubles this expectation and situates the West in the Caribbean and specifically Jamaica, with Black men. Going back to Cornyetz’s discussion of physical adoption of hip hop style

serving as a symbol for Japanese women's phallic empowerment, Moët is able to use her command of patois as a means of signaling her affiliation and desire of Blackness (i.e. the Other) even as she herself is being made Other.

Beyond the visuals of the video, the song itself speaks to the growing prominence of Japanese women in the wider Soca and Dancehall scene. Moët sings about the confusion and curiosity of people who see them and ask, "Where you come from?" in response to them being able to skillfully dance to Soca music. While Soca music is meant to be enjoyed by all, the ability to dance as well as navigate the varying commands, dialect and call/responses that are embedded into Soca is still often considered the domain of locals or those within the diaspora who are connected to these cultural cues. In addition to Moët's official YouTube channel, the video was posted and showcased on the JulianspromosTV YouTube channel. While the comments on Moët's channel were overwhelmingly positive and supportive, the comments via the JulianspromosTV, while positive, echoed some of that confusion that Moët references within the song. Various comments written in dialect like "That face, voice and accent doh mix at all." or simply "I'm confused" express the dissonance that is felt when confronting the conception of who should sing or dance to Soca (JulianspromosTV, 2018).

Irrespective of the fact that the overall tone of the song and video semantically lean towards the Dancehall scene, by labeling her song "Asian Wine," Moët and the other dancers by extension are acknowledging the gaze that is put onto them as relative "outsiders" to Soca music and Soca dancing. Through this video they are showing that not only are they well versed in the vernacular (both physical and linguistically) of the diaspora, they are also creating their own brand of wining which includes their position and visibility as Asian women and making it their own. Just as their red, black and white clothing signifies both a Japanese and a Trinidadian affiliation, Moët and the rest of the women spend the video leaning into the display of facets of their Japaneseness in addition to their fluency in aspects of Caribbeaness. In several scenes, they blow bubbles, play karuta, hand games and kendama, which are all forms of entertainment for children that have remained popular from olden days to the present. To further emphasize this nod to play and playfulness, several of the scenes are shot at a playground with the dancers on and around the equipment.

The goal of the song and the video, then, is showing what makes an "Asian Wine" different from other types of wining. While this may seem arbitrary, the ability to command the dance floor at a Soca party or carnival stage with the way that one moves is not treated lightly. Soca artists are often asking for women to show them a "rude wine" where "rude" implies a more sexual brazenness in the way that a woman chooses to move her body. Similarly there are often calls for a "fast wine" or a "slow wine" indicating speed

and the proficiency of any and all is something that one can be proud to display. In showcasing an Asian wine, there is less of a focus on speed or technique and instead the difference here is emphasized through a display of racial difference. Despite the showcasing of traditional elements of Japanese culture the song does not mention or speak of a “Japanese Wine”. Instead the signifier of Asian is used, which as a marker of identity is exceedingly broad, but as a result, has the danger of becoming essentialist in its depiction. Alternatively, in conjunction with the work of the Japan Soca Weekend events, which work to showcase the Soca activity in Japan, this video also can function as an introduction of sorts to the women of the Japan Soca community and a display of what they are able to bring to the table — the “Asian Wine” delivered by the “Sushi Body Gyal.”

The Politics of the “Body Gyal”

Another way in which the song and video was and continues to be used as a way of speaking to the diaspora and grabbing the attention of the Soca community has been through the hashtag #sushibodygyal. Although this term is only brought to the viewer’s attention for a brief moment in the song and video itself, this phrase is one of the more significant aspects that help to build a specific narrative especially among the dancers of the Japan Soca community.

The word “gyal” is the colloquial term for “girl” and can sometimes be spelled as “gal” but the addition of the “y” tends to correctly connote the emphasis placed on the word in dialect. Although derived from the word “girl,” it refers to women and girls alike. The idea of a gyal is a common way of framing narratives in contemporary Caribbean music. Male singers in Soca often center their songs around a specific gyal or “body gyal” who becomes the recipient of their attention or of their woes. The kind of gyal that is sung about runs the gamut but is often centered on her physicality with many songs having titles that reference specific physical traits or personality archetypes. A recent example is the song “Hot Gyal Soca” (2019) from artist Shal Marshall which talks about a confident and physically attractive woman who garners attention from men and jealousy from other women as a result. Other gyals are more trait-specific like Russell Cadogan’s “Big Bottom Gyal” (2007) where he highlights exactly what he looks for in a woman. Even if the Soca artist incorporates intangible traits, these are often secondary to the physical traits of the gyal which take center stage. The idea is finding a gyal who is able to satisfy the singer’s needs for dance and pleasure during a Soca party, so physical desire and physical traits are paramount. Other times, the depiction of a gyal in a song takes a more ethnic or cultural turn which can reference ideas, stereotypes or even conflicts within the wider society. To illustrate, the popular chutney-Soca song “Indian Gyal”

(2012) is a collaboration between Machel Montano, one of the most popular male Soca artists to come from Trinidad and Tobago, and Drupatee Ramgoonai, one of the pioneering female and chutney-Soca artists in Trinidad. They are often referred to as “The King of Soca” and “The Queen of Chutney” respectively (Singh, 2011; Dugan, 2012) The narrative of this song follows the titular Indian gyal who travels from India to Trinidad and disproves the assumption that she cannot skillfully dance to Soca music, enough so that she enchants the male protagonist (Machel) who is blown away and helpless to her movements. From the beginning of Soca as a genre, despite the aim of its creator Ras Shorty being that of unification of the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian population, the layers of ethnic and racial tensions seem to have merely been transposed into Soca music itself. Ras Shorty himself, when introducing Soca for the first time on his album *Love Man* LP (1974), was criticized for “playing Indian” (Mohammed, 2013). a term that hints at the discomfort at the idea of crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. Even within the boundaries of race, it is easy for other societal frictions to rear their heads in the image of a certain gyal. The song *Red Gyal* (2018) by artist Christo has a mellow tune over which Christo proclaims again and again that he doesn’t want a red gyal in his life. The term “red gyal” is a colloquial phrase within Trinidad and Tobago with the color “red” being a signifier of light skin tone. The women (and men) categorized as “red” tend to come from mixed racial backgrounds, predominantly a mix of Afro-Caribbean and white European historically referred to as mulatto. In Jamaica, the colloquial term is “browning”. For established families in the Caribbean, this often traces back to colonial lineages and ties in with historical wealth, class and privilege. In an examination of the historical narratives that surround the song “Love Me Browning” by popular Dancehall singer and DJ Buju Banton where he sings on his loving of “browning,” Mohammed explains that, “the browning in Jamaica also represents a class of people, the post colonial inheritors of privilege and status passed on by the white upper class” (2000). Whether or not this is factually accurate for each person that is categorized as “red” or “browning,” the privilege and assumptions rooted in colorism passed down from slavery and colonialism remain. As such, a red woman or a browning was considered a more desirable option than someone who was black with darker skin. In Christo’s song, his rejection of a red gyal goes against the usual grain of desirability that is afforded to those of lighter skin. His reasoning, however, is that red gyals are prone to lying, cheating and only care about money, leaving you destitute.

Red gyal go sen you mad

Red gyal go break you heart

Then I don’t want no red gyal in my life no.

(Christo, 2018, 0:26)

Whether the bitterness that he feels is reflective of his own personal experience or of class assumptions taken as gospel, it all ties back to post-colonial politics of class and color in the Caribbean. A red gyal or browning would tend to occupy a higher social class or have an expectation of wealth or displays of status. Even within the frame of a song meant to be played at parties and social gatherings, Christo acknowledges the sociopolitical intricacies that play out within the frame of desire.

With this evidence of various narratives that embed themselves into the naming of a gyal, the term “Sushi Body Gyal” as a new phrase can tell us about the framing of bodies, especially bodies as subject of desire, within the Japan Soca community. It doesn’t take much to know that sushi is one of the most easily recognizable types of Japanese cuisine worldwide and is strongly linked to Japan as a symbol of the country. Even as the term “Asian” in “Asian Wine” remains vague and fluid, the narrative of a “Sushi Body” lets the audience know exactly where they are coming from. This framing of the body and the self as food and therefore something that can be consumed continues to feed off the thread of self-Orientalism in a way that would almost be explicitly racist had it not been a conscious adoption of the moniker by the women themselves. In many of the subsequent dance videos posted online by the members of the Japan Soca community, the hashtags #sushibodygyal and #sushibodymovement have been used as a way of continuing this narrative of Japanese women who are fluent in aspects of Caribbeanness and Soca while still being rooted in their Japaneseness. It is a subtle shift from being mere participants in the wider Soca scene to being able to imagine their own physicality within a Japanese Soca space. It is also a more fluid alternative to the stark switch that we saw in the “Personal” video, although there is still much that can be critiqued.

Conclusion: The Reimagined Body and the Cycle of Desire

If the Caribbean body in the general context of Soca music is one that is predominantly female and the object of desire, i.e., the “body gyal,” then the reimagined Caribbean body in the Japan Soca community continues to align with this narrative. However, as seen through these videos, the body is that of a Japanese woman who, within the narrative, has the most visibility and functions as a site of cultural hybridity that operates through the basis of desire. At times, this desire travels cyclically between her and the audience (framed as Black Caribbean men) and is entangled within narratives of objectifying and Othering which can be seen in both videos. The participants shift between being either active or passive agents of desire depending on the context. With both Japaneseness and Caribbeanness being pulled between the lenses of “minority” and “default” and with each carrying their own histories of stereotyping and misconceptions, these videos draw

attention to the complex nature of representation and being represented even in such a short and seemingly casual medium of a music video.

In “Personal,” 5Star Akil moves from being the site of difference and Otherness at the beginning to becoming an active watcher and consumer of the dancers and their bodies. By doing so, he turns the gaze of the audience and mantle of Otherness onto the women in the video and regains his position of power. At the same time it can be argued that he is also in a position of being objectified as he becomes a means for these women to move beyond their expected roles and ideals of Japanese femininity into the perceived sexual “freedom” that is afforded to them through their desire of Blackness. For the woman who occupies the position of female lead and love interest, the narrative that surrounds her throughout the video can be seen as also going through this cyclical manner of being both objectified and objectifying. Her traditional clothing at the beginning of the video as seen through an Orientalist gaze, roots her into the space of “foreign” and “Other,” in which 5Star Akil also finds himself in. However, through her transformation into a Carnival reveller, she gets closer to Caribbeaness and thus is able to better position herself as not just an object of 5Star Akil’s desire but also one who closer identifies with his physical representation.

In “Asian Wine,” the cycle of desire is still present but the gaze remains outside of the video and within the realm of the audience. Within the narrative of the video, Moët engages pre-existing stereotypes and images of Japanese women as objects of desire and uses them as a platform for distinguishing her song and music video. At times she plays into preconceptions that paint different nationalities and cultures under the broad stroke of “Asian-ness” and in others, she firmly roots her identity within the context of Japan. She does so through the introduction of the “Sushi Body Gyal” who is able to embody both spaces of Japanese and Caribbean/Jamaican femininity and sexuality in order to both present herself as an object of desire and also to closer align with who she desires.

In taking the first steps to create a platform for Soca music and to some extent, Caribbean culture within Japan, these videos function as a concentrated sample of the wider Japan Soca community. From them, we are able to see the process of a subculture that is working to connect to larger narratives across the Caribbean and the diaspora. What remains to be seen is the consideration of the role of Caribbean women within this space and the Japan Soca community. If the visible body has become that of a woman who can embody both Japaneseness and Caribbeaness, then it can be argued that there is not yet a designated space for Caribbean women beyond that of consuming and being consumed which renders them both invisible and hyper-visible. While most of this can be chalked up to the small size of the community as well as the small number of samples available for analysis, it will be interesting to see how this dynamic evolves in the future.

By building on the framework of similarly adopted music genres, the reimagined body allows us to further imagine the fluidity of what can fit into narratives of Blackness, Caribbeanness, femininity, desire and nationality. It also allows us to explore how the genre of Soca music can be moulded in and around other cultural spheres.

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