



## Hafu - the mixed-race experience in Japan

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## Synopsis

With an ever increasing movement of people between 'places' in this transnational age, there is a mounting number of mixed-race people in Japan, some visible, others not. "Hafu - the mixed-race experience of Japan" is a journey of discovery into the complex multicultural experience of mixed-race Japanese in modern day Japan. The film follows the lives of five hafus—the Japanese term for people who are half Japanese—as they explore what it means to be multiracial and multicultural in a nation that once proudly proclaimed itself to be mono-ethnic. For some of these hafus, Japan is the only home they know. For others, living in Japan is an entirely new experience. And still others find themselves caught between two different worlds.

## Story

According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, one in forty-nine babies born in Japan today are born into families with one non-Japanese parent. This newly emerging minority in Japan is under-documented and under-explored in both literature and media. The **feature-length HD documentary film**, "Hafu - the mixed-race experience of Japan" seeks to open this increasingly important dialogue.

The film explores **race, diversity, multiculturalism, nationality, and identity** within the mixed-race community of Japan. And through this exploration, it raises the following questions: What does it mean to be hafu?; What does it mean to be Japanese?; and ultimately, What does all of this mean for Japan?

Narrated by the *hafus* themselves, along with candid interviews and cinéma vérité footage, the viewer is guided through a myriad of hafu experiences that are influenced by upbringing, family relationships, education, and even physical appearance. As the film interweaves five unique life stories, audiences discover the depth and diversity of *hafu* personal identities.

In the **first act** of the documentary, audiences are introduced to each character, their background, and their initial views on being Japanese and *hafu*. The stories progress as the characters attempt to define themselves in Japanese society, as individuals with roots both in Japan and in another country. In the end, audiences learn whether each hafu has reached a sense of peace with who they are.

We then begin exploring the day-to-day lives of our five hafus, starting with **David Yano (29)**, a Ghanaian and Japanese *hafu*. David was born in a small village in Ghana, to a Ghanaian mother and a Japanese father. His father, an architect, was in Ghana to build the Noguchi Hideo Memorial when he met David's mother. After spending 6 years in Ghana, they moved to Tokyo. However, due to the difficulty of adjusting to their new life in Japan, his parents separated when he was 10, after which he spent the next 8 years in an orphanage with his two brothers. When David went back to Ghana for the first time in his early 20s and saw the disparity in quality of life between his two countries, he realized how blessed he was to have grown up in Japan. He now uses his talents to raise funds to build schools back in Ghana.

Audiences then meet **Sophia Fukunishi (27)** as she anxiously passes through the customs gates at Tokyo's Narita International Airport. Raised entirely in Sydney, Sophia has only a few memories of Japan, where she visited her relatives as a child. At 27, Sophia decided it was time to explore her Japanese heritage, and so she has relocated to Tokyo, leaving behind friends, family and a job she enjoyed. She is determined to make a life for herself in Japan while attempting to learn the language from scratch. Will Japan live up to the expectations she's held for so long? Will she be able to assimilate? And, ultimately, how will she identify herself after spending some time here?

Venezuelan-Japanese **Edward Sumoto (28)** dreams of a multicultural Japan. Raised entirely in a single-mother home in Kobe, Ed received his formal education through the international school system. There he found himself feeling disconnected from the surrounding Japanese community and upon leaving for university in the US, he felt no desire to return. But a few years later, he returned to Japan to take care of his aging mother and discovered a vibrant online community of mixed people, prompting him to form the offline community *Mixed Roots Kansai (MRK)*. Through MRK, Ed is working toward realizing his dream of raising multiracial and multicultural awareness by pushing forward public dialogue and understanding of the changing demographics of Japan.

Unlike Ed, no one can tell that **Fusae Miyako (35)** is *hafu* just by looking at her. Fusae was born and raised in Kobe, to a Korean father—now a naturalized Japanese citizen—and a Japanese mother. Until she was 15, she was raised to believe that she was entirely Japanese. Upon finding family documents alluding to her Korean roots, she confronted her mother to discover her mixed heritage—a traumatic experience for her at the time. After this revelation, she began looking into the differences between Japanese and Korean cultures. But 20 years later she is still struggling to redefine her place in society as a Korean/Japanese descendant. She has become actively involved in *Mixed Roots Kansai*. She feels by helping to organize MRK's youth events, she is helping younger people like her find acceptance with their mixed identities.

Audiences will also meet with the **Oi Family**. **Gabriela (Mexican, 37)** and **Tetsuya Oi (Japanese, 41)** met when they were students both studying abroad in the United States. They fell in love, married and moved to Nagoya, Japan. In 2002, they welcomed a baby boy, Alex Oi, and two years later Sara. **Alex (9)** and **Sara (7)** have been attending Japanese elementary school. However, worried about how her children will straddle three languages (Spanish, Japanese, and English), Gabriela has started to investigate whether she should send her children through the international school system in Nagoya. Alex has also been increasingly showing physical symptoms of stress due to the teasing he receives from his classmates for being *hafu*. Through the Oi's, this film looks at the tough decisions parents have to make in raising multicultural children.

Through these stories, audiences learn how these five individuals come to terms with being mixed-race Japanese. As the first feature length broadcast-able documentary to explore the experiences of *hafus* and produced by a team of *hafus*, this film aims to show both the joys and sorrows, the struggles for acceptance, the comical cultural misunderstandings, and, ultimately, the self-empowerment that occurs as these individuals come to embrace who they really are.

## Production Team

**MEGUMI NISHIKURA** (Producer/Director/Videographer) Megumi is passionate about documentary storytelling. A 2002 graduate of New York University's Tisch School of Arts Film and Television program, she has been working steadily in the documentary film industry, first in post production as an assistant editor and editor, and from 2007, as a freelance documentary producer and director. Most of her recent documentaries have been for the United Nations and various foundations and NGOs on global and social issues. She has recently begun to re-explore issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and identity. In 2009, she worked with the Loving Day Project—an educational community organization which celebrates the legalization of interracial marriage in the US—to produce a video about their flagship celebration held each year in New York City. Her passion is to use the medium of film to remind people of our common humanity.

**LARA PEREZ TAKAGI** (Director/Co-producer/Videographer) Lara Perez Takagi was born in Tokyo in 1982, and raised in various cities around the world. Her father is Spanish and her mother is Japanese. She graduated with a degree in Audiovisual Communications and Multimedia Science at the Complutense University of Madrid and Francisco de Vitoria in 2005. As her appetite for cinematography continued to flourish, she returned to Tokyo on a Government Scholarship and explored her dual identity. She worked as a freelancer in Japanese production companies and entered Waseda University's Graduate School of GITS, where she completed a MA in the Multimedia Science and Arts area and directed her first documentary "Madrid x Tokyo".

**MARCIA YUMI LISE** (Researcher/Thematic Adviser) Marcia is the co-founder of the Hafu Project, a collaborative project of photography and research exploring the identity of half Japanese people. Her first exhibition was held in London, UK at Bodhi Gallery. Her expertise lies in the area of culture, race, nationality and identity. In August 2009, her work was exhibited at the 3331 Gallery in Tokyo. As one of the leading researchers on the subject of hafus, Marcia's expertise is indispensable when it comes to poignantly addressing the many complexities that arise in making this film. Three of the five characters selected for the film have come out of the already 60 plus interviews she has conducted. She is of Japanese and Italian-American mixed heritage.

**AIKA MIYAKE** (Editor) was born in Aichi prefecture in Japan. She studied and worked as a film maker in the US for 4 years and has been a Avid/FCP editor since 2006 in Tokyo. She has edited various TV shows, commercials, and documentaries. She is passionate about creative fun projects, especially those with socially positive messages. She believes in the power of film to improve our quality of life. Aika is excited about her future in the entertainment industry, looking to meet ever more inspiring professionals and continue to grow her vast skill set.

**WINTON YUICHIRO WHITE** (Music Composer) Born in New York, raised in Japan, Winton White is a published composer with the versatility ranging from writing for orchestral instruments, to vocal ensembles, and even dance groups or film. Composing since the age of 16, he pursued his studies of music composition in California where he attended San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Biola University. He has had performances of his works by professional members of the Milwaukee, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Colorado, National Symphony and other colleagues in Japan, Singapore, France, and throughout the USA. During his time in the greater Los Angeles area he was active as a freelance tuba player and bassist. Still active as a performer, Winton is now a freelance vocalist singing tenor and countertenor all across the San Francisco Bay Area while working as a music copyist. His music and performance updates can be found at [www.wintonwhite.com](http://www.wintonwhite.com).

## Credit List (Filmmakers and Featured Subjects)

<b>Directed by</b>	Megumi Nishikura & Lara Pérez Takagi
<b>Produced by</b>	Megumi Nishikura
<b>Co- Produced by</b>	Lara Pérez Takagi
<b>Theme Advisor &amp; Researcher</b>	Marcia Yumi Lise
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Jilann Spitzmiller
<b>Cinematography by</b>	Megumi Nishikura & Lara Pérez Takagi
<b>Edited by</b>	Aika Miyake
<b>Original Music by</b>	Winton Yuichiro White
<b>Infographic Design and Animation</b>	Ken Tanabe
<b>Featuring</b> (In Order of Appearance)	
	David Yano
	Sophia Fukunishi
	Tetsuya Oi
	Gabriela Oi
	Alex Oi
	Sara Oi
	Edward Sumoto
	Fusae Miyako

## Project Background

Filmmakers Megumi Nishikura and Lara Perez Takagi both participated in the Hafu Japanese photography and research project. (<http://www.hafujapanese.org>) Created by the social researcher Marcia Yumi Lise and photographer Natalie Maya Willer, this project explores the experiences and identities of mixed-Japanese individuals through portrait photographs and in-depth interviews. Both filmmakers offered their skills and talents to the Hafu Japanese project to create short interview videos which can be viewed at <http://youtube.com/hafuproject>. Out of this collaboration, the idea to produce a broadcastable independent feature length documentary was born.

## Funding

After initially funding “Hafu ” out of their own pockets, in 2011 Lara and Megumi launched an [Indiegogo](#) crowdfunding campaign to cover additional production costs. They reached their project goal of \$10,000 in 5 days and went on to raise an additional \$14,000 over the remaining days of the campaign. Additionally, the film has received financial support from the [Japan Foundation](#) and the [Center for Asian American Media](#), which is funded by the Center for Public Broadcasting.

## Distribution

The filmmaker’s intention is for this film to screen at film festivals, conferences and at schools worldwide. Ultimately, the goal is to spread awareness of the experience of mixed-Japanese in Japan and thus the filmmakers are currently seeking distribution for independent theaters and television acquisition. Once all distribution avenues have been explored, the film will be available via DVD sales.

## Social Media

Website: <http://www.hafufilm.com>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/hafufilm>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/hafufilm>

## Press

**07.22.2010 Japan Times**, 'Hafu' draws viewers into world of Japanese identity

**08.12.2010 Metropolis Magazine**, "The Hafu Project: Exploring what it means to be Japanese"

**10.22.2010 CNNgo**, “The whole story on being “hafu””

**01.22.2011 Rafu Shimpo (Los Angeles, USA)**, "The other hafu of Japan”

**02.01.2011 Mercado Latino**, “"Hafu- Un documental que narrará la experiencia de vivir entre dos culturas"

**02.01.2011 Latin-a**, "Especial- Hafu ¿Dos culturas o mitad de ambas?"

**11.12.2011 Japan Times**, “Searching for connections drives young documentarian”

**1.24.2012 Akahata Newspaper**, ドキュメンタリー映画「ハーフ」を制作した”

## Contact

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