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A Transnational Analysis of American Black Music in Japan: Japanese Male Subculture Elites and American Black Music in the Late 1980s and Early 1990s

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This paper investigates how and why Japanese male subculture elite writers expressed their affection for American Black music in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a case study, it examines their characterizations of American Black music in the October 1991 issue of the subculture magazine *Studio Voice*, devoted to the theme of *Kokujinteki* or "Blackness." Ultimately, this paper argues that these Japanese male subculture elites used "Black musical bodies" as a transnational space in which they could manipulate the cultural borders of Japan. On one hand, they blurred differences between Black Americans and Japanese to create an imagined community beyond racial difference. But on the other hand, they defended the racial borders of Japan. They did so to create their own outlaw ideal of Japanese masculinity as a means to retain their position at the top of both gender and racial hierarchies in Japan. This paper uses Japanese source materials to make its argument. By doing so, it underscores the value of a transnational approach, which allows us to move away from viewing American culture outside the US as either purely delivering values and ideas created in the US, or being transformed exclusively in the place outside the US where they are domesticated, in this case, Japan. This transnational approach helps us rethink the conventional regional boundaries of American Studies and American cultural hegemony in the world.

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1. Introduction

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, increasing numbers of Japanese young people began conceiving of themselves and in part presenting themselves as *kokujin* or "Black people."[1] It was a time when American soul and funk music, Black street culture, hip-hop, and breakdance began to be distributed through major music and entertainment industries all over the world. In Japan, young people danced in discos and clubs that specifically featured Black music, imitating their Black musical heroes. Some male youth emulated the fashion and hairstyles of popstar Bobby Brown and thus became known as *Bobio*, while some Japanese teenage girls and young women dated Black Americans, many of whom served in the US military in Japan. They became known as *sisutā*, a term derived from Black American culture's use of "sister" to refer to Black women generally.[2]

A significant number of Japanese writers—the vast majority of whom were men—celebrated this trend in elite subculture magazines. This paper explores these authors' writings, focusing particularly on the October 1991 special issue of the subculture magazine *Studio Voice* titled *Kokujinteki* or "Blackness." In that issue, which was devoted entirely to an in depth treatment of the subject, Japanese subculture writers expressed their affection for Black Americans and their culture, particularly Black music. They described Black people as outsiders and fighters against the mainstream US society. Similarly, they portrayed "authentic" Black music as containing messages to encourage political activism. By doing so, they encouraged their readers to respect and embrace Black Americans and their culture and use it as a means to critique Japanese mainstream culture.

At first glance, Japanese affection for Black Americans and Black music in the late 1980s and early 1990s seems to fit well with a broader scholarly narrative about Americanization of popular music in Japan. It appears to reaffirm that Japanese admired Black music as an American icon and consumed it as a source of inspiration. But such views do not fully capture Japan's complex encounter with Black music. For example, anthropologist John G. Russell condemns Japanese subculture elites' portrayals of Black people in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as those in the October 1991 *Studio Voice* issue, as discriminatory.[3] While I agree with Russell that such portrayals revealed racial prejudices, I do not concur with the implication of his argument that Japanese representations of Black people should be understood exclusively within the context of racism in Japan. Even though many elite writers depicted Black people in prejudicial ways,

the writers respected and admired them and their culture. Other scholars argue that some Japanese understood Black music as a unique American art form that taught them how to fight against inequality and the hegemony of mainstream, if not white America itself. These scholars tend to highlight solidarity between Japanese and Black Americans. Thus, Japanese people's reception of Black music and culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s was complex, perhaps even contradictory, and informed by other ways in which Japanese people had negotiated their ideas about race in the US and Japan.

This paper employs a transnational approach to examine the circulation of American Black music in Japan. It shifts the focus away from viewing Japan's reception of American Black music as merely Japan's embrace of something constructed in the US and thus inherently and solely American. At the same time, it rejects the idea that American Black music became completely transformed upon its encounter and reception in Japan. By using a transnational framework of analysis, this paper addresses how some male Japanese writers used American Black music both to assert their own masculinity at a time when they felt it was threatened, and to represent their opposition to American cultural hegemony and mainstream Japanese society. As part of this transnational approach, the paper relies exclusively on Japanese source materials to examine the complex meanings of Black musical culture in Japan, thereby providing an example of new research approaches that expand the current boundaries of American Studies.

As a case study, this paper investigates how and why some Japanese male subculture writers favored Black music and Black people in the late 1980s to the early 1990s. In particular, it shows the ways in which those Japanese writers used stereotypical depictions of Black people with respect to Black music in the October 1991 issue of *Studio Voice*, devoted to the theme of Blackness. By locating those representations and this discourse within the historical context of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time in which Japanese subculture elite male writers experienced fear and anxiety, this paper provides more complex and nuanced understandings of Japan's encounters with American Black music. Ultimately, the paper argues that those male subculture elites used American Black music as a transnational space to manipulate the cultural borders of Japan While they blurred differences between Black Americans and Japanese, at the same time they defended the racial boundaries of Japan, a country which places Japanese men at the top of gender and racial hierarchies.

The paper begins by providing its intellectual background in the field of transnational American studies. Then, it explains who the subculture

elite writers were and the historical context that caused them to write articles in *Studio Voice*'*s* Blackness issue. It does so by first, showing how Japanese men shaped occupations and activities related to popular music into male jobs within the masculine sphere. Understanding these processes is important to rethinking the prevailing narrative of prominent American "masculine" influence on "feminine" Japanese popular music culture. Second, it describes how such male subculture elite writers were the successors of earlier Japanese popular music writers who "masculinized" writing about popular music and were conscious of American hegemony over Japan and the world. Third, it explains two elements of the historical context of the late 1980s and early 1990s that created crises for male subculture elite writers. One was the American-fueled economic boom that Japan was experiencing, and the other was these writers' fear that Japanese women were increasingly becoming intimate with Black men. Fourth, the paper shows the ways in which these subculture elite writers constructed a distinct understanding of Blackness. In the conclusion, the article explains why these writers loved Black music during this time period and how this paper helps extend current boundaries of American Studies.

Note that this paper discusses racial characterizations during the late 1980s and early 1990s that are highly problematic today and were for many people at the time as well. By analyzing such characterizations here, I do not intend to cause further harm to Black people and other racial minorities in Japan, who are still exposed to visual and verbal aggression based on their racial differences. I present them only to analyze the structure of racism in Japanese culture at that time and in no way endorse their use.

2. Intellectual Background: Transnational American Studies

This paper contributes to transnational American Studies by providing an illuminating case study of non-Americans' encounters of American culture. It also offers more nuanced understandings of Japan's encounter with American Black music than previous studies by elaborating on the positionality of those who loved Black music in the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

Pioneers of transnational American Studies, such as David Thelen, argue that a transnational framework of analysis can provide nuanced narratives to cultural encounters, by its focus on actors who challenged, reinforced, or debated the construction and unmaking of nation-states. Therefore, it helps us rethink the idea of the nation-state as an unchanging unit.[4] Studying

these actors allows us to recognize multifaceted receptions in cultural encounters, instead of viewing them only as monolithic manifestations of power relations between powerful nations and others, or colonizers and the colonized.[5]

Prominent research in transnational American Studies reveals the unfinished and sometimes contradictory mission of American cultural imperialism in the twentieth century.[6] But such research has traditionally narrated American cultural encounters with the world almost exclusively through US actors. For example, historian Penny M. Von Eschen, who studies Black music outside the US, describes various purposes of Americans who participated in State Department tours during the Cold War. As the State Department aimed to spread an American image of racial liberalism, Black American musicians took advantage of these tours to raise awareness of racial injustice and violence in the US.[7] Eschen also recounts interactions between Black American jazz musicians and non-Americans, but she does not investigate how non-Americans understood these tours and perceived the participation of Black American jazz musicians themselves. As a result, transnational American studies such as hers only provide partial accounts of American cultural encounters around the world.

However, other historians, such as Denise Cruz, recognize non-Americans' agency in cultural encounters and show that non-US actors were neither simply defiant of nor obedient to the cultural hegemony of the US. Cruz criticizes the traditional view of transnational interactions during the Cold War that emphasize a division between the US as a culturally hegemonic force and Asians as submissive actors. She demonstrates how Filipina and Filipino writers in the 1950s and 1960s adapted and revised the gendered rhetoric of the male-coded West and the feminine-coded East to create a transnational community and identity in Cold War settings.[8] Likewise, Yusuke Torii provides a more nuanced understanding of Americanization. Torii shows the reciprocal nature of cultural and ideological exchanges between the US and Japan through jazz music during the first two decades of the Cold War.[9]

Torii elaborates how Japanese music critics of the time, who were the predecessors of subculture elite writers discussed in this paper, used jazz to critique American hegemony in the 1960s. According to Torii, jazz critics who supported the New Left movement such as Hisato Aikura and Masaaki Hiraoka, viewed jazz as an American representation of racial tensions. Influenced by Amiri Baraka's 1963 book *Blues People*, these critics constructed a Black America that was separated from mainstream America

and that criticized American imperialism.[10] Following Torii, Shūhei Hoshokawa and Toshiyuki Ohwada, who further investigated Japanese encounters with Black music, highlight racial solidarity between Blacks and Japanese.[11] For example, Ohwada states that some Japanese musicians during the American occupation identified with the subjugation of Black people in the US, viewing both as oppression carried out mainly by white Americans.[12]

While I agree that Black music was a cultural site where both Japanese and Black Americans sought solidarity to fight against mutual struggles, this paper offers more nuanced understandings about Japanese encounters with Black music. By clarifying the positionality of those who loved Black music within domestic and international contexts, this paper examines why Japanese loved Black music in the ways they did, and expands our understanding about non-Americans' encounters of American culture.

3. Japanese Male subculture Elites and Their Crisis of Masculinity in The Late 1980s and Early 1990s

3.1 Popular Music in Japan and Masculinity

To understand how and why subculture elites in the late 1980s and early 1990s expressed their particular affection for Black music, it is necessary to understand the ways in which Japanese men had earlier constructed jobs and activities related to the popular music industry as belonging to the masculine sphere. The history of popular music in Japan, both for general and academic audiences, has been narrated by internalizing what historian Ayako Kano calls "reverse Orientalism." According to Kano, "reverse Orientalism" is a paradigm that perceives the US and the West as masculine, and Japan and East Asia as feminine, as a means to claim Japan's uniqueness from the West.[13] Kano argues that this "reverse Orientalism" has hindered scholars and the Japanese popular music audience from interrogating male-centered gender relations within Japanese popular music culture and historical Japanese masculine violence against the world and those perceived as racial Others, which continues in various forms today.

Furthermore, popular music has long been described as representing lower taste in Japanese culture compared to Western classical music despite—or perhaps because of—its popularity. While Western classical music has been supported by the Japanese government since the Meiji

period through such means as national symphonic orchestras and higher education, popular music has lacked such recognition by institutions of authority. Postwar young musicians with guitars were considered delinquents,[14] and jobs related to popular music did not allow men to embody hegemonic masculinity.

One way that men in the popular music industry compensated for this lack of social status was to acquire in-depth knowledge of popular music. Despite popular music signifying "lower-class" tastes that classical music did not, college-educated and upper middle-class men tended to dominate the Japanese popular music industry as performers, businessmen, journalists, and critics. Their pre-existing social capital was not threatened by their endorsement of the latest Euro–American popular music, and in fact their interest in this music gave them the opportunity to earn further cultural capital.

Significantly, these well-educated elite men attained their knowledge and participated in activities surrounding popular music primarily outside formal school education. Literary scholar Rieko Takada describes how participating in activities outside school and gaining knowledge through them was a critical way for male high school and college students to become cultured persons from around the turn of the twentieth century to the mid-century. According to Takada, men with *kyōyō* or cultural refinement were not those who obtained good grades in school. They were, rather, those who could rebel against formal education by devoting themselves to activities outside school, such as reading books not required in the classes, engaging in political activism, and creating mangas. In that way, they could show their willpower, independence, and self-discipline.[15]

Although scholars such as Takada claim that this ideology of cultural refinement ended in the 1960s, a handful of men of higher educational background continued to embody and sustain it. For example, Akira Shinohara, a music critic who in a 2004 book chronicled Japanese rock magazines, writes that Tōyō Nakamura's *New Music Magazine*, launched in 1969, was considered the "authority" of rock journalism.[16] According to Shinohara, rock fans at that time treated this magazine as a "journal of literature and philosophy."[17] By the early 1970s, some men replaced the earlier practice of reading literature outside school with reading and writing about rock music as a constructed masculine gesture of rebellion against polite society.

The foreword to the 1974 book *Otokono saundo hyakuyonjūkyū no senryaku* (Men's sound and 149 strategies), written by Nakamura and music

critic Hisamitsu Noguchi underscores this point. In the book, Nakamura and Noguchi compiled several essays that explained how to appreciate Euro–American popular music genres. In the introduction they asked readers, "In our modern age, who would be considered an authentically cultured man? He would be a man who understands and loves 'sound!'"[18] They professed that acquiring *kyōyō* through traditional sources, such as *Iwanami Shinsho* paperbacks, was obsolete, declaring that "men reading *Iwanami* paperbacks was thing of the past."[19] Instead, they argued that talking about "sound" would enhance men's sexual appeal to women: "If you are a man who could not talk about sound at all in front of women, you should not live in this modern period!"[20] These statements encouraged men to assert and affirm their masculinity by talking about Euro–American popular music. They also reinforced male superiority as teachers and female submissiveness as learners. In this way, by the mid-1970s, college-educated male writers constructed appreciation of popular music as masculine behavior.

3.2 Subculture Elites in the late 1980s and early 1990s

Music critics such as Nakamura, who graduated from Kyoto University but gained knowledge of popular music outside school, were forerunners to the subculture elites who embraced Black music in publications such as *Studio Voice* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Musicologist Satoshi Masuda coined the term "subculture elites" to describe members of this social circle that included these writers.[21] In the 1980s, the concept of *sabukaru* or subculture was not generally associated with subversive values held by socially marginalized groups, as the sociologist Dick Hebdidge defined it.[22] Instead, *sabukaru* signified excellent cultural taste.[23] These *sabukaru* writers were cultural elites who had a taste for and access to the Euro–American subculture and underground Japanese cultural scenes, and thus were "subculture elites" in Masuda's words.

Social critic Eiji Otsuka, a frequent contributor to *Studio Voice* in the 1990s, remembers that the subculture in the 1980s encompassed a wide range of cultural products and phenomena. It was influenced by aspects of the counterculture of the 1970s, such as the culture of anime and manga, known as *otaku* culture by the end of the 1980s. It embraced an eclectic range of cultural elements, including techno-pop played by bands such as the Yellow Magic Orchestra, indie band music, designer clothing brands, and the artistic movement of *Nyū-aka* or New Academism.[24] According to Otsuka, many people in the subculture had formerly been members of

the *Zenkyōtō undō* (the Japanese leftist movement of 1968–1969) and the Japanese New Left movement in the late 1970s.[25] As such, these subculture elites were critical of America's global cultural hegemony and the social and cultural capital it had to influence the larger Japanese public.

The subculture elites also educated their readers as to how to be up-to-date and trendy "outsiders" to mainstream Japanese culture. For example, printed on recycled paper with a rough surface reminiscent of punk zines, *Studio Voice* in the early 1990s boasted a rebellious aura. Their edgy and trendy monthly issues featured topics such as "Journey to Tropical Music," which introduced the popular music of the "Third World," to Japanese audiences[26] and "Modern Lovers," which explored the subjects such as fetish fashion and sexual activities during the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.[27] Interspersed with such content were advertisements of designer brands such as Helmut Lang and Calvin Klein, which further conveyed *Studio Voice's* view of how to be fashionable outsiders.

The US-fueled economic boom in Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and America's apparent complete victory over the Cold War order. Against this backdrop, the male subculture elites may have felt eager to demonstrate their own ideal of masculinity, which they believed to be a means to critique Japanese mainstream society in this period. They adopted a view that their forerunners espoused: indulgence in sexual pleasure would make them outsiders in Japan, which would enable them to realize their authentic human disposition and rebel against the constrictions of mainstream Japanese society.

For example, *Studio Voice*'s August 1991 issue, "Bodies of Showa," dealt with popular culture in the 1960s, a decade in which the issue's writers believed that authentic Japanese had experienced feelings through bodies, as Elvis Presley did through his sexualized performance of rock 'n' roll music, and as Yukio Mishima did through committing *seppuku* or ritual suicide.[28] Literary critic Takashi Nibuya in the opening essay titled "Rebel Against Our Dormant Flesh" urgently asked the readers, "Have we found, or lived with, bodily senses in a genuine way?"[29] Columnist Kōshi Ueno lamented that "responses of current students and other youth to social issues had become slow, and they seemed to be shut down from what's happening around them."[30] He contrasted this lack of engagement from young people with the rapid responses the Tokyo stock market had to the markets in New York and London.[31] For Ueno, Japanese youth in 1991 appeared to be accepting the Japanese economic miracle without critiquing it. These

subculture elite writers insisted that their young readers regain physical excitement to interrogate what had brought about the economic boom.

The writers' obsession with bodily senses was one strategy to embody "outsider-ness" and talk back to mainstream society. They inherited this cultural technology of resistance from their predecessors, such as 1960s and early 1970s music critics Hisato Aikura and Masaaki Hiraoka, whom Torii examined in his study. For example, Hideto Mori, editor of the journal *Shisō no kagaku* (Science of Thought) in the early 1960s, claimed that creators of popular art, including popular music, should be able to claim the cultural mantle of societal outlaws, just like the *yakuza* (Japanese gangsters) and women bartenders. Musicologist Yusuke Wajima observes that Mori and other forerunners of subculture elites saw these outlaws from mainstream Japanese culture as socially alienated and sexually deviant—dispositions that they had learned from the most recent interpretations of Marxism at that time by Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich.[32]

In 1970, Tōyō Nakamura similarly praised sensual music, particularly that which involved Black bodies. Nakamura applauded Tina Turner's stage performances in Japan because she danced without technical skill but with sweat and erotic movements, like an amateur in a bar on a dull street off a downtown area. Nakamura further found aesthetic appeal in Turner's music, in addition to her bodily movements or her body itself, akin to that of painter Ryūsei Kishida, "who loved ordinary beauty that was vulgar, showy and ugly."[33] Nakamura considered outlaw Black people to be able to produce "authentic" popular music, and therefore, he projected deviant characteristics onto Black musical bodies, finding a unique Japanese aesthetic in them. In this way, precursors of subculture elites in the 1970s embodied "outsider-ness" through Black musical bodies.

Subculture elites in the late 1980s to the early 1990s used this cultural technology that their predecessors invented. With the Japanese economy booming in the late 1980s and early 1990s, subculture elite writers highlighted their enjoyment of sexual and other physical pleasure to contrast themselves to those who embraced the economic miracle and whose bodies had become numb in their view. When Black music and culture, particularly hip-hop, which critiqued race issues in the US, became popular worldwide and more accessible to young people, Black music was a perfect medium for male subculture elites to show their own ideal version of Japanese men as outlaws who did not hide their enjoyment of sexual pleasure and critiqued mainstream Japanese society. In October 1991, *Studio Voice* published its special *Kokujinteki* issue in order to educate

readers as to the genuine and authentic way to lead life—that is with bodily senses through Blackness.

3.3 Male Subculture elites' fear of Japanese Women Perceived to Embody Blackness

The economic boom and the triumph of American power at the end of Cold War were not the only reasons that male subculture elites embraced sensual pleasures as expressed through Black bodies. These men had also lost their sense of control over Japanese women. According to Russell, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese mass media, from weekly magazines to television programs, reported on Japanese youth eager to embody Blackness. Russell particularly addresses how Japanese media outlets problematized Japanese women who had sexual and romantic relationships with Black Americans.

A 1989 article in the weekly magazine *Spa*!, cited by Russell, portrayed night life in the high-end Roppongi district of Tokyo. The article's writer reported that many "Japanese gaudy girls"[34] were busy dancing through the night at the so-called Square Building famous for its disco dance clubs. The writer observed "big and muscular" Black men and felt that "Japanese young men looked miserable."[35] The writer lamented that "even [as] Japan brought about the economic miracle and bought Hollywood, Japanese men were defeated."[36] Russell further addresses 1980s television programs that often problematized Black American soldiers having sexual and romantic relations with Japanese women.[37] As Russell argues, those characterizations of Black people were testament to Japanese racism against Blacks, but they also represented Japanese men's fear of both Japanese women who were romantically involved with Black men, and Black men themselves who they considered racially inferior to them.

Scandals surrounding the writer Eimi Yamada are further evidence of the crisis of masculinity deeply felt by Japanese men from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. According to the literary scholar Ai Satō, few writers debuted in the same way as Yamada, who was featured in the weekly gossip magazines because of her previous employment in the sex industry.[38] Yamada's first book *Beddotaimu aizu* (Bedtime Eyes), and subsequent *Sōru myūjikku rabāzu onrī* (Soul Music, Lovers Only), for which she won the prestigious Naoki literary prize, both focused on sexual relationships between Japanese women and Black men.

Yamada's affinity for Black men scared Japanese men. Some weekly

magazines described Yamada as promiscuous, instead of celebrating her skills as a writer. The weekly magazine *Shūkan Post* featured an interview Yamada did with Ousmane Youla Sankhon, a Black African celebrity in Japan, who was formerly a Guinean diplomat to Japan. The interview focused on Yamada's sex life with her Black partner, with whom she lived at that time.[39] When Yamada was nominated to win the Naoki Prize, several weekly magazines ran stories, focusing on Yamada's Black partner who had been arrested.[40] By featuring pictures of Yamada with her Black partner, these articles sensationalized Japanese women's romantic relationships with Black men. The articles did not explicitly denounce Yamada's prior career in the sex industry or her literary works, but their tone invited readers to ask if they could accept her as one of the most celebrated writers of the time.

Yamada's novels' descriptions of Black men, that Russell condemns, were undoubtedly racist. However, Yamada received favorable reviews from subculture elites. In fact, literary critic Shōji Shibata in 1997 praised her as a trailblazer who portrayed Black foreigners as living in the same world as Japanese heroines, in stark contrast to her predecessors, such as the writer Kenzaburo Oe, who described Black foreigners as Others.[41] Other subculture elites envied a woman like Yamada who could inhabit the world of "Black music" that they admired. Yamada often described her Black male partners as having a "particular sense of rhythm" because music, in Yamada's imagination, surrounded Black people's daily lives.[42]

Yamada's award-winning *Soul Music, Lovers Only* illustrates her ideas about how Black music was essentialized into Black bodies. The novel features eight different romantic stories with graphic portrayals of sex. Each chapter is named after American soul music songs. For instance, the novel's opening chapter is named after the Motown hit "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye, and names of subsequent chapters include "Me and Mrs. Jones," a song by Billy Paul that describes an extra marital affair, and "When a Man Loves a Woman," a southern soul number sung by Percy Sledge. For Yamada, having romantic relationships with Black men meant appreciating Black music, and that music—in this case, soul music—was only for lovers. Through this description, Yamada reinforced the idea that Black bodies were naturally imbued with Black music and her claim that she herself lived in a "Black world." In the afterword to *Soul Music, Lovers Only*, Yamada asserted that her heart was *kokujin on'na* or "sister," and boasted that she was the only sister in the world who could speak Japanese fluently.[43]

It was in this context of some Japanese women, symbolized by

Yamada, who claimed to inhabit the "Black world," along with the Japanese economic boom and the rise of American hegemony taking place worldwide at the time, that subculture elite writers published the October 1991 Blackness issue of *Studio Voice* to express their admiration of Black people and Black music.

4. The October 1991 Issue of *Studio Voice*

4.1 Creating "Black Musical Bodies"

The October 1991 special *Kokujinteki* issue of *Studio Voice* introduced readers to Black athletes, musicians, dancers, and activists, whose bodies it perceived to possess authentic Blackness, encouraging Japanese men to idealize them and embody such Blackness themselves. In the special issue, subculture elite writers attempted first to define authentic Blackness, and then naturalize Black music onto Black bodies to construct "Black musical bodies."

For subculture elites, fighting against authority and mainstream society in Japan and the US was critical. To do that, they needed to position themselves and perform the role of "outsiders" who were attacking those who held power in the world. Several essays in the special edition celebrated Black courage and intelligence to fight against inequality. Although the writers' descriptions of Black people revealed their racist views of Blacks, the essays expressed their respect for Black Americans who fought against institutional racism in the US as part of portraying those Blacks as outsiders, critiquing those in power.

In a section of the issue entitled "Black Blacks," the writers constructed "authentic" Blacks by describing them as fighters against a society that was imbued with racism and imperialism. For example, Masayasu Date, a music and culture critic as well as activist, identified Malcom X as "the leader of Black Power as an anti-imperialist."[44] Jazz critic Yoshie Ono asserted that Miles Davis had "the highest intelligence" among Blacks who rebelled against white society and conventional musical expression.[45] Music critic Tadashi Fujita celebrated James Brown, who along with his backup singers shouted, "I am Black and I am proud" in his 1968 hit song "Say it Loud."[46] All in all, these subculture elites found Black activists and innovative musicians to be sources of inspiration who represented their ideal of how to express rebellious attitudes toward mainstream society.

Simultaneously, these elites stressed that strong sexual desire and indulgence in bodily pleasures marked authentic Blackness. For example,

photographer Herb Ritts's work, *Djimon Three Quarter Nude, Hollywood*, which captured then-fledgling actor Djimon Hounsou in a provocative pose, was used on the cover of the special edition. The openly gay and HIV-positive Ritts supported gay and lesbian rights and promoted a homoerotic aesthetic in mainstream culture through his works depicting male nudes.[47] The editor of *Studio Voice* used Ritts' photo of Hounsou without explaining where it came from, and consequently, the cover photo simply demonstrated a Black man apparently masturbating, reinforcing the message that authentic *kokujinteki* entailed sensual exploration and indulgence in sexual pleasures. Indeed, the first page of this issue listed ten defining characteristics of Blackness which included having many kids and possessing sexual appeal through flexible leg muscles.[48]

These subculture elites then suggested that these sexual Black bodies produced sexual music, thus naturalizing Black music onto Black bodies. For instance, graphic designer and music critic Teruhiko Yumura described his childhood memories of believing that sensual Black voices heard in soul songs—he called them *amacha sōru* (sweet tea soul)—were inherent in Black bodies, and he even disclosed his own adult blackface minstrelsy, in which he attempted to nurture *kokujin taishitsu* or "Black constructions" by putting "soy sauce and Worcester sauce" on his face to blacken it and using laundry pins to make his lips "thicker."[49]

The Black music that these subculture elites referenced in the magazine differed from that of popular Black musicians at that time. They did not mention, for example, Diana Ross, whose single "If We Hold on Together" had reached number four on the Japanese Oricon music chart in 1989, or Janet Jackson, whose music was used in a Japan Airlines commercial and whose album *Rhythm Nation* reached number eight on the Oricon chart in 1989. Although Michael Jackson was listed, writer Toru Watanabe asserted that unlike Jackson's vigorous performances as part of the Jackson Five, his solo works were unsatisfying. He then called Jackson "an idol from a sterilized room," while praising Bobby Brown, whom many Japanese young people imitated at that time, as "an idol with immunity to virus," a naughty young fella who banged the microphone on the floor.[50] In this way, they selected Black musicians who, in their imagination, were divorced from commercialism and economic success.

For these subculture elites, celebrating bodily pleasures was a humane act of defiance against what the economic boom represented. In the section of the issue called "Voice," which listed Black musicians whom they thought embodied authentic Blackness, music critic Tadashi Fujita claimed that he

was attracted to Black music because it was indecent. On the page with a portrait of the Chicago blues guitarist Muddy Waters wearing a white robe while holding his guitar, Fujita explained that the popular appeal of Black music was its "rich sense of rhythm and positive views toward sexual desires."[51] He explained that celebrating physical pleasures was a way to talk back against polite society. He stated that rock 'n' roll was criticized in Japan in the 1950s because youngsters "shook their waists, played guitars with carefree Black beats that hit directly to their lower bodies," in contrast to mainstream institutions such as *Kōyaren* (the Japan High School Baseball Federation) which "told a big lie …that adolescent sexual desires could disappear with sports."[52] Fujita stated, "The soul of Black music is to ignore an institution supervising young people such as *Kōyaren*. It rests on an idea that our hearts would be healthy when our bodies shake."[53] In short, Fujita constructed hypersexual and musically imbued Black bodies by describing how Black music liberated people's sexual desires and thus made them rebellious. As such, he essentialized sensual music and rebellious attitudes against polite society onto Black bodies. For these subculture elites, Black musical bodies represented the ideal "outsider-ness" in Japan in 1991, a year when the Japanese mainstream public was still enjoying the economic miracle, which was soon to end, and not paying critical attention to the status and pleasures it brought.

4.2 Asserting and Defending Japanese Racial Superiority

Subculture elites respected and admired, but otherized, Black musical bodies to render them embodiments of "outsider-ness" in Japanese society. In the special section titled "Black Non-Blacks," the writers asserted Japanese racial superiority over both Blacks and whites as a means to overcome their fear of losing their masculinity in the face of those Japanese women who embodied Blackness by sleeping with Black male partners. This section listed the names of white and Japanese men whom the magazine believed actually to have been Black people in previous lives.

By featuring such white male musicians, the subculture elite writers urged their Japanese readers to embody Blackness as it believed the white musicians whom they admired had done. But at the same time, they seem to recognize an impediment to Japanese men fully embodying Blackness as whites did because they perceived the white musicians as overly sexual and neglectful of their health and respectability in a way Japanese men would never be.

For example, music critic Hidenori Masubuchi wrote that white southern rock star Gregg Allman "emits Blackness from his whole body,"[54] because when Masubuchi met him in person, Allman was "lumbering like a bear with vacant looks showing yellow teeth from his loosely opened mouth."[55] Masubuchi felt sympathy for Allman as he was a typical "bluesman" who would "become useless" from being "twisted by women."[56] Another music critic, Toshio Nakamura, identified singer Tom Jones as having been Black in a former life because of his sweaty body and sexy macho persona on stage.[57] Nakamura also highlighted Elvis Presley, whom he described as "the waist-twisting man whose degradation in later years was exactly like what Blacks experienced at the end of their lives."[58]

Thus, it is evident that the writers held ambivalent attitudes toward these white musicians and whites more generally. As Russell notes, subculture elite writers considered these white musicians to represent both their "white" selves, as well as a racial Other.[59] Most importantly, the male writers specifically identified white musicians whom they believed embodied Blackness because they thought that those whites would authorize Japanese men themselves to embody such Blackness and to be up to date with the Euro–American subculture that they admired.

However, these writers considered Japanese musicians whom they believed to have been Black people in previous lives to be different from and superior to such white musicians. While the writers highlighted sexual behaviors of these white musicians, they did the opposite when it came to describing the Japanese musicians. They understated the Japanese musicians' sensuality and sexual appeal and appetite. The writers instead focused on the Japanese musicians' creativity and socially conscious attitudes in opposition to conventional society. For instance, music producer Jun'ichi Morita described Kikusuimaru Kawachiya, who sang *Kawachi ondo* (traditional Japanese folk music from the historic region of Kawachi in present-day southern Osaka prefecture) as coming from a "Black nation."[60] Morita otherized the Kawachi region as a gender-deviant place that thus embodied *kokujinteki*. He claimed that Kawachi had "many Yakuza who drink sake with sweet *manjū* (traditional Japanese sweet confections) and women who used male pronouns such as *ore* and *washi* to refer to themselves."[61] He characterized Kawachiya as a rebellious singer, like Black rappers and reggae musicians, who incorporated controversial current events, such as *Guriko jiken* (the Glico Morinaga extortion and kidnapping case) and the Persian Gulf War, into his songs. Morita believed that people from Kawachi possessed a vigorous vitality and creativity "to

transform *Nembutsu odori* (traditional Buddhist chanting and dancing rituals) handed down from the Heian period to *Kawachi Ondo* dance music"—just as Black people took inspiration from traditional Black spirituals and work songs in creating blues and jazz.[62] These efforts and talents that produced Black music were finally celebrated in Japan when they were found in Japanese male bodies.

Music journalist Ippei Kitajima's short essay about Japanese singer Saburō Kitajima emphasized the singer's respectability. He claimed that Saburō Kitajima absolutely was Black in a past life because of the Japanese singer's "kinky perm, wide brim shirt collars, and flashy jewelry that match perfectly with Kitajima's outlook" and "his 15-billion-yen mansion with 30 rooms."[63] He believed that Kitajima possessed the Black mentality in which successful people took care of their families and friends.[64] By doing this, the writer also reinforced Kitajima's respectability as a Japanese man, who exhibited Japanese masculine virtues of diligence, generosity, and kindness. Further, the writer encouraged readers to attend the singer's concerts to understand how to embody *kokujinteki*. He did so because he believed that Japanese men would have a harder time becoming part of the "Black world" than Japanese women who had sexual relationships with Black men.[65]

These male Japanese subculture elites' relationship to Blackness and Black men was multifaceted, if not perhaps inconsistent. They idolized Blackness as a means to rebel against Japanese society, but at the same time they feared that Black men would steal their control over Japanese women because of some Japanese women's increasing interest in being involved with Black men romantically. In the minds of these male subculture elites, these Japanese women were demonstrating how they could live in a "Black world" embodying in many ways what the male writers imagined to be an ideal outlaw and acquiring knowledge about Black music, which they considered to be inherent in Black bodies. But the men rejected doing the same by having relationships with black women. In short, the Japanese male writers of the "Black Non-Blacks" section attempted to assert their own ideal outlaw masculinity, which otherized both Black and white men, as well as Black women and Japanese women who had romantic relationships with Black men, in order to maintain their position at the top of both the racial and gender hierarchies in Japan.

5. Conclusion

The characterization of Black bodies in the October 1991 issue of *Studio Voice* shows how Japanese male subculture elites used their love of Black music to construct Black musical bodies, which they imagined as essential to the music, as a means to critique Japanese mainstream society and state of the world in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

These subculture elites had access to the Euro–American subculture and underground Japanese cultural scenes. Their forerunners were 1960s New Left music critics who established the field of musical criticism as a masculine space in which male writers were also very conscious about racial inequalities and American global hegemony. The subculture writers of the late 1980s and early 1990s inherited this legacy and applied it to their own particular crisis of masculinity and fears of losing their power. The American fueled economic boom and the US's impending victory over the Cold War order with the dissolution of Soviet Union caused them great anxiety. Like their predecessors, these writers believed that their celebrating and encouraging indulgence in sexual pleasures would make them "outsiders" to Japanese society and thereby enable them to regain human "authenticity" they could use to rebel against mainstream Japanese society, then controlled by American cultural hegemony.

Another threat to these subculture elites' masculinity came from the increasing number of Japanese women who were intimate with Black men. Award-winning novelist Eimi Yamada was a prominent example of such women who could live in a "Black world" filled with sensual Black music. While some Japanese men in mainstream society criticized these women as promiscuous, subculture elite men envied them. To them, these Japanese women embodied the ideal of "outsider-ness." But these men refused to have Black women as romantic partners, and thus, they needed a different way to embody "outsider-ness" and to defend their dominant position over women in the Japanese gender hierarchy and assert their superiority to Black people, whom some Japanese women were choosing over them as romantic partners.

Surrounded by fear of American cultural hegemony and loss of their masculinity, the subculture elite writers created their ideal of a superior Japanese man, who was a sexually active and rebellious outlaw, but also creative diligent and generous. In the special *Kokujinteki* issue of *Studio Voice*, they projected this ideal onto Black bodies, constructing them as both sensual and musical. They used these Black musical bodies as a transnational

cultural space to embody an alternative to hegemonic masculinity, which as R.W. Connell observes has been an indispensable ideology for men to maintain the borders of modern nation-states.[66] By doing so, these writers constructed and used Black musical bodies as a means to overcome their fears, engendered by the existence of Japanese women who chose to become intimate with Black men. But the strategy these male writers employed in the name of challenging mainstream Japanese society, in fact, affirmed Japan's dominant racial hierarchy and patriarchal culture.

In this entire process, these subculture elite writers engaged in manipulation of the cultural borders of Japan through their embrace of Black American music. The writers blurred boundaries between the US and Japan, as well as between Asians and Blacks, by standing in solidarity with Black Americans whom they understood to be challenging American mainstream society in ways they admired as Japanese subculture elites purporting to challenge the Japanese mainstream. At the same time, they defended the racial borders of Japan, by portraying both Black musicians and those white musicians whom they viewed as performing "authentic" Black music as racial Others. As such, these Japanese male subculture elites exemplify how conceptions of American culture outside the US do not always reflect the exact same values and ideas they hold in the US, but neither is their meaning exclusively shaped and altered by values and ideas of the foreign destination country, in this case, Japan.

Focusing on actors involved in cultural encounters requires scholars to investigate the actors' positionality both with respect to their own domestic culture and to other cultures around the world. It is a transnational approach, that locates Japan within a transpacific context, where racialization and feminization continually occur in cultural encounters.[67] It helps us move away from understanding cultural encounters in Japan only within the context of Americanization, which often underscores coding of the US as male, and Japan as female. Thus, the transnational approach, which focuses on flow of ideas and explores actors' motivations and anxieties, deriving from both outside and inside their home countries, provides a more complex and nuanced understanding of the meaning of American cultural hegemony and the circulation of American culture around the world. It also helps us rethink conventional regional boundaries of American Studies.

Examining why some Japanese women, such as Eimi Yamada, also constructed and essentialized hypersexual Black bodies imbued with Black music is an important subject for future research. John G. Russell

points out that Yamada, in collaboration with another Japanese female writer, Shōko Ieda, spread this construction of Black people as hypersexual bodies, and future research could shed light on why Japanese women such as them sought to embody "anti-respectability" through their interaction with Black musical bodies. In other words, what were these Japanese women expressing through their engagement with Black musical bodies in a transnational space? Answers would contribute to a deeper and wider understanding of how and why some Japanese embraced Black American music and tried to make it their own.

Notes

[1] This article is a revised version of a paper I presented at the 2022 Annual Conference of Association of Asian Studies in Honolulu, Hawaii, entitled "Becoming Kokujinteki: Masculinity of Japanese Male Subculture Elite Writers and Black Bodies as Transnational Cultural Space." The research was conducted as part of Bumon Kenkyu Three, which focused on Transient Subjects of American culture and values, at the International Institute of American Studies at Doshisha University.

[2] John G. Russell, "Nihon no masumedia ni miru kokujinzo" (Images of Black People in Japanese Mass Media), *Kaiho shakai gaku kenkyu* 6 (1992), 18–19; Toru Takeda, "Kuroi simulacre" (Black Simulacre), *Les Specs* 39 (1992), 41.

[3] John G. Russell, *Nihonjin no kokujinkan: Mondai ha chibikuro sambo dakedeha nai* (Japanese ideas about Blacks: The issue is not only The Story of Little Black Sambo) (Tokyo: Shinhyōron, 1991); Russell, "Nihon," 7–40.

[4] David Thelen, "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December, 1999): 966–967. Among the studies on transnational histories, see Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen, eds., *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014).

[5] Ryan Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity," *History and Theory* 41, no.3 (October 2002): 301–325.

[6] Christina Kline, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003); Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[7] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[8] Denise Cruz, "'Pointing to the Heart': Transpacific Filipinas and the Question of Cold-War Philippine–U.S. Relations," *American Quarterly* 63 no.1 (2011): 1–32; Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). For non-white Americans during the Cold War, see Chiou-Lin Yhe, "'A Saga of Democracy': Toy Len Goon, American Mother of the Year, and the Cultural Cold War," *Pacific Historical Review* 81 no.3 (2012): 432–461.

[9] Yusuke Torii, "Swing Ideology and Its Cold War Discontents in U.S.–Japan Relations, 1944–1968" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2007).

[10] Torii, "Swing," 27, 177–219, 232.

[11] Shūhei Hosokawa, "Soy Sauce Music: Haruomi Hosono and Japanese Self-Orientalism," in *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music*, ed. Philip Hayward (New Bernet: John Libbey Publishing, 1999), 114–144.
[12] Toshiyuki Ohwada, "Tekunorojī to amerika ongaku-Afuro fyūcharizumu, gēmu ongaku, YMO" (Technology and American Music: Afro-Futurism, Game Music and YMO) in *Poppu mūjikku wo kataru jū no shiten* (Ten perspectives to talk about pop music), ed. Toshiyuki Ohwada (Tokyo: Artes Publishing, 2020), 11–33.; *Amerika ongaku no atarashii chizu* (New Map of American Music) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2022), 48–64.
[13] Kano particularly points to Kojin Karatani, Estuko Yamashita and Hidemi Suga. Ayako Kano, "Toward a Critique of Transhistorical Femininity," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, eds. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 520–554.
[14] Postwar biography of musicians often shared such episodes. For example, Kosaka Kazuya, *Meido in okyupaido Japan* (Made in Occupied Japan) (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1990).
[15] Eriko Takada, "Gakko no benkyo nanka shinai: otokono tokken (We don't study school curriculum: Male privilege)" *Ōyō rinri; riron to jissen no kakehashi: kyōyō to gender* 10 bessatsu (2018): 15.
[16] Akira Shinohara, *Nihon rock zasshi kuronikuru* (Japanese Rock Magazines Chronicles) (Tokyo: Ohta Shuppan, 2004) 14.
[17] Ibid., 111.
[18] Hisamitsu Noguchi and Toyo Nakamura, eds., *Otokono saundo hyakuyonjukyu no senryaku* (Men's Sound and 149 Strategies) (Tokyo: KK rongu serāzu, 1974), unpaginated forward. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are mine.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Satoshi Masuda, "Koreha cultural stadizu deha nai" (This is not Cultural Studies), *Dokusho tanken* 15, April 1996.
[22] Dick Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[23] Hoshino Futoshi, "Sabukaruchā" (Subculture), *Artscape*, accessed March 14, 2022, https://artscape.jp/artword/index.php/サブカルチャー.
[24] Eiji Ōtsuka, "1980 nendai to sabukaruchā—Ōtsuka Eiji san ni kiku" (The subculture in the 1980s: Asking Ōtsuka Eiji) in *Taiko bunkashi-Reisenkinihon no hyogen to undo* (The history of counter-culture: Japanese expression and activism during the Cold War), eds. Naoya Unoda and Hideto Tsuboi (Suita: Osaka Daigaku Shuppan, 2021), 324.
[25] Ibid., 325.
[26] *Studio Voice*, July 1990.
[27] *Studio Voice*, May 1991.
[28] *Studio Voice*, August 1991.
[29] Nibuya Takashi, "Nikutai no nemuri he no teikō" (Rebel Against Our Dormant Flesh), *Studio Voice*, August 1991, 13.
[30] Ueno Koshi, "Rokjunendai ha kan'nen no jidai demo atta" (1960s was the time of the ideology), *Studio Voice*, August 1991, 14.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Wajima Yusuke, *Tsukurareta "nihon no kokoro" shinwa: Enka wo meguru sengo taishu ongakushi* (Created Myth of "Japanese Soul": Popular Music History through "Enka" of Postwar Japan) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2011): 206–207.
[33] Nakamura Tōyō, "Tōyō zu tōku" (Toyo's Talk), *New-music Magazine* 3, no.2 (1971): 67.
[34] "Tokyo gogo yoji kokoro yasashiki eirian tachi" (Heartfelt Aliens at Four in the Morning in Tokyo), *Spa!* November 8, 1989, 34–35, cited in Russell, "Nihon," 19.
[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.
[37] Russell, "Nihon," 22–23.
[38] Satō Ai, "Kokujin to chocoleto: Yamada Eimi Bedtime Eyes ron" (Blacks and Chocolate: An Essay on Yamada Eimi's *Bedtime Eyes*), *Geijutu shijo shugi bungei* 27 (2001): 125.
[39] *Shūkan posuto*, "Hen'na gaikokan sankon no bijo mukiashi intabyu 5 Yamada Eimi" (Weird Diplomat Sankon's Interview with Ladies), May 2, 1986, 180–183.
[40] *Shūkan shinchō*, "Naokishō wo mokuzen ni Yamada Eimi ga konwaku suru dōsei kokujin no taiho" (Arrest of Black Partner That Worried Yamada Eimi Before She Is Awarded Naoki Prize), July 30,1987, 132–135; *Shūkan posuto*, "Yamada Eimi san no jikaisaku heno kitai: koibito no kokujin hei reipu wo do atsukau" (Yamada Eimi's Upcoming Work: How She Treats Her Black Partner's Rape), July 24, 1987, 47–49.
[41] Shōji Shibata, "Nichijo no seiritsu: Jesi no sebone Yamada Eimi" (Constructing the Everyday: Jessie's Backbone by Yamada Eimi), *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzaino kenkyū* 42, no.12 (1997): 108; Satō "Kokujin," 126.
[42] *Shūkan posuto*, "Hen'na."
[43] Eimi Yamada, *Soul Music Lovers Only* (Tokyo: Gentosha bunko, 2003), 203.
[44] Masayasu Date, "Malcom X," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 21.
[45] Yoshie Ono, "Miles Davis," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 22.
[46] Tadashi Fujita, "James Brown," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 22.
[47] James Crump and Paul Martineau, *Herb Ritts; L.A. Style* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), 22.
[48] "Kokujinteki jukkajō" (The ten clauses of Blackness), *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 17.
[49] Teruhiko Yumura, "Amacha souru ni mune kyunkyun" (Throbbing to sweet soul music), *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 28.
[50] Tōru Watanabe, "Michael Jackson," and "Bobby Brown," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 33.
[51] Tadashi Fujita, "Ecchi dakara hikarerunodearu" (Because He's Dirty, We Admire Him), *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 35.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Hideki Masubuchi, "Gregg Allman," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 51.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Toshio Nakamura, "Elvis Presley," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 53.
[59] John G. Russell, "Replicating the White Self and Other: Skin Color, Racelessness, Gynoids, and the Construction of Whiteness in Japan," *Japanese Studies* 37, no.1 (2017): 23–48.
[60] Jun'ichi Morita, "Kawachiya Kikusuimaru," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 56.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ippei Kitajima, "Kitajima Saburō," *Studio Voice*, October 1991, 55.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 76; George L. Mosse, *The Images of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.
[67] Catherine Ceniza Choy and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Gendering the Trans-Pacific World" in Catherine Ceniza Choi and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, eds., *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 5.