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Excursus on “Hapa”; or the Fate of Identity

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When I was growing up the license plate on my mom’s Dodge minivan read: R3HAPAS. My mom explained to my sister, brother, and me that a *Hapa* was someone like us—part Asian. And, when I was a kid it made me feel special, gave me a sense of pride-in-difference, to be named in that way because in the predominately Jewish part of Los Angeles where I grew up, we were the only three *Hapas* I knew. In that community, it also offered me a shelter, something “identifiable” and nameable, to combat the questions about my identity. More than twenty years later, from the vantage point of a self-conscious multiracial individual and student of literature and cultural studies at the University of Hawai’i, I have come to separate myself from that license plate. Thinking back to the text of the plate, I see now that the letters—the possessive “R”—were more about my parents than they were about my siblings or me. For my parents, an interracial couple whose own parents refused to attend their wedding, *Hapa* was a term of empowerment, pride, creation—it embodied their (our) family. For my mother, it also symbolized a link to her memories of summers in Hawai’i. And while my brother and sister still identify as *Hapa*, and my family and friends identify me that way, I see that hunk of metal on my mother’s car not as my own, but as naming an identity I took on in the past, as *her* identity for me.

This story of the license plate summarizes some of the contradictions and tensions of the term *Hapa*. For many people, including my family members and me when I was younger, *Hapa* is, as Wei Ming Dariotis claims, “a word of power.” It gives individuals a term for a mixed race identity and access to a community of others who claim the same. But *Hapa* is also a term fraught with contradictions. It is a term that in some ways depends on and produces the very notions it hopes to subvert. It is this space of contradiction that I want to explore through this article. This examination of the term *Hapa* is crucial at this particular moment in Asian American Literature because there has been a recent rise in the number of conferences, panels, autobiographies, theoretical texts, and various other projects dealing with mixed heritage Asian Americans. May-lee Chai’s *Hapa Girl: A Memoir* (2007), Kip Fulbeck’s *Part Asian 100% Hapa* (2006), Theresa Williams-Leon and Cynthia L. Nakashima’s *The Sum of Our Parts* (2001), and Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr.’s Dissertation *Mexipino: A History of Multiethnic Identity and the Formations of the Mexican and Filipino Communities of San Diego, 1900-1965* (2007) are just a few examples of the literary / cultural productions concentrated on mixed heritage Asian Americans. There have been panels focused on mixed heritage Asian Americans at the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, Asian American Association, and American Studies Association over the past few years. And, in Spring 2012 the Transnational Mixed Asians in Between Spaces (TMABS) hosted a symposium at the University of California, Berkeley. These examples demonstrate the growing interest in the Asian American community

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with issues of mixed heritage. As this concern continues to manifest within our culture, especially within our literature, examinations of terms like *Hapa* that are used to identify mixed heritage Asian Americans becomes increasingly important.

Along with mixed heritage Asian Americans, since the late 1980s there has been a growing body of scholarship on the topic of “mixed race” and multiraciality more generally.¹ The early academic writings on multiraciality often stress that the racial paradigm within the U.S. consists of mutually exclusive monoracial categories, which limit and contain racial identities. These categories have been constructed through a variety of apparatuses—the national census, the Office of Management and Budget,² racial solidarity and civil rights struggles, ethnic studies departments at the university—and have structured the racial schema in the United States around five basic “racial” categories: *Asian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, White/Caucasian, Native American/Native Alaskan, and Hispanic* (if conceived of racially).³

¹ I used the terms “mixed race” and multiraciality throughout this paper interchangeably. In both cases, the rooting of the terms within “race” is not biologically based, as some anti-multiracial scholars might argue. Rather, the terms “mixed race” and “multiracial” are both reflective of the ways in which categories of “race” have become socially constructed through a process of conflation by combining/confusing definitions of ethnicity, culture, phenotype, and (sometimes) nationality. I also recognize that many people within the field of multiracial studies may have other terms that they prefer to use instead of “mixed race” and “multiracial.”

² During the census debates over racial categories in the early 1990s, two distinct options for self-identification emerged as alternatives to the established option of “check one box.” On the one hand, groups like PROJECT RACE argued for a stand-alone “multiracial” category. And, on the other hand, groups like AMEA argued for a “check all that apply” option. Since 2000, the census now allows individuals to “check all that apply” for racial tabulation. Although some scholars may argue that the stand-alone “multiracial” category allows for a greater range of self-identifications, other scholars such as Cynthia Franklin, Laura E. Lyons, and Jana Sequoya, argue that such an articulation, like hybridity, runs the grave risk of erasing vastly different material, historical, and epistemological differences that may exist within specific “racial mixtures.” Furthermore, the multitude of self-identifications that may be enabled by a stand-alone multiracial category on the census cause some scholars like Rainer Spencer in *Reproducing Race* to argue that self-identification, in fact, misses the purpose of the census to provide accountability for social justice based on one’s “perceived” race. In an opposing problematic, the “check all that apply” option seems to reify the already stabilized “monoracial” categories, as well as the existence of race as a biological fact (see Rainer Spencer’s *Reproducing Race*). See Maria P.P. Root’s *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996.

³ I realize that these categories, even as the “five major racial groups,” are highly contested. For example, in the past few decades, there have been numerous debates about the pan-ethnic conflation of these categories, as well as how axes

One of the major issues that arose early on within multiracial studies concerned the issue of classification based on the racial schema noted above, especially with regards to the individual multiracial citizen. Within the United States “classification has largely followed rules of hypodescent in a society that subscribes to monoraciality” (Root xviii). The legacy of hypodescent dates back to the laws enacted under slavery, which “relegated children of slave mothers to the status of slaves” (Root xviii).⁴ But, the rule of hypodescent has been carried forward in the service of racial justice. As Carlos A. Fernandez notes, after the various civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s “the need to classify people for civil rights purposes carried forward the traditional rule of hypodescent and applied it to other non-European groups deemed to be victims of racial prejudice” (23). In an opposing form of racialization, Native Americans have been historically racialized through an exclusive taxonomy in the project of settler colonialism.⁵ Through this exclusive taxonomy, Native Americans were/are required to meet a certain blood quantum in order to qualify as a recognized member of an indigenous tribe by the U.S government. In both cases, the processes of racialization (exclusive and inclusive) have had a lasting effect on the way in which we determine others and ourselves racially within the current racial schema of the United States—racial identity is assigned in the tradition of these taxonomies as monoracial.⁶ Within this schema, then, multiracial scholars have argued that the multiracial individual is marginalized, altogether elided, or recognized as only one of his/her constituent “parts.”

Even though the past two census forms have allowed for individuals to “check more than one box” in response to the question of “race,” the inclusive and exclusive taxonomies of racial identity still pervade the American consciousness. Some would argue that multiraciality remains constrained within the dominant monoracial system, even as individuals are permitted to “check more than one” box, because within popular consciousness mixed-race individuals are still pressured for explanations of their mixedness (to tell their

of class, gender, and sexuality may intersect with and trouble these categories. I make the claim here that these racial groups are considered the five major groups because early multiracial activism often made this claim, using the census and OMB Directive 15 as defining guidelines. See Maria P.P. Root’s “Introduction” in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. Ed. Maria P.P. Root. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996.

⁴ See G. Reginald Daniel “Black and White identity in the New Millennium: Unsevering the Ties That Bind” in *Multiracial Experience* or Patrick Wolfe “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.”

⁵ See Patrick Wolfe “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” Wolfe discusses the ways in which various groups in the U.S. have been racialized in different ways for a variety of purposes that, ultimately, abetted white power and domination. Also, see Deborah A. Ramirez “Multiracial Identity in a Color-Conscious World” in *The Multiracial Experience*.

⁶ Although I understand there not to be, nor to have ever been, any racially pure categories, “monoracial” is used here to refer to the way in which the “five major” racial categories have been determined through legal registers, for specific ideological and sociopolitical purposes, as mutually exclusive and wholly determinant.

“parts”), labeled based on physical appearance, or assumed to be monoracial. In response to the limits and containments of the dominant racial schema, over the past twenty years multiracial individuals have increasingly begun to speak out about the need and desire for self-identification. Early multiracial activists, such as Susan Graham and Carlos Fernandez demanded a multiracial-identifier and multiracial recognition for specific legal, educational, and medical purposes. While other multiracial theorists claimed the most productive potential of a multiracial identity was its power to disrupt and destabilize the concept of race from its biological associations.⁷ In either case, and as a result of this early activism, one of the conclusions reached, as Maria P.P. Root acknowledges, is that “[t]he typical vocabulary and dialect for race hardly accommodates the biracial person. There are few positive or neutral words to refer to racially mixed persons on a daily basis. However, many negatively laden words exist for such people” (xxiii). As a response, many multiracial individuals are participating in a creative linguistic process of (re)naming their mixed identities. And, in many cases, building mixed-race communities around these self-proclaimed terms.

In the past two decades, *Hapa* has been taken up as an identity by many “mixed race” Asian Americans. Most famously, the term is used by Kip Fulbeck in his work: *The Hapa Project*. Originally conceived of as a gallery show, *The Hapa Project* is now displayed online, in book form, and in museums around the country; and from his original project, Fulbeck now has a photographic project focused specifically on mixed race children. But many other, less famous, people, as well, are self-identifying as and claiming membership to an identity category known as *Hapa*. For instance, growing out of a proliferation in college-campus identity politics and a lack of acceptance within the traditional Japanese American community, *Hapa* emerged as a term for organizing student and community groups like the Hapa Issues Forum (HIF) in the Bay Area. Although HIF has since disbanded, today, there are still a number of Hapa groups on college campuses, Hapa websites, Hapa forums on Myspace, etc.

As a response to the invisibility of mixed race individuals within our traditional racial schema, *Hapa* has emerged as a means for visibility and community-building. As Adriane E. Gamble notes in “Hapas: Emerging Identity, Emerging Terms and Labels & the Social Construction of Race, “the hapa and mixed race groups have provided communities and reference groups for mixed race individuals,” “provided hapa and mixed race role models,” and “provided terms and labels for the hapa and mixed race identity” (7). Thus, in many ways, *Hapa* offers a positive and powerful identifier for multiracial individuals, who had previously been, or felt, “left out” of monoracial groups. Wei Ming Dariotis in “‘Hapa’: The Word of Power” likens the term *Hapa* to a “ring of power.” Although she acknowledges ambivalence towards the term in the essay she says, “my identity is something more than the sum of my parts. ‘Hapa’ gave me such an identity.” As both these authors claim, *Hapa* becomes a word of power because it offers an identity, a group in which to belong, and a community of others who are somehow the same.

⁷ See Maria P. P. Root’s “Introduction: The Multiracial Experience: Racial Border as a Significant Frontier in Race Relations” or Cynthia L. Nakashima’s “Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality” in *The Multiracial Experience*.

Since the term *Hapa* became a popular identifier for a particular multiracial group, it has been fraught with debate due to the cooptation of the term from the Native Hawaiian language. In “‘Hapa;’ The Word of Power,” Dariotis notes the linguistic shift of the definition: *Hapa* has transformed from its Native Hawaiian usage, whereby it referred to a person of Euro-American and Native Hawaiian mixture, to a slang term referring to anyone of partial Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry.⁸ Dariotis states, “many Native Hawaiian people object not only to the way the word has been changed in its grammatical usage, but also to how it is applied to anyone of mixed Asian and or Pacific Islander heritage, when it implies Native Hawaiian mixed heritage.” The etymological/definitional issues are not merely superficial. Dariotis posits this cooptation as “a question of power” in regards to the “right to use language.” She acknowledges the history of colonialism and its varied and numerous effects on Native Hawaiian sovereignty and Native Hawaiian language. Dariotis notes, Native Hawaiians “lost for many years the right to their own language through oppressive English-language education.” So, with this contextualization, and the continued reality of colonial affects on the Native Hawaiian people, “the appropriation of this one word has a significance deeper than many Asian Americans are willing to recognize” (Dariotis). The issues surrounding linguistic appropriation and colonialism are valid points against the usage of the term *Hapa* as an identifier, and I respect these issues; in fact, the Native Hawaiian objections are the most well-known and recognized objections concerning the term. But, I believe there are other issues at hand.

The term *Hapa*, as an identity, participates in a reproduction and continuation of the very notions multiracial scholars have sought to disrupt: the stabilization and containment of race and racial identity, the exclusion of certain individuals within the racial schema, and racial essentialism. Racial language is a discourse firmly tied to relations of power. Root claims that “some people suggest we need to make a radical change and eliminate the use of all racial language, I think the change can be accomplished by taking concepts people are familiar with and transforming them” (xxiv). In many ways, *Hapa* accomplishes Root’s stated goal—of using a preexisting word and transforming it (as stated above). But Foucault warns us in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* that even as discourse undermines and exposes power, it transmits and produces it (100). The major goals of Mixed Race Studies are, arguably, two-fold: on the one hand, the goal can be said to be to destabilize notions of race and racial identity and to deconstruct the racial schema and disrupt its hierarchy; and on the other hand, the goal can be said to highlight the continued salience of race, especially when one identifies as a member of multiple racial groups, which shape his/her lived experience. In either case, then multiracial individuals need to be more aware of not becoming complicit in that which we would have taken an ethical and politicized stand (Sequoya 302).

Even as *Hapa* is a term that has been transformed from its original Native Hawaiian definition—from referring to a person of Euro-American and Native Hawaiian ancestries to anyone who is of partial Asian or Pacific Island descent—

⁸ In his book *Part Asian 100% Hapa*, Kip Fulbeck defines: “ha•pa adj. 1. Slang. Of mixed racial heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific Islander ancestry.”

the word is still constrained and contingent upon a larger racial discourse. Judith Butler notes in *Undoing Gender* (2004) that, “On the one hand...are the words by which [an] individual gives himself to be understood. On the other hand, we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves” (69). Although Butler’s main concern is with gender and gender identities, multiraciality is similarly bound within a racial language “saturated with norms.” As I have briefly written elsewhere in “Picturing the Mix”:

To assert one’s multiracial self-identification is contingent upon a discourse of race that already exists—one that is already always linked to the hegemony of monoraces, and its reliance on what Alex Cho defines as “a particularly Western hegemonic view of race as scientific, distinct, and measurable” (10). For instance, terms such as *half-breed*, *hafu*, *mixed-blood*, even *Hapa*, are terms of self-description that are already, always limited by the dominant racial language where the “norms” of absolutes rule. (12) So, even as *Hapa* attempts to transform into a term that identifies a “whole” identity, “the language itself still restrains this self-assertion by remaining always already contingent upon ‘a discourse of fractions’”⁹ (12). When it comes down to it, *Hapa* as a “whole” identity still refers to someone who is of *partial* Asian or Pacific Island descent—it still signifies a division, only a part.

In remaining bound to the discourse of division, *Hapa* can never fully emerge as an independent term. Expanding upon the complexities of “the norm,” Butler goes on to argue that “any opposition to the norm is already contained within the norm, and is crucial to its own functioning” (51). Thus, if “monoraces” are said to be “the norm” against which multiraciality attempts to make its stand, *Hapa* as an oppositional form of the norm is actually always already contained within that norm and enables its continued dominance. *Hapa*’s dependence upon the language of the norm demonstrates this relationship. And, in this way, the “transformation” of the term *Hapa*, is hardly a transformation at all; it transmits the power of a hegemonic monoracial discourse even as it “seeks to speak” of itself as an opposition to that discourse.

Not only is the (self-) recognition of *Hapa*, as an identity, a means of reproducing the hegemony of monoraces through language; but it also works to reproduce racial hierarchy and stabilize and limit notions of racial identity. In her discussion on the legalization of gay marriage, Judith Butler makes an interesting point about recognition. She concludes that in the matter of recognition, there exists a sort of dilemma. On the one hand, to be outside the realm of recognition is to be disenfranchised in various ways. On the other hand, to become recognized can “lead to new and invidious forms of social hierarchy,” foreclosures, and support for the extension of state power (115). Although Butler is making her point about the foreclosure of the sexual field, the definition of the family and kinship, etc., her notion of the dilemma of recognition holds lessons for multiracial activists, scholars, and other individuals in a similar pursuit. In many ways, *Hapa* offers recognition (perhaps not state sanctioned) that works

⁹ “Discourse of fractions” is taken from Alexander Cho’s conference paper, “Anyone else like me???” presented at Mongrel America: Graduate Student Conference at the University of Texas, Austin (2009).

against a sense of disenfranchisement as a marginal racial identity in a society where racial identity has come to be one of the major ways in which we are identified and participate in public life. But some scholars, like Rainier Spencer in *Reproducing Race*, argue that some multiracial individuals, like *Hapas*, in their move for (self-) recognition are moving towards a position of “honorary whiteness” (108), leading to a “new form” of social hierarchy. In this argument (a version of hybrid vigor), the identification as *Hapa* works to separate the multiracial individual from his/her constituent “parts” and elevate him/her to a place above the lower-caste monoracial group. Although Spencer’s term, “honorary whiteness” suggests the presumption that *Hapa* refers to individuals of a white-Asian racial mixture who “elevate” above the monoracial category of Asian, his argument can be extended to non-white/Asian mixes as well. Spencer suggests that taking on a multiracial identity in some ways allows an individual to separate/elevate himself/herself from the racial group that he/she considers of lower privilege—whether that is Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American—as he/she moves *toward* whiteness, which remains positioned at the top. In this way, the term “honorary whiteness” in relation to *Hapas* can encompass other variations of mixedness beyond the Asian/white dialectic. And, although Spencer argues that the racial hierarchy is firmly rooted with African Americans on the bottom, I would add that the hierarchy might actually shift in specific contexts for particular individuals. In any case, whether or not “racial” elevation is the intention of the *Hapa*-identifying-individual, it is a concern that should be recognized and understood so that the multiracial individual can avoid becoming complicit in a racial hierarchy that continues to privilege whiteness.

Furthermore, the (self-) recognition of *Hapa* identity limits the very multiplicity it seeks to convey, foreclosing the field of possible identities and limiting those identities that might be included within such a signifier. As I have argued in “Picturing the Mix,” this might be called “*the paradox of identity formation*”¹⁰—the desire to belong to, or create, an alternative community as a response to perceived oppression simultaneously faces the unintentional, unforeseen existential reality that any formation includes some and excludes others” (9). To better understand the paradox, we first need to understand the impulse behind identity formation. Omi and Winant point out in *Racial Formation in the United States*, that all “racially based movements have as their fundamental task the creation of new identities, new racial meanings, and a new collective subjectivity” (91). Like other racial identities, *Hapa* can be understood as a racial project where a new identity is created through an “oppositional movement” (91). Expanding on Omi and Winant’s understanding of oppositional identities, Judith Butler’s articulation of “the norm” helps us to understand exactly how *Hapa* is used as an oppositional force. *Hapa*, as a word of power, becomes a signifier that expresses the multiplicitous “races” of a particular individual. In this sense, *Hapa* becomes the opposition to the “the norm” of a monoracial identity/community that denies an elaboration of racial multiplicity.

The second part of the paradox comes from another elaboration of “the norm” made by Butler. She states, “norms are precisely what binds individuals together” and gives “the basis for the possibility of community” (220). Building

¹⁰ The notion of the *paradox of identity formation* is credited to Kent Ono who suggested this to me in a personal communication.

off the oppositional perspective articulated above, this version of the norm is not the “the regulatory or normalizing function of power” contained within monoracial discourse. But, if we are to understand the norm as a requisite for community building, we must also question what effect “the norm” will have internally on that oppositional community. As Benedict Anderson notes in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* any imagined community, no matter its size, must contain a finite boundary outside which lays other nations/communities (7). *Hapa*, as an identity and community, acts in a similar manner to Anderson’s imagined communities. While some individuals are included within the community or category of *Hapa*, by consequence there must remain “others” outside the boundary of that particular communal group. This is precisely the point at which “the norm” must begin to act with a delimiting function in order to define the oppositional category/identity itself. Within the community/identity of *Hapa*, a new “norm” is implemented that is precisely tied to its linguistic limitations; “the norm” of the *Hapa* is its definition as part Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry. This norm, instituted in opposition to the norm of monoraciality, participates in its own delimiting function. Thereby, if you are *not* of partial Asian/Pacific Islander ancestry than you cannot claim to be *Hapa*. Articulating *the paradox of identity formation* then, *Hapa* functions through its own process of normalization and reproduces the very limitations of identity it sought to subvert in the first place.

Finally, *Hapa* can work to uphold notions of race and racial essentialism. Multiracial scholars, as well as other race theorists, have long argued about the social construction of race and racial identity. In many Mixed Race Studies contexts, multiracial individuals are said to depict the instability of race and racial categories because of their inability, or determination not, to fit into the monoracial categories. By creating *Hapaness* as an oppositional category/identity, demanding to be recognized as such, or claiming membership to such a group, *Hapas* are in some ways (re)stabilizing racial identity in an alternate form. Spencer argues against “the [multiracial] movement’s loud proclamations inveighing against biological race while simultaneously and quite explicitly advocating for federal recognition of a new biological racial identity” (102). He goes on to argue that the construction of a multiracial community/identity “creates new racial subjects while conforming to the preexisting U.S. racial order” (239). While not all *Hapa*, or other multiracial, groups are advocating for state recognition, Spencer makes an interesting point about the reliance on a biological definition of race and the dependence upon the current racial schema. Even as we consciously recognize race as a socio-historic construction, the definition of *Hapa* as someone of part Asian descent implies its reliance upon a certain form of biological race, or ethnicity, and its adherence to the current racial order (in this case its dependence on the racial category of Asian/Pacific Islander).

Along with its dependence upon the current racial order and a form of biological race, *Hapa* also suggests a sense of essentialism. In her arguments against the sex/gender distinctions of French Feminism in *Gender Trouble*, Butler questions feminist theory’s assumption of an existing identity—“woman/women” that “constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (2). Butler’s question hinges upon a form of essentialism that sees the subject as preexisting discourse—as stable, and unchanging. Her questions

hold important value for thinking about Hapaness because in some ways *Hapa* intimates its dependence on a preexisting (essentialized) identity that is mobilized as “the subject” for whom representation, or recognition, is sought and/or as an identity to which one belongs by fact of being of Asian descent. And even as *Hapa* is mobilized against essentialism in the form of monoraciality, a certain stabilization of mixedness, and therefore reinscription of essentialism, occurs as *Hapa* becomes a recognizable, determinate, and delimiting identity category.

Like the license plate of my childhood, *Hapa* is a banged up but lasting term full of tensions, contradictions, and power. It is something constructed, something imprinted, something made and unmade, taken and taken off. It is something that holds various meanings for all those who use it. And, so this paper serves not as a plea against its usage; but, rather, it serves as an excursus into the multiple trappings that such an identity holds. I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which such an identity category, created and implemented as an oppositional tactic, can become complicit in that which it would have taken its politicized and ethical stand. The relationship between identity, discourse, and power is one that will inevitably be fraught with confusion and tension; but we should strive to remain attentive to the ways in which our own desires can reproduce the very power we seek to disrupt. In the end, the fate of identity, of *Hapa*, is a paradox—it is at once something individuals desire and want recognition for, and at the same time it limits and constrains those very individuals. Perhaps, one answer to the problem is to continue a pursuit of questioning this word of power. And, perhaps, another answer is for mixed race individuals to move away from traditional understandings of multi- and mono-racial identity by seeking out an alternative form of recognition. Rather than concentrating on terminology, maybe we should focus more on the affective relationships and experiences that actually create our self- understandings and our identities. My mother’s license plate, R3HAPAS, was indeed her way of naming, recognizing, and understanding what her mixed race children would be; but this understanding was based on assumptions about race that are genealogical, biological, and essential. In contrast, my understanding of my self and my identity is shaped by my experiences growing up in Los Angeles, attending private school, moving East for my undergrad, moving to Hawaii for graduate school, going to temple, dancing at Japanese Obon festivals, making koogle, getting presents at Christmas, lighting candles at Hanukkah, loving my mother and my father, learning about my maternal and paternal grandparents and their histories and experiences and loving them. These cumulative experiences and feelings make me who I am. The identity of *Hapa*, just like the identities of Caucasian or Asian, barely scratches the surface of all these feelings, memories, and moments that comprise my life and my understanding of myself.

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