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Abstract:

Manga and anime attract many Japanese and non-Japanese fans. This attraction is not only the result of its “eastern mystical sense of harmony with nature” but also the outcome of what Jean Marie Bouissou has called anime’s “...aesthetic of excess, conflict, imbalance, and overt sensuality”. Anime is especially appealing because it has the power of expression of people’s hopes and fears and it can be considered as “medias capes of dreams capes” that must be explored (MacWilliams 5). The best demonstration of this attraction to the world of anime, manga and Japanese culture is the anime fandom or what is known as the Otaku community. The Otaku community constructs one of the pillars that supports and furthers of the success of anime and the cultural influence of the Japanese culture across the globe. The existence of the Otaku community in Algeria is yet another acknowledgment of the success of anime and its ability to cross the borders of Japan to become a globalized product that is internationally appreciated. This paper aims to investigate the existence of the Otaku community in Algeria and to explore how active it is through conducting an online survey that is created through an online survey website called *Smart Survey*. The questions were directed to the Algerian population with two major aims. The first is to investigate whether the Otaku community is present within the Algerian population. The second aim is to examine its involvement in fandom related activities.

Keywords: Otaku community, Algeria, Anime, Japan, Manga, Japanese culture

What is an “otaku”?

The word Otaku is a “...polite, almost stiffly formal way of saying ‘you’ in Japanese. Combining the honorific prefix *o-* with *taku*, meaning ‘house,’ it literally translates as ‘your house’. It carries “...connotations of impersonality and detachment”. Its equivalent in English could possibly be referring to someone as “sir,” “ma’am,” or “thee”. This word had been associated in postwar Japan with the polite language used by housewives to refer to their neighbors and acquaintances. In Japan, This word now is used to refer to “obsessive, introverted young fans of popular culture”. Today, the word is being used regularly by groups of manga, anime, and science fiction fans at least since the 1970’s (Education about Asia 14).

According to Murakami, the term had been firstly used by the staff and the founders of Studio Nue who used it in a parodic manner as a “refined sense of elitism”. The word, then, was adapted by anime and manga fans especially after being used by characters in the popular 1982 animated series *Chōjikūyōsai Macross* (*Super Dimension Fortress Macross*) -the characters used otaku over more casual forms of “you”-. Others argued that the first use of the word “otaku” was among socially estranged pop culture fans who preferred the term as a form of an informal language to address their fellow anime fans (Education about Asia).

1. The significance of the word “otaku” in Japan:

In 1989, the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, a serial killer known as the “otaku murderer”, had changed the meaning of the word drastically in the Japanese society and gained a negative meaning. Miyazaki was charged for molesting, murdering, and mutilating four young girls in the suburbs of Tokyo. The police assumed that his actions were due to his addiction to pornographic and pedophilic anime. After his arrest, the Japanese media associated the term with “vilified obsessive, introverted fans” who are “dangerous, psychologically disturbed perverts”. This “belief” was confirmed when the leader of a terrorist group called *Aum Shinrikyō* and few members had interests in science fiction and a particular attraction to apocalyptic manga and anime. Thus, the Otaku culture in Japan became associated intensely with “antisocial habits and fantasies both sexually perverted and violent” (Education about Asia 14)

In Japan, The *otakus* are “the notoriously obsessive fans of *manga*, *anime*, video games, and other forms of Japanese popular culture”. Generally referred to as “nerds” or “geeks”. Otakus are visualized in Japan as “socially maladjusted young men, physically unattractive (usually gawky or overweight), dressed unstylishly (often sporting backpacks and anoraks), and unnaturally fixated on some narrow corner of mass culture”. Otaku are, according to one commentator, “socially inept loners . . . fanatically knowledgeable in one abstruse field, be it Godzilla movies or the history of sumo wrestling”. They are “chronically shy,” “sickly pale,” and “socially inept, but often brilliant technological shut ins”. An otaku, the journalist Tsuzuki Kyoichi concluded, is “someone who doesn’t look good, who has no girlfriend, who is collecting silly things, and . . . who is into something useless.” The rise of an otaku identity in Japan has inspired books, films, and art movements that both celebrate and demonize these Otakus (Tsutsui 18)

In March 2008, the Otaku word had been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* meaning “Originally in Japan: a person extremely knowledgeable about the minute details of a particular hobby (esp. a solitary or minority hobby); . . . one who is skilled in the use of computer technology and is considered by some to be poor at interacting with others” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). Around the world, anime and manga fans and admirers of the Japanese pop culture proudly embrace the label otaku and emulate the practices of Japan’s intense fanatics (Tsutsui 14). Over the past twenty-five years, there was a rapid spread of Japanese popular culture—manga and anime, video games, character goods like *Hello Kitty*—in markets worldwide. The Otaku culture was the most globally embraced Japanese pop phenomena.

2. The significance of the word “otaku” outside Japan:

In the 1990s, American anime fans began referring to themselves with pride as “Otaku”. The term does not hold a negative meaning outside of Japan. It is used to refer to those anime, manga and Japanese culture fans who share their love for Japan and its culture and meet and gather in anime conventions. Such conventions include the *Otakon* or what is known as “the convention of the otaku generation” (Tsutsui 17). In the United States, there is a special interest in the Otaku culture and many works were written about anime such as Susan Napier’s *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, Gilles Poitras’ *The Anime Companion: What’s Japanese about Japanese Animation*, and, most recently, Frederik Schodt’s *Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka*. Many Anthologies were also written in English about anime and manga and the Otaku culture such as John Whittier Treat’s *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, Timothy Craig’s *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, John Lent’s *Illustrating Asia*, Timothy Craig and Richard King’s *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia* and Steven Brown’s *Cinema Anime*. American interest in the Otaku culture and the acknowledgment of its existence appears through *Otaku USA*, a glossy magazine for followers of many aspects of contemporary Japanese pop culture, and *Otaku Unite!*, the documentary that celebrates the American Otaku community (Tsutsui 17).

Otaku communities have spread in other parts of the world including Great Britain, Russia, South Africa, and South Korea and its members share many common characteristics with their Japanese counterparts—an obsession with the fantasy worlds of anime and manga, a reputation as nerds and outsiders—. The only difference their subcultures have evolved differently. American Otaku, for example, are more interested in Cosplay (or Costume play)

and see it as central to their Otaku identity. The Japanese Otaku see it as merely another activity for the Otaku to do. Another notable difference between the American fandom and the Japanese one is the prevalence of female enthusiasts of manga, anime, and video games. Through the 1990s, it was men who seemed to outnumber women among American Otakus, but fan conventions nowadays suggest the opposite. In Japan, the general perception of Otaku is of young men, it is said that women have dominated the early years of Comiket and they sustain, both as creators and consumers especially when it comes to the popular genre of *yaoi* (manga depicting male homosexual relationships). In a global context, the Otaku culture is fluid and its parameters and characteristics are growing increasingly broad and varied (Tsutsui 17).

3. The Otaku culture in Algeria:

In Algeria, the Otaku community constructs a non-acknowledged portion of the Algerian population. Their existence is questioned and there are no relevant studies that deal with this matter. This is why an online survey had been distributed in Algerian Facebook groups and Chats to get as many Algerian participants as possible to answer the questions of the survey. The questions were directed to the Algerian population. The survey was created through an online survey website called *Smart Survey*. This website allows the researcher to choose a theme for the survey website page, insert different questions and choose different answering methods for each question. What is good about this website is that it makes sure that no participant can answer the survey more than once. It also allows the survey creator to see the progress of the survey and get a summary and an analysis of all answers of the participants. The sample was a group of 60 participants who live in different parts of Algeria. Since this survey is aiming to investigate only the existence and the participation of the

Algerian Otaku community in fandom-related activities, there were no questions about the gender and the age of the participants¹.

The first two questions² confirm that all participants are Algerian participants from different parts of the country to ensure authenticity and representation of the population. Question three³, four⁴ and five⁵ aim to investigate whether Algerians had ever been exposed to anime and to what extent they were exposed. These questions revealed that Algerians, in fact, had been exposed to anime with 96.67% of participants who had watched anime at least once in their life, 78.33% still watching it among which 79.63% who prefer to watch anime online⁶. Question seven⁷ aims to investigate whether Algerians are truly influenced by the anime culture through asking about their favorite anime. The answers were varied with most participants answering with more than 3 favorite anime and some mentioning some recent and ongoing anime that are still aired in Japan such as *One piece*, *Fairytail*, *One Punch Man* and *Detective Conan*.

70% of the participants who answered Question eight⁸ are familiar with the Otaku community and acknowledge its existence in Algeria. 60% of participants admitted that they belong to the Otaku Community in Algeria⁹ and 60% of the participants had admitted engaging in some of the Otaku activities or at least have witnessed some of these activities where they live¹⁰. These activities include Cosplay (costume play), making a Doujishin (self-made manga), attending an anime convention, reading manga, watching, downloading or buying anime, buying anime related items, and being in an online Otaku community. Other participants added that they have engaged in more activities such as Fanart (drawing anime) and pretending to be an anime character¹¹.

Question twelve¹² is aiming to investigate the common tendency of the Algerians when it comes to Cosplay. According to the response, It appears that what matters to the

Algerian Otaku, when it comes to Cosplay, is whether the costume matches the character being cosplayed or not. This is unlike the American Otaku who would be more impressed if the costume is self-made. It is also unlike the Japanese Otaku who think that the most important thing in Cosplay is the ability to mimic the character being cosplayed (Galbraith).

70% of the participants were never in a *manga café* or an anime shop¹³ and this might be due to the serious lack of manga café and anime shops in Algeria. Most of the well-known manga café and anime shops are found only in Algiers where most of conventions (such as FIBDA: Festival International De Band Dessiné) are held. It seems that a 65% of the participants are unaware of the existence of Algerians Mangaka¹⁴ (manga artists. This might be due to the lack of media attention concerning this matter.

The last question¹⁵ in the survey attempts to reveal common beliefs held by Algerians about the possible source of ideas of anime. The answers range from reality, history and imagination to legends, mythology, and fairytales.

Conclusion:

Anime is an interesting product that could gain a lot of value, importance and popularity. It could attract many fans across the globe. It established Japan as a cultural and economic force that has a major impact and contribution in the global community. Anime has a cultural and an economic significance and value inside and outside Japan and it was not given the attention it deserves in Algeria. The survey confirms the existence and the participation of the Otaku community in Algeria. This is why this community must be given attention by the authorities and the Algerian society. The Otaku community in Algeria should be seen with a critical eye and probably be investigated even further from a different perspective

Endnotes:

¹ gender and age are irrelevant criteria in this research

² Question 1 “which country do you live in?”

Question 2: “where do you live exactly?”

³ Question 3: “Have you ever watched Anime (Japanese animation)?”

⁴ Question 4: “Do you still watch anime?”

⁵ Question 5: “if no, at what age did you stop watching anime?”

⁶ Question 6: “if yes, how do you watch anime?”

⁷ Question 7: “What are your favorite anime?”

⁸ Question 8: “Are you familiar with the Otaku/anime fandom Community? (Are you aware of the existence of anime fans in the area you live in?)”

⁹ Question 9: “do you belong to the Otaku community? (do you consider yourself an anime fan)”

¹⁰ Question 10: “have you ever engaged in/witnessed some anime fandom activities?”

¹¹ Question 11: “If yes, which activities have you witnessed/engaged in?”

¹² Question 12: “If you chose cosplay, which one of these if the most important to you when it comes to cosplaying?”

¹³ Question 13: “Have you ever been into a manga café or an anime shop?”

¹⁴ Question 14: “Do you know of the Algerian manga/mangaka (manga artists)?”

¹⁵ Question 15: “Where do you think the ideas of anime/manga come from? (If possible, justify your answer)”

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