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Documentary shows hardships of mixed-race individuals in Japan

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By TAKUJI HOSOMI/ Staff Writer

Megumi Nishikura said she had always lived as a “Japanese girl,” so she became despondent when strangers questioned her identity.

“You don’t look like a ‘Megumi,’” she recalled others saying after she introduced herself.

Her search for her identity has culminated in a documentary that focuses on the struggles of mixed-race individuals in Japan.

“Hafu,” directed and produced by Nishikura, 33, and Lara Perez Takagi, born to a Spanish father and Japanese mother in Tokyo in 1982, is now showing at the Uplink theater in Tokyo’s Shibuya Ward.

“Hafu” means “half Japanese.”

“While ‘hafu’ is a familiar word in Japan, they are still a minority in the Japanese society,” said Nishikura, whose father is Japanese and mother is Irish-American. “I want viewers to feel the diverse aspects of ‘hafus’ in the film and deepen their understanding of them.”

The film shows the daily lives, joys and inner conflicts of four “half-Japanese” individuals and a family of mixed background in Japan.

In one scene, a 9-year-old boy born to a Mexican mother and Japanese father explains how he is taunted at school. He is called “Eigo-jin” (English-speaking person) because of his appearance, and that experience has made him stutter when he speaks Japanese.

A woman named Fusae says in the documentary that she was very confused after learning that her father was an ethnic Korean who acquired Japanese citizenship. She had long assumed he was Japanese.

Nishikura has lived in Japan and other countries since childhood due to her father’s job.

She said she became interested in her roots in 2006, when she returned to Japan to study at graduate school.

After using social networking services such as Facebook to find people who could appear in the film, Nishikura and Takagi began production in February 2010. It took more than a year to complete the documentary.

According to a 2012 population survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, one in 50 newborns in Japan come from international marriages involving a Japanese.

“Hafu” runs through Oct. 25.

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