Sexual Abuse and Affect:
The role of Popular Culture in Japan

Robert Ó'MÓCHAIN ※

Abstract

This paper focuses on the issue of contemporary art forms, affective content and sexual harassment as a human rights issue of complex dimensionality. An examination of products of popular culture in Japanese society helps to answer the question: "What is the role of affect, particularly of empathy, in the phenomenon of unwanted sexual attention?" More particularly, "How does engagement with popular art forms either exacerbate or mitigate relevant problems?" On the level of the psyche, women in Japan are often constructed as subjects of "contradictive femininity." A negative social effect of this construct is the pressure to refrain from reporting sexual violence. In contrast to the negative role of news and mass-media representations, analysis shows that the role of storytelling in popular culture often plays a positive role in raising awareness, eliciting empathy, and in increasing the likelihood of favorable responses to the needs of victims of sexual abuse. The negative influence of ideological extremism can be transformed through empathetic engagement with works of artistic expression that enhance the dignity of women as human beings.

Keywords: Sexual abuse; Japan; human rights; empathy

※   Professor, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University

Introduction

A cultural lens allows us to understand the influence of consumption of popular culture products and the meanings that are associated with unwanted sexual attention. Products such as manga, anime, novels, television series, and other media can play a role in either promoting empathy for the victims of abuse or of perpetuating a gender order in which cultures of impunity can flourish. After considering Japanese popular culture and the construction of "contradictive femininity," I expand on an earlier text (O'Mochain, 2016) to make a summary of characteristics of Japan's "hard faction" style of masculinity as a set of identity markers which still animate many acts of political intimidation and acts of harassment that are carried out in schools and workplaces throughout Japan: Based on the works of Reichert (2006), Roden (1980), and Angles (2011), the following elements of unhelpful styles of masculinity are identified: (a) a disparagement of womanhood and femininity which stigmatizes sexually promiscuous women, "unproductive, " "childless" women, and "weak" men as lesser beings in the human hierarchy; (b) strong bonding rituals and career networks for men (c) rough physical treatment and psychological abuse of junior males by senior males, (d) belief in "robust" foreign policy as a means of exalting the state and the Emperor as the embodiment of a patriarchal gender order (e) unwillingness to acknowledge historical evidence of human rights abuses by Imperial Japan. These traits have a certain relevance in considerations of political life, gender relations, and attitudes towards sexual harassment in contemporary Japan.

Objectives

This paper aims at demonstrating the role of empathy in helping to transform social conditions in favor of the victims of sexual abuse. Many artifacts from Japan and outside of Japan provide encouraging signs of deepened understanding and readiness for change. While the notion of universal "human rights" might be seen as alien to Japanese cultural tradition which can be characterized as "communitarian," the notion of the adult human is a central concept in Japan's understanding of culture and social life itself (cf. Kamachi, 1999). While the strength of the concept of the adult human as builder of civilization brought many benefits, the status and value of the child who must be disciplined to become a working member of society suffered a lack of recognition. In Japanese history, militarism has played a lamentable role in shaping social roles and gender expectations according to hostile ends.

This paper shows how toxic styles of masculinity are reflected in works of popular culture and how they provokes reactions from artists abroad. Ultimately, engagement with these issues may prompt social actors to re-consider the style of masculinity they embody, to respect women as fully human, and to engender more peaceful societies where human rights are fully respected.

"Contradictive femininity"

In a study of the effects of sexual harassment by strangers on over 360 young college women in the United States, Carretta and Syzmanski (2020, p. 525) formed a profile of the target of sexual harassment who was more likely to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Typically, the victim who had been most severely damaged by stranger harassment was a young woman who apportioned blame to herself for the incident and who felt deep shame because of it. She did not identify as feminist and had internalized many traditional gender norms of femininity (being "sweet and nice" and sexually faithful). In her analysis of media reporting on British royals Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle, Lewis (2020) argues that the "architecture of misogyny" permeates contemporary cultures in which women are offered a false choice: either they can be warm, motherly women or cold, careerist women. In a Japanese context, the factors outlined in the Carretta and Syzmanski study, and the dichotomy that was noted in the Lewis study may be even more strongly accentuated. In a study that compared the beliefs and practices of young women in Japan with counterparts in Poland, Bak Sosnowska, Palicka, and Warchał (2016) found that both groups expressed strong desire to improve their bodies and body image according to the idealized representations of "successful" women in advertising images, lifestyle magazines, and other products of popular culture. Morris-Suzuki (1998) identified key features of a dominant narrative of gender in Japan that held sway for generations: men belong in the public, workplace sphere to strengthen Japan as an economic and political force in the world; women belong in the domestic sphere to provide harmony in society. Individuals who challenge this "master narrative" of gender are likely to experience social condemnation. Henshall (1999, p. 2) noted that a large number of "latter day samurai" stigmatize young Japanese men as "a generation of weak and selfish wimps." If young men are not strong enough, young women are prone to criticism for not being virginal enough. In schools, moral education is often characterized by "moral panics" about young women having sex, despite a surveilling education regime that emphasizes "chastity" "purity" and "abstinence" (cf. Thompson,

2002). Castro-Vázquez (2007, p. 26) notes that, "The role of women as mothers and lovers has been fundamental in the development of chastity/sex education." Upon leaving public education, many young women in Japan will have received an emphatic message: your sexual desire is dangerous; you must control it or risk gaining a bad reputation or failing as a woman. Other authors have unwrapped some of the implications for women who receive such messages while living in a hyper-consumerist, late Capitalist society that contradicts the messages received through school cultures. This competing message asserts that success as a woman means always being sexy. Un-sexy bodies, even though these are usually a person's natural body shape, are regularly shamed in social media and elsewhere.

Hansen (2016, p. 3) sees an unhelpful, binary logic at work in a diverse range of institutional contexts and cultural products in Japan. A proliferation of images and narratives promote a "contradictive femininity" where women are to be, at one and the same time career oriented and homemaking oriented, outgoing but submissive, mature but child-like, serious-minded but cute, sexually enticing yet virginal/maternal. Based on her interviews of dieting women, Asano (1996, p. 13) summed up this inner tension in the dual aspiration: "I want to stay like a cute little girl" and "I am going to become a leader." A study of representations of Japanese femininities in mass media products, (Steger, Koch, & Tso, 2020) detailed the contemporary idealizations of Japanese mothers who "have it all." After leaving a career to have children, they acquire new skills and take up a new career. In reality, the economy channels married women who return to workplaces into low-paying jobs without work benefits and the possibilities for starting new careers at an older age are limited. Unrealistic expectations of transformations into a sophisticated, slim mother who deftly juggles a successful career and domestic chores are intimidating. They lessen the chances that women will choose marriage and the new motherhood identity that is manufactured for them in pregnancy and young mother magazines. The psychological pressure involved often leads women to over-perform the performance that is expected of them in society. Hansen makes this distinction between performance and over-performance to account for high rates of self-directed violence among women in Japan. There is significant social pressure to endure pain (the hunger of dieting, feet in high heels, removal of body hair, surgery on breasts and other body parts). Yamane Kazuma (2003, p. 61) argues that Japanese society is dominated by the principles of "industriousness" and "self-denial." Girls and women are quickly condemned if they are seen as self-centered or "unproductive."

The social pressure always to remain aesthetically pleasing reinforces a typical trait of patriarchy as identified by Strauss (2012, p. 125): "Females are valued and

rewarded for beauty and as sex objects." Since the 1960's, popular culture in Japan has equated thinness with physical beauty and moral virtue (cf. Ogino, 2002) and this can have harmful effects on women's body image. In addition to psychological harm, Wolf (1991, p. 215) points out the political implications of women feeling permanently half-starved: "A culture fixated on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience. Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one." On the level of the psyche, over-performance of gender norms through eating disorders and self-cutting affords a release from this pressure, a temporary victory in a battle that can never end without effective intervention of some sort. Hansen's (p. 133) analysis may help to explain why a large percentage of Japanese women fail to report or even to tell anyone about the sexual harassment they have endured. The silence itself could be an "over-performance" bringing to an extreme the social imperative to endure pain for the sake of achieving gender ideals. "As both victimizer and victim, as violator and violated [women are] embracing and simultaneously rejecting normative acts by over-performing them ..."

Hansen's analysis of the Anno Moyoco (2004-2007) manga series, also suggests that forces of gender normativity lead to a pronounced inner-tension between a masculine, professional self in the workplace and a feminine, maternal self in the domestic sphere. The male-female dichotomy experienced by the manga protagonist Hiroko is evident when she transforms into the workplace professional by exclaiming: "Work mode on! Turning on the male switch!" or simply, "Male switch on!" Hansen (p. 92) notes that, "In Japan, the idea that the male hormone count increases in women who work professionally is heard frequently." This "hormone imbalance" will be said to account for a range of un-feminine traits. As far back as the 1920s, feminists like Joan Riviére (1929) wrote on the sense of guilt induced in women who have successful careers, and their need to perform exaggerated femininity outside of the workplace by way of compensation. As well as the element of masquerade and the psychological toll of "contradictive femininity" it should also be noted that the less women conform to norms of femininity and the more professionally they perform, the more likely they are to receive gender harassment and to hear epithets like "bossy bitch." This trans-nationally ubiquitous tendency is worsened in Japan, perhaps, by the readiness to believe that women's professional participation in work environments previously dominated by men is in some way "unnatural." Such a belief will only serve to embolden sexual harassers, and to make female targets less confident about their right to speak out.

While Živković (2000) rightly argues that the notion of a "true self" and of

psychological health based on identification with this true self is problematic and that the play of multiple identities can induce a pleasing and fluid sense of self, the fact remains that dominant cultural tropes and storylines demand that Japanese women make a choice between only two possible selves. Figures like Bandō Mariko (2008) a prominent career bureaucrat and university president, may claim that it is possible to "have it all" and happily incarnate dual identities, but, as Hansen shows (pp. 88-90), such harmonization may not be possible in the real world, especially for low-income working women. Dominant discourses demand that female Japanese bodies must be at the service of the state as "baby machines" but must also be slim, petite, and pleasing to the male eye. The term "baby machines" [*umi kikai*] which drew criticism when used by Minister of Health Yanagisawa Hakuo in 2007, is still in use by those who want to induce guilt among women who have chosen not to have children. The demands of normative femininity often lead to self-harm and eating disorders among many women, especially young women. Women's private struggles with their bodies are, however, seen as part of public discourse, fodder for lifestyle products and entertainment shows. This feeds into a culture of eroticized violence, as, for example, in the case of sex industry businesses which simulate train and office environments where men can pay to grope and sexually harass women (Sinclair, 2006, pp. 137-141). Cultural influences can induce psychological pressures that allow sexual harassment to be passively accepted as another form of self-harm, something that has to be endured in a "man's world." In a social world in which women are expected to meet an impossible standard, the danger of toxic silence becomes apparent. When perpetrators habitually sexual harass women in schools and workplaces, these women often pay the price in symptoms such as depression, sleeplessness, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. They may even tell themselves they, somehow, deserve this pain. The internalized violence which girls and women inflict on their own bodies is extended, mirrored, and perpetuated by violence from outside. In sum, Hansen delineates a dystopian view of gender relations in contemporary Japan. Women are led to a lived experience of the body as other, as something not belonging to self but to (patriarchal) society, while the true self remains internal and pure but detached. Consequent psychological complexes of self-harm and depression are compounded by the experience of sexual harassment. Many women feel a pressure to passively accept the pain that is being inflicted upon them in the world of reality and to idealize a "true self" in a world of fantasy. The fantasy of absolute control over restricted female sexuality is the obscene complement to the fantasy of the degraded and hyper-sexualized female of pornographic imagery and of commodified, coercive sex.

The role of news media

High levels of sexual harassment exist in various sectors of Japanese society. Unfortunately, an obsession with the implications of an aging society and residual patriarchal beliefs work to silence targets of sexual harassment who know they may well be blamed for what they have experienced. Attitudes are unsupportive, also, because they tend to see sexual harassment from the point of view of the accused. A news report and headline from 2016 is symptomatic of an unhelpful perspective (Men who lost/ *Sekuhara de subete*, 2016). The article details five different cases of sexual harassment in which male perpetrators were held accountable for their actions. The headline of the article is: "Men who lost everything due to sexual harassment ... Astonishing "sexual harassment case book." The headline chosen by the (unnamed) authors adopts the perspective of the perpetrators who have "lost everything." A feminist perspective, in contrast, argues that this issue should be seen from the point of view of women who often lose their psychological well-being due to sexual harassment. In addition, the phrasing of the headline is ambiguous. Without reading further, one might surmise that false allegations led to the loss of everything for these men. In fact, all of the cases involved the proven victimization of women. The case book of "*sekuhara*" is "astonishing." The topic is being highlighted for its extraordinary or sensational dimensions. In reality, sexual harassment, at least of the gender discrimination variety, is very ordinary in the sense that it is going on continuously in myriad locations of everyday life, often without being challenged. If media reporters and commentators lack an understanding of the basic facts about sexual harassment, the environment will feel hostile for more women.

The key role of legal decisions and the manner in which they are reported by journalists in perpetuating hostile environments is illustrated by a legal case outside of Japan. In March 2020, a political leader in Scotland, Alex Salmond, was cleared of 13 charges of sexually assaulting a number of women. These women were subject to harsh criticism online in the wake of the "not guilty" verdicts. These criticisms prompted a response from Sandy Brindley, the Chief Executive of the non-profit organization 'Rape Crisis Scotland' and her words are particularly applicable in the Japanese context.

"The significance of this trial goes far beyond Salmond and the women in this case… How we respond sends a signal to anyone who might one day try to report a sexual offence. In seeking vengeance against those women, those commenting on this case should reflect on the message that they are sending to all those who have

experienced sexual crimes, and those who one day will. From the volume and nature of recent calls to our helpline, we know that *when there are public conversations, sexual assault survivors are listening*." (emphasis added).

Sandy Brindley (quoted in Riordan, 2020)

Brindley's words on the dynamics of enforced silence on victims of sexual assault indicate that the problems that are experienced in Scotland are probably replicated, in location-modified ways, around the world. In the Salmond case, and in similar cases, the evidence did not exist to prove that rape had taken place. Unfortunately, in Japan, even when the evidence exists to condemn a perpetrator of sexual assault, he may be set free or given a light sentence because the victim "did not sufficiently resist." Here, public conversations about sexual assault have been particularly one-sided. When the originators of one side of the argument can instill fear in their interlocutors, monologue replaces dialog. The chilling effect of judgements in rape trials in early 2019 sent an inhibitory message to all victims of unwanted sexual attention. But it also inspired many citizens to resist oppressive conditions. The Flower Demo movement demonstrated the determination of many Japanese citizens to reformulate the national conversation on sexual assault. The "Flower Demo" campaign developed as a response to a series of court rulings in March 2019 that seemed to neglect the human rights of women who had been raped or sexually assaulted. Judges allowed the perpetrators to go free or to escape with light sentences because their victims had not put up enough resistance during the attack (Kawahara, 2019). In 2019, a woman who had been sexually abused by her father for a number of years and raped by him at age 19 was told that she could have resisted more forcefully if she had wanted (Hundreds protest, 2019). Nagoya District Court's Okazaki branch decided that the father would be acquitted. In a different case, acquittal was also afforded by a District Court in Fukuoka to the man who had raped a woman who had passed out from drinking alcohol. The man had "misunderstood" that consent had been forthcoming as she did not express lack of consent before falling unconscious. Only time will tell how successful their efforts will be. A society of "*Shikata ga nai*" "It can't be helped" might become the society of "We will help!" For the moment, for many factors, including the chilling effect of "proto-comfort women" attributions, Japanese society can be understood as a "hostile environment" for most women. Unfortunately, large numbers of women have been and are implicitly targeted as "proto-comfort women" (O'Mochain & Ueno, 2023). Women who formed relationships with foreign soldiers during the Occupation period, foreigners who claim refugee status in Japan, women of Korean heritage who claim the welfare payments that are available to them, schoolgirls

who engage in "compensated dating" or who adopt radical fashion styles, especially fashion styles that are seen to be racially charged, women who educate themselves for careers beyond the domestic sphere, and, finally, women who demand justice after they have experienced sexual assault. The strength of this negative factor alone may be sufficient to see present Japanese society as a hostile environment for most women.

With or without Empathy: The value of storytelling

In her account of the activities of the socially conservative political organization *Nippon Kaigi* Mizohata (2016, p. 5) argues that the organization's focus on the power of the state and of Japan's international status means that members "are unconcerned about the welfare of ordinary Japanese." This lack of concern with the difficulties experienced by ordinary people prompts a return to the theme of empathy and how it might be elicited. Ultra-nationalist groups view the discourse of human rights as a product of western culture that could not be transplanted onto Japan's narrative of self (Mizohata, 2016). This might seem like an innocuous view if not for the fact that a discourse of misogyny has held sway for well over a century and if a discourse of human rights is not used to improve conditions for women, then acute gender inequality will remain. The process of denigration of women was accentuated during the Meiji era by the dissemination of a new mass-media genre which was derived from the representation of a small number of criminal cases from the 1870's onwards of women who had poisoned lovers for revenge or wealthy individuals for financial gain. Marran (2007) shows how these cases of "*dokufu*" or "poison women" came to proliferate in representations of women in the work of journalists and of authors of fiction for over a century, a process that diminished capacity for empathy for women. The back cover of Marran's work states succinctly "The figure of the oversexed female criminal … became ubiquitous in modern Japanese culture… A few violent acts by women were transformed into myriad ideological, social, and moral tales that shaped popular notions of female sexual desire and womanhood." Because "womanhood" is constructed in relation to notions of "manhood," the processes that denigrated "woman" in Japan's symbolic systems simultaneously enhanced the position of "man." It is dispiriting also to note a lack of progress from the time of Kinsella (2014) writing about "compensated dating" and the work of Marran, writing about "poison women" a century earlier. In each case, a small number of cases of "transgressive women" are exaggerated in number and used to stereotype women as essentially defective.

While culture condemns the women it constructs as "poisonous," it displays sexism in an exaggerated valorization of men. In the modern era, a positive image of the *bōryokudan* (violent organized crime groups) style of masculinity was greatly enhanced by the yakuza film genre during the 1960's and 1970's. McNeill and Adelstein (2008, p. 4) note that products of popular culture continue this tradition. "Fan magazines, comic books, and movies glamorize them. Major gang bosses are pseudo celebrities … The *yakuza* own talent agencies … and work with major media outlets." Celebrated actors such as Takakura Ken portrayed *yakuza* protagonists in a way that underlined and reinforced the audience's ambiguous relationship to these "violence specialists." In a review of a 2019 film which is described as "a heartfelt throwback to the golden age of *yakuza* flicks" film critic Mark Schilling (2020) writes of "genre classics about pure-hearted gangsters starring the famously stoic Ken Takakura." Similarly, "samurai cinema" (*chambira* or "sword fighting movies") also positively depicted *bushidō* warriors, helping to create a social context in which many men still identify with samurai masculinity models (Mikanagi, 2011).

The prevalence of a masculinity model which emphasizes domination and displays of power has led to an attitude of resignation and fatalism among many victims of sexual violence. This is particularly poignant in the case of children and teenagers. In the acclaimed novel "No longer human" by Dazai Osamu (1981, pp. 35-38), the author writes of a servant who committed a loathsome crime, which can be assumed to have been sexual abuse. "To perpetrate such a thing on a small child is the ugliest, vilest, cruelest crime a human being can commit. But I endured it." He told no one about it because he had been "sealed off from the world of trust or distrust." The author never explicitly states that he has been "corrupted" by sexual abuse, but the inference seems likely. It certainly bears characteristics that have appeared earlier in accounts of sexual abuse of victims in contemporary Japan: the resolve to stay silent and endure the pain, the certainty that permanent damage has been done to the self, the intuition that life now feels like a meaningless moral vacuum. The author goes on to recount a young life characterized by misery and failed suicide attempts. As Hansen (2016) shows, self-directed violence is a characteristic of those who have endured silence about their anguish at their perceived failure to reconcile the contradictions imposed upon them. Dazai also wrestles with a contradiction: his sense that silence is the only meaningful response to unspeakable abuse and his sense that people should speak out about the abuse to prevent cruelty against children. The author was writing at a time when the psychological damage of sexual abuse was not fully appreciated in Japan or elsewhere. He never,

for example, suggests that the vile crime perpetrated against him might help account for his long-term depression and suicide attempts. But his damning condemnation of perpetrators reveals an understanding of the long-term toxic effects. Now, seventy years after Dazai wrote his heart-wrenching words, there is a much clearer understanding of the damage inflicted by sexual abuse, not just of children but of adolescents and adults also. Change begins, perhaps, when enough people can imagine what it is like to suffer abuse and its long-term consequences and when they empathize with populations that are vulnerable to abuse. In addition, to imagine a world without sexual harassment is to envision a society and education system with a range of features not yet in place. How might this feat of imagination actually take place? The transformation involved is immense, but educators can play a seminal role.

A number of writers have tried to empower women through fictional female characters who eschew a victim mentality in favor of assertive acts of agency and self-development. For example, Hayafune Chiyo wrote novels that reflected her working-class background in Gifu prefecture (central Japan). Her 1959 novel "The Town with a Cupola" is set in Kawaguchi City near Tokyo and was serialized in the women's magazine, "Mother and Child." The work distinguishes itself by centering on the story of a young woman, Jun, in her early teens. In spite of numerous obstacles, the protagonist finds a way to help provide for her family members and to pursue an education. The novel is also significant for political dimensions which are still relevant in contemporary Japan. At one point in this tale of obstacles preventing a young woman from obtaining an education due of oppressive poverty, the young heroine joins a friend in a bar in her poor neighborhood. A group of boys lace her drink with an incapacitating drug and sexually assault her while she lies semi-conscious. The film adaptation of the book (released in English as "Foundry Town" (Ōtsuka, & Urayama, 1962) includes this scene, as well as a positive representation of the *Kitachousen Kikoku Undou*/North Korean Return Home Movement. It was the latter representation which proved to be the most controversial of the film. Condemnation by *Uyoku dantai* succeeded in closing down the film in most cinemas around the country (just as would happen in 1985 when *uyoku dantai* objected to a film that represented Mishima Yukio's homosexuality). Seeing the sexual assault scene in the same film that critiqued traditional nationalistic perspectives, as well as validating working-class identities, may have further politicized sexual violence issues in the public mind. While viewers felt sympathy for Jun's plight, they might not publicly support her if that risks stigmatization as "non-patriotic" or "anti-Japanese." The discursive overlapping that occurred with regard to the

"*Kyupora*" film from 1962 and the conflation of "comfort women" and "*enjo kōsai*" issues in the 1990's, may have taken place again, to some extent, in 2018, when Itō Shiori told her real-life story in the forum of public opinion. While hers has been "a lonely struggle" that led to exile in London (O'Dwyer, 2020), the fact that she won her civil lawsuit (albeit with less financial compensation than had been sought) has encouraged many Japanese victims of sexual assault to break their silence. The more often literary authors and creators of popular culture products represent female characters and sexual consent issues in helpful ways, the more victims will feel empowered to speak out.

Conclusion

The protection of human rights derives from a sense of empathy for fellow human beings. In his study on the humanly enriching benefits of empathy, Jamil Zaki (2020) cites research with felons in a prison in the United States. These men participated in programs that involved engagement with works of literature and group reflection with a focus on empathy. The felons developed more positive perspectives on life and were less likely to re-offend after release from prison. Even if perpetrators of sexual assault find themselves in prison, that period can be an opportunity for education in empathy, especially if programs also require engagement with the stories of the victims of their crimes. This text focused on the connections between art and empathy for victims of sexual violence in every cultural locale, particularly Japan. An area which could be explored further is the ability of products of popular culture to inspire citizen action such as street protest. The assertion of the role of the empowered citizen finds full expression when people take to the streets in popular protest. In the Middle East in 2011-2012, the "Arab Spring" series of political demonstrations by masses of citizens brought an end to government rule in a number of states. However, later street protests to form new regimes, were often marked by sexual harassment of women, as was the case in Egypt when Islamic Brotherhood supporters asserted a patriarchal view of the "New Egypt" in which women would remove themselves from the public sphere in favor of men and confine themselves to domestic life. In masculinist societies, not only workplaces, but all public spaces are constructed as quintessentially male spaces. It was meaningful, then, in 2017 for activists to organize "Women's Marches" around the world to assert that women's rights remained paramount, even if the occupant of the White House was a man who had been recorded on tape describing his habitual practices of sexual harassment. As noted earlier, these marches in Tokyo had relatively

small numbers compared to those of Seoul, or other cities. This is lamentable, as massive public demonstrations assert social facts as reality and can mark the inauguration of new regimes whether in the field of politics, or education, or media. The canard that men's sexual excesses are to be forgiven as the country needs to arrest a declining birth rate needs to be extinguished definitively. Victims of sexual abuse in Japan, as in all other locales, need to know that they have the right to come out of the shadows and to pursue justice. Their right evokes each community's obligation to support that pursuit of justice.

On a deeper level, the preoccupation of Japanese political leaders with demographics may be connected to emotions of fear, as can be seen in any society where a shrinking majority fears for retribution following past sins. In the United States, many of the policies promoted by white nationalism and populist politicians are rooted in a deep-seated fear that a growing number of people of color will take revenge for the abuses committed by a white ascendancy in the past. Perhaps a similar type of fear exists among the far-right in Japan who worry about the increasing presence of Chinese and Koreans in their midst. Out of fear of an onslaught from the populations which had been in a previously subservient position, political leaders and authority figures envision a future of conflict through a masculinist lens: men must be ready to fight as soldiers, but this will be a source of honor for them, and their carnal desires will not be neglected (cf. the "obscene underbelly" of Žižek (1997) who argues that every highly moralistic system masks and is even sustained by a hidden system of rewards for primal emotions and of (perverse) treatment for traumatic memories). Hence the strength of passion in the defense of the historical "comfort women" system as something legitimate and necessary. All of the traumatic pain associated with the 15-year war and Japan's humiliating defeat are not to be fully acknowledged as such acknowledgment would destabilize the current politico-social order which has prevailed since the Meiji era. From this patriarchal lens, also, the women of Japan must be sexually accessible to men, either as sexual playthings or as wives who will mother a new generation to fight new battles. It is this fear of repressed historical memories which leads to the fear of intimidation by women who have been sexually assaulted. The "association of ideas" that links "comfort women" issues with compensated dating and sex tourism issues, also applies to women who report sexual assault. Even if women are not fully conscious of this association, many feel afraid to speak out in a society where they will be cast as promiscuous and "un-Japanese." That was the fate of Ito Shiori who persevered in the resolve to obtain justice against the man who raped her, in spite of his connections with the establishment. After nearly five years, her quest

bore fruit with a victory over her assailant and that victory may be a harbinger of fundamental change. While the Japan of *Uyoku dantai* (far-right nationalist groups) may be rooted in fear, the Japan of Ito and her supporters is much more hopeful in its assessment of human nature and the potential for social improvement. The latter worldview can envision a multi-cultural Japan in which immigrants from China, Korea, and other countries, thrive within Japanese society while also contributing to its economic prowess. The trend against "silence breakers" may be ominous for those who fear the authoritarian implications of campaigns for a "Beautiful Japan." For some, the present heteronormative and patriarchal gender order is also essentially inviolable. This is lamentable in light of high levels of sexual violence against women that exist in Japanese society, in spite of decades of work by feminist activists. Most forms of violence are, ultimately, products of cultures of "hard masculinity" which form a building block of militarism. The lamentable consequences of unbridled human rights abuses and militarism are all too apparent in the history of Japan and of most, perhaps all, great powers in human history. However, the history of storytelling, in accounts of fiction and of non-fiction, both in Japan and outside of Japan, has pointed to the power of human imagination to stir empathy and to delineate better worlds with peaceful, egalitarian social relations. No matter how utopian, this artistic endeavor should still be encouraged and allowed to thrive.

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