

Representations of the Female Body in Japanese Literature by Women Writers:

Intersections between Literature, Culture, and Gender and Sexuality

日本文学における女性作家による女性身体の表象

——文学、文化、ジェンダー・セクシュアリティの交差——

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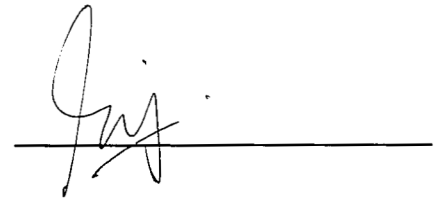
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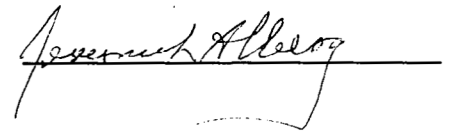
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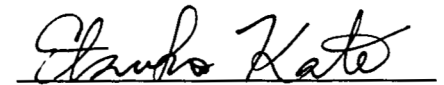
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Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

Representations of the Female Body in Japanese Literature by Women Writers: Intersections between Literature, Culture, and Gender and Sexuality

This dissertation explores representations of experiences of the female body such as, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, mothering and sexuality in a selection of literary texts (poetry and fiction) by three contemporary Japanese authors: *Tokyo jima* 東京島 (Tokyo island, 2008) by Kirino Natsuo 桐野夏生 (b. 1951), “Kanoko goroshi” カノ子殺し (“Killing Kanoko” 1985; trans. 2009) and other poems and texts by Itō Hiromi 伊藤比呂美 (b. 1955), and *Chichi to ran* 乳と卵 (Breasts and eggs, 2007) by Kawakami Mieko 川上未映子 (b. 1976). This thesis aims to give an account of the representation of the female body engaging with sociocultural myths and ideals vis-à-vis motherhood, gender, and body issues in the selected works. In order to do so, I read, interpret and analyze their works from a gender and feminist perspective. I introduce ways of reading these literary works that tie to important concepts in Western feminist critique—particularly in relation to embodiment and gender—and existing scholarship on Japanese literature, criticism and gender.

In addition, this thesis aims to develop alternative ways of re-signifying our bodies, moving towards body empowerment and self-esteem. My personal engagement with the selected texts through feminist theory and reader-response criticism serves as an example of how literature can help us make sense of our own embodied experiences and develop a more positive relationship with our bodies.

Kirino, Itō and Kawakami are diverse in style and content, yet I claim they share a literary gaze that moves away from conventional and idealistic depictions of the female body and mothering. Their works challenge gender stereotypes and norms; specifically, the normative, causal links between sex, gender, and social expectations and ideas regarding the role of women and mothers restricted to private spheres like the home and family life. They do so by narrating the lives of women characters (albeit cis-gendered and able-bodied); paying special attention to their bodies as an intrinsic part of their subjectivity. Together, they reconfigure the female body as leaky and fluid, problematize the theme of agency, and depict female body experiences and mothering in all its ambivalence and complexity.

博士論文要旨

日本文学における女性作家による女性身体の表象 ——文学、文化、ジェンダー・セクシュアリティの交差——

本論文では、三人の日本人女性作家の作品における女性の身体体験の表象について探求する。特に桐野夏生の『東京島』、伊藤比呂美の「カノコ殺し」やいくつかの詩とテキスト、川上未映子の『乳と卵』における女性身体経験、例えば生理、妊娠、出産、授乳、母性、セクシュアリティなどの女性の身体経験を分析する。女性身体の表象を明らかにするために、本稿筆者は、ジェンダー研究やフェミニズムの視点に立ち、身体問題やジェンダーや母性に関連した社会文化的な神話および理想について分析し解釈した。これらの文学作品の解釈方法としては、西洋のフェミニズム批判、特にジェンダーや身体についての主な概念及び、現在日本におけるジェンダーや文学研究を結びつける手法を採った。

選択した作品の中に、ボディ・エンパワーメントの、すなわち、体に力を与えるような表現があること、そしてそれが自尊心や自己肯定感を高めさせる可能性があることを論じる。本稿筆者は、自分の身体体験を理解し、自分の体とポジティブな関係を築く手段として文学を用いることを望んでいる。それゆえ、フェミニズム理論と受容理論の視点から、選択した作品と筆者自身の個人的な体験を関連付ける。

桐野、伊藤、川上の作品は内容や文体こそ異なるが、女性の身体や母性について、理想的かつ伝統的な表象から一線を画す文学的な視線が共通していることを強調したい。そして、これらの作品は、ジェンダー・ステレオタイプやジェンダー規範に対して挑戦するものでもある。とりわけ、この特徴は、女性や母親の役割は家庭と家族の生活という個人的な範囲に限られているというような、性別に関する規範的な考え方や社会からの期待に対して顕著である。身体と主観性に注目しながら、彼らの作品は、たとえそれがシス・ジェンダーや健常者であっても、登場人物の女性の人生について語るにより、挑戦する。これらのテキストを総合的に分析し見えてきたのは、これらの作品が女性の身体が漏れやすく流体なものとして再構築した点であり、同時にエージェンシー（行為主体性、行為体）という問題を扱っている点である。そして、これらは母性や女性の身体体験を両義性と複雑さにおいて描き出している点である。

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Chapter One

Introduction: the female body, women writers and feminism

1.1. Literature for body empowerment and self-esteem

The subject of embodiment—*living* in our bodies, body image, representations of bodily experiences, body politics, and cultural attitudes towards the body—remains timely and important as the control over our bodies continues to take so many different shapes. Sociocultural ideals and myths regarding one's body and gender have a direct impact on our attempts to make sense of who we are, our ways of being in the world, our self-esteem and our very agency.

I find connections between current sociocultural expectations and ideals pinned to our bodies and gender, and the pervasiveness of body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. A negative body image is linked to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem and, even if not exclusively, it is women who are more likely to struggle with body issues than men (See: Nielson et al.; Bordo; Miller L; Orbach; Grogan). This problem is closer rather than distant. I know of a number of stories coming from my own family, friends, and acquaintances about body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. These are manifested via cosmetic surgeries, regular waxing, pregnant women or new mothers feeling ugly and unsexy, dieting and exercising to achieve an ideal body size and weight, not being able to leave the house without makeup, eating disorders, self-harming, domestic violence, among others. All of the above are indicators of sociocultural body control and how it clashes with our very agency.

I am personally engaged with these issues. I have caught myself feeling self-conscious when I have not waxed in a while, and I struggle with my self-image during pregnancy and

post-partum. I have issues embracing my vulnerabilities and weaknesses as I try to be a perfect mother, even though I claim in my writings that the “perfect mother” is an unattainable fiction that does not exist in reality. Through my research, I attempt not only to understand body dissatisfaction, body control, low self-esteem, the mythologization and idealization of motherhood, but also to find alternative ways to re-signify our bodies, develop positive body images and re-negotiate gender roles and norms. Ultimately, I want to feel more comfortable in my own skin, and I want my daughter to grow up feeling comfortable with her body and with who she is.

I have found in a selection of Japanese literature possibilities for readings and interpretations that bring us closer to body empowerment and self-esteem. This dissertation explores the representations of experiences of the female body, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, mothering, and sexuality, in a selection of literary texts (poetry and fiction) by three contemporary Japanese authors: *Tokyo jima* 東京島 (Tokyo Island, 2008) by Kirino Natsuo 桐野夏生 (b. 1951), “Kanoko goroshi” カノ子殺し (“Killing Kanoko” 1985; trans. 2009) and other poems and texts by Itō Hiromi 伊藤比呂美 (b. 1955), and *Chichi to ran* 乳と卵 (Breasts and eggs, 2007) by Kawakami Mieko 川上未映子 (b. 1976).

I selected these texts because they are feminist, liberated writings that place the experiences of the female body at the center of their narratives. Kirino, Itō and Kawakami are diverse in style and content, yet I claim they share a literary gaze that moves away from conventional and idealistic depictions of the female body and mothering, hence the selected works can be considered feminist. Their works challenge gender stereotypes and norms; specifically, the normative, causal links between sex, gender, and social expectations and ideas regarding the role of women and mothers restricted to private spheres like the home and family life. They do so by narrating the lives of women

characters; paying special attention to their bodies as not merely as objects but as an intrinsic part of their subjectivity. Therefore, I claim that through a feminist approach, these authors can help readers in their quest for a more positive relationship with their bodies. My own personal engagement with these texts, featured in the Afterword, serves as an example of how literature can help us make sense of our embodied experiences.

Given that issues concerning body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and idealized motherhood and womanhood are framed within patriarchal culture and gender systems, adopting a feminist approach to address these issues in the literary works is appropriate.¹ The expression “patriarchal culture”—a culture of institutionalized sexism—denotes that “patriarchal thinking shapes the values of our culture;” patriarchal thinking or “psychological patriarchy” does not function exclusively at the sociopolitical level, but also shapes and is shaped by the cultural and personal dimensions (hooks, *Will* 23; *Feminism* ix). In literature, “a feminist approach” is often referred to as feminist literary criticism. In general, a feminist approach is informed by feminist theory; it stresses intersectionality—that is, the interconnectedness of different sources and types of oppression. One of the problems of reducing feminism to a “women versus men” model is losing sight of all the diversity and complexity within and beyond the very categories of “women” and “men.” In this regard, hooks offers this valuable insight: “Men do oppress women. People are hurt by rigid sexist role patterns. These two realities coexist. Male oppression of women cannot be excused by the recognition that there are ways men are hurt by rigid sexist roles. Feminist activists should acknowledge that hurt, and work to

¹ The term “patriarchy” was originally used in anthropology to describe “a social system in which authority is invested in the male head of the household (the patriarch) and other male elders in the kinship group” (Longhurst et al. 25). It is now often used in different fields to refer to a generalized subordination of women; men (as a group) have a higher socioeconomic power than women (as a group) (25). I find bell hooks’ explanation useful: “Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (*Will* 18).

change it—it exists” (hooks, *Will* 26). While pursuing gender equality and focusing largely, but not exclusively, on women’s issues, feminism does not aim to reproduce or invert the oppressive structures that it challenges, but rather, it shows that patriarchy, sexism and rigid gender norms and roles affect us all, and that feminism is for everybody (hooks *Feminism*).

My quest towards body empowerment and self-esteem is an attempt to change one of the ways we have been hurt by patriarchal culture and its fixed gender norms and roles. My quest for body empowerment and self-esteem in literature by Japanese women writers follows to some extent the spirit and intention of Claudia Tate’s *Black Women Writers at Work* (1983). Here, she claims that the fourteen writers she interviewed seem to agree on the idea that “women must assume responsibility for strengthening their self-esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves” (xxiii qtd. in Hill Collins 115). In Tate’s study, she identifies self and individual empowerment in connection to change at the community level, while also stressing that “change can also occur in the private, personal space of an individual woman’s consciousness” (Hill Collins 118). Discussions of empowerment and change deal with the question of agency versus determination.

Tate writes that the heroine of her literary study recognizes “her inability to alter the situation;” that is, the outer circumstances or boundaries, but at the same time, learns to exceed them by “knowing where they lie. In this regard, she teaches her readers a great deal about constructing a meaningful life in the midst of chaos and contingencies, armed with nothing more than her intellect and emotions” (Tate xxiv qtd. in Hill Collins 118). Tate’s study shows that personal empowerment is possible through self-knowledge: “*real power* comes from the personal; our real insights about living come from that deep knowledge within us that arises from our feelings” (Tate 106). Similarly, in this dissertation, I aim to highlight the interactions between the personal and the sociocultural

in relation to our bodies. I reiterate that I pursue this literary engagement not only to understand the representation of the female body and its myths and ideals, but also to identify possibilities for re-signifying and transforming our body experiences in relation to gender roles and norms. In other words, this thesis is about making sense of our own embodied experiences—at the personal and sociocultural levels—through a feminist reading of a selection of Japanese women writers.

1.2. Theoretical framework: myths, sex/gender and embodiment

The works of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami rely on feminist criticism—sometimes mocking it, and often going beyond its legacy. Their texts do not display the female body necessarily as the locus of reproduction and/or maternal instinct, yet they do display how these ideas still constrain our culture of embodiment, and affect the subjectivities of their characters. These authors do not idealize motherhood as the sole reason for women to exist; yet, in their works, we can read how this idealization lurks behind their plots and characters. Within the different experiences of the female body, representations of the maternal body (pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding) and motherhood are prominent in all three selected works. In this regard, some of the major themes that will be addressed throughout the following analysis are the myth of motherhood and mother-child relations; the leaky body (body fluids); beauty ideals and sociocultural norms; and agency and choice.

In our cultural consciousness, motherhood is persistently idealized, mythologized and naturalized (Nakayama 147). This thesis's selected authors move nearer to and farther from the ideal mother. The image of “nearer to, or farther from” indicates the paradox of moving away from the ideal and criticizing it, but at the same time—in order to do so—having to engage with it, and thus move nearer to it. The ideal mother—understood as

a deterministic and essentialist vision of what a mother should be or do—fails to recognize gender and sexual diversity, and the multiple shapes mothering can actually take. Each of these authors contribute a specific, alternative depiction of the female body experience, and when read together, they complement each other. As well as providing a sense of liberation from fixed ideals, they offer a glimpse at all the multiplicity and complexity of the maternal body in particular and the female body in general.

This dissertation primarily deals with ideals and sociocultural myths in relation to the female body, motherhood and gender. The first meaning of myths indicates an attempt to “explain reality,” and often claim universal status. A second meaning alludes to “misconceptions.” In Barthes’ terms, myths are “culture masquerading as nature” (Felski, *The Limits* 74). Myths “transform history into nature...what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural” (Barthes, *Mythologies* 128). Moreover, myths have the “task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (142). Hence, mythologization and naturalization go hand-in-hand, and a gender perspective allows both demythologizing and denaturalizing sociocultural and historical contingencies. Myths also produce sociocultural ideals. An ideal represents a “desirable situation,” something “better than reality,” thus it prescribes how something “should be.” Ideals exist only in our imagination, hence they are neither likely to be nor become a reality—ideals are unattainable. For this reason, the beauty ideal or the ideal mother, for instance, does not exist in reality.

Our very understanding of the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ is often affected by myths and ideals about ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ themselves. Thus, there is a need to clarify these terms. Their use vary in different scientific and social fields and also often differ from the

standard definitions found in everyday dictionaries.² Already in some of the meanings of these broad definitions we can identify how these terms have been constrained by binary thought; as they embody a distinction between biology and society, nature and culture, and are limited to the male/female dichotomy.³ In the 1970s different representatives from the second-wave of feminism, such as Simone de Beauvoir, as well as sexologists John Money and Anke Ehrhard, argued for the distinction between sex and gender: “*sex* represented the body’s anatomy and physiological workings and *gender* represented the social forces that molded behavior” (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 4). This distinction was meant to debunk biological determinism. It was “intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation” and to argue that “whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Butler, *Gender* 8). This distinction has been reflected upon extensively, and different scholars and thinkers have pointed out both its merits (for example, see Beauvoir; Rubin) and its problems (for example, see Butler; Fausto-Sterling).

The conception of sex as a given, fixed biological fact has been questioned by third-wave or post-structural feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler and experts in biology and gender development such as Anne Fausto-Sterling. This critique comes together with the conception of gender as performative—gender is not only already embodied, but it is

² For example, according to the *English Oxford Living Dictionary*, gender refers to “either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female” (“Gender”). And the same dictionary describes sex as “either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions” (“Sex”).

³ In addition, Butler challenges the supposed correspondence between sex and gender: “Even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.” (*Gender* 9)

always “a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed” (Butler, *Undoing* 1). In addition, Butler writes: “if the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (*Gender* 9-10). While blurring the boundaries of this distinction and aiming to give a non-dualistic account of the body, Butler still asks about the materiality of the body, about the processes in which “sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction” (*Bodies* 28; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 22). Both Butler and Fausto-Sterling agree on the necessity of dealing with the material body: our hormones, genes, and other body parts and physiological traits that have been used to differentiate bodies between male and female (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 22).

This dissertation also recognizes this need, and therefore deals with specific experiences of the female body. Yet, as these scholars remind us, if we look at the body as a pre-discursive, natural, given entity that exists prior to sociocultural discourses about gender (that is, about male and female), “we discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put” (Butler, *Bodies* 29). In Fausto-Sterling’s words, “the idea of the material comes to us already tainted, containing within it preexisting ideas about sexual difference” (*Sexing* 23). This recognition of sex as already embedded with gender meanings leads to understanding the body as a sociocultural, discursive construction as well.

To elaborate more on the connection between embodiment and gender, and between bodily processes and social structures, Connell explains that,

Gender relations form a particular social structure, refer to particular features of bodies, and gender practices form a circuit between them... gender involves

a cluster of human social practices—including child care, birthing, sexual interaction—which deploy human bodies’ capacities to engender, to give birth, to give milk, to give and receive sexual pleasure. We can only begin to understand gender if we understand how closely the social and the bodily processes mesh. (68)

The recognition of the interplay between bodily, gendered, biological and sociocultural domains closes the supposed gap between the sex/gender dichotomy (Connell 43). Since the sex/gender opposition can be considered a “recasting of the distinction between the body, or what is biological and natural, and the mind, or what is social and ideological” (Grosz 17), and in an attempt to undermine such distinction, I privilege the use of gender and refrain from making a clear division between the sex and gender. Moreover, when we bring the discussion of sex/gender to the Japanese context, this distinction is also blurred in the use of the term *seibetsu* 性別—as it can refer to both sex and/or gender.⁴

Fausto-Sterling’s clarifications in *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* work as an example of how to use these terms separately while recognizing their mutual interplay that makes it impossible to draw a clear cut line between them. She explains that there are multiple meanings of gender; it may refer to one’s identity (gender identity) and self-presentation (gender expression) or also to “social structures that differentiate men from women” (binary gender system) (5). Also, Fausto-Sterling uses the term “sex” to refer to “the body and/or individual behaviors” (*Sex/Gender* 6). In her words, an individual “has a sex (male, female, not designated, other); but they engage with the world via a variety of social, gender conventions” (6). The female body is not only an indicator of

⁴ In Japanese, the word *sei* 性 has multiple meanings: ‘sex,’ ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ (Suganuma and Welker; Yamaguchi 549.). *Seibetsu* “literally, ‘distinction between *sei*,’ can indicate *sex* and *gender*, as well as *sexual* or *gender difference*” (Suganuma and Welker). It is also important to mention that in Japanese we find *jendā* ジェンダー; the loan word for ‘gender,’ and other related terms that exceed the scope of this dissertation, such as *jendā furi* ジェンダーフリー (‘gender free’; see: Yamaguchi), and *x-jendā X* ジェンダー (‘x-gender,’ see: Dale “Introduction”).

one's sex, and it is not an essentialist category in itself because it already has to do with one's behaviors and with different cultural meanings about gender.

I refer to “embodiment” when characterizing Kirino's, Itō's and Kawakami's literary depictions of different female body experiences: “embodied survival,” “poetic embodiment and healing words” and “embodying beauty, reproduction and agency,” respectively. Borrowing Iris Marion Young's words, this study also aims “to describe embodied being-in-the-world through modalities of sexual and gender difference” (7). Hence, gender-specific embodiment becomes a linking thread throughout this dissertation. The term “embodiment” already captures the idea of representation in terms of making something visible, through literature, in this case. It also conveys the meaning of “giving human form” to something else—hence, it already hints at the human body or to our corporeal experiences. It combines the material, symbolic, and discursive dimensions of the body, which is precisely what catches my interest. According to Tolman et al., “embodiment refers to the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the very specific location of our bodies” (760). In academic fields, embodiment “refers to two distinct processes or phenomena: *being embodied* and *embodying the social*” (761)—hence, it also addresses the personal or individual, and sociocultural dimensions.⁵

The use of terms such as embodied subjectivity, experiences of the female body, or lived bodily experience aim to reconfigure the body not only as a physical or biological entity, but also as a living part of who we are, and of our ways of inhabiting the world (Grosz; Young). The notion of the *lived* body is understood as “the body insofar as it is

⁵ Scholarship on embodiment spans a wide range of disciplines (sociology, anthropology, literature, cultural studies, feminist studies, gender and sexuality studies, psychology, education, among others) (Tolman et al. 759). In embodiment studies, the following concepts are relevant: ‘phenomenological body’ (see: Merleau-Ponty; Grosz; Young) ‘social inscription’ and ‘inscribed embodiment’ (see: Bartky; Foucault; Bordo; Young; Butler). Also, despite their prominent place in embodiment studies, the following theories: Alcott's ‘visible identities,’ Gatens's ‘bodily imaginaries’ and Haraway's ‘cyborg bodies,’ exceed the scope of this dissertation. Many of these concepts and theories are based on the work of Foucault and Butler (Tolman et al. 761-762).

represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures” (Grosz 18). Furthermore, the body is not simply a biological object, but it is rather understood as a “social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification and power” (19). This particular understanding of the body is useful for both analyzing body representations and making sense of our personal embodiment.

In addition to Butler and Fausto-Sterling, feminist philosophers Elizabeth Grosz, Iris Marion Young, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, among others, also provide some of the theoretical grounds for this dissertation.⁶ In particular, the works on volatile bodies (Grosz), female body experience (Young), mechanic or metaphoric of fluids (Irigaray) and abjection (Kristeva) provide an understanding of the body as leaky and fluid, and are also centered on the female body. In general, the history of the male-female dichotomy underlies the understanding of women as “more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men” (Grosz 14; qtd in Tolman et al. 763). For this reason, feminists have had to develop alternatives to “recognize women’s corporeality without eliding into a naturalized, reductionist, essentialized mind-body dualism that attributes minds to men and bodies to women” (Tolman et al. 763). One of the main characteristics of feminist understandings of the body is the rejection of the nature versus nurture model of human development, and the mind-body dichotomy that has served to justify “hard-wired sexual

⁶ The works of Grosz and Young have been informed by Merleau-Ponty’s pioneering work on embodiment in *Phenomenology of Perception*. For Merleau-Ponty, the *lived* body is a “body-subject” and he claims that the body is capable of direct experience and knowledge (Tolman et al. 761). Therefore, he restores the epistemological value of experience, and argues that all experience is bodily. In fact, his work has influenced not only theories of embodiment, in general, but also feminist theories of embodiment, in particular. Butler points out that the term embodiment in Merleau-Ponty’s theory (as well as in Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s) “tends to figure “the” body as a mode of incarnation and, hence, to preserve the external and dualistic relationship between a signifying immateriality and the materiality of the body itself” (*Gender* 209). Young and Irigaray have claimed that his approach is “based around an elided masculinity” (Ahmed “Embodying” 185). Yet, other feminist thinkers, like Ahmed, claim that, “his failure to address (sexual) difference is structural to his model of inter-embodiment as a generalized ‘sharing between bodies’” (185).

difference” while simultaneously “respecting the materiality and situatedness of women’s bodies as they intersect with other structural contexts” (Tolman et al. 764).

Grosz uses the image of the “Möbius strip” to illustrate the indissoluble relationship between the mind and the body, as well as the interior and exterior of the subject (Grosz, *Volatile* xii; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 24-25; Toman et al. 764).⁷ This strip shows “the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another” (Grosz xii). In addition, we may think of one side of the strip as the body (brain, muscles, organs, hormones and more) and the other side, as culture and experience (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 24). This image implies the continuity between the inside and the outside as “one can move from one to the other without ever lifting one’s feet off the ground” (24).

We may think of the leaky body in a similar way. As Grosz explains, “body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body’s inside and its outside” (193). The literary depictions of body fluids stand out in the works of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami and therefore they will be further explored in the next chapters.

Feminist theories of embodiment also deal with the articulation of specific ways in which gender norms and ideals are enforced, or how bodies are “socially inscribed as female-male or feminine-masculine” (Tolman et al. 764). For example, sculpting our bodies through dieting, makeup, exercise, clothing, or cosmetic surgeries, or our attempts to alter menstruation often reflect dominant sociocultural norms, ideals and disciplinary practices (764). In this regard, Susan Bordo’s work on eating problems, exercise and

⁷ A Möbius strip is “a flat ribbon twisted once and then attached end to end to form a circular twisted surface” (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 24). Imagine an ant walking along it: the ant starts walking on the outside but without lifting its legs from the surface it ends up walking on the inside (24).

media images, Naomi Wolf's concept of the beauty myth, and Young's meditations on both the menstrual and breasted experiences are particularly useful. The works of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami offer different literary depictions of personal/individual ways of *living* bodies being affected by sociocultural norms. Therefore, themes related to bodily inscription of sociocultural norms will also be explored throughout the literary analysis in the next chapters.

Kirino, Itō and Kawakami also problematize the question of agency and choice. Moreover, agency is key to move towards body empowerment and self-esteem. However, if the body is discursively constructed and controlled by sociocultural myths, ideals and norms, is the embodied subject doomed to obey? Tolman et al. explain that,

Agency can range from conscious resistance to oppressive forces or cultural constraints to survival strategies that are neither transformative nor meant to be. Agency has been conceptualized as 'strategies' of action, ranging from unconscious capitulation that does not intend resistance to the much more deliberate and organized resistances people engage in because they have the agency to do so. Furthermore, agency can be exercised as accommodation to, or resistance toward, norms and structures that manage, control and discipline the body. (767)

Grosz suggests that the *lived* body is a site of contestation and resistance, a site of agency and choice. She argues that what is at stake in the study of the female body is, "the activity and agency, the mobility and social space, accorded to women. Far from being an inert, passive, non-cultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles" (Grosz 19). In this quote Grosz limits the study of the female body to the experiences of women, and for the purpose of this thesis, this affirmation remains valid as it is limited to

somehow normative gender experiences, and the selected literary texts also focus on cis-gendered, able-bodied women characters. However, even if exceeding the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting the existing scholarship of both feminist and queer theories of embodiment that have looked at even more diverse experiences, such as inter-sexed, transgendered and disabled (See: Butler, *Undoing*; Salamon; Sedgwick). Feminism has also been the center of critiques of “the historical association of the body with a range of ‘lesser’ individuals and statuses” grounded in the notion of intersectionality, “whereby every corporeal body is situated within, constructed, and experienced through interlocking and inseparable standpoints constituted by specific structural realities and meanings” (Tolman et al. 763-764). Therefore, feminist and queer theories of embodiment regard difference—in terms of race, class, sex/gender, sexuality, and able-bodiedness—“as embedded in the flesh, situated in bodies constructed through culturally and historically specific discourses” (764).

1.3. Outline and methodology: feminist literary analysis and reader-response criticism

Up to this point, this introduction has dealt with the dissertation’s “why”—the motivations, significance, and some of the theoretical background of this research. I have introduced this dissertation’s main aim: to give an account of the representation of experiences of the female body engaging with sociocultural myths and ideals vis-à-vis motherhood, gender, and body issues in the selected works by Kirino, Itō and Kawakami. In order to do so, I read, interpret and analyze their works from a gender and feminist perspective. I also introduced a secondary purpose to this dissertation: to develop alternative ways of re-signifying our bodies, moving towards body empowerment and self-esteem. In order to do so, I not only use feminist theory but also engage with the

literary works from a reader-response point of view. In this section I will present the “how” and “what”—the methodology or paths to reach those goals, and also an outline of this dissertation’s contents. The next two sections of this introductory chapter are a historical view on women’s writings in Japan, in which I address the links between gender and literature, and an introduction of the profiles of the authors Kirino, Itō and Kawakami.

Chapter Two, “Embodied survival by Kirino Natsuo,” Chapter Three, “Poetic embodiment and healing words by Itō Hiromi,” and Chapter Four, “Embodying beauty, reproduction and agency by Kawakami Mieko,” offer a close reading of their texts from a gender and feminist perspective. The specific order in which the authors and their works are introduced follows their birthdate: from elder to younger. I also take into consideration the form and genre of these texts. The first work analyzed is Kirino’s *Tokyo jima* and the last one is Kawakami’s *Chichi to ran*. Both are works of fiction, published for the first time in 2007 and were awarded prestigious literary prizes. Also, in these chapters I carry on a theme-based literary analysis grounded on a single literary work. Due to these shared characteristics, they are like the cover and the back cover of my analysis. In between, I analyze Itō’s “Kanoko goroshi”—a prose-poem written in 1985, and published in English in 2009—together with other poems and essays, including one of her more recent works *Onna no isshō 女の一生* (2014). Itō’s literature can be rendered as autobiographical prose-poetry thus it sharply contrasts Kirino’s and Kawakami’s novels. This chapter is like the different pages of a book that take us through different points in time, genres and works of literature.

The specific order of the literary analysis also conditions the reader’s overall journey. We start in Kirino’s far away, imagined, deserted island: the island of Tokyo in which she demythologizes the patriarchal myth. Then, we move towards a more subjective, psychological and emotional site that does not seem to be anchored in a specific location:

Itō's depictions of abject and joyous experiences that undermine the symbolic masculine order. Finally, we end up in the midst of family dynamics between three women from Osaka in the city of Tokyo, in which Kawakami problematizes cultural and economical mechanisms that control the female body and fix gender roles in a male-dominated society. Therefore, one of the merits of reading these three authors together is that they offer different stories that complement each other in order to build a larger picture—that by no means is exhaustive—of what it means, or perhaps let us imagine how it feels, to live in female and maternal bodies, and as a woman—albeit cis-gendered and able-bodied—in a patriarchal culture, in general, and in Japanese society, in particular.

The general strategy used to approach these literary works consists of identifying different themes prominent in their plots and narratives that are also major preoccupations within feminist discourse (Angles, "Reclaiming" 51). Therefore, I introduce ways of reading these texts that tie to important concepts in Western feminist critique—particularly in relation to embodiment and gender—such as Elizabeth Grosz, Iris Marion Young, Judith Butler, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Susan Bordo, Emily Martin, and existing scholarship on Japanese literature and gender, such as Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子, Ōhinata Masami 大日向雅美, Saitō Minako 齋藤美奈子, Rebecca Copeland, Amanda Seaman, and Sharalyn Orbaugh among others. Thus, this thesis interweaves Western feminist and gender critique with Japanese literature and criticism. This dissertation's primary sources are the literary works written by the authors both in their original and translated versions (when available), and also interviews and commentaries by the authors. I use different types of secondary sources with two purposes in mind: to deepen the understanding of a theme and show its treatment within feminist and gender studies, and also, to contextualize certain themes in Japanese society, culture and history.

Despite this general strategy each chapter turns out to be rather different from each other due to the particularities of each author's work and their narratives, as well as the available scholarship regarding not only the selected texts, but also the different emerging themes in their works. In Chapter Two, "Embodied survival by Kirino Natsuo," I rely on the original Japanese edition of *Tokyo jima* and the major themes explored in this chapter are particularly anchored in the story's development: sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth, and motherhood. In Chapter Three, "Poetic embodiment and healing words by Itō Hiromi," I rely on the original Japanese and also on the English translation of "Kanoko goroshi" and other poems by Jeffrey Angles. Unlike Kirino's case, Itō's work and its depiction of the female body has been discussed by Angles and other scholars, and therefore I include their scholarly analysis of her work, in addition to her own discussion of her work. Another feature of this chapter is its structure. It first offers a theme-based inter-textual analysis of "Kanoko goroshi" that touches upon abortion, infanticide, maternal love, maternal pleasure, and breastfeeding, among others. Then, I focus on the themes of pregnancy and childbirth in other poems and texts by Itō. Lastly, I look at the links between her poetry and healing in one of her more recent works *Onna no isshō* (2014) in which she revisits some of her previous texts. Finally, in Chapter Four, "Embodying beauty, reproduction and agency by Kawakami Mieko," I offer a theme-based analysis of *Chichi to ran*, relying largely on the Japanese version and providing my own English translations with a few exceptions. The general themes explored are menstruation, breasts and body image, and motherhood.

In these three chapters, I underline the individual contributions of the selected authors in their portrayals of the experience of the female body and motherhood, but in Chapter Five "Conclusions: A comparative view of female embodiment" I focus on the merits of reading their works together. Here, I articulate the ways in which these authors offer new

ways of thinking about and experiencing the female body, and also offer feminist critiques of gender systems and the myth of motherhood. I bring Kirino, Itō and Kawakami together through a comparative analysis and commentary on how they write about female embodiment in their own terms, and at the same time, problematize one's agency in connection to dominant and rigid gender norms and ideals. In this chapter, I compartmentalize the key takeaways from the authors' works regarding the female body experience by addressing the following common themes: menstruation and menopause, the maternal body: pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, motherhood and mother-child relationships, commodification of the female body and beauty myths, and ecofeminism.

In the Afterword, "Literature and life," I transition from a gender/feminist perspective to a reader response one, in order to delve into my own "implication and involvement" in the selected texts exploring how and why they matter to me (Felski, "After Suspicion" 31). In Felski's words, I attempt to move towards what she calls "positive aesthetics," and "neo-phenomenology," an orientation "toward examining the intricate play of perception, interpretation, and affective orientation that constitutes aesthetic response" (31). In the end, I will write about being engaged with the texts affectively, elaborating on how my embodied experiences, especially of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, mothering and sexuality, shaped my readings and vice-versa. This closing exercise exemplifies how literature can help us make sense of our embodied experience and is an important part of my own process towards body empowerment and self-esteem.

The process of circumscribing this thesis to Kirino, Itō and Kawakami began with several initial questions. I looked through different anthologies and wondered if a feminist depiction of the female body would be included or excluded from these. Which authors deal with the themes of body and sexuality? Is there any writer who focuses on body empowerment and self-esteem? What genre and time periods are appropriate? How many

authors should I choose? Why not choose a larger, more diverse selection of writers (for instance, transgendered, inter-sexed and/or disabled authors? Or feminist men writers?) Every selection is a process of inclusion and exclusion. I began with a reading list of roughly thirty authors. Then, narrowed it down to five authors, and after balancing my own possibilities and limitations I decided on Kirino, Itō and Kawakami. I decided to favor explicit depictions of bodily experiences and their feminist potential over consistencies in genre and time, but in the end, I selected works that spoke to me, works with which I could engage affectively. Yet, I still find it important to introduce a larger body of works by other writers that also depict female body experiences and offer alternatives to idealized motherhood. This list of authors and their works is presented in the Appendix, “Further readings and literary climate.” Hence, as a whole, I hope this dissertation contributes to a deeper appreciation of the literary climate in which a group of women writers are writing, what are they writing about, and why are they doing so.

1.4. On women’s writings: gender, literature and history

By limiting this dissertation to women writers I am confronted with the question of gender and literature, and categorizing works by gender. The selection of authors is not solely based on their gender but on their particular feminist depictions of the female and maternal body. Yet, the question remains: does it matter whether the author is a woman? I will argue that it does. The treatment of women’s writings in academia is filled with apologies and warnings because of what Moi calls “intellectual schizophrenia”: on the one hand, we are reading women writers, and on the other, we think that “the author is dead, and that the very word ‘woman’ is theoretically dodgy” (264). The resistance to focus on women’s writings due to a fear of essentializing or universalizing female experiences is related to the rise of post-structuralism, explicitly to the ideas contained in Barthes’s essay

“The Death of the Author” (1977), Foucault’s essay “What is an Author,” and Judith Butler’s critique to the very category of ‘woman’ (*Gender*), and the currents of thought they represent (Moi 261-262). In order to elaborate on why an author’s gender still matters, I will follow Hemmann’s move, and I will align myself with Felski’s perspective in this discussion (19):

Most feminist critics would not agree that all interest in authorship is politically suspect. When we think about how often female authors have been disparaged, trivialized, or ignored, this case seems hard to sustain. Of course, any critic who sees the author’s gender as the alpha and omega of literary meaning does veer dangerously close to criticism as theology. But we can think of gender as one important layer in a work rather than as a magical key that will deliver the ultimate truth and clear up all ambiguity. Neither does talk about authors require us to believe that we can fully recover the author’s real intentions and that these intentions decree once and for all what a work must mean. (*Literature* 62)

In agreement with Felski, I think the author’s gender does not elucidate a text’s meaning, yet it is one layer of the work—an important one—that allows a better understanding of its literary production and reception. In addition, when studying the female body, women authors often draw on their own experience or bring in a subjective perspective, which I find valuable.⁸ Orbaugh succinctly phrases the significance of the body in literature written by women authors:

⁸ Hartley writes: “the biological experience of motherhood remains a critical juncture in the lives of many women, and one that writers who are both women and mothers regularly refer to in the ‘concealed form of autobiography’ that is their fiction. These narratives are often informed and given substance by the intense physicality of the maternal experience, an experience which, in spite of the advances of reproductive technology, remains unavailable to the ‘male’ writer, as it does to women who have not experienced motherhood. This is not to say that men, or women who are not mothers, are unable to access the social role of mother” (“Writing” 295).

This body I inhabit and experience as real is the physical receiver/performer of all the abstract policies made by patriarchal institutions. The political and the ideological for women often boil down to the physical and the personal. As the late Audre Lorde, among others, has pointed out: for women, far more than for men, the body is the political battleground; the personal is the political. It is not surprising, then, that fiction by women constantly returns to the female body as a source of a metaphor, a locus of structural analogy. ("The Body" 124-125)

It is not a coincidence, then, that in my attempt to focus on explicit depictions of female body experiences I have ended up writing about the works of women writers. The female body is a site of domination, control and oppression. However, it is also a site of resistance, subversion and agency. As Orbaugh points out, women writers often ground their literature in the body, and literature on the body is not only personal but also political, just like the body is not only physical and material but also symbolic and sociocultural. Therefore, women's writings are a rich site for exploring female embodiment. Moreover, choosing to limit my research to women writers is also a personal and political decision; it is personal because I seek an affective engagement with the literary works, and political because I recognize gender inequality in today's literary scene and academia: in general, men have been studied, translated and rewarded more, and some women writers still use male or neutral pen names out of fear of discrimination, for example.

Carving out a space for our own embodiment, and making sense of our bodily experiences and realities are central questions to feminism and have been the subject of writings by different generations of women writers. Next, I will introduce a brief history of Japanese writers who deal with the position of women in society, body issues and put forward necessary critiques regarding idealizations of womanhood and motherhood. In

doing so, I aim to locate Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami within a larger context of literary production and histories by women writers.

From the very beginnings of Japanese literature women writers have played a significant role. From the tenth century onwards we find several works across various genres, including the classics 源氏物語 *Genji Monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*, ca.1010) by Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (d.ca. 1014) and 枕草子 *Makura no Sōshi* (*The Pillow Book*, ca.996) by Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (b.ca.965) (Ericson, “The Origins” 77). Yet, despite these prominent works of the Heian period, Japan’s literary scene fell short of women author names or their recognition for the subsequent centuries. As Ericson puts it, “despite women’s pre-eminent position in classical Japanese literature, and despite the importance of the heavily feminine tradition of poetry and diaries, a strong female voice seems to have died out in Japanese literature by the early modern period” (79). Yet, as she also clarifies, “the scarcity of female authors in the literary history of this period [Edo] does not preclude the existence of women who were writing” (79).

It was only until the late nineteenth century that “a critical interest in women as readers and writers” emerged “as part of the various reforms and collective efforts to create a modern nation-state” (Yoshio 2). Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉 (1872-1896) became the next big figure representative of women authorship in Japan’s literary history, the precursor to modern women writers as she was writing at this very transitional period (Yoshio 56). The interactions between the West and Japan, in which Western discourses on women were redesigned to fit the Japanese context, concurred with a local discussion of *fujin mondai* 婦人問題, or the “woman question” that took place in journals and “media outlets”(2). As Yoshio explains, “reflecting this surge in women’s writing, it was in the first few decades of the 20th century that the journalistic category of ‘women’s literature’ (*joryū bungaku* 女流文学) emerged systematically within the increasingly commercialized

publishing industry” (2). Therefore, during the Meiji period (1868-1912) the literary establishment (*bundan* 文壇) operated with marked gender binary divisions; women writers were the counterpart of the mainstream male writers and were expected to write about “female concerns” in a “feminine mode” (Harada 4). In the beginning of the Meiji period women writers were referred to as *keishū sakka* 閨秀作家 (“lady writers”) and towards the later part they were called *joryū sakka* 女流作家 (“female-style writers”) (Copeland and Ortobasi, *The Modern* 20-22; Harada 4). This gendered division of literature, even when questioned, still persists until today in the use of *josei sakka* 女性作家 (women writers)—a term used during 1970s (Harada 4). Moreover, as Orbaugh points out, “to this day most bookstores in Japan continue to shelve works by female authors in a category separate from *bungaku*, which is exclusively male” (“Gender” 49).

As mentioned, the Meiji period was characterized by an attempt to turn Japan into a modern nation-state. To do so, leaders appealed to “the traditional Japanese family system” as a model for the imperial state (Orbaugh, “Gender” 43). In other words, the *kazoku kokka* 家族国家 (family nation), established in the 1890s, was based on the *ie seido* 家制度 (family/household system) (43). However, “Meiji ideologues who created and enforced the idea of the *ie seido* represented it as Japan’s traditional family system, but in fact it was a modern construct” (44; for more see Ueno, *Modern*). In the *ie seido* 家制度 (family/household system) “women functioned as little more than items of exchange between families, place markers, or ‘borrowed wombs’ (*karibara*) for the production of sons” (44). In this context, the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母) emerged, as a slogan promoted by bureaucrats in the Meiji government that shaped the relationship between women and the state (Koyama 11; Hara; Uno). It aimed to “advance” the role of women through assigning female bodies the function of “reproduction through

family structures” (Orbaugh, *Japanese* 336). Therefore, the *ie seido* 家制度, in connection to the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母), and the notion of *katei* 家庭 (home) that it entails, “worked together to keep women’s roles limited to the home and family” (Orbaugh, “Gender”47).

“The good wife, wise mother” became a paradigm of womanhood, and as such, it has been subject to criticism within Japanese feminist critique, and has often been tackled by Japanese women writers (See Koyama; Ueda; Ueno, *Kindai and Modern*). According to Orbaugh, “fiction by women in the prewar period was in explicit response to the gender and family structures imposed in the modern period” (“Gender” 48). This was the case of writer and poet Yosano Akiko 与謝野晶子 (1878-1942) who started her career as a tanka poet—often centered on her own body and desire—then published a collection of essays—*隅より Ichigū yori* (From one corner) published between 1909-1911, in which she engages in “contemporary debates on marriage, motherhood and women’s education” (Yoshio 63).⁹ She was one of the most established authors published in the first issue of *Seitō* 青鞞 (Bluestocking), which provided this journal with credibility as a “literary magazine” (Yoshio 82). *Seitō* (Bluestocking)—the first feminist journal began by Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚らいちよう, usually spelled 平塚らいてう, 1886-1971) as a literary group, published between 1911 and 1916—was the center of discussions about “chastity/prostitution, abortion and other forms of birth control (all of which were illegal at

⁹ Yosano Akiko was a mother of eleven. Her unconventional depictions of pregnancy as embodied experiences are important throughout her oeuvre. For example, her poetry collection *Midaregami* みだれ髪 (*Tangled Hair* 1909; trans. 2012); her essay “Ubuya monogatari” 産屋物語 (Tale of the birthing room, 1909/1911); her autobiographical essays “Sanjoku no ki” 産褥の記 (Record of my confinement (or childbirth), 1911) and “Sanjoku beki” 産褥別記 (A supplemental record of my confinement, 1911); and her essay *bosei henchō wo haisu* 母性偏重を排す (Overcoming the preponderance of motherhood, 1916) (Seaman, *Writing* 7; Bourdaghs 9; Morton *Alien* chap. 3). In fact, Morton writes: “it is fair to say that until the emergence of Itō Hiromi in the 1980s, no other female poet (or Japanese poet of either sex) had written with such realism and power about childbirth” (Morton, *Alien* 84).

the time), and the balancing of motherhood and other types of works” (Orbaugh, *Japanese* 337; see: M. Suzuki 10-12). It was not easy to challenge the status quo; articles that seemed to threaten the “good wife, wise mother” ideal faced censorship (337). Moreover, women writers who did not comply with what was expected from a woman writer were subjected to criticism “that either diminished or completely erased a woman’s literary output” (Harada 5).

According to Bourdaghs, the so-called “pure literature” (*junbungaku* 純文学) was an unstable ideological field: “masculine literature, both as gender and genre, could only aim at identity by distinguishing itself from its various others, so that the ground of its identity lay outside itself” (117 qtd. in Hemmann 11). Therefore, “women’s literature” (*joryū bungaku* 女流文学) was “marginalized in order to serve the center, which consisted of national, masculine, pure literature (*junbungaku*)” (11). In addition, female characters and themes related to “women’s literature” were also “downplayed at the expense of male characters and themes” (11). In its origins, “women’s literature” (*joryū bungaku* 女流文学) was “limited by romantic standards of realist literature; namely, male critics defended the position that women should write about their experiences of being a women, which are centered around their bodies and their families” (Hemmann 17). “Women’s literature” (*joryū bungaku*) was supposed to be “sentimental lyricism, and impressionistic, nonintellectual, detailed observations of daily life” (Ericson, “The Origin” 101; Harada 5). Yet, despite the aforementioned censorship and the limitations inherent to the categorization of “women’s literature” (*joryū bungaku*) in terms of style and themes, for the years that followed, many Japanese women authors refused to fit the established standards and wrote beyond its conventions (Hemmann 17). They managed to publish literature that offered a poignant social critique on ideal womanhood, and motherhood.

The Women Writers Association (*Joryū bungaku kai* 女流文学会) formed in 1936 was an important event in the history of women authorship from wartime to postwar periods, partly because it granted “official recognition of women’s writing through the establishment of the Woman Writer Prize (*Joryū bungaku shō* 女流文学賞) in 1946 and the publication of the *Gendai joryū bungaku zenshū* 現代女流文学全集 (Anthology of Contemporary Women’s Literature) series in the 1950s” (Yoshio 273). Writers Uno Chiyo 宇野千代 (1897-1996), Hirabayashi Taiko 平林たい子 (1905-1972), and Enchi Fumiko 円地文子(1905-1986) were presidents of this Association (Yoshio 273). These authors, next to Hayashi Fumiko 林芙美子 (1903-1951), can be considered the main figures of an earlier group of writers who questioned the traditional *ie seido* (family/household system) and the restriction of women to the dual roles of wife and mother.

Okamoto Kanoko 岡本かの子 (1889-1939) is another important writer that slightly precedes this group, but because of her relatively early death she is not represented in the Occupation-period and subsequent fiction (Orbaugh, *Japanese* 351). Okamoto’s novella *Boshi jojō* 母子叙情 (Lyricism between mother and child, 1937), partially published in English as “A Mother’s Love” (1982), and her short-story “Sushi” 鮓 (1939) explore feelings of longing and nostalgia for her son, thus it provides the mother with an uncompromising voice as she depicts both erotic and masochistic fantasies (Taniguchi, “Maternal” 14). In addition, *Shōjō ruten* 生々流転 (Wheel of life, 1939) also displays the theme of maternal love and motherhood (M. Suzuki 119). In this novel, “the quest for true female identity leads to the discovery of an ordinary mythic self, a transcendent national identity created through mythic narrative” (129).

A study of female embodiment and subjectivity in Japanese literature certainly finds Enchi Fumiko’s post-war literature captivating. Her writings are characterized by depicting

the psychological interiority of her characters in connection to the shared experience of being a woman in modern Japan (Cornyetz 101). According to Orbaugh, Enchi's *Onnazaka* 女坂 (The gentler slope 1949-1957; trans. *The Waiting Years*, 2002) and *Onnamen* 女面 (Female masks 1958; trans. *Masks*, 2005) are “direct attacks on the slow but devastating effects on women of marriage and patrilineal culture, even when those marriages were superficially successful” (“Gender” 50).¹⁰ Actually, Enchi uses the trope of the “dangerous women” to debunk the myth of ideal motherhood (Cornyetz 102-103; Hemmann 14). Enchi's *Hebi no koe* 蛇の声 (The snake's voice, 1970) and *Onnamen* (*Masks*, 1958) are exemplary texts in which she reconfigures the mother-daughter relationship against the societal expectation of “good wife, wise mother.” Enchi's female characters are not naturally nurturing, but rather angry, jealous and abject characters, hence she appeals to the “trope of vengeful otherness” (Hemmann 14). *Onnamen*'s inter-textuality with *The Tale of Genji* is worth highlighting as it depicts the “theme of spirit possession explored in the Lady Rokujo section...to weave a complex tale of female revenge against men” (Napier 81). Another interesting feature of Enchi's work is her depiction of menstruation, which stands out in a long history of silences around menstruation. Enchi uses grotesque and horrific imagery, “in contrast to the stereotype of Japanese women as subdued and delicate” (81). In agreement with Cornyetz's conclusion, “Enchi's literary metaphor of blood, or inhabitation of the extant troping of dangerous women, frames resistance within the logic of phallogentric difference” (154).

A later wave of women writers that played an important role in the history of Japanese literature and set the tone of the literary climate of women authorship in Japan includes:

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that in both of Enchi's Japanese titles of *Onnazakka* 女坂 (literally “woman's slope” meaning “the easier or gentler slope”) and *Onnamen* 女面 (“female masks, specifically used in noh theatre by female impersonators), the kanji for *onna* 女 “woman” stands out. The English translations do not reflect the underlying focus on women captured by the Japanese.

Ōba Minako 大庭みな子 (1930-2007), Kōno Taeko 河野多恵子 (1926-2015), Takahashi Takako 高橋たか子(1932-2013), and Kurahashi Yumiko 倉橋由美子 (1935-2005), among others. This later group can be considered more explicitly feminist as their works were published in the 1960s and 1970s. Bullock points out that the so-called *nikutai bungaku* 肉体文学 (“literature of the flesh”)—a genre that emerged in the late 1940s focusing on “physical and carnal experiences”—is “one obvious genealogical source for the literature of the body produced by women writers of the 1960s” (34).¹¹ The 1960s and 1970s came to be known as “Little Heian” and 才女時代 *saijo jidai* (age of talented women)—a term initially coined by literary critic Usui Yoshimi 臼井吉見 in 1957 when referring to Sono Ayako’s 曾野綾子 (b.1931) Akutagawa prize nomination for her novel *Enrai no kyakutachi* 遠来の客たち (Guests from a distant place, 1954)—because women writers began to earn prestigious literary awards that had previously been awarded largely to male authors (Jones 221).

To illustrate the crucial change in women’s authorship and its reception, let us look at the list of recipients of the Akutagawa Prize—awarded twice a year to talented and promising authors. From its inception in 1935 until 1963 we find only three women authors: Nakazato Tsuneko 中里恒子 (1909-1987) in 1938; Shibaki Yoshiko 芝木好子

¹¹ *Nikutaibungaku* 肉体文学 (literature of the flesh) is often included in Postwar literature from the Occupation period. Its major themes concern carnality, desire and sexuality as a means for liberation (Jacobs 16). Its origin is tied to Tamura Taijirō’s (田村泰次郎, 1911-1983) publication of a series of stories and texts in which the word *nikutai* 肉体 stands out in their titles. For example, “Nikutai no mon” 肉体の門 (The gateway of the flesh, 1947); “Nikutai no akuma” 肉体の悪魔 (The demon’s flesh, 1947); “Nikutai wa ningen de aru” 肉体は人間である (The flesh is human, 1947)—among others (Igarashi 55; Jacobs 9-10). Other representatives of this genre are: Sakaguchi Ango 坂口安吾 (1906-1955), Ikeda Michiko 池田みち子 (1910-2008), Sono Ayako 曾野綾子 (b.1931), Hiroike Akiko 広池秋子 (1919-2007), Nakamoto Takako 中本たか子 (1903-1991), Shibaki Yoshiko 芝木好子 (1914-1991), Saegusa Kazuko 三枝和子 (1929-2003) (For more see: Igarashi; Slaymaker; Jacobs). Also, Inagaki Taruho 稲垣足穂 (1900-1977), Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970) and Takahashi Mutsuo 高橋睦郎 (b.1937) have been associated with this genre (Angles “Penisism”).

(1914-1991) in 1941; and Yuki Shigeko 由起しげ子 (1900-1969) in 1949 (Jones 221). However, in the 1960s and 1970s these statistics were significantly surpassed, starting with Kōno Taeko 河野多恵子 (1926-2015) in 1963; Tanabe Seiko 田辺聖子(b.1928) in 1964; Tsumura Setsuko 津村節子(b.1928) in 1966; Ōba Minako (1930-2007) in 1968; Yoshida Tomoko 吉田知子 (b.1934) in 1970; Yamamoto Michiko 山本道子 (b.1936) and Gō Shizuko 郷静子 (1929-2014) in 1972; Hayashi Kyōko 林京子 (b.1930) in 1975; and Shigekane Yoshiko 重兼芳子(1927-1993) and Mori Reiko 森禮子 (1928-2014) in 1979 (Jones 221-222). The growth of literary prizes awarded to women authors represents a positive change in the ways women writers and their works were being received by their contemporary readership. The change is not only quantitative but also qualitative in terms of themes and styles that perhaps resonated more with the 1960s and 1970s audience (Jones 221). Actually, Jones asserts that women's writing from these decades:

Seems to be a search for delineating a revised identity more befitting the new age. The quests on which these women embark range from self-discovery to outright rejection of social or cultural norms. The use of deviant modes of behavior seems intentional, however, and reflects a deliberate effort to defy norms or at least force readers to reconsider preconceived notions of femininity and womanhood. (224)

Women writers were not only writing critiques but also portraying alternatives to the idealized womanhood and motherhood rooted in the “good wife, wise mother” ideology. In general, the women writers from this “boom” depicted single women or women who actively rejected the predetermined paths of heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Also included were women characters with fantasies of infanticide, or women who embraced

their sexual desires, sexual fantasies, among others. Kirino, Itō and Kawakami echo all of these themes in their works.

Amongst the more radical and feminist authors of these decades we find Kōno Taeko (1926-2015), Ōba Minako (1930-2007), and Kurahashi Yumiko (1935-2005) who featured “utopian and fantasy worlds, parody, satire and a focus on the grotesque” (Jones 223). Kōno, Kurahashi, Takahashi, and Tomioka Taeko 富岡多恵子 (b.1935) often display single women without children or violent mothers (223). Actually, Bullock’s study about the authors Kōno, Kurahashi, and Takahashi and their feminism claims that their contributions “to emerging feminist discourse helped to lay the theoretical groundwork for a more explicitly political ‘women’s lib’ in the following decade” (5).

Beyond, or rather on top of, the biology of the female body and the maternal body, “there was the social expectation that made the role of bearing and raising children a woman’s sole *raison d’être*” (Copeland, “A Century” 13-14). As Nakayama argues, the myth of motherhood is understood as “the male illusion that woman, as the child-bearing sex, symbolizes the fruitful earth goddess who is irrevocably tied to her sex. [It] suggests a longing for the eternal maternal among men and shows itself in the male wish to return to the womb, the root of life” (147). This myth is also a “problematic male paradigm” dismantled by several women writers (Copeland, “A Century” 14). In order to challenge this myth of motherhood, women authors often portrayed “extreme examples of ‘maternal animosity’” (14).

Next, I will introduce a selection of literary texts by authors of the aforementioned “boom” or *saijo jidai* that are exemplary in demystifying the myth of motherhood. For instance, Takahashi’s *Kanata no mizu oto* 彼方の水音 (The faraway sound of water, 1971) challenges conventional ideals of the maternal body and “maternal love” through her depiction of abject and devil women. Here, female characters hate their daughters,

sisters and other relatives and fantasize about killing them (Nakayama 147). A fact worth highlighting is that, “the protagonist who during the course of her daughter’s onset of menses vividly smells her own reeking menstrual body odor, keeps away from and even feels the impulse to kill her daughter, and she does so in her imagination” (148). The strong depiction of menstruation and fantasies of infanticide resonate with the depictions of mother/daughter plots in Kawakami’s *Chichi to ran* and Itō’s “Killing Kanoko.”

Also, Saegusa Kazuko 三枝和子 (1929-2003)’s “Osanai, utagoeiro no chi” 幼い、歌声色の血 (Blood, the color of a childish singing voice, 1968) and “Tsuki no tobu mura” 月の飛ぶ村 (The village of the dancing moon, 1979) also portray fantasies of infanticide, feelings of hatred towards one’s own children, unwanted children, and violence towards the maternal (Nakayama 148).

Kōno Taeko’s debut story “Yōjigari” 幼児狩り (Toddler-Hunting, 1961) features a woman who is not “fit to be a mother and is somewhat relieved at the thought that she cannot have children” (Ariga 357). The protagonist has a strong aversion towards young girls and a strong interest in young boys. In fact, boys are the object of her sadistic desires, boys who are also “chastised by their fathers” (357). Ariga points out that women with no children of their own who fantasize about boys are recurrent in Kōno’s works, and that “both the aversion toward girls and the excessive pedophilic interest in boys do their part to turn the myth of motherhood on its head” (358).

When Kōno writes from the position of “woman-as-subject,” Ōba specifically writes from the position of “mother-as-subject” (Orbaugh, *Ōba* 266). Ōba’s “San biki no kani” 三匹の蟹 (Three crabs, 1968), “Funakui mushi” ふなくい虫 (Ship-eating worms, 1969) and “Haha no yume” 母の夢 (A mother’s dream, 1978) display protagonists whose “self-consciousness”—regardless of being housewives and mothers—is not

connected to their “husbands, children, relatives, or the friends who surround them” (Nakayama 147). According to Nakayama, “she essentially calls into question all kinds of relationships that make the task of bearing and raising children through the social system of marriage the reason for women’s existence” (147). In addition, Ōba’s “Yamanba no bishō” 山姥の微笑 (The smile of a mountain witch, 1976) challenges maternal love and “debunks the myth of the good mother and the obedient daughter” (Wilson 105) as it unfolds an ironic premise: “every woman must become a mountain witch in order to fulfill her role as wife and mother properly” (Napier 84).

To round up, the female protagonists of the literary texts published between the 1960s and 1970s “struggle to redefine the boundaries of their identities as women and who position themselves outside of these socially accepted normative feminine identities” (Quimby 18). The mentioned authors often focus on “maternal animosity,” showing “a hostile stance towards both children and motherhood itself” (McKinlay par.9). The 1970s and 1980s also marked the rise of feminist discourse, and Japanese literature by women writers “began to describe the experience of women—especially the themes of sexuality, pregnancy and erotic desire—with a frankness rarely seen in the past” (Angles, “Translator’s Introduction” vii). Hence, women writers from previous generations paved the way for contemporary authors to play a more visible and leading role in the literary scene while introducing new themes and expressions.

Already in the 1980s the term “women’s literature” (*joryū bungaku*) was considered obsolete, and feminist critics reevaluated the gendered history of literary criticism (Yoshio 274). For example, in their book *Danryū bungakuron* 男流文学論 (On men’s literature, 1992) authors Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako 小倉千加子 and Tomioka Taeko coined the term “*danryū*” (男流) as an ironic opposite to “*joryū*” (女流) and they looked at the canonical works by male authors from a gendered perspective within the literary critique

(Copeland, “A Century” 3; “Women” 206; Yoshio 274-275). The existence of the category of “women’s literature” can only exist in opposition to “men’s literature,” yet this latter category did not exist as such. Therefore, when “treating male authors to the same kind of essentialist criticism female authors had been receiving for decades, these critics accentuated the unreasonableness of the exercise, while simultaneously opening the texts to new perspectives” (Copeland, “Women” 206). As Ericson explains, “the widespread rejection of the term ‘*joryū*’ and its associated cultural baggage,” led to the “adoption of new terminology” that “helped to recast how the works of female authors were written and read” (Ericson, “The Resisting” 114).

In contemporary Japan women authors are increasingly publishing works, and gaining more and more recognition, so it simply does not make any sense to group all women writers together. They are a heterogeneous group, and the opposition between male authors and female authors is outdated and obsolete. Hence, as Yoshio points out, “there is a need for a reconfiguration of the gendered category that emerged and developed in the social, economic, and political contexts of the 20th century” (275). However, the grouping of certain women writers persists as a marketing strategy in bookstores, and as a subject of study in academia—including this very dissertation.

Therefore, the need to return to the issue of choosing only women writers in this dissertation: I would like to make a point against essentializing and reifying an author’s gender, and thus, a work of literature or an author should not be judged solely based on their gender. In addition, I would like to underline that I talk about particular women writers, a group of women writers, some women writers—I cannot make universal claims as they are not representative of *all* women writers. However, as long as women continue to be excluded from literary canons, from translation and publishing projects and literature reading lists, and/or continue to endure institutionalized sexism by the media, particularly

writing about and promoting women's writings not only champions their writing and makes them visible, but also counteracts sexist literary and critical conventions.

Gender is still a useful category to approach the history of literary production and reception as it unmask the bias of mainstream literature in a system that follows the patterns of inclusion-visibility versus exclusion-invisibility. Gender imbalance still permeates many aspects of Japanese society and culture, including the literary scene. That being said, "women's literature" should never be a fixed, static category, a literary genre or a writing style, because it will always fail to recognize the diversity of literature produced by many different women authors. As Moi stresses: "the whole point, after all, is to *avoid laying down requirements for what a woman's writing must be like*. Every writer will have to find her own voice, and her own vision. Inevitably, a woman writer writes as a woman, not as a generic woman, but as the (highly specific and idiosyncratic) woman she is" (268).

1.5. Introducing the authors

Kirino Natsuo (b.1951) born in Kanazawa, and Itō Hiromi (b.1955) born in Kumamoto, with only four years apart from each other evidently belong to the same generation. Both authors certainly challenge ideals of womanhood, motherhood and gender systems, yet there are significant differences regarding their literary influences and circles, their body of work in terms of genre and style, and their literary production and reception. The third author in this selection is Kawakami Mieko (b.1976), born in Osaka, roughly twenty years after Itō and Kirino. She started her career as a songwriter and a singer. She is both a poet like Itō, and a popular entertainment writer like Kirino. Despite their age gap, they have all witnessed Japan's transformation into an aging and low-birth

society, known in Japanese as *shōshikōreikashakai* 少子高齢化社会, and have tackled its effect on the position of women in society in different ways.¹²

Kirino has a law degree from Seikei University, and worked at different jobs in Japan before launching her career as a writer of fiction (*Bubblonia*; Seaman, *Bodies* 19). Initially, she wrote romance novels and received the Sanrio Romance Prize for *Ai no yukue* 愛のゆくえ (The method of love, 1984), she wrote two more romance novels before shifting to crime fiction, which was what marked her literary success (Seaman, *Bodies* 19; Hemmann 20). When locating Kirino's writings within a larger group of women's writers, it is important to recognize that she is part of the larger boom of detective fiction by women in the late 1990s, next to authors like Miyabe Miyuki 宮部みゆき (b.1960) and Nonami Asa 乃南アサ (b.1960) (Seaman, "Cherchez" 188; *Bodies* 19).

Kirino is quite a prolific author: she has written over thirty novels, four short story collections, and several essays. She is well known inside and outside of Japan, and a few of her works have been translated into multiple languages. She has published and received recognition steadily. With the reception of important literary awards she stands out within the Japanese literary scene. Her debut crime novel *Kao ni furikakaru ame* 顔に降りかかる雨 (Rain Falling on My Face, 1993) won the Edogawa Rampo Prize. Her novel *OUT* (1997; trans. 2003) received the Mystery Writers of Japan Award, and the Best Japanese Crime Fiction of the Year in 1998 (*Bubblonia*). The English translation of *OUT* received a nomination in the category of best novel for the Edgar Allen Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America in 2004, which definitely raised her international reputation (Hemmann 20). Kirino cannot be reduced to the label "mystery writer" as she is often

¹² Since the "1.57 shock" in 1990—Japan's lowest recorded total fertility rate—extensive research on Japan's low birthrate and aging population has been done in different fields (Moriki 27). For more on these issues see: Moriki; Atō.

characterized abroad because of the limited translated sample of her oeuvre, because her works span over a wide range of themes and genres, and she is a laureate of several prizes outside this genre as well (Costa).

She received the Naoki Prize in 1999 for *Yawaraka na hoho* 柔らかな頬 (Soft Cheeks, 1999) and the Izumi Kyōka Prize for Literature for *Gurotesuku* グロテスク (Grotesque 2003; trans. 2007) in 2003 (*Bubblonia*). In 2004, she received the Shibata Renzaburo Award for *Zangyakuki* 残虐記 (A record of atrocities), and in 2005 the Fujinkōronbungei Prize for *Tamamoe!* 魂萌え! (2005). *Tokyo jima* 東京島 (Tokyo Island, 2007/2008) received the Tanizaki Jun'ichiro Prize in 2008 (*Bubblonia*). In 2009, she won the Murasaki Shikibu Prize for Literature for her novel *Joshinki* 女神記 (The goddess chronicle 2008; trans. 2013), an award exclusively for women authors (and an example of how gendered categorizations of literature are still in effect). Copeland's translation of *The Goddess Chronicle* was awarded a 2014-2015 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Translation Prize (Copeland, "Angry"). Kirino's novel *Nanika aru* 何かある (Something there, 2010) won the Shimaserenai Bungakushō in 2010, and the Yomiuri Literature Prize in 2011 (*Bubblonia*). In 2015 Kirino Natsuo received the *Shiju hōshō* 紫綬褒章 (Medal with purple ribbon)—one of the Medals of Honor awarded by the Japanese Government to individuals for scholarly or artistic achievements ("Sakka, Kirino"; "Summary").

When it comes to her literary inspirations or authors she admires, Hayashi Fumiko (1903-1951) is perhaps the most cited. Hayashi is the protagonist of Kirino's *Nanika aru* and in an interview she said: "I still repeatedly read Fumiko Hayashi's *Floating Clouds*. It is enlightening" (Costa). Other names she has mentioned in a couple of interviews include: Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970), Tanizaki Jun'ichiro 谷崎潤一郎 (1886-1965),

Murakami Ryū 村上龍 (b.1952), Kazuo Ishiguro (b.1954), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964), Anne Tyler (b.1941), Stephen King (b.1947), Patricia Highsmith (1921-1955), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014), Manuel Puig (1932-1990), and Agota Kristof (1935-2011), (Schreiber; Costa).

Kirino's work has been subjected to extensive literary and academic criticism, yet academic articles on *Tokyo jima* are still scarce (except for Iyotani Toshio's 伊豫谷登士翁 interest on issues of immigration and mobility raised by the novel). Some international scholars of Kirino's work are Rebecca Copeland, Amanda Seaman, Lisette Gebhardt, Lianying Shan, and she is featured in several doctoral dissertations on Japanese literature in a major or secondary way. For example, Kathryn Hemmann's dissertation focuses mainly on Kirino's work. Her work has been reviewed by multiple Japanese scholars such as Sasaki Atsushi 佐々木敦, Saitō Minako, Saitō Tamaki 斎藤環, Iyotani Toshio, and also, in volume 17 of the series *Gendai josei sakka dokuhon: Kirino Natsuo* 現代女性作家読本-桐野夏生 (A reader of contemporary women authors: Kirino Natsuo, 2013) we find commentaries by Kurata Yōko 倉田容子, Kuroiwa Yuichi 黒岩裕市, Kobayashi Ichirō 小林一郎 among others. It also includes a section by Okazaki Akiho 岡崎晃帆 "Kirino Natsuo shuyō sankō bunken" 桐野夏生主要参考文献 (Main references on Kirino Natsuo) in which the main books, essays and articles by Japanese authors on Kirino's work are compiled.

Next I will introduce Itō's career. She specialized in Japanese Literature at Aoyama Gakuin University. While still a student, her University professor Atsumi Akiko together with Mizuka Mineko published a magazine *Feminist*, and Itō also worked with them ("Personal"). She would deliver the magazine to different "women's lib" centers in Tokyo. These interactions with different feminists definitely influenced her launching of feminist

poetry and made her part of the literary scene already in the late 1970s and early 1980s (“Personal”). In 1975 she was already a contributing writer at the poetry magazine *Gendai shi techō* 現代詩手帖, and by 1978 she was awarded the Gendai shi techō Prize for her collection *Sōmoku no sora* 草木の空 (Sky of plants, 1978) (Quimby 17). In 1979 she published a second volume of poetry *Hime* 姫 (Princess). In 1980 she published *Itō Hiromi shishū* 伊藤比呂美詩集 (Collected poems of Itō Hiromi) and in 1982 she published *Aoume* 青梅 (Unripe plums). Her reputation as a “woman poet” (*josei shijin* 女性詩人) grew and became one of the major representatives of the wave of “women’s poetry” in the 1980s (Quimby 19).

Her subsequent poetry collections *Teritorī ron 2* テリトリー論二 (On Territory 2, 1985) and *Teritorī ron 1* テリトリー論一 (On Territory 1, 1987) focused largely on the experiences of the female and maternal body (10). In a way, the body as written by Itō can be viewed as a territory explored and inhabited by the poet. In 1993 she published *Watashi wa Anjuhimeko dearu* 私はあんじゅひめ子である (I am Anjuhimeko), which consolidated her reputation not only as a poet but also as a performance artist (Angles, “Introduction” 11). In this same year, she was also nominated for the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Kazoku āto* 家族アート (Family art). After moving back and forth between the United States and Japan, in 1993 she finally moved to California, which coincided with her shift from poetry to prose and the theme of migration and language became an important feature of her works. She published the novella *Hausu Puranto* ハウス・プラント (House Plant 1998; trans. 2007), which was a finalist for the Akutagawa Prize. The next year, her novel *Ra nīnya* ラニーニャ (La Niña, 1999) received the Noma Literay Prize, and was also nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. More recent awards include the Takami Jun Prize for *Kawara arekusa* 河原荒草 (Wild grass on a riverbank 2005; trans. 2015) in

2006, which marked her return to poetry (Itō, *Onna* 224). She also won the Hagiwara Sakutarō Prize (2007) and the Izumi Shikibu Prize (2008) for *Toge-nuki: Shin Sugamo Jizō engi* とげ抜き新巢鴨地藏縁起, (*The thorn-puller: new tales of the Sugamo Jizō*, 2007) (224). Extracts of this novel have been translated into English and published in *Monkey Business* magazine. In 2015 she received the Tsubouchi Shōyō Grand Prize from Waseda University. She is the fifth winner of this relatively new prize established in 2007, whose list of winners include prominent contemporary writers such as Ogawa Yōko 小川洋子 (b.1962), Noda Hideki 野田秀樹 (b.1955), Tawada Yōko 多和田葉子 (b.1960) and Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (b.1949) (“Daigokai”).

Itō has had conflicts with the gendered categorization of literature, especially during the 1980s “women’s poetry boom” in which she “insisted on being recognized as a poet without the delimiting adjective ‘woman’ that might pigeonhole her work” (Angles, “Introduction” 10). Itō did not like the label “feminist” either when she was in her twenties or thirties, even though she was a good friend of important feminist figures, like Tanaka Mitsu 田中美津 (b.1943) (“Personal”). Itō thought publishing industries were using gender as a marketing strategy, selling “women poets.” She believed the consequences of this would be a society that then expects them to be a certain type of “women writers:” “young, cute, skinny and writing about sexuality” (“Personal”). Hence, she felt very strongly against being put in the box of women poets. She wanted to be free, on the same grounds as her male counterparts, and wanted to say: “I’m a poet, like you” (“Personal”). Now, after living in the United States, she embraces feminism; in her own words, “now I can say I’m a feminist, hundred percent, why not?” (“Personal”). Now, Itō is a well-established writer, with more than thirty titles to her name. She travels back and forth between the U.S. and Japan, and has active twitter and Facebook accounts. This makes her

an accessible writer who interacts with her readership, and often participates at talk events and readings. In 2016, her works were published in Swedish and Norwegian translations.

When it comes to her literary inspirations or authors she admires, we can mention Siv Cedering Fox (1939-2007) as the one who inspired her to use direct and strong language when it comes to depicting bodily experiences and sexuality (“Personal”). Itō also read Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), and mentioned that she was almost afraid of his texts, and that she loved the uncontrolled speed of his writing (Schunnesson). Her interests bring together Japanese classics with Native American oral traditions. She read the Japanese classics *Kojiki* 古事記 (trans. *The Kojiki: The Record of Ancient Matters*, 1968) and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), and in their modern translations she finds that they are essentially works of poetry. In addition, her strong interest in Native American poetry emerged since she read Kanaseki Hisao’s translation *Mahō toshite no kotoba* 魔法としての言葉 (Words as magic, 1988), which, in her opinion, resonates with the same poetry found in contemporary renderings of Japanese classics (“Personal”). She was also influenced by Hagiwara Sakutarō 萩原朔太郎 (1886-1942) and Miyazawa Kenji 宮沢賢治 (1896-1933), and she mentions that before starting to write she had not read much contemporary poetry, but mostly classics (“Personal”). Even today, when asked about being compared to other contemporary women writers she says that once she has gotten around to reading them, she has been impressed by Kawakami Mieko (b.1976), Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美 (b.1958), Ogawa Yōko (b.1962) and Tawada Yōko (b.1960), but she does not regularly seek new authors to read. In fact, she says that Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922) is probably the more recent author she reads (“Personal”). Itō’s work has received academic attention, especially from a gender and sexuality criticism point of view. Some of the scholars of Itō’s work are Tsuboi Hideto 坪井秀人, Ueno Chizuko,

Leith Morton, Jeffrey Angles, Joanne Quimby, and Ellen Crystal Tilton-Cantrell, to mention a few.

Kawakami Mieko (b.1976) made her literary debut with her prose poem “Sentan de sasawa sasareruwa soraewa” 先端で、さすわさされるわそらええわ (In the forefront, pointing and being pointed at, that’s just fine, 2006) when Kirino and Itō were already well-known and established authors. Yet, her incursion into mainstream literature was fast-paced, and she has produced valuable literary work in the course of only ten years. Her first novella *Watakushiritsu in ha, mata wa sekai* わたくし率 イン 歯一、または世界 (My ego ratio, my teeth, and the world, 2007) received the first Tsubouchi Shōyō Prize for Young Emerging Writers from Waseda University in 2007 (*Mieko Kawakami*). Her second novella *Chichi to ran* 乳と卵 (Breasts and eggs, 2007/2008) won the Akutagawa Prize in 2007, granting her a solid space within today’s literary scene, and it has already been translated into several languages (*Mieko Kawakami*). Her collection of prose poems—*Sentan de sasawa sasareruwa soraewa* 先端で、さすわさされるわそらええわ (including her literary debut one, therefore the title)—received the prestigious Nakahara Chuya Prize in 2009 (*Mieko Kawakami*). Her first full-length novel *Hevun* ヘヴン (Heaven, 2009) has been acclaimed and earned both the MEXT Award for New Artists and the Murasaki Shikibu Literary Prize in 2010—a prize Kirino Natsuo won two years before. In 2013 Kawakami’s poetry collection *Mizugame* 水瓶 (Water jar, 2012) received the Takami Jun Prize—the same prize Itō Hiromi won seven years before. In 2013, her short story collection *Ai no yume to ka* 愛の夢とか (Dreams of love, Etc.) was awarded with Tanizaki Jun’ichiro Prize—the same prize awarded to Kirino’s *Tokyo Jima* in 2008 (“Authors, Mieko”). Her landmark works, *Chichi to ran* and *Hevun*, have not been translated into English yet, so perhaps she is best known among English readers for

her novellas *Dreams of Love, etc* (2013) and *March was Made of Yarn* (2012) which appeared in *Granta Magazine* (Abe Auestad 2). In fact, in 2016 she was selected as one of the “Granta Best of Young Japanese Novelists 2016” with her story *Marī no ai no shōmei* マリーの愛の証明 (Marie’s love proof), and the same year she received the Watanabe Junichi Literature Prize for her full-length novel *Akogare* あこがれ (Longing, 2015) (Mieko Kawakami).

Despite her comparatively “short” literary career, she has also gained national and international recognition and stands on similar grounds as Kirino and Itō. Nowadays she writes regularly on her blog what she calls her *Junsui hisei hihan* 純粹悲性批判 (Critique of pure pathos), a pun on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, written in a colloquial style (Selden and Mizuta xxi). Quite recently, Kawakami’s work has caught the attention of both social and literary critics and scholars, such as Matsumoto Kazuya 松本和也, Fuse Kaoru 布施薫, Kurumisawa Ken 榎沢健, Abe Auestad Reiko, Fujita Hiroshi 藤田博史, and Gitte Marianne Hansen, to name a few, and the number will likely increase.

When it comes to Kawakami’s literary influences, it is worth highlighting Higuchi Ichiyō, both in terms of style and content. In an interview, Kawakami mentions that when she was nineteen she read Matsuura Rieko’s 松浦理英子 translation of Higuchi Ichiyō’s “Takekurabe” たけくらべ into modern Japanese, and it marked a turning point in her life: her deep admiration for the writer and the translator (also a writer) motivated her to become a writer herself (“Sakka no”). Other influential authors she read at the time include Nagai Hitoshi 永井均 (b.1951), Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (1902-1983), Jerome David Salinger (b.1919), Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), Itō Noe 伊藤野枝 (1895-1923), Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), Tanizaki Jun’ichiro (1886-1965), Paul Auster (b.1947), Kōda Aya 幸田文 (1904-1990), Takeda Yuriko 武田百合子 (1925-1993) (“Sakka no”).

When it comes to contemporary authors, she truly admires Tawada Yōko (b.1960) and says that she has had a major impact in her professional life, comparably to Matsuura's translation ("Sakka no"). As for poetry, Kawakami mentions Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933), Nakahara Chūya 中原中也 (1907-1937), Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), Tanikawa Shuntarō 谷川俊太郎 (b.1931), Arakawa Yōji 荒川洋治 (b.1949), and also Itō Hiromi (b.1955), Sagawa Chika 左川ちか (1911-1936), Tomioka Taeko (b.1935), Kitazono Katsue 北園克衛 (1902-1978), Tamura Ryūichi 田村隆一 (1923-1998), Nishiwaki Junzaburō 西脇順三郎 (1892-1982), and Hachikai Mimi 蜂飼耳 (b.1974) ("Sakka no"). Finally, Kawakami also underscores *Finnegans Wake* and "Penelope" in *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1882-1941), and how thanks to Yanase Naoki's 柳瀬尚紀 (1943-2016) translations she was able to connect with such a far-away literature, in a similar fashion as with Higuchi's "Takekurabe" ("Sakka no").

As mentioned, Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami are successful writers, and we may even say that they are part of mainstream literature because they are recipients of prestigious literary awards, with translations into different languages, and have been the subjects of social, literary and academic criticism. As noted, authors posing similar questions and addressing similar themes in the Prewar, Occupation and Postwar periods were considered to some extent marginal, or were simply dismissed (Ericson, "The Origins" 76; 100). However, at the same time, Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami do not occupy a central place in studies of Japanese literature either. They are excluded from main anthologies of Japanese literature in English, for example Schierbeck's *Japanese Women Novelists: 104 Biographies 1900-1993*. Also, they are not even referenced once in *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women's Writing*, edited by Rebecca Copeland, and they also go without mention in the *Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, edited by

Joshua Mostow et al. More importantly, they are not studied regularly as part of modern and contemporary Japanese literature curriculums—in which, regrettably, women authors are still a minority. Hence, I believe there is still a need for their promotion and translation, and I am hoping this dissertation will aid in that direction.

Chapter Two

Embodied survival by Kirino Natsuo

2.1. Introduction: demythologizing patriarchy

The work selected for analysis in this chapter is *Tokyo jima* 東京島 (Tokyo Island, 2007/2008), for which Kirino received the Tanizaki Jun'ichiro Award in 2008. It was originally published as a literary periodicals/series (新潮 *shinchō*). The first short episode entitled *Tokyo jima*, gave the name to the whole series, which in the end turned into a novel. This first chapter was intended to stand on its own as a short story, and the fact that Kirino uses the same title for the whole novel allows us to think of the conclusion of this work in terms of both chapter and novel, since they both reach a similar powerful ending: Kiyoko—a non-conventional heroine—escapes from Tokyo Island and chooses her own survival over anything else. Given the nature of the writing process; that is, a serialization, the way that every detail of the story is articulated to produce a sense of togetherness or wholeness is a testament of Kirino's literary genius (T. Suzuki 367). Only this first chapter has been translated into English by Philip Gabriel and published in 2010 by *Granta*. However, the complete novel is available in French, Italian, Polish and Romanian translations. There is also a film adaptation by director Shinozaki Makoto 篠崎誠 in 2010.

In *Tokyo jima* Kirino features a fictional demythologization in which she dismantles myths of beauty, femininity and motherhood, and reveals the problems that emerge from our current conceptions of masculinity and femininity in relation to community building and patriarchal society. In other words, she demythologizes the patriarchal myth: the myth of male supremacy and criticizes the position of women in a male-dominated society.

Furthermore, Kirino addresses issues regarding gender, ethnic/racial and class power structures. In fact, Kirino herself says in an interview regarding her mythical novel *Joshinki* (The goddess chronicle, 2008; trans. 2013), “I have a rather strong desire to see directly the political intentions which were often concealed in so-called ‘Myths’” (Costa). I believe this political intention of unveiling and debunking myths is also present in *Tokyo jima*. By revealing that patriarchy is “historical and contingent” and not an inevitable, natural order (Butler, *Gender* 45), Kirino puts forward a feminist work of demythologization.

Kirino addresses the blurriness of the boundaries between everyday life and extraordinary events (*nichijō/hinichijō* 日常／非日常), between the average and the uncommon (*heibon/hibon* 平凡／非凡) (T. Suzuki 369). *Tokyo jima* features Kiyoko, described as a middle-aged woman who is cast away on a desert island with her (first) husband, Takashi, a former bank employee. Initially, they are alone on the island, but gradually the island welcomes new residents. A group of twenty-three Japanese young men arrive after a storm shipwreck. Two years later ten Chinese men come to shore after being forced to disembark from a ship that sailed away never to come back. Japanese and Chinese—later addressed to as “Tokyoites” and “Hong Kongers” in the novel—do not live together as one community under the same rules, but are rather segregated. Hence, Kirino displays hierarchical structures based on race, class and gender. Kiyoko finds herself being the only woman on the whole island surrounded by around thirty younger men for several years, until a group of seven Philippine women arrives after a storm shipwreck. After their arrival, Kiyoko soon gives birth to twins, Chiki and Chita. As the plot unfolds, tensions between those who want to stay on the island, and those who want to escape grow stronger. In the end, after a deadly confrontation, Kiyoko and her daughter Chita manage to escape, but her son is snatched away and remains on the island. Kiyoko undergoes

several transformations throughout the story: from being an ordinary wife, to having multiple husbands, becoming a mother, among others. The plot development and Kiyoko's bodily and personal transformations go hand in hand.

Tokyo jima is a story about the search for meaning in life, in which one's gender, class and ethnicity matter in the struggle for survival and power on an unidentified Pacific island. This setting is a new take on the real life incident of Anatahan, a Pacific island in the Northern Marianas, where Higa Kazuko (比嘉和子) was the only woman among thirty-one male World War II soldiers who continued to fight after Japan surrendered (Schilling; "Tokyo-jima" 5). Kirino's depiction has been compared to *The Saga of Anatahan* (1953) directed by Josef von Sternberg, which was based on the two memoirs by Maruyama Michirō 丸山通郎, *Anatahan アナタハン* (1951), and a later edition in September 1952, *Anatahan no Kokuhaku アナタハンの告白* (Confession of Anatahan) which included the testimony of another survivor Tanaka Hidechi 田中秀吉 (Schilling).

Kirino's novel is about a group of people building a community, reconstructing a patriarchal society in conditions near to an idea of an "original" state of nature; that is to say, "primitive" and "uncivilized." It is important to clarify that Kirino's treatment of nature is far from realistic but rather caricature-like. Yet, it is about the relationship between human beings and nature, so nature itself plays an important narrative role throughout the novel. Therefore, it is not only a cast away thriller but also, as previously stressed, a myth about the beginnings of (a) society used to demythologize patriarchy. Not only foundational myths but also folklore and literature often feature a woman who disappears into the underworld—women are locked in the chthonic, destined to the realm of death. Thus, the disappearing or missing woman can be considered a recurring motif that constitutes a Japanese cultural paradigm (Kawai 176). However, in *Tokyo jima* Kirino lets Kiyoko live: the woman survives, in fact. Kiyoko shifts from victim to heroine, and

thus, Kirino rewrites the “origin” myth. In other words, female embodiment takes on the task of survival through demythologization. Therefore, *Tokyo jima* gives an account of the power struggles in the face of myth production.

Kirino states that myths are even more important for society as a whole than to human beings individually (“Ningen” 5). She explains that there are arbitrary stories that are necessary to maintain power, and also, that there are stories necessary for human beings in order to live (5). Being aware of the power of stories, the author wants to write stories that people desire to read, stories that somehow people need (5). The creation of *Tokyo jima* is not isolated from Kirino’s general writing process, since she writes several works simultaneously. Therefore, it is possible to identify common elements and echoes between her texts. Besides *Tokyo jima*, her novel *Politikon* ポリテイコン (2011) also deals with the themes of utopia, dystopia, and community building in the absence of love, and also, Kirino identifies reflections of *Tokyo jima* in the writing of *Joshinki* 女神記 (The Goddess Chronicle 2008; trans. 2013) (5). Kirino even feels that, “in that regard, *Tokyo jima* is like the mother of the story that will be born next” (“Ningen” 5; my trans.).¹³ There are loud mythic echoes between these two novels; in *Tokyo jima* she demythologizes the patriarchal myth, and in *Joshinki* she rewrites the myth of Izanagi and Izanami by creating an afterlife for the goddess Izanami.¹⁴ In the original myth, Izanami’s death and Izanagi’s escape

¹³ 「その点では、『東京島』がこれから生まれる物語の母親みたいなもの」 (“Ningen” 5)

¹⁴ Kirino’s novel *Joshinki* (The goddess chronicle, 2008; trans. 2013) can be considered a feminist rewriting of the myth of Izanagi and Izanami. This creational myth found in the *Kojiki* ends with female-goddess Izanami sealed in the Yomi and most of the attention shifts to Izanagi and his offspring—the origins of Japan’s imperial line (Copeland “Angry”). Kirino chooses to look at Izanami’s afterlife instead. In this novel, Namina, a mortal woman, meets goddess Izanami in the underground world after being murdered by her husband. There is a special bond between the two of them as they share a similar pain, holding deep grudges towards their husbands and seeking revenge. Itō Hiromi’s long poem/short story *Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru* (I am Anjuhimeko, 1993; trans. 2009) also draws on the Izanami and Izanagi myth, and on several other figures in Japanese mythology and folklore, relying heavily on the legend of *Sanshō Dayū* 山椒大夫 (Sanshō the Bailiff), and on an oral version of this same legend. Itō tells the story of an abused young girl who is trying to come back to life, looking for a place called Tennoji. On her way, she

indicate “the transcendence of the male over the female and the subordinate position of the act of reproduction and the maternal process generally” (Hartley, “Writing” 293 qtd. in Seaman, *Writing* 5). In both demythologizing works, Kirino gives voice and agency to female figures.

Tokyo jima is literarily influenced by castaway classics such as Verne’s *Two Year’s Vacation* (*Deux ans de vacances*, 1888), Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954), and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (Kirino, “Ningen” 2). However, there are several distinctive features of *Tokyo jima*: the feminist demythologizing enterprise, the depiction of an older, regular-looking woman whose whole existence dramatically changes while surviving on an island, the selfishness required for survival and the uses of irony, parody and the grotesque.

This chapter is divided into three main sections: “2.2. Female sexuality in a patriarchal society” explores themes related to Kiyoko’s sexuality in connection to the construction of a society with patriarchal values; “2.3. Pregnancy and childbirth” focuses on the experiences of Kiyoko’s maternal body and its symbolism in the novel; and finally, “2.4. Resignifying mothering” deals with the subversive quality of Kirino’s narrative regarding maternal love, the naturalization of childbirth and breastfeeding, and the mother-child plots. These sections are followed by the “2.5. Conclusive remarks,” in which I elaborate on the main takeaways from this novel in terms of “embodied survival” from a gender perspective.

encounters a *yamanba* 山姥 (mountain witch) who brings her closer to overcoming her trauma. Kirino and Itō allude to the same myth in radically different ways, resulting in two unique literary retellings. Yet, both authors engage in a similar feminist creative process that denounces and repairs historical silences regarding the female experience, particularly sexuality and childbirth. Both works attempt to understand psychological and cultural aspects of women’s oppression, and provide a literary voice to victims of abuse and betrayal.

2.2. Female sexuality in a patriarchal society

2.2.1. *Kiyoko: a married femme fatale*

The novel unfolds when the lottery to choose Kiyoko's fourth husband is about to start. The narration's perspective shifts through different characters, but it largely relies on Kiyoko, and the time line jumps back and forth constantly, so readers find themselves puzzling out the order of events. Five years prior to the novel's beginning Kiyoko, at the age of forty-one, and her husband Takashi arrive at the island. In the beginning, the island is a symbol of hope, salvation and life. Yet, it gradually becomes an oppressive place from which she hopes to escape. Similarly, at first, Kiyoko is also viewed as the most valuable member of the community and as an object of desire, but gradually, others grow tired of her, and feel a desire to stay away from her. Kirino paradoxically depicts a formerly ordinary housewife, in her forties, who becomes a sex queen that momentarily controls everyone through her sex power (T. Suzuki 368-369).

Takashi dies mysteriously not long after the other Japanese men arrive at the island. Kasukabe, who was having an affair with Kiyoko, is probably the one who pushed Takashi off what will later be referred to as the *sainara* サイナラ (*sayonara*, "farewell") cliff—a symbol of death on the island. Kasukabe becomes Kiyoko's second husband, and their relatively short relationship is mainly sexual—she even refers to him as a "sex machine" (Kirino, *Tokyo* 41). He is also murdered by an anonymous "Tokyoite."

After they both die, she is perceived as a *femme fatale*, *mashō no onna* 魔性の女, who brings death to her men (Kirino, "Ningen" 3). She is not an archetypical *femme fatale* in the sense that she is not "attractive," yet she possesses the most important characteristic of this trope; that is, men are willing to die and kill for her. Consequently, to restrain her power, a rotational lottery system in which Kiyoko herself is the big prize is implemented

to choose her future husbands. Her third husband is Noboru, and her fourth and final one is G.M/Yutaka. Once this system is implemented, men's libido for her gradually weakens. Kirino points out during a conversation with Satō Masaru 佐藤優, the reason men yearn for her in the beginning is not only out of sex lust, but also, out of loneliness (Kirino and Satō).

The *femme fatale* figure engages directly with the vexed question of agency and destiny—a question that pervades the whole novel (Bronfen 105). Slavoj Žižek's differentiation between the classic noir *femme fatale* of the 40s and the new *femme fatale* turns out to be useful to better understand this trope. According to Mary Ann Doane, the *femme fatale* is “frequently punished or killed. Her textual eradication involves a desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject. Hence, it would be a mistake to see her as some kind of heroine of modernity. She is not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism” (2-3). This description fits the classic notion of the *femme fatale*, who Žižek contends is not “simply a threat to the male patriarchal identity” but that actually “functions as the ‘inherent transgression’ of the patriarchal symbolic universe...the figure of the enemy engendered by the patriarchal system itself” (11-12). Female eradication is also a characteristic of foundational Japanese myths; hence, female presence or survival not only threatens but also transgresses patriarchy.

Even if this is partly true for Kiyoko's depiction, given that she is punished and victimized in several occasions throughout the novel, in Kirino's hands the *femme fatale* is not completely eradicated, on the contrary, Kiyoko's personal journey and her problematized agency, can still be read as a subject of feminism. Her demythologization implies letting her heroine survive. Hence, Kiyoko at a number of points in the story is closer to the new version of the *femme fatale*, “characterized by direct, outspoken sexual

aggressivity, verbal and physical, by direct self-commodification and self-manipulation. She has the ‘mind of a pimp in the body of a whore’” (Žižek 11). Žižek’s phrasing evokes the power dynamics of the sex industry between the pimp (often male exploiter) and the whore (female prostitute). Pimping relates to human trafficking and sexual slavery because pimps often control and victimize the prostitute (Kessler 11). By merging both figures, pimp and whore, as well as mind and body, the figure of the new *femme fatale* takes control over her own sexuality. As Kessler writes, the “reclamation of the term ‘whore’ suggests that sex work is empowering” (53).

Bronfen stresses that the *femme fatale* “forces the spectator to decide whether she acts as an empowered modern subject or is simply to be understood as the expression of an unconscious death drive, indeed, whether we are to conceive of her as an independent figure or merely as a figure of projection for masculine anxiety” (114). I suggest that we read Kiyoko as an empowered figure who displays a strong tendency towards survival and life producing drives such as sex. She is both: sometimes “she is punished and the order of male domination is reasserted” (Žižek 12), and sometimes she is a “cold manipulating subject interested only in raw sex, reducing her partner to a partial object” (13). Kiyoko’s agency is problematic: her subjectivity is sometimes caught up in being a projection of male anxiety or an object of their desire, yet she does not renounce to her independence. All in all, I believe that Kiyoko is closer to Jane Caputi’s positive vision of *the femme fatale*, as “an outlawed form of female divinity, potency, genius, sexual agency, independence, vengeance and death power” (328).

The implementation of the lottery system can be read as a parody of the institution of marriage itself, portraying a sort of “trophy-wife” that does not fit the trophy-wife’s profile either; Kiyoko is not young and attractive; moreover, she is marrying men who are younger than her. Kirino leaves us not only with the *femme fatale*’s paradox but also with

the wife's one: here marriage is not only a form of oppression and control, but also a source of power.

According to Copeland, marriage plays an important role in the institutionalization of male supremacy and heterosexuality ("Woman" 259). In her words, "the marriage system requires a woman's sacrifice of subjectivity and agency and then denies knowledge of her sacrifice, creating a myth that would suggest subdued obedience is a woman's natural state" (264). However, the marriage system in *Tokyo jima* requires men to accept Kiyoko as she is. Paradoxically, as men attempt to control Kiyoko, her subjectivity and agency develop, and she never displays an entirely submissive behavior. Therefore, Kirino "rend[s] the myth of perfect wifeliness" that patriarchal society has carefully constructed (258).

Islanders do not want to talk about the *Sainara* cliff nor remember what has happened there: three men lay dead there (Takashi, Kasukabe and Sakai—the only carpenter who died of food poisoning after eating a crab) (Kirino, *Tokyo* 68). Takashi's and Kasukabe's deaths reinforce Kiyoko's identification with the *femme fatale* and display the typical movements of desire and its imitative nature. This particular reading is informed by René Girard's thoughts on triangular structures of mimetic desire—composed by the self or desiring subject, the mediator or model, and the object of desire—and how it fuels envy and rivalry, resulting in violence or death (*Deceit* 11-14). In Girard's words, "the inevitable consequences of desire copied from another desire are 'envy, jealousy, and impotent hatred'" (*Deceit* 41). Kiyoko believes that several men killed Kasukabe together because his corpse was really distant from the cliff. Despite crying in public for Kasukabe, and feeling sad about his death, her grieving coexists with a sense of worth rooted deep inside her because other men are willing to kill for her. Similarly, Kiyoko smiles when she thinks of Takashi's death (Kirino, *Tokyo* 71).

The complexity of her feelings is described in the novel as it follows: “It is my very presence that makes men’s instinct to be exposed. Isn’t being a catalyst, also, what makes women qualified? Precisely because *Sainara* cliff is an outlet of malice, for Kiyoko, it is what reminds her of men fighting, and what excites her. Perhaps this is why, when she thinks of the *Sainara* cliff she secretly wets herself” (Kirino *Tokyo* 71; my trans.).¹⁵ As explained, my reading of Kiyoko is informed by the *femme fatale* trope, as it is the emphasis on her sexual excitement what makes her dangerous. In this sense, female sexuality is depicted as being dangerous to men. Following Žižek, I claim we can identify in Kiyoko an intimate link between death and desire. Hence, *thanatos* (death drive/aggression) and *eros* (life drive/libido) appear not as opposing forces of connection and disconnection—as in Freud’s theories (*Beyond*; “The Ego”)—but rather as inseparable, interwoven forces—closer to Bataille’s reworking of these drives (*Death*) (Žižek 6, 10).

Kiyoko used to be a conventional wife but since setting foot on the island, marriage is not monogamous, and Kiyoko enjoys her sexual freedom. By the time of her fourth wedding she has had sex with almost all Japanese men on the island (Kirino, *Tokyo* 29). Kiyoko’s role on the island is initially defined in terms of male desire, and she embraces this role enjoying being the center of attention. As described in the novel on the day of the selection of her fourth husband: “‘Since today I’m playing the leading part I need to look beautiful’—she murmured, letting out an unconscious smile. But, Kiyoko was always playing the leading part wherever she was” (12; my trans.).¹⁶ Moreover, the narrator wonders: “People dying, hurting. How many women in the world are being yearned for by

¹⁵ 「自分があるからこそ、男の本能が剥き出しにされるのだ、という。触媒として生きるのも女の甲斐性ではあるまいか。清子にとってサイナラ岬は悪意の捌け口だからこそ、闘争する男の姿そのものを思い起こさせる、昂奮させられる象徴でもあった。サイナラ岬のことを考えると、密かに濡れるのは、そのせいだろう」(71)

¹⁶ 「今日は主役なのだから奇麗にしなくっちゃ、と呟いたが、意識せずに笑みが洩れ出ていた。清子はいつだってどこだって主役だった」(12)

men to this point?” (12; my trans.).¹⁷ Therefore, Kiyoko uses her sexuality and gender identity to secure her survival on the island.

2.2.2. *Searching for home*

When all the other Tokyoites give up on the idea of being rescued, they decide to build a new community on their own, and make of this deserted place their new homeland. Amongst the Japanese men we find Watanabe, the *hikikomori*, a misfit of society, even in *Tokyo jima's* society. He lives by himself in Tokaimura, the farthest point of the island all by himself. Tokaimura is filled with yellow tanks containing nuclear waste that have been dumped on the beach, thus *Tokyo jima's* nature is also exposed to outer pollution. Tokyoites named this part of the island “Tokaimura,” and it is a direct reference to the nuclear accidents that happened there in 1999 (Kumagai 51). Underlying this reference, Kirino displays concern about the way humanity has interacted with nature, and a specific warning against nuclear accidents and nuclear waste management in Japan. Yet, in the novel, “Tokaimura” also stands as a possible way out of the island: if boats would come to dispose more waste in the future, then maybe they could be rescued. Perhaps, this is the main reason for Watanabe to live there, which eventually leads to a positive outcome since he is the only one in the whole island that is rescued in this way.

The other Japanese young men are members of the “precarariat,” the so-called working class, they used to be part-time workers for a research project involving wild horses on Yonaguni Island; they were specifically looking for parasites in the manure of horses. Unsatisfied with their job situation, they stole a boat and escaped. However—as nature would have it—a typhoon caused a shipwreck and, with the help of Kiyoko and Takashi, they came ashore.

¹⁷ 「人が死んだり、怪我したり。これほど男に焦がれた女が世界に何人いるだろう」 (12)

In the end, they are the ones who named the island, “Tokyo Island,” a twofold act: showing nostalgia for home, as well as a determination to build a new home. Even though the island has nothing in common with the actual city of Tokyo, they use familiar names from the city and Japan to divide the island: the Imperial Palace, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Odaiba (the island’s harbor), Tokaimura, Chofu, etc. As literature scholar Shan Lianying points out, “through naming, the Japanese not only projected their desire onto the island but also made the unfamiliar space into something familiar” (6). The projected desire can be interpreted as a preference of culture over nature, which is also evidenced in the ways the Japanese interact with the island (6). The Japanese reserved the best parts of the islands for themselves; they were living in “Tokyo,” in the western part of the island. While the Chinese were left with the parts that were more difficult to live in, they were secluded to “Hong Kong,” the eastern part. The division between west and east is not a casual choice, as it denotes hierarchical segregation based on ethnicity. The power system on the island echoes the more general West-East binary, and it also relates to how the Chinese are considered “second-class citizens” in the novel: they were not only abandoned on the island, but also, once there, they were looked down upon by the Japanese (5). Perhaps herein lies a complaint against the real-life treatment of Chinese as second-class citizens in Japan. However, the Hong Kongers are much more skilled with nature than the Tokyoites, and they relate to the natural environment in a more sustainable and productive way. For instance, they managed to make a sun clock, produce spices, and raise wild pigs, among others. These details work within the story plot to depict gendered representations of ethnicity: Chinese handymen, and later in the story, Filipina women singers/entertainers. Hence, Kirino’s portrayal of a hierarchical society deals with the intersections between ethnic minorities, gender and class, and she exploits stereotypical images of Chinese and Filipino citizens held by the Japanese.

2.2.3. *Kiyoko and the island: “eggs”*

The parallel between Kiyoko and the island is rather explicit: “Kiyoko and Tokyo Island were certainly similar. Isolated and enclosed by the impetuous ocean, the island is as severe as Kiyoko. Like the belly button of the ocean, the island is flat, and its shape is as commonplace as Kiyoko” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 161-162; my trans.).¹⁸ Kirino’s imagery does not simply equate Kiyoko and the island, but rather draws a recurrent analogy between the two of them to explain and expand on their particular features. Kiyoko is just an ordinary, regular-looking woman who is alone in an adverse scenario.

The association between Kiyoko and the island echoes the associations between ‘women’ and ‘nature’ that sustain the myth of patriarchy. Yet, this link is the result of modernization and contributes to a set of paradoxical norms that women face in contemporary Japan (Hansen 37). As, Ueno points out: “in modern industrialized society, woman is assigned *nature* as opposed to *culture*. In this situation, she has no choice but to either accept her alleged inferiority or hate her own femininity” (172). This link between ‘women’ and ‘nature,’ and ‘men’ and ‘culture’ was the result of modernity and industrialization (*Modern* 172). Hence, Kirino’s parallels are part of her overall demythologizing strategy of the patriarchal myth.

Drawing on Shan’s interpretation, Kiyoko and the island are treated similarly by men: men want to take advantage of the natural resources and the environment, just as they want to do with Kiyoko’s body and her sexuality (7). This can also be read through Ueno’s gendered view on industrialization, as a process in which “Japanese people destroyed nature with their hand...a process of civilization that eventually leads to destruction of the

¹⁸ 「確かに清子はトウキョウ島に似ていた。激しい海流に囲まれた孤島の姿は、たった一人の女として生きる清子の厳しさだった。大洋の臍のような、平べったい島の形は、平凡な容姿の清子と同じ」 (161-162)

female principle” (*Modern* 172). However, in *Tokyo jima* Kiyoko’s survival provides an alternative to destruction. Kiyoko’s role is thus complex and contradictory. Kiyoko is far from being a passive character; she faces dangers, lies, resorts to violence and uses her sexual power to her advantage. She is aware of the important status granted to her by being the only woman on the island, as if she were an endangered species:

I’m the equivalent of the crested ibis of Tokyo Island. When they [the men] grow old and decay on this island, and if they then feel satisfied with the island’s ecosystem that has not been disrupted; it is only because Kiyoko was with them. Accordingly, it is only natural that she is cherished.” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 19; my trans.)¹⁹

Even when Kiyoko transitions from being treasured to becoming a less interesting sexual commodity, and men on the island grow tired of her, the feeling of being the “only one” stays with her until the end of the novel (Kirino, “Ningen” 3-4). Kiyoko’s role on the island is related to the way in which her mere existence protects the ecosystem of the island, which infuses her with self-confidence (3-4). Moreover, her existence merges symbolically with the island itself, and both Kiyoko and the island are needed in order to satisfy men’s needs. In Kiyoko’s case, it is through playing several roles in relation to men—wife, *femme fatale*, whore, mother, and even a sort of goddess—throughout the story (Shan 7).

Despite the sociocultural differences between Tokyoites, Hong Kongers, and later on Filipinos, the island welcomes all of them, regardless of their backgrounds, and it provides them with shelter and food (coconuts, taro potatoes, wild bananas, etc.) (Shan 6): “If we disregard the fact that it is a deserted island, and that nobody will come to their rescue, one

¹⁹ 「自分はトウキョウ島におけるトキである、と。彼らがこの島で老いて朽ちる時、無人島の生態系がいびつではなかったと満足できるのは、清子が共にいたからなのだ。従って、大切にされるのは当然なのだった」(19)

could say it's like a paradise" (Kirino, *Tokyo* 13; my trans.).²⁰ Therefore, the Hong Kongers refer to the island as "the egg," which grasps the natural qualities of the island (50).²¹ Kiyoko agrees on it being a more suitable name than "Tokyo," as she says: "Certainly, the deserted island is also an egg. An organism covered by a shell" (50; my trans.).²² Continuing with the symbolic overlap between the island and Kiyoko, this metaphor is also applicable to Kiyoko herself as a pregnant woman since "eggs" are often representative of female reproduction. In fact, soon after she realizes she is pregnant, she says: "Tokyo itself is an egg. I mean it was one egg. On a desert island, which is only an egg, lives more eggs. How absurd" (82; my trans.).²³

Not only do the Hong Kongers seem to thrive on the island, but Kiyoko too. From the very first part of the novel we know that her body adapts naturally to the island by putting on weight. In fact, she is the fattest on the island, and even in this unlikely scenario on a remote island with strangers, she is fat-shamed. One of the Hong Kongers makes a gesture behind her back with his hands to indicate how fat she was, making others around him laugh (13).

The next passage illustrates Kiyoko's bodily adaptation to the island: "Not even she understands why she is getting fat living in this poverty. It was like her plump body with plenty of fat was a proof that the island's lifestyle fitted her, and she didn't like that. 'Seems you got fat sucking men's energy' —bad-mouthed Watanabe" (13-14; my trans.).²⁴ Kirino uses the word *seiki* 精気 ("vigor," "energy"), and its closeness to the word *seieki*

²⁰ 「無人島で助けが来ないことを除けば、樂園と言えないこともなかった」(13)

²¹ 「ホンコンたちは単に「^{タン}蛋」、つまり「卵」と称していると聞いたことがあった」(50)

²² 「確かに、無人島は卵でもあった。殻に覆われた一個の生命体」(50)

²³ 「トウキョウこそが「^{タン}蛋」。つまり、一個の卵なのだった。卵でしかない無人島に、さらに卵が住む馬鹿馬鹿しさ」(82)

²⁴ 「困窮生活なのになぜ太るのか、自分でもよくわからない。脂肪がたっぷり付いた小太りの体は、島の生活が性に合っていることの証左みたいで気に入らなかった。男の精気で太ったんだろう、と嘲ったのは、口の悪いワタナベだ」(13-14)

精液 (“sperm”) cannot be overlooked. This alludes to Kiyoko’s sexual relations with the men in the island, but it also foreshadows Kiyoko’s pregnancy.

Kiyoko’s bodily transformations epitomize her affiliation with the island, which reaches a peak when she becomes pregnant and gives birth safely to twins. During her twenty years of married life in Tokyo she did not bear any children, in fact, she experienced several miscarriages (Kirino, *Tokyo* 83, 159). Despite her age, her body is even more fertile than before coming to the island: “The island forced my pregnancy as the ultimate symbol of fertility and as a scheme to create additional confusion”²⁵ (162; my trans.). This transformation seems to come independently from her will, hence her *forced* pregnancy problematizes Kiyoko’s very agency. For Kiyoko’s body, life on the island somehow renews her female sexuality and strengthens her reproductive capacities but also displays the interplay between nature and culture, and the tensions between agency and destiny.

2.2.4. Kiyoko: A desiring subject and/or “whore”

Up until her fourth wedding, Kiyoko’s social role is a combination between wife, *femme fatale*—as previously exposed—and also, whore. For example, Inukichi makes her a necklace in exchange for sex—a clear business transaction. Even more so is when she complies with the desires of a masochist man, referred to as Yamada, who, soon after Kasukabe dies, offers a dead mouse to Kiyoko in exchange for sex in which she plays a dominant role—one of the grotesque elements of the story. Even though she does not feel any desire to have sadomasochistic sex, she accepts because it has been too long since she has had any animal protein. This decision highlights the power of Kiyoko’s survival instinct and how sometimes women are driven to use sex as an exploitable commodity.

²⁵ 「島は究極の実りの象徴、さらなる混乱を生じさせる方策、として自分に妊娠を強いたのだ」 (162)

Kirino's depiction of this sexual encounter is rather blunt, which adds to the way she problematizes the connections between sex, gender and power: "As Kiyoko pulled his penis, she threw up on Yamada. Vegetable-only-eating Kiyoko's green vomit was splendidly pored onto Yamada's face. Yamada seemed to think of it as an act of grace and he ejaculated with a joyous expression on his face, but Kiyoko didn't understand at all why she threw up" (70; my trans.).²⁶ Yamada—in spite of playing a submissive sex role—asks for what he wants in bed and enjoys fully. This is the sex-positive premise of sadomasochism: as long as two people consensually agree and enjoy, it can be viewed as an empowering act. However, the situation is not so clear-cut when one person is forced to do it, and does not enjoy it. In Kiyoko's case, she is not forced to do it, because she had the opportunity to say "no," and this is an example of self-determination. Yet, since she does not enjoy it at all, we can interpret her behavior as a detriment to her empowerment. In this case, Kirino puts her finger on the main arguments in feminist debates and views on prostitution.

Even though Kiyoko is far from being a teenager, Ueno Chizuko's thoughts regarding *enjō kosai* 援助交際 (a euphemism denoting teen girls' prostitution) and feminism shed light on the aforementioned tension:

In a limited context, women may make the reasonable decision making, which in turn will end up with reinforcement of the existing power structure. In the short run, it may be girls who gain from this game, but in the long run, it is patriarchy that wins, leaving the assumption intact that a woman's body is served for the male desire as an object. ("Self-determination" 323)

²⁶ 「ペニスを引っ張った途端、清子はヤマダに向かって嘔吐してしまったのだ。植物しか食していない清子の青臭い吐瀉物としやぶつは、ヤマダの顔に見事に引っかかった。ヤマダは恩寵と思ったのか、喜悦の表情を浮かべて射精したが、清子は、なぜ自分が嘔吐したのか、全く理由がわからなかった」(70)

When women sell sex by choice they are asserting the right over their own bodies, and in a way they are challenging sexual norms by defining their sexuality on their own terms, but at the same time, they are being sexually objectified by men, which keeps reproducing an oppressive structure (323). As Ueno notes, “a notion of self-determination obscures the political power structure, where the social resources are disproportionately allocated by gender” (“Self-determination,” 323). In *Tokyo jima* the Japanese rebuild a patriarchal society whose power structure reveals a disproportionate distribution of resources that causes both gender and ethnic inequality.

Prostitution is a recurring theme in Kirino’s work. For instance, *Mizu no nemuri hai no yume* 水の眠り灰の夢 (Sleep in water, dream in ashes, 1995), *Gyokuran* 玉蘭 (Magnolia, 2001), *Gurotesuku* グロテスク (Grotesque, 2003; trans. 2006), and *Riaru wārudo* リアル・ワールド (Real world, 2003; trans. 2008) tend to depict prostitution as an empowering act of self-determination surrounded by misfortunes and with a tragic end, or as the only way for a woman to survive in a patriarchal society (Mochizuki 54). In fact, in Kirino’s oeuvre, marriage and prostitution are frequently opposed. Women decide whether to become a wife or a whore, and the former is depicted as a source of imprisonment and control, while the latter one is portrayed as a route towards sexual freedom (54).

In *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko’s sexuality oscillates between being an empowering act, and being policed by patriarchal power; this oscillation is yet another side of the same vexed question of agency. Kiyoko embraces her sexual desire and enjoys and feels powerful. For instance, when Yan, the leader from the Hong Kongers, comes to congratulate her during her fourth wedding, she feels aroused and fantasizes about his embrace. Yet, she refuses his proposal to be part of the lottery. She is in power. She realizes Tokyoites are not enough for her, as she needs “even more diverse experiences, always with a different man.

She feels that while being the only woman on the island, her existence has become an overflowing, enormous desire, greater than all the men on the island together. Even if she swallowed the whole island, her desire would still be insatiable” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 30; my trans.).²⁷

In this passage, the intensity of Kiyoko’s desire goes beyond the sensation of the sexual, and brings her closer to an experience of the erotic, understood as “a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings” (Lorde, “The Uses” 88). Furthermore, Kiyoko’s desire can be read “as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered” (89). *Tokyo jima* incorporates and problematizes descriptions of desire in close connection to the life instinct or drive (as in Freudian theory). When comparing *Tokyo jima* to proletarian literature, and characterizing this genre as being sensual, Kirino stresses that: “You only have your body. Bodies are reflections of the class system, but this loses its meaning because the body is so desperately bare. Desire is only focused on survival, and this is, in fact, erotic” (Kirino and Satō; my trans.).²⁸ Kirino’s words are aligned with Bataille’s thoughts on eroticism in terms of “assenting to life even in death” (*Eroticism* 11) and nakedness as “a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence” (17). Another example of Kirino’s awareness of “the erotic” and its connection to the life-drive/instinct can be seen in the figure of the “fish Eros” (“*ero sakana*” エロ魚) in the novel. There is not a clear explanation of why, or who started naming the small fish that they could catch around the island “fish Eros”

²⁷ 「もっともっと違う体験。いつもと違う男。この島で唯一ひいいつの女として暮らしているうちに、島にいる男を全部合わせたものより巨大な欲望たぎを滾らせた存在になった気がする。島全部を呑み込んでも足りない欲望」(30)

²⁸ 「持っているものは己の肉体しかない。肉体にだって、階級性が出るものでしょうけれども、それも意味がなくなるほど、ギリギリで剥き出しという感じですね。欲望が生きることのみを集約されているのも、実はエッチなことです」(Kirino and Satō)

(Kirino, *Tokyo* 164). Yet, I believe the name is not a mere coincidence; it can be read in terms of the erotic, as the fish feed them with life force.

In contrast, Kiyoko's sexuality is also being controlled and looked down upon too. In Watanabe's words, "The island's prostitute. A hag, all loose down there, they want to do it with you just because you're the only woman" (Kirino, *Tokyo* 31; my trans.).²⁹ This statement is twofold regarding being a woman: it emphasizes Kiyoko's uniqueness, the "only" one, and it also reproduces stereotypes about an older, sexually active woman. Watanabe and Kiyoko are always in confrontation, and Kiyoko expresses on several occasions that she would never have sex with Watanabe, even though he tried once, and in several parts of the novel hate and desire are depicted as two different sides of the same coin. That said, survival is Kiyoko's priority, and consequently, when she realizes Watanabe knows something related to a possible way of escaping, she offers to have sex with him if he would tell her. Once again, Kiyoko uses her sexuality for her survival. His response is shocking and foreshadows Kiyoko's gradual loss of sexual power on the island: "What do you mean you'll let me do it with you? I'm good now, I don't have to rely on your vagina" (43; my trans.).³⁰ At this point, the reader does not know exactly what Watanabe means, since there are no other women in the island yet, but later on, the reader realizes that Watanabe is referring to same-sex encounters, specifically between him and Inukuchi. Even if the plot heavily relies on hetero-normativity and the gender binary system, Kirino includes depictions of different sexual orientations and gendered expressions that push the boundaries of the system.

²⁹ 「島の娼婦しょうふが。ババアだってあそこが緩くたって、女が一人だっていうから、ちやほやされてんじゃねえの」(31)

³⁰ 「場所を教えてくれない。教えてくれたら」「やらせてくれるってか。もういいっすよ、あんたのマンコに頼らなくたって良くなったんすから」(43)

Kiyoko not only provides men with sex but also with a maternal and spousal figure that responds to their need for connection. By the time of her fourth wedding, Kiyoko understands that men on the island do not need her in the same way they used to. In other words, for Kiyoko the time to find meaning in life beyond sex has come. Here is when she decides to take it upon herself to give GM (husband number four) his memory back. After their wedding, Kiyoko and GM establish a therapeutically, caring relationship, and “Yutaka” comes into being—the name chosen by Kiyoko and that will mark his new identity and existence on the island. In a way not only Yutaka is born, but also Kiyoko is reborn into her new spousal/motherly role. In fact, this is one of the few moments in the story arc in which there is love and trust between two people. Kirino describes their sex as love: “Sex was different from Kasukabe’s violent way, and Noboru’s unilateral way, it was tender, and full of love and trust. When Kiyoko got Yutaka as her husband, she decided to cultivate the only thing that was missing on the island. Love” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 40; my trans.).³¹ At this point, in comparison to any other man, Yutaka seems to be the ideal husband (41). Here Kirino separates “love” from “sexual desire,” and associates it with care and trust, instead. Towards the end of the story, Yutaka and Kiyoko are forever separated and they go from love to hate. The text is left open to rethink our own definitions of love, and by placing love outside life on the island, Kirino also distances love from the “natural” realm, and places it into the socially constructed one. Therefore, in *Tokyo jima* both maternal love and romantic love are fictions from civilization.

³¹「交わりは、カスカベの激しいものとも、ノボルの一方的なものとも違い、愛情と信頼に満ちて優しかった。清子はユタカという夫を得て、島で唯一足りなかったものを育む決心をした。愛」(40)

2.2.5. *Kiyoko: victim and traitor*

The island's supplies are limited, and Kiyoko's survival instinct is stronger than her love for Yutaka. The Hong Kongers have built two boats out of the "waste cans" at Tokaimura, and are ready to escape. Yan, the Hong Kongers' leader, makes it clear that he will only accept Kiyoko in and no other Japanese, leaving her beloved husband Yutaka out of the escape plan. Here again Kirino works through gendered depictions of ethnic tensions.

Yan gazes at her erotically. Kiyoko has a premonitory thought and wonders if they will rape her and then throw her off the boat. She wonders whether this is an opportunity to be saved or a faster track towards death (Kirino, *Tokyo* 45). As the Hong Kongers and Kiyoko are leaving, they look at the island from a distance and notice that the island's shape can be compared with an "older woman's breasts: flat and floppy" (42; my trans.).³² Yet again, Kirino's novel is rich with symbolic references that juxtapose both Kiyoko's body and the island, and, in turn, portray the island as a mother.

As mentioned, when Kiyoko was in a position of power she refused having the Hong Kongers take part in the lottery to be her husband, and she had even fantasized about Yan. Now, on the boat, she is under their control, and specifically under Yan's control. As anticipated by Kiyoko, Yan rapes her several times in those two weeks. The first rape scene describes how she takes a mango, and then Yan slaps her in the face, so the mango falls, then he picks it up and hands it back to her, then he rapes her from behind (51). This scene displays an abuse of power, and how he decides what he gives to and takes from her. Yan is completely selfish and abusive:

³² 「トーカイムラ沖合いから見る島は、老婆の乳房のように平べったくてだらしがない」 (42)

I guess I'm used to having sex with men I don't like, so I couldn't even cry. He's a dog, a dog. The night of her wedding in front of the Imperial Palace, when Kiyoko felt excited at the thought of being embraced by Yan, is conveniently forgotten. Now only hate lives inside her. Yan wiped his satisfied parts with Kiyoko's dress that is turning into a rag, after leaving a big amount of semen inside her body. (*Tokyo* 51-52; my trans.)³³

In this rape scene Kiyoko's position is that of a victim. It is certainly an event that happens against her will. During these two weeks she loses control and ownership over her body. The lack of consent is what makes this sexual encounter completely different from her previous ones. As with many perpetrators of sexual violence, Yan enjoys impunity, and as with many victims, Kiyoko succumbs to silence.

At the beginning he rapes her twice a day on the boat but then he gradually loses interest, and does not even come near her—which Kiyoko feels thankful for. The other Hong Kongers, perhaps feeling afraid of Yan, do not show any interest in Kiyoko either (52). In this scenario, her sexual power is completely diminished. Cahill explains that rape is,

A violent, sexual, bodily denial and destruction of a person's sexually specific inter-subjective being...in a case of a protracted series of rapes (that is, where a woman is raped continuously over a long period of time), harms may include the destruction of any sense of sexuality at all, or a sexuality that is centered around the familiarity of abuse and violence. (194)

³³ 「好きでもない男との性交は慣れっこなので、涙も出なかった。犬だ、犬。清子は、結婚式の前夜、コウキョ前広場でヤンに抱かれる自分を想像して体を熱くしたことなど都合よく忘れ、嫌悪を募らせた。大量の精液を清子の体内に射精し終わったヤンは、満足げに性器を清子のボロ切れと化しつつあるワンピースで拭った」(51-52)

This description seems to be true for Kiyoko, given that after her pregnancy, which is a direct consequence of Yan's rape, her sexuality and libido disappear. In addition, Kiyoko's silence and impotence, or seemingly accepting attitude towards Yan's violence, is still part of her survival strategy. In Mackinnon's words, "the deeper problem is that women are socialized to passive receptivity; may have or perceive no alternative to acquiescence; may prefer it to the escalated risk of injury and the humiliation of a lost fight; submit to survive" (177).

Kiyoko wonders that if hunger were to strike, they would probably eat her first. Even when there is no food, and despite having lost a little weight while on the boat, Kiyoko is still the fattest (Kirino, *Tokyo* 52). The constant remarks about Kiyoko's body as fat can be read as a redefinition of the meaning of fat. In this context, fat means being fit for survival and reproduction.

When they finally make it to an island, which they initially think is a new island, Kiyoko imagines that if they had Internet she would call her mom, and tell her that she is a survivor (53). I mention this detail because it reminds us that Kiyoko is also a daughter herself. In fact, "mothers are not just daughters first, but they are daughters always," meaning that one's maternal subjectivity is closely tied with one's daughterly subjectivity (Taniguchi, "Maternal" 2). Also, I would like to highlight the word "survivor" since she is not only a survivor in an island, but also a rape survivor, and her identity eventually shifts from victim to survivor. Kiyoko's identity shifts are marks of the storyline that show the multiple transitions within a woman's life.

The hope does not last for long, as they find themselves on the same Tokyo Island. Yet, even if it had only been two weeks, Tokyo Island is not the same, and the Hong Kongers' fate, as well as Kiyoko's fate and social status on the island have drastically changed. In fact, she says: "Have I lost the value attached to the scarcity, to being the only

woman? For Kiyoko, this is synonymous to loss of identity on the island. Kiyoko's body shivered" (Kirino, *Tokyo* 72; my trans.).³⁴ Kiyoko finds herself back where she attempted to escape, in an even lower social status than before she left, as the Japanese are now considering her a traitor. Kiyoko's transition to a new status as a traitor resonates with the racial tension and discrimination faced by prostitutes after World War II, referred to as "pan-pan," "a derogatory term for street prostitutes who (mostly) served the soldiers of the occupying forces" (Sakamoto 1).

2.2.6. On gendered subjectivities: Watanabe and Kiyoko

The novel is premised on Kiyoko being the only woman among a group of men; hence from the very beginning Kirino deals with a gender binary system and works through gender social expectations and roles. Therefore, the role of gendered subjectivity is significant to both Kiyoko's development and depth as a character, and to the plot's development, as well.

Both Kiyoko and Watanabe have a strong will to escape, and the plot is fuelled by this desire (Kirino, "Ningen" 3). Kirino explains that, "there is also the image of Kiyoko and Watanabe, the two of them making a whole. Even if they really despise each other, they are also interested in each other. If Watanabe would have been born a woman, he would probably be a woman like Kiyoko" ("Ningen" 4; my trans.).³⁵ Hence, besides their antagonistic relationship, they actually reflect each other. In Kirino's comment about Watanabe we can notice that even fictional characters respond to culturally charged notions of sex/gender.

³⁴ 「自分はもう、たった一人の女という希少価値をなくしたのだろうか。それは、清子にとって島のアイデンティティの喪失と同義だった。清子は体を震わせた」(72)

³⁵ 「清子とワタナベは、二人で一對なんだ、というイメージがありました。お互い心底嫌いあっているんだけど、気になるところもある。ワタナベがもし女として生まれてきていたら、清子みたいな女だったかもしれません」(Kirino, "Ningen" 4)

At some point in the narrative, Watanabe actually acts like a woman, questions Kiyoko's status as a woman, and in their confrontation we can identify an example of gender conformity (in Kiyoko) versus gender nonconformity (in Watanabe). A gender nonconformist can be understood as "someone who adopts gendered traits that are stereotypically associated with members of the opposite sex," and that "do not adhere to heterosexist notions about appropriate male or female sexual orientation, or sex-based self-definition or identity" (Lester 4).

Watanabe both despises and desires Kiyoko, in a way he desires to be like Kiyoko. When Kiyoko comes back from her failed attempt to escape, Watanabe is wearing her black dress, and says to her: "From now on I'll live as a woman. You're disqualified. You're just a 'horny hag.' You've been sleeping around with the Hong Kongers, you're a 'horny hag' and a traitor. You don't qualify as a woman. Take that off too! You should live naked, like a wild monkey!" (*Tokyo* 85; my trans.).³⁶

It is important to underline that Watanabe is using features of *onna kotoba* 女言葉 "women's language" or "feminine speech:" "*atashi*" (あたし), "*anta*" (あんた), sentence-final particles like "*wa*" (わ), "*yo*" (よ), that are difficult to get in translation.³⁷ My interpretation suggests that he is using *onē kotoba* オネエ言葉: "(queen's language [literally, older sister's language/speech]), a parody of stereotypical women's language that is generally used by *gay* (*gei*) men in a performance of (hyper) femininity" (Maree 67). *Onē kotoba* is often reduced to a reenacting of typical women's speech, yet it can be

³⁶ 「あたし、これから女として生きることにしたのよ。あんたなんか失格よ。あんたは、ただのエロババアじゃない。ホンコンなんかとつるんじゃって、裏切り者のエロババアよ。女の資格ないわ。それも脱ぎなさいよ。あんたは、野生の猿みたく裸で生きるといいのよ」(85)

³⁷ Japanese language has a wide range of specific features (honorifics, morphemes, sentence final particles, verb forms, pronouns, intonation and pitch, among others) that constitute the so-called gender specific speech styles, such as "women's language" or "men's language" (Camp 71). For more on how these speech styles tie into gender norms and expectations see: Maree, Okamoto and Smith.

viewed as a way to challenge gender norms and stereotypes. In fact, Maree notes that it “is an integral part of Japanese queer culture and community formation; it can invoke feelings of belonging despite, or perhaps because of, its potential maliciousness” (80). As we can grasp from the very definition of *onē kotoba* the limits between *onna kotoba* and *onē kotoba* are not objectively distinct. In a way, *onē kotoba* is *onna kotoba*, yet it is used and performed in different ways. Hence, we need to appeal to the speaker’s intentions, their gender identity, sexual orientation and context to claim that Watanabe is using *onē kotoba*. In this particular scene we know he is performing, he does not recognize himself as a woman, but he is parodying women’s stereotypes rather than reproducing feminine norms (Maree 71; Camp 74). Also, since Watanabe has same-sex sexual encounters, he can be read as a gay man performing femininity, which is one of the characteristics of *onē kotoba*. If we take into consideration the author’s descriptions of Watanabe, we know that he is both the antagonist and a reflection of Kiyoko. Therefore, his character blurs boundaries, and exemplifies the possibility of transgressing gender norms. To some extent, Watanabe’s use of *onē kotoba* exemplifies his own negotiation of gender: he is not a traditional, heteronormative man nor a woman—rather we may read him as a gender nonconformist. In addition to his gender and sexual orientation, what defines his use of *onē kotoba* are the elements of parody, performance, and dressing up. He performs the constructed nature of gender expressions and challenges biological myths and binary thought. Furthermore, as Lucy Fraser suggests, “Japanese women writers use language to ‘perform’ the gender of their characters, just as those characters themselves perform gender within these stories” (16).

In the aforementioned passage I identify three elements in connection to the gendered subjectivities and gender performativity displayed in the novel. Firstly, Watanabe’s claims put blame and shame on the victim. In fact, he does not even recognize Kiyoko as victim,

but rather as an agent responsible of her own fate. He loosely links Kiyoko's previous sexual desires to her experience on the boat, of which he knows nothing about. This way of talking resonates with the victim blaming and shaming so common within rape culture.

Secondly, this passage also deals with the question of what it means to be a "woman," and who qualifies. Hence, being a woman is not equivalent to having a female body, but it rather entails behaving according to social expectations and norms that enable self-identification and also external recognition from others as a woman. Watanabe's words convey an ideal of a Japanese woman: somebody who is not a traitor, or who does not sleep around with foreigners. This scene can be read as an example of Fausto-Sterling's main claims, "that labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision" (*Sexing* 3).

Thirdly, this passage questions the flexibility of gender identity. When Watanabe says he wants to live like a woman, he performs gender through speech and clothing, but then he is asked by Yutaka to take off his dress and give it back to Kiyoko. This poses the question: Is gender identity treated as something that we can put on/take off, like clothes? Also, still in connection with one's appearance and gender identity, by asking Kiyoko to live naked like a monkey, attempting to remove her gender identity, we can conclude that there is no gender in nature.³⁸ Rather, we are encouraged to think of gender in terms of a sociocultural construct. In other words, our ideas of both sex and gender develop as we grow, the way we present ourselves, our multiple identifications vary depending on the context and on different situations; identities are not fixed but rather fluid.

Kiyoko's response to Watanabe's attack is also revealing of the intertwined relationship between the biological or sexed body, and gender identity, and problematizes the issue of identity by emphasizing the materiality of the body. She says: "Not only me,

³⁸ This imagery brings to mind one of the most famous American drag queens, Ru Paul's saying: "We're born naked and the rest is drag" (Ru Paul).

but even the child inside me cannot live. Kiyoko surprised herself for already thinking about the fetus. This is what it is to be a woman. Again, feeling an indescribable sense of superiority, Kiyoko sneered at Watanabe” (86; my trans.).³⁹

In this scene, Kirino depicts an opposition between a man impersonating a woman (Watanabe) and a woman who bases her identity on her female body, in this case, on her maternal body (Kiyoko). This, in turn, parallels two different discourses on gender. One is about performativity—understanding gender as a sociocultural construct; the other one is about “natural” coherence—equating gender to the biological sex. The experiences of the female body such as menstruation and pregnancy problematize the former definition of gender, and are often used to reinforce the latter one, creating an essentialist and naturalistic vision of womanhood. However, a closer look at Kirino’s work reveals that this vision of womanhood is also “fictionally” (socio-culturally) constructed.⁴⁰ As Fujimura writes: “just because something is constructed does not mean that is not real” (4 qtd. in Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 273). In general, Kirino’s work shows gender identity in a fluid and performative way, and at the same time, she includes the experiences of the female body, incorporating the materiality of the body into the gender performance. As mentioned, Watanabe plays with gender in a nonconformist way, but it is important to clarify that he is not depicted as a transgendered woman. The questions raised during Watanabe and Kiyoko’s confrontation, however, do open up a space to think about the available stereotypes, and possible tensions between transgendered and cis-gendered women.

³⁹ 「自分ばかりかお腹の子までが生きられない。清子は早くも胎児のことを思う自分にびっくりした。これが女なのよ。またしても、得も言われぬ優越感^わが湧き、清子はワタナベを鼻で笑った」(86)

⁴⁰ Haraway also writes: “the bodies are perfectly ‘real.’ Nothing about corporealization is ‘merely fiction.’ But corporealization is tropic and historically specific at every layer of its tissues” (142 qtd. in Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing* 273).

As Fausto-Sterling points out, the work of Judith Butler “suggests that we look at the body as a system that simultaneously produces and is produced by social meanings, just as any biological organism always results from the combined and simultaneous actions of nature and nurture” (*Sexing* 23). Butler’s work on gender and performativity informs this literary analysis on gendered subjectivity:

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a “one” who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. This is a voluntarist account of gender which presumes a subject, intact, prior to its gendering. (“Critically” 21)

Butler contends that the assertion of gender being performative does not mean that gender is “purely an act of free-will and agency” (Dale 151). Here we find a response to the question of gender being something we put on and take off; gender as a fluid sociocultural construction denotes change but not by a subject on a daily basis, but rather on a sociocultural and historical scale through repetition and citation. In Butler’s words,

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (Butler, *Gender* 34)

For Butler, rather than a noun, gender is more like a verb; always a constructing rather than a construction—this is what entails referring to it as a performance. Gender performativity is directly affected by sociocultural norms of gender: gender stereotypes, roles and expectations. Performances are “fictional,” socio-culturally constructed, and Kirino’s *Tokyo jima* displays gendered subjectivities in terms of performance. Kirino *fictionally* creates a “natural” subject/character, and plays with experiences of pregnancy and childbirth as reifying traits of that natural subject, like Kiyoko. Simultaneously, she also creates “cultural” subjects/characters with diverse gender expressions, like Watanabe.

Drag is one of the clearest examples of pushing the boundaries of the gender system, showing the porosity of categories such as “woman” and “man,” and dismantling the false coherence between sex, gender identity and sexuality:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “woman” (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience, which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.* (Butler, *Gender* 137)

Imitation of gender and gender performance happens both at a conscious/intentional level, as well as at a subconscious/unintentional level. Sonja Dale's clarifications regarding cynical performances are useful for reading both Watanabe's and Kiyoko's imitations of gender:

The individual who performs as a "man" or "woman" in drag, who makes an intentional performance, is a cynical actor. Cynical performance is not limited to the literal stage—a female acting ditzzy in order to avoid a speeding ticket, a male offering to carry his female companion's heavy bags are both examples of cynical performances. As such, such a performance is about recognizing social roles, and performing according to expectations knowingly and with intention. This distinction is important because it allows us to recognize the difference between performativity in the sense of social discourse (sincere), and that of intentional performance (cynic). (Dale 158)

Both Watanabe and Kiyoko move back and forth between cynic and sincere gender performances. Hence, rather than a clear distinction between these two performances, we face more of a continuum between the two (158). Especially Kiyoko's use of her gender and sexuality to secure her survival display a constant interplay between her own intentions and will, on the one side, and the inexorability of her fate, her subjection to nature and to other humans' actions, on the other side.

2.3. Pregnancy and childbirth

2.3.1. Kiyoko's pregnancy: divine and mortal

Pregnancy renews Kiyoko's status on the island, bringing her to a new/better social position. The next passage describes when she finds out she is pregnant:

Suddenly I felt sick. I vomited. I thought I was overly hungry but just looking at a fruit makes me feel sick. My belly is bloated and it hurts. Kiyoko rubbed her belly. This is strange. I have already experienced this sense of discomfort. These are early pregnancy symptoms. From her late twenties until her early thirties, Kiyoko has had three miscarriages. That is why she clearly remembers how morning sickness feels. She had been told by a doctor that it's not easy for her body to become pregnant, and that it is not so likely that she'll be blessed with children, so she had already given up, and had decided to live with Takashi, just the two of them. After coming to this desert island, I had been way too loose, and it can't be that now I'm pregnant, is it even possible? I'll be forty-six by the time I give birth. Also, is this Yutaka's or Yan's baby? I don't know. And she tried to remember when was the last time that her period came. (Kirino, *Tokyo* 83-84; my trans.)⁴¹

There is a connection between Kiyoko and her body; the body speaks and she decodes its signals. This passage also offers a contrast between Kiyoko in the past and in the present, Kiyoko in the city and on the island. In the city, the doctors somehow decided on her body's fertility, now the island seems to decide. In the city, her pregnancies did not thrive, while on the island her pregnancy does.

⁴¹「急に気分が悪くなった。嘔吐。空腹が過ぎたのかと思ったが、果物を見るだけでも気分が悪くなる。下腹も張って痛い。変だわ、と清子は腹を擦った。この違和感は、経験があった。妊娠の初期症状。清子は、二十代の終わりから三十代初めにかけて、三回も流産していた。だから、悪阻の感覚だけははっきりと覚えている。妊娠しにくい体だから、おそらく二度と子供は授からないだろう、と医者に言われて諦め、隆と二人で生きていく決心をしたのだ。それが無人島に来てからの放埒さに輪をかけていたのだが、まさか今頃になって妊娠することがあり得るだろうか。四十六歳にして出産とは。それに、子供だとて、ユタカの子かヤンの子か、わからないのだ(…)最後の生理がいつだったか思い出そうとしていた」(83-84)

Menstruation is barely represented throughout the whole novel, and it is only depicted as an indicator of whether one is pregnant or not. The representation of menstruation in literature is often reduced to this role. Yet, fertilization is not the only purpose of the menstrual cycle; considering that it is not the aim of every fertile woman, especially those actively using contraceptives, for example, or those who do not even think of themselves as being fertile, like Kiyoko (Bobel, *New* 35).

Also, there is the question of paternity; the roles of Yan and Yutaka (Mori Gunshi 森軍司) as possible fathers also affect the plot's development. Kiyoko's situation can be read through Rich's lenses:

A man may beget a child in passion or by rape, and then disappear; he need never see or consider child or mother again. Under such circumstances, the mother faces a range of painful socially weighted choices: abortion, suicide, abandonment of the child, infanticide, the rearing of a child branded as 'illegitimate,' usually in poverty, always outside of the law. In some cultures she faces murder by her kinsmen. Whatever her choice, her body has undergone irreversible changes, her mind will never be the same, her future as a woman has been shaped by the event. (Rich, *Of Woman* 12)

The chapters "Record of the Island Mother" and "Hormone Princess" embody two different attitudes towards her pregnancy: from joy to worry, respectively. Soon after finding out she's pregnant, Kiyoko is filled with joy at her fertility's recovery on the island. Her pregnancy is a "miracle" (167):

I wanted to be worshiped as the only one who achieved this wonderful job of giving birth. For that, it needs to be reinforced through a myth or something, Kiyoko thought suddenly. We must record and pass on the story of a woman, who copulated with the island, gave birth to the child of the island, and

transformed herself into the island. ‘A mother is all that is needed.’ (Kirino, *Tokyo* 171; my trans.)⁴²

Initially, Kiyoko conceives of maternity as divinity, and as a pillar of the future of the island. Therefore she asks Oraga to write the story, the story of the Mother. However, Mori Gunshi 森軍司 (previously known in the novel as GM, and then as Yutaka. His new name also indicates his new position of leadership 軍司 “*gunshi*” “commander”) has already asked him to write the story of the island, the story of the Father. In both requests, the reader senses a tension between mother and father in an almost mythological way: Kiyoko’s transient dream of a matriarchal society versus the actual patriarchal society that is being reconstructed on the island.

“Hormone Princess” is a title that already symbolizes a pregnant woman. The term “princess” is quite ironic here because Kiyoko is far from being the female monarch of the island, even when she claims that her baby is Mori Gunshi’s, the current leader of the island. Hence, the title rather signals to the negative connotations of the word “princess” as an arrogant or spoiled woman, which is an image often assigned to pregnant women. In addition, the mention of hormones in the title and throughout the chapter exposes the physiological dimension of pregnancy. The physiological or material dimension is always embedded with sociocultural meanings, and, in particular, gender meanings. In Fausto-Sterling’s words, “chemicals infuse the body, from head to toe, with gender meanings” (*Sexing* 147). The so-called “sex hormones” have been categorized into a false dichotomy: “female” (estrogen and progesterone) and “male” (androgens, like testosterone) (Fausto Sterling, *Sexing* ch.7; Caplan et al. 66). This leads to several misconceptions such

⁴² 「子産みという素晴らしい仕事を成し遂げた自分だけが、崇め^{たてまつ} 奉られたかった。それには、神話か何かで補強する必要がある、と清子は唐突に思った。島と交わり、島の子供を産んで、島と化した女の物語を書いて伝承していかねばならない。「母親しか要らない」(171)

as the belief that women are driven by hormones and that the “female-hormone-impelled behavior is crazy; therefore the normal female is ‘naturally diseased’—or at least irrational” (Fausto-Sterling, *Myths* 99 qtd. in Caplan et al. 66). Therefore, we face the association between hormone-based “craziness” and “irrationality” with menstruation, pregnancy, postpartum and menopause.

The truth is both of these hormones exist in *all* sexes. Moreover, these hormones are growth hormones, or “multise chemical growth regulators” that affect our liver, muscles, bones and other tissues, thus their impact goes beyond their role in our reproductive system (*Sexing* 147). As Fausto-Sterling explains: “hormonal systems, after all, respond exquisitely to experience, be it in the form of nutrition, stress, or sexual activity (to name but a few possibilities). Thus, not only does the distinction between organization and activational effects blur, so too does the dividing line between so-called biologically and socially shaped behaviors” (*Sexing* 232). Therefore, to understand our behavior and our bodily experiences we need to always consider both the physiological or biological, and also, the sociocultural—but not as two separate dimensions but as mutually shaping ones.

There is an emphasis on the physical changes of the pregnant body: Kiyoko’s belly has come out and her lower abdomen feels hard. One of the first things she notices is the cravings for sugar, cold drinks, frozen tangerine, vanilla ice cream, cold cucumber, among others (Kirino, *Tokyo* 209). Her pregnancy is not only a physical but also an emotional and mental journey. She constantly thinks about the meaning of her pregnancy in relation to the current situation on the island:

Until recently, I was excited to think that my pregnancy is the island’s will, I will give birth to the island’s kid. I will become the mother of the island. I wonder where my excitement went. At that time I felt so much happiness, but was it the hormones’ fault? This strong desire to drink something cold

and sweet, also the hormones' fault? I'd better hate the hormones. No, I'd better hate this deserted island. (*Tokyo* 210-211; my trans.)⁴³

Kiyoko is aware of the impact the hormones are having on her attitudes, thoughts and actions. Yet, the way she asks the question—"is it the hormones' fault?" (*horumon no sei ka* ホルモンのせいかな)—puts in evidence the negative mythology of hormones associated with pregnancy, as "hormonal hurricanes" or "hormonal and emotional basket cases" (Fausto-Sterling, *Myths*; "Biology"). The emphasis on the hormones and the island's will problematizes the question of agency. Her bodily changes are both cause and effect of her presence on the island. We can elicit that it is an unwanted pregnancy that escapes her will, or perhaps, that her will in this matter is irrelevant. Pregnancy can be a decision but it is rarely lived as such. In fact, "for the vast majority of women in the world today, and even for many women in this privileged and liberal society, pregnancy is not an experience they choose" (Young 47).

Also, she feels that the decision of being pregnant, or to continue with her pregnancy falls into the island's hands or will. Both are recurring thoughts throughout the narrative. Kiyoko then, locates her pregnancy at two levels (micro and macro): at her body, affected by the hormones, the personal, and at the island, the social dimension. As Fausto-Sterling writes: "hormone levels, behaviors, and social circumstances interact in complex ways that produce embodied gender" ("Biology"). It is within these levels that more tensions between biology/nature (the hormones, the psychological/physiological experiences), culture/society (the island, social reality or circumstances) and agency (her will, dreams, actions) develop:

⁴³ 「ついこの間まで、妊娠は島の意志だ、自分は島の子供を産むのだ、自分は島母とうぼになるのだ、と昂揚していた気分はどこにいったのだろう。あの時の多幸福感は、ホルモンの為なせる業だったのだろうか。冷たくて甘いものを飲みたくて堪たまらないのも、ホルモンのせいかな。憎むべきはホルモン。いや、憎むべきはムジントウだ」(210-211)

What makes me angriest is that it is myself that got pregnant. It was really stupid of me to feel all excited about proving my *raison d'être* as a pregnant woman... Giving birth on this desert island is just an act of madness. I thought it's still safer to abort, and I tried to hit this belly that is sticking out with rocks, but I remembered when a cousin had a miscarriage and she lost so much blood, she almost died. That was awful, so I put away the rocks. Until recently, my pregnancy was the island's will. Until recently, I was so happy telling everyone on the island that, but now, I have this dark feeling inside, like I'm the person who'll die first. Is it the hormones' fault? No, it isn't. I'm just following the normal logic. (*Tokyo 211*; my trans.)⁴⁴

Kirino tackles the theme of agency through addressing issues surrounding miscarriages, abortions and unwanted pregnancies. Kiyoko's story is part of a larger picture of women's history, actually, "most women in history have become mothers without choice, and an even greater number have lost their lives bringing life into the world" (Rich, *Of Woman* 13). When Kiyoko says repeatedly that her pregnancy is the island's will, she is also saying that this pregnancy is against her own will, or that whether she wants it or not, she will still be pregnant. In this excerpt she considers, momentarily, putting an end to her pregnancy. Abortion is understood as a *voluntary* termination of her pregnancy. Hence, a pro-choice perspective focuses on a woman's autonomy and ability to choose—in other words, in her agency. The anecdotal reference about Kiyoko's cousin embodies the realities of multiple women who have suffered hemorrhages during miscarriages, and also

⁴⁴ 「最も腹が立つのは、妊娠した自分だった。妊娠で存在意義を示せると意気込んだ自分はおお鹿者おおしかものだった ... 無人島で出産するなんて、狂気きやうきの沙汰さただった。流産の方がまだ安全かも、と突き出してきた腹を石で打とうとしたが、従姉妹いとこが流産した際に大量出血で死にそうになったことを思い出し、それはまずいと石を捨てたりもした。ついこの間まで、妊娠は島の意志だったのよー、と皆に触れ回ったほどの幸福と充実があったのに、今は、自分が真っ先に死ぬ人間であるかのような暗い気持ちになるのは、ホルモンのせいかな。いや、違う。正常な思考の回路だ」(211)

during abortions or births. In this way, Kiyoko's train of thought allows us to think of these experiences not merely as isolated, individual situations, but also in terms of social and public health issues. This is why sexual and reproductive rights are a vital part of the feminist agenda.

Initially, Kiyoko links her ability to create life with pride and divine power, and later, she connects giving birth with her own mortality. She is aware of the possible consequences connected to a "high-risk" pregnancy. In fact, she bluntly says:

The next person to die is me, no doubt about it,' Kiyoko thought. 'As the only woman on this island, I will lose my life while giving birth.' 'That will also become a myth,' she thought for an instant, but immediately, she sputtered: 'This isn't a joke. Kiyoko (bled to death).' She cried out loud.

(212; my trans.)⁴⁵

Kiyoko's fear of dying is grounded on the actual number of women who die during pregnancy or while giving birth, especially in precarious conditions, as "maternal mortality remains a major challenge to health systems worldwide" (Hogan et al. 1). In fact, "everyday, approximately 830 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth," and "99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries," since "maternal mortality is higher in women living in rural areas and among poorer communities" ("Maternal Mortality"). Japan, however, is a successful example of maternal mortality reduction. In 1950, Japan had a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of around 180 deaths for every 100,000 live births, and already by 2004/5 the MMR dropped to 6 deaths (per 100,000 live births) (Graham 1). Japan's health system excels in ensuring the safety of mothers throughout pregnancy and childbirth, as well as in infant care.

⁴⁵ 「次の死人は間違いなく自分だ、と清子は思った。島のたった一人の女として、出産で命を落とすのだ。それも神話になるかもしれない、と一瞬思ったが、すぐに、冗談じゃねーよ、と吐き捨てた。清子（大量出血死）。げーっと清子は声に出す」(212)

Hence, Kiyoko's fear of dying is not only related to her age, but also to not being in Japan. This means she is not in a place where she can have the adequate support and conditions to give birth in. This aspect is paradoxical since her pregnancy and birth actually succeed on the island and not in the city. Here, Kirino addresses the fragile and blurred boundary between birth/life and death (Kirino, *Tokyo* 308-309). Kiyoko's fear underlies her growing anxiety regarding the development of her pregnancy: "And my belly will just keep coming out. How will a baby get out of here? I can't really imagine. Oh, time passing by is scary" (212-213; my trans.).⁴⁶ Here again, we can identify the tension between one's physicality and bodily determination versus one's agency. At this point she cannot do anything to stop the inevitable growth of the fetus.

Kiyoko is making a tremendous effort to make sense of her overwhelming new reality, and is able to look at "how things are." We can thus interpret that she is negotiating her new role as a mother-to-be. She is not only questioning the biology of motherhood, but also the context in which the pregnancy is inscribed.

2.3.2. *The island's mother: meanings of space*

In the beginning of her pregnancy the other Japanese men on the island are kind to her, and provide her with rainwater and food. But as her pregnancy advances, nobody seems to want to go near her due to her emotional instability. Kiyoko becomes quite explosive and irritable. She has been harvesting feelings of anger and hateful thoughts towards the men on the island and towards herself.

For example, when Manta (a Japanese person with a double personality—he and his dead sister), comes to talk to her about the place where the baby is supposed to be born,

⁴⁶「それでも腹はせり出してくる。どうやって、ここから赤ん坊が出てくるのか、想像もつかない。ああ、時間が経つのが怖ろしい」(212-213)

they feel quite scared to talk to her. When they ask her how she is doing, she complains about her big belly and how everyone else is busy doing other things (Kirino, *Tokyo* 213). During this conversation, “the little girl was gone, and then, the witch appeared. This is also the hormones’ fault” (213; my trans.).⁴⁷ This is an example of Kiyoko’s mood swinging between opposites: “little girl” versus “witch,” and these are associated with the hormonal roller coaster—or “hormonal hurricane,” to borrow Fausto-Sterling’s phrasing—pregnant women are expected to experience.

Manta tells her that, in agreement with Mori Gunshi, they think she should give birth at the *Star House Temple* and he asks her to come and take a look at the place herself (215). This is Kiyoko’s response:

‘Why do I have to give birth in a deep cave?’ Kiyoko thought outraged, but just a while ago she’d been obsessed with the fear of her own death, and now she could feel a little bit of relief. ‘If I was to give birth holding somebody’s hand, even if he is a bit cold, it would have to be Yutaka’s. Yutaka already has a daughter back home and he’s the only one on this island with some experience. Out of curiosity, and at the thought of getting some help, Kiyoko decided to go and take a look at the temple. (*Tokyo* 216; my trans.)⁴⁸

We can elicit from Kiyoko’s response that childbirth is something she would rather not go through entirely alone. Childbirth is a personal experience, nobody else can give birth in our place. Yet, the role of midwives, doctors and birthing partners, as well as hospitals or

⁴⁷ 「幼女は引っ込み、魔女が顔を出す。これもみんなホルモンのせいだった」(213)

⁴⁸ 「何であたしが深い洞窟で子供を産まなきゃならない、と清子は理不尽に思ったが、つい先程まで死の恐怖に取り憑かれていたことを思うと、安堵感もなくはなかった。誰かの手を握って子供を捻り出すのなら、少々冷たいヤツだとは思いますが、ユタカ以外にいない。ユタカには郷里に娘もいるから、この島で唯一の子持ち経験者でもある。清子は好奇心も手伝って、寺院を見に行くことにした」(216)

birthing houses, has been and still is highly appreciated and needed. Childbirth is definitely one of those experiences that highlight our vulnerability and dependency, but also our bodily agency and capability. In this novel, Kirino underscores the importance of the place where one gives birth, not only for the birthing mother but also for the myth's construction.

Once they arrive, Kiyoko finds out that the temple is not a wide and fresh place; it is, in fact, a deep cave. Kiyoko feels outraged, just the thought of getting inside there with a big belly puzzles her. She confronts Manta and asks why she should give birth in such a place—a hole, with snakes and bats to keep her company (217). Manta explains that they found out that this place has both male and female deities: a phallic-shaped rock/stalactite, and a vagina-shaped rock/stalactite. One has the shape of the sun (it is a 'sun shaped root'), and the other one is dark, and deep. Kirino's imagery builds on the male/female binary and its subsequent dyads: light/dark, clean/polluted, hard/fluid, active/passive. Manta thinks she should give birth in the female-shaped place, because she is a woman, so it suits her. However, "Mori Gunshi is cautious, he thinks the decision of where to give birth must be carefully made because it will determine Tokyo Island's concept. So, it's better to do it under the phallus" (218; my trans.).⁴⁹ Even Kiyoko's pregnancy is used as a means to fortify the island's patriarchal system. Mori Gunshi is the current leader, and his stand privileges the masculine, and symbolizes the construction of a patriarchal society.

In relation to the "birthing room/hut," 産屋 *ubuya*, we can identify that as her pregnancy progresses, the symbolic bond between Kiyoko and the island strengthens:

My pregnancy is Tokyo Island's will—Kiyoko had previously said. So your baby would be no other than this island's baby. So, you will be the island's mother. This means it's your communion with the island to produce this

⁴⁹ 「森軍司は慎重でして、どちらを産屋として選ぶかで、このトウキョウ島のコンセプトが決定される、というのです。だから、陽根の下ですべきだと」(218)

baby. So logically speaking, it's best if you give birth under the giant penis-shaped rock. (218; my trans.)⁵⁰

Through Manta, Mori Gunshi tells Kiyoko what to do and what she will become, thus attempting to control the female body. It is a struggle of power between the masculine and feminine, between father and mother. Here, she is subjugated to the male power of the island. Kiyoko is considered not analogous to the island, but she is actually engaging in a deep sexual exchange with the island. In this exchange, the island represents the overarching power of nature. The reference to Kiyoko's pregnancy as the island's will emphasize that 'she has no say,' it is nature's course, so to speak. Kiyoko acknowledges the patriarchal power of the island and this is reinforced through the allusion to the phallic symbol. This represents a traditional view of birth, "the union of male and female, from which something new will be born" (Kawai 178).

In this discussion, Kirino is evoking the Japanese traditional notion of *ubuya* 産屋 "birthing huts." According to Tonomura, in postwar historiography the references to *ubuya* "serves as proof that birthing women were seen as polluted. In this view, the *ubuya* is an instrument built to isolate the source of contamination to prevent it from spreading to the rest of the community" (5). Its usual representation "emphasizes its oppressive physical isolation, the misery of its occupants, and by implication the polluted status of women" (4). Kirino's depiction of the *ubuya*, however, displaces the notion of pollution with sacredness, as it is described as a temple with both female and male deities. Yet, the element of oppressive isolation persists.

⁵⁰ 「以前、清子さんはご自分の妊娠はトウキョウ島の意志である、と 仰おっしゃったことがありますね。生まれてくる子供は、他ならぬ島の子供である、と。ご自分は島の母である、と。ということは、トウキョウ島と合体して子供が生まれる、ということでもあります。論理的には島の陽根、つまり巨大ペニスの下で産んだ方がいい、ということになりますかね」 (218)

Kiyoko is not only worried about dying from a hemorrhage while giving birth, but also worried about giving birth in such a small, enclosed space, which might induce a claustrophobic experience. Manta even says: ““would you even fit in there with such a huge belly?’ (Just going inside makes me feel tiresome)” (219).⁵¹ Here we can note that Manta and Mori Gunshi are suggesting/choosing the place in which she is supposed to give birth, yet they cannot relate to what the experience would be. No wonder Kiyoko feels outraged, since even the thought of going inside the cave while pregnant is tiring. It is far from being a comfortable or ideal place to give birth in; it is almost like a punishment.

The origins of the *ubuya* can be traced back to ancient myth, as it is a powerful motif of the myths of “Izanami and Izanagi,” and the “Toyotama Princess” in the *Kojiki* (Tonomura 7). In the footnotes of the English version of the *Kojiki*, regarding Izanagi’s sentence of building one thousand and five hundred parturition huts every day, Phillippi explains that,

In ancient Japan childbirth, as well as menstruation, were regarded as pollution, and the pregnant and menstruant woman was required to live in a building apart from the main dwelling and to eat food prepared separately. In many localities until the Meiji period, pregnant and menstruant women were segregated in separate buildings as a matter of course, and some of these houses may still be seen today. (66)

According to Tonomura, “the *ubuya* trope is a totalizing discourse that fuses the analytically distinct notions of women, pollution (*kegare* 汚れ), parturition, isolation, misery, and disempowerment into an unbroken circle of timeless Japaneseness that is tangibly confirmed by its very physical form and ontologically sustained by its imagined mythical origin” (7). Kirino’s treatment of the place in which Kiyoko is supposed to give

⁵¹ 「「あんな中にでかい腹で入るのかい。」(入るのめんどくさいなという気持ち)」(219)

birth draws on this trope. Despite its prominence throughout Japan, the *ubuya* had different characteristics depending on the region. For example, in Shino Island in Mikawa Bay, Aichi Prefecture, women would give birth in their own house, then move to the *ubuya* with the baby for a month, or a month and a half (Segawa 54 qtd. in Tonomura 6). The *ubuya* was built besides the *kariya*, the menstrual hut, and it was removed after its use (Tonomura 6). Tonomura refers to a topographical record from the Tokugawa period in relation to the Southern islands, originally cited by Segawa:

In each of the villages of the island, on the mountain side away from houses were built several thatched structures with no floor. Menstruating women and women in their full term of pregnancy entered them and stayed there, menstruating women for eight to nine days and expectant women for more than fifty days. During this time, women had no communication with family members. Even if their father or mother were ill, they could not look after them. Even if the woman herself became deathly ill, her child could not come see her. Many women felt miasmatic, some died, some developed chronic illness, and young women invited sexual misconduct. (6)

The fact that women were separated into parturition huts to give birth or during their menstrual period means that it is the female reproductive power that becomes the reason for their exclusion or separation, which is an extension of the link between women and the underworld, also found in ancient myth.

In *Tokyo jima*, this link is also addressed when Kiyoko fears that: “If I give birth to a girl, I think they will kill us both. Oh, they will probably confine my entire life to the vagina-shaped cave. In the middle of the white cliff, Kiyoko remembered the mouth opening of the cave, and trembled” (227; my trans.).⁵² The interpretation of this passage

⁵² 「もし、生まれてくる赤ん坊が女の子だとしたら、自分たち母子は殺されるかもしれな

can be twofold. Firstly, Kiyoko's thoughts echo the figure of women and the chthonic. I believe there is a connection between Kiyoko's references to her fear of dying while giving birth and being confined to the cave, with Japan's creational myth of Izanami and Izanagi. When female goddess Izanami gives birth to the fire god, she dies, and is sealed forever in the Yomi; it is childbirth and its connotations to pollution that becomes the reason for her confinement to the dark underworld (Philippi 55-58). Kiyoko's fear of being confined to the dark cave for giving birth to a girl can be read as an extension of the cultural paradigm of the disappearing woman.

Secondly, Kirino depicts a still pressing psychological anxiety caused by rampant gendercide or femicide in patriarchal societies. Many girls and women still end up in the realm of the dead, thus, the disappearing woman acquires a contemporary transnational relevance. When Kiyoko fears they will kill both her and her daughter, she hints at the realities of infanticide: "Infanticide has been practiced throughout human history in societies where boy children are valued, economically and socially above girls" ("Executive" 6). In most parts of the world being born a girl is already a disadvantage. More over, there are still societies in which sex-selective abortion, infanticide, severe malnutrition, and medical neglect are common causes for the elimination of females ("Frequently"). In fact, according to the United Nations Population Fund, "today, more than 117 million women across Asia are "missing", and many others are missing in Eastern European and Caucasus countries as well" ("Gender-biased"). Therefore, girls and women are not only symbolically missing, but also, demographically. Missing is a euphemism: "if they are 'missing,' then they have been killed, or they have died through neglect and mistreatment" ("Executive" 1).

い。いや、女陰の部屋に一生閉じ込められるかもしれない。清子は白い崖の途中に口を開けていた洞窟^{どくつ}を思い出して、ぶるっと震えた」(227)

In the end, Kiyoko escapes this fate. She rebels, and decides to give birth somewhere else. The reasoning behind her decision is that she fears Mori Gunshi does not care about her or her baby. Deep down, she fears Mori Gunshi knows this baby is not his own, and perhaps suspects it is a Hong Kong baby (Kirino, *Tokyo* 219). In order to increase her chances of survival, Kiyoko decides to look for Yan and the other Hong Kongers.

Inukichi and Shin (the Japanese gay couple) sympathize with her situation, and in exchange for their help, they accept Kiyoko's last valuable possession, the knife. They guide her through a very steep mountain—certainly a dangerous path for a woman in advanced pregnancy (286-287). She explains to them that she feels she can depend more on the Hong Kongers. This constitutes her second escape from the Japanese society of the island. It is a manifestation of her agency as it is yet another attempt to steer the direction of her life.

2.3.3. *Female sympathy and survival through pregnancy*

When Kiyoko finds the Hong Kong village, she is surprised to find out she is no longer the only woman on Tokyo Island. She finds The Goddess, a singing group of seven Filipino women, who are waiting for the Hong Kongers to finish fixing their boat, which was shipwrecked in a storm. The name of their group is rather ironic, and can be read as part of Kirino's mythic parody.

Kiyoko meets Maria, The Goddess's leader, for the first time: "Are you okay? You have a baby inside your belly, right? I speak Japanese. I used to perform in Utsunomiya, that's why" (291; my trans.).⁵³ Here, Maria offers some friendly words and sympathy for her pregnancy. She is not the only one: "The younger women offered their sympathy to the

⁵³ 「あなた、だいじょうぶ？おなかに赤ちゃんいるね。あたし日本語わかるよ。昔、ウツノミヤでショーやってたから」 (291)

older woman who seemed to be going through a lot of trouble” (291; my trans.).⁵⁴ The radical contrast between the treatment she receives from men and from women gives Kiyoko a new hope for survival.

In order to survive, Kiyoko tries hard to gain the trust and sympathy from the other women. For Kiyoko, their boat is a real possibility to escape, and the presence of women is a new hope to give birth safely. However, the spots in the boat are limited, and Kiyoko is worried that she is not being considered worthy of one. Also, she is worried about the timing of her delivery, of the boat reparation and the southern winds (302). These are all aspects that affect her possible escape, and her life, all of which she has little to no control of. Yet again, Kiyoko’s agency is always restrained by more powerful determining factors—both internal (her delivery) and external (the reparation and the winds) conditions.

Kiyoko’s dreams provide insight into the psychology of her pregnancy and her innermost feelings. In one of her dreams, her baby boy looks like Takashi, her first husband (277). She dreams about the possibility of both giving birth and going back home. She dreams of two boats and imagines that her baby finds one boat for them to board (276-277).

Right after meeting the women, she points to Yan and lets them know he is the father (293). Then, she “faces Yan and pointing to her protruding belly, she shows him. Your baby has grown this much. That’s why I came here risking my life, I thought you could help me give birth” (293; my trans.).⁵⁵ The fact that she is asking for his help does not

⁵⁴ 「^{ひど}酷い目に遭った年上の女を、若い女たちが同情を^こ籠めて慰めようとしているのだった」 (291)

⁵⁵ 「ヤンに向かって、突き出た腹を指差して見せた。あなたの子がこんなに大きくなったわよ。だから、出産を手伝って貰おうと思って、命懸けで来たの」 (293)

absolve him of his crime: “You raped me twice in one day. Kiyoko glared at Yan, the probable father of the baby in her belly” (295).⁵⁶ Being close to Yan revives her trauma:

Maria waved at Yan, Yan smiled back at her, something he hadn't done for Kiyoko, not even once. Kiyoko looked down in discomfort. She remembered all the times Yan raped her inside the small boat that was almost sinking like the *tanuki*'s clay boat. When she thinks that the baby that resulted from that time is now hurting her, she gets an urge to hit him. (*Tokyo* 302; my trans.)⁵⁷

Kiyoko is not only a victim, but also an example of sheer resilience on a greater scale. The allusion to the “tanuki's clay boat,” *tanuki no dorobune* 狸の泥舟 is a reference to a Japanese folktale known as “Kachi-kachi yama” かちかち山 (The crackling mountain). Here, the *tanuki* 狸 (raccoon-shaped, cunning creature) is evil, and his crimes are left unavenged until he is left to sink on a small clay boat (Scallywag). Thus, I believe in the quoted passage there is an underlying reference to Yan's impunity and Kiyoko's desire for justice.

Despite being close to Yan, the presence of the other women counteracts the pain he still causes. They have a greater, positive impact in Kiyoko's life. Her whole situation has changed now that she has other women to lean on: “I think it's best to give birth before leaving the island. There are plenty of women here that can help me and I'm also scared to give birth on board on the seas. Kiyoko felt relieved in tears and Maria held her shoulder” (296).⁵⁸ Kiyoko's pregnancy brings women together and evokes sympathy and solidarity.

⁵⁶ 「あたしを一日二回も犯した癖に。清子は腹の子の父親であろうヤンを睨んだ」(295)

⁵⁷ 「マリアはヤンに向かって手を振ると、ヤンは清子には一度も見せたことのない笑いで返した。清子は、不快さに下を向く。狸の泥舟のような、沈みそうな小舟の中で、ヤンに何度も犯されたことを思い出す。その時出来た子供が、今の自分を苦しめているのかと思うと、殴りかかりたい衝動すらあった」(302)

⁵⁸ 「としたら、脱出までに子供を出産した方がよさそうだった。女手がたくさんあるから、出産も手伝って貰えそうだし、海上での出産は怖ろしい。清子はほっとして、涙ぐんだ。

In this case, Rosaldo's words hold true, "the very symbolic and social conceptions that appear to set women apart and to circumscribe their activities may be used by women as a basis for female solidarity and worth" (39).

The physical description of Kiyoko often emphasizes her big belly, and how it affects her. Even something as simple as scratching a mosquito bite is difficult when pregnant: "Kiyoko scratched a mosquito's bite on her leg. Because her belly was so big, just bending was difficult" (282; my trans.).⁵⁹ At the same time, the other women and the Hong Kongers do the daily chores for her: "Since I'm holding a big belly, I only have to wait. This lifestyle is a paradise" (299; my trans.).⁶⁰ This represents a sharp contrast to the way she was treated by the Japanese men. Now she is being helped. Here, amongst the women, her power to "bear and nourish human life" seems to be recognized (Rich, *Of Woman* 13).⁶¹

Kiyoko was accused of treason, but her pregnancy seems to absolve her. There is a general, social approval of her pregnancy. Drawing on Rich's description of her own experience, Young suggests that: "this 'aura' surrounding motherhood depicts repose. The dominant culture projects pregnancy as a time of quiet waiting" (54). At this point in the narrative, Kiyoko is waiting, she is expecting—which is a common way to refer to pregnant women. Young points out that, "the image of uneventful waiting associated with pregnancy reveals clearly how much the discourse of pregnancy leaves out the subjectivity of the woman. From the point of view of others pregnancy is primarily a time of waiting

マリアが肩を抱いてくれた」(296)

⁵⁹ 「清子は蚊に刺された足を掻いた。腹が大きくなったため、身を屈めるのも苦しかった」(282)

⁶⁰ 「大きなお腹を抱えているから、待つだけでいい生活は極楽だった」(299)

⁶¹ Kiyoko's experience is compatible with Rich's description of her own pregnancy: "As soon as I was visibly and clearly pregnant, I felt for the first time in my adolescent and adult life, not-guilty. The atmosphere of approval in which I was bathed—even by strangers in the street, it seemed—was like an aura I carried with me, in which doubts, fears, misgivings, met with absolute denial. This is what women have always done" (Rich, *Of Woman* 25-26).

and watching, when nothing happens” (54). Hence, the pregnant woman’s agency is also being put on hold by this social expectation of waiting. However, there is plenty of action going on inside the maternal body:

Pregnancy has a temporality of movement, growth, and change. The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic. The pregnant woman experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather, she *is* the process, this change. Time stretches out, moments and days take on a depth because she experiences more changes in herself, her body. Each day, each week, she looks at herself for signs of transformation. (Young 54)

Young’s quote sheds light on the tension between agency/destiny, so present in this novel. Pregnancy happens, her will has nothing to do with her being pregnant, as Kiyoko herself would put it, it is the island’s will, she is not a planner or director of her life in this sense. However, pregnancy does not simply “wash over her,” because she *is* the change, the process, and actively uses her pregnancy for her survival. Her pregnancy might be perceived as a sign of helplessness, something that she passively gives into. Yet, this is not always the case. For example, right after Maria asks Kiyoko if the baby is moving:

Kiyoko decided to wear a pitiful face and hold her stomach as if in pain. She’d better use her pregnancy as a “weapon.” If she were not pregnant, she would be just the same middle-aged woman who had been living on this desert island for a long time. And if this were the case, there is no doubt that Maria would never take her with them in their boat. (Kirino, *Tokyo* 299; my trans.)⁶²

⁶² 「清子は苦しように腹を抱え、哀れっぽい顔で暮らすことにした。妊婦という武器を、

This is an example of Kiyoko's agency and of the continuum between multiple cynic and sincere performances. Kiyoko deliberately exaggerates and plays on her pregnancy as a means to survive; she uses her pregnant condition to her advantage. Her perfect scenario is to give birth and then get on the boat. Yet, it is impossible to know exactly when the baby will come: "I wonder when on earth I will give birth, I wouldn't like to die as a result of a difficult late childbearing left alone on the island. Kiyoko felt irritated and kicked the cold sand in the cave" (304; my trans.).⁶³ Kiyoko decides to ask Maria about who is going on board with them and Maria replies:

"What are you saying? I'm thinking of choosing from the weakest on. Aren't you pregnant? You are the weakest" I made it! Kiyoko thought. However, as soon as she gives birth she loses the 'pregnant license.' Kiyoko had been thinking all along to give birth early and safely, yet at the calculation of having more chances of being taken on board if she is still pregnant, Kiyoko felt as if her heart was being torn apart. (304; my trans.)⁶⁴

In this excerpt a pregnant woman is more worthy of survival than a mother. A pregnant woman is perceived of as vulnerable and weak, but also precious. The allusion to the "pregnant license" shares the same connotations of the "pregnant aura" described by Rich; that is, an environment of approval, kindness, and help. The image of the pregnant woman as worthy of being saved is reinforced in the following statement: "After I give birth, I'll

利用しない手はないのだった。清子が妊婦でなく、無人島に長く暮らしているただの中年女といういつもの姿だったら、マリアは警戒して追い払ったに違いない」(299)

⁶³ 「いったいいつになったら腹の子は出て来てくれるのだろうか。一人で島に取り残されて、苦しい高齢出産の末、命を落とすなんてまっぴらごめんだった。清子はイライラして、

洞窟内の冷えた砂地を足で蹴った」(304)

⁶⁴ 「何を言ってるの。私は弱い人から、と思ってるのよ。あなたは妊婦じゃない。あなたが最も弱い人だわ」しめた、と思ったが、出産が終わったら妊婦という資格はなくなる。清子は、早く安全に出産してしまいたいという思いと、妊婦のままの方が連れて行って貰える、という計算とで、心が引き裂かれそうになった」(304)

be physically weak and it is uncertain if they will let me on” (305-306; my trans.).⁶⁵ Paradoxically, she could die from giving birth on the boat, but it is her pregnant condition that brings her closer to survival.

2.4. Re-signifying mothering

2.4.1. Challenging the naturalization of motherly love

Kiyoko dreams that she has already given birth: “I don’t care much about the face and sex of the baby, I’m just relieved because I finished without having a painful memory, and with my life intact” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 276; my trans.).⁶⁶ This is the dream and hope of many pregnant women: to safely give birth to their baby. Kiyoko wants to survive the birth. However, for Kiyoko, giving birth is not thought of as the moment when she will meet her baby. This contrasts with many pregnant mothers who look forward to the moment of seeing their baby’s face for the first time and finding out whether they are boys or girls.

Taking it out of context, an alternative reading of this quote might be that Kiyoko’s lack of interest in her baby’s face or sex might reflect an avant-garde, feminist attitude: not putting much value on one’s assigned sex or appearance, and seeing babies first and foremost as humans, rather than as being already boys or girls. However, Kiyoko’s real feelings display a distance from wanting to meet her baby. For instance, Maria says: “The baby will come out soon. Isn’t it exciting?” (301; my trans.).⁶⁷ And Kiyoko replies: “Yes, I’m looking forward to it” (301; my trans.).⁶⁸ Perhaps a part of her is looking forward to the birth, but the reader already knows that her answers are premeditated, playing on what is expected of her.

⁶⁵ 「出産を終えて体力の弱った自分が乗れるはずがない」(305-306)

⁶⁶ 「子供の性別や顔などはどうでもよく、ただひたすら、自分の命が無事だったこと、苦しい思いをせずに済んだことに安堵あんどしていた」(276)

⁶⁷ 「そろそろ赤ちゃん出てくるね。楽しみじゃない」(301)

⁶⁸ 「はい、楽しみです」(301)

One of the strongest characteristics of the depiction of Kiyoko's pregnancy is that she does not feel any love for the baby inside her, which displays the mentality of a rape victim and articulates a particular depiction of a mother-child relationship:

One afternoon, Kiyoko was walking around the beach while holding her big belly. Lately, the baby inside her belly had been moving so actively that if she doesn't exercise, the baby won't be quiet. Kiyoko touched her now hard lower-belly with her hand. When she felt something like the baby's arm pressing from the inside through her skin, she shivered. This baby I have inside me is Yan's—that man with the yellow canine teeth—just the thought makes her cold. Kiyoko doesn't feel any love for the baby in her belly, to the point of wanting to give the baby away to someone from GODDESS right after having given birth. (Kirino, *Tokyo* 300; my trans.)⁶⁹

This personal confession frankly describes a possible way in which having a baby inside one's belly might feel like. We can elicit a sense of alienation between mother and baby; she is feeling her baby's eerie movements. It also addresses the issue of unwanted pregnancies, and moreover, pregnancies as a result of a rape. The way she refers to Yan—with disgust—and the way she is clear about feeling no love for her baby is a depiction that moves away from the ideal mother, but probably is closer to the realities of some. Also, the passage shows a side of Kiyoko who wants to give the baby away to any of the other Filipino women on the island, perhaps hoping they would do a better job at caring for the baby. This also echoes the realities and emotions around adoption.

⁶⁹「午後、清子は大きな腹を抱えてよたよた海岸を歩いていた。近頃は、腹の中で胎児が盛んに動くため、運動しないと静まらないのだった。清子は固くなった下腹を手で触れた。胎児の腕のような部分が内部から皮膚を押し上げていて、触るとぞっとする。あの黄色い犬歯を持ったヤンの子供が腹に入っているのかと思うと、寒気すらした。腹の子には、まったく愛情を持ってなかった。産んだら、そのまま GODDESS の誰かに押しつけないほどだ」(300)

Alienation is a recurring concept to understand pregnant embodiment. Pregnancy splits or doubles our subjectivity in multiple ways: “[The pregnant subject] experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on the trunk in addition to her head” (Young 46). Actually, there are different moments in the story where different people ask Kiyoko if the baby is moving (Kirino, *Tokyo* 299). It is the movements of the fetus that cause the sense of the splitting subject: “the fetus’s movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space. Only I have access to these movements from their origin, as it were. For months only I can witness this life within me, and it is only under my direction of where to put their hands that others can feel these movements” (Young 49). Kiyoko has yet another dream about her birth that reveals how she feels about the fetus:

“Oh, I’m hungry,” Kiyoko said while holding her belly. The fetus moved, as in agreement. She trembled at her own thought of giving birth to a bold brat like in her dream. Kiyoko didn’t have any feelings of love towards the baby inside her belly, and this surprised her. Perhaps it’s because motherly love belongs to civilization. (281-282; my trans.)⁷⁰

This is a powerful quote in which the very notion of motherly love is put into question. This novel constantly probes the limits between nature and culture, and questions our assumptions regarding essential aspects of so-called “human nature.” This is the case of motherly love. Kiyoko’s surprise at not loving the baby in her belly shows the existence of a certain social expectation regarding motherly love. The element of surprise will only

⁷⁰「あーあ、お腹空いた」清子は腹を押さえた。同意するように、胎児がうごめ蠢いた。この中に、夢に出て来たような凶々しいガキが入ってるかと思うと、ぞっとする。清子は、腹の中の子供に対する愛情がまったくないことに、自分で驚いた。母性愛もまた、文明のもたらすものなのだと思う」(281-282)

come as a response to doing/feeling something unexpected—in this case, not feeling love towards one’s baby. Kirino goes even further and points out how this love is part of civilization, making a clear case of it being socio-culturally constructed rather than naturally embedded.

Through the use of the Japanese word *boseiai* 母性愛 (motherly love), Kirino joins the historical and ongoing debate amongst Japanese feminists between being pro-*boseiai*, which finds motherhood empowering, and being anti-*boseiai*, which considers it a source of oppression (Wilson 104; Also see: Ōhinata; Buckley; M. Suzuki). This tension, however, is not exclusive to Japanese feminism. Mothering scholar and sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn points to the conflict between feminists who regard maternally derived gender differences as oppressive against those who reclaim motherhood as a source of power and status:

We are reluctant to give up the idea that motherhood is special. Pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding are such powerful bodily experiences, and the emotional attachment to the infant so intense, that it is difficult for women who have gone through these experiences and emotions to think that they do not constitute unique female experiences that create an unbridgeable gap between men and women. (22-23)

In Japan, the idealization of motherly love is intimately related to the ideology of “good wife, wise mother” (Koyama 52-54). As mentioned in this thesis’s introduction, this ideology can be traced back to the Meiji period, where the state’s ideal image of the modern Japanese woman was a “good-wife-wise-mother aspiring middle/upper class virgin” (Czarnecki 51). The girls’ high schools of the time were intended to prepare girls for their new role, and to be patriotic (52). Nakamura provides the background of the notion of motherly love in Japan by looking at how the birth control and eugenics

movements defined the requirements of the modern mother (115). Besides possessing musical, literary and cultural talents, “they had to emanate *bosei* (“motherhood,” derived from the Swedish word *moderskap*) and *bosei ai* (motherly love)—words that did not exist in Japan until the beginning of the Taishō era” (Nakamura 115. Also see: Winston 270; i 76). Textbooks from this period depicted “*bosei* and *bosei ai* as natural sentiments that all women possessed, claiming that motherhood was a physical and psychological attribute inherent in all women” (Nakamura 115). This is an example of how a socio-culturally constructed notion is reified and naturalized into a biological, essential trait of human nature.

In addition to these movements, the fields of child psychology and medicine also contributed to considering motherhood “as a part of women’s intrinsic nature (*honshitsu*) an unquestionable fact attested by scientific knowledge” (Nakamura 116). This is how “motherhood thus emerged as a dominant ideology and became naturalized as part of the discourse of the female body” (116). This ideology “demanded total self-abnegation of mothers and expected them to live for their children” (Castellini 170). Moreover, “the myth of maternal love worked by policing the deviant behavior of women who expressed dissatisfaction, anxiety or fear in relation to their maternal experience, and stigmatized as aberrations those mothers who seemed unable to love their children or, worse, who abused and hurt them” (170).

Kiyoko experiences dissatisfaction, anxiety, and fear. She does not love her baby, and has imagined herself hurting the baby. Hence, Kirino sees through this naturalization process, and her depiction of Kiyoko is a direct challenge to the naturalization of maternal love. A maternal love in terms of myth, is used to define and justify women’s role in society. As Ōhinata’s book title exposes, “the trap of the myth of maternal love” is a myth that relies on the idealization of the mother-child bond. Specifically, it relies on the

expectations of self-sacrifice and unconditional love “devoid of ambivalent feelings” (Castellini 170).

Hence the ideal mother, the “wise mother,” is at odds with the notion of strong, independent subjects. Akiyama suggests that the fact that Japanese women have to choose between being a mother and being strong independent subjects is already symptomatic of women’s oppression in society (Akiyama 123; Castellini 170). Kirino’s heroine, however, moves away from the “good wife, wise mother” model, lives motherhood in a particular way, and does not give up on a strong, independent subjectivity.

2.4.2. *Childbirth and breastfeeding like a “natural woman”*

The portrayal of the actual birth is quite peculiar and detailed for a literary text. Of course female characters have babies in literature, but pregnancy and childbirth are often reduced to an ellipsis (Roberts). Poston points out that birth is rarely described in literature, “because female experiences, from menstruation to menopause have been consistently slighted in our literature, childbirth is a virtually unexplored literary topic” (20). The uses of birth imagery, and birth as a metaphor are prolific, yet the depictions of the actual physical birth are limited (Poston 20). This is similar to Saitō Minako’s treatment of “pregnancy literature” (*ninshin shōsetsu* 妊娠小説): instead of looking at the role or representations of pregnancy in literary works, she uses the term to “denote a sub-genre of works...in which an older man falls in love with a younger woman, has an affair with her, and gets her pregnant” (Seaman, “Two” 1; See: Saitō, *Ninshin*). Instead of being narrated from a male perspective, like Saitō’s characterization of “pregnancy literature” indicates, Kirino’s novel can be counted amongst the few works that represents actual childbirth from the woman’s point of view. Thus, I cite the scene at length:

I feel water flowing briefly down my lower belly. In fact, it is as if I've had pee leakage, a large amount of water running down my thighs. 'Ah!' Kiyoko screamed and squatted. And Ruth, noticing an emergency ran towards Kiyoko.

'You okay? Okay? Kiyoko'

Maria also came running and held Kiyoko's shoulder:

'Kiyoko-san, has something happened?'

Kiyoko was speechless. There was a sudden change in her lower belly. A sensation of flow. Does this mean her water just broke? Kiyoko felt with her hands the water down her thighs. It was lukewarm. Her water broke, the amniotic liquid has come out. That means the baby is finally coming out.

'My water broke,' Kiyoko shouted at Maria. (Kirino, *Tokyo* 306; my trans.)⁷¹

Kirino describes the beginning of the birth with Kiyoko's waters breaking, and she describes the ways in which Ruth, Maria, Kim and the other women react. The emphasis on fluids coming out of one's body is worth highlighting, since it is a manifestation of how the female body refuses containment, "the excesses of her body—with its secretions and flows—constantly threaten to leak beyond its borders and endanger the stability of the masculine order" (Copeland, "Mythical" 21).

⁷¹ 「下腹部をざっと水が流れる感触がある。実際に、まるで小便を洩らしたかのように、大量の水が太腿を伝っていた。「あっ」と叫んで 蹲^{うすくま}った清子のところに、異常を悟ってルースが駆け寄った。

「ダイジョウブ？ダイジョウブ？キヨコ」

マリアが走って来て、清子の肩を抱いた。

「キヨコさん、今どうかしたの」

「清子は口が利けずに啞然としている。下腹部に急激な変化があった。流れる気配。この事態は破水だろうか。清子は太腿を伝う水に手で触れてみた。生温かかった。羊水膜が破れて、中の羊水が溢れ出したのだ。ということは、とうとう赤ちゃんが出て来る。清子、マリアに叫んだ。

「破水致しました」(306)

Kiyoko feels (mentally) unprepared, yet her body (re)acts. There is a strong physiological, biological and material dimension to childbirth: “Giving birth on the beach is just like sea turtles, isn’t it? Without being psychologically prepared, she panicked at the sudden experience of birth that came at last” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 308; my trans.).⁷² In comparing this experience to the one of sea turtles, Kiyoko recognizes the animal-ness of birthing. Childbirth is viewed as something normal and natural. However, Kiyoko’s rationality is not completely lost in this experience. In fact, “Even with the pain of the contractions, Kiyoko is looking at Maria’s face, having uninvited thoughts” (307; my trans.).⁷³ The unnecessary things that occupy her mind are several speculations concerning the escape from the island, thus her survival drive never abandons her, not even during birth.

Kim, another younger Filipino woman, also joins the scene. Kim, as an experienced mother, guides Kiyoko through the breathing exercises: “Every time Kiyoko exhaled she’d involuntarily pushed; she couldn’t stop pushing down. The birth could start at any moment. Even if Kiyoko was consumed with worry, she also wanted to free herself from her heavy belly, by “expelling” the baby as fast as possible” (309; my trans.).⁷⁴ The use of the word “*haishutsu*” 排出 translates as “expel,” and it is often used to refer to a discharge of fluids or the process of excreting “waste matter.” Thus it is possible to interpret that, from Kiyoko’s point of view, the baby is just like any other bodily fluid that needs to be “eliminated” or “released.”

⁷² 「砂浜で産むのでは海亀と同じじゃないか。心の準備もないままに、急にやってきた出産という経験に、ひどく慌てふためいていた」(308)

⁷³ 「清子は陣痛に苦しみながらも、マリアの顔を見て余計なことを考えている」(307)

⁷⁴ 「清子は息を吐くたびに自然に力が入って、いきみが止まらなくなった。いよいよ出産が始まるらしい。清子は不安に駆られたが、早く赤ん坊を「排出」して、重い腹から自由になりたくもある」(309)

At this point, Kiyoko finds herself surrounded by the support of all the other women. One of them says: “I saw the head, come on, you can do it!” (309; my trans.).⁷⁵ The description of the birth builds upon the naturalness of the body and the birth: “Now Kiyoko’s arms are being supported by the seven women, and she’s about to give birth in a semi-crouching position. Kiyoko is simply giving birth, like sea turtles do over the sand. They say sea turtles shed tears, but in my case only sweat drops are flowing” (309; my trans.).⁷⁶ Again, the allusion to sea turtles illustrates the physiology of birth, and how maternal bodies are perfectly designed to give birth. This metaphor can also be read in terms of the symbolism of sea turtles specifically, often linked to female sexuality and reproduction. Willis points out that in Latin American folklore, the Brazilian *muraiquita* (an amulet representing frogs, fish and turtles), is a “reptilian or amphibian female essence associated with water, sexual reproduction, and the unconscious or semiotic realm of language origin” (101). I argue that this symbolism can provide insight into Kirino’s allusion to sea turtles as well, as it emphasizes the naturalness of childbirth and the association of the female maternal body to a pre-discursive or non-discursive dimension.

The final part of the birth has parody-like elements as Kiyoko really ends up bringing twins into the world when everyone around her sings Aretha Franklin’s classic, “You Make me Feel like a Natural Woman” (310). She even says that this song is like her life’s soundtrack at the moment, and it gives her the extra energy she needs to finish giving birth:

This song energized Kiyoko, and she finally succeeded in giving birth.

Before the baby got all covered in sand, Kim picked up the baby. After a

little while the baby gave her first cry. “Yes!”—All the other women gave a

⁷⁵ 「頭見えたよ、ガンバレー！」 (309)

⁷⁶ 「今や清子は、七人の女たちに腕を支えられ、中腰でお産をしようとしていた。まさに産み落とすのだ、海亀のように砂の上に。海亀は涙を流すと言うが、自分ほたらだと汗を流すのみ」 (309)

shout of joy. “It’s a girl, it’s a girl”—shouted Kim. You could see tears in Kim’s eyes. Some were crying in each other’s arms... Another piece of flesh covered in blood slid down in between her legs. Another one. This time it was a boy. Believe it or not, Kiyoko became a mother of twins. Contrary to her dreams, the actual babies that she gave birth to didn’t have either cuteness or cleverness, they were as ugly as baby monkeys, they were just a weak existence. And there were two of them. Kiyoko didn’t even have energy to hold them. She was simply dumbfounded. For her, they weren’t remotely cute. (310; my trans.)⁷⁷

This passage shows an act of sisterhood, childbirth in precarious conditions, it depicts both the strength and tiredness of the birthing woman, and the fragility of the newborn life. In spite of the presumed rivalry between Kiyoko and the Filipino women, Kiyoko feels relief and safe thanks to the help and support she receives from the other women. Kirino’s depiction of childbirth has elements of how it is in different human groups, as “a social event, albeit with a usually all-female cast,” in opposition to “solitary childbirth [which] is a Western phenomenon” (Poston 28). Poston explains that,

Birth is a death experience because, like death, it is an act of essential solitude; no one else can die for us; no one else can give birth for us when labor is upon us. However, this essential solitude need not be loneliness. It is a question rather of whether those people who surround the woman at the

⁷⁷ 「清子は曲に盛り上げられて、ようやく赤ん坊を産み落とすことに成功した。赤ん坊は砂まみれになる前にキムにさっと取り上げられ、しばらくしてから産声うぶごえを上げた。イエーイ、と女たちが歓声を上げた。「女の子、女の子」キムが叫んでいた。キムの目に涙が見える。抱き合っていて泣いている者もいた。が、清子は腹にまだ違和感があった...足の中に、血だらけの肉塊がまた滑り出た。もう一人。今度は男の子だった。清子は何と双子の母親かわいになったのだ。実際の産み立ての赤ん坊は想像していたような可愛らしさも、夢に見たような賢しらしさもなく、猿の子のように醜くて、か弱い存在だった。それが二人もいるのだ。清子は抱く元気もなく、ただ呆然ぼうぜんとしていた。少しも可愛いと思えなかった」 (310)

moment of birth are part of the community, understanding and articulating the profundity of her feelings, or whether they are merely an audience.

(Poston 29)

At the moment of birth, the Filipino women are supportive, yet there seems to be a wall between Kiyoko and the other women, they do not have access to the depths of Kiyoko's feelings. Hence, their depiction is to some extent as community members and audience at the same time. Kirino places childbirth outside of technology, capitalism and even patriarchy. In nature, surrounded by women, Kiyoko is displayed as a "natural woman" without "natural instincts." The ironic comedy of the scene is attached to the unrealistic quality of the scenario. It unravels the "natural woman" and the "maternal love" myths, pointing to their constructed nature, and leaves the reader with a real image of a natural woman that is only possible in fiction.

In a study about "natural mothering" (mothers who practice the so-called "attachment parenting" and "simple living"), Chris Bobel concludes that this movement resists capitalism and technology, but "its discourses of choice and control, deeply paradoxical at their core, fail to resist the third institution: patriarchy. The mothers' surrender of agency to so-called instinct and a romanticized view of nature reifies an essentialist construction of womanhood" ("Resisting" ch.47). Hence, "natural mothering" accommodates patriarchy, compromising its potential for social change (Bobel, "Resisting" ch.47). I argue that Kirino's depiction of Kiyoko as a caricatured "natural mother" manages to mine the three aforementioned institutions: capitalism, technology and also, patriarchy. In *Tokyo jima* there is not a romanticized, utopian view of nature, but rather a caricature-like, dystopian depiction of nature (Kirino, *Hakkaten* 230). Kirino is aware of the tensions and paradoxes surrounding agency/destiny, and Kiyoko's subjectivity suffers drastic changes throughout the novel, putting forward a more

fragmented, fluid and corporeal model of identity. Therefore, Kirino actually unravels the process of reification of both motherhood and womanhood.

Kiyoko's uniqueness is preserved. Despite being surrounded by other women, Kiyoko behaves differently: she is not crying tears of joy. Kiyoko's inner state contrasts with the outer ambiance around her. Actually, "everyone came to look at the faces of the two, and competed to hold them" (*Tokyo* 312; my trans.).⁷⁸ Kiyoko is exhausted, while everyone else on the island is bursting with happiness. Especially on a desert island where survival is always at stake, a birth is a tangible manifestation of flourishing life (310).

Despite her lack of motherly love, once they are born, Kiyoko behaves as their primary caregiver. Naming babies is a ritual that symbolizes the belonging to a community, yet for Kiyoko it is part of her strategy for survival: "Maria came holding both babies, one in each arm, and showed them to Kiyoko. With the lack of love for the babies she gave birth to, and to flatter Maria, Kiyoko said to her: 'What about Chiki and Chita? The girl would be Chiki, and the boy Chita. So you can be the singing godmother'" (Kirino, *Tokyo* 311; my trans.).⁷⁹ This was followed by great laughter among all the women, and then they joined in and sang "Chiquitita." Then, "Kiyoko felt relieved and closed her eyes. Now that she's the godmother, Maria wouldn't possibly abandon us, mother and child. Even so, how would I feed the twins?" (311; my trans.).⁸⁰ Here we see that even after giving birth to the babies, maternal love is not natural to Kiyoko. However, she is still part of the mother-child dyad. She knows that feeding them is her responsibility, and so she does (313).

⁷⁸ 「皆が二人の顔を見に来て、争って抱いた」(312)

⁷⁹ 「マリアが両腕にそれぞれ赤ん坊を抱いて清子に見せに来た。産んだ子への愛情のなさ、マリアへの媚びが、清子にこんなことを言わせた。「チキとチータはどうでしょう。女の子がチキで、男の子がチータ。唄ってくれたマリアさんが名付け親ってことで」(311)

⁸⁰ 「清子はほっとして、目を閉じた。名付け親とまで言っておけば、マリアは自分たち親子を見捨てはしないだろう。それにしても、どうやって双子を食べさせればいいのか」(311)

The remaining Hong Kongers went close to Odaiba, risking their lives, to bring fruits and potatoes for Kiyoko. Thanks to this, her breast milk was abundant (313). Kiyoko breastfeeds her babies: “Chita is crying, Kiyoko opens her eyes, without really wanting to. She wanted to sleep some more, but there’s nothing to do, she lets her son suck her shriveled breast” (316; my trans.).⁸¹ Kiyoko does not reflect on the act of breastfeeding, it is not depicted as a pleasurable experience, or as a way to strengthen the bond between mother and child. In the novel, breastfeeding is a natural part of the new mother’s role, who seems to be going through the motions in an almost mechanical way. Suddenly, Kim comes and interrupts her, and tells her that the chance to get on the boat is now or never. While still holding and breastfeeding her son, Kiyoko goes with her (316).

All this time, Kiyoko has been waiting for Maria to be the one deciding who gets on the boat, but unexpectedly, Mun (one of the Hong Kongers) and Kim decide to go ahead and escape behind Maria’s back. Mun does not want Kiyoko on the boat with them, but Kim cannot bear the thought of leaving the children behind: “Kim pointed to the babies and desperately protested” (*Tokyo* 317; my trans.).⁸² Here we see that it is in fact Kim’s love for the children that prevents her from going alone. Kim cannot abandon them, and thus, Kirino depicts also a strong bond between children and a non-mother figure. However, in the end, the Japanese group, who wanted to prevent anyone from escaping the island, comes to stop them in a deadly confrontation. Mun dies, but Kim, Kiyoko and her newborn daughter, Chiki, managed to escape. However, her son, Chita, is snatched away by Mori Gushi, and this is how Kiyoko is forever separated from her son.

⁸¹ 「チータが泣き出したので、清子は嫌々目を覚ました。もっと寝ていたかったが仕方がない。萎びた乳を出して息子にくわえさせた」 (316)

⁸² 「キムが赤ん坊を指して、必死に抗弁していた」 (317)

2.4.3. *Twins: parallel worlds and eco-feminism*

The birth of the twins, Chita (boy), and Chiki (girl), has several implications from an analytical point of view. Twins are liminal figures that have been tabooed in different cultures including the Japanese one, because of the “illusion of two persons as one” (Bargen 153). Also, in the case of male-female twins, “the line between the sexes appears fluid rather than clearly demarcated—in other words, it suggests androgyny” (153). Hence, in literature twins can be used to disturb clear boundaries, and this is precisely what Kirino does.

Girard suggests that twins “threaten the social order through their very existence, because their shared position within the family blurs the distinctions on which peace and order depend. This erasure of difference inevitably gives rise to sacrificial violence” (*Violence* 49 qtd. in Nakamura 48). Girard’s explanation concurs with the situation in Tokyo Island, considering that right after their birth a deadly confrontation takes place that ends up in Kiyoko’s separation and loss of her son.

In the epilogue of the novel, the twins share their parallel stories, and the reader is left with two parallel worlds between Chita in Tokyo Island and Chiki in the city of Tokyo. On the one hand, Chita ends up being raised by his adoptive parents, Mori Gunshi and Maria as the Prince of Tokyo Island (341). The rest of the Filipino women also seemed to have had children of their own, populating the island (342). On the other hand, Chiki ends up being raised by her biological mother, Kiyoko, and Kim, the Filipino woman with whom they successfully escaped from Tokyo Island.

The question of fatherhood is also addressed in the novel and it seems to be a deliberate choice from the author that the son stayed in the island with his fathers. Yan also

stayed on Tokyo Island. He is a lonely man—the only one left from the Hong Kongers. He plays with Chita in secret because Mori Gunshi and Maria do not like that they play together. It is clear that Yan feels he is his father, since he even asks Chita: “Prince, what would you do if I were your real father?” (344; my trans.).⁸³ Chita replies that he would be happy (345). Yan also points to their physical resemblance (345). Hence, there is a tension between Yan as the presumably biological father, and Mori Gunshi as the adoptive father. Also, when the twins were newly born, everyone was competing to hold them, “especially Yan, who started to show off that he was the babies’ father” (312; my trans.).⁸⁴ Therefore, Kirino also plays with the naturalness of paternal instinct, and problematizes the idea of the biological father being the “real” father, versus the adoptive father, being a “fake” one.

Chita wants to marry a boy and not a girl because his heterosexual parents fight a lot while the gay couple on the island seems to have a supportive and fun relationship (346). On that account, Kirino also addresses the themes of heterosexuality and homosexuality, not only in terms of sexual orientations, but also in relation to childrearing.

During Chita’s middle-school graduation ceremony, Maria and Mori Gunshi decide to tell Chita for the first time about his biological mother, and the truth behind his birth. They start by saying that thirteen years ago Kiyoko and Chiki disappeared into the ocean (349-350). In this description we find again the symbolism of the disappearing women into the water.

They all sing the songs “Natural Woman” and “Chiquitita,” (re)creating the setting for the retelling of their birth story by Maria (350-351). In fact, she emphasizes that Kiyoko was breastfeeding when they escaped (351). Maria explains that Kiyoko had both prince and princess and wanted to take them both. However, a deadly confrontation took place: Mun

⁸³ 「プリンス、本当のお父さんオレだったらどうする？」(344)

⁸⁴ 「とりわけヤンは、自分が赤ん坊の父親である、とアピールするようになった」(312)

killed Atama, the other three Hong Kongers were injured and died, Oraga also died, and in this deadly chaos, Mori Gunshi took Chita right from Kiyoko's arms: "At that time, your dad took you, Prince, away from Kiyoko's arms. The reason being that if one kid would stay on the island she would surely come back. Of course Kiyoko became mad, and screamed your name" (353).⁸⁵ Chita's adoptive mother, Maria, explains to him: "While we were carefully raising you, Prince, we were waiting for Kiyoko to come back. If she had arrived safely, she would surely come back to the island to help you, Prince. But Kiyoko didn't come back" (353; my trans.).⁸⁶ This scene displays storytelling as a powerful artifact that produces the myths that support the island's society.

In this case, it is worth noticing that Maria refers to Mori Gunshi as his father, which somehow legitimizes his actions through appealing to paternal power. Hence, this section also raises questions about parental custody, and the power or rights of fathers versus mothers. Kiyoko is clearly being robbed, however, isn't it their father who is also robbed when she plans to escape with their children? Also, breastfeeding is emphasized previous to their separation, and because breastfeeding epitomizes the mother-child bond, this builds on a dramatic and tragic quality to the end of their relationship. Also, in this fragment, from the perspective of Maria and Mori Gunshi, and by extension the rest of the community, a mother who abandons her child is unimaginable; hence, they conclude Kiyoko and Chiki must have died while escaping. Even if Kiyoko did not feel any love towards the babies, her role as a mother is still contradictory and multifaceted. She is in fact close to them, united to

⁸⁵ 「その時、清子さんの腕から、プリンスを奪い取ったのはお父さんよ。理由は子供を一人置いて行けば、必ず戻ってくるだろうから。勿論清子さんは半狂乱になって、あなたの名前を叫んでいたわ」(353)

⁸⁶ 「あたしたちは、みんなでプリンスを大事に育てながら、清子さんが帰って来るのを待っていた。清子さんが生還したなら、絶対にプリンスを助けに島に戻って来るはずだから。でも、清子さんは戻って来なかった」(353)

them through breastfeeding, and does not give up on them easily: she cries Chita's name and holds on to Chiki.

Instead of returning to "save" her son, Kiyoko arrives at the city of Tokyo, and tells Chiki that Chita died soon after she gave birth to him. Perhaps from the author's perspective, in order to grant Kiyoko an independent survival she needed to cut the bond with the masculine power of the island, and thus leave her boy behind. Chiki knows that her mother managed to survive on a desert island and escape from it alive. Chiki has a mother older than the average, and she points out how this surprises people, and how when they go shopping together people say to her "it's nice to have such a young grandma" (356-357; my trans.).⁸⁷ Chiki says: "Surely, my mom is older than other mothers. But she is bold and cool" (357).⁸⁸ Chiki tells the reader in her monologue:

My mom gave birth to me when she was forty-eight years old. And this was her first pregnancy so apparently she was ready to die several times. Also, when she finally gave birth, it turned out we were twins. The other one was a boy. My mom says she named me Chiki, and my little brother, Chita. She says the song "Chiquitita" got in her head somehow, and she couldn't help but name us like that; but this I can't believe. The sad thing is my brother died shortly after having being born. (358; my trans.)⁸⁹

Kirino pushes the boundaries between fiction and reality, between what is true or false.

Kiyoko also tells Chiki that her father got sick and died soon after getting pregnant. This

⁸⁷ 「若いおばあちゃまでいいわね」(356-357)

⁸⁸ 「確かに、あたしのママは、他のママより年寄りです。だけど、堂々としててカッコいいです」(357)

⁸⁹ 「ママがあたしを産んだのは、四十八歳の時でした。それも初めての妊娠だったから、何度も死を覚悟したんだそうです。そして、いざ生まれてみたら、あたしは双子でした。もう一人は男の子だったそうです。ママは、あたしにチキ、弟にチータと名付けたんだそうです。なぜか、「チキチータ」という歌が頭に入ってきて、思わず付けてしまったと言ったけど、これは信じられません。悲しいのは、あたしの弟はせっかく産まれてきたのに、すぐに死んでしまったことです」(358)

will also become an urban myth. In the end, Chiki feels proud and grateful (Kataoka 103). Actually, the novel concludes with this positive depiction of Kiyoko: “No matter what anyone says, I think my mom is a terrific person” (Kirino, *Tokyo* 365; my trans.).⁹⁰ Her daughter holds an exaggerated and idealized conception of her mother.

It is not accidental that the boy is the one who stays on the island; he stays and becomes the Prince of a patriarchal, now peaceful, society. From Kiyoko’s point of view, he stays in a dystopian place. However, from a different point of view, he stays in a place where they managed to rebuild a society, living in a “paradise-like” place with tamed nature, living “happily ever after,” in a sort of “patriarchal utopia,” which typically is built on a myth that features the missing mother. In the one hand, Kiyoko’s disappearance is needed for the establishment of Tokyo Island’s society, and in the other hand, the separation between Kiyoko and her son is needed for granting our anti-heroine complete independence from patriarchy. Yet, Chita thinks his biological mother, Kiyoko, and his twin-sister are dead, and Chiki also thinks his biological father, whoever he is, and her twin-brother are dead. One of the unresolved issues in this novel is their separation. Considering the strong and special connection typically attributed to twins, the probability of them being reunited in the future remains an open-ended question.

Following Shan’s interpretation, Chita probably grows up being an environmentalist, and Chiki grows up being a feminist—in this case, someone who believes in equality of opportunities, capabilities and celebration of difference—inspired by her mother’s strength and courage (11). Therefore, a possible way of reading the figure of the twins is in terms of the possible future links between feminism and environmentalism: “the message of the novel is that the problem of ecology and the problem of women’s oppression go hand in hand, and one cannot be resolved alone without the other” (Shan 11). I would like to add to this

⁹⁰ 「誰が何と言っても、あたしのママは凄い人だと思います」(365)

message, the problems of race, ethnic minorities and class. Kirino shows the inter-sectionality of these issues, hinting that they are all political causes that need to be tackled together.

2.5. Conclusive remarks: embodied survival

Tokyo jima is a multi-layered narrative, and Kiyoko is a multi-dimensional character: she goes from being sexually active to passive, from having power to being abused, from being a housewife, to an island's 'whore,' and then, to a multi-faceted mother away from any traditional idealization. The themes of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are essential to the plot and to Kiyoko's character development. Kirino's depiction of pregnancy and childbirth in this adverse scenario—in which survival is at stake—reconfigures motherhood and problematizes the dyad culture-nature.

The emphasis on Kiyoko's gendered subjectivity also makes us wonder: Would all women behave similarly under the same conditions? Is Kirino suggesting that this life drive and capacity for resilience is present in all women? Perhaps, Kirino is revealing attributes of 'women'—as a sociocultural construct—rather than making a universal, homogeneous claim about womanhood. Suzuki Takeshi claims that the main point Kirino addresses through her novel is the latent "oddness/strangeness" of all 'women' (369).⁹¹ *Tokyo jima*'s special conditions bring to the front all the potentiality that was dormant in Kiyoko. Kiyoko is "odd," she is in fact different to what is usual or expected from a woman. Kirino's gender awareness also manifests in her response to the publishing house

⁹¹ 「『東京島』の物語を通しての「清子」の変化—それはほとんど人格が変わってしまったかにさえ思えるほどの甚大なものだが—は、老衰とか枯淡などと呼ばれるような経年による自然なそれとはまったく別の異様な変化と言えるが、しかしそれは彼女が特別な存在であるからではなく、いわば条件さえ揃えば誰にでも起こり得ることなのだ。それは実のところ、すべての「女性」が潜在させている「異様」さなのだ、桐野夏生は言いたいのだと思う」(*Tokyo* 369)

when they asked her to write *Osaka jima* (大阪島, Osaka Island) with the opposite setting—thirty women and one man:

With that setting there is no quarrel at all. Surely, the man would be like a “Lord,” even if he has no abilities at all, everyone would coexist making a fool of him, and at the same time, flattering him. If he has abilities, everyone would receive his sperm, they would share him, and I think everything would just go smoothly (Laughter). (Bandō and Kirino 229-230; my trans.)⁹²

Kirino seems particularly interested in portraying the position of women, and the violence in a patriarchal society. Kiyoko is a complex character—she is not an “all or nothing” type of woman, she is neither a “whore” nor a “wife,” neither a “lover” nor a “mother;” she is constantly both, or moving between different roles in the gray zone. This particular depiction challenges binary thought, and allows us to think about subjectivity, gender, and bodily experiences in terms of a spectrum or continuum. Similarly, this setting allows Kirino to show the pervasiveness of normative heterosexuality, while also challenging the norms prescribed by the “heterosexual matrix” through the depiction of non-hetero-normative sexual and gender identities (Butler, *Bodies* 24).

Kirino’s setting is definitely a fantastic, imaginary one, yet its narrative deals with very real themes. Kirino problematizes and blurs the boundaries between locals and foreigners, and addresses social issues related to outcasts, the underprivileged and oppressed, as she centers this narrative on “precariat” characters (“freeters” or part-time, free-lance workers without employment security). Given this social dimension, T. Suzuki

⁹² 『東京島』というのは、無人島に取り残された三十一人の男と一人の女という設定なんですけど、新潮社の編集者が、「今度『大阪島』というタイトルで、女が三十人に男が一人というのはどうですか」と言うんだけど、その設定だと全然諍いにならなくて、きっと男が「殿」状態になって、たとえ能力がなくても、みんなでちょっと馬鹿にしながらも持ち上げて共存する。能力があったら、みんなで子種いただきます、みたいな感じで共有して、すごくうまくいくような気がする（笑）」(Bandō and Kirino 229-230)

also questions if it would be possible to draw an analogy between the Tokyoites and the Hong Kongers, with the actual dynamics between the countries (370). Certainly, Kirino's fiction makes us think about sociocultural and political issues in contemporary Japan.

The focus on Kiyoko's survival drive makes readers think about our own desire to live. In agreement with Bandō, "When I read Kirino's *Tokyo jima*, I got the feeling of 'don't sit and wait for death.' Kiyoko, the female protagonist, gets rid of all the men she loved until she finally escapes from the island. By any means possible, Kiyoko would do anything to survive" (Bandō and Kirino 229; my trans.).⁹³ Yet, Kirino clarifies that her depiction of the survival drive is not a literal take on survival in nature (230). In *Tokyo jima* she depicts survival in a simplified, caricature-like way. If she were to depict it realistically, the story would be completely different (230). Hence, Kirino approaches survival in nature in a figurative fashion. In fact, Kirino states that she "wanted to ask how do we continue to live without getting crushed in today's harsh society?" (230).⁹⁴

In the end, Kirino demythologizes patriarchy, and *Tokyo jima* can be read as an example of what is called "revisionist mythmaking"—a narrative intended "to denounce the fractured female subjectivity resulting from the pressures and desires of a male-dominated society" (Castellini 58). Ancient foundational myths feature the "disappearing woman" which symbolically places women in the realm of death. Through demythologization, Kirino lets Kiyoko survive while anchored in her female embodiment. Kirino also exposes more recent myths, such as the myth of perfect motherhood—necessary in the story for peaceful

⁹³ 「座して死を待たない、というのは桐野さんの『東京島』を読んでいても感じました。主人公の女性・清子は愛する男性を捨ててまで、島を脱出しようとする。清子は、とにかく自分が生き延びるためであればなんでもする」 (Bandō and Kirino 229)

⁹⁴ 「私はね、自然の中のサバイバルに興味ないんです。ほら、雑駁な東京至上主義者だから。あのサバイバルは、カリカチュアとして描いています。そこをリアリズムで書くとなると、また別の物語になりますから。今の厳しい社会を潰れないで生きていくには、どうするかということを知りたいんです」 (Bandō and Kirino 230)

community building on the island, and also for Kiyoko's relationship with her daughter in the city.

Chapter Three

Poetic embodiment and healing words by Itō Hiromi

3.1. Introduction: turning the body into poetry

This chapter looks at the experiences of the female body in a selection of poetry and writings by Itō Hiromi. Itō is a crucial author in any discussion about the body in Japanese literature, and, as such, her oeuvre is worthy of our attention. Itō began writing poetry and has gradually shifted mostly to prose and narrative poems. Her texts span a wide variety of themes including sexuality and gender roles and relationships, body issues, botanical imagery, animals, language, and migration.

Feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko calls her writing “private poetry,” after the definition of “private novels,” “I-novels” (*shi-shōsetsu* 私小説) (Foreword 5). “I-novels” have been translated as autobiographical or confessional novels, and they privilege “lived experienced” and “sincerity” (Napier 13). According to literature scholar Edward Fowler, Japanese writers “never had the faith in the authority of representation that his Western counterpart had,” and, in Japan “the notion of what is real or authentic is traditionally limited to personal observations and experiences” (Fowler xxiii, 5 qtd. in Napier 13). Itō’s writings definitely question and move away from canonic representations, and the authenticity of her texts rely on her personal views and experiences.

Yet, her poems are not exclusively autobiographical or confessional, as they show a strong social awareness of women’s issues in general, and often criticize the naturalization of the maternal instinct and the idealization of motherhood; that is to say, the idea that mothers naturally possess loving, caring, self-sacrificing instincts towards their children (Tilton-Cantrell 177).

Poetry scholar Leith Morton describes Itō's interactions with French psychoanalytic feminist critics—including Klein, Kristeva and Cixous—as cannibalistic; “she deliberately plays with and occasionally caricatures most of it in her poetry” (Morton, *Modernism* 102-103; Tilton-Cantrell 164). Therefore, another general feature of Itō's work is that it is highly inter-textual. Her works interact with different kinds of texts: feminist, psychological essays, literary texts, as well as folk and mythic stories.

Itō's work has mostly been described as “exemplar of Cixous's *écriture féminine*, stemming from somewhere deep within the body itself” (Angles, Translator's Introduction viii; “Introduction” 9). The notion of *écriture féminine* is developed in Cixous's “The Laugh of the Medusa,” where she writes that a woman must write her self, and by doing so, she:

Will return to the body which has been confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard. (Cixous 880)

Itō's poetry seems to respond to Cixous' calling because she writes herself into her poetry, reclaiming the female body experience through forthright narratives that refuse any type of censorship or repression. Actually, the title of her 1990s essay captures the inextricable link between her body and words: “*Jibun no karada wo shi ni shita wake*” 自分の体を詩にしたわけ (I simply turn my own body into poetry) (Quimby 28; Tilton-Cantrell 162). Itō puts her own bodily experiences at the center of her narrations, breaking taboos and reclaiming the “repressed body and sexuality of pregnancy” (Quimby 29).

According to Tilton-Cantrell, even when her work is “intensely personal,” she also “engages with various issues of social importance for women in contemporary Japan

including eating disorders, the expectations placed on women as caregivers, and sexist expectations of women's appearance" (162). In addition, Morita refers to her as a "queer eco-feminist poet" because she problematizes the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality, questions the presumed naturalness of heterosexuality, and refuses "to let herself fall prey to the pitfalls of fixed sexual identity or sexuality" (113-114). Furthermore, Itō has also been called a "poet of childbirth" (*shussan shijin* 出産詩人). Even today, her poems about pregnancy and motherhood are amongst her most known works, and have been subjected to considerable academic literary criticism (Angles, "Introduction" 9-10; Quimby 39; Tilton-Cantrell 163; Morton, *Modernism* 105).

This thesis finds great value in Itō as a "poet of childbirth." Her poetry of the 1980s contained in her main two-volume collections *Teritori ron 2* (On Territory 2, 1985) and *Teritori ron 1* (On Territory 1, 1986) were published when she was experiencing pregnancy and motherhood herself (Quimby 29). The poetry from this period is characterized by an unmatched frankness in the depictions of pregnancy and childbirth as well as of several bodily functions and fluids, such as menstruation, masturbation, and breastfeeding (29).

In order to explore Itō's depiction of the female and maternal body in her poetry, this chapter is divided into three major sections. The next section, "3.2. A poetic inter-textual account of the female body in 'Killing Kanoko'" looks mainly at one of her most renowned poems, "Killing Kanoko" ("Kanoko goroshi" カノ子殺し, 1985; trans. 2009; 2007) from an inter-textual perspective. Hence, "Killing Kanoko" is compared with and put in dialogue with other texts written by Itō between 1984 and 1995. The following section, "3.3. About pregnancy, and poop as a metaphor for childbirth, fetuses and children" explores the themes of pregnancy and childbirth in other poems and texts by the author. The next one, "3.4. *Onna no isshō* (A woman's life, 2014): poetry and counseling"

provides an analytic commentary of one of her latest works *Onna no isshō* 女の一生 (A woman's life, 2014), and elaborates on the nexus between poetry and healing. Finally, "Conclusive remarks: poetic embodiment and healing words" closes while highlighting Itō's major contributions to feminism and literature.

3.2. A poetic inter-textual account of the female Body in "Killing Kanoko"

"Killing Kanoko" ("Kanoko goroshi," 1985; trans. 2009; 2007) is one of Itō's most famous poems, and it was written when Itō was taking care of her first daughter, Kanoko (Angles, Translator's Notes 120). The long-poem is written in two separate columns, upper and lower threads in Japanese, or right and left threads in English. They represent two different voices of the character/narrator Hiromi. They tell stories that somehow interact with each other (Angles, "Introduction" 10). Also, within these two voices there are additional multiple voices that represent different experiences of women.

The first thread primarily addresses the theme of abortion, but it also touches on the subjects of breastfeeding, postpartum depression, and the desire to commit infanticide. The main narrator is Hiromi. The second thread describes the suicide of twenty-four year old Hiromi by a friend, the "actual" infanticide of Kanoko in a rage attack, who we know thanks to the first thread is Hiromi's daughter, hence the narration shifts back to Hiromi's perspective. According to Angles, "the bold expression of a young mother's desire to commit infanticide shocked many readers and earned Itō a place in the tabloid newspapers" (Translator's Notes 120). Even today, "Killing Kanoko" is definitely a unique poem that continues to cause shock among readers.

3.2.1. *Abortion, infanticide and child abuse*

This thesis addresses different literary depictions of pregnancy, and in “Killing Kanoko,” this depiction is closely linked to abortion. Talking about pregnancy and reproduction cannot escape the very possibility of putting an end to one’s pregnancy. Abortion is thus one dimension of pregnancy and motherhood, and this poem allows for plenty of discussions on the matter. Itō opens the poem with a quote from psychologist Magda Denes’ book *In Necessity and Sorrow: Life and Death in an Abortion Hospital* published in 1976 (Angles, Translator’s Notes 120). Literary reviewer Sarah Fox points out that “Killing Kanoko” reiterates its ‘doubleness’ not only through employing two narrating voices in separate threads, but also, through the inter-textual wink to Denes’ book (De Lima and Fox). The narrator, Hiromi, is reading it while her sister tells her about her own abortion and she congratulates her. This double movement serves to contextualize the experience of abortion in a personal/familiar setting as well as in a medical setting. The narrator also wonders if her own aborted fetuses would have resembled Kanoko, her daughter.

Denes’ book was translated from English into several languages, including Japanese by Kaji Etsuko 加地永都子 in 1984, and Itō quoted from this translation in “Killing Kanoko” (Angles, Translator’s Notes 120). In general, Denes’ book argues for the necessity of legalizing abortions, yet it is mostly known for its descriptions of “abortion as a brutal and brutalizing procedure” (Shainess 191). It is worth noting that Denes focuses on second-trimester saline abortions that are no longer performed regularly, so her descriptions of the procedures are outdated. However, Denes also talks about the dilemmas and emotional ambivalence faced by women who need to abort, their families and the

personnel of an abortion hospital (Sutherland Airone). These aspects remain relevant in today's society.

Itō's poem starts off with the details from a doctor at an abortion clinic, about the leg of an aborted fetus, and about fetuses who are born alive, and patients dealing with, or suppressing feelings of fear and guilt (Tilton-Cantrell 185): "Twice in one week, babies came out alive" ("Kanoko" 69; my trans.).⁹⁵ "Here on this floor, all of the women are trying to deal somehow with their feelings about getting an abortion, and then we hear the crying of a baby" ("Killing" 33).⁹⁶ This is one of the quotes from Denes' book; like her, Itō depicts the emotional and psychological struggles of getting an abortion while depicting birth or life with the crying of a fetus. It is worth mentioning that the word used in the poem is "*akanbō*" 赤ん坊, "baby," even though the precise medical term is "fetus."

Itō's reference to Denes' book can be interpreted as proof of her interest in the psychological dimension of abortion, as well as her intent to problematize the debate. It is clear that both authors are pro-choice, and in their very different types of texts readers find an understanding of abortion as a necessity, but still, both authors do not hold back on the descriptions of the horror, sorrow or pain that in some cases comes along with this decision. As mentioned, the narrator is reading those details while her sister casually says that she recently aborted a "brat" ("*gakincho*" ガキンチョ). The narrator says the word "brat" is not the one she would use. Even if she congratulates her on her abortion, she seems conflicted with the way she refers to her aborted fetus. Itō poetically problematizes the tensions between life and death, between being born or unborn, addressing the blurry boundaries between fetuses and babies:

⁹⁵ 「一週間に二回、生きて生まれたことがあります」 (Itō, "Kanoko" 69)

⁹⁶ 「この女性たちがみんな、自分の赤ん坊を中絶する気持ちを何とかおさめようとしているこのフロアで、赤ん坊の泣き声がしたわけですからね」 (Itō, "Kanoko" 69)

Kanoko was not disposed of/ I/ Aborted an embryo that must have looked/ just like Kanoko/ The embryo that must have looked just/ like Kanoko would have grown/ I might have had a fetus that looked just/ like Kanoko/ But it would not have been her/ Congratulations on your destruction. (Itō, “Killing” 33-34)⁹⁷

Here the reader knows that before giving birth to Kanoko, Hiromi (the character) has had at least one abortion before. The poet is careful in her words of choice “fetus” (“*taiji*” 胎児). She wonders if those fetuses would have resembled Kanoko, yet she is still aware of the radical differences between them. Even though she compares her aborted fetuses with Kanoko, in the end “congratulations” are given. Itō continues pushing the limits of the definition of fetuses and babies:

I had an abortion in the second trimester/ I asked if the baby was a boy or a girl/ But it is a lie to call it *a baby*/ I should have called it a fetus/ Of course/ they won't say if it's a boy or a girl/ Because the shock is too great/ To the maternal body/ The maternal body wonders/ Was it a female fetus that looked like/ Kanoko? Was it a male fetus that looked like Kanoko? (“Killing” 35)⁹⁸

In this poem we find a double liminal existence between life and death, between being human and not-yet-human (Douglas; Gammeltoft 64). Itō's position grants entire autonomy to choose to the maternal body, yet she problematizes the intertwined relationship between pregnant woman and fetus. The maternal body wonders what is happening inside her, and points to the possibility of humanizing and imagining a

⁹⁷ 「カノコはおろされませんでした・わたしは・カノコによく似たはずの胎児の妊娠を中絶したわけです・カノコによく似たはずの胎児を成長して・カノコによく似たはずの生児を・わたしは得られたかもしれませんが・カノコのことではない・滅ぼしておめでとございます」 (“Kanoko” 70)

⁹⁸ 「わたしは妊娠中期に中絶したことがあります・あかちゃんが男でしたか女でしたかとたずねたのですが・あかちゃんという言い方では嘘をついています・胎児がと言わなければいけない・当然、男か女か教えないことになっています・ショックが大きいから・母体の・母体は考える・カノコに似た女の胎児かカノコに似た男の胎児か」 (71)

relationship with one's "baby" ("akachan" あかちゃん) through knowing the sex of the fetus, and this potentially affecting one's mind to choose. In addition, by wondering whether a female or male fetus would have resembled Kanoko, Itō also questions the differences between the sexes, or rather creates a link between the question of sex difference and abortion. Itō seems to be aware that the maternal body has a delusional construction of the fetus as a baby, as she is clear about it being "a lie;" that is to say, a psychological and social construction, because in reality, she is aware that an unborn fetus is radically different from a baby. Yet, those differences are being problematized in the poem in terms of playing a significant role in the psychology of abortion.

In addition, I would like to dwell on the choice of words when it comes to talking about abortion. As seen already, this excerpt continues to problematize the relationship between the pregnant woman, or to use the poet's words, the "maternal body" (*botai* 母体) and the other being inside her. It is worth noticing that throughout the poem the author does not talk about "mothers" who abort. Perhaps because in the debate over abortion it is important to differentiate mothers of born babies, and women pregnant with fetuses (Dalén 110). Hence the poem carefully refers to "pregnancy" ("ninshin" 妊娠), or to the "maternal body" ("botai" 母体). Similarly, the poem addresses the differences between fetuses and babies. These considerations resonate with Florence Thomas' warning: "I think we need to be very careful with the vocabulary we use, we need to talk about 'embryo' and 'fetus' because 'baby' is once it's born, and also, 'mother' is after a son or daughter has been born, until then, she is a woman, a pregnant woman. I am saying we need to be very careful with this because otherwise we are too easily treated as child murderers" (qtd. in Dalén 110; my trans.). The anti-abortion side of the debate argues for the fetuses' inalienable right to life from conception, hence, it conceptualizes abortion as homicide (Dalén 113). From this side of the debate, women who interrupt their pregnancies are

accused of being “child murderers.” Itō’s poem definitively builds upon and challenges this accusation. In contrast, in Itō’s *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* 良のおっぱい、悪のおっぱい (1984-5), she employs the term “*taiji*” 胎児 “fetus” consistently throughout the sections on pregnancy and childbirth, and this is “a choice that keeps the focus on the woman as agent, rather than as simply mother-in waiting” (Seman, *Writing* 114-115).

In order to assess the impact of such a strong depiction of the theme of abortion in “Killing Kanoko,” it is useful to take a look at the social context surrounding this theme. In 1948, Japan was one of the first countries to legalize abortion through the Eugenic Protection Act, and by 1949 economic reasons were included in the aforementioned Act (Goto et al. 301; Ueno and Turzynski 80). According to Ueno and Turzynski, Japanese women have had “access to safe and relatively cheap abortion” (79). Yet, they also clarify that abortion rights have been gained through political struggle and need to be protected (80). For instance, there have been two attempts to abolish the Eugenic Protection Law, in 1970 and 1982, but they were “unsuccessful due to strong resistance from women” (Tsukahara 101). In 1996 this law was revised as the Maternal Protection Law, deleting the sections concerning eugenics and emphasizing legalization of abortion due to economic reasons (101). For the Japanese women’s movement, reproductive freedom has been a crucial issue and “it encompassed the right to carry a child to term as well as access to abortion and birth control” (Kotani 72).

Feminism has often been depicted as “anti-motherhood” due to its critical perspective on the social constructions of motherhood (Kotani 72), however, within Japanese feminism there has always been “a strong trend towards motherhood ideology,” an affirmation of motherhood as a Japanese cultural value (Ueno and Turzynski 81-82). Therefore, despite the legality of abortion it is still socially stigmatized and is regarded as a “sign of bad motherhood,” or as infanticide (Tsukahara 101). Tsukahara claims that *mizuko kuyō* 水子

供養 (miscarried/aborted fetus's service), the Buddhist rituals honoring aborted fetuses introduced in 1970 by religious and political leaders are part of the stigmatization of abortion (101). In relation to the word “*mizuko*,” Hardacre explains that “virtually all known usages of the term include the spirits of aborted, miscarried, and stillborn fetuses, and wider uses of the term enlarge it to include the spirits of newborn infants and young children” (2; qtd. in Tilton-Cantrell 200). Hardacre emphasizes that the word used in Edo period was “*kaesu*” 返す (“return,” “send back”), and that it “is distinctly different from killing (“*korosu*” 殺す),” hence infanticide was not viewed “as a form of homicide,” and “infanticide, abortion and child abandonment were widely tolerated” (Hardacre 25-25; qtd. in Tilton Cantrell 200).

Itō herself comments that there is a difference between Edo women who aborted fetuses and felt like this was their only choice, and contemporary women who abort, who sometimes fall into a situation that prompts feelings of guilt and leads women to engage in *mizuko kuyō* (Itō and Miyata 161-162 qtd. in Tilton-Cantrell 200). In addition, Tsukahara explains that in Japan there is “a lagging of abortion technology” due to “customary use of current methods, doctors’ lack of concern and desire to maintain an advantageous status quo, the stigmatization of abortion, ‘apathy and disdain’ toward women, and lack of correct information” (116). Therefore, in Japan, as in the rest of the world, there is still plenty of work to do in order to guarantee full access to sexual and reproductive rights for women.

In general, the debate over abortion has been characterized by a tension between the value placed upon the fetus and on a woman’s autonomy to choose. It has been argued that the right to abortion denies the rights of the fetus. As Mackenzie explains, there is a conflict between “the right of a woman to bodily autonomy, that is, her right to decide what happens in and to her body,” and “the ‘right to life’ of the fetus, a right based on the

presumption that it is a being deserving of some moral consideration” (175). Feminist responses to this tension can be divided into two main lines of argumentation: the first one argues that fetuses are not persons, and the second one claims that “even if a fetus does have a right to life, the woman’s right to bodily autonomy overrides that right” (175). Judith Jarvis Thomson is one of the main exponents of the second line of argument, and she focuses on the following clear premises: women should have rights over their own bodies, bodily integrity and self-ownership, “if we accept these premises we can only allow fetuses to use women’s bodies with women’s consent” (qtd. in Satz). Regarding both of these approaches that focus on “the conflict of rights,” Mackenzie says that the “rights-based models of bodily autonomy are liable seriously to misrepresent both the nature of abortion decisions and the reasons why the availability of abortion is essential to women’s autonomy” (175). There is a specific kind of autonomy and responsibility involved in a woman’s decision to abort:

A strong feminist case for abortion needs to construe a woman’s right to obtain an abortion as the right of an autonomous moral agent to be able to make a decision about whether she wishes to take responsibility for the future well-being of a being dependent upon her. In choosing abortion in other words, a woman is not merely choosing not to allow the fetus occupancy of her uterus. Nor is she merely choosing not to undertake responsibility for a particular future child. Rather, as Steven Ross has pointed out, she is choosing that there be *no being at all* in relation to whom she is in a situation of such responsibility. To require that a woman has no right to secure the death of the fetus, at least in the early stages of pregnancy, thus violates her autonomy. (Mackenzie 176-177)

Therefore, pregnant embodiment and abortion also deal with the theme of agency and autonomy. Itō's poetry reveals a "reflective bodily perspective" that emerges from an account of pregnant embodiment (Mackenzie 176), and she depicts the complex emotional and physical dimensions of abortion in her meditations on life and death.

In "Moving" ("Hikkoshi" 引っ越し, 1986) we find another poetic image of life and death as Itō describes a hearse as being "pregnant with a corpse" (6).⁹⁹ This seems paradoxical because pregnancy is often a symbol of emerging life, and a corpse is a physical manifestation of death. However, Itō's work reveals that birth/life and death are like two sides of the same coin; or better said, life and death are constantly interacting with each other, invading each other.

Side by side with the theme of abortion, "Killing Kanoko"'s treatment of infanticide calls for examination. The narrator shares with the readers an intimate secret: "I have committed infanticide/ I have disposed of dead bodies/ It's easy if you do it right after giving birth/ It's easier than an abortion if you just/ don't get found out/ I have all the confidence/ To do it without being discovered/ I can bury any number of Kanokos" ("Killing" 37).¹⁰⁰ In a later poem "The Painted Cat Flies in the Sky" (1993), originally written in English, she "changes her mind" and argues the opposite:

I want to kill people/ Of course I know I can't really do it/so I thought/ I'll get pregnant and get an abortion/ that's the easiest way to murder/ I could think of/ I have been saying that abortion is not murder/ it is only excretion/ Araki-san, do you laugh at me for changing my mind?/ but well, it's true, I felt it, making love with a penis and having fun/ I wanted to face it/ it/ there. (153-154)

⁹⁹ 「死骸を孕んだ霊柩車」 ("Hikkoshi")

¹⁰⁰ 「わたしは嬰兒殺したこともあります・死体遺棄したこともあります・産んですぐやればかんたんです・みつきりさえしなければ中絶よりかんたんです・見つからずにやっつてのける自信は・いくらもあります・カノコはいくらでも埋められます」 ("Kanoko" 72)

In both passages there are not any traces of guilt, in fact the narrator says that infanticide and abortion are “easy.” In “Killing Kanoko” the real problem is rooted in being discovered rather than on the act in itself. Hence, Itō places morality as well as the stigma of abortion solely on a social dimension. Yet, the actual description of Kanoko’s infanticide contradicts this version as feelings of guilt and remorse actually emerge. A possible way to interpret both passages is through the acknowledgement of the heavy irony that characterizes Itō’s work. The reader cannot help to question: How can this be easy? I contend that Itō is comparing abortion and infanticide as she is ironically playing with the arguments—from the anti-abortion side of the debate—that often draw an analogy between both experiences. Yet, at the same time, she is also trying to understand or relate to such a posture.

In “Killing Kanoko” the author implicates herself in the poem by using her real name; but the use of “*san*,” the use of the third-person creates an impersonal distance between author and character (Nakayasu). Similarly, Kanoko—the name of the author’s real daughter—is written in katakana, creating this double movement of implicating and alienating themselves from the poetic act (Nakayasu). This is not the only time she uses her real name for different personas in her poems/texts, for example in *Kawara arekusa* 河原荒草 (*Wild Grass on the Riverbank*, 2005; trans. 2014) the mother is arrested for child abuse and at that point the reader finds out that her name is “Hiromi.” Given these self-referential elements we may identify “self-mocking in the exaggerated portrayal of ‘bad motherhood’ by personas who bear versions of the writer’s name” (Tilton-Cantrell 183). These elements add a personal side to the poem, as well as a challenge to the limits between fiction and reality. The actual infanticide in “Killing Kanoko,” and the fantasies of infanticide are “imagined incidents” that nevertheless highlight vulnerability, fragility and the intensity of a mother’s emotional state (184):

Before I knew it, I lost my temper/ And smashed Kanoko (six months)/ Over the head with a nearby alarm clock/ Kanoko went limp/ And would not respond/ If I called her, shook her, or hit her/ I thought I've killed her/ I've done something horrible/ And I got frightened/ So I put her down/ And left the place/ When I came back about two hours later/ Just like I thought/ Kanoko seemed dead/ Black ants were crawling all over her/ And she seemed to have moved slightly/ From the spot where she first lay ("Killing" 34).¹⁰¹

Hiromi has fantasized about killing Kanoko, and, inadvertently, she does. The narrator is caught up in fear, remorse, and escapes—perhaps in an attempt to escape from this fictional reality—and when she comes back, Kanoko is covered by ants and has moved slightly. The imagery of the ants help the reader understand that these are imagined incidents that highlight the vulnerability and fragility of human life and body. Tilton Cantrell insists that “Killing Kanoko” does not address realistically the topic of child abuse (182). In fact, abortion, infanticide and child abuse are depicted in surreal ways. Hence, “Killing Kanoko” can be rendered as a “therapeutic poem” that liberates women who struggle trying to fit into the ideal of mothering (183). In fact, in a recent interview Itō says that after “Killing Kanoko” she has had to explain herself, as she meant: “kill your children because you are more important” (Schunnesson). She goes on, and shares that she is way too focused on literature, for her, “everything is fiction, everything can be written, but people are not good readers, people stay at the surface” (Schunnesson).

¹⁰¹ 「わたしは思わずカッとなって・カノコ（六か月）の頭を・そばにあった目覚まし時計で殴りつけると・カノコはぐったりしてしまつて・呼んでも揺すつても叩いても・びくともしなくなりましたので・殺してしまったたいへんなことをしたと思い・こわくなって・そのままカノコを置いて・外出しました・二時間ばかりして戻ってみますと・やっぱりカノコは死んでいるようで・全身に黒い蟻がたかかっておりまして・はじめに置いたところより・ちょっと動いているようでした」 (“Kanoko” 75)

In “Tennōji” 天王寺 (1993) we also find a depiction of infanticide in the poem: “An old woman adopts a child, she adopts the child and kills it, she kills it...And the child’s corpse was buried at the root of a big tree” (“Tennōji,” *Killing* 85).¹⁰² These lines are mentioned midway in the poem next to several places that are all located in Kumamoto—the author’s hometown. There is also another connection between the place and the story about the older woman adopting and then killing a child. Itō actually writes “*Kanokogi*” 鹿子木 (which is a place in Kumamoto, and a family name), and it is no coincidence that the author’s daughter is called Kanoko (Angles, Translator’s Notes 127). Thus, there is also an intertextual nod to “Killing Kanoko” in which the author explores her own thoughts of infanticide (127).

3.2.2. Questioning “maternal love”

Based on anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy’s writings, literature scholar Taniguchi explains that a mother harboring aggressive impulses does not deny or exclude the existence of maternal love. In her words: the “possibilities of maternal aggression are recognized not as the abhorrent opposite of the maternal love, but as a part of the real account of motherhood. Itō affirms the coexistence of her sadistic fantasies against her children and intense maternal love” (“Maternal” 22). In “Killing Kanoko” there are non-conventional evidences of the narrator’s maternal love. For example, she writes: “My own child is dearer to me” (“Killing” 37).¹⁰³ However, it is important to contextualize these lines. They come right after the author writes: “Cheerfully punishing a stepchild/

¹⁰² 「子どもを貰っては殺し貰っては殺ししていた老婆が屋根裏に飼う芋虫たち・子どもたちの死骸を根元に埋めた大木」 (“Tennōji,” *Watashi* 36)

¹⁰³ 「自分の子の方がかわいい」 (Itō, “Kanoko” 73)

Cheerfully killing a stepchild” (“Killing” 37).¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Itō is also problematizing the theme of blood ties versus extended-family ties in connection to child-abuse.

Tilton-Cantrell notes that the “bullying and killing of step child by step parent is common in folklore,” and adds that, “one more highly values and is more willing to indulge one’s own child than somebody else’s” (196). Then, when Itō refers to herself as being “*kawaii*” 可愛い, “dear” or “cute”—“My own self is dearer to me” (“Killing” 37)¹⁰⁵—she is implying that one should also “indulge and coddle oneself, because one sees oneself as most worthy of such attention and care” (Tilton-Cantrell 197). Perhaps here lies an explanation for the line that Itō writes in between the declaration of love to her own daughter and then to herself, “Cheerfully abandoning a child” (“Killing” 37).¹⁰⁶ Her own sense of worth stands as a strong reason to abandon one’s child (Tilton-Cantrell 197). Here we see a search for balance between caregiving and self-care. This posture recalls Audre Lorde’s much-cited sentence: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (*Burst* 131). Actually, Ueno’s interpretation of “Killing Kanoko” allows us to rethink the contradictory feelings portrayed in the poem in terms of self-preservation:

Itō transforms herself into an abusive mother, an unfaithful lover, a destructive wife, and a cruel daughter. When she kills her child in the famous poem “Kanoko goroshi,”(...) it sounds as though this act of poetic narration might have saved her from the actual act of infanticide. The excessiveness of her aggressive expression keeps her from excessive damage to herself. (Foreword 5)

¹⁰⁴ 「たのしい継子のせっかん・たのしい継子殺し」(73)

¹⁰⁵ 「自分の方がかわいい」(73)

¹⁰⁶ 「たのしい子捨て」(73)

Itō openly criticizes the oppressive quality of the so-called “maternal love” 母性愛 “*boseiai*” and its supposed naturalness (*Yoi* 151-152). As Tilton- Cantrell explains, the notions of “*bosei*” (母性 “maternal nature”) and *boseiai* (“maternal love”) refer to believing that a “mother automatically possess tender, self-sacrificing instincts toward their children, in addition to innate parenting skills—[it] has been a corner stone of Japanese ideology of family since the word and concept were introduced in the early twentieth century” (177). In *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*, Itō has an exceptional way to talk about “maternal love” and its societal pressures from her own personal experience. Right after stating that children are “troublesome” (“*meiwaku*” 迷惑), she writes: “Even so, after all, a parent obsessed with the idea of maternal love will surely talk to their newborn baby every time they change a diaper, breastfeed them or hold them” (*Yoi* 152; my trans.).¹⁰⁷ She compares this attitude with the “unnatural theory” (“*fushizen na riron*” 不自然な理論) that suggests that talking while watering plants benefits their development (152).

Itō confesses that she could not talk to her new born baby despite being told by the doctor to do so, and reading about the importance of talking to one’s baby in books and such (*Yoi* 153). She also says that mothers were advised not to watch TV or do other things while breastfeeding because babies “deserve” all their attention. However, Itō admits that she could not simply waste time like that, and that she read plenty of books and manga while breastfeeding (153). Yet, she did struggle with sometimes feeling like an inadequate mother, and she did wonder how to be a good mother and what it meant to be a good mother. She concludes that: “If one forces oneself mentally and physically, the one suffering is the mother. And children, contrary to expectations, will grow up just fine, no

¹⁰⁷ 「それでも母性愛を持たねばと思いつめる親は、生まれたてのアカンボのオムツを替えるたび、おっぱいをやるたび、だっこするたびに、なんだかんだと話しかけるでしょう」 (Itō, *Yoi* 152-153)

matter the circumstances. So I didn't talk to her, I did things all the time that lack common sense like reading while breastfeeding and my baby grew up fine" (154-155; my trans).¹⁰⁸

Later on, when her baby was around eight months to a year, she started communicating with her mother. As a response, Itō talked back. She says that, in fact, "when I saw myself telling my kid about this and that, I felt I was being such an exemplar mother, that I was shamefully absorbed in a beautiful "maternal love" (written in hiragana, for some reason)" (155).¹⁰⁹ I argue that when Itō writes "*boseiai*" ぼせいあい in hiragana, she reclaims the word for herself and highlights that experiencing love for her daughter is not the same as complying to the sociocultural norms behind "*boseiai*" 母性愛—written in kanji, circumscribed to the "good wife, wise mother" ideology. Hiragana is the simplest syllabary in Japanese, and its use may imply an attempt to strip "maternal love" from its already fixed sociocultural meanings. In this case, she uses hiragana to convey sarcasm and irony like with with the use of quotation marks in English ("Personal").

The theme of "maternal love" also appears further in the notes. Itō writes the word "maternal love," which is generally perceived as "grand," or "high-sounding" ("*kireigoto*" 綺麗事), and that is perhaps why it was established (*Yoi* 231-232). In relation to this, Itō writes: "In the time that 'annoying' is a reality, the power of 'maternal love' rubs it out, and when your child grows up, your rubbed out feelings will be cleanly forgotten" (232).¹¹⁰

Itō plays with the different meanings of the word "*kirei*" 綺麗 ("beautiful," "clean") and

¹⁰⁸ 「精神的にも肉体的にも無理をしたら、たいへんなのは母親で、コドモはあんがいどんな状況でも元気に育っていくに違いない。というわけでわたしは話しかけてやらない、おっぱいをやりながら本を読むという非常識なことをずっとしていたわけですが、わたしのアカンボは育ちました」 (*Yoi* 154-155)

¹⁰⁹ 「コドモになんだかんだと話しかけている自分に気がついた時は、模範的な母親になった気分、うつくしい「ぼせいあい」(なぜかひらがな)にわれながらうっとりいたします」 (*Yoi* 155)

¹¹⁰ 「つまり人々は、このように「ぼせいあい」をキレイゴトで把握し、そのために「母性愛」はますます確立されていくのである。「うっとうしい」が現実にある間は「母性愛」の権限でそれをもみ消し、コドモがそだてば、もみ消した感情はキレイに忘れてしまうのである」 (*Yoi* 231-232)

“*kireigoto*” 綺麗事 (“grand”). She also reveals how the idealization and expectation of maternal love can be oppressive to women who are struggling with the reality of motherhood.

3.2.3. “*Congratulations on your destruction*”

All in all, “Killing Kanoko” is a poetic exploration of strong and dark emotions associated to mothering, and it is also an affirmation of one’s right and/or ability to end one’s pregnancy. The poem’s final stanzas include several voices of women friends who have also aborted or abandoned their children or who wish they could do so. The poem depicts female solidarity and mutual understanding regarding abortion. The sentence “Congratulations on your destruction” (“*horoboshite omedetōgozaimasu*” 滅ぼしておめでとうございます) is a recurring motif throughout the poem. It creates a world in which abortion and abandoning children is not only acceptable but also encouraged (Tilton-Cantrell 185). Nevertheless, Itō does not idealize abortion since feelings of fear, guilt and anxiety are prominent in the poem. The sentence “congratulations on your destruction” (“*horoboshite omedetōgozaimasu*”) also captures juxtaposing feelings, as it refers to the destruction of the body: sometimes it may refer to the mother’s body, but mostly it refers to the aborted body. Yet, in other passages it may capture the mother’s own desire to destroy, or it may point to her own destruction; “either possibility implies that the (usually celebrated) event of a baby’s birth leads to destruction” (Tilton-Cantrell 194).

Translator Angles openly thanks translator Nakayasu for being the one who came up with the translation for the phrase “*horoboshite omedetōgozaimasu*” (Translator’s Notes 120). Through this sentence, Itō puts forward a critique at the discrepancies in behavior towards people who have just given birth versus people who have had an abortion (Nakayasu). “Congratulations” are usually given to new parents, and are “words that

parents who are ambivalent about their new role or experiencing depression could experience as bitterly ironic” (Tilton-Cantrell 193). The repetition of this sentence creates a “recurring, almost hypnotic cadences that parody the congratulatory message a young mother hears repeatedly upon becoming pregnant or giving birth” (Angles, “Introduction” 10).

The rhythmical effect of the repeated “congratulations on your destruction” also builds a setting similar to a healing trance state, adding to the therapeutic effect of the poem. In fact, according to Fox, the sentence “congratulations on your destruction” supports the poet’s objective to liberate herself (by obliterating child, father, husband) in service to language, the channeling of shamanic/poetic utterance” (De Lima and Fox). The absence of the voices of the children and fathers also add to the notion that the maternal body belongs solely to the mother, reinforcing the feminist position in this debate: my body, my choice.

As Angles points out, the title of the poem “Happy Destroying” (“Happy desutorōingu” ハッピーデストロイイング, 1993) is the author’s own “idiosyncratic rendering of the words *horoboshite omedetogozaimasu*” (“Congratulations on your destruction”) (Translator’s Notes 124). In “Happy Destroying,” Itō actually writes: “And there is this place/ That keeps repeating in my poems...*Happy Destroying* (this is in English)/ Or *Congratulations on your death*” (“Happy” 87).¹¹¹ Here lies perhaps a clue to understanding the importance of death—literally and metaphorically—in her work, and how it evokes juxtaposing feelings. In other words, “Happy Destroying” points to the paradoxes enclosed within, or to the coexistence of the opposites good/evil, life/death, as

¹¹¹ 「それからわたしの詩の中にはくりかえす箇所がなんども出てきます・意味としては、そうですね・ハッピー、デストロイイング・あるいは、コングラチュレイション、ユア、デスとか」 (“Happy” 104-105)

she writes that the word “congratulations” is “unclean/And bright at once” (“Happy” 88).¹¹²

3.2.4. *Pregnant and maternal pleasure*

In “Killing Kanoko” we can also identify a connection between sexuality and mothering. Itō depicts the pregnant body as a source of sexual pleasure: “When I used to think about childbirth/ I could masturbate endlessly/ I imagine the approaching moment of birth/ The pleasant movements of the expectant mother’s fingers” (Itō, “Killing” 36).¹¹³ Here, pleasure is completely centered in the mother; thus, it can be read as an example of empowerment of mothers (O’Reilly ch.48). The pregnant body as a source of pleasure and joy is not a typical literary image but Itō’s poem creates it: “I have had a pleasant pregnancy” and “I could eat as much as I wanted” (“Killing” 36).¹¹⁴ “Pleasant pregnancy,” “*tanoshii ninshin*” 楽しい妊娠, literally, “a fun pregnancy”: through these lines Itō includes the possibility of it being a pleasurable experience (Tilton-Cantrell 189). Eating without restraints, as well as masturbation, bring pleasure and satisfaction to one’s body. Though traditionally considered as self-indulgent, here they are reclaimed as part of the pregnant experience (189). According to Tilton Cantrell’s analysis, the reference to masturbation while thinking of childbirth:

blur[s] boundaries between experiences that are generally kept separate, as when Itō compares childbirth to defecating. While we could take the description of childbirth as erotic fantasy at face value, we could also read the detail about masturbation as slyly undermining the ethos of endurance and

¹¹² 「一緒くたにこめられた・ふけつであかるいことばです」 (“Happy” 105-106)

¹¹³ 「分娩のことを考えると／際限なくマスターベーションできた／のぼりつめる娩出の瞬間を思いやる／たのしい妊婦の指の動き」 (“Kanoko” 71)

¹¹⁴ 「たのしい妊娠したことがあります…いくらでも過食して」 (“Kanoko” 71)

self-sacrifice surrounding childbirth. Alternatively, we could read a wistful note to the detail—if only it all *were* fun and easy. (189)

Itō's reference to masturbation and eating plenty in relation to pregnancy, in terms of it being a pleasurable experience, also relates to Kristeva's ideas of maternal pleasure or *jouissance* in psychoanalytical theory. *Jouissance* is a term that denotes an excessive pleasure for the subject—it is an excitation or enjoyment that can also be experienced as unbearable suffering (Leader and Groves 141). Latimer explains that from Kristeva's perspective, it is a “desire that is beyond signification, is the maternal pleasure that threatens to make the mother a subject rather than the object through which the infant becomes a subject; it both spurs abjection and, like abjection threatens the order of the Symbolic” (Latimer). In the symbolic order the phallus is considered the primary signifier of desire (Leader and Groves 96). The phallus is the residue of the child's repressed maternal desire, the desire for mother-child unity (Moore, *Subject* 101). Hence, due to the lack of the phallus, mothers have been imagined as “sexless and without pleasure” (Latimer). However, it is precisely the experiences of *jouissance* and abjection that disrupt the Symbolic (Latimer). Therefore, masturbation, overeating, and the joyous elements of pregnancy and mothering represent poetic fissures of the symbolic order.

Another poetic exploration of the connection between pregnancy and sexuality, and maternal and female pleasure can be found in Itō's “The Sexual Life of Savages” (“Mikaijin no seiseikatsu” 未開人の性生活, 1985). This poem's title references the title of anthropologist Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski's book *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia* (1929) (Angles, Translator's Notes 117). This poem is a condensed literary exploration of female sexuality, anatomy, bodily fluids and functions, and raises questions against sexual repression. In the poem the female body is being observed by the narrator herself. She is being her own subject of examination, just like the

anthropologist engages in participant-observation. The key point to highlight from this poem is the direct reference to female genitalia, to the anatomy of the vagina, and the specific mentioning of the pee hole, the clitoris, and the anus. It points to the common ignorance about the female reproductive anatomy, and what exactly constitutes the female genitalia or not.

Before the starting line of the poem, in the upper-right part of the page we find the word “*Rorschach*” (“The Sexual” 4). It is an important key to know that the poem is a conversation between the narrator/author, “who on extratextual grounds can clearly be identified with Itō, and a psychoanalyst who is administering a Rorschach ink-blot test” (Morton, *Modernism* 106). This test uses ink blot images to examine personality traits and thought disorders. According to Morton, “the extratextual evidence is the analyst’s published account of the session, which appeared in a medical journal about the same time that *Territory 2* was published” (106). Morton explains that “the Rorschach focus is, first, on female genitals and second, on diarrhea: the author and the analyst are described in the poem as, to put it mildly, somewhat at odds with each other as to just what genitals and diarrhea signify” (106). The image of “the line between the female genitalia and the anus” is recurrent (Itō, “The Sexual” 4-5).¹¹⁵ The interlocutor of the poem, the analyst, asks what is this line for, since in the body, “there’s nothing without a purpose” (“The Sexual” 4).¹¹⁶ The poem also addresses other bodily experiences, such as pubic and armpit hair, earwax, armpit odor, snot, and questions how necessary they are. There is a direct reference to the clitoris as a place of pleasure and about the anus as a place of prejudice and shame:

The part you insist is the female genitalia is the clitoris/ This is where we feel
pleasure/ You have some sort of prejudice against the anus/ You say you are

¹¹⁵ 「女性器と肛門を結ぶ線」(Itō, “Mikaijin” 106-107)

¹¹⁶ 「そんな必要のないものなんてありませんよ」(“Mikaijin”107)

ashamed/ You say about the female genitalia that something, well, / You say something is, well, repressed about the female genitalia, (“The Sexual” 5).¹¹⁷

Hence, we can grasp an awareness of how sociocultural norms have reproduced biases towards certain parts of our bodies, controlling our sexuality, in other words, how the female sexuality has been repressed. Grosz’s work on the female body sheds light on the question of the repression of female sexuality. For instance, she questions why hysterectomy does not carry with it the same kind of phantom effects that the removal of other organs have, and she wonders: “Is this because the vagina, cervix, clitoris and other female sexual organs are already codified paradoxically as “missing” organs?” (71). Itō’s work can be interpreted as a search for those “missing organs,” in other words, in her poetry the female body is found and redeemed.

There are four subsequent questions about anorexia, bulimia, menstruation and sex. Anorexia—but also bulimia—can be seen as a “form of protest at the social meaning of the female body” (Grosz 40). The poet reveals that eating disorders are often related to female sexuality, reproduction and pleasure, thus the connection to menstruation and sex. Towards the end of the poem, we find out the narrator of the poem expresses that she is pregnant, and that she is having sex while pregnant. This intimate revelation is worth underlining since the pregnant woman is often represented as being sexless, but not in Itō’s poetic world.

In addition, the following stanzas of “Moving” (“Hikkoshi,” 1986) depict the narrator’s breasts and the act of breastfeeding using sexual and erotic imagery to describe this act:

¹¹⁷ 「あなたが女性器だと主張するところはクリトリスです。・ここが快感を感じるのですよ。・あなたは何か肛門に偏った、・あなたは恥ずかしいという、・あなたは女性器を何かこう、・あなたは女性器に対して何かこう抑え付けられた、」 (“Mikaijin” 108)

My breast goes into heat as it heads for her lips (Milk begins to leak from my taut breasts), Lips make my breasts go to heat/ (My daughter sticks out her tongue and retracts it/ She has learned to fall asleep licking her lips/ The reason my breasts leak each night/ Is because they want to ejaculate each night/ And because they want to be fertilized that way).¹¹⁸ (6)

This passage constitutes one of Itō's most direct, poetic image that centers on the bliss of breastfeeding, empowering breastfeeding mothers to feel pleasure. Here we find that breastfeeding is a site of maternal *jouissance*. At a first glance, her words seem to distance herself from her breasts, as she says "my breast goes into heat" ("*chibusa wo hatsujō suru*" 乳房を発情する) and not "I go into heat." Yet, when we take a closer look, we can argue that by giving the power of sensation to her breasts, she is treating her breasts not as mere objects but as subjects, as an intrinsic part of her own subjectivity: "from the position of the female subject, what matters most about her breasts is their feeling and sensitivity rather than how they look. The size or age of her breasts does not matter for the sensitivity of her nipples" (Young 82).

Itō uses language that usually belongs to descriptions of intercourse, such as "ejaculation" ("*shasei*" 射精) and "fertilization" ("*jusei*" 受精) and reclaims it as part of the nursing experience, in which mothers are self-sufficient. Young explains that "for many women breasts are a multiple and fluid zone of deep pleasure quite independent from intercourse, though sometimes not independent of orgasm" (82). In other words, the breast can be a site of woman-centered, independent pleasure. Young says that this is "scandalous" within a male-dominated, heterosexist society: "she can derive the deepest

¹¹⁸ 「乳房は唇に向かって発情する・(乳汁は張りつめた乳房からもれはじめる)・唇は乳房を発情する・(娘は舌を出し入れし・唇をなめながら眠りこむことを覚えた・乳房が毎晩乳汁をもらすのは・乳房が毎晩射精したいからだ・そして乳房はそれで受精したい) ("Hikkoshi")

pleasure from these dark points on her chest, a pleasure maybe greater than *he* can provide in intercourse” (82; emphasis added). With regards to nursing and breast pleasure, as depicted in “Moving,” Young continues to explain that,

Breasts are a scandal because they shatter the border between motherhood and sexuality. Nipples are taboo because they are quite literally, physically, functionally undecidable in the split between motherhood and sexuality. One of the most subversive things feminism can do is affirm this undecidability of motherhood and sexuality. (88)

When Itō depicts pregnant women and nursing mothers enjoying their sexuality, or masturbating like in “Killing Kanoko,” she is affirming the unresolved tension between motherhood and sexuality. In Itō’s world, contrary to what has been largely canonized, motherhood and sexuality are not necessarily mutually exclusive experiences. In fact, Itō shatters the borders between motherhood and sexuality. What could this shattering mean? In Young’s words: “It means pointing to and celebrating breastfeeding as a sexual interaction for both the mother and the infant” (89).

A similar portrayal of breastfeeding can be found in Itō’s *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*. Jolivet states that Itō “quite openly gives a detailed description of the bliss she experienced when breastfeeding her two daughters and strongly urged her sisters to take advantage of this source of pleasure which nature had so generously put their way” (210). Itō does not sustain breastfeeding as the ultimate proof of “maternal love,” in fact she writes that “the instinct a woman who becomes a mother holds is not one of finding a child cute or not cute, but is more physiological, for example of wanting to release the milk that has pooled in one’s breasts” (Itō and Miyata 46 qtd. in Tilton-Cantrell 177). Itō centers on the mother’s needs and maternal pleasure. She offers an alternative view of breastfeeding, not

as a mandate of the ideal mother and a source of confinement, but as a source of enjoyment, instead.

Finally, the theme of sexual pleasure is also depicted in “Logical Like a Baby” (1986) through a correlation between masturbation and writing:

On days I can write poetry, I masturbate/ On days I can write poetry, I do not masturbate/ On days I cannot write poetry, I masturbate/ On days I cannot write poetry, I do not masturbate. (“Logical,” *Killing* 18)¹¹⁹

Itō plays with all the possible combinations between writing poetry and masturbating and when she uses the first-person point of view, she shares with us her own personal actions/emotions. Then the poet includes a description of whether her father writes or does not write poetry and masturbates or does not masturbate. For instance, “On days father can write poetry, he masturbates” (18).¹²⁰ Following a description of her father’s engagement in poetry or masturbation, the author describes her own engagement in poetry or masturbation. There are more than thirty lines repeating different variations of the sentences quoted forming a poetic refrain. From correlating poetry and masturbation, the poet moves on to correlate the father’s presence or the daughter’s (speaker/narrator/poet/Hiromi) presence and masturbation, again she plays with all the possible combinations between “being there” and masturbating or not. For example, “When I am not there, father masturbates” or “When father is there, I cannot masturbate” (19).¹²¹ Consecutively, a third presence appears in the poem, “Daddy (my husband)”

¹¹⁹ 「詩がかけた日はオナニーする・詩がかけた日はオナニーしない・詩がかけない日はオナニーする・詩がかけない日はオナニーしない」 (“Logical,” *Teritorī ron I*)

¹²⁰ 「父は詩がかけた日はオナニーする」 (“Logical,” *Teritorī ron I*)

¹²¹ 「父はわたしがいないとオナニーする」「わたしは父がいてはオナニーできない」 (“Logical,” *Teritorī ron I*)

“*otōsan (otto)*” おとうさん (夫) and she writes, “Even when Daddy (my husband) is not there, I can masturbate” (20).¹²²

Reviewer Fox points out that this refrain operates “like a child acquiring language” and it positions “banal events of physical daily life and its privacies alongside the complex interplay of psychic presences and pressures” (De Lima and Fox). The figure of the poet’s father and the poet’s daughter’s “daddy” are juxtaposed, or closely placed one after another, revealing the remaining of an Oedipal fantasy in the psychology of the speaker.

Next, the poet recollects when she experienced diarrhea and convulsions during her early childhood and how by the time she was eight years old she had grown fat. In “Logical Like a Baby” we find a depiction of breastfeeding, or more precisely, weaning, in relation to the poet, and both her father and mother. This family triangle and the presence of the father distance this portrayal from the way in which breastfeeding is depicted in other poems such as “Moving” (“Hikkoshi”), “Coyote” (“Koyōte”), “Healing Kanoko’s Rash” (“Kanoko shisshin wo naosu”) and “Killing Kanoko” (“Kanoko goroshi”). The narrator believes she finally recovered from diarrhea and convulsions because her mother lost interest in her after weaning her off, followed by her father’s growing monopolization which will eventually fatten her:

All day long, mother would hold me wrapped in covers. She would speak on my behalf, describing my feelings in baby language/ The reason my mother lost interest in me was because father started to monopolize me. Father had not just shown his desire to monopolize me but had started to act upon it/ I had been weaned from mother’s milk four months before, and so father had already become just like my mother in my eyes/ Then my mother started treating me meanly, treating me as if I were no more than a stepchild. This was her way of

¹²² 「わたしはおとうさん (夫) がいなくてもオナニーできる」 (“Logical,” *Teritorī ron 1*)

opposing father/ So then father started monopolizing me even more openly/
 Maybe I really was a stepchild. By sucking at a woman's breast, even an
 adopted child can make a woman lactate/ Once the stepchild had stopped
 suckling at her breast, mother grew fat. ("Logical," *Killing* 20)¹²³

This passage deals with the interactions between a child and her parents, and the difference between mother and father as caregivers, and how in the early months, that difference is mainly marked by the breastfeeding experience. In Fox's words "the poem makes transparent early psychological patterning and its persistence in consciousness and family systems" (De Lima and Fox). In this passage the boundaries between biological and adoptive children/parents are challenged. Lactation is not an exclusive experience of the biological mother. Yet, it also plays on the stereotype of a stepmother treating her daughter meanly. It also depicts a correlation between weaning and weight-gain—on behalf of both mother and child. The weight gain of the speaker is added to the interplay between masturbation and poetry, and again, the poet explores the multiple combinations in which these acts may take place. For example, she writes: "If I do not get fat, I will masturbate" and "If I do get fat, I will be able to write poetry" ("Logical," *Killing* 20-21).¹²⁴ The "monopolization" (*dokusen* 独占) of the father gradually "fattens" the poet from a healthy weight-gain until getting overweight: "By eight years, seven months, I was the

¹²³ 「終日母はわたしを抱いて、ワタイレでくるみこみ、わたしのキモチを赤ちゃんコトバで代弁しつづけた。・母がわたしに興味をうしなしたのは、父がわたしを独占しはじめたからである。・独占したいというキモチを父があらわにして実行しはじめたからである。その四か月前にわたしは母乳を断乳して、父はすでに母と同質のモノに成り上がっていた。・そこで母は、わたしをじゃけんにまるでママ子のようにじゃけんに扱うことで、父に対抗した。・そして父はおおっぴらにわたしを独占した。・本当はママ子だったのかもしれない。もらい子でも吸わせていれば乳は出るそうだ。・ママ子に乳をのますことをやめた母は肥満した」 ("Logical" *Teritori ron I*)

¹²⁴ 「肥満しなければオナニーする…肥満すれば詩がかける」 ("Logical" *Teritori ron I*)

fattest in my whole grade at school, and I was nicknamed “third-grade fatso” (21).¹²⁵ This sentence allows us to peep at a possible trauma due to body shaming at school.

Next, Kanoko enters the narrative-poem as the narrator describes Kanoko’s own diarrhea. Hence, there is a transposition between the poet and her daughter, as they both share that similar childhood experience. Once Kanoko’s diarrhea heals she is the one who starts saying “*ii yo*” (イーヨー), “*ii yo*” written in katakana in the original are sounds that make Kanoko happy, these are words without a fixed meaning. According to Angles, “the word *iiyo* is a childish pronunciation of the words meaning ‘that’s nice’ or ‘that’s good’ [“*iiyo*” 良いよ]” (Translator’s Notes 119).

The description of Kanoko’s diarrhea has a strong emphasis on her female body: “In her forty-eighth bout of diarrhea, the area from her rectum all the way to her labia began to grow inflamed” (“Logical,” *Killing* 22).¹²⁶ The poem also shows the ways in which the narrator, as a mother, is Kanoko’s caregiver: “I soaked gauze in warm water and laid it all around her red, swollen labia, covering her vagina. A little bit of diarrhea would often find its way there” (22).¹²⁷ Then, she describes that “Kanoko was pulling at her own labia/ In other words, she couldn’t stand not touching herself/ She started saying *iiyo iiyo*, and as she pulled at her labia, she continued *iiyo iiyo iiyo iiyo iiyo* in her musical refrain” (22).¹²⁸ Gradually this depiction of happy Kanoko touching herself becomes an Oedipal fantasy/drama as “daddy,” her father, “enters the narrative, to masturbate or not masturbate, to cause the speaker to get fat or not get fat, to prompt Kanoko herself to

¹²⁵「八才七か月、学年一肥満しているとして「三年でぶ」のあだなをあたえられた」(“Logical” *Teritorī ron I*)

¹²⁶「四十八回の下痢で、肛門よりも大陰唇の周囲がただれた」(“Logical” *Teritorī ron I*)

¹²⁷「わたしはカノコの赤いはれ上る大陰唇をめくり、湯にひたしたガーゼで膣を巡った。たいていそこにも下痢便の一部が入りこんでいる」(“Logical” *Teritorī ron I*)

¹²⁸「カノコは自分の大陰唇をひっぱるのである。・つまり、カノコは自分で触らなければ気がすまない。・イーヨーイーヨーと言いはじめたカノコは自分で大陰唇をひっぱりながらイーヨーイーヨーイーヨーイーヨーイーヨーとフシをつけて声をつなげていく」(“Logical” *Teritorī ron I*)

masturbate” (De Lima and Fox). The following is one of the Oedipal scenes in “Logical Like a Baby”:

Kanoko speaks to Daddy (my husband)/ Kanoko masturbates for Daddy (my husband)/ Kanoko gets fat for Daddy (my husband)/ Kanoko has diarrhea for Daddy (my husband).

I masturbate for father/ Father masturbates for me/ I get fat for father/ Father gets fat for me/ I have diarrhea for father/ Father has diarrhea for me/ I speak to father/ Father speaks to me/ I have diarrhea for Daddy (my husband). (*Killing* 23-24)¹²⁹

In the passages above we see a triangular depiction of erotic and sexual desire between the poet and her own father, between Kanoko and her own father, and also between the poet and her husband. According to Fox, “Itō underscores the inevitable philo/aphilos between mother and daughter—from both perspectives—as it arises specifically in response to father’s monopolizing interventions” (De Lima and Fox). The monopolization of the father can also be interpreted as an “obstruction to feminine autonomy” or to the harmony between mother and father (De Lima and Fox).

The poet masturbates, gets fat, speaks out in Takehaya (her school), and so does Kanoko. The narrator’s childhood is bound to this particular location. The very last page repeats the different refrains of this poem interrelating writing poetry, masturbation, diarrhea, growing fat and speaking out, and the final words are *iyo*, “repeated in eleven one-word lines, a kind of tail” (De Lima and Fox). De Lima points out that:

¹²⁹ 「カノコはおとうさん（夫）に発声する・カノコはおとうさん（夫）にオナニーする・カノコはおとうさん（夫）に肥満する・カノコはおとうさん（夫）に下痢する・わたしは父にオナニーする・父はわたしにオナニーする・わたしは父に肥満する・父はわたしに肥満する・わたしは父に下痢する・父はわたしに下痢する・わたしは父に発声する・父はわたしに発声する・わたしはおとうさん（夫）に下痢する」 (“Logical” *Teritori ron I*)

It's no coincidence that the text insists on linking poetic composition and masturbation—both circumscribed, self-involved, yet potentially seditious acts—so intimately. In other words, the body enacts the limitations of signification while providing a way through the latter: a means of momentarily irrupting our subjection to language. I think this possibility for extra-linguistic excess is the occasion for “Logical Like a Baby,” especially in light of the poem’s frame in childhood and the thwarted pursuit of coherent, pre-cultural, pre-linguistic self. (De Lima and Fox)

In agreement with De Lima, there is a “seditious,” empowering quality in masturbation—a self-sufficient act of pleasure—and writing poetry that both escape regulation, and provide this poem with feminist overtones. The father’s monopolization seems to cease or disappear towards the end of the poem, as the last page is exclusively in first-person and the final words “*iiyo*” come from Kanoko, and they stand as a sort of “pre-linguistic projection of meaning and/ or self-identification—the baby’s native logic undistorted by cultural determinism” (De Lima and Fox). The title of the poem precisely hints to this “baby’s native undistorted logic.” “Logical Like a baby” contains a paradox within: it evokes unrestrictive and subversive behaviors that are closer to our pre-linguistic/pre-cultural, embodied self, thus it defies logic itself. Therefore, in the end, we are left with a sense of autonomy from both father and mother, and by extension, from cultural norms. The tail of eleven lines of the word “*iiyo*,” in addition to all the different refrains of different combinations repeated throughout the poem leaves its meaning open to multiple interpretations. In “Logical Like a Baby” there is no closure in the narrative and no fixed meaning, because repetition “loosens and proliferates meaning” (De Lima and Fox).

3.2.5. *Of breasts, breast milk and breastfeeding*

In “Killing Kanoko” Itō also includes the portrayal of breast milk following an abortion. The doctor of the abortion clinic tells the speaker that her breasts might swell, and she “smiles nervously,” and then says: “My breasts did really swell/ So much that a good twist would make white liquid dribble out” (“Killing” 34).¹³⁰ Hence, breast milk functions as a reminder of the terminated pregnancy. “Congratulations” are also given in this context, both for the abortion and for the milk. The narrator continues: “In any event/ It is a joyous thing for milk to come out/ For something sweet [and drinkable] to spill forth/ From a place that previously had nothing” (“Killing” 34).¹³¹ The image of breast milk juxtaposes both joy and anxiety, and the smiles and laughter add both sarcasm and honesty to these lines (Tilton-Cantrell 186, 189).

Breastfeeding is an important imagery in Itō’s depiction of the maternal body and experience, and it plays a prominent role in several of her poems. In “Killing Kanoko” we find a sort of ode to breast milk, and a depiction of its production as a pleasant experience, followed by an intense focus on other bodily fluids. This is also typical of Itō’s overall work:

Drink it and you will grow plump/ For me to secrete something/ Like the cow’s
milk that you/Spend money to buy/I secrete/ I secrete it like urine/ I secrete it
like saliva, tears, or vaginal discharge/ From my anus, from my mouth, from
my urethra, from my vagina/ the milk spills out in large quantities/ I become
happy/ I become pleased. (Itō, “Killing” 35)¹³²

¹³⁰ 「ほんとうにお乳は出てきました・つよくひねると白い液がにじむ程度で」(“Kanoko” 70)

¹³¹ 「何せよ・お乳が出るってことはおめでたい・何もなかったところから・のめて甘味もあるものが・わくんですもの」(70)

¹³² 「それをのめば太るんですもの・お金を出して買う「牛乳」と・同じようなものを・わたしが分泌するんですもの・おしっこみたいに分泌するんですもの・つばや涙やおりものみたいに分泌するんですもの・肛門から口から尿道から膣から・夥しい乳がわいて出てくるんですもの・うれしくなって・たのしくなって」(“Kanoko” 70-71)

In this excerpt the narrator is not only celebrating breast milk, but she is also comparing it to other bodily fluids with a joyous tone. Itō uses the words “joyful” (“*tanoshiku-naru*” たのしくなる) at different points in the poem (Tilton-Cantrell 188-189), hence displaying several poetic examples of maternal pleasure. According to Quimby, breast milk is treated not only as a bodily fluid, but also as the result of involuntary functions of producing and secreting breast milk; which in turn, allows for thinking the female body as being intrinsically “maternal” and “milk-producing” (30). In addition, Itō is also combining fluids that are traditionally “considered polluted or abject,” with the idealized or “sanctified image” of breastfeeding and nursing (Tilton-Cantrell 189). Hence, this passage shows a close link between Itō’s poetry and Kristeva’s theories of abjection and her definition of *jouissance*.

Here, the body is depicted as a leaky body, undermining the fiction of a unified and complete self (Quimby 31). Itō depicts the body as being permeable, changing and threatening to stability and coherence; that is, as an abject body. Ahmed explains that “abjection emphasizes expulsion” through which a “boundary line” is established (93). In Kristeva’s own words: “it is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of ‘one’s clean self’” (*Powers* 53).

Based on Tsuboi Hideto’s research, Quimby observes that, in fact, “Itō was quite familiar with French psychoanalytic feminism, particularly the writings of Kristeva” (31). However, Itō’s poem does not simply comply to a fixed definition of abjection, in fact, she directly challenges certain aspects of its definition, like when Itō describes breastfeeding as a source of happiness, and also when she points out that breast milk is “sweet” and “drinkable.” In this sense, Itō moves away from depicting “physical emotions of horror and disgust” that are often related to the abject (Ahmed 93). Therefore, we may say that the very idea of abjection is being subverted in this poem (Quimby 32).

In *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* Itō's descriptions of breastfeeding during the "middle period"—*chūki no junyū* 中期の授乳 (from two to three months till four or five months), when the baby has not begun to eat solid foods yet—resemble her poetic rendering of breast milk in "Killing Kanoko." She writes: "breast milk is sweet," and "I secrete that sweet thing," and "It's just like the milk we pay money to buy, and I'm repeating myself, but I secrete it" (*Yoi* 105; my trans.).¹³³ Her words elicit admiration towards the producing power of the female body.

It is also possible to establish a dialogue between Itō's recurrent use of breast milk and pleasure with Cixous' ideas about the maternal body. The overflowing breast milk "engages several aspects of Cixous' *écriture féminine*—such as the metaphor that *écriture féminine* entails writing in the "white ink" of breast milk, and what Cixous terms the "desire for the swollen belly" (Quimby 32). According to Cixous, "the mother's body is the privileged metaphor of literary production; a production linked to excess and sexuality which breaks the narrow confines of patriarchal meaning and sense" (M. Walker 138). Michelle Walker explains that Cixous refers to "mother's milk" in terms of "white ink," hence, "the breast acts as a privileged topos of female expression" (139). For Cixous, a woman's desire to write is linked with the desire to give birth (139). Furthermore, pregnancy is "where pleasure and reality embrace" (Cixous 891). Like the desire to write, the desire to give birth is "a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood." (Cixous 891; M. Walker 139). I would like to also point out, in agreement with Walker, that:

[Cixous'] assertion that women must write themselves with the mother's white ink reduces both woman and mother to stereotypically eroticized sites. There is something of a romantic polemicizing that pervades Cixous' writing, an

¹³³ 「チチは甘い」「その甘いものをわたしが分泌する」「お金を出して買う牛乳と同じような物を、くりかえしますが、わたしが分泌します」(105)

unreflective gaze that threatens to return us to a fairly traditional cult of the mother. (M. Walker 140)

Hence, Walker emphasizes the “need to re-chart the maternal as a terrain of body *and* word” (140). I believe Itō’s poetry does both—as her work is a manifestation of the intimate connection between language and body. Itō does not speak of the mother’s body in reductive terms; the complexity of her poetic depiction refuses any stereotype. So here again, Itō engages with different feminist psychoanalytical theories but does not necessarily comply with them.

An analysis of “Killing Kanoko” must also consider the recurring image of a baby wanting to bite the mother’s nipples, here breastfeeding is not depicted as the ultimate bonding experience between mother and child but rather as a source of conflict (Tilton-Cantrell 190): “She bites my nipples, wants to bite my nipples off/ She is always looking for just the right moment to do so” (Itō, “Killing” 36).¹³⁴ Also: “I want to get rid of or kill Kanoko who bites off my nipples” (36).¹³⁵ This message is reiterated towards the end of the poem: “Happy Kanoko/ Bites off my nipples” (38).¹³⁶ This motif is clearly connected to Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytical theory that suggests babies focus their fear on the “bad breast” (that denies them milk) and attack it (Tilton-Cantrell 191). Itō’s nod to Klein’s theories regarding what she calls “the paranoid-schizoid position” can be identified in Itō’s *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* (“Good Breast, Bad Breast,” 1985), and in other poems such as “Warui oppai” 悪いおっぱい (“Bad Breast,” 1986; trans. 2009).

As a digression, I should mention that even though academic revisions of Itō’s work dwell on her deliberate interactions with Klein’s theories, the author herself has made clear that her borrowings from Klein’s work are somewhat superficial. In the very final pages of

¹³⁴ 「乳首に噛みつき乳首を噛み切りたい／いつも噛み切る隙をねらっている」 (“Kanoko” 72)

¹³⁵ 「乳首を噛み切るカノコを捨てるか殺すかしたい」 (“Kanoko” 72)

¹³⁶ 「うれしいカノコは／乳首を噛み切る」 (“Kanoko” 73)

her 2010 edition of *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* she explains that her former husband explained to her about Klein's concepts of "good breast" and "bad breast" while she was breastfeeding, and as she heard him talk, she thought: "breasts are neither "good" nor "bad" ... (I have no knowledge of psychoanalytical analysis) but I liked the pairing of them so I decided to borrow it for the title of the book I was thinking about" (274; my trans.).¹³⁷ A similar clarification is made in the Angles' Translator's Notes regarding the poem "Bad Breast" ("Warui oppai"). Angles writes that Itō commented to him that she had received an introduction to the works of Klein and Julia Kristeva by her former husband Nishi Masahiko (literature scholar) but that she had not read much of them directly (Translator's Notes 119). Despite the claimed distance between Itō and Klein through the above-mentioned considerations, I contend that looking at Itō's work through "Kleinian" lenses let us identify different layers of meaning readers can find in Itō's poetry.

The "paranoid-schizoid position" is Klein's revision of the death instinct in Freud's work (M. Walker 141). Klein argues that there is a time (usually from three to four months) where the child can only partially relate to objects and is not aware of whole persons (141). Walker explains that: "in this position the ego splits in order to project its death instinct onto the external object, the breast. As a consequence the breast is experienced as bad and threatening to the remaining ego. Fear returns to the ego in the form of persecution from this threatening breast" (141). And this is known as the "bad breast" in Klein's theory. Alongside the "bad breast," there is also a "good breast;" "the ideal breast, the projected libido that constructs the good breast as that which will endlessly satisfy the ego's preservative instincts" (M. Walker 141). In the words of Klein herself: "The infant projects his love impulses and attributes them to the gratifying (good)

¹³⁷ 「それを聞いているうちに、おっぱいに「良い」も「悪い」もないじゃれんと思いつつ（わたしは精神分析についてはいたって無知です）わざわざ対にしてあるところが気に入って、ちょうど考えていた本のタイトルにお借りしました」（*Yoi* 274）

breast, just as he projects his destructive impulses outwards and attributes them to the frustrating (bad) breast” (63). Walker highlights that “Klein’s genius is to focus on the bodily relation (both psychic and actual) with the mother. Her emphasis on the pre-Oedipal phase makes it possible to concentrate on the period of time when the mother’s body dominates the child’s phantasy world” (M. Walker 143).

Itō also engages with the bodily relations between child and mother and explores the multiple connotations of both bad and good breasts in her work. In addition, Itō’s focus on the mother and obliteration of the father resonates with the way that “Klein manages to capture something that Freud does not, the overwhelming importance of the mother in the period before paternal authority intervenes with Oedipus” (M. Walker 143). Itō is quite specific and direct when she talks about breastfeeding, however the reader should not take her words literally. There is also a symbolic dimension that refers more generally to the mother-child relationship. Following Dinnerstein’s analysis regarding Klein’s *Envy and Gratitude*, the term “breast” should be understood not only in its literal sense, but also as a metaphor for “source of good”:

Threatened by bad feelings from within and (projected) hostility from without, the child is in danger of being cut off from its “good object”—that is, from its sense of connectedness to a benevolent and lovable outside force. The child handles this danger with what Klein calls a “splitting” mechanism: Its hateful feelings are sharply dissociated from its loving ones; the menacing, vengeful aspects of the mother (as she exists in the child’s mind) are walled off from her comforting, providing aspects. The child comes to feel “that a good and a bad breast exist.” (97)

In “Killing Kanoko,” the aggressive feelings are harbored by both the child and the mother, and these characterize their bond and challenge the idealized, always-loving

mother-child dyad. Itō uses parody while also capturing a realistic sensation of being exhausted due to breastfeeding (Quimby 32). The portrayal of not only aggressive mothers but also aggressive children defies “current mother mythology” in which “children are seen as eminently perfectible. There are no bad children, only bad parents. What is at issue here is the old nature-nurture controversy about the determinants of child behavior, now heavily weighted in favor of nurture” (Thurer, ch.21).

Inter-textuality in Itō’s work can be appreciated in the way “Healing Kanoko’s Rash” (“Kannoko shisshin wo naosu,” 1985; trans. 2009) offers a contrasting voice to “Killing Kanoko,” as it focuses on “healing,” which is quite the opposite of “killing.” Yet, it is also a complementary voice, because, just as in “Killing Kanoko,” the depiction of mothering is more down-to-earth as opposed to the overly idealized caring attitude attached to the ideal/perfect mother. “Healing Kanoko’s Rash” centers on Kanoko’s body rather than on the mother’s body. The first aspect to dwell on is on the portrayal of breastfeeding as an indicator of the mother-daughter relationship:

Sweet cow milk fattens me/ Countless eggs fatten me/ Beans cooked into mush
fatten me/ Milk from my breasts/ Fattens my daughter/ Kanoko gets wet from
my gushing breasts/ Kanoko’s cheek gets wet/ Kanoko’s chin gets wet/ The
bruise on Kanoko’s chin gets wet and my milk drips...Kanoko, good girl/
Kanoko, such a good girl/ Kanoko has so many bruises...But I’m not
concerned/ Blue bruises will go away sometime/ Kanoko often throws up my
milk, but I’m not concerned/ She drinks more than she throws up/ Kanoko is
constipated, but I’m not concerned/ Her bowels will move sometime/ But the
rash spreads across her sleek skin/ The protein from the cow milk is the
allergen/ The protein from the countless eggs is the allergen/ The protein from

the beans boiled to mush is the allergen/ The allergen reacts with Kanoko's
body/ And the rash spreads across Kanoko's skin. (Itō, "Healing" 31)¹³⁸

As in "Killing Kanoko," breast milk is not depicted as an entirely abject substance, as it "fattens" her daughter, and "wets" her daughter. In contrast to "Killing Kanoko," here, Kanoko is a "good girl;" instead of biting off her nipples, she drinks her milk. It is interesting to note that, "a baby depends on mother's milk for protection," breast milk contains antibodies that provide "a protective coating on the inside of a baby's intestines to prevent penetration by potential allergens. Mature milk continues to provide this protection-from-the-inside to help the baby remain healthy and allergy-free" (Zeretzke 100). Despite this positive feature of breast milk, some babies have a tendency to be allergic to certain foods. In "Healing Kanoko's Rash," the speaker mentions milk, eggs and beans as the source of the allergens responsible for Kanoko's rash. In fact, Zeretzke explains that, "there are more than 20 substances in cow's milk that have been shown to be human allergens. Eczema—dry, rough, red skin patches which can progress to open, weeping sores—is another common symptom among children allergic to cow's milk" (100). Even when a mother is not allergic herself, small amounts of the protein found in cow's milk may appear in the breast milk provoking an allergic response in the baby (100). Therefore, the poem's treatment of an infant's allergy is quite realistic as it reveals this

¹³⁸ 「あまいうしのちちたちがわたしをふとらせる・むすうのたまごたちがわたしをふとらせる・にくずれるまめたちがわたしをふとらせる・わたしのちちが・わたしのあかんぼをふとらせる・ほとぼしるわたしのちちでカノコがぬれる・カノコのほおがぬれる・カノコのくちびるがぬれる・カノコのあごがぬれる・カノコのあごにあるあざがぬれてわたしのちちがしたたる」…「カノコいい子・カノコとてもいい子・カノコがあざがおおい(…)でもしんばいはしない・あおいあざはいつかきえる・カノコはしょっちゅうちちをはく、でもしんばいはしない・はくちちよりもおおくのむ・カノコはべんび、でもしんばいはしない・カノコのうんちはいつかはでる・でもカノコのすべすべのひふにしっしんはひろがる・うしのちちのタンパクシツがアレルゲン・むすうのたまごのタンパクシツがアレルゲン・にくずれるまめのタンパクシツがアレルゲン・アレルゲンがカノコのからだに・反応してカノコのひふにカノコのしっしんがふえる」("Kanoko no shisshin" 67-68)

ordinary, physical event that may go unnoticed from an outsider's perspective, but for that mother and child is of major importance.

In the poem, bruises, vomit and constipation are just examples of the different experiences in a baby's life that mothers need to take care of. The mother in the poem does not worry about these things, as they seem to be common and transitory. As Angles puts it, the poem describes, "the repetitive motions of a mother caring for a parasitic infant who monopolizes her thoughts and sucks the nutrients from her breasts" ("Introduction" 10). Yet, when it comes to the skin rash there seems to be a different attitude on the side of the mother, perhaps due to its urgency or because her own diet might be the cause.

In "Healing Kanoko's Rash," Kanoko does not fully recover from her skin rash. It is constantly healing, and towards the very end we read: "The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko's forehead congeals, dries and stands up/ stands up and walks off/ The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko's cheek congeals/ The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko's cheek... (*Abbreviated from here onward*)" ("Healing" 32).¹³⁹ Since the rash may be caused by the mother's diet, it may stand as a symbol of the constant conflict between mother and child. The concluding words "abbreviated from here onward" (*ika shōryaku* 以下省略) reinforce the idea that the conflict will never be resolved. From this perspective, this is yet another poem that "demystifies the image of the mother as loving caregiver, that even now holds place in the cultural imagination" (Angles, "Introduction" 11).

The whole poem is written almost entirely in hiragana, and this is a feature found in many of Itō's poems. "Healing Kanoko's Rash" was originally declaimed at a poetry reading Itō participated in a few weeks after giving birth to Kanoko. Kanoko had an actual skin rash and Itō wanted to use her poetry to heal Kanoko's rash. The poem was born

¹³⁹ 「カノコのひたいの脂漏性のしっしんのあぶらがこりかた・まりかわきたちあがり・たちあがりあるいていく・カノコのほおの脂漏性のしっしんのあぶらがこりかたまる・カノコのほおの脂漏性のしっしんのあぶらが (以下省略)」 ("Kanoko shisshin" 69)

orally, as if she were reciting a spell (*majinai* 呪い). It is similar to the function of some Native American chants, and also, it is similar to the way her own grandmother, a shaman, used words to heal (“Personal”). Hence, the background story of this poem brings together Native American traditions and Japanese shamanism. The author claims that the only way to convey this oral quality is through hiragana because when you write in kanji you instantly know its meaning due to its visual symbolism (“Personal”). Itō wanted to capture the chanting aspect in her writing, she wanted to write at the same pace that she talks, hence, through the use of hiragana the author forces readers to read it slowly (“Personal”). Furthermore, this poem is about a skin rash that may symbolize the invasive, parasitic relationship between mother and daughter, and when written in hiragana it is difficult to distinguish one word from another, similarly, in the poem it is difficult to distinguish mother from daughter.

The word “hiragana” originally meant “easy characters,” and its characters are often described as being composed of “curved lines, exuding femininity” (Mizumura 108). Mizumura explains that hiragana,

Became the medium of choice for writing indigenous *waka* poetry—poetry in syllabic groupings of 5-7-5-7-7 that was a precursor to haiku. Then it was used in headnotes, prose descriptions of the situations in which those short poems were composed...These descriptions grew longer—often longer than the poems they introduced—and eventually evolved into short fictional narratives centering on poems... The association with women’s writing became so close that hiragana was often referred to as “women’s hand” (*onnade*) in those early years. (109)

This historical background of hiragana may have little to do with Itō’s choice in “Healing Kanoko’s Rash.” Yet, I would like to stress that choosing to write a word in hiragana, or

katakana, or kanji, or romaji (the system used to transliterate Japanese into Roman alphabet), is specific to the Japanese language, and it plays with the production of meaning in a very special way:

Using different sets of signs to affect the production of meaning is something on a different level altogether, something unique to Japanese... The shades of meaning that arise from using different sets of signs for different purposes occur whether the writing is done by brush... the semantic difference comes from something unrelated to such visual effects. It comes from writing the very same words, pronounced the very same way, but using completely different letters that belong to different systems. Again, the very existence of a written language using such a remarkable method of notation is a living counterargument to phoneticism... No written language but Japanese can play with the production of meaning in this bewitching way. (Mizumura 201)

This layer of meaning is one of the challenges when translating and analyzing Japanese literature, and in a way, these nuances will always remain inaccessible to English readership.

The poem “Moving” (1986) also depicts breasts and breast milk in connection to childbirth and it alludes to the theme of overpopulation in parenthesis: “(I give birth/ Covering the earth’s surface/ Hundreds, thousands of children/ Thousands, tens of thousands of children)/ (As I get pregnant with the next child, the milk will continue/ Coming from my overflowing breasts)” (7).¹⁴⁰ In agreement with Quimby’s interpretation, “the imagery here of endless reproduction and overflowing breast milk is also one of the ways in which Itō aligns herself in a continuous genealogy of women” (32). In addition, in

¹⁴⁰ 「(わたしが産む・地表をおおい尽くす・何百何千の子どもたち・何千何万の子どもたち)・(次の子を孕んであふれるほどの乳がわたしから・出つづけるだろう)」 (“Hikkoshi”)

this poem Itō employs fruits, those sweet and fleshly products, as similes to refer to children, nipples and breasts:

The children I have propagated/ Become Kumamoto tangerines before my eyes/ The bound nipples that have grown luxuriant under my strictures/ Become Iyo hassaku before my eyes/ The milk that has leaked from my breasts/ Becomes Wakayama tangerines before my eyes/ The breasts that ejaculated/ Become Tottori watermelons before my eyes/ Become Arita tangerines/ Become Kagoshima tangerines/ Become Shinshū celery. (“Moving” 7-8)¹⁴¹

In this fragment we can identify a symbolic overlap between the narrator and her hometown’s native flora, and by extension, between mothers and nature. Itō’s poem “Bad Breast” also uses imagery of nature to allude to breasts and breast milk:

In the tropical low pressure/ The rain forms white whorls/ Plants flourish/ I am tying things up for my move/ I am all tied up/ All parts of my bound body/ Transform/ Into breasts/ Insects flourish/ Breasts so swollen in the morning/ They can hardly be sucked dry/ Are sucked unceasingly/ By night, they shrivel/ Bearing nothing more. (“Bad Breast” 28)¹⁴²

Here we find a symbolic overlap between nature and fertility, as well as between insects and breasts. In both poems “Moving” and “Bad Breast” mothers and nature are active agents: the comparison is not based on their so-called passive victimization

¹⁴¹ 「繁殖する・繁殖して場所をふさぐ・わたしが産み殖やした赤ん坊は・みるみるうちに熊本甘夏に・縛りあげられたわたしのくびれに・繁茂した乳首は・みるみるうちに伊予ハッサクに・乳房からもれた乳汁は・みるみるうちに和歌山ミカンに・射精した乳房は・みるみるうちに鳥取スイカに・有田ミカンに・鹿児島甘夏に・信州セルリーに」 (“Hikkoshi”)

¹⁴² 「熱帯性低気圧に・雨が白い渦をまく・植物が繁殖する・引越のために縛りあげる・縛りあげたままのわたし・縛られたわたしのあらゆる部分・乳房に・変化する・昆虫が繁茂する・朝は張って飲みきれない乳房が・ひっきりなしに吸うから・夜になるとしなびてしまつて何も出ない」 (“Warui” 80-81)

because it focuses on active productivity. In Quimby's words, here, maternal bodies are "vigorous, alive, and exceedingly productive" (31).

Also, in "Moving" Itō alludes to specific places in Japan, and to her hometown, thus, we may suggest that she is connecting her own maternal experience with that of her own mother. Almost all similes are round citrus fruits or sweet, juicy melons, but in the end, she chooses "celery." Is celery a marker of dryness and solidity? Is it perhaps a hint to the time when breastfeeding ceases? "Moving," as its title indicates, touches upon the fluidity, transformation, and adaptability of the maternal body.

In "Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary" ("Mayorana, inondo, mannenrō" まよらな、いのんど、まねんろう, 1991; trans. 2009) we find a depiction of breastfeeding, breast milk and breasts in relation to the narrator's partner and her daughter. On the one hand, when her partner is sick, she writes: "I want to drain my breast milk and saliva/ upon his bad nose/ his bad throat/ to restore his organs to health/ I want to rub and stroke him" (56).¹⁴³ In these lines both saliva and breast milk are like medicine. They represent the willingness to offer him the best she has. On the other hand, we find a continuation about the relationship between her daughters and her breasts in the context of her youngest being sick:

Her habit of grasping my nipples also doesn't disappear/ When grasped my nipples hurt/ They are withered, not a drop comes out/ Grow old/ We grow old/ Menopause should have come/ And so the many daughters whom I have born/ Soak up in the dripping from my youngest daughter's nose/ Wipe the diarrhea pouring from my youngest daughters behind/ Just like they were/ Hundreds, thousands of mothers, Into this, they pour their accumulated desires/ With her

¹⁴³ 「わるい鼻にわるい喉にわたしの乳や唾をふりかけて・健康な器官をとりもどすよう・なでさすってやりたい」 ("Mayorana" 20)

treatment, my youngest/ Accepts the caresses of her older sisters. (“Marjoram”
57)¹⁴⁴

In this fragment we can assume that even though the mother is not breastfeeding anymore, the youngest still hangs on to the mother’s breasts. Especially because the youngest is sick we can interpret that a mother’s breasts are not only a source of food but also a source of comfort and solace. Yet, there is a discomfort on behalf of the mother as she points out that her “nipples hurt” when grasped—again demystifying the idealization of the “comforting” mother’s breasts. The breasts that once produced large amounts of milk as depicted in other poems, are now “withered” (“*shinabiteite*” しなびていて) and dry. The narrator is aware of the passing of time; she is growing older, expectant to the time when menopause comes.

By the time “Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary” (1991) was written, Itō was already a mother of three, so her depictions have shifted the focus from a mother-daughter bond to sisterhood bonds. The youngest sisters in the poem are soaked in their snot, and they deal with her diarrhea; again bodily fluids and care mediating their relationship. She situates the act of caring for a child within a larger picture, as a shared responsibility. In the poem, an incalculable number of mothers have poured their incalculable desire into caring. We see mothers caring for their children and sisters caring for each other.

Among the many bodily experiences described in *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* I would like to end this section on breasts, breast milk and breastfeeding with the description of menstruation coming back after one year of breastfeeding. The implication being that one’s body is ready for the next child (240). In the words of the poet:

¹⁴⁴ 「乳首をつまむくせもなおらない・つままれる乳首は痛い・しなびていてひとしずくも出ない・老いる・わたしたちは老いる・きたるべき閉経・わたしが産んだおおぜいの娘たちは・こうして最後の子のたれながす鼻汁を吸い取り・最後の子のほとばしらせる下痢便をぬぐい取り・まるでそこに・何百何千という母たちがいるかのよう・娘たちの累積した欲望がそこに・最後の子はされるままに・姉たちの愛撫を受けいれていく」 (“Mayorana” 20)

That is, physiologically, there is no longer a strict need to give breast milk to this baby, but it comes out because the breasts—in what I perceive as the most physiological mechanism of the body—have gotten used to doing so. That being so, my uterus, my eggs, and my hormones were transformed into milk, but, well, I don't even take “my” seriously. It makes me feel sincerely like: my neighbor's kid, a stranger's kid, an outsider's kid, everyone, welcome! If I wouldn't have been a poet, I would have liked to become breast milk (240; my trans.).¹⁴⁵

In this quote we can admire Itō's awareness of the physiological transformations her body experiences in relation to menstruation and breastfeeding. As she says, even when her period comes back, her body has already established a breastfeeding pattern, thus, something that was once new and perhaps strange, becomes a natural bodily reality. She even feels an openness and acceptance of breastfeeding beyond the scope of her own child. The final line “I would have liked to become breast milk” (“*bonyū ni naritakatta*” 母乳になりたかった) poetically captures how her identity merges with this milk-producing embodied self in a perfect symbiosis.

3.2.6. *The personal is political: genealogy of women and subverting ideal motherhood*

One of the characteristics of “Killing Kanoko” is that it uses polyphonic devices to depict several points of view and experiences. Even in some sections of the poem in which the narration is being told in first-person, the reader feels that each line represents a

¹⁴⁵ 「つまりもう生理的には、このアカンボに乳をやる必然性はなくなりかけているということなのに、からだのしくみの中ではいちばん生理的なものだと認識していたおっぱいというものが、慣れで出てくるのである。これなら自分の子宮と自分の卵子と自分のホルモンをあんばいして出した乳であるが、別に、自分の、ということにこだわらないわけである。隣の子も他人の子もよその子もみんないらっしやい、という真摯な気持ちになる。私は詩人でなければ、母乳になりたかった」(Yoi 240)

different voice. For example, Itō writes: “I have had toxemia of pregnancy/ I have had a molar pregnancy...I have had uterine cancer/ I have had radical hysterectomy/ I have had a child/ I have had induced labor because of sluggish contractions/ I have had an episiotomy, I have had a pleasant pregnancy” (“Killing” 35-36).¹⁴⁶ Here we find general experiences of the female and maternal body embodied in one first-person narrator (Quimby 34). This strategy highlights the individual and particular dimension to mothering, and it also creates a space in which these experiences are being shared, highlighting the multiplicity of experiences related to the female body, and to the birthing body (34).

Itō suggests that even when there are pleasant moments, mothering is not entirely an enjoyable experience. She opens up a space—in full honesty—to say: sometimes it is too overwhelming. For instance, the mother/narrator in the poem says: “Kanoko eats my time/ Kanoko pilfers my nutrients/ Kanoko threatens my appetite/ Kanoko pulls out my hair/ Kanoko forces me to deal with all her shit/ I want to get rid of Kanoko/ I want to get rid of filthy little Kanoko” (Itō, “Killing” 36).¹⁴⁷

In traditional Japanese literature the mother has been portrayed “as tender and merciful and always ready to sacrifice herself for the child’s welfare” (Ueda 13). Itō’s portrayal moves farther from that canonic representation as she conveys exhaustion, frustration and anger when coping with mothering. The mother’s desire to get rid of Kanoko “seems aggressive but also self-protective response to the baby’s attack. The passage presents mother-child interactions as a struggle for survival” (Tilton-Cantrell 192). Thus, this poem explores both the fear of being consumed and harmed by one’s own baby

¹⁴⁶ 「わたしは妊娠中毒症したことがあります・わたしは胞状奇胎あります…わたしは子宮癌したことがあります・わたしは子宮と卵巣摘出したことがあります・わたしは分娩したことがあります・わたしは微弱陣痛の吸収分娩したことがあります・わたしは会陰切開したことがあります・たのしい妊娠したことがあります」 (“Kanoko” 71)

¹⁴⁷ 「カノコはわたしの時間を食い／カノコはわたしの養分をかすめ／カノコはわたしの食欲を脅かし／カノコはわたしの髪の毛を抜き／カノコはわたしにすべてのカノコの糞のしまつを強要しました／カノコを捨てたい／汚ないカノコを捨てたい」 (“Kanoko” 72)

and in response, the impulses to harm one's own baby. "Abusive parents" often tend to victimize themselves (192). In the quote above, we can identify both "child-blaming" and victimization on behalf of the mother (192). The readers can then realize that the mothers in the poem are going through difficult emotional and psychological challenges, given that "mothers suffering from post-partum depression—especially when nobody is available to relieve them when they experience the greatest difficulty—are in particular danger of harming their children" (Tilton-Cantrell 192-193).

There is an implicit conflict between the needs of the mother as a person and the needs of her child, producing a mother-child opposition also evident in other poems by Itō (Angles, "Reclaiming" 61). In fact, several of Itō's poems "may shock readers out of a vision of motherhood that insists on self-sacrifice but ignores the legitimacy of a mother's own needs and the potency of her frustrations" (Tilton-Cantrell 184).

Towards the end of the poem, Itō juxtaposes congratulatory greetings with the desire of getting rid of her daughter Kanoko. Firstly, she lists the presents the speaker received at a baby shower, and she names the people who gave them to her. Secondly, without any separation of section, Itō comes back to her desire of getting rid of Kanoko "without melancholy, without guilt" ("Killing" 38), and then congratulates her friends on their abortions by first name: Teruko chan, Mihoko chan, Kumiko chan. Hence, despite the lack of a rigid structure in the poem, there is a circular movement as it begins talking about abortion and disposing one's children. It then journeys away to address a multiplicity of themes, and then circles back to dealing with the psychological aspects of abortion. In the final stanzas, Itō congratulates another friend for committing infanticide, and moves on to invite her presumed friends Mari san and Riko chan, to get rid of their daughter, Nonoho chan, and son, Kota kun, respectively. In the very last concluding sentence, we find a provoking invitation: "Let's all get rid of them together/ All of the daughters/ All of the

sons/ Who rattle their teeth/ Wanting to bite off our nipples” (“Killing” 39).¹⁴⁸ These lines capture a desire for the communal—pointing to a shared frustration and a shared search for liberation by mothers. It reinforces that the main message is not to get rid of Kanoko on her own, but rather to get rid of the sociocultural oppression imposed by ideal motherhood.

Therefore, “Killing Kanoko” is about many mothers who have strong needs and struggle with their families’ demands. In this poem the mother fantasizes about freeing herself from the infant’s needs, taking a clear standpoint against an ideology of extreme self-sacrifice, and putting mothers first. In addition, “Itō strives to meld her individual voice with the voices of a multitude of other women so that the individual experiences portrayed fuse with those of countless others” (Tilton-Cantrell 167). Quimby also stresses that Itō often calls women by name and/or by familial relation, describing the individual experience but also connecting it to a more general, shared experience by a community of women (34).

This characteristic of Itō’s poetry can also be found in “Coyote” (“Koyōte” コヨーテ 1986; trans. 2009). The coyote is a divine or sacred animal for many Native Americans, thus this poem shows that Itō’s work has been informed by her particular interest in Native American poetry. Angles explains that in “Coyote,” “Itō points out that her maternal grandmother was a shamaness who consulted with the dead, and her mother believed in magical spells” (Translator’s Introduction viii; Translator’s Notes 118). Hence, in “Coyote” we also find a poetic bridge between Native American traditions and Japanese shamanism. This is one of the poems, alongside other works such as “Healing Kanoko’s Rash” or *Noro to saniwa* のろとさにわ (The shamaness and her interpreter, 1991) in which Itō seems to continue with “the tradition of spiritual, otherworldly connections that

¹⁴⁸ 「みななですてよう／乳首を噛み切りたくて歯を鳴らしている／娘たち／息子たち」 (“Kanoko” 74)

run in her family” (Angles, Translator’s Introduction viii). Therefore, this poem is also personal as it “explores the mystical connection between Itō and the various generations of women in her family” (Angles, Translator’s Notes 118). In Fox’s words: “Itō addresses her own sympathies with Native American mythology through her enlistment of the coyote figure, while also paying homage to her matrilineal shamanic heritage” (De Lima and Fox).

In “Coyote,” the presence of the father is reduced to one part: “My daughter’s father, my father: *I wanted to concentrate just on the coyote/ I wanted to isolate my self, insulate myself, see nothing other than the coyote/ I wanted to trade places with him*” (“Coyote” 9).¹⁴⁹ In this quote, Itō attributes a slightly altered version of Beuys’ words to her own father, and her daughter’s father (De Lima and Fox). The father can look at the coyote and even though he wants to trade places with him, he cannot merge with him, he is “isolated” (alone), “insulated” (protected). Hence, the father(s)—so perhaps the masculine, in general—is “denied access to animistic merger” (De Lima and Fox). In contrast, Kanoko, following a long tradition of women—so perhaps the feminine, in general—can access supernatural dimensions and is involved in a “chthonic interplay” (De Lima and Fox). Therefore, “Coyote” also deals with questioning what it means to be female and we can also read it as an ode to the women in her family. Breastfeeding is depicted as the connecting flow between the different generations of women in her family (Quimby 32):

The milk flows from my breast bountifully/ To fatten my daughter it flows in
overabundance, much too much/ My grandmother’s milk also flowed
bountifully/ With it she fattened her four girls and two boys/ My mother’s older
sister’s milk also flowed bountifully/ With it she fattened her three boys/ My

¹⁴⁹「娘の父・わたしの父〈私はコヨーテだけに集中したかった。私自身を隔離し、絶縁し、コヨーテの他は、何ものも見たくなかった。そしてそれと役割を交換したかった〉」(“Coyōte” 78)

mother's milk also flowed bountifully/ With it she fattened just me, and the
 leftover milk flowed out/ My mother's younger sister's milk also flowed
 bountifully/ With it she fattened her two boys/ My mother's other younger
 sister nursed and nursed her adopted child/ With her milkless breasts until
 eventually/ The milk began to flow from her body/ There is so much rain/
 Everything and anything gets soaked... All of them do have breasts that sag.
 ("Coyote" 9-10)¹⁵⁰

This passage depicts the "repetition of a genealogy of women" through the shared experience of nursing (Quimby 33). The words "so much rain" (*"ame ga ōi"* 雨が多い), "soaking" (*shimetteiru* 湿っている), "flow bountifully" (*"yutaka ni deru"* 豊かに出る; literally "comes out in abundance") or "overabundance" (*"yutaka sugite"* 豊か過ぎて) are used to give a sense of unity to the poem and also to "provide a tone of vitality, abundance, and proliferation/reproduction" (33). Itō depicts nursing as a connecting, fruitful experience. Despite it being a natural or common bodily function, her words transmit amazement at how breast milk "fattened" (*"futoraseta"* 肥らせた) children, at how one woman's body can produce enough milk to raise several children. There is also a reference to an adopted child who can still be breastfed by his/her adoptive mother. This inclusion is worth underscoring because even though Itō is talking about breastfeeding in terms of a biological reality of the female body, she does not reduce breastfeeding to the biological mother's body. In addition, we also find a poetic admiration of "breasts that sag" (*"taresagatta chibusa"* 垂れ下がった乳房). Similarly, Young points out that some

¹⁵⁰ 「私の乳は豊かに出る・娘一人を肥らせるには豊か過ぎてあり余る・祖母の乳も豊かだった・四人の女の子と二人の男の子を産み育て肥らせた・伯母の乳も豊かだった・三人の男の子を産み育て肥らせた・母の乳も豊かだった・わたし一人を肥らせて余った乳は流された・叔母の乳も豊かだった・二人の男の子を産み育て肥らせた・もう一人の叔母は人から貰った子に・出ない乳を吸わせていて吸わせていてとうとう・自分の乳房から乳が出たのだ・雨が多い・何もかもが湿っている…そして揃って垂れ下がった乳房を持っている」("Coyōte" 78)

cultures venerate wrinkled, and sagging breasts as “signs of much mothering and the wisdom of experience” (Young 79-80). The image of sagging breasts that breastfed emphasize their fluidity:

[Breasts] they are not objects with one definite shape but radically change their shape with body position and movements. Hand over the head, lying on one’s back or side, bending over in front—all produce very different breast shapes. Many women’s breasts are much more like a fluid than a solid; in movement, they sway, jiggle, bounce, ripple even when the movement is small...Unbound breasts show their fluid and changing shape; they do not remain the firm and stable objects that phallographic fetishism desires. (Young 83)

In addition to the female body’s fluidity, “Coyote” also reveals Itō’s awareness of the multiplicity and diversity of women’s lives: even when women share fundamental experiences and intimate bonds, each woman has a different way of living her own embodied life.

A similar depiction is available in “Vinegar, Oil” (“Suyu” 酢油, 1986; trans. 2009). This poem has been described as a “photo-poem collage” because in one of its first editions there are actual close-up photos of the food evoking grotesque feelings (Morton, *Modernism* 108). It starts off with a list of different foods intertwined with erotic depictions of desire and sex between the narrator and presumably her partner. Throughout the poem there are parentheses with words in italics that “are the sorts of things for which one might pray at local temples” (Angles, “Translator’s Notes 118). Morton explains that,

The comparison of eating to sex is the most obvious of several themes touched on by the text, but the overall construction of vertigo or nausea evoked in the Japanese (the English cannot carry the connotations here) by the collection of shamanistic articles, almost fetishes, adds the second dimension of a

vertiginous loss of balance (in addition to the visual connotations to the representation of menstruation). (*Modernism* 109)

The English or Japanese editions without the photos do not evoke the same sense of nausea as Morton describes; however, I personally believe that when read out-loud, Angles' English translation transmits a sense of dizziness and unbalance. For Morton, the depiction of menstruation in the poem accounts for its power as it conveys the effort

to communicate in sensuous forms the uniquely female experience of menstruation in addition to locating it within a historical/ genealogical and psychic (the synesthetic links between ingestion, sexuality and menstruation suggested by the juxtaposing of photo collage and text) context is surely one of the most difficult tasks a poet can attempt. (*Modernism* 109)

Let us read menstruation's portrayal in "Vinegar, Oil:"

Menstrual blood from my mother's older sister/ Menstrual blood from my mother's younger sister/ Menstrual blood from my grandmother/ Menstrual blood from my mother/ Soaked into cotton and rags/ I understand they would stitch them by themselves/ And when they got dirty, they washed them and used them over/ And on top they wore black underpants they also sewed/ So they wouldn't be ashamed if the stain came through. (15)¹⁵¹

As in "Coyote," Itō addresses the genealogy of women in her family, and in this case it is not nursing but menstruating that serves as a connecting experience through different generations. According to Quimby, here we find an echo to Virginia Woolf's words "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (qtd. in Quimby 25). Quimby also points out that Itō uses menstrual blood "to foreground the biological realities of female

¹⁵¹ 「叔母さんの月経の血・お祖母さんの月経の血・母の月経の血・のしみこんだ綿やぼろぎれ・そういうものを自分で縫って・汚したら洗ってまた使ったそうです・そしてその上に自分で縫った黒いズロースを履いていたそうです・しみてきても恥ずかしくないように」 (Itō "Suyu" 90)

corporeality” as well as “to underscore ‘blood relations’ among women/female family members” (30). There is also an indicator of how previous generations dealt with menstruation, a reminder of the relatively recent appearance of products such as menstrual napkins or tampons. Additionally, we also find a poetic reminder of the ways in which menstruation has been defined in terms of *kegare* (pollution, dirtiness) and how a pervasive sense of shame pinned to menstrual leakage has been transmitted over time. Menstruation has been depicted and constructed as “a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks uncontrollably” (Grosz 205). This visible leakage comes hand in hand with the “idea of soiling oneself, of dirt, of the very dirt produced by the body itself, staining the subject” (205). Hence, our fight and efforts to avoid leakages, because they “spoil our viability as a subject. The state of being stained is a site of embarrassment, a sight and site not to be seen or occupied at any cost” (Buritica Alzate, “Menstrual” 49).

Itō’s family relations in connection to the female and maternal body are also portrayed in “Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary.” The next stanza addresses the relationship of the narrator with her own sister: “My older sister told me she wanted to have her last child at thirty nine...She schemed to have sex with him but/ When she met him, her desire to give birth had faded” (“Marjoram” 57).¹⁵² Here we see how society establishes an ideal age to give birth or a deadline to give birth for women, and how sometimes this imposed date does not correspond with the desire to bear a child. Towards the end, there is a particularly taboo-breaking rendering of sisterhood:

Taking the children she wants to take/ Leaving behind the children she wants to
leave behind / Wiping out the children she wants to kill... We can still have
more/ We can still have more/ When I finish giving birth I would live/ With my
older and younger sisters/ If we wanted to touch each other erotically, we

¹⁵² 「三九歳の時に最後の子を産みたかったとわたしの姉は言った…なんとか性交しようと画策したけれども・会えたときには、産む欲望はうすれてしまった」 (“Mayorana” 20)

would do it/ If we wanted to have sex, we'd go outside and do it/ That's our
promise/ I'd eat with/ Talk with/ Embrace my sisters/ And listen to the sounds
of/ Them, who are there, even in silence. ("Mayorana" 21; my trans.)¹⁵³

Itō's depictions challenge heterosexual normativity, face incest taboo and resist any reduction of sexual pleasure. The first lines of this passage can be interpreted as a demand to have complete control of one's sexuality and reproduction.¹⁵⁴ I interpret the erotic depiction between sisters as an example of a combination of two—sometimes contradictory—drives. In line with Teresa De Lauretis, in the production of feminism's self-representation we find two drives or mechanisms at work:

An erotic, narcissistic drive that enhances images of feminism as difference, rebellion, daring, excess, subversion, disloyalty, agency, empowerment, pleasure, and danger, and rejects all images of powerlessness, victimization, subjection, acquiescence, passivity, conformism, femininity, and *an ethical drive* that works toward community, accountability, entrustment, sisterhood, bonding, belonging to a common world of women or sharing what Adrienne Rich has poignantly called "the dream of a common language." (266)

I believe both drives are present in Itō's work. Sometimes the erotic predominates but there is always a hint of belonging to a larger community of women.

There is one part of the poem "Killing Kanoko" that remains open to analysis, and that is Hiromi's suicide. "Killing Kanoko" and other poems by Itō offer a comprehensive take

¹⁵³ 「連れて歩きたい子は連れて歩く・捨ててて行きたい子は捨ててて行く・殺したい子は抹殺する…まだ産める・まだ産める・子を産みあげたらわたしは・姉や妹といっしょに暮らすことにする・性的に触れあいたければ触れあうし・性交したければ外に出て性交してくる・そういう予約がある・わたしは姉妹と食べ・話し・黙っている間にも存在する相手・抱きあって・その寝息を聞く」 ("Mayorana" 21)

¹⁵⁴ This fragment resonates with different calls for solidarity regarding sexual and reproductive rights within feminism. For instance, bell hook's description of the feminist movement in the 70s in the U.S. and how they understood that "to demand control of our sexuality, effective birth control and reproductive rights, an end to rape and sexual harassment, we needed to stand in solidarity" (*Feminism* 16).

on difficult subjects related to agency and life: abortion, infanticide, suicide, and other experiences particular to the female and maternal body. The depiction of the suicide of the narrator's "friend" named Hiromi three years ago, who is also the main narrator of the poem, leaves the reader confused as to when, how and why the events take place in the poetic narrative. The reader's logic is tempted to think that the reason behind her suicide is the guilt or remorse after losing her child. However, the poem clearly states that the reason behind her death is "man trouble" ("otoko mondai" 男問題) and/or "athlete's foot" ("mizumushi" 水虫) ("Killing" 33; "Kanoko" 74). Was this Hiromi pregnant? Was an unwanted pregnancy the reason behind her suicide? In this case as well, the poet says "Congratulations on your destruction." I believe that readers are left with a sense of irony and respect towards death itself.

3.3. Pregnancy, and poop as a metaphor for childbirth, fetuses and children

In *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* (1985) Itō describes in detail what it feels to be pregnant and the weekly changes she experienced. Even though it is a personal account, she is aware of the vast array of differences in relation to the pregnant experience. For example, when referring to morning sickness (*tsuwari* つわり), she writes: "It varies from person to person. Some people don't feel it at all, others can't eat anything, some change their taste, some will suddenly feel nausea all the time, or some will vomit easily, and basically, it feels like gastritis symptoms" (*Yoi* 23; my trans.).¹⁵⁵ She also discusses other issues such as weight gain during pregnancy, maternity clothes, and the expectations of giving birth. Honesty and inclusiveness characterize her writing; while reflecting on her day-to-day life Itō covers all kinds of practical subjects. For instance, readers will find an explanation

¹⁵⁵ 「人によって違います。まったく感じない、何も食べられなくなる、食べ物のお好みが変わる、つねに吐き気がする、吐きやすくなる、基本的は、胃炎に似た症状です」(*Yoi* 23)

about the *boshitechō* 母子手帳 (a maternity-health record book used at every medical appointment in Japan), and also information about very intimate subjects, such as sex positions during pregnancy (Itō, *Yoi* 51). As stated by Seaman, “she makes it clear that becoming a mother and being sexual—and sexy—are not mutually exclusive” (*Writing* 119).

One of the most striking aspects of this book is that it contains several references to Itō’s famous statement equating fetuses and poop: “a fetus is, in fact, poop” (*Yoi* 33; my trans.),¹⁵⁶ and “a fetus is poop itself” (71; my trans).¹⁵⁷ To the question about fetuses not being really poop, Itō replies: “During pregnancy I was sure it was poop, but during the instant of giving birth, it wasn’t poop. After giving birth to it, it became poop again. It just doesn’t stick to your hands like poop, and it looks too much like me” (74; my trans.).¹⁵⁸ Along these lines, Itō also asserts that, “a pregnant woman worries daily about one’s poop, pee, anus and vagina, it’s a natural right. (Period)” (*Yoi* 33; my trans.).¹⁵⁹ Itō places pregnancy and childbirth away from idealized and sanitized dimensions, and nearer to other bodily experiences, thus, her famous statement about fetuses and poop is liberating, it “free[s] women from widespread idealized notions of motherhood that leave women feeling constrained and self-critical” (Tilton-Cantrell 177). In the words of the poet herself:

What I wanted to assert with the statement “a fetus is poop” stems from my adverse response to the modern views of mothers and children... The burden on mothers has become ever greater and they cannot help but become neurotic... Love for one’s children is demanded above what is necessary. I had

¹⁵⁶ 「胎児は実はウンコである」(*Yoi* 33)

¹⁵⁷ 「胎児はウンコそのものです」(*Yoi* 71)

¹⁵⁸ 「妊娠中は確実にウンコでしたが、娩出の瞬間、それはウンコではない。娩出してしまうと、再びウンコになります。ただウンコにしては手にくつつかず、あまりにもよく私に似ているのです」(74)

¹⁵⁹ 「妊娠にとって、自分のウンコやおしっこや肛門やヴァギナを心配することは、日常であり、当然の権利です(まる)」(33)

the sense that by going ahead and saying during pregnancy that fetuses are poop, [mothers] would be able to cleanly escape the sort of love that is being demanded (Itō and Miyata 27-28 qtd. in Tilton-Cantrell 178).

Itō states that the most important thing when it comes to childrearing is “rudeness” (*gasatsu* がさつ), and “negligence” (*zubora* ずぼら) (*Yoi* 134). In fact, these words appear repeatedly throughout the book as Itō’s best parenting advice is: “*gasatsu*” がさつ (rudeness), “*gūtara*” ぐうたら (laziness), and “*zubora*” ずぼら (negligence) (*Yoi* 155). These words are meant to invite parents to embrace their own imperfections (Tilton-Cantrell 176). Clearly, Itō is offering parents an alternative way of being, one that does not imply that one must try to fit into the ideal, perfect mother model. That being so, critics have praised Itō’s childrearing books because she discusses the challenges faced by parents and “stand in sharp contrast to the idyllic picture painted by many parenting magazines—providing relief to mothers who are harshly self-critical when they find themselves struggling” (Tilton Cantrell 176-177).

In “The Sexual Life of Savages” (“*Mikaijin no seiseikatsu*”) Itō ends with the following line that echoes her famous statements about fetuses and poop in *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*: “I’ve confirmed that all children are crap/ And that they come out, born like crap” (“The Sexual” 5).¹⁶⁰ Japanese writer Kazue Morisaki claims that Itō’s statement “doesn’t come as a surprise because nature as the environment has shrunk, therefore, she cannot find nature anywhere other than in her body. In other words, it is inevitable to compare to feces the nature or the other inside herself (her baby)” (Morisaki and Ueno 213 qtd. in Morita 115). This way of looking at Itō’s equivalence between fetuses and poop reinforces the dichotomy between inner and outer nature (Morita 115). In addition, I regard

¹⁶⁰ 「すべての子どもたちはうんこであり、・うんこのように生まれてくるということをわたしは確かめたのです」 (“*Mikaijin*” 109)

this powerful statement as an attempt to (re)signify our own body, and I believe it is Itō's own poetic liberating realization to bring parenting nearer to a daily, more real experience, and farther from an idealized, oppressive fantasy.

“Zendō” 蠕動 (Peristalsis, 1985) is one of the poems that secured Itō's reputation as the “childbirth poet” as it starts off with a description of the process of the narrator's pregnancy (Morton 105). The narrator starts saying that when people around her ask her if she has experienced any changes since her pregnancy, she chooses to say “no, not really.” Of course people will still know many changes are indeed taking place, but perhaps what they are really asking is if the expected maternal instinct has kicked in, and since it does not work like this, she decides to say in advance “no, not really” (“Zendō” 51). Then she proceeds to describe her visits to the gynecologist, and how she gradually gets used to this place and how it becomes a sharing space as it is easy to talk to other patients, other women who are experiencing or have experienced pregnancy, birth or abortions. In this prose poem, the narrator also describes what happens to her own body:

My body quickly grows thick; especially my breasts, my shoulders and my back, they become very thick. Of course my belly expands. But at its center, behind my navel, I continue to perceive that what is connected to the very end to my womb by the umbilical cord is not a fetus but a foreign object. (“Zendō” 51; my trans.)¹⁶¹

The pregnant woman depicted in the poem is aware of the transformations on different parts of her body, both outer and inner changes. When trying to define what it feels to have a fetus inside, “a part of me that is not me,” she says in the beginning it feels more like a foreign object— something alien to the speaker. Also the word of choice “foreign object”

¹⁶¹ 「わたしのからだはみるみる厚くなり、とくに乳房と肩と背中が、ぶ厚くなっている。もちろん腹も膨張する。しかしその中心、わたしの臍の裏にあり、わたしの子宮と臍帯でつながってるものはあくまでも異物であって胎児ではないという認識を持ち続けている」 (“Zendō” 51)

“*ibutsu*” 異物, also denotes that what is in an unborn state initially is closer to an object and not subject. This metaphor of fetuses as being “foreign” or “alien” has been used in different literature of pregnancy.¹⁶² Pregnancy is an exceptional period of hosting another inside of our bodies. It implies a balancing act for the mother’s body, which has to turn on some systems to nourish the baby and turn off other systems that may hurt the baby (Yoshinaga qtd. in Hutter Epstein). In “*Zendō*,” the poet continues to describe her experience of pregnancy in a larger font:

In the nineteenth week this foreign body/object began to move inside my belly. That is, I began to feel that, rather than a foreign body it was a life form. From then on, for a period of five months, this life form continued to move inside my belly. I’ll explain for those who haven’t experienced it: they were involuntary movements close to my intestines, best expressed with onomatopoeic words like: *piku piku* (twitching), *guri guri* (pushing/wriggling), *gururururu* (gurgling/rumbling). That is, every time I felt it move, I wanted to fart. Or perhaps, I wanted to poo.¹⁶³ (Itō, “*Zendō*” 51-52; my trans.)

In this passage we read that as the fetus develops the mother’s perception of what happens inside her also changes. Itō describes a transition from an alien/foreign presence to a new

¹⁶² Like Itō, Wolf uses the words “foreign”/“alien” or “life form” to refer to the pregnant embodied experience when she describes her experience after receiving a copy of an ultrasound: “Of course my baby looked like an alien, because it *was* an alien. Its true face was the one that turned the eyes of a whistling cosmos right at me and through me...of course it was an alien: it hailed from another world...What was this new life—new life *form*? The weirdness was intense...There was someone *in* me; nurturing itself *from* me; what was the difference between this inner inhabitation and a kind of benign possession, or gentle succubus?...And I could swear that when it had looked at me, it had conveyed this directly to me: *Yes, I will be a human baby eventually, small, helpless, new and wholly lovable. But not yet.*” (*Misconceptions* 30-31)

¹⁶³ 「第十九週に入るとその異物がオナカの中で動くようになった。つまり異物というよりもむしろ生命体としてわたしは感じてきている。これから五か月間、生命体がオナカの中で動き続ける。未経験の方に説明しておくとしてこれは腸も近く不随意的な動きであり、ぴくぴく・ぐりっぐりっ・ぐるるるといった擬態語をもってあらわされる。つまりその動きを感じる度にわたしはオナラをしたい。わたしはウンコをしたいのかもしれない」 (“*Zendō*” 51-52)

life form, and then she opts for describing such a presence through scatological associations. Another characteristic of this poem is that the pregnant narrator asks her friend who has just given birth whether or not she had an enema before giving birth (Quimby 34). This leads her friend to describe her own experience:

To be frank with you, it's like wanting to go to the toilet and holding oneself back. In general, contractions are different from person to person. Look, when it comes to feeling pain, person A might feel them very strongly and person B might not feel them at all, but roughly everyone shares this feeling of wanting to go to the toilet and holding it until the very last, it's a time when it matters how much one can hold it. ("Zendō" 52-53; my trans)¹⁶⁴

Again there is not an idealization or a sanitary depiction of pregnancy. The frankness of the depiction is even made explicit and the scatological depiction of the moment of birth not only feels honest, but also, even if it is told from a personal perspective, it is clear that it is shared by a larger group of pregnant/ birthing people. In relation to this feeling of holding it, the narrator continues to say:

So when I entered the nineteenth week of pregnancy both Nishi and I would put our hands on top of the skin of my belly to feel the hard poo inside my belly, and we'd say: "It's moving." For me, in my maternal body, when that poo-shaped living form moved, I felt the illusion of perhaps wanting to poo as well. More than that, I was under the illusion of wanting to fart. Since that

¹⁶⁴ 「たんてきに言っちゃえば、トイレに行きたくてガマンしてるようなものなのよね、大の方のね、陣痛って人それぞれなんだけど、ほら痛いっていう感覚だってAの人は強く感じるしBの人は感じないってあるでしょ、でもだいたい、トイレに行きたいのをギリギリまでガマンして、どれだけガマンできるかっていうころなのよね」 ("Zendō" 52-53)

living form hardened inside my stomach, I have always been a little constipated. (“Zendō” 53; my trans.)¹⁶⁵

The associations between fetus and poop, between the fetal movements and one’s own bowel movements are prominent throughout this piece as well. The narrator also discusses the acts of defecation and childbirth. She mentions that often people have an enema before giving birth and that is perhaps a good choice for those who are not comfortable defecating in front of other people (“Zendō” 53). Then, she also says that in a book about the Lamaze method of childbirth she found notes about childbirth and defecating simultaneously, and babies being born side by side with poo (“Zendō” 53). Here again we find an inclusion of the multiplicity of attitudes towards childbirth and poop. In the end of the poem, the author moves on to discuss openly with other women constipation during pregnancy (53).

“Zendō” provides an insider’s look at pregnancy and childbirth; it allows us to access all those intimate conversations between people united by this common body experience. Finally, let us dwell on this poem’s title, “peristalsis”—a physical working of the body that denotes “the involuntary constriction and relaxation of the muscles of the intestine or another canal, creating wavelike movements that push the contents of the canal forward” (“Peristalsis.”). This word emphasizes on the involuntary capacities of our body, and Itō shows how pregnancy and childbirth literature are anchored on the functions of the body, such as excretion and expulsion. As maintained by Seaman, “childbirth literature is fundamentally a literature about the body and how it acts” (“Making” 157).

¹⁶⁵ 「つまり西さんとわたしは十九週に入って、わたしの腹の中に固まったウンコを腹の皮膚の上から手を当てて、動いていると言いついていのである。そのウンコの状の生命体が動くと母体であるわたしは、もしかしたらウンコをしたいのかもしれないと錯覚するのである。それよりもオナラをしたいと錯覚するのである。生命体がお腹の中にこり固まって来てからわたしはずっと便秘ぎみであり」 (“Zendō” 53)

Similarly to *Yoi oppai*, *warui oppai* and “Zendō,” in *Onna no ishō* (A woman’s life, 2014) Itō also depicts pregnancy as a process with marked stages that challenge fixed notions of subjectivity:

In the beginning I felt disgusted with the morning sickness, at the base of my breasts I felt a strange sense of incongruity, I cannot make sense of that phenomenon. But once one accepts it, more than the “fetus,” I’d like to call it one’s own energy, hardens, swells, and fills up.

In the midterm, one can feel the movements of the fetus, it is harder to move one’s bowels, and one just thinks something like perhaps “this” that is “here” is poop. One is thinking all the time what would the actual birth be like? So surely, perhaps it’s like that.

Towards the end, the movements of the fetus have gotten bigger, and because their hands and legs stick out the poop feeling disappears. Yet, at this stage, now the desire to give birth increases, that is to say, the desire to expel it, hence, I’m aware of a lingering connection with evacuating one’s bowels, but now from another place. (*Onna* 98; my trans.)¹⁶⁶

Itō’s depiction of the pregnant body is grounded on the materiality of the body, in the morning sickness, or the movements from within, and her trademark rendering of pregnancy and childbirth in connection to defecation still holds value. Itō continuously moves away from any sanitized images of pregnancy and childbirth. Hence, there is an

¹⁶⁶ 「最初はつわりのムカムカした感じ、乳房のつけ根あたりの不思議な違和感でした、その現象を感知できないのです。しかし受け入れていくにつれ、胎児がというより、自我のエネルギーとでも呼びたいものが、こり固まって、ふくれあがり、みなぎります。中期になると胎動を感じますし、排便がうまくできなくなり、もしやココにあるコレはうんこでは、と思うわけです。分娩とはどんなものかいつも考えていますから、やはりそこで、もしや、と。後期になると胎児の動きも大きくなり、手足を突き出したりしますから、うんこ感はなくなります。しかしこの頃になると、今度は、産みたいという欲望が高まってきて、それはつまり排出したいという欲望でもあるわけですから、別のところから強く排便との関連を意識するようになるわけです」 (*Onna* 98)

association with other bodily processes and fluids, and at some stage, there is also a level of alienation and lack of understanding of what happens to one's body. However, in Itō's rendering of pregnancy there is also the image of an empowered pregnant body full of confidence: "while I was pregnant, I was filled with life, physiologically, I felt I could do anything. Whatever the future opens for me, I'm confident I can take it on, with this uterus, these ovaries, these breasts, and these mammary glands" (*Onna* 98-99; my trans.).¹⁶⁷

"Postpartum" ("Bunbengo" 分娩後, 1986; trans. 2009) depicts childbirth as it follows:

Childbirth was not dying nor defecating/ Childbirth was just a very painful period/ For the thirty-seven hours from beginning to end/ I kept on bleeding just as if / I were having my period/ I wanted to change my maxi pad, change it right away/ I was constantly aware of my anus but/ I knew I didn't have to defecate/ The pain was unpleasant, nothing more/ The pain was unpleasant/ The pain was unpleasant/ Dying is unpleasant/ Unpleasant. (Itō, "Postpartum" 26)¹⁶⁸

Childbirth is one of the female body experiences that resist expression or containment by language. Itō does not extend herself in the way of sharing a postpartum experience in this poem, and in her depiction she mentions different aspects that she has mentioned in other works. Firstly, Itō connects birth to death as well as defecation, and in this poem, she says that in fact, it was neither like being on one's deathbed nor defecating. Therefore, the

¹⁶⁷ 「妊娠中は生気も満ちあふれていました、生理的に、自分は何でもできると思っていました。未来はわたしが、この子宮とこの卵巣とこの乳房とこの乳腺で、拓いていくものと確信していました」 (*Onna* 98-99)

¹⁶⁸ 「分娩は臨終ではなく、脱糞でもなかった・分娩は“とても痛い”月経にすぎない・三十七時間かかったその初めから終わりまで・わたしはまるで経血を・流しつづけ・あてた生理パッドを取り替えたいすぐ取り替えたい・肛門をつねに意識していたが・うんこでないことは分かっていた・痛いのは不快でしかなかった・痛いのは不快・痛いのは不快・死ぬのは不快・不快」 ("Bunbengo")

portrayal of childbirth is stripped of any eschatological or scatological qualities. Secondly, it is worth noticing that even if menstruation could be considered the “opposite” of childbirth, as it is an indicator of not being pregnant, it is still the closest reference for the poet to explain how childbirth might feel. Finally, the key aspect to underscore is the pain of childbirth; it is not a pain that might be close to pleasure, as the poet makes sure to clarify in different sentences that “the pain was unpleasant.” Here, childbirth pain is not traumatic, as it is not described in terms of panic or terror, but there is not a romantic view of it either.¹⁶⁹ From “Postpartum” we only know it is an unpleasant pain the female body endures from a personal, subjective point of view.

In contrast, in “Vinegar, Oil” there is a series of depictions of childbirths, as a shared experience amongst the women in her family. Hence, there is an illustration of different births and their particular circumstances:

Grandmother gave birth to my mother when she was forty/ Mother gave birth
to me when she was thirty/ When I was born my seventy-year old grandmother
had not menstruated for years/ I gave birth to my daughter when I was
twenty-eight/ When she was born, my fifty-eight-year old mother had not
menstruated for years/ When my water broke, dabs of blood came out too/
Almost like I was menstruating/ I realized that if I conceived before my next
period/ I'd create a child born the same year almost like a twin/ But I did not
conceive/ Once again/ I realized that if I conceived before my next period/ I'd

¹⁶⁹ Seaman also writes that when asked how much birth hurt, Itō says in *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*: “Beyond all imagination. Uterine contractions. It hurt a lot,” concluding with the Japanese phrase イタタタタタタと言うような痛みです (*itatatatatata to iu yō na itami desu*)—a stream of Japanese characters that, although roughly equivalent to “it REALLY huuuuuurt!,” cannot be accurately rendered in English, depicting as it does the almost inarticulate howl of pain uttered by a laboring mother” (*Writing* 117; Japanese transcription revised).

create a child born the next year who people might mistake for a twin/ But I did not conceive/And my periods kept coming. (Itō “Vinegar, Oil” 15-16)¹⁷⁰

Let us explore the representation of menstruation in this passage from three different angles. Firstly, we read that the narrator’s grandmother, mother and the narrator herself give birth one after another at different points in their lives. Itō takes into account the different stages of the female sexual reproductive experience, inter-generationally connecting menstruation, birth and menopause. She emphasizes the ages in which different women in her family including herself give birth, showing that gradually when the younger members in the family give birth the older members have entered yet another stage in life, thus creating a similar movement to that of a chain of substitutions and displacements. Here we see menstruation as a marker of female fertility and an indicator of non-pregnancy.

Secondly, we find the depiction of the speaker’s birth, which shares a similar imagery to “Postpartum.” Here, Itō reconnects the water breaking, and the blood that comes out with the experience of menstruation. Despite signifying a non-pregnant state, at the moment of birth menstruation becomes our closer referent to describe the experience of vaginally releasing different substances from our body.

Thirdly, menstruation is connected to the narrator’s attempts to conceive another baby that would almost be like a twin to her newborn baby. Since she does not conceive and “her periods kept coming” we can infer a kind of disappointment due to her unfulfilled expectations. If we read between the lines we can grasp a tension between the biological

¹⁷⁰ 「祖母が母を生んだのが四十の時・母がわたしを産んだのが三十の時・わたしが生まれた時七十歳の祖母はもうとくに月経がありませんでした・わたしが娘を産んだのが二十八の時・娘が生まれた時五十八歳の母はもうとくに月経がありませんでした・羊水がしゅっと出ると、月経みたいな血もだばだば出ました・こんどの月経までに受胎すれば・まるで双子のようなおない年のきょうだいができあがる・と考えたのですが・受胎しませんでした・そこでまた・こんどの月経までに受胎すれば・双子に見まがう年子ができあがる・と考えたのですが・受胎しませんでした・月経はまだつづきます」 (“Suyu” 90-91)

body and the subject's will, even if she wanted to become pregnant again it does not necessarily happen at the desired time. It is important to underline that the desired pregnancy has to do with a deeper desire to bear resembling twins. Twins have been traditionally been looked down upon, yet in Itō's poem, this is precisely the desire.

Itō's depictions of the maternal body and the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering are multi-faceted and complex. As Quimby explains, Itō's poetry "does not uphold any sanitized, romanticized images of pregnancy or women's role as the 'bearer of children,' yet neither does she eschew pregnancy or woman's reproductive capability" (30). The main strategy Itō employs to move away from idealized and sanitized images of the maternal body is the recurring reference to bodily fluids, which emphasize the materiality of the body and "the biological realities of female corporeality" (30).

3.4. Poetry and counseling

Onna no isshō 女の一生 (A woman's life, 2014) is a non-fictional journey through a woman's life—her own and that of others—in which Itō shares her acquired "know-how" on several issues such as menstruation, mother-daughter relationships, family relationships, sex, menopause, masturbation, work, and housework, among others. It is partly autobiographical and in fact, towards the end of the book we find a timeline that includes aspects of Itō's personal life and her prolific professional career. Yet, as a whole, this book captures the voices of many different women who contacted her for advice and as she writes: "I listened to the life stories of women, one by one, and I put them together, so I'm narrating their stories in *Women's* (in plural) *Lives*" (ii; my trans.).¹⁷¹ Due to her *Nishi Nippon* newspaper column and her interactions with her readership, Itō is not only a

¹⁷¹ 「一つ一つの女の一生を聞き取ってまとめ上げ、「女（複数）の一生」を語っていかうと思っています」 (ii)

poet and writer, but she has also become an accessible poet/counselor for many. Actually, during an interview, Itō mentions that because of her extensive use of the first-person narrative, she has been called ego-centric and narcissist, and even if this may be true to some extent, her voice is also a collective one, in fact, she says: “When I write ‘I’ I mean ‘us’” (“Personal”).

The way she addresses most of the topics is based on her own experience, yet at times when she faces a topic that she cannot personally relate to, she consults with experts in order to offer a more grounded response (*Onna* 230). The Afterword of this book serves to contextualize it within her larger body of work. Itō writes that when she published *Onna no zetsubō* 女の絶望 (A woman’s despair, 2011), Ueno Chizuko asked to write something like *Onna no kibō* 女の希望 (A woman’s desire), and Itō believes that through *Onna no isshō* she is keeping that promise (230). *Onna no isshō* is a compilation and re-writing of themes brought up by readers’/audience’s questions voicing their concerns, some of which are also addressed in her previous works. Itō tells us that when she needed information about the concerns in a woman’s life she looked into *Onna no zetsubō*, and into her series *Banji OK* 万事OK (Everything’s ok, a title she also regularly shares extracts from in her twitter account). When she needed information about child-rearing she opened *Yoi oppai*, *warui oppai*, and *Onaka hoppe oshiri* おなかほっぺおしり (Tummy, cheeks, buttocks, 1987/1993) and about adolescence she looked into *Itō fukigen seisakujo* 伊藤ふきげん製作所 (Itō’s bad temper factory, 2003-4) and *Ano koro sensei ga ita* あのころ、先生がいた (At that time, there was a professor, 2007) (*Onna* 229). When she wanted to write about her own aging process she went to *Yomitoki ‘hannyashingyō’* 読み解き「般若心経」 (Deciphering the Heart Sutra, 2010) and also to the works she wrote for her own parents *Heikeiki* 閑経記 (A record of menopause, 2013) and *Chichi no ikiru* 父の生きる

(Father's life, 2016) (229). And even to write the final autobiographical timeline "*Aru onna no isshō*" ある女の一生 (A certain woman's life) she referred to her poetic anthology *Zoku, Itō Hiromi shisshū* 続・伊藤比呂美詩集 (A continuation of the collected poetry of Itō Hiromi, 2011) (*Onna* 220). Therefore, we may say that even when this book engages in the personal experiences or concerns of other women, it finds its voice not only in Itō's personal life, but also in Itō's body of work throughout her career. Itō writes that she "copy-pastes" from her previous works, and then revisits and rewrites them. In other words, when it comes to Itō's oeuvre both her personal life and work are in constant interaction. This book contains an overview of her own work by a more mature poet in which we can find continuities and ruptures within her own body of work.

Onna no isshō is divided into six chapters: "Very young women," "Young women who face me," "Fighting women" (divided into four subsections: Sex and Women, Society and Women, Reproduction and Women, and Family and Women), "Not so young women who face me," "Older women" and finally, "A certain woman's life" (her autobiographical time-line). The very existence of this book serves as a testimony of how one's gendered identity affects all aspects of our lives, and also, of how a literary engagement with certain themes can cross the boundaries of literature and fiction and actually serve as a way for readers to rethink their own lives in an alternative way of psychological and life-style counseling. Therefore, the boundaries between narrator/character and author are also blurred.

This section focuses on Itō's depiction of—or shall I say advice regarding—menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth in *Onna no isshō*. In response to the comment of PMS being too tough and that it would be best if we did not menstruate at all by a fifteen year old, Itō explains the physiology of menstruation and how it is an indicator of non-pregnancy (*Onna* 18). She also explains of its associations with *kegare* (pollution)

and how this had led to the process being treated with disgust. Itō can relate to that fifteen year old as she recalls when she had her period when she was in middle and high school and how it was a major hassle, definitely an inconvenient monthly event, how it prevented her from participating in swimming lessons, for example, and how it simply hurt. In addition, she writes: “But most of all, my mother invited me to view menstruation as disgusting, shameful, better concealed, and this way of thinking dropped a dark shadow” (18; my trans.).¹⁷² This perspective on menstruation resonates with Bobel’s words, “Leaky, liquid, flowing menstruation—a uniquely female experience associated with sexuality—is constructed as a shameful form of pollution that must be contained. Menstruation, then, is constituted as a problem in need of a solution” (*New* 31). This negative view of menstruation has been transferred from generation to generation and it was probably one of the reasons why she did not like the bodily changes of her adolescence (Itō, *Onna* 18-19). She also writes about the changes in the menstrual products and how they affect our own view of menstruation:

Dealing with used napkins was something unbearably troublesome. Today’s napkins can be rolled and wrapped with the package of the new napkin; you can tape it (the plastic wrap has tape attached to it) and throw them away. But in the past, they weren’t designed in such a way, and the actual napkin was like a huge cushion, and the used one lost its shape because of the humidity and its weight. I was taught by my mom to roll them in toilet paper or tissues, but as I said, the actual thing was so big that wrapping them up was the hardest. So where can I find a place where it would be okay to throw a used napkin as it

¹⁷² 「でも何よりも、母親から伝授された月経観が、いやなもの、恥ずかしいもの、隠すべきもの、という考え方が、ずうんと暗い影を落としていたのであります」(18)

is, or, where it would be okay to just keep on discharging menstrual blood? I daydreamed of the paradise of my dreams. (19; my trans.)¹⁷³

This quote offers insight on the impact of the materiality of menstrual products and how they define the terms of our relationship with our bodies. If disposing of a menstrual napkin is such a hassle and causes such a waste, the actual menstruation will be seen as nothing other than a hassle and waste in itself. We can also elicit an awareness of sociocultural norms—also known as “menstrual etiquette”—that aim to control an uncontrollable bodily experience (See: Laws; Young). Even if today’s products are more practical, I hold that her young dream of uncontained menstruation and waste-free periods still invites us to think about an alternative way to deal with our menstrual experience. There is another section dedicated to the theme of menstruation, when a seventeen year old asks: “so what is menstruation?” and Itō responds:

It’s annoying, so annoying, and while still thinking that it is annoying, every month we live with it, and so we get completely used to menstruation. We can expect to coexist with it like this for a while, yet I realize menstruation manifests our mental and bodily swings right away, much more honestly than our eyes or mouths, so it kindly accompanies me all along and it is so expressive. That is to say, regardless of how stable your menstruation is, if you get an eating disorder and lose weight it stops completely. When I was pregnant, it also stopped completely. When I was living without having sex, menstruation was only “annoying,” I never thought, “come, come, please

¹⁷³「面倒でたまらなかったのが、使用済みナプキンの扱い。今どきのナプキンはくるくる丸めて新しいナプキンの袋で包んでテープ（袋についている）でとめて捨てることができますが、昔はそんな作りじゃなかった上に、ナプキン自体も座布団並みに大きくて、使用済みは、体重と湿気で形が崩れていました。ちり紙ないしはトイレトペーパーで包んで捨てるという母の教えがありましたが、なにしろ本体が大きいから、包むのが一苦勞。ああ地球上のどこかに、使用済みナプキンはそのまま捨ててOK、あるいは経血は垂れ流しばなしでOKという、そういう夢の楽園はないものかと夢想しておりました」(19)

come.” Yet when I started having sex even if it was just a little late I’d beg for it to “come, come, come fast.” Waiting for menstruation, I suffer from all my regrets. (*Onna* 40-41; my trans.)¹⁷⁴

This is a frank depiction of the menstrual experience, and how its view changes with time. Itō describes it as it being “annoying,” something many women will agree with. As Young explains many women describe it as “something to dread,” “a mess,” “a pain in the neck,” thus in many cases we find certain negativity in our descriptions of menstruation (104). Yet, Itō recognizes that menstruation is also a strong indicator of our mental and bodily health. Hence, in Itō’s words we can find a new potentiality for menstruation that seems to be in agreement with Alice Dan and Linda Lewis’s words: “the menstrual cycle not only is a central aspect of women’s lives, but it also offers a model to researchers who want to understand relationships between mind and body, and between social meanings and individual experience” (1 qtd. in Bobel, *New* 29). As Itō points out, it stops when our bodies go through severe changes, such as an eating disorder or pregnancy.

Itō also describes that menstruation somehow stabilizes, that is because “as women mature, menstrual events become more routine and an accepted part of their lives” (Young 104). Hence, menstruation is also something mundane. Yet, for a sexually active woman, menstruation takes on a new meaning; as Young puts it, “we surge with positive or negative emotion at the appearance or nonappearance of the menses in connection with our desires to avoid or become pregnant. Whether we have wanted our pregnancies or not, we

¹⁷⁴「面倒だ、ああ面倒だ、面倒だと思いながら、毎月ともに過ごすことにすっかり慣れた月経であります。このままずっと共存していくかと思いきや、心身の揺れをすぐ表現するのが月経、目や口なんかより、よっぽど正直で、わたし自身に親身に寄り添い、表情豊かであることに気づくのであります。つまり。どんなに安定していた月経も、摂食障害がはじまって体重が減るや、ぴたり止まる。妊娠したときも、ぴたり止まる。セックスなしで生きていた頃は、「月経、面倒だ」だけで、「来い来い来てほしい」とはこれっぽっちも思ってませんでした。セックスを始めてからというもの、チョットでも遅れると、「来い来い早く来い」とお願いわずにはいられない。月経をめぐる、後悔に悶え苦しむのであります」(40-41)

feel something monumental about the return of our periods” (104). Despite this recognition, Itō’s depiction as a whole does not equate menstruation and reproduction, since this equation “does not add up for women who do not identify with their procreative capacities (or lack of capacities)” (Bobel, *New* 103).

Almost thirty years back she wrote her famous phrase comparing fetuses with poop, and this comparison lingers on. As previously mentioned, she first wrote it in *Yoi oppai*, *warui oppai* and in several poems she wrote around the same time (97). In this regard she says:

The truth is I like dirty things from our “basic nature,” shit and vomit made me happy as a child and I just continued to like this into adulthood. However, I think about the fetus in terms of the sex and physiology of women, and then I am certain of my realization of it being poop. Later, I gave birth and raised my second child and third child, then I accumulated too many different experiences, I took care of my parents, of my dog... then I saw it clearly: To live is to excrete. (*Onna* 97; my trans.)¹⁷⁵

In this passage Itō goes beyond a comparison between pregnancy and defecation as realities of our bodies, and concludes that based on pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for her daughters, parents and dogs, she realized that “to live is to excrete” (“*ikiru toiukoto wa, haisetsudearu, to*” 生きるということは、排泄である、と) (97). As living beings we necessarily expel different substances from our bodies. Young refers to Kristeva’s thoughts on abjection offering a better understanding of the emphasis on excretions:

¹⁷⁵ 「実は、わたしは根っからの汚いもの好きで、ウンコだゲロだと喜ぶ子どもがそのままおとなの女になったようなものです。しかしながら、女の性や生理を考えた上で、胎児について考えつめたら、それはうんこと実感したのもたしかです。その後、第二子第三子を産み、育て、他にいろいろと経験をむだに積み重ね、親の介護も犬の介護も経験し、シモの始末もやった末に、わたしはハッキリと見きわめました。生きるということは、排泄である、と」(97)

The abject denotes a correlate to the subject that lies just on the other side of the border of its identity and threatens to dissolve that border. Human substances ejected from the body most especially evoke reactions of disgust or loathing—vomit, pus, piss, shit, the corpse itself as the limit case of the disintegration of the self. These substances whose origin is in the body challenge the affective investment in our sense of impermeable and solid body boundaries. (Young 109)

Itō's emphasis on excretions presents us with a fluid existence rather than a solid one. Yet, for Itō, excretions are life. They are not depicted in terms of disgust or loathing; on the contrary, they are "likeable." Hence, there is a redefinition of the abject in a more positive or life-affirming light. In addition, Irigaray's theory of fluids offers a suitable interpretative framework as she writes about the qualities of fluids, after asserting that woman ("woman-thing," in her terms) speaks "fluid":

That it is continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible, ... That it is unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable; that it enjoys and suffers from a greater sensitivity to pressures; that it changes—in volume or in force, for example—according to the degree of the heat; that it is, in its physical reality, determined by friction between two infinitely neighboring entities—dynamics of the near and not of the proper, movements coming from the quasi contact between two unities hardly definable as such...that it allows itself to be easily traversed by flow by virtue of its conductivity to currents coming from other fluids or excreting pressure through the walls of a solid; that it mixes with bodies of a like states, sometimes dilutes itself in them in an almost homogeneous manner, which makes the distinction between the one and the other problematical; and further more that it is already

diffuse “in itself.” Which disconcerts any attempt at static identification...

(111)

Fluids and women’s speech refuse to be confined by language or defined logically. In other words, fluids are “unstable...surge and move, and a metaphysic that links being as fluid would tend to privilege the living, moving, pulsing over the inert dead matter of the Cartesian worldview” (Young 80). Therefore, looking at our embodiment and subjectivity from the perspective of the fluids disintegrates fictions of a solid, unified and complete self.

In *Onna no isshō*, Itō also talks about her own experience of abortion, and shares with her readers that it was indeed a tough decision. She struggled with it and she heard inner voices telling her that she was “dirty,” “a bad person.” She even hated herself: “I hated everything, my physiology, menstruation, sex and feelings. I also hated the fetus, no, the not-yet-a-fetus, the embryo” (*Onna* 100; my trans.).¹⁷⁶ Here we see the psychological impact of the way we name things, just like there is a difference between “baby” and “fetus,” there is also a difference between “fetus” and “embryo.” Even if these differences had been addressed in her previous poetry, in this more recent account we can also elicit that it was a painful time for the author and that she was not immune to sociocultural ideas of guilt that cause self-hating attitudes. Itō shares with the readers that she also had morning sickness and that: “as a maternal body, until very recently, I almost forgot those feelings of disgust, and I couldn’t remember them without great difficulty. It was an extremely sad experience” (*Onna* 100; my trans.).¹⁷⁷ On this theme, she continues to write:

No matter how much I try to conceal it, the truth is that it is an act that is very close to a homicide. But, for us, it is a resolution that we must sometimes do.

¹⁷⁶ 「自分の生理を、月経を、性効を、感情を、すべて憎みました。胎児、いえ胎児未満の胎芽というものを憎みました」(100)

¹⁷⁷ 「そして母体であるわたしは、ついさっきまでのそのむかむかの感じを忘れかけていて、思い出そうとしなければ思い出せなかったのです。悲しすぎる体験でした」(100)

Because it is happening in our bodies, women have to start by deciding whether to continue or to abort. More importantly, women can avoid this unless they are ignorant. If you have time for a *mizuko* ceremony, it's better to continue living your own life learning from your regrets. (*Onna* 100-101; my trans.)¹⁷⁸

This passage about abortion clearly states the author's position regarding the continuity or interruption of one's pregnancy, as a decision that must be done by women themselves. Yet, we can elicit that for Itō it is a complex subject and even if she does not mention it here, we can see how the work of Magna Denes resonated with the author as they both recognize the challenges, sorrow, and pain that in some cases come with the decision of abortion. At the same time, they do not hesitate for a second in affirming that it is still a decision that women must make.

Next she writes about her actual experience of giving birth:

Let's say this clearly, childbirth is like having such a good orgasm that can happen only once in many years, plus a big evacuation that can happen only once in many years, and double or triple it. It's stronger, more aggressive and painful than an orgasm or than an evacuation: it is "extraordinary." Almost naked, covered in blood, covered in sweat, I am far from my ordinary self, my whole physiology is shaken, I become crumpled, the feelings get more and

¹⁷⁸ 「どんなに強がりを書いてみたところで、それは、殺人にかぎりなく近い行為だということ。でも、わたしたちには、それを決断しなければならないことがあるということ。自分のからだに起こっているのだから、女が自分で、継続か中絶か、決断しなければ始まらないということ。さらに大切なことは、女たちが無知でさえなければ、これを回避できるということ。水子供養なんかするヒマがあったら、後悔を種にして、自分の人生をずんずん生きていった方がいいですよ」(100-101)

more acute, and I can't stop any of this. You can't experience anything like this in any other situation. (101; my trans)¹⁷⁹

This description privileges the lived experience, reclaiming it, revisiting, and rewriting it. Childbirth takes over all of our body, grounds us in our body, and it hurts. When she says that she can't stop it, we sense a tension between agency and determinism, the body takes over. She continues to meditate on an experience that is difficult to translate into words:

And what is more interesting about childbirth is that others are markedly present during a labor that we can only face by ourselves. The presence of the man who gave the sperm. The presence of the child inside my belly. The presence of my family, doctors and midwives surrounding me. Then, my own physiology that is impossible to control. All these are interconnected like a mandala, and receiving the effect of each of them. I reach to the top, climax, and finish. That is childbirth. (*Onna* 102; my trans.)¹⁸⁰

This last consideration about childbirth is very powerful as it shows the empowerment of birthing mothers. Unfortunately, in today's society we find many cases of birthing women who are filled with insecurities and fear, and their own agency and empowerment seems to be replaced by the doctors and the hospitals taking over. Itō reclaims birth as being something that a woman fundamentally does on her own but in this more recent portrayal,

¹⁷⁹「分娩とは、数年に一度のとびっきりのオーガズムに数年に一度のとびっきりの排便を足して二番か三番したようなものと言いきりましょう。オーガズムよりも、排便よりも、ずっと強くて、積極的で、痛くて、そして究極の「非日常」。血まみれ汗まみれのはだかに近い格好で、日常の自分からかけ離れ、全身の生理を揺さぶられ、もみくちゃになり、感情がどんどん鋭敏になっていくのを止められず、ただなるがままなんていうのは、他では味わえません」(101)

¹⁸⁰「そしてさらにおもしろいところは、分娩という、一人で向き合うしかない作業の中に、他者が、色濃く存在するところ。精子を提供した男の存在。腹の中の子供の存在。自分を取り巻く助産師や医師や家族の存在。それから制御不可能な自分の生理。そういうのがマンドラミたいにからみあい、それぞれから影響を受けながら、自分でのぼりつめ、極めて、終わらせる行為。それが分娩です」(102)

she recognizes external presences and how important it is to consider them because they have a strong impact.

Next, similar to its depiction in *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*, Itō describes breastfeeding as a blissful experience:

Pregnancy and childbirth were both enjoyable, but what I remember thinking is mmm, that felt good, I would like to do it again, like when I remember an orgasm, is breastfeeding. My stiff breasts bursting with energy, my explosive nipples. When my nipples are sucked by that small, moist mouth, that contrary to its appearance, can suck strongly, I feel a sensation of release, this is stronger than the pleasure from any other form of excretion of energy. (*Onna* 103; my trans.)¹⁸¹

This type of depiction is what makes Itō's take on pregnancy and childbirth so unique. Often the focus is on the pain, the uncomfortable sensations, and the challenges. Even if Itō does not avoid mentioning them, in fact, she is very straightforward when describing those as well, the major takeaway from Itō's work is that she accepts and embraces them, and this allows her to depict both pregnancy and childbirth as being pleasurable experiences. In this passage we see the erotic bond between baby and mother, and how breastfeeding can be a source of intense pleasure. In fact, for Itō this was one of the reasons she decided to have yet a third daughter:

When I was forty, I had a pregnancy with several different problems, and so I wondered if I should give birth or not. I remembered that pleasure, or I better

¹⁸¹ 「妊娠も楽しく、分娩も楽しかったけど、ふと思い出して、あへー、よかった、またやりたいと、オーガズムを思い出すように思い出すのは、授乳です。ぱんぱんに張りつめ、みなぎる乳房。一触即発の乳首。そこをあの小さな湿った口で、見かけによらぬ強い力でぐぐっと吸われたときに、解放される感じは、どんな排出エネルギーにともなう快感より強いのです」(103)

say, my pregnant breasts made me remember, and because of that I was determined to give birth! (*Onna* 103; my trans)¹⁸²

Here breastfeeding takes a new force as it is being depicted as one of the very reasons to give birth. In *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*, written almost thirty years before *Onna no isshō*, she dedicates an entire chapter dedicated to breastfeeding and tackles the different stages of breastfeeding, pumping, breastfeeding advantages, but she also discusses its disadvantages and challenges. For instance, Itō talks about what she calls “breast milk fascism” as an extreme offering of the breast in order to boost the mother’s ego (*Yoi* 110). She also points out that it not only operates against one’s own baby but also against other mothers who feed their babies with formula, and so the breastfeeding mother’s ego fills up with a sense of superiority (*Yoi* 133). Itō calls for escaping this form of “fascism” and purports an understanding of each and everyone’s different circumstances (133). After showing this bodily reminiscence and how this gave her strength to continue with her pregnancy she goes on to discuss her thoughts on exclusive breastfeeding:

The idea that breastfeeding is a must for the sake of the babies is a valid argument, however, I think that the logic of doing it for something/ somebody else always somehow somewhere ends up getting lost in risky areas, and so I can’t like it. I breastfed for myself, and this should be enough. When strongly standing on the side of “breast milk, breast milk,” perhaps the mothers and fathers who can’t produce milk feel ashamed. (*Onna* 103; my trans.)¹⁸³

¹⁸² 「わたしは四十のとき、いろいろと問題の多い妊娠しまして、産もうか産むまいか悩んでいたときに、あの快感をふと思い出し、というより、妊娠した乳房がわたしにそれを思い出させたような具合で、それで産もう！と決意したのであります」(103)

¹⁸³ 「子供のためにぜったい母乳という考えは、正論には違いないのですが、何々のために、という論理は、なんだかいつもどこかで危険なところに逸れてしまう気がして、どうも好きになれないのです。自分のために乳をやった、それでいいと思うんです。あまり母乳母乳と言い立てると、母乳を出すに出せない母たちや父たちの肩身が狭いのではないかと」(103)

Here, she is revisiting some of her concerns voiced in *Yoi oppai warui oppai* when she denounces the feelings of superiority from breastfeeding mothers. And what is for many a secondary reason, the pleasure for breastfeeding is a priority for Itō, she does it for herself and not for her babies, in fact, she notes that this can be expressed properly in Japanese: “I breastfeed, I make breast milk” (*chichi wo yaru* 乳をやる), and not “giving breast milk” (*chichi wo ageru* 乳をあげる) (103).

Itō’s childrearing slogan “rudeness (*gasatsu*), laziness (*gutara*), and negligence (*zubora*)” from *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* is also restated in this book. She takes a moment to clarify that even when embracing this mantra the children will not be literally abandoned. In fact, she also advises to just “hold them tight” (“*gyuttodakko*” ぎゅっと抱っこ) (105). Hence, we see a more caring attitude in this later portrayal. Another important aspect of childrearing is self-acceptance and self-esteem: “Ultimately, the goal of childcare is to provide your children with a sense of self-affirmation, with a sense of being okay with the way we are” (105; my trans.)¹⁸⁴ Self-esteem is essentially a matter of “having a deep sense of worthiness—being worthy of love, belonging and connection—to being able to say without hesitation: “I’m good enough” (Brown, “The Power” qtd. in Buritica-Alzate, “Interdependence” 146).

Finally, *Onna no isshō* is an example of how accessible Itō is and how her trajectory as a writer has culminated in the role of a counselor or healer. Her column in the Newspaper *Nishi Nippon* has been a means to connect with her readership for over twenty years, which has resulted in her series *Banji OK* (Everything is okay), in which she offers kind and honest words to all types of people: they are life consultations and direct conversations, a sort of “mini-healing” (“Personal”; Schunnesson). An experience explicit

¹⁸⁴ 「最終的に育児の目標は、自分は自分でいいのだ、という自己肯定感を子どもに植えつけてやること」(105)

or implicit across her work is her eating disorder, which has led her to work with feminist Tanaka Mitsu in workshops with women with eating disorders—a space in which she has used her poetry as a means for healing (“Personal”). Women from her generation and previous generations (e.g. Tanaka Mitsu) were very active in the “Women’s Liberation Movement.” They were looking outside themselves into society (“Personal”; Schunnesson), but because of her eating disorder she also had to look inwards. She was living an inner war: facing death and famine (Schunnesson). Unfortunately, her first two daughters also inherited these problems (Schunnesson), which perhaps is what offers a reason into her motivations to help others affected by eating disorders and other tribulations.

At different readings or seminars, Itō’s audience are often sick people, tired mothers, people with eating disorders, or people who come to her seeking an answer. For this reason, she has continued her grandmother’s tradition of “healing with words” (“Personal”; Schunnesson). Itō’s introspective tone, and her reflections on her own life, her body and her family do not end up in egotism, even though she claims that when she helps others, she is just trying to save herself (“Personal”). All the observations she makes about herself serve as a basis to identify patterns that may be shared by different people (“Personal”). Therefore, we find a marked intersection between poetry and counseling in Itō’s work.

3.5. Conclusive remarks: embodiment and healing

Itō’s work is unique in her depictions of the female body experience; the combination between unrestricted personal honesty and an awareness of different sociocultural pressures regarding body politics make her texts both enjoyable and susceptible to academic interpretations. Itō definitely brings to the center of her texts all of our “repressed cultural impulses” next to “audacious and shocking personal narratives” (Fox

and De Lima). Itō's work is controversial, avant-garde, and an outstanding representative of feminist aesthetics. As Fox puts it, Itō "locate[s] in poetry's ancient but ever-present and life-affirming technologies a powerful mode of resistance as well as a vehicle for cultural and personal transformation" (De Lima and Fox). I maintain that the selection of her work explored in this chapter specifically purport a more positive image of our bodies, offering literature as a path to embrace and accept our bodies and who we are.

For instance, alongside the darker elements of the poem "Killing Kanoko," there are also positive elements of the maternal bodily experience. This poem, alongside others, shows Itō's familiarity with the theory of abjection and the maternal in Kristeva's work, with Cixous' ideas on motherhood, and with the symbolism of breasts in Klein's work. As we have explored in this chapter, Itō's texts enrich all theoretical discussions on the body, not only those concerning abjection (Kristeva), but also those about volatile bodies (Grosz) and fluid theory (Irigaray). Through her depiction of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding as leaky experiences and her emphasis on body fluids, Itō moves away from canonic representations of these experiences, and promotes a view of the body as being permeable, changing and fluid.

Even when Itō's texts span over a wide variety of themes and genres, it is possible to identify recurring concerns/topics and motifs throughout her work. These include abuse and repression of the female body, the psychology leading to infanticide, abortion, pregnant embodiment, breastfeeding, menstruation, scatology, sexuality, and mothering among others. Also, bodily fluids and excretions are recurrent tropes of both abject and pleasurable experiences throughout her work, making materiality an indivisible part of subjectivity. In her strong affirmation of life through excretions, Itō positively values body functions and secretions.

In addition, I believe compassion permeates Itō's work, as she is able to connect to the tribulations of women and mothers, in general. In fact, Itō's voice challenges general assumptions on what womanhood or motherhood look like. Her depictions of motherhood are liberating as she resists an ideology of total caregiving and unconditional sacrifice while probing the tensions between dependence and independence, and between caregiving and self-care. This goes hand-in-hand with her critical perspective on hegemonic gender systems and traditional family-structures that restrict, oppress, or exclude women's agency and sexuality (Tilton-Cantrell 1). Her portrayal brings together a multiplicity of experiences based on the body, thus, moving away from univocally containing the female body.

It is also possible to trace an evolution in her work, or better said, her works reflect a shift in her interests and stages in life. Also, there seems to be an invisible thread connecting all her works. She has written as a mother, and her later works show that she also writes from the standpoint of a daughter. Hence, we find strong gender awareness in connection to identity permeating her works. Ultimately, her major concerns revolve around life and death, but if in the beginning she was more interested in life, now she is more interested in death. In conclusion, I believe Itō's work is disruptive at heart; in Young's terms, it "crashes borders:"

Crashing the border means affirming that women, all women, can "have it all."

It means creating and affirming a kind of love in which a woman does not have to choose between pursuing her own selfish, insatiable desire and giving pleasure and sustenance to another close to her, a nurturance that gives and also takes for itself. Whether they are mothers or not, women today are still too often cast in the nurturant role, whatever their occupation or location. This nurturant position is that of the self-sacrificing listener and stroker, the one who

turns toward the wounded needful ego that uses her as mirror and enclosing womb, giving nothing to her, and she of course is polite enough not to ask. As feminists we should affirm the value of nurturing; an ethic of caring does indeed hold promise for a more human justice, and political values guided by such an ethic would change the character of the public for the better. But we must also insist that nurturers need, that love is partly selfish, and that a woman deserves her own irreducible pleasures. (Young 89-90)

Itō's work re-signifies what it means to be in a nurturing position, it stresses the importance of care, care for one self, for one's children, parents, pets and the environment without idealizing or sanitizing such care. The changes in our body overlap with the changes in our life, and Itō's embodied subjectivity emphasizes fluidity, multiplicity, transformation, fragmentation, and room to heal and grow. Furthermore, her words—completely anchored in her embodied experience—contain clues for healing and overcoming challenges.

Chapter Four

Embodying beauty, reproduction and agency by Kawakami Mieko

4.1. Introduction: echoing Higuchi Ichiyō

This chapter looks at the representations of the female body in Kawakami's *Chichi to ran* 乳と卵 (Breasts and eggs, 2007/2008), which received the 138th Akutagawa Prize in 2008. As mentioned, it has not been published in English yet, but it has been translated into Chinese, French, Norwegian, Korean, and Spanish (*Mieko Kawakami*). The novella explores female subjectivity and corporeality through the relationship of three women characters: Midoriko (daughter), Makiko (mother), and Natsuko (sister-aunt). The plot is developed around breast augmentation surgery, and it tackles the role of a single, working mother, body changes and body image "in the post-bubble, neo-liberalist Japan of the 2000s" (Abe Auestad 2). *Chichi to ran* questions mothering through the relationship between Midoriko and Makiko. Their relationship is dynamic; there are ups and downs, with cycles of conflict and reconciliation. The novella explores feelings of self-sacrifice associated with pregnancy, breastfeeding and childbearing, anchored in the transformations the body undergoes throughout these experiences.

Titles are promises of meaning; they hint at the work's central purpose, tell us something about the work, or perhaps attempt to capture its essence. *Chichi to ran* is a peculiar title because the kanji 乳 (*chichi*) denotes both "breasts," and also "milk," so at a first glance it is possible to read it as *Milk and Eggs*. This subtle double meaning may trick a potential reader into believing that it may be a pastry or a cooking book, yet after a second look, the reader knows it is about the female body and sexuality. Regarding this novella's title, Fujita has suggested that it might imply a twofold relationship to the

“father”: as being “caught or chosen by the father,” *chichi, toran* 父、採らん (suggesting female passivity), or as “the absence of the father,” *chichi to oran* 父と居らん (suggesting a sort of longing for the father). Fujita’s search for hidden meanings overlooks and disregards this novella’s main focus: women’s lives, their bodies, and their sexuality. In opposition to Fujita, I contend that the patriarchal is not secretly being summoned, but rather explicitly ignored and challenged.

The novella unfolds from the perspective of the first-person narrator, Natsuko—although her name only appears towards the very end of the book. For most of the time the reader knows her as “*watashi*” 私 (“I”). She is in her thirties, single, and lives by herself in Tokyo. The whole novella covers the span of a three-day visit from Osaka by Makiko, her sister, and Midoriko, her niece. Makiko is a thirty-nine-year-old single mother and works as a hostess. Makiko is frustrated with mothering, and obsessed with the “ugliness” of her breasts. For this reason, she has decided to get breast implants. Midoriko is around thirteen years old and refuses to speak. Instead, she writes memos and carries around a journal. Midoriko finds it hard to accept the inevitable changes that her body goes through during puberty, and worries that she will end up as obsessed with her appearance as her mother is. It has also been pointed out that the title of this novella alludes to the mother-daughter relationship given that “breasts” are Makiko’s main concern or obsession and “eggs” (menstruation and pregnancy) are Midoriko’s (“Intabyū”).

Aiming to examine the depiction of the female body in this novella, I first introduce the ways in which Higuchi Ichiyō’s “Takekurabe” has influenced the plot and characters of *Chichi to ran*. Next, this chapter is divided into three main additional sections. First, “4.2. Menstruation and the possibility of becoming a mother” offers a multi-angled view at menstruation from the perspective of different characters. Second, “4.3. Breasts, body

image and mothering” focuses on Makiko’s desire for breast enhancement surgery and the ways Kawakami problematizes a larger notion of beauty ideals, body image and agency. Third, “4.4. Rebirth of the mother-daughter relationship” explores the novella’s outcomes and its most climactic scenes in terms of the mother-daughter dyad, as well as the narrator as mediator. Finally, “4.5. Conclusive remarks: embodying beauty, reproduction and agency” rounds up the main points of this analysis in terms of the links between subjectivity and embodiment.

The contemporary setting makes it hard to notice that this novella is actually inspired by Higuchi Ichiyō’s “Takekurabe” たけくらべ (1895–1896; “Childs Play” trans. 1993; “Growing Up” trans. 1956). Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896) was a promising young author who died at age twenty-four after publishing twenty-one short stories. She has been considered one of, if not the greatest, woman writer of the Meiji period (1868–1912) (Copeland, “Meiji” 383; Cullen 10). The connection between both stories has been pointed out not only by the author herself but also by several literary scholars (Kawakami “Ie” 349; “Washa” 525-527; Fuse 65; Abe Auestad 3). One of “Takekurabe”’s main characters is Midori, a girl also around thirteen years old, who is growing up in Daionji-mae, just outside Yoshiwara, a licensed prostitution district in Meiji period Tokyo (Compernelle 144). In “Takekurabe” Midori suffers a drastic change toward the end of the story: “she has her hair done in the adult style and changes from a lively tomboy to a sullen and withdrawn woman” (Cullen 16). With regards to the background of her depression there is a debate of whether it refers to her menarche, her first menstruation, or to a first—unwanted—sexual experience, her “loss of virginity” (Hartley “Trading”; Hansen 69). Until the 1980s there was a scholarly consensus that claimed: “Midori had experienced her first period, and the elaborate attire was meant to symbolize her emergence as an adult woman” (Compernelle 236). Some of the voices that represent the

different positions are Sata Ineko 佐多稲子 (1904-1998), a writer herself, and Maeda Ai 前田愛 (1932-1987), a literary critic, whose debates have influenced the scholarship of Ichiyō's work (Cullen 15). Sata argues that the dominant interpretation trivializes Ichiyō's story and that, in the end, Midori has become a courtesan and has had her first unwanted sexual experience (Sata 192-196; Compennolle 236; Cullen 16). Actually, Sata argues that menstruation is a common experience and that not all girls react in such an extreme way. Therefore, her depression can be better explained by acknowledging that Midori has been "sold" and has lost her virginity (Sata 281; Cullen 16). In opposition, Maeda argues that Midori has experienced menarche, and that far from being trivial, this event foreshadows Midori's fate as a courtesan (Maeda 204-211; Compennolle 236).

Kawakami's novella focuses on Midoriko's upcoming menarche; and this suggests that her own interpretation of "Takekurabe" suggests that menarche is not a trivial experience. In "Takekurabe," Midori is doomed to follow her sister's steps and become a prostitute, even though for most of the time she does not know it (Compennolle 154-164; Kawakami "Ie" 350). It is only until the end of the story that she starts to notice how she is being displayed and gazed at, as an object of desire (Compennolle 165-166). As Van Compennolle notes, "her body is manipulated to conform to that of a full-fledged prostitute, and Midori becomes aware that this signifies her preordained relation to the demimonde" (166). It is thus about fulfilling familial or societal expectations, and how these put pressure on "innocent children to follow predetermined paths in life" (Omori 128). Similarly, Kawakami attempts to explore this same theme—that is, bodily and social determination—from Midoriko's perspective. Kawakami depicts an awakened Midoriko, someone aware of the ways sex/gender, sexuality and society affect our body image, our identity, and actions ("Ie" 350).

According to Abe Auestad, the special kanji “*iya*” 厭 written by Midoriko in the very beginning of the novella also evokes Ichiyō’s presence (5). Towards the end of “Takekurabe,” Midori says: “If only I can go on playing house forever—with my dolls for companions, then I’d be happy again. Oh I hate, hate, hate this growing up! Why do things have to change” (Higuchi, *Child’s* 285, qtd. Abe Auestad 5). Kawakami’s Midoriko embodies Midori’s resistance against growing up. Midoriko chooses the kanji *iya* 厭 (meaning something unpleasant or disgusting, “hate”) over the more common *iya* 嫌 (dislike): “the more difficult *iya* 厭... expresses a truly hateful feeling, which the other *iya* 嫌 lacks” (Abe Auestad 5). Midoriko uses this old-fashioned kanji repeatedly; hence, there is a subtle constant reference to Ichiyō’s work. In Kawakami’s translation of “Takekurabe” into modern Japanese she adds the same kanji in the opening passage, consequently, readers can appreciate a multiple inter-textual connection with Ichiyō (Abe Auestad 16; “Kawakami Mieko san”). Coming to terms with bodily changes in puberty, specifically one’s first menstruation, a refusal to grow up and a clear resistance against adulthood are general common themes addressed by both stories (Fuse 166).

The connection with Ichiyō is also clear when Midoriko makes a comment about the shape of Ichiyō’s face as it is printed in the 5,000-yen note. Midoriko says it looks like an egg (Fuse 166-167; Kawakami “Ie” 349-350). Eggs are a powerful motif in this novella, and one of their multiple meanings in the story is to draw a symbolic literary inter-textual connection with Ichiyō’s work. Towards the end of the novella, when Midoriko returns to Osaka with her mother, she keeps a 5,000-yen note she received from Natsuko as if it were “a talisman” (Abe Auestad 13). Another inter-textual link is emphasized by the location of Natsuko’s apartment from which Midori can see Minowa station, in the Minowa district (previously Yoshiwara) (Hansen 69). This is close to Kasuga, the area where it is presumed Ichiyō lived, and where there is currently a memorial in her honor (Fuse 166).

There are other juxtapositions between the characters, settings and elements of both stories (Fuse 166-167; Kawakami “Ie” 349-350).

Another commonality between these works is that they tangentially address the topic of prostitution and depict the hardships entailed in this life style. Ichiyō’s interest in this topic can be identified in her other works, such as “Nigorie” にごりえ (Troubled waters, 1895; trans.1981) and “Wakaremichi” わかれ道 (Separate ways, 1896; trans. 1981), in which she explores the difficulties and the sadness often found around this business.¹⁸⁵ Ichiyō’s “Takekurabe” addresses prostitution from the angles of sex work (Oomaki’s case) and also coercive sex (Midori’s case). Kawakami also draws a subtle connection by depicting Makiko as a hostess, and by pointing out that in Makiko’s case, part of the reasons she gives to pursue breast enhancement surgery is her job. For this reason, there is a dimension of commodification of her body and of selling her body (Fuse 165).

Like Ichiyō, Kawakami’s literary style includes the narration of sights, sounds and feelings written in long passages with no punctuation marks or quotes (Kawakami “Ie” 349). One of the distinctive features of *Chichi to ran* relates to its use of strong Osaka dialect and narrative power. As mentioned, “*watashi*” 私 (“I”/Natsuko) is the main narrator, but there are two more characters that also have strong and clear voices. Both Makiko and Midoriko have special narrative privileges: Makiko talks and Midoriko writes. Abe Auestad refers to Makiko’s speech as *oshaberi* おしゃべり (“babbling on”) (4). The whole narration is interrupted by Midoriko’s journal, thus, the narrative structure alternates between spoken and written language. As Abe Auestad puts it, “the text juxtaposes their respective moves, alternating between Midoriko’s notes and Makiko’s *oshaberi* reproduced by Natsu in the intermediary position” (9). Natsuko relates to Makiko and

¹⁸⁵ It is worth noticing that Ichiyō’s works have been translated into modern Japanese by both Itō Hiromi and Kawakami Mieko: “Nigorie” was translated by Itō in 1996, and Kawakami translated “Takekurabe” in 2015.

Midoriko, and brings them together in her narration. Therefore, this novella is not only about female body and sexuality, but also about interpersonal relationships and subjectivity (Fuse 166).

The very opening of this novella is an entry of Midoriko's journal about eggs and sperm, her lack of interest in school, a critical voice against education, and finishes by writing several times the ideogram “*iya*” 厭—echoing Ichiyō's text as mentioned. Midoriko, choosing writing as her medium of expression, says, “with just a pen and a paper one can write for free, anywhere and anything, and this is a very good method” (Kawakami, *Chichi* 7-8; my trans.).¹⁸⁶ The journal contains her deepest concerns about the body and bodily changes, and it is written in an often long, inconsequential stream-of-consciousness type of narrative. By giving Midoriko the opening statement, by writing about writing, and by often having Midoriko meditate in ways that are way too mature for a girl her age, we can infer that Kawakami (author) actually borrows Midoriko's voice to challenge society and culture and situates her novella within a larger tradition of women's writings.

The very first lines on eggs and sperm pose a particular difficulty when translating them, as they include a wordplay regarding specific kanji: “In reality “*ranshi*” 卵子(eggs) are called “*ransai bō*” 卵細胞 (ovum/ reproductive cells) yet, the reason we add the “*shi/ko*” 子 (ideogram for child) is to combine it with “*seishi*” 精子 (sperm)” (7; my trans.)¹⁸⁷ Fuse points out that the addition of this kanji is a symbolic gesture that denotes change and connection; two important elements of the novella as a whole (167). Through a linguistic meditation on the name for “eggs” and “sperm”—in Japanese “*ranshi*” 卵子 and

¹⁸⁶ 「書くということはペンと紙だけあったらどこでもできるしただやし何でも書けるので、これはとてもいい方法」(*Chichi* 7-8)

¹⁸⁷ 「卵子というのは卵細胞って名前と呼ぶのがほんとうで、ならばなぜ子、という字がつくのか、っていうのは、精子、という言葉にあわせて子、をつけてるだけなのです」(7)

“*seishi*” 精子 respectively—we can easily identify the common factor in both words: “*shi/ko*” 子 (children). It is clear that Kawakami and her characters pay special attention to names and words. One of the most evident links between *Chichi to ran* and “Takekurabe” is, in fact, the names of the characters. In “Takekurabe” Oomaki and Midori are sisters; in *Chichi to ran* Makiko and Midoriko are mother and daughter. Here we can see how Kawakami also added the 子 (“*ko/shi*,” ideogram for child) to both names. The inter-textual echo goes beyond naming: Oomaki is a courtesan and Makiko a hostess, and Midori and Midoriko are parallel characters. Also, there is Natsuko (first-person narrator), who is named after Ichiyō herself, referring to her birth name, Natsu, instead of her pen name (Fuse 166).

Despite it being a fairly common termination for female names in Japan, it is not mere coincidence that Kawakami’s three protagonists’ names end with “*ko*.” In my view, by dwelling on the ideogram 子 “*ko/shi*”, Kawakami alludes, from the very beginning, to the possibility of uniting eggs and sperm; addressing the themes of sexuality, reproduction and parenting. And on a meta-level, as she pays a literary tribute to Ichiyō, she may also be establishing a literary mother-daughter relationship with her work.

4.2. Menstruation and the possibility of becoming a mother

Chichi to ran is one of the few literary works that contribute to the creation of a new imagery of menstruation favoring healthier menstrual socialization in puberty, an awareness of stigmas and preconceptions and an inclusion of the menstrual experience in our body experience. Menstruation is central to its narrative, and its references span from menarche to menopause. Importantly, Kawakami moves away from traditional depictions of menstruation as that moment in which one becomes an adult, then marries and becomes a mother.

4.2.1. Naming menstruation

Midoriko writes mainly about menstruation and mothering in her journal. She writes that most of her classmates have already had their first periods 初潮 (*shochō*), and that she wants to think about the meaning of the term (Kawakami, Chichi 15). In Japanese, the term for menarche is “*shochō*” 初潮 composed of two characters, the first one, “*hatsu*” 初, meaning “first” or “start,” and the second one “*shio*” 潮, meaning “tide,” “current,” or “salty sea water.” Midoriko looks up this word in some books and finds that it means “first menstruation” (*hajimete no gekkei* 初めての月経) (15).

“*Gekkei*” 月経 is the standard and direct Japanese expression for menstruation, the first character means “moon” and the second one has several meanings including “passing” and “sutra.” However, this term is used almost exclusively in a medical or official setting, shown by how Midoriko finds it in the definition of “menarche” in the dictionary. She understands the meaning of the character “first” in the word, but struggles with the understanding of the second character, “*shio*” 潮 “tide.” Midoriko continues:

When I looked up “*shio*,” there were a lot of meanings, and what it said is: the rising and falling—well, the movement—of the seawater by some force of attraction between the moon and the sun, the waves, and because of that, a good opportunity, and what I also don’t understand is, for some reason, also “charm” was written there, and when I looked up “charm,” there was a lot there, but what stood out to me was pulling customers into a shop, or likability, and what does all that have to do with a first period, the first time blood comes out from

between your thighs? I don't understand it at all, it pisses me off. (*Chichi* 15; my trans.)¹⁸⁸

This passage shows Kawakami's awareness regarding the deep connection between language and culture. Looking at the kanji, “menarche” and “menstruation” are not related to anything negative or shameful; they are actually linked to nature, and moreover they are something that we can potentially like. In addition, this passage allows for a strong connection between the definition of “*shochō*” 初潮 Midoriko finds and Ichiyō's story. In “Takekurabe,” in Midori's case, there is an intimate link between getting her period and becoming a courtesan (which is close to pulling customers into a shop and being charming). Midoriko's discomfort and rejection can be read as an attempt to articulate her counterpart Midori's feelings. Also, Midoriko shows an anxiety attached to her lack of understanding and knowledge about menstruation.

4.2.2. *Menstruation in puberty*

Midoriko and her mother Makiko have a complicated relationship, so even if Midoriko is concerned about her period, her mother is not a guiding figure. In addition, Makiko seems to be entering menopause, which creates a contrast and points to the cyclic nature of menstruation. The conventional ideas about talking about menstruation with your mother and celebrating your first period are far from the reality in this story. Midoriko is self-conscious and wants absolute privacy, whereas Makiko is so absorbed with her own upcoming breast surgery that she does not seem to be aware of Midoriko's upcoming

¹⁸⁸ 「潮というのを調べたら、いろいろ意味がおおくて、書いてあることは月と太陽の引力のあれやこれで海水が満ちたり引いたり、まあ動くこと、波、それのことで、いい時期、ともあって、んでわからんのがほかにはなぜか愛嬌（あいきょう）、とかも書いてあって、愛嬌を調べたら、これにもいろいろあったけれど目にはいつてきたのは、商店で客の気を引く、とか、好ましさ、を、感じさせる、とかがあり、なんでこれが、股んところから血のはじめて出る、初潮と関係があるのかさっぱりわからんでなんとなくむかつく」(15)

menarche: “Besides, there are no pads at home, and that bums me out, and even if it comes, I’m not telling mom, and I’ll hide everything from her” (*Chichi* 31; my trans).¹⁸⁹

Instead of talking to her mother, Midoriko goes to her school friend Kuni-chan.¹⁹⁰ Kawakami brings the experience of learning about menstruation closer to reality in a humorous scene between the two friends. As written in Midoriko’s journal:

Kuni-chan was quite excited when she said “I just realized I was wearing the pad in the opposite direction.” Well, I guess she wasn’t really excited. I’m not sure if I got it right, but apparently, she was using the adhesive-side up facing her body. That’s probably why the pads’ absorption was bad, and she was so worried. But if you put the adhesive side down there, it will hurt when you tear it off. Is it really so confusing that you’d do it wrong? (21; my trans.)¹⁹¹

Kuni-chan’s amusing anecdote regarding the misuse of the sanitary napkin reveals the difficulties and lack of knowledge girls face when interacting with these products. Also, if we notice how, from Midoriko’s point of view, it was a stupid mistake, we can infer that it is different from girl to girl. By putting the sanitary napkin upwards, Kuni-chan is experiencing menstruation in an “incorrect” way, since it is not being absorbed as it should be.

The whole scene addressing the use of sanitary napkins is an example of what Sophie Laws calls “menstrual etiquette,” and how it governs our behavior. Despite her research

¹⁸⁹ 「それにナプキンが家がないし、それもブルーで、もし生理があたしに来たってほしいお母さんにはいうつもりもないし、ぜったい隠して生きて行くし」 (31)

¹⁹⁰ *Chan* is an affectionate suffix most frequently used for and between girls but also applicable to small children regardless of gender, friends, lovers and pets. It is an informal term of endearment that works as a diminutive.

¹⁹¹ 「ナプキンをずっと反対に使ってたことがわかった、とって国ちゃんがもりあがった。うそ、とくにもりあがったってこともない、あたしにはちょっとわからんところがあるけれど、なんかずっとテープのほうを自分にあててたらしくて、知らなかったらしい。吸収が悪いなあってずっと困ってたらしい、のはそういうことやったらしい。テープのほうをあそこにつけたらはずとき、いたいやろう。まちがえるくらい、わかりにくいものなのやろうか」 (*Chichi* 21)

being focused on British secular culture, it still offers a useful category to understand common attitudes and beliefs about menstruation across cultures. Laws writes that the menstrual etiquette is, “part of a larger etiquette of behavior between the sexes, which governs who may say what to whom, and in what context” (211). It basically means that menstruation implies the use of certain products that should be acquired, carried, stored, disposed of, and referred to in conversation in special ways (Young 111). Both Laws and Young allude to the difference between menstrual etiquette and taboos associated with menstruation, which are often inscribed in cultures by making a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane (112). Kawakami is not portraying menstruation from the taboo viewpoint, that is, as something impure or spiritually defiling.

At this point, it is worth noticing the nuances between Kawakami’s and Ichiyō’s portrayals of menstruation. In “Takekurabe” there is not a direct reference to menstruation, it remains nameless, and the readers can only guess that Midori experiences her first period towards the end of the story. In addition, Ichiyō connects Midori’s menarche with becoming a courtesan, or with becoming sexually available, and both sexuality and prostitution are somehow portrayed as defiling. Specifically speaking, Chōkiji calls Midori a “whore” (*gorō* 女郎) and throws a dirty sandal at her forehead (Compernelle 140). This act traumatizes her and makes her feel dirty throughout the rest of the story, which suggests that Ichiyō is alluding to notions of impurity (177). Moreover, the impossibility of the love between Midori and the son of a Buddhist priest, Nobu, also indicate that Midori’s upcoming menarche and forthcoming future as a courtesan is somehow impure, dirty, and spiritually defiling. For her time, Ichiyō’s texts are revolutionary in the sense that through her silence and style, she sheds light on tabooed subjects that had not yet been discussed openly. As Copeland explains:

Ichiyō could write of silences that spoke volumes. Her heroines are the perfect image of reticent rebellion... They suggest a world of words without uttering a sound... Her characters do not need to speak out excessively because the reader can discern everything from the author's very subtle and suggestive prose. ("Meiji" 402)

With regards to menstruation, Kawakami's style is way more direct, and rather than tackling this subject as a taboo, she portrays menstruation from the perspective of the rules of menstrual etiquette, depicting a series of practices (regarding language and hygiene products) that create an emotional and physical burden for women and girls. Midoriko writes:

The period happens because the ovum hasn't been fertilized, and this cushion, that was in fact preparing itself to hold and breed it, comes out with the blood. Kuni-chan and I talked about this. So the unfertilized egg, she thought, might be in the blood, and last month she tore open the pad to look for it, apparently. Huh? I was surprised, and even though I felt a bit disgusted, I asked her: How did it go? She didn't care a bit, and said that inside the pad were tiny little lumps, and each one was like blood that had been ground up and turned into jelly, so she couldn't tell if there was an unfertilized egg in there or not. (Kawakami, *Chichi* 22; my trans.)¹⁹²

Both scenes between Kuni-chan and Midoriko show how the emphasis on the absorbency of sanitary napkins implies a lack of direct contact/experience with our own menstrual

¹⁹² 「生理になるのは卵子が受精しなかったからで、ほんまは受け止めて育てるために準備されてたクッションみたいなものが血と一緒に流れるから。という話を国ちゃんと。そして受精をしてない無精卵、が、血のなかにあるのかと思って、先月なんと国ちゃんは自分のナプキンをさいて、みたらしい。え、ってあたしはびっくりしてどうやった、とちょっとだけ厭な気分になってきたけど国ちゃんはおかまいなしで、ナプキンの中には細かい細かい粒粒があるらしくてそのいっこいっこが血をすってぐじゅぐじゅしてゼリーみたいになってて、そういうわけで無精卵があるのかどうかはどんなけよう見てもわからなかったらしい」(22)

blood—it is impossible to see the real color, the volume or the texture—because it is trapped into super-absorbent gels. Also, the dialogue shows menstruation being described in terms of unfertilized eggs, and also as reproductive failure. That textbook explanation regarding the reason for menstruation needs to be challenged. The purpose of the menstrual cycle is not solely the implantation of a fertilized egg—especially when you are around twelve or thirteen years old. Also, fertilization is not the aim of every fertile woman, especially those actively using contraceptives, for instance (Bobel, *New* 35). According to Emily Martin,

Menstruation not only carries with it the connotation of a productive system that has failed to produce, it also carries the idea of production gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted, scrap. However disgusting it may be, menstrual blood will come out. Production gone awry is also an image that fills us with dismay and horror. (46)

Martin is referring mainly to the medical discourses of the nineteenth century in Western societies, hence the meaning of failure pinned to menstruation has a history that, to some extent, persists in present society, as it still appears in certain textbooks and dictionaries, as Midoriko and Kuni-chan discuss. However, it is pertinent to notice how Kawakami portrays an array of ways to experience menstruation: horror in Midoriko and excitement in Kuni-chan. Naturally, these attitudes towards menstruation are susceptible to change throughout the cycle, and throughout the years.

Both girls are curiosity-driven but Kuni-chan is excited and willing to share her experience with her friend. In opposition, Midoriko is slightly disgusted, and in other parts of the story, we learn that she is even filled with dismay and horror. For example, Midoriko says: “If my period comes, then every month from then on, for years and years until it goes away, blood will come out from between my legs. It scares me, I can’t stop it”

(*Chichi* 30; my trans.).¹⁹³ Without proper guidance for her menstruation, it is not surprising that Midoriko finds it difficult to embrace her period. The following sentence is the most effective expression of her feelings about menstruation and about the body, in general: “Most girls in books welcome their first periods (“welcome?” It just invites itself)” (31; my trans.).¹⁹⁴ In other words, how does a girl embrace something that comes despite her will? This image displays the tension between agency and the lack of control over our body. The body, ultimately, has a mind of its own, and we have no other choice but to inhabit that body.

4.2.3. *Menstruation in adulthood*

Kawakami’s portrayal of menstruation never links it to a supposed inferiority on the part of women, nor does it become a reason for women’s superiority, either. Its depiction does attend to the problems it might present and describes certain unpleasant or uncomfortable aspects of menstruation, as well as the exciting ones. In relation to menstruation as an experience of the female body, Golub explains that:

Since the menstrual cycle is such an obvious difference between the sexes, correlates of the cycle are regularly raised as evidence of women’s inferiority and many people believe that women are victims of their repeatedly cycling biological systems...While arguing against the idea that menstruation is debilitating for most women, it is important for us to attend to the real problems that it may present. A majority of women do report unpleasant or uncomfortable symptoms associated with the premenstrual and menstrual phases of the cycle. (Golub xii, qtd. in Bobel, *New* 36)

¹⁹³ 「もしあたしにも生理がきたらそれから毎月、それがなくなるまで何十年も股から血が出ることになって、おそろしいような、気分になる、それは自分では止められへん」(30)

¹⁹⁴ 「だいたい本のなかに初潮を迎えた（←一迎えるって勝手にきただけやろ）」(31)

In addition to addressing menstruation in puberty and from the perspective of two young girls, *Chichi to ran* also includes a depiction of menstruation during adulthood through the experiences of Natsuko, the narrator. Natsuko wakes up in the middle of the night because her period has come. This is portrayed as an experience, from then on, that requires doing monotonous and mundane actions in an endless cycle. In spite of being an ordinary event, its importance in terms of life-renewal is also emphasized. It is worth quoting this scene at length:

In the middle of the night, I'm awoken by a wet sensation in my butt crack, near my tailbone. I put my hand into my panties, and I feel with my fingertips something slimy. Despite the darkness, I know that my period has come. I step over Midoriko, who is sleeping to my right, and head to the toilet wondering: What day is it? My head, not yet awake, is worn out, heavy. Maybe is out of schedule, about ten days earlier, in quick calculations. Last month, and if I think about it, the one before were the same thing, little by little, during this year, my period started coming in spirals, and each time it surprised me, but since there isn't a clear reason for it, I just got used to it, but until two years ago, and during more than twenty years before that—excluding the very beginning—my period used to come precisely every twenty-eight days. What's happened to me, I wonder? Without realizing, the cramps and heaviness that had come before disappeared, and now that my cycle is messed up, my period just comes out of nowhere. I pee looking absentmindedly at the reddish-black stain on my panties. I'm half-asleep, but I'm surprised at what a long pee it is. I listen to the sound and look at the stain. It looks a bit like a map of Japan. Osaka is down here, Aomori is up there, I've never been to Aomori though. It's a pain that I got it dirty, it's a pain that I have to do laundry and it's a pain that

I have to soak them in water. I take my panties off. I wonder if it's true that antibiotics get rid of the smell of menstruation. I take a whiff. I crumple up the panties and wrap them in toilet paper, placing them at my feet. I take another piece of toilet paper and fold it in a square so that it soaks up the blood, pressing it into my crotch with my fingers. With the tissue still up there, I take the crumpled up panties and throw them away at the bottom of the garbage bag. I go to the closet and search for a fresh pair of panties, the ones for periods that are sturdy in the crotch area and bring them back to the bathroom, where I take a pad from the box on top a shelf, I throw away the toilet paper stuffed between my legs and toss it in the toilet, unwrap and attach the pad and then wear it. Pads are like futons for the crotch, I think, as I absentmindedly return to the futon in my room. Half asleep, inside of my fuzzy brain, I wonder: How many more times will my period come? Another unfertilized egg this month. These words, or should I say dialogue, came to me in the darkness, like a speech bubble you would see in a comic book. I don't know if it's directed towards me, or if it's just floating in space. "Fertilization? Fertilization, you ask? Oh no, I have no plans for that this month nor the next one," I answer in a vague, voiceless way. An image of myself having to hold a giant red pencil, like a pillar towering over me, and making a big mark on a colossal piece of paper clouds my mind. Succumbing to heaviness and tiredness, my consciousness thickly sinks down, as an update in my life is soundlessly repeated. My helpless voice, resounding within my being, grows smaller and smaller, until I can't see it any longer. (*Chichi* 78-80; my trans.)¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ 「夜中、お尻の割れ目、尾てい骨あたりに濡れた感じを感じて腰からパンツの中に手を入れてみれば指先がぬるりとして、暗くても生理になったのだということがわかり、右隣に寝てる緑子をまたいでトイレに行けば、今日は何日、起きぬ頭が綿のように重い、たぶ

This passage is a description of both Natsuko's actions and thoughts, but due to the stream-of-consciousness style there is no clear logic in her train of thought. This is precisely what conveys a sense of honesty that makes it easier for the reader to relate to—and even identify with—her experience. It also includes certain elements from menstrual etiquette: mundane aspects that have conventionally been treated as secrets. This secrecy around menstruation can be understood as a “menstrual closet,” a term used by Iris Marion Young that has been extended from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thoughts on the homosexual experience of the closet. The menstrual closet basically indicates “the imperative to conceal our menstrual processes” (Young 106). This passage in Kawakami's story exposes several details of Natsuko's menstrual experience and it can be read as an act

ん予定としては、十日前後、早い計算で、思えば先月も、その前の月も少しずつ、この一年で生理周期は巻きでやってくるようになっていて、その都度都度に驚いていたのやけど、これという原因は見当たらずに最近慣れてしまったけれども二年前まではそれまでのもう二十年以上、初期を除いて二十八日の周期でそれは定規で測ったみたいに正確にやっていたのに最近は何んやろうか。直前の腰の重みも鈍痛も知らんうちになくなって、周期を乱して突然に生理がやってくると、わたしは赤黒く痕のついた下着の股の部分をなんとなくぼんやりした頭で見ながら放尿し、それは寝ぼけたなりにも驚くほど長い放尿で、その音を聴きながら股の部分についた血をぼんやり見ていれば、それはなんだか日本地図に見えないこともなく、大阪がこのあたり、んで行ったことないけど青森が、とか思いながら、ああ汚したの、めんどい、洗濯の準備、めんどいなあ、風呂場に持って行って水に浸けるの、めんどい、なのでパンツの輪から足を抜いて、抗生物質を定期的に飲んでると体臭がなくなるという話はほんまかな、を思い出してなんとなく臭いを嗅いでみた。そしてそれをまるめてティッシュに包んでから足元に置き、新たにティッシュを手にとっていい具合に四角に畳んで漏れぬよう血を吸うように、指でちょっと押し込み気味に股に挟んで、挟まったままの体勢で丸めたパンツを台所の燃えるゴミ袋まで行って底のほうに捨て、それから箆笥のところまで行って生理用の股部のしっかりしたパンツを探して、持って、トイレに戻ってナプキンを棚の上の箱の中から取り出して、股のティッシュを便器に捨てて、ビニルをひっぱりめくって装着してそれをはいた。ああナプキンは股の布団であるな、を思いながら、体はぼんやり部屋の布団の中に戻り、半分が眠りで白い頭のどこかで、あと何回、ここに生理が来るのかを考え、それから、今月も受精は叶いませんでした、という言葉というか台詞というか漫画のふきだしの意味合いが暗闇にふわりと浮かんでくるのでそれを見た。それはわたしへ向かってるのか、ただ浮かんでるだけやのか、や、受精、受精ですか、いや、今月も来月も受精の予定は、ないですよ、とわたしはぼんやりした音のない意味で答えます。それから自分の背丈を越えた柱のような巨大な赤鉛筆を抱えて、さらに巨大な紙に、大きなしるしをつけてゆかなければならないというような心象がたちこめて、重さだるさに意識がねっとり沈んでゆくなか、生きてゆく更新が音もなく繰り返される。わたしの頼りのない声がわたしの中で響いているのが少しずつ聴こえなくなって、次第にどこからもそれが完全に見えなくなる」(78-80)

of resistance and empowerment, a sort of “coming out of the menstrual closet” by sharing and paying attention to this particular body process.

Natsuko shares with us her intimate experiences and thoughts: from wrapping panties in toilet paper, making temporary toilet paper pads, smelling her menstrual blood and throwing her panties away, to understanding that the twenty-eight day cycle is not necessarily constant throughout our lives, that the period can be irregular for unclear reasons, and so on. Natsuko is aware of her cycle and she makes it clear that she has no intention or plans of getting pregnant. When this is the case, although it is emotionally demanding and to some extent troublesome, “the arrival of menstruation could be seen as a welcome sign” (Martin 112). In other words, following Martin, “I can see no reason why the menstrual blood itself could not be seen as the desired ‘product’ of the female cycle, except when the woman intends to become pregnant” (52-53).

In this dream-like state, Natsuko wonders how many periods she has left. So far, each one has ended without fertilization and she has to explain to the speech bubble floating in space that she has no plans of getting pregnant. The words “another unfertilized egg this month” (*kongetsu mo jusei ha kanaimasen deshita* 今月も受精は叶いませんでした) appear from somewhere exterior to her own mind, hence it can be interpreted as a materialization of the social norms and pressures demanding pregnancy at a certain age. Moreover, from these words we can elicit a kind of emptiness, since the word “*kanaimasen deshita*” 叶いませんでした means something that one had been hoping for was not fulfilled—that is, pregnancy. Therefore, we can deduce that society expects that a woman like Natsuko (over thirty) “should” feel certain emptiness every time her period comes because there “must” be a hidden desire of wanting to become pregnant. Kawakami is using the word “*jusei*” 受精 (fertilization) denoting a biological process that has little to do with one’s own will. In doing so, she reiterates her critique at the very possibility of

agency against biological realities that we cannot control. The sense of helplessness and emptiness also emanates from the image of Natsuko checking another mark on a giant piece of paper with a giant red pen, like yet another month has gone by of her life, like another milestone in her life had been passed. In this sense, menstruation can be considered a way to count the moments in our life. In other words, the passage in which Natsuko describes her menstrual experience reveals that:

As women mature, menstrual events become more routine and an accepted part of their lives. They are less a focus for women bonding and more private, in many cases. We surge with positive or negative emotion at the appearance or nonappearance of the menses in connection with our desires to avoid or become pregnant. Whether we have wanted pregnancies or not, we feel something monumental about the return of our periods. The monthly bleeding punctuates our lives, marking significant events, and it is also routine. (Young 104)

4.2.4. Menstrual literacy and bonding

Additionally, the first-person narrative underlines the particular and subjective dimensions of menstruation, and how each person has their own distinctive way of dealing with it. For example, Natsuko says wearing a sanitary napkin feels like having a futon in between her legs. Her feeling is neutral—neither thrilled nor bothered.

On the second day of the visit, niece and aunt have a meaningful interaction regarding periods. As described, Natsuko gets her period the day before, and in the morning she actually offers Midoriko some advice, allowing the reader to peep into her own way of living with menstruation. Natsuko narrates:

I noticed a big bloodstain on the sheets from last night. Damn! This hasn't happened to me in years. I sigh at the thought that it might have gone all the way to the futon. I open the zipper of the sheet that protects the futon, take it out, fold the sheet and take it to the bathroom. Period blood gets harder if you wash it with hot water. You have to wash it with cold water. I don't know a great deal of things, but this one at least I do: blood and cold water. I grab it by the stained part inside the sink, and I wash it with some detergent. Midoriko comes to check what's going on. While squatting, I look up at her, and she doesn't say a word. "I'm cleaning last night's disaster," I explain. No response. Inside the narrow bathroom, the only noises that could be heard were the chafing sound of sheets rubbing together and the sound of water splashing in the sink. Midoriko stared intently at the movement of my hands and the sheets. "Its cold water," I say. "You have to wash the blood with cold water, otherwise it doesn't go away." Through the soap bubbles, I check if the bloodstain is disappearing...(*Chichi* 84; my trans.)¹⁹⁶

This passage shows more practical rules menstruating women usually follow, leaving no bloodstains being a fundamental one. We clean all body fluids; this is not only true for menstrual blood. In general, they are considered dirty and better to remain hidden. There is nothing wrong with this social convention per se, but the truth is "in everyday life these

¹⁹⁶「昨夜の生理の血の痕がシーツに大きく残ってるのが見えて、あ、めんどい、こんな失敗は何年ぶりの、このぶんやと布団にまでいってるかもしれんなあという予想に息を吐きながら、脇のチャックを引っ張って中から布団を抜き出して、シーツをくるみ持って風呂場へ行った。生理の血というのは湯であらったら固まってしまうので水で洗わなければならないということだけをわたしは覚えていて、血には水、広いシーツの中の血の部分をつまみ出して洗面器に洗剤を溶かしてそこに浸けながら洗っていると緑子が来た。わたしはしゃがんだまま振り返って見上げ、黙って立ってる緑子に、昨日失敗して、洗ってんねん、と云うと緑子はそれには返事をせず、わたしの手とシーツの動きを黙ったまましばらく見ていた。狭い風呂場にシーツをこするこそばゆげな音と洗面器の中で水の跳ねる音だけが響いて、緑子はしばらく風呂場の中をじっと見下ろしていた。わたしは、水やねんで、血は水やないと落ちるので、と泡の中で血がとれたかどうかを確認しながら...」(84)

requirements of concealment create enormous anxiety and practical difficulties for women, and are a major source of our annoyance with the monthly event” (Young 107). This annoyance is shown in Natsuko’s attitude towards leaking, and the way she refers to it as a “disaster” or “failure” (*shippai* 失敗). When speaking with some negativity about the menstrual process women “report a kind of body alienation in which they feel that the physical and emotional menstrual process is out of their control” (Lee and Sasser-Coen qtd. in Young 104).

Although Midoriko remains silent throughout this scene, the reader feels how she cherishes this moment; clearly, learning from her aunt is better than from the amateur Kuni-chan. For this reason, when Natsuko asks her to come with her to hang the sheets on the roof, Midoriko gladly joins her. This is one of the few moments of personal connection between the two of them, thus we can say that menstruation can also be a space of sharing and connection. The recommendation to wash menstrual blood with cold water is also a useful tip that can be taken as a contribution from Kawakami to menstrual literacy.

4.2.5. Against predestined motherhood

Menstruation is often reduced to the capability of fertility and reproduction. The next passage conveys the way Midoriko feels about periods and the notion of “becoming a woman,” but it also addresses a commentary on how society is discursively constructed. By mentioning other books—without naming any particular book—Kawakami puts into focus how the culture of embodiment is constructed by those works belonging to literary canons. If we look at her narration in these terms, we can argue that her way of telling the story of the female body is both unconventional and subversive. Midoriko writes:

The girl in one of the books I read felt she could finally become a mother [when her period came]. She was so moved: “Thanks [mom] for giving me

life.” I was so shocked to find this type of scene, I had to read it twice. In books, when a girl gets her first period, everyone is happy for her, she talks with her mother, who says something like: “Congratulations, you are a woman now.” Actually, I have some friends whose parents organized a celebratory meal for them. They even had *sekihan*.¹⁹⁷ That’s just too much. I get the feeling that in most books, periods are too often written about like they’re a good thing. Whoever reads those books is persuaded to think and feel the same way about it. The other day at school, during one of the class breaks, someone said something like: “Since I was born a woman, I’d like to have kids someday.” Just because one bleeds from here, one becomes a woman, and as a woman, one can give life. How can everyone embrace such a big feeling just like that? I feel different about all this, I don’t see any wonderfulness in it, and this is maybe why I’m so disgusted. But aren’t the books we read, or rather, are forced to read, the ones telling the story like this? (*Chichi* 31-32; my trans.)¹⁹⁸

As explained by Agee, “Japanese families traditionally commemorate a daughter’s first menstrual period by eating red beans with rice” (4). Through the character of Midoriko,

¹⁹⁷ Translation note: *sekihan*, 赤飯 means red rice, happy rice; glutinous rice steamed with adzuki beans or sasage beans often served on happy occasions. (“*Sekihan*” *Wisdom Japanese-English Dictionary*)

¹⁹⁸ 「女の子を主人公にした小説っていうか本があって、読んだら、そのなかであたしもこれでいつかお母さんになれるんだわ。って感動して生んでくれてありがとう、みたいなシーンにそういうセリフが書いてあってびっくりして二度見した。本のなかではみんな生理を喜んで、お母さんに相談して、これで一人前の女、とか、おめでとうとか、実際に友達でも、手当てっていうか赤飯とかそういうのしてもらってるねんけどそれはすごすぎる。だいたい本に書かれてる生理はなんかいい感じに書かれすぎてるような気がします。これはこれを読んだ人に、こう思いなさいよってことのような気がする。こないだも学校で、移動んときに、誰かが、女に生まれてきたからにはいつか子どもは生みたい、みたいなことゆって、単にあそこから出血する、ってことが女になるってことになって、それからなんか女として、みたいな話になって、いのちを生む、とかそういうでっかい気持ちになれるのはなんでやろうか。そしてそれがほんまにほんまにいいことって自分で思うことなんかな。あたしはちがうような気がしてそれが厭な原因のような気がする。こういう本を読むか読まされてかして、そういうもんやってことに、されてるだけじゃないのか」(31-32)

Kawakami questions what we are really celebrating. *Chichi to ran* certainly moves away from the traditional representation of menstruation as the definitive moment in which one “becomes a woman” and everyone celebrates the possibility of bringing a child into this world. Midoriko’s reflections are quite mature for a girl her age, and this suggests that Kawakami borrows her voice to challenge the causal links between sex or the biological body, gender and social expectations and ideas regarding mothering. Her voice stands out in opposition to the majority of people around her who take for granted a correlation between fertility and desire of mothering without even questioning it. The image in the book Midoriko reads represents the ideal of motherhood, and Kawakami masterfully shows how it has been (re)produced by other discourses. Moreover, Kawakami’s characters, for instance Midoriko, take distance from, and criticize such depiction:

I feel as if I’m locked up in this body that feels hunger and has periods all on its own. Once we’re born all the way until we die, we have to keep eating to live, and earn money to live—these things are exhausting all on their own. Just looking at my mother: she works every day of the week and exhausts herself day in and day out. This should be more than enough. But on top of it, I can’t even imagine what it is to release another body. I wonder if everyone honestly thinks that it’s wonderful and great. ‘Cause when I think about it on my own I get so depressed. One thing I know for sure, it’s not for me. And getting your period means you can be fertilized, and you can get pregnant, and that means the number of humans who eat and think will increase. When I think about that, I feel hopeless and overdramatic. I will never, ever have children.

(Kawakami, *Chichi* 32-33; my trans.)¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹「あたしは勝手にお腹がへったり、勝手に生理になったりするようなこんな体があって、その中に閉じ込められてるって感じる。んで生まれてきたら最後、生きてご飯を食べ続けて、お金をかせいで生きていかなあかんことだけでもしんどいことです。お母さんを見て

The very first line of this quote points to experiencing the body as “*confinement and limitation*: a ‘prison,’ a ‘swamp,’ a ‘cage,’ a ‘fog’—all images that occur in Plato, Descartes and Augustine—from which the soul, will, or mind struggles to escape” (Bordo 144). Midoriko clearly struggles between biological determinism and agency. Also, she does not idealize motherhood as the sole reason for women to exist, she does not want to be a mother herself, but moreover, she does not want to be like her mother. Hence, all these meditations are related to her own relationship with her own mother. Midoriko reflects about the biological and social dimensions to pregnancy and mothering: she struggles with having female reproductive organs, and this determining her gender identity as a woman, and then, being expected to embrace pregnancy and motherhood. Midoriko suggests that, in general, we are supposed to have a positive take on childrearing, but for her personally, this is not the case.

Midoriko’s entries in her journal are a source of social commentary on the expectations pinned onto the role of being a woman. She questions the sociocultural imperative to give birth “just because” one is a woman. There is another significant entry from her journal that delves on her thoughts and feelings about the subject of pregnancy and giving birth:

I’m going to write about eggs. Today I reviewed something that I already knew: when an egg sticks to a sperm, it becomes a fertilized egg. If this doesn’t happen, they are unfertilized eggs. Fertilization doesn’t happen at the womb but in the fallopian tubes. Apparently, after they’ve stuck together, it goes to the

たら、毎日を働きまくっても毎日しんどく、なんで、と思っちゃう、これいっただけでもういっぱいなのに、その中からまた別の体を出すとか、そんなこと、想像も出来んし、そういうことがみんなほんまに素晴らしくてすてきなことって自分で考えてちゃんとそう思うのですかね。ひとりでこれについて考えたときにすごくブルーになるから、あたしにとってはいいことじゃないのはたしかで、それに、生理がくるってことは受精ができるってことでそれは妊婦ということ、それはこんなふうに、食べたり考えたりする人間がふえるってことで、そのことを思うとなんで、と絶望的な、おおげさな気分になってしまう、絶対に子どもなんか生まないとあたしは思う」(32-33)

womb and implants itself there (but I don't understand at all this part. In all the books I read and all the pictures I see, it's as if the egg jumps out from the ovary into the hand-shaped fallopian tubes. But I don't know how does it actually get there. It just pops out; it's what is written, but how? I wonder what's in the gap). After this, I don't know what's the best way to think about all this. So first, the egg gets fertilized, then, once it's decided that it's gonna be a woman, there are already ovaries inside that unborn baby girl (having ovaries already by then is so scary). Inside the ovaries there are around seven million eggs. This is the time in which there are the most. Then, from here on, the eggs gradually decrease. When the baby is born there is only a million left, and there's absolutely no way to produce new ones. Then they keep on decreasing. Around my age, by the time the period comes there're around three hundred thousand, out of which just a tiny number manage to become mature enough to get eventually fertilized, and be able to get pregnant. It's so frightening to think that even before I was born, I already had what is needed to bring a person to life. And plenty of them! Before being born we have what it takes to give birth. This is not something that is only written about in books, but it's actually something that's going on at this moment inside my belly. When I think about the fact that whatever is going to be born is in an unborn state inside me I feel like plucking it out and tearing it to bits completely. What on earth is all this about? (71-72; my trans.)²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ 「卵子についてこれから書きます。今日、あたしが知ったのは卵子は精子とくっついて受精卵になって、それにならんままのは無精卵という、とここまでは復習。受精、それは子宮でそうなるんじゃないくて、卵管というところでそうなって、くっついてくっついたのが子宮にきてそこで着床、するのらしい（しかしここが全然わからない。どの本を読んでも絵をみても、やっぱり卵巣、から卵子が飛び出すときの、手みたいな形の卵管に、どうやって入れるのかがわからない。ぽんと出る、とか書いてあるけど、どうやって。すきまにはなにがあんのかなぞ）。それから、どう考えてよいかかわからないこと。まず、受精して、それが女であるよって決まったときには、すでにその女の生まれてもない赤ちゃんの卵巣のなかには、（そのときにも卵巣があるのがこわいし）、卵子のもと、みたいなもの

In this passage, Midoriko refers again to the existing literature on the subject of menstruation. In this case, it is not about literary novels but medical texts, and expresses her lack of understanding of the whole process. Midoriko's concerns begin at the physiological/material level: she wonders what happens inside the female body in order to become pregnant. This reflection points to the tension between biological and social determination, and personal agency. The source of discomfort with her body is having a body that *can* make babies when she does not *want* to. All these reflections about menstruation and reproduction reveal Midoriko's fear of "the prospect of being burdened with a child—a child such as herself, without whom she believes the lot of her mother would have been much better" (Abe Auestad 6). Hence, when she uses imagery of abortion, the reader gets closer to the real underlying questions in her mind: Why am I here? Why was I born? (Fuse 167-168).

A first answer to this question is "because of her mother," but then again, Midoriko realizes that it was not her mother's fault that she was born. It is this search for reason and meaning of our lives that she struggles to express (Fuse 168). The contrast between mother and daughter is clear with regards to their sexuality: the daughter not wanting to be sexual, and the mother desperately wanting to be sexual again. There seems to be a sharp distinction between motherhood and sexuality given that the mother cannot erase the child's mark on her body except through surgery.

が七百万個、もあって、このときが一番多いらしい、そして、それから、その卵子のものはどんどんどんどん減ってって、生まれたときにはそれが百万とかにまで減って、絶対に新しく増えたりすることはないのらしい。それでそれからもどんどん減ってって、あたしぐらいの年になって、生理がきたときには三十万個くらいになって、その中にほんのちょっとだけが、ちゃんと成長して、その、増えるにつながる、あの受精、妊娠をできる卵になるのらしい。ちょっと考えたらこれはとてもおそろしいことで、生まれるまえからあたしのなかに人を生むものがあるということ。大量にあったということ。生まれるまえから生むをもってる。ほんで、これは、本のなかに書いてあるだけのことじゃなくて、このあたしのお腹の中にじっさいほんまに、今、起こってあることやと、いうことを思うと、生まれるまえの生まれるもんが、生まれるまえのなかにあって、かきむしりたい、むさくさにぶち破りたい気分になる、なんやねんなこれは」(71-72)

From this personal dimension, Midoriko moves towards a more general and even philosophical one. She writes: “If nobody had been born one could think that there wouldn’t be any problems at all: no happiness, no sadness, nothing. It’s nobody’s fault that they have eggs and sperm. Yet, it’d be great if people stopped putting those eggs and sperm together” (*Chichi* 83; my trans).²⁰¹ Here Midoriko already makes a distinction between having eggs and sperms—having biological bodies with sexual and reproductive functions—and questions the *necessity* to use them in particular, determined ways.

Hansen’s interpretation of Midoriko’s hatred towards her own body is connected to the unconscious pervasiveness of misogyny, appealing to Ueno’s insights on the matter (70). According to Ueno, misogyny is an intrinsic part of Japanese patriarchal culture, and as such, neither men nor women are exempt from it (*Onnagirai* 7-9 qtd. in Hansen 70). Men and women experience misogyny—hatred against women—differently: “men hate ‘woman’ as ‘other’ whereas women hate ‘woman’ as self” (Hansen 70). Hansen explains that when Ueno writes “woman” she means a category—the cultural meanings attached to what we understand as “female” (70). In Ueno’s words, when it comes to misogyny “men are not reacting to women, but in fact are reacting to the signification of femininity” (*Onnagirai* 9 qtd. in Mizushima 77-78). Midoriko’s rejection of her female body can also be understood as an internalized “hatred of being allocated to the category ‘woman.’ Only by ridding her physical body of its female markers—eggs, breasts and menstrual blood—can she avoid becoming included in the group ‘women’ and escape the destiny of ‘woman’” (Hansen 70-71). In this interpretation we see how an intimate connection between sex and gender has been established and often used to evaluate femaleness, femininity and womanhood negatively.

²⁰¹ 「みんなが生まれてこんかったら、なんも問題はないように思える、うれしいも悲しいも、何もかもがもとからないのだもの。卵子と精子があるのはその人のせいじゃないけれど、そしたら卵子と精子、みんながもうそれを合わせることをやめたらええと思う」(83)

One of the most perplexing moments in a girl's life is the transition from childhood into puberty. It is a time of physical changes—many of which are difficult to digest—that greatly affect the relationship one has with oneself, one's own body and society. As Grosz notes, “puberty for girls marks the development of breasts and the beginning of menstruation as an entry into the reproductive reality that is presumed to be women's prime domain. Puberty is not figured as the coming of a self-chosen sexual maturity but as the signal of immanent reproductive capacities” (205). Hence, two of the main topics in Midoriko's journal refer to these particular changes in puberty: menstruation and breasts, which will be examined in the next section. All the reflections contained in it speak not only to girls in puberty, but also to a broader audience. For example, they speak to the fact that not all fertile women want to have children, and that not all women who want children can have them. It is worth adding that menstruation is presumed to be a women's issue, but actually, “not all women menstruate, and not only women menstruate” (Bobel, *New* 11). This calls for a view of menstruation as an important part of the female body experience without essentializing women's bodies, without assuming it is necessarily a feature of all women's body experiences.

4.3. Breasts, body image and mothering

4.3.1. Breasts in puberty and breasts as objects

As noted, Midoriko struggles not only to cope with her upcoming menarche but also with the development of her breasts:

I'm going to write about breasts. Something I didn't have before is getting bigger, swelling up. There are two things that are swelling up whether I like it or not. Why do they grow? Where do they come from? Why can't they stay as they are? There are some girls who show off proudly how big theirs

are getting and are happy, and there are boys who make fun of them. But everyone gets like this, why are they so happy? Am I weird? I hate that my breasts are swelling up, it's so gross, I hate it so much. (*Chichi* 82; my trans.)²⁰²

When breasts start growing, a girl “experiences herself as being looked at in a different way than before” (Young 77). In this fragment of her journal, we can identify two main attitudes towards breasts in puberty; one is rejection and disgust, and the other one is joy and pride: A girl “may enjoy the attention and learn to draw the gaze to her bosom with a sense of sexual power. [Or] she may loathe and fear the gaze that fixes her in shock or mockery, and she may take pains to hide her chest behind baggy clothes and bowed shoulders” (77). We can also draw from Midoriko’s case that she echoes her mother’s attitude, and rejects her own body and the word “hate” “*iya*” also evokes Ichiyō’s presence. Makiko is the center of the depiction of breasts in *Chichi to ran*; through which we can understand that breasts have been objectified and commodified by beauty standards, subjected to invasive procedures, and also, considered disruptive of the borders between mothering and sexuality.

A powerful episode in this novella is the *sentō* 銭湯 (public bathhouse) scene. Makiko and Natsuko go together to the local bathhouse on the first day of their visit. Literary images and dialogues about naked bodies provide us with an idea of their perception of breasts. Nowadays, bathhouses in Japan are usually divided into men’s and women’s sections. In a “woman-space,” little boys, girls and women from all age-ranges participate,

²⁰²「胸について書きます。あたしは、なかったものがふえてゆく、ふくらんでゆく、ここにふたつあたしには関係なくふくらんで、なんのためにふくらむん。どこからくるの、なんでこのままじゃおれんのか。女子のなかには見せあって大きくなってるのをじまんする子もおったり、うれしがって、男子もおちよくってみんなそんなふうになってなんでそんながうれしいの、あたしが変か？あたしは胸のふくらむのが厭、めさんこ厭、死ぬほど厭や」(Kawakami, *Chichi* 82)

being exposed to an environment of a wide variety of naked bodies. Young argues that in lesbian dominated spaces for women, characterized by the absence of the male gaze, breasts are not objectified (84). According to Young, “such a context deobjectifies the breasts. A woman not used to such a womanspace might at first stare, treating the breasts like objects. But the everydayness, the constant engagement of this bare-breasted body in activity dereifies them” (84). Despite being used to the *sentō* experience, Makiko impersonates aspects of the male gaze (and she is joined by Natsuko), as they both stare and scrutinize bodies, treating breasts like mere objects. Their attitudes contrast with those of everyone else’s, as the rest seem to be taking part in this everyday activity naturally and without judgment.

Feminist scholar Laura Mulvey coins the term “male gaze,” and explains that, “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (837). Despite the internalization of the male gaze, Makiko’s gaze is still different, as it lacks any connotation of sexual interest. The next excerpt from the *sentō* scene allows us to consider their gaze:

The whole time Makiko’s sitting in the tub, she’s ogling other women. Her level of bluntness makes me so uncomfortable that I can’t help whispering “Maki, you’re staring a bit too much,” to which I just get an, “oh yeah?” as her eyes continue to hunt down bodies: Bodies bathing in the hot pools, bodies stepping out of the water, bodies covered in bubbles. She’s completely caught up in her gawking and doesn’t say a word. She is just silently watching naked women coming and going through the steam, and well, since I can’t talk to myself in public, I end up lying there in the bath beside Makiko, staring at women’s bodies with her. I take a look at the variety of shapes, silhouettes and skin tones, and in most of the cases, the breasts are

the central part of the naked bodies. The amount of exposed skin here is bigger than usual. In this environment of total nakedness, faces lose their individuality. Here, the body is doing all the walking and talking, and it has its own will. At the center of every gesture it seems there is only body.

(*Chichi* 52-53; my trans)²⁰³

Despite staring at women's bodies, objectifying them in a similar way to the male gaze—only without sexualizing them—the narrator recognizes both the great corporeal diversity as well as the importance of the body to every action, gesture and intention. The recognition of these two aspects—heterogeneity and centrality of the body to one's own subjectivity—can be considered an example of the female gaze that de-reifies the body.

According to Young,

In a womanspace with many women walking around bare-breasted, the variability and individuality of breasts becomes salient. I would like to say that in a womanspace, without the male gaze, a woman's breasts become almost like part of her face. Like her nose or her mouth, a woman's breasts are distinctive, one sign by which one might recognize her. Like her mouth or her eyes, their aspect changes with her movement and her mood; the movement of her breasts is part of the expressiveness of her body. (84)

²⁰³ 「卷子は湯に浸かってる間、風呂場を行き来する女々の体を舐めるように観察し、それは隣のわたしが気を遣うほど無遠慮に視線を打ち続けるので、ちょっと巻ちゃん、見すぎ、と思わず小声で注意するも、ああとかうんとかの生返事をして、その目が入ってくる体、湯に浸かる体、出る体、泡にくるまれる体をじっくりとせわしなく追うのであった。そうしてる卷子は特に喋ることもなくただ湯気のなかを移動する女々の体を黙って見つめているので、わたしもひとりで喋るわけにもいかないもので、仕方なく湯に並んで黙って女々の体を見れば、当然ながら改めて様々な形態のあること輪郭のあること色味のあること甚だしく、裸の中央に当たる部には、ほとんどの場合に、胸がある。肌色の分量がとても多く、この裸の現場においては、普段ならかなりの割り合いで識別の重みを持つ顔、という部位がとんとすれ、ここでは体自体が歩き、体自体が喋り、体自体が意思をもち、ひとつひとつの動作の中央には体しかないように見えてくるのやった」(52-53)

At this point, our characters have only focused on bodies in general, but the next scene highlights that Makiko's attention is on women's breasts in particular. In the words of the narrator: "Eventually I ask her, 'hey Maki, what exactly are you looking at?' 'Oh. Boobs,' she answered at once" (54; my trans.).²⁰⁴ In a conventional setting, our faces are essential to differentiate one another. Here, in this naked and women-only setting, breasts play an important role as distinctive features of our bodies. In this passage, we see how Makiko scrutinizes other women's breasts; she comments on size, color, nipples and age:

From the entrance, an elderly woman walks in slowly. It's as if her body is under a different law of gravity. Makiko secretly points at her and whispers: "Look at her pink nipples." "Don't you think they're too pink? Why did they get that pink?"—"Mmm, maybe the color faded with age, or maybe she was born like that."—"You can't even see the areola around her nipples. There's no distinct line at all."—"Yeah."—"Sometimes that happens to young girls too. But usually if they have an unnatural color loss, they're using hydro."—"What's hydro?"—"Hydroquinone, it's a kind of bleach," Makiko explains briefly. "Or could be Tret."—"Tret?"—"Tretinoin. Large pieces of your skin peel off. Those two are the strongest. But they are also expensive." After adding this, she stays quiet for a bit. Then Makiko points at another relatively young woman in her twenties. "That girl is still young but she's got a pair of socks"—"What?"—"It's great when they're big but in the end they're just fat, and sometimes, depending on the case, they can become like that girl's. There are different ways of losing your boobs, I mean, they're like water balloons, they're great when full, but depending on the person, they can end up just like a pair of socks. Look at hers, they look just like a pair of men's socks

²⁰⁴ 「ま、巻ちゃんは、さっきから何を見てるの」と声をかければ、「え、胸」と即座に答えた」(54)

dangling without feet in them,” Makiko says this with an even lower voice while sliding her chin under the milk bath’s water. Now that she mentions it, I notice that when this woman leans over, her breasts swing forward and backwards. Lengthwise, they’re full, but they have no thickness to them, and as a result, they look exactly like a pair of socks. Now that Makiko has said it, I can’t see them as anything else but socks. Of course it’s none of my business, but as I lie here, I wonder what they’d look like if she was lying down, and again, none of my business, but how would someone go about touching her breasts? I suppose it’s more like grabbing than rubbing. In any case, I realize I’m also doing a lot of gawking. Makiko keeps pointing out all different types of breasts that come into the bath, saying things like “pointy cones” [*rokepai* ロケパイ “rockets”] or “pancakes” [*kanipai* カニパイ “crab”] and so on. When finally a pair of “big breasts” [*kyonyū* 巨乳] make a clear appearance and come proudly in and out of the milky water, Makiko starts talking about big breasts, but after a while, she grows silent. (*Chichi* 56-58; my trans.)²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ 「入り口からまるで違う重力に支配されてるぐらいの、のっりのっりやって来た老女を卷子はわたしにこっそり示して、「見て、あのピンクの乳首」と低い声で云った。「あれピンクすぎると思わん。なんであんなピンクやの」「や、もうお年で、色素がないっていうか、体質っていうか」「乳輪もわからんくらいに色が無い。あれはきれいに境目が無い」「うん」「たまにおるねんな、若い子でも。はあ。まあだいたい不自然な色の抜け方ってのはハイドロを使ってんねんけどな」「なに、ハイドロって」「ハイドロキノン、漂白剤の一種」と卷子は短く云って「それかトレチ」「トレチ」「トレチノイン。ぼろぼろめくれる。これふたつで最強。でも高い」と付け加えて、じっと黙った。それからまた別の、二十代の半ばぐらいかと思われる比較的若い体をほらと示して「あの子まだ若いのに靴下」「え」「大きいのもええけどな、ゆうても脂肪やから場合によってはああいう感じになくなるわけよ。なくなり方はそれぞれやけど胸なんかゆうたら水風船みたいなもんで、ばんばんのときはええけども人によってはあのように靴下になるのです。あれ見てみ、足入れてない男もんの靴下二枚ぶらさがってるように見えるやろ」と卷子はさらに低い声で、顎の辺りまで白いミルク風呂に浸かりながらわたしに云った。そう云われてみればその体がかがんで見えたときなどの様子は確かにぺろんとかぷらんといいか、長さはたっぷりあるのやが厚みがなくてゆえに靴下そのものといった形状であり、そう云われれば靴下となんの違いもないように見え、余計なお世話であるけれどもあれは寝転んだ時ほどのようになるの、とか、もっと余計なお世話であるけれどもこう、揉まれるなどの機会には

This scene also reveals a “double structure of the gaze,” even when Natsuko joins Makiko in her gawking, she is also gawking at her own sister. Therefore, Natsuko’s “ambivalent, shameful and yet concerned attitude toward Makiko’s tragi-comic obsession is thrown into relief” (Abe Auestad 7). In addition, the way Makiko refers to the old woman reflects a lack of respect and appreciation for the elderly, and a rejection of the natural aging process of the body. As Young points out, “the truly old woman’s body thereby moves beyond the pale. Flat, wrinkled, greatly sagging, the old woman’s breasts signify for the ageist dominant culture a woman no longer useful for sex or reproduction, a woman used up” (79). Makiko rejects her own aging process and her obsession consists of pursuing a physical appearance that responds to elusive aesthetic ideals.

Natsuko and Makiko do seem to agree on the fact that the older woman’s color is natural, whereas younger women engage in bleaching practices, shifting the attention to a younger woman’s breasts, which also get criticized by Makiko at the bathhouse. This example resonates with Miller’s words: “In the struggle against natural and unworked flesh, the entire geography of the body, including the pigmentation of the nipples, comes under the control of new beauty regimes” (*Beauty* 9).

The areola and nipple colors are very diverse; they vary from person to person. During pregnancy, the color usually darkens, and additional factors may cause a change in the color, including hormonal changes, medication and aging, among others. Kawakami includes a relationship between aging and nipple color in this passage. Miller explains that,

どのようにして揉まれるのですか、揉むというよりはもしかして握る的な、というかの感じでなんだかとても色々で、わたしもじっと見入ってしまった。そのほかにも巻きは次々にやってくる様々な形の胸を指してはロケパイだのカニパイだのあれこれとぼそぼそと感想を云うのやったが、いわゆる巨乳の体がずいずいとミルク風呂に分け入ってきたりすると、あからさまにしゅっとした感じになって、出て行くとその巨乳についてひとくさり、しかしそれがひとしきり続いた後はすこんと無口になってしまい」(56-58). Translation Note: There is a word play lost in the English translation that I would like to explain here. In the original Japanese the termination *pai* of the words *rokepai* ロケパイ “rockets” (“pointy cones” in the English) and *kanipai* カニパイ “crab” (“pancakes” in the English) coincides with the the last sound of *oppai* おっぱい (“breasts”).

“a Japanese folk belief holds that the more sexually active a woman is, the darker her nipples become. The color of the nipple does darken with age but in fact has no correlation with sexual activity” (*Beauty* 114). In addition, the industry behind these products creates and reproduces insecurities and worries, thus women who are eager to buy these bleaches want to project a “pure, innocent or naive image” (114). All these elements work together to create an ideal beauty standard for nipples, and in order to attain it, a new commercial need is created. Nipple bleaching can be interpreted as a discriminatory, race-biased, homogenizing practice that reinforces the problematic idea of “the lighter, the prettier.”

4.3.2. *Ideal breasts and Makiko's choice*

Ideal standards are also evident in the previous passage, regarding shape, size and texture of breasts. The use of adjectives such as “a pair of socks,” “pointy cones,” “pancakes,” and “big breasts,” puts in evidence that there is no neutral way of describing different types of breasts, but rather, an ideal, desirable type of breasts is exposed. Here, we can identify the ideal breast as aligned with the one Dr. Ikeda told the readers of a young women’s magazine: “the objective of a beautiful bust is not only that they are bigger, but that they face upwards” (*Seventeen* qtd. in Miller, *Beauty* 94). As we could grasp through Makiko’s remarks, big breasts are preferable but they have to be sitting high on the chest with a look of firmness. However, this norm is contradictory: “if breasts are large, their weight will tend to pull them down; if they are large and round, they will tend to be floppy rather than firm. In its image of the solid object this norm suppresses the fleshy materiality of breasts, this least muscular, softest body part” (Young 79).

In this context, breasts are valued as objects, thus they must be solid, easy to handle. In other words, in concordance with the “capitalist, patriarchal, American media dominated culture [that] objectifies breasts before a distancing gaze that freezes and

masters” (Young 78). This is the context of “docile bodies,” using Foucault’s terminology, in which the object can be controlled and measured.²⁰⁶ The idea of measuring breasts in cup sizes dates from the 1930s, a method promoted by the American Warner lingerie company (Miller, *Beauty* 94). Prior to that, the use of camisoles and waists meant that breasts were much lower and that was acceptable. However, the use of bras encouraged the uplift as a new fashion for breasts. According to Miller, “the dominant breast motif in Japan replicates this mode of highly placed and evenly round breast” (94). However, traditionally, “the body shape thought best suited to the kimono is slender with a willow-shaped waist. Large breasts are said to disrupt the flow of a kimono’s lines” (Miller, *Beauty* 78). Hence, the relatively new view on round and uplifted larger breasts was possible because of the numerous campaigns around the 1920s that attempted to socialize Japanese women into the habit of wearing Western-style underwear and clothing (96).

The role of mass media culture in creating and spreading this ideal must be recognized. Media images homogenize and normalize ideals regarding female beauty (Bordo 254, 260). Therefore, the fact that there is a dominant type of desired breasts, including nipple pigmentation—creating models against which women evaluate

²⁰⁶ Monique Deveaux questions Bordo’s feminist reappropriation of Foucault’s “docile bodies” and points out the dangers of reducing this paradigm of disciplined subjects to an ahistorical, metaphorical dimension: “Bordo uses the docile body and the Panopticon as if these describe a wide range of subjectivities and practices, and this leads her to conflate women’s myriad experiences of femininity. Lost are the historical context of Foucault’s account of the modernization of power and the subtleties of his usage of “normalization” and bodily discipline by institutions and discourses. Moreover, by treating the metaphor of docile bodies as a paradigm for women’s experiences of femininity...Bordo foreclose[s] the integration of ...[the notion that] resistance is inherent to the strategic model of disciplined bodies” (228). I employ Bordo’s usage of the “docile bodies” to understand the control, commodification and sexualization of breasts, yet I will argue for a contextualized understanding that is by no means an experience of *all* women. Moreover, this is part of a dissertation that does not reduce women to docile bodies as we are aiming towards body empowerment by “conceptualizing women’s relationships to their bodies as both a reflection of social construction *and* of their own responses to (and mediation of) the cultural ideals of femininity” (Deveaux 244).

themselves—makes it necessary to tackle the theme of normality. This theme is exposed in a dialogue between Makiko and Natsuko as they are about to leave the bath:

Makiko suddenly takes off her towel and shows me her breasts—“So, what do you think?” she asks, staring at me. —“So what?” I ask back, and she says: “Color? Size?” The words “small, black, but big” run through my mind, but I let them run past me and keep silent. —“I don’t care about size, just tell me about the color. Do they look black to you? Tell me honestly,” Makiko asks seriously with a face that looks like a plant, free of her usual makeup. —“Well, not black,” I say instinctively. —“Are they in the normal range?”—“Well... what’s your idea of normal?” —“It’s fine, whatever you’d call normal.”—“Ok, regardless of the meaning of normal, there’s no such thing, so that type of thinking...” and Makiko interrupts me saying in a flat voice: “Just forget all of that and tell me.” So I say: “Well, they aren’t pink.”—“Of course I know they’re not pink.”—“Oh, right.”—“Yeah.” The conversation faded away just like that. (*Chichi* 58-59; my trans.)²⁰⁷

There is a difference in opinion and perspective between Makiko and Natsuko. On the one hand, Makiko is concerned about the look of her own breasts, and that is why she decided to transform their appearance. She knows she has small breasts, and she is not happy about it. However, she seems insecure about whether her nipple color is in the range of normal or

²⁰⁷ 「それからタオルをとった自分の胸をいきなり現し、わたしの顔をじっと見て、「どう思う」と訊くのであった。「ど、どう？」とわたしが訊き返すと、「色とか、大きさとか」。小さい・黒い・でも大きい、が、すかさずわたしの顔を走り抜けたが、その走り抜けは見逃してとりあえず黙ったままいると、「小さいかどうかは、いいわ。色。あんたから見て、黒い？正直にゆって。」と化粧を落としたなんともいえん植物のような顔でもって真剣に卷子は訊くのだから、「や、黒くはない」と反射的に云ってしまい、「じゃ、これ普通の域？」と続けて問うので、「や、普通っていうのが大体どういう、」「あんたが考える普通でいいから」「や、普通っていうのはどの意味においても本来、ないので、そういう考えをだいたい、」と云うわたしの言葉を遮って、「そういうの、もう、いいから」と平らかな声で云うんであって、「うーん、じゃ、ま、ピンクでは、ないよね」とわたしが云うと、「ピンクでないことぐらい、知ってるよ」「あ、そっか」「そうや」という具合になって、そこから会話が續かなくなってしまった」(58-59)

not. In this case, the notion of normality is associated with an ideal of beauty. Makiko then says: “they are black. They are black and giant. I know. I know they aren’t pretty” (*Chichi* 59; my trans.).²⁰⁸ On the other hand, Natsuko believes there is no such thing as normal, appealing to its constructed nature, and pointing to a notion of beauty that is relative, subjective and diverse. Natsuko’s “critical commentary” alludes to a conversation she heard in a train in which one woman expresses her wish for breast enlargement—and argues that she does it for herself and that her decision is not in response to male chauvinism—and the other one takes a feminist stand and criticizes her “for being co-opted by phallogentric ideology” (Abe Auestad 7). Natsuko herself regards this conversation as being “boring” and “old-fashioned,” which Abe Auestad views “as an implicit ‘snub’ at ‘feminism’ (an ideological critique of phallogentricism) as it was preached back in the 1970s when women still had faith in their cause” (8).

In opposition, I contend this novella does not hold post-feminist views, but rather, through the problematization of the feminist stance, Kawakami directly engages with feminist debates and recognizes their contradictions. At heart, *Chichi to ran* is concerned with female embodiment and agency, and the precarious position of women in current society, thus, its feminist overtones. Budgeon’s thoughts on “successful femininity” vis-à-vis third-wave feminism and post-feminism shed light on the aforementioned tensions:

The contradictions that result from attempting to occupy the subject position of successful femininity are not lived unproblematically but are experienced in ambivalent ways for which resolution is often sought through highly individualized strategies that do not necessarily work to women’s advantage nor do they result in the expansion of their capacity to exercise autonomy. For

²⁰⁸ 「黒いやん。あたしの黒くて巨大やん。知ってるよ、あたしのがきれいでないってことは」(59)

example, maintaining a coherent empowerment narrative consisting of autonomy, individuality and personal choice requires a denial of the effects that external influences have on the realization of individual success and as such the classed and raced constitution of the ‘successful’ feminine subject is obscured. This leads to a fundamental misrecognition of the causes of social disadvantage as explanations for inequality are seen to reside in the ability or motivation of individuals to make ‘good’ choices. Although constructing an unfettered relationship to choice may enhance a sense of personal empowerment it also places incredible pressure on individuals to make the ‘right’ choices. The struggle to incorporate the new cultural ideal of feminine success is particularly complex for young working-class women for whom the limits to doing so are attributed to individualized failure and borne at inordinate psychic cost” (285-286).

Budgeon’s explanation offers a background to understand Makiko’s “choice,” not only in terms of an autonomous, individual and personal choice, but also as part of a classed, raced and gendered context. Makiko belongs to a social and economically disadvantaged group who are struggling to make the “right choice.” It comes at a high psychological and emotional cost—her negative body image and flawed relationship with her daughter. Furthermore, Budgeon also points out that the effects of the separation of choice and self from gendered contexts,

are seen in the disavowal of feminism on the part of young women who associate feminism with narratives of female disadvantage. Within this context making a positive identification with feminism threatens to rupture a carefully constructed narrative of self-determination. It would seem as though there is a

difficulty in recognizing that gender inequality does not cancel out but exists in tension with female success. (286)

Kawakami's novella portrays gender inequality as well as a hope for female success. When analyzing Makiko's own body image we can identify that her experiences of mothering and breastfeeding play an important role in her conception of her breasts. Naturally, breasts undergo a visible transformation during pregnancy, birth and lactation periods. Makiko expresses her feelings about her breasts and warns Natsuko about those drastic changes. Makiko's relationship with her breasts is that of denial and repulsion. She says: "At their worst, my nipples were the color of cherries. You know the color I'm talking about, right? It's an awful color. It's not just black, but a reddish-black, and the size of them! My nipples became the size of the mouths on plastic bottles" (*Chichi* 60; my trans.).²⁰⁹ This is followed by an extended description of her breasts:

Everything left from my nipples. This is what happens when you have children.

Well, for some people it's not like this, or they get theirs back, but for others, this is what happens and nothing comes back. I don't know if you want to have children or not, but yours aren't going to be as they're now; gradually the shape changes. Everything left out of my nipples and where have they gone?

This is what is left. Shrunken, only nipples, look at this, all empty and flat.

There's nothing. They're no longer here. (*Chichi* 60; my trans.)²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ 「最強の時はアメチェ色、知ってる？アメリカンチェリーな。あの色、すごい色な。ただの黒じゃない。赤が混じった黒っていうかな。大きさもな。なんていうの、乳首だけで、乳首部だけで余裕のペットボトルの口くらいになってさ」(60)

²¹⁰ 「乳首から、何もかもが出て行ってしまった。でもな、こうなるんよ。子供を生んだらば人は。戻る人もならん人もおるでしょうけど、なる人も戻らん人もおるねんよ。あんたもこの先に子ども生んでも生まんでもかも知れんけど、今の自分のそののそれじゃなくなつてこのどンドン形が変わっていくこれ、乳首からどンドンなくなつてった全部、どこにいくのん。んで残つたのは結局これ。縮んで、こんな乳首だけついて、こことかも、ほら、べこべこなつて。何もないねん。ここにはもう」(60)

This quote reflects a typical characteristic of Kawakami's writing in *Chichi to ran*; that is, the awareness of micro and macro levels in her characters' opinions and conclusions. Makiko, at a personal level, feels a strong dissatisfaction with her breasts, even nostalgia at their absence, and this triggers her desire to get breast enhancement surgery. Yet, she also refers to a shared experience (without making universal claims either): when mothers have children and breastfeed, their bodies undergo significant transformations, and the body as they knew it disappears. The connection between micro and macro levels show that roles and attitudes in the local level, or personal level, mirror or re-contextualize models that are happening at the level of society at large (De Fina 422).

4.3.3. *Body image: slender ideal*

From Makiko's speech and actions, we can elicit a sense of rejection towards the changes her own body underwent during breastfeeding. Makiko represents the image of a self-sacrificing mother who has given up her body for her child, but at the same time, challenges "the notion that women are most gratified by feeding and nourishing *others*, not themselves" (Bordo 118). The image of Makiko being emptied by her own daughter reflects how the "denial of self and feeding of others are hopelessly enmeshed in this construction of the ideal mother" (118).

In addition to Makiko's pursuit of a specific type of breasts, she is also interested in losing weight and pursuing a slender body image. At the *sentō* Natsuko describes different types of baths, including "a high-powered Jacuzzi, so strong that it hurts, but it's supposed to help you burn fat" (*Chichi* 51; my trans.).²¹¹ This is one example of the availability of technologies that reinforce the ideal slender body, and encourage women to take action

²¹¹ 「あともものすごい強烈な脂肪燃焼をうたった痛いくらいのジャグジーや」(51)

and transform their physical appearance at any cost. Next, there is an excerpt from Midoriko's journal that provides evidence of her mother's weight loss:

Before going to bed, mom takes some medicine. When she was out, I took a look at what it was, and it turned out to be cough-medicine. Last time I checked was last night, and this morning half of it was already gone. Did she drink it all? Why did she? She doesn't even have a cough. Lately, she gets thinner and thinner. (*Chichi* 87-88; my trans.)²¹²

Fuse explains that Makiko is drinking "codeine" and "met-morphine" as if it was "cough medicine" (168). This proves she does not take care of her body. She is getting thinner and is ingesting some kind of drugs. Her slimness and low self-esteem can also be interpreted as a rejection of mothering. Miller explains that a pursuit of a thin body can also be viewed as an act of "resistance to gender roles through dieting and food refusal that counters the other-directed Japanese model of femininity. Dieting by Japanese women is an expression, therefore, of rejection of the social roles of domestic food preparer, family nurturer, and fertile progenitor of future salary men" (*Beauty* 174). In other words, extremely thin bodies reject "a body shape that symbolizes fertility and nurturance, while rejecting both marriage and motherhood as well" (174). In addition, Orbach also offers valuable insights to approach the links between anorexia and social gender expectations:

Anorexia reflects an ambivalence about femininity, a rebellion against feminization that in its particular form expresses both a rejection and an exaggeration of the image. The refusal of food which makes her extremely thin straightens out the girl's curves in a denial of her essential femaleness.

At the same time, this thinness parodies feminine petiteness. It is as though

²¹² 「お母さんが寝る前に飲んでる薬があつてそれはなにかと、お母さんがおらんときにみたらせきどめシロップやった、最後に見たのはきのうの夜、やのに今日はもう半分以上なくなつてこれぜんぶのんだのか。せきも出てないのに、なんのために。お母さんはさいきんどんどんやせてる」 (87-88)

the anorectic has a foot in both camps—the pre-adolescent body-girl and the young attractive woman. (*Fat* 154)

Hence, Makiko's pursuit of slimness can be interpreted as a result of, or resistance to, oppressive social conditions regarding femininity and mothering. In addition to Midoriko's perception of her mother's slimness, we find Natsuko's description of Makiko's body at the *sentō*:

I take off my clothes and put them into a locker and take a peek at Makiko from the back. I'm astonished to see that she looks twice as skinny without her clothes on. Even from the back, your thighs are supposed to touch at the top. But hers are separated, and when she bends down you can see her backbone...(*Chichi* 50; my trans.)²¹³

This is a description of the type of body certain models in fashion catwalks or anorexic women aspire to have. In the fashion industry, a domain in which beauty standards verge on the impossible, a “thigh gap” is a well-known guideline to evaluate and measure bodies. A “thigh gap” refers to the gap that emerges between the upper inner thighs when standing up with the knees together. Natsuko's voice represents a stand against the demand of extreme, unhealthy slenderness.

4.3.4. Agency and surgery

Makiko's obsession with breast enlargement surgery has been analyzed in different ways by scholars Fujita and Abe Auestad: Fujita looks at it from a psychoanalytical perspective and claims that the desire for augmentation, in connection to Makiko's uncontained speech, and Midoriko's menstruation, as well as the symbolism of eggs in the

²¹³ 「なので服を脱ぎまるめてロッカーに入れてる巻子の背中をちらっと見れば、服を着ているときのふた周りも痩せておる事実、そちらにまずぎよつとした。後ろから見ても太股のくっついてあるべきところがくっきり離れており、背中を丸めれば肋骨が浮いて見え...」 (50)

novella, are symptoms of female decapitation or castration complex (Fujita qtd. in Abe Auestad 17). In opposition, Abe Auestad refuses to find an unconscious symptom to be unveiled or debunked in the text, but rather, Makiko's obsession represents a "nonhuman actor," that elicits emotions and mediates the mother/daughter relationship (3).

My own analysis aims to elucidate the complexity of Makiko's choice, and I claim that it cannot be reduced to Freudian symbolism (like Fujita does), because it is completely disconnected from women's embodied lives. On the contrary, I contend Kawakami is positively depicting female bodies rather than negatively defining them in terms of lack. Also, the surgery plays an important role in the relationship between Makiko and Midoriko (like Abe Auestad points out), but Kawakami is also problematizing the themes of female agency and bodily commodification, which are feminist concerns and thus, worth exploring within feminist frameworks.

As seen, Makiko rejects the bodily changes experienced through pregnancy and post-childbirth. Consequently, she feels a strong need of pursuing physical transformation to "correct" her body. In other words, her personal sense of self-worth emerges from pursuing dominant cultural body ideals regarding breasts and body shape; an example of the interaction between the micro and macro levels. Makiko's case is an example of how breasts have been subjected to normalizing beauty practices. Paradoxically, in her desire to transform her body, there is also a sense of self-determination, agency and empowerment. Miller writes:

The history of female breasts in Japan is noteworthy because it illustrates the power of media images, the influence of American culture, and how easily, and quickly, culturally modeled behaviors and ideas become naturalized as "normal." Yet we know that American images of huge breasted women have been in Japan for decades, so something else must be contributing to the new

trend. A general focus on the accomplishment of desired bodies, including idealized breasts, may therefore reflect a certain degree of female agency and empowerment. (*Beauty* 98)

Miller explains the role of media and cultural influx in the process of naturalization/normalization of ideal breasts in Japan. The key words in her reflection are “to a certain degree.” We cannot deny the cases in which the achievement of the idealized and desired body is an example of agency and empowerment, and has a potentially positive effect on one’s life. Fuse also points out that there is a level of empowerment in changing a body one does not like (169). However, there is a need to acknowledge the problems that arise from seeking unattainable, elusive ideals and the negative, painful consequences that come along this search. Makiko exemplifies this latter tendency in her obsession to “enhance” her breasts. Other examples can be found in cases of anorexia or bulimia— which can also be considered as *extreme* examples of agency.

This discussion belongs to a larger problematic regarding “an institutionalized system of values and practices within which girls and women—and, increasingly, men and boys as well—come to believe that they are nothing (and frequently treated as nothing) unless they are trim, tight, lineless, bulgeless, and sagless” (Bordo 32). From this perspective, the large numbers of cosmetic surgery and breast augmentation do not represent women’s agency or empowerment, but rather exemplify the “beauty myth” in action, as well as being a process of disciplining and controlling the body. The “beauty myth” is a concept developed by Naomi Wolf and it states that beauty ideals are supposedly universal and objective, yet they remain unverifiable assumptions (*Beauty* 20). Wolf says that it is the “last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable,” and

argues that there has been a “violent backlash against feminism” in the context of eating disorders and cosmetic surgeries (Wolf, *Beauty* 10-11).

This myth is connected to Bordo’s conception of the body as “cultural plastic.” This notion increasingly pressures people who feel insecure about their bodies to become “docile bodies” through surgical and medical interventions. Strictly speaking,

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion—female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement.’ (Bordo 166)

Breast augmentation is often referred to as breast enhancement, and the word itself already shows how this procedure is thought of as an improvement or increase in quality or value. Bordo argues that the advanced capitalist, consumer-driven culture of the twentieth century, in connection to the great variety of alternatives offered by current technology and science, have created a postmodern understanding of the body: that of freedom from bodily determination (245). Challenging the very materiality of the body, “plastic bodies” are defined in terms of changeability and control as a result of “an ideology fueled by fantasies of rearranging, transforming and correcting” (245). This is reflected in the discourse of choosing the body one wants to have (247). From Makiko’s perspective, she *decides to change* her body:

I’ve already decided the place. Since I started to think about getting them bigger, I’ve been to many different places, I’ve picked up several different pamphlets and I’ve heard a lot about it. In the end, this is a huge deal. They cut you, you

know, they cut you. But, I've made up my mind, it's decided. (*Chichi* 33-34; my trans.)²¹⁴

In this fragment, Makiko feels that she has taken the decision herself, and keeps repeating it over and over, believing she is actively choosing the body she wants to have. However, her choice is not out of a wide selection of diverse, real, possible bodies, but rather one projected by the beauty myth. As Young says, “there is little choice of what body to value; the normalized body is reinforced by the transformative possibilities of medical technology. Why wouldn't a woman ‘choose’ perfect breasts when the opportunity is there?” (91). Makiko emphasizes the different places and research she did while making her decision, and it is precisely the wide variety of offers that reinforce the notion of an ideal, perfect type of body that should be, and can be pursued. Hence, cosmetic surgery is ultimately an industry. It is a successful business that merges health and beauty discourses, an outstanding by-product of our consumer-driven, capitalist societies.

Midoriko represents a stand against her mother's decision, on a personal level, and against the “cultural plastic,” at a larger societal level:

Mom and I don't talk much. Well, not at all. My mom spends every day researching about her breast surgery, and I pretend not to notice. But putting fake stuff in your breasts to make them bigger? Unbelievable! And for what? Is it for her job? I just don't get it. It makes me sick, this is sick, sick, sick, sick, sick! I have seen it on TV and in photos too, they cut you right open and then they shove in something. It's so painful. Mom doesn't understand anything. She's stupid, she's a stupid idiot, completely stupid. I heard something about a

²¹⁴ 「もう決めたあるねんけどな。場所。豊胸をしようと思ってから色んなところに行って色んなパンフもらったし色んな話聞いたけど結局な、やっぱ大変は大変みたいやねん。そら切るねんものねあんた、切るねんもの。でももう心ではこう、がちっとあたしがちっと決めてあんねんけれどもな」(33-34)

screening. That means if you agree to show your face in a magazine, you'll get the surgery for free, which is really stupid too. (*Chichi* 77-78; my trans.)²¹⁵

In this passage we can see how the surgery symbolizes an abyss between mother and daughter. Yet, at the same time, the surgery elicits a strong affective response in Midoriko, a response that Makiko might have been craving for (Abe Auestad 9). Through Midoriko's angry and upset words, Kawakami questions the real purpose of the breast surgery. When Midoriko questions if the reason behind the surgery is for her job as a hostess, breasts are conceived as sexual objects for the male gaze. Also, when Midoriko calls out the role of the media (TV and photos), breasts are conceived as commodities that belong to a larger business and capitalist culture. Hence, breast augmentation surgeries are supposed to positively affect one's economy. Young offers guidelines on the rationale behind this surgery:

Breast augmentation has as its purpose only looks: to enhance a woman's presentation on stage or in magazines photos, to make her look more normal or sexy, to better fill out the look of her clothes. Few people are fooled by the feel of an enlarged breast—it is firmer and harder than one made only of flesh. As for the woman's own feeling, the healing time can be long and painful, and in a few women the pain is never quite gone. And while she may look sexier, she may lose some sexual sensitivity in her breasts as a result of the surgery...

²¹⁵ 「お母さんとはあまししゃべらず。っていうかまったく、お母さんはなんか豊胸手術、
 について、毎日調べてて、あたしは見んふりしてるけれど、でも胸、うそのものなんかい
 れておっきい胸にするんやって、信じられへん、だいたいそれって何のためによ？って何
 のためにか仕事のために？考えられん。気持ちわるい気持ちわる気持ちわる気持ちわる気
 持ちわる気持ちわる、テレビでみたし写真もみたけど、手術ざっくり切るのやで。ぐぐぐ
 っておしこんでいくのやで。いたいのやで。お母さんはなんもわかってない。あほやわ、
 あほすぎ、あほすぎ、なんで、モニターするってきこえて、ゆうてて、モニターっていう
 のは顔が雑誌にでたりするから、ただでやってもらえるやつのこと、それもほんまにあ
 ほやとおもう」(77-78)

Breast augmentation often actually makes women's breasts more like objects.

(91)

Midoriko also worries about the risks of the surgery and opens up a discussion about breast augmentation procedures in terms of a sociocultural and economic phenomena:

Somewhere in North or South America, fathers give their daughters boob jobs as a birthday present when they turn fifteen. I just don't get any of that crap. They say that also over there, the risk of committing suicide is three times higher in women who go through breast enlargement surgery than in women who don't. Is mom aware of this? If she doesn't know, then that's bad, if she knew about it, maybe she would change her mind. I should seriously make the time to talk to mom. Wonder if I'd be able to ask her why she wants to do it. I want to talk about everything, not only about breasts. (*Chichi* 88; my trans.)²¹⁶

Here we can identify elements of Midoriko's affective response; she cares about her mother and there is an underlying desire for connection with her. Also, Midoriko is drawing connections between a personal dimension and a global one, as she references the social realities of the United States, Latin America and other countries across the globe in relation to her mother's upcoming breast surgery. The cosmetic surgery discourse closely ties appearance to success and self-esteem. The reasons behind this decision are probably based on believing that plastic surgery and changes in one's appearance contribute to social mobility, to achieve a better social position and to develop self-esteem. As mentioned, there is also an economic dimension to this decision, based on the belief that

²¹⁶ 「アメリカのほうにある、どっかの国には、自分とこの娘が、十五才になったら豊胸手術を、そこのお父さんがプレゼントするっていうのを知ってまじで意味がわからん、それからこれもアメリカのほうで豊胸手術をした人はせん人より自殺する人が、三倍も多いっていうのも、あって、お母さんはそのこと知ってるんやろうか、知らんかったらたいへんなこと、知ったら気が変わるかも、ちゃんと話の時をつくらな、あかん。なんでそんなことするのかってあたしちゃんときけるかな、胸の話とかはしやんと、全部、ちゃんと、したいねん」(88)

girls or women with larger breasts will have better job opportunities. This is an example of the problematic social constructions of beauty, self-esteem and economic power, which young girls and women are encouraged to follow.

The passage also touches briefly upon suicide in relation to cosmetic surgeries, or rather, in relation to the fears and insecurities that are at the basis of deciding to change one's looks. Fuse also points out that Midoriko is worried about the risk of suicide, and her mother's behavior displays certain suicidal indicators (168-169). Literary reviewer Ishihara claims that Makiko coming all the way to Tokyo, to do a surgery that can be done elsewhere, cannot be reduced to a metaphor of only her breasts (Fuse 169). In fact, the meaning of the surgery is deeper, as it involves raising a child on her own, being separated from her partner, having an unfulfilling job, and facing risk of suicide (169). Ultimately, this surgery symbolizes Makiko's struggle to find meaning in her life. Beauty myths are often taken lightly and the topics around our physical appearance are often labeled as shallow or trivial. However, it is important to point out that the question about how we value our own bodies, and our sense of self-worth is, ultimately, a matter of life and death.

As mentioned, Midoriko resists popular notions of beauty and conventional ideas of femininity. She also stresses that when it comes to breast implants, the situation is even more dramatic in other countries than in Japan. In actuality, breast surgery in Japan can be considered an import from Western culture.²¹⁷ In order to understand the situation in contemporary Japanese society, looking at numbers sheds some light. In 2011 alone, women in Japan reportedly had a total of 52,220 breast-augmentation procedures and 19,372 breast-lift surgeries performed ("ISAPS" 10). When we look at the population in relation to the number of procedures done, South Korea, Greece and Italy are the top three sites for cosmetic enhancement worldwide, followed by the United States, Colombia,

²¹⁷ This argument is further developed in Laura Miller's *Beauty Up*, where she traces the transformations of the beauty ideal.

Taiwan and Japan (“Plastic”). When combining the data from 2010 and 2015, we find that both breast augmentation and liposuction are the two cosmetic surgical procedures performed most frequently (“ISAPS;” “Quick Facts”). Therefore, we can conclude that the current beauty myth and fashion stands for big breasts and thin bodies; a standard that Makiko seems to impersonate.

One way to convince and persuade ourselves about something is by repetition. Makiko says she wants to get the breast augmentation surgery over and over, hence, the reader wonders if this is *really* what she desires. Actually, Abe Auestad argues that Makiko’s desire for breast enlargement can be interpreted as a “form of response to Midoriko’s refusal to speak and her insistence on communicating through writing” (8) or a “desperate attempt, if not conscious, at attracting attention from Midoriko” (9). Hence, Makiko also desires to reconnect with her daughter. On the last evening of their visit, instead of being at the clinic for her appointment, or instead of coming back early from the appointment to her daughter, Makiko meets with her former partner for drinks. In this situation, Makiko displays a new desire, perhaps a more real desire for intimacy and connection.

Hence, Makiko embodies several desires, tying together mothering and sexuality despite their supposed separation. Young explains that without this separation, “there can be no image of a love that is all give and no take... The ideal mother defines herself as giver and feeder, taking her existence and sense of purpose entirely from giving” (87). Makiko’s portrayal moves farther from that ideal.

4.4. Rebirth of the mother-daughter relationship

As mentioned, the main interlinked questions posed by Midoriko are: “Why was I born?” “Why am I here?” And, “Why this body?” (Fuse 167-168). These concerns are at the basis of the conflicts between mother and daughter. A way to approach these questions

is to consider the role of Midoriko's father. He is barely mentioned in the novella, but the reader knows of his importance because Makiko claims she has spent her last evening having drinks with him, and also, because she mentions him in a conversation with Natsuko. Makiko replays a conversation she has had with him ten years ago:

Before being with me he already had another woman. He never really left her, he always had her, and since the very beginning I knew he'd go back to her. Then "why did you make a baby with me?" I asked him once. He had to know that sooner or later he'd have to go back to Tokyo, and he knew both his circumstances and mine, he knew my feelings. What do you think he said? Have I told you before? He said: 'If you think about it thoroughly, having children isn't anyone's fault, and isn't anyone's work either. A kid, well, in this case, I'd better say Midoriko—we are essentially talking about her birth—isn't the result of anyone else's intentions or actions, and becoming pregnant isn't artificial [human-made].' He said something like this with his standard-Tokyo accent that sounded so false to me. Do you understand the meaning of all this? (*Chichi* 61; my trans.)²¹⁸

His words are carved in her memory and her frustration regarding her daughter's father is clearly conveyed. This passage also refers to the existence of a third woman. To question the reason behind Midoriko's birth within this triangle locates the act of childbirth in the realm of the complexities of romantic/sexual relationships. A remarkable aspect of this

²¹⁸ 「あたしと一緒になる前からあの女おって、ずっとおって、おりっぱなしで、最初からあっち戻ってわかってて、ほんならなんであたしと子どもを作ったかってことあたし訊いたわけ、わかってるやんそんなこと、本人やねんからさ、東京に戻るてわかってるやん、自分の情況とか相手のこととか気持ちとかさ。ほんならあの人な、なんてゆうたと思う、これあんたにゆうたっけ、前にゆうたっけ、あの人な云うで、『子供が出来るのは突き詰めて考えれば誰のせいでもない、誰の仕業でもないことである、子どもは、いや、この場合は、緑子は、というべきだろう、本質的にいえば緑子の誕生が、誰かの意図および行為であるわけがないのだし、孕む^{はらむ}ということは人為ではないよ』ってな、嘘くさい標準語でな、このまをゆうてん。あんたこれの意味わかる？」(61)

conversation is the recreation of Midoriko's father's words in standard Tokyo accent. The whole novella is written in Osaka dialect so when a different form of speech is used, it is quite noticeable, especially when Makiko herself makes explicit the distinction between the two of them. Regarding the use of different dialects, Kawakami explains that even though she speaks naturally in Osaka dialect, she does not feel burdened with writing her novels exclusively in Osaka speech style ("Ie" 350). With regards to *Chichi to ran*, she says: "only women in a primitive state of existence speak in Osaka dialect, and men in standard Japanese. I like symbolic consistency, and I guess that when I write there is also an argumentative side to it" ("Ie" 350; my trans.).²¹⁹

Therefore, we can identify in Makiko's words a series of oppositions between Osaka and Tokyo dialects, between Makiko and Midoriko's father, and between primitive (natural/biological but also precarious), and civilized (sociocultural/fabricated) states. Midoriko's father stresses that giving birth is nobody's fault, avoiding full responsibility for his actions and intentions; which perhaps is an attempt to justify his absence from both Midoriko and Makiko's lives. It also shows a vast gap between the figure of the father and the mother in terms of taking responsibility for one's baby. We can read a lack of communication and understanding between the two of them. It is thus, an example of people having children without being on the same page.

There is also a distance based on misunderstanding between mother and daughter. As Fuse puts it, their relationship can be described in terms of an "asymptotic curve" (168). This means that they approach towards each other but never cross. Given that Midoriko has been raised solely by Makiko, when she questions why she was born, she is really

²¹⁹ 「プリミティブな存在である女にだけ大阪弁を喋らせて、男には標準語を喋らせて。シンボリックな辻褃合わせも好きだし、私は書くとき理屈っぽいところがあるかもしれないですね」 ("Ie" 350)

addressing the bond she has with her mother. One of Midoriko's journal entries provides clues on the reasons behind her silence and her feelings about her own mother:

It all started when my mother was seen riding a bicycle in her work outfit, that hideous purple one, and boys in my class made fun of it in front of everyone. I feigned indifference by kind of smiling for everyone to see, but I hated myself for it. A lot of things happened, and my mother, in the end, shouted at me with tears welling up, 'What do you expect me to do? We've got to eat, stupid.' I ended up blurting out 'You're still responsible for having had "me"!' (Kawakami 65-66; trans. Abe Auestad 11).²²⁰

Midoriko has contradictory feelings towards her mother: she is "torn between her sympathy for her mother, who is working her butt off to put food on the table, on one hand, and her embarrassment about her job in *mizushobai* (night time entertainment business), on the other" (Abe Auestad 11). The feelings worth underscoring are embarrassment, followed by shame. There is a tension between her reaction against her classmates and against her mother and her real feelings. Therefore, "feeling ashamed of feeling that way about her own mother, and exasperated by her frustrations about the living conditions, for which she does not know whom to blame, she prefers to withdraw into her own safe, private haven of her notes" (11).

Another symptom of the conflicts between mother and daughter in the story is Makiko's hatred towards her own breasts and her concern with the breast surgery.

²²⁰ 「ケンカは、お金のまえに、ゆうてからあっとおもったけど、かわいそうやけど、お母さんの仕事のことでそうなったんやった、お母さんが仕事の服をきて、しかもあの紫のやつらしいので、自転車で走ってんの男子に見られて、お母さんのことをみんなの前で面白おかしくゆわれたことがはじまりやった、そのときにみんなのまえで笑ってごまかしたあたしも厭で、んで色々あって、最後は泣きそうな顔で仕方ないやろ、食べて行かなあかんねんから、っってお母さんが大きい声で言ったから、あたしはそんなんあたしを生んだ自分の責任やろってゆってもうたんやった」(65-66)

Midoriko viscerally rejects her mom's surgery, which also reveals a cry for her attention.

For instance, she writes in her journal:

And my mom is on the phone talking about wanting to have larger breasts, talking to the people at the hospital about her enlargement surgery, I want to hear everything so I sneak closer and listen. She says it's because she had a baby, and breastfed, and all that. Every day, every day, every day, every day she's on the phone, every stupid day, those breasts she fed me with and disappeared, she wants to cut them, put something in to make them bigger, and make them the way they were before giving birth [to me]. Well, wouldn't it better if I hadn't been born? Wouldn't my mom's life be better if I hadn't been born?"(*Chichi* 83; my trans.)²²¹

In this passage we can identify an incompatibility between "beautiful," "ideal" breasts and breasts that breastfeed. In other words, there is a tension between mothering and an idealized sexuality that requires a specific body-shape. This journal note centers on Midoriko's feelings of rejection, and how this leads her to question her own existence. Makiko's feelings about herself and her body are being transferred to her daughter, and this affects their relationship.

Midoriko opposes her mother in terms of body ideals and her way of life; she does not want to be like her mother, but she also emulates her mother in terms of rejecting her own body. Midoriko feels rejected by her mother and is aware of how her mother rejects her

²²¹ 「そやのお母さんはふくらましたって電話で豊胸手術の話をしてる、病院の人と話してる、ぜんぶききたくてこっそりちかよってってきく、子ども生んでからってゆういつものに、母乳やったので、とか。毎日毎日毎日毎日電話して毎日あほや、あたしにのませでなくなった母乳んところに、ちゃうもんを切って入れてもっかいそれをふくらますんか、生むまえにもどすってことなんか、ほんだら生まなんだらよかったやん、お母さんの人生は、あたしを生まなんだらよかったやんか」(82-83)

own body, so as a consequence (or as a mirroring type of behavior), she rejects her own body and particularly the changes entailed in puberty (Fuse 169).²²²

Midoriko experiences a deep sense of rejection, and according to Orbach, “children who feel that they are unloved can believe that there must be something very wrong about them which makes them unacceptable. The stinging sense of being not right causes them confusion and hurt, but they do not give up the desire for love and acceptance” (*Bodies* 23). This allows us to read Midoriko’s rejection of her mother as a manifestation of how much she actually cares about her. Ultimately, she calls for love and attention, which foreshadows their reconnection towards the end of the story.

Despite Makiko despising all her bodily changes due to pregnancy and breastfeeding she does not despise Midoriko. In fact, evidences of her motherly love and care are prominent. The final, climactic scene is a powerful portrayal of confrontation followed by reconciliation. Makiko is slightly drunk in the living room, while Natsuko is in the kitchen and Midoriko stands silently besides her. Natsuko opens the fridge and disposes of the contents of a bottle of French salad dressing, in the sink. She describes it as a “pure white sticky liquid” (*masshiro no dororitoshita ekitai* 真っ白のどろりとした液体) (*Chichi* 98). At a first glimpse, this detail may be insignificant, but it actually prepares the setting of the most symbolic scene in the novella. As Fuse notices, the dressing symbolizes “sperm,” and as it is being disposed of before the eggs, it builds on Midoriko’s desire to keep the “sperm” and “eggs” separated (Fuse 169). It also symbolically removes the father from the scene.

Later, Makiko enters the kitchen and pushes Midoriko to talk back: “You never have ears for what I have to say anyway, and you think I’m stupid, don’t you? That’s fine with

²²² This case illustrates Brene Brown’s insights on teaching body love to her daughter: “what really matters are the observations she makes about my relationship with my own body” (Brown, *Daring* 229). Basically, if parents want their children to love and accept themselves, then parents need to love and accept who they themselves are (219).

me, just keep on treating me like a moron. Refusing to talk, that's fine with me, just keep on writing on you precious little notes until we both die..."(*Chichi* 100; trans. Abe Auestad 12).²²³ After some struggle and tension, Midoriko lashes out and pokes Makiko's eyes, and speaks for the first time in a long time (12). Her *first* word is "mom," which she says loudly and clearly, and then repeats it a few times. Then she begs Makiko to tell her "the truth" (*Chichi* 102; Abe Auestad 12). Makiko responds in disbelief, followed by laughter and then:

Midoriko stands silent amidst the laughter, head still lowered, shoulders heaving as if she's about to cry, then suddenly lifts her face, draws in her breath, rips open the carton of eggs sitting on the counter waiting to be thrown away, grabs one with her right hand, raises it into the air. Oh no, she's going to? And at that moment, tears spill from her eyes, really gush out, and she smashes the egg against her own head. It slaps with a strange, wet crunch, the yolk splattering. Midoriko repeatedly smashes the remains into her head to the rhythm of her words, Mom, Mom. The egg begins to froth in her hand, in her hair, the shell bits dig in, yolk drips from her ear (*Chichi* 102-103; trans. David Boyd et.al.)²²⁴

The description of the scene continues, from Natsuko's perspective:

While crying, she grabs one more egg in her hand. "Why?" She says sighing. "Why do you have to have that surgery, mom?" Again, she smashes the egg against her head. The yolk and egg white drip from her forehead, blending in

²²³ 「あんた喋らんのやったら、喋れんのやったら、あのいつものノートで、なんか云いたいことあったら得意のあれで書きや、あたしが死ぬまで、あんたも死ぬまで」(100)

²²⁴ 「緑子は笑い声のなか、うつむいたまま黙ってる、肩で大きく息をしてるのでこのまま泣くのかと思ったら、緑子は急に顔をあげて大きく息を吸い込んで、流しの横に廃棄のために置いてあった玉子のパックをすばやくこじ開けて、玉子を右手に握ってそれを振り上げた。あ、ぶつける、と思った瞬間に、緑子の目からはぶわっと涙が飛び出し、ほんとにぶわりと噴き出して、それを自分の頭に叩きつけた。ぐしゃわ、っていう聞き慣れない音とともにしぶきのように黄身が飛び散り、それから、お母さん、お母さん、と連呼しながらすでに叩きつけたのをさらに何度も叩きつけ、手のなか髪のなかで泡だった、割れた殻が突き刺さり、耳の穴からも黄身が垂れ」(102-103)

with her tears. Midoriko doesn't wipe it off nor does she seem to care. She grabs one more egg... With snot, yolk, egg white and tears all over her face, she smashes yet another egg against her head and says to Makiko: "I worry about you, but I don't understand you, and I can't talk to you. You're important to me, but I don't want to become like you. No, that's not it." (*Chichi* 103-104; my trans.)²²⁵

After, Midoriko smashes two more eggs on her head while crying and screaming at her mother. Despite her initial reaction, Makiko joins her daughter, putting some egg on herself and smashing two more on Midoriko's head. Then, she takes the remaining eggs that were in the fridge and smashes them, one by one on Midoriko's head. In the end, they are both covered in eggs all over their faces and hair. After they cry it out and calm down a little, "Makiko takes out a red handkerchief from her back pocket and wipes over and over the egg that was stuck to Midoriko's head. She fixes Midoriko's hair with her hand as many times as she has to, putting it back behind her ear. They remain silent for a very long time, with Makiko rubbing Midoriko's back all the while" (*Chichi* 106-107; my trans.)²²⁶

In this powerful scene described at length, eggs are broken and the emphasis on fluids is evident: yolks and whites get mixed up with tears and snot. Eggs operate both literally and metaphorically. As we know by now, one of Midoriko's tribulations is her upcoming menstruation, which makes her think about the paradox of not wanting to give birth while having a body that potentially can. According to Fuse, "the origin of her incongruity is a

²²⁵ 「ぼたぼたと泣きながらパックからさらにもう一個を手にとって、なんで、と息を吐くように云い、お母さんは、手術なんかしようとするの、と云ってそれを叩きつけ、白身と黄身がかぶさる様に緑子の額を垂れてゆき、涙に混じり、それを拭いもせず構いもせず緑子はさらにもう一個を手にとって…鼻水と黄身とじゅるりとした白身と涙でぐじゃぐじゃになった顔で卷子に云い、それから手に持ったのを叩きつけ、あたしは、お母さんが、心配やけど、わからへん、し、ゆわれへん、し、あたしはお母さんが大事、でもお母さんみたいになりたくない、そうじゃない」(103-104)

²²⁶ 「卷子はズボンの後ろのポケットから赤いハンカチを取り出して何度も何度も緑子の頭について玉子を拭って、ぐじゃぐじゃになった髪の毛を何度でも耳にかけてやり、ずいぶん長い時間を黙って、その背中をさすり続けた」(106-107)

body that can make babies. Because of this, at the climax of the story, Midoriko, while expressing her dissatisfaction with the world, smashes eggs with Makiko, and those ‘eggs’ (*tamago*) are written with the kanji 玉子 instead of 卵” (167; my trans.).²²⁷ In the first part of the novella, Kawakami writes about “*ranshi*” 卵子, “eggs,” “ovum,” and towards the end she writes about “*tamago*” 玉子, “eggs”—denoting chicken eggs. There is a symbolic connection between the two regarding fertility: “*ranshi*” refers to the reproductive cells of women, and “*tamago*” to unfertilized chicken eggs. In this scene, eggs may symbolize not only the reproductive cell of women but also, menstruation.

By disposing of the “dressing”—symbolic sperm—and breaking all the eggs, Midoriko symbolically conveys her feelings about mothering and reproduction, going from her journal to a performance in reality. The word “*tamago*” 玉子 also contains the kanji of 子 “*ko/shi*” that symbolizes “children,” and in this case, “eggs” are a necessary condition to become pregnant. Thus, I contend that Makiko and Midoriko are smashing all these physical conditions and rules concerning the female body; in this scene, the female body is leaking. Abe-Auestad also claims that this “elimination of eggs” evokes “a metonymic association with numerous ‘egg cells’ going to waste every month, and with the constraints and potentials of the female body that they embody” (14).

Hansen’s interpretation complements Abe Austad’s as she argues that this climactic scene “bestows the participating female characters with the awareness, subjectivity and agency to refuse to be birth machines for the nation” (71). In 2007, same year of Kawakami’s novella’s publication, the term “birth machine” (*umu kikai* 産む機械) was used by the minister of health Yanagisawa Hakuo 柳沢伯夫 when he addressed the low

²²⁷ 「〈子〉をなす体が違和の根源なのだ。だから、クライマックスで緑子が世界への違和を表明しながら卷子と共に激しく割続ける卵には、〈卵〉ではなく〈玉子〉の字が当てられている」(Fuse 167)

birth rate in an article for the *Asahi Shinbun* (Hansen 71).²²⁸ Ueno points out that this term reflects the “normative values” of society in which female reproduction is alienated from female agency, and it is also controlled by men (*Onnagirai* 51-52, 129 qtd. in Hansen 71). Actually, his “public ‘apology’ for these remarks only fanned the flames, since in it he reiterated his conviction that a woman’s duty was to have children” (Seaman, *Writing* 2-3). It is precisely this “normative values” and imposed duty that is being challenged by Kawakami.

Fuse also explains that, “up until now she has sank into deep thought in her diary, [now], in an explosive gesture, Midoriko smashes the “eggs”—that are the source of her sense of incongruity—on herself, expressing, explosively, the dissatisfaction with her own female body” (169; my trans.).²²⁹ Therefore, Midoriko’s bodily abjection is not only contained in her diary, but also released in this scene. This scene represents Midoriko’s shift from writing to speaking. So there is a shift from exploding inwardly to doing so outwardly (Fuse 170). As Hansen points out, this shift represents a sharp contrast with “Takekurabe”’s Midori, who grows silent and traumatized whereas Midoriko “breaks not only her silence, but, due to her character’s intertextual link to Midori, also the symbolic silence of Japanese women’s collective trauma” (72).

In addition, the symbolism of eggs, different fluids, the dark kitchen, and the particular smells create womb-like imagery. In this case, the imagery is articulated in such a way that Makiko and Midoriko, mother and daughter are brought closer to each other,

²²⁸ This political position is part of a larger public way of addressing Japan’s low-birthrate issues. In 1989 Japan’s total fertility rate dropped to 1.57, which was treated like a public crisis and therefore, there were several “speeches and exhortations in favor of motherhood, epitomized by Finance Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro’s suggestion that women curtail their education and focus on having babies. A decade later, Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare Yanagizawa Hakuo gained notoriety when he called women ‘baby-making machines,’ noting that since ‘the number of women between 15 and 50 is fixed...all we can ask is for them each to give their all’” (Seaman, *Writing* 2). More recent efforts to address the low-birthrate issue include the creation of the Minister of Women’s Empowerment and Childrearing in December 2012 (3).

²²⁹ 「緑子は違和の根源である玉子を自身に打ち付へ炸裂させる形で、今まで手記にのみ綴り内へと沈潜させてきた、己の女の体に対する違和を、爆発的に表明する」 (Fuse 169)

and reaffirm their bond through eggs and their fluids. Also, since Midoriko has not spoken at all for quite a long time, when she says: “mom,” it is as if it were for the very first time. This recreates her childhood, and it plays on the meaning of one’s first word, “usually”—or ideally—it being “mom.” Kawakami reconstructs that moment before language, when we are soaked in the amniotic bath, when mother and child are one. Midoriko is fully covered in this fluid. Makiko takes an active role by covering her even more and then, trying to clean her up. This can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of going back to take care of her and give her all her motherly attention.

This scene is a catharsis in which deep, repressed emotions are released. Brown argues that shame can be understood as a fear of disconnection: “Is there something about me that if other people know it or see it, that I won’t be worthy of connection?” (“Power”). As previously noted, Midoriko felt ashamed of her mother in front of her classmates—fearing disconnection from them—and then amplified this initial shame, by feeling ashamed for feeling ashamed—feeling a fear of disconnection from her mother. Natsuko has also felt ashamed of Makiko at the bathhouse; hence, “there is a tacit affective alliance” between the two (Abe Auestad 12). Furthermore, Brown claims that in order to achieve connection we have to be vulnerable: touched, talked to and really seen (“Power”). The climactic kitchen scene exemplifies this moment of vulnerability and connection; it can thus be interpreted as a transition from shame to empathy. Abe Auestad uses Sedgwick’s understanding of shame—as being based on “identification and empathy”—to argue that “empathy quickly fills the scene through ‘automatic mimicry’ of one another” (*Shame* 159 qtd. in Abe Auestad 13). This affective transition represents a catharsis, a reconnection between mother and daughter, and a rebirth of their relationship.

4.5. Conclusive remarks: embodying beauty, reproduction and agency

Kawakami's *Chichi to ran*'s characters struggle with and resist the embodiment of beauty ideals and gender norms regarding motherhood. Hence, Kawakami's novella deconstructs beauty and maternal myths through her embodied characters. Kawakami's literary representation of the female body offers a serious consideration of breasts and reproduction from a gender and cultural perspective.

Kawakami displays "precarity" (uncertain and precarious living) in neo-liberalist, contemporary Japan and questions female agency focusing on the hardships of a single mother, attempting to resolve the mother/daughter conflict, while simultaneously producing a text rich in symbolism. Kawakami exemplifies how Ichiyō's concerns are still relevant in contemporary society. The characters' struggle against bodily and sociocultural determination resonates with one of the main points conveyed by Ichiyō's "Takekurabe": regardless of Midori's feelings, there is nothing she can do to escape her predetermined future. From Meiji Japan, to contemporary, neoliberal society, Kawakami reconfigures Ichiyō's concerns about the female body in connection to women's ability or freedom to choose and decide over their own life or future.

In *Chichi to ran*, the connection between mother and daughter is mediated by the narrator, and is affected by one's own body image and personal sources of discomfort and pain. From the narrator's perspective, this novella tells the stories of three main characters (including the narrator), and the relationship they have with each other and with themselves. Hence, it is not only about mother-daughter relationships and the female body, but also, *Chichi to ran* puts in evidence that in order to understand the world that we live in, a distance between "me" and the "other" is required (Fuse 166). In *Chichi to ran*, Midoriko and Makiko are seen from the narrator's perspective: from the aunt's and sister's points of view, respectively. It presents an alternative narrative to those relying exclusively

on either daughterly or maternal perspectives. The distance between narrator and characters allows the reader to understand the narrator as well (166).

Both mother and daughter feel dissatisfaction with their bodies and a sense of strangeness and incongruity (Fuse 167). In other words, they do not feel comfortable in their own skin. Kawakami says in an interview that: “‘even if we take off our clothes, we can’t take off our bodies.’ This became my catchphrase at some point in my life, regardless of whether you are a man or a woman, no matter what, you can’t change your body, and that feels kind of weird” (“Ie” 350; my trans.).²³⁰ This “motto” is displayed in *Chichi to ran* through the three characters. Midoriko’s source of discomfort relates to not being able to “take off her body,” as she feels somehow condemned or imprisoned by her own body, echoing Midori from “Takekurabe.” Makiko, in her desire to get breast implants, is attempting to “take off her body,” even if partly (Fuse 167). Both of them seem to want to free themselves from their bodies, or from bodily determination. Kawakami also contextualizes bodily determination within class and gender systems; hence, bodily determination comes hand-in-hand with sociocultural determination.

Towards the end, Natsuko takes Makiko and Midoriko to Tokyo station, where they will take a bullet train back to Osaka. The ending of the novella is circular because that is the place where they begun, but there is no sense of closure, no real resolution. The reader does not know what will happen next in the lives of any of the characters, it is an open-ended story. There are conflicts and changes, but not a drastic transformation or solution to their problems (Fuse 170). Hansen also points out that, similar to “Takekurabe”—which deals with the position of women in Meiji Japan without offering ‘any solutions’—*Chichi to ran* also raises awareness about different issues, but does not

²³⁰ 「服は脱げても体は脱げない」というのが一時期、私のキャッチコピーだったんですけど、男、女にかかわらず体はどうしても変えられないということは不思議な感じがします」 (“Ie” 350)

solve the problems (73). Even though Midoriko broke her silence towards the end, her feelings of anxiety and discomfort are not necessarily gone.²³¹ Makiko is going back to her work, and we do not know whether she is going to get breast augmentation surgery or not. We do not even know if she really met with Midoriko's father and if so, what happened there. We are left in uncertainty—in this sense, the reader is also left in a precarious position.

The only image left is Natsuko or “I” reflecting about her own body, perhaps an invitation for the reader to do the same. Natsuko, in the end, epitomizes the motto “we can take off our clothes but not our bodies,” as she takes off her clothes and looks at her naked body in the mirror. The concluding scene reads:

I go to the bathroom, take off my clothes, take off the pad that was stuck to my panties, and take a good look at it. There's almost no blood in it, and after wrapping it with tissue, I leave out a new one ready to use on top of the bath towel. I get into the shower and take a hot bath. (*Chichi* 111; my trans.)²³²

Until the very end, Natsuko's depictions of her period and intimacy are detailed and frank. In relation to this detail, Fuse says that this indicates that she “is not a virgin nor a mother, the period of moratorium is getting longer in contemporary times, and this is probably what it represents” (170; my trans.).²³³ So, Natsuko is defined in relation to others: she is not a virgin, like Midoriko, nor a mother, like Makiko. She is undergoing a “moratorium” phase, which is a psychological status that indicates “the process of searching for

²³¹ Hansen explains the link between Kawakami and Ichiyō by claiming that Midoriko “has ended up in what is perhaps the worst positioning of all: aware yet unable to escape the entrapment of her own female body. The convergence of this duality—aware subject and destined object—is the point at which contradictive femininity becomes thematised through the link between Higuchi's and Kawakami's novels” (73).

²³² 「わたしは風呂場に行って服を脱いで、パンツについたナプキンを剥がしてじっと見た、血はほとんどついてなく、ティッシュにくるんでから、新しいのを装着してすぐにはけるようにしてバスタオルのうえに置き、浴室に入って熱い湯を浴びた」(111)

²³³ 「〈処女でもなく母でもない、モラトリアム〉の〈期間が長くなっている〉現代という時代を映したものであるかもしれない」(Fuse 170)

meaningful adult roles and values but have not yet formed firm commitments” (Kroger 208). According to Fuse, “there are no answers to the question of ‘why am I here in this body?’ ‘I,’ gazes at her own female naked body, and the novella closes leaving this question open” (170; my trans.).²³⁴

Natsuko is a full-grown woman who does not fit social roles traditionally assigned to women (wife and mother). Kawakami suggests that times have changed for women:

In the past, women got their periods, became adults, then got married, had children and became mothers. Their “adult” life was around a decade, from twelve or thirteen until twenty-two or twenty-three. Whereas now women are getting married later, so it’s close to twenty years. It has doubled, so this means there’s more time to think and suffer [about having children or not]. (“Ie” 351; my trans.)²³⁵

Despite these sociocultural pressures or ideals, Kawakami does not have one answer for the readers. A possible reading of this novella is that our bodies are all we have. We are first and foremost embodied subjects and our agency will always be caught up in bodily and sociocultural issues. Menstruation, pregnancy and mothering are collective experiences that have too often remained invisible and in silence. Kawakami’s *Chichi to ran* is one of those few times in which they are visibilized and vocalized, making it one of the strongest contemporary feminist portrayals of embodiment and its connections to beauty, reproduction and agency.

²³⁴ 「〈なぜこの体の中に私はいるのか、という問い〉に対して何の回答も得られないまま〈わたし〉は己の、女の裸身を凝視し、つまりは問い続けるままで物語を閉じる」(Fuse 170)

²³⁵ 「昔は生理が来たら〈子供〉から〈大人〉になり、間もなく結婚・出産して〈母親〉になった〈大人〉の期間はせいぜい十二、三歳から二十二、三歳くらいの十年だった。ところが、今結婚するのが遅くなり、二十年近くもある。二倍あるんですから、考えてしまう時間も悩みも増えるわけです」 (“Ie” 351)

Chapter Five

Conclusions: A comparative view of female embodiment

On March 5th, 2016, Kirino participated in a panel titled “Female Writers Challenging Social Taboos: Transcending Gender, Religion, and Community” at Tokyo International Literary Festival together with Malaysian writer Dina Zaman, Philippine writer Jhoanna Cruz and Thai moderator Prabda Yoon. This event’s report states that:

According to Kirino, her inspiration comes from the uncomfortable, strange feeling that she’s experienced living as a woman in Japan...[she] bristled at the thought of resigning herself to the stay-at-home lifestyle of a full-time housewife. That aversion to abiding by the ‘way things are,’ she says, is what began opening her eyes to the possibilities of writing. (“Program”)

The sentiment of resisting to accept the ‘way things are’ and using writing as a subversive force is at the basis of texts written by multiple generations of women writers—feminist writers—across the globe. As Hirsch explains, plots centered on the female experience “attempt to subvert the constraint of dominant patterns by means of various ‘emancipatory strategies’—the revision of endings, beginnings, patterns of progression. This process of resistance, revision and emancipation in the work of women writers is, as Nancy K. Miller has argued, a *feminist* act defining a *feminist* poetics and it needs to be identified as such” (8). It also becomes important to clarify that these feminist acts of resistance, subversion, revision and emancipation are by no means limited to women writers as feminist literature can be found over the gender spectrum. Therefore, following both Miller’s and Hirsch’s considerations, this dissertation studies not only women writers marked by their gender

identity, but also *feminist* writers “who define themselves by their dissenting relation to dominant tradition” (Hirsch 8).

A few months later, on June 28th, 2016, writers Itō Hiromi and Kawakami Mieko were brought together in a talk event titled “*Haha de, onna de, mono kaki de*” 母で、女で、ものの書きで (As a writer, woman and mother) hosted by *fujin kōron* 婦人公論 (ladies’ forum/review) for their 100-year anniversary. *Fujin kōron*, founded in 1916, has had a long history of launching women’s writings as well as promoting the importance of thinking about and discussing women issues. Itō and Kawakami discussed pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing, marriage and divorce, the bodily transformations as we grow old, and the struggles of being a writer. They also mentioned that they have read each other’s works (“Taidan ikitemo” 163). Kawakami commented that after reading Itō’s works, she felt that she has gone through several experiences represented in her own writings (163). She also referred to Itō as a poet “*senpai*” 先輩 (“senior” or “mentor”) while Itō congratulated Kawakami for her work, and even mentioned that *Chichi to ran* particularly resonates with her own personal literary style. In their conversation they mentioned that despite their twenty-year age difference and despite living in different places, they found common concerns and similar realizations. In recent editions of “Monkey Business,” a magazine of contemporary Japanese literature in English, Kawakami’s and Ito’s works were published side-by-side. In a more recent event, on October 1st, 2016, Kawakami participated in a talk event at Shibuya Mark City. As well as stressing the importance of doing things for ourselves rather than to please others, she also mentioned that she was in the middle of reading Kirino’s more recent novel *Saru no miru yume* 猿の見る夢 (The dream seen by a monkey, 2016).

Their participation at these literary events speaks of the current literary climate and context in which Kawakami, Kirino and Itō move, and some of the connections we can

draw between these authors. Yet, up until now the three of them have not gathered together, and have not been compared academically. In this concluding chapter, I aim to put their works into dialogue and expound the benefits of reading their works together from a feminist and gendered perspective. I will present a comparative analysis identifying common themes and motifs in their depiction of female and maternal embodiment in the works studied in this dissertation.

The starting point of this dissertation's approach to the different representations of the female body is the notion of body as text, and that all texts are cultural (Bordo; Grosz). I share Grosz's understanding of the body and body writing:

The body becomes a 'text' and is fictionalized and positioned within myths and belief systems that form a culture's social narratives and self-representations. In some cultural myths, this means that the body can be read as an agent, a laboring, exchanging being, a subject of social contracts, and thus of rights and responsibilities; in others, it becomes a body shell capable of being overtaken by the other's messages (for example, in shamanism or epilepsy). Social narratives create their characters and plots through the textualization of the body's contours and organic outlines by means of the tools of body writing. (119)

The different portrayals of female and maternal bodies analyzed in this dissertation reveal sociocultural myths that allow us to read the bodies as being fluid and always changing. At times these bodies are controlled or seem to follow predetermined paths; at others they act as empowered agents. In some cases, they seem to be merely a shell. In addition, I contend that Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami are concerned with the unresolved question of agency: they address the tensions between bodily biological determination and sociocultural determination versus agency. In addition, these texts are positioned within Japanese culture

and society, its myths and belief systems regarding motherhood and gender, while also having a transnational context. Thus, they also deal with global issues regarding female embodiment and beauty and maternal ideals.

In general, Kirino's *Tokyo jima* demythologizes the patriarchal myth; that is to say, the myth of natural male supremacy or a male-dominated, patriarchal order and society. Kirino criticizes the position of women in such a society, and dismantles gender, ethnic and class power structures from a sociological and political point of view. Itō's poetry is representative of the Japanese "I-novel" (*shishōsetsu* 私小説) literary tradition as it is highly subjective and personal. Itō also presents a psychoanalytical approach to embodiment, appealing perhaps to a shared dimension of female experiences. Thus, we find in her words a desire to connect with other women regardless of their differences, yet at the same time, there is always the recognition of the particular/individual dimension. Itō's texts fissure the Symbolic Order, and this is her particular way of subverting patriarchy. In the Symbolic Order, the phallus operates as the main signifier of desire and power. In Itō's depiction of both abject and joyous experiences, desire and power are centered on the female and maternal body, which undermines the symbolic masculine order. Finally, in *Chichi to ran*, Kawakami carries Higuchi Ichiyō's torch—locating her novella within a larger tradition of Japanese women writers—while simultaneously denouncing current cultural and economical mechanisms at work regarding female body control and beauty myths in a male-dominated society. Hence, *Chichi to ran*'s narrative is developed locally and this is also accentuated by being written in *Osaka-ben* (Osaka dialect).

Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami have their own particular way—an unconventional and subversive way—to address bodily experiences and make them an important part of their narrations. They break taboos and reclaim female and maternal embodiment and sexuality.

Together, they deal with sociocultural expectations of women and their bodies, and they engage with issues that are socially and culturally significant in contemporary Japanese and global society such as: beauty myths, maternal myths, menstruation, sexuality, and aging, among others. Therefore, a common function of their works is that they dismantle different sociocultural myths and taboos regarding gender and motherhood.

Another general characteristic shared by these works is that they show an awareness of the individual, particular and personal dimension of female embodiment in connection to a more sociocultural, general and collective dimension. Firstly, Kirino's *Tokyo jima* narration relies largely on one woman, Kiyoko. It is thus a narrative centered on a particular, individual woman, yet the readership is encouraged to think that there would be a similar outcome if the leading role were to be played by any other woman. Hence, it also appeals to the position of women in general in patriarchal society. The differences between Kiyoko and the other Filipino women—and between themselves—depicted in the novel manage to portray women without essentializing them in an undifferentiated category. In addition, Kiyoko's remarks often recognize the interplay between her body—the personal—and the island—the social. Secondly, in Itō's work, coexisting with her highly personal and subjective remarks, we also find that she appeals to a shared experience by women of different generations and places, hence the associations with a more general and transnational experience of the feminine. Thirdly, Kawakami's protagonists utter both micro and macro appreciations, which show that roles and attitudes in the local or personal level mirror or reproduce models that are happening at the societal level. The narrative centers on the lives of three particular women while inviting the reader to empathize with and criticize the situation of “precarial” women in Japan (Abe Auestad 2). Therefore, when reading these works we can access a personal/subjective dimension of the female body experience that contributes to an understanding of gender dynamics in Japan.

The final common thread linking these three writers is the centrality of the body to their texts and how they problematize dominant ideas and stereotypes of the female body. This dissertation is concerned with the representation of the female body from a twofold perspective, as Grosz explains:

The specificities of the female body, its particular nature and bodily cycles—menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, lactation, etc.—are in one case regarded as a limitation on women’s access to the rights and privileges patriarchal culture accords to men; in the other, in more positive and uncritical terms not uncommon to some feminist epistemologists and eco-feminists, the body is seen as a unique means of access to knowledge and ways of living. (15)

I argue that an analysis of the representation of the female body in the works of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami reveal its control and oppression in a male-dominated society. However, more importantly, they also show how embodiment and subjectivity are connected, and the multiple ways the female body can be known, inhabited, experienced, freed and ultimately, re-signified. In this concluding chapter, I aim to articulate the ways in which these authors—together—offer new ways of thinking about and experiencing the female body, and also offer feminist critiques to gender systems and the myth of motherhood by identifying common themes amongst their works and their five key takeaways regarding menstruation and menopause; the maternal body: pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding; motherhood and mother-child relationships; beauty myths and the commodification of the female body; and ecofeminism.

5.1. Menstruation and menopause

The themes of menstruation and menopause are addressed upfront both in Itō’s and Kawakami’s work. They both are direct and outright when they talk about experiences of

women's lives and bodies, especially menstruation. This is a key portrayal that contributes to raising an awareness of our bodies as leaky. This is worth noting because menstruation has been widely treated as a taboo subject, but not by these two authors. For instance, Kawakami says: "Aren't women's menstruation and breasts part of our way of living? I didn't feel any resistance to talk about this. I wanted to deal with the issues of what kind of life we are living, and how do we live with the parts beyond our will (body and sex), what is all that about" ("Intabyū" 1; my trans.).²³⁶ In this quote we notice that Kawakami is interested in the question of agency, as she is concerned with body processes that are out of our control—such as menstruation—and how they affect our very ways of living. In fact, one of Midoriko's issues with menstruation is how to embrace something that will come regardless of her will. On Itō's side, her body has always been a central part of her writings and she actually says that "writing about something you feel scared of, ashamed or embarrassed of, writing about that is the best way to start" ("Personal"). Both literary depictions deal with the struggle towards accepting menstruation, but they also include an admiration or a positive appreciation of menstruation.

Even when both Itō and Kawakami use the word "gekkei" 月経 to refer to menstruation, in Itō's texts this word is reclaimed to refer to women's experience from the point of view of women themselves removing it from an exclusive medical, textbook setting. In Kawakami's depiction, menstruation is a marker of one's sexual life, whereas in Itō's depiction, the experience of menstruation changes depending on the stage of a woman's life. Both show the cyclic nature of menstruation: In *Chichi to ran* Midoriko represents menstruation and Makiko menopause, and in Itō's poetry both menstruation and menopause are interconnected as they are experiences engraved within a genealogy of

²³⁶ 「女性の生理や乳は私たちの生きている姿そのものではないだろうか。これについて話すのに特に抵抗感を感じなかった。私たちは果たしてどんな人生を生きていくのか、自身の意志でどうにもできない部分（身体や性別）を持って生きていくのがどうということかという点を扱いたかった」 ("Intabyū" 1)

women. In both portrayals, menstruation is a private experience that nonetheless can be seen as a potentially connecting bond among menstruating people in a family.

Both authors write about menstrual napkins and how they affect and mediate our relationship with our own bodies, and they also address the question of menstrual leakage: In “Vinegar, Oil” (“Suyu”) Itō explains how women avoided visibility of stains in the past, and in *Chichi to ran* Kawakami explains how bloodstains are still dreaded in the present, and probably will continue to be so. Hence, in both portrayals we can identify a critical view on the so-called “menstrual etiquette.” It is worth noting that the particular sections regarding menstrual products were based on their own personal experiences. Itō’s trademark subjective style continues to characterize her portrayal of menstruation, but also, Kawakami says that the episode between Kuni-chan and Midoriko is based on her own experience; “it is a scene that emerged from the complementary relationship between fiction and reality” (“Intabyū” 2; my trans.).²³⁷

Chichi to ran also describes certain unpleasant or uncomfortable aspects of menstruation. Both Kawakami’s and Itō’s depiction agree on describing menstruation as an annoyance. There is certain negativity in their descriptions. In *Chichi to ran* Midoriko and Makiko both refuse to accept their bodily processes and it is clear that they do not feel comfortable in their own skin. These are the type of girls and women—in denial of their own bodies—who often contact Itō for advice. In addition, Natsuko’s rendering of her own menstrual experience in *Chichi to ran* is honest and raw, resembling Itō’s poetic voice and subjective tone. Both Kawakami’s narrator “I” (“*watashi*” 私) and Itō’s poetic persona reveal how growing up usually leads to an acceptance of menstruation. Yet, in Itō’s case menstruation is also a strong indicator of our mental and bodily health. Hence, in Itō’s words, we find positive aspects of menstruation as well.

²³⁷ 「実際と虚構の相互補完的な関係の中で場面が作られたりもする」 (“Intabyū” 2)

Finally, in Kirino's *Tokyo jima*, menstruation is only mentioned once and its depiction is reduced to being an indicator of Kiyoko's pregnancy. Hence, like most of literary representations of menstruation this one is largely characterized by its very absence. The absence of menstruation in literature also has to do with its taboo status. For example, when looking at Higuchi Ichiyō's texts—considered revolutionary for her times—menstruation is suggested but not addressed directly. Nowadays, authors like Kawakami and Itō write in a more open and direct way about menstruation. Therefore, we can trace an evolution, a transition towards a more open and direct narrative of the female body that refuses any type of censorship. Although this type of narrative is increasing within contemporary women writers, who are gaining more recognition as they win more literary prizes and reach more readers inside and outside of Japan, this type of depiction has not spread within the literary canon.

Menstruation and pregnancy are intimately related; an awareness of our menstrual cycle will allow us to identify our most fertile days, or the time where we are most likely to get pregnant. Menstruation in literature is often reduced to this one capacity. This limited portrayal of menstruation, such as in *Tokyo jima*, does not gain the sympathy of the readership since there is a large group of “menstruators” (menstruating people) that cannot relate to that specific function of menstruation; for example, young girls entering puberty, anyone who is actively avoiding pregnancy, transgendered men, or women in menopause. For this reason, it is important to find narratives like Kawakami's novella or Itō's poetry that represent more diverse menstrual experiences. The mere presence of menstrual imagery and conversations about different aspects of menstruation favors a healthier socialization of menstruation, and it also raises awareness of the stigmas around menstruation. Yet, there is still a need for more narratives that account for more diverse menstrual experiences.

5.2. The maternal body: pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding

The depiction of different experiences concerning the maternal body is definitely a common ground among all three authors, and read together they provide a mosaic of portrayals of motherhood.

The depiction of pregnant embodiment in Kirino's *Tokyo jima* evokes images found in Itō's texts. They both describe early pregnancy symptoms, discuss alienation and splitting subjectivity during pregnancy, and emphasize the physical transformation that the pregnant body experiences.

As Poston has pointed out, the uses of birth imagery are prolific in literature, but childbirth as it is—the physical and emotional experience of childbirth—is rarely included in literary depictions (20). However, in Kirino's and Itō's texts we find a more literal depiction. It is not necessarily more realistic, but it is worth underscoring. Both depictions emphasize bodily fluids and materiality; the female body is uncontained and excessive. Thus, the act is considered a threat to the stability of the symbolic order (Copeland, "Mythical" 21). The emphasis on body fluids characterizes the body as leaky. Both Kirino and Itō use the word "*haishutsu*" 排出 ("excrete," "discharge") to refer to childbirth, likening childbirth to any other body fluid that the body releases or expels. Expulsion involves permeating and trespassing our own limits and exposes the boundaries of our bodies. Thus, the female body, due to its excessive nature, threatens the coherence and stability of one's contained and "clean" self, to paraphrase Kristeva (*Powers* 53). In addition, the word "*haishutsu*" also denotes an involuntary capacity of one's body. Therefore, childbirth can also be understood in terms of bodily functions (excretion and expulsion), allowing us to understand the workings of the female body.

Both Kirino's and Itō's portrayals do not fit sanitized or idealized images of childbirth. One belongs to fiction and privileges imagination, and the other one belongs to autobiographical poetry/prose privileging lived experience. On the one hand, Kirino's treatment of childbirth is not realistic—she uses parody to mock the myth of the natural mother. On the other hand, Itō's portrayal is grounded in her own experience, which grants her authenticity, and it is characterized by her symbolic link between birth and defecation.

Both of their renderings of pregnancy and childbirth reflect ambivalence, capability and empowerment—Itō's suggests full confidence and Kirino's suggests strength and survival drive. They also address the presence of others during childbirth—a process that can only be faced individually. Even when childbirth is an “act of essential solitude” in the sense that it is an act that no one else can do for us, solitude does not equate to loneliness and thus, the importance of recognizing the role played by members of a community surrounding the birthing woman (Poston 29).

Also, they problematize the tension between pregnancy and agency: Is pregnancy a choice? Pregnancy can be a decision, or perhaps, should be a decision, but it is rarely lived as such. This is yet again another facet of the tension between agency and different types of determinism—biological and sociocultural. Particularly in *Chichi to ran* there are external voices telling women what to do or how to feel, and in *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko is constantly being told what to do by Manta, the messenger of the island's leader, Mori Gunshi. Despite the clear impact of different conditions, the fact remains that our female characters refuse (or attempt to refuse) to accept external orders, favoring agency and building on the importance of choosing one's own lifestyle rather than following a predetermined path. All texts are therefore against imposed motherhood—as it should be a choice, even when often it is not.

Additionally, the nexus between pregnancy and abortion, and the theme of infanticide, are also evident in both Kirino's and Itō's work. In Kawakami's *Chichi to ran* we find a subtle use of abortion imagery in Midoriko's notes when she meditates on her upcoming menstruation as an indication of a possible pregnancy and the prospect of becoming a mother, a thought that makes her angry and scared, and with a desire to remove whatever is in an unborn state inside her. The decision to end or to continue one's pregnancy also puts in evidence the question of agency—in *Tokyo jima* pregnancy and childbirth happen against, or regardless of, Kiyoko's will, as it is an unwanted pregnancy as a result of rape, whereas in Itō's texts we find different choices at different times in her life. A connection between life and death also emerges as they voice their concerns about both infant and maternal mortality in relation to childbirth.

In both portrayals we can also identify the tension between agency and bodily and societal determinism when the body takes over at the time of birth. Their characters/personas cannot stop pushing; hence, birth is portrayed as an imminent, unstoppable reality of the female body experience. However, another major difference between them is that Kiyoko experiences fear, and would have preferred to avoid pregnancy and childbirth altogether. In contrast, Itō's narrator masturbates at the thought of childbirth, and even when Itō describes it as a painful event, she seems to embrace it. Hence, contrary to Kiyoko's case, in Itō's works pregnancy and childbirth are, to some extent, enjoyable and pleasurable.

Kawakami's *Chichi to ran* exemplifies the use of birth imagery without addressing any actual depiction of childbirth. In the scene representing the rebirth of Makiko and Midoriko's relationship, renewing their mother/daughter bond, in which they are smashing eggs and different fluids on each other we find similar imagery to Kirino's and Itō's depictions of birth. It is the emphasis on body fluids that reveals the leakiness of the

female body. The three selected authors depict the body as being permeable, fluid and threatening to stability and coherence: that is to say, as an abject body that is disrupting the masculine symbolic order. Moreover, I contend that they go beyond such a fixed, negative definition of abjection: Kirino's use of parody, Itō's emphasis on pleasure, and Kawakami's symbolic re-birth and catharsis of the mother/daughter bond work together to reclaim the female body experience in a more positive light.

In Kirino's *Tokyo jima* readers find a nuanced depiction of sexuality and motherhood, but ultimately there is a transition: once Kiyoko becomes pregnant she stops being sexual. However, Kirino depicts both pregnancy and sexuality in terms of strategic weapons for survival. In *Chichi to ran* sexuality and motherhood are treated as opposites; here, breasts are objectified and commodified by beauty standards, subjected to invasive procedures, and also, considered disruptive of the borders between mothering and sexuality, whereas in Itō's poetry breasts are a fluid place of independent pleasure. In Itō's work, sexuality and motherhood coexist and the maternal is in fact a source of sexual enjoyment. The inclusion of masturbation, over-eating and breastfeeding are all sites of *jouissance*.

There is also a strong contrast between Kawakami and Itō's depiction of breasts that sag. In *Chichi to ran* we find an ageist look at breasts that sag; the fact that sagging breasts can be representative of mothering and experience is not reflected in Kawakami's novella. In opposition, Itō's poetic admiration towards sagging breasts elicits a kind of respect that recognizes knowledge and experience in the older women's breasts. This contrast adds to the following dichotomy in their portrayal of breasts: In Kawakami's *Chichi to ran*, ideal breasts are hard and solid *objects*. They are exploitable commodities that can be bought and sold. On the contrary, in Itō's work, breasts are fluid and an intrinsic part of one's subjectivity. *Chichi to ran* reveals that an underlying cause of low self-esteem and self-worth might be the objectification of breasts in a male-dominated society, whereas

Itō's poetry explores breasts, breastfeeding and sensual sensitivity from the point of view of the mother herself.

Chichi to ran exposes how, in general, breasts are sexually objectified and commercially commodified, but when they are actively engaged in one of their basic biological and social functions, breastfeeding—a potential instance of female agency and empowerment—they are actually rejected. Despite Itō's contrastingly positive depiction of breastfeeding, it is not idealized as the ultimate bonding between mother and child either.

There is an image of breastfeeding that coincides in all three selected texts; that is, shriveled and emptied breasts after/during breastfeeding. The reader knows that Kiyoko (from *Tokyo jima*), Makiko (from *Chichi to ran*), and several mothers in Itō's poetry, breastfed and had enough milk to feed their respective babies. Yet, "full" is not the word used to depict breastfeeding breasts but rather "shriveled breasts" (*Tokyo jima*), "withered" ("Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary"), and "empty" (*Chichi to ran*). This particular imagery addresses the transformation of the breasts due to breastfeeding, and without directly saying that the mother is tired from breastfeeding all day, their rendering captures the feeling of being emptied by one's baby. This imagery demystifies the ideal image of breastfeeding as a manifestation of maternal love through an acknowledgement of the emptiness experienced by mothers, which by extension alludes to the frustration and exhaustion felt when nourishing and feeding *others*.

The literary depictions of breastfeeding examined do not emphasize it being a mother's duty nor a manifestation of maternal love. Itō's depiction is nuanced. Breastfeeding is a source of pleasure and bliss but in "Killing Kanoko" breast milk is a reminder of the narrator's abortion. Hence, breastfeeding and/or the production of breast milk are depicted as a physiological activity, as something the female/maternal body does (Itō and Miyata 46, qtd. in Tilton-Cantrell 177). Kirino's depiction also resonates with

breastfeeding as a physiological activity from the perspective of expelled fluids, rather than a sentimental act.

Finally, I would like to add yet another dimension of pregnancy and childbirth from the perspective of Kawakami and Itō, as they discussed about this theme during the talk event hosted by *fujin kōron* 婦人公論. Here, Kawakami said: “when I gave birth, I thought to myself: ‘I did not know anything up until now’” (“Taidan ikitemo” 164-165; my trans.)²³⁸. In response, Itō said: “Everything about the bodily changes that came with pregnancy and childbirth was interesting... The repetition of gazing at my body, and writing about it, made all the fears disappear once I became menopausal” (165; my trans.)²³⁹. In both cases we can grasp a positive reassessment of the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth as a potential source of knowledge and courage.

5.3. Motherhood and mother-daughter plots

This section’s title is borrowed from Marianne Hirsch’s *The Mother/Daughter Plot* in which she studies the voices and stories of mothers and daughters, “female figures neglected by psychoanalytic theories and submerged in traditional plot structures” (Hirsch 3). Hirsch acknowledges that narratives focused on the representations of the maternal experience are few (Orbaugh, “Ōba” 266). She finds that psychoanalytic feminism includes the perspective of the female child thus opening a space for women to speak as daughters, however, “it has difficulty accounting for the experience and the voice of the adult woman who is a mother” (Hirsch 12). It is worth noting that her study focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century women writers from Western Europe and North America, and she finds that “mothers tend to be absent, silent or devalued,” or when present, they

²³⁸ 「自分が出産したとき...自分は今まで何も知らなかったって思いましたの」 (“Taidan ikitemo” 164-165)

²³⁹ 「妊娠も出産も、それにとまなうからだの変化は全部面白かったですね...からだを見つめて書くことを繰り返して、更年期になったら怖いものがなくなりましたね」 (165)

are often written from “daughterly perspectives” (Hirsch 14-15). In Orbaugh’s words, “there are, of course, a large number of narratives by daughters speaking *about* mothers or maternity” (“Ōba” 267).

In addition, in Japanese literature written by male authors the recurrent motif of “missing the absent mother” prioritizes the idealization of motherhood from the perspective of the son over the reality of the actual mothers (Ikoma, “To Miss”). Copeland calls this literary motif the “mother obsession,” characterized by “maternal love and the longing for an absent mother” (“Mother” 136-137 qtd. in McKinlay par.8) In fact, the absence of the mother appears to be a necessary condition for “maternal love” and respect, which are constitutive of the idealization of motherhood by male authors (Ikoma, “To Miss”). For example, this motif can be found in narratives by renowned male authors across generations, such as: Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867-1916), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886-1965), Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971), Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899-1972), Nosaka Akiyuki 野坂昭如 (1930-2015), Ōe Kenzaburo 大江健三郎 (b.1935), Nakagami Kenji 中上健次 (1946-1992), and Lily Franky (b.1963) (Copeland, “Mother” 136-137; Mc.Kinlay par 8; Ikoma “To Miss”).²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Ueno Chizuko’s study of the representation of mother in Postwar literature by male authors based on Etō Jun’s 江藤淳 (1932-1999) *Seijuku to sōshitsu: “haha” no hōkai 成熟と喪失—“母”の崩壊* (Maturity and loss: the disintegration of the “mother,” 1993) is worth including here as well. Ueno points out that Etō Jun’s book deals with the theme of motherhood by going beyond the motif of the “loss of mother,” and towards the “disintegration of motherhood” (Ueno, *Modern* 163). Etō associates the maternal principle with agricultural culture and also points out that “behind ‘dominant mother’ is ‘shameful father’” (163). Also, Etō’s analysis looks exclusively at mother-son relationships—characterized by the “incompetent son.” Hence, Ueno decided to fill in this gap by analyzing the role of the daughter, which she describes as the “irritating daughter.” About the mother-child relationships it is worth highlighting that Etō claims it changed significantly after modernization: in agrarian society mothers are busy working, hence the close bond between mother-child “occurred only after and only where mothers were expelled from production and became ‘full-time mothers’ whose identities relied solely on being mothers” (165). Ueno also points to the association between wives and mothers by Japanese men: “their wives are forced forever to take on the role of ‘merciful, tolerant mother’” (170). For more see Ueno *Modern*.

In contrast, when studying Japanese women writers we find narratives featuring “present” mothers; that is to say, narrative voices centered on the mother. These are women characters that become mothers throughout the story and speak from a motherly perspective. This is what Orbaugh calls “maternalism” or “mother-centered discourse” when studying Ōba Minako’s work (267). This notion of “maternalism” together with a portrayal of the complex dynamics between mother-child, and the interplay between motherly and daughterly perspectives can be identified in the selected works by Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami.

Out of the selected texts, *Chichi to ran* is perhaps the one which gives a larger narrative voice to the daughter in the story: Midoriko. *Chichi to ran* also reconfigures the mother-daughter dyad because of the introduction of a “mediating figure” between the two, thus forming a triangular model of female family relations (Abe Auestad 4). In *Tokyo jima* the perspectives of both son and daughter are also shared in the end, and play an important role in the overall outcome of the story, and the storyline privileges the mother-daughter bond by separating mother and son. In Itō’s work we find a mother writing *about* her daughters—especially Kanoko who plays a significant role in her poetry, yet in other works Itō also writes *about* her own mother and father. Therefore, in the selected works we find an interaction between motherly and daughterly perspectives.

In *Chichi to ran* Makiko represents a mother that feels she has lost her body and herself for her daughter. Yet, in her strong desire to pursue something for herself, she also challenges the idea that mothers find this loss in order to feed and care for *others* gratifying (Bordo 18). In Kirino’s *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko is selfish and egocentric. Her strong survival drive leads to always putting herself first, and thus she also refuses to fit the image of a mother who puts her children first. In Itō’s poetry, the focus is on self-care and self-pleasure. She also stands against an ideology of extreme self-sacrifice. Consequently,

the portrayals of motherhood herein studied defy the notion of the so-called “ideal mother,” who is presumed to be all giving and nourishing. Instead, the mothers depicted by Kirino, Kawakami and Itō have desires and act upon desires of their own.

Their portrayals can be placed within a larger resistance and critique to the “good wife, wise mother” ideology. To start with, none of them confines motherhood to heterosexual marriage and/or romantic love. *Tokyo jima* parodies marriage and depicts an unwanted pregnancy caused by rape; *Chichi to ran* tells the story of a single mother; and Itō’s literature as a whole portrays a diversity of experiences regarding motherhood or parenting: divorce, different partners, adoption, and same-sex desire among others.

A commonality between Kawakami’s *Chichi to ran* and Itō’s *Onna no isshō* is the awareness of self-esteem, self-acceptance, and body shame and empowerment being shared and/or transferred from mother to daughter. Midoriko feels rejected by her mother in connection to her mother’s rejection of her own body. Despite being in conflict with her mother, she reproduces her behavior. As a result, she rejects the bodily changes entailed in puberty and struggles with self-esteem. Itō addresses this same theme—mothering and self-esteem—in a more direct and affirmative way than Kawakami’s subtleness and negativity. Itō is rather straightforward about the importance of teaching one’s own daughter about self-confidence or self-affirmation (*jiko kōtei* 自己肯定); that is to say, have a willingness to choose and “make one’s own happiness” (*Onna* 105; my trans.).²⁴¹ Another similarity between *Chichi to ran* and Itō’s poetry framed within mother/daughter plots is the depiction of the force of writing. For Midoriko, writing is therapeutic, her notes are a way to release her concerns, and in Itō’s texts we often find references to the act of writing and to the healing power of words.

²⁴¹ 「自分がしあわせになる」 (*Onna* 105)

Furthermore, Itō's image of babies biting the mother's nipples refers to the ever-present conflict between mother and child. In "Killing Kanoko," for instance, both mother and daughter experience feelings of anger and aggression. This same conflict between mother and daughter is also explored in *Chichi to ran* through the communication wall between them, and in its climactic scene in which Midoriko breaks her silence she pokes her mother's eyes. The depiction of not only aggressive mothers but also daughters (children) defies "mother mythology"—in which there are no bad children but only bad mothers, to paraphrase Thurer. *Chichi to ran*'s general open-endedness—as the reader does not know what happens next, and the story's main conflict is left unresolved—suggests a continuation of the conflict between mother and daughter. Similarly, Itō's poems' narratives are often also left open, especially the ones addressing a constant tension between mother and daughter, such as "Healing Kanoko's Rash." Perhaps the bond between mother and daughter is meant to always be conflictive. Conflict is unavoidable and it is also an opportunity to learn and grow from.

Another important aspect of these plots is their critical position vis-à-vis the so-called "maternal love" ("boseiai" 母性愛). In Kirino's *Tokyo jima* its absence is made explicit. In fact, it exposes that it is not a natural, innate quality of mothers, but rather a sociocultural construct. Likewise, Itō writes "boseiai" ぼせいあい in hiragana—her own way of adding quotation marks—stripping it off from all the connotations pinned to the "good wife, wise mother" ideology. Depictions of motherly love in *Chichi to ran* are also stripped off from idealized notions of perfection. All of the selected works depict mothers that live for themselves and not exclusively for their children, who have ambivalent feelings, and thus firmly stand against an ideology of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. In debunking the naturalization of maternal instinct we also find allusions to non-biological motherhood or adoption, as well as alienation during pregnancy, particularly in Kirino's

Tokyo jima and in Itō's work.²⁴² They all display a level of dependency between mother as primary caregivers and child; yet resist idealizing and naturalizing the mother-child dyad. Therefore, these texts invite mothers to embrace their ambivalence, imperfections and conflictive relationship with their children.

As mentioned, the selected narratives privilege the mother and daughter plot over other family relations. In *Chichi to ran* Midoriko's father is mostly absent: he has no voice of his own, yet he appears through Makiko's speech and their meeting precedes the novella's climactic scene taking place at Natsuko's kitchen. Here, Natsuko throws away an old salad dressing described with imagery that may allude to the father's sperm (a white and thick liquid), thus accentuating the distance between them and him. Comparably, in *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko's son is snatched away, and she decides to leave him behind, and by doing so, she cuts all possible ties with the boy's two possible fathers as well. In Itō's poetry we do find the presence of the father—her own, and her daughters' father—but, in many of the analyzed poems the father is completely ignored, and they are mostly centered on her subjectivity as a mother and her relationship with her daughters.

Lastly, the theme of motherhood in terms of the presence of motherly perspectives and voices has also been explored by the selected authors in different works. Kawakami wrote *Kimi wa akachan* 君は赤ちゃん (You are my baby, 2014) a non-fiction book based on her experience of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and caring for her son during his first year of life. It feels like an intimate journal, thus Kawakami invites the readers to follow her transformation into a mother. She describes the funny, loving, sad, and painful aspects of this experience. The depiction of body transformations during pregnancy is

²⁴² Despite these allusions, this dissertation deals largely with the experiences of biological mothers. For a more comprehensive study of female embodiment and motherhood there is a need to look at more diverse experiences. For example, the experience of surrogate mothers, transgender and x-gender parents, same-sex parenting, experiences of disability in relation to parenting, foster families and adoption, among others.

detailed and loaded with comic overtones. For example, at some point, she describes the changes of her nipples, and realizes that in *Chichi to ran* when she describes nipples as being “dark-red,” like “American cherries,” she was wrong. Instead, she says that, “my nipples while pregnant, were the same black as the TV’s LCD screen. They were as black as the TV’s LCD (Liquid-Cristal-Display) screen when the TV is turned off” (*Kimi* 115; my trans.).²⁴³ The depiction of the labor and childbirth elicits both worry and empathy, as readers can connect to her own worries and the pain she feels during and after the Cesarean, but also to her feelings of gratitude and love for her newborn. In this book she also addresses the themes of emotional crisis, postpartum depression, and how her relationship with her husband was affected both positively and negatively throughout these experiences. She realizes that she was “pursuing an impossible ideal of motherhood,” and that “she must not be alone in this, and reflects on how oblivious to the lives of young mothers she had been until becoming one herself” (“You are my Baby”). This personal account is intertwined with general reflections about motherhood and Japanese culture and society, as she writes about the role of men and masculinity in childcare, the employment system, the social expectation that childcare is a mother’s entire responsibility, the prejudice against epidurals reflected in the medical system, prenatal chromosome tests, among others (“You are my Baby”).

Kimi wa akachan (2014) resonates with Itō’s *Yoi oppai, warui oppai* (1985) and her subsequent *Onaka, hoppe, oshiri* (1987/1993), both non-fiction books based on her own personal experience as a mother. Both of Itō’s books also feature her own illustrations, making it also “a visual text in which she performs her own ‘maternal body’” (Quimby 35). About *Yoi oppai, warui oppai*, Quimby stresses what I believe also holds true for *Onaka, hoppe, oshiri* and for Kawakami’s *Kimi wa akachan*: the very existence of these

²⁴³ 「妊娠中の乳首はね、液晶テレビの黒だったよ。電源を落としてるときの、液晶テレビの画面の黒、だったよ」(*Kimi* 115)

books “can be traced to an important goal of feminism: to provide accurate information about reproduction, birth control, and child care from a woman’s perspective rather from the perspective of the male dominated medical field” (35). Therefore, these autobiographical renderings of motherhood appraise women’s subjective perspective, and through the sharing of knowledge and experiences, they contribute to the empowerment of mothers in Japan.

Kirino’s overall work is filled with mother characters and protagonists, in which the mother-child relationship is relevant—such as *Out* アウト (1997; trans. 2003); *Riaru wārudo* リアル・ワールド (Real world, 2003; trans. 2008); *I’m Sorry, Mama* (2004); *Joshinki* 女神記 (The goddess chronicle, 2008; trans. 2013), and *Tamamoe!* (2005). The last title mentioned should be included, given that its protagonist is modeled after Kirino’s own mother (Gregus 25). *Hapinesu* ハピネス (Happiness, 2013) is perhaps the novel that deals with the theme of motherhood and contemporary society more directly. *Happiness* features a group of *mama-tomo* ママ友 (“mother friends”), young mothers who are caught up in rivalry, jealousy, gossip, and consumerism. It problematizes the idea of friendship and the creation of a network of support on the basis of motherhood, particularly when its members are prisoners of not only cultural ideals of motherhood, but also of elitist ideals integral to a capitalist economy vis-à-vis motherhood. With regards to *Happiness*’ outcome, Otomo writes that “mothers too exist inside the costume of ideal motherhood” and that Kirino’s novel calls “for their shedding of the costume and breaking of the spell cast in the dreamland of motherhood” (“Redrawing” 13). The title indicates a “possibility of happiness out there,” and a possibility of “self-liberation” (8).

Ideals of motherhood are pervasively entrenched in contemporary society; there seems to exist a sort of invisible imperative of ideal motherhood pressuring generations and generations of women and mothers. Thurer explains:

While women today are freer than their mothers to complain about domestic chores, on the maternity front they are as silent as ever; it is the last stronghold of Friedan's 'problem that has no name.' Our society simply refuses to know about a mother's experience—how being yoked to a little one all day transforms her. To confess to being in conflict about mothering is tantamount to being a bad person; it violates a taboo; and worse, it feels like a betrayal to one's child. In an age that regards mothers' negative feelings, even subconscious ones, as potentially toxic to their children, it has become mandatory to enjoy mothering. (Thurer chap.21)

Therefore, literary depictions—like the ones herein studied—that break the silences around the myths of motherhood, move away from the “ideal mother,” or reveal the ways in which this ideal puts pressure and oppresses mothers are already liberating for women, and empowering mothers. Sometimes motherhood is unwanted, or tough, or not enjoyable and this should be acknowledged.

5.4. Beauty myths and the commodification of the female body

Both Kirino and Kawakami deal with the female body as a potential commodity—a valuable *object* that can be bought and sold. In *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko's sexuality at times can be read as an empowering act, and at others it is being policed by masculine power. This duality is yet another side of the recurring problem of agency. Through Yamada and Kiyoko's sex scene in *Tokyo jima*, Kirino makes readers think about prostitution from a feminist perspective. This decision reveals the power of Kiyoko's survival instinct and how sometimes women are driven to use sex as an exploitable commodity. In addition, *Tokyo jima*'s depiction of the seven Filipino women—who worked in the entertainment business in Tokyo—also illustrates the intersectionality between ethnicity, class and

gender as they are subjected to working conditions in which the female body is often exploited. It is also an example of being members of the “precariat” in Japan.

Chichi to ran’s setting is also the “post-bubble, neo-liberalist Japan of the 2000s” in which “a new class of temporary workers called the precariat” has emerged (Abe Auestad 4). Makiko is a “precariat” (*purekariāto* プレカリアート) working as a hostess at a “snack-bar,” thus she also works in *mizushōbai* 水商売—nighttime entertainment business—where the female body is often objectified and commodified (11). However, her decision to enlarge her breasts can be seen as an example of *self*-commodification of one’s own body. Kawakami also addresses this theme through her references to Higuchi Ichiyō’s “Takekurabe”—a story featuring Midori, predestined to become a courtesan, and also deals with prostitution in terms of both sex work and coercive sex.

In both Kiyoko’s (*Tokyo jima*) and Makiko’s (*Chichi to ran*) case the question of agency and empowerment is at stake. Both women characters aim to change their predetermined paths in life. They struggle to exercise their agency vis-à-vis familial, bodily and sociocultural determination. As Ueno points out, even if there is a level of decision making on behalf of women who choose to exploit their own bodies, they are also reinforcing a patriarchal power structure in which the female body is objectified in terms of male desire (“Self-determination” 323).

It is also worth noting that both Kiyoko and Makiko are depicted as aging women, “middle-aged” women, hence, their struggles also raise questions about how older women are valued in Japan, where youth and beauty are valued commodities in different working places (Seaman, “Two” 5). This sociocultural pressure is evidenced in body control epitomized by “beauty myths,” in Wolf’s terms.

In *Chichi to ran* the beauty myth is evidenced when Makiko continues to get thinner and thinner. She also experiences ongoing concern with normality, regarding breast size

and nipple color. In *Tokyo jima*, in a “natural” context lacking media and commerce, Kiyoko is not only described as a fat person, but she is also being made fun of for being fat (in other words, fat-shamed). Yet, I suggest that Kirino redefines Kiyoko’s fat body as being strong, capable of survival, and fit for reproduction. Given that Itō struggled with eating disorders herself, her poetry reveals an awareness of that issue as a manifestation of body control in relation to beauty ideals and the oppression of the female body.

The question of body image is also entangled in the question of agency. An attempt to transform one’s body involves a dimension of self-determination and empowerment, yet at the same time, it also responds to body ideals and external mechanisms of body control. Or, to use Bordo’s and Foucault’s terminology, there is a notion of embodiment caught up in a tension between the “cultural plastic” and “docile bodies.” In *Chichi to ran* the thought of getting breast enhancement surgery allows Makiko to fantasize about being freed from bodily determination.

5.5. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism ties both ecological/environmental and feminist concerns as a result of male-dominated societies. As Gaard and Gruen explain,

Ecofeminism’s central claim is that these problems [environmental and feminist] stem from the mutually reinforcing oppression of humans and of the natural world. It is no longer possible to discuss environmental change without addressing social change; moreover, it is not possible to address women’s oppression without addressing environmental degradation. (277)

In *Tokyo jima* we can identify a concern in the way humanity has interacted with nature, and a specific warning against nuclear accidents and nuclear waste management in Japan. This theme is also evidenced in Kirino’s *Baraka* バラカ (2016), a novel depicting a

“post-nuclear disaster world” following the Fukushima daiichi nuclear disaster of March 2011 (“Program”). *Tokyo jima* shows the intersections between the issues of ethnicity, gender, and environment, and also hints at the need to solve them together (Shan 11). Actually, in Iwata-Weickgenannt’s study of Kirino’s *Metabora* メタボラ (Metabola, 2007) she concludes that the author “makes clear that crude binaries such as ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ or ‘exploiter’ and ‘exploited’ are of little use when faced with the complexly interwoven and entangled relationships of the world we live in today” (“Precarity” 153-154). It is this awareness that permeates her oeuvre, and it is what allows us to identify eco-feminist tones in her texts.

Itō has been called a “queer eco-poet” by Morita in his analysis of her poem “Chitō” (チトー) arguing that she “problematizes the boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality by implicitly questioning the ‘naturalness’ of pervasive heterosexuality” (101). I claim that eco-feminist tones can also be identified in other works by Itō, which deal with environmental and ethnic issues, and use nature’s imagery, such as the poems “Bad Breast” and “Moving,” and particularly, her novella *Kawara arekusa* (Wild grass on the river bank, 2005; trans. 2014).

The depiction of a plant in *Wild Grass on the River Bank* is also representative of the themes of migration and survival. Often deemed as weeds, these plants are also symbols of the “vitality” of migrants who learn to “flourish” in new environments (Angles, Translator’s Preface 14). Angles suggests that this novella or “long narrative poem can be read as a complex exploration of migration, adaptation, and emotional healing, all recounted in a surreal, eco-mythical mode of storytelling” (15).

The symbolic overlapping between nature and women, specifically nature and mothers, can be found in different cultural manifestations including theoretical and literary texts. The link between mother and nature has been criticized for often being used to

essentialize and naturalize maternal instincts, and thus contribute to the construction of motherhood myths. Alaimo poses a relevant question: “can we construct female alliances with nature that don’t mystify nature or pose women as essentially victims or mothers?” (133). I contend that Itō’s poetry and Kirino’s *Tokyo jima* can be considered as a possible response that portrays mothers and nature as active agents rather than passive victims. These comparisons are not based on their so-called passive victimization because they focus on active productivity. Borrowing Quimby’s words, here in those texts, maternal bodies are “vigorous, alive, and exceedingly productive” (31). Kirino’s depiction of the “natural mother” and “nature” is caricatured, thus making a clear point against the naturalization of motherhood.

Finally, I would like to tie this section regarding the domination of nature and women to the general thread connecting this dissertation: the depiction of the female body. According to Young,

It is not at all a matter of making a claim about women’s biology or bodies, for conceptualized in a radically different way, men’s bodies are at least as fluid as women’s. The point is that a metaphysics of self-identical objects has clear ties to the domination of nature in which the domination of women has been implicated because culture has projected onto us identification with the abject body. It makes a difference how we think about beings in the world, and we can make choices about it that seem to have political implications. A process metaphysics, a metaphysics of fluids, where the being of any location depends on its surrounding and where we cannot delineate clearly what is inside and outside, is a better way to think about the world from an ecological point of view. Inasmuch as women’s oppression derives to a significant

degree from literal and figurative objectification, I am suggesting, subverting the metaphysics of objects can also be liberating for women. (Young 80-81)

Young argues for a subversion of the “metaphysics of objects” or a transformation towards “a process metaphysics” or “metaphysics of fluids.” Here, she also points out that all bodies are fluid, but the associations between male-solid and female-fluid are a matter of conceptualization. Representations that objectify the female body have their share of responsibility when it comes to women’s oppression, which is also connected to the domination of nature. Countering those dominant representations, the ones that show the fluidity of the female body—such as the herein studied—and/or human embodiment in general, have the power of revealing the interrelationships between nature and humanity, contributing to the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important to have a holistic view that connects feminist, social and environmental causes, while recognizing the interplay between biology and culture.

Finally, to expound the benefits of reading these authors together, I insist they provide different portrayals of the experiences of female and maternal bodies, and offer a rich ground for discussions about body image, body politics, cultural attitudes towards the body, and the myth of motherhood from a gender and feminist perspective. I also claim these texts contain suggestions on how to deal with bodily dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and how to feel more comfortable in our own skin, which will be further developed in the Afterword through a personal literary engagement.

Afterword: Literature and Life

The process of writing this dissertation has not been linear, or perhaps cannot be a straightforward path because meanings of literary texts are constantly being negotiated, and renegotiated, depending on new literary or academic products, but also, on my own personal journey, which has changed my reading lenses more than once.

In the very first research plan I submitted, I proposed a means to liberate the female body through literature: finding empowering images that allow women and mothers to feel worthy of love and respect. In other words, I wanted to use literature to build a positive relationship with our own bodies—a relationship based on self-esteem and self-acceptance. Moreover, I wanted readers to be able to question the ways in which cultural mechanisms work to control and value their own bodies. This objective, however, remains out of reach, and to move nearer to it, I have decided to use this Afterword to transition from a feminist/gender perspective to a reader-response one, even when they might overlap in certain cases.

I have found that various Japanese literary texts can be read from the perspective of body empowerment and can aid in our journey towards accepting and loving our bodies and ourselves. Consequently, I selected Kirino Natsuo's *Tokyo jima*, Itō Hiromi's poetry and texts, including "Kanoko goroshi," and Kawakami Mieko's *Chichi to ran* because they are feminist and liberating writings, and they place the experiences of the body at the center of their narratives. They also challenge stereotypes and narrate the lives of women characters, paying special attention to their bodies, but not merely as objects, but as an intrinsic part of their subjectivity. It is a part of who they are.

Through this engagement with feminist critique, I have given an account of the representation of the body in the works of Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami from a gender

perspective. I have argued that these authors challenge conventional and idealized notions of the female body, the maternal body, and the myth of motherhood. I have also pointed out the ways in which they subvert patriarchal structures, and offer new alternatives regarding embodied subjectivity. My readings of their texts brought together gender and sexuality studies and Japanese studies. I have also contextualized their works within a larger tradition of Japanese women's writings by tracing literary legacies and offering an overview on upcoming trends (see Appendix). Hence, I have also situated my own interpretations in academic, literary and sociocultural contexts.

Next, this thesis aims to transition to a reader-response perspective by personally engaging with the texts. Perhaps my original aim needs to be adjusted: from a general proposal of liberation of the female and maternal bodies to a particular one—my own. Usually, the reader response approach goes *from* reader *to* text, making the reading experience a self-conscious process (Garrett-Petts 80-81). Yet, a more nuanced version, closer to Felski's proposal, also implies a movement *from* text *to* reader. My personal experiences inform my interpretations of the texts, but also, this textual engagement has affected the way I make sense of my own embodied experiences. Hence, I will document my reactions, and affective responses to the texts, and I will also elaborate on why these narratives are important to me.

Felski has called this type of literary engagement “positive aesthetics:” a sort of “neo-phenomenology” as it involves considering the roles of “perception, interpretation, and affective orientation” in one's “aesthetic response” (“After Suspicion” 31). Felski suggests we bring in our affective experiences of reading to the assessment of the literary work. In fact, “affective engagement is the very means by which literary works are able to reach, reorient, and even reconfigure their readers” (Felski, *The Limits* 177 qtd. in Abe-Auestad 2-3).

I am inspired to use this approach by Abe Auestad's argument that *Chichi to ran* has "a high degree of 'narrativity,' an enabling force that inspires an affective response in the reader—an attribute in the text that is activated through the process of reading" (2). I believe this force of "narrativity" is also found in Kirino's *Tokyo jima* and in Itō's texts. Moi's words offer a departure point for this final task I have embarked on:

To write is to risk rejection and misunderstanding. To create a work of art, Sartre writes, is to give the world a gift nobody has asked for (1988: ch.2). But if we don't dare to be generous, if we don't dare to share with others what we see, the world will be poorer for it. And sometimes someone actually does get it. When a reader feels that a book really speaks to her, she feels less lonely in the world.

Literature holds out the hope of overcoming skepticism and isolation. (268)

For me, the works of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami are precious gifts that have spoken to me and will probably keep me company for many years to come. Just as Moi claims that through literature we may overcome skepticism and isolation, I argue that we may also overcome negative feelings towards our bodies, and accept the complexity of our embodied subjectivity.

Orbaugh realizes that vis-à-vis the maternal subjectivity displayed in Ōba's work, she reads her texts from the position of a daughter ("Ōba" 266). Similarly, in my case, when I first read Kirino, Itō and Kawakami, I also did so from the position of a daughter. However, during the process of writing this dissertation I had the opportunity to also read them from the position of a pregnant woman, and then from the position of a mother. Therefore, this literary and academic engagement has informed my own personal journey of pregnancy and motherhood, and vice-versa. It has helped me navigate through this unknown stage of my life, and the selected authors have offered me new ways of thinking about the pregnant, childbearing and mothering body.



Rhea was born on December 10th, 2015. Let me rephrase it: I gave birth to Rhea, the 10th of December of 2015. Rhea is already more than one year old. Babies grow up so fast, and they develop at an incredible fast pace, yet compared to other mammals, they are so helpless and dependent on us. Since then, she is on the top of my priorities. I am a care- and love-giver. I am her mom.

Breastfeeding embodies our relationship, and pumping milk for her almost every night for the past nine months to bring with her to the day care or to leave with her father while I am away, embodies my struggles to keep her close as I go on with my life. Childbirth, breastfeeding and expressing milk have put me in a constant direct contact with my own bodily fluids in a way I had not experienced before. Of course, menstruation had already made me aware of my leaky nature. However, the use of an intrauterine device for five years before getting pregnant meant my menstruation had gone missing for a while, and it would continue to be absent throughout pregnancy and for a few months after giving birth. Being aware of my leaky body reconfigures my subjectivity as porous, permeable and ever changing; that is to say, as an uncontained and fluid self.

After reading Itō's highly subjective and personal poetry, and Kawakami's *Kimi wa aka chan* I was inspired to write short poems while I pumped. Perhaps it is my own response to Cixous' calling. I share three of them at the very end of this Afterword. Pumping became too boring and tiring; I felt I had fallen into the trap of self-sacrifice and perfectibility and, as an attempt to escape, or to lighten the burden, I resorted to poetry. Thus, for me, motherhood signifies productivity and creativity—I produced/created a baby; breast milk; poetry; and this very thesis. After hitting the one-year-old benchmark Rhea started to drink cow's milk, and I stopped pumping. Like a parallel process, I also submitted this dissertation's last draft.

Just as there is no such thing as a perfect or ideal body, there is no such thing as a perfect or ideal mother. “Killing Kanoko,” *Chichi to ran* and *Tokyo jima* show mothering in all its ambiguity, contradictions, and vulnerability, yet at the same time, the feelings of inadequacy displayed are often grounded on idealized, mythicized and naturalized images of womanhood and motherhood. This is perhaps one of the hardest battles. I too am facing my own feelings of inadequacy while pinpointing the pervasive nature of striving to be both a perfect—or at the very least, a “good mother” and scholar. I will move on to discuss more specifically how these narratives are important to me, because they have become my weapons to defend myself from my own struggles towards accepting my imperfections, vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and my pregnant, and postpartum body.



Kirino and Me

When I read *Tokyo jima* from the position of a daughter, I did not stop to think that in the novel, Kiyoko only finds out she was pregnant with twins during childbirth. I have not been pregnant with twins so I do not know how would that feel, and if it would be possible to know before giving birth how many fetuses are in one’s belly, I suppose some people can. However, I am impressed with, or perhaps envious of, Kiyoko’s sensibility to her bodily changes that allowed her to identify early-pregnancy symptoms. It was not my case, as I only found out I was pregnant already eleven weeks in and it was a big surprise. Hence, from my own experience I can relate to Kiyoko’s ignorance of being pregnant with twins. I could also finally understand that it is, in fact, possible to be several weeks—or even months—pregnant without knowing so, despite receiving enough sexual and reproductive education.

Even when the news of my pregnancy caught me off guard, I have never considered it an unwanted pregnancy. In my case, pregnancy was not an active choice: it was the result

of a malfunctioning diaphragm, love, sheer chance, and who knows what greater will or force that I cannot grasp. Similar to Kiyoko's (albeit short-lived) happy reaction, a few minutes after the initial shock of the news at the gynecologist, I embraced whatever had been growing inside me, and truly hoped that it continued to do so. In contrast to Kiyoko's case, my pregnancy was not a reminder of abuse, and did not pose life-threatening concerns.

In Tokyo, pregnant women get a "maternity patch" that allows them to sit on the priority seats in the train. I always felt it was a marker of a special, transitory period that somehow speaks of the position of mothers in a society: vulnerable yet valuable. Similarly, in the novel, pregnancy is Kiyoko's "patch" to be allowed to sit on the survival boat. Kiyoko used her pregnancy as a weapon for survival; she reconfigured it and used it for her advantage. To some extent, I am trying to do the same. While pregnancy was somehow a valid excuse for delaying the culmination of my dissertation, once Rhea came into my life, I have reconfigured this experience as a valuable tool for improving my research. Rhea is a source of motivation, inspiration and discipline in order to write. If my little one learnt to walk after falling a thousand times, and standing up every time without giving up, so can I. In fact, I have also learnt to walk once. She reminded me of our drive to persevere and complete tasks.

With regards to childbirth, and despite its caricature-like portrayal in *Tokyo jima*, it elicits in me admiration for Kiyoko: what a strong birthing woman. She gives birth to twins "naturally" and without anesthesia in a primitive scenario far away from an antiseptic medical setting. In Japan, giving birth naturally and without anesthesia is perhaps the most common way to do it. Epidurals are available in a few hospitals and are rather expensive. In general, C-sections are only performed in emergency situations. Yet, in the case of twins, there is usually a planned Cesarean. The fact that Kiyoko manages to

give birth safely to twins, with the support of the other women, reclaims the birthing experience as something a birthing mother simply does.

Like Kiyoko's labor, my waters broke first. And just like there is no perfect/ideal body, nor perfect/ideal mother, there is not a perfect/ideal birth. According to my "birth plan," my waters should not have broken in the first place—but they did. I think I thought about Kiyoko at that very moment as I also felt I had peed myself, and I felt the urge to touch the water with my hands, and smell it, until I was really sure: "Erik, I think my waters broke. This is really happening."

By far, giving birth is the most difficult thing I have ever done, and it makes me feel proud and powerful. Looking back at it through Kirino's narrative, I can completely relate to Kiyoko's fear of giving birth entirely by herself, and to her relief at having other experienced women around her. As mentioned, childbirth is a highly personal experience that we do by ourselves, since a human being needs to come out of our own bodies. Yet, there are often mediators or presences, and hence, it does not have to be an entirely lonely or solitary endeavor. Those who surround us have a huge impact on the birthing process. For this reason, I stress the importance of the role of midwives, doulas, doctors and birthing partners, as well as hospitals or birthing houses.

Despite everything happening contrary to my expectations and my carefully detailed "birth plan," it is thanks to the unrestrained support and care from my partner and the medical staff at Kōsei Chuo Hospital that Rhea and I made it happen. After a dose of medicine to open my cervix, and a dose of Pitocin to make my uterus contract, after several hours of contractions (the fake ones and the real ones, even though for me, all felt very real), after an intravenous antibiotic, monitoring my baby's heart (and being told that her heart rate was decreasing), after having used an oxygen mask, and breathing in and out hanging on to life, I finally gave birth to a little, blue baby that we named Rhea.

Thirty-nine hours after my water had broken, Rhea was finally born “naturally,” or better said, vaginally, and without anesthesia. My body is powerful. I am strong and fearless.

Another theme of *Tokyo jima* that I can personally connect to is Kirino’s treatment of ethnicity and of being a foreigner abroad searching for a sense of home and belonging. One thing was being *just* a foreign student: I always had a home to go *back* to. Another thing is being a foreign mother in Japan: Now I am building a new home and we do not know where we will settle. I am a Colombian woman married to a Swede, with a daughter who was born and lives in Japan, yet she is not Japanese. She holds both Colombian and Swedish nationalities, so the themes of national identity, immigration, community building, transnationalism and globalization have acquired a special weight for us. Passports, immigration procedures and bureaucracy exemplify a divided world. In my new situation I have had to renegotiate the very meaning of home. In essence, wherever we are together, I feel this is Rhea’s land, and Rhea’s land is mine too.

Kiyoko is selfish, and in the story very few characters empathize with her, if at all, so as a reader it is also difficult to always connect with her. Yet, I love that from the eyes of her daughter, Kiyoko is simply an amazing, strong woman. I hope Rhea would think as highly of me some day.



Itō and Me

I remember the first time I read Itō’s “Vinegar, Oil.” I had just finished my Master’s thesis on the representation of menstruation in advertisements of feminine hygiene products, and in the works of Japanese author Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986) and Colombian author Marvel Moreno (1939-1995). I had concluded that the “menstrual closet”—understood as the sociocultural imperative to conceal menstruation, and keep it invisible and silent—was dominant in the media, and in the analyzed literature it was predominated by the idea of

menstruation as a taboo to be broken. Itō's poetry goes beyond the menstrual closet and the taboo viewpoint. She voices women's corporeal expression, making menstruation visible, and freeing it from sociocultural restrictions. Hence, reading her work felt fresh, inspiring and liberating, and I knew that I wanted to continue my research in that direction. I find in Itō's work the body as potency. Her depictions are nuanced; there is the negative, positive and the in-betweens.

Then, I read "Killing Kanoko" and I thought of it as a strong, subversive and feminist text. It was shocking, but in a good way. Then, when pregnant, I reread it, and I felt that its interpretation was actually more complicated than I had initially perceived. It explores dark and surreal—but also quite real—emotions. It was still shocking, but in a scary way. Rereading it now, I can relate to the therapeutic quality of the poem, and its overtones of liberation and confession. The poem remains a shocking one.

Critics have avoided the use of the word "shock" to refer to a literary work, as its viscerality seems to clash with "the mediated nature of literary response" (Felski, *Uses* 105). Usually, when discussing "literature's power to disturb" the words used do not come from "everyday usage," but rather from "specialized language of transgression, trauma, defamiliarization, dislocation, self-shattering, the sublime" (105). While this type of language is useful to identify necessary nuances that help clarify our understanding of different experiences, in order to bridge the gap between theory and everyday life, it might also be useful to appeal to familiar references. Hence, the use of shock to describe "Killing Kanoko." Shock is "a reaction to what is startling, painful, even horrifying. Applied to literary texts, it connotes something more brusque and brutal" (Felski, *Uses* 105).²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ The "shock" in literature resonates with the uses and sociocultural role of "scandal". For more, see Jeremiah Alberg's reworkings of "scandal" as "those events, scenes, and representations to which we are attracted at the same moment that we are repelled" (*Beneath*).

Like Itō voices in “Killing Kanoko” and in some of her other writings, I am also impressed by and pleased to be producing milk for my daughter. Her words regarding the “sweet thing she secretes” that is “just like the milk we pay money to buy” have made me think of myself in similar terms, as “a milk secreting body.” I am amazed at what feels like a super power, that keeps us, my daughter and I, healthy. When I was pregnant I spent lots of time preparing for the birth, yet, when it comes to breastfeeding I had absolutely no idea of the physical and emotional tolls it would bring with it. Breastfeeding has been a site of bliss and pleasure, yet at the same time, it has also been a source of exhaustion and pressure.

Rhea has only four teeth. In fact, her first and only tooth so far came at around ten months old (a little late, but apparently mine came in even later). The image of Kanoko and other sons and daughters in the poem biting their mother’s nipples made me scared of feeding Rhea once her teeth came out. The fear was reinforced with stories from fellow mother friends and cousins who mentioned how much it hurts when they bite. In some cases, mothers react so strongly that it ends up accelerating the weaning process. I have been wondering when will she bite me, and if she does, what my reaction will be.

I can draw a parallel between Kanoko and Rhea: she also eats my time, pilfers my nutrients, pulls out my hair, and forces me to deal with all of her diapers, rashes, and infections. On top, she scratches my face, sticks her fingers in my mouth, wakes me up in the middle of night, and throws herself backwards on the floor whenever I do not act the way she wants me to act. Itō’s account has helped me to accept this parasitic side to our relationship. On exhausting days I ask my self: is she just taking all I have got, and is biting my nipples all I will get in return?

In “Killing Kanoko,” Kanoko is six-months old. When Rhea was six months old, I remember thinking of Kanoko and Itō’s depictions of abortion and infanticide: the most

shocking part of the poem. Becoming a mother has confirmed my commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, and I believe a woman, whether pregnant or not, should always have a right to bodily autonomy. The experience of pregnancy has given me an idea of the possible challenges abortion might entail, and just as women who choose to have a baby need different types of social and health support, so do women who choose not to. The experience of raising a baby has also made me more vulnerable to themes of child abuse and infanticide. In reality, I deplore them. But in Itō's literature, a world where everything is possible, I applaud their portrayals. She problematizes the indistinguishable treatment of abortion and infanticide, while also voicing darker desires, giving free rein to one's fantasy. As mentioned, the reception of this poem has caused general shock, and Itō has had to explain herself through other texts and essays. Thus, Felski's explanations seem to be applicable to this case: Literature that causes shock is "caught between the potential humiliation of audience indifference and the permanent risk of outright and outraged refusal. An aesthetic that assaults our psyches and assails our vulnerabilities turns out to be all too vulnerable to the vagaries of audience response" (*Uses* 131).

Another aspect from "Killing Kanoko" that stuck with me is the distinction between fetuses and pregnant women, and babies and mothers; a distinction that is fundamental to distinguish abortion from infanticide and child murder. I had recently found out that I was pregnant, and was talking to a friend over Skype about my "condition," and I mentioned the word "fetus." I was probably referring to the fetus' size or weight. She was so shocked at my use of medical terms, and urged me to think of it in "nicer" terms. She said that "babies" felt everything and that I should call him or her a "baby." I also know that later on, before Rhea was born, I did come to think of it as a baby. Itō is aware of the delusional construction of the fetus as a baby, and of the differences between an unborn fetus and a born baby, yet at the same time, those differences are problematized in her poetry, giving

an insight into the psychology of abortion. Itō's complex view on the subject has informed my own view, and has allowed for the coexistence of ambiguities and tensions without compromising my support to sexual and reproductive rights.

“Killing Kanoko” also invites women to abandon their babies. I have not accepted her invitation yet, but I am toying with the idea. My affective reaction to such an invitation is of resistance. It is easier to put our babies first, since caregiving is expected from a mother. Itō's invitation can be rephrased in a way that makes it easier to assent: it is an invitation to care for oneself, to put oneself first. Self-care is essential, and there are too many tired and stressed mothers who would benefit from prioritizing themselves over their children—including me—even if temporarily. Itō also addresses postpartum depression. I was lucky I did not get depressed after giving birth but I know friends who did and who needed to abandon their child to look after themselves, and when they came back, they were renewed, and better at caring for others. Similar to a case of a loss of cabin pressure in an airplane in which you should put your own oxygen mask on first before assisting your child, we need to help ourselves first so that we can help others. This is complemented with Itō's posture in other poems in which she situates the act of caring for a child within a genealogy of women, and also, as a shared responsibility. Like the proverb indicates: “it takes a village to raise a child.”

I am scared of losing my temper. I cannot stop the shame and guilt following episodes of losing my mind. At those times, I summon Itō's spirit and take her parenting advice: *gasatsu* (rudeness), *gūtara* (laziness), *zubora* (negligence), and I try to be kinder to myself because I am not perfect and never will be.

Finally, Itō has shown me the value of writing personal narratives grounded on my own bodily processes and experiences, and of looking at my own life through other women's lives. Experiences are particular and distinct, but not necessarily unique. The act

of sharing experiences can help us make sense of our own, and even overcome our problems. My pumping/writing project has been therapeutic, and I owe it to Itō for being my writing inspiration. Thank you.



Kawakami and Me

Most of the attention paid to *Chichi to ran* is related to its connection with Ichiyō's "Takekurabe." Yet, the first time I read it I did not identify this intertextual reference, and I was mostly enthralled by Kawakami's openness regarding menstruation and breasts, and the inter-subjective links between mother, daughter and aunt/sister (Felski, *Uses* 54). Felski appreciates the experience of enchantment because it is one of the reasons for turning to works of art, "to be taken out of themselves, to be pulled into an altered state of consciousness" (76). It was enjoyable to let myself get lost in an empowering text grounded on daily, embodied experiences and family relations.

Since my undergraduate years I have been involved in menstrual activism and the promotion of the use of menstrual cups. I used to have strong menstrual cramps and held a negative view of menstruation, so I felt I needed to do something about it. I realized through the study of advertisements of menstrual products that this view not only comes from the media, or general discourses around menstruation, but also from the products themselves. Given that I have personally struggled with embracing menstruation I treasured Kawakami's depiction of menstruation: it is not seen as "impure," "dirty" or a taboo, but just something to deal with. Natsuko's scene of being woken in the middle of the night and then having to clean the sheets made me quickly connect with the character. When I read Midoriko's diary, I also had a flashback to my first period, and to my first interactions with menstrual napkins. Midoriko's hatred around her bodily changes also resonates with my own experience: I

remember hating when boys (or girls) commented on the size of my breasts when I was ten or eleven years old.

Feelings of shame and inadequacy start at an early age, and affect our sense of self-esteem and confidence. This is one of the tasks I feel I have as a mother: how do I teach (or at least try to teach) Rhea to embrace bodily changes and body love? Based on *Chichi to ran*, and also on Itō's account of how her eating disorders were passed on to her daughters, I realize that if I want Rhea to love and accept herself, then I need to love and accept who I am (Brown, *Daring* 219). I think my parents have done a good job with my sister and me. I know parents cannot be blamed for everything, but in my own case, I feel I owe at least part of my sense of self-esteem to them.

The story of my sister and her nose has set a good example to embrace my body. I remember that my sister was being bullied for the size of her nose. She came home from a school party crying one afternoon when she was around twelve years old. My sister's nose resembles my father's nose. My father explained to her that her nose is a reflection of both him and my mother, and that the love they feel for her is too grand, and that her nose is important to them. According to my mother, she stopped crying and hugged him. Later on, when she was about seventeen, before going to France for a year, she came up with the idea of doing nose surgery. My parents said to her that she was still too young to get surgery, but perhaps in the future, if she still wanted to, they could think about it. At the same time, they highlighted other values that can build one's self-esteem, besides physical traits. Also, my dad asked her if she thought he should also do surgery because they have the same nose. My dad said he liked his nose and that he was sorry she did not feel this way. My sister quickly said that my dad should keep his nose. Years later when she was old enough to make the decision and afford the surgery herself, she had already learnt to accept and love her nose and she knows my parents helped her to get there.

Chichi to ran's depiction of bodily dissatisfaction also resonates with my own experiences of bodily dissatisfaction while pregnant and after giving birth. This type of dissatisfaction feels personal, but like *Chichi to ran* shows, it is also a shared experience. Pregnancy and childbirth bring enormous bodily transformations, and our body, as we knew it, disappears. Even if I do not want to perform breast enhancement surgery, I can relate to having nostalgia for my "young" body, and feeling "fat" even when I am hosting and feeding a new human being. Sometimes I desire to have my body "back." All of which are examples of a similar bodily dissatisfaction. I remember just seven days after having given birth to Rhea my own mother mentioned I should lose my postpartum belly soon. It was an offhand comment that was not intended to hurt me—in fact, it was meant as a health advice— but it made me feel fat and judged. It also made me realize how health and beauty discourses can have a direct impact on one's sense of worth. Narratives, like *Chichi to ran* that open a space to renegotiate these feelings, and help us feel less lonely in these struggles.

Also, I know several women, friends and family members that have performed cosmetic surgery. In these cases, despite critically looking at the contexts and sociocultural pressures that may prompt women to feel this way and undergo surgery, I cannot deny the dimension of self-empowerment and agency achieved through cosmetic surgery, and how it might be a positive event in their lives. My personal goal, maybe because of the way I have been raised, is to accept my body as it is, and accept my body's fluid nature. I am to embrace the changes as they come, and even though I have experienced dissatisfaction, I have never felt a strong need to attempt to permanently change parts of my body. A friend who wants to get breast enlargement surgery after breastfeeding, who knows that I am doing this research, confronted me and asked me if I thought she was "shallow," "weak" or "inadvertently an ally of patriarchy" for wanting to perform surgery. I said no, I am not here to judge women in these terms, and if anything I would like to offer support through these processes.

Actually, I recommended her to read *Chichi to ran*, as it validates this desire but also problematizes freedom of choice.

Chichi to ran has definitely made me gaze at my breasts and trace their transformations. From pregnancy to childbirth and breastfeeding, my breasts have become an important part of me. I have now experienced my breasts as being fluid: as a source of pleasure, pain, leakage, connection, warmth, and safety. Breasts have been socially sexualized and commodified, but when they are actively engaged in one of their basic biological and social functions, breastfeeding—an instance of female agency and empowerment—they are often rejected. I have been outraged at stories about breastfeeding mothers who have been excluded from public spaces. They have been expected to breastfeed in private scenarios, which makes these women feel ashamed of something like the essential act of feeding their babies. I was worried that it would happen to me. Yet, in Tokyo, I have found great guidance from midwives, the wide availability of nursing rooms, and a general atmosphere of acceptance of breastfeeding in public spaces, which has made it easier and more enjoyable.

From an affective point of view, *Chichi to ran*'s whole narrative is an attempted transition from shame and disconnection to empathy and connection. I read it as an invitation to move our lives in that direction. I find Eli Clare's assertion relevant: "making our bodies home is well worth it" (464). In *Chichi to ran*'s open-endedness and lack of a definite resolution, I feel that these experiences of shame and disconnection, and empathy and connection, are not mutually exclusive. Like Eli Clare puts it when talking about their personal feelings of shame it "caught me by surprise, reminded me once again that I have traveled nowhere near a complete passage between body hatred and body love. Instead, shame and pride dance, spar, sit at the same table" (461-462). Perhaps, like in *Chichi to ran*, through family ties and other bonds among women, as well as honestly sharing our

experiences with others, we might move closer to empathy, connection and bodily acceptance.

May 8th, 2016

Am I pregnant or am I not

With Rhea I didn't know

Three months passed and a huge transformation was going on inside

Yet, I was oblivious to it all

Now,

Today,

I close my eyes and try to look inside

Darkness

How disconnected can I be from my bodily life?

Pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding force me to connect with my embodied side.

There is a vast, mysterious and unknown world that inhabits

My

Insides

May 14th, 2016

Pumping doesn't feel like sucking

Suction, production; that's the formula

Pumping sucks

Some days it actually hurts

Today it hurts

Yet, I find a deep satisfaction

When I think about giving my little one my very best

My milk is my best

*My body produces milk with parts of my body,
and expulses this part of my body for my baby*

Body and baby, we are still connected

A liquid umbilical chord persists

When will I stop breastfeeding?

Until Rhea & I want

We don't have a set plan

April 3, 2017

One more spring and its transient cherry blossoms

Also volatile, like our bodies

I am closing cycles:

Writing and breastfeediing

As I finish, I stopped.

There is still some milk left,

But it will be gone

I am nostalgic and relieved

No more milk,

No more words,

I am done

Appendix: Further Readings and Literary Climate

This section introduces other authors that are in-between and side-by-side Kirino, Itō and Kawakami, as well as emerging writers, to provide an overview on contemporary Japanese women's authorship in terms of the depiction of the female body from a gender perspective.

As their preceding generations did, a group of writers continue with the literary attack against the myth of motherhood and feminist portrayals of the female body experiences. For example, Kanai Mieko's 金井美恵子 (b.1947) "Usagi" 兎 ("Rabbits," 1976, trans.1982) depicts a "case of Oedipal wish-fulfillment on the part of a young girl," and problematizes the father-daughter relationship (Napier 86). In contrast, her story "Boshizō" 母子像 (Portrait of mother and child, 1992) deals with the mother-son relationship while depicting a strong mother's desire (Holloway 81-82). Kanai's contemporary, Tsushima Yūko 津島佑子 (1947-2016)—who served as the last president of the Women Writers Association before it finally closed in 2007 (Yoshio 273)—also contributed to the depiction of the maternal in Japanese literature through several of her works, such as *Chōji* 寵児 (1978; trans. *Child of Fortune*, 1983) and *Yama wo hashiru onna* 山を走る女 (1980; trans. *Woman Running in the Mountains*, 1991).²⁴⁵ Tsushima's texts represent "women's corporeal experiences," thus her work as well as the audience response to it "primed the publishing world to embrace texts that foreground experiences of women and their bodies" (Hartley, "Feminism" 90; "Writing"). According to McKinlay,

[Tsushima] embraces the process of pregnancy and maternity, rejecting not motherhood itself but its institutionalization and mythologization...By

²⁴⁵ Amanda Seaman explores the depiction of "pregnancy as liberation" in Tsushima's works. (See *Writing* 52-65).

depicting in a non-judgmental fashion, a variety of ways of being a mother—nurturing, aggressive, protective, destructive, violent, selfless, selfish—she allows for a more complex and all-encompassing notion of what it is to be maternal, effectively undermining rigid notions of *bosei* which constrain and disempower women in the maternal role. (par.9)

This argument applies to Kirino, Itō and Kawakami’s works in their complex depiction of female embodiment and subjectivity, and also aligns with one of the general aims of this dissertation; that is, to show the diversity and complexity of the experiences of the female body.

One of today’s most celebrated literary voices is Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美 (b.1958). Among her several awards, including the Akutagawa Prize for *Hebi wo fumu* 蛇を踏む (Tread on a snake, 1996), in the year 2000 she was the last recipient of the now discontinued Woman Writer Prize for *Oboreru* 溺れる (Drowning, 1999). This can be considered as “a symbolic close to the category of ‘women’s literature’ [*joryū bungaku*] which flourished for a good part of the 20th century” (Yoshio 273). Her novel *Manazuru* 真鶴 (2006; trans. 2010) and its stream of consciousness narrative style, has been compared with the writing styles of Kawakami Mieko in *Chichi to ran* and Kanehara Hitomi 金原ひとみ (b.1983) in *Amebic* アミービック (2005), because the narrative power and strategic use of language plays a significant role in the production of meaning for the female body in their works (Mowbray-Tsutsumi 2 qtd. in Otomo, “A girl” 130). Kawakami Hiromi has also written different works centered on women characters, their love lives, and their position in contemporary society, such as *Sensei no kaban* センセイの鞆 (2001; trans. *The Briefcase*, 2012 and *Strange Weather in Tokyo*, 2012).

The prologue of Kirino Natsuo's first mystery novel *Tenshi ni misuterareta yoru* 天使に見捨てられた夜 (The night overlooked by angels, 1994/1997) was written by author Matsuura Rieko 松浦理英子 (b.1958). Kirino's novel, through its depiction of pornographic sex, questions issues around "contemporary sexuality in Japan, interrogating the agency and authenticity of female desire" (Copeland, "Woman" 1). Matsuura also explores the theme of sexuality in her work and, in fact, takes it even further. For example, *Nachuraru ūman* ナチュラル・ウーマン (Natural woman, 1987) "was one of the first mainstream novels to deal with a lesbian heroine, and it gained notoriety on account of its young narrator and graphic scenes of lesbian sex" (Seaman, "Women" 157). Also, one of her most well known stories, "Oyayubi P no shugyō jidai" 親指Pの修業時代 (1993; trans. The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P, 2009) subverts hetero-normativity through parody and female sexual liberation. Another of her representative texts, "Yasashii kyosei no tame ni" 優しい去勢のために (1997; trans. For Gentle Castration, 2006), "radically rethinks the body and its erogenous zones as a means of overcoming the phallogocentric emphasis of both literature and literary criticism" (Seaman, "Women" 153). Here, the anus and belly buttons are sources of pleasure, "these orifices, together with the menstruating womb, a disruptive and chaotic organ defying the reproductive imperatives of heterosex, are the cardinal points in Matsuura's radical vision of human sexuality" (157). This type of direct language that reclaims the female body and women's sexuality resonates with the sexual liberation and bodily awareness depicted in Itō's poetry.

The anthology *Inside and Other Short Fiction: Japanese Women by Japanese Women* (2006) compiled by Cathy Layne, provides a good overview of today's literary scene as it includes short stories by eight authors: Yamada Amy 山田詠美 (b. 1959) current member of the Akutagawa selection committee; Daidō Tamaki 大道珠貴 (b. 1966) Akutagawa

Prize winner in 2002 for *Shoppai doraibu* しょっぱいドライブ (Salty drive, 2012); Fujino Chiya 藤野千夜 (b.1962) also an Akutagawa Prize laureate in 1999 for *Natsu no yakusoku* 夏の約束 (A summer's promise, 1999); Muroi Yuzuki 室井佑月 (b.1970); Shimamoto Rio 島本理生 (b.1983); Takagi Nobuko 高樹のぶ子 (b.1946), Akutagawa Prize recipient in 1984 for *Hikari idaku tomo yo* 光抱く友よ (To a friend embracing the light, 1984), and current member of the selection committee; Uchida Shungiku 内田春菊 (b. 1959); and Hasegawa Junko 長谷川純子 (b.1966). Despite being prizewinning and popular Japanese writers, they had never been published in English until this edition. They “paint a picture of contemporary Japanese women’s lives...[reflecting] the experiences of a wide diversity of Japanese women” (Ozeki 9). In terms of the depiction of the female body and maternity, two stories herein published captured my attention: “Musuko no kuchibiru” 息子の唇 (2000; trans. My Son’s Lips, 2006) by Uchida Shungiku, and “Museiran” 無精卵 (2004; trans. The Unfertilized Egg, 2006) by Hasegawa Junko.

“My Son’s Lips” confronts the social assumption that a mother “must” also be a housewife. Uchida Shungiku (b. 1959) is a prolific manga artist and writer. Uchida’s work is “often predicated on transgressions of modern notions of femininity, sexuality, motherhood, and family” (Shigematsu 572). Her autobiographical novel *Fazā Fakkā* ファザーファッカー (Father fucker, 1993) exposes domestic violence within the family system (574). In addition, her manga series *Watashitachi wa hanshokushiteiru* 私たちは繁殖している (We are reproducing) depicts her pregnancies, childbirths, and the lives of her four children (Seaman, “Our Bodies” 52; *Writing* 120). She also published S4G sex for girls *onna no ko no tame no sei no ohanashi* (S4G sex for girls 女の子のための性お話, 2007), a sex education manual especially aimed at teenage girls, which combines “biology

and biography to teach what it might mean to positively understand oneself as a young woman, a woman who by knowing her body knows her worth, and by knowing her worth can participate freely and confidently in the world around her” (Seaman, “Our Bodies” 52; 62). Uchida’s *Manga nihon sei kyoiku tōku* マンガ日本性教育トーク (A talk on sex education in Japan, 2012) addresses topics such as menstrual products, condoms, and sexual reproduction. She has been using her art and literature to redefine sex education and child rearing, and explore the multiple experiences of the female body from a gender and sexuality perspective. Uchida, together with prominent author Yoshimoto Banana 吉本ばなな (b.1964) published *Onna desu mono* 女ですもの (*Nice to be a Woman*—English rendering of the book’s title in its original publication, 2007) in which they discuss childbirth, child-rearing, and family life-style in Japan based on their personal experiences.²⁴⁶

“Museiran” (The Unfertilized Egg) was published in the collection *Hatsuga* 発芽 (Germination, 2004), which was Hasegawa Junko’s (b.1966) literary debut. It is a story about the anxieties and the expectations behind the mandate of motherhood, and the so-called “biological clock.” The protagonist, thirty-five year old Moriko, is self-conscious about her age in relation to her desire of giving birth to a B blood-type girl in the Year of the Horse. This can only happen every twelve years, and only if the father’s blood type is also B. Additionally, there is almost no control in deciding the sex of a child (without the use of advanced technology). All in all, Moriko’s actual chances of continuing her family’s legacy are very limited. These types of unlikely scenarios regarding pregnancy and motherhood are definitely an ironic and humorous movement by Hasegawa to call attention to the often-irrational social pressure that is put on single women. Here,

²⁴⁶ For more on Uchida’s treatment of pregnancy, motherhood and sexuality see Seaman, *Writing* 146-175.

pregnancy and motherhood are treated as “symbols and symptoms, of the social and economic obstacles faced by single women in contemporary Japan” (Seaman, “Two” 4). This story is exemplary of the tension between female agency versus biological and sociocultural determinism. Like *Tokyo jima* and *Chichi to ran*, this short story deals with aging and reproduction, employs the metaphor of eggs, is rich with symbolism of pregnancy and childbirth, deals with both the beauty and motherhood myths, and includes a “precariat” character. Also, like Itō, Hasegawa locates pregnancy and birth within a genealogy of women, but in the end, breaks free from societal expectations and tradition.

The next contemporary author that I would like to situate next to Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami is Akasaka Mari 赤坂真理 (b.1964). Her novella *Vaiburēta* バイブレータ (1999; trans. Vibrator, 2005) tackles the theme of sexual self-discovery, liberation and the need for connection in a world where isolation and loneliness are becoming more and more common. It is also a sharp social commentary on media, consumerism, image-driven culture and the violence that emerges from it. Like Itō, Kawakami and Kirino, Akasaka is interested in the treatment of eating disorders, beauty myths, and aging. It also features “precariat” characters.

Vibrator's protagonist, Rei, is a bulimic and alcoholic journalist who is extremely aware of her own body, thus her subjectivity is shaped by her lived experience in her body. Rei's bulimia is interconnected to her anxieties and feelings, to liquor, and it provides her with a fragile sense of empowerment and self-realization. Akasaka locates eating disorders within the gender politics that regulate our lives. She locates the problem as an effect of the impositions entailed in the oppressive conditions of our present society and culture. Rei overcomes her troubled inner voices, even momentarily by her encounter with Okabe, a male truck driver. Akasaka gives us enough symbolism to argue that the mother in the story is Okabe himself. This image of the truck as a womb, as the place of both his body

and her heart, recreates the symbiotic union between mother and child. In addition, it takes motherhood from the biological into the metaphorical. Rei and Okabe's relationship is both motherly and sexual. An example of this can be found in the scene in which it is described how he sucks away her tears, focusing on her tears and their saliva. This shared action signals how he calms her and receives her sadness by a caring and loving attitude. Rei recognizes Okabe—a male sexual partner—as a mother, addressing the general characteristics of a motherly figure. In this way, Akasaka conveys the idea of motherhood being offered by a man. It is interesting to note how Okabe's actions are similar to Makiko's actions from *Chichi to ran* in the aforementioned scene; both are immersed in fluids, rubbing the other's back, washing away their tears and bringing peace to their hearts.

Next I would like to highlight Murata Sayaka 村田沙耶香 (b.1979), the 155th Akutagawa Prize recipient for her novel *Conbini ningen* コンビニ人間 (Conbini person, 2016). Her literary debut's short story "Junyū" 授乳 (Breastfeeding, 2003) does not, in spite of its title, deal with the maternal body from a motherly perspective, but rather from a daughterly perspective as it is focused on the life of a teenager who is dealing with puberty's inevitable changes. It also addresses the themes of body control from an aesthetic and sexual point of view. She then published *Gin iro no uta* ギンイロノウタ (Silver song, 2009) which again tackles the transition from childhood into puberty focusing on sexuality, particularly on female masturbation ("Authors Sayaka"). *Shiro-iro no machi no, sono hone no taion no* しろいろの街の、その骨の体温の (Of a white city, and its bones and body temperature, 2013) also addresses the themes of body image, self-esteem and bullying through the eyes of her young protagonist Yuka. The story is set in two different moments: when Yuka is ten, and then when she is fourteen. Again Murata shows the transitional and pivotal period in a girl's life ("Authors Sayaka").

Murata distances her current fiction from her previous works and moves closer to surreal and fantastic narratives in her story-collection *Shussan satsujin* 出産殺人 (Birth murder, 2014) and in her novel *Shōmetsu sekai* 消滅世界 (Dwindling world, 2015). Both works offer a grotesque and horrific dystopia that challenges all traditional, gendered notions of family, marriage, sexuality and parenting. In “Shussan satsujin,” Murata presents a “method to improve Japan’s birthrate” through a “birth murder system.” It creates a world in which “anyone who gives birth ten times [can] murder whomever he or she wants without any legal consequences” (Seaman, “Stretching” 96). In the story men can also give birth through the use of artificial uteruses, and insemination is part of everyday life (96). “Seiketsu na kekkon” 清潔な結婚 (A clean marriage, 2014) is also part of this collection and has been published in English by *Granta 127: Japan*. This short story offers a radical new depiction of marriage, sexuality, and parenthood. It features a heterosexual, married couple that does not have sex between each other, yet they satisfy their sexual desires outside of their marriage. Even so, they decide to have a baby—preferably a girl—using artificial insemination. Despite the surreal quality of this story and the emphasized “cleanliness” of the fertilizing procedure, the direct reference to the body and bodily fluids situates its depiction far away from idealized and sanitized versions of sexuality and motherhood, which is a feature also found in the works by Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami. In Murata’s *Shōmetsu sekai* (2015), she develops the idea of artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization and artificial wombs even further, to the point where it becomes the standard way of human reproduction, and “even between husband and wife, conception through sexual intercourse is deemed to be ‘incest’ and regarded as taboo” (“Dwindling”). Basically it depicts a future without sex and family (Murata, “Suteki” 20). Murata is part of the selection for the third edition of *Granta Japan* and

Waseda Bungaku “Best of Young Japanese Novelists,” next to Kawakami Mieko and Oyamada Hiroko 小山田浩子 (b.1983).

Oyamada Hiroko (b.1983) also received the Akutagawa Prize in 2014 for *Ana* 穴 (Hole, 2013), featuring a young couple who end up moving in with the husband’s parents. The wife narrates what happens after falling into a deep hole (“Akutagawa Prize”). *Kōjō* 工場 (Factory, 2010) was her debut novel and it is based on her own experiences of doing temporary work at an automaker’s subsidiary (“Authors Hiroko”). With regards to the depiction of the female body, her short story “Higanbana” 彼岸花 (Spider Lilies, 2014) stands out for its imagery of breasts, breastfeeding and breast milk. Like in some of Itō’s poetry, here breast milk appears to have healing powers.

In 2003 Kanehara Hitomi 金原ひとみ (b.1983) received the Akutagawa Prize for her novel *Hebi ni piasu* 蛇にピアス (2003/2004; trans. Snakes and Earrings, 2005). The same year Wataya Risa 綿矢りさ (b.1984) was also awarded with the Akutagawa Prize for her novel *Keritai senaka* 蹴りたい背中 (2003; trans. I want to kick you in the back, 2015). The media “frenzy” or “hysteria” that followed their reception of the prize emphasized their gender and young age and accentuated their contrasting images as a marketing strategy (Yoshio 175; Di Nitto 457-458). Actually, Di Nitto contends that both “the record breaking sales of *Snakes and Earrings* and the media treatment of Kanehara as teen idol point towards a high point in the commodification of postwar literature” (454). This illustrates the need to recognize the interplay between gender and literature’s production and reception, as well as problematize the categorization of literature by gender in Japan.

Snakes and Earrings’ protagonist/narrator is Lui, a young woman and a hostess “freeter” attracted to her sadistic tattoo artist who may be responsible for the murder of her

regular partner (Hartley, “Feminism” 91). Kanehara focuses not only on sex but also on the pleasure derived from it (Holloway 61). The story deals with an “interest in unconventional sexual experiences, particularly sadomasochism, as well as an inexplicable interest in body modification” (91). Holloway contends that Lui’s sex is “intended to unleash a radical sense of justice and rage against social mandates of passive female sexuality” (62). However, it may be argued that “it leaves existing gender relations in place” and that it has a “persistent heteronormative undercurrent” (Hartley, “Feminism” 91). With regards to embodiment and subjectivity, Kanehara “provides the ‘immediate experience of the living body’ that, although it is commodified and modified, is centered in a self that feels loss and pain” (Di Nitto 467). Kanehara also addresses the themes of eating disorders, body image, body control and beauty myths through the depiction of anorexic characters in her novels *Amebic* アミービック (2005) and *Haidora* ハイドラ (Hydra, 2007) (Otomo, “A girl” 131).

Up until now, the term “precariat” has emerged on several occasions, and I would like to elaborate on it in terms of a literary motif that seems to be spreading throughout contemporary Japanese literature. Due to the collapse of the bubble economy, the 1990s has been referred to as the “lost decade” (*ushinawareta jūnen* 失われた10年) (from 1990 to 2000), followed by the “decade of the precariat,” resulting in twenty years of economic decline or contraction, that has been termed “two lost decades” or the “lost score” (*ushinawareta nijūnen* 失われた20年) (from 1990 to 2010) (Rosenbaum, “Towards” 2-3). Already in the 1990s the term “precariat” began to circulate to indicate “the working poor,” a group of people who lack a stable job, social benefits and security, largely referred to as “freeters” in Japan (Abe Auestad 16). As Iwata-Weickgenannt explains, Amamiya Karin 雨宮処凛 (b.1975) introduced the term into Japanese, and pointed out that it “fuses the words precarious and proletariat to recast precarious workers in class

terms” (143). The precariat is a highly heterogeneous group because “precarity strays across any number of labour practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious—which is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations” (Neilson and Rossiter qtd. in Iwata-Weickgenannt 144). Hence, it includes the *hikikomori*, *freeters*, NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), and general unemployed workers (Rosenbaum, “Towards” 2). Given its temporal and contingent characteristic, it is difficult to define the precariat as a fixed class in which long-term solidarity could emerge (Iwata-Weickgenannt 144). Therefore, in agreement with Iwata-Weickgenannt,

[It] makes more sense to speak of precarity as a literary motif, or perhaps a literary mode, rather than a new ‘literature of the precariat.’ What seems important is the construction not of a new class of literature, but of a theoretical framework to discuss representations of cultural and socioeconomic change and its repercussions for individual lives. (144)

In 2008, the same year Kirino published *Tokyo jima* and Kawakami won the Akutagawa prize for *Chichi to ran*, Kobayashi Takiji’s 小林多喜二 (1903-1933) *Kani kōsen* 蟹工船 (1929; trans. The cannery boat 1933; The factory ship 1973; The crab cannery ship 2013) was at the top of the best-seller list (Iwata-Weickgenannt 141; Auestad Abe 14). Eighty years after its original publication, this classic, proletarian novel resonated with contemporary readers—perhaps the same readers of *Tokyo jima* and *Chichi to ran* (Auestad Abe 14). Kobayashi’s depiction of the harsh working conditions aboard the cannery ship spoke to the working conditions faced by the precariat in contemporary society, and Amamiya Karin—precariat author and activist—developed this comparison in articles that were published in national newspapers, which helped to consolidate the so-called *Kanikōsen* boom (22 qtd. in Iwata-Weickgenannt 142; Auestad Abe 14).

The post-bubble, neo-liberalist Japan and its growing socioeconomic inequalities provide the background and setting in which *Chichi to ran* and *Tokyo jima* develop. The precariat motif is also central to other works written by Kirino, mainly *Out* (1997) and *Metabola* (2007), which has granted her a place within the so-called “contemporary proletarian literature” (*gendai puroretaria bungaku* 現代プロレタリア文学) (Iwata-Weickgenannt 142). Iwata-Weickgenannt also points out that in recent years, the Akutagawa Prize has been given to authors dealing with precarity in their works, such as *Hachigastu no rojō ni suteru* 八月の路上に捨てる (Tossed out on August streets, 2006) by Itō Takami 伊藤たかみ (b.1971); *Hitori biyori* ひとり日和 (A perfect day to be alone, 2006) by Aoyama Nanae 青山七恵 (b.1983); *Potosu raimu no fune* ポトスライムの船 (The lime pothos boat, 2009) by Tsumura Kikuko 津村記久子 (b.1978); and *Kueki ressha* 苦役列車 (Labor Train, 2010) by Nishimura Kenta 西村賢太 (b.1967) (157).

Iwata-Weickgenannt excludes Kawakami Mieko’s *Chichi to ran* from her list of representative literary works of precarity issues awarded with the Akutagawa Prize. However, in agreement with Abe Auestad, I argue that their harsh living conditions and Makiko’s precarious working conditions affect the mother/daughter plot of the story (6). In the face of unstable and irregular working conditions the only way out for some women was and still is to join the “entertainment business” in which the female body is often treated as an exploitable commodity—as portrayed by Midori and her sister in “Takekurabe,” Makiko in *Chichi to ran*, Kiyoko and the band Goddess in *Tokyo jima*, and even Taki (Kobayashi Takiji’s girlfriend) in the 1920s rural Japan (Abe Auestad 14).

Other characters/protagonists that have been shaped by the economic and social harshness of the “lost decade,” finding themselves in precarious situations, can be

identified in Hasegawa Junko's "The Unfertilized Egg," Akasaka Mari's *Vibrator*, Kanehara Hitomi's *Snakes and Earrings* (1997), Oyamada Hiroko's *Ana*, Murata Sayaka's *Conbini ningen*, to name a few.

The authors heretofore mentioned as being roughly contemporaries of Kirino, Itō and Kawakami Mieko—Kanai, Takahashi, Kawakami Hiromi, Mitsuura, Uchida, Hasegawa, Akasaka, Murata, Okayama, and Kanehara—are authors that stand out in their treatment of the female body, the maternal body, and sexuality. These authors speak to my research themes and questions, and I would like to further my future studies by exploring their works in more detail. This overview is by no means exhaustive, as there is yet much to explore regarding embodiment, gender and genre in the Japanese literary scene.

To close this section, I think it is also important to comment on a few women writers that are undeniably vital in mainstream contemporary literature, and have been often considered representative of today's women's authorship: Ogawa Yōko (b.1962), Yoshimoto Banana (b.1964), Ekuni Kaori 江國香織 (b.1964), and Yamada Amy 山田詠美 (b.1959). In fact, due to their popularity, these were perhaps the first Japanese women writers I came across soon after arriving in Japan. In general, despite their works featuring female protagonists, with regards to their depiction of the female body—in comparison to Kirino, Itō, and Kawakami—I would argue they are more conservative, less explicit or less grounded on the materiality of the body, and from a critical point of view, they elicit a sort of feminist ambivalence.

For example, Ogawa Yōko's novella *Ninshin karendā* 妊娠カレンダー (1991; trans. *Pregnancy Diary*, 2008) deals with the theme of pregnancy but, unlike the first-person protagonists in *Tokyo jima*, *Chichi to ran* and in Itō's poetry, here we find a first person witness, as the story of the pregnant woman is being told by her younger sister. Therefore the portrayal of pregnant embodiment is rather superficial. Moreover,

this novella has been regarded as *shōjo* 少女 literature because “everything is controlled by the younger sister, whose desires and reactions are the true centerpiece of the narrative. Pregnancy is a life-defining event in the narrator’s life, but only insofar as it threatens to upset the family structure she has known” (Seaman, *Writing* 37-38).

Amanda Seaman points out a dilemma that often emerges in *shōjo* fiction: “the dominance of the *shōjo* identity left little productive space for the mature but unmarried woman; indeed, it ironically reinforced traditional structures, insofar as the only way for women to leave *shōjo*-hood behind was marriage itself” (*Writing* 50). This dilemma is exemplified by Yoshimoto Banana’s *イルカ Iruka* (Dolphin [or are you there?], 2006) in which she addresses the theme of pregnancy in connection to *shōjo* identity (50). Even if pregnancy and motherhood are central to the narrative and are treated as life-changing events, its depiction in terms of embodiment is surpassed by the focus on romance and family. Saitō Minako writes that despite her “radical style,” most of Yoshimoto Banana’s works conclude with “lonely girl protagonists developing a light, family-like unity with the people who surround them and experiencing some modest sense of healing. This pattern of conclusion inevitably attracts criticisms for its ‘conservativeness’” (“Yoshimoto” 175).

It becomes important to state that a woman writer is not necessarily a feminist writer. In addition, their works may be considered part of what Saitō terms “*L bungaku*,” that is to say, “an extension of *shōjo shōsetsu*” (girls fiction) predominantly about love and sex, and “targeted at young (and not-so-young) women (or “Ladies”)” (Aoyama 44; See: Saitō, *L Bungaku* 95-113.). I think there is a danger with this new category of “*L literature*,” as yet another contemporary remnant of “women’s literature,” that may be restrictive to the authors and their works, and in fact, may fail to recognize that “the trajectory of *shōjo* literature in Japan... has been toward increasingly queer spaces and

increasingly fluid and complex imaginings of desire, increasingly independent of traditionally conceptualized gender” (Orbaugh, “Girls” 185). Therefore, it is important to look at authors and their works focusing on their particularity and individuality rather than assigning them to any restrictive category.

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