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Sexual Violence and the Role of Public Conversations in Japan: A Closer Look at the “Bakky Case”

Abstract

While the #MeToo movement has led to successful campaigns against sexual harassment in many parts of the world, results have been mixed in Japan. In spite of the fact that #MeToo has inspired a number of offshoot campaigns, many victims of sexual abuse remain silent. Greater attention needs to be directed at the reasons for this reluctance to pursue justice. One factor that requires greater scrutiny is the role of public conversations; that is, widely reported comments from prominent members of society which generate some level of discussion and which exercise some influence over people’s way of thinking on particular topics. If public conversations denigrate women by labeling them as sexually promiscuous or as failures in terms of normative motherhood, the result may be increased violence against women and greater difficulty for women who seek justice in the aftermath of sexual violence. This argument is developed in this article which explores the ways in which a set of public conversations during the 1990’s and early 2000’s may have helped to incite extreme reactions of sexual abuse by stigmatizing certain young women both in terms of masculinist norms of sexuality and of female reproduction. Through engagement with relevant texts and member-checking with gender activists, the author found that the failure to learn lessons from a case of pornography-related sexual violence in the early 2000’s (referred to as the “Bakky case”) means that women remain vulnerable, especially if they are stigmatized for “failing in their duty” to bear children. Prominent figures in society must refrain from initiating public conversations that can lead to the stigmatization of women who challenge traditional gender norms. This study is made so that concerned citizens in Japan today, and readers everywhere, can more strongly justify their insistence on public conversations that reflect principles of gender equality and respect.

Keywords

yamanba (mountain witch), Bakky case, documentary pornography, stigmatization, shōshika (declining birth rate)

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS IN JAPAN: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE *BAKKY CASE*

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ABSTRACT

While the #MeToo movement has led to successful campaigns against sexual harassment in many parts of the world, results have been mixed in Japan. In spite of the fact that #MeToo has inspired a number of offshoot campaigns, many victims of sexual abuse remain silent. Greater attention needs to be directed at the reasons for this reluctance to pursue justice. One factor that requires greater scrutiny is the role of public conversations; that is, widely reported comments from prominent members of society which generate some level of discussion and which exercise some influence over people's way of thinking on particular topics. If public conversations denigrate women by labeling them as sexually promiscuous or as failures in terms of normative motherhood, the result may be increased violence against women and greater difficulty for women who seek justice in the aftermath of sexual violence. This argument is developed in this article which explores the ways in which a set of public conversations during the 1990's and early 2000's may have helped to incite extreme reactions of sexual abuse by stigmatizing certain young women both in terms of masculinist norms of sexuality and of female reproduction. Through engagement with relevant texts and member-checking with gender activists, the author found that the failure to learn lessons from a case of pornography-related sexual violence in the early 2000's (referred to as the "Bakky case") means that women remain vulnerable, especially if they are stigmatized for "failing in their duty" to bear children. Prominent figures in society must refrain from initiating public conversations that can lead to the stigmatization of women who challenge traditional gender norms. This study is made so that concerned citizens in Japan today, and readers everywhere, can more strongly justify their insistence on public conversations that reflect principles of gender equality and respect.

KEYWORDS

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IN MARCH 2020, A POLITICAL LEADER IN SCOTLAND, Alex Salmond, was cleared of 13 charges of sexually assaulting a number of women. These women were subject to harsh criticism online in the wake of the "not guilty" verdicts. These criticisms prompted a response from Sandy Brindley, the Chief Executive of the non-profit organization *Rape Crisis Scotland* and her words are particularly applicable in the Japanese context.

The significance of this trial goes far beyond Salmond and the women in this case... How we respond sends a signal to anyone who might one day try to report a sexual offence. In seeking vengeance against those women, those commenting on this case should reflect on the message that they are sending to all those who have experienced sexual crimes, and those who one day will. From the volume and nature of recent calls to our helpline, we know that *when there are public conversations, sexual assault survivors are listening* (emphasis added). Sandy Brindley (quoted in Riordan, 2020)

Brindley's words on the dynamics of enforced silence on victims of sexual assault indicate that the problems that are experienced in Scotland are probably replicated, in culturally modified ways, around the world. Public conversations in every social site have a toxic potential that needs to be managed with vigilance. When the originators of one side of the argument can instill fear in their interlocutors, monologue replaces dialog. In Japan, public conversations about sexual assault, which include judicial findings in court cases, have been particularly one-sided. During early 2019, verdicts from three rape trials sent an inhibitory message to all victims of unwanted sexual attention, as they seemed to indicate a lack of willingness in the judiciary to clearly reflect the seriousness of rape in their sentencing policies. It is positive that the negative verdicts inspired some citizens to resist oppressive conditions.

The *Flower Demo* movement, which is a movement specifically focused on justice for victims of rape and cases of severe sexual violence, demonstrated the determination of some Japanese citizens to reformulate the national conversation on sexual assault. By meeting at a public space once a month in several cities throughout Japan, the organizers hoped to generate social transformation. However, it seems unlikely that the movement has solved the problem to any significant degree, especially as numbers at the *Flower Demo* gatherings have been relatively small and survey research we carried out (O'Mochain & Ueno, forthcoming) yielded negative findings.

During summer 2020, as part of a project to investigate young women's awareness of anti-harassment campaigns, we commissioned a survey with a professional marketing company based in Tokyo. The survey respondents—211 female university students in their late teens and early twenties—indicated if they had heard about or were familiar with anti-harassment campaigns. Only five percent had heard of the *Flower Demo* movement. This indicates that most young women are unaware of the extent of sexual violence cases in Japan and the anger that has been caused by the judiciary's failure to deliver justice on behalf of victims.

This article acknowledges concerns about links between sexual violence and certain genres of pornography in particular social contexts. Recent years have seen a proliferation of images in sexually objectifying media that raise many issues of concern. From an ever earlier age, young people are developing habits which may last into adulthood, and website algorithms may push pornography viewing into ever more disturbing territories. This also applies in Japan's digital economy, and to the manga genre of pornographic material, which also encompasses a range of questionable content. Someya Asuka, the head of the NPO, Positive, Inclusive, Love Yourself, Collaboration, Open-minded No Violence (Pilcon), which promotes comprehensive education in sexuality issues, noted that the paucity of such education in schools has contributed to the dominant role of pornography in educating young men in abusive forms of sexual interaction:

Boys in particular rely on porn videos as their de facto textbooks for sex, with the result that some of them are mistakenly convinced that the kind of abusive, one-sided sex portrayed in these films is the standard practice (Osaki, 2020, p.2).

Galbraith (2017) notes that there are "sex wars" in Japan to refer to heated debates over the harm done by fantasy representations of sexual violence in anime, manga, videos, and in computer games such as *RapeLay* in which participants can rape female characters. While Galbraith takes a relatively benign view of cultural products which are expressions of imagination or fantasy, Coates and Haapio-Kirk (2020, p. 243) take a more critical view, pointing out that the digital pornography sphere "disproportionally" represents violence against women. The authors wonder if women can feel welcome in a digital sphere that seems so unlikely to promote "a fair and equal society."

Readers of *Dignity* will recall a study by Yamamoto, Norma, and Weerasinghe (2018) that analyzed events from the pre-digital era in a case in which women were treated in a supremely unfair and unequal way: the *bakkī jiken* or *Bakky Case*. This name was widely used in public media after the producers of pornographic content were prosecuted for assault of women. For our purposes, *Bakky Case* refers not only to the prosecution of perpetrators, but also to the assaults and the online discussions which incited sexual violence. Yamamoto, Norma, and Weerasinghe (2018) make a valuable contribution with their analysis and focus on online forums owned by pornography production companies which produced and planned DVD films between 2002 to 2005. However, their study does not explore all of the relevant social conditions, and this article deepens our understanding of the motivations of protagonists in the case by exploring the context out of which it emerged. This exploration is merited by the fact that recent years have seen an exponential rise in the numbers of consumers, mainly men, accessing sadistic images or representations of non-consensual sexual activity in pornographic media. Ease of access through ubiquitous forms of digital technology have led to widespread degradation of pornography actors, misogynistic reactions towards women, and sexual exploitation of persons involved in sexually objectifying media (cf. Dines, 2010, 2016; Shibata, 2008). The films from the *Bakky Case* contained a particularly shocking form of sexual exploitation, the documentary pornography sub-genre in which the infliction of physical pain and sexual arousal are closely intertwined. While attitudes towards sexually objectifying media are diverse and polemical, there is a broad consensus that documentary pornography in which physically harmful acts are inflicted upon participants without their consent is profoundly unethical.

The *Bakky Visual Planning* company formed the '*kankin tomo no kai*'/ *Custody Friends Association* to recruit pornography consumers to participate in films as extras who would carry out acts of extreme sexual abuse (Igawa, 2016). This issue may also be relevant in this context. During 2003 and 2004, the company produced various video films of the documentary pornography genre (Yamamoto et al, 2018). The prosecution of the producers in 2005 became known as the *bakkī jiken* or *Bakky case*. Production company employees of the video series: *Mondō Muyō: Kyōsei Shikyū Hakai* [Stop the Discussion! Forcible Uterus Destruction] posted forum posts to recruit amateur males to participate in the gang rape of unsuspecting female victims. Recordings of the atrocity would then be sold for profit. While the account by Yamamoto et al (2018) allows for an understanding of the details of the *Bakky Case*, it does not elaborate on the social context out of which it emerged.

Public conversations that form part of a pervasive preoccupation with *shōshika* or the declining birth rate also needs to be taken into account. The preoccupation with demographic issues has been increasingly prominent over the past two decades, as has the rise of conservative revisionist groups which seek to restore traditional values, including traditional gender norms and roles, to Japanese society. This paper argues that the preoccupations of prominent voices in Japanese society during the 1990's helped to create an environment that facilitated the targeting of young women for abuse, and that this abuse found its most deleterious expression in the *Bakky Case*. We also argue that the voices which played a toxic role in the 1990's have become more insistent over the past two decades. Since the early 2000's, the term *ukei-ka*/rightward drift, has been used to describe the trend by which far-right groups, including women's groups, have become increasingly dominant in mainstream sectors of society (Asahina, 2019). Deeper engagement with the case can provide valuable lessons for Japan and for global society as we confront the dangers of widespread sexual abuse through the pervasive digital image economy.

METHODS

My interest in issues surrounding sexually objectifying media began with an interview of a young Japanese woman, Yuki (O'Mochain & Ueno, forthcoming) who had felt compelled to work in the sex industry during her university years as she was hampered by ill-health and could not pay her medical bills. The interview was part of an ongoing research project on sexual harassment issues in Japanese society, and Yuki was still angry about the harassment she had experienced on public transportation during her high school years. She believed that her negative experiences had contributed to negative patterns in her life such as inflicting self-harm and choosing abusive intimate partners. She spoke of her belief that the widespread sexualization of girls in school uniform promoted the sexual abuse of schoolgirls. This testimony prompted me to review sources in academic literature that explain the extent to which we can connect toxic behaviors to repeated viewings of sexually objectifying media. Engagement with secondary sources allowed for an understanding of the toxic role of pornography in Japanese society and of the "mainstream" voices in society which facilitate the targeting of young women as scapegoats for society's ills. Reading Yamamoto et al (2018) stimulated me to explore the social context that might help to account for the hate speech and misogynistic cruelty expressed by protagonists in the "Bakky case." With a critical perspective, I read a range of secondary and tertiary sources which showed a preoccupation in Japanese society with demographic issues, while the possible connections of this preoccupation to high levels of sexual abuse seem not to be appreciated. Peer-checking with fellow members of a gender-based special interest group (GALE or Gender Awareness in Language Education) and with other gender activists who are long-term residents in Japan allowed me to verify that my judgments about the "Bakky case" were reasonable and that the problems that were highlighted by the case are still relevant as causes for critical concern in Japan today.

FINDINGS

Clarke (2004, p. 199) identifies two types of documentary pornography. The first type feigns the documentation of actual torture and rape. Repeated exposure to this genre "leads logically" to the second type: "... documentation of unambiguously real rape, humiliation, or torture." Clarke (p. 204) conjectures on the social function of documentary pornography as "emphasizing and enforcing women's lower social status." A focus on both of these types of sexually objectifying media may seem objectionable

to some readers, but they should consider the words of action researchers Rowell, Bruce, Shosh, and Riel (2017, xvi). Action research is not for the "faint of heart ... [it deals with] tough issues in tough times." Since 2009, the Japan-based organization PAPS (formerly "People against pornography and sexual violence" now "Organization for pornography and sexual exploitation survivors") has provided reports with long list of horrendous human rights abuses against women in AV films ("adult video" films the term most commonly used in Japan for sexually objectifying media), as well as essays that detail abuses in the production, distribution, and consumption of sexually objectifying media (Porn harms, 2020). Similarly, Morita Seiya (2004) details abuses in his review of "pornography, prostitution, and women's human rights in Japan." Nakamura (2017) details the ways in which female actors in Japanese pornography are often forced into acts they do not want to commit, or they are subjected to horrendous acts of violence during recordings. Additionally, documentary pornography is a reality in the life of many people through the dissemination of abusive Internet images. It should not be seen as a niche interest that lies hermetically sealed off from "mainstream" or "normal" social life.

Unfortunately, stigmatization of certain women and girls can be part of "mainstream" social life in a broadly masculinist social context. Miller and Bardsley (2005, p. 3) point out that the use of stigmatizing language does not exist in a vacuum or reflect individual idiosyncrasies alone. The use of "denigrating labels and descriptions [against women and girls] does not simply reflect an individual's nasty opinion or attitude but is the manifestation of patriarchal social structure." Yamamoto, Norma, and Weerasinghe (2018) write of consumers of pornography who expressed hatred for *yamanba* (mountain witch or crone). The name, which was often used against a stigmatized group of young women during the late 1990's, refers to an archetype from Japanese mythology, folklore, and Nō theater. From the 1970's, novelist Ōba Minako had attempted to portray *yamanba* in a positive, feminist light. For her, *yamanba* could be an archetype or icon to express "all the resentment and dreams of many generations of women" (cited in Hansen, 2014, p. 151).

However, during the 1990's, *Yamanba* came to be used as "a degrading and discriminatory term to refer to teenage girls who wear a distinct style of makeup that gives the impression of tanned skin, whiteish lips, and pastel colours above the eyes" (Yamamoto et al, p. 5). Practitioners are part of a larger group, *Ganguro* ("black face") high school girls who are distinguished by a particular set of make-up and fashion styles. During the 1990's, young women who adopted *Ganguro* fashion styles such as were highly visible on the streets of Tokyo and other large cities in Japan. While norms of ultra-femininity in Japan prize pale, white skin, and the habitual use of parasols to avoid skin coloring, these young women did the opposite and embraced skin coloring. Often, they were objects of street harassment.

Classified in a rather heavy-handed manner as dark-skinned primitives and animals, girls daring to wear black face and *yamanba* style were subjected to a racist criticism from self-appointed guardians of "racial purity" (Kinsella, 2014, p. 110-127).

In her analysis of "intersectionality" in Japanese sociocultural contexts, Gottfried (2008, p. 31) writes of the "historical erasures of ethno-cultural groups in Japan." Young women who seemed to use fashion and make-up to playfully declare that they belonged to a race and a culture that was not part of a monolithic Japanese identity were bound to become targets of derision and aggression. The word *bakkaka*/idiotization was used in reference to *Ganguro* "bad girls" in weekly news magazines such

as “Spa!” (From *Kogyaru* to witches, 2003). In this context, “bad girls” is the term applied to women who do not live up to hyper-idealized, masculinist constructions of virginhood and motherhood (cf. Miller & Bardsley, 2005). *Yamanba* girls

expose themselves to verbal abuse from passersby, physical violence, the prurient winks of older men, and getting headhunted by scouts working for the sex industry (Miyake, 2001).

In the popular press—dominated by male journalists—*yamanba* were denigrated in terms similar to those used for practitioners of *enjō kosai*: scary, sexually promiscuous, selfish, and socially rebellious (Kinsella, 2014, p. 108). Miller and Bardsley (2005, p. 10) write of “The *ganguro* described in men’s media ... as having low, greedy, animalistic urges.” Leheny (2006, p. 74) notes that in 1997, a popular “scary monster” Halloween costume was the “*ganguro*” girl costume.

During the late 1990’s in Japan, some of the consumers of the documentary pornography genre made online forum posts to demand the targeting of *yamanba* girls. As seen earlier, this genre seems to lead inevitably to ever-greater abuses against the women involved (Clarke, 2004). Some respondents on the online forum which specialized in documentary pornography expressed a desire to target an “amateur girl.” This meant that any young woman who barely connected or even completely unconnected to the pornography industry could be targeted for street harassment and further abuse. The forum contributors fantasized about the woman being harassed or deceived into participation in the film. As soon as she reaches the film location, the woman, who has not been told what will occur, is subject to sexual atrocities. Yamamoto et al. (2018, p. 8) notes that one DVD film was delayed, and producers posted messages on the online forum to apologize for the delay. A female participant in the film had been treated with such a degree of horrendous violence that she sustained life-threatening injuries related to rectal perforation and anal fissure, and she required six months hospitalization. It would likely have been traumatic for this woman to go public with an account of her ordeal, but it might well have had a positive effect by making the general public aware of the human rights atrocities involved in torture pornography. Not surprisingly, though, she retained her anonymity in the subsequent court case. At this stage of the account from the producers, there is mention of their first “brush with the law” as they were taken into custody twice due to the woman’s injuries (p. 14). Even after “pulling strings” they were still facing lawsuits. “*At this stage we can’t release it. Because it contains very cruel torture styles. But we will, someday. Pray! ...*” While the producers of the DVD film were eventually brought to justice, it is disturbing to note the degree of confidence they had that legislation or law enforcement officers would not hinder their activities. In the same series of forum posts, producers sought male recruits to gang-rape a randomly selected woman. The producers reassure the potential rapists that they have done this before with impunity in the following message:

Some men were taken to the police station but were let go after questioning... No arrests were made, and nobody got a record. You don’t even have to answer any questions put to you by police ... You might not feel totally relaxed, but please still give it a try! (Yamamoto, 2018, p. 14).

These posts underline the fact that legislation and the quality of interrogation by police officers cannot inspire confidence among female victims of sexual assault and rape. Women who provided initial consent—however dishonestly elicited—to

participate in a DVD film of a salacious nature are very unlikely to be properly protected under the law.

Until the *Bakkī jiken/Bakky Case* of 2004/2005 when ten protagonists were prosecuted for the violence they had orchestrated, the company's videos and DVD's were still widely available in regular video stores. In DVD films like "*Brutal Rape! Yamanba Busters: Let's Sanction the Worthless Bitches*" key words and subtitles flash onto the screen: "*Punishment from Heaven;*" "*Lazy*" "*Selfish*" "*Stupid*" "*Punishment time!*" (pp. 3-4). The reference in the title to *yamanba busters* was likely cued by a primetime television show from early 2002. In May, the TBS show *Gakkō e ikō!* (Let's go to school!) introduced a new slot entitled *Ōgyaru basuta-zu/Dirty girl busters*.

Each week, its celebrity young male hosts broke into the rooms of teenage girls suspected of being Dirty Girls, often yamanba, and ridiculed their slovenly habits (Kinsella, 2014, p. 70).

This stigmatization of young women who chose a particular fashion style had itself been promoted by Koshihara Tetsuya's manga series for men from 1988 – later adapted as a film directed by Yamamoto Eiji (*Enjo Kōsai bokumetsu undō/ Compensated dating extermination movement*). Kinsella (2014, p. 108) notes that during the 1990's, "Weekly magazines (*shūkanshi*) targeted at male readers had connected radical girls' fashion to casual prostitution." It seems not to have occurred to the producers of these products of popular culture that certain consumers would take the "extermination" directive very seriously when the politically charged element of prostitution was involved. The gender discrimination and hostility that is displayed in comments by ultra-conservative political leaders, on television shows and in media reports, and later in pornographic manga and DVD films, all find warped expression in violent acts of hostility and humiliation in real-life interactions.

The pornographic production company's online forums allowed consumers to share fantasies of torture of women, requesting producers of the films to depict ever more violent scenes of abuse. Yamamoto et al. (2018) cite statements made by pornography consumers on the online forum, and the statements make for chilling reading: *Yamanba's social standing must be destroyed* (p. 4); *It's about time the true nature of yamanba was shown to the world!*; *Why not just hit her hard with a fist?* (p. 5); *Break them into pieces and destroy their characters ...* (p. 12); *Including physical torture is fine but please include psychological pain as well ... I really wanted to see her [female actor in pornographic film] damned face smashed to pieces ...* (p. 13).

Baldwin (2004, p. 301) writes of male customers of prostitutes who sometimes try to adopt the role of "punitive avengers of the public good" by their denigration of women who have often been coerced into prostitution. A similar phenomenon is evident in this case with regard to women who are forced into the production of violent pornographic images. The level of "moral disengagement" in the consumers' online forum posts reinforces the argument that all pornographic depictions of coercive and violent behaviors involve dehumanization. Rape, for these consumers, is "retribution against all women" (p. 9). By extrapolation, one can assume that, within the terms of this skewed perspective, sexual abuse is also "retribution against all women." The hateful epithets used by the online forum contributors emerge from a broader, facilitating social context.

The systemic factors outlined in this paper help to account for the sadistic behaviors of young men in a situation of non-accountability provided by anonymous online forum for producers who would accede to the exhortation of their malevolent

messages. In those forum messages that constituted the building blocks of a hyper-toxic masculinity, the contributors brought to its most extreme conclusion the logic of sexism in the way it is directed against “bad girls” in Japan. The personal experience of *yamanba* women who became material for “trophy DVD films” is more than a story of misfortune for those who happened to fall prey to predators. For the men who sexually abused their “bad girl” targets, it seemed likely that no one would hold them accountable for their actions. The degree of social approbation received by the sadistic *Bakky Case* rapists was minimal. In elementary and high school, they had likely been socialized into social practices of *ijime* and, possibly, of *kōnai bōryoku*/school violence. Perhaps, the lesson they had learned was that the authorities signal who should be targeted and the group that forms to implement a bullying campaign will not be held accountable for their acts of denigration. The suggestion that *yamanba* women were legitimate targets of denigration was taken to an extreme by the men who hospitalized women in their sadistic films, but their “cover story” had been provided by implicit societal norms of denigration for “bad girls.” By scapegoating these renegades, other young women would learn to accept their place in a hierarchy of gender subordination. Systemic factors were compounded by situational factors: producers of pornography invited consumers to express their fantasies on anonymous online forums. Once this forum had been created, norms of toxic masculinity prompted contributors to outdo one another in the scale of malevolence that was expressed.

The contributions of *yamanba*-haters on the online forums of the *Bakky Case* provide some insight into the cultural dynamics that underpin extreme misogyny online in Japan’s. Iida (1998) points out the danger of focusing on a few odd individuals in a way that might reinforce stereotypes (in this case, perhaps, about “sex mad” or “cruel” Japanese men). However, the way in which consumers and producers of documentary pornography came to target one particular group of young women is worth dwelling on. Broader social forces which stigmatize independently minded young women had been given considerable exposure in mass media forums. This allowed a group of exceptionally sadistically minded individuals to imagine that they had societal approval for their attacks on *yamanba* “bad girls.” In an essay on *yamanba* bad girls, Kinsella (2005, pp. 144-145) notes the long history of conservative preoccupation with control over young women’s bodies. This preoccupation has roots in attitudes of misogyny, racism, and antipathy for all things foreign: “Maintaining a national stock of racially pure, sexually chaste, and ethnically Japanese young women ... has been a longstanding concern.” The author goes on to note the role of an “eagle-eyed male press” (*oyaji zasshi*) to surveil young women’s behavior and to provide entertaining accounts for a “rapt national audience.” Those who display “more cosmopolitan styles of female behavior have ... been singled out and stigmatized as racial and cultural traitors to Japan.” These processes of stigmatization have continued over the past two decades and can be linked to acts of sexual abuse. Offhand comments by political leaders that trivialize rape and that mitigate the blame that should be attributed to perpetrators of sexual assault may well have been interpreted by extremists as a license to commit further acts of sexualized aggression. Women who seek justice for sexual assault will continue to risk being stigmatized by ultra-nationalists as “traitors to Japan unless activists succeed on a broad tranche of social reforms and, more fundamentally, transforming the “male cultural imagination” (Kinsella, 2014, p. 161). By constructing *yamanba* young women as a type of ethno-cultural group, critics were placing these women in a group that is at high risk of efforts for erasure.

Assurances were made that police were not going to prosecute perpetrators. Another disturbing aspect of the *Bakky Case* was the initial apathetic reactions of police officers when presented with evidence that men were actively engaged in targeting women to produce these materials. After they became aware of the violent assaults on the women involved, the Ikebukuro police officers did pursue the case diligently. However, if they had been more concerned from the beginning, human suffering could have been avoided. It could be argued that individual, dispositional causes account for the actions of men who act out their sadistic, pornographic fantasies. Rather than adopting a purely essentialist view, however, it seems more plausible to also take account of situational and systemic factors which promote sadistic behaviors. Even gross pathology is limited in its effects without environmental supports. While the principle of freedom of expression needs to be respected, exceptions should be made for misogynistic hate speech such as that of the men who targeted young *yamanba* women, and the privilege of anonymous posting online should be removed from them. Police need to be immediately responsive to any report that a group of pornography producers are targeting vulnerable individuals who are in danger of profound physical and/or psychological abuse. An improvement in systemic and situational factors will enhance the life situation of all women who are stigmatized for their association with sex work. Ideally, in future they will no longer be highly stigmatized and will be able to pursue justice whenever targeted for sexual abuse or gender harassment in their workplaces.

Legislative changes are required to challenge androcentric biases as the present law simply requires that a computer mosaic, or equivalent, needs to cover the genitals of protagonists in all pornographic materials. However, once this proviso has been met, almost any representation involving adults is possible. Hambleton (2020, pp. 365-366) notes that "A lack of legislation surrounding erotic content has meant that extreme violence and rape remain free from censorship." Norma and Morita (2019, p. 5) note that since 2000, organizations like the Anti-Pornography and Prostitution Research Group (APP) have helped to curtail the most sadistic practices of the pornography industry in Japan. They wonder however, why, throughout the 1990's videos depicting the torture of women were easily available:

These materials weren't part of any secretly operating club: they did not circulate underground, and their manufacturers were not especially concerned about legal repercussion (Norma & Morita, 2019, p.5).

The organization has seen the relevance also of collaborating with various women's activist groups and with the Violence Against Women in War Research Action Center (VAWW-RAC) which has worked extensively on behalf of victims of sexual slavery during wartime, especially "comfort women." While the support of the VAWW-RAC helped the APP to thrive as an organization, especially in its early days, the collaboration does carry the danger of targeting by far-right groups. During the course of survey research in 2007, the organization received many e-mails and online forum website contributions which condemned the APP's endeavor to rein in the activities of pornographers. The report gives the following posting as an example of the tone of abusive mail messages: "Anti-pornography proponents, including those against child pornography, should move to China or North Korea!" (*Poruno/kaishun mondai kenkyū kai* (2007). The implication seems to be that activists who work against pornography are communists or agents of Japan's enemies.

In spite of the fact that the *Bakky Case* resulted in prison sentences for the producers of pornographic materials which involved human rights atrocities, the case did not initiate a national conversation about women's safety. The fact that documentary pornography DVD films and digital images remain easily accessible should be a cause for keen debate, but such discussions were not forthcoming at the time of the case, partly because accounts of the women's ordeals were not highlighted in mainstream news media sources. Perhaps time has arrived for change. Norma and Morita (2019) note that, for the first time ever in 2017, a producer of pornography was given a custodial sentence (on appeal) for having forced a woman into the production of pornographic images. The authors appeal for more custodial sentences in the future in view of the profound harm involved.

The experiences of women in the pornography industry are experienced by women in a more diffuse way in society at large where women are inhibited from owning their own sexuality. Most importantly, prominent figures in society, whether they are political, judicial, or media-based protagonists in public forums should refrain from initiating public conversations that express stigmatization of young women who seem to reject traditional gender norms for women. A lack of awareness in this regard could lead to a repeat of the type of shocking incidents exemplified by the *Bakky Case*. It is positive to note that, despite the patriarchal features of Japanese society, some of the men in the *Bakky Case* were held accountable for their actions. They served prison sentences and the *Bakky Visual Planning* company that had orchestrated the attacks for pornography consumers went out of business in March 2005.

In 2007, the Tokyo District Court sentenced the main organizer of the *Bakky Case* atrocities, Kuriyama Ryū, to 18 years in prison for sexual abuse of four women. The court heard evidence of how the four women, who had experience as actors in pornographic films, were lied to about the productions, which left them with grave physical and psychological damage. Few feminist activists in Japan drew attention to the case, reflecting, perhaps, a prejudice against female sex workers, which Ueno (1994; 2004, p. 102) identifies as a weakness of many feminist movements. "Japanese women internalized patriarchy's prostitute discrimination ... this discrimination had remained unchanged post-war." A biased attitude towards women who engage in sex work, either in prostitution or in "adult videos," is interlocked with class discrimination also as it was expected that only low-income women who lacked virginal qualities would become prostitutes, and this was excusable because they helped to "protect the chastity of women from good homes." Ueno argues that this discriminatory attitude towards female sex workers carried over into a lack of concern for those who had been subject to systematic sexual exploitation as "comfort women." Once again, an association of ideas is evident, an association that affects all women who seek justice after being subjected to sexual abuse. While accounts of sexual abuse in the *Bakky Case* make for unpleasant reading, such unpleasant feelings may be justified if they serve to shock readers out of attitudes of complacency and indifference. In this way, the ending of cultures of impunity for all perpetrators of sexual abuse may become an urgent priority for all policymakers in Japan. For the moment, too many policymakers share the preoccupation by far-right groups with women who do not bear children as they are "failing in their duty" to meet Japan's demographic crises.

CONNECTIONS TO PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS ABOUT *SHŌSHIKA* (DECLINING BIRTH RATE)

Comments and suggested video titles reflect the assertion that men control the reproductive capacities of women, who must not think they are too strong to be

controlled by men. They must know, also, that they will be punished, and their reproductive capacities destroyed if they want to put them to illicit use: “I think: *Yamanba revival: Fury, no condoms, and violence* would be good (p. 5). [They are] ... *raped by men without contraceptives!* (p. 5); *I really want to see those women with strong uteruses being broken ...* (p. 7). Advertising copy for the series also features the theme of reproductive violence: “It’s a grievous blow! They have become mere flesh and bones, worthless without the ability of reproduction!” (p. 11). The twisted logic of these consumers of documentary pornography prompts these men to fantasize either about multiple impregnations by violation or about destruction of the uterus of a young woman who “fails” to place her womb at the service of the nation.

A range of public conversations over the past twenty years show that issues of reproductive stigmatization are still relevant and often harmful. The declining birth-rate in Japan is an issue that has gained ever-increasing attention (*Jinkō dōtai*, 2019), but the way in which demographic issues are presented needs deeper interrogation. It is a commonplace to note that globalized capitalism demands ever-expanding economies and continuous growth of each country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures. If a country’s population is declining, a national conversation might result in a decision to make structural adjustments to adapt to a smaller scale economic reality. Alternatively, a state can admit higher numbers of immigrants. However, in the Japanese context, no interrogation has been made of the imperatives of late capitalism or of the scaremongering tactics of public figures who warn of rampant crime if immigrants are allowed into the country. Only one solution—marriage and higher rates of female fertility—is widely touted as the answer to nationwide demographic problems. Allison (1994, p. 138) cites three medical texts from the early 1980’s which expressed concern about the “dulling of sexual interest” among young Japanese males. The belief that male sexuality should be allowed to express itself freely, if only for the sake of demographic gains, seems to remain influential among political conservatives. Within terms of this logic, the answer to the aging society is having large numbers of men who want to have sex, and large numbers of women who want to do their duty to the nation and bear children. At least two unfortunate consequences can follow: men who sexually harass women are not held to account for their actions and a hierarchy is created by which women who have children are validated as “real women” and single women are denigrated as selfish and unpatriotic. As the social problems associated with an aging society accentuate, the pressure on young women to marry and have children remains intense (Dales, 2009, p. 113).

The discourse of stigmatization of women without children can be traced before, during, and after the *Bakky Case*. It was evident in a comment by ex-Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro. In 2003, in a meeting with members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, he was reported as stating that he was opposed to providing social welfare payments to “... women who don’t even give birth once, who grow old living their lives selfishly, and singing the praises of freedom” (Gamble & Watanabe, 2004, p. 340). Another example of discourse that stigmatizes women who are not mothers occurred in 2007 when Yanagisawa Hakuo, then Minister of Health, delivered a speech to LDP party members in which he referred to women as *umu kikai* or “birth machines” (McCurry, 2007). He exhorted women to do a public service by raising the low birthrate of Japan, which fell to a record low in 2005. A more explicit denigration of women who do not have children was expressed by Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro in 2001. He was reported as saying that “Old women who no longer have the ability to reproduce are useless and their lives represent a crime against civilization” (Wakakuwa & Fujimura-Fanselow, 2011, p. 340). Six years later, Ishihara was re-

elected to office. While the 2001 comments were widely criticized at the time, few pointed out the possible connection with sexual assault issues. The connection can be made by reference to comments made by another LDP lawmaker, Ōta Seiichi who referred to a criminal case in which four male university students were found guilty of gang-raping a young woman at a so-called “Super-Free” drinking party (Mori takes turn, 2003). A number of women came forward to report similar experiences. “People familiar with the club’s activities said members competed with each other in some sort of bizarre contest over the number of women they raped” (Tang, 2003, p. 2). In a debate in the House of Representatives, Ōta Seiichi denounced the young Japanese men who lack the courage to propose marriage and start families, commenting: “Gang rape shows the people who do it are still virile and that’s okay. I think that might make them close to normal” (Tang, 2003, p. 2). Ōta’s comments are not made in a discursive vacuum. They reflect an attitude that was evident in the initial nonchalant attitude of police officers in the *Bakky Case* when they were first informed of possible sexual assault and gang rape of women as part of a commercial pornography venture.

A prejudice against women who are constructed as “bad girls” may have contributed to vitriolic reactions against a woman who had worked as a bikini model before she entered politics, Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly member, Shiomura Ayaka. Though her choice of work indicates nothing about her choices regarding sexual behavior, the intensity of the reaction against some of the public statements seem to indicate an antipathy that goes beyond reasonable expectations. In June 2014, the “Your Party” assembly member was presenting questions to Tokyo Governor Masuzoe Yōichi in the Assembly. Shiomura, then in her mid-thirties, a public representative who has chosen not to marry or have children, spoke of the need for the local government to craft policies that would address women’s concerns, including infertility treatment. She received loud and persistent catcalls from Assembly members including: “Why don’t you get married first?” “What’s the matter, are you barren?” “You should have a child yourself first” (Mamiya, 2014). These catcalls are resonant with the sentiments expressed by Lower House member, Katō Kanji when he delivered a speech at a friend’s wedding in 2018: “I would like you to definitely have at least three children ... [people who don’t marry] won’t have any children, so will end up in a nursing home funded by other people’s children’s taxes” (Teramoto, 2018). In 2015, a survey by the Alliance of Feminist Representatives (*Femigiren*) found that 52% of women in local politics had experienced sexual harassment. As an example of the type of comment that female members of local councils often hear, the survey reported that one representative heard a male colleague asserting, “Women who don’t have children are class-A war criminals” (Femigiren, 2015, p. 38). Unfortunately, many members of the public also idealize the figure of the mother as the embodiment of “true womanhood.” When the lifestyle magazine AERA surveyed 172 people and asked, “What experience do you want women politicians to have?” 101 respondents said “childrearing” and this was the most popular answer (Kobayashi, 2015, p. 66).

Perhaps it is not coincidental that the surge in national attention to *shōshika* (declining birthrate) issues comes at a time when Japan has been declining in its gender equality ranking. There has also been an increasingly vociferous backlash against feminists (cf. Ueno, 2006). Shirahase (2010, p. 80) refers to a widespread belief that the marriage rate has declined because highly educated women do not want to get married or are too demanding regarding prospective marriage partners. Later sections show that the promotion of this belief is spearheaded in the gender ideology of far-right factions which seem preoccupied with the nation’s low fertility rate. The falling birth rate presents a large number of challenges that Japanese society will have to

grapple with over time, but the imagination regarding possible solutions, such as the admittance of immigrants into the country, may be hampered along gender lines. As Ishiguro (2020, p. 1) asserts, "getting married remains a strong social norm in Japan." However, the strength of the social norm may reflect the power of older demographic groups to impose norms, rather than the beliefs or practices of young people. Despite social pressure to marry at a young age, the majority of citizens aged under-34 choose to remain single. In 2015, almost 69% of men and 75% of women in the 18-34 age group had never married (The 15th Japanese, 2017). Young women's reluctance to enter into matrimony may reflect a number of negative conditions that often follow taking that life option. Married women are expected to have children, leave the workforce to raise small children, and then return to the workplace. However, their chances of being able to resume their former careers or even to get any high-quality work (i.e. with job security, promotion prospects, high salary, full social welfare coverage) are minimal (cf. Oi, 2021). Women are aware that childcare costs are punitive, and that they are still expected to work long hours of overtime even with small children at home. The chances of shared parenting with their male partners are minimal. Their chances of thriving in the workplace are hampered by the practical difficulties associated with being a working mother. "Maternity harassment," power harassment, and sexual harassment blight too many Japanese workplaces for women to feel confident about feeling safe and appreciated there. Many have chosen to remain single, but the stigmatization of single women did not end with the "Bakky case" trial in 2005.

CONCLUSION

In her exploration of relationships between male infants and mothers, Irigaray (1977) refers to a danger with disturbed men everywhere that they enact sadomasochistic fantasies ... to force entry, to penetrate, to appropriate for himself the mystery of this womb where he has been conceived ..." In a striking example of the feminist maxim that, "The personal is political," one sees in this case how personal fantasy fuses with a political intent through acts of sexual abuse. Women must either learn the lesson of maternal duty or their capacity to bear children will be taken away from them. The fiction that men, not women, are the originators of human life is asserted here in the most brutal terms possible. The consumption of this type of medium and the online forum comments reflect the inferences drawn from influential assertions by members of the power elite about "bad girls": "Women who are not preparing for motherhood, having babies, and living according to traditional gender norms are unworthy of respect as members of society. The *Bakky Case* should have brought about comprehensive reforms in police practices and should also have taught public figures to refrain from initiating public conversations which denigrate women who choose not to be mothers. However, the discursive forces that were evident during this period still have relevance today. Women still have negative experiences when they report sexual assault to the police (see for example the case of Itō Shiori (2018) the prominent journalist who has been called "the face of #MeToo in Japan|" and who felt traumatized by the way in which she was required to re-enact, before an audience of male police officers, the rape she had suffered). Additionally, even after the *Bakky Case*, some public figures continued to denigrate women who do not live up to their pre-set standards as "birth machines."

The factors outlined in this article help to account for the relative lack of progress of anti-sexual harassment movements such as #MeToo. In recent years, public conversations denigrating "bad girls" have promoted hostile acts against targeted women and have made it more difficult for female victims of sexual violence to pursue justice,

or even to tell their stories anti-harassment forums. Perhaps the most striking examples of hostility against targeted groups came from producers of “documentary pornography” who targeted young women who are associated with radical fashion styles and/or compensated dating practices. This targeting was not haphazard but reflected a systematic pattern of denigration from political discourse and across a wide range of mass media products. The targeting of women who fail to conform to masculinist gender norms has continued, as can be seen in the difficulties faced by women who try to pursue justice in the aftermath of sexual violence. In her focus on Japanese society, Kinsella (2014, p. 21) notes “A long history of societal anxiety about girls becoming self-serving and independent: becoming, that is, *schoolgirls*” (emphasis in original). In the case of the attacks on *yamanba* women, the feelings of objectification had been compounded by conceptual justifications provided by prominent figures in politics and in popular entertainment. In order for women to acknowledge the pain they have endured because of sexual assault, they need to have a sense of self as “sexually self-determined” (Ueno, 2004, p. 75), or as one who understands the meaning and value of her own sexual experiences, without reference to external (often masculinist) norms. Survivors of sexual abuse also need to feel confident that their accounts of sexual violence will be heard in an unbiased and supportive manner by authorities and by fellow-citizens. The struggle to create societies in which women can feel safe, empowered, and sexually self-determined continues.

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