London School of Economics and Political Science

Translating Maternal Violence

The Discursive Construction of Maternal Filicide in 1970s Japan

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Abstract

The present dissertation takes late postwar Japan as its case study and investigates the ways in which 'ambivalence to/in motherhood' emerges at the very site where maternal violence and, more specifically, maternal filicide disrupts social norms of acceptable maternal behaviour.

In 1970s Japan the number of cases of mothers who killed their own children saw a dramatic increase to the point of reaching, within media representations in particular, the dimension of a social phenomenon. Within the framework of idealizations of maternal identity, formulated in terms of continuous love, self-sacrifice and domesticity, filicidal mothers came to be labelled as either "bad" (cruel, monstrous) or "mad" (mentally unstable, neurotic). The apparent proliferation of maternal child-killing and what was perceived as the unjust treatment meted out to these criminalized mothers became a major concern for a new women's liberation movement emerging in Japan between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, known as *ūman ribu* (woman lib). *Ribu* contested the widespread characterization of mothers who kill as either devilish or mentally ill, and drew on the numerical increase of cases of maternal filicide as evidence of a symptomatic malfunctioning of the dominant gender ideology in modern Japanese society. Postwar Japan also witnessed a boom in women's literature whose focus on the grotesque, on worlds of dreams and madness and on the morbid portrayal of female antisocial behaviours constituted fertile terrain for the proliferation of disquieting images of motherhood and maternal violence. This thesis focuses on the work by Japanese writer Takahashi Takako as a specific case study to address the discursive construction of filicidal mothers in women's literature.

This study acknowledges motherhood as a heated site of contested meanings and focuses on a close textual reading of media coverage, the rhetoric of *ribu* and women's literature in order to explore the discursive constructions of mothers who kill which characterised early 1970s Japan. It sheds light on the problematic interactions between the different discourses under consideration and identifies the relationship between motherhood and violence as a hot-spot where clashing discourses produce a constant re-articulation of maternal and female identity.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of figures

List of tables

INTRODUCTION

The present thesis investigates discursive constructions of maternal filicide in late postwar Japan. The number of cases of mothers who killed their own children saw a dramatic increase in the 1970s in Japan, to the point of reaching, within media representations in particular, the dimension of a social phenomenon. Within the framework of idealizations of maternal identity formulated in terms of continuous love, self-sacrifice and domesticity, the news media labelled filicidal mothers as either "bad" (cruel, monstrous) or "mad" (mentally unstable, neurotic). The apparent proliferation of maternal child-killing and what was perceived as the unjust and biased treatment meted out to these criminalized mothers became a major concern for a new women's liberation movement emerging in Japan between the late 1960s and early 1970s, known as *ūman ribu* (woman lib) or simply *ribu* (lib). *Ribu* contested the widespread characterization of mothers who kill as either devilish or mentally ill, and drew on the numerical increase of cases of maternal filicide as evidence of a symptomatic malfunctioning of the dominant gender ideology in modern Japanese society. In the same period, Japan also witnessed a boom in women's literature whose focus on the grotesque, on worlds of dreams and madness and on the morbid portrayal of female antisocial behaviours constituted fertile terrain for the proliferation of disquieting images of motherhood and maternal violence.

This thesis explores three discursive sites that emerged in the early 1970s where the image of the murderous mother assumed a distinctive visibility: 1) media coverage of maternal filicide; 2) *ribu*'s rhetoric about mothers who killed their children; 3) works of fiction by Japanese woman writer Takahashi Takako (1932 - 2013), who is

taken here as emblematic of a broader fictional concern with murderous mothers and the "dark side" of the maternal. These three arenas are understood in loosely Foucauldian terms as 'discourses' that (re)present what was said about mothers who killed their children at a specific moment in time and space, and which indicate how maternal filicide was itself "created" *qua* object of discourse. This is, by no means, to suggest that filicide was not real or that it was performatively brought into being by an identifiable set of discursive practices. The consequences of "real" maternal filicide for the child who was killed, for the mother who killed and for society (fathers included) are clearly too important to be downplayed as the result of textual exaggerations that produced something short of a moral panic (Cohen, 2002). However, an engagement with these consequences demands a fundamentally different kind of investigation that is beyond the scope of the present research. While not aimed at justifying crimes of filicide nor devaluing the suffering of children, my analysis, on the other hand, approaches discourses of maternal filicide from a perspective that privileges wider mechanisms of knowledge production: it explores the modalities by means of which knowledge about mothers who killed their children was produced, circulated and contested in the framework of a complex strategic configuration of discourses that made it possible to think maternal filicide in the first place. Taking 1970s Japan as a case study, the present research recognises the relationship between motherhood and violence as a hot-spot where clashing discourses produce a constant re-articulation of maternal and female identity. It also identifies the profound ambivalence that appears to haunt our hesitant attempts to bring a maternal potential for violence into discourse.

In a Japanese cultural and historical context where notions of motherhood and womanhood were understood to be coextensive, it does not come as a surprise that dominant discourses such as those produced in news media depicted murderous mothers in ways that functioned to reinforce gender stereotypes and traditional ideas of maternal propriety. What is noteworthy, instead, is the simultaneous emergence of "counter-discourses" that I understand as explicitly or implicitly challenging those very cultural expectations by means of unorthodox and unexpected representations of mothers who kill. Both *ribu*'s activism in solidarity with mothers who killed their children and Takahashi Takako's fictional portrayals of maternal animosity are interpreted here as instances of a multifaceted effort to make it possible to conceive of a maternal potential for violence in less stigmatizing or pathologizing ways.

In this respect, this thesis is meant to be feminist in scope despite the fact that the relationship of both *ribu* and Takahashi with what might be called 'feminism' is somewhat vexed. A first set of problems emerges as we try to identify what we should take as the referent of the word 'feminism.' Vera Mackie (2003) has drawn attention to the fact that, contrary to our expectations, the Japanese transliteration of the word 'feminist' (*feminisuto*) originally denoted 'a man who was kind to women, rather than a campaigner for women's political rights' (160). She has also observed that it was only in 1977 that the word was reclaimed by the founders of the homonymous journal *Feminisuto*, and with it 'the concept of women's militancy as political agents engaged in a project of social transformation' (ibid.). Furthermore, Setsu Shigematsu (2012) is at pains to stress the enormous gap separating *ribu*'s bottom-up, anti-establishment and anti-capitalist spirit from the one animating a magazine like *Feminisuto* that she describes as 'launched by a group of academic and professional women in

collaboration with a few (white) American and European feminists' and which was funded 'by selling advertising space to [Japanese] corporations' (172). In a similar vein, it has been also observed that the Japanese word *feminizumu* (transliteration of the English 'feminism') carries academic and foreign associations and maintains an uncertain relationship with *ribu*'s grassroots activism, stemming from a desire to dissociate itself from the tone of ridicule with which *ribu* was often portrayed in news media (Shigematsu, 2012: 171-5, 249 note 1; Mackie, 2003: 160-1; Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995: 158-9). Additionally, as will become clear in chapter 3, the relationship of *ribu* with western (mainly American) feminism and with pre-existent forms of women's political organizing in Japan has always been a heated and contested one.

If *ribu* cannot be simplistically understood as synonymous with feminism, Takahashi's stance vis-à-vis feminism is even more ambiguous in that, even though she did write non-fictional essays on woman's condition, she never did so from an overtly political or activist perspective nor did she ever identify as feminist (in fact, notions of 'feminism' or 'women's liberation' never appear in her writings). Nonetheless, both *ribu* and Takahashi portrayed mothers who killed their children in ways that posed a profound challenge to widely shared assumptions about motherhood and maternal love. These portrayals were framed within broader attempts to question society's gender stereotypes and prescriptive ideas of appropriate femininity.[1]

The fact that *ribu* is still barely known to a western audience and the recognition that a comparable engagement with mothers who kill has yet to be found

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[1] Mori (1994; 1996) and Bullock (2006; 2010) offer excellent examples of scholarship that explores the specifically political challenges Takahashi's fiction poses to normative discourses of gender.

in any strand of western feminism that I am aware of, have motivated the distinctive emphasis I place upon the exploration of *ribu* in the overall economy of the present work. In a way that differs from the treatment of news media and Takahashi's fiction, the analysis of *ribu* develops across two chapters, rather than a single one: the first chapter offers a broad introduction to and contextualization of the movement, while the second chapter engages in a close reading of those texts produced and circulated by *ribu* that directly address maternal filicide. These 'twin chapters' (chapter 3 and 4) are spatially located at the very centre of the thesis's linear development, but they are intended to invite a mode of reading that is not expected to be linear. To a certain extent, the central position they occupy (right after the analysis of media coverage and right before the chapter on literature) is meant to operate as a second point of departure for the reader, simultaneously encouraging a "backward movement," that is, a "return" to the analysis of news media in chapter 2 in light of the challenge *ribu* posed to it, and a "forward movement" that approaches the chapter on Takahashi's fiction (chapter 5) while keeping the insights developed by *ribu* in play. The aim here is for these insights to facilitate the recognition and the amplification through juxtaposition of those aspects of Takahashi's writing that might be deemed to harbour a "feminist" potential.

In light of what I have said thus far, at least two aims of my research now become clear. To begin with, by means of a close reading of discursive constructions of mothers who killed their children, this thesis offers a snapshot of a historical and social moment in late postwar Japan when motherhood and the maternal were renegotiated and rearticulated at the very site where maternal violence disrupted social norms of acceptable maternal behaviour. Furthermore, this study also represents an

intervention in the existent scholarship on *ribu*, and investigates a rather underexplored dimension of the movement's ambivalent relationship with motherhood, namely, the importance of the figure of the woman who kills her child for *ribu*'s activism and writing.

But Japan is here also understood as something close to a case study which offers material for this thesis' third broader purpose. This consists of a desire to reflect on the resistance and ambivalence that seem to emerge whenever we attempt to render intelligible a maternal potential for violence, and which may take the form of multiple erasures of that violence from the realm of discourse. The idea of such resistance and ambivalence can best be evoked by recounting a scene I came across time and again during the years that I was working on this project: with regularity a friend, a fellow research student or an acquaintance would ask me about my research and I would briefly mention 'mothers who kill their children' and 'Japan.' Oftentimes, as if facing an inner dilemma, my interlocutor would hesitate and then ask one of the following questions: 'Why were there so many cases *in Japan*?', or 'Why did those mothers kill their children?' And I would struggle to dissimulate my frustration at what I deemed symptomatic of a desire to either dispel the threat represented by the image of the murderous mother onto a cultural and geographical Other (i.e. Japan understood as "different" from a broadly and homogeneously conceived West)[2] or to exorcise that threat by a prompt search for the causes that could explain it away. My interlocutors often seemed to implicitly assume that there ought to be something

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[2] This strategy verges to the comic when we realise that, only in the United States, 1,570 children died for abuse or neglect in 2011, that 81.6% of those fatalities were children under four years of age, and that 78.3% of them were caused by one or more parents. Of these, mothers acting alone perpetrated more than one fifth (26.4%) while another fifth (22%) was perpetrated by both parents, thus suggesting maternal involvement in almost half of the fatalities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2012).

peculiar to Japanese culture and society if filicide was such a common occurrence or to search for an unequivocal explanation to a crime that was considered otherwise exceptional or simply unthinkable. Sometimes I would be asked how it was that I became interested 'in such a topic' and – whenever the degree of familiarity between us would allow it – I would be confronted with the fundamental question: 'How is your relationship with your mother? What does she think about it?' My overall impression was that people seemed to find my choice of subject uncomfortable or suspicious and, in turn, implicitly reminded me that my desire to broach such a difficult topic (especially with no intention to investigate the aetiology of maternal filicide) contravened some unspoken form of discursive propriety.

Meanwhile, in Italy, my mother would be met with similar moments of perplexed hesitation whenever she was asked about the research her son was conducting in the U.K. But she would be confronted with much more inquisitive looks demanding of her that she *justified* my choice of subject. On these occasions, she later confessed to me, she felt as if her maternal role was being put on trial under the assumption that only inappropriate mothering could have ever triggered such an interest of mine. A strong and intelligent woman with a tendency to introspection, she had often questioned her ability to mother appropriately (is there a mother who has never done that?). I remember one specific afternoon when she asked me, with a mixture of shame and in fear of looking ridiculous, whether she had done something to bring about my desire to do research about mothers who kill. She admitted that a friend of hers had once asked her (with a laugh) '*What have you done to him?!*" Behind the irony and the jokes that conceal and displace the profound uneasiness this topic

inevitably raises, no mother will probably fail to recognise and register the repressive and policing attitude at the heart of these reactions.

In her recent book on gender representations of women who kill Lizzie Seal (2010) argues that 'although women who kill their own children […] are not necessarily perceived to embody norms of femininity, they are *not* culturally unthinkable' (2, my italics).[3] The present research aims to problematise this statement and to differentiate between, on the one hand, widespread cultural representations of filicidal mothers as either "mad" or "bad"[4] and, on the other, what I deem to be a deep-seated difficulty in rendering a maternal potential for violence *truly* intelligible. Informing this research is a fundamental understanding of this difficulty as it is seen to forcefully emerge (*qua* resistance and ambivalence) in those instances where *there is* an attempt to bring maternal violence into discourse.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault remarks that '[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses' (1998: 27). It is by drawing on this precious insight and on Judith Butler's early work (1990, 1993) that I came to interpret the pathologization, monsterisation and vilification so common in dominant understandings of mothers who kill as strategies by means of which these mothers are, in fact, silenced and expunged from the domain of the culturally intelligible into the realm of the unthinkable. As a matter of fact, these strategies acknowledge mothers

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[3] This assertion allows Seal to focus her attention onto cases of women who committed more 'unusual' murders where the victims are 'other relatives, friends, acquaintances, strangers or other people's children' (2010: 2).

[4] For a selection of studies on the dichotomous (and biased) treatment of murderous mothers as either "mad" or "bad" in the discipline of criminology, see Wilczynski (1991; 1997a; 1997b) and Meyer and Oberman (2001); in journalism, see Cog (2003), Barnett (2005; 2006) and Cavaglion (2008); in legal studies, see Huckerby (2003), Ayres (2004) and Stangle (2008).

who kill their children as the very limit to intelligibility against which norms of maternal propriety are constantly reaffirmed. Furthermore, and as I shall demonstrate, they also have the effect of denying the possibility of conceiving of a maternal potential for violence in more human and empathetic terms.

In this respect, it seems pertinent here to consider the observations advanced by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists Roszika Parker (1995) and Barbara Almond (2010) who wrote extensively on the topic of maternal ambivalence. They defined it as the simultaneous existence within a mother of feelings of love and hate for her child, and they described it as utterly normal and integral to the maternal experience itself. They also drew attention to the intensity with which a full discussion of such ambivalence seems to be prohibited in western culture and how, in particular, 'the *negative* side of ambivalence' is turned into a full-fledged cultural taboo (Almond, 2010: xiii). The analysis of discourses undertaken in the present thesis initiates an exploration of the ambivalence and resistance that appear to inevitably traverse any attempt to break this taboo. News media, the politically charged rhetoric of *ribu* and literature are discourses that clearly differ from each other in nature and purpose. Therefore, they will not be treated exactly the same but, rather, they will be analysed in ways that take into account their distinctive features so that we remain alive to what this might mean in terms of the different forms ambivalence to maternal violence might take.

I want to conclude this introduction by reflecting on my understanding of the present research as the site of an encounter between an assumed western readership and the Japanese case study that constitutes the main focus of my investigation. I also

flag here a consideration of *translation* as a useful theoretical and methodological tool that is instrumental to such an encounter, and which makes it possible to expose forms of silence that appear specific to Japanese discursive practices. To begin with, the great majority of primary sources that this work relies upon exist only in Japanese and they are mostly unknown to those readers who might not also have a background in Japanese studies. With very few exceptions all translations are mine. Despite its Japanese focus, however, this thesis is not meant to be confined to the geographical and linguistic specificities that often characterise Area Studies but it responds, rather, to a broader desire to enable a conversation, a *dialogue* with the material it makes available in the first place.[5] Judith Butler (1990) once observed that '[t]he power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated' before we can assert that a conversation is indeed taking place (15). As I was conducting this research I deeply treasured such remark, and I frequently reminded myself of the now classical critiques of western feminism's temptation to colonise and appropriate non-western cultures for its own political purposes (see, for example, Rich, 1986; Spivak, 1988; Mohanty, 1988; 2003; Butler, 1992 and Alcoff, 1995). Such awareness operated as a cautionary tale in the structuring of this thesis and motivated my decision not to introduce an investigation of Japanese material with a detailed review of western feminism's engagements with maternal violence. In so doing I hope to have reduced the risk of setting a ready-made grid of intelligibility that might have curtailed the very possibility of 'listening' to that material in the first place, and to have

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[5] Rey Chow (2006) has moved a powerful critique to Area Studies as they developed in the U.S., and she has emphasised how they seem traversed by a suspicious self-referentiality as the results of knowing other cultures appear to be always returned 'to the point of origin, the "eye"/"I" that is the American state and society' (14-15). See also Miyoshi Masao and H.D. Harootunian (eds.), *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (2002) and Gayatri C. Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003).

sidestepped the problems inherent in making western feminism(s) into a privileged interpretative lens.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical and methodological co-ordinates that inform my overall research. It addresses the relevance of a Foucauldian notion of 'discourse' for this project and considers the nature of the archives explored. It locates the present research within the existing (English language) literature on *ribu* and on women's literature in postwar Japan. It continues with a brief reflection about the contribution of this thesis to the field of motherhood studies and the affective and cultural impact engendered by the juxtaposition of two terms, namely, motherhood and violence, which are commonly understood to be antithetical to each other. It concludes by thinking about the value and meaning of translation as a means to establish an encounter with the Other.

Chapter 2 investigates the portrayals of mothers who killed their children in two of the Japanese major newspapers (namely, the *Asahi shinbun* and the *Yomiuri shinbun*). It demonstrates how murderous mothers came to be represented as either "mad" or "bad" and how news media's rhetorical strategies and their increasingly alarmed tone actively participated in fostering the impression that maternal filicide had acquired the dimension of a social phenomenon. It foregrounds the distinction between the categories of *kogoroshi* (chil-killing) and *boshi-shinjū* (mother-child double-suicide) as a distinctive feature of Japanese understanding of maternal violence.

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to an analysis of *ribu*. Chapter 3 contextualizes the movement from a historical and social perspective; it introduces some of its major tenets and lingers on the ambivalent relationship *ribu* itself developed with motherhood and the maternal. Chapter 4 engages in a close reading of that portion of *ribu*'s archive that explicitly addressed maternal filicide. It explores the complexity of the movement's alternative portrayals of murderous mothers, highlights the subversive potential of *ribu*'s understanding of filicide and expose the silences and omissions that haunt the movement counter-discourse.

Chapter 5 explores a selection of works by Japanese writer Takahashi Takako. Through an analysis of the numerous representations of maternal animosity that populate her early fiction it aims to foreground the difficulties and multiple forms of resistance that confront an attempt to bring a maternal potential for violence into discourse. This chapter also constitutes an attempt to shed light upon the discursive echoes and resonances between Takahashi's literary production and the two discourses analysed in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 1

FOUCAULDIAN ENCOUNTERS AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSLATION: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present chapter introduces the reader to the theoretical framework of the research; it outlines the methodological tools that guided the identification of the primary sources, and familiarises the reader with the different fields this project endeavours to bridge. It is also the result of an intellectual journey during which the initial considerations of a Foucauldian notion of discourse that set the original direction of this project were eventually complemented with and, to a degree, supplanted by an increasingly sophisticated reflection on the practice and meaning of translation. In this chapter I have purposefully preserved traces of this theoretical shift. I begin with an opening section on Michel Foucault's theorisation of discourse and I elaborate on its relevance in shaping the first stages of my research. His ideas helped me to formulate the parameters that informed the selection of the textual materials around which the following chapters have been developed; materials that I briefly consider as I expand on the nature of the archives that constitute the backbone of my argument. I then initiate a philosophical reflection on the act of translation and its ethical underpinnings, thus elaborating on the most recent developments of my understanding of this thesis as a whole. This chapter provides the occasion to reflect on a major conundrum that emerged during the research process and which haunted this project until its final stages: namely, what is at stake in writing about motherhood, maternal violence and women's struggle in the Japanese recent past from a perspective that appears inextricably rooted in today's English-speaking academia?

The desire to make an intervention in western scholarship on feminist theory, motherhood and gender that also had the potential to open up a dialogic space where non-western perspectives could be equally heard demanded of me a double effort: to make the object of my research sufficiently familiar to the reader, but also to preserve its specificities in ways that could remind the reader of a cultural and historical gap or, rather, a *différance* – in Derridean terms – that needs to be acknowledged, relentlessly negotiated, and which will haunt the encounter with the text. The growing focus on the question of translation could also be understood in light of my attempt to resolve these conflicting necessities. Having outlined the theoretical framework and methodology, the chapter concludes by situating the research within existing scholarship in English on the rise of the women's liberation movement in postwar Japan and on postwar Japanese women's literature that addresses mothers and violence.

1   Foucault on discourse

It would be difficult to overlook the importance that Foucault's theorisation of what he calls 'the field of discursive events' (1972: 27) played in my initial understanding of the diverse portrayals of murderous mothers that emerged from the primary sources I investigated. The relations he draws between notions of discourse, power-knowledge and resistance have been particularly useful in beginning to understand how multiple representations of mothers who killed their children may have surfaced in late postwar Japan according to relations of proximity, continuity, utter rejection or concealed displacement. They also enabled the formulation of a rationale and basic parameters to single out the three discursive fields this research is

concerned about. As I broach this subject, I am well aware that the definition of discourse that we find in Foucault's oeuvre is far from monolithic but that, in fact, it changes in order to accommodate his shifting understanding of power and mechanisms of knowledge production. I am also conscious that, by sidestepping Foucault's enduring concerns about processes of subjectification and subject-formation, I am bound to offer an account that is partial to say the least. However, my aim here is not to examine in details the pros and cons of his philosophical enterprise, but to simply consider the usefulness of his notion of discourse for the project that I have undertaken. For this limited purpose I have primarily relied on Foucault's observations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1992 [1969]), *The Order of Discourse* (1981 [1970]) and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1998 [1976]).

Foucault has variously defined discourse as 1) 'the general domain of all statements' 2) 'an individualizable group of statements', and 3) 'a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements' (Foucault, 1992: 80). His first, broad definition refers, simply, to that what is said (*ce que ce dit*) (Keenan, 1987: 15), and which consists of 'a grouping that is always finite and limited at any moment to the linguistic sequences that have been formulated' (Foucault, 1992: 27). The second, narrower definition suggests the possibility of grouping together multiple statements on the basis of explicit parameters. We may use, for example, temporal parameters to identify those statements that were articulated within a circumscribed period of time – say the 1970s. We may also adopt spatial parameters to delimit our group of statements to those that were articulated at a given geographical location, and we might even narrow down our selection to those that appeared within a specified medium such as news media or literature. The three discourses considered in this

thesis were selected following these and similar criteria: they all emerged in Japan in the early 1970s, and each of them was further delimited according to the form or medium in which it appeared and through which it circulated: 1) Japanese newspapers; 2) *ribu*'s pamphlets and leaflets; 3) works of fiction by Japanese writer Takahashi Takako (1932 – 2013). Even though we should be wary of simplistically conflating a Foucauldian conception of discourse with an over-emphasis on textuality, for the purposes of this research all three discourses considered presuppose the materiality of the written page and are characterised by distinctive modalities of production, conservation and recirculation that will be briefly considered in Section 2.[6]

The first two definitions of discourse provided by Foucault might seem rather unproblematic, but they immediately present us with an important dilemma: in a discursive economy that appears to circumscribe discourse to that what is *said* (and I will come back to this in a moment), what are we to make of silences, of what is denied any form whatever of intelligible articulation? Is silence synonymous with non-intelligibility? More importantly, does silence always imply an irretrievable erasure? Foucault was not blind to this problematic, and in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* he devotes a brief but significant passage to the relationship between discourse and silence:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There

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[6] For two examples of works that openly collapse the textual/material division in their approach to discourse, see Mary C. Beaudry, Lauren J. Cook and Stephen A. Mrozowski, "Artifacts and Active Voices: Material Culture as Social Discourse" in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology* (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 1996), 272-310, and Derek Hook, "Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis," *Theory and Psychology* 11(4) (2001): 521-47.

is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (1998: 27)

Foucault's point here is suggestive: by exposing the opposition between discourse and silence as a false dichotomy he is advancing the idea that the way things may not be allowed entry into discourse can be equally (if not more) revealing of the power relations that permeate a given discursive field. Furthermore, his observation that there exist 'many silences' suggests that there are multiple mechanisms by means of which something or someone might be denied access to discourse. However, let us take note of the fact that the vocabulary Foucault employs as he unpacks the notion of silence for us seems to convey the idea of a speaking subject who is fully present to that which may (not) be said. Accordingly, this subject may decline to say it or be forbidden to name it, or else, s/he may exert some discretion as to what and the extent to which that something will be said at all. But in all these instances s/he still remains – or so it would seem – conscious of that which should or could not be brought into discourse. And yet, despite all of Foucault's resistance to psychoanalysis, it may be productive to juxtapose the notion of silence with the psychoanalytic concepts of disavowal, repression and foreclosure. These constitute defence mechanisms that deny an object entrance into the conscious and which suggest the possibility that some forms of silence may well be the result of psychic repudiation into the unconscious. The fact that these mechanisms also differ in the extent to which an object can be held back from consciousness will constitute a helpful reminder as I will attempt to address in the following chapters the multiple ways in which silence may

result in the inadvertent (unconscious?) or wilful erasure of maternal violence from the realm of cultural intelligibility.

An elaboration of the concept of disavowal (*Verneinung*) can be found variously dispersed in the Freudian corpus, but it is most clearly articulated in essays such as "The Infantile Genital Organization (An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality)" (1923) and "Fetishism" (1927), where Freud is primarily concerned with the castration complex and the child's disavowal of his first perception of sexual difference.[7] The accidental sight of female genital organs and the subsequent impression of the absence of a penis prefigure the threat of castration and urge the child to either give up the belief that all individuals are endowed with a penis or disavow reality to preserve such belief. We may describe the kind of silence that emerges from such disavowal as 'management by non-recognition' (Shildrick, 2007: 55). In "Fetishism" Freud further specifies that the perception of the lack of a penis reaches consciousness just to be immediately removed, and while the child manages to preserve his belief, he has also to give it up: the perceived threat of castration and the creation of a fetish could be both read symptomatically as instances that betray this short-lived access to the conscious: 'In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of [the child's] counter-wish', Freud suggests, 'a compromise has been reached' (1927: 353).

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[7] It is not my aim here to provide a comprehensive account of Freud's theories of sexual development, which would clearly require a detailed consideration of the differences in the experiences of little boys and girls. For the purpose of my argument I am primarily concerned, instead, with the extent to which disavowal, repression and foreclosure imply different degrees of repudiation into the unconscious and, thus, point at different configurations of silence. Therefore, my privileging of the experience of the male child should be understood for what it is, namely, a narrative strategy to avoid the more convoluted Freudian account of the sexual development in a girl.

The notion of repression (*Verdrängung*) complicates the relationship between what is not allowed to surface to consciousness and language (where 'language' can alternatively signify verbal articulation and the language of the unconscious *qua* symptoms). Freud distinguishes between primal repression and repression proper. The former he simply describes as 'the psychical (ideational) representative of an instinct being denied entrance into the conscious' (1915: 147). Following this repudiation 'the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct remains attached to it' (ibid.). Repression proper occurs only later and consists of a process that 'affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it' (ibid.). By virtue of this association such derivatives undergo the same fate as that which was primally repressed. Two aspects of Freud's account of repression are particularly significant for the purpose of my argument: first, the recognition that the repressed representative of an instinct is already inscribed in the chain of signifiers (to adopt Lacanian parlance); second, that the repudiation of its derivatives into the unconscious is not necessarily absolute, in that they may, under certain conditions, intrude upon consciousness. Freud elaborates on these aspects as follows:

> [R]epression does not hinder the instinctual representative from continuing to exist in the unconscious, from organizing itself further, putting out derivatives and establishing connections. Repression in fact interferes only with the relation of the instinctual representative to one psychichal system, namely, to that of the conscious. [...] [But] let us make clear that it is not [...] correct to suppose that repression withholds from the conscious all the derivatives of what was primally repressed. If these derivatives have become sufficiently far removed from the repressed representative, whether owing to the adoption of distortions or by reason of the number of intermediate links inserted, they have free access to the conscious. It is as though the resistance of the conscious against them was a function of their distance from what was originally repressed. (148-9, emphasis in the original)

As the expression 'representative [of an instinct]' suggests, what is repressed in the primal repression already partakes of the process of signification and it is on account of such participation that it can 'organize itself further' in multiple chains of signifiers. Despite being denied access to consciousness and – it would seem – to the very possibility of discursive articulation, the repressed representative is already enmeshed in the mechanisms that govern the workings of the unconscious (which Lacan conceived, we may recall, as organized like a language). It is this capacity to establish connections with other signifiers that constitutes the enabling condition for temporarily breaking the silence that repression entails. In this respect, Freud's 'talking cure' acknowledges the possibility of moving up the chain of those signifiers that, being sufficiently removed from the repressed representative, are allowed to reach consciousness. However, the movement by means of which the analyst attempts to re-translate, so to speak, the thread of associations accessible at the conscious level into the psychic material buried into the unconscious can be pursued only up to the point where the relation with the repressed becomes so obvious that it demands a new attempt at repression. 'As a rule', Freud observes, 'the repression is only temporarily lifted and is promptly reinstated' (150). He also describes neurotic symptoms as 'derivatives of the repressed, which has, by their means, finally won the access to consciousness which was previously denied to it' (149).

The concept of foreclosure (French, *foreclosure*) as fundamentally distinct from repression was introduced in psychoanalysis by Lacan as a rendering of the Freudian term *Verwerfung*. Despite Lacan attributing this notion to Freud himself, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) point out that foreclosure is a Lacanian, not Freudian concept which designates a primordial repudiation of the fundamental signifier that is the

paternal metaphor. Discussing the problematic use of foreclosure in Judith Butler's account of subject-constitution in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Kirsten Campbell describes the concept as 'a foundational psychic exclusion that *cannot be represented within the subject's symbolic economy*' and which indicates a fundamental disruption in the formation of the subject (2001: 43, my italics). Therefore, whereas the silence of repression may be transgressed under specific conditions – although always only temporarily – what is foreclosed is rigorously barred from signification in the form of what Butler calls 'a certain kind of pre-emptive loss' (Butler, 1997: 23): a silence that can never be broken and can never be thought.

My cursory digression into psychoanalysis is meant to enrich and complicate an understanding of silence as it emerges from Foucault's theorisation of discourse. This conceptual expansion is not simply useful but necessary once we realise that the modalities in which maternal filicide was allowed access to discursive articulation in Japan were thoroughly traversed by multiple configurations of silence, and that these cannot be simplistically understood as (only) the result of external censorship, cultural prohibitions or a fully conscious retreat from discourse. In this respect, the practice of translation that I explore later in this chapter emerges as a productive tool that enables to bring to the fore the linguistic mechanisms and discursive strategies whereby a maternal potential for violence remains relegated to the fringe of signification even when murderous mothers appear in discourse with appalling frequency. As I will show in the following chapters, a critical appraisal of what it means to translate allows us to observe that, while translation may expose forms of silence that are embedded in the specific vocabulary with which Japanese newspapers talked about maternal filicide, in many of Takahashi's short stories we can instead recognise a

character's partial failure to transpose (i.e. translate) psychic material from the unconscious to the conscious levels. I will argue in those instances that the silence that accompanies repression and which appears to deny a mother's potential for violence access to the realm of cultural (and discursive) intelligibility could be understood as such a failure in translation.

The specificity of the configurations of silence that characterise the three discourses explored in this thesis suggests that there clearly exist different ways of talking about mothers who kill their children. More importantly, however, it indicates that the notion of "maternal filicide" itself, instead of being the single, unproblematic referent that would confer unity to these discourses, may be far less stable than we might have originally assumed. Despite the fact that the fantasy of a stable referent admittedly constituted an important, provisional criterion for the selection of the material to be included in the present research – what Foucault has described as 'a provisional division [that operates] as an initial approximation' (1992: 29) – my growing perception of the mutable contours of "maternal filicide" in that same material confirmed Foucault's tenacious resistance to grouping together statements on the basis of the presumed existence of one and the same object of discourse. In this respect, Foucault warns against the possible confusion between, on the one hand, a statement and what it states and, on the other, a proposition and its referent. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he contends that

> [a] statement is not confronted (face to face, as it were) by a correlate –
> or the absence of a correlate – as a proposition has (or has not) a
> referent, or as a proper noun designates someone (or no one). It is
> linked rather to a 'referential' that is made up not of 'things', 'facts',
> 'realities' or 'beings', but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the
> objects that are named, designated, or described within it, and for the

relations that are affirmed or denied in it. The referential of the statement forms the place, the condition, the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself; it defines the possibilities of appearance and delimitation of that which gives meaning to the sentence, a value as truth to the proposition. (1992: 91)

Following the lead provided by Foucault in this passage, we may begin to question the idea of maternal filicide as an unproblematic "fact." This is certainly not meant to deny or downplay the reality of a mother killing her child, but it does call attention to the 'field of emergence' that allowed maternal filicide to surface as an object of discourse in 1970s Japan: a historically specific set of conditions that made possible the appearance of multiple ways of conceptualising maternal filicide; ways that may have been at odds with each other, may have partially overlapped or simply coexisted side by side touching each other only fleetingly. Foucault elucidates this point in another passage from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> The conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to 'say anything' about it, and if several people are to say different things about it, the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects, if it is to establish with them relations of *resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation* […] are many and imposing. […] [T]he object […] does not pre-exist itself […] It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. […] These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterisation; and these relations are not present in the object […] They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority. (1992: 44-5, my italics)

If it is true that maternal filicide *qua* object of discourse does not pre-exist itself, but rather emerges in accordance with specific discursive practices, social norms and

existing systems of classification which allow it to take some forms and not others, to be conceived in certain ways and not otherwise, it seems legitimate to ask: What counts as maternal filicide? Does it designate only real occurrences? If so, how can we read the literary representations of mothers who kill that populate Takahashi Takako's short stories? Has the child to die – in reality or in fiction – for a discursive instance of filicide to count or is a wilful desire to kill on the part of the mother sufficient independently of the final outcome? And what is the status, then, of the fictional representation of a mother who decides not to act and, instead of saving her child, becomes indirectly complicit in his demise? What if maternal filicide only emerges as a mere fantasy in the psyche of a woman? Also, how should we understand the appearance in the rhetoric of *ribu* of the figure of the woman-who-kills-her-child (*kogoroshi no onna*) as a political signifier, however equivocal? Finally, as the chapter on news media will explore, how is the illusion of a single referent exposed by the fact that a western notion of maternal filicide may not find an exact correspondence in the Japanese language, where the two categories of *kogoroshi* (child-killing) and *boshi shinjū* (lit. mother-child double-suicide) convey radically different understandings of the nature of the act involved? We need to be alive to the fact that a careless use of the expression "maternal filicide" (in English) might even conceal forms of unintended epistemic violence as we attempt to use a foreign language to analyse Japanese discursive constructions.

Foucault describes discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1992: 49). Discourses define and produce the objects of our knowledge: they allow us to speak of an object, but they also establish in advance the vocabulary and the categories through which we may apprehend that object in the

first place so that we can speak about it. We may arguably say that objects and events come into existence, that is, acquire cultural intelligibility by means of their representations in and through discourse.[8] As a network of practices that produce forms of knowledge and by means of which a renegotiation of meanings can take place, discourse is also inextricably and intimately connected with power. Power surfaces most clearly in what Foucault identifies as the procedures of exclusion and, more specifically, those of prohibition: the taboo of the object of speech, ritual of the circumstances of speech, and privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject. In other words, 'we do not have the right to say everything […] we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstances whatever, and […] not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever' (Foucault, 1981: 52). A taboo of the object of speech is arguably what Roszika Parker (2010) and Barbara Almond (2011) have in mind when they acknowledge that the negative side of maternal ambivalence (that is, a mother's animosity toward her child that may be conducive of episodes of explicit violence) can hardly been acknowledged and articulated in discourse, lest it is met with careful policing or violent repression. And although maternal filicide may become – under exceptional conditions – the centre around which a variety of discourses may proliferate, those mothers who do kill their children hardly ever receive legitimation as fully-fledged speaking subjects. As we shall see, *ribu* explicitly addressed the 'voicelessness' of these mothers with its use of the expression *koe ni naranai koe* (lit. a voice that does not become a voice),[9] while Takahashi Takako's fictional portrayals of maternal filicide repeatedly confront us with a mother's own inability to articulate her

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[8] Of course, such a claim is not meant to downplay the meaning of experience or a phenomenological access to to reality, but is rather suspicious of the idea of experience as unmediated by structures of thought and pre-existing discursive formations. After all, as Lacanian psychoanalysis clearly shows us, language pre-exists the subject's entry into the Symbolic.

[9] See chapter 4 section 8.

subconscious murderous desires even when they spill over the external world with dramatic effects.

But the connection of discourse with power becomes all the more visible when we consider the extent to which knowledge of maternal filicide and maternal violence in postwar Japan was shaped, challenged and partially renegotiated through the discourses that this thesis analyses. Media coverage of mothers who killed their children, *ribu*'s political appropriation of a maternal filicide in the image of the child-killing *onna* and Takahashi's literary representations of mothers who embrace violence in their search for a new, more authentic self intersected in multiple configurations that challenged cultural idealisations of maternal love and expanded the capacity to conceive of maternal violence differently. Foucault describes the power relations that inhabit this renegotiation and expansion of meaning as follows:

> there is not power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor is there knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the object to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. (Foucault, 1995: 28-9)

Foucault emphasises the fact that 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles and systems of domincation', with words and language becoming the vehicle and faithful expression of a conflict that unfolds outside of it. Discourse, in fact, 'is the

thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power that is to be seized' (Foucault, 1981: 52-3).

2   Background, temporal framework and selection of sources

The present research engages with a set of discourses that were produced and circulated in Japan in the first half of the 1970s. The primary sources that the following chapters rely upon have been identified on the basis of socio-historical considerations that this section aims to elucidate. To begin with, sociological investigations refer to a numerical increase of episodes of filicide in the course of that five-year period (Kurisu, 1974; Sasaki, 1980; Tama, 2008). In this respect, scholars have identified 1973 as a pivotal year marked by at least three major events: 1) the first survey on child abuse and neglect that was carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare which testified to the increasing public awareness of such difficult issues; 2) an attempt to revise the Eugenic Protection Law by removing the article that granted women access to abortion on economic grounds (an attempt that triggered what became, arguably, *ribu*'s most important political struggle); 3) an increase in the number of newspaper articles on filicide, child-abandonment and child-abuse that was perhaps sparked by the 20th International Congress of Psychology held in Tokyo in August 1972 (Kouno, 1995; Tama, 2001; Goodman, 2002; Shigematsu, 2012).

In addition to this, 1970 is often identified as the year of the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement (*ribu*) in Japan, with its first appearance in media coverage dating back to October 1970 (Akiyama, 1993; Buckley, 1994; Ōgoshi, 1996, Tanaka, 1996; Muto, 1997). In 1972 the Ribu Shinjuku Centre was opened in a two-

bedroom apartment in Tokyo with the intention to provide a meeting space for women's groups. The Centre functioned as a women's collective and, despite *ribu*'s programmatic refusal of hierarchies or headquarters, it played a fundamental role as a communication and organisational centre for the movement (Shigematsu, 2012). From 1972 until 1975 the Centre remained regularly open on a 24/7 basis. In 1975 its hours of operation were reduced and the Centre came to be run on a rotation basis until 1977, the year of its definitive closure. During the years of its operation the Centre also became the place for the collection and conservation of posters, pamphlets, newsletter, zines and other printed material that provide important documentary evidence of the discourses produced and circulated by the movement. Among the documentation at my disposal, the most recent pamphlet that engages with maternal filicide to a significant degree dates back to 1975, thus confirming the limit of the temporal framework of this research.

2.1   Japanese newspapers

Chapter 2 of this thesis focuses on articles on maternal filicide from two of the Japanese major national dailies, namely, the *Asahi shinbun* and the *Yomiuri shinbun*. These are the newspapers with the widest circulation in the country (Yamamoto, 2012; Hayashi, 2000), and together with the *Mainichi shinbun* they are often referred to as the 'big three.' Until the 1970s these three were the three major dailies: in 1961, at the time of the television boom in Japan, Edward P. Whittemore claimed that 37 million newspapers were being sold in Japan each day and that of these the Asahi, the Yomiuri and the Mainichi accounted for 19 million newspapers distributed nationally (that is, more than half of the total amount of newspapers published in the country) (1961: 1).

The figures provided by Ofer Feldman in 1993 continue to confirm the primacy of the big three: *Yomiuri* (14.5 million copies), *Asahi* (12.9 million) and *Mainichi* (6.3 million) (11). More recently, Kaori Hayashi identified the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* as 'by far the two best-selling newspapers' in Japan (148), with the *Yomiuri* selling daily 10 million copies and the *Asahi* 8 million. Multiple factors such as the extraordinarily high circulation of newspapers in Japan, their capillary distribution at the national level (facilitated by Japan's relatively small surface area), the nearly perfect literacy rate of the population and a tendency to revere the printed word partially explain the considerable influence of the news press on the public opinion, and have historically made Japan 'one of the most newspaper-conscious countries in the world' (Whittemore, 1961: 1). According to Hayashi each Japanese household subscribes to an average of 1.2 newspapers per day (2000: 147).

The *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* produce morning and evening editions (except for on Sundays and national holidays) and they are considered quality newspapers with a less sensationalistic approach than Japanese tabloids. However, if we look at their distribution, they may as well be identified as mass papers (Yamamoto, 2012; Hayashi, 2000). They are independent newspapers which operate without government interference, they are owned entirely by their employees and they are all committed to a principle of 'impartiality' (meaning simply that they are not committed to any particular party, although they will still take a position on every major issue) (Lee, 1985). The big three do not differ significantly in their editorials and news coverage and they have been described as 'indistinguishable except in matters of degree and emphasis' (Frank Gibney, quoted in Lee, 1985: 1-2). Their relative homogeneity has much to do with the news-gathering system in Japan, called Press Club (*kaisha-*

kurabu): news organizations send their reporters to the Press Clubs attached to government offices, law courts, political party centres and major economic and industry associations which allocate large rooms for use by the reporters in charge of covering those agencies for their companies (Lee, 1985: 62-73; Feldman, 1993: 67-76; De Lange, 1998; Hayashi, 2000: 154-6). Feldman describes these clubs as the operation rooms where reporters 'gather, confirm, organize and write all the news that emanate from a certain location', where they 'receive briefings, handouts, press releases and other communications' and where they 'interact with their information sources' (1998: 69). The press clubs shape reporters' relationship with their information sources and determine to a great degree the nature of the information they may have access to, thus explaining the similarity of newspapers' media coverage.

Despite being considered in the present day as high quality newspapers, both the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* were founded in the second half of the nineteenth century as *koshinbun* (lit. little papers) or *e'iri shinbun* (illustrated papers), a category that broadly correspond to the contemporary tabloids and which starkly differed from the 'large papers' (*ōshinbun*) which had party affiliations and whose main concerns were political issues (Lee, 1985; Hayashi, 2000). The Home and Family section in these newspapers assumes a particular relevance for the purpose of my argument. Usually assigned two pages in the morning edition of each newspaper, this is the section that echoes their tabloid origins the most and which offers to wider strata of the population an important space for critical debate (Hayashi, 2000: 149). Among the articles usually included in the Home and Family section have been practical tips (recipes, fashion, child care, etc.), social issues concerning domestic life (with a focus on women, family and the home) and columns written by women readers (152).

Hayashi argues that the function of this section has been to serve 'as a pipeline to connect immediate daily problems in private life to the stage of social and political debate' (2000: 150). It was the Home and Family section that introduced Japanese readers to the struggle of the US-based Women's Liberation Movement in the early 1970s (whereas other section of the newspapers completely ignored the issue) (152), and it is in this section that we encounter the most explicitly articulated discussions on women's changing conditions in postwar Japan, maternal filicide, child abandonment or abuse and women's allegedly 'loss of motherhood.' The news articles this research relies upon can thus be organized into two major groups. A first group consists of those articles that provide a rather factual description of an accident with limited overt expressions of judgement – although, as we shall see, editorial choices, the employment of a specific vocabulary and the spatial distribution of articles in a single page all offer important insights into the communicative strategies and aims of these news accounts. The second group of news items includes editorials, opinion articles and other pieces from so-called "experts", letters from the readers and so on, which we mostly find in the Home and Family section of the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* and which provide a more articulate understanding of the extent to which maternal filicide had become a widely discussed social issue.

Although the framework of the research had initially been limited to five years (1970-1975), during the research process the retrieval of news items was further limited to the years 1970-1973. The reason for this decision was primarily 'economic' as it made it possible to gather an amount of texts that remained manageable in the limited time and space offered by a single chapter. The widely recognised significance of the year 1973 that I have previously outlined confirmed the validity of the choice

made. The articles were retrieved through keyword search using two online databases: Kikuzo II Visual for the *Asahi shinbun* and Yomidasu Rekishikan for the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Yomidasu Rekishikan allows access to only the Tokyo edition of the *Yomiuri shinbun* while Kikuzo II Visual contains the Tokyo and Osaka edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. For reasons of consistency I have opted to search articles printed only in the Tokyo edition of both newspapers.

A simple search with the keyword *kogoroshi* (child-killing, filicide, infanticide) gave only a few results and alerted me from the start to the existence of possible linguistic and cultural specificities in the way the crime of filicide was understood and reported by the news media. As shown by the translation of *kogoroshi* provided above, the category of filicide is not obvious or transparent. Writing within the parameters set by American legal discourse, Lucy Jane Lang identifies 'infanticide' as an umbrella term that includes the three sub-categories of neonaticide (the killing of a child within the first twenty-four hours after its birth), filicide (the killing of a child older than one day) and abuse-related death (Lang, 2005). However, in this thesis I employ the word 'filicide' rather loosely and based on its etymological root: the action of killing a son or a daughter (from Latin, filius/filia + caedere). My use of this term simply denotes the killing of a child aged less than 18 by a biological parent or parent substitute. Therefore, during the keyword search I discounted those articles where the victim was over 18, where the culprit was not a parental figure and those that were later discovered to be simple accidents. In a few cases more than one article was available about a single case: on these occasions I resolved to count these items only once and to include in a single entry all relevant information. Further details about the keywords used during the sampling process can be found in chapter 2, section 2.

2.2   *Ūman ribu*

Chapter 3 and 4 are devoted to a study of *ribu* and, more specifically, to an investigation of its rhetorical engagement with the figure of the woman who kills her child (*kogoroshi no onna*). Until the recent publication of Setsu Shigematsu's monograph *Scream from the Shadows: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan* (2012) *ribu* has remained a rather unexplored object of enquiry in English-language academic literature on the history of Japanese feminism(s). Arguably, one of the reasons for this gross oversight is the fact that *ribu*'s experience of political contestation has commonly been perceived as short-lived, spanning only the first half of the 1970s (Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995: 159), and already waning when the UN-sponsored 1975 International Women's Year marked a drastic change in the character of the Japanese women's movement 'from one that was targeted at bringing about changes in women's consciousness […] to one seeking visible changes in social institutions' (Tanaka, 1995: 348). However, Shigematsu remains critical of similar interpretations that 'disregard[…] the significance of *ribu*'s interventions during the 1970s' (2012: 172), and she exposes the inaccuracy of traditional periodizations that would locate the end of *ribu* in 1975, thus ignoring the fact that many *ribu* activists remained committed to various forms of political struggle in the following decades (175). As already flagged in the Introduction, a second explanation for the dearth of academic investigations into the history of *ribu* is to be found in the rift between the academic institutionalisation of women's studies in Japan since the late 1970s (together with their growing desire for scholarly recognition) and *ribu*'s radical strategies of political contestation that induced media portrayals of *ribu* as a movement of hysteric and disruptive young women (Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow,

1995: 159; Shigematsu, 2012: 173). Shigematsu confirms that 'many of the founders of women's studies distanced themselves from the *ribu* movement' but she also notices that, at the same time, 'many *ribu* women refused to call themselves feminists and were resistant to the term' (whose usage spread in the late 1970s and early 1980s). On the other hand, she complicates this picture by pointing out that there were also women activists who identified with both *ribu* and feminism and who, like Inoue Teruko, played an important role in bridging and theorizing the relationship between the two (171-5) (see also Ochiai, 1997).

Until the publication of Shigematsu's book the academic literature on *ribu* consisted of a few articles, reports and book chapters addressing (with different degrees of detail and complexity) some of the most salient dimensions of the movement. To a greater or lesser degree scholars seem to agree on the biased nature of media portrayal of *ribu* and on the tone of ridicule that concurred to produce an inaccurate misperception of the movement both at the time of its emergence and in later decades (Matsui, 1990; Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995; Muto, 1997; Ochiai, 1997; Ehara, 2005; Shigematsu, 2012). However, Ochiai has also argued that, despite the biased representations of *ribu*, women in the country could still be overwhelmed by a sense of excitement in realising that other women were sharing their same anger and frustration (1997: 87). Shigematsu confirms this reading and draws on recent scholarship in Japanese to further emphasise how *ribu* activists strategically negotiated and used media attention to spread their message of woman's liberation (2012: 81).

Increased attention to *ribu*'s complex genealogies has functioned to readdress and correct media portrayals of the movement as a mere import of Western (i.e.

American) models (Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995; Buckley, 1997; Shigematsu, 2012). *Ribu*'s commitment to the transformation of woman's consciousness and the liberation of female sexuality has been traced back to the radical feminism of the Japanese literary group *Seitō* (Matsui, 1990; Muto, 1997; Shigematsu, 2012). At the same time, scholars have also acknowledged how the birth of *ribu* was propelled by women activists' bitter disillusionment with the chauvinism and sexism of the Japanese New Left and student movement *Zenkyōto* of the late 1960s (Tanaka, 1995; Ochiai, 1997; Muto, 1997; Mackie, 2003). Muto (1997) and Shigematsu (2012) have further observed that the relationship between *ribu* and *Zenkyōto* was not simply one of utter negation, but also of inheritance as many of *ribu*'s strategies of political contestation developed out of *ribu* women's first-hand experience in the ranks of the student movement. Additionally, Shigematsu has also emphasised the influence that the anti-Vietnam War movement exerted on *ribu*'s organizing principles. Her book *Scream from the Shadow* (2012) integrates these views in what is the richest and most compelling account of *ribu*'s genealogies to date, and counters accusations of *ribu* being a Western import by locating its emergence squarely in a domestic history of feminist, social and political struggles. Arguably, such consolidation of academic appreciation of *ribu*'s Japanese 'lineage' is slowly eroding an enduring resistance to investigating the role that the US-based Women's Lib might have played in the birth of *ribu*. This task has been partially undertaken by Shigematsu who highlighted '*ribu*'s cross-fertilizations with other political movements domestically and internationally' (2012: xxv) (see also Muto, 1997). But it is James Welker (2012) who has recently been at the forefront of a study of the history of *ribu* that privileges the movement's production of 'engaged translations' of pamphlets, leaflets and reports produced by

the American Women's Lib (for earlier works that provide useful information on the importance of translation in the emergence of *ribu*, see Matsui, 1990: 438; Buckley, 1997: 185-98; Mackie, 2003: 152).

English-language literature on *ribu* is unanimous in emphasising woman's search for a new self, the process of consciousness transformation and the liberation of female sexuality as pivotal to the movement's revolutionary commitment. Despite early misrepresentations of *ribu* as suffering from anti-intellectualism – one of the main reasons attributed to the movement's failure to bring about substantial changes in Japanese society (Matsui, 1990) – there has been, over the years, an increasing acknowledgement of *ribu*'s theoretical sophistication and of its elaboration of a 'woman's logic' as opposed to the logic of productivity (or 'male logic') perceived to lie at the core of Japan's postwar economic miracle (Tanaka, 1995; Ochiai, 1997; Muto, 1997). The practice of consciousness-raising has been recognised as integral to the movement's determination to lay bare the 'inner feminine consciousness' that was the result of women's socialisation and to uncover forms of internalised sexual discrimination (Tanaka, 1995; Muto, 1997; Shigematsu, 2012). Scholars have also foregrounded *ribu*'s denunciation of the institution of monogamous marriage and the family as vehicles for the reproduction of women's subordination (Ochiai, 1997; Muto, 1997; Shigematsu, 2012). In this respect, *ribu*'s creation of women-only communes and collectives has been identified as instrumental to the creation of new forms of relationality (Shigematsu, 2012). Furthermore, it is only with Shigematsu (2012) that due attention has been given to the movement's reclamation of the taboo word *onna* (lit. woman) as the signifier of a new political subject.

As we shall see in chapter 3, *ribu* was constituted by a multiplicity of autonomous, small groups that emerged spontaneously and organised their own forms of political contestation. This made it possible for *ribu*'s revolutionary commitment to spill over into multiple struggles on a variety of fronts. Scholars have variously acknowledged this internal diversity: they have recalled *ribu*'s attempts to promote women's knowledge of their own bodies (Tanaka, 1995; Muto, 1997; Mackie, 2003), to fight against the Immigration Control Law which negatively affected *zainichi* Koreans (Koreans resident in Japan) (Matsui, 1990), to forge an international sisterhood by protesting the plight of Korean women suffering from Japanese sex tourism in South Korea (Muto, 1997; Shigematsu, 2012), to oppose the discrimination meted out to single mothers and to organise in solidarity with mothers who killed their children (Shigematsu, 2012). Any investigation of *ribu* never fails to mention the struggle against the proposed amendments to the Eugenic Protection Law (which allowed women's access to abortion on economic grounds). In particular, Masae Kato's investigation of the politics of abortion in Japan (2009) emphasises the complexity of *ribu*'s coalitional politics as the movement joined forces with *Aoi shiba no kai* (the disabled people's movement) to oppose the aforementioned amendments (see also Shigematsu, 2012: 87-91).

With the publication of *Scream from the Shadows*, Shigematsu added a further dimension to the existing knowledge of *ribu*. Her analysis foregrounded the movement's 'politicization of women's relationship with violence' (2012: xiii) and allowed her to identify *ribu*'s articulation of 'an alternative feminist epistemology of violence that locates violence […] in the feminine subject' (ibid.). Following this trajectory, she was able to shed light upon the movement's support and rhetorical

engagement with the unprecedented outbreak of violence that had as its protagonists the United Red Army (a far left revolutionary sect) and its female leader, Nagata Hiroko (Shigematsu, 2012: 139-170). Shigematsu should be also credited for being the first scholar to have ever explored in any depth the role that the figure of the *kogoroshi no onna* (the woman who kills her child) acquired in *ribu*'s language and rhetoric (23-31). The priority she confers to *ribu*'s relationship with violence clearly constitutes a vantage point from which to consider the promising revolutionary implications of a maternal potential for violence. However, her interpretation seems to inadvertently downplay the rich complexity with which the image of the *kogoroshi no onna* appears in the archival material of the movement. This thesis could be said to take over from where Shigematsu left off, and to place the mother-who-kills-her-child at the centre of a multidisciplinary investigation that will point at its proliferation of meanings and uses. By focusing on the figure of the *kogososhi no onna*, chapter 4 also questions the extent to which *ribu* was able to bring the notions of a maternal potential for violence into the realm of cultural intelligibility.

One of the reasons why Shigematsu's analysis of the *kogoroshi no onna* falls short of its promises can be traced back to the research focus that privileges the figure of Tanaka Mitsu and the activism and internal dynamics of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre (whose importance as an organizational centre for the movement certainly cannot be underestimated). Muto (1997) has called attention to what could be understood one of *ribu*'s structural tensions: despite being a collective movement of anonymous activists which programmatically refused hierarchies and leader figures, Tanaka Mitsu acquired in the media and in later academic literature on *ribu* the status of symbol, spokesperson, or leader of the movement. Muto took notice of this tension but also

acknowledge the formative role of Tanaka in shaping the language and direction of the movement. Shigematsu turned this internal contradiction into a central element of her own research, aware of the fact that this could hinder her ability to do justice to *ribu*'s plurivocality. This limit eventually emerges in her consideration of the movement's rhetorical engagement with maternal violence. In the attempt to resolve this difficulty, I have made the effort not to privilege the figure of Tanaka and her philosophy in my investigation of the *kogoroshi no onna* and I have sometimes consciously downplayed her importance in my desire to 'reproduce' *ribu*'s choral voice. In the course of the research, however, Tanaka's theorisation of maternal violence has emerged as so specific to deserve a consideration distinct from the movement's anonymous plurality. It could be argued, therefore, that in the end *ribu*'s structural tensions and internal contradictions have eventually found their way into this thesis irrespective of my attempts to contain them. I leave it to the reader to consider whether the final outcome succeeds in expanding Shigematsu's pioneering reflections on *ribu*'s relationship with maternal violence.

The textual material produced and circulated by *ribu* in the 1970s represents a rather diverse range of documents which were distributed in mimeographed copies during demonstrations, marches or at teach-ins. Many of them were just one-page long and hand-written, given away for free on the streets and tube-stations; others were typed on coloured paper, organised in booklet form and often sold at conferences and summer-camps in order to sponsor new activities or the writing and distribution of new pamphlets. As the movement grew stronger, so grew the number of what goes under the name of *minikomi* (mini-communications). This is an umbrella term that covers information sheets, newsletters, zines, informal magazines and

journals that constituted the central nervous system of the movement: they functioned as a means to establish and maintain communication among *ribu* groups and to foster a sense of community, but they also represented an alternative to the *masukomi* (mass-communications) where discussions of women's issues were infrequently given space. These *minikomi* materials were often accompanied by illustrations or, more rarely, photographs that added to the message conveyed by the written text and contributed to its affective impact.

It is not clear how much of this material has been lost over the years. In the last few decades, however, the desire on the part of some *ribu* activists to preserve the history of the movement and to make this documentation accessible to a wider audience has led to two major archival projects whose importance can hardly been overestimated. Until recently, the three volumes edited by Mizogushi Akiyo, Saeki Yōko and Miki Sōko with the title *A History of the Japanese Women's Lib in Documents* (*Shiryō nihon ūman ribu shi*) constituted the main reference point for any researcher interested in the history of *ribu*. Published between 1992 and 1995, the volumes offer an invaluable compilation of material organised in chronological order (vol.1, 1969-1972; vol.2, 1972-1975; vol.3, 1975-1982) and according to other organisational principles such as specific groups, events, newsletters, etc. This broad collection is composed of over 1200 pages of historical documents and makes available in compact form a vast amount of texts. The compilation process also provided the occasion for printing in typed format those pamphlets whose originals were handwritten.

A critique that could be levied at this first archive is that some of the criteria on the basis of which the material has been collected and chosen for publication remain

unclear. In the editors' preface to the first volume of the collection it is simply stated that

> [the documents] gathered here have been chosen from those which have casually come into our possession. They cannot be said to cover the totality of the documents of *ribu*, and we hope that others will be able to supplement [them with new materials].' (Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1992: 7)

This task has been recently accomplished, at least partially, by the Group for the Conservation of Documents of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre (*Ribu Shinjuku sentā shiryō hozon kai*) whose efforts have led to the publication between 2008 and 2009 of the Compilation of Documents of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre (*Ribu Shinjuku sentā shiryō shūsei*). The group was founded in 1983 by nine of the original members of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre, with the aim of recovering, cataloguing and preserving all the pamphlets, bills, newsletters and *minikomi* that the centre had collected during its five years of life, and that were still preserved in that two-bedroom apartment now converted to office use for a number of women's organizations. Some of the documents date back to 1970, long before the Centre was opened, and were produced by those women's groups that later took part in its activities. The material is organised in chronological order in three volumes: 1) pamphlets; 2) bills; 3) newsletters. This third volume is particularly significant as it reprints all sixteen issues of the *minikomi Ribu News – This Way Only* (*Ribu nyūsu – Kono michi hitosuji*), the journal produced by the Ribu Shinjuku Centre. No attempt was made in any of the three volumes to type handwritten documents. In addition, each of them is introduced by a table that provides useful information such as day, month and year of publication, number of pages, paper size or dimensions of the original, colour of the paper and the ink, etc.

In this case the criterion with which the documents have been collected is clear as the three volumes reproduce all the material that was preserved at the Centre. On the other hand, this is also the reason why it might be problematic to rely indiscriminately on this second collection: an excessive reliance on this archive to acquire a sense of the discourses produced by the movement in its totality risks foregrounding the perspectives of those groups active at the Centre to the detriment of others. Therefore, we may argue that the existence of two separate archives is congenial, as they may be said to complement each other and to downplay their respective weaknesses.

2.3   Motherhood, violence and the boom in women's writing in late postwar Japan

Chapter 5 of this thesis is devoted to an analysis of several of Takahashi's short stories published in the first half of the 1970s. Such a selection is somewhat arbitrary and is not meant to identify this period as an independent phase in the author's creative development. Rather, it primarily responds to a desire to maintain a sense of homogeneity with the temporal framework that informs this research and which is shared, to greater or lesser degree, by all discourses considered thus far. The fact remains, however, that these are the years when literary depictions of a troubled and troubling maternal figure appear in Takahashi's writing with disconcerting and suggestive persistence. In their relentless search for a more authentic subjectivity unconstrained by cultural prescriptions to be(come) a wife and a mother, in their compulsion to dismantle these traditional female identities by undertaking antisocial behaviours that turn them into figures of abjection, in their hostility toward pregnancy, motherhood and family life, Takahashi's heroines are far from unique (Mori, 1994;

1996; 2000; 2004; Bullock, 2006; 2010). Quite to the contrary, they join the ranks of a host of other tormented and tormenting female figures created by the fervid imagination of a new generation of women writers that emerged in Japan in the late postwar period. In what follows I introduce the reader to such a disturbing, but nonetheless densely populated literary landscape as I foreground these writers' increasing preoccupation with a maternal potential for violence.

The 1960s and 1970s are unanimously recognized by scholars as a fundamental moment in the history of women's literature characterised by a 'dramatic increase in the number of women achieving critical acclaim and winning literary prizes' (Jones, 2003: 221). Those two decades saw the emergence of a new generation of women writers of the calibre of Mori Mari (1903 – 1987), Setouchi Harumi (1922 -), Kōno Taeko (1926 -), Saegusa Kazuko (1929 - 2003), Ōba Minako (1930 - 2007), Takahashi Takako (1932 – 2013), Kurahashi Yumiko (1935 - 2005), Tomioka Taeko (1935 -), Kanai Mieko (1947 -) and Tsushima Yūko (1947 -) whose works of fiction sharply differ from the realist or autobiographical approaches that characterise their literary predecessors. These writers' growing visibility and the increasing recognition they received from a traditionally masculine literary establishment (*bundan*) motivated many a critic to speak of an 'age of talented women' (*saijo jidai*), of a boom in women's writing or even of a 'renaissance' in women's literature in Japan long after the great women writers of the Heian period (794 - 1185) (Mitsutani, 1986; Orbaugh, 1996; Jones, 2003; Dodane, 2006). In addition to the numerical increase of women writers in the late postwar, scholars also point at the disturbing peculiarity of the themes these women explored in their writing: sadomasochism, incest, paedophilia, partner-swapping, female and male homosexuality, doppelgänger (doubles), violence and murder, woman's quest for

sexual fulfilment, hatred or refusal of the maternal, infanticide, female alienation and loneliness, just to name a few of the most outstanding examples. Commentators also emphasize the stylistic use of fantasy, dreams, utopian worlds, delusions, madness and parody as another distinctive feature of this revival in women's writing (Orbaugh, 1996: 127; Jones, 2003: 223; Tanaka-Karlic, 1995).

Gretchen Jones (2003) describes this boom in women's literature as 'a search for delineating a revised identity more befitting the new age' with women authors portraying female characters as they embark onto a quest for self-discovery that often demands 'the outright rejection of social and cultural norms' and a reconsideration of 'preconceived notions of femininity and womanhood' (224). It is difficult to avoid the temptation to speculate about the possible relationship between, on the one hand, the quantitative and qualitative changes that distinguished the literary production of this new generation of women writers and, on the other hand, the historical, social and cultural transformations that hit Japan in the aftermath of World War II. The dramatic restructuring of society that followed Japan's defeat opened up for women a world of undreamed-of possibilities as notions of political equality, co-education and equality in the workplace entered their mental landscape regardless of their still inadequate implementation (Orbaugh, 1996: 126; Loftus, 2013). Sharalyn Orbaugh (1996) maintains that for women writers this epochal sea-change 'represented a significant cultural moment in which they could explore through fiction the various discourses and power relationships of postwar Japan' (127). This view has been recently reasserted by Julia C. Bullock who suggested that we read the early works of authors like Kōno Taeko, Takahashi Takako and Kurahashi Yumiko as 'philosophies of gender in fictional form' (2010: 9). Bullock argued that, in the decade preceding the

birth of *ribu* as a politically active movement, other women had already 'sought to critique and subvert hegemonic discourses of femininity that confined women to the "traditional" roles of wife and mother' and opened up a path 'toward a broader range of permissible expressions of feminine subjectivity' (3) (see also Dodane, 2006; Bullock, 2006). In light of these considerations, the title of Nakayama Kazuko's 1986 survey of contemporary women's fiction acquires a distinct tone: "The Subject of Women's Literature and the Transformation of Its Consciousness" ("Joryū bungaku to sono ishiki henkaku no shudai"). In this essay Nakayama refers to the feminist movement and feminist thought of the 1970s and although she never explicitly mentions *ribu*, her use of the expression *ishiki henkaku* (consciousness transformation) suggestively evokes – as we shall see in chapter 3 – one of the key philosophical tenets of the newly emergent women's liberation movement in Japan ([1986] 2006). Whether or not the result of a conscious stylistic choice, the title seems to personify women's literature in the shape of a single woman participating in that broader transformation of female consciousness that constituted one of *ribu*'s most radical political purposes.

I shall sidestep, for the time being, any in-depth consideration of the complex and often ambiguous relationship that appears to exist between women's writing and the invocation of an allegedly subversive and emancipatory potential. Suffice it to say that a preoccupation with this relationship can be variously traced in relation to both western and Japanese women's literary traditions. I shall return to this point only at a much later stage of my argument and only in relation to the figure of Takahashi Takako, once an extensive analysis of her works of fiction and non-fiction has paved the way to a more sustained engagement with this conundrum. Instead, I now return once again to the thematic changes that constituted a distinctive feature of the new generation of

women writers, my main purpose being to investigate the extent to which an unprecedented interest in the "abnormal" made it possible for women writing in the postwar period to venture into a radical questioning of the maternal ideal, while also breaking the taboo surrounding the idea of a maternal potential for violence.

An important dimension of this thematic shift is identified by Nakayama as the 'dismantling of the myth of motherhood' that she considers instrumental to the destruction of the male paradigm whereby woman's subjectivity is moulded into man-made fantasies of maternal selflessness and all-encompassing love ([1986] 2006: 147). Drawing on Adrienne Rich's famous formulation, Fukuko Kobayashi describes this process as the 'killing of motherhood as institution' and argues that the creation of female characters 'who counter and oppose the conventional motherly types popular in earlier fiction [...] reflect[s] the authors' deep-seated antipathy toward anything to do with the prevailing assumption of motherhood as women's natural calling' (1999: 135; see also Copeland, 1992). It is undeniable that a rejection of the cultural belief that 'biology is destiny' constitutes a common trait that runs through most of the literary production by women in the 1960s and 1970s. This refusal intertwines with a profound questioning of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal (*ryōsai kenbo*), the state-sponsored redefinition of womanhood that originated in the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) and which promoted a separate sphere for women, encouraged as they were to contribute to the nation through complete devotion to the family, efficient house management, care of the old, young and ill, and a responsible upbringing of their children (Nolte and Hastings, 1991: 152; Ericson, 1996; Uno, 1999). As we shall in chapter 3, the prewar and interwar ideal of 'good wife, wise mother' survived into the

postwar period when it was efficiently adapted to best suit the changed social conditions of a new Japan (Uno, 1993).

The new generation of women writers that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s levied a relentless critique to such man-made idealisation of womanhood, countering traditional images of wifely abnegation and maternal selflessness with the creation of female characters unable to discover meaning in their socially accepted roles of wives and mothers (Nakayama, [1986] 2006). Ōba Minako represents one such example of a 'resisting woman writer' (Ericson, 2006: 114): many of her short stories such as "The Three Crabs" ("Sanbiki no kani", 1968; winner of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize), "Ship-Eating Worms" ("Funakui mushi", 1969) and "Dream of Hemlock" ("Tsuga no yume", 1971) – just to name a few – portray mothers and housewives whose subjectivity is unconnected to husbands, children, friends and social surroundings. In "The Three Crabs" a profound sense of incommunicability alienates Yuri from her own family and urges her to search for short-lived sexual gratification with a stranger. Nakayama recognises in these works a 'vehement rejection and hostility toward the idea of woman as maternal' and calls attention to Ōba's questioning of 'all kind of relationships that make the task of bearing and raising children through the social system of marriage the reason for women's existence' ([1986] 2006: 147). Ōba makes one of the characters in "The Three Crabs" argue that '[i]n the twentieth century, pregnancy is not a symbol of fertility but of sterility and destruction' ([1968] 1982: 97), and we may not be surprised at discovering a similar accusation in one of Takahashi's short stories where the protagonist declares '[r]eproduction is destruction' (Mori, 1994: 35). Both stories communicate unambiguously a revulsion toward pregnancy, motherhood and family ties that arguably constitutes a leitmotif of much of the

literary production of this new generation of women writers. Kobayashi also foregrounds the literary portrayal of aberrant motherhood in Ōba's story "Dream of Hemlock" where one of the main characters is a woman who plays mah-jong every night and uses sleeping pills to put her children to sleep. This reckless behaviour eventually results in the children suffering neurological damage from the pills (Kobayashi, 1999: 136). But an even more disturbing portrayal of maternal selfishness is provided by acclaimed author Enchi Fumiko (1905 – 1986) in her probably most-representative work *Masks* (*Onnamen*, lit. 'woman's mask', [1958] 1983). Here the middle-aged protagonist Mieko decides, after suffering a humiliating and bitter marriage, to sacrifice her own daughter for the sake of revenge against her dead husband and his family. Despite her internal conflicts, Mieko manipulates her retarded daughter Harume (herself the result of an extramarital affair) to have intercourse with a man and give birth to an heir who will have no ties to the lineage of the family of Mieko's husband (who are completely unaware of the deception). Harume eventually dies in childbirth, and although Mieko is aware that by aborting the child she could save her, she refuses to do so in order to fully accomplish her plan (Carpenter, 1990; Ruch, 1994).

Refusal of the maternal and rejection of a female procreative function seep into women's writing in the postwar in the form of strong assertions of female sexuality as distinct from reproduction (Mizuta, 1995; Orbaugh, 1996; 1999; Mori, 1996; Niikuni Wilson, 1996; Hartley, 1999). Additionally, Rebecca Copeland has also called attention to how authors as diverse as Ōba Minako, Kōno Taeko, Tsushima Yūko and Takahashi Takako challenge the myth of motherhood by indulging in extreme examples of what she calls 'maternal animosity' (2006: 14). Copeland maintains that, by '[c]reating

female characters that kill, maim, or otherwise injure children,' these writers 'violently disrupted expectations of an inherent [maternal] "gentleness".' (ibid.) In this respect, Kōno's fiction is of particular interest to us because in her female characters we encounter a unique blend of revulsion toward the maternal, masochistic sexual desire and sadistic fantasies of 'maternal' violence. Fumiko, the heroine of the short story "Ants Swarm" ("Ari takaru", [1964] 1996) – whose plot unfolds around the protagonist's fear of being pregnant – declares that '[t]he very thought of giving birth and having to raise a baby repel[s] her' (171). In a similar vein Akiko, the protagonist of "Toddler-Hunting" ("Yōji-gari", [1961] 1996) rejoices over the fact that a serious case of pulmonary tuberculosis has made it impossible for her to bear a child, and she perceives herself as 'a woman for whom maternal love [i]s a totally alien emotion – a woman even less able to think of bringing up children' (59). Both characters fantasise the ferocious and cruel treatment they would reserve for hypothetical daughters: 'if it's a girl,' Fumiko confides to her partner, 'I'll just be mean and cruel – I'll be so cruel, people will think I'm her stepmother.' And she abandons herself to a fantasy where the reader is left to understand that she will pour boiling butter on the skin of the unfortunate little girl. A disturbing fantasy of child-torture and disembowelment is what we encounter in "Toddler-Hunting" where one of Akiko's sexual fantasies sees a child being beaten by his father while a woman's voice encourages the violence (Copeland, 1992; Langton, 1997). Whereas similar episodes could be said to challenge patriarchal mystifications of motherhood and to dismantle any notion of a selfless and nurturing maternal, we could also argue that these same portrayals of child-abuse and child-killing safely contain the threat of a maternal potential for violence within a world of fantasy in which female characters who are not mothers consciously indulge

themselves. In other words, there remains a suspicion (yet to be voiced by literary commentators) that the subversive potential inherent in such representations of maternal animosity remains in part undermined by an unresolvable 'contradiction' between these characters' overt refusal to embody a maternal identity and their wilful embracing of fantasised maternal violence.

An attempt to move beyond this contradiction and penetrate the psychological complexities and menacing threat represented by a murderous maternal figure can be found in Ōba Minako's short story "The Smile of a Mountain Witch" ("Yamauba no bishō", [1976] 1991). The figure of the *yamamba* (or *yamauba*), the female demon of the mountains of Japanese folklore, exerted most of its literary influence through an homonymous medieval Noh play traditionally attributed to Zeami (1363 – 1443) (Yamaori, 1997; Hulvey, 1999; Reider, 2005). The *yamamba* appears in the Japanese folk tradition under multiple guises: sometimes an old woman who lives alone in the mountains, sometimes a man-eater female demon or even a cannibal mother figure, just to name a few. Ōba retrieves the archetypal figure of the *yamamba* and through a process that Meera Viswanathan describes of 'revisionist mythmaking' she employs it to denounce the fractured female subjectivity resulting from the pressures and desires of a male-dominated society (Viswanathan , 1996; Fisher, 1997). "The Smile of the Mountain Witch" tells the story of a young girl born with the capacity to read other people's thoughts and who becomes increasingly withdrawn due to the difficulty faced by society and her own family to accept her ability. As she grows up, gets married and gives birth to a child of her own, she also learns to suppress her true feelings and desires and to don the mask of the 'benevolent, good, kind mother [...] sanctioned by society' (Viswanathan, 1996: 254). Throughout the story the protagonist never allows

herself to live spontaneously according to her true nature but wonders, instead, about

how life would have been had she been able to live like a hermit or a *yamamba* in the

depth of the mountains: it is in one such a daydream that maternal ambivalence is

revealed. As she envisions herself looking at her own reflection in a clear spring, she

imagines half of her face smiling like an affectionate mother, while the other half

exudes repressed demonic rage. Half of her mouth is smeared with the blood of the

man she's devouring, while the other half caresses that same man who is curled up in

the shadow of one of her breasts and suckles it like a baby (Ōba, [1976] 1991: 201).

The image of the mask that either conceals or betrays the conflicting desires

harboured within the maternal appears in many of Takahashi Takako's early stories

analysed in the present research. They portray the tortuous journey of self-discovery

of mothers and wives who strive to come to terms with the dark, murderous energies

that surface from the deepest strata of a self buried under the façade of bourgeois

family life. In ways that appear to anticipate the imagery employed by Ōba Minako in

"The Smile of a mountain Witch", Takahashi's stories "Congruent Figure" ("Sōjikei",

1971) and "Boundlessness" ("Byōbo", 1971) introduce us to semi-prophetic, old

women who live close to the mountains or wander relentlessly through the country

who function as alter-egos for the protagonists and instil in them suspicion about the

spontaneous nature of maternal love. The image of the mask of the 'wise mother' that

conceals the protagonist's inner turmoil returns in these stories, together with the

reflection that betrays a maternal experience distorted by rage and frustration. In

chapter 5 I will show that Takahashi's portrayals of maternal animosity and murderous

motherhood are of particular interest to us because they foreground the repeated

failure of existing understandings of motherhood to translate maternal darkness into the realm of cultural intelligibility.

Writing about the social pressures that can transform motherhood into a stifling prison, Japanese writer Tsushima Yūko asserted in the course of a conversation with Takahashi Takako that

> [...] if you assume, as a premise, that such a thing [a maternal instinct] exists, then women shouldn't feel any resistance to having children or to raising children. Usually a woman is docile, so she goes along with the conventional wisdom. Then one day she discovers a completely different side of herself. There are moments when she really wants to murder her own children. At those times, I think the violence of that impulse drives her to the point of wondering, am I completely lacking in maternal feeling? In other words, am I not a woman? (Tsushima Yūko, tr. by Joan E. Ericson in Copeland, 2006: 128).

Five of the stories analysed in that chapter were published in the author's first collection of short stories *Yonder Sound of Water* (1971b). They are: "Sōjikei" ("Congruent Figures") "Toraware" ("Captive"), "Byōbō" ("Boundlessness"), "Kodomosama" (lit. "Honourable Child"), and "Kanata no mizuoto" ("Yonder Sound of Water"). In addition to these, the stories "Keshin" ("Incarnation", 1972) and "Natsu no fuchi" ("Summer Abyss", 1973) are also considered. To be accurate, a few of these stories were originally published in the 1960s in the pages of various literary magazines. Yet, it was only in the early 1970s that they were republished as part of collections with wider market circulation. "Kodomosama," for example, first appeared in 1967 in the pages of the literary journal *Gunzō* and was later included in *Yonder Sound of Water*. On the other hand, the original publication of "Incarnation" in the magazine Hakubyō dates back to as early as 1965. The story was then reprinted in the collection *Castle of Bones* (*Hone no shiro*, 1972) that, although published almost one year after

Yonder Sound of Water, contains stories that predate those in that first collection. Other examples of stories republished in *Castle of Bones* and that chapter 5 briefly touches upon are "Byakuya" ("White Night") and "Me" ("Eyes") which first appeared in 1966 and 1967 respectively. Takahashi's collections surely had a wider distribution than the literary magazines that first introduced them to the public, and I am inclined to conceive of this second appearance as marking a renewed entry of these stories into the discursive arena this thesis aims to investigate. This understanding justifies their inclusion in the chapter.

3   Motherhood studies and the maternal potential for violence

Some of the conditions of possibility for the present research were created during the last fifteen years by a proliferation of representations of the maternal in the academia across a wide range of disciplines and theoretical positions. To a greater or lesser degree, this growing corpus of scholarship has been given shelter under the umbrella terms 'motherhood studies,' 'mothering studies' or 'maternal studies.' The expansion of this new field of academic research was marked by the establishment in Canada of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) in 1998 as the result of the enthusiasm and relentless intellectual efforts of Andrea O'Reilly, Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University. In 1999 ARM established its own journal (the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering) and in 2006 launched Demeter Press, which was dedicated exclusively to the publication of feminist scholarship on motherhood. ARM was the first and for many years the only international feminist organization devoted specifically to interdisciplinary maternal scholarship. However, due to York University's failure to provide further funding to the

association, ARM was forced to reorganize, in 2010, in the form of a non-profit organization under the name Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI), and to move out of the academy. Following this reorganization the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering was re-launched as the Journal of the Motherhood Initiative.

Writing from within the United States and with the world of US academia in mind, Samira Kawash has argued that '[m]otherhood studies as an area of scholarship is on precarious ground: ignored by mainstream academic feminism, fragmented and discontinuous in the academic margins' (2011: 996; see also Baraitser and Spigel, 2009). Her account of the status of motherhood studies in the present fails to acknowledge, however, the founding in 2007 in UK of the interdisciplinary research network MaMSIE (Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics), based in the School of Psychosocial Studies at Birbeck, University of London. On its homepage, MaMSIE describes its main goal as the creation of a 'space for interdisciplinary conversations about motherhood and the maternal more broadly' which will enable the participation and collaboration of 'those working across different knowledge and practice communities including feminism, psychoanalysis, gender and sexuality studies, the social sciences, philosophy, visual and performance art, literature, and creative writing.' MaMSIE also established its own scholarly online journal Studies in the Maternal whose purpose is to provide a platform for contemporary critical debates on the maternal.

The appearance of ARM (now MIRCI) and MaMSIE on the academic scene testifies to a growing interest in a sustained intellectual engagement with notions of

motherhood, mothering, maternal subjectivity and ethics, and could be understood to accompany what Lisa Baraitser and Imogen Tyler have acknowledged as the 'extraordinary proliferation of public representations of maternity' in the last three decades (2010: 117). On a separate occasion, Tyler commented that 'the maternal has never been so very public, so-hyper visible', but she also recognised the profound incoherence that seems to characterise this multiplicity of commentaries on and portrayals of the maternal (2008: 2).

I have come to conceive of this heterogeneous proliferation of images and explorations of the maternal at both academic and non-academic levels as a crucial force that nourished and validated my original interest in discursive representations of maternal violence and maternal filicide in postwar Japan. The original idea for the present research did not emerge, however, from a conscious evaluation of the growing field of maternal studies, but was instead firmly located at the intersection of gender studies, Japanese studies and history. It was only much later in the research process that I recognised the implicit conversation with the field of motherhood studies that was, indeed, taking place.

It remains beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed evaluation of the diversity that characterises recent investigations in the maternal. Here I want to reflect on the fact that, despite the numerical increase of studies on motherhood, maternal subjectivity and their intersections with class, "race," sexuality, and the innumerable other axes of power, there still seems to be a dearth of scholarship that openly engages in an exploration of a maternal potential for violence. It also seems somewhat suspicious that some of the most recent theoretical contributions to this rather

underexplored territory appear to be all inscribed in the medical framework provided by psychoanalysis or (forensic) psychology, such as Estela Welldon's *Mother, Monster, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood* (1988), Roszika Parker's *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (2010 [1995]) Anna Motz's *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body* (2001) and Barbara Almond's *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (2010).

I am aware that, in embracing such an unorthodox focus, there is the serious risk of producing accounts of the maternal whose circulation may have detrimental effects upon the lives of many a mother. Explorations of what Adrienne Rich once called 'the heart of maternal darkness' (1979) can be used against women to reinstate notions of maternal propriety, strengthen the careful policing of maternal behaviour, and sustain those processes of monsterization and pathologization whereby mothers who kill their children are expunged from the realm of cultural intelligibility and into social abjection. Furthermore, there clearly is very limited usefulness in emphasizing the violent side of the maternal as a direct counter-strategy against cultural idealizations of motherhood as all-loving and self-sacrificing. Is there, in fact, any emancipatory potential in "celebratory" accounts of maternal violence? Additionally, a focus that is circumscribed to an investigation of a maternal potential for violence may also be troubling for that brand of feminism which identifies motherhood as the blueprint for the elaboration of an ethics of care (Gilligan, 1998 [1982]; Tronto, 1987).

There exists another genre where we can encounter maternal expressions of rage and aggression and this is the highly popular 'mommy lit' of which Susan Cheever's *As Good as I Could Be* (2001) and Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions* (2002)

constitute two significant examples. Among the memorable works that paved the way to the popularity of these 'coming out' stories of motherhood (Tyler, 2008: 5) are, of course, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1979 [1976]), Jane Lazarre's *The Mother Knot* (1997 [1976]) and Ann Oakley's *Becoming a Mother* (1979). In highlighting the value of these experiential accounts of maternal subjectivity, Tyler has emphasized the need for women 'to communicate what they already know in ways that will make a difference' (2008: 6). However, the very ability to communicate what one "knows" relies on categories that must be already in place in order for us to be able to make sense of our affective landscapes. In this respect, Parker (2010) suggests that widespread public condemnation of the negative side of maternal ambivalence, that is, feelings of hatred and aggression towards one's child, imposes a taboo upon the very articulation of that ambivalence. This 'taboo of the object of speech' (Foucault, 1981: 52) brings about in mothers feelings of anxieties and maternal guilt. In light of these considerations my research acquires the status of an intervention into the field of maternal studies: an investigation of the discursive constructions of maternal filicide in postwar Japan enables us to reflect on some of the discursive strategies by means of which a maternal potential for violence is allowed to enter the discursive realm and to acquire cultural intelligibility. It also shows that even when attempts are made to create an alternative discursive space where such potential could be conceived of in more sympathetic and compassionate terms, these same attempts appear to betray a feeling of restlessness, perhaps rooted in our being all 'of woman born.'

My final considerations revolve around the threat that a woman who kills is perceived to represent for society's gender order. In this respect, Lizzie Seal argues that 'killing by women violates norms of femininity, such as nurturance, gentleness and

social conformity. It disturbs culturally held notions not only of how women should behave, but also of what a woman is' (2010: 1). Women who kill, suggests Ann Jones in her now classic book on female violence, 'test […] society's established boundaries' (2009: 39). Arguably, the notion that women are essentially nurturing, gentle and non-violent has its root in an implicit overlap between femininity and motherhood and in the cultural idealization of the latter as the archetype of an unconditional love devoid of ambivalence. Therefore, whenever a mother kills her child, she comes to embody a double threat to the established order: she transgresses at once norms of femininity and maternal propriety, and she may be said to trigger what Belinda Morrissey (2003) describes as the fear harboured by heteropatriarchal societies in relation to a woman's power to generate and take away life. In Morrissey's words: 'Women who kill confirm the archetypal feminine power, reinforcing the terrible antithesis to the myth of the good mother, reminding us that where creativity is located so too is destructiveness' (2).

The danger that women who commit extreme acts of violence pose to the gender order is so significant that it produces in society the compulsion to contain and limit such a threat. Dominant discourses about women/mothers who kill become, then, instrumental to the regulation and the preservation of gender norms, and point to the intersections of motherhood and violence as a densely populated, contested site where clashing discourses produce a constant re-articulation of maternal and female identity. An analysis of the discourses and counter-discourses that develop around and in relation to filicidal mothers is thus indispensable for an adequate understanding 'of how gender constructions are central to how these women are perceived' (Seal, 2010: 8).

4   Establishing the space of a dialogue through translation

As I was exploring the archival material in Japanese and reflecting on the methodological and theoretical complexities of the project at hand, I happened to read Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). It was a timely encounter, because her theoretical engagement with the question of orientation enabled me to recognise some of the difficulties I had been facing in my own research. I have already flagged in the introduction my awareness of the dangers inherent in approaching my Japanese case study with an initial investigation of western feminist trajectories: a naïve superimposition of categories that have emerged from western feminist investigations of motherhood and maternal ambivalence is likely to efface the particularities of the Japanese experience and to erase the rhetorical idiosyncrasies of the discursive arenas this research identifies. Certainly, such superimposition would make the Japanese case study familiar to a western reader but, as Ahmed puts it, 'in a familiar room we have already extended ourselves' (7). As we extend ourselves in search of the familiar or, rather, creating the familiar, we also determine in advance what will come into view and what will take its place in the line of our horizon: 'The starting point for orientation', Ahmed argues, 'is the point from which the world unfolds' (8). If an object takes the shape that it does as a result of our specific orientation toward it, of the position we occupy when we attend to it, then to set out to investigate the Japanese material at hand with an analysis of western feminist theorisations of the maternal may not only set in advance the terms in which we might apprehend our object, but it might even constitute an instance of western narcissism. Ahmed articulates this conundrum as follows:

Narcissism would refer us to the act of being *orientated toward oneself*, such that the self is the object of one's desire. To describe orientalism as narcissism would be to suggest that in looking at "the orient" – or even in directing one's desire toward it – the Orient stands in for the West, as a return of its image, or as an alibi. (196, nr. 4, emphasis in the original)

A reflection about the notion of orientation requires that we also attend to what it means to experience moments of *dis*orientation, those instances when the world that we inhabit loses its familiarity. At this regard, Ahmed observes that 'getting lost' still takes us somewhere (7), and she encourages us to imagine how an object might appear when it is no longer familiar (35). As she foregrounds the epistemological value of these moments of failed orientation, she also points at the potential for a collective repetition of such moments of *de*familiarisation to *create a new orientation* (61). 'Becoming reorientated', she reminds us, 'involves the disorientation of encountering the world differently' (20). An engagement with translation as both a theoretical concept and a methodological tool provides a fresh perspective on how we might experience these moments of disorientation and sheds light upon some of the lessons we may learn from them. It also paves the way to a reflection on what it means to create the conditions of possibility for a dialogue between cultures and systems of thought to take place.

The question of translation can be taken up in a strict sense as the transfer of a message from one language into another or a 'restitution of meaning' into a different language (Derrida, 1985). This is a practice that corresponds to Roman Jacobson's notion of 'interlingual translation' (2000 [1959]). In this respect, at the etymological level the words 'translation,' 'traduction,' 'Übersetsung' and 'traduzione' all denote the activity of 'carrying something across.' This notion has traditionally been

associated to what Derrida ironically describes as 'the transfer of an intact signifier through the inconsequential vehicle of any signifier whatever' (quoted in Venuti, 2001: 171). Such understanding of translation is ever-present in this research where the content of Japanese documents and texts has been translated into English to make it accessible to those who do not know the language of the originals. I shall return shortly to the transmitting function of translation. Suffice it to say that the translation of news articles, *ribu*'s pamphlets and works of fiction by Japanese writer Takahashi Takako was far from being a homogeneous process, because the diversity of the archival materials demanded constant awareness of their specific nature, communicative intent and of the rules that governed the internal coherence of the discourses they articulated.

In the framework of the present research, however, translation can be also understood in a more general sense as a process of inter-cultural communication. My understanding of what it means to translate deviates here from the notion of transposition of a given content from one linguistic system to another (linguistic translation) to encompass the idea of communication and dialogic exchange between cultures, system of thoughts and (feminist) theoretical trajectories. Antoine Berman offers an important contribution to this understanding of the praxis of translation when he claims in *The Experience of the Foreign* (1992 [1984]) that

> *[e]very culture resists translation, even if one has an essential need for it.* The very aim of translation – to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one's Own with the mediation of what is Foreign – is diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture, that species of narcissism by which every society wants to be a pure and unadulterated Whole. (4, my italics)

Expressed from within the framework provided by translation studies, Berman's reference to forms of cultural narcissism echoes Ahmed's warning against the possibility that 'a desire for the Orient' may just as well conceal the lure of western self-referentiality, and thus confirms the existence of a common ground between orientation and translation. Berman further argues that the *ethical aim* of translating is the creation of 'an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering' and that '[t]ranslation is a "putting in touch with," or it is nothing' (ibid.) A series of questions arise from this claim. When do we know that a dialogue is taking place? What is the shape of a true dialogue? How are the speaking positions of those taking part in that dialogue secured? How do we assure that the voice of the Other will be heard in its own alterity? These considerations introduce us to a conundrum emblematically summarised by Franz Rosenzweig's famous paradox according to which 'to translate […] is to serve two masters: the foreigner with his [*sic*] work, the reader with his [*sic*] desire for appropriation, foreign author, reader dwelling in the same language as the translator' (Ricoeur, 2006: 4). Barbara Johnson (1985) has similarly described the translator as a 'faithful bigamist' whose loyalties remain split between native language and foreign tongue:[10]

> Each must accommodate the requirements of the other without ever having the opportunity to meet. The bigamist is thus doubly unfaithful, but in such a way that he or she must push to its utmost limit the very capacity for faithfulness. (143)

The tension between fidelity and betrayal haunts any attempt of translation (Butler, 2004). If the translator focusses on 'bringing the reader to the author' by

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[10] This configuration could be further complicated by a consideration of the fact that English is my second language, so that the extent to which I 'dwell' in the target language and the interferences of my native language could become themselves important variables in my movements from one language to another.

means of a faithful adherence to the syntax, grammar and phonetic effects of the source language, he risks 'produc[ing] a text leaning toward the unintelligible' (Berman, 1992 [1984]: 3). If, on the other hand, he decides for a conventional adaptation of the foreign work that privileges the criterion of fluency and the ideal of a transparent translation (thus 'leading the author to the reader') (Venuti, 1986; 1991),[11] 'he will have satisfied the least demanding part of the public […] but will have irrevocably betrayed the foreign work as well as […] the very essence of translation' (Berman, 1992 [1984]: 3). The latter is thus usually understood as an example of 'bad' translation that Berman describes as 'the translation which, generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work' (5).[12] In order for translation to function as both the groundwork for and the medium through which a dialogic encounter becomes possible, this foreignness or otherness of the Other must be (partially) preserved. In this respect, Richard Kearney suggests that the work of translation carries a double duty: 'to *expropriate* oneself as one *appropriates* the other' (2006: vii, my italics). A psychically demanding tension between expropriation and appropriation is necessary because full appropriation would take the form of a reduction of the Other to the Same, the erasure and effacement of its alterity. At the site of an encounter between two distinct cultures, two (feminist) traditions and divergent temporalities, this 'swallowing' or 'taking in' has the dire consequence of transforming the Other into a mere projection of the

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[11] Lawrence Venuti describes fluency as a strategy that, by 'minimizing any disruptive play of signifiers, pursuing linear syntax, univocal meaning, current usage [and] linguistic consistency […] produces the effect of a transparent translation that […] mask[s] the translator's decisive rewriting of the foreign text' (Venuti, 1991: 126). A fluent translation strategy

> [m]asks the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, the intricate
> affiliations with a different time and place, but also its own construction of an identity
> for the foreign culture mediated by target-language values' (126-7).

[12] Walter Benjamin identifies a 'bad translation' as the translation that 'undertakes to serve the reader' and which consists of 'the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content' (2007 [1955]: 70).

Subject's own scheme of things, thus making an encounter with things not-yet-known hardly possible.

The foreignness of the Japanese case study can be preserved by means of a 'thick translation' (Appiah, 1993) that takes into account the extent to which specific rhetorical choices were traversed and drew upon a set of political and theoretical interventions that acquire significance only if we read them against the background of their socio-historical and cultural setting. It follows that the inevitable distance between the foreign (i.e. Japanese) and the reader will take the form of a cultural and temporal gap between those discourses embedded in a web of multiple struggles over meaning in 1970s Japan and the institutional setting of an English-speaking academia and its readership located in the present. Therefore, my imperative as translator has been to act not only as a mediator between languages, but also between structures of thought that rely upon highly idiosyncratic uses of specific categories and terminology. The rhetoric of *ribu* is exemplary in this respect because of a highly political use of language that brings about what Shigematsu has named as 'translational troubles' (2012: xviii-xix). We may say with Benjamin that in such instances,

> [f]idelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original. For sense in its poetic significance is not limited to meaning, but derives from the connotations conveyed by the word chosen to express it. We say of words that they have emotional connotations. (2007 [1955]: 78)

As we shall see, these are considerarions that become of the utmost importance when we set out to translate a semantically rich vocabulary that includes words such as *boshi shinjū*, *kogoroshi*, *ūman ribu*, *onna* and *kogoroshi no onna*.[13]

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[13] See chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Importantly, they also make us alive to the theoretical and practical problems that arise when the foreign text we intend to translate is written in *more than one* language: 'how is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated?' (Derrida, 1985: 176). *Ribu*'s texts are a case in point because they are punctuated by transpositions of foreign (English) words and expressions such as *ūman ribu* (woman lib) and *burakku is byūtifuru* (black is beautiful) whose linguistic and affective resonances are likely to be lost in English translations (Shigematsu, 2012: xxv). Furthermore, we will see in chapter 3 how the translation practice of a *ribu* cell called *Urufu no kai* (roughly, Wolf Group) employed distinctive strategies to transpose western concepts such as 'sisterhood,' 'sexism,' 'self-consciousness,' etc. into the Japanese idiom in ways that aimed to associate the original (English) pronunciation to newly coined Japanese terminology.[14]

An important dimension of the present research (and one of its major challenges) has been to develop an understanding of how the notion of translation could be employed at both a theoretical and practical level to engage with the silences and erasures that traverse the discourses it analyses. The exploration of archival materials in Japanese foregrounded the ways in which mothers who kill their children have been variously portrayed in different discourses and how these representations may have in turn challenged or intersected each other, or simply coexisted side by side. But it also made it possible to identify some of the procedures of exclusion and prohibition that restricted the very possibility of speaking of maternal violence. It is in the attempt to translate what appears inherently untranslatable, in our effort to 'translate the silence,' that the nature of those erasures is exposed. If a maternal

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[14] See chapter 3 section 3.3.

potential for violence struggles to find complete articulation in the Japanese discourses under scrutiny (as I will try to demonstrate in the following chapters), how can we make that absence meaningful *in translation*? Such a difficult question takes us beyond a notion of interlinguistic translation (which requires, for example, a careful consideration of how maternal violence may variously (fail to) appear in the Japanese categories of *boshi shinjū* and *kogoroshi*), and into the realm of what we may call with Jacobson 'intersemiotic translation' (2000 [1959]). However, whereas Jacobson defines intersemiotic translation as the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of systems of nonlinguistic signs (Derrida, 1985: 173), our exploration of Takahashi's works of fiction confronts us with the failure to translate the language of the unconscious into intelligible discursive formations. It follows from this that, while it remains unquestionable that any translating activity will inevitably entail 'some salvaging and some acceptance of loss' (Ricoeur, 2006: 3), there is also the possibility that something of the original will *appear* in translation that *does not appear* in the source language. Commenting upon this very possibility Berman argues that by turning the original around, translation may reveal another side of it.' This process can be assimilated to what Novalis has described as a 'potentiation' of the original (Berman, 1992 [1984]: 7).

In order to draw my reflections to a close, I want to briefly return to the notion of translation as the bedrock of inter-cultural communication and as instrumental to a dialogic exchange. From what I have said thus far it could be argued that the drama of the translator may be said to reside in the experience of tension and suffering which s/he undergoes as s/he checks the impulse to reduce the otherness of the other, thereby assuming alien meaning into one's own scheme of things (Kearney, 2006: xv-xvi). Put differently, the translator must engage with the simultaneous demand of

making the foreign sufficiently familiar to the reader so that a common ground for communication might be possible, and preserving what is unfamiliar in order to "force" the reader into a process of deprovincialisation of his/her mother tongue and structures of thought. '[T]he mother tongue', Ricoeur reminds us, 'is invited to think of itself as one language amongst others, ultimately to see itself as foreign' (2006: 9). Barbara Johnson makes a similar point when she claims that '[t]hrough the foreign language we renew our love-hate intimacy with our mother tongue. We tear at her syntactic joints and semantic flesh and resent her for not providing all the words we need' (1985: 143-4). And as both Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis would have it, it is impossible to stay at home with the mother tongue. The account provided by Paul De Man (1985) is emblematic of this 'suffering of the original language':

> We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering. (37)

This process of 'deprovincialisation through translation' acquires a new meaning once it is referred to the idea of a dialogical interaction between distinct feminist trajectories. In this respect, the modalities with which a "western feminist tradition" – denomination already problematic for its implications of a homogeneous singularity – establishes a dialogue with a non-western one must be subjected to a relentless monitoring in order for a real exchange to take place (Spivak, 1993). Writing about the power relations that have informed the traveling of feminist theories, Clare Hemmings argued that

The geopolitical power of located publishing and English as the global *lingua franca* means that feminist theory produced in an Anglo-American context is likely to exceed its geography [...] More importantly, conceptualizing of Anglo-American feminist theory's travels as direct *dissemination* fails to capture the transitions and translations that mark its movements back and forth and that highlight the nature of international engagement with its various forms (2011: 15, emphasis in the original).

In the broader context from which this excerpt is taken, Hemmings is admittedly engaging with an investigation of 'how feminists tell stories about Western feminist theory's recent past, why these stories matter, and what we can do to transform them' (1). It is not surprising, then, that the movements, transitions and translations she refers to seem to be those in which western feminist theory appears to occupy a subject position. However, when it is the foreign (here a "non-western (feminist) trajectory") which is translated and which becomes the subject of a movement across geographical borders *toward* the West, resistance is likely to emerge. Ricoeur elaborates on this resistance as follows:

The resistance on the side of the reader must not be underestimated. The pretensions of self-sufficiency, the refusal to allow the foreign to mediate, have secretly nourished numerous linguistic ethnocentrisms, and more seriously, numerous pretensions to [...] cultural hegemony

Following these considerations we are urged once again to question the power relations that traverse East-West cultural relations whose emphasis, Rey Chow acutely observes, 'tends to be placed on the effects of translating Western terms into non-Western languages, which consequently have to adjust or reform themselves in order to accommodate the Western terms' (2007: 569). To begin our investigation with an in-depth exploration of the Japanese experience enables us to problematise the direction of this movement of words (and theories) and to shed light onto the

strategies by means of which *ribu* activists in Japan were able to conceive in highly original ways of a maternal potential for violence. However, in order to expand the scope of the present research from a simple investigation of a distinctive moment in Japanese social history into an intervention in gender and motherhood studies in the West, the inequitable status in which the world's languages exist must be taken into account. Lydia H. Liu's denunciation of a hierarchy of languages and of the price some languages have to pay in order not to be excluded from the circuit of linguistic exchange is exemplary of what is at stake:

> In thinking about the translatability between historical languages, one cannot but consider the actual power relations that dictate the degree and magnitude of sacrifice that one language must make in order to achieve some level of commensurability with the other. (1999: 34-5)

Therefore, my use of translation as both a theoretical concept and a practical tool ought to be understood as a politically invested choice which aims at temporarily undoing the power relations that contributed to the historical difficulty of Japanese activists leaving a mark in the development of feminist theory in the West. As I investigate the multiple ways in which a maternal potential for violence came to be portrayed and constantly (re-)negotiated in 1970s Japan, I aim to put the language of western theories of the maternal 'into symbolic expansion' (Derrida, 1985: 190) and to make it more sensitive to its own silences and erasures.

CHAPTER 2

FILICIDE IN THE MEDIA: NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MOTHERS WHO KILL THEIR CHILDREN IN 1970S JAPAN

The present chapter investigates how women who killed their children came to be portrayed in the early 1970s by the Japanese major newspapers. My purpose here is not so much to provide a factual account of the reality of maternal filicide in late postwar Japan, but to explore the discursive and narrative strategies by means of which filicide was represented as a social phenomenon of historic proportions. I aim to identify and interrogate the bias of newspaper coverage of mothers who kill and to analyse how news media depicted murderous mothers in ways that reinforced gender stereotypes and secured traditional ideas of maternal propriety. My analysis foregrounds the rhetorical and editorial choices made by news media as they dealt with the social trauma engendered by concrete manifestations of maternal violence. Furthermore, the analysis of Japanese news stories I provide in this chapter aims to render accessible textual materials that seem to have remained largely unexplored in English scholarship in the fields of journalism, media studies and communication studies.[15] As far as Japanese scholarship is concerned, the work of sociologist Tama Yasuko (2008) exerted a profound influence on my own approach to media discourse: many of the strategies of amplification investigated in section 4 were identified in her study of media coverage of filicide in 1973 in Japan. In what follows I have drawn on

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[15] As we might expect, a cursory review of scholarship in English on media representations of mothers who kill reveals a fundamental reliance on primary sources in English. This has inevitably translated in a disproportionate attention given to British, American or Australian news media to the detriment of sources in other languages. See, for example, Barnett (2005; 2006; 2007; 2013); Coward (1997); Douglas and Michaels (2004); Goc (2003; 2007; 2009; 2013). For the only article I came across that was based on non-English sources, see Cavaglion (2008).

her insights and applied them to a dataset that is both broader (in terms of years covered) and different in nature from the one she relied upon, but which equally confirms the validity of her findings.[16] The present chapter is organized in four distinct sections: section 1 briefly reflects on some of the features of news media discourse, while section 2 engages in methodological considerations and introduces the dataset. Section 3 explores the concept of *oya-ko shinjū* (parent-child suicide) which played an important part in the process of sampling. Finally, the qualitative textual analysis of news stories is conducted in section 4.

1   News media

Despite the myth of professional objectivity and journalists' recurrent claims of reporting transparent, factual accounts of actual occurrences, scholars have called attention to the role played by news media in the social construction of meaning and in the shaping of public knowledge of events, actors and places. A degree of control over the selection of what is covered partially explains the structuring power of the media. Mass media performs what has been called an *agenda-setting* function, that is, the capacity to set the salience of a given issue and to transfer that salience to the public (McCombs, 2005) (in other words, the capacity to influence what people think about). In this respect, negativity, that is, 'natural or man-made violence, conflict, disaster, or scandal' has been identified as a significant ingredient of what makes an event newsworthy, and has been deemed an important criterion for news selection (Graber quoted in Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 126).

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[16] Tama's dataset included articles published in 1973 in the *Asahi shinbun* and *Mainichi shinbun* and comprised news items on *both* filicide and child abandonment. This enabled her to elaborate on the changing conceptions of motherhood, parent-child relationship and family. On the other hand, my dataset is primarily focussed on media coverage of cases of filicide (see section 2 of the present chapter).

On the other hand, how an event is narrated has been also recognised as central to the capacity of the media to shape our perception of reality. William Gamson and Andre Modigliani (1989) have coined the term *interpretative packages* to designate the 'set of symbols and narratives the media utilize in order to guide the audience in making sense of a social phenomenon' (Yamamoto, 2012: 2). The notion of *media framing* becomes pivotal here. To frame is to single out specific aspects of a news item and to give them salience: it is 'both a process and an effect in which a common stock of key words, phrases, images, sources, and themes highlights and promote specific facts, interpretations and judgements' (Tucker, 1998: 143). Frames 'define problems […] diagnose causes […] make moral judgements […] and suggest remedies' (Entman, 1993: 3). The idea of framing has drawn attention to the process of selection and composition behind the construction of news items, and led scholars to think in terms of *narratives* (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Lowndes, 2005). In this regard, Barbara Barnett has variously described journalism as a 'story-telling platform' (Barnett, 2013: 2) or 'the art and practice of telling stories' (Barnett, 2005: 13), emphasizing that it is how these stories are constructed that allows for organization and interpretation. News media usually construct frames that mirror cultural themes and narratives within society and which often rely upon well-known tropes and stereotypes (Goc, 2008: 214). Stock stories and scripts that are familiar to the public are used to provide news reports with coherence (Cavaglion, 2008), but the retelling of known plots also has the inevitable effect of reinforcing conventional or "common-sense" understandings of news content.

Conceptually close to the notion of stock story is the idea of *myth,* understood as a narrative structure that draws on the cultural imaginary shared by a given

audience and which evokes interpretative grids that are familiar to the readers. Myths inform, but they also reinforce existing ideas, values and beliefs. They may also serve a *comforting purpose* 'by telling tales that explain baffling or frightening phenomena and provide acceptable answers' (Bird and Dardenne, quoted in Barnett, 2006: 414; see also Lule, 2001). The myth of Medea (what Goc calls 'the Medea frame') is one such narrative that Western culture frequently employs in news coverage of mothers who kill their children (Barnett, 2006; Goc, 2008). Stock stories revolving around the opposition between "good" and "bad" mothers constitute another recurring organizational and explanatory device when cases of maternal filicide hit the news (Barnett, 2006, Cavaglion, 2008).

A considerable portion of news is devoted to reports of deviant behaviours and their individual and social repercussions: they 'inform[…] us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes that the devil can assume' (Cohen, 2002: 8). What shape do these boundaries take, then, when maternal filicide becomes news? It seems particularly useful here to recall an observation made by Barnett in the context of her analysis of media coverage of the Andrea Yates murder case: 'events become news when they shatter the fairy-tale notions we have about love, home and family.' On these occasions, she continues, 'news coverage has less to do with the rarity of the event of infanticide and more to do with the fact that the event shattered the image of the good mother' (Barnett, 2005: 24). The traumatic effects of this shattering surface in the form of confusion, bewilderment and outrage that often characterise media portrayals of mothers who kill, and such affective dimension adds to the cognitive dimension of news coverage. In this respect, Belinda Morrissey (2003) acknowledges the social trauma engendered by

women (in our case mothers) who kill and who, by doing so, contravene cultural assumptions of feminine (and maternal) propriety. She also suggests that media discourses appear 'as traumatized by the murders women commit as the society from which they emanate', and she describes the attempts to limit and contain the threat such women pose to the gender order as 'desperate measures of discourses in crisis' (Morrissey 2003: 2).

Not only does news coverage of cases of maternal filicide draw on the sensational character of what it covers, but it also becomes the occasion to express society's indignation for the (highly gendered) transgression it represents *and* to reconfirm cultural norms of maternal behaviour. In the process dominant understandings of what it means to be a woman and a mother are secured and perpetuated. However, these same accounts that attempt to confront and make sense of the challenges posed to a community's values and beliefs also provide the 'opportunity to examine underlying systems of coherence and sense-making' (Nakagawa, 1993: 146). In what follows I attempt such an investigation: the analysis of media coverage of maternal filicide makes it possible to foreground dominant understandings of motherhood and illustrates the extent to which media discourse allowed the articulation of a maternal potential for violence or, rather, cast that very possibility outside the domain of cultural intelligibility.

2   Introducing the dataset

This chapter is based on a qualitative textual analysis of articles published in the *Asahi Shinbun* and *Yomiuri Shinbun* – the newspapers with the widest circulation in

Japan – in the years 1970-1973. The articles were retrieved through keyword search using two online databases: Kikuzo II Visual for the *Asahi Shinbun* and Yomidasu Rekishikan for the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. In chapter 1, section 2 I elaborated in some detail on the methodological dilemmas that the use of these databases entailed and on the flexibility with which the word 'filicide' has been employed in this research (i.e. the killing of a child less than 18 years of age by a parent or a substitute parental figure). In light of the broad connotations with which the term was used, I identified a wide set of keywords to cover a broad range of news items: *kogoroshi*, *akachan-goroshi*, *yōji-goroshi*, *nyūji-goroshi* (filicide, infanticide); *eiji-goroshi* (neonaticide); *eiji-shitai*, *akachan-shitai* (corpse of a baby) and *shinjū* (double suicide). A cursory reading of the material emerging from this initial search enabled the identification of other relevant terms that were eventually also included in the keyword search. Some of these are *noirōze* (neurosis); *sekkan* (discipline, punishment), *kodomo junan*, *akachan junan* (children's suffering), *bosei sōshitsu* (loss of motherhood), etc. Whenever I happened to come across an article on filicide which had not been already identified by the keyword search, I decided to include it as part of my dataset. Table 1 shows the total number of news items per year that these sampling criteria enabled me to identify (the figures comprise news reports, editorials, commentary, etc.)

Table 1: Total number of articles per year

	1970	**1971**	**1972**	**1973**
Asahi shinbun	109	93	118	85
Yomiuri shinbun	99	58	70	91

The dataset so compiled is not meant to be exhaustive of the totality of cases that occurred across Japan. Not only may some articles have gone easily undetected,

but the fact that the databases provided access to only the Tokyo editions of the two newspapers under consideration means that geographical generalizations were not possible.[17] I am also aware that the use of keyword search to compile a dataset is also likely to exclude potentially useful news item and to engender the possibility that some narratives may go unnoticed. While I attempted to compensate this possible weakness of my data collection by widening the range of keywords in light of my findings, I also made a conscious decision to maintain a clear focus on maternal filicide in order to preserve the overall coherence of this research.

3   *Oya-ko shinjū*

Among the keywords used to identify the dataset *shinjū* (double-suicide) or, more specifically, *oya-ko shinjū* (parent-child suicide) deserves particular consideration. *Oya-ko shinjū* is also variously referred to as *boshi shinjū* (mother-child suicide), *fushi shinjū* (father-child suicide), and *ikka shinjū* (whole-family suicide), where the second term *shinjū* denotes a double suicide committed out of love.[18] In Japanese, the two words *kogoroshi* (子殺し) and *oya-ko shinjū* (親子心中) are linguistically and conceptually distinct: whereas the former entails the idea of killing a child – *ko* (子) meaning 'child' and *-goroshi* (殺し) being the noun form of the verb *korosu* (殺す), to kill – the latter is not even remotely connected to the notion of murder, killing or death. Taimie L. Bryant observes that the two sets of characters that compose the expression *oya-ko shinjū* (親子心中) literally mean 'parent-child' and 'centre-of-the-heart' and

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[17] See chapter 1 section 2 for further details.
[18] The word *shinjū* is traditionally associated to a suicide pact between two lovers of which the play *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (The Love Suicides of Amijima) written by seventh-century dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653 – 1725) represents one of the most famous literary and theatrical examples.

appear to foreground the emotional bond between the persons involved at the same time as they sidestep any reference to the idea of 'homicide' (Bryant, 1990).[19]

In this respect, Roger Goodman observes that '[n]either in Japanese – nor in English translation – is the word 'murder' ever used in what is, in practical terms, the murder of the child by the parent followed by the parent's suicide' (Goodman, 2002: 138). Sociologist Yuko Kawanishi suggested that Western countries may lack the appropriate terminology to identify the phenomenon of 'parent-child suicide' and noticed that Western media rarely report murder-suicides (Kawanishi, 1990). This is not to suggest that this practice is unknown outside Japan, but to foreground the possibility that Western countries may have not developed a vocabulary that renders this phenomenon culturally intelligible. On the other hand, a keyword search with the word *shinjū* instantly reveals that this category has widespread circulation in the language of Japanese news media. Table 2 shows the number of news items per year that employed this terminology (where the figures do not distinguish between parent-child suicides and suicide pacts between actual lovers):

Table 2: Occurrence of the word *shinjū* in the *Asahi shinbun* and *Yomiuri shinbun*

	1970	1971	1972	1973
Asahi shinbun	89	79	71	85
Yomiuri shinbun	100	52	62	77

Additionally, Goodman has noticed that, according to surveys of *oya-ko shinjū*, 70-80 per cent appears to be *boshi shinjū*, that is, mother-child suicides (Goodman, 2002: 138; Kawanishi, 1990: 34). This becomes significant once we observe that the

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[19] News media sometimes employ the expression *muri shinjū* (lit. forced double suicide). However, the use of the word *muri* (forcible, forced) seems to be left to the discretion of the single journalist and its occurrence remains irregular.

killing of a child (together with the mother involved) is perceived in starkly different ways depending on which category (*kogoroshi* or *shinjū*) it is assigned to (Bryant, 1990).

In particular, Kawanishi argued that the high recurrence of mother-child suicides in Japan testifies to a mother's profound identification with her child to the extent that she considers it part of her self (Kawanishi, 1990). Whereas the practice of *boshi shinjū* may involve two events (i.e. the killing of the child by the mother and the mother's suicide),

> it is conceptualized as one act in which the identity of the child as a victim is collapsed into the identity of the parent as a victim. Conceptually, there has been one death; parent and child are one and the same victim of tragic circumstances. The child is not seen to be victimized *in turn* by his/her victimized [mother]. Only in the case of infanticide is the child seen to be victimized by his/her [mother]. (Bryant, 1990: 5, emphasis in the original)

Albeit considered tragic occurrences, mother-child suicides are met with a considerable degree of understanding in Japanese society. Several reasons are often adduced to explain this phenomenon: the absence of a religious tradition that considers suicide a sin (Yamamura, 1986: 34); the importance that Buddhism places upon the idea of reincarnation (and the promise of a better life for a child in his/her next life) and the overcoming of ego boundaries in order to experience oneness with all the existent; the priority Japanese society gives to interdependence among people as opposed to individual autonomy (Doi, 1981); the idealization of the maternal role that obliquely compensates woman's relatively low social status and which easily induces a mother's overinvestment in a child as the source of her identity (Kawanishi, 1990).

Furthermore, suicide has been recognized as a culturally established method of communication in Japanese culture of which several examples can be recognized in the historical practice of *hara-kiri* (ritual disembowelment) to protect one's honour, in the suicide missions of Kamikaze pilots as expression of patriotism, and in a mother's suicide as a means to make amends in the eyes of society for her son's shortcomings or misbehaviours, but also as an instrument to force compliance to parental will through the engendering of guilty conscience (ibid.).

To this we may add the fact that the high value bestowed upon the biological tie between mother and child explains the small number of daycare facilities and institutions for orphans, the deep-rooted stigma attached to adoption and the fact that an adoptive status may constitute a considerable obstacle for a person's participation in social life (Kawanishi, 1990; Bryant, 1991).[20] In light of these considerations it seems fair to say that a mother's choice of leaving her child behind may be generally perceived as a demonstration of her *not* being a good mother.

In order to highlight the impact that the category of *boshi shinjū* may have in the way maternal filicide is portrayed by news media, Table 3 shows the total number of *oya-ko shinjū* (parent-child suicide) within the dataset and distinguishes between those that were officially recognized as being committed by the mother alone as opposed to those that were committed by the father, that saw the complicity of both parents or else, where the culprit was not openly identified.

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[20] See chapter 3 section 6.

Table 3: Mother-child suicides and parent-child suicides committed by someone other than the mother alone

	1970		1971		1972		1973	
	Total		Total		Total		Total	
Asahi shinbun	58		49		52		40	
	Mother	Other	Mother	Other	Mother	Other	Mother	Other
	39	19	31	18	34	18	24	16
Yomiuri shinbun	Total		Total		Total		Total	
	46		28		36		32	
	Mother	Other	Mother	Other	Mother	Other	Mother	Other
	35	11	13	15	24	12	20	12

The table above suggests that the category of mother-child suicide is deeply engrained in the Japanese cultural imaginary or, at least, in the way this imaginary is reflected in news narratives. However, it seems to me that, although the notion of *boshi shinjū* conferred a degree of cultural intelligibility to mother-child suicides, it also engendered a series of possible contradictions when it came to providing discursive representations of a mother's potential for violence and murderous intent. This issue will be further explored in section 4.2.

4   Maternal filicide in the media

This section offers a qualitative textual analysis of media representations of maternal filicide. A considerable amount of news items contained in the dataset offer only short, bare accounts of the circumstances surrounding the accidents and simply provides concise answers to the five Ws of news reporting: Who? What? When? Where? Why? Because of their factual nature these articles do not offer major insights about the social perception of mothers who kill their children. On the other hand, they provide important information about the visibility of this kind of occurrences and

about the identity of the culprit. The figures in Table 4 show the number of cases where the culprit was identified to be the mother or stepmother (**M**), the father or stepfather (**F**), both parents (**P**) and those where no clear statement was made about who might have committed the crime (**?**).

Table 4

	1970				1971				1972				1973			
	M	**F**	**P**	**?**	**M**	**F**	**P**	**?**	**M**	**F**	**P**	**?**	**M**	**F**	**P**	**?**
Asahi shinbun	67	21	4	3	61	19	5	2	62	15	5	2	53	20	4	2
Yomiuri shinbun	65	18	5	0	33	13	3	1	37	14	2	0	43	17	5	1

From the figures above we can observe that in 70 per cent of the total number of cases included in the dataset the mother was singled out as the culprit, while in 23 per cent of cases the father was. 5 per cent of news items identified or suggested the complicity of both parents. The limitations of my dataset do not allow for broad generalizations about the incidence of maternal filicide *vis-à-vis* paternal filicide. Yet, we can still make a few important observations based on this data: to begin with, mothers who killed or were complicit in the killing of their children occupy a considerable portion of the total number of cases portrayed in the news and this suggests a high degree of visibility of such cases in the public eye. At the same time, the number of cases in which fathers were involved in the killing of their children can hardly be ignored. These considerations stand in stark contrast to the biased intensity with which filicidal mothers became the object of scorching social critiques, while paternal responsibility was only rarely acknowledged.

In what follows, my analysis of the dataset has been organized around two major areas: section 4.1 draws on the insights developed by Tama in *The Institution of Maternal Love: The Politics of Infanticide and Abortion* (*Boseiai to iu seido—kogoroshi to chūzetsu no poritikusu*, 2008) and investigates many of the textual, rhetorical and narrative strategies by means of which newspapers portrayed filicide as an alarming social phenomenon. Section 4.2 explores more in depth how mothers who killed their children came to be represented in the news media as either "bad" or "mad." It also reflects upon how news reports attempted to expunge the very possibility of a maternal potential for violence from the realm of cultural intelligibility by conjuring up the idea that they were living in a society marked by a 'loss of motherhood' (*bosei sōshitsu*).

4.1   Media strategies of amplification

As I flagged in the introduction to this chapter, in the early 1970s filicide – maternal filicide more specifically – came to be portrayed by Japanese news media as an alarming social phenomenon. On the one hand, this seems to indicate that filicide was high in the news agenda of those years. On the other hand, whereas the intense media coverage of filicide testifies to an increasing public concern for and visibility of parents who killed their children, we should not necessarily take this as symptomatic of an actual increase in the number of parents committing such crimes. In fact, there are no accurate figures available that allow us to ascertain the possibility of such increase: the official statistics released by the police recognized the killing of a child below one year of age as a distinct category (*eijisatsu*, infanticide), but they recorded all other cases of filicide and mother-child suicide under the generic category 'murder'

(*satsujin*) (Sasaki, 1980: 60-1). Therefore, it could be argued that there is no reliable data on the occurrence of filicide on a national scale (Tama, 2001: 65). The importance of media representations of filicide comes to the fore once we observe that, in order to compensate for this shortage of reliable statistics, a great number of sociological studies have relied on media coverage to develop an estimate of the actual occurrence of these crimes (ibid.). However, even if we ignore the geographical limitations that are likely to characterise the material these studies rely upon, the problem remains that media portrayals are usually taken at face value and not subjected to adequate reflection about their nature or content (ibid., 66).

This section aims to identify and illustrate some of the strategies the news media employed that functioned as 'amplification devices' in the construction of filicide as a phenomenon of frightening proportions. Many of these strategies have already been identified by Tama (2001: 37-42) to whom my analysis is greatly indebted.

4.1.1   Temporal and geographical amplification

A first set of strategies that had the rhetorical effect of amplifying the perceived magnitude of the phenomenon was the inclusion in the headlines of specific words that highlighted the repetitive nature of such accidents. A single case was, thus, linked to previous ones conjuring the idea of a sequence or chain of filicides that was imagined to unfold across time and space. Let us take a look to an indicative range of headlines that employ this rhetoric strategy:

> Even in Aomori (*Aomori de mo*) 3 persons [involved] in a mother-child suicide.[21]

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[21] *Yomiuri shinbun*, 15 May, 1970, p. 15. Morning ed.

Also in Gunma (*Gunma de mo*), a mother-child suicide.[22]

Once again (*Mata*), [child] disciplined with death. Stepmother arrested.[23]

Infanticide again (*Mata akachan-goroshi*). Man fled by his wife.[24]

Once again, a cruel mother (*Mata, hidoi hahaoya*). She strangled the child to death.[25]

Three people on the Yokohama line too (*Yokohamasen de mo*). It's neurosis. Mother dies and takes the children with her.[26]

Once again (*Mata*), mother kills two infants.[27]

Also in Hokkaido (*Hokkaido de mo*) mother [dies and] takes her children with her.[28]

Why? Child-murders happen one after another (*aitsugu*).[29]

An unmarried mother once again (*mata*) a murder.[30]

Once again, a brutal filicide (*Mata mugoi wagakogoroshi*). She hated taking care of her own child. A deranged mother.[31]

Once more (*Mata*), a *shinjū* in Irōzaki. Mother and two children.[32]

As the headlines listed above clearly show, the recurrent use of words such as

mata (again; once again), *de mo* (also in; even in; in… too) and *aitsugu* (to happen one

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[22] *Asahi shinbun*, 5 June, 1970, p. 11. Evening ed.
[23] *Asahi shinbun*, 13 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[24] *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 September, 1970, p. 14. Morning ed.
[25] *Yomiuri shinbun*, 17 November, 1970, p. 13. Morning ed.
[26] *Asahi shinbun*, 17 November, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[27] *Asahi shinbun*, 11 February, 1971, p. 18. Morning ed.
[28] *Asahi shinbun*, 5 April, 1971, p. 22. Morning ed.
[29] *Asahi shinbun*, 4 August, 1972, p. 11. Evening ed.
[30] *Asahi shinbun*, 23 October, 1972, p. 23. Morning ed.
[31] *Yomiuri shinbun*, 26 February, 1973, p. 10. Evening ed.
[32] *Yomiuri shinbun*, 16, October, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.

after another; to occur in succession) constituted a stylistic device frequently employed by journalists to convey a sense of urgency at the apparent proliferation of cases of filicide.

In order to elicit an alarmed affective response these rhetorical choices were often combined with the synthetic, high-impact listing of recent cases: these enumerations grouped together a disparate range of accidents glossing over their specific backgrounds and circumstances. As the following extracts make plain, the likely outcome was a heightened focus on the seeming spreading of parental violence and a parallel erasure of the structural causes that might have led to that violence.

> On December 20, in the city of Sakura (Chiba prefecture) two little brothers were strangled to death by their mother. 'The husband had run away', 'the child cried too much', 'had wet himself', 'did not study', 'wouldn't stop playing wrestling'… This year episodes of filicide have occurred one after another (*wagako-goroshi ga aitsuida*) with, indeed, numerous and simple explanations. There was even the case of a newborn baby who was buried on the riverbank with only his head out of the ground (August, [city of] Ishikawa). 1970, with its enthusiasm over its unprecedented bonus of three trillions yen, appears to be, however, also a dark year of filicides.[33]

> [The demonic couple who gave almost nothing to eat to their four-year-old child and caused him to die of exhaustion allegedly because he wouldn't listen to them (Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture) and the father who strangled to death his sixth child out of concern for the [family's] living conditions (Iwaki, Fukuoka prefecture) were both arrested on [April] 12. The day before, in Matsudo (Chiba prefecture) there had just been the case of a young stepmother who had punished and killed her daughter for wetting herself. Even the police officers in charge with the investigations rack their brains with a gloomy expression at the abnormal psychology of these parents who day after day have committed episodes of a cruelty inconceivable to our common-sense.[34]

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[33] "Wagako no inochi naze ubau." *Asahi shinbun*, 21 December, 1970, p. 18. Morning ed.
[34] "Kore de mo oya ka."*Yomiuri shinbun*, 13 March, 1971, p. 15. Morning ed.

In the examples above we can observe once again how cases that had occurred in different geographical locations were purposefully placed in connection with each other with a move that stressed the "common nature" of their violence or their shared tragic outcome (i.e. the death of a child). This was done to the detriment of a sustained consideration of the structural features that might have provided a better understanding of the phenomenon. Each of the quoted passages also presents temporal markers similar to those that I have already identified as a stylistic feature of many headlines, and which conveyed a sense of alarming repetition through time: 'filicides have occurred one after another', 'day after day…'. Sometimes, the dry enumeration of accidents could even become the driving force for a major portion of an article such as in the quotation below:

> Filicide. Even if we put together only main recent cases…•She detested his mental retardation and gave him nothing but bread and water (Kashiwa, Chiba prefecture, 30 July) •Mother hurled her three-year-old only daughter into the air [because] 'she had spitted out drinking water (Shibuya ward, Tokyo, 3 September) • A father in [the city of] Matsudo: 'The crying was annoying' (20 March) •Punishes her daughter before her entry in preschool [because] she was fretful when it came to studying (Sakai, Osaka prefecture, 8 September) • Stepmother [kills] two-year-old son [because] 'he wet himself' (Atsugi, Kanagawa prefecture, 10 September) •Throws from a train window baby daughter whom she had given birth in a cinema (Shirakawa, Fukuoka prefecture, 4 September) •Man who married into his wife's family and was told that 'he had poor earnings' got drunk, hurled his child across the room and hit him against the wardrobe and pillar (Gifu prefecture, 20 September) •Left in the closet for eighteen hours [because] 'he cried too much', (Higashimurayama, Tokyo) •Father batters daughter (aged one) in drunken frenzy [because] 'she had spilled some miso soup' (Matsudo, 7 November) •[Mother] ties son at his second year of elementary school to a tree [because] 'he wouldn't stop playing wrestling' (Mito, 11 November) • Crawls under the electric *kotatsu*[35] and dies of suffocation

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[35] A *kotatsu* is a knee-high table with an electric foot-warmer installed inside on the top board, which is used with a hanging quilt during winter to retain heat.

while the mother-hostess was on a date (Ikebukuro, Tokyo, 19 November).[36]

The passage above occupies the first half of an article aiming to investigate the possible reasons behind the frequent occurrence of filicide. Whereas the second half of the text outlines (in just a few sentences) the opinion of experts and social critics, the entire first half consists of a catalogue of cases complete with bullet points, places and dates. This has the rhetorical effect of exposing the pressing nature of an issue that is understood to haunt Japanese society, and which demands to be urgently addressed.

4.1.2　Spatial disposition of news items

The temporal or geographical amplification of filicide was not limited to headlines or introductory paragraphs, but was also brought about through the organization of articles in the space of a single page. In this respect, the various amplification strategies that we have so far identified ought not to be conceived as operating in a text in singular fashion and to the exclusion of all others. Quite to the contrary, it is often the case that the sense of urgency related to cases of filicide and the worrying proportions this crime was believed to assume are conjured up through a combination of different rhetorical modes and stylistic choices. Emblematic is the case of feature articles where strategies of amplification are interspersed among lead paragraphs and the headlines of the various news items that the articles group together. The magnifying process by means of which filicide assumed the appearance of a pandemic is here further intensified by the reciprocal reverberation of similar articles published on the same page. Let us take a look at just few examples. The first

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[36] "Katei no naka mo ningen fuzai." *Asahi shinbun*, 21 December, 1970, p. 18. Morning ed.

feature article I want to consider was published in the *Asahi shinbun* on April 5, 1971 and included three news articles under the same headline 'Sunday… *Shinjū* and suicides one after another' (*Nichiyō… Shinjū ya jisatsu aitsugu*):[37]

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[37] *Asahi shinbun*, 5 April, 1971, p. 22. Morning ed.

Figure 1: *Asahi shinbun*, April 5, 1971, p. 22. Morning ed.
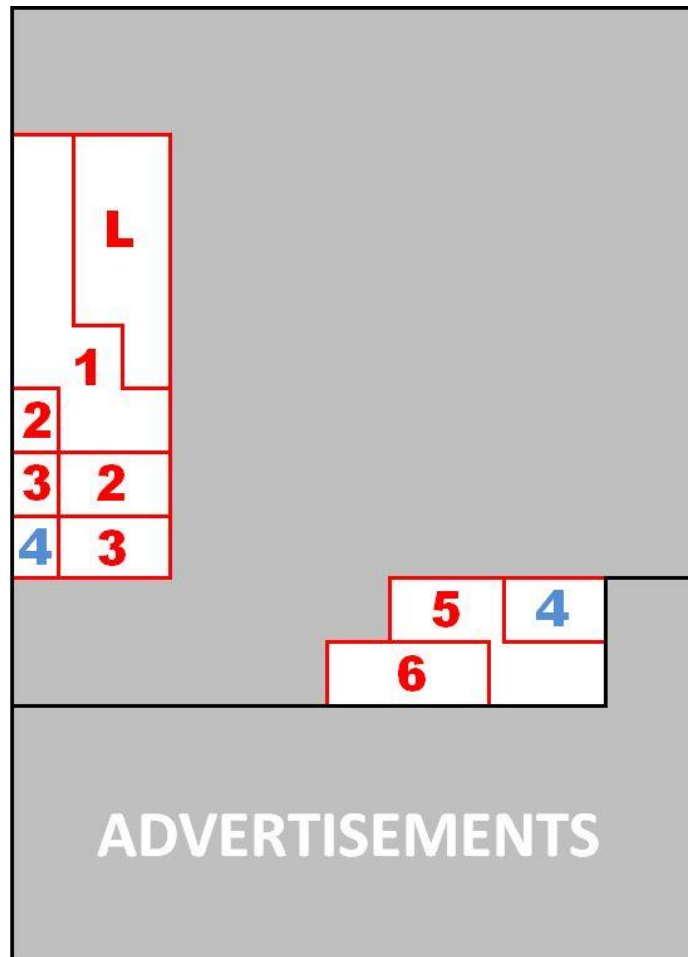
Figure 2: *Asahi shinbun*, April 5, 1971, p. 22. Morning ed. (legend)

In the diagram above section L is occupied by the main headline and the following lead paragraph:

Sunday 4th [of April], a wave of four suicide cases occurred in Hokkaido, Kawasaki, in the Adachi ward in Tokyo and in the city of Minamiashigarashi (Kanagawa prefecture). Six people died. A mother planned to commit suicide and to take her three children with her to follow her husband [in death]; a young manager of a company killed his wife and two children and threw himself in front of a train; a mother who developed a nervous breakdown induced by child-rearing [*ikuji-noirōze*] covered herself in petroleum and set herself on fire; a middle-aged man driven to a deranged state by the impossibility to work and marital discord attempted to kill himself through disembowelment

[*kappuku jisatsu*]. However unspeakable the circumstanced might be, killing oneself together with others is not the only way![38]

We can immediately recognise the amplification strategies that we have previously encountered: the use in the main headline of the verb *aitsugu* (to happen one after another) and the listing of several cases. The four accidents covered are grouped together under the umbrella notion of suicide, expressed in the headline by the words *shinjū* (double-suicide) and *jisatsu* (suicide). A closer reading of the single news items reveals that all cases apart from one involve a parent's suicide and the concomitant killing of his/her children. The various episodes are identified by the following sub-headlines:

1 [Man] kills his wife and child and throws himself [in front of a train].[39]

2 Also in Hokkaido, [mother] kills herself and her children (*ko-michizure*).[40]

3 Mother kills her child and attempts suicide.[41]

4 Suicide by disembowelment in Adachi.[42]

The numbers associated to the articles follow the ideal reading order on the newspaper page (right → left, top → bottom). An interesting characteristic of the feature article under consideration is the fact that article **4** (the only one that does not involve children) is positioned in such a way as to lead the reader to articles **5** and **6**:

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[38] Ibid.
[39] "Saishi-goroshi tobikomu." Ibid.
[40] "Hokkaidō de mo ko-michizure." Ibid.
[41] "Wagako koroshite / Haha, jisatsu hakaru." Ibid.
[42] "Adachi de kappuku hakaru." Ibid.

5 Gas poisoning. Child dies. A mother-child suicide?[43]

6 Two drowned children in Tokyo. [two cases][44]

Here the three reported accidents (the possible mother-child suicide and the bodies of two children discovered on separate occasions) are not included in the feature article, but they nonetheless constitute a coda to it: although only article **5** suggests the possibility that a mother might have killed her own child, both of them convey the clear impression that children keep dying in tragic circumstances and thus preserve with a twist the sense of alarm already communicated by the previous news items of the feature article.

Reproduced below is a second example where the spatial disposition of news items in a feature article has the effect of amplifying the gravity of the phenomenon. The article was published in the *Asahi shinbun* on September 6, 1973 and grouped together three articles under the headline 'Rushing toward death in the autumn rain':[45]

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[43] "Gasu chūdoku / Yōji shinu / Boshi shinjū ka." Ibid.
[44] "Tonai de yōji suishi futari." Ibid.
[45] "Akisame no naka ni shi ni isogu." *Asahi shinbun*, 6 September, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.

Figure 3: *Asahi shinbun*, September 6, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.
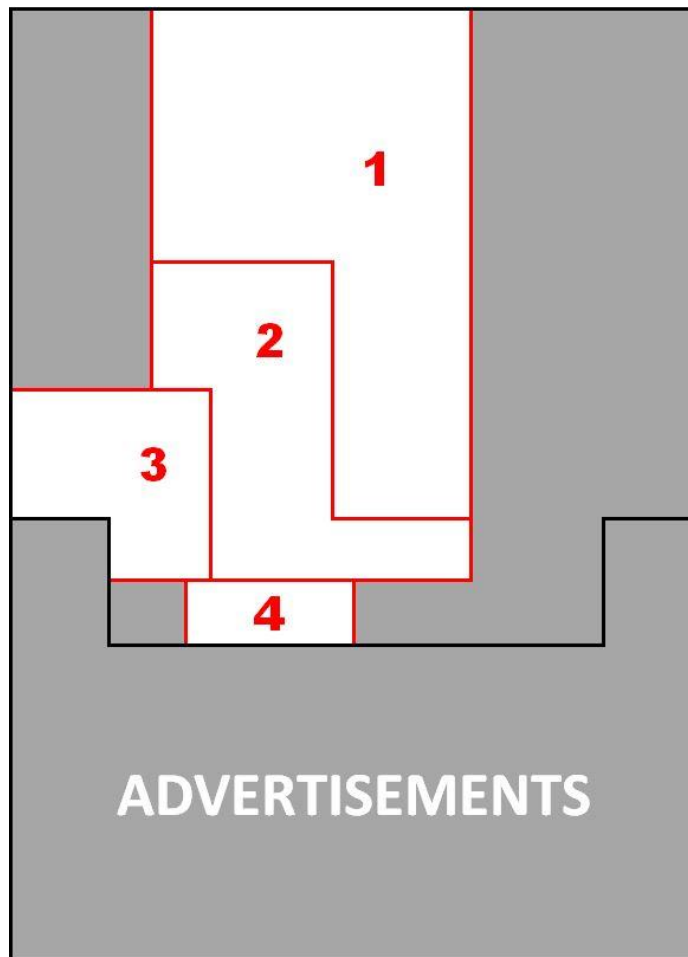
Figure 4: *Asahi Shinbun*, September 6, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed. (legend)

This time the feature article is not framed by a lead paragraph that groups together various accidents, but unfolds through the simple juxtaposition of articles which, once we discount the space devoted to advertisement, occupy most of the page. The articles are identified by the following headlines:

1 Whole-family suicide [*ikka shinjū*] of an associate professor at Rikkyo University. [The parents] drowned themselves into a river together with their two children.[46]

2 Another family: it's business failure. They also killed their two children.[47]

3 Three people involved in a mother-child [suicide].[48]

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[46] "Ritsudai jokyōju ikka ga shinjū / Niji wo michizure jusui." Ibid.
[47] "Jigyō shippai no ikka mo / Yahari niji michizure." Ibid.

The circumstances and motivations clearly differ from case to case, but the selection and disposition of the three articles in a broader feature article communicate a sense of shared tragedy. This tragedy is said to affect entire families, but it is the children's drama that constitutes the common thread to all the articles. The headlines of articles **1** and **2** place emphasis on the fact that, while it was the parents who faced difficult situations (a scandal in the first case and the failure of the family business in the second), their final resolution to kill themselves cost the life of innocent victims (their children). The use of pictures functions here as an important device that heightens the sense of drama by exposing photographs of the families involved. Article **3** is particularly interesting in this respect as it presents only the photographs of the two children victims of the mother-child suicide. In this case the choice of selecting only the photographs of the children may well have been determined by the limited space available. Nonetheless, the final effect is, once again, an emphasis on the tragic loss of children's lives. In addition to this, right under the three articles I have so far analysed a fourth one appears about a mother who beat her two-year-old son to the point of causing him fatal brain injuries. The article bears the headline 'Mother punishes premature baby to death' (article **4**).[49] Its closing sentence conjures up once again the innocence of budding life that had just started moving its first, uncertain steps in the world: 'Shigeru [the child's name] was a premature baby who had finally been able to crawl around.'

4.1.3   Abstractions

A last, important amplification strategy is the creation of a level of abstraction where different categories such as *shinjū*, suicide, infanticide, child abandonment and

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[48] "Gasu de boshi sannin." Ibid.
[49] "Hahaoya, mijukuji ni shi no sekkan." Ibid.

child abuse can be subsumed into broader categories that communicate a sense of alarm. Once again, headlines are the most immediate example of this rhetorical and narrative strategy:

The social conditions of children's suffering [*Akachan junan*]. "Faulty mothers" with no regrets.[50]

An era of children's suffering [*Akachan junan jidai*].[51]

Until when [will] children suffer [*Akachan junan*]?[52]

Children suffer [*Akachan… junan*) again.[53]

Once again children suffer [*Akachan… junan*].[54]

The hardships of children [*Akachan gonan*].[55]

The era of the loss of motherhood. [*Bosei sōshitsu jidai*].[56]

The social circumstances of child abandonment and filicide [*Kosute kogoroshi no sesō*].[57]

Aaah! Children suffer [*Akachan junan*]![58]

Notions such as 'the era of the loss of motherhood' and 'the era of children's suffering' become, in the rhetoric of the news media, broad categories that allow the organization of a variety of articles under the same rubric: this occurs irrespectively of

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[50] "Akachan junan no sesō. Kōkai nai 'kekkan hahaoya'." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 18 August, 1970, p. 13. Morning ed.
[51] "Akachan junan jidai." *Asahi shinbun*, 5 September, 1970, p. 17. Morning ed.
[52] "Akachan junan itsu made." *Asahi shinbun*, 19 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[53] "Akachan mata junan." *Asahi shinbun*, 22 September, 1970, p. 11. Evening ed.
[54] "Akachan mata junan." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 11 October, 1970, p. 14. Morning ed.
[55] "Akachan gonan." *Asahi shinbun*, 8 February, 1971, p. 9. Evening ed.
[56] "Bosei sōshitsu jidai." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 22 October, 1972, p. 18. Morning ed.
[57] "Kosute kogoroshi no sesō." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 10 April, 1973, p. 7. Evening ed.
[58] "Aa akachan junan." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 13 July, 1973, p. 23. Morning ed.

whether or not the selected articles portray parents who kill their children. In these cases the spatial organization of news item on a single page makes it possible for the articles to enter in a relation of co-dependency and to contribute to the creation of unstated new meanings. In this respect, the category of children's suffering (*akachan junan*) emerges as a particularly powerful one. The level of abstraction exercised at a rhetorical level by the notion of 'children's suffering' was originally identified by Tama in her study of media coverage of filicide in 1973, in which context she draws attention to a growing focus on children and childhood in news media. However, as shown by the numerous examples quoted above, this rhetorical strategy had already been in place, to a greater or lesser degree, in previous years. The use of such mechanisms of abstraction made it possible to connect cases of filicide (*kogoroshi*) and parent-child suicide (*oya-ko shinjū*) to episodes of child abandonment (*kosute*, *okisari*) or child abuse (*gyakutai*), thus contributing to the impression of a phenomenon of historical proportions that radically questioned images of parents as natural guardians and protectors of their children. We shall see in the next section that the mutual reverberation of such a variety of crimes and accidents created a fertile environment for the emergence of social criticism mostly directed at mothers' shortcomings and alleged egoism. I take the following set of news items to exemplify this surreptitious emergence of biased portrayals of mothers. The articles appeared in the *Yomiuri shinbun* on 30 October, 1972 and, although they are not unambiguously organized under a common headline, their distribution on the page is such to create the impression of a feature article (the presence of a lead paragraph confirming this impression). Therefore, the spatial organization of the articles encourages the reader to "connect the dots" and see the "bigger picture":
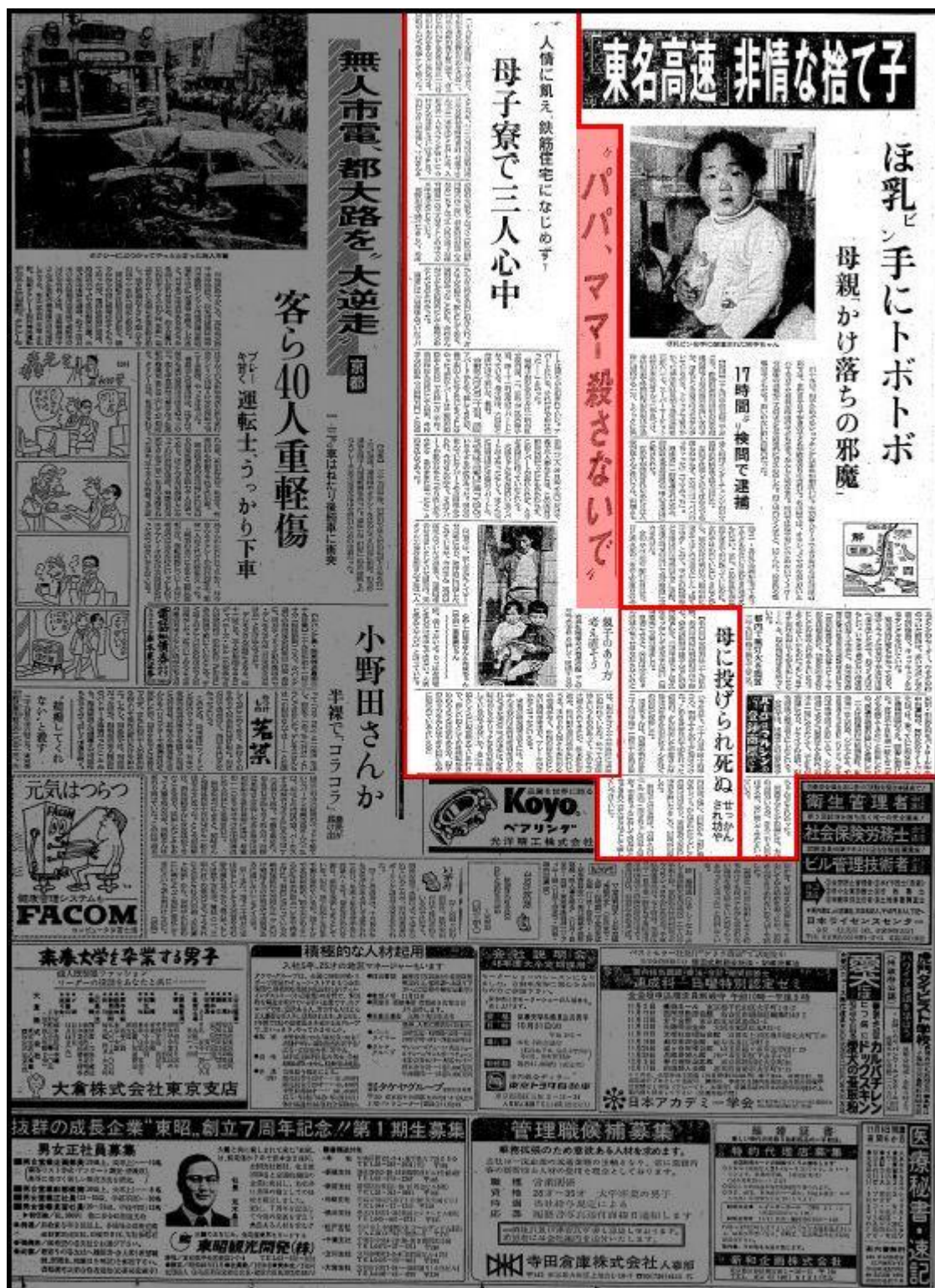
Figure 5: *Yomiuri shinbun*, 30 October, 1972, p. 15. Morning ed.
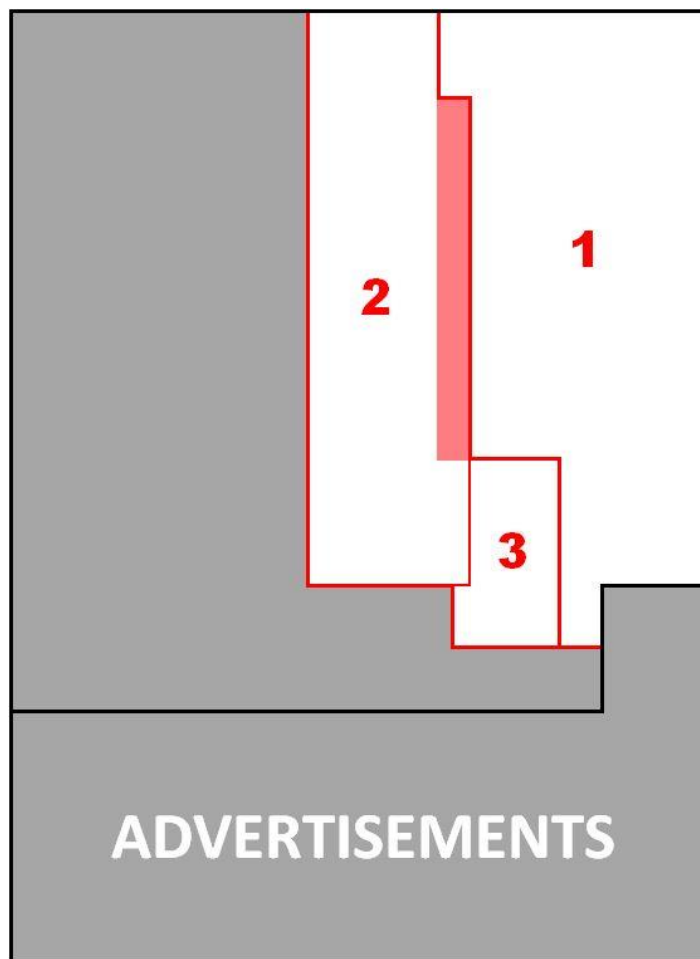
Figure 6: *Yomiuri shinbun*, 30 October, 1972, p. 15. Morning ed. (legend)

The first article of the page (which is the one of the three to occupy the most space) sets the interpretative lens through which the entire set is likely to be read. The headline and sub-headlines run as follow: 'Cold-hearted child-abandonment on the Tōmei Expressway / [The child was] tottering with a nursing bottle in her hands / "A hindrance to the love escape" of the mother' (article **1**).[59] The photograph of the little girl accompanies the text and forcefully conveys the idea of an innocent victim of an awful act. The feeding bottle that she holds in her hand and whose presence in the picture is also pointed at in the caption, functions as a reminder of her young age, her necessary dependence on an adult, namely, the mother, and the absence of that mother.

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[59] "'Tōmei kōsoku' hijō kosute." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 30 October, 1972, p. 15. Morning ed.

The other two articles report the cases of a mother-child suicide and a filicide respectively under the headlines 'Three people [involved] in a *shinjū* at a dormitory for mothers and children' (article **2**)[60] and '[Child] dies thrown [around] by his mother' (article **3**).[61] Cutting the composition vertically in two halves is the plea 'Daddy! Mommy! Please, don't kill!' (*Papa, mama, korosanaide*) written with a font that clearly distinguishes it from both headlines and sub-headlines, and highlighted in red in the diagrams above. The plea has the double function of separating the articles in two groups and of introducing the latter. Placed next to the photograph of the little girl and presented in quotation marks as if it were someone's direct speech, we may even have the impression that this is the child's plea voiced on behalf of all children who are suffering.

The reference to the paternal figure may strike as odd, however, because none of the reported cases involves a father abandoning, abusing or killing his child. The puzzling mention to a parental figure that may *not* be explicitly the mother occurs on two more occasions: to begin with, the lead paragraph in article **1** begins with the sentence 'On [October] 29 shocking accidents revolving around parents and their children (*oya-ko wo meguru jiken*) happened one after another (*aitsuida*). Furthermore, at the very bottom of article **2** a short paragraph reports the opinion about the accidents from a professor at the Tokyo Metropolitan University. The paragraph is introduced by the small title 'Let's rethink the parent-child [relationship]', which is placed right next to the photograph of the mother and two children who committed suicide. What seems to emerge from the spatial disposition of these articles and their

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[60] "Boshi-ryō de sannin shinjū." Ibid.
[61] "Haha ni nagerare shinu." Ibid.

rather contradictory rhetorical strategies is a kind of *double discourse* that, on the one hand, calls attention to a social problem that is understood to affect both parents in equal measure while, on the other hand, conveys the message that it is the mother who is the (only) one who is really falling short of her parental duties. Here we can already begin to observe how, despite the public depiction of filicide as a widespread social phenomenon that saw both mothers and fathers take the life of their children with alarming frequency, mothers became a consistent target for society's indictment and indignation. It is these biased portrayals that constitute the focus of the next section.

4.2 News coverage of mothers who kill their children

4.2.1 Parents or mothers?

The killing of a child by a parent is nothing short of a tragedy. Both the persons most closely involved in the event and the whole of society are left with the difficult task of making sense of it and facing its consequences. For society this means coming to terms with the trauma brought about by the shattering of idealized notions of love and family. On these occasions, shock, confusion, bewilderment, rage and indignation are often the immediate affective responses that we find in news media and which can be understood as society's attempts to make sense of an incomprehensible, unimaginable explosion of parental violence. This remains true independently of whether the culprit is the child's mother or father. This outrage and indignation is clearly exemplified in the following headlines:

Is this a parent?![62]

Prison sentence for the "demonic husband and wife."[63]

Why did they rob their children of their lives?[64]

And yet this would be a parent!?[65]

These cruel parents.[66]

The loss of parental love.[67]

Although the killing of a child by his own father remains a disconcerting occurrence that prompts social outrage, mothers are made time and again into the privileged target for social criticism. This biased treatment surfaces, for example, in the way news media portrays the actors involved in a crime: whenever a mother is involved in the killing of a child it is very likely that the father will be just glossed over or simply portrayed in a bewildered and mournful state. This is particularly evident in the numerous cases of mother-child suicide (*boshi shinjū*) whose recurrent narrative structure sees the father coming back from work just to discover the lifeless bodies of his wife and children. As we shall see, these often laconic reports often end with mentions of the mother's nervous breakdown as the primal motivation for her crime, but they never linger on the role that the father and child-rearing arrangements might have played in the onset of the neurosis. On the other hand, when the culprit is the father, the articles are very likely to devote some space to consider the role of the mother in the tragedy. This often translates in the implicit question: 'Where was the

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[62] "Kore ga oya ka." *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[63] "'Oni-fūfu' ni jikkei hanketsu." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 December, 1970, p. 9. Evening ed.
[64] "Wagako no inochi naze ubau?" *Asahi shinbun*, 21 December, 1970, p. 18. Morning ed.
[65] "Koredemo oya ka." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 13 March, 1971, p. 15. Morning ed.
[66] "Kono kokuhaku na oyatachi." *Asahi shinbun*, 24 August, 1972, p. 11. Morning ed.
[67] "Oya-gokoro sōshitsu." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 11 June, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.

mother?' Even when the absence of the maternal figure is not explicitly adduced as *the reason why* the father committed the crime, the mother seems nonetheless implicitly indicted for having failed to protect the child:

> Once again a child is killed. Man abandoned by his wife (lit. man whose wife had run away)[68]

> Two children involved in a forced murder-suicide / … / Husband abandoned by his wife.[69]

> Two cases of *shinjū*: [men] abandoned by their wives.[70]

> Forced murder-suicide: [man] left by his wife.[71]

> Man abandoned by his wife punishes [his child and becomes a] murder.[72]

Exemplary of some of the rhetorical strategies through which this implicit 'mother blaming' occurs is the following feature article from the *Asahi shinbun*:

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[68] "Mata akachan-goroshi." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 September, 1970, p. 14. Morning ed.
[69] "Niji to muri shinjū." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 May, 1971, p. 11. Evening ed.
[70] "Tsuma ni nigerare shinjū ni-ken." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 20 February, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.
[71] "Tsuma ni sarare muri shinjū." *Asahi shinbun*, 12 June, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.
[72] "Tsuma ni nigerare sekkan satsujin."*Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 November, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.

Figure 7: *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
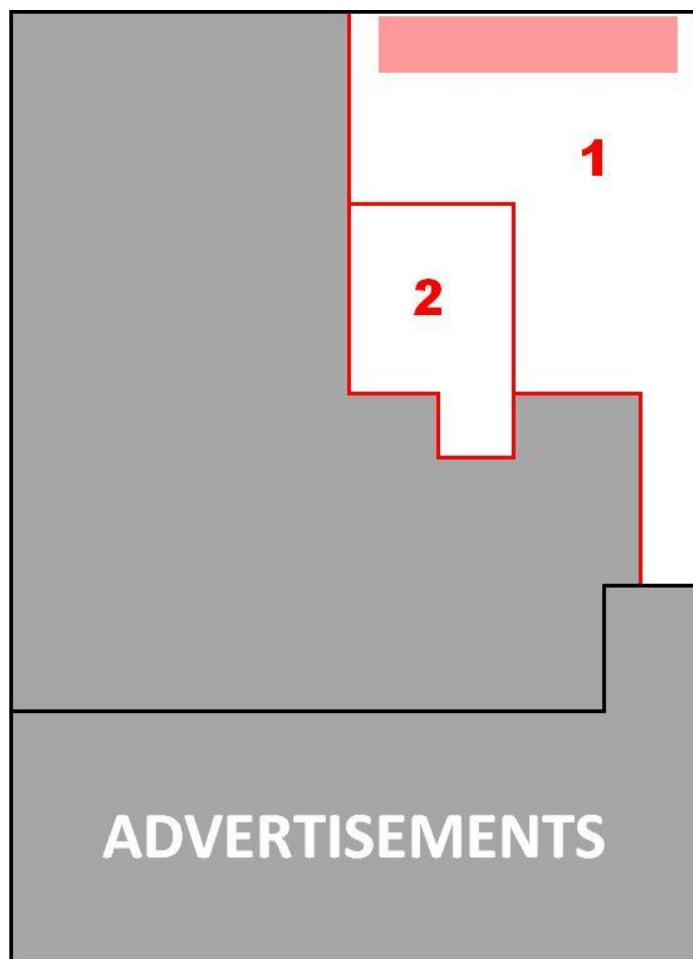
Figure 8: *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed. (legend)

Two articles are grouped together under the main headline 'Are these parents? They killed their own children':[73] article **1** is about a mother who repeatedly abused her three-years-old daughter and eventually beat her to death for spilling some water;[74] article **2** is about a father who had been left alone with a child of seven months, and who had eventually strangled the child because its constant crying was making it impossible for him to sleep.[75] To begin with, we may notice that article **1** occupies much more space than article **2** because of the two pictures that portray the culprit and the building where the tragedy took place. Article **1** reveals the constant abuse of the child by the mother and ends with the reported comments of a married

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[73] "Kore ga oya ka. Jisshi wo korosu." *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[74] "Haha ga yōjo nageotosu." *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[75] "Matsudo de wa chichioya ga kōsatsu." *Asahi shinbun*, 4 September, 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.

woman (*shufu*) from the neighbourhood describing the mother as a demon (*oni*). The child is said to be the result of a liaison with the bartender of the bar where the mother worked as a hostess, but no further reference is made to the putative father of the victim. On the other hand, article **2** reports that the baby daughter often cried and that the father blamed the mother for not taking sufficient care of the children. The mother, we are told, got angry (*okotta*) and returned with the eldest daughter to her parents' house. The article describes how the father, left alone with his baby daughter, ended up strangling the child, hid the body for few days, disposed of it in a cardboard box and lied to the mother about the child's whereabouts once she came back home that same month. The body of the child was later discovered and he was eventually arrested.

Despite the fact that the feature articles purports to be about failing parental figures, the heightened focus on the *maternal* figure *in both articles* is striking to say the least. In article **1** the mother is explicitly labelled as monstrous by another woman who is likely to be also a mother.[76] Here an implicit contrast is drawn between the image of a "bad" (abusive/murderous) mother and a potentially "good" mother (the term *shufu* communicating an impression of ordinary respectability). On the other hand, we cannot fail to perceive the emphasis that article **2** seems to place upon the image of a mother that leaves her house and husband taking with her only one of her child and leaving the daughter who most needs to be looked after in the hands of a murderous father. The fact that anger is indicated as her main motivation for leaving, further suggests the image of a woman that places her emotions before the wellbeing

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[76] The term *fujin* that used to refer to this neighbour 'conjures up the image of a somewhat older married woman with a family' (Endo, 19995: 36).

of her children, and which stands in stark contrast to a society that values emotional restraint and glorifies maternal abnegation and self-sacrifice. Finally, the difference in font size between the headlines of the two articles and the fact that the article on the filicidal mother comes first in the page also contribute to set a privileged interpretative lens: we could arguably say that it is because we have already encountered a "bad" mother in article **1** that we are likely in recognise the shortcomings of the maternal figure in article **2**.

4.2.2   The "bad" and the "mad" mother

Japanese news media systematically portray mothers who kill their children as either cruel or mentally unstable. As I flagged at the beginning of this chapter, the representation of murderous mothers as either "bad" or "mad" is a recurrent story in the reporting of cases of maternal filicide: processes of monsterification and pathologization provide journalists with ready-made narratives that are simple, familiar to the reader and adaptable to the specificities of the single cases. At the same time they also become preferential routes through which the shattered boundaries between what is and what is not acceptable (gender appropriate) behaviour are emphasised and reinstated.

Labelling a mother who kills as 'demonic' or 'monstrous' has the effect of depicting her as an exception to an otherwise widely shared maternal ideal and further secures the illusion that that same ideal has survived unscathed. We have observed one such example in the last feature article I analysed where the action of labelling was carried out by another woman and potential mother. A similar effect is also produced by the naming of filicidal mothers as neurotic, crazy, ill or victim of a nervous

breakdown: emphasizing the alleged abnormality of the mother who kills denies these women the full state of subject and renders their voices difficult to hear within the dominant discourse. The maternal potential for violence that their criminal deeds bring to the surface of public consciousness is stubbornly denied and expunged from the realm of cultural intelligibility. Both the callous mother and the mother who goes insane fail to act according to the parameters of the properly human and, thus, their violent actions are rendered unintelligible. Maternal violence is thus made into a cultural impossibility and the threat that it poses to the gender order is safely contained. Framing maternal filicide according to the narrative of the "bad"/"mad" mother also has a comforting effect for those women who might still buy into the idealised maternal ideal society upholds. And yet, there remains a curious irony in the fact that, while Japanese news media employ such narrative strategies to cope with the trauma and the transgression of gender norms that maternal filicide entails, they also declare that same explosion of parental violence a social phenomenon of alarming proportions.

The rhetorical strategies that made it possible to group together cases as disparate as mother-child suicide, filicide, child abuse, run-away mothers and child abandonment are of crucial importance in the process that establishes the trope of the 'demonic mother' in the language of the news media. Below is a list of exemplary headlines. I have not distinguished cases of filicide from all the others on purpose, allowing me to foreground the mutual resonance of the modes of representation of the maternal:

Mothers… These insensitive, irresponsible [persons].[77]

Savage mum kicks an infant to death.[78]

And yet this would be a mother!?[79]

"Irresponsible mum" sent to the prosecutor.[80]

A demonic hostess-mum.[81]

Once again, a cruel murderous mother.[82]

A demonic mother…[83]

The social stigma attached to mothers who transgress cultural norms of maternal and gender propriety takes full advantage of the amplification strategies that we have previously explored. Below is an example of a feature article from the *Yomiuri shinbun* dated 23 November, 1970 whose main headline reads: 'Heartless mums: two more cases' (*Hijō na mama—mata niken*):[84]

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[77] "Hahaoya… Kono musekinin, mushinkei." *Asahi shinbun*, 19 November 1970, p. 22. Morning ed.
[78] "Zankoku mama, yōji wo kerikorosu." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 11 April, 1971, p. 15. Morning ed.
[79] "Koredemo haha ka!" *Yomiuri shinbun*, 10 April, 1972, p. 8. Evening ed.
[80] "'Musekinin-mama' sōken."*Asahi shinbun*, 3 June, 1972, p. 8. Evening ed.
[81] "Oni no hosutesu-mama." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 8 September, 1972, p. 15. Morning ed.
[82] "Mugoi haha no satsujin mata." *Asahi shinbun,* 11 October, 1972, p. 23. Morning ed.
[83] "Oni no haha wa…" *Yomiuri shinbun*, 4 April, 1973, p. 11. Evening ed.
[84] *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 23 November 1970, p. 15. Morning edition.

Figure 9: *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 23 November 1970, p. 15. Morning ed.
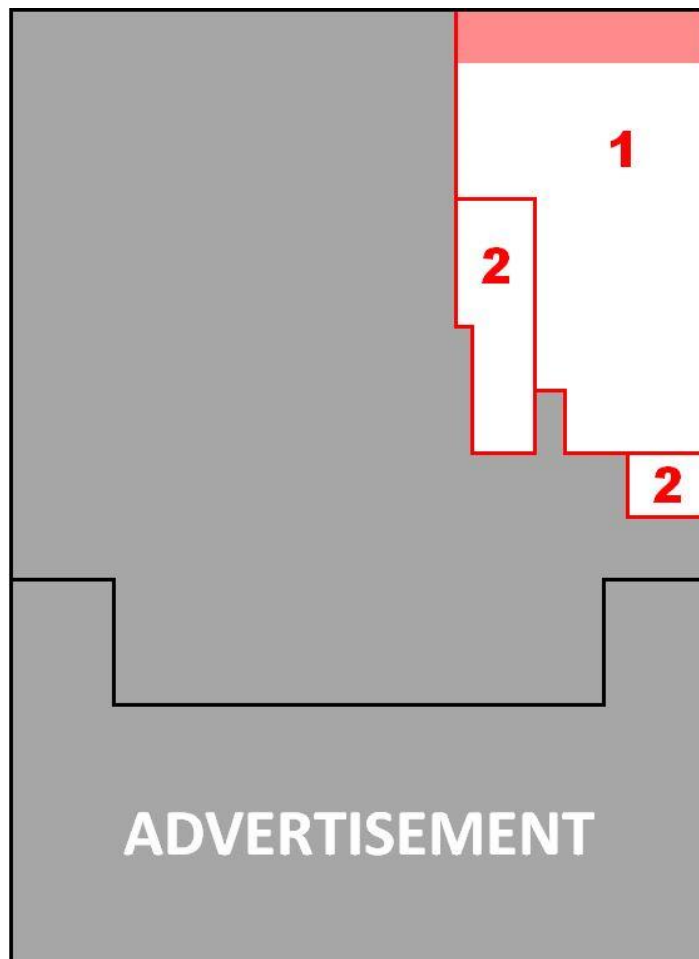
Figure 10: *Yomiuri Shinbun*, **23 November 1970, p. 15. Morning ed. (legend)**

The headline unambiguously identifies both articles as emblematic of cruel or cold-hearted motherhood. However, a close reading reveals that, while article **1** is about a mother who beat her four-years-old daughter to the point of causing her death for internal bleeding in the brain, article **2** is about the body of a newborn baby found in an empty flat. Despite the fact that there seems to be no sound proof that a mother (rather than, say, a father or another family member) abandoned the child, or that the baby had been suffocated *before* being abandoned, this second accident is still reported as a case of cruel motherhood. Cases of child abandonment become crucial in the media coverage that portrays mothers as coldblooded or demonic. Although this chapter strictly focuses on representations of mothers who kill, a single example will

suffice to suggest the degree to which the notion of the "bad" mother is clearly intertwined with such cases:

Figure 11: *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 11 January, 1972, p. 3. Evening ed.

The photographs show two victims of child abandonment, while the headline indicts the culprits with the words 'Cruel mothers!' The innocence of the smiling child in the upper right corner and the painfully contracted face of a baby only few days old that is immediately below it interact to convey the idea of children's suffering that we

have already considered. Maternal cruelty is unambiguously associated here with that suffering.

The representation of filicidal mothers as mentally unstable is perhaps more complex to unpack because the growing public awareness of the psychological strains of motherhood was put into use for two rather opposite purposes: on the one hand, it became a convenient narrative strategy to explain away the abnormality of maternal violence. On the other, it could be used to call for a better understanding of the circumstances that surrounded cases of filicides that, far too often, were attributed to a callous mind. Overall, there seems to be, in the Japanese media, a more compassionate attitude toward filicidal mothers who are found to suffer from abnormal states of mind. While denying these mothers a fully human status in ways that are analogous to the "bad" mother trope, the narrative of the "mad" mother often appears to gesture towards an understanding of mothers as themselves victims of circumstance.

'Mental instability' functions here as a rather loose umbrella term that includes references to notions of nervous breakdown, neurosis induced by child-rearing practices, previous histories of hospitalization and medical conditions like schizophrenia. In this respect, the term that recurs more often in the dataset is the word *noirōze* (neurosis, nervous breakdown) and its various incarnations such as *noirōze-gimi* (a little neurotic, an onset of neurosis, tending toward a nervous breakdown) and *ikuji-noirōze* (child-rearing neurosis).[85] At this point we must also

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[85] Child-rearing neurosis has been identified as 'a condition that emerged as a problem with the nuclearization of Japanese families from the 1960s, when middle-class mothers (tipically full-time housewives) came to take on all responsibility for child-rearing' (Goodman, Imoto and Toivonen, 2012: 117).

observe that in the articles included in the dataset the trope of the cruel mother *never* applies to cases of mother-child suicide (*boshi shinjū*) in relation to which no harsh judgements are to be found. This is arguably the logical consequence of the highly specific understanding of this practice that I have already explored in section 3 of the present chapter. In particular, I found it striking that notions of maternal violence seem to be absent from what is, in practice, the murder of a child followed by the mother's suicide. The majority of news articles about *boshi shinjū* consist of bare accounts of the event and, to a minor degree, of public laments about the tragic loss of children's lives. However, there is no moral condemnation of mothers as the perpetrators of the violence that, indeed, did cause that loss. This seems to confirm Bryant's observation that on occasions of parent-child suicides in Japan the tragedy of the child is subsumed in the tragedy of the parent: the violence perpetrated against oneself (and one's own child) is not recognized as such, but traced back to the unfortunate circumstances that urged the mother to take her own life (together with the life of her child) (Bryant, 1990). It could be argued that the narrative of mental illness becomes, here, a convenient explanatory device that makes it possible to sidestep issues of moral agency in relation to episodes of maternal violence. The article reproduced below is a powerful illustration of this peculiar use of mental illness as the main motivation of mother-child suicides:

> In the evening of 12 [February] three episodes of mother-child suicide occurred in Osaka and the lives of four small children were lost. Mothers who suffered from child-rearing neurosis [*ikuji noirōze*] and were concerned about '[the child] crying in the night' or 'not recovering from childhood asthma killed in a sudden impulse both themselves and their children.
>
> On [February] 12 at 6 pm in the town of Ōmachi (city of Kishiwada), in a three-tatami room at the second floor [of the house] of employer Mr. Furumatsu Masataka, his wife Eiko (aged thirty-four) strangled to death

their second daughter Masako (aged one) with the cord of her kimono and took a large quantity of sedatives, falling unconscious. They were found by Eiko's mother […] who reported the accident to the Kishiwada police station. Eiko was taken to the nearby hospital, but her conditions are critical.

It appears that Masako was not recovering from childhood asthma and, on top of that, the oldest daughter had to go regularly to the hospital for an eye injury: this had triggered in Eiko the onset of a neurosis [*noirōze-gimi*] and she had been going regularly since August of the last year to the psychiatric ward of the Osaka [hospital].

At 5 pm of that same day in the Shōwa district of Higashiōsaka […] unemployed Ikemoto Toshiko (aged twenty-seven) and her daughter Yūko (one and a half month old) were found dead [...] on the futon under which a gas hose had been placed […] According to the investigations of Hiraoka police[86] Yūko was a premature baby, did not drink milk and cried in the night and because of this Toshiko had developed a neurosis [*noirōze ni nari*] and regularly confessed she wanted to die.

Again on that day at 9 pm in the city of Suita [Osaka prefecture] sister-in-law Tada [first name illegible] (aged twenty-seven) went to visit the family of employee Mr. Izutsu [first name illegible] and planned to kill herself with gas. Tada and her daughter Yaeko (aged three) died. According to the investigation of Suita police it appears to be [a case of] child-rearing neurosis.[87]

Three cases are here reported in rather descriptive fashion, providing only the most basic information in the limited space available. We may recognize the listing of accidents that concurs to create the impression of a social phenomenon: in this specific example the practice of enumeration could be understood to have been expanded to the size of a full article, while the lead paragraph identifies *noirōze* as the common denominator of all three episodes.

The distinction between mother-child suicide (*boshi shinjū*) and filicide (*kogoroshi*) becomes apparent in the moral indictment and social stigma that often marks filicide where the mother is perceived to have caused harm to the child. It

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[86] The city of Higashiōsaka was founded in 1967 in the eastern Osaka prefecture by a merger of three cities: Fuse, Kawachi and Hiraoka.

[87] "Osanai miichizure yonin." *Asahi shinbun*, 13 February, 1971, p. 22. Morning ed.

follows that it is in relation to the biased treatment of *kogoroshi* that the narrative of the "mad" mother has the potential to open up the way to a deeper understanding of the social circumstances and psychological strains that induced these mothers to kill. As suggested in the following excerpt:

> Cruel filicides continue (*taenai*). Many are the crimes of young mothers. On those occasions criticisms such as 'Also motherhood has fallen' or 'A distortion induced by the process of nuclearization of the family' are repeatedly proclaimed. However, is this sufficient to explain it all? Voices are rising among psychiatrists according to which 'If we look at the cases, [we realise that] many of them are naïve and impulsive actions. More than a coldblooded and planned killing, pre-existent mental conditions also constitute an issue […].'[88]

4.2.3   The loss of motherhood and the collapse of the family system

As already suggested by the amplification strategies that we have observed operating within news articles, media representations of mothers who kill are intertwined with broader social criticism that calls attention to the 'loss of motherhood' (*bosei sōshitsu*), the collapse of the maternal instinct in modern society and the breakdown of the family system. These issues are raised in editorials, column articles, letters to the editor and they create a wider, alarming context for the images of filicidal mothers that we have encountered thus far. 1970 seems to emerge as a particularly fertile year for these kind of discursive interventions: the social commentary that appeared that year in the news is likely to have constituted a major trigger for the counter-discourse that the Japanese Women's Liberation Movement (*ribu*) began to produce and circulate in 1971.

The public lamentation over the loss of motherhood is often intertwined with references to changes that affected the socio-cultural layout of Japanese society in the

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[88] "'Oni no hahaoya' to iu keredo uchiki de noirōze." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 5 April, 1973, p. 16. Morning ed.

postwar era. A clear example of this trend can be found in an editorial of the *Asahi shinbun* dated 12 April, 1970 where the numerous changes in women's conditions (e.g. the right to vote, free access to higher education, new economic and professional opportunities and a budding sense of an autonomous self) are obliquely recognised as a major influence in women's straying from their "maternal vocation." The headline of the editorial says it all: 'Empowered women, weak mothers.'[89]

Concern about the impact of social changes upon the erosion of maternal love in women is also expressed in the *Yomiuri shinbun* in an article dated 10 October, 1970 with the headline 'In a changing world' from which the following excerpt is taken:

> Filicides (*kogoroshi*) continue to happen. A biological mother kills her own child. […] Maternal love is believed to be, so to speak, the deepest of [all] human emotions and much more than a mere animal instinct: a feeling for life itself. And yet, could it be that even that [emotion] is now in the process of changing and crumbling down? The progress of civilization and the course of history have brought about a change not only in the way we live, but even in [people's] heart. […] Life goals have expanded and multiple [forms of] self-affirmation [now] collide against each other. We keep up with the visible changes, but the changes within that are invisible to the eye render people anxious and impatient. People call our times an era of revolutions (*henkaku no jidai*). [But] is this epoch of changes a period of transition toward a new world and new values or is it [rather] the twilight of a civilization –our civilization (*wareware ga ikitekita bunmei*)? No one have the answer to this question.[90]

In his most recent study of women's autobiographies, Ronald Loftus (2013) vigorously demonstrates that the postwar years in Japan represented a moment of bright hopes and possibilities for young women who were finally able to shake off the burden and constraints traditionally associated to their sex. In addition to this, as chapters 3 and 4 will show, the early 1970s also witnessed the emergence of a new

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[89] "Tsuyoku natta josei, yowaku natta hahaoya." *Asahi shinbun*, 12 April, 1970, p.5. Morning ed.
[90] "Kawaru yo no naka." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 10 October, 1970, p. 1. Evening ed.

women's movement which questioned the gender organization of modern society and reclaimed for women new forms of subjectivity. It is all the more significant, then, that this is the same historical moment that is denounced by media accounts as a major cause in women's failure to live up to gender expectations. A further confirmation of women's estrangement from the maternal role is evident in a *Yomiuri shinbun* article published on August 18, 1970 whose headline and sub-headlines run as follows: 'The social conditions of children's suffering. "Faulty mothers" with no regrets: even though they give birth, they don't know [what it means] to raise a child.'[91]

The illustration below accompanied an article in the family column of the *Asahi shinbun* on 5 September, 1970[92] and portrays in direct and crude terms the accusation that news media made against women:

Hide

元・梅田 英俊

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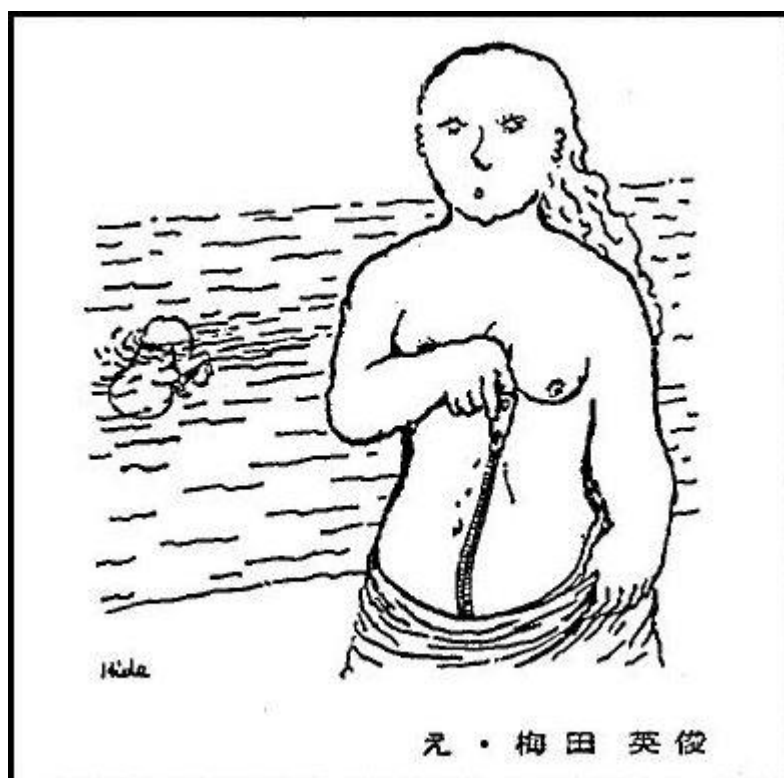
[91] "Akachan junan no sesō / kōkai "kekkan hahaoya" / Undemo ikuji wo shiranu." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 18 August, 1970.
[92] "Akachan junan jidai." *Asahi shinbun*, 5 September, 1970, p. 17. Morning ed.

Figure 12: Illustration from *Asahi shinbun*, 5 September, 1970, p. 17. Morning ed.

The picture shows the rather shocking image of a woman in the act of 'zipping up' her once-pregnant belly as she shows her back, uncaring, to a foetus floating lifeless in the water. 'The era of children's suffering' marks, once again, the main headline of the article where this picture is to be found, while the sub-headline says: 'Mothers who desire the best conditions. At its extreme: terrible [cases] of abortion and abuse.' The article also mentions the high occurrence of abortions in Japan and the recent numerical increase of cases of abuse and child-abandonment. It denounces women's egoism and accuses them of aiming at only the best ever conditions before adequately performing their maternal role.

The next day on the same newspaper, the article 'A genealogy of filicide' was published in the editorial section:

> The problem is that not a few parents, especially mothers, go mad far too easily. Moreover, although madness is usually described as the loss of reason, could it possibly be that the maternal madness in recent cases of filicide has its origin in the loss of an instinct? For a long time, we have believed that what made women love children was a maternal instinct. […] However even that appears to be under question in today's world. Originally, there's no doubt that the killing and abandoning of children were extreme exceptions. But because it now occurs with such frequency, we must reconsider the social conditions of our time. The connection between parent and child that used to be the most fundamental human relationship in society has indeed changed into something that is utterly unreliable.[93]

We can observe once again the shifting status of the terms 'parent' and 'mother:' whereas the passage above begins with a broader reference to parents who seem to be losing their rational control and thus harm their children, the focus moves rapidly away from the image of a gender-neutral parental figure. Suddenly, it is

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[93] "Kogoroshi no keifu." *Asahi shinbun*, 6 September, 1970, p. 5. Morning ed.

mothers who become the main focus of the article and who appear to have an extremely peculiar relation with the "madness of an era." Maternal madness is traced back to a loss of a maternal instinct whose collapse the article laments. No reference is made to a "paternal instinct." Accordingly, while fathers are spared cumbersome entanglements with the natural world, mothers and motherhood are deeply located *within* it, and the social changes of an era are said to have somehow engendered the collapse of a biological, maternal function. In the excerpt above, however, the lamentation for the loss of motherhood becomes to springboard for a reconsideration of the *parent*-child relationship. The paternal figure is clearly included in this relationship, but the rhetorical strategies of the passage sidestep the very possibility that fatherhood might become an object of contestation or reflection.

5   Coda

As the next two chapters will show, a new women's liberation movement known as *ūman ribu* (lit. woman lib) emerged in the early 1970s in Japan. In the context of a broad denunciation of the illnesses that were said to affect modern society's gender regime, this movement embarked in a spirited engagement with the phenomenon of maternal filicide. Beginning with May 1971 rallies, teach-ins, conferences and other forms of public speaking and political organizing were held to discuss the phenomenon of mothers who killed their children and to challenge those biased discourses that I outlined in this chapter.[94]

Although it remains unclear the extent to which *ribu* was able to bring about a radical change in the consciousness of an entire society, on 22 October, 1972 the

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[94] See chapter 4, section 1.

Yomiuri shinbun published an article that seems to acknowledge those counter-discourses that the movement produced and circulated. This article acknowledges almost surreptitiously the entry of a new player into the discursive arena that had been developing around the phenomenon of maternal filicide, and demonstrates that with time the news media took notice of the existence of alternative understandings of a mother's potential for violence.

The article in question appeared as part of the column '*Fujin to seikatsu*' (women and life) under the headline: 'The era of the loss of motherhood.'[95] The article seems to take a critical stance towards a similar formulation, but the very decision of making it into its main headline testifies to the extent to which the 'loss' or 'erosion' of motherhood and the 'collapse' of women's maternal instinct had assumed by then wide currency and explanatory power. The sub-headline announces the article's critical perspective on popular discursive practices of monsterification and stigmatization of violent mothers and argues that '[b]y simply placing the blame on "demonic mothers" the tragedy is not going to be solved.'

A third, smaller sub-headline lists the categories that we have already seen used to motivate and support alarmed denunciations of women's growing alienation from their maternal role: parent-child suicide (*oya-ko shinjū*), filicide (*kogoroshi*) and child-abandonment (*kosute*, *okisari*). There is not enough evidence in the article to clarify whether the decision to use neutral categories that did not convey the image of a gender specific parental figure was motivated by a desire to move the focus away from stigmatised mothers or if it was, rather, part of an editorial strategy that aimed to

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[95] "Bosei sōshitsu jidai." *Yomiuri shinbun*, 22 October, 1972, p. 18. Morning ed.

preserve the "broader appeal" of a social phenomenon. Besides, we could even argue that the appearance of gender neutral categories immediately next to the expression 'the era of the loss of motherhood' (printed in a *much* bigger font) dis nothing to really counter social concerns about mothers' shortcomings.

However, a change of tone becomes apparent in the way the article provides perceptive insights on the acute discrimination meted out to single mothers in Japanese society. To begin with, the article took issue with the concept of 'mothers' disappearance' (*hahaoya no jōhatsu*, lit. mothers' evaporation) that described the growing number of mothers who seemed to vanish without a trace, leaving their children behind: this notion was often used in news reports to support the perception of an epochal loss of motherhood. And yet, the article also mentioned statistics showing that, despite these anxious concerns, the number of families of mothers with children still remained five times that of families of single fathers with children, and called attention to the differential treatment that these two categories of parents encountered as they sought the support of nursing institutions.

The article denounced the forms of discrimination that were embedded in these institutions and which were traced back to the cultural assumption that mothers ought to stay with their children, whereas this was believed not to be possible for single fathers who had to work to take care of them. The predictable outcome was that the child of a single father was much more likely to be accepted than that of a single mother. This rather paradoxical expectation was the result of the gender division of labour that came to characterise the modern nuclear family, where stay-at-home mothers took care of the children while fathers worked outside as breadwinners. It did

not matter that single mothers too had the obvious need to work to maintain their families or that they could only afford to work part-time or from home (thus facing obvious situations of economic insecurity).

As we shall see, the plight of "unmarried mothers" (*mikon no haha*) represented a major concern for the women's liberation movement who attempted to raise awareness of the deep-rooted discrimination these women faced in society and of the risks their unliveable living conditions posed for the well-being of their children. What is exceptional of this article is its direct referencing of *ribu*, here identified with the figure of Tanaka Mitsu (major theorist and spokesperson of the movement).[96] The problem, Tanaka is reported to have claimed, was that child-rearing had been rendered women's only *raison d'être* and that a woman who killed her child might be a woman who was just raising her hands onto the source of contradictions that was most within her reach.

This represents a central claim in *ribu*'s engagement with the phenomenon of maternal filicide and will be explored in details in chapter 4. What interests me here is to highlight how, by the end of 1972, a space seems to be opening in the news media where alternative, more nuanced understandings of maternal violence appear to seep in from external sites of contestation. Certainly, this does not mean a radical sea change in media portrayals of mothers who kill, since both Tama's (2008) and my own research appear to confirm the persistent of biased portrayals of filicidal mothers. On the other hand, it is a clear demonstration of the on-going interaction between existing discourses, and of the possibility that alternative interpretations of the

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[96] See chapter 3.

phenomenon might be not only acknowledged, but reproduced and recirculated through the news media itself. It is to one of these counter-discourses that I will now devote my attention, by introducing the Japanese women's liberation movement and exploring its relentless rhetorical engagement with the figure of the mother who kills her child.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN 1970S JAPAN

Chapter 2 highlighted how the rhetorical and narrative strategies employed by news media in the coverage of cases of (maternal) filicide contributed to the overall impression of being confronted with a social phenomenon of dramatic proportions. Alarmed voices lamenting women's progressive estrangement from the maternal vocation (the so-called 'loss of motherhood') traced it back to historical changes that were said to negatively affect Japanese postwar society (changes that, incidentally, had also brought about significant improvements in women's social status). Stock stories of the "bad" or "mad" mother emerged as privileged explanatory modes whereby episodes of maternal violence were safely contained under a rubric of exceptionality.

It is against this background that Japan witnessed, in the early 1970s, the emergence of a new women's liberation movement that forwarded an unprecedented gender critique of Japanese postwar society. This grassroots movement, known as *ūman ribu* (woman lib) or simply *ribu* (lib), did not make the pursuing of 'gender equality' or the promotion of 'women's rights' its primary concern or discursive hallmark. Rather, it aimed at fostering a radical transformation of society, questioning its socio-political and economic organization, and attacking the cultural values and ideology that shaped gender roles and human relations. *Ribu* formulated revolutionary counter-discourses that developed around notions of solidarity with mothers who killed their children and women's very potential for violence. This chapter provides the

necessary coordinates to locate the emergence of *ribu* in the local and global socio-political and historical landscape and introduces to some of its distinguishing features.

Before embarking on an appraisal of some of the movement's main traits, a disclaimer is needed: both an in-depth exploration of the historical and social factors that made the movement possible in the first place and a comprehensive account of its multiple forms of contestation remain beyond the scope of this chapter. Its more circumscribed and immediate purpose is, rather, to offer a contextualization of *ribu*'s discursive intervention about mothers who kill their children which will constitute the core of the following chapter. In order to do so I will strategically adopt, when relevant, a preferential focus on *ribu*'s multifaceted engagement with the maternal which, as I hope my account will not fail to make clear, is not to be reductively understood as the movement's sole preoccupation.

For those who are not proficient in Japanese language, secondary literature in English with a clear focus on *ribu* was, until recently, limited to a few articles and book chapters. Among these, the work by Tanaka Kazuko (1995), Muto Ichiyo (1997), Vera Mackie (2003), Kato Masae (2009) and James Welker (2012) stands out in quality and richness of information. Such state of affairs has recently changed with the publication of Shigematsu Setsu's *Scream from the Shadow: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan* (2012) which constitutes, to my knowledge, the most extensive and thorough account of *ribu* in English language to date. While relying on a wide range of sources in both English and Japanese, my account of *ribu*, its organizational strategies, forms of struggle and philosophical principles owes a profound debt to her landmark text.

1   What's in a name? *Ribu*'s first public appearance

On June 23, 1970 a group of women in their early twenties who called themselves 'The Preparatory Committee for a Women's Liberation Movement' appeared at an anti-Security Treaty rally[97] held at Yoyogi Park and attended by 70,000 people, and distributed to women participants a mimeographed handbill consisting of an appeal to launch a women's liberation movement in Japan. The pamphlet exhorted women to organize, to denounce their 'internalised female consciousness,' to dismantle all forms of gender discrimination and to liberate women from any form of oppression (Muto, 1997:149).[98]

However, it is October 21, 1970 that is usually identified as the day when the first *ribu* demonstration took place: in the late afternoon of what is known in Japan as the International Anti-War Action Day a women-only demonstration was held in Ginza, one of the major districts in Tokyo: two hundred women wearing helmets took to the streets carrying placards with slogans and phrases like 'What do women mean to men? What do men mean to women?', 'Let's denounce our internalised female consciousness!' and 'Mother, are you really happy with your marriage?' This

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[97] The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty or ANPO (abbreviation for the Japanese *Nichibei anzen hoshō jōyaku*) was signed at the end of the Allied Occupation in 1951, to become effective in 1952, and placed U.S. as the effective arbiter of Japan's defence interests. It established that U.S. military facilities be hosted in and about Japan throughout the postwar period with the double aim of 1) protecting Japan against armed attack from without since the treaty –and the new Japanese constitution imposed during the Occupation –severely restricted the size and purposes of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces; 2) contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.
The treaty came up for revision and renewal in the 1960 and this became the focus of the greatest mass movement in Japanese political history: millions of Japanese mobilised, opposition coming not only from left-wing parties, but also student groups, pacifist groups and other citizens' organizations, and even right-wing politicians who took the renewal to signify Japan's continued subservience to American interests. For an in-depth investigation of the implication of the treaty and the social and political contestations triggered by its renewal, see Hara (1987), Kan (1987), Kersten (1996), Sakurada (1997) and Sasaki-Uemura (2001).
[98] According to Shigematsu the pamphlet distributed at the rally was "The Declaration of the Liberation of Eros" (*Erosu kaihō sengen*), which would have become 'one of the first widely distributed *ribu* manifestos' (2012: 67).

extraordinary event captured the attention of the news media which were, indeed, the first to introduce the term *ūman ribu* in the Japanese idiom. The first newspaper article that used the term *ūman ribu* in reference to Japanese women's activism appeared in the *Asahi shinbun* on October 4, 1970. Its title is emblematic: '*Ūman ribu* lands in men's paradise' (*Ūman ribu —dansei tengoku jōriku*). The choice of the word *jōriku* ('to land' or 'to disembark') alluded in a not-so-subtle way to the activities of the Women's Liberation Movement in the United States which it described as eventually 'landing' on Japanese soil.[99] In the headline the term 'Women's Liberation' appeared in English[100] and was accompanied by the Japanese abbreviated transliteration *ūman ribu* (ウーマン・リブ).[101] These considerations confirm Welker's observation that Ninagawa Masao, the male journalist who coined this new term, clearly saw both the name and the movement it designated as emanating from the United States. Ninagawa's reference in his article to a Japanese abridged translation of *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (a landmark collection of essays of the American Women's Lib edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt) reinforced and promoted the biased understanding that *ūman ribu* was nothing but a mimicking of Western (i.e. American) models (Welker, 2012: 28-9).[102]

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[99] "Ūman ribu —dansei tengoku jōriku." *Asahi shinbun* [Tokyo ed.], 4 October, 1970, p. 24. Morning ed.

[100] Akiyama reproduces at least two more articles from the *Asahi shinbun* that make use of the same linguistic strategy (Akiyama, 1993: 42 and 49).

[101] The Japanese writing system comprises three scripts: Chinese characters (*kanji*) and two phonetic scripts made up of modified Chinese characters (*hiragana* and *katakana*). *Hiragana* is used to write words without character representation, words that are no longer written in characters, and following *kanji* to show conjugation endings. *Katakana* is the simplest and more geometric of the two phonetic scripts and is primarily used to transcribe foreign words and as a mark of emphasis. A correct transliteration of 'Women's Lib' would have been *uimenzu ribu*, *ūman ribu* (woman lib) being a somewhat incorrect version that, by omitting the mark of the genitive, simplified English grammar to a minimum.

[102] This constituted a major criticism that Japanese commentators frequently directed at *ribu* and that is variously acknowledged by Ehara (2012: 106), Akiyama (1993: 52), Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow (1995: 159), Ueno (2011: 10) and Shigematsu (2012: xxii). In particular, feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko dismisses this accusation as rooted in xenophobic stereotypes by means of which conservative

Due to the mocking tone with which news media portrayed, first, the American Women's Liberation Movement and, later, *ribu*, Japanese women activists expressed an initial resistance to adopting the label *ūman ribu* to identify themselves and their struggle.[103] The term rarely appears in the early documents of the movement where we rather find the Japanese expression *josei kaihō undō* (女性解放運動, lit. women's liberation movement). Two examples of this are provided by the name of the above mentioned "Preparatory Committee for a Women's Liberation Movement' (*josei kaihō undō junbi kai*) and by the title given to the Japanese translation of *Notes from the Second Year*: 'From Woman to Women: A Report of the Women's Liberation Movement in America' (*Onna kara onnatachi e: Amerika josei kaihō undō repōto*)[104]. It was only at a later stage that the term *ūman ribu* came into use among women activists as part of the movement's complex process of self-definition.

There has been shared acknowledgment of the tone of mockery with which *ribu* activists were frequently depicted in mainstream media outlets. An often quoted example can be found in Ninagawa's "founding" article where "*ribu*" women[105] were described as 'brave micro-mini-skirted beauties' (Akiyama, 1993: 36, 39; Mackie, 2003:

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forces cast everything that is perceived negatively as foreign and, thus, out of place in Japan (Ueno, 2012:10).

[103] The first appearance of the American Women's Lib on the Japanese scene can be traced back to the spring 1970 when articles began to appear in wide circulation newspapers. Japanese media coverage was fragmentary and biased in the information it provided, focusing almost exclusively on sensational actions of American activists such as disrupting beauty contests, throwing away and burning bras, and holding demonstrations against clubs that barred access to women.

On March 28, 1970 an article appeared in the *Asahi shinbun* under the headline 'Smash "man's society"! Reject femininity: with "no bra" and red stockings.' The title of the article made use of a linguistic pun that transformed the name of the feminist radical group founded by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone (Redstockings) into an item of clothing, and turned women activists into curiously dressed creatures, while simultaneously arousing the curiosity of the reader (Akiyama, 1993: 36-7).

[104] *Onna kara onnatachi e: Amerika josei kaihō undō* (1971), trans. and commentary Urufu no kai (Tokyo: Gōdō Shuppan).

[105] As Welker rightly observes, to apply this application of the term "*ribu* women" is somewhat anachronistic at such an early stage when such women had yet to consciously identify themselves with the movement. See Welker (2012: 29), note 6.

156).[106] On the other hand, Shigematsu has pointed to the more recent scholarship that emphasizes 'how successfully *ribu* activists were able to strategically negotiate and use media attention' and the important role newspapers played in spreading the movement's message (2012: 81). Akiyama recalls that, in the end, women activists came to identify themselves as *ribu*, the catchy simplicity of the *katakana* リブ (*ribu*, lib) being preferred to the complexity of the six-character expression 女性解放運動 (*josei kaihō undō*, women's liberation movement). Of even greater importance was the fact that, as we shall see, the decision to identify with *ribu* also meant to differentiate and distance oneself from those images of women's liberation that had been employed by previous postwar women's groups.

2   Japan's late postwar society

It has been observed that *ribu* could be understood as 'a particular incarnation of radical feminism' (Shigematsu, 2012: xv; see also Matsui, 1990; Muto, 1997) and that 'the 1970s flowering of feminist activity in Japan roughly coincided with similar activities in Europe, the United States and Australia' (Mackie, 2003: 156). In a similar vein Akiyama has described the 1960s and 1970s as a historic time when information could travel around the world at new speed: the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, the anti-Vietnam war movement in America, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the student revolt in Paris were all broadcasted by Japanese media (1993: 57). Akiyama has also suggested that a peculiar historical juncture may have created in Japan social conditions that could be deemed similar to those specific to women in the United States and Europe. This, in turn, may have laid down a cultural common ground that

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[106] See also Ehara, Y., (2005) "The Politics of Teasing," trans. Ayako Kano, in R. Calichman (ed.) *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 45-55.

allowed for similar movements to emerge simultaneously among young people and women across the world, mirroring each other in powerful affective reverberations (1993: 53).

The years that span from around 1955 until the Oil Shock in 1973 are best known among historians as the 'High Economic Growth Era' or 'Japan's Economic Miracle' during which the Japanese economy grew at an astonishing rate of 9.3 per cent. In 1960 Prime Minister Ikeda promised that the personal incomes would double within the decade, but the truth is that the double-income target was reached well before the end of the 1960s. From 1955 to 1973 Japan's GDP quadrupled from $3,500 to $13,500 per capita (Gao, 2007: 303). Such spectacular economic growth was largely based on steel processing and manifacturing, and was triggered by American military activity in Korea in the 1950s and in Vietnam in the 1960s (Sasaki-Uemura, 2007; Mackie, 2003; Robins-Mowry, 1983). It was also driven by a sustained domestic consumer demand that relied on and fostered the rapid development of a middle-class, urban, consumer society to the point that, while in 1960 over 70 per cent of the population thought of themselves as middle class, that figure had reached 90 per cent by the early 1970s (Tipton 2008: 179, 187). The construction boom around the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the building of the *shinkansen* (bullet train) were emblematic of Japan's modernization that was eventually celebrated in Expo '70 in Osaka (Sasaki-Uemura, 2007; Allinson, 1997).

Postwar Japan witnessed a progressive urbanization of the population with a mass migration from the countryside to the cities. A complex interplay of factors such as the experience (and the memory) of the hardships of war, the increase in women's

access to higher education (with the consequent rise in the age at first marriage) and in their participation in the labour force, and the economic demands to maintain higher living standards, all contributed to a dramatic decrease in the Japanese birth rate that dropped to the replacement level by 1960, and didn't show significant changes during the 1970s (Sasaki-Uemura, 2007: 317; Allinson, 1997; Buckley, 1993).[107]

The late postwar period also saw a steady increase, numerically as well as proportionally, of the ratio of nuclear family households to total ordinary (i.e. multi-generational) households. Even though the extended family (*ie*) did not disappear nor was it replaced, during the 1960s the number of nuclear families increased to 60 per cent of all households and the new, urban, nuclear family became established at a mass level (Ochiai, 2005; 1997; Ueno, 1988). The increased number of nuclear units composed solely of husband, wife and unmarried children found its material reflection in the wave of high density urban architecture: the multi-unit, suburban housing complexes known as *danchi* became the typical accommodation of late post-World War II families and the epitome of what it meant 'to live modern' (Nishikawa, 1999; Buckley, 1993: 352). Ueno observes how, in the context of a modern industrial society, the family unit came to be placed at the centre of Japan's economic growth and to be organized according to a rigid gendered division of labour: husbands were expected to act as the breadwinners and to spend most of their time working and socializing with

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[107] Whereas in the 1970s Japan's fertility rate had reached 2.0, in 1990 it fell to its lowest value of 1.57. Such sensational drop in the birth rate prompted the news media to coin the phrase '1.57 shock' (Ogino, 1994: 89). However, in 2001 Japan's birth rate fell to an all-time low of 1.3 and it remained at such a dramatic level until 2007 when it raised to a mere 1.4. The World Bank. (2013). *Fertility rate, total (births per woman).*
Available at: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?page=1. Last accessed 19th June 2013.

colleagues in the public sphere, whereas wives were increasingly confined at home which, in turn, began to be organized around the schedules of children (and mothers) (Ueno, 1988). In this regard, sociologist Yoshizumi Kyoko speaks of the emergence in postwar society of 'pseudo-single-mother-families' where the father, though legally present is too busy to spend much time with his family (1995:185-6).

The widespread use of new electric appliances like refrigerators, washing machines and vacuum cleaners was said to liberate housewives from household chores, while popular discourse, advertisement and ideological mystification bombarded them with images of woman's happiness in the nuclear family and middle-class life-style (Robins-Mowry, 1983; Buckley, 1993; Tanaka, 1996; Muto, 1997; Sasaki-Uemura, 2007). Yoda Tomiko (2000) points at the increased popularity of so-called my-homism (*mai hōmu shugi*, lit. the ideology of home ownership) that symbolised the 'middle-class domesticity and material comfort of privatised family life' and which emphasised the vital importance of domestic life for Japan's economic expansion in the form of increased purchasing of consumer durables (872-3).

Media campaigns promoted the image of the 'professional housewife' (*sengyō shufu*) (Buckley, 1993: 352; Vogel, 1978), while women's isolation from society and from one another, and their subjugation to the sex-role division of labour that characterised the modern nuclear family came to be disguised as 'the happiness of the home' (Ueno, 1988: 169; see also Loftus, 2013: 154-5). Meanwhile, that same family became an important apparatus by means of which the prewar and interwar ideology of the 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) found novel articulation. Such ideology emerged in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, promoting a gendered division

of labour whereby women were defined as 'managers of domestic affairs in the household and nurturers of children' (Uno, 1993: 294). Uno maintains that attempts to prescribe a feminine identity as bound to a woman's role of wife and mother and confined within the boundaries of the domestic sphere continued in various form well into the 1980s (295). This seems further confirmed by Yoda's assertion that, marginalised in the labour market, women 'were expected to fulfil increasingly demanding […] duties of modern and rational household management,' to maintain their family's physical and psychological wellbeing, and 'to supervise children's education' (2000: 874).

Scholars have acknowledged the reality gap that characterised the late-postwar period. This gap emerged from the simultaneous intensification of women's participation in the labour force and of the tendency in popular discourse to valorise women in their primary role as mothers. Despite the increase in women's access to higher education, they have highlighted the ideological tenacity of gendered curricula in schools (Buckley, 1993; Tipton, 2008: 196; Loftus, 2013: 155) and the consolidation of the (in)famous M-curve in women's employment statistics. According to this typical pattern women work while single, leave their jobs on marrying or on occasion of their first pregnancy, and return to work after the birth of their last child, although this time with a shift from full-time to part-time employment. This combined with the constant wage differential according to gender and with women's limited opportunities for career advancement. Furthermore women's employment conditions were regulated by the Labour Standards Act, whose "protective" provisions secured maternity and menstruation leave and prohibited women from dangerous occupations, excessive overtime or night work, suggesting that women were valued mainly in their role as

(potential) mothers and not as individuals (Ueno, 1988; Buckley, 1993; Ochiai, 1994; Mackie, 2003; Tipton: 2008).

Historical and sociological accounts of the "High Economic Growth Era" seem, then, to confirm Ehara's observation that a degree of similarity could be recognised between women's conditions in 1960s and 1970s Japan and those who suffered from the 'feminine mystique' in Betty Friedan's middle-class America (Ehara, 2012: 101; Welker, 2012: 33; Yoda, 2000: 873). While this constituted part of the background against which *ribu* emerged, Shigematsu (2012: xv) has importantly emphasized how the birth of the movement was the result of 'the cross-fertilization of genealogies of resistance both domestic *and* international.' It is these points of intersections and exchange with other forms of political and social contestation that the next section of this chapter will focus upon.

3   *Ribu*'s geneaologies

No social movement is born in a void and *ribu* constitutes no exception. Shigematsu has widely explored the numerous instances of cross-pollination that made it possible for *ribu* to emerge. In this section I will be reading with her as I outline how the movement took shape from the cross-fertilization of existing forms of political mobilization and resistance. Although I am not able here to do justice to Shigematsu's rich and detailed argument, a consideration of her insights remains crucial to an understanding of *ribu*'s socio-political and historical specificities.

3.1 Japan's women's movements

As already flagged at the opening of the previous section, Shigematsu echoes scholars such as Matsui (1990) and Muto (1997) by arguing that the birth of *ribu* marked the (re-)emergence of a radical feminist movement in Japan after the pioneering role played by the Bluestockings Society (*Seitō-sha*). This was a group gathered around the women's literary journal *Seitō* (Bluestockings) established in 1911 by leading feminist and poet Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971). The journal was founded with the aim of advancing female literary and intellectual talents and promoting women's self-awareness. Albeit in theoretical or literary form, its contribution expressed opposition to the family system, challenged the institution of marriage and brought into public discourse taboo topics such as divorce, women's sexual expression, child-bearing, birth control, abortion and prostitution. These women's "outrageous" demeanour caused them to become the object of ridicule and to face social retaliation: Mackie recounts, for example, how they became (in)famous for their visits to the pleasure district in Tokyo and for 'transgressing the spatial division between respectable women and the women of the entertainment industry' (2003: 47) (Reich and Fukuda, 1976; Robins-Mowry, 1983; Sievers, 1983; Lowy, 2004; 2007). Shigematsu has called attention to *ribu*'s acknowledgement of this important Japanese legacy and to the movement's numerous references to other female figures such as the first feminist women's historian Takamure Itsue (1894-19710) and the anarchist Kanno Sugako (1881-1911) (Shigematsu, 2012: 6, 78, 130, 221 note 29; see also Satō, 2010: 31).

On the other hand, *ribu* was extremely critical of postwar women's movement, such as the Mothers' Convention (*Hahaoya taikai*) that was held every year since 1955 and which gathered together women who identified with their role as mothers while making the protection of children and the defence of peace their main political and social goals. Other important women's organizations from which *ribu* distanced itself were the Housewives Association (*Shufuren*) and the National Federation of Regional Women's Organization (*Chifuren*). Founded in 1948 and 1952 respectively, these were large national bodies with ties with the postwar government and which became the leading forces behind the consumer protection movement of the 1960s (Robins-Mowry, 1983; Buckley, 1994; Mackie, 2003). The massive base of these movements, their reliance on socially accepted feminine roles and their close working relationships with the government stood in stark contrast with *ribu*'s much smaller basis (approximating a few thousands of participants) and appeared unacceptable in light of *ribu*'s anti-establishment and anti-imperialist stance (Mutō, 1997; Shigematsu, 20112).

3.2   Leftist influences

This dimension of *ribu* was the result of formative influences from the Left which impressed an indelible mark on the movement's organizing principles and strategies of political contestation. As a matter of fact, many *ribu* activists gained first-hand experience of political struggle both within the ranks of the New Left and, later, as members of the student movement *Zenkyōtō* (shorthand for *Zengaku kyōtō kaigi* or All-Campus Joint Struggle Committee). However, many women involved in the New Left had grown highly critical of the masculine principles that imbued its revolutionary ideals, of its exclusive focus on class struggle at the expense of any consideration of

forms of oppression deemed specific to the female sex, and of the constant competition between its various sects over who possessed the correct revolutionary theory (competition that, in the end, led to dramatic episodes of inter- and intra-sectarian violence).

The internecine struggles of the New Left became object of harsh critique from *Zenkyōtō*: the student movement's refusal of hierarchies and leader figures and its desire to make the single individual the subject of the movement constituted direct reactions to the top-down structure and blind commitment to ideological orthodoxy that had characterised the New Left (Steinhoff, 1984; Marotti, 2009). Although *ribu* activists denounced *Zenkyōtō*'s sexism and criticized its privileging of armed violence against riot police as a measure of one's own commitment to the revolutionary cause, *ribu*'s spontaneous organizing and the confrontational character of its political struggles are clearly indebted to the tactics of the student movement.

Another important lesson learnt from *Zenkyōtō* was the emphasis on self-reflexivity: key principles informing the student movement were the ideas of 'self-denial' (*jiko hitei*) and 'self-criticism' (*jiko hihan*) that constituted theoretical tools through which the self was encouraged to become conscious of its own complicities with the system that s/he meant to oppose and critique. The practices of self-criticism and self-denial were born out of the awareness that, *qua* university students, the members of the movement were indeed beneficiaries of the current political and economic system. The aim was to question the self who was partaking of the privilege and to enable the dismantling of the system that produced that privilege. This implied the necessity to unravel and fight internalised discriminatory attitudes against certain

social groups, be it disabled people, *burakumin* (outcasts) or *zainichi* Koreans (Koreans resident in Japan). It is ironic that, despite such a self-reflexive attitude, *Zenkyōtō* remained utterly insensitive to male-female relationships and to forms of gendered discrimination (Kersten, 2009; Mutō, 1997). *Zenkyōtō* is often described as having played the role of negative example (*hanmen kyōshi*) in reaction to which *ribu* is said to have emerged (Akiyama, 1993: 177). However, the self-reflexivity that characterized the new women's movement and urged *ribu* activists to become conscious of forms of internalized discrimination and to acknowledge their complicity with forms of oppression that differentially affected other Asian women is symptomatic of the profound debt that *ribu* owes to the political experience of the student movement (Tanaka, 2010; Onnatachi no ima tou kai, 1996; Shigematsu, 2012: 33-62).

The anti-Vietnam war movement *Beheiren* (short for *'Betonamu ni heiwa wo!'* *shimin rengō*, commonly translated as The Citizens' Movement for Peace in Vietnam) was another strong influence in shaping *ribu*'s organizing principles and strategies of political intervention. Its rejection of hierarchies and its self-reflexive stance mirrored those of *Zenkyōtō*. Under the slogan 'the Vietnam within ourselves' the anti-Vietnam war movement promoted awareness among its members of their complicity with what was understood as US-Japan neo-imperialism (Shigematsu, 2012: 41). *Beheiren* was an 'action-oriented' movement that privileged spontaneous, autonomous forms of activism to such a degree that anyone who desired to stand up against the Vietnam War could call herself *Beheiren* and initiate her own local activism (Tsurumi, 1969; Akiyama, 1993: 176; Avenell, 2010; Shigematsu, 2012: 40-2). Its innovative nature was displayed in a reliance upon new forms of demonstrations such as sit-ins and teach-ins and in its opposition to any logic that could be traced back to a rigidly structured

organization, to a leader or leading committee. Although *Beheiren* was (informally) led by male members, these were some of the traits that were inherited by *ribu* and which became apparent in *ribu*'s numerous teach-ins and summer camps.

The 'personalization of politics' that characterised *Beheiren* was also recognizable in *ribu* activists' use of expressions like '*watashi wa ribu*' (I am *ribu*) or '*ribu wo ikiru*' (to live *ribu*) (Akiyama, 1993: 182). In her *Notes on a Personal History of Ribu* Akiyama recalls that anyone who could think of herself as *ribu* 'was' *ribu*, and was entitled to organize her own forms of activism without permission or censorship, but in spontaneous ways. (1993: 175-9). However, Shigematsu's careful research on the history of the movement and her investigation of the complex dynamics taking place within one of its most well-known communes (the *Ribu* Shinjuku Centre in Tokyo) suggest that Akiyama's portrayal might be one that oversimplifies the politics within *ribu* and which tends to idealize the movement's democratic openness. These considerations were part of the perceptive comments an anonymous reviewer offered to an article I submitted for publication at the time I was finalizing this chapter. On that occasion I was reminded that Akiyama's absence from Japan during the early years of the movement and her never having lived in a commune might have made her unaware of the extent to which there were contentious debates around who were the 'authentic' or 'true' *ribu* activists. Shigematsu's work does, indeed, shed light upon the complex and dialogic process that characterised the movement's attempts at self-definition and which she describes as involving 'tension, struggle, desire, conflict and, contradiction' (2012: 107). This seems true particularly in reference to the hectic and somehow restless life at the *Ribu* Shinjuku Centre where the charismatic presence of Tanaka Mitsu (major theorist and spokesperson in the movement) was perceived by

many as a source of tension and conflicts.[108] On a second thought, however, we come

to realise that it was only in 1974 that Akiyama left Japan to live in the Soviet Union

(where she remained until 1981), and this makes me wonder whether her idiosyncratic

understanding of *ribu*'s openness ought to be understood as symptomatic of the

degree of spontaneity that the movement inherited from *Beheiren*. Furthermore, as

her 'personal *ribu* history' makes patently clear, Akiyama is reporting on her individual

experience: while this may lose sight of broader dynamics within the movement, it

certainly also testifies to the importance placed upon the single individual as the very

foundation of *ribu*. It seems relevant here to acknowledge the fact that by the time

ribu emerged Akiyama was already in her thirties, married and with a child and this

might have placed her at a relative distance from *ribu*'s younger constituency and from

its fervent critique of marriage and the family system.[109]

3.3   Western feminism

From what I have outlined so far it emerges that the processes that led to the

birth of *ribu* were clearly already in motion by the time the American Women's Lib hit

the news in Japan. Shigematsu remarks that an encounter with other configurations of

women's activism overseas constituted part and parcel of *ribu*'s process of self-

definition and she has described how the emotional impact of such an encounter,

together with the feelings of political identification and transnational solidarity it

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[108] While recognising the pivotal role Tanaka played in shaping the movement in its early years, Shigematsu has also acknowledged that her charisma and vigorous ability to make herself heard at public meetings and within the life at the commune made Tanaka a contradictory figure within *ribu*, in that she came to be recognised as the leader of a movement that purported to have no leader. For an extensive investigation of this complex dynamics, see Shigematsu's chapter "*Ribu* and Tanaka Mitsu: The Icon, the Center, and its Contradictions" (Shigematsu, 2012: 103-135).
[109] Akiyama has also described the group she co-founded as a 'middle-aged *ribu*' (*chūnen no ribu*) (Akiyama, Ikeda and Inoue, 1996:47) in contrast to her perception of *ribu* as a 'movement of daughters' (*musume no undō*) in their twenties (Akiyama, 1993: 188).

aroused, never eclipsed *ribu*'s critical distance and the domestic dimension of its complex genealogies (2012: xxx). Against those views that dismiss *ribu* as a mere Western import, Shigematsu suggests that U.S.-based Women's Lib constituted a significant, albeit not excusive, site of both identification and disidentification (1).

We could also observe that the 1960s and 1970s saw the translation of several American, European and Australian feminist classics into Japanese: Margaret Mead's Male and Female (1961), Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1965), Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1972), Juliet Mitchell's Women's Estate (1973), Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1973), Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1976) and Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1977) were among them. Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex had appeared in abridged translation (five volumes) as early as in 1953 and it had been an instant best-seller, 'selling out more than twenty printings before the final volume even hit the shelves' (Bullock, 2009: 75). By the early 1970s the four volumes that compose de Beauvoir's autobiography were also available in Japanese: Memories of a Dutiful Daughter (1961), The Prime of Life (1963), The Force of Circumstance (1965) and All Said and Done (1973) (89), and by the time she visited Japan in 1966 she had been widely read and reached high popularity among Japanese women.

Additionally, partial and derisive as they were, the first newspaper reports of the American Women's Lib played a crucial role in introducing American radical feminism to a Japanese audience and they provided useful information about the circumstances of women's struggles overseas. Akiyama likens Japanese women of those days to 'hungry people' whose starving condition made them ever more

sensitive to any smell that could betray the presence of food: following those first mocking articles, she argues, women activists searched hungrily for more and more information about the American Lib (1993: 54). In her words:

> It is often emphasized that Japan's *ribu* emerged from an original Japanese context together with an original way of thinking, and there's no doubt about that. However, the influence of the American Women's Liberation Movement cannot be ignored, in that it constituted the trigger that ignited the grudge smouldering among women in Japan and put that grudge into words and theories. (1993: 52-3)

It remains noteworthy that in the archival material I researched there is a dearth of references to Western feminism (usually limited to the simple mention of feminist classics and names such as Firestone and Millett), and that a thorough theoretical engagement with those very texts and thinkers seems to be absent from *ribu*'s writings. This is confirmed by Welker's acknowledgement that 'the bulk of writing in the *ribu* sphere [is] essentially local in origin and focus' (2012: 28). On the other hand, he also acutely observes that 'translations and summaries of reports, essays, and whole books from English did arguably occupy a significant part of *ribu* discourse', and he suggests that the lack of adequate attention to translation in current studies of the movement can be perhaps understood in light of a reaction against the idea that *ribu* might be a foreign import (ibid).

Therefore, while Akiyama's account of the importance of American radical feminism for the evolution of *ribu* might stem from her 'personal history of *ribu*,' it surely provides a sound rationale behind the foundation of the *urufu no kai* (WOLF Group) of which she was a founding member.[110] Akiyama's group played an important

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[110] The name of the group was a Japanese transliteration of the English 'Woolf' from Virginia Woolf: since the Japanese rendering of the name does not distinguish between 'Woolf' and 'wolf,' the

role in getting their hands on pamphlets, declaration and reports from the American feminist movement and translating them into Japanese. They were the ones who translated and published *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (1970). This collection of essays was published in Japanese under the title *From Woman to Women: A Report From the American Women's Liberation Movement*: Welker draws on translation scholar Maria Tymoczko when he calls this text an 'engaged translation', that is a translated text whose translators had specific political agendas and used translation as a vehicle to achieve them (2012: 29). The translation was enclosed between an editor's introduction and a roundtable discussion in which the members of the movement in charge of the translation discussed how the group had come into possession of the original in English and the role they hoped to play in connecting the American authors now in translation and their Japanese readers (Akiyama, 1993: 56-76).

These commentaries to the volume were part of the translators' overt attempt to produce a text that could be immediately relevant to a Japanese audience. Integral to this interventionist approach was the group's decision to translate, in full or in part, only sixteen of the original thirty-four essays that composed the English collection (those deemed more meaningful) and to reorganize them in three sections: women's experience (*onna no keiken*), love and sex (*ai to sei*) and women's struggle (*onna no tatakai*).[111] Akiyama has written about some of the problems they had to face during

members of the group were pleased for the name of the group to be a pun on the name of the writer and the animal. Additionally, even though it was not one of the original intentions behind the naming of the group, *urufu* (WOLF) was later said to also stand for 'Women's Liberation Front' (Akiyama, 1993: 60-1; Welker, 2012: 30).

[111] Among the translated essays were Jo Freeman's 'The Bitch Manifesto,' Shulamith Firestone's 'Love,' Pat Mainardi's 'The Politics of Housework,' Ti Grace Atkinson's 'Radical Feminism' and 'The Institution of Sexual Intercourse,' Anne Koedt's 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,' Carol Hanisch's 'The Personal is

the translation process such as the rendition of English terminology that did not exist in Japanese. The group discussed various strategies to best render that vocabulary in ways that could also be accessible to Japanese readers. In the end, the main strategy became to give the original (English) word in *katakana* alongside the Japanese rendering of the term in *kanji*.[112] Among the examples listed by Akiyama are terms such as *josei kaihō shisō* 女性解放思想 and *josei kaihō-ron* 女性解放論 (lit. 'thought' or 'theory of women's liberation') which were accompanied by the transliteration *feminizumu* (feminism), *kyūshinteki josei kaihō ronsha* 急進的女性解放論者 (lit. 'radical advocate of women's liberation') that rendered *radikaru feminisuto* (radical feminist), and expressions such as *onna no danketsu* 女の団結 and *onna-dōshi no rentai* 女同士の連帯 (lit. 'women's union' or 'solidarity of women comrades') chosen to vehicle the notion of *shisutāhuddo* (sisterhood) (Akiyama, 1993: 59).

These may still have represented pioneering attempts to introduce Western concepts into the Japanese idiom, but their value in the history of *ribu* could be suggested by the fact that the translation of *Notes from the Second Year* saw a total of three editions and sold about 5,000 copies. The volume provoked a wide response from readers who wrote dozens of passionate letters craving more information or attempting to get in touch with like-minded women around the country. Several of those letters were later collected in a booklet and included in the first of the three issues of the zine the group produced: this constituted a renewed attempt to create a sense of dialogue between readers and translators, but it also reflected a desire to promote the formation of a women's network that could be supportive of the

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Political,' Jennifer Gardner's 'False Consciousness,' Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics' and the 'Redstockings Manifesto.'
[112] See footnote 97, p. 108.

transformation of women's consciousness (Akiyama, 1993: 69-74; Welker, 2012: 31).

Limits of space do not allow me to go more in depth into a consideration of the

translation activities of the *Urufu no kai*, and I can here only mention the fundamental

contribution represented by the group's first translation, in 1974, of *Our Bodies,*

Ourselves. This constitutes, however, just another example of *ribu*'s multifaceted

interaction with Western (specifically American) feminism and of the importance of

translation as one of the vehicles that made such encounter possible.[113]

4   Consciousness transformation, relationality and revolutionary commitment

Ribu's relentless efforts to bring about a dramatic remodelling of society

unfolded along what can be described as a threefold movement. To begin with, *ribu*

called for a radical 'transformation of the consciousness' (*ishiki henkaku*) of each

individual who was placed at the centre of the movement's revolutionary project. *Ribu*

affirmed that the establishment of a clear and free subjectivity (*shutaisei*) ought to be

grounded in an internal revolution which, in turn, constituted the premise for any

attempt to change society. This transformation demanded of women to unravel and

overcome those psychological structures that had come into being as a consequence

of the sedimentation and internalization of societal prescriptions of appropriate

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[113] Welker is the only scholar I have knowledge of that has focused on the problem of translation in his analysis of the history of *ribu*. My considerations of the activities of the *urufu no kai* is deeply indebted to the insights he offers in his 'Translating Women's Liberation, Translating Women's Bodies in 1970s-1980s Japan' (2012). I refer the reader to this article for an in-depth study of the first Japanese translation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. In her book *The Making of* Our Bodies, Ourselves*: How Feminism Travels Across Border*, Kathy Davis acknowledges the existence of this first Japanese translation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (revised in 1988) as well as of an unauthorized version appeared in 1976 in Taiwan (2007: 53). However, Welker acutely observes how she seems to downplay these two early translations 'in her narrative about the global spread of the book, perhaps because it runs against the standard narrative of second-wave feminist discourse spreading from the US to Europe to the rest of the world' (Welker, 2012: 31-32, note nr. 23).

femininity through sex-role socialization. Inoue Teruko (1980) describes as follows such forms of internalised discrimination that crippled woman's potential to become a full-fledged agent of social change:

> Needless to say, at the core of women's culture the social expectations about woman's [proper] roles are to get married and, in her role as wife, mother and housewife, to devote herself to domestic duties and to the rearing of children. Under the assumption that 'a woman's place is in the house' (onna wa katei ni hairu beki mono), starting with their upbringing within the family, through the women's education received at school and up to the ideological manipulation of the mass-media, women are since their early infancy under the constant external expectation to become 'good brides.' As a result of such enforced socialization women themselves internalize these images of 'ideal femininity' ('risōteki josei'-zō), and the external pressure to become a 'good bride' even translates into an internal desire or life goal for many a young woman. (197-8)114

Ribu aimed at dissecting concepts and stereotypes such as 'femininity,' 'feminine qualities,' and 'woman's happiness' that were subtly enforced upon women, but also reproduced by those very women in forms of unconscious complicity. Practices resembling the method of consciousness-raising that had been developed by American feminists were regularly employed at *ribu* meetings and teach-ins in order to lay bare woman's 'inner feminine consciousness,' that is, to unravel the internalized

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114 Inoue's insights into women's gender socialization are confirmed by a closer look at Japan's postwar history. Despite the imposed democratization of education in the postwar years (with schools becoming co-ed in the 1960s) and the expanded educational opportunities for women which increased the number of girls graduating from four-year universities, the reality of postwar Japan was that schools remained a two-stream, gender-segregated system where women were still perceived to have the obligation to undertake what was called 'women's education' (*joshi kyōiku*). This is exemplified by the fact that in 1969 the Ministry of Education made four courses in the home economics curriculum compulsory for women, and that, despite the opposition to this change during the 1970s and Japan's signature of the 1980 Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Ministry retained the home economics requirement for girls until 1989 (Buckley and Mackie, 1986: 180; Buckley, 1993: 359-65; Mackie, 2003: 171 note 48; Loftus, 2013: 155).

cultural and psychological assumptions that dictated norms of appropriate femininity.[115]

This inner metamorphosis was deemed, in turn, necessary to promote a more genuine relationality (*kankeisei*) between human beings. This meant not only new forms of relationship between woman and man but also –and importantly for the purpose of my argument –between women and between woman and child. Sit-ins, summer camps and the organization of collectives and other forms of communal living constituted a crucial strategy by means of which both the transformation of the self and the creation of a new relationality were sought. The sharing of personal experience became the basic channel through which *ribu* spread its revolutionary message from woman to woman. Emblematic of this dialogic dimension of the movement is the first *ribu* gathering held on November 14, 1970 in the Shibuya ward in Tokyo. Organized by two *ribu* cells and sponsored by the progressive publisher Aki Shobō with the stated purpose of theorising the movement, this 'Symposium for [Woman's] Liberation' saw the participation of women from all paths of life, from high-

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[115] As I was recently reading Ronald P. Loftus' publication *Changing Lives: The "Postwar" in Japanese Women's Autobiographies and Memoirs* (2013) I came across his excellent translation of numerous passages from the autobiography of feminist writer and activist Yoshitake Teruko (1931-2012) *A History of [Japanese] Women's Movement: My Lived Experience of the Postwar Years* (*Onnatachi no undō-shi—watashi no ikita sengo*) (2006). There Yoshitake recalls how it was thanks to *ribu*'s emphasis on women's mutual sharing of experiences of oppression that she was finally able to come to terms with her being raped by the hands of the American occupation forces shortly after Japan's defeat in 1945. She stresses how pivotal in her healing process was a transformation of her inner feminine consciousness:

> That I became able, in these circumstances, to begin to talk about my rape experience, and to write about it, was due entirely to my encounter with (the activists of) women's lib [*sic*] because they helped me to be aware of the existence of a feminine consciousness located inside each of us. Why had I lived for a quarter of a century trying to conceal the fact that I was a rape victim? Why had I been constantly plagued by a sense of inferiority? As I continued to probe these questions, it suddenly became quite obvious. It was because I was, in the end, still bound up in a stereotypical image of women that defined women's happiness in terms of getting married, being a good wife, and being a good mother (quoted in Loftus, 2013: 101).

school students to women in their forties, fifties or sixties and included *ribu* activists, members of pre-existing women's movements, working women, housewives, teachers and career women. Despite the fact that *ribu*'s constituency would be later characterised mostly by college-educated young women, such heterogeneity speaks of the wide appeal of its message. For seven hours, two-hundred women or so[116] sat around a moderator in an auditorium whose access had been prohibited to men and painstakingly voiced their personal experiences and the problems they faced as women. In addition to the variety of issues raised, what commentators have regularly picked up is the emotional charge that traversed this and other similar gatherings: resentment, dissatisfaction, but also excitement. A few days later on November 17, 1970 an article on the *Asahi shinbun* offered the moderator's first-hand account of the symposium under the headline 'Let's make woman's [*onna*][117] lived pain our starting point!'[118] The choice of (re)living women's painful experiences of discrimination as the shared affective root of *ribu*'s struggle for liberation expressed both the desire to place the individual at the heart of the movement and the belief that only through the dialogical exchange of their experiences of oppression could women bring about a revolution of their consciousness (Aki Shobō, 1971; Akiyama, 1993: 9; Mutō, 1997: 155-6; Shigematsu, 2012).[119]

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[116] Muto argues that there were five-hundred participants at the symposium (1997: 155), while Tanaka offers an even higher figure of seven-hundred (1995: 343). Shigematsu, on the other hand, reports a much more contained two-hundred (2012: 72). In light of her in-depth analysis of the movement, the wide range of sources used and her direct contact with many of *ribu*'s founding members I have decided here to privilege Shigematsu as the most reliable source.

[117] See section 5 for a detailed consideration of the term *onna*.

[118] "'Onna no tsūkaku' wo shuppatsuten ni."*Asahi shinbun*, 17 November, 1970, p. 17. Morning ed.

[119] An edited transcript of the debate was published four months later in the first book-length publication of *ribu*: *Protesting Sexual Discrimination: The Contentions of Ūman Ribu* (*seisabetsu e no kokuhatsu —ūman ribu wa shuchō suru*). Emblematic of the emphasis *ribu* placed upon the individual as the subject of the movement, the volume opens with a section that was aptly entitled 'What woman's liberation (*josei kaihō*) means to me'. Following the record of the symposium is a collection of *ribu* pamphlets and a long section that provides detailed information about the American Women's

Within the threefold movement I have mentioned at the opening of this section the relational dimension of *ribu*'s activism complemented the movement's focus on individual inner transformation and, together, they became a characteristic feature of the numerous teach-ins and summer-camps the movement organized: on August 21-24, 1971 the first *ribu* camp (*gasshuku*) was held in the Nagoya prefecture with the participation of two-hundred fifty-seven women from all over the country, while a second one was held on August 17-21, 1972 in Hokkaidō. Between these two retreats, the first official *ribu* conference (*ribu taikai*) was organized on May 5, 1972 attracting around two thousands participants.

The third dimension of *ribu*'s struggle entailed challenging society on a multiplicity of fronts through the spontaneous organizing of small, urban based groups of anonymous activists. These *ribu* cells took part in both localised, independent actions and concerted campaigns, and promoted political identification and solidarity with those groups facing discrimination or criminalization such as sex-workers, unmarried mothers, disabled people, the criminalised women of the United Red Army and mothers who killed their children (Shigematsu, 2012). Together, the three dimensions I have just outlined ought not to be placed along a linear developmental narrative of feminist struggle that moved *from* the personal *to* the social. In fact, they constituted coextensive and continually interacting vectors of a single but, nonetheless, multidimensional revolutionary agenda. While changes in individual consciousness were regarded as a fundamental enabling condition for the creation of a new

Liberation Movement and which includes an abridged translation of Marlene Dickson's article 'The Rise of Women's liberation' published in the December 1969 issue of Ramparts Magazine and of Gloria Steinem's essay 'What Would It Be Like if Women Win' which appeared in Time Magazine in August 1970. This seems to confirm my (and Welker's) earlier considerations on the relevance of translation as an important vehicle for *ribu*'s encounter with American radical feminism.

relationality as the basis of society, *ribu*'s experiments in communal living and sustained interaction between women constituted, in turn, fertile environments where such transformation could be lived through. Attentive consideration of the movement's numerous campaigns reveals that the support that *ribu* often articulated for discriminated against or criminalised subjects also constituted a distinctive feature of its desire to prioritise human relationality in its approach to political struggle. In this respect, Shigematsu has aptly coined the phrase 'feminist praxis of critical solidarity and radical inclusivity' to identify this aspect of *ribu*'s political engagement whereby forms of solidarity with socially abjected individuals were inflected through a critical consideration of the structural conditions that compelled such individuals into criminalised behaviours in the first place (Shigematsu, 2012: 150). Integral to this approach was the movement's self-reflexive stance that encouraged modes of identification with those who were regarded as defying the system –and whom society deemed deviant – as 'a means to examine the self and locate the other within the self' (152). As the next chapter will make clear, provocative declarations such as 'The woman who kills her child is me! She's you!' (*Kogoroshi onna wa watashi deari, anata da!*) and 'We might be next!' (*Asu wa wagami!*) were exemplary of the outcry with which *ribu* challenged society's stigmatization of mothers who killed their children, while simultaneously asserting a profound (and revolutionary) affinity with them.

5   *Onna* and the liberation of woman's sexuality

Despite the idiosyncratic ways in which the numerous *ribu* groups that mushroomed in Japan attempted to articulate the meaning of their localised struggles, there emerged through a complex, dialogic process traversed by tensions and

contradictions few widely shared principles that provided *ribu* with relative coherence. The idea of 'consciousness transformation' (*ishiki henkaku*) was one of them and I have written extensively on it in the previous section. Here I explore the central notion of 'liberation of *onna*' (*onna kaihō*).

The movement's adoption of the rather untranslatable term *onna* has been recently compared to the reclamation of 'queer' by LGBT movements (Shigematsu, 2012: xvi). Indeed, *onna* had been traditionally a highly derogatory term that designated 'woman' and was imbued 'with strong and often negative sexual connotations' (Endo, 1995: 30; also quoted in Shigematsu, ibid.). Embedded in notions of female physicality, it was considered taboo and 'dirty', conveying the image of a highly sexualized woman. *Ribu* re-appropriated this term and made it into the signifier of a new revolutionary subject. Shigematsu has recently played a crucial role in introducing *onna*'s powerful connotations to a wider audience that might not be fluent in Japanese. Her work has also set a standard that encourages English speaking academia to consistently adopt the word *onna* (woman) as key to the movement's language and rhetoric (Shigematsu, 2012).

Onna was employed as a semantically rich alternative to be opposed to those terms that classified woman according to the socially accepted roles of mother, wife, housewife or female worker and which had constituted the identificatory base for previous women's movements and women's form of mobilization in Japan (as in the case of the Mothers' Convention and the Housewives Association). *Ribu* denounced these images as man-made fantasies and argued that, moulded by these socially upheld identities, woman was doomed to live a fragmented existence, never

recognised in her wholeness as *onna*, but always 'torn apart from within' and forced to live through the roles that a male-dominated society prescribed for her (Ehara, 2012: 110). As we shall see, *ribu* also made an impassioned critique against the institution of the family system: the postwar nuclear family came to be identified as the locus where these 'negative identities' were maintained and reproduced together with the unequal power relations they sustained. The expression 'negative identities' (*fu no aidentiti*) has been employed by Ehara in reference to the rejection of traditional feminine roles that characterised *ribu*'s inception. However, she has also observed that recovering from 'negativity' by means of refusal and opposition could not, in itself, be productive of a distinct political subject. Reclaiming *onna* and striving day by day to create a new revolutionary and political subject through the establishment of alternative forms of relationality signalled, according to Ehara, *ribu*'s shift from being a simply oppositional movement to one that promoted an alternative (2012: 102).

In a powerful move that confounded the distinction between women's widely accepted roles within the family system and the socially abjected figure of the prostitute, *ribu* declared that a housewife and a prostitute were 'racoons in the same den,' two sides of the same coin. One of the much reprinted manifestos of the movement, Tanaka Mitsu's "Liberation from the Toilet" (*Benjo kara no kaihō*) argued that, within men's consciousness, *onna* was split into the two oppositional images of 'mother' and 'toilet': *either* the expression of maternal tenderness (the maternal ideal so dear to Japanese society) *or* the vessel for the release of man's sexual desire (implicitly and ironically compared to excrements) (Tanaka, 2010: 202).[120] The term

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[120] There exist two versions of Tanaka's pamphlet 'Liberation from the Toilet': the original was circulated in August 1970, and it was followed only a few months later by a longer, revised version in October 1970. I cite here the original version reproduced in Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki (1992: 201-7). The revised

'toilet' traced back to the highly derogatory expression 'public toilet' which used to designate comfort women during wartime (Ueno, 2011:4). Ironically that same expression came into use among the New Left and the students of *Zenkyōtō* to refer to female members who expressed an unconstrained sexuality and who were considered mere sexual objects by their male comrades. Yet, Tanaka's use of the term moved a much broader critique to a long history of masculine appropriation of women's sexuality whereby wives and prostitutes discovered themselves grouped *together* by their common strategies of survival, that is, selling (*qua* toilets) their sexual services to men in exchange of economic and/or material security. "Liberation from the Toilet" argued, instead, that *onna* consisted of an organic totality that integrated both the emotional quality of maternal tenderness and a woman's sexual desire.

Women's discriminatory experience within leftist, counter-cultural movement like *Zenkyōtō* had made painfully clear that to acknowledge the independence of woman's sexual desire and to liberate woman's sexuality from her subtle enslavement to the monogamous family system ought not to be conceived as synonymous with a 'liberation of one's sexual organs' nor with a doctrine of 'free sex' (Gurūpu tatakau onna, 1970a: 212; Shigematsu, 2012: 68). Rather, *ribu* understood the liberation of *onna* as coextensive with the liberation of sexuality which, in turn, was deemed constrained by the structure of the monogamous family. For the first time woman's sexuality was placed at the core of women's oppression and the adoption of the term *onna* signalled *ribu* activists' distinctive understanding of their own subjectivity, while

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pamphlet has been reprinted in Tanaka (2010: 333-47). For detailed information about the publishing history of these two pamphlets, see Shigematsu (2012: 205-6, note 81).

simultaneously marking a linguistic and epistemological break from other postwar women's movements (Ehara, 2012: 119; Shigematsu, 2012: 16-19).

Ribu argued that, because woman had been historically confined to the role of sexual object and denied the possibility to live as sexual subject, she now suffered from a lack of knowledge about her own body which, combined with social and moral forms that disqualified her from speaking of anything sexual, worked effectively to keep her in a position of subordination within the family system. This is also patently clear from Ogino Miho's research on abortion and women's reproductive rights in postwar Japan where she highlights women's 'ignorance or fear of their own bodies' and their 'embarrassment in talking about matters relating to sex due to strong sexual repression' (1994: 81). She points to the fact that it is 'taboo for women to act knowledgeable about sexual matters and to give instructions to men' to the point that they may prefer 'maintaining a passive stance toward sex and leaving contraception in men's hands to discussing these matters thoroughly with men or assuming responsibility for themselves.' (80).

Therefore, the liberation of *onna* required that a great amount of energy be devoted to promoting and disseminating knowledge of the female body. The creation of women-only spaces such as centres, communes, cafés and bookstores enabled *ribu* activists to organize teach-ins, seminars and workshops on subjects such as the female sexual apparatus, sex, venereal diseases, contraception, pregnancy, abortion, birth and other aspects of female corporeality. As already flagged in an early section of this chapter, an important contribution to the promotion of women's re-appropriation of their bodies was the first translation in 1974 of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The foreword to

the Japanese edition states: '[Those] women who have felt their bodies somewhat distant, as something other than themselves, by means of knowing about their bodies and by telling each other about their bodies, will make their bodies their own once again' (quoted in Ehara, 2012: 126).[121] Some of these spaces also provided women with professional, legal or medical consultations and constituted a network for the dissemination of information both in the form of face-to-face interactions and through the distribution of pamphlets, newsletters, zines and journals.

These *minikomi* (mini-communications) represented an alternative media outlet borne out of *ribu*'s painstaking effort to establish alternative channels of communication that could counter the prescriptions of womanhood and feminine property with which the *masukomi* (mass-communications or, put it simply, the mass media) bombarded women. This alternative communication network was characterised by an informal and accessible style and played a crucial role in transmitting information among the numerous *ribu* cells across Japan (Buckley and Mackie, 1986: 180-1; Mackie, 1992; Buckley, 1993: 352; Buckley, 1997: 187; Shigematsu, 2012: xxviii; 81, 96).

6 *Ribu*'s critique of the family system

In conjunction with *ribu*'s celebration of *onna* as a new political subject and a call for liberation of (female) sexuality, a fervent critique of the postwar nuclear family traversed the movement's rhetoric as another of its distinctive traits. *Ribu* argued that the family existed not as a place for the creation of meaningful human relationships,

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[121] For an extensive consideration of the work behind this first translation, see Akiyama (1993: 154-66) and Welker (2012). For an account of a later translation of *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, see Buckley (1997: 185-225).

but as the site where woman's sexuality and desire were subjected to masculine dominance and conceived only in (re-)productive terms. Modern Japanese society was understood to be plagued by a capitalist logic of productivity, often identified as a 'male logic' (*otoko no ronri*), which was also described as permeating the family system. Such logic, it was argued, demanded of men that they sacrificed themselves to corporate values for the sake of the country's renewed economic prosperity, while women were rendered intelligible only in their prescribed roles of wives and mothers which, in turn, constituted the sole guarantee of their social existence. I have explored earlier on in this chapter Japan's period of high economic growth after World War II. It might be sufficient here to recall that late postwar Japan, with its process of rapid modernization and industrialization, was deeply rooted in the values of corporate society whose building blocks took the form of the new, urban, nuclear family with its sex-role division of worker-husband and homemaker-wife (Ueno, 1988; Ochiai, 1997; Muto, 1997). With men pressured to devote themselves fully to the company cause, internalise company values and leave childcare and housework entirely in the hands of their wives, the modernization of the family had also translated into women's more thorough confinement to the domestic sphere: women found themselves trapped in a new form of subjugation disguised as 'the happiness of the home' (my-homism) (Yoda, 2000). In this regard, Ueno (1988) has bleakly stated that '[i]ndustralization organized male members of the society as wage labourers but it left women in the private sphere with children, the elderly, the diseased and the handicapped' (171).

Regarded as the foundational unit of society and the cornerstone of Japan's postwar economic miracle, the institution of the family was regulated and legally validated by the family registration system (*koseki seido*). This had been in place since

1872 and required that family status events such as birth, marriage, divorce, adoption and death be registered with the government. The family registry was and is still used to determine a person's eligibility to education and income assistance. It serves as certificate of citizenship, for passport issuance and renewal, and it was traditionally required by schools, prospective employers and future parents-in-law to verify the family background of an individual. *Ribu*'s critiques of family registration denounced it for reinforcing a patriarchal model of the family and for reproducing traditional gender norms whereby a wife married into her husband's family, took his name and was registered into his family registry. Taimie L. Bryant (1991) has described with abundance of details the negative impact of family registration on the opportunities of *burakumin* (outcasts) and *zainichi* Koreans (Koreans resident in Japan) for participation in Japanese society and she has widely documented its negative effects on the life of women. As the authoritative source of Japanese nationality, only Japanese can have family registries. However, the demand that a married woman be removed from her family registry in order to be entered into the family registry of her husband could have serious implications for her and her children if the husband was not Japanese. To begin with, 'non-Japanese fathers did not have Japanese family registries in which their wives or children could be registered' (131), and because the mother had been expunged upon marriage from her original family registry, her children could not be conferred Japanese citizenship (with all the social consequences that this might have entailed). This placed Japanese women at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Japanese men who could simply enter their non-Japanese wives on their parents' family registry:[122]

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[122] Until 1985 neither Japanese women nor men could establish a new family registry in case they married a non-Japanese. However, due to the fact that Japanese men were not removed from their parents' family registry upon their marriage, they were in a position to sidestep such dilemma of

Because women "followed their husbands" and left their parents' registry upon marriage, Japanese women who married non-Japanese were forced to choose between illegitimacy and Japanese nationality for their children. If a Japanese woman had children before marriage, her children would be illegitimate but they would be Japanese by virtue of her being able to establish her own family registry or remaining on her parents' family registry. If the Japanese woman married before having children, her children would be legitimate but they would not have Japanese citizenship. (ibid.)

As if this were not enough, Bryant has also observed how the family registration system reinforced the stigma of illegitimacy and adoption which attached not only to a child (whose adoption is recorded on the family registry of the adoptive parents) but also to the biological mother who 'must retain the stigmatizing record of the child's birth on her family registry' (139). The relevance of *ribu*'s attacks against the family registration system and the institution of the family it supported for the movement's solidarity with mothers who killed their children (at the core of next chapter) becomes apparent when we consider that, as late as in 1986, 82.2 per cent of victims of infanticide were 'nonmarital children' (136). In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that while the spontaneous emergence of *ribu* collectives and other forms of communal living was meant to create suitable conditions for *onna*'s self-discovery, it also represented a major challenge to the institution of the family.[123] In

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illegitimacy/citizenship for their children. This was a legal issue that was specific to Japanese women and that was partially resolved only in 1985 when a revision of the National Law made it possible for either parent to confer Japanese nationality to his or her child (Bryant, 1991: 132).

[123] Nishimura (2006) differentiates *ribu* collectives into three groups, according to the rationale and aims behind their original formation: those focused on elaborating and practicing new modes of childrearing, those that emerged as centres for the organization of *ribu*'s activities and were devoted to the circulation of information and, last, those that were simply born out of a desire to experiment with alternative forms of female communal living (52-3). Among the numerous women-only collectives that emerged in the 1970s, the Ribu Shinjuku Centre occupied a distinctive place, in that it played a pivotal role in shaping the contours and priorities of the movement in its formative years. Shigematsu (2012) has written extensively on the Ribu Shinjuku Centre and readers interested in knowing more about the Centre will find Shigematsu's analysis of its formative role and internal dynamics invaluable. See also Nishimura (2006: 57-96) and Endō et al. (1996).

For a taste of how life at the Centre was like, here is a passage from Shigematsu's much broader account:

particular, the creation of collectives of women and children aimed at experimenting with a lifestyle that was openly critical of the traditional family system and which could allow 'unmarried mothers' (*mikon no haha*) to avoid and counter social stigma. Many *ribu* scholars have identified the desire to fight the discrimination meted out to single mothers as an important element of *ribu*'s agenda which prompted many activists to decide to have children out of wedlock, while searching for and experimenting alternative forms of childcare. The Japanese expression *mikon no haha* (未婚の母) that designated a single mother was in itself exemplary of the social pressure for women to marry and have children within the legitimacy of the monogamous family. The word *mikon* (未婚) results from the union of the two characters 未 which means 'not yet' 婚 which means 'to marry.' The term, thus, framed unmarried mothers in terms of their 'marriageability' and their position within the life-cycle that society prescribed for women: an unmarried woman was conceived as 'a woman who is *not yet* married, even though she *will have to* marry sooner or later' (Inoue, 1980: 198, my italics). Shigematsu underscores how *ribu*'s sensitivity to the political dimension of language prompted women activist to coin the alternative term *hikon no haha* which literally means 'anti-marriage mother' or 'negation of marriage mother' as a conscious linguistic alternative to the widespread use of 'not-yet-married mother'(2012: 20).

The Ribu Shinjuku Center was a commune and an organizing center that was open twenty-four hours a day. It was one of the busiest pulsation points of *ribu*'s activities and often functioned as the communication center for nationwide events. It was a dissemination point and publishing house for *ribu*'s largest newspaper (*Ribu nyūsu: konomichi hitosuji*) and a prolific number of other *ribu* publications. The Shinjuku Center organized regular teach-ins on a vast array of topics… It operated as a shelter for runaway teenage girls and battered women, and… it provided free legal aid services for women. (Shigematsu, 2012: 85-6)

When we considered how the modern nuclear family was regarded as fundamental to Japan's rapid modernization and economic expansion, we can start appreciating one of the many revolutionary dimensions of *ribu*: as women activists questioned the sex-role division of labour within the family and indicted the family system as a site for the reproduction of unequal power relations and structures of discrimination, they also, so to speak, threatened the very foundation of Japan's new material affluence. On the other hand, Ehara has also suggested that the most deep-rooted resistance to *ribu* might well have stemmed from its attacks to the 'maternal fantasy' that she deemed characteristic of Japanese society (2012: 137).[124] It is to this important aspect of *ribu*'s activism that I now turn my attention.

7   Dismantling the myth of maternal love

The postwar nuclear family also came under harsh criticism because it represented an important apparatus by means of which the prewar and interwar ideology of the 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) found novel articulation. At the end of the nineteenth century this ideal was popularized by the Ministry of Education and State propaganda which 'exhorted women to contribute to the nation through their hard work, their frugality, their efficient management, their care of the old, young, and ill, and their responsible upbringing of children' (Nolte and Hastings, 1991: 152). Uno (1993) maintains that attempts to prescribe a feminine identity bound to the roles of mother and wife and confined within the domestic sphere continued in various forms well into the 1980s (295). It will not come as a surprise to know that in the

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[124] For a recent investigation of the emergence of the notion of Japan as a 'maternal society' in the 1960s and its consolidation in the 1970s, see Yoda's insightful article "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society: Gender, Labor, and Capital in Contemporary Japan" (2000).

postwar years this process became coextensive with the placing of the modern nuclear family at the centre of Japan's economic growth and with the ensuing consolidation of a gendered division of labour within the family.[125] *Ribu*'s repudiation of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal was partially rooted in the movement's anti-establishment and anti-imperialist stance which urged women activists to reject an ideology that for almost a century had framed motherhood as decisive for the prosperity of the nation and, under the pronatalist slogan 'bear children and multiply' (*umeyo fuyaseyo*), had celebrated its role in support of Japan's war efforts and imperial expansion (Ogino, 1994: 71; Mackie, 2003: 112-13; Shigematsu, 2012: 6-7).[126]

But the ideology of 'good wife, wise mother' was also deeply entangled with a cultural sanctification of motherly love and devotion that defined marriage as woman's happiness, demanded total self-abnegation of mothers and expected them to live for their children. 'The trap of the myth of maternal love' – to borrow the title of Ohinata Masami's important book (2000) – relied on the idealization of the mother-child bond and on the shared cultural expectation that a mother would sacrifice herself for the greater good of the family, embrace her ingress into motherhood with enthusiasm and that she would naturally establish with her child a relationship saturated with love and devoid of ambivalent feelings (Ohinata, 1995; Orpett Long, 1996). The myth of maternal love worked by policing the deviant behaviour 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 (Ohinata, 2000: 2; Ehara, 2012: 135). This has emerged clearly in

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[125] For an exploration of the ideology and ideal of 'good wife, wise mother,' see Uno (1991; 1993); Nolte and Hastings (1991), Hara (1995), Borovoy (2005) and Tipton (2009).
[126] Wakakuwa (2004) offers a fascinating investigation of media representations of women's roles during wartime.

chapter 2 where media coverage has been shown to constitute a significant part of those discursive practices that attempted to 'quarantine' mothers who killed their children outside of the realm of cultural intelligibility: bearing the burden of an ideology that sang the myth of maternal love, filicidal mothers were made the principal target of articles that indicted them as wicked or mentally unstable, as they also lamented the 'loss of motherhood' (*bosei sōshitsu*) and the advent of 'an era of children's suffering' (*akachan junan jidai*).

However, whereas *ribu*'s solidarity with mothers who kill might seem, at first sight, to express an unambiguous and utter rejection of the maternal role, it is imperative to realise that *ribu* did not attempt to negate or do away with motherhood altogether (Akiyama, 1993; Ueno, 2011; Ehara, 2012). Rather, it was 'motherhood as institution' (as opposed to mothering as experience) that women activists strenuously questioned (Rich, 1979; see also O'Reilly, 2004). In addition to this, *ribu* scholars emphasize how the movement took a self-consciously ambivalent stance on motherhood (Ueno, 2011: 6) and that 'the more they negated [the institution of] motherhood, the more a desire emerged to rescue motherhood into a different form' (Ōgoshi, 2005: 134). Ōgoshi also argues that '[t]he ideological radicalism of *ūman ribu* lied in its sanguinary struggle with the problem of motherhood which constituted the utmost aporia in terms of the establishment of female subjectivity' (131). However, this struggle was not grounded in the belief that motherhood and female subjectivity were two mutually exclusive alternatives for women: in fact, Akiyama suggests that, to a greater or lesser degree, all *ribu* groups shared the view that the imposition Japanese women faced of having to choose between being a mother or having a strong,

independent subjectivity was itself symptomatic of their very oppression in society (1993: 123).

The organization of communes of women and children represented one of *ribu*'s attempts to challenge this enforced either/or. Well-known among them was Tokyo Komu-unu, which opened in Tokyo in August 1972 and whose name was a combination of the word *komyūn* (commune) and the expression *ko umi* (to give birth). Run by the homonymous group, the commune originally comprised three mothers and their children who aimed at forging new forms of relationality between parent and child and 'sought to redefine and create new conditions for raising children that rejected the "sacrificial mother" paradigm that placed all responsibility on the birth mother' (Shigematsu, 2012: 20). The commune also functioned as an open, communitarian nursery to which other parents could entrust their children and where the founding members were intermittently joined by other women and men also involved in childcare activities. The group criticized the commonly held belief that giving birth and raising a child was a woman's life purpose and that it was by becoming a mother that she could affirm herself in society. It strongly opposed the social expectation that from birth until the moment when she could depart from her child a mother's energies ought to be devoted exclusively to child-rearing within the limits of the domestic sphere (Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1994: 26). Indeed, the commune was created with the fundamental conviction that '[t]he very struggle of *onna* while she gives birth and raises a child is the struggle to choose the tomorrow' (Tokyo Komu-unu, 1975: 372). This represents a concise and powerful articulation of the group's belief that the process of self-transformation and the struggle for the creation of a new revolutionary subject were *not* incompatible with mothering: the struggle of *onna*

could, indeed, unfold alongside the experience of childbirth and child-raising. Tokyo Komu-unu strove to make this convergence possible by questioning cultural assumptions about the mother-child relationship and by affirming the possibility of a maternal experience outside the legitimizing frame of the family system: by referring to the commune as 'a family of unmarried mothers' (*mikon no haha no ie*) the members of Tokyo Komu-unu subversively brought into discourse and challenged what current social norms rendered a logical and cultural impossibility (ibid.).

The articulation of new conditions to raise children went hand-in-hand with a relentless problematization of woman's autonomy (*jiritsu*) as the group made active efforts to promote the right of women with children to participate in a life outside the domestic walls: Tokyo Komu-unu fought for women's right to go shopping, visit museums and even take part in street demonstrations *together with* their children. By organizing campaigns against the banning of prams from the platforms of the underground and the national railway stations, from department stores and museums, it posed a revolutionary challenge to the social regulations deemed responsible for maintaining a problematic division between public and private space (Tokyo Komu-unu, 1974; Akiyama, 1993: 185-6; Nishimura, 2006: 97-124; Shigematsu, 2012: 20). The activism of Tokyo Komu-unu made the *onna*-with-child (*komochi onna*) an important site of social contestation and a specific incarnation of *ribu*'s new revolutionary subject (Akiyama, 1993: 186; Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1994: 26).

8   *Ribu* and the Eugenic Protection Law Campaign

Finally we can even recognize a certain commitment to rescuing (rather than rejecting) the maternal in *ribu*'s campaign to safeguard women's access to abortion and to fight against revisions to the Eugenic Protection Law. While this represents an issue that, because of its complexity, warrants an investigation on its own, there are at least two reasons why it is impossible to end this chapter without mentioning it.[127] To begin with, women's strong desire to oppose the proposed amendments to the Eugenic Protection Law triggered a nation-wide, coordinated mobilization of *ribu* cells of such dimensions that it simply deserves to be acknowledged. In the second place, some of *ribu*'s discursive interventions involving infanticide and child-killing were articulated in the context of these campaigns: although I will devote only minimal attention to the notion of abortion-as-murder or abortion-as-child-killing (*kogoroshi*), a certain desire for completeness demands that I briefly consider, at this point of my discussion, such an important aspect of *ribu*'s multifaceted struggle.

Abortion was widely practiced in Japan until the Meiji era (1868-1912) which marked the beginning of a rapid period of modernization for the country. In 1880, with the promulgation of the country first modern penal code, abortion was made a crime for the first time and it has remained a crime since. In June 1948, however, during the Allied Occupation, the Eugenic Protection Law (*Yūsei hogo-hō*) was passed whose Art. 1 stated that the purpose of the law was 'to prevent the birth of eugenically inferior offspring' and 'to protect maternal health and life' (Norgren, 2001: 145). In 1949

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[127] Two detailed studies on this topic are Tiana Norgren's *Abortion Before Birth Control: The Politics of Reproduction in Postwar Japan* (2001) and Kato Masae's *Women's Rights? The Politics of Eugenic Abortion in Modern Japan* (2009). See also Tama Yasuko's article "The Logic of Abortion: Japanese Debates on the legitimacy of Abortion as Seen in Post-World War II Newspapers" (1994).

economic reasons were added as legitimate grounds for abortion (art. 14, para. 1, no. 4), and in 1952 another revision was made that simplified administrative access to abortion and eliminated the need for women to appear in front of a Eugenic Protection Board of Examiners, making abortion accessible with the sole recommendation of a certified doctor (Ogino, 1994: 72; Norgren, 2001 44-52; Mackie, 2003: 166). The continued criminalization of abortion notwithstanding, the 'economic reasons' clause constituted a loophole in the law that, in practice, made abortion on demand accessible to Japanese women (even though a eugenic logic, rather than a desire to recognize women a right to self-determination, remained the rationale behind such revisions). Under the new law, the number of induced abortions doubled between 1949 and 1950 and reached over one million (reported) cases per year between 1955 and 1960s. However, due to the tendency among ob-gyns in private practice to underreport the number of performed abortions in order to escape taxation, the actual number is estimated to have been between two to four times higher than the reported rates (Ogino, 1994: 72-3; Norgren, 2001: 5, 7, 49), and by the late 1950s and early 1960s Japan had become internationally (in)famous as an 'abortion paradise' (*datai tengoku*) (Norgren, 2001: 54).

The early 1970s witnessed several attempts by members of the ruling Japanese party (the Liberal Democratic Party, LDP) to restrict access to abortion. In May 1972, with the support of the right-wing, nationalist, anti-abortion religious group of Seichō no Ie (The House of Growth), the LDP proposed a bill to revise the Eugenic Protection Law. The revision draft would remove the economic clause and replace it with a mental reason clause that would allow abortion if 'the continuation of pregnancy or childbirth [wa]s likely to seriously harm the mother's mental or physical health [...] and

in cases of fetal diseases or defect' (quote in Norgren, 2001: 62). In this regard Shigematsu makes clear how *ribu* understood this proposed revision 'as signifying an ideological shift that would place the blame for abortion on the individual mother instead of improving the societal conditions for giving birth' (2012: 88).

It is not my intent to provide here an overview of *ribu*'s campaign against the proposed revisions to the Eugenic Protection Law. What I want to foreground in my discussion is the fact that the argument the movement raised was not grounded in a rejection of motherhood or an identification of women's reproductive capacities as the source of women's oppression (ibid.). The issue was not to guarantee women's access to a medical procedure that allowed them to freely terminate a pregnancy at will. In fact, to think along these lines would have meant to fail to challenge the very social conditions that gave woman no other choice but to abort (Ehara, 2012). *Ribu*'s intervention to oppose the revisions has to be understood in the context of the movement's broader demands to radically change the status quo. Kato (2009) has made this crystal clear in her analysis of how the alliance that *ribu* formed with the disabled people movement Aoi Shiba no Kai against the revision of the Eugenic Protection Law prompted women activists to question the very rhetoric of rights with which they had originally framed their struggle.[128] Phrases like 'women choose whether to give or not to give birth' (*umu umanai wa onna ga kimeru*) and 'abortion is a woman's right' (*chūzetsu wa onna no kenri*) were soon supplanted by slogans such as: 'For a society where we can give birth! Where we want to give birth! (*Umeru shakai wo! Umitai shakai wo!*) and 'I want to give birth… but I can't give birth' (*Umitai… demo*

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[128] See Kato (2009: 65-83). In addition to this, Shigematsu has pointed out how the presence at the Ribu Shinjuku Centre of Yonezu Tomoko, a woman with a disability who developed a close relationship with Tanaka Mitsu, was also fundamental in shifting *ribu*'s politics from a focus on abortion as woman's right to a critique of the state control of reproduction and ableism (2012: 79-81, 90).

umenai). This rhetorical move aimed to stress the desire to create a society where women *really* had the possibility to choose whether or not to give birth, and where childbirth and child-raising were no longer a private matter, but a broader social issue. Kato has suggested that what made the alliance between *ribu* and the disabled people movement possible was the sharing of a similar self-image implicitly enforced by society and according to which pregnant women, women with children and disabled people (but we could also add the sick and the elderly to this picture) were "deviants" in light of a social norm based on being male, productive and disability free (Kato, 2009).

From this very broad outline of *ribu*'s campaign it emerges that women activists never attempted to do away with motherhood and that, by giving priority to the creation of the very possibility of an alternative, they placed equal weight on both 'giving birth' and 'not giving birth' (Akiyama 1993: 123). Emblematic of this nuanced understanding of the maternal was the slogan 'To give birth is egoism, not to give birth is [also] egoism' (*Umu mo ego, umanu mo ego*) by means of which *ribu* stressed that, while society's common sense considered abortion as a woman's egoistic act, also giving birth ought to be understood as an expression of egoism stemming directly from the unequal gendered organization of society. Some women, *ribu* argued, gave birth just because others did the same, or only to acquire proper status in society, to prove their womanhood and justify their existence, while also avoiding being seen as deviant. Some women even used their children as a means of self-realisation. The movement denounced the fact that, despite all these manifestations of egoism, giving birth and having children had hardly ever been understood as acts of egoism, but, quite to the contrary, they had become in 1970s Japan sources of societal admiration and

recognition (Kato, 2009: 72-3). *Ribu* denounced society's myopic vision that conceived only of abortion as an aberration and pointed at the social expectations that constrained women's experience of motherhood itself and twisted its profound significance.

9   Acknowledging *ribu*'s exclusions

It is important to acknowledge that the movement's discourse on motherhood, its critique of the institution of the family and its urge to make *onna* a new political subject hardly engaged with issues of race, class or age. We can begin making sense of these significant shortcomings by recalling that by the early 1970s 90 per cent of the Japanese population understood themselves to be middle class (Tipton, 2008: 187). Furthermore, Shigematsu reminds us that most *ribu* members were college-educated young women in their twenties and early thirties who were 'predominantly ethnic-majority Japanese largely from the postwar Japanese middle and lower-middle classes' and, thus, 'occupied a positionality that was relatively privileged' (2012: xvi).

As a matter of fact *ribu*'s profound self-reflexivity prompted its members to question their complicity with forms of sexualised violence that differentially affected other Asian women: the movement denounced the comfort women system, the 'colonization of the bodies of Okinawan sex workers by the men of the U.S. military (Shigematsu, 2012: 49) and the sexual exploitation of Korean sex-workers in the so-called Kisaeng tourism in South Korea (93-95). However, the movement showed only a limited engagement with the plight of different groups of women within Japan such as *burakumin* (outcasts), *zainichi* Koreans (Koreans resident in Japan), agricultural

workers, etc. Surely enough, a certain disregard of different experiences of oppression can be recognized in *ribu*'s articulation of *onna* as a universalised collective identity, in the movement's critique of the institution of motherhood and in its preoccupation with a maternal potential for violence (see chapter 4). This oversight could perhaps be explained by reference to *ribu*'s being a "second wave" type movement, although it still remains in a relation of tension with *ribu*'s anti-imperialism, Pan-Asianism and with women activists' openness to confront each other as they walked on the path leading to the transformation of one's own consciousness.

Also, the role of men within the movement remains to date deeply under-explored. It is true that *ribu*'s struggle for liberation was not confined to the liberation of women from forms of oppression deemed specific to their sex, but that it also aimed at freeing the whole society from a state of enslavement to a logic of productivity that equally alienated men in their roles of breadwinners and industrious cogwheels within the corporations. However, during the movement's formative years it was crucial for *ribu* to prioritize the creation of those women-only spaces that alone would have allowed women activists to embark on an individual journey of self-transformation. Since there were no instructions, no ready-made new ideals of relationality waiting to be put into practice to bring about the emergence of a new revolutionary subject it was through these experimental attempts of communal living and daily interaction that the movement attempted to envision the very possibility of an alternative. This meant breaking the circuit whereby the masculine gaze was endowed with the power to either dispense or refuse a woman's sense of self-worth. In this respect, women-only spaces became the springboard for a confrontation of *onna* with other *onna*, while they kept at bay the risks harboured by a face-to-face

interaction with man (i.e. the reactivation of the internalised 'feminine consciousness' women were striving to transform).

There were, nonetheless, communes like Tokyo Komu-unu that opened their doors to men's participation and in April 1973 the Ribu Shinjuku Centre began to organize a men's *ribu* (Shigematsu, 2012: 224, note 61; Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1995: 395-418). To date there is only one book-length published account of *ribu* as seen through the eyes of those men who took part in the movement (Satō, 2010). The original priority *ribu*'s gave to the transformation of woman's consciousness *and* the dearth of documentary evidence about men's *ribu* could be deemed partially accountable for the emergence in the following chapter of an image of the movement that seems to fail to engage or to question the paternal figure.[129]

10   Conclusion

This chapter aimed to offer a socio-historical contextualization of *ribu* and to provide enough information to appreciate its revolutionary potential and the multifaceted nature of its struggles for social transformation. The emphasis the movement placed upon the co-dependency between the transformation of each individual consciousness and the establishment of new forms of relationality represented a key ingredient of the movement's revolutionary strategies of political intervention. These two dimensions combined with programmatic expressions of solidarity for discriminated against or criminalized individuals. An emblematic example of *ribu*'s desire to connect with these abjected social figures is represented by the

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[129] We might also speculate that the gendered division of labour within the modern nuclear family might have made the paternal figure virtually non-existent, thus potentially voiding the chances for *ribu*'s active engagement with it.

claims of solidarity with mothers who kill their own children which constitute the focus of the next chapter. It is when we approach this controversial topic that *ribu*'s ambivalent engagement with motherhood becomes all the more apparent: underneath the movement's multiple interpretations of maternal filicide and its unsettling embracing of maternal violence, we can still detect a desire to retrieve the positive experience of mothering from the suffocating shackles of motherhood as institution.

CHAPTER 4

CONTESTED MEANINGS: MOTHERS WHO KILL THEIR CHILDREN IN THE RHETORIC OF *ŪMAN RIBU*

Chapter 2 showed how Japanese news media came to portray maternal filicide as an alarming social phenomenon and increasingly lamented women's 'loss of motherhood' and their maternal instinct. We saw newspapers describing an era of profound suffering for children marked by the appearance of cruel, irresponsible or mentally unstable mothers. Chapter 3 introduced the readers to *ribu* while foregrounding, against the background of such biased representations of the maternal, its multifaceted engagement with motherhood and its profound critique of the family system. The present chapter explores *ribu*'s vivid interest in the growing visibility of cases of maternal violence. Here I understand *ribu*'s preoccupation with mothers who kill their children as part and parcel of its critique of the gender organization of society, its efforts to dismantle cultural idealizations of motherhood and its desire to promote new forms of relationality. The solidarity that *ribu* demonstrated for mothers who killed their children was (and still remains) revolutionary vis-à-vis the social glorification of mothers as all loving and self-sacrificing (Ohinata, 1995; 2000) and the prescriptive ideal of the 'good wife, wise mother' (Uno, 1993). This solidarity posed a profound challenge to the sanctity of the mother-child bond and questioned the idea of the family as the guarantor of society's growth and stability. *Ribu*'s discursive intervention was aimed at demonstrating that what was supposed to be a safe haven and a nurturing environment for the healthy development of future generations was, in fact, a system that reproduced structures of inequality, discrimination and violence.

Another important dimension of *ribu*'s engagement with maternal filicide was the movement's effort to create a new discursive space that could challenge hegemonic understandings of mothers who kill as either "bad" or "mad." In so doing, *ribu* attempted to counter the all-too-familiar processes of pathologization and monsterification that singled out these criminalized mothers as exceptions to an otherwise widely shared maternal ideal. However, as this chapter will show, *ribu*'s defiant stance *vis-à-vis* the stigmatization meted out to these mothers often intertwined with a degree of ambivalence in the way maternal violence came to be understood and translated into multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations of the phenomenon.

R*ibu*'s engagement with mothers who kill remains a rather under-explored aspect of its multifaceted struggle for social transformation. Shigematsu's analysis of the topic has been so far the most sustained among *ribu* scholars, albeit still limited in depth and scope (Shigematsu, 2012: 23-31). Academic considerations of the relationship between *ribu* and filicidal mothers have also remained few and far between within the secondary literature in Japanese. In this respect, my work owes a particular debt to feminist theorist Ehara Yumiko and to her insights about the relation between *ribu*'s preoccupation with maternal filicide and its broader challenge to cultural idealizations of the maternal role (see in particular Ehara, 2010: 131-7 and 158-63).

1   *Ribu*'s solidarity with mothers who kill their children

On May 8, 1971 *ribu* cells in Tokyo organized a rally 'in solidarity with women who kill their children' (*onna no kogoroshi ni rentai suru shūkai*). Held on occasion of Mother's Day, this demonstration saw the participation of around a hundred people, with women and children marching in the rain with marguerites in their hands (Sayama and Aida, 1971: 4). Numerous demonstrations and meetings were held on that day in support of these criminalised mothers, triggering spontaneous forms of activism across the country such as the call to organize a rally in solidarity with filicidal mothers that was circulated in Hokkaido (Japan's most northern prefecture) by a *ribu* group called Metropolitan (Shigematsu, 2012: 24; Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1992: 149).

Shigematsu has called attention to the significance of the figure of the child-killing mother (*kogoroshi no onna*) 'in the consciousness, writing, and activism of *ribu* women' (2012: 207, note 98). But what was really at stake in the movement's solidarity with these criminalized mothers? To begin answering this question we may look at the following excerpt, which I find emblematic of the terrain this chapter will set off to investigate and which already introduces in a nutshell many aspects of the complex relationship *ribu* had with the phenomenon of maternal filicide. The excerpt consists of a passage from a letter of 23-year-old *ribu* activist R.K. that was published in the first issue of *Ribu nyūsu —kono michi hitosuji* (Ribu News: This Way Only), the main publication of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre. The author refers to a recent case which had been reported in the newspapers of a young mother who abandoned her newborn baby in a coin-locker causing its eventual death:

At that time what arose in my heart was not a feeling of compassion for the poor baby, but for the fear felt by this woman as she faced the fact of the child being born. Although I was myself surprised at the form assumed by my own reactions, I lamented at the same time the misery of the woman who killed her child, of the child who had been killed, and the grotesqueness of the people (including the person who had written that article) who, strong in their "common sense," were throwing words of denunciation against that woman.

I think that might well have been the first encounter (*deai*) where I became conscious that there might be a connection between women who kill their children and myself. I've never been pregnant nor have I ever had an abortion. Nonetheless, I had the impression – whatever the reason – that her misery overlapped with mine, together with the thought 'I'm a woman too' (*watashi mo onna nanda*). I felt as if that thought urged me toward something. I felt that I couldn't live were I not to do something, and that, even though I don't know what the best thing to do is, I must start doing something. (Sayama and Aida, 1971: 4)[130]

The passage above introduces the importance of news media as both sources of public information about mothers who kill and as promoters of modes of representation that denounced and stigmatized these mothers. It is against the backdrop of these biased portrayals that *ribu*'s discursive intervention acquires much of its unsettling and revolutionary potential. Furthermore, although the mother portrayed in the news and the author of the letter would seem to occupy positions of radical incommunicability due to the stark contrast in their life-experiences, a sense of affinity emerges that is recognized in the overlap of their separate miseries and which is rooted in the shared condition of being a woman (*onna*). The author's 'encounter' (*deai*) with the phenomenon of maternal filicide can be easily read as a synecdoche of *ribu*'s own encounter with mothers who kill and to express the movement's relentless emphasis on more constructive forms of relationality. We may recall here the notion of 'feminist praxis of critical solidarity and radical inclusivity' with which Shigematsu

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[130] Due to the paucity of academic investigations of this specific dimension of *ribu*'s activism, this chapter will draw largely on primary sources in Japanese such as pamphlets, bills and booklets that the movement produced and circulated in the 1970s. Unless otherwise stated, all the translations are mine.

described *ribu*'s programmatic solidarity with socially abjected or criminalised individuals. This strategy of political contestation was overtly critical of society's "common sense" and urged a critical examination of the structural conditions that induced individuals into their criminalised behaviours (Shigematsu, 2012: 150). Provocative declarations such as 'The woman who kills her child is you…' (*Kogoroshi no onna wa anata da…*) (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1973), 'The woman who kills her child is me! She's you!' (*Kogoroshi onna wa watashi deari, anata da!*) (Niimi, 1974) or 'We might be next!' (*Asu wa wagami!*) (1974) were all exemplary of the movement's determination to assert a revolutionary affinity with the filicidal mother. Through these statements *ribu* claimed that the social conditions driving mothers to kill their children could easily plunge *any woman* into analogous circumstances, but they also implicitly suggested – in line with the movement's pronounced self-reflexivity – women's own complicity with those same conditions.

This was not a superficial, rhetorical move, but was fuelled by a profound desire to relate to these mothers: *ribu* activists wrote them letters, showed up at the public hearing of their trials and visited them in prisons or hospitals. These attempts to connect clearly emphasise the importance that *ribu* placed on relationality as a fundamental condition to promote social change, but also as an indispensable strategy for self-transformation. The words of Yonezu Tomoko, member of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre, strongly convey the spirit with which such enterprise was undertaken:

> Our solidarity was not just expressed in words, we tried to contact these women and communicate with them to understand them. Even though we recognized that killing a child is wrong, we didn't want to place the blame on that one mother, rather, the blame could be placed on me as well, for allowing and perpetuating such a society. Even though there is no way I could feel the extent of the pain these women felt, the

meaning of our solidarity included how we wanted to reflect on what these women experienced and what were the conditions that allowed this to happen. (quoted in Shigematsu, 2012: 24)

2   Contested meanings

How did *ribu* understand the act of a mother taking the life of her own child? What role did this understanding play in the movement's broader struggle for social transformation? In order to answer to these questions we need to recall that *ribu* never constituted an organic and homogeneous movement with a hierarchy among its members, a recognized centre and its periphery. Any attempt to speak of *ribu* in the third person singular is thus inevitably misleading and fuels misperceptions about the nature of the movement and its internal dynamics. We soon realise that, as a result of *ribu*'s heterogeneity and composite nature, we are not dealing with a singular and monolithic understanding of the phenomenon of mothers who kill, but with a cluster of meanings. However, while the logic animating *ribu*'s stance on maternal filicide was not singular, its diverse interpretations were not mutually independent or mutually exclusive, and could emerge simultaneously in the same text according to the rhetorical and political effects the authors intended to convey. Maternal filicide was variously understood as the expression of an uncontainable feminine grudge unleashed upon an oppressive society or as a meaningless tragedy that destroyed the lives of both mother and child and which inflicted a trauma to the entire community, or else, it could be deemed symptomatic of the malfunction of the system and the unbalances that afflicted Japanese society. It could also be all these things at once. In what follows I will highlight the shared assumptions that concurred to provide a degree of coherence to these multiple understandings and which have already been partially introduced in chapter 3: the notion of *onna* as a new political subject; the

critique of the family system (which traversed the movement's rhetoric as one of its distinctive traits) and the urge to dismantle the myth of maternal love and cultural idealizations of the mother-child bond.

2.1   *Kogoroshi no onna*: the child-killing *onna*

In the previous chapter we have seen how *ribu* re-appropriated the taboo term *onna* (woman) and employed it as a semantically rich alternative to those categories such as wife, mother, housewife and female worker that classified women according to their socially upheld roles and which had so far constituted the identificatory basis for women's forms of political mobilization. The notion of *onna* was not a ready-made, pre-existent ideal, but represented a yet-to-be-shaped revolutionary subject that *ribu* activists strove to articulate in their day-to-day lives and alternative forms of relationality. Here I want to take these considerations forward and reflect on the fact that what appears time and again in the writings of *ribu* analysed in this chapter is *not* the 'mother who kills her child' (expression that would be rendered in Japanese as *kogoroshi no haha*), but the much more emblematic figure of the *kogoroshi no onna* (子殺しの女 lit. the child-killing woman). It would be linguistically and conceptually inaccurate to translate *kogoroshi no onna* as 'the child-killing mother' or 'the mother who kills her child' because this move would efface an important rhetorical dimension embedded in the Japanese original. Furthermore, whereas 'woman who kills her child' may be considered an acceptable translation, it does not yet convey the vibrant connotations that exude from the term *onna* (woman). The more apt translation 'child-killing *onna*' foregrounds, instead, *ribu*'s specific understanding of filicide as the violent act of an *onna* whose very existence was made impossible by stifling norms of

femininity and the overall gender organization of society. According to *ribu*'s logic woman was, in her role as mother, a mere projective surface for male fantasies. Therefore, it was woman-as-*onna* (rather than woman-as-mother) the one who, in a desperate attempt to assert her existence, was understood to lay her hands on her child. In a language that became the hallmark of her rhetorical style, Tanaka Mitsu (1970; 2010) conceived of woman-as-mother as a manifestation of 'the non-existing *onna*' or 'the *onna* who is nowhere' (*doko ni mo inai onna*): an empty figure wrapped up and adorned in male desires, needs and demands. Tanaka contrasted this phantasmatic existence in society with what she called 'the here-existing *onna*' (*koko ni iru onna*) whom she described as imbued with the painful contradictions between man-made idealizations of womanhood and the reality of woman's living conditions and corporeality:

> After all, a self that begins to recognise itself in the eyes of another is the 'non-existing onna' (*doko ni mo inai onna*), and if [this self] relies on this 'non-existing onna' and attempts to make her the life purpose (*ikigai*) of the 'here-existing onna' (*koko ni iru onna*) in flesh and blood, it simply natural for it to turn to shreds in a state of anxiety and exasperation. (Tanaka, 2010: 16)

It was arguably amidst these contradictions and affective turmoil that a woman's manifestations of violence toward her child were understood to occur. Accordingly, when *ribu* activists asserted their solidarity with filicidal mothers with the slogan 'the woman who kills her child (*kogoroshi no onna*) is me!', it was *not* with the 'woman-as-mother' that they claimed identification with, but with the *onna* that they imagined striving for survival through 'an existence saturated with contradictions' (*mujun ni michita sonzai*) (68).

In addition to this, the word *kogoroshi* (child-killing) in the expression *kogoroshi no onna* was also not without a considerable rhetorical force. In chapter 3 we have seen that the categories *kogoroshi* and *boshi shinjū* reflect two profoundly different perceptions of the act of killing a child. On that occasion I have called attention to the fact that only the former appears to convey an idea of maternal violence and to become the object of overt social indictment as the deed of a monstrous, irresponsible or self-centred woman. *Ribu*'s consistent use of the word *kogoroshi* in its writings about mothers who kill combines with the striking absence of any reference to mother-child suicides. This could be motivated by *ribu*'s overt political effort to counter the stigmatization meted out to those mothers who committed *kogoroshi* (i.e. murder) as opposed to those who tragically took their lives together with the life of their child. However, we could also argue that the rhetorical emphasis on the term *kogoroshi* exposed *ribu*'s desire to conceive of that violence as a concrete possibility that further challenged normative stereotypes of femininity. This represented a manifestation of the movement's 'productive politicization of women's relationship with violence – as potentially violent subjects –' that Shigematsu identifies as one of *ribu*'s most distinctive features (2012: xiii).[131]

To sum up, a first important dimension of *ribu*'s engagement with mothers who kill is already apparent in such an epistemic break from previous understandings of

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[131] To realise the revolutionary impact of *ribu*'s stance *vis-à-vis* women's potential for violence, we just need to remind ourselves of the emphasis that the Mother's Convention (*Hahaoya taikai*) placed upon the notion of the pacific and protective nature of women's maternal role (see chapter 3, section 3.1).

maternal filicide and in the movement's critical appraisal of the biased nature of a language through which its political contestations were carried forward.[132]

3 *Ribu*'s critique of the family system and its challenge to the mother-child bond

The solidarity and support *ribu* expressed toward mothers who killed their children went hand in hand with a profound challenge to cultural beliefs in the symbiotic and natural character of the mother-child bond. This challenge was inscribed within the movement's broader critique of the family system that I have outlined in chapter 3, section 6. 'In a social structure that places total responsibility upon the shoulders of the woman who has given birth', *ribu* asked, 'what on earth is a child to a woman?' (Ribu Gasshuku Jikkō I'inkai, 1971: 323).[133] It also claimed that in the framework provided by the gender organization of the family a woman was bound to devote all her energies and emotional investment to a child who functioned, in the end, as the sole guarantor of her social value. As a result, the child was reduced to an item endowed with exchange value and the tacit contract upon which the institution of the family was deemed to rely was denounced for demanding that women secure three meals and a roof over their head in exchange for their reproductive capacities. The birth of a child was then understood to be nothing but the validation of such a silent agreement. In this respect, the mother-child bond could not be naively accepted as the

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[132] Having here addressed the rhetorical dimension of *ribu*'s use of the category *kogoroshi no onna*, I will hereafter translate *onna* as 'woman' for stylistic reasons, emphasising its distinctive connotations only when the context requires me to do so.

[133] The Ribu Gasshuku Jikkō I'inkai (Executive Committee for a *Ribu* Camp) was composed by *ribu* cells such as Gurūpu Tatakau Onna (Group Fighting Onna) and Shisō Shūdan Esuīekkusu (Thought Group S.E.X), and was founded in order to organise the first *ribu* summer camp (*gasshuku*) on August 21-24, 1971 (Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki, 1992:315).

uncomplicated locus of meaningful human relationships. The following extract underlines this point:

> Woman and child: nowadays aren't they doing anything but consuming each other's 'life'? They are forced into a double suicidal pact. The aspiration to 'life' of a woman who *wants to live* with her child (where the emphasis is not on 'with')… what does that mean for the demands for 'life' of that child? (ibid.)

The passage above is a straightforward denunciation of the fact that mother and child, far from being the two terms of a nurturing relationship, consume each other in parasitical fashion, both portrayed as sacrificial victim of the existent social order.

In the context of the movement's critique of the family system the child was also often described as a source of contradictions in the life of a woman: while construed by hegemonic discourse as the mark of her fulfilment *qua* woman, it emerged in *ribu*'s rhetoric as what 'robbed [*onna*] of the freedom of movement when she wanted to fly higher' (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1973: 69) and as the vehicle whereby demands to conform to cultural norms of maternal propriety were implemented. 'In giving birth and raising a child there are extremely binding conditions'; '[o]nce a child is born you are bound hand and foot, and [whatever you do] it's a no-win situation' (Kogoroshi: Shiryō, 1971: 310); '[m]y child's existence over-determines my own existence' (Take, 1971: 309): these are few examples that give the flavour of *ribu*'s questioning of the natural and loving character that was assumed to define a mother's relationship to her child. Exhausted by a gender organization of society that didn't

allow her to live as *onna*, woman was said to be 'torn to shreds together with her child'

(Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971b: 187):[134]

> When a woman kills her child, it's nothing but a misdirected blow. A violent emotion that hits you all of a sudden and of which you don't understand the reason –that is perhaps an impulse impossible to repress, induced by an existential sense of starvation for one's own being. Such woman converges and eventually flings this impulse onto the source of contradiction which is most within her reach. Were she to come to her senses, she would have realised that the child was crying, but this does not happen. (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971c: 188)

Here, the fact that the mother is unable to recognise the pain she inflicts upon her child testifies to an alienating lack of human connection brought about by a suffocating gendered division of labour within the family. It follows that the numerical increase of mothers who kill their children is understood to foreshadow the collapse of the long-lasting myth of motherhood and maternal love, together with a value system that oppresses women by celebrating indiscriminately childbirth and reproduction:

> The frequent occurrence of episodes of maternal filicide is nothing but a declaration of bankrupt stamped in the blood of one's own child on account of a way of living whereby woman bears a child to a man in exchange of a place in the house'. (Tanaka 2010: 28)

To question the 'mother-and-child' relationship meant for *ribu* to question the 'and' under which a spontaneous and unproblematic relationality was subsumed. This did not require a rejection of motherhood, but a relentless effort to separate 'mother' and 'child' and to create the enabling conditions for a more constructive and authentic relationality. As we have seen in chapter 3, such effort to separate mother and child in

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[134] There are two versions of the pamphlet "Ondoro ondoro onna ga kodomo wo koroshiteku" from which this quotation is taken: one appears in Ribu Shinjuku Sentā Hozonkai, ed. (2008a) and is collectively attributed to Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, while the other is reprinted in Tanaka (2010) and is attributed to Tanaka herself. The content of the two versions remains identical. Here I refer to the former version.

the public imaginary was in itself a revolutionary endeavour that was also integral to the process of transformation of female consciousness fostered by the movement's multifaceted activism (Mizoguchi et al., 1971: 7).

A critical position toward motherhood conceived as a monolithic identity that exhausts all that there is to a woman can be found in the following excerpt where the mother of a four-year old child affected by cerebral palsy describes the pain and fatigue of being a parent of a child with a disability. This pamphlet questions once again the cultural norms that expect mothers to be devoid of ambivalent feelings in the love for their children, and denounces both the social pressure to embody a self-sacrificial maternal ideal and the frustration at being acknowledged by society only as a mother:

> It's hard, isn't it? You can do it because you are his mother, can't you? These kind words forced upon me [the ideal] of maternal love and compelled me to dedicate my whole life to my child as a suffering mother. People say: 'Isn't she a cheerful person! She doesn't look like a woman who has a disabled child.' As a human being, however, I am a mother, a worker, and I have an individual existence that feels now joys, now worries in these and all my other roles, and I can't keep playing all the time the mother of a disabled child.' (K., 1973:363)

The author of the pamphlet describes the way in which four years of difficult parenting had the effect of transforming her frustration in resignation, and she painfully recognises how her life 'started exuding a rotting smell from underneath the hypocritical mask of maternal love' (364). While acknowledging that she was lucky enough *not* to kill her child, she also confesses that in the midst of her exasperation she had a hunch that 'at the farthest end of resignation is the killing of one's own child' (ibid.).

Her instinctual struggle for survival reaches the surface of her consciousness only when she becomes aware of the potential for violence that lurks behind the mask of maternal love. It is only at that point that she recognises a not-fully-conscious desire to vent her impotent desperation upon the outside world – that is, a world that has been made coextensive with her child and his needs. Her narration suggests that it is only her encounter with *ribu* that enables her to channel such existential turmoil into a constructive project of social and inner transformation:

> To get back a body and soul that had been living for four years almost exclusively as a mother it was necessary to shout as an act of opposition [to the system]: "Kill the child!" But that also meant "Kill the mother that is (in) me!" [*Hahaoya to shite no jibun wo korose!*] It was at that point that I encountered *ribu*' (ibid.).

A mother's acceptance of her potential for violence emerges here as the expression of a desperate determination to fight the system and to re-appropriate her life as a fully human being. However, an attentive reading of the passage reveals that this is not the endorsement of actual violence against children. It is, rather, an acknowledgement of the fact that such opposition requires the *bringing into discourse* of the maternal potential for violence. It is in the command "Kill the child!" *screamed out loud* so that both the world and the mother herself could hear where we recognise a woman's refusal of gender norms and her firm resolution to shatter the myth of motherhood's perfect love. It is not in the act of killing the child, but in the voice that publicly declares the possibility of that violence. And yet, this brave declaration harbours the danger of self-destruction in that the exhortation to kill the child becomes synonymous with the destruction of woman's maternal identity and with it her public recognition in society. It is this ambivalence that I set out to explore in the following section.

4   The child-killing *onna* between revolutionary agency and victimhood

As we read through *ribu*'s archive and take stock of the various ways in which filicidal mothers are portrayed, we cannot fail to notice a degree of ambivalence in their representations. Side by side with striking claims of the revolutionary spirit that is believed to traverse episodes of maternal violence, we come across numerous declarations of their utterly tragic nature that would deny such episodes any kind of emancipatory potential. As flagged in the introduction to this chapter, this could be explained by reference to *ribu*'s composite nature. However, it seems to me that this ambivalence may well be the inevitable outcome of two potentially irreconcilable approaches to maternal filicide. On the one hand, *ribu*'s programmatic attempts to overthrow society's gender organization motivated a will to embrace maternal violence as the manifestation of woman's revolutionary intent; on the other hand, the movement's desire to empathise with the plight of these mothers and to connect with them at a human level may have brought about awareness of the deep insufficiency of the former mode of representation. The result is the emergence of potentially contradictory modalities with which a maternal potential for violence was given discursive articulation.

4.1   The child-killing *onna* as woman's grudge unleashed

A powerful and audacious interpretation of maternal filicide was offered by those voices within *ribu* that seemed to attribute to the mother who killed her child a kind of activist consciousness and a wilful desire to defy the system. The following excerpt is typical of the tone assumed by this interpretative strand:

[T]hose women (*onna-tachi*) who, while returning to their own self and as they stained their hands with blood, have raised objection to "the myth of maternal love" have perpetrated acts of filicide whose number has reached, only this year, almost 400 cases. (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971a: 243)

The passage above seems to suggest that behind episodes of maternal filicide it is possible to recognise the working of a rational agency moving objection to cultural idealizations of motherhood. Maternal child-killing becomes here the brutal means whereby woman asserts her determination to regain control over her life as a fully human being.

Filicidal mothers were also referred to as 'members of a support army' for the movement (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971d: 251) and were depicted as a different incarnation of the 'energy of woman's grudge (onnen, 怨念)' understood to animate *ribu* (Shisō Shūdan Esuīekkusu, 1971: 176). Filicide came to be seen as a dramatic modality by means of which woman's 'personal resentment (shien 私怨) spread through the darkness of the womb from woman to woman' and testified to the fact that something 'that had neither form nor could be expressed in words, but that was clearly breaking a taboo, [was] now starting to erupt' (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971c: 188). The notion of woman's 'resentment' as constitutive of the spirit of ribu was a recurrent image in the language of the movement, especially for groups such as Shisō Shūdan Esuīekkusu (Thought Group S.E.X) and Gurūpu Tatakau Onna (Group Fighting Onna) that collaborated at the Ribu Shinjuku Centre at close contact with Tanaka Mitsu's vigorous rhetoric. In her personal account of her encounter with *ribu*, Yoshitake Teruko describes the flag of Gurūpu Tatakau Onna emblazoned with the Japanese character for 'resentment' or 'grudge' (怨). Yoshitake recalls that ever since

the ribu demonstration on October 21, 1970, 'wherever women went to demonstrate, that flag was always unfurled to flutter in the wind' (tr. in Loftus, 2013: 96).

Figure 13: Photograph from Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki (eds.) Shiryō nihon ūman ribu-shi 1, 1969-1972 (1992: 263)

In the excerpt above from a pamphlet circulated by Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, the image of woman's grudge spreading from woman to woman 'through the darkness of the womb' bears distinctive traces of the rhetorical style that became strongly associated with Tanaka Mitsu (who, we may recall, was one of the founding members of the group). In her book-length treatise on woman's liberation To Women With Spirit: A Disorderly Theory of Women's Liberation (Inochi no onnatachi e –Torimidashi ūman ribu ron, 1972) Tanaka 'conceived of the womb as the place that carried the

grudge […] of women's historicity and […] oppression, and this grudge bore possibilities that were both violent and creative' (Shigematsu, 2012: 26). The language Tanaka employed suggested a metonymic movement whereby the womb came to stand for the totality of woman's experience in modern society: it harboured both woman's potential to live her life as a full-fledged human being and her existential frustration at the unbearable living conditions which moulded her into a mere instrument for human reproduction. According to Tanaka's logic, maternal filicide constituted a message stained with the blood of innocent children, unfortunate victims of a wider social drama:

> The child-killing *onna* announces the rehabilitation of woman's grudge (*onnen*) that was just rotting in the empty darkness of the womb, and stamps it in the blood of her child. Her scattered life which has come to a dead-end lays bare, amidst insanity and delirium, the lie of the myth of maternal love. […] The womb, which conceals the source of a woman's life, is now awakening. (Tanaka, 2010: 62)

The addressee of this revolutionary message was not only society at large, but every single woman capable of identifying with the existential exasperation believed to prompt such outpouring of violence, and courageous enough to ask herself: 'Isn't the mother who kills her child my own very self?' (Nori, 1972: 17). Therefore, it was contended that '[t]he meaning of the silent question raised by the child-killing *onna* [spoke] to all women' (Suga, 1971: 311).[135] Some voices from within the movement

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[135] In the context of the debates around the proposed amendments to the Eugenic Protection Law, Tanaka vigorously urged to recognise the contiguity of abortion and child-killing (*kogoroshi*) along the same continuum of violence that resulted from the unbearable circumstances in which women found themselves to live. While it is not my intention to delve into the nuances of these debates, I want to take the opportunity to flag here, with Shigematsu's help, Tanaka's discourse about the distinctive relationship between abortion and filicide. According to Tanaka's logic, child-killing *onna* were those unfortunate enough to have missed the opportunity to kill an unwanted child before it was born (Shigematsu, 2012: 27). Tanaka denounced both child-killing and abortion as the infelicitous outcome of the same structural conditions and gender regime. However, she sidestepped issues of morality and argued that 'women should recognize their own inherent capacity for violence in their act of aborting

even claimed that 'in the killing of one's own chid there [was] a sort of self-affirmation' and that it was 'a different issue whether or not the mother [who committed it] [wa]s aware of this' (Mizoguchi et al., 1971: 8). A similar claim remains rather problematic and exposes the possible contradictions between *ribu*'s desire to make the tragic experience of these mothers heard and the risk of co-optation of that experience for political purposes.

Maternal filicide was deemed symptomatic of a broader state of alienation that affected late postwar Japan and which *ribu* aimed to denounce. It was argued that the experience of the filicidal mother exposed the naked reality of human existence in modern society and tore the veil of society's wishful ignorance. The fact that both the soaring phenomenon of filicide and the birth of *ribu* occurred as part of the same historical juncture was taken by Tanaka to signify the actuality of *ribu*'s struggle. The crime of mothers who killed their children was understood to partake of the movement's revolutionary intent and this interpretation led to memorable assertions by Tanaka according to which '*ribu* and the child-killing *onna* are nothing but the two extremities of a branch that share one single root' (2010: 207) and 'child-killing *onna* are the ones who have screamed out that the king is naked, and *ribu* is nothing but the collective that attempts to make this into a movement' (198-9).

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their children' *while* they strove to change society (ibid.). This point is vigorously made in the following excerpt:

> When I choose to have an abortion with my own subjectivity, in the objective situation where I 'am made' to have an abortion, I want myself to become aware that I am a murderer. The child dies in reality, and if somebody calls the woman a murderer, than, I dare to declare that a woman who had an abortion is a murderer, and while doing so, I would still choose to have an abortion. Declaring that I am a murderer and staring at a foetus cut into pieces, now, I want to argue against a society that makes women do so, giving society no way to avoid the argument. (Tanaka, 1972: 63; translated in Kato, 2009: 266)

4.2   The filicidal mother as unwilling victim of the system

In her account of child-killing as integral to the consciousness of the movement, it seems to me that Shigematsu privileges this specific understanding of maternal filicide as 'evidence of women's violent capacity to revolt against the system' (2012: 24). She also interprets the assertions by Tanaka that I have just quoted to mean that 'the abject and violent figure of the child-killing mother was the symbolic subject that prefigured the collective movement of *ribu*' (26). This is the point where I depart from her analysis as I find it problematic in its implicit foregrounding of the mother who kills as a rather uncomplicated agentic subject and in its suggestion of a linear, progressive temporality whereby *ribu* emerges as the "evolution" of maternal violence into a coherent revolutionary movement. In fact, as Shigematsu herself briefly acknowledges, child-killing never acquired a positive light in the rhetoric of the movement and *ribu* never advocated such acts of violence (23). Instead of declaring filicide a *positive* affirmation of the self, the killing of one's own child was often described as a woman's 'desperate proof of existence (*girigiri no sonzai shōmei*)' (Shisō Shūdan Esuīekkusu and Tora, 1972: 185), the deed of someone caught in a situation where she *had to* kill or she would end up being killed by the unliveable conditions forced upon her by society. Thus, contrary to the images of mothers who kill as determined revolutionary subjects that we have so far encountered, in many of *ribu*'s writings the filicidal mother is depicted as committing the crime *not* as a deliberate gesture against the system, but because she 'has been cornered' into an unbearable situation. Let us take a look at a range of passages that unambiguously foreground this dimension of external pressure:

> [W]hy is the cornered woman (*oitsumerareta onna*) – a woman driven into the extreme situation of now knowing whether she will live or be killed – blamed for gripping her child by the throat? [...] We don't blame

the "child-killing *onna.*" We can't condemn her (*iya dekinai*). It is what pushed her into that corner that our rage is directed against. (Chūpiren, 1972: 247)

Why did they have to kill their own beloved children? Who is the real culprit who plunged (*oikometa*) them into such a situation where they couldn't help but kill? (Metropolitan, 1971: 165)

[Such a claim] attempts to conceal the social problems (poverty, bad housing conditions, child-rearing as an exclusively female burden, etc.) that cornered (*oikomerareta*) her to the point of killing her own child. (Asu wa wagami, 1974: 379)

But that which corners (*oitsumeru*) a human being into a situation on the brink, even more than external, apparent and material factors is perhaps that person's psychological exhaustion as she feels the absence of a way out from the deepest darkness. (K., 1973: 363)

Accordingly, the verb that described the mother's murderous gesture was consistently changed from the active form *korosu* (to kill) to the causative-passive form *korosaserareru* (to be made to kill) in order to suggest that the killing ought to be understood as somehow perpetrated against the woman's will (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971a: 245; 1971b: 186-7; Chūpiren, 1972: 247). This was an important rhetorical move that aimed to stress that the urge to kill was fuelled by external social conditions rather than stemming from a woman's evil nature or mental impairment. This move displaced part of the responsibility for the children's death on to a society that was called to be accountable for the crimes these women perpetrated.

Furthermore, even when *ribu* activists understood maternal filicide as the expression of a mutiny against the system that occurred spontaneously in the life of an overburdened mother, they were also profoundly aware that a woman's killing of her child harboured 'nothing but an act of self-denial which turn[ed] into a dead-end'

(Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971a: 246; 1971b: 187). Therefore, the spontaneous and supposedly "revolutionary" act perpetrated by the child-killing *onna* in opposition to a male-dominated society was understood to emerge in the corrupted or 'twisted form' (Ōgawara, 1973: 381) of a terrible crime which '[tore] the woman's very existence apart' (Shisō Shūdan Esuīekkusu and Tora, 1972: 186). Even Tanaka, who described maternal filicide and *ribu* as partaking of the same energy of woman's grudge and who portrayed maternal filicide as 'the extreme act of self-expression of the oppressed' (2010: 62), felt compelled to remark that the mother who killed her child commits an 'irrevocable mistake' (193) which makes her complicit with the process of her own destruction. Whereas the killing of the child might assume the illusionary appearance of the only way out from alienating living conditions (the only chance for *onna* to assert her existence), there is no survival in that criminal act. Maternal filicide, far from bringing relief to the mother and making it possible for her to realize her human potential, plunges her in the deepest and darkest waters of social abjection.

4.3   Digressing into the abject

Theorists of abjection in the Anglo-feminist tradition may be inclined to read *ribu*'s emphasis of the "revolutionary potential and/or meaning" embodied by the filicidal mother as an attempt to positively embrace her (socially) abject status. In this respect, Imogen Tyler (2009) has observed that '[w]hat makes the 'abject paradigm' particularly compelling for feminist theorists is the promise that 'reading for the abject' [...] can challenge and/or displace the disciplinary norms that frame dominant representations of gender" (82).

In her influential work *Powers of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva (1982) elaborates on the concept of the abject as it pertains to both the psyche and the social domain. Broadly speaking, 'the abject arises in that gray, in between area of the mixed [and] the ambiguous [that] trespasses and transgresses the barriers between recognizable norms or definitions' (Braidotti, 1997:65). At the level of the psyche, abjection is the process whereby the boundaries of the ego are set and maintained by means of the (reiterated) expulsion of the infant's attachment to the maternal body and the pre-Oedipal mother. The latter represents the all-powerful phallic mother of the pre-Oedipal stage who is perceived as both life- and death-giver, object of the uttermost love and horror (because hers is the power to deny the separation that will pave the way to the child's entry into the Symbolic). In this process, what is abjected and expunged outside the subject also defines the subject and its contours, constantly threatening them from the "non-place" of that constitutive outside.

On the other hand, Kristeva also describes abjection as a process of exclusion that is at work in culture and the social. In this respect, Tyler (2009) argues that '[a]bjection is not just a psychic process but a social experience' (87) which 'generates the borders of the individual *and* the social body' (79). And further:

> Kristeva argues that the abject is a force which disrupts the social world *in order* to secure social norms, including those of gender. Any 'transgression' functions to reinstate those norms: for example, by providing opportunities for punishment and the enforcement of psychic and social laws. (84)

And yet, even jettisoned, the abject remains a threat to the social because it exposes the fragility of its boundaries (Oliver, 1993: 56). We may also recall Kristeva's

claim that '[a]ny crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject' (1982: 4). In light of this consideration, it seems to me that mothers who kill their children may be loosely considered liminal figures that linger at the border between social and psychic abjection. As the perpetrators of a crime they are made the object of a process of exclusion that is carried forward by the legal and medical institutions and which expel them (at least provisionally) from the fabric of the social. This exclusion operates at once as a guarantor of the stability of social borders and as reinstatement of the law (here also represented by the norms of gender and maternal propriety). On the other hand, as the concrete materialization of the spectre of the phallic mother who can be dispenser of death as well as life, the mother who kills her child could be said to encounter a more violent, visceral form of exclusion that has its root in the constitutive need of the subject to preserve his/her own boundaries.

Let's return now to the interpretative possibility with which I opened this section on the abject: can *ribu*'s representations of filicidal mothers as the embodiment of a revolutionary female resentment be understood as an example of the transgressive potential of the abject? Can we interpret this rhetorical move, with Demorah Caslav Covino, as the process whereby 'the abject woman becomes a subversive trope of female liberation'? (Covino, 2000) My answer to this question is negative. The murderous mother was never unproblematically made into an ideal liberatory or revolutionary agent in the language of the movement. *Ribu* was fully aware that the child-killing *onna* could not become a full-fledged political subject in the struggle for women's emancipation: her crime would have never acquired the status of a constructive political claim able to foster social change nor would it ever constitute part of a positive process of creation of a liberated self. Therefore, the revolution

"prefigured" by the mother who kills could be considered somehow ineffective: by killing her own child she lost social recognition and her state of cultural intelligibility and she became a logical impossibility, a locus of disorder and incoherence that had to be circumscribed and regulated in order to contain the threat that her action represented for the gendered organization of society.

To portray the existential complexities that a filicidal mother embodies, Tanaka borrows an image from the Japanese traditional *nō* theatre. She compares the transmuted face of the mother who kills her child to the *Hannya* mask used to represent a woman who is so consumed by grudge, jealousy and anguish that she has turned into a demon, but with some important traces of humanity left. Her pointed horns, gleaming eyes, golden fang-like teeth, combined with a look of pure resentment and hate are tempered by the expression of suffering around the eyes and the artfully disarrayed strands of hair, which indicate passionate emotion thrown into disorder. The Hannya mask is often described as dangerous and erotic, but also sorrowful and tormented, displaying the complexity of human emotions. When the actor looks straight ahead, the mask appears frightening and angry; when tilted slightly down, the face of the demon appears transfigured by a profound sorrow, as if she were crying.[136]

> The Hannya mask is the face of a woman who has broken the spell, the face of a woman who knows that the king is naked, a woman who has committed an irrevocable mistake. (Tanaka, 2010: 193)

This is the woman who has 'mistakenly' killed her own child (a woman who has been made to kill her child). She becomes the symbol of an outcry that would break the hypocritical spell cast by society's wilful ignorance. But she would also be the one

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[136] For an detailed account of the history of the Hannya mask, see Marvin (2010).

who, committing such an 'irrevocable mistake,' becomes a demon in the eyes of society, and no longer partakes of the quality of the human. Her social recognition destroyed, she is a monster, a deviant creature who has acted against her (maternal) nature. The mother who kills her child ends up being (socially) nothing, an 'exception' that society constantly wishes to discard on the base of her alleged 'abnormality.'

Figure 14: Hannya mask

5   A continuum of women

So far I have introduced the reader to *ribu*'s portrayals of mothers who kill as either potential (albeit problematic) revolutionary subjects or sacrificial victims of a system that drives them to violent extremes. Here I want to explore what I have identified as a third strand of interpretations that emphasises a sense of continuity in the experience of *all* women independent of the specific circumstances in which they find themselves acting. This imagined unity ran parallel to *ribu*'s search for new forms of relationality and nourished its claims of solidarity with filicidal mothers.

The most extensive articulation of this notion can be found in a pamphlet circulated by Gurūpu Tatakau Onna on occasion of the rally held in Tokyo in solidarity with mothers who kill their children (May 8, 1971). Given the meaningful title 'Love Letter to My Mother' (*Haha e no rabu retā*), this document takes the form of a fictional letter of a daughter to her mother. The latter is portrayed here as split between her roles of dutiful wife and mother (which evoke ideas of passivity and scarce empowerment) and what is described as a strong sense of self that urges her to strive to create her own light, rather than reflect the light of her husband. The pamphlet argues that '[t]he myth according to which a mother is always a pure, high-minded, noble person has produced [the idea of] "maternal love"' and that 'a woman who is confirmed [in her own existence] by such a value system is a woman who has accepted "a self-that-is-not-a-self" (*jibun denai jibun*)' (1971: 242-3). In a society that forces upon women this empty self what kind of fate is in wait for a woman with a strong self?

> A woman with a strong self… A woman who tries to live her own life
> fully and autonomously […] [W]hat kind of living space will she be able

> to craft [for herself] within the established order? Your exasperation…
> In the words with which you used to scold me […] or in the strength of
> that hand that hit me there was the exasperation of a person who had
> found herself moulded into "a self-that-is-not-a-self" […] exasperation
> at a self that was not living. (241)

The mother's frustration at being trapped in the selfless images of maternal abnegation and dutiful wifeliness is described as spilling over onto gestures of daily violence toward her child. Expressions of verbal aggression and physical abuse are understood here less as part of the educational practices aimed at enforcing discipline in a child and more as symptomatic manifestation of a mother's existential discomfort. It is at this point that the figure of the filicidal mother is introduced:

> Recently, when I was talking about a woman who killed her own child, I
> was startled to hear a voice from a woman who did actually have a child
> saying: 'That was a misdirected blow!' But then I reconsider that in your
> violence the feeling of starvation for your being compressed into "a self-
> that-is-not-a-self," […] [your starvation] for not being able to live,
> caused the explosion of "something" that couldn't be suppressed with
> the use of reason. And I find myself thinking that on the [ideal]
> prolongation of your line is the woman who killed her child and that, in
> my having a strong self and being similar to you, I myself have a place
> on that very line. (241)

It is here that we encounter the articulation of a *continuum of women* who appear to suffer to different degrees from the social imposition of feminine and maternal ideals and who behave in ways that are more or less compliant with the cultural norms enforced upon them. At one extreme we recognise the woman who has accepted the 'self-that-is-not-a-self' thereby developing a form of false-consciousness that induces her to wilfully embrace cultural values such as 'to be a wife and a mother is the proof of womanhood,' 'marriage is woman's happiness,' 'children are [a woman's] life purpose' (Tanaka, 1972: 62). On the other end of the spectrum we find the mother who, consumed by her existential suffering and unable to channel the

resentment stemming from a frustrating existence, lays her hands on her child. Somewhere between these two extremes we may envision a woman who harbours or is able to develop a strong self, a woman who has not yet capitulated to society's attempts to mould her into an empty subjectivity and who may or may not awaken to an activist consciousness. The depiction of women as having a relation of proximity with the experience of mothers who killed their children was a rhetorical strategy aimed at emphasizing that, far from being an exceptional occurrence and the result of pathology or a (rare) evil personality, maternal filicide was the expression of a drama that touched all women indiscriminately.

The two female figures at the far ends of this imaginary line could be envisioned as two sides of the same coin. They both surrendered (albeit in different forms) to the existential poverty that marks their lives, and they both seem unable to provide intelligible articulation to their existential pain: the former because a false consciousness has made her incapable of recognizing such pain, the latter because the very possibility of verbal articulation has been swept away by a criminal act that forcefully removed her from the realm of cultural intelligibility and into a state of abjection. The image of the continuum of women is further evoked by the following extract from a different pamphlet:

> The woman who kills her child and who, after giving birth just because it's a matter of course that a woman has a baby once she gets married, suddenly focuses her anger and dissatisfaction onto the child [...] appears and disappears (*chirachira miete iru*) on the ideal prolongation line of the rage we feel day by day, but are unable to express. (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1973: 69)

A distinction here is made between affect (the feeling of anger that is portrayed as women's common asset) and the ability to express and channel it in forms of

meaningful protest and social contestation. While women's grudge – as we have seen – was often heralded as emblematic of the energy that informed *ribu*, in order for the movement to foster social change it was key to give verbal articulation to that violent affective charge. In this respect, filicidal mothers fell short of this capacity to articulate resentment and frustration *in discourse*: even though their drama epitomized the difficult living conditions all women arguably faced, their violence was not sufficient to make them full-fledged participants of the movement. In the following passage we may observe, for example, how an emphasis on verbal articulation (conveyed by words such as 'voice,' 'appeal' and 'think') represented *ribu*'s 'constructive alternative' to the violent explosion of mothers who killed:

> [w]e believe that filicide is located at the climax of the circumstances in which all women are placed. And it is to eliminate all this that we raise our voices, make a wide appeal and have set up a "Conference to Think about Filicide" (*kogoroshi wo kangaeru kai*)' (Urawa et al., 1975: 35).

6   *Man ribu* (men's lib) and filicide

Not enough archival material has emerged to make it possible to generalize about the perspective on maternal filicide held by the men within the movement. During my research I came across with just two examples of this kind. However, because they share a specific nuance in the stance they take on mothers who kill their children, I believed it important to flag their voices at this stage of my argument however briefly. It is my sense that there is a danger in separating so neatly pamphlets written by men and women as if the gender of the author signified some intrinsic difference in the perspective s/he expressed. In this respect, I made the choice of considering in this section only those elements that did seem to suggest such a

difference in nuance, while blending their voices with those of other activists whenever I recognised meaningful similarities.

From the start the two texts under consideration present themselves as the expression of an unmistakably masculine voice within the movement. In addition to the male name of the authors, also their titles bear this information: 'Guide to the "Meeting of Men who Find it Hard to Live"' (*'Ikigurushii otoko no atsumari' annai*) (Ōgawara, 1973)[137] and 'Men do not get their hands dirty!' (*Otoko wa te wo yogosanai!*) (Yamakado, 1975).[138] They both emphasize that while cases of fathers who kill their children are equally numerous, it is usually upon the mother that society places its blaming gaze:

> In recent years cases of filicide have been numerous. The one who goes on trial is always a woman. When it comes to man, he's either ignored/left unquestioned or he might only be described in such a way as to deserve sympathy (Yamakado, 1975: 406)

Both Ōgawara and Yamakado critically address the gender division of labour within the family, emphasize that total responsibility for child-rearing is placed on woman's shoulders and that this confines her within the domestic realm denying her the chance to participate in the public sphere on a par with man. Ōgawara also denounces men's hypocrisy and opportunism as they allow 'abortions to exceed one

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[137] The title juxtaposes the characters 息 (*iki*, breath) and 生き (*iki*, to live) to render the expression *ikigurushii* (choking, that makes breathing difficult) thus suggesting that these men flounder in circumstances that make life unliveable.

[138] Ōgawara, at that time in his late twenties and a reporter for a press agency, circulated the pamphlet 'Guide to the "Meeting of Men who Find it Hard to Live"' at a *ribu* meeting. About ten other members answered his call. Yamakado's text appeared, instead, in the first issue of *Otoko no tomo* (The Man's Friend) a *minikomi* produced by Tokyo Otoko Idobata Kaigi ('The Well Conference of Tokyo Men' or 'Tokyo Men's Gossip'). The expression '*idobata kaigi*' originally indicated women's informal gatherings at the local well and had been later used to signify a gender specific understanding of (women's) gossip. *Shufu no tomo* (The Housewife's Friend), of which *Otoko no tomo* is likely to have been a "male" adaptation, had been established in 1917 and in the 1970s constituted the most popular monthly women's magazines in Japan (Sakamoto, 1999: 178; Mackie, 2003: 49).

million cases a year' while 'consider[ing] that same life as something holy when it comes out of the womb' (1973: 381).

He acknowledges that, for a long time, pregnancy and abortion have been socially controlled by men and he juxtaposes the two figures of the filicidal mother and the woman who advocates her right to reproductive control: in the same way in which the latter declares her right to give or not to give birth, the mother who kills her child is described as crying out loud 'woman's freedom to raise or not raise a child' (ibid.). Ōgawara also seems to compare to a form of mockery man's calculated ignorance of the life experiences that "force" a woman to kill her child:

> A man who laughs at the woman who kills her child (*kogoroshi no onna*): doesn't he realise that he's laughing at his own existence of which she is pregnant? It is on him, after birth, that revenge is enacted by the "*onna*" that man's society forces to have an abortion to his own convenience. (ibid.)

The reader will be familiar with the image of a vengeful child-killing *onna* that we have previously encounter in section 4. Here we may observe that by placing clear emphasis on the word *onna*, the author is openly embracing one of *ribu*'s central tenets, suggesting that the violence of filicide is symptomatic of *onna*'s desire to affirm a fully human existence. The new element that Ōgawara's text introduces is the suggestion of man's complicity in the tragic murder of the child, silent collusion that is recognised in man's tendency to minimize or ridicule woman's constraining existence. Men make fun of woman's life circumstances at their own risk, the author seems to be warning, because filicide is a threat that looms large on men's very future.

The argument developed by Yamakado is even more direct in its indictment of men's complicity. He claims that those women who are going to kill their children are the same ones 'who have no chance to associate with men in their everyday lives and who can't communicate their existential suffering (*ikiru kurushisa*) neither to the people around them nor to their families' (1975: 406) 'Man's way of living', he concludes, 'pushes woman in the corner' (ibid.). As exemplified by the following excerpt, Yamakado also calls attention to the fact that not only do men try to sidestep the issue of their own responsibility in episodes of filicide, but they often leave after the mother has been incriminated and abandon her to deal all by herself with the material and psychological consequences of her actions:

> Facing the fact that only by killing her own child (*kogoroshi to iu katachi de shika*) did woman (*onna*) made her life plainly visible, let's interrupt the circuit whereby man allows himself to live a peaceful life by leaving that woman. (ibid.)

Against a superficial approach that would reductively consider man as either an accomplice in a woman's murdering of her child or someone that we should sympathize with, Yamakado emphasizes the need to question men's way of living and man-woman relationality. He urges to reconsider filicide 'from the perspective of men's attitude toward life' which may have destructive consequences for other members in their families. In the current state of affairs where society seems blind to these issues, we should not naively assume that man's degree of responsibility in cases of filicide is limited because it is simply the case that he just hasn't got his hands dirty with the child's blood. 'Now it's the time!', his leaflet ends, 'Let's think, *as men*, about filicide!' (ibid., my italics).

7   *Ribu*'s challenge to media representations of mothers who kill

Thus far I have been navigating *ribu*'s engagement with mothers who kill their children in what I would call "monological" fashion, that is, as a discourse that was internal to the movement itself. Of course, the nature of the archival material I relied upon and which consists of leaflets, pamphlets and bills, indicates *ribu*'s unambiguous desire to circulate its perspectives outside of the women's groups that produced them, and testifies to the movement's attempts to reach out to a wider audience. Although it could be argued that a broad notion of 'society' constituted the implicit addressee of its message, no direct interlocutor emerged from the writings that I have so far introduced. This is clearly not the case for the material explored in this section where news media are made into a privileged target for *ribu*'s critical intervention.

7.1   The "good" and the "bad" mother

The movement contested the treatment these mothers received in mainstream discourse and vigorously denounced the criminal and/or pathological portrayals of filicidal mothers that media coverage was accused of producing and circulating. The urgency with which *ribu* engaged with media representations of mothers who killed their children stemmed from its profound awareness that it was through the biased portrayals published in the pages of the major newspapers that episodes of (maternal) filicide were likely to reach public consciousness: 'Recently, articles about filicide have been published almost daily in the newspapers', it is argued in one leaflet (Chūpiren, 1972: 247); '[i]t is mostly the case that we get to know about filicide in the newspapers,' says another (Sapporo Komu-unu, 1974: 24); '[d]ay after day,' acknowledges a third one, 'articles on "filicide" or "abandoned children" are constantly

published in the newspapers. And they appear in such a sheer amount that it causes the reaction "Oh! Again!"' (Sayama et al., 1973: 192). There was also a widespread awareness among *ribu* activist that, even though cases of fathers who killed their children appeared no less frequently in the news, it was mothers who used to become the target of public denunciation and to receive the brunt of the blame (Ōgawara, 1973; Sayama et al., 1973).

Although *ribu* activists admitted that it could well happen that commentators expressed sympathy for the woman who committed the crime, they also argued that this was 'the same as saying nothing about the fact that the man was to blame (*otoko ga warui*) or that the welfare system had proved inefficient' (Sayama et al., 1973: 192). They were also aware that the way news reports framed episodes of filicide made it difficult to grasp 'the personal anguish that obviously exist[ed] behind those cases' (Ōgawara, 1973: 381). *Ribu* vigorously denounced news media for making a 'vicious propaganda' (Tanaka, 1973: 31) that portrayed cases of filicide as 'extraordinary criminal events by the hands of so-called bad women' (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971a: 243). The following quote is exemplary in the movement's denunciation of media coverage for its pathologization, vilification or monsterification of filicidal mothers:

> The newspapers are always the same. Crime! Something committed by a twisted person who grew up in a damaging environment or by some mentally impaired individual, or else by a pleasure-seeker. (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971b)

Ribu claimed that a similar attitude was rooted in an attempt to conceal the social problems behind the crime – what Ayres has suggestively described as 'the mother's unspoken injuries' (2004: 58) – and to safely stress its "exceptional" nature. By considering each case in terms of an unrepeatable singularity, no space was allowed

for a structural explanation of the phenomenon. This point is clearly stated in the following excerpt:

> [t]he mass-media have a great responsibility because the role they play by emphasizing the "abnormality" of filicide is to provide satisfaction to the average woman and to make filicide something that is understood as the act of an exceptional (*tokubetsu na*) individual. In so doing they plunge women who are [already] cut off [from society] into an even deeper darkness. By blaming only the mother filicide is not going to disappear.' (Urawa et al., 1975: 35)

Observe here how media portrayals of maternal filicide are described as having the double effect of singling out the murderous mother – thus exorcising the threat that her maternal transgression represents for the social fabric – and providing a form of reassurance to those women who, confronted with such extreme, negative example of maternal monstrosity, find confirmation of their performances of maternal propriety.

Even in those cases where negative depictions of filicidal mothers were not obvious, news media were accused of making subtle comparisons between "good" and "bad" mothers, and of hiding their harsh moral indictments behind a veil of sympathy and understanding. This point is foregrounded in the following excerpt from a leaflet circulated in November 1975 by a collective of women and children called Sapporo Komu-unu.[139] The object of its critique is already clear in its title: 'We are enraged at the consensus of men and the mass-media who report the news without paying attention to the social background of filicide':

> [F]rom the beginning of September the Asahi Shinbun has serialised a sequence of articles that for eight times reported the headline "The Loss

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[139] Sapporo is the largest city on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. For an explanation of the name *komu-unu*, (chapter 3, section 7).

of Motherhood" (*bosei sōshitsu*). Because the articles were published in the home column of the newspaper, the articles right next to them conveyed the touching image of a woman who was a 'mother' and a 'wife' taking part and doing her best in some social activity. In the campaign articles (*kyanpēn kiji*) they write that even in the case of a woman who kills her child there are many aspects that should deserve our sympathy. Nonetheless, if we look at the newspaper in its entirety, she who kills her child turns out to be a demonic mother. (*oni no haha*). (Sapporo Komu-unu, 1974: 24)

The passage above testifies to the persistence of those editorial strategies already identified in chapter 2 which relied on a calculated positioning of the articles to implicitly convey unstated meanings. In this respect, the authors of the pamphlet argue that the content and the spatial organization of articles in the broader structure of the newspapers communicated and shaped 'the mood of an era in consonance with [those in] power' (ibid.). This led *ribu* to denounce the dynamic whereby society's dominant masculine values appeared to be mirrored and further reinforced by media's discursive strategies. Reporters, critics and commentators (positions mostly occupied by men) were blamed not only for their insensitivity to the social conditions that framed episodes of maternal filicide, but also for 'frowning' judgmentally at filicidal mothers *while* writing *about* them and making money out of their misfortune (Sayama, S. et al., 1973: 192). In this respect, *ribu* women felt that the biased portrayals of mothers who killed their children added insult to injury.

The sense of urgency animating *ribu*'s discursive intervention – together with its indignation vis-à-vis the dominant narratives that framed public understanding of maternal filicide – powerfully emerges from the following extract:

A woman (*onna*) who wanted to live, who wanted to live with all her soul, who wanted desperately to live, has been made to kill her child. This is the same type of filicide that only last year reached nearly 400 cases! (This is the history of woman's darkness) (*onna no yami no*

rekishi). The cruel "crime" of a hysteric or of a woman who seeks only pleasure, you say?! Don't talk nonsense! That was just a misdirected blow! That moment when you can't help feeling hatred for your own beloved child to the point of desiring to kill him… you, who behave as if you were good-nature persons! You, intellectuals! Do you understand it?! Marriage is a woman's happiness… A child is a woman's life purpose… Curses! Cursing words that are laid on women! (Gurūpu Tatakau Onna, 1971b: 186)

My translation of the first sentence of this passage, although motivated by considerations of stylistic consistency, loses much of the rhetorical impact of the original '*ikitai, ikitai, ikitai onna ga, kodomo wo korosaserarechatta*' where the expression *ikitai* (I want to live) expresses the woman's desire as if it were pronounced in the first-person (rather than in the third-person of my unhappy translation). A more literal translation would have been: 'An *onna* [who thought/felt] "I want to live! I want to live! I want to live!" has been made to kill her child.' The naked repetition of *onna*'s desire for a life that can be deemed fully human draws the reader into her subjective experience. Furthermore, the sense of 'historicity' embedded in her crime functions as an element that connects her to *all* women past and present, suggesting the enormous proportions of the suffering imposed upon women and making a transformation of society imperative.[140] The 'darkness of women's history' comes to represent both the tragedy of women's living conditions and the revolutionary potential of a resentment rooted in their corporeality and which was an asset shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by all women. The following section focuses on *ribu*'s challenge to the media coverage of a specific case of filicide and which becomes representative of the movement's desire to foreground what the murderous mother had in common with other women, rather than focus on what made her stand apart.

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[140] Once again, we may recognise in this pamphlet produced by Gurūpu Tatakau Onna a rhetorical style à la Tanaka: 'the history of woman's darkness' recalls the darkness of the womb that I have already elaborated upon and which was deemed to harbour woman's history of discrimination and frustration.

7.2 Contesting the equation 'maternal filicide=mental instability'

On April 18, 1974 an article appeared in the Tokyo edition of the *Asahi shinbun* about a case of maternal filicide which had occurred in the city of Iwatsuki.[141] It was introduced under the headline: 'She throws the infant in the incinerator: the husband had told her off that he was noisy.' The following day, in the same newspaper, coverage of the case appeared again in a brief article under the title 'Mother affected by postpartum psychosis.' This time it was reported that there were a growing suspicions that the mother might have killed her child in a sudden impulse after her mental condition deteriorated due to the difficult delivery. A psychiatric test, the article informed, was going to be performed. However, *ribu* pamphlets called attention to the fact that an article of a very different tone had been published in the Urawa edition of the *Asahi shinbun*[142] under the headline: 'The tragedy of a mother affected by schizophrenia.' This article (which was said to occupy an entire half a page) was harshly attacked by *ribu* for its alleged attempt to substitute an issue of mental disorder for the dramatic background to the case.

Ribu's writings reported that the culprit was a mother in a family of four living in a six-tatami (9, 18 sq. meters), one-room flat in a terraced house and that the husband worked as a night truck driver. The victim was a baby only few months old who had been a breech delivery. The first two months had been difficult: the baby's constant crying, the husband's angry outburst as he tried to sleep during the day in order to work at night, and the mother's physical exhaustion (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1973; Niimi, 1974; Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1974; Asu wa wagami, 1974; Urawa et al.,

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[141] Iwatsuki was a city located in the Saitama prefecture until it merged in 2005 into the city of Saitama.
[142] As for Iwatsuki, Urawa was a city in Saitama prefecture. It merged into the city of Saitama in 2001.

1975). However, the article in the *Asahi shinbun* built its case on the fact that the woman had not only been hospitalized once on the ground of mental problems during her school-age years, but also had been hospitalised again more recently. The article even used appalling expressions like 'people affected by mental disorder on the loose' (*nobanashi no shōgaisha*).

A similar attitude on the part of the news media was severely criticized by *ribu* activists who accused the newspaper to promote a conflation of the filicidal mother with a person affected by mental disorder, and to support the view that individuals who were mentally disturbed ought to be isolated on the basis that they could constituted a danger for other members of society (Asu wa wagami, 1974). The critique *ribu* made against the *Asahi shinbun* followed three main lines of argument. To begin with, it mobilised an attack against the discriminatory attitude that this alleged campaign was deemed to support and which was said to negatively affect disabled people (be their disability physical or mental). Second, it denounced the newspaper for patently discarding as insignificant the circumstances in which the mother had found herself living. Finally, it argued that by reducing the mother who had committed the crime to an "abnormal" (*ijō na*) or unusual woman, it set her apart from the average woman who did, indeed, face analogous circumstances (Urawa et al., 1975). The following excerpt is emblematic of the movement's critique:

> The *Asahi*'s call to deal by any means possible with "mentally unstable people on the loose" promotes and magnifies a consciousness of discrimination and prejudice toward those people; [consciousness] according to which "a person affected by mental disorder is a dangerous presence that doesn't know what s/he does." In so doing, it attempts to conceal the social problems (poverty, bad housing conditions, child-rearing as an exclusively female burden, etc.) that cornered the woman to the point of killing her child. (Asu wa wagami, 1974: 379)

The *Asahi* argues that, because the woman's abnormal mental condition had been identified early in her life, relatives or welfare service should have put the child into custody in an institution. It also lamented that in the case of a mother who is affected by mental disorder it was not possible, under the current legislation, to separate the child from her following a medical assessment. [143] *Ribu* contended that similar assertions had the effect of promoting discrimination towards people with mental impairment and to encourage the idea that such individuals should be quarantined because of the potential danger they constituted. A direct connection was drawn between the attitude of the *Asahi* and the 'logic of productivity' that the movement deemed endemic in modern society: mentally disturbed people were seen as inconvenient or useless in the eyes of the state and the corporations, and they should be isolated in psychiatric wards to avoid undesirable disruption to the smooth working of society.

Let's note, at this point, that *ribu* never claimed that this mother was not mentally unstable when the crime had been committed or that she had not been suffering from some mental condition all along. What they emphasized was that *this* was not the issue. Even when they admitted the possibility that she might have suffered from an abnormal psychic condition, her criminal action was described as something that was just to be expected once her life circumstances were taken into consideration. Some of the leaflets that covered the case made exactly this point when they stated in their titles: 'The woman who kills her child is you…' (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā,

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[143] The cursory outline I provide here of the attitude of the Asahi in relation to this case of filicide does not emerge from an analysis of the original newspaper articles in the Urawa edition, but it's a reconstruction based upon the accounts embedded in *ribu*'s archival documentation.

1973) and 'We might be next!' (Asu wa wagami, 1974). Further textual evidence can be found in numerous passages, some of which are reported below:

> She might indeed have developed a neurosis. […] But nonetheless, it's crystal clear that she was plunged into a neurosis as a result of having reached the limits of an accumulation of dissatisfaction, lack of freedom, and rage that couldn't find expression. (Asu wa wagami, 1974: 379)

> Irrespective of whether or not she had a history of hospitalization, we can't possibly forgive the article of the *Asahi shinbun* which linked with mental disorder a case of filicide that occurred in [such] living circumstances where all of us, unsurprisingly, would have developed a neurosis[.] (ibid.)

> We don't have forgiveness for the *Asahi shinbun* […] which takes an episode of filicide which occurred in normal living circumstances where a woman developed a neurosis independently from having or not a history of hospitalization as an example to attempt to connect filicide and mental impairment in the same equation! (Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1973: 69)

From *ribu*'s engagement with media portrayals of mothers who kill it emerges that, in order to create an alternative discursive space where a maternal potential for violence could acquire cultural intelligibility, it was necessary to counter those discourses that constructed murderous mothers as exceptional individuals whose abnormal mental state or wicked personality placed them outside the realm of the human. The Iwatsuki case considered in this section highlights the extent to which *ribu* engaged media coverage of filicidal mothers by means of a close reading of newspaper articles and by taking news media to task for their rhetorical strategies. In the conclusions to chapter 2 I briefly elaborated on what seemed to be the (at least sporadic) seeping of *ribu*'s rhetoric in media discourse. Here I want instead to call attention to the fact that a measure of *ribu*'s power to exert pressure upon and affect dominant discourses on maternal filicide may be recognised in the fact that, as a result

of the movement's mobilization, the *Asahi shinbun* eventually published what *ribu* described as a 'statement of regret' (*hanseibun*) or 'self-criticism' (*jiko hihan*). In that context the *Asahi* acknowledged the discrimination and bias that had informed previous coverage of the case and called attention to its social background (Urawa et al., 1975: 35; Ribu Shinjuku Sentā, 1974: 139). Irrespective of whether or not such an episode brought about a long-lasting change in the way mothers who killed came to be perceived in society, this episode was without doubt a major victory that testified to the power of *ribu* activists to alter the landscape in which discursive representations of maternal filicide were articulated.

8   Doubts: the silent voice of mothers who kill their children

Ribu's sustained engagement with maternal filicide notwithstanding, and despite its desire to connect with mothers who killed their children, we may be struck by the realization that the first-person perspective of these criminalised mothers hardly emerges from *ribu*'s written page. Apart from a single, major example, the voice of these mothers strikes us as somewhat inaudible.[144] In fact, a recurrent expression that described the silent (silenced?) voice of filicidal mothers was '*koe ni naranai koe*' ('a voice that does not produce a sound,' 'an inaudible voice' or 'a voiceless voice').

The Association of Voiceless Voices (*Koe naki koe no kai*) was a group that emerged in the context of the AMPO struggle in 1960: it was 'an organization formed to allow people who did not belong to any other organization to participate in the

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[144] The exception is represented by the transcripts of a trial against a mother who killed her three-year old daughter and which the Ribu Shinjuku Centre published as a booklet in June 1973 (Sayama et al., 1973). It seems reasonable to argue, however, that the legal setting that framed the trial is likely to have imposed numerous restrictions to the defendant's liberty of expression, and we may feel legitimated to wonder whether it is unambiguously her voice what we hear as we read through the records of the trial.

marches and demonstrations' (Yoshitake, quoted in Loftus, 2013: 91; see also Sasaki-Uemura, 2001: 148-194). The fact that the expression used by *ribu* to describe the voices of filicidal mothers recalled the Association of Voiceless Voices may be taken as symptomatic of *ribu*'s local genealogies of political contestation. It may also suggest, in line with the portrayals we encountered in section 4.1, a highly specific understanding of maternal filicide whereby mothers who killed their children, albeit not members of *ribu*, were seen as joining the struggle for social transformation. On the other hand, 'voiceless voices' could also be read as a subtle reference to the difficulty of bringing the experience of these mothers into the realm of cultural intelligibility, of creating a space where their voices could be finally uttered and eventually heard. In this respect, their soundless voice would testify to the silent, individual drama that these women experienced and which seems to haunt *ribu*'s rhetoric as the spectre of its own possibility.

If the voice of filicidal mothers is actually absent from the discourses that *ribu* produced and circulated, how should we relate to this absence? Should we look for reassurance in the belief that the movement intended to speak *on behalf* of mothers who killed their children or that its main goal was to give clear and loud expression to these mothers' silent plight? The following excerpt underlines the difficulties we encounter when we attempt to map out the complex relationship of *ribu* with filicidal mothers. The passage is an excerpt from a letter to one of these mothers that a member of *ribu* named Take[145] wrote after attending the court hearing:

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[145] Take (Takeda Miyuki) was a member of the collective Tokyo Komu-unu. The fact that she assisted to the hearing and then wrote this letter is another demonstration of *ribu*'s ambivalent stance toward motherhood, which made it possible even for those women striving to conceive new forms of relationality between women and children to harbour a desire to connect with mothers who killed.

What did you think of my coming to the hearing with my child? From the start comments such as 'a child can't be at this trial!' [...] had made coming to the trial with a baby a taboo. Or didn't you notice me at all? Were you irritated and maybe thinking 'Better you keep it quiet!'? Or were you hostile and thinking: 'All of you! You can't possibly understand! What have you come here for?! What have you come to look at?!' [...] I was just all nerves with the judge throwing warning looks (*chūi*) at me and people from the public [showing] disapproval (*hinan*). And I was holding my breath at the echoes of my child's voice [in the room]. What were you thinking [that day] in the tribunal with the voice of a child reverberating [...] through the courtroom?

The passage offers a visual contrast between the mother standing trial, now childless as a consequence of the killing of her own child, and the young mother with child who silently (and retrospectively) addresses her from the public. The author displays a profound awareness of the potential incommunicability of experience between herself and this other mother. In Take's account the thoughts in the minds of the judge and members of the audience seem almost easy to grasp when contrasted with the silent opacity of the woman standing trial. The word *chūi* used to describe the judge's behaviour means both 'to pay attention/to focus' and 'to give a warning,' thus evoking the idea of a policing gaze that seems to multiply in the eyes of the other people in the room. In stark contrast to this hostile visual interaction, the filicidal mother emerges as an impenetrable and mute(d) space whose contours are drawn only by the writer's insistent questions; questions that, in the end, will not be answered.

The fact that the voice of the criminalised mother is inaudible while the perspectives of the judge and the audience seem to offer themselves to a relatively easy verbal articulation may allegorize the power of dominant discourse to dictate what counts as maternal propriety and to shape the norms against which women-as-

mothers are judged within society. According to this allegorical rendering this normative viewpoint operates simultaneously on two levels: on the one hand, it appears to have already silenced the perspective of the filicidal mother who is being judged because of her crime *and* her transgression *vis-à-vis* the maternal role; on the other, it simultaneously exerts social pressure on the other mother in the audience who is openly violating maternal propriety by bringing her child into the courtroom. Whereas we cannot enter the psychic space of the mother standing trial, the mother in the audience openly expresses her sense of discomfort as she faces society's open disapproval. Yet, instead of taking the passage as the objective portrayal of the reality of social pressure, we may even consider that, because society's chastising looks are introduced in the text through the author's subjective perceptions, the policing gaze might well be a projection of the author's own internalized self-discipline rather than being in a relation of exteriority to her. If this were the case, Take would have become, in Foucauldian fashion, her own disciplinarian as the result of her taking upon herself of the cultural norms of maternal propriety.

Arguably, the passage could be said to foreground the social conditions that deny filicidal mothers a full-fledged subjectivity or a speaking position. It gestures towards the recognition of the *inevitable distance* that separates *ribu* and mothers who kill and the difficulty of establishing a real dialogue. While the archival material does not bear significant traces of this exchange (which seems to have occurred nonetheless), we need to be alive to the fact that *ribu* did not arbitrarily claim to speak on behalf of these mothers'. Nor did it simply fill the mute space these women occupied with its rich rhetoric, thus superimposing its interpretation onto their silent experience. As a matter of fact, Take's letter is a clear example of the movement's

openness to an encounter with these mothers, however difficult that might have been. Whether or not *ribu* succeeded in this intent is likely to remain an open contention.

9   Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to explore *ribu*'s engagement with the "phenomenon" of maternal filicide and to map its tentative articulation of an alternative discourse that could oppose dominant perceptions of mothers who killed their children. Such counter-discourse challenged at multiple levels common understandings of the actions of these mothers as both isolated occurrences and the occasional deeds of inhuman, cruel or sick women. *Vis-à-vis* the tendency in society to offer interpretations of motherhood and maternal filicide that made use of 'disempowering language' (Ayres, 2004: 57), *ribu* created a new discursive space characterised by a highly political use of language which aimed to articulate in culturally intelligible forms the possibility of a maternal potential for violence.

In consonance with the movement's heterogeneous and fragmented nature this process was neither linear nor organic, and it was not necessarily uniform over time. It remains difficult to evaluate the extent to which the Ribu Shinjuku Centre played a pivotal role in shaping the direction of these discursive interventions because the very nature of the archival documentation this chapter relied upon might have inadvertently foregrounded its perspectives to the detriment of the activities of other centres and groups. As outlined on chapter 1, the three volumes edited by the Ribu Shinjuku Sentā Shiryō Hozon Kai (Association for the Documentary Conservation of the Ribu Shinjuku Centre, 2008) contained only materials produced and/or preserved at

the Ribu Shinjuku Centre during the years of its activities. During my research I made a strategic attempt to complement the partiality of this first archive with the more wide-ranging volumes edited by Mizoguchi, Saeki and Miki (1992-1995). Nonetheless, the fact remains that the amount of pamphlets and leaflets on filicide contained in this second archival collection is proportionally small when compared to those preserved at the Centre. Despite these concerns, the analysis of the material at my disposal has given rise to an internally diverse, heterogeneous discursive landscape where multiple perspectives on mothers who kill intersected each other in multiple configurations.

The *minikomi* (mini-communication) network *ribu* developed was pivotal in the creation of an alternative discursive space where new perspectives on mothers who kill could be circulated. It seems pertinent here to recall Sasaki-Uemura's description of the role that *minikomi* played in the context of grass-roots activism: 'Internally they fostered dialogue and group participation, but they were also used for public purposes, disseminating information not carried in the mass media and reaching out to groups and individuals facing similar struggles to create loose networks of solidarity' (2001: 143). Furthermore, despite the expectation that both teach-ins and other collective gatherings organized to discuss maternal filicide be characterised by relentless discussions among activists, the material on which this chapter is based does not suggest that there were major contentions as to the "true" interpretation of the phenomenon. There are also no instances where archival documents refer back to each other in critical fashion. This seems to imply that *ribu* activists were motivated more by a shared desire to prompt social and discursive change, rather than to debate with each other over what constituted the correct interpretation of maternal filicide. Above all, whereas *ribu* remained ambivalent about filicide, its numerous interventions

never became a celebration of murder, death or despair, but they were traversed by what we may call a celebration of life, that life that the movement relentlessly reclaimed for all those women (*onna*) who screamed out loud: 'I want to live! I want to live! I want to live!'

CHAPTER 5

MATERNAL FILICIDE AND MATERNAL ANIMOSITY IN TAKAHASHI TAKAKO'S EARLY FICTION

In chapter 2 I have analysed the problematic representations of mothers who kill their children in Japanese news media, while in chapters 3 and 4 I have outlined *ribu*'s political project of social transformation and delved into the counter-discourse it elaborated around the figure of the 'child-killing *onna.*' In the present chapter I take into consideration Japanese women's literature and investigate what possible configurations of maternal violence the literary medium might have allowed women writers to portray in early 1970s Japan. Specifically, this chapter takes Japanese writer and essayist Takahashi Takako (1932 - 2013) as a case study and explores fictional representations of maternal filicide and maternal aggression in her early works. The stories included in my analysis were all published in the first half of the 1970s. As already flagged in chapter 1, such a selection is not meant to identify this period as an independent phase in the author's creative development, but it primarily responds to a desire to maintain a sense of homogeneity with the temporal framework that informs this research. Nonetheless, these were the years when literary depictions of maternal animosity appeared in Takahashi's writing with suggestive persistence.

There is no indication that by the time these stories were made accessible to a wider audience Takahashi had been influenced by the increasing political, social or media concerns around filicidal mothers. Some of these stories were originally written before *ribu* developed a specific rhetoric around mothers who kill and this mitigates against speaking in terms of the movement's direct influence upon Takahashi's

creative process. Additionally, cases of filicide had already been reported by the media in the late 1960s and they were clearly not an unheard-of occurrence (Tama, 2008). And yet, it is still striking that, even though there's no evidence to suggest Takahashi's conscious or programmatic attempt to intervene in the on-going discursive construction of maternal filicide in late postwar Japan, *all* stories in her 1971 collection display a mesmerizing variety of representations of maternal animosity.

1   Takahashi Takako and the boom in women's writing in late postwar Japan

Born in 1932 in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, Takahashi Takako (née Okamoto) was among the first few young women to enrol in 1950 at the prestigious Kyoto University where she majored in French in 1954. Few years after getting married to fellow student and future renowned writer Takahashi Kazumi (1931 - 1971), she returned in 1956 to Kyoto University and in 1958 she pursued a Master's degree in French literature. Several of Takahashi's essays document with clarity the sense of marvel, discomfort and psychological strain that accompanied the early moments of her adaptation to the new co-ed system, and they vividly describe the harsh reality of having to confront male students whose previous curricula had better prepared for the intellectual challenges of life at such a distinguished institution.[146]

In the years following the publication of her first two collections of short stories (1971-2) she was awarded some of the most prestigious literary prizes such as the Tamura Toshiko Prize in 1973 for *To the End of the Sky* (*Sora no hate made*), the Izumi

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[146] Takahashi's experience at Kyoto University is addressed in essays such as "The Only One Among Men" (*Otoko no naka no tada hitori*, 1975), "Fateful Departure" (*Unmei no wakareme*, 1975), "Co-education" (*Danjo kyōgaku*, 1977b), and "Takahashi Kazumi and My Literary Career" (*Takahashi Kazumi to sakka to shite no watashi*, 1977a).

Kyōka Prize in 1976 for *The Temptress* (*Yūwakusha*), the Women's Literature Prize in 1977 for *Lonely Woman* (*Ronrī ūman*), the Kawabata Yasunari Prize in 1985 for the short story "To Yearn" ("Kou", 1984), the Yomiuri Prize in 1986 for *Child of Wrath* (*Ikari no ko*, 1985) and the Mainichi Art Prize in 2004 for *A Beautiful Person* (*Kirei na hito*, 2003). Takahashi's literary style and choice of themes are informed by a sensitivity for decadent-aesthetic motifs that she nourished through her study of French literature, her profound interest in surrealism and her predilection for fantastic and visionary literary modes. In her essays she makes numerous references to artists such as Marc Chagall, Giorgio De Chirico, Edvard Munch and Caspar David Friedrich and to authors as varied as Charles Baudelaire, E.T.A. Hoffman, Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe. Early in her career she also manifested a profound interest in the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious and her essays frequently indulge in lay explorations of Jungian psychoanalysis, emphasizing the importance of dreams as preferential access routes to repressed desires and to a divided self.

The stories analysed in this chapter clearly participated in the literary climate of the period and echoed the broader changes in terms of style and content that characterised the emergence of the new generation of women writers in postwar Japan. However, my choice of focusing on a single writer should not be understood as suggesting Takahashi as representative of such revival of women's writing. In fact, mine has been, rather, a strategic choice that allowed for the close reading of both her fictional and non-fictional works and which made us alive to the extent to which they resonate with other discourses on maternal filicide that were circulating at the same time in Japan.

What follows of this chapter is divided into two main sections: Section 2 is devoted to the analysis of two short stories where portrayals of maternal ambivalence are associated with the death of a very young child. I read these stories as staging in literary form the difficulties encountered by the attempt to bring into discourse the negative side of maternal ambivalence and a maternal potential for violence. In Section 3 I focus on the four remaining stories and investigate their depiction of maternal animosity in light of Takahashi's reflections on femininity and motherhood.

2   At the margins of discourse: the dark side of maternal ambivalence

In this section I offer a close reading of portions of "Summer Abyss" ("Natsu no fuchi") and of the story "Incarnation" ("Keshin"). I have selected these stories in order to engage with a specific set of questions that, implicitly or explicitly, cut across the present research in its entirety: what is at stake in the creation of a discursive space where maternal ambivalence can eventually find adequate articulation? What obstacles may confront one's attempt to put into words a maternal potential for violence? What possible threats or defences may emerge *within* a subject as she embarks on such a process of verbalization? It is my contention that both narratives analysed here offer a fictional dramatization of such concerns and highlight their fundamental importance.

2.1   "Summer Abyss"

"Summer Abyss" opens with the first-person narrator (who identifies herself simply as *Watashi* [I]) paying visit to the Kido family after the sudden death of their only child Akiyuki. The two-year-old boy fell from a cliff while he was out for a walk

with his mother Reiko. At the time when *Watashi* and the now twenty-seven-year-old

Reiko were attending the same university, they were close friends, but during the last

few years *Watashi* has not kept in touch with her. Last time they met was, in fact, on

occasion of Akiyuki's birth. *Watashi* hesitates in front of the gates to the mansion: she

does not want to meet Reiko. She wouldn't even be there – she admits to herself –

were it not for the news of the child's death that she read in the newspaper few days

before. The reasons for her reluctance will be made clear in the course of a long

flashback that occupies a great portion of the story and to which I will briefly return.

Here, however, it is this more recent encounter between the two female characters

that constitutes the focus of my considerations.

Reiko's old maid takes the narrator through the silent house to the Japanese-

style room where the altar for the deceased has been set up. *Watashi* was expecting to

find a broken family crushed under the weight of their loss, but the room is dark and

empty. The father is completely absent from the narration.[147] The narrator's attention

lingers on the altar and on what looks like a recently taken picture of Akiyuki:

> It's fair to say that, when I came to pay visit on occasion of the birth [of
> Akiyuki], I almost didn't see the baby and I knew as good as nothing
> about Reiko's child. But that rather blurred photograph stirred in me a
> strange feeling. Pictures of the dead are imbued with the sorrow for the
> departed ones and they are chosen to convey most vividly an image of
> them when they were still alive. But the picture in front of my eyes
> looked as if it were the one most out of focus deliberately picked up
> from among all those in one's possession, and which had been [further]

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[147] This is an element that "Summer Abyss" has in common with many of the stories considered in this
chapter and which seems to suggest a condition of isolation characterizing the experience of numerous
female characters within the institution of the family. As a matter of fact, even on those occasions when
a husband is indeed present, the protagonist's deep sense of alienation and radical incommunicability
constitutes a leitmotif throughout the narrative.

enlarged in order to make it even more blurred. In other words, it felt
like it wasn't imbued with Reiko's grief. (Takahashi, 1973a: 98-9)[148]

Placed at the beginning of the narrative this passage gestures from the start toward a certain questioning of socially upheld expectations about maternal love and a mother's grief over the loss of her own child. Instead of communicating the mother's painful need to remember Akiyuki, the photograph exudes an unsettling carelessness and seems to convey the desire to make the memories of the child irrecoverable by rendering his image unrecognizable.

Watashi finds Reiko sitting on a bench in the garden, almost looking as if she were bathing in the burning sunlight of that summer afternoon. She approaches her unsure of how best to address her. With her straight back shining bright in the scorching sun Reiko gives 'an impression rather different from that of a woman walled up in the pain of having just lost a child' (99). Reiko informs the narrator that she's been waiting for her: 'You're the only one who can understand', she adds, 'I want you to hear everything' (ibid.). For the last three days, she explains, she has been sitting in the garden thinking. *Watashi* is still hesitant to ask *what* Reiko has been thinking about, because she has perceived something brazen in the way Reiko has spoken: once helpless and somewhat childish, her voice seems now momentarily tinged with a certain aggressive impudence. For a while, the silence between the two is filled by the sounds of summer. The stage is now set for Reiko's recollection of the tragic events that led to the death of Akiyuki. Hers is also a confession or, at least, it is as a confession (*kokuhaku*) that *Watashi* will understand it.

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[148] "Summer Abyss" first appeared in November 1973 in the pages of the literary journal Bungakukai and was reprinted in February 1974 as part of the collection *The Lost Picture* (*Ushinawareta e*). Page numbers refer to the story's original appearance. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

The story has so far provided sufficient clues as to create in the reader the expectation that Reiko might be somehow involved in the child's death: what we expect her to articulate is a degree of maternal ambivalence. Finally, the passage ends on a silent note that magnifies the distance between Reiko's attempt at verbalization and the world of social norms here temporarily embodied by *Watashi*. Their silence could also be read as symptomatic of a resistance against the articulation of maternal ambivalence that both characters seem to share, albeit for different reasons. To fully appreciate the complexity and psychological nuances of Takahashi's narrative style, Reiko's recollection needs to be quoted at length:

> She looked different. Sure, there had been the death of her child. But it wasn't only that. There was something ambiguous about her, something that had never existed in her before.
> "Don't doubt!" said Reiko looking straight at me with a sudden intuition.
> "What on earth should I doubt?" I looked her in the eyes.
> "You know, I was standing with my back to the cliff. While I was standing like that, Akiyuki fell from the cliff." She spoke fast, as if she were a little out of breath.
> "I can't understand if you don't recount things in a more logical order."
> "I didn't realise anything. It happened while I was admiring the setting sun, giving my back to the cliff" repeated Reiko, with no attempt whatsoever to sound [more] coherent. And, as if she'd finished saying something she absolutely must say, she softened her look, which had been cast straight at me, and looked up instead in a different direction, her eyes now vacuous.
> "What cliff?" I asked, while going in my head over the words she had repeated twice. She had placed an unusual emphasis on the fact that she had her back to the cliff. (100)

It is important to observe that the narrator is deeply implicated in the structure of the above passage (and of the overall narrative): it is, indeed, *Watashi* that constitutes the reader's privileged entry point into the story, and it is *her* perception of Reiko and, later, *her* recollection of a time passed that enable us to start making sense of the events in "Summer Abyss." In the passage above it is through the narrator's

observations that we know about the radical change that occurred in Reiko's inner world and which *Watashi* cannot merely attribute to the trauma she has obviously suffered. Whereas a measure of this change is suggested by the brazen quality of Reiko's voice, it is the narrator who recognises that tone as 'audacious' or 'impudent' (*futebuteshii*). Yet, Reiko's countenance in the passage can be hardly described as shameless or bold. Quite to the contrary, she is the one on the defensive in the first place, stressing repeatedly that she was unaware of the drama that was unfolding behind her.

Reiko's 'impudence' appears wrapped up in a fundamental ambiguity: on the one hand, the story has prompted us to question her attachment to her child and to suspect her possible involvement in his death. In this respect, Reiko might have been perfectly aware of her (filicidal?) desires and her 'impudence' would be the manifestation of a defiant stance à la Medea. On the other hand, her insistent claims of innocence contradict the idea of a conscious rebellion against social norms. Reiko's sudden plea 'Don't doubt!' might stand here for 'Don't doubt about me as a mother!', 'Don't doubt my love for my child!' or even 'Don't raise suspicions about my involvement in his death!' The fact that the act of doubting has no direct object has the effect of leaving open all these interpretative possibilities, but it also suggests a reticence, a holding back from bringing maternal ambivalence into the discursive field. 'Don't doubt!' also stands for Reiko's accurate assumption that she has already been judged, and the fact that it is *Watashi* who recognizes an impudent tone in her voice seems to support this reading.

Considered from a different angle, the brazen quality sensed in Reiko's voice could also be symptomatic of something in Reiko's demeanour that society perceives as a threat to the integrity of the maternal ideal. Reiko, on the other hand, seems utterly unaware that she may represent such a threat: in fact, her passionate claims of innocence might even suggest that she has taken upon herself those very social prescriptions of what a mother should be, and that she might be herself troubled by an unexpected crack in the myth of maternal love. It may be argued here that Reiko's voice occasionally emerges from within a narrative structure set and directed by the narrator, much like maternal ambivalence could be said to surface from the interstices of discourse.

Reiko continues her recollection, while *Watashi* listens with growing discomfort:

> "You know, I got startled when Akiyuki screamed. I was standing facing west. It seems that Akiyuki was playing on the verge of the cliff."
> "In such a dangerous place?"
> "Dangerous? Still, the soil is dry and looks like a sandpit. It's a suitable playground for a child."
> [...]
> "You see, the grass had grown a little."
> [...]
> "It was like that... Akiyuki had almost fallen from the cliff, but he was clinging at the grass with both hands."
> "Eh? Did you see that?"
> "I saw Akiyuki. Only the face was sticking out from the cliff. He was crying and screaming, and the face was all red and congested.
> Reiko said those last words as if she were dropping pebbles on a wooden floor with a hard sound and she suddenly fell silent as though she had precipitated into herself. I was being lured too into the depths of her silence.
> "Why did you fall silent all of a sudden?" Reiko asked, raising her head stiffly.
> "It's you who has gone silent!!" I said, confused.
> "It was really just a moment."
> "I see... It's strange though."

"It was an accident! Accidents happen like that all the time!"
As I felt Reiko's voice getting a bit shrill and nervous, I got up from the bench.
"I was lost in the sunset. The evening sun was sinking red, gushing thick blood."
Reiko's voice reached me there where I stood, like hot vapour.
"Reiko…"
I resolved to speak, despite some hesitation.
"When you were looking at the evening sun, wasn't it after everything was over?"
I had hardly said it that a sickening feeling as if I needed to throw up welled up inside me. I made to leave without even asking. I couldn't stay near Reiko any longer.
"Where are you going? Are you leaving already?"
Reiko stood up and followed me.
"Your story, I have perfectly understood it!" I said while continuing in my steps. (101-2)

One of the most striking features of this passage is the disquieting contrast between Reiko's recollection of the last dramatic moments of her child's life and her aesthetic lingering on the beauty of the sunset. No tears are shed and she does not appear to be struggling emotionally with those painful memories (certainly not in the way we might expect a mother to do). As she recalls Akiyuki's crying and screaming in his desperate attempt not to fall, Reiko falls silent, 'precipitating' into herself and projecting that same silence on to the narrator in what seems to be a form of psychic defence. This represents the climax of Reiko's confession where we are confronted with her elliptical admission of some sort of involvement in Akiyuki's tragedy, be it only in the form of a purposeful lack of action. But this could also be the moment when Reiko moves dangerously close to an awareness of dark emotions lurking in her unconscious. It is particularly telling that this same moment is marked by a *loss of speech* (Reiko's silence) and by a fundamental *negation*: her forceful assertions that 'It was an accident!' and that 'Accidents happen like that all the time!'

It seems to me that Reiko's confession is traversed by a profound sense of fragmentation and linguistic insufficiency. Her recollection is interrupted by pauses, silences, brief or broken sentences that instead of communicating a coherent, linear message seem to cram around the invisible, dark volume of something unsayable. Reiko's falling into silence suggests the difficulty, if not impossibility, of translating this 'something' into words from within a social and cultural context that vigorously opposes its very articulation. Emotions and behaviours which may threaten to shatter society's maternal ideal are rendered unintelligible, confined to a place of abjection from where they can be retrieved only at great personal risk. This is not merely the risk of being stripped of one's own maternal identity in the eyes of society, but also that of experiencing an even greater loss in terms of the psychic investment a woman might have developed in that very identity. We may argue, then, that Reiko's withdrawal into herself is a defence against this unbearable threat: tellingly, her psychic retreat is accompanied by the sudden inability to proceed in the articulation of meaning and by a "looking away" as she searches for the source of that silence *outside of herself*, in the narrator. Her gesture of denial is, however, never complete because her recollection has been pre-emptively framed as a confession, and because both *Watashi* and the reader inevitably find the crescendo of emotional tension in her voice suspicious vis-à-vis her claims of innocence. The beauty of the sunset opens and closes Reiko's memories, the chromatic dominance of shades of red colouring the unfolding of the scene. But in the end, her description of the setting sun 'gushing blood' seems to confirm our suspicions and suggests a degree of awareness in Reiko.

My last set of reflections in relation to the opening scene of "Summer Abyss" concerns *Watashi*'s reactions, because it is *Watashi* who moves the closest to a verbal

articulation of maternal ambivalence, despite the fact that her questions are still formulated in oblique terms. This indirect questioning has nonetheless the power to produce in the narrator a series of violent, material effects, causing a fit of nausea and urging her to move away from Reiko. The physical compulsion to put a safe distance between them is accompanied by a bodily urge to throw up, that is, to refuse and expel an understanding she might have achieved almost despite herself. Her reactions can be read as the reactions of a cultural order expressing utter rejection of a woman who contravened social expectations of maternal propriety and who seems to have turned, at least momentarily, into a being devoid of humanity.

In the end, *Watashi* leaves the house and it is only as she traverses a space that is at a safe distance from Reiko's presence that she is able to express what has so far only faintly surfaced at the threshold of verbal articulation:

> […] my mind was pursuing restlessly what happened inside Reiko. I never thought that she had pushed the child off the cliff with her own hands. Yet, she might have been in a position from where she could have saved him and maybe, while the child was [still] clinging at the grass with his hands, she had [even] made to intervene, the sandy soil of the crumbled hillside hampering her movements, but then she had probably stood where she was. Only [his] face was still left above the cliff, strangely grotesque so flushed and congested, and perhaps, for the several tens of seconds during which that face had gazed persistently at Reiko, she had too stared fixedly at it. Perhaps, while she was holding her breath, her body held stiff, she had watched as an accidental opportunity erased the child's existence. I wandered what the child might have seen. Maybe it was the rapt look, almost serious, of his mother who was just staring without even trying to reach out to him. I wondered if that was what the child had seen with his own eyes, his last sight of this world as he had fallen screaming through the inflamed air made red by the setting sun.
> Maybe it had happened like this. Maybe it hadn't. Why, then, was I picturing it like that? And yet, if it had been like that, what would that mean?" (103)

A direct articulation of maternal ambivalence becomes possible only when the narrator is no longer dangerously close to the source of that ambivalence, and only after her resolution never again to return. If Reiko's presence evokes the material possibility, the reality so to speak, of a maternal potential for violence, it is only when *Watashi* moves away from it that she becomes able to bring her own doubts unambiguously into discourse. Quite ironically, however, this retreat into a safe distance also signifies a withdrawal from the reality of ambivalence into a realm of speculation. The narrator's monologue is interspersed with words that belong to the semantic field of conjecture: 'my mind' (*watashi no atama*), 'I never thought (*kesshite…omowanai*), 'might/perhaps' (*kamoshirenai*), 'maybe/I wonder' (*darō ka*). Furthermore, her conclusions seem to deny the possibility of maternal ambivalence as they consider it: 'Maybe it had happened like this. Maybe it hadn't.' Even when such possibility is reinstated ('And yet…') the narrator still gropes for words to understand. The final outcome is that, in my view, the question closing the passage may still be complicit in an attempt to preserve the commonsensical and comforting notion of maternal ambivalence as defying meaning.

This first episode prepares the terrain for the narrator's long flashback which will constitute an attempt to provide an answer to that final interrogative. *Watashi* recalls the time when they were both university students and Reiko and her fiancé Seishi were making plans for a future together. We come to know that during that summer the narrator had an affair with Seishi which resulted in his growing disinterest for Reiko. After deciding to move to the US, he had left her behind broken and still unaware, and Reiko had eventually accepted an arranged marriage with another man. One year later she was pregnant with Akiyuki, but having discovered that she could not

get over her lost love, she had ended up projecting her ambivalent feelings onto her child.

Reiko's ambivalence is here carefully explained and entirely resolved, as it were, as the product of a resentment pouring out of her broken feelings and broken trust. The story could have ended at this point with a plot astutely planned and carefully developed, but this is not the case. As we approach its real conclusion, two apparently inessential episodes seem to draw us back insistently to what I call (for lack of a better term) a "dark shadow" in the depth of the maternal experience. Toward the end of the flashback, *Watashi* recalls her visit to Reiko when Akiyuki was born: on that occasion Reiko had told her about her conflicting feelings and her dislike of the baby. As the narrator had made to leave, Reiko had followed her to the front door and hurriedly confessed: 'I can't sleep. Every night the baby cries! I want to sleep. And yet, the baby cries. He cries every single night, as if my hatred were rubbing off on him' (120). This image of a worn out Reiko torn in two by her maternal ambivalence ends the stream of memories.

We now find *Watashi* by the seaside reflecting on the recent events. She observes a woman with child walking on the beach:

> A woman of my age and a boy of about three were standing on the seashore. The two, who could be mother and child, were directly facing the sea holding their hands. The song that the woman was singing to herself sounded like some foreign children's song. Her voice had a peaceful, relaxed and quiet tone. I was reminded of Reiko and her dead child. Watching these mother and child in front me what I had imagined about the child's death seemed an absurd misunderstanding.
> As I passed them, the song continued behind me. [...] Singing it too in my head, I left the seaside and crossed the sandy beach. [...] In that moment, I felt a tightness in the chest. Perhaps it was because all of a sudden I couldn't hear the song or maybe the woman with child had

reminded me of Reiko. My feet, sinking in the sand step after step, were heavy. The weight of my feet called forth the burden of my body and evoked the heaviness in my soul. (121)

The apparent serenity of this female figure stands in stark contrast with the memory of a tired and torn Reiko. Looking at such an image of maternal tenderness the narrator herself is inclined to dismiss her previous interpretation of Reiko's story as a gross misunderstanding and a logical impossibility. The appearance on the beach of the maternal couple (which seems to embody social expectations of maternal love) has the effect of silencing once again any intelligible articulation of maternal ambivalence. If we remain faithful to our understanding of the narrator as a synecdoche of the social order, her prompt acceptance of that erasure may be emblematic of society's eager desire to deny to maternal ambivalence the remotest chance to enter the realm of cultural intelligibility. However, the song's abrupt interruption may haunt society's stubborn refusal to recognize a maternal potential for violence. *Watashi* might well have reached a place where the woman's voice can no longer reach her. But the sudden silence (as opposed to a gradual fading away of the voice), combined with the heavy pressure in the narrator's chest and the still lingering image of a distressed Reiko conjure up a dramatic possibility: has the woman walked into the sea with her child?

As we have seen in chapter 2, *boshi shinjū* (mother-child suicide) is a recurrent practice in Japan that receives a degree of cultural understanding together with the acknowledgement of its tragic nature. Between January and February 1985 this pattern of maternal homicide-suicide and the extent of the sympathy with which it is regarded in Japan made the news in the US due to a famous case in which a thirty-two-year old Japanese woman in Santa Monica attempted to kill herself and her two

children. She had walked along the almost desert beach carrying her youngest in her arms and holding the other by the hand, and the three had waded into the cold water of the Pacific Ocean. Only the mother had survived. The accident and the ensuing trial attracted considerable media attention and triggered a series of considerations about how this mother's 'tragic crime expose[d] a culture gap.'[149] We may ask ourselves, then, whether it was the case that the Japanese readership of "Summer Abyss" might have had this possibility in mind when confronted with the story's finale. Takahashi certainly does not attempt to resolve its ambiguity and we might also speculate whether it is fear that holds the narrator back from turning around to look towards mother and child.

2.2   "Incarnation"

In a vein that resonates with my analysis of "Summer Abyss", my reading of "Incarnation" ("Keshin") highlights the ways in which the text offers a fictional dramatization of the resistance encountered when the negative side of maternal ambivalence threatens to become visible. This resistance is twofold: on the one hand, it pertains to the realm of discourse and poses a limit to a direct, intelligible articulation of a mother's potential for violence. On the other, it pertains to the realm of the psyche and betrays the inner conflicts triggered by a mother's growing awareness of such potential.

The plot develops around the encounter between two women and, as in "Summer Abyss", here too a long flashback sheds light upon the death of a child, and here too the stage is set for a mother's confession. What makes "Incarnation" stand

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[149] Leslie Pound, "Mother's Tragic Crime Exposes A Culture Gap" *Chicago Tribune* June 10, 1985.

apart is the fact that the two characters are both mothers who have lost their only children (both daughters) at two years old. The story begins when the narrator (here too identified only as *Watashi* [I]) receives a demand for relief supplies for the RR region,[150] whose crops have been irreparably damaged by the cold weather and the heavy snow. Having resolved to send some clothes, she goes to the storeroom and opens a chest of drawers where she keeps old kimonos she brought with her when she married into her husband's family. Her fingers suddenly stop above one of the folded garments with 'an indescribable feeling' (*nanika iiyō no nai kanshoku*) that crawls up her arm, along her back and which finally rises 'cold and bleak' inside the storeroom (Takahashi, 1972: 35). With trembling hands she unfolds a silk *haori*[151] decorated with a rich pattern of large, white and crimson camellia flowers. In the past that *haori* was so much to her liking that she used to wear it every day: the fabric is now worn out and slightly darkened:

> That faint darkness was probably caused by dust, dirt or mould, but it also resembled the tinge of some dark emotion. Peeking through it, one could catch a glimpse of what could be even described as the shadow of a grudge strangely old and torn, or of a timeworn sorrow. (36)

She makes a little package of it and sends it away, but from that moment she begins to have occasional visions of the *haori* floating in the sky like a living thing and drifting far away toward the RR region:

> […] despite the gay design there was also a melancholy and eerie desolation in the sight of the *haori* rising off [in the sky]. The glow of some persistent darkness similar to the shade of a passion buried and left behind or the gloom of distant memories oozed from the inside of the floating *haori*. (37)

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[150] The use of the only initials in the original Japanese identifies a fictional topography.

[151] *Haori* are hip- or thigh-length garments which serve as light coats to be worn over a kimono.

The two passages quoted above alert the reader from the start to something ominous exuding from the *haori* as though painful experiences or violent emotions had left an indelible trace on it. However, *Watashi* is still unable to fathom the nature of these emotions which she variously describes as dark passion (*kurai jōnen*), grudge (*urami*), sorrow (*hiai*), melancholia (*urayamashii*) and eerie desolation (*zotto suru sekiryōkan*).

The discovery of the *haori* provides the textual occasion to know more about the circumstances surrounding *Watashi*'s life: since the death of her husband and her mother-in-law she has been living alone in the big family mansion. There was also a daughter, we are told, but for a brief, intense moment the narrator seems unable to recall what happened to her:

> And my daughter, my daughter… What happened to my daughter? For a moment I felt pain somewhere inside my head, aware of a lump of memories I wouldn't possibly remember even if I tried to. As the pain enlarged and filled my head, I remembered. That's right, my daughter died of suffocation when she'd just turned two. (35-6)

The first pages of "Incarnation" appear to implicitly associate the dark emotions entwined in the fabric of the *haori* with pain for the loss of the child. The forgetfulness that momentarily makes excruciating memories inaccessible to consciousness could be understood as a psychic reaction to trauma that only allows these affective residues to exist as traces at the very margins of her consciousness.

Time passes by and two years later, while on a train-trip, *Watashi* runs into a younger woman wearing a *haori* identical to the one she gave away. Underneath the lively design of the *haori* the young woman wears dark mourning clothes and a

Buddhist rosary. The narrator is overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia and intimacy for this woman 'as if deep from distant memories some vague image had emerged and perfectly overlapped over [the woman's] face' (38). This feeling grows in intensity to the point that, as *Watashi* becomes certain that the *haori* is indeed hers, she is also struck by the impression of facing her past self:

> I looked at that *haori* which had been unmistakeably mine as if I were sucked into it. […] An indescribable nostalgia started flowing like a subterranean current from inside me towards it. Or perhaps, quite the contrary, a fragment of my soul contained inside the *haori* was trying to gush forth towards me, feeling an unspeakable longing for me, its original home. Its colour, its pattern, its stained conditions, the shape of its sleeves, its red strings, its lining: all that I knew perfectly well. In all that lingered so vividly my own reflection. That's why now, as I gazed at it, I felt almost the illusion that the one wearing the *haori* was not her but me. It was as if the person wearing that *haori* and sitting in front of me in the train were my past self[.] (40)

As the two characters engage in polite conversation, we learn that the young woman is from the RR region and that she suffered a recent loss in her family. It's been only one week and she is on her way back from visiting the tomb. 'You've lost a child, haven't you?' the narrator asks knowingly, causing her interlocutor to momentarily fall into an astonished silence. But this is only the first of a series of rhetorical questions that *Watashi* will pose and which will cause an ever greater surprise: 'Was it your only child? […] It was a girl, wasn't it? […] Right at a time when she was two and adorable, and yet…' (42) The young woman is astounded by the precision of the narrator's considerations and confirms that her daughter died of suffocation when she had just turned two. One night the pillow had accidentally covered the child's mouth making it impossible for her to breathe, and the morning after, when she had found her, she was already cold under the futon. 'At the expression she showed every now and then,' the

narrator tells us, 'I couldn't help feeling that *I had seen it before*' (41) (emphasis in the original).

Watashi's words 'I had seen it before' constitute the only passage that is emphasized in the original Japanese text. Despite the shared loss of a child that bonds the two women in similar grief, and notwithstanding the presence of the *haori* which blurs the distinction between past and present and between self and other, those words betray the narrator's stubborn refusal of any form of identification. They epitomize the resistance she's been encountering all along in becoming conscious of her past emotions and experiences and which has already surfaced at several textual junctures. We have seen, for example, how the impressions emanating from the *haori* are consistently described as 'undefinable' or 'unspeakable' (*iiyō no nai*), how the feeling of nostalgia the narrator experiences remains 'mysterious' (*fushigi na*) and how the woman's expression is *not* recognized as her own. Her choice of words suggests a form of profound alienation, a gap between the narrator and her own past feelings which, even when recognized, are resolutely cast outside of her despite being wrapped up in a film of nostalgic familiarity. To a degree, this 'casting outside' represents a moment of disavowal analogous to the one we have encountered in "Summer Abyss" when Reiko projected the source of her own silence upon her interlocutor.

Takahashi expressed a deep fascination with the idea of the double or alter-ego which she extensively explored in her essay "Thought on the Doppelgänger" ("Dopperugengeru-kō", 1975), and it would seem not so far off the mark to understand the woman on the train as *Watashi*'s own double. Taking this possibility as a starting point, I want to suggest that the encounter between these two women could

also be read as staging a "demand for recognition." The force of this demand surfaces in the following passage:

> We entered a tunnel. The view was interrupted and the windowpane created a black mirror in front of us. Her figure was reflected in the mirror. Her face was leaning a bit forward, as if she were crouching over some dark emotion. The *haori* decorated with camellia flowers really suited her. It merged perfectly with her as if it had been hers from the beginning. The train made a stumbling sound. In that moment she raised her eyes and looked at me in the mirror. That face, a face gleaming with a dark emotion which illuminated it from within. I could no longer move my eyes away from her in the mirror. That was my past self. It strikingly resembled my very self of about twenty years before. (44)

The mirror becomes here a narrative strategy to redouble the theme of the alter-ego: the narrator is looking at herself in the mirror in the form of the young woman's reflection. As the eyes of this younger self stare back at her, a contact is forcefully made which seems to foreclose any possible escape: *Watashi* can no longer divert her eyes from that reflection or, put it differently, she cannot not look at the 'dark emotion' that exudes from the figure in front of her. Or so we believe. But the passage ends abruptly (and with it the episode of the train): textually this translates in a sudden interruption, the subsequent paragraph staged days after that encounter. In that fatidic moment of apparent recognition *Watashi* felt the urge to rush off the train at the first available stop, running away from her own reflection and inadvertently leaving behind a book which carried her visiting card between its pages.

The turning point in the narrative occurs when *Watashi* receives a letter from the young woman. Matsubara Mine – such is her name – explains her motivation for writing her a letter:

> Even though I met you for the first time, I experienced an indescribable nostalgia and I felt that I wanted you to listen to my sorrow and that you could probably understand. What I will now say, I haven't told anyone yet. (45)

What the narrator holds in her hands is a written confession of the darkest side of maternal ambivalence and of the murderous consequences it may spawn. The resemblance to the words uttered by Reiko in the opening and closure of her "confession" in "Summer Abyss" is striking: 'You are the only one who can understand. I want you to hear everything' (Takahashi. 1973a: 99) and 'I feel relieved now that you've listened. I wanted someone to listen […] No one has ever heard this story' (ibid., 102). Both Matsubara and Reiko share a desire to speak: not only do they want to be heard, but they also harbour the hope of being finally understood.

Matsubara explains how she experienced a period of extreme hardship as the RR region was stricken by a merciless winter and how poverty forced her to give her clothes away in exchange for food. It was at this time that a mysterious change occurred within her, albeit undetectable on the outside: her previous self was 'receding like a shadow' and someone other than herself had started living inside her (Takahashi, 1972: 46). In the letter she recounts several episodes that are symptomatic of this change and which testify to the mother's growing ambivalence toward her daughter:

> One day, both my husband and my parents-in-law were out in the fields. Since I hadn't fully recovered from a cold, I was shut up in the house sewing. With open arms and uncertain steps, my daughter (back then she was one year and nine months old) was coming up to me with loud, shrill crows. She was my first child and, of course, I loved her deeply: my daughter was my sole purpose in life.
> But somehow, in that moment, and with no reason I felt hatred of my daughter whom I was supposed to love. She looked like a monstrous thing coming toward me and producing strange, screeching sounds. The

face swollen red and foam spurting abundant from her mouth, screaming words in the language of an unknown country, that monster clung to my shoulder [...] When I came to myself, it appeared that my hand had flung in the air and my daughter was lying down by my knees crying.

After that, such things happened every now and then. I had come to feel hatred towards my daughter, [a hatred] of which I could not fathom the reason myself. (46-7)

This first manifestation of the dark side of maternal ambivalence is accompanied by the naming of that feeling: hatred. The feeling of aversion that takes hold of Matsubara is experienced, however, as incompatible with the form maternal love is supposed to take, and this young mother feels compelled to repeatedly stress her love for her daughter, as if she were trying to make amend for her own negative emotions. There is also a subtle progression in the way she accounts for her loving feelings, which moves from a rather spontaneous affective reaction ('I loved her deeply') to a consideration of the social expectations vis-à-vis what a mother is supposed to feel ('I was supposed to love'). This rhetorical shift symbolizes the social pressure that is exerted upon mothers when they experience ambivalence toward their children, and which becomes a major catalyst for maternal guilt.

In the passage above maternal ambivalence turns into an unexpected explosion of physical violence, but its manifestation undergoes a process of psychic and textual censorship: the moment in which the mother hits her daughter is hidden from consciousness and from textual representation by the mother's own blackout. Only the final result is there to be seen. Despite Matsubara's apparent capacity to acknowledge and name her negative emotions, the episode is traversed by a resistance to the discursive articulation of a maternal potential for violence. It seems to me that her act of naming should rather be understood as a narrative strategy necessary for her to act

as *Watashi*'s alter-ego: to the extent that this young mother functions as the narrator's double, her power to bring to consciousness affects and experiences that *Watashi* has thus far repressed is directly proportional to her own capacity to name, however fragmentarily, what we now understand as their shared maternal ambivalence. "Incarnation" revolves around this unresolved tension between the need to bring maternal ambivalence into discourse and a fundamental hesitation to do so to the extent that the story can be said to stage a simultaneous doing and undoing of such an effort.

The second episode Matsubara recounts in her letter occurs when she receives a parcel from her younger brother: six tins of canned food. She is at home alone and, because for days they've been eating only potatoes and millet, she succumbs to a moment of weakness and hides the cans in the chest of drawers. That evening a meeting is organized at her house during which several members from the farmers' cooperative, her husband and her parents-in-law discuss possible measures to counter the conditions of extreme poverty they are facing:

> Right when we were absorbed in discussion my daughter, who had been fast asleep on my lap, woke up suddenly. Then, without making a sound and with an expression somewhat discontented, she toddled toward the chest of drawers. What on earth was the matter with her? She reached out with both hands to the drawer where I had hidden the cans. Until now, she had never tried to open the drawers. I jumped. Since she had been taken to the fields inside a basket, she couldn't possibly know about the parcel.
> She grabbed the handle of the drawer, looked back at me and released an eerie laugh. That was the impression I had. I hurried close to her and I made to hold her back. But she began to cry in a shrill voice "Wee! Wee!" Angry looks from the people in the room converged on us. Indeed her pants were already wet. "Come on! Change her quickly!" urged my mother-in-law from where the party was sitting. She looked as if she were going to get up any moment and do it herself. With my heart pounding I opened the drawer and took a pair of pants for my

daughter. But what then?! In that moment my daughter's hand reached out all of a sudden. That hand looked like the hand of a terrifying giant still unknown to men. In a flash she removed the [pair of] underwear that was covering the cans. As she discovered the tins with their colourful labels, she grabbed them crowing with delight.

There's no need to tell in what kind of position I was put on that occasion. And yet, more than being ashamed at my pettiness for having concealed the cans, I somehow felt a chilling terror of my little daughter. (48-9)

In the mother's distorted perceptions her daughter assumes the features of a supernatural, malignant being who displays a mysterious knowledge of where the tins have been hidden, and who seems to express a malevolent desire to reveal the mother's shameful secret. To the eyes of family and guests the daughter is simply behaving as a normal child and it is, instead, the mother who bears the blame for not promptly performing her maternal duties. The scene portrays a neat contrast between the mother's anguished perceptions and the judgemental reactions of the other adults in the room. There is no openness to dialogue and this conveys an impression of deep maternal isolation. It also suggests that the very possibility of maternal ambivalence is hardly registered or even contemplated by the world of social and familial relations in which this young woman's existence is inscribed.

The two episodes considered here are similar in structure: they first provide a symptomatic depiction of the mother's ambivalence feelings (in the form of her altered perceptions of her daughter) and they conclude with the naming of those feelings (hatred and terror respectively). As I have already suggested, however, what enables this mother to bring ambivalence into discourse is less the acquisition of adequate discursive tools and more the need of a narrative device by means of which *Watashi* is made to confront "the return of the repressed." This interpretation is

confirmed by the following extract where at the climax of her supposed crescendo of awareness, Matsubara patently fails to come to terms with that very ambivalence she seemed ready to acknowledge:

> I was probably mentally disturbed. I wonder if it was because of an illness that I have done what I am to tell you. This is so unacceptable that I cannot find another way to explain it. (50)

Madness and mental instability suddenly enter this young mother's narrative as powerful explanatory devices that, I contend, risk undermining the legitimacy of her affective experience. As she recounts the night when she smothered her child, she also seems to appropriate "commonsensical" views that consider maternal filicide so unacceptable that it *ought to* be attributed to insanity and nothing else.

> The night of my daughter's birthday, still wearing the *haori*, I lay down next to her with the intention to get up later to tidy up. I dozed off and as I woke up it was already late in the night. My husband was sound asleep with his head buried under the futon, and a loud snore was coming from the adjacent room where my parents-in-law slept. When that stopped, the quiet expanded suddenly all around. A faint sound that I would even call the sound of silence was coming along from somewhere. —— —— Perhaps it was the sound of the falling snow slipping through the darkness.
> Under my chest, as if it were going to be crushed, was my daughter's face. In that moment I remembered that feeling somewhere between hatred and terror. Because of that my heart was [now] beating louder. The snow was making its silent sound. —— —— The night was so quiet that I could hear the drumming of my heart. I think I kept looking fixedly at my daughter's face for a long time. My chest got close as to cover her mouth.
> I really don't remember much of what happened after. I dozed off again. What I wished for, what I wanted in that light indistinct sleep, I don't know. The next morning she was cold under my breast. (50-1)

Here the intensity of the dark side of maternal ambivalence is such that it defies words and can only be lived through an overflowing of sensorial perceptions. Symptomatic of a defence against its magnitude is the fact that, just as the mother

confesses her crime, she disappears from the scene as the agentic subject, receding into a psychically safe distance from where she observes the unfolding of the events. She does not confess to having purposefully killed her daughter. Rather, her recollection makes a part of her body the subject of the action: 'My chest got close as to cover her mouth.' And as soon as this act is put into words a new blurring of consciousness occurs: she can't remember what happened afterwards. As she killed her child, she also drifted into a safe oblivion, unable to articulate her own desires. Her account seems to portray the impossibility of gaining textual/discursive access to that experience. It may be argued that this is the nature of trauma. In addition to this, I am inclined to read this episode as the culmination of the series of pauses, blackouts, interruptions and hesitations that constitute the distinguishing feature of both stories I have thus far analysed. In this respect, if we understand the process whereby a mother becomes aware of her ambivalence to depend on her capacity to articulate those feelings to herself, it seems legitimate to suspect that a failure to do so might be related to the lack of a discursive space where such articulation might be possible (and imaginable) in the first place.

After reading Matsubara's letter *Watashi* is plunged into a state of turmoil and confusion that lasts several days: 'Time blurred and past and present overlapped. Then I remembered vividly the circumstances in which my daughter had died' (51). This is the closest she will ever get to admitting that she had too killed her own daughter, but she will never offer the reader a full-fledged confession. Instead, she will decide to pay a visit to Matsubara. Upon her arrival at the house, the narrator does not share with the young woman (still wearing the *haori*) her newly acquired awareness. She only admits that when she was younger and used to wear a similar *haori*, she lost a two-

year old daughter herself. However, when questioned about the cause of death, she remains silent. 'I didn't know how to answer', she admits to herself (54). Instead, she offers the woman a brand new *haori* asking the old one in exchange that she burns in front of her astounded interlocutor. To the alarmed Matsubara she explains: 'Forgive such an action. And please, don't ask for an explanation. This is a ritual that by all means we had to perform. Please, wear this cotton *haori* and be happy' (ibid.). As the *haori* turns into ashes, the narrator looks at Matsubara, but this time the empathy and intimacy that had once existed between the two of them has disappeared. Even the woman's expression, once so dear and familiar to the protagonist, has faded away: the person standing in front of her looks now like an ordinary wife from a farmer's house.

As with "Summer Abyss," we cannot escape the ambiguity of the story's finale. Despite *Watashi*'s increased awareness, she seems unable to bring that awareness into discourse: even when confronted with Matsubara's unequivocal written confession, she cannot find words or answers. The experience of maternal ambivalence has not encouraged the creation of bonds of female solidarity between the two characters. Surely enough, we may understand their private ritual as exorcising the dark memories they share and to seal the silent forgiveness *Watashi* seems finally ready to offer to her younger self. However, we cannot fail to acknowledge the loss of any chance of real communication, be it verbal or affective: any feeling of nostalgic intimacy is lost, and the narrator explicitly requires that the articulation of ambivalence do not go any further. Although this final scene is meant to be the coronation of a mother's journey toward awareness, it also seems to conjure up a rather bleak landscape: the possibility of rendering maternal ambivalence culturally

intelligible is partially foreclosed by the characters' impossibility to elaborate further on the meaning of their experience.

Both "Incarnation" and "Summer Abyss" portray the attempt to bring the dark side of maternal ambivalence into discourse and resistances and defences which may hamper such an effort. Hegemonic discourse and cultural ideals of maternal love function here as a disabling obstacle to the very possibility that maternal ambivalence might be talked about and experienced differently. It is my contention that one of the things that make these stories so interesting is the implicit emphasis they place upon the absence or elusiveness of such positive discursive space, but also upon the struggle that such a discursive endeavour requires. On a more positive note, however, the existence of these stories as material objects that were (and are) circulated among the wider public can be deemed symptomatic of that very struggle: they represent a vigorous intervention that aims at problematizing the politics of representation and opening the way to imagining otherwise.

3   Motherhood, reproduction and ambivalence in Takahashi's early fiction

"Summer Abyss" and "Incarnation" both portray forms of maternal ambivalence that result in the death of a small child. In this section I investigate further examples of the multiple configurations ambivalence may assume in Takahashi's early literature resulting, instead, in the death of an unborn child or in hallucinatory, murderous fantasies. These fictional representations are often accompanied by a profound dread of reproduction and pregnancy, a radical problematization of the mother-child bond and by what seems to be a conscious attempt to dismantle any

idealization of maternal love. Here my readings of Takahashi's stories will be supported by a consideration of those non-fictional essays where the author explored notions of femininity and motherhood.

3.1 "The Freedom to Give or Not to Give Birth"

Against what the reader might assume in reading the subheading, 'the freedom to give or not to give birth' (*umu umanu no jiyū*) is not a quote from one of *ribu*'s pamphlets, but the title of a short essay Takahashi published in 1973 in the women's magazine *Fujin kōron* (reprinted in 1975 in the author's first essay collection *Soul Dogs* (*Tamashii no inu*). Although the text lacks any reference to *ribu*'s activism, its title and the date of its first publication unmistakeably recall one of *ribu*'s most important battles: the fight to preserve women's access to abortion that exploded in reaction to the proposed amendments to the Eugenic Protection Law.[152] In this essay Takahashi explicitly disagrees with those changes in the law that would make it much more difficult for women to access abortion and argues that '[t]o be able to give birth or not to give birth according to one's own intentions is certainly desirable' (1975: 254). However, she also concedes that this freedom might also run the risk of encouraging women into careless sexual activity, knowing that they will be able to get rid of unwanted pregnancies. Takahashi also acknowledges some of the circumstances in which a woman might not desire to have a child: she makes reference to unmarried mothers, to the smaller number of children present-day families seem inclined to plan and to the possibility that women might simply not desire children (Takahashi places herself in this last category). Against the background of cultural ideals that identified

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[152] See chapter 3 section 8.

womanhood with motherhood we can hardly overemphasize the revolutionary implications of these claims.

Takahashi also expressed aversion for representations of mother and child as a symbiotic totality, which she believed denied woman full subjectivity. Her critical stance *vis-à-vis* cultural and linguistic conceptions of woman and child as an undifferentiated whole emerges in the opening passage of the essay "Woman-hating" ("Onna-girai"), originally published in the pages of the *Mainichi shinbun* (one of Japan's major newspapers together with the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri*):

> For a very long time the expression '*onna-kodomo*' [women-and-children] has appeared in the written language. Of course, those who write it are men. But when I was a child and I still didn't know that those who used such expression were men, every time I encountered the expression 'women-and-children' I couldn't wrap my head around its meaning. Why were '*onna*' [woman] and '*kodomo*' [child] glued together? Being [still] unfamiliar with words, I even thought that a special noun '*onna-kodomo*' existed. Maybe it signified a female child. Or it could rather indicate a feminine child. That expression became such a concern that I ended up thinking such silly things. The reason was that, if human beings were distinguished into men, women and children, then the fact that only women and children were positioned differently seemed totally unreasonable. (1975: 229)

Here Takahashi is describing a linguistic specificity in the use of kanji (characters of Chinese origin) in written Japanese: the corresponding words in Japanese for 'woman' and 'child' are *onna* (女) and *kodomo* (子供). Expressions like 'woman and child' or 'women and children' would be rendered with the expression *onna to kodomo* (女と子供) where the two terms are joined by the particle 'and' (*to*, と). However, by simply juxtaposing *onna* and *kodomo* without the mediation of any particle, we obtain *a single new noun* (*onna-kodomo*, 女子供) made up of more than one character (known in linguistic as *jukugo* or 'multi-kanji compound word') whose

'oneness' I have tried to emphasize in my translation using hyphens to unite its terms in an organic whole.

It seems to me that the passage above denounces the phallogocentrism of the Japanese language, pointing to a masculine linguistic habit that 'lumps together' woman and child. But Takahashi is also referring here to the process whereby a child is socialized into such a language, and she may be suggesting that the cultural expectation that woman and child be naturally bound together is produced and maintained via linguistic habits repeated through time. On the other hand, by recalling her childhood self struggling to make sense of a seeming illogical linguistic rule, while tentatively formulating fanciful alternatives to its "correct" meaning, the author is foregrounding both the violence of the process of acculturation and the possibility that linguistic repetitions might fail to bring about their intended outcomes.

A strong conviction about men's profound investment in images of mother-with-child is a distinctive feature of yet another essay whose title 'Eve and Mary' ("Ibu to Maria", 1977b) is indicative of the author's growing interest in Christianity.[153] After having travelled widely in Europe, Takahashi describes her amazement at the countless artistic representations of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus, and she voices her suspicion that, far from being symptomatic of a religious devotion shared by men and women alike, these images are the expression of fantasies that are specifically male:

> Let's state in advance my conclusion. The Holy Mary is an illusion that men –who represent half of humanity– have continued to embrace for hundreds of years. It's nothing but a mere illusion that again and again the power of men's imagination has projected onto and expected from women. It seems to me that the paintings and sculptures of Mary

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[153] Takahashi converted to Catholicism in 1975.

holding baby Jesus in her arms that have remained in such copious amount in Europe show with how much persistence such male fantasy has been inherited unchanged across the centuries. And could it possibly be that, because the illusion envisioned by men found artistic expression in paintings and sculptures, women too have been confronted for centuries with that illusion as if it were their own? However, should we indeed think that women – who constitute the other half of humanity – feel from the bottom of their heart that the Holy Mary deserves to be reminded of, to be thought of and to be made the object of artistic representation again and again to such an extent? For me, at least, [the answer] is 'no'. (1977b: 110-11)

The points Takahashi raises in this passage echo those in "Woman-hating": a growing suspicion toward man-made notions of woman-and-child (here represented by the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus), a belief in their (re)production and enforcement by means of their repetition through time in discourse – be it language or iconography – and the acknowledgement of the way in which women are made to internalise them.

It is my contention that the recurrent problematization of the mother/child bond in Takahashi's early literature and her frequent depiction of women who explicitly despise motherhood and reproduction can be understood as the author's attempt to short-circuit these man-made illusions and to actively create the possibility of imagining otherwise. Many of her stories portray female characters who perpetrate acts of violence on small children, and it's not rare for such episodes of abuse to take the extreme form of child-murder. Representative of such female animosity against children are stories such as "White Night" (1966) and "Eyes" (1967) whose protagonists end up killing a child. Another example is Takahashi's award-winning novel *To the End of the Sky* (1973b) where the protagonist abandons her child in a burning house during an air raid and then sends her husband to the rescue, perfectly aware that he won't survive. This same character will later steal the new-born

daughter of a woman she dislikes with the devious purpose of twisting her development and 'warping her personality through cruel treatment' (Bullock, 2010: 47). Similarly, the protagonist of the story "Lonely woman" ("Ronrii ūman", 1974) [154] manifests a profound aversion for children to the point that, on occasion of a series of arsons in local elementary schools, she sadistically imagines 'countless young children shrieking, roasting to a crisp in that inferno with no exit' (quoted in Mori, 2004: xxxi). She will even come to fantasize that she is, indeed, the very criminal who caused the fires. We can also find allusions to a woman's murderous rejection of reproduction in the story "Captive" ("Toraware", 1970a): when a stray cat gives birth to several kittens in an abandoned cardboard box, the protagonist's older sister promptly suggests that they should 'strangle them one by one with [their] hands' (102). [155]

The two stories "Kodomosama" (lit. Honourable Child, 1969) and "Boundlessness" ("Byōbō", 1970b) are exemplary in this regard as both their protagonists are women who fail to develop a supposedly natural and loving bond with the child they are or have been pregnant with. In both stories a mother's ambivalent feelings cause or are perceived to have caused the death of her unborn child. The unnamed protagonist in "Kodomosama" struggles with increasing fears and ambivalence as she goes through the final stages of her second pregnancy and experiences a growing sense of alienation from her six-year-old daughter. The opening of the story sets the general atmosphere of the narrative, portraying the mother's perception of her own heavily pregnant body:

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[154] The short story "Lonely Woman" originally appeared in 1974 on the pages of the literary magazine *Subaru*, but was republished in 1977 as part of the homonymous collection of interlocked stories.
[155] "Captive" appeared in the literary journal *Gunzō* in 1970 and was later included in the collection *Yonder Sound of Water* (1971b).

With her right hand she caressed her swollen belly from atop the dress made from Indian chintz. Through the thin material her skin felt a bit sweaty. Even the fabric was slightly warm and damp. Probably because of that, from within the dyed pattern of people, animals, birds and flowers, the vermillion of the flowers seemed to stand out vividly. The big petals of an obscene carnivorous plant blooming in a tropical forest appeared as if they had suddenly expanded on her belly. (1969: 55)

Even at a point when the narrative has yet to provide possible justifications of the mother's ambivalent relationship with the foetus, the carnivorous plant 'blooming' right atop her swollen belly conveys an image of pregnancy as threatening and parasitical. But the real trigger for the unfolding of the plot is her husband's imminent departure on a week-long business trip and the protagonist's superstitious fear that a mother-to-be might give birth to a baby with a black mark or worse, to a completely black baby, was she to bump into a masked burglar breaking into the house. Her husband dismisses such concerns as popular beliefs and recalls that everything went smoothly when she was pregnant with their daughter Chōko. However, we soon come to know that the protagonist perceives her own daughter as strange in her precocious independence, emotional detachment and odd behaviour. This feeling of alienation reaches such a point that she openly describes Chōko as barely human: the dry voice, the pale face framed by a pageboy haircut and which resembles a Noh mask, eyes that are clear but 'hollow like a wide-open cavern' (65). In the attempt to fathom the origin of her anxieties the protagonist recalls Chōko's first visit to the shrine and reminds herself of how, back then, she had already started to perceive her daughter as a weird creature:

On occasion of the shrine visit when she was one month old, Chōko had been dressed for the first time in a ceremonial kimono. When she had lifted her up in front of her eyes, holding her from both sides, Chōko had let out a giggle. With the thick, long sleeves painted in bright colours and stretched out like wings and the pale eyes in the slender,

bony face, the baby looked like a bird.[156] I've given birth to a strange child, she had thought for an instant. If there was to be an origin to her anxiety, the impression she had on that occasion could possibly be it. (58)

This passage portrays the protagonist's reactions to her daughter at a developmental stage when a particular mother-child bond is supposed to be under formation, but what we are confronted with is a mother's sense of distance and separation.

The eerier her perceptions of Chōko become, the stronger her concerns that she might give birth to an entirely black child: her conflicting emotions eventually trigger a delusional fantasy of the foetus whose monstrous transformation is described as if it were already and irreversibly under way. This occurs one evening when she is at home alone and looks at her pregnant body reflected in the darkness of a windowpane:

> The loose sack-shaped maternity dress was swollen on the abdomen. Only the middle of the bulge was illuminated, and the inside was showing through as if in a radiography. The foetus was without any physical defect, with eyes, nose, mouth, and ears already shaped and yet, it was hanging an unusually large head and was curled up in a jet-black body. (61)

One day, on her way back from Chōko's kindergarten, the protagonist deviates from the usual route and comes across a wooden shrine which looks more like a bird-house stuck on a pole. Nearby this little construction she finds a very old woman who explains to her that this is the shrine of Kodomosama.[157] The woman is over one-

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[156] The name Chōko 鳥子 is composed by the two Japanese characters of 'bird' 鳥 and 'child' 子.

[157] The word 'Kodomosama' is composed of the word *kodomo* which means 'child' and the honorific suffix *-sama*. This is a more deferential version of the title of respect *san* which is often rendered in English as "Mr", "Mrs", "Miss", etc. Therefore, a possible translation could be 'honorable child,' but

hundred years old and travels all over the country taking the shrine on her pilgrimages.

She reveals that Kodomosama is not a God-child, but an ordinary child, albeit endowed

with mysterious and frightening powers: at preschool or in the first years of

elementary school, she explains, there's always an unknown child who mingles

unnoticed with the other children on the playground. During the hour of physical

education, when the children stand in a line and one by one call the number assigned

to them, there's always a number that is called in excess: that is Kodomosama. It's

indistinguishable from other seven- or eight-year-old kids, age after which it will no

longer manifest supernatural features: 'Passed that age', the old woman specifies, 'it's

no longer Kodomosama' (66-7). And there is not only one, but there may well be many

of them. 'What does it do?' the protagonist asks:

> "Whatever it likes. When someone dies or goes mad, that's the Child's doing. It waits for the moment when everyone is not paying attention because 'it's just a child.'"
> "Can you tell the difference from the other children?"
> "No, you can't."
> "Has it got a mother?"
> "There are also cases when it's got one."
> "The mother must be scary, isn't it right?"
> "The mother is a normal person."
> "No, what I meant is, the mother must be scared of her own child."
> "You're pregnant, aren't you?!" the old woman stared at her swollen belly. (67)

Reading the passage above, we have the impression that the whole episode

unfolds in a realm of shared female knowledge and that the old crone is voicing a

timeless, secret wisdom, laying bare an obscure truth about maternal ambivalence. In

this respect, Kodomosama with its innocent appearance concealing eerie and

destructive powers may well be said to incarnate a mother's uttermost fears and to

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since the term is used in the story akin to a proper name, I have decided to maintain the original Japanese.

echo the protagonist's own sense of alienation from her children – both Chōko and the baby who is yet to be born. The misunderstanding that occurs between the two women is due to a linguistic ambiguity of the Japanese text that is hardly translatable in English: what the protagonist says (*hahaoya wa osoroshii koto deshō ne*) can be understood as both 'The mother must be scary, isn't she?' and 'The mother must be scared, isn't that right?' The ambiguity of her words compels the protagonist to spell out with unintended clarity her thoughts that a mother might be afraid of her own child. However, she receives no answer. Instead, the rhetorical question that she's asked in return strikes at the heart of her own ambivalence, as if her expectant state were deemed sufficient to explain her thoughts about 'maternal fears.' The final words uttered by the old woman could be also understood to "naturalise" the protagonist's experience of ambivalence as the inevitable extension of her pregnant condition and of her be(com)ing a mother. Instead of associating motherhood with notions of limitless love and self-sacrifice, this exchange places feelings of ambivalence at the heart of the maternal experience. The passage also provides various elements that suggest unsettling similarities between Chōko and Kodomosama: she is of the right age to manifest its supernatural features and she does, indeed, behave strangely; her name and her features likens her to a bird-like creature and the little wooden shrine looks just like a bird-house. Furthermore, the protagonist will also dream of secretly opening the shrine and getting sight of the effigy of Kodomosama that is kept hidden within: in her dream the little clay statue will look just like the one-month-old Chōko in her ceremonial kimono.

And indeed, Chōko begins to behave in increasingly mysterious ways and manifests what will turn out to be a prophetic inclination: time and again she wonders

whether this new child will eventually be born, and she seems disturbingly aware of her mother psychic rejection of it. One afternoon, when she's playing with friends in her room, she draws the image of a black baby:

> "It's a picture of a monster, isn't it?" that was Masako's voice.
> "No, it's Baby!" Chōko replied.
> "That's weird. Babies are red!"
> "There are also black babies."
> "Have you ever seen one?"
> "Mama's said so to Papa."
> "It's probably a lie."
> "She said there's one in her tummy."
> "Is she having a baby?"
> "It seems so."
> [...]
> "It probably won't be born." Chōko said.
> "Why?"
> "Mama said that it would be horrible."
> "The baby?"
> "It would be horrible if the baby turned out black." (68-9)

This conversation is overheard by her mother who feels compelled to interrupt the uncomfortable exchange. As she opens the door, her shaky hands are symptomatic of her deeply troubled state: during the children's innocent games her uttermost fears have been exposed. It's not only her refusal of a black baby that has been revealed: by wondering whether the baby might eventually not be born *because* of her mother's profound rejection, Chōko is voicing a deep-seated hostility toward the child that the mother may not yet be able to elaborate at a conscious level, but which finds confirmation in the story's dramatic conclusion.

Chōko's peculiar awareness of her mother's ambivalence is also hinted at in an earlier episode where the protagonist allows her daughter to feel the baby moving inside her. The protagonist behaves here as might be expected of a mother, that is, allowing her daughter to participate in the imminent coming of a younger sibling.

269

However, she also perceives her daughter as a threat and when Chōko's hand reaches out to touch her belly, she suddenly feels rigid and tense:

"Will it be a little brother or a little sister, who knows?"
"Is it really going to be born?"
"It's already moving!"
"Still, I wonder if it will be born." (65)

We can see how, internal conflicts notwithstanding, the mother strongly opposes her daughter's doubts about the final outcome of this pregnancy, but in spite of her mother's assertive denial, Chōko perseveres in her sinister considerations. The scene ends with the protagonist faking falling sleep as a strategy to inhibit that inappropriate conversation from going any further. Can we read this silence as the mother's difficulty in acknowledging a much deeper desire not to give birth? Instead of insisting on the certainty that this new child *is going to* be born, the protagonist withdraws into "voicelessness," however purposefully performed. She doesn't invoke her desire to bring the child into the world nor her maternal love for the new baby as evidence of the positive inevitability of its birth. In fact, it is difficult to find in the story even tentative articulations of maternal love that are not already hampered by ambivalence. The only evidence the mother seems able to adduce is that the baby is already moving: by doing so she removes herself from any active participation in the development of this new life.

As the story draws to a close, the protagonist decides to walk to a nearby cliff to admire the landscape while Chōko is still playing outside. It's the day before her husband's return. She's standing on the edge of the cliff absorbed in contemplation when she hears the excited voices of children behind her at a distance. The noise and screams grow louder and she turns around just to see a group of children running in

her direction. Their figures appear almost black in the dark shadow of the nearby building complex. When they enter the sunny open space she recognizes Chōko leading the group and shouting to her "Mama, what are you doing over there?" All those excited voices merge and seem to grow more and more violent as the children keep running toward her, her daughter on the lead, her pale, bony face thrust upward as if she were going to take off in flight.

> She stepped back with a start. Right from the front Chōko was illuminated by the evening sun and she saw her surrounded by a large, multi-coloured halo which was taking the shape of the old, showy and colourful ceremonial kimono […]. The sleeves, stretched out horizontally like wings, were flapping in the wind. "That's right. That was it, after all!" she thought and took a further step back. The heel of her sandal touched the edge of the cliff. […] The dry soil crumbled away from beneath her heel. She stared fixedly at those children pressing on right in front of her. Under the weight of her body the earth under her feet kept crumbling away. Behind her was the vertical cliff. Since she'd been filled with such a fear, she thought, there was no doubt that the baby had already turned pitch black. As she was, she moved further back. She perceived her body leaning backward. Spontaneously she took a falling position. In that moment the word "still-birth" was present in her mind. (71)

Maternal ambivalence assumes here the form of a mother's terror of her own child. The protagonist is paralysed as she looks at Chōko's features change: she is the odd daughter, the coal-black child, the bird-like baby girl, Kodomosama! It seems to me that the final line of this passage suggests the mother's psychic detachment from the death of her child, which is not dissimilar from that expressed in the story "Incarnation" where Matsubara describes her breast "killing" her baby daughter: in "Kodomosama" the protagonist's conscious participation in the death of the foetus is also left unarticulated.

However, a consideration of this final passage in the 1971 version of the story in the collection *Yonder Sound Of Water* allows for rather different conclusions. On occasion of its republication Takahashi slightly amended the concluding lines of the story, replacing the mother's thoughts about a still-born baby with a much clearer articulation of her murderous desire. The amended passage runs as follows: '…she moved further back. She thought vaguely that *she was going to kill the foetus*. She felt her body leaning backwards' (1971: 177, emphasis added). It's not possible to know what triggered this change that clearly made the protagonist's murderous intent more explicit, but as I have already suggested, the republication date may perhaps give us some clues.

The story "Boundlessness" represents another clear example of Takahashi's critical stance toward the maternal. The story also problematizes the bonds between family members: the 'boundlessness' of the title is the vast expanse that the protagonist perceives as separating people and which represents the enormous distance she strives to overcome in her search for human connection. As the story begins, the main character Kiyoko is recovering from a recent miscarriage and dreaming of the foetus being carried away by the slow current of a river:

> The foetus floated slowly down a murky river. From time to time it raised its pale expressionless face, turned toward me and shook its head as if to say no. "You're a complete stranger to me!" it almost seemed to be saying, "We don't have the slightest connection!" The foetus was still merely a formless lump of flesh. Only the eyes were shaped in two deep creases. Those quietly half-open eyes seemed to speak that way. As the eyes closed, the foetus floated away, bobbing up and down. The water level was high and the water murky like after the rain, but the river moved along absolutely languid with no ripples or foam. A soft sunlight was shining out of nowhere and tinged the water of a dull, translucent colour. The foetus floated down the river and disappeared into a sky of

the same tinge and which was one with the river. In the vast expanse of that smoky and misty-looking sky there was nothing. There was no one.
Kiyoko stood up from the living-room sofa.
"It went away." She said in a small voice. Those were the words she softly whispered when she was alone. (1970b: 134-5)

Kiyoko's feelings of separation and disconnection from the foetus stand in stark contrast to her husband's sadness at the loss of the baby or to her mother-in-law's insistence on the inexhaustible fertility of a woman's womb. The foetus' silent communication in Kiyoko's daydreaming seems also to question the idea of a supposedly natural mother-child bond. Although the dream could still be interpreted as the manifestation of feelings of inadequacy at her failure to become a mother, the words she whispers to herself do not convey an emotional struggle to overcome this perceived failure, but a sense of relief. In fact, as she reflects upon her husband's reaction to her miscarriage and upon her mother-in-law's insistence that 'a woman's body is like Mother Earth' (135), Kiyoko repeats those words one more time, as if to taste their reassuring power and confirm her renewed sense of integrity.

Kiyoko wonders whether she might have unconsciously caused the death of the foetus. Days after her return from the hospital she happens to see a schoolboy walking down the street and follows him from a distance. She watches him sneak into a farmyard and crush a freshly laid egg under his sneakers: at this sight she's overwhelmed by confusion and by an incomprehensible fear of the boy. The hens' screams of alarm attract people to the windows of the farm and out in the garden, but the boy is now walking away innocently and she ends up being the one they scowl at. Suddenly, she feels as if she is the real culprit and breaks into a guilty escape. She now experiences a 'mysterious intimacy' with the child and she's 'struck by the sudden

thought that without doubts she unconsciously killed the foetus' (137). The child can be read here as Kiyoko's double who acts out desires the full awareness of which remains fearful and threatening to the narrator. His action allows Kiyoko to become conscious of her hostility toward motherhood and reproduction: she *wanted* to destroy the egg/foetus and the child simply translated into action a desire whose name she didn't dare to speak. The angry looks of the people at the farm can be here understood as society's harsh disapproval of her betrayal of her "female reproductive destiny."

The protagonist's rejection of women's traditional participation in extending the family system by means of their reproductive potential can be contrasted to a grotesque fantasy of reproduction that Kiyoko imagines at the heart of her mother-in-law's dreams. Here the mother-in-law is pictured giving birth to an endless chain of potatoes:

> Where the stem touched the ground, there were mother-in-law's genitals. She spread her thighs wide apart, giving birth to innumerable potatoes. They were all […] strung out through the roots similar to capillary tubes. Maybe mother-in-law was now avidly dreaming such a dream of reproduction, with her belly laid down like a huge, obscene earth, pouring warm fluids on a swarm of potatoes buried in the ground. (139)

Living side by side with a woman who still exudes a sensual fertility despite her age and seven pregnancies, and whose relationship with Kiyoko's husband constitutes an ominous reminder of biological interconnectedness, the protagonist is painfully aware that she doesn't belong to this familial community. She is even proud of her body's refusal to become fertile again in the face of her mother-in-law's insistence that it's easier to get pregnant after a miscarriage:

After the miscarriage the days passed by with no evidence that she had got pregnant again. She felt grateful that her own physiology was stoutly resisting the fact that woman's womb is like Mother Earth, as her mother-in-law was used to saying. (149)

Kiyoko's rebellion against her "biological destiny" brings about real or fantasized episodes of unrestrained violence against small children or pregnant women. These explosions of violence should be read side by side with the protagonists' spiteful rejection of those female characters whose normative femininity becomes complicit with the stifling working of society's gender organization. The first episode I briefly consider occurs when Kiyoko is on a train and she's seized by the irresistible impulse to stab a baby's leg with her embroidery needle:

Suddenly Kiyoko saw before her eyes a baby's white calf. The woman standing in front of her seat was chattering boldly with her female friend. The arm with which she held the baby sagged carelessly and one of the child's legs was drooping down. Between the red woollen pants and pink socks a patch of soft skin was exposed. Kiyoko took up her embroidery again. But the chubby leg was dangling right in front of her. Bluish veins were faintly visible in the skin, but neither pores nor downy hair were apparent; the plump white flesh hung there like a creature with a life of its own…. Kiyoko kept staring at the leg dangling before her eyes. It narrowed down at the knee, then bulged out midway down the calf, as if the cells of that area were swollen with copious liquid –or rather, with copious sweet-sour juice –then it tapered sharply at the ankle. The leg jiggled with the train's vibration. The train rushed into the station, its engine blasting, then glided up to the platform and came to a halt. Passengers rose from their seats to disembark, and people dashed in to claim the vacant places; the car was in commotion.
Kiyoko hastily thrust her embroidery material into her handbag but kept the needle clenched in her tight hand and got up. As she dashed toward the door, she jabbed the needle into the baby's calf. There was a shrill cry. Kiyoko joined the throng of disembarking passengers and stepped out onto the platform. The door closed behind her and the train departed. Why, why, Kiyoko murmured to herself. Why did I do such a thing? Bu only the deed itself was certain. Kiyoko stood still on the platform and looked back. Where the train had been was now only a pair of rails. But in the train's place floated an empty space, like a clear plastic box, that harbored one secret deed. Inside the space flowed a sticky, sweet-sour juice that came from a baby's calf, pierced by a needle. (tr. in Mori, 1994: 34-5)

Kiyoko is struck by her own actions and asks herself: 'Why? Why? [...] Why did I do such a thing?' The passionate insistence of her self-questioning echoes the psychic difficulty of becoming aware of one's own ambivalence that we have repeatedly encountered in previous stories and, again, we are confronted only with the final outcome of her violent actions.

Kiyoko also strikes up an acquaintance with an eccentric woman who speaks boldly of having had a mastectomy and whom the protagonist perceives as a possible twin soul, a person with whom she could communicate beyond the constraints imposed by prescriptions of feminine and maternal propriety. However, at the end of the story Kiyoko discovers that this woman is now happily pregnant, and that she and her husband-to-be have recently moved into her neighbourhood. She feels betrayed by the woman's joy in embracing the traditional feminine roles of wife and mother, and as the woman cheerfully converses with Kiyoko's husband and mother-in-law about her plan to have five children, Kiyoko's rage fuels a fantasy of assaulting her belly with a drill:

> Kiyoko stretched up her arm. She was trapped in the group's conversation, but her right arm reached across the five or six meters to the tool box. Softly it removed the drill. The woman's yellow sack dress hung before Kiyoko's eyes. Her lower abdomen rose in a gentle curve. Kiyoko placed the tip of the drill on the woman's abdomen. Supporting the tool with her left hand, she began turning the handle with her right. She ground vigorously. The spiral-shaped slender metal rod ripped through the woman's skin and bore into the uterus. This time I *do* have a reason, thought Kiyoko. Reproduction is destruction. She intensified her efforts. She drilled on. Her fingers ached. But she must keep on drilling. The woman's womb, and the fetus along with it, were gouged out by the screw-shaped tool. (35)

This last scene articulates a sort of programmatic declaration that seems to justify the repugnance of and resistance to the maternal many of Takahashi's female

protagonists share: the passage that Mori translates as 'reproduction is destruction' (*hanshoku wa sonzai no horobi na no da*) could be rendered more literally (but less beautifully) 'reproduction is the destruction of the existence.' Mori's poetic translation effectively reproduces the oxymoronic association between 'reproduction' and 'destruction.' However, it seems to me to suggest too simplistic an overlap between the destruction that reproduction is said to be and the destruction that is imaginarily performed by Kiyoko (to the extent that we could understand her words to mean 'reproduction calls for its own destruction'). Whereas this interpretation may not be inappropriate, I believe that the term left out in Mori's translation (*sonzai*=being, existence) is a fundamental element in the oxymoronic relation because the contrast may also be that between 'reproduction' (i.e. the biological proliferation of life performed through woman's biological potential and upheld by society's gender norms) and 'existence,' that is, woman's very possibility to claim a form of being *in excess of* those very norms. This conflict between cultural idealizations of woman's reproductive potential and women's search for meaning/subjectivity will reappear in the last two stories analysed in this chapter.

3.2   "The Demonic and the Maternal in Women"

In her essay "Sexuality — The Demonic and the Maternal in Women" ("Sei — onna ni okeru mashō to bosei", 1977) Takahashi associates what she calls the 'demonic woman' with female awakening, and places these ideas in stark opposition to motherhood. Against a notion of the maternal as selfless love and devotion, the author describes the demonic woman as a female subject who has awakened to her own self by virtue of antisocial behaviours and the violent breaking of society's laws and taboos:

I have been made to realise that every time I write fiction, the female protagonists that emerge from me and make their appearance in [my] novels are all demonic women. [...] I began to suspect that whenever a woman really releases her [inner] self, the demonic manifests. It is generally thought that women harbour the maternal, the polar opposite of the demonic. But no matter how many novels I write, the maternal never flows from me and into my work. The maternal upholds order, the demonic encourages upheaval. The maternal supports morality, the demonic incites immorality [*handōtoku*]. Something maternal makes women restrain themselves; it directs female energy toward the children produced by woman-as-mother; it makes women devote themselves to family harmony and their offspring's prosperity. In the sort of society in which people normally live, this is desirable and maybe even necessary. But if women have been drugged by the reassuring notion that they are essentially maternal beings, I wish to contend that there is more to woman than this. (quoted in Mori, 1994: 32-33) (translation amended)

Despite Takahashi's conversion to Catholicism, her use of the term 'demonic' ought not to be understood in religious terms and particularly not as suggesting a supposedly sinful female nature. Quite the contrary, the 'demonic' is used here as a positive term to signify a liberatory potential within woman which enables her to break free from stifling cultural understandings of womanhood and femininity. Takahashi's use of the word *handōtoku* (lit. anti- or against morality) instead of the more usual *fudōtoku* (lit. immorality, non-morality) clearly suggests that the demonic woman embodies powerful counter-cultural impulses, while the association of the maternal with ideas of family harmony and offspring's prosperity points at the institution of the family as a pernicious site where stifling gender norms are reproduced and subtly enforced. The author also argues that

[i]t is men those who classify women by distinguishing among them the two types of the diabolic and the maternal woman, the prostitute and the mother. But I can hardly think of them as two distinct types. The woman that [...] happens to awaken to her self is the diabolic woman. And I wonder whether the majority of those who are not awake are merely keeping that diabolic part buried alive. (Takahashi, 1977b: 88)

Takahashi further explores this problematic dichotomy in the essay "Eve and Mary" (1977b) where she considers a fresco of the "Downfall of Adam and Eve" by Michelangelo that she happened to see in the Sistine Chapel in Rome (Italy). The painting portrays Adam and Eve in the garden and the tempting snake coiling around the forbidden tree with its upper body transfigured into that of a woman. Takahashi identifies *two* women in the fresco and confesses that it is the relationship between these two female figures that always constituted for her a source of curiosity and reflection. In the essay "Sexuality — The Demonic and the Maternal in Women" she suggests that the snake might represent Eve's awakening to her own self (here specifically identified as Eve's awakening to sexuality) and she argues that the awakening to one's inner self 'occurs in the form of the breaking of a taboo. Awakening goes against the moral [*handōtoku*]' (1977b: 98). Considered in this light, Eve is understood as a 'real being' (*riaru na sonzai*) (1977b: 112) as opposed to man-made representations of Mary-as-mother: 'There's no Mary inside woman,' Takahashi will claim, 'there's only Eve' (113):

> Mary stands as the symbol of the maternal in women, as the woman who has nothing but her motherhood. Mary is always contented and she's not unstable like Eve (or women like Eve). Within the relationship with her own child she accepts reality and confirms the *status quo*. In the bond with her child she carries on a safe existence. (1977b: 98)

Whereas Takahashi seems to unambiguously identify the woman who is not awake with the maternal woman, we may be left wondering what form the demonic woman might assume. One of the literary examples of demonic woman that the author provides is Thérèse Desqueyroux. The main character of François Mauriac's homonymous novel that Takahashi translated into Japanese in 1963, Thérèse is a young woman who endures the demands of motherhood and marriage and who

embarks on a blind search for 'something' that eventually leads her to unsuccessfully poison her husband.[158] Takahashi describes Thérèse as a woman who is distinctly awakened albeit still unaware of what she really desires: her crime is not carefully planned but it stems, rather, from the depth of her unconscious. It is her unconscious that is suffocating and which resorts to murder in an attempt to escape from a life that resembles a prison. Takahashi recalls an exchange between Thérèse and her husband where he asks what she wanted when she tried to poison him:

> What I wanted? It would probably be easier to say what I didn't want. I didn't want to keep on playing a role, affecting [my] gesticulation, speaking only set formulas; in other words, live by constantly stifling to death another Thérèse. That's what I didn't want! (91)

The reference to 'another Thérèse' evokes a double structure or an internal split in Thérèse's subjectivity that reminds of Takahashi's reflections on Eve and the snake. There appear to be two women within Thérèse: one who conforms to society's conventions and norms of feminine propriety and another woman (*mō hitori no onna*) who exists in latent form inside her, and who is confronted with the choice of either dying away or struggling to live and be set free. But to awake for Thérèse also means that the demonic woman will venture onto a path that may turn harmful to others and herself (her attempted murder brings about the risk of imprisonment and social ostracism):

> In contrast to a secure self that is maintained on the outside, the content of that self that piles up on the inside is perceived as something terribly dangerous. It's an unconscious part of the personality that cannot be analysed at a conscious level and which, while existing inside, comes to act as if it were outside. And it always operates through the destruction of the *status quo*. (98)

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[158] Takahashi wrote her Master dissertation on Catholic writer François Mauriac (1885 - 1970).

I contend that the murderous mothers of Takahashi's fiction and those who are portrayed as harbouring filicidal fantasies are all manifestations of the 'demonic woman,' and it is in light of these considerations that my partial readings of "Yonder Sound of Water" (1971a) and "Congruent Figures" ("Sōjikei", 1971b) are elaborated.

These stories portray two more examples of women who are increasingly at odds with their roles as wives and mothers. Painfully alienated from other family members and from ideals of familial happiness, these women manifest their discomfort and internal conflicts in murderous fantasies where the victims are their own daughters. Yūko, the protagonist of "Yonder Sound of Water" lives with her inconclusive husband and her odd little daughter Mariko in a *danchi*-type apartment complex.[159] She describes the estate where her family lives as a small town made of concrete where all blocks look alike and are partitioned according to an alienating, identical pattern. In her eyes the housing complex looks like a factory that produces pregnant women: on each floor there's always an expectant mother and even when a woman fails to conceive someone else does, so that there always seems to be a fixed number of pregnant women in the complex. Yūko recalls her shame, when she was pregnant with Mariko, at her being incorporated in such mechanism.

Yūko also experiences a profound alienation from the familial intimacy that Mariko and her father seem to share and she longs for the lost vitality and individuality of her younger self. She believes to recognize such independent self in an old

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[159] The multi-unit, urban housing estates known as *danchi* became the typical accommodation of post-World War II families. During the 50's, 60's, and 70's, the Japan Housing Corporation, founded in 1955, built many such low-rent apartment complexes in the outskirts of urban areas to confront the housing demands of the Japanese growing population. With the proliferation of consumer and electrical goods the *danchi* became envisioned as the modern housing for the now expanding Japanese middle-class. See Hoshino (1964); Waswo (2002) and Ronald (2007).

photograph of herself when she was fourteen: 'I want to look like that person,' she thinks, 'I wonder whether she still exists.' (1971a: 68) She feels that the presence of her husband and daughter has cast a dark shadow that erased that younger self and made it impossible for Yūko to live a life as a full individual. 'To live' she ponders, 'is to be consumed by the shadows of others' (ibid.). A similar image can also be found in "Congruent Figures": one summer evening, the protagonist Akiko (who is both a wife and a mother) puts red lipstick on and contemplates her reflection in the mirror:

> I saw the gay face of a woman in the mirror. It was another face buried under the dark layers and layers of life. I thought I could have lived with such a face. [...] But I did not do so. I never regretted it at all. Yet I did think about the gorgeous woman which had been crushed inside of me. If given a chance it could have bloomed into a large flower spreading its pink petals and wafting around a sweet fragrance. Such a flower which could not bloom existed inside of me. It existed inside of me without shrinking or withering, no, containing a still richer fragrance precisely because it could not bloom fully. (tr. Mizuta Lippit, 1991:168)

Both mothers mourn the loss of a richer, younger self which is thought either to harbour the potential of an individual plenitude or the energy of a fully bloomed sexual vitality. Like many of Takahashi's characters, the protagonist in "Yonder Sound of Water" has a hard time understanding her daughter and increasingly perceives her as an utterly foreign, inscrutable being:

> A child supposed to have come from inside her was [now] growing into a mysterious other. Had she been a stranger from the start, it probably wouldn't have felt so strange. When [such] a human being, emerged as a part of Yūko's body which had acquired separate existence, moved around Yūko, out of the reach of her hands, she was stirred by a feeling of restlessness as if her own living flesh wandered about toward a space that was inaccessible to her will. (1971a: 71)

As these feeling of alienation and incommunicability multiply, she discovers to her own surprise that she's capable of harbouring murderous desires toward her own

daughter. The following scene reveals to her the crude violence of her maternal ambivalence:

> The shrill voices of children rose up from the courtyard. Yūko opened the door and stepped out in the long corridor. She recognized Mariko's figure. But it wasn't the usual view. She was walking on the concrete balustrade of that very corridor on the third floor, with hands spread out horizontally to keep the balance. The shouts of children who seemed to be looking up at her were rising up from the courtyard with an air of irritation and enjoyment.
> She was about to shout "Mariko, what are you doing?" but she refrained herself. Startled by the sound of her voice Mariko could even fall. That being which was made of Yūko's own living flesh seemed suddenly to stiffen on the balustrade and, for an instant, twitched her body, unsteady. Immediately she leaned on one side and fell gently, drawing a parabola against the background of the clouded sky. Midway the head turned upside down under its weight and she acquired speed. Reaching the ground in a straight line, upside down like that, the head would perhaps split in half like a watermelon. At that idea she froze, as she had realised she was at the same time wishing that to happen. Had that happened, her living flesh would have stopped wandering around in unknown places. Mariko jumped down from the balustrade [back] in the corridor. (72)

Yūko's maternal ambivalence manifests here in an unexpected intermingling of reality and imagination: the description of Mariko walking dangerously on the balustrade merges with what we only later realise to be Yūko's own hallucinatory state of mind. Yūko herself becomes aware of it only after having unconsciously indulged in her filicidal fantasy. Her reactions are particularly significant here because, even though she 'freezes' at the awareness that for a brief, intense moment she had wished her daughter's death, she doesn't seem at all horrified or ashamed by her 'deviant proclivities,' and she doesn't vent negative judgements against herself as an unnatural or immoral mother. Instead, her reflections take the shape of a final reclamation of her independent subjectivity: had Mariko fallen for real, Yūko speculates, she would have

finally been able to re-appropriate the individuality that her daughter's existence and the humdrum of family life had irreparably undermined.

A similar fantasy will also appear in "Congruent Figures" which arguably offers the most explicit problematization of motherhood among the stories I have considered in this chapter. The story opens with the main character Akiko who receives a letter from her daughter Hatsuko with whom she hasn't been in touch for years. Hatsuko informs her that she has a child now and that she is planning to pay her a visit soon. In the letter she confesses that from a young age she had felt disliked by her own mother and she compares Akiko's face to a Noh mask, where glimpses of sudden emotions emerge only to quickly disappear in its seemingly expressionless surface. The day when Hatsuko had become aware of this particular feature of her mother's face was during a summer vacation: while the family was on a boat trip, Hatsuko had noticed that her mother was staring oddly at her. Extremely uncomfortable because of the intensity of her gaze, she had stood up abruptly and had fallen from the boat:

> I came to realize that your large eyes were fixed on me across father's shoulders. I wondered why you gazed at me in such a way. Your face was like that of a Noh mask. As the boat swayed, your face titled slightly and a certain vivid emotion seemed to appear on it, but your face kept its overall expressionless. I could not stand such a gaze and stood up suddenly. Because of it, the boat almost turned over and I fell into the ocean. Do you remember? I sat down again in the back of the boat after father and brother helped me back in. My eyes hurt because the sea water got into them, and the tears continued to flow. This time I looked at my mother through a veil of tears. Then you quietly looked aside, showing your pale profile, and from that time you continued to gaze vacantly far away, looking into the open air.
> From around that time you did not talk to me frequently. What were you angry with me about? […] Sometimes you looked at me with a hard face devoid of emotion, and after that you always looked aside coldly.
> (tr. Mizuta Lippit, 1991:169-70)

Most of the narrative of "Congruent Figures" consists of Akiko's memories as she recalls her growing feelings of hostility toward Hatsuko. The story is a classic fable of mother-daughter rivalry which recounts a mother's ambivalence toward a daughter perceived as a vampire-like, persecutory double. Akiko recounts of the growing, disconcerting similarities between the two of them: 'I felt as if there was a miniature me beside me' (173) and 'Her appearance resembled mine, her habits resembled mine, her feelings resembled mine' (179).[160]

In due time we are provided with Akiko's own perspective on the boat accident: on that trip, the mother had realised how an episode at school that had revealed some of Hatsuko's dark, anti-social behaviours, perfectly overlapped with Akiko's memories of her own childhood. The feeling of being robbed of her individuality had been too much to bear and the eerie expression Hatsuko had seen on her mother's face was the result of the surfacing of this violent frustration. It is on this occasion that, while Hatsuko is being pulled up from the water and back into the boat, her mother has a first murderous fantasy about her:

> I looked far away, taking my eyes off Hatsuko. Stretched waves marked the few stripes on the surface of the sea. They were constantly moving, but as a whole the same striped shapes remained all the time. As I looked at it vacantly, the sea appeared immobile, as if it were a shining steel sheet. The vision of a shark springing up to break that surface crossed my sight bewitchingly. I could see before my eyes a vision of Hatsuko's body, swallowed by its sharp, wide-opened mouth, shining more vividly red than in reality. (180)

It is here that Akiko becomes first aware of the hostility she harbours toward her daughter. According to Hatsuko this is also the moment when her mother almost

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[160] It remains beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate the mother-daughter theme in Takahashi's fiction. For a detailed consideration of this theme in relation to "Congruent Figure", see Sakane (1998) and Alvis (2000).

stopped talking to her. In line with my argument throughout this chapter, I understand this growing incommunicability as the direct result of the surfacing of maternal ambivalence to consciousness: social expectations of maternal propriety and the mother's own resistance to acknowledging her conflicting emotions inhibit access to linguistic articulation. Those same expectations and internalised norms force her to seal "deviant" emotions behind an expressionless mask: 'She could not know the reason, for I made it my task to hide it from her' (ibid.).

A second murderous fantasy occurs on a day when Hatsuko is outside on the slope that climbs up to the woods and an indisposed Akiko is in bed resting and looking at her daughter through the window:

> Hatsuko's figure was striking and vigorous. […] [I]t seemed as if the colors of her clothes were brought out not by the setting sun but by the life inside her. The book of home economy into which I was entering the household expenses was lying next to the pillow; I stretched my hand to it and picked up the pencil. I raised the upper half of my body from the mattress. The pencil was cut so as to show the long wooden surface and the lead was thin and sharply pointed. Holding the middle part between my thumb and middle index finger, I placed the end of the pencil before my right eye. Closing my left eye, I aimed so that the tip of the pencil was pointed toward Hatsuko. I aimed the gun, so to speak. Hatsuko was still standing in the brightness of the setting sun, looking in the air somewhere far away, showing her profile to me. Hatsuko, move away quickly. If you don't, mother will shoot you. Hatsuko did not move. I held the pencil still. Quickly retreat to some place where mother cannot see you. The pencil in my hand felt heavy and hateful. When Hatsuko's figure moved slowly from my sight and disappeared, I felt relieved and at the same time tired. (184)

Of all the images we have encountered this is perhaps the most explicit. A mother is consciously fantasizing of aiming a gun at her daughter and openly declares her intentions: mother will shoot you. There is, emerging from this passage, a profound sense of inner conflict: a sense of restlessness accompanies Akiko's

manifestation of hostility and the pencil becomes heavy and 'hateful.' In the solitude of the empty room, her maternal ambivalence finds partial articulation. Yet, instead of focusing on her own emotions, Akiko is focused more on her daughter, projecting onto her, so to speak, the mysterious power that is 'making her' hold the pencil/gun. Akiko's words seem to imply that, if her daughter disappeared from view, she wouldn't feel compelled to make her the target of such dark fantasies. However, we may also notice that, like Yūko in "Yonder Sound of Water," she does not experience her emotions as deviant or exceptional. Rather, she recognizes them as feelings that find their way, sooner or later, in every mother's heart: 'Was it something special that I felt about Hatsuko? Was my feeling about her abnormal? No, I don't think so. It was an emotion that all the mothers of this world must have felt about their daughters' (170).

In Akiko's neighbourhood an old, crazy woman whom Akiko believed owned the mysterious power to see through the mind of others used to live. Always concerned that her emotions remained concealed behind a façade of maternal propriety, Akiko had tried to avoid her on the street, as if she were scared that the woman's alleged powers could expose her innermost secrets. One night, when her daughter is still living with her, Akiko has a dream where she chases after the old woman up to her dilapidated house at the foot of the mountain. There the woman gives her an old copper mirror and asks her to look at her own reflection:

> "It's my eyes. Reflect your face into my eyes." Hesitating, I looked at the old woman. Her gray hair hung down, dry like straw. Retaining no moisture, her skin was like leather.
> "You don't know. Look into this mirror," the old woman insisted stickily.
> I looked into the mirror. My face was reflected in vague outline on the dull surface. While I stared at it the face began gradually to change. Or I should say that from behind the blue brown surface of the mirror a

strange, unfamiliar face emerged vaguely, and it overlapped my face. The face which revealed itself contained anger.

"It is the face of mother." At these words of the old woman, the image on the mirror's surface disappeared.

"It was not my mother's," I said. Then the coppered mirror in my hand disappeared too, and looking up I saw the old woman's eyes were gazing at me with the same color as the mirror's surface.

"It is the face of mother itself in general." The old woman laughed with a husky voice. (190-1)

In a scene reminiscent of "Kodomosama," we witness here an exchange that seems to unfold in a realm of shared female knowledge. Far from being the image of eternal and self-sacrificial love, the reflection of Akiko-as-mother is transfigured by dark emotions. Akiko does not recognize her reflection, though: the face she sees is unfamiliar and this suggests her inability to face both her maternal ambivalence and that 'other self' that remains buried and concealed inside her (the 'demonic woman' within Akiko?). The comments of the old woman further suggest that what we see in the mirror should not be limited to the idiosyncratic experience of a single woman: the face of anger and fury that the mirror sends back to us is the face *all* mothers which remains hidden under the controlled expressionless of the mask of maternal propriety. The power of this passage resides in its portrayal of a maternal potential for violence as natural.

The second climatic moment in this episode occurs when the dream turns into a nightmare: with her bare hands the old woman cuts her own wrists and disappears, only her dry laughter still lingering in the air as her blood displaces the darkness:

[...] and the voice of the old woman could be heard from far away saying it was the blood of women, and the sky was filled with a red-black sticky secretion, and the old woman stretched out her hands and scooped it up saying that it was the blood of women, look there is a limitless amount, scooped and scooped and it was still there; it is transmitted to the woman who comes out of your stomach, then to another woman

who comes out of that woman, and what is transmitted is woman's karma, here try to scoop it, where can you find maternal love? It is nothing but an illusion manufactured by men. Look, look, there, there is only blood, why is there such a thing? (191)

Against the background of a gruesome oneiric landscape flooded with blood, Takahashi's story strikes a profound and unrestrained blow to cultural idealizations of the maternal. Reproduction becomes a tragedy and a curse: in all the stories I have explored Takahashi seems relentlessly to argue that, in a society that recognizes women only in their roles as wives and mothers, becoming a mother is inevitably associated with the endless and meaningless repetition of stifling gender norms which hamper the development of woman's autonomous subjectivity. Maternal violence may be read, here, as the symptomatic manifestation of the 'demonic woman' within Takahashi's female characters. Whereas these women utter with only great difficulty their unnameable desires, their actions have the effect to leave the reader mesmerized and disoriented vis-à-vis the realization that the myth of maternal love has been shattered in thousand fragments.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present research I have explored the emergence in late postwar Japan of a distinctive constellation of discourses by means of which multiple portrayals of maternal filicide were circulated, and that engaged to different degrees in the articulation of a maternal potential for violence. Originally this project was clearly motivated by a desire to know what had been said about mothers who kill their children at a time when the birth of a women's liberation movement announced women's growing dissatisfaction with cultural assumptions of womanhood and femininity. A founding suspicion remained, however, as to the effects of these discursive constructions of murderous motherhood, because the frequency with which representations of filicidal mothers appeared in the discursive arena did not by necessity indicate that maternal violence had finally stopped being the object of a deep-seated cultural taboo. Silences, erasures and omissions became then as important as the things said, suggesting that, at the very moment when a maternal potential for violence seemed to make its way into the realm of cultural intelligibility, forms of conscious and unconscious resistance limited the extent to which a renegotiation of the meaning of the maternal was allowed to take place.

The analysis of Japanese newspapers in chapter 2 shed light upon the effort of news media to make sense of the frequency with which mothers seemed to harm their children. Although it would be naïve to conceive of media coverage as internally homogeneous, it was possible to identify a set of rhetorical and editorial strategies whereby filicide came to be portrayed as a phenomenon of alarming proportion, while mothers were made into the main target of social criticism and public condemnation.

A close reading of newspaper articles exposed the ways in which Japanese news media sought to contain the threat to the social fabric and its gender order that filicidal mothers represented. Stock stories of the "bad" and the "mad" mother so familiar to a western audience combined here with the widespread lamentation for an era marked by 'the loss of motherhood' and 'the suffering of children'. Although somewhat at odds with it, recurrent portrayals of murderous mothers as cruel monsters, demonic creatures or unfortunate victims of mental illness combined with a narrative of filicide as a social phenomenon (that is, as a common albeit tragic occurrence) and operated as a safety valve: implicitly suggesting the exceptionality of the accidents, these narratives were meant to relieve the excessive pressure that such manifestations of violence exerted upon society's idealisation of motherhood. We could arguably conclude that despite the growing public visibility of episodes of maternal filicide, the possibility of a coexistence of or dialogic relationship between motherhood and violence was expunged from the realm of cultural intelligibility and made into its constitutive outside (Butler, 1990; 1993). The violence perpetrated by these mothers was tamed; its threat exorcised and made socially 'digestible,' while its implicit call for a re-examination of the myth of maternal love was successfully sidestepped.

One of the most striking features of media coverage on maternal filicide is the employment of the categories of *boshi shinjū* and *kogoroshi* which allowed a systematic and differential treatment of maternal violence. The notion of kogoroshi (*ko + goroshi*, lit. child killing) carried in itself the semantic traces of an unambiguous violence in the nominalisation of the verb *korosu* (to kill). Those mothers who committed *kogoroshi* came to be perceived as the most dangerous transgressors of cultural norms of motherhood and femininity. Their perpetration of violence against

the young lives they were meant to protect was considered inexcusable and was reported accordingly as a monstrous aberration. Filicidal mothers (*kogoroshi no haha*) were stripped of their maternal identities and plunged into a realm of social abjection. At the same time, the maternal potential for violence they embodied was repressed in the social subconscious, expunged from the realm of cultural intelligibility and made into the very limit against which norms of appropriate maternal behaviour were continually re-established.

On the other hand, when the killing of a child by a mother was reported under the category of *boshi shinjū* (roughly, mother-child double suicide) it was arguably met with greater social acceptability and understanding. The use of this category made it possible to subsume a mother's killing of her child and her own suicide under the romanticised notion of a double-suicide committed out of love. This rhetorical move collapsed the identity of the child with that of the mother and erased, as it were, the child's status as a victim in his/her own right. By foregrounding the emotional bond between mother and child and sidestepping any overt reference to the violence the mother perpetrated against her child, the category of *boshi shinjū* actively hindered the intelligible articulation of a maternal potential for violence. In other words, maternal violence was effaced under a dramatic expression of (maternal) love that emerged 'at the centre of the heart' (*shinjū*). It does not seem a coincidence that it was under these conditions of erasure – where both a mother's violence and the child-as-victim disappeared – that maternal filicide acquired a considerable degree of social acceptance.

However, can *boshi shinjū* be read otherwise? The category of *boshi shinjū* draws on the image of the double suicidal pact of two lovers (*shinjū*), a form of suicidal behaviour that gained acceptability and promimence in the Tokugawa period (1600 – 1867) and which found immediate resonance in literature and theatre of the time in the forms of the so-called *shinjūmono*. Traditionally *shinjū* was understood as the dramatic expression of an unresolvable tension between *giri* (obligation, duty) and *ninjō* (emotions). The notion of *giri* was rooted in Confucian values of self-restraint and constituted a central norm of behaviour for the samurai class, whereas *ninjō* represented a value system that found its highest expression in literature and theatre and which proclaimed the right to love and passion of the rising merchant class (*chōnin*). *Giri* and *ninjō* represented respectively the demand of social order and the emotional drive of the individual: sometimes in conflict, sometimes in a relation of complementarity, these values existed side by side and satisfied different needs. The conflict between *giri* and *ninjō* often found a dramatic resolution in the double suicide pact between lovers: the *shinjūmono* usually portray their love as so strong that, when faced with the social impossibility to live it fully, they opt out of this existence in the belief that they will be finally reunited in their next life. It is not death that they choose, but love that leads to death (Katō, 1983; Heine, 1994).

Therefore, *shinjū* becomes tinged with the colours of a transgression to social norms that assert external social obligations over the emotions of the individual. Additionally, if we consider that *giri* prioritises the individual's belonging to the group – whose values are understood to eclipse individual subjectivity – we could also read the double-suicidal pact between two lovers as the affirmation of the individual against the group. Can this interpretation of *shinjū* pave the way to a more subversive

understanding of *boshi shinjū*? Can we read the affective bond between mother and child that appears so central to media potrayals of maternal filicide in the guise of a 'mother-child double suicide' as a manifestation of *ninjō* asserted *against* a set of established social constraints? To what extent the does the *shinjū* in *boshi shinjū* open up the possibility of recognising a culturally sanctioned form of social protest in this distinctive configuration of maternal child-killing? Does this interpretation confer to the mother who kills her child and then kills herself an agentic consciousness that rebels against the *status quo* of Japanese society? The erasure of the child in *boshi shinjū* reproduces cultural assumptions about the child being a non-person and being part of the mother's own self. In so doing, it points at specific features of *boshi shinjū* that distinguish it from the traditional understanding of *shinjū*. However, the fact that such subversive potential of *boshi shinjū* – however partial – never emerged in media coverage of maternal filicide (where the romanticised and literary dimensions of *shinjū* remained prevalent), is indicative of the effacement that the idea of a maternal potential for violence suffered at the very site where its frequent appearance in media coverage should have made it all the more visible.

News media's representations of maternal filicide constituted the background against which *ribu*'s manifestations of solidarity with mothers who killed their children acquired the clear status of counter-hegemonic acts of dissent. In the context of their critique of the gender organization of modern society and their attempts to establish the conditions of possibility for new forms of relationality, *ribu* activists opposed the media's biased portrayals of filicidal mothers. They denounced the criminalization, stigmatization and pathologization of these women and the process whereby the individual mother was singled out and declared the exception to a norm that remained

unquestioned. The unfair treatment meted out to these mothers was understood to deny them the status of agentic subject and rational human being, and to create a separation between their experience and the average woman. In order to counter such widespread and "commonsensical" understandings of maternal filicide, *ribu* aimed at creating an alternative discursive space where a mother's potential for violence could be conceived in more human and sympathetic terms. Shigematsu (2012) called this approach a 'feminist praxis of critical solidarity and radical inclusivity': a modality of political contestation that relied on the programmatic expression of solidarity with socially abjected or criminalised individuals, and which aimed to raise awareness of one's own complicity with the system of discrimination and social injustice that was understood to spur those criminal behaviours in the first place.

Yet, I have identified a degree of ambivalence and ambiguity in the way murderous mothers came to be represented in *ribu*'s rhetoric. One of the reasons was certainly *ribu*'s heterogeneous composition and the relative independence of the various groups that constituted its choral voice. On the other hand, it seems to me that the possible contradictions or inconsistencies in the movement's multiple portrayals of mothers who kill may well have stemmed from the mutual interference of two potentially irreconcilable desires. To begin with, the movement's emphasis on relationality urged *ribu* activists to strive to establish an encounter with filicidal mothers and to provide a discursive space where their voice could be heard. The voices of these mothers do not seem to have left material traces in the archival material this thesis relied upon, but their presence can be somehow perceived, at times, as the ghostly addressee of some of *ribu*'s rhetorical interventions. The second motivation that fuelled *ribu*'s discursive engagement with maternal filicide was its

desire to articulate an alternative understanding of the phenomenon that was in line with the movement's political agenda. In this respect, the production and circulation of images of murderous mothers that certainly constituted an important discursive intervention in the context of *ribu*'s multiple struggles for social transformation might also have exposed the tragic experiences of these mothers to the danger of co-optation. In other words, *ribu* might have sometimes slipped into an appropriation of the notion of maternal filicide for political purposes which might have inadvertently relegated the *actual* experience of mothers who killed their children to the fringes of discourse. This would explain why these mothers cannot be identified as a consistent and material presence in the language of *ribu*. Whether or not the voicelessness of these mothers was sometimes exacerbated by *ribu*'s rhetorical engagement with the notion of maternal filicide remains an open question. But there is enough evidence to suggest that, while the two driving forces behind such engagement were not necessarily mutually exclusive, they may have at times shaped *ribu*'s discourse on maternal violence in unpredictable directions.

Ribu's discourse(s) on maternal filicide were born out of the movement's urgent desire to challenge the biased portrayals of mothers who killed that appeared with alarming frequency in the media coverage of the time. It is therefore striking that the silences that traverse *ribu*'s archival material betray what appears to be a failure to engage (or, possibly, a purposeful choice not to engage) with instances of maternal violence in the form of *boshi shinjū*. In fact, it was *kogoroshi* and not *boshi shinjū* that became a buzzword in the context of *ribu*'s numerous interventions to reclaim a maternal or, rather, female potential for violence. *Ribu*'s emphasis on *kogoroshi* could be understood in light of the movement's politicization of women's relationship with

violence (Shigematsu, 2012). By embracing *kogoroshi*, women activists were also purposefully embracing the unambiguous violence that distinguished it vis-à-vis the romanticised (and tamed) image of *boshi shinjū*. In this respect, it could be argued that it was because news media denounced the violent nature of *kogoroshi* as aberration that *ribu* reclaimed the term and its violence, associating it to the notion of *onna* as a new political subject. Therefore, this may well have constituted a conscious strategy to counter those representations of murderous mothers that were most damaging to women's effort to articulate a female identity freed from the shackles of cultural prescriptions of femininity and womanhood.

On the other hand, *ribu*'s lack of engagement with a common understanding of *boshi shinjū* and its use by the media to portray more "acceptable" forms of maternal filicide may also identify a lacuna in the movement's intervention on maternal violence. A selective focus on *kogoroshi* to the detriment of *boshi shinjū* may even nourish the suspicion that many *ribu* activists did indeed buy into the romanticised image of *shinjū*. In doing so they might have become inadvertent accomplices in specific forms of erasure of a maternal potential for violence.

In chapter 5 the analysis of early works of fiction by Japanese writer Takahashi Takako offered the chance to consider the extent to which women's literature might have participated in the redefinition of female identity in late postwar Japan. Investigating the multiple configurations of maternal violence that surface in Takahashi's literature in light of her non-fictional essays leads us towards a recognition of how deeply her literary representations of maternal animosity resonate with *ribu*'s commitment to social change. Her early works lend themselves to being read as the

manifestation in literary form of a programmatic effort to challenge cultural prescriptions of femininity and norms of appropriate maternal behaviour. And although Takahashi never referred to *ribu* in explicit terms nor ever expressed support for its struggle, it is my contention that a careful analysis of her writings places her in a legible relation to the women's movement. A preoccupation with the proposed changes to the law that regulated women's access to abortion (the Eugenic Protection Law), an adamant support for women's freedom to decide not to give birth, the acknowledgement (however cursory) of the plight of unmarried mothers and a fierce critique of the institution of the family reveal Takahashi as an acute and engaged social commentator, despite her claims to the contrary.[161]

Furthermore, the specific vocabulary and imagery she employs in many of her non-fictional writings show such striking similarities with the rhetoric and language of *ribu* that one may well be tempted to read them both as refracted manifestations of a single revolutionary consciousness. Those instances, for example, in which Takahashi indicates woman's awakening to sexuality as a preferential route toward a liberated self, find a suggestive correspondence in the emphasis placed by *ribu* on the promotion of woman's knowledge of her body for the eventual articulation of a new female identity. Even more reminiscent of *ribu* is Takahashi's claim that, just as the mother and the prostitute had once been exposed as two sides of the same coin (which were perceived as opposites only within man's split consciousness), the categorical distinction between the diabolic and the maternal woman was also understood as the inaccurate (and damaging) result of man's classificatory system.

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[161] In "My Obtuseness" (*Watashi no donkansa*, 1977), for example, Takahashi confesses her lack of political and historical consciousness at the time she was attending university.

The disturbing fascination that Takahashi's depictions of maternal animosity exert(ed) upon her readers is indicative of the potential of literature to constitute a counter-discourse that may interfere with hegemonic understandings of maternal violence. The insistency with which mothers who kill appeared in her early writings constituted an affont to cultural idealisations of maternal love and selfless devotion. It was the repeated nature of this affront that performed an intervention into the Symbolic, expanding the capacity of 'imagining otherwise.' Arguably, the challenge that Takahashi's literature posed to the Symbolic was further amplified by the emergence, at that time, of a new generation of women writers whose disturbing fantasies of female transgression produced an effect of kaleidoscopic reflections and reciprocal amplifications.

Literary representations of "aberrant" motherhood certainly contributed to the dismantling of the myth of maternal love. However, it is the disconcerting similarity between Takahashi's 'demonic woman' and the 'child-killing *onna*' of *ribu*'s rhetoric that is most suggestive of the ways in which these two discourses might have jointly participated in the reclaiming of a female potential for violence. Takahashi theorised the demonic woman as the embodiment of a female awakening to a new self. Positionied in stark opposition to the maternal – which, in turn, was conceived unequivocally as a condition of lethargy and sleep-walking – the demonic woman was described as caught in a struggle for survival underneath the mask of feminine propriety. Thérèse Desqueyroux's split subjectivity was taken by Takahashi to exemplify this existential conflict, and 'the other woman' within Thérèse to be the true origin of Thérèse's murderous desires. The real culprit, so to speak, was not Thérèse-

the-wife or Thérèse-the-mother (in other words, the Thérèse whose identity society recognised), but the image darkly forming of this 'other woman' within Thérèse.

When we read Takahashi's fictional portrayals of mothers who kill in light of the figure of the demonic woman, we come to understand that she who perpetrates the violence is not the mother, but the demonic woman *within/underneath* (the mask of) the mother. In similar fashion, *ribu* claimed that she who laid her hands on the child was not the woman-as-mother but the *onna*-within-the-mother. In light of these considerations it is tempting to read the demonic woman and *onna* as twin figures that remind us of the reciprocal permeability of these two counter-discourses. In analogous ways in which *onna* was understood to harm the child (and eventually herself) in a desperate, blind attempt to break free from the prison of an inauthentique self ('a self that was not a self'), a woman's awakening to her "demonic self" (her *real* self) often signified the breaking the taboo of a female (maternal) potential for violence.

Takahashi's depictions of mothers who kill their children also made it possible to explore in fictional form the psychic dimension of maternal violence. Literary portrayals (re-)produced mothers' intimate experience of their murderous desires, and imagined the fracture these could generate in women's identities as mothers and wives. Essay titles such as 'Moving backward toward the world of the unconscious' (*Senzai sekai e no gyakkō*),[162] 'To dig into the unconscious' (*Muishiki wo horu*)[163] and 'Subconscious landscapes' (*Senzai ishiki no kōkei*)[164] testify to the importance Takahashi attributed to the subconscious and the inner workings of the psyche. 'The

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[162] Takahashi (1977b: 29-33).
[163] Takahashi (1980: 94-98).
[164] Takahashi (1977b: 81-85).

act of writing fiction', she once claimed, 'is the act of digging into the unconscious.' (1980: 96). Accordingly, literature became for Takahashi a realm where she could unearth desires, passions and dark emotions that social mores made barely acceptable, when they did not simply repress and expunge them from the realm of cultural intelligibility.

Commenting on literature's transformative potential, Takahashi also argued that, by means of writing about a character's dark impulses and criminal deeds, the author could undergo those same experiences and be transformed by them (1980, 35-8). In the essay "A literature of crime" (*Satsui no bungaku*) she further elaborated on this aspect and considered that writing about individuals who committed crimes in solitude had become for her a way to experience an otherwise inaccessible existential journey during which she could share the deep incommunicability that separated the person who had committed the crime from those who had not committed it (1975: 13-6). We would have expected that, as a result of such an approach to the writing of fiction, Takahashi's portrayals of mothers who kill would have succeeded in retrieving a maternal potential of violence from the realm of psychic repression and in conferring to it a fully intelligible formulation. However, what we encounter in her stories is a tenacious resistance to discursive articulations that takes the form of multiple interruptions, hesitations, pauses and silences. It could be argued, therefore, that Takahashi's portrayals of murderous mothers fall short of their promises (a complete salvaging of a maternal potential for violence from the repressions performed by cultural taboos and linguistic prohibition). On the other hand, they could also be understood to denounce a most dramatic form of erasure, where verbal articulation is

not simply prohibited from without but from within, and collapsed into the physicality of symptoms.

This research began with a Foucauldian understanding of discourse. This made it possible to recognise the extent to which media coverage of maternal filicide, *ribu*'s interventions in solidarity with mothers who killed their children and Takahashi's literary depictions of maternal animosity did not constitute isolated instances of an unprecedented preoccupation with maternal violence. Instead, they represented a historically and culturally specific tactical configuration of discourses that engaged in a passionate struggle over the meaning of womanhood, femininity and motherhood. *Ribu*'s political appropriation of a maternal potential for violence in the figure of the child-killing *onna*, its efforts to establish new forms of relationality with mothers who killed their children and Takahashi's portrayals of murderous mothers' psychic landscapes operated as powerful counter-discourses that challenged hegemonic understanding of maternal violence as a pathological or diabolic aberration. In this respect, both the *kogoroshi no onna* and Takahashi's 'demonic woman' functioned as figures of resistance and were instrumental in what seemed to be a collective attempt to dismantle the myth of maternal love.

An in-depth analysis of these discourses called attention to the numerous silences that traversed them. These were not to be understood as the very limit of discourse, ambiguous instances plagued by an absence of meaning, but as part and parcel of a complex set of discursive strategies and power-relations. This thesis investigated the extent to which each of the discourses analysed had its own silences

and erasures. Translation as a theoretical concept and as a praxis was instrumental in exposing these silences and making them "visible." But can silence be translated? The existence in Japanese language (and culture) of the two distinct categories of *kogoroshi* and *boshi shinjū* suggests that discursive elaborations of maternal violence may be hindered by the impossibility of what Jacobson called intralingual translation (or rewording). What is at stake, then, in our attempt to translate that which resists translation, that which appear to be non-translatable? Given these premises, betrayal of the original may seem unavoidable, thus making a self-reflexive caution in our approach to the source language a priority:

> If the original text is already a translator battle in which what is being translated is ultimately the very impossibility of translation, then peacemaking gestures such as scrupulous adherence to the signifier are just as unfaithful to the energy of the conflict as the tyranny of the swell-footed signified. The translator must fight just as hard against the desire to be innocent as against what we today consider the guilty desire to master the text's message. (Johnson, 1985: 147)

To expose the linguistic erasure of maternal violence performed by the use of *boshi shinjū* in the news media meant to translate it in ways that foregrounded its constitutive exclusions. As we have seen, however, to translate *shinjū* as 'double-suicide' is already to betray the rich set of connotations that inhabits the original. Let us note, for example, that the etyimology of the English word 'suicide' indicates unambisuously the act of killing oneself (*sui*=of oneself + *caedere*=kill). There exists a word in Japanese that corresponds to 'suicide' and that is *jisatsu* (自殺, 自=self + 殺=to kill). Therefore, whereas the English notion of 'double-suicide' conjures up either the idea of reciprocity (as in the action of 'killing each other') or a simple redoubling of the act (the simultaneous action of 'killing oneself' by two individuals), the Japanese word

shinjū does not bear traces of that violence and instead foregrounds the perception that the action is rooted in a shared emotional bond 'at the centre of the heart.'

'[B]etrayal appears to be an ineluctable reality in intercultural translation', commented Rey Chow (2007: 570), but to say so is far from suggesting that we should give up translating. Quite to the contrary, Berman (1992 [1984]) contends that we are faced with an ethical demand to translate, to establish a dialogue with the Other – even though '[t]he betrayal of the original in the process of transmitting it is inherent in translation' (Butler, 2004: 82). In fact, we could contend that the extent to which the 'resistant materiality' of the original emerges in the translation may provide a measure of our capacity to enter into a dialogue with the foreignness of the original without effacing its alterity. 'Translation meets the original at the site of resistance', claimed Butler (2004: 84). 'The original becomes perceptible in resisting [translation]', she further suggested, but 'that it becomes perceptible does not mean that it becomes restored. On the contrary, it becomes perceptible at the moment of contact.' Therefore, the aim of translation ought not to reside in a desire to restore the meaning of the original. Translation should not be conceived of as a process of *restitution* of meaning. In fact, as Benjamin acutely observed, translation involves a process of transformation and renewal to such an extent that 'it is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original' (2007 [1955]: 71). By 'resist[ing] the structures and discourses of the receiving language and culture', translation tests the limits of the target language and the systems of thought that are expressed by and through it. At the same time, 'it interrogates the structures and discourses of the foreign [language and culture], exposing its unacknowledged conditions' (Venuti, 2001: 172-3).

To conclude, we should acknowledge that an exploration of the extent to which a maternal potential for violence in Japan was allowed access to the realm of cultural intelligibility should not limit itself to a consideration of the different connotations of *boshi shinjū* and *kogoroshi*. Categories such as *michizure* (道連れ), *yōji-goroshi* (幼児殺し), *nyūji-goroshi* (乳児殺し), *eiji-goroshi* (嬰児殺し) and *mabiki* (間引き), just to name a few, certainly will provide the chance to investigate whether and how parental violence might have found alternative articulations in different contexts/discourses and at different historical times, thus expanding the limited focus of the present research. Finally, future studies on paternal violence as opposed to my preoccupation with maternal violence will offer insights into the role of gender in cultural representations of parental violence and child-abuse. A differential attention to the gender of the parent will also deepen our understanding of how *kogoroshi* and *shinjū* may be employed differently in the media and in other cultural representations of violence against children.

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