EMBODIED SURVIVAL AND DEMYTHOLOGIZATION IN KIRINO NATSUO'S *TOKYO JIMA*[1]

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Introduction

The "precariat" is a literary motif that appears to be spreading throughout contemporary Japanese literature. Since the collapse of the bubble economy, the 1990s have been referred to as the "lost decade" (*ushinawareta jūnen*), followed by the "decade of the precariat." These twenty years of economic decline or contraction, from 1990 to 2010, have been termed the "two lost decades" or the "lost score" (*ushinawareta nijūnen*).[2] Precariat author and activist Amamiya Karin introduced the term, which is a combination of the words "precarious" and "proletariat" into Japanese to redefine precarious workers in terms of class.[3] The precariat is a highly heterogeneous group encompassing all kinds of professions and practices, such as *hikikomori, freeters*, NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), and general unemployed workers. Their temporary and contingent connections to work (and each other) make their relations precarious, which stands in the way of becoming a long-term, supportive, fixed class group.[4]

The post-bubble, neo-liberalist Japan and its growing socioeconomic inequalities provide the setting in which Kirino Natsuo's *Tokyo jima* (Tokyo Island, 2007–2008) develops. This setting, together with the precariat motif, is also central to other works written by Kirino, such as *Out* (1997), *Grotesque* (2003; trans. 2007), *Real World* (2003; trans. 2008),

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[1] Author's Note: I would like to thank Dr. Natsumi Ikoma for her feedback, and Dr. Hitomi Yoshio for her detailed and helpful suggestions.

[2] Roman Rosenbaum, "Towards an Introduction: Japan's Literature of Precarity," in Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt and Roman Rosenbaum, eds., *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2–3.

[3] Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Precarity Discourses in Kirino Natsuo's Metabola: The Okinawan Stage, Fractured Selves and the Ambiguity of Contemporary Existence," *Japan Forum* 24/2 (2012), 143.

[4] Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Precarity," 144; Rosenbaum, "Towards," 2.

and *Metabola* (2007), which has granted her a place within "contemporary proletarian literature" (*gendai puroretaria bungaku)*.[5] Kirino's *Tokyo jima* received the Tanizaki Jun'ichiro Award in 2008. That same year, Kobayashi Takiji's (1903-1933) *Kani kōsen* (1929; trans. The cannery boat 1933; The factory ship 1973; The crab cannery ship 2013) was at the top of the best-seller list. Eighty years after its original publication, this classic proletarian novel resonated with contemporary readers – perhaps the same readers of *Tokyo jima*. Amamiya Karin wrote in articles published in national newspapers that Kobayashi's depiction of the harsh working conditions aboard the cannery ship spoke to those faced by the precariat in contemporary society, which helped consolidate the so-called *Kanikōsen* boom.[6] Similarly, Kirino's *Tokyo jima* also speaks to the harsh working conditions and fragile relationships at the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

However, when discussing precarity in literature, as scholar Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt points out:

> [It] makes more sense to speak of precarity as a literary motif, or perhaps a literary mode, rather than a new 'literature of the precariat.' What seems important is the construction not of a new class of literature, but of a theoretical framework to discuss representations of cultural and socioeconomic change and its repercussions for individual lives.[7]

To read contemporary literary works within the precariat framework, such as Kirino Natsuo's *Tokyo jima*, implies an awareness of the impact of precarity

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[5] Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Precarity," 142; Kathryn Hemmann, "The Precarity of the Housewife in Kirino Natsuo's 'Rusted Hearts,' *Japanese Language and Literature* 52/1 (2018), 205.

[6] Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Precarity," 141–142. Also, Kawakami Mieko's *Chichi to ran* (Breasts and Eggs) received the Akutagawa Prize in 2008, a work that depicts stories of the precariat, and Abe Auestad has emphasized this connection between contemporary readers and literary works in the *Kanikōsen* boom. See Reiko Abe Auestad, "Invoking Affect in Kawakami Mieko's *Chichi to ran* (Breasts and Eggs, 2008): Higuchi Ichiyō, Playful Words, Ludic Gestures," *Japan Forum* 28/4 (2016): 530–548.

[7] Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Precarity," 144.

on said works and their reception, rather than a fixed definition of a new categorization or genre. Shan Lianyin explains that *Tokyo jima* is an allegory of Japan's sexual politics that makes us rethink contemporary sociocultural and political issues affecting survival concerning the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, race, and class.[8] In *Tokyo jima*, Kirino problematizes and blurs the boundaries between locals and foreigners while addressing social issues related to outcasts, the underprivileged, and oppressed, as she centers the narrative on precariat characters. Given this social dimension, there is also room for a geopolitical reading that draws an analogy between the Tokyoites and the Hong Kongers, with the actual dynamics between the countries.[9] But this study is concerned with precarity as a key background and framework useful for exploring representations of embodiment and gender vis-à-vis the question of survival. Hence, this article analyzes embodied, gendered experiences, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering, relating to survival from a feminist perspective and argues that through debunking and reinterpreting myths, Kirino's *Tokyo jima* reimagines the survival of an alternative sexual, maternal, embodied femininity. Namely, it contests hegemonic, ideal, and naturalized views of womanhood and motherhood.

Tokyo jima's setting is a new take on the real-life incident of Anatahan, a Pacific island in the Northern Marianas, where Higa Kazuko was the only woman among thirty-one male World War II soldiers who continued to fight after Japan surrendered.[10] Kirino's novel features a group of people building a community, reconstructing a patriarchal society in conditions close to an ideal "original" state of nature; that is to say, "primitive" and "uncivilized." It is important to clarify that Kirino's treatment of nature is far

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[8] Shan Lianyin, "Rewriting Women's Oppression through Myth and Nature – Kirino Natsuo's *Tokyo Island* and *The Goddess Chronicle*," *Japanese Language and Literature* 52/1 (2018): 179–200.
[9] Takeshi Suzuki, "Kaiketsu," in *Tokyo jima* (Tokyo: Shinchōsa, 2008), 370.
[10] Mark Schilling, "'Tokyo-jima (Tokyo Island)' Lust, Power, Death and Deception – Welcome to Paradise," *The Japan Times*, August 27, 2010. In this article, Kirino's depiction has been compared to *The Saga of Anatahan* (1953) directed by Josef von Sternberg, which was based on the two memoirs by Maruyama Michirō *Anatahan* (1951), and a later edition in September 1952, *Anatahan no Kokuhaku* (Confession of Anatahan), which included the testimony of another survivor Tanaka Hidechi.

from realistic but rather caricature-like. In other words, Kirino offers comically and sometimes grotesquely exaggerated depictions of nature and events that would otherwise be tragic. Thus, in Kirino's literary world, humor seems to be a key component to survival.

Embodiment and survival are central to this study's characterization of Kirino's depiction in terms of "embodied survival." Iris Marion Young reflects upon gender-specific embodiment as her work aims "to describe embodied being-in-the-world through modalities of sexual and gender difference."[11] Thus, embodiment refers to how our sexual and/or gendered body mediates the way we inhabit, interact with, and experience the world. In addition, the term refers to "*being embodied* and *embodying the social*"; hence, it addresses both the individual, personal dimension, and the sociocultural one.[12] In analyzing survival in both literal and figurative ways, as a personal experience and a sociocultural phenomenon, the question of survival is also interlocked with precarity: How do we survive in precarious conditions and under multiple systems of oppression? What kinds of jobs are sustaining one's survival and that of others? This article is primarily concerned with what it takes for women to continue living under patriarchy and how the act of survival can be feminist. More than "living on," Sarah Ahmed thinks about survival in terms of "keeping one's hopes alive; holding on to the projects that are projects insofar as they have yet to be realized" and stresses that "we need each other to survive; we need to be part of each other's survival."[13] With this in mind, it is assumed that Kirino's *Tokyo jima* articulates a feminist, embodied survival via demythologization.

Kirino has identified that there are arbitrary stories necessary to maintain power and that there are stories needed for humans to live; these stories frequently become myths, which are more important for society as a

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[11] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.
[12] Deborah L. Tolman et al., "Sexuality and Embodiment," in Deborah L. Tolman and Lisa M. Diamond, eds., *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology*: *Vol. 1. Person-Based Approaches* (Washington, DC: The American Psychological Association, 2014), 761.
[13] Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 235.

whole than for individuals.[14] In a different outlet, in connection to *Joshinki* (*The Goddess Chronicle* 2008; trans. 2013), Kirino says: "I have a rather strong desire to see directly the political intentions which were often concealed in so-called 'Myths.'"[15] This desire towards unveiling and debunking myths is at the heart of *Tokyo jima*. By revealing that patriarchy is historical and contingent rather than an inevitable natural order, Kirino puts forward a feminist work of demythologization grounded in contemporary Japan's precarious and gendered reality.

Tokyo jima is thus a fictional demythologization in which Kirino dismantles ideals of femininity and motherhood and reveals the problems that emerge from our current conceptions of gender in relation to community building and patriarchy. It is possible to identify common elements among Kirino's works. For instance, her novel *Politikon* (2011) also deals with the themes of utopia/dystopia and community building in the absence of love. Moreover, Kirino published *Joshinki* the same year as *Tokyo jima*, and these two demythologizing works seem to be in conversation with one another.[16] Both of them can be read as an example of "feminist revisionist mythmaking," a term initially proposed by Alicia Ostriker, and often referred to as "myth revision," which requires the act of looking back at old stories, texts, or myths, then question, alter, and modify them, in order to subvert and/or deconstruct the patriarchal order as well as enable new alternatives.[17]

Ostriker has suggested that sometimes this revisionist mythmaking appears as "instructions of survival"[18] and as opposition "to the patriarchal praxis of reifying texts."[19] Also, Adrianne Rich has linked myth revision to survival: "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of

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[14] Kirino Natsuo, "Ningen ga ikiru tame ni hitsuyō to suru monogatari wo," *Tokyo jima* kankō kinen intabyū, *Nami*, June 2016, 5.
[15] James Costa, "Interview with Kirino Natsuo," interview by James Costa, *Three Guys One Book*, August 19, 2013 (accessed May 20, 2021, 1http://threeguysonebook.com/interview-with-natsuo-kirino/).
[16] In both works *Joshinki* and *Tokyo jima* Kirino gives voice and agency to female figures. Refer to Lianyin, "Rewriting," 179–200.
[17] Susan Sellers, *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 1991), 30.
[18] Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking," *Signs* 8/1 (1982), 73.
[19] Ibid., 87.

entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival."[20] In *Joshinki*, the old text is the *Kojiki*, whereas in *Tokyo jima* Kirino comes up with a new tale regarding the beginnings of (a) society and, by doing so, dismantles the myth of patriarchy. Not only foundational myths – such as the Izanagi and Izanami myth retold in Kirino's *Joshinki* – but also folklore and literature often feature a woman who disappears into the underworld; women are locked in the chthonic, destined to the realm of death. Thus, the disappearing or missing woman can be considered a recurring motif representing a Japanese cultural paradigm.[21] In *Tokyo jima*, through demythologization – an act of imagination and reinterpretation that exposes all the mythical elements and thus is freed from them – Kirino lets Kiyoko live. The woman survives.

Tokyo jima was originally published as a literary periodical or series (*shinchō*). The first short episode, entitled *Tokyo jima*, gave the whole series its name. This first chapter was intended to stand on its own as a short story. The fact that Kirino uses the same title for the whole novel opens the possibility to think of this episode's end in terms of both chapter and novel, since they both reach a similar powerful conclusion: Kiyoko, our non-conventional heroine, escapes from Tokyo Island and chooses her own survival over anything else.[22] Thus, Kiyoko is not a victim but a survivor. The image of Kiyoko as a survivor is performed and embodied, and it is also nuanced as it shifts with the changes in the plot and her subjectivity.

Life on Tokyo Island: Plot and Characters

The novel begins when the lottery to choose Kiyoko's fourth husband is about to start. The narrative perspective shifts through different characters, but it largely relies on Kiyoko, and the timeline jumps back and forth, so readers are tasked with puzzling out the order of events. Five years

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[20] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *College English* 34/1 (1972), 18.

[21] Hayao Kawai, "The 'Forbidden Chamber' Motif in a Japanese Fairy Tale," in Yoshihiko Ikegami, ed., *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 176.

[22] Only this first chapter has been translated into English by Philip Gabriel and published in 2010 by *Granta*. However, the complete novel is available in French, Italian, Polish and Romanian translations. There is also a film adaptation by director Shinozaki Makoto in 2010.

before this moment, Kiyoko, at the age of forty-one, and her husband Takashi are cast away on a desert island. At first, the island symbolizes hope, salvation, and life, yet it gradually becomes an oppressive place from which she wishes to escape. Kiyoko used to be an ordinary housewife, but once on the island, her survival instinct grows stronger, and she is able to catch snakes and eat all kinds of food, whereas she thinks Takashi is quite useless as he spends his energy in keeping a diary.

A few months later, a group of twenty-three Japanese young men arrives after a storm and shipwreck. They are members of the precariat; they used to be part-time workers for a research project that looked for parasites in the manure of wild horses on Yonaguni Island. Unsatisfied with their job situation, they stole a boat and escaped. Not long after their arrival, Takashi dies mysteriously. Kasukabe – who was having an affair with Kiyoko – may be the one who pushed Takashi off what will be referred to as the *sainara* (*sayonara*, "farewell") cliff. Then Kiyoko lives with Kasukabe, her second husband, depicted as a strong, possessive, jealous man whom she calls "sex machine."[23]

Two years after the arrival of the Japanese, ten Chinese men who are also members of the precariat come to shore after being forced to disembark from a ship that sailed away, never to return. Japanese and Chinese, later addressed as "Tokyoites" and "Hong Kongers" in the novel, do not live together as one community but are segregated. Yan is the leader of the Hong Kongers, who relate to the natural environment more productively and sustainably than the Tokyoites. Even though the island's best areas are already in use by the Tokyoites, the Hong Kongers manage to make a sun clock, produce spices, and raise wild pigs. Kasukabe dies mysteriously, and Kiyoko believes that since his corpse was found at a distance from the cliff, several men may have killed him.

The Tokyoites are the ones to name the island "Tokyo Island," a twofold act: it shows nostalgia for home, as well as a determination to build a new one. Even though the island has nothing in common with the actual city of Tokyo, they use familiar names to divide it: The Imperial Palace, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Odaiba, Tokaimura, Chofu, etc. The Tokyoites seem helpless, bored, and concerned with trivial matters. Initially, Kiyoko – the only woman on the island – is treated like their queen. Watanabe is the only

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[23] Kirino Natsuo, *Tokyo jima* (Tokyo: Shinchōsa, 2008), 41. All translations of *Tokyo jima* are mine.

Japanese who does not aim to please her at all costs. He is a *hikikomori*, a misfit, even in *Tokyo jima*'s society. He lives all by himself in Tokaimura, the farthest point of the island. Tokaimura is filled with yellow tanks containing nuclear waste that have been dumped on the beach.[24] Watanabe and Kiyoko have an antagonistic relationship but share a strong will to survive and escape throughout the storyline. Among the Tokyoites, we also find Oraga, whom Kiyoko asked to write the story of the island; Manta, who has double personality (he and his dead sister) and who assists the leader of the Tokyoites; Yamada, who soon after Kasukabe's death offers a dead mouse to Kiyoko in exchange for sex; and Inukuchi and Shin, who become a couple in the story.

After Takahashi and Kasukabe die, Kiyoko is perceived as a *femme fatale* or *mashō no onna* in Japanese, who brings death to her men.[25] She is not an archetypical *femme fatale* in the sense that she is not stereotypically attractive, yet she possesses the most important characteristic of this trope: men are willing to die and kill for her. Consequently, to restrain her power, a rotational lottery system in which Kiyoko herself is the big prize is implemented to choose her future husbands. Kiyoko refused to have the Hong Kongers take part in the lottery. Kiyoko's third husband is Noboru, and her fourth and final one is GM, who had lost his memory. Kiyoko decides to help him get it back. She and GM form a caring bond, and he becomes Yutaka (a name chosen by Kiyoko).

The lottery system can be read as a parody of the institution of marriage, portraying a sort of "trophy-wife" that does not fit the trophy-wife's profile. Kiyoko is not young and beautiful, and she is marrying men who are younger than her. This system is both allegorical of sexual politics and dystopian, as she loses her freedom. Kiyoko's survival drive is stronger than her "love" for Yutaka, so when she finds out the Hong Kongers have built two boats out of waste cans from Tokaimura, she joins them in their escape attempt. As Kiyoko anticipated, Yan rapes her several times during the two weeks they remain aboard. When they finally reach land, they find themselves back on Tokyo Island. Yet, the island is not the same as the Hong

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[24] This is a direct reference to the nuclear accidents in Tokaimura in 1999. We may thus read this reference as an expression of concern about humanity's treatment of nature and a warning or commentary against nuclear accidents and nuclear waste management in Japan.

[25] Kirino, "Ningen," 3.

Konger's fate, and Kiyoko's social status has drastically changed. She is now considered a traitor, and GM/Yutaka has become Mori Gunshi, the Tokyoites' leader, as indicated by the new last name "*gunshi"* meaning "commander."

Pregnancy renews Kiyoko's status on the island. As it progresses, she decides to leave the Tokyoites once more and looks for the Hong Kongers, hoping, yet again, for a better chance of survival. When she finds them, she is surprised to discover she is no longer the only woman on Tokyo Island. A group of seven Filipina women – precariat singers and entertainers – have arrived after a shipwreck. Their band name is "The Goddess" (which adds to Kirino's mythic parody), and they are waiting for the Hong Kongers to finish fixing their boat. Their presence is of great value to Kiyoko, as it is thanks to their support that she gives birth to twins: a boy, Chita, and a girl, Chiki. As the plot unfolds, tensions intensify between those who want to stay on the island and those who want to flee. In the end, after a deadly confrontation and with the help of Kim, one of the Filipina singers, Kiyoko, and her daughter Chiki manage to escape. Her son, however, remains on the island, snatched away by Mori Gunshi.

Embodied, Gendered Experiences in Context

In order to analyze embodied, gendered experiences such as pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering, and hence relating to survival from a feminist perspective, it is important to put them into context and recognize how Kirino dramatizes reality and exposes gender problematics via humor and satire. A sharp, critical, social commentary underlies her entertaining literary work. Moreover, Kirino's oeuvre may be located within the larger scope of "feminist humor" as it "both elucidates and challenges women's subordination and oppression."[26] Humor is thus a strategy to expose and challenge the status quo and conventional ideas.

Kirino Natsuo's *Tokyo jima* can be read as a response to real-life discourses on the following issues: maternal mortality, abortion, rape, pregnancy as alienation, and the imperative of motherly love. This analysis aims to identify how Kirino comments on and offers new alternatives to such issues. For instance, in *Tokyo jima*, Kiyoko is afraid of dying during childbirth. The fear of dying not only contests the motif of the disappearing woman but it may be read as a response grounded on the actual number of

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[26] Nancy A. Walker, *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 152.

women who die during pregnancy or while giving birth, especially in precarious conditions, as maternal mortality continues to be a critical challenge to health systems around the globe.[27] Moreover, "about 295,000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth in 2017. The vast majority of these deaths (94%) occurred in low-resource settings, and most could have been prevented."[28] These numbers cannot be understood without considering the intersection of gender and precarity. Japan, however, is a successful example of maternal mortality reduction. In 1950, Japan had a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of around 180 deaths for every 100,000 live births, and already by 2004–2005, the MMR dropped to 6 deaths (per 100,000 live births).[29] Japan's health system excels in ensuring the safety of mothers throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care. Hence, Kiyoko's fear of dying can be interpreted as commentary on a global concern. It is not only related to her age, but also to being in a precarious situation outside of Japan. In other words, she is not in a place where she can have the adequate support and conditions to give birth. But there is an ironic twist, given that Kiyoko's pregnancy and delivery succeed on the island and not in the city.

Momentarily, Kiyoko considers putting an end to her pregnancy. Abortion is understood as a voluntary termination of one's pregnancy, or in other words, as an act of agency that requires one's autonomy and ability to choose. Kirino problematizes agency throughout the novel. In fact, through a reference to Kiyoko's cousin's miscarriage, Kirino moves away from idealizing, essentializing, and naturalizing the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. Instead, she echoes the realities of those who suffer hemorrhages during miscarriages, abortions, and/or births. Therefore, by following Kiyoko's train of thought, it is possible to recognize such experiences as interrelated, as social and public health matters, instead of isolated individual situations.

The portrayal of pregnancy and the actual birth is quite peculiar and detailed for a literary text. Of course, female characters have babies in

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[27] Margaret C. Hogan et al., "Maternal Mortality for 181 Countries, 1980–2008: A Systematic Analysis of Profess Towards Millennium Development Goal 5," *The Lancet* 375/9726 (2010): 1609–1623.

[28] "Maternal Mortality," *World Health Organization*, September 19, 2019 (accessed May 25, 2021, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality).

[29] Ibid.

literature, but pregnancy and childbirth have, more often than not, been reduced to an ellipsis. Writing in 1978, Poston points out that birth is rarely described in literature, "because female experiences, from menstruation to menopause, have been consistently slighted in our literature, childbirth is a virtually unexplored literary topic."[30] The uses of birth imagery and birth as a metaphor are prolific, yet depictions of the actual physical birth are limited. Almost twenty years later, this omission persists in Saitō Minako's treatment of "pregnancy literature" (*ninshin shōsetsu*): instead of looking at the role or representations of pregnancy in literary works, she uses the term to "denote a sub-genre of works…in which an older man falls in love with a younger woman, has an affair with her, and gets her pregnant."[31] Instead of being narrated from a male perspective, as Saitō's characterization of "pregnancy literature" indicates, Kirino's novel, written fourteen years later, can be counted amongst the few works that represent actual childbirth – albeit its comic tones – from the woman's point of view. It is important to emphasize when these studies and books were written and published because they illustrate the shifts and constant redefinition of both hegemonic and alternative representations of motherhood.[32]

Kirino also addresses experiences of alienation, which is a recurring concept to understand pregnant embodiment. Pregnancy splits or doubles our subjectivity in multiple ways: "[The pregnant subject] experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on the trunk in addition to her head."[33] The question of bodily boundaries emerges in the story when different people ask Kiyoko if the baby is moving. As Young explains, it is the movements of the fetus that cause the sense of the splitting subject: "the fetus's movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space.

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[30] Carol H. Poston, "Childbirth in Literature," *Feminist Studies* 4/2 (1978), 20.

[31] Amanda Seaman, "Two for One: Pregnancy and Identity in Hasegawa Junko's 'The Unfertilized Egg,'" *Japanese Language and Literature* 44/1 (2010), 1. See also, Saitō Minako, *Ninshin shōsetsu* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1994).

[32] See Amanda Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

[33] Young, *On Female*, 46.

Only I have access to these movements from their origin, as it were. For months only I can witness this life within me, and it is only under my direction of where to put their hands that others can feel these movements."[34] Pregnancy and childbirth are thus embodied experiences that shake fixed ideas of subjectivity and agency.

On a related note, Kirino writes in *Tokyo jima* that motherly love is part of civilization, but it is somewhat removed from the story because the setting is outside of civilization. Kirino thus joins the historical and ongoing debate amongst Japanese feminists between being pro-*boseiai,* which finds motherhood empowering, and being anti-*boseiai*, which considers it a source of oppression.[35] This tension, however, is not exclusive to Japanese feminism. Nakano Glenn points to the conflict between feminists who regard maternally derived gender differences as oppressive against those who reclaim motherhood as a source of power and status:

> We are reluctant to give up the idea that motherhood is special. Pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding are such powerful bodily experiences, and the emotional attachment to the infant so intense, that it is difficult for women who have gone through these experiences and emotions to think that they do not constitute unique female experiences that create an unbridgeable gap between men and women.[36]

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[34] Ibid., 49.

[35] Michiko Niikuni Wilson, *Gender is Fair Fame: (Re)thinking the (Fe)Male in the Works of Ōba Minako* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 104; Ōhinata, Masami, *Boseiai shinwa no wana* (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 2000); Sandra Buckley, *Voices of Japanese Feminism* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[36] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview," in Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, eds., *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22–23.

In Japan, the idealization of motherly love is intimately related to the legacy of the so-called "good wife, wise mother" ideology.[37] This ideology can be traced back to the Meiji period when the state's ideal image of the modern Japanese woman was a cis-gendered, heterosexual, married woman who aspired to become a mother. Education was gendered and focused on preparing girls for their roles as wives and mothers in connection to patriotism.

Nakamura provides the background for the notion of motherly love in Japan by looking at how the birth control and eugenics movements defined what was required of the modern mother.[38] Besides possessing musical, literary, and cultural talents, "they had to emanate *bosei* ("motherhood," derived from the Swedish word *moderskap*) and *bosei ai* (motherly love) – words that did not exist in Japan until the beginning of the Taishō era."[39] Textbooks from this period depicted "*bosei* and *bosei ai* as natural sentiments that all women possessed, claiming that motherhood was a physical and psychological attribute inherent in all women."[40] This process exemplifies how socio-culturally constructed notions are reified and naturalized into biological, essential traits of human nature, which in turn become individual and sociocultural pressures and expectations. Kirino sees through this naturalization process, and her depiction of Kiyoko is a direct challenge to the naturalization of maternal love.

Kiyoko's Sexuality

Kiyoko's body and her sexuality are articulated in the novel through a symbolic analogy between her and the island. The parallel is quite explicit: "Kiyoko and Tokyo Island were certainly similar. Isolated and enclosed by the impetuous ocean, the island is as severe as Kiyoko. Like the belly button of the ocean, the island is flat, and its shape is as commonplace as Kiyoko."[41] Kiyoko is thus seen as an ordinary woman who is all alone in an adverse scenario. The correlation between Kiyoko and the island is recurrent and

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[37] Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Modern Japan* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 52–54.
[38] Mari Nakamura, *Monstrous Bodies: The Rise of the Uncanny in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 115.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 161–162.

presupposes the common association between "women" and "nature" that sustains the myth of patriarchy. Also, men on the island take advantage of nature's resources as well as of Kiyoko's sexuality. Both Kiyoko and the island are required to satisfy men's needs.

Yet Kiyoko is far from being a passive character: she faces dangers, lies, resorts to violence, and uses her sexual power to her advantage. She is aware of her special status as the only woman on the island, treated as an endangered species. Even when she transitions from being treasured to a less interesting sexual commodity and then to a traitor, the feeling of being the "only one" stays with her until the very end.[42]

The Hong Kongers refer to the island as "the egg," a name that emphasizes its natural qualities as it welcomes everyone regardless of their background and provides them with the chance of survival.[43] Kiyoko agrees on it being a more suitable name than "Tokyo," as she says: "Certainly, the deserted island is also an egg. An organism covered by a shell."[44] Given that "eggs" are often representative of female reproduction, this naming process adds to the symbolic overlap between the island and Kiyoko, since this metaphor is also applicable to Kiyoko herself as a pregnant woman. Here, the overlap is rather straightforward. Soon after she realizes she is pregnant, she says: "Tokyo itself is an egg. I mean it was one egg. On a desert island, which is only an egg, live more eggs. How absurd."[45] Hence, "eggs" are a powerful metaphor for both the island and Kiyoko in terms of being life enablers, but they are also a gendered depiction that creates a new maternal femininity.

Kiyoko's correlation to the island is also seen in how her body adapts to life there after putting on weight. For example: "Not even she understands why she is getting fat living in this poverty. It was like her plump body with plenty of fat was a proof that the island's lifestyle fitted her, and she didn't like that. 'Seems you got fat sucking men's energy' – bad-mouthed Watanabe."[46] Here, Kirino uses the word *seiki* 精気 ("vigor," "energy"). Its closeness to the word *seieki* 精液 ("sperm") cannot be overlooked. The pun alludes to Kiyoko's sexual relations with the men on the island, but it also foreshadows Kiyoko's pregnancy. Kiyoko's sexuality oscillates between

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[42] Kirino, "Ningen," 3–4.
[43] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 50.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 82.
[46] Ibid., 13–14.

being an empowering act and being policed by patriarchal power. Kiyoko embraces her sexual desire, which can be read "as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered."[47] Kirino connects the desire to live with survival. When comparing *Tokyo jima* to proletarian literature and characterizing this genre as being sensual, Kirino stresses that "you only have your body. Bodies are reflections of the class system, but this loses its meaning because the body is so desperately bare. Desire is only focused on survival, and this is, in fact, erotic."[48] This explains why we find a variety of depictions of sexual desire and sexuality in a tale about survival, such as Kirino's *Tokyo jima*.

Kiyoko's Pregnancy

Kiyoko's bodily transformation epitomizes her affiliation with the island, which reaches a peak when she becomes pregnant and safely gives birth to twins. As the Hong Kongers and Kiyoko are escaping from the island, they look at it from a distance and notice that its shape can be compared with an "older woman's breasts: flat and floppy."[49] Kirino continues to juxtapose Kiyoko's body and the island, and in turn, portrays the island as a mother too. Descriptions of Yan raping Kiyoko on the boat stand in sharp contrast to previous displays of eroticism. During her twenty years of married life in Tokyo, Kiyoko did not bear any children; in fact, she had experienced several miscarriages. The island somehow makes her body more fertile. The next passage describes Kiyoko's realization that she is pregnant:

> Suddenly I felt sick. I vomited. I thought I was overly hungry but just looking at a fruit makes me feel sick. My belly is bloated, and it hurts. Kiyoko rubbed her belly. This is strange. I have already experienced this sense of

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[47] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins, eds., *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 89.

[48] Natsuo Kirino and Masaro Satō, "'Tokubetsu taidan,' Satō Masaro vs Kirino Natsuo: *Tokyo jima* no riaru na kannō to konton," *Shūkan Shinchō*, June 5, 2008 (accessed May 27, 2021, https://www.shinchosha.co.jp/wadainohon/466702/).

[49] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 42.

> discomfort. These are early pregnancy symptoms. From her late twenties until her early thirties, Kiyoko has had three miscarriages. That is why she clearly remembers how morning sickness feels. She had been told by a doctor that it's not easy for her body to become pregnant, and that it is not so likely that she'll be blessed with children, so she had already given up, and had decided to live with Takashi, just the two of them. After coming to this desert island, I had been way too loose, and it can't be that now I'm pregnant, is it even possible? I'll be forty-six by the time I give birth. Also, is this Yutaka's or Yan's baby? I don't know. And she tried to remember when was the last time that her period came.[50]

There is a connection between Kiyoko and her body: the latter speaks, and she decodes its signals. This passage also contrasts Kiyoko in the past and present, in the city and on the island. In the city, the doctors somehow decided on her body's fertility; now the island does. Her pregnancies did not thrive in the city, while on the island, the opposite is true. The attempt to remember her last period is a usual reduction of menstruation to indicate whether one is pregnant or not. There is also the question of paternity. Is the father her last husband Yutaka/Mori Gunshi? Or is the pregnancy a result of Yan's rape? Kiyoko will exploit this question and try to manipulate both to increase the likelihood of survival.

The task of writing the myth of the island is a crucial element to make sense of the castaways' new reality, and Kiyoko's pregnancy is a key component of such a task. The chapters "Record of the Island Mother" and "Hormone Princess" embody two different attitudes towards Kiyoko's pregnancy: from joy to worry, respectively. Soon after finding out she is pregnant, Kiyoko is filled with joy at her fertility's recovery. Her pregnancy is a "miracle":

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

[50] Ibid., 83–84.

> woman, who copulated with the island, gave birth to the child of the island, and transformed herself into the island. 'A mother is all that is needed.'[51]

Here, Kiyoko conceives of maternity as divinity and as a pillar of the island's future. Therefore, she asks Oraga – the most studious member – to write the story of the Mother. However, Mori Gunshi has already asked him to write the story of the island, of the Father. In both requests, there is a tension between whose point of view will prevail in telling the story of the origin of Tokyo Island's society: Kiyoko's transient dream of a matriarchal society versus the actual patriarchal society that is being reconstructed on the island. Kirino thus poses larger questions about the myth-telling tradition and the role of writing and stories in reproducing myths as cultural artifacts. Here, Watanabe's eventual theft of Takashi's diary is worth mentioning, which he reads on his own and cherishes as it serves different purposes: from entertainment to erotica, to mysticism. More importantly, the journal still has blank pages in which Watanabe tries to put down his own thoughts and imaginings.

"Hormone Princess" is a title that already symbolizes a pregnant woman. The term "princess" is quite ironic here because Kiyoko is far from being the female monarch of the island, even when she claims – as a survival strategy – that her baby is Mori Gunshi's, the current leader of the Tokyoites. The title rather signals to the negative connotations of the word "princess" as an arrogant or spoilt woman. In addition, the mention of hormones in it and throughout the chapter exposes the physiological dimension of pregnancy. The material dimension is always embedded with sociocultural meanings, particularly gender meanings. In Fausto-Sterling's words, "chemicals infuse the body, from head to toe, with gender meanings."[52] The so-called "sex hormones" have been categorized into a dubious dichotomy: "female" (estrogen and progesterone) and "male" (androgens, such as testosterone). This, in turn, feeds into the misconception that women are controlled by hormones and that the "female-hormone-impelled behavior is crazy; therefore, the normal female is 'naturally diseased' – or at least irrational."[53]

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[51] Ibid., 171.

[52] Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 147.

[53] Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women*

In Kiyoko's case, despite emphasizing the physical changes and the impact of the hormones, she is never depicted as irrational nor ill.

Kiyoko's belly has come out, and her lower abdomen feels hard. Early on, she notices the cravings for sugar, cold drinks, frozen tangerine, vanilla ice cream, cold cucumber, among others. In addition to such physical changes, Kiyoko experiences emotional ones. For example, she thinks: "I wonder where my excitement went. I felt so much happiness at that time, but was it the hormones' fault? This strong desire to drink something cold and sweet, also the hormones' fault? I'd better hate the hormones. No, I'd better hate this deserted island."[54] Through the recurring question – "is it the hormones' fault?" – Kirino makes a satirical comment on the negative mythology of pregnancy hormones that depicts pregnant women as "hormonal hurricanes" or "hormonal and emotional basket cases."[55]

In addition, pregnant embodiment also exposes the vexed question of agency. Her reactions to the pregnancy combined with it likely being a result of Yan's rape make clear that it is an unwanted pregnancy that escapes her will, or perhaps that her will in this matter is irrelevant. Kiyoko often mentions that the decision of becoming or remaining pregnantseems to fall into the island's will. Kiyoko then locates her pregnancy at two levels, the micro and the macro: at her bodily level, affected by the hormones and as a personal, singular experience, and at the social level, as an experience of the island. It is within these levels that more tensions between biology/nature (the hormones, the psychological/physiological experiences), culture/society (the island, social reality or circumstances), and her agency (her will, dreams, actions) develop:

> What makes me angriest is that it is myself that got pregnant. It was really stupid of me to feel all excited about proving my raison d'être as a pregnant woman... Giving birth on this desert island is just an act of madness. I

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and Men (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 99.

[54] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 210–211.

[55] For more on the discourses of hormones surrounding pregnancy, see: Fausto-Sterling, *Myths,* 90; and Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Biology of Fatherhood," *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*, June 3, 2014 (accessed May 30, 2021, http://bostonreview.net/world-us/anne-fausto-sterling-biology-fatherhood).

> thought it's still safer to abort, and I tried to hit this belly that is sticking out with rocks, but I remembered when a cousin had a miscarriage and she lost so much blood, she almost died. That was awful, so I put away the rocks. Until recently, my pregnancy was the island's will. Until recently, I was so happy telling everyone on the island that, but now, I have this dark feeling inside, like I'm the person who'll die first. Is it the hormones' fault? No, it isn't. I'm just following the normal logic.[56]

In this powerful passage, Kirino tackles the theme of agency by addressing issues surrounding miscarriages, abortions, and unwanted pregnancies. This fragment also shows both sides of Kiyoko's character. On the one hand, Kiyoko is extremely calculating and uses her logic and reason to gain power on the island and secure her survival. On the other hand, Kiyoko's story resonates with a larger picture of women's history, as it reflects Adrienne Rich's words: "most women in history have become mothers without choice, and an even greater number have lost their lives bringing life into the world."[57] When Kiyoko repeatedly says that her pregnancy is the island's will, she is also saying that it is against her own will, or that whether she wants it or not, she will still be pregnant. In this excerpt, she considers, momentarily, ending her pregnancy, yet her survival drive persists.

Kiyoko is aware of the possible consequences of a "high-risk" pregnancy. She bluntly says: "*The next person to die is me, no doubt about it*, Kiyoko thought. *As the only woman on this island, I will lose my life while giving birth*. *That will also become a myth*, she thought for an instant, but immediately, she sputtered: 'This isn't a joke. Kiyoko (death by hemorrhage)' – She cried out loud."[58] Initially, Kiyoko linked her ability to create life with pride and divine power and wished to be mythologized as the mother of the island. Now, she connects giving birth with her own mortality, echoing origin myths such as that of Izanam, and rejects being mythologized as a victim. In this passage, Kirino uses and goes beyond satire to address the fragile and

[56] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 211.
[57] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 13. Reprint in 1995.
[58] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 212.

blurred boundary between life and death and allows us to peep into Kiyoko's fear of dying and dreams of survival.

Kiyoko is also scared of giving birth in the place that both Manta and Mori Gunshi have chosen, a small, enclosed cave. She also fears that if the child is a girl, they will both be killed or that she will be confined her entire life to such a cave. This fear also seems to echo the Izanami myth, as the goddess is sealed forever in the Yomi after dying from giving birth to the fire god. Thus, I read Kiyoko's fear of death and confinement to the dark cave as an extension of the cultural paradigm of the disappearing woman. Kiyoko escapes that fate and finds a new place to give birth with the Hong Kongers' help.

When Kiyoko meets Maria, The Goddess's leader, for the first time, the latter immediately asks: "Are you okay? You have a baby inside your belly, right? I speak Japanese. I used to perform in Utsunomiya, that's why".[59] Here, Maria clarifies that they are also members of the precariat but offers friendly words and sympathy for her pregnancy. As Kiyoko watches in confusion, it is explained that "the younger women offered their sympathy to the older woman who had gone through a lot of trouble."[60] The radical contrast between the treatment she receives from men and from women gives Kiyoko a new hope for survival based on female solidarity. Thus, she tries hard to gain their trust and sympathy. For Kiyoko, their boat supplies a real possibility of escape, and the presence of women is a chance to give birth safely. The spots in the boat are limited, however, and so her worries continue.

Calculating as always, just like she was with the Tokyoites when she claimed Mori Gushi was the father, Kiyoko now points to Yan and lets everyone know the child is his. Then, she "faces Yan and pointing to her protruding belly, she shows him. Your baby has grown this much. That's why I came here risking my life, I thought you could help me give birth."[61] Asking for his help does not absolve him of his crime, as being close to Yan revives her trauma:

> Maria waved at Yan, Yan smiled back at her, something he hadn't done for Kiyoko, not even once. Kiyoko looked down in discomfort. She remembered all the times Yan

[59] Ibid., 291.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 293.

> raped her inside the small boat that was almost sinking like the tanuki's clay boat. When she thinks that the baby that resulted from that time is now hurting her, she gets an urge to hit him.[62]

Clearly, Kiyoko is not only a victim but also an example of sheer resilience on a greater scale – a survivor. The "tanuki's clay boat" (*tanuki no dorobune*) is an allusion to a gruesome Japanese folktale known as "Kachi-kachi yama" (The Crackling Mountain). Here, the *tanuki* (raccoon-shaped, cunning creature) is evil, and its crimes are left unavenged until it is left to sink on a small clay boat.[63] This tale also features a disappearing woman: an innocent wife killed by the same *tanuki* she saves. Therefore, in the quoted passage, there is an underlying reference to Yan's impunity and Kiyoko's yearning for justice. Similarly, in both the folktale and Kirino's treatment of Kiyoko's rape, there is a link between physical and symbolic violence, cynicism, and humor.

Despite how painful being close to Yan is for Kiyoko, the presence of the other women has a positive impact on her life. Her whole situation has changed now that she has other women to lean on: "I think it's best to give birth before leaving the island. There are plenty of women here that can help me. I'm also scared to give birth on board on the seas. Kiyoko felt relieved in tears and Maria held her shoulder."[64] Kiyoko's pregnancy brings women together and evokes sympathy and solidarity. Now the other women and the Hong Kongers do the daily chores for her. Now she is being helped, as opposed to being looked down on by the Tokyoites. Kiyoko certainly uses her power to "bear and nourish human life" to get recognition and appreciation from others around her.[65] Kiyoko's desire to survive is always on her mind, thus when Maria asks her if the baby is moving:

> Kiyoko decided to wear a pitiful face and hold her stomach as if in pain. She'd better use her pregnancy as a "weapon." If she were not pregnant, she would be just the same

[62] Ibid., 302.
[63] See Hatsue Nakawaki, *Chaachan no mukashi banashi* (Tokyo: Fukuinkan shoten, 2016).
[64] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 296.
[65] Rich, *Of Woman,* 13.

> middle-aged woman who had been living on this desert island for a long time. And if this were the case, there is no doubt that Maria would never take her with them in their boat.[66]

This is an example of Kiyoko's performance as she deliberately exaggerates and plays on her pregnancy to survive; just as she did with her sexuality, now she uses her pregnant status to her advantage. Maria replies this when Kiyoko asks who is going on board with them:

> "What are you saying? I'm thinking of choosing from the weakest on. Aren't you pregnant? You are the weakest." *I made it*, Kiyoko thought. However, as soon as she gives birth, she loses the 'pregnant license.' Kiyoko had been thinking all along to give birth early and safely, yet at the calculation of having more chances of being taken on board if she is still pregnant, Kiyoko felt as if her heart was being torn apart.[67]

In this excerpt, a pregnant woman is more worthy of survival than a mother. The former is perceived as vulnerable and weak, but also precious. Kirino dramatizes pregnancy as a license that is easily revoked, with her heroine stuck in the following paradox: Kiyoko could die from giving birth on the boat, but it is only because she is pregnant that she would be allowed aboard. In this way, pregnancy is interweaved with the possibility of both dying and surviving.

Kiyoko's Lack of Motherly Love

Kirino's depiction does not idealize motherly love. Childbirth is not presented as that moment when baby and mother meet or when sex is assigned, but rather it is written as a matter of survival. Kiyoko dreams that she has already given birth: "I don't care much about the face and sex of the baby, I'm just relieved because I finished without having a painful memory, and with my life intact."[68] It is clear that above anything else, Kiyoko wants

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[66] Kirino, *Tokyo,* 299.
[67] Ibid., 304.
[68] Ibid., 276.

to survive the birth. To do so, Kiyoko performs the role of the vulnerable pregnant woman and widow and pretends to conform to the general expectations of soon-to-be mothers. For instance, Maria says: "The baby will come out soon. Isn't it exciting?"[69] And Kiyoko replies: "Yes, I'm looking forward to it."[70] The reader knows that her answers are premeditated and that she is not eager to meet her baby but to survive.

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

> One afternoon, Kiyoko was walking around the beach while holding her big belly. Lately, the baby inside her belly had been moving so actively that if she doesn't exercise, the baby won't be quiet. Kiyoko touched her now hard lower belly with her hand. When she felt something like the baby's arm pressing from the inside through her skin, she shivered. This baby I have inside me is Yan's – that man with the yellow canine teeth – just the thought makes her cold. Kiyoko doesn't feel any love for the baby in her belly, to the point of wanting to push the baby away to someone from GODDESS right after having given birth.[71]

This personal confession frankly describes one possibility of what having a baby inside one's belly might feel like. We can elicit a sense of alienation between mother and baby as she feels her baby's eerie movements. The excerpt also addresses the issue of unwanted pregnancies, especially as a result of rape. The way she refers to Yan – with disgust – and her clarity about feeling no love for her baby is a depiction that moves away from the essential, ideal, natural mother, but probably is closer to experiences of maternal regret. Also, the passage shows a side of Kiyoko that wants to give the baby away to any of the other Filipina women on the island, perhaps feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility or hoping somebody else would

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[69] Ibid., 301.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 300.

be willing to care for the newborn. There is more textual evidence of Kiyoko's feelings about the fetus:

> "Oh, I'm hungry," Kiyoko said while holding her belly. The fetus moved, as in agreement. She trembled at her own thought of giving birth to a bold brat like in her dream. Kiyoko didn't have any feelings of love towards the baby inside her belly, and this surprised her. Perhaps it's because motherly love belongs to civilization.[72]

This is a powerful quote in which the very notion of motherly love is questioned and relativized as a social construct. *Tokyo jima* constantly probes the limits between nature and culture and questions our assumptions regarding essential or naturalized aspects of "human nature." In this case, Kirino denaturalizes motherly love as an innate quality of all mothers. Kiyoko's surprise at not loving the baby in her belly shows the existence of a certain social expectation regarding motherly love. The element of surprise only comes as a response to doing or feeling something unexpected – in this case, not feeling affection towards one's baby. Kirino further points out how this love is part of civilization, making a clear case for it being socio-culturally constructed rather than naturally embedded. This point is reinforced through parody during childbirth, as all the other women sing Aretha Franklin's classic "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman."

Throughout her pregnancy, Kiyoko experiences dissatisfaction, anxiety, and fear. She does not love her baby and has imagined herself hurting it. Hence, Kirino sees through the naturalization process of motherly love, and her depiction of Kiyoko is a direct challenge. In terms of myth, maternal love is used to define and justify women's role in society. As Ōhinata exposes, "the trap of the myth of maternal love" is a fabrication that relies on the idealization of the mother-child bond. Specifically, it relies on the expectations of self-sacrifice and unconditional affection, where there is no room for ambivalence or contradiction.[73] Within the framework of the "wise mother," the ideal mother also seems to be at odds with the notion of choosing between being mothers and being strong independent subjects, as this is already symptomatic of women's oppression in society. Kirino's

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[72] Ibid., 281–282.
[73] Ōhinata, *Boseiai*, 2.

heroine Kiyoko not only belongs to a different time. Since she finds herself on a deserted island, she can also move away from ideals of motherhood and experience it in a tragicomic way. The setting away from civilization allows Kirino to criticize these fixed roles and social norms and ideals. Even when Kirino reconstructs an oppressive and exclusive patriarchal setting, Kiyoko never gives up on a strong, independent subjectivity that acknowledges her own contradictions.

Kiyoko's Childbirth

Kyoko's childbirth scene is key to portray her as a "natural woman" without so-called natural instincts. The ironic comedy of the scene is attached to the unrealistic quality of the scenario. Again it is the setting of the deserted island that allows Kirino to dramatize childbirth. It is in the mode of parody that Kirino unravels the "natural woman" and "motherly love" myths, pointing to their artificiality by exposing their fictionality. She ultimately leaves the reader with an image of a natural woman that seems possible only in fiction.

The birth begins with Kiyoko's waters breaking. Kirino then describes the reactions of Ruth, Maria, Kim, and the other women. Kiyoko feels (mentally) unprepared, yet her body (re)acts. There is a strong physiological, biological, and material dimension to childbirth: "Giving birth on the beach, it is just like sea turtles, isn't it? Without being psychologically prepared, she panicked at the sudden experience of birth that came at last."[74] In comparing this experience to that of sea turtles, Kiyoko recognizes the animality of birthing. Childbirth is generally perceived as an experience that belongs to the natural world. This experience does not completely overshadow Kiyoko's rationality and interest in survival, however. Indeed, "Even with the pain of the contractions, Kiyoko is looking at Maria's face, having uninvited thoughts."[75] Her mind is occupied with speculations concerning the escape from the island. Thus, her survival drive never abandons her, not even during birth.

Kim also joins the scene. She is an experienced mother and guides Kiyoko through the breathing exercises: "Every time Kiyoko exhaled, she'd involuntarily pushed; she couldn't stop pushing down. The birth could start at any moment. Even if Kiyoko was consumed with worry, she also wanted

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[74] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 308.
[75] Ibid., 307.

to free herself from her heavy belly by "expelling" the baby as fast as possible."[76] The word *haishutsu* translates as "expel." It is often used to refer to a discharge of fluids or the process of excreting "waste matter." Therefore, it is possible to interpret that, from Kiyoko's point of view, the baby is just like any other bodily fluid that needs to be "eliminated" or "released." The emphasis on bodily fluids is significant in moving away from an ideal depiction of childbirth to an embodied one.

At this point, Kiyoko gets support from all the other women. One of them says: "I saw the head, come on, you can do it!"[77] The description builds upon the naturalness of the body and the birth: "Now Kiyoko's arms are being supported by the seven women, and she's about to give birth in a semi-crouching position. Kiyoko is simply giving birth like sea turtles do over the sand. They say sea turtles shed tears, but in my case only sweat drops are flowing."[78] Once more, the allusion to sea turtles illustrates the physiology of birth and how maternal bodies are perfectly designed for the act. But there is also humor implicit in being physically sustained by seven women during birth. In this scene, humor serves as a subversive strategy that alters standard images of childbirth.

The final part of the birth's description increases the parody-like elements as Kiyoko ends up bringing twins into the world while everyone around her sings Aretha Franklin's "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman." The role of this song is significant to the scene because it both entertains and adds layers of meaning regarding gender discourses. Judith Butler claims that this song suggests "that some natural potential of her biological sex is actualized by her participation in the cultural position of "women" as object of heterosexual recognition."[79] In Butler's consideration, the emphasis is on how the sociocultural dynamics of heterosexuality and the recognition of "woman" as object of heterosexual desire cause the effect of naturalness. Even if the song sounds like a confirmation of natural gender, in actuality, it suggests its performativity. In Butler's words: "After all, Aretha sings, you make me feel *like* a natural woman, suggesting that this is a kind

[76] Ibid., 309.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 317.

of metaphorical substitution, an act of imposture, a kind of sublime and momentary participation in an ontological illusion produced by the mundane operation of heterosexual drag."[80] In Kirino's scene, it is childbirth (rather than heterosexual recognition) that creates the illusion of naturalness. Kiyoko is also performing the natural woman in labor. She even says that at that moment, this song is like her life's soundtrack, and it gives her the extra energy she needs to finish giving birth:

> This song energized Kiyoko, and she finally succeeded in giving birth. Before the baby got all covered in sand, Kim picked up the baby. After a little while the baby gave her first cry. "Yes!" – All the other women gave a shout of joy. "It's a girl, it's a girl" – shouted Kim. You could see tears in Kim's eyes. Some were crying in each other's arms… Another piece of flesh covered in blood slid down in between her legs. Another one. This time it was a boy. Believe it or not, Kiyoko became a mother of twins. Contrary to her dreams, the actual babies that she gave birth to didn't have either cuteness or cleverness, they were as ugly as baby monkeys, they were just a weak existence. And there were two of them. Kiyoko didn't even have energy to hold them. She was simply dumbfounded. For her, they weren't remotely cute.[81]

This passage exposes an idealized version of giving birth to twins as it also shows an act of sisterhood and a successful childbirth in precarious conditions. There is a divergence among the other women's reactions, especially Kim's and Kiyoko's. The scene still conveys the strength and tiredness of the birthing woman, as well as the fragility of the newborn life. Kiyoko feels safe and relieved thanks to the help and support she receives from the other women. Kirino's depiction of childbirth is closer to "a social event" rather than "solitary childbirth."[82] Poston explains the difference between the individual and social dimensions of childbirth: Birth is "an act of essential solitude...no one else can give birth for us when labor is upon us.

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 310.
[82] Poston, "Childbirth," 28.

However, this essential solitude need not be loneliness. It is a question rather of whether those people who surround the woman at the moment of birth are part of the community, understanding and articulating the profundity of her feelings, or whether they are merely an audience."[83] At the moment of birth, the Filipina women are supportive, yet there seems to be a wall between Kiyoko and the others since they do not have access to the depths of her feelings. Hence, in the scene, they function as community members and audience simultaneously.

Kirino places childbirth outside of technology, capitalism, and even patriarchy. In a study about "natural mothering" – that is, mothers who practice "attachment parenting" and "simple living" – Chris Bobel concludes that this movement resists capitalism and technology, but "its discourses of choice and control, deeply paradoxical at their core, fail to resist the third institution: patriarchy. The mothers' surrender of agency to so-called instinct and a romanticized view of nature reifies an essentialist construction of womanhood."[84] In this way, "natural mothering" accommodates patriarchy, compromising its potential for social change.

Furthermore, Kirino's depiction of Kiyoko as a caricatured "natural mother" in *Tokyo jima* manages to undermine the three aforementioned institutions: capitalism, technology, and patriarchy. Kirino does not offer a romanticized, utopian view of nature, but rather a dystopian caricature of it and of patriarchal community.[85] Kirino is also aware of the tensions and paradoxes surrounding agency, and Kiyoko's subjectivity suffers drastic changes throughout the novel, putting forward a more nuanced and embodied model of identity.

Despite being surrounded by other women, Kiyoko behaves differently: she is not crying tears of joy. Her inner state contrasts with the ambiance. Kiyoko is exhausted, while everyone else on the island bursts with happiness, competing to hold the two babies. Especially on a desert island where survival is always at stake, a birth is a tangible manifestation of flourishing life. Despite her lack of motherly love, Kiyoko behaves as the

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[83] Ibid., 29.

[84] Chris Bobel, "Resisting but Not Too Much: Interrogating the Paradox of Natural Mothering," in Andrea O'Reilly, ed., in *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2007), 782–791.

[85] Kirino Natsuo, *Hakkaten: Kirino Natsuo taironshū* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2012), 230.

children's primary caregiver once they are born. Naming babies is a ritual that symbolizes belonging to a community, yet for Kiyoko, it is part of her survival strategy: "Maria came holding both babies, one in each arm, and showed them to Kiyoko. With the lack of love for the babies she gave birth to, and to flatter Maria, Kiyoko said to her: 'What about Chiki and Chita? The girl would be Chiki, and the boy Chita. So you can be the singing godmother."[86] This causes great laughter among the women, who then join in and sing "Chiquitita." Afterward, "Kiyoko felt relieved and closed her eyes. Now that she's the godmother, Maria wouldn't possibly abandon us, mother and child. Even so, how would I feed the twins?"[87] Kiyoko continues to be calculating with an eye towards survival. Even after giving birth to the babies, maternal love is not natural to Kiyoko. However, she is still part of the mother-child dyad and takes the responsibility of feeding them.

The remaining Hong Kongers go close to Odaiba (the island's harbor), risking their lives to bring fruits and potatoes for Kiyoko. Thanks to this, her breastmilk is abundant. Kiyoko breastfeeds her babies: "Chita is crying, Kiyoko opens her eyes, without really wanting to. She wanted to sleep some more, but there's nothing to do, she lets her son suck her shriveled breast."[88] Kiyoko does not reflect on the act of breastfeeding. It is not depicted as a pleasurable experience or as a way to strengthen the bond between mother and child. In the novel, breastfeeding is an intrinsic part of the new mother's role, who seems to be going through the motions in a mechanical way. Suddenly, Kim comes and interrupts her. She says that the chance to get on the boat is now or never, anticipating the novel's dénouement. Still holding and breastfeeding her son, Kiyoko goes with her.

All this time, Kiyoko expected Maria to decide who gets on the boat, but surprisingly, Mun (one of the Hong Kongers) and Kim decide to go ahead and escape behind Maria's back. Mun does not want Kiyoko aboard with them, but Kim cannot bear the thought of leaving the children behind: "Kim pointed to the babies and desperately protested."[89] So it is Kim's love and care for the children that prevents her from going alone. Kim cannot abandon them, and thus, Kirino depicts a strong bond between children and a non-biological mother figure. This is also significant with regards to Kirino's

[86] Kirino, *Tokyo*, 311.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 316.
[89] Ibid., 317.

denaturalization of motherhood. In the end, however, the Tokyoites, who want to prevent everyone from escaping the island, stop the would-be fugitives in a deadly confrontation. Mun dies, but Kim, Kiyoko, and her newborn daughter Chiki manage to escape. Chita is snatched away by Mori Gunshi, and this is how Kiyoko is forever separated from him.

The birth of twins is noteworthy as it serves to disturb clear boundaries. In the epilogue, the twins share their stories, and the reader is left with two parallel worlds: Chita in Tokyo Island and Chiki in the city of Tokyo. Chita is reared as Tokyo Island's Prince by Mori Gunshi and Maria, while Kiyoko and Kim raise Chiki. On the one hand, in Tokyo Island, Kiyoko is the disappearing mother featured in the myth sustaining the island's patriarchal society. Through storytelling, Maria reenacts their birth scene, singing "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" and "Chiquitita," and explains that a mother would never abandon her son – an essentializing view of the ideal mother – so they conclude that Kiyoko and the others must have died while escaping. On the other hand, Kiyoko tells Chiki that Chita died soon after she gave birth to him. It seems that, in order to grant Kiyoko an independent survival, it is first necessary to cut the bond with the masculine power of the island, and thus she is forced to leave her son behind. It was not a choice, since he was snatched away, yet she did choose to live on and keep the hope for the future alive. Through this demythologizing narrative, Kirino lets Kiyoko survive and embody an alternative sexual and maternal femininity.

Conclusion

Tokyo jima's setting is fantastic and imaginary, yet its narrative deals with very real themes. This analysis has shown that there is critical social commentary and dramatization of gender issues underneath humorous and entertaining scenes. Indeed, Kirino's allegorical fiction makes us think about sociocultural and political issues in contemporary Japan in connection to the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. This reading focused on representations of embodied experiences (such as pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering), taking into consideration the precariat framework and feminist conceptions of survival. As a result, this study revealed how *Tokyo jima* offers a demythologization of the patriarchal maternal myth through striking depictions of sexuality, pregnancy, lack of motherly love, and childbirth. In so doing, Kirino articulates a feminist, embodied survival via Kiyoko as she moves away from essentialized, naturalized, and idealized versions of femininity.

The novel does depict – as secondary yet important characters – homosexual couples, experiences of same-sex desire, as well as characters that seem to be gender-nonconforming and moments of gender-bending. The particular setting of a desert island with a group of men surrounding one woman makes it possible to grasp the pervasiveness of normative heterosexuality, while some characters challenge norms prescribed by the "heterosexual matrix."[90] The focus on Kiyoko's gendered subjectivity and her embodied experiences related to parenting serves to reveal attributes of "women" – as a sociocultural construct – instead of making universal, homogenous, essentialist, and naturalizing claims about womanhood. Kiyoko challenges any ideal or archetype. She is different from what is usual or expected from a woman, and her manipulative, selfish qualities make it hard for both characters in the novel and readers to like her and connect with her.

There is no doubt that Kiyoko's wish to survive drives the plot of the story. *Tokyo jima* is a parody of a castaway tale. Nature in the desert island is depicted as a tamed caricature, and thus, the novel's take on survival is more figurative than literal.[91] In effect, Kirino states that she "wanted to ask how do we continue to live without getting crushed in today's society."[92]A question that more than ten years after *Tokyo jima*'s publication remains relevant and timely. Both the literary work and this academic study are concerned with how to continue living under patriarchal systems of oppression and exclusion, what are our hopes for the future, and how can the act of survival be feminist. For these questions, *Tokyo jima* presents embodied survival and demythologization as possible answers.

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[90] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 24.
[91] Kirino, *Hakkaten*, 230.
[92] Ibid.