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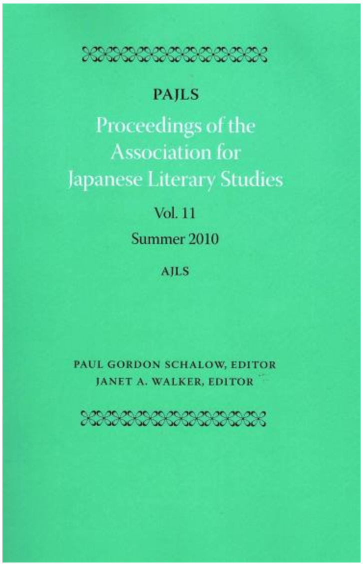

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Degendering Ecodegradation and Rethinking Ecofeminisms in the Writing of Kurihara Sadako, Sakaki Nanao, and Ishimure Michiko

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Much creative writing that addresses environmental problems degenders not only human suffering caused by ecodegradation but also responsibility both for propagating and remediating this suffering.[1] Even as it condemns such conventionally male-dominated arenas as industry and politics for promoting destruction of environments, literature often depicts ecological distress, its perpetrators, and its ameliorators as involving all human beings, not "men," or "women," or even "men and women," but people. Such strategies highlight a shift in focus from male-female and at times even intra-human interactions to those that transcend species. In Japan, this phenomenon is particularly noteworthy in the oeuvres of the late-twentieth-century creative writers and activists Kurihara Sadako 栗原貞子 (1913–2005), Sakaki Nanao サカキナナオ (1923–2008), and Ishimure Michiko 石牟礼道子 (1927–). Kurihara's work frequently divides human beings along strict gender lines, only to undermine such separations. In contrast, some of Sakaki's poetry explicitly degenders responsibility for advancing and avenging environmental degradation. For its part, Ishimure's oeuvre engages in more implicit degendering of the degradation of ecosystems. It depicts suffering that stems from ecological devastation as well as responsibility for facilitating and remediating this suffering as transcending gender; gender divisions exist, but they are superseded by the human/nonhuman dichotomy.[2] In so doing, texts by these writers address questions and challenge assumptions central to ecofeminism and ecofeminist literary criticism.

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[1] The one significant exception is creative writing that discusses congenital illness caused by environmental pollution, although most texts that do so address the damage this pollution inflicts on both men and women.

[2] By the nonhuman I mean nonhuman animals, plants, and other organisms, as well as chemical elements and geophysical entities such as air, water, and soil.

Ecofeminism is a collection of diverse and often conflicting beliefs and practices, but if there is one central argument within this movement it is that "the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women are intimately linked."[3] Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, two of ecofeminism's key theorists, elaborate:

> Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the 'maldevelopment' and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are waged for environmental balance [among other goals] . . . [For many ecofeminists] ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.[4]

Some ecofeminists embrace women's conventional association with the nonhuman and seek to exalt this connection, promoting a mirror-image of patriarchal constructions. They argue for acknowledging a "women's spirituality" grounded in female biology and acculturation, one that takes advantage of the "holistic proclivities of women."[5] Promoting "motherhood environmentalism," some understand women—as bearers of children and guardians of "family sanctity"—as having a heightened awareness of ecological destruction.[6] It is women, they believe, who will "green" society and improve the environment, and they will do so primarily from the private sphere. These forms of radical ecofeminist essentialism have been critiqued by other ecofeminists from economic, philosophical, and sociological perspectives; the latter ecofeminists argue for more sophisticated examination of relationships between gender and the nonhuman, as these involve etiologies, progression, and remediation of environmental degradation.[7] Many believe the link between the subordination of women and the destruction of ecosystems stems not from an essentialist identification of women with the nonhuman, but instead from women's position in society; they perceive a material connection between the externalization and exploitation of women, and of the nonhuman.[8]

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[3] Hay 2002, p. 75. Ariel Salleh argues that there is a "parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other." Salleh 1989, pp. 26–31. Many critics use the term "nature" to signify "the nonhuman." Since people are part of nature, I do not conflate these two terms, and instead distinguish between human beings and the nonhuman.

[4] Gaard and Murphy 1998b, pp. 2–3.

[5] Spretnak 1989. Cited by Garrand 2004, p. 24.

[6] Sandilands 1999, p. xi.

[7] For examples see Garrand 2004, pp. 23–27. See also Sandilands 1999. As Catriona Sandilands has argued, "Ecofeminism needs to take a close look at the limitations of its static notion of identity, especially its related claim to speak of and as nature, and to reject the notion of Cartesian subjectivity upon which this 'speaking identity' is based. The exploration of a more flexible, open-ended version of subjectivity . . . in which a subject is constituted imperfectly *in* discourse rather than transparently prior *to* discourse, suggests a way out of ecofeminism's crisis of identity politics and points the way to a radical democratic vision" (xx). Carolyn Merchant proposes a compromise of sorts with her "ethics of earthcare," an ethics that "neither genders nature as female nor privileges women as caretakers, yet nonetheless emerges from women's experiences and connections to the earth and from cultural constructions of nature as unpredictable and chaotic." Merchant 1995, p. xii.

For its part, ecofeminist literary criticism can be broadly understood as politically engaged discourse that analyzes creative negotiations of connections between the exploitation of women and that of the nonhuman. It also explores how creative texts intertwine discourse on these and other forms of exploitation. Such analysis has provided numerous insights into the multiple paradigms and fantasies concerning the nonhuman—particularly relationships between women and the nonhuman—embraced by writers and literary characters of both genders.[9] Insufficient attention has been given, however, to creative depictions of women as complicit in or even spearheading damage to ecosystems, often simply by virtue of their being human. Such literary articulations appear more frequently than might be expected. By depicting women as oppressed and oppressor, and ecodegradation as a potentially degendered phenomenon, writings by Kurihara, Sakaki, and Ishimure construct and deconstruct understandings of gender in ways that disrupt and at times overturn multiple threads of ecofeminist discourse. They demonstrate the importance not only of eschewing essentialist approaches but also of looking more closely at the nuances and ambiguities of discourse on environmental degradation writ large.

Kurihara was the first published poet of the atomic bomb, as well as one of the most prolific. In both her writing and her political activities she was also one of the most outspoken critics not only of American and Japanese policies during World War II but also of Japanese treatment of Koreans, particularly Koreans affected by the atomic bomb (*hibakusha* 被爆者); of the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons; and of the apathy toward war exhibited by individuals the world over. She also wrote extensively on the literature of atrocity, including literature of the atomic bomb and that of the Holocaust. These activities isolated her from the Japanese literary establishment (*bundan* 文壇), which argued that literature and literary criticism should refrain from discussing such matters.[10]

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[8] Mellor 2009, p. 251.

[9] For instance, Lorina N. Quartarone examines how the *Aeneid* embraces and complicates dualisms, drawing then erasing clear lines between nature/culture, female/male, and body/mind and connections between female/nature, etc. See Quartarone 2002, p. 147–58. Annette Kolodny's readings of men's and women's writings on western landscapes reveal men as emphasizing massive exploitation and alteration of the continent and women as concerned with "locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden." Kolodny acknowledges that by twentieth-century standards, "their aspirations seem tame, their fantasies paltry and constricted." But when examined in relation to their contemporary milieu, "these same fantasies emerge as saving and even liberating." Kolodny 1984, pp. xii–xiii.

[10] In 1960 Kurihara instigated the second published debate on this topic, protesting against the continued marginalization of atomic bomb literature; her opponents urged her and other atomic bomb writers to "transcend" the bomb.

Kurihara's poetry frequently divides human beings along strict gender lines; her writing often explicitly designates women as the principal victims or at least mourners of crumbling ecosystems, and as the planet's potential saviors. But a number of texts that gender certain facets of environmental degradation implicitly degender others, pointing to the fluidity and even arbitrariness of conventional categories. An excellent example of a text that depicts women as victims yet also degenders responsibility for suffering is Kurihara's "Betonamu, Chōsen, Hiroshima" (ベトナム、朝鮮、広島 Vietnam, Korea, Hiroshima, 1975), a stirring poem on the horrors of war. The text's opening lines describe the fall from glory of the United States—thirty years ago, the speaker declares, the United States was savoring its triumphs in World War Two. Today (August 1975), in contrast, not only is its exalted technology of no use in Vietnam, it has had to depart the country in shame. The poem then describes some of the violence "America" unleashed on the human and nonhuman residents of this southeast Asian nation:

> [America] burned the fields of Vietnam
> and burned the jungles
> and burned the birds
> and with cluster bombs opened so many holes in human bodies
> that they resembled honeycombs
> and at the end used suffocation bombs
> that left heaps of corpses of dead women and children
> suffocated, their mouths open like fish
> shedding not a drop of blood.[11]

Suffering is depicted as transcending species, age, and, to some extent, gender in that the poem speaks of "dead children" and of holes being opened in "human bodies." On the other hand, the corpses are explicitly those of "dead women and children." Nothing is said about the suffering of adult men, either civilian or military, a significant lacuna considering the millions of men who died during the war.

In the following stanza of "Vietnam, Korea, Hiroshima," the poet accuses the press of relishing these murders, even of "licking their chops, like beasts starved for blood" over the prospect that similar events might soon unfold in Korea. The poem also accuses South Korean authorities of preparing for a new war by murdering rebellious compatriots, and the American secretary of defense for threatening to use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea. Furthermore, the poet laments, the army and the war criminals who supposedly were purged, in fact, have not changed in any meaningful way. The final stanza returns to the legacy of Hiroshima, declaring that mothers are worried about their microcephalic sons, those who were sickened by the radioactive fallout of the atomic bombings, either while in the womb or as infants:

> Microcephalic children now are thirty
> and say "I want a bride,"

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[11] Kurihara 2005a, 342–43.

turning white their mother's hair.
Even now mothers wait
for children who left that morning
of whom not even a bone has been found. (343)

Suffering is portrayed as plaguing both genders, although it is noteworthy that only male voices are cited; certainly an equal number of women also suffer from microcephaly and lament how difficult it is to find a spouse. Remaining silent about the fate of the daughters who survived, the poem in some ways privileges male suffering. It at the same time privileges maternal suffering; there is no mention of what fathers or other concerned individuals might be feeling regarding the condition of these individuals.

On the other hand, gender divisions are undermined by the poem's implicit degendering of responsibility for atrocities committed in Vietnam; "Vietnam, Korea, Hiroshima" speaks of "America" as destroying human beings and the nonhuman in Vietnam. Kurihara's text also degenders delight in violence, speaking of the "world's newspapers" as thrilled that Korea, another hotbed of brutality, will likely provide riveting news stories for months to come. To be sure, in 1975 the vast majority of American military personnel were men, as were the majority of reporters covering international news. Likewise, the poem speaks explicitly of Hitler, Mussolini, the Japanese emperor, and the American secretary of defense, all of whom were men. It also refers to the Japanese army and war criminals; Japan's military was predominately male, and Japan had no female war criminals. Yet nowhere does "Vietnam, Korea, Hiroshima" suggest that violence is an intrinsically male behavior. The poem could be read as conflating "America" with male violence, demonstrating the peripheral position of women in the country's political, economic, and social dynamics. But the fact that Kurihara's text speaks only of Vietnamese and Japanese women and remains silent concerning American women points to violence as a national, not a gendered concern. After all, American women did play vital civilian and military roles in Vietnam and important support roles at home.

Written nearly a decade later, Kurihara's "Mō hitotsu no tokei" (もうひとつの時計 Another Clock, 1983) degenders responsibility for both degradation and, to a lesser extent, remediation. The poem opens with a warning that nuclear war is becoming ever more imminent: Pershing IIs (surface-to-surface guided missiles) have been brought into Europe and Tomahawks (long-range, low-altitude missiles launched from submarines) will be deployed in the Western Pacific in a mere six months. Under these conditions, the poem's speaker asks, "Is there nothing mothers can do/ but kiss their children goodbye/ and wait for the end?"[12] In the following stanza she notes that, in Great Britain, women did more than this: they unleashed a massive, extended protest at Greenham Common, a military base.

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[12] Kurihara 2005e, 415.

They did so, she declares, to protect both people and the biotic and abiotic nonhuman:

> So that the children's future wouldn't be extinguished
> so that the sun wouldn't be obstructed by radioactive dust
> and turn the planet into a cold, dark ruin
> the women of Europe
> created a human chain around the military base. (415–16)

After a brief plea that the world's fields, forests, and insects be preserved for the world's children, the poem's speaker turns her focus to the women of Japan, concluding: "Three minutes remaining to 0 hour/ The women of Japan, what should they do?" (416).[13]

Kurihara's poem first discusses the sorrow experienced by (European) mothers kissing their children goodbye and then waiting for the end. The poem is ambiguous as to who is departing, and for what purpose. The most likely scenario is that these mothers have children who are leaving for military service and whom they fear they might be embracing for the last time. But these lines also could be read in a more general sense; with zero hour drawing ever closer and the planet being in such a perilous state, the goodbyes they exchange with their children before they leave the house to do something as commonplace as visit a friend might be their last contact. The speaker of "Another Clock" then remarks on European women's protests against nuclear weapons, claiming that women are protesting *for* children, but not necessarily for *their own* children. Her focus broadens from mothers—especially those with children in the military—to European women in general. "Another Clock" depicts European women as at once suffering mothers and political activists striving to preserve the nonhuman for the world's children.[14] This is in contrast with Japanese women, who, the poem suggests, are not engaged in these struggles.

The emphasis on women as playing these particular roles raises several important questions concerning both genders. Kurihara's poem is notably silent on men's activities. It also does not assign responsibility for bringing the planet to the brink of destruction; even the gender of the children leaving home—many of whom are pawns of their country and complicit in the (non)human losses experienced by other countries—is not specified. The reader's instinct is to assume a dichotomy between women as mothers and activists and men as responsible for the very problems that women are attempting to solve, including developing and accelerating the nuclear clock. And, in many instances in both literature and the empirical world, it is precisely these dynamics that play out. The speaker suggests this is the case when she describes the women of Europe as forming "a human chain around the military base." She is alluding here to one of the many protests that occurred at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, established in 1981 to protest the storage of cruise missiles at the RAF Greenham Common (Berkshire, England) and a model for other such establishments; on 12 December 1982 thirty thousand women joined hands to encircle the common. But women were not the only ones who demonstrated. On 1 April 1983 tens of thousands of men, women, and children formed a 14-mile human chain linking sites in Berkshire's "Nuclear Valley"—from Greenham Common to the Aldermaston nuclear research center to the ordnance factory in Burghfield—to protest nuclear proliferation.[15]

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[13] Zero hour refers to the end brought about by nuclear war.

[14] Noteworthy here is the speaker's anthropocentrism, indeed, child-centrism. She urges not only that the planet be transformed into a place where "the sun shines down on children," but one where "the children in forest and meadow/can chase butterflies, dragonflies, and cicadas" (416). Nonhuman animals are depicted here as creatures to be chased for the amusement of children, not creatures to be valued in their own right.

It is also likely that the mothers in the second stanza of "Another Clock" are bidding farewell to both male and female children. Although it was not until the early 1990s that women were fully integrated into the British military, they have long played important roles in the nation's armed forces. Furthermore, while the speaker in Kurihara's poem is clear about the activities of (some) British women, the fact that she asks what the women of Japan should be doing suggests that they are not already involved in pacifist activities. "Another Clock" does not declare these women—or any women—culprits whose behaviors have contributed to the planet's instability. But neither does it absolve them. Similarly, the poem's silence concerning the activities of Japanese men and failure to urge them to fight for peace, much less cease militaristic activities, suggests that significant numbers might already be involved in antinuclear protests, as in fact they were in postwar Japan.[16] When read in this context, pleas to women to do more than simply wait helplessly for the world to implode dichotomize women and men, but they also at once implicate both genders in environmental degradation and make room for both genders to advocate environmental remediation.

Further complicating gender pigeonholing is Kurihara's "Dare no tame ni tatakatta no ka" (誰のために戦ったのか For Whom Did They Fight?, 1968), which genders suffering only to degender it, as well as its roots and remediation. The first two-thirds of the poem describes soldiers severely injured in Vietnam who return home to their mothers and harbor vengeance against those who sent them to battle in southeast Asia. Mothers are depicted as providing comfort, but nothing is said about the genders either of the soldiers being comforted or of those responsible for sending them overseas. The final section of the poem focuses on war protests, the speaker noting the similarities between the mothers of wounded American soldiers and individuals harmed by the atomic bomb:

American mothers
saying "Don't send our sons to war!"

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[15] 1983. For a chronology of events at Greenham Common see http://www.guardian.co.uk/newsroom/story/0,,1865394,00.html.

[16] In fact, since the mid-1940s Japanese of both genders have been actively protesting nuclear proliferation.

march in the streets.
Those of us who were burned by the atomic bomb
call out
"Don't repeat Hiroshima in Vietnam!"[17]

These lines describe mothers taking to the streets to protest the draft. On the other hand, *hibakusha* are depicted as protesting both Hiroshima and Vietnam. Injured Americans are portrayed as staying at home, while injured Japanese, both men and women, protest violence in their own country and abroad.

More significant, Kurihara's poems also complicate gender pigeonholing by addressing female complicity in human and nonhuman suffering. Like "For Whom Did They Fight," her poem "Nanmin" (難民 Refugees, 1985) distinguishes between *hibakusha* and a particular group of women, this time not American mothers but instead wealthy women in the global North. These latter individuals are accused of being so concerned with indulging themselves, their children, and their carefully coiffed pets that they give little thought and even less in the way of donations to the hundreds of millions starving in the global South. These women pamper their own children but care not at all for the plights of other children. The speaker contrasts them with *hibakusha*, both men and women, calling on survivors of the nuclear bombings to "change missiles into bread" and deliver "hearty human love."[18] On the other hand, the fact that she is calling on *hibakusha* to do so rather than describing them as already involved in relief efforts suggests that they are not now engaged in these activities to the extent that she would like them to be. The speaker has confidence in the ability of *hibakusha*—who themselves have suffered so much—to broaden consciousness and work to alleviate the suffering of others.

"Refugees" degenders suffering, describing children in Africa as tormented by malnutrition, tens of thousands of people in southern countries as dying daily of starvation, and refugees as maimed and killed, their bodies lining the roads and their blood staining the sand. It also degenders the propagators of direct physical and economic violence, speaking of "Israeli soldiers" as wounding and murdering refugees and being even vaguer concerning responsibility for the poverty that plagues the global South. But women, at least wealthy northern women, are depicted as complicit in indirect violence; the poem correlates their failure to donate more of their wealth to the global South and the hardships experienced by people there.

An even more intriguing subset of Kurihara's poems that complicate gender pigeonholing are those that address Japan's 1941 population policy, outlawing contraception and abortion and essentially forcing women to bear cannon fodder. Giving birth is depicted as instigating considerable suffering: women, treated like nonhuman animals, create children who will themselves both suffer and cause undue human and nonhuman suffering. In "Ningen no songen" (人間の尊厳 Human

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[17] Kurihara 2005b, pp. 278–79.
[18] Kurihara 2005f, pp. 425–26.

Dignity, 1946), for instance, the poet expresses dismay at women's having been treated like hens, constantly pressed to increase egg production. Noting that under such policies "the dignity of life [*seimei no songen* 生命の尊厳] gets trampled," she declares: "Women, get angry at deliberate life and death!/ Until the demise of abominable militarism/ Women of the world, do not have children!"[19] As is the case in other of Kurihara's texts, "Human Dignity" places on women the onus of reforming policy while implicitly degendering responsibility for instigating these policies. On the other hand, the fact that the poem's speaker calls on women not only to refrain from having children but to do something so fundamental as become angry that the state has co-opted their reproductive systems, reveals her great frustration with her gender. The poem's principal focus is the dignity of human life, but by speaking simply of *seimei no songen,* rather than *ningen no songen* 人間の尊厳 as in the title of the poem, she leaves room for considering the suffering of all forms of existence. The final lines of the poem capitalize on this dynamic, featuring an elderly soldier beaten with a horse whip for not saluting. The child born at the state's command becomes the soldier flogged like an animal after himself undoubtedly causing great harm on the battlefield.

Other important articulations of the politics of giving birth appear in Kurihara's "Futatabi taiyō o" (再び太陽を Once More, the Sun, 1940). This poem begins by contrasting times past—when the sun shone brightly and people defended their lands from positions on sturdy ramparts (i.e., an era when violence and pollution could be relatively contained)—and the present, when dense black smoke from munitions factories blocks the sun, harming human beings and the nonhuman, and people destroy one another's cultures, threatening to obliterate human civilization itself. The narrator urges people to restore the gleaming sun so extolled by their ancestors.[20] In "Once More, the Sun" responsibility for human and nonhuman suffering, as well as responsibility for ending this suffering, are degendered.[21] The one exception concerns childbirth: the poet comments that simultaneous with the bombing and destroying of entire cultures is the birth and death of a child, that new life is extinguished almost immediately after it appears. Women are, of course, not solely responsible for either the conception or the rapid smothering of this life, but the poem does depict them as instigating its suffering by bringing it into the world. Also important in this context is Kurihara's poem "Tomo, danshi uminu" (友、男子生みぬ My Friend Gives Birth to a Son, 1940). This text features a speaker mesmerized by her friend's newborn.[22] She indicates that she had resolved not to have additional children since she did not wish to subject new life to such a violent world. But seeing this child has awakened emotions that have weakened her resolve. "My Friend Gives Birth to a Son" depicts women as in many ways fated producers of both life and suffering.

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[19] Kurihara 2005g, p. 61.

[20] See Kurihara 2005c, pp. 50–51.

[21] "Once More, the Sun" speaks of human beings rather than a particular gender as suffering; it likewise specifies the professional identities, rather than the genders, of those responsible for the "hellish ideas" that instigated this suffering: politicians, scholars, educators, and artists. The factory workers who must inhale noxious fumes and work inhumane hours are identified as "male and female," but gender is invoked here primarily to degender suffering.

Kurihara's "Umashimen ka na" (生ましめん哉 Let Us Be Midwives!, 1945), her most famous poem, powerfully degenders responsibility to remediate suffering in the context of war and childbirth. Written in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, "Let Us Be Midwives!" features a group of *hibakusha* crowded into a basement. When one of them goes into labor the others do their best to help, including a midwife, who moments before had been moaning in pain and dies not long after assisting with the birth. The poem urges everyone to become midwives, even at the cost of their own lives. Kurihara herself later criticized the naïveté of this text, particularly its implication that lives can be so easily replaced. But even more than celebrating the birth of new life among the rubble, "Let Us Be Midwives" honors the selflessness of *hibakusha* and encourages people of all backgrounds to emulate their example. Kurihara 2005h, p. 88.

More ambiguous is Kurihara's poem "Inochi to heiwa no onna no genri o" (いのちと平和の女の原理を Women's Principles of Life and Peace, 1985). As its title suggests, "Women's Principles of Life and Peace" explicitly distinguishes between the aspirations of men and women. In her final lines, the poet declares: "Let all women join hands/and prevent all the infants on earth sleeping in cradles/from being burned to death./Let's turn the male principles of bullets and bombs/into the female principles of life and peace."[23] But the mere fact that so-called "male principles" (*otoko no genri* 男の原理) must be changed into "female principles" (*onna no genri* 女の原理) suggests that "female principles" have not been widely embraced by either men or women. In fact, the body of the poem indicates just how complicit—however involuntarily—women have been in solidifying "male principles." Kurihara's text describes the experiences of Japanese women during World War Two: sending husbands, sons, and lovers off to war, being transformed into child-bearing machines, being forced to have more children than they could possibly feed, and handing over these children to be sacrificed for the glory of the emperor and the nation.

Even more troubling, the speaker notes, is that for decades after their defeat the Japanese showed no concern for the suffering of children on other continents, the nuclear arms race, and the increasing threat of nuclear winter. The poem accuses women of having become "blank-faced, middle-class clones."[24] Certain principles might be identified as "women's principles," but there is no guarantee—in fact there is a strong likelihood—that these principles will be spurned by men and women alike. Fundamental differences between men and women appear to exist primarily in the abstract. Also blurring the boundaries between men's and women's beliefs is the deep intertwining of life and weapons. The increased production of life, the poem suggests, is precisely what has encouraged the increased production of bullets and bombs, which in turn threaten both human and nonhuman lives.

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[22] The title of this poem indicates that the infant is a boy, but the body of the text speaks of the infant only as "child" (*ko* 子). Kurihara 1983, p. 101.

[23] Kurihara 2005d, p. 435.

[24] The poem speaks of the blank-faced middle-class clones as people (*ningen* 人間), not distinguishing between men and women. Yet surrounding discourse focuses on women, strongly suggesting that the line cited above does as well.

In sum, although Kurihara's writing frequently divides human beings along clear gender lines, it often does so in ways that also deeply complicate such pigeonholing. Invocations of gender in her oeuvre resemble lightening rods, attracting attention to undeniable differences between men's and women's experiences. Many women give birth, whereas until recently no men had had this experience.[25] Similarly, men have been much more likely to be sent to battlefields or to design weapons systems and thus to engage in direct violence against other human beings and the nonhuman, and women have been far more likely to remain closer to home, working in less obviously aggressive professions. But in many of Kurihara's poems invocations of gender are made, only to be destabilized. Women frequently are called on to fight for peace. This suggests that, in the speaker's opinion, they are not currently doing so to the degree that they should, if at all. It also suggests that men are believed incapable of protesting destruction of environments. On the other hand, it leaves room for the possibility that men already are protesting this destruction. Likewise, although women's suffering often is privileged, the poems regularly degender responsibility for suffering. This is not to suggest that Kurihara's poems necessarily imply that men and women are equally culpable, albeit in different ways, for devastation unleashed on human beings and the nonhuman. It is only to propose that these texts leave open the possibility that this is the case.

Works by Sakaki Nanao more explicitly degender suffering and responsibility. Sakaki was a leader of *Buzoku* (The Tribe 部族), a countercultural group in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s that included foreigners, such as the American poet and environmental activist Gary Snyder (1930–). Sakaki spent considerable time traveling and hiking in Japan, the United States, and other sites, and ecological concerns are at the forefront of much of his work. His creative articulations of anthropogenic ecodegradation at times collapse the gender divisions that Kurihara's work both reinforces and undermines, providing alternative visions of relationships between gender and environmental health.

Most striking in its degendering of responsibility for avenging and advancing environmental harm is Sakaki's lengthy prose poem "Haru wa akebono" (春はあけぼの Spring Dawn, 1994), which features explicitly degendered creatures destroying human beings and the (a)biotic nonhuman. "Spring Dawn" is dedicated to the Japanese writer and court lady Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (966–1017) best known for her *Makura sōshi* (枕草子 Pillow Book, late 10th- early 11th century). *Pillow Book* begins with a paean to the glories of the spring dawn; daybreak is declared the most beautiful attribute of the season, celebrated for its subtle coloring of distant hills. Echoing its predecessor, Sakaki's "Spring Dawn" likewise opens with the phrase, "In spring it is the dawn," followed by a note that "cherry blossoms are in mid-bloom, today is the Flower Festival [Buddha's Birthday]."[26]

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[25] Matt Rice, a transgender man, gave birth to a child in 1999. In 2008, Thomas Beatie attracted considerable attention for becoming the first "legal male" to give birth. Beatie was born a woman and had sex-reassignment surgery but retained his female reproductive organs; he now is pregnant with his third child.

But Sakaki's poem veers quickly away from Sei Shōnagon's verse. The following line describes a band of 1200 semihuman explicitly degendered creatures descending on Japan, carrying a flag congratulating the Japanese on the 1200th anniversary of their former capital city, Kyoto.[27] Dressed in black, with chainsaws for wings, these Black Angels (*burakku enzeru* ブラックエンゼル) are avenging Japan's use of overseas resources. The Japanese presume that the Black Angels have targeted them as the world's largest consumer of trees, a country that relentlessly turns trees to woodchips, woodchips to toilet paper, and then toilet paper to comic books; the Japanese determine that the Black Angels are particularly concerned with the impact of Japan's demand for trees on Australia's primeval forests. Nothing can stop this rogue environmental group: not the Japanese riot police, not Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force, not even the United Nations Special Inquiry Commission Task Force. Ironically, for a group avenging the destruction of environments, the Black Angels not only kidnap 1200 Japanese cartoonists, perhaps as a protest against the resources commandeered by this profession, or perhaps simply because they are addicted to their creations and want them in their service. The Black Angels also use their chainsaw wings to fell every tree in Japan: those in forests, parks, and private gardens, as well as those lining city streets. The consequences of their so doing are immediately recognized:

> Bugs are chirping. Bats are flying. But how long will this continue? Garden violets are in full bloom but without trees what will become of them? Without trees, forests, and woodlands there'll be no dragonflies, beetles, deer, or bears, and perhaps even no seasons. A world without trees, can we call it earth? We can only call it a mountain of concrete garbage. (44)

"Spring Dawn" depicts the Japanese landscape as nearly overwhelmed by human cultural artifacts. At one point these constructions were at least somewhat shielded by nonhuman bodies, but they now stand starkly alone.

On the other hand, the Black Angels do not let the trees go to waste. They send them to factories, where they are turned into woodchips. The Black Angels transform woodchips into toilet paper, and toilet paper into comic books, which they consume as food. This extraterrestrial group does to Japanese ecosystems precisely what the Japanese have done to ecosystems at home and in other parts of the world. The difference is that while Japanese consumption is depicted as at least in some measure unwarranted, as rooted in desire, people destroying forests in part so that they ultimately can read comic books, the Black Angels depend on processed trees for survival. "Spring Dawn" does not argue that this difference justifies the deforestation of Japan, but it does point to some of the ambiguities surrounding the anthropogenic, as well as extraterrestrial, shaping of environments.

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[26] Sakaki 1999, p. 34.

[27] Kyoto became Japan's imperial capital in 794.

Particularly noteworthy in this context is the explicit and repeated degendering of the Black Angels, those responsible for avenging environmental destruction by destroying environments. The first word comes from a Beijing radio flash, midmorning on 8 April: "Their size and physique, like Japanese. They have no facial expressions and no sign of gender" (40).[28] The 9 April news report from Japan's Inquiry Commission declares that the angels "have no sexual characteristics or function" (41). And the United Nations, at 3 P.M. that afternoon, warns against negotiating with "black angels," emphasizing that "the planet cannot bestow rights on a sexless and ageless existence" (42). While exposing prejudices against individuals who cannot be readily classified as one of the two constructed genders of human beings, Sakaki's poem "Spring Dawn" undermines stereotypes of female "innocence" and male "guilt" in the transformation of human and nonhuman environments. This undermining is reinforced in the poet's own portaryal of "Japan," as opposed to "Japanese men," as to blame for the destruction of forests worldwide.

Degendering suffering and responsibility more thoroughly, yet more implicitly than Kurihara's or Sakaki's poems is Ishimure Michiko's novel *Kugai jōdo: Waga Minamatabyō* (苦界浄土: わが水俣病 World of Suffering and the Pure Land: Our Minamata Disease, 1968), Japan's most prominent narrative on Minamata disease.[29] This novel discusses the experiences of men and women who suffer from this disease, pointing to relatively subtle differences between them, but it depicts larger distinctions as based on wealth, power, and experience: on the one hand, the government, businesses, and villagers unaffected by Minamata disease, and, on the other, Minamata patients, their families, and other concerned parties. Ultimately, although much more subtly, it depicts distinctions along the lines of species (i.e., human beings and the nonhuman). The narrator intermingles passages on her own experiences interacting with Minamata patients and their loved ones and clashing with politicians, corporate officials, and even local residents in order to bring these patients justice, with moving stories of Minamata sufferers in their own voices and in those of their families and friends. She also includes poetry, documents such as medical, scientific, and journalistic reports, accounts of the rich cultural history of the towns on Minamata Bay and the Shiranui Sea, and lyrical depictions of the region's landscapes. *World of Suffering* both openly defies narrow definitions of genre and, more importantly, underlines the interdependence of scientific, social scientific, and humanistic interpretations of the experienced world. Chronologically, the novel loops backward and forward in time, denying human suffering a beginning and an end. Demonstrating a cosmopolitan consciousness, it additionally denies suffering any clear spatial borders. Not only does the narrator speak repeatedly of the Ashio Copper Mine incident and of Niigata Minamata disease, the latter of which she describes as creating in her mind the vision of a "deep, chasm-like passage that with a cracking sound ran the length of the Japanese archipelago."[30] True to its title, *World of Suffering* also moves outside Japan, exposing the Chisso Corporation's controversial history in colonial Korea, including its damming of the Yalu River between China and Korea. The narrator discusses the plight of Koreans under Japanese control more generally, including Korean deaths in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In her afterword, Ishimure condemns as well Chisso's clandestine attempt, in the late 1960s, to export to Korea containers of poisonous mercury effluent (255–56). The novel speaks of Minamata disease as having national and global implications.

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[28] This comment also to some extent depersonalizes and degenders the Japanese themselves.

[29] The symptoms of Minamata disease, which affected well over three thousand people in and around Minamata (a village on the Shiranui Sea in western Kyushu), are well known even outside Japan, thanks in part to W. Eugene Smith and Aileen M. Smith's powerful photographic volume *Minamata*. They include severe brain damage, neurological degeneration, physical deformities, numbness, slurred and involuntary speech, involuntary movements, unconsciousness, and death. See Smith and Smith 1975. The key dates in the Minamata story also are clear: in 1908 Nihon Carbide built a factory in Minamata; later that year Nihon Carbide merged with Sōgi Electric to create Nitchitsu (Nihon Chisso Hiryō Kabushiki Kaisha, Japan Nitrogenous Fertilizers, Inc.); in 1932 Chisso began using mercury catalyst in the production of acetaldehyde; in the mid-1950s people in Minamata and surrounding areas began exhibiting symptoms similar to those of acute anterior poliomyelitis; in 1959 a Kumamoto University research group declared mercury the probable source of their distress; in 1968 the Japanese government declared Chisso's organic mercury the cause of Minamata disease. To this day, Minamata patients, their families, and activists continue to struggle for compensation. George 2001, xviii–xix, 17.

Throughout, the narrator of *World of Suffering* also explicitly condemns capitalism and its emphasis on sacrificing human life for financial gain. She repeatedly censures the unchecked desire for profits that led Chisso first to dispose of its untreated waste in the waters surrounding Minamata without ascertaining that so doing would not harm local environments, and then to continue so doing even after the toxicity of its emissions became indisputable; she denounces the analogous greed that for decades enabled the Japanese government to condone Chisso's actions, in practice if not always in legislation. The narrator also frequently reproaches Chisso's and the Japanese government's failure to admit responsibility, provide medical care, and financially compensate people suffering from Minamata disease. And she asserts that not only the government and Chisso are to blame; many living in the long-impoverished Minamata region were so thankful to the company for improving their standard of living that they turned against neighbors who had contracted Minamata Disease and, in many cases, refused to acknowledge their suffering. As the narrator observes: "Minamata Disease is becoming more and more of a taboo topic among the people of Minamata. They think that if they speak of the disease, then the factory will collapse, and if the factory collapses, the town of Minamata will disappear" (233). Highlighting both the degendered physical suffering and the emotional isolation of Minamata patients, the narrator and many of the characters in *World of Suffering* condemn economic, political, and social systems that facilitate destruction of human lives.

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[30] Ishimure 2004, p. 218.

The narrator's and many Minamata residents' deep concerns with human anguish and human-on-human cruelty provide important contrasts with their attitudes toward the nonhuman. On the one hand, the narrator and many suffering from Minamata disease—both men and women—idealize symbiotic, mutually beneficial contacts between human beings and the nonhuman, contacts that in light of Chisso's degradation of the region now exist for the most part either as memories or as aspirations. On the other hand, these same individuals also reveal themselves as concerned about the health of the nonhuman primarily because of its direct impact on human health. Moreover, some of them speak explicitly of their belief that the nonhuman exists for their benefit, that it in fact is their garden, to do with as they please and to pass down to their progeny. To be sure, neither the narrator of *World of Suffering* nor her characters appear aware of their contradictory attitudes vis-à-vis the nonhuman. In addition, *World of Suffering* does not explicitly discuss actual or potential impacts of this type of anthropocentrism (loving nature but believing it exists for one's own consumption) on the nonhuman. As of the publishing of *World of Suffering*, the actual consequences of these attitudes appeared minuscule in the areas surrounding Minamata; they do so still today, more than four decades later. But as scholarship on anthropogenic shaping of environments has revealed time and time again, although their impact tends to be more immediate and intense and thus more obvious, factories, power plants, commercial farming, fishing, and whaling are not the only entities and practices capable of severely damaging ecosystems.

The narrator of *World of Suffering* celebrates the harmonious interactions men and women in the Minamata region once enjoyed with the nonhuman; the novel's opening passage depicts the town's ecosystems before Chisso's arrival as healthy, as in sync—as places where human beings, their cultural artifacts, and the nonhuman all flourished and boundaries among the three regularly blurred:

> The village of Yudō surrounds a small bay where the waves billow only with the typhoons that come once or twice a year.
>
> Small boats, sardine baskets, and the like floated on the gentle ripples of Yudō Bay. Naked children played there, jumping from boat to boat and splashing into the water.
>
> In the summer, the voices of those children went up through tangerine groves, oleanders, tall sumacs with coiled bumps, and stone walls and could be heard in the houses.
>
> At the lowest part of the village, at the base of the terrace right by the boats, there was a large old well—the communal washing place. Small minnows and cute red crabs played in the shadows of the moss on the stone walls of the large four-sided well. This kind of well where crabs lived was without a doubt fed by a pure gushing rock spring of sweet water.
>
> Around here springs gushed even at the bottom of the sea. (8–9)

Speaking first of a human settlement (the town of Yudō) as surrounding a peaceful nonhuman body (a bay of the same name), then homing in on human cultural artifacts (boats, sardine baskets), followed by human beings (children) interacting with the larger nonhuman body (Yudō Bay), *World of Suffering* points immediately to the water as a peaceful space of degendered human/nonhuman intermingling.

This portrait is solidified in the third paragraph, which has children's voices rising through various nonhuman bodies (plants) and human cultural artifacts (stone walls) and infiltrating into other human cultural artifacts (houses) some distance away—water, air, and land, human beings, human cultural artifacts, and nonhuman bodies, all tied together by voices at play. Even more significant is the scene at the well, in the following paragraph. The mostly nonhuman home (the bay of the first two paragraphs) and the mostly human home (the house of the third paragraph) here blend into a home more integrated in terms of both composition and occupancy.[31] The well is a small body of water, surrounded by stones arranged by human beings, fed by a rock spring; the gathering place of moss, marine life, and human beings, this structure built and used regularly by human beings is a comfortable home to the (a)biotic nonhuman. The fifth paragraph—sharing with the fourth paragraph a reference to gushing springs—shifts the spotlight back to the sea. The narrator's careful choice and placement of images in these opening lines reinforce impressions of harmonious degendered human/nonhuman symbioses. Taking the reader back to the well and then out again into open waters, the next several paragraphs continue in a similar vein. The narrative pans out; to Yudō, both town and bay, are added the names of adjacent bodies of water, pieces of land, and human settlements. Then suddenly, in the final paragraph of the novel's first section, the narrator indicates that this region also is home to the greatest number of Minamata cases. After listing the towns and villages most affected by the disease, she concludes: "The Chisso Corporation's Minamata factory had its drain in Hyakken Harbor" (9–10).

As the reader quickly learns, Chisso's effluent has poisoned the harbor and surrounding waters. Besieged in turn by anthropogenically devastated nonhuman bodies, human beings—both men and women—are both the polluters and the polluted: "Organic mercury never attacked from the front. It lurked densely in the mullets, the clear sea octopuses, and the nocticulae that were such an important part of people's daily lives. It infiltrated deep into the human body together with people's food, their sacred fish" (107). The very nonhuman animals that sustained human beings, the very nonhuman animals on whom the fishers depended for livelihood and life, for physical and spiritual fulfillment, now hasten their deaths, economic and corporeal. But even this reality does not dampen local people's deep emotional attachments to the nonhuman. For instance, as Yuki, one of the Minamata patients visited by the narrator, exclaims: "Is there anything more beautiful than fish? . . . I believe the Palace of the Dragon King really does exist on the bottom of the sea. I'm sure it's as beautiful as a dream. I just can't get enough of the sea . . . I long to go out to sea again, just one more time" (123).

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[31] Also noteworthy in this regard is how the stone wall and the house here blend into the stone well.

Affection for the nonhuman persists, but for the most part *World of Suffering* portrays the nonhuman as being discussed and examined—by male and female government and corporate officials, scientists, journalists, teachers, activists, fishers, Minamata patients, and the narrator alike—primarily in relation to its service to human beings, whether as a vital source of human physical and spiritual nourishment or as a convenient space for depositing waste. Significantly, concern for human suffering trumps concern for nonhuman suffering. People are depicted as alarmed by the mercury levels in fish primarily because they depend on the fish for nourishment. Likewise, people become concerned when confronted with cats with visible symptoms of Minamata disease primarily because they believe the fate of the cats might soon be their own; for their part, scientists study cats precisely because they believe that understanding the suffering of these animals will provide insights into human distress. There are few passages in *World of Suffering* that decry or even mention the suffering of nonhuman animals without almost immediately indicating the relationship of this suffering with that of human beings.[32]

These attitudes are to be expected, considering the severity of human suffering caused directly by fish and prefigured by cats. Likewise, degendered human-on-human violence is a central part of the Minamata story and one that, as the hybrid and whirling narrative structure of Ishimure's novel suggests, needs to be continuously repeated in words, lest it recur in behaviors even more frequently than it already does. But those characters in *World of Suffering* who believe nonhuman suffering worthy of consideration regularly suggest that this is because of its direct connection with human suffering. This type of privileging of human suffering raises several important questions. How severely must anthropogenically degraded nonhuman bodies harm human beings before human beings are motivated to remediate and prevent further devastation of environments? To what extent is remediating and preventing devastation of the nonhuman deemed important only when the health of human beings is clearly at stake? Ishimure's novel emphasizes that, for the most part, at least in the case of Minamata disease, the people—both men and women—who become concerned about, much less actively protest against ecodegradation nearly always are those who have relatively little to lose. This includes people who have been adversely affected by ecodegradation, those who have become ill or whose loved ones have become ill (Minamata patients) or even more deeply impoverished (fishers who now have nothing to catch). On the other end of the spectrum this includes concerned outsiders (journalists, intellectuals, artists) who champion causes without making significant personal sacrifices.

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[32] The principal exception is an article from a supplement to the January 1957 issue of the *Kumamoto Igakkai zasshi* 熊本医学界雑誌 (Journal of the Kumamoto Medical Society) titled "Neko ni okeru kansatsu" 猫における観察 (Study of a Cat) which discusses the symptoms of a cat afflicted by Minamata disease. This article is included in the novel's third chapter (118-20). The narrator also includes several poignant descriptions of poisoned fish.

World of Suffering contrasts these two groups with those threatened by potentially substantial economic losses: Chisso, the Japanese government, and the many local residents not afflicted with Minamata disease who are terrified that Chisso will be forced to close its doors and that their livelihoods will subsequently evaporate.[33]

On the other hand, were Minamata disease to have affected only cats (i.e., if human beings, unlike cats or fish, somehow could tolerate mercury), would the fishers have had sufficient resources to investigate the devastation of the feline population? More important, are people suffering or watching a loved one suffer from an illness as debilitating and horrific as Minamata disease at all capable of reflecting on nonhuman suffering? Should they really be expected to do so? *World of Suffering* implies that all three questions merit a negative answer and that this is precisely part of what makes prevention and remediation of ecodegradation so difficult: belief that nonhuman suffering is significant in and of itself requires empathy as difficult to attain by those physically removed from and even economically dependent on this suffering as it is by those more proximate to it. The one hope perhaps is concerned outsiders, including the journalists, intellectuals, and artists to whom Ishimure refers, who seemingly have less at stake. But the narrator exposes these persons as somewhat fickle, their interest in human and nonhuman suffering lacking the deep roots often required for sustained involvement in its amelioration in any particular site.

Concern with nonhuman health almost exclusively in terms of its impact on human health is related closely to perceptions of the nonhuman as in the service of human beings, whether male or female, perceptions harbored even by those with deep emotional connections to the nonhuman. In fact, in highlighting this attitudinal conflict (deeply respecting the nonhuman *and* believing it to be at their service), *World of Suffering* unwittingly posits congruencies between certain aspects of local people's attitudes toward the nonhuman and the attitudes of the Japanese government and the Chisso Corporation.[34] Japanese authorities and

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[33] What these groups often fail to realize is that, although in some ways they have much to lose economically, they are not as far removed as they might imagine from those already visibly suffering. Most obviously, the residents of the Minamata area protesting the anti-Chisso protests are themselves at some risk of contracting Minamata disease. Also important is the narrator's suggestion that Tokyo—home to the Diet officials who eventually are persuaded to travel to Minamata—might in fact be just as polluted as the environs of the Shiranui Sea. As the elderly fisher Ezuno notes: "I heard that in Tokyo cars line up on the road, outnumbering people. Houses and people both are rapidly multiplying, and even sunlight doesn't filter down to them . . . The people in Tokyo are to be pitied. From what I've heard the fish paste they eat is made of rotten fish . . . People who live in Tokyo never come to know the taste of fresh fish and live their entire lives without seeing the sun" (159–60). Left unsaid in *World of Suffering* is the possibility that Tokyo officials, already inured to environmental degradation, simply take for granted what has happened in the Minamata region.

[34] *World of Suffering* likewise reveals contradictions between local people's attitudes and actual behaviors toward the nonhuman, most significantly between the fishers' deep affection for and killing of fish. For instance, the narrator remarks that Yuki would guide her boat to areas teeming with fish and "would call out to them: 'Hey there, hey fish, why don't you come out again today?'" The narrator continues, "Fishers often talk to the fish affectionately like this. But being from Amakusa, Yuki had an especially cheerful way of speaking" (112). Yet in light of the vast devastation wreaked on the Minamata area by the Chisso Corporation and its collaborators, conflicts in local peoples' attitudes are even more revealing.

Chisso officials, like high-ranking employees of most governments and corporations, are depicted as believing the nonhuman to be a collection of bodies at their behest, to be used as they see fit. And in certain ways, paradoxically, so too do the people of Minamata, despite their profound attachment to it. The narrator reveals that residents of the area believe the nonhuman to be their own, to do with as they please. As one of the local residents asserts: "I've neither rice paddies nor fields to leave my family. Just the sea, which I think of as my own sea" (167–68). And as the elderly fisher Ezuno explains: "We row into the sea, which stretches from our houses like a field or a garden, and take what fish we want . . . Out on the sea, it's like the whole world is yours" (159–60). Yuki also likens the sea to her garden. She reassures her husband Mohei that they will have little difficulty finding fish, reminding him: "I've been at sea since I was three; I grew up on a boat. The area around here is like my own garden. And anyway, Ebisu [the Japanese god of fishers; one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune] has deep compassion for boats with women" (112). Harvesting the sea as one would a garden is not only sanctioned, but encouraged, especially for women. To be sure, some fishers advocate gluttony, if only in jest, the narrator noting that the favorite saying of the fisher Masuto was: "A fisher who can't eat a bucket of sashimi in one sitting is no fisher" (128). But most pride themselves on taking from the sea only what they believe they require, and what has been heavenly sanctioned. Ezuno stresses: "Fish are a gift from heaven. We take only what we need . . . All our lives we have eaten what heaven has given us" (162–63). And the narrator remarks that Yuki and Mohei "never took more fish than they needed; they spent their days fishing in moderation" (112).

On the other hand, it is significant that Yuki and Mohei believe there is nothing wrong with continuing to fish even when the supply of marine life has decreased significantly. Immediately before citing Yuki's reassurance to her husband that their voyage is blessed by Ebisu, the narrator remarks, "I remember that at that time fish had already disappeared from the sea around Hyakken. But unknown even to the Minamata fishers, some places still had fish" (112). Yuki not only believes the sea is her garden; she also is seemingly undisturbed by the fact that she and her husband might be taking the last vestiges of piscine life from this space. And it is not just Yuki; the narrator indicates that over the years many fishers, both men and women, have exhibited similar tendencies. Earlier in *World of Suffering* the narrator describes the long tradition of gray mullet fishing in Minamata. She notes that fishers long had "competed with one another for the season's largest gray mullet catch" (63). Beginning in the early 1950s, neither they nor their counterparts in nearby Tsunagi could get a single gray mullet to bite, no matter how carefully they tweaked conventional fishing techniques; the populations of other animals also decreased dramatically. The fishers talked with one another about these strange conditions, but their discussions appear to have become snagged in a debate about whether the depletion of marine life in Tsunagi had anything to do with the depletion of marine life in Minamata. Ishimure's novel does not depict the fishers as having any interest in investigating the reason behind the sudden disappearance of the mullet, shrimp, gizzard shad, sea bream, lobsters, and other creatures on whom they had long depended. Instead, they are said to have sold their fishing supplies and invested in flashier nets, which were not only ineffective but also quickly consumed by a rat population that exploded thanks to a dearth of cats. Not long thereafter, the narrator reveals, the newly bankrupt fishers began poaching to survive. Lacking the perspective to seek more sustainable alternatives, they believed this to be their only choice.

Without question, corporate pollution usually involves more rapid and more severe disruption of the nonhuman than do conventional fishing, hunting, and farming by local peoples. But attitudes vis-à-vis the nonhuman, and, in particular, perceptions of appropriate relationships between human beings and the nonhuman, are not as dissimilar as might be assumed. *World of Suffering* implicitly raises an important question: how fundamentally different is a corporation's believing it appropriate to use a body of water as its dumping ground, from a town's believing it appropriate to use the same nonhuman body as its source of nourishment, even if so doing involves hunting down this body's last remaining nonhuman animal? Many would argue that there is a world of difference between these two beliefs. But when these beliefs are translated into behaviors, as they often are, distinctions can become more ambiguous. Jared Diamond's *Collapse* and much other scholarship has revealed that there is little preventing seemingly sustainable use from eventually bringing about massive devastation of the nonhuman.[35] In fact, Japan's fish populations had experienced devastating losses, at times from overfishing, long before those brought about by the polluting of Hyakken Harbor by the Chisso Corporation.

The narrator of *World of Suffering* establishes a sharp dichotomy between the villagers' (directly) killing animals for survival (killing based on need) and Chisso's (indirectly) killing animals for profit (killing based on desire); the former is depicted as preserving human bodies, and the latter as destroying both human and nonhuman bodies. But a persistent question remains: what will happen when nonhuman reproduction no longer keeps pace with human reproduction? As Conrad Totman has noted:

> When we try to understand the dynamics of human-biosystem relations, it is well to bear in mind that how we humans think about other animals (or about plants) carries little weight when compared to the level of our capacity to manipulate or otherwise affect the world around us. If we need or want something badly enough, and have the capability to obtain it, it seems, we will soon devise a rationale to justify doing so. Sadly, the record of human history suggests that it is a matter of little consequence whether any other members of the biosystem—including weaker humans—are inconvenienced by the enterprise.[36]

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[35] Diamond 2005.

[36] Quoted in Pflugfelder 2005, p. xv.

World of Suffering is first and foremost a moving portrait of the physical and psychological anguish suffered by the human victims of Minamata disease, victims whom the narrator only very rarely divides solely on the basis of gender. Yet it also sheds important light on conflicting attitudes toward ecosystems, not only between but also within other groups and individuals. The novel does not directly address the potential impacts of local people's attitudes, when translated into behaviors, on the long-term health of ecosystems. But it does reveal attitudes toward the nonhuman as complex, and often contradictory, particularly in cases of the anthropogenic degradation of the nonhuman.

As much ecofeminist scholarship has demonstrated, the same beliefs and practices that facilitate the exploitation of women also facilitate the exploitation of other conventionally subjugated groups, including the nonhuman. On the other hand, although texts by Kurihara, Sakaki, Ishimure, and many other creative writers do not deny similarities between the abuse of women and that of the nonhuman, the divisions they depict—experience, wealth, power, nation, and ultimately species—supersede those of gender. They stress that just as both genders can suffer, both genders can inflict and alleviate suffering. Preventing and remediating future environmental problems will involve continued dismantling of the structures that facilitate the oppression of women and the nonhuman. But they also will involve recognizing that no single group of human beings is solely responsible for either damaging or remediating ecosystems. Sakaki's "Spring Dawn," Ishimure's *World of Suffering*, and a number of Kurihara's poems articulate one of the great challenges of the twenty-first century: reconfiguring the common belief, however unconscious, that the nonhuman exists primarily to serve human beings. As disparities in the treatment of men and women are diminishing in this increasingly postgender era, disparities in the treatment of other groups, and, in particular, of human beings and the nonhuman, are becoming ever starker.

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