

Scream from the Shadows: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan. Setsu Shigematsu. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. ISBN 9780816667581

A self-reflexive exploration of the interconnections between feminism and violence, *Scream from the Shadows* is more than a historical account of the *ribu* movement in Japan. It offers a radical and unflinching look at liberation politics that fight against systems of violence while at the same time being formed through systems of violence. Shigematsu courageously brings to light the disavowed shadow of power within feminism that haunts us in the book with screams of 'ecstasy, terror and rage.' (xiv) This preoccupation with larger questions involving liberation and its intricate relationship with domination and violence makes the book relevant not only as a historical account of the feminist movement in Japan but also as feminist philosophy.

The merit of the book lies in the "thick description" of the 1960s–70s in Japan, offering excellent contextualization and analysis of the connections and differences between the various movements for liberation that characterized Japan during this period. Readers will find in this study a strong critical analysis of empowerment as the emergence of a subjectivity constituted by power. It invites feminists to look in the mirror and explore their desire for power and participation in violence. Many accounts of feminist activism have avoided this topic because of the fear that disclosing the contradictions and complicity of feminism with systemic violence would undermine their empowerment efforts.

Shigematsu moves seamlessly back and forth between transnational conditions, the social and political situation in Japan, the variety of movements and liberation groups, the meetings and activities organized by *ribu* activists to individual members of *ribu* and their philosophy. Although complex and analytical, the reading flows because the author makes us feel present to the events and struggles of the *ribu* movement through a masterly accumulation of details whose connections she explains. Her approach constructs a genealogy of the *ribu* movement showing how deeply the personal is enmeshed with the political. The result of ten years of fieldwork during which intellectual growth was accompanied by personal transformation and investment in relationships, the book appeals with its intellectual vigor and deep commitment to its topic.

One shortcoming of the book is that the author's Foucauldian understanding of violence as any manifestation of power might seem ambiguous to some readers. There is no detailed account of the difference between violence that leads to killing, such as the revolutionary violence of the United Red Army, and the violence of silencing or dominating others as Tanaka Mitsu, the icon of the *ribu* movement, did.

The first chapter, "Origins of the Other/*Onna*: The Violence of Motherhood and the Birth of *Ribu*," differentiates the *ribu* from other feminist movements in Japan and radical feminism in the West. The author brings forward a global view of the movement as it emerges and intersects with imperialist formations and highlights the solidarities it engendered with other movements of liberation. The philosophy of the *ribu* exposed the connections between Japanese imperialism and the family system, showing how the modern family system was reproducing discrimination. The rejection of the family system also resulted in the practice of women living in communes and their adoption of the term *onna*. In an even more courageous move, the *ribu* activists expressed

solidarity for the abjected category of women who killed their children. They saw this violence as a revolt against a violent system that for many generations did not allow women to live except through dominated identities. Unlike the other feminist movements in Japan, the *ribu* were more concerned with the quality of their politics, refusing to collaborate with power institutions in order to expand. They were keenly aware of the connection between the prosperity of Japan and the domination of other Asian countries. Instead of massive social movements, the *ribu* activists focused on the liberation of female sexuality, whose oppression, they thought, lay at the basis of other forms of oppression.

The second chapter, “Lineages of the Left: Death and Reincarnation of a Revolutionary Ideal,” offers a detailed contextualization of the political movements of the Japanese Left and the New Left lying at the origin of *ribu*. The *ribu* activists distanced themselves from the idealization of violence used by leftists not only against the government but also against members of other revolutionary groups. They saw violence as a masculine “logic of productivity” and a negation of embodied relationality. (56) Liberation for *ribu* meant not expressing violence against those who did not conform to one’s ideals but rather creating relationships between self and others.

Chapter Three, “The Liberation of Sex, *Onna* and Eros: The Movement and the Politics of Collective Subjectivity,” analyzes the relationship between *ribu* subjects and the movement’s core philosophical concepts. In this account the author herself performs a feminist analysis by embodying ideas and locating them in the subjects and the actual events that produced them. *Ribu*’s core idea of the liberation of sex led them to create alliances with other social movements and marginalized groups. The liberation of sex for *ribu* did not mean free sex between men and women, but the liberation of the female sexual potential. *Ribu* activists had to grapple with the contradiction between female subjectivity as victim and participant in violent systems of domination.

The fourth chapter, “*Ribu* and Tanaka Mitsu: The Icon, the Center, and Its Contradictions,” zooms in on the most representative member of *ribu* activism, Tanaka Mitsu. Her iconic status revealed the impossibility for the movement to remain nameless by acknowledging the efforts of all women involved. Tanaka’s fame betrayed the non-hierarchical ideas of *ribu*, exposing the specter of violence among feminist subjects. Despite her charismatic figure, it was not Tanaka herself who laid the basis for the movement but rather all the other *ribu* women. The author offers a detailed account of Tanaka’s leadership role and the reactions she produced in other members.

The last chapter, “*Ribu*’s Response to the United Red Army: Feminist Ethics and the Politics of Violence,” delves into the courageous response of Tanaka and other *ribu* activists when faced with revolutionary violence. In 1972 the United Red Army (URA) tortured and killed 12 of its members in an internal purge that sent a wave of shock and criticism across the nation. The media presentations of and reactions to these acts of violence diverted people’s attention from the government’s own participation in violence, delegitimizing leftist struggles. Tanaka highlighted the complicated relationship between state domination, sexual oppression and subjectivity formed through violence, expressing critical solidarity with the URA’s female leader, Nagata Hiroko. The principles expressed by Tanaka refused the idealization of either violence or non-violence, acknowledging contradiction as the necessary condition of being in the world. While

acknowledging Nagata Hiroko as a perpetrator of violence, she refuses to condemn her as an individual, condemning instead larger systems of domination.

The book ends with a historical account of the *ribu* legacy in Japan, the institutionalization of women's studies and the complicated relationship between feminism and the state. The author offers her account as a lesson pointing out the dangers of idealization in liberation politics. The screams from the shadows warn us that the road to liberation requires great awareness and countless negotiations between our subjectivity and the outside world. I see this study as a timely participation in the increasing self-awareness in feminist philosophy found in the works of authors such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Bell Hooks, Chela Sandoval and many others.

This study is a rich and informative source for scholars of feminism, women's studies, Japanese studies and Asian history that privileges "genealogy over historiography." It is not the most recommended book for scholars interested in the complete history of the *ribu* movement in Japan, but it is highly recommended for all researchers concerned with the transnational underpinnings of violence and liberation.

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