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"Breast-Is-Best" and Care in Fukazawa Ushio's *Chibusa no kuni de*

Letizia Guarini

Introduction

In June 2016, the documentary *'Bonyū būmu' no kage de—Oitsumerareru hahaoyatachi*『母乳ブーム』のかげでー追い詰められる母親たち (In the shadow of the "breastfeeding boom"—Trapped mothers) aired on the NHK documentary program *Mokugeki! Nihon rettō* 目撃！日本列島 (Witnessed! In Japanese archipelago).[1] This short documentary, which at the time of airing created a buzz on Twitter, emphasized how some maternity hospitals put great emphasis on the "breast-is-best" discourse. It revealed that in recent years, a growing number of women have adopted increasingly desperate measures in order to successfully breastfeed: from visiting the Ryuonji Temple in Komaki City, Aichi Prefecture, known as the "breast temple" (お乳のお寺 *ochichi no otera*) and offering prayers to Mama Kannon, to seeking help at maternity hospitals that claim to provide support to breastfeeding mothers through breast massages and dietary advice.[2] The NHK program also interviewed young mothers who struggled to breastfeed, highlighting how pressure from families and peers could cause women to believe that they are "unfit mothers" (母親失格 *hahaoya shikkaku*) and suffer from depression.

While breastfeeding offers many benefits both for the mother's and the newborn's health, the "breast-is-best" discourse can be a source of anxiety, causing women to experience stress as well as physical and emotional pain. When used in literature, breastfeeding can be easily recognized as a symbol for childcare, and we can thus read it as a *topos* that highlights the great pressure put on mothers as primary caregivers in contemporary Japanese society. Kakuta Mitsuyo's novel *Saka no tochū no ie* 坂の途中の家 (The house on the slope, 2016) and Matsuda Aoko's essay collection *Jibun de nazukeru* 自分で名付ける (I give the name, 2021) are

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just a few examples among many literary works that have covered this subject.[3] In this paper, I analyze the representation of breastfeeding in relation to the concept of care in the novel *Chibusa no kuni de* 乳房のくにで (In the country of breasts, 2020) by Fukazawa Ushio 深沢潮 (b. 1966). Through my analysis, I will examine the representation of reproduction and breastfeeding as a means of articulating women's physical and psychological oppression within Japanese society. Furthermore, I will explore the connections between literature and contemporary sociocultural dynamics of gender and family in contemporary Japan, focusing on the possibilities of redefining traditional models of femininity and masculinity.

The first half of *Chibusa no kuni de* is set in Tokyo at the end of the 1990s. The novel unfolds from the perspective of the first-person narrator, Tōjō Fukumi, with two chapters narrated from the point of view of another female character, Tokuda Nae. Fukumi, a poor, unemployed single mother in her thirties, who cannot rely on the support of her own family, is hired as a wet nurse to support Nae, the daughter-in-law of a wealthy politician, and her son Hikaru. In fact, Fukumi only agrees to work for the Tokudas because Nae is a former classmate who used to bully her. While Hikaru's attachment to Fukumi becomes stronger, Nae studies hard to get back to work; however, she discovers that she is pregnant again and, at the same time, that her husband Hideto has been cheating on her. Eventually Nae divorces him and leaves the Tokudas, who get custody of Hikaru. The first half of the novel depicts Fukumi's and Nae's respective struggles as a wet nurse, and as a young wife and mother, whose female bodies are controlled by the Tokudas, the wealthy family to which they are bound. In the novel's second half, set around 2020, both women escape from that oppressive family model and begin fighting its heteronormative and patriarchal values in the political arena. Nae, who, after divorcing Hideto became a lawyer and activist for women's rights, is persuaded by her son Hikaru to run in the local elections against her ex-husband, who is the representative of the ruling conservative party. Fukumi, at first jealous that even though Hikaru and Nae spent nearly twenty years apart, they managed to swiftly rekindle a close relationship, eventually decides to support Nae's election campaign. Even though Nae becomes a high-profile candidate, gathering support particularly from women and young voters, she does not defeat Hideto. Nevertheless, the ending, where Nae is depicted as strong, confident, and full of energy, gives hope for a better future for Japanese society.

As will be discussed in the final section of this paper, Fukazawa revised the ending of the novel in its paperback edition published in 2022.

By doing so, she further demonstrated the ways in which literature can address political and social issues, and form part of the conversation on how feminism, defined by bell hooks as a "movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," is essential to create a society in which the rights of all people are championed.[4]

Fukazawa's novel tackles the issues of reproduction and "breast-is-best" discourse on several levels. On the one hand, it describes the discomfort that both the lack and overproduction of breastmilk can cause women, and emphasizes how individual reproduction and practices of care are embedded in a network of political and social structures. On the other hand, it questions and challenges the ideology of maternal love and the traditional view of care as something that should be performed at the individual level in the intimate sphere. In this respect, the relationship between Fukumi and Nae is pivotal in my analysis of *Chibusa no kuni de*, as I will explore the link between breastfeeding, care, and power while shedding light on the interdependence between caregivers and care-receivers. My analysis of Fukazawa's work highlights an aspect of care that Joan C. Tronto has stressed in her book *Who Cares?: How to Reshape a Democratic Politics* (2015), that is, how care is "always relational" and "always infused with power," in that "all caring, every response to a need, involves power relationships."[5] This is true not only when we think about how, for instance, infants are at the mercy of their caregivers for protection and food, but also in terms of the interdependence between caregivers and care-receivers.[6] As noted by the Care Collective, a group of academics from a breadth of disciplines who have addressed the crisis of care:

> One of the great ironies surrounding care is that it is actually the rich who are most dependent on those they pay to service them in innumerable personal ways. Indeed, their status and wealth are partly signified by the number of people they rely upon to provide constant support and attention, from nannies, housemaids, cooks and butlers to gardeners and the panoply of workers outside their households who service their every need and desire. Yet this deep-rooted dependency remains veiled and denied so long as the very wealthy retain their full sense of agency, having the capacity to dominate or sack and replace those who care for them.[7]

The perspective offered by the Care Collective is useful to understand how the dynamics of power involved in the practices of care are determined by the intersection between class and gender. As I will show in detail, when read through the lens of intersectional feminism, *Chibusa no kuni de* not only reveals the vulnerable condition of women in contemporary Japan but

also offers a means of imagining a more just future for the whole of Japanese society.

Maternal Love and "Breast-Is-Best" Discourse in Contemporary Japan

When talking about "breast-is-best" ideology, or *bonyū shinwa* (母乳神話) in Japanese, there is a need to refer to a larger ideology, that is, the ideology of maternal love (母性愛神話 *boseiai shinwa*). In her book *Boseiai shinwa no wana* 母性愛神話の罠 (The trap of the ideology of maternal love, 2000), Ōhinata Masami explores this ideology, which is deep-rooted in Japanese society, by starting with a linguistic analysis of the term:

> The most naive myth of maternal love is the idea that a woman's ability to reproduce leads directly to her ability to raise children. For example, in the Kōjien dictionary, motherhood is defined as "a quality that a woman possesses as a mother; being a mother," while maternal love is defined as "the inborn and instinctive love a mother has for her child." It emphasizes that motherhood is an innate characteristic unique to women, while omitting specific descriptions of what characteristics are meant, and is representative of the so-called maternal instinct theory.[8]

While the meaning of *boseiai* remains quite vague, it manifests itself in other ideologies as well as in common practices: for instance, the ideology of maternal love is reflected in the "myth of the three-year-old" (三歳児神話 *sansaiji shinwa*), which states that mothers should give up work and be entirely devoted to the care of their children until they are three years old. Following Ōhinata, Alessandro Castellini explains that the myth of maternal love relies "on the shared cultural expectation that a mother would sacrifice herself for the greater good of the family, embrace her ingress into motherhood with enthusiasm and naturally establish with her child a relationship saturated with love and devoid of ambivalent feelings."[9] Furthermore, he argues that women are not only expected to perform the role of loving mothers but are also policed when they deviate from that norm:

> The myth of maternal love worked by policing the deviant behaviour of women who expressed dissatisfaction, anxiety or fear in relation to their maternal experience, and stigmatized as aberrations those mothers who seemed unable to love their children or, worse, who abused and hurt them.[10]

In fact, the myth of maternal love works throughout the whole embodied experience of motherhood, from the "active pursuit of pregnancy" (妊活 *ninkatsu*), through pregnancy and childbirth, until breastfeeding.[11] In Japan, a country facing a rapid population shrinkage,[12] women are considered "the driving force and mainly responsible for reproductive planning;"[13] hence, good mothers are expected to actively engage in a process of "bodybuilding"[14] that facilitates procreation. After becoming pregnant, women are expected to be constantly engaged with their bodies to ensure safe childbirth. As Amanda C. Seaman points out, "the woman must control her desires and impulses in order to create the perfect environment for her child, and make a 'good birth' (*anzan*) more likely."[15] Furthermore, mothers-to-be are also expected to involve themselves with *taikyō* 胎教, or "fetal education:"

> Fundamental to this idea of mother-baby bonding is the idea that a mother's behavior decisively shapes her unborn child, for good as well as for ill. Whereas in earlier centuries women were warned that improper or immoral behavior might prevent them from giving birth to an attractive and virtuous child, now they are encouraged to avoid stress, relax, and play Mozart or speak English during pregnancy, in order to protect the fetus and predispose it to become a music lover or learn a second language.[16]

In other words, pre-pregnant women, as well as pre-childbirth women, are already considered mothers and are thus expected to show their maternal love through their active engagement in pursuing pregnancy, building bodies capable of giving birth, and educating the fetus.

The myth of maternal love pervades every aspect of the experience of motherhood, including childbirth and breastfeeding. Seaman points out that "Japanese medical practitioners have long advocated natural childbirth, *shizen bumben*, as the best and often only acceptable method for giving birth."[17] Moreover, in her analysis of videos used in Japanese childbirth preparation courses, Tsipy Ivry examines how such courses are used to disseminate the idea that the pain of labor generates a special bond between mother and child. Ivry explains that in one prenatal course, the nurse instructor emphasized that pain in childbirth is not only unavoidable, but necessary, and concluded with the proverb *onaka wo itamete unda ko wa kawaii* お腹を痛めて産んだ子はかわいい (the child that made one's belly hurt is lovable).[18] As Muriel Jolivet explains, the idea, still deep-rooted in Japan, is that "a woman who has suffered to bring her child into the world cannot avoid 'finding him lovable.'"[19]

Finally, the myth of maternal love also stigmatizes as aberrations those mothers who seem unfit to love their children because they are unable to breastfeed them. It is not by chance that Jolivet included "Thou shalt breast-feed thy child day and night for a whole year" in "The Ten Commandments of the Good Mother."[20] This "oppressive Decalogue," which refers to various theories fostered by Japanese pediatricians, is a collection of declarations that, while not scientific, are expression of dominant ideologies that permeate Japanese society.[21] With regard to the "breast-is-best" discourse, Jolivet noted that during the 1980s, experts such as Kyutoku Shigemori, Hirai Nobuyoshi, and Kobayashi Noboru, as well as the Ministry of Health, started drawing attention to the decline in the number of women who were breastfeeding their children and began denouncing the "decline or disappearance of this mother instinct."[22] While stressing the "technical" advantages of breastfeeding, these experts put great emphasis on the effects that breastfeeding would have on the psychological development of children: breastfed babies would be more intelligent and placid than those fed on artificial milk; they would not feel confused at having been deprived of their mothers' love; and they would have fewer chances to develop short- or long-term personality problems.[23] Jolivet summarizes as follows:

> In conclusion, all women who choose for personal reasons to bottle-feed rather than breast-feed are thereby expressing an egoism which is bound to attract relational difficulties later on. That is why childcare books carry the message that maternal love is passed on through the milk, a declaration, Hirai emphasizes, which, though not scientific, is no less full of common sense.[24]

The "breast-is-best" discourse was also supported by schools of breastfeeding such as the one founded in 1982 by Oketani Sotomi, who claims that "all women can breast-feed as long as they follow the few simple rules behind her ingenious method."[25] While this method provides mothers who are struggling to produce breastmilk with massages designed to reduce engorgement and thus stimulate the production of milk, Oketani also stresses how breastmilk is material proof of maternal love, in that "it is essentially the love which flows from the mother's heart, automatically imprinting the child, which constitutes the basis of his well-being."[26]

The "breast-is-best" discourse has thus gained momentum over the decades. While it has, as the above-mentioned NHK documentary suggests, enhanced assistance available to women during pregnancy and after childbirth, it has also become a source of anxiety and even depression.

Along with *ninkatsu* discourse, as well as the deep-rooted ideologies concerning the embodied experience of pregnancy and childbirth, breastfeeding is a battlefield where gender roles are constantly constructed and reproduced in terms of women as primary caregivers. The following analysis of the representation of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding in *Chibusa no kuni de* must be understood in the context of the circumstances described above.

Breasts, Care, and Power in *Chibusa no kuni de*

The purpose of a literary work's title is not only to capture the reader's attention but also to hint at the work's central theme. In this respect *Chibusa no kuni de* is an extremely interesting title. In the *Dejitaru Daijisen* デジタル大辞泉 (Big Digital Dictionary) by Shōgakukan, *chibusa* (乳房)[27] is defined as follows: "A raised dermal mammary opening on the breast or abdomen of a mammal. In females, it develops with maturity and pregnancy."[28] In other words, the female breast is strictly linked to the maternal image of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Nevertheless, at present, 乳房, whether read as *chibusa* or *nyūbō*, conveys an erotic image.[29] In his analysis of the representation of breasts, Kitayama Seiichi argues that the role of female breasts can be expressed in the following three words: first, as essential organs that produce milk and sustain the "life" (命 *inochi*) of the baby; second, as symbols of "abundance"(豊かさ *yutakasa*) in the sense of procreation; and third, as expressions of "joy" (喜び *yorokobi*)[30] in the relationship between a man and a woman.[31] Kitayama further claims that "it is as if [the] contemporary [meaning of] breasts has been simplified to 'joy.' Now, it is almost impossible to talk about the breasts without relating them to sexuality."[32] Furthermore, the second part of the title of Fukazawa's novel, *kuni*, is not written with its usual kanji (国) but in hiragana (くに), which allows for a wide range of interpretations. While the title can be translated as "In the country of breasts," the reader is left wondering what country it is referring to: Is the story set in a fantastic place filled with erotic dreams? Readers with such expectations will be disappointed once they open the book and see the very first line of the novel: "I can see that my breasts are full and taut. However, it's not the right time to breastfeed my daughter."[33] As they keep reading, they find out that the story is set in Japan at the end of the twentieth century, and that the breasts of the title are not there to sexually titillate a reader but stand for the discomfort and pain women endure when breastfeeding.

From the very beginning of the story, the protagonist, Fukumi, is introduced as a young woman, struggling both physically and emotionally with her breastfeeding body. Motherhood is depicted in its darkest tones: Fukumi is a poor, unemployed single mother, who cannot rely on the support of her own family; she walks around an expensive department store, wondering whether it would be better to abandon her three-month-old daughter, Sara, there. Fukumi does not hide her dissatisfaction in relation to her maternal experience, and she seems aware of her inability to love her own child:

> To be honest, I don't feel [Sara] is cute or cuddly. All I can think is that if I didn't have this baby, I would be free and not be driven around by my boobs [*oppai*]. I've never liked children. I didn't want to have a baby. But I didn't have the money to get an abortion and I reached the last month of pregnancy.
> . . . I feel like a cow right now. Not only did my boobs become bigger, but I have too much milk and I'm pumping from morning till night. And I'm covered in the smell of milk.[34]

Fukumi's words are in striking contrast with the "breast-is-best" ideology, which states that breastmilk is material proof of maternal love, or in Oketani's words, "the love which flows from the mother's heart." Fukumi's body is proof that there is no direct causal connection between the ability to produce breastmilk and the love that a woman can feel for her child. On the contrary, the pain and discomfort caused by the overproduction of breastmilk, combined with the emotional and financial uncertainty that Fukumi faces, in fact drive her desire to get rid of her daughter. Despite her poor diet, Fukumi's engorged breasts are constantly full and sore, and this oversupply of breastmilk causes her pain. She is certainly a woman who needs care.

Tronto argues that there are four phases of care: "caring about," that is, "identifying caring needs;" "caring for," or "accepting responsibility and realizing that something has to be done;" "caregiving," which is "the actual task of caregiving" and working in order to meet caring needs; and finally, "care-receiving," which consists of verifying whether the care was successful in meeting the need, reevaluating the situation and the resources assigned to improve the actual task of caregiving, and recognizing new needs when necessary.[35] This analysis uses Tronto's framework to examine the depiction of care in *Chibusa no kuni de* by identifying the way in which these four phases operate in the novel.

As stated above, Fukumi suffers terribly because of her oversupply of breastmilk. However, the cause of her pain suddenly becomes a way to relieve the pain itself. While she is pumping her breasts in the nursing room of the department store, Fukumi is approached by Hirose Atsuko, a woman who claims to be the founder of "Nanny Network," a secret organization that connects women with an oversupply of breastmilk to mothers who are unable to breastfeed their babies. The services offered by Nanny Network include selling and delivering breastmilk, while mothers can also visit the headquarters ("Nanny Home," which is also Hirose's house) where their babies can either drink the breastmilk from the bottle or be breastfed by a wet nurse. At first glance, Nanny Network seems to be a place founded on care ethics: Hirose explains to Fukumi that she created this organization because she wanted to "save" (救いたい *sukuitai*) those women who wanted to breastfeed their babies, even if they had to rely on another woman's breasts. In other words, Hirose's organization seems to reflect the first three phases of care devised by Tronto: Hirose identified caring needs, that is, that some women want to breastfeed their babies even though they are unable to; she accepted responsibility and realized that something had to be done, thus creating Nanny Network; and finally she worked in order to meet those needs by connecting women with an oversupply of breastmilk with mothers unable to breastfeed their babies. Nanny Home also welcomes poor single mothers like Fukumi and their children who can live rent-free in Hirose's house.

Nevertheless, Nanny Network is a clear example of what Tronto defines as "Care, Inc.," in that it reflects the market-foremost orientation upon which neoliberalism is founded and the "vicious circle of thinking about care primarily from the standpoint of market-foremost democracy," or, simply put, the idea that "receiving care depends on having money."[36] Hirose assures Fukumi that she can make money with her breasts: at Nanny Network, the reward is determined by the amount of breastmilk one can sell, which is based on the frequency of pumping and feeding. In fact, Fukumi's pumped breastmilk costs twice as much as the same amount of formula. Therefore, the services offered by Nanny Network are not practices of care ethics but rather are embedded in the neoliberal market, where individuals in the settings of "open" markets are key to the economic growth and development of a country. Hirose's words clearly show this link:

> There are so many people out there who need your boobs! Being a nanny isn't just about money, it's also about helping people. This is the best job

> ever. It might sound exaggerated, but you'll also be saving children, the treasure of the nation. In other words, it's a way to support the country. Really!
> ... You will save the wonderful children who will carry the future of this country and their mothers with your boobs.[37]

Fukumi's breasts will provide care through her highly valued breastmilk, but they will ultimately be used to sustain the country, not to help mothers in need. In this way, Fukazawa raises a question that has been at the center of the study of the representation of breasts in Japanese culture: "Breasts for whom?" Ueno Chizuko examines whether female breasts are a symbol of eroticism, motherhood, or rather a mix of the two, and asks: To whom do they belong? In particular, she questions whether breasts (おっぱい *oppai*) are "'something that belongs to the baby,' 'something that belongs to men,' or 'something that belongs to women themselves.'"[38] Kimura Saeko poses a similar question in her book *Chibusa wa dare no mono ka. Nihon chūsei monogatari ni miru sei to kenryoku* 乳房はだれのものか—日本中世物語にみる性と権力 (Breasts for Whom? Sexuality and Authority in Medieval Japanese Tales, 2009), which opens by asking "Breasts for whom? Do they belong to mothers? Or do they belong to women? Are the breasts a symbol of the mother? Or do they denote the body of a sensual woman?"[39] However, Kimura simultaneously argues that such a dichotomy, which reproduces the stereotypical assumption that a woman can only be either a "mother" or a "whore," is based exclusively on male desire and is ingrained within a male-dominated society.[40] By referring to the image of motherhood during the war years, when women were expected to "procreate and multiply for the sake of the country" (産めよ殖やせよ国のため *umeyo fuyaseyo kuni no tame*),[41] Kimura suggests that within such a system, women's breasts, or more generally women's bodies, belonged to the country, both as a means of reproduction and as objects of sexual pleasure based on a heteronormative vision of sexual intercourse.

While the role of women during wartime was to "produce" soldiers to sustain Japan's imperialist ambitions, the postwar years saw a shift in governmental intervention in reproduction: on the one hand, Japan was able to reduce the birth rate and fight overpopulation through the legalization of abortion in 1948 with the Eugenic Protection Law (優生保護法 *Yūsei hogo hō*), while, on the other, it succeeded in establishing what Ochiai Emiko refers to as the "modern family" (近代家族 *kindai kazoku*)[42]

or the "postwar family system" (家族の戦後体制 *kazoku no sengo taisei*),[43] that is, the salaryman-housewife family with two or three children. Within such a system, women were expected to "stay at home and lovingly care for their families."[44] In other words, they were supposed to provide the care necessary for the well-being of their husbands and children: the workforce necessary to sustain the country's economic growth. In recent years, the Japanese government has created policies to combat the low birth rate and promote childbirth. Kazue Harada notes that the goal of these programs is "to achieve a (re)productive futurism that focuses on heterosexual family care."[45] However, while the heteronormative model of the family remains largely unchanged, women are no longer expected to stay confined within the private, domestic sphere and perform the work of care; as Fassbender points out, "the social atmosphere has shifted from a situation where women need to 'choose between family or work' to one where both are required ('work and family')."[46] In other words, the burden has become heavier for women, and while the government has emphasized the need for men's involvement in childcare, the normative model of mothers being responsible for caregiving remains unchanged; even the *Ikumen* project, launched in 2010 to boost men's participation in childrearing, has reproduced the image of men as "supporters."[47] Thus, women's bodies are still expected to reproduce and perform the work of care in order to save the future of the country.

By reading *Chibusa no kuni de* against such backdrop, it is possible to understand that the care services provided by Nanny Network are not aimed at helping women in need, but at sustaining the country's economic growth. As stated above, the services offered by Nanny Network are embedded in the neoliberal market, where individuals are expected to be self-responsible, "productive and autonomous member[s] of the state."[48] Accordingly, the act of caregiving at Nanny Network is controlled and calculated to maximize profit. The wet nurses must follow a breastfeeding meal plan created by Hirose that ensures that they eat healthy foods with enough nourishment to produce high-quality breastmilk in large quantities. Within such a system those with more economic resources would have better chances to pay for the care services offered by Nanny Network. Thus, it comes as no surprise that, when Tokuda Chiyo, a rich woman married to a delegate of the ruling party, asks Nanny Network to provide her with a wet nurse who can commute to their home to breastfeed their grandchild, Hirose accepts their request saying to Fukumi: "Let's take the money. Besides, we have to give good breasts to the mothers and babies involved.

Children are the treasure of the nation."[49] In her view, there is no contradiction between the care ethics she professes and the neoliberal practices she applies.

Moreover, the "breast-is-best" ideology pervades Nanny Network, for instance, Hirose says:

> All babies should be happy with breastmilk. If the babies are happy, the mothers are happy too, but that's not always possible because some people just can't produce breastmilk. That's why I started Nanny Network, to make both mothers and babies happy …. There is nothing better than breastmilk. Both in terms of nutrition and immunity. This is especially true for low birthweight babies and babies who have not reached their full term. In some hospitals, these babies are breastfed by other mothers. Besides, breastfed babies are smarter and have better motor skills. There is something mysterious in breastmilk that can't be explained scientifically, and children who are breastfed have better personalities and are less likely to have behavioral problems.[50]

Hirose's words echo Kobayashi Noboru and other experts who, as mentioned above, stressed the "technical" advantages of breastfeeding along with the effects on the psychological development of children during the 1980s. While highlighting the importance of breastmilk for the physical and emotional well-being of babies, Nanny Network also reinforces the idea of women as primary caregivers.

It is in such an environment filled with the ideology of maternal love that Fukumi receives the care that she needs (beginning with a place where both she and her daughter can live, as well as food) and becomes a caregiver (as a wet nurse) in return. Fukumi's story as a caregiver offers a chance to reflect upon the power relationships embedded in care practices. As mentioned above, Tokuda Chiyo asks Nanny Network to provide a wet nurse for her grandchild Hikaru. His mother, Nae—married to Chiyo's only son, Hideto—is unable to produce breastmilk and is thus considered unfit as a mother. Nae postponed her pregnancy to pursue a career as a professional worker, had to undergo fertility treatment, had three miscarriages, kept working during her pregnancy, delivered a preterm baby by C-section, and cannot produce any breastmilk. For all these reasons, Chiyo does not conceal the hatred and disgust that she feels toward her daughter-in-law, whom she considers a "defective product" (欠格品 *kekkakuhin*).[51] Chiyo is not aware that the cause of infertility is in her son Hideto, and she refuses to accept such a possibility, insisting that

there is something wrong with Nae, even when doctors advise him to be tested for infertility. Chiyo particularly blames Nae for continuing to work after marriage, considering it to be the cause of her delay in getting pregnant, the three miscarriages, and the premature birth of Hikaru. She finds it unacceptable that Nae continued working while pregnant, claiming that "working is not good for the education of the fetus" and that since babies begin to form memories in the womb, her child will hate her for not being loved enough, and this will eventually be the cause of his "delinquent behavior" (非行 *hikō*).[52] Furthermore, as soon as Nae opens her eyes after giving birth to Hikaru, Chiyo attacks her for having delivered the baby prematurely via a C-section, yelling "You're a failure as a mother" (母親失格 *hahaoya shikkaku*) to her.[53] Those words stick with Nae, who blames herself for not being able to breastfeed her son.

Nae is clearly in need of care. In fact, even though Chiyo hired Fukumi as a wet nurse for Hikaru against Nae's will, based on the business philosophy at Nanny Network Fukumi is supposed to be a caregiver both for Hikaru and his mother. However, Fukumi only agreed to work for the Tokudas because Nae is a former classmate who used to bully her. Hence, the breastmilk that was supposed to "save" both the child and his mother, becomes a tool to take revenge and exercise power. In this way, breastmilk reveals how care always involves interdependence and power relationships.

The wealthy Nae, married and employed in a full-time job, is more powerful than Fukumi, who cannot rely on her husband or her family's social capital; yet Nae depends on Fukumi's care. Fukumi takes care of Hikaru's needs as a wet nurse and eventually Nae, exhausted by Hikaru's night crying, asks Fukumi to breastfeed him at night too, and to sleep with him so that she can get some rest. Thus, as a caregiver, Fukumi is in a position of relative power, in that her breasts make her a more suitable motherly figure for Hikaru. Such a power relationship between caregiver and care-receiver becomes even clearer as Chiyo reveals to Fukumi that she hired her as a wet nurse to get rid of Nae and Fukumi agrees to use her breasts as part of that plot.

The relationships between the Tokuda family and the caregivers who work for them also show how care is intertwined with interdependence and power. The Tokudas depend on those they pay to service them, yet they treat all their employees, from the driver to the housekeeper, as disposable. In other words, the very wealthy Tokudas have "the capacity to dominate or sack and replace those who care for them."[54] Nae is no

exception: considered by Chiyo a "baby-making machine" (産む機械 *umu kikai*),[55] once she has given birth to their heir and proved that she is unfit as a wife and as a mother, she is forced to leave their house and is replaced with a new daughter-in-law, Sakiko. Needless to say, in most cases the victims of such a power imbalance are women. As Fukumi realizes after Nae is forced to accept the divorce and loses custody of her son, all women in the Tokuda family are considered caregivers and as such are disposable:

> The Tokudas perceive women only in the roles of wife, daughter-in-law, mother, as someone who must take care of someone else. Even the thoroughbred Sakiko is seen only as the wife of the Tokuda family. This is evident when I think about Nae, who was kicked out of the house after giving birth to Hikaru. Hideto quickly remarried, as if to say that there were plenty of replacements. I'll never forget the words of one of the guests of honor at the wedding party, a politician: "Sakiko, you should have as many babies as you can, three or four so that you can contribute to this country. And I hope you will raise a great politician to follow in the footsteps of Tokuda Yasuo." Contributing to this country... At the end of the day, Nae and I were just exploited for our motherhood by the Tokuda family and by this country, weren't we?[56]

The speech given by the politician at Hideto and Sakiko's wedding clearly echoes the words uttered by Suga Yoshihide in September 2015, when he was Japan's chief cabinet secretary and a close ally of the then-prime minister Abe Shinzō. As reported by local and international news outlets, commenting on the celebrity marriage between the singer Fukuyama Masaharu and the actor Fukiishi Kazue, Suga said: "With their marriage, I am hoping that mothers will contribute to their country by feeling like they want to have more children. Please have many children."[57] Both within and outside of the fictional world of *Chibusa no kuni de*, women's bodies are supposed to contribute to the country's wellbeing through their reproductive and caregiving functions. Furthermore, the speech uttered at Sakiko and Hideto's wedding in Fukazawa's novel, as well as Suga's words, emphasize how care has been associated with the "feminine" while caretaking, constructed and understood as women's work, is still "tied in with the domestic sphere and women's centrality in reproduction."[58]

It is worth noting that in such a power structure, even the wealthy and powerful Chiyo can be seen as disposable. During a *kōenkai* (後援会 local support group party), Chiyo's husband, Tokuda Yasuo, says that "once they can no longer bear children, women are finished, so it would be good

if we restore the practice of *ubasuteyama* (姥捨山)," that is, the ancient practice from Japanese folklore of abandoning old women in the mountains.[59] Yasuo's speech echoes the words uttered by Ishihara Shintarō, a Japanese politician and writer who was Governor of Tokyo from 1999 to 2012: in a 2001 interview with women's magazine *Shūkan josei* 週刊女性 (Women's Weekly), Ishihara argued that "the most evil and harmful thing that civilization has brought is old women (ババア *babaa*)" and that "old women who live after they have lost their reproductive function are useless and are committing a sin."[60] As a woman, Chiyo is expected to perform care through reproduction, childbirth, and childcare. In fact, she internalized the assumption of a woman's caring nature and the ideologies that construct motherhood as the fulfillment of womanhood. Nevertheless, after giving birth to her first son Hideto, Chiyo became infertile; moreover, as an old woman incapable of reproducing, she cannot contribute to the wellbeing of the country, and she is rather a burden to it. In other words, while her social status makes her more powerful than Fukumi and the other women bound to the Tokudas, as a woman she is expected to act as a caregiver, which makes her position extremely vulnerable in that once she cannot fulfill her role she is to be disposed of.

The question arises then as to how such a system of power can be dismantled. How can women subvert the ideologies of motherhood and create new practices of care? What is the role of men in changing stereotypical views of gender roles and heteronormative constructions of family? These questions will be at the center of my analysis in the following sections.

From Kinship Groups to the State: New Ethics of Care in *Chibusa no kuni de*

The Care Collective notes that "the ideal citizen under neoliberalism is autonomous, entrepreneurial, and endlessly resilient, a self-sufficient figure."[61] Such an "entrepreneurial self" is expected to possess skills that are fundamental for the individual to survive in society.[62] However, these abilities, as well as the way they can be obtained, have been left largely undefined, and this creates "an atmosphere of constant need for self-improvement and fear of failing."[63] An intersectional approach reveals that gender and class are reinforced as dimensions of social inequality through neoliberal subjectification strategies: not only are individuals unequally addressed as entrepreneurs of their own lives based on their gender, but class also affects access to the resources necessary to become an

entrepreneurial subject. Moreover, intersectionality is a key concept in understanding how care is not cultivated on an egalitarian basis: as Tronto points out, "[g]ender still predicts who does most of the professional care work in society, and race and socioeconomic background still predict who is most likely to get stuck doing the dirty work of care."[64] In order to understand the models of femininity and masculinity depicted in *Chibusa no kuni de* it is necessary to analyze the text within the context described above. Such an approach will also help us identify new care ethics and practices suggested in this novel.

Even though Nae and Fukumi used to attend the same private elementary school, they came from vastly different socioeconomic backgrounds. While Nae is the daughter of two university professors, Fukumi's father was a businessman married to an actress. Nae used to bully Fukumi, calling her "nouveau riche" (成金 *narikin*), and after her father's company went bankrupt and her mother disappeared, Fukumi was forced to leave the prestigious school and later pay her father's debts. Hence, while Nae could keep studying in expensive private schools and obtain a law degree, Fukumi had to support herself by working as a waitress until she had her baby. Even though they are both women and, as such, they are both expected to perform the work of care, their socioeconomic backgrounds predict their respective roles within society and allow Nae to hold a level of privilege over Fukumi. This is true not only in terms of positions of power within their relationship but also when we consider their knowledge of and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Nae, whose socioeconomic status guarantees her access to oral contraceptives and abortion, can control her reproductive life: she takes the contraceptive pill until she bows to Chiyo's pressure and starts to undergo fertility treatment, and she considers getting an abortion when she finds out she is pregnant with her cheating husband's baby. In other words, her financial status and social capital allow her to have control over her sexual and reproductive health and life. On the other hand, Fukumi became pregnant after having unprotected sex with a colleague who disappeared after she refused to lend him a sizeable sum of money, and she eventually had his baby only because she did not have enough money to get an abortion. After she gave birth to her daughter, her financial situation was so dire that her gas, water, and electricity were cut off. Furthermore, while Nae, after giving birth to Hikaru, spends most of her time studying to acquire the skills necessary to return to work and take back her position, Fukumi's only means to survive in society is to become

a wet nurse and do "the dirty work of care." In other words, though their gender defines both Nae and Fukumi as "care-givers," their divergent socioeconomic status affects their ability to access the resources necessary to become entrepreneurial subjects. Therefore, even though, as women, they are both victims of a system that exploits their reproductive bodies, they cannot recognize their shared vulnerabilities and interconnectedness. *Chibusa no kuni de* can thus be read as a "care novel," in that it offers the chance to understand the causes of carelessness endemic in contemporary neoliberal societies, and to imagine "caring alternatives" to such a condition.

The Care Collective argues that "[p]ractices more conventionally understood as care, like parenting and nursing, . . . cannot be properly carried out unless both caregivers and care receivers ‑ indeed, all of us ‑ are supported."[65] Furthermore, it stresses that this is possible only as long as care is "cultivated, shared and resourced on an egalitarian basis."[66] In order to do this, it is necessary to adopt and spread a new model of "universal care," that is, "the ideal of a society in which care is placed front and centre on every scale of lives . . . from our kinship groups and communities to our states and planet."[67] In Fukazawa Ushio's novel, it is possible to recognize how new care ethics and practices are applied on three levels: kinship, community, and the state.

The last part of the novel is set about twenty years after Nae left the Tokudas. After being expelled from their house while pregnant for the second time with Hideto's child, Nae gave birth to a daughter, Nozomi. When living at the Tokudas, Nae could not rely on the support of her in-laws or their houseworkers and was expected to perform childcare and household chores by herself. By contrast, after divorcing Hideto and becoming a single mother working full-time, she greatly relied on the support of her own family, with her old parents and her sister helping her take care of her daughter. In this new environment, Nae is no longer expected to be the sole or the primary caregiver, and while kinship is still determined by consanguinity, there is a new model of care that is not necessarily based on the individual (specifically the mother) but rather shared with other members of the extended family.

Moreover, the transformations that occurred in Hirose's organization, Nanny Network, offer a chance to reflect upon new care ethics and practices within the community, specifically in relation to the "breast-is-best" discourse. Upon realizing that Nae has been forced to leave the Tokuda household because Fukumi's breasts became a tool to stigmatize

Nae as an unfit mother incapable of supplying her own son's needs (in other words, because of the service that Nanny Network provided), Hirose realizes that "breastfeeding is not only a good thing, it may also be something that binds people," and decides to transform the Nanny Home into an organization that provides different types of care, such as babysitter dispatch services and a "baby room," that is, a space where parents can take care of their children (e.g., changing diapers, feeding them, playing together).[68] The new Nanny Network is no longer a secret organization, and it can thus be seen as the first step toward a model of care shared within the community, where not only the wealthy, but anybody can access care. In other words, it can be considered a public space, an essential component of building caring communities in that public spaces are egalitarian and can foster interconnections. It is worth noting that the transformations that occurred within Nanny Network can also be understood as the final phase of care as it is defined by Tronto. As stated above, "care-receiving" consists of verifying whether the care was successful in meeting the need, reevaluating the situation and the resources assigned to improve the actual task of caregiving, and recognizing new needs where necessary. By acknowledging the negative effects of the service provided by Nanny Network and transforming her organization, Hirose has finally shifted away from a neoliberal approach to care practices and redesigned the way she can address the needs of parents, regardless of their gender.

Finally, Nae's story offers an opportunity to consider what kind of care a caring state should provide. The final part of the novel is set in an imaginary Japan that, with its shrinking population, closely resembles the present. In the novel, the fictional Japanese government, facing a severe decline in birthrate, implemented two laws: the "Bachelor Tax Law" (独身課税法 *Dokushin kazei hō*), which penalizes men and women who are not married by the age of thirty, and the "Birth Promotion Law" (出産促進法 *Shussan sokushin hō*), which reduces the pension premium for heterosexual married couples that do not have children by the age of forty. Furthermore, the abolition of the "Act on the Promotion of Women's Active Engagement in Professional Life" (女性活躍推進法 *Josei katsuyaku suishin hō*) hampered women's career opportunities.[69] In such a "careless" state, the government identifies heterosexuality as the only legitimate/acceptable form of marriage and family, and at the same time urges people to reproduce without providing support for childcare. Governmental policies, based on essentialist beliefs about parenthood and the dominant idea of women's bodies as being biologically predisposed to

provide care, simultaneously reinforce traditional gender roles within the intimate sphere. Nae, who after divorcing Hideto goes back to graduate school and becomes a lawyer and human rights activist who works mostly on divorce, domestic violence, and sexual violence cases, openly attacks such policies in her open lectures at conferences inside and outside of Japan. Furthermore, once she decides to run in the local elections against her ex-husband, her vision of a new model of care ethics enters politics. Nae's political agenda envisions a caring state: she opposes governmental policies that reinforce a heteronormative vision of the family as a place of production and reproduction, and advocates for a state that provides care services such as an adequate number of daycare facilities so that both parents can work and take care of their children at the same time. Furthermore, she demands the creation of a caring state that treats its caregivers, e.g., daycare workers, not as disposable but as valuable resources.

Nae's electoral manifesto proves her awareness of the vulnerable condition shared by women, whose gender determines the role they are expected to perform as caregivers both within and outside the intimate sphere of the family. At the same time, she also recognizes her own privileges: even though she has lost her status as a married woman and become a single mother, Nae acknowledges that she is in a "blessed environment" (恵まれた環境 *megumareta kankyō*).[70] It is this new awareness that fuels her "desire to help other women beside [her]self" (*jibun igai no joseitachi no chikara ni naritai*).[71] Nevertheless, there still is a contraposition between elite women like Nae, who can speak from a place of privilege, and less privileged women like Fukumi. During her election campaign, Nae claims: "We are not the nannies of the state. Let's make our country a place that doesn't need to cling to our boobs forever!"[72] Fukumi does not hide her disappointment in Nae's words, knowing that "there are many women who have no choice but to become nannies for the state," and that "[s]ome women might even want to be nannies."[73] Even though she admits that Nae is not wrong, Fukumi, who spent her life working as a nanny, feels belittled and rejected, and cannot help but feel resentful toward Nae:

> In the end, Nae is a person who has [everything].
> Power, financial strength, personal connections, so many things.
> That's why she can aim for a free life.
> Nae cannot understand how people like me, who do not have such things, feel.[74]

The gap that Fukumi feels between herself and Nae estranges her from Nae's campaign. However, when Chiyo reaches out to Fukumi and asks her to become part of a plot to bring Nae down, Fukumi recalls how the Tokudas treated their employees as disposable, and finally understands that, by claiming that women are not "the nannies of the state," Nae has spoken out against a system where women's bodies have been commodities and sources of exploitation by patriarchal culture. Upon this realization, Fukumi decides to help Nae in her political campaign and actively joins her support group. Thus, by recognizing their respective differences and practicing solidarity, Fukumi and Nae join forces to bring care into politics and dismantle a vision of family as a space that constructs, maintains, and reproduces traditional gender roles.

Conclusions: New Gender Models and "Care Feminism"

Chibusa no kuni de was first serialized in the literary magazine *Shōsetsu suiri* 小説推理 (The Mystery of Novels) from October 2019 to May 2020. The original ending, which was omitted in the 2020 book edition and appeared in the paperback version published in 2022, further emphasizes the ideal image of a caring state. In the last part, both the narrator and the time-setting shift. Nae's daughter, Nozomi, is now forty years old, moving the time of the novel forward to 2041. It is through her point of view that the reader learns what happens after her mother becomes a metropolitan assembly member. Around 2030, the Japanese government, controlled by the conservative party to which Nozomi's father belonged, failed to manage recurrent crises caused by a pandemic, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and three nuclear incidents. Nae's party becomes the ruling party of a newly formed coalition government. Nozomi lists the changes brought about by the new state as follows:

> It abolished the Birth Promotion Law and the Bachelor Tax Law and reintroduced the Equal Employment Opportunity Law; moreover, it revised the criminal law in regard to sex crimes, introduced the selective surname system for married couples, and recognized same-sex marriage. It created a groundbreaking law for the protection of daycare centers which led to many changes. There are many issues that still need to be addressed, from the economy and defense to diplomatic relations, including measures to solve the problems regarding energy and climate change, but the proportion of female legislators rose to 40%.[75]

Furthermore, in around 2034, Nae becomes Prime Minister. Owing to the efforts made by her government and the woman who follows in Nae's

footsteps after she prematurely dies from heart failure in 2040, Japan becomes a caring state in that it applies care ethics and practices. Nozomi continues to explain the concrete measures taken after Nae became Prime Minister: funding welfare services that grant access to care and public health; making education compulsory until high school and providing free education until university; granting birthright citizenship; increasing the number of foreign permanent residents; facilitating the child adoption process; abolishing the *koseki* 戸籍 system;[76] and normalizing children born out of wedlock. In other words, it is a state that subverts the dominant paradigm that sustains neoliberal societies and promotes collective joy rather than the satisfaction of individual desire. Nozomi goes as far as to say: "I feel like this country takes care of me" (*kono kuni ni daiji sareteiru, to kanjiru*).[77]

Furthermore, *Chibusa no kuni de* provides a perspective on the role of men in changing stereotypical views of gender roles and heteronormative constructions of family. In this sense, it is worth noting that Nae decides to enter the political arena and run against her ex-husband Hideto after her son Hikaru asks her to do so. Hikaru clearly refuses the model of hegemonic masculinity reproduced within the Tokuda family. He despises his father and grandfather for their values and attitudes that underpin, express, and legitimize policies that perpetuate gender inequality, and recognizes how the traditional essentialist view of gender roles embedded in the microcosm of his own home and the macrocosm of Japanese society forced Nae to abandon him. Furthermore, his sexual orientation, even though it is not openly discussed in Fukazawa's text in terms of asexuality, works to dismantle heteronormativity. When asked by Fukumi about his love relationships, he claims that, even though he is surrounded by young men who feel the urgent need to find a girlfriend to avoid the consequences of the above-mentioned "Bachelor Tax Law" and "Birth Promotion Law," he is not particularly interested in love. This is further emphasized in the revised edition of the novel, where Nozomi, a lesbian woman who is going to adopt a baby with her partner, touches upon her relationship with Hikaru, mentioning, in passing, that "he is not particularly interested in love and likes being alone."[78] In other words, in the ideal society depicted by Fukazawa, the newly created caring state abandoned not only the vision of (re)productive futurism that focuses on heterosexual family care but also the imposition of normative ways of being that reinforce the idea of the "homonormative, assimilated, respectable same-sex couple."[79]

In her commentary on the paperback edition of *Chibusa no kuni de*, Kimura Saeko links the publication of Fukazawa Ushio's novel to the need for "women's novels" (女たちの小説 *onnatachi no shōsetsu*) and for

feminist literature; she further defines *Chibusa no kuni de* as a "Japanese feminist novel" (*Nihon no feminizumu shōsetsu*).[80] In her novel, Fukazawa tackles issues that are at the center of contemporary Japanese society, where reproduction is considered the ultimate goal of the good citizen. In the last twenty years, Japanese politicians have repeatedly identified women as responsible for the country's plummeting birth rate and reinforced the heteronormative foundations of kinship. Through Fukumi and Nae's story, Fukazawa clearly opposes the idea of a society based on gender essentialism and inequality. In so doing, she goes against neoliberal feminism and postfeminism, that is, a feminist narrative that, by focusing on autonomy, empowerment, and self-realization determined by an accumulation of wealth, ignores social structures and ideologies as the source of gender inequality.[81]

Furthermore, *Chibusa no kuni de* is a "care feminism" novel. Motohashi Rie summarizes the results of applying the ethics of care to feminism as follows:

> 1) Shedding light on women's experiences that have been ignored by existing knowledge; 2) bringing out care, which was seen as self-sacrifice, as an ethic of responsibility to others; 3) revealing the androcentrism existing within the public/private dualism, i.e., the gendered power relations that have undermined the value of care; and 4) exposing that under the public/private dualism, women have been marginalized from family and care relationships as well.[82]

Fukazawa's novel applies such ethics to fiction and proves that feminist literature is a powerful tool for making real change in the world. It recognizes the existence of inequalities, addresses the power imbalance inherent in practices of care as they have been reproduced within neoliberal societies, and offers a new perspective on overcoming the differences between women as the only way to end oppression.

Finally, by depicting Hikaru as a man who criticizes the hegemonic masculinity model embodied by his father and grandfather, Fukazawa also stresses that patriarchy greatly affects the lives of young men who are forced to perform their roles within the family and society. At the same time, by making Hikaru the catalyst for Nae's political action, Fukazawa emphasizes the role of men within the feminist movement. *Chibusa no kuni de* seems to echo bell hooks when she argues that, "it is urgent that men take up the banner of feminism and challenge patriarchy. The safety and continuation of life on the planet requires feminist conversion of

men."[83] In Fukazawa's novel, the safety and continuation of Japan as a country are possible only as long as men also join the fight to change the status quo, dismantle traditional gender roles, and build a more equal society.

NOTES

[1] *Mokugeki! Nihon rettō*, "'Bonyū būmu' no kage de—Oitsumerareru hahaoyatachi," aired June 11, 2016, on NHK.

[2] On Ryuonji Temple see Tamura Yōko, "'Shiawase ippai omune ippai.' Mama Kannon sanpaiki," in *Yureru oppai, fukuramu oppai. Chibusa no zuzō to kioku*, ed. Takeda Masaya (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2018), 82–85. On other temples and religious practices linked to breastmilk see Takeda Masaya, "Ezogashima chichigami junreiki," in *Yureru oppai, fukuramu oppai*, 74–77, and Sekimura Sakie, "Sei naru chibusa. Fuji no fumoto 'Funatsu tainai jukei,'" in *Yureru oppai, fukuramu oppai*, 78–81.

[3] Kakuta Mitsuyo, *Saka no tochū no ie* (Tokyo: Asashi shinbun shuppan, 2016); Matsuda Aoko, *Jibun de nazukeru* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2021).

[4] bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2000), 1.

[5] Joan C. Tronto, *Who Cares?: How to Reshape a Democratic Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2015), 4, 9.

[6] This is an example given by Tronto in her analysis of the implications of power inequality within the practice of care. See Tronto, *Who Cares?*, 9.

[7] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 22.

[8] Ōhinata Masami, *Boseiai shinwa no wana* (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 2015), 14. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Japanese are mine.

[9] Alessandro Castellini, *Translating Maternal Violence: The Discursive Construction of Maternal Filicide in 1970s Japan* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 110.

[10] Ibid.

[11] The catchphrase *ninkatsu* was registered as a trademark and is thus "owned" by Merck Serono, the biopharmaceutical division of the Germany-based multinational pharmaceutical company Merck, and Kōdansha, one of the largest publishing companies in Japan. Isabel Fassbender explains that the term, which refers to "the acquisition of knowledge about pregnancy, encompassing health management and proactive life planning, including pregnancy and birth," has

become quite common since its inception in 2011 to describe the active pursuit of pregnancy as well as the state of undergoing infertility treatment. State policymakers, mass media, and the biomedical business have played a pivotal role in spreading the phenomenon by providing information about fertility, emphasizing knowledge about its age limitations, and stressing the importance of a life-planning program designed to increase the chances to have children. See Isabel Fassbender, *Active Pursuit of Pregnancy: Neoliberalism, Postfeminism and the Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Japan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022), 70–71.

[12] Japan's population has been in steady decline since the economic boom of the 1980s. After the "1.57 shock," when the country's total fertility rate dropped to an historical low of 1.57 in 1989, measures to alleviate gender inequality were proposed. Nevertheless, population decline continues, and even though the birth rate has increased from its lowest level of 1.26 in 2005, the fertility rate in 2022, with 799,728 births, stood at 1.27. See Hilary J. Holbrow, "Japan's Successes in Boosting Birthrates Should Not Be Overlooked," *Nikkei Asia*, February 6, 2023, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Japan-s-successes-in-boosting-birthrates-should-not-be-overlooked. Accessed May 3, 2023.

[13] Fassbender, *Active Pursuit of Pregnancy*, 75.

[14] Tsipy Ivry, *Embodying Culture: Pregnancy in Japan and Israel* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 92.

[15] Amanda C. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 82.

[16] Ibid., 83.

[17] Ibid., 109.

[18] Ivry, *Embodying Culture*, 159.

[19] Muriel Jolivet, *Japan: The Childless Society? The Crisis of Motherhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 82.

[20] Ibid., 85–87.

[21] Ibid., 77.

[22] Ibid., 85.

[23] For instance, Kobayashi mentions how breastfeeding helps the uterus contract back into its pre-pregnancy shape and size, protects against breast cancer, and supports the child's immune system through the immunizing properties of breastmilk. See Jolivet, *Japan: The Childless Society?*, 86.

[24] Ibid., 87.

[25] Ibid., 88.

[26] Ibid.

[27] While the kanji 乳房 can also be read as *nyūbō*, the *furigana* on the inside cover of *Chibusa no kuni de* reads *chibusa*. The two readings hold the same meaning, although *nyūbō* is mostly used as a medical term.

[28] *Dejitaru Daijisen*, s.v. "chibusa," accessed Accessed May 3, 2023, https://kotobank.jp/word/%E4%B9%B3%E6%88%BF-110468#goog_reward ed.

[29] It should be noted that even though many scholars agree that in pre-modern Japan breasts were not considered an object of sexual desire, Tanaka Takako points out that representations of the breasts as a symbol of femininity and object of male sexual desire can be detected in stories produced during the Heian period (794–1185) and the Kamakura period (1185–1333), as well as in *shunga* (春画 erotic art) of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867). See Tanaka Takako, "Nihon no chibusa wa ika ni katarareta ka," in *Yureru oppai, fukuramu oppai*, 10–17.

[30] Here Kitayama uses the word "joy" to refer to a relationship where the woman is understood as an object for male pleasure, while the subject who feels pleasure in touching the breasts is male.

[31] Kitayama Seiichi, "Nyūbō no shakaigaku," in *Nyūbō no bunkaron*, ed. Nyūbō bunka kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tankosha, 2014), 28.

[32] Ibid., 29. It should be noted that scholars are still divided over the image conveyed by the word *chibusa*. For instance, Jitsugawa Motoko uses *chibusa* to refer to the organ that produces breastmilk, and prefers *basuto* (バスト bust) when discussing the female breasts as a sexual object and a symbol of femininity. See Jitsugawa Motoko, "Nihon no basuto nanajū nen. 'Midashi nami' kara 'jibun rashisa' e," in *Yureru oppai, fukuramu oppai*, 20. *Oppai* (おっぱい) is also often used to refer both to the female breasts as a sexual object and to the organs that produce breastmilk.

[33] Fukazawa Ushio, *Chibusa no kuni de* (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2020), 3.

[34] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 9–11.

[35] Tronto, *Who Cares?*, 5-7.

[36] Ibid., 19, 18.

[37] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 19.

[38] Ueno Chizuko, "Kanjiru chibusa. Dare no mono ka?," in *Nyūbō no bunkaron*, 54.

[39] Kimura Saeko, *Chibusa wa dare no mono ka*. *Nihon chūsei monogatari ni miru sei to kenryoku* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 2009), 3.

[40] Ibid., 3–4.

[41] Ibid., 4.

[42] Ochiai Emiko, *Kindai kazoku no magari kado* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2000), i.

[43] Ochiai Emiko and Stephen Filler, "The Postwar Japanese Family System in Global Perspective: Familism, Low Fertility, and Gender Roles," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 29 (2005): 8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42771933.

[44] Ochiai, *Kindai kazoku no magari kado*, i.

[45] Kazue Harada, *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures: Women's Speculative Fiction in Contemporary Japan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 9.

[46] Fassbender, *Active Pursuit of Pregnancy*, 20.

[47] On the *Ikumen* project and its related policies see Ishii-Kuntz Masako, *"Ikumen" genshō no shakaigaku. Ikuji kosodate sanka e no kibō o kanaeru tame ni* (Tokyo: Mineruva shobō, 2013), Tatsumi Mariko, *Ikumen janai "chichioya no kosodate." Gendai nihon ni okeru chichioya no otokorashisa to "kea to shite no kosodate"* (Kyoto: Kōyō shobō, 2018), and Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, "We Are Not Ikumen, We Are Self-Reliant Househusbands: Crafting a Stay-at-Home Father Identity in Japan," *Current Anthropology* 63.5 (2022): 541–569.

[48] Glen D. Hook and Takeda Hiroko, "Self-Responsibility and the Nature of the Postwar Japanese State: Risk through the Looking Glass," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 33.1 (2007): 106, https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2007.0016.

[49] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 34.

[50] Ibid., 17–18.

[51] Ibid., 109.

[52] Ibid., 77.

[53] Ibid., 78.

[54] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*, 22.

[55] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 65.

[56] Ibid., 124–125.

[57] Justin McCurry, "Japanese Politician in Sexism Row after Call for Women to Have More Babies," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/japanese-politician-yoshihide-suga-in-sexism-row-after-call-for-women-to-have-more-babies. Accessed May 3, 2023.

[58] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*, 24.

[59] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 140.

[60] See Nomura Fusayo, "Ishihara Shintarō shi no 'aikawarazu na' hatsugen ni gennari. 'Babaa hatsugen' soshō no moto genkoku," *Mainichi Shinbun*, July 31,

2020, https://mainichi.jp/articles/20200730/k00/00m/040/324000c. Accessed May 3, 2023.

[61] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*, 12.

[62] Ulrich Bröckling explains that the entrepreneurial self as a form of subjectification is a "field of force" that "produces a model for people to understand what they are and what they ought to be, and it tells them how to work on the self in order to become what they ought to be." Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (London: Sage, 2016), viii.

[63] Fassbender, *Active Pursuit of Pregnancy*, 27.

[64] Tronto, *Who Cares?*, 19.

[65] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*, 6.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 19.

[68] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 146–147.

[69] While the "Bachelor Tax Law" and the "Birth Promotion Law" are fictional elements created by Fukazawa, the "Act on the Promotion of Women's Active Engagement in Professional Life" is a real law introduced in 2016 to eliminate gender differences in working conditions and create a society in which women can play an active role.

[70] Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, 196.

[71] 自分以外の女性たちの力になりたい. Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 217.

[73] Ibid., 218.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Fukazawa Ushio, *Chibusa no kuni de*, rev. ed. (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2022), 275.

[76] The *koseki* (family register) is an official document that records gender, parental relations, and spousal relations, among other items, and certifies the identity and family relationships of Japanese citizens based on family law. On the *koseki* system see David Chapman and Karl Jakob Krogness, eds., *Japan's Household Registration System and Citizenship: Koseki, Identification and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2014), and Linda White, *Gender and the Koseki in Contemporary Japan: Surname, Power, and Privilege* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[77] この国に大事にされている、と感じる。Fukazawa, *Chibusa no kuni de*, rev. ed., 277.

[78] Ibid., 276.

[79] Eliza Garwood, "Reproducing the Homonormative Family: Neoliberalism, Queer Theory and Same-sex Reproductive Law," *The Journal of International Women's Studies* 17.2 (2016): 10. "Homonormativity" refers to the belief that sexual minorities should conform to heteronormative institutions such as marriage, monogamy and reproduction, in order to achieve greater acceptance into dominant society. See Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–194.

[80] Kimura Saeko, "Kaisetsu," in *Chibusa no kuni de*, rev. ed., 280.

[81] On postfeminism and neoliberalism in Japan see Kikuchi Natsuno, *Nihon no posutofeminizumu. "Joshiryoku" to neo riberarizumu* (Tokyo: Ōtsuki shoten, 2019).

[82] Motohashi Rie, *Bosei no yokuatsu to teikō. Kea no rinri wo tooshite kangaeru senryakuteki bosei shugi* (Tokyo: Kōyō shobō, 2021), 23–24.

[83] hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody,* 116.

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