

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF  
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM  
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

**SITE: Japan**

**Transcript of Teruko Karikome  
Interviewer: Mieko Yoshihama**

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**Teruko Karikome**, founder and former Executive Director (2007~2019) of NPO Women'sSpace Fukushima (<https://www.npo-womensspacefukushima.com/>), formerly, Association Supporting Women's Independence), Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture. She has long and extensive experience promoting women's rights and wellbeing including previously serving as the Director of the Koriyama City's Maternal and Child Welfare Center. Following the Great East Japan Disaster in 2011, her NPO managed "Women's Space" in the biggest evacuation shelter in Fukushima, and continues to operate programs such as telephone counseling, support groups, and workshops on gender-based violence, while advocating for policy attention to women in Fukushima. Although she stepped down from the Executive Director, she continues to be actively involved in the growing program activities of Women's Space Fukushima.

**Mieko Yoshihama**, Ph.D., LMSW, professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, Ann Arbor, MI, USA; a licensed clinical and community social worker. Her research focuses on the prevention of gender-based violence and discrimination and the promotion of women's safety. Her long history of feminist action research efforts in Japan include co-founding the Domestic Violence Research & Action Group (1991) and conducting the nation's first study of domestic violence; developing and co-facilitating support groups for survivors of domestic violence following a series of focus group research (1998~); and co-founding the Women's Network for East Japan Disaster (2011) and conducting the first study of gender-based violence in disasters (<http://risetogetherjp.org/?p=4879#more-4879>) and launching the PhotoVoice Project with disaster-affected women (<https://photovoice.home.blog/>).

*Keywords: Environment, Gender-Based Violence, Reform of Domestic/Family Roles, Community Activism*

**Mieko Yoshihama: Hello everybody. Today, we are going to interview Ms. Teruko Karikome of Women’s Space FUKUSHIMA.<sup>1</sup> This interview is part of the Global Feminisms Project<sup>2</sup> at the University of Michigan.<sup>3</sup>**

**Today, I’ll be interviewing Ms. Teruko Karikome of Women’s Space Fukushima. Thank you for joining me, Ms. Karikome.**

Teruko Karikome: Thank you all for having me today.

**MY: To start, your work has spanned quite a long span of time. How did you get your start, and what work have you been doing up until this point?**

TK: When I was in high school, I’d go to school from my grandparents’ house. My grandparents had a saying back then: “women are taught to obey three things: their parents when they are children, their husbands when they marry, and their children when they’re old. And nowhere in these three is a place for them to rest.”

Women have nowhere to rest, not in their past, present, or future. And that “men’s stupidity is balanced by women’s intellect.” People say that kind of thing all the time. When I’d say that I wanted to be a doctor or pharmacist when I grew up, I was told that “women don’t do that sort of job.” But despite that, I studied medical psychology, thinking I could meet people through the hospital who were ill or could use my help. So I decided to major in psychology in college. Once I graduated, I worked at a psychiatric hospital for about 10 years. After those 10 years, I spent 3 years working at an institution for children with disabilities. Then, at a mother-and-child welfare center for 12 years. As I approached my retirement years, I began serving as a committee member for human rights protection and domestic affair mediation. I thought that if given the chance, I could speak my mind and live my own life. I surrounded myself with those sorts of people, from all sorts of different places. And that brings me to today.

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s Space Fukushima is an organization that is dedicated to advocating for attention to policies regarding women. This organization provides services such as support groups and telephone counseling for all women. (“CJS Lecture Series | 3.11-Ten Years Later: Addressing Gender Disparity in Japan’s Disaster Response.” Happening @ Michigan. <https://events.umich.edu/event/79859>. Accessed 22 March 2023.)

<sup>2</sup> The Global Feminists Project originated in 2002 and is dedicated to keeping an archive of interviews by women who are academic and activists from many different countries. (“About the Global Feminisms Project.” Global Feminisms Project. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/globalfeminisms/about/>. Accessed 22 March 2023.)

<sup>3</sup> The University of Michigan is one of the oldest public research universities in the United States and is known for being one of the best ranked schools in the world. (“University of Michigan.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Michigan). Accessed 22 March 2023.)

We'll probably talk about this later, but I'd say the most impactful time in my life was in 1994-95 in Fukushima Prefecture.<sup>4</sup> An 18-year-old girl, from the end of elementary school through high school, had been sexually abused by her own father and his friends. Supporting her in that trial might have been the start of my women's support activities. I've since worked on other trials, but this case with "Ms. R" in 1994-95 got me to think about my own direction in life. I think that encounter helped make me who I am today.

**MY: I see. And in fighting for her rights, you keenly felt the importance of women being able to live independently, and worked to give shape to that reality. Today you have Women's Space Fukushima, but before that there was the "Association for Women's Independence." It's a fitting name, I think.**

TK: When we established the Association for Women's Independence, around that time, there was a mother who had been suffering from domestic violence, and resolved to kill her husband rather than dying herself. She and her daughter were discussing how to kill him when they thought he was asleep, but he was awake and heard everything. As he turned to attack them, she fled to a women's counseling and support center. We supported her in the trial, which was just after we had created the Association for Women's Independence. We helped her through the trial and collected donations for it. That was in 2007 or '08, and I still keep in touch with her today. She's become fairly independent with welfare support, though sometimes things are tough. Like when she'd steal a can of beer, I'd go with her to the police and apologize to the store. She can be hard to leave alone. She's over 50, but there are just some people that can't be left alone. That's why I try to stay in touch with them personally as well as through the NPO.<sup>5</sup>

**MY: I see. So even though you're considered to be at retirement age, you haven't retired at all. You may have actually become even busier.**

TK: Yes, I have. Because when I got to that age, I took on the human rights and domestic affairs committee. And we also became an NPO soon after in 2012. Right now, we have a younger director at the helm, so that side of things is quite easy-going for me. But until then, it was always on my mind, to the point I was talking in my sleep night after night. My husband would wake me up every night saying, "Honey, honey, what's wrong?" That's what those days were like.

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<sup>4</sup> Fukushima Prefecture consists of 13 districts and 59 municipalities within Japan. It is located in eastern Japan and is known for being home to one of the largest lakes in the country. ("Fukushima Prefecture." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fukushima\\_Prefecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fukushima_Prefecture). Accessed 22 March 2023.)

<sup>5</sup> NPO stands for nonprofit organization. The goal of a nonprofit organization is the betterment of society, rather than profit. ("Nonprofit organization." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonprofit\\_organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonprofit_organization). Accessed 22 March 2023.)

**MY: Right. Even when you were sleeping, your mind was always at work, and you had no time to rest. On the topic of women’s independence — that’s a very difficult thing for women living in Japan<sup>6</sup> to achieve, isn’t it?**

TK: We also run a phone counseling service now, mainly on domestic violence. These women can’t live alone, and have no choice but to put up with it and keep living with their abusers. “I don’t work and have no money,” they say. “I have to put the children first. Even though they’re in school, I can’t afford to send them to higher education on my own. All I can do is give up. Every day I just ask him how he’s doing, to make sure he’s not angry. That’s the only option.” I hear these sorts of things all the time. In terms of financial independence, they could work part-time or anything else, or there are welfare systems they can get on. But they don’t see those options. To them, they have no options.

**MY: No options. And even if they want to work and be independent, there is a huge wage gap for women. Their work is also often irregular, either part-time or limited employment. And when there’s a recession, their jobs are the first to get cut. Those structural imbalances will always make independence difficult to achieve. Even if they want it, they can’t have it. And even if they work hard, they face sexual harrasment. Discrimination against pregnant mothers, too. Yet despite those conditions, you’ve continued your activist work. What has kept you going?**

KT: I tell my clients that they are not alone. I tell them I know what they’re going through, that I remember their story. Their eyes light up and say, “You remembered me!” And when we have our consultation sessions, we have someone there with us. This way, we’re not alone, either. We aren’t doing this alone, and when we were done, we had someone to talk to. We share everything, and if there’s something we don’t know, like the name of a particular illness, you can tell the person next to you and they’ll look it up on their laptop for you. They’ll come right back and report, “That disease is this sort of thing, and here are some treatments for it.” I think knowing that we’re not alone is what has kept us going.

**MY: Right. But through this work, you’ve also run into your fair share of hardship and troubles. For example, what has the public response been like?**

TK: We’ve worked with city hall on proposals to promote gender equality. That review board was made up of 8 members, all of which were men. It was a proposal on gender

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<sup>6</sup> Japan is a country located in eastern Asia. It consists of many islands and is known for being one of the most populated countries in the world. (“Japan.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan>. Accessed 22 March 2023.)

equality, yet an all-male board was reviewing it. The mayor, deputy mayor, directors — all of them men.

**MY: Nothing equal about that, huh.**

TK: No, not at all. Once when I was with the mayor, I said, “The review board was all men. Gender equality is still a long way off.” Something tells me the mayor was less than pleased. Really, after we gave the proposal to this all-male board, the mayor said, “We’re not so old-fashioned that we haven’t studied and know these things.” I nearly called him out — how can you justify this, then?

**MY: If he did, he would have worked to improve things.**

TK: So strange.

**MY: Let’s talk about the earthquake disaster on March 11, 2011.<sup>7</sup>**

TK: Well, it was a tremendous quake, and people really couldn’t go outside. We all had to take care of ourselves. There was no water, no electricity or gas. All the goods in the stores were gone. It was incredibly difficult to live in all this, so people started talking about evacuating somewhere. But we couldn’t get on the highway, and there were no trains, buses, or airlines running. On top of all this, no one had any gas, either.

**MY: No gas at all. And in those first few days when there was no electricity, you likely couldn’t get any information on what was going on.**

TK: Well, though we did shake quite a bit where I was, it wasn’t as bad as it was in the city. So my area still had electricity, water, and gas. But my sister’s family didn’t, so they’d come over to bathe and eat. My neighbors had parents in Iwate Prefecture,<sup>8</sup> and when they were going to see them, I made a lot of onigiri<sup>9</sup> they could take to them. In times like that, it really helps to have someone there for you. You couldn’t get by alone.

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<sup>7</sup> Also referred to as the Great East Japan Earthquake, the 2011 earthquake was the one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in the world. The tsunamis after the earthquake caused the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. (“2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.” Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_T%C5%8Dhoku\\_earthquake\\_and\\_tsunami](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_T%C5%8Dhoku_earthquake_and_tsunami). Accessed 22 March 2023.)

<sup>8</sup> Iwate Prefecture is one of the largest prefectures in Japan. It is located in eastern Japan and is known for being home to many famous Japanese attractions. (“Iwate Prefecture.” Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iwate\\_Prefecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iwate_Prefecture). Accessed 22 March 2023.)

<sup>9</sup> Onigiri is a traditional Japanese dish that is made from white rice, seaweed, and various types of fillings. (“Onigiri.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onigiri>. Accessed 22 March 2023.)

**MY: I see.**

TK: You couldn't be alone. You make connections just going about your day-to-day, like with this neighbor lady. When she said she was going to Iwate, I said, "Wait a moment, I'll make some onigiri for them." If we didn't know each other, we wouldn't have been talking like that. She probably would have tried to stop at a convenience store on the way to get food, only to find that they were all closed. All the way from Fukushima,<sup>10</sup> to Miyagi,<sup>11</sup> to Iwate. I realized then just how vital it was in times like these to not be alone, to not be isolated. My daughter and I had to evacuate after the disaster. I remember feeling restless, thinking things like, "My family evacuated. Should I really be sitting here doing nothing?" Was it okay to not do anything?

In just that first month or so, we were all assembled as [shelter] volunteers. "It seems that men have been going in and out of women's sleeping quarters, and young boys are being molested." Then later, on April 12th, I went to the disaster prevention centers of Tomioka Town<sup>12</sup> and Kawauchi Village,<sup>13</sup> and then Koriyama City Hall.<sup>14</sup> There was open lodging for mothers and children in Koriyama.<sup>15</sup> They had room for 38 households, but had only filled 4 or 5. So I asked them to let us in. But they said I couldn't because I "didn't have a certificate of residence." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "There's no precedent for this," they said. It's not like there haven't been earthquake disasters before.

**MY: That's right!**

TK: That's what they'd say. So we can't just ask them, "can we do this?", or "tell us where we can set up consultation sessions." We then immediately went to the Big Palette [center],<sup>16</sup> and in a corner with piles of relief supplies stacked up, we set up a consultation area. But

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<sup>10</sup> Fukushima is the capital of the Fukushima Prefecture and is located in the northern part of the prefecture. ("Fukushima (city)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fukushima\\_\(city\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fukushima_(city)). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>11</sup> Miyagi Prefecture is located in eastern Japan and consists of many national parks. ("Miyagi Prefecture." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miyagi\\_Prefecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miyagi_Prefecture). Accessed 23 March 2023.)

<sup>12</sup> Tomioka is a town in the Fukushima Prefecture. It is located right on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. ("Tomioka, Fukushima." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomioka,\\_Fukushima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomioka,_Fukushima). Accessed 23 March 2023.)

<sup>13</sup> Kawauchi is a village in the Fukushima Prefecture. It is surrounded by land and is bordered by Tomioka Town. ("Kawauchi, Fukushima." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kawauchi,\\_Fukushima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kawauchi,_Fukushima). Accessed 23 March 2023.)

<sup>14</sup> Koriyama City Hall is the town hall for the city of Koriyama. It is located in the Fukushima Prefecture. ("Koriyama City Hall." Mapcarta. <https://mapcarta.com/W304607141>. Accessed 23 March 2023.)

<sup>15</sup> Koriyama is a city located in the Fukushima Prefecture. It is a central city and is known for being the commercial center of the Fukushima Prefecture. ("Koriyama." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C5%8Driyama>. Accessed 23 March 2023.)

<sup>16</sup> The Big Palette is a large complex that has many service rooms and exhibition halls. It is located in the Koriyama city in Fukushima Prefecture. ("Big Palette Fukushima." archello. <https://archello.com/project/big-palette-fukushima>. Accessed 23 March 2023.)

there were a lot of eyes and ears around, so not many people came. They'd ask, "What should I do about my child's schooling?" "I wonder if there's a daycare around that will pick up my kid." "Is there a laundromat around here?" Things like that. Later, we were contacted by the prefecture, which was planning on creating a women's space at the end of April and wondering if we were interested in collaborating. We had done this kind of thing many times before and were willing, but we couldn't take on the 9:00am-9:00pm schedule every day by ourselves. So we worked with other organizations, like the Women's Association<sup>17</sup> and Single Mothers' Forum Fukushima,<sup>18</sup> and our three groups took turns working in the new space. We all were able to talk with one another, and this was how that first women's space was made.

**MY: I see. You said this was towards the end of that April. Since the earthquake disaster struck on March 11th, that was only about a month and a half later. Even with three organizations working together, creating that women's space in that time must have been challenging.**

TK: It was. We worked from 9:00am to about 4:00pm, since not everyone had a car, and someone had to give them a ride to Big Palette. So we'd finish our work at 4:00 or 5:00 at the latest. But some groups took two or three shifts and would stay there until nightfall.

**MY: What sorts of troubles did people bring to those consultation sessions?**

TK: All sorts of people came in. Like before, people would ask about schools for their children, daycare services, hair salons, and hospitals they could go to. Later, one person came and said, "I'm an employee at TEPCO,<sup>19</sup> so I don't really deserve to be here." I told them, "This wasn't your fault. The nuclear accident was caused by the company, not by you." This person came to us on their own when they had no one else, and broke into tears. Another woman said her ex-husband was evacuating along with the whole town, and was staying in the same gymnasium shelter as her. There were those sorts of sessions. Some came from elsewhere, too. We had a lawyer with us who started doing consultations, so people who weren't evacuees, like foreign residents, would come in and talk about things

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<sup>17</sup> The New Women's Association of Japan is an organization dedicated to increasing women's rights specifically in the fields of education, suffrage, and employment. This organization first started in 1919. ("New Women's Association." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Women%27s\\_Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Women%27s_Association). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>18</sup> The Single Mother's Forum is a nonprofit organization that was originally in Tokyo. This organization is dedicated to helping single mothers across the country. ("Nationwide committee to support Japan's single moms to launch July 7." The Mainichi. <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20190706/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>19</sup> TEPCO stands for the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings. It is an electric company based in Tokyo that was responsible for the Fukushima nuclear disaster. ("Tokyo Electric Power Company." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo\\_Electric\\_Power\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo_Electric_Power_Company). Accessed 28 March 2023.)



like domestic violence. Little by little, we started gaining more traction. People had heard there was a lawyer here as well.

Eventually, women came to this space for things like hemming up their pants, or to take a nap and refresh like it was their room, or sew a button onto something. Women would come in hoping to make their daily lives a bit smoother. Things like, “My hands are so dry, I wish I had some lotion,” or, “If you had some lip balm that’d be great.” We heard that sort of thing often. A lingerie manufacturing company also donated some high quality underwear, though it didn’t feel necessary at the time.

**MY: Oh, really?**

TK: The thing is, whether or not they actually used the quality underwear, they were happy to have gotten them.

**MY: I see.**

KT: Then, we were quick to think that they might need aprons or something, too. But that wasn’t the case, actually.

**MY: Right. Those kinds of daily essentials are also needed, but to get pretty and indulgent things, it’s also....**

TK: It’s healing.

**MY: And that has value. That’s one lesson there, right?**

TK: They don’t have to use it — just having it is enough.

**MY: Indeed.**

TK: So I’m truly grateful to that lingerie manufacturer. Everyone even took their measurements for it. Some people may think this isn’t all that useful....

**MY: Right, they may not have worn or even seen that sort of thing before. But it’s precisely because that thoughtfulness came at such a difficult time — that’s why they were so happy.**

TK: Yes, incredibly so. That was a great lesson for me. We all thought things like lip balm, lotion, and aprons were what was needed. Rather, just having something in your hands, or

putting something in your bag — I learned that it's enough in those times to make people happy.

**MY: One theme I see from your talk so far is that of division. With the nuclear accident and the person who had worked for TEPCO, for example. There's also the rift between people who are pro or anti-nuclear power, or those who evacuated from Fukushima versus those who stayed.**

TK: Yes, yes.

**MY: I want to ask something like, how do you feel about that division? But maybe it's a strange question....**

TK: Well, I do feel that we've been divided. The enemy may be in one place, but for some reason, people take out that stress on the weaker person closest to them. That's not where the enemy is. Yet people focus on those closest to them. They'll say, "So-and-so was lucky they could evacuate. I wanted to leave, but I couldn't." That has nothing to do with that person, but that sort of thing divides us.

**MY: It's like that saying, "divide and conquer," right? Even though the enemies are higher-up.**

TK: Just as they expect. It's like everyone was playing right into their hands. They divide themselves, badmouth each other, bicker on who gets reparations, etc.

**MY: Right. With differences in reparations being paid from one residential area to another just across the street, right? Even though the same air flows between them.**

TK: That's why we're all being divided, I think. And that's exactly what they want. If we waste all our energy this way, we won't have any left to come for them. But even in all this, there are still many people who fight it in court. One elderly woman who was going to trial called us and said, "I really don't want to do this. It'll take 10 or 20 years at best, and even if I won, I'd get a million yen at most. I really didn't want to do it, but everyone wanted me to get involved in the trial, so I am. The lawyers and experts and activists working with us are all so enthusiastic. But frankly, I really don't want to do this." But she can't tell people that.

**MY: No, she can't.**

TK: She can't. If she did, they'd say, "How can you say that when we're all fighting together?" But this person is over 70, and said she isn't sure if she'll "live to see the end of

the trial.” She had nowhere she could say this. But when she came to us, the words sort of blurted out. Though she couldn’t tell anyone. I’m really glad we got that call. We do it all anonymously, so we don’t introduce ourselves and neither do they. I told her she doesn’t have to worry about us notifying anyone of what’s said here. And she said, “That’s a relief. I haven’t told anyone this. Not even my family.”

**MY: Right. This isn’t something you can easily talk about with those close to you. Not with family, or with those in the community.**

TK: With everyone working together on this trial, her family would say, “Why would mom say such a thing?” It would lead to more quarrels with her husband and kids.

**MY: Right, and then it would divide them further.**

KT: Exactly, yes. That’s why they divide us — and that’s exactly what those responsible want to happen. But, you know, when people tell me they’re “relieved,” or that they “haven’t been able to tell anyone this before,” it does feel kind of nice. Of course just saying it won’t solve all their problems, but....

**MY: No, you’re right.**

TK: Mm. It’s not a solution.

**MY: After all, in principle, these are rights that should be guaranteed without having to go to court.**

TK: True. If they had done this from the beginning, properly apologized and asked for their forgiveness, people wouldn’t need to go to court or stay so angry. They’d say, “Well, I guess we just need to put up with it for a while,” or “Let’s pack up and go somewhere else.” All they could do was cope with it. I think this is something women in particular are burdened with.

**MY: Right. For those watching this interview, could you describe what’s involved in these trials? What are these people seeking from the government in these lawsuits, or from TEPCO?**

TK: They want their land and jobs back. They want their communities back, and to be able to live there again. They also lost their livelihoods. They can’t continue doing their work. There’s no farming, no fishing, and companies have gone under. These areas were

designated as difficult-to-return zones<sup>20</sup> and people can't live there. So the biggest thing they are hoping for is to have their communities and livelihoods given back to them.

**MY: Mhm. These are basic human rights, those that should be protected.**

TK: They want to get their normal lives back. Living in an unfamiliar place means living with uncertainty, worries, and feelings of hopelessness. If they were home instead, they wouldn't feel these things — that anxiety and hopelessness. Perhaps the most painful part is the loss of personal relationships. If areas were evacuated together by region, they would still be able to talk with one another. But everyone had been separated. These people had relied on their friends and relatives, and are now isolated and living in a completely unfamiliar place.

**MY: Yes. And then are forced to move time and time again, from shelter to shelter.**

TK: Some people have already moved 10 times. Some of our PhotoVoice<sup>21</sup> colleagues have moved about 7 times. Think about going on a trip somewhere — when you get back, you have that “there's no place like home” feeling, right? These people don't have that. No home to return to. And this isn't a vacation — they didn't intend to leave. They were ordered by the government and forced to evacuate their homes against their will. That's why I feel the government should properly take responsibility, apologize, and guarantee these people their rights. They need to listen to how everyone is feeling.

**MY: It's been 10 years now since the disaster — what is the situation in Fukushima like today?**

TK: Right. The 21st century is often called the era of human rights, but frankly speaking... Since 1997, I've actually been working with CAP, the “Child Assault Prevention” program.<sup>22</sup> I really appreciated their thoughts on rights, and I think meeting those at CAP and learning

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<sup>20</sup> A difficult-to-return zone is defined as an area affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster where living and entering is not allowed, however there are some exceptions to entering the zone. (“Fukushima Exclusion Zone Tour from Tokyo – What's Happening in Fukushima Now.” Japan Wonder Travel Blog. <https://blog.japanwondertravel.com/report-of-fukushima-exclusion-zone-tour-from-tokyo-10784#:~:text=Difficult%2Dto%2Dreturn%20zone,-As%20for%20the&text=This%20means%20this%20area%20hasn.much%20higher%20than%20other%20areas.> Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>21</sup> Photovoice is a research method that was discovered in 1992. This method consists of using photos to help lead interviews. This method is generally used in community research. (“Photovoice.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photovoice>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>22</sup> The Child Assault Prevention Program (CAP) is a nonprofit organization that was started in 1984 to help decrease the child abuse occurring. “About.” Child Assault Prevention. <https://www.childassaultprevention.org/about>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)

through them has formed the basis of all the work I've done. When I started there, we used to say that it would take 100 years or so for human rights education to gain traction. It's been over 20 years now, and I still don't see much progress. Even nowadays with COVID-19,<sup>23</sup> people will gossip and say "so-and-so tested positive," "I heard they got it." Protection of personal information is also a basic human right. There's still a lot to learn.

**MY: I see.**

TK: I want to tell people just how important these basic human rights are. Lately in our phone counseling services, we've been trying to increase our staff. I tell them that spreading baseless rumors is another form of human rights violation — it's character assassination.<sup>24</sup> They say that it takes 100 years for education to take root in society, but...

**MY: Mhm.**

TL: But I worry that 100 years may not be enough for people to understand that.

**MY: I wonder. You mentioned the coronavirus pandemic. The earthquake 10 years ago was a catastrophic disaster, and the pandemic is also a major disaster in another sense — a societal disaster. How has the pandemic affected women's safety, or their human rights?**

TK: Right. Women have had to take on all the work around the house nonstop. So when she gets sick, the whole family reaches a breaking point. That's why fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers — everyone needs to routinely do their share of housework. It was the same during the earthquake disaster, too. But that's considered a woman's role, and even in an earthquake or pandemic disaster, they can't get any rest.

**MY: Yes, even in normal circumstances, women are overburdened with housework and caregiving. And when a disaster strikes, that burden becomes heavier.**

TK: That's right. One single mother of three told us, "If I test positive, who will take care of my kids? I don't have anyone to turn to." And even when she asked someone to watch just

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<sup>23</sup> COVID-19 is a viral disease that is very infectious and targets the respiratory system. Symptoms of this disease include fever, cough, and loss of taste or smell. ("Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)." World Health Organization. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_3](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_3). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>24</sup> Character assassination is defined as defaming an individual in order to publicly discredit that individual. ("Character assassination Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/character%20assassination>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)

her youngest child, it turns out they were positive, too. At just a few months old. Her family would be at risk of contracting it, too.

**MY: Right.**

TK: Whether you're a woman or a man, when anyone gets sick, it's comforting to not have to shoulder the burden alone. In times of disaster, too, people shouldn't be placing burdens on others, but looking to share them together. If we can instill ideas of gender equality in normal times, then maybe women wouldn't have to go through such miserable experiences.

**MY: Agreed. How has the pandemic affected violence towards women?**

TK: With the pandemic, well, In Koriyama<sup>25</sup>, the first person [to test positive] was a woman, and she was in the news. They didn't say who or where she was, but rumors on where she worked spread like wildfire. Even other people working at that office were being harassed. It may have been because she was a woman — I wonder if a man would be treated the same way. But with this first instance, it was a woman. It was all over the news, including where she was believed to work. I couldn't help but think they were saying all these things because she was a woman, that things would be different if it were a man. They said such horrible things, so much baseless gossip. People need to understand that this too is a human rights violation. I'm not sure if gender played a role, but my first thought when I saw that was, it's because she's a woman.

**MY: I see.**

TK: You see this particularly in rural areas, like in Northeast Japan. Like my grandfather used to tell me, I remember thinking how deeply ingrained these ideas are still.

**MY: I see. Going back to the phone counseling service you mentioned — after the earthquake disaster in 2011, Women's Space Fukushima was incorporated in 2012, correct?**

TK: December of 2012, yes.

**MY: And at that time, you collaborated with the Japanese government for phone counseling?**

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<sup>25</sup> An important city in Japan within Fukushima prefecture. Wikipedia.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C5%8Driyama> (Accessed 15 December 2023)

TK: That's right.

**MY: What was that like?**

TK: That was our first time working with the Cabinet Office.<sup>26</sup>

**MY: Yes, nothing like that had happened before. Working with citizens to provide phone counseling, that is.**

TK: That's right. The way we did it, we were told to recruit people and pay a certain hourly wage. We quickly got a group together, which included some ordinary older ladies who never had any counseling experience. We couldn't bring in experts or train people on short notice — we were just told to get people quickly and what to pay them. We got 10 people in the end, for about 3-4 years. Then, groups like the Feminist Counseling Society, Single Mothers' Forum, and Shelter Net,<sup>27</sup> as well as people from the Japan National Council of Women's Centers offered their support. While they were supporting us, we had been working with the hourly wage I mentioned earlier. But when they stopped sending us support and told us to do it on our own, they promptly cut the pay in half.

TK: Terrible, right? The pay is still halved today...

**MY: Unbelievable.**

TK: And only half the rent, half the energy and utility bills. But still, we haven't quit. And starting this year, the Cabinet Office will withdraw, and reconstruction aid will come from the Fukushima Reconstruction Agency.<sup>28</sup> Fukushima Prefecture would sponsor us — until now we were sponsored by the Cabinet Office, but starting this year it'd be Fukushima Prefecture. They had us operate as an NPO, though the wage would be kept the same as what the Cabinet had set. But the prefecture was also covering all rent and utility costs, so that's a big help. But this was the first time the prefecture worked with an NPO. At times things have been difficult and slow-going, and some people from the prefecture were still

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<sup>26</sup> The Cabinet Office is an agency within the Japanese government that manages day-to-day affairs of the government. The head of the Cabinet Office is also the Prime Minister of Japan. ("Cabinet Office (Japan)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet\\_Office\\_\(Japan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_Office_(Japan)). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>27</sup> The All Japan Women's Shelter Network is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to assisting women and children who have been affected by domestic violence. ("Feminization of Poverty in Japan: Single Mothers and Survivors of Domestic Violence." Taiwan WCWS. <https://fourth.worldshelterconference.org/en/sessions/598>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>28</sup> The Fukushima Reconstruction Agency is a subdivision of the Japanese government whose main goal is to lead reconstruction related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. ("Reconstruction Agency." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstruction\\_Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstruction_Agency). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

very new to the work. But everyone was patient, and I think we all work really well together. It's so reassuring to see these younger people collecting all sorts of data, applying for grants, and making various proposals. At any rate, the Cabinet's way of doing things was terrible.

**MY: So terrible. Blatant discrimination.**

TK: That was the price of having people across the country come and support us. But because we were now forced to do it on our own, our wage was halved, budget for rent halved, budget for utilities halved....

**MY: It's not like there was less of a need for it.**

TK: We'd get about 1,000 cases per year.

**MY: Right.**

TK: And I mean, at first, the Cabinet officials would accompany us to search for a place, and after finding something suitable, would then say that Fukushima apartments are too expensive. They are expensive. After the earthquake disaster, people came to Nakadori<sup>29</sup> in droves, and rent went up as demand increased. That's where we're renting. But they'd say they "looked some things up, and there are cheaper places elsewhere, ya know."

**MY: And yet I'm sure they're wasting taxpayer money in all sorts of other ways.**

TK: Right, and they say there's a surplus in the reconstruction budget.

**MY: Yes, it's not like they're short on funds.**

TK: So why can't they give us the other half of the wages?

**MY: It's really not that much money for them, right?**

TK: Exactly.

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<sup>29</sup> Nakadori is a region located in the Fukushima Prefecture in Japan. This region consists of the capital of the Fukushima Prefecture. ("Nakadori." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakad%C5%8Dri>. Accessed 28 March 2023.)



**MY: If they had enough money to build the Japan National Stadium,<sup>30</sup> they could manage it.**

TK: It's nothing compared to that!

**MY: They called the Olympics<sup>31</sup> a symbol of Japan's "revival." What was that all like?**

TK: Well, everyone was rooting for them. You see all these great people across Japan and you want to root for them. Fukushima also held something like an opening ceremony, but of course they did it without an audience. Everyone truly thought this would bring Fukushima back. But really, all Fukushima had was 1 or 2 of the qualifying rounds, and the main events were held somewhere else.

**MY: Oh, really?**

TK: Just 1 or 2 qualifying events. How is that a revival? Everyone was so disappointed, and the thought of doing it at all with the coronavirus pandemic going on — it all just seemed pointless.

**MY: Right.**

TK: It was pointless, I think.

**MY: In general, it all seemed absurd ever since Tokyo got the Olympics invite, right?**

TK: Right.

**MY: I mean, when it was all decided, they said that "Fukushima is under control." But there was absolutely no control at all.**

TK: Not at all. Just look at things now — they're going to pump [radioactive] groundwater through pipes about 1 kilometer off the coast out into the ocean. How can they do that? Really, how?

**MY: Mhm.**

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<sup>30</sup> The Japan National Stadium, also known as the Olympic Stadium, is a stadium located in Tokyo, Japan that is known for its use during the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. ("Japan National Stadium." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan\\_National\\_Stadium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_National_Stadium). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

<sup>31</sup> The Olympics are a competition in which individuals from around the world from various sports compete during the Summer and Winter every 4 years. ("Olympic Games." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic\\_Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games). Accessed 28 March 2023.)

TK: I'm strongly against that. Just think of the fishing industry. They've already suffered so much damage, yet their only option is to dump it into the sea? And then to do so just 1km off the coast, when it's all open sea!

**MY: And that all costs money.**

TK: That's right.

**MY: It makes no sense at all. Even 1km offshore, the water all still flows together.**

TK: Yes, and even today, I heard the measuring instruments in the first, second, and third [nuclear plant reactors] are broken, and that they've been without power for months. What in the world could they possibly be doing — are they not taking the repairs and reconstruction seriously? Everyone's had enough. And they're spending all this money — where is it all going? People want to see where that money's going, and to have their old lives back. And when both the Fukushima District Court<sup>32</sup> and Sendai High Court<sup>33</sup> decree that 5 billion yen<sup>34</sup> is the settlement, albeit still not enough for everyone, [TEPCO] appeals to the Supreme Court.<sup>35</sup>

**MY: Right, they are.**

TK: It'll take years. And before that judgment day finally comes, people are dying before they get to see it.

**MY: That's right.**

**I want to return to the topic of human rights, as well as that of feminism. There's a lot to unpack with that, but what does "feminism" mean to you? How would you define it?**

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<sup>32</sup> The Fukushima District Court is the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier of Japan's courts. This court deals with judicial issues within the Fukushima Prefecture. ("Judicial system of Japan." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial\\_system\\_of\\_Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial_system_of_Japan). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>33</sup> The Sendai High Court is the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of Japan's courts. This court deals with judicial issues within many prefectures. The Sendai High Court sees cases from the Fukushima, Morioka, Akita, Yamagata, and Aomori Prefectures. ("Judicial system of Japan." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial\\_system\\_of\\_Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial_system_of_Japan). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>34</sup> Yen is the type of currency typically used in Japan. It is one of the most common types of currency used around the world. ("Japanese yen." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_yen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_yen). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>35</sup> The Japanese Supreme Court is located in Tokyo and has the most judicial power of all the court systems in Japan. ("Supreme Court of Japan." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme\\_Court\\_of\\_Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_Japan). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

TK: As for me, meeting those at CAP and the Feminist Counseling Society [FCN] has had such a great impact on my life. Like through academic groups in equal rights, and in connecting women together. I learned that my personal problems were not just my own but were problems at a political and societal level. Like, “Oh, so it isn’t my fault after all.” It was a refreshing way to think about things. I’m so glad that my daughter found feminism, too. It makes our lives easier. Our staff have also learned a lot from the people at FCN. It’s made family life better, like those times when living with children or our parents’ generations can get irritating. Though there may be a lot we want to say [to them], we can remember that with feminism, we’re fine just the way we are. We’re equal. I’m so thankful that many people’s lives have been made better for knowing this.

And I came to understand PTG<sup>36</sup> through meeting people like you and Ms. Yunomae<sup>37</sup> at PhotoVoice, and people at FCN. This was all after the earthquake disaster. If that disaster didn’t occur, I never would have met you all, or the people at FCN, or those in Kansai.<sup>38</sup> And I’d never get the chance to talk to people in the US like this, really.

**MY: I see.**

TK: It really was life-changing.

**MY: Indeed.**

TK: I’m nearing the end of my life now, going into my 70s. To have been able to meet with academics from across the world, and continue to express myself at this point of my life is incredible. That in itself is PTG, I think.

**MY: “Post-Traumatic Growth”, right? Often people talk about PTSD<sup>39</sup> that follows a traumatic experience.**

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<sup>36</sup> PTG stands for post traumatic growth and is defined as a theory in which individuals who experience trauma or psychological issues exhibit growth afterwards. (“Growth after trauma.” American psychological Association. [https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma#:~:text=Post%2Dtraumatic%20growth%20\(PTG\),often%20see%20positive%20growth%20afterward](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma#:~:text=Post%2Dtraumatic%20growth%20(PTG),often%20see%20positive%20growth%20afterward). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>37</sup> Tomoko Yunomae is a researcher who uses the Photovoice research method in many of her projects and has many published research papers related to the Great East Japan Disaster and violence against women on the basis on gender. (“Tomoko Yunomae’s research while affiliated with University of Michigan and other places.” ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Tomoko-Yunomae-2142132979>. Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>38</sup> Kansai is a region that is located in southern Japan. It consists of areas from many different prefectures, including many highly populated cities such as Kyoto and Osaka. (“Kansai region.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansai\\_region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansai_region). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>39</sup> PTSD stands for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and is defined as a condition which can be triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms of PTSD include anxiety and flashbacks to the event.

TK: Yes, the psychological trauma, and its ongoing effects.

**MY: There are ongoing effects, but also growth. Though it is unfortunate, and of course it'd be best if the trauma never occurred in the first place. But having gone through the trauma of the earthquake disaster and the nuclear accident, so many women have started new things, or are overcoming that hardship and growing from it. And like we said before, through human connection and the women's groups that developed, regional groups have banded together to say, "This isn't right," and call for social justice. We've seen movements like that.**

TK: That's why it's been so life-changing. If the disaster didn't happen, I wouldn't have learned these things, or met these people. I'd never want a disaster like this to happen again, but it's true that without it, I'd never have met these people. Back then, Ms. Yunomae and the others were at Big Palette, and I was like, "What's this PhotoVoice?" At first I thought they were a bit shady... you know, since all sorts of people were coming through back then.

**MY: You probably thought, "What in the world is this?" With all the hardship after the earthquake, why are these people showing up at this huge evacuation shelter in Big Palette, asking if we wanted to "do PhotoVoice together?"**

TK: It seemed shady, to be honest. But before that, Ms. Yunomae gave a lecture at Ochanomizu Women's University,<sup>40</sup> and I was there to listen to her talk.

TK: This was long before the disaster. I thought, "Yunomae, huh, I wonder if this is the same person I heard back then. Maybe they're not so shady...."

**MY: No, but it was such a difficult time for everyone, right? You were running a women's space, though you had all been exposed to the radiation. Still, in all that, for the first time....**

TK: Really, back then at Big Palette, people at Japan National Council of Women's Centers were offering a grant, and I thought we should take the teatime discussion groups they had here and hold them in temporary housing complexes, too. I was terrible at writing

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("Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)." Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>. Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>40</sup> The Ochanomizu Women's University is regarded as one of the best universities in Japan and is located in Tokyo. ("Ochanomizu University." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochanomizu\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochanomizu_University). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

applications like that, and it was a lot of work. If I did write it, I'd also be doing all this without pay. All of us at Big Palette were working only as volunteers.

**MY: Right.**

TK: Other groups apparently were part of umbrella organizations, and that's where their money came from. But for simple NGOs<sup>41</sup> like ours, we worked with no pay and had to cover all travel expenses ourselves. That was a citizen-led initiative.

**MY: But still, you had been asked to work on this women's space, right? By the city of Koriyama?**

TK: Right, by the prefecture.

**MY: The prefecture, was it? They just asked you to work with them without pay?**

TK: Right, they didn't say anything like that. About pay, I mean. But other women's groups have umbrella organizations, like Forum Fukushima, for example. And they've been working with various subsidies from here and there.

**MY: But you often hear that in evacuation shelters after the disaster, women were distributing food without pay. Meanwhile, men were out clearing debris and being paid. It's the same structural factors at work. Women were the ones volunteering and helping other women — with no pay. In the end, women's jobs are often volunteer work, caregiving, child rearing, etc. That all hasn't changed in the slightest, right?**

TK: So, I started the application to the Council of Women's Centers to do the work in temporary housing complexes. I thought it would be hard, but they said just one A4<sup>42</sup> size page was enough. Just submit it, and they'd push it through.

**MY: Right, they'd approve it.**

TK: They just told me to submit it. So then we moved to temporary housing. It covered expenses for the teatime discussions, including snacks, tea, and an hourly wage of 1,000

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<sup>41</sup> NGO stands for a nongovernmental organization which is an organization that operates and is founded separate from any government. ("Non-governmental organization." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental\\_organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>42</sup> An A4 size page is defined as a piece of paper that is approximately 8 inches by 12 inches. It is very similar in size to a standard US piece of paper. ("A4." PaperSizes. <https://papersizes.io/a/a4>. Accessed 29 March 2023.)

yen per person. Those teatime discussion groups in that complex were the first time we were paid for this work.

**MY: Is that right?**

TK: And afterwards, we realized that at this housing complex that these women's husbands, neighbors — anyone could hear and see what they were doing. It was then that we developed the phone counseling service with the Council of Women's Centers, as women could call us while covered under their blankets or something. We said we would do this for about 6 months, but they said a private-run program like ours would usually only run for about 3 months. A bigger project like this would usually go through a public organization, so I submitted the application for 3 months. I applied again, and from that September to February of the following year, we received money from the Council. Then the Cabinet Office took over on February 13th of 2012. I can see that more clearly now, looking back on how we did things — though it's a bit late now. When you described [the pay structure] that way, I thought, "Ah, yeah that's true." I didn't question any of it, just did the work. I didn't doubt it much at all. I guess I just figured that's how citizen-led initiatives worked.

**MY: Right, right. Less that you didn't question it, but rather you had no framework to question it, right?**

TK: Yes, I was so unfamiliar with that sort of thing, so I never doubted it. But I think we've done well for ourselves thus far.

**MY: Truly, you have. And you continue to do so. For over 10 years already...**

TK: That's right. And now our younger folks are taking on new projects, like the domestic violence counseling hotline. And for those who have been abused by their parents or children, helping to secure them a temporary place to stay, or getting on Koriyama's welfare assistance program, doing things like that. So besides just the phone counseling service, the younger generation has their hands full with all sorts of new developments.

**MY: I see.**

TK: But I'm handling the phone counseling side, at least.

**MY: I see. On that topic, younger people are coming to work with Women's Space Fukushima more and more these days, right? However, there are also women of your generation there, too.**

TK: More than half of us, in our 70s.

**MY: 70s. How about those in between?**

TK: We do have staff in their 60s, but they're actually considered the more elderly, with the youngest being 48.

**MY: Oh, I see.**

TK: Those going through the development course right now are in their 20s, and after some time, they'll start training in the evenings. After the training, they'll start working with us in the phone counseling service.

**MY: Mhm. The younger generation is interested in things like women's support and empowerment, but at the end of the day, they still have to eat...**

TK: Right, you can't make a living that way. When you invite them on and tell them what the pay is, they'll say, "Hmm, just 1,000 yen an hour, huh..." And then you work a full 6-hour day. We can't bring in younger people if they can't make a living.

**MY: That's right. A lot of NPOs run into that bottleneck. You want to bring in the younger generation, but they can't afford to eat that way. You can't afford to eat if you're working in women's support and empowerment.**

TK: It's because we're not independent ourselves. And we're not in a place to support people in that way. Since this year when we joined with the prefecture, we were only allowed to hire two people as full-time salaried employees: the director and vice-director. The rest are paid by the hour. That's about 30,000-40,000 yen per month — not enough to live on.

**MY: Definitely not.**

TK: So if you don't have a pension like us, or a husband or someone to help out with things, you can't make it work. I was just so shocked when that pay got cut in half.

**MY: I'm sure.**

TK: But it was remarkable that nobody quit despite all that.

**MY: It really is. One thing I'd like to ask you now is, in your mind, what would you say has been your greatest achievement?**

TK: Well, I would say the fact that I'm still entrusted with all this. I worked at a welfare center for 12 years, and offered counseling and support for single-mother households. It's been 12 or 13 years since I quit, but those women always call me when there's trouble. And before the pandemic, 10 of us would get together once a year to catch up, see how big their kids have gotten, that sort of thing. I see them like my own kids and grandkids — they're so adorable, and heartening. I am so glad that I've been able to stay in touch with them. And people like — let's call them "I" — from this one trial, who was the assailant, will still reach out to me if something comes up. My family sometimes is like, "How long is mom going to be doing this?" My daughter also feels the same and has been working with me.

**MY: Mhm.**

TK: She's studying hard, as is the director. Having passed things onto them is the biggest thing for me, I think.

**MY: Mm, I see.**

TK: I passed it on.

**MY: Yes. Though they have learned and continue to learn so much by following in your footsteps, by watching you work. You've been leading them for a long time now.**

TK: I've been more idle lately, and they've all taken up the mantle. It's so reassuring to step back and see these younger people develop things even further.

**MY: That's great to hear about their progress. You can see hope in them.**

TK: Yes, and I really want them to keep going. But there's the money issue.

**MY: That's true. We need women's independence, and for those who have it to be able to support other women in their independence. That's the kind of system we want to create, right?**



**Thinking about feminism in Japan today, if there were more people mobilizing for it, for example researchers at universities, right?**

TK: Yes, yes.

**MY: What are your hopes for feminism in Japan?**

TK: I think women should go out and do more field work. Like with those street demos, those are happening lately.

**MY: Like the Flower Demo.<sup>43</sup>**

TK: Yes, that. Having university professors participate in that makes the case very strong. And for proposals, too. We're making petitions and proposals, sitting in on parliament sessions, and are working to appeal to senators and members of congress. If we could get university professors to have their names linked to these initiatives — that prestige goes a long way in Japan.

**MY: Right, titles and such.**

TK: So if those professors could just.... It sounds bad to say "take advantage" of it, but they do have a great deal of power.

**MY: Right.**

TK: It would be great if they could give their endorsement in times like that, I think.

**MY: Right. And not just with their name, but also more actively participate in those initiatives. Not just limit it to universities and research, but to have them actually mobilizing for women's rights.**

TK: And to help educate society. Educating the public is important, and being able to say some university professor is coming to give a lecture gets a different reaction from people. They have more influence than I would in that case. It would be great if they would help us educate the public as well.

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<sup>43</sup> The Flower Demo is a social movement in Japan that challenges the sexual crimes and violence occurring in the country by individuals holding flowers representative of their support for victims of sexual crimes and violence. ("Flower Demo." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower\\_Demo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower_Demo). Accessed 29 March 2023.)

**MY: Agreed. You mentioned before the need to bring up people who can put these ideas into practice, like counselors for example.**

TK: That's right, yes.

**MY: Like, in training more counselors from a feminist perspective.**

TK: Yes, I agree. You know, on the Feminist Counseling Society board, as far as we know, only one of them is from Fukushima Prefecture.

**MY: Oh, really?**

TK: Yes. But despite that, the 2014 Feminist Counseling Society national conference was held with us in Koriyama. That's a big deal.

**MY: That it is. You all should be proud.**

TK: Amazing considering none of us were on that board. At first, I was against the idea, and said we weren't big enough yet to pull something like this off. But the vote in favor of doing it was the majority by just one person or so.

**MY: By majority vote?**

TK: Just afterwards, people like Ms. Inoue and those from the secretariat said, "But Ms. Karikome herself is against the idea." But the event came and was thankfully a great success. About 200 people came from across the country. We also had a bus tour of the coastline that was a big hit. Though at first, with no members and us hardly knowing anything about FCN, I didn't think we could handle a national conference. We had to raise money for it, too. But everyone worked hard, and we ended up with a lot more advertising revenue than usual.

**MY: I see.**

TK: None of us had done a conference of this scale before. We all had to reach out to people we knew to pull it off. It really was a group effort.

**MY: You had to push yourself in many different ways.**

TK: Yes. When I think about it now, we've really been through a lot. But I'm relieved that this movement will keep going.

**MY: I see. This may lead to a more heavy conversation, but since this project is called the Global Feminisms Project, I'd like to ask a bit more on your views of feminism. There are often times when the activism work and research are fairly divided on this, right? This is particularly true for Japan, but what's the relationship here? This may be too difficult or abstract a question, but what does feminist research mean to you?**

TK: I don't particularly think of it as feminist research, but more sense of equality that we haven't known before. On some level, you and I always knew that our lives had value, but to be able to put it into words in this way is to better understand yourself. Rather than studying feminism or joining academic groups on it, for me, it's about being able to articulate what I'm feeling and better understand it. It's been very productive for me, I think.

**MY: I see. You said earlier that you could now see your "personal matters as societal matters," and that you had been keeping it pent up before...**

TK: That's right.

**MY: And then it all sort of hit you, right? I can see how feminism would have that effect, too.**

TK: For me, though I never really joined academic groups on it, I see it in things like what my grandfather used to say about a woman's place in society — that "they must show humility and serve their parents, husband, and children throughout their lives." Nonsensical things like a "man's stupidity is balanced by a woman's intellect." I always questioned these things. And then when I learned about feminism, I realized what it all was. These are things that men have said from universally and politically privileged positions in society. This was something I really didn't realize until I was in my 60s.

**MY: Mhm, I see. That really is the way things work, isn't it?**

TK: Yes. Really, when my grandfather was on his deathbed, a woman I didn't know sat at his bedside, and I wondered what it was all about. If he were alive today, he would be about in his 140s. He was still healthy by the time I was in high school. He'd tell me to listen close, and say all these weird things. I questioned it for years, but it wasn't until my 60s when I met other feminists that I could put it into words: "I see now, my grandfather said those

things from a position of privilege.” I didn’t realize until well into my 60s. And I feel I’ve grown a lot since the disaster, too.

**MY: That’s wonderful. Is there anything you’d like to share with those watching or listening to this interview, from around the country and the world? Any final thoughts?**

TK: Well, more on PTG. Truly, though the earthquake disaster was a tragedy and so many people have suffered from it, I’ve met good people because of it. And I’ve learned new things from it. It’s possible to come out of anything better than you were before. That is one thing I’ve learned from this. When I learned about the term PTG, it really resonated with me.

**MY: And PTG is something you work towards every day — you, and the women of Fukushima.**

TK: I think so, yes. I can take these things I didn’t know before, and offer advice and work through things with those in our phone counseling sessions. In the past, I might have thought like everyone else and said those women were at fault, too. But that’s not true. It’s not their fault. It’s just men saying what’s convenient for them, and they’ve been brainwashed to it. Then the women on the other side of the phone will be like, “I see....” If I never met these people, I would never be able to say this. I’m truly glad I met them.

**MY: I see. How are you connected with the other women’s organizations and groups in Japan?**

TK: We were contacted by an organization in the prefecture who was running a smaller-scale shelter, who said they had “people here from Koriyama with no place to stay.” We all got together there to find something for them. And we got calls from organizations from Tokyo to Sendai,<sup>44</sup> saying, “We have people from Koriyama going through this and that, would you come see them?” So we met and spoke with them. We didn’t have a place for them up until then either, though very recently we were able to procure something. Rent was also difficult to pay, but this way, these women could get help getting back on their feet. That’s all thanks to those organizations who informed us of these people that needed help in Koriyama. We get calls from other cities and prefectures by phone, or that hotline. There’s no way we can ignore those requests when we receive them. One way or another, we’ll try and find them a room to rent. There’s one person there now, and...

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<sup>44</sup> Sendai is the capital of the Miyagi Prefecture and is also known as the largest city in its region. (“Sendai.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sendai>. Accessed 29 March 2023.)

**MY: The shelter, it's open 24-hours?**

TK: But, that first young woman has already been there about two months, I'd say. They thought it would be about one or two months, but have found returning home to be too difficult. At first, the staff members stayed there with her. She had been attending school during the day, and stayed away from home to avoid abuse particularly from her parents. When she was found out, we as directors explained to the parents on the phone that we'd be looking after her given the current situation. I've had to deal with reactions like "give me back my child" before, and I explain that they themselves don't want to go back, and that they're doing this so they can be more independent. And to do that, we're studying new things and applying for different grants. Particularly younger people are able to use the internet and find this information, which I think is great.

**MY: Truly. And those horizontal connections<sup>45</sup> become so important, like connections across different organizations, and more vertical connections,<sup>46</sup> too. How about connections with overseas organizations?**

TK: As for overseas, outside of what I've done with you recently, like today's talk — honestly I didn't know much about even western Japan until recently, so what we're doing here with the University of Michigan is really the first overseas connection for me. I don't really have much in connections with overseas organizations.

**MY: Understood. Finally, then, let's talk about the work you're taking on now. Your group has been growing quite a bit, and taking on new projects. What have you and your organization been focusing on as of late?**

TK: Mainly the funds to continue this work.

**MY: I see.**

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<sup>45</sup> A horizontal connection is defined as a connection in which all individuals have the same amount of power or status. ("Difference Between Horizontal and Vertical Relationships." DifferenceBetween. <http://www.differencebetween.net/business/difference-between-horizontal-and-vertical-relationships/#:~:text=Horizontal%20and%20vertical%20relationships%20are%20terms%20used%20to%20refer%20to,authority%20or%20knowledge%20and%20wisdom>. Accessed 29 March 2023.)

<sup>46</sup> A vertical connection is defined as a connection in which one individual has more power or status compared to other individuals. ("Difference Between Horizontal and Vertical Relationships." DifferenceBetween. <http://www.differencebetween.net/business/difference-between-horizontal-and-vertical-relationships/#:~:text=Horizontal%20and%20vertical%20relationships%20are%20terms%20used%20to%20refer%20to,authority%20or%20knowledge%20and%20wisdom>. Accessed 19 March 2023.)

TK: That, and supporting the livelihood of our staff — we could do more with that. Right now, only two staff members are full-time and paid monthly. The rest are paid hourly, and I said they only get 30-40,000 yen per month. There isn't an outright conflict going on per se, but I'm sure this money problem will ripple through here and there, and I worry that we'll lose people interested in joining us because of it. In fact, those two [full-time staff] work themselves so hard that none of the others complain, or think they could even work that much. But still, you just don't know. It's an issue for everyone.

**MY: Right. Both women and women's organizations are starting from a weaker financial position. There's a bottleneck there. We're approaching the end of the interview, but I'll ask once more: Is there anything you feel we didn't quite cover, or anything you'd still like to say before we end?**

TK: Like I've said before, meeting everyone though this has just been such an asset. Meeting the folks at CAP and the Feminist Counseling Society has greatly validated my experience, and I'm so grateful. And you and Ms. Yunomae taught me the PhotoVoice method, which has been so empowering. When something happens, I often find myself thinking, "Hm, I should capture this."

**MY: In photos?**

TK: Those encounters, that is.

**MY: Right. In working together, we could really feel the significance that taking pictures has. When we notice something, if we don't take a picture of it, we often forget it or have the thought slip our minds. Taking pictures means not only having it for yourself, but to be able to show and discuss it with others and make new discoveries. It's incredibly meaningful. I still feel this today after doing so for 10 years.**

TK: I'm truly glad that I met you all.

**MY: Thank you. With 10 years having passed, the events in Fukushima are increasingly being forgotten. That's true of Japan as well as other disasters around the world, where it gets lost in all the incidents that happen. What can we do to help people understand what happened and is still happening in Fukushima? How outrageous it all was, and how human rights were not protected and continue to be violated in Fukushima? What do you think?**

TK: Like in the media, for example, they said that a certain coastal highway was opened up. They said it was a good thing, but when you actually go there, you see [signs that say], “Don’t stop. Don’t open your window. Don’t get out. No motorcycles allowed.” You just have to roll up your car window and vroom on by. But no one knows this. Even today they tell you not to open your window. Don’t get out. Don’t stop. No motorcycles.

**MY: I see. But no one reports on that. And Fukushima has just become a place that you pass through.**

TK: The news will say how convenient it is that it’s opened up, or how great it would be to go there for sightseeing. So come and see what it’s actually like there, then! “Don’t stop, Don’t open your window, Don’t get out.” And the statistics, too — the number of those who evacuated out and within the prefecture are reported, but not those like us who bought new homes or moved into reconstruction housing. We’re not considered evacuees anymore — not counted. So even if they say now there are over 20,000 people or so in evacuation, in my eyes, no matter how many reconstruction housing complexes I move to, I’m still an evacuee.

**MY: That’s right. I mean, you still can’t return to your home!**

TK: But they don’t count those people. They build houses in Koriyama or Fukushima, but they’re still considered to be home. They don’t count these people anymore. I wish they’d be courteous and take people’s feelings into account in their work.

**MY: Right. It’s the same structural forces at work we mentioned earlier. They determine how to define and count things based on what suits them. They’re a formidable enemy.**

TK: Yes. And we’re playing right into their hands.

**MY: Indeed. But we have ways to prevent it, like you said, with women working together, and through sharing information.**

TK: That’s right.

**MY: You keep fighting, keep pushing forward. That’s what the feminist — this women’s movement is all about. Thank you for joining us in such a meaningful conversation today.**

TK: Thank you very much.

**MY: Thank you.**