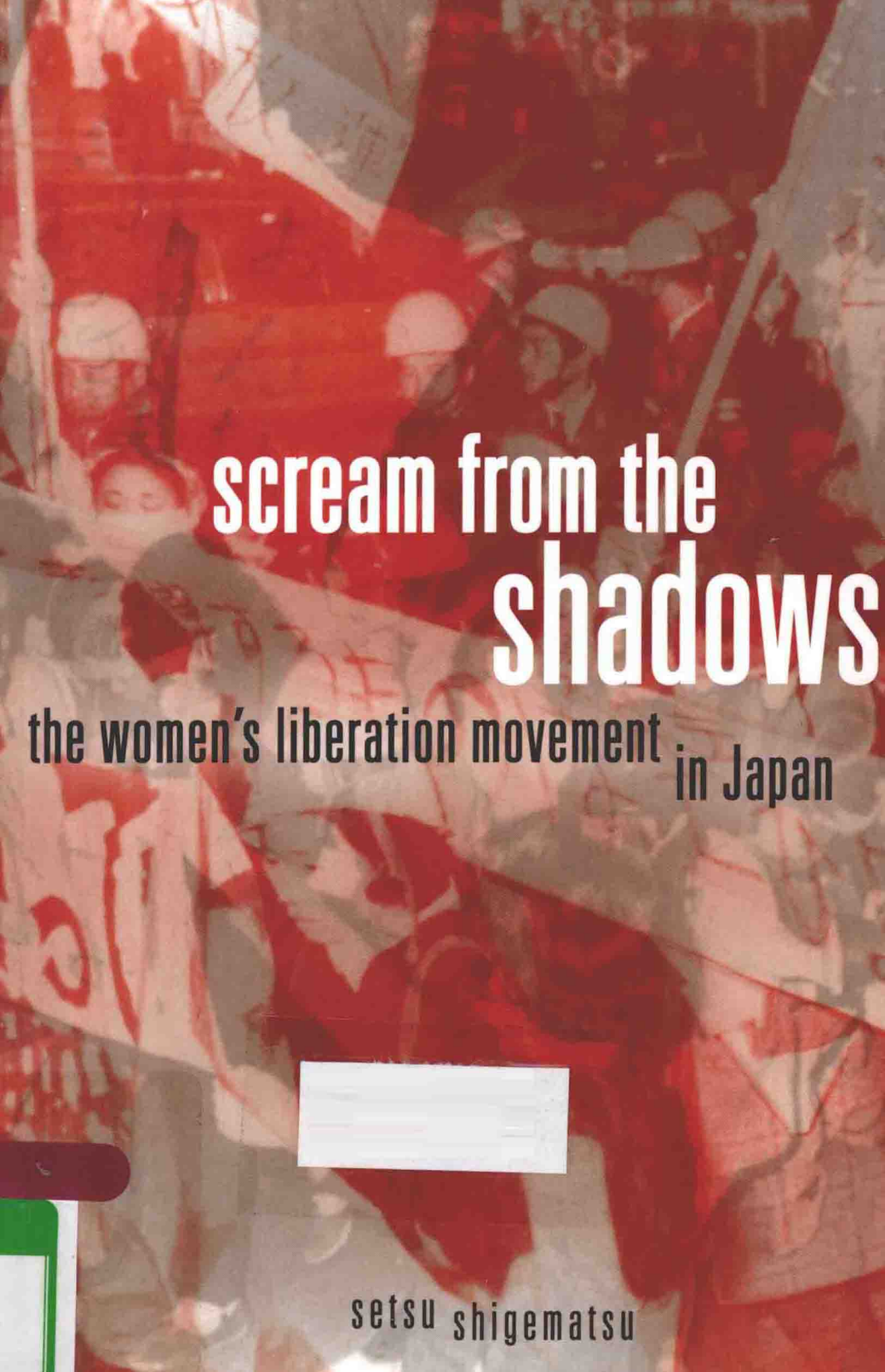

scream from the shadows

the women's liberation movement in Japan

setsu shigematsu

Scream from the Shadows

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN JAPAN

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SCREAM FROM THE SHADOWS

To the *ribu* activists and
all those who have given their lives to
the struggle for collective liberation

PREFACE

Feminism and Violence in the Womb of Empire

After more than a decade-long U.S.-led globalized war *of* terror that has punctuated the onset of the twenty-first century, what are the conditions of possibility for feminist politics in this age of Empire? What have been the interventions as well as the fault lines of feminism(s) in such times? This book begins by posing questions about the interrelationship of feminism, imperialism, and violence to delve into the frequently disavowed conditions of violence that make many feminisms possible. To pose such questions at this historical moment seems particularly urgent given the ways that certain feminist discourses have been rallied in the name of U.S.-led multinational crusades to protect women's liberty and freedom in places like Afghanistan. The patriotic support of liberal feminist institutions (such as the Feminist Majority Foundation) have endorsed the invasions of other nations as a means to liberate women.[1] If notions such as women's liberation can be invoked to help cosmeticize imperialist warfare, then how should we reassert the imperatives and strategies for women's liberation today?

More than forty years ago, a women's liberation movement—called *ūman ribu*—was born in Japan amid conditions of violence, radicalism, and imperialist aggression. The movement was catalyzed by the forces of capitalist modernity and infused with anti-imperialist politics directed against what was deemed to constitute a U.S.–Japanese neo-imperialist postwar/Cold War reformation. Given the broader imperialist conditions that constitute feminisms through and across the borders of the United States and Japan, one of the tasks at hand for feminists located in the centers of Empire is to self-reflexively and critically analyze the different kinds of violence within the subject of feminism and the feminist subject as a means of confronting and

potentially more effectively disrupting the systemic forms of violence that constitute our conditions of existence.

In recent decades, the hypervisibility of women who have authorized and sanctioned massive forms of imperialist state violence has been notable. On the global stage, Madeleine Albright's (in)famous public statement that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children, even prior to the official invasion, was "worth it" was followed by the prominence of Condoleezza Rice, and now Hillary Rodham Clinton, as the advocates of U.S. foreign policy.[2] These stateswomen serve as the most visible apogees of the convergence of liberal feminism and imperial power. Given how liberal feminist political goals for women's equality has largely enabled the rise of such elite women and has created the institutional space for women, myself included, to enter and occupy positions in the U.S. academy, I am disturbed by the relative hesitation, if not reluctance, of feminists to theorize the capacities, complicities, and desires for power, domination, and violence *in women*.

Informing this book's trajectory is a concern about the capacity of feminist subjects—including feminist-identified scholars and activists and those sympathetic to and informed by feminist politics—to engage with the questions, manifestations, and modalities of violence constitutive of our political horizon. Haunting the writing and completion of this book are thus unresolved questions that arise through a confrontation with the ways in which hegemonic (liberal and radical) feminist paradigms and particular kinds of feminist discourses have contributed to U.S. domestic and imperialist state violence.[3]

After the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and the sensational images of U.S. Army Private Lynndie England and her compatriots engaging in sexualized racial violence, feminist authors such as Barbara Ehrenreich declared that the era of naïve feminism has seen its own demise.[4] In contrast to the sensationalization of women's use of violence as a gender aberration, feminist scholars like Jacinda Read have argued that the popularization of the role of vigilante women in the mass media is an aftereffect of the infusion of second wave feminism into mass culture.[5] The valorization of gun-toting women getting even or outdoing men has become a staple part of popular culture. While some feminists may desire such forms of women's empowerment, the attempt to blame women's violence on the emergence of feminism is a perilous endeavor.[6] The origins of violence do not lie exclusively within the bounds of feminism; however, the empowerment of women perhaps has enabled the production of new kinds of violent female subjects. Liberal feminist tenets have constituted the political foundations that have enabled the entry of women, even those who do not identify as liberal feminists, into many

professions, including the military, policing, and prisons. This may account for why feminist critiques that rigorously problematize women's relationality with violence have remained, until recently, rather reticent, lest such criticism bolster discrimination against women and undermine the work of multiple generations of feminists.[7]

The contributions of the legacy of "second wave feminism," as well as the problems with this dominant periodization, are well documented.[8] Feminist activism from the 1960s through the 1970s enabled a fundamental shift in our political understandings of violence against women, producing significant legal and sociocultural changes that contributed tremendously to the politicization and criminalization of domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape. These particular forms of violence against women have been rendered highly visible, and their criminalization and prosecution have relied on a legal system that reinforces liberal notions of the individual and punishment as its formula for justice. This feminist legacy is also implicated in the endorsement of policing and imprisonment as the primary apparatuses that have exponentially increased and expanded domestic state violence.[9] These penal regimes are imbricated with the history of racist practices and state-sanctioned violence in the forms of physical, psychological, and sexual violence against inmates regardless of gender or sexual orientation.[10] Accommodation to such forms of state violence through policing and prisons is one example of how many feminists have been complicit in perpetuating cycles of systemic violence.[11]

As a feminist scholar, my work in no way attempts to minimize the historical-material conditions of women's symbolic and systemic subordination. My own intellectual and political identity formation and life work is predicated on commonly held feminist tenets about the history of modern sex and gender subordination as constitutively intersecting with race and class, and I am committed to a "women-centered" praxis in terms of my own research and activism. Nevertheless, I am interested in interrogating how feminist subjects have both resisted and been implicated in the expansion of empires, national ideologies, state violence, and interpersonal and microlevels of normalized violence. Cognizant of such contradictions, how is more effective insurgency possible in the womb of Empire and at its extremities?

While recognizing the paradigm-shifting contributions of feminist movements, it is imperative to problematize how certain feminist discourses have rendered paramount (if not unassailable) the victimhood of women as one of its universalizing discursive tendencies. Although feminist gains have significantly empowered certain groups of women, particularly those racialized as white and middle-class, the feminization of poverty on a global scale and the wages of war continue to disproportionately impact women and children.[12]

Such conditions, at the very least, point to the limits of feminist politics to effectively prevent and transform these conditions. While this suggests how much feminist work remains to be done, I wish to emphasize that a delimited focus on the concept of women's victimhood may prevent us from taking seriously the problem of women's complicity and agency in the perpetuation of violence against other women, children, and men and how these circuits are maintained and reproduced geopolitically through gendered and racialized economies. Arguably, the relative feminist mutedness about violence among women (intrafemale/woman on woman) might be symptomatic of a problematic desire and discursive tendency to posit women as the perpetual victims of patriarchy and sexism, obscuring or eclipsing differences of power and how such a discourse has sanctioned violence against men, particularly men of color.[13] I suggest that universalizing discourses of women's victimhood may function to obscure and forestall an adequate theorization of women's differential power, agency, and shifting investments in perpetuating systems of violence against the other. This underrecognized condition of women's ontologies in and of violence remains a shadow subject of feminism and a vexing problematic for those concerned with the future efficacy of feminist politics.

This book initiates a modest attempt to address the condition of Japanese women engaging in violence against other women and children and men. I raise questions about how adequately feminism has theorized this phenomenon or whether it has remained a taboo subject in feminist studies. Japanese feminists have long examined women's complicities in Japanese imperialism. Through my study of the Japanese women's liberation movement, I not only pay attention to its legible forms of liberation, antisexist practices, and counterhegemonic resistance but also tarry with the contradictions, repressive tendencies, and power dynamics among feminist activists to better understand the workings, limits, and impasses of our own notions of liberation, resistance, and radicalism.

At this historical juncture, I am most interested in examining what remains compelling and relevant about *ūman ribu* for contemporary politics. Given the global dimensions of the war *of* terror in the present context, what lessons and interventions were not learned adequately from the politics of the early 1970s? When *ūman ribu* emerged in the early 1970s, counterviolence was an active horizon of contestation and deemed, among certain political radicals, as necessary to liberate people from the capitalist-imperialist state. In the early 1970s, the state violently suppressed political radicalism and revolutionary movements across the United States and Japan. How was the state

able to hegemonize its monopoly over political violence, and how were liberals and leftists implicated in conceding this hegemony?

Activists of *ūman ribu* sought to examine how Japanese women were constituted by the conditions of a violent society, a society that largely disavowed its complicity in the violence being done to others, especially other peoples of Asia during Japan's imperial past and in its ongoing neo-imperialist formations. By closely examining the political genealogy, formation, and fissures of the Japanese women's liberation movement, this study offers an opportunity to reflect on the blind spots within our contemporary and dominant understandings of feminism across their liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical, Euro-American, postcolonial, and women-of-color discursive configurations. It offers a nuanced understanding of how dominant forms of feminist inquiry may have minimized and repressed different forms of violence within and among feminist subjects through less visible forms of violence, including silencing, repression, and gatekeeping of what and who counts as a proper feminist subject.

Ūman ribu offered an important intervention in how we approach violence expressed by women. *Ūman ribu* activists sought solidarity with women who killed their children, and they supported the female leader of a notoriously "violent" far left sect known as the United Red Army. Through its political approach to violence expressed by women, I suggest, *ūman ribu* provides insights into an alternative feminist epistemology of violence that locates violence in the female body and the feminine subject. Through an inquiry into this movement and its productive politicization of women's relationship with violence—as potentially violent subjects—we can rethink feminism's relationship to political violence and women's relationality with the politics of violence.

An examination of feminism's relationality to violence suggests the need for a new feminist analytics of violence as well as the possibility for an alternative feminist ethics of violence. Such analyses would involve an examination of how feminisms and feminists have been structured by and within systems, ontologies, and epistemologies of violence and domination (be they class, race, sexual) and entangled with other dominant ideological systems such as liberalism and its continual domesticating calls to moderation, reason, and nonviolence as the proper norm.

My representation of the movement may unsettle and disturb how some feminists and *ūman ribu* activists desire to represent their legacy and contributions. The movement was of course heterogeneous and complex and, at moments, troubled by its own contradictions. The lessons of this movement's

legacy have remained in the shadows and include its complex relationship to violence. I chose to grapple with this difficult and undertheorized issue precisely because of the urgency of critically theorizing the multifarious modalities of violence in a time of perpetual war. Although some may question or be wary of its possible effects or implications, such a feminist inquiry is vital as we face the perilous conditions of feminism along with its complicities with state violence in all its spectacular and muted forms. Given my supposition about the ontologies of women's violence as an aporia of feminist thought, I turn to the title of the book—*Scream from the Shadows*. The polyvalence of the scream marks an eruption, evoking a spectrum of sensation from ecstasy to terror and rage. As we turn the pages, let us reckon with the shadows that follow us and our relationality to the sound of their screams.

INTRODUCTION

Ūman Ribu as Solidarity and Difference

In 1970, a new women's liberation movement, known as *ūman ribu* (woman lib), erupted across Japan. This grassroots feminist movement was catalyzed by the 1960s uprisings in the wake of the anti–Vietnam War movement, student movements, and New Left radicalism. This book forwards an analysis of the historical significance of *ūman ribu* and its politics, philosophy, legacy, and lessons for the future. As part of the crest of social movements that arose internationally during the 1960s and 1970s, *ūman ribu* can be understood as a particular incarnation of radical feminism, born from the cross-fertilizations of genealogies of resistance both domestic and international.

A study of *ūman ribu* offers a vital contribution to understanding the gendered formations of Japanese modernity, imperialism, and the limits of postwar liberal democracy and its complex leftist history. *Ūman ribu* activists forwarded an incisive critique of Japanese national imperialism and how its dynamics of discrimination shaped Japanese leftist culture. Beyond assessing *ūman ribu* within the framework of the nation-state, a close examination of its historical and political formation illuminates the international and transpacific dimensions of the feminist and liberation movements of this era.

The study of any non-Euro-American, or non-Western, feminist formation must, at the outset, take into account the implications of the constructed global divisions of West and East, first and third worlds, north and south, and their racialized and gendered significance. This framework is further complicated by Japan's complex rivalry with Western "civilization," its history as an imperialist power, and its colonial legacy that articulates through the *ūman ribu* movement in multiple ways. This project is therefore necessarily positioned within and against the centuries-long orientalizing gaze that sees the non-West as subordinate, inferior, feminized, and colored, yet

it remains mindful of the racialized and first-world geopolitical status of the nation-state designated Japan.[1]

My project, as an interpretive analysis of this feminist movement, seeks to unsettle Euro-American epistemic hegemonies and imperializing power-knowledge formations, constituting a critical counterdiscourse that exposes the domesticating implications of certain master narratives that would seek to render resistant subjects marginal. While some may argue that the numerical size of *ūman ribu*, approximating a few thousand participants during the early 1970s, was marginal compared to the massive memberships of existing Japanese women's movements, the importance of its historic interventions and its critique of modern society and the Japanese left cannot be adequately measured by a sociological enumeration of its participants.[2] *Ūman ribu* not only was a past social movement but also constituted a political identity and a living philosophy. Its political interventions and contradictions remain as relevant lessons for our present political condition.

Many *ūman ribu* activists were variously involved in the New Left and the anti–Vietnam War and student movements of the late 1960s, and they learned many difficult, painful, and productive lessons from those formative experiences. Most *ribu* participants were college-educated young intellectuals, largely women in their twenties and thirties. They had come of age in the education system that had undergone democratic reforms during the U.S. occupation, and thus they witnessed the limits of Japan's democracy and experienced the contradictions of inequalities within a capitalist state. As women who were predominantly ethnic-majority Japanese and largely from the postwar Japanese middle and lower-middle classes, they occupied a positionality that was relatively privileged yet discontent. In sync with the student rebellions and middle-class dissent erupting across cities around the world, the women of *ribu* identified with this larger wave of revolt. As a network of urban-based autonomous groups, *ribu* groups did not seek to establish a hierarchical organization or appoint a formal representative or leader, which characterized the new organizing style of the late-1960s movements.[3]

Its break from the existing constellation of progressive and leftist movements was based on its emphasis on the "liberation of sex" and the "liberation of *onna*." *Ribu* adopted and politicized the term *onna*, a term for women that was imbued with sexualized connotations. Linguist Orie Endo states that *onna* "contains a strong and negative sexual connotation" and can be considered disrespectful, taboo, and "dirty."[4] *Ribu* activist Sayama Sachi writes that precisely because *onna* emphasized a "sexual being, with many desires" and had a negative connation during the 1960s, *ribu*'s deliberate use of this term was similar to the reclamation of the term "queer" by lesbian,

gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movements.[5] The liberation of sex was a key concept and slogan but did not imply an open-ended advocacy of free sex. Rather, *ribu*'s discourse emphasized a notion of the liberation of sex that focused on a critique of the modern family system as the foundational unit of Japanese national imperialism that reproduced discrimination. This link between the family system and Japanese imperialism characterized *ribu*'s discourse as a feminist critique that deciphered the interlocking logics of capitalism and imperialism and its reproduction through the regulation of gender roles in the family system.

Within the broader histories of competing imperialisms, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and orientalism, such geographies of power cannot be elided or undone through the invocation of the rubric transnational or transnational feminism. While the rubric of transnational feminism has proven useful as a means to critique the globalizing impulses of certain feminist discourses and "Western cultural imperialism,"[6] what remains to be elaborated is the political trajectory and discursive effects of any given method and the need to further examine transnationalism.

While it has been necessary to critique how area studies methods have served to reinforce the interests of dominant nations, the postarea studies' paradigmatic shift to the transnational has not been without its own attendant problems.[7] Transnationalism has been rightly criticized for the way it privileges first-world and (middle- to upper-) class mobilities and subjectivities who can appropriate, consume, and represent difference and otherness.[8] Transnational mobility across and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state does not necessitate or imply reciprocal forms of exchange, critique, and collaboration or dismantle imperialist formations. The political open-endedness of transnationalism (like the endless possibilities of globalization) enables both its capacious lure and the potential space for change. Even as we recognize postarea studies imperatives and other formations of postnationalism, I emphasize a close analysis of the conditions of possibility that frequently traverse indices of the local-global, domestic, and international.

In terms of conceiving a *transdisciplinary* method that produces a critical historiography and a genealogy of internationalist or transnational liberation and feminist movements, this introduction proceeds with an elaboration of my argument for a translocational politics. The kind of transdisciplinary and translocational approach I take cautiously grapples with material specificities while recognizing that any claim to materiality is nonetheless constantly open to reiteration and appropriation. Even as we trace genealogies and lines of connection and identification, it is imperative to acknowledge, preserve, and mark differences and recognize how terms such as women, liberation,

and feminism shift and morph across various historical and semantic contexts and intersections of time and space.[9] Theorizing transnational feminist movements involves an ongoing contestation over who and what defines the feminist subject and the meaning of liberation. An analysis of *ūman ribu* contributes to an understanding of the transnational circuits of feminist discourses and, perhaps more significantly, how this movement's formation in an East Asian and Japanese context illuminates the limits of dominant paradigms of second wave feminism as integral to the master narratives emanating from Euro-American-centric globalizing feminism. How we approach or assess *ūman ribu*, as a "non-Western," East Asian radical feminist movement requires a recalibration of existing methodologies to account for local and linguistic, racial and regional specificities as well as translational troubles and nontranslatable differences.

Translational Troubles

Throughout the book, I use the terms *ūman ribu* (woman lib) and *ribu* (lib) to refer to the movement, its activists, its discourse, and its praxis. Those women who identified themselves as *ribu* and considered themselves part of the movement are referred to as *ribu* women and *ribu* activists. *Ribu* activists reappropriated and politicized the word *onna,* and this nomenclature was used by the women of the movement as their markers of political identification. Although differing views and priorities, as well as conflicts and debates, existed among the activists within the movement, akin to many other feminist and liberation movements, *ūman ribu*'s relative coherence as a social movement was based on a definable set of core political critiques and premises, which aimed specifically at the liberation of *onna* and sex as key to human liberation. The significance and praxis of these core premises are further elaborated throughout the book.

Ūman ribu is an abbreviated transliteration of women's liberation *(ūmenzu riberashion)*. It is written in *katakana* (ウーマン リブ), the phonetic alphabet used to mark emphasis and foreign words. To be more precise, it is the phoneticization of the Japanese-English phrase "woman lib" *(sic)* versus the "correct" English phrase "women's lib." This is a minute example of the translational trouble involved in assessing translocational difference, signified by this Japanese-English phrase.[10] Given that several other Japanese terms for women's liberation existed (such as *fujin kaihō* and *josei kaihō*), the movement's adoption and adaptation of this new name signified its distinction from existing Japanese women's movements and a desire to signal its con-

nection to women's liberation across national borders. My (re)invocation of *ūman ribu* thus underscores a relationship of internationalist feminist solidarity and difference alongside other women's liberation movements across the first and third worlds. *Ūman ribu* activists, on the one hand, identified with U.S.-based women's lib and its feminist movements of the 1970s, and on the other hand, reached out to women in other Asian nations, expressive of a Pan-Asian feminist solidarity.[11] Insofar as *ūman ribu*'s politics were infused by the broader anti-imperialist trajectory of the Japanese left and New Left, its feminist postcolonial consciousness was directed toward other Asian women as a potential nexus of solidarity in opposition to the reformation of neo-imperial–colonial relations.

Across the Japanese context, *ribu* and *feminizumu* (feminism) are not synonymous. *Ūman ribu* and *ribu* are associated with the movement era of the late 1960s and 1970s, with the direct-action political style and grassroots activism that characterized its organizing models. Unlike, for example, in the United States where *women's lib* and *feminism* were often used interchangeably during the 1970s, in Japan, the usage and meanings of *ribu* and *feminizumu* have been historically and semantically distinct, at times signifying a contentious relation.[12] It was not until the late 1970s that the transliterated term *feminizumu* was more widely used as a direct translation of "feminism" and, in contrast to the more activist and grassroots connotations of *ūman ribu, feminizumu* signified more explicitly a "foreign" concept and became associated with academic feminism and the establishment of women's studies that began in the 1980s.[13] Thus, in addition to marking *ribu*'s own distinct politics within a transnational context of feminist movements, I designate *ribu* by its own name to mark its difference from *feminizumu* in Japan and to signify that these terms are typically used and understood differently among *ribu* women and feminists in a Japanese context.

Ribu as Radical Feminism

While I mark *ribu*'s specificity, I also recognize that this movement most closely approximates what has been categorized and designated as radical feminism in other contexts. *Ūman ribu* has been referred to as a version of radical feminism by Machiko Matsui (1990), Ichiyo Muto (1997), and others, even though it did not refer to itself as such.[14] Therefore, my deliberate use of the terms *ribu* and *ūman ribu* instead of *feminism* marks this contextual and linguistic specificity. Through my examination of *ribu* as a radical feminist movement, I elaborate its synchronicities and solidarities with other

liberation movements and feminist politics and attend to its departures and differences. I redeploy these terms to mark the intricacies of solidarity and difference signified by this appellation.

My use of the term *radical feminism* in characterizing *ribu* follows what Imelda Whelehan has defined, in contrast to liberal feminism and socialist feminism, as a version of feminism that generally has the following traits.[15] First, it is a feminist discourse that demands comprehensive political, economic, and cultural transformation, in contrast to the more limited aims of attaining women's equality or advancing the recognition of women's rights within the existing sociopolitical system. Second, in terms of its genealogy, many radical feminists were "defectors from the New Left"; therefore, much of radical feminist theory was forged in direct reaction to the theories, organizational structures, and political style of the male-dominated New Left.[16] Third, in terms of its political style, radical feminism's language is more confrontational and militant than its liberal and socialist feminist predecessors, with its militancy taken to be an expression of the rage of women against male dominance, "a rage which became channeled into numerous acts of militancy and direct action against patriarchy."[17]

Like other radical feminist discourses, *ribu*'s politics were not defined or circumscribed by the goal of achieving equality between men and women, nor did its discourse promote the importance of women's rights as central to *ribu*'s conception of liberation. Instead, *ribu* activists collectively forwarded a comprehensive critique of the political-economic-social system as fundamentally male-centric *(dansei-chūshin)* and discriminatory. They sought to politicize sex discrimination *(sei sabetsu)* and male-centrism *(dansei-chūshin shugi)*, denouncing them for their oppression of both women and men. At the core of their politics, *ribu* activists emphasized that sex and sex-based discrimination were fundamental to human oppression, and this tenet characterized their discourse, with lesser attention to ethnic and class distinctions. They also used the terms male supremacy *(dansei shijō shugi)* and patriarchy *(kafuchōsei)* but to a lesser extent than sex discrimination and male-centrism (which was an analytic concept similar to "masculinist").

During the 1970s, *ribu* activists engaged in myriad activities on multiple fronts. They protested many forms of sex discrimination and formed women-only organizing groups and women-centered collectives and communes. Some of their most significant and sustained campaigns were directed against the state's attempts to restrict access to abortion, emphasizing instead "the creation of a society" where "women could decide" whether "they wanted to give birth."[18] Many *ribu* activists formed communes where women raised their children together to resist the family system.[19] They protested against the