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The All-Encompassing Inclusivity of Exclusion: Kaneko Fumiko's Universalist Tendency

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The subject of this article is the life of Kaneko Fumiko (1903–1926), and how Kaneko's life engendered an all-inclusive universality in her thought. Kaneko Fumiko was a Japanese anarchist and nihilist, active during modern Japan's Taishō era (1912–1927). She and her partner Park Yeol (1902–1974) were arrested in 1923 and convicted of high treason. Kaneko defined herself as an egoist and nihilist, which would commonly give the impression of an individualistic thinker that rejects having her uniqueness subsumed by universal notions. While she was undeniably a staunch individualist above anything else, a universalist understanding of humanity plays a significant role in her worldview. This universality is especially evident in Kaneko's relentless insistence that humans are absolutely equal by nature, a deviation from Stirner's egoism. I attempt to understand the kernel of universality in her individualistic thinking by referring to the philosophy and psychoanalytic theory of Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan. This article asserts that the reason for the universal range of Kaneko's thought can be located in her life experiences as an oppressed and exploited outcast of society.

Keywords: universality, egoism, exclusion, Max Stirner, Slavoj Žižek, Todd McGowan

This article explores the connection between the life of Kaneko Fumiko 金子文子 (1903–1926) and the universalist tendency in her thought. Kaneko was an anarchist insurrectionist during modern Japan's Taishō 大正 era (1912–1927) with connections to the Korean national-liberation movement, particularly through her comrade and lover, Park Yeol 朴烈 (1902–1974). The imperial authorities arrested Kaneko and Park after the Great Kantō earthquake in 1923, and after three years of interrogations and court hearings charged them with high treason for plotting to assassinate members of the imperial family. Fearing the fallout from their execution, the authorities reduced their sentence to life imprisonment, but at twenty-three years of age, Kaneko was found dead in her cell on 23 July 1926.

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While her actions were perceived as traitorous terrorism by the authorities, Kaneko believed they had solid philosophical foundations. Unfortunately, her written legacy is minimal, and her philosophical outlook must be reconstructed from disparate documents like her memoir, trial records, and letters. Prior research on Kaneko has highlighted the importance of abuse, exploitation, and exclusion for her ideology. However, there has been insufficient attention to explaining how her life experiences engender a universalist position. Deploying concepts from contemporary philosophy, this article examines the connection between universality and exclusion in Kaneko's thought. Specifically, I show how Kaneko's universalist conception of human equality distances her from Max Stirner (1806–1856), her philosophical role model. I draw on the ideas of Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan to explain and assert that the primary reason for Kaneko's belief in absolute equality is her awareness of her societal position. Her universalist view originates from her status as an outcast in modern Japanese society and her resulting life experiences. The article demonstrates that Kaneko's conception is not an abstract notion of humanity but one based on the universality of exclusion and non-belonging.

Thinking with Kaneko

Anarchism in Japan is enjoying a resurgence in the English-language literature. The publication of Sho Konishi's work on how a rich history of Russo-Japanese reciprocal intellectual relations contributed to the development of prewar Japanese anarchism has signaled an uptick of interest over the past decade.[1] The recent monograph of Nadine Willems examines the anarchist thought and activism of Ishikawa Sanshirō 石川三四郎 (1876–1956), honing in on his transnational cooperation and consistent assertion of the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.[2] Robert Kramm's article studies the activities of the Farming Village Youth Association (Nōson Seinensha 農村青年社), one of the last anarchist groups active during a late prewar era characterized by fascist suppression.[3] Mark Shields explores the Dadaist art movement in Japan and introduces the thought of, among others, Tsuji Jun 辻潤 (1884–1944), who like Kaneko was greatly influenced by the egoist Max Stirner.[4] However, the only recent work which focusses on Kaneko is that of Hélène Raddeker, comparing how Kaneko, Kanno Sugako 管野須賀子 (1881–1911), and Itō Noe 伊藤野枝 (1895–1923) sought to overcome the restricted role allocated to them within libertarian movements.[5]

Japanese studies on anarchism in prewar Japan are obviously more numerous, with recent examples including the works of Umemori Naoyuki 梅森直之, Ōsawa Masamichi 大澤正道, Hiyazaki Masaya 飛矢崎雅也, Kurihara Yasushi 栗原康, Sekiguchi Sumiko 関口すみ子, and Gotō Akinobu 後藤彰信.[6] While these also focus on famous anarchists of the era, though, Kaneko barely merits a mention, with the only partial exception being in a recent anthology of texts by Japanese anarchists.[7]

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[1] Konishi 2013.
[2] Willems 2020.
[3] Kramm 2020.
[4] Shields 2020.
[5] Raddeker 2016.
[6] Umemori 2016; Ōsawa 2020; Hiyazaki 2013; Kurihara 2013; Kurihara 2016; Sekiguchi 2014; Gotō 2016.
[7] Kurihara 2018, pp. 132–135, 139–153.

The two most comprehensive studies on Kaneko are from the 1990s, by Yamada Shōji 山田昭次 in Japanese and Hélène Raddeker in English.[8] The former is a critical biography which mentions Kaneko's philosophical influences but does not delve deeply into the connections between these ideas and Kaneko's life. The latter is again a comparative study of Kaneko Fumiko and Kanno Sugako, the female anarchist executed during the Great Treason Incident of 1910–1911. Raddeker explores how the two activists interpreted the meaning of their lives and deaths when faced with imminent execution. The study refers to many influential thinkers and philosophies of the time but does not conduct a rigorous analysis of Kaneko's thought.

Although Kaneko's ideas have not featured much in recent research on anarchism, there has been an upsurge of interest in Kaneko's life, possibly influenced by the 2017 Korean film *Anarchist from Colony* by Lee Joon-ik, which portrays the relationship between Kaneko and Park. An extended essay by Brady Mikako ブレイディみかこ examines the lives of three rebellious women: Kaneko Fumiko, Emily Davison (1872–1913), and Margaret Skinnider (1892–1971), and shows how all three fought class, gender, and ethnic injustices and lived on their own terms.[9] Particularly relevant are Brady's insights that Kaneko and Park's union is an example of a nonhierarchical relationship and that Kaneko's "unregistered" status led to her oppression by the state. Naitō Chizuko 内藤千珠子 draws upon Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha to explore how Kaneko transcended traditional tropes of revolutionary heroines as seductive and voluptuous sidekicks to their male counterparts.[10] Finally, Mae Michiko investigates the demarcation of gender roles as an essential element of the modern nation-building process.[11] She views Kaneko (and Kanno) as examples of women who, through their experiences, rejected this and transcended the social positions prescribed for them by the state.

This article draws particular inspiration from the work and methods of Yasumoto Takako 安元隆子. Yasumoto's studies have investigated the possible influence of Rousseau on Kaneko's memoirs, and how Kaneko's life in Korea and addition to the family register made her aware of the unfairness and brutality of the Japanese imperial state.[12] Yasumoto has also explored how Kaneko's experience of rape shaped her insistence on gender equality, and her escape from fatalism.[13] All of Yasumoto's work is characterized by close attention to Kaneko's life *and* thought. The present article also seeks to bring both aspects of Kaneko's legacy into focus and is particularly indebted to Yasumoto's recent study examining Kaneko's understanding of Max Stirner.[14] The focus here, though, is universality in Kaneko's thought and how this *differentiates* her from Stirner, a topic left unaddressed in Yasumoto's writings.

A letter Kaneko wrote to the court during her trial cites Max Stirner, a nineteenth-century German philosopher and founder of egoism, as her most significant influence.[15]

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[8] Yamada 1996; Raddeker 1997.

[9] Brady 2019.

[10] Naitō 2020.

[11] Mae 2014.

[12] Yasumoto 2020; Yasumoto 2021a.

[13] Yasumoto 2019; Yasumoto 2021b.

[14] Yasumoto 2022.

[15] Suzuki 2013, p. 345.

Stirner's thought had been introduced into Japan during the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912), when the dramatic social transformations associated with modernization created fertile ground for the spread of numerous ideas, including Stirner's egoism, a form of radical individualism often associated with anarchism and nihilism.[16] Such ideas were a reaction to the strongly authoritarian and anti-individualistic politics of the period.[17] In 1920, the anarchist Tsuji Jun published the first Japanese translation of Stirner's most significant work, *The Ego and Its Own*, under the title *Yuiitsusha to sono shoyū* 唯一者とその所有, although this was only of the first part of the work on "Man" (*Ningenhen* 人間篇). The following year, Tsuji released his translation of the entire text under the title *Jigakyō* 自我経 (The ego sutra).[18] Kaneko first encountered Stirner's philosophy in 1921 through her classmate Niiyama Hatsuyo 新山初代 (1902–1923). Her extensive engagement with and praise of Stirner's thought, and the fact she does not refer to any other source, suggests she was familiar with Tsuji's translation.

Kaneko left no extensive written legacy, and any attempt to reconstruct, decipher, and systematize her thought must rely on a few sources. The most exhaustive account of her philosophy is contained in two letters she submitted to the court.[19] These are supplemented by sporadic yet essential fragments of her thought in her memoir, interrogation records, and a personal letter to an unknown addressee.[20] Utilizing these disparate materials, I demonstrate how Kaneko's thought diverged from the Stirnerian version of egoism, and argue that this divergence was the result of her unshakable universalist belief in the inherent equality of humans. Together with Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan, I argue that the concept of universality in Kaneko's thought was not abstract, but one engendered by her experience of exclusion and non-belonging in society.[21] The article's contribution emphasizes that the status of the socially excluded is not just a particular position that is not and cannot be subsumed by the universal, but is counterintuitively the space where universality becomes manifest. The empirical case of Kaneko Fumiko exemplifies this theory of universality.

The Roots of Universality: Kaneko's Turbulent Life

Kaneko's understanding of the ideas of Stirner and others was filtered through the prism of her life, and it is crucial to examine her experience of exclusion, abuse, and exploitation to understand how she came to espouse a universalist position. These life experiences clearly shaped her worldviews. In prison, Kaneko would write a memoir posthumously published under the title *What Made Me Do What I Did?* (*Nani ga watashi o kō saseta ka* 何が私をこう

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[16] Sasaki 1974, p. 48; Yasumoto 2022, p. 62.

[17] Raddeker 1997, p. 97.

[18] Takaki 1982. This complete version was rereleased in 1929 under the original title, *Yuiitsusha to sono shoyū* (Yasumoto 2022, p. 62). Tsuji translated the 1907 English translation of Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* by Steven Tracy Byington (1868–1958), rendered as *The Ego and Its Own* (Tsuji 1982, pp. 9–10). Kaneko knew English, so it is possible she read Byington's English translation, although it is more likely she read Tsuji's translation (Yasumoto 2022, p 62). A 2017 translation by Wolfi Landstreicher of Stirner's text is titled *The Unique and Its Property.* This article uses the older title, as irrespective of whether Kaneko read the work in English or Japanese, that was the version she was familiar with.

[19] Suzuki 2013, pp. 344–356.

[20] Kaneko 2013, pp. 9–289; Suzuki 2013; Yamada 1996, pp. 327–329.

[21] Žižek 2012; McGowan 2020.

させたか).[22] In the text, Kaneko credited philosophical ideas for helping her understand the twisted workings of society, but also stressed the centrality of her lived experience. For instance, she stated:

> Socialism has not given me anything new. It only gave me a theory of the correctness of my feelings that I had acquired from my past circumstances. I was poor. I had been used, bullied, tormented, held down, deprived of my freedom, exploited, and controlled by people with money. Thus, I have always harbored a deep-seated antipathy towards those with such power. At the same time, I have always had deep compassion for those in the same situation as me. . . . It was socialism that ignited this rebellion and compassion in my heart.[23]

Kaneko makes it clear that both ideas and her life experiences were crucial to her rebellious path. Without radical ideas such as socialism, nihilism, and egoism, she would not have acquired a critical conceptual framework to understand the systemic causes of the injustice that plagued her life.[24] Absent such ideas, her hardships may have been seen as fate, against which there is little recourse. Many people led lives of hardship but did not become anarchists.

Both Kaneko's experiences and the ideas she encountered and absorbed must be considered in her intellectual formation. Ideas gave her a framework, but life experience was the raw material which would later be interpreted through it. To paraphrase Kant: lived experience without radical ideas is blind; radical ideas without lived experience are empty. Radical ideas gave Kaneko the tools to understand the systemic causes of her suffering and, by extension, potential solutions, while her experiences provided such ideas with something to work with, namely a purpose. Life and thought are clearly complementary for Kaneko. This article argues for the universalist dimension of her thought, but that universalism is only comprehensible if we understand Kaneko's experience of social marginalization. We must begin, then, with an understanding of her life.

Kaneko was born in Yokohama in 1903 to Kaneko Kikuno 金子きくの and Saeki Fumikazu 佐伯文一.[25] Whereas Kikuno was of humble peasant birth, her father's family was a prestigious sake-brewing household embodying the Japanese ideal of a family-owned business.[26] Kaneko's parents had different surnames because her father did not add her mother's name to his family register (*koseki* 戸籍)—perhaps because he did not want to stain the respected family name by including Kaneko's mother, an ordinary peasant girl, or because he intended to replace her with a younger and prettier woman one day.[27] Thus,

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[22] The title is a sentence from toward the end of the memoir, which Kurihara Kazuo 栗原一男, the friend to whom Kaneko entrusted the text, thought summed up Kaneko's intentions, see Kaneko 2013, p. 288.

[23] Kaneko 2013, p. 250. All translations from Japanese into English of Kaneko's writing and interrogation records are my own.

[24] Kaneko eventually distanced herself from socialism and came to see a socialist vision of a post-revolutionary society as untenable, but the socialist critique of modern capitalist society would always stay with her.

[25] This summary of her life primarily relies on her memoir (Kaneko 2013), and Yamada's (1996) critical biography of Kaneko.

[26] Ueno 2009, p. 81.

[27] Yamada 1996, pp. 16–17; Brady 2019, p. 2.

Kaneko's birth was not recorded, and she was officially an unregistered person (*musekimono* 無籍者).

Whereas diverse registration forms existed in earlier periods, the modern *koseki* system was introduced in Japan in the Meiji period to transform the various people of former feudal lands into a modern nation.[28] The registration of all Japanese subjects facilitated public order, allowing for the mobilizing the population for land cultivation or reclamation, the drafting of men for military service, collecting taxes, and enrolling children in primary education.[29] By being excluded from the register, Kaneko could not enjoy basic rights such as attending school. She was marked by exclusion at birth.

Abuse, poverty, abandonment, exploitation, and discrimination were constants throughout her life. Her father was an idle alcoholic, who frequently beat her mother and brought other women home, before abandoning Kaneko and her mother for her mother's younger sister. Kaneko's mother subsequently introduced different men into their lives and, at one point, even considered selling Kaneko off to a brothel. Kaneko would later note her mother's lack of independence.[30] Her mother eventually remarried and moved to her new husband's household, leaving Kaneko behind with her maternal grandparents.

When she was nine, Kaneko's paternal grandmother Mutsu ムツ took her to Korea, where Kaneko's aunt Kame カメ had married into the Iwashita 岩下 family, powerful and wealthy usurers in Bugang 芙江 Village (today a part of Sejong 世宗 City). The Iwashitas adopted and officially registered Kaneko as their daughter since they were childless.[31] The family was part of the Japanese elite living amid the newly-colonized Koreans. Kaneko later recorded that while she believed she would finally be able to live a decent life, her hopes were soon dashed. Her adoptive family was apparently appalled by her coarse habits, decided she was unfit for the role of the family's only child, and treated her as a housemaid.[32] Her grandmother was cruel and abused her physically. The constant torment allegedly drove her to the point of suicide, but as she was ready to plunge into a river, the will to live triumphed as the beautiful natural scenery convinced her that life was worth living. This change of heart gave her another purpose: vengeance against not only her tormentors but on oppressors in general: "With that in mind, I started to think, 'Don't die.' I must, together with those suffering like me, take my revenge on those who inflict suffering. I must not die."[33]

As Raddeker points out, this story of her attempted suicide is clearly a retroactive interpretation of past events: Kaneko reflects on her entire life while incarcerated and constructs a narrative of what brought her to that point.[34] Another clear example of this is when, in one of her interrogations, she said that she "witnessed the Korean riots for independence," referring to the March 1st Movement for which she later expressed deep admiration.[35] Kaneko interpreted her experiences in Korea as foundational for her subsequent activities.

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[28] Endō 2017, pp. 99, 101.

[29] Endō 2017, pp. 111, 115, 130; Brady 2019, p. 1.

[30] Kaneko 2013, p. 41.

[31] According to Kaneko (2013, p. 67; Yamada 1996, pp. 26–27), Mutsu, concerned about appearances, requested that Kaneko be first officially registered as a daughter of her maternal grandparents before being registered as the Iwashita's daughter, since directly adopting an unregistered child would be considered shameful and embarrassing. As a result, Kaneko was first registered as the fifth child of the Kaneko household before becoming the only child of the Iwashita family.

[32] Yamada 1996, pp. 36–39; Brady 2019, pp. 3–4.

[33] Kaneko 2013, p. 124. Many later authors also cite this suicide attempt as the turning point in Kaneko's life; see Raddeker 1997, p. 78; Brady 2019, p. 5.

[34] Raddeker 1997, p. 28.

Kaneko returned to Japan in 1919 and lived again with her maternal grandparents for a while, but her father Fumikazu soon appeared back in her life and invited her to move into his household. She later recounts that her father was interested in her because he sought to enrich himself by marrying Kaneko to her uncle Motoei 元栄, her mother's younger brother. Motoei was a Buddhist monk, and Fumikazu hoped to gain access to the temple's wealth through the marriage. However, Kaneko developed a romantic relationship with a local boy named Segawa 瀬川 that Motoei discovered, calling off the wedding. This setback angered her father, and when Kaneko subsequently criticized her father for lying and being a cheapskate when buying shoes for her brother, Fumikazu beat her violently. This confirmed in Kaneko her desire for independence.

In 1920, Kaneko left for Tokyo, working while attending two schools. She experienced labor exploitation and became acquainted with Christian and socialist activists. Initially, Saitō 斎藤 (presented as Itō 伊藤 in Kaneko's memoir), a student and rickshaw puller, introduced her to Christianity and the Salvation Army. Kaneko was fed up with her job and lodgings at a newspaper seller, and Saitō helped her find a new place to stay. She initially sold soap on the streets, but then had to change residence and occupation again. Kaneko moved into a Christian sugar merchant's home as a housekeeper, but the debauchery, greed, and exploitation she witnessed there disillusioned her. Christians preached high morals yet failed to live up to them. This was confirmed by Saitō, who ended their relationship saying that she evoked impure (sexual) feelings in him. For her, it was a contradiction "that 'Christians,' who advertise on the street 'love' as a banner, are prevented from practicing true love because they are bound and cowardly before the name of God, which they have created themselves."[36]

When Kaneko had been selling newspapers, some socialists gave her a pamphlet about the October Revolution. After abandoning Christianity, she stayed at the home of Hori 堀, a socialist printer, but soon became disillusioned with socialists as well. Hori was lazy and made others work while he rested upstairs under a *kotatsu*. Kaneko also accused the famous socialist activist Kutsumi Fusako 九津見房子 (1890–1980) of neglecting her children and hanging out with young men, and of hypocritically propagating the system's destruction while seeking fame within it. More materially, Kaneko once lent Kutsumi a kimono, which Kutsumi pawned and never reimbursed her for. Despite her disappointment with socialists, however, their critique of society provided her with theoretical tools with which to analyze modern society's inequality.

At school, Kaneko became acquainted with Niiyama Hatsuyo. As Naitō points out, Kaneko was impressed by Hatsuyo's independence as a woman and indifference to social expectations. Hatsuyo was skeptical of revolutionary idealism and disdained the people involved in such movements, but believed that one could be free and fulfilled if one worked on oneself and found one's task. It was Hatsuyo who introduced Kaneko to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Mikhail Artsybashev (1878–1927), as well as Stirner.[37] While Kaneko came to know of many movements, thinkers, and ideas, these nihilist and egoist philosophies solidified her thoughts. With these ideas and the example of Hatsuyo, Kaneko concluded that success in society is an empty, pointless, and vain project.

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[35] This was during the fourth interrogation on 23 January 1924; see Suzuki 2013, p. 306. Kameda (2020, p. 39) postulates that the lack of mention of the March 1st Movement is likely due to censorship.

[36] Suzuki 2013, p. 301.

> There is nothing more trifling than being what they call a distinguished person . . . I must have my own true contentment and freedom, must I not? I must be as I am.[38]

Kaneko's life had showed her the cruelty of society and its norms. The exposure to radical ideas enabled her to see the arbitrary, exploitative, and ultimately unnecessary values which shaped success in society. She would even come to reject education as inherently valueless, despite having yearned for it most of her life, as she became aware of education's use as a tool to climb up the social ladder; an inherently vain project.[39] While her understanding of egoism and nihilism must have continued to develop, one can perhaps designate this point as the birth of Kaneko, the nihilist.[40]

The Path to Terrorism

Socialist activism brought Kaneko into contact with Koreans residing in Tokyo, through whom she came across a poem titled "Pup" (*Inukoro* 犬ころ) by Park Yeol. Something struck a chord with her, and she became determined to meet the poet. After several failed attempts, they met and decided to live together. Before long they were engaged in rebellious activities, such as organizing meetings with other activists and publishing papers. Park introduced Kaneko to the Black Wave Society (Kokutōkai 黒濤会), a Korean socialist study group, and they founded, edited, and wrote for its newspaper *Black Wave* (*Kokutō* 黒濤).

The late 1910s and early 1920s were a fruitful era for socialist and labor movements in Japan, whose numbers swelled owing to the influence of the October Revolution, the rice riots of 1918, and labor disputes.[41] Anarchism gained popularity, particularly among printworkers, who established two anarchist trade unions called the Shinyūkai 信友会 and Seishinkai 正進会. Anarcho-syndicalism, the branch of anarchism that sees autonomous labor movements as the agents of revolution, was the most popular ideology at the time, with Ōsugi Sakae 大杉栄 (1885–1923) as its central figure. Along with his comrades, he published *Labor Movement* (*Rōdō undō* 労働運動), which would, for a short while, print articles by anarchists and communists alike.[42]

Initially, communists and anarchists cooperated, and their efforts culminated in Japan's first Mayday event and the formation of the Labor Union Alliance (Rōdō Kumiai Dōmeikai 労働組合同盟会).[43] This alliance was short-lived, and the following year a rift occurred between the two groups, now known as the anarchist-Bolshevik dispute (*ana-boru ronsō* アナ・

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[37] Kaneko 2013, p. 261; Naitō 2020, pp. 207–208.

[38] Kaneko 2013, p. 274.

[39] This does not imply that her curiosity or desire to learn were also extinguished. She just no longer equated them with social success or the urge to prove others wrong for doubting her.

[40] Raddeker 1997, pp. 225–226. About Kaneko's deepening understanding of Stirner's thought, particularly during her imprisonment, see Yasumoto 2022, pp. 68–69.

[41] Komatsu 1972, p. 92.

[42] Crump 1996, p. 20.

[43] Komatsu 1972, pp. 103, 106.

ボル論争). The Black Wave Society also split into communists and anarchists, echoing the broader dispute.[44] The former established the North Star Society (Hokuseikai 北星会), while the latter reorganized themselves as the Black Friends Society (Kokuyūkai 黒友会), where Ōsugi Sakae lectured.[45] This tension may have contributed to Kaneko's endorsement of the anarchist label.

Stirner's brand of nihilism and egoism informed Kaneko's anarchism; one highly individualistic and skeptical of collectivist ideals for a post-revolutionary society, such as those of anarcho-syndicalism. While Kaneko's rejection of collectivist visions sets her apart from socialist anarchists like Ōsugi, she was also not a Dadaist like Stirner's translator Tsuji Jun, a roaming vagabond who did not involve himself with rebellious activities or organizations.[46] Kaneko by contrast edited and wrote for the Black Friends Society's journal *Cheeky Koreans* (*Futoi Senjin* 太い鮮人), later renamed *Today's Society* (*Genshakai* 現社会).[47] However, the activity which led to her arrest and ultimately her death was Park's failed plot to obtain explosives with which to assassinate the crown prince. Although this plan never came to fruition, that they even considered such a treacherous act would ultimately be enough for the authorities to convict them.

In 1923, the Great Kantō earthquake rocked the general Tokyo area, causing many fires in residential areas. In its aftermath, it was rumored that Koreans were looting and setting Japanese homes ablaze.[48] This led to a massacre of Korean residents and Japanese left-wing activists, resulting in an estimated 6,618 deaths nationwide; among the victims were anarchists Itō Noe and Ōsugi Sakae, both detained and brutally murdered by the military police.[49] The government feared being held accountable for the massacre by Koreans and the international community. To save face, they found scapegoats in Kaneko Fumiko and Park Yeol, whose half-baked plan to assassinate the crown prince was twisted and framed as evidence of the real threat Koreans represented.

The authorities arrested them in 1923 and subjected them to approximately three years of imprisonment and interrogation, during which Kaneko wrote *What Made Me Do What I Did?* and a collection of poems.[50] The two were sentenced to death in 1926, but the authorities, fearing a potential backlash from their execution, commuted the sentence to life imprisonment.[51] Kaneko, though, died in prison that year, although the circumstances of her death remain obscure.[52] The theory that she hung herself as a last act of defiance (against an imperial pardon) remains popular.[53]

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[44] Raddeker 1997, p. 195.

[45] Raddeker 1997, p. 199.

[46] Ōsugi was inspired by Stirner, as he makes clear in his essay (Ōsugi 2014), but he was also strongly influenced by collectivist thinkers and revolutionaries like Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) and Georges Sorel (1847–1922). Unlike Kaneko, he believed that a worker's movement could bring about a new society.

[47] While primarily meaning "fat" or "thick," *futoi* 太い also means "daring," "shameless," "brazen," "audacious," or "cheeky." "Cheeky" here follows Raddeker's (1997, p. 198) translation. Kaneko and Park initially wanted to name their journal *Malcontent Koreans* (*Futei Senjin* 不逞鮮人), but the authorities did not allow this. However, in the Kantō dialect, the word *futoi* can also be pronounced *futei*, which sounds the same as malcontent (*futei* 不逞). According to Kaneko, an official at the police department called them "cheeky scoundrels" (*futoi yatsura* 太い奴ら), and that gave them the idea for the journal's name; see Suzuki 2013, p. 307.

[48] Kitamura 2013, p. 10.

[49] Yamada 1996, p. 142.

[50] Kaneko 2013.

[51] Yamada 1996, p. 351.

The Philosophy of Kaneko Fumiko

Many of the better-known anarchists of Kaneko's era, such as Ōsugi Sakae, Itō Noe, Ishikawa Sanshirō, and Hatta Shūzō 八太舟三 (1886–1934), accepted socialist and collectivist ideas like anarcho-syndicalism or Kropotkin's anarcho-communism. They had a vision of how society should be structured. In contrast, Kaneko, who believed that people's real motivations are inherently selfish and self-serving, was pessimistic about the possibility of a more just post-revolutionary society. Her thought came to be inflected by the nihilistic egoism of Max Stirner. This section will detail Stirner's philosophy and show how Kaneko adopted and adapted it.

Stirner's Thought

Although nihilism is today generally associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, Stirner was a key early figure.[54] While he never used the term in *The Ego and Its Own*, the book's introduction is titled "All Things are Nothing to Me,"[55] which had a double meaning—directed both externally and internally. The former is not limited to material things outside the individual and includes the following ideas:

> But, if I say to it, "you will pray, honor your parents, respect the crucifix, speak the truth, for this belongs to man and is man's calling," or even "this is God's will," then moral influence is complete; then a man is to bend before the calling of man, be tractable, become humble, give up his will for an alien one which is set up as rule and law; he is to abase himself before something higher: self-abasement.[56]

It is this denial of any inherent value to morality that marks nihilism. Morality and established values are grounded in raw power, which is arbitrary. However, ideas can exert authority and subjugate people precisely because they need not rely on forceful, physical coercion—Stirner referred to such ideas, essences, and concepts as "spooks."[57] Such signifiers are social; they are not the individual's creation but exist within a broader social structure. The egoist is aware that ideas are just spooks in one's head and does as they please with them, effectively coming to own them.[58]

For Stirner, "ownness" is the essential condition for an egoist. One puts the ego—one's uncompromised, unmitigated, and unmediated self-interest—as one's only criterion and guide:

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[52] Yamada 1996, pp. 237–238.

[53] Raddeker 1997, p. 69.

[54] Paterson 1971; Schiereck 2018.

[55] Stirner 1995, p. 5.

[56] Stirner 1995, p. 75.

[57] "To know and acknowledge essences alone and nothing but essences, that is religion; its realm is a realm of essences, spooks, and ghosts," see Stirner 1995, p. 41.

[58] Stirner 1995, p. 17.

> Now why, if freedom is striven after for love of the I after all, why not choose the I himself as beginning, middle, and end?[59]

The ego is not an abstract philosophical or psychological concept but a concrete, one-of-a-kind, unique, finite, and transitory individual.[60] Focusing on the self, an egoist "owns" oneself, precluding them from being defined by social signifiers. They do not allow other people or ideas to dictate their desires or interests, and so own themselves.[61]

Stirner contrasted ownness with freedom: "I am free from what I am *rid* of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*."[62] Ownness is absolute self-mastery, which returns us to Stirner's proclamation that all things are nothing to him, and the internal implications of this statement. Stirner describes himself as a "creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything."[63] The egoist is defined not by social signifiers but as "a construct to be developed."[64] Egoism aims for individuals to become arbiters of their own fate, and to not sacrifice their personal desires, passions, or self-interests in order to fit into society, receive God's grace, or adopt a greater cause.

Stirner propagated a radical individualism, but also argued for his preferred form of community, a "union of egoists."[65] People are involuntarily born into a society, adapt to their allotted social roles, and compromise their desires. However, in a voluntary union, people pursue their self-interests because "only in the union can you assert yourself as unique because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you."[66] A union enables an individual to achieve impossible things alone; it is "a multiplication of my force, and I retain it only so long as it is *my* multiplied force."[67] A union helps egoists grow; it is a "means to both validate being and bring about solidarity."[68] Egoists are free to leave or rebel against a union if they so wish; it is potential for rebellion and the reciprocal "recognition of one another's power of annihilation" function as a guarantee of fairer relations.[69]

Let us now see how Kaneko adopted these ideas.

Kaneko's Nihilistic Egoism

I argue that Kaneko's philosophy is summarized by her expression, "living in nothingness."[70] She criticized how most people lived in pursuit of vacuous material or ideational aims, motives which are not inherently valuable. Things acquire value only because people ascribe it to them. For example, Kaneko states, "the state's dignity and the emperor's sanctity are dignified and sacred only when protected by this power."[71] The state has no inherent properties that justify its authority; only through violently imposing its rule does it retroactively endow itself with an appearance of dignity or sanctity.

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[59] Stirner 1995, p. 148.
[60] Stirner 1995, p. 163.
[61] Stirner 1995, p. 153.
[62] Stirner 1995, p. 143.
[63] Stirner 1995, p. 7.
[64] Shields 2020, p. 452.
[65] Stirner 1995, p. 161.
[66] Stirner 1995, p. 276.
[67] Stirner 1995, p. 276.
[68] Shields 2020, p. 452.
[69] Blumenfeld 2018, p. 112.
[70] Original text: ニヒルの境に生きること; see Suzuki 2013, p. 347.
[71] Suzuki 2013, p. 346.

The same goes for morality in general, which she did not consider divine or natural but instead a tool to legitimate power relations. She denounced filial piety (*oya kōkō* 親孝行) as deployed by parents to rule over their children.[72] The strong (parents, rulers, employers) use morality to "protect their freedom of conduct and force the weak to submit."[73] This aligns with Stirner's thinking in which, for instance, church and state are the same, differing only in terms of their tools: whereas the former espouses devoutness as a virtue to its flock, the latter propagates morality to its subjects.

Yamada argues that Kaneko's anti-hierarchical view was entwined with her critical stance on gender relations and roles.[74] Her experience of being abused, exploited, and mistreated because of her gender led her to rebel against gender norms by, for example, refusing to enter a girls' school and making a pact for equal treatment and respect with Park.[75] Naitō points out how an imprisoned Kaneko's rejection of a futon from a friend expressed her desire to be seen solely as a human.[76] She refused to be an object of pity owing to her gender: "I am alive as a human being. I refuse to be seen as a 'fragile' woman and for these reasons I reject all the benefits based on this premise."[77]

As a nihilist, Kaneko rejected the authority of morality, the state, society, and metaphysical ideas. As an egoist, the only authority she acknowledged and followed was herself:

> So I declare: therefore, I do not recognize any "vocation" or "mission" above human beings, nay, above myself. In other words, "I want to do this, so I do this" is the only law and command I have to govern my actions. To put it simply, all my actions are equal to just "I do it because I want to," and I don't tell others that "you have to do this" or "you should be like that."[78]

Yasumoto notes that Kaneko became averse to notions of destiny, fate, or luck because people like her detested father regularly evoked fate to explain their misfortune.[79] This aversion stemmed from two intersecting reasons: faith in fate or luck represents faith in the authority of a higher power and rejection of one's capacity to assert one's will. For her, evoking such concepts meant passively resigning rather than taking responsibility and actively carving out the life one desires.

An egoist acknowledges no authority above oneself and, therefore, has self-interest as the only compass to guide their actions and judgments. For Kaneko, "it goes without saying that the state and the individual are incompatible. For the state's prosperity, individuals must not have their own will. The state will fall when the individual awakens to their own will."[80] An individual's strength to assert one's freedom and ownness against oppressors (the state, parents, employers, and so on) is the ultimate weapon. That is why she saw great beauty in rebellion:

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[72] Suzuki 2013, p. 299.

[73] Suzuki 2013, p. 300.

[74] Yamada 2006, pp. 19–21.

[75] Kaneko 2013, p. 207. It is important to note that Kaneko comes to describe her desire to prove herself by competing and outdoing men as vanity. Yasumoto (2018, p. 22) argues that Kaneko's desire to outdo men is internalized misogyny.

[76] Naitō 2020, p. 206.

[77] Yamada 1996, p. 329.

[78] Suzuki 2013, p. 351.

[79] Yasumoto 2021b, pp. 53–55.

> Here I cry out: Rebel, rebel! Rebel against all power! It is good to restrain a strong power. To rebel against an oppressor is not only good for the oppressed; it is also good for all humankind. And that alone is the only good and the only beauty in what humans do.[81]

These words resemble those of the collectivist anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), but Kaneko never offered any blueprint for the kind of society these rebellions should bring about, and was skeptical of revolutionary projects.[82] She believed that people were too materialistic to create a society that rejected the importance of private property.[83] This does not mean, though, that she gave up on forming bonds with others:

> I have indeed acted and lived as a human being. And based on my being a human being, I have formed relationships with many of my friends. And you also surely see me in the light of my humanity. And only by seeing me as such can we be true comrades. In other words, only a union based on equality can be a genuinely free and personal union.[84]

It was essential for her that her individuality and will are respected in relationships. She offered a vague, short description of how an ideal society should function based on this principle:

> I think [that] just as I have my own head and my own feet to think about myself and walk my own path, so should others have their own head and their own feet. In other words, independence and self-governance, where every person is the master of his or her own life and governs it accordingly, would encourage me to begin sketching out my desired society, if only faintly.[85]

Kaneko wanted her partnership with Park to reflect the ideals she described above, so they made a three-point pact for a fair and noncoercive relationship: (1) they would live together as comrades, (2) Kaneko would not be perceived as a woman in their activism, and (3) if one became ideologically corrupted and collaborated with the authorities, they would break up. By adhering to these points, their individualities would be protected, and they would "mutually cooperate in their activism for the sake of their ideology."[86] Kaneko described her relationship with Park as a partnership of "one and one person," meaning that neither submitted to the other's will, and they did not form a collective will to which their individual intentions would be subsumed.[87] Their desires and interests were aligned, so they came together to multiply their power as individuals but not to be fused into one will. Thus, their relationship can be considered egoistic. They sought a nonhierarchical, noncoercive human relationship—a union of egoists.

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[80] Suzuki 2013, p. 351.

[81] Original text: ここにおいて私は叫ぶ――反逆せよ反逆せよ！ あらゆる力に反逆せよ！ 強い力に掣肘を加えることは、それは善である。すなわち圧制者に反逆をすることは被圧制者にとって善であると同時に、それは全人類の善である。しかしてそれのみがただ人間がすることのうちにただ一つの善であり、美である――と; see Suzuki 2013, p. 347.

[82] Shields 2020, p. 453.

[83] Suzuki 2013, pp. 346–347.

[84] Yamada 1996, p. 328.

[85] Suzuki 2013, p. 305.

How successful they were is debatable, especially when one considers Kaneko's lamentation in her second letter to the court (26 February 1926).[88] She confessed how she became involved in one of Park's plans to acquire a bomb without truly consenting to it and how she should have been egoistic and left Park. Not doing so, she became an unwilling sacrifice in someone else's plan.[89] Yasumoto argues that Kaneko's doubts about whether she should have left Park resulted in a deepening of her understanding of Stirner's egoism which enabled her to free herself from the ideal of rebellion, a "spook" for which Kaneko worked even against her own interest.[90] However, in the very same letter, Kaneko proudly reaffirms her love for Park and valiantly accepts all the consequences brought about by her implication in the plan, apologizing to Park for doubting him, doubts which she describes as "egoistic."[91]

Another nihilistic and egoistic aspect of Kaneko's attitude can be gleaned from her utter indifference to a person's background. In an imperialist and colonial era, where people from mainland Japan considered themselves superior to their colonized subjects, such as Taiwanese and Koreans, Kaneko rejected nationalism and supported her Korean comrades by wearing traditional Korean clothing to the Supreme Court of Judicature (Daishin'in 大審院) for the commencement of her public trial on 26 February 1926.[92] Kaneko believed that everyone is inherently equal, regardless of social signifiers, and that all people are entitled to be treated equitably owing to the simple fact of our common humanity. That is why she saw it necessary to overthrow the state, which artificially imposes hierarchies between people, such as rulers and the ruled, oppressors and the oppressed, and exploiters and the exploited. The state, capitalism, and other oppressive social formations hinder individuals from growing and pursuing their self-interests. Her egoism encompassed individual self-assertion that led to an active anarchist rebellion against such formations.

Nevertheless, one could argue that this unshakable belief in human equality is incompatible with Stirner's egoism as it ascribes value to abstract ideas, such as "humanity" and "equality," which have an almost transcendent, metaphysical value. In Stirner's terms, is Kaneko espousing a belief in spooks?

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[86] Suzuki 2013, p. 305.

[87] Suzuki 2013, p. 353.

[88] Suzuki 2013, pp. 352–354.

[89] As Park had not consulted her about the plan to obtain a bomb, Kaneko felt that she had been implicated in events without her consent, which goes against egoist principles. In Stirner's terms, Park's unilateral behavior caused their union to degenerate into a society.

[90] Yasumoto 2022, pp. 67–68.

[91] Suzuki 2013, p. 354. For more on this see Dolinšek 2022.

[92] Yamada 1996, p. 205.

An Unfaltering Belief in the Equality of All

Despite Kaneko's professed admiration for Stirner, the latter does not share her enthusiasm for universality. Given his emphasis on the absolute, irreducible, and unique singularity of the individual, it is not difficult to understand his aversion to universality, commonly understood as something that transcends individuals in their particularity. He makes this explicit in his negative stance toward the concept of "man" (humanity):

> To see in you and me nothing further than "men," that is running the Christian way of looking at things, according to which one is for the other nothing but a concept (a man called to salvation, for instance), into the ground.[93]

Stirner sees the deployment of abstract concepts, such as humanity, as tools to reduce individual uniqueness and enforce ways of thinking, valuing, and behaving. Such universal concepts, according to Stirner, promote conformity by making individuals identify with those terms and, consequently, adopt the prescribed modes of being:

> So every opinion must be abolished or made impersonal. The person is entitled to no opinion, but, as self-will was transferred to the state, property to society, so opinion too must be transferred to something *general*, "man," and thereby become a general human opinion.[94]

Stirner is similarly hostile to the notion of "equality." For Stirner, people have striven to overcome inequalities by considering everyone as equal to their fellow human beings and consequently "brought on this last equalization, levelled all inequality, laid man on the breast of man."[95] An egoist is "the unique"—a singular entity whose particularity cannot be defined by any essence. As the unique "no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me; they are only names."[96]

Stirner argues that the individual that has awoken to one's unique self becoming an egoist is inevitably a danger to institutions of power; thus, the authorities deploy abstract concepts to assimilate individuals into a generic mass. He says that "all states, constitutions, churches, have sunk by the *secession* of individuals; for the individual is the irreconcilable enemy of every *generality*, every *tie*, every fetter."[97] Institutions like the state require equalizing and flattening universal concepts to subjugate individuals and keep them from straying from their allotted roles.

Despite Stirner's antipathy toward universalist thinking, however, Kaneko fully embraced the notion of humanity's inherent equality:

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[93] Stirner 1995, p. 155.

[94] Stirner 1995, pp. 115–116.

[95] Stirner 1995, p. 123.

[96] Stirner 1995, p. 324.

[97] Stirner 1995, p. 192. Emphasis in original.

> I have always been a great believer in the equality of human beings. Human beings must be equal as human beings. There is no fool and no genius. No one is strong; no one is weak. I believe that all human beings are completely equal in terms of their value as natural beings on earth and that all human beings should, therefore, enjoy the full and equal rights of human life only by virtue of their qualification as human beings.[98]

For Kaneko, humans were neither equal because of some liberal ideology that would grant people equality through a constitution nor because God said so. For her, human equality was an obvious truth that did not require any legal or metaphysical grounding. She asserted that it was the existing sociopolitical system that divided and allocated people into unequal positions.[99] Only humans remain after the social categories that separate people and make them unequal are removed.

In such a state, Kaneko claimed it is useless to try and separate them into higher and lower, strong and weak, smart and stupid. Her rejection of established values strips the nobles of their assumed superiority. With the sanctity of rulers founded on established values, nihilist insight into the ultimate groundlessness of said values exposes the artificiality, arbitrariness, and gratuitousness of unequal human divisions.

One may consider Stirner and Kaneko's positions on universality incompatible or that Kaneko's universalist position reflects a betrayal of true egoism. I contend that there is a way to think of Kaneko's universality that reduces it to an abstract essence that flattens all particularity and uniqueness into a generic commonality. Kaneko's belief in universality, paradoxically, originates from and is tied to her exclusion from society.

Kaneko: The Unregistered, the Woman, and the Worker

It was Kaneko's social position (or lack thereof) and her resultant experiences that endowed her thought with a universal range. I categorize her trials and tribulations into those she faced as an unregistered person, a woman, and a worker. Her lack of registration meant that she was not legally recognized as a Japanese citizen and consequently denied a citizen's rights. She first noticed discrimination toward her when she could not enter school, although she did not quite grasp the reason for her mistreatment. Although Kaneko was permitted to unofficially attend classes after her mother pleaded to a local school, she was continuously singled out and looked down upon by the school's staff. It was not until she arrived in Korea and became registered as the daughter of the Iwashita family that she became aware of her hitherto unregistered status as the reason behind the discrimination. She describes this realization as the factor that helped her understand the inherently discriminatory nature of the legal system:

> Although I exist, the law did not admit I am real because I was unregistered. My presence was ignored simply because the law did not recognize my existence.[100]

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[98] Original text: 私はかねて人間の平等を深く考えております。人間は人間として平等であらねばなりませぬ。そこには馬鹿もなければ、利口もない。強者もなければ、弱者もない。地上における自然的存在たる人間としての価値からいえば、すべての人間は完全に平等であり、したがってすべての人間は人間であるという、ただ一つの資格によって人間としての生活の権利を完全に、かつ平等に享受すべきはずのものであると信じております; see Suzuki 2013, p. 320.

[99] Suzuki 2013, p. 321.

[100] Suzuki 2013, p. 301.

It was her acquisition of Japanese nationality (by being included in a family register) which paradoxically enabled her to identify with other excluded persons, such as Koreans.

Yamada notes how Kaneko's mistreatment because of her gender also contributed to her critical outlook.[101] From her mother's intention to sell her to a brothel to her father's attempt to marry her to her uncle, she saw that being a woman meant to be reduced to an object at others' disposal. She lamented how "my uncle freely toyed with me, my father used me as a tool, and then, like a worn-out pair of shoes, they threw me away, trampled on me, and kicked me."[102] While in Tokyo, she dated men but also noticed that they were only using her as a sexual plaything before discarding her. Furthermore, the fact that she was discouraged from pursuing an education and an independent lifestyle and instead pushed to learn sewing and become a "good wife and wise mother" showed her the limited expectations and social roles society assigns to women. This caused her to disidentify with the signifier of "woman" and the manifold disadvantages and limited benefits that it brought.

Her class position also came with many disadvantages in society, with poverty representing a constant struggle until moving to Korea. After moving to Tokyo, life again became a relentless struggle for survival, with her having to work for little pay. Through her experience and acquaintance with socialist ideas, she came to understand the underlying cause of these struggles: exploitation. Despite working excessively and being paid only a pittance, employers expected gratitude for keeping their workers employed. However, Kaneko realized that the hard labor of others kept businesses and lifestyles afloat. Owners exploited them because "there was much money to be gained from students."[103] She noticed how workers, whose work keeps businesses afloat, were excluded from the fruits of their own labor.

This exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation undoubtedly brought her much pain and anguish, but also fostered her universalistic belief in human equality. Her subordinate position in society allowed her to empathize and identify with others who were similarly marginalized, such as Koreans. Social distinctions such as man and woman, Japanese and Korean, or rich and poor lost value in her eyes. Ultimately, she saw people only as human beings beyond the hierarchical distinctions that such social signifiers create.

The Universality of Exclusion

Stirner argued that universality was employed by powerful institutions to ensure their continued existence and to subjugate individuals. Universality imposes ideas or ways of life on others, as universal claims silence particular voices that do not conform, creating excluded subjects. Universality can also be used as a flattening concept—by reducing individuals to generic signifiers, such as citizen, woman, or worker, one reduces their unique, ineffable singularity to something generic.

It is, of course, undeniable that claims of universality have been used to impose and justify the exercise of power. Nonetheless, I argue here that Kaneko deployed universality in her thought in such a way as to avoid Stirner's criticisms. To clarify this, I turn to the

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[101] Yamada 2006, pp. 18–19.

[102] Kaneko 2013, p. 188.

[103] Kaneko 2013, p. 217.

Hegelian-psychoanalytic-Marxist philosophy of Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan, who do not merely dismiss universality as an oppressive ideological tool to assert one's hegemony. Žižek contends that universality and particularity are not dualistically opposed but are dialectically implicated in each other. "Actual universality 'appears' (actualizes itself) as the experience of negativity, of the inadequacy-to-itself; of a particular identity."[104]

> In short, a universality arises "for itself" only through or at the site of a *thwarted particularity*. Universality inscribes itself into a particular identity as its inability to fully become itself: I am a universal subject insofar as I cannot realize myself in my particular identity—this is why the modern universal subject is by definition "out of joint," lacking its proper place in the social edifice.[105]

Žižek argues that marginalization from system and society does not imply that the excluded one becomes invisible with no effects on the exclusionary order. Excluded subjects are the site of true universality because their exclusion and non-belonging highlight the system's false claim to universality. The empirical example of Kaneko Fumiko can help clarify this abstract idea.

Kaneko is a painful reminder of society's failure to become a complete, holistic totality, that is, to close in on itself and become an organic, harmonious whole in which everyone is in their proper place. Organicist harmony is only a pretense because it must violently exclude someone while striving to achieve this ideal. Therefore, harmony cannot be truly harmonious, as the excluded part haunts it like a perpetual symptom, the vengeful return of inevitable leftovers caused by the necessary process of exclusion.

These leftovers are not just empirical remnants that a more inclusive, open system can someday include. The act of exclusion is structurally necessary because those that seem to be a barrier to the system's completion (the excluded) are, at the same time, a necessary condition of its existence. This barrier brings the system into existence in the first place. Systems exist to regulate and mediate social relations because these relationships are not naturally harmonious but defined by antagonisms. Totality, control, and mastery depend on what they cannot assimilate: "[Its] external barrier is really an internal limit."[106] No matter how hard the system strives to assimilate, include, or eliminate its excluded remnant, a new remainder always appears to bar completion. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this perpetual remnant a symptom of the system.

Kaneko was painfully aware of how imperial Japan was an exclusionary system that did all it could to suppress its excluded symptoms. She understood how harmony was just a facade for a brutal system of exploitation and oppression and actively strived to expose this. Her exclusion was an endless source of pain and suffering, but also gave her the means to distance herself from social determinations. She describes this process in her memoir:

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[104] Žižek 2012, p. 361.
[105] Žižek 2012, p. 362.
[106] McGowan 2020, p. 62.

> From the time I was born, my life has been full of misfortune. I was abused all the time in Yokohama, Yamanashi, Korea, and Hamamatsu. I could not come to hold a sense of self. But now, I am grateful for the bullies of the past. I am thankful to my father, mother, grandparents, aunt, and uncle. I am thankful to my destiny in its entirety for not letting me come from a wealthy family, but making me suffer to the fullest everywhere and in every aspect of my life. Why thankful? If I had been raised by my father, grandparents, aunt, and uncle without any tribulations, I probably would have been molded by the ideas, character, and life of those I despise and hold in contempt so much. I would not have finally found my own self. But thanks to what fate has not blessed me with, I have found myself.[107]

I describe what Kaneko is talking about in the above quote as alienation. However, I deploy this concept slightly differently than its common usage, where it is often used to describe an exclusively negative social phenomenon, something undesirable and in need of overcoming. Kaneko was barred from participating in society as a fully-fledged member. While still a part of society, she was never recognized as such, never given a respected place within it. This is how Kaneko was alienated from society.

As the system pushed Kaneko to the margins of society, she became disillusioned with the idea of finding a recognized place in it. For a period, she had wanted to prove herself to others by acquiring an education and achieving success that was seen as available only to men, but her encounters with anarchistic, nihilistic, and egoistic ideas convinced her of the vanity and emptiness of trying to secure a position for herself. This caused her to disinvest from social positions and signifiers, so that rather than trying to conform with the norms such signifiers imposed, she instead sought to shape herself. Her alienation inadvertently opened a space of freedom. Whereas such a space is theoretically available to anyone, it is not easy for a person invested and comfortable in their privileged social position to become aware of this space. Possession of special advantages, regardless of whether these are due to nationality, gender, or class, act as a barrier to not being defined by social signifiers. Kaneko refused to identify with such signifiers, accepting her exclusion and lack of belonging. Her disinvestment from social signifiers enabled her to overlook differences, such as ethnicity in the case of Koreans, and to identify with and feel compassion for different people.

While particular identities (Korean, woman, proletarian) distinguish people from the universal (Japanese), a universal sense of non-belonging unites these excluded, marginalized, and exploited people. Kaneko and Park did not belong to society; the only position available to them was a marginalized one, a non-position. Yet it is precisely in this thwarted particularity that universality manifests itself:

> The universal is the stopping point that prevents particulars from realizing themselves fully as particulars. They are universally united through the failure of a full realization.[108]

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[107] Kaneko 2013, pp. 197–198.

[108] McGowan 2020, p. 61.

Non-belonging is a universal trait that everyone shares. Many people desire to belong, and some go to extraordinary lengths, such as dying for one's nation in war, to ensure a sense of belonging.[109] That is why authorities perceive figures like Kaneko and Park as threats—their existence exposes the fragility of belonging. Kaneko could assert that all people are inherently equal because equality for her implied equality for everyone.

Kaneko's rebellion has a universal scope because to be equal means that everyone participates in the space of non-belonging. Non-belonging, no longer in binary opposition with belonging, comes to mean liberation from social determinations and the freedom to carve one's path. Whereas non-belonging as the opposite of belonging is defined as an excluded and marginalized position simultaneously inside and outside the system, universalizing non-belonging entails abolishing this binary opposition, which would affect everyone. It would mean doing away with institutions that are by their very nature exclusionary, such as the state and the imperial family. It is not surprising, then, that Kaneko's life experiences of exclusion and her acquaintance with radical ideas promoting detachment from social signifiers led her to join the anarchist revolt.

Conclusions

Kaneko's belief in the universal equality of humanity is not based on some abstract, positive, and describable characteristics (for example, rationality, moral conscience, or soul).[110] If it were so, Stirner could legitimately have accused her of worshiping spooks. Her universality originated from a negative aspect, something everyone lacks in common—the universal absence of belonging.

The non-belonging, the lack of a proper social position, is painful, but it also opens the possibility of detaching oneself from social signifiers. This opens a space of freedom, where one can define oneself freely and actively, instead of being passively defined by the labels assigned to one by society. In this sense, I draw a parallel between non-belonging and Stirner's (creative) nothing, which rejects being a "something," identifying and adapting to abstract social signifiers and adopting their prescribed behavior and values, and instead chooses to create oneself from scratch. Moreover, disinvestment from social signifiers also means that one is not concerned with, and can look past, others' backgrounds and labels, such as ethnicity or gender, and see an equal human that similarly fails to belong. While Stirner remained blind to this universality, Kaneko's life experiences made it impossible to ignore. Kaneko did not worship spooks but was a specter herself, one that haunts Japanese history—the specter of the excluded.

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[109] Naoki Sakai (2005) explores the length to which colonized subjects and migrants were ready to go to assure themselves a place in the dominant nation be examining the writings of Taiwanese in imperial Japan and Japanese-Americans during World War II.

[110] By positive and negative, I do not mean a value judgment, good or bad. I use positive to denote features that can be described, while negative features can only be described as an absence or a negation of a positive term.

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