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Images of Exclusion in Shinsei Kamattechan's Work: Bullying, *Hikikomori*, Unemployment, Mental Illness, Gender Non-conformity in Contemporary Japan

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author focuses on the contemporary Japanese music band, Shinsei Kamattechan 神聖かまってちゃん. The band's songwriter, who goes by the artistic pseudonym of "Noko" (の子), seems to base their (they are non-binary) oeuvre on their own experiences of being bullied and excluded, as well as that of suffering from mental illness, suicidal thoughts, and unemployment. These experiences found in Kamattechan's work can be called "images of exclusion".

The aim of this paper is to present the aforementioned images of exclusion in a broader sociological context. To do that, the article analyses the band's songs in a broader perspective based on the academic literature on the topic of Heisei Japan (1989–2019).

The paper concludes by providing evidence that his family's origin was as a Heisei era *hi-shimin* (非市民; people excluded from the norm) from the start, with Noko's father being part of the "working poor". Various social problems of Heisei-era Japan (for example bullying or *hikikomori* 引きこもり) are clearly reflected in Noko's biography and closely intertwined with their art.

KEYWORDS: NEET, bullying, *hikikomori*, mental illness, pop rock music, avant-garde, outsider music, Internet, Heisei Japan

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Introduction

The Japanese music scene is vast and holds a variety of styles, from over-produced J-pop on the one hand to avant-garde noise (“Japanese blues” – see: Bath 2014) on the other. Although in general the pop music of the country is seen as being overly refined, produced and polished, as well as narrow-minded (young artist Haru Nemuri talks about strict rules that J-pop follows, see Terry 2021), there are artists who go against the norm. Shinsei Kamattechan, whose music is the topic of this article, may be considered one of such groups. This band’s music may be considered a synthesis of pop and avant-garde (pop music cherishes vulgarity too and often incorporates polar opposites, like gangsta rap being a fad in the 90s). But what distinguishes the band is their use of the Internet to self-promote self-recorded music and to stream the daily lives of the members. Nowadays streaming is nothing new, but in the latter half of 2000s, it was a refreshing trend. Then, in the realm of the Japanese Internet, the showing of one’s face in the cyberspace was considered a taboo (see Takeuchingu 2020).

The author of the band’s music and lyrics, Noko の子 (they are non-binary), bases their songs on their own experiences of being bullied and excluded, of suicidal thoughts, mental illness, unemployment and other such experiences. The aim of this paper is to present those issues in the broader context of Heisei Japan’s society. To do that, the paper first draws from the academic literature on Heisei Japan to present the problem, and then introduces the band’s songs connected to the issue. These experiences are the titular “images of exclusion” found in Kamattechan’s music.

1. Songs like a diary: The introduction to Shinsei Kamattechan’s music and *Ringin’ in Their Ears*

Shinsei Kamattechan was initially formed in 2007 by three friends who had known each other since preschool: Noko の子 – real name Ōshima Ryōsuke 大島亮介, Mono (stylized as “mono”, in Latin alphabet) – the leader of the band – and Chibagin ちばぎん. Misako みさこ, the drummer, also joined, but she was found through the Internet.

Since Noko is basing their musical work on their own experiences, this article will now present some events from their life that affected their work. Noko was bullied since primary school both by girls and boys. This is what caused them to drop out of high school (Shiozuka 2011).

Before dropping out, Noko entered a high school distant from their home, Tōkyō-gakkan in Shisui-machi, where they no longer experienced bullying. But because of previous experiences, they had already developed Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder which manifested as hearing voices saying things such as “Die, Ōshima”, and “You disgust me”. On an Internet stream they said hearing voices was similar that of the symptoms of schizophrenia. The stream (Noko-kamattechan [kirinuki] 2020) took place when Noko was 31 years old and they said they were now improved. But until the age of 25, the experiences were severe. This means that when they begun Shinsei Kamattechan, they were still very bothersome. The stream must have taken place around 2016, but it was uploaded by a fan account to YouTube in 2020. There is another significant event from Noko's youth that should be discussed. Noko does not talk about the topic openly (probably it is too much of a private matter), so I could not determine exactly when it happened, but Noko was bereaved of their mom. There is one song of which the lyrics are not published, *Sei Maria Kinen Byōin* 聖マリア記念病院 (‘St. Mary’s memorial hospital’). It seems that the words “angels are over, over, over, / mom is over, over, game over” can be heard in the song. There is a rumor among fans of the band that the title is a name of a mental institution Noko went to after her death. The author found a mental hospital with that name in Narita, Chiba Prefecture, which is the same prefecture Noko is from. The hospital offers care “based on the Christ’s compassion”. That could explain the religious motifs that are found in Noko’s music.

Some time after dropping out of high school, Noko began to attract attention online by streaming their daily life, releasing homemade music videos, running blogs, and streaming their own guerilla gigs. This became a chance for an EP debut, *Tomodachi-o Koroshite-made* 友達を殺してまで (‘Kill even your friends’) in 2010 as the band Shinsei Kamattechan (Oricon n.d.a). It is hard to say how much of a mainstream band Shinsei Kamattechan is. Besides the cult following, the band’s Oricon (Japanese music charts) results vary from 43rd position (*Tomodachi-o Koroshite-made*, 2010), 16th and 17th position (*Tsumanne* つまんね, ‘Boring’, 2010 and *Minna Shine* みんな死ね, ‘Everyone die’, 2010) to 9th position with the album *8-gatsu 32-nichi-e* (‘Let it be August 32nd’, 2011; see: Oricon n.d.b). It is also notable that there is a fictional movie revolving around the band called *Gekijōban Shinsei Kamattechan. Rokkunrōru-wa Nari Yamanai* (*Ringin in Their Ears*, 2011) released early in their career and a NHK ETV special report about the band from the same year (Shiozuka 2011).

Rokkunrōru-wa Nari Yamanai ロックンロールは鳴り止まないっ (*Ringin in Their Ears*) is considered the most accomplished song that Noko has produced. Combining a simple yet powerful chord progression written out for a catchy piano and noisy guitar, the song’s lyrics tell the tale of Noko’s initial encounter with rock music. The subject of the song rents The

Beatles' and Sex Pistols' CDs in a local Tsutaya (rental service store) near the station only to be disappointed. But then, coming back from extra-curricular activities in school, he tries to remove his earphones and Walkman only to find that the music did not stop ringing in his ears. What follows is a buildup in which Noko sings that they have not changed from back then and that the melody of the song still rings from afar. The song's narrator craves the stimulus caused by rock music even now: "More, more, more, give me more!". There is also an addressee in the song. The *kimi* ('you') stands far away, and the subject wants to "let it all out" to him. The *kimi* says that "recently every song sounds like shit" whatever the decade. That is why the narrator will shout: "Rock and roll will not stop ringing", as Noko sings in the apogee of the song (the lyrics can be found here: Fujii (ed.) 2010: 22–23).

Saitō Tamaki 斎藤 環 (a psychologist) in *Poppusu-de Seishin-igaku* ポップスで精神医学 ('Psychology of pop') considers the song crucial to the success of the group (Yamato et al. 2015: 85–86). Full lyrics of the song also open the 40-page special material about the band in 2010 *Quick Japan* magazine (issue 90). At the time that issue was published, the song, which had been uploaded to YouTube on 26th of January 2008 (Sawayaka et al. 2010: 56), had already accumulated 471,1278 views (Koyama 2011: 75).

2. "Images of exclusion" found in Noko's music

2.1. *Ijime* – bullying

The previous section has introduced the music of Shinsei Kamattechan and life of Noko. The following parts of the paper explain the lyrics of the songs in the broader context of Japanese society. First is the subject of *ijime*, or school bullying in Japan.

Bullying has been considered a systematic problem in Japan since the 80s, when *ijime* was recognized as a cause of suicides among the pupils (Akiba et al. 2010: 369). Previous to that, school violence was considered an acceptable form of control (Kingston 2004: 25–26). Since the 60s, when Japan's rapid economic growth began, corporations (rather than the government) had increasingly more power over schools. This in the 70s is the cause of "Japanese collectivism". This change caused severe standardization and competitiveness among the pupils, leaving less and less room for individuality. Strict school rules were introduced. The students were expected to conform to group norms and standards, with not much space left for individual needs (Asano 2000: 104–105). It was key to Japan's success, and thus hypothetical changes to this system were feared (Kingston 2019: 232).

In the school year of 1991/92 *ijime* was yet again increasing. Fourteen thousand social workers were hired to battle this problem (Tubbs 1994: 507). In 1995, MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) hired psychologists to work in schools (Ando et al. 2007: 766). These measures worked, as the cases of *ijime* decreased by two thirds by 2005 (Akiba et al. 2010: 370).

It is worth mentioning that another major problem of Japanese education is *futōkō* 不登校 or *tōkō kyōhi* 登校拒否, that is school refusal. In the school year of 2007/08, 130 thousand pupils were engaged in school refusal (Willis et al. 2008: 496). School refusal is not necessarily connected to bullying, however. It may be a revolt against the rigorous system of education, which prevents creativity (Kingston 2004: 26).

The increase in *ijime* in 1991/92 seems significant in the context of Shinsei Kamattechan, since Noko, born 1985, was just starting to go to the elementary school.

Saitō Tamaki states that the trauma of having been bullied in school may linger on as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and influence adult life (Yamato et al. 2015: 95–98). This may explain why so many of Kamattechan's songs deal with this topic. Saitō writes he sees inspiration from such experiences in songs like *Gakkō-ni Ikitakunai* 学校に行きたくない ('I don't want to go to school'), *Yūrei Miman* ゆーれいみマン ('Less than a ghost'), *Penteru* ぺんてる ('Pentel'), *Ribon* りぼん ('Ribbon'), *Kamisama Soredewa Hidoi Nari* 神様それではひどいなり ('God, why are you doing this to me?') and *Takeda-kun* たけだくん ('Takeda').

According to the editor at Music Magazine, *Yūgata-no Piano* 夕方のピアノ ('Evening's piano') is an even more essential Kamattechan's song than *Ring in Their Ears* (Koyama 2011: 75). The song's major mode and simple, naïve melody seems to contrast with the lyrics, which deal with bullying experiences at school. "Die, Satō", shouts Noko, his voice's pitch shifted by a vocal processor to sound child-like. This pitch-shifted voice is heard in many of Noko's songs. Satō, a Japanese surname, in the song designates a real-life person – a harasser who bullied Noko in an elementary school and junior high school (Noko 2013: 108). "Every day I leave home / thinking I want to kill you" – one can suppose that Noko is, by this song, reliving the experiences of his past, and the pitch-shifting adds to that (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 106–107).

In Noko's volume of poems, next to the lyrics of the song we find a quote: "Because Satō changed my life. He ripped it out of the ground and turned it upside-down. He is the one who gave me my first nickname, 'Ōshima alien'"

(Noko 2013: 108). Noko also brings Satō up in an internet stream on 12th January 2009 (Saitō Tamaki also mentions these words). They describe the kind of bullying that they received from him, such as locking Noko in the toilet, pouring water on them, trampling their face, blackmailing them for money – “the typical form of *ijime* (bullying) in Japan”, as they say. Noko also said that Satō stood out among the perpetrators, but it was not only him who bullied them.

The band planned for *Yūgata-no Piano* to be a major debut single, but due to the lyrics, which consist of the command “die” for the most part and referencing a real-life person, it was self-released in the quantity of 4000 units. They sold out immediately (Koyama 2011: 75).

According to Saitō, Kamattechan’s songs hint at exclusion even when they are not dealing directly with the topic of *ijime*. The psychologist gives a valuable insight into one of these songs, *Tomodachi Nante Iranai Shine* 友達なんていらぬ死ね (‘I need no friends, die’). Saitō first interprets the opening lines of the song’s lyrics (“There is one person whose head I would shoot off with a shotgun / and eat it with stew”) as referring to Satō. The song’s chorus says “‘Oh, really?’ / If I could speak such lines, / would I have friends?”. The psychologist writes this could be an image of a school break. During recess, people who are bullied often pretend to sleep with heads on their desks, scared to move because then someone would take their seats. Then they hear other people chatting: “oh, really?”. They feel a mixture of envy and hatred (Yamato et al. 2015: 92–94).

It is worth mentioning that in the 2019 song *Shizuka-na Ano Ko* 静かなあの子 (‘Silent girl’) there is a similar depiction of a person curling up in their seat at school. Time passes by, but the theme of bullying does not seem to go away from Kamattechan’s music.

Noko dropped out of school. By becoming a songwriter, Noko explored the possibilities that maybe only a school dropout could have – school refusal is in many cases a statement of non-conformity to the rules of the rigorous education system. In Noko’s case though, the dropping out was connected to *ijime* and a death in the family.

2.2. Dropping out of school and being unemployed

The songwriter dropped out of school early, in the freshman year of high school. There is a song which alludes to this experience. It is called *OS-Uchūjin* Os-宇宙人 (‘OS-alien’), which is short for Ōshima alien, Noko’s first nickname given to them by their perpetrator. This was the first song that Noko wrote on request. It was used in an *anime* (Japanese animation; in Japan it designates any animation show or movie) show called *Dempa Onna-to Seishun Otoko* 電波女と青春男 (*Ground Control to Psychoelectric Girl*).

Even though it was commissioned, the lyrics open with Noko's own experiences: "In second grade, they are all by himself, this idiot / Lifting their head up, they look at the starry skies above the city, / a truant in pajamas / Dropping out of school is a prolonged summer vacation" (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 80–82).

"Prolonged summer vacation" is a figure which is explored by Noko in their other works as a symbol of being stuck in life. There is a stream of songs concerning the metaphorical summer vacation among Kamattechan's repertoire: 22-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi* 22 才の夏休み, 23-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi* 23 才の夏休み, 26-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi* 26 才の夏休み, 33-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi* 33 才の夏休み ('Summer vacation of 22/23/26/33 years old' respectively). The first two are based on simple major chord progression and are rather bright except for the lyrics: "This year I turn 23 years old / My face is a little tired / Although summer vacation is finally here, / I do not go out anywhere, I do not plan anything" (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 92–94), opens 23-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi*. Age 23 is when the Japanese end their education and move on to work. The third song is, by contrast, minor in key, with lyrics such as "somehow I lost my sensitivity", "this cannot be, I do not feel anything anymore" (the lyrics can be found here: Shinsei Kamattechan kashi 1 n.d.). Although the song was released on a major label's album, it retains the demo sound of that versions of the songs recorded by Noko himself in his home studio have. It has a different quality than that of cleaner album versions of songs. Major key progression returns in 33-*sai-no Natsu Yasumi*.

After dropping out from school, Noko spent time as a freeter² or a NEET. NEET is an acronym for 'Not in Education, Employment or Training'. In 2012 there were 2,5 million people who belonged to that category. The cause of this phenomenon may be the pressure that is put on young people to succeed (also connected to bullying) or a lack of love and encouragement to children for chasing their dreams by families (also connected to social withdrawal; Baldwin and Allison 2015).

The economic recession of the 90s had a great impact on phenomena like freeters and NEETs. To save the jobs of the middle-aged and elderly, Japan cut down on the jobs for the young (Genda 2007: 23–24). Heisei era Japan carried out neoliberal reforms with the aim of regaining its economic power (*kokuryoku-no fukkō* 国力の復興; Matsubara 2018). There was no culture of protest, with civil society working with the government. This system

² Freeters are young people in Japan that lack full-time employment. They rather partake in part-time jobs to make a living.

favored the economically strong (*tsuyoi kojīn* 強い個人) and was discriminatory towards the poor, who were regarded as unmotivated and not economically independent enough to participate in society. They were regarded as *hi-shimin* 非市民 (non-citizens). For example, groups such as the homeless, working poor, freeters and NEETs fall unto this category (Murai et al. 2022: 94–97).

Research has also determined that NEET people often dropped out of high school, lacked communication skills, were lonely, and came from prefectures with a higher percentage of low-income families (Genda 2007: 48). Saitō Tamaki in his paper about the band mentions *sukūru kāsuto* スクールカースト, ‘school hierarchy’. The position in this hierarchy is determined by one’s *komyuryoku* コミュ力, communication skills (Yamato et al. 2015: 93–95). Noko was a person from the lower end of the hierarchy. That means they lacked communication skills, which is characteristic of NEETs. Dropping out of high school is also typical of NEETs.

There is a song that briefly documents Noko’s experience being unemployed called *Ikareta NEET* いかれた NEET (‘Crazy NEET’): “From morning to evening, I sing songs that nobody cares about, because this is my routine / Crazy NEET”, “When it comes to being alone, I alone sing happy songs, because this is my diary / Crazy NEET / Yeah” (the lyrics can be found here: Shinsei Kamattechan kashi 2 n.d.). The whole song sounds disheartened, like they had given up on life, and musically there is painfully offensive noise to be found.

Another song connected to the topic of the employment is called *Ossan-no Yume* おっさんの夢 (‘Middle-aged man’s dream’) in which Noko envisions a salaryman who “works too much”, but remembers being an instant kid and wants to chase his dreams again.

2.3. Being a shut-in

The Japanese Ministry of Health gives the definition of *hikikomori*, Japanese term translated into English as ‘shut-in’, as a social withdrawal lasting more than 6 months (Umeda and Kawakami 2012: 121). The population suffering from *hikikomori* is estimated at 500 thousand people to 1 million people, with diagnoses concerning mostly young males (Kingston 2004: 268). The term *hikikomori* was coined by Saitō Tamaki (Saitō 1998), the psychologist who wrote a paper about Shinsei Kamattechan. *Hikikomori* as a social problem has been recognized since the late 90s, when a moral panic about the alleged crimes committed by the *hikikomori* population occurred, caused by attention from the media.

There are theories that hikikomori may mask psychosis or be a form of *hattatsu-shōgai* 発達障害, developmental pathology (Kingston 2019: 227–228). The phenomenon is very diverse in the behaviors of those concerned (Rosenthal and Zimmerman 2012–13: 83), and that is a problem in preparing effective help programs (Umeda and Kawakami 2012: 122).

There are many theories (called by people who try to explain and cure *hikikomori* the “hikikomori industry”, see Rosenthal and Zimmerman 2012–13: 87) which try to explain the phenomenon. Some connect *hikikomori* to bullying and school refusal, while others concentrate on the ability to communicate (or rather – lack of ability) and past traumas, while still others connect this phenomenon to the poor situation of the job market (freeters, NEET etc.). There is some recent research that suggests a connection to poverty (Kingston 2019: 227), although previously it has been suggested that most of people affected by *hikikomori* come from the upper and middle classes (Umeda and Kawakami 2012: 121–122).

Noko dropped out of school and later became a *hikikomori* and NEET or freeter. The theory of *hikikomori* resulting from poverty is one that is the most interesting in the context of this paper, since Noko's father is part of the working poor. There is an improvised, unreleased song on YouTube of that the title and the chorus sings *Oyaji Wāpua Ore Nīto* 親父ワープア俺ニート (‘My old man is working poor, I am a NEET’; see rsskc 2014). In the context of Noko's life a connection between *ijime* and being a NEET is evidenced. Research says that 45,5% of the hikikomori population are not burdened with mental illness (Umeda and Kawakami 2012: 121). In the case of Noko, it is otherwise.

Nihei Norihiro writes that there is a need to hear these “Other” people's voice (Nihei 2005). Their father being working poor, Noko's family members were “non-citizens” from the start.

A song in Kamattechan's repertoire deals with social isolation. It is called *Michinaru Hō-e* 美ちなる方へ (‘Into the unknown’). “A song that contains a resolve to come face to face with the world” (Shiozuka 2011), as the narrator in NHK's documentary about the band describes it: “Everyone pretends to be as happy as possible / If you become depressed, suddenly there is no one beside you / I know that and thus I sometimes completely lose my mind / There is a real face I want to show you / I started to go outside, I started to go outside / Everyone pretends to be as happy as possible, even me / When I am depressed, I sometimes hurt others / I know that and thus I sometimes completely lose my mind / I want to show you my sad face / I started to go outside, I started to go outside / I went into the

unknown” (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 14–15). The song documents the struggle to overcome *hikikomori*.

The song’s title contains a wordplay. The word *michinaru* is written differently than the standard – 未知なる (‘yet unknown’). Instead, it is written by a kanji which means ‘beautiful’, read as *mi* 美 in names. This hints that Noko expects the unknown to be beautiful.

2.4. Mental illness

In *Tomodachi Nante Iranai Shine* (2.1.), the victim of *ijime* goes the mental health professional: “two of the clock in the afternoon, at the psychiatrist / you are also here with your parents / In the waiting room / we are both as white as sheets”.

Chikako Ozawa-de Silva writes in a book from 2006 (Ozawa-de Silva 2006) that psychoanalysis did not catch on in Japan, where mental disorders were looked upon as a problem with *ki* 気, or vital energy. The fundamental approach to these matters is thus different in Japan than in the West.

Up until the 80s, mental health problems were regarded as a problem of the family of the ill person. Mental institutions were built in case the family could not manage taking care of the patient (Sugiyama-Lebra and Lebra 1986).

Even though 1988 saw an attempt at shifting the center of gravity towards the resocialization of mental health patients in Japan (Nakatani 2000: 591), the stigma remained. Setoya Yutaro writes in 2012 that the level of awareness of the Japanese society on the topic is very low, and that the mentally ill are condemned in Japan (Setoya 2012: 10). Shinsei Kamattechan was already active in 2012. Noko is diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder (they sometimes talks about it on Internet streams, see for example Noko-kamattechan [kirinuki] 2022).

Lifetime prevalent bipolar affective disorder (hereafter BAD) affects around 1% of population (Jain and Mitra 2023). This illness is considered to be the effect of interplay between genetic heritage and environmental factors, although studies shows that genes play a bigger role than the environment (65–80%). Many gene mutations which are responsible for BAD are also found in patients with schizophrenia. Patients may be admitted to a mental institution if they behave recklessly (so that they pose a threat to themselves or the environment), are heavily psychotic, lack criticism and engage in risky behaviors, experience severe psychomotor excitement or intend to harm themselves or others. Medication includes benzodiazepines, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers and antidepressants (Marwick and Birrell 2013: 158–159). In general, patients suffering from BAD experience manic phases and depressive phases in their illness. In manic phases, patients may

overestimate their own position, have problems concentrating, experience racing thoughts, and not be critical of their own state of mind. In severe manic episodes they may also show symptoms of psychosis, such as thought disorder, impairment of logical thinking, persecutory delusions, hallucinations (ibid., 71–72). In the context of Noko's household, mental patient care being considered a problem of the family (until the 80s) is interesting, because their father is very supportive of them and even helps them shoot music videos.

In general, Noko's songs often deal with suicide, death, mental illness, wrist cutting and such: topics labeled outside of the norm by psychiatry.

It is probable that the illness also affected the creative process of Noko. As the author wrote before, patients suffering from BAD may be impulsive and experience racing thoughts. This may explain Noko's charisma and even lyrics, because in some cases (*Yūgata-no Piano* for example) they resemble a stream of consciousness. Noko once said in an interview: "My songs are all intuitive. They are not something that comes from rational thought. Suddenly they come out" (see Ōyama and Hashimoto 2010).

BAD is characterized by severe mood swings, manic and depressive episodes, and non-normative states of happiness and depression. This is reflected in Shinsei Kamattechan's music itself. Examples of mood swings can be found in the band's music. *Michinaru Hō-e*, even though reflective in lyrics, musically sounds almost manic, especially in the apogee of the song.

As an example of a depressive song there is *Kuroi Tamago* 黒いたまご ('Black egg'). Not only depressive, it also contains lyrics which evidence resentment towards Good ("Do not be ridiculous, [you want to be] pure-white? / Fuck off and die / Do not laugh at me darkly"). "If a pitch-black egg is born, / I will carry it far away / It is a pitch-black, disgusting egg, / but I will call it 'you'" (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 122–123) – the lyrics suggest that the titular "black egg" is a person who is born different from the others.

A song epitomizing the polar opposite, a manic state of mind, might be *Otoko-wa Roman-da-ze! Takeda-kun* 男はロマンだぜ! たけだ君っ ('Men are idealists! Takeda'), which sounds like Noko was overjoyed when they wrote it. The lyrics encourage the titular Takeda to chase his dreams "with everything he has" (the lyrics can be found here: Shinsei Kamattechan kashi 3 n.d.). He is a shy and depressed protagonist, and maybe a victim of bullying – there is another demo which shares the same Takeda as a protagonist and he is depicted as such there.

One can guess the mood swings that the author of the songs experienced. But there are a few songs that are about taking, or even overdosing on, the psychotropic drugs that were prescribed to Noko, for example *Maisurī Zembu Yume* マイスリー全部ゆめ (‘Everything is a dream on Myslee’) or *Guroi Hana* グロい花 (‘Atrocious flower’).

2.5. Neither a boy, nor a girl

Noko goes beyond gender expectations. One term that is important in the context of such people in Japan is X-gender (*ekkusū-jendā*; エックスジェンダー). It designates people who do not fit into pre-existing gender categories or are not sure of their sex. They could be without sex *musei* 無性, of both sexes *ryōsei* 両性, or androgynous *chūsei* 中性 (Coates et al. 2020: 64–65). In 2001 Tsutamori Tatsuru wrote a book called *Otoko-demo Onna-demo Naku: Hontō-no Watakushirashisa-o Motomete* (‘Neither a man, nor a woman: I want to live in my own way’; 男でもなく女でもなく本当の私らしさを求めて; Tsutamori 2001). This is one of the pioneering works on non-binary gender research in Japan and the author of this paper notices a striking resemblance to the lyrics of *Jibun-rashiku* 自分らしく (‘In my own way’) by Noko. “Live like a man, live like a woman, they say / but I cannot do that / It is because I will never be a man, nor a woman / I feel hurt by everyone’s judging sights / It is because I will never be a man, nor a woman / I want to live in my own way” (the lyrics can be found here: Noko 2013: 52–54), sings Noko. In that same song there is the line “I am *boku*, but I am also *atashi*”. *Boku* and *atashi* are Japanese first-person pronouns, but *boku* is more of a male ‘I’ and *atashi* is more feminine. *Atashi* is also used by Noko in the song *Tomodachi Nante Iranai Shine*.

In 2010 the term X-gender was still on the margins, but has since then entered the mainstream of LGBTQ terminology in Japan (Coates et al. 2020: 63–64). The personal blogs on the Internet played a part in that (Coates et al. 2020: 214–215). I am not aware of whether Noko has read X-gender blogs or has ever used the term X-gender, but it is possible to describe their gender this way.

The narrator of NHK’s documentary about Shinsei Kamattechan, giving viewers Noko’s backstory, says that Noko was bullied from young age both by boys and girls. That is why they do not want to be a *otoko-no ko* 男の子 (‘boy’) or *onna-no ko* 女の子 (‘girl’), and that is why they chose their pseudonym to be Noko の子 (Shiozuka 2011). This is the genesis that they sometimes spoke about, but after some time they also said that “I sometimes said that (...), but [my pseudonym] does not have a deeper meaning. Well,

[we named ourselves that], just because it sounds adorable” (Noko 2013: 55).

It is true though, that Noko wears dresses for live shows and sometimes posts their photos cross-dressing on social media, constantly blurring the lines of difference between the sexes.

Conclusions

To conclude, Shinsei Kamattechan's music reflects many of the “images of exclusion” that were found in Heisei Japan's society. It may be that it gives voice to the excluded “Other”.

Various problems of contemporary Japan are connected to the life and work of Noko. The “images of exclusion” are connected to school bullying, being a NEET, *hikikomori*, mental illness and X-gender. These problems are connected with the band's lyrics and biography of Noko.

As Noko's father was a part of the working poor, the Ōshima household was Heisei era's *hi-shimin* (‘non-citizens’) from the start. These people were excluded from the society because of their economic weakness.

All in all, Shinsei Kamattechan's music gives voice and courage to those excluded by honestly speaking about these problems in the lyrics.

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