



## Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima, by Aya Hirata Kimura

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## **Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima**, by Aya Hirata Kimura, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2016, 224 pp., \$23.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-6199-2

A corporate public relations veteran ostracized for concern over an advertising campaign promoting food from potentially contaminated areas, a spotless citizen-run radiation measuring station dubbed “mother’s laboratory,” and radiation detox recipe books. These are some of the elements brought together in Aya Hirata Kimura’s powerful *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima*, a significant contribution to the research areas of science and technology studies, post-feminism, neoliberalism, food studies, nuclear disaster and Japanese society. Drawn from fieldwork in and around Fukushima Prefecture in Northeastern Japan following the triple disaster of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe of 11 March 2011, Kimura’s book concerns the social and cultural forces impeding citizens’ attempts to ensure their food is safe from radiation. Throughout, the text benefits from compelling storytelling around the lives and experiences of those individuals addressed in its title: citizen scientists and the groups they founded, including women dubbed with the neologism of “radiation brain” moms (*hōsha-nō*, a cruel pun on *hōshanō* or “radiation,” and *nō* or “brain”), socially sanctioned for expressing concern (35). Addressing this post-3/11 environment through rich engagement with anthropological subjects, Kimura offers a rigorous theoretical analysis that extends far beyond the circumstances of Fukushima.

Alarmed by radioactive cesium found in children’s urine or other warning signs, citizen radiation-measuring organizations were founded across Japan to test food contamination following 3/11. This was met with a hope for a rejuvenated practice of activism that could counter the political and economic interests of the “nuclear village” (*genshiyokumura*) in Japan, a complex of the utility industry and connected businesses. Food safety emerged as one of the few tangible ways in which radiation’s harm could be made visible, and as a resource of intimate familiarity extending beyond the immediate area of Fukushima, seemed a promising organizing cause. However, such a focus did not lead to the adoption of widespread radical politics,

or success in stopping the restarting of nuclear reactors in Japan. Food policing, or censoring people's concerns around food safety, depends upon power relations that shape understandings of contamination in a post-disaster context, and is not just a matter of government propaganda versus self-organized monitoring, but, as Kimura argues, mutually constitutive social dynamics promoting the ideal of a citizen-subject. She writes that "constraints for citizen scientists came from much broader forces of neoliberalism, scientism, and post-feminism. These forces reinforced notions of citizenship that largely excluded political activism, rendering activism inappropriate for an ideal citizen" (5). Scientism promotes science as free and apolitical while emphasizing the risk calculation of food policing, as neoliberalism instructs personal responsibility and market participation, and the ideology of post-feminism assumes women as already emancipated while rendering the enforcement of normative, non-threatening gender roles invisible. Kimura finds women specifically targeted by relying on stereotypes of domesticity and irrationality to malign as having strong attachments to food and insufficient scientific knowledge or expertise. This study finds a limitation for the potential of the citizen scientist and anti-contamination activism in bringing attention to systemic issues when the very notion of the citizen has shifted. "A particular neoliberal citizen-subject has emerged, who is to be self-reliant and collaborative with the state, but not to oppose or challenge the existing political, social, and economic order" (121). Across its five compelling chapters, the book examines the dynamics of food policing following 3/11, and potential challenges to these forces, with a focus on the work of women seeking justice.

In addition to compelling storytelling and lucid theoretical discourse, the volume should prove accessible to readers outside science and technology studies or Japanese studies thanks to clear introduction of terms, historical contexts, translations and concepts. Providing a helpful note on abbreviations, a comprehensive index and interdisciplinary list of bountiful references, Kimura's argument presents researchers with a bold intervention to engage with in future research on these subjects. *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists* joins a handful of other significant book length studies approaching the post-3/11 environment available in English, and offers a necessary addition to those addressing emergent activist practices and histories, while advancing critical analyses of neoliberal precarity. In the broader context of post-war nuclear technology, gender and everyday life, it will be similarly valuable as a contemporary case study addressing risk perception and scientific knowledge as well as disaster management, food safety and critical appraisal of the political potential of citizen science and civic organizations under neoliberalism. Kimura's book will no doubt also be valuable for instruction in courses in anthropology, science and technology studies, and key issues in contemporary Japanese society.

### Note on contributor

**Joel Neville Anderson** is a PhD Candidate in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester working at the intersection of personal documentary and social justice. His writing has been featured in scholarly journals, anthologies and magazines including *Millennium Film Journal*, *Hyperallergic*, *Film on the Faultline*, *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, *Screen Slate* and the *Directory of World Cinema*. He also curates "JAPAN CUTS: Festival of New Japanese Film" at Japan Society in New York.

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**Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility**, by Hagar Kotef, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2015, 248 pp. \$23.75/ £19.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-5855-8

With her dense and insightful analytic treatise, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility*, Hagar Kotef has provided a valuable contribution to contemporary debates on the political conundrum of freedom of movement versus security confronting all citizens of liberal democracies in the post-9/11 global liberal order. The gender, race and class dimensions of this conundrum are systematically revealed by Kotef's analysis of political subjectivity. "By providing a reading of several means through which movement is produced as freedom or as a threat," Kotef provides "a critique of the modes of governance that crystalize around these two main configurations of movement: surveillance, enclosure, eviction, imprisonment, and siege" (5).

Kotef begins her study with two chapters that unveil Israeli occupation practices directed at controlling Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The enormous militarized effort to regulate Palestinian life anchors on Zionist capture, regulation and denial of movement to Palestinians. Through a labyrinth of checkpoints, mobilizing technologies of surveillance and the disciplinary mechanisms of policing, Palestinians are delayed and detained. This is all the more successful as the procedure of preventing movement establishes expectations and demands behaviors that Palestinians cannot possibly meet, thereby rendering them as "undisciplinable" to Israeli as well as many foreign observers (38). Nowhere is the distinction between the mobility of Palestinians and Israelis being made by Kotef's enquiry more evident than through her examination in chapter three of the road networks that privilege Israelis while denying Palestinians as the two populations move across the intimate landscape of the West Bank. Kotef clearly outlines how such efforts maintain a long line of colonial restrictions on movement that emerged from the seventeenth century onwards in the liberal conceptualization of freedom. While many would take exception to the identification of contemporary Israeli society as liberal, Kotef unequivocally anchors Israeli practices within the European liberal tradition. As with the examples she explores in colonial settler societies in America, she demonstrates that they are not in opposition to liberal freedom, but rather constitutive of it.

In this way Kotef provides the reader with a clear window into how Israeli occupation practices are not at all dissimilar to the modalities deployed against Hispanic Americans in the United States. In their logics and desire to control populations, to frame movement as a distinguishing characteristic of freedom and citizenship,