

# **Locals, New-locals, Non-locals**

(Re)mapping people and food in post-disaster Ishinomaki, Japan

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographically informed analysis of the transformations undergone by the practices of consumption, distribution, and discourse production of local seafood after the Great East Japan Disaster of 2011 in the municipality of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. Drawing from data collected during a 12 month fieldwork in Miyagi and Tōkyō, I individuate three classes of actors (locals, new-locals, non-locals) whose activities contribute to the changes in the imagery about seafood and its producers; and two movements: one centrifugal, along which food leaves Ishinomaki to reach Tōkyō, the capital, and one centripetal, followed by visitors and tourists who come to Ishinomaki to experience its food, among the other attractions.

In this thesis the study of disasters and their consequences on human society, and the study of food as a fundamental instrument of signification and negotiation of locality, converge to produce a novel interpretative frame through which I look at the transformations of Ishinomaki as a dialogic process that embeds the 2011 disaster in the wider historical perspective of the Japanese Northeast (Tōhoku) as a politically subaltern region. Locals, new-locals and non-locals inscribe in this stratified horizon their values, projects and hopes, creatively re-negotiating the meanings of locality, sociality, and civic subjectivity through seafood such as oysters (*kaki*), scallops (*hotate*) and sea-squirts (*hoya*). This intensive work of inscription, in turn, causes the lives and experiences of individuals to ‘stick’ to the seafood as it circulates, generating a network from which emerges images of young, enterprising fishermen and domestic immigrants, striving against a conservative past in order to build new social spaces out of the tsunami debris.

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## Introduction

### 1 The Great Disaster, Ishinomaki, and its food

This thesis is about food production, consumption, and representation, and about how these three activities take place in the municipality of Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, Northeastern Japan (figure 2). There are several clarifications to be made on the place, the activities, and the objects of study themselves.

The first necessary consideration is about the Great Disaster of Northeastern Japan (*Nihon Tōhoku Daishinsai*), as it is formally called, or just ‘the disaster’ (*shinsai*) as most people in Ishinomaki refer to it – ‘*ano hi*’, ‘that day’ is also a common term for it. In the early afternoon of March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 (hence ‘3/11’) an extremely powerful earthquake shook Japan. According to the seismographs it reached a magnitude of 9 points, positioning it as the strongest ever recorded in the nation since the invention of seismographs, the second being the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 (8.3), followed by the Kobe earthquake (7.2). The quake alone caused damage to several buildings and disrupted water, electricity, gas and telecommunications all over the eastern coast of the Japanese main island, Honshū. Gill, Steger and Slater (2015: 1) suggest that the deaths caused by the quake alone (e.g. people caught under collapsing buildings, trapped in house fires, etc.) could be counted in the order of the three or four hundreds. This is of course tragic, but was obscured by what happened next. In the same minutes, from the quake’s epicentre, located about 70 kilometres off the coast, in the Pacific Ocean, the energy released by the tectonic shift pushed a formidable mass of water at high speed in every direction.

Earthquakes are an everyday matter in Japan, and everybody knows that a strong one can trigger a *tsunami*, a giant wave. The Northeastern coast, called Sanriku, spanning from the northernmost prefecture of Honshū, Iwate, to Fukushima prefecture, has been previously hit by two tsunami still clear in the memories of the elderly: the Chile tsunami of 1960 and the Shōwa Sanriku Earthquake tsunami of 1933. Before that, another major tsunami, caused by the Meiji Sanriku Earthquake of 1896 is well documented by historical sources. Despite the historical knowledge of the local population and the state-of-the-art sophisticated technologies, the latest *shinsai* caused 18,600 casualties,



destroyed 100,000 buildings and severely damaged many hundreds of thousands more. ‘That day’ quickly became a symbolic watershed in many senses: it marked the end of a decades long narrative of safe and necessary nuclear power in Japan (Wang & Chen 2012). It tragically highlighted the political and economic subalternity of Tōhoku to the Tōkyō area (Hopson 2013). It led to the first leftist government in the last 20 years of Japanese politics coming to an abrupt end.<sup>1</sup> For the generation who were facing adulthood in the beginning of the 2010s, post-disaster volunteering acted as a newfound ethical framework, paving the way for organized movements of deurbanization and post-growth (Klien 2016). As with other exceptional events (e.g. the Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Hiroshima bombing), the time and space of the whole country reconfigured discursively around it, and re-absorbed it in the everyday lives of the Japanese, while being absorbed by it.

In Ishinomaki, the disaster came just when the city seemed to be recovering from the 10 years long crisis it had slumped into at the beginning of the 2000s. Historically, the city has been in a strategic position, in the delta of the great Kitakami river’s southern branch. During the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), the rice grown in the fertile valley of the Kitakami was easily loaded onto boats and transported to the Ishinomaki harbour, where it was shipped southwards to the densely populated Kantō region. A second route, northbound, would concentrate in Ishinomaki numerous fine crafts, that were later sold to the southern regions for a great profit. One of the favourite history topics of Ishinomaki’s students is the story of Tsudayū, the first Japanese to circumnavigate the world, who started his journey from Ishinomaki in 1793 (Katō 1993).

During the internal turmoil that prompted the Meiji Revolution in 1868, the Sendai region, led at the time by the Aizu clan, sided with the Tokugawa warlords, and opposed the forces of the imperial restoration. After being defeated by the imperial forces in a bloody military campaign (Hoshi 1995), for a short time the ruling court of the Northeast was established in Ishinomaki, as Sendai was rebuilt from the ruins of the siege, and plans were made to transform the trade town into the new administrative capital of Tōhoku, but it was quickly discarded for Sendai. In contemporary times, as motorized and railway transport of goods replaced marine navigation, Ishinomaki lost its centrality in commerce, but gained new importance as a harbour for deep sea fishing vessels. Likewise, with the

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the only other leftist government of Japan since 1947, the 1995 Maruyama coalition, ended prematurely after the Great Hanshin Earthquake (also called Kobe Earthquake) and the Sarin gas attack in the Tōkyō subway (Nakamura 2000).

construction of an industrial port and the pulp factory in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Sasaki 2007), Ishinomaki's economy and population grew relatively steadily until the burst of the Japanese price asset bubble in the 1990s (Oizumi 1994). As the whole national economic growth abruptly came to a halt and then started to slowly sink into recession, Ishinomaki faced massive emigration, as the young and capable moved to the metropolises of Sendai and Tōkyō in search of better salaries and living conditions.

The municipality of Ishinomaki significantly expanded in a 2005 merger, absorbing five neighbouring cities (Kahoku, Kanan, Kitakami, Monō and Ogatsu). Now, it includes the area of the northern Kitakami river branch and the Oshika Peninsula. The peninsula's coast is dotted with small fishing villages, connected by a coach line (the Ishinomaki-Ayukawa Line). The roads are very winding and narrow, and to get to the furthest point from Ishinomaki, the former whaling port of Ayukawa, it takes about two hours and a half. Inland the peninsula is covered with thick woods, and inhabited mostly by deer, boars, and apparently a few brown bears – although, in 2017, none had been sighted for about five years. After the disaster, between Ishinomaki town and the Oshika Peninsula, a centre-periphery relation quickly developed, as the residents of the fishing villages washed away by the tsunami moved *en masse* to Ishinomaki's residential area of Watanoha, located between the eastern side of the Kitakami and the Mangoku Bay.

The notion of specific food cultures, i.e. the link between regional locality and certain food products, has gained massive popularity in the context of Japanese domestic tourism since the 1970s, as discussed below (see 1.3, Knight 1998, '*isson ippin undō*'). This factor notwithstanding, the concept of a 'cuisine of Ishinomaki' is variously contested (see 3.4). Most interlocutors, when asked about local typical dishes, would rather reply with specific products, such as scallops (*hotate*), oysters (*kaki*), bamboo leaf-shaped fish paste morsels (*sasa-kamaboko*), types of fishes (saury, whale meat, bonito, etc.), rather than methods of cooking.

One notable exception is represented by the 'Ishinomaki yakisoba', a variation of the classic Japanese yakisoba – wheat noodles called *soba* cooked in a pan with diced carrots, cabbage, and other vegetables and a specific sauce, the yakisoba sauce, until they become brown, then served with a topping of pickled ginger (*shōga*) and dried *nori* seaweed powder. Ishinomaki Yakisoba are made using brownish buckwheat soba instead of regular white ones, and the dish is topped with a fried egg.

Apart from the Ishinomaki Yakisoba, usually local restaurants propose Sendai specialities, such as the *gyūtan* (ox tongue), discussed in 6.3, and simple dishes based on fresh seasonal foodstuff. The seasonal food calendar is considered a basic piece of knowledge in Ishinomaki, shared even by children or adults not employed in the fishery sector – although it is quite hard to find an Ishinomaki local who does not have any relative employed in fishery, in some capacity.

It is worth noting that the fishery industry of the Sanriku coast is based on differentiated activities, the two main branches being deep-sea fishing (*shinkai gyogyō*) and aquaculture (*yōshoku*). Small communities on the coast tend to focus either on one or the other – so that, for example, in the municipality of Kuji in Iwate, deep-sea fishing has been the most common employment for over five decades (Gasparri & Martini 2018). In the case of Ishinomaki and its surroundings, conversely, the main activity is aquaculture, and the main source of income is the *wakame* seaweed (MAFF 2018). Oysters and *hoya* seafarming, conspicuously featured in this thesis, account for a smaller portion of the overall net value of seafarming in Ishinomaki. These activities became the focus of my work not due to their regional or prefectural economic relevance, but because in the course of building a network of informants, I came in contact more often than not with oysters and *hoya* seafarmers, a fact that significantly shaped my perspectives (on this topic also see 1.7.b, 1.7.c).

In the Japanese customary laws of fishing, seafarming grounds are assigned to individual companies, roughly corresponding to family units, in accordance with the ‘classic’ model of the *ie* (stem family) as enterprise (cf Yomemura and Nagata, 2009). Due to significant emigration from the area, heightened in the aftermath of the disaster, family continuity is often regarded as a thing of the past in Ishinomaki. However, seafarming in Miyagi still roughly follows this structure, where the family head and his male relatives (brothers, sons, grandsons) carry out tasks involving boat navigation (fishing, oyster raft maintenance, etc.), while women are occupied in land operations (such as oyster shucking, seaweed cleaning and processing, etc.). Interestingly, Wilhelm (2018: 144) reports a higher overall amount of female employees in Tōhoku fisheries, while Soejima (2018) highlights female-only sub-sections of local fishery cooperatives in the Ishikawa Prefecture (see 1.7.c for more detailed considerations on gender roles in the context of this thesis).

As will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the development of less traditional models inspired by ideals of entrepreneurship, and less dependant on the ‘traditional’ gender division of labour of Japanese fishery<sup>2</sup>, point towards more individualised and dynamic tendencies, although the representatives of the ‘new look’ of fishermen are in fact all male individuals. This process finds relevant parallels in similar contexts of shrinkage in areas devoted to primary industry (e.g. Kelly 2006; Barret and Okudaira 1995; Knight 2003a).

Seafarming areas are usually dedicated to one main product. In the case of Ishinomaki, the Mangoku Bay and several bays of the Oshika Peninsula are dedicated to oyster (*kaki*) farming, while a smaller number of bays present a prevalence of *hoya* farming. Such areas of sea close to the coast are dedicated to the production of one or more goods. Unlike fishing, seafarming is a sedentary activity, and generally speaking, in Sanriku, villages are either focused on the former or the latter.

The *hoya* (*Halocynthia roretzi*) is a bright red, bulbous sea creature living attached to the rocks in shallow water, well adapted to cold water. Originally farmed in South Korea (where it is called *meongge*) since the 80s, seafarmers in the Ishinomaki area started cultivating it after a massive disease destroyed the Korean production. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that in 2006, out of a 21,500 tons of total world production, 16,000 tons of *hoya* came from Japan, and 12,163 from Miyagi alone.<sup>3</sup> I was fascinated by this fire-red, fist-sized, globular-shaped sea creature from the first time I saw it. Its outer shell, rigid and leathery, is covered in cone-shaped bumps, and the colour changes to bright yellow in the vicinity of its foot, from which extend thin root-like appendages. Unable to move, the *hoya* procures its food by filtering the seawater with two syphons positioned at the top of its body, one for sucking and one for expelling. The *hoya* is cultivated by letting the newborn microscopic spores attach to the rough surface of an oyster shell, then attaching the shells on a long strand of rope, separated from each other by about half a meter. The ropes are then submerged, with floaters on top to locate the sea-farming ground. In about three years, from one oyster shell covered in *hoya* spores, will grow a huge, ball shaped colony of adults, several kilos of individuals. *Hoya* is consumed both raw and cooked. Raw, it can be served on top of white rice as *sushi*, or by itself, usually accompanied by a *shisō* leaf (*Perilla frutescens* var. *Crispa*) and

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<sup>2</sup> Where women concentrate their activities in the “indoors” phases of work (cleaning and/or preparing the products harvested by men) and in the retail subsector (see Soejima and Makino 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Ishinomaki *Shiyakusho*, 2016.

powdered ice (*hoya sashimi*). Cooked, it can be either boiled or grilled, in both cases the outer shell is discarded and its soft, yellowy and chewy insides are eaten. *Hoya* is not particularly expensive, as one fresh 250 grams piece costs on average around 100 Yen (0,69 GBP) – although it needs to be noted that the edible amount of a shelled *hoya* will amount to a mere 20% of its total weight. I elaborate more on the taste and uniqueness of *hoya* in 6.2.

The oysters farmed in the Ishinomaki area belong to the *Crassostrea Gigas* family. They can become very big and heavy, as their shell becomes thicker with age. Their taste is renowned by connoisseurs on the North American west coast, while in Ishinomaki oysters are considered a precious staple of domestic export – as the official website of the Miyagi prefecture states: “Oysters are *the most representative local food of Miyagi*. Nurtured in our rich and clean ocean, safe, secure and delicious oysters are produced.” (Miyagi Prefectural Government, my italics, see also Gasparri 2019). Oyster prices in Ishinomaki are lower than in other Japanese towns (e.g. in Tōkyō oysters are from 30% to 50% more expensive). Fresh oysters are usually cooked on the grill until their shells open, and then eaten on the spot – this is very common with oyster stalls at festivals or train stations. Alternatively, oyster meat can be bought already shelled, either fresh or frozen, and used in an array of more or less elaborate recipes, like oysters on rice, oyster soup (*kaki-shiru*), oysters rolled in bacon, fried oysters, etc. Oysters are farmed with a method not dissimilar to the *hoya*: oyster larvae are released on scallop shells, which are then attached to ropes. Oysters take about two years to become big enough to be sold, and they are harvested usually from October until March. In July and August, young oysters called *natsu-kaki* (summer oysters) are enjoyed, although they are commonly regarded as less tasty than their adult counterparts.

## **2 Traveling to timeless rural Japan**

In a recent ‘Special Promotion’ article (Katz 2017) of the online newspaper Japan Today, the author started with these words: ‘The number of visitors to Japan has risen rapidly in recent years, and with this increase has been a desire among tourists to venture out to regions off the beaten tourist track’. Such demand led to the alleged discovery of the beauties of the ‘timeless rural Japan’ of the Tōhoku macro-region, i.e. the Northeastern portion of the main Japanese island, Honshū.

The article goes on enumerating the many beauties of the land, considering scenic vistas, exotic spiritualism, and local food. These aspects will be analysed more in detail as this thesis proceeds (e.g. 3.2, 4.1, 4.2), but on the foremost and most obvious reading level, we can observe *in nuce* three elements relative to the language used to describe Tōhoku, three components of a process of construction carried out in order to express the Tōhoku *placeness* with words. The first element in this context is the act of visiting a place as a tourist. Although not the specific focus of my ethnography, tourism has become a prominent field of enquiry in anthropological literature all over the world (Graburn 1983, Bruner 1987, Cohen 1974), and in the anthropology of Japan (Ivy 1995, Ehrentraut 1993, Martinez 1990, etc.). At the same time, as tourism and ethnography appear to be isomorphic on the surface, the blurring of the two orders' knowledge-making has quickly become a subject for discussion (Simoni & McCabe 2008). Traveling to a new place in order to discover the multiplicity of people, things, and ideas which intermingle there is thus the first condition of our 'Timeless Japan' article. The second relevant aspect we encounter is food, local cuisine: in the town of Tōno, made famous by Yanagita Kunio's eponymous legends (Yanagita 1912), the readers are promised to '[stay] overnight at a local farmer's home, and learn about [...] folk stories of spectres and mythological creatures, [while enjoying] dishes made using local and seasonal ingredients'. In Tsuruoka City's UNESCO-certified 'advanced food complex facility', visitors would learn about modern technologies and scientific approaches to food production. Food is without doubt considered a fundamental aspect of the experience of Tōhoku's locality, and is actively used as an efficient tool to establish a connection (factual or imagined) between visitors and local residents. This is no news by any means, both considering anthropology at large (Avieli 2013, Cohen & Avieli 2004, Appadurai 1995, Sutton 2001, West 2015), and the specific case of Japan (e.g. McMorran 2008, Knight 1998), but assumes a specific centrality in a land of saturnine fishermen, as Tōhoku is often regarded by the inhabitants of the southern prefectures. Simplicity and freshness are the two most commonly evoked qualities of Tōhoku food.

The third element of interest in the Japan Today article is referred directly in the title: 'Stepping off the beaten path'. Whether it is regarded positively or negatively, Tōhoku's peripherality is assumed here beyond doubt. It is extremely relevant that, after the 2011 disaster, one of the reactions of the Japanese Government to the nuclear meltdown was to sponsor visits by foreign students in order to reassure both the national population and the

neighbouring countries about the safety of the North-East (McMorran 2017), as if, given the distance between the northeastern stormy coast and the tranquil waters of the capital, only going there in person (or, in this case, through an intermediary) could convey the informational weight necessary to vanquish the spectre of radioactive fallout – indeed one of the most disquieting apocalypses humankind has conceived of yet.

Like the wanderer-poet Bashō (cf Hudson, 1999), then, whether it was to volunteer, to witness, or just to tour the ruins, many took the road to the north after the disaster. A confession is needed at this point, since, in the same way as those multitudes who discovered Tōhoku only after a good portion of it was washed away, I would decide to travel north to volunteer for a couple of months in the spring of 2012, considering it a vacation from the fieldwork I was carrying out in Tōkyō (Gasparri 2014, 2016). Volunteering turned into an experience that would lead me to make of Ishinomaki the focus of the present doctoral research, in part due to the fascination of a very different Japan I found there: a wasteland without doubt, variously dotted with resilience and generosity, but above all the intermingling of extremely different subjectivities, from the silent (see 4.5), elderly fishermen who only in recent decades struggled out of poverty and were already witnessing the economic decline of the once-prestigious shipyards of Ishinomaki (see 7.2), to the well-to-do, educated, young and vocal youth of Tōkyō and Ōsaka willing to make a difference by partaking in an activity – volunteering – almost irrelevant in Japan before the Kobe earthquake of 1995 (Avernell 2012, see also 6.2). This intermingling, never pacific nor seamless, both in 2012 and now, sits at the emotional core of this work. Food was another reason. In the post-tsunami Ishinomaki fresh seafood was not easy to come by even twelve months after ‘that day’. We lived off ready-made *bento* from the few retailers open in the area – namely *konbini* (convenience stores) – and yet locals around us gifted us with seaweed, dried persimmon, and occasional bonitos every time they could. Everyday food was an empty space, at the time, mysteriously surrounded by a gravitational field of care, and longing, indicating a conspicuous mass that was not there. Curiosity about both human relations and food brought me back, when I embarked on my doctoral research, to meet a place very different from the mud-drenched wasteland I left in 2012. The silent fishermen were slowly passing their batons to their sons and daughters, who grew up *in* the aftermath, and who looked paradoxically more akin to the new-age-ish volunteers than their saturnine



parents and grandparents. Food was back also, and was becoming way more than a ‘thank you’ gift, but rather an instrument of affirmation.

Back to the visiting multitudes of 2012: like Bashō they spent many words about the broken beauties of cliffs, pines, and pebble beaches. Aesthetic appreciation accounted for, one must not disregard the long and detailed history of subalternity Tōhoku went through the last centuries (Hopson 2017, 2013, Oguma 2011, 2013). First, foreign land of dreaded barbarians (the Emishi), rumored to be a race cross-bred with the Others *par excellence* in the Japanese emic anthropology (until the arrival of Europeans and Northamericans, at least), the indigenous Ainu; then conquered frontier. In the postwar period, low population density and reliance mostly on primary economy made of Tōhoku an idea, before an actual place, variously depicted as traditional, superstitious, backward, rural. Subalternity, in the sense Antonio Gramsci attributed to the term (Spivak 2005, Green 2002, Gramsci 1971) fits Tōhoku’s historical and contemporary predicament well. The centre-periphery dynamics that establish this condition, therefore, represent a key interpretative frame in order to analyse the data presented in the following chapters.

### **3 Aims and structure of the thesis**

This thesis’ main aims have been subject to the steerings and tunings that usually affect ethnographic doctoral researches. I began with the humble aspiration to explore the effects of the disaster on local food production, but soon into the fieldwork I decided to consider in detail the relations among the different groups of actors operating in Ishinomaki during my stay, as it was (and is) my contention that this represented a necessary prerequisite to understand what was being said, done, and thought, about Ishinomaki’s food.

During the fieldwork, I came to understand the individuals working and interacting in the Ishinomaki municipality as belonging to three wide groups, which later became central in my analysis and now feature in the very title of this thesis: locals, new-locals, non-locals. Intuitively they indicate individuals born and raised in Ishinomaki, individuals who moved into town after the disaster, and individuals who are neither from the area, nor moved in afterwards, but rather stayed briefly in order to complete a task or interacted at a distance with Ishinomaki and its food. The anthropology of the Japanese countryside



acknowledges the centrality of new-locals (Knight 1998, 2002, 2003; Klien 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019; McMorran 2017, etc) and employs a further internal distinction, that of I-turners (those who moved in a rural area from a urban setting), U-turners (those born in a rural area, moved in a major city and then returned to their home villages), and J-turners (born in a rural area who moved to a different countryside, e.g. in another prefecture or municipality) (Knight 2002). As I discuss in detail in 1.7.b, it was my choice to collapse these three categories into the more general concept of new-local, as the agentivity, the ideals, and the strategies of such individuals, in the Ishinomaki case, were similar in some key respects, regardless of their ‘U’, ‘I’, or ‘J’ categorisation.

This thesis aims to describe, discuss, and analyse the interaction between the power structures of representation, the construction of locality and subjectivity within the seafarming community, and the ambiguous middle ground where these two processes meet and interact, namely in the activities of the new-locals. These interactions are then multi-locally explored both in the geographic setting of the Ishinomaki municipality, and in their expressions in Tōkyō and Sendai. The main topic of my research is food (and in this particular instance, seafood: oysters and *hoya* – see above), but with a *caveat*: it is *aftermath food* I am dealing with. If, as Simpson (2012) suggests, an anthropology of disasters is necessarily an anthropology of the aftermath, it is in the chaotic transformations of ‘the day after’ that we need to look for in order to understand what happened on ‘that day’ (see also Conclusion, Section 5). In Ishinomaki those transformations inevitably concerned food, for the obvious reasons that food happened to be at the same time the most precious survival tool of the local economy (Gasparri 2019, also see Section 1 in this chapter), and the most endangered. Ishinomaki food, precarious as it first appeared to me in the end of 2016, lies at the centre of the nexus of local, new-local, and non-local agentivities. Both Ishinomaki food and Tōhoku as a whole are best understood as inherently subaltern sociocultural constructions (the concept of subalternity of local food is discussed in 3.4, 3.6, 6.2), and subalternity inevitably frames the aftermath of the 2011 disaster.

In this sense, this thesis’ contribution consists in a perspective on the transformations in the nexus of meaning within which food exists as a sociocultural object in a post-disaster area: the (re)mapping mentioned in the title refers precisely to the change (*henka*, a word I used endlessly during the interviews) and readjustments in significance produced by a

multitude of actors, factors, and instances, not only towards the object in focus, but rather to the whole world it is surrounded by, space and time included. Conversely, food-related acts such as the production of locality, the rise in personalistic entrepreneurship, centre-periphery interactivity, artistic expression, or individual memories, reflect such changes and readjustments in a significant manner.

The general structure of this thesis can be thought of as divided into three parts, introduced by a methodological and bibliographical section (Chapter 1). The first part, comprising Chapters 2 to 4, is dedicated to the three main categories of actors I have encountered in Ishinomaki: locals, new-locals, non-locals. In the second part I consider movements of people (and thus, objects and ideas), with Chapter 5 covering movements centripetal to the area of Ishinomaki, and Chapter 6 covering centrifugal ones. In the last part, comprised of the seventh chapter, I discuss artistic visual representations, and their relevance in the system of actors and strategies previously described.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the literature review. In the first part, I discuss seminal works from the several relevant disciplinary frames (disaster studies, ethnographies of the Japanese countryside, theoretical anthropology and sociology, food anthropology). In the second part, I describe and discuss the main methodological directions, my previous experiences of Japanese fieldwork, and my first encounter with Ishinomaki. The aim of the chapter is to introduce the reader to the ethnographic material that follows, adopting the same intellectual tools I started with.

Chapter 2 presents interlocutors who have been living in Ishinomaki, or the Oshika Peninsula, since before the disaster. Many of the locals whose words I discuss here will reappear in the following chapters as well, as they interact intensely with the other two categories. The first actor I present is a very important one for this thesis: the organization Fisherman Japan. The modalities through which FJ interacts with the social environment at the local, national, and international level, are exemplars. The following actors, fishermen and restaurant owners, elaborate their activities in an ethical and perceptual *milieu* similar to the one of FJ. The conclusion sketches the main relevant planes of analytical concentration that cut across the first part of the thesis.

Chapter 3 is about a family of social actors, New-Locals, that I consider the most ethnographically significant among those addressed in the thesis. In this chapter I examine the spectrum of approaches through which domestic immigrants (*ijūsha*, or new-

locals) operate in the area, considering in particular the activities of ‘culinary brokerage’ (Cohen and Avieli 2004) put forward by organizations such as Peace Boat Ishinomaki, or individual restaurant owners. In the conclusion I consider the ambiguities of the new-locals’ attitudes and ideologies towards the Northeast, and I employ the Hegelian concept of ‘vanishing mediator’ and a few movie references to interpret them.

In Chapter 4, the last of the first part, I consider the third type of social actors, Non-Locals. Non-Locals are an elusive category, only negatively defined: I choose to consider both Japanese Non-Local actors, such as the tourism promotional campaigns and the web messages from the organizers of the Reborn Art Festival, and foreign Non-Locals, represented in the chapter by the students of a prestigious North American University visiting Tōhoku. In the concluding remarks, I again resort to elements of the critique of ideology already introduced in Chapter 4, and explore the Gramscian lexicon and authors in order to position Non-Local agency in Ishinomaki within the frame of Subaltern Studies (with the help of Nathan Hopson’s work, 2013, 2017).

The second part of the thesis, dedicated to movement, starts with Chapter 5. In order to address the topic of centripetal motion towards Ishinomaki, in this chapter I make use of the concept of mapping, as used by the French scholars Foucault (1986) and de Certeau (1984). The chapter proceeds through ethnographic cases of city re-mapping for the sake of visitors: with Pokemòn digital creatures, prefabricated diners, impromptu food stalls, supermarkets and footraces, I attempt ‘mapping the mapping’ of Ishinomaki and its neighbouring town Onagawa (figure 1, 3). In the conclusion I reflect both on the inescapable necessity, and the creative potential, of place making in post-disaster contexts, introducing key analytical themes from the work of the Italian ethnographer Ernesto De Martino.

In Chapter 6, the flux reverses, and I discuss how people (and all they carry with themselves) emanate from Ishinomaki, drawing from the ethnographic material I gathered on my secondary field site, Tōkyō. Focusing on the Wotani-ya Ishinomaki cuisine restaurant, the Koko Miyagi Furusato Plaza antenna shop, and the Hoya-Hoya Gakkai, I explore how locality, authenticity, and innovation are narrated by the ‘ambassadors’ of culinary Ishinomaki-ness in the capital. The most relevant aspect of such narratives, I contend in the conclusion, is the problematic overlapping of the homogenizing and hegemonic nation-wide *furusato* ideology, and the recent attempts to market specific

localities. The case of Ishinomaki is particularly significant as *ijūsha* are found – unsurprisingly – intensely engaged in processes of culinary brokerage.

Chapter 7 covers art and artists living in Ishinomaki, and how they interpret and express their everyday locality. I attended a photographic exposition in Ishinomaki, interviewed a local photographer (Moritomo), a writer/designer (Matsuo), a performance artist (Ueki), and analysed the work of the realist photographer Takeuchi Toshiyasu. None of the artists are originally from Ishinomaki, but each in his or her own way developed an intense participation in local life. Through their words, and their works, I tried to define, or at least describe, the diverse senses of meaningfulness each taps into when creating art that is significantly tied to the territory of Ishinomaki. Finally, I consider on the centrality of artistic representations in the creative reframing of agentive presence, from the very mundane and lowly aspects, to the most rarefied and profound ones. Unlike many of the artists discussed, the photographer Moritomo, and the performance artist Ueki, assume local food as a central focus (seafood for Moritomo, specifically *hoya* for Ueki), deeply intersecting with the way their artistic endeavor is expressed, and received.

The conclusion brings together the many topics and *foci* discussed in the previous chapters by highlighting how the interactions among locals, new-locals and non-locals, the perception of time in light of the disaster and the long-term demographic and economic trajectories of the prefecture reciprocally intersect. Finally I reflect on how the variously qualified (Klein 2007, Simpson 2012, Oliver-Smith 1995) phenomena that I here address as ‘apocalyptic creativity’, i.e. the rise in activism, entrepreneurship, the invention of locality, the distribution of funding and resources etc., emerges through food production, distribution and consumption both in objective, macroscopic and sociological terms, and in subjective, individual, cognitive ones. Aftermath ‘reconstruction’, in its wider definition, in the context of food and foodways becomes a struggle for identity that mobilizes in direct and indirect ways the whole historical, geographical, and economic reality of the Sanriku coast and Tōhoku at large, revealing the fault lines as well as the connections between the macro region and the Nation-state.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### 1.1 Introduction

The aim of the following chapters is to isolate and analyse the production of discursive narratives about the locality of Ishinomaki, emerging from food-related practices. In order to do so, I will also consider the significant social transformations which took place after the 2011 disaster, and the dynamic relations established between the central Japanese metropolis of Tōkyō and Ishinomaki, Miyagi, and the Tōhoku at large. In several cases the *tsunami* produced a condition of dynamism, where a number of approaches to production and consumption unseen in the area until now, had the chance to emerge and be tested. To address this complex and multi-layered objective, my data will be compared to, filtered through, and interpreted with academic contributions from an array of disciplines (history, philosophy, disaster studies, and of course anthropology).

During this thesis, I rely on comparisons, analyses, and reflections from Japanese studies and ethnographies of Japan, especially those addressing the theme of the countryside and its transformations across the twentieth and twenty-first Centuries. A nascent body of English-language literature on the Northeast has conveniently become available during the last few years, and it will be considered in detail as well. Disaster studies provided a set of tools necessary to analyse the more contingent predicaments of the Tōhoku coast, while studies on subalternity conversely described a wider perspective, used here to sketch the historical and political position of the macro-region. Finally, the attention devoted by anthropologists to food, and its roles in the diverse symbolic orders in which we operate, set the stage for an understanding of cultural charges held by creatures-and-then-foodstuffs such as oysters, scallops, *hoya*, etc.

Although there are only a few examples where these fields partially overlap (and none where they do so completely), the literature I present in the following sections will hopefully provide a detailed, albeit heterogeneous, background for the analysis of my fieldwork data.

## 1.2. Perspectives on Tōhoku: from ‘famine stricken hell’ to ‘heartland Japan’.

As a peripheral region, Tōhoku is subject to power dynamics which have contributed to shaping its inhabitants' habits and perceptions over the last century. Alternatively described as an ‘internal colony’ (Kabayama et al. 1984), a ‘frontier’ (*henkyō*: Hopson 2014, Yamauchi 2012, Takahashi 1979), a land ‘materially poor, spiritually rich’ (Hopson 2013), the ideological status of contemporary Tōhoku in the Japanese national discourse is rooted in its historical development since the Meiji Restoration (1868).

A brief background: in pre-Meiji and early Meiji years (1780-1880), as Kawanishi (2015) demonstrated, the standard image of Tōhoku was that of a savage land, populated by barbaric brutes. Particularly relevant are the words of the statesman Takayuki (quoted by Kawanishi 2015: 38):

‘At a teahouse they stopped at on the way back to Aomori on January 29, they saw children whose “faces were covered in snot,” who were almost “as black as Negroes,” and who ate with their hands just like “baby monkeys.”’

At the same time, significantly, as this frontier-like conception of local people and climate, the region was also projected as a ‘rich land’ (Kawanishi 2015: 143), due to its fertile valleys and lively naval trade, which was virtually obliterated by the ‘Tokyo-centered domestic land transportation network’ development of the 1890s (Kawanishi 2015: 143).

The reconstruction Nathan Hopson proposes in his recent *Ennobling Japan's Savage Northeast* (2017) highlights in this sense the late Meiji shift in the signification of Tōhoku. Since its violent annexation to the newborn Meiji nation, which Tōhoku at first resisted, only to end on the losing side of the Bōshin War (1868-1869), through the famines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries, which won Tōhoku the appellation of ‘famine-stricken hell’ (*kiga jikoku*, Hopson 2017: 86), the Northeast became associated with foreignness. Perceived as a cold, barbarian, and inhospitable territory, Tōhoku was despised by the population of the central and southern Japan, and its people considered inferior. The exploitation of its relatively vast arable land, and the cheap workforce produced by the Northeastern migrant proletariat, made of it a land where ‘boys became soldiers, girls became prostitutes, and peasants paid tribute’ (Akasaka et al. 2011).

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, this interpretative model was progressively

juxtaposed by a second one, that of Tōhoku as a ‘repository of traditional values’. Having not participated in the Meiji era, military-led industrialization of Japan – notably started in Tōkyō, Nagasaki, Hyogo and Akabane around the 1870s (Yamamura 1977) – the agrarian Tōhoku was identified as the national soul by Yanagita Kunio’s illustrious *Tōno Monogatari* (*Legends of Tono*, 1910), a collection of folk legends gathered in the eponymous town of the Iwate Prefecture. Yanagita’s Tōno was a place where the spirits (*kami*) guarded houses, weird water monsters called *kappa* inhabited lakes and streams, assaulting women, and witches called *itako* could speak to the dead. This universe of fantastic, dangerous, and ambiguous beings appeared deeply fascinating to the eyes of the Tōkyōites, ‘not anachronistic, but antidotal to Japanese modernization and westernization’ (Takayuki 1996).

This tendency developed in the postwar period in two different passages, pointed out by Hopson, where the first was a long narrative stretch of ‘Tōhoku as Noble Savage, as the Other leveraged to critique Japan’ (2017: 7), which lasted from 1945 to the 1980s, and was followed by the ‘nostalgia’ post-1980 period. The Second World War defeat ‘forced people [...] to rethink the nation’s values and path’ (Hopson 2017: 8), and dialectically search for nobility in defeat. In this context, the historian Takahashi Tomio (1921-2013) tapped into this national aspiration by describing the ancient inhabitants of the northeastern regions, called Emishi, who long fought against the seventh century central Japan military expansion, as ‘noble freedom fighters’, a ‘virtuous victim and marginal repository of values and traditions oppressed, suppressed, and ignored by mainstream Japan’ (Hopson 2017: 8).

But in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the contempt towards the inferiority of Tōhoku gave way, ironically, to a very different national feeling for the Northeast. From the postwar up to the 1980s the general conception of Tōhoku was fueled by the desire to ennoble the savage Emishi and redeem them from their condition – an ideological operation in turn facilitated by the postwar popularity of victimization. Disenfranchisement from the Japanese rule was legitimized by the need to reinvent a set of values alternative to those shattered by the military defeat and by the catastrophic catharsis of the atomic bombing.

This change culminated with the 1980 rise of nostalgia, that challenged the idea of Northeastern alterity altogether, transforming it from a cold and far frontier (whether ignoble or noble) to the very cradle of the Japanese national identity. The “backwardness”

of Tōhoku was reconfigured as the comforts of a “vanishing” home – ‘Japan’s heartland [...] where the heart, the rice, and grandmother’s house is’ (Hopson 2017: 8).

### 1.3 Furusato, Japan

It is central to note here that this second movement became inscribed within a wider, national trend of ‘rural revitalization’, from which the reimagination of Tōhoku as an object of nostalgia inherited most of its characteristics. During the 1970s and 80s, in response to the loss of centrality of Japanese modes of rural production, due to the mechanization of agriculture, the migratory flow from the countryside towards the urban centres, and the general ageing of the peripheral areas, both the central government and local authorities addressed the phenomenon of *shrinkage*, the name attributed to the compound depopulation, impoverishment, and infrastructural insufficiencies of the countryside. Notes Allison (2013: 24):

Following the war that devastated and emptied the cities, the Japanese soon returned in ever higher numbers, leaving the land for jobs and life in urban centers. By 1970, 72 percent had become wage laborers, 70 percent lived in big cities, and only 9 percent remained farmers (a reduction by half since the 1950s).

Over the years, the result of these forces produced a new and positive image of rural Japan, which was superimposed over the historically earlier conception of the countryside as a backward and depressed area. The effect was one of internal contradiction, as contended by Marilyn Ivy in her *Discourses of the Vanishing* (1995), where the outer edges of the Japanese nation (countryside, or *inaka*) became the storehouses of its most inner and precious cultural tenets. This emerging model became evident in the touristic campaigns for Japanese domestic travel.

As agrarianism and folklore were forcibly pushed out of the national discourse during the Meiji era, they became re-absorbed and re-phrased in a discourse centred on the ‘volkish’ unity of intentions and emotion of the Japanese people. Ivy’s ‘vanishing’ is intended as the progressive deconstruction of rural’s actual locality and individuality, symbolized with the voice of her informants as a subaltern, subjective, irrational mean of communication (Classen 2005; McLuhan 1962). This voice becomes a written, hegemonic document (the ‘discourse’, epitomized in Yanagita Kunio’s folklore studies – *minzokugaku*), executing a leap, from a state of cultural and economic backwardness, to



become a monument of ‘real’ Japan. Domestic tourism advertising, folklore studies and government policies primed and propelled this leap, both centralizing and exoticizing rurality: Ivy contends that rural Japanese identity is a case of ‘marginality-turned-tradition’ which follows a ‘double inscription’ (1995: 25), a formula which aptly describes the status of the countryside in contemporary Japan. Ivy points out, on the one hand, a process of marginalization, coherent with Hopson’s layout of the Meiji era Northeast. On the other hand, the second, opposite movement, is one of nostalgic revitalization. This conservative impulse paradoxically singles out the countryside’s subaltern marginality – the agrarian tradition, the infrastructural insufficiencies, even the otherwise unpleasantly backward home appliances such as the hearth (*irori*) or the squat toilet (such as the one I encountered in Mutsu Town: Conclusion 1) – as the ‘marginality-turned-traditions and their (vanishing) preservation of a world before the destruction of communal solidarities’ (Ivy 1995: 25).

Central to the imagery of tradition and authenticity, is the concept of *furusato* (old town). Widely used in the domestic tourism campaigns of the 1970s and 80s, the *furusato* holds a distinctive invented quality (Creighton 1997). The “new” *inaka* is constructed as the destination of a ‘nostalgic voyage’ (1997: 241), which often assumes the appearance of an escape. The ultimate goal in experiencing the *inaka* is to reach for one’s own *furusato*. The first two domestic travel national campaigns devised to pursue this quest were: ‘Discover Japan’ and ‘Exotic Japan’ (both used the English terms, in order to appeal to internationalized urban youths).

Beyond its nostalgic drive, the *furusato* is also qualified as in ‘intimate place of nurturance’ (Creighton 1997: 243), strongly referring to the Japanese idea of motherhood. Analysed in Takeo Doi’s psychoanalytic theory of *amae* (Doi 1985), ‘motherly love’ is a condition of interdependency devoid of individuality: feelings of belonging, childhood memories, and emotionality are specifically located in the *furusato* (Japan, feminine), opposed to the city (the West, masculine), where individualism and rationality are embodied. The distinction between these two ideological domains emerges eminently in the domestic tourism discourse:

‘Discover Japan played on the most reified and consumable distinction between *national self* [...] and *other*. There is no doubt that this other fundamentally implied the rationalized American other [...] Americanized rationalism and materialism are the antitheses of the Japanese *kokoro*, or ‘heart’ – that much-invoked concept [...] equated with the place of

return: that which is uniquely Japanese and native' (Ivy 1995: 42).

As Creighton (1997: 243) observed, 'Mother and *furusato* may be considered synonymous in the sense that both are prototypes of *amae* relationship'.

Consequently to this dualistic system of values, the leisurely and desirable *inaka* and *furusato* quickly became objects of marketing (Moon 1997, 2002), included with common short-circuits among nature, rurality, and authenticity, such as presenting a reforested mono-crop lumber wood as a 'natural forest' (Moon 1997: 224), or the spread of the popular – and wrong – notion that fireflies and dragonflies only live in uncontaminated areas (Moon 1997: 225), with several rural towns declaring themselves 'firefly villages' in order to attract nostalgia driven tourists to admire their entomological marvels. A dualistic reification of Western-ness as strictly logical and Japanese-ness as inherently intuitive and in harmony with nature can be observed here. Moon concludes that this imagining of *inaka* is a homogenizing label ('With the mass marketing of *furusato*, specific place identity is masked, so that any rural location may symbolically be experienced as anyone's *furusato*' Creighton 1997:224) superimposed by a hegemonic ideology which did not originate from the places it describes. Both in Moon's and Creighton's analyses, the Japanese countryside becomes a bourgeois and urbanized product.

The process of elevation of the *inaka* and the *furusato* during the 1970s and 1980s, at the same time collapsed any possible regional differentiation among the vast Japanese countryside into a single idea, in a fashion similar to what Spivak (1988) laments about the subaltern world, where the diversified instances of subalternity, in the synthetic reification of the Gramscian discourse, are deprived of their own agentive vocality – answering negatively to the title question ('Can the subaltern speak?'). Creighton (1997: 244) observes:

'References to specific places are eliminated. Instead, in an attempt to conflate the idea of one's own *furusato* with a desire for a more Japanese Japan and a search for Japanese identity, the captions to the scenes depicted in the travel posters read: "*watakushi no furusato, watakushi no Nippon*" (my *furusato*, my Japan)'

The poster described by Creighton is interestingly aligned with the post-disaster reconstruction motto *Ganbatte Tōhoku, ganbatte Nippon* (Hopson 2013), where in the mourning and recovery efforts, the vilified Northeast became indeed a vital organ of the nation-state, or even its *doppelgänger*.

From the different angles considered above, the continuity of the ‘top-down’ nature of the reimagination of Japanese countryside is striking. Naturally, processes such as Ivy’s ‘double inscription’, Creighton’s re-invention of the *inaka* and Moon’s homogenization of the countryside, did not take place in a political void. The first attempts to resignify the countryside in Japan date back to the early 1970s, as Moon (2002) and Robertson (1991) both observed, from the images of backwardness and under-development of the first half of the century,<sup>4</sup> to the idealization and nostalgia of the domestic tourism era. The initiator of this process, which lasted more than three decades, was the Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, who expressed in his 1973 bestseller *Nihon rettō kaizō ron* (‘Proposal for remodeling the Japanese archipelago’) his worries about the current state of depopulation and decline of the countryside. His plan for the rebirth of rural Japan consisted in the ‘remodeling of the physical landscape’ (Robertson 1991: 28) through relocation of industries and the construction of transport infrastructures in the countryside.

Despite Tanaka’s concerns, the plan failed due to several factors. Both economic speculation and the 1970s oil crisis<sup>5</sup> played a role together with a more general reluctance of urban firms to relocate industry in the remote countryside and the already depopulated condition of these areas, which could not provide the workforce necessary for effective industrialization. The combination of this failure and the decline of forestry and agriculture (see Knight, 1994), forced Tanaka’s successor in the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party), Noboru Takeshita, to redefine the countryside recovery policy in the following decade. Significantly, Takeshita changed the name of the project into *Nihon rettō furusato ron* (‘Proposal for the Japanese home villages’), introducing a term which would soon become the main code word for the nostalgia-driven affective landscape construction and the reorientation of domestic policy towards ‘folkish’ values. The operation offered the LDP ‘an efficacious way of addressing troublesome political, social, and environmental issues under a single rubric’ (Robertson 1991: 27). This development of the *furusato-zukuri* (‘hometown’ or ‘village’ building, intended in terms of community construction and locality affirmation) reflects both short-lived and long-lasting issues proper to postwar Japan; if in the first place the ‘oil shocks’ were answered with a search for self-sufficiency

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<sup>4</sup>Referencing Kelly (1986), Moon points out how after the 70s two parallel discourses on the countryside (*nōson*) existed, one derived from the immediate postwar modernization process and describing the rural people as ‘backward, poor, illiterate, feudal, superstitious and irrational’ (p. 240) and one linked to the *furusato* imagery.

<sup>5</sup>In the early 1970s the price of oil dramatically rose, leading Japanese politicians and the public opinion to face the problem of Japan’s chronic dependence upon imported raw materials.

(which was metaphorically embodied in the dreamlike past of the *furusato* by the political discourse), simultaneously that same countryside had gradually become a forgotten and exotic container of true Japaneseness from which the Japanese were expected to draw once again to counter the progressive and massive westernization of the everyday urban life.

The passage between Tanaka's and Takeshita's approaches appears blurred, with a common demoninator in the activities of the many local *mura okoshi undō* (movements for village revitalization, Knight 1994, 1998, 2003a). Rural areas started experiencing decline during Japan's industrialization, their demise beginning with the crisis of forestry – as the price of lumber plummeted after the increase of foreign imports in the 1960s (Knight 1994: 635) – culminating in the 1980s with the beef and citrus fruit import agreement with the U.S. and finally in 1994, with the late opening of the rice market to foreign rice.

Parallel to the occupational and demographic shrinking, in the 80s the domestic tourism industry started to draw urbanites to the countryside (*inaka*) to visit temples, hot springs and seaside resorts. In this context, several local initiatives attempted to fight depopulation and to generate employment for the rural youths. One example comes from Oita Prefecture, in Kyushu, where Morihiko Hiramatsu, Prefecture Governor in the 80s, launched the *isson ippin undō* (one-village-one-product movement, Knight 1994: 638). This project was to link every single village (*mura*, actually rural municipalities containing an number of smaller hamlets born out of the 50s land reform, and often eclipsing pre-existing village entities) to a single, typical product (*meibutsu*), enhancing local productivity and at the same time advertising for tourism. While opposed by a number of empirical obstacles (such as the impossibility of avoiding overlap with neighbouring areas *meibutsu*, or the presence in a single *mura* of more than a single traditional product) the strategy was picked up by other prefectures (see Moon 2002). In 1984, in a small village in Oita Prefecture, a small group of men founded the *sutokku no kai* (stock society), with the intention of promoting a new approach to the *mura okoshi* (village revitalization), by actively engaging the issues of depopulation and tourism attraction from within the village. The key point of the *sutokku no kai* was to concentrate the production of food and merchandise as much as possible in the local area, in order to boost occupation and share the benefits of tourism within all the community, instead of the smaller group of hostels, hot springs and restaurants owners. Later, this same

philosophy was applied in Wakayama Prefecture, where the *furusato kai* (hometown societies) emerged, small family-based enterprises specialized in mail-orders of local food products dedicated to urban dwellers (Knight, 1998). The philosophy of the *furusato kai* was to stress the similarity between the village parents and migrant children relation and the consumer-producer one. The main customers of this service turned out to be urbanites with no relation with the original area whatsoever (Knight 1998: 163), being more interested in the healthiness and safeness of countryside food, they did not even come from the Wakayama countryside. Highlighting this tendency, in the 80s domestic tourism boom, rural villages all over Japan were likened to each other, so that any *furusato* could be the tourist's *furusato* (Creighton 1997:224).

A second set of dynamics, specifically analysed and commented in the chapters 5 and 6, follow the material displacement of people and goods to and from Tōhoku, in connection with the production of local food narratives. Embedded in the wider contexts of *furusato* and *mura okoshi* presented above, the movement of local food outside the borders of the Northeastern prefectures is better understood when considered within the frame of the *antenna shop* phenomena. This class of retailers, specialized in goods from a specific town or prefecture, emerged in the late 1990s (Thompson 2004), and quickly became the interface between the urban environment and its rural counterpart. Sources of traditional knowledge and practices, and rural food, *antenna shops* are seen as instances of counter-urbanization, counter-westernization necessary to defend Japaneseness against a rapidly transforming environment. A similar function was played also by department stores (in Japanese, *depāto*), which have not only become hosts of Japanese traditional art (*dentōten*) displays, but ‘play the [...] role of reeducating a westernized consuming public in their own cultural heritage, real or imagined’ (Creighton 1992: 54), and do so by *kimono* wearing seminars, cooking classes, tea ceremony or traditional musical instruments courses. In this capacity, *depāto* become ‘key agents in the (re)invention of tradition’ (55), and retailers of nostalgic escapism for urbanites.

As will become evident in the next chapters, such processes and phenomena are extremely relevant when considering the foodways and social change of post-disaster Tōhoku, as such pre-existent dynamics have commonly shaped and directed many of the initiatives, discourses, and agentivities currently deployed in Miyagi Prefecture.

If the image presented by Ivy and Creighton strongly relies on ‘top-down’ government policies, most of the ethnographers presented in this paragraph (Creighton, Knight,

Thompson, etc.) stress the particular expressions of Discover Japan and Exotic Japan in the local realities, and how local institutions have received and interpreted this new direction, fostering specific initiatives such as the *isson ippin* (one-village-one-product), the *furusato kai* (old town association), or the *antenna shops*. In this sense, center-periphery dynamics become a central focus through which to interpret the *mura okoshi* of the second half of the twentieth century. As noted above, Tōhoku has been for several decades at the centre of a discourse about its subordination, which is useful to briefly address here in order to introduce more critical points of view on the historical condition of the region.

The strange admixture of domesticity and exoticism that characterises the Japanese countryside has been associated with the idea of ‘frontier’ (*Henkyō*) by both Morris-Suzuki (1996, 2001) and Hopson (2014) (discussed in 1.2). Although both provide useful insights into this concept, the former mainly focused on the traditional frontier territories of Japan (Hokkaido and the Ryūkyū Islands) and the development of the official narrative about them during the modern history of Japan (from 1600 on), while the latter explicitly links the term to the whole region of Tōhoku, referring to the work of the Japanese and Tōhoku native historian Tomio Takahashi.

In Morris-Suzuki, ‘frontier’ is the space of the State’s hegemonic agency enacted to ‘define and tame’ the spacially peripherical Ainu and Okinawans, two native population historically perceived as marginal by the rulers of central Japan. During the Tokugawa era, the model of the world was that of a *ka-i* concentric system in which a ‘settled, orderly center (*ka*) was surrounded by boundless circles of increasing strangeness, disorder and barbarism (1996: *i-ii*)’. To define itself as a *ka*, Japan had to exert domination over its less civilized neighbours, namely the Ainu (inhabiting the land of Ezo) and the Okinawans from the Ryūkyū islands, who had to be subject to tribute payment (although the Ainu-Japanese relation was of commercial nature). Fueling this view of the world, then, was the strangeness of the customs of the submitted countries, whose alterity was at the centre of the narration of identity in seventeenth century Japan.

This conception underwent a radical transformation during the second half of the eighteenth century, with the development of the Japanese nation-state identity. Japan’s northern and southern neighbouring populations were annexed within the newly established national boundaries (in 1869 Ezo was incorporated under the new name of Hokkaidō and the Ryūkyū islands became Okinawa prefecture in 1879, ten years later),

and the emphasis on the distance between their inhabitants and the Japanese people shifted from space-based to time-based. As extraneous to the new concept of civilization – *bunmei*, a progressive movement of individual towards improved conditions – Ainu and Okinawans were depicted as previous stages, ancestral models of Japaneseness which had failed to become civilised. As such, they were expected to transform, abandon their customs (which were no longer sources of strangeness but of backwardness instead) and assume the ‘right’ ways of rice farming, proper dressing, and, in later years, speaking Japanese.

The new value under which Japan was to be unified became that of *minzoku*, ‘a word whose most apt translation was the German *Volk*’ (Morris-Suzuki 2001: 88). ‘*Minzoku*’ was identified as group based on communal solidarity, without specific border (thus different from its contemporary, Western concept of ‘race’), and would freely shift from blood bonds, nationality, culture, or a combination of the three. The ideological value of *minzoku* fueled the idea of Japaneseness during the first half of the nineteenth century and Japan’s colonial period, when the forced integration of Koreans was enacted on the basis of a ‘Japanization’ process which entailed the acceptance of this common ideology.

This shift in the definition of Japaneseness enabled the intellectuals of the time to define the neighbouring alterities not on a spatial basis, where the differences are products of separate and independent histories, but on a temporal one: ‘the societies of the frontier had shifted [...] to being communities that not only were Japanese, but *always had been Japanese*, only Japanese stranded in an earlier phase of historical evolution’ (Morris-Suzuki 1996: 61).

In her analysis of the ideological transformation of the ‘frontier societies’, Morris-Suzuki explores the development of a dehistoricising process which has led to a monodimensional interpretation of the Ainu culture, among others. Moving on similar ground, Hopson explores how the concept of frontier – originally defined by the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner – was interpreted and put into use in Takahashi Tomio’s postwar thought in order to overcome Tōhoku’s dehistoricisation and exploitation by part of the Japanese state.

Originally, Turner introduced the concept of ‘frontier’ in 1896 as an element of cultural ‘naturalization’ which permitted the American civilization to transcend older institutions and qualify itself as a new instance of Western culture. The ‘transforming influence of the



free land’ (Turner quoted in Hopson 2014: 143) acted as a cathartic process which favoured modern American values and practices, and the encounter with the frontier itself was the birth of the American nation, rather than the institution of the New England colonies. For this reason, the Turnerian frontier is to be considered not a physical place but rather a transformative momentum of positive revitalization, which defines both the State and the Nation.

Born in the northeastern Iwate Prefecture, Tomio Takahashi developed his history of Tōhoku in the postwar academic ‘community of contrition’ (*kaikon kyōdōtai*, Barshay 1988: 238-247) of those scholars who ‘struggled [...] to metabolize the experience of war and defeat to produce a new value system’ (Hopson 2014: 153). Influenced by Marxist studies, he identified the Japanese state as the antagonist of progressive social change, and initiator of the exploitative policy which left the North-East victim of the 30s famines and highly vulnerable in the 1933 Shōwa Sanriku earthquake and tsunami and the 1934 Muroto typhoon (151). In fierce opposition to mainstream historiography, Takahashi critically re-examined the Japanese east-west divide<sup>6</sup> identifying ‘a different Japanese history’ – in Japanese *Mō hitotsu Nihon-shi* – and applying to this his personal approach to Turner’s frontier. Whereas the American historian conceived the ‘wilderness’ as a culturally deserted and naturally prosperous space of appropriation, Takahashi focused on the capacity of mutual definition that a frontier and a nation exercise on each other during the process of colonization, dismantling the one-way ‘colonial’ model of the Japanese conquest of the Emishi (ancient name of the Tōhoku inhabitants). Aiming at a model of reciprocal interaction he intended to restore the historical agency and identity of the North-East of Japan.

The same Takahashi actively opposed Tanaka’s 1970s countryside industrialization plan (the *Nihon rettō kaizō ron*) denouncing his urbanization and homogenization policy as ‘evil egalitarianism’ (Takahashi quoted in Hopson 2014: 157), defending Japanese internal heterogeneity as a virtuous quality in spite of the diffused ‘Tokyo-ification’ tendency of the 1970s. Takahashi’s model was based on a fundamental dichotomy, which opposed to the Japanese state a historical construct – the *Michinoku* kingdom. In 1988 archaeologists found the remains of the Michinoku capital in the city of Hiraizumi,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> He identified the borders of this divide in the Fossa Magna, a great lowland rift that traverses the widest portion of Honshu from the Sea of Japan to the Pacific, separating the Tōhoku region from the rest of Japan.

<sup>7</sup> Southern Iwate Prefecture.



which was identified as the main political and administrative centre of the North-Eastern Japan during the Heian Era (794-1185 AD). At its zenith its population of 100,000 competed with Kyoto in size and splendor (see Sanuki, 1996).

#### **1.4 Subaltern Tōhoku: envisioning the Japanese Northeast through Gramsci**

Although scholars of political philosophy have seldom addressed Tōhoku's predicament, it can be recognized in the writings of the Antonio Gramsci, and specifically in his concept of *subalternity* (1971: 52). In this section it is my intention to outline the overlapping spaces between Tōhoku's historical development and the thought of Gramscian political and social theorists concerning power and the construction of meanings, including de Certeau's theory of social agency (1984, 1986), Foucault's reflections on space (1965, 1986), Žižek's critique of ideology (2008), and the insights on the dynamics of crisis by the Italian ethnographer Ernesto de Martino (1977).

Critical analysis of centre-periphery relation is typical of many Marxist socio-anthropological theories, and in this sense, Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci's work – especially his reflections on the conditions of sub-proletarian and proletarian classes, whom he called 'subaltern classes' (Gramsci 1971: 52) – and his theoretical critique of folklore studies is illuminating. Gramsci's anti-romantic stance and his vision of folklore as something that 'must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but something which is very serious and must be taken seriously' (quoted in Gencarella 2010: 221-222) stands out as a conception of popular class' culture far ahead of his time, which only many decades later has been fully taken up by scholars.

Particularly relevant to Tōhoku is the Gramscian notion of *hegemony* (Mouffe 1979: 186): given a centre of power and a periphery to be controlled, Gramsci asserts that mere military or administrative domination is not enough, and describes 'hegemony' as an exercise of power through consent, identity-construction, representation and education (Gramsci 1971: 350), or in equivalent terms, 'a system of class alliance in which a *hegemonic class* exercised political leadership over *subaltern classes* by *winning them over*.' (Ramos 1982). As observed by Williams (1977), this is far more refined than the classical and blunt Marxist concept of domination/subordination, as it posits a social relation between the ruling and the ruled groups; Gramscian hegemony is a relation which can mutate, adapt, and be manipulated by both 'players'. These specific features of

hegemonic rule emerge notably in the analyses of rural Japan (Kelly 1992, Thompson 2004, Dusinberre 2012), as the ideological apparatus of countryside imagery created by the urban upper classes (Ivy 1995) was acknowledged, reproduced, partially manipulated, or contested by local actors.

The relevance of Gramscian analysis to the contemporary history of Japan is due to the partial similarity between Italy and Japan's political transformations across the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries; in Gramsci's analysis of the subaltern southern Italy during the national unification of Risorgimento (1815-1871), his 'Southern Question' (2005) can be compared to a similar 'Northeastern Question' in the Japanese case: Italy's failure to transform military and economic domination into an actual political consent are mirrored by a similar failure by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese government and its postwar counterpart as well. Similarly, his notion of 'social disintegration' in subaltern areas can be compared with Dore's observation on the weakening of solidarity in post-1945 *buraku*<sup>8</sup> communities (see Dore 1959, 351-355).

Considering the definition above ('a system of class alliance in which a *hegemonic class* exercised political leadership over *subaltern classes* by *winning them over*'), subalternity emerges as the constitutive quality to the establishing of a hegemonic relation. As Smith (2010) argues, if in Gramsci's times the subaltern classes were easy to identify, his theory of hegemony encompasses far more than proletarians and peasants, and aims more broadly at social life in the 'margins of society' (Smith 2010: 38). The conceptual flexibility of Gramscian hegemony makes it extremely appropriate to analyse the development of the centre-periphery dynamics in post-disaster Tōhoku, as apart from a few extraordinary cases,<sup>9</sup> the stance of North-eastern local middle and working classes, i.e. 'those lacking autonomous political power' (Smith 2010: 39) have been non-confrontational towards the directives of central and regional authorities. This lack of demarcation (a us-vs-them ethos) thus makes necessary, in order to properly frame the activities discussed in the following chapters, an approach sensitive to the generative interexchange among state power, peripheries, dialectics of locality, and imageries of recovery.

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<sup>8</sup> Literally "hamlet", the *buraku* was a mutual and hierarchical system of households – mainly based on farming, but *buraku* of merchants also existed – which constituted the single unit of a larger village (*mura*). The term is included in the derogatory *buraku-min* (lit. *buraku* dweller), term used to address communities of 'untouchables' who still in contemporary times are subject to significant discrimination (see Neary 1997).

<sup>9</sup> A paramount one being the Okawa Elementary School lawsuits described by Lloyd-Parry (2018).

Drawing from Gramsci, several scholars developed and elaborated the notion of subalternity in connection with the body of postcolonial studies and, in particular, cultural studies primarily of India (Guha 1997, Chakrabarty 2002, Chibber 2014), and of Latin America (Beverley 1999, 2008, Saldívar-Hull & Guha 2001). The reason Gramsci, among the many Marxist scholars available, was extensively read, translated, and quoted, concerns precisely his interest with the subaltern classes, and in particular the peasantry. In contrast with the founders of Marxism's 'confident assumption of the imminent demise of the peasantry in the face of rural and industrial capitalism, and their overemphatic contrast between the 'idiocy of rural life' and peasant barbarism on the one hand and the revolutionary, class-conscious industrial proletariat on the other' (Arnold 2000: 24). Gramsci's peasants are instead presented as a creative, adapting, and ideologically sound group.

With the initial impulse provided by the Bengali historian Susobhan Sarkar (Chaturvedi 2000), who introduced Gramsci's thought in India in the late 1950s, and the subsequent contributions of Sarkar's pupil, Guha (*Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, 1983) and the British historian Hobsbawm (*Primitive Rebels*, 1971), the focus of Marxist historians in India and the United Kingdom shifted from the political agency of dominant groups, identified by Chaturvedi as the 'interpretations [...] which celebrated elite contributions in the making of the Indian nation' (Chaturvedi 2000: vii), to that of peasantry, in order to overcome the 'elitist bias' (Guha 1982: vii) inherent in the academic discussion of subalternity in South Asia and write the '*history from below* about the nineteenth- and twentieth-century India' (Chaturvedi 2000: x, my italics).

Advancing from the original Marxist framework of Guha, and introducing Foucauldian elements into the debate, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 1991, 2005) produced a keen critique of the Subaltern Studies series. Criticising Gramsci, Spivak (1988) warned against the collapse under the umbrella of subalternity of diverse and differently characterized social groups, and the advocacy of forms of subaltern emancipation – a typically Gramscian stance – as narratives of subalternity produced by voices external to the marginal group, muted the voice of the actual subaltern. Considering the practice of funeral pyres in India under the British colonial rule (*sati*), Spivak points out how, lost between the British humanitarian discourse ("white men saving brown women from brown men", 1988: 92) and the Hindu native policy ("the woman actually wanted to die", 93), 'the Hindu woman loses their voice in such a contradictory position between two

antagonistic poles that constantly teases her to make a conscious decision. The “voice” of the Hindu woman herself disappeared while these two discursive groups tried to give her a voice’ (El 2011: 7).

Spivak’s contribution is fundamental as it posited the figure of the subaltern within the space of postmodern theory, shifting the fundamental question from “what is the subaltern” to ‘how is the subaltern represented?’ (Jazeel & Legg 2019: 14). Answering the question she asks in the title of her seminal essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988, 2000), as Gidwani (2009) highlights, Spivak answers a definitive ‘no’, echoing Guha’s central object in the analysis of subalternity: ‘the study of [the] historical failure of the nation to come to its own [...] due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism’ (Guha 1988, quoted in Beverley 1999: 6, see also 6.5).

The role of heteronomous narratives (a body of discourses produced by a set of actors that do not belong to the area/group/timeframe said narratives revolve around) in the subjectification and muting of subaltern actors is fundamental in the context of this thesis, as is extensively discussed in Chapters 4-6. These statements resonate powerfully with the scenario drawn by Kabayama and others, later translated and commented by Hopson (see 1.2), and by Hara (see below) of the Northeast as a subaltern region and an internal colony, as well as the critical issues implicit to the inability of the middle-class to interpret and convey the subjectivity of the rural working class.

The Gramscian functioning of hegemonic rule – particularly the peculiar and constitutive phenomenon of consensus – ‘never imposed aprioristically but [...] always developed within the social, economic, and political relations’ (Howson & Smith 2008: 3) – and the notion of ‘voiceless’ subalternity as framed by Spivak, are precious tools to frame the social reality of Tōhoku, and in particular the experience of local acquaculturists and fishermen, placed in ambiguous continuity with the voices of both non-locals, and upper-class new-locals. The interplay of heteronomous narratives, local agency, and domestic immigrants’ mediation is analysed in detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The Gramscian dynamics between hegemonic and subaltern classes resurfaced after Gramsci in the way the French scholar Michel de Certeau envisioned power structures, the construction of spaces, and social life under capitalism. In his analyses, de Certeau looks into the creative impulses resulting from the frictional interplay of social instances

– control, top-down normativity and structure opposed to individual free agency, bottom-up repurposing and counter-narratives.

In his *Arts de Faire* (*The Practice of everyday life*, 1984) de Certeau deals with what he calls ‘strategies and tactics’, practices enacted by two separate kinds of social actors – producers and consumers. The former, being politically and materially empowered, realize coherent and highly structured logical systems, such as books, cities or supermarkets, which ‘generate relations with a [distinct] exterior’ (xix). The latter follow a different pattern of behaviour, being unable to distinguish the exteriority in which they operate, not ‘being able to keep it at a distance’ (xix). Consumers’ behaviour is thus characterized by situationality, lack of temporality (it is not structured over time) and of productivity (it does not capitalize), but on the other hand, taking place in environments structured by producers’ strategies, invents itself by ‘*poaching*’ a way through the otherness by merging with it. In contrast with Foucault’s focus on control institutions’ mechanisms, De Certeau attention is devoted to the ‘silent’ *poiesis* (production) which emerges from the everyday strategies of what he calls ‘marginal groups’ as a form of reappropriation of the product-system within the industrial (and post-industrial, since De Certeau’s thesis is still valid in many aspects) reality. Notably, De Certeau’s definition of ‘marginal group’ is very broad and not limited to what we generally intend – i.e. that of a minority, or a specifically Gramscian subaltern group. Marginality in de Certeau’s covers ‘the cultural activity of the non-producers [...] a universal [...] silent majority’ (1984: xvii). In this sense we can see a generalization and universalization of the concept of subalternity and marginality, but also the updating of the Gramscian hegemonic theory to the postmodern neo-liberal era of policing, nascent in the years *Arts de Faire* was being written (Barfuss 2008): the agency of the marginals, who operate at the margins of a world of sense-making, poaching meanings and practices, was something Gramsci did not fully acknowledge. If the Gramscian struggle was one for self-consciousness and intellectual representativity (Gramsci 1971: 15 ff.), in de Certeau the subject is always-already suspended, sketched, ironically engaging (Barfuss 2008). As I discuss in the following chapters (2-4), the Certeauian condition is well portrayed by my local and new-local informants, who very often do not recognize themselves as political agents, in direct opposition with homogenizing, ideologized forces, but rather negotiate with those normalizing impulses – in turn well described by the Gramscian notion of hegemonic forces.

The theoretical takes of Gramsci and de Certeau strongly resonate with several critical approaches to the Northeast. Notably, Katsurō Hara's comment on Tōhoku in his *Introduction to the History of Japan* (1920), highlights how the region was considered by the Meiji and Taishō political establishment as nothing more than an 'internal colony' (pp. 26-27). The concept – never abandoned in the following years by Tōhoku historians and ethnologists – was refined more than half a century later by the economist Tomohiro Okada in his analysis on the role of the region as domestic colony for the postwar capitalist rise of Japan, to which it provided both rice and labour force while the more politically and geographical central areas of Tokyo-Yokohama and Osaka-Kobe effectively developed as affluent industrial centres (Okada, 2012). As Hopson (2013) puts it, when the famous Tōhoku anthropologist Akasaka Norio visited the coast after the 3/11 disaster, despite his previous analysis of the North-East internal differences which led him to contend that Fukushima Prefecture was more properly part of Kantō rather than Tōhoku, 'he recollects, that to his surprise, "Tōhoku was still a colony"' (Hopson 2013: 3). The lingering disparity perceived by these scholars suggest a degree of comparability with the Italian texts and offers an original and solid background with which to contextualise an analysis of the Tōhoku inhabitants' subjective strategies and agencies in the contemporary setting. In their rich edited volume about Tōhoku, *Wearing cultural styles in Japan* (2006) Traphagan and Thompson contend that postmodernity has gradually rendered the rural-urban dichotomy 'obsolete' (Traphagan & Thompson 2006: 8). There is no arguing against that, and yet, they continue, 'we move away from the idea of culture [...] as a process of intersubjective construction [...] but [we consider it] a process through which people adopt different versions of their culture to achieve specific aims' (Traphagan & Thompson 2006: 8). 'Frontier' or 'internal colony' as it is, Tōhoku is perceived as a 'repository of traditional lifeways'<sup>10</sup> (Traphagan & Thompson 2006: 11) within a context of political subalternity and infrastructural uncertainty. In this condition, individual social agents adopt, invent and construct specific cultural patterns in order to position themselves within their Nation and the world, producing a 'presence' which manifests itself (also) through modes of production and consumption.

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<sup>10</sup> Following the pattern of thought by which a colony is as materially poor as it is spiritually rich (Hopson, 2013).

## 1.5 Aftermath: The Anthropology of Disaster

The academic study of disasters and their consequences offers precious insights into the mechanics of crisis and rebuilding that have deeply affected the social and economic situation of contemporary Ishinomaki. Particularly relevant are the concepts of *vulnerability* (Alexander 2000: 25-35; Oliver-Smith 1996: 305 foll.) and of *resilience* (Alexander 2000: 57-58). The former term refers to the potential for loss and damage that a given territory may suffer in case of disaster; it is a very complex value to determine, but particularly important in the case of Sanriku, where vulnerability was allegedly produced, among other causes, by long term central policies of infrastructural under-development (see Hopson 2013).

As Oliver-Smith pointed out (1996: 314):

‘anthropologists [...] began to reconsider disasters less as the result of geophysical extremes such as storms, earthquakes, avalanches, droughts, etc and more as functions of an ongoing social order, of this order’s structure of human-environment relations, and of the larger framework of historical and structural processes’

This ‘extended’ version of the concept, as discussed widely in the previous sections (1.2, 1.4) is particularly relevant to the Japanese case, especially in light of seafarming as a ‘structural characteristic of Sanriku’s fishery sector’ (Wilhelm and Delaney 2013: 101). Discussing the Haiti Earthquake of 2010, Schuller (2016) significantly points out that two centuries of colonial history and more recent development policies had de facto turned a magnitude 7 earthquake into a disaster due to the direct and indirect impoverishment through colonial undermining and development fueled dependancy of the Caribbean nation (see also Barrios 2016, Goudge 1999), a consideration that resonates significantly with Hopson’s analysis discussed above (1.4).

The latter term, *resilience*, connects the physical, economical and social characteristics of the territory (for Japan, see Gill et al 2015, Samuels 2013) with the agency of local actors. The capacity of individuals and groups to modify their behaviour in order to adapt to new conditions, or ‘capacity for renewal, re-organization and development’ (Folke 2006: 253) holds particular significance in light of the emergence of new patterns of food production and consumption on the coast, in connection with macroscopic initiatives (governmental and not), such as the boost for tourism in the affected prefectures (see Chapter 5), the gradual shift towards neo-liberal, individual entrepreneurship (Traphagan



2017, 4.4 in this thesis), the spread of internet-based advertising and marketing (see 2.2, 3.2), and the search for new narrative patterns to frame the Japanese Northeast (Chapter 7). Further significance is added by the criticism of the concept of *resilience* by Barrios (2016), concerning the ideological background from which the term stems: is it appropriate, asks Barrios, to qualify a community's resilience in the measure that it is able to revert to its pre-disaster status? Is it even desirable?

‘the idea that resilience is the capacity to return to a precatastrophe state of affairs, where the “prestate” was a stable condition is a fundamentally inadequate model for understanding what human communities are, and how they may respond to disasters’ (Barrios 2016: 30)

One corollary of this position directly concerns *vulnerability*: if a community's vulnerability is produced by its organization (or, in a larger scale, by its socioeconomic status within the nation-state), is it not paradoxical to aim at returning via *resilience* to that same, vulnerable, status? We see below (1.5.b) how this criticism has been fruitfully contextualized in the Tōhoku case.

Vulnerability and resilience thus represent the two poles around which the reconstruction of Tōhoku – and, most importantly, the reconstruction of Tōhoku's inhabitants' lives – constantly orbits.

In a partial critique of Oliver-Smith's approach to the disaster and its aftermath as ‘blank slate’ conditions, Simpson (2012) points out five arguments that are significant in regard to the contents of this thesis. First, Simpson emphasizes a simple but fundamental aspect of disaster anthropology, i.e. that it necessarily studies an aftermath. As discussed in detail in the Conclusion (Section 6), I share Simpson's emphasis on the centrality of the aftermath as a broad social process that *de facto* produces the disaster it follows as a discernible object.

Second, discussing his own fieldwork in western India, Simpson highlights how the long regional history of Gujarat played out in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake that devastated the region, thus introducing the fundamental aspect of socioeconomic history and regional specificities in post-disaster context.

The third observation concerns the role of the state and of capital in post-disaster transformation. Fueled by aid and reconstruction funds, Simpson contends, a consumption boom follows disasters, promptly capitalized by private investments backed by local and national administrations. According with Naomi Klein's notion of ‘shock



doctrine' (2007) 'capitalism uses the public disorientation of collective shocks to control and profiteer' (Simpson 2012: 8). In the course of this thesis, the dominant modality of production is understood as a form of neoliberalism. This term describes the process where central state apparatuses and the public sector at large lose centrality in the economic development in favour of corporate and private agency, a transformation started in the 1980s that has extended across the industrialized world (Arrighi 1999; Brenner 1999; Tsing 2005). Following this logic, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century the *locus* of political sovereignty migrates from the nation-state to the economic sphere, in its specific expression of free-market capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000), which in turn affects "not only the ontology of production and consumption, but also the essence of labor, identity and subjectivity in the situated interactions of individuals" (Chang 2015). Considering Simpson's stages of the aftermath, which range from the collapse of traditional social distinction to the nostalgic mourning and recovery/invention of regional identity, to the re-formation of social structures and finally to the emergence of new economies fueled by the rapid growth induced by recovery policies, it is in the last passage that individual entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-promotion emerge as examples of neoliberalist-oriented subjectivities. Barrios (2016: 33) puts the matter in different words: 'postdisaster contexts are moments when political elites and culturally dominant groups attempt to define disaster recovery in ways that align with their socioeconomic interests and sensibilities'. Marchezini (2015) and Collier & Lakoff (2015) theorize in detail how the State implements regulatory biopolitics during aftermaths: 'discourses of power and knowledge, categories and target populations, disaster narratives [...]' (Marchezini 2015: 370) are mobilized in order to strengthen a (usually) capitalistic-neoliberal agenda. Such cases, which I have commonly encountered during my fieldwork (e.g. 2.2, 2.8.b, 3.4, 6.2 etc) and represent driving forces of change, debate, and conflict in the socio-economics of post-disaster Miyagi, whose protagonists are without doubt the new-locals, a 'culturally dominant group' as aptly defined above.

Fourth, alongside private development, can be observed a 'dynamogenic effect' of 'congealing emotions and trauma in the form of a nostalgic regional identity, that in turn came into conflict with the actions of the state' (Simpson 2012: 10). This double passage of capitalistic-neoliberal proactivity opposed to anti-state regionalism draws a very vivid and dynamic image of post-disaster transformation, definitely not limited to the Gujarat case illustrated by Simpson, but also discussed by Barrios and Bird (see below).

Fifth, in his conclusion, Simpson points to a possible development of great interest for this thesis:

‘My final suggestion is that it is productive to see aftermaths as reflections on the intervention of catastrophe in social life. [...] [I]t [...] asks for research on the *imagination of time in the aftermath*. People are endlessly drawn back to the moment of the disaster by the affection of fear, as well as to the pre-catastrophic days in *a quest for the absence of the burden nostalgia*, while at the same time, they are indivisible from the *accelerated and future-oriented acts of reconstruction*’ (Simpson 2012: 10, my italic)

Part of this thesis is dedicated precisely to unravel this fundamental *imagination of time*, moving from the notes of Professor Numazaki Ichiro and the theoretical reflections of Ernesto De Martino (see below, 5.7, 7.6, Conclusion Section 4), and considering the two opposite instances of nostalgia (4.3, 6.1) and reconstruction (3.5, 6.5, Conclusion Section 5) while at the same time considering the effects capitalism, neoliberalism, and national policies produced on the above instances in the Tōhoku case.

#### *1.5.a 3.11: Disaster in Japan*

The themes discussed above resonate with the rich body of anthropological articles, chapters, and monographs produced after the 2011 tsunami. Vulnerability and regional history, resilience and response, imagination of time and construction of locality are prominent phenomena in the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The Japanese government’s entanglement in Tōhoku's disaster vulnerability is a theme resonating with Hopson’s (2013, 2017) reflections on the exploitation of the Northeast and the deresponsabilization concerning the aftermath of 3.11. Similarly, Oguma (2011) describes Tōhoku as a region which has been explicitly devoted to intensive rice production and cheap manufacture in order to secure Japan's national independence. The Fukushima nuclear plant was part of this scheme, as the oil shocks of the 70s caused a significant increase in the use of nuclear power, where in the 60s it only amounted to a mere 3% of electricity generation in the whole nation.

Tōhoku as a supplier of food and lumber was exposed to the Asian competition during the 1990s global market expansion, with great losses for economy and tax revenues, causing a subsequent reform of redistribution systems and leaving the already depopulating region further behind the urbanized centres of Japan, such as Tokyo and Osaka (Kelly 2006). In this general context, the earthquake and *tsunami* hit a Sanriku

coast inhabited by elderly (Volker 2008), with scarce public transportation, inefficient supplies of gasoline, heavily reliant on fishing and farming infrastructures (Wilhelm and Delaney 2013: 101) causing breaks in the manufacture supply network due to stricken factories (Sedgwick 2018). Oguma (2011) further contends that the claims of unpredictability of the disaster came from the Tokyo-centrism of those who could only anticipate urban crises like the Kanto and Hanshin (Kobe) earthquakes. If Kobe in 1995, a healthy industrial centre, in the five years following the earthquake produced revenues which covered 90% of the government infrastructural reconstruction funds, the coast of Tōhoku was already in a condition of decline before the disaster, and despite the reconstruction efforts, its condition is expected to worsen. Okada (2013) in his comparison between the Kobe and the Tōhoku earthquakes, comes to a conclusion very similar to Oguma's, highlighting how the rurality of the Sanriku towns and villages suggests a very different outcome than the reconstruction of Kobe – which, similarly to the rebuilding of post-1923 Tokyo, served as a means of urban space modernization and optimization (see also Schencking 2006).

Okada's perspective is backed up by a 2016 overview issued by the Tōhoku Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which indicates a general downward trend both in agriculture and in fishery overall outputs, consequentially, 'recovery' following the 2011 negative peaks almost never reaches the same values of 2009-2010. The 2013 census, of a total of 9 million for the 6 prefectures (with 2.33 only in Miyagi-ken) suggests a significantly increasing quota of elderly (250,000, against the 170,000 of 1995) and a drop in the working age population (550,000 in 2013, 650,000 in 1995). The births/deaths ratio was negative already since 2005, and in the last 10 years the diverging pattern has widened, leading to dire predictions for death-birth ratios and population decrease in the course of the next 30 years (see also Wilhelm and Delaney 2013: 102). This pattern is often described as *shrinkage* (Matanle et al 2011; Matanle 2011), in Japanese *kasō*.

On a more subjective level, the ethnographer and anthropologist of Japan Ichiro Numazaki (2012) reflected about the places he saw and the time he spent in Sendai, and how the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incident disrupted his memories and perceptions. 'March never ended, and April never came' (31), as he wrote in a heart-felt passage of his account, an allusion to the enstrangement the anthropologist experienced in the aftermath. Significantly, Professor Numazaki also chooses to refer to the political status of Tōhoku as 'internal colony' (Iwamoto, quoted in Numazaki), as the main cause

of structural and social *produced* vulnerability of the Sanriku coast.

Along with the articles and essays considered above, a thematic coherence emerges between disaster vulnerability and Tōhoku recent history, which could be defined as a political and macrosocial aspect of which Tōhoku inhabitants may or may not be aware. On the other hand, focusing on the existing literature on resilience phenomena in the Sanriku coast, I observed a general attention towards locally situated action and perception. In this sense, where Tōhoku's vulnerability carries an institutional background, post-disaster reconstruction and transformation appear to be in part influenced by bottom-up trajectories, and often carried out with a critical stance towards governmental priorities, as I contend in Chapters 3, 4 and 7.

The 'bottom-up' quality of reconstruction strategies is exemplified by Thompson (2013), who in September 2011 visited a number of heavily damaged coastal villages of the Iwate Prefecture, and reported both a generalized perception of absence of governmental support and at the same time a proactive attitude of recovery efforts by the local residents. Notably, a third significant factor was the diffused lack of understanding of local priorities by volunteers from outside the area (e.g. McMorran 2017). This strongly resonates with Oguma's (2013) remarks on the path-dependancy process of reconstruction, a distinct separation between local and national efforts marks the Sanriku coast, particularly the smaller villages. The over-reliance on large scale construction, Oguma contends, risks leading to an excessive dependancy on government funds by local communities, where those who oppose projects and policies from Tokyo are cut out from the funds. This, Oguma argues, generates a virtual suspension of democracy where local opposition is impossible. This separation and the enforcement of top-down measures is eloquently described by Bird (2013) in her article on the prefectural seawalls construction and community relocation projects. Following the *tsunami*, in order to ensure the safety of coastal communities, the Prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, backed by the Japanese government, announced plans for massive concrete walls, paired with the construction of residential areas 5 to 10 km further inland. The projects, some of which are currently under construction, were met with disbelief or open hostility by locals, who well remembered the ecological and economic damage to the coastal fishery and agriculture brought by the dam built in 1997 in Fukuoka. Backed up by ecological groups such as the Ecological Society of Japan and the Nature Conservation Society of Japan, several demonstrations ensued in the Sanriku area, but many local municipalities decided

to proceed with the seawalls projects, many of which are now under construction.

Disconnection between the governmental and local agentivities is an ambiguous factor. Where national policies appeared to be supportive for local producers, as in the *Tabete Ōen Shiyō* (Eat and Support) campaign (Watanabe 2014), open confrontation has been practically non-existent. In more blurred cases, such as the Reborn Art Festival (see 4.3, 5.3), or the Lapras event in Ishinomaki (5.2) spaces of (informal) critical engagement emerged.

Post-disaster developments and social change have also been analysed in a more ‘Solnitian’ (see Solnit 2010) light (e.g. Klien 2016), considering the social category of the domestic immigrant (*ijūsha* in Japanese, also addressed as ‘new-local’ in the following chapters): a creative group of young, middle-class, highly educated urbanites who, first as volunteers, then as employees or independent entrepreneurs, moved into Ishinomaki ‘seek[ing] to establish novel lifestyles combining the merits of the knowledge economy with the rural idyll’ (Klien 2016: 2). The transformations in Ishinomaki, led by new-locals, mimic the passage from production to a multi-functional information economy in the whole country. Even more importantly, immigrants rely on networks of like-minded friends and acquaintances (often established during post-disaster volunteering) subverting the traditional distinction between work and leisure, and engaging in ‘intensive daily socializ[ation]’ (Klien 2016:11). Klien’s idea that ‘Post-disaster recovery has been interpreted as return to normalcy by some, whether in a social, economic or emotional sense; others define recovery as an opportunity for radical reform’ (Klien 2016: 18) thus becomes central in understanding the dynamics of social change in the town of Ishinomaki (and several similar urban realities on the Sanriku coast).

Discussing empowerment and powerlessness in the post-disaster reconstruction of Sanriku, at the ASA 2018 conference in Oxford, Anna Vainio asked what is maybe the most urgent question related to the 2011 disaster: what is being reconstructed, exactly? To elaborate on Vainio’s lucid critique, by the term re-construction (and the similar meaning of the Japanese work *fukkō*, ‘to once again build’) we assume a *status quo ante* to which it is desirable to return, and that reconstruction efforts need to aim at the re-creation of what existed before the crisis. But in the context of Tōhoku, described in detail in 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4, considering especially the invented and ideological nature of many qualities assumed by governmental authorities to belong to such a land (see also 3.1), a fundamental

problem of perception arises: to whose voices should one listen, when establishing *what* was Tōhoku before, and therefore *what* is to be, once again, built?

According to Barrios (2017: 254):

‘while disaster recovery is certainly characterized by negotiation, discourse interpretation, and practice reconfiguration, it also has moments when expertise or claims to knowledge of the better are mobilized in ways that steer disaster recovery processes in directions that many disaster survivors find of little relevance to their embodied ways of being and modalities of sociality.’

Empirical examples of this concept in the Japanese case abound (Bird 2013; Hopson 2013; Oguma 2011, 2013; Wilhelm 2018), and in this thesis several other similar cases are discussed (e.g. 4.3, 5.2, 5.5). Notwithstanding the disconnection between locals’ needs and hopes and governmental or otherwise hetero-directed actions (e.g. NGOs such as Peace Boat or APBank), during my fieldwork I have approached many cases of individuals negotiating their agentivity through this impasse (see Chapter 2). Following Barrios’ reasoning further, a prime example of disconnection between cultural and political elites and ‘locals’ emerges with cases of biased reconstruction priorities. According to his informants in Louisiana, following the 2005 hurricane Katrina, ‘the bureaucratic practices of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, FEMA, Red Cross, and home insurance companies featured a number of biases that favored highly educated, upper middle-class beneficiaries whose ways of speaking and behaving indexed “whiteness,” leading to an exclusion of people whose forms of personhood did not reflect such cultivation’ (Barrios 2016: 33). Racial inequality in Japan follows very different patterns and does not come into play in Tōhoku, naturally, but class and geographical inequality certainly do: it is well documented in the literature how reconstruction efforts were focused on major urban centres such as Ishinomaki downtown, Minamisanriku or Kesenuma, and that minor fishing villages were on the one hand neglected in this sense (leading to massive emigration towards suburban areas such as Watanoha, see Introduction Section 1 and 2.1), and on the other hand subjected to the construction of seawalls, often against the will of the few local residents left (Bird 2013, see also 5.3).

Caught between the apocalyptic and Solnitian perspectives, I opted for a middle ground, highlighting both the inconsistencies and insufficiencies of top-down reconstruction policies, but also the many cases of personal agency and creative efforts brought forward

by many locals and new-locals (see for example Chapter 4, 5.4, 6.4 and 7.5).

## **1.6 Identification: The Anthropology of Food**

In relation to the phenomena discussed above, food plays a fundamental role. As a commodity charged with highly significant symbolic and affective values (Appadurai 1981, 1995), and as a ‘potent representation and embodiment of [...] social inequities and cultural politics’ (Karrabaek *et al* 2018: 26), the ‘beliefs and behaviors surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food’ (Counihan 1999: 2) represent an exceptional vantage point from which to analyse social change. If, again, Counihan states that ‘[Food is] a prime domain for conveying meaning because eating is an essential and continuously repeated activity’ (1999: 19), meaning that food practices channel, for example, gender and class normativity, Mintz and DuBois add ‘Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart [...] Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity’ (2002: 109).

Food does not only construct a normative interpersonal space, but also defines the superpersonal spaces of nationhood and/or ethnicity (Osella 2008). Food acts as a metonym of the social self, in which the anthropologist can and does partake. As Mookherjee (2008: 74) states: ‘culinary boundaries and connections can constitute political identities [...] and become visible through the food practices of the ethnographer which itself become a marker of political borders, territoriality and place-making’. Place-making acts so that, as Osella (2008) observes, the conspicuous similarity of two meals across a border is disregarded, preserving its *distinctive* sociocultural significance.

Moreover, shifting along lines of class and subalternity (i.e. centre-periphery socioeconomic dynamics), food illustrates equivalent shifts in national policies and cultural meanings: food production and consumption habits, cuisine and representation (both autonomous and from external perspectives) are central in the process of inventing an ideological and geographical entity, and are deeply grounded in the historical and political context of the area they are developed into. If Mary Douglas in *Deciphering a Meal* (1972) suggested a grammar and a lexicon of meals that structure food from a mouthful to an entire biography of eating memories, her limitation to the microsocial and



prescriptive level of meal was promptly criticised by Mintz (1985: 200), who demonstrated how supposedly immanent structures as described by Douglas and Levi-Strauss were in fact dependant on the global and macropolitical processes. These processes, such as the massive production of cane sugar in the British Caribbean, radically transformed the Britons' eating habits. Colonial history not only transformed the modern diet, but acted upon the very nutritional and ideological framing of items such as sugar, tea and tobacco.

Mintz (1996) also introduced a two-layered model of relation between food and power. Power as a category, for the author, transcends simple political authority over decision-making within the settings and domains of preexisting social conditions, but instead structures the world by 'organiz[ing] and orchestra[ting] the settings themselves, and [by] specify[ing] the distribution of energy flows' (Mintz 1996: 29). Mintz associates this force with Marx's 'power of capital to harness and allocate labor power' (29), setting its cogency within the modern, globalized trade system. This first layer of relation, organizational, set on the level of production and socio-historical in a macroscopic sense, directly shapes a second, microscopic process that takes place at the level of consumption and signification. Mintz addresses the two layers as outside and inside *meaning*, stressing the operational difference of the two and their dependancy in top-down (outside-towards-inside, production-towards-consumption) trajectories.

Analysing the process of identity construction and political development during the postwar consolidation of the Basque Country nationality, MacClancy (2007: 68-87) highlights pivotal elements around which the construction of gastronomic tradition takes place: the invention of local folklore literature, the development of transport routes, industrialization, the development of tertiary economy, the emergence of tourism, gastro-journalism and professional cooking. In the postmodern iteration of the Basque national construction, beginning with the 1980s, the imperative of taste refinement as a social aspiration has progressively weakened, giving way to feelings of nostalgia and rural revivalism (cf Ivy 1995), a typical expression of Mintz's *outside meanings* (Mintz 1995: 5 foll).

The interplay of food and locality construction is considered in MacClancy (2004), who suggests a critical approach to the problematic concept of 'identity', favouring the more processual and agent-oriented term of 'mode of identification' (MacClancy 2004: 65-70). Among the modes described, particularly significant for this research are the



historiographic (67) and local (69) ones, which stress the processes of nostalgia, invention of tradition, attitudes towards local products, communal meals and heritage construction, themes widely discussed in 1.3 and 1.4. As Wilk (1999: 244) put it, the central role of food in the definition of a local identity established, one must also consider its inherent relational processuality, the measure in which food narratives become ‘fluid and changeable’ (Wilk 1999: 244) when the social constructs around them mutate.

The transformation and the ambiguities resulting from the re-adaptation of food-related practices and ideas in the context of tourism are discussed by West (2013, 2015). Exploring typicality and the construction of a ‘gastronomic heritage’, West highlights how postmodern anxieties and the desire to reconnect with the natural environment (2015: 407) provide the demand for natural, authentic, and artisanal foodstuff. The process of social construction of taste, thus, enables the outlining of a narrative of *terroir* (see Trubeck 2008), a dimension which embeds both aspects of invention of tradition and concrete ‘social, economic, and political impact [...] and the hope they hold out for those who imagine distinctive futures’ (Coombe and Alywin, 2011: 2032). The negotiatory interplay among modes of production, historicity, and postmodern market demands, carves out a space of authenticity (West 2013) subject to discussion, critique, and analysis. The inevitable hiatus between heterodirected narratives and local self-consciousness, creates a dissonance (West 2015: 419) between the world of the visitors and the world of the residents. This array of themes and concepts provides a precious tool-box to address the Japanese case, as it presents a significant resonance with the European gastronomic environment investigated by West.

Food and its significance within the processes of tourists’s consumption of locality has been tackled by Cohen and Avieli (2004) and Avieli (2013). Similarly to West, the authors elaborate on locality, authenticity, and the invented nature of culinary heritage, and similarly to West they do not consider the inventedness as a reductive or negative aspect of local gastronomies, but an ‘ongoing, self-generating process that influences and alters the local culinary scape, while relations between tourists and the local food [...] are shown to be complex, dynamic, and multi-directional’ (Avieli 2013: 121). Building on the classic concept of the tourist’s ‘quest for authenticity’ (MacCannel 1976) and the dualistic nature of the phenomenon of tourism, where visitors interact with a front-stage where locals actively select what to (re)present, opposed to a back-stage where ‘authentic’ activities are carried out (see Goffman 1959), Cohen and Avieli identify a fundamental and dynamic

actor in the intermediary, the ‘culinary broker’, a local resident, who directly engages with the tourists, and negotiates both their fruition of the local attractions, and the organization of the representational ‘front-stage’ (Cohen & Avieli 2004: 772-773). In Ishinomaki, this same role is often played by proactive new-locals (Chapter 3), reworking food meanings in order to meet the two ends of local producers and non-local visitors and consumers (3.2.a, 3.4).

The authors discussed above addressed from different perspectives similar issues of locality, centre-periphery dynamics, political and economic authority, social transformation and identification. If on one side Mintz focuses on historical, superindividual and superlocal processes, his concept of deep entanglement between the wider frame of history and global economy and everyday, domestic food habits is very valuable in understanding and defining a small scale reality such as Miyagi Prefecture, until now relatively untouched by ethnographic attention.

#### *1.6.a Food and Japan*

The anthropological study of food in Japan has a short but intense history. One of the earlier works now extensively quoted is without doubt Ishige’s structuralist *The History and Culture of Japanese Food* (2001, edited from translations of Ishige’s Japanese books and articles dating as back as the late 1970s), composed as a relatively short guide to the nation’s most iconic delicacies and their historical context – a text that although alluding to the multiculturalism of the four islands’ food culture and their Chinese, German and Korean roots, builds an inherently nativist, vegetarian- and rice-centred self-contained foodscape. Ohnuki-Tierney’s work (1993) rests on a similar basis to that of Ishige, while Ashkenazi & Jacob (2000) and Rath (2016) attempt and succeed in providing detailed and complex accounts, the former more nuanced towards normativity and tradition, the latter definitely oriented towards critical historical analysis.

Cwiertka's *Modern Japanese Cuisine* (2006), a brilliant application of Mintz’s perspective in Japan, explores the historical changes and developments in Japanese food habits and meanings in relation to the modern political transformations the nation, notably including wartime. Cwiertka’s work describes in detail the links between Japan's opening to the 'West', its colonial period, the WWII experience and the development and refinement of its national cuisine, the introduction of new foods both from Euro-American countries and the colonized Asian nations, the hegemonic discourse on food

from the governmental institutions, and more. Cwiertka's reflections are precious as they strictly set food and cuisine within their historical contexts and account for deep transformations of dietary habits and food values as consequences of equally deep social and economic changes that accompanied the formation of modern and contemporary Japan as a nation-state.

An interesting chapter on the process of invention of 'local food' in Japan is provided by Rath (see above): born out of the postwar nostalgia boom, countryside food deemed unpalatable before quickly became a delicacy produced in sustainable, traditional and culturally significant *loci*. Rath focuses on the *Nihon no Shoku Seikatsu Zenshō* (Collected Writings on Japanese Food), a fifty volume series edited by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery, and Forestry (MAFF). This 'countryside survey of regional food lore' (Rath 2016: 157) was focused on food and preparations dating back to the Taishō (1912-1926) and Shōwa (1926-1989) periods, weaving together interviews with 'unattributed narratives presenting an idealized version of local food culture in the 1920s and '30s including typical daily meals, festive dishes and the ways in which special food are used to celebrate moments in people's lives' (158), aimed at celebrating while describing in detail the variety and good taste of regional cuisines. Rath highlights how the 'goodness' of local food is, despite the claims of the MAFF, a late and urban-centred quality superimposed on a diet largely avoided by urbanites in the first half of the century, whose meals were 'more variegated and luxurious', and 'local food, [...] once synonymous with a backward diet of coarse grains [...] has become in recent years a cornucopia of gourmet dishes' (163). A romanticized, homogenized rural world was conjured in order to frame a meaningfulness, that of 'local food', that in reality was produced by the policies of the central government in order to promote 'regional delicacies to bolster the domestic economy, the rural sector, tourism, and Japan's image abroad'. These are very similar themes to those delineated by Creighton (1992), Moon (1997) and others discussed above in 1.3 and below in 4.2.

It is useful to consider the condition of rurality as a specific configuration of the subaltern perspective and its modern and post-modern implications. In *Alternative Countrysides* (2015), MacClancy depicts the non-urban reality of Western Europe as an ambiguous nexus of discourses, whose transformations have been overlooked by domestic ethnographers for decades. Many aspects pertaining the European countrysides present considerable similarities with the Japanese case, from the romanticism of the

nationalist pastoral rhetoric (Hopson 2013, 2017) to the new-age-ish returnees (see Knight 2003a), and even the clash between the ecological agenda of romantic urbanites and local farmers on matters of hunting or pesticides (see Knight 2003b, Moon 1997), not to mention many other less conflictual and thus less evident cross-cutting modes of cooperation and creative dialogues (Thompson 2004), such as the political and social participation of rural U-turners, or the adaptive ‘exaptation’ of farming *loci* into places of ‘experiential tourism’ (see 3.6, 6.5).

MacClancy's observations on the use of food and cooking as means of identification provide a fundamental framework to interpret the ways in which local Miyagi food has been perceived and commodified after the disaster, both in relation to the tsunami consequences on the coast and the transformations in the circuits of distribution (see in particular 2.2, 3.2, 3.4, 4.4, 5.3-4).

In the Miyagi case we face a very fluid situation, where instances of policy, politics and social history are in open conflict with local trajectories of self-identification, counter-homogenization and economic autonomy (4.3, 5.3). In her study on creativity in Peruvian cuisine, Lasater-Wille (2017) points out how in the discourse of cooking professionals, areas of Peru, the people inhabiting them, climatic and geographical characteristics, and food are strongly associated, producing a form of ideological “iconicization” (Lasater-Wille 2017: 10) comparable to the *isson ippin* movement discussed above. At the same time, individualism and entrepreneurialism as values have emerged as effects of the “rise of neoliberalism on a global scale” (Ganti 2014, Gershon 2011, quoted in Lasater-Wille 2017: 15, also see 1.5).

Ishinomaki's fluidity is best understood as a complex interplay of individuals, who interpret and negotiate meanings and histories, and in 2011 found themselves surrounded by wreckage and death, but also potential and flexibility, seized by the young and the enterprising (2.3, 2.5, 2.9). Beyond its specificities, Miyagi shares key characteristics with the Western European countryside studied by McClancy and West in terms of revivalism, construction of locality, and the implicit risk of disappearance looming over peripheral practices and products (see 3.2, 4.3, 6.3), upon which are built marketing campaigns and the ‘commodification of rural and proletarian nostalgia’ (Leitch 2000); similar to Avieli's Vietnam in what concerns the brokering practices of food culture for the sake of tourists and aficionados (see 3.6). Similarly, Simpson's (2012) Gujarat and its post-disaster

reconstruction carries similarities with the Ishinomaki and Onagawa reconstruction policies and the reactions of residents (as discussed in 1.5, see also 5.6).

#### *1.6.b Disaster food: why and how*

In this thesis I investigate the processes relative to food production, marketing and signification through the frameworks of both disaster studies and of food anthropology. This decision stems from the need to look at cases such as oyster or *hoya* farming as embedded in their local socio-economic backgrounds. These backgrounds are influenced by the consequences of the 2011 disaster, and present features – such as food-brokering, and production of locality – for which the literature on food anthropology has provided in-depth analysis and comparative materials.

In order to properly convey the complexity I encountered in the field, I have thus chosen to integrate both perspectives, as the lack of a proper disaster related background analysis would be as detrimental as the flattening of food related instances onto a framework based solely on the status of Tōhoku as a post-disaster area. Furthermore, it is safe to say that food anthropology implicitly relies on multi-disciplinary sources for what concerns the environmental, historical and social backgrounds of its objects of study, thus indicating that a detour is necessary to allow any anthropological interpretation. This detour is provided, in the contingent case of Tōhoku, by the contribution of disaster-studies.

Reversing the issue, i.e. asking why should someone look at post-disaster through the lenses of food, reveals an equally compelling motivation: disaster is a localized event, and it affects primarily – as it is dramatically highlighted by the *fuhyō higai* phenomenon – a circumscribed area within the nation-state. Food, as a sociocultural object, tends to behave in a similar manner: it belongs inherently to a place.

In the Japanese case this paradigm is confirmed by the intricate network of local delicacies composed since the Seventies under the banner of the *isson ippin undō* (discussed in 1.3, 4.2). It is only through its inscription into the wider grammar of ‘local food’ that the *hoya*, once banned from the Korean market, is being remarketed for domestic consumption (see 2.9, 6.2, 6.4). It is also through food that the political subalternity of Tōhoku is reproduced to this day (see 5.4, 6.3). It is eminently through food policies that the Japanese nation and its neighbours reacted to the 2011 disaster.

Food as point marker for locality enables the anthropologist to analyse it as a metonymic object for a specific locality within a hegemonic framework (see 6.5).

When I chose to focus on local food, I decided to frame it within the interplay of newcomers and locals in order to stress the transformative and adaptive aspects of food discourse, production, and consumption practices. I decided not consider the roles of *hoya* or *kaki* (3.2) before the disaster as my research goals were not to provide a complete description of local seafood culture, but rather to analyse local food products in the transformative context of post-disaster recovery. In this thesis, the 2011 disaster is understood as the dramatic, recent development of a broader socio-historical phenomenon, that of the subalternity of Tōhoku (discussed in 1.4). Considering Tōhoku simply as a post-tsunami macro-region, without accounting for its modern history, poses a severe limit to our understanding of its position in the economic and political reality of contemporary Japan – and thus a limit to our understanding of the complex network of agentivity that situates post-disaster Tōhoku within the Nation. Food, in this sense, operates as the agent connecting the Northeast to the rest of Japan, and a very significant agent it is: from potential source of radiation (2.5, 2.10) to means for the recovery and reconstruction of Tōhoku (3.5, 5.4, 6.3), local food has acquired a distinct centrality in the aftermath of ‘3.11’, symbolizing the uneasy ambiguousness of the region: culturally central, politically peripheral, spiritually rich, materially poor, pristine and radioactive.

Concerning disaster in Tōhoku, we deal with two distinct but related phenomena: the 2011 disaster, a relatively straightforward event, framed within the economic and social process of rural decline. The latter, I contend, is to be considered the ‘real’ disaster, the context that defines vulnerability and resilience in the region. In both cases, food-related strategies sit at the core of the aftermath process of constitution of new economies by an emerging group of entrepreneurs and actors (see Simpson 2012, 1.5). Exploring food production, representation, and consumption, under these premises allows us an extraordinary window on aftermath transformations and how they emerge within the Japanese ideological context surrounding food and cuisine.

## **1.7 Notes on Methodology, and an Elephant in the Room**

### *1.7.a Ethnographic fieldwork and techniques*

My initial research goals were to investigate fishery at large, and were not yet focused

on seafarming and food marketing. I distinctly remembered the seaweed farmers and the deep-sea fishermen who sometimes interacted with us volunteers (see Introduction section 2), mainly as recipients of our volunteering – in several occasions we helped with the *wakame* harvest, which takes place in March and April, and fish cleaning in the workshops of the Oshika Peninsula and Onagawa. This led me to consider Ishinomaki as a potential field site, as I expected my previous experiences and already established local contacts could ease my introduction in the local matters.

Working at the field outline and the literature review in 2015 in Oxford, I was not able to find many anthropological works set in Ishinomaki (Susanne Klien's articles were to be published only in 2016, while Wilhelm's work focused on areas close to Ishinomaki, such as Shiogama and the Oshika Peninsula), a factor that encouraged me further, in the hope of producing an original ethnography and establishing a field potentially expandable further over the years. In the same period, I was extremely interested in the work of Kimura (2016) and Sternsdorff-Cisterna (2015) about radioactivity and food security in Tokyo after the 2011 disaster. In this sense, choosing Ishinomaki over Fukushima seemed to many colleagues an inexplicable choice, given the relevancy the effects of a radioactive fallout on social relations at large – as Ligi exemplifies with his reflections on post-Cernobyl Sweden (2009: 58 foll.). My aim, although, was not to produce a research similar to those of Kimura or Sternsdorff-Cisterna, but to look at a perspective only indirectly affected by the Fukushima meltdown – a post-tsunami context, rather than a post-fallout one (see 1.7.d), since the implications of food security were not the focus of my project, but instead the changes to foodways and food meanings prompted by the disaster. To the extent of my knowledge in 2015, Ishinomaki was a perfect place to research such changes, and the interactions between locals and new-locals that informed them. In many ways, I still believe it is.

My research aims were initially focused on post-disaster change in a neutral way; naturally I was expecting a decline in sheer terms of production and workforce, since the prefectural and municipal statistical and demographic data strongly highlighted this, but only had vague clues about processes such as locality-focused marketing (see 2.2) and domestic tourism-oriented campaigns and initiatives (2.9, 3.2, 4.2), which during fieldwork became more and more central in my enquiry. Similarly, I had not previously established a demographic focus on younger fishermen, while in the first stages of the field (late 2016), due to my association with Fishermen Japan and Peace Boat Ishinomaki,



oriented me towards that segment. In fact, I did encounter a certain resistance by elderly fishermen to being interviewed about their work and activities, more often than not being directed towards their sons and grandsons, many of whom I had already come into contact through associations and individuals, thus making it easier for me to arrange encounters and interviews. I consider my status as a young and inexperienced foreign researcher a further possible cause for this resistance. Different networks of acquaintances and interlocutors produce different perspectives, as the work of Johannes Wilhelm demonstrates – Dr. Wilhelm has been researching fishery in the Ishinomaki municipality for more than a decade, establishing a network qualitatively different than mine, being able to collect material more focused on the perspectives of elderly and conservative individuals (Wilhelm and Delaney 2013, Wilhelm 2005, 2016, 2018).

Being most often than not gatekeepers between me and fishermen, new-locals naturally became interlocutors as well. This in turn produced a limitation, making it hard for me to find individuals who might have had a critical point of view towards these organizations – despite my efforts, I failed to come in contact with anyone who did not share my interlocutors’ most commonly held opinions.

In the course of the first months of fieldwork, covering about September to December 2016, my interest was solidified around the younger fishermen and activists of Ishinomaki area – by then I had widened my field to the Oshika Peninsula villages of Magi-no-Hama, Hamaguri-Hama, Ogi-no-Hama, and Onagawa town. This in turn sharpened my research’s focus on the less conservative food-related practices young individuals and new-locals had been carrying on – marketing, domestic tourism, festivals, new establishments such as gift shops and supermarkets – with its result in the present text.

Similarly, my position in Ishinomaki town, although selected innocently in the beginning, became more significant as my research focus coalesced. Since my previous experience in Ishinomaki, the vast majority of friends and acquaintances with whom I had worked in 2012 had moved to different prefectures, so that only three individuals remained in Ishinomaki and Onagawa: Miyako, Megumi and Paul. During the preparation for the fieldwork, under Miyako’s suggestion, I contacted a local real estate agency and rented a room in a shared house in central Ishinomaki, Chūō district. For this and other reasons linked to the concentration of activities and people, Chūō features conspicuously in this thesis (e.g. 2.6, 3.2, 5.2 etc). Apart from the general and sustained human support I received from these three friends and for which I am deeply grateful, there has been



extremely limited, if any, direct interactions between my personal acquaintances and my interlocutors, although from them and other friends I received many precious insights concerning everyday life in Ishinomaki and the Oshika area.

Living in Chūō made it easier to be in touch with people and groups such as Ishinomaki Peace Boat (3.2), the *Hashidōri Komon* (2.6), Ishinomaki 2.0 (3.5), Mr. Fujihara (3.4), who all had their workplaces in the same district. Being remarkably close to the Ishinomori Manga Museum, I also had the chance to encounter the young photographers of the *Tsuzuku-Tei* exposition described in 7.3, not to mention the fact that I was able to witness the construction of the *Genki Ichiba* supermarket described in 5.5.

When looking for accomodation, I did not choose the Chūō shared house for particularly strategic reasons other than its closeness to the bus and train station, and the availability of services, included internet access and laundry machines; nevertheless it turned out to be the hub of Ishinomaki's new locals and house to many activities and initiatives. I shared the house with a variable number of individuals, all of them new-locals in their early thirties, but similarly to my previous acquaintances in the Ishinomaki area, their networks of connections only rarely collided with my research interests, although friendly exchanges with these individuals indirectly contributed to my perception and knowledge of the lives and activities of new-locals in Ishinomaki, and positively reinforced the general focus of my fieldwork towards *ijūsha*.

Ishinomaki offered many benefits as a research base, as living there allowed me to access several different interlocutors (fishermen, restaurant owners, NGO and private company employees, etc) and observe how their respective worlds interacted. Because of this Ishinomaki can hardly be considered representative of Sanriku as a whole: as a considerably large town close to Sendai, for reasons of accessibility it tended to soak most of the volunteering efforts in the aftermath of 3.11 – as a rule of thumb, moving up north the presence of former volunteers turned into *ijūsha* decreases significantly (for a reflection on the effects of *ijūsha*'s presence on local economy, see below, 1.7.b). In this sense, Ishinomaki can be definitely considered a centre within the periphery, and this aspect needs to be taken in careful consideration. Considering fishery, there are no actual fishing docks in town, and a researcher exclusively interested in this sector will need to constantly move to the north (Watanoha, Oshika Peninsula) and the south (Shiogama, Matsushima) – although transportation is fairly efficient. This is another, albeit minor, circumstance that encouraged me to engage Ishinomaki's new-locals, together with my

other interlocutors scattered around the coast.

This project relies on classic ethnographic research tools such as semi-structured and non-structured interviews as the main source of data from interlocutors, and participant observation as a qualitative source of direct information filtered by my analytic abilities as an ethnographer. During fieldwork, however, I came in contact with other media of communication, such as the pictures and other works of art which will be discussed in Chapter 7, or the many social media posts produced by my interlocutors, and several perspectives expressed through websites and internet videos, as the ones discussed in Chapter 5. These indirect expressions enriched my research and widened its scope, as they allowed me to access patterns of communication not immediately reflected in everyday activities or individual face-to-face conversation, as casual and intimate as they could be. Specifically, material such as the Reborn Art Festival website logs (4.3), or the Peace Boat Ishinomaki homepage (3.2.a, 3.2.b), allowed me to integrate superlocal narrative processes which tend to be submerged in the quotidian life of my interlocutors.

The overall result is one of mixed methods, in order to deal with the multi-layered means of expression of the area, attempting to interpret the complex interplay of feedbacks between the representational (dialectic, narrative) and practical (affective, operative) modes that surround food the Miyagi Prefecture.

Interviews played a major role in acquiring the former order of data, and included:

- Structured, formal encounters with employees of the Ishinomaki City Hall (*shiyakusho*), representatives of the Fishery Union's (*kumiai*) different branches, and local entrepreneurs.
- Semi-structured interviews with the many producers (fishermen, seafarmers), intermediaries (cooks, members of NGOs, touristic operators, store owners, artists) and visitors (tourists, professionals, commuters).
- Unstructured sessions with collaborators and close friends, often accompanying sessions of participant observation.

Different registers of enquiry naturally lead to qualitative difference in the gathered data, where structured and semi-structured sessions produced data concerning practices, statistics, technical know-hows, organizational overviews, and other descriptive contribution. Unstructured encounters, on the other hand, tend to be more fragmented,

interwined with practical actions or referring to unspoken backgrounds. They often express affective considerations, and proceed by omission (as in the case of Goro, in 2.3). As with the pattern of integration between ‘classic’ ethnographic data and textual entries discussed above, I blended my unstructured and structured data, in order to sketch a more comprehensive image of Ishinomaki and its inhabitants.

Participant observation, in the course of this fieldwork, proved to be the more challenging aspect of my research. Easy to carry out in restaurants and bars (e.g. 2.7, 5.3), fairs (6.4), public meetings (3.5), or guided tours (3.2.a), following my seafarming interlocutors in their everyday activities proved to be unpractical. The docks are not a place for idlers and anthropologists, although during lunch breaks I often sneaked in. On several occasions, I could take part in the seafarming operations, but those were exceptional cases and did not, unfortunately, constitute the everyday routine of my research. Differently, a resolute deploying of ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz 1998, Clifford 1997) in local bars allowed me to befriend several interlocutors, variously distributed among new-locals, locals, and occasionally non-locals such as visitors, passing by individuals. One of the establishments I preferred during 2017 was a small bar in Onagawa – possibly the only one in town – normally attended by young-to-middle-age locals and new-locals, hosted by a local couple, whom I befriended thanks to our mutual acquaintances among volunteers – people now gone, but who left behind long-lasting memories and personal connections, evidence of the deep significance the years of recovery (roughly 2011 to 2013) left in Sanriku (see 6.2). There I could be introduced to my interlocutors at the Again Station (2.9) and several residents of Onagawa and Ishinomaki who indirectly informed the contents of this thesis.

The bulk of my interlocutors were recruited in several waves of snowballing, starting from a core of Fisherman Japan employees (see 2.2) and a few Ishinomaki residents I was already acquainted with before the beginning of the fieldwork, who provided me with a significantly smaller amount of contacts compared to the first source (Fisherman Japan). This led to the predominance of specific perspectives among the material I have collected, particularly concerning the proactivity, entrepreneurship, and young age of local fishermen.

The voices portrayed in this thesis are undeniably limited to those of young males, which limits the scope of my analysis and conclusions. There are several reasons to account for this limitation. In the course of 2017 I attempted to establish contacts with

several branches of the Fishery Union (*gyogyō kumiai*) in Ishinomaki and in the Oshika Peninsula in order to include in my interlocutors older fishermen holding significant ties with the *kumiai*. This attempt produced a few formal interviews with *kumiai* representatives in early Spring, but very limited results in snowballing – several reasons were put forward by my initial contacts: the scarce disposition of fishermen to be interviewed, limited interest in the topics I was exploring (post-disaster change in the world of fishery, relations with new-locals, locality, foodways *etc.*), and lack of time.

I found myself unable to overcome this initial resistance, as I had by then identified other virtually productive directions of enquiry (the Hoya Matsuri portrayed in 6.4, and the Art Festival discussed in 4.3, 5.3 and 7.4) and decided to concentrate my efforts on those and the contacts I already acquired. In general terms, during the fieldwork it has been my impression that the individuals and phenomena I had the chance to observe constituted a significant contribution by themselves, and despite the lack of interest in locality, tourism or marketing activism on the side of elderly fishermen, there were no visible instances of active opposition produced against my interlocutors.

Similarly, a limitation in the gender of interlocutors is clearly visible (more details on this below: 1.7.c): apart from Takada of the Again Station (2.9), Satō from Peace Boat Ishinomaki (3.2.a), and the artist Ueki (7.5), all the voices portrayed in the thesis belong to young men. The characteristics of Japanese ‘traditiona’ fishery in part shaped this unbalance, as males normally occupy leading positions in the small family-companies, and in the cases of individual companies, such as Goro’s (2.3, 5.4), Ōzu (2.4), Morishima (2.5); the same applies to mention small-scale restaurants and food-stalls (Katō: 2.6.a, Iwasaki: 2.6.b, Fujihara: 2.4).

Without doubt, my positioning as a young male researcher inevitably affected the composition of my interlocutors, leading to more intense interactions with male individuals roughly of my own age – who incidentally also cover a good portion of the domestic immigrants’ network in Ishinomaki (for reasons discussed in 1.7.b and in the course of Chapter 3) and most fishermen (see 1.7.c). This is not to imply that somehow post-disaster Ishinomaki food-related activities are more pertinent to men, but simply that a number of factors influenced the composition of the voices featured in this study: both my positioning and the gendering of occupation in the sectors discussed in this study (e.g. fishery, food stalls, restaurants) apparently marginalize women’s activities. An in-depth study of female agency and activities in this context is unfortunately missing, and future

contributions in this sense will certainly be precious resources for comparison.

Concerning my positioning, it related to the field's context in complex ways. In the first place I was a foreigner researcher from a place (Oxford) that sounded very prestigious to most of my interlocutors' ears, and my connections with the University of Tōhoku reinforced this image – one I had little control over. On the other hand, my everyday comings and going around Ishinomaki and Onagawa, where I was often spotted buying groceries or sitting at cafes – not to mention my evening presence in nightlife establishments such as pubs, bars, *izakaya* etc – would categorize me within the realm of the 'local foreigners', that awkward-and-yet-familiar group of English teachers, company employees and occasional freelancers (and, in Sanriku, volunteers-that-had-taken-root) that characterize medium to big cities in Japan. A reinforcement of this position was provided by my volunteering past, which on many occasions preceded me, as when I was introduced to a third party by an interlocutor or acquaintance. This made very easy to interact with others who had volunteering experiences (as most *ijūsha* did), and further identified me as a "Chūō-ite" (resident of Chūō). Inevitably the conflation of my academic, former-volunteering and foreigner *personae* influenced the reach of my connections (see below, 1.7.b), as shown by the polite but firm rejection I experienced when trying to interact with elderly individuals, or those less involved with the dissemination activities I was surrounded by in Chūō. Combined with the focused snowballing produced by my already established network of interlocutor, this factor without doubt estranged me from more conservative individuals, and from those who did not interact significantly with *ijūsha*-led activities of recovery and marketing. Reflecting on the refusals I experienced – which were often frustrating, as I was attempting at collecting as many discordant perspectives as I could – I have become aware of the limitations of this fieldwork.

I could only get a vague and fleeting glance of the harsh realities of the dilapidated fishing villages in Oshika (which emerged mostly in their negation, see 5.3 for example). Conversely I had a hard time trying to get close to younger individuals such as the Sendai-based ring of rappers and graffiti artists, whose political radicality was precisely directed at the themes of subalternity and regional underdevelopment I make vast use of. My Japanese was out of tune with their quick and witty 20 year old's slang as much as my frequentations with NGOs and hip *hoya* farmers were with their skate parks and garages.

In my weekly attendances to the local Culture Centre Japanese classes I could witness the significant presence of families of immigrants from South-East Asia, many of whom are, in fact, employed in fishery. Linguistic and social barriers kept me from looking at sides of post-disaster Ishinomaki that are just as relevant as the aspects described in this thesis, barriers whose existence, for the most part, I only realized *a posteriori*, working backwards at what I could guess but not explore.

The reflections above are not meant to imply by any means that my experience has been insignificant, or unfruitful. Focusing on new-locals and innovative individuals allowed me to explore perspectives of transformation, rather than restoration, and to provide an early account of impulses and initiatives that in the near future will possibly produce significant trajectories, such as the shift towards neoliberal behaviors, individualism, the production of a new imagery of the fishermen and the adoption of experience-based forms of tourism. New-locals interact and will keep interacting with peripheral locality in ways that are both disruptive and innovative, particularly in relation with locality and traditionality – for which food represents an ideal stand-in. Their activity as brokers of locality is a novel one in Japan, where domestic tourism has seen a stark separation between locals as producers and non-locals as consumers. A third position blurs this dualism, and refracts in complex ways the force lines of cultural hegemony and subalternity. Finally, and fundamentally, new-locals' individual histories as volunteers frame them in two antithetical position: one of post-growth heralds – 'this is not about making money' is a recurring sentence in my interviews and notes (see also 1.7.b, 2.4, 2.6, 4.4), and one of agents of free-market capitalism – since the possibility of living in Ishinomaki is directly connected to their success as entrepreneurs, artists, NGO employees etc. To summarise I believe that, despite its limitations, my research sheds light on a novel and significant phenomenon, as the following chapters demonstrate.

### *1.7.b Post-disaster demographics*

In order to better locate young entrepreneurs in their 40s and 30s, and to construct a profile able to define this category, often heterogeneous in Ishinomaki, it is necessary to backtrack to the Japanese socio-economic transformations of the Lost Decade (*Ushinawareta Jūnen*: 1991-2001), more recently redefined as the Lost Two Decades (*Ushinawareta Nijūnen*) (Miwa 2011; Asada 2014; Gordon 2016), a period of economic stagnation caused by the collapse of the Japanese asset price bubble (*baburu*, 1986-1990). During the bubble, a *laissez faire* lending policy caused real estate and asset prices to

raise in an extraordinary manner (Oizumi 1994). After its collapse, caused by a sharp increase in lending rates by the Bank of Japan, the Japanese stock market spectacularly crashed, and most of the major companies reviewed their job security policies in favor of more precarious contracts with decreased benefits. With time, this share of precarious ‘nontraditional’, ‘non-regular’ employees (Tabuchi 2009) grew in number to cover, twenty years after the bubble’s collapse, at least one third of the national workforce (Hirayama, Ronald 2008: 337).

The burst of the bubble and the stagnation acted as triggers to end the national policy of ‘from the cradle to the grave’ employment safety, born and developed after the Second World War, as Japan rose from its ashes to become an economic giant. A nation ordered as an ‘enterprise society, around the three pillars of family, corporation, and school’ (Allison 2013: 22) where the individual was accompanied by an ethos of obedience and structural belonging in every aspect of his private and public life,<sup>11</sup> gave way to a new conception of *risuku to jiko sekinin*, ‘risk and individual responsibility’ (Allison 2013: 28). In a neoliberal twist carried forward by the Prime Minister Koizumi since 2001:

Labor sits at the heart of this, shifting from one work model (lifelong, family-linked, associated with Japanese Fordism and miraculous economic growth) to another (short-term, individual, associated with flexible labor, decline, and precarity) (Allison 2013: 28).

In the midst of this objectively epochal shift, came the generation that grew up during the Lost Two Decades, i.e. the Lost Generation (Hirayama, Ronald 2008), who entered Japanese society starting from the 90s, a category to which the vast majority of Ishinomaki *ijūsha* and young entrepreneurs belong. Events such as the Kobe earthquake of 1995, and the Aum Shirinkyō Tōkyō subway gas attack (Metraux 1999) contributed to the unravelling of the securities and certainties of the *pre-baburu* years.

With insecurity, consumption collapse, lower wages and reduced job benefits, came a significant decrease of marriages and home ownership. Ominous expressions such as NEETS, or *hikikomori* (Tamaki 1998), and parasite singles, *parasaito shinguru* (Yamada 1999), dominated the late 90s and early 2000s Japanese social commentaries, often balancing between serious analysis and apocalyptic fearmongering.

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<sup>11</sup> The already mentioned Takeo Doi (2001) defined his psychological theory of dependency/motherly love (*amae*) as the transfer of homely care and protection from family to the (motherly) authority of the workplace. The ethics of *tate* (vertical hierarchy) made famous by Nakane Chie (1967) are those of the ‘traditional’ family structure, spread all over the Japanese society.



Following a classic sociological typology of goals and means arranged in a Greimasian semiotic square, Toivonen et al (2011) divide the young Japanese into five categories, spanning from Conformist (accepts socially defined goals and accesses legitimate means to achieve them), Innovators (achieve those goals, but with socially unconventional means), Ritualists (access the means, but are disenchanted as far as the goals are concerned), Retreatists (the infamous *hikikomori*, who refuse both means and goals), and lastly Quiet Mavericks, i.e. individuals who strive to achieve unconventional goals with unconventional means. Overall these categories act in a society, the Japanese one, defined as ‘conformist’, where can be observed ‘the inseparability of culturally defined, dominant success goals, and culturally approved institutional means’ (Toivonen et al 2011: 1). Whereas Innovators and Retreatists tended to be left to the margins of a ‘conformist’ society, Mavericks, through their skills and innovative vision, are able to reconfigure the whole social macrocosm of goals and means into a paradigm more suitable to themselves. Again, Toivonen *et al* (2011: 7; my italic) note:

It makes sense also that such youth should possess *post-materialist values* [...] as they have grown up in affluent conditions, and that they are the group that has the greatest potential to act on such values of openness, tolerance of diversity, and self-actualization.

If the very concept developed by Toivonen and colleagues was not published after 3/11 and several other direct experiences of the volunteering in Tōhoku, it would appear as a weird coincidence how individuals corresponding to the Maverick’s profile would quickly become volunteers, considering that ‘[...] in Japan, the most important reason for volunteering was that it gives a new perspective’ (Klien 2017a: 163), and that ‘[...] volunteers show the situation of a new generation of youth caught between the aspiration for more self-determination and purpose in life, on the one hand, and a sense of insecurity on the other’ (Klien 2017a: 168). Klien’s interlocutors often claim they earn less money in their new *ijūsha* lives, than they used to do in previous, more conventional jobs. They also assert that they greatly enjoy a less stressful and more free workday, where ‘there is no clear-cut division between work, leisure, and private life’ (171). Again, ‘many openly remark that they do not aspire to the lifestyles of their parents and the norms [...] prescribed by Japanese society’ (171).

A further characteristic of the Quiet Maverick is the ability to ‘tactfully negotiate’ with the accepted discourses about work and self-realization, in order to engage society on their own terms. Toivonen (2011) sees in the ‘3/11 generation’ the possibility for such



Mavericks to emerge and conquer their own position in the context of post-disaster social entrepreneurship. For the reasons discussed above, I have concentrated my ethnographic efforts among such ‘Mavericks’, in order to individuate patterns of creative transformation and adaptation in food-related practices.

Together with the insights of Toivonen and Klien, Knight (1999) formulates an analysis fundamental in order to frame the process of counter-urbanization, i.e. movement of people from the major urban centres towards the periphery, the phenomenon at the base of this thesis. Knight explores the role of return migrants (Knight 1994, 2002), individuals born in peripheral areas who had studied and worked in Japan's major cities and later decided to return to the countryside. Depopulated villages are experienced by their inhabitants with a mixture of fear and nostalgia. The growing number of empty houses (*akiya*), the spooky and lonely atmosphere (*bukimi, sabishii*) are met with feelings of loss and dereliction by the increasingly elderly and isolated residents (Knight 2002: 269-270; Aoyama 1994: 19-20). Immigrants were generally looked down on by the rural inhabitants for their wealth, for not conforming to the farmer's ethos and methods, and for their progressive tendencies which ideologically emancipated them from their new villages (Knight 2002: 275-277).

Nevertheless, their contribution to peripheral communities has proved to be effective in many ways: through their modern ideas and enterprising spirit, through their children (whose presence contributed to keeping local schools open), and through their unconventional ideologies, which became the lead of local resistance movements against industrial exploitation and high impact construction, in fact re-imagining forms of rural dwelling and participation. Knight points out how the presence of returners, or new-locals, addresses several key issues in the countryside: apart from the obvious, quantitative repopulation of the area, former urbanite returners contribute to livening up local public debate, introducing new ideas, and providing publicity by attracting ‘enormous mass media interest’ (2002: 279 foll).

One important aspect to clarify here is the analytical structure of Knight's approach to the phenomenon of return: the author utilizes the terms employed by prefectural governments: I-turn, U-turn and J-turn, indicating respectively migrants originally from major cities moving to countryside villages, ‘returnees’ going back to their original prefectures and villages, and individuals born in rural areas who later moved to different rural areas (Knight 2002: 270). This classification has been useful and inspiring for me,

although the significant qualitative differences between the case studies analysed by Knight and post-disaster Ishinomaki made necessary a change in perspectives. My analysis focuses mainly on the group Knight identifies as ‘I-turners’ and secondarily ‘U-turners’, which I employ the term ‘new-locals’.

The choice of a new term was prompted by the different context within which the movement of people took place in Ishinomaki: far from being part of a governmental-led series of campaigns, it emerged as a trend in the context of post-disaster volunteering, a temporary visit oriented towards a goal (contributing to the reconstruction of the damaged areas) which, for a portion of the volunteers, turned into a semi-permanent stay. Furthermore, although local-immigrant interactions carry similarities with those highlighted by Knight, the production context of Ishinomaki’s new-locals is not directly connected with farming, another reason for which I avoided using terms related to the rural repopulation campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s.

In addition, as the case of Iwasaki (2.8.b) hypothesises, actual U-turners (i.e. former Ishinomaki residents who, after a period of study or work in a different prefecture, returned home) seem to share many of their views and action strategies with I-turners – with which, at least in the case presented in this thesis, they also share a *milieu* of friends and acquaintances – making them more akin to new-locals as a category, rather than standing as a group on their own.

In the course of the thesis, as interlocutors are presented, significant biographical details will be provided in order to situate them within the three main analytical categories deployed in my study, although most new-locals have the typical characteristics of the Japanese middle class – access to higher education, financial availability, views on life and work centered on individual agency, etc. This aspect is useful in understanding the phenomenon of clustered networks of associates that emerges from the data presented in this thesis (a notable example is provided by the Wotani-Iwasaki-Fujihara *trio* discussed in 2.8,b, 3.4, 6.2).

Class difference is a factor in the general dishomogeneity in objective, means and strategies observed between locals and new-locals (see 3.6), as well as the general feeling of distance expressed by locals towards new-locals and non-locals, but falls short from providing a complete explanation. The intersectional combination of class, geographical provenance and age – as observed above, most new-locals are comprised between their

late 20s and early 40s – provides a more complete frame of reference, with significant exceptions, such as Moritomo (7.3). Referring to the reflections I propose above (1.7.a) on my positioning and the ways it shaped the contents of this research, the intersectionality factor played a notable part: being a University researcher, a relatively young man, and a resident in central Ishinomaki eased significantly my interactions with highly educated, wealthy (relatively to fishermen living in the villages of Oshika), and urbanized new-locals.

#### *1.7.c On gender*

A second, necessary remark is to be made about the gender distribution of my interlocutors. As noted above, the fishermen, restaurant owners, entrepreneurs, and NGO employees who shared their time and perspectives with me were in the majority male. This necessarily leads to an initial acknowledgment of partiality – what of the female voices, are there any at all, how do they differ, if they differ, and so on. Surveying literature focused on the Ishinomaki municipality (e.g. Klien 2016, 2017a, 2017b), we can observe a more equal distribution in the context of new-locals, as both women and men took part in networks for reconstruction, relief, and revitalization. Personally I observed this same distribution within the Ishinomaki 2.0 Network (see 3.2), and among the local community of artists (see 7.3, 7.4, 7.5).

In the context of restaurants and food stalls, where the sheer component of male entrepreneurs strikes attention most, I could observe that in the majority of cases (2.6, 2.8, 3.4) the male owner was accompanied by his partner or wife who worked in the same place in a subordinated role (e.g. serving customers, or preparing food to be cooked by the owner). I encountered two cases of a female owner (the Again Station in 2.9 and one restaurant led by a new-local which closed shortly after my arrival in Ishinomaki), while inside the Peace Boat Ishinomaki NGO and the Fisherman Japan company gender distribution appeared equal (although positions of management were in both cases occupied by a male employee).

Beyond the limitations of the case studies examined in the following chapters, concerning gender in post-disaster Tōhoku, it is worth mentioning Iwata-Weickgenannt's reflection (2017) *apropos* the generational and gender differences in how the crisis is perceived and portrayed. Discussing Sono Sion's feature film *Land of Hope* (*Kibō no kuni*, 2012), Iwata-Weickgenannt highlight how the emotive reaction to the Fukushima

meltdown organized around the coordinates of *inochi* (biological life) and *seikatsu* (everyday, community life). If the protection of the former became the priority for many younger residents, who voluntarily evacuated the areas bordering the interdiction zone at the expense of their belongings and affects, *seikatsu* was the focus of the older generations, who would rather remain in potentially dangerous areas in order to maintain their social bonds. Conversely, around the same conflict, a distinction emerges between male and female Japanese, as the idea of a feminine ‘natural instinct’ of protection and nurturance of *inochi* is perceived as deeply embedded in the ‘established family models’ of Japan (Iwata-Weickgenannt 2017: 116). This instance, politicized through the common perception of anti-nuclear demonstration as “womens’ and mothers’ demonstrations”, is opposed to the role of the man/father, who replaces the role of the elderly in the generational divide, behaving in a responsible, conformist, socially acceptable fashion, whereas the rebellious women are identified by national media as irresponsible, ignorant, or even hysterical (see Kimura 2016).

The sociopolitical aspects of the civil reactions to 3.11 are thus deeply relevant, as through them are mediated the core aspects of the Japanese gender ideology (see e.g. Marshall 2017). However, looking at the several interviews and encounters reported in the following chapters, it emerges that the majority of my interlocutors are male. This specific feature of the thesis’ ethnographic component is due to a complex of causes. One is certainly the genderized distribution of labor in the Japanese fishery, where the leading activities (e.g. driving the boat, operating machinery, forklifts, interacting with brokers and *kumiai* employees) are carried out by the male components of the family. Having snowballed interlocutors from institutions such as the Fishery Cooperative, P.B. and F.J., my body of interviews inevitably reflected a male-led interpersonal networking – with the significant exceptions of Satō (3.2.a), Takada (2.9), and Ishikawa (5.3). This phenomenon is not inherently different from the factors discussed in 1.7.b, where young age and shared progressive attitudes led most of my interlocutors introduced me to like-minded peers of them, reinforcing a ‘bubble’ of ideology which, ultimately, informed the contents of this thesis.

#### *1.7.d On radioactivity*

There is a further element I have found myself struggling against, after the end of the fieldwork. When discussing with colleagues or presenting in academic contexts, I received several questions and observations concerning a specific aspect I did, as a matter of fact,

not thoroughly investigate: radioactivity. It quickly became evident that whenever I talked about my work, this huge ‘elephant in the room’ would soon begin to stretch and make itself visible.

Although I do not grant the 2011 disaster any specific seminal quality towards the current processes of place-making developing in Tōhoku, many narratives *about* Tōhoku certainly take the tsunami as an implicit ‘foundational myth’ of the region. Radioactivity, consequently, was immediately assumed as an intrinsic feature of the land, one that curiously stopped, southwards, at the border of the Fukushima prefecture, and northwards around the Shimokita Peninsula, the northernmost tip of the Honshū island. Following the newspaper article mentioned in the introduction of this thesis (Introduction, 1), a Japan Today Special Promotion about gastronomic tourism in Tōhoku, dated 2017, an interesting exchange of English speaking users’s comments ensued, as one reader observed:

For an area that was radioactively contaminated, the last thing I'd do is go on a food sampling tour [...] !

To which a second user quickly replied:

You must not know Japan well at all, or you'd know a) that much of Tohoku is farther away from the Fukushima plant than Tokyo is and b) that most of Tohoku is upwind from the plant. Contamination levels aren't even measurable in much of Tohoku. Indeed, outside of parts of Fukushima and, to a much lesser degree, Miyagi Prefectures, contamination is generally higher in the Kanto region, including Tokyo. Even then, outside of the exclusion zone in Fukushima, you're probably doing more harm to yourself eating pesticide-laced food, or just by going for a walk in smoggy Tokyo. If we are being realistic, the number of people dying daily from air pollution in Japan is greater by far than the number of people who will die in twenty years from radioactive contamination from Fukushima.

Setting aside any consideration on the last few lines, about which only time and specialists will be able to shed light, I find the nature of the exchange very significant. The amount of specific knowledge needed in order to go past the direct and homogeneous statement ‘Tōhoku is radiactively contaminated’ is, indeed, considerable, and much of the reluctance to visit Tōhoku reasonably comes from the simple notion expressed by the first user. Both Sternsdorff-Cisterna (2015) and Kimura (2016) explored how the nuclear incident and the fear of ingesting irradiated food shaped the shopping and social habits of many citizens in Tōkyō, but apart from great metropolises, quantitative data on the

perceived impact of the Fukushima Dai-ichi after effects in Tōhoku at large is surprisingly missing.

Going back to my personal ‘elephant in the room’, during the conversations with the Ishinomaki residents, almost nobody actively mentioned radiation (*hōsha*, or *hōshanō*), and the interest or preoccupation locals seemed to express on the matter appeared as inversely proportional to the amount of questions and observation I was receiving from academic sources, on the matter. As a colleague informally suggested, the reluctance to delve into the matter could represent a significant fact in itself, following the logic by which risk is often unspoken of, suppressed in the Freudian sense. On the other hand, governmental and independent measuring (as the second user of the Japan Today website rightly observed) have been registering lower and lower cases of dangerously irradiated foodstuff across the whole Sanriku (see also Povinec and Hirose 2015, Gilmour et al. 2016).

As one Ishinomaki *shiyakusho* employee observed, for the first 12 months a ban was issued on the catch and consumption of *karē*, a flatfish commonly found close to the Ishinomaki coast, due to the higher risk of contamination of bottom feeders. After several tests, though, the ban was lifted. To my experience, today in Ishinomaki a very few people have changed their eating habits due to the risk of ingesting irradiated food. Conversely, considering the two main anthropological monographs concerning the reactions of civil society to the dangers of food radioactivity (Kimura 2016, Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2019), we should note that both authors’ fieldwork were focused on the Tōkyō area. Nevertheless, as observed above, specific research on the subject in the Miyagi Prefecture could lead to unexpected results, and prove itself particularly significant if compared with the existing socioanthropological material on this topic. A growing number of articles focusing on the Fukushima Prefecture (e.g. Cleveland 2014, Williamson 2014, Iwata-Weickgenannt 2017) and the sometimes ambiguous, sometimes blatantly misleading policies of the central government, are extremely informative on the subject, but fall short of providing a more general frame of interpretation for Miyagi and Iwate. Regarding this aspect the centrality of social response to the Fukushima disaster appears definitely muffled among my interlocutors. Since my lines of enquiry did not directly address issues contingent to the dangers of radioactivity, and because of the significant geographical distance between Ishinomaki and the Fukushima Dai-ichi area (150 km), I am led to think that my interlocutors did not perceive the issue as directly

affecting their everyday activities, although naturally the negative consequences of rumor damage (*fuhyō hagai*) were very seriously pondered.

For the reasons discussed above, the perceived risk of radioactivity in relation to food consumption and production rests at the margins of my research, appearing only where it imposes significant alterations to the experience of producers – such is the case of *hoya*, discussed in 2.3, 6.4. Furthermore, as much as a deep focus on the dangers of radioactive contamination (perceived and otherwise) is more than ever necessary to properly frame the long-lasting consequences of the 2011 disaster, we can safely differentiate the Fukushima Exclusion Zone, roughly covering 30 kilometres around the Fukushima Dai-ichi reactor and including among others the towns of Namie, Futaba, Okuma and Tomioka (Zhang et al. 2014), from the rest of the 300 kilometres of the Sanriku coast affected by the 2011 event. If in the former case it is proper to discuss the direct effects of the radioactive fallout, the latter area – in part of which I conducted my fieldwork – can be safely described as a post-tsunami territory, where the effects of the Fukushima incident are certainly discernable, yet are nonetheless indirect.

## Chapter 2: Locals – Fishermen and entrepreneurs

### 2.1 Introduction

Ishinomaki is a quiet, mid sized town on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. It slumbers on the plain in front of its eponymous bay, where the southern branch of the Kitakami river meets the Pacific Ocean. Ishinomaki carries the chaotic, untidy quality of many Japanese towns, with brand new buildings innocently neighbouring metal sheet huts. It is surrounded by a vast municipality covering more than 500 square kilometres, inhabited by almost 150,000 residents. In sheer numbers, within Miyagi, it is bested only by Sendai, the capital of Tōhoku, home to 1 million residents.

Ishinomaki's locals tend to be dismissive of their own town. 'Ishinomaki is not so important, if you compare it to Sendai... Plus we don't have an airbase, like Matsushima [Ishinomaki's eastern neighbour], or a nuclear plant, like Onagawa [Ishinomaki's northern neighbour, although its plant is not operative now]. There is nothing special here' an elderly woman told me during a city fair. I met the same spirit in Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, some 300 kilometres north of Ishinomaki, where I was told during a party: 'Kuji is nothing special, you know. At least, in Ishinomaki, they have a paper factory'. Many others described Ishinomaki as a sort of 'convenient countryside', with all the benefits of a large town, such as supermarkets, cafes, restaurants, bars, and the advantages of the bucolic rice fields, the mysterious mountains and the beautiful sea just around the corner. In this sense, Ishinomaki appears in between different statuses – that of centrality and marginality, affluence and poverty, city and countryside.

In fact, Ishinomaki also stands at the border between the sandy and smooth coast of central Honshu and the rocky and irregular *rias* coast of the northern half of the island. One could drive a car on Ishinomaki's coastal road – the *Onagawa Kaidō* – northbound, and literally witness the change of landscape – from long and flat beaches to small rocky bays nested between the mountains. The road changes as well, from a wide and straight line of tarmac to a winding mountain path.

The gateway from the densely urbanized Ishinomaki bay to the wild Oshika Peninsula (*Oshika Hantō*), is the Mangoku bridge (*Mangoku-bashi*), which connects the suburban area of Watanoha – a vast residential district – with the peninsula. The bridge crosses over the mouth of the Mangoku bay (*Mangoku-ura*), a shallow inlet used for extensive



oyster farming. After the bridge, a couple of hairpin bends lead up to the first hill. From the high ground, looking down at the bay, one can clearly see row after row of bamboo rafts (*ikada*), anchored to the seabed and loaded with growing oyster shells, covering most of the bay. Unfortunately, it will only be a brief glance, as the road will turn west and lead into a long tunnel. On the other side, the many houses and workshops and boats and rafts of Ishinomaki and Watanoha give way to the small fishing villages (*gyōson*), made of a few houses perched between the mountains and a small dock, with the little fishing boats and a few rafts groggily floating in the small bays.

The first village after the tunnel is Hamaguri-hama. The beach itself is just a short strip of rocks and pebbles, surrounded by wooded hills protruding into the sea. On the hillside, old-fashioned wooden houses bask in the sun. An elderly fisherman is putting out his seaweed to dry on green plastic nets, helped by his nephew who came in from Ishinomaki for the weekend. In the small flat space between the hills, there is only a parking lot, a sacred portal (*torii*) painted with bright red paint, and the pen of a furry goat very popular with the local kids. Looking closely, one can still see the concrete basements of the houses there, in the lower area of the village, which were swept away by the tsunami. Following the winding road towards Ayukawa, the town at the easternmost tip of the peninsula, one will find many other Hamaguri-hamas, some less desolate than others, some with massive grey seawalls, some full of life and people at work, some completely deserted. Only a few new-local residents (*ijūsha*) venture as far as the peninsula, the vast majority of them residing in Ishinomaki downtown.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, Ishinomaki became fairly important in marine commerce, as its patron, the feudal lord Masamune Date, developed it into a major trading port. In the uncertain years after the Meiji restoration, with Sendai in ruins after the Boshin War of 1868-69, it was even – briefly – considered as the new potential chief town of Miyagi.

What the building of the railway at the beginning of the twentieth century took away from Ishinomaki in terms of naval trade centrality, it gave back to the town as it became an active deep-sea fishing port. This, paired with the prominence of the nearby Ayukawa as a whaling port, seemed to set the fortune of Ishinomaki, then the twenty-first century happened, and the trend of falling prices for rice and fish – the two main categories of production of the North-eastern coast – sent the economy of Ishinomaki into recession.

On the top of this, half a century of intense emigration from the region resulted in an average resident age well above 50.

This was Ishinomaki when, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011, at 2 PM, the earthquake hit the northeastern coast of Japan, shortly followed by the ocean waves. In terms of structural damage and loss of human lives, Ishinomaki is considered the most hard hit municipality on the coast, Miyagi being the prefecture with the most damage and deaths reported. Still now, a little concrete prefab treasures the memories of those weeks, with photographs, models, and the memories of the citizens. I visited that place many times, and I was struck by one particular picture, among many. It was a very wide frame, depicting on the lower side the chaotic and muddy debris which covered the coast for weeks and months after the waves, and in the upper half a very early morning starry sky. A caption was hung under the photograph: ‘Everything was lost, but the stars were so bright’. It was not a very pragmatic statement (later it was explained to me that the bright stars visible after all the artificial lights had gone away during the aftermath were associated with the souls of the deceased, as benevolently reassuring those who had survived not to feel too guilty about it). Still I found it fascinating: in such a life-changing, completely destructive event, could there be something good to be found? And if so, was it something more concrete than bright stars in the sky?

Even without looking directly for this elusive quid – something out of nothing – elements started to emerge, especially when talking to people who lived in Ishinomaki and its surroundings from before the disaster. Many of them had a clear vision of the differences between the *mae* (pre) and the *go* (post), and sometimes found themselves happier than they were before. Some clearly found a purpose in their lives, while others were able, through clearing the debris and helping with the reconstruction, to rebuild or strengthen networks of friends and acquaintances which exorcised the spectres of the *muen shakai* (relationless society, see Allison 2013), which haunted more than ever a depopulated, aged, and exhausted Tōhoku.

In this chapter I introduce the voices of different local interlocutors across the municipality of Ishinomaki, involved in different degrees with fishery or catering. Even though most of the people I have met and talked to did carry memories of destruction, or experienced the loss of loved ones, very rarely will such themes emerge during my analysis, as I focused more on the transformations and changes they experienced after the disaster. It is not by chance that many of the interviews that follow will contain references

to other actors, who will be presented in the following chapters: my interlocutors draw, by telling their own stories, a complex network of acquaintances, collaborations, friendships, which span the whole municipality, individuating places of production (the peninsula) and places of transformation and consumption (Ishinomaki downtown).

Post-disaster transformation is a recurrent theme in my interlocutors' contributions: when the disaster hit, most of them either were outside Miyagi or had a different job. In a way, the *dai-shinsai* influenced their existences both in negative (loss) and positive (gain) terms. The way in which it changed Ishinomaki people's perspectives on their own place or their own life is central in understanding the specificities of invention of locality (West 2015) in the Ishinomaki area, as the disaster and the subsequent campaigns for the support of Tōhoku (Hopson 2013), put in motion a shift of focus from primary and secondary production to the tourism industry in the prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate.

## **2.2 Fisherman Japan and Ishinomaki *ryōshi***

One of the actors I encountered most often while exploring the changes in seafood production and narrative in Ishinomaki is a company called Fisherman Japan (henceforth FJ). I came in contact with FJ for the first time through their website,<sup>12</sup> a colourful and smart Flash site presenting their mission and their associates (figure 4). I was fascinated by the dynamic approach of a company with the explicit mission of 'becoming leaders of the fishing industry in Sanriku'. One of the first things I did when I arrived in Ishinomaki was to meet with the employees and the head of FJ in order to better understand their aims and how they were pursuing them.

Established in 2016, FJ is a corporation (*ippan shadanōjin*) based in Ishinomaki, committed to empowering Sanriku's fishermen (*ryōshi*) through widening their possibilities. Traditionally, fishery in Japan is built around the structure of the *gyogyō kumiai* – the fishery co-operative, or Fisheries Cooperative Association (FCA). The *kumiai* historically has been characterized by a hierarchical structure headed by an enclosed oligarchy of elderly 'master fishermen' (Kalland 1981, 1990), now replaced by a bureaucratic class of white collar employees who administer insurance, credit services, healthcare, and accounting for the many family-based small fishing companies of the

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<sup>12</sup> <http://fishermanjapan.com> (last access: 03/12/2017).

coast. Willing to break free – at least in part – from the top-down decisional process of the *kumiai*, and pursue more individually oriented endeavors, post-disaster Ishinomaki young fishermen tentatively joined FJ in order to enter a direct sale market, and to access the company's marketing and promotion resources, events, and extra-regional activities and contacts.

Talking with an employee, Takamura, I could go deeper into the motivations and worldview of the company:

‘In Japan, when people think of fishermen, everybody imagines an old man with a hard life, lots of wrinkles, going out with his boat everyday in bad weather, with a very low income. It is a terribly negative image, and does not represent all the fishermen. It represents a job that is considered old fashioned, static, without any creativity or joy. We want to change, first of all, this image. When we sell Miyagi products on the internet, or we organize events, we propose images of fishermen – our fishermen – that are young, cool, lively.’

As the website puts it, FJ celebrates the ‘three Ks’: *kakkō-ii* (coolness), *kasegeru* (to earn an income), and *kakushinteki* (innovation),<sup>13</sup> constructing an allegedly new image of the fisherman as a young, healthy, and energetic man, able to make a living out of his job, and open to new ideas and technologies. The order of the ‘three Ks’ is not casual either: the aesthetic aspect as the first and foremost is reflected by the great effort put by the FJ people in representing their fishermen associates: high quality pictures and videos, bright saturated colours, lots of smiles, and shiny new, company branded *gomu*, the classic Japanese fishermen's plastic overalls – also available for sale at the FJ website. As Moritomo, the main photographer associated with FJ, put it when I met him at the beginning of 2017, ‘When people type ‘fisherman’ in Google Images, rather than pictures of old, shabby, backward, countryside men, I want my pictures to pop up instead’.

During one of my first encounters with the FJ staff I am handed a leaflet describing the products they market on the electronic shop of their website. It is revealing, in its structure, of one of the significant changes FJ introduces into the local fishery production: individuals. For each of their four main products (*wakame*, scallops, salmon, *hoya*), a box presents a single producer with a close up picture, surname and name, and a short description. This aspect, together with the highly humanized environment portrayed in

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<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, the ‘three Ks’ indicated the unpleasant characteristics of arduous work: *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous), *kitsui* (demanding) (Cornell 1993).

FJ's videos, pictures, and blog posts, reflects, as one employee defined it, the quality of *ningen-kusai* (casual and genuine, lit. 'stinking of humanity') of the world they describe. This aspect deeply resonates with other similar attitudes highlighted in the interviews of this and later chapters).

Apart from the well developed visual imagery, FJ operates on different levels of entrepreneurship. One of their activities, the Triton Project, is deeply tied with the *kumiai* administration. It consists in an introductory course for future fishermen including lectures and short experiences with local companies. FJ operates as intermediary between mid-sized fishing companies (operating in the northern side of the Ishinomaki municipality) and the students looking for a specific experience in certain areas (seaweed, scallops, oysters, etc.), while the teaching infrastructure and personnel was provided by the *kumiai*. FJ is also the official supplier of the Wotani-ya, a restaurant in Nakano, Tokyo, owned by a former fisherman from Ishinomaki. The place – a cosy 40 seats basement, decorated with pictures by Moritomo – is very popular among Tokyo-based Miyagi natives, and it serves exclusively seasonal fish, seafood and vegetables from the Ishinomaki area. The third area of activity of FJ is direct selling of the products of their affiliates, i.e. seaweed (*wakame*, *nori*), scallops, oysters, fresh fish, and other seasonal products, such as octopus, mantis shrimp, and the seasquirt (*hoya*). During 2017 the company further expanded their direct sales base by setting up a small dedicated stall (*uriba*) in Ishinomaki's main shopping mall, the Aeon, and participating in two international food fairs in Malaysia and Thailand. The expanding, proactive nature of FJ has been particularly praised by some of my interlocutors, but most importantly, its fishermen members all belong to approximately the same age group (25-35), and share a feeling of dissatisfaction with the current situation. Among my contacts, Goro and Morishima express very clearly this attitude.

## 2.3 Goro

On a hot summer day, I travel by bus outside Ishinomaki, headed for the peninsula. In about 40 minutes I am in Ogi-no-Hama, a small fishing village now almost deserted, apart from few houses newly built on a nearby hill and the dock workshops. Between the main road and the sea, an unpaved stretch of land is covered with construction materials and dusty bulldozers: a seawall is being made. I can still see glimpses of blue in the gaps of

the gray concrete wall, but once it is finished (sometime around 2018, I am told), Ogi-no-Hama will be sealed off from the sea and its waves. At the northern end of the town, a rectangular lot of land is occupied by the temporary houses (*kasetsu jōhō*, or just *kasetsu*), small housing units built with containers.

Goro works and lives in Ogi-no-Hama, where he owns a warehouse/workshop space, and one of the new houses on the hill, after living for several years in one of the *kasetsu*. In his thirties, he is a thin, outgoing young man. We meet in his warehouse, surrounded by packs of dried *kōnago* (young lancefish, smoke-dried it is commonly used as a snack), drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. It is a summer day, octopus season. Goro had a different job before the disaster: he used to teach math to elementary and middle school students as a home teacher. He shares with me the reasons why he became a fisherman and some details about oyster seafarming:

‘My family had ties with fishery and fishermen, because we lived here, so I already knew that world a little. I didn’t want to be a fishermen, when I was a kid, it looked too hard. Immediately after the disaster, there were so many of them [fishermen] leaving. Everybody thought ‘It’s over’. Boats were destroyed, there was a general feeling of *akirame* (resignation). Then, the people around here collected their efforts, started working together, cooking together. It was a collective way of living (*kyōdō seikatsu*). So, out of that experience, I kinda changed my mind about being a fisherman. ‘I could give it a try’, I thought. Plus, it was a perfect time to start that kind of business. So many chances, out of nowhere! So I took the challenge, and started. We began as a group, working together, doing *wakame* [a type of seaweed], because they grow up very fast – only six months from seed to harvest. After a while, each one started working on his own, and I switched to oysters, mainly, and other things. This year I am fishing *tako* (octopus) too, to serve it with rice in a stall (*yatai*) here in Ogi-no-Hama, in July. Usually I do the oyster job in the morning, and go out fishing *kōnago* and *tako* in the evening until dawn. I fish them at night, with big light bulbs. Mine is a small company, a family company. Mostly everybody around here has a family company.

With the oysters, now it is *tane hasami* (seed inserting) time [*Tane hasami* is carried out all year round, but in June and July there are no other activities. In August/September the ropes will be placed on the rafts]. Roughly at the end of summer we put out the ropes, as that is the time when the seawater is filled with

oyster seeds.<sup>14</sup> The seeds then attach themselves to the shells and start growing. These will become oysters next year. So, it goes like this: until October everybody works in their homes, doing *tane hasami*, checking if the oysters on the rafts are alright, and moving them further into the sea as they grow bigger. Then in October, the oyster market opens, so everybody switches to *kaki muki* (oyster shucking), they bring their fresh, 2 year old oysters to the market (*ichiba*) and sell them. There is a special market for oysters, different from the regular *ichiba* in Ishinomaki [the *kaki ichiba* (oyster market) is in Ayukawa]. I have been selling my oysters there, even though... [Here Goro becomes very pensive, and elusive] You see, it's not like the prices are low or anything. The fact is, everybody gathers their goods there, but the way people collaborate (*dōryoku no shikata*) is... If there was more innovation, it would be better. Everybody producing oysters around here... One really doubts they are putting all their efforts in it, do you know what I mean? Simply put, with all the damage of the disaster, lots of people were forced to group up in one single *ichiba*, and if within all those people, even some decided to step up, innovate (*kufū*), take challenges, then there would be more chances for everyone... Such chances have been absent, until now.

This is more or less the reason why, when I have heard about FJ through my friend Morimoto (the photographer), I joined them. We had many views in common, we wanted to change things, and to step up, take challenges. We are all a group of 'challenge-loving guys' (*charenji-kun*). It is very simple in the end: we want people to be happy with our products: oysters, *wakame*, *hoya*... If they are ok with them, we're good too.

Goro's intricate ambiguity here is an attempt not to aim direct criticism at the *kumiai* system, which is the subject of most of his sentences. Put it simply, he feels – like many others of his age – a lack of proactivity in a context of deep economic depression, which causes him frustration. His disappointment springs from the separation between an abstract idea of progressive cooperation (*dōryoku*), a very strong and rooted trope in the Japanese discourse – especially relevant in context of farming or fishing (see Vlastos 1998, Kallan 1990, Barret & Okudaira 1995) – and the conservative attitude of the elderly fishermen and the *kumiai* leaders (often the same). Goro's critical stance is probably derived from

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<sup>14</sup> The concentration of oyster larvae in the coastal seawater is carefully measured each August: I was present at the measurements taken during the oyster tour (*kaki tsuā*) described in 3.2.a-3.2.b).



his marginal position of *parvenu* fisherman, and the subaltern position of his age group within the process of decision-making in the *kumiai*. Nonetheless, interestingly, his introduction to the world of fishery takes place among the wrecks and debris of the post-tsunami Ogi-no-Hama (which was completely razed and never reconstructed, apart from the harbour buildings, the seawall, and sparse private houses on the hills). His account refers to the *kyōdō seikatsu* (collective life), a primordial soup from which sprang the vast majority of interpersonal relations recalled by most of my interlocutors. This highly creative and informal moment – utopian almost – is indeed extremely relevant to many social transformations in Ishinomaki, as I will expose in the next chapters.

After Goro's optimistic vision – shared by several of his colleagues, at least in FJ – I went looking for different perspectives about the vision brought on by FJ, and I found Ōzu.

## 2.4 Ōzu

On a quiet evening at a food stall in downtown Ishinomaki, I am introduced to Ōzu, a fisherman from the Oshika Peninsula, good friend of the owner of the stall. It was July, *tako* season, and accordingly, Ōzu brought a huge, bright red octopus. In a matter of minutes, the young cook sliced a couple of tentacles and treated us with vinegar *tako* sashimi, chewy and delicious. Eating *tako* and drinking beer, we begin to talk. Ōzu is a stout man in his late 30s, wearing worn clothes and a baseball cap bleached by the sun. He talks passionately, but there is a creeping fatalism in his attitude – a deeply negational word, *muri* (impossible, useless, absurd) often recurs in his speech patterns just as often as Goro uses the work *challenge* (in its Japanese transliteration, *charenji*). One of the first things he does is to show me his hands, swollen and calloused:

‘I wasn’t a fisherman before the disaster, I was an IT technician for the paper factory. But after the disaster, they had to close down because of the damage to the infrastructure and machineries, so I lost my job. I stayed almost 2 years doing part time jobs – I even grilled *yakitori* [chuckles] – then I decided to become a fisherman. A friend told me I should try, that it was not so bad, actually enjoyable (*omoshiroi*). So I started working for a *shishō* – someone like a teacher, a *sensei*.

It was a hard time (*kitsui*). For the first months I did not know what to do, I was like a baby. My hands either hurt or had no feeling at all. Even eating was difficult.



I had trouble learning everything, because that kind of knowledge depends on the place where you are or the people who are teaching you (*kankei no chishiki*). There is no method apparently! It is not at all like, say, programming a computer.'

Ōzu looks happy to talk about his personal history, eager even. He spends a great amount of time and effort to explain to me the difficulties in obtaining the *gyogyōken*, the fishing rights which would grant him independence from his employer. He already tried twice, without success.

Ōzu is very skeptical about FJ and the young, bright eyed fishermen like Goro, who joined the company. His concerns are mainly practical, as he explains in detail:

'Their sales volumes are very thin, and most importantly they cannot deliver a constant flow of goods. For this reason it is very rare that they manage to deal with restaurants, or fishmongers.' In Ōzu's eyes, this devoids the whole operation of legitimacy and meaning. I try to object: 'But they also sell products on the internet, and opened up the *uriba* at the Aeon supermarket'. He dismisses the whole thing with a hand gesture: 'That is nothing'. Despite FJ's effective visual communication, which favours individual "characters" and their own specific products, Ōzu will not change his mind:

'Consider this: it's like you're on your own. If one day you cannot go out with the boat, you won't catch anything that day. Or, let's take the *tako* as an example [he points at the sashimi in his plate]. What if you don't catch enough of it? If you're in a group (*dantai*) of 30, 40 people, there will be someone who got more, that can compensate for you. But if you are on your own, you cannot supply anyone. It's impossible (*muri*). No one would trust you, or buy from you regularly. Shops need something like 10, 20 kilos of product every day. So, people join it if they have time to spare from their main activity, if they are already in a well established company. But if you have to make a living, you don't have time to waste with *fisshāman* [here 'Fisherman' is pronounced with a very strong Japanese accent and a dismissive expression]. The way I see it, it's pointless [*muri*]. Ishinomaki is beyond saving. They have all these projects [of reconstruction and community restoration], but in the end there isn't much [to recover] in Ishinomaki, nor in Ogi-no-Hama. [...] Fishermen don't live from advertising, or art, we live from fishing, and the catches are decreasing. [...] I make a living somehow, but all those guys affiliated with *fisshaman*, they're not making any money out of it, probably.

In this case, Ōzu is making a point opposite to Goro's: while the latter lamented the lack of dynamism of the *kumiai* system, my employee fisherman friend was praising the inherent virtues of the collective effort in terms of reliability and capacity to supply the client without shortcomings. If on the one hand Goro spoke in terms of progressivism, the more conservative – and pessimist – Ōzu considered the efforts of *fisshaman* fruitless, and the general condition of post-disaster Ishinomaki 'beyond saving'. All considered, I have met very few people with such a bleak vision, and most of them were past their 60s – but still a minority even among the elderly.

## 2.5 Morishima

If Goro's frustration as an oyster seafarmer is a bit clearer now, there is another category of fishermen working on the coast which has been affected by the 2011 aftermath more than others: the *hoya* farmers (see Introduction 1). Unlike oysters, seaweeds, and scallops, which are produced mainly for the domestic market, the *hoya* was produced for export. With the 2011 disaster, in response to the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown, the South Korean government quickly banned all *hoya* imports from Japan. As one of my interlocutors speculates, this could be interpreted as a strategic move aimed at rebuilding the Korean *meongge* production, cutting out the flux of goods from Miyagi, but regardless the motivations, it gravely affected all *hoya* seafarmers in Ishinomaki. With more than three-quarters of their product now unusable, they found themselves in a real pinch.

At the end of 2016 I met Morishima, a *hoya* producer in his late 30s, based in the peninsula. Although still youthful, deep wrinkles are carved around his mouth and eyes, heightened by his purposefully punk-ish look.<sup>15</sup>

When I get there by car, he is at his lunch break, so we sit outside his workshop (a crude plastic tent surrounded by piles of oyster and scallop shells, used as growth medium for the *hoya* spores). A campfire is lit, and Morishima is boiling some *hoyas* in a big pan, thick white steam swirling in the freezing air. First of all I am treated with the raw thing, still dripping sea water. For lack of a better description, I found the Lonely Planet Japan's

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<sup>15</sup> Although informal, there is a more or less common dress code among fishermen, especially older ones, consisting of plain, light grey work clothes, white bandana towels, work boots. Morishima, and many others from FJ, are instead flamboyant, sporting knee-ripped jeans, biker gang leather jackets, baseball caps. Golden teeth and earrings are very popular too.

‘rubber dipped in ammonia’ (Rowthorn 2003: 1142) acceptable, with a caveat: it is better than it sounds. Its very distinctive flavour – the ‘ammonia’ note – becomes highlighted when served cold (a popular version to go with a dry *nihonshu*, is *hoya* sashimi with crushed ice served on a *shisō* leaf), while when boiled or otherwise cooked the alcoholic taste is dampened and deeper seafood notes emerge. Without doubt, *hoya* indeed is an acquired taste (Sweetser 2009:178). Back at the campfire, Morishima shares his *hoya* and explains me his situation:

‘I am a fisherman, from a family of fishermen. We used to live in Oishihara-hama [a small village on the northern side of the Oshika peninsula], but then the water washed our house away. We managed to get out in time, we even saved the dog [chuckles]. [...] I have been doing *hoya* for quite some time now, with the help of my father, since before 2011, but after the disaster it has become almost impossible to sell our goods. You see, *hoya* is more difficult (*kibishii*) than, say, oysters or *wakame*, because it takes 3 to 4 years before it can be harvested. So, after the disaster, the first decent harvest could be done only around 2014. On top of that, with the Korean business in this condition, we lost almost 80% of our revenue. The *Tōden* (*Tōkyō Denryoku Kabushiki-gaisha*, better known as Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO) was ordered to compensate us for 70% of our revenues until the Korean ban lifts, but that puts me and others in the position of working all year to get this money and then, maybe throw away all the stuff. There are a lot of people out there happy with just getting the money, but that’s not what I want. At the moment I collaborate with FJ, the Wotani-ya and the *Hoya-hoya Gakkai* [see below] to disseminate *hoya* knowledge. It’s delicious, and it’s healthy [he gestures at the *hoya* cooking under our eyes]. You can cook it in so many different ways. [...] They serve it in Ishinomaki, Onagawa, and we have started bringing it to Tōkyō at the Wotani-ya. [...] We are trying to go beyond the old production and distribution modalities. We are doing *kangae hasshin* (knowledge transmission) about our products, promoting them in Japan and abroad, to counter the damage we suffered [he is referring specifically to rumor damage here, connected to the Korean ban on Japanese *hoya*]. This is a way of reacting and rebuilding. Our *hoya* is a resource here, it is a special food from this area, so we have a chance to have others to appreciate it as well.’

Morishima points out a complex situation, where the Fukushima meltdown effects (defined by the term *fuhyō higai*, rumor damage) have become dramatically tangible for *hoya* producers. This in part discouraged many, especially those in retirement age, from carrying on with their jobs, and in part created a group of seafarmer artificially supported by TEPCO compensation. Morishima asserts a moral standpoint here: he devotes his time and energies to dissemination projects, in order to contain the losses and redirect his *hoya* onto the domestic market. In order to do so, he and his colleagues need to present a coherent discourse about the *hoya* so that it can be received and consumed by the Japanese, who barely know it exists.

He is not alone in this enterprise, as the already mentioned *Hoya-hoya Gakkai* (Hoya Study Society) quickly became the backbone of *hoya* dissemination in Tōkyō. FJ is active in this aspect as well, as it sponsored twice a *hoya* dinner event at the Wotani-ya and features specific *hoya* contents on its website. Considering that the *hoya* is a very recent introduction in the seafarming of Miyagi, it is significant that Morishima refers to it as something that belongs in Ishinomaki. Recently the *hoya* has been portrayed in many different ways. One of the most popular is the *Tōhoku Kazoku* (Tōhoku Family) design series, which features anthropomorphized Tōhoku typical products (local sake, scallops, oysters, regional dishes), including the *hoya*, an apparent intruder which is instead captivating the hearts of Miyagi residents and the rest of the Japanese alike. This process of appropriation is indeed significant in understanding the ongoing transformations of Ishinomaki.

From the voices of the fishermen collected above derive two fundamental points: a sense of frustration with a system considered passive and excessively conservative, and the desire to react against the *fuhyō higai*. Both such tendencies are of course limited to a relatively small group of young fishermen involved with local initiatives such as FJ or Peace Boat (which will be considered in the next chapter). Among the majority of older workers, the most common attitude is best described by a fisherman from Magi-no-Hama (close to Ogi-no-Hama) ‘we don’t really take sides here, just sit and see what happens’. This difference in participatory attitudes reflects in part the minor impact that FJ is having in Ishinomaki, in contrast to the activities it is involved in, outside Miyagi.

## 2.6 Feeding Ishinomaki

Talking to the fishermen it emerged how most of them were relatively detached from the shops and restaurants they supplied with their products, since in the *kumiai* system, distribution is managed collectively and the individual fisherman does not directly sell his goods. Still, from the experience and accounts of Goro or Morishima, emerged an attitude towards direct interaction with their clients, both in terms of supplying and through collaboration in events, meetings, or simple friendly talks. Even Ōzu, who distanced himself from the FJ vision, that he perceived as an inconsistent utopia, regularly provided fresh *tako* for a couple of selected friends. In probing the views of local restaurant owners, I found elements common with Goro and Morishima's ideas – a desire to increase direct connections among producers and consumers, a newfound reliance on networks of friendship – coupled with the active search for local suppliers (facing sometimes higher prices).

I also noticed the emergence of new visions of social engagement which Klien (2016) qualifies with the adjective 'post-growth', referring to and expanding from the notion of the 'creative class' proposed by Florida (2002, 2003, 2005). Klien refers to a shift of focus from growth-oriented, capitalist modes of life and production, towards social models 'that emphasize sustainability and small-scale activities at the local level' (Klien 2016: 19). If Klien concentrates on the activities of domestic immigrants (*ijūsha*), I contend that the same principle applies to certain proactive locals as well. Through the voices of Katō and Iwasaki, I explore actions and reactions to the social change in Ishinomaki and the Oshika peninsula as conceived by those who transform local products, adding another layer to the already on-going dialectical transformation operated by producers themselves.

### 2.6.a Katō

Katō is the owner of the little stall where I met his friend Ōzu. He is in his late twenties, thin and childlike, constantly gesticulating. We met at the beginning of my fieldwork and I quickly became a regular at his little stall, the *Matsubara*, where he and his wife serve seasonal delicacies, varying from vegetable *tenpura*, sashimi, *tōfu*, *croquettes*, sandwiches, and seafood soups. His *Matsubara* is part of a stall owners collective called *Hashidōri Komon* (Bridge Street's Commons), an undeveloped lot in the Ishinomaki downtown district of Chūō, covered with a makeshift plastic canopy and packed with

shabby food stalls. In the middle, on a precarious wooden floor, tables and chairs are occupied by all customers, regardless of the stall they bought their food at. In the summer the patio is partially replaced by a music stage.

The *Komon* stands as one of the last remnants of the 2011 immediate aftermath, a time of temporary chaos, when university students, bikers, locals, and outcasts (such as American English teachers) joined their efforts in the grassroots debris cleaning and face-to-face volunteering that characterized Ishinomaki during the first 24 months after the disaster. In a sense, that spirit of impromptu co-existence and collaboration endured, if only in spirit, as the community of Chūō is still fond of the volunteering lifestyle, often organizing informal events and gatherings among youngsters. Katō, and his neighbouring *yatai* owners maintained that spirit as well, relying on a thick network of friends and acquaintances for their supplies of local products – vegetables from the mountains, fresh fish and seafood from the harbours, craft beers from Tōhoku micro-breweries.

Where, at first, the shabby huts hastily put together with old wood, and second hand furniture, were a necessity for those who lost their bars and restaurants in the tsunami, now they remain as a significant place of social interaction. During spring Sundays, and the main festivals of Ishinomaki (*Tanabata* and *Kawabiraki*, in the summer), the *Komon* becomes the epicenter of intense socialization, with hundreds of customers and passers by crowding it until late.

‘My family owned a small *minshuku* (guest house). I was in Sendai, studying at University when the disaster happened, and as soon as I went back to Ishinomaki our house was completely destroyed. So I quit Uni, joined with other people who had their places flooded or destroyed and we decided to start this place [the *Komon*]. We rented the plot from the owner and set up the stalls. Now, some people left after a while, and we are renting their *yatai*, sometimes even for a one-shot event. The idea was: we cook and serve food here until we got enough money to open our own place, you see? But then, even if I could move, I wouldn’t. That of course, until November<sup>16</sup> [chuckles]. [...] I mostly do seasonal cuisine here, Japanese cuisine (*washoku*) that is. I get the vegetables in the farms in Oshika and the north-western Ishinomaki municipality, from the same people who used to supply my family

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<sup>16</sup> On November 2017 the rental contract expired and the owner did not show willingness to renew it. In 2018 the *Komon* was reconstituted as Common-Ship Hashidōri and through a negotiation with the landlord and the City Hall, managed to keep their actual position.

before the disaster. Some things, I grow myself. For the fish, there always fishermen around here [laughs], we get the freshest things. And we do events together. In Spring we'll have a little oyster festival on the street, the fishermen come with their own and we cook some, try new recipes.

Before the disaster, my family used to cater to tourists, especially in the summer. People used to come here for the beaches, swimming, surfing, and the like. That kind of tourism now has disappeared, because the water took away the beaches. The seabed is changed too, so surfers don't come anymore. Now things are very different. This place, also is different [chuckles]. It is not a normal place, like the others. We have a small community here, of people from Chūō. We have the 2.0 people,<sup>17</sup> Peace Boat, workers. [...] It is not like a normal business, it's more like family. And we don't care about how much money we make, really.'

Katō exemplifies some of the elements pointed out by Klien in a different context: the nature of the *Komon* is not completely a commercial one. Although they do bask in the Bohemian atmosphere of the place, and display it in order to attract young, informal customers, gaining popularity among the millennials of Chūō, the commitment of Katō and his colleagues is sincere. While others, after some years working in the *Komon*, eventually moved to their own restaurant – as Katō observed, that was the aim of the whole project – at least for *yatai* owners remained since the foundation until the closure of the shared space.

Katō's Matsubara is very popular place for informal meetings, dates, and after-work socialization. Despite its frugality it is possible one of the most popular establishments in Chūō – a record that Katō would probably minimize.

#### 2.8.b Iwasaki

'You must try the *shika karē* (deer curry)! It's delicious!'. With this warm suggestion from a friend, I travelled to Hamaguri-hama, the beach after the long tunnel in the Oshika peninsula. The entrance to the village is a flight of concrete stairs departing from an anonymous car park at the side of the road. As I descended towards the sea, the beautiful sight of the small bay revealed itself to me through the pines. From the vantage point of the stairs I could see the bright green sea framed by wooded hills, and the roofs of the old houses perched on the hillside, shining with their enamelled blue ceramic tiles. At the

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<sup>17</sup> Here Takeshita refers to the Ishinomaki 2.0 Network discussed in 3.5 and Klien 2016.



bottom of the stairs, a small maze of inclined alleys took me to the Hamaguri-dō (Hamaguri house), a tea house renowned throughout the area for its deer curry and peaceful atmosphere. Inside the old, renovated family house, I sat on the *tatami* floor at a low table, enjoying the warm, worn wooden furniture: old bookshelves, 50s lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling, a copper teapot quietly bubbling on a petroleum stove. Everything, including the small patio with rocking chairs, overlooking a luxurious little garden paved with large stones, was soothing, old-fashioned and charming. Even the dried *katsuo* (bonito) hanging on the front door from straw ropes was reminiscent of an old family house, or a *minshuku* from the early postwar years.

Around me, a couple of white collar employees and at least 4 small groups of young *hipsters* were dining (or taking pictures of what they were supposed to eat) in blissful silence. A faint smell of *tatami*, old wood, and *katsuo* was lingering in the air, adding earthy notes to that small retreat. I was treated with a generous wooden bowl of deer curry, seasonal salad and coffee from Kesennuma ('rich coffee from rich port') picked from a hand-drawn illustrated menu. It seemed almost shameful to pester the waitresses with questions, until I was able to obtain an appointment with the owner, Mr. Iwasaki, a brilliant young graduate from Tōhoku University.

Iwasaki received me a few days later, in an annex of the tea house. We sit at a wooden table sipping coffee, and immediately after the initial pleasantries he starts a Powerpoint presentation of his project:

'The Hamaguri-dō building used to be my parents's house, before the disaster. I was in Sendai, studying for my graduation in Marine Sciences at the Tōhoku-dai [short for Tōhoku Daigaku, or University of Tōhoku] when the tsunami struck. Fortunately my family evacuated in time, and as you can see our house was high enough to suffer only partial damage. They left and went to live in Sendai after that, leaving me the building. With my degree, I intended to work in the fishery sector: I wanted to produce oysters. Of course, after the disaster, my plans went to pieces.

[...]

I did volunteering instead, I worked in Ishinomaki with a mixed group of locals and visitors from Kantō. With time, a tight group of 6 people were formed, and we came up with the idea of opening a tea house here. The first floor was damaged, but we worked hard, asking other volunteer groups for help. Someone gave us wood,



someone else gave us old furniture [laughs] that's why everything is worn and old, they are all second hand or salvaged. They add to the charm (*miriyoku*). A good friend of mine made some of the furniture as well, like this table [points at the table we are sitting at, which was incidentally made by the same craftsman who built the furniture for the guest house I was staying at – this delighted Iwasaki].

[...]

The business model we got inspiration from for the Hamaguri-dō is the *Sanpo*[-*yoshi*] system. It means that when we do business we do not only consider the satisfaction of our customers, or ours as sellers, but also positive repercussions on the local community we live in.<sup>18</sup> So, we buy only local products from local producers: our meat, the vegetables, the drinks, the tableware, everything is made locally. Most of our supplier are my personal friends, or family friends. Prices tend to be higher of course.

[...]

For now we are a tea house, and organize summer events, like paddling, or fish barbecues. We also do workshops on woodworking, deer hunting, fishing and seafarming. I want our study activity to increase, together with the leisure ones. We want to teach others how it is possible to lead a sustainable life with the resources of the sea and the mountains (*umi to yama*). See, after the disaster, the population here in Hamaguri-hama and the other villages, decreased dramatically. Now the woods and wild animals are increasing proportionally. So we can make use of wood, and the *shika* (deer) that are so abundant, to build things, and eat. Same thing with the sea. Lots of young people, and couples, come here from as far as Tōkyō, or Ōsaka. When we teach them these things, and we work together, we manage to create deep personal connections (*fukai kankei*). It's not just tourism, they come here and have an experience (*taiken*) of our *rokaru aidentitī* (local identity, in Japanese transliteration).

We have all sorts of clientele. Employees from the villages of the peninsula come here to have lunch. The elderly come here too, because it reminds them of tea houses from when they were kids. Youngsters think this place is fashionable

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<sup>18</sup> The *Sanpo-yoshi* (three-way satisfaction) defines a model presented as 'traditional Japanese business' (Suyenaga 2005). In its more general definition, it does not contemplate 'local community' as the third party, but 'society' at large. Interestingly, Iwasaki adds a twist of locality to the concept.

(*oshare*). We care about *ripīta* (repeaters), we want people to become our *shiriai* (acquaintances). They come back and tell us they felt nostalgia (*natsukashii*) of this place.

[...]

This is my approach to the community. It is a *sofuto* (soft) approach, focused on the mental (*mentaru*) aspects of recovery. We provide food, a quiet environment, art,<sup>19</sup> experiences.

Iwasaki exposes his ideas in a methodical and precise way, much more like a presentation speech than an interview. His personal take on the *Sanpo-yoshi* is particularly interesting as it is completely consistent with the concepts expressed by Goro, Katō, and in part Moritomo. But he expands this attitude further, introducing the keyword of *taiken*, or experiential, tourism. It was not the first time I heard that expression: it is becoming more and more popular in Ishinomaki, as the numbers of pre-disaster tourism crumble. The attempt to introduce a direct interaction with the visitors throughout the dissemination of local activities or knowledge is a significant propulsive element in the transformations of food producers-consumers interaction in post-disaster Ishinomaki.

Like the previous interlocutors, Iwasaki incubated his progressive business model in the years following the disaster, incorporating instances of support to the local community, self-sustenance, and environmental sustainability, common among volunteers. His personal connections feature several local and *ijūsha* volunteers as well. Interestingly, in his ring of acquaintances, are present several artists, including the photographer Moritomo and Ōta (whose work will be analysed in Chapter 5).

Although Iwasaki himself, unlike Goro, does not engage a direct critique of the pre-disaster *status quo*, he has a sometimes troubled relationship with his elderly neighbours of the peaceful Hamaguri-hama. Even if he would not admit it, the increase in car traffic and leisure activities in the bay has stirred a moderate amount of complaints, often expressed in very indirect manner. An elderly fisherman living closeby commented casually, with a thick Miyagi accent:

‘Iwasaki’s restaurant is a good thing around here, he is working hard. Sometimes people come here and do not know where to park their cars. In the summer all

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<sup>19</sup> Among his many projects, Iwasaki is also a patron of local arts, sponsoring and showcasing woodwork and earthenware from local art schools in the building next to his tea house.

these kids come here with their surf boards to swim in the bay. I don't really understand that. The seabed is dangerous, some neighbours who are seafarming oysters on the southern beaches are concerned they could hit the rafts and get injured'

One cannot but think of similar troubled neighbour relations described by Knight's 'Organic farming settlers in Kumano' (2003a), where young and educated young couples went back to the countryside in search of healthier lifestyles, only to find a curtain of mistrust and incomprehension. This is but a small detail, but it connects significantly Iwasaki's experience with some of the FJ affiliates in their search for an alternative future on the coast.

Ultimately, Iwasaki assumed the role of mediator of, in his words, *rokaru aidentitī*, taking advantage of his authoritative position of highly educated university student in Sendai and Tōkyō.

## 2.9 Again Station

Winter is a dead season in the tourism machine of Miyagi. Streets are empty, cold, and dark. But as the daylight begins to last longer, the cogs spring back to life, and in Onagawa, the Again Station begins its season of workshops and seminars. 'Again', as I am explained by the manager, Mrs. Takada, 'stands for both the English word and the Tōhoku dialect term for *itadakimasu*'.<sup>20</sup> The small local food shop was built with funding from the Nippon Foundation, and features fresh, frozen, and processed seasonal fish and seafood from the Onagawa harbour – *hoya*, *wakame*, whale meat cans, *sanma*, oysters, and scallops. Through a website a group of participants can book an afternoon and take part in a short seminar on the fishing or farming techniques employed in Onagawa, and learn how to clean and cook any of the products available at the Station. On a rainy April afternoon I was invited to sit in at one of these workshops, dedicated to the *hotate* (scallop, figure 5).

I arrive a couple of hours before the beginning of the event, to talk with the organizers. One is Takada, a tall and sociable young woman, armed with a massive Nikon camera. The other is a more withdrawn man in his late 40s, called Endō, employee of the Again

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<sup>20</sup> The Japanese expression used at the beginning of a meal.

Station. We exchange some thoughts on the workshop, and the other activities of the small retail:

‘At first the people who came here were mainly volunteers, or people who had contacts with volunteers, but in the last two years regular tourists are coming back to see Onagawa. Our mayor worked very hard on advertising the new town. We were very lucky here in Onagawa, because of the *genpatsu* (nuclear power plant).’

Remarks like these are easily heard in Onagawa. After being completely destroyed by the tsunami, in less than five years, the whole city centre has been rebuilt as a cozy wooden promenade with small shops and restaurants, with a graceful new train station designed by the worldwide famous architect Ban Shigeru. The plan was to turn the town into a tourist attraction, and this is apparently working, at least in the summer. A common notion among the residents of Onagawa is that the affluence of the town is mainly due to the presence of the *Onagawa Genshiryoku Hatsudensho* power plant (non operational at the moment), which also granted the municipality a greater margin of autonomy, when compared to similar sized towns on the coast. By looking at the municipality borders of Miyagi, Onagawa is easily spotted as a solitary island, surrounded by the territory of Ishinomaki, which during the last merger in 2005, annexed most of the smaller villages around it. Another widespread common concept regards the safeness of the plant, built in a sheltered area thanks to the conscientiousness and the carefulness of a local head engineer.

‘Today we will have a group of young people from Kantō, from catering schools. They came to learn about local cuisine and our seafood production. This is a common category, but we also receive groups of housewives, and even kids from local schools, to learn how to cook properly. Our idea is to have them experience (*taiken*) the cleaning and cooking themselves, rather than just watching, or eating.’

The backroom of the shop has been prepared meticulously, with gloves, white aprons and masks for everyone, a large basket of freshly harvested scallops, knives and sharp tools, cutting boards and pans. On the side, lie a few fresh, fire-red *hoya*. ‘We will clean and cook *hoya* too’ says Endō with a smile ‘because no matter what the workshop is about, we always are asked about *hoya*’.

Finally the students arrive, escorted by Naganuma, a young employee of the local advertising agency managing the Again Station’s website. They are a group of 12 white-

masked, well dressed young men and women in their 20s, visibly distressed by the heavy rain, and extremely shy. To add to their embarrassment, I am introduced as the ‘local researcher’. As I try to keep myself on the edges of the group and not interfere, the workshop starts with ritualistic self-introductions and an educational video on the seafarming of scallops, projected directly on a wall of the room.

The practical portion of the workshop begins with the opening of the shells, using sharp metal tools and thin spatulas. After a short demonstration from Endō the students begin working silently, as the room fills with the marine aromas of seafood. While the rain stubbornly taps on the windows of the backroom, the meaty bodies of the scallops are separated from the intestines – small, black sacks filled with digested refuse. The clean *hotate* collected, they are boiled in a deep pan. The students, until now silent and blank, begin to look hungrily at the *hoya*, on a side of the working table. A few questions are asked, *hoya* are handed over for the students to touch and smell, and, just as Endō predicted, the attention soon shifts towards the mysterious creatures.

Under the vigilant eye of Naganuma and Takada’s Nikon lenses, Endō begins to cut open the thick red skin of the *hoya*, revealing its milky inner flesh. Like soft eggs, the bodies are popped out their carapaces and quickly sliced, releasing their distinctive smell.

‘*Hoya* can be served as sashimi, the fresher the better. As cooking techniques go, it can be boiled in hot water, grilled – in this case it is better not to remove the thick skin, and use aluminium between the *hoya* and the grill – or you can even simmer it in *shiru* (bonito stock) and serve it with *komezue* (rice vinegar). It has a strong taste, and is a unique dish from Miyagi. Please don’t forget to try it after the workshop!’

After some attempts at opening and cleaning the real attraction of the event, with exaggerated expressions of curiosity and amused diffidence, the students managed to produce some boiled and sashimi-sliced *hoya*, encouraged by Endō’s remarks (‘Well done’, ‘It looks delicious, doesn’t it?’, etc.). This marked the end of the practical session, and everybody returned their gloves, aprons, and tools in an orderly way. At this point, *donburi* bowls of white rice were distributed, and topped with several fresh seafoods provided by the Station. In separate dishes, the *hotate* and *hoya* were also passed around for everybody to sample.

The students sat on a long table separated from Endō and Takada, while Naganuma entertained them with a detailed account of Onagawa reconstruction. Sporadically, when

they ate something particularly meaningful, ‘*Oishii!*’ (‘Delicious!’) was uttered in delight. Within an hour, the event was over, and multiple bows and ‘*Arigatou gozaimasu*’ (‘Thank you very much’) were exchanged. Takada gave a short closing speech, thanking once again everyone for using their precious time to come to Onagawa and savor the local delicacies.

She ended with ‘Please do come again, and please do bring some of Onagawa with you if you like’, alluding to the seafood they just cooked and tried. The students went back to the station half walking, half running under the rain.

In a separate encounter, that evening, I could exchange a few thoughts with Takada, born and raised in Onagawa. ‘I graduated in Sendai, in marketing’ she tells me ‘and I was living and working there when the disaster came. I returned back home to find almost everything gone. I have spent two very difficult years, going back and forth between Onagawa and Sendai, trying to work and taking care of what was left of my family at the same time, and I kept thinking about a way to work here. In the end I was able to take part to a project sponsored by the Japan Foundation to open this place [the Again Station], to sell local products. It is part of the Onagawa reconstruction project, one of the main aims is to provide services for tourists and visitors. It is a small shop, but easy to access, and we employ several locals who lost their jobs – one is Endō, who you met this morning. Naganuma and his company were very kind to help us organize these meetings with students, it feels like we are stepping up somehow.’

## **2.10 Conclusion: the sea-pineapple at the end of the world**

The Onagawa workshop was valuable not just to witness the interaction between locals and tourists, but also to access, in part, the process of narration that locals elaborated in order to promote their products to outsiders: if the scallop is a shell easy to find all over the nation, the *hoya* was the real attraction of the workshop. This is in part due to its unusual look – *hoya* seafarmers like Morishima post closeups of their harvest far more often than oyster, scallop, or seaweed producers: it has a certain iconicity to it – but also the very peculiar taste and its relative exoticity.

If pre-2011 the *hoya* was a relatively neutral product, farmed to be exported in Korea and almost unseen on the tables of the Japanese, apart from some living in the direct proximity of the farming ground, now, as Morishima put it, ‘there is so much *hoya* lying

around’, that finding new markets for it is becoming more and more a necessity. The way *hoya* is being digested by locals, and presented to anyone interested goes inevitably through locality. In this sense, *hoya* and Onagawa, as concepts, are becoming more and more superimposed, through mascots, t-shirts, gadgets, workshops, and actual *hoya*, processed and packed as a ‘Local food from Miyagi’. In a similar fashion, products like oysters, or *ginzake* (silver salmon), which had not been marketed as ‘Miyagi products’ before the disaster, began to undergo processes of *burando-zukuri* (brand-construction), for analogous reasons.

Although it is not possible to ascribe all such processes to post-growth and alternative models – for example, the Again Statio, a classic *meibutsu* shop for tourists, is very different from the new-age-ish Hashidōri Komon – some of the younger fishermen and restaurant/shop owners I have interviewed still harbour a deep connection with the time of *kyōdō seikatsu*, as Goro called it. In many cases, their friendship networks, their decision to start a business, or their life-changing choices were made in this tumultuous period which corresponded significantly with the passage between their 20s and 30s.

Cases such as the *Komon*, or Iwasaki’s holistic ‘mountain-and-sea’ lifestyle, are the local manifestation of a diffused overlapping between leisure and work, social and professional life, a pattern which is becoming more and more popular in a nation that discovered precarity in the workplace and is currently questioning the *sararīman* (salaryman), the previous generation of male workers who sacrificed their personal life for the good of the company (see Klien 2013, Noritoshi 2011, Allison 2013). Tightening up relations, direct interactions, and emphasis on bodily experience (*taiken*) are keys to understand how this generational shift in values and priorities manifests itself in post-disaster Ishinomaki.

One of the most recent initiatives of FJ is a service called ‘Fisherman Call’ (written in English in their website and on the promotional video available on Youtube),<sup>21</sup> a free app where anyone from all over Japan can schedule a wake up phone call with one of the fishermen affiliated to FJ. The purpose of the app was not to ‘recruit anyone into fishery’, as the FJ website states, but to promote direct contact between city people (consumers) and the young men producing their daily meals. Highlighting the third pole of Iwasaki’s

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<sup>21</sup> <https://youtube.com/watch?=6-lyuTJ71a0>, last access 09/12/2017.

*Sanpo-Yoshi*, the community or society at large, this is indicative of the current *weltanschauung* in Ishinomaki.

Conversely, the intense degree of interaction that the mediation between locality and the outside nation, or even foreign nations involves, as in the case of FJ's presence at food fairs in Thailand and Malaysia, implies an equally intense effort in the invention of regional or prefectural identities, to be transmitted through narratives which, in the case of Ishinomaki, for the most part were not present before 2011. Despite the paramount relevance of the disaster and the aftermath in the subsequent transformations of seafood production and consumption in the municipality, though, accounts of the disaster rarely slip into the narratives of FJ, the *Komon*, the Again Station, or Iwasaki's Hamaguri-dō.

To conclude, I isolate three main focus points from the interviews and observations included in this chapter: the de-neutralization of previously neglected elements (*hoya*, oysters, environmental features) to be used as *foci* in the ongoing process of invention of locality of the Ishinomaki area; the paradigm in the models of work, leisure, and community networks after the 2011 disaster; the emergence of an intense activity of mediation which informs the above transformations in a coherent discourse.

This chapter, moreover, begins to highlight an aspect central to chapters 3 and 4, concerning the difference in attitudes among class and age boundaries that inform the ideological dimension of Tōhoku recovery in general, and of food and locality construction in particular. Although in the sections above I have presented voices from locals, it is worth noting how, given the young age and the progressive attitude of my interlocutors, a significant portion of their dispositions and visions are not dissimilar from those of the new-locals discussed in chapter 3. This derives in part from the research techniques I have deployed during my fieldwork (discussed in detail in 1.7.a), particularly the snowballing which produced a substantial homogeneity among my local and new-local interlocutors. Age, class, wealth, and educational differences produce in Ishinomaki a conflation of interests and dispositions among new-locals and young, proactive locals, which are opposed both on the conservative local side (see 3.6) and, in a more subterranean way, on the governmental and organizational side (see 4.5).

In the next chapter, these points will be further analyzed through the activities and voices of the *ijūsha* residents of Ishinomaki, strong in their intermediate position between the locality of the Miyagi coast and the centrality of the urbanized Kantō.



## Chapter 3: New-Locals – Mavericks and chefs

### 3.1 Introduction: a very cold place

Some years ago I was in London, attending a conference. After a speech on the Great Japanese Disaster, the *Daishinsai*, given by a Japanese researcher, I asked her how the condition of political and economic subalternity of the Northeast (*Tōhoku*) was affecting the recovery process. She did not answer me directly, but at the end of the event, during the reception, she approached me and, in a very apologetic tone, declared: ‘There is no subaltern condition in the Northeast, you see. The problem is, that region is very, very cold. But the people there have to work very, very hard’.

It puzzled me. It sounded like the naturalization of a condition deeply embedded in the Japanese nation’s social and political history, a history from which it was abruptly removed by virtue of cold, and hardship. It was a textbook example of how Eckert and McConnell-Ginet defined the success of a dominant ideology, i.e. the ability to persuade its listeners that it is not, in fact, ideology, but the natural way things are (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 43). The fact that *Tōhoku* was a ‘very, very cold’ area, apparently, qualified it as a place where life was hard on its own, in my interlocutor’s brief reply. Thus, the disaster did destroy almost everything on the coast, leaving villages and towns in pieces, but also let the stern, noble, and dedicated nature of *Tōhoku* inhabitants emerge for everyone to see. In a fashion similar to the researcher I met in London, the journalist and author Richard Lloyd-Parry repeatedly describes *Tōhoku* as a place of ‘abundant nature’ (Lloyd-Parry 2017: 49) – and consequently thin culture, one might assume – to the point that the absence of infrastructures and *Tōkyō*-like commodities made it ‘[e]ven before disaster struck its coast, nowhere in Japan closer to the world of the dead’ (Lloyd-Parry 2017: 49). Its people possesses ‘a robust, tousled quality suggestive of bracing weather, and an indifference to indulgences such as indoor heating’ (2017: 53) and ‘everyone talked about the beauty of nature, and his or her relationship with it’ (2017: 53). This ‘natural’ condition was acknowledged by the British journalist, who describes the village of Kamaya, in *Tōhoku*, as ‘the archetypal *furusato*, the Japanese Arcadia’ (2017: 57).

A few years after the London exchange, I found myself in Sapporo, at the Hokkaidō Ethnographic Museum, contemplating an Ainu culture exhibit. A wide poster hanging

from the ceiling read, approximately: ‘Ainu people lived in a very cold and harsh environment, but despite that they managed to adapt to modern life quite well, and for that they are commendable’. Again I was hit by the naturalization of a subaltern condition – that of the native Ainu, this time – which dismissed any historical, political, and economic dynamic between the former and the Japanese nation, but went as far as complimenting the population subject to it for their resilience, while perpetuating the ideological mechanism of naturalization. For the concept of naturalization itself, Rambelli (2013: 185) proposes an effective definition which resonates with the lines above:

‘[By naturalization we mean the] reduction of culture to nature. Cultural traits are ultimately reduced to natural characteristics, namely environment, climate, or even the peculiar functioning of the Japanese brain. [...] [It is an] essentialization of culture [...]’

Expanding on Rambelli, the cultural traits hidden under the process of naturalization are, by definition, historically embedded, so that the negation of their cultural and historical situated-ness ‘saves’ the analyst from facing the processes of hegemonic discourse-making, internal colonization, and political denial of responsibility (see Hopson 2013) that not only characterized the past of Tōhoku, but extend to the present day and deeply affect it. Similarly, in a passage on the philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurō, Oguma (2002: 272-275) highlights how the Japanese national character was, in Tetsurō’s view, ‘aesthetically’ linked to the monsoon and arctic climates, which characterize the southern and northern parts of the nation (this is explored further in 4.3).

The search for “nature” in rural Japan has a long history, and permeates some of the accounts of my *ijūsha* interlocutors – although most of them made a life choice, rather than an excursion in the countryside in search for temporary *furusato* bliss. Nonetheless, the common statement ‘Here I have found a community I can be part of’, almost omnipresent in the interviews with new residents of Ishinomaki, betrays the post-industrial, domestic tourism background which has qualified much of the discourse about Tōhoku, but is by no means restricted to it. At the same time, the choice of relocating in Ishinomaki – a real centre within the periphery of Miyagi – betrays a partiality which is only in part individualistic: most of the endeavours undertaken by the *ijūsha* are of an inherently urban nature, such as community-building projects, social architecture visions, and the mediation between production and consumption.

It is precisely on this third position, that of the mediator between the urban and centralized world of consumption, and the rural, peripheral world of production, that I

concentrate my analysis of the following encounters. I have chosen to highlight, in this sense, the specific position of domestic immigrants as the creators of a set of contents, varying from food culture to post-disaster narratives, to the very nature of citizenship of Ishinomaki. This is especially relevant as, in many regards, the voices of local residents have been either ignored or mystified by national media, as far as many matters tackled by *ijūsha* over the past five years are concerned. In the words of a fisherman from Chapter 2 (2.4), locals would rather ‘sit and see what happens’, rather than taking initiatives, which are then carried out by more active and organized immigrants. Such an attitude is exemplified by another individual discussed in the Chapter 2, the oyster farmer Gorō (2.3): he mentions the lack of *kufū* (innovation) and of the will to take chances (uttering once again his favourite word, *charenji*) among his fellow seafarmers, and praises the new and unconventional impulses introduced by *ijūsha* such as Morimoto and the employees of FJ

It is important to note, here, that although direct conflict among residents and new-locals is generally avoided both in the general discourse and in the practices of urban life of Ishinomaki and the villages surrounding it, a creeping mutual friction between locals (often elderly) and new-locals is part of everyday life in the Sanriku. Klien reports the communicative ‘gap’ (2016: 9) among the new-local network of activists and former volunteers called Ishinomaki 2.0 (discussed in this chapter, 3.5) and the many doubts of the elderly locals about the efficacy of unconventional reconstruction activities such as the promotion of tourism and small-scale local events. In a similar fashion, Wilhelm (2018) reports the many conflicts between the local population and the often short-sighted top-down institutional initiatives of post-disaster reconstruction (this theme will be tackled more in detail in Chapter 5).

In his *Organic farming settlers in Kumano* (2003), the anthropologist John Knight describes a scenario relatively similar to the Ishinomaki post-disaster condition, where the farming village of Kumano, in Wakayama prefecture, is repopulated by ‘newcomers [...] from the major cities of Tōkyō, Ōsaka, and Kyōto’ (272). These newcomers are ‘typically young, university-educated, and their past occupations include company employee, designer, computer programmer, [...] and artist. [...] Most practice organic farming’ (Knight 2003: 272). Such newcomers made the life-changing move to the countryside, following a de-urbanizing ideology and a specific lifestyle (a search for self-sufficiency being their most common attribute). In the following pages, I will present people who

similarly chose to relocate to Ishinomaki, disregarding better conditions in cities such as Tōkyō or Ōsaka, and producing very significant interaction both with local residents and with outsider tourists.

### 3.2 Gastro-volun-tourism

One of the first encounters of my fieldwork was with the employees of Peace Boat Ishinomaki, the local branch of the eponymous non-government organization based in Shinjuku, Tokyo (henceforth, PB). Founded in 1983, PB initially concerned itself with human rights, anti-nuclear campaigns, and environmental protection, funding international lectures and cultural events in Asia. In 2011, PB already had experience in post-disaster relief operation, having being active after the Great Hanshin Earthquake (1995, see 6.5). Shortly after the tsunami, a team moved to Ishinomaki to establish a base, collecting funds, goods, and volunteers from Japan and the rest of the world. During its first year of activity, PB aimed at providing the 290,000 residents of the area food, clothes and shelter (Peace Boat 2011).

On June 2, 2012, the Peace Boat Ishinomaki Center (*Pīsu-Bōto Sentā Ishinomaki*) opened in Chūō, in a wide building once belonged to a store. On its front door, a large semicircular, point-eared cat face made out of plywood welcomed the visitors. With the emergency over, Peace Boat abandoned most of the ‘hard’ (*hādo*) projects, like mud and debris removal, drain-pipe clearing, and food distribution, and started sponsoring ‘soft’ (*sofuto*) initiatives, such as gardening, elderly care, social gatherings, or volunteering support for local companies damaged by the tsunami – mainly aquaculturists and farmers. As a friend put it in 2016, after all the debris cleaning and relief work was done, ‘all that was left for volunteers was planting flowers and building playgrounds’. In 2015 the PB office moved into a smaller building, still in Chūō, and, under the guidance of Mr. Kawasaki, started its two main projects, still ongoing, which became part of my research, as they impacted mainly local seafarmers, and particularly the younger generation discussed in the previous chapter.

Kawasaki is a stout young man in his late thirties, with a thick Sapporo accent. In 2016, he had been living in Ishinomaki only a couple of years, working as coordinator for the PB office with his fiancée, Satō (see below, 3.2.a). Kawasaki’s organizational skills are a reflection of his degree in engineering at Sapporo University, as he stated. ‘I worked for

four years after graduation’ he stated in one of our interviews ‘but was not very satisfied with an office job. I felt out of place. After my time at volunteering I decided I wanted to be more involved with Peace Boat, and since I was more or less the most experienced person available here, I decided to join the NGO and start working more seriously’. Kawasaki is adamant in wanting to live in Ishinomaki. When he and his partner got married in the Autumn of 2017, they bought a house in Watanoha (a residential area on the eastern side of Ishinomaki). I met Kawasaki in the October of 2016 in that serendipitous place of meaningful encounters (Klien 2016: 8) that is the Irori Cafe, right in front of the new PB headquarters in Chūō. It appeared from the beginning that Kawasaki and his office were trying to build bridges between the seafarmers of Ishinomaki and the wealthier galaxy of volunteers, investors, and customers of central Japan. Symbolically, their two main projects (*Kaki no Wa* and *Ima Koko*) summarized the bridging activity by the two opposite movements of sending out (goods) and bringing in (people).

### 3.2.a Ima, Koko (*Here, Now*)

“Here” in Blum’s reflections about the ‘talismanic quality of local food’ (2017) assumes a conspicuously positive meaning, rooted in the indexicality of the word itself: ‘quality along with location’ (Blum 2017: 10). The material distance between a supporter’s ‘here’ and Miyagi is closed by the second PB project presented in this section: a one week homestay program aimed mainly at university students who wish to travel to Miyagi and learn more about the lives of fishermen. Its advertising focuses on human contact, cooperation, and the beauty of the fishing villages (*gyoson*). A revealing flyer, circulated in Tōkyō and Ishinomaki by PB, shows pictures of smiling youngsters sporting blue rubber overalls, working with elderly seafarmers. At the top, a box says: ‘The delicious seafood will be shared with the program’s participants’. The offer, of local delicacies and beautiful marine landscapes, is described in the dreamy lines of the flyer, superimposed on a wide-angled picture of the Oshika Peninsula coastline:

‘In Ishinomaki, surrounded by mountains and sea

The fishing villages dot the coastline

The transparent sea, the sky full of stars

The strength and kindness of those who live together with nature

Parting for a while from the restless everyday

Will you try and come to meet the rich charm of the fishing village?’

This elegiac presentation was downplayed by Kawasaki as ‘advertising’ in a later encounter, but nonetheless, to the reader and prospective participant of *Ima Koko*, it promises an escape from the ‘restless everyday’ (*sewashinai nichijō*) to a place where strong and kind people live together with nature. In fact, more lines are dedicated to the qualities of the landscape than to its human inhabitants. On the back, a short introduction reads:

‘Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, suffered significant damage due to the great Eastern Japan disaster. Previous issues of production decline, depopulation (*kasō*), and lack of manpower, became even worse after the disaster. Even though suffering from scarcity of workers, the villages dotting the coast, called “-hama”, are rich with fishermen who live everyday in contact with nature. [Joining] their [*karera*, a masculine pronoun] charming everyday lifestyle will be an interesting experience, out of the ordinary. We would like everyone to taste a little (or more) of the charming life in the *hama*.’

In this passage, like in the front sheet piece, the recurring terms set the tone: charming (*miriyoku*), rich (*yutakana*), living together with nature (*shizen to tomo ni ikiru/kurasu*). Such elements are perfectly aligned with the *furusato* narrative in Japan, depicting a world that is cleaner and more spontaneous. And just like *furusato*, from which genuine and delicious foodstuff is generated (Knight 1998), the fishermen’s *wakame*, *kaki*, and *hoya* are shared with the volunteering visitor. Among the many comments Kawasaki collects from former participants, the vast majority are remarks on the quality of food:

Participants usually are very satisfied by the experience, because at the end of the week, they have learned something new, and made some human connection (*ningen kankei*). And all of them are very happy about the food, that is as fresh as you can possibly have it.

Shortly after meeting Kawasaki and the PB crew (at the time composed of four other members, which became five in 2017), I decided to take part to the *Ima, Koko* program as a volunteer. In November I was quickly briefed by Kawasaki about basic security (‘If they ask you to do something you’re not sure you can do, say no’), a short account of the aftermath of the disaster, and some information on the family I was going to stay with. After a two hour bus ride, I was in Maki-no-Hama, a 200 household hamlet in the Oshika Peninsula, facing Ogi-no-Hama at the other side of the inlet.

My hosts were the Shimada family, composed of an elderly couple, their son, his wife, and their two children. All of them lived in a small plot of temporary housing (*kasetsu*)

about 300 metres uphill from the docks. The Shimada used to live in a large wooden house near the sea, as Mr. Shimada Senior told me, not hiding his discomfort for the loss. 'We built it in the early 70s' he said, and did not add more than that, but once, walking uphill, his grandson pointed to a patch of grass saying 'that's where the old house was'. The Shimada lived and worked in Maki-no-Hama for generations, together with their neighbours and fellow fishermen. Shimada's son's wife is from a neighbouring village, and works in Ishinomaki as a shop assistant, helping with the oyster harvest after her shift.

Every morning they went to the workshop at the dock, to open oysters, as from November to March it is *kaki-muki* (oyster opening) season. The work was not easy, nor pleasant. The weather was becoming colder, and at 6 PM the sky was already pitch black. At 5 PM the working day was over, and we slowly climbed back to the *kasetsu*. There, we enjoyed dinner with the rest of the family: the patriarch's sister, and her grandsons, two middle school boys slightly older than the son and daughter of my fisherman host. Afterwards, sometimes I was invited to drink with the few other seafarmers of the village in a nearby house. The days went by, with cigarettes and coffee cans, and I was almost surprised after one week passed and I had to return to Ishinomaki.

Despite having spent more than one week with fishermen and dock workers in several other villages on the Oshika Peninsula, asking questions, taking pictures, or simply chatting about the local soccer team (the Onagawa Cobaltore, which counted many supporters in Ishinomaki as well), I cherish the Maki-no-Hama experience, for the stark contrast it poses to the way *gyoson* life is narrated to the outsiders. To begin with, there was nothing I could possibly associate with 'living together with nature' in Maki-no-Hama, except the obvious fact that the village economy was based on seafarming and sporadic foraging in the woods (an activity disregarded by anyone below 50, apparently). In second instance, richness (at least in the material sense) was unknown in the hamlet, despite the best effort of the family women to keep everything as neat and comfortable as humanly possible. As for the charm of it, while discussing with some of the younger seafarmers of the docks, no one wanted to stay in Maki-no-Hama, they were all 'Just helping their family for some time, and going to move to Sendai soon'. As I asked the young son of one of my fishermen friends if he wanted to take on his dad's job when he grew up, all he replied with was a sardonic grin, one a twelve years old would reserve for a schoolmate who asked a very dumb question.



Despite the unfulfilled *furusato*-esque promises of the flyers, Kawasaki reported that most participants expressed great satisfaction with their experience, and some even returned for a second round. As one *Ima, Koko* member explained, ‘Working with this program is like going back to volunteering times. You work really hard, then have a bath, drink a beer. It’s the best’. PB also faces some of the same issues as post-disaster volunteering more broadly, for example the question of equitable allocation of volunteer labour. The issue – how the volunteering workforce is distributed equally among who needs it – has been acknowledged by Kawasaki, who introduced a 4,000 Yen fee (around 25 British Pounds) both on the visitor’s and the host’s side, ‘so fishermen do not get free labour from volunteers, and also are prevented from abusing the program’. The matter of abuse of volunteer work in Sanriku is in many respects a minor one, as other more poignant themes have been developed by scholars, such as the interactions between urban volunteers and local population (Toivonen 2015), the ethical dimension of unpaid work (Klien 2017a), female activism (Morioka 2015), religious implications (Graf 2016) or even the refusal of locals to be helped by volunteers (Slater 2015). Although cases of abuse of unpaid work from local population are definitely rare, it is evident from Kawasaki’s stance that the few which emerged prompted a reaction on the side of the informal gatekeepers, in this case the PB organization.

Although the topic of volunteering abuse is not covered, to my knowledge, by existing literature, I can report an anecdotal case dating back to 2012, when I was working as a volunteer in Ishinomaki: a small group of us was recruited by a local lady, who acted as an intermediary between volunteers and local fishermen in need, to help a seaweed farmer for one week during the *wakame* harvesting season (late spring). The first day on the docks the owner of the small family company was particularly insistent that we were not to speak with workers from other neighbouring companies, and made sure all seven of us were dressed with the green plastic overalls of his company. We did not pay any particular thoughts to these details, but a few weeks after word came that the *wakame* farmer was not actually in dire need of help (he could count his two sons, one employee, and three or four ladies who cut the harvested seaweed in the workshop), and on the contrary he was practicing what turned out to be unfair competition, with seven unpaid workers in a busy period such as the harvest season. This reconstruction is of course undocumented, but if it can be assumed as an example of volunteering abuse, the informality of the situation partially explains the absence of analysis of such practices.



Another possible interpretation of Kawasaki's fees comes from a comment from Slater (2015). Having worked as a volunteer in Ishinomaki as well, he faced the difficulty of providing free assistance to those in need, who would rather decline a stranger's help than finding themselves in the embarrassing situation of not being able to give anything in return (both due to the dire conditions tsunami victims lived in, and to the impermanence of volunteers, who would only spend in a single place no more than a few days: Slater 2015: 281-282). If refusal became the perfect way out from a 'reciprocity or [social] disgrace' (281) situation, the payment of a fee on the side of the recipient would prevent this mechanism setting a (symbolic) price to be paid back for the help of a volunteer.

According to Kawasaki's latest updates (December 2017), *Ima, Koko* has been attracting a steady number of participants in 2017, at roughly the same level as 2016. The main target remains University students as, in Kawasaki's words 'they have more spare time, and are the kind of people who usually get involved with volunteering more easily'. When I ask him what does he think about the actual effectiveness of such a short-term, low-intensity voluntourism (MacMorran 2017), he shrugs:

'It is not like people coming for *Ima, Koko* are going to significantly revitalise the industry [due to the small number of visitors and subscriptions], but it is a way to participate, and to connect [*tsunagaru*].<sup>22</sup> Our members will, in turn, talk about their experiences – we also have a blog where participants's experiences can be shared – so others can access them. [...] At the moment, promoting Miyagi as a place to go, meet new people, and share experiences, is the best for the region, I think'.

Even though different configurations of volunteering and tourism offers appeal to different categories of people, it is significant here how University students become the focus of the activities of PB in Ishinomaki. It is not by chance that highly educated young urbanites from Tōkyō and Ōsaka also represent a vast majority among *ijūsha* of Miyagi. As we will see in the Fisherman Japan example in the next section, both *ijūsha* and visitors share a common background – a milieu – which enables more effective interactions between them than, for example, is the case for interactions between local fishermen and non-local visitors.

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<sup>22</sup> This term has become very popular in the narratives of post-disaster relief in Tōhoku (Shaw et al. 2011).

### 3.2.b A visit to Ogi-no-Hama

At the end of 2016, on a sunny november Sunday, I was invited at short notice to take part to a visit at Ogi-no-Hama docks, accompanying a group of visitors from Tōkyō. Our host was an employee of Fisherman Japan, Mr. Nagaoki. A young man from Sendai, graduated in advertising, Nagaoki has no personal ties in Ishinomaki apart from his job. ‘After the disaster I was very busy working my former employer, an IT company. I am ashamed I could not take part to the volunteering, but when I was asked to take part to this project [Fisherman Japan], I decided very quickly. I commute most days from Sendai, which is not very convenient, but the environment here is so much better. More humane. I have never worked with fishermen, but they are very fun to be around, and focused. Finding myself immersed in this world I did not know before, is like being ten years younger. Many people I know were originally from here and came back after the disaster, either to take care of their families and possessions, or to start new jobs with the reconstruction. Sometimes I feel like we are all working at the same goal, it gives me a sense of unity I never felt working in normal companies before. I do not feel out of place at all’ he said to me in an interview in February 2017.

Nagaoki has an outgoing personality, a plus in the public relations (*shōgai*) he often carries out on the behalf of his company. The visit was our second encounter, and my first visit to the headquarters of FJ, a small two storey house reworked as office space in Ishinomaki city centre.

I meet with Nagaoki outside the building, and we have coffee at a nearby convenience store (*konbini*), waiting for the other participants to gather. They will arrive shortly with the morning train from Sendai. He explains me that such organized visits are not very common, but are happening more often lately, which is a sign of interest from potential customers and supporters. The group from Tōkyō were almost all regular customers of the Wotani-ya, the Miyagi cuisine restaurant in Tōkyō (see 6.2) that FJ supplied.

After a few minutes, a group of 10 people comes towards us from the direction of the train station, carrying cameras and backpacks. The Tokyoites are young, between their 20s and 30s, geared up for a walk in the woods, with trekking shoes, technical clothing, canteens and hot tea thermos. After a round of self presentations and bows, we get another coffee and move inside the building for our briefing. As we sat down at an elaborate *chabudai* (short tea table), we were handed the always present *ankēto* (a form to be filled with personal information, used in Japan in a very wide array of occasions), a

standard presentation pamphlet from FJ, and a well presented booklet titled *Ishinomaki Hyaku-ryō* ('The hundred fisheries of Ishinomaki). Nagaoki provides us with a summary of the last 6 years in Ishinomaki, starting from the *Daishinsai*, and proceeding through the volunteering support (when he himself first established contact with the fishermen of Ishinomaki), and the slow but steady recovery in production output, despite the severely reduced manpower and the displacement of those who remained.

After the backstory, Nagaoki focuses on the oyster seafarming, which is featured in a chapter of the booklet. Essentially summarizing the printed version, he goes through the phases of oyster raising, the main sites where they are farmed in Ishinomaki, the oyster farmer's average day. My fellow visitors were busy taking notes or admiring the colourful pictures of the booklet (provided by Moritomo, the photographer). At the end of the briefing, with a '*Osore irimasu ga...*',<sup>23</sup> Nagaoki also collects the fee for the visit (around 10,000 Yen), a quite expensive one compared to the similar experience provided by PB's *Kaki no Wa* project (less than half that price).

The visit in itself proceeds not so differently from the Mangoku oyster tour I would take part in almost a year later: we are taken to the village by car, we meet the local fishermen who would accompany us, and are once again briefed about the day's programme and given some basic information about the village. As we walk through the docks, the other visitors are fascinated by everything, from old nets hanging to dry, to floats encrusted with seashells, and take many pictures on expensive mirrorless cameras. As we quickly climb a hillside to visit a set of *ikada* built near a pebbles beach, we get a glimpse of the sea and the rocky coast, framed by pines. A young girl in our midst exclaims 'This sea is wonderful! It's just like Okinawa!'. A round of laughter, approval, and a salvo of pictures ensues.

The second part of the tour is on the boat. Each of us is provided with a bright yellow inflatable vest, as we sail to the entrance of the bay to inspect the rope structures, the third and final stage of oyster farming, when half-grown shells are moved from the *ikada* to the open sea and then collected by boat. Not without pride, our host lifts a heavy underwater rope filled with oysters showing us the bountiful harvest soon to be, as the visitors frantically take pictures and utter '*sugoi!*'s ('great!') and '*oishisō!*'s ('it looks delicious!'). As we return to the docks, Nagaoki, his colleague Shimamoto, and two other fishermen

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<sup>23</sup> Roughly translated as 'I am terribly sorry to bother you, but...'

from Ogi-no-Hama, are already setting up the *forte* of the day: a lavish buffet with fresh fish and seafood directly from the bay. The smells of the oyster soup and the shellfish *yakisoba* fill the air.

Under the enthusiastic eyes of the Tōkyō visitors, the fisherman Naganuma skillfully peels, cleans, and cut a freshly caught *tara* (pacific cod) into clean *sashimi* slices, to be enjoyed with *wakame* hot soup and a can of beer. The group soon fragments into smaller cohorts of friends, commenting on the day, showing each other pictures, and enjoying the meal. As I roam around, I gather some of the visitor's thoughts: 'I had no idea that oyster farming could be so interesting, and it's so nice to be outside with this weather'; 'Feels like camping'; 'This food is fantastic, we never get things so fresh where I live'. Meanwhile Nagaoki and Shimamoto distribute paper dishes of *yakisoba* and grilled salmon, answer questions, pose for selfies, and provide further information on the courses of the buffet. Almost nobody interacts with the helping fishermen, who chat with each other, smoke cigarettes, and concentrate on their beers. I manage to get along with the fishermen by sharing a lighter, telling them I live in Ishinomaki, and raising the usual curiosity that surrounds almost every foreigner in rural Japan. After a few standard pleasantries, discreetly nodding at the visitors – now spread around the concrete widening of the docks, separated from us by the long tables used to lay the food – I ask them what do they think of people coming to the docks like that. 'It's weird, isn't it?' one tentatively answers 'There's nothing interesting here. I mean it's not like they're going to the Mangattan<sup>24</sup> or anything'. Another one intervenes in an explanatory tone, talking to me but really reprimanding the first fisherman 'That is part of Nagaoki-kun's project.<sup>25</sup> They want to disseminate knowledge (*kangae hasshin*) about life in Tōhoku'. 'And you are okay with that?'. A short, but embarrassing silence. 'Sure, it's all right. It's not like we have to do this every weekend. Meeting new people is fun'.

### 3.2.c Kaki no Wa (*Oyster link, or Oyster ring*)

This project focuses on the oysters (*kaki*) produced in the municipality of Ishinomaki, aiming to provide a significant and direct connection between producers and consumers.

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<sup>24</sup> Ishinomaki Manga Museum, one of the few tourist attraction of the area together with Masamune's "San Juan Bautista" caravella replica.

<sup>25</sup> Here the fisherman uses –kun, an honorifix suffix used by senior members of a group to refer to juniors. It might imply a slight age difference (Nagaoki is in his late 20s, while most of the fishermen on the docks are in their early 30s), but is also a reference to the employee, non-executive position of Nagaoki in FJ. Conversely, the head of the company, Mr. Abe, a local seaweed harvester, is referred to with a more respectful language.

A group of younger seafarmers from the Mangoku village *kumiai* (see 2.1) has agreed to take part in the project as producers, whereas the members are ordinary citizens from all over the country. By joining the project, a member is put in contact with an oyster seafarmer chosen from among the producers, who will inform the member about his or her oysters via monthly bulletins, containing short descriptions of farming procedures, seasonality, special events, and individual reports from the fishermen, featured on the project's website.<sup>26</sup> From November to March, the members are also able to purchase from the producers fresh oysters at an agreed price (usually more expensive than regular frozen oysters found in supermarkets), shipped directly to their doorstep.

The *Kaki no Wa* website introduction section opens with a revealing statement, which translates as:

‘Everybody knows well how fast the modern world is running. In this fast world, we want to introduce you to a place to connect with real human producers.

We would like you to appreciate with your senses and bodily experience how much energy and dedication the producers of the oysters on your table put into them.

[...] The price of oysters becomes cheaper and cheaper due to trends in consumption, but if the price is low, the fishermen will have to produce more oysters to support themselves and their families. Because of this, [negative] transformations have occurred in the marine ecosystem.

Oyster producers are in a weak position, but we want to change that: how much are fishermen valuing their own carefully farmed oysters? In the Oyster Ring, fishermen decide the price’<sup>27</sup>

A *Kaki no Wa* subscription is worth 11,800 Yen (about 80 British Pounds), and it buys 1 kg of steamed oysters and a direct connection with a chosen producer (selected through a menu with pictures and short bios), with whom further arrangements for regular supply are then negotiated. It is very important to note that 1 kg of fresh oysters in Japan is worth on average 2000 Yen (15 GBP), or 4000 Yen (30 GBP) for the above-average product (larger, fresher pieces). The *Kaki no Wa* prices are thus 600% usual retail price.

In the summer, paying 4,000 Yen (25 British Pounds), members may also take part in an *oyster tour* (*kaki tsuā*), to inspect the farming grounds of the Mangoku bay, meet some of the producers, and be updated on the seeding season. According to Kawasaki, since its

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<sup>26</sup> <http://pbi.or.jp/kakinowa/>, last access 15/01/2018.

<sup>27</sup> <http://pbi.or.jp/kakinowa/about/>, last access 15/01/2018.

beginning in January 2016, the project has collected roughly two hundred affiliates mainly from Kantō and the prefecture of Yamagata. Advertising campaigns are run through the PB Ishinomaki and PB Tōkyō websites. Through Kawasaki, I was able to take part in an oyster tour in the spring of 2017.

On a cloudy August Sunday, a small group of outsiders gathers in front of the Mangoku *kumiai* office, a small building on the bay's shore. A woman from Yamagata, a man from Sendai, and a family of four from Tōkyō are welcomed by a cooperative employee, a young woman from the Peace Boat Ishinomaki NPO, four oyster farmers and one curious anthropologist.

After introducing ourselves with the usual Japanese *jikoshōkai* (self-introduction) ritual, we move inside and listen to a detailed description of an ordinary oyster seafarmer's duties, provided by Morita, a young member of the *kumiai*. Morita explains how, in the summer, the concentration of oyster larvae (*anbo*) is checked in the waters of the bay, how scallop shells are used to craft oyster farming vessels, and how the vessels are planted in the seafarming grounds for the baby oysters to grow. With a hint of pride Morita also lets us know that the Mangoku bay provides 60% of the Prefecture's oyster output, and that local seeds are sold in the whole country as well as abroad, due to the high quality of local oysters.<sup>28</sup>

After the lecture, we are taken on a tour on the *gyojo* (seafarming grounds) to inspect the young oysters. The Peace Boat employee is Satō, Kawasaki's partner, a Tōkyōite. She met Kawasaki for the first time in 2011 as they were both volunteering with Peace Boat, during the early efforts of recovery in Ishinomaki. As their union developed, so did Ishinomaki Peace Boat, which hired its fifth employee in the spring of 2017. After spending most of her life in the capital, she once confessed to me in a casual conversation, it seemed 'a dream to live in a place like this, so full of human connections'. Unfortunately Satō never agreed to be formally interviewed, since, as she stated, she had 'nothing to add to what Kawasaki had already said'.

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<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the *Kaki no Wa* dedicated webpage states that the Mangoku oyster strain (*Miyagi shinshō*) is also called the 'Oyster-king of the world' (*Sekai no kaki-ō*). In general terms, the good quality of an oyster depends on its freshness, its age (oysters older than 2 years tend to become less flavoursome, and grow a thicker outer shell), and the amount of meat it contains. A further element to be considered is the environmental quality of the farming grounds, as the oyster filters seawater and ends up absorbing any harmful substances it may contain: Ishinomaki, with a deindustrialized coastline and an almost depopulated northern area (the Oshika Peninsula) can boast very clean waters.

Satō cheerfully hands out life vests, gives advice on how to properly sit on the boat, and takes pictures for the Peace Boat Facebook page. As we sail in the shallow bay of Mangoku, merrily chatting with our fishermen hosts over the engine's roar, Satō intervenes, explaining dialect and technical terms, or instructing the two women of the group on oyster cooking. We visit the *seage* (uplift) area, where scallop shell vessels are raised over the tide line on the *ikada* (bamboo rafts) so that the weaker and smaller oysters die, and the biggest and healthiest remain – a practice defined as *suparutan* (Spartan) by an amused fisherman, as the women and children of the expedition recoiled in a chorus of *kawaisō* ('Poor things!'). We spend a couple of hours sailing among the moldy jungle of *ikada* (figure 6), extending all around us, intoxicated by the marine smell of decay, carefully monitored by a few seagulls. We learn how to wash and rearrange the scallop shells, aligned on metallic wires, quickly experiencing how to perform a daily maintenance run on the *gyojo*.

After the boat trip, we go back to the *kumiai* to enjoy a lunch of fried *anago* (eel), *hoya* (seasquirt), and a fresh batch of one year old *natsu-kaki* (summer oysters), 'still too small, but by no means bad' as Morita commented. At the end of the lunch, Satō takes control and gives us a closing speech, stressing the gratitude and the hard work of the Kaki no Wa oyster farmers, as well as the high quality of the Mangoku oysters (the healthiest in Japan, due to the clean waters of the bay), and inviting the participants to further disseminate the love of Miyagi oysters. We are then handed a 'Certificate of Appreciation' and greeted with the recitation of the program's motto, '*Isshokenmei manabi, isshokenmei sagyō shi, isshokenmei tabe, isshokenmei kōryū shi*' ('To ardently study, to commit to, to eat, and to exchange'; 'oysters' is implied).

After the event, I approach Morita to compliment him on his opening speech, but he shrugs: 'Oh, it was nothing, Satō wrote it for me'. Later, when asked if he was ok with working on Sundays he comments

It's not really work you know. We just got on the boat, went around. Plus the lunch was good, so it's more or less ok. It's nice to see how people get serious about oysters.

A few months earlier I had interviewed Kawasaki, *ijūsha* and Peace Boat Ishinomaki coordinator. He proved to be extremely knowledgeable about oyster production, due to his contacts with fishermen and JF employees since his volunteering days:



Oyster production was in crisis even before 2011. In 2009 there was overproduction which caused the prices to drop. Since then, with the disaster and everything, the prices have been behaving so erratically that sometimes it's economically impractical to sell at all. Lots of producers around here keep deep-frozen oysters, waiting for the prices to increase. Nowadays producing oysters resembles gambling (*gyanburu*) more and more. [...] For this reason we contacted the *kumiai* of Mangoku Bay and started the Kaki no Wa. We wanted to facilitate direct sales and promote contact between producers and consumers. Our office in Tokyo provides good advertising, so every year we get some hundreds of participants in the program. And the seafarmers who joined are all young, ready to accept the challenge.

Kawasaki and his colleagues are furthering, in a sense, the original efforts in volunteering coordination made by PB in the immediate aftermath of the disaster by providing a (small) window of opportunity for local producers to sell their products directly for a 'fairer' price than at supermarkets (where, as already mentioned oysters are sold at 2000 to 4000 Yen/Kg, although prices have been steadily rising since the 70s, despite the *Kaki no Wa* website's claims).

### 3.3 *Ningen-kusai* pictures

On a rainy spring morning, Moritomo welcomes me to his house, a small rustic workshop converted into a living space in Watanoha, a residential suburb of Ishinomaki. The floor is raw concrete, and the kitchen table is an old cable spool. Two cats come meowing as we sit to drink a cup of tea. He is in his early 40s, short and bulky, with curly hair, thick glasses, and a bright laugh.

I moved here from Ōsaka after the disaster, working as a volunteer, for a while. After, I started working as a photographer, for some local NGO, web-shops, or fishery companies. I like photographing people at work, I like that human element (*ningen-kusai*, lit. 'smelling of humanity') that emerges on the seafarming grounds. [...] I think I built a very deep connection with locals here. I don't hang out with other artists, I really enjoy spending my time with fishermen. Nowadays nobody really wants to be a fisherman you know, the kids want to become company chairmen or something,<sup>29</sup> and I want to change that. I take pictures to show how cool the *real life* (*ikite iru*) fishermen are. You need a personal

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<sup>29</sup> Here Moritomo uses a pun: chairman is transliterated into *chāman*, while fisherman is *fuishhāman*, with an assonance less obvious in English. The play of words was used also in written materials and speeches related to FJ's Triton Project, an initiative aimed at popularising the job of fishermen among younger Miyagi residents. It was not clear whether the pun was originally Moritomo's or he borrowed it from his FJ connections.



connection to do that. There is that, and exertion, difficulty, waking up as the sun rises. I woke up with them and went on the boat, so many days waiting for the right shot! [...] And with food it is the same. People like it pretty, glistening. I try to portray it as it is, good and fresh, yes, but also raw, weird, sometimes disgusting. That's the beauty of it. [...] In the end, what I try to do is not just coming here, taking away from the fishermen images to be used by whoever wants them. I try to give something in return, work ethically, create a ring where everybody wins.

Shikoku-born, Ōsaka raised Moritomo is well known in the Ishinomaki and Onagawa area. After graduating in contemporary art at the Ōsaka University, he trained as a photographer and worked on private advertising and fundraising campaigns for charity in Ōsaka and Tōkyō. In 2011, like many others, he took part in the volunteering efforts, moving around Ishinomaki, Kesennuma and Minamisanriku. 'I was doing volunteering work, so shoveling mud, collecting debris, helping fishermen at the docks, but I never stopped taking pictures. I felt I was developing more and more of an artistic connection with the people and the place here' he says, thoughtfully. Shortly after he decided to move in Ishinomaki permanently, his wife joined him. She is actually working for the Yahoo Japan office in Ishinomaki, and helps with the many side projects Moritomo carries on (e.g. see 5.4).

His pictures are used in many posters and local advertising campaigns, especially on the Fishermen Japan and Peace Boat websites. In a sense, he presents himself as the perfect example of the mediating *ijūsha*, the 'creative class' and its 'innovative ideas and networks' (Klien 2016: 17): he has established a deep connection with local residents – in his words, '*fukaku tsunagaru*', the same verb I encountered during the PB interviews and in innumerable other flyers, paintings, oral and written communications. Moritomo is on particularly good terms with the fishermen of Ogi-no-hama, where he volunteers at the only shop, a co-owned container selling cigarettes, ice-creams, and dry ramen cups to fishermen and seawall construction workers, a project he contributed to perpetuating. His very claim 'I don't hang out with other artists' is thick with implications: first, that he thought he was supposed to, or at least he thought people around him thought so. Second, that his apparently voluntary alienation from a more refined social life is part of his vision, an immersive experience into the world of Ishinomaki fishermen – the position of his house-office is significant as well in this sense: the suburban outskirts of Ishinomaki, the Watanoha district, is home to many of his fishermen friends too.

As an artist, however, he possesses a unique authority which allows him to represent his friends working at sea in delicate pictures, thick with the ‘human element’ he strives for. His authority is also subject to his ethical code, which he shares with his fishermen friends (in particular with Goro, seen in 2.3), and deeply resembles Iwasaki’s self-styled *Sanpo-Yoshi* holistic approach: both declare they are not in any way opportunist exploiters, and share the earnings of their activities (both material and immaterial) with the wider community which welcomed them – and this is true with Moritomo as it is with Iwasaki, who, despite being a local, has spent enough time studying in Sendai and Tōkyō to be perceived as some sort of an I-turner (Knight 2003a: 270), i.e. an urbanite migrating from cities to rural Japan. Moritomo’s closing remark was particularly suggestive:

‘What I want is this: when anybody writes “fisherman” (*ryoshi*) in Google Images and hits “search”, instead of pictures of weary, grumpy elderly men, I want them to find my pictures, of my friend. Hard working, but enjoying it, and proud of it. I want to change how people think about fishermen’.

### 3.4 No recipes in Ishinomaki

For quite some time, every time I mentioned the nature of my study with interlocutors and acquaintances, the most common reply was ‘You research food? You must speak to Fujihara then’. Conveniently placed in the already mentioned central district of Ishinomaki, Chūō, Fujihara’s is one of the most refined restaurants in town. For a medium-to-high price (7,000 to 12,000 Yen, roughly 50 to 80 British Pounds for each customer) one can savor a full, *kaiseki*-like<sup>30</sup> set of seasonal delicacies prepared by the chef on the spot, with a more than adequate choice of local *sake* on the side. With a very few tables (around 20 seats, including the counter) it has been defined by many of my interlocutors as a place to take your colleagues or your date to. The rustic interiors have a certain *shibusa*, i.e. a refined aesthetic convention which draws its tropes from folk crafts and rural architecture, seeking beauty in the simplicity of the designs and the irregular textures of wood, stone and clay (Sawada & Caley 1990). Fujihara’s *shibusa* is evident in the small straw canopy hanging over the kitchen backdoor – completely useless in an indoor environment, if not as a declaration of style. I also found myself being greatly

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<sup>30</sup> *Kaiseki* indicates Japanese *haute cuisine*, a set of small, seasonal portions historically established around the Edo period (1600-1878), defined by aesthetic disposition, and almost religious etiquette, and ‘insipid’ – or rather ‘subtle’ tastes (Ashkenazi & Jacob 2003: ix).

fascinated by the countertop, a four metres long cedar slate, the silhouette of the tree trunk still discernable in its irregular edge.

Countering the austere and humble *shibusa* of his own restaurant, Fujihara himself is a snappy, sarcastic, epicurean young man from Tōkyō. Our first meeting, unconventional as it was, happened at the 2017 season opening soccer match in Onagawa, where he was supporting the Colbaltore (house team) by joyfully banging a large drum and shouting chants. We were introduced to each other by a common friend, as I was extremely interested in hearing about his personal vision of local cuisine.

After the match, he kept coming and going from the various bars celebrating the victory, drinking and singing with a cohort of friends. Sitting on the floor at 3AM, with a can of beer, he was still demanding new songs from the extremely tired guitar player, most of them early 90s Japanese rock classics, singing loudly with a coarse and broken voice.

A few weeks later, we met in his restaurant before the opening time, and talked about his experience in Ishinomaki. During the interview he seems unable to just sit and talk, and keeps standing up, giving instructions to his helper (a busy teenager named Yoshi), making tea, looking around him:

‘I came here shortly after the disaster to volunteer. When the disaster struck, I was in Tōkyō, studying to become a chef. I felt I really needed to come here, so I dropped the studies, packed my things and came up to clean the debris and mud from the streets. I made many friends, and became well connected [*tsunagaru*, again] with Iwasaki [owner of the Hamaguri café] and Wotani [owner of the Wotani-ya in Tōkyō]. After the first year, we all wanted to start our restaurants, cooking with the food from here. I helped Iwasaki with his place. [...] I came back to Tōkyō from time to time, but I like here better. Here you can see the faces of people, feel more at ease (*anshin*). There is *passion* [in english]. You can build real relationships with friends. [...] After the disaster, you see, there were almost no places to eat out. Lots of restaurants and bars were washed away (*nagasareru*) by the tsunami, and especially elderly people had a hard time rebuilding theirs. But opening a restaurant here is incredibly convenient, because raw materials are so cheap! Fish, vegetables. And fresh too.’

At this point, I asked him explicitly what was his opinion on local cuisine, if he was using any Ishinomaki recipes to prepare his dishes. Fujihara looked at me half-smirking, and said ‘I don’t know any local cuisine. Hey! Yoshi! [he gestures in his helper’s

direction] You're an *Ishinomaki-kko*,<sup>31</sup> do you know any local recipes?'. Yoshi, clearly embarrassed by my presence, bows his head and mutters in a thick Miyagi accent 'Eh, I don't know. Whale, maybe?'. Fujihara makes a 'I told you so' face at me: 'Here things are so fresh there's no need for recipes, you could eat stuff raw and it'd be still delicious [laughs]. [...] All my suppliers, I know them personally. Some, I have worked with as a volunteer. Those bonds are the stronger. Others, friends' friends. [...] It's the right way to do business, I think'.

After this exchange, he went back explaining how, in 2014, he borrowed money to start his own restaurant and, helped by a group of friends from the volunteering years, he refurbished the premises of the actual Fujihara's. With a wide gesture he pointed around him 'This is all handmade. It is not very fancy, see the irregularities in the wall? But we did it together'. After promising I would join him for the next Cobaltore match, I let him finish the preparations for the evening, and left.

In the days following our meeting, I reflected for some time on the curious exchange between Fujihara and his employee, and Fujihara's final remark. My conclusion was that Fujihara had no concerns towards Ishinomaki-ness as it was, but rather regarded the town as a blank slate. There was no malice in his attitude although: he really considered Ishinomaki as his *dai-ni furusato*, his second hometown (see Mano et. al. 2012), but rather than attempting at rolling back to a past condition he never experienced in the first place, he was set on building something new out of it. Thus, he had no need for local recipes, just for the excellent raw material Ishinomaki's "mountain and sea" quality provided for a cheap price.

A few months later, Fujihara triumphantly posted on his Facebook page (where he is very active) a short message, which read:

'Super-awesome chefs came to Ishinomaki...!!??

Mr. Tokuoka from Kyoto Yoshiko, Mr. Imada from Ginza Hisaki, Mr. Higashi from Chi-fu, Mr. Yamashita from Bistro-Q, Mr. Yamada from Yamada Chikara, and the members of EAT TOKYO visited Ishinomaki.

They all visited the fishing and seafarming grounds, the Ishinomaki fishery, ate together with the workers who produce and process the seafood, and took part to a workshops to exchange opinions and solutions.

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<sup>31</sup> Here Fujihara jockingly applies the suffix *-kko*, used normally to identify Tokyoites (*Edo-kko*) for Ishinomaki.

How can we draw the consumers' attention to our fishermen's determination [*kodawari*] and the charm [*miryoku*] of their production?

We also discussed how to transmit to fishermen, distribution, and chefs the importance of sustainable fishery. It has been two very fulfilling days.

Our chefs made a group called "J-chefs", in order to connect with production areas and producers, to spread the charm [of Ishinomaki fisheries].'

Fujihara's enthusiasm about this meeting of *kangae hasshin* (dissemination, lit. 'thought transmission', see 3.2.c), as he later described it, falls in line with his view of Ishinomaki as a raw diamond, a place of great charm (*miryoku*, the same term used in the *Ima, Koko* flyers) that only needs to be acknowledged. His ideal interlocutors, Tōkyō and Kyōto famous chefs, also betray his ambition to reach out to a central authority in order to, on the one hand, establish local products as worthy materials, and on the other hand to introduce to Ishinomaki principles of sustainability needed to raise the qualitative level of local fishery on the national market.

Following on from this initiative, Fujihara would later take a proactive stance in the organization of the Reborn Art Festival 'Food' section, which will be considered in chapter 5 as it impacted on Ishinomaki and the Oshika peninsula significantly during the spring and summer of 2017.

### 3.5 Rebuilding Ishinomaki

Across the year 2017, at the Irori Cafe in Chūō, a small group of six-to-ten people gathered to explore, report, and discuss proposals for the construction of the new *bunka sentā* (culture centre) in Ishinomaki, scheduled to begin in 2020. Whoever wanted to take part could come, sit at the big central table and discuss what he or she felt important to have – or not to have – in their new centre. Proceedings from the meeting would be regularly forwarded to the City Hall and a spokesperson of the initiative would sit at the public discussions with municipality representatives and carry forward the suggestions coming from the discussion group. Fascinated by that slice of active citizenship, I decided to join the group.

Informal as it was, the discussion group was coordinated by two Chūō residents, members of the Ishinomaki 2.0 network, 'a network formed by local and non-local youth after 3.11' (Klien 2016: 4). As Klien explains: 'Most non-locals have professional

backgrounds in architecture, design, advertising, and urban planning’ (2016: 6). The general aim of Ishinomaki 2.0 initiatives is directed towards sustainable, socially informed architectural projects, such as housing for evacuees, spaces for leisure and socialization, recovery of abandoned spaces (still very common in Ishinomaki downtown), and the very same Irori Cafe where the culture centre discussion meeting happened (not incidentally only a few doors away from the Ishinomaki 2.0 office).

Over a period of nine months, a wide range of participants showed up at the discussion meetings, ranging from a couple of local musicians in their 50s (quite famous, as it turned out, which caused the gathering of a small but loud number of selfie-hunting fans), a part-fisherman, part-taiko drummer from the Ogatsu folk theatre (*kagura*) group, an alternative *ojisan* (granpa) from Ishinomaki, with long grey hair and constantly wearing worn out Hawaiian shirts, two very attentive neighbourhood grannies who never uttered a single word but listened to and took notes of everything said, and so on. Despite a certain interest showed by locals, though, the most active participants, who came every month, brought materials, and engaged in extensive questions and answers, were four young women, part of the *ijūsha* community, employed by Ishinomaki based NGOs, between their late 20s and their early 30s.

Themes and ideas processed by the group were very down-to-earth, such as how many bicycle parking spaces should there be on the outside, the suitability of a coffee shop within the centre premises, or what kind of musical performances could be performed in the main hall (a topic of conversation very dear to the man from Ogatsu). All conversations, however, were inevitably led by the two coordinators of the group, a man and a woman from Ishinomaki 2.0, who introduced the day’s topic and meticulously collected reactions and observations. On one occasion, the young woman employed at 2.0, an architect from Kyushu, described to us in detail the internal structure and activities of the culture centre in Kawasaki City, which she had visited the previous week.

At the end of summer 2017 I decided to speak with a Ishinomaki 2.0 representative (also the second person coordinating the Irori meetings), in order to collect his thoughts on the reconstruction process and the involvement of local residents. After a long recollection of all the Ishinomaki 2.0 activities, including a small free magazine, the organization of the music festival Stand Up Week, and the Fukkō Bar (Reconstruction Bar), he explained to me that their long term objective was to empower the local population in order to counteract emigration and promote local businesses: ‘Every young man and woman from

here has to move out to attend University, and that is a fact, but we mean to attract them back once they graduate’. This aim put them in a position of responsibility, he insisted, as Ishinomaki 2.0 needs to set a positive example. Was his a plan to make of Ishinomaki an organized centre for social and economic recovery? Not exactly:

‘What we are striving for is, to put it this way, the opposite of urbanization. Everybody should become like the *Hashidōri Komon* [see 2.6]: no extensive or long-term planning, extreme flexibility, which is a direction especially young people are encouraged to move towards. There is a silent majority of people willing to go this way, I believe, to reduce centralization, and the path-dependancy of local administration, which is slowing down reconstruction and hindering individual, bottom-up entrepreneurship. [...] A good example of what I am talking about is the Hamaguri Cafe. It is a business model based on a lifestyle dependant on the ecosystem. It is sustainable. And the kind of service it provides – experience tourism – is positive for the region. That is the kind of empowering we are aiming at’

Here again, Iwasaki’s *Sanpo-Yoshi* resurfaced in an unexpected context, as if an unspoken agreement connected him with the architects of Ishinomaki 2.0, the photographer Moritomo, or even Fujihara. Naturally there had been numerous contacts among these actors, who shared the significant experience of volunteering and often interacted during the past five years. But there was also, I believe, a common ideological ground linked to a certain idea of active citizenship, unhindered entrepreneurship, bottom-up, socially and environmentally virtuous living, which informed, on different levels of commitment, the choices and philosophies of my interlocutors. And, lacking a better term, a deep sense of belonging to a space which could – or rather, eventually, would – be molded following the same ideals. From the interviews commented on in chapter 2, the same attitudes are shared by a vast majority of younger locals as well, notably the ones more keen to cooperate with new-local endeavors. Entrepreneurs such as Iwasaki (2.8), or Katō (2.7), in particular, show the characteristics of the ‘quiet mavericks’ described by Toivonen (2011b), i.e. individuals capable of deploying ‘creative and integrative ways to adapt [...] engaging with society on their own [and] actively shaping social change’ (Toivonen, quoted in Klien 2016b: 2; the topic is further developed in 6.5). Activities such as the Kaki no Wa, or the FJ initiatives, show such characteristics, and so do the endeavors of the Hamaguri Cafe or the Hashidōri Commons.



### 3.6 Conclusion: Un-vanishing mediators, culinary brokers, creators of content.

Commenting on George Cameron's *Titanic* in his *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008: 57-58), Slavoj Žižek made a significant point on the relation between the proletarian artist Jack (Di Caprio) and the rich heiress Rose (Winslet). In Žižek's analysis, the depressed and suicidal Rose escapes her bourgeois whereabouts to commit to a romantic adventure with Jack, who initiates her to the joys of proletarian spontaneity and sincerity – the joyful dance in the *Titanic* third class quarters, sarcastically defined by the Slovenian philosopher as a prime example of Cameron's Hollywoodian Marxism. The tragic end of the movie – the sinking of the *Titanic* – prevents the real tragedy, i.e. an 'unnatural' relation between two separate social classes. Jack, having fulfilled his social and philosophical task of revitalising Rose, helping her find her 'true self' beyond the upper class pretences, disappears in the icy waters.

The role of Jack as an intermediary position between the old Rose and the new one is defined by Žižek with the Hegelian formula of the 'vanishing mediator' (2008: 185), a feature emerging from the passage from a previous paradigm (in Žižek's specific instance, the medieval society) into a novel one (the bourgeois state) which configures, at first, as a 'crucial shift [...] within the limits of the old form, even taking on the appearance of its renewed assertion, then [...] the old form can fall off' (2008: 185). Jacobins and protestants operated in this shift, claims Žižek, in the same way Jack operates in *Titanic*'s narrative arc, by carrying out a transformation first within the frame of a given reality (class divisions, epitomized in the transatlantic's actual first, second, and third class separations), followed by a paradigm reshape.

This suggestion provides an insight into the material presented in the previous sections, with a caveat: in many regards the mediation performed by *ijūsha* and residents of Ishinomaki by no means disappears at the end of the voluntouristic, gastronomic experience, but strengthens its connections with the world of consumers, through the building of an overlap – e.g. the *Kaki no Wa* oyster home delivery, FJ's initiatives such as the e-commerce, or the Fisherman's Call service – resisting the closed circuit of touristic consumption of places, where the visitors re-emerge from the experience by separating themselves from the mediator of the same experience (in a fashion similar to Rose's arc). By injecting a means of durable connection, mediators such as Kawasaki and Nagaoki aim at constructing a coherent and durable reshaping of Miyagi. In their narrative dynamics, food plays the central role of emotional and experiential 'glue', as it emerges



from the voluntourists's reactions and reports. At the same time, though, *ijūsha* attitudes towards Ishinomaki food, especially seafood, and the people producing it, is characterized by a measure of ambivalence as many actors, such as Fujihara, Moritomo, or even the Ishinomaki 2.0 activists, allude to the possibility – or rather the need – to *empower* locals, rather than letting their *miriyoku* shine on its own. The transformative forces evoked are often the post-modern, post-growth totems of sustainability, de-urbanization, and freedom from administrative hindrances – as the 2.0 architect put it – of which inevitably the educated and progressively-minded *ijūsha* are advocates.

In their 2004 essay *Food and tourism: attraction and impediment*, Cohen and Avieli pointed out two central concepts when looking at the relation between tourists, locals, and local food in Thailand (among the many areas featured in the essay). The first aspect can be summarized with the image of a tourist guide, or a tourist map of a given territory. As a means of representation of features perceived as significant to the touristic experience of a place, the map acts as a filter of relevance:

The menu can be approached as the culinary equivalent of the geographical map, guiding the customer through the fare offered by the establishment. Like the map, it is of greater importance as a guide through the culinary territory to outsiders, such as tourists, than to locals. It is the principal means of mediation between the establishment's offerings and prospective customers (although the display of ready-made dishes and oral explanations and recommendations by the staff may supplement it or even substitute for it). Again, just as there are tourist maps, menus in these establishments are adapted to tourists' needs and thus *differ from those in local establishments in several significant respects*. (Cohen, Avieli 2004: 770-771, my italic).

Comparing this passage with the activities of Nagaoki and Kawasaki, it emerges how seafood and its producers are used to portray Miyagi coastal locality and its post-disaster condition (the young and proactive fishermen of Ishinomaki photographed by Moritomo, the safeness and deliciousness of the Mangoku bay king-oyster as recounted in the PB website, the *charming*, abundant nature of the Oshika peninsula) in ways not necessarily consistent with the everyday experience of said fishermen or their fellow residents of the Ishinomaki area.

During my stay with the family of Maki-no-Hama, we only ate oyster once, the first evening, as my clumsiness with the *kaki-muki* T-knife produced a good amount of waste (ruined oysters not suitable for sale), which were put to good use. During an interview

with Ishinomaki *shiyakusho* (city hall) employees, when at the end of a long exchange on the current condition of the municipality I asked them what was their ‘soul food’, one was frozen in indecision and refused to answer, while the other confessed with a smirk he was crazy for *aisu* (ice-cream). Fujihara’s helper’s reply to his boss is also central to this point, and revealing about the constructed nature of Ishinomaki’s gastronomy.

Cohen and Avieli’s reflection on difference and mediation brings a further reflection on the actors of such adaptation to the tourist market of consumption: who draws the map? The authors’ answer is the following:

An important auxiliary role at the stage of presentation, which amplifies the menu or may even substitute for it, are various “culinary brokers” mediating between the tourists and the local food. [...] These intermediaries may function in two opposite directions: on the one hand, they may reassure the tourists and thus encourage them to become more adventurous in the choice of otherwise strange dishes. But, by repeatedly playing their intermediary role, they may learn from previous experience which dishes tourists generally prefer, and thus act to restrict the choices to a few “iconic” dishes. (Cohen and Avieli 2004: 772).

Drawing on Cohen and Avieli’s “culinary brokers” and widening the scope of their definition, Ishinomaki residents and *ijūsha* found themselves in an analogous position, acting to reconcile a local gastronomy with the expectations and desires of a class of tourists and volunteers deeply affected by the *furusato* imagery (which is often explicitly presented or alluded at, as in the *Ima, Koko* flyer, also see 1.3), and at the same time challenged to radically rethink their conception of a fishery and seafarming coastal, peripheral society.

The second movement, the transformative impulse is also significantly directed at local residents, especially fishermen, so that it appears as a force radiating in both directions, coming from the middle-ground of those who belong partially to both worlds. Although its effectiveness remains to be measured in detail, and will possibly be at the centre of locality-making discourses for many years to come, it naturally caters to the weakest portion of the population, in political terms: the young adults up to their 35s and 40s. Former volunteers, often seen by more conservative locals as air-headed, slackers, or more generally ineffective (Klien 2017b: 196; 2016: 8) navigate the aftermath with a set of ethical principles doubtlessly bourgeoisie and progressive (Toivonen *et al* 2011, 1.7.b), at odds with more recovery-oriented visions. *Ijūsha* values can be seen as steering the

discourse of locality towards an entrepreneurial and neo-liberal turn (and in several instances they indeed are), and yet in Katō's imagery of *sanpo-yoshi* (2.6.a) or in the volunteering, quasi-non profit initiatives of P.B.I. (3.2) I recognize a hint of a more egalitarian, utopistic ideological background.

This tension between a comfortable, established model of reality that refuses or downplays the effects of change (in Cohen and Avieli's terms, neophobia), and the ideal nudge towards a new conception of locality (neophylia), produces the ongoing discourse about Ishinomaki and Onagawa seafood as a synthetic result, directed at both outside visitors and local residents. Significantly, the conservative vs progressive attitude is parallel to the generational gap that White and Mathews discuss in their *Japan's Changing Generations* (2004). Following their line of thought, an interesting question comes to fore:

‘postwar Japanese society has been structured in particularly rigid ways, demanding, broadly speaking, a standardization of behavior and the sacrifice of the individual to the collective. Now that that society no longer offers the rewards it once did, discontented young people may serve as agents for its transformation. But is this in fact happening?’  
(2004: 189)

Less universally, my question is ‘is this in fact happening in Ishinomaki?’. In Toivonen's and Klien's reflections upon the emerging attitudes of the contemporary 20-to-30 years old individual in post-disaster Tōhoku (Toivonen 2015, Toivonen et al. 2011, Klien 2016, see also 1.7.b), the social agency of new-locals, former volunteers, and returnees is certainly stressed.

Shifting back to the national level, it has been through the younger generations, inspired by the 1970s movements, that the (only) internal counter-hegemonic, anti-nuclear discourse could be effectively vocalized (Kimura 2016, Iwata-Weickgenannt 2017), and it was against the perceived ‘caste’ of policymakers, corporate executives, scientists, generally elderly and male. Again, we seem to find among those who are further from the centres of power (young mothers, inhabitants of the national periphery, fishermen, small-scale social entrepreneurs) a hint that goes beyond the ‘old ways’, an opening towards experiential tourism, electronic commerce and communication, popularization of local cuisine. At the same time, the scale of ideas and actions that these ‘mavericks’ can conjure up is often disproportionate to their aspirations. Conversely, large-scale operations such as the Reborn Art Festival presented in 4.3, 5.3 and 5.4, although

certainly projected and inspired by young and proactive individuals, do not necessarily evade the ideological construction of the countryside that individuals such as Kawasaki (3.2), Moritomo (2.2, 3.3) or Goro (2.3) seem to challenge. Certainly those who are more concerned with the future of the northeast are those who will necessarily have to invent it, and the newcomers' proactive attitudes do point in that direction. Being sedentary, their presence becomes crucial: the un-vanishing-ness of the *ijūsha* is the key feature of the complex, often ambiguous, process of post-disaster re-imagination.

As already discussed in 1.7.b, beyond the generational divide in the Japanese nation at large, the post-disaster case is particularly significant, as in Tōhoku the differential in attitudes, expectations, and proactivity towards reconstruction is inherently generational. Implicit in the role of the *ijūsha* culinary broker is the generational *weltanschauung* described in detail above. Conversely, older and more conservative generations have generally showed either indifference or antagonism toward post-growth lifestyles and ways of thinking. The macroscopic effects of this divide are less self-evident. If on the one hand the sheer number of domestic immigrants in rural Japan has been steadily rising since the 2008 Lehman shock (Klien 2019), on the other hand *ijūsha*'s efforts tend to remain individual, or embedded within small networks of acquaintances. *Ijūsha*'s agency has more to do with dialectics and narrative than actual social transformation.

Many new businesses in Ishinomaki (including those described in the previous sections) rely on networks of acquaintances established during the volunteering experience, durable and emotionally charged. A valid example is also provided by Iwasaki's Hamaguri-dō discussed in 2.8. It is worth noting that one relevant characteristic of initiatives such as the PB's and FJ's programs, lies in their commercial target, i.e. non-local consumers (this is also partially true for the Hamaguri-dō). Conversely, Fujihara's, or the Hashidōri Komon seen in Chapter 2, tend to cater to locals and *ijūsha* new-locals. In this sense, the target of a specific enterprise does not seem relevant to the background upon which it grew, even though it must be noted that case of public gathering places such as restaurants, bars or food stalls, regular customers often share a common experience or ideological position with the owner – this is especially true for the *Hashidōri Komons*, as most customers are between their 20s and 30s, both locals and new-locals (2.8). Fujihara's in this sense represents an exception as its high end prices tend to operate a selection in its clientele, and discourage regular attendance: observing the customers who dined at his restaurant, I could not help but notice that most of them were well dressed,

middle aged salary men; as one night I suggested to a small group of friends, in their 30s and not particularly wealthy, paying a visit to Fujihara's for a nightcap, they politely denied, preferring a low-end *izakaya* instead (but insisting that the real issue was the number of seats, as Fujihara could only accommodate about 30 customers).

On top of this, what Klien called an 'elevated sense of responsibility' (Klien 2016: 12) deeply affects the activities of the *ijūsha* youth towards Ishinomaki and the surrounding area. Analysing the interactions between the employees of Ishinomaki 2.0 and other Chūō residents (2016: 8-9), Klien highlights a space of disconnection, where local residents do not share with their young, new neighbours, but rather consider them unprofessional, or improvised urbanites without the necessary knowledge of, or care for, a place themselves have instead spent most of their lives. This was confirmed by the words the fisherman Ōzu, who on different occasions referred to the activities of FJ as 'pointless efforts' from which 'they are not really making any money' (2.4). In fact, outside a restricted circle of like minded peers, both PB and FJ cannot rely on more substantial connections, e.g. with the City Hall, or with the *Kumiai* at large (even though both organizations do interact with minor branches of it), nor the support of more senior citizens, who in fact do constitute the vast majority of Ishinomaki and Onagawa residents, but very rarely interact with the Chūō *intelligencija*.

Concerning the newcomer farmers of the Kumano village, Knight (2003, see 3.1) observes how 'One of the conspicuous features of Japanese modernity has been the ideological incorporation of peasant motifs and imagery as a central constituent of national identity' (281). At the same time, in the Japanese post-postwar modernization at the end of the Twentieth Century, due to the massive withdrawal of state commitment to farming, and the 1993 inclusion of rice imports in the GATT talks, 'the Japanese farming sector appears incapable of reproducing itself' (281, see also Kelly 2006). Here again, similarities emerge: while the *furusato* narratives set the 'wild strawberries place' of every Japanese in the countryside, and the culinary appetite for freshness glorified fishing villages as the connoisseurs' Mecca, the Disaster also showed the face of a depopulating, aging, and paralyzed northeastern coast.

In this post-apocalyptic scenario – but "apocalypse" here has less to do with the tsunami and more with the *revelation* of an internal subaltern colony (Hopson 2013, 2017 - Kawanishi 2015) the anthropologist witnesses the intense and frantic activity of inscription onto the multi-layered reality of Tōhoku; the forces producing these vastly

different inscriptions belong first and foremost to classes and demographics (see 1.4), and are thus informed by class and generational conflicts. As discussed in the sections above, new-locals belong to the wealthy, educated, urban middle class of Tōkyō, Ōsaka, Sendai, and their production of meanings alternates erratically between neoliberal (1.5), individual entrepreneurship, and utopistic volunteering, environmentally-savvy progressivism. Only partially acquainted with the deep-rooted social history of proletarian subalternity of their new place, here to stay but not here since the beginning, their narrative is optimistic, oriented towards degrowth (or post-growth, see Klien 2017, Florida 2002, 2003, 2005), extremely sensitive of social bonds. Here we find the first of our conflicts, setting *ijūsha* and younger individuals against an impoverished silent majority of conservative, elderly, less optimistic ones. The *summa* of this conflict is a diffused and subterranean feeling that innervates the Ishinomaki everyday – Klien provides one revealing interview where an insightful Ishinomaki local reports the *vox populi*:

‘Isn’t that kid doing volunteering or something? What’s the point of spending your time with volunteers?’ This is what residents in Ishinomaki have really been thinking. [...] ‘You’re saying you want to revitalize the city, but the truth is that you have nothing to do, right? On a personal quest? Having lost your job back home in the city?’ This is what locals think about newcomers. We are in the countryside after all. (Klien 2016: 8)

Centre and periphery, individual and collective, implied wealth difference (I interpret ‘having nothing to do’ here is a stand-in for not needing a job to feed the family): they all come together. If regretfully I have not been able to collect such lucid critiques in my fieldwork (see 1.7.a), the consequences of this inequality, in turn rooted in the social history of Tōhoku (1.2) are indeed fundamental to define the processes explored in this thesis.

In the next chapter I further explore this aspect by adding a layer of complexity represented by the activities of actors who, contrary to the *ijūsha*, are not even partially connected to the living tissue of everyday Ishinomaki, thus producing a sharper contrast of differential inscriptions.

## **Chapter 4: Non-Locals – inscribing Tōhoku**

### **4.1 Non-locals: hetero-directed narratives of Tōhoku-ness and Ishinomaki-ness from their historical roots to the contemporary**

After March the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011, Tōhoku as a place was rediscovered by the world's ethnographers and anthropologists. As Traphagan and Thompson observed before the disaster:

‘The northern part of Japan’s main island of Honshū, known as Tōhoku, is a region where the sociocultural dynamics of local lifestyle, as well as the attitudes and self-perceptions of local residents, are still not thoroughly documented or understood in sufficient detail, even while some important ethnographic research has been conducted in the region’ (2006: 7).

Further examples of studies of pre-disaster Tōhoku include: Shinpō 1976, Brown 1979, Bailey 1991, and Yanagita 1955. Tōhoku has also been studied by several prominent Japanese historians (e.g. Akasaka 2009, Akasaka et al. 2011, Takahashi 2004). But on 3/11, the region’s history, demographics, and politics, became central in order to try to understand not what happened, but what is going to happen from this point onwards. Ironically enough, policymakers, tourism companies, and big NGOs also took the ‘narrow road to the deep north’, like the wandering poet, on a pilgrimage to ‘the ultimate beauty of nature and of man, which had been lost in the steadily decaying contemporary society’ (Ueda 1983: 145 quoted in Brown 2006: 198). The extent of this similitude will become clearer in the next sections.

This chapter aims at analysing narratives whose roots are external to the Tōhoku region – or, more precisely, external to the rural and coastal areas these narratives focus on – considering them in a perspective broader than the seven years span of the postdisaster time window. I will consider the correlation between the geographical and climatic characteristics of Tōhoku and the moral and ethical traits of its population – ‘resilience, resistance, resolve, and resourcefulness’ as Kelly (2012: 2) puts them – as well as contemporary domestic tourism narratives, their transformations through the decades, and their latest configuration in the Oshika Peninsula, summer of 2017: a first reconnaissance of the Reborn Art Festival (henceforth RAF) phenomenon will be carried out here, and further developed in the next chapter. In the last section, I analyse the contents of a significant visit paid by a group of prestigious North American postgraduates to the



farmers and fishermen of the three tsunami-struck prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate.

In this chapter food temporarily loses its centrality, as the scope of authoritative, placemaking narratives transcends, so to say, the platitudes of eating. Food of course resurfaces, and is discussed, but in a subordinate position to the *spirit* of place, that becomes manifested through ancient cities, mysterious intuitions on the seashores, or the economic systems of postmodern globality, as the three sections that follow will illustrate.

Each narrative, in its own way, identifies the significant features of the place called ‘Tōhoku’, and the people inhabiting it, as a very significant ‘other’: ‘other’ than urban, central Honshū, ‘other’ than an organic, productive society, ‘other’ than human, even.

A negative stance towards the Northeast characterized most Japanese literature since the eighth century’s National Histories (*Kiki*), when hunting-gathering, millet-farming Tōhoku was still called *Ōu/Ezo/Michinoku* (its current name was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century). After the Meiji Revolution, the loyalist stance of the Aizu Domain (contemporary Fukushima), who fought against the winning side of the Satchō coalition (Jensen 1989), helped to reinforce the national idea of a backward, unenlightened, inferior Northeast. This concept was in turn naturalized through the labeling of both Northeasterners and Ainu as ‘inferior races’, born out of the diffusion in late Tokugawa and early Meiji times of Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism in Japan (Nagai 1954, Morris-Suzuki 1998). After the Second World War, as the national intellectuals struggled to make sense of the defeat, the American occupation, and the newfound stigma of the Japanese colonial enterprise, the idea of Tōhoku as a victim of a rapacious and aggressive Central Japan (see 4.2) brought forward a Northeastern version of the Japanese victimization (Bukh 2007) that partially shifted the role of the Tōhoku inhabitants from ‘ignoble’ to ‘noble’ savages (Hopson 2017). Positively or negatively, the farmers and fishermen of the Northeast were still viewed as a separate stock, an otherness to turn to in order to regain one’s self unity. To the intellectual attempt at turning Tōhoku into a victim, led by Takahashi Tomio between the 1950s and the 1980s, followed a ‘nostalgic turn’ (see 1.2, 1.3), in which what was once considered backward came to be perceived as the core of the Japanese national identity – traditional family structure, religious festivals, folk art, typical food etc. Promoting national unity and internal consumption, the nostalgic turn quickly became fuel for domestic tourism campaigns (see Ivy 1995, 1.3), in a trend that since the 80s seems to be still ongoing.

## **4.2 Framing the issue: Destination Tōhoku (2012), and Tōhoku Treasureland (2016) tourism campaigns and the repairing of the Nation**

There is a positivist, developmental and teleological undertone in the discourse about Japanese tourism (e.g. Ehrentraut 1993, Soshiroda 2005). Even in the case of Tōhoku, a macro-region covering 17.7% of the national surface that in 2015 attracted only 8.3% of total touristic overnight stays in Japan (Kodoku-kōtsū-shō 2017), growth is the projected outcome of a ‘luminous march’ towards the national *eschaton* of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (see Handerson 2016).

Japanese national campaigns for domestic tourism offer a great deal of insight into the imagery of national ideological tenets, such as how the urban-rural difference is portrayed. Such campaigns make use of a vast grammar of tools – landscapes, items, foodstuff, memories, feelings – to craft precise discourses, which gradually shifted from the 70s as the countryside became less of an exotic scenario and more of a long forgotten motherland. This trajectory has not significantly changed since the 80s and 90s, but drew further momentum from the 3/11 disaster in order to craft a more desirable Tōhoku for urban tourists.

As Creighton (1992), Moon (1997), Thompson (2004), and many others point out, most narratives pertaining to rural Japan have a distinct urban origin. Among these, railway tourism campaigns provided much of the imagery and regional stereotypes that even Peace Boat Ishinomaki’s employees could not ignore, when crafting their ‘Ima, Koko’ homestay volunteering campaign (see 3.2.b). As Ivy (1995: 31) puts it, ‘The containments of travel facilitate the narrative bounding of Japan as object of knowledge, as an object that constantly threatens to overrun its borders [...]. Travel (as a difference that allows home to be thought) and home (as a deferred origin that allows travel to take place) emerge as phantasmatic constituents of Japanese identity’. To understand Ivy’s ‘phantasms’ one must look at Marxist and Post-structuralist theories, in particular Zizek (1990, 1991): again, we are confronted with a vanishing mediator (see 3.1, 3.6), an escape into the peripheral and subaltern in order to revitalize the central, hegemonic presence, doable via the inscription of a set of ideological values into the national, peripheral’s otherness.

Japan as an ‘object of knowledge’ has everything to do with this, as it is precisely through the *isson ippin* imagery projected onto the Japanese countryside (see 1.3), that the otherness becomes a consumable commodity. Within this binary, pendulum-like movement, lies a deeper mode of identification, at the root of many of the oppositions we read in the authors mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. The nostalgic quest for authentic Japanese-ness lies in the opposition to the the ‘rationalized American other’ (Ivy 1995: 42), and the ‘Americanized rationalism and materialism [...] antithesis [to] the Japanese *kokoro*, or “heart”’ (Ivy 1995: 42). Visiting the countryside, then, became a way to reappropriate a lost soul (*seishin*, see Moeran 1984). Ironically enough, the Discover Japan campaign of the 70s was modeled on the Discover America domestic tourism campaign, also penned by the same author, Wakao Fujioka.

On the theme of *kokoro*, in a novel iteration of the campaigns analysed by Ivy, post-disaster Tōhoku administration prompted two attempts at re-launching domestic tourism in the Northeast. The first was the *Tōhoku Kankō-haku* (Destination Tōhoku), a promotional campaign which lasted from 2012 to 2013, aimed at ‘stimulating travel demand in the disaster-hit and damaged region of Tōhoku’, as the Wikipedia page briefly states – the campaign’s website has been closed and now hosts an ads-ridden healthy food blog.<sup>32</sup> The means to stimulate such demand were identified in ‘turning the whole region into a sort of exhibition hall [*hakurankai-kaijō*] [...] and promote encounter-making and heart-binding [*kokoro wo musubi*]’ (Japan Tourism Agency, 2012).<sup>33</sup> *Kokoro* and *musubi* are the two keywords of the campaign, depicted beside the *Tōhoku Kankō-haku* main logo.

The *Tōhoku Kankō-haku* produced a number of eighteen promotional videos to be distributed via Youtube, featuring a *ōendan* (cheering team) of artists and athletes, native or resident in Tōhoku, recounting the Northeastern wounded beauty and grace. The Youtube campaign appears to have been extremely unsuccessful, with mere ten subscribers to the *Tōhoku Kankō-haku Dōgu* (Destination Tōhoku Videos) channel, with an average of 800 views for each video. An interesting feature of the campaign is the division of Tōhoku in 28 production zones (*zōn*) where ‘an integrated effort that benefits both public and private will be deployed’ (Japan Tourism Agency, 2012).

The overall aim was to rewind the Tōhoku tourism sector to pre-disaster levels, catering also to the international – i.e. English-speaking – audience. Significant in this regard is

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.visitjapan-tohoku.org/>, last access 23/02/2018.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.mlit.go.jp/common/000210226.pdf>, last access 23/02/2018.

the only Tōhoku promotional English video made available in 2012, the ‘Colourful Emotions Tōhoku’,<sup>34</sup> uploaded via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs channel. The video features a couple with two young daughters, touring Tōhoku and partaking in several iconic activities (e.g. watching the Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori, meditating in a Buddhist monastery, enjoying the hot springs, picking cherries, and playing with *bushi* impersonators under the bronze statue of Masamune in Sendai). The video ends with the catchphrase ‘find new feelings, find new you’. ‘Colourful Emotions Tōhoku’ fared better than its Japanese counterparts, scoring around 10,000 views, but still a drop in the ocean for an international travel campaign. A striking difference between the English video and the *ōendan* selection is also the complete absence of any hint of the 3/11 disaster – while, in the Japanese videos, this theme is at the very dialectical centre of the campaign, as the VIPs appearing in the videos focus particularly on the damage suffered by the region, the resilience of its residents, and the necessity to support them through tourism (and the purchase of goods from the recovery areas), a strategy consistently backed by the government (MacMorran 2016), and met not without resistance and distrust by both Japanese and foreign visitors, among whom the image of an ‘irradiated Northeast’ easily took root (see Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2015, 2019, Kimura 2016).

The general aim of the campaign was not reached, apparently. Following primary and secondary productive performance and other growth indicators of post-disaster Tōhoku, since 2012 on tourism-related business has gone slightly better than 2011, but never returned to the pre-disaster levels. Although the total number of visitors to the six prefectures rose by 115% in the last 7 years (due to the presence of volunteers), tourists dropped by around 87% (Tōhoku Unyu-kyoku Kankō-bu 2017).

What particularly struck me while watching the English video, was the almost complete absence of human beings apart for the family of four.<sup>35</sup> The ‘new feelings’ Tōhoku was supposed to transmit to them are apparently purely aesthetic ones: breathtaking landscapes, delicious food – the four are depicted sitting around an *irori*, a square sunken

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJ2GOQ3ovio&feature=BFa&list=PL485006D5D9738951&lf=plcp>, last access 23/02/2018.

<sup>35</sup> With two exceptions: the already mentioned *bushi* impersonators under the statue of Masamune, and a stern, expressionless Buddhist monk performing *keisaku* duty on the father – i.e. slapping him on the shoulder with a light, flat stick. Both examples, in my opinion, count not as human beings *per se*, but as playful landscape elements. The family alone in a meditation hall could not convey in any way the ‘visit a Buddhist monastery’ message; a selfie of four in front of the motionless Masamune statue of Sendai is not as exciting as a group picture with cool samurais.

hearth, enjoying some soup (possibly a *hittsumijiru*)<sup>36</sup> – beautiful snow. The removal of humanity, in a national campaign aimed at *repairing* (Imaoka 2013) the whole of Japan in the eyes of the (English-speaking) world, after the nuclear meltdown, is at odds with the voices of many among my interlocutors, who aimed at more intense interactions and experiential deepness between visitors and locals in and outside Tōhoku (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Moving on from the Destination Tōhoku campaign – which not only did not produce any measurable impact, but possibly backfired, as in 2013 tourism figures slightly decreased since 2012 (Tōhoku Unyu-kyoku Kankō-bu 2017) – in a 2016 public document, the *Kokusai Kankō Shinkō Kikō* (Japan National Tourism Organization or JNTO, an independent administrative governmental institution) stated that ‘In order to promote Tōhoku, JNTO strongly supports the efforts of the whole government, at the core of which is the *Tōhoku Kankō Suishin Kikō* [Tōhoku Organization for the Promotion of Tourism, TOPT]’ (Matsuyama 2016). The first and still ongoing campaign proposed by the TOPT is *Nippon Tōhoku Torējarando*<sup>37</sup> (Japan Tōhoku Treasure-land), which at first sight presents a set of professional, high-definition promotional videos (four, one per season) which scored several millions views each. Attractions featured are landscapes, historical buildings and works of art, craftsmanship, and food.

Unlike the Destination Tōhoku videos, the *Torējarando* production did not feature a separate set for foreign tourists, but rather dubbed the original Japanese videos into English, thus leaving unchanged the ‘classic’ structure for domestic tourism professional videos, which features short presentations of selected establishments (museums, hot springs, local producers, traditional inns, and the like) with a short greeting by the owners/managers. This structure follows in an audiovisual fashion the *isson ippin* policy already discussed (1.3) breaking the total touristic output of the region into sub-categories (history and culture, food, natural beauties, festivals) and presenting a few examples for each prefecture. Interestingly in the *Torējarando* video there is no trace of tourists, as the spectators beyond the fourth wall are addressed by the sponsored producers’ greetings (e.g. ‘Please visit our *onsen* [hot springs resort], we are waiting to welcome you’) as they smile and wave at the camera.

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<sup>36</sup> Flour-based soup from Morioka, Iwate Prefecture.

<sup>37</sup> Campaign’s main page: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeW1w74ZzPoF\\_xi9v2NEE-Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeW1w74ZzPoF_xi9v2NEE-Q); English subtitled video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIINY903wVo>; last access: 26/02/2018.

Notably, despite the facts that each landscape, festival, and historical location is clearly set in a specific prefecture (indicated by a small map superimposed in the bottom right corner of the shot), two edible elements are associated with the whole region. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are *nihonshu* (rice wine) and rice. In this case, and with particular focus on rice, I contend that the discourse transcends the *isson ippin* framework and moves into the expression of a wider idea of the Northeast which has been elegantly circumscribed and analysed by the Nagoya University historian Nathan Hopson in his recent *Ennobling Japan's Savage Northeast* (2017). In the mid section of the second chapter (81-89), Hopson draws from the Northeast's contemporary history of rice crop failures (1931, 1934), and 'bumper crop famines' (1930, 1933), where exceptional harvests caused the rice prices to fall down to one-third of their former value, and analyses the stance of Takahashi Tomio, historian of Tōhoku.

Takahashi, was born in Iwate prefecture in 1921, and grew up witnessing the social consequences of famine,<sup>38</sup> denouncing them in the course of his academic career. Historian and intellectual, '[h]e was also one who had, even before the deprivation of the war years, seen devastation wreaked upon his home region by what he believed to be an unnatural rice monoculture economic system transplanted forcibly into Tōhoku by "standard Japan"' (Hopson 2017: 88). Takahashi would use the expression "standard Japan" or "central Japan" (*Nihon Chūō*) to identify the hegemonic national forces which, in his view, colonized and exploited Tōhoku with little concern for the good of its people. The unsuitability of rice monocrops in Tōhoku, due to its climate, had been in fact addressed for several decades even before Takahashi's books and articles of the 70s and 80s.

There is general consensus about the significant role of the Northeast in the national rice production of Japan, and how rice became a source of wealth for the region – especially through the fixing of the price of rice after the Second World War. 'Tōhoku was a key contributor to the achievement of [Japanese] rice self-sufficiency by 1966' (Hopson 2017: 89), but these achievements were reached only after the war, employing a range of modern technologies unavailable between 1900 and 1930. Takahashi's identification of rice production with the main hegemonic homogenization of 'production, lifestyle, [...] political culture of class, power, and state' (2017: 89) represents a precious interpretative tool to understand the subaltern role of the Northeast during the modernization of the

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<sup>38</sup> One example that sparked heightened reactions in Tōkyō was the account of the 'selling of daughters' reported by the *Akita Sakigake Shinbun*, which fueled the already popular commonplace view of the Northeast as a backward, impoverished, culturally and morally dubious region (Hopson 2017: 86).

Japanese nation-state. The imposition of rice monoculture became, in Takahashi's argument, the key event of the colonization of Tōhoku by 'central Japan' – where 'colonization' is not to be intended with a metaphorical meaning, as Takahashi himself produced a series of poignant parallels between Tōhoku, the European colonies, the American frontier and wartime occupied Manchuria (e.g. Takahashi 1955, 1973).

Hopson's and Takahashi's remarks on the troubled history of rice growing in Tōhoku lead us to reconsider the apparently trivial matter of how rice and its closest derivative, *nihonshu*, are portrayed as belonging to the whole of Tōhoku in the TOPT video, and to appreciate its historical complexity. A historical complexity in which the coercive hegemony exercised by the Japanese state onto the wide plains of the Kitakami river, exceptionally spacious for a land-hungry Japan in full prewar economic expansion, gave rise to a naturalizing narrative (Tōhoku as a rice producer). Northeastern rice is removed from the historical dimension, in the camera gaze of the promotional video – but also from the consciousness of its residents. In the occasions I either jockingly or seriously referred to rice as one of the beauties of the Northeast, never once did my many interlocutors object to that 'truth'. The same goes for *nihonshu*, which is often referred to as 'drinkable rice' – a transubstantiality confirmed by Ishige (2001: 177-178).

A second, significant encounter between Takahashi's countercurrent history and the 2016 regional tourism campaign is to be found in the symbol chosen for the *Nippon Tōhoku Torējarando*, the red and orange silhouette of a phoenix, 'a motif that represents the vital force inherited in Tōhoku since the dawn of time and symbolizes the triumph over adversity after the earthquake',<sup>39</sup> as it is described in the campaign's website. The 'History and Culture' section of the TOPT video opens with shots of the *Chūsonji* (Chūson temple) of Hiraizumi, 'designated as a World Heritage Site'. Interestingly, the image of the phoenix was also evoked by Hopson in a 2014 article, to symbolise the ideological value of the very same Hiraizumi in Takahashi's counter-hegemonic history of Tōhoku:

'Established in the waning years of the eleventh century, the city of Hiraizumi flourished on the banks of the Kitakami River, in present-day southern Iwate Prefecture. [...] [B]y the middle of the twelfth century the city of Hiraizumi was the eponymous capital of a regional polity that expanded its influence over all of Tohoku. [...] Hiraizumi was in fact the third major power in the archipelago [after Kyōto and Kamakura] (Hopson 2014: 357-358).

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<sup>39</sup> <http://en.tohokukanko.jp/feature/phoenix/>; last access 26/02/2018.



Before the end of the war, Hiraizumi was considered, in the Japanese national and historical discourse as an exceptionally affluent region, where Tōhoku constituted a racially separated space, product of blood mixing with the neighbouring, ‘dying race’ of Ainu (see Siddle 2012).<sup>40</sup> After the Second World War military defeat and the occupation, as racial theories lost much of their authority, Takahashi re-evaluated the affluence of Hiraizumi in order to ‘eject’ the Northeast from the pre-existent model of enlightened and civilizing imperial Japan. Moving away from a unitary ‘imperial’ model, and presenting the Japanese archipelago as a more fractured and less centripetal entity, Takahashi sought to ‘historicize Tōhoku’ (Hopson 2014: 362) against the racial and cultural determinisms which described the region as ‘naturally backward’, insisting on the idea that it constituted an example of complex organization which brought peace and prosperity in an area otherwise ravaged by the central Japanese conquest wars and exploitative occupations.

Long after Takahashi’s thought established itself and became mainstream, the Hiraizumi complex was proposed in 2008 as candidate for the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites. Although rejected, in June 2011 it was finally accepted after a revision of the application’s dossiers – and not a few felt that it was a very encouraging move towards the recovery of the tourism industry, at least in Iwate. Notably in 2016 Iwate’s coastal cities have experienced a major decline in tourists, while half of the prefecture visitors are concentrated in the area of the Hiraizumi complex, which is far from the coast – and a similar figure occurs also in the Miyagi Prefecture, where inland attractions are favoured by more than four fifths of the visitors (Nguyen & Fujihara 2017, Miyagi Prefecture 2014). What better symbol for the (expected) rebirth of the Northeast – a rebirth longed for by Takahashi himself, who harshly criticized Tanaka’s *Nihon Rettō Kaizō-ron* (Takahashi 2004, see also 1.3) – of Hiraizumi, the symbol of Tōhoku’s glorious past? Here again we are faced with a contradiction. With the inscription in the World Heritage Sites, an ‘international forum for the politics of national identity’ (Hopson 2014: 377), and its elevation to a national and international tourist destination, what remains of

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<sup>40</sup> To avoid simplifications, it is necessary to note that the racial theorization in postwar Japan shifted from a “hybrid vigour” paradigm, in which the Japanese considered themselves racially superior for having absorbed and synthesized the characteristics of the Asian races, and were thus patriarchally bound to save them through colonial dominance (the theory was first advanced by the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō, quoted in Oguma 2002: 261; see also Ching 2001, Askew 2002, Weiner 2013), towards an “isolated homogeneity” model in postwar years, where the Japanese became distant and different from any other Asian population, and thus uniquely superior (e.g. Murphy-Shigematsu 1993, Oguma 2002, Narzary 2004, Burgess 2010).

Takahashi's radical reinterpretation of Hiraizumi's *meaning* for modern day Tōhoku? It appears, from the brief shots of *Tōhoku Trējarando* Youtube video, that the depth of this controversy have been completely flattened. It is in this flattening – or normalization in the Yurchakian sense of the term<sup>41</sup> – that I locate the pivotal analytic frame of this chapter. The normalization of controversial, dynamic, or even conflictual aspects of the Japan-Tōhoku relation is certainly not limited to the hetero-directed narratives on which I focus in the present and the following sections. The naturalization of Tōhoku otherness and backwardness does not develop uniquely around historical or heritage-related themes. In the following sections I highlight three contemporary cases where the ideological imagery discussed above finds new life.

### **4.3 Liminal encounters, a quest for something lost, and the *kappa*: Reborn Art Festival**

One fine morning I came back to Ishinomaki after my golden-week Tokyo tour (see 6.2). Climbing down the train from Sendai, one has a clear sight of the municipal building of Ishinomaki, right in front of the station. It was with great surprise that, waving from the windows of that building, I saw 2 metres long banners of the Reborn Art Festival (from now on, RAF).

I knew what the RAF was, as several of my interlocutors were eagerly waiting for it (especially restaurant owners). It was most commonly referred to as the 'AP Bank thing' (*Eipi Banku no koto*), from the name of the loaning finance NPO, brainchild of the musicians and producers trio Kobayashi Takeshi, Sakurai Kazutoshi (Mr. Children), and Sakamoto Ryuichi (Yellow Magic Orchestra). Active since 2003 in fundraising for sustainable projects, AP Bank became famous for the AP Bank Festival, a multi-purpose musical and entertainment festival held from 2005 to 2012 in Shizuoka, later discontinued, then resurfaced in 2016 with the new 'Reborn Art Festival x ap bank fes' double event held in Ishinomaki.

According to an employee of the Ishinomaki *shiyakusho*, the 2016 event was meant to test the capacities of local structures to host a large number of visitors for a short period of time. The test run gave positive results, and the RAF 2017 program started to develop.

The interactions between Ishinomaki, Oshika, and Onagawa residents and the RAF have been numerous and significant, and they will be considered in detail in the next chapter

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<sup>41</sup> See Yurchak 2005; Curtis 2016.

(5.3, 5.4, 5.6). In this paragraph, it is my aim to report, comment on, and analyse the specific contents of the RAF website, communications, and printed materials, in the measure that they present, represent, and circumscribe the locations chosen for the festival events: Ishinomaki and the Oshika Peninsula.

The main difference between the RAF and the old AP Bank Festival is quantitative. If the AP Bank Fes was a musical event, the RAF brings the musical entertainment together with other two sub-categories: Art (*Āto*) and Food (*shoku*). In order to better understand the further contents of this section, it is important to note that the AP Bank NPO is an affluent, high-profile national organization, with the ability to mobilize hundreds of volunteers, organize national and international events, and disseminate knowledge about its projects very effectively through its main website<sup>42</sup> and the one dedicated to the RAF.<sup>43</sup>

The wealth and stability of AP Bank represents an emergent and novel phenomenon in the Japanese economy, that of NPOs. The dynamics which led to the boom of social entrepreneurship and NPOs in Japan have been studied for at least a decade (e.g. Tanimoto 2006; Tsukamoto & Yamagishi 2008; Sawamura & Arimoto 2015), and most scholars agree that it found its first impulse with the exceptional gathering of volunteers in the aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake (*Hanshin Awaji daishinsai*, see 6.2). The necessity to legally define such groups of volunteers, was met by the LPD with the 1998 NPO law (Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities, Sohn 2017: 146), which allowed NPOs to become incorporated companies. Today, the number of NPOs in Japan is approaching 50,000 (Ito & Pilot 2015). It is my hypothesis that most of the popularity of AP Bank may be due to the decision of its founders to focus on environmental and sustainable funding, an area which had been largely neglected by Japanese policymakers since approximately the 70s (Schreurs 2003: 75-76), and that gained wide popularity over the last 20 years, a situation summarized by Kobayashi's words of 2011: 'There is no philosophy or vision within the government at the moment, so the private sector has to lead when it comes to selling ecology and the economy' (Poole 2011).<sup>44</sup> Moreover, being financed and regularly funded by the three artists, and their annual, nationwide music festival, AP Bank fares well in financial terms.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.apbank.jp/> (last access 28/02/2018).

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.reborn-art-fes.jp/> (last access 28/02/2018).

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2011/11/22/life/rock-star-starts-a-new-circle-of-life-with-yoyogi-village/> (last access 28/02/2018).

In response to 3.11, the NPO started a special fund for reconstruction support called ‘ap bank Fund for Japan’ (in English), a charity initiative aimed at collecting money for reconstruction and social projects. As a follow up to this fund, since 2016, the bank transferred its annual music event to Miyagi Prefecture and expand it further as described at the beginning of the section.

Earlier in 2016 it had been announced that the 2017 RAF would take place in the municipality of Ishinomaki from July to September. During the spring of 2017 I encountered AP Bank employees more and more often, as the inauguration drew closer, even though it appeared that the majority of organization and management people were not particularly keen in engaging with locals. When the RAF rented a small office in Chūō, right in front of the PB’s office and next door to the Irori Cafe, it took me weeks to be able to meet with some of the staff, and only because I happened to be in good terms with an employee’s wife, who worked part time at the cafe. More interestingly, according to both my PB contacts and several restaurant and café owners (including Iwasaki), the RAF administration behaved in a dissuasive manner:

‘they are not actively discouraging anybody from making contacts and propose ideas, and actually they are collecting information for their flyers, pamphlets, and website basically from anybody willing to share, but when it gets to concrete collaborations, everything immediately slows down and you aren’t called back for days’ (Satō, local kimono shop owner).

As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, a collaboration with FJ was underway around May, which led to the Hama Saisai project, but it was by no means easy or pleasant for the FJ office to carry out their part.

I tried in many ways to interview the RAF employees, in order to collect their impressions about temporarily living and working in Ishinomaki, but I encountered myself the barrier described by Satō, which was expressed by the word *isogashii* (busy): apparently the frantic preparations for the festival drained all the organizers’ time sparing none for ethnographic interviews. This led me to start extracting and analysing information from their otherwise freeflowing, outward oriented information channels: the RAF website and blog, flyers, artwork, and observable *modus operandi*.

The homepage contains a few revealing lines:

‘This festival takes place in the city of Ishinomaki and the peninsula of Oshika. Works of domestic and international artists are exhibited with the cooperation of local people (*jimoto no katagata no kyōryoku no moto*)<sup>45</sup> [...] furthermore, not only Tōhoku chefs of Ishinomaki, but also domestic and international chefs will prepare local ingredients (*jimoto no shokuzai*) for meals that you will be able to taste only here.

Now, since this Tōhoku is trying to be born again, here you will be able to meet values (*kachikan*) and people you could not meet elsewhere. And maybe, you will even be able to meet a ‘you’, you have never met before (*Ima-made deau koto no nakatta jibun ni sae, deau koto ga dekiru kamo shirenai*)’

In an interview with the environmentalist radio podcast ‘Earth Radio’, Kobayashi himself declared:

‘The goal of the Reborn Art Festival in the Tohoku area is to create connections between the small, local community and society at large. This will create greater diversity in society and will promote a healthy economy’ (Iseya 2015)

Key themes can be already identified in these two short presentations. The first is the perceived distance between a ‘society at large’, namely the society of young, environmentally sensible musical and artistic event-goers Kobayashi interacts with, and the *jimoto*, alluded to as ‘foundational’ for the realization of Kobayashi’s project. Another element, already highlighted in Fujihara’s interview (3.4) and which will return in Wotani’s interview as well (6.2) is the notion of locally produced ingredients (*shokuzai*) further manipulated by chefs in order to properly convey their respective tastes.

Further key analytic elements emerge from another short disclaimer appeared on the RAF website, one about the meaning of art:

‘Art comes from ‘Ars’ (Latin), which refers to the ‘way of human living’ (*hito ga ikiru jutsu*). After the Disaster we recognize that the ‘way of human living’ is lost amongst us. For this reason, ‘Reborn’ art festival, in order to reproduce and regain this Art.’

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<sup>45</sup> Literally, this translates as ‘Under (*moto*) the cooperation of local people’, which implies a higher authority (the same *moto* expression can be used meaning ‘under the Law’ or ‘under a superior’). *Moto* means ‘foundation’, and coupled with *ji* (earth), becomes *jimoto* (local), a recurring word in the whole presentation.

The paragraph produces a list of examples, among which I found particularly interesting the voice ‘regional traditions and the “wisdom skills” of life’ (*chiiki no dentō to seikatsu no “eichi no waza”*).<sup>46</sup> It then proceeds:

‘There is so much uncontaminated nature in the Oshika Peninsula, [...] and the lives of people, closely together with the bountyful (*yutakana*) sea, mountains, and woods. When coming here and enjoying the festival (*omatsuri*) with locals, artists, and staff, the energy to advance the region onwards will be born without doubt’

This point is particularly poignant as it ties together the themes we already mentioned: an ontological distance between visitors and the peninsula, and a similar ontological relationship between locals and the uncontaminated nature to be found there; the transcendent quality inherent in the encounter of those two poles. On top of that, with the mention of the *eichi no waza* (wisdom skills), the anonymous author individuates in ‘traditional’ locality a foundational quality of the artistic process.

In a different section of the website, interviews with locals are featured. One of my interlocutors, who cooperated with the RAF managers as a middleman between them and the residents of Ogi-no-Hama, told me that the RAF had a very ambitious project in the small fishing village, aiming at involving local residents in the managing of the diner that was going to be built there. The interviews section webpage was going to feature many more participants and portraits, but changes were made as local residents showed reluctance to be directly involved (discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

The introduction to the interviews uses words we have already encountered above:

‘If “art, music and food” is a flower in bloom, its root is indeed “local” [in English]. With “Local”, walking around Ishinomaki and the Oshika Peninsula, we can unearth the “way of human living” that grows in the soil itself (*“LOCAL” de wa, Ishinomaki, Oshikahantō wo aruki, tochi ni tsuchikawareta hito ga ikiru jutsu wo horiokosu koto*)’<sup>47</sup>

This passage is quite obscure, but I interpret it as a further reiteration of the same concept: a virtue that is currently lost among those addressed by the text, and is to be found again among ‘nature untouched by human hands’ (*hito no te no kuwaerarete inai shizen*) and among the ways of the people living in its vicinity, the “locals”.

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<sup>46</sup> *Waza* and *Jutsu* both mean something inbetween the ‘art’ and ‘technique’ spectrum, where *waza* leans more towards ‘technique’ and *jutsu* more towards ‘art’.

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.reborn-art-fes.jp/article/local\\_vol1/](http://www.reborn-art-fes.jp/article/local_vol1/) (last access 04/03/2018).

The following section features only one interviewee, Mrs. Esashi, a 77 years old ‘grandma’ (*obaachan*) from Ogi-no-Hama. Her speech in fact covered only 25% of the total text, as for each reply she gave, the author produced a long series of comments. The contents of Mrs. Esahi’s interview cover mainly her childhood memories, when she used to play and swim by the sea, and in the woods. Alternating with these recollections, the author describes his impressions of Ogi-no-Hama. An image evoked by Mrs. Esashi seems particularly poignant to the author, that of the *kappai*.<sup>48</sup> ‘I really enjoyed diving and swimming, when I was a child. I was a *kappa*’, to which the author comments:

‘*Kappa* designates something between a person and a non-person (*hito to hito-de-nai mono no chūkan ni ichi suru*) [...] The beach, the place where Mrs. Esahi spent her summer afternoons as a child, is the place where land and sea meet, a place where she was free to either walk or swim. [...] After the Chile Tsunami [1960] Mrs. Esashi rebuilt her house, and now she lives in a temporary shelter, still in Ogi-no-Hama.’

The theme at this point shifts to Mrs. Esashi’s view of the current situation, to which she candidly reply with an ‘as long as there’s life, there’s hope’ expression. Esahi’s quiet resilience and disregard for earthly belongings assumes a supernatural relevance for the author: ‘Such things, said by the ‘*Kappa*’, came to the world of people living only on the land’. The shoreline as a liminal place, in the author’s intentions, comes to represent the spirit of local residents, who face a world of non-human agencies – the sea, the tsunami, or even the ‘rapture of the deep’ of the swimming child, included those creatures that represent their wealth (*yutakasai*)<sup>49</sup> again:

‘The sea is a source of wealth. It gives birth to the food of human beings (*kurasu hitobito no kate wo umi*)<sup>50</sup> and at the same time carries *tsunami* that can destroy entire villages. It is surrounded by both life and death (*Sei mo, shi mo, soko ni meguru mono*)’

The piece further elaborates on the complementarity of opposites (sea and land, death and life, humans and non-humans) that the Oshika Peninsula residents experience everyday, ultimately to affirm that ‘All the wisdom and skills emerging from such experience, represent the concept of the ‘way of human living’ we call here “Reborn Art”’.

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<sup>48</sup> The *kappa* is a well known folkloric image in Japan. It is a water spirit belonging to the category of the *yōkai*, or demons, held accountable for drownings and kidnappings. ‘Being a *kappa*’ is quite a common figure of speech to address a good swimmer of a person who spends a lot of time in the water (see Ishida 1950).

<sup>49</sup> In Japanese grammar, *yutakana* is the adjective form, and *yutakasa* is the noun form.

<sup>50</sup> Here *umi* (the act of giving birth or bringing into the world) is significantly omophone to ‘sea’.



The contents of the RAF website partially reveal a set of ideological ‘inner workings’ *apropos* the self and the other, that can be historically and philosophically traced back to the seminal work of the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960), namely the ecological approach made famous in Japan by his *Fūdo, Ningengaku-teki Kōsatsu* (Milieu: an anthropological approach).<sup>51</sup> Commented on by Berque (1992), Befu (1996), and Oguma (2002) among others, Watsuji produced a philosophy informed by continental existentialism – and aimed at expanding Heidegger’s notion of ‘being-in-time’ (1927) including geographic space as well. Simplifying to the extreme, in order to do so, he constructed the complex concept of *fūdo* (lit. ‘climate’), that he defines as ‘the structural occasion of human existence’ (Watsuji 1935 quoted in Berque 1992: 100), i.e. a non-casual frame, ‘in between an ecological and symbolic process’ (1992: 100), through which cultural traits and selves become identified in a ‘special ontological correlation’ where, to a given climate, will correspond a certain cultural trait. Watsuji proposes, for the Japanese character, a mixture of monsoon-type (by him linked with receptivity), and arctic-type (endurance) characters. Defined as an ‘aesthetic logic’ (1992: 100) of intersubjective meld with the other and the environment, Watsuji’s theory was well received among folklorists, and influenced in part the work of Takahashi Norio, who referenced his work in many books and articles (Hopson 2017: 305-306). It has also been pivotal in the rise of *nihonjinron*<sup>52</sup> theories, as ‘a large number of scholars [...] slavishly accept[ed] Watsuji’s thesis *in toto*’ (Befu 1996: 108).

If we consider again the main themes emerging from the RAF website contents, e.g. the liminality of the shoreline in relation with Mrs. Esashi’s ‘*kappa*-ness’; Tōhoku’s high tsunami risks in relation to the apparent anti-materialism of its inhabitants; the triple conceptual chain of art, everyday life, and environment, a similarity emerges quite clearly between the festival’s conceptual and philosophical framework and Watsuji’s theories, where individuals and environment co-determine each other in a ‘fractal or holographic’ (Befu 1996: 115) model. Another fundamental aspect of the RAF narrative is a partial abolition of time – ‘timeless practices’ or ‘traditional wisdoms’ are often evoked – a typical *nihonjinron* strategy of mythification and naturalization of the Japanese self as

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<sup>51</sup> I use the translation for *fūdo* proposed by Berque (1992), milieu, and repropose here ‘anthropological’ in its ethymologic *structo sensu*, to express Watsuji’s *ningengaku*, lit. ‘the study of the human being’, already used by Sakai (1991).

<sup>52</sup> *Nihonjinron* (‘Theory of Japanese-ness’) defines a set of philosophical and anthropological publications popular in post-war Japan, focused on the homogeneity and uniqueness of the Japanese national character. Befu (1996) extensively criticised the tenets of *nihonjinron* highlighting their nationalistic and ideological underpinnings.

nature (both to be left untouched by the passing of time), also in essence present in Watsuji's work.

It is extremely significant, although, how such concepts were not mindlessly lifted from the imaginary of Japanese self-identification, but were selectively posed as belonging not to the website author's voices – who identify themselves with the class of the urbanized artists and intellectuals, as do, I believe, most of the readers of the site, and the visitors of the festival – but to the *jimoto no kata* (local people). This, in turn, brings forth the fundamental consequence of the thaumaturgical communion with the locals in order to participate in the wholeness they are already experiencing – the 'meet a "you", you have never met before' mentioned above.

The fracture implied by the RAF narrative is coterminous with, I contend, the one addressed by Chun (2006: 291), when analysing TV culture of postwar Japan: a generational one, before a geographical one. It began in the 70s – in the author's frame of analysis – when the Generation X started watching radically different programmes than their Baby Boomer parents, who had meanwhile acquired a second television set. The fracture, exemplified by the consumption of information and entertainment, and by the end of communal TV watching, a decade afterwards would break up the 60s family unit and pave the way for the post-bubble individualizing alienation (Ronald & Hirayama 2009).

Commenting on the advertising company Dentsū's 1960 'Discover Japan' (*Jisukabā Japan*) campaign, Ivy compares its motto, '*Utsukushii Nihon to watakushi*' ('Beautiful Japan *and* myself'), with the speech by Kawabata Yasunari, '*Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi*': 'Kawabata's 1968 speech is also conventionally translated as "Beautiful Japan and myself", yet the possessive *no* indicates a self modified by "Beautiful Japan" rather than separated from it' (1995: 44). A self in ontological resonance with its environs brings us back to Watsuji's *fūdo*, but Ivy's juxtaposition suggests also another fracture, the one between *to*, meaning 'and', and the possessive *no*:

'In stereotypical pre-Discover Japan mode, Japanese considered travel as sightseeing – the viewing, often seasonal, of culturally acclaimed landscapes and sites [...]. Travel to these landscapes *was an exercise in confirmation*: the sightseer [...] expected no unusual encounters, no solitary experience. [...] The desire to encounter people of the locale and

have meaningful exchanges with them grew, according to many observers, with the experiences Japanese had at Expo '70'<sup>53</sup> (Ivy 1995: 44-45, my italic)

As travel (*tabi*) became a more solitary activity – a phenomenon resonating with the intergenerational fracture of family structures and of urban society at large (Chun 2006, Sakurai 2004) – participation (*sanka*), bodily experience (*taiken*), and the encounter (*deai*) came to the fore as key aspects of tourism, especially domestic rural tourism. This change was characterized by a curious phenomenon; if in the former case, tourism destinations were Japanese sceneries famous on their own ('the cherry blossoms of Yoshino, the autumn leaves of Lake Towada, snow-clad Mount Fuji', Ivy 1995: 45), after Discover Japan the relevance of visited places shifted from a culturally shared aesthetic order, towards the synecdochical identification of a part for the whole: the *furusato* stood for the Nation and, conversely, the individual stood for the moral component of national identity (see also Creighton 1997, Moon 1997, 2002).

To recover a theme already addressed in the last chapter, that of the 'vanishing mediator', we could set the observations on the RAF website side by side with Žižek's comments on Titanic and the role of Di Caprio as a means to reintegrate Winslet's character with herself:

'beneath this sympathy for the poor, there is another narrative, the profoundly reactionary myth, first fully deployed by Kipling's *Captain Courageous*, of a young rich kid in crisis whose vitality is restored by a brief intimate contact with the full-blooded life of the poor' (2008: 58).

With bitter political irony, the Slovenian philosopher is pointing at a trope in many ways similar to the interpolations of Watsuji's *fūdo* in Discover Japan and the Reborn Art Festival. If we consider the cases analysed in Chapter 3, the processes of interaction between locals and non-locals were mediated by the new-locals *ijūsha*, who introduced a buffer zone of integrating alterities – and by all intents and purposes, they do not only produce such zones, but embody mediation in their very existence. Differently, here, the buffer zone is mostly nullified, as the visiting experience is administered by a nonlocal, super-individual organization, whose direct contact with the place in question is not to be

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<sup>53</sup> Hopson (2013) notes about 1970: 'This was also the year of the Osaka Expo, which echoed the 1964 Tokyo Olympics' message that Japan had not only recovered politically and economically from defeat, but was once again a privileged star among the developed nations of the world'. Oguma (2009) calls the Japanese model of a stable, wealthy, and steadily growing middle-class the '1970 paradigm'.

seen – and this will be a central theme of the next chapter as well. In the RAF case then, or even the Tōhoku Treasureland campaign's one, mediators become 'vanishing' again.

*En passant*, it is interesting to note that, in Žižek's psychoanalytic criticism of Hollywood cinema, the final 'secret motif' of disaster movies such as *Titanic*, or *Jurassic Park*, lies in the recovery of the father figure, or rather the 'rediscovery of paternal duties' – by Sam Neil in a quite straightforward fashion in *Jurassic Park*, and by Di Caprio in *Titanic*, whose last words before sinking in the icy Atlantic waters, 'are not the words of a departing lover's, but, rather, the last message of a preacher, telling her how to lead her life, to be honest and faithful to herself' (Žižek 2008: 58). A perceived loss and the necessity to recover what has been lost can be interpreted as the shared prime mover of both Hollywood "Marxist" apologies of pauperism, and also the Japanese encounter narratives seen in this chapter so far.

#### **4.4 'Too many middlemen': looking at Tōhoku from the Ivy League**

In 2016, the executive director of IMPACT Foundation Japan, William H. Saito, wrote on a special issue of the *Japan Times* dedicated to the Qatar Friendship Fund (QFF):

'The devastation that struck the Tōhoku region in March of 2011 damaged more than homes and offices. The long-term impact of the earthquake and tsunami changed the mindset of those who survived. Thus, rebuilding Tōhoku required much more than simply reconstructing the physical infrastructure – it meant creating a bold new program to revitalize the *hopes and dreams* of the people who lived there, and in particular, the youth of the region. As a life-long believer in the power of entrepreneurship, I knew that one key element in such a program would be to promote the entrepreneurial spirit of the local people. [...] To achieve this, we are first reaching out to entrepreneurs in the Tōhoku community, providing them with useful information, and instructing them in critical business skills. Second, we are connecting these local entrepreneurs with globally oriented professionals who can show them how to leverage their regional success to appeal to national and global markets.' (Saito 2016, my italic).

These lines effectively summarize the stance of several NGOs and recovery associations towards the development of postdisaster Tōhoku. In general terms, one could even trace narrative similarities between Saito's sober and propositive piece and the RAF's dreamy streams of consciousness, in terms of loss and recovery. But more importantly, Saito's words frame a line of initiatives – such as the *Tōhoku Wakamono 10,000-nin Kaigi*

(Tōhoku 10,000 Young People's Assembly) held in February 2016 – for the rejuvenation of entrepreneurship in the North-east. In the case of the QFF, the process has taken a definite international turn, which led the fund – and its Sendai headquarters, the INTLAQ – to organize a tour of local agricultural and fishery companies for a small group of Ivy League postgraduate students, who later presented their impressions and suggestions to a small floor of listeners (with an ethnographer in their midst) in January 2017.

The Sendai INTLAQ study centre is a sturdy, modern-looking building in the Oroshimachi residential district, occupied mostly by a warm, wooden lecture theatre. It is not crowded on the presentation day, around thirty participants, among which only four are farmers, apparently. The others are equally divided among academic scholars, journalists, and social entrepreneurs. The five young, elegant, and brilliant North American students parade in, shake hands, exchange *meishi*, and begin their presentation, with a pause every one or two sentences to allow the real-time translator to convey their words in Japanese. Notably, the American speakers were not given microphones, while the translator was – a fact revealing about the status of the academic guests: visually exposed, and yet aurally muffled.

The main objective of the five was, as they put it, to:

‘compare and contrast the North-eastern small agricultural and fishery companies they visited with their US equivalents, in order to assess the effects of post-tsunami revitalization programs, and provide insights and suggestions for the improvement of both regional policies and individual strategies’.

Their main referents were small companies affiliated with the Pocket Marche<sup>54</sup> smartphone app, an initiative financed with crowdfunding, where members are able to buy food directly from the producers, who upload in the app pictures and prices of their goods – the Pocket Marche company was in fact co-sponsoring the INTLAQ meeting. Their data was collected in a few days, during which the students travelled through Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate, visiting a few selected farming and fishing companies. I did not know it at the time, but among their interlocutors there was one of my friends, Morishima (seen in 2.5), whose reaction to their visit and the subsequent presentation I would not know until a few months later – and which will be discussed below.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://poke-m.com/about> (last access 09/03/2018).

After an initial acknowledgement of the consequences of 3/11 in terms of *fuhyō higai* (rumor damage, see 2.5), and the suggestion of ‘collaborating with scientists for the production of objective research to prove the safety and credibility of local producers’ – a phenomenon which in fact took place, but did not produce the expected results (Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2015, 2019, Kimura 2016), one of the students focused on the imbalance of negotiating ability between farmers and fishermen and the brokers (cooperatives and big distributors), where the latter ‘concentrate enough power to set prices and demand for products’, an aspect combined with the ‘lack of economy and business notions by the part of most farmers [and fishermen]’ which put them in a challenging position. This apparent lack of preparation became worsened by the rarity of young prospective farmers and fishermen, deriving from either difficulties in starting a business or the absence of interest in following one’s own parents’ footsteps. This combination of factors described a ‘situation characterized by a low level of innovation, change, and sharing of best practices’, only exacerbated by the difficulty of accessing governmental support.

The overall sketch drawn by the students is one of a weak community of producers, subaltern to a class of brokers and unable to gather necessary negotiating power to defend their own interests. Comparing this short analysis to the elusive words of Goro (2.3), emerges a faint, mutual echoing of concepts, namely a lack of coordination and a passive attitude towards risks and innovation; both perspectives, in addition, draw on a neo-liberal world view emphasizing individual action and entrepreneurship. The students proposed two solutions to the issue currently faced by Tōhoku producers; the first is to ‘strengthen the ties between single producers in order to form *consortia*, able to gather resources in order to produce their own administration, accounting, advertising, and branding’. The second solution proposed was the creation of an ‘educational program’ aimed at guiding producers through the jungle of governmental regulations and subsidies, and perspective farmers and fishermen through the possibilities of crowdfunding, microcredit, knowhows, and best practices – and here again the students’ suggestions are compatible with the initiatives of, for example, FJ and their Triton Project (2.2).

The consequences of the scenario drawn by the students are ones of separation between producers and consumers, caused by ‘too many middlemen’, a phrase that became a refrain during the over two hours of presentation. The distance created between consumers and farmers/fishermen, both geographical – consumers were almost

automatically defined as Tōkyōites, and the students' visit program mentioned they did 'sojourn in Tōkyō for several days in order to carry out market research – and interpersonal, resulted in both parties knowing very little about each other. This was, in a distinct neo-liberal fashion, identified as the main issue, as producers were denied a direct knowledge of their customers, thus facing a reduction of their potential of self-determination.

The conclusion of the speech touched a topic I had already heard elsewhere: solutions to the problems described above were more or less all pertaining to the enhancement of direct interaction between consumers and producers. Very similar concepts were expressed within PB's project *Kaki no Wa* (3.2.a). Examples such as direct sales, information campaigns, gastronomic tourism (or food education, or *shoku-iku*, as it was defined at the INTLAQ event), the students said, were all being currently put into practice, but on a level too fragmented, uncoordinated, and small-scale to be effective. A few months later, during an interview with an employee from the *shiyakusho* of Onagawa, I would be told more or less the same thing:

'See, everyone is carrying out their specific project, with aims that in many cases are similar to others, but for example two organizations, or organizations and institution, very rarely cooperate, even if they are basically doing the same thing. You can have either a very big, well funded NGO that raises lots of money and carries out big projects, or a lot of small groups doing very little. There is no way many small groups would get together to pursue bigger objectives'

My almost automatic response was a heartfelt 'But why?', to which he just stared at the empty green wall of his office, gently rocking his head, as he was looking for something without being able to grasp it.

The meeting ended with a few not particularly illuminating questions from the floor, and it left me the impression of a rational, but hyperuranic approach. I did not think about it again, until several months later I discovered, as already mentioned, Morishima was one of the seafarmers visited by the delegation. Months later, on a hot summer afternoon in Watanoha, Morishima, Iwasaki and I were sitting in the seafarmer's garage slowly drinking cold tea and discussing that experience, after I reported to them what had been said at the INTLAQ.

**Morishima:** 'Yes I do remember, those [North-]American kids came with their teacher asking a few questions and looking around. I had no idea they gave a presentation



afterwards. When I was answering them I was not even sure they would understand fully, since I was being translated. Anyway, “Consortium of producers” sounds good, but it’s not very concrete as a concept.’

**Iwasaki:** [overlapping Morishima] ‘See that’s the problem, those ideas are abstract. *They might work maybe in the US*, but you can’t just come here and say what people should do in your opinion, without knowing what place you are into.’

**Me:** ‘On that regard, I do not think they had any background information on Tōhoku, or on Japan for what it matters, except maybe in terms of economy and business’

**Iwasaki:** ‘Exactly. What the majority of people are trying to do here *has nothing to do with business*. It is a deeper thing.’

[...]

**Morishima:** ‘See, I can agree with the need of having closer relations between producers and consumers, but this idea of excluding retailers, or the cooperatives, cannot work. Because those are people who belong to the community as well. In their reasoning, it is like there is us on a side and them on the other [traces a line in the air with his hand]’

Language barriers aside, Iwasaki and Morishima were questioning a line of reasoning, acritically assumed by the postgraduates, by which individual producers ought to ‘cut the middlemen’ in order to access both direct profits and a direct contact with the consumers aimed at producing further profits. In this Manichean split there was no space for Iwasaki’s concept of three-way economy seen on Chapter 3 (3.8), where the benefits of business were to be shared equally among the producer, the consumer, and the community nesting the producer as well. At the same time, both Iwasaki and Morishima were resisting – or so it seemed to me at the time – many of the arguments they might have shared with the North American students’ analysis out of an initial ‘they are not from around here’ principle. If on the one hand neoliberal individualism did not suit them completely, on the other they did also refuse – as it emerges from their previous interviews in Chapters 2 and 3 – to completely defend the top-down, path-dependant infrastructure of municipal authorities, cooperative management, and hypermart (*sūpā-sentā*) policies of distribution. In fact both of them were not willing to let go of their sense of community in front of the phantasm of the American other (Ivy 1995).

#### 4.5 Concluding thoughts: foreshadowing subalternity

As I was preparing a bibliography for this research project, avidly swallowing any text with the words ‘disaster’, ‘Tōhoku’, or ‘food’ in it (alas, very rarely the three went together), I stumbled onto a short piece by Nathan Hopson, ‘Systems of irresponsability and Japan’s internal colony’ (2013). While reading it, I could not help but go back to my days of studies of Antonio Gramsci and his followers *apropos* the ‘Southern Question’ of agrarian, deeply Catholic, irrational, and subaltern Italian *mezzogiorno*. Among the many parallels, the role of Tōhoku *minzokugakusha* such as Akasaka Norio as subaltern intellectuals and the one of the Italian folklorist Ernesto de Martino, or the ‘dense narrative chronicles [of] the (fictional) secession of the (fictionalized) area of southeast Iwate and northwest Miyagi’ (Hopson 2013: 5) that is Inoue Hisashi’s 1981 *Kirikirijin* (*The People of Kirikiri*, 1981, see Napier 2005: 159-167) and Carlo Levi’s 1945 account of poverty and backwardness in the superstitious Lucania region in *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 1945) – Tōhoku is considered extremely superstitious as well. Naturally those were mere suggestions, family resemblances of two distinct phenomena of internal colonization that have many significant differences, yet I can trace to that specific reading the moment I began to shape my work loosely around the concept of internal colony, and centre-periphery dynamics.

My wish to bring Gramsci to Tōhoku would find in Ishinomaki inevitable challenges, as hegemony and ideology fall into the realm of things ‘we don’t know we know’ – the subterranean fourth category devised by Žižek (2005) expanding on US Secretary of State for Defence Donald Rumsfeld’s 2002 infamous press conference. Italian southerners, and Tōhoku residents also possess two very different characters in the respective national narratives, the former being ‘passionate, undisciplined, rebellious’ (Schneider 1998: 1) while the latter having inherited from their cold motherland resilience and stubbornness, a ‘culture of resistance’, *teikō no fūdo*, as in Takahashi’s Watsuji-esque definition (1973: 129). Yet, if Italian southerners were (and still are) accused of being too individualistic and prone to an ‘amoral familism’ (Banfield 1958) which inhibited them from joining collective efforts for the common good, such an accusation does not sit too far from the American students’ claim of excessive small-scaling and lack of coordination in Tōhoku’s farms and fisheries, even if they – fortunately – did not attempt to back up their observations with ethno-psychological analyses.

Looking at the English literature dedicated to subaltern minorities in the Japanese society – and there is no shortage of works exploring this theme (e.g. Weiner 2009, Hicks 1997, De Vos & Weatherhall 1974) – we notice that Tōhoku has almost no place in these analyses. It is almost as, in face of more ‘textbook’ examples of subaltern groups – ethnic and linguistic minorities, immigrant enclaves, former colonial subjects – the Northeast for many decades was not perceived in the same analytical and methodological terms. Interestingly enough, though, Tōhoku did come across as a tourism destination or object of nostalgic longing, even before 2011 (Ivy 1995, Occhi 2006, Knight 1994, 1998). If the tide is finally changing with the post-disaster “boom” of Tōhoku-centered research from many different disciplines, I still find worth focusing on the possible definitions of a subaltern Tōhoku, taking in special consideration the materials discussed in this chapter.

Aitchison (2001: 134) observes that ‘tourism needs to be considered [...] as a powerful cultural arena and process that both shapes and is shaped by gendered (re)presentations of places, people, nations and cultures’. The *obaachan*-led diner envisioned by the RAF organizers (discussed in 4.3) falls precisely into this mechanism of presenting locality as synecdochically embodied, engendered in some equivalents of Mrs. Esashi (4.3). Caregiving and food-giving grandmas, in turn, evoke the maternal ‘intimate place of nurturance’ (Creighton 1997: 243) of the *furusato*. Slater (2013: 273) reports a very interesting remark by one of his volunteering companions during his experience of debris cleaning in Ishinomaki, after they were treated with cold ambiguity by an elderly man: ‘Tōhoku men are like that: they don’t talk, they’re not very friendly. Actually [...] the men from these parts are supposed to be the most unfriendly, even for Tōhoku’. The supposed stubborn introversion of Tōhoku men is also highlighted by my fisherman interlocutors (see Chapter 2) when they say about themselves ‘we don’t really take sides here, just sit and see what happens’. The *enka* singer and Tōhoku-born Masao Sen sang in his 1977 hit: ‘Like my father, my older brother does not talk very much’ (*aniki mo oyaji ni de mukuchina futari ga*) (see 6.1). To the vocal impotence of men, is opposed the (relative) loquacity of women – the ones who handle neighbourhood relation and gift-exchange policies (Slater 2013: 278), the ones who feed the men (Knight 1998), the ones who create and strengthen bounds, counteracting the many fractures of the Japanese society (Gasparri & Martini 2018).

To conclude, the convergence between tourism and the practices of subalternity lies in a very similar dynamic of consumption of the otherness, that have been, under different

circumstances, highlighted both by Ivy (1995) and bell hooks (1990). If the former generally states that ‘travel [...] allows home to be thought’, indentifying the fundamental self-defining potential of the ‘othering’ (see de Beauvoir 1949, Said 1978, Žižek 2008), hooks exposes it in full view in the following passage:

Often this speech about the ‘Other’ annihilates, erases: ‘no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. *Re-writing you, I write myself anew*. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk. (hooks 1990: 151–2)

In her exceptionally vivid ‘Re-writing you, I write myself anew’, hooks significantly resonates the RAF promises of self-finding, assuming the subaltern subjectivity as a passive surface upon which external agencies trace their words: a reified raw matter (*sozai*, further developed in chapter 6).

Developing from my previous observation on power and conflict in the construction of the narrative concerning food and locality in post-disaster Tōhoku (3.6, 2.10), it is worth noting how the introduction of non-local agency in the dynamics of Ishinomaki food culture adds a further layer of complexity. The organized, top-down inscription of meaning produced by powerful agents of signification such as domestic tourism campaigns (4.2), the RAF (4.3), or the visit of foreign students (4.4) polarizes reactions along a different axis than the already discussed progressive-conservative dispositions – aligned with age, class, and education – establishing instead a neoliberal-collectivist opposition. The issue raised by Morishima and Iwasaki in 4.4, ‘this has nothing to do with business’ highlights an ethical dimension of sociality and support that is superimposed with the everyday business by *ijūsha* and their sympathisers (see also 2.8.b, 3.3). Beneath this ideological set-up lies, I believe, the utopian values that characterized the Sanriku in the early stages of post-disaster volunteering, which survive now in the further elaborated form on *sanpo-yoshi*-esque attitudes well represented by Iwasaki, Moritomo, or P.B.I. (3.2). The defenders of this non-profit disposition heartily criticised pragmatic initiatives such as the RAF (more on in below: 5.3, 5.4), operating precisely upon the aforementioned opposition of business vs non-business.

Returning briefly to Spivak’s opinion whether the subaltern can or cannot speak, we find here a possible parallelism between her case (see 1.4) and our: what happens to the voice

of Tōhoku locals in this clash between the orthodox governmental or corporate narratives of countryside bliss, and the counter-narrative of utopian construction of a de-capitalized locality heralded by new-local mavericks? Bell hooks above aptly answers this question, although alternatively to her dual dominated-dominant system I propose, for the Tōhoku case, a three-bodies model: here we have *ijūsha* and conservative narrators clashing for narrative hegemony, at the expenses of an unvoiced group of locals.

## Chapter 5: Bringing people in – subjective spaces, transversal practices

### 5.1 Introduction

In 2017 the Ishinomaki *Hibi Shinbunsha*, editor of the *Hibi Shinbun*, a local newspaper, published a fascinating collection of historical maps of the city, covering more than 250 years, from the oldest Edo period map, to the more recent (Ishinomaki Ākaibu, 2017). Beautiful scrolls and papers depict the transformation of the city and its expansion. Browsing the illustrated book with my local friends, often prompted exclamations of surprise: ‘Oh, that was already there a hundred years ago?’. The *Ishinomaki Kochizu Sanpo* (A walk through Ishinomaki’s old maps) not only provided an account of the city’s spatiality, but mapped as well that ‘fatal intersection’ (Foucault 1986: 22) of time with space.

Generally speaking, a map is needed when somebody needs to act in an unfamiliar territory. Maps exist to inform us about general orientation, bridges, places of leisure, professional activities, or particular salience. On a more general level, and transcending the idea of a paper map, the act of mapping describes figures of significance protruding from a neutral gestaltic background. In the following sections, I proceed through different case studies where Ishinomaki has been mapped for visitors from outside – cases of different natures, as we will see.

It may be worth, then, before starting *our* walk in Ishinomaki’s produced spatiality, to recall de Certeau’s ‘Spatial Stories’ and ‘A Walk in the City’, in *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). The French scholar recalls how the first medieval maps were more similar to a ‘history book’ (120) than what we intend today: they were travel logs, accounts of the author’s itineraries. With time, the voices and means of the first map-makers became marginalized as pictorial figurations: ‘[...] the sailing ship painted on the sea indicates the maritime expedition that made it possible to represent the coastlines’ (121). Little by little even those last remainders disappeared, and the current geographical map ended up forgetting ‘the physical evidence of its own construction’ (Fitzpatrick & Reynolds 2009: 131).

Looking at the more ancient map of Ishinomaki in the *Kochizu Sanpo*, each village and temple of the coast is connected by a winding red line: the path of the traveler. In the same fashion, marine routes are marked with a similar red line, from which thinner lines

depart, indicating possible docks. Other pictorial representations of the Kitakami delta depict fishing boats, carts, and even minute people carrying out their daily duties, as one painter traveller might see them from a ship, or from the top of a hill. To reinforce the concept of mapping mentioned above, de Certeau sees it as the highlighting of affordances, possibilities, and applications, a ‘proper [place] in which to exhibit the products of knowledge, form tables of legible results’ (1984: 121-122) – and here De Certeau confronts the normativity of the map with ‘stories’ of travels, improper mingling of spaces and boundaries. To put it in different words, ‘although they are presented as objective indicators of place, maps are founded on the spatializing assumptions that affect the way that those mapped places are perceived’ (Fitzpatrick & Reynolds 2009: 132).

The reflections that follow, each considering a specific area of Ishinomaki, are presented with the space-place couple outlined by De Certeau (1987) in mind. It is crucial to note that, in De Certeau’s lexicon, ‘place’ (*lieu*) and ‘space’ (*espace*) define two categories different from the classic opposition proposed in human geography by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and since then becoming widespread among scholars. If Tuan posits ‘space’ as an abstract, insubstantial dimension, and ‘place’ as the phenomenological *milieu* of existence (a *space* with a *meaning*), Certeau uses the two terms in a different way. The French thinker ‘explicitly defines the distinction [...] as a matter of the presence of absence of practices’ (Fitzpatrick & Reynolds 2009: 131), where his ‘space’ is created by practices of movement, temporalization, situatedness etc, and is opposed to a ‘place’ of (objective) uniqueness (in Certeau’s lexicon, *propriety*), where all qualifying elements are ‘*beside* one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines’ (1987: 117). In terms of objectivity and practice, thus, Tuan’s and Certeau’s space/place pairs appear almost opposite to each other, as the Certeauian *lieu* is characterized by abstraction and descriptiveness, as much as Tuan’s space, and De Certeau’s *espace* is characterized by the possibility to be practiced (and thus signified) by humans, in a manner that reminds us as Tuan’s phenomenological place.

Keeping this important detail in mind, considering the following case studies, I add that although some intersect more than others with food trajectories (most notably the Hama Saisai and Goro’s cases in Ogi-no-Hama, and the supermarket geographies explored in the *Genki Ichiba* section), matters of food’s spatiotemporality emerge also in cases not explicitly focusing on it (e.g. in the role of the Ishinomaki Station convenience store –



*konbini* – during the *Rapurasu* event, or during the *Fukkō Matsuri* in Onagawa). Even a deserted area like the district of Minamihama hides a little tea place, like a solitary islet.

Space-making practices can be fruitfully interpreted according to de Certeau's notions of *strategy* and *tactic* (exposed in 1.4 and 1.5), as mapping is both an exercise of power (Foucault 1991, Gregory 1994, Matthew 2000) and of conflict (Appadurai 1995), and from the making of a *lieu* into an *espace* derives our capacity, as social actors, not only to orientate ourselves, but to act at all: 'subjective territory [i.e. a place realized through strategic prescriptive processes both physical and emotional/conceptual] is the existential [...] real in and from which a given subject of a society perceives and relates to the universe and his place in it' (Fitzpatrick & Reynolds 2009: 136), an exquisitely Foucauldian notion. Furthermore, as Marks (1999) observes, a theme dear to both Foucault and de Certeau was certainly that of the *other*, the phantasmatic category of what is left out of history, which from time to time, in the language of the two philosophers appears to merge with the subaltern: de Certeau in the *Writing of History* (1988: 2) associates it with 'the Indian, the past, the people, the mad, the child, the Third World'. In this sense, Foucault himself – less prone than de Certeau to researching subjectivities which escape his totalizing Panopticon – in *Madness and Civilization* (1965) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977) admits a degree of centrality for the 'neglected practices' (Marks 1999: 127), an opening acknowledged by de Certeau after the death of Foucault, defining him as 'poacher' like himself (1986: 191).

The frame of analysis triangulated among Certeau, Foucault, and Appadurai's 'The production of Locality' (1995) will be discussed further in the conclusion, and used in order to analyse the places and spaces practiced by the visitors of Ishinomaki.

## **5.2 Virtual invasion – the space politics of Pokémon in Ishinomaki**

On a November Saturday morning of 2016, Ishinomaki was quietly invaded by masses of prowlers on the hunt (figure 7). They did not carry rifles or spears, but shiny smartphones with several power banks to keep them going for hours. Their prey was *Rapurasu* (Lapras<sup>55</sup> in English), a phantasmatic demi-presence manifested into the

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<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, one of the many possible transliterations of the Japanese *Rapurasu* can also be Laplace (which is the French official name of the monster). The eponymous French mathematician did formulate a set of equations to describe the behaviour of tidal flow, suggesting a marine connection between the two (Miles 1974).

material world through the complex interactions between GPS mapping, smartphone cameras and clocks, and human locomotion, that is commonly addressed as the augmented reality of the Pokémon GO (in Japanese shortened to *PokeGO*) videogame. The crowd tide lasted two weeks, before being disrupted by the 7.4 magnitude earthquake and the subsequent mini-tsunami (1 to 1.4 mt) that gently hit the Sanriku coast, but before the wave scare, Ishinomaki station was photographed as busy as it presumably ever got in decades.

The watery nature of Ishinomaki and its recent history was reflected by Lapras itself, that is portrayed as a kind giant sea creature who ‘possesses a kind heart’ (*yasashii kokoro no mochinushi*), ‘intelligent enough to understand human language’ (*hito no kotoba wo rikai suru takai chinō wo motsu*). Lapras does not like to fight, and rather enjoys ferrying people and other Pokemons on his back (Pokemon Wiki 2018). Despite his peaceful nature, Lapras is highly appreciated by Japanese Pokemon Go players (it is very strong and rare), to the point that 100,000 visitors bought train tickets to Miyagi Prefecture during the event, a surge quickly nicknamed by the press ‘Lapras Effect’ (*Rapurasu kōka*), that allegedly generated 2 billion Yen (approximately 13,5 million GBP) (ITmedia 2016). Japanese fansites and discussion groups ironically dubbed the event *Rapurasu Matsuri* (Lapras Festival).

In the days before the beginning of the Lapras event the tension in Ishinomaki was palpable, as many restaurant and food-stall owners braced themselves for the incoming invasion. The *kumiai*, with the assistance of the *shiyakusho*, went as far as setting up a small oyster festival in front of the station, to welcome the Pokemon hunters with the most representative *meibutsu* in town. Even I felt a sense of urgency, to which I responded by grabbing my camera and spending the day outside, taking pictures of small wandering groups, eyes fixed on their smartphone screens, nimble fingers moving at unseen speed to catch their prey.

In her seminal work on Pokémon, Allison (2006) examines in depth the phenomenon, highlighting interesting characteristics. She analyses the complex, multi-media exchange system of Pokémon, at the time comprised of multiple videogames, collectible cards and other gadgets, reading it as an attempt to bridge “traditional” animism (Pokémon as spirits, or *yōkai*) and a post-modern, urban urge to reconnect with a lost community of peers ‘in these postindustrial times of nomadicism, orphanism, and stress’ (Allison 2006: 231). Ten years after her publication, in 2016, Pokemon GO was released, and saluted as anything

from a salvific panacea for *hikikomori*-ism (Tateno et al. 2016), a community-building, physical activity enhancer, consumption booster jack of all trades (Zach & Tussydia 2017), to a criminogenic recipe for walkway injuries and road disasters (Barbieri et al. 2017, Tsukayama 2016). The main difference between *PokeGO* and its predecessors is the fact that, in order to catch the little digital monsters, the player is supposed to physically move in space. Thanks to GPS tracking the whole world was re-signified as a game environment. Thus, the Lapras event was purposefully set up in order to draw people to the Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures.

Despite the novelties of this further iteration, Allison's analysis is more relevant than ever. Even in an 'augmented' world, players are still walking in what she defined a 'gentle world' (Allison 2006: 222), a geography smoothed out of its challenging aspects, a game where nobody loses, and where nature is tamed into commodity and then into social interactions – captured Pokémon are nurtured, made to battle each other, and traded in a circuit of exchange with other players. What intimately differentiates the *PokeGO* from the games considered by Allison is its intrinsic pilgrimage-like nature, where the voyage to obtain new magical allies is carried out *literally* in geographical space. This distinction carries further, more specific distinctions, such as the age of active players – a young independent adult is more likely to be able to travel even to distant locations to indulge in his or her desire for new Pokémon – hence the internationally commented 'road deaths by Pokémon GO' (e.g. Faccio & McConnel 2018, Maruta 2017). Naturally, with such an engagement from gamers, who possibly for the first time became active subjects in open environments, and not static users in enclosed spaces, the touristic potential of *PokeGo* became quickly clear to both private and public institutions (Koike et al. 2016, Kurata 2012), so that the Lapras event came almost naturally into being.

As I wrote, in these days I was in Ishinomaki taking pictures and trying to chat with strangers – a practice not particularly popular in Japan, which did not lead to much in my case. Interestingly enough, though, I could notice that the further from the train station one went, the more scarce and dispersed the groups of visitors were, to the point that on reaching *Minamihama-chō*, the desolate southern beach district, there was not one soul in sight. The Lapras population in Ishinomaki was probabilistic, so maps depicting chances of Pokémon encounters in the city area show a distribution cloud (see figure 8), not unlike an electron orbital model, following the west bank of the Kitakami, elongating towards the train station. Only a few isolated, low-probability Lapras appeared on the coastal

districts – which is peculiar even for the internal logic of Pokémon *per se*, being it a marine creature – drawing *de facto* a ‘gentle’ urban cartography, informed by the intrinsic value of the monster itself. The overlap between the digital distribution cloud, calculated by the videogame’s servers, and the factual distribution of gamers, appeared to my limited perception, quite consistent. This, under many circumstances, became a problem.

It was the late afternoon at the end of the first weekend of *Rapurasu Matsuri* in Ishinomaki, as I stopped outside the *kōminkan* (community hall) to smoke a cigarette and exchange a few words with an acquaintance who worked there. We watched the empty streets for a while – the *Hiyorigaoka* district was without doubt outside the distribution cloud – then he said very slowly:

Most of us were looking forward to this event, because there were promises of bringing many visitors to Ishinomaki. It was a way to state things like ‘Ishinomaki can be a tourist town too’, or ‘This is a safe place to visit’. But by looking at this weekend, I am not so sure anymore. I mean, people came of course. They took a walk downtown in Chūō or Tachimachi [the train station district]. But that’s it, it is as sterile as that.

At that point I showed him some of the pictures I took right in front of the Seven-Eleven convenience store a few minutes away from the station. The parking lot in front of it was literally filled with people standing, much like a concert, or a show. But everyone was looking down at their phone, or hastily nibbling some *konbini meshi*, convenience store food. That proved his point:

See? That’s exactly what I meant. What is the point of having such masses of people coming here to have them eat at the *konbini*? That kind of tourism is not much use for us, is it?<sup>56</sup>

There was not much else to do except to agree, so we finished our cigarettes and parted ways. The following weekend would then be dramatically disrupted by a 7.4 magnitude earthquake which triggered a minor tsunami wave between 1 and 1.5 metres on the 22<sup>nd</sup> early morning. This appeared to many, as an ironic footnote to the main theme of the Lapras tourism campaign, which vigorously promoted the safeness (*anzen*) of visiting the

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<sup>56</sup> Other interlocutors showed less critical views: a *shiyakusho* employee observed that ‘If people discover Ishinomaki because Pokémon GO, then they could come back, and bring their families too’. Even in this optimistic view, it is implied the perceived sterility of a one-time crowd-gathering event such as a Pokémon Go hunt, mostly unrelated with local attractions and identities.

coast.<sup>57</sup> The event triggered a confused discussion on Reddit and Twitter among *PokeGO* players, focusing on whether it was better, to catch Lapras in the midst of a tsunami alert, or to save one's own life but give up the hunt.<sup>58</sup>

The wave *per se* was met by locals more with laughter than preoccupation, but for many visitors it acted as an urgent reminder of what had recently happened there, and how easily it could happen again. The figures for the 26-27 weekend consequently dropped.

The *PokeGO* event and its perceived effects – both on the more optimistic side, represented by the municipality and the East Japan Railway Company (JR East), and the less enthusiastic stance of my *kōminkan* acquaintance, shared by many others especially on the Oshika coast – provide us with an apt metaphor for the rest of this chapter, which will present and analyse the context in which outsiders visit Ishinomaki.

This movement of 'coming in' or 'bringing in' is not limited to tourists flows – these will nonetheless be considered by a comprehensive analysis of the RAF activities in the peninsula – but includes also former residents and residents' relatives, who collectively visit Ishinomaki on festive days, such as the national *Tanabata* Festival, or Ishinomaki's local *Kawabiraki*, and on mourning occasions, such as the annual anniversary of March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011. Allison's reference to maps and cartographies of the virtual *Pokemon* worlds, mutated by Foucauldian reflections ('As Foucault [...] defines it, discourse is the cartography by which the world is mapped by values, relationships, and power(s). *Pokemon*, too, I soon learned [...] was a discursively charged subject' – Allison 2006: 206), perfectly matches the theoretical themes presented in the introduction to this chapter. The 'modernist principles – those of new frontiers inviting exploration and conquest' (2006: 212) embedded into the game do follow the lines of an authoritarian discourse which orients the player's (subject's) actions. By the same token (and switching to de Certeau), the resistance offered by the visitors to the likewise *strategic* plan to flood Ishinomaki with potential tourists, the refusal to engage with the specific locality of Tōhoku, and the retreat towards the urban, sheltered space *par excellence* (the convenience store), carries in my opinion specific *tactical* traits, as the 'contact' promised by the *Lapras* event never took place. In my own day of exploration of the strange human tide that invaded Ishinomaki, I could clearly tell the visitors (urbanite young adults, eyes

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<sup>57</sup> Similar *anzen*-centred messages were conveyed through many other domestic and international tourism campaigns, as McMorran (2017) has rightly observed.

<sup>58</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/TheSilphRoad/comments/5e6qfs/tsunami\\_warning\\_for\\_japan\\_lapras\\_area/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheSilphRoad/comments/5e6qfs/tsunami_warning_for_japan_lapras_area/) (last access: 23 March 2018).

fixed on their smartphone screens) from the locals (usually the ones staring amazed at the former). Even in Chūō, which does not lack attractions with shops, restaurants, and food stalls, tourists were aimlessly roaming the streets, stalking their digital game.

To push the analogy further, the Foucauldian idea of cartography as knowledge and power,<sup>59</sup> posits a significant reflection over the construction of Ishinomaki's image for its visitors, as the functional mapping of the town shapes and frames the experiential performance of being in Ishinomaki. The Lapras distribution cloud is a tell-tale sign of such framing, as most of the digital sea-monster instances could be captured around shopping streets. A higher concentration of monsters can be traced in Tachimachi and Chūō, but their density quickly decreases to a Pokémon desert as one keeps walking southwards on Aitopia Dōri (Chūō main street), in the direction of the Hiyori hill, and the *Minamihama-Chō* – which incidentally resembles a human desert as well (see section 6 in this chapter). The power dynamics of cartography-making and place-making, and de Certeau's take on geographical and anthropological spaces, will be developed further in the next section, which present a textbook case of strategy and tactic, set in the Oshika Peninsula.

### 5.3 The Hama-Saisai

In the previous chapter we encountered the RAF, the motivations and contexts through which it was organized in Ishinomaki and the Oshika Peninsula, and its main narratives as expressed through the website and blog. In this section I instead explore the RAF as a cluster of events which took shape in Ishinomaki and the peninsula, with particular attention to the village of Ogi-no-Hama. It functions as a counterpoint to 'Liminal Encounters' (4.3), which considered the narrative tropes deployed by the Festival's organizers.

As rumors started to spread about the RAF plan of building two 'villages' – i.e. eateries with information points attached – in two villages of the Oshika Peninsula, Momo-no-Ura and Ogi-no-Hama, most of my interlocutors in the villages had lukewarm reactions: 'Lots of people are going to come? It's going to be hard to find a parking place' was the most common comment. As time passed, local companies, businessmen, and smaller NPOs

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<sup>59</sup> Or, conversely, of 'discourse as a cartography by which the world is mapped by values, relationships, and power(s)' (Foucault & Hurley 1978 quoted in Allison 2006: 206).

tried to contact the organizers, a small group of young men and women from the greater Tokyo area working in a shared office in Chūō. Quite soon it became clear that the managing of the RAF was a very strict top-down process with little wiggle room for local, smaller groups which would have been willing to cooperate.

After several failed attempts to contact and interview the RAF organizers, I was told that the management of the Ogi-no-Hama diner (that would, in time, be called *Hama Saisai*, figure 9) had been entrusted by RAF to the FJ personnel. The reasons were apparently unclear, but the FJ employee who took the job, a young local girl named Ishikawa, suspected one reason could be that, as a small company focused on social entrepreneurship and local development, FJ had a detailed knowledge of both local players and ground rules of the Ishinomaki coastal area – an assumption which highlights the fact that the RAF people in fact did not. As the village project proceeded, at first sluggishly and then feverishly in the last months, Ishikawa encountered several obstacles in finding people willing to work at the eatery that was already being built. RAF directives stated that staff had to be preferably older women. The parallel between the RAF desired staff and the *obachaan* image I describe in the last chapter is striking, and blatant. Unfortunately, the plan did not go smoothly:

It's hard to find people interested in the project. I was hoping, the fishermen's wives could be interested maybe, it could be a way to earn some money, plus some fishermen already agreed to supply oysters, so we have already a connection. Until now responses from Ogi-no-Hama have been quite cold. As for the reason I don't really know, they don't seem interested in the project, in the festival. I've heard they are having similar issues in other sites of the peninsula as well.

After a few weeks, Ishikawa finally found one *obaachan* willing to work at the diner and the project started to take shape, as the rest of the workforce was recruited from Ishinomaki, and Ishikawa herself ended up filling shift gaps. In the festival days she was extremely busy and could not find the time for a formal interview, nonetheless in a short break she revealed it was 'more or less ok working at the diner', as she had previous experience in taking orders and serving food, even though she did not think she'd have to go back (*modoru*) to that kind of job.

The wooden building was completed in under a month, ready for the opening of the festival. On a hot June day I decided to visit Oginohama and have a look at the menu: the dining area was crowded. *Hipsters* and foodies were of course there, but also a surprising



number of families with kids, and many dogs. I met with a friend from the village and sat at a table. We ordered the dish of the day: *Kaki Karē* (oyster curry). My companion, a local fisherman, raised an eyebrow: ‘Oysters? In this season?’. Oysters are harvested across winter and the beginning of spring. As good as the dish was, he couldn’t stop looking at it with a puzzled expression. ‘These must be from last year’s leftovers. And look at this crowd. Can’t even stop for a moment to chat with the waitresses’. It was true: the five persons staff of the Hama-Saisai was overwhelmed.

Daring the scorching sun we finished our hot meal and then wandered in the direction of the sea, searching for some shade under the pines nearby the docks. From there we could observe the scattered but constant flow of visitors coming to see the giant three metres tall deer sculpture by the famous artist Kōhei Nawa, exposed on a rocky shore near Ogi-no-Hama. The imposing, shiny white deer was dubbed by the locals the ‘deer-thing’ (*shika no yatsu*) and mocked in several photographic pranks, as people tried with different degrees of success to imitate the magnificent creature with makeshift costumes.

On the RAF website, the Hama-Saisai section promises an ‘everyday homecooking taste’ and a ‘diner with a feel of the beach activities and the bright and energetic grandmas of Ogi-no-Hama [...] connecting producers and consumers’.<sup>60</sup> Still, the bulk of beach activities in Ogi-no-Hama in the last few months has been the massive construction of a *bohatei*, a concrete sea-wall meant to stop incoming *tsunamis*. The half-finished grey wall blocks the sight of the sea – an inconvenience which distressed the fishermen as well, as Bird (2013) observed – and voids the website promise, while the actual food breaks one of the most deeply embedded habits of Japanese culture, that of seasonality (*shun*), which caused confusion and recoil in my fisherman companion. All around us, however, tourists enjoyed their oyster curries despite the hot midday sun.

As already seen in Chapter 4, the narrative that the RAF public relations section expresses is a powerful one: it taps into imageries of an idyllic marine countryside, sunburned energetic *obaachan*, fresh and bountiful catches, and does so with the full authority of a nation-wide NPO committed to sustainable living. The *furusato* utopia it invokes strongly resonates with the anti-capitalist, highly mobile, and nonconformist *ijūsha* youth described by Klien (2016, 2017a). Still, the engagement with locals (and some *ijūsha* as well) seemed to fail, despite the impressive number of visitors the festival

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.reborn-art-fes.jp/access/facility-oshika/#hamasaisai> last access 23/03/2018.

attracted (estimated in several thousands per week, over the 51 days of the event). When asked if they wanted to visit the art installations, or try the diners, most of my Ishinomaki contacts (fishermen, activists, former volunteers in their 30s) declined, describing it with epithets ranging from ‘uninteresting’ to ‘annoying’. Discussing their thoughts about the event, Ogi-no-Hama residents – very few in number, as the village was almost completely swept away, and only a handful of households choose to remain in the temporary houses – mostly recalled funny anecdotes related to parking space. One of the most popular is the one when a family of arts connoisseurs from Tōkyō managed to park their station wagon in the middle of the dock, disrupting the unloading activities and greatly embarrassing the forklift operators. ‘Plus, there is a dangerous turn over there, low visibility’ helpfully adds Goro, the oyster seafarmer we first met in Chapter 2 ‘and if you’re not from around here is easy to end up crashing against incoming cars. It happened once or twice, no big deal, nobody got hurt, but this is not exactly an easy place to drive cars if you are not a local’.

#### 5.4 *Tako-meshi* (or anti-oyster)

At the beginning of August I received an excited phone call from Moritomo (the photographer met in Chapter 3, section 2.c). He wanted me to come to Ogi-no-Hama the next weekend to have a look at the project he and his friend Goro put up for the Art Festival. It did not come completely as a surprise, as Goro himself had mentioned the thing a few weeks before, but apart from that the project seemed to not have advanced further. Instead, on another very hot August Saturday morning, I found myself looking at the shabby makeshift wooden hut the two had put together, facing the *Hama Saisai* right on the other side of the road. A bright red-and-blue big catch flag (*tairyō-bata*) was flapping in the sea breeze, and on the flag I could glimpse the *kanji* characters of Goro’s boat, the *Rihō-maru*.<sup>61</sup>

Beside the stall, handwritten on a small blackboard and surrounded by an exclamatory balloon, I could read the words ‘*Tako Meshi*’ (octopus rice). Inside, a small crowd comprised by Goro (2.3), Moritomo (3.3), Moritomo’s wife, and a third helper, were working as quickly as they could to keep up with the orders – a handful compared to the traffic at the *Hama Saisai*, but still quite challenging for the four improvised

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<sup>61</sup> Incidentally, the name of Goro’s ship, includes the *yutaka* ideogram I commented in 3.2.b and 4.3.

restauranteurs. I patiently waited for a couple of hours for the lunchtime rush hour to end, then approached the *Tako Meshi* stall to chat with my friends.

As soon as I materialized at the bar, I was loudly greeted by all present, in a mock ‘*irasshaimase*’ call.<sup>62</sup> In an overlapping of explanations, the four presented to me the day’s menu, which included *tako meshi*, *shako ebi* (Mantis Shrimp), boiled *hoya*, rice topped with small sardines (*niboshi*), and tap beer. The four seemed to enjoy immensely being there, serving simple food to the tourists, and loudly chatting with each other in the few moments of calm. After eating my octopus rice (it was very refreshing, despite the rice being hot) I hung out in Ogi-no-Hama until the end of the day, in order to listen to their impressions and afterthoughts. I would not be disappointed.

Goro finishes tidying up the stall, before taking out the small portable gas stove, the Asahi beer keg, the rice cooker and the supplies. ‘It was a thing we wanted to do’ he chuckles:

‘when we first heard they were putting up the deer-thing around here. It’s not like we wanted to compete with the diner or anything, we just wanted to give them [the visitors] something local, some fishermen’s food. *Tako meshi* is great, we have it every night when we fish for octopuses. The *ebi* (shrimps) are seasonal (*shun*) too. We are doing this only in the weekend, so it’s almost like a game. We make some money, we have fun, plus on the average, I get more money by cooking and selling my octopus and shrimps to tourists rather than the *ichiba* (fish market). And the costumers enjoy it (*manzoku suru*), so it’s even better.’

Goro opened his stall every weekend until the end of the festival, in September. After that, he started looking for funding in order to keep his project going, and organized an online crowd-funding campaign with the technical advice of his FJ contacts. Moritomo gradually quit, as the *tako meshi* sale became less of an *impromptu*, informal, and playful activity, and more of a structured enterprise. In private, the photographer admitted he did not care much for a more engaged commitment to the *tako meshi*, and was glad to let Goro go on with his side project.

While writing this thesis, I discovered that, after six months since the RAF, Goro has turned his *tako meshi* stall into a regular, weekend lunch event for the few residents of Ogi-no-Hama, with the patronage of the local (and only) shop, a container-turned-retailer

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<sup>62</sup> Vendors’ greeting in Japan, roughly meaning ‘Please come in’ (see Tsujimura 1991).

of instant ramen, ice cream, coffee and cigarettes – a project Moritomo was part of as well.

My fisherman friend's playful experiment and the FJ sponsored diner carry profound differences, despite being only a few metres apart in the tiny village of Ogi-no-Hama. Confronting the Hama-Saisai and Goro's stall thus becomes central in understanding how food, from different perspectives, came to signify locality in the Oshika Peninsula during the busy days of the RAF.

Two of the most prominent actors operating within Ishinomaki's oyster narrative dynamics appear clearly defined as the two ends of a spectrum described in de Certeau's classic *The practice of everyday life* (1984). The French scholar defined his system as divided into producers and consumers. What is produced and consumed, however, are not goods, but power structures. Those in control of power structures (such as communication, urban planning, legislation, etc.) produce a control strategy over the consumers of the same structures (see also Everett 2012), i.e. the people who make use of communication means, city streets, State laws, etc. When the structures provided do not meet their users' needs, consumers perform 'productive consumption', partially disengaging themselves from strategic control without leaving the structure they operate within. Goro's makeshift and extemporaneous *tako meshi* stall is a good example of this modality of action, in contrast with the RAF administration, which, following a detailed plan of action (as exposed by the FJ employee mentioned in the previous section), came to exist as an instance of hetero-directed local food narrative in the form of the Hama-Saisai diner (within the wider structure of the festival itself): the grandmas, the oysters, and the narrative analysed in 4.3 and 4.4, were inscribed onto the reality of Ogi-no-Hama by individuals who completely ignored its specificities and peculiarities. Conversely, the fisherman Goro operated within the structure of the festival, poaching revenue from the wandering visitors, while freeing himself of a counterproductive (from a local's point of view) offer of out of season oysters, and producing an original self-narrative as the easy-going, young, active fisherman he struggled to become in a time of hardship for his own category. As a result, Goro produces a counter-stance against a superimposed, hetero-directed narrative closely tied to the *furusato* tropes (beautiful natural landscapes; healthy and busy elderly, friendly grandmas; delicious local food), by introducing his 'native' point of view, which relies on a slightly different set of values (entrepreneurship, *makezugirai*, DIY).

From the Goro-RAF spatial quasi-conflict (and yet both parties vehemently denied there has been any, at any time), besides strategy and tactic, another two Certeauian concepts emerge, mutated from Merleau-Ponty philosophy of perception: the couple of geographical and anthropological space (Merleau-Ponty 1962; de Certeau 1984: 93; Buchanan 1996: 120). The two spatially define Certeau's two main modes of production (strategies and tactics, respectively). The first place (*lieu*), a panoptical configuration of measurable distances and 'proper' practices – in this case, the Hama-Saisai diner and the wider cartography of Oshika it produced as a place of rest and nourishment for visitors – is put into being by superimposing deterritorialized strategies (and deeply informed by *furusato* ideology, as see in Chapter 4). Conversely, the second, anthropological space (*espace*) of the *tako meshi* is defined precisely by the counter-maneuvers which emerge from a localized, ground-level, point of view, the one of the pedestrian. The *tako meshi* stall is spatially defined by the flow of pedestrians directed towards the Hama-Saisai, built in order to attract the peripheral visitors who wander outside the overcrowded area of the diner and the info-point. Let us consider a short passage from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (93):

Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. Within this ensemble, [...] practices [...] are foreign to the 'geometrical' or 'geographical' space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of operations [...] to 'another spatiality'.

The protagonist of the Certeauian alternative spatiality is the pedestrian, walking a city, a "spatial order" organized as an "ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further)" (97). Limited by positive and negative bonds ("possibilities" and "interdictions"), the pedestrian enacts such limitations by abiding to them. At the same time, though, the walker partially interdicts his possibilities (e.g., by not taking a path considered accessible or even mandatory) and opens up possibilities beyond interdictions ("creating shortcuts and detours", 98). The pedestrian thus "creates a discreteness, whether by making choices among the signifiers of the spatial 'language' or by displacing them through the use he makes of them" (98-99).

Our pedestrian, Goro, as an 'unrecognized producer' (xviii) of locality, counter-produces a 'poaching space' where he negates the obliviousness of the RAF cartography, excluded

from the official maps and guides, perhaps over-looked by most of the visitors, and yet firmly embedded in his own transversal, tactical vision. If the Hama-Saisai geographical place enables the ‘forgetting principle of the cartography’ (Fitzpatrick & Reynolds 2009: 137) already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the *tako meshi* operates without doubt an anamnnesis (138), a remembrance of local seasonality, and actual spatial practices (the impromptu assemblage of a transient *yatai* food stall). The stall resignifies a peripheral space (the coastal side of Ogi-no-Hama, a grey and dull space covered in half-finished seawalls, construction machines, and “no entry” signs) into an alternative place of leisure, mirroring (quite literally, with the main street as the axis of symmetry) the Hama-Saisai.

### **5.5 *Genki Ichiba* – remapping supermarkets in Ishinomaki downtown**

During an interview with a *shiyakusho* employee in Ishinomaki, I asked my interlocutor whether he could introduce me to the managers of the *ichiba*, the fish market located in the south-eastern quarters of the city. What happened, in fact, was a linguistic misunderstanding which incidentally led me to discover an interesting new project on the bank of the Kitakami river, the *Genki Ichiba* (lit. ‘Healthy/Lively Market’). Instead of directing me to the biggest fishery wholesaler of the region, the Ishinomaki fish market (*ichiba*), unbeknown to me I had a meeting set up with Mr. Kobayashi, one of the managers of a soon-to-be newly built supermarket in Chūō, Ishinomaki downtown.

Despite discovering the nature of the misunderstanding fairly soon, I decided to carry out the interview nonetheless, as the construction of the new store was already under way, and appeared to bring significant changes in the landscape of Chūō’s riverside. Before the building site became busy with caterpillars and construction crews, around the end of 2016, I found the Kitakami banks not much changed since the last time I was in Ishinomaki, in 2012. The tsunami waves travelled through the riverbed, flooding the surrounding areas, so that the Kitakami tide surge brought destruction far deeper inland than the tsunami itself (Kayane et al., 2011). For this reason, around the sides of the river, one could observe a level of structural damage comparable to areas much closer to the sea. The river banks in Chūō were no exception, and all the torn metal rods, houses’ basements and desolated land plots made a stark contrast to the lively, busy downtown streets.

Upon initiating conversation about the grim view of the Kitakami with my acquaintances and interlocutors, I soon found myself caught between two common, and opposite remarks. The first was one of memorialization: many said some particularly significant remains should be left where they were, or musealized, in order to remember the effects of the disaster. Others, possibly the majority, had instead a more radical approach, and claimed that every piece of leftover debris, damaged building, and memory of the traumatic event, ought to be completely removed. In other coastal cities, such as Minamisanriku or Kesennuma, this polarity caused animated public debates *apropos* half-destroyed buildings and landed trawlers carried by the waves in the middle of the streets (see McNeill 2013, Andō 2013, Kenji 2016). In Ishinomaki similar debates took place over the fate of the Okawa Elementary School (Lloyd-Parry 2017), or the memorial park in Minamihama-chō (Ishinomaki Kahoku 2017, Ishinomaki Hibi Shinbun 2017a). Despite open discussion often being held regarding buildings or sites with a specific significance, the Kitakami riverbank area of Chūō was quietly sold to the Genki Ishinomaki Co. Ltd., a company ‘funded by local fishery processing factories and restaurants’ (Kahoku Shinbun 2017), which in less than three months built a two-storey wooden structure of vaguely scandinavian inspiration, to become a supermarket – with a food court on the first floor.

The opening of the Genki Ichiba in June was preceded in May by the definitive closure of another supermarket, the Esta. Located in the *shiyakusho* building in front of the station, Esta was a landmark for many local residents, especially the elderly, and the only supermarket in the Ishinomaki downtown area. Mr. Wagai, president of the company owning the Esta, declared to a local newspaper he intended to close the shop due to a severe decrease in sales after the disaster (Ishinomaki Hibi Shinun 2017b), exacerbated by the opening of a large shopping mall (Aeon), in the suburban area of Ebita. Wagai commented that, although he was conscious of the lack of supermarkets in Ishinomaki downtown, he could not keep the Esta open on a negative balance.<sup>63</sup>

As I used to shop at the Esta myself, and as it happens in such cases became acquainted with the cashiers, upon casually asking one of them whether she was worried about the closure, I was reassured she was already been hired by the ‘new place’ (the Genki Ichiba), and indeed I would keep meeting her there as I switched as well.

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Akaji no mama eigyō o tsuzukeru koto de meiwaku wo kakerarenai. Kinrin ni, sūpā ga nakunaru no wa mōshiwakenai ga, mikiri wo tsuketai’ (I cannot bear the inconvenience of operating in deficit. The lack of supermarkets in the neighbourhood is regrettable, but I intend to quit) (Ishinomaki Hibi Shinbun 2017b).



Esta closed due to the disaster, facing the high prices of recovery – its refrigerators and stored goods were all damaged by the flood – and a lack of customers. It is interesting to compare Wagai's stance with Kobayashi's initial thoughts on the position the Genki Ichiba was going to assume in the local retail landscape:

‘The Genki Ichiba will open up new possibilities for Ishinomaki after the disaster. [...] The river of this city, the Kitakami, was a source of wealth in the past, and Ishinomaki flourished from the banks of the river. [...] On the other hand, Ishinomaki's industries are fishery and agriculture. Both received a severe blow by the disaster, so our current mission is to regenerate and promote our production by selling it. That is the meaning of ‘genki’: to energize the city and make it healthy once again’

Kobayashi is a local entrepreneur, and despite the formal atmosphere of our meeting, a certain commitment transpires from his words. While he insisted on the symbolic aspect of building the store by the river,<sup>64</sup> he also acknowledged what he called a *dōnatsu genshō* (doughnut phenomenon), a process by which business, shops, and most urban activities tend to concentrate in the rings of well developed infrastructure surrounding a city, leaving the centre obsolete and emptied (see Taniguchi et al. 1983, Okabe & Masuda 1984, Smyth 1996), one of the main issues which led to the *mikiri* (closure) of Esta.

During our interview it became more and more evident that, even acknowledging the role of local customers and the critical necessity of a supermarket reachable easily by those who do not own or cannot drive a car – i.e. the majority of elderly residents – Kobayashi had high hopes for tourism.

‘Naturally we thought about products popular with visitors as well. Fishery processed goods, for example, or local specialities from Sanriku, in the form of omiyage. As for the fresh food, visitors can try them at the food court on the first floor. The idea is that customers can shop below and then order and eat at the restaurant. We will definitely put special seafood *donburi* sets in the menus, but those are still in preparation now.’

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Ishinomaki wa yappari kawa ni yotte hatten wo shite kita machi desunode, mōichido *sono genten ni modotte, sono furukiyoki jidai no Ishinomaki sore wo mōichido tsukutte ikou*’ (After all, since Ishinomaki originally developed by the river, we intend to take it *back to its origins, once again back to those good old days*) (Italics mine). Kobayashi locates by the riverside area the golden years of his hometown – and rightly so, since historically Ishinomaki developed as a rice-shipping harbour, collecting by the Kitakami river goods from the vast plains of Sendai, and sending them southwards, to Tōkyō (see Watanabe & Kodama 1999). As I visited the food court on the first floor, I could not help but recalling Kobayashi's words as I noticed a dining area facing the wide eastern windows, with a pleasant sight of the placid Kitakami flowing around the minute Nakaze islet.

Interestingly, the structure envisioned by the entrepreneur, closely resembles the two-storey arrangement of the *Koko Miyagi* antenna shop in Tōkyō presented in Chapter 6, section 3. In this sense, Kobayashi appeared to be concerned about access possibilities to his store, and explained to me his strategy.

‘We contacted a bus company that organizes visits to Miyagi. [...] Now, if you compare our facility to Matsushima, or Onagawa, you see two different models. They have many shops distributed among an area. In order to have a bus stopping in your area, the company must be paid, so either each single store pays a fee, or the payment is covered by the local municipality. For example, in Matsushima they follow the first model. [...] In the case of Genki Ichiba, this is way easier, as we provide both easy access for buses [a massive, multi-storey parking space was already under construction on the other side of the road] and as administrators, we do not have to distribute the fee among many stores. The same logic applies to local buses, to facilitate access for locals.’

Building on his previous experience in the realization of shopping areas in the nearby municipality of Onagawa, Kobayashi has a lucid vision of what kind of customers to expect in his supermarket. Only a handful of locals would come and shop there regularly, while during tourist season, a significant share of profits would come from visitors. Apart from the scarcity of locals downtown, Kobayashi also expected adverse reactions from the small-scale retailers in Chūō: in the immediate vicinity of the Ichiba there are at least two grocery stores, two fishmongers, three butcher shops, and a couple of *tōfu* and *miso* shops.

Not long after our conversation, the Ichiba held its inauguration ceremony in June, gathering an impressive crowd of locals and casual visitors as well. I could not attend due to previous engagements in Ogi-no-Hama (I was following the developments of the RAF), but shortly after I collected some impressions from friends and acquaintances who did. At the time it appeared that, between locals and *ijūsha*, the latter did not care much for the new *sūpā*: most of them owned cars, had a high degree of mobility, and were not interested in the joys of grocery shopping nearby their homes – moreover, despite most of them working in Chūō, only a fraction of them lived downtown, while most commuted from Watanoha. As for my millennial *Ishinomakikko* friends, I received lukewarm reactions:

‘I don’t care much about it, normally I shop at the York-Benimaru down the Onagawa *Kaidō* [Onagawa so-called Highway, a regular two-lanes road that stretches from

Ishinomaki to Onagawa cutting through the Mangoku Bay coastline], but my mom was very excited about it. Despite that, after we went, she was not really happy with the prices of grocery and fresh fish, they were a bit too expensive for her.’

Likewise, a young mother of two constantly searching for convenient yet healthy food for her kids observed:

‘It is convenient alright, just a few minutes walk from home, but the prices are no good. It’s a tourist place, I think. I would only shop there if it’s an emergency or if my husband took the car.’

A third would be even more trenchant:

‘It’s not a good place to shop for people in Chūō. It’s not a regular *sūpā*, it’s more like the Kesenuma fish market, tourist stuff. Esta was a normal place where you could buy groceries, frozen goods, spare lightbulbs... The only good thing about this is the restaurant, and only when they do discounted menus.’

Kobayashi was very attentive towards the community impact, accessibility, and pricing (he even organized neighbourhood meetings to collect suggestions, shortly before the opening ceremony), but despite that the *Genki Ichiba* was categorized as a ‘tourist place’ anyway. I explored the supermarket a few days after the opening ceremony, and was able to confirm most of what Kobayashi anticipated: it featured organic vegetables from local producers – which came at a higher price than regular *sūpā* vegetables, ranging from 50% to 100%, thus the reluctance to shop there regularly from many of my contacts – fresh seafood and fish sourced from the Ishinomaki *kumiai* and a few selected companies which engage in direct sales.

Kobayashi made a point that the *Genki Ichiba* would source its fishery and agricultural products from Sanriku producers which received support from disaster reconstruction funds. This information was displayed nearby the counters, in order to tap into the plusvalue provided by recovery national and prefectural campaigns – a detail which in my opinion leads consistently towards a tourist-oriented marketing strategy, as well as the pesticide-free labels found on most agricultural products sold at the *Ichiba*. Processed seafood and fishery products, as well as common *omiyage*<sup>65</sup> goods – which are displayed

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<sup>65</sup> Souvenirs (*omiyage*) often brought back from leisure or work travels, and gifted to friends and family members. They normally are crackers or cookies, easy to transport, durable, and marked with specific icons from the place they come from (e.g. typical Nara *omiyage* will portray deer, Nara’s mascot, *omiyage* from Kumamoto will be orange-flavoured, etc). Typical *omiyage* from Ishinomaki can be oyster, *hoya*, or Ishinomaki Yakisoba (see the Introduction) flavoured.

nearby the entrance – also point in the same direction, as locals tended to concentrate on fresh goods (which the management acknowledged as well).

## **5.6 3/11 Anniversary celebration: the mourning and the dancing (Ishinomaki & Onagawa)**

### *5.6.a Onagawa: run to the hills*

During our interview, Kobayashi mentioned several times Onagawa, the small municipality neighbouring Ishinomaki's northern borders (seen in 2.8), and Seapal Pier (*Shīparu Pīa*). He participated in its design and realization with a company of entrepreneurs in collaboration with the municipality. As I asked him to compare the two projects, he was reluctant for the following reasons:

‘Onagawa and Ishinomaki are two very different situations, and quite difficult to compare. [...] Onagawa is a much smaller municipality [with its roughly 6,500 residents, it amounts to a mere tenth of Ishinomaki's population], and at the same time a wealthier one. Regrettably it was very heavily damaged by the disaster, as almost all of its residential and commercial areas were flooded. [...] From that condition, we were able to perform an almost complete reconstruction and restructuring of the city centre, building the Seapal Pier as the main commercial and touristic hub, separated from the new residential area located in the northern hills, to where most of the residents evacuated during the tsunami. The Pier is very well connected to the train station [it is right in front of it] and it features a design that is consistent with its surroundings. We designed it to be a place where people could do sightseeing, enjoy the local restaurants and souvenir shops, while easily arriving and departing. [...] The same cannot be said of Ishinomaki, or Kesennuma for example. We call realities like Onagawa, or the Genki Ichiba, which was designed following the same principles, ‘boxed’ (*hako-mono*), while regular towns present ‘dotted’ (*dotto*) spaces. [...] Tourism is a vital resource right now, and we wanted to tap fully into it. Reconstruction and revitalization are vastly based on the service sector, which in turn revitalises local production as well. It is a virtuous circle (*kō-junkan*), so to say’

The ‘boxed’ reality of the newly built commercial and touristic area of Onagawa is a quality well understood by its residents. Many of the owners of the Seapal Pier shops and restaurants agree that it is an advantageous topography they live and work in, but at the same time cracks appear when asking a few more questions. A young bar owner from

Morioka commented on the negative effects of the separation between living and working areas in town:

‘Working in Onagawa is very convenient: the municipality allocates funding to encourage new entrepreneurs to settle here. There is a sort of harmonious unity between the *shiyakusho* policies and the way this area have been rebuilt. But then, Onagawa is not very friendly for its residents. People now live in the hills, where there are no shops whatsoever. It sounds easy to, say, take a car and shop in Watanoha, or come down to the *konbini* by the road, but if you’re elderly and do not own a car, the risk is to live secluded or worse. Most of my customers come for a drink and stay until eleven, or midnight, then take their cars and go back home, but you don’t see old people around here. Still, we have to work with what we have’

Onagawa’s new touristic profile emerges especially during one very significant festival, the *Fukkō* (reconstruction)<sup>66</sup> *Matsuri*. The *Fukkō* takes place in March, during the weekend closest to the disaster anniversary: e.g. in 2017, the 11<sup>th</sup> was a Saturday, so not to interfere with the private mourning and graveyard visits, the festival was scheduled for the 18-19 weekend. The *matsuri* followed a program of live music, food stalls (*yatai*), and special menus from the Seapal Pier restaurants and bars. The main event was the *Fukkō* run, a short uphill race starting from the side of the train station, and ending on the top of the nearby *Chōritsu* hill (figure 10). The most common explanation for the meaning of the event was that it meant to represent and remember the evacuation procedures during the disaster, as all the residents from the lower areas flocked to higher ground.

Local celebrities, high school students, athletes, artists, and pranksters with funny costumes all ran together, cheered by the crowd gathered on the sides of the road. The 2017 winner, a young promising highschool sprinter, was celebrated afterwards with stadium choirs. The outstanding weather of that Saturday brought out several hundreds people who, after either partaking in or cheering at the race, poured into the Seapal Pier for drinks and *matsuri* ‘soul food’ – yakisoba, french fries, skewed scallops in BBQ sauce, and the inevitable *hoya*, sold in many different varieties.

As the festive weekend passed by merrily, I wondered about the uphill race and its deep implication in the mapping of Onagawa, where the dimensions of work, living, and

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<sup>66</sup> Drawing on the many omophonies of Japanese, here *fukkō* is written with the ideograms of ‘once again’ (*mata*) and ‘happyness’ (*shiwase*), where in the usual form the second ideogram would be ‘revival’ (*okosu*). The intended meaning of the substitution points towards a ‘once again happy’ rather than ‘once again revive/rebuild’, posing a nuance towards social and communal recovery (the *sofuto* aspect seen in 2.8).

visiting appeared to be so detached from each other. The escape from the waves on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 solidified, in time, in a displacement from the coastal former residential area, and a separation between the spaces of living – a newly built vast complex of apartments (relocation houses) on the *Chōritsu* hill, beside a smaller group of temporary shelters still in part occupied by less wealthy residents – and the ‘boxed’ commercial and touristic area. The invented spaciality (*topo-poiesis*) of the *matsuri* run embodied that movement, and the *yatai* spaces of festivity and merry celebration, located in a parking lot nearby the Seapal Pier, seemed to reinforce the topography of a town where the everyday routine and the exception found two distinct spaces. The seaside, one-time place of death and destruction, turned into a place of lively celebration, economic well-being, and municipal pride, while in the “safety” of the hills now loomed the threat of isolation, abandonment, and lonely death (*kodokushi*), which my barmaid friend could bear herself only to vaguely address. My friend’s words echoed, somewhat regretfully, Kobayashi’s *kō-junkan*, a circle that appeared to be virtuous and vicious at the same time.

#### 5.6.b Ishinomaki: ‘the Zone’

Back to Ishinomaki: just a week before Onagawa’s *matsuri*, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2017, at 14:46 the *bōsai* (disaster prevention) signal went on, re-enacting the tragedy of six years before. It was a stark contrast with the merry celebration of the neighbours, with empty streets, a gloomy black cloud blocking out the sun’s warmth, and the far away chimes of the *Minatohama* graveyard bells. I walked towards the desolated plain, together with many others: the disaster anniversary was a moment to visit one’s relatives graves, bring gifts to the dead, and pray. The otherwise spectral southern beach area was filled with parked cars, families, even TV crews from NHK and prefectural broadcasters, but there was no joy, nor the lightheartedness that usually accompanies big gatherings in Japan.

I reached a small grocery shop called *Maneki-shoppu*, owned by a couple of elderly locals with whom I enjoyed a cup of tea and a chat from time to time. In the back of their shop, they were setting up many small candles to be lit after the sunset. A reporter and her camera operator were looking at the proceedings, maybe wondering if it was worth filming candles in the middle of the day. All around small groups of people walked down the flat road with hardly any buildings at its sides, that let the eye wander up to the sharp silhouette of the pulp factory, several hundred metres to the west.

Compared to the neighbouring Onagawa, Ishinomaki disaster anniversary mapping is a very different matter. Former residents, coming from Sendai or Tōkyō to honour the dead here enter an interdiction zone, a place utterly depopulated during the day – despite the presence of two towering apartment complexes, destined to house all the former residents of the area. In the flood area, the vast coastal plain at sea level where no buildings are permitted, only reeds and weeds prosper, yet on this day many empty lots are used as parking spaces for the numerous visitors. There are no *matsuri* nor festive uphill races in Ishinomaki downtown today, and in this regard Onagawa could be seen as acting as a leisure place not only for tourists from far away, but even for Ishinomaki residents. The amusing, bright-coloured Seapal Pier offers a relief from the grim Minamihama, only a twenty-minutes train ride away.

As the sun sets, most visitors have paid their respects to their relatives, and return to their homes or hotels. Only a handful of elderly remain, most of them living in the apartment complexes in front of the *Maneki Shoppu*. I helped the couple lighting the many candles, and chatted with the passersby. Nobody really wanted to talk about the disaster, and I did not ask: the tired hand gestures, the slow, reluctant pace of people on the sidewalk, and the worn out looks were eloquent enough for me. As I bent to the ground lighting candles – a daunting task for the two shop owners – the elderly couple casually brought up how lonely were the lives of people in Minamihama. ‘The only thing many have left’ the wife said, moved by her own words ‘is to come here and have tea. That is why we keep this shop open, and we would keep it even if nobody bought anything’.

What a strange place, I wondered, is one where people live together in huge apartment buildings, and yet are lonely, where a shop stays open just to offer free teas – and very good ones – and casual chats. And how it changed during that day – so many people came, so many cars were parked all around, and flowers, and TV cameras – and how it stayed the same, as every visitor probably felt as lonely and uncomfortable as the people who live there every day. The inhabitable area in Minamihama borders the interdiction zone (where nothing can be built), and it appears to have inherited something from it, an existence parallel to the lively Chūō, separated only by the *Hiyori* hill. I could easily climb the stone stairs by the tennis court behind the *Maneki Shoppu*, get to the *jinja* on the top of Hiyori-yama, and walk down the slope. But to the elderly who lived there without a car, Chūō could as well be a distant planet.



The cemetery and the festival are two of the spaces Foucault included in his 1967 lecture *Des Espaces Autres* ('Of Other Spaces', 1986). Drawing from Bachelard's phenomenology, Foucault contends that 'we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but [...] in a space *thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well*' (23, my italic). Foucault's specific interest rested in a special set of places he calls *heterotopias*, which 'have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to *suspect, neutralize, or invert* the set of relations that they happen to *designate mirror, or reflect*' (24, italic mine). In describing these special fragments of space and the fragments of time (*heterochronies*) coupled with them, Foucault puts together the cemetery and the festival as opposite in their temporal development – the eternity for the former, an ephemeral glimpse for the latter.

In the economy of my ethnography, I contend such principles can be easily overturned, as the Minamihama places of mourning assume their specific significance once per year (of course they do not lose it the other 364 days, but it is definitely muffled), and the festive run to the hills in Onagawa mimics a movement ephemeral in itself, but certainly solid and significant enough to transcend the short window of reproduction dedicated to it. But both *heterotopias* certainly follow a pattern of inversion in regard to the places around them. The cemetery borders the de-anthropized interdiction zone, an actively forgotten geography of *Verdrängung*,<sup>67</sup> a place so efficiently removed from the emotional mapping of Ishinomaki that living in it has become an actual burden (due to the lack of services), and opening a shop has become a counter-economic act. Once the day of remembrance begins, it emerges from the year-round forgetfulness to become a central stage of mourning and memory. Similarly, the 'boxed' Onagawa downtown, usually severed from its residential quarters, becomes whole again in the short and wheezy space of the race, that connects its two inner worlds, mimicking a movement that reminds the dramatic moments of the evacuation, but also, and more significantly, restitches two separated spaces.

## 5.7 Conclusion: Crises and Places

In this chapter I presented very heterogeneous cases. My intention was to highlight the processes of place-making which took place when specific areas were visited at specific

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<sup>67</sup> Freudian repression, cf. the case of the *Kyōtoku-maru* in the concluding section.

times. The Pokemon GO *Rapurasu* hunt, the disaster anniversary ceremonies, the opening of the *Genki Ichiba*, and the many effects of the RAF on the local topographies of leisure and work: these examples all intersect, in more or less significant ways, with flows of visitors. The purpose of remapping the Sanriku coast is not limited to a mere response to tourism, dark or otherwise coloured (Ide 2014), but answers to the wider process I have addressed throughout this thesis, one of change and transformation both prompted and made possible by the 2011 tsunami.

Despite being a later scholar, and focused on many aspects of postmodernity that the French philosopher had been unable to properly analyse, de Certeau would have probably saluted Appadurai as a fellow pluralist, as much as he did (with a certain discontinuity) with Foucault. In particular, in Appadurai's reflections on the production of locality (1995), and the conflicts it encounters against 'context-producing drives of more complex hierarchical organizations, especially those of the modern nation-state' (222), resonate with de Certeau's notions of geographical-vs-anthropological spaces seen in the previous pages of this chapter. And even if Appadurai posits such disparities in a post-modern world dominated by local-global dynamics, his vision is not radically different from de Certeau's thoughts in 'A Walk in the City'.

Appadurai's production of locality, i.e. local subjectivity, develops into the formation of a cultural atom, the neighbourhood, 'the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized. Neighbourhoods [...] are situated communities characterized by [...] their potential for social reproduction' (204). In his thought, locality as a bonding *corpus* of practices, is constantly under siege not just by our recent delocalizing modernity, but by reality itself, which fiercely resists the 'default designs of human agency'.<sup>68</sup> Situating the self (social and individual) and demarcating its boundaries stands at the core of locality production technologies, and notably it does not only involve space, but also time: practices of 'marking of seasonal change' (206) have a fundamental role, and the case of Goro and the RAF proves this point well enough.

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<sup>68</sup> In Appadurai's concept of constant erosion of meaning, I see a stark similarity with De Martino's idea of crisis of presence (*crisi della presenza*), a risk of disorientation (decoupling of the phenomenological relation between the self and the world) which humanity fights off constantly. Professor Numazaki's 'loss of normalcy' perfectly fits this idea, as I contend in the concluding section. Furthermore, Foucault seems to acknowledge such destructive behaviour in his lines 'The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, *the space that claws and gnaws at us*, is [...] heterogeneous' (1986: 23).

Place-making, map-making, authority and countermeasures: where to begin? The Italian historian and geographer Franco Farinelli (2009: 15; translation mine) observes:

‘If territory is a symbol of power, where does the former come from, by who or what is it constituted? To understand, consider the ambiguous figure of the scarecrow. Not by chance, during the mid-to-late Roman Republic, it was called ‘*territorium*’ [...]: stuck into a field, it represented the property right insisting onto it, but also translated this right in natural terms, scaring off birds. Right became thus an autonomous and immediate quality of the field. Authority, customary *par excellence* [...] was defended as a right implicit into the earth itself: *iuris-dictio* (jurisdiction) stands for the enunciation (*dico*) of a right (*ius*) that already exists’

Defining in a top-down manner a place and its characteristics – let us think of the *Genki Ichiba*, and how it became the only supermarket in the central districts of Ishinomaki – sets the affordances and orientations of those who move and act within such place – i.e. produces a strategic discourse based on authority and means. Fairly straightforward examples are the *Rapurasu* distribution cloud, or the Hama-Saisai. Such de-territorialized instances, as Appadurai (1995: 201) observes, are characterized by a disjuncture between territory and subjectivity. It is precisely such disjunction which alienates locals (and new locals) engaged in alternative forms of bottom-up production of locality. Working mothers, or younger Ishinomaki residents, reacted negatively to the *Genki Ichiba* as a supermarket, while its ‘boxed’ accessibility, stylistic uniqueness, and good selection of *omiyage* (travel gifts) and processed products, were designed to appeal to visitors. The Seapal Pier (not by chance realized by Mr. Kobayashi) offers a similar disjunction, heightened by the total separation of spaces of Onagawa.

*Fukkō Matsuri* racers, and *tako-meshi* eaters, or even the two elderly owners of the *Maneki Shoppu*, instead, represent a class of poachers who constantly maneuver around the counter-productions of ‘more complex hierarchical organizations’ (Appadurai 1995: 221), switching between structural consumption and creative production, guided not only by the economic principle, but also by the search for a more ethically sound, locally oriented, or even just a more pleasurable experience. In the case of Pokémon hunters, the structure within which they operate does not allow any deviation or creativity in its signification, as the possibility of catching a Lapras quickly decrease to zero outside specific areas.

In 2015, shortly after I started the Ph.D. program, I presented a paper at the Italian *Associazione Nazionale Universitaria degli Antropologi* (National Academic Anthropologists Association, ANUAC). At the time it was, for me, a way to organize what I gathered during my short three months stay in Ishinomaki in 2012, and set a line of enquiry. The paper's title was 'Archipelagoes of feeling: towards a post-disaster urban study of Tōhoku'. At the time I was already fascinated by Minamihama, even though when I saw it for the last time before returning in 2016, it was very different: heaps of trash and debris from the flooded houses were still being collected, and right in front of the Hiyori hill, an empty lot collected many crashed and destroyed cars, like empty husks left as bitter reminders. The ocean wind gusts, without buildings to break them, were so strong that one day I was almost thrown in a deep ditch full of metal scraps. Not a soul could be seen there at day or night.

My take on Minamihama, at the time, was informed by the work of the Italian ethnographer Ernesto de Martino on 'cultural apocalypses' (de Martino 1977), where he analysed how sudden environmental transformations affected the psychic balance of individuals, generously drawing from Heidegger and Husserl's phenomenology. In his famous (in Italy) case study of the 'farmer from Bern' (*il contadino bernese*, 194), de Martino discusses the madness of a young farmer who, after waking and noticing that the great oak in front of his house was missing, lost his mind as well. De Martino argues that the farmer's world became flattened by the absence of landmarks, and time as well as space (in the Certeau-ian sense) lost their capacity to receive human individual agency – incidentally, 'madness as absence of work [*oeuvre*]' is a concept Foucault explored as well (1995). In my speech, I juxtaposed the case of the farmer from Bern with the words of the Tōhoku University Anthropology Professor Numazaki Ichiro (2012: 31-32):

'For many of us, time stopped on March 11. March never ended, and April never came. Our graduation ceremony was cancelled and we could not say goodbye to graduating seniors. The enrollment ceremony for freshmen was postponed and then cancelled. Classes finally started after the so-called "Golden Week" holidays in early May and freshmen did come in, but we could not hold welcoming events as usual. Everything was irregular and different.

[...] Normalcy has both temporal and spatial dimensions. I "normally" buy my groceries at a certain time of the day at a certain place in the town. Disaster disrupts this temporal and spatial normalcy. And that is painful. Why am I buying a cabbage at this hour of the day at this location of the town?'

Numazaki's 'normalcy' hovers close, in phenomenological terms, to de Martino's *presenza* (presence), i.e. an ethnographically informed version of Heidegger's *Dasein*: the Italian ethnographer himself, in his later works, defines his *presenza* in Heideggerian words (see de Martino 2005: 94). De Martino elaborated the concept of presence in his studies of the religious experience, first in the theoretical-methodological volume *Il Mondo Magico* (1948), then in the ethnographic study about Southern Italy low magic *Magic: A Theory from the South* (1959). It can be defined as 'being present to oneself in a given situation, being-in-the-world as exclusively human existential condition' (Variano 2017: 177), or 'to design oneself, to possess oneself, to gather oneself, to single out oneself' (De Martino 2005: 7): possessing *presenza*, in De Martino's ethnography and philosophy, is thus the precondition to the mastering of time and space through agency, and ultimately to existing in the world as significant act. As becomes clear reading De Martino's bibliography (and in particular in his last and posthumous *La Fine del Mondo – The End of the World*, 1977), the *presenza* is defined in order to analyse the possibility of its demise: the crisis of presence (see Conclusion, section 2), which, as I exposed in 2015, is perfectly exemplified by the reaction of Professor Numazaki to the 2011 disaster.

Numazaki's sense of loss and disorientation is overtly personal, before professional, and informs his conclusion, professional before personal, *apropos* the tragic necessity of an anthropology able to transcend 3/11 as an isolated, 'native' (36) disaster. The Sendai Professor concludes advocating a social science which reconnects the specificities of Sanriku to the economic, political, colonial, and social history of the whole nation (33-36). A wider gaze, to fill the existential void of an area that was already facing an 'end of the world', and suddenly became subject to another: a rediscovery of an acted past which drew a map now oblivious of its own history.

In my ANUAC speech I concluded drawing from the *Inei Raisan* (*In Praise of Shadows*, 1977), written by the *Belle Époque* and later chauvinist nationalist Tanizaki Junichirō. In the *Inei Raisan*, an attempt at defining the 'inherently Japanese' aesthetic system in contrast with the 'Western concepts of cleanliness and beauty', the author elaborates on the concept of '*nare*' (11-12), i.e. the residual grease left on wooden bowls and kitchen utensils by the hands of their owners. Such grime, condents Tanizaki, would be a shame to scrub away, as it celebrates the temporal *durée* and agency of mankind, and their material connection with the world in the 'glow of antiquity' of the 'soil from handling' of *nare*. The function of Tanizaki's *nare* could be seen as a subversion of Husserl's

(1989) and Merleau-Ponty's (1974) conception of a 'subjectivity full of world' (see Carman 1999). Conversely, Tanizaki points towards a 'world full of subjectivity', where the footprints of past actions are at the same time the anchors for further acting, i.e. the mediators of presence upon which subjectivity (in its autopoietic, phenomenological take) is bestowed to the point that, with the demise of the (apparently) inanimated *substratum* of the environment, a measure of us, the dwellers, is lost as well, as the farmer from Bern (see above) lost himself as the oak dominating his subjective world was taken down.

If the disaster configured what De Martino and Numazaki described, a generalized and shared *crisis of presence*, it is because, physically before conceptually, the waves erased the *nare* of the territory – the landmarks of local agency, the infrastructural signification that imbued space-ness into the place, made it transversable, and made action possible and meaningful. The strategic centrality of remapping became blatant after the municipality of Kesennuma took the decision to remove the remains of the *Kyōtoku-maru*, a 360 tons tuna trawler stranded in the middle of a residential area 750 metres inland (Andō 2013, Ōta 2013). Residents and tourists had progressively turned it into a landmark at which to pray, take pictures, construct local narratives, in other words started applying *nare*, a structure of feeling, onto it. Despite this, the will to forget – to *repress* the *Kyōtoku-maru*, in the Freudian sense – the obscenity of displacement, the carcass 'heaved ashore [...] with red belly and propeller exposed' (Associated Press 2011) won, with the Kesennuma mayor calling residents to vote on the fate of the ship in 2013. Out of 14,000 votes, 70% wanted it removed, torn down piece by piece on site, and sold for scrap (Associated Press 2013).

De Certeau's claim of cartography as forgetfulness, where the practiced space of travel is turned into a panoptical place of surveillance, encounters significant parallels in the many layers of the Sanriku post-disaster reconstruction. If, on the one hand, the necessity of rebuilding a practical and quotidian *presenza* is not only a post-disaster priority, but an everyday fundamental human activity (cf. Appadurai 1995), the internal dynamics inherent to the pluralism of actors in place – that is to say, the divergent discourses about *what place should be(come)* – draw a complex map of hierarchies and trans-localities, which manifests itself in all its ambiguity and manifold configurations, in the place-making of Ishinomaki for the sake of its visitors.

Thus remapping the land of Sanriku – establishing new tropes around which to signify presence – assumes an urgency that by far exceeds the necessity to rebuild its materiality.

Iconically, Kohei Nawa's imposing White Deer dominates the peninsula landscape: its height allows only a gaze from below. Its smooth, glossy curves appear out of place on the grey pebble beach, surrounded by twisted pines and the dirt slopes of the mountainsides.

I think the significance of the *shika no yatsu* is better described by a comparison with another deer, the one in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*, the acclaimed 2006 utopian science fiction film referenced in the opening lines of Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* (2009). Fisher uses *Children of Men*, a film set in a future where mankind lost its ability to reproduce leading to widespread millenaristic barbarisms and the collapse of the democratic nation-state, in order to prove his main point: it is easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of capitalism. The deer scene becomes in this sense particularly poignant, as during the protagonist's pilgrimage across the barren wasteland, he stops by an abandoned school, representing the surrender of the public space in a world where the ability to (pro)create has ceased – the postmodern predicament which many have described using the worn-out (but still effective) Gramscian motto 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (1971: 276). In Cuarón's crisis, the deer emerges out of nothing, crossing the protagonist's – and our – field of view in a naturalistic, careless fashion. The living subject is depicted as completely removed from the spectator's symbolic order, and at the same time there it stands, representing the unrepresentable Real in the Lacanian broader sense of the repressed, material substratum: pre-Oedipal, irreducible to symbolization, oblivious of negativity – 'always in its place' (Lacan 1988: 40). In Cuarón's movie, animals often represent the unmediated, prolific dimension, opposed to humankind sterility, one that Slavoj Žižek in his personal commentary on the movie (included in the DVD version), links with the lack of meaningful historical experience.

What does Nawa's deer, in its majestic stillness, stand for, if not the flattening dehistoricification, with the smoothing out of a space – the peninsula – for the sake of consuming it as a signifier: a symbolic act of mapping Oshika in its only thinkable configuration, that of a space of vanishing mediation, where to come and absorb a phantasmatic Japaneseness that haunts the land? Nothing less than this white, imposing specter, can effectively represent this. Conversely, this attempt is friendly mocked by local pranksters, who devised several '*shika cosupure*' (deer costumes) to be – often



times tipsy – photographed in: a good-tempered act of resistance to a solemnity that only dead things could bear without kicking back (figure 12).

To the movement of people towards the Sanriku coast seen in this chapter, I oppose the movement of things – food *in primis* – and ideas – e.g. Fujihara’s *kangae hasshin* (3.4) – from Tōhoku outwards. The dynamics and power relations of such material and immaterial objects, will be the theme of the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Moving food out – freshness and power

### 6.1 Introduction: a small parcel from my mother arrived

As Knight (1998: 158) observed, a great significance is to be found in the words of Masao Sen's 1977 enka, *Kitaguni no Haru* (Spring of the northern country), even more so after the 2011 NHK Kōhaku Uta Gassen,<sup>69</sup> where the then 75 years old Rikuzentakata-born singer, performed his strong piece. Visibly moved, he closed the song exclaiming 'ganbappe!', the Iwate dialect equivalent of standard Japanese cheering 'ganbatte!' ('don't give up'). The song (originally written by Haku Ide) depicts the feelings of longing of a young man, who moved from his hometown, presumably in Tōhoku, to a big city, where he 'can't feel the seasons anymore' ('*kisetsu wa tokai de wa, wakaranai darō to*'). In Professor Laura Miller's effective description:

'It seemed to ooze such smarmy sentimental pathos. It referred to that overused trope that later reached a marketing peak in the early 1980s, the notion of *furusato*, the native place or the old hometown. A Korean Japanese, Sen Masao projected a homey bumpkiness that suggested modest origins, even though he was by then a wealthy and urbane celebrity.'<sup>70</sup>

Incidentally, by its rise to popularity throughout Southeast Asia, the song became the vector for the same ideals – the *furusato* trope already discussed in the previous chapters – which evidently resonated in societies, like Japan, largely characterized by the abrupt end of diffused farming economy coupled with massive urbanization (McGee & Robinson 2011; Rigg 1991). Jumping forward to the aftermath of 3/11, the song quickly became a post-disaster refrain – probably caused by Sen's Iwate origins, but also qualifying the whole Northeast with an allure of *furusato*-ness.

The song is characterized by a series of pastoral vignettes at the beginning of each stanza: *shirakaba*, *aozora*, *minami-kaze* (white birch, blue sky, winds from the south); *yukidoke*, *sesseragi*, *maru-ki-bashi* (thawing snow, stream's murmur, log bridge); *yamabuki*, *asagiri*, *suishago-ya* (yellow roses, morning mist, a watermill). The three triplets are followed by short glances on the narrator's longing for his family: *kisetsu wa tokai de wa, wakaranai darō to, todoita ofukuro no chiisana tsutsumi* (in the city I can't

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<sup>69</sup> The Kōhaku, for short, is the annual new year's eve TV song contest, an extremely popular show in Japan.

<sup>70</sup> 'That "old hometown" motif might be a real place', in Savage Minds (<https://savageminds.org/2012/09/17/that-old-hometown-motif-might-be-a-real-place/>, last access 24/01/2018).

feel the seasons anymore; a small parcel from my mother arrived); *sukidato otagai ni iidasenaimama, wakarete mō gonēn ano ko wa dō shite iru?* (we couldn't say 'I love you' to each other; five years already passed since we parted, how would she be doing now?); *aniki mo oyaji ni de mukuchina futari ga, tamaniwa sake demo nonderu darōka* (like my father, my older brother does not talk very much, I wonder if they are drinking together now).

Plain as it appears, Sen and Ide's musical agenda carries significance, as the song effectively couples pastoral scenes (de-anthropized) with internalized narratives of longing and loneliness. Of the three instances, two appear to be completely detached from the narrator (interestingly the romantic love, and the connection with the father and older brother), while the first one, the mother connection, is maintained by the small parcel (*chiisana tsutsumi*), which contains of course food from the old village. The mother connection is not incidental, and reflects the *furusato*, which Creighton (1997: 243) described as the 'intimate place of nurturance', to where feelings of belonging, nostalgia, and regret are often directed by the inurbated *imin* (emigrants), and where the maternal figure overlaps with the upbringing whereabouts themselves, both providing a comfortable, caring, and safe environment. Food thus becomes the most emotionally significant link between inurbated individuals and their family back home, due to its mobility – of course, not all foods are equally mobile, and this will come into play later in the chapter – and it's Proustian capacity to convey memories and emotions through sensorial stimulation (see Sutton 2001).

What makes *Kitaguni* a relevant and seminal piece in the *furusato* discourse is its differential value: the very fact that the narrator left his old town urges him to remember his former life and affections with 'sarmy sentimental pathos', thus creating a hiatus which generates the set of values he is longing for. As Moon (1997) observed, commenting on the process of appropriation and commodification of the natural landscape of rural Japan, it is eminently the urbanites who seek leisure and relaxation in the countryside, as those living in it hardly see the point.<sup>71</sup> Going back to Miller's observation on Sen as a 'wealthy and urban celebrity', and the process of

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<sup>71</sup> A similar inverted parallelism is highlighted by Martinez (1990: 111) in her work on the fishing village of Kuzaki, suggesting that wealthy businessmen from the city come to the village in order to flirt with the rustic and sexually desirable *ama* (diving women), while the fishermen from the *gyōson* would rather go 'drinking and dancing in the big cities like Kyōto or Tōkyō'.

commodification of the ‘naturalness’ of the Japanese countryside – epitomised in the North(east) – Moeran notes:

Tourism is basically a product of urbanization. [...] Those who live in the cities are the first to want to get out of what they see as “artificial” surroundings and go back to “nature”: it is they who want to eat something other than packaged food and to participate in activities other than those that confine them to milling around inside large blocks of concrete. (1983: 98)

As it was perceived and analysed during the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, Japanese domestic tourism was no exception to Moeran’s definition, as the flow of information, wealth, and people did invariably stream from the urbanized centres (Tōkyō, Yokohama, Ōsaka) to the peripheries. In a partial reversal, Thompson (2004: 580) noted that ‘In 1997, Major Obara Hideo of Tōwa-chō, a small rice-farming town in the mountains of northeastern Japan, opened an “antenna shop” in Kawasaki City, Kanagawa prefecture’. The so called ‘antenna shops’ are stores specialized in the local products of a given village, or area, sited in major cities in order to attract either inurbated former villagers, or – more probably – customers lacking ties with the source area, in search for the taste of a *furusato*, whichever may it be. Both Thompson discussing antenna shops, and Knight discussing the *furusato kai* (1.3), highlight a movement – of things, but also people, and in part of ideas – departing from the periphery towards the centre – the city, where the small parcel arrives, or the antenna shop is opened.

If we pose the *furusato* narrative(s) as a background for the ideologization of the Japanese countryside, we can point out it was operated by centralized authorities, such as LDP prime ministers Noboru Takeshita (1987-1989) and his predecessor, Kakuei Tanaka (1972-1974) (Robertson 2004:27-30), advertising agencies, such as Dentsu (Ivy 1995:34), more recent national campaigns (Martini and Gasparri 2018), ‘wealthy and urbane celebrit[ies]’ such as Masao Sen, Saburō Kitajima, Osamu Yoshioka (Yano 2002:170-173; Occhi 2006), countless novels and movies.<sup>72</sup> We can even discern it in the words of the conservative Shintarō Ishihara, Tokyo Governor in 2011, who called the tsunami a *tenbatsu* (divine retribution) aimed at punishing egoism, which had been polluting the Japanese mentality for a long time – Ishihara was of course implying that a more collectivist and less Westernized Japan, features typical of the agrarian idyllic *furusato*

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<sup>72</sup> To name one nonetheless: 1983, Kōyama Seijirō’s *Furusato* depicts a farming village evacuated and inundated after the building of a dam. The only one who will remain in his place is the elderly Denzo, left behind by his family, who dies before he can see his hometown flooded (see Robertson 1991:200).

(see Scheiner 1995; Moon 1997; Creighton 1997), would not have received such punishment from the heavens, although he promptly retracted his statement and apologised<sup>73</sup> (see Hopson 2013:2). As Thompson (2004: 587) synthetically put it:

‘But while explanations that describe the *inaka* (regional Japan) as a sanctuary of the nation’s recuperative traditional cultural values seems elegant, this is mainly an urban construction that largely ignores the viewpoints and experiences of those who live their contemporary lives in the countryside’

Opposed to the initial hetero-defining, auto-directed impulse, since the 90s, a countermovement of auto-defining, hetero-directed narratives started to flow in the opposite direction, i.e. from the countryside to the city. Although framed by the hegemonic *furusato* discourse, particularisms started to come back as echoes of an original signal, partially distorted by the properties of the surfaces it hit.

After several months spent in Ishinomaki, I moved briefly to Tōkyō in the spring of 2017, to come into contact with instances of ‘host produced’ tourism and local product promotion from the Miyagi Prefecture in the capital, namely the Miyagi antenna shop in Ikebukuro (*Coco Miyagi Furusato Plaza*), and the Wotani-ya *izakaya* in Nakano. On my way back I stopped in Sendai for a much anticipated event, the *Hoya Matsuri* (*Hoya* festival) held in the Kotodai municipal park, held during Golden Week, a week of vacation located at the end of April-beginning of May, usually devoted to travel and leisure. These three examples, together with related encounters and interviews, constitute a window on activities not located in Ishinomaki or the Miyagi Prefecture, but radiating from there, towards major cities, with the purpose of transmitting knowledge about, popularising, and in part raising awareness of, local food products – marine as far as Ishinomaki is concerned, more differentiated if we consider Sendai or Miyagi Prefecture. Such activities, and further minor examples I will analyse in the course of this chapter, carry the common denominator of being directed outwards, and specifically to a urbanized audience, in some cases featuring the direct testimonies of local producers, in others mediated by specific, middleground ‘brokers’ (3.5).

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<sup>73</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/15/tokyo-governor-tsunami-punishment>.  
Last access: 29/01/2018.

## 6.2 The *Wotani-ya*

I was first made aware of the existence of the *Wotani-ya* and its owner, *Wotani*, by my FJ contact, *Nagaoki*. As an *Ishinomaki* citizen transferred to *Tōkyō*, *Wotani* kept contacts with FJ and its fishermen associates, in order to receive direct shipments of seasonal products. The two enterprises operate in a co-sponsoring fashion, with FJ advertising the *Wotani-ya* in its flyers and website, and with *Wotani* sponsoring FJ and its members on his own page (as in the flier seen in 2.2), with each individual fisherman associated with a single product. I also heard *Wotani* mentioned on several other occasions by both *Iwasaki* (2.8), and *Fujihara* (3.4), as the three often collaborated during the post-disaster reconstruction. Both *Morishima* the *hoya* seafarmer, and *Kawasaki* from PB mentioned him as part of their ‘*hoya-connection*’, a network working in parallel with PB and FJ, aimed at the dissemination of *hoya* knowledge in *Tōkyō* and *Sendai* – I then would soon meet a representative of the *Hoya-hoya Gakkai* (*Hoya-hoya* study group), an informal association apparently curating aspects of such dissemination. So, to all intents and purposes, despite being far removed from his hometown and deep into the ‘belly of the beast’ of *Nakano*, *Tōkyō*, *Wotani* was an active member of at least three of the circles of friends and acquaintances I followed in *Ishinomaki*.

First a few words about *Nakano*. As one travel blogger from GQ put it, ‘*Nakano* is pure *Tōkyō*: around the next corner you might find a tiny shrine, a vintage clothing shop, a pencil-thin house, a mom-and-pop rice-cracker shop, or all four on the same block’.<sup>74</sup> I did not see any shrine, tiny or not, but soon I lost myself in the maze of alleys around the train station, literally crawling with people eating and drinking – it was, after all, the beginning of the Golden Week.<sup>75</sup> Many *izakaya* advertised their aperitif menus, offering both classic *Kantō* snacks, and specialities from all over the country, while in a short walk I could pass by a KFC, a Starbucks, several convenience stores (*konbini*), and a *halal* shop. Uninterrupted electronic chirps and chimes came from a huge *gesen* (arcade), swarming with hyperactive middle-school kids and bored-looking *pachinko* addict *ojiisan* (grandpas). I take note of a small, basement jazz bar, with a small blackboard advertising a live session, at the top of a narrow staircase leading down from the street level, to the entrance door.

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<sup>74</sup> <https://www.gq.com/story/nakano-tokyo-guide>, last access 30/01/2018.

<sup>75</sup> The Golden Week (*Gōruden Wīku*) is the week following the 29<sup>th</sup> of April. As it contains several national holidays, in modern Japan it quickly became a time for leisure, which often includes tourism and travel.

After roving some more around the alleys, I head to the Wotani-ya. The entrance is as narrow and discreet as the jazz bar's, but here, in a corner, stands a broad Fisherman Japan plastic flag-like poster (with a nice picture made by Moritomo, depicting a happy crew of light-blue *gomu*-clad fishermen standing on the dirty, slimy deck of their ship, surrounded by deep blue water and a cloudless sky). The alien environment of Nakano – ironically, during my Japanese fieldwork so far, I was not used to being around so many people – for a moment felt like my foster home of Ishinomaki. Inside, the atmosphere is clean and refined. A warm incandescent light diffuses over the sturdy cherry wood tables, shoe-horned around the open kitchen, that occupies the central square of the room. On the walls, are Moritomo's pictures of fishermen, flashy *tairyō* flags,<sup>76</sup> dried octopuses and flatfish (*karē*), and three wide blackboards with the night's menu. In a later interview, Wotani insisted on the fact that he did not serve 'set lunches', but rather devised for each night dishes with the fresh ingredients he got from Ishinomaki (such special menus are handwritten by the owner himself on slips of paper sporting the *izakaya*'s logo).

The room is already filled with customers, as the night is dedicated to a selection of *ginzake* dishes accompanied by local *nihonshu*.<sup>77</sup> *Ginzake* is the silver salmon, or coho, an important export of Miyagi seafarming (Shimizu et al. 2015). The atmosphere is slightly less formal than the average *izakaya*: the waiter is chatting with customers, people lean over the central counter to look at the cooks' work, and Wotani goes from table to table dispensing smiles, handshakes, and business cards. As a friend of his FJ friends (and I suspect one rare example of foreigner somehow involved with his fishery dissemination agenda) I am greeted with particular vitality, and almost immediately poured a generous glass of Asabiraki, a pleasantly spicy *nihonshu*. My booked seat is at a table for four, and I am quickly introduced to my fellow diners. One is a member of the Hoya-Hoya Gakkai and Miyagi cuisine aficionado, while the other two are colleagues from the same company: one, originally from Ishinomaki, took his friend to taste his hometown's specialities. As I later find out, except for me, my table is a fairly accurate synecdoche for the whole *izakaya*, as to Wotani's word, customers are equally divided into Miyagi 'expats', Tōkyōites with a personal Miyagi-connection, and foodies.

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<sup>76</sup> Colourful flags used to announce/conjure a big catch (literally translation of *tairyō*) used in the past centuries on fishing boats, and now used mostly in festival or as indoor decorations (Kawashima 2003).

<sup>77</sup> Common name for the Japanese rice wine, wrongly referred to in English and many other languages, as *sake*, which is instead a general terms for any alcoholic beverage (see 4.2).



The dinner starts with a short speech by Wotani, who profusely thanks those present (the *izakaya* is booked up) and takes his time in praising the freshness and tastiness of this year's *ginzake*. At my side, the two employees whisper to each other and snap pictures of the interiors. Everybody is very relaxed, and there is no trace of even the slight amount of formality that usually accompanies a public speech in any Japanese context. The owner himself has an overall ironic behaviour, which turns quickly to formal seriousness only when he ends his speech, thanking again those present and all the Miyagi fishermen. Before concluding, though, Wotani reads out loud the night's menu (provided to every customer as a photocopy of his handwritten original), which features different preparations of the 'king of [...] salmons, the Onagawa-farmed *Miyagi Sāmon* [in English]'. *Miyagi Sāmon* is a recent attempt at *burando-zukuri* (brandization) coordinated within the prefectural *kumiai* of Miyagi by the *Miyagi Ginzake Shinkō Kyōgi-kai* (Council for the Promotion of the Miyagi Coho Salmon). Comparing Wotani's speech with the Council's webpage<sup>78</sup> revealed that he lifted the *ginzake* description without significant changes, describing the salmon's body as possessing both *tsuya* (glossy mellowness) and *hari* (tonic), a melt-in-the-mouth feel (*torokeruyōna shokkan*), and a sweet taste (*amai shokumi*). The key terms as I have reported above, were left unaltered in Wotani's presentation.

Shortly after the speech we are served the hors d'oeuvre, *ginkzake*, lean *katsuo*, and *hoya* sashimi, accompanied by a glass of citrusy Marukei, a *nihonshu* from Kesennuma (Miyagi). We savor attentively the three sliced delicacies, and as he tried the *hoya*, the Hoya-Hoya Gakkai member chuckles: 'It's not very fresh, is it?' he confides, leaning towards me and lowering his voice. It was not: the marine notes of freshly harvested *hoya* dissolved, leaving behind only the harsh taste of the cynthiaol (the 'ammonia' taste mentioned in 2.5; see Nguyen et al. 2007: 23). 'It's the transport' continued my neighbour 'even though you transport it in ice, the *hoya* spoils so quickly'. 'But then' I replied 'how could someone tell, unless he had fresh *hoya* in Ishinomaki?'. He laughed at my joke, and we kept eating – the *hoya* was not that bad, after all.

The dinner proceeded merrily, as from the light sake and fresh sashimi of the beginning we escalated to progressively greasier salmon dishes, covering European cuisine (carpaccio, fish and chips, pasta) and some *washoku* classic (miso, *shutōyaki*, *oden*) – and considerably more alcoholic *nihonshu*. At the end of the *ginzake* night, Wotani warmly

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<sup>78</sup> <http://www.miyagi-ginzake.jp/miyagisalmon/>, last access 02/02/2018.

invited anyone who had not yet done so, to visit Miyagi and keep enjoying its specialities. As I visit the restroom, I notice hanging on a wall a poster reporting the coming season's matches of the Onagawa Cobaltore (3.2.b).

After parting with my table neighbours, I walked back to the jazz bar I saw before, but as I entered the band was already putting the instruments away. 'Too late for the live' grinned the landlady from behind the counter. I sat there for a couple of hours, chatting: nobody had ever heard of the Wotani-ya.

The following day I meet Wotani in his realm. He sits comfortably at one of the tables, while a couple of employees clean up the kitchen. His relaxed attitude and crooked smile remind me of Fujihara, but he lacks the latter's mercurial snappy-ness. In presenting himself and his restaurant, I can tell he is confident, cheerful: being interviewed is not a new experience for him, and indeed I would later find a number of contributions by him in both local magazines of Ishinomaki and food blogs, with contents not unlike the following:

When the disaster happened, I was employed in a restaurant in Kōbe. I was already considering quitting it to start my own place, to tell the truth. When I was in junior high school the Hanshin-Awaji disaster [the Kōbe earthquake, 1995] came, and I remembered well the good volunteers did for us. So I put on hold my idea of opening a place and went there instead. Then, after two weeks, it was clear to me there was so much more to do. I wanted to help more. [...] I ended up staying there four years! [laughs]. Around 2015, I had been working with Fujihara, Iwasaki and other young people [*seinen*, young adults from 18 to 30 years old, usually male] for more than two years. We gradually realized that, beyond the destruction of houses or boats, the real danger was depopulation, and isolation. So we started up the [Hamaguri] Cafe, as a gathering place for the nearby villages<sup>79</sup> [...].

The next thing that struck me, was that we had to disseminate [*hasshin*, see 3.2.c, 3.4] outside Miyagi the good points [*yosa*] of the region. I went back to the project of opening my own restaurant, and considering how far you can transport fresh fish, and the potential customers, I decided on Tōkyō, and opened this place last year [2016].

Wotani continues explaining that he intended the Wotani-ya to be a place of exchange between customers and fishermen, in a wording very similar to that reported by

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<sup>79</sup> The Hamaguri Cafe as a gathering place made for local residents, if one looks at it cynically, might sound like a preposterous statement. The usual customers might as well be locals (although many people travel to get there from inside and outside the prefecture, especially on weekends), but it certainly does not cater to the most fragile individuals of the coastal community and the ones most likely to be vulnerable to isolation and depopulation – the elderly.

Thompson when analysing the purpose of Tōwa's Tōkyō Antenna Shop (2004:588, my *italic*):

[It] promotes rural tourism in Tōwa-chō through its local products by *personalizing the consumer–producer relationship*. [...] Customers are encouraged to get to know the people and experience the culture associated with the products they purchase.

As in an antenna shop, Wotani would regularly call local residents from Ishinomaki – fisherman associated with FJ, invited monthly to the 'Fishermen's Night' events. The fishermen are able to directly speak to customers about their experience as producers, their hopes, and aspirations. Wotani stresses that the fishermen guests would address themes such as their commitment (*kodawari*) and enthusiasm (*netsui*),<sup>80</sup> an emphasis consistent with his link with FJ, whose spokespersons stress analogous themes (2.2). Conversely, continues Wotani, the *izakaya* can function as a means of gastronomic input to Miyagi:

[From here] one can elaborate cooking methods and bring them back to Miyagi. This is what I think. In other words, there are so many places, in Sanriku, that compete with each other over the same ingredients. On the other hand, I'm confident to say that only a few of them really make good, or creative use of the raw materials (*sozai*). If one were to serve original dishes in his or her shop, I'm sure tourists would appreciate it.

Here Wotani makes an important statement, which falls perfectly in line with Fujihara's doubts about the existence of an Ishinomaki cuisine (3.4). He provides, through his own and his employees' skills, an inscription of meaning – popular recipes – onto a central, material *medium* (the *sozai*, fresh fish and vegetables produced in Ishinomaki, significantly *underused* by Miyagi locals) which he considers neutral in nature, i.e. not characterised by any ethical or aesthetic value, and becomes elevated after Wotani's *inculturative action*, to a piece of cuisine 'tourists would appreciate'. Wotani's testing ground is of course Tōkyō, the wellspring of Japan's domestic tourists.

[...] When I was working as a volunteer I had a direct experience of the decline Japanese [sic] fishery is undergoing. Restaurants and shop owners haggle with the producers to reduce their prices, in order to secure their own revenue. I was struck by the realization that, as the profits from fishery become lower and lower, being a fisherman becomes impractical.

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<sup>80</sup> *Netsui* written in ideograms conjoins heat/passion and idea/mind. Could be better translated as 'fervour'. In the same fashion, *kodawari* implies something stronger than 'commitment', verging more towards 'obsessive determination'. Although they might sound extreme, these terms are not uncommon when used to describe one's passions – and in Wotani's dialectics, fishing comes across more as a passion, than a job.

It also follows that, with lower wages, younger generations will not take on their parents' jobs.

Here Wotani uses the term *kōkeisha fusoku* (lack of successors), an expression widely used in depopulation studies (see for example Hayashi, Uchida 2015). The use of the same term for fishery implies an equivalence between fishery and artisanal crafts, both endangered by modern capitalism and globalization (Furuya et al. 2002):

For this reason, this place doesn't produce a huge income. We respect the fishermen, and by dialoguing with them, the staff gains better knowledge of the ingredients. [...] What I personally try to do, here, is to convey to everyone the sensations I felt when working as a volunteer in Miyagi, after the disaster. Like the taste of freshly harvested seaweed. I wanted people to see and touch, that's why the *open kitchen* [in english],

'This place doesn't produce a huge income' (*ōkiku kasageru o-mise ja nai*) is a sentence one does not hear very often in Japan. Nevertheless, it was not the first time I heard it from people involved in the recovery of the Northeast. Even more interestingly, the verb used by Wotani (*kasageru*) is one of the 'three Ks' of the program devised by FJ for the recovery of fishery in Sanriku and supporting young fishermen (2.2). Following his line of thought, he operates an ethical reversal between his income as a retailer and the one of his suppliers, in order to counter the decline of fishery on the Northeastern coast. His desire for transparency, human connection, and an ethical framework around his enterprise becomes thus embodied in his own restaurant, in the open kitchen, the 'Fisherman's Night', the informal attitude and young age of his employees – aspects widely comparable with Fujihara's (3.4), although Wotani aims at a lower end as far as prices are concerned (the full set dinner of the *ginzake* night was sold for 4000 Yen, around 25 British Pounds).

The Wotani-ya, and the ethical and ideological position of its owner, are extremely relevant to the process of invention of Ishinomaki's local cuisine, as this Tōkyō *izakaya* brings together broader issues, that we already encountered in the previous chapters, and that become more evident and impactful as the task of defining Ishinomaki, its people, and its cuisine, is made necessary by a translation – a movement of goods, people, ideas, and words.

### 6.3 Selling Miyagi-ness – the Antenna Shop

Later in the same week, I visited the *Koko Miyagi Furusato Plaza*, Miyagi Prefecture's very own Antenna Shop in Ikebukuro, a busy commuter hub and home to the famous department stores of *Tobu* and *Seibu*. A few steps out of the station's main exit, the relatively small shop is not easy to spot in the street full of stores and people. On the main doors, a somewhat unobtrusive, green sign announces one is entering the *Miyagi Furusato Plaza* (*Furusato*'s four syllables are encased as many coloured squares). The store was refurbished on its tenth year anniversary in 2015, and the green sign replaced the previous logo, a flashy crescent hanging over the main doors. The crescent itself was a reference to the iconic military helmet of Date Masamune, regional ruler (*daimyō*) of Tōhoku from 1600 to 1636. The helmet, exhibited at the Sendai City Museum, along with many items owned by the ruler, sports the golden asymmetrical crescent shape that has become a trademark of everything Date-related.

The official mascot (*yurukyara*) of Sendai City is Musubimaru,<sup>81</sup> an *onigiri* (rice ball) wearing Date's nobleman outfit and helmet, with the crescent visible. Significantly, even when the mascot changes its clothes (for example, wearing a t-shirt to advertise sport events) and loses the helmet, the crescent remains in place. Needless to say, at the *Coco Miyagi*, Musubimaru is everywhere: posters, T-shirts, pins, hats, pens, block notes. The gift corner is all about him, and the Rakuten (*Tōhoku Rakuten Gōruden Īgurusu*, or Golden Eagles), Sendai's baseball team, fairly popular and quite successful (third team of the Pacific League in 2017).

The area facing the entrance is dominated by snacks, the most popular being the classic *zunda*, a green paste of *edamame* soybeans widespread throughout the Northeast. According to a *Coco Miyagi* representative, though, their bestseller for 2017 is individually wrapped *sasakamaboko*, bamboo leaf-shaped morsels of pureed white fish. *Kamaboko*, in different shapes and sizes, is popular all over the nation, but the *sasakamaboko* (pointy shaped and slightly browned) is a typical Miyagi product, inspired by the Date Masamune's family crest, which depicts a bamboo branch with many leaves, framing a couple of sparrows.

On the left, facing the cashier, a small refrigerated counter exhibits a selection of fresh vegetables from Miyagi (cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, and spinach, representing the

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<sup>81</sup> Like other regional mascots, Musubimaru is active on Twitter, where he has 67,000 followers and regularly advertises Miyagi Prefecture events.

main agricultural exports of the prefecture), along with more specific products such as the *myōga*, member of the ginger family. It grows in stalks, and its young stems are popular pickled in rice vinegar. Towards the centre of the shop, a significant space is devoted to rice, Miyagi's third primary industry export, following sea products and processed food (*Miyagi ken nōrin suisanbutsu-tō yushutsu sokushin senryaku* 2017). Rice is famously farmed in the vast plains between Sendai and the coast, carved by the Kitakami river.

Separating the main area from the back of the store, dedicated to frozen goods and *nihonshu*, a partition wall exhibits pieces of *mingei-hin*, or folk craft. These are mainly *kokeshi* wooden dolls, whose most famous production site is the evergreen tourist destination of Matsushima (thirty kilometres west of Ishinomaki), with some lacquerware bowls from Sendai. In a corner, a few *umakko*<sup>82</sup> wooden horses, intruders from Iwate. On the right side, from the gift corner, I buy a small block of flash cards with various Tōhoku dialect expressions and their standard Japanese translations – a tool I later found out to be utterly useless.

At the back of the store, frozen seafood and *nihonshu*. Despite the season, there are still oysters for sale – but then, frozen ones do not follow the logic of *shun*, or seasonality. *Ginzake* is of course the main attraction of the seafood corner, with the banners of *Miyagi Sāmon* hanging at the sides of the counter. There is even a small selection of frozen *hoya*.

There are quite a lot of customers, mostly women, picking vegetables and fish. As I discreetly approach some of them, I find out that most of the people I talked to are from Miyagi. Most of them also grab a copy of the shop's monthly magazine (the *Coco Miyagi Shinbun*) with a calendar of events, Miyagi sightseeing tips, and pieces focusing on seasonal products. April's issue is dedicated to *ginzake*, featuring a two pages special on the *Miyagi Sāmon* products.

The first floor houses the Food & Drink corner (*Inshoku kōnā*), which features menus centered around Sendai's most iconic and famous foodstuff, the *gyutan*, thin slices of ox tongue peeled of its outer skin and grilled, a dish circulated for the first time around the 50s. According to the journalist Kikuchi Takeshi, it was originally cooked to accompany a stew made of ox tail, as tail and tongue were the leftovers from the meals of the

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<sup>82</sup> These little wooden toy horses clad with bright red and gold refer to the *Chagu Chagu Umakko* festival held in June in Takizawa and Morioka, the two main centres of Iwate Prefecture, where horses parade to the sound of bells (hence the *chagu chagu* onomatopoeia). The festival was included in the Intangible Folk Cultural Properties (*Mukei Bunkazai*) list in 1978, and selected as one of the 100 Soundscapes of Japan (*Nihon no Oto Fūkei Hyaku-sen*) in 1995 (Andō 2008).

American soldiers stationed in Sendai after the end of the war (Takeshi 2013: 84-85), who allegedly consumed vast quantities of beef (an assertion later denied by the Organization for the Promotion of the Sendai Gyutan). Gyutan is intensely advertised in Sendai's tourist areas (as well as in any major town in Miyagi, including Ishinomaki and Matsushima). I even had the chance of listening to a 'Gyutan Rap' song (written by Shinichi Tanimura and performed by Tantarō), and the line 'Everybody loves it, even Date Masamune' was received with much laughter by my companions. A Sendai girl went as far as stating 'We don't eat that much gyutan in Sendai anyway...'.

Still, the *Inshoku kōnā* menu is doubtlessly centered on the ox tongue, which is also available for sale in store downstairs. Other foodstuffs present in the menu are *sasa-kamaboko*, grilled *sanma* (ocean saury, famously fished in Onagawa in September, and tragically out of season during the Golden Week), and even a *hoya* sashimi – the menu is all-year-around, so eventually each meal would be out of season, except for the *gyutan* of course.

Chatting with the representative of the *Koko Miyagi*, I find out that, as would be expected from an Antenna Shop, they organize many events, focusing mainly on local food (rather than folk crafts, as Thompson highlighted), with cooking workshops, new product presentations, and market tests. I am told the number of attendees is 'variable'. Social media followers are around 800 for the Facebook page, and 4500 for the Twitter account (both last accessed on 06/02/2018).

Overall, the *Koko Miyagi* does not differ substantially with the examples described by Thompson, as it serves a very similar purpose: being a hub for local products and informations for potential domestic tourists. Naturally, being an *antenna shop* devoted to the whole prefecture, it does not present those characteristics of immediacy typical of Thompson's Tōwa-chō, and its structure and initiatives are managed by the *Miyagi-ken Bussan Shinkō Kyōkai* (Miyagi Prefecture Products Promotion Association), a corporation contracted by the Prefecture. In these terms, it carries inevitably instances of de-territorialization (Gupta, Ferguson 1997) and a process of construction of local cuisine, history, geography, etc., that is top-down shaped, rather than emerging from the direct agencies of individuals. In this specific sense, the wide usage of elements of significance such as Date Masamune, or the *gyutan*, characterized by a direct and unambiguous reference to Sendai, Miyagi, or even the Tōhoku at large. A detailed comparison between the *Koko Miyagi* and the Uotani-ya will follow in the conclusion of this chapter.



#### 6.4 The young man and the sea(squirt)

The opening day of the *Hoya Matsuri* 2017 (*Hoya Festival*) in Sendai's Kotodai public park is blessed with a hot and sunny morning. Even after days in Tokyo, I am not really used to the air of a large city, and the heat quickly becomes vexatious. The stalls are disposed in a shoehorn pattern, facing a stage on the open side. There are stalls from twenty-five cafes, restaurants, and similar operations. As soon as I complete the first round of the square, I recognize at least seven stalls from Ishinomaki and Onagawa stores. I meet with Morishima (2.5) who is helping out at the Hoya-Hoya Gakkai stall (manned by young members I have never met before). Unlike the other stalls, that exhibit and sell *hoya* cooked in various ways, the Hoya-Hoya Gakkai's is informative, with booklets, flyers, and two huge glass tanks filled with the bright red *Ascidée*.

Strolling around the stalls I recognize Horino, owner of the Orino's (or, in Italian, *Da Hori-no*), a fusion Italian-Spanish-Japanese cuisine very popular in Ishinomaki. He used to work at the *Hashidōri Commons* (2.6), from where he moved into a building in the Tachimachi quarter. True to his fusion cuisine vocation, Horino was preparing deep fried *hoya* paella balls, to be eaten with melted gorgonzola cheese. A few stalls to his right, a crowd quickly gathered to try the *hoya sōseji* (sausage) with potatoes, while from another stall the sizzling and the smell of charcoal announced *yaki* (grilled) *hoya*, a popular fishermen's barbecue component. Not far away, the stall of the Cafe Cebolla from Onagawa is selling *yaki hoyo* as well, while owners and employees keep moving around to say 'hi', or chat with their stall neighbours, or actual neighbours, at the other side of the square.

The crowd is flowing: on a Golden Week day, a sunny day, and a festival day as well, people just flocked to the relatively small square at the park's edge. There are mostly families, with kids yelling for their *sōseji*, and elderly couples sporting sunshades and forearm covers to avoid burns. Under the now scorching late morning sun, we gather in front of the stage to hear the words from the organization (*Miyagi Genki-shi*).<sup>83</sup> Clad in yellow *happi* (festival jackets), the members of the board gave a short speech about the

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<sup>83</sup> A joint board of executives from the Miyagi *Gyogyō Kumiai*, the Miyagi Industry Promotion Association (*Miyagi Bussan Shinkō Kyōkai*), the Tōhoku Economic Federation (*Tōhoku Keizai Rengō-kai*), the Agriculture and Forestry Central Bank (*Nōrin Chūō Ginkō*), and the Kahoku News Agency (*Kahoku Shinpōsha*), with the special sponsorship of the Tōhoku Electric Power Co. (*Tōhoku Denryoku*), owner of the Onagawa power plant.

importance of local production, the history and traditions of Ishinomaki and Onagawa, and the necessity to support local products. The bystanders received positively the message (or so I felt) and applauded cheerfully as the representative of the *kumiai* performed a halfhearted *kagamibiraki*<sup>84</sup> on a barrel of *nihonshu* donated by a store dedicated to local products (*Chisanchishō Ichiba Sendai Iroha*). I could not bring myself to drink *nihonshu* under that heat, but most of the audience lined up to receive a wooden cup filled with the newly opened barrel.

I sit in the shade with an *izakaya* bartender friend from Onagawa, Ishida. Kids form neat queues to take pictures with the *kigurumi* (costumed performers) of a Musubimaru clad in fisherman's clothes, Makapū (a massive blue bird, mascot of the *Tōhoku Denryoku*), and Begatta (the eagle mascotte of the Sendai Football Club Vegalta).

Ishida is by any definition a local of Ishinomaki. Born and raised there, he lost both parents in the tsunami when he was in his early twenties, which prevented him from pursuing the higher education he aspired to. He was nonetheless able to buy a new house downtown and live off his job at a popular *izakaya* near the station – the same that operated a food stall at the *Matsuri*. We became friends through common acquaintances and he agreed to have some of his opinions transcribed for my project.

Slowly chewing our *yaki hoyo* we reflect on the purposes behind the *Hoyo Matsuri* initiative.

Hoyo is not, say, like oysters [...] Most people outside Sanriku barely know what it is. It is not a product Japanese would consume without information: how you cook it, what does it taste like, is it good with *sake*, and so on. On the other hand, producers need to sell their stuff. The Korean embargo will last for another 20 years, possibly, and those exports covered roughly 60, 70% of the output in Ishinomaki and Onagawa. Yes, there is the TEPCO compensation, but that means that an equal amount of product has to be disposed of in incinerators<sup>85</sup> [...] People think this is *yurusenai* (unacceptable, unforgivable). As cooks, and restaurant owners, we have a responsibility to take part in campaigns and initiatives like this one. And to come up with new ways of cooking hoyo, so it becomes more popular. [At this point I brought up the conversation Wotani and I had few days before, in Tōkyō, as his ideas resonated with Ishida's. I asked him to comment on Wotani's

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<sup>84</sup> Ritual breaking of a sake barrel's lid with a wooden hammer. Performed during significant events such as weddings, inaugurations, and the like (Nakamura 1979:94).

<sup>85</sup> Similar remarks were made by the *hoyo* fisherman Morishima, interviewed in Chapter 2: 12, and referenced by local newspapers (see for example Yomiuri Shimbun 2016).

point as well, since we both knew him] Wotani-kun is right when he says that we don't have many interesting recipes in Miyagi. Fishermen do not eat in a very refined way. Hoya, you can either eat it very fresh, that's OK, or simmer it. Goes good with *sake*, especially the one from around here [chuckles]. But we thought, hey, maybe we could do something new. [I show him a *Hoya* sausage I bought for experimental purposes] Yes, like that. How is it by the way? [We nibble at the scorching hot sausage, that leaves us not completely convinced. Then I ask him about transportation] You see, that is part of the issue. Hoya loses its taste as soon as you freeze it, and even fresh, after a mere day it changes, becomes harsher. If you cook it together with other things, as in a full-course meal, you can even use frozen ones. It is more suitable for the city life, don't you think?

My friend is abruptly called by his boss, very angry to see him idling around while there is so much work to do – his stall has a long line of customers waiting for their cold beverages and snacks. Daring the heat, one brave juggler is climbing a pile of chairs on the stage, cheered by a few old ladies who sought a little shade under the plastic canopy nearby. Rethinking of what my friend just told me, I cannot help but think about similar remarks I heard months before, from my interview with Morishima. He too was ethically unsatisfied by the temporary solution introduced by TEPCO's compensations, and went even further stating that 'there are a lot of people out there who are happy with just getting the money, but that's not what I want' (2.5). Morishima and my *izakaya* bartender friend are standing up for a principle, here, one that I would define as self-determination: rather than passively receive compensation, they would rather see the *hoya* trade expanded by addressing the domestic market. How to do this, nonetheless, appeared as a complicated matter in itself.

The following day, as Horino told me on the phone, the prizegiving of the event took place, based on the feedback from a popular jury. His *hoya* paella, part of a triptych featuring also *hoya* and gorgonzola cheese, and *hoya* fried meatball, called 'The three *hoya* sisters' (*Hoya san-shimai*), won a special mention, while the first prize was won by the *Hoya-shiru* (*Hoya* soup), proposed by the cooking team of *Sanriku Ōshan* (Sanriku Ocean), a store and web-shop located in Sendai, specialized in *hoya*. After congratulating him on his and his employees' success, I asked him point blank 'Why did Kimura-san win?' (Kimura is the owner of the *Sanriku Ōshan*). After a very long pause – to the point I was beginning to wonder whether he put down the phone and went away – Horino said,

dragging his words ‘Well... I guess he was more conservative’.<sup>86</sup> Afterwards he spent a good ten minutes convincing me he was ok with the jury’s verdict, and deeply thankful for the special mention.

I believe Horino just wanted to give me an answer out of good manners, rather than making a precise statement. Nonetheless, I can see the appeal of a traditional *shiru* soup, flavoured with the unconventional *hoya* taste, in terms of dissemination. The ingredients provided by *Sanriku Ōshan* are, apart from *hoya*, chinese cabbage (*hakusai*), golden-needle mushrooms (*enokitake*), *sasakamoboko*, bamboo shoots (*take-no-ko*), freeze-dried *tofu* (*shimidōfu*). Now, out of six ingredients we have at least three – *hoya*, *sasakamaboko* (discussed above), and the *shimidōfu* – carefully chosen to represent Miyagi. The *shimidōfu* is in fact a very Tōhoku-esque food, as legends tell the freeze-drying technique from where it takes its name, was first invented by Date Masamune as a means to preserve *tōfu* longer – other sources state he just forgot it outside on a very cold night (see Fukuhara 2010). Compared to this threesome, the *hakusai*, *anokitake*, and *take-no-ko* are definitely more common ingredients, available at any supermarket or convenience store in any Japanese town, which is significant, as they structure a frame of familiarity, in which the exoticism of the former is to be set (see, for example, Youn & Kim 2017).

Horino’s specials, on the other hand, provided a different manner of translating the *hoya* into the Japanese cuisine: a detour, into southern European delicacies. We do know that the two rivals entered the contest starting from at least an equal amount of skill, given Horino’s renown (and the fact that he won the special mention). The scales tipped, in my opinion, on at least two features of the *hoya shiru* that better fulfilled the general purpose of widening the *hoya* domestic market. The first being its composition – an exhaustive epitome of edible Miyagi-ness – the second is certainly the saleability of the soup, which is fairly easy to prepare, and has been promptly marketed by the Sendai company as a dried, add-hot-water ready meal under the name *Hokkori Hoya Shiru* (Steaming hot *hoya* soup). Over the last half-century, the popularity of ready-made meals in Japan has been constantly increasing, to the point that in a 1999 survey, cup noodles were selected as the most representative Japanese food (Traphagan, & Brown 2002: 131). The *hoya shiru* then, managed to combine deeply rooted qualities of Japanese food (its add-hot-water cooking

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<sup>86</sup> Horino used the straightforward word *hoshu*, but during a casual conversation with a member of the jury a few weeks later, the way more charged term of *dentōtekina jun-washoku* (traditional, pure Japanese cuisine) came up, in reference to Kimura-san’s soup. It seemed to be of little interest to my interlocutor that the *hoya shiru* consisted in dried ingredients and flavour enhancers.

method, familiar ingredients and tastes), infiltrating three “intruders” (*hoya*, *sasakamaboko*, *shimidōfu*), after defeating the consumers’ ‘neophobia’ (Avieli & Cohen 2004: 759) with familiarity.

## 6.5 Conclusion - shared ethics of the creative class

Around December 2016 Nagaoki from FJ called to tell me exciting news: he and other two FJ employees were to take a trip to Thailand and Malesia to promote their own products at two important international food fairs. FJ grouped up with several other minor retailers and producers of the coast. A previous agreement with the Sendai Airport would allow them, once a line of supply was established abroad, to send their goods.

Nagaoki told me their mission was meant to be purely exploratory, and they were setting up test marketing for their main products (*hotate*, *kaki*, and processed goods from Onagawa, Minamisanriku and Ishinomaki) together with a partner from a neighbouring prefecture (*Yamagata no Ringo*, Apples from Yamagata).

The tour was scheduled at the end of January, so I waited for Nagaoki to come back and invited him for a *risotto* lunch in my apartment. I was experimenting, at the time, with local *sasanishiki* rice, a cultivar with a good resistance to cold, developed in 1963 and quickly risen to a regional speciality (Ōno 1994). It proved to be almost decent as a *risotto* rice, and my guest was enthusiastic about the resultant saffron and duck breast hybrid dish.

After lunch, Nagaoki described his experience in Bangkok’s Tohoku Fair. Their booth was provided with a cooking corner, so the FJ cooked and served salmon, *hotate*, and *kaki* dishes to visitors and potential buyers. Apparently, Thai customers greatly appreciated *karai yatsu* (spicy stuff) such as *tarako*, or *mentaiko* (both salted roe of Alaska pollock cod - *tara*), and *hotate* dishes. Nagaoki managed to talk with several businessmen interested in importing goods,<sup>87</sup> and was very positive about the possibility of selling goods to Thailand, and praised the business-oriented mentality of his newly found Thai friends (several months later, exchanges with his contacts slowed to a halt, unfortunately).

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<sup>87</sup> Despite running radiation tests on Japanese food imports in the immediate aftermath – and requiring ‘export certificates’ (*yushutsu shōmei-sho*, documents to certify the non-contamination of the goods) from Sanriku, Chiba, and Ibaraki producers, Thailand never placed any ban on Japanese food imports. On the contrary, several other nations such as China, Republic of Korea, Singapore, etc., did (Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene 2015).

The same did not happen with his Malay contacts, as the food fair was by his own words:

‘In Malaysia the kind of target of the food fair was different, more focused on healthy food such as *nihoncha* (Japanese tea), *natto* (fermented soybeans), *miso* (a paste also made of fermented soybeans, often used in stock soups). They were not interested in salty food [*shoppai mono*]. Average prices for the retailing of the goods were way higher than Bangkok. Our salmon was particularly popular there, but we did not meet any entrepreneur interested in keeping in contact and developing something together.’

Nagaoki did not provide many other details, but considering his remarks on the ‘focus on healthy food’ of the Kuala Lumpur fair, the higher prices, and the inability of him and his colleagues to establish contacts with local investors, this gives us clues on the terms by which FJ intends to export their goods abroad. *Shoppai*, the kind of foods the Malays were not interested in, does not only define saltiness, but also partially denotes the degree of refinement of a foodstuff or a cuisine: in Japan, salty is dull, and poor, and has been used notably to define Tōhoku food at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (see Aoyama 2008: 137). In the refined context of Japanese ‘health food’, Nagaoki could not find a place for FJ’s narratives of local seafood and fish.

Effectiveness and ineffectiveness of translating food and locality outwards to different contexts – urban ones, or rather metropolitan, since Ishinomaki town is in its own right a city of one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants – are revealing of the choices and strategies actors make, and how specific actors’ narratives better fulfil specific roles.

In this chapter I recounted aspects of the ongoing construction of narratives aimed at the presentation, the evaluation, the transmission, and the marketing of Miyagi products *outside* the prefecture of Miyagi. As the reader has noticed, such processes may not be qualitatively distinct from similar undertakings set in Ishinomaki: I have already highlighted the ethical similarities and experiential intertwinement among Fujihara, Wotani, and Iwasaki. From their new-local perspective, a process of transmission, translation, and adaptation – I choose here the term *renegotiation*, which conveniently implies a two-way interaction, and allows my analysis to consider both how further configurations of Sanriku-ness are transmitted in Tōkyō and Sendai, and how the process of *rescription* of significant elements – e.g. a specific taste and the choice of specific ingredients, as in the case of *hoya* cooking – is operated onto Miyagi cuisine. Locality,

authenticity, periphericity, and the invention of cuisine are all key tools to understand the following analysis.

Considering more in depth the trajectories from which a considerable portion of the material I have collected comes, it is also central to consider the shared ethos of the creative individuals acting within the transformative process of Miyagi cuisine. Different social, generational, and ethical positions generate different results, as the internal comparison of the Wotani-ya, the Koko Miyagi, and the Sendai Hoya Matsuri will highlight.

It is clear, and significant, that among the interviews reported in the previous pages, those of Fujihara, Wotani, and Iwasaki strongly resonate with each other in their overlapping similarities, similar to Wittgenstein's notion of *family resemblances* (2001). Iwasaki strived for a tighter relation between visitors and locals, focusing on direct bodily experience as a medium to understanding and appreciating local crafts and cuisine (2.6). This pairs with Wotani's intention of making of his Wotani-ya a place of exchange between fishermen and (urban) consumers, where Wotani substitutes *taiken* (experiential) leisure with the Fisherman Night, the direct encounter with the producer. In their dialectics, they both expose a hidden something in order to connect their customers with Miyagi-ness; Iwasaki exposes the contact with "mountains and sea" (*yama to umi*), downplayed by the classic domestic tourism model of sightseeing; Wotani exposes the invisible producer of the *sozai* (raw ingredients, see 4.5, 6.2), in order to connect Tōkyōites with the wellspring of their exotic delicacies.

The connection between Fujihara and Wotani, on the other hand, revolves around the concept of dissemination (*kangae hasshin*). They share a great affection for exporting their newfound ways and insights back to the urban realities they came from (see for example Iwasaki's enthusiastic post reported in 3.4) – of course, Iwasaki stresses this aspect as well, but is more concerned with expanding his model in new directions than describing it. Ultimately, the features the three of them share are those of the so-called 'Quiet Mavericks' (Toivonen et al. 2011; Klien 2017, 1.7.b in this thesis), i.e. individuals who, in a conservative society such as the Japanese one, struggle for unconventional aims (in this case the construction of a community of Miyagi-food aficionados, but also simply economic survival in a town like Ishinomaki, as in Fujihara's case). Interestingly, Toivonen's Mavericks not only do aim at unconventional objectives, but does so following unconventional patterns as well, i.e. not conforming to the paradigm of value



and agency currently shared by their generation. Toivonen (2011) and Klien (2017b) frame such unconventional aims and means within the family of ‘post-materialist’ values (see 1.7.b). The socially engaged activities of Fujihara, Wotani, and Iwasaki are a good example of post-growth, post-materialist entrepreneurship, as well as their shared ethos of social activism, aimed at a possible future economic and social transformation of the Sanriku. Wotani’s disregard for the money-making part of business, along with Morishima (2.5) and my bartender’s ‘yes, but...’ reaction to TEPCO’s compensations to *hoya* seafarmers do definitely fall into the category of ‘post-materialist values’, as well as Iwasaki’s *yama to umi* ethos (2.8). Fujihara’s reliance on only local, fresh products, is another member of the Maverick’s mentality family – the deep connection and participation to local life.

As the red line connecting the three individuals, I see FJ’s utopically optimistic long term project – to affectively connect young, active fishermen with their urban peers in order to promote positive exchange of ideas and uplift the Tōhoku fishery to a sustainable, fruitful, innovative business deeply intertwined with its customers – i.e. a typical Maverick’s agenda, negotiating with the old world (*kumiai*, *shiyakusho*, distribution chains, international commerce) brave new visions.

It is with this concept in mind that I compare the Wotani-ya and the Koko Miyagi Furusato Plaza, as both vectors of “food transmitted Miyagi-ness”, embedded into the belly of the Japanese capital. Which of the two is the most successful or effective vector, will not be discussed, as despite their similarities, the latter relies on prefectural funding and a dedicated administrative board, while the former is limited to the partnership between the owner and FJ, propelled by a Campfire crowd-funding campaign which covered roughly five million JPY (thirty-three thousand BGP).<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, analysing the narratives undergoing the presentation of their signature products, it is possible to isolate significant differences.

It would be easy to simplify by arguing for a higher or lower degree of authenticity to one or the other. In both cases, authenticity is at the centre of a self-defining discourse. Sendai’s *gyutan* as a genuine, salty-and-chewy Miyagi specialty, born out of the hardships bravely endured by the Tōhoku people. The seasonal food on Wotani’s handwritten menus are bought directly from the fishermen who sometimes even come to

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<sup>88</sup> <https://airregi.jp/magazine/guide/2989/>, last access 13/02/2018.

the *izakaya* for a chat. Both heavily rely to the principle of authenticity, and yet are vulnerable to the usual critical questions – is the *gyutan* to be considered an authentic Japanese piece of cuisine as it is made of red meat (banned until the Meiji restoration, see Cwiertka 2006: 24), and derived from the (alleged) presence of the American army in Sendai? Does Wotani's creative approach to cooking apparently neutral Miyagi *sozai* even allows him to claim any degree of authenticity? I find more productive to consider the concept of authenticity an inherently empty one (Vlastos 1998, Rath 2016, Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, Cwiertka 2006, Ashkenazi 2004, etc.), and yet fundamental when it is reclaimed. As West (2016: 406) observed taking on Lindholm (2008), '*authenticity* is rooted in the notion of *sincerity* that emerged with the dawn of modernity'; a sincerity that seemed to fade away as the urban world became more and more central. The concept inevitably refers to the urban-rural divide, and although West and Lindholm were thinking of Europe, it partially translates in the Japanese context as well.

Considering the materials presented above, the *Koko Miyagi*'s strategy to authenticate Miyagi food draws mainly on the 'natural' products of the region, i.e. the dehistoricized typicalities of the Northeast. *Gyutan*, *sasanishiki*, *sasakamaboko*, *shimidōfu*, or even *hoya* (which is a marginal presence at the antenna shop) are presented as established, possibly ancestral Tōhoku food, the more connections with the reign of Masamune, the better. Recipes presented in the first floor restaurant are anonymous, *autochthones* ('sprung from the earth by themselves'). The *mingei-hin* are not works of an identified craftsman, or original art pieces, but iterations of the 'ur-*kokeshi*' (see Eco 1995) model of Matsushima's folk craft.

On the contrary, at the Wotani-ya, everything seems to be about connecting people to things – and other people. Not only customers can meet fishermen, but the interaction between customers and *izakaya* employees as well is highly anti-hierarchical. The food itself is situated in time (seasonality) and place (specific areas of Miyagi, and specific producers), and linked to specific individuals, often making use of pictures and short bios (element derived from the FJ's site, on the model of which the Wotani-ya's webpage has been designed). If the *Koko Miyagi* exposes pictures of nationally famous *Rakuten* baseball players, the Wotani-ya hangs a poster of the Onagawa Cobaltore.

Are those comparisons significant enough to state that Wotani is operating in a geographically counterhegemonic fashion, whereas the antenna shop acts within a hegemonic paradigm? Certainly not. But following Toivonen once again, we find in

Wotani aspects of tactful negotiation, as he introduces, together with food, individualities and personal accounts into his Tōkyō *izakaya*. The voices of such individualities, nonetheless, are often flattened over narratives of *kodawari* and *netsui*, consistent with national discourses on Japanese-ness, or on FJ's 'Three Ks'. Moreover, as has been often observed in this work, the fishermen connected to FJ (and thus to Wotani) were representative of a class of young entrepreneurs with radically different views than most of their fathers and older brothers: sustainability, glocalism, individual entrepreneurship, active engagement in the community. In fact, many of those characteristics are also typical of Toivonen's Mavericks.

Another significant aspect of this process of 'negotiated counterhegemonization' is the deterritorialization of recipes (intellectual product of a class of displaced young entrepreneurs, such as Fujihara and Wotani) inscribed onto territorialized *sozai*, raw matter. If on the surface one would be tempted to apply Levi-Straussian categories of culture and nature, we must not forget about the prominent aspect of *translation*, which is being operated by the *ijūsha*: hinge between urbanity and the otherness of Sanriku, their contribution is precisely one of brokering, mediating, inevitably transforming the object of their attention – an object whose ontology has been already conspicuously weakened by the disaster, and is thus the perfect raw matter (*sozai*) in which to inscribe new agencies, and with which to smuggle new ideologies.

To conclude, in his song, Sen constructed a world of longing, melancholic nature, nursery rhymes, and lost lovers. By doing so he also posits his *furusato* in a wider discourse about Japanese-ness, overlapping the two together – and he was by all means not alone in doing so (see Yano 2002: 171-172). Similarly, when *ijūsha* and other active individuals craft a specific, ethically charged view, they are (re)building the world around themselves. On the encounter between the subaltern producer and the central consumer, West (2015: 428-429) observes:

‘such encounters may be fleeting [...] (they) may be significant nonetheless [...]. Through such relationships [...] producers and consumers not only craft food, but also craft themselves, the cultural and environmental worlds in which they live’

Conversely, Beverley (2008: 573) observes, considering the Latin American *testimonio* autobiographical novels:

‘[T]estimonial narrator is not the subaltern as such either; rather, she or he functions as an organic intellectual (in Antonio Gramsci’s sense of this term) of the subaltern, who speaks to the hegemony by means of a metonymy of self in the name and in the place of the subaltern.’

The Gramscian organic intellectual’s duty is, in fact, to articulate on the one hand the feelings and affects of the subaltern, and on the other to infuse the uneducated masses with class conscience (see Hoare 2005). The concept of ‘metonymy of the self’ is poignant for our Tōkyō cases, as it describes the inevitable dualism of the *ijūsha*, one that escapes his urban and wealthy environment only to go back, carrying an experiential plusvalue. Wotani moved because he suffered the Kobe earthquake, in the first place. His positive narration reverberates with both Kobe and the Sanriku. On the other hand, his own authoritative metonymy becomes partially hegemonic towards the experiences of his peers in Ishinomaki. In the same way, the *hoya shiru* won the contest in Sendai, which contributed in part to popularize the *hoya*, but in the nationalized, hegemonic framework of the *shiru*.

## Chapter 7: Representing Ishinomaki

### 7.1 Art, memory, disaster

This chapter, the final one of my doctoral thesis, is to be intended not as a direct continuation of the themes explored in the previous ones, but rather as a deliberate deviation into a neighbouring realm, that of the visual arts.

I have discussed above how flows of people and food interact, construct, reinforce, or contest the production of locality on the coast, and how these fluxes meet and deal with subalternity, imagination, social change. My next step will be a lateral one, to examine how the localities of Ishinomaki and the Oshika Peninsula are imagined by contemporary artists, most of them being new-locals, arriving in town with modalities similar to those discussed in Chapter 3.

The reason I have chosen to dedicate space to the theme of imagining a place – Ishinomaki, the Sanriku, the *gyoson* (fishing village) – is intimately connected with the role of imagination, perception, and artistic expression as it has been debated across the Twentieth Century within European philosophy and various facets of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Contributions from authors such as Walter Benjamin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, or Susan Sontag, who wrote extensively on photography and artistic representation, are still central to the current debate (see for example Jameson 2011, Gardiner 2011, Summers 2011, Bal 2003) and will be considered in conjunction with the ethnographic data presented.

It is my contention that among the most important concepts is that of inter-subjectivity, i.e. the relational *milieu* within which the artistic representation is produced, and consumed. This concept is clearly relevant to my general reflection on the post-disaster social change of Ishinomaki. In an even wider sense, the field of dialogue, confrontation, and conflict (implicit in most cases) corresponds to the same *milieu* in which the discourse on local food is produced, in post-disaster Miyagi. And, last but not least, artistic expression has a role to play in the visual representation of food and its connections with the activities in post-disaster Sanriku.

Following this line of argument, I therefore discuss several cases where my path crossed with artists and/or their production, in Ishinomaki. The first case will cover the exquisite pictures of Takeuchi Toshiyasu, a realist photographer from Tōkyō who took images of

pre-disaster Ishinomaki. In the second section I present the *Tsuzuku-Tei*, a photographic exhibition by young, local and new-local artists held in February 2017 at the Ishinomaki Manga Museum, and compare their production searching for an ‘epistemological path’ to the understanding – in its more profound sense – of Sanriku. Further on I discuss the photographs, writings, and interviews produced by Matsuo, an artist interested in food and memory in the peripheries of Japan. To conclude, I present and analyse the *hoyapai*, a strange, carnivalesque and reproducible work of art, realized by the polemic, antagonist artist Ueki.

## 7.2 Takeuchi – Shutters, stray cats, and rubbish

One day I decided to spend a few hours at the *Maneki Shoppu* (5.5) to have tea and exchange a few words with the owners. It was a windy, cold, and dark late afternoon in November, and after a short but chilly walk along the Kitakami banks, I welcomed the warmth of the small store. The smell of cypress wood, the bubbling of the kettle, and the glow of the small stove, lingered in the ‘conversation corner’, a small area furnished with benches and tables, explicitly made to foster interactions among customers – a very emphasized aspect of post-disaster *sofuto* recovery (2.8).

After the initial surprise and curiosity aroused in the residents of Ishinomaki by my person and mission, an atmosphere of quiet recognition and benevolent indifference slowly descended on me, as I became a regular sight in town. Basking in my newfound normalcy, I sat at the table and had a much welcomed cup of scorching *maccha* tea, answering the usual questions – how was my day, who did I talk to, what did I eat for lunch... The shop was empty, and seeing that the landlady, after the initial compliments, was busy cleaning, I started browsing through the many photo books scattered on the tables. Most of them were about the disaster, volumes displaying almost pornographic depictions of houses turned inside-out, unnatural orgiastic coupling of cars, boats, and buildings piled up one another, filthy tides of silky black seawater, thick with *gareki* (debris) as far as the eye could see.

Out of nowhere came the disembodied voice of the landlady, suggesting that ‘if you like *shashin* (pictures), please have a look at Takeuchi-san’s book, there in the corner’. Half-buried in a stack of flyers, there I found a small white booklet simply titled ‘Ishinomaki

2002~2011’, by the amateur photographer Takeuchi Toshiyasu, member of the *Nippon Riarizumu Shashin Shūdan* (Japanese Realism Photographic Association).

At the time I was entertaining the notion that, in truth, I had no idea of how Ishinomaki looked like before the disaster. Of course, most of the central buildings are still standing, but I felt the 2011 tsunami had somehow severed time into two sections, marked by the *shinsai-mae* (before the disaster) and *shinsai-go* (after the disaster) formulas, widely used by my interlocutors. *Shinsai-mae* Ishinomaki was a mystery to me. Takeuchi’s unassuming pictures, delicate in a way, were astronomically distant from the flamboyant, saturated ‘disaster porn’ (cf. Alexander 2000, Omar & de Vaal 1992) that filled the *Maneki* tables. They opened for me a partial window on the town’s pre-2011 appearance.

Takeuchi’s suspended, almost deserted Ishinomaki, haunted by stray cats, lonely *obāsan*, and shadowy alleys, speaks of a countryside sluggishness, a stubborn, self-righteous shabbiness, insisting against the merciless dazzling sky. The slices of city he chose to capture were the spaces of everyday life: the bus stop in front of the station, the docks, the main crossroads in Tachimachi.

His eye lingers on messy courtyards, wooden shacks, derelict boats left to rust in the grass. The only human being portrayed in the collection is an old fisherman, clad in a filthy *samu-e* (kimono-shaped working clothes), and rubber boots, playing the *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute) in the fishing docks. In the foreword, the photographer (Takeuchi 2014: 64-65; translation mine) comments:

The [early Shōwa] novelist Shiga Naoya was born in Ishinomaki, but left the city when he was only three. Nevertheless, according to [the postwar novelist] Agawa Hiroyuki, he chose to set many of his novels in the city of Onomichi [Hiroshima Prefecture], where he could, due to the topographic similarities between Onomichi and Ishinomaki, re-enact his childhood memories, as if he still lived in his ancestral hometown.

Shiga Naoya’s specialization in the genre of autobiographical novels (*watakushi-shōsetsu*) reinforces Takeuchi’s claim, and introduces a theme – that of memory, loss, and reconstruction, that haunts the photographer’s intellectual approach to his Ishinomaki collection. Most notably, though, Takeuchi’s position involves a powerful shift, triggered by the tsunami, which will inform part of the following sections as well. Let us begin at the beginning, with the Japanese Realism.



In her vivid reconstruction, Professor Julia Thomas (2008) points at the ambiguous position of 1950s photography, considered ‘neither art nor documentary’ (370), but rather the expression of a political practice – more accurately, several political practices. Japanese *Riarizumu* (Realism), the photographic movement aimed at finding ‘what was actually there’, became reified as an intellectual *telos* by the monthly journal ‘Camera’ directed by the photographer celebrity Domon Ken. Every month it featured an array of amateur pictures of ‘street children, prostitutes and beggars’ (373), aimed at portraying the ‘unjust and doleful affair’ (373) of Japanese postwar reality. An analogous intellectual enterprise can be sensed in Takeuchi’s words:

In 2002, as my mother-in-law passed away, I visited Ishinomaki for the first time after many years, but the city centre, once flourishing, has since then declined beyond imagination. The main shopping street was full of closed shutters, the Kitakami’s mouth was filled with sunken and abandoned fishing ships. The shipyards, once the pride of this city, were abandoned and in ruins. [...] I came back two or three times over the following ten years, stopping for a few days to take pictures. Each time I came back, there were more closed stores and workshops. In Ishinomaki, the ‘light of tomorrow’<sup>89</sup> became dimmer and dimmer (*Sakiyuki no akarusa ga mienai yōsu deshita*) (Takeuchi 2014: 65; translation mine).

Takeuchi’s quest, with his original Ishinomaki collection project, was somewhere inbetween memorialization (‘With the former glories of the fish markets and the fishing docks fading away, I wanted to save images of the town centre and the dock’s neighbourhood’, Takeuchi 2014: 65) and denunciation. As Onomichi became for Shiga a surrogate for his hometown, one might argue that Ishinomaki became for Takeuchi the epitome of the unkept promise of the pre-bubble Japanese development: a source of regret, shame even, but at the same time a shape worthy of being portrayed, and preserved: just like the homeless beggars of Domon’s *Riarizumu*.

Interestingly, Takeuchi did organize an exhibition in Tōkyō’s Shinjuku and Ikebukuro, to be inaugurated on April 2011. Just a month before, the disaster hit the Sanriku coast. Takeuchi could enter the city only in July, several months after the mud drainage (*sarawai*). As he writes, all ‘his’ places, in particular those around the old fishery docks (roughly corresponding with the actual interdiction zone of *Minatohama*, seen in 6.4) and the Kitakami’s mouth had been ‘crushed, flooded, or simply washed away [*nagasareta*]’.

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<sup>89</sup> Takeuchi’s socialist undertones here are explicitly revealed, but could be guessed since he references Shiga and Agawa, two explicitly socialist novelists.

In the following lines, Takeuchi seems to express a feeling akin to Numazaki's 'crisis of presence' (5.7).

After that [June 2011] six months passed. I returned to watch the transformations of the city, as if in a pilgrimage (*junrei no yō ni*). Much of the debris (*gareki*) was still there, as footsteps of previous lives, items without any purpose anymore. *I could not recognize the roads, and ended up driving back and forth, looking for places.* [...] What was an everyday normality until yesterday, was violently rooted out (*nekosogi sareta*) from the usual flow of the 'now' (*ima*). My pictures portray the 'nows' of years ago. They are also possible 'nows' of an Ishinomaki never hit by the tsunami. Ultimately, they can also be a way to keep (*umeru*) the history and memories of Ishinomaki, or so, at least, I hope.

It is revealing that the photographer did not take pictures after the disaster. In his foreword, he mentions how, after the earthquake hit his house in Tōkyō, the developing liquid in his dark room spilled onto the floor. In narrative terms, this points clearly to the suspension of his capacity to act as a photographer, an inability to fully 'develop' the event – reiterated in his inability to recognize and thus practice the places he knew and photographed.

Takeuchi's final reflections highlight the central theme of the following sections, i.e. the strategies in play in order to represent Ishinomaki, to memorialize it, and to construct its hypothetical futures. Takeuchi's *riarizumu* photography was without doubt originally meant to portray the city's decline, following a well-established stylistic pattern. What changed after 2011 were not the pictures, but their perception, *in primis* in the eyes of Takeuchi himself. The transformation of Ishinomaki photographic or otherwise artistic representability reflects a transformation in the gaze of the author. Thomas's final reflection on Japanese 1950s *riarizumu* is a political one: if the gaze of the photographer is framed by power, the power to reflect, co-determine, and qualify civic spaces, poverty and wealth, and perspectives over the past, the present, and the future, realists could be seen as aiming at revealing such power (Thomas 2008: 391-392). After the disaster, the meaning of Takeuchi's pictures changed radically. Susan Sontag measured her reality in terms of 'before' and 'after' seeing the photographed atrocities of Baden-Baden and Dachau (1977: 14-15), actively splitting reality in two segments separated by a revelation. A very similar reasoning reshaped Takeuchi's pictures, from the classic 'prostitutes and beggars' approach, to a memorializing intent: revealing and remembering are two drives whose interplay we will explore in the following sections.

### 7.3 Four views of Ishinomaki

In February 2017 I was invited to the first edition of the *Tsuzuku-Tei* ('Continue' Exhibition) at the Ishinomaki Ishinomori Manga Museum, an iconic, spaceship-like building miraculously spared by the tsunami and reopened in 2014.

I had lukewarm feelings about the exhibition, but rapidly changed my mind after seeing one of the flyers advertising the event. It featured a frontal shot of the four artists featured in the exhibition, standing in the middle of Aitopia Dōri, Chūō's main street. Under their feet, superimposed on the picture, were little white roots. Over their heads, a caption: '*Ishinomaki ni nekkō no haeta shashinka-tachi no sashin-tei*' (Photo exhibition of photographers who took root in Ishinomaki). Apart from Moritomo, already encountered in several previous chapters, three other photographers took part to the event, each contributing with their own work.

It was a busy day, for the Manga Museum. A considerable crowd gathered in the not-so-spacious exhibition hall, before the presentations began. Each artist briefly 'gallery talk'-ed about their work. The first speaker, Mr. Suzuki, was originally born in Kanagawa Prefecture (Kantō area, south from Tōkyō), and moved into Ishinomaki after 2011 as a volunteer attached to the Peace Boat Volunteer Center in town.

Suzuki's pictures are religiously taken in the moments preceding dawn, resulting in a collection of blue-shaded panoramas, very peaceful and yet extremely cold. Coldness was also a feature I instinctively attributed to his character, as he emotionlessly went through his personal story, not unlike that of many other intellectual *ijūsha*. After volunteering on the coast, he decided to live in Ishinomaki and portray its beauties in a long-term project he called '*Ishinomaki no Asa*' (Ishinomaki's Morning). Suzuki's art occupies a specific place in the organizational logic of the exhibition, a place I would define as 'romantic representation'. In this sense, his suspended landscapes, empty of movement and human figures, conveyed a de-humanized, aestheticising narrative of place not unlike the representations of Tōhoku showcased in the 'Colourful Emotions Tōhoku' promotional video series (see 4.2).

As I asked him why he preferred that lighting, or landscape photography, he simply replied 'I think that they look good'. Suzuki's visuals belong to what could be named 'classic landscape photography' (see Wells 2011). He positions himself on a higher ground, and takes shots with a wide angle, harmonically composing marine views with

mountains, woods, small villages surrounded by trees, solitary boats rippling the shiny surface of the sea. His aesthetic drive appeared to me as apocalyptic,<sup>90</sup> and reminded me closely of the Cartesian, objectivist approach criticised firstly by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), that of a ‘solitary subject gazing on a world of discrete [...] “facts” [...] reflected, or “possessed” in thought, by a sovereign act of cognition’ (Gardiner 2011: 118), and further defined as ‘visual essentialism’ by Mieke Bal (2003). Suzuki’s photography is quite appreciated in Ishinomaki, and his vistas feature in several advertising campaigns and local gravure magazines. It answers, in a way, to the self-orientalist desire of aesthetic representation that the Tōhoku region tapped into for its domestic and international travel campaigns (see 4.2 and 4.3).

The idealised (and heavily photoshopped) beauty of Suzuki’s pictures contrasted starkly with the second artist featured in the exhibition, the young, Ishinomaki-born, Mrs. Furusato. Specialized in analog photography and film development, her project focused on negatives found in the post-tsunami debris, which she restored and developed. As most of her material was understandably damaged, she produced an exhibition of semi-incomprehensible shapes, burned out landscapes, vague silhouettes.

As I found myself lacking the intellectual tools to interpret her conceptual art in photographic terms, I relied on her presentation and attitude for a possible reading. Furusato spent long minutes in describing, and tracing with her hands tenuous forms, barely perceptible, guessing a face, a body, or a smile. The care and effort she put into recognizing the traces of *shinsai-mae* lives, memories, and affects, helped me categorize her work as an exercise of Sartrean existentialism. The final display became signified by the personal expertise and agency which led to it, rather than the ‘naked beauty’ of the picture. Suzuki’s non-human co-author, the disaster, worked by erasing, blurring, eroding family pictures, signifiers in turn for family bonds, social relations.

The value of Furusato’s pictures was in this sense understandable only by listening to her recollections, and watching her hands move over the abstract canvases. Interestingly, her approach resonated with Sartre’s takes on photography and imagination, as analysed by Sawada (2013). In his early works, the French philosopher reflected about the relations between imagination and perception, and the role of pictures and drawings. Particularly interesting is his concept of *analogon* (analogy): ‘The image is an act which focuses upon

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<sup>90</sup> Here ‘apocalyptic’ (from Ancient Greek *apokálypsis*) is meant to convey its literal meaning of ‘revelation’, the description of an objective reality (*apó*: to undo; *kalýptō*: to cover, to hide).

an *absent* [...] object in its corporeality, via a [...] content which is not given as such, but rather as an “analogical representative” (*représentant analogique*)’ (Sartre 1940: 4, quoted in Sawada 2013: 14, translation by the author, my italic). The constructive and imaginative process sparked by the act of looking at a material *pre-text* (1940: 15) theorized by Sartre in *L’imaginaire* (*The Imaginary*, 1940) anticipates several key themes of *Being and Nothingness* (1943), namely the synthetic impulse towards the unattainable synthesis between consciousness and uncounsciousness, i.e. the very tenet of human knowledge; and the subjectifying action of the ‘gaze of the other’. In Sartrean existentialism, knowledge (imagination) becomes a product of the performative act of seeing (cf. Rose 2011, Bal 2003), and the photographic image a ‘sign of absence insofar as it represents an absent object’ (Sawada 2013: 31). Furusato’s performance when illustrating the shapes of her ruined pictures implied precisely such a construction, the imaginative inference of absence, transcending the broken medium. Further analysing Sartre’s *L’imaginaire*, Sawada contends that ‘When I look at Pierre’s portrait, my consciousness does not focus on the portrait itself, but [...] it *seeks out* Pierre’ (15).

As I was reflecting on the concepts above (and frantically scribbling in my notebook), the third artist, Watanabe, introduced himself and his work. *Ishinomaki-kko* (see 3.4), like Furusato, his take was completely different from the previous two. Watanabe displayed a vast array of colourful, blurred, objectively bad pictures, taken with a cheap point-and-shoot camera in Ishinomaki, on various moments: the *Tanabata* festival in June, Ishinomaki’s *Kawabiraki* summer festival, the new year’s eve, *etc.* He explained himself: ‘I took these pictures as a young, amateur photographer. Now looking at them, they have no particular value, except they are *among the few pictures available of shinsai-mae Ishinomaki*’.

I was struck by this notion, as those pictures were clearly far from the works of art and technical prowess displayed in the exhibition. Yet, the temporal qualification – the *shinsai-mae*-ness – wrapped and elevated them, in the same way as Furusato’s misshaps were signified by their author’s *recherche*. In respect to Suzuki’s ‘positivist romanticism’ (see Bal 2002: 12-13) and Furusato’s ‘Sartrean’ existentialism, Watanabe’s work, with its involuntary absence of skill and method, taps precisely into the temporal border-crossing plusvalue a picture of a lost world carries. I came to think of it in terms similar to those used by Fiona Summers (2011) in her comments on Walter Benjamin’s 1931 ‘A Short History of Photography’ (1972). In the German philosopher’s approach, pictures ‘capture

moments in the flow of time [and enable] us to see retrospectively elements within a scene which are lost to the conscious mind (or memory) as time, and that which occurs through it flows on, and away.’ (Summers 2011: 458). More specifically, Benjamin’s photography steps forward from the appreciation of the *thing itself*, and becomes a means to ‘understand the present by looking back for clues [...] in order to contextualise the future-present in its past’ (Summers 2011: 459).

There is a deep significance in the work of Watanabe, but even more in the reactions it was meant to cause among the viewers. Even if Ishinomaki’s city centre had not been extensively disfigured by the disaster (the opposite would happen with Minamihama and the Kitakami’s river mouth), most guests stared at the festive, oversaturated *Kawabiraki* pictures with longing and sadness. Several months later, at the end of July 2017, a few days before the same festival, I would find that same longing and sadness again, at work in the words of a friend, who recalled how ‘*Before the disaster*, the town hall would set up some serious firework show. They used to go on up to four hours, with thousands of rockets fired. Now they halved it. I mean, it’s still great, but hell, those were good times’. Intentionally or not, Watanabe’s pictures seemed to tap into this regretful fall from greatness, and provided a visual support to frame, temporally, the ‘good times’ of Ishinomaki.

The last – and in many ways most important – artist to introduce his work was Moritomo, who would later become a close collaborator and a good friend. I have already partially described his photography (3.3), but not in detail. Exactly like Suzuki, Moritomo shot most of his exhibited pictures at dawn. But instead of searching for a higher ground to capture vistas, he sailed with the fishermen. His point of view was that of a man on a boat, leaning over the railings, glancing through the ropes, pointing at men at work from the sides, poaching shots of their moving hands. Moritomo, unlike Suzuki, has a preference for earthy colours. His pictures are warmed by the browns of mud, the greens and oranges of the workers’s rubber overalls. His eye is pitiless, in a sense, highlighting every flaw, speck of dirt, and wrinkle. Yet, he had the ability to invest his pictures with a sense of closeness – even camaraderie. During our conversations, Moritomo reflected about his own position and social interactions, and how they shaped his photography:

Before I came here, before the disaster, I did not really mind about that [friendship, social relations] in my job, or if I did, it was not relevant to my pictures. Before, I don’t think people like photographers and fishermen became friends very often [laughs]. Since then, I

heard often, and said often, words as ‘If it wasn’t for this disaster, we would have never met’. People of all kinds collided (*butsukatta*), and sometimes connected (*tsunagatta*). Fishermen used to be friends of other fishermen, and now that has changed. It’s impressive the kind of change this earthquake triggered.

[...]

In the beginning I came here as a volunteer, but after the shoveling and cleaning was done, I had to start thinking about what I could do for this place – this people – by shooting pictures. I worked a little bit for NHK and newspapers as photoreporter, then I started working for NPO’s websites, with pictures, design. [...] Around that time, I became friend with this seaweed farmer, Kimura [pseudonym]. This guy [points at a picture lying on the table]. We met at this nursery/shelter place, back in 2011, kinda became friends. Took him one year to go back to work, because of broke machinery or something... During that year, well, lots of things happened. Thing that’d make you cry, and other that’d make you laugh. He allowed me to take some pictures of his life, of his family. After that year, I was with him on his boat, for the first harvest. And I did the only thing I could do, I mean, taking pictures. I think we are best friends now, or something close to that.

Sometimes interview transcriptions do not do justice to the emotional states of who is speaking. Moritomo, while saying these words, was clearly moved by his own memories. He did not elaborate on the remarks about his friend Kimura, but I think he meant to explain – answering one of my general questions about his experience as an Ishinomaki new resident – the roots of his connection with local fishermen, as well as with NPOs such as Fisherman Japan. His participation to Kimura’s joys and sorrows (the birth of a daughter, amidst the many losses he and his family endured after the disaster), accompanied by his picture-taking, surely informed deeply his artistic approach – which Moritomo does not shy away from admitting: ‘Copying-and-pasting my previous work in Ōsaka or Tōkyō just wouldn’t do. I wanted to connect deeply (*fukaku tsunagaru*), because there are pictures that can be taken only when connected deeply’.

Watching Moritomo’s pictures for the first time at the Manga Museum exhibition, my interest was sparked at first by two smaller photos of food – one of a rich plate of sashimi, the other of pale, raw fish meat being sliced. The two pieces – artificially illuminated, studio photographs probably from one of his ‘commercial’ portfolios – were dwarfed by much wider prints of fishermen at sea. When we met for our first interview, after several weeks, I asked him about those two pictures. The answer he gave was polemic, poetic, and interesting:



Food, *seafood*, is portrayed with ‘yummy pictures’ (*oishisō-na shashin*). But those images are not in any way connected (*tsunagatte-inai*), visually, with those of the fishermen who caught that food. Sales are made using ‘yummy pictures’, the customers’s judgement is based only on those. Before that could happen, a fisherman had to drip his sweat on his boat (*ryōshi-san no asemizu tarashitari*), going out in the stormy sea (*shike no umi ni detari*). Wouldn’t food taste better, knowing the stories of the people who produced it? Being able to *picture* those figures (*sono sugata ga arutte iu no ga, imēji dekitara*)?

Moritomo was weighting his words very carefully in the second half of the quote. In fact, I believe he was putting into words the ethic and aesthetic aims of his own work (faces twisted by weariness and effort, sweat drops, foamy waves are all elements present in his work). Considering his artistic production, this choice of words should not be interpreted lightly as a turn of the phrase, but as a methodological framework. In Chapter 5 I briefly mentioned Tanizaki’s *nare* (5.7), the idea that human agency and affects end up being inscribed into the features of significant objects, or places, filling up the world with subjectivities. Moritomo followed, I believe, similar philosophical insights when juxtaposing the sweat of the fishermen (*asemizu*) with the stormy sea (*shike no umi*), as if the two salty liquids acted as a connective *medium*, inscribing the fisherman’s work, his fatigue, and his frequentation with the place – the shifting, mercurial, potentially deadly place that is the sea – with the food that emerges from the interaction of humankind and ‘nature’ (cf. 4.3, where the shore became, in the RAF rhetorics, the meeting point of two separate worlds).

Photography, like ethnography,<sup>91</sup> is an interpretative method, applied from an observational standpoint. Photographers choose which elements, of what is in front of their eyes, they want to highlight, and which ones to downplay. They interpret movement, as well as light. Good photographers acknowledge their positioning (physical, social, linguistic...) and include it in their work. Good photos, like good ethnographies, possesses a narrative drive.

Narration indeed exuded from the work of all the four artists described above, and the progression by which they were introduced mimicked an epistemological progression towards acknowledging Sanriku. From the aesthetic appreciation of a landscape in the liminal state of faint light preceding sunrise, to the fading and yet cherished memories of

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<sup>91</sup> In a famous passage, Geertz observed: ‘all ethnography is part philosophy [...]’ (1973: 346). I argue the is true same for photography, without stretching the second half of Geertz’s sentence too much (‘[...] and the rest of it is confession’, 1973: 346).

past affects, to a more structured and rational remembrance of sociality, signified by the passing of time, ending lastly with the powerful acknowledgment of the lowly work of fishermen, from a grounded, human viewpoint.

Moritomo's viewpoint is sometimes uncomfortable, as it positions the viewer right within spaces of affectivity, intimacy. His portfolio on Kimura's life and family does exactly this: enters the house of the fisherman, explores with wide, warm glances, its joys and its sorrows. Moritomo transcends both classic aesthetics, and memorialization, and attempts at portraying not *the thing itself*, but the inter-subjective connection between him and the people on the other end of the camera. It is a very ephemeral thing, the aim of his photography, and one that does not end when he shuts down the camera and puts the equipment away. In a sense, is like trying to shoot a smell – and it is no accident that he himself defines his photography *ningen kusai*, 'smelling of humanity'. Between the lines, in our interviews, Moritomo acknowledges his alterity to his fishermen friends, and at the same time distances himself from being a photographer: 'I don't hang out with other artists' (3.3) is a statement of principle.

Hands and faces are often emphasized in Moritomo's pictures. In many of those, the fishermen portrayed look into the camera, establishing a direct, emotional contact between the viewer and the viewed, defusing the subjectification of the Sartrean 'gaze of the other'. Moritomo's photography inevitably made me think of Merleau-Ponty's 'intra-ontology' (1974: 168), originally formulated in his 1964's *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). In a distinct anti-Hegelian, anti-Cartesian impulse, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of process envisions a world which 'is something to be constructed' (1982-1983). In the words of Michael Gardiner (2011: 121):

For Merleau-Ponty, the world is presented to me in a strangely 'deformed' manner – that is my perspective is always inflected by the precise situation I occupy at a particular point in time/space, the idiosyncracies of my personal psychosocial development, relevant sociocultural factors and so forth. Insofar as I am 'thrown' into a universe lacking intrinsic significance – the world does not simply consist of self-evident 'things-in-themselves' – the existential task that confronts me is to make the world meaningful, to create [...] coherent patterns out of the chaotic rhythms, events and fluctuations of lived experience.

Merleau-Ponty's counter-teleological world of chaos is to be perceived and constructed (two processes which are not mutually exclusive) via what the French philosopher describes as 'intra-ontology', i.e. the 'understanding from within our embodiment in and

of the world' (1974: 121, cf. Ingold 2013:1-15). The transformative encounter with the other as a reality-building practice leans close to what Moritomo identifies as his positional intersubjectivity (his *tsunagari*, or connection), and the source of his photography ('there are pictures that can be taken only when connected deeply').

As I have illustrated in this section, epistemological patterns can be identified in the different approaches chosen by individual artists to portray Ishinomaki. Such means are used to different ends, but it is precisely in their dependancy on a generative event – the disaster itself, which acts in a similar way to Sontag's *apocalypse* (see above) – that they produce specific meanings, very different from the motivations which produced them (in particular in the cases of Takeuchi and Watanabe, and less explicitly in the case of Furusato).

#### **7.4 Matsuo – opaque memories**

One summer night of 2017 I finally convinced a friend, Mr. Matsuo, to sit at a table in his studio and discuss some of his views. Originally from Kyūshū, he moved with his family to Tōkyō spending his adolescence there, and studying editing at Waseda University. He volunteered in Shiogama and Matsushima in 2011 and 2012, then he decided to settle down in Ishinomaki and pursue several projects related pre-disaster memories.

Matsuo is a multifaceted artist: photographer, writer, editor, graphic designer. We had many common acquaintances, kept bumping into each other at food-related events, and I gradually came to understand that his work focused mostly on food. Matsuo is a practical young man, not particularly prone to intellectual speculation – although we did share a common interest in Proust. From there we inevitably started our conversation with food and the memories of food, a recurring theme in my interlocutor's production.

I have been working on food and cooking for quite a while now. Collecting memories of cooking tells you something about why a particular dish sticks in people's memories, and how it intersects with people's backgrounds and lives. Tells you something about their past. If you collect enough memories, they can eventually become town memories, a shared value.

Between 2012 and 2013 Matsuo has been working on the shared memories of a curry restaurant in Shiogama, a medium sized town at the southern end of the Matsushima Bay,

about 40 km from Ishinomaki. He patiently interviewed many residents – another thing we had in common – in order to put together the ‘town memory’ of the curry restaurant, tragically washed away by the tsunami. By doing so he not only reconstructed a local, sensory memory, but also the memory of the restaurant’s owner, Mrs. Mariko, who lost her life in the disaster as well.

‘What we did was, basically, to recollect memories of Mariko, and her curry. It was strange at first, because everyone had a slightly different idea about her, everyone had their own ‘Mariko’, as it was more a fictional image (*kūsō no zō*) than a real person. So I listened to their memories, and then asked them to try and reproduce her curry, which we ate together’

As diverse as individual accounts could be, Matsuo’s final aim was to collect the different angles, and to archive them. His final products are generally books with photographs and text illustrating them.

‘I had other projects though, unrelated to Miyagi or the disaster. That is not my point really, I like to look at other places too, like Mito [Ibaraki Prefecture], or Himi [Toyama Prefecture]. With those, I looked into community ties and cooking, especially in *shokudō*.<sup>92</sup> Or how grandmas still use wild vegetables and mushrooms gathered in the mountains. Those things give you a sense of continuity, and of community. Here things are very different than that, I don’t work in Ishinomaki’

Memory and authenticity seemed themes very relevant to Matsuo, but he tended not to delve too much into analysis, eluding my more abstract questions. Nevertheless, I managed to get a better grip on his worldview as he introduced me to the artistic installation he realized for the Reborn Art Festival (see 4.3, 5.4). The title was ‘When I saw what I could not see’ (*Mirenakatta mono ga mieta toki*). In a hostel in the Oshika Peninsula he set up a small, featureless white room, with a solitary stool placed in the middle, and a narrow window a couple of metres in front of it. Overlooking a cliff and the Pacific Ocean, the window was fit with an opaque screen. The more I sat on the stool (not very comfortable), trying to look at the scenery, the more tiresome and annoying my effort became. Matsuo refused to reveal his motivations for the that specific setup, leaving me to deduce (and infer) my own interpretations. An excerpt from the exhibition website written by Matsuo (my italic):

‘From that incident we had to see that the beauty and horror were inseparably related. And from then we had to experience the time that followed. Six years since, based on the pride

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<sup>92</sup> Lit. ‘Dining hall’, cheap family restaurants.

of our motherland, we are trying to recuperate the beauty of the land and the daily lives. But in that process, the *difference of awareness* among various areas and communities has widened. [...] Whether it is good or bad, I do not know. But we have seen *extreme irrationality and conflict* in the recollections of different people. I have taken a piece of actual scenery and reframed it differently. Is there any way to measure the distance between psychology and reality one faces? The distance between self and the other, the distance between one and substance, between time and space?’

It is not difficult to see in the installation the core concepts of Matsuo’s artistic research, i.e. those of memory and loss. As in his work on the washed away curry restaurant in Shiogama, or the countryside cuisine, the artist confronts himself with disappearing worlds, and the ambiguity of individual memory, which acts as an opaque screen, progressively more and more unreliable, biased. His conclusion is quite clear as well: only a collectively mediated effort can and should restore truthfulness whereas an individual person is incapable of objective remembrance. The ‘extreme irrationality and conflict’ of individual recollections is opposed to the ‘pride of our motherland’; the small, uncomfortable white room mimics the individual mind, incapable of reflecting lucidly the beauty of the landscape, looking at the world from a narrow, malfunctioning aperture.

On the one hand, Matsuo is at odds with the memorializing potential of photographic imagery, and recognizes the partiality of individual representations. On the other hand, his images are supported by research, interviews, an active attempt to construct a collective memory. He is clearly not satisfied with photographic representation and its ‘talismanic uses’ (Sontag 1977: 12), the ‘(ghostly) markers of proof that someone/something existed’ (Summers 2011: 454): in his RAF setup, the ‘eye’ (window) is clouded and narrow. In a definitely collectivist and *nihonjinron*-esque manner, Matsuo addresses a critical issue in post-disaster Sanriku: the search for a coherent narrative. Far from being the artistic whim of an intellectual, Matsuo’s polemical focus highlights the mnemonic conflict over several key events, such as the Okawa Elementary School (see Ishigaki et al. 2013, Oda 2016, Lloyd-Parry 2017), or the *Higeki Bōsai Chōsha* (Disaster Prevention Office) in Minamisanriku (Kenji 2016, Koga 2017). Imbued with ideology as it is, Matsuo’s work becomes significant when compared to the work and thoughts of the last artist featured in this chapter, Ueki and her *hoya*-shaped headdress.

## 7.5 Ueki – performing the *hoya*

My first encounter with the artwork discussed in this section happened in the first weeks of my fieldwork, many months before I could meet its creator. It was October 2016, and I was visiting the annual Fishery Festival, held at the newly built fish market in the fishery docks of Watanoha – which became the post-disaster fishing hub of Ishinomaki, after the irreparable damage suffered in Minamihama. The central hall of the huge building was filled with fresh fish and cooked food stalls, and the grounds were flooded with people.

In the early afternoon, as scheduled, the Ishinomaki Tango School delivered a performance: a small platoon of tango dancers streamed up and down the building, surrounded by wings of curious snapping pictures. On the head of the *prima ballerina* stood a very curious artifact, a lumpy pink aggregate of half-inflated balloons, held together by a plastic red net. The contraption completely hid the dancer's face, conferring her an eerie look. With the corner of the eye I also noticed a second person wearing the unusual headdress, sporting a pink summer *kimono* over an incongruous white tulle *tutu*.

I took a mental note of the weird item, but after a while I lost track of it, and it was not until Spring of the following year that I would learn about its name, and its creator. At that time I was in the Oshika Peninsula, interviewing the *hoya* seafarmer Morishima (2.5), when I noticed a couple of smaller pink objects of the same nature as the ones I had seen months before in Watanoha. I could not resist asking him about those, and his comeback was intriguing:

‘Those? Those are *hoya-pai* [laughs]. Have you never met Ueki? She's a friend of mine, lives up in Kobuchi-hama [Oshika Peninsula]. She's an artist. She did this thing, says it's a *hoya oppai*.<sup>93</sup> Weird isn't it? We use some of those for when we do direct sales, or when we are invited at food events. People can wear them and take pictures, they're advertising basically.’

The idea of a many-breasted *hoya* effigy fascinated me, as I recalled Diana of Ephesus, the disturbingly multi-breasted pagan fountain in Villa d'Este, commissioned by the Cardinal Ippolito II in pre-counter-reformation times. I was able to satisfy my curiosity about the *hoya-pai* when I finally met Mrs. Ueki, in the early Summer of 2017.

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<sup>93</sup> *Oppai* is a infantile word which several decades ago became incorporated in the *otaku* (Japanese geeks) jargon, meaning both ‘big breasts’ and ‘mother's milk’ (see Katsuno & Maret 2004, Azuma 2009).

Similarly to other artists operating in the area, she was an *ijūsha* from Tochigi Prefecture (Kantō area), although she pointed out that her family was originally from Sendai. She defended her belonging to Tōhoku in several brief mentions during the interview. For example, when considering her first months in Ishinomaki after the disaster:

‘Well of course I had to settle a little in Ishinomaki at first, but there was no such thing as a gap to cross really. Or maybe people were already used to having people from outside, I don’t know. Anyway, when people asked me where I was from and I said “Sendai”, the usual comeback was “It’s been hard there too, right?” [*“Sendai mo taihen dattayone”*].’

There are a few elements which differentiate Ueki from Matsuo, making her more akin to Moritomo, in some ways. Although she did live in Ishinomaki city for two years since 2011, afterwards she moved to a relatively remote area in the Peninsula, taking a job at a local *kappō-minshuku* (inn-plus-restaurant), the Meguro. That is where her first *hoya-pai* was conceived:

‘Before working at Meguro I carried out a project with local elementary school kids, for a public interest company (*kōeki shadanhōjin*). I worked as coordinator, editor and photographer for the elementary school journal, helped kids do interviews and such. That’s how I first met our common friend Morishima, who was interviewed by the students. [...] One day I came up with this *hoya-pai*, and I showed up at a party wearing it. I guess it was also a little personal, I was afraid of talking to men at the time, so I used the thing to cover up my face. People said ‘What’s that?!’. It’s a *hoya* and *oppai* together [laughs]. I always had an attraction for huge breasts too, as an image of abundance, bountifulness. At the party I met my current employer, the owner of Meguro, who just said ‘Did you know that our *minshuku*’s colour is pink?’. He meant they used to have pink banners, before the disaster. So they asked me to redecorate the main hall with *hoya-pai*, and eventually I got a job there, and moved in’

Ueki keeps jumping back and forth, delineating her connections with the Meguro, the *hoya*, and the fisherman. The post-disaster renovation of the *minshuku* intertwined with her personal feelings and social awkwardness, as she conceived something that was as much as her individual expression, and a symbolic gathering of locality, post-disaster renewal, and the omnipresent, heterogeneously declined myth of *yutakasa* (‘richness’, ‘abundance’, a term often associated with fishery in Sanriku, see for example 4.3, 5.1).

‘Essentially, it stands for femininity. I originally had the idea of putting balloons in mandarin nets for my graduation at Yokohama University. At the time I stayed in Koganechō, in a building right under the Keikyu line. We were mostly girls in that area. I kinda put



together that with the memories of my mother's love (*hahaoya no aijō*). But after, when I first saw a *hoya* in Yagana-hama [Northern Oshika], I was really inspired by it. They pulled out a huge colony, all lumped together, with that vibrant, intense red, all glossy with seawater. I could *feel* the glossiness. So, after a while, a fisherman said like 'I'll be selling my *hoya* at the docks, can I borrow a *hoya-pai*?'. And then the thing went viral, I guess. In that occasion, *it felt like the seed of some sort of mascot in costume (yurukyara) was growing in the imagination of the locals.* (Soko de hajimete, aru tane yuru-kyara-tekina imēji ga jimoto no hito-tachi ni teichaku shite itta kanji desu)'

[...]

But then, people would say 'the *-pai* in it stands for breasts, it's indecent, it's not just a *yurukyara*, etcetera' and all sort of problems came up, people disliking it, kids being scared of it, crying even.<sup>94</sup> I saw all sorts of reaction, but then I thought, this is a product of my art. They say *hoya* has five tastes,<sup>95</sup> so I guess my work moves five emotions as well. It is cute, scary, erotic... And another two I guess, but I don't know [laughs]'

In this very dense passage, Ueki touches several key themes. The symbolic deconstruction of the *hoya-pai* is particularly interesting, as she declared it was originally associated with a mix of her memories of Kogane-chō and her mother. The multiple and lumped nature of her headdress seems to me alluding at her communal, female-only environment. The soft, rounded and protruding shapes have obvious feminine connotations, that she links to her mother – and *oppai*, before becoming a Tōkyō slang word for '(woman with) huge breasts', also had the meaning of 'mother's milk'. Pinkness of course was suggested by the owner of Meguro, but it also amplifies the femininity theme the whole *hoya-pai* is about, according to its creator.

The *hoya-pai* has been used as a decoration item in several occasions (meetings of the Hoya Hoya Gakkai, market stalls, the Meguro main hall), but it is way more relevant as Ueki wears it and stalks the streets in her pink kimono: it completely covers her face and head, substituting her individuality with a multitude of shapes lumped together. Mixing with the rest of the environment is central in Ueki's *practice* of her product: she would generally pose for her husband (who assumed the role of official *hoya-pai* photographer) in the midst of a crowd, the pictures capturing many a puzzled look from the passers-by.

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<sup>94</sup> Here Ueki is presumably referring to the view of herself wearing the *hoya-pai* hat rather than the item in itself.

<sup>95</sup> This is a common heresay about the *hoya*. The five tastes are the ones usually acknowledged by physiology and neuroscience: sweetness (*kanmi*), saltiness (*shioaji*), acidity (*sanmi*), bitterness (*nigami*), and *umami* (see Brillat-Savarin 2009).

It is precisely this intersubjective milieu of the *hoya-pai* which triggered the reactions Ueki mentioned: fear, eroticism, cuteness.

Out of the two emotions she could not think about when interviewed, I might infer one: collegiality, emerging from her active intermingling with the social world of Ishinomaki and beyond. As Sussloff observed, considering the transformations of the concept of aesthetics in the course of the Twentieth Century, ‘If [...] traditional aesthetics [...] addresses issues of value, judgement, beauty [...], contemporary aesthetic turn is precisely towards [...] contradictions’ (2011: 96). Ueki’s *hoya-pai* hat is a good source of contradictions, namely in the different feelings it entices. Moreover, when performing her apparitions, wearing the unlikely combination of pink *kimono* and white *tutu*, Ueki often takes off her headdress and lets others try it on and take pictures, removing the observer-observed separation typical not only of traditional works of art, but also of the *yuru-kyara* world – one actor is allowed to impersonate the mascot, and others relate to him or her. In this light, Ueki’s observation about the seed growing assumes a specific meaning: the multiplicity of the *hoya-pai* seems to act as a homogenizing agent, bonding its wearers in anonymity, muffling their subjectivity – wearing a *hoya-pai*, it is virtually impossible to see anything as well.

Going back to her connections with the world of *hoya* seafarmers, Ueki became quite knowledgeable about the current issues, as she explained me:

‘I have been working together with the Hoya Hoya Gakkai [seen in Chapter 6]. Generally I do not receive any compensation, but my travel expenses are covered, so I provide them *hoya-pai* for their stalls, and sometimes pop up at presentations, to cheer up vendors and visitors. [...] There is a very ambiguous situation now with *hoya* farming you know. Currently, a good amount of harvested goods are incinerated. TEPCO’s refunds are handed through the *kumiai*, which means that fishermen not affiliated with the cooperative receive next to nothing, just the little money they can get from the incinerator’s company. This leads many to try to get into direct sales and marketing, but with a sense of injustice, not to mention the notion that such a huge percentage of what they produce, will be destroyed anyway. On top of that, there are different opinions all across the beaches [i.e. villages, marked by the suffix *hama*, beach] in the Peninsula. Some people are happy with the current situation, for whatever reason, so do not support others who explore new solutions.<sup>96</sup> [...] I am not a fan of artworks used for commercial ends, but this is different.

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<sup>96</sup> Ueki’s vague remarks about the incoherences among the Peninsula fishermen echoes with similar (and similarly indirect) observations made by Goro (2.3).

The fishermen are struggling, so if they ask me to make a big *hoya-pai* for them, I happily do so.'

Here we can observe an approach to the internal struggles among the coastal residents that significantly departs from the positions expressed by Matsuo in the previous section. Ueki choose to align herself with a more critical line of reasoning for what concerns the post-disaster narratives of locality. A further, notable element of opposition between the two artists is their take on the Reborn Art Festival (Chapters 4, 5). Whereas Matsuo took active part in it, contributing with his work, Ueki opted for a less conventional angle, organizing random apparitions in the exhibition areas clad in her *hoya-pai* costume.

'The RAF, I mean, there are various aspects to consider. [...] Although I am not against this kind of initiative, the impact on locals is minimal. Take the Hama-Saisai [see 4.3, 5.3]: when the festival is over, that will close down. [...] Plus they were looking for famous artists, who could gather many visitors. I tried at first to get in contact with the organizers [...], they even offered me some exhibition space in one of the minor venues. I did not really like it, so in the end I decided to just go there on random days, walk around, make my own exhibition [laughs]. My own festival maybe?'

There is a delicate quality in Ueki's antagonism, something similar to Moritomo's optimism. It appeared clear to me that both the artist and the photographer were more engaged with local residents and local priorities, than with the top-down structure of the RAF. Compared to Matsuo's negative stance towards the ongoing contradictory activities of Sanriku and his search for a common, normalized narrative, Ueki's intellectual and artistic engagement with the Oshika Peninsula and the *hoya* farmers appears more receptive to less conservatory instances, and oriented towards the contradictions of plurality.

Ideological differences notwithstanding, each artist's contribution examined in the previous sections clearly aims at the construction of a narrative of locality. These narratives proceed through processes of rereading the city's past, introduce interpretative deviations, and most importantly the reframing of the everyday. In the concluding section, I elaborate on these passages.

## 7.6 Reframing the everyday

Discussing how in *safari* cameras came to replace rifles, Susan Sontag observed that ‘When we are afraid, we shoot. But when we are nostalgic we take pictures’ (1977: 11). The nostalgic drive is central in the works of some of the artists discussed above. Certainly it was a principal motivation for Takeuchi, who visited Ishinomaki in 2002 to attend his mother-in-law’s funeral, and found it ‘in decline beyond imagination’. In his implicit temporal configuration, Takeuchi juxtaposed two dimensions, that of Ishinomaki’s flourishing ship building and fishery industries of the 60s, and the 2002 time of economic stagnation. To define the city’s past grandeur, he pushes back to the Edo period (1600-1868) and Ishinomaki’s fluvial commerce –a similar ‘golden age’ rhetorics to the one used by the Genki Ichiba representative discussed in 5.5. Takeuchi’s Ishinomaki is an objectified, historicized process – as much as his photography, in which humans are nothing but minute, passing-through instances. In his visual narrative, present/day Ishinomaki is signified by its past, which is at the same time represented and castrated: boats are ashore, rusting; buildings are in ruins; a solitary *sunakku*<sup>97</sup> called *Dorīmu* (Dream) is closed and derelict.

It is with the disaster that the author subtly shifts his own interpretative frame, from a *riarizumu*-inspired *j’accuse* to the ravages of time, to a memorializing intent. The original furrow between the 1960s Ishinomaki and the present becomes blurred, as a new, more distinct ‘quilting point’ (Lacan 1993, Žižek 2008) of convergence emerged in the 2011 disaster. Takeuchi’s photographs were radically transformed by the rereading of the city’s past, now collapsed in the new category of *shinsai-mae*. As the past reconfigured, present and future followed, in the teleological rhetorics of reconstruction (*fukkō*).

A very similar shift in significance occurred in the work of Watanabe: his private, amateur pictures of *matsuri* and city life were turned into nostalgic portraits of *shinsai-mae* Ishinomaki to a degree that bypassed their technical inconsistency. Interestingly, the shift in significance coincided with the transformation of Watanabe’s photographs into public items, exhibited in a museum. In her *Judging the Image* (2005), Professor Alison Young discusses the role of photographs as document and witness in the aftermath of a

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<sup>97</sup> *Sunakku* stands for ‘Snack Bar’. In Japan the term qualifies an array of ‘hostess’ bars serving light fares and female non-sexual company, although often bordering on prostitution (see Yano 1996, Norma 2011, Prideaux 2004). In Ishinomaki *sunakku* are concentrated in a small network of alleys between Chūō and Tachimachi, known as a popular spot for sailors and dock workers. Most of them are now closed, with only their banners left as a phantasmatic reminder of past pleasures.

catastrophic event – in her specific case study, the New York World Trade Center 2001 attack. Young begins her chapter asking: ‘When disaster is all that remains, how can image stand in the place of ruins?’ (2005: 121). In this context, photographs present a compelling quality Barthes defined as ‘that-has-been’ (*ça-a-été*, Barthes 1981: 115), the ability ‘to present us with the social and material world through its power to convince us that, whatever else the image evokes, there is a simple correspondence to a reality in the past’ (Dant & Gilloch 2002: 7).

Naturally, this romantic discourse was received in very different ways on site. On a national level, Hopson (2013: 4) observes:

‘The Japaneseness of victims has been emphasized more than their universal humanity, repeated ad infinitum and made a fundamental rationale for aiding them—as fellow Japanese and as fellow members of an economy shaken by disaster and threatened by failure to get quickly back on track. Calls of “Ganbare Nippon!” (“Go Japan!”) were paired with “Ganbare Tōhoku!” as the “Japaneseness” of the tragedy was forefronted.’

Meanwhile, in the disaster-struck areas, heated debates and confrontations over responsibility, accountability, and the quality and scope of responses divided most of the local residents. The case of the Okawa Elementary School has become a tragic emblem of these frictions. After the deaths of 74 pupils and 10 teachers, a long and bitter legal battle ended only recently as the municipality of Ishinomaki was ordered to pay 1.44 billion Yen (GBP 10 million), deeming the school’s administration responsible for faulty decision-making and the failure of the evacuation procedure (Lloyd-Parry 2017, McCurry 2018). The idea that there were at least two worlds, one of citizens and one of irresponsible bureaucrats, was definitely at odds with the homogenizing national campaign mentioned by Hopson.

The perceptive splitting of reality between the intimate and the public caused a fundamental ethical dilemma, one that the artist Matsuo overtly addresses in his ‘*Mirenakatta mono ga mieta toki*’ (‘When I saw what I could not see, 7.4). Highlighting the partiality of singular perceptions and memories, he significantly uses a veiled view of the Oshika Peninsula, implying a disconnection between the individual and the territory. The very same territory becomes, in Suzuki’s aestheticising landscape, an epitome of beauty, leading to the conclusion that by adopting an egoistic, self-centred perspective, Ishinomaki’s residents relinquish the very Tōhoku-ness that characterizes them. Only a collective, and therefore harmonious, effort can restore an ‘objective’, shared memory, as

in the case of the Shiogama curry house. Matsuo clearly aspires at attaining the double role of ‘scientist and moralist’ photographer (Sontag 1977: 45), in a sense inheriting the *riarizumu* tenets of photography as a political practice (Thomas 2008).

Following an equivalent principle of visual art as ‘a form or medium of ethics’ (Sussloff 2011: 96), artists like Ueki or Moritomo came to very different results. In their respective sections, I have stressed the importance of the inter-subjectivity experiences, constitutive to their artistic productions and ethical views. Instead of pursuing a conflation of subjectivity and objectivity (which underlines inevitable hegemonic dynamics), in different measures both approached post-disaster Ishinomaki as a heterodox construction, becoming themselves social actors, in opposition to the bird’s eye view of Matsuo (or Suzuki).

Commenting on Martin Jay’s *Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn* (2002), Gardiner (2011) observes that, in order to transcend both visual essentialism (objectivism) and radical relativism (Romanticism), an alternative, Latourian position emerges: ‘Cultures are always impure and heterodox constructions, amalgams of myriad discursive impulses and forms, and are ‘always-already’ complexly intertwined with natural processes’ (116). As I have already observed in this chapter, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty plays a central role in establishing such position.

Taking a step back, it is interesting to note the role of the discursive ‘other’ in what Merleau-Ponty defines as the ‘philosophy of reflection’, i.e. the objectivist, Cartesian approach to knowledge and vision. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), the French philosopher claims that ‘the other can enter into the universe of the seer only by assault, as a pain and a catastrophe; he will rise up not before the seer, in the spectacle, but laterally, as a *radical casting into question of the seer*’ (1968: 78, my italic). In Matsuo’s world, Tōhoku residents similarly enter the ordered world of remembrance and communal practice as small catastrophes, with the threat of undermining his construction with dissonant standpoints. Individual others can only produce ‘fictional images’ (*kūsō no zō*). Conversely, e.g. in Ueki’s recollections, closeness and interaction with the other is likened to the *hoya* colony, a glossy lump of bubbly shapes. Similarly, Moritomo’s lenses seem to embrace the spaces, and his ‘subjects’ often proxemically interact with him, his camera, and by the transitive property, with the viewers.

In the production of both Ueki and Moritomo, the ‘subject’ is not what stands before the camera’s lenses, or what is materially crafted, but rather the relations between them and their surroundings. It is not by chance, I believe, that they both choose as their residence not Chūō (as Matsuo did), but the more remote areas of Watanoha (which incidentally is also a fishermen’s neighbourhood) or Kobuchi-hama. In this sense, both figuratively and literally, they acted according with Merleau-Ponty’s principle of intra-ontology, ‘to understand from within our embodiment in and of the world’ (1974: 168).

It is the inter-subjective quality of Ueki, Moritomo, and to a lesser extent of Furusato, that qualifies their artistic production. Although neither of them addresses specifically ethical or political issues, it is through their activities (Moritomo’s collaboration with Fisherman Japan, or Ueki’s guerrilla appearances) that they state what resembles an ‘*ijūsha* manifesto’. Their refusal to insulate themselves from the often conflicting, heterodox *milieu* of Ishinomaki’s fishermen, grants them an embedded standpoint from which to enact a reframing of the coastal everyday – a peculiar intermingling of intellectual and artistic activities with the mundane world of seafarming. In particular Moritomo, scarcely interested in the past – idealized or not – of the region, is proactively projected towards a novel, creative, positive approach to the future of Ishinomaki, a mission he shares with FJ as well.

In this sense, a key to interpret these artists’ productions as representations of locality is provided by the reflections of Schneider and Wright (2013, 2014) on the intersubjective and relational characters of contemporary art. Schneider and Wright rely on Bourriaud’s concept of *relational aesthetics* (1998). Bourriaud’s core concept is that the art product acquires meaning within the space of social exchange its coming into being defines. As the work of art is negotiated, relations are invented. The gaze with which I look at Moritomo’s pictures is in part Moritomo’s gaze, affectively informed by his ‘fieldwork’ (of indefinite length) among the fishermen of Miyagi, and in part a personal, inquisitive gaze upon the artistic representation of their lives, carried out in the vicinity of the artist; in Ueki’s case, her public performances further enhance the intersubjective quality, literally positing the observer *within* her horizon, the *hoyapai*’s intimate horizon. If Matsuo’s intention is didactical – putting his pupil-spectator in the position of questioning their own subjective gaze upon Tōhoku – Ueki and Moritomo’s stance is definitely dialogical, as it stems both from a continuous, embodied dialogue with their surroundings (and an eminently socialized one, as active members of their respective communities).



Schneider and Wright's argument is in favour of a dialogue between art as a practice informed with locality and ethnicity (Schneider 1996), and anthropology, as a means to engage the artistic production with society. Without fully following their line of action – I did not produce works of art or collaborate with artists during my Tōhoku fieldwork – I acknowledge the significance of such reasoning, especially in light of the examples discussed in this chapter and the centrality of Merleau-Ponty's concepts of intra-ontology. More generally, the work of Moritomo and Ueki, following Schneider and Wright, can be positioned within a wider current of contemporary art, started during the 1990s (Bourriaud 1998) and still in progress. Such current, over time, established significant connections with anthropological and ethnographic practices (Ingold 2013; Figueroa 2017; Schneider and Wright 2010, 2014). In this sense, the main focus of art in post-2011 northeastern Japan might be reasonably identified with the aftermaths of the disaster. Although the disaster features in both Ueki and Moritomo's personal recollections (see above), the main objective of their activity is directed towards everyday practices (fishery, seafarming) mimicking, I contend, the very attitude of local – especially younger – workers, striving for a self-identification that transcends the roles of victims.

Moving back to the core theme of this thesis – the transformations of local food after the great disaster, the intersubjectivity of artistic production in Ishinomaki intersects food significantly as a *locus* of exchange, a collating space (the *hoyapai*), but also the everyday matter of Moritomo's fishermen, where the slime and grime coexist together with the shiny fish and the glossy seafood. In a sense, these edible substances provide a fundamental contribution to the *form* (the '*representative* of desire in the image [...] the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning', Bourriaud 1998: 9) of the work of art. Food, again, is found at the centre of dialogical spaces, re-negotiated and re-produced. If classic landscape photography highlights the natural attractions – the beautiful woods, solitary boats leaving a foamy wake, the delicate and quasi-de-anthropized views – it fails, I contend, to deal with the human portion of that geography. A photography that is relational and intersubjective, in the sense attributed to the former term by Bourriaud (1998) and the latter by Merleau-Ponty (1968), certainly comes better equipped to convey the everyday experiences of Ishinomaki residents.

In a private conversation, an anthropology professor suggested the idea that the new-locals described in this thesis acted in certain ways – brokering local food against *fuhyō hagai*, championing local reconstruction and revival – as a mean to connect to the

unexpressed alterity of backwardness, the political subordination of the Tōhoku people. This would certainly be a nearly untenable generalization, as most individual acted out of personal motivation, personal gain and recognition not excluded. With Moritomo, and his ethical orientation towards the revaluation of the figure of the fisherman, I believe a case could be made in this sense. Ueki's position is more complex, but her disavowal of the RAF narratives and policies as its 'impact on locals is minimal' (see above) could imply the siding with a silent minority of those not invested by the mainstream narrative.

## Conclusion

### 1 Serendipity of the Vanishing

During the summer of 2017 I took a two week vacation from my fieldwork. With my fiancée Sara, we went to visit Marilyn Ivy's Osorezan. At the mountain of the ghostly epiphanies, we took care not to miss the yearly *kuchiyose* festival, when the shamanic priestesses *itako* gathered in makeshift tents to speak with the voice of the dead. We travelled through the Iwate prefecture riding local trains, watching melancholic and dreary landscapes pass by the window. We stopped briefly in Kuji, where I met my friends of the local *shiyakusho* tourism office. We stopped in the industrial, deserted Hachinohe, where we took the *Aomori Tetsudō-sen* (Blue Woods Railway), a little one-liner connecting Sannohe to Aomori. From the coast, we pointed inland, towards the *Mutsu* bay, crossing the magnificent pine woods of the Kamikita District. In Nohei, we changed with the *Hamanasu Beirain Ōminato-sen*, to get to Mutsu city. With the sandy beaches of the Shimokita Peninsula on our left, we reached Mutsu in a couple of hours. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, first of the *kuchiyose* days. Too late to reach the mountain with the bus, we postponed our visit to the next day and started looking for our accomodation, an old *minshuku* reopened just for the summer by the granddaughter of the former owners. We choose that place simply out of stinginess, because it was cheaper than hotels and other *ryokan* in Mutsu, as the *kuchiyose* days usually draw many visitors and accomodations consequently raise their prices.

We could not have found a more suitable place: lost in the recesses of a residential area, the *minshuku* was barely presentable, its wood panels old, scaled and dried by the sun, a heap of broken furniture and tableware lying beside the entrance doors. The interiors were ascetically bare-bones, with only a few items laying around in the small living room which, together with the kitchenette and the *ofuro*, constituted the ground floor of the building. Waiting to welcome us, we found Kyōko. Kyōko is a well-mannered, urban, Uniqlo-styled girl, terribly out of place in the rural setting of Mutsu. At the time, she was busy cleaning up the *minshuku*, as we understood she had only opened it two days before, and planned to keep it running only for a couple of weeks, to cover the festival time of the Osorean. She had inherited the old, decaying wooden guesthouse from her grandparents, who sadly passed away a few years back.

The only other guests were a Polish couple, who had come to shoot a documentary on the mountain temple festival. After we unpacked our luggage, Kyōko invited us for dinner, insisting that she received ‘fresh stuff’ from family friends – cuttlefish (*ika*) and scallops (*hotate*). I helped her set up a small, old *shichirin* (charcoal grill) in front of the main door, and we all sat on the front stairs, drinking beer and carefully cooking the delicious seafood. During the evening Kyōko kept switching between English and Japanese, telling us how she lived in Tōkyō most of the time, studying hotel management, and how the *minshuku* was only a short-lived experiment to ‘try to do things on my own and see what happens’. Eventually the conversation topic shifted to the Osorezan and the *kuchiyose*. At first Kyōko was dismissive, and said – in English – she did not care nor believe any of that, but as the conversation continued she turned out to be quite informed on the topic, and shifted more and more often to Japanese. After an initial reluctance she admitted being interested in the Osorezan priestesses, to the point of consulting them during the *kuchiyose* on several occasions in order to speak with her grandfather (the former owner of the *minshuku*).

We discussed matters of ontology – whether the priestesses’s ability to channel the voice of the departed was genuine or not – and the recent uprising in skepticism, which ensued after several *kuchiyose* sessions from different *itako* were recorded. Kyōko went as far as researching those and similar facts on local newspapers, and she read the book *Saigo no Itako*, The Last Itako (Matsuda 2013), the autobiography of the young priestess Matsuda Hiroko, defending the authenticity of her practices.

During this long conversation – which in the end saw only me and Kyōko exchanging thoughts in Japanese, as neither my partner nor the other guests could speak it – our landlady carefully put aside small portions of all the food we consumed (including crisps and snacks, and a can of beer). I sensed vaguely her intentions, of which she did not make any mention in English, and my suspicions were confirmed as she, at the end of the dinner, took out a small lacquered tray with a set of bowls. She carefully placed in each bowl the morsels she saved during the dinner. After excusing the guests Kyōko gently asked me to follow her to a small side room, as I expected, a small *butsudan* (altar to deceased family members), where she solemnly offered the meal to her grandfather.

Inexperienced in the daily routines of mourning, I tried to follow her lead, as she bowed, rang the bell to attract her grandfather’s attention, placed the tray in front of the altar, bowed again and joined her hands in prayer. After a few moments of concentration we

respectfully left the room, and she whispered in Japanese ‘I’ve never let anybody in here before, it was a relief to share this’.

It took me several months to digest this small event, completely unrelated to my fieldwork, and yet very profound. Rivoal and Salazar (2013, see also Van Andel 1994; Bourcier & Van Andel 2011), in discussing the etymology of the term ‘serendipity’, refer to the Persian tale *The Three Princes of Serendip*, as commented by Horace Walpole:

‘Importantly, Walpole not only stressed the elements of fortune or chance as part of the practice, but also that the discoverer needs to be ‘sagacious’ (knowledgeable) enough to *link together apparently innocuous elements in order to come to a valuable conclusion*’ (Rivoal and Salazar 2013: 178, my italic).

Rather than discussing my personal ethnographic ‘sagaciousness’, which is debatable, I focus on the ‘linking together’ aspect, as in our dinner with Kyōko many, many things intersected in unexpected ways. The most obvious one is the estrangement of the young, educated Kyōko, from the environment of the Shimokita Peninsula, a depopulated area, visited mostly during the religious festival in July. In this sense, Kyōko’s presence was significantly transient, concentrated in the second half of the month, and open-ended – exemplified by her sentence ‘I will see what happens next’.

Kyōko’s *persona*, in Mutsu, is thus doubled into the one of a foreigner, a visitor who did not come to stay, and that of a business owner, with family ties to the territory, although thinned by a two generations gap –her parents, she told us, had already moved out of Mutsu before she was born, raising her in Yamagata before she moved to Tōkyō for her studies. This ambiguous status fully informed her approach to the practice of *kuchiyose*, as she at first declared she was ‘not interested’ in the rituals of the Osorezan, and questioned humorously the validity of the priestesses’s necromantic abilities. This was Tōkyō’s Kyōko, an educated, cosmopolitan, English-speaking, rational young woman, at odds with the decaying old inn she decided to run almost as a vacation. During our dinner, in several occasions she told us of her plans to visit some coastal areas, the nearby national park, or just to spend time with family friends (the same who provided us the *ika* and *hotate*), just like a fellow tourist would.

Mutsu’s Kyōko emerged slowly, and intermittently, as I politely questioned her initial *trenchant* views over the *itako*’s *kuchiyose* (‘I don’t believe those things, people in this area are very superstitious’ she had declared, in English). Shifting to Japanese, she

admitted being interested in the ritual, in which she took part twice, harbouring conflicting feelings: ‘They were criticised a lot after records of the *seances* were made, revealing they used recurring formulas even if they were supposed to speak with the voices of different people. But it may be that there are some cheaters, and others instead are genuine. I think so’. Mutsu’s Kyōko was also, probably, the one who gathered and served us *ika* and *hotate*, grilling them on the precarious old *shichirin*, teaching us how to properly cook the scallops – pouring *sake* in the semi-open shell to ‘get the *hotate* drunk’, as she said.

As Kyōko was – possibly unknowingly, certainly awkwardly – crossing boundaries, just so did the food we ate. It first connected her, an ephemeral new local, to her family friends, locals who epitomized, together with the *minshuku*, her partial belongingness to Mutsu. It then became instrumental in gathering together with her non-local guests – us – in the manner of a pleasantly Japanese summer night seafood barbeque. It also crossed an even more drastic boundary – the one between the living and the dead, between the everyday and remembrance – as it was offered to the *butsudan* of Kyōko’s grandfather.

The mercurial trajectories of Kyōko’s food became, as I read and re-read my notes, my personal moment of ethnographic serendipity, of linking together of ‘innocuous things’ – people of different origin, young and old, living and dead. Out of these three stitching surfaces, I managed to sketch a general reflection on the work I have done in Ishinomaki, which was in part reflected in my short experience in Mutsu. The analogy between them emerges out of a qualifier that is clearly not the post-disaster condition (Mutsu was not affected by the 2011 tsunami), but rather the shared condition of subalternity of the two cities. This overlapping space is the axiomatic condition upon which my attempt at analysis of the transformations of food in post-disaster Tōhoku rests. In this light, this work does not necessarily address the disaster itself as a foundational event – and for this specific reason, I deliberately did not collect or make use of individual testimonies and memories on the disaster and the moments that followed it. The 3/11 tsunami is a fundamental theme of my research, but can only be understood within the historical and sociopolitical background of Tōhoku.

### 3 Locals, new-locals, non-locals: entwined trajectories

In the first chapter of the thesis I attempted an analysis of the post-disaster social dynamics in Ishinomaki, focusing in particular on the agency and the interactions among three groups, arbitrarily defined as ‘locals’ - residents since before the disaster – ‘new-locals’ – residents of the area who moved in after the disaster, often as volunteers – and ‘non-locals’ – individuals or groups who are neither residents nor originally from the area, and nevertheless deploy forms of narrative agency regarding Ishinomaki and its features.

The definition of ‘Ishinomaki-kko’ (3.4) and the implication of citizenship in Miyagi are going through a phase of deep renegotiation, as newcomers ‘earned’ their own stable and profound personal connections through their continuous activity in the hostile time-space of immediate post-disaster reconstruction. Moritomo (3.3, 7.3) or Fujihara (3.4) are significant examples of such emergent, structured networks. Conversely, locals who did previously emancipate themselves, e.g. moving to Sendai, Tōkyō or Ōsaka to pursue higher education or undertake professional training, such as Iwasaki (2.8) went through a very similar process of social re-integration – and it is not by chance that new-locals and highly educated returnees often bound together, as with Iwasaki and Ueki (7.5).

The integration of new-locals and returnees in Ishinomaki civic spaces was accompanied by an important increment in the narrative proficiency and reach of the coastal communities. The appropriation of e-commerce platforms, youtube videos, intense use of social media, established communicative, material, and rhetorical ‘supply lines’ with Tōkyō. A perfect example of the latter is the Wotani-ya (6.2). Entangled with the multi-mediatic narrative production of Fisherman Japan, the Wotani-ya operates as a vanguard of the relations built during the intense intersubjective networking – a real ‘social big bang’ for Ishinomaki – that took place during 2011 and 2012.

The DeMartinean impulse implicit in the narrative strategies of the Wotaniya, Fisherman Japan, Moritomo, Peace Boat Ishinomaki (2.2, 3.2), consists in the search for a new and alternative eschaton to bring about, one coherent with the historicity of the crisis it intends to transcend. Moving beyond de Martino’s magical contexts, and entering the more prosaic reality of liberal capitalism, this eschaton is well defined by Iwasaki’s *sanpo-yoshi* ethical business (2.8), and in more detail by Klien’s concept of post-growth (2.6, 3.6) in post-disaster Ishinomaki:



‘[N]on-regular company work (*hiseiki koyō*) among those aged 15 to 24 has increased considerably in Japan after the onset of the millennium, with catchphrases such as ‘crisis of youth’, ‘unequal society’ and ‘ice age of employment’ featuring in the media. But on the other hand, many young people simply no longer aspire to tenured company employment’ (Klien 2016: 2)

The burst of the bubble, the progressive end of lifetime employment, the crisis of the urban, growth-oriented bourgeoisie: this is another ‘end of the world’ within which not Tōhoku residents, but the young educated Tōkyōites have been trapped into for almost two decades. In order to survive the transformation and resignify their new world, Ishinomaki’s *ijūsha* have deployed different tactics, a particularly poignant one being the Ishinomaki 2.0 network seen in 3.5. Their most recent initiative, the Concierge information service for those willing to move to Ishinomaki, is revealing in this sense.

The people of Ishinomaki 2.0 have been extremely active in ‘smoothing’<sup>98</sup> the organized spaces of Ishinomaki town into areas of shared ethics, services, and leisure, such as the Hashidōri Commons seen in 2.6 and 2.7, which Ishinomaki 2.0 provided informal counseling to, the Fukkō Bar (3.5) the Irori Cafe (3.2), several publications about the post-disaster heroism of ‘common people of Ishinomaki’, etc. The programmatic abandoning of a top-down, structured mode of organization, in favour of a horizontal network of collaborators matches with the DeMartinean concept of creative reintegration. As Klien observes (2016), Ishinomaki’s post-disaster life somehow harbored a paradoxical sense of liberation from the slow and inesorable decline of peripheral, post-bubble consumption, enabling, in a measure, those ‘creative and revolutionary powers’ of DeMartinean recovery, in the form of ‘experiments that depart from the classic economic growth model, seek to establish novel lifestyles combining the merits of the knowledge economy with the rural idyll’ (Klien 2016: 2)

From Klien’s turn of the phrase emerges the suture, central in this thesis’s chapters, of the two sides, as the powers of the ‘knowledge economy’ inevitably spring from the urbanite and educated *ijūsha* – with a caveat: the ‘rural idyll’, other half of this reconciliation, is so conceived by the active, hegemonic side of the equation. This

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<sup>98</sup> I use here a Deleuzian term to intend the act of converting a vertically organized system (striated space) into a horizontally area of shared services. A similar binary frame of analysis is also present in de Certeau, as he defines the spaces of strategy and those of tactics (see Deleuze & Guattari 1988, Deleuze & Parnet 1987, de Certeau 1986)

perceptual partiality, discussed in Chapter 4, is not necessarily ignored or refused by local residents. Klien reports (2016: 17):

One Ishinomaki resident in his thirties sums up this idea by describing the turnaround: ‘Before the earthquake, everybody was somehow resigned in Ishinomaki that everything would stay the same or get worse, but since March 2011 hope has grown here that Japan may be changing.’

Nonlocal agency in this regard operates on a different but connected level, drawing from similar repositories of imagery – the rural idyll, the *furusato*, the natural landscape – but countermaneuvering against the tactical operationality of both locals and new-locals, i.e. maintaining a definitely striated and strategic set of modes of production – e.g. the organization of the RAF and the production of information about Ishinomaki and the Peninsula seen in chapters 4 and 5; the spatial organization of the Onagawa Seapal Pier, which hierarchically separates mere residents from value producers (5.6.a); the menu of the Hama Sai-Sai diner in Ogi-no-Hama (5.3).

To conclude, the dynamics of post-disaster symbolic reconstruction, as defined by Ernesto de Martino (1951, 1977), in a subaltern context, tend to follow the two modes of action described by Michelle de Certeau (1984, 1986) as *tactical* and *strategic*, where the networks led by young and educated new-locals broadly follow the less structured, more progressive – in some instances even defiant to the *furusato* discourse – paths of action. Institutions, such as the municipal office (*shiyakusho*), or national NGOs, will more likely assume a conservative stance, drawing on the symbolic imagery of traditional Japanese countryside (see 4.5, 3.6), striving not for the overcoming of current regional issues through new socioeconomic paradigms, but to the restoration of the *status quo ante*.

#### **4 *Shinsai-mae, shinsai-go*: stitching time, space and people**

Similarly to the social relations discussed above, the ways residents related to the territory and the passing of time became the subjects of a widespread process of reinvention. In this case, the sudden and immediate quality of spatial transformation produced by the disaster, tends to dominate the reintegrating narrative: *shinsai-mai* and *shinsai-go*, or the many significant places where memories remain, although buildings and debris are now long gone. Nevertheless, the scope almost never stops at the immediacy of 2011, and this becomes obvious when looking at the words of the

photographer Takeuchi (7.1, 7.2). As he recalled his *shinsai-mai* Ishinomaki, already a form of crisis of presence is in place, caused by the decline of the shipbuilding: the bitter landscape of abandoned shipyards and workshops Takeuchi constructed with his pictures was already an answer to the real disaster. In the same spirit, new-locals constructing networks of tight social relations in which to navigate labour and leisure do so in response not only to the 2011 disaster, but to a more distant and continuous crisis of employment and perspective their generation faced since the burst of the bubble at the beginning of the 1990s.

The disaster happened to provide the ultimate externalised objectification of a condition which, metonymically, was at the same time symbolically coterminous with the post-modern recession of Japan, and more easily open to the ritualistic mending of reconstruction – *fukkō* in the *double entendre* of the Onagawa Matsuri reading (5.6): ‘to built anew’ and ‘happy again’. In this fracturing of time and space – now and then, on the three-layered architecture of rural depopulation, post-bubble crisis, and the Great Disaster; the metropolis, the city, the countryside, the sea, the land, the ruins and the spaces of life – food comes in as a much needed point of reconciliation and reintegration of antagonistic dimensions (and for the same reason, in food production, the painful scars of all peripherality, subalternity and shrinkage reopen).

Much like Kyōko’s cuttlefishes, the Oshika *hoya* stands by its own right on the quilting point among the many levels of presence and agentivity discussed above. As with many other fishery products, *hoya* seafarming suffers from depopulation and lack of manpower in Sanriku. In terms of broader geographic and productive issues, *hoya* farmers were in fact alienated from their products as they were aimed mainly at the foreign market. The disaster tragically disrupted *hoya* seafarming first by the destruction of the farming grounds and the coastal infrastructures, then by the post-meltdown rumor damage, which severed the South Korean retail channel. Farming *hoya*, now, carries the potentialities for reconnecting the producer with their significant past (as with Morishima, a ‘fisherman from a family of fishermen’, 2.5), but represents also a ransom of locality, as *hoya* begins to be marketed as an Oshika speciality, and laboriously finds a way in the domestic market. Other than time and space, through *hoya* are connected people, the local producers, the new-local creatives who assumed the task of re-envisioning the seafood’s image (a photographer like Moritomo, or a chef like Fujihara), and the non-locals who learn how to consume and appreciate it (the members of the Hoya-hoya Gakkai).

Similarly, oysters from the Mangoku Bay followed an analogous path, as a new meaningfulness was found in their locality: mere things no more, but rather edible portions of Miyagi-ness, they are consumed by the members of the Kaki no Wa (3.2.a) who with their oyster-eating act upon their connections with the producers, and the place of Mangoku, visiting it, and receiving monthly newsletter. An analogous process of counter-alienation can be seen in Goro's *Tako Meshi* (5.4) and its informality, the attempt of the fisherman Goro to interact in a more appropriate (according to him) way with the multitudes of *flaneurs* came to admire the artistic installation of the RAF.

In the creative, tactical *milieu* born out of the violent geographic, social, and economic destructuration of the disaster, processes of place-making are performed through local food: the significance of such tentative and heterogeneous acts cannot be underestimated. It is certainly through such bottom-up, practice-oriented social interactions that Ishinomaki and the Oshika Peninsula manage to still exist, and it is through analogous phenomena that their people will continue to think, feel, and act in a meaningful way.

## 5 Apocalyptic creativity

As already observed in 5.7, one of my sources of inspiration when considering the transformations of a post-disaster area, is the work of the Italian ethnographer Ernesto de Martino. It is worth delving further into de Martino's theory. As he observed after his Southern Italy field research in the Basilicata region (De Martino & Zinn 2005; 2015), the human condition is characterized by a constant 'erosion' (cf. Foucault 1986: 23) of reality due to the crises of 'presence', i.e. of Heideggerian *Dasein*. The 'crisis of presence' marks the collapse of an otherwise functioning 'Hegelian synthesis' (Saunders 1993) between perceived present and past, which operate in order to produce a future (in de Martino's lexicon, *orizzonte*, horizon). In Carlo Aldrovrandi's words (2014: 195):

'being cast outside any possible secular or religious horizon of salvation, completely detached from the familiar, facing without any comfort the diabolical unhinging of all that has been known.'

De Martino maintains that the crisis of *presenza* becomes characterized by a phenomenon of 'dehistorification', where the individual is 'lost' in an a-temporal, eternal present, unable to reconstruct a dialectic to navigate space and time. Farnetti and Stewart describe such dehistorification (De Martino, Farnetti & Stewart 2012: 432):

‘Since everything is historical, losing presence – being cut off from the synthesizing process of historical becoming – is equivalent to losing history, or losing society. The anguish accompanying the loss of presence may begin to be managed by an even greater removal from history through rituals that place one in a timeless metahistory; what Eliade termed “*illo tempore*”, the time before time – archetypal time. Like cauterizing a wound, the resort to ritual (or “religious reintegration”) exaggerates the initial crisis on the way to healing it. An unfortunate individual falling out of history is conscripted, through ritual, into a larger step out of history, which re-opens the person to values, and enables the reacquisition of everyday historicity.’

Now, de Martino mostly dealt with low magic and religiosity – thus the specific remark on the ritual as means of reintegration. But it is his general conclusion, rather than the specific instances that he explores in his life’s work, that I intend to recover as a lucid and, in a measure, brilliant interpretation of human agency.

The Italian ethnographer devoted the last years of his life to an analysis of what he defined ‘cultural apocalypses’ (*apocalissi culturali*, de Martino 1977, see also Ligi 2009, Virno 2009), i.e. those moments in which a ‘presence crisis’ event assumes a systematic quality (whether social, economic, technological, etc.) to the point that the loss of agency horizon is shared by most members of society. With a spatial metaphor, de Martino defines the crisis as the entering of an unknown territory (de Martino 1952), with the anguish (*angoscia*) that this normally ensues. This subordination of presence to the ability to navigate space, although to be considered in part allegorical, draws on the psychological dimension of ‘normalcy’ in everyday life. As already noted in Chapter 5, the inability to spatially navigate post-disaster Tōhoku, was expressed specifically in such terms by several witnesses, and many of those reflections (see for example Numazaki 2012), carry significant resemblances with de Martino’s description of ‘cultural apocalypse’ (1977: 91, translation mine):

‘The daylight is faded, the sun is pale and does not set; stars fall down; the earth is flat, barren, or “slips from under the feet”; the rain floods; etc. Every natural force overflows from its normal order, turning into its destructive counterpart, *incompatible with human labor*’

In a world constantly eroding our faculty to *be* in it, are thus central in de Martino’s anthropology the techniques used by humankind to repond to individual and collective crises of presence. In his work, the recurring term for this response is *riscatto* (redemption,

or reintegration), an array of strategies enacted in order to reinstate the agency of individuals in the world. The mechanism through which the *riscatto* operates is one of further dehistoricification: the inscription of the crisis into a narrative of fall and redemption, analysed by de Martino in innumerable texts of low magic incantations and *apocrypha* parables (*historiole*, see de Martino & Zinn 2015). Re-narrated within an eschatological frame, the Italian ethnographer contends, the crisis is tamed, and everyday activities can continue.

De Martino saw the main expression of *riscatto* through magic and religion. I contend that his definitions are open to a more productive widening. In this sense, the processes I observed throughout this thesis, offer a perspective on the generalization of the DeMartinean concepts elaborated above.

Returning to the vignette opening this chapter, Kyōko's presence of Mutsu presents itself as ultimately superimposable to the experiences of the *ijūsha* of Ishinomaki extensively described in chapters 3, 5 and 6. As Kyōko, the new-locals move into the unknown territory of a marginal town or a rural area, detach themselves from their urban materialistic rationality, and face the presence of foreign individuals as much as the absence of familiar ones. In short, by facing the danger of crisis, new-locals put into practice strategies of reintegration by positioning themselves as actors, redefining (sometimes in a contradictory manner) the world around them. It must be noted that, in de Martino's work, the *riscatto* is not described necessarily as a conservative folding towards the known past, but rather a creative resignification of strategic *foci* from the past in order to retell a present as operatively open ended towards the future. Again, Farnetti & Stewart (2012.: 433) comment: 'Reintegration is not a return to a stable cultural norm, but an exercise in creative, even revolutionary power akin to the invention of culture described by Wagner (1981)'. This reflection is particularly relevant if compared with de Martino's notes in his latest and posthumously published work, *La Fine del Mondo* (The End of the World, 1977), where he considers the linguistic aspect of cultural apocalypses, translated and commented by Virno (2009: 141-142):

Among the multiple symptoms which for De Martino presage an 'apocalypse', there is one which possesses strategic importance. The undoing of a cultural constellation triggers, among other things, 'a semantic excess which is not reducible to determinate signifieds' (de Martino 1977: 89). We witness a progressive indetermination of speech: in other words, it becomes difficult to 'bend the signifier as possibility towards the signified as reality' (ibid:

632) [...] As de Martino writes: ‘things refuse to remain within their domestic boundaries, shedding their quotidian operability, seemingly stripped of any memory of possible behaviours’ (ibid: 91) [...] The ultimate outcome of the apocalypse or state of exception is the institution of new cultural niches [...] Rare and fleeting are the apocalyptic diagrams of human nature.

From different perspectives, Farnett, Steward and Virno observe the same phenomenon: in de Martino’s work a crisis is followed by a cultural (and thus, also linguistic) readjustment which, on the one hand, stratifies the exceptional event into the narrative of everyday life in order to secure human interaction with the environment. Alternatively, the transformations necessary to readjust quotidian agentivity open up a chance of radical rewrite, i.e. the ‘revolutionary power’.

In the following sections I juxtapose several examples from the previous chapters to de Martino’s theory in order to highlight how the DeMartinean ‘cultural reintegration’ presented itself in the Miyagi Prefecture. I will then examine possible differences and points of contact between the production of post-disaster significance in Ishinomaki, and recent instances of the hegemonic discourse on the Japanese North-east. Before proceeding, it is although necessary to anticipate a point that will be further examined at the end of this chapter: 3/11 was a disaster within a more massive and slower disaster, that is the decline of Tōhoku (see for example Kelly 2006, Oguma 2011, Hopson 2013, 2017). I contend that the specificity of Tōhoku modern and contemporary history, elaborated in 1.4 and 1.5, is underdeveloped in the relative anthropological literature and, at the same time, the key to ethnographically locate the perspectives explored in this thesis, particularly in chapters 2, 3 and 6. Considering the work of prominent scholars such as Slater (2013), Steger (2013), Kimura (2016), Stensdorff-Cisterna (2019), or Mullins and Nakano (2016), the absence of a wider reflection on the sociopolitical context of Tōhoku – an outstanding example of which can be found in the writings of Hopson (2013), Oguma (2011), and Kawanishi (2015) – dangerously leads to a reading of the consequences of 3.11 as a historically ‘shallow’ phenomenon, isolated in the (morbid) spectacularities of a massive tsunami and a nuclear meltdown. ‘Rural area’ in this case, as in any other, does not describe in sufficient depth the implicit superstructural contingency *through which* the consequences of the disaster came to pass, hence the abundant attention devoted in this thesis to the preexisting conditions of Tōhoku. The historical understanding of the three authors mentioned above (and by the many other scholars of



Tōhoku) needs necessarily to be held into account by social anthropology, in order to escape the double trap of reading the disaster as a national phenomenon (as, among others, Kimura and Stensdorff-Cisterna do), or looking at it through the (inherently hegemonic) lenses of Japanese rurality (as Slater appears to do).

It is specifically in the wider historical and political sense that, I contend, de Martino's ideas should be interpreted and applied to the Japanese case: rather than a singular, catastrophic event, the concept of 'cultural apocalypse' needs to be related to Tōhoku's increasing issues of depopulation, reduced opportunities, political subordination, and internal migrations. As this socio-economical context was intersected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, subsequent DeMartinean 'reintegrations' aimed at re-signifying not only the 'semantic excess' of the debris, floods, and human losses (see Martini and Gasparri, 2019), but also, from a broader perspective, Tōhoku as a place.

## **6. Food for thought – concluding remarks**

In this thesis I have explored how the local food of Miyagi is being re-negotiated, re-purposed and re-invented after the Great East Japan Earthquake. I have proceeded with the identification of three classes of actors contributing to these activities, and the two orders of movement (centripetal and centrifugal) that characterize the material and ideological exchanges on Miyagi food.

Throughout the descriptions and analyses advanced in the previous chapters, I have defended the centrality of Tōhoku political subalternity – the real 'disaster' that necessarily framed 3.11 – as the interpretative key to the phenomena that characterize post-disaster social change in Ishinomaki, and which reverberates in the ways food is managed, narrated and represented.

In a general context of radical reframing, a process of re-invention of presence well described by Ernesto de Martino as discussed in the second section of this chapter, elements of continuity and change intersect: national and regional policies – neoliberal in the majority of their aspects, as contended by Wilhelm (2018, see also 1.5) – met communal and individual struggles for economic survival and self-affirmation.

Taken individually, the many themes of this thesis have been explored by academic scholars of Tōhoku before, but I contend that the organic conflation of history of ideology, analysis of post-disaster social change, multi-sited observation of foodways and the study

of visual representation I propose in this dissertation represents a perspective that is novel, but more importantly generative towards a thorough understanding of the relation between food and disasters, not limited to the Japanese case. The reasons for this claim are the following.

Concerning the aftermath of 3.11, Slater (2013b) called for the deployment of an ‘urgent ethnography’, in order to preserve and analyse the still-fresh memories of the disaster among the ones who suffered the loss of their loved ones, their properties, and their means of livelihood. An agreeable position. Nevertheless, comparing his method to the ‘long-term engagement’ of ethnography, Slater observes the following:

‘[...] without urgent ethnography, without listening to the voices of the people as early as possible, without the detailed accounts of everyday life in the immediate aftermath, those long-term engagements may be seriously compromised. Memories fade quickly, particularly in post-traumatic situations; people get used to the situation and forget the details of events and thoughts of the first days [...]’ (2013b: 33)

I disagree with this claim. As the philosopher Slavoj Žižek often remarks referring to the popular movie ‘V for Vendetta’ (2005), at whose end a dystopian England is shaken by a revolution of the masses who overturn their despotic rulers, ‘I would sell my mother into slavery to see the day after [the revolution], V for Vendetta Part Two’. Comparing the tragic experience of the 3.11 survivors and a fictional movie might sound distasteful, but Žižek’s crude expression perfectly summarizes my argument: the transformations that a society undergoes after one single, central event, are the only keys we have to understand the very same event, up to the point where, as in the Tōhoku case, the disaster itself partially loses its perceived centrality.

To be more clear about this: a few lines before the passage quoted above, Slater writes:

‘It is necessary to have a pre-history of disaster, some backward tracing of players and policy, of technology and adaptability, of geographies and capital, that are linked together, that will reveal the trajectory of disaster, and the patterns of vulnerability [...] Only ethnography can capture the complexity of the moment’

Slater resorts to classic historical materialism here, envisioning a contingent chain of forces that shape a future event. We could reverse this logic, and contemplate the possibility that the complex social and material transformations that follow a traumatic event define that event in a much more cogent and complete manner than the conditions that pre-existed the event itself. Furthermore, considering the actual historical condition

of Tōhoku in particular, we can see how the disaster did not represent a turning point (a ‘revolution’) by any means, but in fact accelerated and exacerbated processes already in place (such as depopulation, the decline of fishery, or even the ideological perceptions of the northeast as such). For this reason, an approach that moves beyond the disaster as a ‘central’ event towards one that explores the ‘day after’, provides an effective means to understand in depth the society that experienced it: in the crisis of presence, individuals are stripped of what makes them subjects, it is in the reconstitution of presence after a temporary suspension – and here lies the transformative potential of disaster – that old and new patterns of subjectivity emerge.

Another aspect of my work – the role of new-locals as brokers – potentially presents a central topic of discussion for any anthropologist concerned with the relations between centre and periphery, regardless of the regional, national, or international frame of analysis. It points precisely at how the movements of exchange and mediation re-textualise the ideological tenets within both national and local processes of signification: the figure of the fisherman, as described alternatively by Fisherman Japan (2.2) and the spokesperson of the Reborn Art Festival (5.3, 5.4) is an excellent example of this interpretative tension. If seafood was consumed *inside* determinate horizons of meaning, once such horizons are challenged and re-negotiated, the mode of consumption in turn shifts – and there an excellent case is made by the *Kaki no Wa* campaign (3.2.a).

Brokerage, in turn opens up a space of debate on the modalities through which individuals and groups traverse the horizon of ideology, namely the *tactical* and *strategic* modes discussed in 5.1 and 5.2, which lead us back to the centre-periphery – this time in terms of production and consumption of national meanings. If this is a central aspect for food anthropology, it assumes a further, fundamental level when the two worlds of food and disaster studies are interrogated together, as continuous fields of structuration of space. To consider another recent case in Japan, the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes provide an excellent potential field of application for a food-and-disaster anthropology, where many of the themes highlighted in this thesis could be easily located in Kumamoto as well. To expand the scope to the rest of the world, in the recent years the raising alarm for food insecurity and the intensification of natural disasters caused by the epochal anthropogenic environmental transformations points towards a critical necessity for these two fields of anthropological scholarship to dialogue.

Considering in particular chapters 5 and 6, and how food and its meanings traverse space co-structure it, the contents of these chapters allow an opening towards the world of tourism and its effects both on local communities, and vice-versa (i.e. how food travels from local communities towards the irradiation centres of tourism). There are countless cases where such a double-crossing of people and food can find useful applications, such as the many instances in which a local product is both exported and prepared ‘abroad’ (not necessarily outside the nation) and experienced by visitors in its place of origin, with all the disconnections, disavowals and insincerities that this movement arises. In fact, it is precisely in the emergence of conflict that we can observe the focal processes of construction and negotiation of locality, thus space and time.

Ultimately, the artistic representation of food, but also of local human activities related to food, is a topic that ties closely with the recent debates *apropos* art, ethnography and aesthetics, as the subjective experiences of the artist are collected with ethnographic spirit (if not outright formal methods) and precipitate several criticalities concerning the intersubjectivity of artistic production, and the ways it informs the construction of the everyday experience, in the measure it is informed by it as well. This specific aspect of my research, that exists in this thesis as a brief hint, finds its focus in the study of human landscape and the many-faced geographies of affect. Food as an object of artistic (and thus political, as emerges clearly in 7.5) contention is eminently embedded in the primary frame of my analysis – that of subalternity. As such it has the potential to open up a body of anthropological literature on food, generally focused on the classic modalities of production, transformation and consumption, to a new angle of analysis, which welcomes an interlocution with the worlds of visual studies, anthropology of art, and the already mentioned human geography: throughout the detours of this thesis, ultimately, I highlight the continuous presence of food as a means and as an end of the process of signification that is re-shaping the human environment of post-disaster Miyagi.

To conclude, this work aims at providing a novel and plastic contribution to an anthropology that is delving into the complexities of a world where peripheries and centres are colliding with increasing vehemence, where the contribution of intermediaries is more and more pivotal, and the movements of people, things and ideas have reached the highest intensity in history. The uncertainties of a shifting environment meet the biological necessity, but also the pleasure we find in the food that from the same environment is made. Like a picture, taken on the slippery deck of a fishing boat against

the early morning sun, it appears chaotic, precarious. The people in it are busy, struggling, smiling, enjoying and suffering at the same time. Freshness spills from the nets pulled aboard, glistening in the salty air. In the background, the sea appears as a towering mass of indefinite creases, crested in grey, green and gold. It is a fearsome, bountiful space, whose indeterminability constitutes what lies at the back of the photographers: land, houses, roads, families. This work is about lives suspended in between, ensnared and yet fiercely wiggling.

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## Appendix 1 – Images

Figure 1 has been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

*Figure 1 - Municipality of Ishinomaki, courtesy of Google/Zenrin*

Figure 2 has been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

*Figure 2 - Ishinomaki City Map, courtesy of the Ishinomaki Tourism Office*

Figure 3 has been removed from  
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*Figure 3 - Walking map of Onagawa, courtesy of Onagawa Saigai FM Radio*

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*Figure 4 - Fisherman Japan logo, courtesy of Fisherman Japan*





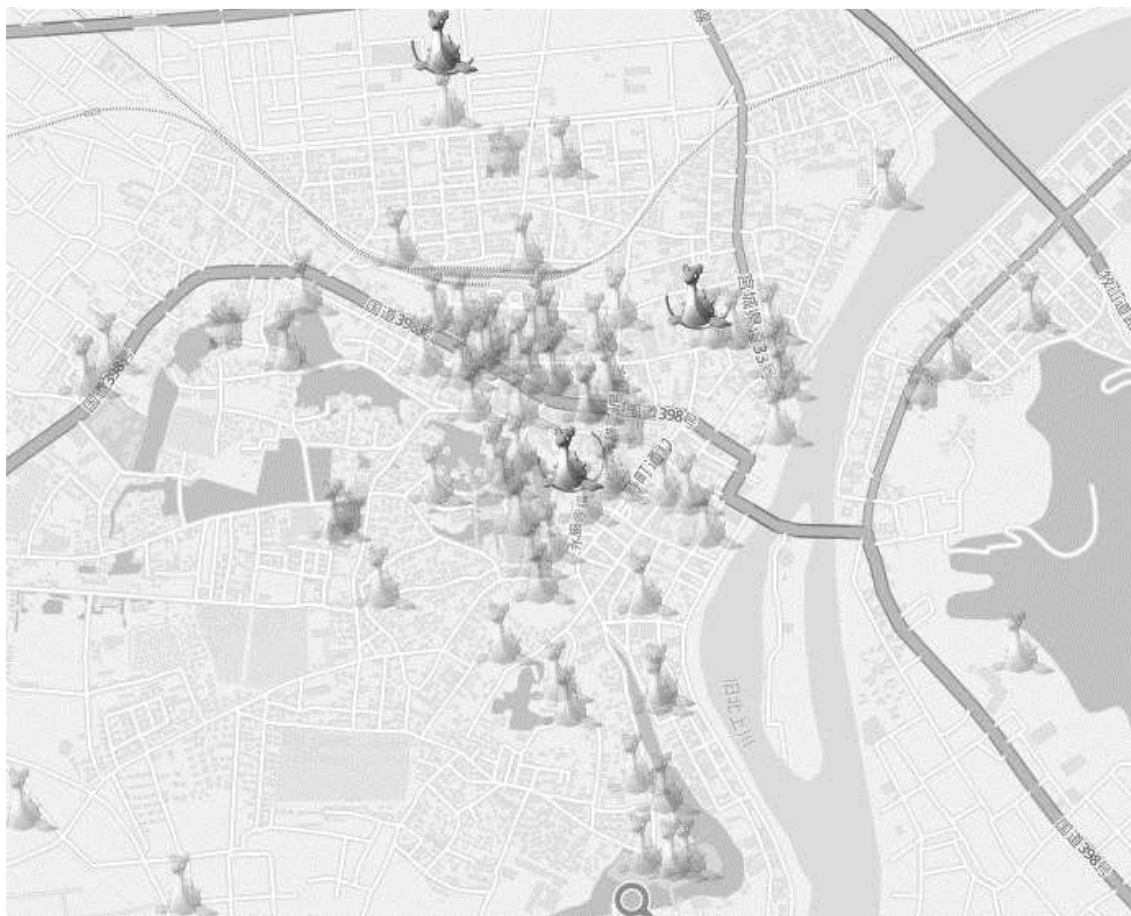
*Figure 5 - Scallop cleaning in Onagawa, Again Station (picture by the author)*



*Figure 6 - Oyster rafts in Mangoku-ura (picture by the author)*



*Figure 7 - Pokemon hunters in Ishinomaki Station (picture by the author)*



*Figure 8 - Lapras distribution cloud*

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*Figure 9 - The Hama-Saisai in Ogi-no-Hama, courtesy of Hanako Naganuma*



*Figure 10 - Onagawa Footrace (picture by the author)*





*Figure 11 - Ueki dancing (right corner)*



*Figure 12 - Kohei Nawa's White Deer and two masked impersonators (pictures by the author)*

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*Figure 13 - Flyer for the Tzuzuku-Tei*

## Appendix 2 – Glossary

*Amae*: ‘Motherly love’ in Takeo Doi’s psychological theory of dependancy (Doi 1985, 1.3, 1.7.b).

*Butsudan*: Buddhist shrine dedicated to a deceased family member, commonly found in temples and homes in Japan.

*Dentōten*: Japanese traditional arts.

*Depāto*: Department store (English loan).

*Edamame*: Steamed soybeans.

*Fuhyō Higai*: Rumor damage, esp. referring to consumer and retailer avoidance of products from Fukushima Prefecture and the neighbouring areas.

*Fukkō*: Reconstruction.

*Furusato*: Old town, the house of the parents/grandparents.

*Ginzake*: Salmon.

*Gyogyō Kumiai*: Fishery Union.

*Gyogyō-Ken*: Fishing rights.

*Hado*: ‘Hard’ (English loan).

*Hashidōri Komon*: Hashidōri (Bridge Lane) Commons, Ishinomaki shared restaurant space (2.7)

*Henkyō*: Frontier, term used by Morris-Suzuki (1996, 2001) and Takahashi Tomio (1979) to describe the Japanese periphery.

*Higashi Nihon Dai Shinsai*: Great East Japan Disaster.

*Hotate*: Scallop (*Pecten yessoensis*).

*Hoya*: Sea pineapple (*Halocynthia roretzi*).

*Ichiba*: Fish market.

*Ijūsha*: (Domestic) Immigrant.

*Inaka*: Countryside.

*Isson Ippin Undō*: One-village-one-product movement, policy for the promotion of local goods launched for the first time in the 1980s in Kyūshū (1.3).

*Kaki*: Oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*).

*Kaki-Muki*: Oyster-opening (shucking).

*Kangae Hasshin*: Knowledge transmission (2.5).

*Kankei*: Relationship, connection.

*Kaso*: Depopulation.

*Katsuo*: Bonito (*Sarda lineolata*).

*Kawabiraki*: lit. ‘River opening’, seasonal festival held in Ishinomaki between the end of July and the beginning of August.

*Kiga Jikoku*: ‘Famine-stricken hell’, expression used by newspapers to define Tōhoku during the famines and bumper crops of the 1930s (Hopson 2017).

*Kodokushi*: ‘Lonely death’, the phenomenon of dying alone and remaining undiscovered for a long period of time.

*Kōnago*: Sandlance (*Ammodytidae*) fry.

*Konbini*: ‘Convenience store’, loan from English, contracted.

*Kuchiyose*: Shamanic ritual performed at Mount Osore (Osorezan), in northern Aomori (Shimokita Peninsula), where the female shaman (*itako*) channels the voice of a dead person.

*Kumiai*: See *Gyogyō Kumiai*

*Minzokugaku*: Folklore Studies.

*Miryoku*: Charm, glamour (see 2.8, 3.2.b, 3.4, 3.6).

*Mura*: (Countryside) village.

*Mura Okoshi Undō*: Movements for village revitalization (1.3).

*Nihonshu*: Japanese rice wine (commonly known as *sake*).

*Nori*: Edible red algae (*Pyropia*) commonly consumed in Japan.



*Obaasan (Obaachan)*: Grandmother (Grandma, coll).

*Ojisan*: Grandfather.

*Omiyage*: Travel souvenirs (5.5).

*Onigiri*: Rice balls, eaten as snacks.

*Onsen*: Hot springs resorts.

*Pachinko*: Mechanical gambling game similar in its use and diffusion to the North American ‘slot machine’.

*Ryokan*: Travel lodge.

*Ryōshi*: Fisherman.

*Sanpo-Yoshi*: lit. ‘Three-way Satisfaction’, business model that links company development to ecological and social wealth (2.8).

*Sararīman*: Salaryman, Company employee, or ‘white-collar worker’.

*Sasakamaboko*: lit. ‘Bamboo fish paste’, fish paste snacks (*kamaboko*) shaped like a bamboo leaf, popular snack in Miyagi Prefecture.

*Sofuto*: ‘Soft’ (English loan).

*Tabete Ōen Shiyō*: Eat and Support, a campaign started in April 2011 in order to mitigate consumer avoidance of food from areas affected by the Fukushima meltdown (Watanabe 2004, Kimura 2017, 1.5).

*Taiken*: Bodily experience.

*Tako*: Giant Pacific octopus (*Enteroctopus dofleini*).

*Tako-Meshi*: Octopus rice, a common fishermen’s staple.

*Tanabata*: Festival held on July 7<sup>th</sup>.

*Tane-Hasami*: Seed-insertion, a step in the oyster seafarming process where ropes are immersed in seawater rich with oyster *larvae* to attract them.

*Tsunagaru*: ‘To connect’ (see 3.2.b, 3.3, 3.4).

*Uriba*: Counter in a shop or supermarket.

*Wakame*: Edible seaweed (*Unaria pinnatifida*).

*Washoku*: Japanese Cuisine.

*Yatai*: Food stall, commonly seen at festivals.

*Zunda*: Green bean paste, popular local product of Miyagi Prefecture.