

New Approaches: #MeToo in Japan and the UK

Jason James, the Director General of the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, introduced the evening's chair, Dan Damon, a journalist and radio broadcaster. Back in the early 1970s, Damon and a friend joined the Women's Liberation Movement. Damon remarked that he could not believe that we are still discussing today whether women can commentate on football, a topic which has been brought up during this year's World Cup. Last week, Damon said, he had worked on a piece on upskirting. Men who think it is tough for them too, commented Damon, are missing the point.

A recent OECD survey showed that Danish men are the most helpful around the home. 50% of Spanish men are helpful, while British men came out average. Japanese men, on the other hand, were shown to be the least helpful, reported Damon.

Damon then called on the first speaker, Shiori Ito.

Ito began by introducing herself as a journalist and filmmaker. She was raped in 2015. She reported being raped to the Japanese police, going through all relevant procedures. Japan has a 99.9% conviction rate, which makes it harder to prosecute those accused of sexual crimes.

Ito decided to talk about her experience from the point of view of a journalist hoping for a change in the legal system. While it is taboo to talk about rape in Japan, Ito said she has spoken about her experience at press conferences. She remarked that this had led to many threats against her and she has suffered from a backlash in attitudes towards her.

She remarked that it has been difficult to talk about her experience within Japan, and that it is easier to do so abroad. While in the UK 510 rape allegations per 1 million people are reported to the police, in Japan 10 allegations are made per 1 million people.

Ito said that in Japan, only 3% of rape victims go to police. Victims are put off by the fact that there are very few female police officers, and that victims are made to re-enact what they went through using life-size dolls. Only 8% of police officers in Japan are women.

In her case, three police investigators placed a life-size doll on her, and asked questions about where she was touched and what had been done to her. This was very humiliating. Ito said that there is a lack of understanding as to what rape victims go through. She also was made to return to the crime scene. Growing up in Japan, one is taught that enduring pain and being patient is regarded as a good thing, said Ito. However, keeping silent will result in taking no action and no change, she remarked.

Ito said that shame is a big part of Japanese culture, and that as a Japanese woman, she considered that feeling shame for speaking up was a good thing. She said that there is a Japanese saying, whose meaning is that "saying no can mean yes". As she was being raped, continued Ito, she said, "No" and, "Stop," but her attacker didn't stop. He only stopped when she used the "F" word in English. As a girl, she had been told to respect men and to respect elders. Ito confided that she had respected the man who violated her.

Ito went on to say that in Japan, she was groped on her way to high school like many other girls. She never reported these incidents, as they were part of everyday life, and she thought she just had to get on with it.

She was groped for the first time when she was ten, in a swimming pool. She was wearing a new bikini. She didn't realise what was being done to her. When she tried to explain to the

adults, her friend's mother said she had been groped because she was wearing such a cute bikini. Ito was made to feel it had been her fault and she never wore the bikini again.

When Ito began talking publicly about her rape, she was told to wear white shirts and to dress demurely, but she wouldn't; this behaviour made her think too much of her childhood. But wearing what she wanted resulted in a backlash as people made comments about her clothes. She felt she could no longer live in Japan, and moved to the UK.

#MeToo didn't happen in Japan in the same way as in other countries. People in Japan commented on individual women who brought up issues of sexual harassment as though they had an agenda. When a Japanese minister was accused of sexually harassing a journalist, this resulted in another minister saying that female reporters should not be sent to interview him, rather than dealing with the issue.

Ito said that she believes in the #MeToo movement. She said that Sweden is a great example of a country taking #MeToo seriously, where politicians have reformed their rape laws. Whereas previously victims had to prove that they had said, "No," now the onus is on the perpetrator having to prove they heard a "Yes," to suggest consent. This is what we have to do in Japan, said Ito, to stand on the side of the victim.

Japan saw the law change in 2017, for the first time in 110 years, but not in a major way. The age of consent is still 13, and in the case of rape, victims have to prove that they were sufficiently threatened and coerced. Ito said that there has to be a conversation about the issue of consent in Japan. There is so much that can be done to improve the situation in Japan. The first goal is to understand what the situation entails.

Sophie Walker, the final speaker, began by saying that it was great to be able to talk about #MeToo in a forum that doesn't feel it to be an over-reaction. She has taken part in so many discussions which wonder whether #MeToo has gone too far. It is great to commence from the same starting point, she remarked.

"The day that we don't have to discuss feminist issues is the day that equality has been reached," remarked Walker. She commented on the inequality present in the media and entertainment industries. This is not a surprise, as these industries are the bastions of male power that perpetuate male power and portray women as being lesser than men and as fodder. The media, continued Walker, is one of the most important cultural tools that we have, and yet it belittles and dismisses women. Single women are portrayed as too focussed on their careers, while black women are shown to be angry and disabled women are depicted as helpless. Media is where women are most portrayed as inferior. Then there is politics. Men vastly outnumber women in parliament, 2 to 1. They legislate for the protection of their own privilege, said Walker.

There have been incidents of politicians reporting that they have been patronised or belittled. Walker said that she has been shocked to see how political parties have been dealing with this. They have sought to manage the situation through better reporting systems, hoping these attitudes will stop if more people report incidents. Reporting systems are very delicate, however, said Walker. They need to be independent and transparent, not a situation where you report to a peer or someone you have worked with for the last 10 years. Walker said there is no understanding as to what gives rise to female harassment. She then turned her attention to the charity sector.

She spoke of men working in the charity sector, who have arrived in ruined lands and seen in starving, desperate women an opportunity for sex. Walker commented on the disconnect between what is happening to women in the UK and overseas. She said that the National

Crime Agency has reported the highest number of slavery and trafficking incidents in the UK since it started collecting data.

Walker said that we must not neglect the most abandoned, and remarked that we have not been looking closely enough at what is happening in the UK, but mainly looking at how the charity sector operates overseas.

Walker remarked that we need to demolish structural inequality. The issue is to do with power and women's lack of it, not sex. Women are told that the barriers are of our own making and that it is the duty of women to try harder, continued Walker. At college, women try hard to get all As and to have better bodies. Then they walk into a job with a pay gap. When women complain, they are offered resilience training, and when they have children they are expected to raise them for no pay.

When women complain of rape or harassment they often face claims of over-reacting. #MeToo is the start of collective organising, considered Walker. It is in collective organising that women gain strength. This collective organising started on the internet, said Walker.

Some people think that collective organising online is less serious, a cop-out, but Walker explained that many women simply cannot attend lectures. They might be stifled or trapped or of the wrong class or wrong race and could never conceive of being able to walk into a forum. Others who cannot join forums in person are the disabled, those who provide care unseen and those who are unpaid and are impoverished as a result. All these people can, however, access the internet. These are people who are saying #MeToo as no one is coming to their rescue. It is up to us to rescue ourselves. Walker remarked on high levels of trolling against women who are standing up for women's issues and said that we must defy this attempt to use technology to silence us. Typing #MeToo ties us to sisterhood, she remarked, though we may be in for a backlash. Progress is never linear and a backlash will allow us to double down and prepare for the next push.

Walker said that women who bring perpetrators to light are often ripped to shreds and depicted as being alone. Commentators try to separate us, continued Walker, in order to make the #MeToo movement seem small. She said that she has been invited to talk about sexual harassment many times, and on these occasions rape is often mentioned. The problem is that rape becomes the means by which to grade all other experiences of sexual harassment and find them wanting. Walker said that of course rape is serious and that both sexual harassment and rape should be taken seriously.

Walker continued by saying that men do not rape or harass anyone who has the power to fire them. The stigmatisation of sex has not liberated women, but put more stress on how they wield their bodies. #MeToo must break down the idea of sexual commodification. Women need to fight back.

Has #MeToo done enough, wondered Walker. It hasn't, she considered, but it has shown that people will stand up with and for victims who speak out.

Civil society, felt Walker, has to move into politics. She is fed up with being told that achieving women's equality is hard. It is not hard, it is a matter of political will. Yes, we can stop violence towards girls and women, said Walker. Equality is about freeing women, not policing them. It is about valuing and sharing care, about paying women equally, about insisting that women are equally represented in politics and about realising that investment in care is an investment which will grow the economy and revolutionise life for women. It is about building a media that builds its success on honesty and equality for women, and about allowing women to use technology without being hounded. Walker concluding by saying that siding with #MeToo makes you a gladiator not a victim.

The lively questions and comments which followed the talks included the fact that there have been two significant developments since Ito went public – the police decided not to charge the perpetrator and the issue has not been widely reported by the mainstream media in Japan. The perpetrator is reportedly close to the Abe administration and wrote a biography of Prime Minister Abe. There is no evidence that the government has been involved in a cover-up, but the chief detective stopped the perpetrator's arrest. Ito has questioned and chased high-ranking policemen, but to no avail. She keeps demanding an answer as we deserve a good explanation. She has begun to question issues related to Japanese democracy and power. We need to make a noise, exhorted Ito.

Samantha Rennie, Executive Director of ROSA, the UK Fund for Women and Girls, thanked the speakers for their powerful talks. ROSA has been working with entertainment professionals for a "justice and equality" fund, now topping £2 million, to tackle sexual harassment. 2/3 of the British population think that not enough is being done to tackle gender issues. In reply to her question as to how non-activists can help, Walker encouraged people to attend the Women's Equality Party conference in September 2018, which will centre on activism. The world seems on fire now, said Walker, and people think they can't put it out. She continued by encouraging the audience to allow themselves to care. We teach ourselves too long not to care and we mistake surviving for thriving. If you choose not to care, you can't thrive. Walker said it was important to work out what you are good at and how you can help. Another comment was that though the percentage of women in employment in Japan has increased, so has the pay gap, while other countries have been doing so much more in this area. The United Nations is helping developing countries, but not Japan. Nevertheless, things are changing, and a UN Women's programme will be launched in Japan to look into the economic empowerment of women. Japanese women are not trained to stand up for themselves and voice complaints, so workshops will be held for women in rural areas and will organise empowerment and leadership programmes for adolescent girls. Another question wondered how men did not notice these issues, to which Damon said that men did well out of the status quo. The need for early sex education and focus on human rights and respect was also voiced. Australian schools hold respectful relationship classes, while in Sweden children from the age of three are taught how to say penis and vagina. Without the relevant vocabulary, how can harassment be talked about? The issue that British schools are still old-fashioned in their approach to sex education and do not teach about respect, consent or upskirting was also touched on. The fact that reproductive rights are human rights was voiced. Another comment had to do with the huge jump in sexual harassment and violence in schools in the UK. 11 rapes are reported an hour in the UK and sex education is still somehow disconnected from this, and still focused on biology. There is a need to reconsider what we are teaching.