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Bullying, death and traumatic identity. The taboo of school violence in new Japanese cinema

Introduction

The ways of depicting children in Japanese cinema visibly changed after the World War II, as before the tragic events, the youngsters had mostly appeared in *jidō-eiga* ('juvenile film')¹ productions. The best-known pictures from the pre-war era, such as *Children in the Wind* (*Kaze no naka no kodomotachi*, 1937) or *Four Seasons of Children* (*Kodomo no shiki*, 1939), both by Hiroshi Shimizu, revolved around the bucolic (and often comic) portrayals of childhood. During the "golden age of films about children" (1937–1941)² there was no space for the discourse about trauma or violence – the characters, even if influenced by temporary sadness, were still able to enjoy the happiness of life and overcome the problems³. However, the national trauma related to atomic bombing and the events of the World War II profoundly influenced the way of presenting a child on the screen. That new perspective made a young person a symbol of lost innocence and the inevitability of the history. The pictures such as *Twenty-Four Eyes* (*Nijushi no hitomi*, 1954) by Keisuke Kinoshita focused on the problems of children's progress to adulthood because of the horrors the protagonists survived⁴. The way of depicting young characters on the screen in the post-war cinema, with the emphasis on the past trauma, gave birth to another kind of drama – the films about toxic school environment.

¹ Loska, Krzysztof. *Poetyka filmu japońskiego*. Kraków: Rabid, 2009, pp. 156–161.

² McDonald, Keiko. *From Book to Screen: Modern Japanese Literature in Films*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000, p. 31.

³ Loska, Krzysztof., op. cit., pp. 159–161.

⁴ Lury, Karen. *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, p. 26.

The new Japanese cinema, from the 1990s, provides numerous examples discussing the problems of school days trauma and relationships between the students. The filmmakers present the reasons and results of bullying (Jap. *ijime*)⁵, such as bad memories that return even in the adult life, the transgressive behavior (for example forced sexual intercourses), suicide and other traumatic experiences that constrain progress to adulthood. Another motif related to the trauma of school bullying, reappearing in the Japanese films, is the personality change of a student – from the victim to the oppressor or, depending on the course of events, from the oppressor to the victim. It is worth mentioning that the films about school anarchy and fighting for power have their origins in the 1980s pictures about *bōsōzoku* (Japanese motorcycle street tribes), such as *Crazy Thunder Road* (*Kuruizaki sanda rodo*, 1980) by Sōgo Ishii. What is more, a great deal of inspiration was taken from the *Be-Bop High School* (1985) – Hiroyuki Nasu's adaptation of the manga that was being released under the same title since the early 1980s⁶. Observing the acts of forming allies and using excessive violence by the youngsters in later films about bullying also brings to mind yakuza films⁷. Even though the narratives concerning coming-of-age problems appeared before the 1990s⁸, cases of bullying in Japanese schools, broadly commented on the media, started a new wave of interest on the topic.

In the emerging subgenre, the directors found the opportunity to discuss the shape of contemporary Japan, especially the welfare, the nostalgia for the pre-war school system and its clash with modernity. They also comment the influence of the omnipresence of the new media, as well as new fashions and trends, on the youngest generation⁹. According to the above, the Japanese cinema tries to depict the reasons and results of creating toxic relationships by the children in the school environment, what is accomplished by transferring the pictures provided by the media reports into the language of the cinema art. In this case, many examples of bullying depicted in the films are inspired by real situations. However, the directors try to reveal the elements tabooed in the media discourse, such as the impotence of the school system

⁵ Morita, Yohji. "Japan." *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*. Ed. Richard Catalano, idem., et. al. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 309–323.

⁶ Mes, Tom. "Blue Spring." *Midnight Eye. Visions of Japanese Cinema*, 9.04.2002. Web. <http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/blue-spring/>. 2.01.2018.

⁷ Ibidem. Here should be mentioned *Fudoh: The New Generation* (*Gokudō sengokushi: Fudō*, 1996) by Takashi Miike. There, the director mixes the gangster film genre with coming-of-age narrative and grotesque aesthetic, presenting the story of Riki Fudoh, who fights with yakuza in the case to avenge his brother's death.

⁸ For example, the problem of student's suicide appeared in Sōgo Ishii and Yukihiro Sawada's B-class film *Panic in High School* (*Koko dai panikku*) released in 1978.

⁹ Berra, John. "Japanese Youth Cinema." *Directory of World Cinema: Japan 2*. Ed. idem. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect Books, 2012, p. 284.

or the passivity of the teachers. Wondering what might happen if the boundaries of acceptable behavior are crossed, the filmmakers also present the imagined nightmare visions of possible results of youths being out of control, as, for example, Sion Sono in *Suicide Club* (*Jisatsu sākuru*, 2001).

The primary purpose of this article is to analyze the depictions of bullying in Japanese cinema, the reasons for presenting particular approaches to the problem and the educational potential the films offer to the viewers. The chosen pictures will be divided into four categories: the first one contains the films discussing the moment of embracing a “traumatic identity” by a young person who witnessed a liminal experience, such as sudden death of a colleague. The second category revolves around the films about the aggression between the students, who change the school environment into a battlefield ruled by the fittest. Furthermore, the author analyzes the films that focus on overcoming trauma by the protagonist. As a comparison to the live-action pictures, the last part of the article contains a brief description of the animated *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) by Naoko Yamada, in which the director offers a different approach to the topic. The author of this paper decided to focus on the films related to the topic of bullying exclusively, leaving behind such productions as *Confessions* (*Kokubaku*, 2010) by Tetsuya Nakashima, which are not only widely described in the research papers, but also revolve around the different specter of social problems.

Bullying and traumatic identity

The child and the child-rearing process have a special place in the Japanese way of thinking about the societal order. The descendant is perceived not only as a future citizen but also as an element complementing the family¹⁰. However, when the youths are forced to start compulsory education¹¹, there appear fears and problems connected to the new environment ruled by the different laws. Bullying¹² and school refusal (*Jap. tōkōkyōhi*)¹³ are among the leading problems of Japanese teenagers. According to the most recent definition used on the Japanese ground, collective bullying involves “psychical and psychological abuse by a group of students against one student”¹⁴. Among the violent acts there should be mentioned kicking, hitting, hiding or destroying stu-

¹⁰ Joy, Hendry. *Becoming Japanese. The world of the pre-school child*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, pp. 1–10.

¹¹ Nemoto, Yasuhiro. *The Japanese Education System*. Parkland: Universal Publishers, 1999, p. 12.

¹² To read more about bullying in Japan in sociological context, see: Morita, Yohji., op. cit., pp. 309–323.

¹³ Yoder, Robert S. *Deviance and Inequality in Japan: Japanese Youth and Foreign Migrants*. Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011, pp. 44–47.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

dent's personal belongings, as well as threatening and verbally abusing¹⁵. As Robert Yoder observes, official statistics on bullying in Japan might be misleading, as teachers and schools are reluctant to report the violent actions happening on their premises¹⁶. However, recent reports of the Japanese Ministry of Education show that over 65% of middle schools reported bullying. Yoder further points out that “*ijime* stems from the pressures and measures taken to create conformity in Japanese schools [...]. The irony is that school socialization through observations or direct experience of teachers' abuse of students for the purpose of conformity leads to copycat behavior”¹⁷. As the reasons for bullying in Japanese schools the researcher mentions the differences from others, such as physical disability, being a loner, being a worse learner or living abroad (thus possessing different language abilities)¹⁸.

The first bullying-related suicide¹⁹, recognized as such by Tokyo High Court, shocked Japanese public opinion in 1986²⁰. A 13-year-old boy committed suicide because of threats he received from his colleagues. The bullies treated him as if he was dead and even prepared a mock funeral during the school hours. The reports state that a teacher also took part in the bullying by writing a message of condolences that supposed to be humoristic²¹. Since then, the topic of bullying regularly appeared in Japanese media and the Ministry of Education conducted first studies and surveys among students. A report from 1986 stated that during nine months 155,000 incidents happened all over Japan²². Then, bullying has been classified and recognized as “a structural problem, a syndrome of pathological developments in the education system and in society”²³. Despite the government's preventive actions and the public discourse, cases similar to that from 1986 still appear on the agenda²⁴.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 45.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ See: Erbe, Annette. “Youth in Crisis: Public Perceptions and Discourse on Deviance and Juvenile Problem Behavior in Japan.” *Juvenile Delinquency in Japan: Reconsidering the Crisis*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, p. 56. Erbe observes that: “While there had been previous reports on incidents of suicide or acts of revenge related to bullying among school children, the causal relation had not been emphasized.”

²⁰ Morita, Yohji., op. cit., pp. 311–312. It is worth indicating that the Court's sentence was issued no sooner than in 1994 – eight years after the tragic incident.

²¹ Schott, Robin M. “The life and death of bullying.” *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. Ed. idem., D. M. Søndergaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 185.

²² Erbe, Annette., op. cit., pp. 56–57.

²³ Ibidem, p. 57.

²⁴ See: Harrison, Trevor. *21st Century Japan: A New Sun Rising*. Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books Ltd., 2008, p. 106. For example, in October 30th 2006 *Asahi Shimbun* reported that 14-year-old girl from Mizunami (Gifu Prefecture) was found hanged after a school basketball team practice – she was bullied by her teammates.

The mentioned case, as well as the following ones, inspired the filmmakers, who focus not only on the suicidal act itself but also on the development of the traumatic identity²⁵. They try to investigate the motifs and mental states that lead the child to a suicide. What is more, the directors show the actions of the colleagues – reconstructing the possible order of events that is often overlooked in the reports. As a vivid example of the attempt to present the way of creating the traumatic identity by the bullied students can be analyzed Sabu's (Hiroyuki Tanaka) picture *Dead Run* (*Shisso*, 2005). The plot is constructed around the life of young Shuji (Yuya Tegoshi), who, from his early years, is surrounded by gangsters. Spending time in a dangerous neighborhood, he learned how to remain quiet and always stay in the shadow of the others. Even though the plot of Sabu's picture focuses mostly on the actions of the members of Japanese demimonde, under the gangster story one can find a narrative about bullying and coming-of-age in a hostile environment. Portraying the protagonist's schooldays, the director presents a typical circle of aggression that leads to children's frustration. Shuji's class is terrorized by the teacher, who wants to break youngsters' free will by screaming at them and breaching their inviolability. When Eri (Hanae Kan), a new student fascinated with Christianity, joins the class, she becomes a victim of the teacher's aggression. During the confrontation, he tries to cut the girl's long hair in front of the class, which causes Shuji's reaction. However, as the protagonist stands up for the newcomer, the class starts perceiving him as a stranger, who is against the order stated by the teacher – and, as a result, they bully him. In the meantime, Eri openly admits that she hates the members of the class – which surprisingly does not influence her – and all animosities are manifested towards Shuji. The reaction of the class and the increasing physical and mental bullying (for example, the colleagues throw the desk and boy's personal belongings out of the classroom) lead to developing the traumatic identity by the protagonist. On the one hand, he perceives himself as “the other,” excluded from the community. On the other hand, he also develops aggressive and auto-aggressive behaviors – he starts feeling the need to kill random people, as well as has a failed suicide attempt. It can be observed that it was the bullying that influenced the change of personality of the main character. In this case, Sabu tries to deliberate on the possible tragic results of bullying that started from the irresponsible teacher. Analyzing the described film, it can be perceived that the director compares the influence of the surroundings on the character – the hostile neighborhood and the school. Shuji is perfectly capable of coping with the gangsters and even finds relief in visiting Eri and her friend – a priest; it is the attitude of the class that influences him the most.

²⁵ The traumatic identity is understood by the filmmakers as the mental condition of the child experiencing the abuse.

The trauma of bullying that chases the protagonist in his adult life and stops him from coexisting with society also appears in Yasuo Inoue's film *The Neighbor No. Thirteen* (*Rinjin 13-gō*, 2005). The psychological drama depicts the story of Juzo Murasaki (Oguri Shun), who tries to stabilize his situation by moving to a new place (a flat number 13 in a small block of apartments) and taking a new job as a construction worker. From the beginning, the viewer is conscious of the fact that the protagonist suffers from split personality disorder. His illness developed because of the tortures the character survived as a child – the school bullies poured acid on his face. As a result of excessive bullying, in his mind, Juzo created the imaginative vision of an old shed, where two parts of his personality – he as a young boy and his alter-ego that has visible burn marks on the face, as well as a blind eye – meet. The traumatic memories make the protagonist unable to work, as he continually sees the imaginary wounds on his body and, later on, the alter-ego starts haunting him, manifesting his presence as another man, always standing behind. Soon, the character discovers that Toru Akai (Hirofumi Arai), the boss of the gang that was harassing the boy at school, works in the same company and even lives in the apartment just above Juzo's cramped flat. The feeling that Akai is close again disconcerts the protagonist and brings the memories back. In the meantime, Juzo tries to make friends with Seki Hajime (Tomoya Ishii) and, under the spur of the moment, when the wave of memories appears in his head, the protagonist informs Seki about the personality disorder. The imaginary scene of aggression towards the former oppressor, which Juzo sees in some kind of trance, is animated. In this way, the director underlines the difference between the reality and the protagonist's delusions, which are even more bestial than the bullying he faced. However, as the disorder develops because of the presence of Akai, Juzo starts killing random neighbors and co-workers. Finally, he takes revenge on his oppressor and his family.

Inoue one more time, similarly to *Dead Run* described above, shows that bullying leads to mental problems and the inability of the victim to start an adult life. Juzo, just like Shuji from Sabu's film, perceives violence and killing as the only possible solution to the problem, as well as the mean to soothe his suffering. The traumatic identity he developed makes him unable to think rationally, so by killing random people he compensates his fears and makes up for the horror of his youth days. What is significant here is that while portraying various kinds of bullying Inoue refers to the mock funeral ceremony that appeared in the reports describing the case from 1986, mentioned at the beginning of this paper²⁶.

²⁶ See: Morita, Yohji., op. cit., pp. 311–312.

Anarchy at school premises

While depicting group bullying in new Japanese coming-of-age cinema, the directors also use fictional pictures of schools entirely controlled by the youth's gangs. Not only the fellow students (or members of the different gang) can be violated, but also the teachers, who do not influence the students. There, the school premises become the battleground, and the youngsters spend all days on fighting, rarely taking part in the lessons.

One of the examples of such narratives that revolve around the depictions of school taken by members of the gang is *Blue Spring* (*Aoi haru*, 2001) by Toshiaki Toyoda. In the mentioned film, the director presents the school premises that are destroyed continuously by the rebellious young boys – they openly draw graffiti on the walls, occupy chosen classrooms and change them into their own dens. The teachers have no significant voice, and they even rarely appear in Toyoda's picture, same as family life and future perspectives. The students seem to be floating in the world full of violence, in which the only option outside school is joining yakuza²⁷. The element worth analyzing here is the way of stating and holding power by the dominated gang and its boss. Kujo (Ryuhei Matsuda) established the specific game of dare – a test of courage known as The Clapping Game. The boss is the best player, but he is also able to hold his position using his fists. He continuously invents new forms of bullying, threatening all those who stand against him. Tom Mes observes that the violence here is connected with a system of hierarchy – if the boys are tough enough, they can continue their lifestyles within yakuza gang. Also, the director not only criticizes the educational system that allows for bullying but creates a comparison between the school system, gang rules, and corporate life. He states that those three environments are based on “the need to rule and regulate”²⁸. As Mes further points out, Toyoda shows that the system created by youths may look like anarchy but in fact, they copy the rules of the order they tried to overthrow²⁹. What is significant, the director also covers the topic of suicidal tendencies among the students. However, in his film, the death of a youngster is not the result of him being bullied, but it stemmed from an extreme need to replace Kujo and become a new leader. Aoki (Hirofumi Arai) trains so hard to beat him in the game that he loses contact with the reality and commits suicide by jumping off the rooftop. As in the other films mentioned above, Toyoda also presents the world of violence that leaves no space for compassion – fellow students perceive Aoki's death as an exciting event and an inevitable consequence of the rat race.

²⁷ Mes, Tom., op. cit.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

A similar course of action and similar characters (young gangs' members, bullied teacher and yakuza gangsters) appear in Takashi Miike's picture *Crows Zero* (*Kurōzu Zero*, 2007). Young Genji transfers to Suzuran High School, which is famous because of the violence determining the shape of school life and the gangs fighting on the corridors. Therefore, Genji's choice is not accidental – he aims at becoming a new “king of Suzuran,” which means fighting to the top and reuniting all gangs³⁰. The vision proposed by Miike is somehow cartoonish and grotesque – even the severely hurt members of the fighting gangs quickly heal and come back to the battle. However, as John Berra observes, this film's message is to celebrate youthful energy, it is a fantasy vision of a new, rebellious generation and its world – completely different from the adults' one³¹. The distinctive feature of Miike's picture is that, conversely to the bullies depicted in the films previously mentioned in this paper, Genji has an aim – related to his family's history. As the viewer learns, over the decade ago Genji's father tried to reunite the gangs, but he failed. The boy not only shows a strong motivation to perform better (in terms of acquiring power) than his parent, but also follows the family tradition – he wishes to become yakuza boss one day. What is more, the characters manifest a specific moral core (for example they do not harm women), based on the loyalty and honor³².

Even though the narratives described above stem from the combination of yakuza cinema and the films of youth rebellion, it is also worth indicating some pictures that went beyond those categories. Analyzing the films about trends-following Japanese teenagers, who develop destructive group behavior and rebel against the adults' order, Sion Sono's *Sucide Club* (*Jisatsu sākuru*, 2001) should also be mentioned. The director presents a wave of mass suicides among the schoolchildren that starts for no apparent reason, but results in a large social disturbance³³. However, students jumping in front of the train a moment before it gets to the station, holding their hands and murmuring, are no victims of bullying, but blind followers of the ludicrous fashion. The director deliberates on the nature of violence and, as Jim Harper observes, “[he] suggests that the roots of this wave of self-destruction are already present in Japanese psyche, simply waiting for the right trigger”³⁴. The brutality and graphic violence in Sono's film provoked a lot of media critique because it revealed a controversial picture of the young generation prone to media influence. Even though the film is often misrelated to the topic of bullying, it opens the opportunities for further analysis of the coming-of-age problems.

³⁰ Berra, John. op. cit., p. 285.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Dixon, Wheeler W. *A History of Horror*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010, p. 190.

³⁴ See: Harper, Jim. *Flowers from Hell. The Modern Japanese Horror Film*. Hereford: Noir Publishing, 2008, p. 62.

Overcoming the trauma

In Japanese films concerning the topic of bullying also appear the pictures of the attempts of overcoming the trauma. Among the narratives in which the directors try to present the possible solutions to the problem, there can be mentioned Shunji Iwai's *All About Lily Chou-Chou* (*Riri Shushu no subete*, 2001)³⁵. The plot follows an introvert Yuichi, who found the escape from brutal reality in listening to the music of Lily Chou-Chou – a pop star. Even though the boy has several friends, he becomes a victim of bullying after he is caught stealing in the music shop. The youngsters think that he had ratted on them, so they hit Yuichi severely, destroy his CDs and force him to masturbate in front of them. Since that time the music and the message board on the website, where the fans of Lily communicate, have become the only place where the boy can be anonymous, thus feel safe. However, as the alluring music of Lily provides only temporary escape, there is no real alternative to avoid bullying³⁶. It is worth mentioning that among the fans of Lily there are also Yuichi's oppressors (however, he does not know their nicknames). When observing mental and psychical bullying of other colleagues, and even a rape of a fellow female student, Yuichi falls deeper into the world of music. As Berra points out, referencing to William Gibson's novel *Idoru* (1996) and the idea of a virtual idol, Iwai concludes that the virtual world is misleading and offers no real escape from coming-of-age suffering³⁷. What is more, it can interfere with the "real" relationships and make one unable to communicate with others. For example, Yuichi devotes his feelings to Lily so much that he has problems with showing his feelings to the "material" girl – pianist Kuno. Analyzing Iwai's film in the context of the social problems, it is worth looking at the relationships between the students and their parents. It is significant that the alienation of the students in the virtual reality leads to the "disconnection" from the adult world³⁸. As José Montaña comments: "[...] throughout the film, the main character doesn't talk at all to his parents; they supply money, scold him, and even slap him, but he merely looks at the ground – the boy is not able to articulate with even that elementary and intuitive form of communication, the look"³⁹. The lack of parental guidance is also visible when observing the actions of Tsuda – a girl forced into prostitution by school bullies. Even

³⁵ See: Berra, John., op. cit., pp. 284–285. It is worth mentioning that the film refers to Iwai's internet novel *Lilybolic*, published in the form of a website, where the director created the narration posting the comments on the message board. He created several different characters and interacted with each other.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 285.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Montaña, José. "Lost Names, Deviant Attitudes, and the Ether. Goddesses in Contemporary Japanese Audiovisuals." *Dialectics of the Goddess in Japanese Audiovisual Culture*. Ed. L. J. Torres Hortelano. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018, p. 86.

³⁹ Ibidem.

though it seems that her family can be classified as Japanese middle class, providing her with all fancy goods the teenager desires, nobody notices the girl's fate. As a result of constant nasty violence and the inspiration Tsuda suddenly takes from Lily's lyrics, the girl climbs an electric pole on the field and jumps. Concluding the analysis of Iwai's film it can be observed that no matter how hard the students try to find the way to escape bullying, the traumatic identity they develop leads them to auto-aggression and transgressive behavior. As Montaña sums up: "The alleged omnipotence of the idol fails to relieve painful feelings; rather it contributes to intensifying them"⁴⁰.

The traumatic identity and the attempts of the whole class to overcome the trauma related to the suicide of one of the students were also depicted by Kenji Nakanishi in his film *Aoi Tori* (2008). Here appears the unique figure of a teacher – he takes the role of a savior for the students influenced by the traumatic events, but he also acts as an investigator, whose aim is to find out who was bullying the deceased Noguchi. The plot of the film revolves around the events right after the suicide. Even though the staff, as well as the students, try to forget and continue everyday activities without resolving the problem of bullying, the new teacher, Mr Murauchi (Hiroshi Abe), wants the students to reconsider their behavior. The revolutionary methods of the teacher, together with his speech impediment (stuttering), make him an illustrative example of the actions taken by the schools in the late 90s, when the second wave of bullying came⁴¹. Then, the primary way of dealing with the growing aggression between the students was to encourage them to write diaries – to monitor the potentially dangerous behavior⁴². Murauchi not only openly addresses the students as "cowards", but also forces them to remember that the death of their colleague was their fault. He starts the program of reporting bullies by the students and encourages writing about their problems, as well as deposit the anonymous letters in the blue mailbox he puts on the corridor. The constant reminding the students of the deceased Noguchi creates additional trauma in the minds of the class, what, therefore, seems to escape the teacher's attention. In *Aoi tori*, the director presents how the traumatic identity can also be developed by people not related to bullying personally, who just kept the positions of the observers.

Summing up the analysis of the overcoming trauma in the films about bullying, it can be said that the directors give no solution to the problem. Instead, the mentioned pictures reveal the brutal truth about methods of escaping from reality – they all let the young generation down. The ways of depicting the problem of bullying suggest that the aggression at school, even if only observed from a distance, changes the perception of a child forever.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 87.

⁴¹ Erbe, Annette., op. cit., pp. 60–67.

⁴² Ibidem.

Animated bullying

The problem of bullying was also depicted in full-length animated teen drama. One of the brilliant examples of the films about the traumatic identity and the tragic results of bullying that influence the whole life of the protagonist is *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) by Naoko Yamada. The story of a deaf girl, who is being bullied by a boy from her class, is based on Yoshitoki Ōima's manga, released between 2013 and 2014⁴³. The highly appreciated picture received, among other nominations, Excellence Award on the 20th Japan Media Arts Festival in 2017⁴⁴. The film covers the topic of bullying the disabled person – what is one of the main reasons of the ostracism among students mentioned in the research and surveys⁴⁵. Yamada presents the moving story of deaf Shoko Nishimiya, who fights her inability to speak well and tries to be polite to everyone, doing her best to cope with everyday routines. However, she captures the attention of a class bully – Shoya Ishida. The boy perceives pestering fellow students as a remedy for the boredom and, consequently, Nishimiya becomes an easy victim. He starts to mimic her poor speech, commit violent acts, such as hitting the girl or destroying her hearing aids, and laugh at her attempts to communicate with others. What is more, the class, encouraged by Ishida, joins the harassing. Here one can also observe the passive behavior of the teachers, who perceive girl's appearance as the factor disturbing the social balance. The bullying goes too far when Shoya yanks out Nishimiya hearing aids and causes her ears to bleed. After the affair, during which the girl transfers to another school and the management finally confronts the students, as well as points out the boy as the main culprit, the situation changes. The students, scared of the high costs of the broken aids that had to be covered, turn on Shoya, and the bullying is directed towards him. Lonely and excluded from the community, the boy develops the traumatic identity, loses his courage and remains a social outcast. The constant feeling of rejection leads to his loss of the joy of life – he plans to commit suicide after he repays his mother for the cost of the broken aids she was to cover. Trying to portray the inner states of the boy's mental disorder, the director depicts the feelings of shame and guilt uniquely. Shoya “blocks” the faces of the people around and, being unable to look them in the eyes, does not see their facial expressions – only big, blue crosses.

⁴³ N. a. “A Silent Voice Anime Film Earns 283 Million Yen in 2 Days, Ranks #2.” *Anime News Network*, 20.09.2016. Web. <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2016-09-20/a-silent-voice-anime-film-earns-283-million-yen-in-2-days-ranks-no.2/.106697>. 23.12.2017.

⁴⁴ N. a. “The 20th Japan Media Arts Festival Award – winning works.” *Japan Media Arts Festival*, 10.11.2017. Web. http://festival.j-mediaarts.jp/download/20jmaf_award_winning_works_en.pdf. 22.12.2017.

⁴⁵ Yoder, Robert S., op. cit., p. 45.

Yamada's adaptation, as well as manga, emphasizes the fact that even the brash and the most irreverent bully can lose his position and take the place of his victim. However, the director, differently than in the other Japanese films about bullying, shows that if the characters change, they can regain happiness and bad memories can be forgotten by making friends and apologizing. Shoya and Nishimiya meet once again in high school, and after the numerous turns and events, they fall in love. It should be pointed out that fairytale-like ending of the animation makes it suitable for younger viewers, while the narratives about violence, presented in the other coming-of-age films, are mostly aimed at mature audience. Thus, Yamada's film can be perceived as an educational picture, whose role is to focus the attention of the youths who might have faced bullying at school and encourage them to take actions. Also, contrary to the other pictures mentioned above, Yamada shows that traumatic identity can be overcome and the fate of the bullied students is not determined.

Conclusion

As it can be observed from the presented analysis, bullying appears in Japanese cinema as a significant social concern. However, while presenting the reasons for aggression between the students, the development of traumatic identity and the reactions of the staff, the directors offer no simple solution to the problem. The mentioned narratives show the failure of the system, which is unable to cope with the scale of bullying. The adults presented in the films vary from the sacred (and also bullied) teachers, through the passive observers, who pretend not to see the problem. Moreover, the exceptional ones as Murauchi from *Blue Bird*, who try to fight the bullying, are bound to be defeated by the inefficiency of the education system. Equally significant is the fact that in the films about bullying the family life is rarely seen and the parents, if they appear on the screen, have no contact with the growing youths, thus no influence on what is happening at school. Also, except for the case of Genji in *Crows Zero*, the career prospects and plans do not exist, as the students are more focused on "the moment" and current school affairs (or, simply, survival). It is apparently visible on the example of Shoya Ishida from *A Silent Voice*, who chooses a part-time job only to pay back his mother for the Nishimiya's destroyed hearing aids, not because he wants to pursue his career goals.

The directors of the mentioned films show multiple approaches to the topic, as they aim at presenting the problem to different audiences. It can be concluded that the animated story by Naoko Yamada, aimed at the younger viewers, offers happy ending and shows that traumatic identity can be overcome, if only the protagonist wishes to change his attitude. However, the characteristic feature of the Japanese

films about bullying is that the violence influences all students from the class, even if they are not the victims. The trauma, connected with the observed aggression, makes everyone live in fear of being the next aim of the bully. The further research on the subject brought up in this article could follow the topic of the intricate tortures in the school environment, as the wide range of teenagers' bestiality on the screen was only the additional point of this article. Here the titles such as *Moonlight Whispers* (*Gekkō no sasayaki*, 1999) by Akihiko Shiota and in exploitation cinema, for example, *The Torture Club* (*Chotto Kawaii Aian Meiden*, 2014) could be covered.

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Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi analizę przedstawień przemocy szkolnej w kinie japońskim. Autorka zwraca uwagę na różnorodne podejścia do problemu, prezentowane przez wybranych reżyserów, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem powodów takich reprezentacji i ich potencjału edukacyjnego. Wybrane obrazy filmowe zostały podzielone na przestrzeni tekstu na cztery kategorie: filmy opowiadające o kreowaniu „tożsamości traumatycznej” przez świadków doświadczeń granicznych (na przykład śmierci kolegi z klasy, który doświadczył szkolnej przemocy); filmy o agresywnych stosunkach panujących między uczniami przekształcającymi środowisko szkolne w pole działań wojennych rządzone przez najsilniejsze jednostki; filmy o wychodzeniu z traumy. Jako studium porównawcze do obrazów live-action, czwarta kategoria filmów oscyluje wokół animacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem produkcji *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) Naoko Yamady. Obraz ten pokazuje, że trauma nabyta przez doświadczenie przemocy w środowisku szkolnym może zostać przezwyciężona.

Summary

The author of this article analyzes the depictions of bullying in Japanese cinema, the reasons for presenting particular approaches to the problem and the educational potential the films offer to the viewers. The chosen pictures were divided into four categories: the films discussing the moment of embracing a “traumatic identity” by a young person who witnessed a liminal experience, such as sudden death of a colleague; the films about the aggression between the students, who change the school environment into a battlefield ruled by the fittest; the films that focus on overcoming the trauma by the protagonist. As a comparison to the live-action pictures, the last part of the article contains the brief description of the animated *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) by Naoko Yamada – presenting the problem of bullying as something that can be overcome.