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Film review: Kamikaze Girls [Shimotsuma Monogatari]

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—where nobody seems to care about fashion and one supermarket takes care of all clothing needs of the town—she is still happy as long as she can live in her French Rococo fantasy world. Her “Gothic Lolita” dresses and her habit of disconnecting herself from the reality of 21st-century Shimotsuma is made possible by consumerism, pretension, and her principle of life: “all humans are born alone, think alone, and die alone.”

But Momoko’s world of comfort is penetrated in an awkward encounter with Ichigo in her “kamikaze” jumpsuit and shaved eyebrows, a dynamic young woman who was once an emotionally repressed adolescent and now belongs to an all-girl biker gang.

Perhaps the English title of the film (Kamikaze girls) is misleading, if not ironic, for it is not the superficial “toughness” of Ichigo’s biker gang, itself a product of Japan’s postwar transformation, that Momoko and Ichigo turn to, but to the inner strength they see in their friendship and in each other to stand firm against social pressure to conform. Seasoned with animated scenes and based on a popular novel by Takemoto Novala in a country where nine out of ten women own at least one Louis Vuitton item, this film provides a window to changing subcultures of Japanese teenagers from eccentric fashion consumerism to the rise and fall of the motorcycle gang phenomenon.

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