



Disarming Hearts and Minds

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For seventy-five years, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, widely known as the *hibakusha*, have carried a great burden. As the first population to suffer the indiscriminate violence of the atomic bomb, they felt responsible for preserving the collective memory of nuclear warfare so that it might never happen again. Many *hibakusha* became publicly involved in international, civil society campaigns advocating for the total elimination of nuclear arms, while other *hibakusha* dedicated their lives to the much less visible effort of transforming the hearts, minds, and societal attitudes that promote reliance on nuclear weapons. Thus, the legacy of the *hibakusha* can be fully appreciated by examining both manifestations of their leadership in the nuclear age.

While the *hibakusha* share a common vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, those who have demonstrably advanced this cause may be grouped into two schools of thought. The “structural” approach is concerned with shifting the global politics of disarmament and indeed the postwar structure; the role of these *hibakusha* is mainly to weaken the nuclear-armed states and their allies by stigmatizing the very weapons on which their power rests. The “personalist” approach is concerned with establishing a culture of peace within the nuclear-armed states; the role of these *hibakusha* is arguably to initiate a societal process of truth-telling and reconciliation that can overcome the politics of fear that states use to justify the possession of nuclear weapons. The personalist approach to nuclear disarmament, and especially its connection to the structural approach, has received little attention in academic and policy circles.

Today the *hibakusha* number less than 150,000 worldwide, and their average age exceeds 80. A historical appraisal of their legacy might consider the extent to which they have reflected and shaped the nuclear weapons discourse of their time. In his classic 1946 account of the Hiroshima bomb, John Hersey noted that many survivors were indifferent to the use of the atomic bomb in wartime; others developed a strong hatred for Americans. These attitudes were temporary coping mechanisms. Within a lifespan, the *hibakusha* went on to find purpose and meaning

through educating the world about the dangers of nuclear weapons and striving for peace, earning praise from many world leaders.

Yet, their legacy is not yet fully realized, and humankind is in danger of losing their voices. As the *hibakusha* finally fade from the world stage, their legacy will be evaluated in part by the progress the world has made toward nuclear disarmament. Despite the breakthrough of a nuclear weapon ban treaty in 2017, the political resistance by nuclear-armed states and the actual risk of nuclear war remain high. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, in its most recent Doomsday Clock Statement, assessed that humanity is “100 seconds to midnight,” or closer than ever to nuclear catastrophe. The use again of nuclear weapons would largely negate what the *hibakusha* have worked for. The prospects for integral disarmament would be enhanced by more deliberately integrating the complementary efforts of the *hibakusha* to address not only the deficiency of international law concerning nuclear weapons, but also the deficiency of a culture of peace in the nuclear-armed states.

In 1954, a U.S. hydrogen-bomb test at Bikini Atoll gave rise to the global anti-nuclear movement. The suffering of a Japanese fishing crew, exposed to radioactive fallout from the bomb, was widely reported in the press. That nuclear accident inspired the *hibakusha* to establish *Nihon Hidankyo*, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organization. *Nihon Hidankyo* organized the first World Conference for Survivors of the A- and H- Bomb, where they pledged to “save humanity from its crisis through the lessons learned from our experiences, while at the same time saving ourselves.” While political divisions among the *hibakusha* later resulted in the formation of *Gensuikin*, Japan Congress against A- & H- Bombs, and *Gensuikyo*, Japan Council against A- & H- Bombs, all three associations shared the belief that nuclear weapons should be abolished.

“It is our strong desire to achieve a nuclear-free world in our lifetime so succeeding generations will never see the hell on Earth we saw,” the *hibakusha* declared in a 2016 petition. Their statement, known as the Hibakusha Appeal, called on all state governments to conclude a comprehensive global ban treaty on nuclear weapons, which the UN General Assembly adopted the following year. The Hibakusha Appeal, which has amassed more than ten million signatures, illustrates the ability of the *hibakusha* to influence world opinion on nuclear abolition with their own clarion call: “No more Hiroshima! No more Nagasaki!” Just as physicians and scientists have credibility on the medical-humanitarian dangers of nuclear weapons, the *hibakusha* have a unique moral authority on the use of nuclear weapons, which comes from having suffered the tragic human cost.

Hibakusha activists who adhere to the structural approach, focusing on the state as the primary unit of power, have framed their personal loss and suffering as a cautionary tale against nuclear weapons. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has become a major platform for *hibakusha* activists who want to pressure the nuclear-armed states. Many stoke the fear of nuclear annihilation, noting that modern nuclear weapons have the equivalent destructive power of tens of thousands of bombs like the ones dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Others have described the global effort to ban nuclear weapons with the language of redemptive hope. In her 2017 speech to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, on behalf of ICAN, Canadian *hibakusha* Setsuko Thurlow stated:

When I was a 13-year-old girl, trapped in the smoldering rubble, I kept pushing. I kept moving toward the light. And I survived. Our light now is the ban treaty. To all in this hall and all listening around the world, I repeat those words that I heard called to me in the ruins of Hiroshima: ‘Don’t give up! Keep pushing! See the light? Crawl towards it.’

Over the past twenty-five years, humanitarian disarmament has emerged as a promising framework for ending civilian suffering. Reflecting the intersection of international humanitarian law and disarmament law, humanitarian disarmament instruments take preventive measures to protect civilians from suffering indiscriminate violence both in and out of wartime. This paradigm shift, emphasizing human security over state security, enriches the discussion on nuclear weapons and deterrence strategies, which threaten both civilian and military targets. Inspired by weapons conventions for anti-personnel land mines and cluster munitions, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) promotes a humanitarian norm through comprehensively banning the production, transfer, stockpiling, use and threat of using nuclear weapons.

While humanitarian disarmament should foster a cooperative approach among states, the effort to enact a global ban treaty on nuclear weapons departs in this respect from earlier weapons conventions. Because the nuclear-armed states still regard their nuclear arsenals as a source of international power and prestige, they have not made progress toward fulfilling their disarmament obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), long considered a cornerstone of international security. The lack of credibility and leadership from the nuclear-armed states over five decades of the NPT caused the non-nuclear states to support the normative framework of the TPNW. The latter

treaty is intended to shame the nuclear-armed states into compliance. According to Tim Wright of ICAN, the nuclear-armed states “understand very well the power and stigmatizing effect of international legal norms. They are fearful of the pressure this treaty will create once in force and once ratified by the vast majority of the world’s countries.” Disarmament activists believe the stigmatization of nuclear weapons will lead to public debate and policy changes within the democratic, nuclear-armed states.

Yet, the acute sense of victimization felt by these states may also prolong the stigmatization phase, delaying the much-needed debate and policy changes. So far, the nuclear-armed states have reacted with defensive coping mechanisms to avoid, reject, counter, and evade the stigma imposed on them by the ban treaty. In response to the TPNW, the U.S. implicitly threatened to withhold support from non-nuclear allied states that support the ban treaty. Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland have not signed the TPNW, citing their need to maintain trust with the nuclear-armed states. Nor has Japan, which, despite having the largest *hibakusha* population and broad public support for nuclear abolition, remains under the U.S. nuclear umbrella. While the testimony of the *hibakusha* regarding nuclear weapons has resonated deeply with civil society and the non-nuclear states, the structural approach alone cannot resolve deep-seated, existential fears and anxieties within the nuclear-armed states.

In contrast to the structural approach, the personalist approach practiced by some *hibakusha* focuses on transforming people and societies from the inside-out. In the nuclear-armed states, culture has been used to legitimize the structural and direct violence associated with the atomic bomb. American atomic culture, for example, consists of historical narratives and military ideologies that justify nuclear weapons as a vital instrument of foreign policy. Generations of Americans were commonly taught that the use of the atomic bomb on civilian targets was morally justifiable because it caused Japan to surrender, and that nuclear deterrence between the U.S. and Soviet Union worked as intended during the Cold War. Although the historical truth is more complex and less charitable to the U.S. government, past efforts to supplement the historical record with nuanced facts and interpretations surrounding the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have encountered cultural resistance from those who felt threatened by a more all-encompassing version of history.

The cultural interpretation of nuclear weapons has long been guided by a technocratic paradigm, whereby the state’s scientific authority on nuclear weapons is affirmed by a silent majority. Accordingly, collective memory of the atomic bombings has been shaped more by its U.S. perpetrators than by its foreign victims. Furthermore, the sacrosanct image of

American war heroes has been upheld by well-organized interest groups such as the American Legion and the Atomic Heritage Foundation. Their influence could be seen in the 1995 controversy over the Smithsonian's planned *Enola Gay* exhibit, which had attempted to show the human suffering caused by the bomb; the museum director apologized for "attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the end of the war." The selective remembering or whitewashing of history prevents the U.S. from a moral evaluation of wartime actions and forecloses the possibility of repentance. By failing to critique the historical use and threat of using nuclear weapons, American atomic culture legitimates and allows that specific form of violence to be employed again.

The antidote to cultural violence is a "culture of peace," which UNESCO defines as "a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations." A culture of peace requires teachers of peace whose behavior can inspire others to imitate their example. While Hersey's famous essay succeeded at rehumanizing the *hibakusha*, it was still too early in 1946 to assess their agency for building peace with their own thoughts, words, and actions. Today, organizations such as Peace Boat, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, Hibakusha Stories, and Nuclear Age Peace Foundation regularly encourage the *hibakusha* to explore their role in peace education. While many *hibakusha* have been involved in education for negative peace, that is, disarming states of nuclear weapons, relatively few have pursued education for positive peace, that is, manifesting global justice through a network of humane relationships based on equity and mutuality.

The leadership of the *hibakusha* in the realm of personal and relational peace is understated but highly relevant to building a culture of peace. While the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are usually viewed as discrete events, the psychological aftereffects, including trauma, fear, and anger, persisted much longer in the survivors. *Hibakusha* who personally embody peace show how to interrupt cycles of violence that entangle individuals and communities over time. Sachiko Yasui and Takashi Tanemori are two *hibakusha* with inspirational stories of personal transformation and transcendence. Their lives contextualize the challenge and promise of building a culture of peace within one's own society.

"Sachiko" is a Nagasaki survivor whose traumatic experience of losing family members, being discriminated against, and developing cancer was typical of the *hibakusha*. Beyond the physical effects of the bomb

she experienced from the age of six, Sachiko was more deeply wounded by “the scars that such an enormous shock left on our hearts.” Through studying the nonviolent Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Sachiko “found light in darkness, hope in despair,” acknowledging the coexistence of human suffering and human love. The long arc of her learning and transformation lasted fifty years before she would finally teach peace. By the end of her time as a peace educator, Sachiko had brought her message of peace to Japan, Canada, and the U.S. She encouraged young people to reflect on the nature of peace and human fulfillment, offering answers through careful reflection on her own life:

Remembering those days, I know that the tranquil and healthy lives we live nowadays ... have been built up on top of a history of pain. I always think of that and hold mercy and deep gratitude in my heart, for that is where true human nature resides.

“Tanemori” is a Hiroshima survivor whose journey to forgiveness also began with profound loss and loneliness in postwar Japan. His sense of victimization was compounded when he came to the U.S. as a young man, and was sent to a migrant labor camp, then institutionalized and held at hospitals against his will after doctors discovered he was a survivor of the atomic bomb. Tanemori struggled with feelings of anger and revenge for years until he realized that “the enemy was none other than me: the darkness of my own heart.” In an epiphany on the fortieth anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, his Samurai Father's teaching fused with his personal faith in Jesus Christ, and he suddenly understood that divine forgiveness is unconditional. With that, he publicly forgave President Harry Truman for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and asked forgiveness for the Bataan Death March, Rape of Nanking, Korean “comfort women,” and Pearl Harbor.

Thereafter, Tanemori sought reconciliation over the years with Pearl Harbor survivors and U.S. veterans, even offering forgiveness to Gen. Paul Tibbets, who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. But his overtures of forgiveness were rarely reciprocated and sometimes defiantly refused. Undaunted, Tanemori believed that only unconditional forgiveness could break the long chain of violence connecting historical atrocities:

We can settle human conflicts and differences, national enmity, ethnic hatred, cultural and individual divisiveness, without resorting to violence or war, without the path of endless cycles of revenge ... if the human race is to survive, we all need to fight the last battle, the most difficult one of all: learning to forgive and making peace with our own hearts and our own pasts!

While the lives of Sachiko and Tanemori followed strikingly different trajectories, they offer similar insights into building a culture of peace. First, peace may be understood as a deeply personal and relational process that begins with an individual and is cultivated over a lifetime. Second, peace is linked to the search for justice, but justice itself is not a precondition for the victim to find the will to embrace the perpetrator. Third, individuals who have overcome unspeakable suffering through personal transformation make ideal teachers of peace. Both Sachiko's and Tanemori's lives have been preserved, respectively, in a children's book (*Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story*) and adult memoir (*Hiroshima: Bridge to Forgiveness*). Yet, the limited political impact of Sachiko's and Tanemori's work so far suggests the need to explore the possibility of intergroup reconciliation and political forgiveness.

Barack Obama's presidential legacy includes a symbolic reconciliation event with the *hibakusha* during his visit to Japan in 2016. Speaking at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Obama stated, "We have a shared responsibility to look directly into the eye of history and ask what we must do differently to curb such suffering again." While Obama did not make a political apology for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, his will to embrace the *hibakusha* and converge upon a shared history and commitment to justice constitutes a solid foundation for intergroup reconciliation. Obama also noted the importance of long-term, self-transformation, observing that "we must change our mindset about war itself . . . to define our nations not by our capacity to destroy, but by what we build." An authentic reconciliation process between the *hibakusha* and the U.S. government, by fulfilling the collective needs of both victim and perpetrator, could bring about the desired societal transformation.

In 1948, J. Robert Oppenheimer, who had directed Los Alamos Laboratory, noted that "the physicists have known sin; and this is a knowledge which they cannot lose." Authentic reconciliation moves beyond the knowledge of sin and toward the redemption of the sinner. This requires a truthful interrogation of the past from the perspective of the victim, and acknowledgment of guilt by the perpetrator. As new historical scholarship raises questions about the military necessity of bombing Hiroshima, and especially Nagasaki, the U.S. government will face mounting pressure to atone for the original sin of the nuclear age. Radical empathy and unconditional forgiveness by the victim, as practiced by *hibakusha* such as Sachiko and Tanemori, would create a safe environment for admission of wrongdoing. Equally important, a culture of peace that finds expression in education, media, and politics, would reduce domestic backlash to the apology.

Authentic reconciliation would also require the perpetrator to offer meaningful reparations for the past injustice, such as providing material

assistance to victims or establishing a just procedure. Because the *hibakusha* have long demanded the abolition of nuclear weapons, the U.S. government may summon the political will to embrace legally binding instruments such as the TPNW (that outlines remedial obligations for the nuclear-armed states) or to honor its disarmament obligations under the NPT. These structural mechanisms can become public expressions of repentance that help the nuclear-armed states to improve their moral standing and regain acceptance by the international community. While there are many victims of the nuclear age who can demand accountability for the social and environmental harms caused by nuclear proliferation, nuclear testing, and excessive spending on nuclear weapons, the *hibakusha* have the strongest and most clearly articulated claim on justice.

The politics of disarmament currently illustrates the challenge of pursuing global justice without reconciliation. The TPNW has been used to empower the non-nuclear states and stigmatize nuclear-armed states, but this has driven the latter into a predictable pattern of denial and recriminations. When that stigma becomes unbearable, the nuclear-armed states might reluctantly disarm, but their defensive mindsets and conflict psychology will not have changed. Their commitment to total nuclear disarmament under such circumstances would seem contrived. A restorative approach, on the other hand, offers a more credible option for the nuclear-armed states to productively manage the stigma that has been imposed on them. Where stigmatization inflicts painful wounds upon the aggressor, reconciliation is the salve that allows those wounds to heal; it is desirable that reconciliation follow stigmatization. Because reconciliation promotes unity over division, it is perhaps the most effective way to break the logjam in global disarmament politics.

In 2017, the TPNW was heralded by the *hibakusha* as “the beginning of the end of nuclear weapons.” The real end of nuclear weapons demands the integration of both structural change and personal transformation. While global disarmament politics and domestic peace education are often viewed as separate realms of engagement, the notable work of the *hibakusha* in both areas is highly complementary. Building cultures of peace in the nuclear-armed states can help those societies to reject their reliance on nuclear weapons and deterrence strategies. Furthermore, an authentic reconciliation process involving the *hibakusha* and governments would change the tenor of political discourse on nuclear weapons. The justice aspects of reconciliation would clarify the connection between what the *hibakusha* have long demanded, and what the nuclear-armed states owe them. Global reconciliation cultivated by cultures of peace would allow the unspeakable suffering of the *hibakusha* to bear new fruit.

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