

## HIROSHIMA – MEMORY AND THREAT

Sixty years have passed since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Today, August 9, exactly 60 years ago, Nagasaki just by chance became the second city in world history to have become victim of an atomic bomb. By chance, because the intended goal for the bomb was Kokura. But the cloud cover above that city was thick. The airplane with the bomb had to have enough fuel for the return trip to the island of Tinian in the Pacific where an American base was situated. However, the crew wanted to fulfil its mission and since Nagasaki had been appointed as another alternative and was situated quite close to Kokura the pilot decided to have a look at how the weather situation was there. Clouds covered Nagasaki too, but just as the plane was about to turn back, the clouds opened up and, in a hurry, the bomber let go of the atomic bomb without even having time to take proper aim. The goal was supposed to be the great shipbuilding wharf. Instead it fell on the valley where the Catholic cathedral lay. It was completely destroyed.

During all the time that has passed since these two bombs started the Atomic Era, the time in the history of mankind when we have become able to destroy our world with a few weapons, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have tried to tell us what they experienced, in the hope that we would not need to share their fate. Every year in the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, all over the world people gather to remember what happened. The survivors, called hibakusha, have written innumerable books, given innumerable interviews and travelled the world to tell about their lives during the bombings and afterwards. This continues to this day.

My own field of research concerns what hibakusha do not tell, and why. It started with the silence in Hiroshima during the years after the bombings 1945. When I first came to Hiroshima I interviewed many hibakusha. One of them was the poet Sadako Kurihara. She told me that right after the war she would not have been able to write about things she was telling me. The reason was American censorship. I was very surprised. The American occupation, which started when Japan surrendered August 15, 1945, had as its aim to make a democracy of Japan. But the fact, which Sadako Kurihara pointed out, was that strict American censorship was in force during the next four years. I started researching it and found out that American censorship in Japan covered many subjects and that one of these was anything that even mentioned the atomic bomb. Not only research of the results of the atomic bombings was prohibited to write about. Personal experiences, including poems, were also censored. The reason was of course partly military. But to a large extent the reason given by the censors was fear that the Japanese might revolt against the American occupation forces if

people in general were informed of the results of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Another reason was that the United States wanted to ensure that it could keep a monopoly on nuclear weapons. To prohibit the publishing of facts concerning their effects was a part of that endeavour.

The result of this censorship that for several years after the war the world outside of the atombombed cities knew very little about the effects of nuclear weapons. Neither individuals nor governments knew enough to decide against nuclear weapons during these years when the United States had monopoly on them.

This enforced silence was hard to accept for those hibakusha who saw it as their duty to warn the world against a build-up and use of nuclear weapons. When the American Occupation ended in 1952 a sudden flow of witness reports on the bombings suddenly appeared. When the Japanese magazine Asahi Graphic published pictures, the Japanese population in general finally understood what had happened.

But from the day of the bombings there have also been many hibakusha who never told outsiders that they were survivors and what they had been through. After having researched hibakusha who were not allowed to tell, I turned to those who voluntarily were silent.

In 1945 almost all Japanese cities were burnt down by American napalm bombs. The war against the United States and its allies was four years old. The fighting in China, Southeast Asia and The Pacific had caused millions of deaths among soldiers and civilians. The war was coming to the Japanese home islands. In modern times, Japan has always been dependent on imports, especially oil, iron and foodstuffs. The war meant that there was lack of everything. There was very little food. Most people had to survive on sweet potatoes and vegetables.

When Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed, living conditions of course became even worse for the survivors. Many had indescribable burns and other injuries. There were no medicines and no knowledge of how to treat the radiation victims. Some inhabitants had been lucky in that they had been outside of town at the time, but they had no homes, no water and no food. Taking all these aspects into account, it is natural that at that time they had no strength to engage themselves in telling the rest of the country about their conditions. It was more than they could bear to keep living from one day to the next. Few had the strength or means to sit down to write.

Even after conditions had become somewhat better, many continued to keep silent. Strangely enough Hiroshima became something of an eldorado. Many outsiders were thinking that Hiroshima had been hit differently from other towns, so maybe Hiroshima would also be supported differently by the government. The leader of the American occupation, general

Douglas MacArthur decided however that no extra help would be given Hiroshima in order that no one should regard Hiroshima as any different than all of Japan. As president Harry Truman said, the atomic bombings was America's revenge for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor which started the war.

In spite of this, Hiroshima gradually was rebuilt. But many of the survivors were ill. Some seemed to be healthy, but fell ill later. In 1947 The Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission started its work in Hiroshima and one year later in Nagasaki. Survivors thought that they could get treatment for their illnesses here. When they discovered that the ABCC, as it was called, did not treat survivors they were very disappointed. When it became clear that the purpose was to study the effects of the atomic bombs on human beings, they felt like test animals. Many refused to participate in its activities and kept silent about being survivors.

The hibakusha often fell ill. Some of them had frightening injuries. The atomic bomb developed heat so strong that human skin melted and caused terrible burns. When these burns healed they remained as scars called keloids. These could not be removed by operation. Some survivors had such scars on their backs if they had been carried the back of their mother at the moment of the explosion. Others had keloid scars in the face. Many who had such scars hid inside the home and never showed themselves to strangers. They were not accepted in bath houses, which was especially cruel in a country where everyone takes a bath every evening and at a time when few people had their own bath at home. Their looks were so horrible that bathhouse owners thought their customers would be scared off if they saw them.

Consequently, these survivors were isolated and lost contact with others.

Other survivors had not visible injuries or were even completely healthy. In spite of that they did not talk about being a hibakusha. They feared discrimination. In Japan, it is generally thought that hibakusha and their children easily fall ill, die young and, above all, risk getting handicapped children.

The effects of radiation from the atomic bombings has been researched since 1947. In 1994 The Radiation Effects Research Foundation, RERF, which is the earlier ABCC but including Japanese researchers, reported that nine kinds of cancer were common, especially leukaemia, were common among hibakusha. 86,000 persons were studied. Hibakusha had a risk 8-12 per cent higher than non-hibakusha of getting cancer. Among 500 children conceived before August 1945 but born after the bomb 21 had serious malformations. That is four times normal.

But there is no research showing that children conceived by hibakusha after August 6 1945 or in later generations are injured by radiation received by their parents. Research on 72216 children during several decades and published by RERF in 1990 says that there are no “significant genetic results”. This includes genetic malformations and cancers.

In spite of these results of research, the survivors and their children still are concerned and worried about the effects they fear from radiation.

This fear of genetic injuries in second or even third generation have led to discrimination of the survivors and their children. This concerns especially marriage. Many children of hibakusha worry about marriage because if it becomes known who they are in this respect it is very possible that their counterpart will refuse marriage. In Japan, it is quite accepted to research the background of a marriage candidate. In an attempt to hinder this, some hibakusha children keep silent about their heritage. Some have kept silent their whole married life, and lived a lie for their spouses and children.

Many also keep silent about their background because they fear labor market discrimination. Hibakusha and their children are thought easily to become sick and often find it hard to get a job.

The Japanese Nobel Prize winner Kenzaburo Oe has written about Hiroshima. In a book called Hiroshima Notes a hibakusha named Yasutaka Matsusaka talks about his silence. He says:

“People in Hiroshima think it is best to keep silent until death. They want to decide their own lives and their own death. They don’t like to show off their misery so that it can be used in antinuclear-weapons movements or other political campaigns. I hate people who do not understand how we feel regarding silence. We don’t want to remember August 6. We want it to go away, like all the dead ones.”

Matsusaka talked about silence as a way to try to forget the terrible memories and to try to live as normally as possible.

Some hibakusha who have kept silent have started asking themselves if, in spite of everything, they ought to tell their spouses, their children and the world about their experiences. It would indeed mean a terrible shock for the family. The children would maybe worry about their health. The thought that truth is a duty means a heavy burden.

In spite of this among the silent hibakusha more and more start talking, thinking that it is important. The peace movement all over the world was strong during the 50’s and the 80’s.

Young people wanted to know what Hiroshima meant and hibakusha travelled the world to tell. Today, they feel, it is more necessary than ever to talk.

The nuclear power accident at Chernobyl in 1986 put the spotlight anew on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In these atombombed cities there was ample knowledge of the effects of radiation, both among victims and scientists. Relations became lively with Chernobyl survivors and researchers. Today, many hibakusha have started to relate their knowledge of atomic weapons to nuclear power. This is very controversial, especially in Japan, which has a very large nuclear power program.

50 years after the end of the Second World War, August 15 1995, became a new opportunity for hibakusha to speak up. At that time, the mayor of Nagasaki Hitoshi Motoshima, plainly stated that the Emperor had been responsible for the war. This was extremely controversial since it tied the atomic bombings to Japan's militaristic past which led to the war committed against humanity.

Another example of the importance of hibakusha and their experiences in our days were protest against French nuclear test at Mururoa atoll in The Pacific in 1955. The mayor of Hiroshima Takashi Hiraoka pointed out that according to international law it is prohibited to use weapons which cause unnecessary suffering. He also criticized the Non-Proliferation Treaty which accepts certain nuclear weapons. The goal, he said, should be to totally eliminate them.

Many silent hibakusha are now old. They notice that young people often know very little about history. They think back on their lives and decide to engage themselves in showing the young in Japan and other places what nuclear weapons mean.

Some hibakusha have never been quite recognized. Among them are Koreans who were taken as slave laborers to Japan. 48.000 are thought to have been in Hiroshima during the atomic bombing and 30.000 of them are thought to have died. In Nagasaki there were approximately 30.000 and 12.000 probably died. Of those living today far from all have received the right to medical care in Japan.

In conclusion, there are and have been many reasons for hibakusha not to talk about their experiences. In the beginning after the war they were not allowed to talk. Today, discrimination is one reason for silence.

Silence can be personal. In many Western countries, and very much in Sweden where I come from, we think that it is beneficial to talk things thru. We believe that traumas will ease if you verbalize your experiences and if somebody listens to you. This is not the case in Japan.

There, silence, reticence and discretion are more respected. To endure without complaining is

honorable. On the other hand, to speak too much about oneself is regarded as something negative. Such opinions is also a factor when hibakusha keep silent. In addition, some of them just want to live, to try to live a normal life if at all possible.

I think that that kind of silence has to be accepted.

But all the other hibakusha, those who speak, write, paint and research, are the only witnesses to tell us what nuclear weapons mean. This is more important than ever. During the Cold War and the terror balance the United States and the Soviet Union had the possibility of destroying each other with enormous nuclear weapons. Now, the Soviet Union is no more. But proliferation of nuclear weapons makes the world more unsafe than ever. Not only the so-called Great Powers, the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France and China have them. Israel, India, Pakistan do, and North Korea says it does too. Iran claims its right to have them. Terrorists might get them.

In addition, new kinds of nuclear weapons are being constructed. Only this summer the American Congress voted for a budget developing small nuclear bombs called bunker busters. They are intended for use in struggle. Great Britain and Russia plan similar nuclear weapons. Earlier, nuclear weapons were constructed to destroy whole cities, large areas. It frightened even the owners of these weapons. But smaller weapons will more easily be used and the threshold of nuclear war will be lowered.

For this reason we must listen to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They know what the effects are, regardless of the nuclear bombs being big or small. Nuclear weapons bring unlimited damage not only at the moment of war but fear for generations afterwards.

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