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## Without a witness, prayer, or mourning

Kaori Hatsumi

What are the faces of our nuclear futures? I would say one face would be a world without a witness, prayer, or mourning. How can it be confronted? Through the act of storytelling and listening to witness testimonies. Theodor Adorno once wrote, “To lend a voice to suffering is a condition for all truth” (1973, 17-18; cf. Schick 2009). Stories can continue living beyond our physical existence and beyond borders.

It was Isaac, a survivor of Sri Lanka’s thirty-year civil war (1983–2009), who told me about Hisashi Inoue’s play “*Chichi to Kuraseba*,” or “Living with Father/Face of Jizo.” Hisashi Inoue (1934–2010), a leading post-war Japanese playwright, wrote this play in 1994 to tell the story of Hiroshima. Isaac declared to me that this play was a masterpiece, and that he wished a play like this could be written on Sri Lanka’s experience—a prolonged, slow-death of a civilization in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka since 1956, the worst nightmare of which occurred in 2009 in Mullivaikkal: tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were trapped in the final battle between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and perished.

Isaac read aloud the author’s preface to “Living with Father” (Inoue 2014, 472):

When I bring up the subject of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an increasing number of people say, ‘It is wrong to dwell on having been victimized, because the Japanese of those days also victimized Asia.’ The second part of this view is certainly accurate. The Japanese did victimize all of Asia. However, I will never accept the first part of the statement because I believe that the two atomic bombs were not merely dropped on the Japanese; they were dropped on the entire human existence.

“You see,” Isaac said, “This gave me a whole new perspective. What happened in 2009 in Mullivaikkal was a crime against the entire human existence!” He continued reading the preface:

*The bomb victims of that time who were burned by the infernal flames represent people throughout the modern world who cannot escape from the existence of nuclear weapons. I write as one among six billion human beings, not out of a feeling of victimization, but rather out of a conviction that it would be a greater wrong to pretend ignorance of the inferno that I know. (Italics added.)*

*Hibakushas*, or atomic bomb survivors, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent our contemporary existence. The Tamil victims of Mullivaikkal in 2009 in Sri Lanka—whose number amount to one hundred thousand if we add the number of those who are still missing to the dead—represent *us*. The Palestinians today represent *us* and our troubled future.

In “Living with Father,” Mitsue, a twenty-two-year-old librarian in Hiroshima and herself a *hibakusha*, is tormented by “stubborn feelings of unforgivable guilt over being alive” three years after the war. It is a sickness called “victimitis” (Inoue 496). Mitsue believes she should never be happy because, on August 6, she left her father in the rubble in order to save herself when their house caught fire.

Takezō, her father, visits her from the Shadowland to encourage her to marry a man she likes and be happy. The daughter, however, refuses to be happy. “It’s unforgivable,” Mitsue tells the father’s ghost, “that I’m alive. To have died that day in Hiroshima is natural, to have survived is unnatural. That’s why it’s strange for me to be alive” (491-2). Upon hearing her wish to join him in the Shadowland because she does not deserve to be alive, though she lacks the courage to die, Takezō admonishes his daughter (498):

TAKEZŌ (With a slap): Listen up. That time, as you were crying, didn’t you say: “It’s heartless, it’s horrible, why must we part like this?” . . . Do you remember?

MITSUME (Faintly nods): . . .

TAKEZŌ: I said in reply, “A parting like this must never happen again for the rest of eternity, because it’s too heartless.”

MITSUME (Nods): . . .

TAKEZŌ: Did you hear my last words? “Please live out my share of life, too!”

MITSUME (Nods vigorously): . . .

TAKEZŌ: That is why I am giving you life.

MITSUME: Giving me life?

TAKEZŌ: That’s right. I’m giving you life to have people remember that there were indeed tens of thousands of such heartless partings. Isn’t the library where you work also a place to tell about such things?

Like Mitsue, the librarian, left to tell stories, we are given life to tell stories of tens of thousands of such heartless partings. Isn’t the academia where we work a place to tell about such things?

I took Isaac, who came from Sri Lanka to visit me in Nagasaki, to Urakami Cathedral. It was upon this cathedral of the Urakami Christians that the hydrogen bomb exploded on August 9, 1945, three days after Hiroshima. The Urakami Christians were the descendants of those Catholics who had gone underground to practice their faith for more than two and a half centuries when Christianity was banned in Japan (1612–1873).

Two of my friends from Nagasaki joined Isaac and me to pray to *Hibaku no Maria*, the head of the wooden statue of Our Lady that also endured the bombing. *Hibaku no Maria* was found in the rubble of the cathedral. Her face

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was charred, and her famous blue glass eyes were gone. Yet, with those bare eyes, she was looking beyond the world of nuclear futures.

Seijiro, a seventy-year-old Buddhist from Nagasaki and a patriot, says to me:

It's a lie that the US targeted the city of Kokura that day. From the beginning, their target was this cathedral. The faithful of Urakami were gathering in a small chapel in the cathedral, and prayers were rising up from this place. It was a prayer that would unite Japan. The US feared the power of that unifying prayer; to destroy it, they dropped the atomic bomb.

Like *Hibaku no Maria*, the charred Mother Mary of Urakami Cathedral, there are other statues of this queen of mercy that endured the atomic bomb. *Hibaku-Maria Kannon* is one such statue.



**Figure 1:** *Hibaku-Maria Kannon* (The statue that survived both the persecution and atomic bombing.)

Courtesy: Japan 26 Martyrs Museum, Nagasaki

Eighteen-centimeters tall and made of porcelain. Made in China during the Edo Period (1603–1867). The back of the statue and the left side of its face were melted by the atomic bomb. *Hibaku* means “atomic bombed.” Kannon is the bodhisattva of compassion, and Maria-Kannon, for the Nagasaki Catholics during the ban on Christianity, was Mother Mary. The statue belonged to a Catholic in Nagasaki who inherited it from his grandfather, who kept it with him during the persecution by the Meiji Government (1868–1873). *Hibaku-Maria Kannon* is displayed at Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum in Nishizaka, Nagasaki.

## Biography

**Kaori Hatsumi** is an anthropologist whose research encompasses colonialism and neoliberalism within Japanese academia. She currently leads a research project, entitled “Sri Lanka’s civil war and Japan’s development-craze: An ethnography of illness and environment, response and regeneration” (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) 24K00192).

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