Representation of Intergenerational Trauma: Narratives of Second Generation Nuclear Victims
Imari Yasuno ’24 • Amherst College, USA • Summer 2023 • USA & Japan

Project Summary and Background
“Trying to understand the pain of others,” is the definition of peacebuilding passed along by Sakue Shimohira, a hibakusha in Nagasaki, a Japanese word meaning atomic bomb survivor/victim(s). My encounter with her shaped my interests in advocating for peace and nuclear disarmament. My motivation is to collect narratives of people who were/are at the crossroads of nuclear war. Those people include the second generation of several communities: downwinders (people affected by radioactive fallout or nuclear contamination) of a series of nuclear testing in New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Marshallese relocators in Arkansas; US veterans who were involved in testing and the ‘clean-up’ missions; and hibaku-nisei (second generation atomic bomb survivors) in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although the stories of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are relatively heard and known by the global society, neither the narratives of downwinders in the US nor the second generation of nuclear survivors are recognized. By meeting the downwinders in person and conducting a semi-structured qualitative research interview that centers those people’s experience of trauma and its representation, I intend to put together their voices so I can increase the solidarity among nuclear victims and allied civilians on a global scale. I hope to advocate for those being affected as well as for those who are still at risk of being exposed due to the increasing possibilities of nuclear wars. I plan to create a digitized archive of material, containing a variety of narratives, in the medium of pdf/handbooks accessible on the official websites of the partnering organizations. I will also organize an interactive talk session with middle to high school students in Nagasaki. Such educational initiatives will help create a discourse on a grassroots level supporting the total elimination of nuclear weapons. After getting reflections from informants and students, I intend to submit the material along with a statement of “shared voice” to the United Nations and the government of the United States and Japan.

Intention and Anticipated Outcome
My mission is to document the untold outcome of war and people’s lived experiences. The history of the people who were affected by systematic oppression should be known and remembered broadly in the world. As an initial step to a larger scale peacebuilding project, I intend to spotlight the voices of the second generations of nuclear victims. By recording the narratives of people around the world who have been the victims of “nuclear machines,”1 it is possible to connect the globally experienced intergenerational trauma manifested in people’s lives. The effect of intergenerational trauma includes the constant fear of radiation-related illness, reduced socioeconomic status, stigmatization, the pain of holding a victim identity, and rejections in relationships. Communities, including children, inherit the experiences and aftereffects of direct survivors; such significance of nuclear legacies should be identified. I acknowledge that channeling the voices of survivors into anti-nuclear activism is key to shifting public opinions and changing society. However, there should be more of a focus on the details of narratives because they reveal the truth of the bigger historical picture; they can only be accessed through listening to the survivors’ experiences carefully, including their creative “ways of operating”2 in their daily lives with the invention of life tactics as a nuclear survivor. Svetlana Alexievich, the Belarusian Nobel Peace Prize winner named ordinary civilians as “the little people,” which are those “who never appear in any history written by a state.”3 Through the documentation and recording of the detailed lives of “the little people,” we, as global citizens, can prevent the vanishing of their history of torment.

Demonstrated Need and Research
A breathtaking visual work of art4 produced by Isao Hashimoto demonstrates the neverending game of nuclear testing. Starting from the Trinity, followed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it showcases the

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ostentatious competitions among the nuclear states from 1945 to 1998. In total, the United States had conducted 1054 nuclear tests across the globe. These tests brought a devastating amount of nuclear fallout under the gigantic mushroom clouds. Some people were forced to relocate, while some other people continued to live without proper compensation. Following the claims and advocating activism, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) was enacted in 1990, but the eligibility was limited and discriminatory to certain populations\(^5\). Despite the fact that thousands of people are still suffering from cancer, other illnesses, emotional damage, and socioeconomic struggles, the act will expire in 2024\(^6\). From an academic perspective, the early contribution was made by an American psychologist Robert Jay Lifton, in “Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima” which reflected the 73 interviews he collected in Hiroshima. As he stated, it is necessary to record the narrative of trauma, suffering and its representation in order not to repeat the tragedy that affected the entire world, community, and holistic individuals\(^7\). The second generations of nuclear victims have been neglected by all compensation acts ever since they were born, both in the United States and Japan. Although their experiences are quite different from the first generations and atomic bomb survivors, they faced similar issues like high cancer rates and social and internal stigmatization. Additionally, the narratives of the second generation of nuclear victims are underrepresented, since most of the literature about nuclear issues has focused on the first generation of victims. The inhumanity of nuclear weapons remains in the lives of subsequent generations in the forms of “physical, socioeconomic, cultural, and social factors.” The “domino effect of trauma\(^8\)” prevents the second generation victims from living a life as other non-victims do.

**Partners and Collaborators**
This project requires numerous collaborators from different places who are willing to speak about their traumatic experiences. I was accepted to conduct interviews with some of the members of “The Committee of Second Generation of Atomic Bomb Survivors in Nagasaki,” including Kazuhiro Ihara, a second generation atomic bomb survivor in Nagasaki. He will also assist me in connecting with the informants from Hiroshima. For the downwinders in the United States, I got in touch with Ms. Mary Dickson, an activist and a thyroid cancer survivor. She assured me that she will introduce me to a number of downwinders in the western United States. Also, I am in the process of getting in touch with some founders of the pioneering advocacy organizations including Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium, Marshallese Educational Initiative (MEI), and Arkansas Humanities Council. Towards the end of this project, I will prepare a presentation for students in Nagasaki to introduce the experiences of second generation survivors. Kenji Ichinose, teaching at Nagasaki Higashi Senior High School, where I graduated, will manage the interactive session. The school has a research program run by the Japanese government; my project will contribute to groups studying nuclear disarmament by providing the information of nuclear victims outside Japan. I am in communication with students from other schools and organizations I have worked with previously to set up sessions. To complete this project, I will submit a statement to the United Nations and the government of the United States and Japan, the countries which have not signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

**Experience and Preparation**
Being inspired by a testimony of one survivor, I started to get involved with peacebuilding in 2015. Together with hibakusha, fellow high school students, and their supporters, I have participated in a weekly anti-nuclear petition campaign, lectured visitors from other schools and organizations, and delivered a speech at the United Nations in Geneva, about a bombed boy in a photo taken by Yosuke Yamahata.\(^9\) During my college years, I continued managing the interactive testimony sharing sessions with atomic bomb survivors as well as war witnesses of the Pearl Harbor Attack in Hawaii as a part of my peace education for students. One of the greatest opportunities I had was the ability to interview some of the survivors about their life history. In my honors thesis, I analyzed the everyday life experiences of people who witnessed the war and the atomic bombing through the concept of “tactics of everyday practice” by

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\(^{5}\) United States, Department of Justice, Civil Division, Compensation Programs. RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION ACT. December 2022. https://www.justice.gov/civil/common/reca.


\(^{9}\) A former-military-served Japanese photographer, started photographing Nagasaki just one day after the bombing.
Michel de Certeau and “Suffering” by Arthur Kleinman. While mainstream discourse tends to showcase only the moment of explosion in Hiroshima, my project focuses on the ongoing physical and emotional pain, loss, and people’s constant fight with illness and trauma: a true representation of war. I want to answer my inquiry from a more creative and combinational view: how do people live with pain and trauma?

Assessment and Reflection
As a short-term assessment, I will reach out to the informants in order to obtain their reflections on the transcript, by sending them a follow-up email, letter, phone call, video call (Zoom), or revisiting their places. In this way, I should be able to correct the misinformation or my misinterpretation of their narratives as well as enable them to omit personal and sensitive information. Also, I will collect feedback from high school students in Nagasaki after my presentation and interactive session with them. I will conduct a short survey about their learnings and reflections from my materials towards the issues surrounding the nuclear victims. Moreover, I will ask for feedback from Professor Ryo Suzuki, my adviser from my previous institution (Graduate School of Doshisha University, Japan) who has extensive experience with in-depth qualitative interviews. Furthermore, considering that my project is a small step of a long journey to store the memory of nuclear survivors, my method of preserving data must be sound. At this point, I am consulting with Dr. Yael Danieli, the founder of International Center for MultiGenerational Legacies of Trauma, who plays an active role in collecting the oral history of war survivors.

Implementation Strategy

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<th>April/May</th>
<th>June W1-2</th>
<th>June W3-4</th>
<th>July W1</th>
<th>July W2</th>
<th>July W3-4</th>
<th>Aug W1-2</th>
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<td>Schedule interview</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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Possible Risks and Challenges
This project aims to collect the narratives that follow tragic events, including traumatic experiences such as illness, witnessing of death, discrimination, and all sorts of life struggles of a human being who may have been exposed to extreme levels of emotional and physical pain. Therefore, there is a high possibility that the individuals I interview may experience a flashback or uneasiness with the interview. In order to prevent these difficulties, I will tell each and every informant before interviewing that they can stop our interview anytime they want, and they can refuse to answer any questions. Also, I will keep my time around 60 to 90 minutes in order to prevent fatigue. Additionally, I will ask the interviewees’ consent whether I can use their actual name. As a researcher who wants to preserve the details of everyday life of survivors, I think having an actual name published along with their experiences is very valuable, because the audience and readers can imagine that the survivors’ experiences are related to the real person. However, due to the sensitivity of their narratives, publishing actual names might violate people’s privacy and thus harm their social relationships. In that case, I will only use the pseudonym or initials. To summarize, risks and challenges for this project include protection of the interviewees in terms of creation of a safe and comfortable environment and confidentiality.