

Ōta Yōko's Literary Dilemma Who Cares about the Atomic Bomb in Times of Peace?

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1 Initial Considerations

The two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, devastated by the world's first nuclear bombs, have long since become symbols of a new nuclear threat humankind has been confronted with since their first use in August 1945. Whereas outside Japan, Hiroshima or Nagasaki are generally remembered as symbols of absolute nuclear devastation, inside Japan, both cities are remembered as symbols of world peace that had to be preserved by mankind as a lesson learned from the devastations caused by the atomic bomb. Until today, countless visitors from all over the world have come to Hiroshima or Nagasaki to pay a visit to well-known memorial sites such as the Peace Park, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Nagasaki Peace and Atomic Bomb Museum, the Peace Statue or the Atomic Bomb Dome, a designated World Heritage Site since 1996, to name only a few. Most Japanese first visit Hiroshima or Nagasaki during their school days, as a school excursion to one of these two cities is an integral part of the concept of "peace education" 平和教育 (*heiwa kyōiku*). This concept has been implemented nationwide in most junior and senior high school curriculums since the 1970s. Besides the more or less standardized sightseeing program for the most famous memorial sites, meeting survivors of the atomic bomb and listening to their testimonies is given special importance during these excursions, as passing on memories of the atomic bombings and their aftermath to future generations is considered pivotal in peace education to preserve peace. Encounters between students and survivors have become more and more important over the last years, as knowledge of and interest in the past has been gradually decreasing. Sharing a personal experience of the atomic bomb

with an unaffected third person has nowadays become quite a challenge for both survivors and students.¹

Today, there is no doubt about the value of all kinds of first-hand experiences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Obtaining, archiving and disseminating all these first-hand experiences has become important in recent years, especially as there are fewer and fewer survivors still alive. However, society's interest in eyewitness accounts of the atomic bombings and their aftermath had not always been as strong as it seems to be nowadays. On the contrary: In the first decade after the war, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the very two cities devastated by the atomic bombs, did almost everything to shrug off their tragic legacy as part of a remote past and to reinvent themselves as modern cities of peace (Hiroshima) and culture (Nagasaki). This is impressively shown by the respective reconstruction laws, the "Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law" 広島平和記念都市法 (*Hiroshima heiwa kinen toshi kensetsu hō*) and the "Nagasaki International Cultural City Construction Law" 長崎国際文化都市建設法 (*Nagasaki kokusai bunka toshi kensetsu hō*), both established in 1949.² As a result, remembering and writing or telling about one's own

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- 1 See, for example, MORITA Toshio 森田俊男: "Hiroshima, Nagasaki wo tazuneru koto no igi" ヒロシマ・ナガサキをたずねることの意義 (The Significance of Visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki), *Heiwa kyōiku* 平和教育 (Peace Education) 31 (1988): 8–13. However, as the increasing age of atomic bomb survivors has become a serious problem in recent times, students visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki on their school excursions often meet with so-called "storytellers" 語り部 (*kataribe*) who are thoroughly trained in the 'correct' tradition of survivors' first-hand experiences, so that they may pass on these testimonies to the next generation. See FUKAYA Naohiro 深谷直弘: *Genbaku no kioku wo keishō suru jissen* 原爆の記憶を継承する実践 (The Practice of Inheriting Memories of the Atomic Bomb), Shin'yō Sha 新曜社 2018: 129–84.
 - 2 Shortly after the war, the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was generally not considered to be any different from the devastation of other cities like Tokyo or Osaka, due to a lack of reliable information at that time. Therefore, in order to obtain national funding for a systematic reconstruction of the city, the establishment of these two laws was crucial to underline the cities' special financial need in contrast to other cities. However, it was symptomatic of the rivalry that existed between the two cities in the first post-war years, that Hiroshima single-handedly made the first step by introducing a bill as a "Peace Memorial City" to the government. Nagasaki, literally left in the lurch, now had to emphasize the historical role as an "International Cultural City" for its own bill, introduced to the government shortly after, to obtain national funding. For further details, see FUKUMA Yoshiaki 福間良明: *Shōdo no kioku: Okinawa, Hiroshima, Nagasaki ni utsuru sengo* 焦土の記憶 沖縄・広島・長崎に映る戦後 (Memory of a Scorched Earth. Post-war as Seen in Okinawa, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki), Shin'yō Sha 2011: 244–46, and SATŌ Masumi 佐藤真澄: *Hiroshima wo nokosu. Heiwa kinen shiryōkan wo tsukutta hito – Nagasaki Shōgo* ヒロシマをのこす 平和記念資料館をつくった人・長岡省吾 (Saving

personal experience of the atomic bombing was anything but an easy task for survivors – despite the psychological pain that many of them had to suffer in their daily life being haunted by the traumatic events of August 1945.

In this context, the case of author Ōta Yōko 大田洋子 (1929–63), whose works are hard to find in Japanese bookstores nowadays³, must be considered a prime example for the difficulties a survivor had to face when making the decision to provide personal accounts of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. She did so in public, right in the first years after the war – and in the notoriously conservative field of literature, no less. In contrast to John Whittier Treat, who paved the way for further research on Ōta Yōko with his insightful literary analysis⁴, this paper will rather attempt to contextualize Ōta Yōko and her writing historically, paying particular attention to the different dynamics that characterized the first decade of post-war Japanese history. In his well-cited eponymous study, Etō Jun speaks of a “sealed space for verbal utterances” (*tozasareta gengo kūkan*) in post-war Japan due to rigid censorship policy under Allied Occupation.⁵ It was this “sealed space” that was responsible for the apparent distortion of historical awareness in post-war Japan, as historical accounts of the war were more often than not confiscated before they could be published. But, at least in the case of atomic bomb survivors such as Ōta Yōko, this approach only tells half of the story. Even after the end of Allied censorship in October 1949, writing about one's personal experiences of the atomic bombings continued to be a controversial issue for many authors, at least insofar as this

Hiroshima. Nagaoka Shōgo, the Man who Built the Peace Memorial Museum), Chōbun Sha 汐文社 2018: 106–07.

- 3 Despite the high esteem Ōta Yōko enjoyed among some of her contemporary critics, like Tanabe Kōichirō 田邊耕一郎, who in 1954 praised her work as the best written account on the atomic bomb hitherto, her work was generally not included in the regular paperback series 文庫本 (*bunkobon*) of Japan's big publishing houses – an exception is a single volume in *Kōdan Sha bungei bunko* 講談社文芸文庫 (Kōdansha's literary library), published 1995 – as it is, for example, the case with Hayashi Kyōko 林京子 (1930–2017), who wrote about the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. The process of deliberate inclusion in or exclusion from a paperback series is vital for the accessibility and, by that, visibility of an author's work. See TANABE Kōichirō: “Genbaku no bungaku” 原爆の文学 (Literature about the Atomic Bombing), *Bungaku* 文学 (Literature) 22.11 (1954): 85–93; at 93.
- 4 See John Whittier TREAT: *Writing Ground Zero. Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*, Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press 1995: 199–226.
- 5 See ETŌ Jun 江藤淳: *Tozasareta gengo kūkan* 閉ざされた言語空間 (The Sealed Space for Verbal Utterances) (Bunshun bunko 文春文庫), *Bungei Shunjū* 文藝春秋 1994: 347–66.

experience seemed to contradict the new national narrative of victimhood during the war as it became apparent in school textbooks in the mid-1950s.⁶

This paper will be based on Kawaguchi Takayuki's idea that literary accounts of the atomic bombings constitute a discursive field which contains a number of competing and/or contradictory discourses.⁷ It will show how and why Ōta Yōko's literary accounts, which even were used as teaching materials in the junior high school text book "Democracy and Cheerful Life" (*Minshu shugi to akarui seikatsu*), published in two volumes in 1952⁸, eventually became both unwanted and contested memories for most of her contemporaries. For that purpose, and following a short introduction of the author, I will first depict fundamental narrative strategies in Ōta Yōko's recollections of August 6. A close reading of Ōta Yōko's early account(s) on the atomic bombing will illustrate the stylistic devices the author adopted to recreate the atomic bombing and the aftermath for her readers. The analysis will show that Ōta's literature oscillated between writing about a trauma, that is writing about the atomic bombing as a historical event, and writing trauma, that is writing about the personal experiences of this event.⁹ It was exactly this ambivalence of adopting different stances within her texts that became the bone of contention in contemporary critiques. In a second step, I will illustrate the historical context Ōta Yōko's writing on August 6 was confronted with. Particular attention will be drawn to Hiroshima's transfor-

6 In contrast to many other kind of "war experiences" 戦争体験 (*sensō taiken*), survivors' testimonies 証言 (*shōgen*) of August 1945 are highly contested memories, as talking about the events of August 1945 also means to ask why these events happened in the first place. By that, Japan's role as the aggressor during the Fifteen Years War, which has widely become marginalized in the national historical discourse, comes back into the focus of consideration. On the general reception of "war experiences" in the first post-war decade, see FUKUMA Yoshiaki: 'Sensō taiken' no sengo shi 「戦争体験」の戦後史 (Post-war History of "War Experiences") (Chūkō shinsho 中公新書 1990), Chūō Kōron Shinsha 中央公論新社 2009: 11–24.

7 See KAWAGUCHI Takayuki 川口隆行: *Zōho ban: Genbaku bungaku to iu puroburematīku* 増補版原爆文学という問題領域 (Enlarged Edition: The *Problematique* of Atomic Bomb Literature), Fukuoka: Sōgen Sha 創言社 2011: 47.

8 See OKADA Yuzuru 岡田謙 et. al.: *Minshu shugi to akarui seikatsu* 民主主義と明るい生活 (Democracy and Cheerful Life), vol 2, Chūkyō Shuppan 中教出版 1952: 206–10.

9 According to Dominick LaCapra, writing about trauma is an aspect of historiography. By attempting to reconstruct the past as objectively as possible, the author becomes a kind of chronicler of the event. Writing trauma, in turn, is a process of dealing with the past, a kind of emotional reencounter with the traumatic events related to this very past. See Dominick LACAPRA: *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Parallax Re-Visions of Culture and Society). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2014: 186.

mation into a new center of peace shortly after the war, since through this conversion, the former Hiroshima of August 6 irreversibly became a sealed space in Japanese history – with dire consequences for its survivors and chroniclers, as Ōta Yōko had to experience first-hand. In a third step, I will reflect on the reasons for Ōta Yōko's marginalization as both a writer and an eyewitness of August 6. The analysis will show that Ōta's works carried with themselves the impossibility of writing about August 6, as due to the reorientation of the literary establishment and the national commemoration of August 6, atomic bomb survivors and their testimonies became more or less useless for society. As a result, authors like Ōta Yōko became unwanted voices from the past, with memories no one wants to share anymore. Finally, a short concluding remark will round off my paper.

2 *Chronicler of the Bomb*

Ōta Yōko (formerly Fukuda Hatsuko 福田初子) was born in 1903 in the district of Yamagata, Hiroshima prefecture. She began her literary career with her novel “The Blessed Virgin in the Twilight” 聖母のいる黄昏 (*Seibo no iru tasogare*), published in the journal “Women's Literature” 女人芸術 (*Nyōnin geijutsu*) in 1929, followed by “On Distant Shores” 流離の岸 (*Ryūri no kishi*, 1939), “Land of Cherry Blossoms” 桜の国 (*Sakura no kuni*, 1940), and several other novels.¹⁰ There can be no doubt that Ōta Yōko's early work was still perfectly in line with nationalistic propaganda of that time, as her novels revealed a romanticized view of everyday life in Japan's new Asian colonies – a fact that would undermine her credibility as an eyewitness of the atomic bombing for many years to come.¹¹ However, August 6, 1945, marked a significant turning point in her literary work, and, above all, her attitude towards the Japanese government. Ōta Yōko, who had survived the bombing of Hiroshima in her sister's house in the city center, now devoted the rest of her literary life almost exclusively to tell about her personal experiences of the atomic bombings. Ōta's literary account of August 6, “City of Corpses” 屍の街 (*Shikabane no machi*), which, according to its

10 For detailed biographic and bibliographic information, see URANISHI Kazuhiko 浦西和彦: “Ōta Yōko nenpu” 大田洋子年譜 (Biographical Notes on Ōta Yōko), Ōta Yōko: *Ōta Yōko shū* 大田洋子集 (Ōta Yōko Collection) 4, San'ichi Shobō 三一書房 1982: 355–80, and Richard H. MINEAR (ed. / transl.): *Hiroshima. Three Witnesses*, Princeton et al.: Princeton University Press 1990: 117–42.

11 See ESASHI Akiko 江刺昭子: *Kusazue. Hyōden Ōta Yōko* 草繪 評伝大田洋子 (Rotten Grasses: A Critical Biography of Ōta Yōko), Ōtsuki Shoten 大月書店 1981: 37–39.

preface, had been sketched out between August and November 1945, could finally be published in 1948, albeit in a revised version.¹² In accordance with the Press Code issued by the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) of the Allied occupation force, from September 10, 1945 until October 31, 1949, all kinds of documents relating to the bomb and its aftermath were immediately confiscated or at least heavily censored before being released for print in a revised version. According to the Press Code, published on September 19, 1945, all kinds of (textual or pictorial) news about the atomic bombings, including information about the damages, survivors or fatalities, was considered a disturbance of public peace that could lead to criticism of and resentment towards the Allied Powers, and was therefore not to be disclosed to the public.¹³ This is why the full version of Ōta Yōko's "City of Corpses" had to wait until the end of Allied censorship to be finally published in 1950.

For the next years, Ōta Yōko published several novels and essays about Hiroshima. "Human Tatters" 人間襤褸 (*Ningen ranru*, 1951), "Half Human" 半人間 (*Han ningen*, 1954), and "Town and People in the Evening Calm" 夕風の街と人と (*Yūnagi no machi to hito to*, 1955) can be counted among her most important works of that period. However, writing about Hiroshima and the atomic bombing eventually turned out to be a double-edged sword for the author. In next to no time, Ōta Yōko was widely considered an "atomic bomb author" 原爆作家 (*genbaku sakka*) who was trying to capitalize on writing about the aftermath of the bomb.¹⁴ Even literary colleagues such as Eguchi Kan criticized her thematic narrowness:

Is it because Ōta Yōko [...] is publishing one work after the other? It looks as if the founder of atomic bomb literature has just run out of ideas. Ms. Ōta, perhaps you should better go back to Hiroshima one more time to get new and better ideas [for your writing].¹⁵

12 According to the preface of the 1950 edition; see ŌTA Yōko: "Shikabane no machi" 屍の街, ŌTA Yōko: *Nihon no genbaku bungaku* 日本の原爆文学 2 (Japanese Atomic Bomb Literature), Horupu Shuppan ほるぷ出版 1983: 12.

13 The Press Code is available on the website of Gordon W. Prange Collection, University of Maryland: <https://prangecollection.wordpress.com/2013/07/21/sample-ccd-documents> (last access on 2021/02/25).

14 KUROKO Kazuo 黒古一夫: *Genbaku wa bungaku ni dō egakarete kita ka* 原爆は文学にどう描かれてきたか (How was the Atomic Bomb Depicted in Literature?) (21-seiki no wakamono-tachi e 21世紀の若者たちへ 4), Hassaku Sha 八朔社 2005: 24–25.

15 EGUCHI Kan 江口渙: "Ōta Yōko ni kotaeru" 大田洋子に答える (In Response to Ōta Yōko), "Kaku sensō no kiki wo uttaeru bungaku sha no seimei" shomei sha 「核戦争の

In the second half of the 1950s, Ōta Yōko felt more and more misunderstood by both critics and readers thinking that she would only capitalize on her personal experiences by writing work after work about August 6 and the aftermath. Hence, she distanced herself from Japan's literary establishment of the post-war period.¹⁶ Ultimately, however, Ōta could not shed the unwanted image of an atomic bomb writer until her death in 1963. Today, Ōta Yōko is widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of Japanese atomic bomb literature, at least in some academic circles. But as most of her work is out of print, only very few modern readers are really familiar with her writings about August 6. In fact, being lost to oblivion is a fate shared by many who wrote about the atomic bombings.

Labelled as an atomic bomb writer, Ōta Yōko had the feeling of being stuck in a mental dilemma, as she stated in a short essay titled "Attitude as an Author" 作家の態度 (*Sakka no taido*) in 1952, in which she declares:

If only Hara Tamiki [1905–51] was still alive and could continue to write in his very special way [about the bomb]. Or if only Tōge Sankichi [1917–53] was in much better physical condition to write more poems [about his experiences]. Or if only the children of [Osada Arata's] "Children of the bomb" had grown up now [...] to write one long report after the other. What a great relief that would be. For me, it is very hard to accept the fact that I am obviously the only one who feels obliged to give accounts of everything. I alone am not able to write about all this. It is really a shame for Japan's literati to leave me alone with all this work to do.¹⁷

In this rather reproachful statement, which was in part a response to Eguchi Kan's above-cited criticism, Ōta Yōko did not only lament being left carrying the can for Japan's literati. She did also express her irritation and bewil-

危機を訴える文学者の声明」署名者 (eds.): *Nihon no genbaku bungaku* (Japanese Atomic Bomb Literature) 15, Horupu Shuppan 1983: 246. [first published in *Kindai bungaku* 近代文学, 1953].

16 As Robert Jay Lifton points out, even survivors themselves were highly suspicious of people, especially other survivors, who were "selling [their] name[s]", 'selling the bomb', 'selling Hiroshima', or seeking to become an 'A-bomb star'. The aspect of "making money from writing about the bomb", so Lifton, "evokes imagery of the dead [...], and this is the essence of [...] 'selling the bomb'". Robert Jay LIFTON: *Death in Life. The Survivors of Hiroshima* (A Pelican Book), Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1971: 218–19.

17 ŌTA Yōko: "Sakka no taido" (Attitude as an Author), *Kindai bungaku* (Modern Literature) 7.7 (1952): 8.

derment that only seven years after the atomic bombings, novels glorifying the war were being published again, and that quite successfully.¹⁸

For authors like Ōta Yōko, writing about August 6 was a highly difficult and at the same time very controversial task. On the one hand, they felt personally obliged to give an authentic and accurate account of the events of August 6, as illustrated by the quote above. On the other hand, they had to translate their very personal experiences into a language that was commonly understood. This meant that they had to find ways of representing an un-representable experience, so that the readers would be able to connect these experiences with their own world of experience and to understand August 6 as part of a collectively shared history.

However, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as human experiences unprecedented and beyond description, pose – analogous to the experiences of Holocaust survivors – an almost unsolvable problem for the writers, because even if one finds a way to verbally express one’s experiences, there is no guarantee that readers will really understand. With regard to Holocaust literature, Jessica Lang addresses the problem of ‘unreadability’, that is, the “textual quality or condition of inaccessibility—blankness, illegibility” or, in other words, the “textual silence”.¹⁹ According to Lang, it is not so much the things expressed, but the things not expressed in a written text which cause an immeasurable burden for both writers and readers, as this “blankness” or “illegibility” is more often than not the result of an unshared language or history.

The very same can be stated for atomic bomb literature. Especially in the first decade after the war, Ōta Yōko had to experience first-hand how difficult it was to share her recollections of August 6 with readers for whom these texts were in many ways ‘unreadable’, as the following paragraphs will illustrate.

3 A Survivor’s Dilemma or How to Recollect August 6, 1945

It was as early as August 30, 1945 that Ōta published her first account of the atomic bombing in the national newspaper *Asahi shinbun*, titled “An Unfathomable Deep Light” 海底のやうな光 (*Kaitei no yō na hikari*).²⁰ In this

18 Ibid.: 8.

19 Jessica LANG: *Textual Silence. Unreadability and the Holocaust*, New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press 2017: 3.

20 See *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞, 1945/08/30: 2 (morning edition).

short text, Ōta Yōko recollected her own experiences of the bombing, her escape from her younger sister's house in Hakushima kukenchō 白島九軒町, right in the center of Hiroshima, to the near riverbank, where she, her younger sister with her baby, and her mother took refuge from the fire for the next three days, and finally her flight from the devastated city of Hiroshima to her relatives, who lived in the countryside outside of Hiroshima. From the very beginning of her writing about the bomb and the aftermath, Ōta chose a rather personal mode of depiction when talking about her experiences during and after the bombing. For today's readership, who may have expected a highly pacifistic person behind the author, Ōta's feelings are somehow confusing, as she shows a rather nationalist orientation in some of her statements:

After the city of Hiroshima had disappeared in an instant and burned down completely, so that nothing remained left, I became warlike. I did not really appreciate the war before, but after that August 6, I thought that war must go on. I thought that we must not end this war.²¹

However, Ōta seemed to be no exception. According to Nagaoka Hiroyoshi, many early atomic bomb writers showed some nationalist sentiment in their writing – one which they had cultivated during the war and which discredited them as a reliable source for the events of August 6 in the eyes of more than just a few readers.²² And those who had not shown any nationalist sentiment during the war often became “warlike” afterwards, just as Ōta Yōko, because Japan's announcement of unconditional surrender on August 15, 1945 rendered their personal sacrifice ultimately senseless.²³

In November 1946, almost one year later, Ōta tried to publish a short novel titled “Riverbank” 河原 (*Kawara*) in the literary journal “Novel” 小説 (*Shōsetsu*).²⁴ But due to the newly imposed censorship, the complete issue was confiscated, and “Riverbank” remained unpublished until February 1948, when this short novel could finally be published in the same journal.

21 Ibid.: 2.

22 See NAGAOKA Hiroyoshi 長岡弘芳: “Genbaku bungaku to nashonarizumu” 原爆文学とナショナリズム (Atomic Bomb Literature and Nationalism), *Kikan: Shakai kagaku* 季刊社会科学 (Social Science Quarterly) 14 (1968): 35–47; at 36–37.

23 See ITŌ Sō 伊藤壯: “Ningen wa genbaku to dō tatakatta ka” 人間は原爆とどうたたかったか (How Did Mankind Fight Against the Atomic Bomb), *Heiwa kyōiku* (Peace Education) 39 (1990): 22–30; at 25.

24 The confiscated text belongs to the aforementioned Gordon W. Prange Collection. The text is available on Microfilm at the National Diet Library, Tokyo.

In the confiscated version from 1946, Ōta described three atomic bomb victims' struggles for survival: Atsushi, his wife Koyuki, and their rather mysterious neighbor Katori, who lost his wife a few of days after the bombing on August 6. Katori explains the circumstances of her death in a rather matter-of-fact sort of way: "The evening she died, she suddenly began to guffaw while she was spitting blood and died."²⁵ All three characters spend their days and nights in an overwhelming feeling of sadness and despair, sleeping in provisional huts they built at the riverbank. Ōta's depiction centers around the aftermath of the bomb, which destroyed the life of Atsushi and Koyuki, formerly wealthy mercers with a shop in the heart of the city and a summer house on the outskirts of Hiroshima, and who have now ended up as beggars living at the riverbank. Without explicitly mentioning 'radiation' in her text, the obvious changes in her protagonist's physical condition speak for themselves. The keloids that have disfigured Koyuki right from the beginning of the novel begin to disappear over the course of time. But Atsushi, who apparently didn't suffer any visible injuries from the bomb apart from some tiny little red spots on his scalp, begins to show first symptoms of what will later be known as radiation sickness. After Atsushi dies tragically in a former air-raid shelter while trying to find shelter for them during a storm, Koyuki quickly begins a new life with Katori, who – as Koyuki will find out later – makes a living with dealings on the black market. Ultimately, both of them accept Atsushi's sudden death as an inevitable effect of the bomb, as Katori explains to a guilt-ridden Koyuki: "In the end, it makes no difference whether he died due to the collapse of the air-raid shelter or due to the mysterious symptoms [of the bomb]. Ultimately, it was his destiny to die."²⁶ The whole narration is overshadowed by the survivors' permanent fear for their lives, a fear of succumbing to a yet unknown disease caused by the bomb.²⁷ Although neither atomic bomb nor radiation are explicitly mentioned in the text, they are almost omnipresent as a kind of common knowledge of August 6, one that Ōta Yōko shared at least with some of her readership from the destroyed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

25 ŌTA Yōko: "Kawara" 河原 (Riverbank), *Shōsetsu* (Novel) 1.1 (1946): 43.

26 Ibid.: 60.

27 At a very early stage of the narration, Atsushi mentions to Koyuki that he probably will die in the very near future, even though he has only suffered very small direct injuries from the bomb – a theme that will become central in Ōta's later work "City of Corpses"; see *ibid.*: 44.

Ōta's "Riverbank" can be considered a prime example for the arbitrary nature of official censorship in Japan. Although the story is not very explicit, the mere fact that it mentions the health effects of radiation, the mysterious deaths of uninjured people and rampant black-market activities would have been reason enough to censor it as 'incitement to unrest'. As a comparison with the versions from 1946 and 1948 reveals²⁸, nothing was changed in Ōta's text when it was finally published – including the title illustration. Allied censorship was conducted by Americans, foreigners with a sufficient proficiency in Japanese (e. g. from the former Japanese colonies), and, above all, the Japanese themselves. And the native Japanese who were responsible for the first screening of the manuscripts were even more strict than their American supervisors, as Jay Rubin has already pointed out.²⁹

In her next work, "City of Corpses", Ōta returned to a more autobiographic way of writing about the bomb. As mentioned before, she had already demonstrated this particular style in her short account "An Unfathomable Deep Light", published in the *Asahi shinbun* in August 1945.³⁰ But due

28 Ōta's "Riverbank" was published in *Shōsetsu* 2.2 (1948). The fact that the text could finally be published in its original version leads to two possible explanations. First, not Ōta's text but another text of the volume was considered to be in violation of the Press Code, so the entire 1946 number was confiscated. Second, due to a change of censorship practice from pre-production to post-production censorship at the end of 1947, problematic texts could now easier pass censors' control, so the 1948 version could be published unrevised. See HORIBA Kiyoko 堀場清子: "Kinjirareta genbaku taiken <shō>" 禁じられた原爆体験<抄> (Forbidden Experiences of the Atomic Bomb <Extract>), *Nihon genbaku ron taikai* 日本原爆論大系 (Compendium of Japanese Treatises on the Atomic Bomb) 1, Nihon Toshō Sentā 日本図書センター 1999: 423–54; at 428–30.

29 See Jay RUBIN: "From Wholesomeness to Decadence: The Censorship of Literature under the Allied Occupation", *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11.1 (1985): 71–103; at 97–100.

30 According to Fukagawa Munetoshi, even Ōta Yōko's earliest account "An Unfathomable Deep Light" was censored. However, an uncensored version under the title "Exposed to the Atomic Bomb" 原子爆弾を浴びて (*Genshi bakudan wo abite*) was published one day later, on August 31, 1945, in the Ōsaka edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. Ōta's account is a striking example for the fact that even before the CCD was founded by the Allied Powers in September 1945, censorship was already exercised in Japan, as the Japanese government did almost everything to suppress any information about the atomic bombs following their use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Unfortunately, the account "Exposed to the Atomic Bomb" could not be verified for comparison yet. See FUKAGAWA Munetoshi 深川宗俊: "Genbaku wo atsukatta sakuhin (nenpu)" 原爆をあつかった作品 (年譜) (Works Dealing with the Atomic Bombings (Bibliographic Notes)), *Minshu bungaku* 民主文学 (Democratic Literature) 69 (1971): 137–45; at 139, and TAKAKUWA Kōkichi 高桑幸吉: *Makkāsā no shinbun ken'etsu* マッカーサーの新聞検閲 (Censorship of Newspapers under MacArthur), Yomiuri Shinbun Sha 読売新聞社 1984: 35–42.

to censorship, only a cut version of her new work could be published by Chūō Kōron Sha 中央公論社 (Tokyo) in November 1948.³¹ In May 1950, almost half a year after the CCD was closed in October 1949, Ōta's "City of Corpses" could finally be printed by Tōga Shobō 冬芽書房 (Tokyo) in an uncensored edition.³² In the preface to the new edition, the author describes her difficulties when writing about Hiroshima:

During these five years, my only thought was to rearrange [my former manuscript of] "City of Corpses" in a more objective way and to rewrite it completely, after I had regained my mental and physical health, so that it becomes a more coherent and comprehensible piece of writing for my readers. [...] However, new ways of depiction and new kinds of expression that would have been necessary for that purpose could not be found so easily inside the mind of an already established author like me. I had neither seen something like hell, nor did I believe in any infernal scenario Buddhism teaches us about. People had lost their imaginative power for finding new expressions, so they had no other choice but to speak of hell or scenarios of hell all the time. [...] But, without the creation of a new vocabulary, it will become absolutely impossible to tell the truth [about August 6].³³

Ōta Yōko's attempt to objectify her personal – and by that 'subjective' – experiences is the main reason for the inevitably incoherent character of the entire text. The process of reading "City of Corpses" is heavily affected by the usage of very different kind of texts assembled in this work, because fictional and non-fictional parts impede the flow of the narrative and make it

31 The removal of "Apathetic faces" 無欲顔貌 (*Muyoku ganbō*), a chapter that contains a lot of information and many quotes from renowned scientists and well-known newspaper articles of that time, is undoubtedly the most obvious effect of 'censorship'. However, it is noteworthy here that the chapter was not deleted by the censors, but removed from the manuscript before filing in for approval by Ōta's own publisher. Apparently, Chūō Kōron Sha feared possible consequences from the CCD if Ōta's manuscript was classified as being "incitement to unrest". For a detailed comparison of the two versions of this text, see NAGAOKA Hiroyoshi 長岡弘芳: *Genbaku bunken wo yomu* 原爆文献を読む (Reading Documents on the Atomic Bomb), San'ichi Shobō 1982: 241–67. Ōta, who was even interrogated personally by American soldiers after sending the manuscript of "City of corpses" to the publisher Chūō Kōron Sha in 1948, describes her own experience with censorship in her short novel "On Top of the Hill" 山上 (*Sanjō*, 1953).

32 Interestingly, Ōta Yōko published another account titled "August 6, 8.15" 八月六日 8時15分 (*Hachigatsu muika hachiji jūgofun*) in 1949. In this account, she used her well established frame narrative of her escape from the city, and already integrated parts of "Apathetic faces", the chapter excluded from the publication of "City of Corpses" in 1948. See ŌTA Yōko: "Hachigatsu muika hachiji jūgofun", *Kaizō* 改造 (Reconstruction) 30.8 (1949): 42–49.

33 ŌTA 1983: 13.

difficult for readers to empathize with one of the protagonists. Ōta's "City of Corpses" is less a 'documentary' 記録 (*kiroku*) about the events of August 6 than a 'testimony' 証言 (*shōgen*) of a traumatic experience the author had suffered herself. In contrast to the majority of atomic bomb survivors that had given rather amateurish 'testimonies' about August 1945, Ōta Yōko wrote about her experiences as a professional writer right from the beginning. However, Ōta's self-awareness as a professional writer who gives testimony about the bomb is omnipresent in both her writing and her reflections about her writing: "I do not really feel comfortable when I am writing about the atomic bomb. When writing a novel, an author can hide himself [behind his characters], but when writing about the bomb, there is no place to hide."³⁴

In "City of Corpses", Ōta used a narrative double perspective, which is quite common for testimonial literature such as, for example, Holocaust literature. One anonymous, intradiegetic first-person narrator depicts all her experiences from August until November 1945, while an extradiegetic first-person narrator provides supplementary explanation and comments critical for the reader's understanding from a significantly later point in time. Both first-person narrators can be equated with the author, Ōta Yōko, who used this double perspective to render her narrator's depiction more reliable, more trustful. As "City of Corpses" is primarily an autobiographic 'novel' about the events of August 6, 1945, the "question of truth" which, according to Cathy Caruth, arises with the reader when eyewitnesses who "carry an impossible history within them" give testimony, was also a problem Ōta Yōko had to face.³⁵ Ōta as an eyewitness knew the unspeakable 'truth' about August 6, but at the same time, she had to ensure that her readers, too, would know that she really knew this 'truth' by choosing a narrator's double perspective. As John Whittier Treat appropriately remarks, "[t]he lack of distance between narrator and author suggests that we are to trust that narrator to be reliable, but in fact we have no other choice."³⁶

The frame narration begins in September 1945, in the village of Kujima (rural Hiroshima prefecture), where the 41-year old "I" finally finds refuge. Soon, "I" becomes aware that she is surrounded by quite a few disfigured

34 ŌTA Yōko: "Ikinokori no shinri" 生き残りの心理 (Psychology of Surviving), ŌTA Yōko: *Ōta Yōko shū* (Ōta Yōko Collection) 2, Nihon Tosho Sentā 1982: 313–20; at 317–18.

35 See Cathy CARUTH: "Introduction", Cathy CARUTH (ed.): *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1995: 3–12; at 5.

36 TREAT 1995: 211.

people in this village, people whose horrible appearance she describes as follows: “The skin all over the body, which already had looked like that of a person in the last stages of tuberculosis, began to change to an even more hopeless, opaque color, like that of a roasted eggplant.”³⁷ Here, outside the destroyed city of Hiroshima, she finally recalls the events of August 6 in form of an embedded narration. At the end of July, the intradiegetic “I” has left Tokyo due to air raids and food shortages and returns to her hometown Hiroshima to live in the district of Hakushima kuken chō together with her younger sister, her new-born niece and her mother. When the bomb explodes, all of them miraculously remain relatively unhurt and manage to escape from the fire that breaks out all over the city, reaching a riverbank which quickly becomes crowded with injured people. The riverbank (*kawara*) – already a central setting in the eponymous short novel from 1946, mentioned above – becomes a temporary shelter for three days and, at the same time, an epitome for the destruction of an entire city.

In contrast to other works on August 6, such as “Black rain” 黒い雨 (*Kuroi ame*, 1966) by Ibuse Masuji 井伏鱒二 (1898–1993) or “Barfoot Gen” はだしのゲン (*Hadashi no Gen*, 1973–87) by Nakazawa Keiji 中沢啓治 (1939–2012), Ōta Yōko did not guide her readership through the devastated city of Hiroshima to illustrate the extent of destruction. Instead, she led her readers directly to the riverbank to share with them the multifaceted despair and fear of the survivors. Talking to other people arriving at the riverbank, the intradiegetic “I” finally realizes that not only her district has been reduced to rubble and ash, but the entire city of Hiroshima. The sight of many victims deformed beyond recognition leaves no doubt that both the city and its inhabitants must have been struck by something new and horrendous:

There was no sign of fire far and wide, so where did they get all their heavy burns? [...] All of them were burned in exactly the same way, as if someone making rice crackers had roasted them all on an iron cooking grid. Normal burns have red or white parts, but their burns were all ashen. Their skin seemed more broiled than roasted, ash-colored skin hanging down from the flesh, like a peel pared from a roasted potato.³⁸

Ōta Yōko’s characters seem somewhat emotionally detached from the incidents occurring around them. Due to the rather matter-of-fact sort of tone,

37 ŌTA 1983: 20.

38 Ibid.: 46.

their 'conversations' with other victims of the bomb somehow resemble the interviews that newspaper reporters usually conduct with survivors of a disaster. In "City of Corpses", these 'conversations' are primarily a way of presenting the reader, who at that time was often completely unaware of the atomic bombing and its aftermath, with allegedly objective pieces of information – not a means of showing empathy with the survivors. All characters remain strangely anonymous, representing rather a social group than a particular individual. Examples for this include "the student", who was mobilized to work in an armament factory, or "the soldier", who was ordered to help in hospitals and other social institutions in the city – something they have in common with many others. Moreover, these complementary characters remain, above all, strangely 'mute' during the entire text. The characters need mediation through the intradiegetic "I" to talk about their experiences. Ōta did not resort to other people's experiences to give a multi-voiced account on the events of August 6. Quite the contrary, these experiences were only used to reinforce the narrator's authority as a reliable and credible chronicler of the catastrophe.

Within three days, the riverbank, formerly a refuge for survivors, has transformed into a kind of graveyard for most of them. Ultimately, the intradiegetic "I" has no choice but to leave the riverbank with her family. She explains her decision to the reader as follows:

It goes without saying that I was afraid of an outbreak of infectious diseases and a possible launch of further air raids. But actually, I also felt a different, even more fundamental horror, because I did not want my soul suffering further mental and emotional damage by the dismal view of this city of corpses lying before my eyes than it had already been the case. [...] If I had to watch this putrefying city for a long time over and over again, my heart might become further eroded, and my soul might get completely ruined.³⁹

For the reader, the full extent of the city's devastation is reduced to a symbolic level. The burning freight train that the protagonists see from the riverbank, which ends up as a deformed metal skeleton in a sea of flames, symbolizes the downfall of the modern industrial and military Hiroshima, and the ruined castle of Hiroshima, the former landmark of the city, epitomizes the irreversible loss of age-old history. Train and castle function as metonymies thoroughly selected by the author to illustrate the very different

39 Ibid.: 63.

aspects of destruction that exceeded human imagination. Hiroshima has turned into a city without a past and without a future.

Rather than portraying the destruction of the city in detail, Ōta Yōko deliberately focused on the human element of this catastrophe. Hence, the “City of Corpses” becomes, in a very literal sense, a book of corpses, as the whole city is overflowing with dead bodies. Wherever “I” goes, she is confronted with dead bodies: in her neighborhood, at the riverbank, on her way through the city, at the bus stop or at the train station. Virtually everyone around “I” seems to be doomed to die from the effects of the bomb, in both the intradiegetic world and the frame narration. In her “City of Corpses”, Ōta Yōko gave testimony of an unconceivable human tragedy that happened in Hiroshima, a tragedy that has not failed to leave its mark on the psyche of her alter ego “I”. Despite the nightmarish scenery “I” finds herself walking through, her description is rather unemotional:

Our way, which actually did not really look like a way any longer, was virtually obstructed by all the dead bodies. As almost all of them were burned, they must have turned into these foul-smelling bodies whilst still alive. The corpses, half-decayed, exuded an acidic odor, as if coming directly from a crematorium.⁴⁰

At the end of the day, the protagonists manage to escape to Kujima by bus and train. While mother and sister head further for Nōmishima to stay with their relatives, “I” remains in Kujima. At this point, the embedded narrative returns to the frame narration from the opening of “City of Corpses”, in September 1945. Although “I” is quickly recovering from her physical and psychological injuries, she lives in permanent fear of dying the same mysterious and unpredictable death as many other survivors with no or only a few apparent injuries. In November 1945, the confidence that “I” really has survived the bomb grows day by day:

Over the last three months, I have seen the shadow of an unfathomable death again and again, but now that death is receding from me more and more. Once or twice a day, I unfold four or five unreal-looking scenes before my inner eye. But these scenes were no longer pictures of the city’s massive devastation.⁴¹

40 Ibid.: 77.

41 Ibid.: 116–17.

Ōta Yōko's "City of Corpses" somehow epitomizes the struggle of early atomic bomb writers to find an appropriate way of passing on personal memories of August 6. After choosing a more fictional style with her short novel "Riverbank", Ōta returned to a fairly documentary style with her "City of Corpses", one which she had already employed in her earliest written newspaper account "An Unfathomable Deep Light" in August 1945. However, in the case of "City of Corpses", this documentary style brought about another serious problem, namely the relationship between author and reader, as now, as John Whittier Treat put it, the issue was "how much to empower the non-victim reader to make any history of Hiroshima his own."⁴² Ōta Yōko, as could be seen so far, made it pretty hard for her readers to take part in her experience, to become what Dominick LaCapra calls a "second witness", a reader who experiences an event on a secondary level of perception by reading about it.⁴³ The reader is left outside Ōta's personal account; he is always aware that the author's experience will ultimately remain an inaccessible experience for him. In the chapter "Apathetic faces" (*Muyoku ganbō*), which had been removed from the 1948 edition of "City of Corpses", Ōta described a widespread syndrome of general apathy among many survivors of the atomic bombing, a syndrome Robert Jay Lifton describes more aptly as "psychic numbing", which describes a tendency amongst trauma victims to mentally withdraw from the world around them. However, one should keep in mind, that Ōta Yōko was not only an author who wrote about the atomic bombing and the survivors, but first and foremost a survivor who had suffered traumatic experiences, just like her intradiegetic characters. That is probably the primary reason, why Ōta deliberately "threaten[ed] the implicit contract that ordinarily links author and audiences in a mutual exchange of interested assurances", as John Whittier Treat states in his analysis.⁴⁴ In other words, the feeling of being excluded that arises while reading "City of Corpses" was less a question of willingness, but more a question of ability on behalf of the author to let a personal trauma experience become a commonly shared one.⁴⁵

42 TREAT 1995: 206.

43 See LACAPRA 2014: 70–71.

44 TREAT 1995: 207.

45 In his analysis of Ōta Yōko's short novel "On Top of the Hill" (*Sanjō*), Nakano Kazunori put forward the thesis that censorship had inhibited Ōta Yōko from writing about the bomb in the way she really wanted to. In his argumentation, Nakano refers to Ōta's short novel "A Page of Youth" 青春の頁 (*Seishun no pēji*), published 1947 in the magazine

4 *The Transformation of a City or How to Reconfigure August 6, 1945*

The revised version of Ōta Yōko's "City of Corpses" was published in a time of national rearticulation and reconstruction. The author had to face up to the fact that she was trying in vain to give testimony about something that was virtually erased from the historical consciousness of large parts of Japanese society at that time.⁴⁶ The Allied censorship, which was originally imposed to support Japan's reconstruction into a democratic state committed to the freedom of speech, was now filtering out undesirable reports and records as supposed disturbances of "public tranquility" via its Press Code. According to Etō Jun, censorship produced a climate in which it was nearly impossible to address so-called taboo topics.⁴⁷ Even after the CCD was closed in October 1949, this restrictive climate was perpetuated by the Japanese government. However, official censorship was not the only reason for this lack of historical awareness. As control of the media and censorship had been in practice since the early days of the Meiji period (1868–1912), publishers and authors reacted very sensitive to this new kind of oppression and adopted a strategy of "self-restraint" 自粛 (*jishuku*), that is self-imposed censorship, to avoid any trouble with the government. This form of anticipatory obedience became a widely practiced survival strategy in the publishing business during the following decades, so even after the war, many writers or publishers of atomic bomb accounts retained the established practice and often refrained from telling the unveiled truth about what really happened in August 1945. The result was truly fatal for historical con-

"New Camellia" 新椿 (*Nii Tsubaki*), which was partly censored due to its "disastrous scene[s]", to show the psychological pressure writers such as Ōta Yōko were permanently exposed to during the occupation. However, Ōta Yōko seemed to be fairly accustomed to coming into conflict with the Press Code, as the case of the aforementioned short novel "Riverbank" illustrated – or she would not have continued to write so many accounts about the bomb. It seems quite likely that it was less the Press Code as an exterior pressure that inhibited Ōta from expressing her 'truth' about August 6, but rather the interior pressure caused by the trauma she had suffered on that day. See NAKANO Kazuhiro 中野和典: "Shutai no yuragi – Ōta Yōko 'Sanjō' wo chūshin ni" 主体のゆらぎ 大田洋子「山上」を中心に (Fluctuating Subjects – with Focus on Ōta Yōko's 'On Top of the Hill'), *Genbaku bungaku kenkyū* 原爆文学研究 (Research on Atomic Bomb Literature) 9 (2010): 24–38; at 32–35.

46 It should be mentioned that the Japanese government also tried to impede the dissemination of information about the bombing even after the CCD was closed in October 1949; see YAMAMOTO Akihiro 山本昭宏: *Kaku enerugi gensetsu no sengo shi* 核エネルギー言説の戦後史 1945–1960 (Post-war History of the Discourse about Nuclear Energy), Kyōto: Jinbun Shoin 人文書院 2012: 76–82.

47 See ETŌ 1994: 212–43.

sciousness in Japan, as it fostered deliberate obfuscation of historical facts and contexts, and by that a distortion of collective memory. As objective information about the events of August 6, 1945 was either impeded in the process of its production or confiscated before it could be disseminated (and brought to the United States soon after), literary works, both prose and poetry, were of vital importance for the majority of readers from all over the country, serving as an alternative source of information about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁴⁸ The effects of this climate of concealment on collective memory may be best illustrated by the case of renowned author Inoue Hisashi (1934–2010). In a round-table talk on atomic bomb literature with writer Hayashi Kyōko, he admitted that he had only learned about the real extent of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1951 – six years after the bombings.⁴⁹

Interestingly, the criteria for considering something a serious “incitement to unrest”, one of the most common reasons for censoring either parts of a work or even for confiscating the entire work after printing, differed significantly. As far as can be reconstructed nowadays, censorship was most often the result of arbitrary decisions made by Americans, Japanese-speaking foreigners, and Japanese working for the detachment.⁵⁰ As Shigesawa Atsuko points out in her study on the impact of Allied censorship in Japan, this inevitably led to an attitude of “ignorance” 無知 (*muchi*) and “indifference” 無関心 (*mukan shin*) towards the bomb and its aftermath within the majority of Japanese society.⁵¹ However, one should keep in mind that information about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was censored right from the beginning. In its earliest reports on the bombing of Hiroshima on August 8, 1945, the *Asahi shinbun* was obliged to use the vague expression “the enemy’s

48 See SHIGESAWA Atsuko 繁沢敦子: *Genbaku to ken'etsu. Amerikajin kishatachi ga mita Hiroshima, Nagasaki* 原爆と検閲 アメリカ人記者たちが見た広島・長崎 (Atomic Bomb and Censorship: Hiroshima and Nagasaki as Seen by American Journalists), Chūō Kōron Shinsha 2010: 136–74.

49 See INOUE Hisashi 井上ひさし et al.: “Genbaku bungaku to Okinawa bungaku” 原爆文学と沖縄文学 (Atomic Bomb Literature and Okinawa Literature), INOUE Hisashi, and KOMORI Yōichi 小森陽一 (eds.): *Zadan kai: Shōwa bungaku shi* 座談会 昭和文学史 (Round-Table Talk: The History of Literature from the Shōwa Period [1926–89]) 5, Shūei Sha 集英社 2004: 25.

50 According to HORIBA (1999: 429) more than 9000 persons were involved in the process of censoring. Most of the Japanese that worked for the CCD had already worked as censors for the Japanese government during wartime and were therefore used to rigid censoring practices.

51 See SHIGESAWA 2010: 199.

new type of bomb” 敵新型爆弾 (*teki shingata bakudan*)⁵², since no detailed information about this bombing was allowed to be published. In actual fact, the Japanese government already knew about the world’s first usage of an atomic bomb on August 7, 1945. Since an investigation team, including Japan’s leading nuclear scientist Nishina Yoshio 仁科芳雄, was immediately sent to Hiroshima, it soon became clear that the immense devastation of the city was caused by an atomic bomb. However, the government decided not to make this information public, as public’s support for continuing the war was at stake. Instead, the Imperial Headquarters 大本營 (*Dai hon’ei*) gave a press release about the bombing with the rather vague information “new type of bomb”.⁵³ Eventually, on August 11, after Harry S. Truman’s famous radio address to the American people on August 9, the true nature of the bomb was revealed to the Japanese public for the first time. Now the hitherto unknown term “atomic bomb” 原子爆弾 (*genshi bakudan*) was correctly used in press releases, but almost no one outside of Hiroshima or Nagasaki had the slightest idea of the extent of the devastation the two cities had suffered, and how it compared to conventional bombings of other cities all over Japan. Information was systematically withheld, first by the Japanese government itself, then by the Allied Powers.⁵⁴

For an atomic bomb writer like Ōta Yōko, general ignorance as a result of a strict information policy on the nuclear issue posed a severe problem. On the one hand, Ōta Yōko had to reconstruct the events of August 6 as a central, but due to different forms of censorship (official censorship, self-re-

52 See *Asahi shinbun*, 1945/08/08: 1 (morning edition). The earliest report in the *Yomiuri shinbun* was also published two days after the bombing, on August 8, titled: “B29 used a new type of bomb” B29 新型爆弾を使用 (*B29 shingata bakudan wo shiyō*); see *Yomiuri shinbun*, 1945/08/08: 1 (morning edition).

53 For further details, see SODEI Rinjirō 袖井林二郎: “Genbaku wa ika ni hōdō sareta ka” 原爆はいかに報道されたか (How the Atomic Bomb was Covered), GENBAKU TAIKEN WO TSUTAERU KAI 原爆体験を伝える会 (eds.): *Genbaku kara genpatsu made. Kaku seminā no kiroku* 原爆から原発まで 核セミナーの記録 (From Atomic Bomb to Nuclear Power Plant: Records of the Nuclear Seminar), Agune アグネ 1975: 266–76; at 269, and UBUKI Akira 宇吹暁: “Genbaku taiken to heiwa undō” 原爆体験と平和運動 (Experiences of the Atomic Bombing and Peace Movement), FUJIWARA Akira 藤原彰, and Imai Seiichi 今井清一 (eds.): *Jūgonen sensō shi* 十五年戦争史 (History of the Fifteen Years War) 4, Aoki Shoten 青木書店 1989: 129–64; at. 129–33.

54 According to Shibata Yūko, even Americans were unaware of the full extent of devastation, also due to the censorship practiced in America during the war; see SHIBATA Yūko 柴田優呼: “Hiroshima, Nagasaki”. *Hibaku shinwa wo kaitai suru* 「ヒロシマ・ナガサキ」被爆神話を解体する (Deconstructing the Myth of Exposure to Radiation in *Hiroshima and Nagasaki*), Sakuin Sha 作品社 2015: 119–78.

straint etc.) also unknown part of wartime history to make her accounts understandable for her readers. On the other hand, she had to reconfigure August 6 as a vital part of post-war history that had to be shared by the whole nation as part of its collective memory. The depiction of the many casualties Ōta saw on her way to the train station with “the eyes of a human being and of an author”⁵⁵ was a challenging task. As an author, she had to find adequate words and expressions to describe the singularity and enormity of the visible effects of the bomb on a human body, but without stereotyping or even simplifying her observations. Also, she had to raise awareness among her readers for the false sense of security of apparently uninjured bodies that, in fact, often were doomed to die several weeks later due to their exposure to high levels of radiation, as Ōta has already demonstrated in her short novel “Riverbank”.

When writing about the victims of the bomb in “City of Corpses”, Ōta could not help but speak vaguely of “disaster victims” 罹災者 (*risai sha*), in contrast to the more common “war victim” 戦災者 (*sensai sha*). However, as both terms were also used to refer to the victims of conventional air raids, Ōta's depiction of the effects of this “new type of bomb” on the human body remained more or less unconceivable to readers not familiar with Hiroshima's nuclear devastation. As Naono Akiko reveals in her 2015 study, the term *hibakusha* for individuals externally (被爆) and internally (被曝) affected by radiation only began to appear in Japanese newspapers in the early 1950s, and even then, the term was only sporadically mentioned. It was only after the Bikini Atoll hydrogen bomb test between March and May 1954, during which the crew of the Japanese fishing boat Lucky Dragon Nr. 5 第五福竜丸 (Dai-go Fukuryūmaru) was exposed to radioactive fallout, that the term *hibakusha* became more common. In public perception, Japan had yet again become a victim of a nuclear disaster. The crew of the Lucky Dragon became a metonymy for the whole nation, which now felt reinforced in its national myth of being the only nation in the world to be struck by an atom bomb 唯一被爆国 (*yuiitsu hibaku koku*).⁵⁶ Henceforth, the term *hibakusha*

55 ŌTA 1983: 60.

56 According to Iwadare Hiroshi, the widespread idea of Japan being the only nation in the world that had suffered from radiation caused by an atomic bomb can be traced back to an article published in *Asahi shinbun* as early as on March 17, 1954. The respective Japanese expressions *tada hitotsu* ただ一つ and *yuiitsu* 唯一, respectively, became crucial discourse markers in post-war Japan. See IWADARE Hiroshi 岩垂弘: “Hibaku mondai to hōdō” 被曝問題と報道 (The Problem of Exposure to Radiation and Journalism), *Nihon*

became common in the Japanese discourse on August 6 (and, of course, August 9) and a key concept in all subsequent atomic bomb writing.⁵⁷

Today, the term *hibakusha* incorporates very specific information and associations related to the various kinds of effects caused by the atomic bomb in a condensed form. For Ōta Yōko, whose work “City of Corpses” was published before the advent of the term *hibakusha* in the Japanese discourse, integrating statements and opinions of well-acknowledged specialists on that very topic was the method of choice to build bridges between her own and her reader’s experiences. With the chapter “Apathetic faces”, Ōta tried to provide at least a minimum of background information for her readers to understand her mode of representation for an experience that was actually unrepresentable. In this chapter, which, as mentioned before, was removed from the 1948 version, renowned scientists – such as the physician Dr. Fujisawa (Hiroshima Bunri University), the pathologist Prof. Tsuzuki (Tokyo University), or the internist Dr. Sawada (Kyushu University), whose names can be found in many articles of that time published in the *Asahi shinbun* or the *Yomiuri shinbun* – were cited as reliable sources of information to reveal the specific horror of the atomic bomb and the aftermath from a more “neutral” point of view:

The effects of the atomic bomb on the human body can be divided into three cases. In case one, [the victims] die instantly. In case two, they show symptoms of diarrhea, similar to patients with pseudo-dysentery, and die. In case three, they lie still in the rescue stations with only small superficial injuries, that is no skin burns, and die. Main symptoms of third case patients are gum bleeding, anemia, hair loss, and development of throat ulcers.⁵⁸

Ōta Yōko’s “City of Corpses” is a continuous balancing act, generalizing personal experiences and objectifying subjective impressions. More than thirty different, but all anonymous victims of the bomb are introduced to the reader by short conversations with her intradiegetic younger “I”. These authentic “third” voices serve as a kind of guarantee for the correctness of the author’s depiction and recollection of August 6. Without any doubt, Ōta

genbaku ron taikai (Compendium of Japanese Treatises on the Atomic Bomb) 7, Nihon Tosho Sentā 1999: 295–304; at 299–300.

57 See NAONO Akiko 直野章子: *Genbaku taiken to sengo Nihon. Kioku no keisei to keishō* 原爆体験と戦後日本 記憶の形成と継承 (Experiences of the Atomic Bomb and Post-war Japan. Formation and Tradition of Memories), Iwanami Shoten 岩波書店 2015: 16–20; 37–50.

58 ŌTA 1983: 35–36.

Yōko was quite a challenging author for her readers, telling some inconvenient truths. Directly after the bombing, the city of Hiroshima, Ōta wrote, had already turned into a forgotten city; forgotten by the nation, by history, and even by local politicians. As the intradiegetic “I” complains in “City of Corpses”: “No one showed up, neither the head of the neighborhood association nor the air-raid wardens. All the leaders who had [...] shouted out ‘traitor!’ to other people and put them in jail – where had they been yesterday morning?”⁵⁹

The younger “I” blames both the local and the national government for their blatant negligence of the victims in Hiroshima, as no measures to help people in the devastated areas had been taken. It took the Japanese government almost four weeks to officially send a first group of experts to Hiroshima – and of course, it did not come to provide medical help to the survivors, but rather to gather further information. It goes without saying that the Japanese government showed itself incapable of properly reacting to this emergency situation. Since the atomic bomb was initially treated as a new, but still conventional bomb, the true extent of the devastation caused by a nuclear bomb could still not really be grasped, even after President Truman’s speech on August 9, 1945. For the government, Hiroshima was only one of many areas devastated by air raids during the war, therefore swift humanitarian aid was needed throughout the country, not only in Hiroshima or Nagasaki.⁶⁰

At the time “City of Corpses” was published, the pre-war Hiroshima formerly written in *kanji* as 広島 had already been transformed into the post-war Hiroshima, now written in *katakana* as ヒロシマ, by public discourses. This change of notation may seem inconspicuous, but it implies important connotations, as with this new notation, the historical cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were irreversibly transformed into places that had been detached from time and space in Japanese collective memory, transformed into places for national commemoration and mourning. It also symbolized a specific historical and national awareness in Japan. While the *kanji* notation referred to the historical pre- and interwar cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

59 Ibid.: 57.

60 See OKUDA Hiroko 奥田博子: *Hibakusha wa naze matenai ka. Kaku / genshi ryoku no sengo shi* 被爆者はなぜ待てないか 核／原子力の戦後史 (Why Survivors of the Atomic Bomb Cannot Wait any Longer. Post-war History of Nuclear Weapons and Energy), Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan Kai 慶應義塾大学出版会 2015: 24–35.

the *katakana* notation referred to the reconstructed new post-war cities.⁶¹ As Matsumoto Hiroshi convincingly points out, the *katakana* notation of Hiroshima (and Nagasaki) was the result of a deliberate depoliticization of August 1945. This depoliticization was pushed forward – especially in local media – in order to conceal Japan’s role as the aggressor during the war by emphasizing victimhood. By that, Hiroshima became a keystone of Japan’s reconfiguration as a “peace nation” in the post-war period.⁶² Unfortunately, Hiroshima’s *hibakusha* had to pay the price for this change of notation, as their personal tragedy was now confined to the history of the old *kanji* Hiroshima. In the new *katakana* Hiroshima, the *hibakusha* seemed not to be needed any longer. Only one year after the atomic bombing, the regional newspaper *Chūgoku shinbun* made the following statement in an article titled “The Sparkle of Peace that has Come to us Today” けふぞ巡り来ぬ平和の閃光 (*Kyō zo megurikinu heiwa no senkō*):

This city of Hiroshima symbolizes the beginning of a new age of world peace. Now, it has gone down in history as Hiroshima, the atomic city [*atomikku shiti* アトミックシティ]. [...] Due to the [immense] sacrifice of its citizens, this war could finally end.⁶³

The article’s rhetoric is noteworthy, since the idea that the city of Hiroshima was the price that had to be paid to end the war would become somewhat of a foundation myth in Japan’s new post-war self-awareness.⁶⁴ From a very

61 See also Lisa YONEYAMA: *Hiroshima Traces. Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*, Berkeley (Ca.): University of California Press 1999: 48–49.

62 See MATSUMOTO Hiroshi 松元寛: *Hiroshima to iu shisō* ヒロシマという思想 (An Idea Called *Hiroshima*), Tōkyō Sōgen Sha 東京創元社 1995: 14–15; 56–59.

63 *Chūgoku shinbun* 中国新聞, 1946/08/06: 3.

64 According to this “foundation myth” 起源の物語 (*kigen no monogatari*), the bombing was ‘necessary’ so that emperor Hirohito could finally end the war in order to save millions of his subjects’ precious lives by his “wise decision” 聖断 (*seidan*) to surrender, a decision he deliberately took against the opposition of Japan’s military leaders. This logic implies that Hiroshima had to be sacrificed to save the nation, and to save the emperor, who by his “wise decision” successfully transformed himself from a warmonger to a peace bringer in the public eye. However, during a short visit to Hiroshima on October 31, 1975, the emperor stated in a slip of the tongue during an interview that he was “sorry” 気の毒 (*ki no doku*) for the people of Hiroshima, but convinced that the bombing was “inevitable” 止むを得ぬ (*yamu wo enu*) to end the war. This again sparked a debate regarding the emperor’s personal responsibility for wartime events, including his blatant refusal to end the war much earlier, so that the bombings could have been prevented. See *Asahi shinbun*, 1975/11/01: 1, 3; IGARASHI Yoshikuni 五十嵐恵邦: *Haisen no kioku. Shintai, bunka, monogatari* 敗戦の記憶 身体・文化・物語 1945–1970

early point in post-war period, the *Chūgoku shinbun* functioned more or less as a mouthpiece of local conservative politicians who enthusiastically propagated the new 'peace city' narrative in dozens of articles. Moreover, focusing on "peace" also helped distract the public from Hiroshima's most urgent problem, namely what to do with all the survivors of the bomb – these now seemed to become victims again, but this time victims of Hiroshima's transformation.⁶⁵

Ōta Yōko, however, did not subscribe to this nation-wide transformation process from *kanji* to *katakana* Hiroshima, which Okuda Hiroko scrutinizes in her study.⁶⁶ On the contrary, in her recollections of August 6, the younger "I" even deliberately evokes reminiscences of the historical, undamaged Hiroshima. These were facets that had already slid into oblivion for most of Ōta's contemporary readers, as the modern post-war Hiroshima, written in *katana*, had forfeited its historicity, its connection to time and space. The process of Hiroshima's 'musealization' for the sake of world peace is commented on rather cynically by the older "I" of the frame narration: "Will those guinea pigs, which have covered the soil of Hiroshima with their stench of death, pray for the reconstruction of Hiroshima from their graves? For the reconstruction of a beautiful, peaceful, fertile, bright city?"⁶⁷

In "Town and People in the Evening Calm" (*Yūnagi no machi to hito to*), published in 1955, the intradiegetic author Oda Atsuko, an autobiographic alter ego of Ōta Yōko that was first introduced to her readers 1954 in "Half Human" (*Han ningen*), visits her former hometown Hiroshima for a report she is planning to write. While taking a critical look behind the scenes of this radiant post-war Hiroshima, Atsuko encounters the *hibakusha* slums beyond the magnificent boulevards of the anonymous city "H". Shimazaki, a local reporter who shows Atsuko around the city, makes a rather dry comment on this dramatic change: "In this city, the [new] 'Hiroshima' written in *kataka-*

(Memories of a Lost War: Body, Culture, Narrative 1945–1970), Chūō Kōron Shinsha 2007: 31–50; KATŌ Norihiro 加藤典洋: *Amerika no kage. Sengo saiken* アメリカの影戦後再見 (The Shadow of America: Post-war Period Revisited) (Kōdan Sha gakujutsu bunko 講談社学術文庫), Kōdan Sha 講談社 1995: 287–303.

65 See also Yuko KAWAGUCHI: "Newspaper Reports of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima in the Early Post-war Years: Local, National, Transnational", *Tōkyō Daigaku Amerika Taihei Yō Kenkyū* 東京大学アメリカ太平洋研究 (Tokyo University: Pacific and American Studies) 6 (2006): 227–41; at 233–37.

66 See OKUDA Hiroko: *Genbaku no kioku. Hiroshima / Nagasaki no shisō* 原爆の記憶 ヒロシマ／ナガサキの思想 (Memories of the Atomic Bomb. The Idea of *Hiroshima* and *Nagasaki*), Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan Kai 2010: 61–115.

67 ŌTA 1983: 114.

na is becoming more and more present. However, this should not be called a reconstruction of the former city any longer.”⁶⁸ In this novel, which bears the significant subtitle “The actual situation in 1953” 1953 年の実態 (*1953-nen no jittai*), the reader is confronted with a parallel world of the forgotten ones of Japanese post-war society, that is victims of the atomic bomb, refugees from the former colonies, small-time gangsters from the flourishing black market etc. For them, this city under reconstruction had mutated into a strange, uninhabitable film set. The new boulevards only give the illusion that this city, which had been entirely destroyed, rose like phoenix from the ashes. The real Hiroshima exists first and foremost in the slums at the riverbank, where many of the socially and economically ostracized elements of society have finally found shelter. Nishii Marina illustrates in her study how and why as early as at the end of August 1945 slums emerged at very different points in the center of Hiroshima. According to Nishii, people who were forced to live in one of these slums could be divided roughly into three groups: people who had survived the bomb but lost all their belongings; people who had been evacuated to the countryside during the war and now returned to the city; and people who had been repatriated after Japan’s surrender. One should bear in mind that for all of them, the slum was mainly a refuge, not a place they really chose to live in. However, the municipal government’s incapability to provide alternative spaces for living was the main reason that many of these rather provisionally erected slums continued to exist for many years, growing larger and larger – until they were ultimately bulldozed in the early 1950s for Hiroshima’s planned resurrection as a center of peace with its memorial park and museum.⁶⁹ From their residents’ perspective, Hiroshima’s transformation into a city of peace was actually an irreversible conversion into a city of peace tourism. It was just this commercial character of Hiroshima’s transformation in the first post-war years which Ōta Yōko observed with great skepticism as a former citizen of Hiroshima.⁷⁰

68 ŌTA Yōko: “Yūnagi no machi to hito to” 夕風の街と人と (Town and People in the Evening Calm), ŌTA Yōko: *Ōta Yōko shū* 3, San’ichi Shobō 1982: 136.

69 See NISHII Marina 西井麻里奈: *Hiroshima – fukkō no sengo shi* 広島 復興の戦後史 (Hiroshima – Post-war History of its Reconstruction), Kyōto: Jinbun Shoin 2020: 240–49.

70 See NAKANO Kazunori 中野和典: “Shinzō fūkei to shite no hibaku toshi” 心臓風景としての被爆都市 (Hiroshima as a Landscape of the Heart), *Genbaku bungaku kenkyū* (Research on Atomic Bomb Literature) 4 (2005): 130–47; at 131–37.

In 1955, the year in which the novel was published, the transformation into the new Hiroshima of peace was irrevocably carried out. The inauguration of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in that very year sealed the fate of the pre-war *kanji* Hiroshima, devastated by the nuclear bomb, as part of a remote past, and paved the way for the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the post-war *katakana* Hiroshima, even providing exhibition space for the “Exhibition for the peaceful use of nuclear power” 原子力平和利用博覧会 (Genshiryoku heiwa riyō hakuran kai) in the following year.⁷¹ In December 1955 – the very month in which the Japanese parliament adopted the Atomic Energy Basis Act 原子力基本法 (*Genshiryoku kihon hō*) –, Nagaoka Shōgo 長岡省吾, first director of the Peace Memorial, declared the following in the newspaper *Chūgoku shinbun*: “I am glad that, thanks to international support, we have the great fortune to develop from a museum that has, so far, restricted itself to presenting only materials documenting the signs of devastation into an international museum for nuclear peace.”⁷²

National commemoration of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima began as early as 1946, with the celebration of the “Hiroshima peace reconstruction festival” 広島平和復興祭 (*Hiroshima heiwa fukkō sai*), an event that was aired nationwide on radio with the support of the Allied Powers.⁷³ Real victims’ recollection of the events was deemed dispensable and was systematically excluded from the collective memory of the nation over the years. Hence, Ōta Yōko had to give full account of the horrendous experiences of the atomic bombing and, at the same time, connect her personal recollection of an individually experienced *kanji* Hiroshima with the reader’s imagination of a collectively commemorated *katakana* Hiroshima. Like many other writers of *genbaku bungaku*, Ōta Yōko was highly dependent on her reader’s willingness to listen to ‘alternative voices’. As an undesirable voice from the past, Ōta’s “City of Corpses” received very little attention, aside from a nomination for the third Women’s Literary Award in 1948. But in 1953, things suddenly changed. The so-called “first dispute on atomic bomb liter-

71 For details see FUKUMA Yoshiaki: ‘*Seisen*’ no zanzō. *Chi to media no rekishi shakai gaku* 「聖戦」の残像 知とメディアの歴史社会学 (Afterimages of the ‘Holy War’: A Historical Sociology of Knowledge and Media), Kyōto: Jinbun Shoin 2015: 160–69.

72 *Chūgoku shinbun*, 1955/12/11: 3.

73 See SENBA Nozumu 仙波希望: “‘Heiwa toshi’ kūkan no keifu gaku” 「平和都市」空間の系譜学 (Genealogy of Space as ‘Peace City’), HIGASHI Takuma 東琢磨, KAWAMOTO Takashi 川本隆史, and SENBA Nozomu (eds.): *Bōkyaku no kioku Hiroshima* 忘却の記憶 広島 (Hiroshima: Memories from Oblivion), Getsuyō Sha 月曜社 2018: 126–73; at 133–45.

ature” 原爆文学論争 (*genbaku bungaku ronsō*) sparked a debate on atomic bomb literature in general, as well as Ōta Yōko and her writing in particular, for the first time.

5 A Nation of Victims or How to Commemorate August 6, 1945

On January 25, 1953 Shijō Miyoko, member of the Hiroshima Literary Association 広島文芸協会 (*Hiroshima bungei kyōkai*), published a rather polemic essay titled “Regarding ‘Atomic Bomb Literature’” 「原爆文学」について (*‘Genbaku bungaku’ ni tsuite*) in the newspaper *Chūgoku shinbun*. This kicked off the first of a total of three debates on the role of *genbaku bungaku* in post-war Japan.⁷⁴ In her essay, Shijō expressed her deep annoyance about all the different sorts of atomic bomb literature:

Even today, everyone soon starts talking about the atomic bomb for hours on end. So, as if they all were insinuating that novels that do not give any account of the bomb, or pictures that do not show an image of the bomb, cannot be considered to be the authentic and sincere work of an artist from Hiroshima. Off course, I am not saying that we should get rid of our history completely now, seven years after the atomic bombings. But, should not we at least grow out of drawing pictures of hell or fabricating texts about hell, bit by bit?⁷⁵

The ensuing debate mainly focused on the question of atomic bomb literature’s literariness and legitimacy in post-war society. First person perspective, which many literary critics deemed to be a relic of the antiquated tradition of “I-novels” 私小説 (*watakushi shōsetsu*) from a remote, non-modern past, and the artless, matter-of-fact style of primarily documenting the events, a stylistic device that was widely used by atomic bomb authors to objectify their personal, subjective experiences of the bomb, apparently did not live up to readers’ and critics’ expectation of modern literature.⁷⁶ At that time, labels such as “documentary literature” 記録文学 (*kiroku bungaku*) or “testimonial literature” 証言文学 (*shōgen bungaku*) were commonly used both to

74 The first and second debate took place in *Chūgoku shinbun* from January to February 1953 and March to May 1960; the third debate took place 1978 in different journals and newspapers.

75 SHIJŌ Miyoko 志条みよ子: “‘Genbaku bungaku’ ni tsuite” 「原爆文学」について (Regarding ‘Atomic Bomb Literature’), *Nihon no genbaku bungaku* (Japanese Atomic Bomb Literature) 15, Horupu Shuppan 1983: 248 [first published in *Chūgoku shinbun*, 1953].

76 See TREAT 1995: 68.

classify these somewhat different works, and to marginalize them as “literature that is not really literary” 小説らしくない小説 (*shōsetsu rashiku nai shōsetsu*). As a result, authors of atomic bomb literature like Ōta Yōko were excluded and shunned in the literary scene of post-war Japan, as pointed out by Kurihara Sadako.⁷⁷ In virtually all of her works on August 6, Ōta Yōko acts as an intradiegetic fictional author (for example Oda Atsuko), who feels obliged to give a full account of her personal experience of the atomic bombing and its aftermath, and who is respected at least by the other intradiegetic personae in her novels. However, the extradiegetic real author Ōta Yōko was criticized by both critics and readers for not being qualified enough to give any reliable literary account of the ‘real’ events of August 6.⁷⁸ As writing about Hiroshima gradually evolved into a discursive field for negotiating Japanese post-war identity, individual speakers’ positions (and memories) had become highly contested.

However, from a European point of view, Japan’s “first dispute on atomic bomb literature” seems quite confusing, as no one would seriously question the credibility and competence of a survivor giving testimony in the case of Holocaust literature. It seems that atomic bomb literature, and in our special case Ōta Yōko, had become a kind of scapegoat in a wider national dispute on the questions of how, why and by whom post-war literature should actually be written. John Whittier Treat highlights the discrepancy of atomic bomb literature as literary works from the (remote) periphery, standing in opposition to works from the literary center in Tokyo, and stresses the problem of “subjective mediation”, by which the author’s experiences are mediated in a way “that narrows the focus of modern Japanese fiction to the range of the individual consciousness.”⁷⁹ But this periphery was, as Kawaguchi Takayuki has pointed out, rather reluctant to publish atomic bomb literature in local literary magazines.⁸⁰ And even the problem of “subjective media-

77 See KURIHARA Sadako 栗原貞子: *Kaku, tennō, hibakusha* 核・天皇・被爆者 (The Nuclear, the Emperor, and the Atomic Bomb Survivors), San’ichi shobō 1978: 183.

78 See KAWAGUCHI Takayuki: “Machi wo kiroku suru Ōta Yōko” 街を記録する大田洋子 (Ōta Yōko Making a Record of the City), *Genbaku bungaku kenkyū* (Research on Atomic Bomb Literature) 4 (2005): 83–100; at 83–89.

79 TREAT 1995: 99.

80 See KAWAGUCHI 2005: 85–87. KURIHARA Sadako (1978: 166–83) stresses the point that Ōta Yōko was isolated from both literary circles in the center, that is Tokyo, and literary circles in the periphery, that is Hiroshima. Even though many of the writers in Hiroshima’s literary circles were *hibakusha* themselves – unlike the literary center Tokyo –, their willingness to write about August 6 differed largely from Ōta Yōko.

tion” Treat mentions seems to be rather the tip of the iceberg than the real cause of the problem. In Japan, the first years after the war were overshadowed by fierce disputes about how a new modern literature ought to be. The fact that most of Japan’s renowned literati had more or less willingly joined the “Japanese Association for the Promotion of Literature” 日本文学報告会 (*Nihon bungaku hōkoku kai*), founded in 1942, to support national policy, led to passionate debates after the war regarding their presumed complicity in wartime events, a debate held in Japan’s then most prominent literary magazines, “Modern Literature” (*Kindai bungaku*) and “New Literature of Japan” (*Shin Nihon bungaku*).⁸¹ One central point of discussion was the question of how objective must and how subjective can modern literature be without running the risk of falling back into literary traditions of “I-novels” or “Psychological novels” 心境小説 (*shinkyō shōsetsu*), which were considered anti-modern as they excluded depictions of social reality in favor of detailed psychological insights into their protagonists. Especially authors publishing for “New Literature of Japan”, a magazine in tradition of prewar proletarian literature, campaigned for a new form of literature, called “documentary literature” (*kiroku bungaku*), which was meant to realistically reflect on society from an objective point of view.⁸² As early as 1946, in the founding number of the local literary magazine “Hiroshima Culture” 中國文化 (*Chūgoku bunka*), which was also a special issue on the atomic bomb, writer Hosoda Tamiki explained the essence of this kind of writing as follows:

The most important thing is that an author does not distort or gloss over any given reality by his own subjective judgement. Instead, he should look upon this reality from everywhere, from a vertical or horizontal perspective, from a view point above or beneath. He should reflect what is the truth, what is the reality [...] and extract the essence [for his readers].⁸³

81 For the crucial debates about “Subjectivity” 主体性論争 (*Shutai sei ronsō*), “War Responsibility of Literati” 文学者の戦争責任論争 (*Bungaku sha no sensō sekinin ronsō*) and “Politics and Literature” 政治と文学論争 (*Seiji to bungaku ronsō*), see ŌKUBO Tsuneo 大久保典夫 et. al. (eds.): *Sengo bungaku ronsō* 戦後文学論争 (Literary Disputes of Post-war Period) 1, Banchō Shobō 番町書房 1972.

82 See IWAKAMI Jun’ichi 岩上淳一: “Kiroku bungaku ni tsuite” 記録文学について (Regarding Documentary Literature), *Shin Nihon bungaku* 新日本文学 (New Literature of Japan) 1.1 (1946): 18–22; at 21.

83 HOSODA Tamiki 細田民樹: “‘Minshu sensen’ no bungaku e” 「民主戦線」の文学へ (Towards a Literature at the Front of Democracy), *Chūgoku bunka* (Hiroshima Culture) 1.1 (1946): 2–6; at 6.

In this respect, Ōta Yōko's personal testimonies seems to fail the prerequisites of the newly promoted "documentary literature", as the author's alleged 'subjectivity' while giving testimony of her experiences is omnipresent in the texts. And they also failed the prerequisites of literature due to their lack of literariness, as often stated by contemporary critics.⁸⁴ Atomic bomb literature, in marked contrast to Holocaust literature, seemed to carry within itself the impossibility of being a literary text – at least for the literary establishment.

For literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru, authors such as Ōta Yōko failed as a reliable voice of the events of August 6, 1945 due to their intrinsic motivation for writing. In his essay "Art in the Nuclear Age" (*Genshi jidai no geijutsu*) from March 1955, he makes the following comment about Ōta Yōko: "If her only desire as a victim directly affected by the bomb is to become a spokesperson for all the other victims who were rendered help- and speechless, she will not be able to fulfill her real responsibility as an author."⁸⁵ According to Hanada, authors like Ōta Yōko were neither able to write objective reports on the atomic bomb (*kiroku*), nor able to put their innermost traumatic feelings and experiences into words adequately (*bungaku*). Furthermore, this inability on part of the writer impeded the communication with and the involvement of the reader when talking about August 6 as part of a commonly shared history. As John Whittier Treat strikingly points out:

Every representation of is a representation to; rhetoric is directed toward assisting the reader to grasp the work in a predetermined way. Such coercion, however gentle, is bound up with contending premises, both on the author's part and the reader's, over rights to knowledge and consequently power.⁸⁶

It seems that, somehow, for literary critics, atomic bomb writers like Ōta Yōko had forfeited their right to be traumatized as a survivor of the bomb right from the beginning. They were expected to give objective accounts on

84 Literary critic Ara Masahito, for example, acknowledged that, at least in her later works, Ōta Yōko managed to give her accounts on August 6 a more literature-like touch. See ARA Masahito 荒正人: *Sengo bungaku no tenbō* 戦後文學の展望 (Outlook on Post-war Literature), Mikasa Shobō 三笠書房 1956: 186–87.

85 HANADA Kiyoteru 花田清輝: "Genshi jidai no geijutsu" 原子時代の芸術 (Art in the Nuclear Age), *Nihon no genbaku bungaku* (Research on Atomic Bomb Literature) 15, Horupu Shuppan 1983: 198–208; at 204 [first published in *Sekai bunka nenkan* 世界文化年鑑, 1955].

86 TREAT 1995: 207.

August 6, with a new literary style and appropriate language that fulfilled all the prerequisites of ‘documentary literature’ as promoted by the literary establishment at that time. As Yamamoto Akihiro points out in his analysis, Ōta Yōko tried to employ a new mode of depiction in “City of Corpses” to “document that her memories are really true” by integrating external sources.⁸⁷ However, this struggle to find new ways to represent the unrepresentable was not acknowledged by her contemporaries, as Odagiri Hideo noted after the first dispute on atomic bomb literature.⁸⁸

In most cases, Ōta Yōko had to share her first-hand experiences as a *hibukasha* author with a predominantly *hi-hibakusha* 非被爆者 (non-atomic bomb victim) readership. However, over the course of institutionalizing national commemoration of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the first years after the war, the whole nation transformed into an imagined “community of sympathy” 共感の共同体 (*kyōkan no kyōdō tai*) for the victims. This meant that virtually everyone in Japan became a victim that was, at least emotionally, affected by the bomb.⁸⁹ This change of her readers’ perception of themselves as also being victims of the atomic bomb was barely perceivable initially, but ultimately posed a serious problem for most atomic bomb writers. It meant that writers such as Ōta Yōko and their accounts lost their singularity and legitimacy as authentic voices. In this sense, Ōta Yōko had to write about August 6 for readers who had emotionally become victims themselves and who now only selectively needed support from real victims – at a particular time of the year and for the purpose of national commemoration. Oda Atsuko, Ōta Yōko’s literary alter ego, clearly complains about this development in “Half Human”: “For broadcast stations, it was a very natural thing to call Oda Atsuko, who was assigned the mendacious label ‘atomic bomb author’, on this very day at that very hour, and let her talk about her memory of the bomb.”⁹⁰ Oda Atsuko’s voice is primarily

87 YAMAMOTO Akihiro: “Senryōka ni okeru hibaku taiken no ‘katari’” 占領下における被爆体験の「語り」 (‘Talking’ about Atomic Bomb Experiences under Occupation), *Genbaku bungaku kenkyū* (Research on Atomic Bomb Literature) 10 (2011): 101–11; at 107.

88 See ODAGIRI Hideo 小田切秀雄: *Genshi ryoku to bungaku* 原子力と文学 (Nuclear Energy and Literature), Kōdan Sha 1955: 187–88.

89 See HIRO SAITO: “Reiterated Commemoration: Hiroshima as National Trauma”, *Sociological Theory* 24.4 (2006): 353–76; at 368–73.

90 ŌTA Yōko: “Han ningen” 半人間 (Half Human), ŌTA Yōko: *Ōta Yōko shū* (Ōta Yōko Collection) 1, San’ichi Shobō 1982: 276–77.

listened to in the context of collective commemoration on August 6, 1945, as an affirmative voice of a supposedly shared memory of Hiroshima.

Over a period of ten years, during which Ōta Yōko continued to write about Hiroshima and the aftermath of the bomb, Hiroshima was not only detached from time and space, it was also somehow detached from the real victims of the bomb, who had to struggle for their official recognition as atomic bomb victims until 1957. For the real victims of the bomb, as Kuroko Kazuo points out, the first post-war decade was anything but an easy time, because telling unpleasant truths about the past was not really appreciated by a society that did its best to suppress all memories of the latest war.⁹¹

For the process of national victimization as a vital element of the new narrative of Japanese post-war identity, real *hibakusha* became more or less negligible. This 'nationalization' of post-war *katakana* Hiroshima went hand in hand with a 'depoliticization' of Hiroshima, a process Nemoto Masaya has described as "Hiroshima's nuclear universalism" 広島普遍主義 (*Hiroshima fuhen shugi*).⁹² Commemoration was primarily practiced for commemoration's sake, without questioning the reasons for the bombing or the exclusion of the victims from society. Atomic bomb literature as part of the communicative memory had, by all appearances, forfeited its *raison d'être* as an authentic voice from the past for post-war society, as the removal of an excerpt of Ōta Yōko's "City of Corpses" from school textbooks for junior and senior high school from the mid-1950s strikingly illustrates.⁹³ Eyewitnesses became systematically replaced by documentation centers and peace parks, for which plans had been made as early as 1947, as Ebara Sumiko illustrates in her study on the preservation campaigns for the Atomic Bomb

91 See KUROKO Kazuo: "Sengo, aru juso to ikari no kōzō" 戦後・ある呪詛と怒りの構造 (Post-war Period – Structures of Curse and Anger), *Shin Nihon bungaku* (New Literature of Japan) 32.4 (1977): 78–91; at 88.

92 See NEMOTO Masaya 根本雅也: *Hiroshima paradokusu. Sengo Nihon no hankaku to jindō ishiki* 広島パラドクス 戦後日本の反核と人道意識 (The Hiroshima Paradox: The Awareness of Anti-Nuclear and Humanity in Post-war Japan), Bensei Shuppan 勉誠出版 2018: 14–15.

93 Being one of the very few female writers giving accounts on August 6, Ōta Yōko was the target of criticism in a primary male-dominated literary establishment right from the beginning. However, the exclusion from school textbooks in the mid-1950s affected male writers like Osada Arata 長田新 with his "Children of the Bomb" 原爆の子 (*Genbaku no ko*, 1951) as well. The exclusion was the result of a conservative backlash in Japanese politics that took place at that time. This backlash heavily affected the production of critical textbooks, which were now defamed as so-called "red-textbooks", and paved the way for a new revisionist historical narrative in school education.

Dome in Hiroshima.⁹⁴ Right from the beginning, the reconstruction of Hiroshima was planned as a transformation into a city of peace, as early town planning sketches reveal. The ratification of the “Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law” by Japanese parliament in August 1949 accelerated this transformation process, as national funding could now be used to remove virtually all signs of the damage caused by the bomb and erect a memorial park for peace on the former ground zero. However, redesigning the city center into a place of peace and commemoration required the area to be cleared entirely. Therefore, bomb survivors who had been forced to live in barracks at the riverbanks, such as Atsushi and Koyuki in Ōta’s eponymous short novel “Riverbank”, were evicted from the center and moved to the outskirts of the city, into one of the aforementioned slums Ōta Yōko impressively describes in “Town and People in the Evening Calm”.

In 1954, Ōta Yōko was awarded the “Peace Culture Price” 平和文化賞 (*Heiwa bunka shō*) for “Half Human” and nominated for the 31th “Akutagawa Price” 芥川賞 (*Akutagawa shō*), the most prestigious award for literary newcomers. But none of the eight jury-members discussed her work in any greater detail in their statement, a symptomatic treatment of author and work in particular, and of *genbaku bungaku* in general.⁹⁵ For people in the mid-1950s, not only the post-war era had already been overcome, as suggested by the contemporary slogan “no longer post-war era” もはや戦後ではない (*mohaya sengo dewa nai*), but also the time of *genbaku bungaku* as an important voice from the recent past. As a result, Ōta Yōko became alienated from the literary establishment and her readers, undoubtedly being fully aware of the fact that her historic *kanji* Hiroshima could no longer be connected to her reader’s post-war *katakana* Hiroshima.⁹⁶ In her short novel “Half Nomad” 半放浪 (*Han hōrō*), written in 1956, the semi-autobiographic “I”, who leaves Tokyo to wander around the Izu Peninsula for an unspeci-

94 See EBARA Sumiko 榎原澄子: *Genbaku dōmu. Bussan chinretsu kan kara Hiroshima heiwa kinenhi e* 原爆ドーム 物産陳列館から平和記念碑へ (The Atomic Dome. From Product Exhibition Hall to Peace Memorial) (Rekishi bunka raiburari 歴史文化ライブラリー 431), Yoshikawa Kōbun Kan 吉川弘文館 2016: 53–105.

95 Only Uno Kōji 宇野浩二 provided a relatively detailed explanation for rejecting her work for the Akutagawa Price, stating that “it is indeed a remarkable fact that an author tries to write such a novel, but it is really a pity that the writing style, which is so essential for literature, is anything but good”; see UNO Kōji: “Dai-sanjū ikkai Akutagawa shō senpyō” 第31回芥川賞選評 (31th Selection for the Akutagawa Price), *Akutagawa shō zenshū* 芥川賞全集 (Complete Collection of the Akutagawa Price) 5, Bungei Shunjū 1982: 422.

96 For details, see ESASHI 1981: 184–217.

fied period, vents her frustration about a society that, in 1954, had been highly engaged in protests for the abolition of nuclear weapons following the hydrogen bomb test, and in 1955, only one year later, had become enchanted by the seductive promises of a peaceful use of nuclear energy: “After the hydrogen bomb test, the so-called ashes of death [*shi no hai* 死の灰] fell on Tokyo. I only thought: Serves you right! All of you should be contaminated by this lethal ash and die one after another.”⁹⁷

Writing about the atomic bomb and its aftermath was and still is very unpopular amongst the majority of Japanese readers, as it is part of an unwanted and highly contested memory. In the final analysis, it remains to be seen if 3/11 will bring about a fundamental change in the attitude towards atomic bomb literature in the long run, as Kobayashi Takayoshi optimistically prophesied in his 2016 study.⁹⁸ As shown above, Hiroshima has become an irreversibly sealed space in Japanese history, for the sake of the new post-war identity of national victimhood. Hence, only a thorough and critical revision of this post-war ideology will finally be able to lay the foundation for a long overdue reevaluation of *genbaku bungaku* as a crucial part of Japan's communicative memory and to finally establish a real, reciprocal dialogue between *hibakusha* author and *hi-hibakusha* reader for the first time.

6 Concluding Remarks

The case of Ōta Yōko has illustrated the difficulties an author of atomic bomb literature was confronted with in the first decade of the post-war period. As a female writer who tried to give account of a moment in history which an entire nation actually was trying to forget about as soon as possible, Ōta Yōko was, somehow, doomed to struggle right from the beginning of her career as a *genbaku sakka*. Her deliberate exclusion from Japan's literary canon – one of the reasons why it is difficult today to find any of her works even in well-sorted book stores – was less the result of her so-called lack of literariness than society's unwillingness to remember August 6 first and foremost as a local tragedy. Ōta Yōko's literature functioned as a counter-narrative to national commemoration, as it focused on the local 'real'

97 Ōta Yōko: “Han hōrō” (Half Normad), Ōta Yōko: *Ōta Yōko shū* (Ōta Yōko Collection) 3, San'ichi Shobō 1982: 296.

98 See KOBAYASHI Takayoshi 小林孝吉: *Genpatsu to genbaku no bungaku. Posuto-Fukushima no kibō* 原発と原爆の原爆 ポスト・フクシマの希望 (Literature about Nuclear Power Plants and Atomic Bombs: Hopes for Post-Fukushima), Seishidō 青柿堂 2016: 7–11.

hibakusha, instead of the national ‘imagined’ *hibakusha*. Since a canon, according to Aleida Assmann, “signifies a society’s trans-historical self-commitment to read and interpret [a certain work] over and over again”⁹⁹, Ōta’s exclusion from the literary canon was nothing more than the logical consequence of a nation’s decision to forget about the events of August 6.

In 2015, a campaign was launched on a local level to get atomic bomb literature inscribed in the UNESCO world heritage list until 2020, the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing on Hiroshima. The “Association for the Preservation of Literary Materials from Hiroshima” 広島文学資料保存の会 (*Hiroshima Bungaku Shiryō Hozon no Kai*), founded in 1987, put forward the idea to get original manuscripts of three *genbaku bungaku* authors, namely Hara Tamiki 原民喜, Tōge Sankichi 峠三吉, and Kurihara Sadako, inscribed into the list to preserve these materials for future generations. According to Horikawa Keiko, these materials have an outstanding universal value for mankind, since literary accounts were, as illustrated above, virtually the only reports on the atomic bombing, and by that comparable to other nominations on the list of documentary heritage, such as the Magna Carta or the Anne Frank Diaries.¹⁰⁰ However, this campaign, widely reported on in Japan’s leading newspapers, did neither include Ōta Yōko, one of the earliest voices from Hiroshima after the bombing, nor acknowledge the literary value of these ‘documents’. Here, the unconscious bias that *genbaku bungaku* is rather a documentary format than a literary format, as seen in the first dispute on atomic bomb literature, became apparent yet again.

However, the campaign was not blessed with success as of yet. Rather than nominating pieces of *genbaku bungaku* for the respective UNESCO program, which carries the risk of them being again instrumentalized for national discourses, as it became evident with Japan’s so-called dark heritage sites, a systematic reevaluation and recontextualization of *genbaku bungaku* as a highly contested counter-narrative of early post-war period seems to be badly needed – today perhaps more than ever.

99 Aleida ASSMANN: *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (published in English as: *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*), München: C. H. Beck 2006: 56.

100 HORIKAWA Keiko 堀川恵子: “Hiroshima bungaku wo sekai isan ni” ヒロシマ文学を世界遺産に (Making Literature from Hiroshima a World Heritage), *Bungaku kai* 文學界, (Literary World) 69.9 (2015): 94–108; at 107–08.