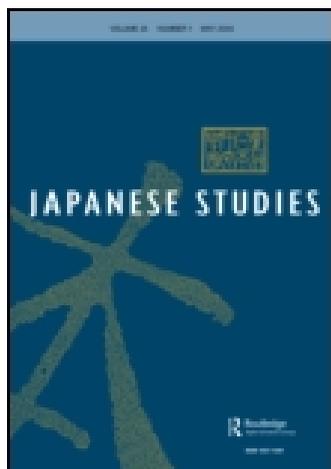


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From Local to National Experience: Has Hiroshima Become a ‘Trauma for Everybody’?

ANNA SHIPILOVA, *Independent Researcher*

Within Japan, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima is understood as a national experience that sets the country apart from nations that have been spared such devastation. A special phrase the Japanese use to describe their country is yuitsu hibaku kokka, ‘the only country that has experienced atomic bombing’. This phrase has become a powerful cliché for depicting Japan to a national and international audience. Even though Hiroshima was the experience of a comparatively small group before it spread to a larger collectivity, its transformation into a collective experience is regarded as a natural outcome, explained by the devastating nature of the event. This perspective, however, does not fully explain why people who have different war experiences unconditionally accept as their own experiences ones which they have not personally suffered. This article aims to clarify the process by which the Hiroshima experience was nationalised, and the period of its nationalisation. It also examines whether this transformation means that Hiroshima has become a ‘trauma for everybody’. This is achieved through the application of Jeffrey C. Alexander’s work on the transformation of Holocaust memories into a collective trauma.

The most distinctive feature of the bombing of Hiroshima as a story (hereafter I will refer to this event simply as ‘Hiroshima’) is its clearly determined boundaries, as evidenced by its widespread acceptance as an exceptional Japanese national experience. It is a frequently brandished symbol and repeatedly evoked memory, with a strongly developed commemorative infrastructure, whose representational meaning is tightly connected to the understanding of Japan as a state and nation; thus, we talk about it as a component of national identity.¹

In reality, Hiroshima (as well as Nagasaki) was not a ‘national experience’. In his announcement of Japan’s agreement to the Potsdam Declaration, the Emperor declared that a ‘cruel bomb’ was the reason for the war’s termination. This pronouncement connected the bombing to the national experience; nevertheless, Hiroshima was not viewed as such at the national level for a long period. The absence of such consciousness was partly due to censorship aimed primarily at preventing the promotion of anti-American sentiments. We should also note that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not experiences ‘familiar’ to the majority of the population. The cities were only two of the 66 Japanese cities bombed; in addition, roughly three million soldiers, sailors, and civilians were killed during the Asia-Pacific War.² Enduring fire-bombing, unconditional surrender, repatriation, and occupation were all experiences

¹This is fully discussed in Anthony Smith’s definition of national identity as a ‘continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myth and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations’; Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 18.

²Dower, ‘The Bombed’, 121.

shared by the geographically dispersed majority of Japanese. Why would these people, who grappled with their own tragedies, unconditionally accept as their own experience what they had not been through themselves? Understanding the transformation of the Hiroshima narrative in Japanese society necessitates determining not only why it became a national symbol, but also whether this perception developed into a sufficiently appealing collective experience that drove the Japanese to view it as their own traumatic experience.

From 'Because It Is Hiroshima' to a Constructed Identity

For decades, Hiroshima has been viewed as an unprecedented Japanese national experience, and the reasons Hiroshima became the core of national self-perception have not been questioned. The answer seemed apparent to the Japanese: 'because it is Hiroshima', an unparalleled event in the history of humanity. During the Cold War, anti-nuclear aspirations were regarded as ethnically acquired qualities of the Japanese which emerged naturally, as reflective of the *minzoku ishiki* (ethnic consciousness).³ It was not until the end of the Cold War that scholars analysed the functions that peace ideology played in Japanese society.⁴

Post-Cold War changes turned scholars' attention to the Hiroshima narrative itself. A few attempted to grasp the evolution of the narrative from a local to a national experience, and unveiled the structural changes in its perception. John Dower⁵ and Yūko Andō⁶ examined the penetration of the Hiroshima story into the realm of Japanese public memory. James Orr investigated the process that formed Japan's perception of itself as a victim, and argued that while Hiroshima became the climax of the mythology of self-victimisation, it was not its starting point.⁷ The shift from viewing Hiroshima as a naturally evolving conviction to identifying in it a constructed phenomenon was a significant breakthrough in understanding the role of the narrative.

The next breakthrough was made by Hiro Saito, who deviated refreshingly from conventional research by conducting a study based on the concept of a collective, using Jeffrey C. Alexander's approach to explain the changes in the perception of a non-carrier group, a larger audience who did not personally experience the tragedy. Saito investigated and captured the shift in non-carrier group emotion from pity – the feeling of 'being a spectator of trauma' – to sympathy, in which sympathy is the 'feeling of sharing a survivor's wounds'.⁸ Introducing the idea of collective trauma provided a new perspective for approaching Hiroshima's role within Japanese society. However, Saito's research was limited to a ten-year period, and gaps in correspondence between sources, materials, and the conclusions derived from them leave room for more thorough investigations. The question that remains unresolved is whether the entry of the

³In 1961, for example, Sakamoto argued that 'the experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the spirit of absolute rejection of hydrogen bombs, are without any exaggeration, a unique ethnical quality acquired by the post-war Japanese; a quality that they can be proud of'; Sakamoto, 'Kenryoku seiji to heiwa undō', 22. (All translations into English are the author's own unless otherwise stated.)

⁴For further details, see Ishida Takeshi, *Nihon no seiji to kotoba*; Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt*; Stronach, *Beyond the Rising Sun*; Kōseki, *Heiwa kokka Nihon*; Dower, 'Futatsu no taisei no naka'; and Fujiwara, *Sensō o kioku suru*.

⁵Dower, 'The Bombed'.

⁶Andō, *Hiroshima-Nagasaki*; Andō, 'Gakkō kyōiku'; Andō, 'Hankakutoshi no ronri'.

⁷Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 36–71.

⁸Saito, 'Reiterated Commemoration', 359.

narrative into the public realm means that the Hiroshima narrative has become a story that evokes a personal response from the average Japanese.

Collective Trauma as a Collectively Founded Phenomenon: Definition and Formation

Studies on collective trauma investigate how a traumatic event experienced by a carrier group becomes an identity component for a larger collectivity. Although the nature of collective trauma is understood in diverse ways, a consensus is that collective trauma significantly shapes collective identities and/or symbolic belief systems. On the basis of this consensus, I define collective trauma as an end product in the following manner: *collective trauma pertains to a belief accepted by larger collectivity that a particularly dramatic past event has had a strong effect on a group's state of being, influencing all its members and drastically differentiating them from the members of other groups, even if they do not personally belong to the primary group of victims/survivors of the event in question. It implies that larger collectivities feel personally connected to a traumatic event they have not personally experienced.*

This transformation can be understood in a number of ways. The first is the psychoanalytic approach,⁹ which is strongly criticised for its application of individually relevant rules to a community or group. For this reason, I believe this method not to be relevant to this study. The second approach is the quality approach, which suggests that the harmfulness of an event itself is the *natural* cause that drives its evolution into a collective trauma. Arthur Neal, an adherent of this approach, argues that natural disasters, wars, revolutions, economic crises, and other 'serious disruptions of the tranquillity of everyday life tend to be remembered and to become embedded into collective perception'.¹⁰ This is the perspective from which Japanese society tended to view Hiroshima for a long time. Nevertheless, Neal's argument suffers from a few weaknesses. Collective memory studies disproportionately focus on 'successful cases' that have already been subjected to an evaluation of traumatic experiences, and neglect myriad events that have fallen into oblivion. Such studies also fail to explain why some small-scale events, which cannot be classified as fundamental or comprehensively meaningful to a larger collectivity, later evolve into collective traumas for groups that are larger than those that actually experienced such events. This is the case of Hiroshima, a traumatic event that initially influenced a geographically determined minority, but one that was transformed into a national story. Was this transformation a 'natural' outcome or was it influenced by internal and external factors? Answering these questions necessitates thinking beyond the quality approach.

The final approach, proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander, rests on the assumption that events themselves do not create collective traumas, but that such trauma is a 'socially mediated attribution'.¹¹ Alexander argues that harmfulness per se does not turn an event into a collective trauma because 'traumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are *believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity*'.¹² He uses

⁹Jenny Edkins, for example, argues that trauma occurs when a betrayal of trust happens, such as 'when the powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors'; Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 4.

¹⁰Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, 35.

¹¹Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', 8.

¹²Alexander, 'On the Social Construction of Moral Universals', 101 (emphasis added).

the perception in the United States of the Holocaust as an example and emphasises that ‘in April 1945, the Holocaust was not “the Holocaust”’;¹³ only in 1970 did the mass killing of Jews become ‘a sacred evil’.¹⁴ The same transformation can be perceived in the Hiroshima narrative: in August 1945, Hiroshima was a local tragedy and some time passed before it became the ‘Hiroshima’ that is understood at the national level. Therefore, if we apply the insights that Alexander gained from studies on alterations to the Holocaust narrative to investigations of how Hiroshima memories have been constructed, we may understand the inner processes behind the transformation.

Alexander’s Approaches and Methods

In this article, Alexander’s approach is used as a tool for (1) investigating when and how Hiroshima developed into a national trauma, and (2) examining whether the role that the Hiroshima narrative plays in Japanese society is attributable to the national trauma described by Alexander. Alexander outlines three key groups that influence the process by which the perception of an event as a collective trauma develops. First, Alexander assumes that carrier groups are important agents for popularising an event and convincing other members of a collectivity that they are also traumatised by the event. The influence and weight of a carrier group, its ability to construct institutional structures for commemorating and influencing symbolic resources, and its quantitative correspondence with the broader collectivity are determinative.¹⁵

Second, narration itself is considered an important element. At the start of the process, ‘most audience members see little if any relation between themselves and the victimized group’;¹⁶ therefore, only when the frames of narration broaden to include a wider collectivity do the individuals start to feel personally connected to a traumatic event and place themselves within the circle of shared victimhood. Alexander outlines important steps in the process of narrative transformation. He emphasises that the Holocaust narrative initially presented a clear image of perpetrators and victims – Nazis, who were seen as a distinctive group embodying absolute evil, and Jews, who were seen as among the many but nonetheless distinctive victimized groups. Later, when anti-anti-Semitism became widespread, the murder of Jews became perceived as an unprecedented crime in the history of humankind. Alexander believes that this change in perception did not cause the tragedy to be viewed in connection with various personal traumatic experiences by others because the Jews were still regarded as an exceptional group. With the development of social thought and changes in international policy, the Nazis were then de-demonised and assigned the features of ordinary and recognisable men; that is, anybody who abuses human rights. This expansion of the circle of perpetrators triggered likewise the expansion of the circle of victims to include all individuals whose human rights were abused. Given these transformations, the Holocaust narrative was widely acknowledged and turned into an emotionally compelling narrative within the USA. This step-by-step broadening of the circles of perpetrators and victims from exclusive groups into inclusive groups provides a matrix for examining the transformation of the Hiroshima narrative.

¹³Ibid., 197.

¹⁴Ibid., 222.

¹⁵Ibid., 11–12.

¹⁶Ibid., 14.

Finally, a narrative is widely accepted because of its institutionalisation at different levels. Alexander claims that 'social narratives are not composed by some hidden hand of history',¹⁷ but emerge in 'bits and pieces'.¹⁸ These 'bits and pieces' are formed through institutionalisation in different arenas – religious, legal, mass media, state bureaucracy, and art – and also comprise stories, movies, books, laws, and the speeches of political figures and the cultural elite. Alexander emphasises that the evolution of a narrative from a carrier group trauma to a trauma embracing a larger collectivity is gradual and influenced by multiple actors.

These key groups identified by Alexander help unravel the evolution of the Hiroshima narrative, the institutionalisation of its memories, and the role that carrier groups played in both. Next, I analyse two dimensions of the story's development: the construction of (1) a commemorative infrastructure; and (2) metaphysical symbols.

Examining the development of a commemorative infrastructure, physical objects and rituals, such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony (HMPC), assist in understanding the involvement of local actors and state officials in this process. Such understanding clarifies the period during which the Hiroshima narrative developed into a story of national importance.

This article will now trace alterations in the Hiroshima narrative by examining the 'Peace Declarations' (*heiwa sengen*) made by Hiroshima's mayors, the speeches delivered by prime ministers during the HMPC and on other occasions, and the articles published annually on 6–7 August in the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* newspapers. Examining these sources provides an opportunity to compare perceptions of Hiroshima at three different levels: local, state, and public memory. It also illuminates storytelling dynamics and serves as an avenue from which to grasp these alterations at both micro and macro levels. The next section focuses on whether the story is viewed as a carrier group trauma or as a national trauma by different actors, on the changes in the understanding of victims and perpetrators, and on the explanations and links that connect a carrier group tragedy to a larger collectivity.

This investigation reflects results for three periods: (1) 1945–1959, the period in which the Hiroshima narrative was acknowledged; (2) 1960–1989, when Hiroshima evolved into a national experience and the perception of it as such expanded; and (3) 1990 onwards, the period when a series of attempts (most of which failed) to reshape the Hiroshima narrative and enlarge frames of perpetrator/victim circles were undertaken.

The Evolution of the Hiroshima Narrative

Period of Acknowledgement (1945–1959)

After Hiroshima's complete devastation, the need to mourn went hand in hand with aspirations to forget the horrors of war and restore the city from ruins. The first commemoration ceremony was held in 1946, not only as commemoration but also as a Peace Festival. It was launched under the initiative of the Hiroshima Peace Festival Association and was a citizen-led initiative: the mayor was appointed the head of the association, which was headquartered at the City Hall but funded independently of the city budget.¹⁹ In 1955, however, a drastic change occurred: Hiroshima City took full

¹⁷Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', 14.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Hiroshima-shi eiseikyoku, *Hibaku 50 shūnen*, 62–63.

control over the HPMC and cut its ties with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Association, which became pro-left and supportive of anti-nuclear movements.²⁰ Cutting off the HPMC's connection to its grassroots changed the nature of the ceremony, turning it into a more official event.

Local commemorative infrastructure was fully developed during this period. In 1949, Hiroshima was accorded the status of 'Peace Memorial City', a privilege viewed as the result of the combined efforts of then-Hiroshima mayor Hamai Shinzō (1947–1955), and Yamada Setsuo, who was a member of the House of Councillors from Hiroshima prefecture.²¹ This special status gave Hiroshima the right to receive special aid from the government. In 1952, the Peace Memorial Park was completed and commemorations have been held there ever since. That year, the Hiroshima Peace Festival was renamed the HPMC. By that time, its program was already an established initiative to which only a few changes had been made. The last development was the completion of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in 1954.

The process of symbolic meaning formation is represented in the annual Peace Declarations issued by Hiroshima's mayors. Hamai Shinzō and Watanabe Tadao (1955–1958) took office during this period. The Peace Declaration was an outcome of what they, as *hibakusha* (nuclear bomb survivors) and politicians, perceived the Hiroshima tragedy to be and what they were allowed to say under press code restrictions. The Japanese nation or state was not presented in their narratives, and this did not change even after the Bikini Atoll incident in 1954. The mayors viewed Hiroshima as a local experience but, at the same time, the story was framed as a transnational issue highlighting the dangers of nuclear war, and survivors had a special right and mission to warn the world:

At the eighth anniversary of the atomic bombing, we, the citizens of Hiroshima, as the first people in the world exposed to atomic bombing, should promote repeatedly the story of Hiroshima to people all over the world.²²

The Peace Declarations during this period did not touch on perpetrators and were focused on nuclear weapons as the primary evil and threat to humanity. During the first few years, the Declarations tended to conjure images of the city's destruction, describing it as a 'living hell'. Only in 1955 was attention directed towards survivors; they were represented as a people who continue to live in fear or suffering from the 'nuclear bomb disease'.²³

SCAP²⁴ military officers attended the Peace Festival in 1946 up to 1950, when the festival was abolished. For three years in a row, speeches on behalf of SCAP commander General MacArthur were delivered during the ceremony.²⁵ Representatives of

²⁰See Ubuki, *Heiwakinenshikiten no ayumi*, 28–30.

²¹Ishida Norioki analysed public discourse in local newspapers and revealed that before 8 March 1949, no discussion or even mention of legislation to establish Hiroshima as a Peace Memorial City appeared in the print media. An interval of only two months marked the date on which the law was first mentioned and 10 May, when it was adopted by the Diet. Ishida and other researchers are inclined to believe that some special agreement among Hamai, Yamada, and SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) may have driven the formulation and implementation of this law. See Ishida, 'Hiroshima heiwa kinen toshi', 190.

²²Hamai, 'Heiwa sengen', 8 August 1953.

²³See the Peace Declarations from the period 1955 to 1959.

²⁴SCAP is an acronym for the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, but this term also referred to the entire occupation authority in Japan during the period 1945–1952.

²⁵Kamata, 'Hiroshima-Nagasaki no heiwasesen no rekishi', 26–58.

the prime minister began attending the event from 1947; from 1949 to 1955, however, no representatives participated. For the next 10 years, the prime minister was represented mostly by Hiroshima members of the House of Councillors, a move that reflected the national government's minimal interest in the event.²⁶ Unfortunately, no records of the speeches delivered at the HMPC by the representatives in the second half of the 1950s can be found. Nevertheless, governmental officials' attitude towards nuclear issues can be ascertained from the relevant policies implemented during the period.

No reference to nuclear issues was made at the Autonomous Peace Diplomacy initiative adopted by Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirō in 1954. Appeals for a ban on nuclear testing appeared for the first time in 1957, in a policy speech by Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke. At that point, however, no comments about the special mission of the Japanese people were made. The appeals were issued on the basis of the 'pure humanistic position and feelings of the Japanese people'.²⁷

Orr states that during the same period, few intellectuals understood Hiroshima as a national experience, and most of the Japanese public did not perceive Hiroshima as relevant to their own experiences. Some evidence supports this argument: Japan did not, for example, become a cradle of the anti-nuclear movement. The Japanese Scientists' Declaration on War and Peace²⁸ did not include nuclear-related issues and the first nuclear weapons ban was initiated by an overseas organisation – the World Peace Movement Stockholm Appeal in 1950. This movement received minimal attention in Japan because, until the beginning of 1954, Japanese pacifist movements were mostly fighting against American military bases and the expansion of military agreements.²⁹ Legislation regulating the pensions of war veterans and bereaved families was implemented in 1952 and 1953, whereas laws that provided for free medical care to atomic bombing survivors were adopted only in 1957, implying that the *hibakusha* and the human effects of the bombing were of secondary importance. Ongoing discrimination against the *hibakusha* vividly revealed their alienation from society.³⁰

The restrictions imposed on the press are regarded as one of the reasons for the lack of awareness of Hiroshima's significance. However, in 1949, when censorship was formally terminated,³¹ a number of Hiroshima-related poems, essays, and novels were published and several movies were released.³² In 1956, in the early days of NHK broadcasting, programs about the *hibakusha* were shown on TV. According to Andō, the programs of that period portrayed them as a very special people whose burdens – captured in the eloquent pathos of the synecdoche 'scars of the *hibakusha*' – were extraordinary.³³

²⁶Information concerning the prime minister's involvement in the ceremony is based on a document I received from Hiroshima City Hall (Sensō to heiwa ni kansuru kagakusha no seimei).

²⁷Kishi, 'Shisei hōshin enzetsu'.

²⁸Ōtake, *Sengo bōei mondai shiryōshū*, 357–361.

²⁹Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 45–46.

³⁰Some of the reasons for the particularisation of the *hibakusha* are addressed in this paper. For more details about discrimination against *hibakusha* see Ibuse Masuji, who described the ostracism they suffered in his novel *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain). Also, an analysis of this issue from the *hibakusha* perspective is provided by Yoneyama, *Hiroshima kioku no poritikusu*, 133–167.

³¹Ibid., 127.

³²Andō, *Hiroshima-Nagasaki wa dono yō ni hyōshō sarete kita ka*, 139.

³³Ibid., 107.

Hiroshima-related information was also presented in print media. In 1947, the *Asahi* reported that a victim's shadow had been burned onto stones by the nuclear heat which the bomb generated.³⁴ In 1952, the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* began publishing personal *hibakusha* stories, depicting the experiences of the *hibakusha* as incomparable and emphasising the long-term effects of radiation on humans.³⁵ While presenting the Hiroshima experience as exclusive, both newspapers showed that international delegations to the HPMC viewed Hiroshima as a Japanese tragedy, and addressed their speeches to the Japanese people. This projection provides an idea of how Japan was viewed externally; it was a positively sympathetic perception of Japan, which at that stage was still concerned about being trusted by the international community.³⁶

After the Bikini Atoll incident, the Hiroshima narrative gained considerable national attention, eventually facilitating its further acknowledgment in Japanese society. First, Hiroshima became a symbol for Japanese leftist movements. They built up their rhetoric describing Hiroshima as a unique Japanese experience, which they linked to the special role and mission of Japanese people. Orr believes that the strategy of 'uniquely privileging the Japanese'³⁷ brought this movement success in the 1950s. Second, the incident spilled into the political realm when it was discovered that radioactive tuna – the consequence of the Bikini Atoll incident – had been sold in Japanese markets. This expanded perception of the 'enemy' and the 'victims' helped to bridge carrier groups and wider audiences. The enemy was no longer solely the bomb but extended to radiation pollution through food.

In sum, from 1945 to 1959 the Hiroshima narrative was not integrated into the national narrative in official public memory at the national and local levels. Changes that were critical to the further integration of the narrative into Japanese society, however, occurred during this period. First, a commemorative infrastructure was fully developed at the local level. Second, the perception of the enemy was expanded and accorded relevance by the wider collective. This acknowledgment differs significantly from the transformation in perceptions of Holocaust perpetrators as described by Alexander; in the case of the Holocaust, the group of perpetrators was clearly defined and widely accepted from the very beginning. For Hiroshima, the question of who should be blamed for the Hiroshima tragedy had not been addressed because of a variety of international and domestic factors. As a result, the tool of destruction and its consequence – the bomb and radiation – were instead viewed as the causes, whereas the 'real' perpetrator remained unclear. Third, victims were personalised and visualised, but their experiences were described as exclusive. Lastly, the story itself became an important part of the leftist agenda, narrated as a unique Japanese event. Significantly, this perception was supported by the positive attention Hiroshima received from the international community, which also viewed it as a national Japanese experience. During this period, no mechanism facilitated a strong connection between the *hibakusha* and a wider audience, but against the backdrop of the Cold War the story began taking shape and was incorporated into the political agenda.

³⁴Hiroshima ni nokoru "ikita kage".

³⁵See, for example, 'Genbakuichigō kanja intai chikashi'; 'Chikara ni yoru heiwa ni hansei'; 'Genbaku shōgai'.

³⁶In his inaugural policy speech, delivered at the opening of Session No. 38 of Parliament on 1 January 1961, Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda said, 'I strongly believe that all countries will start to trust the sincerity and good will of our country'; Ikeda, 'Shisei hōshin enzetsu', 30 January 1961.

³⁷Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 63.

Hiroshima as Part of the National Narrative (1960–1989)

As discussed above, the 1950s saw left-wing movements develop the Hiroshima narrative by encouraging Japanese feelings of uniqueness and shared victimhood, and differentiating them from the rest of the world. In the 1960s, Japan as peaceful nation, with the Hiroshima tragedy at its core, became part of the official national narrative. High-ranking officials began actively incorporating Hiroshima into their visions of the Japanese past, present, and future. In 1960, the *Yomiuri shinbun* for the first time published the entirety of the prime minister's speech at the HPMC. The prime minister referred to Japan as the 'first and only country that experienced atomic bombings' (*yuitsu hibaku kokka*), a phrase that has since then been commonly used; in 1964, it was included for the first time in an official policy speech.³⁸

Whether top-ranking officials considered Hiroshima a national trauma is difficult to determine, but they had many reasons to adopt the Hiroshima narrative in articulating the Japanese position in the international arena. Given the significant changes in consciousness driven by sustainable economic growth, the attention of ordinary Japanese shifted to national identity and self-perception.³⁹ In the 1960s, three major newspapers began discussing Japan's role in the international community, as well as the necessity of constructing a national identity and healthy nationalism.⁴⁰ The Hiroshima narrative, which provided the Japanese with feelings of distinctiveness and was likely to be accepted by people of different political views, filled this role.

Furthermore, in the early 1960s, the Cuban Missile Crisis elevated nuclear-related issues to the top of the world agenda. For Japan, the issue became of primary importance when China joined the nuclear arms race in 1964. By the end of the 1960s, Japan had technical potential to produce its own nuclear weapons,⁴¹ with politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party supporting the idea of a nuclear scenario for Japan.⁴² During negotiations over the reversion of Okinawa, however, the government eventually announced that Japan would stay beneath the US nuclear umbrella; on 13 March 1969, Prime Minister Satō Eisaku confirmed that three non-nuclear principles would be applied to Okinawa.⁴³ This pacifist rhetoric became a significant source of leverage within bilateral relations with the US.

Tracing the official perception of the Hiroshima narrative through the annual speeches delivered at the HPMC shows us how Japan was treated as the only nation

³⁸Satō, 'Shisei hōshin enzetsu', 21 November 1964.

³⁹According to an NHK public opinion poll conducted in 1963, the number of people who deemed Japanese 'better' than Westerners grew to 33%, and only 14% regarded the Japanese as inferior to Westerners, a huge change compared with the results of the poll conducted in 1953, whose outcomes for the same scales were 20% and 28%, respectively. Tamotsu Aoki also detected a change in self-identification in the development of the 'theory of Japanese rhetoric': in 1963, the 'recognition of the positive features of the Japanese and Japanese culture became the main trend'. See NHK, *Zusetu: Sengo seronshi* and Aoki, *Nihon bunkaron no hen'yō*.

⁴⁰Shipilova, 'Kokumin aidentitii', 17–23.

⁴¹Welfield, *An Empire in Eclipse*, 265.

⁴²In 1967, the *Asahi* published a number of articles describing LDP nuclear ambitions. See, for example, 'Kaku mochikomi heno fukusen', where the *Asahi* reported the opinions of politicians supporting the idea of a nuclear scenario for Japan and published a comment by Prime Minister Satō, who argued that 'we should have a right attitude to nuclear [issues] and overcome our nuclear allergy'.

⁴³Satō, Parliament No. 27, Main Session of the House of Councils, 13 July 1969, http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/cgi-bin/KENSAKU/swk_dispdoc.cgi?SESSION=5759&SAVED_RID=6&PAGE=0&POS=0&TOTAL=0&SRV_ID=4&DOC_ID=14518&DPAGE=1&DTOTAL=2&DPOS=1&SORT_DIR=1&SORT_TYPE=0&MODE=1&DMY=13224.

to have been subjected to atomic bombings. The relationship between the Hiroshima tragedy and a larger audience was explained by a metaphor suggested by Satō. In his speech at the HMPC in 1963, Satō stated that the ‘remarkable restoration and prosperity of the city of Hiroshima are symbols of the restoration and prosperity of Japan’.⁴⁴ This metaphor bridged the post-war experiences of most Japanese people, who had shared the adversity of defeat and then the success of Japan’s ‘miraculous’ post-war restoration. The efforts of ordinary Japanese people and the economic progress they helped bring about became symbols of shared success. The other link was based on discourse about the special role and mission of Japan in warning humanity about the evils of nuclear war. The perpetrator issue was never addressed. Nuclear war was viewed as a threat to humanity and was underlined in nearly every speech. Non-nuclear related issues, such as territorial conflicts or other problems in the international community, were mentioned in very few speeches, and no consistency of approach to other traumatic events and victimized groups, let alone relationship with them, was developed. Consequently the Hiroshima narrative did not build in any linkages to other victimized groups and traumas.

As a result, the official Hiroshima narrative became part of a ‘grand story’ and received, accordingly, representation in all important state ceremonies and events. Since 1965, high-ranking officials have attended the HMPC as representatives of the prime minister. In 1971, Prime Minister Satō visited the HMPC for the first time, and since 1981, visits to Hiroshima or Nagasaki commemorative ceremonies have become more or less customary.

Similar to state officials, the mayors increased their involvement in the process of symbol recreation by exerting control over allocated commemoration spaces. Given that the HMPC grew into a political symbol for left-wing movements, city officials looked for ways to de-politicise it and the space in which it was conducted. First, after the riots and clashes between left- and right-wing groups in 1959, the attendance of political groups of any kind at the HMPC was prohibited. After the ban-the-bomb movement divided into two factions in 1963, Hiroshima city officials drew a clear distinction between themselves and the movements.⁴⁵ As an additional measure, all the street stalls located within the vicinity of the Peace Memorial Park were shut down in 1967; protests, meetings, gatherings, and even walking on the grass were prohibited.⁴⁶ The effects of these changes were the formalisation and sacralisation of the space that commemorated Hiroshima.

In the 1960s, Hiroshima mayors continued to avoid the perpetrator issue or any international issues other than those that directly concerned the dangers of nuclear war. There was no change in the perception of the main evil, that is to say, the nuclear-related dangers that had made victims of the *hibakusha*. This absence of any development in the perception of the perpetrator may indicate stagnation in the narrative trajectory, but such apparent quiescence most probably originated from the aforementioned intention to avoid politicising the memory of Hiroshima and contradicting national authorities. Nonetheless, the Hiroshima narrative of victimhood differed markedly from the nationally constructed narrative of victimhood. The mayoral Peace Declarations during this period emphasised the devastation and scale of the tragedy, but not the post-war successes. They represented

⁴⁴Copies of the speeches delivered by prime ministers at the HMPC from 1962 to 2006 were provided by the Ministry of Welfare. The speeches delivered in 1960 and 1961 were published by the *Yomiuri*. Since the late 1990s, the speeches of prime ministers have been uploaded online and are accessible from the list of successive prime ministers at the home page of the Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet: http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/archive/ (accessed 3 July 2014).

⁴⁵Ubuki, *Heivakinenshikiten no ayumi*, 38.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Hiroshima as an exceptional and unique tragedy: 'Hiroshima was burned to the ground in one moment';⁴⁷ 'sweltering heat turned the city into hell';⁴⁸ 'radiation diseases continue to threaten the lives of the survivors; the severity of its effect cannot be measured still'.⁴⁹ The Hiroshima tragedy was also depicted as an exclusive and local, but simultaneously transnational, experience: 'Nowadays, collective human entities should not be restricted to separate nation-states, but should be broadened to the entire Earth'.⁵⁰

In 1978, however, the Hiroshima story was positioned within the national context on the local level, when the then Mayor Araki Takeshi used the phrase 'our country, which is the only country that experienced nuclear bombing',⁵¹ for the first time. Since the 1980s, mayors have regularly referred to Japan and its government in its remembrance: 'As the only country that experienced nuclear bombing, the Japanese government should adhere to its peaceful principles and the three non-nuclear policies, and play a leading role in abolishing nuclear weapons'.⁵²

Like the Hiroshima mayors and state officials, the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* depicted the Hiroshima tragedy as an unparalleled experience. Numerous articles and editorials were published on the life stories of *hibakusha* during this period. In these articles, the *hibakusha* are portrayed as a very special group of people 'who had [had] a glimpse of hell';⁵³ through such experiences, they were 'baptized' and endowed with the special mission of telling the world about the nuclear threat. The reports characterised the *hibakusha* as a people suffering from 'radiation sickness' or 'terrified of a death that might come for them at any moment'.⁵⁴ This manner of depicting the *hibakusha* and their experiences made their encounter with the bomb, as the *Asahi* stated it, 'impossible to understand for those who [had] not experienced it'.⁵⁵

At the same time, both newspapers narrated the Hiroshima story as a collective national experience that only the Japanese had undergone, repeatedly emphasising that 'as the only country that experienced nuclear bombing, Japan has to appeal to the world about nuclear danger. It is the will of the Japanese people'.⁵⁶ Controversy surrounds the assumption that a particular experience is highly specific and can be understood by a restricted carrier group and nobody else while proclaiming it as a national experience. The *Asahi* acknowledged this controversy, and in one of its editorials, raised the problem of bridging the *hibakusha* experience with the national narrative:

This experience was very special. Those who have not experienced it cannot understand what is hidden deep inside the hearts and prayers of the *hibakusha*. In order to transform this experience into social thoughts and movements, it should be generalized.⁵⁷

⁴⁷This is the most frequently used phrase, but different variations are found in the Peace Declarations of 1968, 1969, 1971, 1975, and 1976, <http://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/www/contents/0000000000/1111729228787/index.html>.

⁴⁸Araki, 'Heiwa sengen', 6 August 1980.

⁴⁹Yamada, 'Heiwa sengen'.

⁵⁰Hamai, 'Heiwa sengen', 6 August 1966.

⁵¹Araki, 'Heiwa sengen', 6 August 1978 <http://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/www/contents/00000000000000/1111718197970/index.html>

⁵²Araki, 'Heiwa sengen', 6 August 1985, <http://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/www/contents/00000000000000/1111715138064/index.html>.

⁵³'Hitosuji no inori 25nen'.

⁵⁴'Genbaku kinebi o mukaete'.

⁵⁵'Nagasaki no hibaku 33 kaiki'.

⁵⁶'Wasurarenai 8 gatsu 6 nichi'.

⁵⁷'Hiroshima hibaku 30 nen o mukaete'.

The same editorial nonetheless established that the generalisation had been achieved through the promotion of the perception that nuclear weapons were an evil that led to nuclear danger. In contrast to the *Asahi*, the *Yomiuri* did not question the national character of the Hiroshima experience. It strongly emphasised the immense threat to mankind and assumed that ‘everybody [is] far from feeling only sympathy, because we cannot be sure that the same will not happen to us one day’.⁵⁸

Both newspapers periodically attempted to expand the circle of victims by broadening the way victimhood is comprehended. The *Asahi*, and after a significant delay, the *Yomiuri*, touched on the problem of non-Japanese *hibakusha* and war responsibility, thus slightly loosening the borders of victim perception. The issue of other civilian victims was raised, but did not gain traction against the mainstream approach, which was to place the *hibakusha* atop the victim hierarchy: ‘atomic-bomb survivors are different from other war victims; they are very special victims’.⁵⁹ However, viewing the *hibakusha* as an exceptional group also served to create discrimination against them. Articles regarding discrimination against *hibakusha* began to be published in the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* in the second half of the 1960s, but in very insignificant numbers, indicating that the problem did not receive sufficient public attention.⁶⁰

The discussion above indicates that in 1960, national and local officials, as well as the media, began to refer to Hiroshima as a national experience. It also became a symbol of shared post-war economic success. These factors, along with feelings of distinctiveness, influenced the transformation of Hiroshima as a local tragedy into a national trauma. However, there were still a number of differences between the process of trauma expansion as described by Alexander and the expansion process of the Hiroshima narrative.

First, the role of a carrier group in convincing a wider audience that its members are also victims of the same event was not as significant in the case of Hiroshima. At the local level, Hiroshima was incorporated into the national narrative only in the late 1970s, during which various political groups, national officials, and different media outfits played considerably larger roles than the carrier group in transforming the Hiroshima tragedy into a national narrative.

Second, unlike the transformation of the Holocaust narrative, the Hiroshima narrative avoided the perpetrator issue and assigned the role of ‘ultimate evil’ to the bomb. The narrative functioned in such a way that the victimhood of the atomic bomb survivors remained within the framework of an exclusive experience. As a result, Hiroshima victimhood was not linked to other types of victimhood, but endowed the *hibakusha* with an exceptional status in society, placing them at the top of the victim hierarchy. Despite the exclusivity of the *hibakusha* experience, however, the story was narrated as a shared Japanese tragedy – a belief based on feelings of shared victimhood and collective mission, further reinforced by fears of nuclear devastation.

As a result, therefore, the Hiroshima narrative of this period fits the definition of a national trauma because it occupied an important place in Japanese self-perception and differentiated Japanese from non-Japanese. Nonetheless, the manner by which it was narrated does not replicate the process that Alexander elucidates in his research: the change in victim and perpetrator perceptions did not develop to include wider audiences

⁵⁸‘Natsu to hibaku’.

⁵⁹‘Hiroshima hibaku 30 nen o mukaete’.

⁶⁰Between 1960 and 1989, only three articles in the *Asahi* and four articles in the *Yomiuri* raised the problem of discrimination against the *hibakusha*.

in its frame. Therefore, the Hiroshima narrative became a national emblem that extrinsically encompassed all features of national trauma, but intrinsically did not have relevance and emotional connectedness to a larger collectivity.

Beyond 1991: Changes with the End of the Cold War?

The end of the Cold War triggered drastic changes in world politics, but the most significant in relation to our topic was the diminishing possibility of nuclear war. Although a few nuclear-related issues remained on the agenda, the world's attention at the end of the twentieth century mostly shifted to civil wars, and religious and ethnic conflicts. Consequently, Japan's role of standing guard for the sake of humanity to stop nuclear devastation lost its timeliness, meaning that the way Hiroshima was narrated changed after 1990.

Japan had to face the fact that its positive self-identification as a 'peaceful country' and limited contribution to world order no longer corresponded with the world's value system.⁶¹ This situation drove Japan to reconsider the practice of providing only material and monetary support to peace initiatives; in August 1992, the Diet passed the International Peace Cooperation (PKO) Law and Japanese military personnel were deployed to Cambodia. These decisions became a turning point for reconsidering what being a 'peaceful country' now meant in Japan.

The end of the Cold War also spelled significant changes in the balance of security in the Asia-Pacific region, precipitated by the economic rise and military modernisation of China and the growing nuclear threat from North Korea.⁶² These changes pushed Japan to reconsider its relations with its close neighbours, which included re-evaluating its role as a perpetrator of the Asia-Pacific War. To strengthen its position in the region, Japan reconsidered its alliance with the US, which led to amendments to the Mutual Defence Guidelines in 1996 and the adoption of the National Emergency Law in 1998, in which Japan abandoned its policy of exclusively 'homeland defence'.

These radical changes made the self-identification story, constructed during the Cold War, incompatible with the new world order and triggered a crisis of identity in Japanese politics. These changes found representation in the policy speeches delivered by prime ministers,⁶³ but no conspicuous changes can be observed as to the way the Hiroshima story was told at the official level: it was still a national story. Speeches focused only on nuclear-related issues and rarely touched upon other problems. The issue of Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War was never discussed. Significantly, even North Korea's development of nuclear weapons was referred to in a speech only once in 1994, demonstrating that no attempt had been made to update the Hiroshima narrative in accordance with current political needs.

⁶¹For example, Matsuoka Hiroshi underscores that 'Japan sent minesweepers and contributed \$13 million, but received neither appreciation nor gratitude. The isolation in the international arena became a trauma that triggered discourse about possibility of Self Defence Forces dispatch overseas'; Matsuoka, *20seiki no kokusai seiji*, 378. For more details about Japan's contribution to the first Iraq War (1990–1991), see Shimotomai and Kitaoka, *Shinseiki no sekai to Nihon*, 325–329.

⁶²For an analysis of the post-Cold War situation in East Asia see, for example, Green, 'Reisengo no nichibeï dômei', 39–44.

⁶³Starting from the 1990s, such addresses frequently emphasised the necessity of active contribution to world politics, and raised the 'principle of international cooperation' as a goal of Japanese foreign policy.

By contrast, the Peace Declarations underwent a number of transformations. No changes marked the manner by which the Hiroshima was viewed as a national experience and used as transnational leverage:

As the government that was the first to experience atomic bombing, the Japanese government should lead the world and urge nuclear powers in taking action towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. At the same time, we the Japanese people should seriously consider non-reliance on nuclear power security policy.⁶⁴

However, in the 1990s, the Peace Declarations began to reshape and expand victim–perpetrator circles. The fact that ‘there are plenty of other *hibakusha* given the occurrence of nuclear tests around the world’⁶⁵ meant an expansion of the recognition of the circle of victims through the inclusion of non-Japanese *hibakusha* and victims of other nuclear disasters. Non-nuclear problems, such as civil wars and conflicts, human rights, and the environment,⁶⁶ were raised, but the Hiroshima narrative was still viewed as a single isolated event in humanity’s history and no parallels were drawn.

The most significant transformation was the attempt to enlarge the circle of victims and perpetrators through the acknowledgment of war responsibility, one which finally didn’t succeed. In 1991, Mayor Hiraoka Takashi recognised for the first time that Japan was a perpetrator of the Asia-Pacific War and incorporated apologies into subsequent Peace Declarations. Nevertheless, this attempt to reshape the victim–perpetrator pattern through the inclusion of Japan in the list of perpetrators was fully excluded from the Declarations after 1996.

The realm of public memory experienced a number of dramatic changes. On one hand, the *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* were consistent in treating *hibakusha* as exceptional people who survived extraordinary experiences.⁶⁷ But at the same time, they viewed Hiroshima as a national story. Even the right-wing *Yomiuri* contended that the appeal of ‘No more Hiroshima’ had dramatically grown,⁶⁸ but the newspapers presented the story in very different contexts and from very different angles. The *Yomiuri* made no attempts to reconsider the circle of victims. Given that the publication was more concerned about Japanese security, it regularly warned that the ‘threat of nuclear danger heavily looms over the world’⁶⁹ and discussed a subject that had been taboo in Japanese politics for decades – the possibility of a nuclear solution – and called for reducing Japanese anti-nuclear sensitivity.⁷⁰

By contrast, the *Asahi* attempted to reconsider victim–perpetrator frames by addressing war responsibility. It argued that ‘if Japan says “Hiroshima”, it should firmly

⁶⁴Hiraoka, ‘Heiwa sengen’, 8 August 1998.

⁶⁵Hiraoka, ‘Heiwa sengen’, 8 August 1997.

⁶⁶The Declarations of 1991, 1994–1996, and 2002–2003 discussed issues unrelated to nuclear problems.

⁶⁷See, respectively, ‘Watashitachi mo kataribu ni’ and ‘Kaku no jidai ni ikiru’.

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 3.

⁶⁹‘Hiroshima no genbaku no hi hankaku undō no ipponka ga hitsuyō’.

⁷⁰Numerous articles illustrate this position. In the article ‘Genbakuki “kita” no kaku no kyōi’, the Peace Declarations were criticised because they failed to include any comments about the North Korean nuclear program. The editorial ‘Hiroshima hibaku no tsumi’ claimed that discussing the abolition of nuclear weapons was not enough, that Japan had to change its attitude on the dilemma of the nuclear balance of power and acknowledge the importance of the US nuclear umbrella. The editorial ‘Genbakuki kakugunshuku no chōryū’ went even further, stating that ‘despite the fact that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been bombed, we still have no choice but to rely on the nuclear umbrella’.

acknowledge being a perpetrator'.⁷¹ Nonetheless, this attempt raised contradictions. First, on the victim side, no readiness to reshape the story in a way that explained victim–perpetrator interrelations can be observed. For example, in 1996, the mayor of Hiroshima, Hiraoka, was reluctant to discuss issues of war responsibility during A-bombing exhibitions because he thought that such discussion would take attention away from the nature of nuclear problems.⁷² Second, although the 1990s saw attempts to question the Japanese government's responsibility for the Hiroshima bombing and to review the definition of who or what constituted a 'perpetrator', all these efforts were unsuccessful because they could not build a public agenda to promote and support them.⁷³ Both newspapers addressed the dark side of the particularisation of the *hibakusha* – as in the discrimination against them – slightly more often during this period but, unfortunately, these efforts did not lead to a serious reconsideration of the contradictions in public attitude towards them.⁷⁴ In 2000, print media discourse finally shifted back to a previously trodden path – that of the special mission of the *hibakusha* which was based on the assertion that they are 'beyond the dimensions of perpetrator–victim'.⁷⁵ The *Asahi* connected this assertion to a statement which emphasised that the Japanese 'abhor bombing, but they never had anti-American feelings, and it was the core of their anti-nuclear aspirations'.⁷⁶

With regard to anti-American feelings, the 1954 Bikini Atoll incident had triggered vague and subtle expressions of anti-American sentiment,⁷⁷ but as previously discussed, the United States was never clearly defined as a perpetrator. It was not until the 1990s that both newspapers started to question why, in the debate, there was not even the shadow of the country that dropped the bomb.⁷⁸ The publications argued over the differences between Japan and the US in their respective perceptions of the Hiroshima tragedy. The discussions were inconclusive, but they did come close to identifying America as the perpetrator: the bombing was claimed to be the result of racial discrimination, an unnecessary and inhumane experiment. Criticism was also directed at the US for omitting to express regret for the bombing. However, similar to how Japan's responsibility in the Asia-Pacific War was addressed, this identification of the US as the perpetrator was not the core of the debate, but was left at the periphery of public memory. Since 2000, avoiding the perpetrator issue has become another angle that reflects the exclusive and unparalleled nature of the Hiroshima experience. Hiroshima was described as a 'great teacher', who 'didn't think of taking nuclear revenge against America, but instead became a non-nuclear state'.⁷⁹ Eventually, shunning discussion of the perpetrator issue was considered to be a positive achievement in the development of the Hiroshima narrative.

In sum, the end of the Cold War spelled the end both of the Hiroshima narrative in its role as timely admonishment to the world of the dangers of nuclear weapons and of its relative role within the context of Japanese foreign policy, triggering attempts to reshape and update it. It led to the loosening of the perception of victimhood and encouragement

⁷¹'Hiroshima o sekaika'.

⁷²'Genbakuten de katarihajimeta'.

⁷³See, for example, 'Engohō naze dekinu'.

⁷⁴'Hibaku akasu made ni 56 nen'.

⁷⁵'Kakuizonshō o tachikirō'.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷See, for example, articles published in 1954–55 in the *Yomiuri*, such as 'Suibaku wa kono yo kara keshite kure' and 'Sekai no jikokuhyō'.

⁷⁸'Sohō no hansei'.

⁷⁹'Hiroshima heiwa shinpo'.

of the inclusion of other types of *hibakusha* in the circle of victims. However, *hibakusha* victimhood could not be extended to embrace other categories of victims. Such an extension should have been considered alongside attempts to reshape the perpetrator perception but this would contradict the victim–perpetrator perception adopted earlier. It would also require a revision of Japan’s role as a perpetrator during Asia-Pacific war that would be painful for Japanese society, and a consideration of the role of Japan’s political ally, the United States. As a result, these attempts failed to bring a change in the perception of the bomb as an ultimate evil, and the circle of perpetrators was not expanded to include various perpetrators. Furthermore, *hibakusha* victimhood did not develop into a fully inclusive story even though it drifted away from being a ‘Japanese only’ story. Nevertheless, the Hiroshima narrative is still referred to as a national story by officials at the local and national levels, as well as by the media.

Conclusion

To provide a satisfactory conclusion to the Hiroshima narrative, I revisit the issues of whether Hiroshima has become a national trauma and whether the process that underlies the evolution of the narrative into a national trauma is similar to the process described by Alexander.

Hiroshima became an official national emblem in the 1960s, when it was seen to qualify as a sufficient basis on which to cultivate a national identity through the media. It developed into the story of an exclusive experience, which, under growing tensions between the US and USSR, was at the top of the agenda. It also became a story of shared post-war successes, endowing the Japanese with feelings of uniqueness. When the Cold War ended, the Hiroshima story lost its quality of timeliness and relativism in the current national agenda. However, its thoroughly designed commemorative infrastructure and institutionalised memorialisation at different levels sustain the narrative’s exceptional position and potency. Despite the very limited awareness among Japanese of Hiroshima commemoration day, there exists strongly among them a general non-acceptance of nuclear weapons.⁸⁰

By introducing Alexander’s approach, I aimed to reveal the inner mechanisms that govern the transformation of the Hiroshima story, as well as to examine the extrinsic and intrinsic properties of the Hiroshima narrative to clarify whether it has developed qualities similar to Alexander’s description of the phenomenon of collective trauma. Concerning the mechanisms of transformation, Alexander emphasises that the process of memory transformation emerges as a result of interactions among different actors and the interests they pursue, of progress in developing physical and metaphysical commemorative infrastructures, and of the occurrence of causal factors. In Hiroshima’s case, among various determinants, the tension brought on by nuclear-related issues during the Cold War can be regarded as the most important driver of transformation. In discussing internal factors, priority is conventionally accorded to the Bikini Atoll incident. However, internal factors are more complicated than this simple strategy of prioritisation would suggest, and consist of various factors such as: (1) the

⁸⁰According to the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, ‘Sixty-Five Years Since the Atomic Bombing’, only 27% of respondents could correctly identify the date of the Hiroshima bombing. However, most of the respondents (79%) deem not only the use, but also the possession, of nuclear weapons unacceptable.

commemorative infrastructure developed at the local level by 1955; (2) the vivid consciousness of nuclear danger triggered by the Bikini Atoll incident; (3) the presentation of Hiroshima as a narrative depicting a national experience, built up by leftist intellectuals in 1950; (4) the search for national identity, triggered by the economic growth that began in the 1960s; and (5) the adoption by government officials of Hiroshima as a national narrative from the beginning of the 1960s.

Alexander states that the expansion of the victim–perpetrator perception from *exclusive* to *inclusive* groups turned the Holocaust into what it is now – a trauma for everybody. Introducing Alexander's approach reveals that the perpetrator perception behind the Hiroshima narrative remained vague because of various circumstances, and that all the attempts to reconsider the circle of perpetrators after the end of the Cold War received minimal public support because revision of perpetrator perception was unachievable without the revision of Japan's role in Asia Pacific War. Conversely, victim perception was always exclusive, never incorporating within itself other categories of victim and thus never lending itself to expansion into a larger collectivity. It does not extend to other war victims within Japan; it does not include individuals victimised during any war. Even though the victimhood circle has undergone a few expansions (the perception of victimhood was extended to victims of other nuclear disasters), Hiroshima has never grown into the trauma of everybody. The *hibakusha* have been regarded as a special people, whose experience not only stands out from other traumatic experiences, but sits at the top of the victimhood hierarchy.

We can therefore say that although the Hiroshima narrative acquired the features of a national emblem, it has never extended beyond the frame of one particular event in the past and is not, for the majority of Japanese, emotionally connected to their own experience.

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