Remaking Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Local Commemorations of Atomic Bombings in the United States

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are often considered necessary to have ended its war against Japan. On the other hand, there are also American people who commemorate the victims of the atomic bombings. This article examines how and why people in the United States commemorate the A-bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After explaining the official US narratives, this article explores as case studies three local commemorations in the United States: the vigil for Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Ashland, Oregon; the annual interfaith ceremony for A-bomb victims in New York City; and the lantern ceremony in the San Francisco Bay Area. While they are different in many ways, they share a common feature: “localization” of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience to disseminate it in the United States. Through looking into the local commemorative events, this article elucidates their efforts and the dilemma of making the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering more familiar to people in the United States.

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Introduction

The Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are well known worldwide for their unprecedented catastrophes. On 6 and 9 August 1945, almost at the end of World War II, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on each of these two cities – on Hiroshima on 6 August and on Nagasaki on 9 August. The bombs’ inhumanly destructive power, composed of the heat wave, blast, and radiation killed numerous people and completely devastated both cities. Politicians, religious leaders, philosophers, and artists around the world have referred to the nuclear catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only because they care about the victims of weapons of mass destruction, but also because they can’t avoid the possibility that nuclear bombs could wipe out humankind in the future. Having faced the threat of the annihilation of humanity, people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, A-bomb survivors (hibakusha) in particular, have called for peace and nuclear disarmament by disseminating their experience of suffering. In other words, the the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience has been to a certain extent globally shared for the past seventy years.

However, there are countries where the nuclear catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have different meanings. In East and Southeast Asian countries that suffered
Japanese occupation in the past, the atomic bombings are a powerful icon of their liberation from Japanese imperial rule (Hayashi 1989). In these countries, the US atomic bombings are often seen as a key factor in bringing an end to the bitter colonial experience.

The United States is another nation where the victimization of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is often considered inevitable. The official US narratives from the national government have justified the atomic bombings of the two Japanese cities (Lifton and Mitchell 1995). In one of these narratives, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were needed to compel imperial Japan to surrender without an invasion of its mainland. Such an invasion was projected to cost the lives of many young American soldiers as well as Japanese citizens. Therefore, there has been a certain difficulty in speaking up about the victimization of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because it was often seen as sacrifice to end the war.

On the other hand, there have been individuals and groups in the United States who have sympathy for the victims of the atomic bombings. They even commemorate the victims and inform the general public of the tragedy by remaking the meaning of the nuclear catastrophes for their own purposes. For example, anti-nuclear movements often use the names of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for their actions (Boyer 1996).

This article examines how the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are commemorated in the United States, where the use of nuclear weapons against Japan has been basically justified by the state. For this purpose, this article begins by exploring the official US narratives, especially in national public spaces such as museums, to consider the difficulty in highlighting the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering. Then the article looks into three local commemorations: the vigil for Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Ashland, Oregon; the annual interfaith ceremony for A-bomb victims in New York City; and the lantern ceremony in the San Francisco Bay Area. These commemorations are chosen because they show local efforts to disseminate the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience to American people who are unfamiliar with it. While the commemorations have been held by local groups or individuals in different parts of the United States, they have something in common: remaking the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of the A-bombs into a form that is more familiar to people in the United States. The last section of this article considers the meaning of the remaking and points out its dilemma: the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience is remembered but its historical context, the Pacific War, is blurred.

**Difficulty of Recounting Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the United States: Narratives of National Museum**

Any effort to recount the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the United States faces a dilemma. The atomic bombings certainly contributed to the US victory of the war against Japan. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the bombings of Hiroshima and

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1This is a reason why this article does not examine commemorations strongly connected with Japanese Americans or their communities. In general, they have more interest in the atomic bombings because of their backgrounds.

2Japanese Emperor Hirohito made a special statement to declare the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945 (Japan Standard Time). In the statement, he said the atomic bombings of Japan were one of reasons for the surrender ("Shusen No Shousho" 1945).
Nagasaki killed many people including children, women, and the elderly. Therefore, the United States has repeatedly justified its use of nuclear bombs against Japan by arguing that it was inevitable, reasonable, and effective for the United States. On 9 August 1945, President Harry S. Truman spoke on the radio about why the United States used the new bomb against Japan:

We have used [the atomic bomb] against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans. (Truman 1945b)

According to Truman, Hiroshima was chosen as a target because it was “a military base” (Truman 1945a) though there were actually many civilians who were killed by the bomb.

Another key person for the official US narratives on the use of nuclear bombs is Henry L. Stimson. As secretary of war, he was involved with the entire process of development and use of atomic bombs. Stimson explained the necessity of the atomic bombings of Japan in an essay for Harper’s Magazine in February 1947. Lifton and Mitchell (1995, 107–108) summarized his arguments as follows: from 1941 to 1945, no official who had responsibility in this matter was opposed to the use of atomic energy in the war. The Interim Committee adopted a recommendation for the president that atomic bombs be used without any demonstration. Even in July 1945, Japan did not seem to be ready to surrender. Stimson prompted the president to send Japan another ultimatum (the Potsdam Declaration on 26 July 1945) as a de facto “last chance” before using the nuclear bombs. And the bombs were thought to be useful to compel surrender from Japan. Thus, Stimson’s article concluded as follows:

The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision that brought death to over a hundred thousand Japanese. No explanation can change that fact and I do not wish to gloss over it. But this deliberate, premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent choice. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the Japanese war. (Stimson 1947, 16)

Stimson’s essay and Truman’s statement became the cornerstones of the official US narratives, which have prevailed as a powerful part of the discourse in the United States.

These US official narratives serve to justify the atomic bombings of Japan. Their premises are: the number of casualties from the atomic bombings was smaller than if the United States had not used the bombs and had invaded Japan instead; the targets of the nuclear bombings were cities that had deep connections with Japanese militarism; the bombings brought victory in the war; the use of the bombs was reasonable and even humane because the net result was that it saved the lives of more people.

Thus, suggestions that Japan would have surrendered even if the United States had not used the A-bombs would run against the official narratives. Also, pointing out the negative aspect of the bombings, such as the suffering of victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would muddy the official narratives because it calls into question the justice of the bombings. Even though the bombings might have saved many lives, it would be

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3According to Stimson himself (Stimson 1947), there were two reasons not to give a detailed warning or demonstration. First, these tactics did not seem effective in persuading Japan to surrender. Second, the United States did not have atomic bombs to spare.
still questionable if they were truly humane. Recounting the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki “remains a raw nerve” in the United States (Lifton and Mitchell 1995, XI).

One of the frequently quoted examples of hitting an American nerve is the controversy over an exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution fifty years after the end of World War II (Hogan 1996; Lifton and Mitchell 1995; Saito 1995). For the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the National Air and Space Museum, one of museums of the Smithsonian Institution, planned to hold a special exhibition of the Enola Gay, the aircraft that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The director and curators tried to include information on the reasons for the use of the atomic bombs and their effects on people, referring to the works of historians who argued the atomic bombings were not necessary to end the war. They also originally intended to show the suffering of the victims by exhibiting artifacts from museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the exhibition plan met strong opposition from inside and outside the museum (Harwit 1996). In particular, military-related organizations and veterans fiercely protested against the exhibition plan. They argued that the victimization of Japanese by the A-bombs should not be exhibited with the Enola Gay, one of the great war heroes. After receiving a great deal of criticism, the Air and Space Museum finally gave up its original plan and decided to have a simple display of the Enola Gay. There was no detailed explanation of its historical context and no display of artifacts from Hiroshima and Nagasaki museums. This is how the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering was excluded from the Smithsonian, a national public space where official narratives often appear.4

The difficulty of recounting the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the United States has endured until today although it is not as obvious as two decades ago. The museums of the Smithsonian Institution often refer to the atomic bombings, but they do so simply, without detailed description, just as the 1995 exhibition of the Enola Gay did after the turmoil. For example, the Enola Gay is displayed in the Udvar-Hazy Center of the Air and Space Museum in Chantilly, Virginia. Under the headline of “The Final Blows”, there is the following description:

On August 6 and 9, 1945, specially modified B-29s of the 509th Composite Group carried out two of the final strategic bombing missions of the war. They dropped a single atomic bomb on Hiroshima and then on Nagasaki. Japan surrendered days later.

This brief and simple description refers to only a set of facts: the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and then Japan surrendered. There is no analysis of the cause-and-effect relationship between the use of the new weapons and the Japanese surrender. Moreover, the description does not mention what happened in the two Japanese cities after the bombings.5

4This section focuses on US official narratives as the state narratives, which do not always represent the whole society of the United States. In the case of the controversy over the exhibition plan for the Enola Gay, many historians were against the official narratives and the change of the National Air and Space Museum’s initial exhibition plan (Linenthal 1996). Furthermore, in 1994, a Gallup poll of Americans, 39% disapproved of the use of atomic bombs on Japan while 55% approved (Moore 2005).

5The Price of Freedom: Americans at War, a permanent exhibition at the National Museum of American History from 11 November 2004, also refers to the atomic bombings of Japan. With a large photo of ruined Hiroshima City, the exhibit explained the atomic bombings under the title of “The Final Blow”. In the same manner as exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum, the detailed context is not clear here. However, the National Museum of American History juxtaposed various
The value of the *Enola Gay* and its atomic bombing may be found in two short episodes at the Air and Space Museum today. When I visited the museum in March 2013, I happened to see a volunteer guide speaking to his audience in front of the *Enola Gay*. He talked mainly about how the mission of the atomic bombings was carried out and what the challenges were during the mission. His explanation apparently focused on events before the bombings, not after. Another episode comes from the museum shop. The shop has a wide range of items related to its exhibitions. One of the items was a model of the *Enola Gay* (Figure 1). The package says, “Known to many as the ‘[S]uperfortress,’ this WWII bomber brought an end to the war on the Pacific front”. These two episodes imply that the *Enola Gay* is still considered heroic because it succeeded in dropping an atomic bomb, which brought the US victory. 6

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been officially justified. On the one hand, this comes from an attitude of seeing them as inseparable from their context, the war against Japan. The use of nuclear bombs is considered to have ended the war. 7 On the other hand, the perceived need to justify the bombings makes it difficult to acknowledge the sufferings of their victims. Stressing the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering requires a specific reason that does not call into question the legitimacy of the nuclear bombings.

**Commemorating Victims of Atomic Bombs in the United States: Localizations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

There have always been groups and individuals in the United States who have sympathy with the suffering created by the A-bombs. Pacifist Christians such as Quakers came to the ruined Hiroshima to help just after the war. Prominent writers such as John Hersey and Norman Cousins were concerned about the nuclear catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and wrote articles on how people suffered (Lifton and Mitchell 1995; Winkler 1993). 8 Moreover, in the rise of nuclear disarmament movements in the United States during the 1950s and 1980s, activists often referred to the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Boyer 1996).

This section examines how and why people in the United States commemorate the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I conducted case studies of three commemorative actions. They are held in different places in the United States by different types of organizers in different ways. But they have one thing in common: the localizations of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of the A-bombs. “Localization” in this article points of views. There are four plates of “My View”: President Truman, Paul Fussell (US veteran), Kazuo Hanaoka (atomic-bomb survivor), and Emperor Hirohito. While those different views are juxtaposed, no analysis or interpretation is given.

6The National Atomic Testing Museum in Las Vegas, Nevada, which has an affiliation with the Smithsonian Institution, more clearly shows the official narratives on the atomic bombings. In the early part of its exhibition, there is a board on “Ending World War II”, which explains the connection between the atomic bombings and the end of the war: “A belief that an allied invasion of the Japanese mainland would be very bloody grew (with estimates of up to one million American casualties alone). Policy makers unanimously concluded the atomic bomb would end the war with the least bloodshed and should be used without warning against military targets. Accordingly, two atomic bombs were detonated over industrial military targets in early August 1945. Japan surrendered shortly afterwards ending World War II, avoiding a massive Allied invasion and post-war division among the victors”.

7Some studies argue that the United States used A-bombs on Japan to restrain the actions of the Soviet Union (Alperovitz 1994). This article does not explore the reason(s) why the United States used the A-bombs on Japan; its focus is how the official US narratives explain the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

8John Hersey visited Hiroshima soon after the war ended and conducted interviews with the survivors. Revealing what the atomic bomb brought to people in Hiroshima, his reportage, published first as an article in the New Yorker and then as a book, had a great impact on American society (Raphael 2016). Norman Cousins, editor in chief of the *Saturday Review of Literature* at that time, brought to the United States young Japanese women who had keloid scars on their bodies in order to give them medical treatment such as plastic surgery to remove the scars.
means to remake something in accordance with the local context. In other words, the commemorations above are attempts by their organizers to change the meaning of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience to fit their local situations in pursuing their goals. Through such localizations, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience, which seems foreign to many Americans, could become more familiar and meaningful in the United States.

**Connecting Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Domestic Issues: Ashland, Oregon**

The Hiroshima-Nagasaki Vigil is an annual commemorative event in Ashland, Oregon. Ashland is a small city in southern Oregon, but a large number of tourists visit the city to attend the Oregon Shakespeare Festival each year. Ashland is an active city for peace and a nuclear-weapon-free world. The city declared itself a Nuclear-Free Zone in 1981 and joined Mayors for Peace in 1998.

The vigil officially began in August 1986. It was originally organized by a local peace organization named Peace House, which was affiliated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation USA. Established in 1982, in the middle of a huge nuclear disarmament movement in the United States, Peace House proactively worked for nuclear disarmament and peace with nonviolent actions. On 6 August 1986, around thirty people gathered at Ashland Plaza and

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9I write “officially” here because a flyer I obtained during my fieldwork in 2010 described that year’s event as the “25th”. However, Peace House, which started the event, held a commemorative event in August 1985. Also, Peace House had a monthly vigil for peace and nuclear disarmament at that time.
began a 72-hour silent vigil for “peace in connection with Hiroshima and Nagasaki days”, according to a local newspaper, the Mail Tribune (6 August, 1986). It began with a talk from a guest speaker, and the participants hugged each other, prayed, and stood silently during the morning ceremony. As a part of the vigil, the organizers, borrowing an idea from Sasaki Sadako’s story, planned to distribute garlands of paper cranes for the participants to wear. As it was this year, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Vigil was one of actions by local peace movement to call for nuclear disarmament.

Peace House changed its scope over the years while it continued to hold the vigil. One of the biggest reasons for the change was the end of the Cold War. In 1987, US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. In 1989, after the Berlin Wall fell, President George H. W. Bush and Gorbachev had a summit meeting and joint statement in Malta. In December 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved. In these rapidly changing circumstances, Peace House, the main organizer of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki vigil, gradually shifted its focus from nuclear disarmament to other international and domestic issues, such as US intervention in Central America and poverty within the country. The shift of Peace House is represented in the change in its newsletter. As seen in Figure 2(a–c), the title of the newsletter was originally “Nuclear Reactions” but became “Clear Actions” through a two-stage process, first making the first two letters of each word smaller and then omitting them. This is one of reasons why the initiative to hold the vigil was taken by another local peace organization, a branch of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), in 2005.

Not everyone in the city favored the commemoration of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This event was often criticized by the neighbors, as one letter to the local newspaper in 2006 indicates. The letter was from an ex-Marine living in Medford, Oregon:

There goes that peacenik segment of Ashlanders again. … Now the Presbyterian and Methodist churches sanctioned a vigil for the poor 250,000 Japanese who died at Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945. Let us not forget that they attacked us first, killing about 3,000 of our GIs at Pearl Harbor. Not to mention the thousands of GIs that were killed [in the Pacific]. … And let’s not forget the POW’s that were tortured and killed. The Japanese got what they deserved. This vigil was indicative of a weak, namby-pamby populace. In my opinion this does nothing but show our present enemies what wimps some Americans are. Let’s see if they’ll have a vigil on Dec. 7. We should have no regrets for what we did. We saved American lives. (Seward 2006)

This veteran thought that the atomic bombings were justifiable because Japan attacked first at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and killed many American soldiers. For him, people commemorating the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is almost same as people criticizing the United States: anti-American.

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10The movement was known as the Nuclear Freeze campaign. Randall Forsberg and major peace groups in the United States issued a “Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race”, which immediately attracted support from many peace organizations (Wittner 2009).

11Sadako Sasaki was exposed to radiation from an atomic bomb in Hiroshima when she was two years old. Ten years after the bombing, she died from leukemia, a disease commonly found among the A-bomb survivors. She had folded origami paper cranes, inspired by an old Japanese belief that if she made 1,000 origami cranes, a wish of hers would come true (Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum n.d.).
The content of the vigil changed over time. In 2010, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Vigil was held at Ashland Plaza from 6 to 7 August (Figure 3), and a related ceremony was also held on 9 August. The theme of that year was “Citizen Action for a Nuclear Free World.” More than seventy-five people participated in the opening ceremony, starting at 8 AM. At 8:15, the time of the bombing of Hiroshima, a bell was rung and people
held a silent prayer. After the mayor of Ashland made a brief speech, a candle was lit as a symbolic action. A peace choir sang three songs, one of which was a Japanese anti-atomic-bomb song, *Genbaku Yurusumaji* (Refusing Atomic Bombs), followed by the performance of Japanese drums. Then the audience heard a talk from a Medford resident who was originally from Hiroshima and had survived the atomic bombing there. On 9 August, people gathered in a different place, the Japanese Garden, to join a closing ceremony to “float sunflowers, the symbol of the nuclear-free movement, down the park stream” (WILPF Ashland 2010b).

The 2010 vigil had more focus than previous vigils on nuclear issues in the United States. For example, there was an outdoor exhibition, named “Nuclear Maze”, to which visitors were invited during the vigil. The exhibition displayed photos and information on the history of nuclear power and weapons. It was not only about the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also about nuclear issues within the United States such as nuclear power accidents, uranium mining, and downwinders. Another example was a public gathering in a local library on the day before the vigil. Three local activists were invited as speakers to talk about “the importance of citizen action in creating a nuclear-free world” (WILPF Ashland 2010a).

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12 I conducted my fieldwork in August 2010. The description of the vigil in 2010 is based on videos and photos I took, along with materials such as press releases I obtained there.
13 This ceremony seems a localization of a Japanese commemoration for A-bomb victims. The Japanese use lanterns, not sunflowers, and they don’t generally recognize the sunflower as a symbol of the nuclear-free movement.
14 The materials for the exhibition came courtesy of WILPF Ashland.
15 Downwinders are people or communities exposed to radiation from nuclear testing, accidents, and production, mainly because they lived downwind from the sites.
The first speaker, a Hanford downwinder as well as a professor of history in the area, talked about nuclear tests and downwinders. The title of his talk was “America’s Domestic Victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki”. The second speaker was a Native American who discussed uranium mining and its problems. The third speaker, an anti-nuclear activist, talked about the recent nuclear disarmament movements in the United States. The organizers of the vigil emphasized the connection between the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience and domestic issues in the United States by focusing on radiation problems, as the first speaker at the gathering did.

The commemorative event in Oregon is an example of American localization of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering. When the vigil began in the mid-1980s, the commemoration of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki certainly had a strong connection with the rising tide of the anti-nuclear-weapon movement in the United States. That means people used the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience as a symbol of nuclear disarmament. They slightly shifted their focus and highlighted the connection between the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings and nuclear issues that the United States was facing. In both ways, people in Ashland remade the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering into a more familiar one by providing common ground for Americans while the opponents of the vigil saw the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki only as a Japanese matter.

Making Hiroshima and Nagasaki a Universal Symbol: New York City

Another way of localizing the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience appears in the Annual Interfaith Peace Gathering: Commemoration of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Atomic Bombings, which takes place in New York City. It is a commemorative event by various religions for victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As such, this event deals with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as an issue for humanity beyond national and cultural borders (Figure 4).

The interfaith commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in New York was started in 1994 by a Japanese Jodo Shinshu Buddhist monk, T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki. He came from Japan to the United States in 1985. After serving in Buddhist temples on the West Coast for nine years, he was transferred to the New York Buddhist Church (NYBC). The NYBC has a statue of St. Shinran, the founder of Jodo Shinshu. According to Nakagaki (2010), the statue was originally erected in Hiroshima and exposed to the atomic bombing about three kilometers from the hypocenter. In 1955, the statue was donated to the NYBC as a messenger of peace. When Nakagaki learned the history of this Shinran statue, he decided to have a commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims that would serve as a call for peace. Interestingly, he did not receive any negative comments from Americans.

The ceremony’s program varies from year to year. However, there are things that have not changed: an interfaith gathering and attendance by an atomic-bomb survivor. Leaders from

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16 Many uranium sites are on Native American lands. Native Americans were often affected by radiation because they lived in communities near uranium mines and/or engaged in uranium mining.

17 Jodo Shinshu is one sect of Buddhism. It is practiced mostly in Japan or Japanese-related communities overseas.

18 Rev. Nakagaki founded the Heiwa Peace and Reconciliation Foundation of New York in 2018 after he left the New York temple. I would like to express my special gratitude to Rev. Nakagaki for my interview conducted on 14 March 2014.
various religious traditions gather to pray, and an A-bomb survivor plays an important role in the ceremony. The 2013 ceremony, which took place at the Interchurch Center in New York on the evening of 5 August (Nakagaki 2013b), is a good example. After showing a film on the Nagasaki bombing for fifteen minutes, Nakagaki started the ceremony with an invocation. There were opening remarks by the president of the Interchurch Center, greetings by Nakagaki, and interfaith prayers by religious leaders from Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist traditions. Then, musical performances, other greetings, and messages from the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki followed. Tomiko Morimoto West, a Hiroshima A-bomb survivor living in upper New York state, gave a presentation about her experience of the atomic bombing. Next there was one minute of silence, during which the participants prayed in their own ways. At 7:15 PM, which was 8:15 AM in Japan, the exact time of the dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, a bell was rung in a row by about twenty participants, saying phrases such as “No more Hiroshima”, “No more Nagasaki”, “No more nuclear weapons”, and “No more war”.

The interfaith gathering in New York deals with the nuclear catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as an issue for all humanity. Nakagaki mentioned the atomic bombings with the Holocaust in his book.

Human beings have a cruel aspect because we can kill tens of thousands of people as in the case of the Holocaust and Hiroshima-Nagasaki atomic bombings. We must remember that the Holocaust and Hiroshima-Nagasaki are not only the tragedies of the Jewish and Japanese people, respectively, but also of all humanity. (Nakagaki 2013a, 20)

A similar idea is found in the opening remarks of the 2013 interfaith gathering. The president of the Interchurch Center told her audience that the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience was not just Japan’s but the world’s and that all nations should work to
prevent another nuclear disaster.\textsuperscript{19} Another common feature is that the organizers call for actions that transcend nationalities and cultures. In another of his books, Nakagaki wrote that in terms of the atomic bombings, “instead of blaming either country, the United States or Japan, we all should make an effort together to create a nuclear-free, peaceful world” (Nakagaki 2010, 163–64).

The interfaith gathering is a good way of presenting Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a universal symbol. If the commemoration were done only by Buddhists, it would be just a Buddhist event. But if it involves various religions, it can represent the universality of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience because it is an action across religions, spanning the world. The commemorative event in New York is an effort to universalize the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience to call for peace and a nuclear-free world.

But this universalization is also an American localization. An interfaith gathering is not an unusual event, especially in New York; it is quite a popular form of gathering. By considering the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience universal, the commemoration tries to include the Japanese victims of atomic bombings in the category of “us”, a category of humanity, beyond national and cultural borders.

\textit{Making Hiroshima and Nagasaki Cultural and Educational Event: San Francisco Bay Area}

There is another type of commemoration carried out in the San Francisco Bay Area: the San Francisco Bay Area Peace Lantern Ceremony. Organized by local people, this ceremony is a cultural and educational event through which people can become familiar with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Peace Lantern Ceremony has been held every year since 2002. Participants come to a lake in Aquatic Park in Berkeley and they make their own lanterns by decorating paper lantern shades on which they are supposed to draw or write something about peace. They watch beautiful candle-lit lanterns floating on the lake and take photos of them.

The Peace Lantern Ceremony has been organized by local individuals.\textsuperscript{20} Steve Freedkin, the founder of the event, visited Japan in 2002 as the vice chair of the City of Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission, and met a survivor of the US air raids on Osaka. The survivor used to go to the Hiroshima lantern-floating ceremony, but she had to stop going because of her poor health. Because he was moved by her story, Freedkin decided to have a peace-lantern ceremony with his friends on her behalf. About a hundred people joined the first Peace Lantern Ceremony. There were about 600 participants during the Iraq War, which was the highest number of people until recently. The number of participants had rapidly increased for the past several years and thousands of people took part in the ceremony. In 2017, the organizers estimated around 4,000 people came to the ceremony. The organizers think it was because of the prevalence of social media and their functions such as Facebook and its event algorithm (Hsieh 2017).

The purpose of the ceremony is to commemorate the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, but it is also an activity for peace with an educational

\textsuperscript{19}Nakagaki also said that the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not a matter of the United States and Japan, but rather for all humanity.

\textsuperscript{20}For information on the history of the ceremony, see the website of the San Francisco Bay Area Peace Lantern Ceremony. \url{https://www.peacelanterns.org}.
Lantern-floating is a traditional Japanese way to commemorate ancestors, with the paper lanterns representing ships to carry souls. But the Bay Area ceremony, just like the Hiroshima version, is for peace at the same time. Participants are supposed to write personal messages related to peace. This could serve as education for the participants because they stop to think about peace. Freedkin suggests to children to draw or write on the shade of their lanterns a world they want to create. He said, “It’s a great way for them to start being in the habit of thinking of themselves as having a role in these issues” (Slayton 2010).

On the other hand, the organizers try not to make the ceremony too political. During the ceremony, messages from the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are read. The messages call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and the organizers expect participants to take some steps in that direction. They do not want activists to mobilize the participants in the ceremony directly for their aim, but they hope the ceremony could be the first step for participants to take action, even if it is a small one. Freedkin said in 2010, “Once you take a small step, like coming to lantern ceremony or writing a letter to Congress, or decorating a lantern shade . . . you become someone who does not just think about doing something but someone who has taken action. And the next time an opportunity comes for you to act, you will be more likely to do something about it” (Slayton 2010). The ceremony is oriented to actions for peace, but the orientation is moderate politically.

The 2017 ceremony went as follows: Before the ceremony began, people had already come to the site to decorate their lantern shades at tables set up for that purpose. At other tables, they also enjoyed folding origami paper cranes or wrote letters to politicians to ask for the United States to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted by United Nations conference on 7 July 2017. The ceremony started with a Japanese drum performance around 6:30 PM. Then Freedkin gave a greeting and an explanation of the ceremony, followed by a message from the mayor of Nagasaki City. Next came another drum performance, a talk by an A-bomb survivor living in San Francisco, a message from the mayor of Hiroshima, and prayer by a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist monk. After half an hour of these talks and performances, people enjoyed beautiful floating lanterns on the lake: walking around, sitting in one place, taking photos and so on (Figure 5).

In 2018, however, the ceremony was held privately. Since it had no organization behind it and was dependent on donations from its participants, the ceremony had accumulated thousands of dollars in debts because of the number of people who participated in the 2017 edition. Also, some core members were not available for the 2018 ceremony. The organizers decided to make it a small and private one, using a few lanterns with LED tea lights rather than candles.

The San Francisco Bay Area Peace Lantern Ceremony is a cultural and educational event to commemorate the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The floating candle-lit lanterns are beautiful to watch and are photogenic. The general public enjoys a beautiful scene, deriving from Japanese tradition. But this ceremony is also educational, and it can be the very first step for them to take action for peace, as the organizers hope. Participants touch the history of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and have an opportunity to think about peace through decorating and watching lanterns.
A New Dilemma: Forgetting War through Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

The local commemorations separate the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering from its original historical context, the US–Japanese war. The official US narratives justify the atomic bombings, and their prevalence complicates the effort to disseminate the story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In these official narratives, the atomic bombings and the US–Japanese war are inseparable because the bombings are seen as a result of the war. But the local commemorations seek to disentangle the meaning of the bombings from the historical context of the war through their localizations. In Ashland, Oregon, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were categorized as one of the nuclear issues that the United States also faces. In New York City, the bombings were represented as an issue for humankind, which everyone should get involved with. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the commemoration for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became educational material as well as an enjoyable event. In these commemorations, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience is decontextualized from the war and recontextualized in the present local communities for their own purposes.

Remembering and forgetting can be two sides of the same coin. Remembering resembles the act of creating a focal point because it frequently highlights one part while disregarding the others. In the case of the local commemorations in the United States, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience of suffering became a focal point to be remembered, but its historical context was obscured. It is a way of remembering but also a way of forgetting. It may blur the war in which the nuclear bombings took place.

While they succeed in avoiding particular conflicts to a certain extent, the local commemorations and their localizations of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience create
a new dilemma. They highlight the suffering of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not as war victims but as nuclear victims. In doing so, they seem to step back from complicated discussions on the US–Japanese war and the use of the atomic bombs against Japan. However, simple questions arise: Is it possible to decouple the suffering of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the original context of the war? Should they be separately discussed? These are challenging questions not only for the organizers of the local commemorations but also for anyone who has concerns about the nuclear catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

A-bomb survivors, *hibakusha*, often consider the atomic bombings to be inseparable from the war. They oppose war as well as nuclear weapons. According to a survey report by a national organization of A-bomb victims and its related association (Nihon Hidankyo and No More Hibakusha Kioku Isan Wo Keishou Suru Kai 2017), A-bomb survivors have a tendency toward pacifism and anti-militarism. One survivor wrote, “We should not resort to war no matter what happens! We should make every effort . . . to avoid military action” (Nihon Hidankyo and No More Hibakusha Kioku Isan Wo Keishou Suru Kai 2017, 28). Another survivor said, “I cannot forget what I saw on the day of the atomic bombing. Must not have a war again” (Nihon Hidankyo and No More Hibakusha Kioku Isan Wo Keishou Suru Kai 2017, 28). A-bomb survivors protest against war and militarism not only because they lived in wartime Japan, but also because they think the atomic bombings were carried out due to the war. One survivor clearly stated in the survey, “Atomic bombings were the result of the war” (Nihon Hidankyo and No More Hibakusha Kioku Isan Wo Keishou Suru Kai 2017, 21). Another survivor also pointed out “I would not have experienced the A-bombing if the war did not break out. It was the Japanese government that began the war” (Nihon Hidankyo and No More Hibakusha Kioku Isan Wo Keishou Suru Kai 2017, 21). A significant portion of A-bomb survivors think the atomic bombs were dropped because of the US–Japanese war, which they often think the Japanese national government began. They see the connection between the war and the use of nuclear bombs through their firsthand experience.

**Conclusion**

While official US narratives have made it difficult to emphasize the suffering of A-bomb victims, there have been groups and individuals who commemorate the victims of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings. The commemorative events in Oregon, New York, and the San Francisco Bay Area show us how such people remake the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience into something more familiar and accessible to Americans. Such localizations would play a significant role in the global dissemination of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience; the meaning of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience can be changed in local contexts.

However, the localizations of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience seem to face with another dilemma. Localization requires transformation in order to make the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience more familiar to local communities. Something could be obscured or eliminated during the process. In the case of the United States, even though the suffering of A-bomb victims gets attention, the suffering is decontextualized from the US–Japanese war. This is a contrast to the viewpoints of some A-bomb survivors; they recognize that the atomic bombings cannot be separated from the historical context of the war between Japan and the United States.
The names of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are well known around the world. There could be other local commemorations for the Hiroshima-Nagasaki victims just as in the case of the United States. Those commemorations may also localize the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience in their local contexts. By examining what they try to remember – and to forget – in those localizations, we could explore the presence and nature of globalization of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience to discuss its potential and limits.

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