If something positive can come out of the dreadful nuclear accident at Fukushima's power plant in 2011, it is the revival of interest in nuclear matters seen in its aftermath. The arts participate in this revival. In 2016, for example, the United Nations headquarters in New York City exhibited Chernobyl: Tragedy, Lessons, Hope. Such an exhibition is instrumental in increasing awareness of the civilian catastrophe, yet it elicits the question of why military nuclear traumas so rarely become the topic of exhibitions, or at least outside of Japan. These traumas still have consequences today, and artists have produced significant artworks that convey particularly well the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, especially in places where the traumas occurred. This article discusses some of the pivotal works and the reasons for their lack of visibility through three "past" traumas: A-bombs, Cold War tests, and the effects of uranium mining—which exist alongside and in addition to any civilian or military use of the atom.

HIROSHIMA: THE "CITY OF CORPSES"

Having had two cities almost entirely destroyed by nuclear weapons, Japan hosts a profusion of thoughtful artworks, some produced by direct witnesses of the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the visual arts, works by Makima Kenzo, Yamamoto Keisuke, Takamasu Keisō and the Marukis (Iri and Toshi) with their Hiroshima Panels series, directly represented the catastrophes' aftermath. Literature played a particularly central role: Genbaku bungaku (A-bomb literature) is a genre regrouping works on the bombings, mostly produced by artists who were also hibakusha (bomb survivors), which spreads over several generations, since some were only children in 1945. The genre is also inclusive, from songs and poetry to photography, literature, cinema and paintings (such as those by the Marukis).

Ota Yōko's Shikabane no machi (City of Corpses, 1948) is representative of the genre, and Ota is usually referred to as "the" A-bomb writer. In the novel, she describes the blast she witnessed, the destruction and the suffering of the burned and agonized victims. In one instance, she details the piles of corpses she and her family had to walk through to reach the hospital, where they hoped their injuries would be treated. The corpses were bloated, stinking and rotting in the summer heat and swarmed by flies and maggots.

She also describes some of the survivors, and takes care to describe women in particular:

The women were an ugly sight. A girl was walking about naked, with nothing on her feet. A young girl had not one strand of hair. An old woman had both shoulders dislocated, and her arms hung limply. . . . People were no longer vomiting up everything, as had been the case yesterday; but there were people whose whole bodies were covered with broil-like burns—skin hanging off, bleeding, exuding an oil-like secretion. They had all slept naked on the sand, so sand and blades of grass and bits of straw and the like were pasted onto the putrid-looking flesh of their burns.

After reading some of the A-bomb novels, the reader realizes something quite evident: the impact on the civilians and, thus, on women's and children's bodies. It is precisely this aspect that is so often forgotten. Matsuo Sachiko, a hibakusha from Nagasaki who regularly testifies in official proceedings, illustrated this impact on civilians, recounting the terrible sight of ash-burned, bloated and decaying bodies she witnessed at the age of 11, before explaining that something left an even stronger experience with her: behind her house, a pregnant woman's body was decaying. Her skull could
be seen and then the baby's skull. No one did anything to cover them up, but that was because there was nothing to cover them up with [5]. Matsuo Sachiko was 85 years old at the time of her 2018 speech, and one question is pressing in Japan: How will the testimonies continue to be spoken and heard after all of the hibakusha have died?

Because of the dreadfulness of the suffering, the lack of circulation of decades of hibakusha testimonies outside of Japan is surprising. In the 1980s, A-bomb literature's many works were canonized in Japan through the publication by Holp Editions of a collection of more than a dozen thick volumes regrouping hundreds of novels, songs, poetry, and theoretical works. But out of these, only a handful of novels or poetic works were translated into English (mostly in the 1990s). Of the visual testimonies of Yama yama Yosuke, who took pictures of Nagasaki one day after the bomb, and of the many other photographers who portrayed the victims after the war, only the mildest have circulated.

One central reason for this invisibility is Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany and its actions as a feared colonial empire. Susan Sontag also analyzed the problem of nationalism (and the idea that evil always lives elsewhere) when she analyzed in 2001 how photographs of lynchings of African Americans began to be discussed even as discussion of several other national calamities was avoided. The pictures first allowed for the acknowledgment of the monstrosity of chattel slavery and continuing violence against African Americans in the United States—an unarguably pressing necessity even today. Yet, while this represents “a benchmark of civic virtue,” Sontag explains, “acknowledgement of the American use of disproportionate firepower in war (in violation of one of the cardinal laws of war) is very much not a national project.” And yet, as she stated: “The children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were no less innocent than the young African-American men (and a few women) who were butchered and hanged from trees in small-town America” [4].

Another reason for the lack of circulation is censorship. In Japan, for about 10 years, beginning on 21 September 1945, General Douglas MacArthur and the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander enforced a Press Code, censoring and regulating publications on the bombings in the media and the arts. One of Ota's chapters was censored, and she later recounted her encounter with the censorship officers in a cynical fashion in her memoir. While these publications were not official enemies of the imperialist powers that continued after the war, censorship continued. In the United States, the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 took effect, and in France, the “Très Secret Défense” also shrouded in secrecy the country’s Cold War military nuclear activities. Meanwhile, antinuclear artworks by none other than Robert Rauschenberg, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Yves Klein, Nancy Spero and William S. Burroughs were produced in the U.S. and Europe. In spite of these, the lasting effect of censorship is such that even today, the Oceanian victims are still invisible.

### PACIFIC GLOOM

Contemporary Pacific literature does not mince words when revealing the actual human and ecological impacts in Oceania. Marshallese poet and visual artist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s verses in *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017) are beautiful and sharp, and depict miscarriages, leukaemia and lingering radioactivity that added to the historical traumas: the lies from the militaries, a forced exodus, miscarriages, the rain of radioactive ashes contaminating the displaced population and the contamination of islands that remain uninhabitable. In “History Project,” which is based on archival material she read when she was 15, Jetñil-Kijiner writes about the “jellyfish babies,” so named because they have no head, no bones and skin “red as tomatoes” when born:

I read firsthand accounts

... the miscarriages gone unspoken
  the broken translations
  I never told my husband
  I thought it was my fault
  I thought
  there must be something wrong
  inside me [5]

In another poem, “Monster” (2017), performed in front of the Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima, Jetñil-Kijiner relates that there were already 574 stillbirths and miscarriages in 1951, compared to 52 before the bombs. And the problem persists.

In “Bursts of Bianca” and “Fishbone Hair,” she describes how Bianca learned the English words for the disease: “Most Marshallese / can say they’ve mastered the language of cancer” [6]. Unarguably, the Cold War’s nuclear power still contaminates lives today, although the Oceanians were not official enemies of the imperialist powers that contaminated them. In addition, Oceanians had and still have a closer relation to nature, in which natural elements are as personifications that must be respected. The Marshallese and Polynesian societies are also matrilineal, which perhaps makes the contamination of women and children (who are more sensitive to radioactivity) even more shocking to their members. Jetñil-Kijiner explains that “Iep Jāltok” in her title refers to a basket whose opening faces the speaker, as well as to girls and to the Marshallese matrilineal society as a whole.

The French nuclear program in the area fares no better than the American one. In French Polynesia, Tahitian writer Rai Chaze in *Vai: La rivière au ciel sans nuage* (Vai: The River with Sky without Cloud, 1990) also portrayed leukemia and contaminated landscapes and food. The metaphor for the nuclear test is one of rape, perpetuated by “intelligent” men who then looked away from the permanent pain and consequences:

In the island of the night, the soil trembled. The light of the intelligent people has risen over the flows like a mushroom...
Moreover, the embarrassing problem of nuclear waste reposi-
tories remains and still touches upon another real case by depicting the plight of
Pacific island artists such as Jetñil-Kijiner, Alexander
Lee and Viri Taimana, for example, produce contemporary
visual artworks that challenge this silencing. Yet silencing
remains strong in patriarchal and colonial societies: Self-
censorship is expected of the women concerning stillbirth
and abortions and is at times regulated via juridical and car-
ceral systems. Self-censorship is also expected of the colo-
nized and decolonized nations (something brought to light
in feminist and anticolonial movements of the 1960s but still
being negotiated to this day). Finally, these patriarchal and
colonial systems continue even today with the issue of the
extraction of uranium ore.

IS URANIUM MINING GREEN?

In his famous 1939 letter to President Roosevelt, at the start
of the Manhattan Project, Albert Einstein mentioned a mine
in the then–Belgian Congo as a possible counter to the Nazi
takeover of the Jáchymov mine in Czechoslovakia, which was
the only inland Western mine at the time. (The United States
began mining inland, in or near Native American lands in
Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, for example, along with
Canada—also taking ores on Indigenous lands—in the 1940s.
After the Second World War, France mined its colonies and
former colonies in Madagascar, Congo and Niger (the Ni-
gerian mines are still being operated). The United Kingdom
mined aboriginal lands in Australia before moving on to
South Africa and Namibia.

From the beginning of the nuclear age, such issues were
depicted in the arts. In Radium (1937), Austrian writer Rudolf
Brunngraber compares the life of a scientist studying radium
hoping to make a living by advancing radium cures to the
greed and wealth of a banker and shareholder of a mining
company in the Belgian Congo, Pierre Cynac. Cynac’s hopes
for a global monopoly of minerals are rejuvenated when
he reads about a U.S. mining company and syndicate that
mines radium in Colorado and Utah, since one of his “Negro
boy[s]” had excavated a stone impressive by its “orange-red
color”: a piece of uranium ore [10].

Thus, the European colonial system and its “abolished”
slave trade gradually transmuted:

Instead of the old “factories” or trading-stations, run by
agents who were always ready to use the lash, there was a
more orderly colonial Government, and mining companies
and the Bourse du Travail held sway in the land. . . . Though
nominally free labourers, the thousands of black boys who,
under the orders of a few dozen whites, labored in mines
and at the blast-furnaces were substantially slaves, being
the victims of a system of contract labour upon whom the
“contract” had been arbitrarily enforced [11].

Even though it was written in 1936, Radium is particularly
interesting: Firstly, radioactive ores were indeed exploited
in the Belgian Congo (in Shinkolobwe), as mentioned by Ein-
stein in his letter to Roosevelt. Secondly, Radium also briefly
touches upon another real case by depicting the plight of

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the Radium Girls. The Radium Girls were hundreds of female U.S. factory workers, as young as 16 years old, who were trained to use their mouths to apply radium paint on dial clocks, in Orange, New Jersey, and Ottawa, Illinois. Their demise was very quick and remains a classic case of class and gender exploitation. Notably, some corporate scientists even tried to attribute their disease to syphilis.

A few decades later, the impact of military (followed by civilian) nuclear programs on Indigenous lands can be detected via the photographs of Robert Del Tredici and Toyoaki Hiromitsu of the Atomic Photographers Guild. Their photographs and lengthy captions tell the story of cancers among miners and their families, crippling accidents and deaths of newborns in the United States, Canada, certain African nations and elsewhere. Mining in the 1930s (and even the 1960s and 1970s) was plagued by lack of appropriate safety standards. Workers (including white workers) and nearby villages were contaminated. These artworks thus visualize what Marsha Weisiger analyzed decades later in the effect of uranium mining on a Navajo family, the Cly. After a mother had passed away from cancer, a grandmother sick with cancer was forced to place her grandson in the care of missionaries (who refused him any connection with his own culture or knowledge of his biological family) [12]. The patriarchal and colonial dynamics are here at play. Tracy Bryne Voyles has also analyzed the mines and the lives of the Navajo Diné and Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, when she describes the “affect of power relations between colonizer and colonized [and how] it has shaped experiences, bodily health, and life expectancy of the Diné long after the problem should have been rectified.” The uranium mining violated the land, the people and their culture. It involved “American insistence [on] recognizing the political leadership only of men . . . [and] to undermine the strong position of women in the tribe” [13]. Many native tribes are also matrilineal, as in Oceania.

CONCLUSION

There is thus a patriarchal and colonial “biopower” over people. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault examined the evolution of capital punishments from bodily torture, in which the sovereign exercises its power of “letting live or taking life away,” to carceral systems, psychological expertise and “painless” executions. In “Necropolitics” (2003), Achille Mbembe refers to the notion of biopower described in Foucault’s lecture “Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France” (1975–1976). In this lecture, Foucault refers to Nazism and, for Mbembe, both Nazism and colonialism are systems of biopower, some of which developed in modern warfare with the use of depleted uranium (DU), for example, designed to “quickly [cripple] the enemy's capability” [14]. Through DU, as well as chemical weapons and the destruction of life-support systems, the future soldier is targeted via women’s wombs. Another of Mbembe’s examples is the destruction of a petrochemical complex near Belgrade during the Kosovo war that led to pregnant women being directed to abort and others to avoid becoming pregnant for two years. In the nuclear age, “biopower” goes beyond national borders, and focuses on regulating the land and bodies of civilians that are also “innocents” (as opposed to “convicts”). It focuses on the enemy (for Japan) and the colonized (Oceania), and in a territory outside of the aggressor’s jurisdiction system.

This nuclear biopower still exists. The consequences of the use of DU during the Gulf War was portrayed in a 2012 photo essay by Christian Werner (published in *Time* magazine in 2014) that made visual what Mbembe described in words. Taken in Basra, Fallujah and Baghdad, the pictures are of children with tumors, leukemia and deformities; of stillborn babies; and of children’s graves. The insistence of patriarchal societies on regulating women’s bodies in giving or not giving birth (to living, dead or dying babies), and in inscribing their power physically onto the female body, are also forms of biopower, atomizing the so-called nuclear family. Inevitably, this has consequences for men too. “Gulf War Syndrome” follows “shell shock” and “PTSD” in the lexicon of “side” effects of modern warfare. Many American prisoners of war also died at Hiroshima, and military men as well as women were exposed during the Cold War tests. Victimhood is not always easy to define, but what is now evident are the contemporary consequences of past wars and the weight of history upon the present.

Colonialism, imperialism, racism and patriarchy are intricately woven and thus ontologically necessary to consider for the atomic age. Finally, for victims to gain visibility, censorship must be abolished, and there must also be a reversal of focus from the aggressor to the victim to equally acknowledge them. Debates and narratives in the U.S. and Europe too often focus on the actions of the scientists and militaries of the atomic age, rather than those of the victims. In this task, the arts have a role to play, especially given that many nations are still developing nuclear weapons.

References and Notes

1 Note that for all Japanese names, I use the traditional order (family name preceding given name).


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