

Social situation of the populations affected by Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident

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Introduction

Radiation is falling. It is a quiet night. (Wago, 2011)

A Fukushima poet, Ryoichi Wago, posted this sentence on his twitter account, crying with chagrin, misery and anger, on the 16th of March in 2011. At that time, he might not have considered that the plant would continue to spread radiation for 5 years. Also he did not imagine that a different type of silence would prevail after five years of the accident. People eat, work, and sleep with radioactive material. But they talk less and less about it.

My friend, an evacuee from Fukushima to Hiroshima, recently wrote me that she felt a deepening crisis because people who have suffered from the accident more and more rarely talk. She herself does not know what she can say or how she can express herself. It never means that she has nothing to tell. She strongly feels she should talk because no one is willing to take responsibility for this horrible accident. She would like to fulfill her own responsibility by speaking about her situation and let people know about it. She thinks it is the only thing she could do with her very limited capacity and to mitigate her strong sense of guilt towards her son and the next generation. But she bitterly confesses she does not know how to talk. She ends her mail with the sentence, "I try to keep thinking, not to give up, although social ties restrain me and busy life easily occupies me".

She said she could not describe her situation; however, her short mail eloquently describes several factors that made it difficult for her to talk. I think that the current quietness captures a feature of the social situation of the population affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident today. The objective of my talk is to consider their quietness despite their continued hardship.

However, please note, I will talk only about those who once were or still are residents in severely contaminated areas. It does not include, for example, workers in the Fukushima No1 Power Plant or so-called "decontamination" workers, who are also a group of people seriously affected by this disaster.

Life with radiation

In Fukushima prefecture, "decontamination" works continues. One of the most severely contaminated places is Iitate Village, 30-40kms away from the plant; there every day 7500 workers are "decontaminating" the village where 6500 people lived before the

accident. The village aims to lift the evacuation order next year. However, in 2015 the air radiation dose amount was still $1 \mu\text{Sv/h}$ and only 20 percent of villagers showed their willingness to come back. Also in Fukushima city, the capital of the prefecture, which has never been designated as an evacuation area, decontamination work also continues. The noise of machines of high pressure washing, cutting glass, and slicing and removing the topsoil has become a familiar sound in the everyday life of the city dwellers.

The Asahi newspaper (14 Feb 2016) reported that the decontamination work of Fukushima prefecture has produced 9 million Black Flecon Bags and those bags have been piled up in 115 thousand places in the prefecture. About 60% of them are put in “temporary storage places”. However, 20% are kept in the homes and offices where the work was done. Another 10% are put in schools and the other 10% are in parks (Ministry of Environment, 2015). Old bags are easily worn out and some have already become man-made new hot-spots here and there. Last year, severe rain swept 400 Flecon bags down the river and broke them. Please imagine a life surrounded by those radioactive black bags and the sound of decontamination work. There is a 2015 survey of 1207 Fukushima mothers who have a child of 6 to 7 years old. Although they live in towns and cities of Fukushima Nakadoori, more than 70% of the mothers still limit the time for outdoor activities of their children to within one hour (Sung et al., 2015).

Loss of Atarimae life

Listening and reading stories of residents or evacuees, I often come across the word, “Atarimae”. Atarimae can be translated into “normal”, “natural” or “obvious” in English. For example, Ruiko Muto, the leader of Fukushima NPP Accusation Group, said in her speech last year, “We would like to demand Atarimae (normal things) Atarimaeni, (normally). That is why we will not give up”. Unfortunately “normal” is neither natural nor obvious. Yamamoto et al. (2015:48-9) after analyzing evacuees’ voices, say that evacuees only demand to get back “Atamimae life”. However, outsiders cannot always understand it correctly. They tend to think providing work and houses can bring their Atarimae life back. But it is not so. An evacuee frustratedly and sadly said, “It is impossible to calculate what we lost by money. There are various things” (Yamamoto et al., 2015: 49).

Naoko Kanai an evacuee from Naraha town to Iwaki city describes her situation in her interview in November 2014 as follows.

No one can understand the experience of being deprived of [one’s] whole life from its roots without experiencing [it] by oneself. Many gave me sympathetic comments that “you had a terrible hardship of running away with little more than the clothes on your back”. But I think no one [can] understand how hard it was. I could say devastating … Chagrin, sadness and anger have been piled up inside

me. I need to pour them out by transforming those emotions into different energy. That is the reason why I now work as a secretary of an evacuees' collective lawsuit. But if I could go back to [my] previous work, my husband also could go back to his work, and my mother could go back to Ookuma town and I could go back to Naraha town, I would not need any compensation payment, even a dime. But we all know that it is impossible. It is deadly clear. (White Paper of NPP Evacuation, 2015: 82-3)

The very characteristic of loss caused by nuclear deserters is not like simply losing some property. If you lost your property, let's say someone stolen your car, your damage can be compensated by money which allow you to buy a new one. But if you lived in Naraha town like her, you lost not only house, your garden, work, neighbors, friends, favorite shops, various memories attached to every corner of the town and human relations in the community. Those losses are interrelated and the whole loss cannot be a simple sum of each loss.

Loss of Five Layers of Life Environments

A sociologist describes the above loss of Atarimae life with the concept of the 5 layers of life environment (Funahashi, 2014). They are natural, economic, town infrastructure, social and culture environments. They continuously provide goods and services to fulfill individual needs and keep individual life going. The natural environment, such as mountains, rivers, plants and animals, is the foundation for the other four layers. In the case of a nuclear accident, the radioactive material changed this foundation to become hostile to human health. In the case of Okuma town, where the entire population have forcibly evacuated, 5 layers were destroyed. In other places, such as Minami-souma, whose the evacuation order was recently lifted, the decreased population with very limited young returnees resulted in a weakening economic, social, town infrastructure, and also cultural environment.

Loss of Joy of Life

Sociologists tend to emphasize functions of 5 layers but they are also the very origin of the joy of life. As Takashi Shimu, an evacuee from Tomoka town to Tokyo, described, "I lost my lifestyle. I was deprived of life" (White Paper of NPP Evacuees, 2015: 78) Evacuees often talk about growing vegetables and rice in their fields, and they miss their autumn mushroom hunting or collection of spring mountain vegetables. They enjoy those "blessings from nature". Also community bonds including bonds with ancestors are an important part of their life. Sigeru Yoshitomo, a 64-year old-man who was a part-time cow farmer in Iitate Village, said.

Other people might say "why do you want to go back to such a remote place in the middle of mountain?" People in TEPCO said, "Immigration is the same as

company transfer". But it is different. For me it [Iitate] is the only place. Why do people carry together a mikoshi portable shrine in the autumn festival? Why do people dance together to send the souls of their ancestors in summer festivals? What is homeland? Far away from home, I have first noticed that I would never have a sense of relief here, like going back to my mother. ... Reconstruction is not a reconstruction of visible life. But I think, it means that we can talk about culture, listen to music and dance together. When we can really enjoy those things from the bottom of our hearts, probably it is a real reconstruction. (White Papers of NPP Evacuation, 2015: 76-77)

Disfunction of Habitual Behavior, Forced Choices, Endless Discussion

After losing life environment, life cannot go on as usual. Our everyday life mostly consists of preconscious habitual behavior, but without life environment, people cannot rely on habits. The risk of radiation makes the situation worse. If your life is a jigsaw puzzle, in order to accommodate a new piece, radiation, your other pieces have to be changed; no old piece? can be used.

People are forced to think and make decisions, such as stay or evacuate, eat or not eat, go out or not go out, make children put masks on or not. No one can be sure about their own decision. Any decision has a certain risk. Risk in its worst case ends in serious health problems. Furthermore, in case your decision influences others or there are many stakeholders around your decisions, you have to consult, discuss, negotiate with others. However, without agreed measurement to predict the consequences, discussion has no conclusion and those processes have become very painful experiences.

Differences in recognition of the radiation risk often seriously damage people's relation with others and generate psychological fear (Sung et al., 2015:151). I know those who talk about broken relationship with close relatives, or important friends, as the saddest experience after the accident. The survey referred to above indicates that the gap in recognition of radiation risk with partners or friends and neighbors prolonged the mothers' depression and symptoms of PTSD in statistically significant ways (Sung et al., 2015: 151). Losing habitual behaviors means losing Atarimae life and decreases predictability of human relationships.

It is psychologically exhausting.

Financial Burden, Health and Discrimination Anxiety

When the 5 layers of life environment become deteriorated or destroyed, people buy extra goods and services in order to supplement them. Those who have chosen to stay in contaminated area but always pay attention to radiation exposure are called "evacuees at home". They buy bottled water and vegetables from western Japan. They also spend significant amounts of money to take children out from contaminated areas dur-

ing the weekend or long holidays. Those evacuees at home have serious health and discrimination anxiety for their children, and in order to minimize the risk of radiation, they have to pay more. The trade-off between financial burden and health and discrimination anxiety becomes a big stress for many.

However, more financial burdens are put on the shoulders of evacuees from officially non-designated areas. They abandoned a whole life environment on their own. TEPCO pays compensation for evacuees from officially designated areas. However, many from not-recognized areas have had to pay most of the cost by themselves. Although evacuees are away from the everyday worries of avoiding hot spots or contaminated local food, they are never free from the anxiety over the future health of their children and discrimination.

Who Disturbed Their Voices?

So far I have tried to explain the suffering of residents affected by the Fukushima NPP accident. They lost their Atarimae life. It can be explained as losing their properly functioning 5 layers of life environment, their joy of life and their habitual ways of doing things. Furthermore, forced choices without agreed upon risk standards have damaged human relationships and added psychological stress. The financial burden is also serious. Its trade off relation with health and discrimination anxiety is another seed for stress. Moreover, evacuees who are now away from radiation also cannot completely escape from health and discrimination anxiety.

People continue to suffer for 5 years after the accident. In the situation where no one takes responsibility for their sufferings, society should listen to them. But it is not only my friend in Hiroshima who cannot talk about own situation; a woman who lives in Kooriyama also told me about her difficulty.

I very much hate my psychological state, endless anxiety for 5 years. But now so many people live just normally. They say loudly “ It is Rumor damage!” “We need Reconstruction!” Both town and prefecture all help them and gear up “reconstruction”. But they look at us coldly. They look those anxious people with prejudiced eyes. But in reality at the parking lot of the supermarket at Koroiyama city, when I get out of my car, the air radiation level is 0.53μ . It is a place where decontamination work has finished. … The situation is still worrisome. I do not want to have regrets later. I as a mother hate to see my children get sick. I do not want you to forget this. That is why I want to talk and I want you to listen.

She is a mother of two children and came to find a host for a summer camp of Fukushima children. Her concern seems legitimate but she is minority in Fukushima. She said that she could not talk like this in Fukushima. If she shows her anxiety, people

think her strange and will say “if so, you should go”. In her talk we can see strong political and social pressure. Those who give her pressure are the town, prefecture and those who reject the risk of radiation. They also tend to be proponents for “Reconstruction”.

My Hiroshima friend also has told me,

There are people who cheered me up, saying “Fukushima can be reconstructed again like Hiroshima.” Their goodwill hides the very essence of the issue and it benefits those who try to earn money through nuclear power. Not only indifference but also goodwill of ordinary people trivialize this serious global issue into a private mental issue. For that goodwill we are forced to say thank you. It made me agonize.

She lost her words in front of genuine encouragement for reconstruction. She cannot say that the issue is not reconstruction. She cannot say that reconstruction does not reduce her suffering. Also as she indicates, the frantic call for reconstruction hides the issue of responsibility for the destruction. The government also conveniently put responsibility for reconstruction on people, saying “ you are the agent to built your community, not us”. However, reconstruction seems appealing for many. It might be because people, without exception, get their Atarimae life back.

The woman from Fukushima also shuts her mouth when someone cries “reconstruction”. Her justified concerns about radiation are treated like obstacles against reconstruction. After five years, the government has put more efforts on reconstruction. It seems an important factor hindering people from talking about their concerns over radiation.

Politics for Reconstruction based on 20mSv/year

To regain “Atarimae life”, reconstructing the life environment is necessary. It is not individual but collective work and requires coordination and financial support. Thinking of the scale of destruction and its responsibility, the role of the national government is inevitable.

Prime Minister Abe has kept repeating “Without reconstruction, no revitalization of Japan”. The government issued the latest Guideline for Speeding up the Reconstruction in June last year. It demands that the current evacuation order of “Zone in Preparation for the Lifting of the Evacuation Order” and “Restricted Residence Area” be lifted by the end of March next year. This applies to about 55,000 evacuees of 19,300 households (White Paper :59). The government plans to provide various support for

returnees. But there is no policy measure and no support for evacuees from those areas (White Paper of NPP Evacuees, 2015: 29)¹.

Those reconstruction policies are based on the government “safety” standard of 20mSv/year. It was also the standard for the series of evacuation and compensation policies which brought confusion, battles and suffering of people affected by the accidents. The government has justified it by ICRP’s recommendation. However, it seems difficult to convince many because the public standard has been 1 mSv/ year for other parts of Japan.

When the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology decided that nursery and schools would be open under the 20mSv/year in 2011, Prof. Kosako quit his job as a special advisor to the Cabinet, saying with tears, “My academic life will end, if I approve 20mSv.” Also thanks are due to the IPPNW, who immediately sent official letters to the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister, warning of the health risk of 20mSv/year. Some Fukushima parents stood up and protested against the standard and appealed to the court in 2011 to demand the right of evacuation of their children. However, despite all that opposition and resistance, the government has maintained their 20mSv level until now.

Enemies against Reconstruction and Communities

The 20mSv/ year radiation standard is a key part of their reconstruction package. In a situation where reconstruction is impossible without government support, Fukushima people are forced to accept the 20 mSv/year standard. For many it seems inevitable in order to regain the Atarimae life and revive their community. Based on this “safety” standard, 5 layers of life environment are under construction.

However, reconstruction does not question the responsibility for the nuclear accident and the continuous suffering of numerous people. Reconstruction does not take into account future diseases caused by radiation because it regards 20mSv/year as safe enough.

¹ The government demands TEPCO should continue to pay for evacuees monthly compensation of 100,000 yen until April 2018 regardless their returning time. But it means after April 2018, all will lose that financial support. Also the government ordered Fukushima prefecture to differentiate its housing support between enforced evacuees and voluntary evacuees. The Fukushima Governor already announced they would stop providing housing for voluntary evacuees last June. After April, 2017, only 24,000 evacuees (9,100 household) from the "Difficult-to-return Zone" will be the only officially recognized evacuees and the only ones entitled to official support for evacuation.

In this situation those who worry about radiation under the 20mSv/year standard may become enemies of reconstruction. Reconstruction is only possible in safe places. Reconstruction is not only a political issue but also a community issue. It is not easy for many to become enemies of their community. Those worries are regarded to damage sales of local agricultural products. Those worries can make young people away from their home. The worst thing might be that they will trigger anxiety of those who try to ignore the risk. Proponents for the reconstruction have many reasons to attack people who worry about radiation under the 20mSv/ year. Even for those who are not big fan for reconstruction, it might be more practical and easier to accept and follow reconstruction policies. They can stop thinking and forget about radiation. Anyway it is not enjoyable to face the risk and to think about future health problems. However, it is not easy to escape from anxiety. A Fukushima mother says:

As time goes by, the NPP accident is becoming a past incident. I find myself not worrying about radiation in everyday life. But watching my child, I keep asking myself, "Is it good to keep going on like this? What should I do? They cannot get married because of radiation? Can I take responsibility as a mother?" I try to think about it as little as I possibly can, because I become confused when I think of those questions. Among doctors there is no agreement; some say harmful but others say no harm. What is the truth? Probably no one knows. But every day I want someone to show me a clear answer. (Sung et al., 2015: 9)

Resignation but New Mode of Sending Voices

Silence also comes from the attitude of the audience. Japanese as a whole have been losing interest in the Fukushima accident, especially as more attention is being paid to new security laws and the government efforts to change the Constitution. For the last five years, the government did not take the voices of people seriously. Their opinion has never been listened to and it is clear that the government did not care much about them. Also their policies for restarting NPPs shocked those who still suffer from the accident. Here their resignation cannot be avoided.

However, now some determined people are changing their mode of speaking and fighting in the court. Last week the court ordered the government to compensate "voluntary" evacuees. To date, 21 collective compensation lawsuits have been filed. Also more than 2.3 million compensation claims (by the end of 2014) were made to TEPCO directly and 15,000 cases have been brought to the Nuclear Damage Compensation Conflict Resolution Center.

My another evacuee friend, Maki, has also found a new way of voicing. She told me that she can see a hope now. Although there are so many bad news, she find more and more people are gradually discovering the real important thing and start to move. Look-

ing back her last 5 years, the first three years have been frenzy. In fact, she has been always a great speaker and an efficient organizer in many demonstration and meeting against NPP in Hiroshima. But after three years of hard work, she noticed she could not defeat the big thing. She changed her way. She now works for city government who wants to invite new residence. The city is situated in the middle of mountain with shrinking aging population where she is creating a community welcoming evacuees. The community should be the place where young people and children, including herself can fully enjoy their life without worries about radiation. For that objective, A lots of job should be done. The local people need to change their way of thinking too. She said that she is preparing for the time when people in contaminated area want to escape. The time will come soon, she thinks.

The government is now speeding up its “reconstruction” ignoring health risk under the 20mSv/year, In this situation many are forced to mute their voice, hoping to regain their Atarimae life and suppressing their anxiety. However some people have found a new way of voicing. Those voices might create an alternative Atarimae life with justice and peace.

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