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The Ongoing Disaster

ALEXIS DUDDEN

On March 15, 2011, late at night at the Osaka train station, I met the first refugees from the earthquake that I would come to know. The family of four did not look like what I thought that people who were fleeing the horrendous images on television would. The mother, father, and two young daughters were neatly dressed, and their yellow lab was obediently packed into a crate that stood in the middle of their matching suitcases. Each wore a crisp, white mask. Much as I wanted to hear stories of what they had seen, I imagined that they did not want to talk. My son, however, zoomed a toy train over to their youngest girl, who was about six or seven; she happily raced it back. I motioned for him to stop and smiled at the mother, who acknowledged me from behind her mask as she brushed a hand across her forehead in exhaustion. "Are you OK?" I asked, not knowing how to avoid noticing that something appeared wrong. "Mmmm-hmmm." "Are you traveling further tonight?" "Kanazawa." "How terrible it all must be." "We're from Fukushima," she said. "We're fine. Our house is fine. It all looks fine, but we don't know what will happen, and the girls are so young."

In the days to come, I would see and meet many people on train platforms and in hotel lobbies and hear many fraught and distinctive disaster stories. That first encounter, however, underscored the profound dissonances that lay ahead for those fleeing the different kinds of disasters that struck Japan on March 11, 2011: the natural catastrophes of earthquake and tsunami and the manmade hell generated by the ongoing meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

From the earliest moments of the crisis, those in charge at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) lied about the severity of the situation to many, including then-Prime Minister Kan Naoto, who was responsible for making drastic decisions such as calling for mandatory evacuations (Kingston 2011). As an unprecedented three reactors went into meltdown between March 11 and 15, TEPCO officials insisted until May 25 that this dangerous situation was not happening, despite numerous Japanese and international scientists' vocal concern that it was. During this time, TEPCO officials and their political allies

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instead wove a malevolent tale of damage control. Through a concerted effort, they pushed a "woe is us" explanation: no one, they said, could have predicted or planned for such an emergency. In the coming months, this would prove both false and enormously irresponsible. Geologists, for example, demonstrated that waves from several earlier earthquakes would have breached the plant's 10-meter sea walls. Nonetheless, TEPCO's denials from the start created an either/or difference among those who fled their homes and livelihoods in Fukushima and elsewhere in the ravaged Northeast when none should exist.

On that awful afternoon of March 11, 2011, everyone who could ran from a terrifying tsunami, including some workers at Fukushima Daiichi who had to shout at plant guards to unlock company gates so they could flee the approaching wall of water. In part because of TEPCO's willful untruths from the start, differences in awareness and knowledge about the dangers that people escaped then and since in and around the Fukushima plant have created a divide between these refugees and their supporters and those drinking what might be called the TEPCO Kool-Aid.

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By the end of 2011, detailed lists of the dead and missing were available through local and national police websites.[1] Rosters of the tens of thousands of evacuees remained imprecise, however, because defining the term proved so difficult. The tsunami evacuees had no homes; compensation was assured. Other evacuees had houses but had escaped what is now called the "mandatory exclusion zone" around the Fukushima plant (a 20-kilometer circle). Compensation is promised, yet complicated by arguments over how much and whether the government or TEPCO is responsible for payment. Finally, several thousand people from towns such as Iitate outside the "mandatory exclusion zone" were in temporary housing because their local leaders urged them to stay away due to the radiation. These people—including those from towns that would eventually be declared unsafe—together with others who chose to leave different parts of Fukushima because of radiation are the so-called "voluntary" evacuees. On November 28, 2011, Iitate's Mayor Kanno Norio told me that by his count the number of his town's registered households has doubled to 2,600 because of the way the evacuation has worked: a mother and daughter might live in one small apartment, while her husband and mother-in-law might share a space in a shelter, for example.

By year's end, the government announced that all but those from the "mandatory exclusion zone" should return home in April 2012. How this would work and with what safeguards remained unclear. Some have moved as far away as Hokkaido and Okinawa; compensation remains undelivered, increasingly dividing the haves and have-nots. A woman in the town of Ino, where many from

[1]http://www.npa.go.jp/archive/keibi/biki/mimoto/identity.htm

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Iitate moved despite high levels of radiation there too, mentioned that Ino's doctor fled to Osaka with his family several days after the March 12 explosion. He returned, she said, but added: "His family *did not*." Likely, the couple whom I met travelling with their children and dog was among the first in this group; they had the means to leave right away, and for them and those in their path, the choice to stay ceased to be a choice. Throughout the irradiated area, to the confusion of evacuees and others alike, many houses and farms are intact and look fine albeit getting weedy. Although barriers deter people from entering the "mandatory exclusion zone" closest to the plant, it is alarmingly easy to go to places where radiation levels at times have measured as high as parts of the no-go area, depending on the wind (see figure 1).

One woman from Iitate explained how she spent the summer doing her family's laundry after evacuating to a tiny apartment in Ino (about 50 kilometers northwest of the plant): "They told us it wasn't safe to dry things outside, but there was no room indoors. My daughter and I would do the wash and then I'd take it home (to Iitate) and hang it in the house there and wait or come back for it later. Now my husband lives in a shelter, so I can hang it inside the apartment here, but my daughter and I have no room to stand up." Not addressing the problem of how radiation in Iitate at times exceeded levels in officially evacuated towns, she paused and continued, "I miss Iitate's wide open space. I have no fields here, and I can't grow anything. I think I'm a bother, so I don't stop by and say hi to people. I don't know how long this can last."

Some argue that as much as an 80-kilometer radius of the plant (lopsidedly skewed to the northwest) should be sealed off for generations—even though hundreds of thousands remain there now (counting Fukushima city)—raising immediate questions about the use of the words "voluntary" and "temporary."



Figure 1. Road from Ino to Iitate.

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In addition to painful loss and insecurity, those dislocated by March 11's disasters quickly began to face the challenges of being used politically, especially at the national level. Five days after the disasters struck, Emperor Akihito named the moment "the Great East Japan Earthquake," designating its collectivization in Japanese society. Startling many with a rare television appearance, the emperor's action recalled his father's declaration of Japan's defeat in August 1945 and underscored the monumental scale of what was taking place.

Right away, myriad interests became involved in defining the disaster's terms and dimensions, and on June 25, 2011, the government released its plan, "Towards Reconstruction: 'Hope Beyond the Disaster'" (Reconstruction Design Council 2011). The report drew criticism from all sides for its emphasis on the future instead of on victims' immediate conditions.

In October 2011, Tatsushi Arai, a Japanese-raised, U.S.-based peace negotiator, visited several of Iwate Prefecture's most devastated areas, and his concerns spring from the most ubiquitous term in play since March 11: "*kizuna*" (bonds, as in the bonds that many Japanese have to Tohoku). Arai urges those in decision-making positions—particularly at the national level in Tokyo—to *continue* to understand the socially transformative possibilities of realizing "the bonds that disaster affected people themselves felt, by way of receiving donations and voluntary service from so many sources, including countries whose names they have never heard of" (Arai 2011). Those in need expect action that pays attention to them; talking from the center about "bonds" without understanding how victims are living could lead to deepening their frustration and despair.

Different difficulties arose for those who escaped within and from Fukushima: Geiger counters at evacuation centers, certificates to "prove" refugees' health, rejection from hotels for perceived contamination even for those with certificates, and children bullied for the same reasons far from home. Those who fled Fukushima—even those who escaped initially because of the coming tsunami—were from the beginning doubly damned, never simply *just* refugees: they were from Fukushima and believed to be polluted by radiation.

Deeply problematic, competing interests determined that the revitalization of the Northeast—including Fukushima—would be critical to the revitalization of the nation just emerging from the long years of economic stagnation. The region's rebirth would reinvigorate Japan into the economic powerhouse it still should be, able to compete with China; pushed further, a renewed Japan could be militarily capable of standing side by side with the United States instead of in a permanent state of dependency (Samuels in progress). In line with Tatsushi Arai's thinking, political theorist David Leheny observes peril in such collectively propelled "disaster nationalism," especially in how differing interests locate in this nationalized narrative particular *pre*-March 11 passions and agendas regardless of what the disasters' victims might need or want (Leheny 2011). In this volatile combination of national imaginings, TEPCO's lie necessitates that nature's forces alone be held entirely responsible for the disaster's aftermath. To

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include manmade problems in the equation now—specifically radioactive contamination and those fleeing it "voluntarily"—does nothing less than call one's patriotism into question.

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As Fukushima's victims navigate their new realities, several features of contemporary Japanese society are clear. First and foremost, use of recent communication tools such as Twitter and blogging demonstrate that widespread acceptance of mass media and knowledge is a thing of the past. The new media primarily challenge the radiation safety assurances heard from other sources.[2] Also, growing numbers of Japanese are acting on such challenges.

To be sure, the social media revolution is global—the 2011 Arab Spring is a powerful example—yet a critical component of modern Japanese history lies at the heart of the Tweeting and protest that surround the Fukushima disaster: the *hibaku* phenomenon. The term itself, as many will know, translates as "exposed to radiation," yet most often describes victims of the 1945 American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*hibakusha*). Indeed, when the first Fukushima reactor exploded on March 12, 2011, hearing and reading the terms "*hibaku*" and "*hibakusha*" being used to describe something taking place in Japan in real time had a chilling effect: a woman working at the inn in western Japan where I was staying stopped cold when she saw the news on television. "No," she said. "That's my husband's family's home. No. Not again. Not again." Months later a woman in the town of Ino told me she did not think much of the news on March 12 when she heard it over her battery radio; she and others had been so lucky the day before: "No one was hurt in Ino." Only when her electricity came back on several days later and she saw the continuous explosions on television, she said, "I thought, 'Can I really be a *hibakusha*?' I was very afraid. Then I realized I might be."

There are significant echoes now of the 1954 reaction that launched Japan's first anti-nuclear movement, which, in turn, sparked the world's initial movement to stop nuclear weapons testing. On March 1, 1954, when Kuboyama Aikichi, a fisherman aboard one of a number of boats trawling in the South Pacific, became a *hibakusha* after being caught in ash showers from American hydrogen bomb testing near Bikini Atoll, many Japanese were incredulous that this could happen again so soon after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing disasters in 1945. His death, combined with awareness that the boats' poisoned catch had gone to market, propelled a group of women in Tokyo's Suginami district to amass fifteen million names and demand action against the United States.

The most immediately important similarity between the Bikini history and the current crisis is the failure of official compensation when it grossly divides victims of a common disaster. Public outcry over the Bikini tests compelled

[2]Twitter reported a 500 percent increase in Tweets from Japan abroad after the quake struck. Twitter 2011.

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even the pro-American Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru to act, not in the least because fish boycotts were impoverishing villages in Shizuoka. Yoshida agreed to a $2 million settlement with the U.S. government, which stipulated that fishermen able to demonstrate radiation illness would receive about $10000 each, but only those able to do so conclusively (which proved difficult then as well as today with far more scientific information available). Fifty years later, a former schoolteacher from Kuboyama's hometown of Yaizu described how others envied the money because they had all become poor from the national fish boycotts. He recalled some local women saying, "I wish my husband had been showered with radioactive ash" (Hirano 2004).

Uneven forms of compensation are in play for March 11's victims, especially regarding TEPCO's portion of the disasters (McNeill 2011). To begin with, those in shelters because of the earthquake and tsunami have raised concerns that their needs will become secondary, or worse, forgotten in the whorl surrounding the reactors. Their apprehensions compounded during September 2011's six-month anniversary coverage that focused on how hard victims and volunteers had worked to clean up debris. Many worried that those outside the disaster's path would remember only September's photographs of newly neatened neighborhoods filled with lush, fresh grass and forget the homeless and jobless or that winter would soon blanket them with snow (Reese 2011).

At the same time, victims in the path of Fukushima's radiation—which includes other parts of the Northeast yet concentrates in Fukushima's thinly populated farming communities closest to the plant—still find themselves confronting officials who *continue* to equivocate about what constitutes danger. Many question whether they should leave their homes and jobs and children's education plans, worrying about mortgages and children's college and high school entrance exams, let alone neighbors, friends, and older family members staying on, all of which describes the profound unease of new daily life where personal Geiger counters are the latest home appliance. In November 2011, a poster hanging in the entryway to the Ino Town Hall quietly publicized this feeling, especially to young parents (see figure 2).

From the beginning, TEPCO's determination to minimize compensation costs imperiled hundreds of thousands of peoples' lives. Within weeks of March 11, mayors of a number of towns outside the official evacuation zone, such as Iitate, began to take independent action, authorizing municipal funds for evacuations and pleading for help on behalf of their towns. Sakurai Katsunobu, mayor of Minami-soma, became most famous with his March 26, 2011, "S.O.S." video on YouTube that became an international scandal. Minami-soma is within 30 kilometers of the plant in what TEPCO then called an "exclusion zone," meaning that evacuation was not mandatory, provided residents stayed entirely indoors, with all vents and water taps sealed ("SOS from Mayor" 2011). The mayor's straightforward, ten-minute appeal sought help for the 20,000 people in his town who had survived the earthquake and tsunami but

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Figure 2. "Fukushima Hospital Public Lecture Series on Radiation. Lecture: 'Can't Sleep Because of Radiation Concerns?' December 4, 2011, Sponsoring organization: Fukushima Breastfeeding Society." Note at the bottom: "Child care not provided, but children welcome."

had not gone to shelters and were now running out of water, food, and fuel at a moment when millions of dollars and aid supplies were pouring into Japan from around the world. His act would temporarily shame TEPCO and the government into naming the town provisionally unsafe. By the end of September 2011, however, Mayor Sakurai and others outside the "mandatory zone" learned they were on their own again: their municipalities would be responsible for decontamination costs to fit into national rebuilding plans, and residents would soon be

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"free" to decide whether or not to return. Over half of Minami-soma's residents have gone home; school is open, and the mayor is unpopular, seen as having created additional troubles for the hard-hit seaside town. There are promises but no guarantees of additional compensation for these areas, which include villages from which farmers were unwittingly sending cesium-contaminated beef to market last summer as well as cesium-laden rice by fall, and whose land the National Tax Agency declared "non-taxable" for inheritance purposes on November 1 (meaning "valueless").

Moreover, at times officials named certain portions of towns uninhabitable, the remainder "safe" or "within acceptable limits," and then changed their minds again. On June 30, 2011, 113 households in the town of Date (roughly 60 kilometers to the plant's northwest) received "special evacuation orders" due to exceedingly high radiation readings at their homes. One young mother, Akiba Chieko, did not receive "orders" yet lived next door to a family who did. She appeared on NHK news that evening and urged officials to understand that their actions were creating far *more* fear, anger, and unease (NHK 2011). Would they please visit the area, she asked, to understand what was going on and how people were living? A farmer who received "special orders" smiled at the camera and explained that he could not afford to leave because he had to tend his crops.

On August 17, 2011, four children from different towns throughout Fukushima prefecture (aged nine to thirteen) and their sponsoring organization, Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation, held an open meeting in Tokyo at the First Members' Office Building of the House of Representatives. They wanted to voice concerns to the government's nuclear response committee and also to Ministry of Education officials who urged children to attend school despite reports of poisoned air and soil. With remarkable poise, thirteen-year-old Hashimoto Kaya said:

> I can't trust the government asserting Fukushima is safe even though children there go to schools wearing masks and can't enter swimming pools. The government has raised the legal limit of radiation by 20 times and insisted that the new limit is safe. But I cannot believe that. The government's policy like that can't gain support even from junior high school students like us. Is money more important than Fukushima people? Both those who have evacuated and those who have stayed in Fukushima, have worried about each other very much. So, please think seriously about evacuating us and our school friends in Fukushima all together to a safe place (quoted from the YouTube subtitles). ("Japanese Government" 2011)

A young bureaucrat responded to Hashimoto's statement with familiar platitudes about efforts to rebuild infrastructure, only to be immediately questioned: "What about evacuating the children?" The bureaucrat appeared stunned—"Evacuation?"—and yet another man, while looking up from his

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iPad, shouted: "Will the government pay compensation to evacuees?! Radiation keeps coming out every day! Nobody can live in Fukushima!"

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On August 6, 1945, no word existed in Japanese for those who survived Hiroshima to describe themselves, as Hachiya Michihiko's famous *Diary of a Japanese Physician* makes clear (Hachiya 1955). Today, however, the word "*hibaku*" and basic knowledge about it exists because of the central roles that Hiroshima and Nagasaki's tragic histories have held now for generations of Japanese in explaining the Second World War. Better equipped than many around the world to understand the term, radiation specialist Anzai Ikuro nevertheless argues that a fundamental problem in educating Japanese about the hazards of the radioactivity around them now is that so much discussion has focused on the horrors of bombs and on banning weapons (Anzai 2011). In order to understand the difficulties Japan faces going forward, "*hibaku*'s" meaning must broaden beyond something that many associate primarily with war. Kyoto University radiation specialist Imanaka Tetsuji put it differently: "It is already impossible to live in a world free of radioactive contamination. Instead we must know what it means to live with it. Understanding this means having policies to match"(Imanaka 2011).

Unfortunately, the prime minister's office did not get the truth from TEPCO, nor did cabinet members understand the resources available to them in the days and weeks following March 11. Failure to employ the national SPEEDI radiation dispersion prediction system is paramount. Among other things, use of this system could have prevented thousands of people in the explosion's immediate pathways from seeking refuge in areas such as the Iitate town hall complex that exposed them to *more* radiation than the places they fled (see figure 3).



Figure 3. Iitate Town Hall.

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By March 21, 2011, many were astonished to learn that the government failed to use the SPEEDI system, making it clear from the beginning that officials have been making it up as they have gone along. Those believing themselves trapped by attempts to downplay hazards have capitalized on this thread of recklessness.

Throughout the early weeks of the crisis, television channels replayed images of the reactors exploding as announcers attempted to explain number-drenched information in interchangeable millisieverts (mSv), microsieverts, and becquerels, all the while reassuring viewers with cartoon-charactered flip charts that there was no need to worry because all these numbers equaled "the same amount of radiation on a flight from Tokyo to New York" or "in a year's regular exposure to the sun." To the further bewilderment of many, the government would soon trot out a baseline dosage limit for Fukushima residents—including children—that is on par with or higher than limits for radiation control workers worldwide (20 mSv), yet by which it stood at year's end, saying simply that it would aim to reduce the number to 1 mSv as soon as possible. Meanwhile, workers at the Fukushima plant received a significantly higher threshold limit than before (from 100 mSv to 250 mSv), giving them the highest rate internationally and one far greater than U.S. military personnel called in for radiological control duty on America's assistance mission, "Operation Tomodachi" (Operation Friend). In this mix, the woman from Ino quietly understood herself as a new *hibakusha*.

Right away, small, disconnected voices began protesting, beginning with the Fukushima cabbage farmer who killed himself on March 24, 2011, once a little tangible information of what was spewing out of the reactors became known (cesium being of primary concern for farmers). At his burial, family members maintained that he was "murdered by the nuclear blast" (*Asahi Shinbun*. 2011a). Then, on April 11, two European-based Greenpeace radiology experts held a press conference at Tokyo's Foreign Correspondents' Club and dealt the first substantial blow to the government and TEPCO's "Things Will Be OK If We All Work Hard Together!" approach. In dispassionate terms, Drs. Rianne Teule and Jan van de Putte explained that children and pregnant women throughout Fukushima prefecture—including Fukushima and Koriyama cities with populations of 290,000 and 338,000 respectively—should be evacuated (Miller 2011). Teule maintained that results from her team's survey conducted between April 4th and 10th at a playground in Fukushima City revealed radiation levels that translated to the "threshold for evacuation at Chernobyl" (Greenpeace International 2011).

Therefore, as the nation marked the one-month anniversary of the disasters, the challenge for the "truth" about Fukushima was on. In what now can only be seen as a gross distraction for people in harm's way, those toeing TEPCO's line launched a well-financed campaign to keep "Japan Open for Business!" Chernobyl be damned because even while raising the category of the Fukushima Daiichi

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crisis to a level 7—the same as Chernobyl—throughout April, May, and June, politicians of all stripes daily chomped on cucumbers and other things from Fukushima, including former Prime Minister Kan, famous for blowing the whistle on AIDS-tainted blood but who nonetheless now spouted "Mmmm! Crunchy!" while eating his vegetables on television for all to see (*Asahi Shimbun* 2011b).[3] Popular entertainment stars guzzled Fukushima sake, while sumo wrestlers and soccer teams showed up to eat Fukushima fruit and fish at train stations and evacuation centers. Even Lady Gaga got in on the act when she visited Japan in June and December: "Ooooh, I just looove Japanese green tea," she cooed, apparently unaware of how much a part of the establishment she seemed by doing so (Dudden 2011).

Cucumber campaigns notwithstanding, the Fukushima radiation story proved resilient in the face of early efforts to will away its magnitude. To be clear, with three reactors in meltdown, areas around the Fukushima Daiichi plant would have been contaminated even if TEPCO officials told the truth about the crisis from the start. That said, TEPCO's falsifications together with the government's fumbling obfuscated the explosions' poisoning of parts of the nation's food chain, groundwater, and streams, not to mention the Pacific Ocean. Moreover, by pretending that things are not as bad as many Japanese and international scientists, citizen activists, and concerned parents show them to be, TEPCO and the government's efforts to minimize their losses and responsibilities have held tens of thousands of Fukushima residents hostage in their houses and at schools, as well as Japanese society at large in limbo at the supermarket.

Tainted-beef scandals drew wide attention in July and August 2011 and compelled the government to measure cesium in farmland and forests in Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Yamagata, Gunma, Niigata, and Chiba, leaving many aware of where danger lay but on their own to cope (Yasunari et al. 2011). Topsoil removal began with a passion at schools and parks yet without support for what to do with the tainted dirt. Many piled it in corners of yards, securing it temporarily under blue tarps. A priest offered the grounds of his temple, and one woman in Ino told me that she and her friends dumped the soil and leaves in ditches and streams behind their houses; they knew that what they did was likely harmful, but they had no help.

Equally important, activists and worried parents blogged and Tweeted about tainted and/or banned food showing up in nursery and primary schools throughout Japan. Their actions cemented widespread distrust, leading to things such as

[3]Japanese and international businessmen and politicians became involved right away in the effort to promote Japan's post-March 11 financial viability, ranging from former U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle to Japan's Foreign Minister Matsumoto Takeaki, who published "Japan Is Open for Business" on April 30 in *The International Herald Tribune*. The year ended with Warren Buffet's visit to Fukushima.

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the city of Tokyo's decision to begin testing processed food in early November. Many would cry, "Too little too late!" while TEPCO *still* missed the point. During the company's first media tour of the power plant on November 12, 2011, a company spokesman responded to questions about international studies of cesium in the ocean and atmosphere in and around Japan that far exceeded TEPCO's numbers: "We have not studied the content of their research, and are not in a position to respond. We have no plans at this point to modify our estimates" (Guttenfelder 2011). When Prime Minister Noda declared the reactors "stable" on December 16, the blogosphere and Twitter world (deepthroat@gloomynews 2h) minced few words, equating the statement with U.S. President George W. Bush's 2003 "mission accomplished" speech.

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The effects of long-term exposure to constant low doses of radiation are open to debate; the government and TEPCO keep the "we couldn't have prepared" myth alive in this arena, too, giving the nod to open-ended, thirty-year cancer studies on Fukushima residents in lieu of financial help for relocation now. This especially enrages those with young children who refuse to accept that making lab animals out of their families is the best that their rich country can offer.

Long-standard print and visual materials concerning effects from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings are just the beginning of what fuels contemporary debate. The knowledge that Japanese pediatricians and radiology experts gained in the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster proves invaluable, such as Anzai Ikuro's recently re-released *Family Discussion: Radioactive Contamination at Your Dinner Table*. This blends with the work of others, such as photojournalist Morizumi Takashi, whose recent series, "Nuclear Blue," focuses on Fukushima but comes on top of a career made famous tracking the effects of depleted uranium on Iraqi children sickened by soil contaminated by American weapons (Takashi 2011).

Curiously, the haphazard approach to the Fukushima disaster flies in face of the issue that has consumed Japanese society for the past decade: the nation's declining birthrate. Among other things, the horrible histories of the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as Chernobyl teach that radiation affects children much more than adults, and yet it would appear that TEPCO's story—and government compliance with it—necessitates erring on the side of risk.

Such backstory has only bolstered those challenging the government's handling of the TEPCO disaster. Although nothing like a mass movement appeared overnight, last summer small-scale anti-nuclear walks, flash mobs, and protest concerts began to gain traction. On August 15, 2011, a number of Tokyo-based rock stars sponsored outdoor charity events throughout Fukushima under the "Project Fukushima" banner (Yoshide and Ryo 2011). A month later, groups gathered in Tokyo's Meiji Park for a demonstration that counted over sixty thousand protestors; they and others aimed for ten million signatures by March 2012

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and a national referendum on nuclear power. Emboldened, a small number of "Fukushima Mothers" began sit-ins outside the prime minister's office, and hundreds more held hands around government buildings. It no longer seemed radical for a lecture advertisement to read: "And now, of course, in Fukushima Prefecture and other areas, millions more are joining the ranks of *hibakusha*."

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In March 2011, radioactive plumes also raced over Tokyo, carried south by wind and rain. Although effects were far less severe there than in areas closer to the plant, hot spots continue to emerge in Tokyo's downtown as well as in Yokohama and Kawasaki ("Fukushima Unit 3 Plume" 2011). In short, fallout from Fukushima refused to hide in the less populated and poorer parts of Japan where the nation's nuclear industry has long played NIMBY politics to its advantage (Dunisbree and Aldrich 2011; Lesbirel 1998). Similar to how the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe broke beyond the Ukraine to become part of Russian and European history, Fukushima is now and forever part of Japan's national story as well as international history throughout areas of the Pacific that wait for the radioactive waste dumped into the sea.

Emphasis remains on topsoil removal and power washing over organized support for dignified relocation for those who want what the young girl from Fukushima requested: "Evacuate us and our school friends in Fukushima all together to a safe place." Guidelines have stressed the need for children to play indoors and wear masks when they go outside, regardless of their questionable effects, let alone parents' ready explanations that children no longer wear them: "They're hot"; "They're uncomfortable"; "They stopped using them long ago."

Sitting in the receiving room of his temporary offices, Iitate's Mayor Kanno did not miss a beat when asked how it felt to be ignored by Tokyo: "I am dedicated to making sure that we are not ignored," he said, surrounded by colorful paper cranes, children's drawings, and signs of support from all over Japan. In a nearby building, however, the woman in charge of many of Ino's social service programs said she knew something was wrong: "I look at the autumn leaves, but I see only black and white." Elsewhere, a woman helping to run the temporary service center for Iitate's "voluntary" evacuees (of which she counted herself) said that she "felt (her) heart being strangled" the longer the unease continued: "And I hear it in others' voices, too, they aren't who they were anymore."

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