

Report for Mayors for Peace – Samuel Shaw, September 2016

This report will address several aspects of my recent involvement in the Mayors for Peace summer programme, including personal reflections on peace in the context of Japan and, more specifically, Hiroshima, as well as a conceptual and practical suggestion for future peacebuilding activity in Manchester. It is first worth briefly describing the nature of the programme as well as introducing myself before going into further detail about what I have learned through my time in Hiroshima.

I was in Hiroshima for ten days at the beginning of August in several different capacities. That is to say that I was representing different places and institutions in different ways. The majority of the programme consisted of an intensive short course at the Hiroshima City University (HCU), my participation in which was facilitated by the Mayors for Peace secretariat at Hiroshima's city government. Hiroshima and Manchester are related at a local government level by their involvement and leading roles within Mayors for Peace, which in Manchester, as in Hiroshima, has led to a working relationship between local government and local universities. In this instance I was therefore representing both sides of the relationship between Manchester City Council and the University of Manchester-associated 'Humanitarianism and Conflict Response Institute' (HCRI), of which I am a student-member. All these various institutional and geographical links took a while to conceptually untangle at the beginning of the time in Hiroshima but the warm welcome and helpful induction by Mayors for Peace and HCU staff made the orientation process simple.

The short course at HCU was framed by the invitation to reflect on the question: "What does peace mean to you now?"

Being part way through my masters degree in Peace and Conflict Studies this was an opportunity, at the beginning of the week, to reflect on all the studies and experiences that led up to my being in Hiroshima at all. Studying peace in the critical context of HCRI and having previously studied theology and philosophy at undergraduate level, my predilection when faced with a question of defining an abstract term such as peace is to aim for a systematic general definition, normally in the abstract! Within peace studies there are two main conceptual categories into which definitions of peace can be organised. These are: 'negative peace' for definitions which consider peace as the absence, or negation, of conflict; and 'positive peace' for definitions which posit peace as a thing in and of itself – normally a social structure defined by the presence of "peace things" such as, for example, constructive relationships, justice, love, forgiveness etc. My experience of working on and being in the occupied Palestinian territories in 2014 where the discourse around peace is shaped by its protracted occupation and asymmetrical

conflict with Israel had led me to particularly emphasise the presence of justice as prerequisite for a positive peace. Amongst Palestinians, peace can only mean a just peace. The idea that peace might be achieved by a ceasefire is absurd—as long as the occupation and various other injustices remain unresolved, negative "peace" is scorned for obscuring how much remains unsolved and thus obstructing process towards justice.

The absence of conflict seems however to be a necessary part of a positive just peace and is a more intuitive concept to most people. Just as the testimony of Palestinians affected my thoughts on peace and justice, so did the testimonies of the hibakusha and of Hiroshima in general affect my thoughts on peace in the absence of a justice process. Particularly poignant is the manner in which, in the absence of a reconciliation process with its former enemy, "Hiroshima" no longer sees an adversary in the nation which near totally destroyed it. Hiroshima seems to have gone through the normally bilateral process of making peace on its own. It has turned away from war in declaring itself a city of peace. It has taken reparation upon itself in reconstruction. It has in some ways rehabilitated what was left after the bomb. It has reconciled itself to the US. But it has done all this unilaterally, not in a *social* justice seeking process but in an effort to reinforce its negative peace. Further differentiating Hiroshima from a Palestinian context of peace and justice is the historical proximity of conflict. With a difference of 71 years of negative peace, it is obvious that different emphases and priorities for peace activities exist in both contexts. Hiroshima has a focus on memory and story – it aims through its peace activities to Report for Mayors for Peace – Samuel Shaw, September 2016 amplify and sustain the human stories of those who survived the atom-bomb attack. This emphasis is foreign to the Palestinian context where new survivor stories are constantly being made, and where, for most Palestinians, the task of upholding the history and collective memory of past suffering through conflict is considered of secondary importance to actively resisting present injustices.

The experience I had in Hiroshima, through the HCU course, the Mayors for Peace programme, the memorial ceremony, and the testimony of the hibakusha has therefore given me a new-found appreciation for the importance of memory and history for the maintenance or building of negative peace. Although a just relationship of repentance and forgiveness has not arisen between Japan and the USA, Hiroshima has nonetheless committed itself to not only decrying the horrors of nuclear weaponry by witnessing to its own suffering, but also to a disavowal of militarism as a solution – to either its past or present grievances. Hiroshima therefore presents a closer parallel to Manchester than anywhere in Palestine could, another city heavily bombed in WWII but which has since enjoyed 71 years of largely uninterrupted negative peace. Given that a large proportion of the British standing

army was made up of working class young men from northern towns, memorial activities tend to be focused on the heroism of the European war where most British casualties were sustained.

Consequently, very little public memorial of the A-bomb attacks, nor public consideration of nuclear issues, seem to take place in or around Manchester – at least not in a way that seeks to actively spread the memory and history of the Japanese experience to members of the public who are not otherwise engaged in peace or nuclear issues professionally, or as a matter of personal interest. This leads me finally to a short, and admittedly pragmatically incomplete, proposal for peace activity in Manchester that the Mayors for Peace chapter may consider investigating, if not implementing exactly as writ.

In order to access the previously discussed majority demographic of Manchester citizens who don't spend any significant proportion of their time reflecting on the human stories of suffering in war, it would seem utile to take any peace activity outside of the metaphorically closed doors of particular public spaces like museums, the town hall, and religious spaces, and into the open and busy public spaces where people may encounter the human memory of conflict in a way that interrupts their routine. If at all possible, I believe it would be extremely impactful to bring the great resource of hibakusha video testimonies, which are being brought gradually to a measure of completion through the efforts of Mayors for Peace

Hiroshima, to the general public in Manchester city centre through projections on various well-known public spaces. It is hard to generalise an idea through a description so an example might be as follows. A video clip of the testimony of the hibakusha from nearest the Hiroshima or Nagasaki hypocentre displayed on the concrete wall in the middle of Piccadilly gardens, followed by a video testimony from a survivor of the blitz in Manchester's own city centre. This could be further contextualised with a QR code for interested observers to find other displays or further information

about the UK's current nuclear capacity, e.g. “each Trident warhead carries approximately 30 times the destructive capacity as the bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima.” In other locations, hibakusha testimonies could be contextualised by parallel Manchester testimonies, e.g. people of the same profession, study, relative location etc. If and where projection is not possible, other media can be used to convey testimony in a public setting, just as in a museum.

The real heart of my proposal is to take stories of ordinary people out to a wider cross-section of ordinary people – in the same way that the A-bomb did not discriminate between victims, the stories of its survivors and survivors in Manchester should not be tacitly withheld from the non-museum-going portion of society. Interruption of public space is thus another way in which reflection on the bombing of cities might be widened.