



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“You Know Nothing Of The Bottomless Malice.....Within The Human Heart!!”¹

Atomic Bombings and Comfort Women in selected Manga and Manhwa.

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2021 / Vienna 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 803

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Geschichte

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof.in Dr.in Kerstin von Lingen, MA

¹ Yoshihiro *Togashi*, *Hunter X Hunter*, Volume 28, chapter 298: Rose (San Francisco 2012), S. 151.

Abstract/Abstrakt

This thesis explores the most infamous chapter in Japan's history, World War II, through the medium of comics, specifically Manga and Manhwa. The Empire of Japan massively expanded its territory between 1931 and 1945 across East-Asia, South-East-Asia and Oceania, using its military might. This led to the occupation of many nations under Japanese rule, China being one of them, while other nations had already been under Japanese control previously, like Korea. Among the many atrocities committed against the populations of these occupied countries, one was the practice of widespread sexual slavery for the Japanese Army, infamously known as, "Comfort Women". World War II ultimately came to an end for Japan with the use of two atomic bombings carried out against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6th and August 9th in 1945 respectively. These bombings and both their short- and long-term consequences have affected Japan ever since. Looking at both topics of the atomic bombings and comfort women in the context of comics offers a unique perspective into the collective memory of not only Japan, but the global audience of these comics. This thesis examines the portrayal of these events in specific comics, as well as comparing the different portrayals to each other and gives greater context to the authors behind these stories.

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem berüchtigtsten Abschnitt der Geschichte Japans, dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, durch das Medium von Comics, spezifisch Manga und Manhwa. Das Japanische Kaiserreich hat sich mithilfe seiner enormen militärischen Macht massiv ausgedehnt zwischen 1931 und 1945 über Ost-Asien, Süd-Ost-Asien, und Ozeanien. Dies führte zu der Besetzung Japans von vielen Nationen, China als eine davon, während andere Länder schon vorher von Japan kontrolliert wurden, darunter Korea. Unter den zahlreichen Grausamkeiten und Verbrechen, die von der japanischen Armee an den Bewohnern dieser Länder verübt wurden, befand sich die weit verbreitete sexuelle Versklavung von Frauen im Auftrag des japanischen Militärs, eine Praxis die heute als „Comfort Women“ bekannt ist. Letztlich kam der Zweite Weltkrieg zu einem Ende für Japan durch den Einsatz von zwei Atombomben, welche von den USA über der Stadt Hiroshima am 6. August 1945, und über der Stadt Nagasaki am 9. August 1945 abgeworfen wurden. Die kurz- und langfristigen Konsequenzen dieser Bombenabwürfe haben Japan seither beeinflusst. Die Darstellung der Atombomben und Comfort Women im Kontext von Comics ermöglicht eine einzigartige Perspektive in das kollektive Gedächtnis von nicht nur Japan, sondern des globalen Publikums dieser Comics. Diese Arbeit untersucht die Darstellung dieser Ereignisse in ausgewählten Comics, vergleicht sie miteinander und liefert größeren Kontext über die Autoren hinter diesen Geschichten.

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis would have been incredibly challenging by itself, but I started preparing it in March 2020, when the global Covid-19 pandemic hit my home in Vienna. The entire year of 2020, as well as the entirety of 2021 so far up to July, have been uniquely challenging, to put it mildly. And yet the experience of researching the historical background of this thesis, as well as reading the different comics that serve as the primary sources, has been fascinating. This was largely possible thanks to Univ.-Prof. Dr. Kerstin von Lingen, who is frankly put the best possible supervisor I could have wished for. Her knowledge of the Pacific War and comic books as a medium made her academic insight invaluable for me, but it was always her genuine passion for history that motivated me to do my best. She embodies a sense of enjoyment in this scientific field that I want to follow and never lose, no matter what. And on top of all that, she was always extremely respectful, responded quickly to all questions I had, and was simply always very pleasant to talk to. All these things put together just show how lucky I was to work with her on this thesis and I sincerely hope that I get to work with her again in the future. Every project, scientific or otherwise, would be fortunate to have her.

I also want to thank Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Johanna Gehmacher, who accompanied the beginning stages and research of this thesis for many months and this work would not have been possible without her feedback. It was very fortunate that she realized that my original scope for the thesis was far too big, and she very politely urged me to refine my concept to a smaller scale. She also was always a delight to talk too and embodies the same kind of excitement and passion for her work that I admire within both her and Prof. von Lingen.

My dear friend Magda was kind enough to offer her feedback many times and her academic insights and experience were vital in correcting many mistakes. She spent a considerable amount of time reading over the different chapters and noticed things that I never could have. I can only hope to repay her by preparing many exciting things for our upcoming Dungeons & Dragons Games.

Most importantly, I want to thank my partner in love and life, Yoshi. She made all the challenges during the time I was working on this thesis bearable. Without her, I would not have taken care of my physical and mental health during the pandemic and my thesis would have never seen the light of day. She continues to bring kindness, joy, and color into my life, and I will always try to do the same for her. Thank you, my rainbow, I love you soooooo much.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Relevancy of the topic in the modern day

Japan's handling of the topic of war crimes during World War II has been highly controversial ever since the war ended. After decades of silence, the Japanese Government only acknowledged the responsibility for the treatment of the comfort women in 1993, 48 years after the war had ended. Moreover, the former prime minister of Japan Shinzo Abe (in office 2006-2007 and 2012-2020) tried several times to downplay the significance of this war crime and he barely even mentioned it at the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.² This had led to tense relationships with the nations that had suffered under the Japanese occupation. An event that showed how relevant this topic still is to this day occurred at the beginning of 2020. "My Hero Academia" is one of the currently most successful manga (Japanese black and white comics) in the world (as of February 2021) and this comic managed to create a massive controversy between Japan, China and Korea. It achieved this with a single word: "Maruta". The name of a character in chapter 259 was revealed to be "Maruta Shiga". This word happens to hold a particularly grim meaning in connection with World War II.³ The word Maruta can be translated from Japanese to mean „wooden log" and was used by the infamous Unit 731, a group of the Japanese military that conducted experiments with biological weapons on living human prisoners.⁴ The character in question in the manga also happens to be a medical doctor and villain, who experiments on living victims. Many people, especially in China and Korea, felt personally insulted by this and the controversy went so far that both the manga and its anime adaption were completely banned in China. The author of the manga, Kohei Horikoshi, as well as his publisher Shueisha issued two separate public apologies, with Horikoshi claiming he never intended this reference. The name of the character was subsequently changed for all future print releases of the manga.⁵ All this, because of a single word:

² Tsuneo Ahaka, 'Comfort Women': A Lasting Barrier to Japan-South Korea Reconciliation. In: Global Asia, available online <https://www.globalasia.org/v10no3/feature/comfort-women-a-lasting-barrier-to-japan-south-korea-reconciliation-tsuneo-akaha#>. (20.02.2021).

³ Spencer Baculi, My Hero Academia creator Vows to Change Character Name Following Outrage Over Perceived Reference to WW2 War Crimes. In: Bounding Into Comics, available online <https://boundingintocomics.com/2020/02/04/my-hero-academia-creator-vows-to-change-character-name-following-outrage-over-perceived-reference-to-ww2-war-crimes/> (20.02.2021).

⁴ Yuki Tanaka, Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II (Boulder 1996), p. 135-137.

⁵ Spencer Baculi, Weekly Shounen Jump And Kohei Horikoshi Update Maruta Shiga's name In My Hero academia Following Accusations of WW2 War Crime References. In: Bounding Into Comics, available online <https://boundingintocomics.com/2020/02/13/weekly-shonen-jump-and-kohei-horikoshi-update-maruta-shigas-name-in-my-hero-academia-following-accusations-of-ww2-war-crime-references/> (20.02.2021).



Image 1: Maruta Shiga in "My Hero Academia".

Another even more recent example happened in the fall of 2020, this time in the city of Berlin. A local group of South Korean activists unveiled a statue within Berlin which commemorates the victims of sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese military. The statue shows a young woman sitting in a chair looking forward, while another chair next to her remains empty.⁶ The activist group had permission for the installation, but the Japanese government protested heavily and demanded that the statue should be removed. So far, the city government has decided that the statue can remain, but the Japanese Government has already outlined their plans that the statue will be removed by the end of 2021.⁷ If they will succeed with that plan remains to be seen. These examples show just how sensitive this topic remains to this very day. The atom bombs of 1945 remain a massive presence within the collective memory of the world, to the point that atomic weapons have never been used again in warfare since World War II. Instead, the atom bombs have since served mainly as a deterrent between different nations.⁸

⁶ Jiji Kyodo, 'Comfort women' statue to remain on display in Berlin. In: the japan times, available online <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/02/national/comfort-women-statue-berlin/> (20.02.2021).

⁷ Jiji Kyodo, Japan aims for removal of Berlin 'comfort woman' statue in a year. In: the japan times, available online <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/16/national/japan-berlin-comfort-woman-statue/> (20.02.2021).

⁸ Nina Tannenwald, The Legacy of the Nuclear Taboo in the Twenty-First Century. In: The Age of Hiroshima (Princeton 2020), p. 276-277.

The culture of Japan has used the trauma of nuclear destruction as inspiration for many works of fiction, one of the most famous being the Godzilla movie series since the 1950s. These fictional works often focus on the absolutely horrific experience and trauma that so many Japanese had to suffer through after the bombs fell. One example is the quote that forms the title of this thesis, which is from the manga “Hunter X Hunter” by Yoshihiro Togashi. The quote is made by a character right before he detonates an atomic warhead as a suicide bomber and both the words and imagery drawn by the author convey a sense of pure dread and malicious evil, with the atom bomb serving as the example of humanity at it’s very worst:



Image 2: Humans in “Hunter X Hunter”.

But this thesis puts the spotlight specifically on comics, because manga especially hold an enormous cultural significance within Japan. While comic books remain a very small medium here in Austria, manga have been dominating Japanese pop culture since several decades and are read by people of all ages and backgrounds. The reason for this that manga inherently do not have a particular topic, they are not a genre. Instead, manga, and comics in general, are simply mediums to tell any form of story and can have any subject matter, from children's stories, fantasy, science fiction, romance, slice of life stories and pornography, to name a few.⁹ This means that even the subject of war and war crimes has been explored in many comics and these portrayals offer a unique insight into the pop culture of Japan and other nations. How these events are portrayed and how they are received by the public tells us, as historians, a great deal about the respective current culture and how many people feel about these historic events. The events surrounding the aforementioned incident with "My Hero Academia" highlight how fresh these wounds still are for many people. And while this thesis mostly focuses on Japanese manga as its main sources, I also made the decision to include one manhwa (Korean comic). Considering that Korea was one of the victims of the sexual slavery committed by the Empire of Japan, it felt wrong to only look at Japan's perspective in this particular matter. While it is fascinating to look at these events from the perspective of the culprits and how Japan has tackled this subject in the last eight decades, it felt necessary and respectful to the victims to also look at their depictions of these events and to make their voices heard.

I also wish to clarify how and why I use the term "comfort women". This term originated as a cruel and demeaning euphemism to downplay the frankly disgusting and evil acts of many men against their victims. The word itself originates from the Japanese word "ianfu", meaning "prostitute".¹⁰ One could therefore make a good argument to not use this term as a historian. The author Yuki Tanaka writes about this specific issue in his work and argues that the term should not be used by historians to demean, but instead to differentiate the specific victims of these events from the countless other victims of sexual slavery throughout history.¹¹ This once again is not done to ignore the experience of other victims, simply to clarify the topic of historic research. The term is also widely common in countries like Korea and used by the victims themselves to raise awareness on the issue.¹² Yuki Tanaka explicitly writes that he hopes his use of the term does not offend anyone, as that is not his intention especially as a Japanese

⁹ Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga. Culture & Power In Contemporary Japanese Society* (Cambridge University Press 2001), p. 3-4.

¹⁰ Keum Suk Gendry-Kim, *Grass* (Montreal 2019), p. 6.

¹¹ Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women- Sexual Slavery and prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (London 2002), p. 6-7.

¹² Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 6.

historian, and I shall do the same. I do not want to demean or insult anyone who had to endure these horrendous crimes and should there ever be a new term, that the activists around this topic establish, in order to identify the victims and this topic in general, I will gladly use that new term instead. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use both the terms “comfort women” and “sexual slavery/slaves”.

1.2 Historic background of the war crimes

It is important to establish on what historical stage these events took place. When we talk about World War 2 in a European/American context, we tend to think of the events starting on September 1st in 1939, when Germany attacked Poland. But this era of warfare begins much earlier in the context of Asia. Yuki Tanaka uses the term “Asia-Pacific War” in several of his works, to differentiate the period of World War II and the years predating it, in which the Empire of Japan had already begun its aggressive expansion. To be more precise, Tanaka sets the starting date for this 14-year era of warfare with the “Manchurian Incident” of September 18th, 1931, when Japanese soldiers falsely accused Chinese dissidents of a bombing attack and Japan invaded Manchuria in retaliation.¹³ The grim importance of this incident is still reflected today in the way that China and Japan refer to it. While Japan calls the region Manchuria, China officially refuses this description and uses “Donbei” or Northeast China instead. To accept the term Manchuria, which invented by the Japanese, would give their imperialism recognition.¹⁴ Using Tanaka’s definition means that the war began already in 1931, years before Adolf Hitler became the chancellor, and later dictator, of Germany. But the situation becomes even more complex when it comes to Korea, as the peninsula had begun to fall under Japanese influence in 1876 with the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876. Japan had forced Korea to open its borders and trade with the threat of violence and this slowly led to Korea coming more and more under Japanese control, until the full annexation in 1910.¹⁵ This is important because suddenly we understand that the conflict between Japan and Korea happened 69 years before the atomic bombs fell, and that Korea was already ruled by the Japanese before World War I began. All this is part of the explanation why Korean women were the most numerous victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese army. The system of systematic sexual slavery exclusive for members of the Japanese military likely began in 1932 in Shanghai, when Japan continued to annex more

¹³ Tanaka, Japan’s Comfort Women, Author’s note.

¹⁴ Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps. The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (University of Hawaii 2009), p.10.

¹⁵ Young-Iob Chung, *Korea under Siege, 1876-1945: Capital Formation and Economic Transformation* (Oxford 2006), p.42-43.

regions of China after the initial attack on Donbei.¹⁶ I say likely, because future sources might reveal that the practice even predates these events.

The system of sexual slavery was run through designated comfort houses, of which there were three different types: under direct control by the military, privately owned by under military oversight and exclusively for military personnel and finally privately owned and used by both military members and civilians. The second type was the most common and these involuntary brothels moved with the troops.¹⁷ There were several official justifications for the establishment of this system: to prevent widespread rape by the soldiers and raising the local resistance against Japanese occupation as a result, to avoid the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among the soldiers, to raise moral and to better prevent the infiltration by spies. The victims were most often forced into these conditions, and many were tricked into joining by telling them that they would have completely different work. But once they reached the brothels and learned the truth, they were no longer allowed to leave. This practice continued into all parts of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”, which is how the Japanese leadership referred to the territories conquered by them between 1931 and 1945. Victims mainly came from Korea (roughly eighty percent), China, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, as well as prisoners of war (POWs), especially Dutch, American, and Australian. Because the Japanese military destroyed countless indiscriminating documents around the time that World War II ended, it is impossible to know how many women had to endure this nightmare. Estimations are very difficult and while some estimations suspect 80,000-100,000 victims, this number could be much higher, some historians even estimate numbers up to 200.000 victims.¹⁸

Japan’s aggressive expansion ultimately led to war with the allied forces of World War II, starting with the infamous bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Why Japan chose to attack the United States of America despite their well-known militaristic- and economic strength was often debated, but it seems most likely that the Japanese leadership decided that conflict with the West was only a matter of time, since they wished to expand ever further and secure more resources.¹⁹ This aggressive policy had already lead to economic embargos and political threats by the US and its allies and Japan chose to initiate the first strike by attacking the military base on Honolulu in Hawaii. This attack led to both Japan and the United States of America joining World War II and both nations continued to fight until the summer of 1945.

¹⁶ *Tanaka*, *Japan’s Comfort Women*, p. 8-9.

¹⁷ *Tanaka*, *Hidden Horrors*, p. 95.

¹⁸ *Tanaka*, *Hidden Horrors*, p. 99.

¹⁹ *Douglas Ford*, *The Pacific War: Clash of Empires in World War II* (New York 2012), p. 46.

At this point in history, Adolf Hitler had already killed himself and Nazi Germany had lost the war officially on May 8th, 1945. Japanese forces were pushed by the allied advance all the way back to the mainland of Japan, with America threatening an invasion should Japan not surrender. The emperor (Tenno) of Japan, Hirohito (also known by his posthumous title Showa), and the military leadership of Japan continued to refuse to surrender. It is heavily debated why America ultimately chose to use the atom bomb in warfare. One common explanation claims that America feared that an invasion of the main island Honshu would lead to catastrophic losses for both their troops and Japanese civilians.²⁰ Ultimately, it was decided to use a new type of bomb to show the Japanese leadership just how hopeless their situation actually was and to force them to surrender. This technology was the atomic bomb and on August 6th, 1945, the B-29 bomber “Enola Gay” dropped the bomb nicknamed “Little Boy” on Hiroshima, resulting in an estimate of 140,000 people dying in the city.²¹ But the Empire of Japan did still not surrender and so another atomic bomb, nicknamed “Fat Man”, was dropped on the city of Nagasaki by the bomber “Bockscar” on August 9th, 1945. Estimations regarding the death toll go as high as 80,000. Threatened by more atomic bombings, Japan finally surrendered on August 14th, with the condition that the Japanese Emperor would remain as a polity.²² The allies agreed on August 15th, ending the Pacific War and therefore also World War II.

1.3 Memory politics since 1945

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had an enormous impact on the world and are still portrayed as one of the most calamitous events in human history, be it in education or the arts. The imagery of the “mushroom cloud” has inspired countless works of art, across different genres. To name a few examples: Godzilla franchise (since 1954, movies), Terminator 2 (movie), Akira (movie), Hunter X Hunter (manga), Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (2007 version, video game), Fallout franchise (since 1997, video games). The legacy of the bombings remains a controversial topic between the United States and Japan, as the societies of these nations approach these events from different perspectives. The Japanese tend to focus on the catastrophe and horror wrought by these events, while many scientists and politicians of the U.S. have defended the use of the atomic bombs as necessary and that Japan was ultimately responsible, since they started the war against the U.S. to begin with.²³ The debate in the U.S.

²⁰ Ford, *The Pacific War*, p. 211-212.

²¹ Ford, *The Pacific War*, p. 213.

²² Ford, *The Pacific War*, p. 214.

²³ Michael D. Gordon, *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton 2020), p. 2-3.

surrounding the topic of the atom bombs has lasted for nearly 80 decades up until now and it will likely never be fully put to rest. On one hand, America won the Pacific War against an aggressor and ally of Nazi Germany. The Empire of Japan had committed terrifying atrocities all over its territory and beyond. It is widely accepted nowadays that both Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan needed to be stopped and their defeat is celebrated to this day as a symbol of good triumphing over evil.²⁴ But on the other hand, the way how Japan was defeated is not remembered as heroic but the exact opposite. It carries many questions with it, first among them: Was it right?

American historians have argued about this following different schools of thought: Some argue that the use of the bombs was justified to prevent further casualties, others argue that the U.S. had already won, and that Japan would have soon surrendered without a fight over the Japanese mainland. They also claim that Japan was used as a warning and example in order to intimidate the Soviet Union, as the Cold War had already begun at that point. Another group sees the truth somewhere in the middle, that President Truman (acting president during the end of World War II) and his staff believed that the use of the atom bombs was in fact necessary to win the war without massive casualties on all sides, but they did not understand what exactly they were unleashing upon the world.²⁵ The historian Douglas Ford argues that the use of the atomic bombs was indeed necessary, but not to win the Pacific War. Instead, it was necessary to achieve the specific win conditions, that the U.S. leadership had set out to achieve.²⁶ The United States and the Allied overall wanted to achieve an unconditional surrender from Japan, a policy that had been supported by President Roosevelt, who had been the acting U.S. president for almost the entirety of World War II. President Truman set out to fulfill these conditions set by his predecessor, one of the reasons likely being that he would have faced major political backlash if he had tried to change the goals of the war.²⁷ Ford argues that the use of the atom bombs was the only way to ensure that Japan would indeed surrender unconditionally, as the Japanese leadership had been unwilling to surrender through diplomatic means before. Even if this theory were correct, it would just mean the bombings are “justified” from a purely tactical and political perspective. But the end results remain horrific all the same and it seems very likely that the use of these weapons would be universally considered a horrific war crime if either Japan or Germany had used them during World War II. Eichiro Oda, the author of the most successful Japanese manga of all time, “One Piece”, addresses the question of right and wrong during war

²⁴ *Gordon, The Age of Hiroshima*, p. 16.

²⁵ *Ford, The Pacific War*, p. 214-220.

²⁶ *Ford, The Pacific War*, p. 228-229.

²⁷ *Ford, The Pacific War*, p. 215-217.

times in the following speech from one of his characters. The speech argues that there is no true justice, but merely winners and losers. And the winners decide what justice means:

“Are the pirates the bad guys?! Is the navy the good guys?! Things like that change with the seasons!! Kids who’ve never known peace.....and kids who’ve never known war.....have completely different ideas of right and wrong! It’s the job of those at the top to decide what’s good and what’s evil! Right now; it could go either way! Justice will prevail?! Of course it will!! Because the side of justice.....will be whichever side wins!!”²⁸

While the events of the atomic bombings remain controversial in certain aspects, the topic immediately got massive attention from the world after the events themselves. By their very nature, the destructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could not be ignored. The devastation was immense and at least the first step of the suffering, that the victims had to endure, happened in the open for everyone to see. But the suffering of the comfort women was very different. After the war had ended, the crime of sexual slavery went unaddressed by Japanese officials for decades and most of the victims remained silent. This changed 1991, 46 years after Japan had surrendered, when one woman filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. Her name was Kim Hak-Sun and she publicly shared her story, how she was enslaved when she was 15 years old and what she had to endure until the Empire of Japan had been defeated.²⁹ This event marked the boiling point for a series of small, local movements of women across the former territory of the Empire of Japan, who were encouraged by the testimony of Kim Hak-Sun to finally come forward and demand recognition of the atrocities that they and so many others had to live through. This resulted in a chain reaction where hundreds of victims came forward and supported the claims of each other. And the topic also found significant coverage from the media for the first time.³⁰ The stories of Kim and other survivors did not only draw the attention of the media and governments, but also inspired many individuals to investigate these events for the first time in their lives. One of them was the Japanese historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi, who became one of the most prolific researchers of the topic of comfort women.³¹

This flood of lawsuits and unprecedented public interest forced the Japanese government to finally act. After two internal investigations, the first official Japanese acknowledgment of comfort women came in 1993, in form of the Kono pronouncement, named after Chief Cabinet

²⁸ Eichiro Oda, *One Piece*, Vol. 57, chapter 556: Justice Will Prevail! (San Francisco 2009), p. 89-92.

²⁹ Erik Ropers, *Voices of the Korean Minority in Postwar Japan* (London 2018), p. 157-158.

³⁰ Nishino Rumiko, Kim Puja, Onozawa Akane, *Denying the Comfort Women. The Japanese State’s Assault on Historical Truth*. In: *Asia’s Transformations*. (Abingdon/New York 2018), p. 1-2.

³¹ Yoshiaki Yoshimi, *Comfort Women. Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. (New York/Chichester 2000), p. 33.

secretary Kono Yohei, in which he admitted the crimes of sexual slavery committed by the Japanese military. This statement has become highly controversial since then, as many saw it insufficient in fully acknowledging the sheer scope of the crime committed.³² But the later Japanese Prime minister Shinzo Abe (in office 2006-2007, 2012-2020) criticized the statement many times publicly, claiming that comfort women were not the victims of coercion.³³ He therefore claims that women joined the military brothels willingly and they were never forced to go there. This is a, frankly put, insulting lie which has been disproven in countless reports from China, Korea, and other occupied nations of the Japanese at the time.³⁴

Statements like Abe's are one of the major contributors to why the topic of comfort women remains so controversial to this day. Some Japanese officials recognize and acknowledge the scope of the crimes, while others deny them. It sends a contradictory message to the surviving victims, their families, and friends, as well as their nations. And since Abe was the most important political leader and representative of his nation for many years, this mixed impression comes from the very top of Japan, not a fringe-group of extremists. One argument that has been used by Japanese revisionists for decades is the claim, that the case of the comfort women is a common practice during war, that it happens all over the world. According to this logic, the cases of sexual slavery committed by the Japanese military are nothing special compared to similar cases in other armed conflicts.³⁵

Part of this mentality might originate from the fact that many Japanese women became victims of rape after the war had ended and allied forces arrived on the Japanese mainland. Hundreds of cases of extortion, violence and rape against Japanese citizens at the hands of allied soldiers were reported during the autumn season of 1945. And the perpetrators faced nearly no consequences whatsoever by their superiors, especially in the case of American soldiers.³⁶ What happened to these Japanese civilians was truly abhorrent. But putting aside for the moment that the defense "Others have done this awful thing too, so it's not so bad right?" is once again incredibly insulting towards the victims, it also is completely false in this particular case. There is a reason why the term "comfort women" exists, why this topic receives so much attention and why it is still controversial. It is the scale of it all and the intricate system behind it. Coming back to Yuki Tanaka, he points out that the sheer number of victims and the amount of

³² *Rumiko, Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 3.

³³ Yoshiaki Yoshimi, The Kono statement. Its historical significance and limitations. In: Denying the Comfort Women. The Japanese State's Assault on Historical Truth (Abingdon/New York 2018), p. 17.

³⁴ Yoshiaki, The Kono statement, p. 22-23.

³⁵ *Ropers*, Voices of the Korean minority, p. 158-162.

³⁶ *Tanaka*, Japan's Comfort Women, p. 116-120.

bureaucracy and organization that was created to hurt them, is something that sets it apart from other wars.³⁷ It is the same reason why the Shoa (or Holocaust) is not viewed as just another war crime, it was a state-built extremely complex system, created for mass murder and the annihilation of entire ethnic groups. The system of sexual slavery of the Empire of Japan was on a completely different scale and the victims deserve to be taken as seriously as this topic demands. But diplomatic conflicts, like the one in Berlin during the fall of 2020 that was mentioned in the introduction, show that there is still a long way to go for that.

1.4 Culture and comic books

The focus of this thesis is not just these historical events however, but specifically their portrayal in certain comics. But this introduces a very complicated aspect: the topic of comics as a historic resource. This is where culture plays a very important role. This master's thesis was written at the University of Vienna in Austria, and comic books are a fringe-interest of historic studies in this part of the world (Austria specifically, Europe as a whole) at best, while slowly gaining more academic interest. Most scientific publications about comics come from the English-speaking areas of the world, especially the United States of America, as well as Japan itself. The reason for this is very simple: comics are an essential part of the culture of certain nations, while they are exclusively viewed as forgettable children's entertainment in many others. In Europe France and Belgium stand out compared to most other nations when it comes to the success and cultural significance of comics. Authors from these countries have produced very nationally and internationally successful comic series "Asterix" and "The Adventures of Tintin", as well as series which have completely left the children-stories genre, like the post-apocalyptic series "La Transperceneige", better known by the name of its movie adaption "Snowpiercer". In nations where comics have gained the widely accepted respect that other art forms enjoy, this was a long process over several decades. Manga was not a respected medium in Japan until the 1980s. Before then it was seen as a cheap form of entertainment, and supporters of the medium tried to tie the origins of manga to older forms of Japanese arts, like the "ukiyo-e" (traditional paintings and woodblock prints), in order to gain more respect for the medium.³⁸ At that point it was assumed manga could only be culturally relevant if they were historical in their roots, they could not simply be a new contemporary medium. But precisely the fact that manga were very cheap to produce and something different allowed the explosive success of the medium after World War II. What had begun as simple comic strips in local

³⁷ Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, p. 19-27.

³⁸ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 19-20.

newspapers grew into a completely new industry until the end of the 1950s. This era also already shows that manga, just like comics in general, can be about anything and covers countless genres. While the term manga was mostly used in the 1950s to describe kid-friendly stories, at that point other terms started to emerge in order to classify specific sub-types of manga. One example are “gekiga” (roughly translates to “dramatic pictures”), which describes manga aimed at an adult audience, that often deal with dark subject matters.³⁹

1.5 Comics as a medium and as historic sources

At this point it seems to be appropriate to take a step back and ask a simple question: what exactly are comics? The comic artist Will Eisner defined the medium as “Sequential Art”, as several images in sequential order form the typical structure of a comic. Author Scott McCloud specifies this definition further to differentiate between comics and movies/animation:

*“I guess the basic difference is that animation is sequential in time but not spatially juxtaposed as comics are. Each successive frame of a movie is projected on exactly the same space—the screen—while each frame of comics must occupy a different space. Space does for comics what time does for film!”*⁴⁰

Going forward with this definition shows something very significant: it does not mention anything about the actual content of the comic. Nothing about the story, the characters, not even whether it is in color or black and white. McCloud argues that this is exactly the biggest misconception about comics.⁴¹ They can be about Japanese high schoolers with the ability to see and punch ghosts, American superheroes, Celtic warriors fighting the legions of Rome or the social stigma of being a survivor of the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima. The last 4 decades have brought a big change in the perception of comics in the eyes of many. While manga and anime (Japanese animated movies, series, and short stories) have become an extremely successful cultural export of Japan, the global success of American superhero movies has brought stories and characters that originated in comic books to hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Especially the movie adaptations of Marvel comics have utterly dominated the global box office for more than a decade by the year 2021. Comic book stories have become the opposite of a fringe phenomenon, they have become the mainstream that many other genres try to catch up to.⁴²

³⁹ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 24-26.

⁴⁰ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York 1993), p. 7.

⁴¹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 5-7.

⁴² Mark Bowden, *Why Are We Obsessed With Superhero Movies?* In: *The New York Times*, available online <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/06/opinion/sunday/ant-man-wasp-movies-superheroes.html> (02.03.2021).

But success is not the only reason to pay attention to comics as historical sources. Many authors of comics with a historical theme have personal ties to the events that inspired their works. Keiji Nakazawa for example was born in Hiroshima and six years old when his hometown was hit by the atomic bomb. Most of his family died as a result and he would later write his most famous series of manga, “Hadashi no Gen” (“Barefoot Gen”) about the destruction of Hiroshima and the following aftermath, based on his own experiences. Other authors like Keum Suk Gendry-Kim spoke with women who survived the sexual enslavement by the Japanese military and brought their memories to paper in form of the comic “Grass”. These and other works clearly hold a great amount of historical significance and should therefore be studied, instead of being ignored. Both “Barefoot Gen” and Grass will be among the main sources for this thesis.

1.6 Research questions

The main goal of this thesis is to answer a number of questions as best as possible. First, how were the atomic bombings and the treatment of the comfort women, as well as the long-term ramifications of these events, depicted in certain comic books? Did the authors choose to depict graphic violence in detail, did they only hint at the brutality of the events or did they choose use metaphors to imply what happened and leave most to the imagination? After that comes a question that is much more difficult to answer: Why did the respective authors depict the events in the ways that they did? This is where the biography of the authors is going to play a big role in the analysis. This includes general events in their lives, interviews, political activity and other artistic or scientific works. But also, what advantages do these works of art possess by specifically being comics? What were the artists able to achieve by using this medium, which they would have been unable to, had they instead chosen a different medium like film for example? All these puzzle pieces put together will hopefully allow a better understanding of these comics as a whole, as well as the people behind the pages. But this thesis will not just focus on the depiction of the war crimes themselves, but especially how these sources portray the long-term ramifications of these events. Every single one of the chosen authors does not depict the war crimes in a vacuum, but rather as the catalysts for a series of grievous consequences that continued throughout the second half of the 20th century, as well as into the present of the 21st century.

1.7 Historiography

The scientific research that this thesis builds upon is vast in certain areas, but almost barren in others. The topic of the atomic bombings has been researched extremely thoroughly since the 1940s, and the topic of the comfort women has received more and more recognition since the

1990s. The mushroom cloud became a globally known symbol throughout the cold war and the history of sexual slavery of the Japanese military has slowly turned from a blind spot of history into a widely discussed topic across East-Asia. After exactly 30 years since Kim Hak-Sun began to publicly tell her story, more and more people across the world are aware of the issue and the fact that a memorial was built for the comfort women in Berlin, so far away from where the crimes originally occurred, shows that many people are paying attention now. But once the medium of comics comes into play, the scientific sources become much scarcer, for reasons explored in chapter 1.4. The possible sources are further limited since I am only able to read English and German, but not Japanese, Korean or other possible languages. But thankfully several relevant sources on the matter have either been translated into English or were written in English to begin with. One reason for this were the works of several rightwing-extremist Japanese mangaka, who tried to present a revisionist take on history, where Japan's responsibility for many war crimes is either downplayed or outright denied. One of these authors is Sharin Yamano with his "Manga Kenkanryu" series, which presents itself not only hateful towards Korea and its citizens, but also completely denies the responsibility of Japan for the practice of institutionalized sexual slavery.⁴³ Comics like these caused a wave of outrage and made more authors and historians pay attention to how Japanese history is actually depicted within manga, as Manga Kenkanryu was hardly the only example of historical revisionism.⁴⁴

Certain publications that appear as part of this thesis analyze comics, and especially manga, in a general sense, as in their history, characteristics, different styles and so on. Other authors have worked more specifically on the depiction of history in the context of manga, but usually in a broad sense. There also have been several publications in German in recent years, with a particular focus on the depiction of the Shoa in comics. The story of Anne Frank has been told in the form of several graphic novels, which invited scientific interest and study.⁴⁵ Another important work which raised scientific interest in the medium of comics, especially in Germany, was the graphic novel "Maus", written by Art Spiegelman and first published in the United States of America between 1980 and 1991. It tells the story of the author interviewing his father, who was a victim and survivor of the Shoa. This framework and the story overall are based on the actual life of Art Spiegelman and the life of his parents, who survived the Auschwitz extermination camp. The characters in the comic are presented as anthropomorphic animals,

⁴³ Raffael Raddatz, Hating Korea, hating the media. Manga Kenkanryu and the graphical (mis-)representation of Japanese history in the Internet age. In: Manga and the Representation of Japanese History (London/New York 2012), p. 217-218.

⁴⁴ Jaqueline Berndt, 'Comfort Women' Comics, Multifaceted. Revisiting the 2014 Manhwa Exhibit in Angoulême from the Perspective of Manga Studies (Stockholm 2016).

⁴⁵ Sid Jacobson/Ernie Colón, Das Leben von Anne Frank. Eine Grafische Biografie (Hamburg 2018).

Jews as mice, Poles as pigs and Germans as cats. The story alternates between different moments in time; in the present with the interview, the events that Spiegel's father had to endure and survive in Nazi-Germany, as well as different moments of Spiegelman's own childhood and how the relationship with his parents developed over the years.⁴⁶ "Maus" was very successful, partially because it used all the strengths of the medium of comics, while depicting extremely serious events. The usual critics of comic books could not simply dismiss the work of Art Spiegelman as something inherently childish, because the topic was very much tailored to adult readers. And once it got translated in German, several academics in the German-speaking parts of Europe started to realize that comic books should not be ignored as historic sources. This thesis aims to continue this research with certain events in the context of four different manga/manhwa and I hope that this thesis will convince more people to not only be interested in Japanese history and pop culture, but also to view comics in a different light than they possibly did before.

⁴⁶ Martin Frenzel, Der Holocaust im Comic. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte. 64. Jahrgang, 33-34/2014 (Bonn 2014), p. 45.

2. Methodology

2.1 Structure of the analysis

In order to follow the approach of looking at a topic in a greater context, this thesis will not look at the chosen sources in isolation. The thesis is divided in two main chapters, each about the atomic bombings and the sexual slavery of the Japanese military respectively, with two main sources for each chapter. The analysis of the sources is intended to follow the structure of a double helix. Each source is going to be examined by itself, but then they are compared to each other at certain thematic intersections. These intersections are meant to highlight both differences and similarities, as well as to provide as much insight as possible into the reasons behind these differences. After that the analysis splits again to examine a different aspect of the overall topic in the two sources, only to then once again intersect. This structure will hopefully allow the different works to “shine” on their own, but also put them in a greater context. The analysis is going to focus on different aspects of how the events are portrayed. Comics are a visual medium, and it is important to pay equal attention to both the writing and the illustrations, and how they affect one another. This part of the analysis will follow specific methods on how to interpret a visual medium and comics in particular. Certain literature will inform the steps of this part of the analysis, as further explained in chapter 2.2. One example for this would be a focus on visual analysis with aspects like “panel structure”, meaning how the authors have chosen to lay out their pages, as this is a fundamental tool to create a comic and a very deliberate process by the artists. Also, the absence of either artwork, written words, or both, is going to be a subject of the analysis as well. The decision of an author to omit crucial components of a visual medium deserves close examination.

Another example is the so called “gutter”, which describes the empty space between individual panels. While this might seem not important at first, the placement and use of the gutter is actually another meaningful tool for comic artists. Since the images in a comic do not move, the reader has to fill in the transitions between the panels. Therefore, the correct placement of the gutter is important to guide the reader’s imagination and at the same time should prevent confusion between scene transitions. A gutter placed incorrectly could make the scene very disorienting, while a well-placed one allows for smooth transitions and the reader does not have to stop but effortlessly fills in the missing gaps without thinking much about it.⁴⁷ The phenomenon of only observing certain parts, but visualizing the whole within one’s mind is

⁴⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 66-68.

called “closure” and happens constantly while reading comics.⁴⁸ This tool allows to also affect the reader’s perception of time while reading the content. Some gutters let only a few seconds pass, continuing the scene as it was.⁴⁹ But others jump forward in time, while others transition into “flashbacks”, showing the reader events which happened in the past. If these empty spaces are used without care, the reader would quickly lose all sense of time in the story. There are many other examples like this and hopefully analyzing as many of them as possible will reveal as much information about the selected sources as possible. The visual analysis will then be paired with the information from historical sources, in order to highlight how close the depictions in the sources are to the actual events. The goal of these sections is not factchecking, but instead to examine how these events are portrayed and why the authors decided to depict the events in such a way.

2.2 Method of the “Six Steps”

The central method of this thesis will follow the “Six Steps” from Scott McCloud, a theory that he explains in great detail in his book “Understanding Comics”. According to McCloud, all creative processes follow these six steps, and they provide a simple, yet very effective method to analyze the different elements of a work of art and how these pieces relate to one another. The six steps according to Scott McCloud are:

1. Idea/Purpose: The work’s content
2. Form: A Song? A movie? A Sculpture? A Comic Book?
3. Idiom: The art, style, vocabulary, genre
4. Structure: How to compose the work, what to include, what to leave out
5. Craft: Construction, applying skills, practical knowledge, problem-solving
6. Surface: Production values, finishing, superficial exposure to the work⁵⁰

When one looks at these steps, it is very easy to think that they follow a very clear order. But these steps can in fact first appear in any order in the mind of someone creative. It is possible to simply look at a painting and to think that it looks beautiful, without understanding any of the deeper facets behind it. How was it made, why does it stand out from others, why does it work so well specifically as a painting and what was the idea of the artists who made it. For someone enjoying creative works that is perfectly fine. The more someone starts to analyze a work of art however, the more they will start to realize the different steps that were part of its

⁴⁸ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 62-63.

⁴⁹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 65-67.

⁵⁰ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 170-171.

creation. Scott McCloud actually argues that most artists experience these steps more in a reverse order, starting on the surface level and then slowly working their way closer to the core idea or purpose:

“Any artist creating any work in any medium will always follow these six steps whether they realize it or not. All works begin with a purpose, however arbitrary; all take some form; all belong to an idiom (even if it’s an idiom of one); all possess a structure; all require some craft; all present a surface. [...] the order of the six steps is innate. Like the arrangement of bones in a dinosaur’s skeleton, they can be discovered in any order, but when brought together, they will always fall into place!”⁵¹

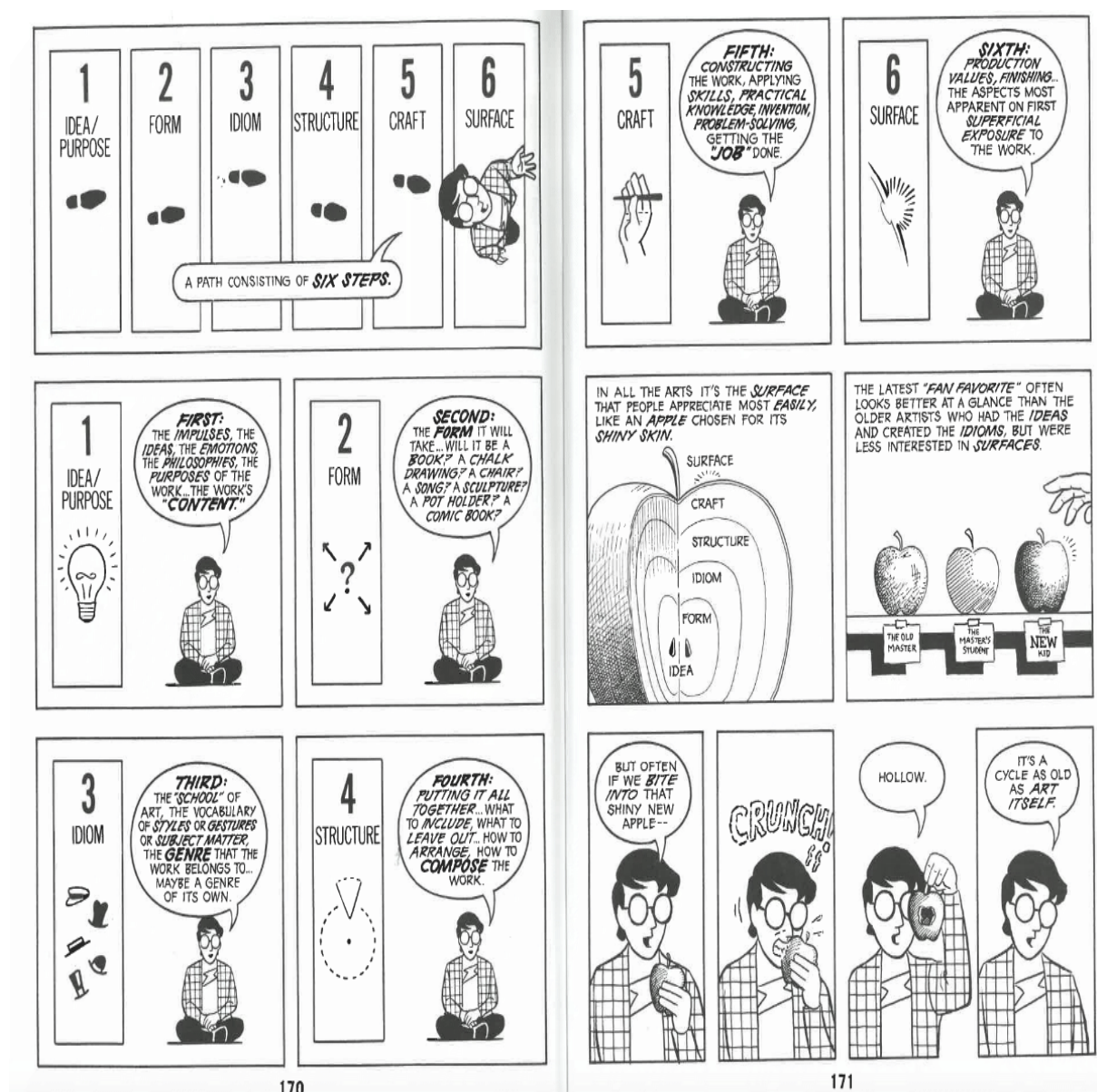


Image 3: “The Six Steps” in “Understanding Comics”.

⁵¹ McCloud, Understanding Comics, p. 182.

All these six steps will be used to analyze the selected sources for this thesis, among other methods from a variety of different works. The analysis will not follow a rigid order of these steps, but will usually begin on the surface, step 6, as that is the first impression upon the reader. Every description of a panel during this thesis, without further analysis, falls into this step, as it is simply what the author puts in front of the reader. Even step 2, form, will be of great relevance. It is true that all of these sources share the same type of form, that of a comic book. But it is still worthwhile to understand why these works of art succeed specifically as comics and what advantages the artists take by using this exact medium. It can be easy to just focus on certain aspects when analyzing comics, like the words for example, but comics work precisely as they do because they combine many different elements together. The art and overall visual design are very important as well, but they also have to be looked at as part of a greater whole.⁵²

2.3 Introduction of the selected sources

Chapter 3 focuses on the atomic bombings of 1945 and the selected sources that depict them are *“Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima”* by Keiji Nakazawa and *“Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”* by Fumiyo Kouno. After that follows chapter 4 with an emphasis on comfort women and the portrayal of the topic in *“Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths”* by Shigeru Mizuki and *“Grass”* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. There are certain parallels between these works: Both Nakazawa and Mizuki personally lived through the events of World War II, Nakazawa as a civilian during the destruction of Hiroshima and Mizuki as a soldier of the Japanese army in the Pacific War. Both men experienced the horrors of these events firsthand and later spent decades to share their experiences with their audiences, both through their works and interviews. They were also both advocates against war and were highly critical of the actions of the Empire of Japan. Unfortunately, both have also passed away, Nakazawa in 2012, and Mizuki in 2015. Kouno and Gendry Kim on the other hand are both women, that were born decades after the end of World War II. Both talked to survivors of the atom bombings and the comfort women system respectively and based their works on these descriptions. Their distance to these events allows for a completely different perspective, influenced by modern education regarding these moments in history, as well as their representation in different forms of media. While Kouno is one of three Japanese mangaka, whose works serve as the main sources for this thesis, Gendry-Kim is a Korean author, and her manhwa allows for a perspective both outside of Japan and exclusively showing the topic of comfort women through

⁵² Sean P. Connors, *Designing Meaning. A Multimodal Perspective on Comics Reading*. In: *Teaching Comics Through Multiple Lenses. Critical Perspectives* (New York/London 2017), p. 25.

the stories of surviving victims. These are the formal characteristics of each one of the four major sources for this thesis:

1. **“Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima”** was written by Keiji Nakazawa and started publication in Japan in the magazine “Weekly Shonen Jump” in 1973. It continued to be published in different magazines until 1987 and the finished story was released in 10 standalone volumes. The version used for this thesis was published by “Last Gasp” in 2004, translated from Japanese into English by a collective of translators named “Project Gen”. The series tells the story of the character “Gen”, who is heavily based on the author himself. The 10 volumes span a time span of 21 years, beginning in Hiroshima 1945 before the atomic bomb fell, and ends in 1966. The story follows Gen’s life before, during and after the destruction of his hometown and mainly focuses on the years following the devastation and how he survived. Nakazawa decided to write about his trauma after his mother had passed away in 1966 and was among the first Japanese mangaka to write about his experience as a “hibakusha”, which is a term generally used to describe the victims of the two atomic bombings in Japan.⁵³
2. **“Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”** was written by Fumiyo Kouno, originally in the form of three different parts, “Town of Evening Calm” and “Country of Cherry Blossoms Part 1 and Part 2”, and was first published in Japan in the magazine “Futabasha” in 2003. It ran in the magazine until 2004 and all parts were later published together as a single volume. The first part is “Town of Evening Calm”, the latter two combining into the story of “Country of Cherry Blossoms”. The version used for this thesis was published by “Last Gasp” in 2009 and translated from Japanese into English by Naoko Amemiya and Andy Nakatani. The story follows one family over several generations, visiting different moments in history between 1955 and 2004. It not only tells the story of the hibakusha among the family, but also their descendants, and focuses mainly on the long-term health problems caused by the atom bomb, as well as the social stigma of being a hibakusha in Japan. Kouno was born in Hiroshima in 1968 and had no familiar connection to any hibakusha. She only approached the topic in 2003 after an editor suggested it and based her story mainly on eye-witness accounts, interviews, and research.

⁵³ Fumiyo Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* (San Francisco 2009), p. 103.

3. **“Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths”** was written by Shigeru Mizuki and was originally released in Japan in the magazine “Shukan Gendai” and published by “Kodansha” in 1973, before the entire story was collected in a single, stand-alone volume. The version used for this thesis was published by “Drawn & Quarterly” in 2011 and translated from Japanese into English by Jocelyne Allen. The story is based on Shigeru Mizuki’s own life and follows him as a soldier in the Japanese army during World War II. He was stationed on the island of New Britain in Papua New Guinea and lost his left arm during an American air raid. Mizuki not only tells the story of his own life during the war, through his alter ego as a soldier called “Maruyama”, but focuses on the experience of the Japanese soldiers in general, as well as the civilians on the island. He describes the many war crimes committed by Japanese soldiers, but also heavily criticizes the Allied military forces and any people in Japan, who attempt to rewrite history and present Japan as just a victim of World War II. His own background as a veteran gave his anti-war message a very strong resonance within Japanese society.
4. **“Grass”** was written by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim and was first published in Korea as a single volume by “Bori Publishing Co.” in 2017. The version used for this thesis was published by “Drawn & Quarterly” in 2019 and translated from Korean into English by Janet Hong. The story is based on the life of Lee Ok-sun, a comfort woman who survived her abuse and is still alive to this day. The author Gendry-Kim interviewed Lee Ok-sun and brought her memories to the page as an autobiographic comic. The story begins in Busan, a city in South-Korea where Ok-sun was born, in 1934 and continues until the year 2017. Gendry-Kim depicts how Ok-sun was abducted and forced into sexual slavery, among many other girls, and how she managed to survive. The comic also depicts the decades after World War II and how comfort women began their fight for recognition. The overall structure of the comic is reminiscent of “Maus” by Art Spiegelman. Gendry-Kim mainly focuses on the enormous strength that women like Lee Ok-sun needed in order to make it through their captivity and that the same strength makes them fight today in order to receive the recognition and respect that they were denied for more than half a century.

2.4 Personal perspective and cultural memory

One important topic that has to be mentioned, is that these sources are by no means objective and simply four perspectives. Nakazawa and Mizuki were eyewitnesses to most of the events that they describe, but that does not mean that they perfectly recalled everything they saw, and even if they did, then they would have only seen a tiny window of what was happening. That is

the nature of human perspective. Kouno and Gendry-Kim work entirely throughout the accounts of others, amplifying this effect even further. And every single one of these authors has experienced the cultural memory surrounding these events, which shapes their perspectives, and possibly even memories. The analysis of these sources will reveal inconsistencies between the actual historical events and how they are portrayed in the selected sources. But these differences are not inherently negative at all or always meant to rewrite history. Comics are not history books but the result of a creative process involving these events. If history is a beam of light, comics (and art in general) are mirrors, which reflect, bend and change the light. Some artists do this with malicious intent, as explained previously in the example “Manga Kenkanryu”, but many others simply wish to tell their story in a certain way.

A perfect example is the illustration of the mushroom cloud in the first volume of “Barefoot Gen”.⁵⁴ Nakazawa draws the pillar of smoke, following the atomic bombing, in haunting and gorgeous detail. But Nakazawa never saw the cloud with his own eyes. He was far below where Little Boy was detonated, in the sky roughly 1,900 feet above Hiroshima, and only airplane crews or people on the ground far away actually saw the giant mushroom cloud.⁵⁵ Instead Nakazawa witnessed something that the survivors later called “pika-don” (flash-boom), an impossibly bright light, followed by the sound of the actual explosion.⁵⁶ Nakazawa drew the mushroom cloud nonetheless, showing a combination between his own memories, artistic interpretation and the cultural memory developing in the decades after World War II, when the images of the atomic clouds became infamous. And Nakazawa is not lying when he draws this panel, as we know that the mushroom cloud really existed and looked like that. And even if these sources depict events that are fictional, that does not change their value as sources. Because then it is possible to look at the reasons behind these depictions and what the author wanted to achieve with them. These different aspects all coming together form the comics that are examined in this thesis and what makes them such unique and beautiful sources. They all tell stories on a spectrum from real memories, all the way into personal imagination. Each source lands somewhere different on this spectrum, with every ratio offering a unique experience. And these experiences shall be the focus of the following two chapters.

⁵⁴ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima. Volume One* (San Francisco 2004), p. 252.

⁵⁵ Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima, page 8. In: Atomic Archive, available online <https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/atomic-bombing/hiroshima/page-8.html> (08.03.2021).

⁵⁶ Mike Ives, After Atomic Bombings, These Photographers worked Under Mushroom Clouds. A new book of photos documents the human impact of the bombings that ended World War II – and challenges a common American perception of the destruction in Japan. In: The New York Times, available online <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/world/asia/hiroshima-nagasaki-japan-photos.html> (08.03.2021).

3. The atomic bombings of 1945 and the suffering of the hibakusha

3.1 The Explosion and following devastation

*“That was ten years ago. Whenever I think I’m happy, whenever I see beauty...I remember everything – everything about my beloved city, everything about all those people. And I get pulled back to the day I lost it all. That voice calls out to me, “You don’t belong here in this world.””*⁵⁷

This is how one of the protagonists of Fumiyo Kouno’s “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms” remembers the day Hiroshima was destroyed by the atomic bomb. The author conveys just how traumatizing August 6th, 1945, was for the people of Hiroshima, something that would be part of their lives forever. One of the sources that Kouno lists for her own work is “Barefoot Gen”, by Keiji Nakazawa. It is a simple connection between these two sources and demonstrates that stories like this never exist in isolation. Nakazawa and Kouno portray the destruction of their hometown very differently, which is immediately visible on the surface. Part of this however lies in the structure of these comics, a different step of the artistic process, specifically structure, step 4. “Barefoot Gen” was produced over a time span of 14 years and all ten volumes together have more than 2000 pages. Kouno’s comic has a little bit less than 100 pages in comparison. This naturally means that these two authors used different techniques in order to tell their stories. I will first analyze how Nakazawa portrays August 6th, 1945, in Hiroshima, and then do the same with Kouno.

3.1.1 August 6th, 1945, in “Barefoot Gen”

Keiji Nakazawa spends most of the first volume of “Barefoot Gen” to introduce the readers to the main character, Gen Nakaoka, a six-year-old boy, as well as his family, and the city of Hiroshima. Gen and his family are heavily based on Nakazawa himself, as well as his own family members. Nakazawa went so far as to write that Gen was his own alter ego.⁵⁸ We get to see what Hiroshima was like before it was destroyed, which makes the devastation even more impactful. But Nakazawa also builds up tension by drawing the first use of an atomic bomb in human history, which was not the detonation of Little Boy over Hiroshima. Instead that first detonation is known as the “Trinity test”, which took place in New Mexico on July 16th, 1945, under the supervision of the United States Military and members of the Manhattan Project, the scientists who created the atomic bombs.⁵⁹ Nakazawa uses $\frac{3}{4}$ of an entire page to draw the

⁵⁷ Kouno, Town of Evening Calm, p. 24-25.

⁵⁸ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, A Note From The Author Keiji Nakazawa.

⁵⁹ Gordon, The Age of Hiroshima, p. 268.

mushroom cloud after the Trinity test, while describing in detail that this explosion was as powerful 20.000 tons of TNT.⁶⁰ Drawing this explosion not only references the historical event, it serves to build up tension in the story of “Barefoot Gen”. The readers get a small glimpse of what is heading towards Hiroshima, before it actually happens. Nakazawa also chooses to not show any aftereffects of the Trinity test, likely because this invokes the imagination of the readers. If something like this would not be detonated in a desert, far away from any human beings, but instead in the middle of a city, what would happen? Of course, we know the answer even before we reach that point in the comic.

Nakazawa emphasizes that the citizens of Hiroshima had truly no idea what was coming on August 6th, it was an ordinary day for them. He even draws the scene of an earlier air raid at beginning of the first volume, to show how desensitized the population already was to these types of attacks.⁶¹ They knew that they had to hide, but it was nothing new anymore. That’s how August 6th begins, with the alarm siren warning the citizens of an air raid. Nakazawa masterfully builds up a sense of dread, since the readers know what is coming, but the characters, like Gen, do not. The Enola Gay and the airplanes accompanying it are not first shown in full view. Instead, they are only seen in a small panel as white silhouettes against a black background. This simple choice in colorization makes them stand out from previous airplanes that Nakazawa drew, and the small panel gives the reader the sense that they are far away but coming closer. Nakazawa builds up a sense of time and movement in a medium that inherently cannot move. This is an example of Nakazawa’s use of step 4, structure, as well as step 5, craft. He not only knows how to build suspense in a story, but he executes it very well with how he draws perspective and the flow of time. Nakazawa knows how to pace this moment effectively and makes it more impactful because of it. The next panel at the bottom of the page is larger and we suddenly see the Enola Gay upfront, massive, and imposing. This is accomplished by the sudden shift from a perspective that is far away, to one that is very close. The gutter between the two panels leaves the exact movement to our imagination, but because the panels are on the same page and right next to each other, we get the sense that barely any time has passed in the narrative. Which means that these airplanes move incredibly fast to their destination, and to the people we were following in Hiroshima. The sense of dread is also increased by the use of an “onomatopoeia”, a word that is created in order to emulate certain sounds, that the word refers to.⁶² These words are seen in comics constantly, a very famous

⁶⁰ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, p. 205.

⁶¹ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, p. 2-7.

⁶² Cambridge Dictionary, onomatopoeia, available online
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/onomatopoeia> (18.03.2021).

example is the “POW!” often used in American comics to emulate the sound of a punch.⁶³ In this case, Nakazawa portrays the sound of the airplanes with the word “ROARRR”. This an interesting choice, because imagining that a machine roars conjures up the idea that it is something dangerous, like the roar of an animal alerting other animals of its presence. The exact same onomatopoeia was also used during the scene of the Trinity test, effectively calling back to that event and connecting the different scenes of the volume.

The actual explosion of Little Boy is portrayed by Nakazawa over 3 pages and 10 individual panels. He takes a step-by-step approach, beginning with the word “FLASH” in the sky above Hiroshima. This is the moment when the atomic bomb detonates and Nakazawa’s depiction fits the reports of other survivors perfectly, who spoke of a blinding light followed by loud noise.⁶⁴ The reader witnesses the explosion from the ground, alongside the protagonist Gen. But as Gen closes his eyes because of the light, the panels start to shift elsewhere. We see rooftop tiles flying through the air, followed by entire houses that are torn apart and catapulted into the sky. We then see the first depiction of the Mushroom Cloud, but it is a tiny panel, and the perspective is from far above Hiroshima. This is the figurative birds-eye view from the crew of the Enola Gay. The Americans inside the aircraft are not visible to the reader, but two panels show their reactions via speech bubbles. At first, they rejoice that they achieved their mission. But they then comment that the Enola Gay was just hit by the shockwave and the airplane is shaking dramatically.⁶⁵ This is the perspective that most people in the world are familiar with when it comes to the destructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The cities from above, a large explosion in the distance and destroyed buildings far beneath. This perspective from far away makes people more comfortable. The horror of nuclear destruction is technically seen and heavily implied, one does not have to look at the gruesome details. But this is exactly what Nakazawa challenged with “Barefoot Gen”.

He does this by using a technique, that can only be used by the medium of comics: the “page turn”. Turning the page is a fundamental aspect of a printed medium, like books or comics. But comics use images and that can be used to great effect in order to surprise or shock the reader. The reader controls when they turn to the next page, to reveal how the story continues. This is something that can only be achieved via the medium of comics and Nakazawa’s use of it is an example of step 2, form, using his chosen medium to his advantage. A skilled artist can use the

⁶³ Dictionary.com, pow, available online <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pow> (06.04.2021).

⁶⁴ Ives, After Atomic Bombings, available online <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/world/asia/hiroshima-nagasaki-japan-photos.html> (19.03.2021).

⁶⁵ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, p. 251.

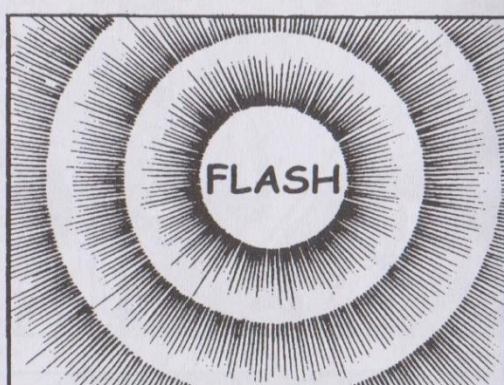
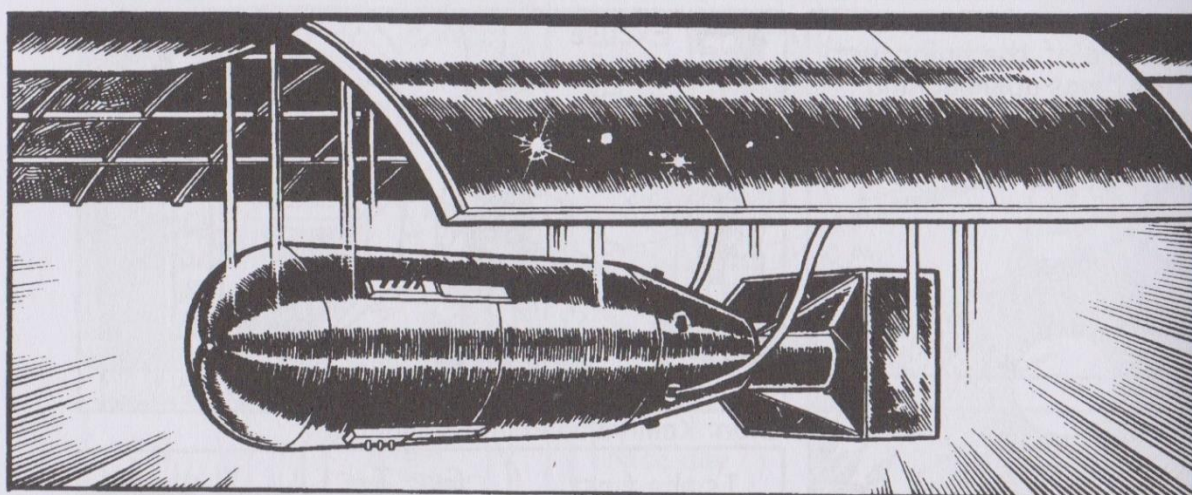
page turn to build anticipation or dread within the reader. What is going to happen next? Do I want to turn the page to see what happens?⁶⁶ It becomes an especially powerful tool in horror, with the Japanese mangaka Junji Ito being an infamous master of this technique. He regularly uses page-turns to reveal horrifying monsters or transformations, achieving something that is similar to the “jump scare” in horror movies.⁶⁷ The difference between the jump scare and the page turn lies in the agency of the reader. A movie simply continues unless someone explicitly pauses it. But a comic by its nature only goes as fast as the reader chooses to. We have to make the choice to turn the page, or we hesitate, which increases the tension even more.

This special mix of tension and agency is something that comic artists can use to powerful effects. Keiji Nakazawa uses the page turn in order to dramatically reveal the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima, this time from the ground and far away, as indicated by a small looking mountain range at the bottom of the panel.⁶⁸ Compared to the former panels, this panel is huge and stretches from top to bottom of the entire page. It fills half of the page overall and an interesting detail lies in the comparison with the mushroom cloud of the Trinity test. Put side by side, the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima is drawn larger as the Trinity one, a simple method to signify that the destruction of Hiroshima was worse than anything that we saw previously in this manga. Nakazawa also adds several lines of narration next to the mushroom cloud, commenting that the cloud looked like it came straight out of the pits of hell itself. This statement is an example of step 1, purpose, because Nakazawa quite literally states how he saw this event at the time and how he wants the reader to view this. His intention behind what this panel is supposed to mean is made unmistakably clear. He also states that time seemed to briefly stop in Hiroshima following the explosion, possibly referring to several clocks that still exist to this day, that stopped when the eruption occurred. But this comment also serves as a narrative device, because Gen is nowhere to be seen and the readers does not know how much time has passed until we see him again:

⁶⁶ Vinh Nguyen *Tu*, The Suspense of Turning a Page. “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.” – H.P. Lovecraft. In: medium.com, available online <https://medium.com/@vinhnguyentu/the-suspense-of-turning-a-page-6c3ad12d889c> (19.03.2021).

⁶⁷ Robert *Shail*, Anxiety and Mutation in Charles Burns’ *Black Hole* and Junji Ito’s *Uzumaki*. In: *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Comics, Games and Transmedia* (Bingley 2019), p. 24-27.

⁶⁸ *Nakazawa*, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume One, p. 252.



Forty-three seconds later, 1,800 feet over Hiroshima, the atomic bomb named Little Boy exploded with a white-hot light. It was like a million flashbulbs going off at once...

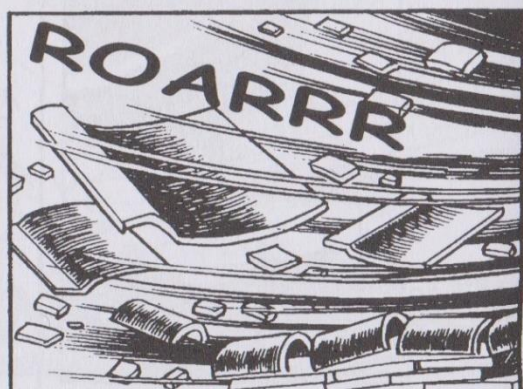


Image 4: "Pika-Don" in "Barefoot Gen".

Gen himself is unconscious after the blast and when he wakes, the city around him is in ruins. Nakazawa emphasizes how confusing and disorienting these events were for the people on the ground. In just a few seconds their city had turned into a nightmare and Gen wonders why the sky is dark, when it was morning, and he was on his way to school. This is the result of how the timeline following a nuclear explosion unfolds. Within minutes after the detonation low visibility starts to cover the “moderate damage zone”, meaning the area outside of the epicenter of the explosion.⁶⁹ Little Boy is estimated at 15 kilotons of TNT in destructive power and according to the official report of the Manhattan Engineer District in 1946, the same scientists who created the atomic bombs, almost everything within one mile of the initial blast radius was annihilated, with the exception of a few dozen heavily reinforced buildings.⁷⁰ The blast of the explosion then continued for several more kilometers, getting weaker, but still wreaking havoc as it destroyed the structures of the city.⁷¹

Gen was lucky enough to not be within that deadly radius, but the massive amounts of dust carried upward after the explosion blackened the sky above him. Gen is immediately confronted with a dead woman next to him when he wakes up and whom he had talked to just a few panels before. This dramatic juxtaposition effects the reader with the knowledge that Gen survived by pure coincidence, since the person next to him was not that lucky. He runs to get help for her, seeing the silhouette of someone walking towards him. Nakazawa combines the steps of 4 and 5, structure and craft, in this scene in order to build up the tension and sense of horror. The silhouette that Gen sees through the smoke is clearly a human shape, but Nakazawa draws it in a very rough way, where neither Gen nor the reader can make out any details. The body is either completely black or covered by smoke. Gen runs towards the shape and the next panel shows Gen’s shocked reaction, before Nakazawa reveals what Gen actually sees. The final panel at the bottom of the page shows the shape in clear detail and a human face is visible in the frame, but it looks horrifying. The face looks like it is made out of melting wax, with hair and skin flowing downwards and contorting the face into a monstrous shape. The eyes of the person are drawn completely black, likely indicating that the eyes have completely burned within their sockets:⁷²

⁶⁹ Nuclear/Radiological Incident Annex to the Response and Recovery Federal Interagency Operational Plans, October 2016-Final. In: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Appendix 1 to Branch 1, p. 26.

⁷⁰ The Manhattan Engineer District, *The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Manhattan 1946), p. 11.

⁷¹ The Manhattan Engineer District, *The Atomic Bombings*, p.14.

⁷² Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume One, p. 253.



Image 5: The bottomless malice within the human heart in "Barefoot Gen".



Image 6: Horror of nuclear devastation in "Barefoot Gen".

Turning the page reveals a huge double-page spread, which cover the upper half of the next pages completely. This big drawing depicts the ruined city of Hiroshima, burning and torn apart, with people walking through it in the same state as the person that Gen just saw. The perspective in this panel is from above and the image of the naked, melting humans shambling forward evokes the imagery of many zombie stories. Gen comments on what is shown in the panels, that everything is destroyed and that the people look like monsters to him. One of the victims grabs Gen and pleads that the boy may bring him some water. Gen is horrified at first but agrees to look for water, running further. Turning the next page reveals the only “splash page” within the entire first volume of “Barefoot Gen”, meaning a single panel that covers the entire page of a comic.⁷³ The panel shows a burning horse, screaming in agony, galloping towards the perspective of the reader. The fire covering the animal continues into the background and combines with the flames and smoke coming from the buildings in the background, creating the image that this horse is galloping directly out of a firestorm. This panel has become one of the most famous out of the entire “Barefoot Gen” series, with artists like Art Spiegelman commenting on the extremely shocking effect it had on them.⁷⁴ More information on Spiegelman can be found on page 18. This is a simple example of step 5, craft, as Nakazawa uses the size of the panel to naturally stand out compared to every other page in the volume. He conveys this information to the reader without actually saying anything about the significance of the panel.

Nakazawa is once again adding text as narration to explain what is going on. The blast had ripped the clothes of most of the citizens away that were too close to the explosion, and the extreme heat emitted from the detonation was melting the skin of anyone close by. This type of injury is referred to as “flash-burns” and the closer victims were to the explosion without anything interrupting the line of sight, the worse their burn wounds would be.⁷⁵ Anyone caught in the severe damage zone of a nuclear explosion, that is not heavily shielded, immediately incinerates completely, leaving nothing of the body behind. The same effect also happens to most objects, even concrete or metal, because of the extreme levels of heat.⁷⁶ Gen had been spared this horror because debris lying on top of him had shielded him from getting hit by the heat wave directly.

⁷³ Duy Tano, Comic Book Glossary: Splash Page and Spread. In: The Comics Cube, available online <http://www.comicscube.com/2012/10/comic-book-glossary-splash-page-and.html> (06.04.2021).

⁷⁴ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, Introduction by Art Spiegelman.

⁷⁵ The Manhattan Engineer District, The Atomic Bombings, p. 20.

⁷⁶ Planning Guidance for Response to a Nuclear Detonation, Second Edition. In: Federal Emergency Management Agency of Homeland Security (2010), p. 24-25.

Nakazawa uses step 3, idiom, in these scenes, as he had to decide how exactly he wanted to depict the destruction wrought upon Hiroshima and its citizens. He chose an uncompromisingly honest, up-close and uncomfortable style, which became a main reason for the success of “Barefoot Gen”. Nothing is implied, everything is there to see on the page. No matter how gruesome or horrific, Nakazawa depicts everything exactly how it happened according to him, or other eyewitnesses, forcing the reader to look upon the destruction. His choice to draw the melting skin like wax melting at the sides of a candle is a particularly striking use of step 5, craft, because not only does it create very impactful images, but the inspiration behind this style also makes sense. Candles melt and these human beings melt as well. Nakazawa shocks the reader on the surface level, step 6, while doing it in a very deliberate way that relates to what is going on in the scene. Gen continues to run, screaming in horror in the background of the panel with the burning horse. He runs past more survivors, one of them being a little girl whose face is covered in glass shards. She is screaming for her mother, as she is blind because her eyes have been shredded by the glass. Nakazawa makes it once again very clear that he will show everything, including the horror that this event inflicted on children. Gen finally manages to find water and returns to the person that begged him previously, only to realize that this person was already dead. He starts to look around, seeing nothing but fire and people running in terror.⁷⁷ The story continues even further throughout the day, with Gen having to witness the death of most of his family members except his mother and his newborn sister, as their house was torn apart by the shockwave. We will return to it later and now look closer at the portrayal of this dark day in Fumiyo Kouno’s work.

3.1.2 August 6th, 1945, in “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”

“Town of Evening Calm” begins with the protagonist, the young woman Minami Hirana, working on a dress alongside her colleagues. She lives in the city of Hiroshima and the story takes place in 1955, 10 years after the bombing of the city. Fumiyo Kouno portrays what seems to be several ordinary days in Minami’s life, from work, to talking to her mother, and finally a date. There are only a handful of clues to tell us where this story takes place and what Minami lived through. Minami walks past a sign that promotes the upcoming first world conference against atomic bombs, which took place on August 6th, 1955.⁷⁸ When a young man called Ushikoshi, who Minami seems to have romantic feelings for, mentions that she would make a good wife one day, a single panel appears showing debris and a hand sticking out from between

⁷⁷ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume One, p. 257.

⁷⁸ Miho Takeuchi, Kouno Fumiyo’s *Hiroshima Manga*: A style-centered attempt at re-reading. In: *Kritika Kultura* 26 (Manila 2016), p. 247.

the rubble. Minami then loudly proclaims that she will never get married and runs away.⁷⁹ Kouno also draws a scene where Minami visits a bath house, and she looks down on several scars on her arm. All these scenes foreshadow what happened in Minami's past, as Kouno uses step 4, structure, in order to build up anticipation. Once again, the audience already knows what happened to Hiroshima in 1945, but we don't know yet what happened to Minami specifically. The full ramifications of her memories are only revealed when she stands on a bridge in Hiroshima, kissing Ushikoshi. The moment when she kisses him, the view of the scene switches to a perspective looking down at the two and the readers see that the river below the bridge is filled with corpses. The bridge itself is heavily damaged and more dead or injured are on the ground close to the couple. Minami ends the kiss immediately and runs away from Ushikoshi. This is when Minami starts to remember August 6th, 1945, and what she witnessed that day:⁸⁰

Fumiyo Kouno never draws the explosion of the atom bomb itself, nor the mushroom cloud following it. Instead, the scene begins with Minami tripping and falling to the ground and the grass below her is drawn like hands, that hold onto her ankles. The author adds text that confirms that these are the memories of the day when Hiroshima was destroyed and Minami starts to run, while thinking about the events. Kouno tells the following flashback in a multilayered way, combining different layers of time while making special use of step 2, form. The panels take place in 1945, while Minami's narration comes from the "present" of 1955. But the most unique aspect of these panels is how they are laid out on the page. All of the panels in Kouno's book are laid out in the same way, where the characters are positioned horizontally. But this flashback breaks that structure suddenly and Kouno experiments with how readers are used to read comics, experimenting with the aforementioned step 2 and also step 4, structure. Kouno knows what readers of a manga expect, especially considering that she herself has been following the standard layout up until this point. She then subverts these expectations and changes her own established structure, step 4. The first panel where Minami starts to run is suddenly placed vertically and Minami runs upwards, moving from the bottom to the top of the page. This is very disorienting at first, since the previous pages are laid out completely differently. This was possibly precisely the effect that Kouno wanted to achieve, as Minami herself was likely disoriented herself. The panel shows Minami running past injured survivors, corpses and destroyed parts of the city. The grass in the light looks normal, but the one in

⁷⁹ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 22-23.

shadow looks like human hands reaching out, continuing the imagery which were at the beginning of this nightmarish sequence:

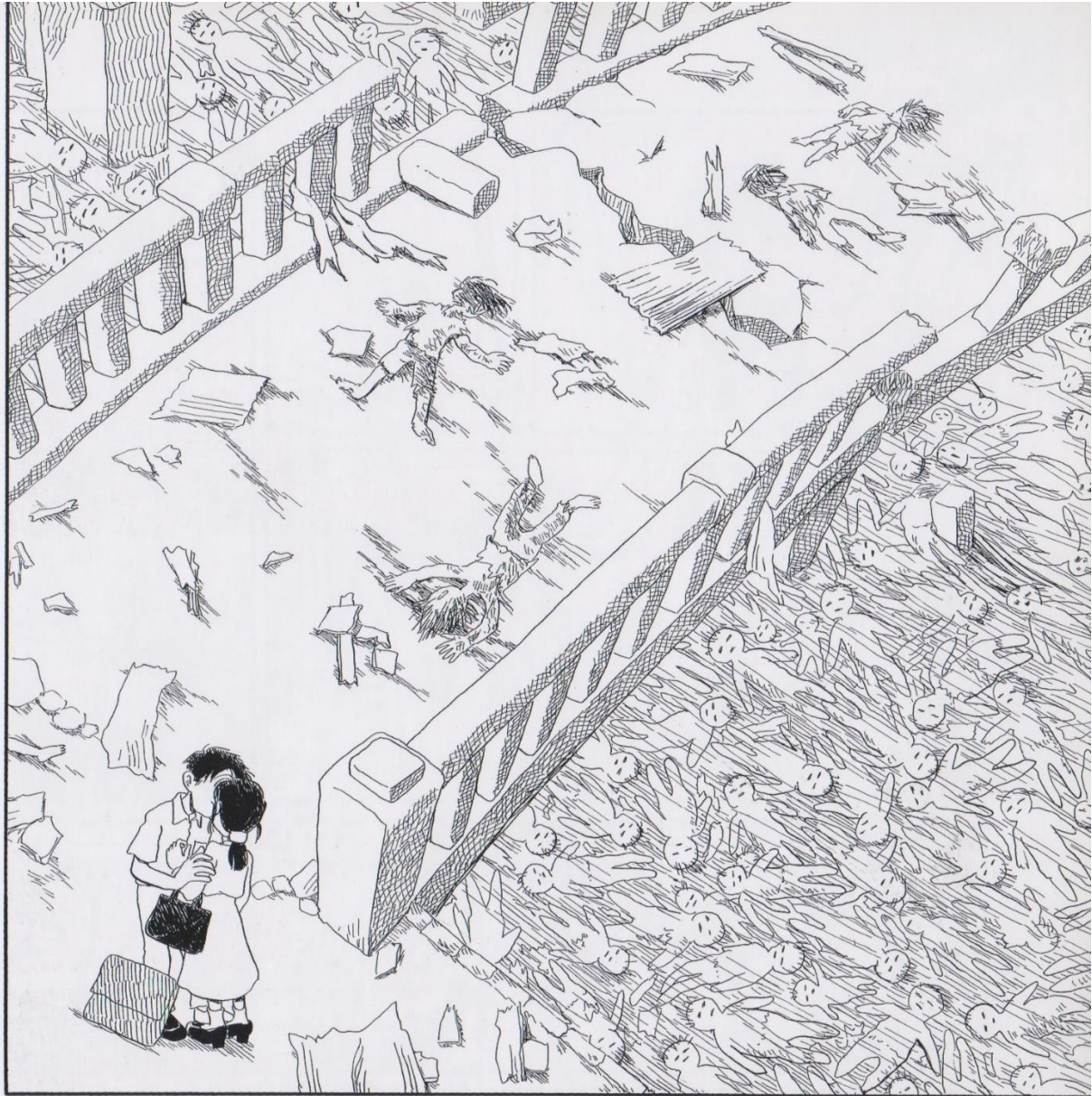
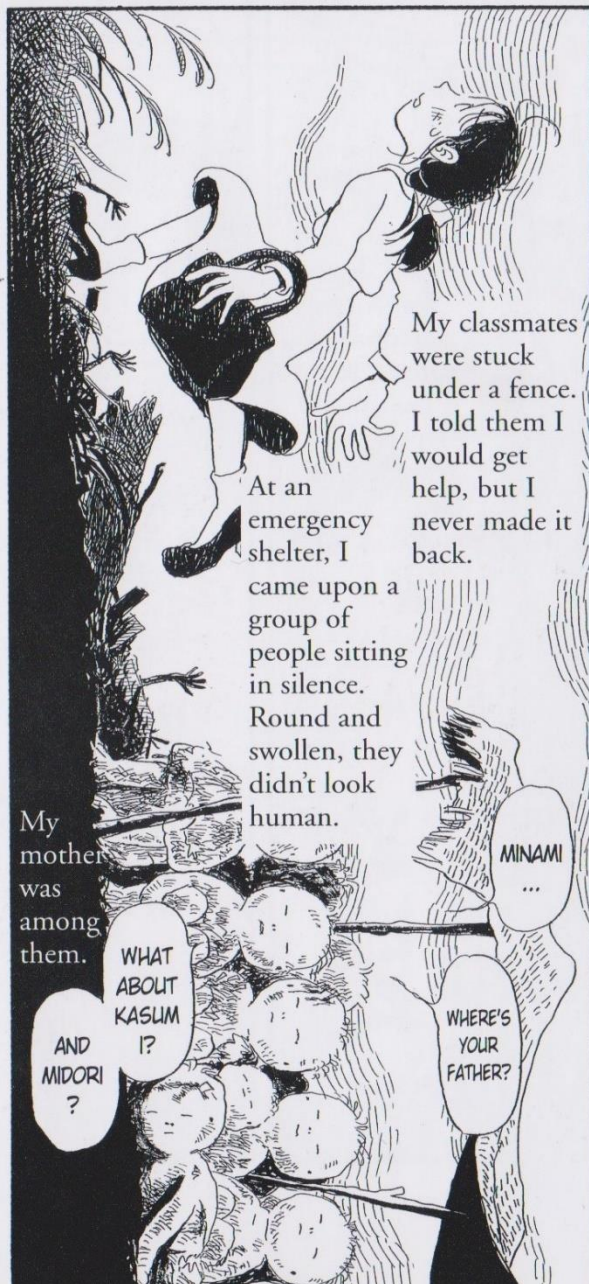


Image 7: Traumatic memories in "Town of Evening Calm".

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A voice told me—you don't belong there in that world.



Image 8: The nightmare of August 6th in "Town of Evening Calm".

Minami remembers that she came across many people that she knew, like her classmates, but simply continued to run forward. This has led to a terrible sense of guilt that she still feels 10 years later, which is an example of the phenomenon called „survivor’s guilt”.⁸¹ Many survivors of the atomic bombings later suffered from this guilt and questioned why they were allowed to live, when so many others were not.⁸² Minami recalls seeing her mother with her face swollen, asking where the other family members were. She continues to run on the next page, mentioning that she started to feel a burning sensation on her arm, which calls back to the scars that were visible on her body during her visit to a bathhouse. This is a very subtle use of step 4, structure, as Kouno foreshadowed Minami’s past at the beginning of the story, without revealing directly where the scars came from. Minami remembers searching for her family and was ultimately able to find her older sister Kasumi, but her younger sister Midori was never found, and their father died while being at work. Minami also mentions a bird with charred wings, which was only able to hop across the ground, something that will be relevant in the comparison with “Barefoot Gen”.

The following panels all follow the vertical structure, with Minami running through several different events that she encountered, remembering small elements from them. Kouno overall draws a very small number of corpses, injuries, or destruction in these vertical panels. There are only a few destroyed structures in the background and some of the black “hands” reaching up from the ground seem to originate from human bodies, but they are drawn in a very crude, almost sketch-like way, which makes it very hard to tell any details. On the surface level, step 6, this might seem poorly done to the reader, but based on the artwork quality throughout the entire book, it is obvious that Kouno is a fantastic artist, capable of drawing beautifully detailed images. The crudeness of these specific panels is an intentional artistic choice, combining steps 3 and 5 together, idiom and craft. Kouno finds her own style, idiom, to portray these scenes in a particular way and uses her craft, step 5, to execute her idiom in practice. Drawing “badly” on purpose is difficult and requires that an artist has a clear intention behind the “messiness” and is able to convey that intention towards the reader. It could have been very jarring if Kouno had used this style in other parts of the book. But knowing that these specific panels depict traumatic memories makes it easy to understand why the images are starting to look contorted and twisted like in a nightmare. The linework is a subtle but effective way how a comic book artist can convey certain emotions without any words and these rough lines can evoke

⁸¹ Akiyo M. *Cantrell*, The management of survivor’s guilt through the construction of a favorable self in Hiroshima survivor narratives. In: *Discourse Studies* Vol. 19(4) (2017), p. 378.

⁸² *Cantrell*, The management of survivor’s guilt, p. 378-383.

impressions of something deadly, weak, and/or unstable.⁸³ This might in part be informed by Kouno's admission that she was doubtful of her own abilities as an artist when it came to this book, because she had to draw many things, like certain facial expressions, that she was not used to at that point in her career.⁸⁴ She might have decided to choose this particular style because no matter how she would have portrayed the violence and suffering inflicted by the atomic bombing, it still would not be as gruesome as the imagination of the reader. By simply drawing a shadowy figure on the ground, reaching out with a hand seemingly made of shadow, she implies everything that is needed to understand the context of the scene. At the end of the nightmare sequence, Minami simply lies on the ground, with the shadows wrapped all around her. While Hiroshima is seen on the upper part of the panel, the image starts to shift into a complete black color. It looks like the shadows are growing out of a black void and Minami is entrapped by it.⁸⁵

⁸³ *McCloud*, Understanding Comics, p. 125.

⁸⁴ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 102.

⁸⁵ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 25.



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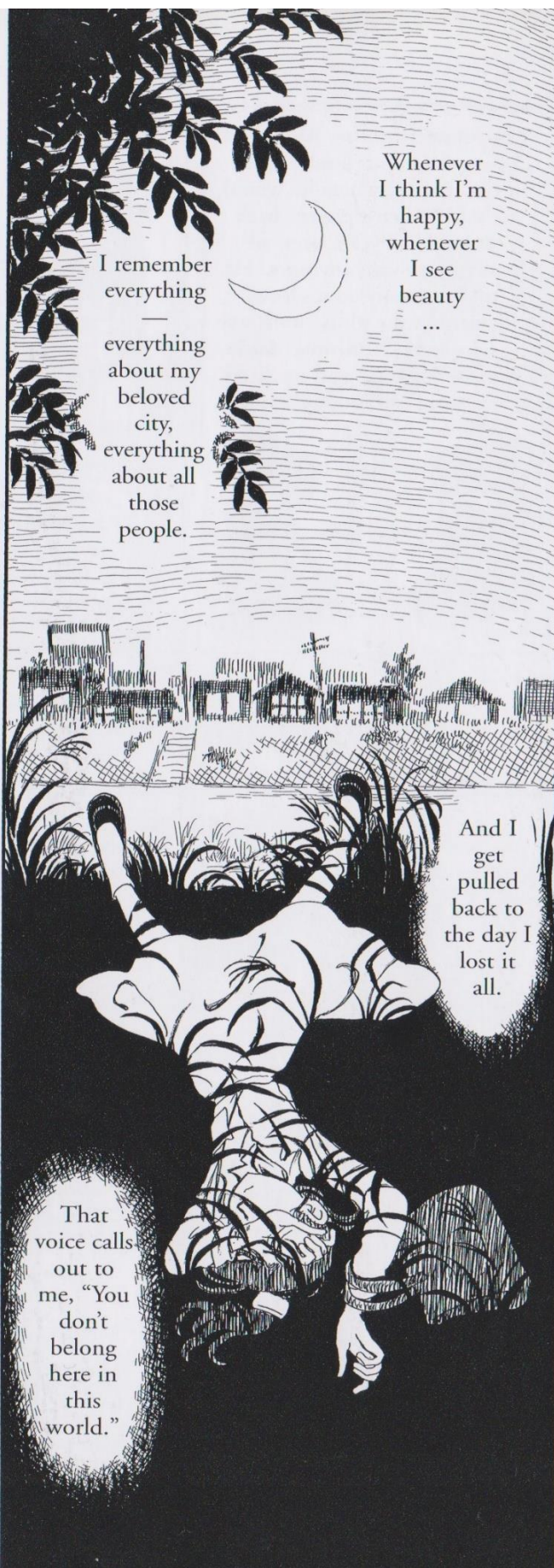


Image 9: Minami falls into darkness in "Town of Evening Calm".

Minami's memories continue to describe the days following August 6th, 1945, with one particular event being especially important. The Hirano family had another member, Minami's younger brother Asahi, and he had been sent to his uncle and aunt in the countryside before Hiroshima had been destroyed.⁸⁶ Minami remembers seeing him again years after the atomic bombings and barely recognized him anymore. He spoke a different dialect and did not want to return to Hiroshima. His family ultimately agreed, and he was adopted by the Ishikawa family, his uncle and aunt. This will be very important in a later part of the thesis, but we will leave Minami's story for now and try to compare how Keiji Nakazawa and Fumiyo Kouno decided to portray this particular day in their respective works.

3.1.3 Nakazawa and Kouno and August 6th, 1945

When comparing these two authors and how they depict August 6th, 1945, the most obvious difference is seen in the number of correlating pages. Nakazawa spends 42 pages of his first volume of "Barefoot Gen" to show what happened during this day and continues until page 4 in the second volume. The entire story of "Town of Evening Calm" takes up less than 30 pages in comparison, as it is the first story out of the overall 3 in "Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms", showing just how short Kouno's work is in direct comparison to Nakazawa. Nakazawa uses the length of his comic to his advantage and chooses to focus on many details of the event, but he also builds up anticipation and suspense throughout his panels, taking his time in order to build a sense of dread. Nakazawa employs the step of structure, step 4, very effectively and this is something that will continue throughout all of his volumes. Kouno can simply not afford to use panels in the same way he does, because she would run out of space very quickly. Instead, she shows a masterful use of step, 5, craft, and her ability for problem solving as a mangaka. If she has to work within an extremely limited number of pages, she needs to tell a story that fits within that frame and construct it in a way that does not feel rushed or too short. Scott McCloud argues that an important aspect of the craft ability of a comic book artist is simply the ability to "get the job done".⁸⁷ You have to be able to make do with what you have, and most artists work within clear limitations: deadlines, budget, available personnel and materials, or the page count of a planned book. Kouno uses the very little space she is given very efficiently, focusing on individual moments, and even working her limitations into the story itself. Gen is experiencing the events of August 6th, 1945, in the present tense, he is living through everything as the reader follows him. We therefore see everything happen

⁸⁶ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 26.

⁸⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 171.

right in front of him, before these experiences become memories. But Minami is only remembering this day a decade later and most importantly, she does not even want to remember it. She actively tries to suppress these traumatic moments of her life and the few scenes that Kouno draws are brief moments of Minami's trauma, that force their way onto the surface of her mind.

One of the biggest differences in the style of Nakazawa and Kouno lies in their depiction of suffering and violence. They use a completely different interpretation of step 2, idiom, and how they decide to tell their respective stories. Nakazawa draws everything in detail, while Kouno subtly implies most of the time. Gen sees melting people blindly wandering throughout the ruins of Hiroshima, while Minami looks on a few small scars on her arm. The perspectives could not be much more different, but the historic context plays a significant role for these depictions. Nakazawa was one of the first mangaka who openly wrote about what happened to the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki back in the late 1960s, and he wanted to finally express what had been building in his mind for several decades, a terrible rage over the fate of his family and so many other victims:

*"In 1966, after seven years of illness, my mother died in the Atomic Bomb Victims Hospital in Hiroshima. When I went to the crematorium to collect her ashes, I was shocked. There were no bones left in my mother's ashes, as there normally are after a cremation. Radioactive cesium from the bomb had eaten away at her bones to the point that they disintegrated. The bomb had even deprived me of my mother's bones. I was overcome with rage. [...] I began drawing comics about the A-bomb as a way to avenge my mother."*⁸⁸

This sense of rage, at first, seems to be the core of step 1, idea and purpose, when it comes to Nakazawa's writing in "Barefoot Gen". It informs everything in his story and how he decided to tell it. This can be seen in the visceral way in which Nakazawa makes use of the steps of idiom and craft, steps 3 and 5. He chose a style that is forcing the reader to take a close, uncompromising look at the horror that the victims of the atomic bombs had to suffer through. And he uses his skills in crafting comics to draw these horrors in great detail. Nothing seems taboo in "Barefoot Gen", no matter how brutal, undignified or just downright depressing. Death by dysentery, children drowning in a river or babies attempting to drink the milk of their dead mothers, everything is laid out before the reader. For many readers this would likely feel too brutal to read, but it all comes from the intention of honesty. To depict what actually happened and abandon all heroic depictions of war or respect that the survivors later received. Fumiyo

⁸⁸ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume One, A Note From The Author Keiji Nakazawa.

Kouno on the other hand was not only born decades after all this happened, but she actively avoided the topic for a long time, precisely because she came from Hiroshima and was confronted with this subject matter very early in her life. Reading her thoughts invokes no feeling of anger but instead suggests that Kouno confronted a fear that she had buried within herself for many years. She also seemingly was affected by the circumstance, that people she met outside of Hiroshima knew shockingly little about the events of 1945:

“I always thought all I needed to know about the bomb was that it was a terrifying thing that happened once upon a time, and a subject best avoided. After living in Tokyo for a while, however, I came to realize that people outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki didn’t really know all that much about the ravages of the atomic bomb. [...] There were many expressions I wasn’t used to, and I had many doubts. But I kept telling myself that drawing something is better than drawing nothing at all, and that’s how I was able to do it.”⁸⁹

While there are many differences between these two works, there are also striking similarities. One of them being that both Nakazawa and Kouno make a point to mention in their stories, that not only humans suffered because of the atomic bombings. Nakazawa drew the aforementioned splash page of the burning horse, while Kouno mentions a bird with charred wings during Minami’s flashback. These small moments not only show that the devastation affected local animals just as much as the human population, but also serves as a perfect microcosm that shows the differences in their styles and storytelling. Nakazawa draws the burning horse as a big panel, detailing everything from the burning flesh and hair to the panicked expression on the animal’s face. It is direct, shocking, and visceral. Kouno on the other hand does not draw the wounded bird at all. Instead, Minami just reminisces about seeing it, while thinking about her own wounds as well. It is a distant memory, barely there, but part of her trauma and still stuck in her mind. If someone wants to understand the difference between Nakazawa and Kouno when it comes to their use of step 3, idiom, these two scenes are a very straightforward example:

⁸⁹ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 102-103.



Image 10: The burning horse in "Barefoot Gen".

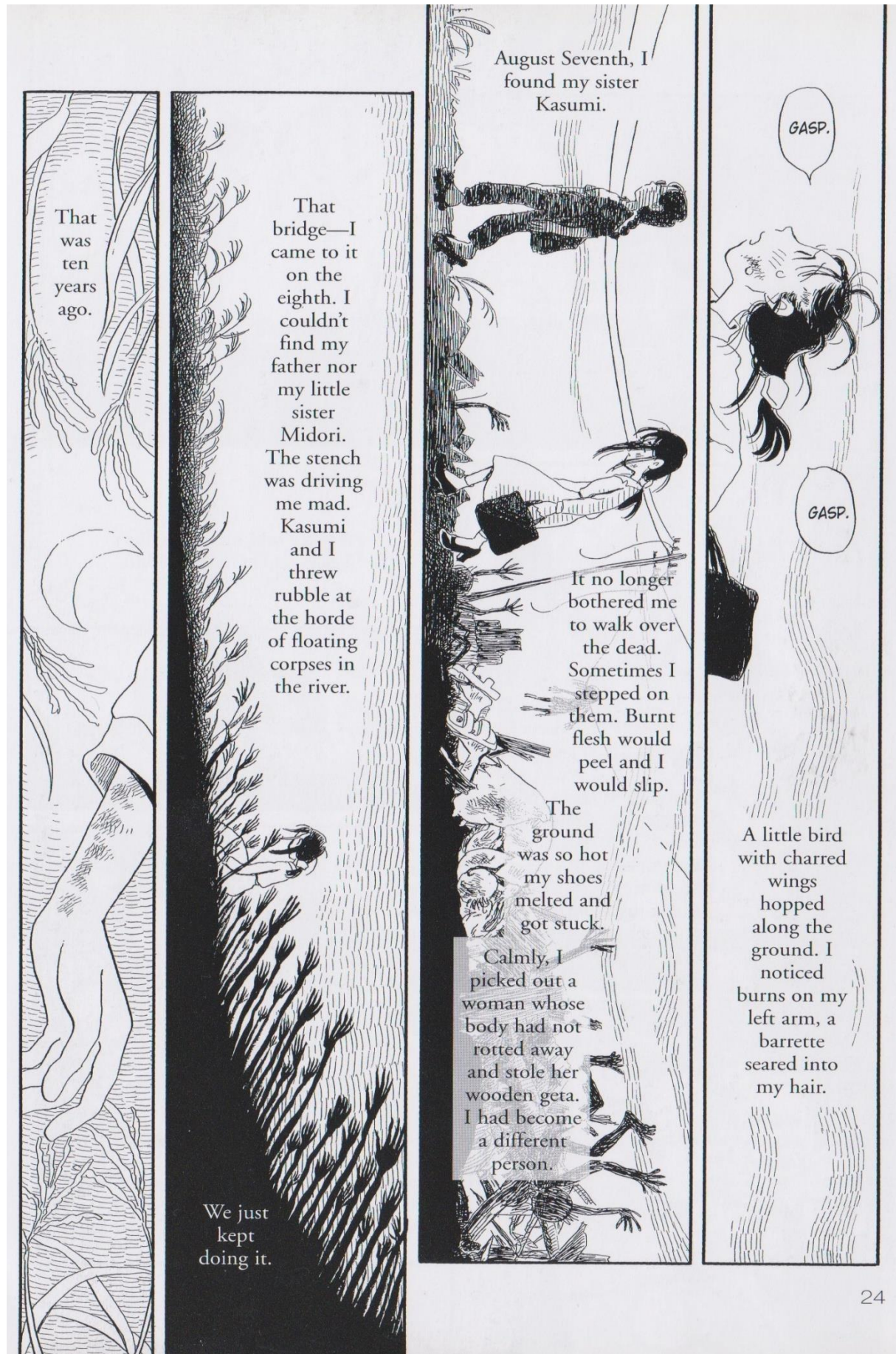


Image 11: Walking through the ruins of Hiroshima in "Town of Evening Calm".

Another interesting detail that both author's explicitly depict is a moment, when a victim of the atomic bomb asks either Gen or Minami for water. Gen runs off and brings water back to the victim, only to find the person dead. Minami ignores the request and keeps on searching for her family, later lamenting how many people she left behind on that day. Considering that "Barefoot Gen" and "Town of Evening Calm" have been written decades apart, it is curious that both Nakazawa and Kouno decided to depict this particular interaction. Many survivors of the atomic bombings have later told stories where someone asked them to bring water. Most often, the survivors did not do that but the reasons for this have been examined in historic research. Apparently, most survivors later told the story, that they were either told that water would kill the people asking for it, or they even claimed that they saw victims die after drinking water.⁹⁰ These stories told by the survivors were potentially responsible why Kouno included this topic in her manga, as she mentions that interviews with survivors were a crucial part of her preparation to write her book.⁹¹ In Nakazawa's case it is possible that he witnessed it himself or later learned about it from other survivors. He even depicts a scene in his second volume where several victims of the bombing of Hiroshima beg for water and start drinking it from a puddle. Right after they start drinking, they start to collapse and die on the spot, horrifying Gen who is watching it.⁹²

There are several theories why some victims of the bombings might have died after drinking water, one of them being that only the extreme stress of the situation and the correlating adrenaline was keeping some of the victims alive and as soon as they got to rest and drink, their bodies simply collapsed.⁹³ Almost all of the survivors that were interviewed regarding this topic presented themselves favorably when it came to this situation, giving reasons why they were not able to help. Historic research on the matter suggests that this might be the result of survivor's guilt combined with the wish, that none of these survivors want to appear responsible for the death of others.⁹⁴ The survivors often don't describe what happened in these situations in great detail, but still so many of them remember this specific situation decades later, where most of them had been children when the bombs fell, like Gen in Nakazawa's story. While Gen tries to help someone with this request, depicting Gen as an honest and helpful child, Nakazawa follows the same kind of story that survivors have told over the years. Since the line between

⁹⁰ Cantrell, *The management of survivor's guilt*, p. 380-384.

⁹¹ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 103.

⁹² Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Two: The Day After* (San Francisco 2004), p. 87-88.

⁹³ Cantrell, *The management of survivor's guilt*, p. 380-384.

⁹⁴ Cantrell, *The management of survivor's guilt*, p. 384-398.

Gen as a character and Nakazawa as an actual survivor is very hard to define, it is possible that Nakazawa was in this situation himself and tries to rationalize what happened.

Kouno on the other hand, someone who only spoke with actual survivors, does not depict Minami in a heroic way at all, nor does she attempt to explain how Minami was acting “correctly” in this situation. Instead, Kouno’s depiction of the scene is brutally honest. Minami simply ignores the suffering of others, because she was confused, disoriented and most importantly completely focused on finding her own family members. Kouno does not present this in a judgmental way, but simply as the harsh reality of the moment. And Minami as a character herself feels guilty about what she has done 10 years later and questions whether she should even be allowed to live after what she has done.⁹⁵ It is possible that other, actual, survivors might have done the same thing as Minami, but simply cannot bring themselves to admit it. Or they truly do not remember fully what happened, either because they were so young when it happened, or because their trauma blocks out the exact memories and creates a story that is easier to live with.

Nakazawa and Kouno might have both chosen to show this particular event because it serves as an easy-to-understand example of the suffering that the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had to endure. Every human being understands what being thirsty is like and so everyone can imagine that these victims were in horrible pain, unable to do something as simple as to stand up and drink. They were completely helpless and reliant on other survivors to help them. Nakazawa depicts the helplessness of other survivors, who tried to help but were often unable to. Kouno focuses on the terrible choice that many survivors had to make in order to survive, putting their own well-being, and that of their loved ones, above others. This then in turn leads to long-term psychological consequences. Long-term ramifications will be the focus of the next chapter, as the terrible effects of the atomic bombs would not end in August 1945. Instead, the survivors would have to endure far more hardships in the coming decades, something that both Nakazawa and Kouno depict extensively in their respective works.

⁹⁵ *Kouno, Town of Evening Calm*, p. 23-25.

3.2 The long-term consequences and it's victims

While the immediate effects of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were terrible and left both cities in ruin, the consequences of these two attacks had barely begun in August 1945. What had yet to follow were the long-term consequences for the survivors, both physically and socially. The concept of radiation poisoning is well known in Central-Europe since 1986, when reactor Nr. 4 at the nuclear power plant of Chernobyl exploded and released massive amounts of radiation into the air all over the Northern-Half of the planet.⁹⁶ But the consequences of what large amounts of radiation do to the human body were barely understood yet when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed by the Americans in 1945. One of the first scientific publications on the matter was released in 1948 by Elbert DeCoursey, where he described how American and Japanese physicians conducted autopsies on the survivors of August 6th, 1945, who had died in the following weeks and months after the bombs fell.⁹⁷ In recent years, the HBO produced series “Chernobyl” has drawn renewed attention to the topic of radiation poisoning. In one particular scene, one of the show’s main characters, Dr. Valery Legasov, is asked by Boris Shcherbina, another main character, to explain how exactly radiation kills a human being, referring in this case to the personnel of the power plant and the firefighters who arrived shortly after the explosion. Legasov explains just how terrible their deaths are going to be, before being asked what is going to happen to himself and others, like Shcherbina, who were close to Chernobyl for months in order to get the situation under control. He responds with the following words:

*“(Legasov): We’ve gotten a steady dose, but much less of it. Not strong enough to kill the cells, but consistent enough to damage the DNA. In time... cancer. Or aplastic anemia. Either way, fatal. (Shcherbina): Well. In a sense, it would seem we’ve gotten off easily then... Valery.”*⁹⁸

41 years before the explosion at Chernobyl, the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as other Japanese citizens who came to the cities in order to help, fell victim to the same consequences. They were poisoned by something they couldn’t see and most didn’t even know existed. Some became ill months or even many years after the atomic bombings, as radiation poisoning goes through a so called “latent phase” where the victim seems healthy. The duration of this period can vary from hours to decades depending on many factors, like the amount of radiation and the consistency of prolonged exposure to it, but ultimately leads to the

⁹⁶ Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed. Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (Princeton/Oxford 2003), p.1-3.

⁹⁷ Elbert DeCoursey, *Human Pathologic Anatomy Of Ionizing Radiation Effects Of The Atomic Bomb Explosions*. In: *Military Medicine. International Journal of AMSUS* Vol 102, Issue 6 (1948), p. 427.

⁹⁸ Craig Maizin, *Chernobyl. Episode 3 – „Open Wide, O Earth“* (2018), p.17.

manifestation of further symptoms and possibly even in death.⁹⁹ But the suffering of the victims would not just be physical however, as many of them became social outcasts known as the hibakusha. These stories in particular form the bulk of both “Barefoot Gen” and “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”. We shall first examine several examples of how Keiji Nakazawa has depicted the suffering of the survivors in his work.

3.2.1 “Barefoot Gen” and the life of the Hibakusha

One of the earliest examples that Nakazawa depicts in his work regarding radiation poisoning occurs in Volume 2. The author does not state exactly how much time has passed since August 6th, but he does highlight that the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945. That implies that at least three days have passed since Gen managed to survive the initial destruction of Hiroshima, alongside his mother and newborn sister. They are trying to survive among the ruins of the city and Gen is trying to find food for his family, as his mother can no longer feed her baby and they are terrified that the baby might starve. Gen wanders across the broken landscape, corpses everywhere, but he ultimately finds no food and falls unconscious because of the lack of nutrition and the scorching summer heat. Soldiers that clean the city of the corpses of it’s former citizens at first believe Gen to be another corpse and nearly burn him alive on a pyre.¹⁰⁰

One of the soldiers feels bad for Gen, being reminded of his own son, and promises to help him. Nakazawa draws the soldier carrying Gen appearing tall and strong, like a hero. He even gives his own rations to the starving child, making him very sympathetic. The author uses both steps 4 and 5, structure and craft, to draw the soldier appearing healthy and making the reader like him, so that following scene feels all the more tragic. While the soldier is carrying Gen, he feels weaker and weaker. He does not understand what’s going on, as he was always strong but ever since he arrived in Hiroshima several days ago, he feels like losing his strength. At first, he cannot carry Gen any further and then he is starting to have diarrhea, without even realizing it. Gen has to point it out and the soldiers realizes with horror that the diarrhea is bloody. Wondering what is going on, his hair is starting to fall out as well. Nakazawa creates a sequence of several panels where the soldier looks at the bundle of hair in hair in disbelief, only to pull out even more hair and stare at it again. This sequence builds up a sense of dread for both the character of the soldier, but also the reader. His health is deteriorating at an alarming speed.

⁹⁹ Miquel Macia i Garau/Anna Lucas Calduch/Enric Casanovas López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome. In: Science Direct, Reports of Practical Oncology and Radiotherapy. Special Issue: Acute Radiation Syndrome (2011), p. 125-128.

¹⁰⁰ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume Two, p. 28-29.

The sequence culminates in a larger panel, where large spots on the soldier's head are already bald, with him sweating profusely and looking terrified.¹⁰¹ The next sequence depicts Gen laughing at the soldier losing his hair, at first coming off as cruel. But Nakazawa depicts very effectively that Gen is still a child, not realizing that the man in front of him is dying. Gen also quickly apologizes, and the soldier starts to shiver, feeling terribly cold, and falls to the ground. Unable to move, he is completely helpless and dependent on Gen, who at first tries to keep him warm, and then decides to drag him on a self-made sled to the nearest medical tent. Within just 7 pages, we see the same man who at first carried Gen now being dragged by the same child he wanted to help. This might be an example of Nakazawa's use of step 1, idea/purpose, as he shows in a short sequence that no one is safe from this horror. No matter how strong you originally were, your body starts to break down if it came in contact with too much radiation:

¹⁰¹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume Two, p. 34-35.



Image 12: Death by radiation in "Barefoot Gen".

This phenomenon is known as “acute radiation syndrome” and occurs when human tissue comes in contact with high doses of radiation within a short amount of time.¹⁰² This happens because the internal organs are starting to fail because of the radiation and the body starts going through a number of different stages of illness, resulting in death if the radiation dose was high and constant enough.¹⁰³ The soldier depicted in these scenes seems to suffer in particular from “gastrointestinal syndrome”, which is characterized by watery diarrhea, gastrointestinal bleeding, dehydration, sepsis and multisystem organ failure.¹⁰⁴ It stands to reason that the soldier touched countless bodies and debris heavily contaminated with radiation, without any form of protection, and all of this occurred relatively recent after the destruction of the city. This might explain why Gen and his mother survived, despite the fact that they had been in the city longer and even during the initial blast. Gen was seen previously in Volume One to be very scared of the corpses and his mother is shown as well in this way, trying to stay away from the constant death surrounding her in order to take care of her two children.¹⁰⁵

But Nakazawa is not just showing the “acute radiation syndrome” in civilians and soldiers, but also the main character of his story, Gen. Not long after the soldier has passed away, Gen starts to notice that his hair is falling out as well. He starts panicking, since he witnessed that the soldier died briefly after he had lost his hair. Gen starts screaming in fear, not wanting to believe what is happening and he covers his hat with a cap that he found on the ground. Nakazawa starts to add narration, explaining for the first time what is happening to the people that we have seen dying so far seemingly without a reason. Not only does he explain that the radiation is destroying the cells of the victims, but he adds a single line of text that gives the scene even more gravitas. He states many people are still affected by this disease in the present, which was in the 1970s when Nakazawa wrote and published this volume. This is Nakazawa using step 3, idiom, choosing the vocabulary of his work very carefully in order to build a sense of dread, but also importance. He makes the reader realize that these events are not in the past, they are still happening. The scene continues as Gen runs to a local river, staring at his own reflection in the water. Nakazawa draws several panels with Gen staring at the water and while nothing seems to change between these panels, the focus lies on Gen’s face. We see Gen’s expression change panel by panel, very slowly and building a sense of time, starting with an expression of disbelief and defiance. This category of panel-to-panel transition is called moment-to-moment, allowing very little space for the reader’s own imagination of what happens in the gutter

¹⁰² Garau/Calduch/López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome, p.123.

¹⁰³ Garau/Calduch/López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome, p.124.

¹⁰⁴ Garau/Calduch/López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome, p.128.

¹⁰⁵ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume Two, p. 18-19.

between the different panels.¹⁰⁶ But realization of the truth starts to slowly appear on his face, as he tries to subvert his gaze but cannot help himself but to look again. Panel by panel, his fear becomes more and more visible, until a large panel shows him removing his cap and he looks at a completely bald Gen, staring back at him from the surface of the water.¹⁰⁷ That is when the truth is fully revealed, and he starts screaming in defiance that he is healthy and does not want to die. Nakazawa makes use of the steps 4 and 5, structure and craft, as he not only draws Gen's expressions in incredible detail, but by structuring the scene into these small panels puts the reader into the mind of Gen. Slowly following these panels reveals Gen's thoughts moment by moment, creating a sense of intimacy. Once the truth is revealed to him, the reader can fully understand not only how Gen feels, but even how he tried to deny the truth. It is a scene that feels incredibly relatable and "human", as most people had to face facts they did not want to accept during their lives. The fact that a child who is only six years has to endure this makes the scene even more tragic:

¹⁰⁶ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume Two, p. 45-49.



Image 13: The dread of realization in "Barefoot Gen".



Image 14: "Acute Radiation Syndrome" in "Barefoot Gen".

One of the most heartbreaking examples of radiation sickness that Nakazawa depicts within “Barefoot Gen” is not even the case of Gen Nakaoka, the alter ego of the author himself. Instead, it is the story of Gen’s little sister, Tomoko, who shares her name with Nakazawa’s own sister in real life.¹⁰⁸ Tomoko Nakazawa was born on August 6th, 1945, briefly after Hiroshima was destroyed by the atomic bomb, but passed away 4 months later of unknown causes, possibly malnutrition or radiation sickness.¹⁰⁹ Keiji Nakazawa chose to tell the story of his little sister’s life and passing through the eyes of Gen, with Tomoko Nakaoka being born under the same circumstances on August 6th, 1945, at the end of the first volume of “Barefoot Gen”. Her life is depicted throughout volumes two, three and four, with Gen and his mother trying their best to take care of her. Gen is incredibly protective of her and is willing to do any work just in order to earn enough money so that Tomoko can eat.¹¹⁰ For two years the family continues to survive and even the oldest son of the Nakaoka family, Koji, returns home after he joined the Japanese military, briefly before his hometown was destroyed. But one day, Tomoko starts to cough up blood. Nakazawa makes a point to show that the 2-year “anniversary” of the destruction of Hiroshima has passed around this time in the story, with parades and memorials held for the victims. This is an important moment of step 4, structure, as Nakazawa establishes a timeline for everything that has occurred so far within the first few volumes up until this point. It gives context to how long Gen and his family have managed to survive.

Tomoko is brought to a doctor, who tells Gen’s family that Tomoko is going to die very soon. He states that her internal organs are in terrible condition and suspects cancer as the cause.¹¹¹ As described earlier, acute radiation syndrome is capable of destroy the internal organs of a human very quickly, depending on the radiation dose and how long the victim was exposed to the source. Tomoko is not the same as the soldier mentioned before, the radiation was not strong enough to kill her outright. Instead, it seems likely that she is an example of what Valery Legasov describes at the beginning of chapter 3.2, a victim of radiation damaging the DNA and causing cancerous growths. The topic of hibakusha suffering from cancer after the events of August 1945 has been studied extensively, with leukemia being the first type of cancer that was identified in many survivors of the atomic bombings.¹¹² Nakazawa makes a point that the doctor explicitly mentions that he suspects cancer to be the reason for Tomoko’s suffering, but he

¹⁰⁸ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Four: Out of the Ashes* (San Francisco 2005), *The Birth of Barefoot Gen*.

¹⁰⁹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Four, The Birth of Barefoot Gen*.

¹¹⁰ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Three: Life after the Bomb* (San Francisco 2005), p. 17.

¹¹¹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Four*, p. 236.

¹¹² M. P. Little, Cancer and non-cancer effects in Japanese atomic bomb survivors. In: *Journal of Radiological Protection Prot.* 29 A43-A59 (2009), p. A43-A44.

cannot be certain without special medical equipment and the possible treatment for her is extremely expensive. While it seems impossible for the poor family to afford the medicine, it gives them a sense of hope. Nakazawa interrupts the panels of the doctor speaking to the family with several panels that show Tomoko's face in a close-up, coughing up more and more blood. This combined with the idea of a possible treatment creates a sense of time pressure, as the author establishes the stakes and why the family has to hurry. This is another example of Nakazawa using step 4, structure, to great effect, as he understands how to create a scenario with tension that keeps the reader engaged. There seems to be a glimmer of hope that both the Nakaoka family and likely many readers cling to. While Gen is looking for work during the following pages, he starts to have visions of his deceased family members. He starts to beg his father for help and reveals something about how he views his little sister:

*"Poor Tomoko's so skinny now...I can't stand to see her hurting like that day after day. Please, Papa, please help her somehow! Tomoko's special! She was born on the day of the bomb! If it kills her, the bomb will have beaten us all! We just can't let her die..."*¹¹³

Gen ultimately finds someone willing to give him the money he needs and runs back home happily that he can buy the medicine. But as he enters his home and tells every one of his success, no one says a word. Nakazawa draws three panels right next to each other, showing Gen's family and best friend one after the other. No one says anything, instead they are all sweating heavily and look defeated to the ground. Nakazawa chooses silence in these panels, as part of his chosen idiom, step 3, for the deafening silence of the family says more than enough. Once again does the reader know more than Gen and now the question is no longer if Tomoko is going to survive, but how Gen will react once he learns the truth. Gen does not notice and keeps talking about the medicine and it takes an entire page before anyone finally tells him what the reader could already tell from the expressions of the other characters. Tomoko Nakaoka had already died. Gen reacts with disbelief and anger, lashing out at everybody in the room and claiming that Tomoko is still alive, despite his mother telling him that the little girl had died hours ago. Gen spends the next 6 pages of the comic denying his sister's death in anger, yelling at his family and taking Tomoko's body to the same doctor as before.¹¹⁴ He tells Gen that the boy is holding a corpse, enraging Gen even more. Only once Gen sits down at a river and tries to feed his little sister with milk does he slowly start to realize the cruel truth. Nakazawa uses the same technique as when Gen had to realize his own illness, as the author draws one small

¹¹³ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume Four, p. 238.

¹¹⁴ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume Four, p. 259-265.

panel after the other, showing the slow changes in Gen's facial expressions. This is juxtaposed by several panels of Tomoko's face, never changing. This contrast between change and stagnation depicts the difference between life and death in this scene, as Nakazawa uses both steps 4 and 5, structure and craft, to establish a sense of intimacy in the scene once again. From panel to panel, moment to moment, we watch Gen relive the trauma of losing his loved ones once again, as half of an entire page is filled with a single drawing of him crying, holding his sister, and pleading her to drink the milk. And as he starts to scream in realization and agony, the last panel of the page cuts away, showing a few houses and a mountain in the distance:¹¹⁵



Image 15: The death of Tomoko in "Barefoot Gen".

¹¹⁵ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen. Volume Four, p. 267.

The long-term consequences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not limited to health problems. Nakazawa also takes the time to show that the survivors faced terrible psychological problems and discrimination from both the American occupation forces and even the Japanese population itself. During the time of the U.S occupation of Japan following the war, censorship prevented any widespread media coverage about what happened to the survivors of the atomic bombings, the so called hibakusha.¹¹⁶ The survivors were politically silenced and the treatment that they received from their own population was not much better in many cases, as the hibakusha started to become social outcasts.¹¹⁷ Nakazawa unites the themes of physical, as well as psychological torment, combined with social stigma in one character in particular, the young girl Natsue. Gen meets her not long after the destruction of the city during the story of volume 2. She has suffered terrible burns on her face during the atomic bombing, but when she asks Gen about her condition, he cannot bring himself to tell her the truth. Natsue's dream is to become a famous dancer and Gen immediately realizes that her dream has become impossible because her injuries. Despite the fact that she asks him several times how bad her condition is, Gen lies to her repeatedly.¹¹⁸ The lie is ultimately revealed when Natsue sees her own reflection in the water and not only does she curse Gen for his lies, but she also attempts to commit suicide. Gen manages to prevent her from killing herself, only for Natsue to try again later. She claims that her life is not worth living without the ability to dance.¹¹⁹ The way how Natsue discovers the truth about her face is very reminiscent to earlier in volume 2, when Gen sees his own bald head reflected in the surface of a local river. Nakazawa shows part of his idiom, step 3, as he uses reflective water several times throughout his story as a way for his characters to confront the cruel reality that they live in. They keep denying what is real, until they have to face it. This also is an example of his use of step 4, structure, as he constructed the scenes of Gen and Natsue very similarly. Gen finally manages to convince Natsue to keep on living and makes her promise to never attempt suicide ever again. The two of them part ways but hope to see each other again in the future. This would not occur until years later in the story.

“Barefoot Gen” volume 6 takes place several years after the destruction of Hiroshima. As Gen wanders through the still mostly destroyed city, he sees a girl attempting to drown herself in a river. He leaps into the water without hesitation and pulls the girl to the shore, only for her to yell at him in protest and asking why he can't finally let her die. Gen does not recognize her at

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories: Between the Generations*. In: *Wasafiri*, 35:2, 79-86 (2020), p. 81.

¹¹⁷ Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81-82.

¹¹⁸ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume Two, p. 73-77.

¹¹⁹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume Two, p. 90-91.

first, but she then reveals her identity as Natsue.¹²⁰ Her face is covered with scars and she has once again lost her will to live. She tells Gen of how her wounds healed into the scars now visible and how everyone started to treat her as if she was a monster. Dr. Masao Tomonaga, a real-life survivor of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and medical doctor, spoke about the case of a young woman who suffered terrible burns on her face and how these later formed into keloid scar tissue.¹²¹ He explained that many hibakusha became the victim of social stigma for years and the aforementioned woman was never able to marry throughout her entire life because of her disfigurement.¹²² This is an example of how close to reality Nakazawa's story in "Barefoot Gen" really is. But the most painful aspect of Natsue's life, until she was reunited with Gen, was not her injuries, but how her own relatives and neighbors treated her. She explains that her family thought she was contagious and forced her to live in a barn, separated from the rest of the household. The locals threw rocks at her and treated her like a monster, to the point where she only walked around the neighborhood during the night. Nakazawa includes a very interesting detail in this scene, as the reader first sees Natsue suffering through all the aforementioned abuse. During these scenes, we see her face covered in scar tissue. But when Natsue tells of her walks during the night, Nakazawa draws her in the panel walking under the moonlight, her face completely unscathed.¹²³ It shows Nakazawa's attention to detail in his craft, step 5, as he adds this small but impactful panel, but also could be an example of his ideas behind his work, step 1. Natsue seems happy as long as she is by herself, it is only when others demean her that she starts to feel worthless. This is reinforced a few pages later, when Gen himself comments on the cruelty of those insulting survivors like Natsue:

*"Japanese people are so cruel. The pot can't call the kettle black. No one's any different. We're all in the same boat. We fight and put each other down without thinking about who the real enemies are. I hate it!"*¹²⁴

Nakazawa makes it clear countless times throughout the volumes of "Barefoot Gen" how much he despises the American military for what they did to his family, hometown and country. But at the same time, he never hesitates to call out not only Japan's faults as a country, but also as a society. The anger displayed by Gen in these scenes towards other Japanese citizens might stem from Nakazawa's own experiences as a hibakusha, as he likely suffered a similar kind of

¹²⁰ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Six: Writing the Truth* (San Francisco 2007), p. 131.

¹²¹ International Review of the Red Cross, *Voices and Perspectives. After the atomic bomb: Hibakusha tell their stories*. In: *International Review of the Red Cross* 97 (899), 507-525. *The human cost of nuclear weapons* (2015), p. 510-511.

¹²² International Review of the Red Cross, *Voices and Perspectives*, p. 512.

¹²³ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Six*, p. 139-140.

¹²⁴ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen. Volume Six*, p. 148.

discrimination. Gen ultimately manages to break Natsue out of her suicidal cycle by showing her a girl who has lost both her hands because of the atomic bombing. But she is shown sewing a dress with just her mouth and feet, refusing to give up. Natsue starts to realize that she was luckier than many others and together with her friends creates a new dream for herself, instead of becoming a dancer: she wishes to open up a clothing store and learn how to sew a dress, just like the brave girl she saw before.¹²⁵ This another example of one of the core ideas, step 1, behind “Barefoot Gen”, to not give into desperation and to grow strong again, despite how cruel life can be.

3.2.2 Hibakusha in “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”

Fumiyo Kouno began her work in “Town of Evening Calm” depicting Minami’s mental torment 10 years after the destruction of Hiroshima. Minami was running away from both her love interest and her past, questioning her right to live. The story continues with Minami telling Ushikochi why she left him on the bridge earlier in the story. He tells her that he is glad that she survived, making Minami feel relieved and her body goes numb as she sits down, smiling. But the scene then cuts away to a view of the city outside. Kouno simply states with a little bit of text that Minami’s muscles stayed limp after that moment.¹²⁶ These few words create a terrible sense of realization within the reader, as we know already what Kouno implies here. Minami has become sick 10 years after she survived the destruction of Hiroshima. Not every hibakusha became ill as a result of the explosion right after it happened. For some it took weeks or months until symptoms manifested and in Minami’s case an entire decade. The first 15 years following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed highly elevated rates of leukemia among the hibakusha, as the radiation was slowly damaging their bone marrow.¹²⁷ But there was still not enough reliable data about the aftereffects of radiation poisoning available to Japanese doctors during Minami’s time and countless deaths were officially caused by “unidentified illnesses”.¹²⁸ Many of these cases were labelled as “ochaku byo” or “lazy people’s disease”, as lethargy was one of the most common symptoms among those who suffered from radiation poisoning.¹²⁹

Kouno draws the next two pages as a series of panels describing Minami’s condition and how it gradually becomes worse. Minami mentions that she is tired and is not even able to stand any

¹²⁵ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume Six, p. 156-159.

¹²⁶ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 29.

¹²⁷ International Review of the Red Cross, *Voices and Perspectives*, p. 509.

¹²⁸ Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81.

¹²⁹ Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81.

more after a short amount of time. A doctor visits her and Kouno draws a speech bubble for the physician where he ponders what the cause for Minami's illness could be. This could be an example of idiom, step 3, as Kouno makes a point to highlight that this doctor does not know what is going on with Minami, possibly referencing the lack of medical knowledge at the time. Minami reminisces over the story of her older sister Kasumi, who survived August 6th, 1945, just like Minami and their mother did. Kasumi apparently became sick two months after the city's destruction and Minami describes that her sister not only became bedridden, but she also started to change mentally, yelling at her family and she even started to hit them.¹³⁰ This story might be a reference to another possible consequence of radiation poisoning called "neurovascular syndrome", as not only do the victims usually only go through very short latent phases before the disease worsens, but they also develop neurological symptoms, like headaches, abnormal behavior and neurological deficits.¹³¹ As Minami becomes bedridden and thinks about her past, Kouno chooses several interesting techniques for the final pages of "Town of Evening Calm". First, the point of view switches from a third-person perspective, which was used throughout the entire book so far, to a first-person view from Minami as she is lying in bed. This immediately establishes a more intimate relationship between the readers and the character, as we now see the world quite literally through her eyes. But even more striking is while Minami talks to her visitors while she is sick, the panels start to show less and less details. At first, her visitors look normal, but two panels later and Kouno no longer draws the eyes of the next visitor. Their entire face is covered in thin black lines, like shadows, obscuring much of what they might look like.¹³² The readers can understand what is happening even before the author confirms it with text: Minami is losing her ability to see. Kouno combines every single of the six steps in these last pages to craft Minami's illness in a way that only a comic book can:

¹³⁰ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 31.

¹³¹ Garau/Calduch/López, *Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome*, p. 128.

¹³² Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 32.

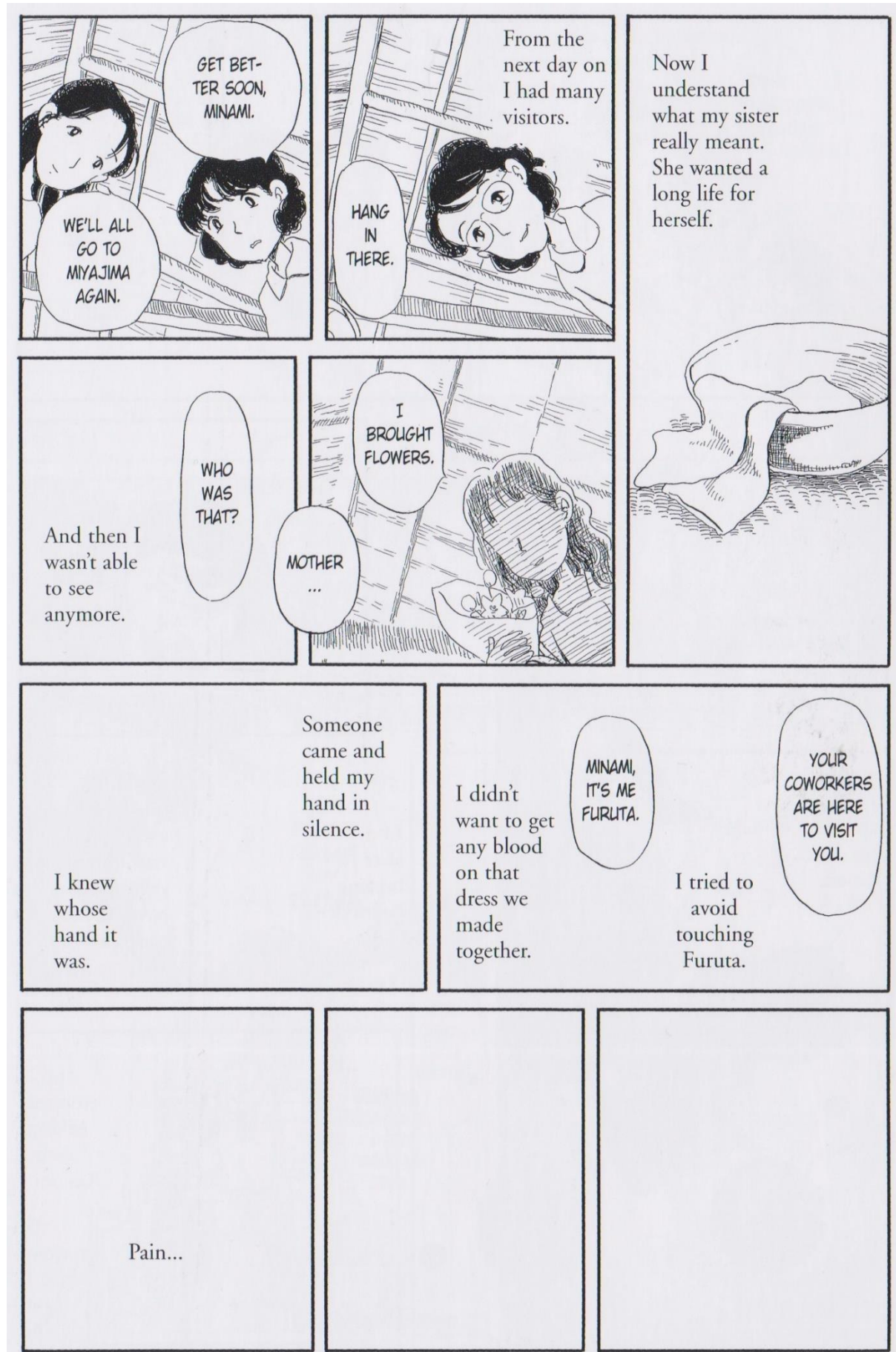


Image 16: Minami loses her eyesight in "Town of Evening Calm".

After Minami is shown to lose her eyesight, she states that she has gone completely blind, and the panels become completely white. This is very striking for the readers, as comics are by definition a visual medium with images and that is usually exactly what the surface, step 6, consists of. Kouno makes this sequence immediately stand out simply by removing what anyone reading a comic book would expect to see. But she also does not leave the page completely blank, as she still draws two things: Minami's thoughts and the panels themselves. The panels at first seem to fit no purpose, as there is no artwork within them. But the empty panels, as well as the gutter between them, actually achieve something vital. The gutter in a comic is usually left so that readers can fill in the blanks between individual panels. But they also establish a sense of time, as the comic transitions from image to image, from scene to scene.¹³³ Kouno establishes that something would indeed be within these panels, but both Minami and the readers can simply no longer see it. Normally when this thesis mentions step 5, craft, it involves a particular way of how the author was able to draw a scene, maybe through a certain number of details or a unique interpretation. But here, Kouno shows her mastery of craft by explicitly not drawing anything. Instead of showing Minami's body dying, Kouno chooses to leave those images to the imagination of the reader.¹³⁴ And this fits her idiom, step 3, very well, as she has chosen a similar approach to graphic injuries before, as seen for example in chapter 3.1.2 of this thesis. This is something that can only be done within a comic, as a blank page within a book would not allow to still hear Minami's thoughts and a white screen within a movie would not allow the same feeling of time passing thanks to the individual empty panels. As such, this is Kouno taking full advantage of her chosen medium with step 2, form. As the panels continue, Kouno reveals the purpose, step 1, of her story through Minami's final thoughts, as the young woman thinks about the cruelty of the entire situation:

*"Happy now? It's been ten years. I wonder if the people who dropped the bomb are pleased with themselves - 'Yes! Got another one!' This isn't fair. I thought I was one of the survivors. I felt wind. The evening calm, the yunagi – has faded? This story isn't over yet. No matter how many times the yunagi fades, this story will never end."*¹³⁵

The title of the story reveals its meaning here, as it is stated that this story, this suffering, will continue no matter how much time passes in Hiroshima, as the evening calm fades every day. The story of Minami does not end with blank panels however. On the third to last page, while Minami has the thoughts mentioned above, Kouno draws a single window, at the same time

¹³³ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 66-67.

¹³⁴ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 33.

¹³⁵ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 34.

when Minami mentions the *yunagi*. The point of view then shows different people in Hiroshima, as a piece of paper is carried through the air by the wind, likely the *yunagi* that Minami mentioned. This paper floats through several panels, until it is revealed that the paper promotes the world conference against atomic bombs, the same conference referenced at the beginning of the comic.¹³⁶ This is Kouno showing her skill with step 4, structure, as this flyer suddenly takes on a completely new meaning.

In the beginning it established a sense when the story takes place and might even bring a sense of hope towards the future, as the world seems to have learned from the terrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But Kouno instead shows that people are still dying from the aftereffects of the atomic bombs a decade later, while politicians talk about peace and moving forward. An event that was far in the past for many, was still killing people. The second-to-last panel of this page shows Uchikoshi sitting and looking into the distance, as the final panel reveals a single hand, with scars on the forearm, lying still on the ground, with a handkerchief lying between the fingers.¹³⁷ The scars make it clear that this is Minami after she passed away. This raises the question who exactly is talking at the very end. Is it Minami right before she passes? Or is this possibly Kouno herself, acting as the narrator while her protagonist has died? The second-to-last page is completely white, and this might act as a transition into the next part of the story or could symbolize that this is truly the moment when Minami dies, as there is nothing anymore for the readers to see. No empty panels, no gutter, no thoughts, just white. This is possibly a reference to white originally being the color of funerals and mourning in Japan, before the country was opened to the West in the 19th century.¹³⁸ The handkerchief is also not randomly chosen, as this item was seen previously when Uchikoshi gifted it to Minami to show her his affection. He gave it to her before they kissed on the bridge in Hiroshima, right before Minami's memories brought her back to the horrors of August 6th, 1945.¹³⁹ And she still had the handkerchief with her, right until the very end:

¹³⁶ Takeuchi, Kouno Fumiyo's Hiroshima Manga, p. 247.

¹³⁷ Kouno, Town of Evening Calm, p. 34.

¹³⁸ Amelie Geeraert, Traditional Meanings of Colors in Japanese Culture. In: Kokoro Media, available online <https://kokoro-jp.com/culture/298/> (26.04.2021).

¹³⁹ Kouno, Town of Evening Calm, p. 18-22.

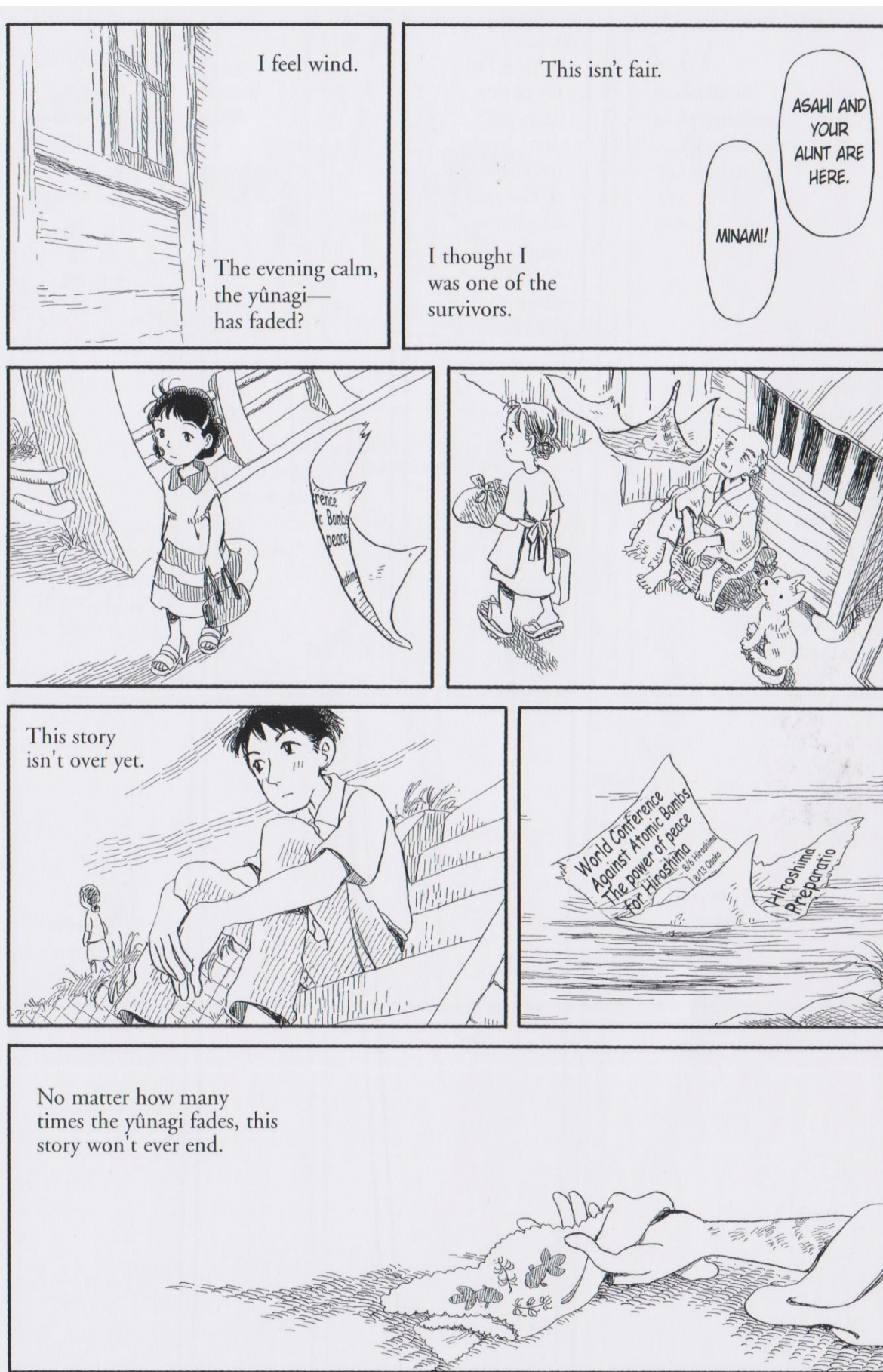


Image 17: Minami's final moments in "Town of Evening Calm".

The story of Minami's family continues in the two stories "Country of Cherry Blossoms, Part 1 and Part 2". The protagonist of these two stories is the young girl, and later woman, Nanami Ishikawa, who is the daughter of a man named Asahi Ishikawa. This name immediately places Nanami as the niece of Minami, as it had been established in "Town of Evening Calm" that Asahi had been adopted by his uncle and aunt and took their last name, Ishikawa.¹⁴⁰ Kouno creates a very striking transition between "Town of Evening Calm" and "Country of Cherry Blossoms Part 1", as the final page of the first story is a splash page.¹⁴¹ It depicts Minami sitting in her home in Hiroshima, smiling, while braiding the hair of a young girl. This is likely one of Minami's sisters, either Kasumi or Midori. The first page of "Country of Cherry Blossoms Part 1" is another splash page, this time depicting Nami as she is sitting in the branching of a blooming tree. By its nature as a black-and-white comic, it is impossible to tell what color these flower petals might have but based on the title of the story it seems almost guaranteed that this a cherry tree.¹⁴² This arrangement of the two splash pages is Kouno making use of step 4, structure, as this creates a seamless transition from one protagonist to the next. It is also a very pleasant transition between the two stories parts on a surface level, step 6, as the reader is guided between the two parts without interruptions.

Part 1 takes place in the Nakano district of Tokyo in 1987, 32 years after Minami's death.¹⁴³ Nanami is 11 years old at this point and immediately established as being quite different from Minami in terms of personality. Where Minami was polite and reluctant to open herself up to others, Nanami is very brash, likes to pick fights with other kids in her school and generally always says what is on her mind. Kouno does not put any spotlight on the family relation between the two, but instead hints at it very subtly. Asahi's face is never revealed in Part 1 and his name is only seen in one panel, as Nanami enters the family apartment and the names of everyone living there are written on the wall in the background, including her father's.¹⁴⁴ Kouno shows her skill with craft, step 5, as she is aware that the attention of the reader is naturally drawn to Nanami. Details like the nameplate in the background can be very easily missed when someone reads the story for the first time, possibly even on several occasions. It is also quickly established that Nanami's grandmother is still alive, but her face is never directly revealed during conversations in Part 1, just like with Asahi. There is also an early hint of tragedy, as

¹⁴⁰ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Tano, *Comic Book Glossary: Splash Page and Spread*, available online <http://www.comicscube.com/2012/10/comic-book-glossary-splash-page-and.html> (28.04.2021).

¹⁴² Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 37.

¹⁴³ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 100.

¹⁴⁴ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 40.

Nanami prays at a small family shrine in her apartment before leaving for baseball training. It is not revealed at this point who she is praying to.

Kouno chooses to take her time, as she establishes the different family members, as well as Nanami's best friend and neighbor in the girl Toko Tone, while only dropping small hints towards the larger story. Another important character is Nagio, Nanami's younger brother, who has asthma and needs medical care at the hospital regularly because of it. One particularly interesting example of Kouno's subtle idiom, step 3, is when Nanami stands on her balcony, humming a song, while her grandmother is visible in the background. As the small panels continue, someone hands Nanami's grandmother an envelope with the name "Fujimi Hirano" on it and takes out several documents from the envelope. Nanami avoids looking further, but the door opens and the person reading the documents is revealed to be her father, Asahi. At first, everything seems to be normal. But the ramifications of this small scene are revealed two pages later, on the final page of Part 1, as Nanami's narration states that these documents were test results for her grandmother and that they were not good. Fujimi Hirano, the mother of Asahi and Minami, passes away during the summer of 1987. Part 1 follows Kouno's established idiom, step 3, as her storytelling continues to show little, but imply much. But this is not where the story of "Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry blossoms" ends.

Part 2 makes up nearly 50% of the length of the entire book and serves as the pay-off for all the subtle hints and build-up that Kouno has created during the first half of the book. The story jumps 17 years into the future, from 1987 to 2004, and opens with Nanami, Nagio and Asahi all living together. Nanami has noticed that her father has been going out for long periods of time recently and he never explains why. He also seems to forget more and more things, like when Nanami realizes that peaches are missing from the fridge and her father has seemingly forgotten that he ate them. Fearing about his mental health, she decides to follow him one day. Purely by chance, she runs into her former neighbor and friend Toko, who decides to accompany Nanami during her trip.¹⁴⁵ The two follow Asahi, as he takes a bus to Hiroshima, and talk about Toko's job as a nurse and that Nagio works together with her as an upcoming doctor at the same hospital. Toko mentions that she has recognized Nanami immediately, even though they have not seen each other in 17 years. It is during the night, while Toko is sleeping, that Nanami's thoughts are written out on the page, and she regrets seeing Toko again. The reason is that Nanami actively ended contact with Toko in 1987, after her grandmother had passed away, and the remaining family moved into a different neighborhood. She thinks that

¹⁴⁵ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 58-59.

everything about seeing Toko again takes her back to 1987 and the scene transitions into a flashback. Nanami talks to her dying grandmother, who is bedridden at this point, and Fujimi is no longer capable of recognizing her own granddaughter. Instead, she calls Nanami “a friend of Midori’s” and asks where she was. Nanami is confused what this question means, but that’s when her grandmother asks how she survived. Fujimi’s mind is not in 1987, it is back in Hiroshima, sometime after the bomb was dropped and her daughter Midori never came home.¹⁴⁶ This could be another reference of Kouno towards “neurovascular syndrome”, and it is possible that Fujimi suffers from the same symptoms as her daughter Kasumi did in 1945.¹⁴⁷ The scene then returns to present of 2004, with Nanami looking outside of the bus’s window, with gloomy expression on her face.

The way how Kouno constructs and draws this scene, using the steps of idiom, structure and craft together, is unique to almost every other page of the entire book. While the panels start to transition into the flashback, parts of the page start to become pitch-black. But not the panels themselves, but the gutter between them. All the space surrounding the panels, which is usually always white in most comics, turns black, creating a background of darkness. Kouno draws two panels on the page where the first shows Fujimi’s face, with her eyes concealed by the perspective, and the second shows Nanami’s face up-close from the front. These two panels are the point when Nanami is asked by Fujimi how she survived, and the two images are completely surrounded by darkness on all sides. The panel right below them, at the very bottom of the page, shows Nanami’s arm, resting at the window of the bus, transitioning back into the present. This then leads into the final panel of the page, with Nanami looking out of the window. Kouno pays enormous attention to detail in this scene, as the black background ends right next to and above the two panels when Nanami comes into frame in the present, and one line deserves particular attention. One line of the gutter separates three images on the page, Nanami’s face in the past, her arm resting on the window, and her face in the present. This gutter-line runs horizontally between the three panels and begins pitch black on the upper end, when it is still next to Nanami in the past, but then turns white as soon as it only separates the two panels of Nanami in the present.¹⁴⁸ These two panels look like a single drawing with Nanami sitting at the window of the bus, with the gutter running directly through Nanami’s arm. But the gutter is white again at this point, there is no sudden difference of color, and the gutter-line is barely noticeable, creating the impression that these two panels are in fact one image. There is no closure

¹⁴⁶ *Kouno, Town of Evening Calm*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Garau/Calduch/López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁸ *Kouno, Town of Evening Calm*, p. 63.

necessary between these two images, no empty space that our brain has to fill in.¹⁴⁹ Kouno's use of the gutter is remarkable in this scene, as she does not just use it to separate images and transition between scenes, as almost every comic does.¹⁵⁰

The black background is very easily noticeable on the surface, step 6, as no other page has looked like this so far during the entire comic, and therefore draws the attention of the reader. But Kouno possibly also calls back to the flashback of Minami in 1945, where dark shadows were reaching out from all around her.¹⁵¹ During Minami's flashback, the darkness was within the panels, but here it returns to surround the panels. It could be a visual representation of the last words at the end of "Town of Evening Calm", that the story of suffering surrounding the hibakusha will never end. The same darkness, 59 years later. Kouno's attention to detail on this page results in a very impactful scene, serving as a bridge between all three parts of the entire book. Fujimi's words call back to the events in "Town of Evening Calm", while the scene between her and Nanami takes place in "Country of Cherry Blossoms Part 1" and Nanami remembers this moment in "Country of Cherry Blossoms Part 2". A timespan of 59 years, divided in three periods, all within one page:¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 70-71.

¹⁵¹ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 23-25.

¹⁵² Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 63.



Image 18: The past and present bleed into one another in "Country of Cherry Blossoms".

It is finally revealed what Asahi was doing only 3 panels after Nanami's flashback, as she follows him the next day into a graveyard in Hiroshima. He prays there before he leaves, and his daughter looks at the gravestone. It is the Hirano family grave and all the subtle hints and puzzle-pieces that Kouno created previously are coming together. Tenma Hirano was the name of Fujimi's husband and Minami's father, who was killed while he was at work. Below him are the names of the 3 daughters of Tenma and Fujimi: Kasumi, Midori and Minami.¹⁵³ And below them the name of Fujimi Hirano herself. Nanami is looking at her family's history and sees that her father has left two peaches as an offering at the grave of his family. The same peaches that he supposedly forgot about previously, at the beginning of Part 2.¹⁵⁴ Another example of Kouno's masterful use of foreshadowing as part of step 4, structure.

The particular use of darkness in the gutter for a flashback is only used twice by Kouno in her entire book. Once in the flashback in the bus, and the other time when Nanami and Toko stay at a hotel in Hiroshima. Toko is not feeling well at this point, since she visited the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima for the first time during this day and shortly after started to vomit and nearly fainted. This very likely a self-reference for Fumiyo Kouno herself, since she openly acknowledges that this is exactly what happened to her when she visited the museum herself.¹⁵⁵ When Nanami brings her friend to a hotel, she opens the door to their room and suddenly the panel starts to zoom in on Nanami's face. As the reader turns the page, the background of the page and the gutter are no longer white as usual, they are pitch-black. Nanami is no longer 28 years old, she is a child and stands within her apartment. She is looking at a person lying on the floor, their face obscured, and the floor is covered in blood. Nanami's speech bubble reveals that the person on the floor is her mother and the parent reaches out to Nanami with a bloody hand, saying the name of her daughter, but split into three parts. This implies that her mother is so weak, that she can't even say Nanami's name in one breath.¹⁵⁶ The next panel returns to 2004, as Nanami is once again an adult, and just like last time the gutter turns white again around the bottom of the page, where three panels take place in the present. As Toko reaches out to Nanami, she starts to scream. Toko believes it is because of her and apologizes, but Nanami realizes where she is and starts taking care of her friend:

¹⁵³ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 66.

¹⁵⁴ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 57.

¹⁵⁵ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 103.

¹⁵⁶ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 80.

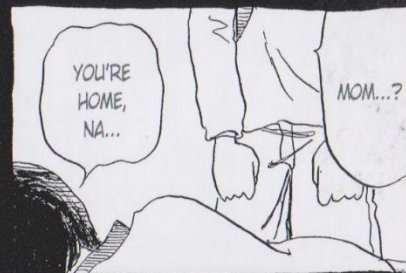


Image 19: Nanami remembers her mother's death in "Town of Evening Calm".

This scene shows that the pain of the atomic bomb runs through Nanami's entire family, from her grandmother, to her own mother, to herself. Three generations of Hibakusha. It not specified when exactly Nanami's mother passed away, but she was already dead by 1987 during Part 1, when Nanami was only 11 years old. It is later specified that her mother passed away when she was 38 years old.¹⁵⁷ Her mother must therefore have been very young when Hiroshima was destroyed and the highest risk for development of cancer among the hibakusha was observed among those exposed during early childhood or in utero.¹⁵⁸ And it is now clear who Nanami was praying to at her family shrine in Part 1. The story still does not end here, but the final pieces shall be analyzed in comparison to the work of Keiji Nakazawa.

3.2.3 Nakazawa and Kouno and the Hibakusha

Many of the same differences and similarities, that have already been highlighted between Nakazawa and Kouno, remain the same when it comes to their depiction of the hibakusha. Whether it be the aftereffects of radiation poisoning or social stigma, Nakazawa is very direct, while Kouno is subtle. One example for this are the long-term effects of radiation poisoning. "Barefoot Gen" depicts the stories of many characters who ultimately fall victim the aftereffects of the atomic bomb. Among them are Gen's younger sister, his mother, and even his friend Natsue, the woman who survived with burn scars on her face. While Natsue was convinced by Gen and her other friends to keep on living, her life was still taken by colorectal cancer.¹⁵⁹ Gen is horribly enraged and depressed every time he loses yet another person he loves, but he continues on moving forward. Towards the end of the final volume of "Barefoot Gen" is when Gen is starting to envision his future. He has fallen in love with a woman named Mitsuko, who wishes to become a doctor in the future to help the hibakusha and absolutely despises war and anyone who supports it, including her own father.¹⁶⁰ Gen and Mitsuko both wish for a future without war and both share an incredible anger for what happened during World War II, not only for the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also for the victims of the Empire of Japan during their terror across Asia.¹⁶¹ Mitsuko is particularly passionate and fearless when it comes to her hatred of war, as her father not only served as a commanding officer in the Japanese army, but also still supports the notion that the war was justified. But even Mitsuko starts to become ill and ultimately dies from the radiation poisoning in 1953, 8 years after Hiroshima's destruction. This unfortunately fits the modern data in a cruel twist if irony. Gen and others are

¹⁵⁷ *Kouno*, Town of Evening Calm, p. 86.

¹⁵⁸ *Little*, Cancer and non-cancer effects, p. A45.

¹⁵⁹ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen Volume Nine: Breaking Down Borders* (San Francisco 2009), p. 80.

¹⁶⁰ Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen Volume Ten: Never Give Up* (San Francisco 2009), p. 166-175.

¹⁶¹ *Nakazawa*, *Barefoot Gen Volume Ten*, p. 19-22.

horrified that the atomic bomb is still claiming lives, but the passage of time is a “natural” part of the latency period of acute radiation syndrome, and no one can accurately predict how long it is, especially not back in the 1950s.¹⁶² This exact uncertainty, the fact that the survivors never know if they are healthy and actually survived, or if they could die at any moment and never truly escaped the bomb, paints a sense of horror in this scene after Mitsuko’s death. It is at this point that Gen reaches his mental breaking point, as the deaths of his loved ones never seems to stop, no matter how much time has passed since the bomb was dropped. When Mitsuko’s father blames Gen for what happened to her, Gen attacks him and yells about how people like him, people who wanted Japan to go to war and still defend their actions, are the ones who killed Mitsuko. This seems to be another of so many examples of the core idea and purpose, step 1, behind Nakazawa’s work, the conviction that war is fundamentally wrong and evil:

*“You’re always glorifying the war and babbling nonsense about how a lousy A-bomb or two wasn’t enough to defeat Japan. Well, now you know how terrible the A-bomb is! Now you can see what it does! Eight whole years after the bomb fell, it suddenly reaches out to claim your precious daughter’s life. And it’s all because warmongers like you just had to go to war! That’s what led to the A-bomb! People like you are too stupid to see the cruelty of war and the bomb until the suffering hits you directly!”*¹⁶³

Kouno also shows the aftereffects of radiation poisoning through characters like Minami, and there are even similar character arcs in her book when compared to “Barefoot Gen”. Asahi, the brother of Minami and father of Nanami, chooses to become a doctor in order to help the surviving victims of the atomic bombings, the same dream that Mitsuko wanted to pursue. This choice for Asahi’s story could be inspired by real surviving hibakusha, who did exactly that, one example being Dr. Masao Tomonaga. He survived the bombing of Nagasaki when he was only two years old, and later became a doctor who specialized in the treatment of patients suffering from the aftereffects of radiation poisoning and even became the Director of the Japanese Red Cross Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Hospital.¹⁶⁴ But Kouno also puts a twist on this topic, as many scenes in her book question how many health-problems were actually caused by the bombs or were just superstition. Asahi himself is a perfect example, as Kouno reveals more of his past in a flashback while he is sitting at a riverbank in Hiroshima in 2004, all the while Nanami watches him in the background. Asahi’s memories bring him back several decades, when he returned to Hiroshima right before entering University. He came back after his sister

¹⁶² Garau/Calduch/López, Radiobiology of the acute radiation syndrome, p. 126-127.

¹⁶³ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen Volume Ten, p. 194-195.

¹⁶⁴ International Review of the Red Cross, Voices and Perspectives, p. 507-508.

Minami had already passed away, in order to reconnect with his mother.¹⁶⁵ He is even asked by a local girl why he calls her mother even though their last names are different, but he declares that Fujimi Hirano is his mother all the same, showing that he was no longer afraid or ashamed of his family. The same young girl, named Kyoka Ota, visits his mother often and Asahi agrees to become her tutor, as she claims that she is not a quick learner. The interactions between them begin very innocent, but it does not take long for Kyoka to reveal why she likes Asahi so much. Apparently, everyone says that Kyoka's learning problems are caused by her being a baby when the atomic bomb was dropped. Asahi, for the first time in his flashback, becomes very serious and tells Kyoka that people blame everything on the bomb far too quickly.¹⁶⁶ Kouno implies here that while many survivors of the atomic bombings suffered of terrible aftereffects, not all of them did but were still mistreated all the same. Kyoka might have indeed suffered from radiation poisoning, or she was simply a healthy child who was not a fast learner. Whatever the truth was, people did not care and simply claimed that she was another case with "ochaku byo" or "lazy people's disease".¹⁶⁷

Kouno makes it clear that this particular issue is something very important to the ideas and purpose, step 1, behind her book, as she directly refers to this phenomenon again, but this time through Nanami. After Toko and Nanami spend the night in Hiroshima, they take a bus back to Tokyo and Nanami starts talking to herself, and therefore the readers, after Toko falls asleep. Nanami reminisces about the flashbacks she had, the final moments with her mother and grandmother. She reveals that while no one explicitly said that her family members died because of the aftereffects of the atomic bomb, people acted like they did all the same. According to her, both her brother Nagio and she were always treated as if they could die at any moment, simply because of their family's history.¹⁶⁸ But Nanami also admits to herself why she ended her friendship with Toko all those years ago, because she actively tried to remove everything from her life that reminded her of her old neighborhood, where she lost two people she deeply loved. This not only reveals more of Nanami's character but seems to be a moment where Fumiyo Kouno herself steps into the story. Kouno also actively avoided anything that had to do with the destruction of Hiroshima for many years, in her case not because of a trauma but because it made her deeply uncomfortable. And just like Nanami she decided to confront the past one day and no longer run away from it.¹⁶⁹ This perspective is

¹⁶⁵ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁶ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁷ Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁸ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁹ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 102-103.

something that is simply not possible in “Barefoot Gen”, as the events are still far too fresh and can’t reveal the social consequences over half a century and three different generations. Nakazawa and Kouno both tell the stories of the hibakusha and their suffering from a perspective that suits their backgrounds perfectly. Nakazawa stays relatively closely to the bombings in terms of time and shows all the fresh wounds and suffering that they wrought, just like they did to him in real life. Kouno meanwhile shows the perspective of someone much younger and later in history, but also that the fresh wounds that Nakazawa depicts have never disappeared. Instead, they became literal and metaphorical scars, not only on the survivors but also their descendants.

Nakazawa depicts many different topics across his 10 volumes of how the survivors had to suffer after World War II. From poverty, existential dread, loss of religious faith, drug abuse and even conflict with the yakuza, the organized crime syndicates of Japan.¹⁷⁰ Because of the sheer number of pages available to him is he able to paint a complex picture of what Hiroshima, and to an extent Japan, was like in the years after World War II had ended. Kouno is not able to address the same number of aspects because of her limitations in terms of page-count, so she once again chooses to instead to focus on fewer aspects but explore them in great detail. One similarity of how both Nakazawa and Kouno choose to depict the suffering of the hibakusha can be summed up with one word: marriage. They choose the same topic, but once again depict it with their own respective idioms, step 3. Nakazawa highlights the tragedy of a lost possible marriage in the future, as Gen and Mitsuko wanted to marry, but she died instead. Gen also had to face the hatred of Mitsuko’s father beforehand, as Gen opposed the war and anyone who supported it.¹⁷¹ This particular conflict between generations and worldviews only ends after Mitsuko’s death, as her father finally starts to see how foolish he had been after reading her final message to him. In her will she pleads him to stop glorifying the war and also reveals how much Gen meant to her. He swears to change for the better and even apologizes to Gen, who forgives him and talks about how Mitsuko will always be with him in his memories. Gen remembers everyone he lost over the course of the entire series and states that their lives is what allowed him to survive and that he won’t waste their gifts to him. As he says this, Nakazawa draws the faces of all those who passed behind Gen, in the same panel while he remembers them.¹⁷² This simple but incredibly effective use of his craft, step 5, reminds the readers of everyone who Gen lost over the course of more than 2000 pages of story, but Nakazawa draws

¹⁷⁰ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* Volume Ten, p. 226-236.

¹⁷¹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* Volume Ten, p. 59-62.

¹⁷² Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* Volume Ten, p. 206.

all of their faces smiling, maybe to show that they are happy that Gen continues to live and remembers them:



Image 20: Gen remembers his friends and family in "Barefoot Gen".

Kouno depicts three different romantic relationships over the course of her book and how they were all effected by the atomic bombings. Minami was unable to marry as she died beforehand, just like Mitsuko did. But Kouno once again looks further into the future and shows how Asahi was affected by this as well. He himself was never exposed to the radiation of Hiroshima, but after moving back to the city he falls in love with his former student Kyoka Ota. While their relationship seems very happy, it is actually Asahi's mother who opposes their possible marriage, a hibakusha herself. She explains that she cannot accept that he wants to marry someone who was exposed to the bomb, as she can't bear the thought of losing more people that she loves.¹⁷³ Kouno on the hand shows just how much trauma Fujimi had to endure, as her husband and three daughters all died because of the atomic bomb and Asahi was the only child still alive. But Kouno also highlights that the prejudice against hibakusha did not only come from Japanese people who were not affected by the bomb, but that some of it even came from other hibakusha.¹⁷⁴ Asahi chooses to ignore his mother's concerns, going against the experiences that many hibakusha had to endure during their lives, as marrying was often very difficult for them.¹⁷⁵ Now it is also clear to the reader who Nanami's mother was and why Kyoka's death at a young age cast such a shadow over Nanami's life.

But the same problem continues into Nanami's time in 2004, as it is revealed through a letter that Toko and Nagio are actually in a relationship, but Toko's family opposes it. Nagio wanted to break up with Toko in order to not alienate her from her family, and he even directly states that the asthma from his childhood is fully healed and that both him and his sister Nanami are completely healthy now.¹⁷⁶ This directly shows what Nanami later thinks out loud, that both her and Nagio are treated as if they were deathly ill. Kouno's depiction of this event once again seems directly inspired from the experiences of hibakusha in the real world, as there are documented cases of stories almost exactly like this. Emiko Yamakanak, a survivor from Hiroshima, told the story of how the mother of her boyfriend would never allow a marriage of her child to a hibakusha and Emiko ultimately broke up the relationship without any explanation, which unbeknownst to her led to a suicide attempt of her former lover.¹⁷⁷

Nakazawa and Kouno ultimately bring their stories to an end with hope towards the future. Nanami on one hand arranges a meeting between Toko and Nagio, destroying the letter

¹⁷³ *Kouno*, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁴ Akiko Naono, 'The Origins of 'Hibakusha' as a Scientific and Political Classification of the Survivor, In: *Japanese Studies* Vol. 39, No. 3 (2019), p. 333-335.

¹⁷⁵ *Chappell*, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81-82.

¹⁷⁶ *Kouno*, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 68-69.

¹⁷⁷ *Chappell*, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 82.

beforehand and encouraging them to stay together. As she does this, her thoughts are revealed while she rips up Nagios letter to Toko and releases them into the breeze. She thinks of her mother and the following panel shows Kyoka's face, looking towards the former panel with Nanami. The arrangement of the two panels makes it look like as if mother and daughter were looking directly at each other, as Kouno once more shows her meticulous use of structure, step 4, in her placement of panels. The tiny pieces of paper transition seamlessly into cherry blossoms, as Asahi proposes to Kyoka and she accepts with a smile. The transition from the present with Nanami to the past with her parents is not only a beautiful example of both Kouno's use of structure and craft, steps 4 and 5, but also combines the titles of all three stories of the entire book into a single scene. The cherry blossoms bloom in the town of evening calm, as the wind returns once again and the *yunagi* fades. As the page turns, Kouno reveals a gorgeous double-page spread of Kyoka and Asahi standing on a bridge in Hiroshima, smiling at one another.¹⁷⁸ This could be the very same bridge that Minami stood on with Ushikoshi much earlier in the book and many decades before in the story, or simply a reference to that scene:¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ *Kouno*, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 94-95.

¹⁷⁹ *Kouno*, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 22.



Image 21: Nanami thinks of her mother Kyoka in "Town of Evening Calm".

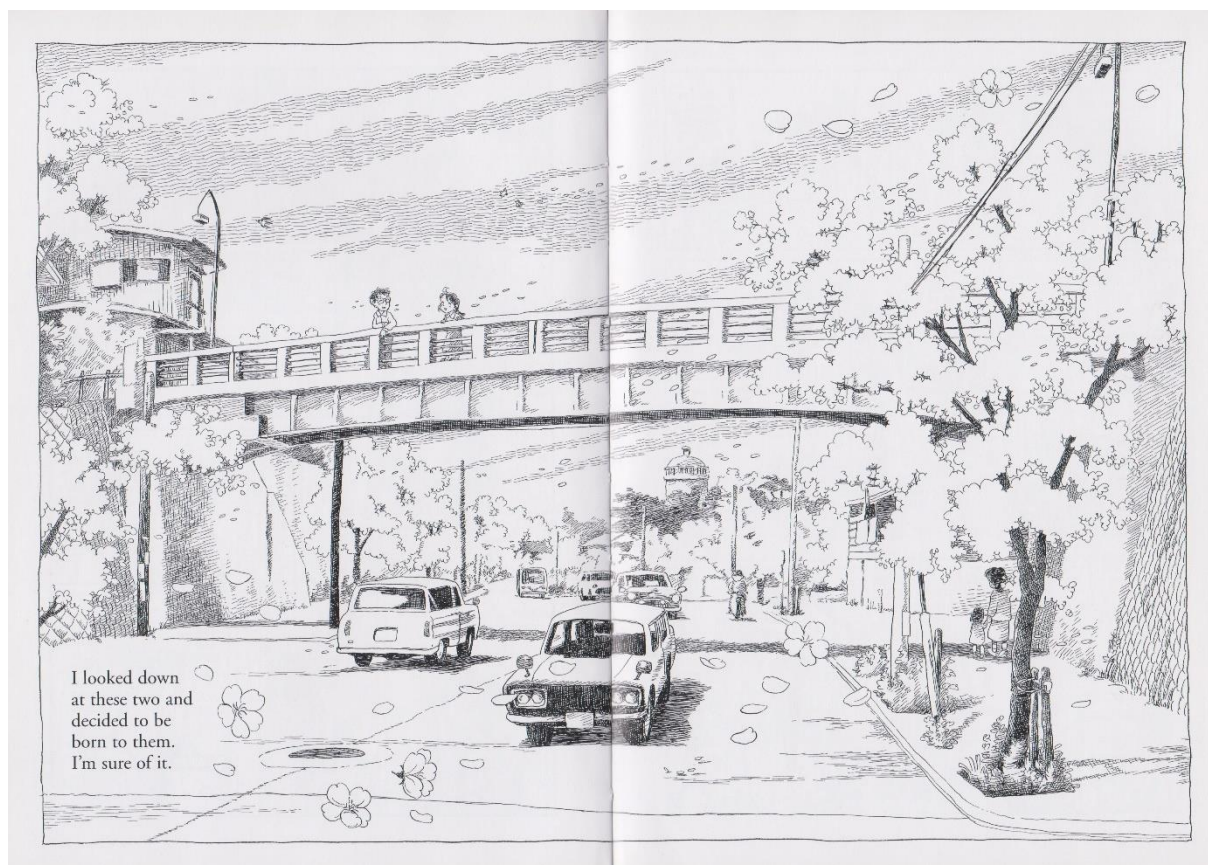


Image 22: *Kyoka and Asahi* in "Town of Evening Calm".

Gen on the other hand chooses to no longer stay in Tokyo after Mitsuko's death. He has shown great skill as a painter over the time of several volumes and his remaining friends and mentors encourage him to go to Tokyo, in order to challenge himself and become a great artist. He agrees and leaves Hiroshima via train. As he looks out of the window, he says goodbye to the only home he ever knew and sees farmers working on a field of wheat.¹⁸⁰ Nakazawa then draws Gen's father, who passed away on August 6th, 1945, who encourages his son to live a happy life and always get back up and grow strong. With tears on his face, Gen yells that he will do just that and Nakazawa then draws the final page of "Barefoot Gen". It consists of two panels, with the upper being a pair of feet, standing on the wheat in Hiroshima. The final panel below it shows the train Gen is taking, driving away from the perspective of the reader, towards a better future.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* Volume Ten, p. 252

¹⁸¹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* Volume Ten, p. 254.

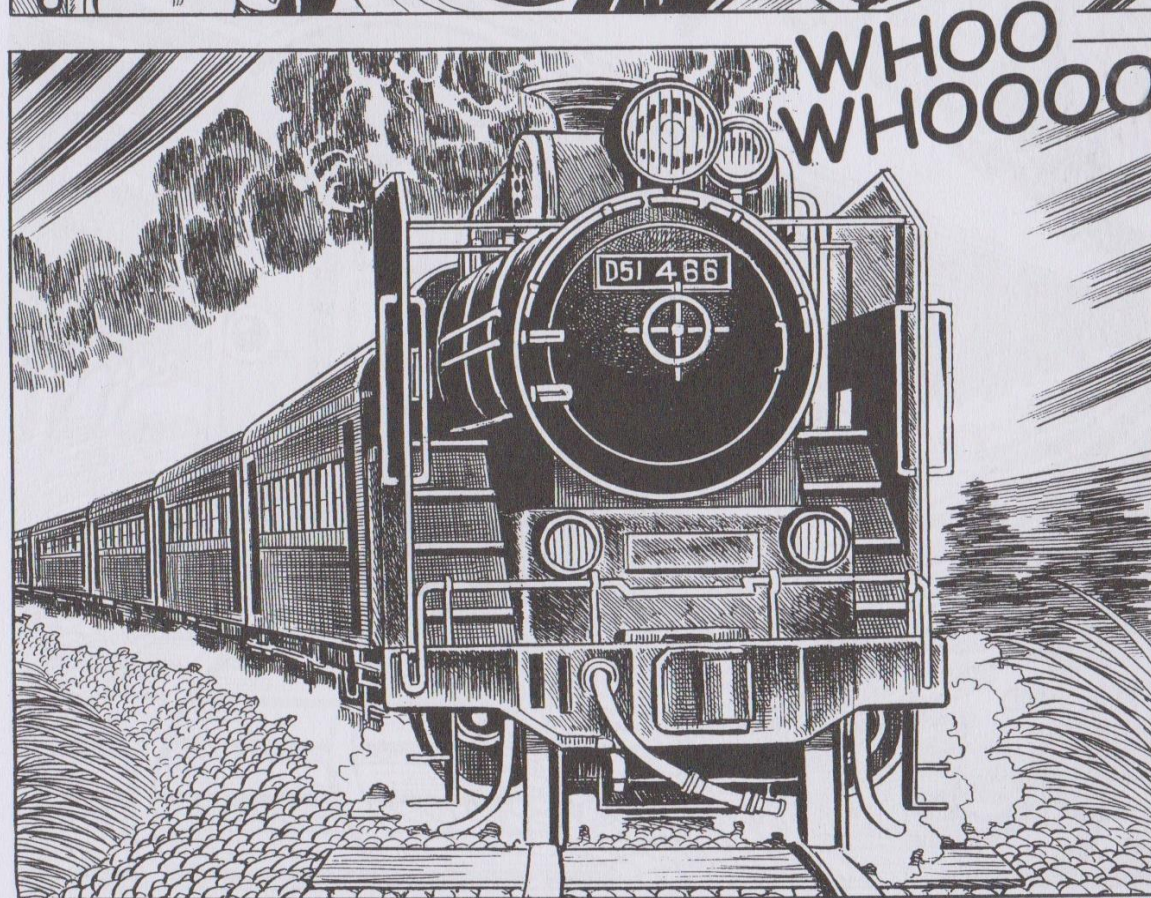
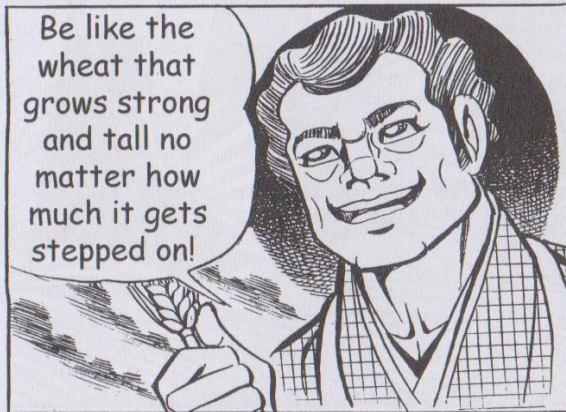


Image 23: Gen swears to live his life to the fullest in "Barefoot Gen".

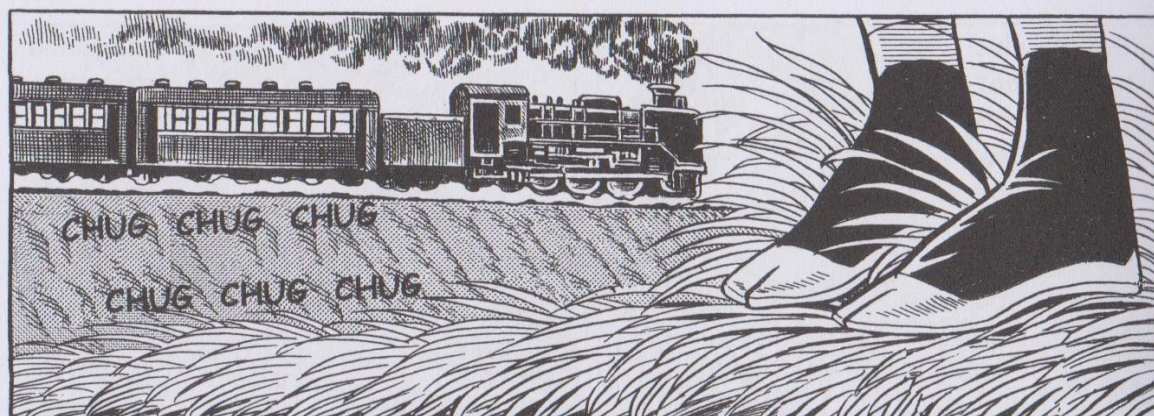
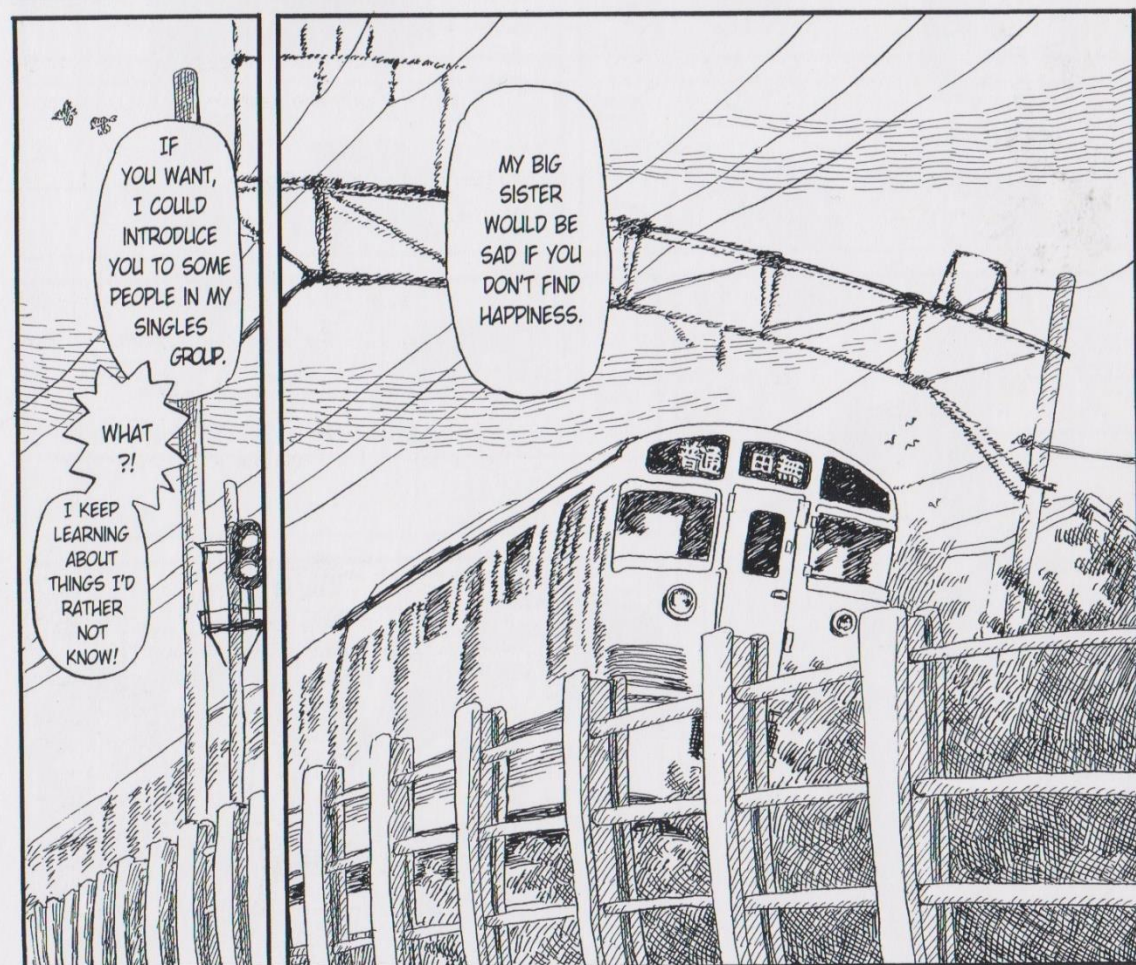


Image 24: A train drives towards the future in "Barefoot Gen".

This ending mirrors Nakazawa's own life once again, as he was also someone who left Hiroshima and went to Tokyo and became a renowned artist. Fumiyo Kouno chooses almost the exact same imagery on the final pages of "Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms", as Nanami takes a train in Tokyo and her father Asahi suddenly takes a seat right next to her. He reveals that he knew the entire time that she and Toko had been following him and why he came to Hiroshima on the former day specifically. It was the 50-year anniversary of Minami's death and he wanted to not only visit her grave, but to speak with other people who knew her and share in their memories.¹⁸² Nanami tells her father about what happened with Toko and Nagio and Asahi starts to cry. He claims that he does not cry because of that however, but that Nanami is 28 years old and still has not found a partner, as she never goes out on dates. It is on this final page that he says that Nanami reminds him of Minami and that he wants his daughter to find happiness, as that is what Minami would have wanted as well. The final panel then shifts away from the faces of the duo and instead shows the train itself. As it moves along the rails, speech bubbles show that Asahi suggests that he introduces Nanami to his singles group, which horrifies his daughter. Suddenly all the sadness of the overall story seems to be taken away by the wind, leaving a daughter and her father in a humorous conversation on their way home:

¹⁸² Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 98.



END

98

Image 25: Nanami and Asahi drive towards the future in "Country of Cherry Blossoms".

It is possible that Kouno's final panel depicting the train could be a direct reference to the final panel of "Barefoot Gen", as Kouno references Nakazawa's series as one of her main inspirations for her own work.¹⁸³ There even seems to be a direct reference to the last conversation between Gen and the image of his father in Kouno's afterword, as both her and Nakazawa directly reference their wish for "growing strong" in the future, with Nakazawa referring to wheat and Kouno to the cherry tree:

*"Be like the wheat that grows strong and tall no matter how much it gets stepped on! I will, Papa! I'm gonna grow into the tallest, strongest stalk of wheat you ever saw! Whatever comes my way, I'll never let it get me down and I'll never give up! I'm gonna live, and live, and live!"*¹⁸⁴

*"And with Country of Cherry Blossoms (Sakura no Kuni), I tried to write what I most needed to hear two years ago, when I still avoided anything to do with the atomic bomb. I truly hope this story someday finds and touches those of you who may realize you were just like me. May you grow as strong and gentle as the Sakura tree."*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Kouno, Town of Evening Calm, p. 99.

¹⁸⁴ Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen Volume Ten, p. 253.

¹⁸⁵ Kouno, Town of Evening Calm, p. 102.

4. Sexual Slavery and the suffering of the comfort women

4.1 A system of abuse

*“I needed my visa from the Korean Embassy in Beijing. Because I was reported dead in Korea. No matter how long it’s been, I can find my way back home with my eyes closed. Bosu, Busan...It took me fifty-five years to return, and yet the flight was only two hours. Fifty-five years. That’s how long it took to go home.”*¹⁸⁶

These words are how Lee Ok-sun remembers her return to her country of origin, Korea (specifically modern South-Korea), in 1996. She had survived for several years as a sex-slave of the Japanese military and lived most of her life in China after she was freed, never returning home from where she had been abducted for more than half a century. This changed in the 1990s, when the debate surrounding comfort women and the responsibility of Japan exploded with media attention.¹⁸⁷ The interviews with Lee Ok-sun serve as the basis for the “Grass”, as the author Keum Suk Gendry-Kim tells the story of Granny Lee’s entire life, as she is endearingly referred to by the author. From Granny Lee’s origins in South-Korea, to her enslavement and suffering at the hands of the Japanese military, to her life in China and return to South-Korea and her fight for recognition. Most Japanese soldiers who were questioned about the comfort women system before and during 1990s talked about this topic by glorifying the actions of the Japanese military and downplayed the brutality towards the victims, but there were exceptions and among them was Shigeru Mizuki.¹⁸⁸ He spoke about his own experiences with his system, which shouldn’t be surprising considering he had already written about the topic almost 20 years before, with his book “Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths” in 1973. This means that he started to write about Japanese war crimes around the same time when Keiji Nakazawa was writing “Barefoot Gen” and “Grass” was published nearly 50 years later. He not only talked about the atrocities, but he also went so far as to admit that he visited the brothels of the comfort women as well during his time in the military.¹⁸⁹ The goal of these chapters is going to analyze how both Mizuki and Gendry-Kim depict the suffering of the comfort women, as well as the portrayal of the Japanese soldiers that enslaved them, and what differences and similarities can be observed between them, taking their respective backgrounds and the large

¹⁸⁶ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 16.

¹⁸⁷ Ropers, Voices of the Korean minority, p. 158-159.

¹⁸⁸ Okano Yayo, Toward Resolution of the Comfort Women Issue-The 1000th Wednesday Protest in Seoul and Japanese Intransigence. In: The Asia-Pacific Journal, Volume 10, Issue 50, Number 2 (2012), p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Shigeru Mizuki, Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths (Montreal 2011), p. 21-23.

timespan between the publications into account. I will begin with the analysis of Mizuki's work and then continue with Gendry-Kim, before comparing them directly.

4.1.1 Japanese soldiers and sexual slavery in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths"

Mizuki opens his comic with three pages that depict the cast of the story, each with their respective face and their name and/or title in the military, since they are all soldiers in the Japanese army. The actual first page of the story depicts a parade of Japanese soldiers, marching on a long street and being flanked by a large crowd of people, who hold Japanese flags and seem to celebrate them.¹⁹⁰ This scene likely takes place in 1942, when the Empire of Japan invaded the region of modern Indonesia and fought primarily against Australian and Dutch colonial forces.¹⁹¹ Most Indonesians initially greeted the Japanese forces with gratitude and happiness, as they thought that the Japanese would free them from European and Australian colonialism.¹⁹² This would change quickly however, as Indonesian women were also victims of the comfort women system and the enslavement of local women was well established by the time Mizuki sets the story of his comic, beginning in late 1943.¹⁹³

What is immediately striking about the first few pages of "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths" is the extreme difference in style between how Mizuki draws environments, machinery and backgrounds, compared to how he draws humans. The human characters look extremely cartoonish, with exaggerated expressions, very large heads and even stars flying around a character's head when they are being hit by someone. But then Mizuki also draws several pages at the beginning of the comic depicting Japanese warships traveling across the Pacific Ocean and approaching the island of New Britain. This is where Mizuki was stationed, and he spent a lot of time in the town of Rabaul in particular. The detail in these pages is mesmerizing, with extreme detail on the shading of each part of the ships, as well as the waves and the palm trees. Mizuki also pays enormous attention to the placement of shadows, as certain parts of these drawings are completely covered by pitch black shadows. These images look shockingly real and Mizuki later stated that he mostly drew the environments from memory, but he also used photographs for reference, and he even visited Rabaul again, 26 years after the war.¹⁹⁴ The juxtaposition between these detailed drawings combined with his cartoon-like characters create the distinct idiom, step 3, for Shigeru Mizuki's work. Characters that look like they are from a

¹⁹⁰ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 14.

¹⁹¹ Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, p. 61.

¹⁹² Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, p. 63-64.

¹⁹³ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 14-20.

¹⁹⁴ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 353-354.

children's cartoon, but in a real world and real war. This idiom fits perfectly for what readers were expecting from him, as Mizuki's most famous work at the time (and still today) is his series "GeGeGe no Kitaro", which features the same style for his characters.¹⁹⁵ But while that series depicts a world filled with mythical creatures that interact with humans, "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths" stays away from any supernatural elements and focuses on the real events of World War II. The juxtaposition between these characters and the environment around them, as well as the violence that occurs in the comic, makes for a striking experience for the reader. This is also an example of Mizuki's use of his craft, step 5, as it takes enormous skill to draw images as detailed as he does, but also great restraint and confidence in his personal style when he draws the characters so differently:



Image 26: The highly detailed drawings in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

¹⁹⁵ Matthew Penny, War and Japan: The Non-Fiction Manga of Shigeru Mizuki. In: The Asia-Pacific Journal, Volume 6, Issue 9 (2008), p. 1-2.

Mizuki tells the entire narrative of his book through the viewpoint of the Japanese soldiers on New Britain and the topic of the comfort women is brought up immediately when they appear and start talking with each other at the beginning of the narrative. As two young soldiers are talking, called Maruyama and Akasaki, a higher-ranking officer orders them to visit the local brothel. At first, this gives off the impression that these soldiers were acting against their will and that did not want to participate in the systematic slavery of their military. This is a narrative that is often presented by those who deny the claims of the comfort women in the modern day.¹⁹⁶ But Mizuki immediately dispels this idea, as the next page shows the Japanese soldiers standing in front of the brothel, complaining that it will close soon. It is directly stated that each soldier has only 30 seconds with one of the comfort women, as more than 70 soldiers are still waiting.¹⁹⁷ The women tell the soldiers that they are closed and that their bodies cannot bear any more, but the soldiers still insist. One of the soldiers states that the women should do it for their country, like it was a patriotic duty, even though it is not clear if these women are from Japan or other parts of Asia. The soldiers complain that some of the women will be allowed to leave the island soon, while they will die soon. These men clearly believe that the female sex slaves are the lucky ones, compared to those men who have to fight.

They present themselves as victims, but Mizuki makes it clear how horrible their behavior is, as he draws them with wide grins as they claim that they only want to touch or lick.¹⁹⁸ There is no sense of heroism or honor, just pure lust and no concern for the victims. And at the same time, several of the soldiers seem completely lonely and desperate, but not really malicious. The entire scene overall feels uncomfortably realistic, as these soldiers are doing something wrong but either don't care what they are doing, are forced to it by abusive superiors, think that it is a normal duty of the comfort women to please them, or they are just emotionally broken by the war. These soldiers are not a single evil entity, instead they are a collective with personalities across a wide spectrum, but all participating in something that they shouldn't. This seems to be one of the most important ideals, step 1, of Mizuki's work, that these soldiers are humans, nothing more and nothing less. They are not all evil, but they are also most certainly not good either. It is just a horrible situation overall and Mizuki tears down the idea of the heroic soldier and his sacrifice for his country to reveal how ugly, pathetic, lonely and brutal war actually is:

¹⁹⁶ Erik Ropers, *Representations of Gendered Violence in Manga: The Case of Enforced Military Prostitution*. In: *Japanese Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2011), p. 257-258.

¹⁹⁷ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 20.

¹⁹⁸ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 22.

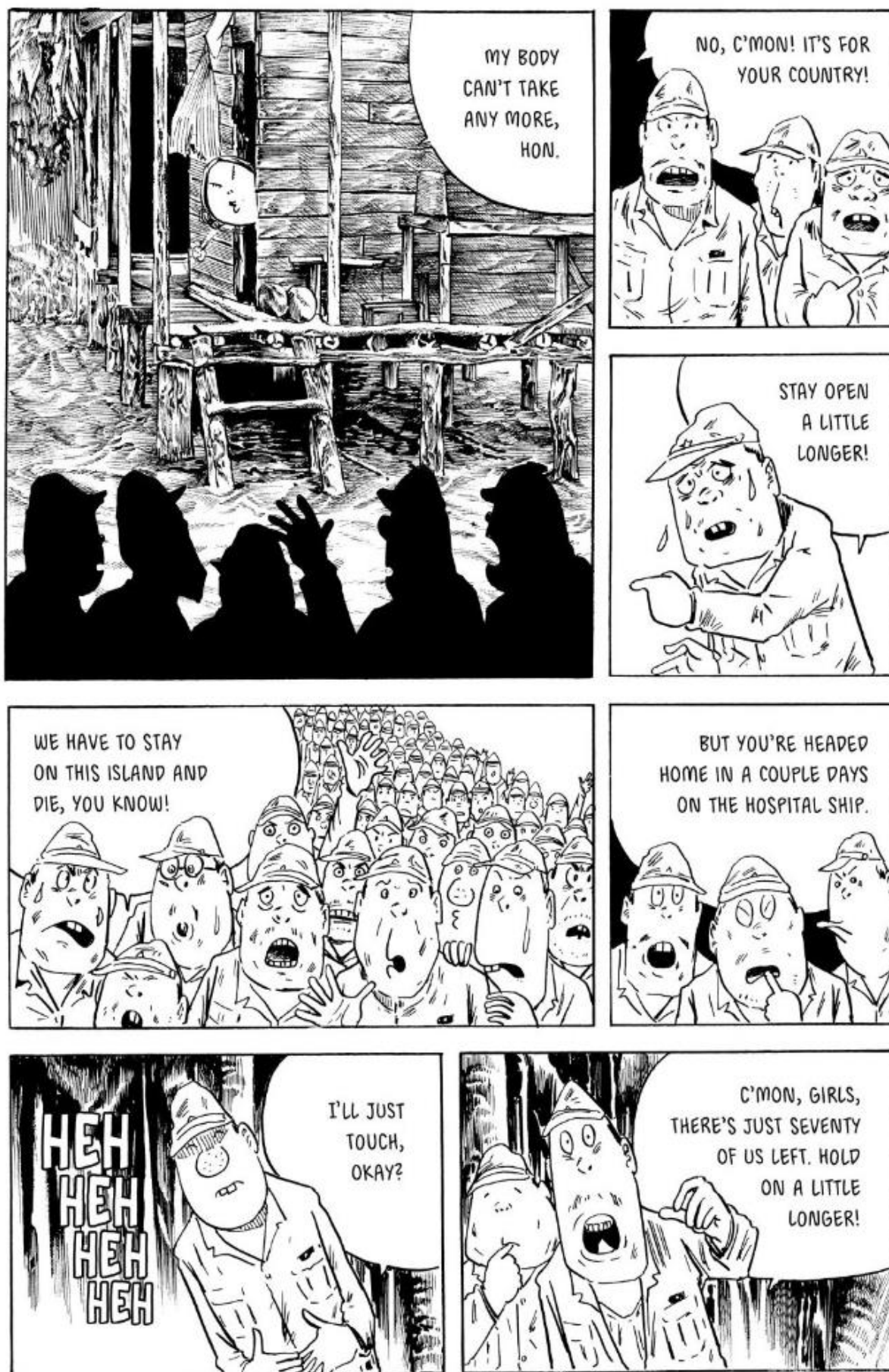


Image 27: The Japanese soldiers and comfort women in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

Mizuki continues this brutally realistic portrayal, as the character of Maruyama later states that most of the men simply received a song from the comfort women, which will be further examined in a later chapter. Maruyama smiles while saying this, stating it in a completely calm and nondramatic way. This is significant, as Maruyama serves as the alter ego of Mizuki himself. This is seen in a later work of Mizuki, where he uses the exact same personality and character design as for Maruyama, but this time the character is directly referred to as Private Shigeru Mizuki.¹⁹⁹ Mizuki does not exclude himself from the overall picture that he draws of the Japanese soldiers and continues this throughout the entire story. The comfort women are referenced again directly at the end, when Maruyama's unit is ordered to perform a suicide charge, which is what the title of the book refers to.²⁰⁰ "Noble Deaths", or "gyukosai" in Japanese, was a euphemism to describe a suicide charge.²⁰¹ The soldiers are standing together, knowing that they are about to die, and start singing a final song about how "shitty" their job is, once again dispelling any sense of heroism and staying in theme with Mizuki's ideal, step 1, for the comic. The soldiers are drawn with tired expressions and many of them are crying. One of them then states that the "whores" are much luckier than them, with one of his comrades agreeing.²⁰²

This seems to serve as a thematic bridge between the beginning and ending of the comic, showing how Mizuki chooses to structure his story, step 4. Just as in the beginning of the story, these soldiers still believe that the women trapped at the comfort station are the lucky ones compared to them. The derogatory term "whore" is also used likely very deliberately by Mizuki, to show a sense of disrespect of these men towards the enslaved women. Mizuki continues to walk this line of brutal realism, as he never defends the words or actions of the combatants, but once again portrays the scene in a way that feels eerily real. These men know that they are about to die brutally, for no reason whatsoever, and their desperation is starting to show itself more and more, including in the form of jealousy towards those who do not have to die with them at this moment. They do not think about the horrors that these women had to endure as sex slaves, just that they get to live and these men themselves do not. The soldiers then charge and the two sides of Mizuki's art style clash in the most brutal way possible, as the soldiers are ripped to shreds by enemy fire. Only one survivor, Maruyama, wakes up after the battle and his face still has the cartoonish outline as before, but is now covered in blood and a realistic bullet wound.

¹⁹⁹ Shigeru Mizuki, *Showa 1944-1953, A History of Japan* (Montreal 2014), p. 75.

²⁰⁰ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 14-20.

²⁰¹ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 350.

²⁰² Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 337.

This is Mizuki combining the two sides of his idiom into a single image and shows the enormous sense of detail in his craft, step 5:²⁰³

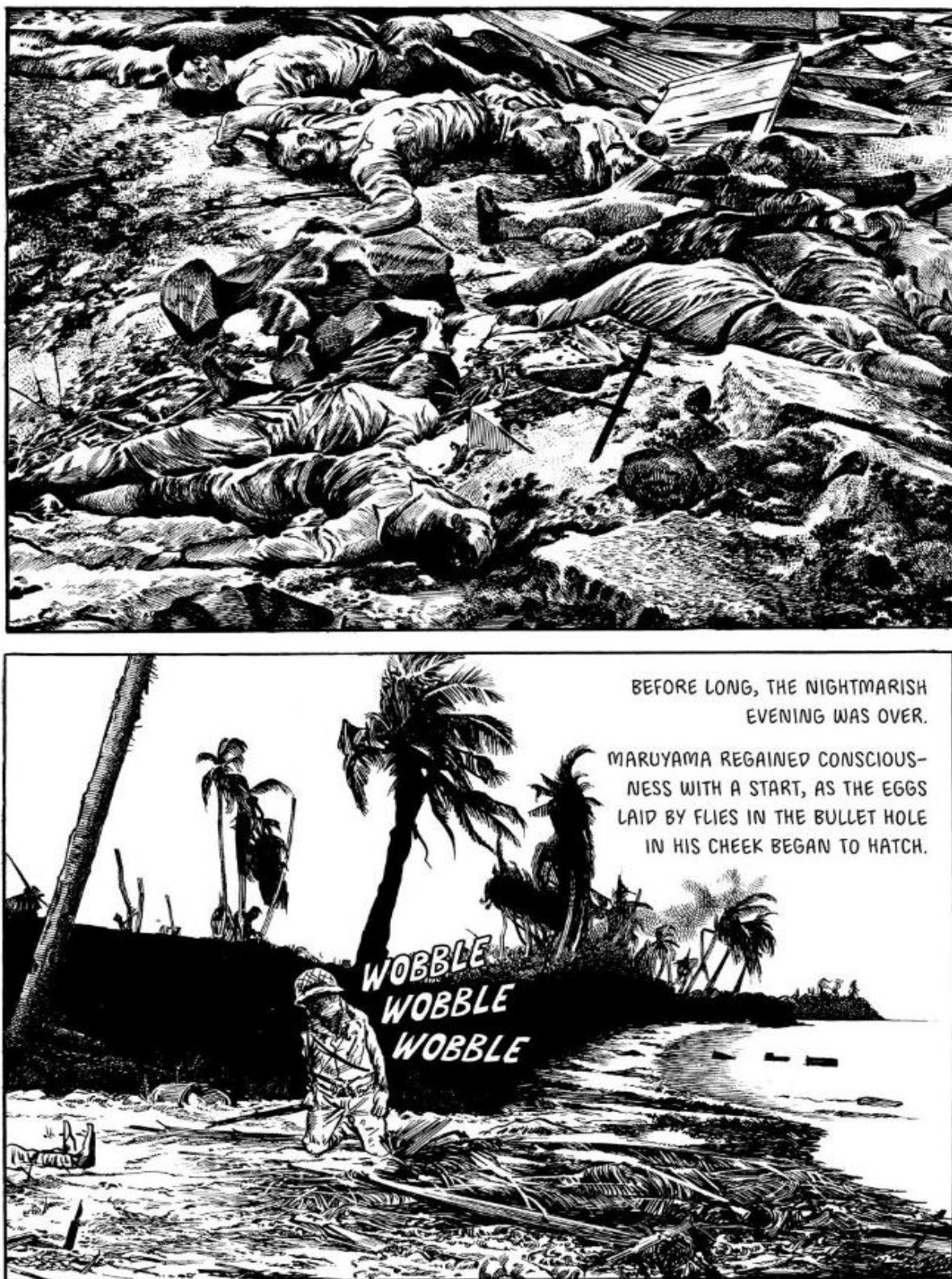


Image 28: The aftermath of the suicide charge in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

²⁰³ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 340-341.



Image 29: Maruyama walks while singing in his final moments in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

Maruyama starts singing the same song as the entire unit did before the battle, as he limps across the ground, when an American unit sees and shoots him in the side. His torso explodes in pitch-black ink, and he collapses on the ground, with the panels slowly zooming in on his face, closer and closer with each frame, as he realizes that this is how all of the other soldiers throughout the entire story must have felt when they died. Alone and forgotten.²⁰⁴ The sun then rises to reveal 4 pages covered in extremely detailed drawings of dozens of dead soldiers. Mizuki chooses to change his art style on these final pages, as the soldiers no longer look like they did the entire time before. Their faces are realistically drawn, with meticulous shading revealing their final expressions. The final page of the comic then shows two panels, both half the page in size, which show nothing but human bones. By breaking with his own established idiom, step 3, Mizuki brilliantly conjures a final message in the mind of the reader, that all of the cartoon characters in the story were real humans, who brutally died. The phenomenon of switching between more cartoonish and more realistic drawings is not exclusive to Mizuki, as many Japanese manga artists in particular use a similar principle to make certain characters, objects or backgrounds stand out to the reader. This is referred to as “objectifying power”.²⁰⁵ Mizuki himself survived the war, but he later stated in an interview that not a single one of his friends in the army made it out of New Britain alive.²⁰⁶ He chose to end the comic with everyone’s death, including his own alter ego, because the comic would have been too long if anyone survived and reported back, even though that is exactly what happened to himself.²⁰⁷ The portrayal of not the soldiers, but the comfort women, in Mizuki’s comic will be examined in a later chapter, but the focus of the next chapter will be the portrayal of Japanese soldiers through the memories of a woman who survived her captivity enforced by them. Mrs. Lee will be referred to as “Granny Lee” when the comic focuses on her in the present, while she will be referred to as “Lee” when events in the past are the focus of a scene, as she was still very young back then.

4.1.2 Japanese soldiers and sexual slavery in “Grass”

The beginning of “Grass” shows a short window into the childhood of Lee Ok-sun, before establishing it’s main framework of the story. The author, Gendry-Kim, sits in a room together with Lee as an old woman and they talk about how she grew up and her life as a comfort woman. The art style of Gendry-Kim is an interesting combination, starting with a cartoonish design of

²⁰⁴ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 342-343.

²⁰⁵ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 44.

²⁰⁶ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 353.

²⁰⁷ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 351-352.

the characters, reminiscent of the simple and very charming style of Charles M. Schulz in the “Peanuts” comics.²⁰⁸ But she then adds heavy shading on the faces of certain characters, with Granny Lee being the perfect example. The lines on the face of Granny Lee are thick and pitch-black, adding much more nuance and detail to her expressions than the drawings of Gendry-Kim herself, who looks much younger and has no lines on her face whatsoever.²⁰⁹ This stark difference is used to make Granny Lee stand out much more visually on the surface level, step 6. Gendry-Kim by comparison simply acts as a listener to the story, and this example shows the careful use of Gendry-Kim’s ability within her craft, step 5. But shading and the use of shadows are one of the defining aspects of her entire idiom, step 3, as Gendry-Kim regularly uses shadows as a tool to enhance the story being told.



Image 30: Lee Ok-sun remembers her childhood in “Grass”.

²⁰⁸ Chipp Kidd, *Only What’s Necessary: Charles M. Schulz and the Art of Peanuts* (New York 2015), p. 14-15.

²⁰⁹ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 42-43.

One example would be when Granny Lee starts to recall memories of her mother and while she talks about how she was never allowed to attend school, her face becomes almost entirely covered in darkness, as well as large parts of the white background around her.²¹⁰ It looks like the darkness is completely enveloping her, reminiscent of other authors who have used similar techniques in their respective comics, like Fumiyo Kouno in “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”.²¹¹ But the panel also shows an open window next to her, with a blooming tree outside. As one of the pedals falls, it transitions between the two panels on the page and crosses the empty space of the gutter into the next image, which shows Granny Lee in the foreground and a group of young children behind her, playing in the village where she grew up. This is a beautiful example of how Gendry-Kim uses structure, step 4, to arrange her panels, as the window serves as a literal window into Granny Lee’s past.²¹²

And shadows also play an important role when Japanese soldiers appear for the first time in the comic, as they are depicted during their invasion of China in 1937, and their faces are completely obscured by darkness. This makes them look almost inhuman, like a monstrous force, only visually identifiable by the Japanese flag of the rising sun above their heads.²¹³ The story continues to show how Lee was separated from her family when she was only 14 years old and was sold between several different Korean shops and taverns as a maid, originally under the wrong pretense that she would be allowed to go to school. She was abused while being forced to live in those places, but everything gets immeasurably worse when she walks to her tavern one day. This is when two shapes appear in front of her, and the term “shape” is important here. Gendry-Kim draws a full-page spread with Lee in the center, appearing very small in the panel. Most of the panel shows two human shapes from behind, walking towards the tiny Lee. While their outline is clearly human, Gendry-Kim draws them completely differently than Lee however. The young girl is drawn clearly visible, with all of the details that identify her as a character in the story, and most importantly her face is shown. The two shapes approaching her are instead drawn in a very rough style, with thick black lines and empty white space between them, allowing the reader to partially see through their bodies.²¹⁴ The clash between these two styles shows the variety in Gendry-Kim’s ability to craft her drawings in different ways, step 5:

²¹⁰ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 43.

²¹¹ *Kouno*, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 63.

²¹² *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 43.

²¹³ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 54.

²¹⁴ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 154.



Image 31: The kidnappers approach Lee Ok-sun in "Grass".

But this is also a technique that is only possible in a comic, as the author conveys the dread of the situation without any words and uses the strengths of comics effectively in its form, step 2. Simply looking at the way the characters are drawn makes it apparent that something horrible is about to happen. This wouldn't be possible in a movie for example, as human actors still generally look the same, even with costumes, make-up, or special effects. But these "things" walking towards Lee look fundamentally different than her and convey the horror of the situation in a way that will appear many times across the entire comic as Gendry-Kim's idiom, step 3. The following double page spread shows how Lee is abducted by the two shapes, who are revealed to be Koreans working for the Japanese military. This serves as an important reminder that Korea had been directly controlled by Japan for decades already at this point and many among the population were working against their own people, in order to gain favor with their oppressors.²¹⁵ These individuals usually worked for the owners of comfort stations and were later known as "sub-contractors", who often kidnapped dozens of girls at a time before shipping them to the brothels.²¹⁶

Gendry-Kim also chooses to not separate the different timelines with clear borders, but instead the present and past often bleed together on the same pages, which makes for an interesting approach to the overall structure, step 4, of the story. While a 15-year-old Lee is being kidnapped and screams for her parents in 1942, Granny Lee is also drawn in the same panel, staring off into the distance with a pained expression. Seeing both timelines together shows how long ago these events happened and yet Granny Lee remembers them still so clearly. The story continues as she was brought to an airport, where the comfort station was that she was forced into. More kidnappers are drawn guarding the terrified girls on the way there, and once again do they not look like humans. Their bodies are almost entirely pitch black, with only white eyes glowing from the darkness where their faces should be, and a few spots where light illuminates tiny places on their heads and clothes.²¹⁷ These men are once again Koreans, as the Japanese soldiers are only talked about so far in a very dreadful way, but Lee had not met them up until this point. The trains that she had to take took her out of Korea and she wouldn't return until more than half a century later. Her final destination was East Yanji Airport, located in modern China.²¹⁸ The Japanese owners of the comfort station refused to use the actual names of the enslaved girls and gave them Japanese names instead. They did not have to endure the

²¹⁵ Chung, *Korea under Siege, 1876-1945*, p. 50.

²¹⁶ Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors*, p. 38.

²¹⁷ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 161.

²¹⁸ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 166.

soldiers at first, as they had work all day to expand the airport and suffered under the brutal conditions of the forced labor.

One page during this section stands out in particular, as Gendry-Kim makes special use of the gutter. The panel shows a Japanese soldier standing on the left side of the page, his face and uniform once again nearly completely black except his eyes and mouth. On right are three different conversations between Lee and other prisoners, talking about how awful their conditions are. But while the page is split into three panels of equal size and the conversations likely took place at different moments in time, the soldier is drawn across the entire page and in all three panels, with the white gutter cutting through his body two times as those lines separate the different conversations on the right.²¹⁹ This unusual way of structure, step 4, for this page could represent that while time passed and the prisoners had to suffer every day, their tormenters never changed. The gutter is used as a way to reference the passage of time in comics and an image staying the same despite the appearances of several gutter lines would therefore represent something not changing despite time passing.²²⁰ The soldiers mistreated them every single day, leading to the death of many of them and the excessive brutality at the comfort stations is well historically documented.²²¹ The first time in the entire comic when Japanese soldiers are focused on in detail is also one of the most disturbing scenes in the entirety of “Grass”. It is when Lee Ok-sun is raped for the first time, at a moment when she had not even experienced her first period yet. The door to her room opens and four soldiers are revealed. Their bodies are heavily shaded, showing only a few details on their uniforms, but their faces are revealed more than before. White eyes and wide, horrifying grins, making them look closer to nightmarish monsters than humans.²²² As Granny Ok-sun starts to recall what happened, the page is separated into six different panels with a pitch-black background and her face shown from the side. Each panel makes her appear younger, going from an elderly woman to the 15-year-old girl she was back then. Once again showing that these scars are timeless. The next page has the exact same layout, black background and six panels, but Lee’s face is drawn much larger than before, in the center of the page, staring directly at the reader. Her face is covered in black ink splatters, likely referring to blood, and the darkness around her neck makes it look like as if she has been decapitated. An image of pure terror and pain, possibly suggesting that a part of Lee was in fact murdered that day:²²³

²¹⁹ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 178.

²²⁰ McCloud, Understanding Comics, p. 66-67.

²²¹ Tanaka, Hidden Horrors, p. 92-94.

²²² Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 190.

²²³ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 192.



Image 32: The rapists enter the comfort station in "Grass".



Image 33: The bottomless malice within the human heart in "Grass".

The next 3 pages have the same layout once again, but there is nothing within the pitch-black panels. No dialogue, no background, just darkness. The lines separating the different panels are still there however, making it clear that something is happening, the readers just can't see it. This is only possible in the medium of comics, as a movie would only be able to show a blank screen or a book a blank page. But the panels continue the sense of time passing and evoke a sense of dread because one can only imagine what is happening behind this darkness and silence. Gendry-Kim takes full advantage of the chosen form, step 2, of her story as a comic in this scene. Slowly the narration of Granny Ok-sun returns, lamenting the nightmare she suffered through:

*"Girls have a thing called a hymen. Imagine how it felt when mine ripped before I could get married or see the face of my husband. It was awful. I bled so much. I felt so dirty. That's why so many girls try to kill themselves after rape. I wanted to die. But I couldn't kill myself. No matter how much I wanted to, there was no way to do it."*²²⁴

Gendry-Kim decided to create the scene in way to convey one of the ideals and purposes, step 1, of the entire comic. Granny Lee says "imagine" and Gendry-Kim made the choice to leave the true horror of this scene to the literal imagination of the reader. Instead of seeing what happened, our minds fill in the darkness of these panels. Part of this choice might have also been motivated by respect towards the comfort women and to not draw the awful abuse they suffered through, at least in these particular moments. This something that becomes a theme throughout the book, as Gendry-Kim chose to exclude most direct depictions of physical violence and instead chooses to cut away.²²⁵ The idea that she was at least partially murdered that day is something that Granny Lee herself implies, as later during the story she and the other comfort women are supposed to take a bath, but fear that the water was poisoned. Lee simply states that they cannot be killed twice and jumps in, briefly acting as if she was ill, but she was just playing a prank on her companions among the other victims.²²⁶ Lighthearted moments between the comfort women happen throughout the book, reminding the readers that these were indeed real human beings who tried to still cling to hope whenever they could and tried to find opportunities to laugh despite everything that was done to them. At first, the overall impression of the Japanese soldiers in "Grass" could not be clearer. They were not humans who did wrong things and treated other humans badly. They were inhuman, monsters, and creatures whose faces disappear behind darkness.

²²⁴ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 196-197.

²²⁵ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 124-125.

²²⁶ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 237-238.

4.1.3 Mizuki and Gendry-Kim and the Japanese soldiers

The most fundamental difference between Mizuki and Gendry-Kim when it comes to their respective stories is the perspective. Mizuki as a Japanese veteran could never remember nor depict these events in the same way that a surviving comfort woman would. In his story, the comfort women themselves are barely directly seen and the focus does not lie on them, but instead on the war and its many atrocities overall. They are but one part of the greater ideal, step 1, which Mizuki seemingly tries to tell with his comic, in that war itself is wrong and that suffering is spread towards all sides. This perspective of war itself as the greatest threat seems to appear in several Japanese manga about this era, including the works of Keiji Nakazawa, Mizuki himself or Kei Ishizaka, with Ishizaka in particular facing criticism of downplaying the brutality of sexual slavery and focusing too much of the idea “good” soldiers among the rapists or even romances between captors and victims.²²⁷ But Mizuki does not seem to fall into the category of a historical revisionist, because he never defends what happens. He simply portrays the soldiers as people and then proceeds from there to draw all kinds of situations, some who make certain soldiers sympathetic, while others paint them in a horrifying light. And throughout everything, no sense of heroism whatsoever.

Gendry-Kim also does not draw all the soldiers in the same way, as Granny Lee at one-point recalls that a group of young soldiers visited her comfort station and says that these ones at least never hit the girls. This is visually portrayed by the soldiers having completely white faces, without any facial features.²²⁸ This is a simple but striking difference to before, when their faces were covered in darkness. Gendry-Kim still draws them in an unsettling, not quite human way, yet her idiom, step 3, changes along with the descriptions that Granny Lee gives. This difference also naturally sticks out to the reader on the surface level, step 6. The first example that paints one of the soldiers in a somewhat sympathetic light did not involve Lee herself, but another comfort woman she knew named Seo Mija. She was regularly visited by the same soldier, who told her that he liked her. Gendry-Kim portrays this man differently than other soldiers, as the speech bubble where he confesses to Mija covers most of his face, but she still draws one visible eyebrow above it.²²⁹ This does stick out, as the other soldiers were either drawn in a monstrous way or had no facial features whatsoever. A subtle continuation of Gendry-Kim’s personal idiom, step 3, and how she seems to draw people more detailed the less monstrous they are. When Mija becomes pregnant, the soldier is drawn from behind as he apologizes several times

²²⁷ Erik Ropers, *Representations of Gendered Violence in Manga*, p.254-256.

²²⁸ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 247.

²²⁹ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 272.

to her. His face is never shown, but it is stated that he cries, gives Mija some money and then leaves:



Image 34: Every one of them was ultimately the same in "Grass".

Slowly but surely Gendry-Kim uses the structure, step 4, of her comic to first focus on the soldiers as monsters, to then slowly and very carefully also show that not all of them were equally brutal or heartless. But the situation as a whole is never glorified or romanticized, as the soldier still raped Mija many times, leaves her alone with her pregnancy and Gendry-Kim draws the long suffering that Mija had to endure later, including that her daughter was stolen and sold by the owners of the comfort station shortly after the birth. Granny Lee herself states directly in the story that while some soldiers were nicer than others, they were ultimately all the same in the end.²³⁰ This is said in the same chapter when Gendry-Kim asks her if there was a soldier back then that Lee had feelings for.²³¹ Instead, it was reverse, as one of soldiers claimed to have feelings for her. He is the first soldier that is drawn “normally”, with no shadows and all of his facial features. Considering Gendry-Kim’s style so far, this makes him stand out significantly and he claims that he wants to go with Lee to Japan and that he loves her. But he ultimately never fulfills this promise and Granny Lee states that he was just like everybody else. One small but significant detail is that this unnamed soldier always calls Lee “Tomiko”, a Japanese name that was forced upon her by the comfort station. She makes it clear many times throughout the comic that her name is Lee Ok-sun and that they could never abuse her enough that she would renounce it.²³² This fits with her thoughts towards the soldier, because if he never even bothered to ask for her actual name, how would she ever be fooled to think that he actually loved her?²³³

One aspect that both Mizuki and Gendry-Kim portray in a nearly identical fashion is the universal contempt for the soldiers in charge. Mizuki on one hand constantly shows not only the incompetence of the officers, but also their needless cruelty towards their own men. Gendry-Kim on the other hand lets Granny Lee describe her captors in detail and the survivor states that the officers were usually the worst people visiting the comfort women, physically abusing them for things as insignificant as looking at them in a perceived “wrong” way.²³⁴ Mizuki in particular spends much time of the comic to show the different members of the army and how their horrible reality affects their decisions. The aforementioned cruel officers are also shown to be absolutely terrified of their own high command, since they know that they are all expected to die and nothing else is seen as satisfactory. One of the most bizarre examples is when a group of soldiers is ordered to perform a suicide charge, but some of them survive. They are looked

²³⁰ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 297.

²³¹ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 311.

²³² *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 170.

²³³ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 304.

²³⁴ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 248.

upon with shame by many of the officers and even told that they are supposed to either commit another suicide charge or kill themselves right then and there.²³⁵ In 1991 Mizuki stated that every time when he thinks back to these moments of fanaticism and insanity, he gets filled with an intense sense of pure rage.²³⁶ This seems reminiscent of the same language used by Keiji Nakazawa, when he talked about the anger he felt when thinking about what happened to all the victims of the war.²³⁷ Mizuki himself appears to both vent this anger and reinforce the purpose, step 1, behind his comic through the character of the medical officer of Maruyama's unit, who states the following after the "failed" suicide attack of his unit, before committing suicide later when his pleas are ignored:

*"Regardless, it is the will of the universe for all living things to live. It's wrong to get in the way of that. But this is the army. Army? This 'army' is the most diseased thing humanity has ever seen. This is not the way human beings should be."*²³⁸

4.2 The life and strife of the enslaved women

The goal of the previous chapter was to put the system of sexual slavery of the Japanese military into greater context. Who the perpetrators were, how they operated and what some of their interactions with their victims were like. But the comfort women themselves will be the direct focus for the remainder of this thesis, as their fight for recognition still continues and remains an open wound between Japan and many other nations. This is something that can be easily forgotten when it comes to a topic like this, in that the story of the comfort women does not suddenly end without further consequences after Japan lost World War II. After being ignored for decades, they also had to endure false claims that their own testimonies had been exaggerated in order to ruin Japan's international image. One claim by many historic revisionists in favor of Japan is that most comfort women were in fact not teenagers or virgins and that Koreans were mainly responsible for their recruitment.²³⁹ Part of this is true, as Granny Lee herself states that she was originally abducted by Koreans that wore no uniforms, who were likely contracted by the Japanese military.²⁴⁰ But the idea that the age of many victims was a lie in order to create more outrage is beyond insulting towards anyone who endured these traumas, especially since these claims were often made by people with no historic background

²³⁵ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 289-291.

²³⁶ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 351-352.

²³⁷ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume One, A Note From The Author Keiji Nakazawa.

²³⁸ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 268.

²³⁹ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, *Denying the Comfort Women*, p. 136-137.

²⁴⁰ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 155.

and were quickly proven to be false.²⁴¹ Even if non-Japanese individuals were used in order to kidnap or lead the victims to comfort stations under wrong claims, they still ended up as prisoners of the Japanese military all the same.

This is an example of why this topic so far could not come to a close, as Japan regularly seems to make one step towards acknowledging the scope of these crimes and beginning to compensate the surviving victims, only to then take two steps backwards and open the wound again. The state of Japan officially apologized in 1993 and 1995, beginning an initiative called the “Asian Women’s Fund”, in order to compensate the survivors.²⁴² The full name of this fund was the “National Asian Peace Fund for Women”, running from 1995 to 2007, and was used many times time by Japanese politicians to claim that the matter of the comfort women had been resolved and that Japan had fully done it’s part to make up for the events of the past. But closer examination of the fund’s efforts over the years reveal many crucial errors, including that it was entirely funded from civic donations and not the actual state of Japan, suggesting that the government put the responsibility on the conscience of the population instead of taking responsibility themselves.²⁴³ Combined with the movement of historical revisionism in Japan, carried by extremely influential individuals like the former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, this created more and more anger among the surviving victims and their supporters.²⁴⁴ It also should be noted that even these flawed original attempts of recognition only occurred in the first place because individual survivors began to fight for the truth, not because the Japanese government themselves had decided to actively look into the crimes committed during World War II.²⁴⁵

Just like their depictions of Japanese soldiers, Mizuki and Gendry-Kim are almost 50 years apart when it comes to how they portray the comfort women themselves. And once again the completely different perspectives of Mizuki with the context of a soldier and the stories of Granny Lee as a comfort woman are important to keep in mind when it comes to analyzing how the two comics approach this topic. “Grass” also is not confined to the years during World War II, but instead tells the story of an entire life, following Lee Ok-sun when she was a child, all the way into the modern day. This allows “Grass” to look at the subject matter of sexual slavery and it’s consequences in a much larger context compared to “Onward Towards Our Noble

²⁴¹ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 136-137.

²⁴² Kim Puja, The „Comfort Women“ Redress Movement in Japan: Reflections on the Past 28 years. In: Genocide and Mass Violence in the Age of Extremes, Volume 2, The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (Berlin/Boston 2020), p. 45.

²⁴³ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 96-98.

²⁴⁴ Puja, The „Comfort Women“ Redress Movement in Japan, p. 45-46.

²⁴⁵ Okano, Toward Resolution of the Comfort Women Issue, p. 1-3.

Deaths”, especially because comfort women are only a small part of Mizuki’s comic, that is ultimately about all the different aspects about what life as a Japanese soldier was like. Yet it is also important to remember that Mizuki wrote his comic roughly 20 years before the testimony of Kim Hak-sun, which brought the issue of the comfort women to much more attention in both Japan and other countries.²⁴⁶ There was no political pressure to talk or write about this subject in Japan in the 1970s, when the war crimes of the Japanese army were still largely considered taboo. Yet Mizuki still chose to not only address the issue, but he opened his comic with it, exposing every reader to this particular crime as the first example of the many horrible things they are about to read. The first subject of closer examination in the following chapters will be Mizuki’s portrayal of the comfort women in “Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths”, then followed by “Grass”, and concluded in a comparison between the two.

4.2.1 Comfort Women in “Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths”

The scene at the beginning of Mizuki’s comic already described in chapter 4.1.1 shows a large group of soldiers visiting a comfort station 5 minutes before it is supposed to close. Mizuki mostly focuses on the soldiers in this scene, but a group of comfort women is shown and one of them also directly speaks to the group waiting in front of the brothel. At first, she simply tells them that they are closed because it is 5 o’clock, but the soldiers keep insisting. She then speaks in a more direct manner and states that her body is not capable of enduring any more visitors.²⁴⁷ This statement is horrifying and yet is said nonchalantly, without any sense of impact or drama. There is no sad expression on the woman’s face, but a neutral look instead. Mizuki also does not draw her up-close in a dramatic sense, but far in the back of the panel, with her head sticking out the open door and one raised hand, as if to wave the soldiers goodbye for the day. This continues the idiom, step 3, that Mizuki has chosen to use throughout most of his comic and is very similar to how he depicts the soldiers. The conversation seems mundane, precisely because this happens constantly, and the woman behaves as if she just had a long day at any other job. At first glance it might seem tasteless that Mizuki portrays this subject like this, but he once again does this with almost every serious moment in the entire story. Abuse, suicide, death, it is all mundane at this place in time for these people. Nothing of this is unusual or out of the ordinary, these women are, for lack of a better phrase, “used” to their captivity.

²⁴⁶ *Ropers*, *Voices of the Korean minority*, p. 60.

²⁴⁷ *Mizuki*, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 20.

Another aspect which was briefly mentioned previously in chapter 4.1.1 was a song, which will be closer examined here. The song ends the scene at the comfort station, as the women try to convince the protesting soldiers to leave.²⁴⁸ First the comfort women themselves start to sing, only for the soldiers to join them. Mizuki draws the lyrics in large letters across several pages, transitioning away from the brothel in order to show different environments on the island, as well as the sky. At first this might simply seem like clever use of structure, step 4, in order to move from one scene to another seamlessly. But the lyrics of the song actually hold great significance of how the comfort women are portrayed and the song also appears again at the end of story, highlighting it's importance. The lyrics are as follows:

*I am a blossom that falls in the red-light district. Wilting in the day, blooming at night. Can't hate nasty Johns, forced smiles for smug pimps. Why am I stuck working this shitty job? No way out, all for my parents.*²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 20.

²⁴⁹ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 22-24.



Image 35: "The Prostitute's Lament" Part 1 in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

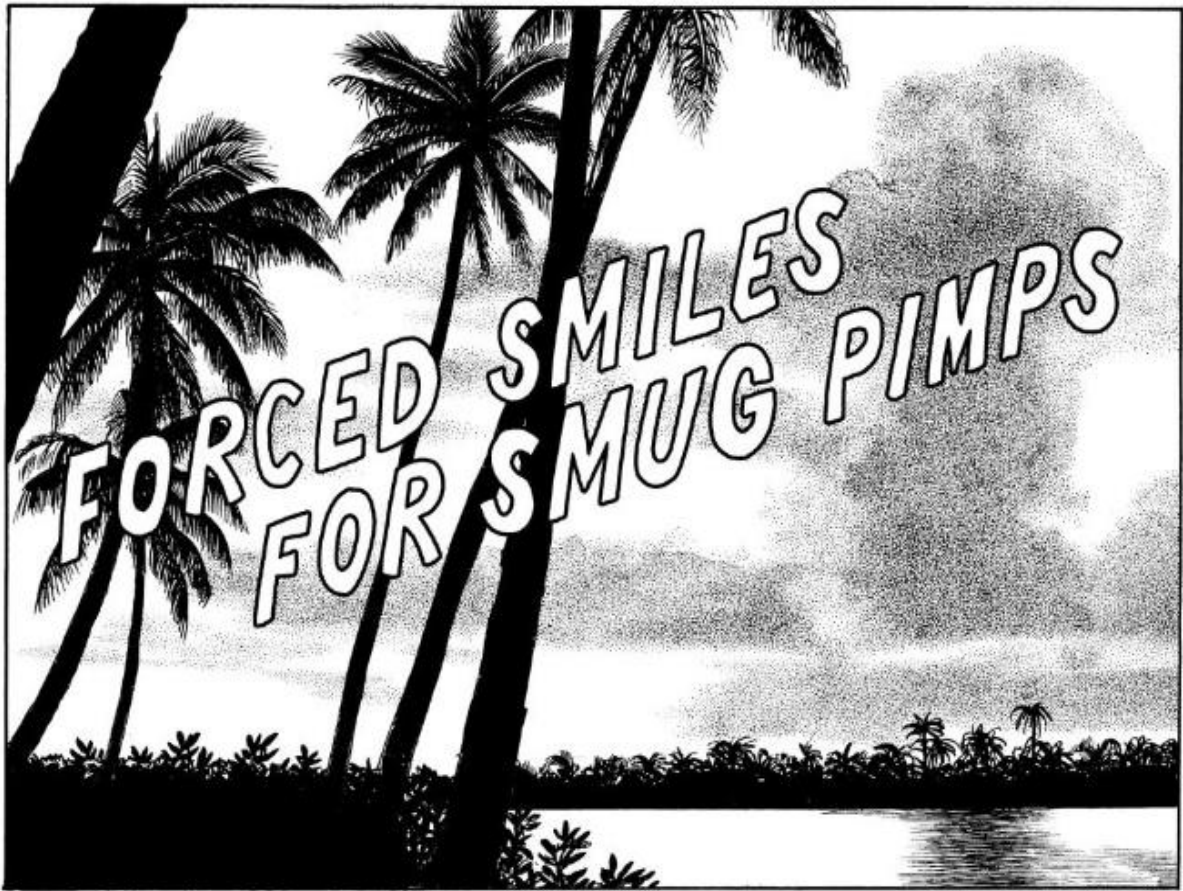


Image 36: "The Prostitute's Lament" Part 1 in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

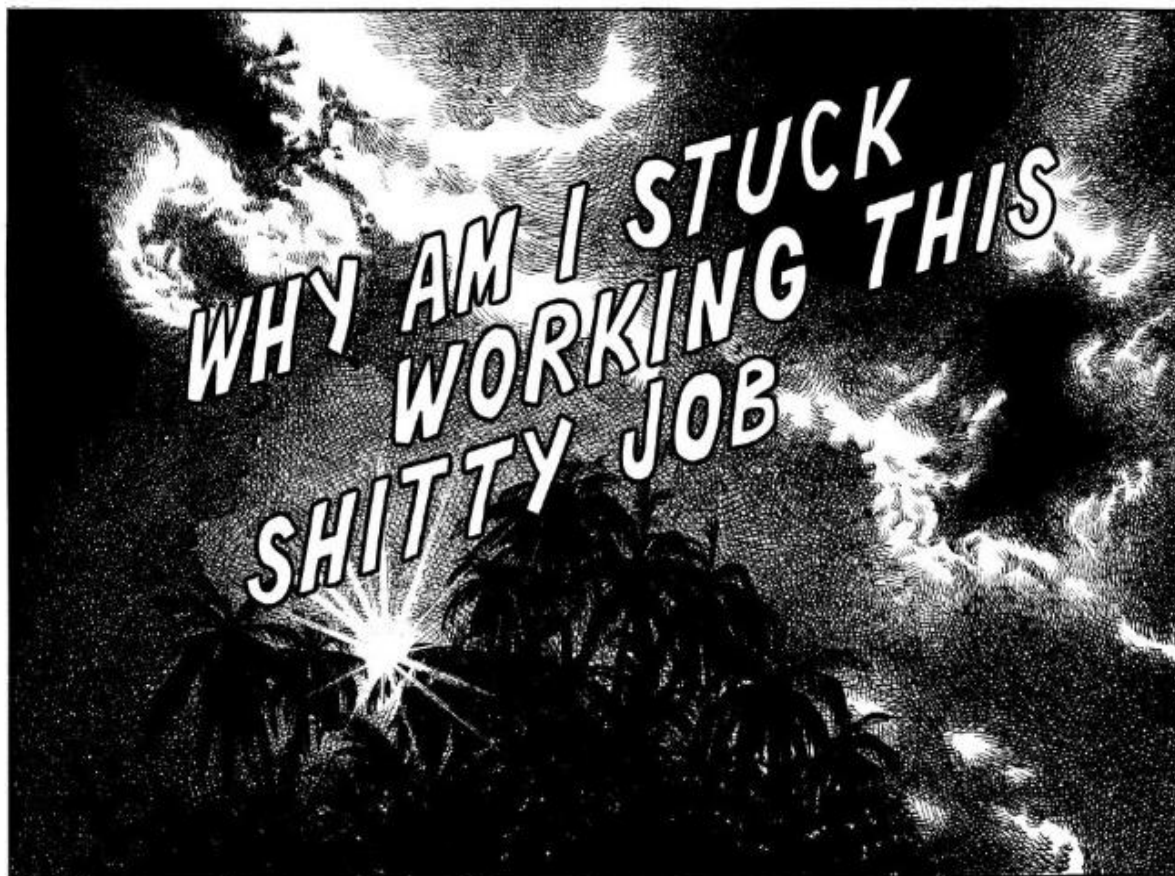


Image 37: "The Prostitute's Lament" Part 1 in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

Mizuki notes in the gutter below the lyrics that this song was called “Prostitute’s lament” and that it was sung during World War II.²⁵⁰ The lyrics themselves do not only reflect the suffering of the comfort women, but reference Japan’s history with prostitution as a whole. While the sexual slavery during World war II was on an unprecedented scale, the de-facto enslavement of young woman and girls into brothels, overseen by the state, has a much longer history in Japan, going back to the Tokugawa period (1603-1886).²⁵¹ The term “red light district” in the song refers to the Japanese word “yukaku”, meaning pleasure quarters, as these were areas where state-approved brothels were located.²⁵² Most women did not enter these quarters willingly, as they were instead sold to the owners of a brothel by their own parents. The parents received a large amount of money, first called ransom (minoshirokin) and later referred to as “advance cash payment” (zenshakkin), and it was then the young woman’s “duty” to work off this debt as a prostitute.²⁵³ This is very likely what the lyrics “no way out, all for my parents” refer to. This system was so predatory and fundamentally designed to keep these women trapped within the red-light districts, that the entire system was often referred to as slavery (doreisei) in Japan before the end of World War II.²⁵⁴ This sense of being trapped, of being enslaved, is likely the origin of the lyrics “no way out”.

The song also references flowers as a theme, with the women being represented by blossoms. The enormous symbolism of plants, and flowers in particular, is a recurring theme in all the four main sources of this thesis. Both Nakazawa and Kouno ended their respective works with symbolism regarding wheat and cherry trees and Gendry-Kim also chooses to include this rhetoric in her idiom, which will be further analyzed in the next chapter. The line “can’t hate nasty Johns, forced smiles for smug pimps” seems to imply that, in the context of this specific song, the customers at the brothel are not viewed as the real problem, even if they are repulsive. Instead, the pimps and therefore de facto “owners” of the brothel are called out and that the victims not only have to stay with them, but even need to pretend as if they were happy. The women of these red-light districts over time started to fight for right of independence and managed to achieve a number of improvements in the early 20th century, but ultimately the system of loans from brothel owners to parents and the ensuing imprisonment of young women

²⁵⁰ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 22.

²⁵¹ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, *Denying the Comfort Women*, p. 71

²⁵² Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, *Denying the Comfort Women*, p. 73.

²⁵³ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, *Denying the Comfort Women*, p. 73.

²⁵⁴ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, *Denying the Comfort Women*, p. 73.

was not abolished in Japan until 1955.²⁵⁵ And the line “why am I stuck working this shitty job” is self-explanatory but has great significance towards the end of the comic.

Mizuki not only lets the comfort women in his comic lament their suffering, but as the soldiers begin to sing the same song with them, suddenly the song’s meaning extends even further than before and seems to include the soldiers themselves. Mizuki uses the structure, step 4, of the story to draw a clear parallel between the beginning and the end his story, as the way how he draws the lyrics across different panels and pages immediately sticks out to the reader on the surface level, step 6. He reinforces this at the end, when the group of soldiers that the readers have followed throughout the story, are preparing for their suicide charge. Their commanding officer suggests a final song, and everyone starts to sing “Prostitute’s lament”.²⁵⁶ The lines that are drawn across several pages specifically are “why am I stuck working this shitty job” and two soldiers, as mentioned previously in chapter 4.1.1, complain that the comfort women have it much better than they do, right before they charge toward their deaths. Mizuki uses the song’s lyrics to destroy any pretense of heroics in the scene, as the song makes it clear that none of these men want to die. Maruyama continues to sing after he is the only survivor, but this time with slightly changed lyrics, referring to everyone’s death and once again repeating the line about their shitty job.²⁵⁷ The lyrics now describe more than before, as the role of pimps could be replaced with officers and the red-light district with army camps.

Mizuki spend much time throughout the entirety of his comic that there was no way out for soldiers like him, whether they agreed with the war or not, they were trapped. The only way out appeared to be death, either by the enemy, your own fellow soldiers, or suicide. And the line “all for my parents” could either be taken literal, as many soldiers likely joined the war to defend their families back home. But it could also represent the Japanese government, as it forced all these men to fight for them, just like the parents who sold their children into enslavement. And on top of all this cruelty, it was traditionally seen as an act of filial duty and respect that the young women would agree to their captivity and not resist, all in order to “support” their parents.²⁵⁸ Just like how the soldiers throughout Mizuki’s comic are constantly abused by each other and their superiors, while being told that it is proper and their duty. The idea of children being subservient to their parents is a complex topic all in itself within Japanese history and society, but it is something that is more openly questioned and criticized in the modern day,

²⁵⁵ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 74.

²⁵⁶ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 334-336.

²⁵⁷ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 341.

²⁵⁸ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 74.

with one very recent example being in the very successful Manga “Jujutsu Kaisen”. The author, Gege Akutami, makes his disdain of the unconditional filial obedience very clear, as he portrays a scene of extreme abuse of a father towards his daughters, who views them as nothing else but a steppingstone for his own success. They are not allowed to hinder him in any way and the entire family agrees with this sentiment. One of his daughters replies to him in the following way, after which he attempts to murder both of them:

*“(Father) Children must not hold back their parents. (Daughter) Didn’t you know? Holding each other back is a virtue in this country. [...] (Father) Farewell. You are a stain.....on my life.”*²⁵⁹

The comparison by Mizuki between the lives of the comfort women and Japanese soldiers are very interesting and seem to be a part of the ideal, step 1, of the comic, as he drives home over and over just how terrible the situation of the soldiers was. But it is also potentially highly problematic, as what happened to the comfort women was not same and certain aspects of the topic, like the enormous amounts of racism towards any women, or humans in general, who were not seen as part of the “Japanese race”, is something barely mentioned in Mizuki’s comic.²⁶⁰ In order to take a closer look at the perspective of the comfort women themselves, without focusing on their captors this time, the following chapter is going to examine how Gendry-Kim depicts the lives of the comfort women.

4.2.2 Comfort Women in “Grass”

The story of Granny Lee’s life not only covers many decades, but also directly dispels certain misconceptions about comfort women, like the idea that they had it better than the men did. Putting the horrific sexual abuse aside for a moment, Granny Lee describes how she and the other captured girls she knew had to work tirelessly every day in order to build an airport for the army. This was before they had to work in the brothels and she insists that no one cared if they were girls or young, they had to endure everything in the same way as the male prisoners.²⁶¹ But once they had to endure the rape by Japanese soldiers, things became even worse. Comfort stations had, in theory, a large number of rules that the owners had abide by. One of these articles explicitly mentions that the health of the comfort women had to be checked regularly,

²⁵⁹ Gege Akutami, Jujutsu Kaisen, Chapter 149: Perfect Preparation, Part 2 (Tokyo 2021), p. 2-5

²⁶⁰ Hiroshi Fukurai, Alice Yang, The History of Japanese racism, Japanese American Redress, and the Dangers Associated with Government Regulation of Hate Speech. In: Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly, Volume 45, Number 3 (San Francisco 2018), p. 533-535.

²⁶¹ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 172-174.

in order to prevent the spread of venereal diseases.²⁶² And the rules also clearly stated when stations had to pay at least half of these medical costs and when comfort women had to pay it all themselves.²⁶³ This was linked to the theoretical payment that comfort women were supposed to receive, yet Granny Lee describes it quite differently when she herself contracted syphilis.

She had not received any money from the soldiers ever since she arrived, it all went directly to the owners of the station, and she was only treated for her disease when her condition was so bad that she couldn't "work" with any soldiers.²⁶⁴ The treatment from the military doctors did not help however and Granny Lee mentions that the owners were desperate, but not for her live but that she could not earn them any pay and was only a burden to them. They proceeded to buy mercury privately and Lee was forced to expose her genitalia to the vapors produced by boiling mercury, which was supposed to help her. Her condition ultimately improved, but she was rendered infertile for the rest of her life because of it.²⁶⁵ Gendry Kim draws these scenes in a particular way, as the usual heavily shaded backgrounds fade away, becoming completely white. This choice of style sticks out compared to Gendry-Kim's usual idiom, step 3, as the heavy use of shading characterizes most of her panels. The only things visible in the panels are Lee herself, her hair covering up her face, and a large drop of molten mercury on the other side. This change in style was possibly chosen in order to visually highlight how far-reaching the consequences of this event were, as they would become a permanent condition of Granny Lee's entire life. This story not only shows another example of horrible personal suffering, but also that the rules of the comfort women system were often not actually enforced. The soldiers were supposed to protect themselves and their victims from diseases, but most violently refused to wear condoms.²⁶⁶ The rules did exist but were ultimately hollow and only really enforced in a way that prioritized profit for the comfort stations:

²⁶² *Yoshimi*, *Comfort Women*, p. 136.

²⁶³ *Yoshimi*, *Comfort Women*, p. 142.

²⁶⁴ *Gendry-Kim*, *Grass*, p. 249.

²⁶⁵ *Gendry-Kim*, *Grass*, p. 250.

²⁶⁶ *Gendry-Kim*, *Grass*, p. 199-200.

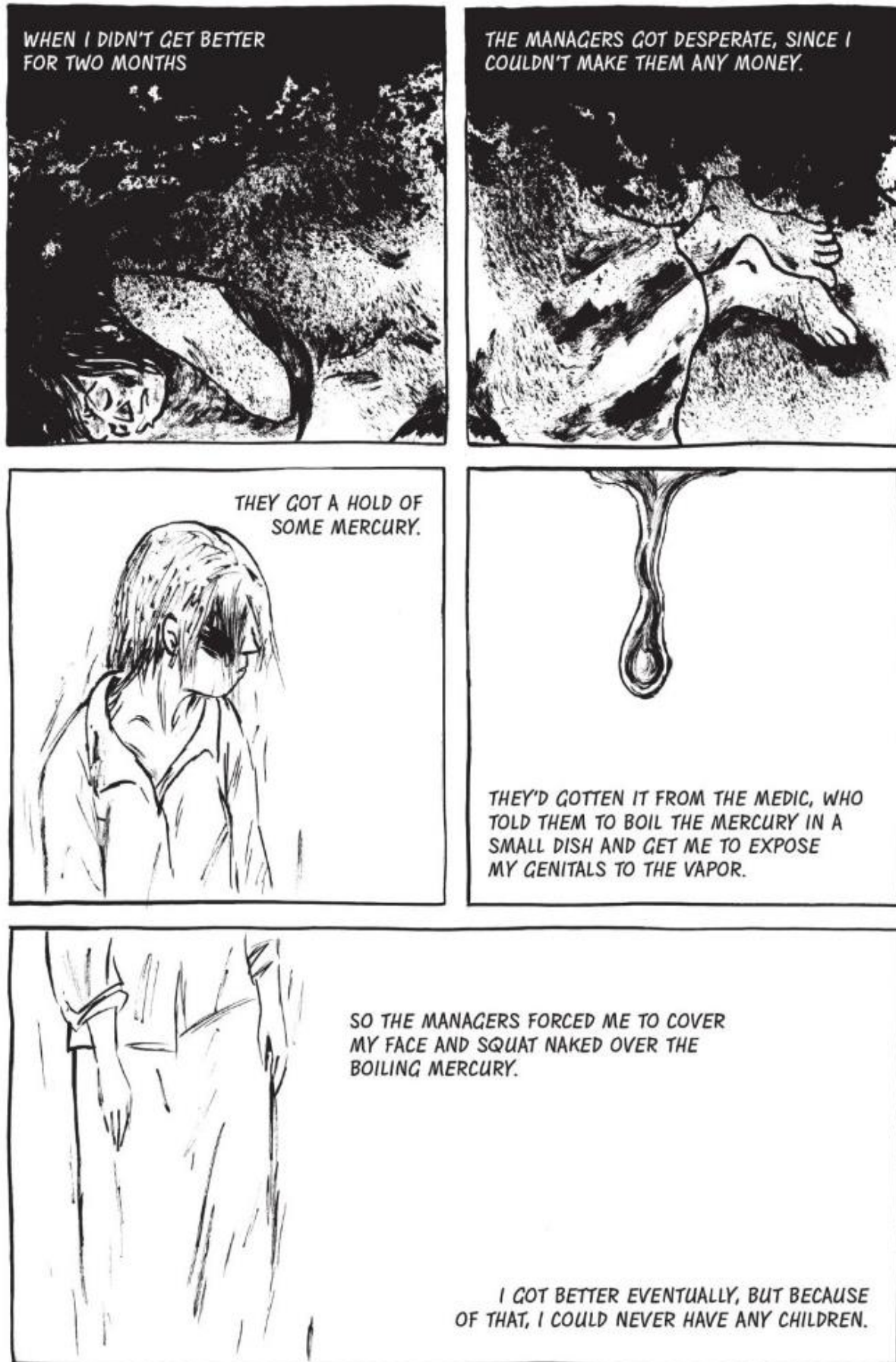


Image 38: Mercury treatment in "Grass".

Another example of rules, that were more cruel jokes in truth, relates to the payment of the comfort women. They were supposed to receive a certain percentage of the money which soldiers paid at the stations, somewhere between 40-60%, depending on the situation.²⁶⁷ These numbers have been used by revisionists to argue that comfort women received a good amount of money for their “work” and that it was just normal prostitution.²⁶⁸ They are seen as state-sanctioned prostitutes and that they do not deserve any kind of pity because it was just a normal transaction. The reality is that there were indeed many women from Japan who worked as legal prostitutes at military stations, usually reserved for officers. These women often entered these contracts willingly and some managed to earn quite a bit of money before the war ended.²⁶⁹ But to put these women and comfort women into the same group is misinformed at best, malicious and misleading at worst. The everyday life of the comfort women described in “Grass” is much closer to how the red-light districts in Japan operated since the Tokugawa era, as described in chapter 4.2.1, but even worse.²⁷⁰ Lee didn’t even earn enough money to buy sufficient food, clothes or make-shift tampons, so she and many others had to borrow money, increasing their debt ever further. All the “work” they did in the stations exclusively earned money for the owners of the stations, while they were being told that they did not earn enough.²⁷¹ The entire system was a vicious cycle with no way out. In the end, Lee was left with no money whatsoever, all of it stolen by the owners of every station that she was ever sent to. The same reality was shared by countless other comfort women, which is well documented since proper research began in the 1990s.²⁷² And the entire time, they were constantly told that the owners of the comfort stations were doing them a favor by lending them clothes and food despite the girls’ “debt”.

Another crucial aspect of the everyday lives of the comfort women was their imprisonment in the literal sense, as they their movement was heavily restricted. Both the Japanese army and the owners of the comfort were in their own way highly dependent on these captives, the army with stress relief for the soldiers and the owners as a source of income. Therefore, security at the stations was severe and based on the sources, not many women attempted to flee.²⁷³ One of the main reasons for that was not just the risking of punishment and even death, but also that many of these women had been brought to places of the world where they did not speak the language.

²⁶⁷ Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, p. 142.

²⁶⁸ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 70-71.

²⁶⁹ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 71.

²⁷⁰ Rumiko, *Puja, Akane*, Denying the Comfort Women, p. 74.

²⁷¹ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 216-218.

²⁷² Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, p. 144-145.

²⁷³ Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, p. 145.

Even if they escaped, they would be lost and unable to converse with the population.²⁷⁴ Some still attempted it and Granny Lee recalls that one girl actually managed to escape against all odds. This worsened the situation for all the remaining comfort women, as the soldiers and owners of the station were enraged and threatened their prisoners with death. But they never managed to find the girl who escaped into freedom.²⁷⁵ Lee herself did attempt to flee early during her imprisonment and Gendry-Kim takes the time to focus on the “idea” of running away several times throughout the story. The incident is at the airport in China where she was first stationed, as she and several other girls leave their quarters in the middle of the night and try to find a way out of the airport. But there is an electric fence surrounding the entire compound.²⁷⁶ Gendry-Kim uses backgrounds as a crucial tool of her craft in these panels, step 5, making use of them as storytelling devices. When the girls are first shown discussing their escape, they stand behind the large, three-panel, image of a Japanese soldier, as further described in chapter 4.1.2. The background behind is not a room within their station, but pitch-black instead, evoking the sense that they are standing in the soldier’s shadow. This is reinforced as the next panel no longer shows the soldier, but now there is the light of a single window in the darkness, evoking a possibility of freedom. The girls then go outside and as the panels progress across the page, further and further away from the comfort station, more and more light becomes part of the backgrounds behind them. This subtle technique shows Gendry-Kim’s thoughtful approach with structure, step 4, but also with form, step 2, as she continues to use the back-and-white nature of her chosen artform not as a limitation, but part of her storytelling.

The group ultimately reaches the electric fence and Lee’s face is drawn with shock in the last panel of the page. The next page consists of a single full-page spread, with Lee warning the others to not come closer, because a corpse is lying among the grass right in front of the fence. Gendry-Kim’s personal idiom, step 3, when it comes to the depiction of violence is shown on this particular page once again, as she does not show the dead body, just Lee standing in the high grass.²⁷⁷ The perspective of the panel is also significant, as the readers can look beyond the three girls and through the barbed-wired fence, showing a large landscape in the background, with a mountain and a night-sky full of stars. Gendry-Kim evokes both hope and dread at the same time with this page, as it shows what lies just out of reach, but the presence of the fence makes it impossible for the girls to leave. The next page at first glance looks very similar, with the girls walking away and Lee stating that there was no way to escape. But the

²⁷⁴ *Yoshimi*, Comfort Women, p. 144-145.

²⁷⁵ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 305-308.

²⁷⁶ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 179-180.

²⁷⁷ *Gendry-Kim*, Grass, p. 180.

perspective is crucial, because now the readers see the girls walking away, with the fence in the foreground. The perspective of the readers is now outside of the airport beyond the prison and beyond where the comfort women themselves can be. Another detail of this page is that Gendry-Kim draws a single house far in the background, in the direction where the three girls are heading. The house almost completely black with no visible windows, only the roof is left in white coloration. This could very well be the comfort station that the group has to return to, their prison. The page captures the suffering of the comfort women very effectively in a single image and it was ultimately chosen as the cover art for the entirety of “Grass”:²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 181.



Image 39: Imprisonment in "Grass".

Lee managed to survive her captivity and Gendry-Kim dedicates an entire section of “Grass” to what happened after the war ended and the system of sexual slavery of the Japanese military collapsed. Lee and the other women had no idea at first in 1945 that the war had ended, because nobody told them. Gendry-Kim spends several pages, and even full-page and double-page spreads, to depict the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She draws the annihilation inflicted upon the city and makes a point to mention that at least tens of thousands of Koreans were stationed at these cities against their will when the bombs were dropped, killing them as well as the Japanese civilians.²⁷⁹ These Koreans were included in the overall term of “hibakusha” for decades, but this notion has been questioned recently. After all, they mostly had not been citizens of these cities, but were forced to come there in order to work for the Japanese war effort, very similar to what Lee experienced when she worked at the airport.²⁸⁰ The history of the Korean victims of the atomic bombings was not overlooked by everyone, as Keiji Nakazawa dedicated an entire character of his comic series “Barefoot Gen” to this topic, a man named Mr. Pak. He was a neighbor of Gen’s family before the bombs fell and acts as a kind supporter for Gen, while also lamenting the fate of his father who died in the destruction of the city, as well as the subjugation of his people by the Japanese.²⁸¹

Granny Lee describes that one day, all the soldiers at her station suddenly ran away and the owners of the station left as well, dragging the remaining comfort women with them. She describes that the comfort women were planning to kill the owners and run away afterwards, but they were suddenly gone one day and left the former slaves behind. Lee later learned that the owners were later caught by Chinese civilians and killed.²⁸² She and her companions did still not know that Japan had lost the war, until a farmer happened to walk past them and tell them the news. Gendry-Kim dedicates an entire page to the realization that the war was over, split into three panels. The first shows Lee and two other survivors standing in a Chinese village, as people in the background are yelling that Japan has surrendered. The three young women are drawn from the waist up when they hear this, not very close to the readers perspective. The next panel zooms in much closer and shows Lee’s expression in a close up, as the realization slowly appears on her face:

²⁷⁹ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 330.

²⁸⁰ Ropers, *Voices of the Korean minority*, p. 86.

²⁸¹ Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*. Volume One, p. 69-70.

²⁸² Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 336-337.

*“Japan surrendered... We don’t have to service those animals anymore. We can go home now. Mama...”*²⁸³

Gendry-Kim uses her mastery of her craft, step 5, to draw the realization of Lee slowly in a moment-to-moment transition.²⁸⁴ At first her expression is one of disbelief, as a single tear appears in the corner of her eye. She does not look happy yet, more like all the sadness and desperation she felt during her captivity for over three years all comes to the surface. The following panel zooms in even closer but now she is smiling, with tears streaming down her cheeks. These tears could refer to all the pain she had to endure up until now but considering her expression they appear to be caused by relief and happiness and hope. This is not where “Grass” ends however. As mentioned before, many of these women were lost in lands foreign to them and had no one besides each other. And even if they were able to communicate, they had no money as all of their earnings had been stolen. Most people did not want to help them and so they had to split up in order to find enough food.

As Lee says goodbye to the last of her former companions, Gendry-Kim uses the same moment-to-moment transition as described previously. But the expressions on Lee’s face are completely different this time. She looks down with a serious expression, but the next panel shows what seems to be a mix between anger and pain or regret. When the page turns, Gendry-Kim draws another full-page spread, except there is no background. Far in the back is a single other comfort woman, walking away from the perspective of the reader. Lee’s head takes the center of the entire page, possibly a reference to the nightmarish panel when she was first raped, as described in chapter 4.1.2.²⁸⁵ But this time she no longer looks towards the ground as in the previous panel, but instead stares right at the reader with an expression of angry determination. She and the other woman had previously promised each other that they would survive and Lee’s look conveys the sense of utter determination to keep that promise no matter what. While her face is covered in dirt and her clothes are ragged, there is an impression of incredible strength coming of this page, something that the Japanese were not able to break.²⁸⁶ This impression of strength might be part of Gendry-Kim’s ideal, step 1, of her entire comic, to not just portray the comfort women as helpless:

²⁸³ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 339.

²⁸⁴ McCloud, Understanding Comics, p. 70.

²⁸⁵ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 192.

²⁸⁶ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 343.



Image 40: A promise to survive in "Grass".

Lee's life after regaining her freedom was still filled with strife and hardship, first as she lived as a beggar in order to survive. She then started to recall a Korean officer, who collaborated with the Japanese army, at the airport where she had once been stationed. Her feelings towards him were more complicated than simply "love", but he treated her nicely and considering her imprisonment, that meant much to her. She ultimately managed to find him, and the story shows how this man, called Oppa Yeongseop, wants to marry her, but his father forbids it. The father argues that Lee cannot have children and that makes a marriage impossible. This is eerily similar to what happened to many hibakusha after World War II, whether they were actually infertile or not.²⁸⁷ Fumiyo Kouno's work touched upon this topic several times and it appears here as well and even though the origin for Lee's condition is completely different, it results in a very similar treatment towards her.²⁸⁸ Oppa manages to convince his father to change his mind, but still more tragedy is waiting for Lee. Her husband enlists to fight against the remaining Japanese forces and leaves very briefly after the wedding, going missing for 10 years. When he reappears, it turns out that he had married another woman and started a family with her, all the while Lee had patiently been waiting and even took care of his dying parents.²⁸⁹ The two panels following this revelation show Gendry-Kim and Granny Ok-sun in the present, covered mostly in thick shadows and not saying a single word, staying consistent with her idiom, step 3, and darkness creeping into the panels. This could very well be what happened after Gendry-Kim heard this for the first time, she had no words and all that was left was deafening silence in light of all this tragedy and abuse.²⁹⁰

But one thing about Granny Lee's story is still not adding up. At the very beginning of the book, we see Granny Ok-sun in her village in China where she spent most of her entire life. Her family and neighbors are all there to send her off before she leaves for Korea, including her daughter-in-law and her son.²⁹¹ The reason for this is answered in the chapter titled "My son". This chapter opens with just the title and the image of a laughing Lee, holding a smiling child. After the tragedy of her first marriage, Lee married another man who was not deterred by her inability to have children, since he already had two from a previous relationship. His daughter did not want to accept Lee and her husband himself had many problems, including a gambling addiction.²⁹² At first, she describes her second marriage as horrible, but she did not leave,

²⁸⁷ Chappell, *Hibakusha Memories*, p. 81-82.

²⁸⁸ Kouno, *Town of Evening Calm*, p. 84.

²⁸⁹ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 373-378.

²⁹⁰ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 379-380.

²⁹¹ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 14-15.

²⁹² Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 387-392.

nonetheless. The reason for this was not her husband, but his very young son called Cheolgu. He became the center of Lee's life and her reason for staying:

*“(Lee Ok-sun) The boy had a disability. We had to shout because he couldn't hear well. He didn't start talking until he was eight. The boy thought I was his mom and followed me around from the first day. (Cheolgu) Ma.Ma... (Lee Ok-sun) He wasn't my flesh and blood, but because of him, I couldn't leave. I didn't think I could stay with that man, but I ended up spending fifty years with him.”*²⁹³

In the end, Lee Ok-sun did not just survive her enslavement and daily abuse. After all the suffering and permanent damage to her body, she not only survived, but lived a long life. She lived long enough to meet some of the comfort women again that were imprisoned with her, and she made her voice heard, refusing to remain silent. And she also managed to move past the physical and psychological trauma and was ultimately able to have a son and grandchildren. They could not kill her, her name, or her future:

MY SON



Image 41: Lee Ok-sun and her son Cheolgu in “Grass”.

²⁹³ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 393-395.

4.2.3 Mizuki and Gendry-Kim and the Comfort Women

The biggest fundamental difference between how Mizuki and Gendry-Kim portray comfort women in their respective comics comes down to perspective and focus. These women do appear in Mizuki's work and play an important role in the overall idiom, step 1, of the comic, but the focus overall clearly lies on the Japanese soldiers, not them. This does make sense because Mizuki tells the story of the war from his viewpoint and the comfort women only appeared for brief moments of time in their lives compared to the rest of the war. Mizuki himself makes that clear at the very beginning of his work, when an officer tells the soldiers that each one of them gets only 30 seconds.²⁹⁴ For them it was over very quickly. The phenomenon of rape during war is a complex topic all on its own, but research has revealed that the most common type of rape in war times is gang rape.²⁹⁵ Soldiers tend to commit these crimes much more likely when they are in groups in order to establish a hierarchy and sense of comradeship as a group. As individuals, some of the reasons why they rape are to either escape the horror of war for a brief amount of time or to inflict the abuse that they suffered from their fellow soldiers on somebody else.²⁹⁶ Granny Ok-sun recalls this in the same way, as the comfort women had to endure one soldier after the other, especially during weekends, with an average of 30-40 men per day. Gendry-Kim portrays herself in the comic as nearly speechless when she hears this number for the first time.²⁹⁷

But while the soldiers only spent very little time with the comfort women, "Grass" flips the perspective and the soldiers are the ones seen only briefly, while the enslaved women are the protagonists. They did not have it better, as some of the soldiers in Mizuki's comic claimed, but went through terrible agony, just a different kind than the soldiers. And even if the soldiers suffered as well, so many chose to use their own misery as a reason to inflict more pain on others. The comfort women on the other hand had no power like that, all they could usually do was try to survive somehow. Research has revealed several cases when Japanese soldiers decided to commit suicide and attempted to force a comfort woman to die alongside them.²⁹⁸ Luckily, several of these victims managed to avoid being murdered by these soldiers, but these stories show just how extreme the sense of despair in many soldiers was and how twisted their worldview became, as they attempted to murder an enslaved victim in their final moments. Granny Lee's story makes it clear that most comfort women did not want to die and to force

²⁹⁴ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 20.

²⁹⁵ Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors*, p. 107.

²⁹⁶ Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors*, p. 106.

²⁹⁷ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 213.

²⁹⁸ Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, p. 149-151.

them to participate in a forceful "suicide" might be the most extreme example of why the perspective of the victim always needs to be heard.

This leads to the question if Mizuki's work is an appropriate depiction of the issue of sexual slavery or not. But what is and is not appropriate is of course very subjective. What can be said is that Mizuki does talk about the topic roughly 20 years before it became widely known, which speaks for his overall idiom, step 1, in that he despises war and the atrocities committed in it's name. He does not hold anything back in his criticism and it easy to see why he became such an influential voice in Japan for peace.²⁹⁹ At the same time, his work barely scratches the surface of what happened to the comfort women and Gendry-Kim shows not only how much more there is to say, but also how far the topic has come in nearly 50 years after Mizuki finished "Onward Towards to Our Noble Deaths".

One final interesting similarity between the authors lies in the way how to conclude their respective works. After the actual story of "Onward Towards our Noble Deaths" has concluded, Mizuki includes both an afterword and a questions & answers section, where he talks in more detail about his experiences. This is where he recalled how he revisited Rabaul twenty-six after the war and how this visit created an urge to write about what happened to him and so many others, who suffered who through the war.³⁰⁰ He goes so far so say that he felt forced to do so. The idea of retreading the steps of the past also appears at the end of "Grass", but it was not Lee Ok-sun who walked this path again, but the author Keum Suk Gendry-Kim herself. She wanted to see one of the former comfort stations, as well China's landscape, in order to better understand what Granny Lee had seen all those decades ago. One moment that stands out is when Gendry-Kim manages to find house that had been used as a comfort station. As soon as she enters the building, nearly all light disappears and she describes the chilling atmosphere in these dark rooms, while once again using the presence of shadows as her idiom, step 3, in order to convey the horror which occurred in that location.³⁰¹ She even managed to find the first comfort station where Lee herself was imprisoned. Gendry-Kim draws the building and surrounding area in painstaking detail, with the building in the background and a large number of flowers in the foreground.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Penny, *War and Japan*, p. 2-4.

³⁰⁰ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 354.

³⁰¹ Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 429-430.

³⁰² Gendry-Kim, *Grass*, p. 444.

In his afterword, Shigeru Mizuki talks about how after everything the readers saw while reading his comic, the mission to hold Little Britain, had been completely pointless from the beginning. There had been no strategic reason for all these men to die and all that remains for him is a sense of resignation. This sense of melancholy and rage marks the end of Mizuki's work, as the final page before the afterword depicts nothing but bones of the dead, drawn in macabre detail:

*“The general in charge of the third mixed regiment actually said this about our suicide charge: “Why did they have to go to such lengths to hold that place?” All I could do when I heard this was heave an empty sigh. Such lengths to hold that place... What vain words these were, the dead have no mouths to tell. Whenever I write a story about the war, I can't help the blind rage that surges up in me. My guess is, this anger is inspired by the ghosts of all those fallen soldiers.”*³⁰³

³⁰³ Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, p. 352.



Image 42: The bones of the dead in "Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths".

But Gendry-Kim chooses a more hopeful ending, in many ways reminiscent of the endings of “Barefoot Gen” and “Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms”, even including the plant-based imagery and choice of words. The final pages show her watching an interview with Lee Ok-sun in 2017, when Granny Lee criticizes both the Japanese and Koreans governments and refuses to stop her campaign for recognition. She states that the political leaders make deals and speak on behalf on the comfort women, without actually including them in any of the discussions.³⁰⁴ As Gendry-Kim walks smiling through the snow during the winter of South-Korea, the author uses two double-page spreads right after one another to create this beautiful drawing spanning four pages, with herself walking at the edges of the drawing and a large tree in the center. She then shares her hope for the future, and it is here that she reveals why her comic is called “Grass”. And the final two pages of the comic first show the same tree as seen before during the winter, but now it blooms in the spring. With the very last page depicting the face of Granny Lee Ok-sun, laughing:

*“When this harsh winter passes, a sun-kissed letter will surely come from the south, bearing news of spring. Delicate sprigs are trembling at the end of a long winter. New life is struggling to emerge from within. The ground that had been slumbering wakes, and the young grass pokes out from between the dead withered leaves. Grass springs up again, though knocked down by the wind, trampled and crushed under foot. Maybe it will brush against your legs and whisper a shy greeting.”*³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 446-448.

³⁰⁵ Gendry-Kim, Grass, p. 449-450.



Image 43: Granny Lee Ok-sun in "Grass".

5. Conclusion

All four comics analyzed in this thesis show that the authors put a tremendous amount of work not just into portraying their respective stories in beautiful and unique ways, but why they deserve attention for historical studies. Their work is deeply rooted in real historical events, either based on personal experiences or research. Nakazawa and Mizuki offer a view into World War II in very intimate way, retelling their own lives, mixed with what others like them had to live through. Kouno and Gendry-Kim spent much time researching the events that they portrayed, in a way that is reminiscent of the same kind work necessary to work as a historian. They might not have published scientific papers, but their comics show a special way how historical research and art can meet, in order to create something both emotional and educational. These sources are of course never objective, they are just parts of a greater sum. But this thesis will hopefully add a piece to that greater picture and hopefully others will find this research interesting and will add their own perspective. This thesis attempted to highlight many different examples why these comics are valuable historical sources, not just for the events that they portray or how the authors chose to do so, but also how they are a part of far larger movements that have shaped history. Keiji Nakazawa was one of the first artists that managed to break the taboo in Japan at the time about the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This sent ripples throughout the coming years, as other people like Fumiyo Kouno were inspired by him and continued what he and others began. But she did not just copy his message and style, but instead made her own interpretation. Mizuki managed to paint a vivid picture to oppose the idea of the honorable Japanese soldier and to show what war was truly like for young men like him. And while he also touched on the victims of Japan, the work of Gendry-Kim highlights that there is never a substitute for actually listening to the story of the victims of such crimes. The comfort women deserve to be examined by themselves, not just as a piece of a larger story about Japan, it's soldiers and their atrocities. Her work once again does not exist in a vacuum but is instead part of a global movement to achieve a sense of acknowledgement and actual respect towards the victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese military.

Another goal of this thesis was to put these comics into context not just with historical events, but also each other. None of them are written by themselves without external factors but are a product of their time and influences. Nakazawa and Mizuki wrote during a time where many did not want to hear what really happened during the war, filling both of them with an intense rage. Their styles are brutal, upfront, and uncompromising. Precisely because they saw how the victims of the war had been ignored and lessons were not learned, their art forces the readers to

face what they do not want to see. The ugliness, the unfairness, the brutality, and the pointlessness of it all. But their comics do not exist just to vent anger and trauma, but instead are dedicated to the future and the peace that both of them wanted to see in it. Kouno and Gendry-Kim write from the perspective of being raised in a world where these crimes are widely known and have been portrayed by artists like Nakazawa and Mizuki, but also countless others. It would be pointless to just endlessly repeat what was already written, so they instead focus on new things that got little attention before. Kouno shows the ramifications of the hibakusha for several generations, something that Nakazawa could not do at the time when he wrote “Barefoot Gen”. And Gendry-Kim offers the voice of Lee Ok-sun to be heard by a much wider audience, telling the story of the comfort women from their point of view. Kouno interviewed survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, visited archives and museums, and included her own experiences as someone born in Hiroshima many decades after its destruction. Gendry-Kim also interviews a survivor, but instead of incorporating that knowledge into fictional characters and their stories, she presents something that often blurs the line between a traditional comic, an interview and a biography. Both Kouno and Gendry-Kim also do not write with a source of anger and their styles reflect that, not focusing on the depiction of violence but more so internal suffering and trauma, as well as overcoming that.

Finally, this thesis attempted to add something to the growing historical interest into comic books as a medium. The goal was to highlight the very real history they are based in, but also to focus on the artistic interpretation. If a comic is purely examined based on the events that inspired it, that ignores the entire artistic aspect of the medium. It would rob comics of their identity as a form of art. How the panels are drawn, how they are laid out, how the story is structured, how an artist makes use of elements that only exist in this medium like the gutter, all of these things are what makes comic books what they are. Historians are taught how to critique their sources, to spend time not just with their contents, but the bigger picture as well. Why something was recorded, in which form or how it survived the passing of time. The same lessons should be applied to comics as well and how they offer their own unique perspective on history and its portrayal. Not the best perspective, but simply a standalone one that deserves to be seen and studied as such. All of these different goals came together in this thesis and hopefully it will serve as both a contribution to the overall scientific field, as well as gain the curiosity of other researchers that are interested in this topic. These stories have drawn my attention for one-and-a-half years and inspired me to write the longest and most ambitious work of my life so far. If this thesis manages to achieve one thing, then I hope that others besides me will be inspired to read these comics themselves and create their own interpretations.

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