

“Hiroshima 1989 and Kabul 2004”

Resilient city is not a product, but continuation of “new normal.”¹ Although destructions are “opportunities for progressive reform,”² reconstruction not the door to the perfect city. “New normal” does not necessarily contain all voices. Injustice and inequality remains to certain degree in reconstructed resilient city. In a sense, selection of who gets what is a continuation of pre-destruction³.

Then I wonder, in the process of building resilient city, where is the place for destructing power? Back when natural disaster was seen as an act of God, the resilient city devoted significant space for a destroyer – the nature. As seen in many other traditional societies, the Island of Hawaii worshipped the source of destruction, the volcano, as the god of Pele. Japanese folktales are filled with rituals to sooth anger of nature – the god of cloud for drought, the god of mountain for volcano, and the god of earth for earthquake. Shrines to worship nature are the center-piece of ancient city in Japan. Reconciliation with the source of trauma was a continuous and repeated attempt in the process of building resilient city.

On the other hand, in a human disaster situation such as Hiroshima and Kabul, Afghanistan, situations are different. I first visited Hiroshima at the age of 10. I walked around the city of Hiroshima with my classmates and felt bizarre. I could neither find a grotesque piece of skin nor hear a desperate cry for help, but the memorial park, buildings and survivors’ testimonies left striking impression of the extent of destruction.

However, what I did not find in Hiroshima was space for the source of destruction – the United States of America, the government that made the decision to drop the atomic bomb. In 1946, when the U.S. sponsored research institute, the Atomic Bomb Causality Commission, was built in Hiroshima, survivors of atomic bomb visited ABCC desperately seeking a treatment for aftereffect of exposure to radiation. Hope was resulted in disappointment when the survivors learned that ABCC is a research institute to measure the impact of nuclear weapon, as the government that used the atomic bomb not knowing what exactly the impact would be. ABCC was physically in Hiroshima, but never was a part of recovery. In the process of national reconstruction from the war, the voices of Hiroshima was altered, responsibility neglected, and the structure of destruction left untouched. Destruction of Hiroshima indeed was an opportunity for new normal, which is pacifist Japan. Good or bad, however, it is interesting that in the resilient city of Hiroshima, there is a total absence of the perpetrator.

¹ Vale, Lawrence J. and Thomas J. Campanella. 2005. “Introduction: The Cities Rise Again” P12 in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, New York: Oxford University Press.

² Vale, Lawrence J. and Thomas J. Campanella. 2005. “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience ” P340 in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, New York: Oxford University Press.

³ *Ibid.*, p337

Kabul 2004 was a different. On the first day in Kabul, I was briefed by senior official of Japanese Embassy and told that never get near the U.S. Embassy. He also made it clear that no U.S. citizens are not allowed in our house. Later on, driver secretly took me to the driving tour and we passed by U.S. embassy compound. As far as I saw, the U.S. embassy compound was one of the most heavily guarded area in Kabul.

In Kabul, the U.S. presence is visible, unlike Hiroshima. The U.S. is by far the largest donor and president Karzai is a citizen of the U.S. However, at the same time, the U.S. is not clearly welcomed. They are so unwelcomed that they need to block themselves in the compound with heavy security where the U.K. and Japanese embassy only has a gate with guards. And other embassy workers such as Japanese are not even allowed to get to the area where the U.S. embassy is.

Trying to put Hiroshima and Kabul into the framework presented by *The Resilient City*, I ponder on the place of perpetrators in the resilient city. Making peace with, ignoring, or hating for what it did? Deciding *what* is the source of destruction and *where* is the place for it in the city is also a part of constructing “new normal.”