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Human Rights, Popoki and Bare Life

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The theme of this year's IPE was 'Human Rights Learning as Peace Education: Pursuing Democracy in a Time of Crisis,' and participation gave me an opportunity to explore further the relationship between human rights learning and my work for peace with the Popoki Peace Project. In particular, it raised questions about human rights and human rights learning in the context of the so-called "zones of exception," those bare life zones¹ and "othered" places that provide evidence for governments and concerned citizens alike that good governance and democracy are necessary and desirable. Some scholars suggest that NGOs and others engaged in humanitarian action play an important role in the creation of such zones, although one can hardly think they do so

¹ Agamben discusses bare life zones in terms of homo sacer: "One of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics ...is its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside...separating life from death in order to identify a new living dead man, a new sacred man. (Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p.131).. Agamben 1998:131)

intentionally.² (See for example Duffield, 2008). In our commitment to human rights learning, do we fall into that category? In reflection, I realized that if we are to engage in critical human rights learning, we need to be critical of ourselves and the way humanitarian efforts, our own included, often serve to replicate many of the contradictions they seek to solve.

The symbol of the Popoki Peace Project is that cat Popoki, who also serves as the catalyst and energy behind the Project. Our work takes a holistic approach to peace, seeking to be a celebration of life and diversity, and emphasizing the use of our entire bodies to imagine, express and create peace. The presence of Popoki reminds us that life is not exclusively human and communication is more than the use of human languages, while at the same time encouraging us to explore all of the modes of expression available to us as humans. Popoki of course is not human, and communicates in different ways. His presence helps to politicize the borders of human and non-human life, as well as human diversity and difference. In our work with Popoki, we aim to not only look from the outside to find the ways in which bodies, human and otherwise, are understood, governed and controlled but also from the inside, to see what kinds of expression are possible.

In the following pages, I will use Popoki and the work of the Popoki Peace Project to suggest some ways to take a critical look at human rights learning from the perspective of biopolitics, bodies and life. As I am interested in the interstices of the personal and political, the essay will make use of story-telling as a technique for expression; a story of Popoki and human rights will be used to pose the questions of most concern. The first part of this essay will look at the way Popoki first became directly involved in human rights learning through a human rights poster project, and relate the story of his posters. As this experience provided the basis for my workshop at IPE, a brief description of that workshop will also be included. The next part will be a consideration of the questions raised by the story, primarily in the context of biopolitics and bare life. In so doing, I will attempt to expose some of the contradictions that not only underlie human rights in today's world, but are often replicated in humanitarian efforts for human rights learning and work for peace, democracy and social justice. It will also expose the tension between the need for theory and analysis and the needs of people, particularly those in bare life zones, to survive. The essay will conclude with a story about a Hiroshima *hibakusha* (a-bomb survivor). Her story reflects the

² See for example Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008).

meaning of the above discussion for further work in human rights learning in general, and the Popoki Peace Project in particular.

THE POPOKI PEACE PROJECT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Popoki Peace Project³ is a grass roots effort in Japan which uses *Popoki's Peace Books*⁴ to question and politicize the meaning of peace, and to encourage people to find and implement ways to be involved in peace-making. Using a dialogic methodology, the Project seeks to create learning spaces that are inclusive and democratic 'oases of peace' in which not only critical thinking, but also critical imagination and expressions of peace can occur. Ultimately, it is hoped that the experience gained in these oases of peace will be taken back and incorporated into the lives and work of each individual and community, contributing on many levels to the building of a culture of peace.

Human rights are an essential aspect of a culture of peace, and as such, respect for human rights has from the beginning been a basic component of the work of the Popoki Peace Project. The idea of creating inclusive and democratic spaces for peace learning relies on an understanding of human rights and commitment to their implementation. However, the first work of the Project in direct relation to human rights learning as such was through my participation in the creation of a poster exhibit in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.⁵ The poster exhibition is comprised of 31 posters, one for each of the thirty articles of the Declaration and one with the text of the Preamble, including the phonetic reading of all the Chinese characters to make it accessible to children and others who may not have fluency in reading Japanese. The other thirty posters contain the text of each Article and an illustration by one of six local artists. The title for each Article is a simplified version of the text, easily read and understood by primary school children, and includes an English translation. Below each illustration is the full text. I was asked to make posters to illustrate four articles: Articles 4 (Slavery is despicable), 11 (All are presumed innocent until proved guilty), 14 (Seeking refuge abroad is also a right) and 20 (Freedom both to get together and to stay home). (*See Appendix*)

³ See for example, Ronni Alexander, "Popoki, What Color is Peace? Exploring critical approaches to thinking, imagining and expressing peace with the cat, Popoki," *In Factis Pax*, Volume 2 Number 2 (2008), pp. 211-228. http://www.infactispax.org/Volume_special_IJPE/Alexander.pdf

⁴ Ronni Alexander, *Popoki, What Color is Peace? Popoki's Peace Book 1* (Kobe: Epic 2007) and *Popoki, What Color is Friendship? Popoki's Peace Book 2* (Kobe: Epic 2009).

⁵ This poster exhibit was created by the *Yasashii kara Hito desu Ten Part 20* Committee in cooperation with Hyogo Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Institute 2008

In the process of creating these posters, I made two important discoveries. One was that I found my understanding was greatly enhanced when I created a story about the meaning of each Article as presented in its simplified form. The other was that I was only able to make these four posters after first using the four themes to create a story that was meaningful for me. In creating that story, I moved from being a spectator of human rights to an actor in my own story about human rights. In creating my story, I made changes, including the order in which I used the Articles. Unknowingly, I was engaging in the aesthetics of the oppressed; the experience allowed me to further develop my metaphoric world – to think, imagine, dream, create parables, and to distance myself sufficiently from the reality of what I know as ‘human rights’ to allow me to be critical.⁶

POPOKI’S HUMAN RIGHTS STORY

Slavery is despicable, and here are the slave cats, chained and threatened by their guard cat. These are the bare life cats; existing in the space of sovereign exception, invisible and without value to the world outside the wall, where we see the dancing, playing carefree cats. The technology of government based on liberalism and a doctrine of human rights, has made slavery illegal, and all people (but not cats) have the right to seek refuge abroad. Some of the stronger cats are able to break their chains and escape over the wall, leaving the world of exception behind and enabling them (if they survive) to try to exercise their right to seek refuge. In this story, some are successful and they are welcomed with open paws, and given food and shelter. (What happens after this first warm welcome is a matter for discussion. Will they be judged suitable for welcome, detained, or sent back to the world from which they have so recently escaped? They are, after all, not human...). The smaller, weaker cats remain chained and beaten, and seem to have been forgotten in the jubilation over the escape of their companions. Do some strong cats stay behind to help their weaker friends? Do the ones who escaped revel in their own good fortune and leave the others to their fate? Do they escape, but then lobby for the release of their companions? If they raise their voices to reveal the ‘truth’ about the zone of exception they have left behind, does anybody listen? Do they change their stories in order to get an audience? Does anybody care? They are, after all, not human....

No answers are provided here to these questions, but they provide the basis for the next poster: the right to get together and to stay home. Here, cats have gathered in front of the wall in

⁶ Augusto Boal, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. Translated by Adrian Jackson. (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pg.41.

protest of the slavery within. Popoki leads the march and there, in the gray zone between inclusion and exclusion, he is arrested and taken away. Many of his friends have also gathered; others choose to stay home. Perhaps they are involved in this protest in other ways, perhaps not. We do not know what happens after Popoki's arrest; the success or failure of their efforts is again a subject for discussion and conjecture. Perhaps his fate remains on the front pages of newspapers; perhaps it is never mentioned and he just disappears.

In my story, Popoki does have a trial, which is the subject of the final poster. This depicts his right to be considered innocent until proven otherwise. In the happy ending of this particular tale, Popoki is released and celebrates his freedom joyfully. Why did the tiny judge in his huge chair release him? Was he just lucky? What will he do with his regained freedom? We are left to create and re-create our own endings for this story.

POPOKI'S HUMAN RIGHTS WORKSHOP

When I was asked to present a workshop on human rights and posters at IIFE, the experience of questioning and story-telling in the context of creating the human rights posters was still fresh and I wanted to find a way to share it with others in the context of human rights learning. Since my work centers on Popoki, he would of course have to be present at the workshop. His presence would not only make it easier to raise human/non-human life issues, but in the context of the work of the Popoki Peace Project, the use of Popoki would allow for emphasis on creative imagination and expression.

As workshop participants tend to emphasize verbal communication, I needed to find a gentle and interesting way to emphasize forms of non-verbal expression without denying words. The solution was to use *kamishibai*, a story-telling technique from Japan in which the story-teller stands behind or next to picture boards (traditionally in a special story-telling frame), and the attention of the listener is focused on the pictures. This technique is still used frequently today in schools and other situations where stories are told to groups of children. I learned about *kamishibai* techniques from a traditional story-teller.⁷ For my workshop, I used a variation on his work, asking participants to make a five-page 'silent *kamishibai*.' They were given the option of providing a

⁷ My interest in *kamishibai* came originally from *Musubi*, a group of former homeless men who perform wonderful original stories. Later, I was introduced to Yuji YASUNO, a master who gives performances at the Kyoto International Manga Museum. Yasuno-san also runs workshops for children where he has them make individual *kamishibai*. Yasuno-san began his work in the days when licensed *kamishibai* masters performed on street corners for the local children. This is no longer practiced.

title for their work, but otherwise no words were to be used in the story. In this way, emphasis was shifted from the words to other modes of expression. The five-page length requirement may at first seem like a lot of pages for a limited time. In fact, it is an easy number to work with; the first page is for the title/introduction and the fifth for the ending/conclusion. That leaves three pages, or three steps, for the body of the story. In the IIPE workshop, I asked participants to work in groups to create a story about human rights and added the further requirements that Popoki be present in some form and that the story contain a critical, open-ended question. It was hoped that the questions raised would then lead to further discussion of the issues raised and provide another layer of human rights learning which would continue after the end of the workshop. Needless to say, the first half of the workshop involved exercises in preparation for the creation of the *kamishibai* including the introduction of Popoki and the work of the Project, and group exercises to help participants think more deeply about human rights.

I believe the workshop itself was both enjoyable and a learning experience for all of us. In this workshop, as well as subsequent similar ones held in Japan, participants struggled with the requirement that they not use words, and also had difficulty with the final open-ended question. Partly this is a function of not having sufficient time, but I think it also speaks to how difficult it is to break away from our reliance on words. Moreover, it shows how difficult it is, even for experienced and dedicated people, to be critical of something which we firmly believe to be good: the importance and value of human rights.

BIOPOLITICS, STORIES AND BARE LIFE

As indicated above, in the course of making my contribution to the poster exhibit, I was very impressed by the experience of story creation, both in the ways in which I found myself being led by my story, rather than leading it myself and in the way the story-telling process encouraged me to engage in critical thinking. From the beginning I planned to have my posters feature Popoki, so I knew that in the creation of the posters I would on some level have to grapple with the issue of human/non-human rights. Is Popoki merely a substitute human, a cat in human clothes or something else? Does the presence of Popoki, rather than a human figure, allow us to tell this story not only as it is outlined above, but also perhaps in the context of the abuse of nature? Can the natural world and environment escape from enslavement by humans in zealous pursuit of ‘development’? How does the idea of bare life in which freedom for some is contingent on continued enslavement for others apply to the non-human inhabitants? What is the meaning of the

human/non-human line in a world where bioscience is bringing radical changes in the ways we think about life in general and human life in particular? In the context of the posters, if the area within the wall represents bare life, is there any place for human (and perhaps animal) rights either within or outside? What possibilities are there for resistance within and without? Can the enslavers within the walled area be put on trial from without, and if so, how might that occur? Is it possible that they might have a fair trial within, and if so, in what ways must conditions change in order for that to happen?

It is clear that the creation and telling of Popoki's story has enabled me to create a whole range of difficult and important questions which I cannot hope to answer in these pages. I include them more to demonstrate the power of stories to help us think in new and different directions, and to suggest some of the issues that might be addressed in this context. At the same time, as here we are looking at the question of human rights and zones of exception, let us take a deeper look at the idea of bare life and biopolitics.

Unlike Popoki, who is interested in the ways individuals act upon their environment, Michel Foucault and others following him are primarily interested in populations and the political techniques and practices that comprise the art of government. At the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault discusses bio-power, and looks briefly at the way in which natural life began to be incorporated in the mechanisms of state power, turning politics into 'biopolitics.' Here he holds that when the fate of the species is dependent on a society's own political strategies, that society can be said to have crossed the 'threshold of modernity.' "Man," says Foucault, was for millennia "a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; (but) modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question."⁸ In other words, modernity begins with the incorporation of the biological into the political, when "the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death."⁹ Although the concept remained undeveloped, Foucault was interested in the ways in which biological life or the 'state of population' has become a problem of sovereign power and of the art of government. This, he claims, makes it "possible to both protect life and to authorize a holocaust."¹⁰ Wars, says Foucault, "are waged on behalf of the existence of

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley, (Penguin Books, 1976), p.143.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.138

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*. Michel Senellart, ed., translated by Graham Burchell. (Palgrave/MacMillan, 2009). Cited in *op. cit.*

everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital.”¹¹ Patel and McMichael applied this thinking to colonialism, describing it in terms of the exclusive sovereignty over biological and political existence.¹² Colonial practice relied on biopolitics, forcing people to change their behavior, dress, knowledge, ways of communication, work and other ways of engaging with the world. Development was an integral part of colonialism for both colonizer and colonized. Even in the post-colonial condition, development has continued to be subsumed within this sovereign right of exception, the ‘right’ to both destroy and protect life, “assigning statuses that are despised, dispossessed and, as Agamben would describe these, ‘bare’.”¹³

The value of the work of Foucault and others in the context of this essay is to expose the contradictions of liberal technologies of government that violate human rights with impunity, while at the same time insisting that human rights be protected and maintained. This work does not offer any solutions, or at least any immediate ones, although Patel and McMichael express their hope for the global justice movement. Similarly, in a short essay on human rights, Foucault exhorts that, “The will of individuals must make a place for itself in a reality of which governments have attempted to reserve a monopoly for themselves, that monopoly which we need to wrest from them little by little and day by day.”¹⁴ Popoki, as a critical and expressive cat, invites his friends to join him in engaging in this struggle

Following Foucault, many scholars have taken up this question of biopolitics and modern societies which, in becoming managers of life, have at the same time become managers of death and destruction. It is this management of both life and death that allows for societies where human rights are protected to exist simultaneously with zones of exception where very existence is denied. As indicated earlier, Giorgio Agamben discusses this in terms of bare life zones of exception, while Duffield looks at the role of surplus life in the context of the liberal problematic of development,

Agamben, p.3.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* Foucault 1976, p.137

¹² Rajeey Patel and Philip McMichael, “Third Worldism and the lineages of global fascism: the regrouping of the global South in the neoliberal era.” *Third World Quarterly* Vol.25, No.1, 2004, pp.231-254.

¹³ Sylvester, Christine. “Bare life as a development/postcolonial problematic.” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol.172, No.1, March 2006, pp.67.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power: essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol.3, Faubion, James., ed. (Penguin Books, 1994), p.745.

discussing the ways in which liberalism serves to reproduce emergencies and zones of exception. Judith Butler looks at the problem in terms of precarious life and grievability. Here we will ask whether one can both acknowledge bare life and recognize the possibility for life within bare life zones. From the perspective of the individual, bare life can be death, but it can also be bare life as life, and as living.

Giorgio Agamben describes a politics of sovereign exception which allows for the construction of bare life zones of 'homo sacer,' "a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide. *The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere.*"¹⁵ In homo sacer, there is no justice or hope, and individuals' lives can be taken without a need for justification. For Agamben, the extreme example of this are the Nazi concentration camps, described as the "pure space of exception."¹⁶ In 'homo sacer,' there is no convergence between the biopolitics of bare life and the ideal of human rights as expressed in liberalism; rather it is the exclusion of "exception" that allows for "the rule" of human rights to be applied to those on the inside.

Homo sacer, or bare life, reflects the way in which biopolitics forms both the strength and the contradiction of modern democracy; democracy places bare life at the core of each individual body. Such bodies, as sovereign subjects and bearers of rights, "can only be constituted as such through the repetition of the sovereign exception and the isolation of the ... bare life in himself."¹⁷ Bodies become what is at stake in political conflict, and it is only through the defining of the exception that democracy and human rights can assume their present form. Patel and McMichael discuss this in relation to decolonization, suggesting that "colonized subjects appropriated the democratic discourse of the colonizers in fuelling their independence movements," and newly established states appropriated the legitimating ideals of the development era through such claims for equality as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They note that in making states the exclusive guardians of human rights, the UN was sanctioning a form of biopolitics and sovereignty which originated under colonial rule.¹⁸

Foucault and Agamben are concerned with the processes of power over life. Returning once more to the posters, this 'power over life' became a central question as my story of cat oppression

¹⁵ *Op. Cit.* Agamben, p.83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Agamben, p.124.

¹⁸ *Op. Cit.* Patel and McMichael, p.241.

and liberation took me to the borders of the realm of sovereign exception in both a human and non-human context. In particular, it raised for me three questions: (1) Are there distinguishable borders outlining where bare life begins and ends? (2) To what extent are those borders permeable? Is it possible to both go in and come out? (3) Is bare life truly devoid of all emotion and expression, human or otherwise? For Agamben, the decisive moment in modernity occurred when natural life (*zoe*) began to enter the sphere of the political life (*polis*), but this is a purely human biopolitics.¹⁹ The homo sacer of concentration camps is devoid of many kinds of life. If a clear distinction between human and non-human life is maintained, there is perhaps no need to consider the condition of non-human life in the context of human bare life. However, if we suggest that certainly outside of the zones of exception, non-human life is an integral part of human life, then perhaps we must also pay attention to the relationship between human bare life and the life of the rest of the living world.

It is here that another possible connection can be found between human rights defined in terms of human dignity and the essence of our existence as human beings, and biopolitics in the form of what Didier Fassin terms ‘biolegitimacy,’ or recognition of the value of life itself.²⁰ Fassin is interested in why some lives are saved and others not, and distinguishes between what he terms the ‘power of life’ or biolegitimacy from Foucault’s concept of bio-power or power over life. The idea of biolegitimacy allows us to focus on the quality of particular lives, rather than on the manipulation of life itself in the political arena. Fassin uses this idea to discuss humanitarian assistance, a mechanism of government which is based on particular kinds of biological fragility (disease, bio-contamination, particular physical threats to survival, etc.) and legitimated through the right to survival/life. This biological fragility becomes in turn the basis for not only continued existence (as the threat is removed and/or treatment provided) but also the basis for legitimate citizenship (biocitizenship) in a new society. This idea of biolegitimacy adds another dimension to our discussion, in that it recognizes certain types of vulnerability and conditions under which it might be possible for individuals to move from zones of exception into zones of life. This thinking can be applied to why some receive refugee status and others are denied, or to the fate of those who donate organs and/or are trafficked. Yet it, too, fails to deal adequately with the question of borders; the area where one zone ends and the other begins.

A further hint comes from Judith Butler and her discussion of precarious life, vulnerability

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Agamben, pp.2-4.

²⁰ Didier Fassin, “Another Politics of Life is Possible.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2009, Vol.26 (5): p.50.

and grievability. Butler begins her consideration of biopolitics and power over life with the idea that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living.”²¹ Determinations of who deserves to be grieved and in what ways, and who does not deserve such recognition reveals aspects of power over life and death. They also entail recognition of precariousness and precarity of life, where the former refers to the vulnerability of all life and the latter to the politically created circumstances under which certain lives are put at risk.²² Here Butler is dealing with not only power over life, but also power of life. As such, her thinking conveys for me the possibility of a flexibility and dynamism absent from Agamben and Fassin. In addition, the idea of grievability provides a way to respond to some of the questions about human and non-human lives. It can, for example, explain why many environmentalists in perfectly good faith and with great dedication work to preserve the lives of certain species such as whales or polar bears, while at the same time completely ignoring the plethora of insects that become extinct practically every day. Relative grievability might also be a factor in the tendency of the media to focus on particular animals rather than humans in situations of disaster, such as the attention paid to pandas in the recent Sichuan earthquake. This is not to suggest that attention should not be paid to animals; Popoki would never forgive me! Rather, it helps to explain the possibility for animals beyond the zones of exception to co-exist in zones of human bare life.

Within bare life, it may, under certain circumstances and in certain capacities, be possible to create ‘zones of exception’ within the zones of exception for humans as well as animals; life and liberation may indeed be possible even under the most difficult of circumstances. The introduction of the idea of liberation within this context in some ways takes us back to the fundamentals of liberalism and democracy. As we have seen, the creation of, and respect for, human rights is based on a liberal technique of government which establishes the separation of the citizen and sovereign subject and the ‘rules’ to which Agamben’s ‘exception’ applies.

Christine Sylvester considers how bare life politics continue in post-colonial transitions and in development in Africa. In post-colonial settings, the rights of the now independent citizen/subject may continue to be threatened. She describes the case of one AIDS patient who, unable to access proper medication, succumbs to the disease joyful in the knowledge he will be spared death by the “chop of a triumphant machete.” This story shows how, even in the homo sacer, it is possible to experience bare life as life through the substitution of one biopolitics for

²¹ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), p.1.

²² *Ibid*, p.25.

another.²³ Of course, in the homo sacer, the far more frequent experience is of bare life as death; in Rwanda, for example, "...the fate of girls depends on the perceived identities and politics of their families...biopolitics all the way down."²⁴

The assertion of the possibility of experiencing bare life as life, rather than as death or perhaps nothingness, is an assertion of the possibility for liberation; a claim to the legitimacy and value of life where no such claims are perceived or recognized. It is here that we return to Popoki and human rights. Popoki, in urging the use of not only our minds but our bodies and entire range of sensibilities, is suggesting liberation from a biopolitics of separation of mind and body. In applying this to human rights learning, he is seeking transformation through breaking the bonds of the liberal tradition in which human rights were created. He is asserting bare life as life in the intellectual bare life that denies validity to those who engage in other forms of expression and those who do not qualify for 'citizenship' in that world. He is, in the words of a philosopher from a very different genre, urging people to engage in acts of 'trespassing.' Augusto Boal urges that, "If we do not trespass (not necessarily violently), if we do not go beyond our cultural norms, our state of oppression, the limits imposed upon us, even the law itself (which should be transformed) – if we do not trespass in this we can never be free. To free ourselves is to trespass, and to transform. It is through a creation of the new that that which has not yet existed begins to exist. To free yourself is to trespass. To trespass is to exist. To free ourselves is to exist. To free yourself is to exist."²⁵

Here is another story about Popoki, trespassing and the potential for freeing oneself and for bare life as life. One time, Popoki met a man working with children in his country, Liberia. After meeting and getting to know Popoki, the man asked whether it would be possible to take Popoki home with him. His reason was both simple and radical. The children he worked with, he said, have never known peace. They have never experienced it; their parents do not know what it is; they have no knowledge of, or experience with, the concept and/or reality of peace. How can those children, in the homo sacer of their everyday lives, learn to do anything other than recreate the violence into which they have been born? Popoki, he said, might provide them with a clue for taking the first step toward bare life as life or perhaps even bare life as living.

²³ *Op. Cit.*, Sylvester, p.73.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.74.

²⁵ Augusto Boal, *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp.xxi-xxii.

CONCLUSION: CROSSING THE BORDERS OF BARE LIFE

In looking at human rights in the context of biopolitics, we have seen that human rights exist in their denial; the unpunishability of killing and the ban on sacrifice lie at the base of homo sacer and the ability of modern governments to at the same time protect and destroy. We have seen this repeated when colonized territories attain independence and take up the sovereign entitlement of exception, often incorporated in the rhetoric of ‘development.’ Moreover, it has been suggested that in our own work for human rights, we are at risks of inadvertently re-creating zones of exception even as we try to change them.

Human rights and human rights learning are possible outside of the ‘zones of exclusion,’ but what about inside? Agamben’s portrayal of homo sacer allows for bare life as death, but not for bare life as life. If, however, we accept the possibility of bare life as life, then we find areas within bare life for possible transformation and liberation. Here we suggest that Popoki, in blurring the distinctions between human and non-human and posing the possibility for critical imagination and expression, offers one possible tool for creating the space for such transformations. This potential exists in the physical space of bare life, but perhaps is more visible and more easily achieved in the intellectual spaces of bare life that exist in the academy, and perhaps even in those of mass culture.

We will conclude with a final story, one that gives both hope and reason for despair. It is a story about a woman who has been a friend and strong supporter of Popoki (and Ronni) for many years. Her name is Suzuko NUMATA.²⁶ Numata-san was twenty-one years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and on that day, she lost her left leg and her innocence. On the same day, although she did not know it at the time, her fiancé was killed on the front lines in China. She says that for the first two years after the bombing she was so filled with hate that it began to take over her entire person. Then she met the *aogiri* (Chinese parasol tree), a tree that like Numata-san had been so poisoned and disfigured by the bomb that it was not expected to survive...but it did. Seeing the green shoots beginning to form on the tree gave Numata-san the hope she needed to begin to start her life again. It took a long time, but she really did learn not to hate. When asked why it was possible, she replied, “I don’t know why I survived when everyone else was killed, but there has to be a reason. As long as I am alive, I have to work to prevent this

²⁶ I first met Numata-san in 1978. She is the first hibakusha with whom I truly became close, and over the years she has been like an older sister, inspirational, strict and always there for me. Read more of her story in Diana Wickes Roose, *Teach Us to Live: Stories from Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, (Pasadena: Intentional Productions, 2007).

from happening again. My life was spared so I can work to make the world a better place.”²⁷

Numata-san’s story is one of human dignity. As the ‘enemy’ in the context of US strategic bombing in WWII, her life was expendable. As it turns out, she remained a number on the list of the survivors rather than on that of the victims, but in fact, no one knows the exact numbers of those incinerated in the ‘homo sacer’ that was Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the face of the horror of surviving nuclear attack, Numata-san’s story of overcoming hatred and ultimately of forgiveness inspires us with hope. At the same time, as becomes clear below, when Numata-san began to share stories not only of her own pain, but that others, she encountered bare life in a different form in the creation of a peace discourse which privileges one type of victim over another.

Her story continues. In the course of our conversation that day, I told Numata-san about a documentary about children in Vietnam I had seen recently. Even three and four generations later, children are still being born with serious birth defects as a result of dioxide poisoning from defoliants used during the Vietnam War. Numata-san said she knew about the problem and had visited a museum in Vietnam, where she took many photos of deformed fetuses. Then she told me how she had brought them with her to a talk she was giving to high school students in Tokyo because she wanted them to learn not only about radiation poisoning, but about other kinds of poisons, too. When she began to show the photos, the principal rushed over and told her to stop. He said, “We want to learn about how you suffered in the war, not about these other things.”

This principal, in asking Numata-san to speak, was recognizing the grievability of the *hibakusha* and appreciating their lives. At the same time, he was re-creating zones of exception through not extending that recognition to other victims of ‘extraordinary’ weapons and biotoxins. In so doing he was both denying, and re-creating, bare life.

A long time ago, I asked Numata-san why she liked Popoki. She replied that in addition to her love of cats, she spoke to many groups of children about her experiences. It is difficult for the children to relate to experiences that happened so long ago in a world so different from their own. Popoki helps her to convey to them her most urgent message: the importance of life, friendship, respect for one another and being at peace with oneself, nature and the world. For Numata-san, life is important, even in the bare life zones of homo sacer. Her work shows us that it might be possible to have bare life as life, and perhaps bare life as living.

Taking inspiration from people like Numata-san, Popoki continues in his journey to discover

²⁷ Quoted from a conversation with Suzuko Numata and Marie Tsuruda at Numata’s home in Hiroshima on 27 August 2009.

hope, and in so doing celebrate life as living, and as life.

APPENDIX

The four human rights posters, shown in the order used in Popoki's story.



1. Article 4: Slavery is despicable



2. Article 14: Seeking refuge abroad is also a right



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3. Article 20: Freedom to both get together and to stay at home 4. Article 11: All are presumed innocent until proved guilty

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