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A victims' movement against the termination of housing support for voluntary evacuees

AYAKA LÖSCHKE 

Abstract: After the Fukushima nuclear disaster, more than 50,000 people moved from irradiated areas without being ordered to do so by the government. They are called 'voluntary evacuees'. Because they received very little compensation, a government policy to provide rent-free public housing units has been a lifeline for about 25,000 voluntary evacuees. However, the housing support expired on 31 March 2017. Based on sixty semi-structured, problem-centred interviews, this article provides an analysis of the victims' movement against the termination of the housing support. After explaining the development of the movement over the past six years, from mobilization of third-party supporters on behalf of victims to victims' strong commitment, this article analyses why this movement had only limited success. It is argued that (1) the absence of litigation and early access to officials hampered mobilization of other victims and third-party supporters; (2) bureaucratic conciliatory measures and the victims' faith in the government's benevolence limited political opportunities for the victims; and that (3) the framing process of the victims' movement encountered severe difficulties in developing shared collective identities of the victims and facilitating rights assertions by the victims.

Keywords: voluntary evacuees, Fukushima, nuclear disaster, social movement, victims' movement

Introduction

A new term was coined a few months after the meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant: *jishu hinansha*. The term translates to 'voluntary evacuees' and it refers to people who moved from irradiated areas without being ordered to do so by the government after the nuclear disaster. The government applied a standard of twenty millisieverts (20 mSv) as the annual

radiation exposure limit, to create a range of evacuation zones and compensation packages for nuclear disaster victims. This decision to raise the exposure limit to a level twenty times higher than the former standard of one millisievert, a decision made within a month of the meltdown, created growing public distrust, although the government regarded the decision as ‘rational’ (*gōriteki*), insofar as it was based on a recommendation published by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP).¹ Most residents of areas where the annual radiation exposure was estimated at even only slightly less than 20 mSv a year stayed at home. Some, however, moved from irradiated areas without being ordered to do so by the government. Because the government provided rent-free public housing units for both compulsory evacuees (*kyōsei hinansha*) and voluntary evacuees who moved from Fukushima prefecture to other prefectures, most voluntary evacuees left Fukushima prefecture, while only a few moved within Fukushima prefecture.²

This housing support was very important for voluntary evacuees because they received little or no compensation. Compulsory evacuees who moved from the difficult-to-return zones, where annual radiation exposure was estimated at more than 50 mSv per year, received more than 150 million yen in some cases (Reconstruction Agency 2015a, p. 27). In contrast, voluntary evacuees received on average roughly 1.6 million yen per household in one lump sum (Yoshida 2016, p. 102). Put simply, compulsory evacuees received about one hundred times more compensation as voluntary evacuees. Another paper in this collection describes the former as ‘nuclear aristocrats’; the latter may equally be described as the nuclear proletariat.

Apart from the compensation, however, the government also paid about eight billion yen per year for housing support and provided 9,261 rent-free public housing units for about 25,000 voluntary evacuees (Mainichi Shinbun 2015a; Hino 2016, p. 191). The housing support was a ‘lifeline’ (*inochi zuna*) for the residents because most of them lacked the financial resources to rent private apartments (Yoshida 2016, p. 191–196). To demand the extension of housing support, third-party supporters launched a social movement in November 2012 on behalf of voluntary evacuees who could not afford to be involved themselves. Nevertheless, on 15 June 2015, it was declared that the housing support would expire on 31 March 2017. After that, voluntary evacuees started to take the lead in the social movement for housing support, which began to take on the character of a victims’ movement led by the victims themselves (*tōjisha undō*).

The termination of housing support was in accordance with the government’s intention to accelerate the reconstruction of Fukushima prefecture and to urge voluntary evacuees to return there. The government has more openly declared this intention since the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) returned to power in December 2012 and the reconstruction of Fukushima

prefecture became vital to the success of the 2020 Summer Olympics (LDP 2013, p. 10). Voluntary evacuees responded by starting a victims' movement in May 2015 with the help of third-party supporters who had begun lobbying to support voluntary evacuees since June 2011 (Löscke 2018). Having footholds in two national organizations of nuclear disaster evacuees (the Liaison Conference of Nuclear Disaster Victims and the National Association of Evacuees to Demand the Right to Evacuate), voluntary evacuees conducted intense lobbying of national and local government officials. However, the movement failed to prevent the government from terminating housing support: nor has it persuaded the government to restore it subsequently.

This article examines the voluntary evacuees' movement. How did it emerge? How has it been transformed? Why has the movement not been more successful? It contributes to research into victims' social movements that started in the 1980s and was revived by Celeste L. Arrington (Upham 1987; Feldman 2000; Arrington 2016). My main methodology is qualitative analysis, underpinned by social movement theory. The research is based on data that I collected during fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 in which I conducted semi-structured, problem-centred interviews³ with twenty-one voluntary evacuees and forty of their third-party supporters. Thirteen voluntary evacuees were in the Kansai region (Kyoto and Osaka prefectures), two in the Tōkai region (Shizuoka and Aichi prefectures), two in the Chūgoku region (Okayama prefecture), two in the Kyushu region (Kumamoto and Fukuoka prefectures), one in the Kanto region (Saitama prefecture), and one in Hokkaido.⁴ Twenty-six third-party supporters were in the Kanto region (Tokyo, Saitama, and Chiba prefectures), five in the Kansai region (Kyoto, Osaka, and Shiga prefectures), and nine in the Tōkai region (Shizuoka prefecture).

Before I analyse the social movement of the voluntary evacuees as a victims' movement, it is important to reflect on the very notion of voluntary evacuees, and describe which people I grouped under this term. This will also help the reader to see why it is warranted to analyse the movement as a *victims'* movement.

Voluntary evacuees as victims

A diverse range of people who were affected by the nuclear disaster can be divided primarily into voluntary evacuees and compulsory evacuees. The popular view among Japanese people is that voluntary evacuees chose to leave freely and do not return out of personal preference, while compulsory evacuees were forced to leave and cannot go back, and that voluntary evacuees should take 'self-responsibility' (*jiko sekinin*) for their voluntary evacuation. In other words, they should not depend on government support, because they moved unnecessarily and 'arbitrarily' (*katte-ni*). This view is rooted in the 'discourse of self-

responsibility' that has continued since the Japanese government started to steer its policies in a neoliberal direction in the 1990s.⁵ But these views seem highly simplified. Most voluntary evacuees do not feel that they chose to leave freely. They have a sense of victimhood, because they became furious when the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) refused them sufficient compensation, forcing them to evacuate suddenly and reluctantly.

Concerning the family structure of voluntary evacuees, there is a distinct type, the so-called '*boshi hinansha*', a term that refers to both single mothers and families with small children who moved from irradiated districts without their husbands (and primary breadwinners). There are no data on the percentage of such families among voluntary evacuees, but a mother who evacuated to Sapporo explained during a meeting held in the Diet members' office building on 9 June 2015, that immediately after the nuclear disaster, 70 to 80 per cent of about 1,200 voluntary evacuees living in Sapporo consisted of families where the husband had stayed behind, declining to 60 per cent as of June 2015 because some husbands had joined their wives and children in the interim (UPLAN 2015). The emergence of *boshi hinansha* reflects the determination of mothers to protect their children from radiation, even at the cost of breaking up the family.

Concerning their motives, voluntary evacuees can be primarily divided into three groups: (1) people who had a strong personal conviction about the health risks from radiation; (2) people who moved from irradiated areas on other people's advice (primarily family members' advice), without a strong personal conviction; and (3) people who had been vaguely thinking about returning to their hometowns, or that of their parents, even before the nuclear disaster. For example, a mother who moved from the north-western part of Chiba prefecture, a radiation hotspot, to Kumamoto prefecture belongs to the third group of voluntary evacuees. Even before the nuclear disaster, she had tired of urban life and had hoped to live in the countryside (written interview, 12 March 2015).

Regardless of their different motives, almost all members of the three groups of voluntary evacuees have a sense of victimhood, because they feel that they were forced to move and had to struggle to rebuild their lives in new places. They left their irradiated homelands in a hurry, without the necessary preparations: for example, without having secured employment in their new place. However, nearly all those who became politically active were members of the first group of voluntary evacuees.

Victims' movements in Japan

'*Tōjisha*' (lit. 'directly affected people') have often been called 'victims' in English-language literature. The translation of '*tōjisha*' as 'victim' might appear

problematic. 'Victim' has a negative connotation, implying people who have been stripped of agency and control, whereas *tōjisha* has a quite positive connotation in the research context of social movements in Japan, insofar as it refers to agents who are seeking redress for damage on their own initiative. However, voluntary evacuees sometimes refer to themselves as *'higai tōjisha'* (lit. 'directly victimized people') which has a similar nuance to the English term 'victim'. So the translation of *'tōjisha'* to 'victims' seems warranted.

Victims have gained recognition as key players in Japan's changing social movements insofar as they have often influenced the government policy (Upham 1987; Feldman 2000; Arrington 2016). Social movements in post-war Japan have undergone considerable changes. Mass protests against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s intensified grass roots activism (Sasaki-Uemura 2001; Avenell 2010). International norms enforced social movements for human rights from the 1970s onwards (Gelb 2003; Chan-Tiberghien 2004; Flowers 2009). Consumer movements and anti-nuclear movements, which reached a peak in the early 1990s, succeeded in recruiting housewives in urban areas who had not previously been politically active (Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998; Maclachlan 2002; Hasegawa 2004). Many scholars focus on such changes and the potential of Japanese social movements. However, LeBlanc (1999, 2009) argues that most Japanese people have been alienated from politics, and Pekkanen (2006, p. 21) points out that social movements have not been able to influence government policy significantly because they have failed to establish a solid organizational structure. Even so, victims' movements, especially anti-pollution movements, which reached a peak in the 1970s, have had notable success in changing government policy (McKean 1981; Almeida and Stearns 1998; Broadbent 1998).

The term 'victim' has a wide application and ranges from people suffering from diseases caused by atomic bombs, environmental pollution, and pharmaceutical products, to people who are ill-treated by government policy or suffering from discrimination (for example, Hansen's disease survivors, *Burakumin* outcasts, disabled people). The term *tōjisha* refers not merely to people who are suffering damage (*higai*). The movement of disabled people in the 1960s started to claim the victims' right to self-determination (Nakanishi and Chizuko 2003). Since then, the term has referred not to victims passively awaiting relief but to committed victims who are seeking redress for damage on their own initiative.

Three concepts of social movement theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1994; McAdam et al. 1996) may help us to understand the distinguishing characteristics of victims' movements and to form a framework for analysing the effectiveness of a victims' movement. In Japan, the success of victims' movements can be understood as winning redress from the state, which includes 'fact-finding about their suffering, official apologies,

compensation, and political reforms to prevent similar victimization in the future' (Arrington 2016, p. 8). The following elements can influence the success of victims' movements in Japan.

First, mobilizing structures (the means to mobilize and engage people in collective action) are indispensable for victims' movements to mobilize third-party supporters. For this purpose, litigation is an effective tool, as demonstrated by pollution victims, leprosy survivors, and HIV-positive haemophiliacs, all of whom attracted many supporters to their redress movements (Upham 1987, p. 30, Feldman 2000, p. 122, Arrington 2016, pp. 86–87). The temporal order of victims' interactions with elite allies (politicians and bureaucrats) is also important for the development of victims' movements. Arrington (2016, pp. 28, 34) argues that victims' early access to elite allies can be disadvantageous because the presence of elite allies conveys the impression that the case is already settled and therefore deters potential third-party supporters.⁶

Second, concerning political opportunities, defined as the political constraints and opportunities unique to the context in which a movement is embedded, Upham's (1987, pp. 21–26) research shows that a range of informal and unaccountable bureaucratic measures to minimize or eliminate social disruption discourages victims' movements. Such conciliatory measures are aimed at making victims compromise without formal administrative acts and at keeping them from filing lawsuits. One typical measure is the holding of 'explanatory meetings' (*setsumeikai*) with victims. According to Upham (1987, pp. 67–76), victims' faith in the government's benevolence as well as their reliance on the government can make bureaucratic conciliatory measures effective. Upham explains such faith by the neo-Confucian concept of the 'benevolent lord' (*jinkun*) that developed during the Edo period, referring to Bellah's research (Bellah 1957, pp. 93–98) into *bushidō*. The common pattern of social conflict in Japan since the Ashio copper mine incident is that the government discourages victims' movements, appealing to protesters to re-establish their faith in its benevolence (Upham 1987, pp. 69–76).

Third, in regard to the framing process (the process of sharing meanings and definitions that people bring to a collective action), the development of victims' identities as victims is indispensable. For this purpose, shared physical and psychological injuries are crucial.⁷ Victims' ability to create an image of weakness, and the presence of geographically clustered populations of victims, are also advantageous (Arrington 2016, pp. 11–13). Moreover, universal normative appeal plays an important role in the framing process of victims' movements. In the context of his case study of HIV-tainted blood claims and medical errors in organ transplantations, Feldman (2000) emphasized the power of victims' rights assertions, especially the assertion of the right to self-determination (*jiko kettei-ken*). Heyer and Nakamura also focused on victims' (disabled people's) appeal to equal rights (Nakamura 2006; Heyer 2015).

This article focuses on six of the aforementioned points: (1) mobilization of third-party supporters through litigation; (2) the temporal order of access to elite allies (early or not); (3) bureaucratic conciliatory measures; (4) victims' faith in the government's benevolence; (5) development of shared identities of victims (physical and psychological injuries, perception of weakness, geographical clusters, etc.); and (6) rights assertions (especially the right to self-determination). After explaining the development of the movement over the past seven years, I argue that its main demand, the extension of housing support, has not been satisfied because the movement did not meet the conditions conducive to success.

How did the movement emerge?

Third-party supporters who were concerned about voluntary evacuees' rights started to speak for voluntary evacuees who could not easily appear in public because of the difficulties caused by voluntary evacuation. The transition from a third-party supporters' movement to a victim-centred movement took place around May 2015.

Lobbying for the nuclear disaster victims' support law

The movement for housing support emerged from a third-party supporters' group lobbying to lower the 20 mSv safety limit, improve the criteria for evacuation and compensation, and support voluntary evacuees. In June 2011, two environmental NGOs (Friends of the Earth Japan and Greenpeace Japan), three local anti-nuclear organizations (*Fukushima Rōkyū Genpatsu o Kangaeru Kai*, *Mihama no Kai* and Green Action Japan), a network of parents in Fukushima prefecture (Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation), and a network of thirty-five lawyers in Tokyo and Fukushima prefecture (Save Fukushima Children Lawyers' Network) started lobbying Diet members under the slogans 'the right to evacuation' and 'the right to self-determination' (Ogawa 2014; Löscke 2018). Concern for the human rights of voluntary evacuees prompted third-party supporters to get involved in the movement. They also enlisted more generous financial support, including housing support for voluntary evacuees, using as a model the Chernobyl law, which was enacted in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia in 1991 and has compensated residents remaining in areas with an estimated annual exposure of one to five millisieverts, and also people who moved from these areas.

Their advocacy succeeded partially when the Nuclear Disaster Victims' Support Law (*genpatsu kodomo hisaisha shienhō*, hereafter 'NDVS Law') was passed in June 2012. Although the NDVS Law withheld judgment as to whether the 20 mSv standard should be lowered, it required general support

for voluntary evacuees. Voluntary evacuees placed their hopes especially on Article 9 of the NDVS Law because it provided that the state should take measures to secure housing for nuclear disaster victims in the locations they have moved to (Hino 2016, p. 143). At that time, environmental NGOs and lawyers took the lead in lobbying politicians, while only a few voluntary evacuees were involved in the movement for the NDVS Law due to financial, housing, and mental/emotional constraints. Many voluntary evacuees have made statements such as ‘we made desperate efforts to rebuild our lives’ and ‘we did not have financial and emotional reserves’ (*yutori ga nakkata*) on SNS platforms and mailing lists. The voluntary evacuees’ first priority was to rebuild their lives (*seikatsu saiken*).

Serious difficulties for voluntary evacuees

Most voluntary evacuees have been forced to cope with difficult financial situations because they had only a severely limited chance of getting compensation. Low income families, especially *boshi hinansha*, single mothers and mothers with small children who moved from irradiated districts without their husbands (and primary breadwinners), found themselves experiencing serious financial difficulties. Three routes to compensation were accessible to voluntary evacuees.

First, TEPCO directly compensated voluntary evacuees who moved from one of thirty-two municipalities in Fukushima prefecture relatively close to the nuclear power plant to locations outside the evacuation zone due to emotional distress (TEPCO 2012a, 2012b). These voluntary evacuees received one-off payments of about 1,600,000 yen per household, which was not enough to cover the full cost of moving and additional living expenses (Yoshida 2016, p. 102).

Second, voluntary evacuees could also use the Alternative Dispute Resolution system (ADR), a way of settling claims without litigation. Although it is designed to save time, the proceedings have been very slow because hundreds of cases were filed each month after the nuclear disaster (Feldman 2013, p. 352). For example, a mother who moved from the northern part of Fukushima City to Kyoto prefecture used the ADR for the first time in the Kansai region, and the procedure took her about one year. In addition, using the ADR was a heavy burden especially for working mothers and mothers with small children because the claimants had to submit documentary evidence for all their voluntary evacuation expenses (Yoshida 2016, p. 139). Moreover, the ADR awarded relatively low amounts, 80,000 to 600,000 yen to voluntary evacuees per person in one lump sum, while compulsory evacuees often received more than two million yen in addition to compensation through the

first route (MEXT 2017). Therefore, not all voluntary evacuees chose the ADR route.

As a third route to compensation, litigation was an option for voluntary evacuees. However, not all voluntary evacuees joined collective lawsuits against TEPCO and the government. There were voluntary evacuees who had negative images of litigation, as do most Japanese people (cf. Upham 1987; Ramseyer 1996, but see also Haley 1978). For example, a mother who moved from Fukushima city to Kyoto prefecture stated, 'I was not involved in litigation because I did not want to fight against other people' (written interview, 10 February 2016). Moreover, voluntary evacuees who moved from outside Fukushima prefecture were pessimistic about the outcome of such collective lawsuits due to the relatively low levels of radiation in the districts from which they had evacuated. A mother who moved from Tokyo to Kyoto prefecture stated, 'I do not want to devote my time and energy to a collective lawsuit because I moved from Tokyo' (interview, 26 January 2015).

It was mainly voluntary evacuees who moved from Fukushima prefecture who became involved in litigation. They filed civil tort claims together with compulsory evacuees on the argument that TEPCO interfered with Articles 13 and 25 of the Japanese Constitution. Article 25 guarantees the right to 'wholesome and cultured living'. Article 13 guarantees the right of individuals to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'. The first verdict on such a collective lawsuit against TEPCO and the government was given on 17 March 2017, in the Maebashi district court. Forty-three voluntary evacuees were awarded 70,000 to 730,000 yen as compensation, in a significant victory against the government, which had been refusing to compensate them. However, another seventy-two had their claims dismissed. Moreover, the amounts awarded were far less than the 11 million yen per capita demanded, and we should note that nineteen other claimants who were from areas that *were* subject to evacuation orders were awarded compensation of 750,000 to 3.5 million yen, meaning that the best compensated voluntary evacuee received slightly less than the worst compensated compulsory evacuee (Jiji Tsūshin 2017). It seems difficult for the plaintiffs to win these suits, insofar as 'Articles 13 and 25 of the Constitution are generally seen as hortatory provisions that do not provide plaintiffs with specific remedies' (Feldman 2015, p. 146).

Bad housing conditions have also been a serious problem. Speaking from personal observation, I can state that many apartments provided for voluntary evacuees are very old and earmarked for demolition. The interiors, especially the kitchens, bathrooms, and tatami flooring, are old-fashioned and often dirty. There is seldom enough storage space. The exteriors of the buildings are dilapidated, with cracked concrete walls and rusty old fences. Safety is also an issue in some of these apartment complexes. Three sexual assaults against girls and women took place on the premises of an apartment complex in Kyoto prefecture

where voluntary evacuees lived (interview, 27 January 2015). Some single-mother families were terrified of living in their allocated apartment complexes. Furthermore, difficulties in establishing human relationships in their new surroundings have been a severe psychological burden on voluntary evacuees.

Voluntary evacuees have not easily been able to become fully integrated into the local community. In general, they have been nervous and frightened that local people might realize that they have come from Fukushima prefecture and discriminate against them. There have been also cases of being envied by local people, based on the misunderstanding that voluntary evacuees received substantial compensation money (Hino 2016, p. 60, Yoshida 2016, p. 49). Mass media widely reported a vicious case of bullying that was reportedly caused by this misunderstanding: a voluntary evacuee child was called ‘bacillus’ and was intimidated into giving money, about one and a half million yen in total, to other pupils of his primary school (Tokyo Shinbun 2016). Since then, bullying cases at schools involving voluntary evacuee children have been given widespread coverage (Mainichi Shinbun 2017a). Thus, most residents do not feel they received a warm welcome from local people. A mother who moved from Tokyo to Okayama prefecture reported in an interview on 18 January 2014 that voluntary evacuees were seen as ‘alien elements in the local community’ (*chiiki no ibutsu*), especially in western Japan, where most local people did not care about radioactive contamination and therefore thought that voluntary evacuees had hysterically or unnecessarily evacuated.

With factors like these constraining voluntary evacuees from speaking up, their third-party supporters started to speak up for them. The movement for housing support from November 2012 to April 2015 might be called a movement on behalf of victims, insofar as the third-party supporters did most of the campaigning.

The emergence of the social movement for housing support as a proxy war

When the government decided to offer rent-free public housing units to a limited number of voluntary evacuees, it set a deadline for applications, concerned that an increase in numbers of voluntary evacuees would sap the population of Fukushima prefecture and thereby hamper reconstruction (Hino 2016, p. 78, Yoshida 2016, pp. 113–116). The deadline for applications was 28 December 2012. The announcement of this date sparked a proxy war fought by third-party supporters on behalf of voluntary evacuees.

The first big signature-collecting campaign to prevent the government from setting such an early application deadline was launched in November 2012 under the leadership of third-party supporters. In July 2012, these supporters established the ‘Citizens Conference to Promote the NDVS Law’ (*shienhō shimin kaigi*, hereafter ‘Citizens Conference’), a large sixty-eight organization

lobbying group for the implementation of the NDVS Law. Additional groups such as the Pal System Consumer Cooperative Union and the *Kodomo-tachi o Hōshanō kara Mamoru Zenkoku Nettowāku* (National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation, hereafter Kodomozenkoku) were subsequently recruited. The Citizens Conference continued to lobby for the immediate and effective implementation of the NDVS Law and protested against the government decision to set a deadline for applications because Article 9 of the NDVS Law obligated the state to secure housing for nuclear disaster victims. The Citizens Conference members succeeded in collecting more than 100,000 signatures on a petition website. The biggest contribution came from Kodomozenkoku, which had more than 330 local groups.

However, the Citizens Conference's demands for the immediate and effective implementation of the NDVS Law and for an application deadline extension were not met. Their lobbying of the bureaucracy was essentially deadlocked when the LDP returned to power in December 2012 and declared its intention to accelerate the reconstruction of Fukushima prefecture from January 2013 onwards. Although civil society organizations have been more involved in policy-making since Fukushima, voluntary evacuees have not achieved the kind of redress won by some other victims' movements in Japan. Their early access to elite allies seems to have been disadvantageous, insofar as the movement focused completely on contact with elites, and therefore failed to mobilize other third-party supporters and attract public attention. Hajime Shiraishi, a freelance journalist who has watched this movement from the beginning, observed that 'the movement remained too quiet [*shizuka sugi*] because it only repeated meetings with politicians and bureaucrats and no public demonstrations were held' (interview in Tokyo, 12 February 2014).

How the movement transformed into a victims' movement and subsequently developed

Beginning in May 2015, voluntary evacuees started to establish a strong presence, appearing in public frequently, while third-party supporters continued to be active behind the scenes as organizers of meetings and negotiations.⁸ After giving an overview of the movement and focusing on key actors and repertoires in this phase of the movement, I analyse why the movement has been unable to make the government reverse its decision to end housing support, focusing on the aforementioned six points.

Why did voluntary evacuees get involved in the movement?

Most residents of public housing units avoided involvement in the movement and appearing in public for fear that they might be slandered (Hino 2016,

p. 180). Mothers with children lived in hiding and worried that their children would be bullied if they appeared in public and criticized the government.⁹ Therefore, only a few voluntary evacuees were involved in the movement to extend housing support. However, the government decision to set a firm date for ending housing support forced voluntary evacuees to appeal to the public to oppose the decision, after *Asahi Shinbun* (2015) scooped the story about the decision on 17 May. At this point, the social movement was transformed into a victims' movement.

Voluntary evacuees started to get involved for two main reasons. First, those who lived in rent-free public housing units were afraid of facing extreme poverty when the housing support expired. Immediately after the *Asahi* report, the movement to extend the housing support began to protest against the decision, using the slogan 'voluntary evacuees will be cast out on the streets' (*rotō ni mayou*; IWJ 2015). The voluntary evacuees' greatest concern was adopted as the slogan of the movement.

Second, 'victims' voices' (*tōjisha no koe*) became a more important part of meetings with the bureaucracy responsible for housing support. During explanatory meetings and negotiations, bureaucrats gave victims more opportunities to speak than their third-party supporters. Meetings had to be conducted within a time limit, usually two hours, and bureaucrats gave priority to voluntary evacuees themselves. Thus, the Citizens Conference members had to mobilize additional voluntary evacuees for negotiations with bureaucrats, and for press conferences.

The withdrawal of some important third-party supporters from the movement also necessitated greater reliance on 'victims' voices'. After the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) fell out of power, the Citizens Conference lost access to policy-making and their lobbying of the bureaucracy faltered. The movement lost a key sponsor when former DPJ politician Kuniko Tanioka lost her upper house seat in the 2013 national election. She had allowed nuclear disaster victims and their third-party supporters to participate in drafting the NDVS Law. Some supporters lost motivation while others shifted focus to different political issues.¹⁰ Thus, the government decision to terminate housing support forced victims to appeal on their own behalf in May 2015.

Which voluntary evacuees have been involved in the movement?

Only a minority of voluntary evacuees became politically active both at the national and local level: people who decided to move from irradiated areas with a strong personal conviction about the health risks from radiation. They played the key role in lobbying for the extension of housing support from May 2015 onwards. Almost all voluntary evacuees who were involved in the movement are mothers, while only a few fathers appear in public.

At the micro level, in a public housing complex in the Kansai region where sixty-eight voluntary evacuee households lived in 2015, one mother was involved in a campaign to collect signatures for the extension of the housing support, but only five other voluntary evacuees gave their signatures. At the macro level, for example, in Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures, only about thirty voluntary evacuees are actively lobbying, and in the whole of the Kansai region, fewer than ten voluntary evacuees are participating in the movement. Many voluntary evacuees feel grateful towards the government because it provided rent-free public housing units for more than five years. According to two residents interviewed in January 2015 in Kansai, some residents actually wished that the government would terminate the housing support, because they could not easily decide whether to stay put or to return to Fukushima prefecture. For these and other reasons, many residents did not want to be involved in the movement for the extension of housing support.

That said, a few voluntary evacuees did engage in intense lobbying of elite allies (national and local politicians, bureaucrats, and prefectural officials) for the extension of housing support. Often, they were people who were used to being in the minority on political and social issues before the nuclear disaster in their work environments in nursing, IT, and publishing. This gave them the energy to engage in political activism. One voluntary evacuee said of such mothers: 'Because they often have work experience as freelancers, they have explicit goals in their lives and plenty of independent spirit (*dokuritsu-shin*)'.¹¹

Although voluntary evacuees have become more independent of third-party supporters, they have not been entirely satisfied with the strength of their voice. In May 2015, the Liaison Conference of Nuclear Disaster Victims (*Hidanren*) was established, bringing together plaintiffs in collective lawsuits against TEPCO and the government. October 2015 saw the launch of the National Association of Evacuees to Demand the Right to Evacuate (*Hinan no kenri o motomeru zenkoku hinansha no kai*), which consisted primarily of voluntary evacuees. Within these two big national organizations, voluntary evacuees established a strong presence and appeared in public. However, they were often overshadowed by compulsory evacuees. One voluntary evacuee stated that 'voluntary evacuees' voices have often been ignored in comparison with compulsory evacuees' voices, even if victims' voices have been heeded generally'.¹²

Activities of the movement

At the national level, the movement protested against the government decision to terminate housing support mainly in (1) meetings with Diet members in the Diet members' office buildings; (2) meetings with bureaucrats; and (3) public events such as workshops and symposia. Since 2015, the Citizens Conference and national and local groups of voluntary evacuees have taken turns in

organizing events held in the Diet members' office buildings almost monthly. Each of these events brought six to ten voluntary evacuees into the limelight to emphasize the importance to them of the housing support. In general, 130 to 200 people took part in these meetings, including six to seventeen Diet members. Former prime minister Naoto Kan has attended these meetings since June 2015 and continues to do so. Meetings with bureaucrats have been chaired mainly by bureaucrats of the Reconstruction Agency. Bureaucrats of other ministries (Cabinet Office, Ministry of the Environment, METI, Nuclear Regulation Authority) have also attended.

At the local level, voluntary evacuees have utilized the following lobbying opportunities: (1) monthly meetings with prefectural officials; (2) meetings with elite allies (governmental and local officials, and a parliamentary vice minister of the Reconstruction Agency), held three times a year in each of Japan's eight regions¹³; (3) petitions delivered to the Fukushima prefectural office; and (4) lobbying to make prefectural and municipal assemblies adopt 'written opinions' (*ikensho*) requesting the government to extend housing support. Monthly meetings have been organized and chaired by local officials. Some voluntary evacuees have become close to officials, as they attended the meetings regularly. From September 2013, the Reconstruction Agency started to outsource meetings to the Mitsubishi Research Institute (MRI), a major think tank (MRI 2014). The MRI recruited co-organizers from local groups all over Japan. Concerning the fourth activity, voluntary evacuees needed considerable and constant effort to get a favourable vote in most assemblies. For example, it took about one year for the Kyoto prefectural assembly to adopt a 'written opinion'. Overall, seventy-two local assemblies had adopted written opinions by February 2017 (Hidanren 2017).

In addition, voluntary evacuees have tried to connect with local Diet members from all parties. For example, four mothers met two LDP Diet members from Kyoto prefecture on 17 December 2015. One of them commented:

The politicians were totally uninformed about radiation and the housing support issue; therefore, we have to keep working to teach them about such things. It would be good if we could get along with LDP politicians as well as the opposition ones.

Meanwhile, third-party supporters launched an 'Evacuation Cooperation Centre' (*hinan no kyōdō sentā*) for voluntary evacuees remaining in public housing in July 2016. It offered consultations, in person and on the phone, for evacuees ordered out of public housing, on a case-by-case basis.

Although the most important demand of the movement, the reversal of the government decision to end housing support in March 2017, was not met as of May 2018, the intense lobbying has born some fruit. National and local governments introduced the following new policies (Fukushima prefecture 2015): (1) subsidized rents (50 per cent in the first year, 33 per cent in the second

year) for voluntary evacuees moving into private apartments by 31 March 2017; (2) public contribution to moving expenses (100,000 yen per household) for voluntary evacuees moving into private apartments by 31 March 2017 (not applicable when moving into public housing); (3) priority for voluntary evacuees on waiting lists to move into public housing. All three policies seem to reflect 'public comments' that voluntary evacuees and the third-party supporters sent to the government from July to August 2015 (Reconstruction Agency 2015b, pp. 6–7). Concerning the third policy, the government reversed its previous statement from October 2013, according to which voluntary evacuees would have no priority when moving into public housing units (Mainichi Shinbun 2015b). In addition, five prefectures¹⁴ decided to continue providing rent-free public housing units for some voluntary evacuees, independent of the national government (Kahoku Shinpō 2017). However, these successes are far from achieving redress from the state, which Arrington defines as the success of victims' movements. Moreover, the targets of the first and third policies are limited, insofar as the government and Fukushima prefecture set a strict upper limit on income per household in determining eligibility (Fukushima prefecture 2015).

Why has the movement achieved only limited success?

The rest of this section analyses the movement within a framework consisting of six of the aforementioned points and shows that the movement did not meet the conditions for success as a victims' movement.

Mobilization of third-party supporters through litigation

Voluntary evacuees lobbying for the extension of housing support did not litigate, although litigation is a valuable tool for victims' movements in Japan seeking to mobilize third-party supporters' grassroots activism (Arrington 2016). They were unable to file a suit against the national and local governments and TEPCO for the extension of housing support. As we saw, only a small number of voluntary evacuees who received public housing became politically active. They could not file suits exclusively for the extension of the housing support because many of them were engaged in other lawsuits, such as damage suits against the government and TEPCO (civil tort claims, as mentioned above). They had to appear in court every two months and present lengthy statements in close consultation with lawyers. Therefore, they lacked time for additional lawsuits.

Moreover, the negative image of litigation that most Japanese people have kept many voluntary evacuees from litigation, as mentioned above (cf. Haley 1978; Ramseyer 1996; Upham 1987). Meanwhile, many voluntary evacuees who were engaged in collective lawsuits against TEPCO and the

government moved out of rent-free public housing and into private apartments, because they had more financial resources than evacuees still living in rent-free public housing units.¹⁵ The latter were never politically active and lived in hiding; they were not in a position to file lawsuits. The absence of litigation seems to have weakened the movement, insofar as litigation was a focal point of almost every other victims' movement in Japan.

Temporal order of access to elite allies

Voluntary evacuees and their third-party supporters started to build close relationships with elite allies just as the movement for extension of housing support for voluntary evacuees began in November 2012, although 'gaining elite allies early in a conflict has disadvantages' (Arrington 2016, p. 31). The bureaucratic measure to give victims' voices priority over third-party supporters' voices in meetings was an important factor prompting more voluntary evacuees to join the movement. Therefore, voluntary evacuees' early access to government and local officials and the establishment of a close relationship with them came before they attracted third-party supporters and received attention from the public. In this way, the movement seems to have failed to mobilize both ordinary mothers involved in the movement for the NDVS Law, and older leftist activists politically active since the 1960s. Some voluntary evacuees reported that third-party supporters, especially veteran activists, criticized their cooperation with elite allies, accusing them of being co-opted and arguing that 'dialogue with officials is too mild [*namanuru*] a method'.¹⁶

Bureaucratic conciliatory measures

The bureaucracy and governmental and prefectural officials made informal conciliatory measures in the process of conflict resolution on housing support for voluntary evacuees, as was the case in other victims' movements in Japan (cf. Upham 1987). The bureaucracy used explanatory meetings with voluntary evacuees as a tool to make voluntary evacuees accept the government decision to terminate housing support and to persuade them to move out of public housing. Explanatory meetings with bureaucrats led to fragmentation, as with other victims' movements, which then accepted mediation by the bureaucracy (cf. Upham 1987, p. 66). Among voluntary evacuees who participated in monthly meetings in the Kansai region, there were two opposing opinions about the housing support. Many felt deeply indebted to the government, as they had been able to live rent-free for more than five years in public housing. Even a voluntary evacuee mother herself said in a meeting with prefectural officials on 27 January 2016 that 'voluntary evacuees should not depend self-indulgently [on the government] forever' (*itsumademo amaete ite wa dame*). Others thought that they were entitled to receive housing support and were

unwilling to compromise but were accused by fellow voluntary evacuees of emotional and financial dependence on the national government and the prefectures into which they had moved, sometimes even in the middle of meetings. For example, at a meeting on 27 January 2016 one mother told another, 'we should not make demands any more. I feel sorry for Mr. X [one of the prefectural officials]'

Victims' faith in government benevolence

In the voluntary evacuees' feeling that they are deeply indebted to the government, we can discern their faith in the 'benevolent lord' or 'benevolent ruler' (Upham 1987, pp. 68–75). Voluntary evacuees involved in the movement were unable to recruit such victims. This prevented the establishment of a big national network of voluntary evacuees living in public housing to lobby for the extension of housing support. Most voluntary evacuees made their appeals as 'humble requests directed towards *okami* [political or social superiors] rather than as forthright demands' (McKean 1981, p.26), echoing other victims' movements in Japan.

Development of shared identities of victims

The voluntary evacuees were unable to develop a firm collective identity as victims and mobilize many other voluntary evacuees into the movement. Almost all voluntary evacuees have a sense of victimhood or victim consciousness because they moved suddenly and reluctantly to new places and felt that they were unfairly treated by the government and TEPCO. But they had no opportunities to vent their anger in public and talk about their emotional stress and feelings of victimhood, unless they participated in the movement and came to know other victims and third-party supporters.¹⁷ Only a minority of voluntary evacuees became politically active; therefore, few could share their sense of victimhood.

While '[g]eographically clustered populations of victims tend to recognize their victimhood more readily' (Arrington 2016, p. 12), the voluntary evacuees were scattered all over Japan. This also hindered them from developing a collective sense of victimhood. Furthermore, five years of rent-free public housing prevented most voluntary evacuees from feeling continuous anger against the government, and many concealed the fact of their voluntary evacuation and even said they did not want to be categorized as evacuees. Two voluntary evacuees also stated that politically inactive voluntary evacuees were afraid to experience discrimination for their voluntary evacuation, and that they disliked being labelled as 'economically disadvantaged' (*keizaiteki-ni yowai*) or 'poor' (*binbō*) people who need public assistance.¹⁸ Most voluntary evacuees living in public housing did not highlight their 'weakness [which, paradoxically,] can be

a strength in the process of building coalitions of support' (Arrington 2016, p. 13), as they were ashamed of their dependence on the government and their inability to take 'self-responsibility' for their voluntary evacuation, and did not want to reveal their vulnerability.

Moreover, voluntary evacuees living in public housing have not shared 'physical and psychological injuries' which participants in other victims' movements in Japan generally shared because they evacuated before they were exposed to prolonged radiation. Nor could voluntary evacuees easily express their anger and victimhood, since the state defined only compulsory evacuees as 'real victims'. The very name of the nuclear disaster, 'Fukushima nuclear disaster', generates 'privileging victimization rhetoric' (Arrington 2016, p. 14) in that it distinguishes Fukushima residents from residents in hotspots outside Fukushima prefecture. A member of the Citizens Conference warned that 'residents in radiation hot spots outside Fukushima prefecture did not have a sense of crisis because only 'Fukushima' has often been talked about as an irradiated region' (interview with a representative of Citizens' Radioactivity Measurement Station, 21 January 2014).

Rights assertions

Eric Feldman emphasized 'the symbolic power of rights assertion' in which victims can appeal to the public for the right to self-determination (Feldman 2000, p. 51). However, the voluntary evacuees' appeal for the right to self-determination, against the government's normative appeal for 'self-responsibility', failed. One reason was that rights-consciousness was not shared by those voluntary evacuees who had not been involved in the movement for housing support. One voluntary evacuee mother pointed out that 'many residents regarded living in rent-free public housing units as a privilege, not as a right'.¹⁹

Another reason was the considerable success of another normative appeal to public opinion. Since March 2013, in published guidelines for its reconstruction policy, the LDP has emphasized that 'nuclear disaster evacuees should return as soon as possible', and that 'nuclear disaster victims should become independent' (LDP 2013, pp. 4–5). The LDP has accelerated the reconstruction of Fukushima prefecture since Tokyo was chosen to host the 2020 Summer Olympics in September 2013. From July 2015 onwards, the Reconstruction Agency also started to appeal directly to voluntary evacuees to return to Fukushima prefecture (Our Planet TV 2015). Masahiro Imamura, who assumed the office of the Minister for Reconstruction in August 2016, also emphasized the need for 'self-responsibility' at a press conference on 4 April 2017 (Japan Times 2017; Reconstruction Agency 2017). He resigned following this remark and another gaffe about Japan's 2011 disasters on 25 April 2017 (Mainichi Shinbun 2017b).²⁰

Even voluntary evacuees emphasized self-responsibility in voluntary evacuation. On 20 September 2016, this opinion circulated on a mailing list for nuclear disaster victims in the Kansai region:

I doubt whether we should concentrate on the issue of housing support. The residents who demand the extension of the housing support should only be supported by the government if they have made enough effort [to make a living on their own].

Meanwhile the public opinion that voluntary evacuees moved from irradiated areas 'arbitrarily' and therefore must take 'self-responsibility' has been prevalent in Japan (Yoshida 2015, 2016, p. 42).

Conclusion

This article has examined the social movement for extension of housing support for voluntary evacuees as a victims' movement. After elaborating on the concept of voluntary evacuees, I explained the emergence of the movement in November 2012 as a social movement that third-party supporters launched on behalf of victims who could not afford to be involved themselves. I focused on various factors that exhausted voluntary evacuees' financial and emotional reserves and necessitated voluntary evacuees' voices to develop the movement. I then examined the period from May 2015 until April 2017 in which the victims' movement passed its peak. I analysed why this victims' movement had only limited success, focusing on six points taken from the research literature on victims' movements. The sixth point, that the 'rights assertions' of victims was not successful, needs further investigation. This case study suggests that the symbolic power of rights assertion diminishes if there is another stronger normative appeal to the public, which rejects victims' rights assertion, such as the appeal to 'self-responsibility'. This leads us to think about the stigma attached to receiving social assistance, insofar as the government has regarded housing support for voluntary evacuees not as compensation, but as support, comparable to social welfare. Further research should compare voluntary evacuation after the Fukushima nuclear disaster to other cases of voluntary disaster evacuation. For example, oil spill accidents are similar to the Fukushima case, since voluntary evacuation occurs because harmful substances spread and decontamination of the soil is a lengthy process. One hopes that both the unique aspects of the Fukushima voluntary evacuation and its similarities to other cases will be explored in future.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Interview, Fukuyama Tetsurō, former parliamentary deputy cabinet secretary, 10 February 2015.
2. Because Fukushima prefecture had provided rent-free public housing units in Fukushima prefecture exclusively for compulsory evacuees up to November 2012, voluntary evacuees who moved within Fukushima prefecture had to rent private apartments with their own money (Hino 2016, p. 78).
3. This method owes its origin to the German tradition of qualitative research and has been internationally adopted since the 2000s (Mey and Mruck 2007). It is designed to improve the asymmetric relationship between researcher and respondent. According to Witzel and Herwig (2012) who systematically developed the method, the researcher should involve a respondent in a process of active interaction that provides the possibility to extend and improve the researcher's prior knowledge and thereby to reconstruct the problem during the interview.
4. This article does not mention personal names or the names of prefectures in case studies, in accordance with interviewees' wishes.
5. The public discourse was triggered by then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's remark on Japanese citizens taken hostage in Iraq in 2004 (Hook and Hiroko 2007). The rhetoric of 'self-responsibility' was an important tool for Koizumi to carry out a programme of 'structural reform', which was framed by neoliberalism. Kimura (2016, p. 62) also points out that neoliberalism burdened citizens with the responsibility to minimize their exposure to radiation in Japan.
6. There might also be advantages to having early access to elite allies. For example, policy-making processes might be accelerated, insofar as lawmakers might start to draft bills during the early phase of a movement. However, Arrington's argument sounds plausible because the disadvantages that Arrington points out do seem to have seriously hindered the development of social movements including the movement for the Nuclear Disaster Victims' Support Law. Its participants devoted themselves entirely to contacting elite allies and put no hard effort into attracting potential third-party supporters from the public.
7. Upham's research into the 'reason for the decline in environmental activism' (Upham 1987, p. 63) in the 1980s, in which the plaintiffs did not share serious physical and psychological injuries, provided the framework for this article.
8. My own data on who made speeches at public meetings organized by the Citizens Conference between July 2012 and June 2015 show that voluntary evacuees started to establish a strong presence for the first time after the Liaison Conference of Nuclear Disaster Victims was established in May 2015, and after four voluntary evacuees were invited as main speakers to a symposium that was held to mark the third anniversary of the NDVS Law in June 2015.
9. Written interview, Daisaku Seto, Pal System Consumer Cooperative Union, 30 October 2016.
10. The Citizens Conference's concentration on the housing policy created a gulf between Kodomozenkoku and other members because the central concerns of Kodomozenkoku – abolition of the 20 mSv criterion and warning of health risk from accumulated low-level exposure to radiation in the Kantō region – were almost completely excluded from the agenda-setting of the Citizens Conference. Although Kodomozenkoku remained involved in the Citizens Conference, it shifted focus from housing policy to providing pregnant women with basic information about radiation (written interview, Emiko Itō, representative of Kodomozenkoku, 5 October 2015).
11. Written interview, 13 February 2015.

12. Written interview, 6 November 2016.
13. The Reconstruction Agency classified the fifteen prefectures that had had the most voluntary evacuees evacuated to them into the following regions: (1) Hokkaidō; (2) Tōhoku; (3) Kantō; (4) Shin'etsu; (5) Chūbu; (6) Kinki; (7) Chūgoku and Shikoku; (8) Kyūshū and Okinawa.
14. Hokkaidō, Yamagata, Kyoto, Tottori and Ehime prefectures.
15. Daisaku Seto, written interview, 30 October 2016.
16. Interviews, 18 and 28 January 2014.
17. This analysis is based especially on data collected from a six-hour interview with a mother who moved to the countryside of Aichi prefecture and therefore was isolated from other victims (Interview, 1 February 2015). Although she showed her sense of victimhood during the interview, she stated that she had no opportunities to express her anger openly and talk about her victimhood with other voluntary evacuees. After the interview, she disclosed that she is a voluntary evacuee, via SNS, and started to support voluntary evacuees' campaigns.
18. Interviews, 21 January 2014, 28 February 2015. The public discourse is quite different as of May 2018, since mass media are often reporting about voluntary evacuees and their poverty.
19. Written interview, 31 October 2016.
20. He said it was 'good' that the disaster struck the Tōhoku region rather than the Tokyo metropolitan area.

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