



'We were all in this together... - Challenges to and practices of cleanliness in tsunami evacuation shelters in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, 2011 力を合わせてー 2011年岩手県山田の各津波避難所における清潔さへの目標とその実践

Brigitte Steger

“We were all in this together ...” Challenges to and practices of cleanliness in tsunami evacuation shelters in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture, 2011

Brigitte Steger, text and photographs¹

Based on ethnographic research in tsunami evacuation shelters in the coastal town of Yamada, this article explores how people have employed hygiene practices to regain control over their lives after the tsunami disaster of March 11, 2011. By considering toilets and baths, shoes and food, face masks and cleaning routines, it discusses issues of health and wellbeing, and shame and solidarity, and shows how people have resorted to han (group) structures and gender division of labor to create a temporary home. Co-operating in cleaning practices has helped them to regain stability and to re-create social order.

On about the tenth day of shelter life, the operators of a spa in Toyomane, a few miles inland, opened up the bath for us. They provided a bus so we could take a bath there. Actually, it was sooner than I had expected. I had assumed that we would have to go even longer without taking a bath. That bath felt so great! I was really relieved (*hotto shimashita*). Shortly after that, electricity and water were reconnected at the shelter. When I could wash my hands again, when I could drink the water again, some weight was taken off my shoulders for the first time (*hajimete hito anshin*). Then daily life started to improve. (Toda Haruko², 36, staying at the shelter of Minami Elementary School)m

For people staying at tsunami evacuation shelters in Yamada,³ a coastal town in Iwate prefecture, the first bath they had after the earthquake and tsunami disaster of March 11, 2011 not only washed away the accumulated dirt, it also started a transition from a state of apathy, memory loss, high tension and anxiety to a process of re-creating social order and stability. More broadly speaking, as I will elaborate in this article, one of the important ways in which people in this region have tried to regain control over their lives after having lost their houses was by cleaning, both of their own bodies and of their environment. I will show what challenges they faced in overcrowded shelters lacking basic facilities (water, electricity, etc.), and how they avoided and treated contamination by infectious diseases. (People hardly mentioned fear of radiation; some 200 miles north of the nuclear disaster and protected by mountains, they had more immediate concerns.) I discuss how dirty, barely usable toilets affected their sense of stability and shame. While the difficulties in taking care of personal hygiene after the disaster were unsettling, people became somewhat insensitive to unwashed clothes and body odor; sharing the experience of dirty conditions showed them that they “were all in this together” and thus became a source and a sign of solidarity. Survivors soon re-established hygienic conditions in the shelters by resorting to *han* (group) structures they had experienced at school. By working together for a clean environment, they tried to make sense of their situation and get a grip on the anxieties they were facing.

How do people react during a major – and largely shared – crisis? How do they co-operate and when do they refuse to co-operate? How do social hierarchies and power relations, including gender roles and relationships, develop when a large number of people of diverse backgrounds suddenly share the fate of destroyed homes and the place where they live? There are not many anthropological studies investigating life in shelters after major disasters⁴, and to the best of my knowledge none deals with the basic issues of cleanliness and hygiene. Thus, comparing the impact of a major disaster on the social fabric of the communities in disaster evacuation shelters with the situation in other countries directly is not possible. However, some earlier work provides useful comparison. Studying the Red River Valley Flood crisis of 1997, Linda Jencson has come to the conclusion that coping with disaster enhances a sense of self and of community and that during the crisis gender differences become blurred. Stories “of survivors reflect gender equity and reversal of gender roles”⁵. By contrast, Susanna Hoffman finds that in the wake of the 1991 Oakland firestorm “what appeared first among the survivors [...] was not the reconstitution of the life lived immediately prior to the conflagration but rather the regeneration of old, deeply rooted cultural patterns.” This was true particularly for gendered roles and division of labor, going hand-in-hand with a cultural division of public and private arenas. Many women lost or gave up their jobs to concentrate fully on taking care of other family members and getting their household up and running again.⁶ Since cleaning practices are gendered in everyday life, focusing on cleanliness in the shelters provides an opportunity to look into the impact of major disasters on social structures, in particular gendered relations and gendered division of labor.

Yamada and the 3.11 disaster

The center and coastal areas of Yamada were badly hit by the disaster. A total of 3,346 residential buildings (55.5 per cent) were destroyed by the tsunami and fires that followed, 2,789 of them completely. The total death toll reached 734.⁷ I visited Yamada from June 1 to 13 and from July 15 to 25, 2011 to conduct ethnographic research on how people coped with the situation in the evacuation shelters (*hinanjo*). I stayed at Ryūshōji, a Sōtōshū temple⁸, as a guest of the head priest (*jūshoku*) Shimizu Seishō (68) and his wife Noriko (60). The temple had narrowly escaped both the



Yamada in July 2011



The author and some of her project collaborators at Ryūshōji.

tsunami and fire and had become a *hinanjo* for some 12 to 15 evacuees. Not only did I have a place to stay and eat and observe life in a small *hinanjo*, but the priest also provided me with contacts, an occasional driver and a quiet room to do my interviews; an invaluable asset as I talked to people who had lost their homes.

My second main research site was Minami Elementary School⁹, although I was not allowed to enter the sports hall, where some hundred people slept. I also visited a few other *hinanjo*. Once I had established contact with a former high school teacher and my research project had been introduced by the local newspaper *Iwate Nippō*,¹⁰ recruiting willing interviewees posed no problem. I conducted more than 30 in-depth interviews with people staying at shelters and a few who had restored their flooded house and moved back in again. In addition to these interviews, which each lasted between one and four hours, I also had many informal conversations during my participant observation in the temple, while on home visits with a doctor, or simply walking around town. People were very open with me; some saying that it helped them to clear their heads.¹¹ They also had more time than usual and seemed happy to help me while they depended so much on the support of others, thus creating a balance of exchange.¹²

There was, however, one methodological challenge I had not anticipated: most people had suffered from a period of “amnesia.” While they told me the stories about the first hours during and after the earthquake and tsunami in detail, most people found their memories of the following days or even weeks had blurred or completely disappeared. They had a very unreliable sense of time and filled the gaps in their memories with stories they heard from others or read in the newspaper. Shimizu had warned me that some tell other people’s stories as their own. Such reactions are common in people who have lived through traumatic experiences¹³ and I will further explore the significance of this fact in a forthcoming book on shelter-life; for the purpose of this article I would like to emphasize its methodological consequences, as it complicates the reconstruction and interpretation of events, while some of the gaps cannot be filled.



The sports hall of Minami Elementary seen from the back entrance.



Shoes and slippers outside a prefectural youth house in the south of Yamada that functions as both a school and a *hinanjo*.

Taking off shoes: marking the shelter as *uchi*

TV images showed Japanese evacuees taking off their shoes in shelters, neatly lining them up at the entrance. Foreign media have commented on this sign of Japanese orderliness and composure with appreciation. Initially, however, chaos and anxiety were prevalent. When the crowd who had escaped the tsunami and gathered at the grounds of Minami Elementary was told to get inside the sports hall on the evening of March 11, the thought of taking their shoes off did not even cross their minds. The practical reasons for this are obvious: in a crowded and dark building, people would not have found their own shoes again if they had taken them off; it was also too cold to walk around without footwear in the hall. More importantly, I suggest, people did not regard the sports hall as a home or *uchi*, either of their own or of others. Nobody imagined they would stay here for long. My informants all assumed that they would be able to return after a few hours when the tsunami had receded, clean up their houses and get on with their lives.

After some time¹⁴ the evacuees at Minami Elementary realized that they had to make themselves a temporary home in the sports hall. In my first group interview, Yamamoto Tomi (81), a former high school teacher who had been able to move back into her house after repairing and cleaning the ground floor, and her friends, the Inekawa couple (the husband is a hair dresser, the wife a housewife) in their late 50s who stayed in the sports hall of Minami Elementary, told me:

At the beginning there were some 180 people staying at Minami Elementary, hardly any space to walk in between, and it was very dusty. As we had a medical care unit in the school, there were also many people coming in from outside with their shoes on. Nobody changed into slippers [as is usual in day clinics in Japan]; everything became very dirty. The dust was incredible. Now everyone has slippers, they were probably donated from somewhere. The other day we saw someone who walked outside the house with slippers and were appalled. But then we realized that there was "*soto yō*" (for outside use) written on the slippers.

Everyone laughed at this. The initial horror of seeing someone walking with indoor slippers outside and presumably tracking dirt into the living space was followed by laughter of relief that things were in perfect order. Anthropologist Mary Douglas has pointed out the importance of the distinction between the clean inside/house (*uchi* in Japanese) and the dirty outside as a basic classification in any culture. The inside is vulnerable to the dirt from outside, brought in with shoes or – unwashed – hands.¹⁵ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney argues that although customs such as taking off shoes in Japan are generally justified with reference to germs (*baikin*), the underlying assumption is that the outside (*soto*) is dirty and (metaphorically) polluted. Therefore temple and shrines usually have signs saying *dosoku genkin* (strictly forbidden to enter with shoes) and provide slippers. The phrase *dosoku de hairu* (entering with one's footwear) means to bring in dirt and is the height of bad manners; the phrase is also used metaphorically when someone commits an egregious invasion of privacy.¹⁶ Miura Michiko (56), who sheltered at Minami Elementary, told me:

In other places, illnesses were very common, but at our place (*uchi wa*) nothing spread. Even if someone caught a cold, it was dealt with very quickly. Also when we had some cases of infectious bowel disease, these people were immediately isolated and treated. In terms of hygiene, Minami Elementary is perhaps the most proper place (*ichiban shikkari shiteiru tokoro ja nai no ka na*). As soon as possible it was strictly forbidden to walk inside the sports hall with shoes on (*dosoku wa mō ichihayaku genkin ni shita*). On coming back in, people would thoroughly clean their hands with alcohol. [...] We had nurses and public health workers teaching these things, but we also did it ourselves. We decided on a shelter representative; he and the *hanchō* (group leaders) talked among ourselves and said that it would no longer be allowed to enter in shoes or boots. ... In the beginning when people got out to town [to look after their destroyed houses], they were really dirty. Thus, if they had entered like this, diseases would have spread.

Miura explains these cleaning practices by referring to the necessity of keeping germs and dirt outside to prevent the spread of disease. Much of the dirt is, however, not directly linked to germs and disease. Practices of cleanliness served to classify the sports hall as a safe place. More generally in Japan the emphasis on the floor in regards to cleaning practices is obvious. When I asked people about *sōji* (cleaning), most informants' immediate response was to think of cleaning the floor, although they also use the term "*toire no sōji*", or "*ofuro no sōji*" ("toilet cleaning" and "bath cleaning") as well. The Japanese term for vacuum cleaner is *sōji-ki*, cleaning machine.

People soon started to clean the floor of the school, initially with the help of volunteers and aid workers. Without electricity and running water, they drew upon "traditional" techniques. They used wet newspaper shavings, dispersed them over the floor and swept them with a broom to take up the dust. This cleaning technique (originally with wet tea leaves) had generally been applied in Japan before the common availability of vacuum cleaners (during the 1960s–70s). Ms Inekawa, who had not used this method before, thought it took up the dust surprisingly well, and the method was kept up even after vacuum cleaners became available. Using this technique was obviously the initiative of an individual in this shelter; at the shelter of Orikasa Elementary in a different district of Yamada, the method was not used, and my interviewee Takeuchi Hiroshi (61) complained that it was very dusty there. A dust-free environment certainly helped people to feel more comfortable. Nevertheless, using wet newspaper shavings and sweeping them away with a broom does not do anything to fight germs. The dust that is swept away stands metaphorically for different kinds of dirt and dangers. Moreover, Leo Walter Hildburgh¹⁷ observed that the broom in many cultures, Japan included, is considered a weapon of defense and/or a magic instrument of control: one can almost see the act of sweeping away dusty newspaper shavings as an act of sweeping away ghosts and evil influences that caused the disaster.

If we follow Elizabeth Shove's assessment that "cleaning is at heart a matter of policing social boundaries and restoring order,"¹⁸ then it is evident that by creating a distinction between the dirty outside and the inside through cleaning techniques and changing shoes, the evacuees also worked towards creating a home for themselves, albeit a temporary one. In this respect, it makes sense that I was not allowed inside the school without scrutiny. The head of disaster relief in Yamada, Shirato Yasuyuki, whom I interviewed during my second visit, pointed out that it would be impossible to protect the people from disease and crime if any well-meaning researcher, journalist, or volunteer were just to walk inside the *hinanjo* as s/he pleased. In fact, the otherwise very reserved man became very emotional when he told me how these people hindered him in his work and did not conceal his anger. Restoring the cleanliness of the sports hall in the school was thus not only a matter of hygiene to avoid contamination with infectious diseases. Protecting the inside from dirt, both in the sense of contamination with disease and with social disorder, was most importantly an issue of marking the place an inside, or even a home, that provided some degree of comfort and safety, despite continuing aftershocks and existential fears caused by loss of house, job, and people. Tsunami victims no longer felt that they had control over their lives; but by gaining some degree of control over the dirt in their environment, they could regain a sense of stability. I do not entirely agree with Douglas when she writes that: "In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea."¹⁹ Clearly, in Yamada a major motivator for the avoidance of dirt was the anxiety to avoid disease.²⁰ Nevertheless, part of her argument can be confirmed. Re-establishing a sense of social order certainly was a central concern in the cleaning practices.

Other than at the school, people who had evacuated to the Ryūshōji took off their shoes. They were apologetic and hesitated to enter the tatami-floored temple hall (*hondō*) in wet and dirty clothes. The young *oshōsan*²¹ told them not to worry. He and Satō Tatsuya (43)²² brought towels, blankets, and little mats for people to dry, clean, and warm themselves. When it became obvious that some 50–80 people had nowhere to go, they were shown to a large tatami-floored hall on the second floor and taken care of. Despite the panic, people very much perceived their entry into the temple as that of a guest into a private house. The rule of taking off shoes in order to avoid bringing dirt and pollution inside was still observed.



Water canisters at Ryūshōji. No longer in use, but always in reach.

Water and food hygiene

A central problem in dealing with matters of hygiene and cleanliness was the lack of running water and of electricity. As long as the streets were full of debris, the *jeitai* (Self-Defense Forces) were unable to deliver water where it was needed. Minami Elementary was one of the first places in town to have its water supply reconnected, on 19 March²³, only eight days after the disaster. Until then the situation was very difficult, and time was perceived as passing very slowly. Toda Haruko* (36) remembers that water from the school's swimming pool was carried over to wash and to flush the toilet (see below); the *jeitai* had also provided purifying tablets to turn the water from the swimming pool into drinking water, but she felt uncomfortable drinking it, not sure whether it was really safe to do so. No one else talked about drinking the pool water, and there were certainly other sources of water available. Everyone at Ryūshōji and some at Minami Elementary, including Toda, told me about sources of spring water (*sawa mizu*) in the hills behind the town. For Shirano Takashi, a young fisherman staying at Ryūshōji, collecting water was his most important job immediately after the disaster, while his father, also a fisherman and a fire-fighter, was involved in searching for survivors under the debris:

Since we had no tap water, securing water was one of our central tasks. Around Yamada, there are several sources of spring water, but the streets were difficult to pass, so water had to be carried. It was quite an effort. This was one of my responsibilities from the beginning. Later, a few others helped me. I always walked around with empty plastic bottles in my rucksack. After a while, when the streets were cleared, the water-tank truck (*kyūsuisha*) of the *jeitai* came to the entrance of the temple compound, so we only needed to go down there to fill our plastic bottles and water canisters. (Shirano Takashi, 29)

Minami Elementary was always reachable by road, if only via a small mountain road; so it is likely that the *jeitai* water tank had already been available there after only a day or two. A number of people who lived in private houses told me that they reactivated the wells in their garden. Nishikawa Tatsuko (53), who lives in the Funakoshi district of Yamada, away from the town's immediate support network, explained that they were afraid of contamination if they drank the water after several decades of not using or testing it, but at least they could make use of the well for non-drinking water. That was an enormous help for the hard work of cleaning the house of sand, salt and mud and for doing laundry. Since water was scarce and labor-intensive to obtain, it was crucial to use it very frugally and to purify it before consumption, primarily by boiling it. Takashi's mother, Shirano Mikiko (51), explained:

At the beginning we were very careful not to waste water. We covered the individual rice plates with *saran wrap* (plastic film) and only washed them when we ripped it by accident.²⁴ We used disposable chopsticks, and for drinking we used paper cups on which we wrote our names so that we could reuse them. Unlike now, we did not have one little individual plate for each dish, but just put the big pots on the table, and we put some fish or vegetables onto our rice plates. This is how we ate, trying to reduce dish washing as much as possible. It also helped that it was still cold, so even though we did not have refrigerators, the food did not spoil that easily and it was easier to maintain hygiene. We usually drank tea, but even when we drank spring water, we always boiled it first to make sure we would not get sick.

Medical care units were established in the large shelters and the town hall immediately after the disaster, so health care was available in town even though the new hospital had been flooded. Lack of water, electricity, and the difficulties of bringing in new medical supplies or technologies, however, meant that this care was basic and mainly dealt with potential infections, first aid, emotional support, and preventative care. Severe or chronic cases were evacuated to other areas. People took special care not to catch any infectious diseases, especially since (apart from radio) no means of communication were available and they could not go to the hospital easily. Water was heated mainly with gas stoves, fuelled by small propane tanks, or initially also with wood fires outside. Several people recalled public health workers and nurses visiting them and giving guidance on how to deal with food hygiene. They also brought antibacterial hand sanitizer. As the person responsible for the priest's household at Ryūshōji, Shimizu Noriko also felt responsible for people in the shelter and very much emphasized the importance of hygiene. Even months after the disaster, I could observe her and the other women's concern with detail in this respect. Here is an excerpt from my field notes on 16 July:

After breakfast Shirano Mikiko, Shimizu Noriko, Kon Rumiko, and Sasaki Mami were preparing a large number of *onigiri* (rice balls)²⁵. They are very efficient and fast. Shirano took the rice from the huge rice cooker into a bowl, mixed it with some salt, and cooled it a bit with a fan. Then she took a portion for a large *onigiri* with a scoop to give to Shimizu. In the meantime Shimizu had torn off a piece of wrap (the wrap was also delivered for free with the donations), on which the rice was put. She added an *umeboshi* (pickled plum) and pressed it together in the wrap, mentioning how hot the rice still was. Then she gave it to Kon, who was pressing it into proper shape. In the end, Sasaki opened the wrap and folded a strip of *nori* (sea weed) around the rice, before wrapping it up again. They were working very quickly. I watched them with admiration and mentioned that this was an interesting (*omoshiroi*) way of making *onigiri*. Shimizu understood what I meant and answered that in a normal household one does it with bare hands (*futsu wa te de yarun desu ga*), but here it's more efficient to do it this way. Moreover, they don't make their hands dirty, also because of *baikin* (germs); it's more hygienic to make them with the wrap.



Women at the temple are preparing *onigiri*. Some wear face masks, some don't.

before we touch them. Otherwise, there might be some bacteria growing. A public-health nurse came and introduced that. Especially now, as temperatures get warmer, that's really important. Some of the others wear a mouth mask, but I don't. Outside I sometimes wear one, because it's very dusty, but at work, because I wear glasses, they tend to mist over and I don't see anything, so it's of no use. At the beginning the air outside was really dusty. You can get infectious diseases from this, so that's why. (Sasaki Mami, 37)



Fig. 7: Hygiene is a high priority in the kitchen. Shirano Mikiko is cutting octopus into sashimi. (Octopus was not part of government food provisions, but the fisher family often received gifts from friends or could buy fish freshly; other inhabitants of the temple also occasionally brought some extra food for everyone.)

As in this quote, when people talked about cleanliness in the household, they always used biomedical terms or everyday language, never words that signify ritual pollution such as *kegare*.²⁶ It is also evident that the experts that people relied on in terms of keeping a state of cleanliness were the health authorities. The latter were immediately put on alert and engaged with containing potential epidemics using hygiene measures based on germ theory. Public-health training is very well developed in Japan; even toddlers are aware of the necessity of fighting germs by hygienic practices through stories based on their favorite animation character, Anpanman²⁷. It was not difficult to convince people to take up hygienic behavior like boiling water, wrapping food, or washing hands with anti-bacterial hand sanitizer. Many of them had already taken their own initiative:

We have always used anti-bacterial hand sanitizer, so for the time being, there haven't been any health problems caused by poor hygiene. Each time we use the toilet, we not only wash our hands, but also use hand sanitizer. And when we start cooking, then again, we carefully wash our hands with soap. For things that we eat raw, like cabbage or tomatoes, we always use gloves

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I could not observe any systematic usage of the white surgical mask. Masks were distributed at the shelters and everyone was encouraged to wear one, but while some women would wear one while preparing rice balls, others would not. The same women also would not always wear a mask when they were cooking. The priest told me to wear a mask when I went out to walk around town because of the dust, though he himself never wore one. In principle people used the mask both to protect themselves from germs and dirt (as well as radiation, although this was hardly an issue in Yamada) and to avoid allowing their own germs to contaminate the food.²⁸ Dust, whether real or not, seems to be the tangible dirt that stands in lieu of all the other potential contamination that people cannot feel, see or smell.

While people were careful about hygiene, not all were obsessed with making things sterile. Shirano Makoto*, Mikiko's husband, once picked up some food crumbs that had fallen from the eating table onto the carpet-covered tatami floor and put it into his mouth, commenting to me that people nowadays made too much fuss about hygiene and sterility, causing children to get all kinds of allergies. He thought it was quite healthy to get exposed to a bit of dirt.

Toilet troubles

Although hardly ever discussed in public, one of the most crucial issues for the wellbeing of people affected by the tsunami were toilets. The topic came up frequently in interviews. At schools, existing sanitary facilities were not meant to serve such a large number of people, especially without running water and electricity. Moreover, toilets for elementary school children are small. Toda Haruko* (36), mother of a toddler and elementary school child best describes the precarious situation:

As we did not have running water, the hygiene situation at Minami Elementary declined more and more. First of all, the toilets. We carried many buckets of water from the school's swimming pool to put into the toilet's tank and flush, but we could not get them clean. In Yamada there is still no proper sewage system, and without electricity the sewage pumps do not work. So, very soon all the toilets were overflowing with the discharge and could not be used anymore. People who had to empty their bowels were told to go into the hills or in the inner garden of the school, where holes had been dug.²⁹ However, afterwards you could not wash your hands properly. Buckets of water were provided, but that water was rather disgusting. After changing the nappies of my little son, I could not wash my hands either. It was really, really filthy. From time to time I wiped my hands with wet tissue, but that was scarce, so we had to be really thrifty. In the end I caught a bowel infection and had to be brought to the hospital in Miyako by ambulance. I recovered quickly and could return after one night, but even in the hospital I could not take a shower, as they did not have enough water.



Dinner at the *hinanjo* of Ryūshōji. Some people are still at work. Dinner at all *hinanjo* was usually a bento box and miso soup. At the temple, the women usually prepared a few extras. The women were excellent cooks.

I was really, really desperate and anxious. How long would this situation go on? What other troubles were in store for us? That was very, very stressful and I was extremely exhausted. Not surprisingly, we couldn't sleep properly. Even if I fell asleep, I would wake up again immediately. I could not think clearly at all, everything was turning around in my head.

A clean and comfortable toilet is a central concern not only due to the risk of spreading infectious diseases. I talked to Toda several times extensively, and it was only during the second interview that she told me about her bowel infection, even though she had alluded to the story earlier. Clearly, she was ashamed of the consequences of unhygienic behavior, even though she could not do anything about it. People lost control over their house, their belongings, often even over close family and friends; and the ground was still shaking frequently. All this caused anxiety and insomnia. Not having control over the discharge of their own excrement was a further blow for their feeling of stability of the self. As an indicator of moral standards, the inability to control one's life and body also became a question of shame.

The authorities were largely able to restore public safety relatively quickly, but most people could hardly get any sleep during the first few days and nights. Many strong aftershocks, worries about relatives and friends, fear for the future, the close presence of strangers, and uncomfortable circumstances kept them awake, and they thus had to visit the toilet more often in the night. Outside it was cold, dark, and unfamiliar. Even at the temple, where the toilets were inside the house and not far from the sleeping place, this caused a problem for some:

I hate darkness, so it was annoying (*fuben*) having to go to toilet at night. Whenever possible, I went with my daughter or with my husband. My daughter also hates the darkness, so she also woke me up when she had to go to toilet at night, and we usually went together. We all had our own torch, and there were torches for common usage. At the beginning we did not have enough batteries, though, as they could not be bought, so we had to be very thrifty. (Sasaki Mami, 37)

Even though Sasaki does not explicitly say so, the hate for or dislike (*kira*) of dark toilets has to do with a century-old superstition that one could encounter ghosts in such places, not least at a temple (see below). For children, such insecurity sometimes manifested itself in bed-wetting. Yamanishi Shiho* (36) told me that her eight-year old son started to wet his bed at the shelter. Of course, he (and she) was embarrassed, since he had already passed the age when doing so was normal. Since washing machines were not available, washing the bedding was also a practical problem. To solve this, his mother helped him to secretly put on his two-year-old brother's diapers underneath the futon.

Considering that many young women in Japan find it difficult to make use of communal toilets (because the person in the neighboring cubicle might hear them urinating³⁰), it is easy to understand that this toilet situation added to the discomfort, tension and the feeling of being unsettled at shelters. Luckily for people at Ryūshōji, the facilities did not depend on electricity and running water. As Satō Tatsuya (43) recalled:

The temple has no flush toilets, so in terms of toilet use we had "peace" [laughs]. In places with flush toilets the situation became really bad. Once I visited a different shelter and saw a note with instructions on how to use the toilet: "If you have to empty your bowels, put some paper into the toilet pot, and when you have finished, wrap it and throw it in the bucket provided." It must be terrible, if you have to do that every day. At that *hinanjo* there were several hundred people. You can imagine how the situation must have been before they put up that note. But the temple toilet is disaster-resistant (*shinsai ni tsuyoi toire desu*). This alone probably made a big difference to how we felt. We were a bit worried what we should do if the toilet waste tank became full. Of course, we thought about these things. It's an everyday issue, and you need to be clean. Fortunately it did not become a problem.

For many reasons including this toilet situation, it was noticeable that people at Minami Elementary were far more stressed by their inability to wash themselves properly than those at Ryūshōji. Thus, for them the first bath was a much more emotional and significant event, even though they did not have to wait for it as long as the people at the temple.

The bath

Such first baths were prominent events both in people's personal accounts as well as in the media. The Japanese are known for their love of a hot daily bath not only for personal hygiene, but also as a way to relax, to warm the body and the soul.³¹ The first bath after the disaster was even more significant. After their dramatic escape from the tsunami, this bath represents the first event people remember clearly. As the statement by Toda Haruko* quoted at the beginning of this article makes particularly clear, the first bath started a transition from a state of apathy, memory loss, high tension, and angst, to a process of "normalization," especially for people at Minami Elementary. As soon as water had been reconnected, the *jeitai* provided showers, but people in Yamada had been able to take their first bath several days earlier. Shimada *kōsen*³², a public bath hotel in Toyomane, a district of Yamada that had not been damaged by tsunami, invited everyone staying in Yamada's shelters to bathe there for free. As soon as they had electricity to heat up the water, the Shimadas provided a bus and shuttled groups of bathers in turn.

When we were able to take a bath for the first time at the Shimada hotel in Toyomane, I was really moved (*kandō shimashita*). The first several days we could not take a bath, and then these people provided us with a free bus and we could take a bath there. That was really helpful. (Ms Inekawa, in her 50s)



The owner of Shimada *kosen* at the counter of her bath house.

After about a week, we could all take a bath at the spa in Toyomane. They came many times with the bus to pick us up, but we were all worried what would happen if they ran out of gasoline, since that had been still difficult to come by. So all of us queued to have a chance. Since we lived without water, we very much longed for a bath after a week or ten days. We were really happy about it, really grateful. (Miura Michiko, 56)

I think that was the first bath after 12, 13 days. The *oshōsan* [priest] had organized some free tickets for us, and several of us went. I remember that I had to wash my hair many times to get it soft. (Satō Tatsuya, 43)

Until this bath, the sense of time is very unreliable; most people regardless of age had the feeling that they waited much longer for this event than they actually had. The sensory tension before the first bath was also recognizable in their relative insensitivity to dirty bodies. People were worried about hygiene and contamination but were uncharacteristically lax about body odor and unwashed clothes. My interviewees explained this by saying that hygiene would have been much worse in the summer,

when they would have sweated more. I suggest that there was another reason for the increased tolerance: the overwhelming post-traumatic stress placed on the senses and emotions, which made people forget about the passage of time and events, also made them relatively insensitive towards dirt and body smell. Ueno Noriko (70) told me that although she normally washed her hair every day, much to her surprise, she did not even sense itching in her head after more than a week of not washing her hair. My interviewees also commented that they were “all in this together” (*mina issho*). As Shirano Mikiko recalled:

We were all in this together and lucky that everyone in our family survived. People who did not lose their house, even those who live nearby, probably cannot understand our feelings properly. Just a few days after the disaster, when we all were still unwashed and wearing the same clothes day and night, a woman came to the temple in full make-up. “*Usō deshō*” (that can’t be true!), I thought. (Shirano Mikiko, 51)

Shirano strongly felt that showing off a made-up face, something that would be expected under normal circumstances, at the area of destruction was an affront to all the people who had become victims of the tsunami. In other words, sharing dirty conditions had become a source and a sign of shared suffering and understanding, of community and solidarity.



The public bath at Minami Elementary, sponsored by Chiba Prefecture.

The *jeitai* showers installed at Minami Elementary were popular because of their hot water and excellent water pressure, and not only with people staying at shelters. Yamamoto Tomi (81), who soon returned to her own house, which had only been flooded at ground-floor level, often went to take a shower there before water and electricity returned to her house. By June a blue tent sponsored by Chiba prefecture, containing a large bathtub and shower, had been put up behind the school, and daily bath routines had been established. From June 10 on, the cleaning and organization of the bath was “professionalized.” Three evacuees, including Miura Michiko and Satō Katsumi (61; see below), were hired for this job by the local government. In mid-June, women and small children could take a bath from 3 to 7 p.m., and men from 7 to 9 p.m. Women who were at work until late had the chance to take a quick bath together with Miura after that, and then the last men took a bath with Satō. After that, the water would be emptied and the bathtub cleaned.

At Ryūshōji, since it took much longer for the supply of water and electricity to be restored, people occasionally went to one of the public baths provided by the authorities. By late April, the priest and his wife opened up their large family bath for everyone in the shelter to use. At

about 3:30 p.m. every day, Shimizu Noriko prepared the bath and called upstairs that it was ready. People went in rather fixed schedules. At the door, there was a reversible sign showing that the bath was occupied, and I was advised by Shirano Mikiko that women were to lock the door as well. The bathtub was big enough to share. As is not uncommon in public baths, the two older men at the shelter sometimes took a bath together. Ten-year old Maekawa Chiyuki, who stayed at the temple with his single father for some weeks, also did not want to go on his own. Shimizu Noriko was kept wondering why he was so bath-shy, but to me he explained as follows:

Normally I am fine being on my own. I am only afraid when it is dark. I am afraid of ghosts (*yūrei*). Here in the temple there are obviously bones. That makes me feel uneasy. I can feel the presence of the ghosts. The most frightening for me is taking a bath. I once took a bath alone, I sat down in the water, only my head looked out; it’s a big bathtub. When I put my hands in front of me, the water was warm. But when I put my hands into the water behind me, the water suddenly felt icy cold. That freaked me out. It’s not supposed to be like that, is it? I was glad that I had already washed my hair. Since then I don’t want to take a bath anymore. I always ask for someone to take a bath with me. At home I was also frightened and always took a bath with grandpa. There are people who don’t believe in ghosts, but I do. When I have to go to toilet at night, I wake up my grandmother. It’s too frightening. It’s like something heavy sits on my shoulders that makes me feel tense. When the light is on, I hardly feel the ghosts, but when it is dark, it is very frightening.

Chiyuki is not the only one who feels the presence of ghosts. Indeed, Horiie Kazuyo (72) and her friends also told me that there were numerous ghosts about town since the disaster. That was, however, not the reason why she could not take a bath in a relaxed manner anymore. Her house had been flooded up to almost one meter by the tsunami, but not destroyed. Thus, after a couple of weeks of cleaning

during which she stayed at the shelter of Minami Elementary, she moved in again. But she stayed in constant fear that another tsunami could hit at any time, so she decided to wash her hair during the day and chose not to relax in her bathtub. While people in the shelters were at least convinced that their location provided them with a modicum of safety, Horiai had seen her house exposed to the forces of nature and so continued to keep a rucksack packed with emergency provisions at her entrance to use in case of a speedy evacuation. But staying in one's private home has clear advantages, too. After moving into temporary housing (*kasetsu jūtaku*) in mid-July, Satō Tatsuya (43) told me that the thing he enjoys most is being able to take a bath whenever he likes.



Horiai Kazuyo shows her emergency rucksack to her friends. She has prepared some essentials, which she keeps close to the entrance in case she has to escape a tsunami again.

Restoring cleanliness and order

Given the implications of a problematic hygiene situation for the wellbeing of the people at the shelter, reinstating toilet hygiene at Minami Elementary was essential in order to cope with visible and invisible threats and to regain control over daily life. The handling of the "toilet problem" is also a prime example of the techniques and social structures that enabled people to re-establish a sense of normalcy, cleanliness, and order. Restoring order requires coordinated effort and cannot be achieved by individuals on their own.

None of my interviewees was able to tell me in detail about who was responsible for cleaning in the days immediately after the disaster, but initially it seems to have been mostly volunteers and town officials or the *jieitai* who took care of cleaning, while the interviewees told me that they needed all their energy to hold on to their lives (*hisshi de ikiteita*), as Toda Haruko* put it. After water and electricity were restored, sewage ejectors also worked again, and gradually, as Satō Katsumi (61) explained, some evacuees thought that they should take care of things themselves:

After a while I thought that this was something for us to do and that we need to get organized. So on 1 April I became the shelter representative [of Minami Elementary] and we created a *han* (group) structure to be responsible for cooking and cleaning in weekly turns.

The *han* structure is commonly used in Japanese schools and other institutions to divide certain tasks, including cleaning. During *gasshuku* (school groups lodging outside town for a few days) in particular, *han* are in charge of cleaning (*seisō*) not only for maintaining a clean environment but as a moral training. Kuwayama Takami describes at the *gasshuku*, how the students (beginning of middle school) were divided into small groups of six to nine children. They were equipped with brooms, dustpans, mops, and cloths to clean the assigned areas. He comments: "Cleaning is essential to Japanese discipline, not because the Japanese are obsessed with cleanliness, but because *darashinai* (being untidy) is a sign of moral degeneration. Put another way, it is not the object being cleaned, but rather the mind and the body of the person who is doing the cleaning that is important. Thus, *seiri seiton* (putting things in order) is considered a first step toward moral integrity in Japan. Nothing makes better sense, then, than to begin a new day with cleaning."³³

Orikasa Elementary had a similar *han* system in place, according to Takeuchi Hiroshi. At Minami Elementary, people were sleeping (and living) in four long rows in the sports hall, originally each divided into two *han* (by June, there were only four *han* in total), and people sleeping alongside the wall were then added to different *han*, selected according to their gender, because, as Satō explained, when a *han* that consisted mostly of men were in charge of cooking, the food would have been terrible. (During my stay I did not hear of any man cooking in a shelter.) Each *han* had a *hanchō* and a *fuku-hanchō*, a group leader and vice group leader, respectively. They coordinated tasks within the *han* and represented the group in daily meetings, in which the representative of the shelter and town officials (who were responsible for the shelter) also took part. These posts rotated. There were no elections. *Hanchō* "naturally emerged" through volunteering, as people explained to me; they often had to be "convinced" by someone senior. Being a *hanchō* meant a great commitment in time and energy. Initially most of the group leaders were men, but when more men went back to work, many women took up leading roles.

Miura Michiko (56), herself a *hanchō* at the time of the interview, told me that they made great efforts in answering people's often contradicting demands and in reducing stress. Many people said that they had to *gaman* (endure) the situation. However, far from being a common cultural trait of people in Northeast Japan, individuals differed greatly in what they felt they could ask from the *hanchō* and when they had to endure. Noda Tokiko*, a single mother in her 30s, whose baby was six months old in March, was excused from community cleaning and cooking duties, as were many elderly. She also requested a room for breastfeeding, and she and another woman with a child under the age of one were allocated a classroom to use (by June the other woman had moved out and Noda* could not breastfeed anymore, but she was allowed to keep her private room). By contrast, Yamanishi Shiho* (36) slept with her extended family in the sports hall. She found it very stressful that her sleeping space was very narrow and that there was no partition between the sleeping places. In most large *hinanjo*, on the recommendation of experts, partitions between individual sleeping places were introduced. Officials tried to introduce them, but shelter representative Satō Katsumi told me that he (autocratically) decided that they wouldn't need them, commenting that "we are like a family".³⁴ The absence of partitions meant not only a lack of privacy, but also that Yamanishi had to constantly prevent her toddler son from transgressing on other people's space. Nevertheless, even when her own father was *hanchō*, she did not feel that she could make demands. Sekiya Makoto, a journalist who had encouraged me to go to Yamada for research and accompanied me for a day, opined that Yamanishi's situation was probably connected to her illness (she is epileptic). He explained that it is not uncommon that people with such an illness feel themselves to be a burden and are reluctant to make any demands at all.

In shelters in Yamada, kitchens were completely under the supervision of women. Miura had put her mother forward to be the "head chef" of their *han*, as she had professional experience and was most senior. The women always decided on the menu based on the food deliveries from the town hall. The main meal in all *hinanjo* was breakfast, generally taken around 6 a.m. Thus, being in charge of cooking meant early rising. Nevertheless, as Miura said, they aimed at having a cheerful (*akaru*) atmosphere. Toda*, who was in the same *han*, confirmed that the women had a good time preparing meals, even though it was a lot of work.³⁵ Men did "*chikara shigoto*" (physical labor), carrying heavy pots and water or, in the case of small *hinanjo* like the Ryūshōji, going to pick up food from the town hall.

Unlike cooking, cleaning was done by both men and women, though there were differences in what each gender cleaned. Men generally took on tasks that required physical strength and were more commonly found outside. They were hardly ever found in a kitchen for dish washing or



Cleaning the kitchen and dish-washing is women's work.



... but today the young monk has overslept and only arrived at breakfast at 6.30 a.m. The women decided that he must be educated by having him doing all the dishes alone.

balls, but during the day, I leave things to Kon Rumiko and

cleaning. In Japan, children, both boys and girls, have to take turns in cleaning the toilets at school. Taking on this habit, at Minami Elementary men cleaned the men's facilities and women theirs. Shelter representative Satō remembers that he had been involved in cleaning (although as a "traditional" husband he had never done this at home before). He not only facilitated the establishment of *han* structures, as in other shelters, but also introduced unique strategies to avoid dirt:

I introduced squatting gymnastics. Nowadays in Japan we all use Western toilets at home, but at the school there are no such toilets, and the elderly don't have enough muscle strength to squat, so the toilets were really dirty. Since I carried water and cleaned the toilets I was very much aware of this and I suggested to a former teacher who had trained sumo to introduce some squatting exercises. So, at our shelter we did the radio gymnastic program, and afterwards squatting exercises. Especially the grannies were very much into it (*issho kenmei*); and the toilets were used properly. After a while I was liberated from my duty of cleaning the toilets. (Satō Katsumi, 61)

As in the kitchen, preventative measures that need a high level of cooperation were thus introduced (and maintained) to handle the toilet crisis. Introduced in 1928, every primary school child has to participate in early morning radio gymnastics during its summer holidays. Many elderly find the daily exercises refreshing and energizing. The radio gymnastics help to structure their day. These examples show how communities used cleaning to enhance social integration by collaborating in avoiding dirt, cleaning, establishing structure and order, as well as by increasing personal comfort. It also makes clear that although some people had creative ideas to tackle problems, by and large they relied on well-trained social structures and habits. They were highly aware and well-trained in hygiene practices even before the disaster.

Similarly, at Ryūshōji, negotiating and sharing household duties was one major way to create a community. The small group of evacuees had to take care of their household from the beginning, since there were no officials or volunteers to do so. During the first weeks, the temple had not been officially recognized as a *hinanjo*. The priest couple who hosted the evacuees was instrumental in organizing food and other supplies, but they were also extremely busy advising people about what to do with their dead relatives or destroyed home altars, listening to people's worries and conducting funerals or other community services. Thus, they mostly left it to the people in the shelter to organize their household.

This is a small *hinanjo* with nice people; so when there is something to decide, someone makes a suggestion, and we come to an agreement. It's different from other *hinanjo*, where they divide themselves into *han*, and you often hear, "You cannot do this, you cannot do that." We get along very well—that's good, isn't it? That's rather rare in a *hinanjo*. [...] I am usually at work during the day, so I cannot help much with the cooking and cleaning, but I do all the toilets. There are three places with toilets, here on the second floor, on the first floor, and also at the main temple hall (*hondō*). Toilets have to be cleaned when nobody is around, so that's what I can do in the morning before breakfast. When the others start cooking at 5.15 a.m., I also get up. Downstairs I clean once a week, more often when there are funerals, upstairs every other day, so that it's always clean. I also help after breakfast, doing the dishes and preparing the rice Shirano Mikiko. It's quite a lot of work for them. (Sasaki Mami, 37)

In the "household"-sized shelter where people had the feeling that the division of labour has emerged "naturally" (*shizen ni*), cleaning was done by women. There are exceptions, though. Shirano Takashi was in charge of cleaning the bathroom every day (encouraged to do so by his mother), and one weekend, when he was away, his father stepped in:

We live here as a group, so everyone has to make a contribution and keep one's own things tidy. At the beginning I mainly carried water around, but this is not necessary anymore. The women do the cooking for us, so I help to set the table, and I also clean the bath every day. I did that at home as well. (Shirano Takashi, 29)

Carrying waste bags to the collection site was also a job for men, in this



Every family has a corner where they try to keep their belongings orderly.



actually said that they were doing their laundry either at a friend's or relative's home or in a public launderette rather than at the *hinanjo*. A fact-finding mission in April and May 2011 by the Tokyo-based NGO Human Rights Now (HRN) found that "It is still difficult to do laundry, little safe space is secured to hang out female laundry, women have little choice but to use their underwear once and throw it away, and the supply of underwear is limited,"³⁷ confirming that hanging out women's underwear in public spaces is considered a problem in Japan. Thus, even though people always pointed out that "they were all in this together" or "like a family", living together with people who had previously been mostly passing acquaintances increasingly demanded measures to be taken to maintain privacy. Increasing cleanliness and order also meant an increasing social differentiation.



Laundry in front of the *hinanjo* at a prefectural youth house (*seishōnen no ie*) in the south of Yamada.

duties. Adults were very concerned about the psychological stress to children caused by the disaster. They worried about their wellbeing and were generally very indulgent. Older children were to concentrate on studying, which was particularly difficult for high school students, who struggled to find a quiet place to finish their work before the 9 p.m. curfew and would often sit in the corridor to study after that. Thus, by and large, during their life at the *hinanjo*, men, women and children concentrated on what they perceived to be their core responsibilities using practices they had learned best.

case for the retired Saitō-san (73) and, on his free days, also grandpa Sasaki (65). In the temple, it was obvious that everyone made an effort to contribute to group life by taking up tasks in the household, offering gifts of food and trying to avoid conflicts to show gratitude to their hosts, even though that did not always work.³⁶ In larger *hinanjo* where evacuees were not personally hosted, not everyone seems to have felt that way, as I gather from small hints in my conversations with people staying at Minami Elementary.

In general, cleaning duties were not onerous. Because of the temporary state of shelter life, spring-cleaning was not required.

We don't do major cleaning, just use the vacuum cleaner. Before having electricity, we used a broom and a "*korokoro*" (a lint roller for the floor). Kon *sensei* and I do the cleaning after everyone is gone. At 8 we watch the NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) morning drama together with Saitō san, and at 8:15 we start. For the kitchen, we first do the vacuum cleaning and then wash the floor with a rag (*zōkin*). Basically we clean every other day, but depending on the weather and whether people are around, we might agree to do it a day earlier or later. (Shirano Mikiko, 51)

At both places, each family took care of its own laundry. Single men did the laundry themselves, otherwise it was women's work. Washing machines were available shortly after electricity and water had been re-established, but with only three machines for a shelter of hundred people, the capacities were insufficient. Yamanishi Shiho* said that she often drove 15 miles to Miyako to use the coin launderette because she had too much laundry. With a bed-wetting child, she also might have preferred using an anonymous facility rather than hanging up her laundry at the shelter. Moreover, the necessity of hanging out her underwear might have been a reason behind driving that far to do the laundry (as an epileptic she was not able to drive herself and relied on her husband's free days to do so). Subsequently when discussing an earlier draft of this article, Keiko Morrison, a woman in her fifties, drew my attention to the fact that young women are usually shy about hanging out their underwear in public, because they are an intimate article of clothing, and the women were worried about men having sexual fantasies and molesting them. She wondered how the women had handled this, but none of the women had mentioned such a concern during interviews. However, revisiting the interview transcripts, I realized that all the women under 40 I talked to

Unfortunately I could not talk to many children, as teenagers spent a lot of time at school. Moreover, people were reluctant to introduce them to me, especially the ones who had lost a parent, because they were afraid that talking would be painful. As a result, I only spoke to the two children at the temple, the 13-year old Sasaki Saaya and the 10-year old Maekawa Chiyuki. Judging from what the adults as well as these two children told me and my own observations, young people were hardly involved in any household tasks.

I am not involved in tidying up or cleaning at all. Even at home I never did anything. People do this for me. I wouldn't even know how to tidy up. Even before, I have always asked someone (*tanonda, dareka ni, zettai*). (Maekawa Chiyuki)

Saaya's contribution to household tasks had been to roll the carpet with a lint roller, and since there was electricity to operate vacuum cleaners by late April, she was no longer involved, not even taking back the empty dishes into the kitchen. At Minami Elementary, people also seem to have felt that there were enough adults to take care of the rather light cleaning

Conclusions

Re-establishing cleanliness and orderliness has been a central way for evacuees to get a grip on life after the disaster. It has helped them to regain some structure in their lives as well as a sense of normalcy, familiarity and emotional security. Practices of demarcating between the clean, safe home or *uchi* and the dirty, dangerous outside or *soto* marked the shelter as an – albeit temporary – home. A safe and clean place makes the home, or, put the other way around, to make an emergency gathering place into a home, it is necessary to make it clean.

Joy Hendry suggests that (from early childhood onwards) “the enormous ritual distinction made between the inside of the house and the outside world, recalled at least at a subconscious level each time shoes are donned or removed, creates a system of classification predisposed towards further dichotomies in behavior based on the difference between a public and a private self.”³⁸ In the shelter people created a sense of community and solidarity by sharing and solving hygiene problems. Immediately after the disaster, unwashed bodies and clothes became a sign symbol of shared suffering. With time, shelter inhabitants succeeded in creating solidarity through the shared efforts to keep their place a comfortable and safe environment. Likewise, maintaining hygiene and organizing household duties at the shelter served as a basis for creating the social structure that held the community together. By cleaning their hands, taking off shoes, wearing masks, cleaning the toilets and the bath, or watching out for the potential contamination of food, people made clear what was right and what was wrong.

When people re-created a home in the shelter, the most evident social distinction was made between genders. Both men and women took it for granted that women had the main responsibility in everyday cleaning tasks. Shirano Mikiko (51) laughed at my question, when I asked her whether by “all” being involved in household tasks, she meant “all women” or “all evacuees.” Of course, only women would be active in the kitchen, she said. While they shouldered the lion’s share of cleaning and hygiene practices, particularly in the kitchen, sharing responsibilities among women helped them to gain some sense of normalcy and solidarity as well as social and temporal structure into their lives. By all accounts, gender roles in Northeast Japan were much more clearly divided than in the urban areas of Kantō and Kansai even before the disaster.³⁹ However, confirming Hoffman’s findings introduced at the beginning of this article, it is evident that gender relations and social structures not only returned to their pre-disaster situations, but reflected older and deeper-rooted patterns. Far more women than men lost their jobs; and they found it more difficult to re-enter employment.⁴⁰ As they did not have a job, everyone found it natural that women would take the brunt of household (and caring) responsibilities.

Cleanliness and order in the shelter reflected social norms and morals. As the toilet issue has shown most poignantly, not being able to keep oneself and one’s home clean is also a question of shame. Women were affected more than men because for them personal hygiene is a more intimate affair. They also needed to protect their underwear from the male gaze and felt uncomfortable using communal toilets. While the shared experience of dirt before the first bath provided a feeling of shared suffering and solidarity among shelter inhabitants, with increasing levels of cleanliness, social distinctions within the shelter became more pronounced. Over the course of several months, it became difficult for some to maintain the solidarity that had marked the first phase of life in the shelter and many evacuees felt the increasing need to have partitions between themselves and others and looked very much forward to moving into temporary housing. The need for privacy heightened.

The seemingly private issues of hygiene also shade light on the bigger question of the role of the state. The government – both national and local – was often criticized for the inadequate response to the disaster. People in Yamada frequently expressed their anger towards the town hall officials and criticized them heavily. Officials in charge of disaster relief, in turn got angry with researchers, volunteers, and journalists who hindered them in their work. It seems almost paradoxical then, that people trusted the authorities to provide a clean and safe environment and food. What’s more, as their handling of hygiene issues show, they also co-operated in achieving these goals by reverting to familiar patterns of co-operation and practices of hygiene. Compared to major disasters in other countries, disaster relief was well organized. Many town officials went out of their way to support the people despite being disaster victims themselves. I propose that people were angry with the town hall officials precisely *because* the social contract between the people in Yamada’s shelters and the Japanese government largely worked. The authorities could not help sufficiently and were neither able to bring back the evacuees’ houses nor their beloved ones. Anger is an emotion associated with post-traumatic stress disorder;⁴¹ it could not easily – at least not openly – be thrown at fellow sufferers. The handling of issues of cleanliness suggests that people wanted to and could, by and large, rely on the support of the authorities.

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Notes

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- ² Asterisks indicate pseudonyms.
- ³ [Yamada-machi](#) had about 20,000 inhabitants before the earthquake; on October 1, 2011 there were 17,735 registered. (accessed October 7, 2011).
- ⁴ See e.g.: Lynn Blinn-Pike, "Shelter Life after Hurricane Katrina: a Visual Analysis of Evacuee Perspectives," [International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters](#) Vol. 24, No. 1 (2006), pp. 303-330.
- ⁵ Linda Jencson, "Disastrous Rites: Liminality and Communitas in a Flood Crisis," [Anthropology and Humanism](#), Vol. 26, No. 1 (2001), p. 51.
- ⁶ Susanna Hoffman, "The Regenes of Traditional Gender Patterns in the Wake of Disaster," Anthony Smith and Susanna Hoffman eds, [The Angry Earth. Disaster in Anthropological Perspective](#) (London: Routledge 1999), p. 174.
- ⁷ [Data](#) as of December 19, 2011; they exclude the district of Toyomane, a village further inland that had merged with Yamada in 1955. (accessed December 28, 2011).
- ⁸ A Zen Buddhist temple. <http://www.ryushotemple.sakura.ne.jp/index.html> (accessed July 7, 2012).
- ⁹ Minami *shōgakkō* or Southern Elementary School; hereafter: Minami Elementary.
- ¹⁰ *Iwate Nippō*. 2011. "Yamada de hinanjo seikatsu chōsa. Kenburijji dai kenkyūsha" [Cambridge University researcher conducts study on life in shelters in Yamada], *Iwate Nippō* 4 June, p. 27.
- ¹¹ Cf. Brigitte Steger, "Secrets in a tsunami evacuation center," [Anthropology News](#) Vol. 16 (November 2011), <http://dev.aaanet.org/news/index.php/2011/11/14/november-seaa-news/> (accessed November 23, 2011).
- ¹² David Slater, "Moralities of Volunteer Aid: The Permutations of Gifts and Their Reciprocals," Tom Gill, Brigitte Steger and David Slater (eds): *Coping with Disaster: Ethnographies from a Tsunami and Nuclear Devastated Japan*. Oxford: Peter Lang, forthcoming.
- ¹³ Bemet Elzinga and J. Douglas Bremner, "Review: Are the Neural Substrates of Memory the Final Common Pathway in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?" [Journal of Affective Disorders](#) No.70 (2002), pp. 1-17.
- ¹⁴ Due to the blurred memories of my informants the timing of the following events as well as details are unclear.
- ¹⁵ Mary Douglas, [Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo](#) (London: Routledge. 2002 [1966]).
- ¹⁶ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, [Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan. An Anthropological View](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21-50.
- ¹⁷ W[alter] L. Hildburg, "Some Magical Applications of Brooms in Japan," [Folklore](#) Vol. 30, No. 3 (1919), pp. 169-207.
- ¹⁸ Elizabeth Shove, [Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience. The Social Organization of Normality](#) (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 84.
- ¹⁹ Mary Douglas, [Purity and Danger](#), p. 2.
- ²⁰ See also Peter W. Kirby, [Troubled Natures. Waste, Environment, Japan](#) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), p. 115.
- ²¹ *Waka oshōshan*. This is a young priest who was working at the Ryūshōji until the end of March. On March 11, the day of the disaster, the Shimizus were out, and only returned late at night using small mountain roads, as coastal streets had been impassable.
- ²² According to interview with Satō. Satō fled to the temple rather than the town hall, because he had occasionally worked for the *oshōsan* and knew that the Shimizus were out that day. He knew the young *oshōsan*, and thus helped to take care of others immediately.
- ²³ According to [Yamada town hall](#) (accessed October 7, 2011). In the memory of my interviewees, this was considerably later.

²⁴ Shimizu Noriko pointed out to me that for this reason, even several months later, rice was served on small plates rather than in rice bowls.

²⁵ These rice balls were for the employees of the town supermarket who were at that time still working in two small places or rebuilding the large supermarket as the first store opening in the center of town in early August. Mase Keizō, the young owner of the supermarket, was also staying at the temple. Shimizu explained to me that they wanted to support him with preparing the *onigiri* every day, because he worked so hard to provide the town with this important part of infrastructure, and he also often brought special food treats for people in the shelter to enrich their meals.

²⁶ The only context in which people pointed to indigenous or ritual pollution, albeit hardly explicitly, and the need for purification was in dealing with death and bodies. After the disaster, recovering, identifying and transporting bodies from underneath the debris was largely left to the *jieitai*, while local fire brigades concentrated on finding survivors. Fishermen had returned to the sea to rebuild the rafts for aquaculture, but there was no fishing going on in Yamada bay. Noone went to swim for fear of encountering bodies or body parts floating in the water. At the temple, ashes were delivered to the temple after dark and people were very keen to get advice on how to deal with the ashes and funeral rituals correctly. Many said that they sensed the ghosts that haunted the ruins of the town. In this article, however, I concentrate on cleanliness in everyday life in the shelter.

²⁷ Anpanman (first published in 1973) is the most popular animation and merchandise character for young children in Japan. In the stories, the hero Anpanman (bean paste bread man) fights against the villain Baikinman (germ/bacteria man) and his friends. The most effective weapons being soap, toothpaste and the like.

²⁸ Adam Burgess and Horii Mitsutoshi, "Risk, Ritual and Health Responsibilisation: Japan's 'Safety Blanket' of Surgical face mask-wearing," [Sociology of Health and Illness](#), [published online, 23 March] (2012), pp. 1-15, trace the use of the white mask among the common Japanese back to the outbreak of the Spanish flu in 1919. But it is likely that the origin of the mask as a means of protection against epidemics is in Manchuria, where the Malay-born and Cambridge-trained Chinese doctor Wu Lien-teh (1879–1960) developed and systematized it to be used in the combat against a pneumonic plague epidemic in Harbin in 1911. He later advocated the use of the white gauze mask through the WHO; cf. Wu Lien-teh, [Treatise on Pneumonic Plague](#) (Geneva: League of Nations, 1926), pp. 391–99. See also Ohnuki-Tierney, [Illness and Culture](#), pp. 25–6; Kirby, [Troubled Natures](#), p. 116.

²⁹ It is unclear who did this work, but I assume that either the *jieitai*, town hall officials or volunteers took the initiative.

³⁰ In public toilets, it is common for women to flush the toilet just before using it so that they cannot be heard urinating. To avoid water wastage, many companies, schools and universities use flushing sound devices (*oto hime*). Notably, a friend told me that during the electricity-saving campaigns in summer 2011, some companies switched these devices off, only to realise that water consumption went up rapidly. These women appear to feel that one of their most intimate activities is being witnessed; they are very embarrassed about it. By contrast, friends or immediate family often use neighboring toilets at the same time.

³¹ Scott Clark, [Japan. A View from the Bath](#) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

³² As opposed to a real *onsen* or spa, Shimada *kōsen* is a cold spring bath, the water being heated up to 43 degree C.

³³ Kuwayama Takami, "Gasshuku' Off-campus Training in the Japanese School," [Anthropology and Education Quarterly](#) Vol. 27, No. 1 (1996), p. 121.

³⁴ The recently amended 2005 Basic Plan for Disaster Prevention incorporates specific support for women, such as providing a room for changing clothes and for breastfeeding, the distribution of sanitary items, and the introduction of privacy partitions (see Saito Fumie: "Women and the 2011 East Japan Disaster", *Gender & Development* 20:2, 267). Shirato, the town official, also confirmed that he had attempted to introduce partitions, but that the people in the shelter had refused them. He considered that this might have discouraged sexual harassment, since everyone could see everything. Although a small number of people mentioned the topic, I have not heard of any actual incident of sexual harassment at either of the shelters.

³⁵ Both women and men took it for granted that women would do the cooking; this was also the case in other shelters. While the women I talked to did not complain about this, one great frustration was that they were not paid for cooking nor for other household chores that contributed to the community (see Saito, *Women and Disaster* 2012, p. 269).

³⁶ Cf. Steger, "Secrets"

³⁷ Human Rights Now (2011) [Statement] "[Regarding the establishment of evacuation centres with due consideration of the various needs of residents, including those of women](#)," (last accessed September 11, 2012)

³⁸ Joy Hendry, "Shoes: the Early Learning of an Important Distinction in Japanese Society", Gordon Daniels (1984 ed.) [Europe interprets Japan](#) (Tenterden, Kent: Paul Norbury Publications, 1984), p. 219.

³⁹ See also Saito, "Women and the Disaster" 2011, 267.

⁴⁰ This is in part because women tended to be employed locally and on short-time or part-time employments and most of the little businesses were destroyed by the tsunami. Moreover, government programs to create employment after the disaster concentrated on the construction industry and recovery. From the personal stories I have been told, I understand that men were also advantaged in the areas of employment that were previously done by both men and women.

⁴¹ Wada Hideki, [Shinzai torauma \(Disaster trauma\)](#) (Tōkyō: Besuto Shinsho, 2011), p. 131.