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Apocalyptic Reconstruction of A-bomb Literature, *Frankenstein*, *The Phantom of the Opera*: *Onibaba*

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Abstract

Preliminary studies on Kaneto Shindō's horror film *Onibaba* (1964) have based their analyses, in a positivist way, on the director's elliptic statements, which inevitably restricted their perspective. Hence there are crucial points that preliminary studies overlooked: *Onibaba* was a self-criticism of Shindō, who had unintentionally contributed to the post-war Japan's "victimisation narrative" with his early films inspired by contemporary a-bomb literature. Furthermore, the film draws on many motifs from such popular Western horror films as *Frankenstein 1970* (1958) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) to form an allegorical image of an apocalyptic world reverted to primitive ages due to the devastation by nuclear world wars. Endeavouring to "unmask" the hidden meanings of this intriguing but equally esoteric film, this comparative study aims to contribute to the research on a-bomb literature adaptations and horror cinema.

Keywords

literature and cinema

Onibaba

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Atom Bombası Edebiyatı, *Frankenstein* ve *Operadaki Hayalet*'in Mahşerî Yeniden İnşası: *Onibaba*

Öz

Kaneto Şindō'nun korku filmi *Onibaba*'ya dair ön araştırmalar, olgucu bir şekilde, yönetmenin filmle ilgili eksiltili beyanlarını temel alagelmiştir. Bu da kaçınılmaz olarak çözümleme perspektiflerini sınırlandırmıştır. Dolayısıyla filmde ön araştırmaların gözden kaçırdığı önemli noktalar vardır: *Onibaba*, atom bombası edebiyatından esinlendiği erken dönem filmleriyle savaş-sonrası Japonya'nın "kurbanlık anlatısı"na istemeden katkıda bulunan Shindō için bir özeleştiri niteliğindedir. Ayrıca, Shindō nükleer savaşların yol açtığı yıkım sonucu ilkel çağlara dönmüş bir mahşerî dünyanın alegorik imgesini oluşturmak için *Frankenstein 1970* (1958) ve *Operadaki Hayalet* (1962) gibi popüler Batı korku filmlerindeki birçok motiften yararlanmıştır. *Onibaba*'nın gözden kaçırılan böylesi derin anlamlarının "maskelerini düşürmeye" çalışan bu karşılaştırmalı çalışma, atom bombası edebiyatı uyarlamaları ve korku sineması araştırmalarına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

edebiyat ve sinema

Onibaba

dünya korku sineması

atom bombası edebiyatı

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Introduction

Today, Kaneto Shindō's (新藤兼人) *Onibaba* (『鬼婆』, 1964), is watched and discussed as a cult quality horror film, despite being made on a very low budget and in black and white. What contributed to its quality was not its accessibility, as is often the case with blockbuster horror films, but its tendency to be esoteric and vague, especially its bizarre symbolism; therefore, it is not an easily digestible type of film. In other words, *Onibaba* is intriguing for two reasons: first, it has, like Shindō's other works, a social dimension and second, that social dimension is, as Joan Mellen (1975) puts it, "very interesting and complex."

However, the vague and ambiguous nature of the story has increasingly motivated the critics to analyse the film's symbolism and allusions. Almost all critics agree that *Onibaba* is a breaking point in the career of Shindō as a director. As a matter of fact, although he established a reputation as a passionate social critic until 1964 (Mellen, 1975, p. 73), with such realistic works as *The Story of a Beloved Wife* (1951), *The Children of the Atom Bomb* (1952), *Epitome* (1953), *Gutter* (1954), *Lucky Dragon No. 5* (1958), and *The Island* (1960), he flabbergasted the critics and audience by shooting a mysterious horror film consisting of intense motifs of eroticism as well as physical and psychological violence.

Although some accurate technical analyses have been made on the film's location, cinematography, score, performances etc., none of them have managed to fully clarify the symbolism of the film and the context it refers to. Indeed, in the early Western critical responses, the symbolic background and context of the film was almost completely ignored. These early critics' immediate concerns were whether the film fit the horror cinema standards of the West and whether it appeals to Western audiences. For instance, Wear (1964), praised the film's eroticism and the performances of Nobuko Otowa and Jitsuko Yoshimura, yet he lambasted its symbolism for being dull and redundant (as cited in Bowker, 1983). Although Weiler (1965) liked its photography and music, complained that the film was immature, and criticised it for being exclusively exotic for the Western audience. Milne (1966) emphasised the perfection of the director's image yet stated that the film's content was precarious in terms of thematic consistency.

Even the critics who responded positively, treated it as a "universal" work of art, overlooking its specific context. For instance, in *Japan* Arne Svensson (1971) highly praised its "bestial" aesthetics, combining sexuality and brutality (as cited in Mellen, 1975, p. 77). Additionally, in *Japan: Film Image* Richard N. Tucker (1973) saw "the introduction of

eroticism blended with sadism" as a radical progress in Shindō's complete oeuvre (as cited in Mellen, 1975, p. 77).

This paper presents an original analysis, after indicating the strengths and shortcomings of the preliminary studies. In particular, it clarifies such issues as how the film was influenced by contemporary Western horror films such as *Frankenstein 1970* (1958) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962). Furthermore, the study also demonstrates how the film relates to the atomic bomb literature, and especially how it develops a dystopian vision of a future apocalyptic nuclear "World War III" and "World War IV," which have been the missing points in the preliminary studies. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of *Onibaba*, which has not been fully grasped despite being a cult film constituting the cornerstone of world horror cinema.

The Synopsis

First of all, it would be useful to give an analytical synopsis of the film. The setting is the tumultuous Nanboku-chō period (南北朝時代, literally, "Northern and Southern Courts Period," 1336-1392), an era of a long civil war, triggered by the power struggle between the forces of the Emperor Go-Daigo and Shōgun Takauji Ashikaga, representing the Southern (Yoshino) and Northern (Kyoto) Imperial courts, respectively. The protagonists are an old woman (Nobuko Otowa=乙羽信子) and her daughter-in-law (Jitsuko Yoshimura=吉村実子) who used to be ordinary peasants until their son/husband Kichi was forcibly conscripted along with the other young men of the village to fight for the forces of the Shōgun Ashikaga, yet by now metamorphosed into monstrous bandits as the only way to survive the harsh conditions of the civil war. These women hunt down and massacre the runaway or lost warriors, remove their armour and weapons, and toss the corpses into a profound pitfall in the field. Then, they take the "goods" to the Shylockian devious merchant, Ushi (Taiji Tonoyama=殿山泰司) and sell them in exchange for a handful of food.

One should note in passing that the two women's banditry corresponds to "*ochimusha* hunting" (*ochimusha-gari*, 落ち武者狩り) that was a common practice of peasants' local self-defence, especially during the Warring States period (*Sengoku Jidai*=戦国時代, 1467-1590). This intensely violent practice consists of searching for, looting, and murdering "the fugitive warlords" (literally "fallen warriors") when their army is defeated (Fujiki, 2005, pp. 178-179).

The established order (based on "*ochimusha* hunting") of the two women, built by the old woman, is threatened when a villager named Hachi (Kei Satō=佐藤慶) flees from the front

and comes to the village. The audience gets all the historical background from his mouth: he and Kichi were first conscripted by the Ashikaga forces, who supported the northern emperor, yet were later taken prisoners and coerced to fight for the Kusunoki forces, who backed the southern emperor. Hachi highlights that as they were peasants, the sides were of little importance, only survival mattered. He is an emotionless, egotistic, and inhumane person, as much as the other characters. For instance, when he stops by their home, he does not immediately inform the women that Kichi was lynched on the way by the farmers that he was stealing from, until his stomach is full. Therefore, the audience understands that they are landed in an environment of total insensitivity and chaos, where morality and superego are suspended indefinitely. Namely, these persons have been dehumanised under the conditions of civil war and famine. They have completely lost their ways in terms of religion and morality, and they commit various sins, such as murder and theft. For instance, as is common knowledge, in Buddhism, not only killing human beings but also animals is a sin, yet these two women kill insensitively a puppy and eat it.

Then in this "land of sin" *à la* Saramago, where everything is allowed and free, the daughter-in-law who has just learnt that her husband is dead, begins an affair with Hachi, responding to his sexual advances. Consequently, as previously mentioned, the order established by the old woman, who is in a sense a matriarch (*onna kachō*=女家長), is jeopardised. The old woman is against this relationship for both economic –if her daughter-in-law marries this man, the older woman will be deprived of the youthly "labour force," and would not be able to continue the robberies they have committed so far, as a result, perhaps she would die of starvation– and emotional –she is not really infuriated because her daughter-in-law desecrates her son's memory by having an affair without even a brief period of mourning, but because she is jealous of their relationship, so much so that she tries unsuccessfully to seduce Hachi– reasons.

The opportunity for bringing this relationship to an end comes in a very bizarre way. One night, the older woman encounters a samurai commander wearing a scary demon mask, which happens to be an *hannya* mask (般若). These masks are used in Japanese *nō* theatre (能) to represent jealous female demons. At first, she thinks that he is a real demon or a spectre of some sort. But the commander explains that he is human. Then the old woman, as though having sensed the curiosity of the audience, asks why he wears the mask. The commander answers because he is very handsome, he wears it to protect his face (Konya and Shindō, 1964).

The old woman misleads him to their pit; she jumps over it, having the masked man fall. Then, the woman descends into this pit, which looks like a hellish grave, as it is full of the skeletons of all the samurai they have killed. When she removes the mask from his face, she sees that the dead man's face is totally disfigured and thinks that he lied to her about his beauty. Then the old woman decides to put on the mask, with the aim of scaring her daughter-in-law thereby preventing her from seeing Hachi. Therefore, the old woman becomes *onibaba*/ "the demon granny" as the title of the film promises and she manages for a while to scare the young woman blaming her for committing the sin of adultery.

On a stormy night, *onibaba* attempts again to scare her daughter-in-law so that to keep her from going to meet Hachi. Yet, this time he comes to find the younger woman, and they have sexual intercourse in the grass, under heavy rain, not noticing *onibaba* watching them. This is a breakpoint in the film, as the frustrated older woman awakens to her hopeless impotence over her daughter-in-law's carnal desires. Meanwhile, as Hachi returns to his hut, is unexpectedly murdered by a deserter just like himself, who was stealing his food.

At the same time, *onibaba* realises that she cannot remove the mask anymore. Namely, the mask has a strange chemical feature; it becomes extremely sticky as soon as it comes into contact with water. Hence, due to the rain, the mask has stuck to the face of the older woman. When the younger woman returns to the hut, sees the older woman who was hiding in a corner. The older woman confesses the trick she has played on her and implores her to remove the mask. The younger woman offers her mother-in-law a deal: she will take the mask off only if the mother-in-law agrees not to obstruct her relationship with Hachi. Since she cannot remove the stuck mask, the young woman inconsiderately destroys it with a mallet along with the face of the older woman. Now the spectators understand why the samurai commander was disfigured. In an ironic manner, terrorised by the unmasked but deformed face of her mother-in-law, as it looks like that of a *onibaba*, the younger woman flees. The older woman runs after her, trying to catch her, and exclaiming that she is a human, not a demon (Konya and Shindō, 1964). The daughter-in-law manages to jump over the hellish pit, the older woman follows her, yet the audience cannot be sure, whether she fell into the pit as her eyesight has decayed due to the disfigurement or managed to leap over it. Thus, the film ends with an ambiguous open ending.

Subversion of post-war victimhood narrative

The mystery of *Onibaba* is not enabled by its genre, as it is not at all a cathartically entertaining horror film; but, by its implicit references to history. Namely as demonstrated by

Kapur (2005), the film's compact, diegetic projection of horrifying historical realities *as such* is the very source of its mystery. Therefore, "mystery" that provides the frightening effect is not an *end* as in other conventional horror films, but a *means*. What we mean by horrifying historical realities are not limited to the catastrophic World War II and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but, as will be demonstrated in what follows, they also relate to a dystopian "future"—i.e., the impending threat of total nuclear wars, which would literally be apocalyptic. This issue has been ignored in the preliminary studies.

Being a Hiroshima-born film director, who had undergone the World War II, Shindō's priority in his films was the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experiences. Lowenstein (2005) asserts that Shindō is the creator of the most important yet undervalued cluster of works dealing with the atomic bomb in Japanese cinema. Indeed, such films as *Children of the Atom Bomb* (1953), *Lucky Dragon No: 5* (1958), *Onibaba* (1964), *Lost Sex* (1966) that he directed, and *The Bells of Nagasaki* (1950) to which he contributed as the screenwriter, dealt with the issue of the collateral damage inflicted by modern nuclear weapons. However, unlike the other four realist films, in *Onibaba*, the issue of Hiroshima or the nuclear threat is implicitly and symbolically expressed (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 83). This is one of the most important reasons why the film is not fully understood both in Japan and the West. Although in her interview Mellen (1975) gives wide coverage to *Onibaba*, does not ask Shindō any questions about the film's relation to Hiroshima-Nagasaki experiences and he does not mention about it either. Furthermore, *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film* which was edited by Mick Broderick (1996), makes no reference to *Onibaba* at all.

The most remarkable indication that *Onibaba* is related to Hiroshima and nuclear collateral damage is indubitably the deformed faces of the samurai commander and old woman. For instance, in his "Interview" with Donald Richie (2000), Shindō explained that the destructive effects of the mask on the persons who wear it are symbolising the facial disfigurement of *hibakushas*, (i.e., the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings), and that he modelled the makeup design "on photographs of maimed *hibakusha*" (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005, p. 87) –a point which will be repeated in his 2003 interview for the DVD edition of *Onibaba* (Shindō, 2021).

Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this information was the primary inspiration and basis for Lowenstein's (2004) "Allegorizing Hiroshima: Shindō Kaneto's *Onibaba* as Trauma Text," which would later be expanded on in "Unmasking Hiroshima: Demons, Human Beings, and Shindō Kaneto's *Onibaba*" (Lowenstein, 2005, pp. 83-109).

Furthermore, Lowenstein's (2004) *hibakusha* theses influenced also the subsequent *Onibaba* studies (Kapur, 2005; Mcdonald, 2005). Thus, Shindō's statement regarding the *hibakusha* faces enabled preliminary studies to establish the film's connection to the experiences of *Hiroshima* and *Nagasaki*. However, while the issue of the face was highly emphasised, that which concerns what the "mask" represents and/or hides was left in suspense. We will deal with this issue in detail later on.

Before that, one should focus on how the film responds to the issue of "victimhood" discourse. Lowenstein (2005) correctly argues that *Onibaba* subverted various intertwined dominant discourses in post-war Japan, such as victim consciousness, war responsibility, and the construction of gendered models of Japanese national identity. One of the reference points of Lowenstein is James J. Orr's (2001) *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Post-war Japan*, in which he periodises the ten-year era from 1955 to 65 as "a critical period of common acceptance of the mythologies of Japanese war victimhood" (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005, p. 87). Needless to say, this period was also a term of high economic growth, which could be summarised in the introductory sentence of the 1956 Economic White Paper, "もはや戦後ではない", i.e., "it is no longer the post-war years" of extreme poverty and national humiliation. Orr (2001) also indicated that especially the 1960s was a period where the victim became the hero for Japan not only metaphorically but in economic terms as well, thanks to the government compensation packages for the citizens with "victim experiences as service to the state" (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005, p. 87).

On the level of representation, this discourse of "victimhood" constituted the core of the collective memory of World War II and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 86). In *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*, Lisa Yoneyama (1999) draws attention to the paradigm shift concerning the cultural representation from "Japan's pre-Hiroshima imperial aggressions" to the "post-Hiroshima national victimhood" —in this process, patriotic images of the militarised man/soldier are replaced with images of the innocent, self-sacrificing maternal woman (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005, p. 86). One of the many figures that concretised this gendered cultural representation was "A-bomb maiden" namely, twenty-five young, unmarried *hibakusha* girls who were sent to the USA for plastic surgery and medical treatment. As has been indicated by Maya Morioka Todeschini (1996) in "'Death and the Maiden': Female Hibakusha as Cultural Heroines and the Politics of A-bomb Memory," the "A-bomb maiden" incarnates features identified with an idealised, non-sexual "female youth and beauty, stoic maternal sacrifice, and traditional

Japanese cultural values" (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005, p. 93) Thus, the mainstream post-war Japanese media discourse utilised the figure of Japanese woman, for constructing a historical narrative of oblivion, in which "victimisation replaces responsibility for aggression" (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 86).

Hence, Lowenstein maintains that *Onibaba* subverts the image of "A-bomb maiden," as the predominant female icon of Hiroshima representation. In other words, the old woman disguised as *onibaba* may be considered an "anti-A-bomb maiden" figure, as she is an old and ugly woman who does not repress her sexuality. Furthermore, she does not accept her fate "with silent, sacrificial resignation," instead she fights persistently for maintaining ties with her daughter-in-law (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 93). In short, she is everything that "A-bomb maiden" are not.

Yet, while Lowenstein's argument that *Onibaba* relativises and reverses the gendered "victimhood theses" in Japan's post-war discourse holds true, there is an ironic contradiction in his analysis. This is due to the fact that while trying to criticise the victimisation narrative, he unconsciously reproduces it in his character study of *onibaba*/the old woman. For instance, quoting Keiko McDonald's explication of the *hannya* mask that in *nō* theatre it symbolises the "jealous fury that transforms a woman into a demon" but also a deep sorrow within (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 93), he argues that the mask far from celebrating the Japanese theatrical tradition, functions as a malady, inflicting modern wounds. One can hardly fail to notice the sympathy of Lowenstein for the old woman. His commiseration becomes even more conspicuous in the way he propounds how the old woman/*onibaba* presents the painful, occluded underside of A- bomb maiden," which are based on the image of permanent innocence and beauty of traditional "Japaneseness," despite the effects of the atomic bomb (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 93).

Is such a sympathy not based on the presupposition that the old woman/*onibaba* is actually "good," and simply a "victim" of her circumstances? A similar affinity is also observed in other preliminary studies——for instance Kapur (2005) states more directly that the old woman, symbolising the common people, is a victim of the social conditions she lives in. She thinks that we should sympathise for this disfigured old woman, whose only fault was to internalise the desires of the ruling class (represented by the samurai commander), namely the emperor's imperial holy war during the World War II. Finally, McDonald (2005) who maintains that whatever they do, "the masses" (represented by the old woman) would always be "at the mercy of an oppressive feudal system," also empathises with "the demon granny."

Is *onibaba* really a victim? —Rereading the film from the perspective of its intertextuality with atomic bomb literature

Hence, Lowenstein, on the one hand, says that *Onibaba* attacks the making of history with its propaganda of emotional exploitation based on "victimhood theses," on the other hand, he contradicts himself by representing the old woman as a "victim." The principal reason for this deficiency is that he goes from context to text, instead of going from text to context. What we mean by "context" is what Shindō said about the film and the old woman, in the 1975 Mellen interview:

> Speaking about *Onibaba* in particular, my main historical interest focuses on ordinary people, their energy to carry themselves beyond the predicaments they encounter daily. I wish to describe the struggles of the so-called common people which usually never appear in recorded history. This is why I made *Onibaba*. My mind was always on the commoners, not on the lords, politicians, or anyone of name and fame. I wanted to convey the lives of down-to-earth people who have to live like weeds (Mellen, 1975, p. 80).

At one point Shindō goes as far as to say, "the mother (i.e. the old woman) is myself" and "I am Onibaba" (Mellen, 1975, p. 81). Yet the director's sympathy and affection for his anti-heroine, i.e., the old woman, does not mean that he considered her as a "victim." On the contrary, both women are anything but victims. Indeed, they are conceived not only as survivors, but as predators. What we have in *Onibaba* is but two wild women's acts of lawless banditry, which have definitely nothing to do with Robin-Hood-style "benevolent" robberies. *Onibaba*'s world is a hell where the old woman/*onibaba* and her daughter-in-law, rob the samurais they brutally murdered – just to mention in passing, such a reversal of power relations between the peasants and samurais, transforming the peasants into (anti-)"heroes," indicates clearly that it is an "anti-samurai film." Thus, violence and destructiveness are at the forefront in the film, to put it in Nietzschean terms, all the main characters are Dionysian ones, or villains, who have been dehumanised in the extreme.

Thus, Lowenstein's contradiction stems mainly from his misinterpretation of Shindō's sympathetic comment on the old woman/"demon granny." As one focuses on the film *per se* and its intertextuality, one can observe that *Onibaba* is a breaking point in Shindō's individual history in the context of victimhood issue, as it was his first film treating the nuclear problem, which refuses to be used for the victimisation narrative. Moreover, since Shindō's films concerning nuclear damage were not evaluated in the context of their relationship with atomic

bomb literature in preliminary studies, the problem of "victimhood" could not be sufficiently analysed. Indeed, Shindō's first cinematic works, *The Bells of Nagasaki* and *Children of the Atom Bomb*, were film adaptations of atomic bomb literature. In addition, it has not been taken into account that Shindō is a dynamic director that constantly renews himself, just like the atomic bomb literature that innovates itself from the modern to the postmodern periods.

The Bells of Nagasaki (*Nagasaki no Kane*,『長崎の鐘』, 1950), to which Shindō contributed as the scriptwriter, is based on the 1949 autobiographical essay by the same title, of Catholic radiologist and writer Dr. Paul Takashi Nagai (永井隆・ポール), who was exposed to the atomic bombing and seriously injured at the Nagasaki Medical College where he worked, while his wife was tragically killed —he testifies that as he returned home two days after the bombing, he found his wife's bones in the kitchen (Kataoka, 1961, p. 173). The book was censored by The Civil Information and Education Section of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, for three years, and could be published only after an appendix entitled *The Tragedy of Philippines* compiled by the same occupational authorities depicting the massacres perpetrated by the Japanese army in the Philippines, was added. The 1950 film adaptation by Hideo Ōba (大庭秀雄) of this best-selling book was also subjected to heavy censorship, so much so that Shindō, as the scriptwriter was forced to add a long opening statement that blamed the bombing on Japanese expansionism (Kapur, 2005, p. 86).

One can interpret the censorships applied both to the book and film, as the occupation forces' attempts at preventing the film from turning into a victimisation narrative. Nonetheless, even the censored version of the film keeps being a typical example and important component of victimhood propaganda, since Nagai is one of the influential opinion leaders and architects of this discourse. For instance, in a mass commemoration ceremony held in November 1945, he controversially likened the people of Nagasaki to pure, clean lambs that had to sacrifice their lives by being "burnt" for peace. He also speculated that Nagasaki as the holiest site of Japan (in terms of Christianity) had been chosen for a nuclear mass destruction (Seirai, 2011, p. 1). Nagai, a mediatic and religious opinion leader of the period, contributed to the discourse of victimhood by continuingly using the archetypical images and concepts like "sacrificial lamb," and "penance" of the Christian culture in his speeches and books. Given that his book, *The Bells of Nagasaki* is built on such a metaphysical meaning, it is obvious that Shindō, who wrote the script based on that text, also had his fair share of the formation of the victimhood discourse.

Moreover, Shindō wrote and shot his next atomic bomb film, *Children of the Atom Bomb* (*Genbaku no Ko*,『原爆の子』) in 1952 when the American occupation ended. It was loosely based on *Children of the Atom Bomb—Testament of the Girls and Boys of Hiroshima* (*Genbaku no ko –Hiroshima no Shōjo, Shōnen no Uttae*,『原爆の子〜広島の少年少女のうったえ』, 1951) which is a collection of compositions written by *hibakusha* children of Hiroshima, edited by Arata Osada (長田新). The film concerns a *hibakusha* kindergarten teacher Takako Ishikawa (Nobuko Otowa) who returns to Hiroshima four years later to pay visits to some of her former students. What she finds there is nothing, but a wasteland filled with human tragedies. One of the main characters is Iwakichi (Osamu Takizawa=滝沢修), who used to be their servant before the Hiroshima bombing. He is by now a *hibakusha* with a disfigured face just like *onibaba*, and half blind. His only relative and *raison d'être* is his grandson Tarō, who stays in an orphanage due to his grandfather's economic problems. Takako offers to adopt Tarō, but Iwakichi refuses, as they are fond of each other. On a second thought, he decides to give him to Takako, yet as his grandson strongly opposes the offer, he decides to commit suicide by setting his hut on fire, so that Takako would be able to take him with her. Hence, he altruistically sacrifices himself for the well-being and future of his grandson.

Although it is not an atomic bomb literature adaptation, Shindō's 1958 film *Lucky Dragon No. 5* (*Daigo Fukuryū-maru*,『第五福竜丸』) had also the potential to be used for the victimisation propaganda. The film is a realist drama relating the crew of the fishing boat Daigo Fukuryu-maru's exposure to radioactive damage caused by the American nuclear testing at Bikini atoll in 1954 —this incident was the subject of Nâzım Hikmet's (2002) internationally celebrated poem "The Japanese Fisherman" ("Japon Balıkçısı").

Hence, each one of these three pre-*Onibaba* Hiroshima-Nagasaki films had underpinned the victimisation narrative of post-war Japan's mainline conservative cultural discourse against Shindō's will. Namely, as a pacifist Japanese intellectual, he was critical of this discourse, as it served to blur, relativise, and possibly obliterate Japan's responsibility for the catastrophes and destructions it caused during the World War II. By making those films, he contributed ironically to the project of social amnesia as a result of the forcible repression of the war responsibility. One is tempted to say that *Onibaba* marked a personal awakening to this fact. Namely Shindō must have bitterly realised his contribution to the victimhood narrative. Thus, it can be deduced that this awakening was the major motivation of the director's decision to make such an idiosyncratic film as *Onibaba* that reverses the narrative of victimhood, thus deconstructing the

dominant discourse. He did this in an autoreferential way by having Nobuko Otowa, who had played an emotional, human-loving and non-sexual *hibakusha* in *Children of the Atom Bomb*, performed a witchy, dehumanised, lecherous, and sinful anti-hero, namely the old woman and her disguise as *onibaba*.

It may be deduced that what bothered Shindō was essentially the same thing that would bother Nagasaki-born writer Yūichi Seirai (青来有一), five decades later in the 2000s: the sinless, incorrupt, desexualized, innocent, and almost angelic *hibakusha* image, as seen in the image of the a-bomb maiden. Seirai's (2006, 2014) *Bakushin* (『爆心』)/*Nagasaki: Ground-Zero* attacks such a fetishisation from within, re-representing *hibakushas* in a more *human, all too human* way as "individuals" with anger, sins, mental disorders, and tendencies to violence. Shindō had already made such a de-mythicisation in *Onibaba* as early as in 1964, in which he had lambasted not only the conservative narrative of victimhood, but also his own early atomic bomb films. The old woman/*onibaba* character, is the reflection of his will to portray *hibakushas* not as stigmatised fetishist objects of taboo, but as ordinary "individuals," which certainly overlaps with the will of the peoples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Onibaba as the reconstruction of *Frankenstein* and *The Phantom of the Opera* within the frame of a future "World War III" involving nuclear weapons

For some reason, preliminary studies in the West did not address the issue of *Onibaba*'s reception of Western horror cinema and limited the intertextuality of the film to Japanese national cinema (Kapur, 2005; Lowenstein, 2004, 2005; Macdonald, 2005; Mellen, 1975). Moreover, Shindō himself did not shed light on this issue either, as he did not mention the film's foreign inspirations, and merely said: "*Onibaba* is an old Japanese folk tale, probably a Buddhist tale. I made it into a dramatic, dynamic drama" (Mellen, 1975, p. 86). However, on closer inspection the film proves to be influenced by two major representatives of Western horror cinema in the 1950s and 60s: Howard W. Koch's *Frankenstein 1970* (1958) and Terence Fisher's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962).

Frankenstein 1970 is a postmodern deconstruction of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), within the context of "cold war" under the Damoclean threat of a new nuclear World War III. A number of common points is observed between *Onibaba* and this film, like disfigurement of the face, symbolic expression of nuclear damage, and reversal of victimisation theses. The protagonist, baron Victor von Frankenstein (Boris Karloff) was gravely tortured by the Nazis for being an anti-Nazi pacifist, which left his face severely disfigured. With such an opening, the audience naturally expect him to be a "good guy,"

because he has been a victim of fascism. This state of relief, continues, with a parodic postmodern remark: von Frankenstein who wants to raise a fund to carry on his scientific experiments, lets a television crew to make a "horror film" about his monster-manufacturing family, whose setting would be his castle in Germany.

Yet, von Frankenstein's real hybrid "face" as both a victim and monster, is revealed when he purchases an atomic reactor using the money he has obtained from the film, for his project of creating a human being, whose face would look exactly like his, before having been deformed as a result of grave Nazi brutalisation. He does not refrain from murdering his personnel, even his loyal butler for acquiring human body parts. He is then like the old lady in the disguise of *onibaba*, especially in the sense that he is conceived as someone who metamorphosed into a disfigured monster which is underpinned by the experience of being the victim of unjust violence. In the end, the "monster" attacks his creator, namely baron von Frankenstein. The fight ends as they both are exposed to radioactive steam from the reactor, and eventually die. This scene is also very similar to the finale of *Onibaba*, where a strange struggle occurs between the two "bad characters," the old lady with a badly disfigured face and his daughter-in-law, who thinks that she looks even more demon after her demon-mask is forcefully removed. "Frankenstein the monster" (Mike Lane), may also be defined as a masked figure, as his face covered with bandages for the entire film, and they are removed only at the closing of the film, which is almost a "happy end," as the atomic reactor is safely shut down and the radiation is lowered to tolerable levels. As the monster's bandages are taken off, the audience sees that the monster's face is indeed the baron's own face before having been exposed to extreme Nazi torture. In the background, the baron posthumously confesses through an audiotape that he invented the monster with the aim of perpetuating himself, since he was the last member of the Frankenstein family (Schenck and Koch, 1958).

Frankenstein 1970 titillates the 1950s Western audience's common fear: what if some fanatic group, or an uncontrolled lunatic gets hold of nuclear weapons –a theme that would later become a cliché of conventional Hollywood films. One can imagine that Shindō was influenced by this internationally acclaimed film. Accordingly, he handled this theme very creatively and put it into an anti-nuclear content. While the issue of nuclear damage had been treated explicitly in *Frankenstein 1970*, it was expressed symbolically in *Onibaba* through the motif of the harmful chemical substance contained in the inner surface of the mask.

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, preliminary studies focused on the face concealed by the mask rather than the mask as such, and the issue of what the mask represents has not been

clarified. Thus, preliminary studies overlooked that Shindō's conception of the "mask" in *Onibaba* as a motif symbolically expressing the destructive force of nuclear weapons might have been inspired not only by the bandaged face of "Frankenstein the monster," but also by the masked anti-hero of Terence Fisher's 1962 film *The Phantom of the Opera*.

This film is a loose adaptation of Gaston Leroux's 1910 novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*, which has been famously adapted into many films and musicals by the same name, set in 1900s London. The central mystery of the film is based on a supposed ghost haunting the London Opera House and randomly killing some of the Opera staff. The tension is solved when a promising young diva Christine Charles (Heather Sears) is kidnapped and her lover and the producer of the opera, Harry Hunter (Edward de Souza), manages to find her in the lair of "the phantom" where she has been held. The spectators, along with Harry listen to the phantom's confessional account and thereby find out that the one who have been terrorising the staff and audience of the opera was not a ghost, but a man dressed in black and wearing a terrifying mask with only one eye, which he uses to cover his badly deformed face. The Phantom (Herbert Lom), whose real name is Professor Petrie and who lives in his lair deep in the cellars of the opera house, with his accomplice, "the dwarf" (Ian Wilson), used to be an undervalued and impoverished composer with great talent. He had been compelled to sell all his compositions, to Lord Ambrose for a very scarce fee. By having his works published, he had hoped to obtain recognition, yet he learnt that Lord Ambrose relegated Professor into a "ghost-writer," by publishing them dishonestly under his own name, which enabled him to gain fame thanks especially to Petrie's operatic work. Taken by wrath, Petrie rushed to the printers with the aim of burning the plates of his (already printed) compositions and accidentally started a fire. He splashed nitric acid on his face as well as his hands, while he was trying to extinguish the fire. This was what had caused his face's frightening disfigurement. Then he went out and he threw himself into the river, which took him to an underground drain and the dwarf rescued him.

After some time, he decided to take his revenge on Lord Ambrose, who had ruthlessly hindered his career, by terrorising both the staff and the audience of the opera. He also tells the two lovers he is terminally ill, and his last wish is to see his opera. He wants Christine to perform in it as the prima donna, for which he gives her singing lessons. In the finale, Petrie's dream comes true, he manages to watch Christine sing from a box that have been rumoured haunted by "the phantom." Yet, his rapture is interrupted as he sees the dwarf who has escaped from a stagehand, holding on a huge chandelier right above Christine. Noticing the danger that the rope will break any moment, he rips off his mask, jumps to the stage pushes and saves Christine at

the expense of his own life, which shocks the audience of the opera (Hinds, Keys, and Fisher, 1962).

As can be observed in this analytical synopsis, there are striking parallels between *Onibaba* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Here, again, is a disturbing, anti-hero who metamorphosed into a monster in the aftermath of undergoing a traumatic victimisation, as is the case with the demon granny=*onibaba* and Frankenstein. Furthermore, the masked phantom, is a character who both terrorises and murders people by pretending to be a ghost, as the name suggests, as does the demon granny=*onibaba*. Here, too, when the "mask" is removed, an even uglier and more terrifying face appears from underneath. We can conclude that, in *Onibaba* Shindō radically reversed the disfigurement episode of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Namely, Professor Petrie covers his face with a terrifying mask, after it was burnt as the chemical substance i.e., nitric acid that he had accidentally splashed to his face came into contact with fire. Shindō re-establishes the mask as an accessory with a chemical substance that sticks to and disfigures the face as soon as it comes into contact with water. Needless to say, the chemical substance inherent to the mask, symbolises the destructive effects of nuclear weapons.

Dystopic previsions of an apocalyptic "World War IV" and *Onibaba*

Hence, in *Onibaba*, the "mask" symbolises the psychological and physical effects of nuclear weapons. Indeed, this "mask" has many common features with several aspects of nuclear arms. For instance, throughout the cold "war era" West and East blocks used them to "frighten" each other, and such a mutual intimidation strategy has always kept the risk of dragging the whole world into an apocalyptic self-destruction. By the same token, when the commander and the old woman use the mask to scare others, they eventually suffer the damage themselves, their faces were ruined by the mask that becomes sticky as it gets wet.

Additionally, if the "mask" is the symbol of the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the facial disfigurements of the old lady and samurai commander are not signs that refer exclusively to the *hibakushas* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also express a prevision of the world being plunged into self-destruction in the aftermath of a future world war. The film allegorically reconstructs in a dystopian way, a future world, which has been relegated into a wasteland, due to a self-destructive "World War III" involving nuclear weapons of mass destruction, which is perfectly represented in the image of the hellish pit full of the skeletons of all the samurai the two women have massacred. What is more, in this apocalyptic and primordial world, whose modern technological infrastructure has been demolished, a new world war, i.e., "World War IV" is being waged with primitive weapons such as spears and sticks.

The fact that this apocalyptic future is really a return to archaic ages is implied as early as in the opening subtitle message: "A hole, deep and dark, a reminder of ages past" (Konya and Shindō, 1964).

Shindō might have been inspired by the renowned German theoretical physicist Albert Einstein's (1949) following statement: "I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones" (as cited in Calaprice, 2005, p. 173). As is widely known, alarmed by the atomic bomb research of Nazis, Einstein, had signed a letter written by the Hungarian scientist Leo Szilard for the American President Roosevelt in the summer of 1939, and urged him to start its own nuclear program, which had eventually resulted in the "Manhattan Project" (Lanouette and Silard, 1992, pp. 262-264)

Namely, Einstein was partly responsible for the Hiroshima-Nagasaki tragedies, which he later regretted deeply, and became a fervent defender of the anti-nuclear cause –so much so that he signed an anti-nuclear manifesto ("Russell–Einstein Manifesto") in 1955, with the logician and philosopher Bertrand Russell," (Moreno, 2005), who also promoted, the same year, Shindō's above-mentioned *Children of the Atom Bomb*, by highly praising it as "a most impressive film, which deserves to be widely seen" (Russell, 2003, p. 281).

Although the above-mentioned statement can be seen as a self-criticism of Einstein, he was not the "originator" of this "hypothesis." It can be ascribed to an unnamed American army lieutenant at Bikini atoll. As he was questioned about what kind of weapons would be used in the "next" war, he answered: "I *dunno*, but in the war after the next war, sure as Hell, they'll be using spears!" (Winchell, 1946). One is tempted to say that Shindō, who would later shoot a film treating the incident about the radioactive exposure of the crew of a Japanese fishing boat, as a result of the American nuclear tests at Bikini (i.e., *Lucky Dragon No: 5*), may also have been inspired by this American officer's sincere self-critical comment.

Conclusion

As we have clarified so far, the major reason of the fact that Kaneto Shindō's *Onibaba* is still watched and discussed as a cult quality horror film, despite having been made on a very low budget, is its allegorical expression of several crucial problems related to the issue of nuclear damage, based not only on past experiences like Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, but also on future threats, which rendered it disturbing, esoteric but also gripping. Shindō is the creator of such atom bomb literature adaptations as *The Bells of Nagasaki*, of which he wrote the screenplay, and *Children of the Atom Bomb*, which he wrote and directed, dealing with the issue of nuclear collateral damage in a realistic and therefore explicit style.

However, as previously mentioned, it can be deduced that when he realised that he had unintentionally contributed with these works (as well as with *Lucky Dragon No: 5*, although it is not an atomic bomb literature adaptation) to the consolidation of the "victimisation narrative" of the post-war Japanese representation, he intended to make an implicit and esoteric film using the popular subculture genre of "horror" and thus to subvert this narrative. Therefore, this film could be seen, as the director's self-criticism, as well as his *criticism from within*, of the early atomic bomb literature and cinema.

Moreover, by borrowing many motifs like "nuclear damage," "facial disfigurement," "metamorphosis into a monster through victimisation," and "mask" from such popular and commercial films of the period as *Frankenstein 1970* and *The Phantom of the Opera* that responds to the cathartic entertainment desires of the audience, and by subjecting them to deconstruction, he aimed to arouse an awareness in the audience against the nuclear armament frenzy of the 1950s and 60s which could lead to apocalyptically self-destructive world wars.

However, Shindō had never fully unveiled this *modus operandi* of his, and hidden meaning of his work, until the early 2000s, when he clarified that he had designed the disfigured faces of the old lady and samurai commander, modelling after maimed *hibakushas* –even then his disclosure was very brief and elliptic. Most likely, his strategic intention had been to prompt the audience, critics, and researchers to discover *Onibaba*'s deep meanings through their own efforts. This deliberate taciturn attitude of his has been an influential factor that increased the mystery of the film and thus its appeal. In this sense, he was indeed like *onibaba*/the demon granny, keeping his mysterious "mask" on about his work, with the aim of creatively unsettling and threatening its audience. Thus, endeavouring to "unmask" the hidden meanings of this intriguing but equally esoteric film, this comparative study aims to contribute to the research on a-bomb literature adaptations and horror cinema.

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