

Introduction

Hiroshima (Nagasaki) and the politics of commemoration

In 1962 a young Jewish American psychiatrist by the name of Robert Lifton visited the Hiroshima Peace Museum. Lifton described his visit to the museum in a letter to his friend David Riesman as follows: “I had seen many such pictures before ... but somehow seeing these pictures in Hiroshima was entirely different ... we left this part of the exhibit reeling ... Both of us anxious, fearful and depressed – Betty [Lifton’s wife] to the point of being physically ill.”¹ Lifton decided to stay in Hiroshima and help its survivors. His research greatly altered our understanding of Hiroshima and the psychiatry of trauma. It will be hard to find similar responses by visitors today. The Liftons’ reaction to the museum was not just a function of their encounter with the horror of Hiroshima but of the heightened awareness of the importance of the city in light of the global tensions that would bring the world to the brink of nuclear war that same year. The museum and Peace Park today are far calmer places (perhaps even too calm). The message of peace, felt so urgently by Lifton, has lost its edge in Hiroshima. Italian journalist Tiziano Terzani captured the mood of the place succinctly when he wrote, “In Hiroshima ... even the doves are bored with peace.”² The serenity and passivity of the memorial begins right at the entrance to the museum, where a film opens with the words, “on the sixth of August, 1945, a nuclear bomb *was dropped* on Hiroshima and vast numbers of its citizens died [emphasis added].”³ There is no mentioning or way of knowing who dropped the bomb or what had led to the event. These words embody in them the entirety of

¹ Robert Lifton to David Riesman, April 10, 1962, Box 15, Folder 8 (1962), Robert Jay Lifton papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (NYPL-MSA).

² Quoted by Ian Buruma, “The Devils of Hiroshima,” in the *New York Review of Books*, October 25, 1990.

³ See Daniel Seltz, “Remembering the War and the Atomic Bombs: New Museums, New Approaches,” *Radical History Review* 75 (Fall 1999), p. 95.

the message of the memorial: Hiroshima is presented like the scene of a natural disaster, separated from any historical chain of events. Carol Gluck called this kind of narrative, “history in the passive voice.”⁴ In a world that still has over 20,000 nuclear weapons, such serenity in the face of past and (possible) future horror is extremely troubling.

When I visited the memorial, forty years after Lifton, the Hiroshima Peace Museum’s passivity stood for me in sharp contrast to the shocking photos and evidence of destruction of that day. The words that framed the images seemed to be a part of an effort to contain the shock and anger a visitor might feel. The memorial message seemed to be designed to counter the subversive potential of Hiroshima. Indeed, this was the case not just with the memorial. The survivors themselves, whose stories I heard, seemed restrained; their stories almost always ending with a plea for understanding and world peace. What I came to understand over the course of this research is that the entire edifice of remembrance in and around Hiroshima was, consciously or not, built around containment. The very shape of the city and the spatial division between the island of Nakajima, where the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is located, and the rest of the city, suggest a much deeper division between the past and the present; as if Hiroshima wished to demarcate and distance itself from the past. It seemed to me that, as a visiting journalist once remarked, “People built this city to forget.”⁵ Hiroshima’s memory, I realized, however, was never, with the possible exception of the late 1940s, actively suppressed. Rather, the principal argument of this work is that Hiroshima’s tragedy was rendered harmless to the status quo by the particular way in which it was remembered. Commemorative work in Hiroshima was largely used to normalize and domesticate the memory of the bombing. The bomb was presented not as a probable result of our reliance on science and technology but – in the words of the epitaph of the central memorial cenotaph – a mistake: a sort of temporal slippage into a darker time. Furthermore, Hiroshima’s sacrifice was supposed to rectify this error somehow, set history right and put progress back onto its “normal” course. The bomb therefore was presented as a transforming baptism, on one hand, and a rupture that must be healed, on the other. This phenomenon was not limited to Hiroshima. The effort to contain the bomb’s memory was profoundly shaped by the larger efforts of elites in the East and West to rebuild a postwar order and to reaffirm, the bomb and the concentration camps notwithstanding, belief in modernity and science.

⁴ Carol Gluck, “The Idea of Showa,” *Daedalus* 119, 3 (July 1990), pp. 12–13.

⁵ The quotation is from a visiting Nigerian journalist, James Boon, who told a Japanese colleague, “People built this city in order to forget about the bomb ... [they] are trying really hard to live just like people in other cities.” Cited in the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, June 18, 1962.

Because of the nature of the tragedy and the enormous importance given to the efforts to formulate a proper reply to it, the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki came to possess important symbolic power. The bombing was thought to have bequeathed Hiroshima's victims with a global mission and importance. This was synchronous with and influenced by a similar view of the place of the victim-witness in Holocaust discourse. In both discourses, the survivor was eventually elevated as the ultimate bearer of moral authority; what Avishai Margalit called "a moral witness."⁶ This development was a direct consequence of the unprecedented nature of the tragedies and the failure of conventional means to represent and explain them. This had important implications for commemoration and politics in Japan and elsewhere, a phenomenon that went well beyond the confines of one nation or culture. As evidenced by Robert Lifton's story, whose moment of shock in Hiroshima led him on to a career that affected profoundly both cultures of memory, Hiroshima had an important role, now largely forgotten, in the making of global memory culture. However, the importance of Hiroshima was not appreciated by scholarship on either Hiroshima or the Holocaust so far. Thus, this work has three main goals: first, to explain how and why Hiroshima's memory developed the way it did; second, to reinsert Hiroshima into the larger global conversation about memory; and, third, to examine the many links between Hiroshima and "the world," mainly through an examination of its links and comparison with Holocaust discourse in Israel and other places. This is done, first, by examining the way in which the bomb and, to a lesser extent, the Holocaust were interpreted, contained and integrated into the national and international narratives and ideologies that came before them and, second, by looking at the way in which survivors reacted to (and sometimes produced) these discourses, leading to the emergence of the figure of the survivor in postwar Japan and the West.

I do not intend to produce here an exhaustive survey of the emergence of victims and commemoration in both East Asia and the Cold War West. A great deal has already been written about the Holocaust and the A-bomb (though surprisingly little in English or Japanese about Hiroshima when compared to the corpus of works on Holocaust memory). This book is first and foremost about Hiroshima. Thus, this project is limited primarily to the history of the city and, secondarily, to Israel, making only brief forays elsewhere. The most conspicuous absence in this book is that of Nagasaki. However, the nature and scope of my sources left little room for a further look into Nagasaki and its uniqueness as

⁶ Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 182.

a city. As Chad Diehl pointed out, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, have a unique local history. Hiroshima's history should not stand for Nagasaki's.⁷ The narratives of remembrance that were developed in Nagasaki shared much with Hiroshima but also differ on many levels; most notably in the presence of an active Catholic community in the city. Given these differences and Nagasaki's history, giving Nagasaki its due attention would have required me to write a much different manuscript. The place of Nagasaki and the related issue of the role of Christianity, although touched upon in many points throughout the book, are not addressed directly in this work. This was not just an editorial decision. Significantly, Nagasaki was not much talked about in Hiroshima. Indeed, my sources led me away from Nagasaki towards the more global angles. What began as a localized project about Hiroshima and its survivors became a global one that sent me to Auschwitz, Ramallah, Los Angeles, Salzburg and Kyoto in search of documents and leads. Thus, this project examines Hiroshima principally through its entanglement with the "world." Throughout the writing of this work, I constantly struggled with the tension between comparing and connecting, between using Holocaust discourse and other discourses as a lens for viewing global developments or remaining on a more strictly comparative level.

Indeed, a traditional comparison is almost impossible given the large number and flows of ideas and people between Hiroshima and Holocaust discourse. Consequentially, the main methodology this work seeks to employ is that of entangled histories or *histoire croisée*. Jürgen Kocka succinctly summed up this kind of history as one that is "much less interested in similarities and differences [of different historical settings] ... but rather in the processes of mutual influencing, in reciprocal or asymmetric perceptions, in entangled processes of constituting one another."⁸ This is not to say that similarities and differences, as noted by more traditional comparative historians, are not important. Yet, traditional comparative history does not acknowledge the fluidity of categories and the way in which these develop through cross-influences and the circulation of ideas. Furthermore, such comparisons, especially in the realm of memory studies, usually use the nation as the prime site and ignore global exchanges. Despite its rising importance, the global has been, until recently, something of a lacuna in memory studies. While many historians seek to displace the dominance of the "nation" in their work, studies of the history of memory tend to cling to the nation with

⁷ Chad Diehl, "Ruins of Memory: Reconstruction, the Urakami Cathedral, and Atomic Memory in Nagasaki, 1945-1960," paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies, Philadelphia, March, 2014.

⁸ Jürgen Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory*, 42 (February 2003), p. 6.

peculiar stubbornness. The familiar effort to interpret the past as part of a national culture has led us to what Sebastian Conrad aptly named “a tunnel vision of the past,” which marginalizes entanglement with other national memories as well as the influence of the counter-memories of minorities and others.⁹ No place is isolated from transnational and trans-regional influences. Cross-influence and entanglements are an intrinsic part of how ideas and movements emerge; ideas about commemoration and witnessing are no exception.

Both in terms of content and the fields involved in this investigation, entanglement is, indeed, an apt term. While memory studies are the main “target” of this work, my study covers more than one field, aiming to contribute to Japanese studies and the emerging literature on victim discourse. Other subcategories are, of course, the history of Hiroshima itself, as well as the history of emotions, psychiatry (more specifically the creation/discovery of post-traumatic stress disorder), and the history of the peace movement in the Cold War and beyond.

Within Japanese Studies, my project is connected to work on Hiroshima in particular and to Japanese war memory in general. The most well-known study that explored Japanese war memories in their diversity is Franziska Seraphim’s *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan*. Seraphim, however, explicitly excluded Hiroshima and Nagasaki from her study.¹⁰ Other major works are Yoshida Yutaka’s *Nihonjin no Sensōkan* and Igarashi Yoshikuni’s *Bodies of Memory*. Both works aim at exploring how discourses of power historically shaped Japanese views on World War II and its meaning.¹¹ A similar thrust can be found in writings on Hiroshima that often regard themselves as critiques of hegemonic memory discourse, that is, as critiques of attempts to deny or hide Japan’s imperial past by exclusively remembering Japanese victims.¹²

⁹ Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 245.

¹⁰ Seraphim excluded Hiroshima for reasons similar to my own exclusion of Nagasaki. The inclusion of atomic issues would have extended the scope of the research well beyond its original goal. Furthermore, Seraphim argued, Hiroshima’s memory was separated from the larger issue of the war until at least the 1980s. I disagree with her on that last issue but have relied on her work extensively throughout this work. Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), p. 25.

¹¹ Yoshida Yutaka, *Nihonjin No Sensōkan: Sengoshi No Naka No henyō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹² Fujiwara Kiiichi, *Senso o kioku suru: Hiroshima horokosuto to genzai* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001); Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

This book aims to supplement and complicate the work done by these scholars; looking at the ways in which different actors, both within and outside of the establishment, pushed different agendas and how “truth” about the meaning of the bombing (in the Foucauldian sense) was created.¹³ That is, truth not as a top-down elite imposition of a commemorative narrative, although there was much imposition and suppression, but truth as a product of multiple agents working in all levels of society, sometimes at cross-purposes, to produce a commonsense view of the past and its meaning. Indeed, one of the main points I am arguing is that one can hardly separate the “survivors” from the “establishment” that produced the hegemonic discourses of commemoration. Many within the elites were survivors themselves and competing interpretations existed within survivor groups, as well as within the various bodies that engaged in commemoration. Though I do not necessarily wish to contest Lisa Yoneyama’s and other scholars’ interpretations of how these discourses operate at the present, I do wish, following on the work of John Dower and James Orr, to look into the origin and history of these discourses and to examine how they emerged and were eventually transformed.¹⁴

Indeed, what is lacking in past scholars work, such as Yoneyama’s and Fujiwara’s, is history. Fujiwara, a political scientist, and Yoneyama, a cultural anthropologist, do not supply us with the nitty-gritty details of how and why Hiroshima’s dominant narratives developed in the way they did. Fujiwara’s work, despite its promising title (*Holocaust, Hiroshima and the Present*), mostly deals with events beyond Hiroshima, whereas Yoneyama’s *Hiroshima Traces* is dedicated wholly to Hiroshima. Yoneyama seeks, by using a methodology borrowed from Walter Benjamin’s version of Marxist historiography, to reclaim “missing” elements of Hiroshima’s history in order to construct a critical view of the present.¹⁵ The book, accordingly, is highly polemical and theoretical. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Yoneyama does a brilliant job of identifying the various agendas behind the facade of nuclear universalism and Hiroshima’s message of peace, whether about the silencing of the narratives of Korean *hibakusha* (Japanese term for an A-bomb survivor) or the way in which a capitalist-driven developmental agenda influenced the design and content of Hiroshima’s memorial and general reconstruction. Urban space,

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 92–98.

¹⁴ James Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001); John W. Dower, “Triumphal and Tragic Narratives of the War in Asia,” *The Journal of American History* 82, 3 (December 1, 1995), 1124–1135.

¹⁵ Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, pp. 29–30.

argues Yoneyama, was manipulated and used by Hiroshima's power elite in its efforts to create a vision of a consumer-friendly, globalized and cosmopolitan Hiroshima that transcended, by way of exclusion, the city role as a memory site.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Yoneyama, an anthropologist, did not go into the archives. Her book does not supply us with the history of how and why Hiroshima's message developed in the way it did.

An older work that does seek to supply such history is a 1984 official history of Hiroshima, the *Hiroshima shinshi* (*A New History of Hiroshima*).¹⁷ The *Hiroshima shinshi* is extremely detailed and read together with works by excellent local historians such as Ubuki Satoru and Ishimaru Norioki; it is indispensable to any student of Hiroshima's history.¹⁸ Much of this work, however, with the exception of Ubuki's, is almost bereft of any attempt at interpretation and is completely uncritical towards the official "peace" ideology of Hiroshima City. It presents the city's history as a heroic struggle for peace and glosses over many of the counter-narratives, disagreements and controversies that were a part of Hiroshima's postwar history. It does not ask many of the important questions that drive my own study. How did the ideology of passivity and "flowers and pigeons" peace come to hold sway? How did it defeat the radical challenges from the Left and why was there no thirst for revenge or any challenge from the Right? In what ways was this ideology used or abused, and then why did it elevate victims to be the peace movement's martyr-heroes? The *shinshi* takes all these developments for granted and presents history as seamless progress. Hiroshima's story, however, is not one of the linear rise of the "victim-hero," but of multiple coalitions that rose and fell. It is a story of contradictions and ambiguities. The history of Hiroshima's commemoration and its attendant development of the trope of the victim were messy, multi-directional and open to many interpretations. Hiroshima's "history in the passive voice" has its own story, which this study wishes to trace.

The phrase "hero victims" comes from James Orr's work *The Victim as Hero*, which seeks to examine critically the history of victim movements in Japan. Although not without some shortcomings, most notably its overemphasis on USA-Japan relations, Orr's work is an astute history of the way in which different groups of victims pushed their agenda as victims for the purpose of compensation and political advantage and thus led to the early creation of the cultural trope of the "victim-hero"

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Hiroshima shi, *Hiroshima Shinshi* (Hiroshima: Hiroshima shi, 1984).

¹⁸ Satoru Ubuki, *Heiwa kinen shikitan no ayumi* (Hiroshima-shi: Hiroshima Heiwa Bunka Senta, 1992). Is the most notable work by Ubuki. Ishimaru's many articles are cited throughout this work.

in Japan. This work follows Orr's model, as well as the insightful work done by John Dower in a number of articles on the topic.¹⁹ But, I also seek to reintegrate this history with global developments and to examine its impact beyond the Japanese and even East Asian contexts. Indeed, this book diverges from existing focus in the scholarship on USA–Japan relations. This move, however, carries the risk of removing the USA, the perpetrator, from the overall picture. This is, ironically, also exactly what commemoration in Hiroshima was aiming at. And, indeed, curiously, after 1970 or so the USA seem to disappear from debates in Hiroshima. While some developments, such as relations with Asia or increased comparisons to Germany, changed during Hiroshima's history, attitudes to the USA remained constant. This is, to a large degree, the result of the particular nature of commemoration in Hiroshima. The near complete absence of the perpetrator – in great contrast to Holocaust memory – is, indeed, the most conspicuous element in its commemoration. Much of the first part of this book is about the (successful) erasure of the US role as perpetrator from the official discourse. Up to the 1970s, especially with the challenge from the student movement, this move was often questioned. This more or less ended with prosperity and the end of the Vietnam War. The USA was, of course, always there; it was the hegemonic power throughout the fifty years or so covered by the book. But its role was actively concealed. This situation is symbolized, for me, by a mimeographed copy of Truman's speech of August 7, 1945 that I found inside a Japanese language draft of a 1949 law, adhering to the script but hiding its origin. The US role was clearly important but had been obscured through censorship, self-censorship and the subsequent peace discourse that mostly refrained from mentioning the USA.

Thus, although the US role is significant this book mostly deals with Hiroshima's connection with the "world." Hiroshima was the center of an international network of peace and anti-nuclear movement activism and shared much with other discourses of commemoration all over the world, in particular, with that of the Holocaust. In the mind of many contemporaries, Hiroshima and Auschwitz were intrinsically connected. Until the 1980s, it was quite common to refer to them as the twin horrors of the war.²⁰ Hiroshima, however, following 1989 and the end of the Cold War, had fallen by the wayside. Indeed, Hiroshima's relative

¹⁹ Among other works already mentioned Dower's article "The Bombed" was exceptionally important for me. See John W. Dower, "The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19, 2 (1995), pp. 275–295.

²⁰ For a particularly late example of this, see participants' responses in John E. Mack, "Discussion: Psychoanalysis in Germany 1933–1945: Are There Lessons for the Nuclear Age?," *Political Psychology* 10, 1 (March 1, 1989), pp. 53–61.

marginality is reflected in the huge gap between the number of historical works on Holocaust memory and those on Hiroshima. What struck me as I began this project is how much more has been written on the Holocaust than on Hiroshima. This is partially because of the timing of memory studies' rise, in the 1990s, as Hiroshima was receding from view and the events in Bosnia and Rwanda were thought to make the Holocaust more relevant than ever. Another reason is simple, if unintentional, namely Eurocentrism. The Holocaust, for the West, happened at the heart of civilization, while Hiroshima and other non-Western sites of mass killings were on the periphery. Hiroshima was always somewhat foreign, somewhat removed, and even exotic. There were times, though, when Hiroshima stood at the center of world attention; when nuclear issues mattered; and when it was realized that Hiroshima is not just the past, but might also be relevant to the future. It is the main objective of this book to bring Hiroshima back into conversations about tragedy and mass killings; to explore the ways we dealt with these as a global community and not as the isolated nations that we never were.

The Holocaust and Hiroshima in Israel and the Cold War West

Bringing the histories of the Holocaust and Hiroshima back together is not, of course, a zero-sum game. Bringing back Hiroshima does not diminish the importance of the Holocaust. This is not the view of many of my compatriots. For many in Israel, and among Jews especially in the USA, the Holocaust was a unique event that cannot be compared or tied to any other tragedy. This view is the lynchpin of a peculiar form of Jewish nationalism that centers on victimization and precludes any wider view of the tragedy. In the many presentations and talks I have given on the topic, I have always been confronted by some version of that view. In some cases, even the possibility of comparison is frowned upon. Many Israelis and Jews seem to fear even the suggestion of looking at the Holocaust in the context of postwar history in general; fearing context might lead to relativization and downgrading of the horror (as I am never tired of pointing out, it is the *postwar* history that I compare and not the tragedies themselves).²¹

This was not always the case, as demonstrated by a fascinating exchange that took place in 1973. Just months before the Yom Kippur War, Muki

²¹ This is, of course, not limited to Israelis. Germans and Americans are just as sensitive. Indeed, even the word contextualization itself is suspect after the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s.

Tzur, an Israeli historian, wrote in the introduction of the German translation of “*siach lokhamim*” (*A Soldiers’ Conversation*), “[this book] was written by Jewish youths of the 20th century. This century was shaped by two colossal events, two earthquakes in modern civilization: Hiroshima and Auschwitz. It seems that there is no young man in this world who is free from relating to these two events ... we (young Israelis) are looking for meaning between these two extremities.”²² Haim Guri, one of Israel’s leading publicists at the time, took offense at Tzur’s linking up of the two tragedies. In a biting critique entitled “Al ha-hevdel” (“On the Difference”), Guri dismissed any attempt at comparison or connection between Hiroshima and Auschwitz. Guri presented Hiroshima as a tragedy, but one that was conducted as part of a war in which the Japanese were the aggressors, while the Jews were not in any way conducting warfare against the Germans. Furthermore, accepting the prevailing American interpretation of the bombing, Guri presented Hiroshima as “evil with a purpose,” meaning as a lesser evil that prevented many more casualties (in the event of an American invasion of Japan). Auschwitz was different. “It had no purpose ... it was a crime.” Implicitly (and ahistorically) condemning the allies, Guri added, “If the A-bomb was dropped on Auschwitz millions would have been saved.” Guri hinted at what was really at stake when he concluded, “the Germans would be pleased at this false confluence of Hiroshima and Auschwitz,” thus implying that the very comparison served to undermine German guilt.²³ In a forceful reply, Tzur responded, “I cannot forget Hiroshima ... not because I could identify with its victims to the same degree I could with my own people. Not, also, because I attribute to Truman and his advisers the same motives I attribute to Eichmann or Heidrich. But because Hiroshima has put us under the threat of a total weapon ... we must understand the horrible absurdity [which is Hiroshima], even I as an Israeli cannot release myself from that shadow.”²⁴

That such a conversation could even take place in 1973 demonstrates how much discourse has changed since. It also shows, first, how nuanced and complicated the connection between Hiroshima and the Holocaust is; second, how unacceptable the connection was for some; and third, what strong emotions both elicited. Emotion is a key term here as what I call the emotionalization of memory that occurred during the Eichmann trial in 1961 and the 1955 anti-nuclear conferences in Hiroshima played

²² *Davar*, January 29, 1973. ²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Davar*, July 25, 1973. Tzur was no pacifist. He was disgusted by a group of Jewish American students who told him that the “Jewish people chose justice over the politics of force.” Tzur argued that, in the face of destruction, “not to be strong is immoral.”