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Stubborn Legacies of War: *Japanese Devils* in Sarajevo

By Linda Hoaglund

Japanese Devils*, a documentary of personal confessions of war crimes by Japanese Imperial soldiers in China during World War II, was invited to the Sarajevo Film Festival in August 2002. Accompanying the film and its director to Sarajevo, the author, an American, sensitive to the postwar Japanese experience, discovered a people and city still deeply traumatized by war. The visit prompted a series of questions about the origins of genocide, the consequences of targeting civilians in war, and our collective responsibility to question and listen to the stories of perpetrators, as civilians increasingly become explicit targets in hostilities.*

When *Japanese Devils*, the historic documentary in which Japanese veterans face the camera to recount the brutal crimes they committed against Chinese civilians in the 1930s, was invited to the Eighth Sarajevo Film Festival (2002), I knew I wanted to accompany it. I was especially keen to witness the response to this harrowing film in war-torn Sarajevo.

I first encountered Matsui Minoru's *Japanese Devils* at the Berlin Film Festival in 2001 and have worked closely with the producers since then to bring the film to audiences around the world. *Japanese Devils* is unique in providing uncoerced first-person accounts of war atrocities -- not from the victims' viewpoint, but from the perspective of the perpetrators, who sit comfortably in their living rooms, half a century after the events. These witnesses are in a unique position to offer such testimony, having spent five years in postwar Soviet labor camps, followed by six years in Chinese "reeducation" camps, from 1950 to 1956. The explicit goal of their incarceration was to "rehabilitate" them from brutal war criminals into thinking and feeling civilians, by confessing to their individual crimes and coming to terms with the consequences of their war-time acts.

The unprecedented, frank testimony of the so-called Japanese Devils has elicited correspondingly open responses from audiences around the world. Instead of the anger one might reasonably expect from people of Chinese descent on hearing explicit confessions about the torture, rape, and murder of Chinese civilians decades earlier, many viewers have thanked the director for tackling this incendiary material.

An American Child in Japan

The peculiar contradictions of my childhood have left me obsessed by war, and more specifically with how memories and scars of war persist through years of postwar reconstruction and subsequent mythicization. I was ten years old, the only American fourth grader in my Japanese school, when I learned of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. That day, our teacher wrote the words "America" and "atomic bomb" on the blackboard, and we opened our textbooks to a chapter entitled "The Defeat." All forty of my classmates turned around to stare at me. I did not need them to tell me I was implicated. As an American, raised in Japan, my childhood was shaped by a profound sense of pain and guilt for the damage American bombs had wrought upon Japan.

When, as an adult, I stumbled upon Tomatsu Shomei's extraordinary photographs of Nagasaki's Catholic hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) [1], I felt compelled to create a wider Western audience for his work. I translated the survivor narratives that accompany his photographs and came to understand that the survivors' memories of an obliterated Nagasaki, combined with their lingering scars and illness, branded them as outsiders in a Japan obsessed with prosperity and eager to put the war behind it. In the eyes of the hibakusha, I recognized the emotions of the American schoolgirl who had nowhere to hide in her fourth grade classroom.

Already as a fourth grader in a Japanese school, I had absorbed the message that Japan was a victim in World War II. My later work with the hibakusha testimonies led me to revisit twentieth-century Japanese history, focusing on the legacy of Japan's World War II aggression in Asia and its tortured postwar relations with the United States. In *Japanese Devils*, I finally heard individual Japanese willing to personally corroborate the accusations of wartime brutality that have cast such long shadows over Japan's postwar international relations.

Struck by the profound significance of *Japanese Devils*, I offered to provide English subtitles for the film. (The producers had undertaken the entire project at their own expense.) As I translated the perpetrators' words, I realized that the "devils" and the hibakusha share a similarly awkward position in contemporary Japan. Like the hibakusha, whose aging scars and repeated stories summon the horrors of atomic catastrophe, these former war criminals (a rare minority among returning veterans who for decades have insisted on recounting their crimes in public) were prickly obstacles in Japan's headlong rush to purify its past by forgetting or suppressing it. The hibakusha stories and these veterans' confessions remain stubborn legacies of war, linked by their narrators' shared insistence on bearing witness: in the case of the hibakusha, about what was done to them as civilians, in the case of the veterans, about what they did to civilians.

Sarajevo

Director Matsui Minoru, his wife, Masako, and I arrived at Sarajevo's pristine new airport in mid-August 2002. Driving into town I was struck by the many buildings that are still pockmarked or had been reduced to rubble. Prominent among them is one left that has been deliberately unrestored, the crippled tower that housed *Oslobodenje*, still Sarajevo's principal daily newspaper. The crumpled hulk of the building has been preserved as a memorial to the local journalists who risked their lives to report on the savage siege of the city. During our week in Sarajevo, still a dim shadow of its former self, I came to realize the fragility of "postwar peace."

On our first day, we joined a festival-sponsored tour of Mostar, a medieval city that lost its majestic fifteenth-century limestone bridge to relentless Serbian artillery pounding. Our tour guide was Samira, an irrepressibly good-natured Bosnian Muslim in her mid twenties. We traveled to Mostar in a large bus, not unlike those that carried thousands of Bosnian Muslims to their fates in concentration camps. As I gazed out at the scarred farmhouses lining the road, I wondered if our vehicle had once ferried such human cargo. Catching sight of a farmer resting from chopping firewood for the enormous wood piles every farmhouse seemed to boast, I had to wonder what else his ax might have split cleanly in two during the war. I was unprepared for the effect the unreconstructed surroundings had on the most commonplace objects of daily life.

We returned to Sarajevo in the late afternoon heat for an interview with Mitrovich Predrag, a Serbian journalist who had stayed on through the siege. He chain-smoked as he told of his reaction to *Japanese Devils*. He had experienced it as two parallel films. As the mostly impassive Japanese Imperial army veterans testified to their atrocities in China, his own mind replayed memories of the Sarajevan siege.

I asked Predrag about the local population's response to the screening of *No Man's Land*, the acerbic tragicomedy that ruthlessly exposes the heart of the Balkan disaster, which had opened the Sarajevo Film Festival in 2001. [2] He said that many residents, still devastated by the war and anxious to put it behind them, could not bring themselves to attend. When I asked how Sarajevans, in general, regard the ongoing trial of Milosevich in The Hague, he shrugged off the question with a nervous chortle that suggested its overall irrelevance to a people still hungry for a sense of normalcy:

"Remember, here we had seven armies, none uniformed. It was neighbor pitted against neighbor. What comfort can the televised Milosevich trial provide, when rapists have comfortably settled back into their homes and jobs, even as their Bosnian victims cower next door? People will remain tense and anxious until the individual rapists and petty war criminals have been apprehended and tried."

Suddenly, the towering hulks flanking Sniper's Alley loomed as incarnations of the battered souls who scurry across crosswalks, dodging the careening motor traffic so characteristic of Sarajevo. Predrag longed for the city's return to laughter and spontaneity, and mourned the loss of his favorite pastime, long roving walks in the hills that surround the city. "You see the hills are still rife with land mines," he explained. "We can no longer ramble to our favorite vistas of this magnificent city." With *Japanese Devils* fresh in mind, I wondered whether the Sarajevan survivors of an all-too-recent grisly war might yet have any appetite for the testimony of perpetrators from another time, another place.

War and Ethnic Cleansing

I had prepared for my trip to Sarajevo by reading Peter Maass's book, *Love Thy Neighbor*, a rumination by an American journalist who had actively covered the war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. [3] Maass concludes that Bosnia's Muslims "thought that being a minority group no longer mattered in civilized Europe, and they thought the wild beast had been tamed....[But] [t]he wild beast is out there, and the ground no longer feels so steady under my feet," Maass concluded. [4]

Love Thy Neighbor was especially instructive in its revelation of how little methods of violence against civilians have changed in the fifty years since the Japanese military targeted Chinese peasants. In Bosnia and in China humans were crammed into warehouses to suffocate; prisoners were forced to beat each other and to have sex; women were raped. Beheadings. Beatings. Torture. Part of what is so disturbing in these interchangeable accounts is the intimacy of the violence. A single shot kills instantly, but the slow torment of unspeakable pain and endless humiliation are apparently the irresistible alternative when the targets are civilians. The goal of such behavior can only be to render its victims inhuman. We like to believe that technological progress has refined the weapons of war sufficiently to convey the impression that our own soldiers' hands are clean. But when civilians become explicit targets in war, as they did for Japan in China, for Serbs in Bosnia, and for Americans in Vietnam and recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, apparently, "the wild beast" is never far away.

Maass's book examines our capacity to absorb stories of inhuman behavior. What is the appropriate balance between remembering and forgetting atrocities against civilians? This, of course, is the daunting challenge for *Japanese Devils*. Some critics have said the film comes far too late, six decades after the war; right-wing challengers have declared its testimony false, even slanderous. Why should we expose ourselves to harrowing testimony from aggressors in a war now so distant that many young people have no idea it ever took place?

The day before the Sarajevo screening, the Matsuis and I scheduled a private tour of the siege front lines with Samira, the Muslim guide who had taken us to Mostar. That morning, as we prepared to depart, a Belgrade-based Japanese television correspondent, accompanied by a Serbian crew, asked if he could cover our private expedition. We readily agreed, not considering the effect the crew might have on Samira. As soon as we started off by taxi, with the Japanese correspondent and the Serbs following in a Land Rover, Samira slumped deep in her seat. "They're Serbs," she said. "I'm not changing anything I say on the tour. I don't care who they are!" The Serbs' presence had reduced the effervescent Samira to the angry, tense teenager she must have been during the siege.

As we drove among the city's forested hills, again and again we encountered yellow warning tape emblazoned with a single word: MINE! The word turned my stomach. The road to our first destination was blocked with this tape, and a large crew was sweeping the area for mines. A step into the bucolic forest only several feet from where we stood might have rendered us another statistic in the worldwide campaign to clear and ban land mines. I was ill prepared to find stubborn legacies of war so close to my own body.

Heedless of the de-mining crew, Samira stood in a safe zone, recalling in a tremulous voice how the "aggressors" had claimed this spot for its strategic view of the entire city. Still agitated, she went on to explain her choice of words: "Since the aggression, we intentionally use the term 'aggressors' rather than 'Serbs,' as many Sarajevan Serbs chose to stay and fight with us. We have no desire to indict all Serbs, only those who came to destroy our city, whatever their ethnic background."

Afterwards, she slumped back in the cab, growling: "That Serbian driver stared at me the whole time. He wouldn't even get out of his car. He hates me for what I'm saying about the war. I know it." Between the MINE! tape and Samira's discomposure, I felt an almost tangible anxiety as we sped down the mountain, the white Land Rover close behind. By the end of our tour, I was sure that our screening would be sparsely attended at best. The war, safely seven years past by my own yardstick, still hovered within striking distance in the hearts and minds of many Sarajevans.

The next morning, as we sipped coffee before our screening, a youthful *Oslobodenje* reporter approached us for an interview. When she asked how Japanese audiences had responded to Matsui's painful film, he recalled that initial screenings were poorly attended, but eventually through word of mouth, more than ten thousand young people had thronged to see it at a modest art house in Shibuya. When she inquired about his bringing the film to Sarajevo, he answered, "I was never a participant in war. Screening this film here, I am frankly humbled, overwhelmed by an inexpressible weight." His interview was featured in the following day's paper.

Japanese Devils has now traveled to international film festivals in Berlin, Portugal, Munich, Toronto, New York, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Seoul, Yufuin (Kyushu), and Singapore, and to special screenings in Los Angeles, Portland, and Glasgow, among other places. In some venues, it has served as a kind of "surrogate truth commission," as it did at its sold-out screenings at the San Francisco Asian American Film Festival. There, one Chinese woman tearfully recalled that her grandmother had never recovered from seeing her brother murdered by Japanese soldiers on the eve of his wedding. She had been raised on her grandmother's hatred of the Japanese. Pausing to compose herself, she confided, "After meeting friendly Japanese in America, my hatred has become a burden in my life. This film has allowed me to see the Japanese as humans. I only wish my grandmother had lived to see it." A young Japanese woman timidly raised her hand and said: "I knew all about what happened in Okinawa and Hiroshima, but nothing about what our soldiers did in China. Did all this really happen?"

***Japanese Devils* in Sarajevo**

As we filed into the theater, my heart caught in my throat. My gnawing suspicions were confirmed. There were only about forty people in the 200-seat theater. As Matsui began introducing the film, I realized this was the only time he had introduced the film from a prepared text. Shaken by his encounters with a city and its people still devastated by war, he evidently wanted to accurately contextualize his own reasons for tackling the material. In a trembling voice, he began, "Some fifty years ago, Japan, too, was an aggressor in war. This film documents, in the words of the actual perpetrators, the war crimes our fathers and grandfathers committed as Imperial soldiers on the Chinese mainland. Screening my film, here in Sarajevo, where the scars of war are still vivid in the city's landscape and the hearts of its citizens, I am filled with a range of emotions difficult to put into words. I can only hope you will have the stamina to resist walking out."

Putting his text aside, he continued: "My own father served as a soldier in Japan's Manchurian Army. Although I had seen a photograph of him in uniform, I only realized after his death that I'd never had the courage to ask him the question, 'What did you do during the war?' Later, when I met a returnee from the Chinese re-education camps, I vowed to make a film based on their testimony." It was the first time I had ever heard Matsui publicly discuss his private reasons for making the film.

Part way through the screening, I went to the projection booth to correct a sound problem. The technician apologized for his gaffe, and then confessed: "Compared to this film, what happened in Sarajevo was like Disney animation." Perhaps he was thinking of the Japanese medical doctor who graphically recounts vivisecting Chinese civilians, or the sergeant who confesses with strange gusto to his rape and murder of a Chinese woman, whom he then butchered to feed his hungry men. Perhaps these acts eclipsed the violence in Sarajevo, or perhaps the projectionist simply wanted to distance himself and his recovering city from the film.

For whatever their own reasons, half the Sarajevans in the audience had already walked out. Though those who remained were few in number, their enthusiasm during the question-and-answer period following the film resulted in an extended, intense discussion, covered by both the Japanese/Serbian crew and by the local Bosnian television station.

The questions in Sarajevo were of a different order from those at other festivals, coming, as they did, from people searching for a way out of the tension that still grips their community. The first question came from a Bosnian woman in the front row. "Was it therapeutic for these men to testify to their acts? Because you know, when it comes to war crimes, no one's ever willing to confess. It's always someone else who has committed them. But really, the only way to survive after committing such acts is to talk about what you've done."

Recalling how uncomfortably close Sniper's Alley had appeared from Serbian positions in the hills -- even I could probably have held a slow-moving toddler or grandparent in a rifle's scope from that vantage point -- I wondered how the Serbian sharpshooters who gunned down so many civilians were living with what they had done.

The next question came from a Bosnian journalist: "Looking back, I cannot help but perceive the history of civilization as the history of war crimes. What did you hope to accomplish by making this film, breaking the taboo against discussing Japanese war crimes in postwar Japan?" (Had he chosen to, Matsui might have refuted the journalist's claim that war crimes remain strictly taboo in Japan. Conflict between those who choose to remember and those who wish to pretend certain events never took place continues to flourish around the edges of Japanese public discourse.)

By this point in the discussion, Matsui barely had time to get a word in edgewise, as the audience responded quickly to each other's points. He seemed deeply satisfied to observe the intense Bosnian engagement in their own pressing issues, which his film had precipitated.

A shy young woman followed with an insightful point: "Several men testified to raping Chinese women. Did they offer this information voluntarily, or only after you prodded them?" Matsui divulged that though the witnesses had spoken freely of other atrocities, they only confessed to rapes when asked pointedly. Several days before our screening, there had been a soccer match between the Yugoslavian national team and its Bosnian counterpart, the first such match since the war. After the game, the Serbian fans, a clear minority, had begun taunting the local losers. Enraged Bosnians had stormed the Serbian side of the stadium and seventeen police officers were seriously wounded as they intervened between murderous fans. The match was the talk of the town the next morning, with Bosnians reflecting that perhaps it was "too early" for such a match while Serbian land mines still lay buried in wait for the footsteps of playful children.

When are we ready to hear from perpetrators in a war? If seven years is too soon, is fifty-seven years too late? Does the span of a generation, twenty years, provide sufficient distance? Japan is hardly alone in turning a deaf ear to stories of soldiers returning from war. Who can blame civilians for wanting to put their memories behind them? Who wants to hear repeated the grim details of combat, the terrible acts wrought against civilians in the name of patriotism? As Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien writes in *The Things They Carried*,

"A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior....If a war story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie." [5]

Shattering that "very old and terrible lie," speaking the plain truth of their acts, the "Japanese Devils" of Matsui's film have frequently been accused of having been brainwashed during the period of their captivity in China. Why else would they spin such unbelievable tales? In the Dutch documentary *First Kill* [6], American Vietnam veterans recall, in language nearly identical to that of the witnesses in *Japanese Devils*, many of the themes that underlie Matsui's film.

Most of the veterans still refer to their Vietnamese victims as "gooks," just as the Japanese called theirs "chinks." Many recall how their main mission was to generate "body counts." Pausing uncomfortably in his recollection, a former soldier recounts: "Kids, women, children, the innocent, the guilty, everyone goes in wars....'We need body count, more body count.'" Another veteran, interviewed in a veteran's hospital, recalls: "That first moment, your first kill...it's strange. Because it's something you've never done before. But after that, what with me, it started getting good. The killing started getting good. It was such a rush. It was like a rush better than any dope you could get on the street....It was just a high, you couldn't even imagine. So you keep on killing."

Asked to describe the sensation of killing, one veteran, seated at a table strewn with prescription drugs, his hands shaking in the telling, flatly compares it to sex: "Every kill that you made, seemed like it made you feel a little better.... There was a place in your heart that it just [sigh] made you feel good....Sex is such an enjoyable thing, you take it and you compare it to killing somebody and havin' the same feeling and that's where you're at." Another describes the "full throttle" experience of killing: "...you become highly sexed....And adrenaline becomes a way of life and it cannot go back to normal again...." Their words reverberate with an intimacy common to soldiers remembering their own violence against civilians.

The American veterans' stories in *First Kill* are foreshadowed by antiwar Vietnam veterans' accounts of American war crimes, featured

in the recent American documentary *Unfinished Symphony*. [7] Many of the antiwar Vietnam veterans portrayed in this film had participated in the Winter Soldiers investigation [8] and had marched backwards along the route of Paul Revere's ride to protest U.S. participation in Indochina in 1972. Whether referring to their own behavior in Vietnam -- "I was an animal" -- or simply calling themselves "war criminals," the men tell stories that have been corroborated by victims' accounts from around the world and that validate Matsui's contention that his subjects' testimonies are not the product of brainwashing.

Philip Gourevitch's account of genocide in Rwanda, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, offers another vital perspective on the nature of wartime violence against civilians. [9] With the benefit of hindsight provided by tentative explorations of alternative forms of postwar criminal justice, including South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Gourevitch observes,

"In 1994, Rwanda was regarded in much of the rest of the world as the exemplary instance of the chaos and anarchy associated with collapsed states. In fact, the genocide was the product of order, authoritarianism, decades of modern political theorizing and indoctrination, and one of the most meticulously administered states in history....The specter of an absolute menace that requires absolute eradication binds leader and people in a hermetic utopian embrace, and the individual -- always an annoyance to totality -- ceases to exist." [10]

In a recent survey of four books that document genocide and ethnic wars, Istvan Deak proposes that "the driving forces in genocide and ethnic cleansing are generally modern governments, armies, police, administrators, clerics, politicians, medical doctors, historians, writers, poets, and other creative individuals." [11] Given the typically sensationalist and confusing media coverage of genocide, it is essential that we understand the critical analyses Gourevitch, Deak, and other students of genocide provide. Their writings, among other sources, lead me to conclude that a specific list of preconditions must be established before war is unleashed against civilians: (1) aggressive propaganda against the intended victims; (2) a call to an inviolate national or tribal identity to be vindicated by murdering the "enemy"; (3) provisions of arms by those in power in cases when the aggressor population remains unarmed; and (4) explicit guarantees of immunity for any acts of aggression conducted in the name of the nation or tribe.

In China, Rwanda, Bosnia, and so many seemingly disparate cases, civilian massacres were precipitated not by explosive tribal or ethnic hatreds, but by leaders who deliberately manipulated such historical tensions between people in an effort to consolidate power. Careful scrutiny of *Japanese Devils* reveals that the above list of conditions corresponds exactly to the strategies implemented by the Imperial Army of Japan in China in the 1930s. They were also key elements of Milosevich's gambit to expand his power in the 1990s.

Asking Questions

After an exhausting but cathartic question-and-answer session, we emerged into the broad Sarajevan daylight to find Samira bantering lightheartedly with the Serbian driver whose silent presence had tormented her only the day before. I drew her aside to ask her if all was well. Her reply startled me:

I found him standing outside the theater, so I went up to him and confronted him, point-blank. I said, "During my tour yesterday, you stayed in your Land Rover the whole time. Did you have a problem with what I said?" He answered that throughout the war he had stood by helpless as his countrymen, crazed with rage, had destroyed our people. He felt so humiliated by what his people had done to mine, he didn't have the courage to face me. He said he was sorry for what had happened to Sarajevo. When I repeated Samira's story to several local Bosnians, they were skeptical, but Samira was obviously mollified. After our chat, she resumed her conversation with the Serbian driver.

Samira had the courage to ask an apparent "aggressor," in no uncertain terms, on which side he stood. Is it possible that that's all it takes? To be willing to ask and to answer the simple question Matsui had never dared ask his father: "What did you do in the war?" The question few Americans have had the guts to ask of our Vietnam veterans, perhaps because we're afraid to hear the stories they might tell. Stories some veterans may still be waiting to tell, to anyone who would ask that simple question.

This question was the crux of the exchange between the Japanese Devils and their Communist wardens in the reeducation camps. Well before he faced Matsui's camera, Tominaga Shozo, a graduate of Tokyo University, who went on to lead the former war criminals' organization, Chukiren, recalled in an interview, "In time my eyes got used to the darkness [of my cell] and I made out writing on the wall. 'Down with Japanese Imperialism!' 'Devils of the Orient!' All of it was abusive language about us Japanese. Written in blood. When I saw these, a chill went up my spine. [Chinese] prisoners who were about to die had written these words in desperate, hopeless defiance. For the first time, I understood the minds of those prisoners. Up to that moment, I'd excused myself from responsibility on the grounds that I [had been] ordered to commit such acts by my commanders. From the point of view of those murdered, though, it didn't matter whether the act of killing was [voluntary or compulsory]." [12]

In *Japanese Devils*, Tominaga, a wizened old man with large ears, surrounded by books, recalls arriving in China to complete his training as an officer and lead a platoon of battle-hardened men. When after a week of training, his commander ordered him to decapitate a Chinese prisoner, Tominaga faltered. When his turn came, he asked himself: "Can this really be allowed to happen?" But realizing that he had no other choice, he sliced off his victim's head. Fifty years later, he reflected: "After all, I'd read my Kant, his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and was familiar with the idea of personal responsibility. I'd considered myself something of a humanist." A liberal intellectual, a humanist, confronted with the choice of his life or another's, joins the ranks of "the wild beasts" with the single stroke of a blade.

Tominaga died in February 2002. In April, I attended a joint memorial service for Tominaga and Jin Yuan, his principal Chinese reeducator. The two men had died within a year of each other in Tokyo and Beijing, respectively. In honor of their longstanding friendship, their families had chosen to hold a joint memorial service. The hall was overflowing, with more than fifty reeducation camp veterans among the mourners. Tominaga's widow and daughter were present, as were Jin Yuan's widow and a retinue of Chinese involved in preserving the memories of the reeducation camps. The ceremony took place in Japanese and Chinese.

No one but the Chinese reeducators and their Japanese wards can attest to what actually happened between them [13], but any contradictions that may inhere to postwar relations between them seemed swept away by the emotions of the moment. It was apparent that both Jin Yuan and Tominaga had won the deep and reverent respect of the other veterans. Transcending their opposing roles during the war, the two men had achieved some kind of a personal understanding in the decades that followed.

Perhaps one reason Tominaga and the other veterans felt free to testify on camera is that, unlike most lower-ranking soldiers involved in Japanese war crimes, they had actually been tried, albeit in China, by a Special Military Tribunal convened in 1956. The footage from these trials is unforgettable, with Chinese peasants stripping to reveal scars as they shriek accusations at the weeping Japanese defendants. Of the 1,062 Japanese prisoners the People's Republic of China incarcerated for war crimes, only forty-five were indicted at trial. The rest were repatriated immediately after the trials.

The U.S. decision, in 1945, to exempt the emperor from culpability in the Far Eastern War Crimes Tribunal, circumvented any serious examination of individual collaboration and national responsibility. In popular Japanese imagination, the "rogue" militarists behind Japanese aggression had been tried and judged and questions of individual participation abandoned to the postwar realities of hunger and survival. In this context, individuals willing to testify to their own actions were as rare as those who would hear them.

The fact that Tominaga and other witnesses are legally free to speak of their crimes may be compared with the situation in postwar Germany. Today, if former Nazis came forward with comparable testimony, they would find themselves behind bars, regardless of their age or the distance from their crimes. In Germany, which prosecuted its own, there is no statute of limitations for Nazi war crimes. The Japanese witnesses, by contrast, are legally exempt from prosecution and imprisonment, no matter what they admit. The Japanese government has never brought a single veteran to justice for war crimes. The ironic result of this position is that some have used their immunity to speak out vigorously against Japanese militarism and their personal crimes.

Japan has an ancient tradition of kataribe, those who recite oral histories of significant past events. Tomatsu describes the Nagasaki hibakusha kataribe as "those who relate to future generations unforgettable stories from the past, stories which must never be forgotten." [14] In an eerie parallel, Matsui describes the "terrible truths" we must force ourselves to confront if we are not to repeat the folly of Japanese aggression in China. The stories of both the Nagasaki hibakusha and the veterans who testify in *Japanese Devils* offer little healing and no redemption, yet we ignore their collective, terrible wisdom at our peril. For as long as we find compelling only the stories of victims, the perpetrators will forever remain at arm's length, outside the limits of the selves we imagine. What *Japanese Devils* ultimately teaches us is that we are all potential perpetrators.

In a world of global conflict, constantly bombarded with news of the latest atrocities against civilians, we must confront the twinned destinies of the Nagasaki hibakusha and the Japanese Devil, the Hutu and the Tutsi, the Sarajevan Muslim and the Serbian sharpshooter. When the tables turn abruptly, on which side of the ever-shifting line between aggressor and victim will we stand? As we try to imagine new platforms for bringing aggressors to justice, we need to balance our need for vengeance with our need to hear their stories.

Like amnesiacs
in a ward on fire;
we must find words
or burn.

-- Olga Brumas

Notes

1. Tomatsu Shomei, *Nagasaki 11:02* (Tokyo: Shaken, 1968). This book of photographs and survivor accounts resulted from Tomatsu's extensive documentation, during the 1960s, of Nagasaki's Catholic hibakusha community, which was largely ghettoized after the war.

2. Danis Tanovic, writer, director, *No Man's Land* (97 minutes, 2001) – winner of the Best Foreign Picture Oscar in 2002.

3. Peter Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

4. Ibid., 227

5. Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 68-69.

6. Coco Shrijber, director, *First Kill* (52 minutes, 2001). Distributed by First Run/Icarus Films (New York).

7. Bestor Cram and Mike Majoros, directors, *Unfinished Symphony* (59 minutes, 2001). An emotional, poetic, and lyrical reflection on the Vietnam War, this audience favorite at the Sundance Film Festival employs archival footage of "Operation POW" in 1971, when U.S. soldiers home from combat pointedly retraced Paul Revere's "freedom ride" between Concord, Massachusetts, and Bunker Hill -- resulting in 410 arrests on charges of civil disobedience. In lieu of conventional voice-over narration, the directors use Henryk Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* as both a structuring principle and a mournful expression of unspeakable loss. (from *City Pages* documentary film festival website)

8. Winterfilm, Inc., *Winter Soldier* (95 minutes, 1972).

9. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1998).

10. Ibid., 95.

11. Istvan Deak, "The Crime of the Century," *New York Review of Books* 49, no. 14 (26 September 2002): 48-51.

12. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 466.

13. Matsui did not ask survivors to recount their treatment in the reeducation camps, describing their treatment in voice-over narration as: "Following Chou En-Lai's motto 'Even war criminals are human, Respect their Humanity,' the newly created People's Republic gave these war criminals humane treatment. Staff at both facilities overcame their personal enmity. Any corporal punishment or verbal abuse was forbidden, and prisoners were treated with extraordinary warmth and humanity in every way, from food, medical care and exercise, to education and culture. The war criminals, who had expected severe punishment, were both profoundly moved and remorseful. Their treatment eventually awakened their own consciences. They acknowledged their crimes during the occupation and apologized to the Chinese people."

14. Tomatsu Shomei, Nagasaki <11:02> August 9, 1945, Linda Hoaglund, trans. (Tokyo, Shinchosha, 1995), 128.

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