

Lisa Yoneyama. *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016, 320+xii pages.

### **Review by Griseldis Kirsch, SOAS University of London**

We are all part of the time that we live in. Historiography, Anthropology or indeed any other academic discipline will invariably be influenced by the political currency of the day, be it by rejecting, critically assessing or even embracing the political discourses. Perhaps one day we will also look back at the present with the benefit of hindsight, allowing us to understand what forces were at play “back then”. And, indeed, how the ripples of the Cold War continue to manifest themselves in our world.

This is why Lisa Yoneyama’s book is so timely. Looking at how Cold War politics dominated the discourses on commemoration, remembrance and redress in Japan and the USA is an interesting approach to re-reading post-war history. The work is situated ‘in the genealogy of transpacific critique that has emerged at the interstices of Asian studies, American studies, and Asian American studies – or more broadly, area studies, ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies’ (p. ix). The introduction therefore sets the tone of the book by tackling ‘Transpacific Cold War Formations and the Question of (Un)Redressability’, both proposing theoretical considerations about ‘justice’ as well as explaining America’s grand narrative of the “good war” and how political formations influenced the lack of redress (e.g., as she points out on p. 29, the United Kingdom opposing compensation for Japan’s former colonies on the basis of its own colonial Empire). These narratives are central to the following chapters, in which the complex relationship between Japan, Asia and the US is looked at from the angle of Cold War power politics.

The book is structured into five chapters which are spread over two parts. The first part *Space of Occupation* consists of two chapters. The first chapter deals with Okinawa, and its positionality of having been ‘liberated’, yet remaining under Occupation. A close reading of Ōshiro Tatsuhiro’s novel *The Cocktail Party* is at the heart of the argument, as Lisa Yoneyama reads each of the characters as symbolic of particular positions with regards to Okinawa and its relationship to Japan on the one side and the USA on the other.

The second chapter deals with Japanese women and their appropriation by the USA, how the USA constructed itself as the “saviour” of Japanese women, forgetting that they had turned them into female warriors not long before. The meek and docile “Oriental” women were cast as being in need of help by the USA in emancipating themselves. This chapter

succinctly works out how double standards were applied – as it was perfectly alright for an American woman to be a housewife, but not so in Japan where their existence as housewife was recast as a male, patriarchal society suppressing women.

The third chapter opens the second part, entitled *Transnational Memory Borders*, and it is possibly the most complex chapter of all, as it looks at the roots of historical revisionism and its ramifications for Japanese society. Yoneyama aligns the issue with Cold War politics and the narrative of Japanese “liberation” by the USA that left US actions during the war not dealt with. Using the “Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru kai” (Textbook Reform Society) as example, she outlines how the Society started out its mission to rewrite Japanese history textbooks in order to instil patriotism in the next generation of the Japanese, as, according to the members of the Society, the textbooks commonly used provided a “masochistic” view of history. Another example she cites is how NHK has edited the coverage of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal, a redress effort from the grassroots to tackle the issue of “Comfort Women” in relation to the creation of the Asian Women’s fund, which ‘offered unilateral apologies and presumed that its terms of apology would be automatically accepted’ (p. 125).

In the fourth chapter, Yoneyama looks at redress efforts from Asian Americans in the USA and their attempts not to be forgotten. The example central to this chapter is a legislation by California which would allow US citizens to sue Japan for slave labour, which, however, is trumped by Federal legislation that sees all accounts as settled through the Peace Treaty, making it virtually impossible for those victims to find justice during the Cold War. She furthermore outlines the complicated identities of those Asian Americans and their attempts at redress.

The fifth and final chapter could equally serve as conclusion. Here, Yoneyama works out how forgetting one’s own actions on the one side of the Pacific has led to forgetting on the other side as well. This time, the focus is set on the Smithsonian dispute, an argument between various political actors as to how much context was needed for the Enola Gay to be put into an exhibition commemorating the end of the Second World War in Asia. She elucidates how an attempt to make it balanced went against the narrative of the US having had “saved Japan” by dropping two nuclear bombs. It eventually resulted in a change in the outlay of the exhibition. Ironically, as she works out, this kind of amnesia in the US, has furthered Japanese amnesia with regards to its own actions during the Second World War, as Cold War power politics required the support of conservative forces in Japan. Those

purporting views on the war that would be “acceptable” to the USA were, and continue to be, found on the political left in Japan – that the USA in turn did not want to work with.

The book ends with an epilogue in which the choice of cover picture is explained alongside answering the question how ‘the Cold War impaired postwar transitional justice, to what extent [we can] understand renewed calls for historical justice since the 1990s as facilitating or disrupting the transpacific entanglement that are rooted in post-World War II institutional and epistemic formations?’ (p. 205).

While the arguments in most chapters are compelling and convincing, as well as theoretically well founded, it remains unclear how the material has been chosen overall. Taking the book as one oeuvre, it is not clear why it makes use of novels alongside court rulings and media coverage and why certain examples have been chosen over others. Could there not have been countless other examples? Does not discourse always produce counter-discourse? Because the focus is limited to these poignant examples only, the question of ‘counter-discourse’ is never really raised to the full extent.

Furthermore, there are some minor errors that could and should have been edited out, for example, Germany was not ‘reborn’ in 1989 (p. 4). If anything, the four former Occupation Zones that had respectively formed the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in 1949, were reunified in 1990 within very different borders from what “Germany” looked like in 1871, 1918, 1939 or even 1945. Although there is the cursory nod at the situation in Europe, it rarely does the complexity of the European Cold War formations justice.

All in all, the book is not so much about Japan, or Asia, or the USA, but about the wider region, showing history, memory and redress to be complex issues that cannot be limited by national borders. In spite of its shortcomings, it shows very well how actions taken at one end of the world will directly influence actions of others at another end of the world which a narrow focus on one country will rarely adequately explain. Understanding a former enemy and new ally is central to the creation of post-war Japanese Studies and the book adds an interesting layer to the history of Area Studies as a field. However, countries cannot and should not ever be studied in isolation, the world always has been more complex than often arbitrarily drawn borders on a map would allow for. This book therefore also shows that it is maybe time to re-evaluate “Area Studies” by broadening scope and focus, reinvigorating it by studying complex transnational phenomena.

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