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Re-imagining Hiroshima

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EDITORIAL

Re-imagining Hiroshima

A great deal has been written about Hiroshima. One only needs to mention the city's name – Hiroshima – and people of all generations tend to recall the two nuclear attacks that America inflicted on Japan on 6 and 9 August 1945. Over time, however, there is also the growing tendency for the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – along with the awareness of nuclear weapons and war in general – to be erased from contemporary consciousness.

Nevertheless, for those who have retained a sense of the nuclear imaginary, Hiroshima has come to stand in for a world historical event – some would argue, a crime against humanity – that called into question the very meaning of harm, as well as of life, death, and politics. For the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were just that: attacks. Attacks not only on the human body, but also on the biosphere on which all life depends. In this way, both Hiroshima *and* Nagasaki introduced a form of harm that was fundamentally different in kind from all others that had gone before it.

Numerous people claim to have contributed something new to our understanding of Hiroshima, as well as its aftermath. In 1965, historian Gar Alperovitz wrote about how the attack on Japan was, in part, an aimed at the Soviet Union, spawning the revisionist interpretation of the attacks. In 1986, journalist and historian Richard Rhodes won a Pulitzer Prize for propounding the traditional American narrative that the real story behind the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is primarily one about American scientists. In 1995, Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell brought the image of Hiroshima home to the United States, arguing that Americans have never really confronted what occurred at Hiroshima. These previous efforts are American, reflecting the imbricated relationship of American thinkers with the legacy of the nuclear attacks.

However, major volumes dedicated to thinking freely and imaginatively about the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are rare. Certainly, there have been very few, if any, concerted attempts to interpret Hiroshima anew and from a range of different perspectives, as contributors do in this special issue of *Critical Military Studies*. These re-imaginings not only contribute to our understanding of nuclear culture in particular and military studies in general, but taken together, they pave the way for scholars of tomorrow to explore novel ways of thinking about the nuclear events of August 1945.

Indeed, the motivation behind this special issue on “Re-imagining Hiroshima” is to bring together contributors who are attempting to re-imagine the nuclear harm that was inflicted, as well as its aftermath. The idea for this volume was born from finding ourselves – a nuclear ethicist and a nuclear historian, respectively – working together as part of an international collaboration between artists and atomic survivor communities in Australia, Japan, Kazakhstan, and the Marshall Islands, among other locations. For this chance encounter we are grateful to the convenor of the Nuclear Futures initiative, Paul

Brown and his administrative team, as well as to the Australia Council for the Arts for its multi-year sponsorship.

This special issue includes five full articles and four shorter “Encounters” pieces. These contributions have each been selected because they address the event’s recollection, memorialization, and commemoration by officials and states, or examine ordinary people’s resentment, suffering, or forgiveness. Yet all of the contributions that follow are united by how they either invite or provoke the reader into thinking differently about the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

- Ran Zwigenberg’s article examines Hiroshima’s relation to nuclear modernity by way of a detailed investigation into how and why Isamu Noguchi’s design for the Hiroshima cenotaph came to be rejected;
- Yuki Miyamoto traces the media appearances (or lack thereof) of the Hiroshima maidens in Japan and the US, whose wounded bodies, she believes, were used to normalize the horror of the atomic bombings;
- Stefanie Fishel compares the memorialization of the nuclear attacks in Japan and the US, and ventures how remembering the event from multiple viewpoints could lead us towards different policies or debates about the weapons themselves;
- Erik-Heinz Roper traces the emergence of testimonies of Korean *hibakusha* (i.e. atomic survivors) who were resident in Japan at the time of the nuclear attacks, in order to examine attempts to remedy their marginalization in Japanese society by way of counter-histories and activism; and
- Thomas Doyle II argues that there are at least two paradoxes of the nuclear age in which the Japanese people are simultaneously “allergic” to nuclear weapons but do not wish to be “treated”, while the Japanese government endures the nuclear allergy without ridding itself of the “allergens”.

Although these contributions are drawn from scholars in a variety of disciplines, we believed that *Critical Military Studies* – as a journal and as a subfield – was the appropriate site for this new way of thinking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thankfully, the editors and publishers also permitted us to curate two photographic images for the Encounters section alongside two provocative essays.

- Robert Del Tredici’s aerial image, taken on 6 August 1983, of the L-reactor at the Savannah River Plant site, in Aiken County, South Carolina, reminds us that weapons-grade plutonium is produced;
- elin o’Hara slavik’s image from on top of the Hijiyama mountain overlooking the city of Hiroshima captures within the foreground the Japanese–American organization whose job it is to objectively study the victims (survivors) of the atomic bomb, though not to treat them;
- Makeda Best speculates as to the meaning of memorialization and the national memory role of *ひろしま/HIROSHIMA* (2008) by photographer Ishiuchi Miyako, who “uses clothing and personal items as sites through which to establish and expand the viewer’s connection to the lives and experiences of bombing victims”; and
- Kathleen Sullivan’s intervention serves as a reminder that the two nuclear attacks – on Hiroshima *and* Nagasaki – are in fact two bombs of different kinds, against different people, and with different effects.

We are hopeful that this special issue, as well as the expanded edited volume that is to follow it, goes some way towards re-imagining the nuclear attacks of August 1945.

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