

# Book Review: Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes by Lisa Yoneyama

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*At a time when legalistic responses to war and conflict have become a dominant discourse in international relations, Lisa Yoneyama examines the contested legacy of the Allied justice project in occupied Japan and suggests that we need to 'unlearn some of the most familiar terms with which we make demands for a just world'. **Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes** offers an original account that will be of interest to those researching Cold War and area studies, postcolonial feminism and transitional justice theory, finds Teemu Laulainen.*

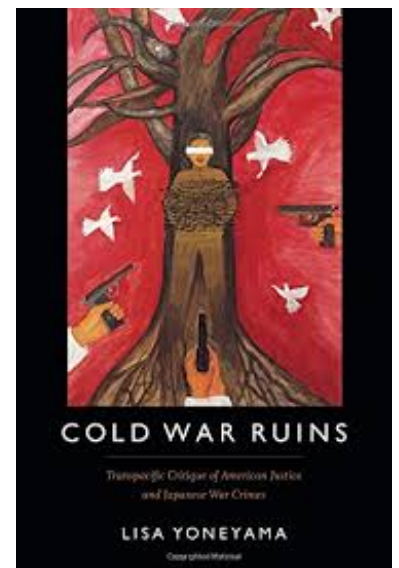
***Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes*. Lisa Yoneyama. Duke University Press. 2016.**

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The Cold War is traditionally seen as a lacuna in the progressivist development of the international criminal justice regime on the road from Nuremberg to The Hague. In her third single-authored book, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes*, Lisa Yoneyama breaks with this narrative by looking at how Cold War formations and postcolonial attitudes under the cloak of Western liberalism continue to shape a justice project that formally concluded in 1952.

*Cold War Ruins* concerns the post-Cold War resurgence of political debates on Japanese colonial and wartime violence and the issuing of official apologies and war reparations for the victims. By deconstructing the coloniality of 'transborder redress culture', Yoneyama offers a poignant and richly illustrated account of the limits and hypocrisies of liberal peace-building projects and judicialised forms of post-war justice.

*Cold War Ruins* is a book with a rhapsodic structure. Transborder redress culture as a research subject is both nebulous and multi-dimensional, as it touches upon issues such as collective memory and amnesia, national self-identity and historical forgiveness. The narrative of the book oscillates between the past and the present in Yoneyama's exploration of the *longue durée* of the post-war period. Yoneyama guides the reader through a thematic exploration of commemorative history and the '[Politics of the Past](#)'. The book is divided into two parts: Part One theorises the space of occupation in Okinawa and mainland Japan; and Part Two addresses the emergence of transnational discourses of redress. On the whole, *Cold War Ruins* includes such stylistic variety that it could be read as a collection of essays. What it does not offer, however, is a substantive and fact-based account of Japanese war crimes nor the Allied-led tribunals that sought to address them.





**Image Credit: Comfort Women Statue (YunHo LEE CCO)**

In methodological terms, *Cold War Ruins* combines critical historiography with discourse analysis and literary criticism. There is a strong link to critical literary and social theory, which is perhaps most apparent when Yoneyama analyses Japanese historical revisionism of the 1990s in terms of racial and sexual hysteria and emasculation using psychoanalytical terminology to inform socio-historical analysis. *Cold War Ruins* also makes multiple references to the works of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, but despite the occasionally arcane language of the book, Yoneyama beats the aforementioned in terms of accessibility.

Transitional justice projects and other post-war settlements are performative acts that shape the political memory of wars as historical events, but they rarely do this unequivocally. Yoneyama's main argument in *Cold War Ruins* is that, following defeat and occupation under the Allied powers in the 1940s, the 'political unconscious' of Japan has internalised the role of being a client state within the US liberal empire. Because of this client-statist mentality, Yoneyama argues, Japanese attempts to address wartime and colonial-era violence continue to be shaped and informed by the power relations and ideological patterns of the Cold War; the Japanese culture of redress has therefore become 'Americanized'.

Yoneyama describes the 1990s as a period when a unique form of redress culture emerged in Japan and the United States as the end of the Cold War saw the creation of a political space in which historical grievances, unresolved and undisclosed by the US-led [International Military Tribunal for the Far East](#) and the [1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty](#), were brought back into public eye. Yoneyama centres her argument on the famous cases of [military comfort women](#) and the [history textbook controversies](#), where nationalist political organisations advocated for the removal of mentions of Japanese war crimes from the national curriculum. Through these, Yoneyama analyses the construction of a culture war between liberal sensitivity and conservative revisionism, where calls to establish belated justice for the victims of gendered violence, on the one hand, have been countered by the neo-patriotism of the conservative Japan Society for History Textbook Reform on the other.

Through its transnational discursive analysis, *Cold War Ruins* also challenges the US 'good war' narrative of the Second World War and criticises the self-proclaimed position of the US as the benevolent modernisers of Japan. The book takes a predictable, albeit justifiable, stance in contrasting the official discourse on Japanese wartime violence with the [silences that surround the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), with the author highlighting the apparent

hypocrisies therein. At its best, the book reveals the postcolonial limbo of places such as Okinawa Island which remains part of the [American Empire of Bases](#), as the author explores themes of statelessness and memories of violence through Tatsuhiro Ōshiro's 1967 novella [The Cocktail Party](#). The author's account of the gendered narratives of occupation is especially rewarding. The absurdities of modern biopolitics that Yoneyama addresses through the colonisation of Okinawa offer some interesting parallels to the current refugee crisis, as the author describes the Kafkaesque statelessness of East Asian refugees at the cross-section of Japanese and US imperialism.

*Cold War Ruins* does not pretend to provide a textbook account of Japanese war crimes or their aftermath. Instead, Yoneyama critically analyses the normative discourses surrounding Japanese wartime criminality and exposes how the Cold War power relations between Japan and the US continue to influence the terms in which international redress culture is enacted. The book offers a highly critical dissection of the political sensitivities of the post-Cold War era in the Japanese context, which makes postgraduate researchers and area specialists its natural target audience.

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**Teemu Laulainen** is a PhD candidate in War Studies at King's College London. His research focuses on the formation of international legal personality of soldiers in the post-WWII Class B war crimes trials.

*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*

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