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Lost Pasts and Unseen Enemies: The Pacific War in Recent Japanese Films

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Introduction

Since 1945 the history of the war itself, and the record of Japan's aggression against its Asian neighbours, the United States and its allies have themselves become battle grounds disputed by national and international commentators. As a result, the depiction of Japan's war in popular culture has been marked by obfuscation and ambiguity, with historical fact as much as national perspective being contested by the creators of fiction, films, comics and animation. In many examples of post-war popular culture, representations of Japan's adversaries, most notably Americans, have been virtually absent, or have been limited to distant, dehumanised aircraft or ships on the horizon, the crews of which remain invisible and anonymous. In effect, the difficulty of portraying the war in Japanese cinema has become focused not on troubling representations of death (which can, on the contrary, be explored spectacularly and voyeuristically, with the full spectrum of cinematic effects and a concomitant exploitation of emotional and visceral impact[1]) but on the necessary and identifiable presence of the adversaries and antagonists that Japanese wartime heroes can be seen to face:

> For the Japanese, it was important to construct a clear demarcation between the pre-1945 and post-1945 Japan because it needed to separate the 'polluted' past from the new present, as a springboard to construct a new narrative of postwar Japan […] the postwar Japanese liked to portray themselves as victims of pre-1945 militarism […] Moreover, the intensely myopic preoccupation of the Japanese with the 'self' came at the cost of ignoring the 'other', namely the victims of Japanese aggression, especially in Asia. This was symptomatic of the incapability of the Japanese to come to terms with their own past.[2]

In Japanese war films made since 1945, a pervasive, national assumption of victimhood has functioned to obscure the victims and targets of Japanese aggression (the peoples of East Asia and their Western colonisers), while the deepening relationships with former adversary nations (primarily America) have made the portrayal of enemy combatants difficult and discomfiting. Such treatments also obfuscate, ignore or alter the origins of the conflict. Even *Nobi* (*Fires on the Plain*) (dir. Ichikawa Kon, 1959), a celebrated post-war example which represents unflinchingly the brutality Japanese troops showed

towards Filipino civilians, ultimately places greater emphasis upon the suffering of Imperial Army soldiers abandoned to their fate far from home. The American enemy is only glimpsed from a distance, and is scarcely connected to the plight of Japanese soldiers. In Japanese films the war can therefore appear as a de-contextualised drama rather than a narrative, represented with combatants but without combat, with consequences which lack original, apparent causes, and with heroes seemingly unopposed by tangible enemies. While similar characteristics, arousing comparable criticisms, have been discerned in Western war films,[3] Japan's initiation of the conflict and (in the opinions of its neighbours) its apparent evasion of responsibility for it, have made this manipulation of the national past appear disingenuous, flawed or culpable. Far from marking a healthy separation from history, postwar Japanese attitudes have themselves 'polluted' the understanding of the past with the interests and interpretations of the present.

In two films addressing the problematic history of the Japanese *kamikaze* tactics adopted in 1944-1945, the effort of recovery of a stable national past is located within individual memory, familial history and the painstaking (re)discovery of lost relatives. *Ore wa, kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku* (*For Those We Love* a.k.a. *Assault on the Pacific: Kamikaze*) (dir. Taku Shinjo, 2007) and *Eien no O* (*The Eternal Zero* a.k.a. *The Fighter Pilot*) (dir. Takashi Yamazaki, 2014) largely eschew representation of the enemy until climactic battle sequences showing deliberate, suicidal attacks upon American warships, which stand as moments of both national pride and personal mourning. The formidable contradictions apparent in these films' interpretation of Japan's war (in lamenting the destruction and loss of life suffered by Japan and her adversaries, and yet celebrating the patriotic sacrifices of the past which produced modern, peaceful and prosperous Japan) complicate the portrayals of the wartime enemies who are now essential post-war allies and trading partners. Therefore within ongoing nationalist and pacifist discourses of the country's disputed past, and in the narratives of films representing versions of war history for contemporary audiences, the 'enemy' is frequently relocated within the militarist establishment, which may be more unproblematically identified as the instigator of Japan's war, and condemned as the source of the people's suffering. Yet in these films the continued honouring of the nation's war dead persists, both as a gratifying commemorative element for a loyal home audience, and as evidence of re-emergent militarism and a galling revisionist provocation for pacifist Japan and for the country's former enemies. As David Desser observes, Japan's war cinema has evinced:

> both an admirable attempt to come to terms with Japanese aggression against its neighbors [sic] and an almost simultaneous slippage into seeing the Japanese as no less

> a victim of their own wartime actions […] Saying that war is hell is not the same as saying that Japan's war aims led to hell.[4]

These controversies of history appear most aggravated, in films portraying the forms of 'special' (suicide) attack initiated and institutionalised during the last months of the Pacific War. Portrayals of willing self-sacrifice for the Empire had been the staple of many post-war Japanese films, particularly those representing Japan's war against Russia in 1904-5 such as *Meiji tenno to nichiro daisenso* (*Emperor Meiji and the Great Russo-Japanese War*) (dir. Kunio Watanabe, 1957) and *Nihonkai daikaisen* (*Battle of the Japan Sea*) (dir. Seiji Maruyama, 1969). These commercially successful Russo-Japanese War films provided extravagant recreations of historical combat, in which dutiful soldiers laid down their lives willingly in the nation's cause. However, since they portrayed a more distant war in which Japan had been victorious, these films appear to have appealed to Japanese post-war audiences unproblematically as spectacular entertainment comparable to contemporary Hollywood war films, and may also have provided a focus for nationalistic pride without the danger of offending the country's former enemy and new ally, America. Indeed, portrayal of a Russian enemy (albeit sympathetically in *Battle of the Japan Sea*), may have actually suited American opinion in the Cold War period. When the subject of the kamikazes of the Pacific War was addressed, as in *Taiheiyo no tsubasa* (*Attack Squadron*) (dir. Shue Matsubayashi, 1963), the moral objections raised explicitly against suicide attacks within the narrative deflected criticism of the portrayal of willing self-sacrifice. The treatment of this subject in recent Japanese films, in a period when visits by politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine (which honours all Japan's war dead) provoke annual controversies, has compounded the contentious attitudes to conflict and war commemoration which have divided the country.[5] In these films' attempts to articulate the purposes, meanings and after-effects of self-sacrifice as a key characteristic of Japanese identity, the identity of the enemy often becomes displaced, elided, or obscured.

For Those We Love: 'the right way to lose a war'

Ore wa, kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku (*For Those We Love*) dramatizes the kamikaze missions flown by Imperial Japanese Army pilots from the Chiran airbase in Kagoshima during the last months of the war. Chiran has a potent symbol of the kamikaze campaign, since many pilots departed from the base on their final missions and the site has since become a memorial and museum.[6] The film begins with the following title:

> I had the fortune to hear the poignant stories of the suicide corps recruits from Tomé Torihama, who had come to be known as 'Mother to the Kamikaze.' I was struck by the need to create a legacy attesting to the bravery and beauty of Japanese people back in those days.
>
> Shintaro Ishihara

Ishihara's careers as a politician and governor of Tokyo were punctuated by frequent controversies regarding his right-wing views, including revisionist pronouncements on Japan's war history.[7] As screenwriter and executive producer, Ishihara's statement of inspiration and intent connects his own memorialising effort with that of Tomé Torihama, the 'auntie' and mother figure to the youthful pilots who patronised her family restaurant. The role of the town and Tomé's restaurant in supporting the young pilots had been dramatized previously in *Hotaru* (*The Firefly*) (Yasuo Furuhata, 2001). Tomé's reverential stance towards the 'splendid, lovely young men' dominates the film, as her recollections of the war conveyed through voice-over and flashback pursue a persuasive and restorative agenda. Shots of young cadets engaging in competitive sports are interrupted by a cut to the grey-haired, smiling Tomé. Here the editing and eye-line imply that she looking on, in the physical presence of the young men, when in fact her vision of them actually reflects an imaginative, contemplative retrospection. As such this enshrining of Tomé as the custodian of the memory of the kamikaze (via the validation of her perspective and voice-over as the authentic account of the past) defines the film unapologetically as a first-hand emotional advocacy for the remembrance and recognition of the youthful pilots. Her 'view' brings the 'young men' insistently into the present.

However, these first memories of the young pilots' training are quickly succeeded by an historical episode which Tomé could not have witnessed: the briefing by Admiral Onishi at Mabalacat in the Philippines in October 1944, at which the strategy of 'special attack' became institutionalised.[8] The film's dramatization of this event foregrounds Onishi's ruthless imposition of kamikaze tactics, against his own and his subordinates' objections, as the only means to 'protect our national identity through defeat and into the distant future.' To overcome the other commanders' misgivings, Onishi asserts the necessity of the kamikaze campaign, not in order to win the war or even avoid losing it, but to 'lose it the right way' to preserve national honour beyond the now-inevitable defeat:

> I'm talking about Japan as a nation and the spirit of our people. One thing that must be said about this war is that we fight to free like-coloured people and races from the grip

> of the white man. This is beyond question: a just and valid purpose. This belief, this resolution, even though our struggle be defeated, for the honour of our nation, must be recorded correctly in the annals of history. To this end, young men must die. This is our only way.

Onishi's rationalisation of the adoption of kamikaze attacks accords with the dictums of contemporary propaganda: that far from engaging in a war of aggression and imperial expansion, Japan had responded protectively and responsibly against Western colonial control of Asia. The unqualified recapitulation of this justification in a film made in the 21st century exemplifies Japanese attitudes to and representations of war history which provoke accusations of disingenuousness. However, rather than simply evading Japanese accountability, this statement consciously aggrandizes the sacrifice of the kamikaze pilots, endowing their actions with a wider ideological integrity in addition to its stated importance in national defence. The deeds of the kamikaze are defined in sympathy with Japanese identity and official political morality, and in contradistinction from the corruption and iniquity of the Western enemy. However, the admiral's attempts to instil a nationalistic zeal are severely undermined when he admits that the kamikaze attack corps must be 'voluntary in name alone.' This stance is reaffirmed at the end of the Philippines sequence, which shows Onishi's subordinates repeating his unyielding doctrine to the first chosen 'volunteer', Lieutenant Seki. Although he initially reacts with horror, Seki is persuaded to lead the first attack, to set an example for others to follow in safeguarding the 'fate of the nation.' Subsequently Seki's successful attack is represented by generic archive footage of kamikaze attacks.

As with the combination of persuasion and coercion credited to Onishi, the film's valorisation of Seki epitomises the contradictory stances adopted towards the role and character of the kamikaze. The admiral appears as both the mouthpiece for nationalistic dogma, which hedges historical fact and underpins the hero worship of the suicide pilots, and as the symbol of an inhuman totalitarian military establishment, held responsible for squandering lives to defer an unavoidable defeat. Similarly, Seki is shown to be a victim of military authority, a professional officer susceptible to the immoral manipulation of his superiors, and a heroic role model for the volunteers who succeed him. The film's depiction of the conscious selection of Seki as a regular pilot officer, to serve as an example for the drafted student pilots who made up the bulk of the kamikaze corps, condemns the military hierarchy even as it celebrates individual commitment and heroism in the national cause.[9] In this way the kamikazes' enemies can be located internally and externally, and their heroic example can be commemorated and praised in victories over both.

Ore wa maintains these dual and contradictory claims throughout its subsequent narrative of the Army pilots nurtured by Tomé Torihama. The devotion of local civilians to the support of the Chiran

pilots is shown to be both inspired and repaid by their willingness to die for the country. Tomé gives away her best kimono to get the ingredients for one pilot's requested final meal at her restaurant. Her daughter Reiko is a member of the group of schoolgirls recruited to work at the airfield, who learn the pilots' patriotic songs and copy their actions in making rising sun tokens with their own blood for the kamikazes to carry with them into battle. Witnessing the departure of one fighter group, civilians in the streets are shown kneeling and bowing in respect of their sacrifice. The connections between civilians and pilots are exaggerated when the schoolgirls and their teacher are amongst the victims of an American air attack on the base. Tomé's voice-over asserts their communal commitment: 'The Special Attack corps weren't the only ones to die: Reiko's support team, the girls' volunteer corps, local soldiers, all took part in the sacrifice.' This sharing the kamikazes' martyrdom is also derived from a similar subordination to military authority: over archive footage of the bombing of Japanese cities and General MacArthur's re-invasion of the Philippines, Tomé's voice-over insists that beyond hearing rumours, 'us common folk never knew how the war was really going.' Being subject to curfews and censorship, the pilots and civilians alike are shown to be at the mercy of self-serving authorities, demanding obedience until death. Depictions of the reprimands and beatings meted out to pilots who show 'disloyalty', by returning from missions because of bad weather or mechanical failures, extend the unsympathetic portrayal of the military establishment requiring their sacrifice for notions of national identity, irrespective of the success they may be able to achieve.

The film's depiction of this reciprocity of care between civilians and kamikazes is foregrounded in the incident of Tomé's arrest by the Kempeitai (military police) for contravening rules on service personnel's mail. Pilots ask Reiko and Tomé to post letters to parents and relatives outside the base so that their final communications are not censored. When Tomé is detained and subjected to the same brutal treatment as the trainees, the pilots besiege the police station to demand her release. Even when she is freed, Tomé continues to antagonise the police commander by repeating her question: 'Why do young men about to die deserve curfews and censors?' The enraged commander is only prevented from drawing his sword to kill her by sirens warning of an approaching air raid, in a moment which curiously conflates the internal and external adversaries against which the kamikazes, with Tomé's blessing and kinship, are seen to pit themselves. Tomé emerges from this confrontation surrounded and protected by her adoptive sons, with bruises which she labels her own 'medals.' In other episodes Tomé also appears to transgress convention or propriety in her support for the young pilots. For example she reunites one with his fiancée against his father's wishes and defies the curfew in her restaurant. In one troubling, explicit example of the film's historical stance, Lieutenant Kanayama, a Korean special attack volunteer, expresses his gratitude to 'Auntie' for treating him as an equal to the Japanese pilots: 'I forget I'm Korean when I come here. You took care of me for so long,

more so than my real mother.' This representative of an 'inferior', colonized people within the Asian 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' (the euphemism for Japan's empire-building agenda) attains an authentic status within the Imperial forces when he proves willing to sacrifice himself like a true Japanese citizen. The film appears to celebrate this Korean pilot's heroism and his loyalty to Japan, even though like other pilots he is also seen to be afflicted by doubts as to the meaning and purpose of his actions.[10]

Tomé's nurturing activities, in defending the pilots' rights and well-being, combines her maternal and memorialising roles. As their supporter and spokesperson, she is the informed and privileged commentator whose knowledge and survival of this period of history are, the film suggests, invested with a national responsibility. In his last conversation with 'Auntie', the youngest pilot, a nineteen-year-old named Kawai, passes on the years of life he forfeits to her. In the same conversation, Tomé assures him he will always be remembered. In the final attack sequence of the film, Kawai is seen to make a successful attack after his comrades have been shot down. Although mortally wounded, Kawai steers his plane into an American aircraft carrier, with his shouts of defiance and the diegetic sounds of battle replaced by elegiac orchestral music. In previous attacks no kamikaze planes have been seen to actually hit ships: instead the action has been rendered through digitised recreations of World War II documentary footage, showing Japanese planes being destroyed in great numbers in futile attacks. By contrast, in the climactic attack the pilots are recognisable inside their planes, and in addition American ships (and their crews) are clearly visible for the first time. In succeeding the youthful Kawai becomes the embodiment of the entire campaign, symbolically protecting and elongating Tomé's life in order for her to become the kamikazes' apologist and vindicator in and for the post-war world.

Following the attack the film records the inevitable end of the war, and the progression into the post-war world for which the kamikaze pilots died. Tomé and her family listen in disbelief to the Emperor's announcement of Japan's surrender, and witness American occupation troops destroying the few planes remaining at the base. Despite this concretisation of defeat, not least in the visible presence of Americans, the film's final definition of an enemy emerges from the recognition of the gap between past and present, and of the work of memory undertaken by Tomé and privileged by the film's narration. While survivors of the final attack are shown to be traumatised by their experiences and ostracised by civilians eager to forget the war, Tomé remains faithful to her nurturing of the pilots who lived as well as those who died. To help the troubled Lt. Nakanishi who is burdened by survivor's guilt, Tomé visits the shrine erected at Chiran in memory of the kamikazes. As they gaze on the path lined with cherry blossoms (the 'master trope of Japan's Imperial nationalism'[11]), the spirits of the dead pilots seem to appear before them, rejoicing and greeting them without recrimination. Tomé is comforted and Nakanishi consoled by the sight of these ghosts who, far from condemning the

survivors and subsequent generations, appear contented and united in the afterlife. In completing its subjective war history and its personal reflection, the film's conclusion reiterates Tomé's uncritical, emotional honouring of the men and their memory.

The Eternal Zero: 'To succeed meant to die'

Ore wa locates its retrospective narrative within the experience and devotion of an emblematic individual, whose act of memorialisation makes her a role model for later generations who must be taught to remember and respect the war dead. By contrast, *Eien no O* (*The Eternal Zero*) is grounded in a familial investigative narrative, in which a secret past and a relative 'lost' in the war are recovered and rehabilitated, that positions the film poignantly within Japan's post-war negotiation (and negation) of its militarist past:

> Contestations over Japanese war memory are not only about the contents of textbooks or government apologies: they are real and current family dilemmas. Japan is made up of millions of families that all have members from the war generation. Given Japan's ongoing public war responsibility discourses, facing the past within the family frequently means asking difficult questions about grandparents' personal war guilt.[12]

At his grandmother's funeral Kentaro, a directionless young man, discovers that she had a wartime husband who is never discussed at family gatherings. This lost relative is dismissed as a coward, who has been expunged from memory as a familial and national disgrace. With his sister Keiko he sets out to uncover the story of his vanished grandfather, interviewing surviving veterans who flew the iconic Zero fighter with him in a Navy squadron. Poignantly, the family funeral is dated diegetically in 2004, thereby multiplying the acts of retrospection which work to recover and redeem a symbolic history. Their enquiry carries several contradictory connotations of memorialisation and expiation: the unknown pilot, Lt. Miyabe was the same age as his grandson (26) at the time of his death as a kamikaze; his granddaughter is an author who sees the forthcoming sixtieth anniversary of the war as a lucrative writing opportunity; Kentaro, currently failing in his attempts to become a lawyer, hopes to find a sense of purpose through their investigation.

Having sought their grandfather permission before embarking on their search, the siblings encounter hostility and experience embarrassment at the veterans' opprobrium for their lost relative. Miyabe is repeatedly condemned as a coward who cared only for his own survival and avoided dogfights, despite being a gifted pilot. However, their interview with Izaki, a terminally-ill veteran (and

guardian of memory comparable to Tomé) initiates a return to wartime in flashback in which Miyabe's actions are explained and exonerated. His love of life (also inseparable from love of his wife) leads him to shun combat for reasons of both personal survival and moral abhorrence. When he returns to the aircraft carrier *Akagi* after the attack on Pearl Harbour, Miyabe is shown to be alone in lamenting the absence of the key targets, the American carriers, while other pilots celebrate the destruction of the enemy fleet. Prophetically, he foresees Japan's inevitable defeat in the failure to destroy the enemy carriers in the attack. He also describes his horror at witnessing the loss of a bomber aircraft and its three-man crew, and voices his determination to survive the war.

Izaki admits to feeling loathing for Miyabe's selfishness in the midst of the nation's war, but the continuation of his flashback narration ultimately vindicates his superior officer. Miyabe and Izaki are next shown during the Imperial Navy's defeat at the Battle of Midway. Miyabe again seems endowed with prescience when he foresees the disaster which befalls the fleet, but nonetheless fights the attacking enemy planes with Izaki to protect their carrier. When his unit is ordered to undertake a long-range mission from the island base of Rabaul, Miyabe expresses his doubt that they can navigate, fight and return successfully, and is beaten by another pilot for his lack of martial spirit. However, when their wingman is forced to ditch his damaged plane on the flight back and dies in the sea, Miyabe tells Izaki of his anger at being forced to face a futile death, and restates the importance of survival for his family's sake. While the youthful Izaki demands that Miyabe allow him to crash his plane into an enemy ship should he be unable to return to base, the aged Izaki admits his understanding of Miyabe's desire to live. While openly expressing such a thought at the time was 'unthinkable', Izaki now sees it as the strongest declaration of love (for family and child) that a man of that generation could make. As in *Ore wa*, the authoritative veteran's narration in *Eien no O* eschews the origins of the war and the presence of the foreign enemy in exonerating and elevating personal and emotional motives within times of national crisis. Miyabe's ignominious reputation as a selfish coward is rectified and rehabilitated through recognition of his comprehensible and sympathetic desire for personal, romantic fulfilment, which is threatened by the enemies of Japanese militarism and the arbitrariness of war. Izaki's eventual acceptance of Miyabe's conviction, and his imitation of his superior's example in surviving the war himself, is vindicated (again in an echo of Tomé's narrational act) in his endurance to the present, epitomised and validated by the existence of his own family and his ability to correct the injustice done to Miyabe with his own recollection.

Having been inspired to find out more, Kentaro tracks down Takeda, an ageing businessman, who recalls meeting Miyabe as a flying instructor later in the war. Stories of their teacher's cowardice, and his refusal to volunteer for kamikaze duty, were known to his cadets. In training teenage reservists who have been conscripted only for special attack duty, Miyabe deliberately fails them in order to

prevent their departure on missions. When a trainee is killed in a flying accident, their unit commander reviles the dead youth and denounces his lack of martial spirit. Miyabe speaks out in defence of the dead pilot and is severely beaten, but earns the understanding and respect of the other trainees as a result. Takeda recounts how a trainee crashed his plane into an American fighter to save Miyabe when he was attempting to lead enemy aircraft away from his students. The end of Takeda's flashback shows Miyabe with the cadet on the way to hospital, with both men exhorting each other to survive in order to 'live and do good work for the sake of Japan.' This recollection reinforces those of the other veterans, so Kentaro remains unable to understand his grandfather's eventual decision to undertake a kamikaze mission.

Poignantly, in finding his purpose in probing his family's hidden past, Kentaro isolates himself further from his contemporaries. Arriving late at a dinner with friends where a group holiday is being planned (ironically, all their suggested destinations – Hawaii, Saipan, and Okinawa – bear associations with the Pacific War which the youthful members of the party are either unaware of or choose to ignore), Kentaro vigorously defends his relative and the kamikazes against their accusations of 'romantic heroism' and 'brainwashing', and comparisons with modern suicide bombers. However, in his attempts to distinguish the kamikazes' patriotically and militarily from the fanaticism of terrorists, Kentaro confronts again his ignorance about his grandfather's motives for volunteering. A comment from Kageura, another former pilot who flew from Rabaul, only compounds the mystery. Kageura had hated Miyabe's perceived cowardice, but had seen him traumatised and transformed by their shared duty of escorting the kamikazes to their targets. When Miyabe finally volunteered for kamikaze duty himself, Kageura recalled how he angrily objected to skilled veterans being expended in a futile strategy: 'Against overwhelming odds I'd gladly risk my life, but the Kamikaze had no odds. To succeed meant to die.' Yet Kageura remembers that Miyabe swapped planes with another pilot on the morning of his final mission. Miyabe gave up his later model Zero to a younger pilot in preference for an earlier version of the fighter. Subsequently the younger pilot was forced to ditch because of engine trouble, and so was rescued after the mission. It appears that fate might have spared Miyabe after all, and that he could have survived the war.

However, on seeing the pilots' roster for the mission, Kentaro finally understands Miyabe's decision to volunteer, and the choice to swap aircraft. Although driven to volunteer by guilt over the deaths of his cadets, Miyabe had earlier promised his wife and child that he would return from the war, if he was wounded or even if he 'had to be reborn' in order to do so. Revisited and reinterpreted flashbacks now solve the mystery of the past and reveal Miyabe's survival pact with Oishi, the cadet who saved his life. On the day of the final mission, Miyabe swaps his faulty plane with Oishi, assuring his survival and leaving a photograph of his family in the cockpit for him to find. At the end of the war,

Oishi seeks out his leader's widow, and becomes her second husband, allowing Miyabe to keep his promise and maintain his principle of protecting his family, despite going to his death. Miyabe's act therefore merges the supposedly selfish and cowardly desire for survival with the altruistic saving of others and the safeguarding of family as analogies and parallels to the kamikazes sacred, sacrificial and national duty. In a reversal of Kageura's understandable cynicism and a tacit reaffirmation of the kamikaze strategy, Miyabe's death meant that he succeeded. The achievement of Kentaro's understanding of his ancestor's heroism and selflessness is accompanied by a montage sequence which erodes the distinction between past and present in uniting the flashbacks, the veterans' voice-overs, and scenes from the end of the war which concretise the significance of Miyabe's symbolic and representative act. Included in this sequence is the broadcast of the Emperor's announcement of surrender, stating the need for the nation to 'endure the unendurable' for a lasting peace for Japan. The threading together of wartime and peacetime in this sequence insists upon Miyabe's heroism, inferring his endurance of the unendurable in choosing death to save lives, and to safeguard his family by conferring its protection to an indebted surrogate. The film's final images, in which Kentaro appears to see Miyabe flying in his Zero over the cityscape of modern Tokyo, cements the film's connection between present-day Japan and the sacrifice of the past, and asserts the unbroken continuance of national values from one generation to another.

Conclusion

Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversy they inspired by their ambivalent treatment of the wartime past, these films became landmark commercial successes within the Japanese cinema. *Ore wa, kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku* gained 2 billion yen from its Japanese release, while *Eien no O* earned more than 8 billion yen, staying at the top of the Japanese box office for two months and in the process becoming one of the top ten highest grossing Japanese films of all time.[13] While it would be true to say that spectacular war films have always been popular in Japan (as in other countries), the spectacle of combat offered by these two films constitutes a negligible proportion of their overall duration. At the same time their recreation of kamikaze attacks, though arguably a selling point emphasized by their digital effects, represents the climactic resolution of their ambivalent deliberations on patriotic self-sacrifice. Their evasive or disingenuous arguments for peace and life, which are claimed to necessitate the pursuit of war and death, are resolved by the unequivocally

heroic deeds of their protagonists in successfully executed attacks. The solitary, dedicated, selfless individual pilot is exalted as the unarguable victor over both the massed, anonymous enemies of wartime, and the Japanese enemies of past militarism and present indifference. In these respects, these treatments of the kamikaze phenomenon depart markedly from historical assessments of the late 20th century, which claimed that the 'special attack' had been intended initially as no more than a short term expedient for the battle for the Philippines, and criticised the conception, operation and evaluation of the kamikazes strategically and tactically.

> Japan's suicide air operations mark the Pacific War with two scars that will remain forever in the annals of battle: one, of shame at the mistaken way of command; the other, of valor [sic] at the self-sacrificing spirit of young men who died for their beloved country.[14]

Ore wa engages in an act of national restoration, reaffirming heroic individuals through a narrative of personal recollection and commemoration. This is judged, by Tomé and presumably also by the film's screenwriter Ishihara, to be a necessary and expiatory task which restores war heroes to their proper place in national history. By contrast, *Eien no O* portrays the conduct of a familial-historical investigation, an attempt to recover fact and redeem a misprized individual. From a personal, socio-archaeological enquiry a national, cultural past is uncovered, with an emblematic extrapolation from one to the other: one family owes all to one man, and thus the country owes everything to him and his comrades. Both films are strident in their assertions of the essential validity of the truths they reveal or re-establish. Paradoxically, part of the reaffirmation of the men's heroism and of the country's obligation to them is the assertion of their own victimhood at the hands of the Japanese politico-military establishment. Their patriotism and sacrifice may be celebrated as fundamentally representative national traits, yet the connections created between the kamikazes and traditions of feudal loyalty (in *Ore wa*, for example, one pilot claims to be descended from the 'White Tigers', the loyal samurai renowned for their service in the Boshin War) underline how contemporary Japan has (in error, it seems) progressed beyond, strayed from or pragmatically abused such honourable, historical precedents. If the truth of past has been lost in a shameful obscuration, its restoration also appears to imply a perturbing retrenchment of conservative values. Within such a schema for circumscribed history and prescribed identity, the films' makers appear unabashed or unaware of the mendaciousness with which the past is treated:

> Ishihara zeroes in on the ignorance of youth as a particularly worrisome feature of contemporary Japan. He relates a story told to him by a WWII pilot. The pilot, while standing on a commuter train, overheard a couple of young people talking:
>
> 'Hey, did you know that 50 years ago Japan and America were at war?' 'What? No way.' 'Idiot. It's the truth.' 'Are you serious? Who won?'
>
> As Ishihara relates it, the pilot, hearing this, experienced such a shock that he had to get off the train and sit down on a bench on the train platform to recover. Here the victim is the pilot, and the countless other Japanese who suffered as a result of WWII. For Ishihara, the source of the problem is the lack of historical knowledge that leads to such confusion on the part of young people. What is striking about Ishihara's logic, however, is the limited way in which he portrays militarism, nation and youth. Rhetorically, it's quite powerful, but logically, it ignores as much history as the youths on the train.[15]

Here the American adversary is almost irrelevant to contemporary Japan's obliviousness to its chronological past and its cultural traditions. The enemy is Japanese ignorance and identity loss: an ironic conclusion to reach given the long-running and rancorous clashes between left-wing and right-wing factions over the incomplete, inaccurate or partial accounts of Pacific War history endorsed by state-regulated school texts.[16] The disputable interpretation of the past which both *For Those We Love* and *The Eternal Zero* advocate is rendered unquestionable by the films' elliptical narratives, which foreground and portray the redemption of past and present through the recovery of a restorative truth. The pilots in both films are both distanced from militarism and yet anointed as patriots by their decisions to die so that others may live, replacing inevitability and victimhood with choice and heroism:

> This kind of almost tautological explanation for kamikaze actions is also the most inoffensive, because it largely isolates the dead from history. However, it also depends on the narration, as if kamikaze existed in order to be narrated as existing. As in *For Those We Love*, this effectively functions as self-justification for these movies themselves, reducing the kamikaze to a textual operation, as if their suicidal missions were essentially acts of narration but only about themselves […] Yet the fact that these narratives aim to imbricate the act of narration (the films, the internal storytellers), the subject of narration (the kamikaze sailors or pilots), and the reception of the narration (the film audience or

> the survivors of the war) all in the same circular, unmediated textual process, purports to circumvent alternative interpretations.[17]

Noticeably, it is not just the ignorance and indifference of younger Japanese which must be overcome by this narrative act, but also the obfuscation and silence of the intervening, parental and postwar generation which has implicitly failed to inform its offspring of wartime history. Kentaro's ignorance can only be corrected by a return to the original source of testimony in the veterans' flashbacks, which are treated as reverentially as Tomé's commemorations of the dead.

However, other types of 'enemies' are also troublingly identified among those who oppose war, who attempt to evade duty or fail to honour the dead. At the outset of *Eien no O*, the condemnation of the lost grandfather's cowardice is unquestioned, as if the shamed individual has been scapegoated unproblematically for the defeat of the nation. If neither are discussed, both are implicitly denied. Conversely, the recovery of the emblematic Zero pilot as a multifaceted individual (a loving husband, an excellent pilot, a committed patriot and a sacrificial patriarchal figure, wedded to life but ultimately willing to die) provides a model citizen and hero essential to the construction of modern Japan. This realisation is confirmed by the paradoxical vision of the Zero over present-day Tokyo, apparently on its way to heroic destruction aboard an American ship in 1945. The film's conclusion thus consummates the incomplete recreation of the kamikaze attack seen at its opening, in which its outcome and identity of the pilot are deliberately occluded. That Miyabe is last shown smiling before the (still unseen) moment of impact, implies his transubstantiation in success, obscures his violent death, and confers immortality upon him and the fervent, enduring national values he has come to incarnate.

The casting of kamikazes as defenders, literally of 'loved ones' and allegorically of the nation and its inherent values, embeds these films within long-standing romantic and patriotic discourses surrounding Japan's wartime pilots. Dashing individualism and skill becomes entwined with personal bravery in the defence of Japan from American bombing raids, and moral superiority and integrity in the self-sacrifice of the kamikazes, in which pilots re-enact the loyalty of the feudal era samurai.[18] Just as the origins of Japan's war of aggression have been obscured by rhetoric of liberation from and defence against Western imperialism, so the ferocity of 'special attack' is transmuted into heroic defence of the tangible family, which stands in symbolic stead for the abstract nation. In their complex conflicts with personal conscience, imperial duty, individual desire and national authority, the cinematic kamikaze re-assert aspects of Japanese-ness even as they evasively redefine the adversarial enemy in the present as well as the past:

> [*Ore wa*] presents what might be called the Yasukuni Shrine version of the *tokkotai* story, in which the war was not an imperialistic adventure but an idealistic crusade to free Asia from Western domination. The pilots died not pointlessly but to protect their loved ones. They are not the local equivalent of suicide bombers but pure-spirited heroes who embody the Japanese tradition of self-sacrifice for the common good. And now they are gathered at Yasukuni Shrine, gods for all eternity, to be worshipped — and emulated. […] Despite its problematic ideology and rambling story structure, [*For Those We Love*] offers informed insight into the pilots' lives, including their fears and regrets, that makes them less like park statuary, more fallible flesh-and-blood. But it's also a rally-round-the-Hinomaru film that will warm the hearts of the boys on the sound trucks who long to re-launch that old Asian crusade. With any luck, Gov. Ishihara — and the rest of us — won't live to see it.[19]

Schilling's suggestion – that the re-emergence of World War II in general and the kamikazes in particular as cinematic subjects speak to aggressive nationalism in 21st century Japan – may be derived from Shintaro Ishihara's inflammatory comments on the country's present-day territorial disputes with China.[20] Although the circular narrational acts of *For Those We Love* and *The Eternal Zero* might appear to elide the presence and identity of the enemy in their prejudicial returns to the past, it could be inferred that a third (regional, future) enemy is discernible alongside the anonymised adversaries of the Pacific War and the unsympathetic depictions of military authority. Additionally, therefore, these films' didactic evocation of Pacific war history and dutiful veneration of the kamikazes' victory over obscured foreign adversaries and modern indifference, can also be seen as an ominous, inculcatory patriotism for audiences of the Japanese cinema, at home as much as abroad.

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