

the death pits at Kuropaty, in some respects Lukashenko remembers European history better than his critics. By starving Soviet prisoners of war, shooting and gassing Jews, and shooting civilians in anti-partisan actions, German forces made Belarus the deadliest place in the world between 1941 and 1944. Half of the population of Soviet Belarus was either killed or forcibly displaced during World War II: nothing of the kind can be said of any other European country.

Belarusian memories of this experience, cultivated by the current dictatorial regime, help to explain suspicions of initiatives coming from the West. Yet West Europeans would generally be surprised to learn that Belarus was both the epicenter of European mass killing and the base of operations of anti-Nazi partisans who actually contributed to the victory of the Allies. It is striking that such a country can be entirely displaced from European remembrance. The absence of Belarus from discussions of the past is the clearest sign of the difference between memory and history.

Just as disturbing is the absence of economics. Although the history of mass killing has much to do with economic calculation, memory shuns anything that might seem to make murder appear rational. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union followed a path to economic self-sufficiency, Germany wishing to balance industry with an agrarian utopia in the East, the USSR wishing to overcome its agrarian backwardness with rapid industrialization and urbanization. Both regimes were aiming for economic autarky in a large empire, in which both sought to control Eastern Europe. Both of them saw the Polish state as a historical aberration;<sup>13</sup> both saw Ukraine and its rich soil as indispensable. They defined different groups as the enemies of their designs, although the German plan to kill every Jew is unmatched by any Soviet policy in the totality of its aims. What is crucial is that the ideology that legitimated mass death was also a vision of economic development. In a world of scarcity, particularly of food supplies, both regimes integrated mass murder with economic planning.

They did so in ways that seem appalling and obscene to us today, but which were sufficiently plausible to motivate large numbers of believers at the time. Food is no longer scarce, at least in the West; but other resources are, or will be soon. In the twenty-first century, we will face shortages of potable water, clean air, and affordable energy. Climate change may bring a renewed threat of hunger.

If there is a general political lesson of the history of mass killing, it is the need to be wary of what might be called privileged development: attempts by states to realize a form of economic expansion that designates victims, that motivates prosperity by mortality. The possibility

<sup>13</sup> Polish territory had often been part of one or more larger states. [Ed.]

cannot be excluded that the murder of one group can benefit another, or at least can be seen to do so. That is a version of politics that Europe has in fact witnessed and may witness again. The only sufficient answer is an ethical commitment to the individual, such that the individual counts in life rather than in death, and schemes of this sort become unthinkable.

The Europe of today is remarkable precisely in its unity of prosperity with social justice and human rights. Probably more than any other part of the world, it is immune, at least for the time being, to such heartlessly instrumental pursuits of economic growth. Yet memory has made some odd departures from history, at a time when history is needed more than ever. The recent European past may resemble the near future of the rest of the world. This is one more reason for getting the reckonings right.

## 5

IRIS CHANG

### The Rape of Nanking

Nazi genocide and Soviet atrocities were not the only systematic slaughter of civilian populations during World War II. The military government of Japan, a German ally during the war, engaged in some of the same tactics of brutal and indiscriminate mass murder of civilians. In fact, atrocities in Japan preceded those in Germany.

While for Europeans World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and for Americans with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, for the Chinese it began ten years earlier with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. By 1937, Japanese troops occupied Peking and Shanghai as well as the old imperial capital of Nanking. It is estimated that more than twenty-five thousand civilians were killed by Japanese soldiers in the months after the fall of Nanking on December 13, 1937. But it was the appalling brutality of Japanese troops that foreign residents remembered, even those who could recall the brutality of the Chinese nationalist troops who captured the city in 1927. In the Introduction to *The Rape of Nanking* (p. 6), Iris Chang writes:

Source: Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 55–59.

The Rape of Nanking should be remembered not only for the number of people slaughtered but for the cruel manner in which many met their deaths. Chinese men were used for bayonet practice and in decapitation contests. An estimated 20,000 to 80,000 Chinese women were raped. Many soldiers went beyond rape to disembowel women, slice off their breasts, nail them alive to walls. Fathers were forced to rape their daughters, and sons their mothers, as other family members watched. Not only did live burials, castration, the carving of organs, and the roasting of people become routine, but more diabolical tortures were practiced, such as hanging people by their tongues on iron hooks or burying people to their waist and watching them get torn apart by German shepherds. So sickening was the spectacle that even the Nazis in the city were horrified, one declaring the massacre to be the work of "bestial machinery."

In the selection that follows, the author asks how Japanese soldiers were capable of such offenses. What is her answer?

#### THINKING HISTORICALLY

What would have happened to these recruits if they had refused an order to kill a prisoner or noncombatant? Once they had killed one prisoner, why did they find it easier to kill another? Did they eventually enjoy it, feel pride, or think it insignificant? The last informant, Nagatomi, says he had been a "devil." Had he been possessed? By whom?

How then do we explain the raw brutality carried out day after day in the city of Nanking? Unlike their Nazi counterparts, who have mostly perished in prisons and before execution squads or, if alive, are spending their remaining days as fugitives from the law, many of the Japanese war criminals are still alive, living in peace and comfort, protected by the Japanese government. They are therefore some of the few people on this planet who, without concern for retaliation in a court of international law, can give authors and journalists a glimpse of their thoughts and feelings while committing World War II atrocities.

Here is what we learn. The Japanese soldier was not simply hardened for battle in China; he was hardened for the task of murdering Chinese combatants and noncombatants alike. Indeed, various games and exercises were set up by the Japanese military to numb its men to the human instinct against killing people who are not attacking.

For example, on their way to the capital, Japanese soldiers were made to participate in killing competitions, which were avidly covered by the Japanese media like sporting events. The most notorious one

appeared in the December 7 issue of the *Japan Advertiser* under the headline "Sub-Lieutenants in Race to Fell 100 Chinese Running Close Contest."

Sub-Lieutenant Mukai Toshiaki and Sub-Lieutenant Noda Takeshi, both of the Katagiri unit at Kuyung, in a friendly contest to see which of them will first fell 100 Chinese in individual sword combat before the Japanese forces completely occupy Nanking, are well in the final phase of their race, running almost neck to neck. On Sunday [December 5] . . . the "score," according to the *Asahi*, was: Sub-Lieutenant Mukai, 89, and Sub-Lieutenant Noda, 78.

A week later the paper reported that neither man could decide who had passed the 100 mark first, so they upped the goal to 150. "Mukai's blade was slightly damaged in the competition," the *Japan Advertiser* reported. "He explained that this was the result of cutting a Chinese in half, helmet and all. The contest was 'fun' he declared." . . .

For new soldiers, horror was a natural impulse. One Japanese wartime memoir describes how a group of green Japanese recruits failed to conceal their shock when they witnessed seasoned soldiers torture a group of civilians to death. Their commander expected this reaction and wrote in his diary: "All new recruits are like this, but soon they will be doing the same things themselves."

But new officers also required desensitization. A veteran officer named Tominaga Shozo recalled vividly his own transformation from innocent youth to killing machine. Tominaga had been a fresh second lieutenant from a military academy when assigned to the 232nd Regiment of the 39th Division from Hiroshima. When he was introduced to the men under his command, Tominaga was stunned. "They had evil eyes," he remembered. "They weren't human eyes, but the eyes of leopards or tigers."

On the front Tominaga and other new candidate officers underwent intensive training to stiffen their endurance for war. In the program an instructor had pointed to a thin, emaciated Chinese in a detention center and told the officers: "These are the raw materials for your trial of courage." Day after day the instructor taught them how to cut off heads and bayonet living prisoners.

On the final day, we were taken out to the site of our trial. Twenty-four prisoners were squatting there with their hands tied behind their backs. They were blindfolded. A big hole had been dug—ten meters long, two meters wide, and more than three meters deep. The regimental commander, the battalion commanders, and the company commanders all took the seats arranged for them. Second Lieutenant Tanaka bowed to the regimental commander and reported, "We shall now begin." He ordered a soldier on fatigue duty

to haul one of the prisoners to the edge of the pit; the prisoner was kicked when he resisted. The soldiers finally dragged him over and forced him to his knees. Tanaka turned toward us and looked into each of our faces in turn. "Heads should be cut off like this," he said, unsheathing his army sword. He scooped water from a bucket with a dipper, then poured it over both sides of the blade. Swishing off the water, he raised his sword in a long arc. Standing behind the prisoner, Tanaka steadied himself, legs spread apart, and cut off the man's head with a shout, "Yo!" The head flew more than a meter away. Blood spurted up in two fountains from the body and sprayed into the hole.

The scene was so appalling that I felt I couldn't breathe.

But gradually, Tominaga Shozo learned to kill. And as he grew more adept at it, he no longer felt that his men's eyes were evil. For him, atrocities became routine, almost banal. Looking back on his experience, he wrote: "We made them like this. Good sons, good daddies, good elder brothers at home were brought to the front to kill each other. Human beings turned into murdering demons. Everyone became a demon within three months."

Some Japanese soldiers admitted it was easy for them to kill because they had been taught that next to the emperor, all individual life—even their own—was valueless. Azuma Shiro, the Japanese soldier who witnessed a series of atrocities in Nanking, made an excellent point about his comrades' behavior in his letter to me. During his two years of military training in the 20th Infantry Regiment of Kyoto-fu Fukuchi-yama, he was taught that "loyalty is heavier than a mountain, and our life is lighter than a feather." He recalled that the highest honor a soldier could achieve during war was to come back dead: To die for the emperor was the greatest glory, to be caught alive by the enemy the greatest shame. "If my life was not important," Azuma wrote to me, "an enemy's life became inevitably much less important. . . . This philosophy led us to look down on the enemy and eventually to the mass murder and ill treatment of the captives."

In interview after interview, Japanese veterans from the Nanking massacre reported honestly that they experienced a complete lack of remorse or sense of wrongdoing, even when torturing helpless civilians. Nagatomi Hakudo spoke candidly about his emotions in the fallen capital:

I remember being driven in a truck along a path that had been cleared through piles of thousands and thousands of slaughtered bodies. Wild dogs were gnawing at the dead flesh as we stopped and pulled a group of Chinese prisoners out of the back. Then the Japanese officer proposed a test of my courage. He unsheathed his sword, spat on it, and with a sudden mighty swing he brought it

down on the neck of a Chinese boy cowering before us. The head was cut clean off and tumbled away on the ground as the body slumped forward, blood spurting in two great gushing fountains from the neck. The officer suggested I take the head home as a souvenir. I remember smiling proudly as I took his sword and began killing people.

After almost sixty years of soul-searching, Nagatomi is a changed man. A doctor in Japan, he has built a shrine of remorse in his waiting room. Patients can watch videotapes of his trial in Nanking and a full confession of his crimes. The gentle and hospitable demeanor of the doctor belies the horror of his past, making it almost impossible for one to imagine that he had once been a ruthless murderer.

"Few know that soldiers impaled babies on bayonets and tossed them still alive into pots of boiling water," Nagatomi said. "They gang-raped women from the ages of twelve to eighty and then killed them when they could no longer satisfy sexual requirements. I beheaded people, starved them to death, burned them, and buried them alive, over two hundred in all. It is terrible that I could turn into an animal and do these things. There are really no words to explain what I was doing. I was truly a devil."

## 6

### President Truman's Announcement of the Dropping of an Atom Bomb on Hiroshima

In World War II the aerial bombing of civilian populations became increasingly common. A war that began for the British in a Nazi blitzkrieg of bombs and missiles on London, and that began for the United States in a Japanese air attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor, came to a conclusion with an increased intensity of allied aerial attacks on the populated cities of Germany and Japan. In February of 1945, 1,300 U.S. and British bombers dropped 3,900 pounds of explosives on the medieval German city of Dresden, unleashing a firestorm that claimed tens of thousands of lives. Tokyo was bombed throughout the war, but in March of 1945, a single bombing run of 179 new long-range B-29s took well over a hundred thousand lives. By the end of the war 50 percent of Tokyo, the most densely populated city in the world, had been leveled, an area that had once

Source: "Statement by the President Announcing the Use of the A-Bomb at Hiroshima," Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/viewpapers.php?pid=100>.