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Documenting a People yet to Be Named: History of a Bar Hostess

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Abstract: The paper focuses on Imamura Shōhei's *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* (*Nippon Sengoshi—Madamu Onboro no Seikatsu*), a documentary released for general viewing in 1970. The subject of the documentary was Azaka Emiko, the uninhibited middle-aged owner of the bar *Onboro* in the port city of Yokosuka, home to a U.S. naval base. Emiko embodied the phantasmagoric (*chimimōryō*) lowlifes who inhabited the nooks and crannies of Japanese cities and went about their lives without resentment or guilt, unburdened by familial responsibility and social norms that fascinated Imamura. While other intellectuals and film makers were obsessing about the status of Japanese democracy, Imamura chose to focus on people such as Emiko to identify the psychological and moral changes undergone by the Japanese people during three decades of post-war recovery and growth.

Keywords: Imamura Shōhei; *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess*; fiction and documentary; history; memory; experience

1. Introduction

In the decade from 1960 to 1970, Imamura Shōhei (1926–2006) wrote and directed a body of work dealing with the carnality, squalor, greed and lurking violence that gave context to the lives of pimps, prostitutes, and peddlers of pornography. His focus fell on life in the streets and back alleys of urban Japan. Key to his aesthetic vision was the search for a cinematic practice with the capacity to extract stories directly from reality. If the camera had the ability to capture this thing called life, what was the role of cinema: to record or to interpret life? Imamura's response was to combine the world of the reality—the immediacy and authenticity associated with documentary film-making—with the world of the imaginary: the artifice of storytelling with its emphasis on character development and dramatic arc.

Imamura's turn to documentary film-making techniques was part of a wider quest to identify the sign under which post-war Japan was born. The people who were the subjects of his camera were without identity. They were an unassimilable heterogeneity, without representation and "outside" of history; the unchecked off-shoots of life that emerged as an overwhelming number of the rural poor migrated to cities looking for work and wealth. This heterogeneity living outside the pages of history is the subject of *Pigs and Battleships* (*Buta to Gunkan*, 1961), *The Insect Woman* (*Nippon Konchūki*, 1963), *The Pornographers* (*"Erogotoshitachi" yori Jinruigaku Nyūmon*, 1966), *A Man Vanishes* (*Ningen Jōhatsu*, 1967), and *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* (*Nippon Sengoshi—Madamu Onboro no Seikatsu*, 1970).

Imamura chose to focus his camera on the diversity of life and subjective experiences that grew shoots in the cities of high-economic growth Japan. The streets of urban Japan were the intersection of two contemporaneous historical forces. One force of history was post-war defeat, where the Japanese

were forced to find a living in the bombed-out shells of once functioning cities. This historical duration was dominated by the question of food and survival. Food rationing and a lack of basic services forced people to sell their possessions one by one to afford the basic consumer goods available at exorbitant prices on the black market (Kramm 2017, p. 36).[1] For many city dwellers, especially women, survival meant selling the only object they possessed of value: their body.[2]

The other force of history crystallised around the U.S. Occupation, the dissemination of American democracy, and subsequent economic recovery. This historical trajectory involved the assimilation of Japan into the global market economy under U.S. hegemony and a fundamental transformation in the outer and inner life of the Japanese. The introduction of American-style democracy did not herald unprecedented freedom for the Japanese people, but rather initiated a radical change in personality. The economic miracle was founded on numbing homogeneity and cruel indifference, as post-war individualism reduced all forms of life to units of equivalence and exchange.

However, Imamura also discovered an important "truth" from his life as a black marketer in the years immediately after surrender. Defeat brought with it new possibilities. The war had scattered families far and wide. In the wake of defeat, people found themselves on their own, without any social constraints and familial obligations, "totally free" to survive as required (Nakata 1997, p. 111; Imamura 2001, p. 234). Those who survived the best played the game of "survival at all costs" with abandon, accepting the rules and rough and tumble of the street without reservation. In the everyday activities of prostitution, selling contraband cigarettes and hooch (*kasutori shōchū*), and smuggling gasoline off U.S. bases, Japan in the wake of defeat was a world full of new possibilities and expectations, far removed from the programs of austerity and sacrifice that defined the war years (Imamura 2004, p. 57). In the alleys of the black market, Imamura came to realise that food and sex gave value, direction and meaning to life in post-war Japan. Echoing the ironic detachment of essayist Angō Sakaguchi (1906–1955) who advocated "decadence" as the antidote for the counterfeit wartime morality that demanded sacrifice and righteous duty, Imamura too wryly noted that, after surrender, the staunch and steadfast soldiers of the Imperial army were "scattered as blossoms" across the wasteland of Japan where they survived as black marketers (Imamura 2004, p. 57).[3] From his experience of the black market, Imamura came to the conclusion that the biological materiality of the body was the foundation of all human activity (Imamura 2001, p. 234). The body did not follow any laws other than those of its physiology. The social and the biological were impossible to untangle. Cultural artefacts and social organisation were not signs of progress or the unfolding of the law of history, but a solution to the problem of sustaining the species.

2. Betwixt Fiction and Documentary

Imamura's body of work from 1960 to 1970 was defined by a curiosity for the changing nature of contemporary Japan in its own right. During this period, Imamura constantly returned to the same existential question: what are we Japanese becoming as people leave the village en masse to find new opportunities in the cities (Katori 2004, pp. 9–10)? He saw the everyday details of street life as a manifestation of contemporary culture. What amazed Imamura was how the phantasmagoric (*chimimōryō*) lowlifes who inhabited the nooks and crannies of Japanese cities went about their lives without resentment or guilt, free from the burden of familial responsibility and social norms (Imamura 2004, pp. 127–33). Racketeers, pimps, con artists, prostitutes and newly arrived migrants from the countryside to the city accepted the rules of the street as the ground of their historical reality.

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[1] This practice was colloquially known as *takenoko seikatsa* (bamboo-shoot existence)—an analogy for living a life below subsistence, where securing access to a daily meal was reduced to stripping layers of bamboo shoots.

[2] It has been estimated that Allied servicemen contributed $150 million to the Japanese economy while they were on duty in Japan during the occupation. Around $75 million is alleged to have passed into the hands of sex workers. (Kramm 2017, p. 2).

[3] Here, Imamura is paraphrasing the opening paragraph of Angō Sakaguchi's well-known essay "Discourse on Decadence (*Darakuron*)" written in 1946.

To achieve his cinematic vision, Imamura turned to documentary film-making techniques in order to develop a cinematic style that was both effective and realistic.

Documentary film-making practice was also the process by which Imamura chose source material for his films. He firmly believed the raw moments of everyday life had the power to strip the actor of his or her artifice in front of the camera. Consequently, Imamura placed great value in researching and understanding time, place, cultural context, and beliefs. He saw background research as providing the authentic material from which to build narrative arc and character development.

However, Imamura came to the issue of authenticity and truth via cinematic practice. He was not content to leave his films as a record of the transformation of post-war Japan. He wanted to use the neglected, undervalued culture of Japanese street life to expose the oppressive ideologies that constituted post-war Japan (Tessier 1997, p. 64). Imamura was conscious that his project was double pronged. He was aware that he relied on the narrative grammar of film-making to create immediacy and drama in order to challenge prevailing ideas about Japanese identity and culture. However, at the same time, he was sensitive to the fact the effectiveness of his cinema lay in being able to appropriate a local cultural reality that was separated from mainstream knowledge and Japanese identity. Imamura was convinced that documentary film-making techniques had the power to break down the barriers between performance and action. For better or worse, Imamura firmly believed that documentary techniques had the potential to transform the quotient details of everyday life into an exposé of the psychological motives that grounded post-war social and historical experience (Imamura 2017, pp. 103–5; Imamura 2001, pp. 234–38).

In his quest for a new realism, Imamura was heavily influenced by the cinematic practice of directors such as Hani Susumu and Matsumoto Taisho who believed documentary techniques had the ability to extract stories directly from reality (Centeno Martín 2018a, p. 6). Akin to Hani, Imamura too thought that the boundaries between reality and artistic expression could be transcended by linking cinema to the current moment as it was unfolding (Centeno Martín 2019, pp. 55–56). He followed Hani and Matsumoto by experimenting with non-linear narratives, technical improvisation, filming close up through long takes, and favouring shooting on location rather than film sets as a way of capturing the complex beliefs and psychology of his characters (Imamura 2017, pp. 103–5; Imamura 2001, pp. 234–38; Centeno Martín 2018b, pp. 132–34). The novelty of Imamura's experimentation was that he privileged the body as the signpost of the present. The bodies that inhabited the back alleys of the city carved out a culture of freedom that came from the pursuit of pleasure, laughter and gratification. They were configured differently from the bodies dedicated to work, domesticity and self-sacrifice that had become the allegory for post-war development. For Imamura, the subjects of his films were a metonymy for the correlative transformations in Japanese character, sociability, and post-war economic recovery. The elements of personality that seemed private and accidental—greed, violence and cold indifference—were said to have a wider collective significance.

3. The History of Post-War Japan as Told by Imamura Shōhei

Imamura used the power of cinema to make visible the different temporalities which create the whole of the present. A brilliant display of Imamura's use of techniques to articulate multiple times is *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* (*Nippon Sengoshi—Madamu Onboro no Seikatsu*), released for general viewing in 1970. The subject of the documentary was Azaka Emiko, the uninhibited middle-aged owner of the bar *Onboro* (literally, shabby or ragged) in the port city of Yokosuka, home to a U.S. naval base.[4] As the title suggests, the film offered a subjective view of Japanese history as experienced and narrated by Emiko. Stripping away all cinematic artifice, a large portion of the film

[4] Yokosuka was also the setting of an earlier Imamura feature film, *Pigs and Battleship* (*Buta to Gunkan*). Since 1945, the Yokosuka naval base has been used to maintain and provide logistic, recreational, administrative support and service to the U.S. Seventh Fleet and other U.S. forces operating in the Western Pacific region.

consists of Emiko talking to the camera while ignoring the newsreel content and images projected on a screen behind her. Emiko, with beehive hair-do, heavy make-up and false eyelashes, ignores the visual cues on the projection screen and instead narrates her own highly personal history. As the film proceeds, a disjuncture develops between the visual image of the newsreels and the audio image of Emiko's narrative. A gap opens between the sanctioned history of post-war Japan—centred on U.S. occupation, reforms and subsequent economic recovery—and alternative histories of Japan lived by people on the margins of Japanese society due to the unevenness of post-war development. The brilliance of this film is the way Imamura presents the heterogeneity of Japanese culture—incompatible realms of Japanese life which coexist in the single space of the Japanese nation-state.

The documentary makes visible a Japan of multiple pasts, presents, and possible futures that are incompatible and outside the narratives of official history that form the conditions of shared memory. The lived experience of Emiko offers new spatial and perceptual situations that challenge the notion of a single Japanese identity as the fixed and immutable point of reference of all things Japanese. At the heart of film lies scepticism of the dominant post-war belief in the resurrection of democracy and freedom in Japan. The history of post-war recovery as experienced by Emiko is not about the advancements made by democratisation and the genesis of a new, mature Japanese species-being that has overcome all militaristic tendencies, but about how to make the best of given circumstances.

The historical question that drives the first two-thirds of *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* is: What have we Japanese become when we live in a world in which all principles have been shattered by defeat and the consequent "Americanisation" of Japan? Emiko's life-story stands in for the transformations in Japanese character and sociability during post-war recovery and growth where "success" in life was configured in terms of survival. Emiko was a proprietor of a bar that catered for American service men. Her life was based on calculations and trade-offs with exclusive reference to the means/ends of making money. Her success depended on her coldness to others. This trait in her personality and those around her was brilliantly revealed in the opening sequences of the documentary where Emiko and her mother, Etsuko, are shot speaking on the phone with Imamura's production team negotiating the monetary terms of her daughter's involvement in the film (Standish 2011, p. 127).

In terms of the collective experience, *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* tells of a post-war Japan doubly colonised by the adaptation of the pre-war emperor system to parliamentary ideology in the name of democracy and by the market forces unleashed and nurtured by the American occupation and subsequent patronage. These two strands of history are captured in the news footage that flickers on a screen behind Emiko and her personal narrative about how she came to money. The newsreels chronicle the marriage of the crown prince to a commoner (albeit a commoner whose father is a very rich industrialist), and the omnipresent, bone-shattering state violence that erupted in the open streets targeting mass democratic movements calling for an end to U.S. occupation. Emiko talks about her loves, losses, and her ability to survive based on her wits and ability to exploit others. On the personal level, the film offers a diagnosis of the transformation in the outer and inner life of the Japanese character due to the changes of orientation in life imposed by the U.S. guided post-war economic recovery. Emiko stands for a post-war individualism: a product of a market-driven economy and society that reduced all forms of life to units of equivalence and exchange. In her personal relations with men, Emiko offers money for personal qualities such as affection and sex. She supports her lovers by giving them money and work in return for sex.[5]

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[5] *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* in many ways echoes the findings of an early diagnostician of urban life, Georg Simmel. Emiko's personal experience reveals a powerful internal contradiction that defines her everyday life, namely, how money robs things of their innate value and distinction by making everything interchangeable with money (Simmel 1990, p. 391).

4. A People Yet to Be Named

History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess seeks to show the force of the proliferating new cultural forms riding the wave of rapid economic growth. In official versions of history, people such as Emiko do not exist. In conception and praxis, Emiko occupies a space outside of history: she is neither a People nor a historical Subject. She has no identity. She and her like are insignificant. They are the flotsam and jetsam of society: a declassé mishmash of criminal marginals with a dubious origin and an unsavory means of subsistence. The events and details that make up her life are never subsumed into the official version of the history of Japan.

For Imamura, Emiko represents the eruption of heterogeneity and difference. Her marginal social space—as a *Burakumin*,[6] black marketer, prostitute, brothel madam, and bar hostess to American navy personnel based in Japan during the Vietnam War—represented an everyday organised around gratification, excess and expenditure that escaped the norms and cultural values espoused by the voices of post-war authority and rapid economic growth. The details of Emiko's life and her obscure localism from mainstream Japan allowed Imamura to deliberately use existing imagery to challenge the cherished beliefs that constitute post-war Japanese identity and present an alternative version of the type of individual post-war Japanese culture was cultivating. He did this by being both dependent and dismissive of mainstream post-war culture. Using a technique of doubling, through the manipulation of sound and image, Imamura placed the official history encapsulated in newsreel footage on top of the clandestine details of Emiko's life in such a way as to allow the lower layer to reveal itself through the imposed stratum. Imamura lets Emiko speak over the newsreel images that fill the screen. The disjuncture between the content and details of Emiko's spoken word and the newsreel visuals of "significant" events that define post-war Japan creates a jarring disjuncture. While the newsreel montage shows the major political disturbances that frame the evolution of post-war Japan—the Matsukawa incident (1949),[7] the May Day Incident (1952),[8] Sunagawa anti-base protests (1956)[9]—Emiko recollects her life as a child during the war, her co-habitation with a policeman during her late teen years, her forays in adultery, and selling contraband beef on the black market. The dissonance between the newsreel visual image and Emiko's oral narrative creates a moment of non-synchronicity: sequences of time fork or bifurcate into different pasts and presents. Emiko's "point-of-view" narration challenges and defies the "objective" view-point and facts of the newsreels projected on the screen behind her. The history revealed by the news footage, the chain of action and consequence that represents the political and cultural history of post-war Japan is doubled with the forces that shape and constitute the details of Emiko's life. This technique of doubling gives

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[6] *Burakumin* are Japan's largest minority group. The so called *Brakumin* do not differ from the "mainstream" Japanese population ethnically or linguistically. The discrimination that they face is a deeply ingrained, based on ambiguous concepts of genealogy and pollution coupled with institutionalized practices of ostracization.

[7] On 17 August, 1949, three crewmen of a freight train were killed when a train derailed and overturned near the village of Matsukawa in Fukushima prefecture on the Tohoku Line. Twenty-one Japan National Railway [JNR] workers, including union leaders who had already been fired, were arrested and imprisoned on the suspicion of sabotage. Many of the arrested JNR workers were members of the fledgling Japanese Communist Party. In the narrative of the nation, the "Matsukawa Incident" was the first instance of violent opposition to the anti-communist measures of the U.S. Occupation, and the earliest flashpoint of an ongoing public struggle by leftist to democratize Japan.

[8] On the 1 May, 1952, two people were killed and over 1400 injured after 6000 demonstrators shouting "Yankee go Home!" and demanding a new government entered the Imperial Park and clashed with armed police. 1232 people were arrested. It took the Tokyo district court 17 years and nine months to pass verdict. Of the 219 people arraigned who did not plead guilty or partially guilty, 110 were acquitted, 93 were found guilty and either fined or imprisoned, and 16 died before a final verdict was reached.

[9] In 1955, protests erupted over the plans to extend the main runway of the American military airbase in Tachikawa through the heart of the nearby village of Sunagawa. The protests against the extension of the base were multilayered. At the time, Tachikawa was renowned as the city of black markets and drugs and, in the early 1950s, it was reportedly home to 5000 sex workers who worked in the bars and cabarets surrounding the base. Toxic runoff from the operations of the air base had also badly contaminated the local water supply. In October 1956, farmers, trade unionists and students staging a sit-in to prevent surveying of the land clashed with police, giving rise to an estimated 1000 casualties (Wright 2015).

Imamura the cinematic grammar to draw attention to heterogeneity of a present where time forks and diverges into incompatible worlds.

The schism between Emiko's narrative and the visual images of the newsreel turns the medium of the documentary itself into an aspect of the problem history, memory and point of view. Without a fixed and immutable point of common reference, history and memory are struck by uncertainty and begin to lose their moorings (Harootunian 2019, pp. 2–6).

History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess directly intervenes in the national narrative of post-war Japan. The documentary attacks two conceits: first, the tacit assumption that national history speaks for all and has the power to fit the multiplicity of experience into a single category, and second, that subjectivity is a fixed and secure property spread evenly and homogeneously across historical time. The documentary also issues a caution. Post-war consensus was produced by the telling of founding narratives about society, culture and modes of life via the determined fixed viewpoint of a homogenising nation-state (Igarashi 2000).

The documentary also offers a realization of the world Emiko inhabits. The montage at the beginning of the film comprises the following sequence of shots: Imamura on the phone talking money in order for Emiko to appear in the film; Emiko's mother in intense negotiation with Imamura's lawyer over Emiko's remuneration for appearing in the film; a speeding train; the killing of cattle at an abattoir; and a Vietnamese freedom fighter. The montage brilliantly reveals the forces that surround the actual occurrence of Emiko becoming the person she is today: her love of money, a love also shared by her mother, her birth in a *Burakumin* household, her migration to Yokohama to pursue her desire for fun and money, and her success as a bar owner catering to the wants of American navy personnel fighting a war in Vietnam. *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* reveals how Emiko is nothing more than the sum of her actions and the ensemble of relations that make up these undertakings.

5. The Never-Ending Pacific War

However, there was an element of Emiko's life that Imamura was very critical of: her direct involvement in the Vietnam War. The context for Imamura's scorn is his investment in the politics of *Beheiren*—the Citizens' League for Peace in Vietnam (*Betonamu Ni Heiwa O! Shimin Rengo*)—which also informed the series of documentaries he made in 1971 for Tokyo Channel 12 on Japanese soldiers who chose not to return home (Mihalopoulos 2018).[10] Imamura's challenge to national history and Japanese remembrance of the Pacific War, along with his spare, handheld camera and low production cost approach to documentary making, inspired other Japanese film makers to embark on similar projects most notably Hara Kazuo's *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* (*Yukiyukite Shingun*, 1987) and Matsubayashi Yoju's *Flowers and Troops* (*Hana to Heitai*, 2009).

Imamura situated the documentaries firmly within the politics of *Beheiren* for a Japanese television audience. The broad historical context that framed the documentaries was: (i) Japanese government involvement in the Vietnam War; and (ii) public concern that Japan's post-war affluence was founded on tacit collaboration by Japanese citizens with American Cold War conflicts in Asia. From February 1965, when the United States began Operation Rolling Thunder, the U.S. military was dependent on the unrestricted use of the 148 U.S. bases across the Japanese archipelago for their sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Most of the 400,000 tons of monthly supplies needed to sustain the U.S. military in Vietnam also passed through the U.S. bases stationed at Yokosuka, Sasebo and Naha (Havens 1987, pp. 85–87). Fiscally, the Vietnam War was a windfall for the Japanese economy. Japanese manufacturers supplied commodity goods to the Allied forces and the equipment and materials for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. Between the years of 1965 to 1968, Japanese exports to Southeast Asia increased 18% annually. An estimated one billion American dollars per year entered the Japanese

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[10] *In Search of the Unreturned Soldiers in Malaysia* (*Mikikan-hei o otte: Marei-hen*, 1971) and *In Search of the Unreturned Soldiers in Thailand* (*Mikikan-hei o otte: Tai-hen*, 1971).

economy because of the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1971. By 1970, Japan had surpassed the United States as the leading trading power in Southeast Asia (Halliday and McCormack 1973, pp. 54–56).

Many Japanese citizens saw their government's willingness to allow Japan to be used as a base for U.S. war-making in Vietnam as unlawful. From mid-1967 to 1970, 18.7 million Japanese took to the streets to protest U.S. bombing raids originating in Japan. Such acts were seen as a direct contravention of Japan's 1947 post-war constitution and violating the sovereign will of the Japanese people who had renounced the right to war (Havens 1987, p. 133; de Bary et al. 2005, pp. 1029–36).

Beheiren activists drew attention to the fact that by allowing the U.S. to use its bases in Japan to bomb Vietnam, every Japanese going about their daily life was complicit in supporting the U.S. military. Oda Makoto and Tsurumi Yoshiyuki, the co-founders of *Beheiren*, claimed that under the Japan–U.S. Security Treaty, Japan was a client state of the United States. They pointed to the fact that the supply of special procurements for the Vietnam war by corporate Japan was a permanent and institutionalized feature of the Japanese economy and made possible the recent affluence enjoyed by most Japanese (Avenell 2010, p. 143). *Beheiren* spokespeople urged Japanese citizens to critically address their role in the historical circumstances that saw Japan once more perpetrating aggression against an Asian nation—this time by logistically supporting the U.S. military in Vietnam (Avenell 2010, p. 146).

The last section of *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* is uneven. A major reason is that the focus of the documentary moves from a diagnosis of what Japan is becoming to an exposé on the workings of power framed by the politics of the *Beheiren* movement. Following the cues of *Beheiren* activists, Imamura incorporated a victim–aggressor dynamic in his documentary based on the critique that for Japan to find peace with their Asian neighbors, individual Japanese needed to resist the state locked into supporting the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. Otherwise they would remain victims of the state while simultaneously the victimizers of fellow Asians (Avenell 2010, pp. 106–47). In *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess*, Imamura attempts to illuminate how politics and culture were inseparable by showing how deeply the victim–aggressor dynamic was embedded in Japanese identity. Imamura's research discovered that one of Emiko's favorite American patrons was an officer on *USS Puelbo*, an unmarked U.S. Naval intelligence vessel captured at gunpoint by North Korean forces for spying on 23 January 1968. Imamura confront Emiko with this information along with photos of atrocities committed by U.S. forces in the Vietnam, while raising the possibility that the U.S. military personnel that frequented her bar were directly or indirectly responsible for the shattered bodies found in the photos. Aggressively pushing images from the conflict in front of her, Imamura badgers Emiko for her thoughts about her clientele being engaged in a war against other Asians. Emiko, however, refuses to see any linkage between her work, her clientele, and the wars in Asia. She adamantly refutes such a connection. Her belief lay in the confidence that her American military clients were gentlemen. They could not possibly be involved in such nasty business.

In the end, *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess* proves to be a messy, uneven collision between history and memory, experience and the everyday. It would seem that when interrogated, any recollection—personal or collective, written or oral—reveals an investment in symbols, images and representations that constitute a specific subjectivity. The value Emiko attached to her self-image was greatly affected by the political and economic power that impinged on the relations she had with others. However, at the same time, the details of Emiko's everyday revealed the workings of power that effectively tied Japan's prosperity to the United States' global strategic policy aimed at containing communism via military involvement in East and Southeast Asia.

6. Conclusions

For *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess*, Imamura directed the camera to focus on the new forms of subjectivity that were at work in the present, the variable creations that arose out of the processes of individuation which were brought to bear upon the people who left the countryside to fill the cities of post-war Japan. The camera recorded how the introduction of American-style

democracy did not herald unprecedented freedom for the Japanese people, but rather initiated a radical change in personality. The camera also revealed that the elements of Emiko's personality that seemed private and accidental—greed, violence and emotional suffering—had a wider collective significance. They pointed to the double-colonization of Japan by the adaptation of the pre-war emperor system to parliamentary ideology in the name of democracy, and by the new market forces unleashed and nurtured by American occupation.

The camera's recognition of the lived experience of people such as Emiko challenged the notion of a single Japanese identity as the fixed and immutable point of reference of all things Japanese. For Emiko, post-war Japan was a world full of new possibilities and expectations far removed from governmental programs aimed at cultivating bodies singularly dedicated to work and self-sacrifice. Emiko stood for a spontaneous post-war individualism: a product of a market-driven economy and society that reduced all forms of life to units of equivalence and exchange.

The power of Imamura's documentary lay in the way the camera captured the positive and inventive process of life that occurred from the affirmation and embrace, rather than the rejection and avoidance of, chance events. He was drawn by the vitality, energy, spontaneity, and resourcefulness in which the game of chance was played, and the exhilarating feeling of freedom that accompanied it. In *History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess*, Imamura's cinematic practice was the ethics of *amor fati*—the love of what is. He did not hone his camera in search for higher standards of truth or morality from which to order and judge post-war Japanese culture, but to locate the unexamined forces that frame action and belief in the 'now' of present.

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