

Takako Barker Interview

Speaker Key

IV Interviewer
TB Takako Barker

IV Um, so I just wanted to know a little bit about, you know, the, the, the protest and the, and the exhibition; sort of, the things that you're doing, um, to try and make a difference, ah...

TB Okay. Um, I do quite a few things, so, ah, um, I don't know which one to, ah, put a stress on but, um, well, I've been believing in non-violence for long time; even, well, as a child in Japan, I was told, war is wrong and, ah, I believed in that and, um, I was always interested in, ah, yes, well, um, well, war; ah, Japan was involved or, and, yes, of course, Japan remains the only country in the world to have suffered nuclear war and, but I always enjoy the, um, peace and, ah, freedom in Japan. So, I wasn't really aware what was going on outside Japan. And, of course, Japan has adopted the, um, ah, Peace Constitution so for 70 years, that country avoided, well, using a bullet, single bullet. Ah... but, yeah, I started realising that, um, it's not always the case. Well, outside Japan, this, um, there has been always, ah, war somewhere in the world and now it looks even worse.

So, ah, I just somehow wanted to, um, promote good, good parts, good side of humanity, human beings and, ah, [sighs], um, yeah, promote resilience of the human beings and, yeah, I have been collecting the, um, ah, things regarding, ah, nuclear bombs and, ah... ah, lots of posters from, ah, um, Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima. A lot of videos, a lot of, ah, ah, comic books, ah, ah, people's stories and, um, yeah, a lot of people don't know about, ah, um, other bombings in Japan. Um, prior to Hiroshima/Nagasaki, all of Japan was bombed, carpet bombed, ah, and, well, the target was the civilians so it was really horrendous and that more people actually died, ah, from that, ah, than Hiroshima/Nagasaki. And I have spoken to many people, who experienced those bombings and those stories I collected, um, so whenever I have chance, I talk about those things and also, I organise, um, exhibitions on Hiroshima/Nagasaki particularly and, um, yes, I make all my own banners and, and I go to lots of demonstrations: demonstrations against wars, against, ah, arms trade or, yes...

IV Mm-hmm, and you said that, when you were growing up in Japan, that you didn't realise there was such a thing as a pacifist because you just thought everybody was peaceful.

TB Yes [laughs].

IV I was interested in that.

TB Yes. Ah, that, that was the, that was a new word; totally, ah, new word for me, ah, when I came to England. I was, obviously, asked, are you a pacifist? And I couldn't really work out, ah, what this person was asking me, um, because I never really thought there was anything other than pacifist. And, yes, so... [laughs]

IV And so what was it in, in your, sort of, talking to your family and, and growing up that, what was it that, that had brought about that feeling that peace is the only answer?

TB Um, well, there, there wasn't anything else, ah, around me, first of all. So I, all I knew was that, um, I didn't have to worry about, um, being attacked or attacking other people, um, in that small country. And I was taught that in the, in, during the last war, um, people just, ordinary people just suffered... and, [sighs] um, [laughs] I don't know, it, I think, it's, ah, it's a very, very simple thing. Um, you don't hurt other people, ah, and, ah... well, you try and help other people and if you can't do that, at least, you don't hurt other people. I think, that's very, very, um, simple and ordinary thing to do. And surely, it's, you know, not just between people; it should be between countries too.

IV Yeah. So when you say that there wasn't a bullet fired, did that include, sort of, domestic, so in, within Japan, people would try to treat each other peacefully?

TB Yes, they don't... I think, it's, ah, there, there is a cultural background as well but we don't like conflict, so quite often, ah, even the words we use, they're quite vague. Ah, that's a cultural thing and, I think, Japanese Government have been using that technique, ah, even with other countries too, because, ah, obviously, Japan has been getting awful pressure from America to do this and that but they, somehow, managed not to be armed again and, ah, so, I thought, yeah, Japan's, Japan's been doing well.

IV And, and why do you think that's, you know, there's a desire to change that?

TB In Japan at the moment?

IV Yeah.

TB Yes, there's, there's, um... [sighs] um, I think, it's, again, ah, just like, just like how the, ah, the previous war started. Oh, it's only a hand-, a handful of people just... [sighs], oh, there, I'm sure there are, there's lots of other, other reasons like, um, um, ah, ah, economy supports the, um, ah, things like, ah, arms trade, which has been, kind of, well, it, it was, it's been almost taboo in Japan to be involved in, ah, ah, arms, arms, ah, trade but now that's, um, that's been loosened as well and, ah, um... yes, but most of the people I, I don't believe that they, they want to go back where Japan was before the war.

IV Mm-hmm. There was, um... I talked to this man in the week, Jim Radford, who's one of the Vet-, part of Veterans for Peace and he was, I think, the youngest person to, to be in Normandy where, with, when, for D-Day. He was, sort of, a, I think, you know, a kitchen hand on a ship and, um, and he says that when you've experienced such awful violence and you've seen war close up you know that you

don't want it; you know that it's not the answer and that you just don't want to go there. You don't want to talk about it; you don't want to think about it and you don't want it to happen. And so he then became a peace campaigner. [Coughs] And he says, whenever he goes, you know, he goes to quite a lot of, he goes and talks in a lot of places and often will find himself with a lot of ex-servicemen and he says, none of them want war. None of them think war is the answer. They might not say that they're peace campaigners but you ask them and they say, no, I, you know, we don't want that.

TB Yeah, war. I, it is human beings, I think; hu- human nature.

IV Mm-hmm, and I just, I wondered whether, in Japan, because of, because so many people had seen it all so close up...?

TB Yes. Ah, it, um, they were in it and they were not soldiers. And, well, most of the young men were out of the country so, ah, people who were left were the old or the, um, women, children, and they had to suffer. They didn't have, ah, much to eat and then, ah, they got bombed. And, yeah, my mum was one of them and, ah, yeah, she was, she was seven when she started seeing B-29 bombers, ah started flying around and, ah, um, first, their, their target was factories and, ah, well, um, military-related buildings but then, ah, they started, um, targeting the, ah, just civilians. And, ah, it was either the, ah, firebombs or the, ah, machine guns. When they target people with machine guns, they go really, they fly really low so she thought she could actually see the, ah, the pilot's faces. And the targets, obviously, they could see the target: the children—they didn't care.

And when the carpet bombing started, it was just, ah, ah, you know, running through the fire, just for life and it wasn't just one/two cities/towns. It was just, ah, so many cities were targeted, so, yes, people did see and people were fed up. That's why, that's why this, ah, Japanese Consti-, Peace Constitution was, was, lots of people say that it was forced to have by the, ah, Americans but Japanese people actually welcomed it. That's why people had a huge, massive demonstration when the, when Japan and America got this, ah, ah, security treaty because they didn't want a war again. That was, ah, Japanese people's consensus; they just didn't want it again. Yeah, so what you explained makes sense, that it's the same thing.

IV Yeah. Mm-hmm, and you've been going, each week, to protest, particularly about that. Can you just tell me what you do?

TB Um, it's, um, it's more irre- irregular now but, ah, I started this, ah, my own vigil, ah, in 2014. Um, um, well, basically, I, I just hold my own sign, together with a petition paper, ah, in front of the Japanese Embassy for the whole day. And the sign says that, um, I am proud of being Japanese, who are all pacifist by law. Save Japanese Peace Constitution. Um... I know that wouldn't change, ah... well, I know that wouldn't change the government [laughs].

IV [Laughs]

TB But I spoke so many people by standing there by myself. A lot of people just would come up to me and say that, ah, ah, so what's happening in Japan? Or, yes,

some people do say that, um, you know, it's, it's not, ah what you made, that, that constitution. Why don't you want to change it? Or, um, but, basically, um, people's reaction is that, um, it's great, you know. It's Peace Constitution and, ah, they just support, support me.

IV Mm-hmm, and why do you think it's important to do something, so to go and stand there, rather than just being at home?

TB Well, well, [laughs] one thing is that there's, there's no other option, not to do, not to do anything. There's, there's no way I cannot do anything. And I'm not good at, um, being a part of a, a big organisation. So I just had to have my own way of doing something. And somehow to convey the, ah, well, rather than convey it, I think, to share this, um, um, you know, common thing but, um, something important, ah, to, to, to protect peace and freedom. Ah, to do that, for me, it was, ah, it was really direct and, ah, the easiest possible way, I suppose. I just, um, went out and, ah, stand there.

IV And when I talked to Bruce Kent and, I think, I might have said this to you before, he said, you know, we don't know the effect that we have in the world. Um, we just keep putting it in stream, was how he put it and I wonder if you feel that that's right?

TB Yeah, well, um, [laughs] yes, it would be nice if I can see some kind of effect, ah, but, ah... well, to get to know what other people are thinking, that's a huge difference, I think, I am making to myself and to other people too and, ah, yeah, look at outside; you know, um, Arabic, ah, women starts driving or, um, given boat. I think, something has started changing already. It's, the, it's already started and once it starts, I don't think it will go back where we, where it was before. So, yeah, well, it, it will take long. It will take long, long time but human beings might do something good and positive and worthwhile, just, just in time, I hope.

IV Yeah, I mean, you, you said, when I was here before, you showed me that particular picture with the girl sitting in it and I wonder if you could just tell me about you, sort of, saying how you think, well, I'll, I'll do it for her? And I wonder if you could just tell me about the picture and, sort of, describe the picture and, and tell me about your relationship to it?

TB Yes, it's, um, it's a, a picture from, ah, a poster, ah, from the, um, Peace Memorial Museum. Um, it's the, a picture, which was taken after the, um, Hiroshima bombing. This, ah, girl, probably, I don't know, about 11/12, I think, um, she's just, um, sh- she's quietly looking into the, into the space and she's outside surrounded by wounded people. She's sitting up but she herself doesn't know where to go; she doesn't have anybody around her who she knows. She's really on her own, surrounded by wounded people and, ah, it's, the picture is in black and white, so, ah, it's really difficult to, ah, see what's what but, well, one can, I suppose, imagine; it's, ah, and it's a very quiet scene. Nobody's shouting; nobody's screaming; nobody's crying but it's shortly after the bombing and, ah, yeah, this girl is quietly sitting in the middle of the picture and, yes, so whenever I go out and protest or go out and talk about what I do and I looked, look at her and I say to myself, I speak up for this girl. Ah, there are so many people, who doesn't have a say, who suffer so much, who feel the pain so much, that can't even say a word. So, um, yeah, so I've... nice to be, ah,

their voice somehow. I don't know exactly what they had to go through but, ah, ah, we can all use our imagination just to, you know, um... this girl can be you or me or can be your loved ones. So, um, yes, just use a little imagination.

IV And you talked also about the, the storks that you make, the paper storks and I wonder if you could just tell me what, what they signify for you and, and even just the, sort of, what the act of making them is about?

TB Yeah. Yeah, it's a, um, a thousand...

IV Oh, wow.

TB It's cranes actually.

IV Cranes, yes. That's right.

TB Yes. Yes, cranes in Japan, it's a, um, kind of, holy creature and, ah there are said to be, ah, well, they're said to live a thousand years. They don't.

IV [Laughs]

TB [Laughs] But, ah, um, yes, so, they're the symbol of long life and if you make origami cranes, um, a thousand of them and, ah, hold them together with strings, um, you can wish for long life or the recover, ah, from disease or illness or injury and, um, yes, we, lots of people do that.

IV To make 1,000?

TB Yeah, to make 1,000 and then make them like that and then give, give them to people who, who's got illness or... yes.

IV They're tiny then?

TB Well, these are. These are tiny [paper rustling] but, ah, you can make them large, yes.

IV They're amazing. Amazing. And, um, and do you, for you, do they have a relationship to the work that you're doing? So the, when...?

TB Well, um, [sighs] I've got these only because this is a part of my, ah, Hiroshima/Nagasaki exhibition and there is, ah, Sadako's story. Um, sh- she was too years old when, ah, in Hiroshima, she was, um, it, the Hiroshima was bombed. And, ah, years later, she developed leukaemia and that was the, um... she was actually, um, was, I think, she was in, ah, she wasn't in a centre of Hiroshima. She was some-somewhere like, ah, um, 1.4 km away or, but she had this black rain on her so, um, yes, and then, years later, she developed leukaemia and, um, in the hospital bed, she started making the, ah, cranes. And the story was that, ah, she died before she finished the, ah, um, the whole cranes but there are lots of stories but since that story went out, all over Ja-, all over, ah, Japan and all over the world, people started making those cranes and, ah, a lot of them send them to, ah, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial

Museum and they have a large, um, well, they, they've got a statue of Sadako, that girl, and, ah, with the crane and around it there's, ah, well, how do I describe? Well, it's this place to display the thousands of cranes coming from all over, all of the world, yeah.

IV And what do you think are the wishes of the people who are sending those cranes?

TB Well, um, I think, their wish, ah, well, I hope their wish is the same as the, ah, ah, Hiroshima/Nagasaki people and also, ah, people all over Japan. Ah, you know, this shouldn't, never happen again.

IV Mm-hmm, yeah. Yeah, it's, um, as you say, because Japan's the only country to have experienced that, it still, I think, feels very distant to us in many ways.

TB Yes, I feel that. I feel that. Yes, and, ah, of course, um, the, there's a, as a history, um, lot of sch- schools still teach children that those bombings were necessary to finish the, that war. But, I think, we have to know the facts and, ah, um, lots of information coming out now so, ah, um...

IV Yeah. I mean, talking to people like Bruce Kent, people who were around and remember the end of the Second World War, um, there was a huge amount of awful racism towards Japanese people.

TB Yes, of course, that, that was, um, propaganda, you know, so, ah, government had to create that image and, of course, we had the image that, ah, ah, English people/American people, they were all awful. But having said that, ah, individual, individual people, I don't think they believed such thing at all.

IV No, it's interesting. I mean, I think, that propaganda, at the time, was very successful and, not that people approved of the bombing, particularly, but people felt that, ah, you know, there'd been great cruelty in the concentration camps and that somehow, you know, the Japanese were different, a- almost more different than the Germans.

TB Yeah, well, the concentration camp, again, I think, um, that, that, that was, ah, used to advertise that aspect, awful lot. I mean, ah, there are so many things we have to know. I mean, the, um, even aft- aft- after the war, ah, it was nearly a million Japanese people were taken to the, ah, um, concentration camp in, um, Soviet Union and, of course, there, if the people are in, in labour camps like that, they wouldn't treat people as human beings, full stop. And, ah, ah, over a third of the people didn't come back. They didn't have things to eat; they didn't have... you know, most, lots of them went crazy or just died, starving and even the people who came back got mad, ah, committed suicide. Ah, the coun- country didn't give them any compensation, full stop; no apologies, no compensation. The life was very, very hard for them and even the Japanese people forgetting those people.

IV Yeah, yeah. And so what, what were you told about the Americans and British? Or what was, you know, in Japan, what, at the end of the Second World War, what was the propaganda?

TB Well, I th-, it, it was a similar thing, I think...

IV Was it? Yeah.

TB Yes, and, ah, you know, you, you just have to kill yourself once you see the, those people coming to, to Japan because they're, they're really, really nasty people. You, you know, if you're women specially, you know, otherwise, you know what they would do; that's what they, they were told. And, ah, those propaganda was really successful. At the, um, the battle of, battle in Okinawa, ah, those are the only people, who actually saw the, ah, Americans, ah, came to land and, ah, well, it wasn't a battle really because there weren't Japanese soldiers there so it was just, ah, American soldiers came, came to the, the island and, ah, um, burnt people to death. That's, that was all. But apart from that, you know, people were so scared, ah, of the Americans, ah, they just used their grenades to kill themselves before they, ah, got, um, yes, Americans to, ah, do something to them. Ah, yes, so that, that's, that's the war, isn't it?

IV Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, and, um, and, I suppose, then, when you look at the different responses of different countries, Japan's Peace Constitution, you know, there weren't, there weren't other countries who, who took a peace constitution. It's, it is quite a remarkable thing to have happened and that it's stuck for so long.

TB Yes. I think, lots of pe-, lots of countries, actually, do have the similar constitution but they don't use it and, ah, but Japan was... because of the impacts of the last war, people really, really suffered and people really hated that violence. So, um, yeah, the, the government has to be very, very careful. So careful that, ah, well, I think, pe-, yeah, i- it's, other countries, probably laugh. So you go out there with the, ah, ah, self-defence forces but you didn't do that. Yeah, because, ah, we've got this Peace Constitution and, ah, we decided not to fire a gun.

IV Yeah. And, and having lived with that, what, because when, I think, the problem, one of our problems over here is that, you know, with, thinking about Syria recently, there's the idea that either we bomb Syria or we do nothing. There doesn't seem to be any understanding of what peace means. And you were saying earlier that it's, you know, about a different way of being and I don't know whether, you know, if, if, if we were to try and extend the idea of peace worldwide, what do we need to do to...?

TB Well, I think, ah, the first thing, first step is we have to understand what's actually going on. Why things became as they are now; how did it start? When it started or... I mean, it's, it's not that complicated actually. The things are complicated now but who gave these weapons or who made these weapons? It is actually not difficult to find out. And we do know. We do know who, um, gave these weapons to who. And who wanted this fight, actually started or... we do know that. And it looks as if, ah, well, lots of Western countries actually are involved in that process. So, I think, ah, we have to understand that first and untangle whatever seems tangled up. I don't think it's impossible.

IV No, I agree.

TB And, ah, certainly, it's, it's not a solution to go somebody else's land and start bombing that land without asking those people who are actually living there. I don't think we allow anybody to do the same to us.

IV No, of course not.

TB So it's very simple. We cannot do that to other people. And I can't really say any more really [laughs].

IV No, I know. I agree. I agree. Yeah, we, um, we seem to have a very skewed view of, of ourselves and, and of the world.

TB Yes. And, I think, ah, I th-, I think we have to stop just taking other people's things away from them. Somehow, certain people seems to, seem to have this idea that we can, we can take other people's stuff away from them. I just don't understand that but, ah, some people have been doing that for a long time.

IV Yeah. Well, yeah, absolutely. And built whole empires and things on it. Yeah, it is bizarre. It is a bizarre... and, I think, certainly, with Britain, we need to get used to the fact that we're not that important and let go of the idea that, somehow, we're important in the world.

TB I think, I think, um, that, yeah, it is, this country's probably important but, ah, I think, we need to respect other people the same way.

IV Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's it really. That's all, that's all the questions.

TB [Laughs]

IV It's fantastic.