

Songs of War and Peace: Music and Memory in Okinawa 戦争と平和の歌—沖縄の音楽と記憶

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I—Sengo Zero-Nen

The year 2010 marks the 65th year since the 1945 Battle of Okinawa between American and Japanese armed forces, the 50th year since the signing of the Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960, and the 38th year since Okinawa was officially returned from American to Japanese control in 1972. In May of 2010, after juggling ill-conceived and unpopular alternative proposals for the relocation of the American military's Futenma Airbase in Okinawa, the short-lived Democratic Party's Hatoyama Government capitulated to American demands for the continuation of the original relocation plans, agreed upon in 1996 with the then ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which call for the construction of a heliport at Camp Schwab, in Henoko, also in Okinawa. Despite this latest Japan-US agreement, or rather because of it, the controversial and much contested issue of Futenma Airbase's return-as-relocation (see Inoue 2007) remains unresolved, especially for Okinawans.

The Futenma Airbase was built during the Battle of Okinawa on farmland, originally used for growing sugarcane and yams, which was appropriated from local villagers by the American military. It is thus one reminder that, as perhaps with all wars, the Battle of Okinawa has in many ways even now not yet ended, has

not yet been brought to closure. Instead, as Okinawan writer Medoruma Shun (2005) has recently written, the war is still too much an everyday presence in Okinawa to talk of it as having passed, as being singularly in the past. The Battle of Okinawa is instead still a physical presence in the land, embodied in aging survivors and their descendants and, as Chris Nelson's (2008) work on "Dancing with the Dead" also shows, the war and memories of it are archived, articulated and recalled in Okinawan cultural discourse, practice and performance.

Memories of the Battle of Okinawa—as Medoruma, Nelson and others suggest, and as I argue here—are thus complexly interwoven with the past, the present and the future. They are a vital force, in the sense of being both living and important, because of the continuing everyday presences of the war in Okinawa, among Okinawans, who also long for peace. These memories and their multiple inscriptions and engravings in Okinawan places, bodies and minds can act, as Yelvington (2002) has elsewhere and somewhat differently argued, as powerful resources in recollecting a past, in giving cohesion to or in re-membering present collective identities, and in authenticating both claims to that past and legitimating current actions, claims and contestations. Thus, for example, when the Japanese Ministry of Education attempted in 2007 to modify history textbooks to downplay the involvement of the Japanese army in Okinawan civilians' forced suicides during the Battle of Okinawa, an estimated 110,000 people gathered in Ginowan to protest this rewriting of still vital memories.

This essay surveys the cultural politics of memory and music in Okinawa by situating some of the songs that mark Okinawans' journeys through the landscapes and imaginaries of war and peace. An abridged and revised version of my paper "Memory and Music in Okinawa: The Cultural Politics of War and Peace" (Roberson 2009), it also draws from related work (Roberson 2007, 2010a, 2010b). The songs I describe here are primarily though not exclusively from the folk or new-folk (*min'yō* or *shin-min'yō*; also *shima-uta*) and "Uchinā Pop" (see Roberson 2003) genres. Though for certain songs I also draw attention to particular musical elements, my primary focus is on song lyrics.¹ I first describe songs that give voice to Okinawans' experiences of assimilation and mobilization in the period prior to the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. I then describe songs which recount the world of war experienced at home by Okinawans, and which sing of the sorrows of war and of the treasure of life. I next describe songs from the long postwar period that sing of dreams for peace and that protest the continuing presence of American military bases and armed forces.

As recorded and recalled, these Okinawan songs comprise critical, contested, and at times contradictory sites of historical memory and of continuing social dialogue. The complexities of contemporary memory work in Okinawa involve both individual and collective identities constructed within historical contexts framed and fragmented by contending local, national, and international forces and influences, including those of (neo)colonialism and imperialism. Here, memories become "perilous" in the double sense described by Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama as "memories in need of recuperation and as memories that continue to generate a sense of danger" (2001:3). The perilousness of memory in Okinawa is related to processes of remembering and forgetting a war in which nearly one third of the population on the main island perished but in which Okinawans

themselves were complexly participant, to continuing conditions of militarization by both American and Japanese forces, and to strongly held yet fragile and contextually imagined dreams of peace.

My goal here, then, is to consider how songs in Okinawa may be heard to constitute complex sites of cultural memory and resistance. I contend that regardless, or because, of their minority voice, these songs need to be carefully listened to, especially by people from American and Japanese centers of economic and political power and imperialism.

II—Becoming Japanese

In 1879, the Meiji Government of Japan unilaterally dissolved the Ryūkyūan Kingdom and established the Prefecture of Okinawa (see Kerr 1958). Invoking a modernist rhetoric of progressive "civilization," Japan subsequently embarked on the political-economic and cultural assimilation of Okinawa, employing a "totalizing vision of 'Japaneseness'" in the processes of making Ryūkyūans into proper Japanese imperial subjects (Morris-Suzuki 1998:26-8; Christy 1997:141-169). This assimilationist dynamic involved a dialectic in which Japan was held up as the progressive model of civilized modernity to overcome Okinawan backwardness. Japanese historian Tomiyama Ichirō's (1995) important work on war memory in Okinawa emphasizes the everyday aspects of assimilation and the consequences of these for Okinawans. While language was in many ways the most important and debated issue in Okinawan cultural assimilation, other cultural and religious practices (including Okinawan folk music) were also targeted as backward and in need of reform. Such assimilation also included the extension of the Japanese military draft to Okinawa, which was welcomed by members of the Okinawan elite as a sign of Okinawa's equal inclusion in the Japanese state (Ota 1996:56-7).

The everyday and ideological dilemmas and

dynamics of Okinawa's modernist/imperialist assimilation are reflected and commented on in a number of prewar Okinawan folk songs. One such song is *Hadashi Kinrei no Uta* (literally, Barefoot Prohibition Song), recorded in 1941, that sings of the prohibition on walking barefoot promulgated in early 1941 as part of the Movement for the Improvement of Manners and Customs (*Fūzoku Kairyō Undō*). While ironically also referring to Okinawa as "*Shūrei no Kuni*" (Land of Propriety) and "*Bunka Okinawa*" (Cultural Okinawa), *Hadashi Kinrei* warns about possible fines and other embarrassing consequences if found barefoot in Naha. In part it also reflects the (self-) disciplining of, if not the attempt to eliminate, such everyday aspects of Okinawan "backwardness." (see Arakawa 1982:7; Nakahodo 1988:166).

Hadashi Kinrei may be heard both to reflect and to resist prewar assimilationist processes and practices. Okinawan writer and social critic Arakawa Akira contends that, sung in Okinawan dialect and to sanshin² accompaniment, *Hadashi Kinrei* uses music and the nuances of local language to indirectly invert the pro-Japanese denotations of the lyrics. Such contradictions and inversions suggest the folk manipulation of music in expressing ambivalence toward assimilationist programs, making music a subtle if contradictory weapon of the weak (see Arakawa 1982:8; Tomiyama 1998).

Tsuyoi Nipponjin (Strong Japanese), also recorded in 1941, more clearly shows the strength of Japanese control and influence as the embodiment of desirable modernity and the (self-) inclusion of Okinawa(ns) in Japanese imperialism. Extending to seven verses, *Tsuyoi Nipponjin* sings, in Japanese but to sanshin accompaniment, of Japan as the land of the emperor and gods, where strong and brave men are fighting a sacred war (*seisen*), and where the women are also strong, holy mothers (*seibo*) and angels caring for and supporting

their men. The last verse is especially dense in the work it performs as a lyrical site involved in the making of imperial subjects:³

Tsuyoi Nipponjin

Men going forthrightly to the
sacred war

wives on the home front taking up
hoes

Advance the building of Greater
East Asia

with the latent power of 3000
years

Be Proud, Be Proud! Prospering for
a Thousand Generations

For Eight Thousand Generations,
Long Live the Japanese Empire!

Showing the attraction and allegiance of Okinawans as members of the Japanese nation-state, in what may be simultaneously heard as a song of professed patriotism and of propaganda, *Tsuyoi Nipponjin* remains a site of memory marking Okinawan complicity in Japan's militarist imperialism. As Michael Molasky points out, "Okinawans were not mere victims of Japanese colonialism and imperialism, for many also aspired to be recognized as fully fledged Japanese citizens and to partake of the fruits of Japanese power and prosperity" (Molasky 1999:14). Open recognition and critique of such complicity remains a contentious issue in postwar Okinawa, as is reflected in the work of Medoruma Shun, who is critical of Okinawan cultural amnesia regarding prewar and wartime complicity in Japanese militarism and imperialism (Molasky 2003:184; Medoruma 2005). Such controversies involving Okinawans

and the Japanese government also surround attempts to revise or remove displays at Okinawa's New Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum critical of the militarist expansionism that preceded the 1945 Battle of Okinawa (see Ishihara, et al. 2002; Figal 1997:745-78; Yonetani 2000:145-68).

A number of other Okinawan folk songs similarly bearing the deep colorings of the wartime system that appeared between 1939 and 1941, with titles such as: *Wakare no Sakazuki* (Wine Cup of Parting), *Jūgo no Mamori* (Home Front Defense; literally, Defense Behind the Guns), *Jūgo no Tsuma* (Wife Behind the Guns/Wife on the Home Front), *Senshō Bushi* (War Victory Song), *Nikudan* (Human Bomb), and *Mamore Nan'yō* (Defend the Southern Isles!). The gendered division of imperial subjecthood (Angst 2001:92-3) and of Okinawan complicity in the Japanese imperialist project is given clear refrain in many such songs. While "for the sake of the country" Okinawan men went to the front lines, Okinawan women struggled "behind the guns" to take care of family, farm and village. One of the earliest and the most re-recorded of such songs is Fukuhara Chōki's 1933 *Gunjin Bushi* (Soldier's Song; see Arakawa 1982:6; Takaesu 1982:150-1). The first two verses are:

Gunjin Bushi⁴

Since I met and wed you, but few
months have passed,

Now we must part, since it's for
the sake of the country

Do your utmost, my beloved wife

My husband, you are a soldier, so
why do you cry?

I pray that you will return smiling,

For the sake of the country,
perform your public duty⁵

At the time of *Gunjin Bushi*'s composition and recording, Fukuhara lived in Osaka's large Okinawan community.⁶ Fukuhara was subject to investigation for *Gunjin Bushi*, since the Japanese authorities apparently felt it inappropriate to use the honorable Japanese Imperial soldier's appellation "*gunjin*" in the title of a popular Ryūkyūan song. According to one story line, Fukuhara renamed the song "*Shusse Heishi o Okuru Uta*" (Song to Send off a Soldier Going to the Front) or, combined with "*Kumamoto Bushi*" as "*Nyūei Defune no Minato*" (Harbor of a Boat Leaving for the Barracks), though he did not otherwise change the music or lyrics (see Nakahodo 1988:152-5; Uehara 1982:207; Kamiya 1998:111).

While marking Okinawan complicity in Japanese imperialism, the conflicted nature of Okinawan incorporation into the Japanese imperialist project may also be heard in many of these songs. Musical elements such as the use of local dialect, the Ryūkyūan musical scale and instruments, most notably the *sanshin*, mark the celebration of Okinawan cultural distinctiveness amid on-going pressures to become good imperial subjects. Thus, that *Tsuyoi Nipponjin* is accompanied by music employing the Ryūkyūan scale may at once be heard to lend local support to the nationalism of the mostly Japanese language lyrics, and by, inserting Okinawan musical difference, qualify the full imperialistic thrust of the song (Arakawa 1982:5). Similarly, that the wartime cooperation voiced in *Wakare no Sakazuki* is shaded by a characteristic sadness in the *sanshin*-based music, may be heard to render problematic any simple reading of Okinawan wartime complicity (Arakawa 1982:5-6; Nakahodo 1988:154-5).

Thus, while the Okinawan elite may have

welcomed the Japanese state's extension of the draft to Okinawa, the subtexts of many prewar Okinawan may be heard to reflect commoner Okinawans' ambivalence about being so mobilized.⁷ This local Okinawan ambivalence toward incorporation into Japan's imperial project—compounded by later reflections on the horrific outcomes of such mobilization—may in part account for the re-recording of songs such as *Gunjin Bushi*. What is signaled by the musical incongruity here is perhaps also similar to that in the recent performance piece based on this period of memory/history by Fujiki Hayato, wherein “Okinawan culture—the same culture that somehow articulated with Japanese militarism—also empowers the recognition of the peril of becoming Japanese” (Nelson 2003:219). However, it must also be remembered that the Okinawan past as embodied action was constructed under historical conditions of unequal power relations. In his liner notes to the 2002 CD re-release of Kinjō Minoru's immediate important post (1972) reversion LP, *Jidai* (which included versions of several prewar songs), Okinawan writer, media personality and music expert Uehara Naohiko is thus critical of the militarist, imperialist context in which the songs first appeared and suggests that many songs may now be listened to as anti-war songs.

These songs thus not only narrated experience to contemporary audiences but remain as (re-) recorded and archived sites of memories of Okinawans' unequal encounters with assimilation policies, cultural reform movements, and military cooperation, service and sacrifice. They reveal the conflicted position of Okinawans and necessitate readings that recognize both Okinawans' complicit participation in and implicit resistance to Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, the critical or rehabilitating commentary of postwar writers such as Arakawa and Nakahodo must be seen as part of ongoing contemporary internal debates about Okinawa's “difficult

past” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991:376-420) of participation in Japanese assimilationist, militarist, and imperialist projects.

There are important historical and political reasons for the contemporary forgetting of many such songs beyond a mere denial of complicity in Japan's imperialist aggression. That is, the cultural amnesia evident here must in part be understood in relationship with an eclipsing focus on the suffering of Okinawans at home. And, such contemporary cultural amnesia regarding assimilationist, militarist, and imperialist complicity must be understood within the context of the continuing American military presence in Okinawa, and of related appeals for their removal and for the realization of local prayers for peace.

III—Ikusa-yu

The husbands, lovers, and sons departing for war in the songs described above were going elsewhere, “a thousand *ri* away” according to the lyrics of *Kuni nu Hana*. These songs are mournful but often lack the grounded specificity of place, while death is primarily portrayed only as a possibility facing the soldiers being sent off and requiring that the surviving women carry bravely on. With the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, however, death became an immediate and enduring reality for ordinary Okinawans.

The “typhoon of steel” produced by fighting between American and Japanese forces began when American troops landed on the outlying Kerama Islands in late March and on the main island of Okinawa on April 1 of 1945, and then lasted through June 23, when organized Japanese resistance ended, and continuing until early September, when the Japanese military formally surrendered. Some 150,000 Okinawans died, approximately one-fourth of the prefecture's total and one-third of the main island's prewar population. Commonly given numbers for Okinawan deaths include some

38,754 common citizens and another 55,246 civilian combat participants. A further 28,228 deaths occurred among soldiers of Okinawan origin and Okinawan army employees, including student, nurse, and civilian defense corps members who did not necessarily differ greatly from ordinary citizens (see Okinawa Prefecture 1991; Ota 2000). Okinawan deaths during the Battle of Okinawa embodied most devastatingly the disjunctures between Okinawan desires and everyday actions to become modern imperial subjects versus Japanese discrimination against and disregard for Okinawan culture and lives (Tomiyama 1995; Medoruma 2005; Oshiro 2002:21-2; Ishihara 2001).

The horrifying realities of the Battle of Okinawa are remembered and reflected upon in a number of postwar *sanshin*-based folk songs that narrate Okinawans' direct experiences of wartime suffering, (being) sacrifice(d), and survival. *Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā*, for example, graphically describes surviving Okinawans as the leftovers of the American warships' cannons. Describing also the postwar hardships of impoverished Okinawans and their joys at seeing their children born and grow, *Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā* ends:⁸

Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā

That war which devoured my
parents

Those cannons that devoured my
homeland

Even if I'm reborn, I won't be able
to forget.

Just who was it that started these
things?

My resentment and regret are
endless.

Let us tell to all generations,

That you and I, and I and you are
all

But the leftovers of the warships'
cannons.

Another of these songs is *Himeyuri no Uta*, originally popular in 1967 (Takaesu 1982:158), which portrays the fate of the Himeyuri Student Nurse Corps, composed of 219 female higher school students who were drafted into service as nurses. Most died during the battle. The lyrics to the first two and the last verses (of ten total) are:⁹

Himeyuri no Uta

It is widely known, the story

Of Okinawa's Himeyuri Unit

Of Girl Students who were
sacrificed

The two lines of loyalty and piety

They held in their breasts

Harder than iron, Japan's *yamato-*
damashi

Cherry blossoms

....

At last, honorable deaths, the
Himeyuri girls

Together in their graves, are they
crying?

Sad and lonely crying, summer

cicada

(for a live recording by Kenbō with Bōchirāzu, set to photographic montage, follow [this link](#))

Linda Angst notes that for most Japanese and Okinawans the Himeyuri girls are the “primary (and conflicted) symbol of dual Okinawan wartime patriotism and victimhood” (2001:33; see also Angst 1997). The Japanese language lyrics of *Himeyuri no Uta* may be heard to simultaneously invoke and invert gendered and national symbols such as cherry blossoms. Thus, like cinematic and other narratives regarding the Himeyuri students,¹⁰ the political implications and meanings of *Himeyuri no Uta* are open to variously positioned nostalgic and critical readings and acts of remembering. Okinawan folk-music researcher Nakasone Kōichi critically writes that the use of militarist-era words such as “*yamato damashi*” (Japanese soul) and “*gyokusai*” (honorable death—literally, shattered or crushed jewel) beatify patriotic death. On the other hand, Uehara Naohiko argues that *Himeyuri no Uta* should now be heard as a protest song that retrospectively, reflexively questions the meanings of “(for the sake of the) nation” and “honorable deaths” (Nakasone 1999:238; Uehara 1986:127-8).

Such protesting political inversions—and the transformative potentialities enabled thereby—are given further expression and force by the musical elements of the song, as to a certain extent was seen earlier in regard to *Hadashi Kinrei no Uta*. Thus, *Himeyuri no Uta* is sung to plaintive sanshin accompaniment and uses the melody of *Haisen Kazoe-Uta* (War Defeat Counting Song), a song composed in the aftermath of the war that recounts the sorrows and losses of war and the futility of the battle, criticizes Japanese military strategy, and calls on listeners to rebuild postwar Okinawa (Nakasone 1997:115-16). To different musical accompaniment, I have also seen Okinawan singer-songwriter and folk guitarist Sadoyama

Yutaka perform *Himeyuri no Uta* at an event in Tokyo marking Okinawa’s “*Irei no Hi*” memorial day for victims of the Battle of Okinawa, very clearly evoking the protest potentials of the song. Thus, while I believe it would be a mistake to ignore the cultural-political significance of lyrics, sometimes read against the grain, it also is true that the performative dimensions and contexts of songs may carry or constitute, sometimes alternative, forms of significance.

Another song that acts as a critical site of memory of the Battle of Okinawa is Tsukayama Hiroyoshi’s *Nuchi du Takara* (Life is a Treasure). Sung in Okinawan dialect, this didactic anti-war song calls, as does *Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā*, for its listeners to keep memories of the war alive, forever. The first two verses are:¹¹

Nuchi du Takara

Forget, I can’t forget, the sorrows
of the warring world

Every time I remember, my hair
stands on end

Truly, we must tell of the war

Truly, life is a treasure

To survive the war, we hid in caves

But the caves also became hells,
the houses of devils

Truly, we must tell of the war

Truly, life is a treasure

By invoking the phrase “*nuchi du takara*,”

Tsukayama embeds his song in complex webs of cultural, historical and political reference. Thus, for example, anti-base activist Ahagon Shōkō's similarly titled book opens with the famous Ryūka (short Ryūkyūan poem) attributed to King Shō Tai at the time of his forced abdication in 1879: "The Era of War has ended// An era of peace has come// Do not grieve and moan, Life is a Treasure" (Ahagon 1992:2; my translation). Okinawan writer Shima Tsuyoshi (1997) has more broadly suggested that the Battle of Okinawa has two faces, represented among other things by the main public and the lesser known war sites and memorials. Shima sees the phrases "honorable death" (*gyokusai*) written on war site epitaphs and "life is a treasure" (*nuchi du takara*) spoken by Okinawans as representing opposing sets of values: *gyokusai* expressing those of the imperialist military, and *nuchi du takara* expressing those of common Okinawans in their will to live (1997:235-47).¹² Songs such as *Himeyuri no Uta* and *Nuchi du Takara*, *Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā* and others give voice to "gyokusai" but especially convey "nuchi du takara" orientations.

These and other songs that recount local experiences related to the Battle of Okinawa act as sites of memory available for re-examination and embedded within other discourses and debates. By focusing on Okinawan suffering these songs perhaps risk joining the "national victimology" that Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama note as the product of "dominant modes of remembering" in postwar Japan (2001:7; see also Orr 2001). As such, they threaten to sing the forgetting of Okinawan complicity and responsibility in a complex contrapuntal similar to that which Gerald Figal (1997) discusses in relation to the commemoration of the war dead at the Cornerstone of Peace in the southern Mabuni area.

On the other hand, by singing of Okinawan sacrifice and suffering, these songs

simultaneously act as critiques of Japanese militarism, contributing to the broader "oppositional memory work" (Fujitani, White and Yoneyama 2001:13) going on in Okinawa. As such, these songs allow for interpretations of their significance as musically composed sites of memory that critically invoke Okinawan suffering as the result of Japanese and American militarized violence and of Okinawan complicity born of misguided assimilationist loyalties. The protagonist of *Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā* thus asks in critical, challenging fashion: "Just who was it that started these things?" It is the nature of the Battle of Okinawa as a "difficult past" (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991)—together with the intervention of peace activists and the existence of counter-narratives, including those in song—that helps preclude facile revisions to history and social memory in Okinawa.

Survivors of the Battle of Okinawa, including many civilians, were initially placed by the American military into internment camps throughout Okinawa (Molasky 1999:17). Two well-known songs recall life in these camps, *PW Mujō* (also, *PW Bushi*) and *Yaka Bushi* (Bise 1998:184). The lyrics of both songs largely overlap and were written in the POW camp at Yaka. Both melancholic songs sing of sadness deepened by the harrowing experiences of war, by thoughts of homes and villages destroyed by fighting, by worries about the safety of relatives, and by personal troubles. The lyrics to the first verse of *Yaka Bushi* are:¹³

Yaka Bushi

Beloved Okinawa, turned into a
battlefield

Turned into a battlefield

All of the people, with flowing
tears

With flowing tears

The final verse of *PW Mujō* laments:

PW Mujō

If only there had not been this
thing, war

This pitiful figure, I [we] would not
have become

How pitiful is a PW

As Molasky similarly points out regarding other Okinawan narratives of the war and American occupation, *PW Mujō* and *Yaka Bushi* mark the internment camp experience not only as the end of the war but as the beginning of the postwar era of the American Occupation (Molasky 1999:17). *PW Mujō* and *Yaka Bushi* are still recorded and performed. Kina Shoukichi included *Yaka Bushi* on his 1998 CD *Akainko*, while Koja Misako recorded *PW Mujō* on her anti-war 2005 CD *Kuroi Ame*.¹⁴ Kinjō Minoru, meanwhile, has performed in military olive green, playing *PW Bushi* on a *kankara sanshin* modeled on the rustic instruments originally made in the camps from empty food ration cans and other discarded American military materials (Bise 1998:184). For a recent video recording of *PW Mujō* by young performer Uema Ayano, follow [this link](#).

IV—Miruku-yu

That the end of the world of war (*ikusa-yu*) would lead to a world of peace (*miruku-yu*) has been a long held hope among many Okinawans. In this section, I describe songs that over the past half-century plus have narrated Okinawan dreams of peace. Here the political contexts within and at times against which the songs are sung become critical in understanding the changes, continuities and complexities of such dreams.

A—Nuchi nu Sūji

While songs like *Yaka Bushi* describe the end of the war from the position of someone having experienced the battle in Okinawa, there are a number of songs which describe the (desire to) return to Okinawa among people who were elsewhere at the war's end. The theme of separation that runs throughout many wartime songs becomes an inverse longing to return in Fukuhara Chōki's famous early postwar song *Natsukashiki Kōkyō* (or, *Natsukashiki Furusato*; Nostalgic Homeland). Written and first performed by Fukuhara in Osaka in 1947, the first and last verses are:¹⁵

Natsukashiki Kōkyō

The Okinawa I see in dreams, is its
original shape

But the Okinawa I hear of in
rumor, has changed completely

Oh, I want to go! Back to the island
of my birth

....

When will it be that freely, with all
my family

We will be able to live together
smiling?

Oh, let us go! Back to Okinawa!

Though also reflecting general nostalgic desires and imaginaries among the Okinawan diaspora (see Roberson 2010b), which in part account for its frequent re-recording, *Natsukashiki Kōkyō* more directly portrays early postwar Okinawan concerns for loved ones and dreams for peace given particularly sharp resonance by the then recent Battle of Okinawa. While *Natsukashiki Kōkyō* describes a yet unrealized desire to return to Okinawa

and find family members safe and Okinawa at peace, Noborikawa Seijin's *Sengo no Nageki* (Postwar Lament) portrays the sadness of someone who has in fact returned to Okinawa from Japan (Yamato) to find that Okinawa has been transformed by the war and that his family are not there. Such is the teaching and fate of war, he laments, and protests.¹⁶

In addition to such mournful laments, however, there are other songs that participate in what Chris Nelson refers to as the "politics of hope" found in the performances of Onaha Buten and Teruya Rinsuke and more recently of Fujiki Hayato. Onaha and Teruya visited the interment camps and villages of central Okinawa in the immediate postwar period and through comedic performances that included music encouraged war weary Okinawans to celebrate and enjoy life (Nelson 2003, 2008). Of similar sentiment is *Hiyamikachi Bushi*, a song from the early 1950s. Now commonly played up-tempo, this song calls on Okinawans to stand up and be proud, even if they fall seven times and more (Nakasone 1997:162-3.).¹⁷ For a version of *Hiyamikachi Bushi* performed by Noborikawa Seijin, follow [this link](#).

Kadekaru Rinshō's early 1960s *Jidai no Nagare* and Teruya Rinken's 1993 *Yu-Yu-Yu* may also be heard as satirically comical (*Jidai no Nagare*) or energetically optimistic (*Yu-Yu-Yu*) calls to celebrate life, despite difficulties faced and changes in the world. The recent Uchinā Pop song *Obā Jiman no Bakudan Nabe* (Grandma's Favorite Bombshell Cooking Pot), by the group Begin, may also be heard as a playful invocation of the same spirit.¹⁸ Optimistic, and often comical songs of the "*nuchi nu sūji*" celebration of life give voice in a different key to the "*nuchi du takara*" value orientation introduced above. Such celebrations of life, furthermore, invoke celebrations of peace. As Teruya Rinken (Rinsuke's son) has said: "We sing about how wonderful it is being alive here and now. It's the celebration of life like this which negates

war and other acts that involve violence and killing" (Barrell and Tanaka 1997:114).

B—Heiwa no Negai

In the long postwar period, the theme of peace has been taken up in a continuing series of songs. Peace appears to have become a more explicitly expressed theme from about the mid 1960s. This, of course, was the time of the Vietnam War, when Okinawa was still under US Occupation and used for American military operations in Southeast Asia. This is also, however, a time during which Okinawans protested more vocally about their desire to return to Japan and its "Peace Constitution."

Songs mapping Okinawan calls for reversion include *Akogare no Uta* (Song of Yearning), which sang of the desire to return to Japan and the Japanese era (*yu*), and *Okinawa o Kaese* (Return Okinawa; written in the 1950s) which became, as it remains, a movement and protest song (see Arakawa 1982:10; for more on *Okinawa o Kaese*, see Roberson 2003). Other songs combined dreams of peace with the desire to return to Japan, portrayed in political rhetoric and in song lyrics as Okinawa's ancestral homeland (*sokoku*; on Okinawa protest movements, see Tanji 2006; Taira 1997). *Heiwa no Kane* (Bell of Peace), popular in 1966, and *Heiwa no Negai* (Prayer for Peace) are two such songs (Takaesu 1982:158). The latter, re-recorded in 1997 by Tamaki Kazumi, combines a call like that in *Nuchi du Takara* not to forget the sorrows of war with appeals for return to Japan and for a peaceful Okinawa. The first and last verses are:¹⁹

Heiwa no Negai

This island Okinawa, always
nothing but war

When will the time finally come
that we can live in peace?

Ah, let us together, for this island
Okinawa

Pray for Peace, for this Okinawa

....

Our thoughts one, beloved Yamato

The happiness when finally we
return²⁰

Ah, let us together, for this island
Okinawa

Pray for Peace, for this Okinawa

For a performance of *Heiwa no Negai* by Suzy (Sūji [-gwa], a performer based in the Yokohama-Kawasaki area, that was intended as part of an online sanshin lesson but interestingly uses a type of *kankara* sanshin, follow [this link](#).

A song such as this indexes complex ironies of history. Okinawans, discriminated against and strategically sacrificed in war by the Japanese, seek to return to Japanese control and benefit from its postwar Peace Constitution, which was a product of the American occupation of Japan. The formal occupation of Japan, but not the withdrawal of US forces, had ended in 1952 with Japanese agreement to continuing American occupation of Okinawa. These ironies must be understood strategically and logistically, within the context of Okinawan attempts to free themselves from American military domination and racism. The prayer for peace is thus less ironic than multi-vocal, simultaneously recalling the experiences of Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa and restating Okinawan desires for a peaceful home free of the American military.

However, despite Okinawans' "prayers for peace," close to 40 years after reversion, nearly 75 percent of the U.S. military bases and 60 percent of U.S. military personnel in Japan

remain concentrated in Okinawa. Symbolic here is the yet unrealized 1996 agreement to "return" Futenma Air Base, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, which has met with continuing protest because of plans to relocate the base within Okinawa Prefecture near the town of Henoko (see Inoue 2007). Furthermore, between reversion to Japan in 1972 and the end of 2003, there were some 5,269 reported crimes committed by US military and their dependents in Okinawa. These included 977 cases of aggravated assault and 540 violent crimes, the latter of which between 1972 and 1995 included 12 murders as well as 111 reported cases of violence (including rape) against women and girls (see Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division 2004; Arasaki 1996:204). There continue to be off-base automobile accidents, cases of environmental pollution, forest fires, stray bullets and other accidents and incidents related to the American military bases. In August 2004, for example, a large CH-53D transport helicopter crashed onto the campus of Okinawa International University, leading some 30,000 Okinawans to gather in September 2004 to protest (Asahi Shinbun 2004a; Asahi Shinbun 2004b).

Singer Koja Misako, a former member of the Uchinā Pop group, the Nenes, released a mini-CD in 2005 called *Kuroi Ame* (Black Rain), which includes *PW Mujō* and several versions of the title track, *Kuroi Ame*. This song was originally composed by Sahara Kazuya, Koja's partner and producer, after joining a "Peace Festival" organized in Baghdad in 1990 by wrestler-politician Antonio Inoki (Yoshizawa 2004). The black rain in the song thus originally referred most directly to the missiles and bombs dropped during the first Gulf War, but also offers ready allusion to the black rain that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombings of those cities.

Koja's recordings and performances of *Kuroi Ame*, however, index as well the "typhoon of

steel” that fell on Okinawa during WWII and the continuing crashes of American military aircraft. The association of *Kuroi Ame* with the Battle of Okinawa is lyrically accomplished by the insertion after the second verse of an interlude in which Koja sings the final verse of *PW Mujō* coupled with a Ryūka (8-8-8-6 syllable poem) of her own composition. The lyrics to the first verse and interlude of Koja’s recording of *Kuroi Ame* are:

Black Rain²¹

Rain keeps falling

Rain pours down

The sky is dark

Who knows where this rain is
coming from

Hooy, hooy, hooy, hoo

Hooy, hooy, hooy, hoo

....

If there was but not this war

This sad figure

I/we would not have become

By but the two characters of
“war” [*sensō*, 戦争]

Life is taken

Those surviving left to cry

Are the children

The intertwining of a more universally

composed anti-war message with Okinawan particularities is further enhanced when Koja has introduced or interlaced live performances with personal comments referring to the crash of an American transport helicopter into the campus of Okinawa International University in August 2004, to her own childhood memories of witnessing the crash of an American B52 bomber, and to memories of her father, who died while working on the U.S. Airbase at Kadena. Koja’s narration, acting as prelude and spoken interlude accompanying a live performance of *Kuroi Ame* recorded on this CD, is roughly as follows:

Prelude:

The song I’m about to sing is called *Kuroi Ame*. From the first time I sang on stage until here today, how many years have passed? I first sang on stage when I was about five years old and this year I’ll be fifty-one, so I’ve been singing for forty-plus years. In that lifetime of singing, I’ve had lots of varied experiences. Today, during this short time, there are lots of things that I can’t fully describe. In the town where I live, Kadena, there is a large American military air base, called the largest in East Asia. Inside that military base there are many people working, and outside, we are living. American jets that had taken off have on a number of occasions crashed. Among those times when planes have crashed, the most terrifying was when I was a young elementary school student, when a B52 with black wings crashed. At that time, I remember thinking, even though I had not experienced war, ah, Kadena has been hit. That frightening memory is, after all,

impossible to forget no matter how many years pass. This year, it makes 60 years that, throughout, we've been told of how Okinawa suffered as the site of the sole land battle [on Japanese home soil]. It might appear as though it is now [a time of] peace, but in Okinawan, [the war] hasn't ended. Inside the heart of Okinawa, paradise has yet to arrive. With my prayers embraced in this song, *Kuroi Ame*.

Interlude:

My father worked inside of Kadena airbase. While on his way to work [one day], my father was run over by a military truck and died instantly. At that time, my mother was 28, my father was 30, I was four. My mother and I have both lived as best we could. But, my mother passed away at 67. Now, I have a child and grandchild, and when I have the strength to look back and think about the past, my father[’s death] is so mournfully regretful. I think, if there hadn't been the war and Okinawa was as it had been in the past, my father would surely even now have happily been taking loving care of me. My most loved, most loved father's memory only have I held in my heart and lived. Therefore, children like me will only have sad memories, so after all having one's parents healthy and happy is best.

Koja's narrative here is many layered and multivocal, interweaving personal and Okinawan cultural memory; intertwining past, present and future in criticism of war; and appealing for peace both in Okinawa, where the war has not ended even after 60 years, and more universally.

There are a number of other recently produced songs that similarly recall Okinawan experiences of war and repeat Okinawan desires for a peaceful existence at home and elsewhere, thereby also reminding us of the ongoing local importance of such memories and of struggles to achieve a less militarized and more peaceful present and future. In 2000, Daiku Tetsuhiro recorded *Okinawa Kagayake* (Shining Okinawa; for more, see Roberson 2009) that sings of a future, shining Okinawa, that has been able to put its past sorrows to sleep and that will heal hearts and teach the world about peace. As the liner notes to this CD point out, *Okinawa Kagayake* must be understood within, and as a positively phrased and future-oriented statement of resistance against a political context in which the real, foreseeable future of Okinawa as a "discarded stone" (*sute-ishi*) burdened with the continuing presence of American military bases appears likely to remain unchanged.

Although rarely overtly political the Nenes' 1997 CD, *Akemodoro Unai* included a number of songs with peace as their theme. Among these were *Heiwa no Ryūka* (Ryūka of Peace; for a video, look [here](#)) and *Nasake Shirazuya* (Heartless Bastards).²² The immediate context for these songs includes the 1995 rape of a twelve-year old Okinawan girl by three US servicemen and the renewed struggle in the 1990s to regain control of land occupied by U.S. military bases (see Angst 2003; Inoue 2007). Sung in Japanese and set to a deceptively, ironically, light electric guitar pop tune, *Nasake Shirazuya* calls on its listeners to live with mutually held compassion and excoriates Japanese politicians and America for forgetting the past so easily and for being so uncaring about the lives of Okinawans, even fifty years after the end of World War II. The refrain, repeated at the end, is: "50 years, 50 years// All you who forget so quick and easy// You heartless bastards you."

Like *Kuroi Ame* making reference to rain is

Sora ga Shiranai Ame ga Futteita (A Rain the Sky Knew Not Fell) included on a 2004 CD by Kamiya Chihiro.²³ And, in 2001 the punk-rock band Mongol 800 recorded *Song for You* on their two million plus selling CD *Message*. Sung in English, *Song for You* pleads for listeners not to repeat past mistakes and asks “how many boys [will] be killed by fuckin’ wars.” It concludes with a positive vision not unlike that in *Okinawa Kagayake* of Okinawa/the world as “Forever green. Forever blue/Never end LOVE and PEACE and SONG.”²⁴

The desires for peace sung of in these songs imagine Okinawa as a place where there are no military bases and no crimes or accidents associated with them and their soldiers. Such desires make meaningful otherwise self-exoticizing, neo-romanticist recollections of a halcyon Ryūkyūan past as well as dreams of a future Okinawa, which, sung of in universalistic terms, simultaneously allow for the creation of a space where it is possible to imagine peace in, of, and for Okinawa—and through Okinawa, the world. The particular, obdurate histories and memories of war and military occupation in Okinawa are thus related to future imaginings of a dreamlike, peaceful Okinawa. As such, while the shining Okinawa that Daiku sings of may risk the construction of an Okinawa blind to its past, it must simultaneously be heard as constituting a poetic site of resistance to experiences of war and the continuing American military presence.

That such songs continue to be composed reflects (upon) the ongoing presence of the war in Okinawa—in both individual and cultural memory, in physical marks left upon the land, and in the continuing presence of the American military.²⁵ Like other earlier songs, they not only call for peace as a longed for future possibility or critically recollect past experiences of war, but thereby also indict present conditions in Okinawa, whether indirectly, as in *Kuroi Ame* or *Okinawa Kagayake*, or more forcefully as in *Nasake*

Shirazuya or *Song for You*. These songs thus act as sites of cultural resistance and by their continued creation, recording and performance insert into the public sphere—both Okinawan and Japanese—Okinawan memories of war and dreams of peace, significant because of the everyday traces and presences of war, even after more than 60 years. As such, these songs require that we listen to them seriously.²⁶

V—This Ain’t no Sideshow

Representing a larger corpus of songs in various musical genres, the songs introduced here constitute a continuing feature of the Okinawan musical landscape. Viewed from the present, they may appear to compose a discordant set. Yet, as mnemonic sites and practices, the creation and lyrical content of these songs reflect, resist and require an understanding of ongoing historical processes, contexts and events in Okinawa that compose fields of experience and identity characterized by unequal power relations.

Early songs reflect the dynamics and contradictions of assimilationist pressures and desires that led Okinawans to participate, with whatever sadness on parting, in Japan’s wars and empire building. Later songs give witness to personal and cultural ambivalences and to the profound injuries suffered by Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa. As a result of their experiences in war, Okinawans have since that time sung of peace, first in terms of a desired return to an originary peaceful homeland, then imagined in reference to reversion from American military control to the promise offered by Japan’s “Peace Constitution.” More recent songs offer visions of a peaceful Okinawa shining for all to gather warmth from or sharply criticize the powerful conjunction of self-serving Japanese and American geo-politics in maintaining conditions in Okinawa that make such desired peace a dream too long delayed by the everyday realities of continuing militarization.

Though as suggested by Kinjō Minoru's LP/CD *Jidai* never complete, the postwar amnesia constituted through the elision of wartime songs that index assimilationist Okinawan complicity, like other forms of personal and cultural forgetting, is troubling. However, it must also be understood in relation to the eclipsing, defining trauma of the Battle of Okinawa and the continuing presence (with Japanese state support) of American military forces. While some might suggest that early wartime Okinawan songs that bear the lyrical markings of Japanese assimilationist and militarist control are largely and rightly forgotten (see Arakawa 1982: 7), this simultaneously reminds us that if social memories are "contextual, partial, and subject to self-interested manipulation and obfuscation" (Kenny 1999:425), they are also persistent and resistant to efforts at revision (Climo and Cattell 2002:5). There are, as Appadurai points out, limits to the debatability of the past, and this is as true of Okinawan complicity as it is of the more pernicious attempts of the state to revise if not falsify historical representations of the war (Appadurai 1981; see also Figal 1997; Ishihara, et al. 2002; Yonetani 2000).

Furthermore, as Schwartz has pointed out in regard to contested American commemoration of the Vietnam War, "To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present." (Schwartz 1982:374). In Okinawa, memories of the war given voice in song, like other practices and structures for meaning making and in other contestations over commemoration, are part of ongoing struggles in which Okinawan identities are constructed in inter-relationship with Japanese and American influences and forces. However, the needs of the present in Okinawa are here also importantly composed with reference to visions of the future. Memories of the war, including the dangers of memory undone, are thus linked both to present cultural and political identity construction in Okinawa

and to interrelated dreams of a future, peaceful Okinawa free of wars and weapons.

Thus, while also speaking to historical complexities and contradictions, these Okinawan songs of war and peace are important because—as George Lipsitz writes more broadly of the messages and products of popular culture in the introductory chapter to *Time Passages*, entitled "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow"—"[a]t their best...they retain memories of the past and contain hopes for the future that rebuke the injustices and inequities of the present" (1990:20).

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Articles on related themes from *The Asia-Pacific Journal*:

Ahagon Shoko and C. Douglas Lummis, "[I Lost My Only Son in the War: Prelude to the Okinawan Anti-Base Movement.](#)"

Miyume Tanji, "[Community Resistance and Sustainability in an Okinawan Village](#)"

C. Douglas Lummis, "[The US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement and Okinawan Anger](#)"

Miyagi Yasuhiro, "[Okinawa - Rising Magma](#)"

Notes

¹ Takahashi Miki (2010) has recently criticized Nakahodo Masanori, Kumada Susumu and me (Roberson 2003) for such focus. I make no apologies. I conversely suggest that a-theoretical and a-political detailing of musical minutiae, however fascinating for fans and fetishists (including lay and academic “Okinawa freaks”), risks obscuring if not obfuscating the broader cultural-political significance of musical production and practice, especially in complexly contexted, marginalized and contested places such as Okinawa.

² The key Ryūkyūan instrument, the sanshin is a three-stringed instrument derived from the Chinese sanxian and is a predecessor of the Japanese shamisen, see Kaneshiro (1997).

³ All translations into English are my own. Original lyrics from Kinjō Minoru, *Jidai; Kinjō Minoru: Senji-Sensō o Utau*, BCY 20NCD-1002, 2002 (1981).

⁴ Translation based on Nakahodo 1988:152. Lyrics and music by Fukuhara Chōki. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.

⁵ See: *Chanpurū Shinguruzu* Volume 2: (*Sensō to Imin*)—*Heiwa no Negai*, Toshiba EMI, TOCT 9552, 1996.

⁶ By 1940 some 42,252 Okinawans were resident in Osaka, another 11,426 in neighboring Hyogo Prefecture. See Tomiyama (1990:254).

⁷ Such reluctance was also reflected in Okinawan migration abroad as a strategy not only to improve their economic conditions but to avoid the military draft (Matsumura 2002:136; on songs of Okinawan migration, see Roberson 2010b).

⁸ Written by Higa Tsunetoshi and originally recorded in the mid 1970s. Translation based

on Matsumura (2002:162-6; see also “Okinawa o Dō Oshieru Ka” Henshūinkai 2006:86-7; Deigo Musume, *Ketteiban: Deigo Musume Tokushū*, Marufuku Records, ACD-3004, 1995.

⁹ Lyrics by Komune Saburō. Translation based on Radio Okinawa (1994:82).

¹⁰ There have been at least five major Japanese motion pictures about the Himeyuri students, starting with Imai Tadashi’s 1953 *Himeyuri no Tō* (see: Nakae and Nakae 2000:154-75). Angst’s critique resonates with those of others: see Fujiwara (2001), Shima (1997).

¹¹ Lyrics and music by Tsukayama Hiroyoshi. Tsukayama Hiroyoshi, *Nuchi Du Takara—Yomitansan Basha Muchā*, Marufuku Records, CCF 83, 1995. My thanks to Bise Katsu of Campus Records for permission to include this translation.

¹² For more on sites of war memorialization, see Figal (2003).

¹³ This translation based on Yamazato Yuki *Natsukashiki Kōkyō*, Nafin VICE-6009, 1998.

¹⁴ Kina Shoukichi & Champloose, *Akainko*, Nippon Columbia, COCA-15326, 1998; Koja Misako, *Kuroi Ame*, Disc Milk DM006, 2005.

¹⁵ Lyrics and music by Fukuhara Chōki. This translation based on Yamazato Yuki *Natsukashiki Kōkyō*. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.

¹⁶ Noborikawa Seijin, *Howling Wolf*, Omagatoki, OMCA-9001, 1998. For the story behind this song, see Noborikawa (2002:194-7).

¹⁷ Versions may be found on Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, *In Love*, Toshiba EMI TOCT-6688, 1992, and Noborikawa Seijin, *Spiritual Unity*, Respect Record RES-45, 2001.

¹⁸ For more on *Yu-Yu-Yu* see Roberson

(2003:192-227). *Begin, Begin no Shima-uta: Omototakeo 2*, Teichiku Entertainment TECN-20798, 2002. Thanks to Shirota Chika for reminding me of this song.

¹⁹ Tamaki Kazumi, *Tinin*, Akabana, APCD 1003, 1997. Lyrics by Heija Nami, music by Fukuhara Tsuneo. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.

²⁰ The original reads, “*Yagati uhizamutu muduru urisa*,” implying the return of a child to the safety of a parent’s care.

²¹ Translation of main verses by Kurota Nagisa, included in liner notes to Koja Misako, *Kuroi Ame*, Disk Milk DM006, 2005. Translation of interlude by the author.

²² Nenes, *Akemodoro Unai*, Antinos Records, ARCJ 69, 1997. The liner notes to the western release of this CD weakly translate this as “You are Inhumane.” I prefer the more direct “Heartless Bastards,” though here “bastards” is conversely perhaps too strong for the Japanese “*shirazuya*.”

²³ Kamiya Chihiro, *Tinjāra*, Campus, MYCD 35013, 2004.

²⁴ Mongol 800, *Message*, Highwave, HICC-1201, 2001.

²⁵ Medoruma (2005) thus questions the correctness of talking about the “postwar” period in Okinawa.

²⁶ An anonymous reviewer of a prior version of this paper (Roberson 2009) objects that the songs discussed in this paper must be seen as commodities produced by a massive music industry, and that their potential as vehicles of resistance is thus reduced to being “facile deployments of cultural memory.” The reviewer is also “tired of every gesture being valorized in cultural studies analyses as a form of resistance.” I understand the need to be

cautious about the culture industry and reading everything as resistance. However, I also believe that it is dangerous to deny a priori the critical political significance of popular cultural production, particularly that by people who have been or are subjects of colonialism and imperialism. This is especially true in the case of Okinawa, where such resistance has been given voice for over 60 years in music and in other forms of cultural and political protest—including ongoing anti-war and anti-base movements and sentiments that in 2010 continue to intervene into US-Japan-Okinawan relationships and exercises of power.

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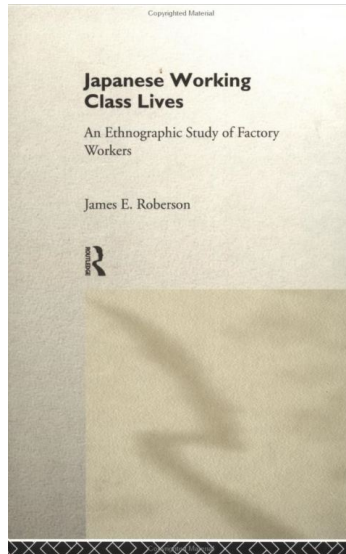
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