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BLOOMSBURY STUDIES IN TRANSLATION

Self-Translation

Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture

Edited by

ANTHONY CORDINGLEY

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GENERAL EDITOR'S COMMENT

The International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) provides a global forum for scholars and researchers concerned with translation and other forms of intercultural communication.

The Association facilitates the exchange of knowledge and resources among scholars in different parts of the world, stimulates interaction between researchers from diverse traditions and encourages scholars across the globe to explore issues of mutual concern and intellectual interest.

Among the Association's activities are the organization of conferences and workshops, the creation of web-based resources, and the publication of newsletters and scholarly books and journals.

The Translation Series published by Bloomsbury Academic in conjunction with IATIS is a key publication for the Association. It addresses the scholarly community at large, as well as the Association's members. Each volume presents a thematically coherent collection of essays, under the co-ordination of a prominent guest editor. The series thus seeks to be a prime instrument for the promotion and dissemination of innovative research, sound scholarship and critical thought in all areas that fall within the Association's purview.

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CHAPTER NINE

Indigenization and opacity: Self-translation in the Okinawan/ Ryūkyūan writings of Takara Ben and Medoruma Shun

Mark Gibeau

Abstract: As with many post-colonial writers, contemporary Okinawan writers are faced with a language dilemma. There is no single, neutral language upon which they can unthinkingly draw. Instead they must choose between variants of their native, local or ancestral tongues, the tongue of the colonizer (standardized Japanese) or some combination thereof. This paper examines how two contemporary writers, the poet Takara Ben and the novelist Medoruma Shun, integrate the language dilemma into their works and employ it as a mechanism for redefining contemporary Okinawan subjectivity vis-à-vis mainland Japan.

The paper examines how both writers use Okinawan/Ryūkyūan languages in their texts to resist the hegemonic dominance of mainland Japanese culture, language, historical narratives and identity. Through an analysis of the writers' use of language, self-translation, historical narratives and local culture I argue that the works function on a performative level to introduce a 'strategic opacity' into the texts in order to delimit the gaze of the mainland reader, to reject Japanese ethnocentrism and assert the existence of Okinawan difference.

In an article discussing post-colonial writing as translation Paul Bandia outlines the paradoxes facing the post-colonial writer of a minor literature. Building upon Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'minor literature' (16) Bandia writes of 'the impossibility of writing in the language of the oppressor [. . .] as well as the impossibility of doing otherwise' (353). Forced to write in an environment where language itself is an object of contention and where 'everything is political' (Deleuze and Guattari 17) the writer of a minor literature 'turns the literary machine into a revolutionary machine, claiming the right to difference' (Bandia 354).

The need to reclaim such a 'right to difference' is particularly important in the case of contemporary Okinawa. Subjected to a highly aggressive assimilation policy for over 100 years, Okinawa has been redefined as a 'branch' or variant of Japanese culture. In examining how contemporary Okinawan writers utilize translation to reassert their right to difference and to navigate a new form of cultural identity, the present investigation takes its cue from Bandia's application of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' to the realm of translation in post-colonial literature. This investigation will focus primarily on two contemporary writers: the poet, Takara Ben (born in 1949) and the novelist, Medoruma Shun (born in 1960), though other important literary figures – Sakiyama Tami, Ōshiro Tatsuhiro and Yamanokuchi Baku – will be discussed briefly in the final section.¹ Specifically, this article will look at the ways in which these two writers integrate Ryūkyūan² languages into their works and how strategic use of language serves the dual function of rendering Okinawa simultaneously visible and opaque to a mainland Japanese readership. The significance of this characterization of language will then be assessed in terms of what it holds for the translator.

The language dilemma

Okinawan writers face a dilemma common to many post-colonial writers in that there is no neutral language on which they can draw. They must choose between variants of their native, local or ancestral tongues, the tongue of the colonizer or some combination thereof. This decision carries with it a range of connotations that reflect back on the writer, the work and the work's stance vis-à-vis Okinawan political and cultural identity. To write in one of the many Ryūkyūan languages is, among other things, to convey the rhythm and concrete daily existence of the islands; it is to preserve what Wa Thiong'o calls the 'collective memory bank of a people's experience in history' (15), and to resist the 'passive colonial alienation' (28) that distances colonial subjects from their histories, cultures and languages. Furthermore, as many Ryūkyūan languages are being driven to

extinction by the overwhelming presence of the Japanese education system, mass media and popular culture, the act of writing keeps the language alive, if only just. In a sample of approximately 200 Okinawans surveyed, none identified themselves as speaking Okinawan languages 'very well' or 'fairly well', and most indicated that they could speak it only very little or not at all (Osumi 75–6). While the sample size is quite small in relation to the total population of Okinawa (approximately 1.31 million), the results are confirmed by the UNESCO online Atlas of Endangered Languages, which lists three Ryūkyūan languages as 'definitely endangered' and two Ryūkyūan languages as 'severely endangered'. To write in a Ryūkyūan language is to delimit the size and diversity of one's audience; in many respects, to write into a void (Molasky and Rabson 7–8; Cather 55–7).

Writers thus face the unsavoury choice of either 'betraying' their Ryūkyūan heritage by writing in the dominant language or of relegating themselves to a narrow readership and reducing the potential impact of their writings. Medoruma Shun, among others, has been criticized for using an 'impure' form of Okinawan dialect to gain a broader Japanese readership (Cather 55–6). However an either/or choice does not reflect the reality of contemporary Okinawa. After over a hundred years of assimilation, it is impossible to expunge all traces of Japanese and Japanese-ness and return to a pre-colonial utopia. Japanese language and culture are integral parts of Okinawan life and the works of these two writers – both of whom are fervent supporters of Ryūkyūan languages – are written mostly in standardized Japanese. This is not to say, of course, that there is no place for 'pure' Ryūkyūan languages in Okinawan literature or that standardized Japanese should be uncritically adopted. Okinawan identity and culture are defined by their hybridity and to fail to recognize that is to engage in cultural essentialism.

Before Okinawan writers can reclaim and redefine difference they must first render that difference visible. In Okinawa the campaign of assimilation has been so successful that not only do most Japanese see Okinawa as a natural part of Japan, the majority of Okinawans also see Okinawa and Okinawans as Japanese (Molasky 22; Lie 95). This view of Okinawa in relation to mainland Japan, coupled with the widely held (and deeply flawed) perception of Japan as an ethnically homogenous nation, results in Okinawans being relegated to the category of a largely invisible minority.

To be characterized as 'different' often means to be subjected to ethnocentrism, to be dehumanized and discriminated against. Accordingly, much post-colonial writing seeks to reclaim and redefine difference and employ that difference to undermine the hegemonic order of ethnocentrism. In Okinawa, however, the universalizing logic of colonialism has been taken to such an insidious extreme that Okinawans are not recognized as non-Japanese even as they remain objects of exclusion and discrimination.

Oscillating identities: Redefinitions of Okinawan otherness

The position of Ryūkyū islanders as a invisible minority is a modern development. During the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) both the ruling Tokugawa shogunate and the Satsuma domain, the Ryūkyū kingdom's closest Japanese neighbour, emphasized the kingdom's 'foreignness'. The kingdom's position as a foreign state enabled the Satsuma domain – which invaded the kingdom in the seventeenth century and forced it to pay heavy tributes and taxes – to circumvent the prohibition on foreign trade as proscribed in the 'closed country' policy of the Tokugawa government (Oguma 18–19). The Tokugawa government, keen to represent itself as a central power dominating lesser states, wanted to maintain the visibility of difference between Japan and the Ryūkyūs. Thus, Ryūkyūans were forbidden to adopt Japanese dress or the Japanese language and assimilation was actively discouraged (Oguma 19). Tributary missions to Japan were required to wear suitably 'foreign' garb to ensure that the members of the mission not be mistaken for Japanese (Morris-Suzuki, *Reinventing* 19).

Far from being assimilated as Japanese, the difference between Okinawans and Japanese was specifically insisted upon until the late nineteenth century. When the Ryūkyū kingdom was annexed and reconfigured as 'Okinawa Prefecture' in the new modern nation-state of Japan the differences between Okinawa prefecture and the rest of Japan were remapped onto the temporal axis. That is, the Okinawans could not be seen as fundamentally different from Japanese – for they were now part of a single, homogenous nation state – so their difference was attributed to backwardness, superstition and the unfortunate influence of China. Okinawans were fundamentally the same as mainlanders, only a bit behind the times (Morris-Suzuki, 'A Descent' 81–94; *Reinventing* 28). Similarly, in *Okinawa no gengoshi* Hokama Shuzen demonstrates that Ryūkyūan languages are often seen not as separate languages but as dialects of Japanese frozen in the distant past. Folklorists and ethnologists such as Yanagita Kunio, Shibusawa Keizō and artists such as Okamoto Tarō characterize Okinawa as a 'treasure house' of Japanese culture that has vanished from the mainland (Christy 623; Lie 95).

To not be considered 'non-Japanese' is, of course, very different from being treated as an equal. Though the most blatant forms of discrimination to which Okinawans were subjected over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have largely disappeared, the prefecture remains the poorest in the country, it has the lowest percentage of students going on to university and the highest divorce rates. Unemployment is double the national average and, to the great resentment of many Okinawans, the prefecture houses approximately three-quarters of all the US forces

stationed in Japan, despite the islands constituting less than one per cent of Japan's overall landmass (Molasky 22; Lie 100; Tanji 1).

As Tomiyama notes, the historical relationship between mainland Japanese and the Ryūkyū islanders has been characterized by a frenetic oscillation between the desire both to assimilate and to other the Ryūkyūan (168). Historically the Ryūkyūan served to define, by means of contrast, what it meant to be 'Japanese', while at the same time being placed within the realm of Japanese (albeit at a temporal remove). This oscillation – what Tomiyama calls an 'incomprehensibility' that emerges from the 'inaccessible reality' of the Ryūkyūan – bears within it the potential to 'shake and rattle the relationship that defined "the Japanese" and "the Ryūkyūan"', thus triggering a crisis into which the uniformity known as "the Japanese" would plunge' (168). While Tomiyama is referring primarily to the early twentieth century, the works of Takara Ben, Medoruma Shun and other contemporary Okinawan writers can be seen as trying to revive and amplify this oscillation for their own purposes. By pushing the 'incomprehensibility' of the Ryūkyūan to a crisis point, they may force a contemporary re-evaluation of the very meaning of 'the Ryūkyūan' and 'the Japanese'.

Takara Ben: Writing from the in-between

Takara Ben is a prominent Okinawan intellectual, former high school chemistry teacher, editor of various Okinawa-related journals, literary critic, political activist, proponent of Ryūkyūan independence and a poet. In his poetry, Takara employs both Ryūkyūan language and self-translation, and juxtaposing this linguistic strategy with the historical and cultural trauma of the islands, he cultivates that 'inaccessible reality', or strategic opacity, which pushes the mainland reader to the brink of Tomiyama's 'crisis point'.

Before commencing, however, it is important to note that the bulk of Takara Ben's poetry is written almost entirely in standardized Japanese. Only poems that focus specifically on events or themes that are inextricably tied to Ryūkyūan culture, history and identities employ Ryūkyūan languages in a prominent manner. The relatively small number of such poems, nevertheless, does not reduce their significance but rather emphasizes the larger, metatextual significance of the poet's choice of language. It is because the poet is trying to negotiate a space for Ryūkyūan identity and subjectivity within and against the dominant Japanese language and culture that language and translation come to the forefront.

'Cape Kyan' is representative of this smaller subset of Ryūkyūan poems. Whereas his other poems freely interject Ryūkyūan terms into standardized Japanese verse – employing various cushioning devices to make their meaning clear to the mainland reader – his self-translations do not allow

Ryūkyūan and Japanese to intermingle: the two poems are presented as two separate versions, with the Ryūkyūan text running across the top of the page and, carefully separated by a blank space, the Japanese version below. Rotating the text to the horizontal axis, romanizing its script and adding Takara's own English translation (*Koeru* 105), an excerpt of 'Cape Kyan' appears as follows:

(Ryūkyūan)	(Japanese)
うらみん・あわりん・ちむむげーいん Uramin, awarin, chimumugeein	怨み・悲しみ・怒りを Urami, kanashimi, ikari o (To break Grudge, Grief)
ていちなーていちなーわていくだち Teichinaa teichinaa watei kudachi	一つ一つ打ち砕き hitotsu hitotsu uchi kudaki (And rage one by one)
胸内ぬ底なかいしじみーんどおー Muni uchinu sukunakai shijimiindoo	心の奥深く沈める kokoro no okufukaku shizumeru (Sink into my soul deeply)
ちゃんざちよー Chanzachi yoo	喜屋武岬よ (Takara 1994, 101) Kyanmisaki yo (Oh CAPE KYAN)

The eye goes to the Ryūkyūan version first – it being at the top of the page – and the reader of standardized Japanese is immediately struck by its almost complete unintelligibility. Only a handful of scattered words can be understood. Thwarted by the Ryūkyūan version, the reader must turn to the Japanese texts at the bottom of the page. When reading the poem in public, the poet adopts a similarly disorienting approach, reading only the Ryūkyūan version of the poem while those who are not proficient in Ryūkyūan (usually the entire audience) are left to follow along using a bilingual written version.³

Why publish a poem in a language that very few readers know and read a poem in a language that none of the listeners can understand? In readings given on the mainland to an audience of non-Okinawan listeners the poet is almost invariably the only person who can understand what he is saying. The significance of the two versions is further complicated by the fact that there is no 'Ryūkyūan original' or 'Japanese translation' at all. Rather, the poet composes the Japanese version first and then writes a Ryūkyūan version, neither one neither being a simple translation of the other nor being completely independent (Takara, 'Interview'). The processes of composition and performance indicate that the object is not primarily to bridge the gap between languages – in that case the softer approach he adopts in his other poems would be more appropriate. Rather, the poem itself constitutes a performance of difference and the gap between the languages becomes

a central component of the poem. The Ryūkyūan version delimits the mainland reader's gaze, rejecting attempts at assimilation and acculturation, while the Japanese version enables the reader to understand just enough to realize how much of that Ryūkyūan reality remains inaccessible. The poem revives the 'incomprehensibility' that once threatened the stability of 'the Japanese' while simultaneously carving out a space in which Ryūkyūan subjectivity can be explored.

Just as the languages of the poem alienate the reader, the content of the poem reveals the gaps between the historical narratives of the mainland reader and the Ryūkyūan poet. Cape Kyan is the southernmost point of the island of Okinawa and also a site of one of the many 'group suicides', or what Norma Field terms 'compulsory group suicides' (61), that were one of the more tragic consequences of the Battle of Okinawa.⁴ A Memorial to Peace stands at the Cape commemorating those who died. Located approximately 15 kilometres from Takara Ben's birthplace, the Cape functions as an important symbol of the modern Okinawan experience in Takara Ben's writing.

As with many Okinawan writers, the Battle of Okinawa, and the suffering incurred by the civilian population, is critical in defining Takara Ben's understanding of 'the Ryūkyūan' and 'the Japanese'. The Okinawan islands were the site of the largest land battle on Japanese 'home' territory during the Pacific War. Although it was clear by early 1945 that the war was lost, the emperor refused to consider surrender, instead insisting that one more major victory first be won in order to wrest concessions from the Allies – the foremost of these concessions being the preservation of the imperial throne. The Battle of Okinawa was intended to delay attacks on the mainland and to inflict heavy casualties upon the Allies. This would give Japan more time and more leverage to negotiate surrender. Okinawa was deliberately positioned as a 'sacrificial pawn' despite the knowledge that military and civilian casualties would be devastating (Bix 487–93; Ienaga 229–31; Ishihara 89–91; Arasaki 2–3).

In late 1944, the allies dropped incendiary bombs on the city of Naha, destroying approximately 90 per cent of the city and killing or wounding nearly 8,000 people. A few months later, the air raids were followed by a seemingly endless naval bombardment known as the 'typhoon of steel', which left hardly a single building standing, and in some cases even altered the shapes of mountains (*Heisbitachi no sensō*). While exact figures vary, approximately one-third of the entire population – some 65,000 soldiers from the Japanese mainland, 30,000 soldiers conscripted from Okinawa and 94,000 civilians – was killed in the battle. Those who survived were left homeless and severely malnourished (Arasaki 2–3; Molasky 17–18; Ienaga 199).

Compulsory group suicides were one of the more horrific aspects of the battle; many civilians and Japanese soldiers committed suicide when capture by the Allies was imminent. However these suicides were not

necessarily acts of fanaticism. Indeed, many were coerced by a Japanese military that did not want to see potential sources of intelligence fall into the hands of the enemy. Furthermore, both civilians and soldiers had long been subjected to propaganda campaigns designed to convince the populace that various atrocities, tortures and abuses awaited any Japanese so unfortunate as to be captured by the Allied Forces – beliefs reinforced by what some of the Japanese soldiers had done themselves in China. The act of suicide was thus more often than not a result of desperation and terror (Yakabi 164–71; Field 61; Ienaga 185). Cape Kyan is one of many such sites where civilians and military personnel committed ‘group suicide’ or ‘compulsory group suicide’. Groups of Japanese soldiers and civilians, driven to the southernmost point of the island by the Allied advance, leapt from the cliffs of Cape Kyan.

The poem, of which the above is only a small excerpt, is structured as a series of images: farmers tilling the red earth of the Cape; the timelessness of the waves; the bright sun on the memorial; traces of blood washed out to sea; prayers offered to the dead. The Cape – a synecdoche for the Ryūkyū islands – is an image of an unchanging natural purity that transcends human grief. It stands amid the waves, the rocks below and the blue sea, each the same as they have always been, but to the narrator this ‘pure’ nature will always be stained with the blood of those who threw themselves into the sea. Even as he prays for the souls of those killed, he struggles to contain his rage towards those responsible.

While all Japanese suffered during the war, there is something qualitatively different about the experience of the Okinawans. Used as pawns by the Emperor and military command, bombarded and attacked by the Americans, Okinawans were also threatened and attacked by their own army. Japanese soldiers murdered civilians for their food, their hiding spots, for surrendering to the enemy (and being subsequently released), for making noises that might give away their position and so on. Of the officially verified 298 executions of Okinawan residents by the Japanese military – the actual figure is thought to number in the thousands – the most common reason for execution given was suspicion of spying (Yakabi 165). Orders for regiments stationed in Okinawa treated the mere act of speaking in the local language as evidence of spying and ordered that such people be ‘disposed of’ (*Heishitachi no sensō*; Yakabi 165). In some instances civilians were lined up and executed for no discernable reason whatsoever (Molasky and Rabson 22). Medoruma Shun’s hometown of Nakijin was the site of one such ‘spy hunt’ (Yakabi 167) and the sudden disappearance of men figures in his novella *Mabuigumi*.

The narrator of the poem is more than simply grief stricken. Not only was Okinawa colonized by Japan, it was then betrayed by the military and an emperor, whose duty it was to protect them. The narrator is on the verge of being overcome by his rage.⁵ This rage is not an abstract deception provoked by the injustice of war or the Americans. It is anger

at mainland Japan’s betrayal of Okinawa. While they may empathize with the Okinawan, this rage no doubt provokes in the mainland reader a sense of alienation no less substantial than the wall of Ryūkyūan text running across the top of the page. Mainland readers can thus experience the poem and feel its emotions in ‘translation’, but they are confronted with a linguistic barrier designed to ‘other’ them, to make them aware of their delimited experience of the poem. Use of the local speech, which was once a capital crime, is thus resurrected to drive home the consequences of difference: recognizing how subjects are positioned differently by historical narratives makes one aware of ‘other’ experiences and traumas of war and its aftermath.

Insofar as translation is considered to be a communicative act, Takara Ben’s poem is perhaps best interpreted as an act of anti-translation instead of self-translation. His deliberately ‘self-othering’ approach does not attempt to convey a message to the reader so much as it attempts to emphasize the reader’s inability to understand that message, occupying the gap between the poem’s language and the reader. It highlights the limits of the mainland reader’s gaze and, through its opacity, signals the depth of cultural and historical experience that the mainland reader cannot share. The poem is not a communicative act but an untranslatable ‘surplus’ of meaning lost in translation, what Venuti calls a ‘remainder’ which ‘[. . .] exceed[s] communication of univocal meaning and instead draw[s] attention to the conditions of the communicative act, conditions that are in the first instance linguistic and cultural but that ultimately embrace social and political factors’ (471). This ‘remainder’ constitutes the poem’s *raison d’être*. It must not be domesticated or supplanted by the target language, lest the critical historical dimension of the text be lost (Venuti 472).

In Takara Ben’s poem the ‘remainder’ the historical, linguistic and ongoing political conditions of the communicative act overpower the communicative component of the Japanese version, making the ‘meaning’ of the poem secondary to the display of that which cannot be communicated. There is no original or translation in Takara Ben’s poem, rather the poem itself exists in the tension between the two – in the white space between the Japanese and Ryūkyūan poems, between Japanese and Ryūkyūan histories and identities, between ‘the Japanese’ and ‘the Ryūkyūan’.

Medoruma Shun: Writing in the margins

Medoruma Shun first came to national prominence in 1997 when he won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for the combination of his anti-realist tone, the strong sense of the ‘*locale*’ and his unflinching treatment of the Battle of Okinawa (Maruya et al. 427–8). Since then he has gone on to win numerous other literary prizes and in 2004 his story ‘Fūon’ or ‘The crying

wind' was made into a film and received the Innovation Award at the 2004 Montreal World Film Festival.

As with many Okinawan writers, Medoruma Shun is highly attentive to the range of island languages and the subtleties conveyed by the employment of each. In his article, 'Uchinaaguchi to Yamatoguchi no aida de' (between Okinawan language and Japanese language) he discusses not only the significance of using Okinawan (or Japanese) but also the sociopolitical nuances conveyed by the extent to which people speak the creole – uchinaayamatoguchi – that exists between the two languages (see Bhowmik 131–2). Indeed, the linguistic hybridity of Medoruma's 1997 novella, 'Suiteki' ('Droplets', translated in 2000) is a compelling example of how multilingual writing offers a mode of self-translation with strong political implications. In this work the dialogue of the villagers – the older residents in particular – is written largely in the Okinawan dialect native to the author's hometown of Nakijin. As Ikeda notes, language becomes a mechanism to delineate and stratify the social structure of the village itself: outsiders, characters affiliated with the mainland and/or its institutions, tend to speak in standardized Japanese; on the other hand, the protagonist Uta, as the shamanness or 'yuta' of the village, speaks in the local dialect of Okinawan; whereas the speech of younger characters tends to be less heavily inflected (118–19, 143). Critical attention has been devoted to how this choice of language plays an important function in the delineation of characters within the novel. Yet little has been said with respect to the effect of Medoruma's use of Okinawan languages on the reader of standardized Japanese.

When Medoruma writes a dialogue in Okinawan, he writes in something very close to standardized Japanese, appending a gloss which provides the Okinawan rendition. Excerpts from his novella, 'Droplets', Romanized and translated, appear as follows:

「珍しいことあるものやさ」

mijira kuto

mezurashii koto mo aru mono ya sa (Medoruma, 'Suiteki' 11)

'Mighty strange' (Rabson translation, 256)

「何が、我つ達徳正や見せ物るやんな。」

nuu watta mishimun

Nani ga, wattatchi Tokushou ya misemonoru yan na (Medoruma 11)

'What do you think this is, some kind of freak show?' (Rabson, 256)

「何しが来やーが」

n u u ch

Nani shiga kyaa ga (Medoruma 23)

'What in hell's name you doin' here?' (Rabson, 265)

The technique employed here is a combination of self-translation and what Zabus, referring to techniques in African writing, has called 'cushioning' (7). The main line of dialogue – that which appears below the superscripted gloss – while much closer to standard Japanese than the glossed version, is nonetheless inflected. The author appears to bend the language in the main line of dialogue and, once he reaches a breaking point, shifts the Okinawan language into the gloss. If only the gloss were provided the dialogue would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the reader of standard Japanese to follow.

The constant presence of Okinawan language on the margin of the reader's vision has the effect of jarring the reader out of the flow of the narrative. The gap between what is 'said' and written – the space between Okinawan and Japanese – is reinforced throughout the text. As such, Medoruma's glossing diverges from the conventional function of glossing in intercultural texts. While considered to be a less-than-ideal explanatory apparatus which suffers from the defects of being both bulky and distracting, glossing is one mechanism by which transcultural texts can resist complete domestication by the target language – allowing for the inclusion of 'native' terms while retaining intelligibility for non-native readers (Ashcroft et al. 60–5). In Medoruma's case, however, Okinawan words are not glossed with Japanese equivalents; it is the other way around and the Okinawan language lurks in the spaces between the lines. The gloss does not serve an explanatory function as the meaning is already clear in the body of the text, rather, it disrupts the flow of the narrative and forces the reader to consider what has been omitted, serving as a visible reconstitution of the 'domestic remainder', that which played such a critical role in Takara Ben's poetry. By insisting on the visibility of the gap between languages the gloss enables the text to retain that which cannot be fully expressed in either language, but only through the tension and ambiguity that exists between them. The function of the gloss is thus not so much one of translation as it is of transculturation. The distinction between the two lies, for Maria Tymoczko, in that transculturation may involve the transportation of 'a culture [. . .] a language, a cognitive system, a literature [. . .], a material culture, a social system and legal framework, a history [. . .]' (20).

Writing and translating contemporary Okinawa

The writers discussed thus far are only two of a large number of Okinawan writers who have grappled and continue to grapple with the problem of Okinawan-Japanese relations, language, identity and representation. Motohama's dissertation on Ōshiro Tatsuhirō, the first Okinawan novelist to attain widespread recognition in Japan, shows how Ōshiro tries to navigate the difficulties involved in constructing an Okinawan subjectivity while continuing to engage with Japan. More radically, Sakiyama Tami adopts an approach somewhat reminiscent of Tawada Yōko, in which language becomes a tool to fracture and disrupt calcified meanings and structures. Sakiyama's desire for her writing and her languages to behave like Bandia's 'revolutionary machine' (354) of post-colonial translation is evident in her portrayal of her writing strategy:

[. . .] island language will detonate an explosion in the solid, high rise building, steeped in history, we call Japanese. When it comes into contact with suicide bombing island language, this Japanese building will break into smithereens. (qtd. in Bhowmik 166–7)

In 'Shell-Shocked Island', Yamanokuchi Baku offers a different image of this complex intersection of language, history and politics. Yamanokuchi is Okinawa's most prominent poet and has been a powerful influence on Takara Ben, who even devoted himself to a study of Yamanokuchi, *Boku wa bunmei o kanashinda*. In 'Shell-Shocked Island' the poet's attempts to engage islanders in the local language is met with their awkward smiles, causing him to wonder if even the local language had been destroyed in the war. Indeed, this situation is emblematic of the tension between languages which preoccupies contemporary Okinawan writers and which often governs the tropes within their works. Furthermore, the scene in Yamanokuchi's 'Shell-Shocked Island' exemplifies an inescapable component of much Okinawan writing: the need to inscribe the tension between the writer of the minor language and the culturally dominant Japanese readership.

This critical and complex relationship between languages in Okinawan writers presents a daunting challenge to the translator. How to translate translations that are anti-translations, disruptions, explosions and laments? How can one replicate the tension and contested identities that emerge out of the hybridity of the text? The translators of Medoruma Shun and Takara Ben, and other Okinawan writers, have deployed a variety of strategies. Michael Molasky's English translation of Medoruma's 'Suiteki' ('Droplets') in 2000 renders the language into a somewhat equivalent dialect in the target language. On the other hand, Kyle Ikeda's English version of Medoruma's 'Mabuigumi' leaves the dialect intact, providing parenthetical translations in English. Alternatively, translating Takara Ben, Norma Field chooses

to leave key terms in their (Romanized) original, relying on footnotes to convey the nuances of the original to the reader (Takara, 'Dream' 51–5).

Regardless of the strategy adopted, it is essential that the translator be aware of the presence and significance of the tension between Okinawan and the 'official' language, its historical contexts and, at least in the works addressed here, this tension's important, performative function. To return to Bandia, it is essential that the translator be committed to 'an ethics of difference whose main objective is to safeguard [. . .] linguistic and cultural specificity' (359).

Notes

- 1 All Japanese names are listed in Japanese order, surname followed by given name.
- 2 One of the first issues encountered when studying Okinawa is that of nomenclature. There is no politically neutral term for the region, culture, history, language and people. Independence activists – Takara Ben among them – prefer the term Ryūkyūan over Okinawan as a means to highlight the region's past and its distinct history. Furthermore the terms 'Okinawan' or 'Ryūkyūan' conceal the enormous amount of diversity between the various islands contained in 'Okinawa'. Accordingly, while this will necessarily generate some degree of confusion itself, the terms Ryūkyū, Ryūkyūan, Okinawa, Okinawan, islands and islanders will be used as appropriate to the particular context.
- 3 I was fortunate enough to attend two public readings of this poem, once on 14 May 2004 and again on 30 September 2006. In both cases, the poet read the Ryūkyūan version of the poem only.
- 4 The term 'group suicide' (集団自決) is problematic as it conceals the various forms of compulsion – direct, indirect, physical and psychological – that drove groups of civilians and soldiers to end their lives rather than be captured. Norma Field has proposed the term 'compulsory group suicide' (61) as a more accurate alternative, a term that has since been adopted by Japanese scholars.
- 5 It should be noted that while the Okinawans were undoubtedly victimized by the Japanese military they were also active participants in the military campaign and, as one-third of the military personnel were recruited from Okinawans, they were also victimizers (Yakibi 149–77).

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