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Rethinking Resistance in Everyday Okinawa: Diaspora, Transformation and Minor Literature

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DAVINDER L. BHOWMIK. *Writing Okinawa: Narrative Acts of Identity and Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. 248 pp. US\$170.00, hardcover.

CHRISTOPHER T. NELSON. *Dancing with the Dead: Memory, Performance and Everyday Life in Okinawa*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008. 277 pp. US\$22.95, paper.

YOSHITAKA TERADA (director). *Drumming Out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan*. DVD, 75 minutes, not for commercial distribution, 2005. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

The Okinawan people's resistance has come full circle since the uprising of 1995, in which 85,000 residents protested against the rape of a local schoolgirl by three United States soldiers, giving rise to a "third wave" of the postwar "Okinawan struggle" (Tanji, 2006; Arasaki, 2005). The first and second waves of protest refer to a series of mass protests against the forceful land seizure by the US military's "bulldozers and bayonets" for military base construction in the mid-1950s; and subsequently the all-island campaign for reversion to Japan, which eventuated in 1972. The "third wave" of Okinawan protests are generally about demanding safety and human rights for Okinawan people, still neglected under the continuing excessively heavy US military presence. This third wave of protest continues, most prominently against the Japanese government's plan to relocate the Futenma US Marine Corps Air Station, which requires land reclamation from the pristine ocean off Henoko, a seaside hamlet in northeastern Okinawa Main Island. But the

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spectrum of resistance extends – as it always has – beyond the explicit US military presence. In September 2007, 110,000 Okinawans demonstrated their anger at the central government’s history textbook censorship, which eliminated descriptions of the Japanese state and military’s responsibility for Okinawan civilian suicides and killings during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, known as the bloodiest World War II battlefield in the Pacific. The 2007 textbook revisions united residents in their anger at the continuing history of Japanese colonialism and discrimination (Tanji, 2010), expressed most audaciously today in the still-operating US Air Station in Futenma and Japan’s persistence with its relocation to Henoko (Norimatsu, 2011).¹

Unlike the ups and downs of public dissent, everyday memories related to historical events are publicly shared and reconstructed in cultural activities in everyday Okinawa. In my study of the community of protest in Okinawa, I conceptualised the idea of the “Okinawan struggle” as a crucible of informal and formal memories of historical events that are preserved in stories, myths and public cultural expressions, creating a unified political subject (Tanji, 2006, pp. 7–8). Literature, for example, is a significant cultural domain that constructs and preserves a “society’s memory” by rendering “personal memories ... social”: “different types of memory (personal, social, historical, etc.)” and history are distinctive yet “contested, interdependent areas of inquiry” (Molasky, 1999, p. 2, p. 4). An increasing number of recent studies have focused on various forms of cultural memory, as inspirations for resistance to Okinawa’s current political predicament, arguably shaping a sub-field of Okinawan studies (for instance, Gerow, 2003; Ko, 2006; Roberson, 2009; Molasky, 2003). James Roberson, for example, argues that Okinawan popular song lyrics longing for peace are an important “poetic site of resistance to experiences of war and the continuing American military presence” (2009, p. 701). This review essay examines the connection of cultural memory to political resistance explored in three recent works on Okinawan popular culture.

The two books and documentary film reviewed here focus on *eisa* and fiction writing as significant cultural sites of memory and, although not always obvious, resistance. *Eisa* is a traditional Okinawan dance performance dedicated to ancestral spirits and performed during the annual festival for their return, accompanied by Ryukyu-style costumes, drums, *sanshin* (Okinawan three-string lute), and folk songs (Thompson, 2008, p. 307). *Drumming out a Message* is a film documentary that records the history of a thriving *eisa* annual festival performed by the Okinawan diaspora in Osaka. Here, the diaspora’s *eisa* is depicted as a cultural process of migrants’ reconciliation with Okinawan identity; whereas *Dancing with the Dead* explores *eisa* and other forms of cultural expression such as storytelling, comedy theatre, and poetry unique to the regional locality of Okinawa City (named Koza by the US authority) in central Okinawa Main Island, where the author first arrived as a US marine in 1985. *Writing Okinawa* examines Okinawan fiction as a genre of literature, “a creative space in which Okinawa’s authors express particular concerns that bear a relation to Okinawa’s past, present, and future” (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 3). Although vastly different in scope and method of inquiry, all authors illuminate the critical cultural activities that reconcile with memories of the past that inform current political realities and the imagining of a different future. In particular, how do they account for the recent articulation of anger towards Japan’s continuing colonialism in the community of protest in Okinawa?

Reconciliation with Okinawan Roots: *Eisa* in the Diasporic Community of Osaka

Drumming out a Message is set in contemporary Taisho Ward, the largest diasporic neighbourhood of Osaka, with 20,000 Okinawan migrants or direct descendants among its population of 70,000. *Eisa* as depicted in this documentary began a few years after Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972, in a specific generational context of Okinawan diaspora. The *eisa* festival was introduced in the mid-1970s by the Banyan Association (*Gajumaru no kai*) – a coalition of Okinawan youth groups across Osaka and surrounding regions (Hyogo, Nara, Kyoto), composed mainly of workers of the baby boom generation in their 20-30s, either migrants or their descendants born in *yamato* (mainland Japan). This documentary is a significant visual record of how *eisa* contributed to the recovery of migrants' self-respect and Okinawan identity, away from their place of origin. With very little authorial narrative, the political significance of cultural dance performance is conveyed mainly by the interviews with performers, which are particularly intriguing.

When the Banyan members originally started the annual *eisa* festival practice in front of Osaka Castle, the public display of *eisa* disturbed first-generation migrant Okinawans: *Kenjin-kai* of Taisho Ward refused the request from the Banyan Association to use one of its four large tents for the *eisa* festival. A male Banyan member reflects: "I pointed out they did sponsor classical Ryukyū dancing". He went on, "the classical dancing is done indoors, watched only by other Okinawans. But with *eisa*, it's different. Out in the open, you never know who's watching" (24:10–24:29). Understanding the early migrants' discomfort requires some familiarity with the historical significance attached to Okinawan cultural attributes for migrants in Osaka, beyond the extent explored by the film.

After annexation by Japan in 1879, Okinawa Prefecture's underdeveloped local industry, lack of government protection scheme, and the sugar price fall in the 1920s caused severe poverty that produced a massive exodus of the Okinawan labour force – to *yamato*, and to the colonies of the prewar Japanese empire in Taiwan and the Pacific islands, Hawaii, Latin America and beyond (Nakasone, 2002; Matsuda, 2008). The largest number went to major cities in mainland Japan in search of work. As early as 1914, Okinawan neighbourhoods began to form in the Osaka area, often in flood-prone areas near the river, associated with images of slums. These neighbourhoods provided mutual support systems; residents could communicate in Ryukyuan languages and have access to traditional food, liquor and music (Rabson, 2003, pp. 105–09). The Okinawan population in the Osaka-Kobe area grew from 1,575 in 1920 to 53,670 in 1940 (Rabson, 2003, p. 101). From a sudden over-supply of newly arrived migrants in Osaka in the 1920–30s emerged a distinctively "Okinawan labour market" – a pool of labour that was characteristically cheap, seasonal, and hired in large numbers (Tomiyama, 1990, pp. 131–32). Okinawan names, music, attire, distinctive accent when speaking Japanese, and residence in Okinawan neighbourhoods served as "codes" that distinguished Okinawan labour as a socioeconomically disadvantaged class. The ambitious migrants who considered cultural "codes" an obstacle to upward socioeconomic mobility played a particularly important role in the so-called "self-improvement" campaign among Okinawan migrants in Japan from the 1930s until the end of World War II.² The alleged Okinawan traits that were targeted for correction were, in particular, use of

Ryukyuan languages (dialects), lack of punctuality, scruffy appearance, staying up late drinking, and being seen in public performing Okinawan music and theatre in traditional costumes (Tomiyama, 1990, pp. 133–68, pp. 198–232). *Eisa* was therefore at the top of the list of prohibited cultural activities. The earlier migrants' fear of being seen performing *eisa* derived from their traumatic personal memories of experiencing abuse, deception and discrimination.

Paradoxically, however, Okinawan migrants strongly valued their unique ethnic roots. Working-class Okinawans tended to stay in the ethnically Okinawan neighbourhoods, even after achieving higher socioeconomic status (Tomiyama, 1990, pp. 221–26).³ Taisho Ward, the location of Terada's film, was one such working-class neighbourhood, with residents torn between repressing their Okinawan cultural traits in public, and at the same time thriving on special ties to the "Okinawan" tradition. In this environment, Okinawan music, particularly traditional folk songs or *shimauta* (island songs), characterised by the use of *sanshin* (Ryukyuan scales and lyrics), thrived in the disadvantaged ethnic culture in Osaka (de Ferranti, 2009, pp. 240–41). It was in Osaka that Marufuku Records, the first record company to commercially market Okinawan popular music, was established in 1927 by migrant Fukuhara Choki.⁴ This record company from Osaka exported traditional Ryukyuan music and *shimauta* to overseas migrant Okinawan markets (Kuriyama, 2010, p. 300).⁵

Terada's film is witness to a turning point in the expansion of public cultural performance in the diasporic Okinawans in Osaka in the early 1970s.⁶ According to a male Banyan member, Kinjo Kaoru, discrimination was a major issue in the 1970s. In their everyday lives, the Japanese gaze at any sign of difference would make the Okinawan migrants self-conscious: "some had trouble expressing themselves, leading to awkwardness and misunderstandings, which worsened the discriminatory attitudes on the Japanese side" (Terada, 2005, 18:07–50). Kinjo explains the effect of *eisa*:

I had never seen *eisa* performance: it was completely the first time for me... But it stimulated something already living inside me. The shell was broken, and my roots came out: it was moving... In *eisa* practice, as we beat the drums, our expressions changed; we became more alive, animated and relaxed. *Yamatonchu* (the Japanese) stopped and watched us, but no one looked at us in a particularly funny way. When we expressed ourselves freely and openly, people around us more easily accepted the way we were (Kinjo Kaoru in Terada, 2005, 7:35–8:05; 19:25–20:12).

Eisa enabled Banyan members to confront and overcome the internalised *yamato* gaze on Okinawan cultural differences, inherited from the previous generation. The history of the diaspora's *eisa* in Osaka filmed by Terada records a process of reconciliation: by performing *eisa* in public, Okinawan migrants and their descendants confronted and accepted their Okinawan identity. The diasporic Okinawans not only overcame the stigma attached to Okinawan culture but also the self-imposed alienation from their Okinawan roots to "become good Japanese workers".

This process of reconciliation is simultaneously a resistance to the basic formula of *yamato* understanding of Okinawan culture: the "archaic other to modern Japan" (Christy, 1993, p. 627). Since the abolition of the Ryukyu Kingdom and annexation

to Japan in the late 1870s, the ethnology of the islands of Okinawa was of political importance for the modernising Japanese state, to claim their naturalised position inside the southern border of the Japanese state (Tomiyama, 1998). In the 1920s, folk scholar Yanagita Kunio stressed the importance of understanding the local linguistic forms and shamanistic practices found in the islands of Ryukyu, as the reservoir of the ancient elements of Japan that were rapidly disappearing with modernisation, urbanisation and industrial development. The excesses of modernisation in Japan since the Meiji era required a counterpoint, thus assigning a therapeutic role to Okinawa. In this context, Okinawa is represented as the “hometown or native place” (*furusato*): a place to return for solace, a society that possesses something that Japan has lost (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 44).

Since the mid-1990s, there has been an “Okinawa boom”, whereby “Okinawan culture” has been commodified into utopian, pre-modern images. While these images contribute to Japan’s “cosmetic multiculturalism”,⁷ they actually have the political effect of obscuring the violence and injustices of the Okinawan social predicament (Ko, 2006, pp. 156–57; Tanaka, 2003, p. 421). Thus overtly positive interpretations of Okinawa as comprising idyllic tropical islands with endlessly generous natives are a continuing expression of “subconscious colonialism” (Nomura, 2005). This is the rationale for *yamato*’s pathological dependence on Okinawa, as the majority (75 per cent) of US military bases stationed in Japan congregate on one island, fulfilling the Japanese need for maintaining an alliance with the US. For *yamatonchu* (Japanese people) to enthusiastically proclaim their love for Okinawa is to continue exploiting it: usually such enthusiasm is expressed innocently, making colonial oppression through cultural politics “subconscious” (Nomura, 2005, pp. 163–65, p. 179).

Terada’s documentary depicts the uncomfortable tension between Banyan members and the mainland Japanese, who wish to perform *eisa* in Taisho-ku, pursuing their romanticised vision of Okinawan culture, imposing their own ideas of how the festival should run. The attraction of *eisa* fans from *yamato* embodies the gaze on Okinawa as a romanticised archaic version of Japan. Here Banyan members and *yamatonchu* confront the legacies of (subconscious) colonialism: in this case the *yamatonchu* normally chooses to step back from taking charge (Terada, 2005, 45:10–36). Rather than being an act of simple exclusion, this process reveals the historical and political role of *eisa* in re-defining Okinawa’s cultural difference in diasporic communities. In *eisa*, then, we see that shared forms of cultural practice and memory provide a distinct site for both political resistance and reconciliation.

Dancing *Eisa* in Koza: Transforming Memories

In contrast to *Drumming out a Message*, *Dancing with the Dead* achieves the seemingly impossible feat of communicating the political implications of *eisa* purely in writing. Nelson does not speak outright of “resistance”. Rather, the political ramifications of his anthropological accounts of multiple cultural forms in central Okinawa are hinted at in a quote from Marx’s letter to a friend:

Our campaign slogan must be: reform of consciousness, not through dogma, but through the analysis of that mystical consciousness which has not yet become clear to itself. It will then turn out that the world has long dreamt of

that which it had only to form a clear idea of in order to really possess it. It will turn out that it is not a question of any conceptual rupture between past and future, but rather the completion of the thoughts of the past (*Letter to Ruge*, cited in Nelson, 2008, p. 27).

“That mystical consciousness of the past” is resurrected in ubiquitous moments of remembrance and their transformative possibilities in the present, including political resistance and potential for reform: the book sensitively captures many of these moments.

Nelson’s exploration of Central Okinawan culture is closely linked to the historical narrative of *yadui*: the settlement villages of former samurai nobility families of the Ryukyu Court. With Japanese annexation that abolished the kingdom in 1879, former samurai clans were dispersed from the old capital Shuri to other parts of Okinawa, cut off from their privileges and old way of life, becoming farmers and labourers. In particular, Nelson probes cultural memories of *yadui* in the comedy theatre in the Koza area, which encompasses the Kadena US Air Base, with strong traces of GIs during the Vietnam War era in the bar districts – recalled by, among others, legendary musician and humorist Teruya Rinsuke, and media personality and actor Fujiki Hayato (also, Nelson, 2001; 2003). In the cultural activities developed within *yadui*, the subjectivity and historical perspective particular to the former Ryukyu ruling class have been inherited.

Since the ethnologist Yanagita’s time, *yamato*’s ideological struggle to control Okinawan difference has expanded from the realm of culture to history, as exemplified in the 2007 history textbook revisions. Addressing the local chamber of commerce in Naha in August 1997, Nelson (2008, pp. 6–12) detects in then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro’s speech a coloniser’s plea to remember history in a particular way. Hashimoto talked of his personal remorse for the wartime Okinawan children killed aboard a vessel sunk by an American submarine, effectively designating Okinawans in a “melancholy community” with Japan, where Okinawans sacrificed their lives as Japanese subjects, against the United States. However, this historiography is challenged in Okinawa, as in Teruya’s version of the musical *Handogwa*, performed during the immediate postwar years. Teruya re-wrote a tragic love story that originally ended with the heroine killing herself, as a life-affirming comedy in which she survives: “too many people had sacrificed their lives, had committed suicide needlessly for their country and for the emperor. She must survive, he believed” (Nelson, 2008, p. 87). Such transformative acts represent the “*chanpuru* (fusion) spirit”, too often explained in superficial accounts of hybridity and flexibility. Importantly, Okinawans’ wartime readiness to commit suicide as a glorified act is often a preferred representation of history by conservative *yamato* politicians. Teruya’s *chanpuru* spirit embodies an antithesis of Japanese culture that stresses purity and homogeneity (Nelson, 2008, p. 14).

However, the significance of Nelson’s work is not confined to resistance to *yamato*’s cultural and historical impositions. Its main theme is the transformative reckoning of the past, created by cultural performance that resonates with the local audience: an anthropological theme concerning the role of cultural memory in many places beyond Okinawa. In engaging and re-engaging with traumatic historical events that shaped all facets of contemporary Okinawa – amongst others,

assimilation to Japan, war and massacre, and the US military occupation – transformative power is created. These cultural processes of historical memory are practised and experienced not merely in terms of anachronistic nostalgia, but also in terms of living in the present and imagining a better future. Nelson conveys this transformative process in the concept of *karī*: “its distribution is necessary for the revitalization of the community and the health and happiness of its members” (2008, p. 26). *Karī* is communally experienced in *eisa*, which plays an important role in the development and strength of a community.

In *eisa*, experiences of previous generations are revived and reinterpreted. The purpose of *eisa* is to entertain the dead with historical performance, thereby to revitalise the community, and to enhance the “health and happiness of its members”. But “the beauty of the performance, the pain and sacrifice of the dancers, the artistry and expressiveness of the dance” are essential (Nelson, 2008, p. 26, p. 211). Youth members of the Sonda District practise for long hours after their daily work, have lengthy discussions, and listen to the oral history of local elders. Only then is a transformative value reproduced. The spirits of the dead come back every year; their memory is revisited and recreated. The *eisa* dancers “do not need sympathetic native ethnologists . . . to explain to them the value of their dance: they do not need to be told of the burden of Okinawan history” (Nelson, 2008, p. 192). The Okinawan people who enjoy *eisa* every year will not easily give in to pressure to cooperate in revising history, as attempted by the *yamato* political leaders (e.g. Hashimoto). In that sense, *eisa* is a reserve of resistance in everyday Okinawa. In the early twenty-first century, *eisa* is increasingly popular in many communities in different parts of Okinawa Main Island – an important cultural backdrop of heightening political protest against mainland Japan’s textbook revisions in 2007.

In central Okinawa Island, *eisa* was redeveloped in the 1950s from its original seventeenth-century form. Its importance for Okinawan resilience and resistance is evident in Sonda District, for instance, where *eisa* played a crucial role in rebuilding a sense of community in a new settlement, built in post-World War II ruins by Okinawans again displaced – their homes and native villages are lost to the US military base construction, now inside Kadena Air Base where they are prohibited from entry (Nelson, 2008, p. 172–77). Likewise, *eisa* in Sonda appropriates Okinawan historical narratives of lives in the Ryukyu kingdom, told from a vantage point of patriarchal descendants of the déclassé samurai. Nelson notes that, in its original form, “only young men of noble ancestry were allowed to participate in *eisa*” (Nelson, 2008 p. 176), and today local young men (*seinen*) holding drums are the main act. Female *eisa* dancers are assigned commoners’ costumes inconsistent with the historical setting, rationalised as “favourite images and idealised qualities of the past” according to the “protean expressiveness” of the Okinawan theatre (Nelson, 2008, p. 184). Regrettably, further gender analysis of *eisa* is outside Nelson’s field of inquiry, suggesting a necessary area of future research.

In relation to the struggle against the US military, Nelson reveals the worldview of the anti-military landowners, which also represents the *yadui* spirit, inherited with the land along paternal lines from the Ryukyu samurai ancestors. In a protest against continuing US military occupation, the landowners entered their ancestral properties and temporarily reconstructed the lost *yadui* community beyond the fence: they conducted traditional rituals in their *furusato*, representing particular aspects of *yadui*

life (Nelson, 2008, pp. 165–69).⁸ The importance of *eisa* for cultural resilience and rebuilding of communities is evident here, where the continued reimagining of a Ryukyuan past is expressed in the contemporary Okinawan struggle against occupation and assimilation, either by the US military or mainland Japan.

Diversity within Resistance: Okinawan Fiction as a Minor Literature

As a literary genre, fiction writing developed from the early twentieth century in an attempt to modernise Okinawan literature, focusing on Okinawan social themes. Unlike the traditional Ryukyuan verse (*ryūka*), it is written mainly in Japanese language, a foreign language for its writers, especially earlier on. Okinawan fiction and poetry pieces have also been translated into English (Molasky and Rabson, 2000). Molasky (1999) has provided literary analysis on Okinawan fiction during the American occupation years, viewing it as an imperative part of Japanese occupation literature. Bhowmik's analysis is dedicated solely to Okinawan fiction from the early twentieth century. It is a more extensive, if not necessarily more in-depth, study than Molasky's. An ambitious project, condensed into a clear and readable style, *Writing Okinawa* provides an understanding of the complex dilemmas and tensions between multiple political positions within Okinawan literature.

An important point of difference among writers of Okinawan fiction, Bhowmik believes, pertains to the different authors' ways of dealing with Okinawan culture, an object of desire for mainland Japanese readers in their search for Japan's archaic "other" in Okinawan fiction. In Okinawan writings, *yamato* readers and literary award judges have constantly demanded romanticised images of Japan's lost *furusato*, and "local colour" also found in other Japanese localities. Okinawan writers have, to varying degrees, catered to this demand, primarily for marketability and to include Okinawan perspectives in Japanese literature. For example, Yamagusuku Seichū's 'Mandarin Oranges' (1911), published in a mainland Japanese literary journal, helped establish Okinawan fiction as a genre, written in the newly imposed Japanese language. The colour orange, presented as "local colour", played an important role in his writing, making it the earliest distinguished work of Okinawan fiction. The piece was praised by mainland Japanese critics, but greatly disappointed one local critic for lacking depth in its depiction of the complex "interiority of Ryukyuan", making it appear flat (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 38).⁹ Bhowmik evaluates the way in which 'Mandarin Oranges' produced, from the outset, the fraught nature of Okinawan fiction: Does "writing from Okinawa . . . affirm Okinawa's position within the nation or does it contest that same nation?" (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 40). Here Okinawan fiction emphasises the nexus between cultural practice and political tensions in Okinawa – various Okinawan writers have dealt with this tension between affirmation and resistance to incorporation within Japanese nationhood.

Bhowmik also points out that the use of local dialect is another source of tension for Okinawan writers. According to the late local literary critic Okamoto Keitoku, using Japanese as the main language of expression has forced Okinawan writers to assume alternative personas, and thus constitutes a process of self-denial (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 67). While many writers pepper their work with easily understandable Okinawan dialect for mainland Japanese readers to improve marketability, others use it strategically. For example, Oshiro Tatsuhiko, a leading literary figure during

US military rule, stressed the Okinawan-specific perspectives on war, and mythical elements in Okinawa, especially the spiritual world, when these were absent from mainstream Japanese literature and the media. Oshiro further invented an Okinawan language to depict dialogues, combining different vocabularies within the archipelago. Bhowmik argues that Oshiro's main aim was to "compensate for the suppression of culture in Okinawa during the prewar period" – but, again, at the cost of the complexity of different Okinawan characters (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 114). By contrast, Medoruma Shun, a contemporary writer,¹⁰ uses his dialect in ways that are much less accessible, constantly confusing the meanings attached to cultural stereotypes about Okinawa (Molasky, 2003, p. 181). In his non-fiction writings, Medoruma severely attacks portrayals of Okinawan culture by mainlanders and locals alike – such as references to its "gentleness" – as they effectively divert attention from the injustice and abuses rife in Okinawa (Bhowmik, 2008, pp. 145–46). Medoruma's messages are particularly strongly directed to Okinawan colleagues' tendency to accept the reality of continuing injustice in the name of their gentleness (Medoruma, 2001, p. 265). Albeit differently, Oshiro and Medoruma both interrupt the imagining of Okinawan culture as Japan's lost *urusato*, or the "archaic other" of Japan.

To the extent that they fulfil the romanticised image of Okinawa as Japanese *urusato*, Bhowmik explains, Okinawan fiction writings have functioned as "regional fiction": a sub-genre of Japanese fiction, but also a vehicle for protesting their predicament (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 3, p. 10). That is, Okinawan fiction verges on "minority fiction", which "highlights shared thematic concerns and historical experiences that are assumed to bind these groups to one another and to minority writers in other societies (African American, Irish, etc)" (Molasky, 2003, p. 162).

When lush settings give way to sombre tombs where Okinawan civilians escape artillery fire, or to damp caves . . . prose fiction from Okinawa demands pause. When expressions of intimacy are uttered in perfectly accented Japanese because to speak otherwise marked one as a wartime spy subject to immediate execution, readers become increasingly uneasy. *What begins as purely escapist travel ends on a far different note* (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 10; emphasis added).

Like Molasky, Bhowmik finds the two frameworks ultimately unsatisfactory: Okinawan fiction is more than a quaint literary category for readers strictly interested in a particular region or minority group. While Molasky (2003, p. 164) argues that Okinawan literature drastically extends the rubric of Japanese literature, Bhowmik in contrast suggests reading Okinawan fiction as a "minor literature", as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari based on Kafka's writings as something "a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997, p. 26). Bhowmik highlights "three important characteristics of minor literature: 1) a tendency to deterritorialise a dominant language, which is both an imposed and chosen medium; 2) a representation of the world as politicized; and 3) an articulation of a collective consciousness" (Bhowmik, p. 11). According to Bhowmik, Sakiyama Tami, a contemporary female unconventional writer, most clearly writes a minor literature. Sakiyama fills her texts with remote island lives, dialect, or in place of dialect, "a wholly foreign, motley collection of symbols"

(Bhowmik, 2008, p. 171), thereby constantly depriving language of the function of conveying meanings – among others, regional identity (e.g. Okinawa). She thus detaches meanings from local dialect in Okinawan fiction, destabilising language and even literature as a genre. American bases and war in Okinawa do not feature in Sakiyama's stories. Nevertheless, Bhowmik argues that Sakiyama's stories are political, in that her work “very much resists the romance of the individual life and speaks, like much other writing in the genre of Okinawan prose, only in a different register, for a collective” (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 160). By deterritorialising language, Sakiyama paradoxically depicts the process of “fabulation” or “becoming”, in which a community or a people are invented: “The sounds that fill her pages are the voice of the minor people, whose collective enunciation finds expression only in and through the writer . . . from the narrow world of the individual to the cacophonous sphere of the collective, wherein politics contaminates every statement” (Bhowmik, 2008, pp. 177–78).

Connecting Okinawan literature to the concept of minor literature is Bhowmik's original contribution. Although she suggests that all Okinawan writers should be read as minor literature, only Sakiyama's writings are linked closely to the concept. Analysis of other writers' contribution to Okinawa's fiction as a “minor literature” would have been helpful. I wonder, for example, how the writings of Okinawa's leading postwar literary figure, Oshiro Tatsuhiko, can be read as minor literature.

A concept of minor literature is potentially relevant to other kinds of Okinawan culture, including *eisa*, as a site of resistance. *Eisa* is a genre of its own: not a minor literature of Japanese cultural dance as Okinawan fiction is of Japanese literature. Nevertheless, as Terada and Nelson's works tell us, there are many versions of *eisa*: in different regions within Okinawa Main Island and in Okinawan diasporic communities. My reservation is that in *Dancing with the Dead*, *yadui* identity is represented as a universal point of Okinawan resistance. *Yadui* represents “a stunning synecdoche for life in contemporary Okinawa – it is representative of the experiences of all Okinawans who were thrown from their native villages into the crumbling, post-industrial, relentlessly reconstructed world of modern Japan” (Nelson, 2008, p. 135). *Eisa* is also traditionally a cultural form that is unique to Okinawa Main Island, and the enthusiasm for it is not necessarily shared in other islands to the same extent. In Sonda *eisa*, male- and Okinawa Main Island-centred *yadui* binds all Okinawans in relation to mainland Japan. If Okinawa contains many subaltern positions as Bhowmik suggests, can *yadui* descendants speak for all Okinawans? Perhaps *eisa* in Sonda and Okinawa City has become a hegemonic voice within Okinawan resistance, which in turn facilitates the emergence of a “minor *eisa*”.¹¹

Okinawans are now making clear demands that the Japanese government construct the “Futenma replacement facility” in mainland Japan, rather than simply pleading for the reduction of the US military presence in Okinawa. On 25 April 2011, 90,000 Okinawans spent another boiling Sunday afternoon attending a public rally to oppose the Democratic Party's breach of its election promise to build a Futenma relocation facility outside Okinawa. They demanded assertively that it be moved either overseas or to mainland Japan.¹² Such overt forms of assertiveness would have been unimaginable in 1999, before the G8 Summit Meeting held in Nago, Okinawa. Then, the political opposition to the US military presence in Okinawa had been severely weakened, partly by the central government's strategy to

buy local acceptance by handing out compensation and subsidies, and also by the local pro-base enthusiasm for embracing the economic opportunities for base-related income (Yonetani, 2003). But the seeds of resistance have been transmitted and kept alive in everyday life at different times through cultural expressions – in *eisa*, songs, films, comedy, novels and theatre. The three works reviewed here tell us how people have confronted, caricatured and transformed the historiography and cultural stereotypes that circumscribe Okinawa within Japan’s colonial desire and control, in *eisa* and fictional writing. These cultural accounts, however, are to do with more than just struggle or resistance; they concern community building and the making of a minor people in a majority culture. Today, the US military can no longer be assured of the construction of a new base in the pristine marine environment of Henoko. Studies on Okinawan cultural politics also tell us that not all cultural forms in Okinawa are about resistance: only some are, and in different ways. Without an appreciation of the complexity and evolution of internal debates in Okinawa, in terms of what is being resisted by whom, the ongoing political strife there would appear no more than a small island’s never-ending oscillation between conformity with and revolt against larger powers.

Notes

1. Nago City residents opposed the relocation in a referendum in 1997, and protesters encamped on site have been watching and blocking the construction in Henoko since that time. The government did not significantly change the textbooks in response to Okinawans’ demands, and the misrepresentation of Okinawans’ wartime experience deeply resonated with their discrimination by the Japanese government, which continues to concentrate US military forces on Okinawa Island (Tanji, 2010).
2. In Osaka and surrounding areas, migrants’ voluntary associations also functioned as labour unions: in particular, the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association (*Kenjin-kai*) played an important role in promoting the “self-improvement” campaign.
3. The fifth issue of *Doho* (15 December 1924), the newsletter of the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association (hereafter, *Kenjin-kai*), criticised migrants who avoided participating in the organisation’s activities: “Regretfully, those who are ashamed of their Okinawan origins, pretending to be from other places, are often intellectuals” with Japanese tertiary education such as corporate managers, doctors and teachers (in Tomiyama, 1990, p. 159). In the late 1930s, these “super-elite” migrants became central in *Kenjin-kai*’s promotion of the “self-improvement” campaign, as other Okinawans’ role models of assimilation into mainstream Japanese society (Tomiyama, 1990, pp. 230–31).
4. Fukuhara Choki was called “Chikonki (gramophone) Fukubaru” for cycling around Okinawan neighbourhoods playing and selling Okinawan folk song records with a gramophone on a bicycle (Roberson, 2009, p. 689). “Fukubaru” is the traditional Ryukyuan pronunciation of Fukuhara, an official reading used by the record company (see <http://fukuhara-music.com/>).
5. Interestingly, *eisa* performance has also been enthusiastically practised in the diasporic communities – for instance, in Hawaii and Bolivia (Suzuki, 2010; Shirota, 2002). Suzuki explains *eisa* in Bolivia as “a crucial means to teach Nisei and Sansei youth self-discipline and hard work through physically rigorous training, which would help them develop into ‘good’ Bolivians not simply of Japanese descent, but also of distinctly Okinawan heritage” (Suzuki, 2010, p. 141).
6. This phenomenon was not unique to Osaka. In early-1970s mainland Japan, inspired by Okinawa’s 1972 reversion, Okinawan culture, especially popular songs, was eagerly introduced to the mainstream Japanese media and market. Media writer Takenaka Ro was particularly influential, instigating the Ryukyu Festival in Tokyo and Osaka (1974–75), featuring famous Okinawan pop musicians influenced by traditional folk songs. The Festival was revived in 1995 and continues in Osaka (Gillan, 2005, pp. 183–84).

7. Morris-Suzuki explains Japanese multiculturalism as “a disguised form of nationalism or self-indulgent culturalism. Cultural diversity is praised and consumed on a superficial level”, whereas “the claim for the political and economic rights of the bearers of these ‘other’ cultures is often ignored” (Morris-Suzuki, 2001, quoted in Ko, 2006, p. 157).
8. On anti-war landowners in Okinawa, see Tanji (2006, pp. 106–26).
9. However, Bhowmik considers that ‘Mandarin Orange’ is an accurate depiction of the confusion experienced by people, at a time of major social change just before the Sino-Japanese War, and the loss of words to describe the helplessness felt by people, in the transition from Ryukyu to Okinawa (Bhowmik, 2008, p. 40).
10. Medoruma Shun has been more widely read by Okinawan and Japanese readers since receiving two Akutagawa Prizes in the late 1990s.
11. For example, Okinawan visual artist Yamashiro Chikako invented “graveyard *eisa*”, reflecting the uncertain Okinawan identity of an urban Naha resident with few ties to the local community. Her *eisa* is danced silently in front of a traditional turtleback grave by dancers clothed in track pants and plain white shirts, their faces covered by paper bags. Aiming simply to entertain the dead, Yamashiro eliminated all visual and sound effects (Higashi, 2006, pp. 78–80).
12. ‘Futenma wa kokugai, kengai e, 4.25 kenmin taikai 90,000 nin ga sankai’ (Move Futenma to overseas or mainland Japan, 90,000 attend the April 25 rally, *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 25 April 2010. Available at <http://ryukyushimpo.jp/news/storyid-161314-storytopic-1.html>, accessed 16 October 2011).

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