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Locating Tami Sakiyama's Literary Voice in Globalizing Okinawan Literature

Ikue Kina*

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself.

— Gloria Anzaldúa (81)

To my great delight and surprise, however, people there knew how to listen to my silences in all complexities and subtleties, and I learned that this mute language could be effectively shared. *In their silences, I returned home.*

— Trinh T. Minh-ha (12)

Introduction:

Living in Okinawa and/or being an Okinawan never sets one free from a geopolitical identity. The integral part of Okinawan history consists of the communal memories of people's survival in negotiation with the political struggles against overpowering nation-states such as China, Japan, and the United States. One of the contributions that postcolonialist thinking has made is making us, Okinawans, understand our situation in a global context—as one of many colonized states struggling against colonizing powers in each historical and political context. Viewing Okinawa as a state—rather than just a prefecture of Japan—and identifying the dichotomous power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized among nation-states, we are able to discern continuous postcolonial resistance of Okinawa in the history of colonization that continues today.

As I shall elaborate later, discovering “postcoloniality” in Okinawan literature has urged critics and scholars inside and outside of Okinawa to articulate Okinawa's postcolonial resistance in the form of literature. “Okinawa” has become a popular subject of postcolonial studies, and the trend signals the emerging desire to interpret and theorize “Okinawa” and its literature in terms of postcolonial theoretical discourses. More precisely, Okinawa has finally discovered the logic to define the meaning of the long-term political and cultural struggles in its history. The subsequent problem, however, is that the

* Professor, University of the Ryukyus 琉球大学教授

theorization tends to oversimplify the multiplicity and complexity of the possible forms of agency exercised by Okinawans who have been regarded as the colonized. In other words, Okinawan people's life-experience and situated-knowledge may not be always taken into account in the on-going postcolonialist discussion of Okinawa, because the dominant discourses striving to achieve theoretical consistency make sense of reality only in scholarly terms. In other words, theorizing Okinawa and Okinawan literature as a conceptual and metaphorical terrain where different ideological discourses converge and collide, on one hand, makes the colonizing agency visible; however, on the other hand, in the process of interpreting "Okinawa" only as the conceptual site where postcolonial discourses make sense, the agency of the colonized remains invisible. The agency of the colonized reflects their memories and awareness formed and accumulated through the historical process of communal sharing of their physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges and struggles against the colonizers. What is missing in the contemporary theory-based scholarly arguments of Okinawa is a physical sense of place or homeland, which deeply ingrains people to their living reality, and enables them to constantly give rise to their stories not only from individual sensory experience but also from an awareness of communal responsibility.

The literature of Okinawa, therefore, carries more meaning than what satisfies the scholarly desire for interpreting Okinawa. It seems to me, as an Okinawan reader living in Okinawa, that reading Okinawan literature requires an understanding of the literary texts as the voices in which Okinawan people's experience of reality claims the most significance. In Okinawa, the texts desire. In other words, Okinawan literature should be understood fundamentally as a voice of a desiring speaking subject conscious of the other local voices situated in Okinawa historically and geopolitically. The question is how to balance local understanding of Okinawa with global perspectives of it. Following Amrita Basu's definition of the "local" as the term "to refer to indigenous and regional" and "global" as "the translational" (70), and taking her suggestion "to rethink entirely relations between the local and the global" into consideration (69), we need to think of how to make Okinawan literature understood as the local voices that grow essentially out of a sense of commitment to local struggles, without ignoring its critical importance in the world order. This understanding also requires the readers who tend to overlook the agency on the side of the colonized to be able to recognize it by questioning who has actually defined the postcoloniality in and of the text, how it has been defined, and where Okinawan voices are allowed to enact their agencies in the interpretive process.

The stories of Tami Sakiyama, a contemporary woman writer born and living in Okinawa, make agency of the colonized visible through demonstrating her strategy of resistance based on her own logic and desire in the act of writing. Her works are doubtless located in an Okinawan literary tradition where the act of writing usually represents the writers' political consciousness, and, just as other Okinawan writers, Sakiyama's writings represent her resistance against the dominant ideologies that disable agencies of Okinawan voices. However, as a woman writer, she also resists Okinawan literature as a liter-

ary institution in which she and her language have been marginalized. What kind of literary voice, then, does she create in negotiation with the politics of institution, and what can her voice communicate in the context of globalization? In this paper, I shall first identify the multiple agencies and their motivations in defining the postcoloniality and strategies of resistance in Okinawan language and literature, and then also explore the possibilities of Sakiyama's language and storytelling in making colonized agencies visible in the global context.

Postcoloniality of Okinawan Literature

The impact of long-term colonization on Okinawa is multidimensional and hard to elucidate; however, in relation to Okinawan literature, it comes down to the most fundamental problem: contemporary local Okinawan people are losing command of their own indigenous languages.¹⁾ Globally speaking, along with the indigenous languages spoken by Ainu in northern Japan and in Amami, the islands located north of Okinawa, the five groups of regional dialects spoken in the Ryukyu Islands have been designated as endangered languages in Japan by “UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger.”²⁾ This is—at least partly if not entirely—a historical consequence of more than 400 years of colonization of Okinawans by Japanese. Regarded as inferior to Japanese culture, Okinawan culture has been denied its value in the process of Japanese modernization which, in the name of civilization, indoctrinated Okinawans to self-trivialize their own indigenous languages as uncivilized dialects or defective variations of the Japanese language. Okinawan languages thus were to be abandoned and replaced by standard Japanese.

The reality of lost language is the result of self-colonization promoted through voluntary and involuntary assimilation into what was acknowledged as superior culture, and this fact alone may naturally hasten a presupposition that the cultural survival of minority people is at stake today as their ability of storytelling in their own language has been waning. For Okinawan culture, such an assumption is both right and wrong. The fact that the indigenous Okinawan languages are dying does not mean voices of Okinawan people are dead. Just as other indigenous populations all over the world who have been working through colonization, Okinawan voices have strived to survive, continuing to tell their stories in Japanese—oppressors' language—in such forms as fiction, poetry, and drama, shifting their strategies of expression in ways that enable them to respond to a changing receptivity of Japanese audience. The desire to remember is so strong and deep that the memories cannot be lost so easily even in difficult situations. The inherited memories constantly beckon Okinawans to look for or invent the right words so to articulate both who they are and what their cultural values are.³⁾

What, then, is the definition of Okinawan literature, which would enable such articulation? To answer this question, it should be noted that Okinawan writers' artistic struggles were simultaneously politicized toward decolonization of their literature, and that securing the place for Okinawan literature within mainstream Japanese literature was

and—still is to some writers—the goal to achieve. Okinawan literature, therefore, emerges with institutional significance as it promises the occupancy of the literary voices from Okinawa within the institution of Japanese literature. In this sense, Tatsuhiro Ōshiro's winning the Akutagawa Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in Japan, in 1967 for his novel *The Cocktail Party* was significant both in terms of literary history in Japan as well as cultural politics between Japan and Okinawa because the award-winning novel finally legitimized Okinawan literature in Japanese literature. Following Ōshiro, more Okinawan writers won the Akutagawa Prize, e.g., Mineo Higashi with *Okinawa no Shōnen (An Okinawan Boy)* in 1971, Eiki Matayoshi with *Buta no Mukui (The Pig's Retribution)* in 1995, and Shun Medoruma with “Suiteki” (Droplets) in 1997.⁴⁾ Okinawan writers also won other major Japanese literary awards.

In order to express their local consciousness, Okinawan writers found the use of Okinawan languages in their stories indispensable. Another goal of their decolonizing efforts was to secure a place for Okinawan language vis-à-vis Japanese. Okinawan writers were in constant struggle over how to reconcile Japanese and their own Okinawan language in their written literary voice. To analyze the process of linguistic reconciliation, Okinawan literary critic Keitoku Okamoto remarked back in 1981 that Higashi's “An Okinawan Boy” exemplifies the linguistic situation of Okinawan novels in the 1970s, as “the novel emerges at the focal historical point when Okinawan writers became confident claiming a variety of elements that were original to Okinawa and what Okinawa had historically kept, e.g., ‘dialect’ and ‘folklore.’ It is the point where Okinawans finally started enjoying freedom in incorporating those elements in their literary expressions when they were liberated from the obsessive ideas that they had given in exchange for assimilating into the literary mainstream of Japan” (my translation, 126).

Another aspect that fostered the institutionalization of Okinawan literature as a recognizable genre within Japanese literature was the increased availability of published works. Particularly noteworthy among many accomplishments is the publication of *Okinawa Bungaku Zenshū*, a comprehensive twenty-volume anthology of traditional and contemporary poems, novels, and essays written by Okinawan writers which had been previously miscellaneous published. Beginning with the distribution of the first volume of *Okinawa Bungaku Zenshū* in 1991, the period of 1990s observed a rush in the publication of anthologies of Okinawan literature, which contributed to the sudden formation of the canon of Okinawan literature. Following *Okinawa Bungaku Zenshū* were the publication of such anthologies of Okinawan literature as the fifty-fourth volume of *Furusato Bungakukan (Literature from Homeland)* published in 1994, *Okinawa Bungaku-Sen (Selected Literary Works from Okinawa)* in 2003, and *Okinawa no Bungaku (Literature of Okinawa)*, a supplementary reader for high school students, in 1991 first publication. As Sadatoshi Ōshiro points out, all the anthologies have contributed to an important “attempt to secure a place for Okinawa literature within Japanese literature” (my translation, 220).

While it may be reasonable to assume that the publication rush in the 1990s caused the

Japanese audience's changing receptivity of Okinawan literature, it may also have been true that the changing receptivity accelerated the publication rush. The incident of the 1995 political rally of about 85,000 Okinawans protesting against the rape case of a twelve-year-old school girl by two U.S. military servicemen took place in a context of the prevailing multiculturalism in Japan of the 1990s. This coincidence between the political incident and cultural situation may have contributed to the Japanese audience being more sympathetic to Okinawan society as well as Okinawan culture, particularly, its literature. In terms of multiculturalism, Okinawan culture began to be viewed as an alternative to traditional Japanese culture and as strong enough to resist the homogenizing national ideology that neglected cultural diversity in Japan.⁵ The existence of Okinawan literature as an accepted alternative genre in Japanese literature was thus expected to play an integral role in shifting the institution of Japanese literature towards becoming multicultural. The acceptance of Okinawan literature as a legitimized part of the literary institution, however, does not necessarily emancipate Okinawan voices from their marginalized position in both social and cultural institutions. From the new political context in which Okinawan literature was situated emerged the beginnings of Okinawan people's resistance against the orientalist Japanese gaze. This is because Japanese stereotype Okinawan and the Okinawan people as an exotic Other no matter how positively or negatively they read Okinawan literature and try to make interpretation of Okinawan culture.⁶

Okinawan Literature in Globalization

While perplexity and skepticism lingered among Okinawans, the increasing popularity of Okinawan culture and literature became the background for extensive efforts and attempts across national boundaries to establish Okinawan literature as part of Japanese literature. The earliest publication to bring modern and contemporary voices of Okinawan literature to an international audience was *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, co-edited by Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson and published by University of Hawai'i in 2000. While it showcased the works of five poets and twelve novelists of modern and contemporary Okinawan literature translated into English, however, *Southern Exposure* essentially represented a response of Japanese—rather than Okinawan—literature to globalization. Through *Southern Exposure*, the editors attempted to revise the traditional—and often stereotypical—understanding of Japanese literature and culture that is dominant among English-speaking readers. Their intention is asserted in the preface to the volume: “We would be particularly gratified if Okinawa's literature begins to find its way into translated collections of Japanese literature” and it is “with this hope in mind that our anthology is subtitled ‘Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa’” (xi). Translated into English, the anthology enables Okinawan literary voices to travel internationally; however, identified as a variant of Japanese literature, Okinawan literature can never cross national literature boundaries. The voices in *Southern Exposure*, therefore, remain within imagination and interpretation of the colonizers, to be merely

heard as the voice of an exotic Other holding a Japanese passport.

Will Okinawan literature continue to be a subordinate affiliate of the Japanese literary institution? Parallel to the question for Okinawans who dream of future political independence of Japan: Can Okinawan literature one day free itself from the position of just another alternative genre of Japanese literature? *Living Spirit: Literature and Resurgence in Okinawa* edited by Frank Stewart and Katsunori Yamazato and recently published in 2011 by University of Hawai'i Press is another anthology of Okinawan literature translated into English. Nevertheless, this anthology should not be understood as a sequel accomplishment to *Southern Exposure*. *Living Spirit* intends to resist against the multicultural project that tries to embrace Okinawan literature within Japanese literature. Yamazato, a guest editor of this volume, asserts their editorial intention in the Editor's Note:

[. . .] despite the fact that Okinawan authors have been awarded Japan's highest literary award, the Akutagawa Prize, Okinawa writing has been largely marginalized or subsumed in the larger category of Japanese literature. Okinawan literature, however, is not a subordinate category but a literature with its own history, traditions, and sensibilities. It stands on an equal basis with Japanese and other world literatures. *Living Spirit* is an invitation for English-speaking readers to experience the many strengths and surprises of Okinawan writing in several genres. (vii)

Prior to *Living Spirit*, Yamazato and Stewart had co-edited *Voices from Okinawa*, which Yamazato calls "the 2009 sister volume" of the *Living Spirit* (vii). *Voices from Okinawa* was the first project to put together the voices of the people of Okinawan descent in the U.S. and included a collection of plays and essays written by such Okinawan Americans as Jon Shirota and Philip K. Ige as well as the writings of first-generation Okinawan immigrants such as Mitsugu Sakihara. While *Living Spirit* is a collection of Okinawan writings from Okinawa, what "Okinawa" signifies in *Voices from Okinawa* is not only a geographical sense of homeland but also the spiritual linkage of Okinawan diasporics subjects with their roots of their self-identity. In so doing, *Voices from Okinawa* makes heard the stories of Okinawan immigrants and their descendants for whom physical location has been less important than passing on a sense of who they are and where they came from across generations.⁷⁾ Though there are no doubt cross-cultural difference among their featured writers, *Voices of Okinawa* and *Living Spirit* share the same goal: bringing to an English-speaking audience the understanding that Okinawan identity has always been transnational. Globalization as a context helps visualize a diasporic Okinawan identity with which Okinawans claim agency in taking control over the definition of their own history, language, and literature.

Defining Okinawan literature in the context of globalization thus requires recognition and imagination of a transnational and diasporic Okinawan identity. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, who identifies herself as a Chicana Riqueña, or of Chicana and Puerto Rican heritage, aptly asserts this point in her discussion of multiplicity in Chicana identity: "Forging transnational linkages that operate in a dynamic manner also involves

acknowledging the various forms of multiculturalism that coexist within a global culture, outside of the U.S. national context, and addressing a series of competing notions of what constitutes multiculturalism” (276). In case of Okinawan literature, “outside of the U.S. national context” in this statement can be replaced with “outside of the Japanese national context.” Inside the U.S. context, it means the inclusion of Okinawan American voices in American literature. As an independent genre, which “stands on an equal basis with Japanese and other world literatures,” Okinawan literature is capable of resonating with other literatures in the global context.

Nevertheless, recognition and imagination of such cultural identity need to go beyond the definition of identity, which is preconditioned by nation-states and nationalism. Reading and discussing Okinawan literature as an expression of nation-based identity—regardless of national or transnational—ultimately embeds the cultural paradigm in nationalism. The individual particularity expressed through the works of Okinawan literature is obliterated in the interpretation based on a nationalistic definition of literature. In other words, as soon as Okinawan writers are hailed as “the authors of Okinawan literature,” they lose their voice as Okinawans. In her dialogue with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler suggests a “state” in an alternative logic to undo nation-state and defines it as that which signifies “the ‘conditions in which we find ourselves’ and that which “signifies the legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory” (3). On the other hand, Spivak points out that in reality the “nation-state requires the national language” (74), and in the world where “the abstract political structure is still located in the state” although “the nation-state as a form was faulty from the start”(76), “global feminism might seek to reinvent the state as an abstract structure with a persistent effort to keep it clean of nationalisms and facisms” (77).

How, then, would it be possible “to reinvent the state as an abstract structure” in terms of Okinawan literature? As it has been pointed out, in the 1990s, Okinawan literature served multiculturalism by playing the role of remapping Japanese culture. Legitimizing Okinawan literature as a part of Japanese literature contributes to fulfilling Japan’s national desire for an alternative self-image as a more culturally diverse nation-state. In this sense, multiculturalism is not effective for undoing nationalism, as Minoo Moallem and Iain A. Boal thus criticize nationalism in the guise of multiculturalism:

The discourse of multiculturalism and its call for political and cultural recognition and inclusion in the framework of a nationalist ideology therefore has fundamental limitations. It does not address the question of cultural politics and its implications for ethnic and racial minorities. It is a discourse that homogenizes ethnic groups; it refuses specificity and particularity among and within groups, dismissing the question of hybridity. (256)

Moallem and Boal’s problematization of “dismissing the question of hybridity,” or failing to accept the differences within a minority ethnic group is useful in considering hybridity within a literature not in a way that locates Okinawan literature as an alternative form of literature within mainstream Japanese culture, but in a way that illustrates the very diver-

sity within Okinawan literature that has been considered as already a part of the diversity in multicultural Japanese literature.

In the question of hybridity, the preconditioning force of the nation-states declines. The diversity within Okinawan literature indicates is the decline of the institutions preconditioned by nationalism, such as national identity, national language, and national literature. Okinawan literature written in the indigenous Okinawan language—the irregular versions of Japanese language—has contributed to making Japanese culture multicultural and legitimizing Okinawan literature as its part with a peculiar accent. The backdrop of this legitimacy is nationalism. Nevertheless, the idea of declining nation-states fosters an awareness that Okinawan language is actually hybrid as it consists of diverse tongues. It is a recognition of the diversity within Okinawan language that transforms our understanding of it as Okinawan tongues and sets Okinawan literature free from its status as part of national literature.

“Border Tongue”

Revising the notion of a “state” is a global feminist issue, related to the questions of how to have a literature and language transcend the limitation set by nationalism and have its own logic work outside the mainstream nation-based definition of literature and language. In her 1987 book *Borderlands / La Frontera*, a Chicana feminist thinker and writer Gloria Anzaldúa thus explains Chicano Spanish belongs to itself, neither to Spanish nor to English.

“*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you’re speaking the oppressor’s language by speaking English, you’re ruining the Spanish language,” I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución*, *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.⁸⁾ (77)

Anzaldúa’s Tejana (Texan Chicana) sense of “borderlands” and “border tongue” doubtless emerges out of the same historical background of critical consciousness as what Elaine Showalter proposed as gynocriticism in *The New Feminist Criticism* published in 1985, two years before Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera* was published. Their theories both speak about writing in illegitimate language in the space or the border that emerges in between two very different traditions and that represent the “muted” culture (Showalter 264). In Showalter’s theory, the space emerges in between male and female literary traditions in the U.S., as she explains by quoting from Myre Jehlen’s lucid explication:

[. . .] the literary estate of women, as Myre Jehlen says, “suggests . . . a more fluid imagery

of interacting juxtapositions, the point of which would be represent not so much the territory, as its defining borders. Indeed, the female territory might well be envisioned as one long border, and independence for women, not as a separate country, but as open access to the sea." As Jehlen goes on to explain, an aggressive feminist criticism must poise itself on this border and must see women's writing in its changing historical and cultural relation to that other body of text identified by feminist criticism not simply as literature but as "men's writing." (264)

The mission and project of feminist criticism in the 1980s, which perhaps still continues today, lie in "reinventing language" (Showalter 254), or, in the postcolonial context, "transforming their enemy's language" as a Native American woman poet Joy Harjo puts it (22), in a way that changes the relationship in two different cultures and traditions with a heterarchical rather than hierarchical recognition of the border tongue as the language that has parallel significance to the one that has been traditionally believed as dominant over the other.⁹⁾

Reinventing language that would enable the muted to break their silence is also Anzaldúa's intention. Sharing the similar sense of "border" and "borderlands" as well as seeking heterarchy among different languages, however, the terms, "border" and "borderlands" in Showalter's theoretical perspective and in Anzaldúa's one are significantly different. While for Showalter's and other white feminists' "border" remains more textual and metaphorical, Anzaldúa's sense of "border" is more physical, situated in a specific geographical and geopolitical location: the U.S.- Mexico border in the U.S. southwest or northern Mexico. The "fluid" and "open" border, where there are "interacting juxtapositions" and is chronologically imagined as "one long border" in the theory for seeking woman's literary tradition, is in Anzaldúa's writing spatially defined as "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" and is "in a constant state of transition" (25). In addition, whereas gynocritics's task was "redefining women's writing" as "a step toward self-understanding" and "every account of a female literary culture and a female literary tradition has parallel significance for our own place in critical history and critical tradition" (Showalter 263-64), Anzaldúa's "border" appears more inclusive because she herself was a economically unprivileged lesbian Chicana speaking in non-standard English. Her "self-understanding" requires sensibilities to other muted groups than women:

The prohibited and forbidden are its [borderlands'] inhabitants. *Los atravesados* [scoundrels] live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." (25)

Anzaldúa's "border tongue" is both political and creative practice, and at the same time, it explores the strategy that would make ineffectual the control from such institutional structures as nation-state, language, and other categorized norms that have generated "*los atravesados*," the acceptable name for people only according to the definitions of what is

considered “normal.”

Tami Sakiyama's Language on the Border

In Okinawa, too, there are “*los atrevesados*” who remain even harder to be heard or remain invisible located in the borderland or edge of Okinawan society. Consisting of more than one hundred islands and linguistically having more different dialects than islands, Okinawa is both geographically and linguistically heterogeneous. An Okinawan “tongue” spoken on one of the remote islands can be incomprehensible on other islands, e.g., to the Okinawans who speak a standardized version of Okinawan based on Shuri dialect on the main island. Ironically, Okinawa, having been considered by Japanese as the margin of Japan, has in fact generated a periphery or a border within itself, internalizing the ideology of centralization and hierarchization in its consciousness. The more Okinawan language is emphasized in expressing Okinawan voices in resistance to Japanese centralization, the more linguistic periphery is generated through the standardization of Okinawan language. Certainly, this marginalization is not only linguistic but political and cultural as well, giving more agency to the Main Okinawa Island, the largest and most inhabited island in Okinawa, to impose political, economical, and cultural dominance over other islands.

Tami Sakiyama is a writer whose language and stories emerge from her experience of living in the unprivileged borderlands in Okinawa. Born on Iriomote Island in 1954, Sakiyama then moved to Ishigaki Island, and after brief period of living on Miyako Island, she moved back to Ishigaki. Then, as a teenager, she finally moved to Koza, a town, surrounded by the U.S. military bases on the main island of Okinawa. Koza's location made it one of the busiest business districts and a hub of the entertaining infrastructure for the U.S. soldiers stationed in Okinawa from after WWII until the Vietnam War ended and the administrative authority over Okinawa was returned from the U.S. military government to Japan—so-called “Reversion”—in 1972. Migrating from one borderland to another within Okinawa and having settled in Koza for more than forty years, Sakiyama has always located her life on the border or what she calls as “the edge” that is “the place emerging in between the mutually exclusive landscapes” (my translation, “Monologue in a Dream of Solitary Island,” 86), or “chasm in everyday life” (my translation, *The Place Where Words Are Born* 149).

Though her background of migration may have not been out of her choice but her family's, her decision to locate herself in the borderlands or in the margin of Okinawan society eventually became a conscious choice. However, Sakiyama, in her stories never marginalizes her consciously chosen location—the borderland—such as Koza and other islands, no matter how desolate their neighborhoods are and how quickly their languages are dying out. As Yuichi Matsushita notes, Sakiyama, by expressing the peripheral place in her texts, “does not try to create a narrative that recaptures the past filled with the memories” as resistance against “on-going urbanization that changes the place into the

impersonal space” (my translation, 110). It seems to me, however, her resistance is not only against the process of “urbanization” itself but also against the logic that justifies the presupposition that those places are marginal as well as the acceleration of the memories ingrained in those places toward oblivion. In her stories, the borderlands are located in the center. In other words, her stories are told within the logic and vision of the borderlands as the center. Finding her home in the borderland or the chasm of Okinawan society as deliberate choice, Sakiyama creates a logic that justifies agency in the borderlands.

Sakiyama’s frequent choice of the islands as the setting for her stories begins as early as her 1989 Akutagawa Prize nominated work, “Round-trip Over the Ocean” and continues in her more recent works, such as *Yuratiku Yuritiku (Swinging Swaying)* published in 2003, demonstrating her vision in which the islands in the margin are in the center.¹⁰ Through her actual life-experiences of living on the islands, Sakiyama has formed her literary voice. The landscape sustains her desire to seek home in marginality. Her conscious choice of home or her origin in the marginality of the islands represents her practice of agency. What constitutes the borderland in between the mutually exclusive landscapes in Sakiyama’s narratives is both temporal and spatial: temporally it means the landscape in the memories that connect the past to the future, and spatially it represents the locations of present conflicts and struggles. She thus states: “In reality, between individuals and between an individual and society, there is always the chasm of comprehension that the examples and events based on academic research and theories cannot fill” (my translation, *The Place* 149), and continues:

I imagine the water and darkness drifting in the bottom of the island—steadily changing every hour in a day but actually never changing after the change making a circle and eventually coming back to its original spot. I can gradually see the steady movement as well as the vastness of it. The strong brightness of the southern island is on the reverse side of darkness and it mercilessly comes down from the sky and dominates the islands just as the colonizers do; whereas the darkness replacing the light starts spreading over one’s feet until it covers the entire island. The darkness enables everything to come close to the primitive images. The islands remain drifting on the water. The vision of water and darkness arises from the bottom of poverty. I crave for the creative energy that perhaps can be generated through the persistent gaze at the world locked in that vision. This is my relationship with the southern islands. (my translation, *The Place* 150)

Though it is hard to reflect it in an English translation of the stories and it may not be possible for or those who do not understand Okinawan languages to discern, Sakiyama incorporates the words of non-standard Okinawan language—*island tongues*—in her stories. As she makes it clear in her interview, it is precisely this linguistic gap that she experienced from moving one island to another as a child in her actual life. Sakiyama thus speaks:

The biggest barrier for me was language. The moment I remember clearly is when I introduced myself in front of the class in a new school. I spoke as usual, but when I finished, my classmates told me, ‘you speak weird.’ I didn’t know what was wrong. To me, they spoke

weird. Anyway, I couldn't help holding back my tongue though there was nothing wrong with my language. . . . Now I think, perhaps, that's how I began to think I wanted to write a novel. ("Subaru Literary Café," 64).

The narrative choice of the setting as well as the language of the stories expresses her agency in strategically controlling the logic of envisioning the borderlands moving from margin to center in her artistic vision and imagination that are both local and global.

The same logic of location and agency is also true of her other stories. The seven stories about "Kuja," published in *Subaru*, a popular literary magazine in Japan, and that I call the "Kuja stories," for instance, represent Sakiyama's other artistic challenge to create the image of the places that are in the chasm yet the center of her perception and awareness.¹¹ "Kuja" is the name of the place where those stories are located and, considering the fact that Sakiyama has been making her home in Koza for more than forty years, the readers are naturally tempted to identify "Kuja" with Koza. However, this presumption may not be right because of the various theories about the origin of the word Koza: Koza in Okinawan pronunciation is usually the same Koza, whereas "Kuja" may actually be the pronunciation for Kojia. Nevertheless, regardless of whether Sakiyama signifies Koza by "Kuja" or that "Kuja" only remains as a fictional representation of Koza, her home place, it is true that "Kuja" in the stories shares the similar image with the actual Koza, crowded with the U.S. servicemen who were regarded with hostility by most Okinawans. With the same hostility, Okinawans despised and located the place, Koza, in the edge of Okinawan society.

Having lived in Koza for more years than in any other place in her life, Sakiyama expresses Koza's marginality particularly in relation to women's experience. In doing so, Sakiyama resists a conventional depiction of Okinawan womanhood by male Okinawan writers who idealize the image of an indigenous Okinawan woman along an image of mother in their male fantasy.¹² In Koza, besides so-called A-sign bars, there used to be a number of brothels where women from the Main Island as well as from neighboring islands engaged in prostitution.¹³ Sakiyama creates her stories out of the chaos of women's experiences that are conceived and nurtured in the reality of this specific place. In her artistic perception, the prostitutes who survive on the edge of society enact their agency to find their language by which they are able to speak out their life-stories, and "Kuja," the place on the border or the edge, becomes the center of the world. As it is impossible to interpret all of seven works of "Kuja stories" in this limited space available for this paper, I shall focus in this section on "Passing into Twilight Alley," as a story that exemplifies Sakiyama's literary strategy of expressing the voices of women arising from a borderland called "Kuja."

Language of the Sounds: Sakiyama's "Passing into Twilight Alley"

"Passing into Twilight Alley" appeared in 2006 September issue of *Subaru* as the third piece of the "Kuja" stories. The narrator of the story, whose gender is not specified, day

dreams of his or her memory as a five-year-old child encountering a nameless woman in the alley called “Akou-kurou gai.” The “Akou-kurou gai” is a main street of red-light district presumably in “Kuja”:

That’s right. Now I remember people called that alley Akou-kurou-gai. During the day the alley lay soundless and like a night without human shadows. At night, it grew noisy as if it were daytime, tornadoes of chaos swirling around silent hollows lit by grimy neon.¹⁴ (241)

An Okinawan phrase “Akou-kurou” means twilight, the state in between light and darkness. In the story, “Akou-kurou gai” represents the street in between the light and darkness evokes the image of the “chasm in everyday life,” as she expresses. The street itself may represent “Kuja,” the chasm or the chaos appearing in between the dichotomy of two oppositional elements. What Anzaldúa calls “*los atravesados*” is expressed in the “Akou-kurou gai” as rather chaotic collection of sounds that haven’t yet become language.

Everywhere in that town smells rotten.

Stink’s source is alcohol sweat, spit, urine, sex, and mold mixed and fermented. A sudden shriek becomes a scream, followed by the sound of an explosion. Yelling. Shouts. Accusations. A sound of a siren. Spasm. Mass seizure. Loud mocking laughter, like random gun shots, fire off through the dark alley, now dyed a sad blood red. The colliding sounds and stink rip away, slide, and criss-cross the streets. Thus memories of that alley crawl out tsuku tsuku through the walls of my dream. (241)

Mimesis is frequently used in Japanese, but the mimetic phrase “tsuku tsuku” is perhaps Sakiyama’s original, as it is neither a commonly used Japanese mimesis nor an Okinawan expression. The expression is accompanied with an image of the memories “crawling out” little by little, tediously, and even timidly, and its rhythm creates a “chasm” in between visual and auditory images.

The visual image of “twilight,” the space merging the contrastive elements of light and darkness permeates this story and further illustrates the auditory aspect of Sakiyama’s language of storytelling emerging in between written and auditory languages, between the stories and songs, and between voices and silences. She questions herself about the meaning of her act of writing: “Does the future exist for those who cannot restrain their desire to charge ‘voice’ through their writings, or an act that entirely relies on the written words?” (my translation, *The Place* 114). Listening to the “mysterious hailing voice of others” or “the remnants of [her] own voice” in the bottom of her “hearing” (my translation, *The Place* 114), Sakiyama has been asking herself a recurrent question of how to “recreate the desire for ‘language of the sounds,’ or how to “write the sounds” that “shook and shocked [her] body,” while exploring how to “transmit” that “language of the sounds” to those “who feel the words [she] wove” (my translation, *The Place* 115). In “Passing into Twilight Alley,” Sakiyama expresses the “sounds” including human and non-human voices, songs, and even soundless signs as the constituents of the memories that are ingrained in the place. The women’s gossiping voices in the story, for instance, are expressed as the chaotic noise accompanied with the rhythms resonating with the place

where their bodies stand:

The women shook their bellies drumming the ground. As they raised their voices, the ground rumbled “duh, duh, duh, duh, . . .,” resonating with their spattering spit raging, “puh, puh, puh, puh.” Then rose another sound, “chii, chi, chi, chi, chi . . .,” a vexed spitting followed by a long deep almost secretive sigh of forgotten breath. Then whistles, “phii, phii,” responded weakly in exhaustion. (243)

The women are gossiping about a mysterious woman who may be a daughter of a “monster juri woman”¹⁵), who “got a huge ten-story building” by making money “from Shuri samurai” and “Japanese soldiers” “when Japan took over Ryukyu” and then “played those American officers for their money in the American days” (242). The lengthy conversations of these townswomen are seemingly nothing but non-sense gossip, but actually contribute to the communal construction of women's history as collective discourses.

Suddenly out of noisy chaos came someone's low powerful voice, “You, liar.” The air grew tense, and the heads quickly turned around toward where the voice came from.

“Who's the liar?”

“You. Liar!”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm telling you are the liar.”

“What? What makes you say that?”

This story that should have concluded found a way to continue on.

“Tell you the truth, the truth was that—that—.”

“What's *that*?”

“I mean, the inaguuya [mother] of that woman was *she*.”

“Who's 'she'?”

“How could she have been a juri! *She* was a mud woman, so to speak.”

“Mud woman? What you talking bout?” (243)

What the conversation in this story indicates is twofold. First, it is that the women's gossip is a form of agency, since by sharing their memories in their own voices the women create their own history that has been silenced in the public historical narrative.

Nevertheless, their articulation in the meantime reveals another existence of the silenced. The “mud woman,” the target of women's gossip and the mysterious character the narrator encounters as a child represents the ultimately silenced in this story. Attracted by her strangeness, the child follows the woman and watches every move of her; however, she never speaks a word in the story and only shows the child's movement as if she were dancing:

A strange stillness surrounded the woman's body giving off a smell of the soil. Overwhelmed by these things, the child watched her, wondering if she might not be a real human. Neither tottering nor moving her half-sitting posture, the woman was holding herself so still that she looked as if she wasn't breathing. She looked like a clod of dirt. (245)

The woman's identity remains unknown throughout the story, but the depiction of her body “giving off a smell of the soil” and that she “looked like a clod of dirt” evokes the

image of a woman's body that is deeply rooted in a particular place, like an extension of the soil. In other words, the mysterious "mud woman" in perfect silence in the child's recollection is the personified memories and stories that have been carried along with history of the place. Though "nothing special, however, happened between the mud woman and the child no matter how long they shared time together," and that the mud woman eventually "may have leaped instantaneously to the other space," the story is not concluded in total darkness but in the time in which "darkness outside and dimness inside fade into each other," or the space of possibility. The narrator toward the end states: "Still, I waited. I waited in the alley as darkness fell faster and faster, murmuring yet invisible stories in yet silent voices, hutsu, hutsu, hutsu, singing out, ho-oy, ho-oy" (252).

Conclusion

At the base of Sakiyama's writing is a sense of resistance against globalization that has de-centered the place that she believed to be the center of her existence and that has trivialized what she has treasured, her places and her language, in other words, her subjective vision and voice. She questions: "Is there any future for me, who keeps writing a novel in the same way as if I am trying to collect the dust of the sounds that have already flown far away into the universe?" (my translation, *The Place* 112). Sakiyama's vision of "twilight," however, does not only express ambivalence and struggles of being located in the chasm of the nation-states, languages, and differences, but also possibility. In this sense, it may not be a total coincidence that Sakiyama and Trinh T. Minh-ha share the image of "twilight" as the space of possibility. Trinh writes:

Twilight: the hours of melancholia, loss and nostalgia; but also of preparation for a renewal, when the sun sets in the west, the moon rises in the east, and the ending passes into the beginning. The journey to the west is, no doubt, the journey toward the future, through dark transformations. (74).

Whereas Okinawan literature today has gained the status as a transnational and global literature beyond its being part of Japanese literature, Sakiyama's literary voice has a location in another context: border literature.

Just as Anzaldúa and Trinh have done, Sakiyama finds her agency in translingual borderness. The translinguality and the issues of struggles in which each writer is situated are local and regional; nevertheless, the abstract vision and image such as "border" and "twilight" or what Trinh describes as "mute language," also work to deal with dichotomous thinking and connect writers across difference in the shared situations for mutual empowerment. Making a translingual connection across different languages may begin with the efforts to listen to silence and to imagine the invisible. The possibility for women in the globalizing world to do so is greater when they consciously locate themselves in the "twilight" where differences meet and turn silent voices into stories with new meanings for surviving in the new world.

Notes

- 1) The languages spoken in Okinawa are called different names depending on the context of the speech communities. For examples, "uchināguchi," "shimakutuba," or simply "hōgen (dialect)" are used more popularly in the local context by the people claiming themselves to be Okinawan, whereas "Ryūkyūan," or "Okinawan languages" or "Okinawan dialects" are the terms used in an academic context in which languages are observed and analyzed rather than spoken. In this paper, I shall use "Okinawan" or "Okinawan languages" to refer to the group of languages that are included in both of the above categories. However, as I shall discuss later in this paper, it should also be noted that this comprehensive understanding of Okinawan languages often creates power relations between standardized Okinawan and other Okinawan tongues.
- 2) "UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger" (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/index.php>) October 1, 2011.
- 3) Okinawan writers' struggles for finding a way to express both in standard Japanese and in their own language have been one of the critical topics in discussing Okinawan literature. Just as many languages of indigenous or oppressed people all over the world, the regional dialects in Japan, and numerous different languages existing within the smaller islands in the Ryukyus, the languages spoken by Okinawans have been treated as alternative or subordinate to Japanese language. I am not able to discuss it fully here by quoting from a number of previous arguments and statements of such critics and writers as Tatsuhiro Ōshiro, Keitoku Okamoto, Shun Medoruma, and Katsunori Yamazato, but perhaps the following quote from Toshinori Hanada in his discussion of a poem of an Okinawan poet Baku Yamanoguchi makes a precise point about Okinawan in relation to Japanese: "The 'Japanese' here [or what Yamanoguchi expresses as 'Japanese' in his poem] refers to a Standard Japanese that at the same time signifies Japanese as a national language. Standard Japanese is never identical with a specific language or dialect, e.g., Tokyo dialect or Hakata dialect, which should be understood as a possible counterpart of 'Okinawan language.' The 'Okinawan language' is one of the dialects that are rooted in a sense of indigeneness and of living, and such characteristics are never found in Standard Japanese. In other words, Standard Japanese is merely an extremely peculiar, fictitious, and plastic language that has no root in any specific place" (my translation, 106).
- 4) The translation of the titles of Matayoshi is taken from "About the Contributors," on pp. 280–82 of *Living Spirit: Literature and Resurgence in Okinawa*. Medoruma's title "Droplets" used in *Southern Exposure* is also used in *Living Spirit*.
- 5) Katsunori Yamazato in his 1999 essay, quoting from Akira Arakawa's statement—"It may not be wrong to say the biggest characteristic of the history of ideas in modern Okinawa is the state of ambivalence between conflicting desires: the desire to be separated from the nation-state of Japan and the desire to be assimilated into it"—states that "what constitutes the undercurrent of such words as 'assimilation and differentiation' and 'assimilation and separation' [as seen in Arakawa's statement] is, to use a recent critical term, regarded as a multicultural impulse or resistance against the tendency to try to confine Okinawa within the monolithic culture of Japan" (179–80).
- 6) Hanada, for instance, harshly criticizes the discourses of well-known Japanese editor Yutaka Yukawa and Japanese author Natsuki Ikezawa at the Okinawa Literature Forum in 1992 as they betrayed paternalistic and stereotypical interpretations of Okinawa and Okinawan literature, a common attitude of Japanese literary critics (2–22). Hanada states that the series of discourses at the panel session at the Forum only ended up representing "Okinawan version of Orientalism" (6). I shall, however, point out Hanada's criticism of the Forum intentionally or unintentionally neglects to discuss other international participants of the Forum, e.g., Ihab Hassan, a postmodern critic, and John Montague, an Irish poet. The implication of ignoring those non-Japanese participants is how Hanada's discussion of the Forum overlooks the point that Okinawan literature can be located not only in Japanese but also in a world-wide community of interpretation. Interestingly enough, although Montague's poetry articulated his radical postcolonial thoughts which resonated with those held by Okinawan writers because of their shared sense as the colonized, his

presence and the anti-nationalistic content of his keynote speech was never televised in a special program about this forum produced by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation).

- 7) As a place that historically has had one of the largest immigrant populations in Japan, the narratives of Okinawan immigrants as diaspora form a significant genre in Okinawan literature. Masanori Nakahodo's study of the dramas and Ryūkyūan (pre-modern Okinawan) poetry written by immigrant Okinawans and the people of Okinawan descent in Hawaii is another attempt to expand the conventional scope of Okinawan literature in Japanese literature by including the writings from Okinawans living overseas. Nakahodo argues that both Jon Shirota's play, "Leilani's Hibiscus," and Satoshi Miyagi's short story, "Kokyō wa Chikyū (My Home, the Earth)," thematically belong to the same literary category that Nakahodo terms as "syukkyō (leave-home)" writings because both works depict the cross-cultural struggles of the Okinawan protagonists leaving Okinawa for Japan as in Miyagi's novel or for the United States as in Shirota's play (177). Nakahodo's reading of "Leilani's Hibiscus" relies on its Japanese version translated by Katsunori Yamazato.
- 8) The sentences in Spanish—starting the second sentence of the second paragraph in the quotation—read in English as follows: "Change, evolution, environment of new language by invention or adoption have created variants of Chicano Spanish, a new language. The language that corresponds with a way of life. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language."
- 9) The term and concept of "heterarchy" is borrowed here from Patrick D. Murphy's ecofeminist theory. Quoting from Hazel Henderson's explanation of "heterarchy," Murphy thus discusses: "Hazel Henderson, . . . argues that 'hierarchy is an illusion generated by a fixed observer' Thus we can recognize that biogender differences exist, can occur in both genders, and should not be comparatively evaluated to determine which are more useful or superior" (6).
- 10) Sakiyama, Tami. "Round-trip over the Ocean." Trans. Sminkey Takuma. *Living Spirit: Literature and Resurgence in Okinawa*. Ed. Frank Stewart and Katsunori Yamazato. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 2011. 1–26. *Yuratiku Yuritiku* hasn't yet been translated to any foreign language. The title *Swinging Swaying* is my translation. For more detailed discussion of Sakiyama's expression of "the border" in terms of the islands, read the essay written by Victoria Young, "Dystopia-teki Ekkyō: Sakiyama Tami *Yuratiku Yuritiku* ni okeru 'Hazama.'" (*Dystopian Crossing: 'the Space Between' in Tami Sakiyama's *Swinging Swaying**)." *Ryukyuan and Okinawan Studies* 3 (2010): 98–114.
- 11) The seven stories include: "Kotōmu dūchiumuni (Monologue in a Dream of Solitary Island)," *Subaru* 28.1 (2006): 84–96; "Mienai machi kara shonkanē ga (Shonkane Coming from an Invisible Town)," *Subaru* 28.5 (2006): 130–44; "Akou-kurou genshikō (Passing into Twilight Alley)," *Subaru* 28.9 (2006): 240–52; "Pīnghira zaka yakō (Nightly Walk up the Pīnghira Hill Road)" *Subaru* 29.1 (2007): 65–79; "Psugurukaji nu fukiba (When the Psuguru Wind Blows)" *Subaru* 29.5 (2007): 140–51; "Mapiroma no tsuki ni tatsu kage wa (A Moon Shadow Standing at Midday)" *Subaru* 29.11 (2007): 197–212; "Kuja kisōkyoku hensō (A Variation on a Fantastic Music Piece of Kuja)" *Subaru* 30.3 (2008): 168–89. All the English titles are my translation.
- 12) Ikuo Shinjo questions: "Through manifestation of 'womanhood,' and by praising and celebrating a charm and strong life of women, isn't the peculiar literary world [of Eiki Matayoshi] seemingly successful in decentering the male-centric world but actually grounded on an extremely strong male-centric self-approval? . . . I even wonder about the risk of hiding among extremely numerous discourses in many literary works related to Okinawa as well as Okinawan culture, which, in unconditional praise for 'womanhood,' turns one's attention from many contradictions and repressions in the reality of many aspects of women's political, social, and sexual, existence (my translation, 237).
- 13) The "A" in the so-called A-sign bars in the pre-reversion period—the period of being occupied by the U.S. military—stands for "authorized," meaning that the particular establishment was given official authorization by the U.S. military government in Okinawa. During that period, in order to be authorized, bars had to pass inspection under guidelines set by the U.S. military government for authorization.
- 14) "Passing into Twilight Alley" will be anthologized in my translation in the volume entitled *My Postwar Life: New Writings from Japan and Okinawa*, edited by Elizabeth McKenzie forthcoming in 2012. In this paper, every quotation from this story comes from the text of my translation.

- 15) The “juri” refers to accomplished female performers trained to entertain high-ranking officials through dance and music. “Juri” women were usually girls sold into prostitution by their poor families. The juri, as a social institution, had lasted for 400 years until prostitution was abolished by GHQ in 1946. Modern Okinawan feminists also contributed to abolishment of the institution, but in a recent controversy, juri and their tradition of performance were reevaluated in terms of their positive contribution to shaping the cultural heritage of Okinawan women.

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グローバル化する沖縄文学と崎山多美の文学の「声」

喜 納 育 江

400年以上に渡る沖縄の被植民地的状況は、沖縄の人々から土着の言語を奪った。しかし、それは沖縄の物語る力そのものを完全に奪ったわけではない。「沖縄文学」は、沖縄の発する「声」として、時代と共に移り変わる読者の意識や、日本語と沖縄口^{ウチナーグチ}の葛藤の中で、ふさわしい表現を模索しながら存続している。1990年代に世界的な多文化主義の動きによって、日本文学の多様性の一部として位置づけられた沖縄文学は、21世紀的なグローバリゼーションの中では、国家主義的文学観を越え、「沖縄系」という越境的でディアスポリックなアイデンティティへの認識を高めることによって、新たな位置を獲得しようとしている。沖縄文学の受容をめぐるこのような考察にもとづき、本稿では、崎山多美の文学が、どのような論理にもとづいて、多文化主義や沖縄系ディアスポラの視点による沖縄文学観ともまた異なる「越境言語的」な位相を表現し、グローバルな文脈の中に立脚しているのか。本稿では、拙訳による2006年発表の崎山の短編小説「アコウクロウ幻視行」を例として論じていく。
