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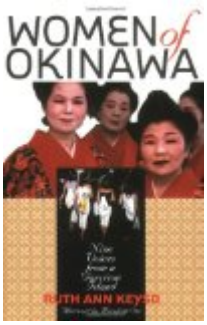
Ruth Ann Keyso. *Women of Okinawa: Nine Voices from a Garrison Island.* Afterword by Masahide Ota. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000. xv + 166 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-8665-4.



Reviewed by Sayuri Shimizu

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Okinawa In Her Mind

In this gem of an oral history collection, Ruth Ann Keyso deftly untangles the layered memories of war and peace spun by nine women who have lived in Okinawa, site of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II and host to 75 percent of the American military bases in Japan today. Through collective memoirs spanning three generations, the book tells the varied stories of war and displacement of people who came of age under foreign occupation and citizens whose peacetime life is conditioned by a pervasive foreign military presence. Not only is this volume a welcome addition to the literature on postwar U. S.-Japanese relations, which has veered heavily towards diplomacy, national security, and matters economic; it will help lay readers to understand in fuller historical complexity the diplomatic crisis and popular outrage precipitated by the rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl by U.S. military personnel in September 1995 and revived by the similar incident earlier this year. These translated narrations of women of diverse backgrounds speak eloquently to many of the themes at the core of the garrison island's contorted past. The relevance and interconnectedness of subjects addressed and questions raised by these interviewees, strangers to each other and reflecting separately on their individual experiences, reveal the astute piloting of an oral historian who understands both how the personal and the public intersect in Okinawa's modern history and that the past and the present are linked through multiple chords of memory.

Reflections by the three women covered in the book's opening section encapsulate the complexity of the encounter between two nations defined by war and uneasy reconciliation. These women, now all over 70, were teenagers when their home island became the stage for the last major military campaign of World War II. They witnessed first hand the horrors and destruction of a battle in which one third of the island's civilian population perished, and they survived the paralyzing chaos and depravation of the immediate postwar years. Americans cast long shadows in their recollections. One of Keyso's interviewees lost nearly her entire family. She remembers lying next to her mother's dead body for two days only

to be rescued from imminent death by starvation by, to her surprise, American soldiers. Another woman looks fondly on her memory of working in the mess hall on a U. S. military base in the early postwar years. GIs were kind to her and the PX was a cornucopia of the good life America seemed to promise. An 84-year old documentary film maker and anti-base activist holds a more jaundiced view of Americans in her midst, yet she believes that Okinawa's exposure and close proximity to American culture gave her a more tolerant and cosmopolitan outlook. She sees problems stemming from the U. S. military presence in her homeland as a symptom of military culture and holds the government in Tokyo equally responsible for the misery long endured by many Okinawans.

The next section features three women in their late 50s: too young to remember the war or to have been indoctrinated into seeing Americans as the wartime enemy. This age group's formative experience was America's continued military presence in Okinawa after occupation and the campaigns by Okinawans for reversion to Japanese rule in the 1950s and 60s. Two of them speak passionately of involvement in political movements that shaped their identities in a vortex of convulsive social change. The third, an instructor of classical Okinawan dance, recalls a less politicized young adulthood. She saw herself as a beneficiary of special treatment accorded to her artist father by the American occupiers. Because of this relatively privileged childhood, she has fond memories of socializing with Americans and feels more beholden to them than to the mainlanders, who all too often slight Okinawans as cultural and racial inferiors and have always sacrificed Okinawa to their own interests. Of the more politicized two, one laid out the darker side of the American presence in Okinawa. As a student activist, she used to recoil at practices of racial segregation that Americans carried into the streets of Okinawa and the many race-motivated fights among GIs. The impunity with which U.S. servicemen committed crimes against the local population drove many Okinawans, herself included, to the reversion campaigns, even those who could not embrace the Rising Sun flag or Kimigayo as their national anthem. Another child of the 1960s who speaks out in this section spent thirty years as a social worker providing support for Okinawan unwed mothers of biracial children. Her own failed marriage to an American in Okinawa has served as a personal reference point in her efforts to meet the challenges involved in inter-cultural relationships that often result from base-town romantic encounters.

In the final section of the book, Keyso gives voice to three women in their twenties and thirties, a demographic bloc for which World War II in and of itself has little meaning. They can not imagine Okinawa without the ubiquitous U. S. military bases and are comfortable with the transient mass of Americans released into their lives by from these familiar features of the landscape. Their reminiscences and ruminations have the qualities of a good coming of age tale. A thirty-year old graduate student recalls how she relished Okinawa's vibrant borderland atmosphere as a teenager and became naturally attracted to the American men who packed the streets dressed in blue jeans and T-shirts. The cruel gossip and stigmatization that followed an adolescent romance across the race line opened her eyes to the oppressiveness of existing gender expectations and certain aspects of Okinawa's indigenous social structure. This feminist awakening led her to find common ground with other Asian women whose existence is even more contingent on American military bases, such as Filipino dancers who catered to U.S. servicemen on Subic Bay. A similar political awakening shaped the life of a thirty-five-year-old woman who intuitively sees something fundamentally political in her decisions about work and marriage. To this self-professed rebel, employment on a base meant escape from the blatant sexism of Japanese corporate culture, and remarriage to an American was conduit

to a more equitable domestic partnership. She is irked by those who scapegoat U.S. bases for all of Okinawa's problems and ignore the economic advantages the bases bring to the island. The book ends with a former Miss Okinawa who shared her hopes and dreams with Keyso. This twenty-one-year-old woman remembers being taught little about the island's place in modern Japanese history, and she feels this neglect has much to do with her generation's inattention to questions of war and peace. She does not profess strong opinions about the presence of American military bases in Okinawa and the problems this semi-permanent foreign intrusion creates, Yet one remark she made about public reaction to the rape of a twelve-year old girl stands out in her mostly unpoliticized take on the world. She found the racial stereotyping many Japanese resorted to about African American males in the wake of the rape unfair and deplorable. It is a quietly powerful criticism of the Japanese mainstream made from the vantage point of a periphery in what anthropologist John Lie calls "Multiethnic Japan."

In a seamless sequence of generational shifts expressed in personal reflections, Keyso illuminates the gradual erosion of WW II memories in a society still fettered by the war's legacy. Although Keyso places all the participants in her oral history project in the middle-class, their class backgrounds were differentiated enough to demonstrably shape their views of the island's history and their attitudes towards Americans, the mainland Japanese and, ultimately, themselves. Former Okinawa prefectural governor Masahide Ota's afterword rounds out the volume with information and insights that will help readers contextualize the personal experiences narrated in this volume. Given the book's likely appeal to a general readers, who may need a background briefing on the Okinawa problem, Ota's helpful commentary might have served the book better as a foreword.

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