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Interrogating mainland representations of Okinawa: The case of Takamine Gō's *Paradise View*

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Introduction

> In the south, that zone of indigo seas where it's always
> summer and dragon
> orchids, sultan umbrellas, octopus pines, and papayas all
> nestle together
> under the bright sunlight. That place shrouded in misconceptions
> where, it is said, the people aren't Japanese and can't understand the
> Japanese language.
>
> – Yamanokuchi Baku, "A Conversation"

Okinawa's distinct historical development of a territory annexed and subjected to a colony-like rule by Japan in the late XIXth century, and its vibrant subtropical features, so unlike the mainland, have led it to occupy a peculiar position within the Japanese national imaginary, being at once a place that "provokes a mix of desire and disavowal."[1] The ambivalence the southernmost prefecture has been regarded with in mainstream discourse, which has made it "shrouded in misconceptions," persists, the latter oscillating between appropriating it as integral part of Japan and "otherizing" it. Nowhere are these unequal relations and perceptions of Okinawa as a "subordinate space for playing out national desires" more apparent than in Japanese cinema featuring Okinawa.[2] Those productions have been historically dominated by mainland Japanese directors, and as such, have not shied away from perpetuating stereotypes and representing Okinawa in an essentializing way by either obscuring or emphasizing its differences in relation to the mainland. The Okinawa portrayed on postwar screen has straddled the line between being included and excluded from the boundaries of what is considered "Japan," being portrayed either as an unfortunate, but loyal victim of the Second World War, as the "long lost traditional Japan," or an "eternally festive" resort. These contradictory narrations have invariably affected the way Okinawans see themselves in relation to the mainland.

The field of Okinawan cinema only started to garner scholarly interest with the onset of the so-called Okinawan boom in the early 1990s, when Okinawan culture, including music, food and travel, became prominent in Japanese mainstream culture. As a result of the

[1] Davinder Bhowmik, "Introduction," in *Writing Okinawa: Narrative Acts of Identity and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.
[2] Aaron Gerow, "From the National Gaze to Multiple Gazes," in Hein, Laura and Selden, Mark, *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 290.

boom, numerous productions were filmed in Okinawa, which inspired scholarship that criticized this "neo-imperial gaze," which accentuated the prefecture's exoticism and obscured its historical predicaments.[3] Curiously enough, whenever the question has been brought up about an alternative, "possible Okinawan cinema"[4] which does not conform to stereotypical depictions that aim to appropriate the prefecture one way or another, eyes almost unequivocally fall on the Okinawa-born independent filmmaker Takamine Gō.[5]

In this thesis I intend to interrogate assertions of Takamine being the filmmaker who most "successfully challenges dominant representations of Okinawan identity,"[6] and Japan's myth of homogeneity and "cosmetic multiculturalism," while also addressing Okinawa's distinct cultural, social and historical circumstances.[7] For this purpose, I will focus on three of the film scholars that have perhaps most extensively traced the "genealogy" of Okinawan cinema,[8] namely Aaron Gerow, Mika Ko and Yomota Inuhiko.

This study will aim to contribute to the above-mentioned scholarship by focusing on the analysis of Takamine's understudied first feature work, *Paradise View*, released in 1985. It will look at this film as a case study of how dominant, essentializing representations can be destabilized, while in the meantime articulating an entirely new way of seeing Okinawa.

The reasons why I think analyzing this film studying this film is a worthwhile inquiry are manifold. First, as stated before, the film has received surprisingly little scrutiny in scholarship, barring a few scattered mentions and (brief) overviews, unlike Takamine's two subsequent features *Untamagirū* and *Mugen Ryūkyū Tsuru-Henri* [*Tsuru-Henry*]. Second, I will argue that *Paradise View* is seminal for setting the stage for the above-mentioned films in which Takamine will later explore issues of Okinawan identity in more depth. As it can perhaps be inferred from its name itself, more than any other of Takamine's motion pictures, *Paradise View*, depicting the everyday life of a village community in the dawn of the 1972 reversion to Japan, engages with the landscape of Okinawa with a pronounced awareness of how it is seen from the outside, i.e. in idealized and essentialist terms. Rather than reiterating

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[3] Oliver E. Kühne, "Research Report: Historical Amnesia and the "neo-imperial Gaze" in the Okinawa Boom," *Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo* 24, no. 2 (2012): 214.
[4] Mika Ko, "Representing Okinawa: Contesting images in Japanese cinema," in *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 110.
[5] His actual name is Takamine Tsuyoshi, however, he tends to go by the name Takamine Gō.
[6] Aaron Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 297.
[7] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 91, 110.
[8] The issue of what can be categorized as "Okinawan cinema" is still contested, but for the sake of clarity, I will refer to features that were filmed in Okinawa and take as subject Okinawa Prefecture or its inhabitants. For a more comprehensive discussion on the definition issue, please refer to Kosuke Fujiki, "The scholarly gaze toward *Okinawa eiga*: Notes on the Academic Discourse," *Cinema Studies* 8, 2013: 42-44.

these stereotypes, Takamine seems to consciously avoid using or emphasizing any issues and tropes that have come to symbolize Okinawa, thus creating a portrait of the prefecture, unseen in cinema before. As Takamine himself has noted in an interview that he created this film with the keyword "*mabui*" or spirit, that permeates the Okinawan landscape,[9] I find his approach to landscape in his first documentary, *Okinawan Dream Show*, easily applicable to *Paradise View* as well:

> The question of the Okinawan landscape (*Okinawa no fūkei*) does not concern political issues such as to have Okinawa symbolized, but the landscape as it is (*arinomama no fūkei sonomono* [….]) The landscape does not carry a core of its own, and there is no hierarchy attached, so there is no center (in landscape) either. What has become important is my personal perspective. Leveraging this personal instead of a generalizing perspective, I could take a grip on the non-differentiational/equal value (tōka-sei) of the landscape. […] Of course, the Okinawan problem (*Okinawa mondai*) cannot be ignored, and I don't mean that works concerning the problem are no good, but human subjects as well as the politics are already contained in the landscape.[10]

While Takamine certainly does not ignore Okinawa's political predicament, he does not put politics in the center of his films, but "contains" them as part of the landscape that gives rise to Okinawan specificity. Instead of using the generic signifiers used in mainland cinematic representations to stand for Okinawa, he chooses a "personal perspective," that focuses on the local and mundane, through which to subvert this discourse. In my analysis of the film's narrative structures and themes, I will aim to demonstrate how he achieves this, thus ultimately challenging discourse that defines Okinawa by its politically ambiguous status.

While my thesis will focus on the contextual and textual analysis of the film, my argument will be informed by postcolonial discussions of cultural identity, specifically by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha. More concretely, I will argue that to challenge hegemonic representations, Takamine consistently "grounds" his films in Okinawan specificity, while also resisting essentialized conceptions of the region that reduce it to stereotypical

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[9] Takamine Gō, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (2/2)," interview by Nakazato Isao, *Documentary Box,* 2003, https://www.yidff.jp/docbox/22/box22-1-2.html.
[10] Takamine Gō, *Eiga koten jikkō iinkai*, cited in Ran Ma, "Okinawan Dream Show," in *Independent Filmmaking across Borders in Contemporary Asia*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 174.

representational tropes. Ultimately, in his attempt at "gaining at the center"[11] he aims to create an "island that speaks for itself" (*mizukara kataru shima*).[12]

In order to study how *Paradise View* is "positioned within the dominant regimes of representation"[13] and how it interacts with them, the first chapter will address the socio-historical context of Okinawa's tumultuous relations with mainland Japan. The second chapter will provide an overview of the general trends of representation of Okinawa in postwar Japanese cinema. I will then move on to Takamine himself and look more closely at how he has been approached by Gerow, Ko and Yomota, particularly in relation to the articulation of identity in his subsequent films *Untamagirū* (1989) and *Tsuru-Henry* (1998). Then, I will move to the analysis of *Paradise View*, focusing on how this particular feature's themes and narrative structures dismantle dominant representations, while also "otherizing" the mainland.

[11] Homi Bhabha, "The postcolonial and the postmodern," in *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 177.
[12] Nakazato Isao, "*Hanmosuru guntō*," in *Okinawa: Imēji no ejji* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 2007), 218.
[13] Stuart Hall, "Cultural identity and cinematic representation," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, no. 36* (1989): 76.

Chapter 1: Overview of socio-historical context

Discourse on Okinawa and Okinawan identity has been informed by a long history of Okinawans being treated as different and, at times, even "expendable," despite being considered full-fledged Japanese citizens. The pervasive feelings of inadequacy and continuing ambivalence with regards to Okinawans' position in relation to Japan that arose due to this treatment continue to be reflected in cultural productions centering on Okinawa, and remain a key concern in analyses of the latter by scholars.

The Ryukyu Kingdom had existed fairly independently as a monarchy with its own unique Okinawan languages and customs until 1879 when Japan designated it as a Japanese prefecture, Okinawa, and implemented "emperor-based and assimilationist" educational policies that focused on making Okinawans imperial subjects and promoting the study of standard Japanese.[14] Japanese historians, such as Oguma Eiji, have referred to Japan's rule at the time as colonial.[15] Although coercive measures were used, where the use of local language was forbidden both in public and private,[16] a vast majority of Okinawans willingly started studying Japanese in order to escape perceptions of "backwardness" and gain better employment prospects.[17] However, despite Okinawans proactively pursuing opportunities to integrate as Japanese citizens, they continued to encounter discrimination when looking for work in mainland Japan. Perhaps the most exemplary instance of this, that is engraved in Okinawan cultural memory through Seishin Chinen's 1976 classic play *The Human Pavilion* (*Junruikan*), is the pavilion for human races at the Fifth Domestic Exhibition for the Promotion of Industry in Osaka in 1903, where two prostitutes from Okinawans were displayed as "Ryukyuan noblewomen" among Ainu, Taiwanese, African Americans and other members of ethnic minorities, "disciplined" by a Japanese with a whip in hand.[18] Unsurprisingly, this event, that emphasized the racial hierarchy in relations between Okinawans and Japanese, brought about feelings of anger and humiliation, that still resonate today.

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[14] Davinder Bhowmik, "The color orange in Yamagusuku Seichu's Okinawan fiction" in *Writing Okinawa: Narrative Acts of Identity and Resistance*, 21.
[15] Ina Hein, "Constructing Difference in Japan: Literary Counter-images of the Okinawa Boom," *Contemporary Japan* 22, no. 1-2 (2010): 181.
[16] Bhowmik, "Introduction," 7.
[17] Bhowmik, "The color orange," 23.
[18] Bhowmik, "Introduction," 6.

The Battle of Okinawa in the Second World War serves as another flashpoint in the prefecture's history that continues to bring up questions regarding its status in relation to Japan. During the war, the prefecture suffered the consequences of the only land battle on Japanese soil, which raged for twelve weeks until 2 July 1945, and which led to the death of up to 140,000 civilians or more than one fourth of the prewar Okinawan population.[19] Furthermore, a fair share died in the hands of Imperial Japanese Army soldiers, suspected of being spies, or were ordered to commit suicide, instead of surrendering to the US army. Given that in the spring of 1945 Japan had already lost the war, it is of little surprise that according to a 1993 opinion poll by Ishahara Masaie, 87.5 percent of the Okinawan citizens interviewed believed that the battle was "reckless" and unnecessary.[20] As a result, this battle has also emerged as a contested issue still affecting Okinawan attitudes toward mainland Japan. Numerous commemorative sites have been established that reportedly counter officially sanctioned Japanese historical narratives by emphasizing the Japanese military's "brutal treatment" and continue to call attention to the supposed "ethnic / racial hierarchy of the presurrender Japanese Empire, particularly the similarities between Japanese treatment of Okinawans and of colonial subjects."[21] This is reflected in the way the theme of the war still inspires Okinawan creators, such as writer Medoruma Shun who have attempted to articulate the residual memories of wartime suffering in the prefecture. Ultimately, the war has left Okinawans with the impression that the military protects the interests of the Japanese state at the expense of civilians, which has led to lingering distrust toward decisions undertaken by the state.[22]

The end of the Second World War and the start of the American occupation saw the emergence of a new way of referring to the island prefecture: the "Okinawa Problem." While the whole of Japan was under US occupation between 1945 and 1952, it was only Okinawa that remained under US military rule or namely the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) for twenty years longer, until 15 May 1972. In fact, it is contended that Japan "sacrificed" Okinawa in exchange for the end of its own occupation and for protection against the Soviet Union,[23] which has led to a felt sense of expendability among Okinawans. In accordance to this arrangement, not only did the US administration heavily

[19] Laura Hein and Mark Selden, "Culture, Power and Identity in Contemporary Okinawa" in *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, 13.
[20] Ibid., 14.
[21] Ibid., 15.
[22] Julia Yonetani, "Future "Assets," but at What Price? The Okinawa Initiative Debate" in *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, 257.
[23] See Hein and Selden, "Culture, Power and Identity," 21.

militarize the prefecture by establishing 75 percent of its military bases in the country in Okinawa, which by itself accounts for less than one percent of Japan's total land area, but it has been accused on multiple occasions for treating Okinawa as a colony,[24] as the highest-ranking American official had the power to promulgate laws and remove public officials not to his liking from their posts. Furthermore, US presence has been accompanied by numerous other issues, such as noise and environmental pollution, helicopter crashes, and instances of physical and sexual violence. With the all the problems with regards to the US occupation, numerous Okinawans pushed for a reunification with Japan, hoping that the US military would leave. This culminated with the Okinawa Reversion Agreement of 1971, between then US President Richard Nixon and Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Satō and the subsequent reversion on 15 May 1972.

Despite the strong local support, the expectations regarding decreased US military presence remained unmet, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and disappointment with the Japanese government. In fact, the number of military bases remained the same, and tensions between US soldiers and local residents continue, only escalating in 1995 with the rape incident of a twelve-year-old girl by four US military service members, that triggered nation-wide protests.[25] The bases have had an inextricable role in shaping contemporary Okinawan cultural identity. On one hand, they have contributed to tensions in the relations between both Okinawans and Japanese, and between Okinawans and US military, who serve there, but on the other, it has also been argued that the prefecture is economically dependent on them. Due to the inevitably higher frequency of interactions between Americans and Okinawan residents compared to the mainland, which is most explicitly expressed in the significant number of mixed-race children born in the region,[26] the US presence has had an inevitable social and cultural impact that is unobserved in other parts of the country. It is also of note that generation divides are beginning to be observed in Okinawans, where war memories affect less and less attitudes of younger Okinawans toward the military bases, and are gradually replaced with pragmatic concerns for economic prosperity instead.[27]

While Okinawa had already experienced wide-scale destruction of its environment and communities during the war and the US occupation, through the forced seizure of

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[24] Ibid., 19.
[25] Robert Elbridge, "The Okinawa "Base Problem" Today," *Nippon.com*, February 3, 2012, https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a00501/the-okinawa-base-problem-today.html.
[26] Johnson Chalmers, "Okinawa Between the United States and Japan," JPRI Occasional Paper 24 (January 2002), http://www.jpri.org/publications/occasionalpapers/op24.html.
[27] Motoko Rich, "A Marine's Son Takes on US Military Bases in Okinawa," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/25/world/asia/okinawa-governor-election.html.

property to be used for military bases, this process was continued by the Japanese state in the postreversion period through the implementation of the Okinawa Promotion and Development Plan.[28] With this plan, the state aimed to decrease the economic disparity between Okinawa and the mainland by investing in the prefecture and promulgating social safety net programs.[29] Whilst the benefits of this program for the prefecture's accelerated economic growth are indisputable, the large-scale environmental and social destruction brought by modernization and tourist development in this time period had a compelling impact on Okinawans' growing sense of threat to their indigenous cultures and practices.[30] As Okinawa began to be developed and advertised as a subtropical tourist destination following the model of Hawaii, with All Nippon Airways (ANA) establishing direct routes from Tokyo in 1973,[31] tourism emerged as the islands' main industry, with newly built resorts transforming the prefecture's landscape and its inhabitants' ways of life. As early as 1973, a committee for the prevention of Okinawa's "destruction of culture and nature" was established, which argued that "[t]he loss of natural environment will lead to the loss of Okinawan thought."[32] Bhomwik suggests that in the 1980s these changes were also reverberated in Okinawan fiction with "a resurgence of themes connected to indigenous culture, such as shamanism and ancestor worship."[33]

In concurrence with the rapidly changing lifestyles and environment, Okinawa continued to grow in popularity as a touristic destination, reaching its peak in the 1990s and 2000s with the so-called "Okinawa boom." This movement has been characterized with the propagation of positive, but stereotypical images of the prefecture disseminated in popular media, promoting it as an exotic destination with pristine nature and preserved traditions and spirituality. These representations, which often ignore Okinawa's tumultuous history and tensions in its relations with mainland Japan and the US military, have been criticized for being a nostalgia-invoking, homogenizing "neo-colonial" gaze.[34] and will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

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[28] Asato Eiko, "Okinawan Identity and Resistance to Militarization and Maldevelopment" in *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, 229.
[29] Ibid., 21.
[30] For example, the Okinawa Marine Exposition in 1973 necessitated the development of infrastructure, that destroyed local environment in Nakagami district, Okinawa, and also the building of leisure facilities, that led to a rise in land prices and the effacement of the agrarian foundations of the community. See Asato Eiko, "Okinawan Identity and Resistance," 236-37.
[31] Osamu Tada, "Constructing Okinawa as Japan's Hawai`i: From Honeymoon Boom to Resort Paradise," *Japanese Studies* 35:3, (2015), 295.
[32] Asato, "Okinawan Identity and Resistance," 237.
[33] Bhowmik, "Postreversion fiction and Medoruma Shun," 129.
[34] Bhowmik, "Introduction," 12.

This chapter was an overview of the various events and developments in Okinawan modern history, that have contributed to feelings of uncertainty as to how Okinawans are positioned with respect to mainland Japan's boundaries. It formulated five developments as the particularly significant in evoking these feelings of ambivalence: the incorporation of the Ryukyu Kingdom as a prefecture and the subsequent assimilative policies; the disastrous Battle of Okinawa; the US occupation; the return to Japan in 1972 and the subsequent political and economic changes; and the continuing tensions with regards to the presence of US military bases. The next chapter will endeavor to look at how these turning points have been reflected in cinema by mainland directors.

Chapter 2: Cinematic representations of Okinawa

Unlike the case with literature on Okinawa, that is replete with works by Okinawa-born writers who ruminate over issues connected to their history, culture and identity,[35] cinema on Okinawa has so far been dominated by mainland directors who would tackle such issues from a different, outsider's perspective. Okinawa's first representation in a film by a Japanese mainland studio, the 1937 film *Oyake Akahachi,* was a case in point of the kind of forces that would shape cinematic representations of Okinawa throughout the years. Telling the story of a legendary 16th century Ryukyuan lord and leader of a rebellion, it was criticized by Okinawan media for presenting Okinawans as backward and "encourag[ing] prejudice and discrimination," with many demanding that its screenings were cancelled.[36] Regardless of this incident, subsequent articulations of the prefecture have continued to be underscored by its ambiguous position in relation to Japan, and oscillate between affirmations of its belonging to the state and overemphasis of its alterity. In the following sections of this chapter, I will detail instances in which Okinawa has appeared in films which, as Gerow has noted, have "function[ed] within a hegemonic nationalistic imaginary, identifying both sameness and difference in Okinawa in order to confirm the self-sameness of Japan."[37] In this respect, there have been four ways in which mainland filmmakers have approached the region: through a nationalistic, ethnographic or touristic gaze or as an embodiment of otherness that critiques national homogeneity discourses.

2.1 *Okinawa as a sacrificial victim*

The Pacific War introduced a theme of victimhood that would be recycled by filmmakers in Japanese mainstream media up to today. In the case of Okinawa, one of the most potent stories in the male-dominated war discourse that emerged to occupy the postwar imaginary as a "canonical narrative of Okinawan identity"[38] is the story of the Himeyuri Student Nurse Corps. The Himeyuri were 219 Okinawan elite schoolgirls mobilized during the Battle of Okinawa as nurses to tend on wounded soldiers, but toward the end of the battle a majority of

[35] Davinder Bhowmik has explored this in depth. See Bhowmik, *Writing Okinawa.*
[36] Mika Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 78.
[37] Aaron Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 274.
[38] Linda Angst, "Gendered Nationalism: The Himeyuri Story and Okinawan Identity in Postwar Japan," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (1997): 103.

them ended up victims of American bombings or were pushed to commit group suicide. As they acquired a symbolic status among Okinawans as carriers of Okinawan memories of wartime suffering, their narrative has also been appropriated by Japanese mainstream discourse, where they are portrayed as patriotic subjects who died for the emperor. Cultural anthropologist Linda Angst looks at the more problematic aspects of their mythologization in mainland Japan, arguing that the choice to revere victims based on their gender, youth and purity constructs the Okinawa-Japan relationship in gendered terms,[39] reinscribing Okinawa's position in the national imaginary as dependent and thus subordinate.

The story of the Himeyuri has been mostly successfully exploited by Imai Tadashi in his 1953 melodrama *Himeyuri no tō* [*The Tower of Lilies*]. The film's large commercial success, evidenced also by its two subsequent remakes by Imai, suggests the strength of the narrative of Okinawa as a sacrificial victim. Imai's film in this sense is contradictory as it not only served to perpetuate this kind of discourse, but it also obfuscated differences and tensions between Okinawans and Japanese during the war, thus implying a homogenous Japanese society. Throughout the film's entirety, the schoolgirls speak in standard Japanese, never show any signs of wavering in following their assigned mission, and, as Yomota Inuhiko notes, are never shown to be subjected to discrimination by the Japanese military.[40] The striking lack of distinguishing characteristics between the heroines cements their symbolic status, appropriated by Imai to solely further an anti-war rhetoric and condemn the *kōminka* policies in effect before and during the war, which had pushed for Japanese militarism and loyalty to the emperor. This kind of representation, that downplays ethnicity and Japanese wartime acts of aggression, continues to be observed even in war films not about the Himeyuri, such as the 1971 *Battle of Okinawa* and up to today in mainstream media, such as in the 2003 TV movie *Song of the Canefields*.

2.2 *Okinawa as an ethnographic object*

With the increasing Americanization and transition to consumerist economy in mid-twentieth century Japan that brought drastic changes in the lifestyles of urbanites, feelings of disenchantment with modernity and a common desire to return to one's "cultural roots" arose. This gradually led to a romantic shift in the way Okinawans were perceived, from

[39] Ibid., 106.
[40] Yomota Inuhiko, "Nihon eiga to mainoritii no hyōshō," in *Ajia No Naka No Nihon Eiga*, (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten 2001), 98.

economically and socially backward natives to "long lost forebears of Japanese culture."[41] This view likely reflects a much more longstanding ethnographic gaze on the part of mainland Japan toward Okinawa, that was started by ethnologist Yanagita Kunio in the early 1920s. In his records from his trip to the Ryukyu Islands, Yanagita, according to Alan Christy, consistently called attention to commonalities with mainland Japan in terms of their archaic past.[42] However, it was in the early1960s that these ideas were picked up and truly popularized by Shimao Toshio when he published of a series of essays on the theme of "Yaponesia," which "set in motion a flurry of scholarly activity in the Ryukyus that continues to the present day."[43] While Shimao theorized that Japan was an amalgamate of the Ainu, Yamato and Ryukyu cultures, his focus was on Okinawa, which he refashioned as an "object of desire, a place that would allow him to escape the oppressiveness of the main islands,"[44] which had been encumbered by the "dehumanizing" modernity. Furthermore, in the words of Philip Gabriel, Okinawa was defined by Shimao as Japan's "unconscious other,"[45] where mainland Japanese could retrieve something long lost due to their society's inexorable transformations. In his view, Okinawans had preserved a gentleness and a simple way of life unattainable in the rational mainland. While Shimao's texts were influential among members of the anti-reversion movement to assert Okinawa's distinctive character, some voiced unease with their essentializing ideas, that fixed Okinawans in an unchanging past.

In cinema, this kind of objectification of Okinawa was most famously observed in Imamura Shōhei's *Kamigami no fukaku yokubo* [*The Profound Desires of the Gods*] from 1968, which works as a critique of Japanese modernity, by emphasizing Okinawan difference and the latter's living connection with the past. The film, set on Ishigaki island, is the account of a closed community on a fictional island, grappling with its own ancient superstitions and taboos while on its way to opening up itself to industrial modernization. The film achieved significant critical acclaim in the mainland[46] for mingling reality and myth to explore the theme of original sin through its focus on the incestuous relationship of an ostracized brother and sister. Among film scholars, focusing on Okinawa, however, it has been criticized for its

[41] Angst, "Gendered Nationalism," 109.
[42] Alan Christy, "The making of imperial subjects in Okinawa," in *Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Modern Japan,* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 197-200.
[43] Davinder Bhowmik, "Ōshiro Tatsuhiro and mythic Okinawa," in *Writing Okinawa: Narrative Acts of Identity and Resistance*, 115.
[44] Ibid., 116-17.
[45] Philip Gabriel, "Shimao Toshio's Quest for Yaponesia," *Japan Quarterly*, 1999, 55.
[46] It was ranked first at *Kinema Junpo*'s 1968 Top Ten Best Films. See Nakazato Isao, "Ediposutachi ha onari no yume wo mita ka," in *Okinawa, imēji no fuji (ejji)*, 154.

ethnographic gaze and lack of factual accuracy,[47] with Ōmine Sawa and Gerow consenting that the setting bears no relation to real life Okinawa and has only been instrumentalized to serve as Japan's primordial "other" in order to denounce the "hollowness of Japanese capitalism."[48] Curiously, the film also attracted a lot of attention in Okinawa itself, with film critic Nakazato Isao observing that there was opposition against shooting it on the island. In fact, its release subsequently prompted four staff members of *Okinawa Times* to organize a round-table discussion, in which the film was particularly strongly criticized by writer and, later anti-return activist Arakawa Akira, who maintained that Imamura had shallowly incorporated Okinawan traditions, such as the Akamata festival (presented as Dongama festival in the film), ignoring their actual meaning and significance for the locals and using them to pursue his theme of "primitivity," ultimately committing "cultural misappropriation" (*bunka ōryō*).[49] While on one hand, the choice of Okinawa as a setting uncovers veiled mainland perceptions of it being a temporal and spatial "other," stuck in an ahistorical past, the criticism it garnered among some Okinawan intellectuals is particularly noteworthy for Takamine Gō also expressed his disapproval for it. I will come back to this in the fourth chapter.

2.3 *Okinawa as an object of consumer desire*

The ethnographic gaze toward the southern islands elaborated on in the previous section, together with Japan Tourist Bureau's promotion of Okinawa as a tourist destination following the reversion contributed to the establishment of the most commonly encountered and discussed representation of Okinawa today as an object of consumer desire. This mode of representation did not truly pick up until the 1990s "Okinawa boom" when mainstream and popular Japanese media was flooded with representations of the region as an "eternally festive place,"[50] boasting pristine nature, preserved traditions and healing (*iyashi*) experiences. It has been criticized for domesticating differences by capitalizing on the island prefecture's reputation as an exotic resort that situates it in opposition to the metropolitan mainland Japan. Just like the case in the previous section, this touristic gaze essentializes and

[47] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 82.
[48] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 277, and
Ōmine Sawa, "Towairaitozōn nama: Takamine Gō ikō no Okinawa no hyōshō," *Gengo Bunka* 24 (2007), 61.
[49] Nakazato, "Ediposutachi ha onari no yume," 155-58.
[50] Tanaka Yasuhiro, "The Media Representation of "Okinawa" and US/Japan hegemony," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4:3, 2003: 421.

stereotypes Okinawa, but is also supported by a consumerist economy, that promotes differences as "cool" and relatable.

The most commercially successful director in this mode is Nakae Yūji, whose films *Nabi no koi* [*Nabbie's Love*] (1999) and *Hotel Hibiscus* (2003) achieved significant acclaim both in Okinawa and in the mainland. While they both present utopian visions of the prefecture, the former is particularly characteristic of subsequent tendencies in representation of filmmakers that are part of the boom. First of all, the film abounds with warm colors and scenes of nature, music, dance, and harmonious interactions between Okinawans, mainland Japanese and foreign characters, and is absent of any feelings of "historical anguish" or ambiguousness toward the reversion. Ko utilizes Tessa Morris-Suzuki's concept of cosmetic multiculturalism to argue that this way films like *Nabbie's Love* celebrate superficial cultural diversity in order to conceal Japanese violence in its imperial and colonial past, thus absolving Japan from any responsibility for its past activities and their present consequences.[51] Secondly, the film is told from the perspective of Nanako, who quits her job in Tokyo and returns to her grandmother's place in Okinawa where she eventually finds love. This motif of Okinawa as a place to which lead characters travel to, seeking some sort of a spiritual or emotional healing experience is persistent in films utilizing the touristic gaze, cementing the position of the spectator as an outsider, but also the function of these islands as catalysts for transformative experiences. With those features, Nakae's films have played a key role in the promotion of an Okinawa constructed "in the way desired and scripted by the dominant Japanese culture,"[52] thus also reinforcing the invisible hierarchical relationship between mainland Japan and its southernmost prefecture.

2.4 *Okinawa as a symbol of Otherness*

At scattered points of time, directors who challenge the dominant gazes on Okinawa have also emerged. Here I will give overviews of three films by such directors, who include Ōshima Nagisa, Sai Yōichi and Kitano Takeshi, and how they in various ways also use Okinawa as a space that signifies difference.

As if in a direct critique to *The Profound Desires of the Gods*, Ōshima Nagisa's *Dear Summer Sister* takes as subject the return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972 to problematize any relationship the two countries could have based on a common origin. The film lacks any

[51] Ko, "Nihonjinron: The ideology of Japaneseness," in *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*, 28-29.
[52] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 88.

references to any indigenous island culture, and instead the search of the main character and Tokyoite Sunaoko for her Okinawan half-brother unravels issues of war responsibility and discrimination against Okinawans that impede on the proper integration of Okinawa as a Japanese prefecture. As Ko discusses in her analysis of the film, the lack of resolution in the plot and ambiguousness surrounding the brother-sister relation denotes Ōshima's critical attitude toward ethnographic discourses of a common origin with regards to Okinawa that serve to justify its integration and disregard historical contentions.[53]

Ōshima's former assistant director, *Zainichi* Korean director Sai Yōichi brings up Okinawa as a central setting in four of his films – *Rest in Peace My Friend* (1985), *Ei sain deizu* [*Via Okinawa*] (1989), *Attack* (1991), *Buta no mukui* [*Pig's Revenge*] (1999) – but without reflecting on its more conventional representations, as described above. Instead, Sai focuses on the prefecture's "opaque" differences, thus, as Gerow argues, developing "films that respect the otherness of others" with characters that "do not fit the dominant national image."[54] For instance, most of the plot in the film *Via Okinawa*, which is based on the life of Okinawan rock 'n' roll singer Marie Kyan and her band Marie with Medusa during the height of the Vietnam war, is mainly set in dark gritty bars, attended by American military personnel, and includes numerous instances of violence in the form of bar fights and domestic abuse perpetrated by the female lead's husband. Not only are the typical touristic shots of blue sea and abundant nature absent, but so are any references to traditional Okinawan music and culture, as well as references to war memory and US base-related tensions. Instead, the film follows the dynamics between the lead Okinawan characters, one of whom is a half-American, and US soldiers in the tumultuous time period. Yomota contrasts Sai's "spatial and physical" approach to Ōshima's "conceptual world traced along a historical temporal axis."[55] Rather than imbuing the narrative with historical references in order to bring into light the problematic relationship between Japan and Okinawa as the latter does in *Dear Summer Sister*, Sai chooses to stick to the present, individual realities of his characters and their specific circumstances. In fact, in relation to *Via Okinawa*, he indicates in an interview that he aimed to resist any political representations of Okinawa that see it as the "keystone of the Pacific," and instead reveal it in its heterogeneity and "cultural

[53] Ibid., 81.
[54] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 275.
[55] Ibid., 291.

creolization."[56] Gerow notes that this is an attempt to "counter nationalist essentialism with a detached style that is thoroughly grounded in the chaotic mundane."[57]

Similarly to Sai, mainland Japanese auteur director Kitano Takeshi has also utilized Okinawa as setting in two of his films, as a form of critique of Japan's myth of homogeneity. In his *Boiling Point* (1990) and *Sonatine* (1993) the mainland Japanese characters are pushed by circumstances to go to Japan's southernmost prefecture, however, over there they only find death. Kitano's use of startling long saturated shots of blue skies and beaches in these cases is neither touristic, nor comforting. Rather, it is presented as chilling and uninhibited, a "free space of play in contrast to the confined world of Tokyo."[58] As Yomota points out, in the case of *Boiling Point*, there are no scenes of the characters' transition from Tokyo to Okinawa, which contributes to the Okinawa's rendering as an alternative space, free of social rules.[59] This rather abstract interpretation seems to aim to portray this space as the place where the characters' journeys end, a liminal point between life and death. Kitano's "detached" style, as defined by Gerow, reproduces a version of the "other" in the face of Okinawa, that is different from the gazes elaborated on above, as it does not try to present the region as an object of consumer desire, neither does it use it to affirm national myths of homogeneity. Ko, however, argues that rather than challenging notions of nation state, Kitano attempts to romanticize the notion of Japan's emptiness, by relating these representations to philosopher Kitarō Nishida's ideas from the early 20th century of Japan as a place of nothingness, embodying "subtle, fragile and noble beauty."[60] In this sense, Kitano's use of Okinawan setting to criticize Japan is no different to directors, such as Imamura, who pay no heed how close to reality the representation is, and instead, conceive it as an abstract space necessary to provoke the unveiling of deeply buried truths.

In essence, all three directors treat Okinawa as an illustration of otherness that aims to expose certain uncomfortable "truths" about the Japanese state, such as the myth of the common origin and historical memory. These representations are, in general, not concerned with the specificity of the prefecture, and in the cases of Sai and Kitano's films, the differences would have likely been negligible if another locale had been used.

[56] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 90.
[57] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 290.
[58] Ibid., 293.
[59] Yomota, "Nihon eiga to mainoritii no hyōshō," 104.
[60] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 90.

This chapter aimed to show a glimpse of the general trends in portraying Okinawa by mainland directors, by providing examples and the cultural contexts in which they arose. These examples can be divided in four broad groups: cinematic depictions that appropriate Okinawans as a war victim and loyal subject; ones that see it as an object of colonial or consumer desire; and ones that use it as an embodiment of otherness within the boundaries of Japan. In all cases, Okinawa appears to operate "as a productive space for identities that have come into crisis."[61] This raises the question of how one could represent Okinawa without "reconfirm[ing] Japan's centrality and Okinawa's marginality."[62] The next chapter will look at Takamine and his articulations of a more personal Okinawa.

[61] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 274.
[62] Ibid., 275.

Chapter 3: Takamine Gō's articulations of Okinawa

Despite being exceedingly rare to come across, with his works only having been released on VHS and screened at the occasional film festival, Okinawa-born experimental director Takamine Gō's oeuvre has come to be regarded unequivocally by film scholars as the "quintessential" Okinawan filmmaker, with Ōmine Sawa and Nakazato Isao dividing "Okinawan cinema" as before and after Takamine.[63] In this chapter I will first provide a brief overview of Takamine's biography. Then I will assess prior scholarship on Takamine that analyzes his most discussed films *Untamagirū* and *Tsuru-Henry* and in what ways they are argued to differ from dominant cinematic representations of Okinawa.

3.1 *Biographical overview*

Takamine was born in 1948 in Ishigaki, but grew up in Naha, Okinawa Prefecture. He went to university in Kyoto, where he still lives today. Takamine notes in an interview that it is the alienation he felt in "the heart of Japan" Kyoto, which he saw as "barren" (*fumō*) and "exotic" (*ikokujōcho*), which made him more self-conscious of his identity and incited him to start filming in Okinawa.[64] He is known for producing experimental films that include multiple documentaries, the more prominent of which include *Okinawa Dream Show* (1974), *Okinawa Chirudai* (1978) and *Private Images of Ryukyu: J.M.* (1996), and four feature films, that include *Paradise View*, *Untamagirū* (1989), *Tsuru-Henry* (1998) and *Hengyoro* [*Queer Fish Lane]* (2016). *Untamagirū* has garnered multiple film festival awards, most notably the Caligari Film Award at the Berlin Film Festival. Takamine's idiosyncratic cinematic style in combination with elements of indigenous culture and political undertones pertaining to Okinawa's ambivalent status have made him a filmmaker, always analyzed in terms of his ideas of Okinawan identity.

[63] Takamine Gō, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (2/2)," and Ōmine Sawa, "Towairaitozōn nama: Takamine Gō ikō no Okinawa no hyōshō," 60.
[64] Takamine Gō, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (1/2)," Interview by Nakazato Isao, *Documentary Box,* 2003, https://www.yidff.jp/docbox/22/box22-1-1.html.

3.2 *Explorations of the theme of identity*

Despite Takamine's professed irritation with having his films used for the study of Okinawan issues,[65] their Okinawan specificity and political undertones continue to invite interpretations that prioritize the respective films' political dimension and involvement in the "postcolonial struggle about representation."[66] Perhaps the most conspicuous reason these kinds of readings are unavoidable is his persistent interrogations of memories of the 1972 reversion to Japan. From *Okinawan Dream Show* up to *Tsuru-Henry,* Takamine's early films all take as their main theme this highly political event, revealing the auteur's preoccupation with the change, which he himself admits in an interview that he still finds it "difficult to digest."[67] As detailed in the first chapter, Okinawans' expectations for decreased military presence remained unmet, and the reversion itself led to rapid economic and societal transformations, that gradually evolved into anxieties related to Okinawa's seemingly imminent "Japanification." As a result, the event emerged as a "temporal and conflictual axis around which Okinawan identity was constructed."[68]

In this sense, Takamine's films have often been interpreted as ruminations over what Okinawan identity stands for, especially with respect to mainland Japan. Yomota and Ko, in particular, bring up Fredric Jameson's notion of national allegory to argue that this concept is used, particularly in *Untamagirū*, as a "focal point from which to look on things."[69] Jameson argued that all texts from the so-called Third World, which accounts for nations that had at some point been subjects to colonialist or imperialist rule, have to be read as national allegories, for the political and personal realms in such societies are not separated. With Okinawa's ambivalent status and alleged experience of colonialism, it is of little surprise that native Takamine's films have been approached as Third World texts. In fact, Yomota asserts that the protagonist Girū in *Untamagirū* is a "perfect example" of the notion.[70] Ko further

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[65] Takamine, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (2/2)."
[66] Ina Hein, "Media Constructions of Okinawa as a 'Different Japan': A Postcolonial Struggle about Representation," In *"Making a Difference: Representing/Constructing the Other in Asian/African Media, Cinema and Languages," Annual Conference of the Consortium for African and Asian Studies (CAAS) Conference, Proceedings of the Papers,* ed. by Aoyama Toru, (Tokyo: Office for International Academic Strategy (OFIAS), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2012), 99.
[67] Takamine, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (2/2)."
[68] Ito Shigeaki, "An Intersection of Okinawa Images: Memory, Documentary and Dreams," *Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival,* 2003, https://www.yidff.jp/2003/cat095/03c097-e.html.
[69] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 98.
[70] Yomota Inuhiko, "The Collapse of the Studio System: 1981-1990," in *What is Japanese Cinema: A History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 166.

develops this idea by analyzing how national allegory is expressed in the film, which I will relate below, after a brief summary of its plot.

Set in the late 1960s, *Untamagirū* has a well-defined protagonist, Girū, who initially works at a sugar cane refinery, but is quickly forced to take on life as an outlaw in the Untama forest after he sleeps with the refinery owner Nishibaru's adopted daughter Marē. Marē, originally a pig, had been entrusted to Nishibaru by the Untama Forest God, to be looked after until she was of age, when the god was expected to take her as his bride. In the forest Girū is given supernatural powers by *kijimunā*, a tree spirit from Okinawan folklore, and gradually establishes himself as Untamagirū, a chivalrous thief who steals from the rich to give to the poor and helps out the Okinawan independence movement. However, towards the end of the film he is fatally wounded by Nishibaru, who throws a spear in his head in revenge, following which the protagonist starts to wander aimlessly around the island.

The interpretation of this film as an allegory for Okinawa is primarily underscored by the importance and popularity of the folk story Untamagirū for Okinawans. The whole film is a modern reinvention of a story about a mythical 18th century Okinawan bandit who rebelled against his governors by stealing property and giving it to the poor. According to Ōshiro Tatsuhiro's research on Ryūkyūan drama, the story was, in fact, fully developed as late as the 1880s, just after Okinawa's annexation, with the purpose to be held as a moral example for Okinawans.[71] The folk hero is still widely popular in the prefecture with Okinawan creators continuing to produce plays, stories and even comic books based on the legend.

It is easy, then, to see Girū, who is depicted as a reincarnation of Okinawa's national hero, as a personification of Okinawa in the years leading to the reversion. In particular, Yomota argues that the final shots of Girū wandering with a spear in his head project him as "the fate of Okinawa" once it becomes part of Japan, as the event is associated with the obliteration of the dream of Okinawan independence.[72] Ko adds to this analysis, suggesting that on one hand, Girū in this state could be argued to represent a feminized and subjugated Okinawa "before dominant and powerful foreign (male) intruders."[73] However, she is also quick to point out that Takamine's use of cinematic and narrative strategies "refuse to generate a simplistic narrativization of Okinawan memories and experiences," but rather can be seen as "a method or a point from which complex and plural memories […] can be evoked

[71] Ōshiro Tatsuhiro, cited in Yomota Inuhiko, "Nihon eiga to mainoritii no hyōshō," 110.
[72] Yomota, "Takamine Gō," 167.
[73] Ibid., 96.

and interrogated."[74] To illustrate this, Ko argues that Nishibaru can also be seen as an allegory of the "blind" supporters of the reversion, who at the time did not realize what the consequences would be, and Marē, his adopted daughter, who is depicted as being desired by the majority of the male characters in the film, could be a personification of the desired Okinawa, a "symbolic capital to be freely exchanged by men, in the same way Okinawa has been traded between Japan and US."[75] In the final scene of the film, when Nishibaru switches from Okinawan to perfect standard Japanese to say that from then on Okinawa is to be Japan, he takes out sticks of dynamite from his pocket and commits collective suicide with Marē, which in a sense could signify the destruction of those two "kinds of Okinawa," while the fate of the wandering, but weakened Girū remains uncertain.

Ko is cautious in pursuing this analysis further by conceding that while it suggests a well-defined binary between Okinawan and mainland Japanese, *Untamagirū* in the end presents an ambiguous view toward the extent of which the protagonist is actively engaged with actively constructing and asserting a political identity. Girū, when subjected to a surprise attack by the police after bringing weapons stolen from the US Kadena Air Base to the Okinawan Independence Party, notes: "Neither America, nor Japan is my home country. It is only this Ryūkyū that is my homeland."[76] However, the political strength of this statement is negated, after the protagonist comically admits that he was provoked to say it by fear.

This brings me to the second point that is persistently brought up when looking at Takamine's films, or namely their conscious attempt to escape essentialist conceptions of identity and move beyond representation. In particular, in his textual analysis of *Tsuru-Henry*, Gerow notes that Takamine's use of techniques, such as collage "foregrounds the problem of textuality and representation, thus emphasizing Okinawa as an issue of performance."[77]

A collage of different media, *Tsuru-Henry* interweaves the narrative of a singer, Tsuru and her son Henry, who set on stage as a play an abandoned film script, written by a Taiwanese, called "Love's Love" (*Rabū no koi*), together with the narrative of the script's protagonist, James, son of an Okinawan woman and USCAR High Commissioner, who leaves Okinawa to study at UCLA, while also searching for his father, who had abandoned him just after his birth. However, James is soon deported back to Okinawa by the US

[74] Ibid., 98.
[75] Ibid., 98.
[76] My translation, based on the Japanese subtitles.
[77] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 298.

government. There, he immolates himself, in a fashion resemblant of Buddhist monks protesting against the Vietnam war,[78] and wanders to the beach, where he reunites with his mother. In the end the two of them walk into the sea where they both disappear.

The film appears to put forward a "nomadic form of Okinawan identity,"[79] embodied by the mixed-race character of the play, James, who, marginalized by his own community, declares in a voiceover: "I am not an American./ I am not a Japanese./ I may not be an Okinawan."[80] If considered as an allegory, this strategy shows how unstable the concept of an Okinawan identity is. More than any other of his previous feature films, Takamine problematizes the idea of a Japan-Okinawa binary and refutes the value of a dialogue on origins, while in the same time putting under question the possibility of a unified and an "authentic" identity. In *Tsuru-Henry* characters themselves shift between identities, political positions and languages, in between disparate scenes of *rensageki* theater performances or restored footages of historical events, "emphasiz[ing] the confusion of a colonized culture as well as the thrill of manipulating elements in a collage."[81] Interestingly in this respect, Yomota notes a continuity between *Tsuru-Henry*, *Untamagirū* and *Paradise View* expressed in the motif of the "wandering man" (*hōkōsuru seinen*).[82] In the endings of all three, their respective protagonists, James, Girū and Reishū are in a way crippled and drift aimlessly around the island, because of which Yomota sees them as metonymies for an Okinawa that will continue to lead an ambivalent existence. While the injuries of these characters might corroborate this pessimistic reading, perhaps this motif is another manifestation of a "wanderer" form of identity.

Ultimately, while the employment of an allegorical perspective in *Untamagirū* and *Tsuru-Henry* illuminates historical predicaments that have informed the films, its complex use in combination with the films' blurred boundaries between reality and fiction, and victims and aggressors frustrate any attempts to apply any binary designations to Okinawa as self or other.

[78] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 301.
[79] Ibid., 299.
[80] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 103.
[81] Ibid., 300.
[82] Yomota, "Takamine Gō," 166.

Chapter 4: Paradise View

More than any other of his feature films, *Paradise View* is a film engaged in interrogating Okinawa's dominant representations and moving beyond them. Unlike *Untamagirū* and *Tsuru-Henry*, his pioneer feature work lacks overt engagement with US and Japanese ruling authorities, employing instead an inward-looking perspective of the way the impending reversion was experienced. How is this film positioned with respect to Takamine's filmography and Okinawan film history, and to what extent does it engage with redefining the way to represent Okinawa? In this chapter I will look at how in *Paradise View* engages with constructing a binary between Okinawa and Japan, while at the same time resisting the use of representational strategies, characteristic of the mainland representations investigated in the second chapter.

4.1 *Paradise View as an allegory for Okinawa's loss of mabui*[83]

Similarly to *Untamagirū* and *Tsuru-Henry*, *Paradise View* also engages with historical recollection of the sense of anxiety prevalent immediately before the return to Japan, connected to the impending reversion. To explore this topic, the film consists of disjointed episodes of the prosaic everyday life of a small and seemingly isolated village community in the "paradisal" Okinawa, who are connected by the central plotline of the ruined wedding between a newcomer Japanese and a local girl, Nabē, because of the latter's affair with another local, Reishū, before the ceremony. Reishū's key role in the film's central conflict and his interminable loss of *mabui* toward the end of the film has led critics like Yomota to designate him as a metonymy for Okinawa's fate following the reversion.[84] While this makes it tempting to follow Mika Ko's approach in applying the concept of national allegory, I intend to focus on examining his storyline "not in nationalistic terms, but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal,"[85] in order to discuss the film's political dimension.

Paradise View itself starts with a long shot of a rocky beach with the lone, crouched figure of Reishū collecting sea salt, hoping that it would help him deal with persisting

[83] According to Okinawan folklore, the *mabui* or spirit of a living person can leave the body if the person is in a state of shock or surprise. "*Mabui*," Memoriaru Yōgen, Memoriaru Seibi Kyōkai, accessed December 14, 2019, https://oki-memorial.org/glossary/2350
[84] Yomota, "Takamine Gō," 159.
[85] Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory." *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 15.

chirudai, a state defined as weariness and despondency.[86] It is noteworthy that in his analysis of Takamine's prior film, *Okinawan Chirudai*, Nakazato argues that Takamine uses this term to refer to a distinct Okinawan affectivity, which "cannot be forcefully contained by the narrative of the nation and its people," and which would be abolished once Okinawa is absorbed within Japan's conceptions of temporality.[87] A little later, as the protagonist returns to his home, and talks to his mother and sister, it is revealed that the film is set near the end of the Vietnam War and that Reishū has been dismissed from his job at a US military base because of his participation in a strike. This is the only instance in the film where the protagonist is shown to have been entangled in a political act, but the spectator is never provided with any details about it. As Reishū continues to loaf about, catching snakes and in the meantime also starting a business with amphibious trucks, he eventually impregnates Nabē at a *mōashibi*, a now obsolete Okinawan custom, where young men and women would gather in the evening typically at the beach to sing and dance. Since Nabē had been set to marry Itō, a Japanese newcomer botanist,[88] this accident emerges as the central conflict of the film and will be explored in more detail in the following sections. Meanwhile, Chirū, a neighboring girl unusually interested in Reishū, starts having "prophetic" dreams of Reishū's *mabui* being eaten and then puked by a dog. Reishū is soon observed to be eating dirt, in relation to which Ryōsuke, a member of the independence movement, notes that Bajanga, a former member of the Independence Party, had lost his soul soon after he started eating dirt. At the wake of Reishū's grandmother, who was shot at a shrine next to the American shooting range, one of the visitors blurts out that her death was fate for she had not shown respect, which provokes Reishū to get in a fight with the former. As a result, the protagonist is arrested by the police. On the way to prison, anti-return guerrillas attack the bus he is on, which allows him to escape. Although Reishū tries to return to his girlfriend Jūru, he is greeted by her mother who informs him that she no longer wants to see him. No longer welcome in his home, Reishū starts wandering in the forests and around the shore, subsisting on soil. It is in this span of time that a *kijimunā*, an Okinawan forest fairy, is shown drawing out his soul during the protagonist's sleep. Reishū's empty shell of a body continues

[86] "*Chirudai*," Shuri-Naha Dialect Dictionary, accessed December 11, 2019, http://ryukyu-lang.lib.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/srnh/details.php?ID=SN21559.
[87] Nakazato Isao, "*Komamushitachi no hanran*," in *Okinawa: Imēji no ejji*, 244.
[88] It should be noted that film critics, such as Yomota, as well as Gerow and Ko, who ultimately cite Yomota, refer to Itō as an ethnologist in their interpretations, likely because the character teaches Japanese classics to Okinawans and demonstrates interest and an in-depth knowledge of the community's traditions. However, Itō's actual profession is never stated explicitly and all online resources about the film refer to him as a botanist. Given that throughout most of the film he wanders in the forest and collects plants, I will follow this convention.

wandering, but this time is also followed by two pigs, colored red and blue, respectively, perhaps as a nod to the short-lived tricolor flag of the Independent State of Okinawa. Perhaps symbolic in this case is that the "rainbow pigs," as they are referred by the villagers, are deemed dangerous and attack people. Eventually even he gets bitten on the abdomen by one of the two pigs, because of which he starts losing blood and is, from then on, depicted lying on the ground whenever encountered by other characters, such as Itō, Ryōsuke and Nabē's mother and two brothers. Although Nabē's family try to rejuvenate him by transfusing pig blood, this does not help, with the mother proclaiming that "there is no hope for him." The final scene of *Paradise View* is of Ryōsuke finding Reishū lying near the road and asking him if the latter was about to die. Reishū then stands up and starts walking on the road, leaving Ryōsuke behind. The film ends with a long shot of Reishū seen from the back, with the camera slowly zooming out to show him trudging toward the interior of the island. This scene seems to suggest an open ending, and that rather than die, the protagonist will simply continue wandering, gravely wounded and *mabui*-less. Reishū seems to embody the wounds to be inflicted by the upcoming reversion and as a result, Okinawa's inevitable loss of sense of self in its Japanese future.

What is perhaps most conspicuous in the above summary is the absence of any mention or visualization of political struggles. The negative impact of the US occupation on Reishū's life is only indicated by the mention of his dismissal from his military job, as well as the off-camera accidental shooting of his grandmother, most likely by training military recruits, but the reasons behind these events are never really explained, nor is blame appointed to anyone. In fact, even after his layoff, Reishū appears to still collaborate with the US military, as he starts his own business with military trucks. There is also no mention of tensions with Japan arising out of historical experiences, nor is Japan at any point depicted as an "aggressor." Rather than any political predilections, the direct cause of Reishū's loss of *mabui* is shown to be an Okinawan folk creature. It is noteworthy, in this respect that the two other characters in *Paradise View*, who are said to have lost their souls are Bajanga and Ryōsuke, both active members in an independence movement, which could suggest a sense of hopelessness regarding dreams of independent Okinawa. While Reishū does not appear to have been involved in any political factions, he can nevertheless be seen as the embodiment of Okinawa in transition, as it was trying to find new means of living with the impending handover. The displacement of power inevitably affects bystanders like Reishū and the displacement of his *mabui* is the visible manifestation of this.

Unlike in his later films, that were discussed in the previous chapter, and which were more concerned with demonstrating the instability of the concept of an "authentic" Okinawan identity, with its focus on loss, *Paradise View* appears to argue the end of Okinawa as it is with its handover to Japan. However, rather than using any visible manifestations of political rhetoric, the uneasiness with the transition is interwoven in the film's narrative in the form of a symbolic binary between Japan and Okinawa, expressed in multiple ways. In the next sections, I will study in more depth the expressions of this binary, the ultimate aim of which appears to be the subversion of the nationalistic, ethnographic and touristic homogenizing gazes analyzed in the second chapter.

4.2 *Language as marker of difference*

Paradise View is considered the first film to be made almost entirely in standard Okinawan language, requiring the insertion of subtitles for Japanese-speaking audiences, and for this reason it has been noted favorably by numerous critics for its use of language as a counter-hegemonic strategy and attempt to preserve a disappearing language.[89] Yomota has argued in detail how the filmmaker's choice does not respond to demands for realism, but is rather ideologically motivated.[90] At the time of filming, *uchinā-yamato guchi*, a synthesis of Okinawan and Japanese languages, was already used on a daily basis, while Okinawan had started to fall into obsolescence among the majority. In *Paradise View*, however, the Okinawan language is spoken by the majority of the characters, thus serving to exclude standard Japanese-speaking characters. In this section I will look more closely at the dynamics revolving around those "excluded" characters, focusing on the interactions between the Japanese-speaking Itō, Suzuki, as well as Reishū's girlfriend Jūru on one side and the Okinawan-speaking locals on the other.

The exclusion of Japanese is perhaps most overtly epitomized via the film's treatment of the mainland Japanese newcomer, Itō. The character is a botanist and teacher, who is shown to give lessons to villagers in Heian poetry. In his free time Itō wanders alone around the island, collecting plants and observing locals going about their daily life. His "elevated" status as an observer is illustrated in one such scene where, during his walk, he climbs a

[89] See for instance, Davinder Bhowmik, "Fractious Memories in Medoruma Shun's Tales of War," in David C. Stahl, and Mark Williams, *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film* 34 (Boston: Brill, 2010), 204, Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 92, and Yomota, "Takamine Gō," 160.
[90] Yomota, "Takamine Gō," 160.

concrete staircase that soars far above the forest, and takes in the view. Although he is also shown to work hard to fit in by, for instance, mastering the local way of making houses and learning on his own how to play a *sanshin*, a traditional Okinawan musical instrument, his rigid understanding of the locals ends up ultimately alienating him from them. This is seen when he decides to integrate fully by marrying the local Nabē in the way he insists that she partakes in *yāgumai*, a traditional "initiation ceremony" in which the future wife is confined in a cabin for a week. Even though Itō himself admits that he realizes that this practice is not taken seriously by the villagers anymore, he contends that if he does not follow it, the plants would "reject" him (*shokubutsutachi ni kobamareru*). This scene consolidates the impression that Itō holds an essentialized view of the village, and values more the idea he has of it, of a traditional community, rather than its dynamic actuality. In this respect, Gerow has argued that Itō was included in the film as a response to Imamura's *The Profound Desires of the Gods*, which the filmmaker had renounced for seeing the prefecture as an "ethnographic object."[91] As Nabē never shows up for their wedding, however, the botanist's status as an outsider in the community is cemented for all subsequent happenings in the film.

The invisible barrier set between the two languages is further reinforced with the inclusion of instances of communication misunderstandings based on language. In one such case, Nabē's brother Mitch discusses her pregnancy with the mainland Japanese dyer Suzuki, and blurts out that he wants to beat up Reishū for ruining her marriage, using the Okinawan slang word *takkurusu*, which carries the literal meaning of "to beat up to death." Suzuki, however, misunderstands its meaning to be identical to the Japanese *korosu* or to kill, and starts the alarming rumor that Mitch might want to murder Reishū, which causes heightened tensions within the community and signifies that the differences between Japanese and Okinawan might be too irreconcilable for the "return to the motherland" to not have any adverse consequences.

With the inclusion of Jūru, the standard Japanese-speaking girlfriend of Reishū, however, Takamine problematizes the idea of a simple binary between mainland Japanese and Okinawans based on language. Jūru's background is never elaborated on, nor is it explained why she never endeavors to speak in Okinawan, even when her mother addresses her in it. Furthermore, Jūru is shown to be detached from the community, with no instances of interactions with characters other than Reishū and her mother. Ko suggests that Jūru "may

[91] Gerow, "From the National Gaze," 277.

embody "occupied" space – in other words, occupied Okinawa."[92] The character acts distant toward the protagonist, anticipating from early on that their relationship will not last long, and even refuses to see him in the end. Language in this case is not simply used to assert cultural specificity and difference, but perhaps also to uncover tensions within the community itself with regards to the infiltration of an "outsider's" language in the local speech.

4.3 *Undoing the romanticizing gaze*

On a visual level, the film's lack of exotifying elements underlining Okinawa's sense of "otherness" is striking. Although *Paradise View* contains nearly all Okinawa "staples" of ethnographic and touristic representations, incorporating elements of tradition and folklore, it displays them in a subdued, ambivalent way, emphasizing ordinariness, rather than exoticism and essentialism.

The film's incorporation of folk stories and magical realist elements add to its Okinawan specificity, but not in a fetishizing way. Particularly noteworthy are the nondiegetic inserts of Okinawan parables about the "Ryukyuan primitive man" (*Ryūkyū genjin*), who mistakenly seduces an old pig, that has taken the form of a young woman, and about a *kijimunā* making fun of the primitive man and stealing the soul of a Ryūkyū samurai's wife. At first glance, these episodes seem to play the role of snippets into Okinawan culture, as their separation from the plot is accentuated by the monochrome scheme in which they are shot, as well as the absence of any sound apart from the dramatic voiceover that narrates the stories. However, they are also seamlessly interwoven within the narrative as dreams of Chirū and Reishū. Furthermore, in parallel with Chirū's dream of *kijimunā* stealing a woman's *mabui* and her hollow body following the forest fairy to the "river of clouds," boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred as immediately after the end of the "dream," Reishū is shown to stand in front of the very same river with a vacant look in his eyes. Soon after, a *kijimunā* is shown stealing Reishū's soul in reality. These moments are just few of many slippages of the fantastical world of Okinawan folklore into the characters' world, suggesting that they occupy the same space and time. What diminishes the exoticism of these magical realist elements is the commonplaceness with which they are introduced, a trademark of the magical realist mode,[93] and, particularly, their comicality. The

[92] Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 93.
[93] Takamine has been consistently commended on his subversive use of magical realism in his works, however, a more comprehensive review of how this applies to *Paradise View* is beyond the scope of this thesis. For an

exaggerated acting of the mythic characters in combination with the oddly specific descriptions of authoritative-sounding narrator, such as of the *kijimunā* being bitten by "ancient Ryukyuan mosquitoes," seem to be poking fun at the serious tone of these framed narratives, rather than presenting them as exemplaries of authentic culture.

Takamine's choice to focus on the local and specific as opposed to the touristic and generic is another way he overturns the touristic gaze. While the film is abounding with shots of traditional houses, goats, pigs, scenes of *sanshin* playing and dancing, it is scarce of any establishing shots of blue skies and sea, that could be appropriate for its title, *Paradise View*. Instead, Okinawan specificity is expressed through the inclusion of numerous local music and comedy performers in the main roles, such as two of hard rock band Condition Green's members as Nabē's brothers, folk singer Rinshō Kadekaru as the pot repairman, stand-up comic Teruya Rinsuke as the dentist, and numerous others. Takamine himself remarks in an interview that he intentionally selects Okinawan entertainers without experience in cinema, instead of professional actors from the mainland, to give his films a "concreteness" (*gudaisei*) and local color (*irodori*).[94] The film's emphasis on the mundane also contribute to its local feel. This is shown in a particularly comic way in the opening scene at the beach, where Reishū observes a group of villagers carrying a coffin, likely as part of the *shinkuchi* ritual, involving washing the bones of an ancestor. At one point a snake jumps out from the coffin, biting one of the carriers. Because of this he botches the ritual by losing hold of the coffin, for which another participant laments that they will be never forgiven by the ancestors. Traditions and rituals thus add specificity to the film, but the lack of solemnity surrounding them works in a demystifying and anti-essentializing way.

4.4 *Problematizing homogeneity*

The notion of one harmonious, and even backward community, suggested in other cinematic visions of Okinawa is problematized here, on one hand by asserting the deficiency of a theory of a pure origin, and on the other, by depicting the variety of political positions of the characters.

In its interrogation of essentialized notions of identity, the film brings up the topic of the village community's ethnic purity into question multiple times, particularly through the

example on the implications of the use of magical realist elements in *Untamagirū*, see Ko, "Representing Okinawa," 100-02.

[94] Takamine, "*Nihon no dokyumentarii sakka intabyū* #20: Takamine Gō (2/2)."

case of the mixed blood heritage of Nabē's family. This topic is first introduced when Nabe's mother, Mōshii, consults a *yuta* (female shaman) regarding whether her daughter marrying the mainland Japanese Itō would be favorable for "purifying" the blood of their family. The root of the issue are Nabē's two brothers, Mathew and Mitch, who were born to Mōshii by US military servicemen after her former husband had left her to work in the Philippines. Since the *yuta* gives her approval, this becomes the main drive behind Mōshii's insistence for the union between the two and thus behind the central conflict, as well. As a justification as to why the unenthusiastic Nabē should go forward with the arrangement, Mōshii states that after all, they will all be Japanese after the impending reversion, implying that there are no fundamental differences between the mainland and Okinawa. Mōshii's expectations, however, are ruined with the wedding fiasco. Moreover, the possibility of maintaining any purity, is also shown as unattainable, as in a later scene Ryōsuke questions Mōshii's assumption that marrying a Japanese won't lead to further mixing, thus retracing the binary between the mainland and Okinawans. The task itself is exposed as absurd, as in the end he points out that they are all already "mongrels," implying the impossibility of a return to purity.

This lack of homogeneity is also reflected in the attitudes of the characters toward the return to Japan, as well. On the one hand, Ryōsuke who engages in stealing weapons from the Kadena Air Base, planning attacks on government buildings and deploring the death of shamanism, because of which people reportedly had become materialistic and preferred money before independence can be considered a representative of the anti-reversionist view. However, the rest of the characters, like Mōshii, try to look to the future. This is seen in the classroom scene when Ryōsuke interrupts Itō while the latter teaches Okinawan locals *waka* poetry, to call on the students that as fishermen, studying Japanese does not suit them. Ryōsuke is, however, ignored and even told off by one with the words to "get with the times." However, this is perhaps the only instance where there is some kind of animosity between him and other villagers. It is noteworthy in this respect, that Reishū does not dominate the film like *Untamagirū*'s Girū in terms of symbolism and even screen time, which has led Ōmine to argue that the lack of distinctive characteristics on the part of *Paradise View*'s characters obscures the presence of any protagonist whatsoever and ensures their equality in importance for the plot.[95] Even if the film seems to suggest a sense of discontentment with the reversion process itself, expressed in the lack of *mabui* in pro-

[95] Ōmine Sawa, "Towairaitozōn nama," 87.

Independence activists, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, it does not seem to prioritize characters based on their political stands, thus resisting any essentializations of Okinawans as being of the same mind. Instead, the sense of discontentment is implied to be caused by an external factor. The collapse of Nabē's marriage to the Japanese botanist, which throws the whole village into turmoil, incites the community to look for ways to fix the situation or someone to blame. At first, Nabē's brothers decide to confront Reishū about it, inviting him for a swim, but as they lie on the beach with him, they find themselves unable to ask, for as Mitch concurs after this meeting, *mōashibi* is something widely accepted within their community. Later, when the brothers go to discuss this issue with the headman of the village to ask for advice, the latter states that no one is to blame for this situation, not Nabē's, nor Itō, nor Reishū's, since there is "no harm in a bit of fooling around." However, then he notes, that perhaps Itō is the one that "can't appreciate these things…" Similarly to the language differences, the cultural differences between the locals and the mainland Japanese Itō are once again suggested to be irrevocable and a cause for misunderstandings and tensions in the community. Rather than taking an aggressive and direct stance on the aspiration for independence, Takamine is more attentive to portraying the conflicting feelings and anxieties surrounding the period, ultimately emphasizing that they left an indelible mark in Okinawan public memory.

The aim of this chapter was to show how Takamine moves between asserting Okinawan cultural difference and resisting essentializing representations of the prefecture. Interpreting the film from an allegorical perspective reveals a general disconcertion with the present, without, however, attributing blame to anyone in particular. Instead, through the use of language as a marker of difference and through examinations of the mainland ethnographic and touristic gazes, the film evokes Okinawan specificity, while also reinforcing an irreconcilable difference between the island prefecture and the mainland, thus ultimately reversing discourse that fixes Okinawa as the "other" and making Japan the "external" object.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to bring to light to English-language scholarship the first feature of Okinawa-born Takamine Gō, *Paradise View*, and demonstrate the ways in which this film interrogates stereotypical representations of Okinawa. After discussing Okinawa's ambivalent status in the Japanese imaginary and the way it has been seen in cinema from nationalistic, ethnographic, touristic and "detached" gazes, I have argued that *Paradise View* is perhaps the film most engaged in "overthrowing" stereotypical representations of Okinawa in cinema, actively subverting images of the prefecture as a sacrificial victim, an ethnographic object, an object of desire and as an "other." The film achieves this through actively avoiding direct references to any representational tropes of Okinawa, such as the Battle of Okinawa, the US bases, touristic imagery, and through its focus on the mundane. As an end result, *Paradise View* creates a new way of seeing Okinawa, providing Takamine's subsequent films, *Untamagirū* and *Tsuru-Henry* with the landscape on which they could engage with articulating a particular concept of Okinawan identity.

While it needs to be acknowledged that this research project has been fairly limited in scope, mainly due to difficulties in obtaining Japanese-language academic and film resources regarding the subject, I hope it gives a glimpse at one of the various ways in which Okinawan creators today try to negotiate their position in local and national contexts. This is even more so in the case of Takamine, who has lived in Kyoto since the 1970s, yet has based all of his films in Okinawa. Perhaps it is partly this distance that incites him with every subsequent film to try to reinvent and transcend his interpretations of his home prefecture via experimental narrative strategies, asserting increasingly fluid notions of identity.

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