

NEGOTIATING MARRIAGE: CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE REPRODUCTION OF AMERICAN EMPIRE IN OKINAWA¹



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For U.S. military personnel stationed overseas, military regulations concerning personal conduct, overseas marriage, and family constitute a much resented symbol of the institutional surveillance and control the U.S. military exercises over its own rank and file. This article examines the complex set of procedures known as the “Marriage Package,” proscribed by U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington as the only legitimate means for Marines and Navy corpsmen to legalize an international marriage in Japan. The Marriage Package is a means of governance with implications for how U.S. servicemen conceptualize citizenship, social identity, and self. This article focuses on how institutional representations of transnational marriage and family are received, resisted, and/or reformulated by service personnel and their spouses. The intrusive and time-consuming marriage requirements contribute to a range of functional and gendered notions of citizenship and empire, crucial for the projection of American military power abroad. (Cultural citizenship, gender, transnational marriage, U.S. military, Okinawa)

On the outskirts of Kita-Nakagusuku in traffic-congested central Okinawa, about a 10-minute drive from U.S. Marine Corps Camp Foster and across the street from a small family sugar cane field, stands an apartment building, not particularly notable except for the tenants who occupied one of the fourth-floor flats. The rental contract for this apartment listed Yuki Shimabukuro as sole tenant, but the flat was occupied by both Yuki and her American military husband, USMC Lance Corporal Josh Eisner.² The small apartment had a cramped kitchen, and the adjoining living room was sparsely furnished with a worn, black leather couch and a glass-topped coffee table picked up at one of the ubiquitous military yard sales. Despite the heat, humidity, and the utter lack of a cross-breeze, the air-conditioning unit sat idle. Yuki explained apologetically that it was too expensive to run during the day. The Eisners spoke about their personal and family backgrounds, Josh’s rocky relationship with Yuki’s parents, and their carefully considered decision to marry across national cultural boundaries. Throughout their narrative, Josh expressed irritation with official Marine Corps rules and regulations.

After I asked Yuki to marry me, I discovered what a pain in the butt it was to *get* married. There was this “package” that the Marine Corps wanted you to fill out, where eventually, it was like

asking the General of 1st MAU [Marine Amphibious Unit], who I'd never met, for permission to get married. Like the guy could decide for me if I was smart enough to pick the right girl!

Rather than submit to this sort of institutional surveillance, the Eisners had opted to get married "out in town." As a result, Yuki was not "command sponsored"; i.e., she had no access to military healthcare, she could not fly standby on military flights, and they did not qualify for the comparatively spacious and air-conditioned base housing.

Countless U.S. military families in Okinawa and elsewhere, like the Eisners, engage in circumventing official U.S. military marriage and family regulations.³ As a result, they are able, to some degree, to fly under institutional radar. Yet, published personal memoirs, internet blogs, and ethnographic interviews suggest that even for couples who marry "by the book," military marriage and family regulations constitute a much resented symbol of the unrelenting institutional surveillance and control the U.S. military exercises over its own rank and file.⁴

This article addresses the complex procedures collectively known as the "Marriage Package." Proscribed by U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington as the only legitimate means for Marines and Navy corpsmen to legalize an international marriage in Japan, the Marriage Package is frequently disparaged as unnecessary, unenforceable, and unfair by servicemen and their fiancées facing the lengthy process. The analysis focuses on how institutional representations of military marriage and family found in the Marriage Package, particularly those involving "foreign national" spouses, are received, resisted, and/or reformulated by service personnel and their spouses. Of particular interest is the impact such institutional discourses have on experiences and expressions of military affiliation and other aspects of social identity and self among military personnel serving in Okinawa. Also considered are the voices of Okinawan spouses as they articulate subject positions that are markedly different from their feminist counterparts in the local anti-base movement.

Marriage Package directives specify the need for numerous U.S. and Japanese government documents substantiating the nationality and family background of the applicants, as well as physical examinations of both parties. The heart of the process—and the target of the most vociferous complaints—comprises a mandatory two-day Premarital Seminar and group counseling session led by military chaplains. Seminar procedures and content clearly presuppose an American male head of household, and prevailing military institutional gender and racial ideologies and long-standing stereotypes of foreign military brides continually emerge in the language of seminar presentations. On another level, seminar lectures draw on a model of marital strife framed as a clash between essentialized males and females. Seminar participants are in this way exposed to a U.S. military institutional model of the ideal military family,

wherein men serve their country by participating in combat while women serve their country by supporting their military husbands. Against the backdrop of Okinawa's long-term political and economic subjugation under the U.S. military, the seminar serves to recast the social and political inequalities inherent in the U.S. military presence in less threatening idioms of naturalized gender difference, marriage, and family.

The Marriage Package thus functions as a convenient tool for restructuring gendered and racialized notions of "cultural citizenship" in Okinawa and other overseas locations where the U.S. military has installations. "Cultural citizenship" I refer to here as the ideological process through which individuals become tied to (or subjected to) the state and state authority along cultural lines, for example as members of a social group deemed deserving of state benefits and protection. The effectiveness of the Marriage Package in restructuring such notions lies in its focus on the most intimate and personal details of servicemen's behaviors and relationships. Yet, even the military's considerable leverage in imposing official notions of the intimate and private, personal and professional responsibility, and cultural citizenship has limits.

The material presented here draws from fieldwork conducted on military transnational marriage in Okinawa between 2000 and 2002, and again in 2009. It includes an extended description and analysis of the Marine Corps Community Services ("MCCS") Premarital Seminar, which I observed in March 2002. This material is analyzed with reference to the larger historical and political context of the ongoing U.S. military presence in Okinawa, particularly with regard to the military-associated sexual economy and politics. Further data from semi-structured interviews with military transnational couples and participant observation⁵ reveals a fundamental tension between military institutional representations of marriage and family and the subjective ideas and experiences of service personnel and their spouses, raising critical questions about subject position, power, agency, and the military as a state institution. Ultimately, this research contributes to what Lutz (2006) refers to as "ethnographies of empire," anthropological research concentrating on the people living in and around U.S. military bases and designed to reveal the human face and vulnerabilities of American imperialism.

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND MILITARY MARRIAGE PROCEDURES

Within anthropology, the designation "cultural citizenship" refers to the interplay between coercive definitions of citizenship that emanate from state centers of power and the responses of (often marginalized) citizen groups who variously

embrace, challenge, and transform imposed ideologies and policies (Rosaldo 2003). Specific formulations of cultural citizenship variously revolve around notions of “deservingness,” the “proper” conduct of relationships in institutional settings, and the discursive manipulation of “progress” or “civilization” and civic “backwardness” (see Horton 2004; Gammeltoft 2007; Fong 2007).

Investigating the changing dynamics of state power and citizenship in East and Southeast Asia, Ong (1996) has explored cultural citizenship as a process of subjectification, “in the Foucaultian sense of self-making and being made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administration” (Ong 1996:737). Ong emphasizes the role of state institutions in this process. “Hegemonic ideas about belonging and not belonging in racial and cultural terms often converge in state and nonstate institutional practices through which subjects are shaped in ways that are at once specific and diffused” (Ong 1996:738). In recent decades, the spread of American-style neoliberalism may be reconfiguring the relationship between governing and the governed, driving an imagined wedge between state governments and disciplinary practices, rearticulating such practices as imperatives of market capitalism (Ong 2006). Nonetheless, state institutions play an important role in processes of subjectification, particularly through their involvement in biopolitical modes of governing, which “center on the capacity and potential of individuals and the population as living resources that may be harnessed and managed by governing regimes” (Ong 2006:6; cf. Foucault 1978).

In Okinawa and throughout the global U.S. military complex, official marriage procedures and family regulations serve as a “site” of biopolitical governance and cultural citizenship processes. Analogous to historical European and American colonialism (Stoler 2006), U.S. military governance works through the bodies of enemy combatants, occupied civilians, and U.S. military personnel. The military utilizes an elaborate complex of bureaucratic regulations and procedures to buttress a training regimen that produces soldiers who are prepared to commit otherwise intolerable acts and to place loyalty to fellow soldiers and one’s mission above concerns for their own survival. Regulation of intimate domains—including sex, sentiment, and family—is an important component of military code. Overseas marriage, for example, is governed by an array of location-specific orders, established in accordance with Status of Forces agreements and General Orders of Conduct.

Notions of national/racial hierarchy and gendered images of the ideal military family play an important role in structuring official military approaches to marriage. In the MCCS Premarital Seminar, for example, ideas concerning what it means to be an active duty member of the U.S. military romantically involved with an Okinawan woman—including assumptions concerning the primacy of

the serviceman's language, family, and career—create a diversity of unequal subject positions, differentiating seminar participants along lines of gender and nation/race. Such processes contribute to a sense of entitlement and responsibility among many U.S. military personnel in Okinawa, evident in often conspicuous displays of privilege, prerogative, and control. For example, many believe that Okinawans should bear the burden of learning English in order to communicate with Americans, many of whom have no desire nor see a need to learn Japanese themselves. Many American servicemen display a profound lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity in off-base settings, expecting local merchants and Okinawan neighbors to behave according to familiar American social mores. Furthermore, crimes perpetrated by U.S. military personnel against Okinawans, including rape, receive inadequate attention and response across all ranks of the military (Angst 2003; Enloe 2000).

This “regime of truth” does not go unchallenged, however, even within the ranks of the military itself. The critical stance of the Eisners and couples like them vis-à-vis the Marriage Package and other forms of institutional control exposes the seams of the military's power, built precariously upon shifting hierarchies of rank and branch of service, as well as race, nationality, class, and gender. Ultimately, however, rigid military training and discipline, combined with a somewhat flexible approach to dissonance, encourages a range of “acceptable” and functional notions of citizenship and empire, crucial for the projection of American military power abroad. American imperialism is buttressed not only by physical coercion, but also by a “cultural language” that is used to naturalize and normalize the global U.S. military presence, making it appear unremarkable, inevitable, and legitimate (Lutz 2009:20–29). Perhaps more subtly and insidiously than even the utilitarian and humanitarian discourses discussed by Lutz, the negotiation of and even overt resistance to the disciplinary regimes of U.S. militarism, including oppositional notions of citizenship and identity adopted by occupied peoples and by U.S. servicemen, often play a role in reproducing the power dynamics that underpin American empire.

HISTORY OF MILITARY TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGE IN OKINAWA

The U.S. military has maintained a large-scale presence in Okinawa, the southernmost of Japan's 47 prefectures, since 1945 when the largest and most deadly battle of the Pacific War was fought there. Following the battle, U.S. officials transformed the archipelago into a training ground and base for forward-deployed American troops. In 1972, the islands reverted back to Japanese sovereignty, but the United States military continues to maintain a military

presence in the prefecture. Today, more than 75 percent of the U.S. military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa Prefecture, and more than fifty thousand U.S. military personnel, civilian employees, and family members are stationed in the prefecture (Okinawa Prefectural Government 2004).

Sexual and romantic interactions between young American servicemen and Okinawans have been commonplace throughout the postwar period. Yet military leaders have tended to discourage marriage between GIs and Okinawan women. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, the U.S. military government introduced formal anti-fraternization regulations throughout Japan. Supreme Commander Allied Powers ("SCAP") Circular No. 7 drew attention to miscegenation laws in many U.S. states, as well as to U.S. immigration law, stating that no Armed Forces approval would be granted to servicemen to marry Japanese women (Koshiro 1999:156). In May 1946, SCAP ruled that Americans in Japan must abide by the Japanese civil code to establish the legality of a marriage. Following this order, many U.S. military men were legally married to Japanese women by Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian priests even though they had not received official military approval. U.S. immigration laws, however, barred Japanese persons—defined as those having 50 percent or more Japanese blood—from entering the United States and becoming citizens or permanent residents. Thus American servicemen were not able to take Japanese wives and children back to the United States. With the exception of a 30-day reprieve of immigration quotas in June 1947, Japanese brides were not permitted to immigrate to the United States until the McCarran-Walter Act was passed in 1952.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, military transnational marriages continued to be strongly discouraged in Okinawa, by both the military and the local Okinawan community. In interviews, military men who married Okinawan women during this period spoke of numerous bureaucratic obstacles and mixed responses from commanding officers. Retired Airman Ray Horner, 19 years old when he began dating Katsuko Asato in 1968, reported, "If he [the commanding officer] found out that you were living with somebody, officially he couldn't condone that. But he always asked us to have a map of where we were living on the back of our locator card so that somebody could find us in case of emergency. So it was a kind of tacit approval." Other commanders routinely discouraged such relationships on the grounds that interracial relationships would draw public disapproval within both Okinawa and the United States. George Johnson (married in 1966) explained, "The primary argument was 'Son, you're away from home and lonely. This is something that we're sure your family is not going to accept. You're letting your testosterone think for you instead of thinking logically.'" Rick Marshall, a retired Marine Corps Staff Sergeant (married in 1972), complained, "The chaplain was talking about how dirty these people are, and this

kind of stuff, and how I didn't really want to get married" Tom Grisham, married in 1968 while recuperating from combat injuries in Vietnam, described a meeting with a gunnery sergeant who tore up his marriage application and threatened, "You'll marry a damn gook over my dead body." Personal and institutional racism against the Japanese thus provided the political and cultural context for military regulations concerning marriage between American GIs and Okinawan women.

The sexualized nature of the American military occupation of Okinawa is also critical to understanding the local context within which U.S. military men and Okinawan women met, dated, and married. Following the Battle of Okinawa, the large-scale appropriation of village agricultural lands by the U.S. military forced farming families to find alternative means of economic survival. Many relocated to the growing "base towns" in search of work. Over the next 30 years, these areas developed into thriving cities dependent upon massive base-related service economies, including the sex/entertainment industry (Sturdevant and Stolfus 1993). During the occupation, military institutional involvement in the local sex industry was exemplified by the A-sign system, in which restaurants, bars, and cabarets that met official standards for hygiene were conspicuously posted with a sign bearing a large "A" and the words "Military Approved."

Within this social political context, Okinawan women were discouraged by their families and neighbors from engaging in any kind of intimate relationship with American GIs. Popular stereotypes linked women who dated and married GIs with the sex trade flourishing outside the gates of the larger Okinawan bases. Miyagi Satoko, who married a Marine Corps NCO in the late 1960s, remembered:

In the early days, there were many instances where young Okinawan women met GIs, dated or simply had sex with them, got pregnant and gave birth to children without getting married. They deposited the kids with grandma and grandpa, and then left to work in the base towns or in mainland Japan. . . . Commonly, you would see grandmothers walking around with small blond children in villages like Motobu and Nakijin. Older folks, grandparents, were ashamed of the children because it was generally assumed that most of them were conceived by mothers who were involved in prostitution.

Generally speaking, sex with American soldiers was considered to be morally contaminating behavior. This had much to do with the association of U.S. military men with war and killing. However, an emphasis on racial differences between American GIs and Okinawans also suggests a connection between conceptions of moral purity and ideas concerning racial purity. The creation of special bar and cabaret districts—with the co-operation of local U.S. military officials—during the late 1940s thus constituted a key strategy of moral and racial

containment. Social worker Shima Masu recalled the situation in one Okinawan base town:

At that time, Goeku Village (now part of Okinawa City) had already become the symbol of Okinawa as a military base island (*kichi okinawa*). The adjacent villages of Chatan, Kadena, Yomitan, and Misato were under siege by the U.S. military camps. . . . In Koza, there were many women (prostitutes) specializing in American soldiers. Most of them rented rooms in private homes, where they brought black men (for sex). In many of these homes, middle school and high school students were living as well. . . . For the sake of environmental purification (*kankyō jōka*) and the prevention of youth misconduct, we had to intervene quickly. (Quoted in Takushi 2000:126–27, my translation)

Goeku Village leaders co-operated with local military officials in establishing a special bar zone just outside the settlement. In 1949, the U.S.-backed government of the Ryukyus designated special entertainment zones in Koza, Naha, Maebaru, and elsewhere (Takushi 2000:127). Okinawans reacted variously to the concept of special zones, but many believed that the creation of separate zones would help protect young women of “good families” (Takushi 2000:128).

Local understandings of race and class thus intertwined with ideas concerning sexual morality in popular images of military sex workers. Women who found their way to the base towns and sold their sexual labor to American soldiers, it was assumed, came from lower-class backgrounds; they had little education and their families depended on the income they earned to survive. In interviews, Okinawan women who married U.S. servicemen during this period expressed sympathy towards occupation-era sex workers, perhaps in part out of an awareness that they shared the same popular image due to their intimate association with American military men, but they also strategically utilized discursive devices, such as expressions of pity, that made explicit their own distance from the military sex industry. For example, I was enjoying a friendly lunch in Miyagi Satoko’s sunroom one afternoon when she began speaking about her career as a caseworker for the local branch of an Amerasian advocacy organization. One extremely poor family that she had worked with had consisted of four siblings who were being raised by their grandparents while their mother lived and worked in the vicinity of one of the mid-island bases. The children had suffered a great deal, Miyagi-san explained, because of their mother’s “poor choices.” Miyagi-san’s own history of leaving the village to work in Koza, as well as her own intimate relationship and marriage to an American military man, could not have had less bearing upon the conversation. In this way, Miyagi-san was able to project negative stereotypes associated with military transnational intimacy away from herself, even as she reinforced the overall truth value of such images by framing her comments with references to the internationally known Amerasian organization she worked for.

Illustrating a contrasting approach to occupation-era military transnational intimacy, Nakama Tetsu,⁶ a translator from Okinawa City, expressed admiration for women who had had the courage to marry Americans during this period despite the fact that this transgressed popular ideas concerning sexual morality and family. Nakama remarked that women who married U.S. military men during the occupation were truly remarkable compared to those who do so today. He said, “*Erai, naa. Ano yō na kokusai-kekkon, yokatta naa*” (That kind of international marriage was truly impressive). Nakama described women who married GIs in the 1950s and 1960s as having had “old-style educations” and “old-style values.” When they committed to marriage, it was for good. They had no career skills to fall back on, and they had no money of their own. Once they left with their husbands for the United States, they could no longer count on the support of their Okinawan friends and family, and flying back for a visit was unthinkable. Many women left believing that they would never see their families in Okinawa again.

The comments of retired military servicemen, military spouses like Miyagi Satoko, and Okinawan community members like Nakama Tetsu reveal the complicated relationship between military institutional and normative community approaches to military transnational intimacy, on the one hand, and the reactions and experiences of individual servicemen and Okinawan spouses on the other. For U.S. servicemen, narratives of occupation-era transnational dating and marriage highlight bureaucratic obstacles and unsupportive officers and chaplains, building an overall image of determined and fair-minded selves positioned against an oppressive and racist U.S. military institution. For Okinawan wives, personal narratives carefully construct the narrator’s own experiences of love and marriage as separate from the intimate experiences of occupation-era military sex workers. Perhaps unintentionally, this discursive strategy tends to reinforce popular community discourses—themselves constructed in relation to military institutional policies regulating military intimacy—that conflate sex, class, and morality to condemn women who share intimacy with American GIs. Such examples provide clear illustration of the complex processes of subjectification that radiate from state institutional practices which define a person’s deservingness and community membership in racial and cultural terms. Notions of cultural citizenship emerging out of institutional and community approaches to military transnational intimacy are therefore multifaceted and unpredictable. As illustrated by Miyagi-san’s strategic use of pity, even oppositional notions of self and citizenship may underpin and serve to naturalize overarching relations of power.

As Nakama Tetsu’s comments demonstrate, popular understandings of occupation-era military transnational intimacy are constructed in opposition to contemporary relationships and vice versa. After reversion to Japan in 1972, as

the yen gained strength against the dollar, the most visible point of reference for Okinawan understandings of class difference—the socio-economic divide separating American occupier from Okinawan occupied—all but reversed itself. Enlisted U.S. servicemen suddenly found themselves not able to afford basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter on the Japanese economy. It is tempting to consider this as one motivating force for the decline in military transnational marriages. Okinawan encyclopedias estimate that approximately 400 military transnational marriages took place per year during the American occupation (Takushi 2000:17). Today, local municipal offices process approximately 200 marriages a year between American men and Okinawan women, still giving Okinawa the dubious honor of being the Japanese prefecture with the highest rate of international marriage, as well as the highest rate of marriages involving Japanese women and foreign men, and the greatest percentage of American grooms (Okinawa Josei Zaidan 1999).

The following sections of this article examine the procedures and official rationale of the current Marriage Package, while continuing to foreground the historical and political context of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa.

TODAY'S MARRIAGE PACKAGE: PROCEDURES AND RATIONALE⁷

Today, the marriage process for U.S. Marines and Navy Corpsmen serving under Marine Corps commands is detailed in an 11-page instruction obtained from the Personal Services Center on Camp Foster. The instruction divides the marriage process into three phases. "Phase One" includes the Premarital Seminar, preparation of necessary documentation, and medical examinations. The Premarital Seminar is mandatory for military members, who must be excused from duty in order to attend, and is recommended for civilian prospective spouses. Simultaneous interpretation is provided in Japanese for "local national" prospective spouses. Military members must produce a passport or birth or naturalization certificate, and the Japanese prospective spouse must obtain and translate a copy of her family register (*koseki tohon*) from her local city office.

Also under "Phase One," both parties must have physical examinations and blood tests for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and syphilis. Active duty servicemen are able to arrange these at the Naval Hospital on Camp Lester. Japanese fiancées, however, must go to the Adventist Medical Center ("AMC") in Gushikawa, the only medical facility in Okinawa approved to do physical examinations for U.S. military marriage and visa purposes. AMC does not accept Japanese National Health Insurance, and the cost of the exam and tests (approximately US\$250) must be paid out-of-pocket.

After attending the Premarital Seminar, couples begin “Phase Two.” The active-duty partner must submit an Application for Authorization to Marry to the senior overseas area commander for approval. This application includes a statement of financial resources indicating future plans for employment, present bank account, property ownership, insurance, and other data showing how he plans to support his fiancée, while alive and in case of his death. The couple cannot marry until military approval is granted, and they cannot begin the immigrant visa application for the Japanese spouse until they are married. Informants reported that it took anywhere from several months to a year or more for them to receive official approval to marry.

After approval is issued, the military member obtains an Affidavit of Competency to Marry from the Legal Services Office at Camp Foster. The Affidavit must be translated into Japanese (for another fee) and presented to the local Okinawan municipal office, which issues the actual marriage certificate. At the municipal office, the Japanese spouse fills out the necessary paperwork, and the couple and two witnesses sign the document. They pay yet another fee and submit this document to the city in exchange for the marriage certificate. The couple is now officially married and facing the even more extensive paperwork process associated with obtaining a U.S. Spouse Immigrant visa for the Japanese spouse.

The military has laid out the rationale for the current Marriage Package in joint service instruction MILPERSMAN (Military Personnel Manual) 5352-030, which governs marriage in overseas commands. The document states: “This instruction is intended to make both aliens and U.S. citizens aware of the rights and restrictions imposed by the immigration laws of the United States and to assist in identifying and precluding the creation of military dependents not eligible for immigration into the United States.” Built into this statement is an acknowledgment and justification for the overlap between military marriage procedures and U.S. immigrant visa procedures. Marriage Package requirements basically replicate the requirements for the United States immigrant visa application; however, the various tests and checks conducted for the Marriage Package cannot be used again for the visa application. Applicants must retrace their steps, have the medical examination, and gather all of the documents and their translations a second time, a considerable financial burden for a couple living on an enlisted serviceman’s salary.

The Marriage Package is thus designed to prevent a situation in which the foreign spouse is unable to obtain a U.S. immigrant visa, an outcome that could adversely affect the ability of the serviceman to change duty stations when ordered to do so. The MILPERSMAN document goes on to make the following statements concerning international marriage:

The restrictions imposed by this instruction are not intended to prevent marriage. These restrictions are for the protection of both aliens and United States citizens from the possible disastrous effects of an impetuous marriage entered into without appreciation of its implications and obligations.

The very linking of the overseas marriage process to immigration procedure places foreign brides at the center of concern. This second statement is predicated upon the assumption that marriages to such women are often “impetuous” and entered into without a full understanding of the obligations that marriage entails. Whether this clause refers to servicemen who marry on the basis of physical attraction and later regret their marriages (some of whom end up abandoning their spouses and children), or to Okinawan women whose interest in marrying an American serviceman the military customarily regards with suspicion, is unclear. Nevertheless, statements like this call to mind long-standing stereotypes of crafty Asian women bent on marrying naïve young GIs in order to enter the United States and obtain a green card.⁸ Orientalist assumptions, tempered by language of “natural” gender differences, also emerge as a key element of discourse in the MCCS Premarital Seminar.

THE PREMARITAL SEMINAR

Following Okinawa’s return to Japanese sovereignty in 1972, chaplains and legal officers established an All-Island Premarital Seminar to meet the requirement for premarital and legal counseling. Premarital Coordinator Robert Radansky developed a full-day seminar, whose topics included language-related issues (ESL and JSL classes), interactions between partners and relations of dependency that shift depending on where the couple lives, relationships with parents and in-laws, moving to the United States, raising children in a bicultural home, and building networks of support. An associated workshop series included segments on American and Okinawan/Japanese history and culture, cooking and other homemaking skills, military medical facilities, spouse employment, money management, legal issues (including visa procedures, insurance, and taxes), and parenting (Radansky 1987).

In the 1990s, the U.S. Marine Corps, intent on systematizing its premarital training across installations worldwide, replaced Radansky’s seminar with a comprehensive couples’ counseling program, “PREP” (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program), developed by psychologists at the University of Denver. PREP continues to comprise the primary content of the seminar today. The PREP Leader Manual describes the workshop as “a research-based approach to teaching couples how to communicate effectively, work as a team to solve problems, manage conflicts without damaging closeness, and preserve and

enhance love, commitment, and friendship” (Markman et al. 1999:6). The specific goals of the program are “(a) the development and guided practice of constructive communication and conflict resolution skills, (b) the clarification and modification of relationship beliefs and expectations, (c) the development of understanding to enhance commitment, (d) the maintenance and enhancement of fun, friendship, and spiritual connection . . . , (e) the creation of an agreed upon set of ground rules for handling disagreements and conflict . . . , and (f) the development of skills to enhance, understand, and maintain commitment” (Markman et al. 1999:19). The PREP Leader Manual provides no specific instruction for counseling cross-cultural or international couples.

The overall structure of the Premarital Seminar is the same every month. On the first day, the program runs from 8:15 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and consists of a series of presentations on the topics of U.S. immigration, U.S. citizenship procedures, financial issues, legal concerns, and social services available on base. These briefs conclude at 2:00 p.m., and the remainder of the first day and all of the second day are devoted to PREP. According to records kept by the seminar co-ordinator, during the two-year period from January 2000 through December 2001, a total of 387 active duty servicemen attended the MCCS Premarital Seminar, and 206 (just over 53 percent) indicated that they were marrying Japanese women. At the March 2002 seminar I observed, 15 of the 17 servicemen attending were marrying Japanese women.

In the seminar I observed, the PREP program was led by Naval Chaplain Patrick Buckman. Chaplain Buckman addressed his audience from the front of the room. He lectured on each topic as it appeared in the PREP manual, writing the key terms on a whiteboard: Escalation, Invalidation, Negative Interpretations, Withdrawal, Avoidance, Mind Reading, Character Assassination, Catastrophic Interpretations, Blaming, etc. An interpreter had been employed for Japanese native-speakers, and periodically Chaplain Buckman stopped his lecture and asked her to explain the points he had covered. Interpretations were sharply abbreviated, usually confined to a word-for-word translation of the scant material the chaplain had written on the whiteboard. Many of the women seemed to be depending on their American fiancés to interpret the chaplain’s anecdotes and jokes into language they could understand. While the American participants laughed and appeared to be enjoying themselves, many of the Japanese women looked bored.

Some of the topics that Chaplain Buckman covered did not come out of the PREP Leader Manual. The additional lectures mainly concerned differences between men and women and between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For example, early on the first day, the chaplain asserted, “God created male and female . . . and each couple owes it to themselves to get an education

on what the other sex thinks. . . . The fact is that men and women filter things, react to things, think through things differently. And if we can latch onto that and not deny that that exists, we will have far better relationships.” While the PREP manual states that men and women tend to adopt different communicative strategies, Chaplain Buckman took this further, advancing a biologically driven model of gender difference.

A second area of Chaplain Buckman’s presentation that was not directly taken from the PREP Leader Manual involved discussions about how language barriers and cultural differences might affect a marriage. In his attempt to tailor his lectures to an audience largely composed of American/Okinawan couples, the chaplain talked about the frustration of not being able to communicate with one’s spouse about important issues or feelings due to a language barrier. This discussion developed out of a comment from one of the male participants about how “sharing emotions is harder ‘cause they (Japanese fiancées) don’t know the language that well.” Later, the chaplain asked the group how they might resolve an argument between a husband and a wife that had arisen because the husband had not spoken clearly. In response, one military participant called out “Japanese classes!” Everyone laughed, and the chaplain dismissed the comment as a joke: “What’s that? Japanese classes. Yeah, yeah. What else could be done?”

The chaplain’s discussions about cultural differences paralleled his discussions about gender differences. Within his lectures, American culture and Okinawan culture were presented as polarized, each a distinct and internally cohesive bundle of traits, in much the same way as male and female.

If you analyze some of your experiences in Okinawan culture, saving face and being polite is absolutely integral to their belief system. . . . If you as an American, with your let-me-wear-it-on-my-face attitude, go and get all over your wife . . . and you may be wrong, and she may know that you’re wrong, but her belief system will filter that through, and you’ll get a silent polite response. . . .

Taken together, the chaplain’s lectures on gender and cultural difference supported an overall theory of marital conflict as a set of biologically and culturally determined misunderstandings between men and women and between partners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This approach to social differences, gender and cultural, normalized power inequalities within relationships and represented them as part and parcel of the “natural” differences between American men and Japanese women. For example, language-related miscommunications between partners were framed as a result of Okinawan women’s imperfect control over English and their culturally determined inability to express emotions. As discussed above, the chaplain and seminar participants laughed at the possibility of military men learning Japanese. The history of

unequal power relations between Americans and Okinawans, of course, structures the use of language in Okinawa, making English the primary language of inter-action. These power relations were made invisible within the chaplain's lectures.

MODELING THE IDEAL MILITARY FAMILY

Military institutional models of gender and national/racial difference contributed to the underlying logic as well as the organizational format for Chaplain Buckman's presentation. The gender component of this particular formulation of cultural citizenship was especially evident in imagery of the ideal military family that circulated throughout the seminar. The first theme, as discussed above, was that men and women are essentially dissimilar. A second theme also resonated—that the husband-wife bond is the most fundamental kinship relation and nuclear family households are, therefore, the norm within military communities. From the opening discussion of Relationship Trouble Spots to a discussion of culturally different spiritual practices, the chaplain referred to conflict, negotiation, and compromise solely between husbands and wives. Children were discussed as a possible source of disagreement, and parents and in-laws appeared as potential distractions pulling one away from one's primary familial obligations to spouse and children, as in a discussion of Okinawan women flying back to Okinawa to attend memorial services for a deceased parent. No mention was made of everyday interaction with members of the extended family, financial aid to American or Okinawan relatives, travel back and forth in order to maintain close family ties, or even communication difficulties with one's in-laws and family opposition to marriage, all situations frequently encountered by military transnational couples (Forgash 2004).

Feminist scholars have argued that the notion of men and women being absolutely and essentially unlike, pervasive in military circles, serves as the basis for a key military ideology that men serve their country by participating in combat while women serve their country by supporting their military husbands.⁹ The idea of an autonomous nuclear family clearly works to the military's benefit as well by binding spouses to their husbands and to the military community, while reducing the potential distractions of outside relationships and obligations. The objective is to encourage military personnel and their spouses to build relationships that further the aim of "combat readiness." Whereas combat-ready units, like the Marine Corps units based in Okinawa, once discouraged marriage altogether—hence, the oft quoted saying, "If the Marine Corps wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one!"—they now push the primacy of the nuclear family. That such an ideology pervades the U.S. military's premarital

training is no accident. In recent years, amidst increased deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, a rising divorce rate, and recruiting shortfalls, the Marine Corps has increased funding and support for marriage enrichment programs. “This is absolutely a retention issue. We are trying to get spouses involved so they don’t want their Marines to leave the service,” one battalion commander explained (quoted in Rogers 2005).

Readiness is therefore the operative concern in military approaches to marriage and family. Limiting the participation of prospective Okinawan spouses in the marriage process fits neatly with this objective. Current marriage procedures set up Japanese and Okinawan women to be passive recipients of military decisions, while their military fiancés have at least some agency in the process. Civilian women are not authorized to perform any of the legal activities required to complete the Marriage Package. Significantly, Japanese and Okinawan wives have no legal rights on U.S. bases not because they are non-U.S. citizens, but because they are not active duty members of the U.S. military. Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the category of “military dependents”—defined as (a) Spouse, and children under 21, or (b) Parents, and children over 21 if dependent for over half their support upon a member of the United States Armed Forces—marks military spouses of all nationalities as legally dependent, lacking autonomy in the eyes of both the U.S. military and the government of Japan. Okinawan spouses are thus given the same limited legal rights as American civilian spouses on U.S. bases in Japan. Neither can sign legal documents, including those as simple as a verification of receipt when a package is delivered to their on-base home or a consent form allowing their children to participate in after-school activities. All legal activity must be channeled through the active duty military member. Because of the gender makeup of the U.S. military, the dependence of civilian spouses takes the form of a gendered hierarchy, with active duty men holding legal authority over legally powerless women and children. The overall significance of marriage orders and the SOFA for Japanese and Okinawan spouses is that they occupy the lowest category of persons in a racial and gender hierarchy constructed by the U.S. military and the Japanese government.

Taking into account the broader gendered context of American militarization in East and Southeast Asia, it is also evident that in a very overt way, gender and sexual exploitation of and domination over “host” populations has been an essential ingredient of American militarization throughout the region.¹⁰ One particularly notable element of that domination has been sexual violence. In Okinawa, historians have estimated that as many as 10,000 Okinawan women may have been raped by occupation personnel in the immediate aftermath of the war, but most did not report the crimes out of shame or fear (Fisch 1988). Official

reports estimate more than 5,394 military crimes against Okinawans from 1972 to 2005, including the widely publicized rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl by two U.S. marines and a sailor in September 1995. Women's groups have documented an additional 300 cases of assaults against women and girls that have gone unreported (Akibayashi and Takazato 2009). Finally, throughout the region, the military institution/administration has played a key role in regulating sexual and romantic intimacy between service personnel and "local-national" women through systems similar to the occupation-era A-sign system, but also through rules and regulations concerning personal conduct, overseas marriage, and family. In recent years, in response to continuing problems related to the U.S. military presence, a number of women's peace, human rights, and demilitarization advocacy organizations, including Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence, have emerged and achieved international visibility (Akibayashi and Takazato 2009; Francis 1999). These groups criticize the notion of militarized security, arguing that military combat training and experiences induce anger and aggression, which is often vented against women in base localities.

RESPONDING TO INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

The Premarital Seminar thus showcases a model of the ideal military family underpinned by institutional ideologies that define entitlement and belonging along gender and racial lines. But subjective experiences of and responses to military institutional notions of position, identity, and entitlement continue to be multifaceted. Resistance to the kind of institutional surveillance associated with the Marriage Package is a common reaction among service members and their families. For one, American servicemen and Okinawan military spouses work hard at distancing themselves from military stereotypes of couples who are "not serious," "not appropriate," or who have questionable motives. Miyagi Satoko's strategic use of pity, discussed earlier, is one example. What is more, military marriage procedures, in combination with parental disapproval, commonly induce an "us against the world" mentality, especially among U.S. servicemen. Often, this is expressed through references to self-reliance, responsibility, or independence.

We got married to finalize our feelings for one another. . . . Plus, I'm in the military. If I go back to the States, they're not going to pay her way, or let her live on base, or give her an ID card, or let her have medical. . . . I'm one of those guys that likes to have everything squared away. If I decide not to get married, that's fine. But I want it to be my choice and my option, not the government saying, "Oh, you don't have enough time."

At times, such self-possession takes on stronger tones:

At the meetings, the commander is directing you to do things. And it's like, he doesn't know anything about my love for this girl. The more he tells you [that] you can't do something, the more you want to do it. So in the case of a young guy, stubborn, trying to prove his manhood, he starts thinking, "Well I'm going to show them!"

Looking back, one serviceman explained, "I learned how to raise hell and stomp my feet and get the appointments I needed to get it done."

This attitude, too, ultimately serves the purposes of the military institution. Encouraging the development of personnel and families who are strongly committed, as well as independent, who are prepared to get by without institutional support and without consuming military resources, intrusive and time-consuming marriage procedures benefit the military in multiple ways. Of course, burdensome institutional procedures and the head-strong mentality they sometimes engender do not always benefit the couples, particularly Okinawan wives. Amid the stepped-up deployment cycles associated with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, official programs for military personnel and their spouses have begun to integrate frank discussion of marital infidelity and climbing military divorce rates, fueling even more flagrant displays of domination and control. Citing rumors concerning a growing number of "Dear John" letters from unfaithful military spouses, the Marine husband of one Okinawan informant transferred the couple's jointly earned savings into accounts accessible only to him.

Interestingly, Okinawan family and community opposition to military marriage often contributes to the emergence of a similar "us vs. them" mentality among Okinawa military spouses. Yuki Eisner, featured in the anecdote at the beginning of this essay, left Miyako Island against her father's wishes and migrated to Naha, the capital of Okinawa Prefecture, when she was 18. On weekends, she frequented dance clubs that played salsa and hip-hop music and catered to GI customers from nearby bases. In 2002, Yuki married Josh Eisner, an enlisted Marine. Believing that her father had wanted her to stay on Miyako Island to care for him and his wife as they grew older, Yuki adopted a combative tone and foisted this responsibility onto her older brother, calling it the *chōnan*'s (eldest son's) duty.

That is my brother's job. He is *chōnan*. My father is *chōnan*. My grandfather is *chōnan*. My grandfather's father is *chōnan*. As the youngest daughter in that kind of family, I won't get any land or money when my parents die. If they ask for my help, I will help them, but I won't let them control my life.

Strategically manipulating an important Okinawan kinship norm in order to justify her decision to leave Miyako Island, Yuki was simultaneously providing

justification for her decision to marry an American military man. Ultimately, Yuki's oppositional stance dovetails with the military institution's image of the ideal military family, a nuclear family independent from extended family obligations and ready to mobilize when called upon.

CONCLUSION

"Properly trained, soldiers develop strong loyalties, pride, and self-confidence. They also gain a sense of superiority over civilians," asserts Lt. Col. Andrew Cernicky (2006:46), Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army. In Okinawa and throughout the global U.S. military complex, official marriage procedures and family regulations are important techniques of governance aimed at producing military families that conform to institutional requirements regarding operational readiness. The Marriage Package process and the Premarital Seminar reinforce notions of marital and family relationships whose needs are subordinated to the needs of the service member's unit. Engendering a sense of cultural superiority and entitlement, as well as responsibility and self-reliance, such processes contribute to particular formulations of cultural citizenship in Okinawa.

Historically, socioeconomic disparities between American servicemen and Okinawans contributed to an overall sense of superiority. This was evident in interviews with U.S. military men married to Okinawan women:

Her mother always chaperoned our dates. Her dad had died in the war, and they were very poor, and I had this car. We went to the beach, and we went to the northern part of the island. Her mother was so happy because she had never gotten out before. I enjoyed seeing her get so excited. I felt like Santa Clause.

Feelings of entitlement and responsibility were reinforced by military commanders and chaplains during premarital counseling sessions, and by U.S. Consulate representatives during the visa application process. As recently as 1987, the U.S. Consulate in Naha told one newlywed Air Force officer and his Okinawan wife, "You can't just take her back to the States. She's just going back there to get her citizenship. Eventually, she's going to leave you."

Today, beliefs that prioritize American culture and the U.S. military lifestyle continue to circulate in Premarital Seminar discourse. Ideas concerning what it means to be an active duty military serviceman, romantically involved with an Okinawan woman—including assumptions concerning the primacy of the serviceman's language, family, and career—create a diversity of unequal subject positions, differentiating seminar participants along lines of gender and nation/race. These military institutional formulations of cultural citizenship are backed by historically specific relations of power emerging from Japanese colonialism,

American occupation, and the continuing militarization of Okinawa, all of which are profoundly gendered. Consequently, Okinawan wives tend not to expect their husbands to learn Japanese. Learning English, they argue, will open up new career opportunities and help legitimize their claims to global citizenship.

Similar formulations of cultural citizenship arise in locales around the world where the U.S. military maintains a presence. As in Okinawa, these are backed by location-specific overseas marriage procedures and regulations. Hegemonic ideas about belonging and not belonging in gendered and cultural terms promote the erasure of political and social inequalities inherent in the maintenance of U.S. troops in economically depressed and politically subordinate nations and provinces. As such, they constitute an important structure of meaning that supports and legitimates U.S. military dominance.

While resistance to institutional surveillance and control is a common reaction among service members and their families, how this engages existing power relations is not always predictable. Cumbersome marriage procedures help generate self-reliant service members and families. While this serves the purposes of the military, it does not always benefit Okinawan wives. Even so, individuals adapt. Rick Marshall's wife, Chiemi, declared,

He controlled the money, while he was in the service and after he got out. I didn't know how much we had and then I found out we didn't have any! . . . He has a strong personality, and he was really bossy. Well, I have a strong personality too, and I don't keep my mouth shut anymore."

In 2009, the institutional status of Josh and Yuki Eisner had evolved. After a brief tour of duty in the United States, the Marine Corps had granted Yuki command sponsorship. The couple enjoyed institutional support in the form of family healthcare, moving assistance, on-base housing, and monetary compensation when they lived off-base. Yet, the Eisners recalled the cramped apartment in Kita-Nakagusuku with fondness. More than mere nostalgia, they agreed that it was the best accommodation they had lived in during their married life. Military housing and other institutional incentives and rewards were not all they were cracked up to be. Along with changing perceptions and individual positioning, this fuels the ongoing negotiation of cultural citizenship, identity, and intimacy in Okinawa and throughout the global U.S. military community, and has important implications for the cultural reproduction of American empire.

NOTES

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2. This anecdote is drawn from ethnographic field research conducted in Okinawa during 2001–2002. I use pseudonyms throughout this article to protect the privacy of informants.

3. Neither Japanese government nor U.S. military statistics are reliable indicators of how many such couples exist in Okinawa. Okinawan municipal offices process approximately two hundred marriages a year between American men and Okinawan women (Okinawa Josei Zaidan 1999). Prefectural numbers do not include couples who fly to Guam, Hawaii, or the continental United States and marry there. U.S. military records are even less comprehensive, as they do not include couples who marry “out in town” without official military permission.

4. Numerous personal homepages and blogs describe the experiences and complaints of U.S. military personnel concerning marriage procedures and regulations governing personal conduct. A highly critical account for example, is posted on retired airman Robert Humble’s homepage (Humble n.d.). Examples of secondary sources include Allen 2000 and Takushi 2000.

5. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 Okinawan women and 14 U.S. military men who were, or had previously been, involved in military transnational marriages. Approximately one-third of the respondents had married prior to Okinawa’s postwar reversion to Japanese sovereignty in 1972. Two-thirds of the marriages involved enlisted men; the remaining third involved officers. More than half of the marriages (57 percent) involved white servicemen, and nearly a third involved servicemen who identified themselves as persons of color. Participant observation was conducted in on- and off-base settings, including community events sponsored by the local municipal governments, formal workshops offered to Okinawan spouses on the U.S. military bases, and less structured observations at local restaurants, shopping areas, beaches, bars, and clubs.

6. Nakama’s real name is retained because his story is already well known. Nakama’s translation business and his work with internationally married couples has appeared in local newspapers and NHK documentaries (e.g., *Ryūkyū Shimpo* 1/16/2002).

7. This description applies to the U.S. Marine Corps in Okinawa. The Marine Corps, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army all have regulations governing the marriage process, though there is considerable variation depending on branch of service, region, time period, and even differences among commanding officers. For Air Force personnel, for example, marriage counseling, medical examinations, financial statements, and even the Application for Authorization to Marry are all optional.

8. The content and history of such stereotypes, including their connection to political and economic relations between the U.S. and Japanese governments, as well as their impact on Japanese notions of self and desire for Western others, is discussed at length in Johnson 1988, Kelsky 2001, Liu 2003, and Ma 1996.

9. Harrison and Laliberté (1997) argue that the military uses a socially constructed polarity between masculine and feminine as the cementing principle which unites men into combat-ready units and justifies the extraordinary expectations placed on wives who must assume all of the couple’s domestic work and childcare while her husband is deployed, relinquish her own paid employment every time her husband is posted to a new place, and devote a significant amount of time to unpaid volunteer work within the military community.

10. Scholarly works on this aspect of U.S. militarism include Cheng (2010), Enloe (1989, 2000, 2007), Lutz (2009), Moon (1997), Sturdevant and Stoltzfus (1993), and Yuh (2002).

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