

PIANTA

*Uchinanchu*

*For Bairon Fija*

*"Wanne Uchinanchu—I am Okinawan."*

show me the blood  
and bones  
the sacred grove  
of women  
and the miscanthus  
that surrounds them

show the usurpation  
of "ni" that became "ne"  
in my family's name  
*A-ka-mi-ni*  
my father kept the pronunciation  
whole and unbroken

but I changed mine without realizing it  
in Japanese class  
I gave it the "ne"  
like the schoolbook told me  
and just like that

a knot gets untied  
the anchor rope  
that secures us  
disintegrates  
into filmy seaweed from years  
of lying at the bottom of the sea

*Uchinanchu*

*what is your culture*

is it in the skin  
of the *taiko*  
or the purple fabric  
dyed so deep  
that it turns a river  
as dark as the strain  
of DNA

the karmic  
siren

that makes the fall of suicide  
more palatable  
than the shame of living

or is the culture in  
the over 100,000 civilian casualties —  
men, women, and children —  
nearly a third of its population  
in the 82 days  
during the Battle of Okinawa

or is it in the stacks of litigation  
brought on by aging Japanese military officers  
who want essays of Nobel Prize winners  
stillborn  
so that culpability for suicide-genocide  
remains submerged

already 110,000 in *Ginowan* have gathered  
to light a *fire of peace*  
and bear witness  
denouncing as complicity  
the removal of these criminal acts  
from textbooks  
rejecting the expulsion  
of their truth

though less is said  
about the *Uchinanchu* women

raped at the end of the war  
documented by historians yet  
*no war crimes reported*  
military officials say

out of turbulence  
come whispers  
and a sudden plume of particles  
that floats above shifting ground  
shaken loose by the exhaling  
of the Tohoku tidal wave

we find ourselves tied like buoys  
to the Fukushima 50—  
heroism complicates—  
as they  
encased in white  
attempt the work of 800  
while statements from management seep out slowly  
like the micro-flecks  
of radioactivity  
that appear on spinach and  
buds of chrysanthemum leaves

we call out to the criminal acts  
that scar the body of the island

as it struggles against the vise  
of military bases  
the dark metal  
of war

that attempts to propagate itself  
as an industry  
but instead

sours the water  
and turns the stomach  
acidic  
and hurting

*Uchinanchu*

spread over oceans  
and land mass

Peru, Brazil, Bolivia,  
Argentina, Paraguay,  
Hawai'i

are we now like the languages  
we adopted  
and our physicality as hybrid as the landscapes  
we emigrated to  
scattered from the archipelago that birthed us

existing only to reconnoiter

in *ōdori*  
a dance to escape  
churning water

wrists turning  
as the heel pivots the floor

circling to  
declare ourselves

nerve and bone  
liquid and flesh

the last strand leading  
all the way  
to the drum

of the moon

*Mother*

my mother combed her hair in the reeds  
and let it float on the water  
    leaning her hair back  
        she let the water seep into  
        the fiber her hair collected  
            blue stars that would shine  
        when she was happy  
        she slept inside the hollow of the  
            tree  
            in the morning shaking out her  
                just-washed hair and yellow leaf and flower  
        bits would catch on the ends of her  
        hair and birds came by to nip at them  
            to tease her  
    my mother fell in love with my father  
        because she loved the daylight and she thought he  
        would be a good guide to the night  
            he would know the water night birds and  
he could watch for night animals  
    they would ride the bus  
        around the island at night and  
            find places to go dancing  
            in magazines there were  
                pictures of double-breasted suits and  
                party dresses but they  
            would come home early  
    because their parents didn't like the blackouts with children  
    riding vehicles in the streets  
        she thought his face was beautiful  
            and his motions still  
                together they could seep up water  
                through their veins and fly starward  
    open palmed to gather all the  
material to make the houses for  
    their children  
        despite the red sun  
            white flag sky of December 7

Pearl Harbor notwithstanding  
people running in the streets  
my mother fell in love  
my father fell in love  
their children have grown into  
rare species  
rare sorts of color  
rare spirits  
from that holy white heart branch

*Father*

he followed his own blue smoke  
walking carefully between the crisscrossed reeds  
sometimes he'd crouch in the tall grass  
and watch the sun come up  
he never quite understood the lack of elegance in his life  
he would just sit silently  
stacking matchbook covers or  
mounds of twigs and when  
people would ask him for advice  
he would pause  
turn his head slightly  
then shake his head  
saying only two or three words—  
the girls loved it—  
they thought his silence  
was so measured  
they thought his rough hands  
and calluses were only a disguise  
to hide him from rich  
brocaded men who didn't understand  
how a laborer could have the mind  
of a philosopher king  
weary sometimes at night he'd find  
his favorite place by the river  
and listen to the mother duck and  
ducklings sing their way across the  
river she was so beautiful  
the white beneath the feathers  
showed and she never stopped  
not even when the white blossoms  
bumped her side  
only for a moment  
and then she'd take her  
little babies to the other side  
meanwhile across the river  
my mother sang  
long songs about

the farmers coming here and  
missing their wives  
and the special fish  
they could catch and fry only  
on their island



From the collection of the author, *Chester Hideo Akamine and Barbara Mitsue Kaneshiro, Wedding Day, 1944*, photograph