

# ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Postmodern Memorializing And Peace Rhetoric: Case Study of ‘The Cornerstone of Peace’, Memorial Of The Battle Of Okinawa



The Cornerstone of Peace is a monument which the Okinawa prefecture dedicated at the 50th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War and the Battle of Okinawa on July 23, 1995. According to its official pamphlet *“The Cornerstone of Peace,”* the memorial is “to remember and honor” all the dead from the Battle of Okinawa. Unlike most war memorials, it lists names regardless of the side on which they fought and their status as either combatant or noncombatant. Up to June 23, 2000, 237,969 names are inscribed on the wall, including 148,289 from Okinawa, 75,219 from mainland Japan, 14,006 from the U.S., 82 from U.K., 28 from Taiwan, 82 from North Korea, and 263 from South Korea. More are added as the war dead continue to be identified. With this materialized monument as a subject of rhetorical criticism, I will explore how the Cornerstone was intended to remember the battle in the unique postwar condition of this island

The Battle of Okinawa was one of the bloodiest ground campaigns by the U.S. army during World War II, causing over 200,000 casualties in total. In this battle, the Japanese imperial government used Okinawa as a seawall to hold American Army personnel outside the mainland (Himeyuri Peace Museum, 1990). Under this policy, the Japanese Army deployed in Okinawa virtually abandoned the defense of the island. Instead, with all the islanders, they had to endure the attacks of the U.S. troops to the last person in order to do maximum damage to the enemy’s forces and to buy as much time as possible for the central government (Himeyuri Peace Museum, 1990). This suicidal order massively expanded Okinawan civilian toll up to over 100,000, nearly one-third of Okinawa’s population then.

Although it was apparent that the cause of the massive civilian casualties was the

Japanese imperial army among Okinawans, this was not recognized as a national memory. Oshiro (1999) explained the reason of the different remembrances between Okinawans and mainlanders was that Japanese mainlanders tended to remember the Pacific war in the ideological framework of victimization symbolized by Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings so not to often estrange their own army.

Besides the wartime period, the abandonment of Okinawa again occurred after the Pacific war. George Feifer (2000) offers accounts of the postwar condition of Okinawa as a product of scapegoat policy. Shortly after the war, the Japanese government sacrificed the island this time as an outpost for the U.S. forces to be stationed. Some 75% of U.S. bases in Japan were concentrated on this island, which accounted for less than 1% of the Japan's landmass. This disproportionate amount of the U.S. military presence formed Okinawans' economic dependency on the bases-related business like "ground rents, bar sales, and retail income" (38), while those military personnel "committed nearly 5,000 crimes - including mugging, molestation, and murder" since the end of the war (36). Thus, local economic profit was used in a primary rhetorical strategy to support the bases on the island in addition to the national security of Japan. On the contrary, those crimes stirred up Okinawans' resentment toward the U.S. bases and it would peak at the rape of 12-year-old schoolgirl by three U.S. Marines in September 1995, around five weeks after the dedication of the Cornerstone of Peace. Okinawans' discontents toward the U.S. bases and the Japanese government, which militarized the island, was the unique context of the Okinawa memorial construction.

Thus, Okinawans' pains from the battle and the bases made them separate from mainland Japan, fueling the contemporary controversy over the U.S. bases on this island. In this tension, the Okinawa prefecture aimed to construct a memorial to cope with the massive civilian losses in a way that does not alienate the United States, the country against which Japan fought but which has become its contemporary military protector as well as the economic prop of Okinawa.

This complexity made the Okinawa memorial struggle to embrace respective positions regarding the Battle of Okinawa in a way that does not merely describe losses as glorious sacrifices for their country. Such absence of military heroism to romanticize war recalls the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which articulates multiple positions as contested regarding the war. Using the Vietnam memorial as

“a prototype of postmodern memorializing” (Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, Jr., 1996, 351), I will argue that the Cornerstone of Peace also fits within the postmodern category in general but distinguishes itself in efforts to harmonize competing positions.

### *1. Collective memory shapes through a memorial*

Derived from French scholar Maurice Halbwachs, “collective memory” suggests remembering an event proceeds within a social framework. Barbie Zelizer (1995) found one of major premises in contemporary collective memory studies among scholars who saw “memory as a social activity, accomplished not in the privacy of one’s own gray matter but via shared consciousness with others” (215). Thus, memory of any kind is not exclusively personal experience but also social, so thereby even those who have bodily experienced a certain event would modify their memory through the socially shared remembrances of it.

Memorials are one of those shared resources of the past, selectively representing a particular part of it. Kristin Ann Hass (1998) argues, “the work of any memorial is to construct the meaning of an event from fragments of experience and memory. A memorial gives shape to and consolidates public memory: it makes history” (9). Hence, a memorial designs history as a collective memory based on the selection from pieces of individuals’ experience and memory.

However, this strategic act of remembrance does not always reflect a social consensus regarding the past. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka (1994) pointed out “the social construction of ‘realities of the past’ is frequently a site of intense conflict and debate” (67). This is because some community members may oppose the resource of the past the majority proposes. In this regard, although seemingly univocal, the power relation in the contested resource of the past would distinguish dominant and marginalized groups.

Against different views toward the past, it is the postmodern commemoration that preserves those views without univocally making a dominant memory. Barry Schwartz (1996) raised a perspective of postmodernism as influential on contemporary collective memory studies by respecting positions of “minorities who would be otherwise deleted from history and by deconstructing” the dominant position (277). It is complex that multiple views are articulated in the postmodern memorializing.

In addition, when dealing with traumatic events or catastrophes, the process of memorialization is made more complex. Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver (2001)

pointed out the shift in remembering the national catastrophe toward the “new desire to extract lessons from catastrophes, to make collective memory a humanistic tool for future remedial application” (10). This is because “while the representation of war as glorious had endured, especially in victorious states, the casualty rates of modern conflicts demanded an official response that valorized and memorialised mass suffering” (11).

Overall, the postmodern perspective and the future-based rhetoric feature contemporary war memorializing. These features will appear in the following analysis of the Cornerstone of Peace.

## *2. Analysis of the Cornerstone of Peace*

I attend to three characteristics in the design of the monument and contemplate them in the context of Okinawa mentioned above. The Okinawa memorial seemingly represents the consensual memory of the Battle of Okinawa in remembering the large number of casualties, but in fact includes multiple positions toward the battle and allows for controversy over the way of maintaining peace for future.

Dubbed “Everlasting Waves of Peace,” fan-shaped walls surround the Peace Plaza within which the Flame of Peace is located as the focal point. The walls face the Pacific Ocean, from which the Sun rises in the East. Largely into two areas, the walls are divided by the main walkway, which leads to the Flame of Peace in the plaza and the sunrise. The Cornerstone of Peace is in the Peace Memorial Park, Itoman-city, where the harshest part of the Battle of Okinawa killed many people. The Peace Memorial Museum is located in the park, where visitors see the tragedy of the battle through displays of the atrocities of the Japanese army. This is located right next to the Cornerstone. In addition, there are various kinds of memorials for the dead of the Battle of Okinawa, such as the Memorial to Okinawa Normal Schoolchildren, Okinawa Shihan Kenji-no To, War Memorials to Koreans, the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum, and other memorials. Outside the park, there are several memorials all over the island, like Himeyuri-no-to Memorial to Nursing School girls.

### *A. Walls*

The fan-shaped walls recall the design of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. In both memorials the walls are made of black granite and engraved with the names of those who died in the wars. However, while the Vietnam Veterans Memorial lists only names of U.S. soldiers, the Okinawa Peace

Memorial lists the names of all the dead: soldiers, civilian, Japanese and foreign. In both memorials the bereaved families touch the name and rub a pencil on a sheet of paper to trace the name. This ritualistic action connects the families with a soul of the dead symbolically and makes the dead sacredly remembered. Thus, both memorials enable the family to recall their personal stories in front of the names as well as generally emphasizing the individually victimized aspect of the war, which is often described as an inhumane national act.

The difference between the two memorials lies in the conspicuousness of the walls. In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the walls are less conspicuous because they are below the horizontal line of the land. The wall blends with the surroundings of the mall. On the other hand, in the Cornerstone of Peace, the walls are conspicuous above the ground as forming fan-shaped leaves around the Flame in the Plaza. The walls with planted trees are exposed to the real sun in the sky and the symbolic sun in the flame. This scenery represents the image that the sunlight blesses the souls of the dead and the trees as a part of the land as if enmity from the past has already been buried. Thus, the Vietnam memorial makes the names not outstanding in the site, while Okinawa memorial deals with the names as central figures, celebrating the friendship among Okinawans, mainlanders, and American people, who commonly enjoy today's peaceful days.

### *B. Flame of Peace*

The "Flame of Peace" is located at the center of the plaza. This flame was originally taken from Akajima, Zamami Village, where the first landing took place in the Battle of Okinawa, and combined with the "Eternal Flame of Peace" of Hiroshima and the "Pledge Fire" of Nagasaki, the two sites of the atomic bombings (The Cornerstone of Peace).

The Flame linked the site to two other places Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where Japan was victimized by the U.S., shadowing the fact Japanese victimized their own at Okinawa. The association of Okinawa with Hiroshima and Nagasaki is intended to not only frame the Battle of Okinawa with victimized image but also to make it recognized as a national catastrophe by juxtaposing the battle with Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings.

This association appreciates Okinawans' feelings toward the war deceased by constructing an image that the Okinawa memorial deeply mourns them to an extent similar to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On the other hand, the expression of Hiroshima and Nagasaki diverts hostile eyes from the imperial Army by

reemphasizing the hostile dichotomy between Japan and the U.S. as well as integrating Okinawa into the side of Japan.

### *C. Names*

Okinawa memorial carries the names of the war dead on their hometown basis, and distinguishes no roles and status in the battle.

The monuments are arranged into three areas: Okinawa Prefecture, other prefectures, and abroad. Starting from the left hand side from the Peace Plaza, the monuments to the people of Okinawa are placed in north to south order, starting with Kunigami village. Monuments for people from other prefectures also placed in north to south order starting with Hokkaido (*The Cornerstone of Peace*) On the contrary, Vietnam Veterans Memorial reflects the chronological order in which American soldiers died in the war.

The 58,209 names are inscribed in chronological order of the date of casualty... The names begin at the vertex of the walls below the date of the first casualty and continue to the end of the east wall. They resume at the tip of the west wall, ending at the vertex above the date of the last death (*Vietnam Veterans Memorial*).

Visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial walk along the wall and see the names in chronological order, connecting the deaths in the time flow in the war. The path along the wall seemingly leads visitors to walk on one-way traffic so to pass all the names, thereby making a sense to respect all the dead, individually inscribed but united in the one-folded wall.

However, in the Okinawa memorial the Main Walkway divides the leaves into two parts: the north (left hand) side for Okinawan casualties and the south (right hand) side for the dead from the outside of the island. Visitors easily find Okinawan casualties are much more than the rest from outside Okinawa by seeing the larger physical space for Okinawans' names. With a computerized information system, visitors "can search for the location of a specific person's name" in English, Korean, Hangul, Chinese and Japanese (*The Cornerstone of Peace*). Thus, the Okinawan bereaved families can find their family member's name without going through the names of the Japanese officers' and American soldiers, and vice versa. Or the Okinawans bereaved families can walk to the other leaves with different feelings.

Hence, visitors who have personal associations with the inscribed names can distinguish the meanings of the deaths according to the location of their names,

although there is no distinction in the materialized monuments between Okinawans and non-Okinawans. Even those who do not have particular kinship with the war dead likely differentiate the meanings of the casualties remembered in each area. The memorial seemingly remembers all the dead in an equal manner, but, in fact, allows visitors to recall the names in differently ways. The bereaved families from the U.S. and U.K. maybe go to their area and take pride in their brave soldiers to fight for justice.

From Okinawans' perspective, the north and south parts of leaves do not merely represent the dichotomy between the victimized and the victimizing because the location of the foreign dead includes the names of Taiwanese, and North and South Koreans, who were brought to the island to work for the military unit by the imperial government of Japan. They died in Okinawa just because they were brought there. The characteristic of their death is apparently victimized, maybe, rather than Okinawans, because those foreigners had originally no relation to the battle on this island.

If the names from Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula belonged to the north area with Okinawans, it would be highly intentional to make the north victimized and the south responsible in the battle. But this would be highly problematic since the memorial would implicitly associate the soldiers of the U.S. and their supporter from U.K. with the mainland imperial officers in killing Okinawans and those from Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. From the U.S. and U.K. sides, the war was for justice to save Asia from Japanese imperial colonialism (Lloyd, 1995). Thus, the memorial allows people from the U.S. and U.K. to regard the meaning of their deaths as sacred and they would reject the labeling of their soldiers as responsible for the civilian deaths from Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Korean Peninsula.

Apparently, it was the atrocity of the imperial Army that must not be forgotten from the history. However, the Cornerstone of Peace, allowing visitors to think of the meaning of the deaths in multiple ways, never emphasizes the atrocious aspect of the Japanese army, who killed "a sizable portion of Okinawa's noncombatant population" (Takashima, 2000). But it simply represents the scale of casualties, thereby convicting the war itself as a dehumanized event.

General Ushijima Mitsuru, who was legally and practically responsible for direction of the imperial Army and Okinawans, is also inscribed in the non-Okinawans' area along with other high ranking officers and civilians from the

other prefectures. Takashima (2000) pointed out that Okinawans were outraged to know General Ushijima and other ranking officers would be engraved in the memorial because they had never questioned the atrocities of the national army. It was natural that the inscription of the General offended the feelings of Okinawans.

Hence, regardless of the victimized nature of the casualties from Taiwan and Korean Peninsula and from Okinawa, the evil side of the high rank officers of the imperial army, all the names are located based on their ethnic backgrounds. This creates the equality of the listed names, although there is room for concerned visitors to interpret the different meaning of the losses.

### *3. Conclusion*

The Cornerstone of Peace directs the public attention from the past to future and is postmodern in articulating various positions toward the past as harmonized or compromised and opens the controversy over the interpretation of maintaining peace.

The Cornerstone was bound by Okinawa's relationship with Japan, and other international settings. The memorial was subject to "the uneven balance of political and economic power between Okinawa Prefecture and Tokyo" (Figal, 1997, 754). Thus, it was hard from Okinawans' perspective to represent their critical voice about the war and the U.S. bases so they likely conform to the dominant power of the mainland allied with the U.S. Yet, it was necessary to consider Okinawans' feelings toward the Battle and the U.S. bases.

Against this complexity, the memorial considers the respective positions, while at the same time, it became problematic "as a conveyor of historical knowledge, especially with respect to the question of causes and responsibilities for the war" (Figal, 1997, 750). Consequently, the memorial encourages "a commonplace peace rhetoric for the larger Japanese (and global) "family" of which Okinawa Prefecture is a member" (Figal, 1997, 754).

Unlike the Vietnam memorial, which functions as "a reflection of contradictory assessments of the war in American society as a whole" (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991, 410), the Okinawa Cornerstone was intended to harmonize competing views toward the battle under the name of peace for future. Thus, in an effort to find a common ground among those different positions, the future-directed rhetoric of peace obscures a historical critique of the Battle of Okinawa. The memorial aims to closure the controversy over the past among Okinawans, Japanese mainlanders, and American people compromise on the past without



constructing a dominant narrative that oppresses other views. Thus, this war memorializing is seemingly postmodern in representing the respective positions with some parts of the memorial.

However, the compromise in the different views toward the battle newly creates the controversy over the future. Ultimately both Okinawa and the superpowers agree not to repeat the tragedy of the war. Thus, what Okinawa and Tokyo are competing about is not the interpretation of the war in the past but the way of realizing peace in the future.

The controversy over the peace reflects the dichotomy between Okinawans and the superpowers in how to interpret the military power; thus the Okinawa memorial develops the controversy to the necessity of the U.S. bases on this island. Governor Ota aimed to make the Cornerstone “break vicious circle of bitterness and hatred” (Takashima, 2000, 27) by equally remembering all the war dead. This is Okinawans’ message of peace for all over the world and they believe people should achieve the world peace by eradicating all militarism. Further, Ota regarded the bases in Okinawa as shaping a collective memory of the war tragedy: “Okinawa’s past and present are tragically united by military objectives” (Robinson, 1995). In addition, Ota even considered the bases as a cause of the future tragedy: “The Okinawan people do not want to have bases that are related to warfare, ... We want to use all our land in a productive way, not for killing people” (Kristof, 1995). On the contrary, the U.S. and its ally Japan celebrated the stability as a product of the U.S. bases in Okinawa.

Therefore, the contested views toward the U.S. bases again enmesh Okinawa in the power struggle with Japan and the U.S., which are influential on the economy of the island. Further analysis of the interaction between the memorial and public discourse of the bases would be necessary in order to explore how the memorial provides those superpowers with opportunities to rationalize military power as a peacekeeper. However, this study concludes that Cornerstone of Peace represents the massive casualties equally remembered as war tragedy, thereby finding a compromise view toward the past as postmodern memorializing and developing competing positions in the way of maintaining peace as the peace rhetoric.

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