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Misreading, Espionage and "Beautiful Martyrdom": On Hearing the Okinawa 'Mass Suicides' Suit Court Verdict. UPDATE

Oe Kenzaburo

Translated by Scott Borba

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Immediately following the ruling by the Osaka District Court on the Okinawa Mass Suicides Suit (March 28, 2008), I was being interviewed by a correspondent from a foreign newspaper, while the plaintiffs were already engaged in the appeals process. Almost by way of greeting, I was asked by the correspondent, "What has this trial meant to your life?" I replied by saying, "If I have spent half my life writing essays and novels, then I have spent the other half of it reading books, or more precisely, focusing my reading on certain topics continuously for three year periods. During the two and a half years of this suit, my job has been to read the preparatory documents submitted by both the plaintiffs and defendants as well as the books named in those documents. This part of my life, trying as it was, was spent reading the works of distinguished writers whom I never would have had the chance to know otherwise."

Following the post-trial press conference it was reported that I had said, "I am grateful to the chief justice for having accurately read *Okinawa Notes*." This is precisely what I said. However, having thoroughly read the written judgment, I feel that I should have said that I was thankful to the chief justice for actually having carefully read all of the materials I had read continuously over these two and a half years.

Oe at March 26, 2008 press conference in Osaka

The chief justice's efforts, along with the numerous vital testimonies that the defendant's lawyers collected in the field from survivors, laid the foundation for this to be a deeply meaningful historic trial. As an example, I would like to share the following quote from one of the cited works, which I will read from the written judgment to ensure accuracy.

> "In fact, on October 16, 2000, in the Judicial System Reform Council, Sono Ayako expressed the opinion that, due to a lack of correct understanding of legal terms, there is a risk that ordinary citizens will not be able to understand the positions or emotions of the people involved in trials. As an example of human language being difficult to correctly understand, Sono referred to her work on the writing of *Aru Shinwa no Haikei* (The Story Behind a Myth). While Sono explained a series of words in *Aru Shinwa no Haikei*, an Okinawan newspaper reporter remarked, 'But this means that the myth of Akamatsu has been overturned.' To this Sono replied, 'Not once have I said that Akamatsu did not submit the suicide order. I have just said that no evidence to prove this has been found yet. It is not impossible that the paper on which the order was written might be found tomorrow in an island cave.'"

I had the impression that the judge also took particular note of these words; however, this was not because of the thought that

"the paper on which the order was written might be found tomorrow." Rather, it was because, when I read these words, I reaffirmed my intention to treat the Tokashikijima Island forced mass deaths as forced by the military whether or not concrete evidence regarding any such paper or verbal command is found. I agree with Professor Ishihara Masaie's conclusion that these forced mass deaths are inappropriately called suicides and will refer to them as forced mass deaths (kyosei sareta shudanshi) in my writings from here on. (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter, Ministry of Education) uses the word "involvement," though this "involvement" was undoubtedly close to or even crossing over into "compulsion".) This has been my principle since my first trip to Okinawa in 1965, when I collected *Tetsu no bofu* (Storm of Iron) and other materials on the battle of Okinawa, strengthened my friendship with Makiminato Tokuzo, one of the authors, and started to be friends with Okinawan intellectuals of my generation like Arakawa Akira, who gave vital testimony at this trial on unit leader Umezawa Yutaka in relation to the forced mass suicide on Zamami island.

My life was carved by three great changes: my first son being born with an intellectual disorder in 1963, my material-gathering trip to Hiroshima that same year, and my stay in Okinawa two years later. Since then I have done my work with these experiences as its pillars, I answered the foreign correspondent mentioned above. And I feel pride in the fact that the early outcomes of my work, the full-length novel *Kojinteki na Taiken* (A Personal Matter), and the full-length essays *Hiroshima Noto* (Hiroshima Notes) and *Okinawa Noto* (Okinawa Notes) continue to be published in their original form.

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In this article I plan to write about how the Okinawa Mass Suicides Suit has shed strong light on the subject that has continued to be a central issue in my life. I do not intend to re-create and criticize the claims of the plaintiffs, which were dismissed by the Osaka District Court. Rather, regarding the basic task of literature that is textual interpretation, I will, in line with the article I had published before judgment was passed, summarize the testimony I gave in response to the main interrogation by the counsel for the defense and the cross-examination by the attorney for the plaintiff. ("What Does It Mean to 'Degrade Human Beings'?—Giving Testimony at the Okinawan 'Mass Suicide' Trial." In *Subaru*, April 2008.)

In "Ningen o Otoshimeru" to wa do iu koto ka…Okinawa "Shudan Jisatsu" Saiban ni Shogen shite (What it means to "Look Down on Humans"…Testimony in the Okinawa "Mass Suicides" Suit) in the April, 2008 issue of Subaru, I stated that the plaintiffs, Mr. Akamatsu Hidekazu and Mr. Umezawa Yutaka, had testified regarding *Okinawa Notes* that at the time they filed the lawsuit against me, Mr. Umezawa had not read Okinawa Notes and Mr. Akamatsu, though he had the book, had skipped through and only read the portions regarding former Commander Akamatsu Yoshitsugu.

Akamatsu Hidekazu (left) and Umezawa Yutaka at Osaka Court

However, in Mr. Akamatsu Hidekazu's sworn statement the following can be found:

> "Upon reading the words of Mr. Oe Kenzaburo, 'I fear the god-like judgmental tone that with faith condemns and rebukes the sins of man,' and, question the mythical great evil depicted therein. Ms. Sono Ayako used the September 1970 Memorial Service Debriefing Session held in Osaka as a starting point for her aggressive efforts to interview related parties and procure related literature, and in May 1973, she published *Aru Shinwa no Haikei* (The Story Behind the Myths) on the mass suicides on Tokashiki Island, Okinawa.

Mr. Akamatsu seemed to be at ease due to the publication of *Aru Shinwa no Haikei*. However, in 2004, upon being visited by his elder brother (Akamatsu Yoshitsugu) and a former classmate from the Military Academy, he realized that his fears had not been wiped away as he was told, "Several volumes of *Okinawa Notes*, in which my elder brother was depicted as a villain, had been printed and were being sold by the publisher

Iwanami Shoten without correction."

One of the plaintiffs' lawyers, Mr. Tokunaga Shinichi, conveyed Mr. Akamatsu's words in the following way in the September 2006 *Seiron*.

> "At the October 2000 Judicial System Reform Council, Ms. Sono Ayako criticized Mr. Oe in the following way for standing in the 'viewpoint of God' and rebuking former Captain Akamatsu as 'the king of sin' (*tsumi no kyokai*) in *Okinawa Notes*.
>
> 'The words of Mr. Oe Kenzaburo established the reputation for former Commander Akamatsu as "a demon-like person who casually sacrificed the lives of the people of Okinawa," amplified hatred for him, rebuked him as if saying, "In the world there are peaceful men like me and evil men like former Commander Akamatsu," and deeply hurt the hearts of those who belonged to Akamatsu's brigade…His words were an inhumane lynching' (from the official record of the Judicial System Reform Council).

Ms. Sono Ayako herself wrote the following in the *Seiron* column of the *Sankei Newspaper*, October 23, 2007:

> "In 1970, 25 years from the end of the war, the survivors and families of members of Akamatsu's brigade were invited to the island to take part in a memorial service. Former Commander Akamatsu was the only member of the brigade turned away by protestors. Upon seeing this I felt a capricious fascination with this incident. There were accounts that former Commander Akamatsu had ordered people to die while he looked out for his own safety. Later that year in September, when the author, Mr. Oe Kenzaburo, published *Okinawa Notes* in which he wrote that the actions of former Commander Akamatsu were those of 'the king of sin,' I found myself more and more intrigued by the incident." As one might tell from my becoming an author, I am a weak person, and I have sometimes resented or disliked others. However, I have never met one person, not once, who seemed to be a "colossal mass of sin." That is because only God, who knows all hidden things, can determine that a person is sinful. Even so, I thought that if there is such a vile person, I wished to see him in this world before I die.

From the time I visited Okinawa until the time I wrote *Okinawa Notes* five years later, I found myself constantly thinking of the pictures I saw in the *Okinawa Times* and other newspapers that showed the sites where the forced mass deaths had occurred on Tokashikijima Island and other locations. I did not want to write in my own words that 329 dead bodies were found strewn over the mountains of Tokashikijima Island. Feeling that I was not qualified to ask the survivors to speak in person about what had happened on Tokashikijima Island, I obtained as many materials as possible to read. I merely asked some questions to Mr. Makiminato Tokuzo and other journalists who had spoken with survivors. Even now I feel this anew as I read Ms. Jahana Naomi's marvelous *Shogen Okinawa "Shudan Jiketsu"* (Testimony: The Okinawa Mass Suicides (Iwanami Shinsho).

Given these feelings, I decided to use a term that I had encountered as a youth while reading English novels (more particularly, the green-covered Penguin Books mystery novels): *corpus delicti*, which is a legal term for the body of a murder victim, *corpus* meaning "body" or "mass" and *delicti* meaning "of sin." So I created a Japanese equivalent "tsumi no katamari" (a mass of sin) for the legal term corpus delicti meaning "murdered body," which I encountered in English novels (especially mysteries I read from green-covered Penguin Books) I was reading in my youth, for the reason that in Latin corpus is "body" or "mass", and delicti is "of sin." Emphasizing a mass of dead bodies of that colossal number in addition, I decided on "*tsumi no kyokai*," colossal mass of sin."

I wrote the following in my *Okinawa Noto* (Okinawa Notes): "The one responsible for the mass suicide on Kerama, too, must have ceaselessly repeated that kind of attempt at self deception and fraud toward others. Before there is *too colossal a mass of sin* to atone for, he wishes to somehow live on in sanity."

He here refers to the garrison commander of the Kerama islands. If the italicized part in the phrase "Before too colossal a mass of sin" also refers to the garrison commander, the phrase would be rendered into "Before the garrison commander, the garrison commander. . . ," which does not constitute a sentence. Only when one interprets this sentence in a normal way as saying "Before a large number of bodies, the garrison leader. . . ," does the sentence makes sense. I do not agree with the written judgment that "It is conceivable that the average reader, when normally reading the descriptions in *Okinawa Notes*, may have the impression that the phrase 'an all too great horde of sin' refers to either the crimes committed by the garrison commander of Tokashikijima Island or to the garrison commander himself."

I now find intention rather than simple corner-cutting in the way Sono Ayako quoted this passage in "Aru shin'wa no haikei", [the book] that is the very starting point of the misinterpretation: "Before too large a mass of sin to atone for as a human being. . . (the rest omitted)." In face of the fact that the statements by the bereaved relatives of the former commander Akamatsu invariably esteemed Sono's work but did not closely read my book, I have had a basic question about their "way of reading"; but I have come to think that perhaps the responsibility lies with Sono's "way of writing."

To add by way of precaution, in *Okinawa Noto* I did not use (not once, never, if I follow Sono's defiance hurled at a newspaper reporter quoted above) such words as *villain, vile person*, or *sinner*, let alone *utter villain, great villain*. This was a choice of words springing from my conviction that the act of coercing the island people (giving them hand grenades, using the authority of the *Senjinkun* (Instructions for the Battlefield) by forbidding them to become captives, and instilling fear in them that if taken captive by the enemy, they would be beaten and then killed) to carry out mass deaths was a large-scale act exceeding that of one evil man and involving the entire vertical structure of the army. That I did not cite the personal names of the two garrison commanders is likewise from a conscious intention.

According to the written judgment, newspaper coverage clarified the following regarding Captain Akamatsu not being allowed to participate in the combined memorial service for the war dead. The decision states that, in light of the newspaper report on how Akamatsu tried, but was unable to attend the joint memorial for the war dead on Tokashiki island, "it cannot be denied that the general public can specify or identify the content of various statements in *Okinawa Noto* to be about Captain Akamatsu." However, I would like to continue to claim that my intention in *Okinawa Noto* was to deny the viewpoint of personal crimes.

I am impressed by the ruling of the Osaka District Court that the army was deeply involved with the enforcement of the mass deaths.

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After writing *Okinawa Notes*, I read the following passage in volume ten of *Okinawa Kenshi* (The History of Okinawa Prefecture), written by a man who was a subordinate to former Captain Akamatsu, and I was reminded of myself as a youth living in a mountain village following Japan's defeat. "Two young men who had escaped from captivity by American forces were seized at the sentry line and brought into camp headquarters. Commander Akamatsu chastised the young men, asking them 'As imperial subjects, what will you do to make amends for the disgrace you have brought by being captured?' They replied, 'We shall die' and then hung themselves on a tree."

Young soldiers from the Air Force Training Course had also come to my village in Shikoku to gather pine oil. The village children had become friends with them. However, upon hearing that someone had seen these soldiers being severely beaten by superior officers in a building used for livestock fairs located on the river bank opposite the downtown area, I stopped going to the site where the young soldiers and village children played together.

Stirred by this memory, I read as many records as I could find regarding former Commander Akamatsu who played a part in these beatings. All of these records, including that above of the lieutenant, are cited in the written judgment.

> "The two young men had been seized at the sentry line. Though they were unaware of it, since they had at one point been captured by the American forces, it was no longer possible for us to treat them as *fellow villagers*, and it was decided that they would be executed because we had no way of knowing whether or not they were involved in a conspiracy. One of the two, Omine, was the son of a family whose home in Aharen I used to lodge, so I went to directly interrogate the two myself. After listening to their stories, I told them, 'You can either commit suicide here or return to Aharen,' to which both replied that they wanted to return to Aharen. However, both committed suicide at the sentry line by cutting American Army telephone wires and hanging themselves with them. The Akamatsu battalion did not execute them."

In another account, former Commander Akamatsu stated the following in an interview with a weekly magazine.

> "I actually knew quite well one of the two young men from Tokashiki who turned themselves in to me. When I went out to meet them following their seizure at the sentry line, both said they wanted to be with the people of Tokashiki. I told them, 'You were taken prisoner by the American forces. You are Japanese subjects, and therefore you have to fix this yourselves. If you can't do that, then go home.' And then they went and hung themselves."

If my village had been a battleground, I might have met the same cruel death as these two young men. Before making such generalizations, however, I must clarify the peculiar origin of the anti-espionage consciousness that existed in the Japanese forces in Okinawa. Here I cite only the facts as explained in the writings of Professor Ishihara Masaie (*Ideorogi no Mondai to Natta Shudan Jiketsu to iu Kotoba no Imi* "The Meaning of the Phrase 'Mass Suicide' and the Ideological Problem it Caused," printed in the Okinawa International University, Institute of Ryukyuan Culture bulletin Nanto Bunka).

During the trial, the 1944 guideline, "The Officers and Citizens Live Together and Die Together as One," enacted by the Japanese Army 32nd Battalion in Okinawa, was often mentioned. The idea was imposed that residents and soldiers would "die together". This was a means to prevent the leaking of secrets by residents who had been taken captive by enemy forces (these included people who had been deployed to construction sites where soldiers and citizens lived together). In other words, this only reinforced the anti-espionage policy. Moreover, the 32nd Battalion issued an order stating, "Effective immediately. The use of any language other than standard Japanese is prohibited, regardless of military or army civilian employment. Anyone caught conversing in the Okinawan

Language will be punished as spies." With regard to the surrender leaflets dropped by American planes over Okinawa, the battalion even went so far as to announce that "Any person caught with one of these leaflets will be condemned as a spy and shot."

On the basis of these facts, I am convinced by Professor Ishihara's conclusion:

> "In the author interviews with thousands of Okinawa residents, not once did I hear testimony of someone choosing 'to die like a crushed jewel.' (*gyokusai*) Therefore, to attribute the cause of forced mass death to militarism or education of the people (*kõminka*), or to 'community pressure' is to condone wartime Japan's military tactics (which could be termed war crimes or war responsibility). Consequently, the national government and defense department, along with historical revisionist groups, deliberately began using the term 'mass suicides' as a phrase to absolve Japan from wartime responsibility. The real intention was to forge 'military-civilian unity' among the war-mobilized Japanese people through military emergency crisis legislation."

Kinjõ Minoru's sculpture of forced suicides in the Battle of Okinawa

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I quote directly from the written judgment, in which my motivation for writing *Okinawa Notes* is summarized based on my sworn statement and testimony.

> "As written in 4.4(2)i, the defendant Oe also has stated that he intended the main themes of *Okinawa Notes* to be: (1) the history of the relationship between the people of Okinawa and the Japanese mainland from the modernization of Japan to the Pacific War; (2) reflection on whether the government was conscious of the burden of the extremely large military bases on postwar Okinawa, which, unlike the mainland, was under the control of the American military; (3) personal questioning and thought concerning the current situation of the Japanese people with regard to the rift between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, and what the Japanese people should do to show Asia and the world their principles. Also, in 4.4(2) in his personal examination, the defendant Oe stated the following concerning references to Captain Akamatsu in *Okinawa Notes*: 'As explained in pillar 2 as just mentioned, I am a person who lived under the new constitution and in the recovering, developing and prospering postwar Japanese mainland. I do not comprehend Okinawa well, neither the most severe experiences from the Battle of Okinawa, nor that it was a postwar American military base and that the constitution wasn't fully recognized, nor the gap and discrepancy these

circumstances clearly created between Okinawa and the mainland, along with the discrimination of Okinawa by the mainland or, from Okinawa's side, Okinawa's many sacrifices. However, I think that these things have very distinctly come to the surface through the recent Okinawa trip of the former garrison commander of Tokashikijima Island.'"

In addition, I did not have concrete knowledge at the time I wrote *Okinawa Notes*, and therefore no such knowledge is incorporated therein, though I would like in future to arrange the astonishing facts that I came to know anew while reading the written judgment.

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These facts are given in full in the fourth chapter revealing the court's ruling, in the section regarding the application of the Relief Law. Much is revealed about the Relief Law, officially *The Relief Law for Individuals and Survivors of Individuals Fallen or Injured at War,* in Prof. Ishihara Masaie's work mentioned above (which urges attention to the fact that the term "mass suicides" is being defined by this law) who is continuing his profound analysis of the state of this law in Okinawa. Several years ago, I was shocked to find out that both the Okinawan elderly and the young, including infants, are honored together as war dead at Yasukuni Shrine because this law identified them as war combatants.

The Relief Law was issued in April 1952. At the time, Okinawa was under the control of American forces, and the Japanese government's Naha Southern Areas Liaison Office and the US government were in negotiations. In March 1953, the government announced its intention to apply the Relief Law to those currently residing on islands south of 29ã‚œNorth Latitude, including the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands. In order to establish the number of combatants, staff members of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Repatriates Relief Bureau Relief Division visited Okinawa and decided on a process to determine combatants in the Battle of Okinawa.

There is a movement by some who, based on these facts, claim that a movement was created to show that the Japanese military ordered the "mass suicides" on both Tokashikijima and Zamamijima Islands, and that this claim made it possible for those who carried out "mass suicide" to receive compensation on the basis of this assistance to the military. Those who so claim are the ones who hold that the theories of the Umezawa Order and the Akamatsu Order were fabricated for this purpose. The following sentence describes part of this movement that to this day is still not well known. Here I quote from the written judgment the sentence itself as well as how it came to be made.

"The following have been acknowledged: the plaintiff Umezawa stayed at an inn managed by Miyamura Yukinobu when he visited Zamamijima Island in order to attend the March 26, 1987 Zamamijima Island memorial service; Miyamura Yukinobu was pressed by the plaintiff Umezawa on March 26, 1987 to 'Stamp this paper with your official seal. I will not release this to the public, I'm just going to show it to my wife,' he said; on the 27th of the same month, the plaintiff Umezawa and two men who accompanied him gave Miyamura Yukinobu *awamori* to drink and Miyamura Yukinobu became heavily intoxicated; at this time the plaintiff Umezawa showed Miyamura Yukinobu the following document which the plaintiff Umezawa himself had made, 'The mass suicides from March 26, 1945 and after were committed on the orders of Deputy Mayor Miyamura Morihide and not the orders of Commanding Officer Umezawa. This was a measure that the town office had no choice but to take in order to apply for financial relief for the survivors of the dead. Signed at the right by Miyamura Yukinobu, former Director of Zamamijima Village Office, March 28, 1987'; Miyamura Yukinobu wrote a new document patterned after this one entitled 'Testimony' and gave it the same date, March 28, 1987."

Though the ruling, based on various testimonies and evidence, clearly judges this document to be implausible, while seeking the story behind it, beginning with how it was made and including how it was later presented by the mass media as proof that the Umezawa Order theory was fabricated and then how the document was subverted in the trial, I thought of the cruel mentality of those many people who lack a sense of responsibility for the tragedy of the Battle of Okinawa.

I would like to quote another passage from the written judgment regarding the forced mass deaths on Tokashikijima Island that shows a twin-like case of this same mentality.

"Teruya Nobuo was a staff member of the Ryukyu Government Department of Social Affairs Relief Division. The August 27, 2006 evening edition of the *Sankei Newspaper* published an article stating that Teruya Nobuo, identified as a staff member of the Ryukyu Government Department of Social Affairs Relief Division who had interviewed those who under the Relief Law were entitled to condolence money, stated regarding his interviews on Tokashikijima Island that 'of the more than 100 people interviewed in [his] week on Tokashikijima,' 'not one resident

declared the order to be from the military.' The article stated that Teruya Nobuo, upon asking for and receiving permission from Captain Akamatsu to state that the military had 'issued an order,' submitted a self-made report to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to this effect so that the Relief Law would be applicable to the survivors of the dead."

The written judgment shows that those who forced the mass deaths on Tokashikijima Island had no need to come up with such a movement because the survivors of the dead were already from the start able to receive relief funds, that the work statement provided by the witness to the Relief Division does not coincide with the personal records of the Ryukyu Government, and that the report Teruya Nobuo said he submitted to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare with the permission of Captain Akamatsu is not on file at the ministry (it is not conceivable that this report may have been disposed of because Relief Law payments are still being conducted today).

A supporter shows off a banner reading "Oe, Iwanami won suit" outside Osaka District Court just after the court's rule in Osaka, western Japan, Friday, March 28, 2008.

6

I will now return to the issue of the misreading that I discussed earlier. Following my court testimony, the critic Mr. Yamasaki Kotaro, who is quoted as saying, "I completely object to and cannot approve of [Oe's] political standpoint," made the following just observation in a dialogue (from the March issue of *Gekkan Nihon*).

"Strictly speaking, Ms. Sono Ayako had clearly misinterpreted the phrase as 'the king of sin' from the start, though she had accurately transcribed the words of Oe Kenzaburo and the Chinese characters for *tsumi no kyokai*. As numerous copies of the book were published, however, the mistaken 'king of sin' theory took root and until quite recently went unnoted in magazines and newspapers. Studying this problem, I noticed that the conservative world of critics had become ever more absurd. First of all, Sono Ayako's misreading had been reproduced on an enlarged scale in the conservative world of critics. Watanabe Shoichi, Hata Ikuhiko, the lawyers involved and others speaking in regard to the Okinawa mass suicides suit are all regurgitating Ms. Sono's misreading. I have realized that Mr. Watanabe, Mr. Hata and the majority of the critics have reviled and passed judgment on Oe Kenzaburo without having properly read the original text of *Okinawa Notes*."

Upon reading the repeated statements Ms. Sono Ayako made after the publication of *Aru Shinwa no Haikei*, I have come to the conclusion that what seems to be nothing but the misreading in *Aru Shinwa no Haikei* is actually rooted in Ms. Sono's political beliefs.

During court examination, the lawyer Akiyama Mikio requested that I read the following section from *Aru Shinwa no Haikei*. This is a conversation between Self Defense Force Colonel Tomino Minoru, who was a company commander under Commander Akamatsu, and Ms. Sono, and it conveys Ms. Sono's personal beliefs.

"Rather, what I find curious is why, after the war, he insists on looking down upon the pure deaths of those who with upright hearts died for their country by stating they were actually forced to do so under orders. I do not understand why he

> insists on this."

I testified that it is my belief that individuals who say such things are the ones who are looking down on people.

I realize now that the expressions "death with an upright heart" and "pure death," or "death for one's country" and "death with dignity" appear often now in the mass media.

In 2005, the year this suit began, I was writing an essay that appeared in *Tsutaeru Kotoba Purasu* (published by Asahi Shinbunsha). In this essay I quote a document in which the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare reveals its fundamental way of thinking on the occasion of an inquiry concerning victims of the atomic bomb:

> "In the crisis state of war, which is a fight to the death among countries, even if citizens are forced to make sacrifices of things such as life, body or property, they must bear these as 'general sacrifices' in the fight for one's country."

Concerning this oracle, who commands citizens to accept without resistance the "general sacrifices" of the past (which in reality are still continuing), such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I wrote that we must establish our basic stance as individuals: no, we will not accept such suffering. Naturally, I was also thinking of the forced mass suicide on the Kerama Islands of Okinawa. As with earlier war experiences, given the fact that we have Article 13 of the Constitution, which states that "All of the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall, to the extent that it does not interfere with the public welfare, be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs," I thought that we could explicitly claim that "individuals need not accept such suffering."

I was not yet clearly aware, however, that a government-sanctioned adverse current was gaining strength to recast the national sentiment. Thinking back, there was the enactment of "emergency defense legislation" in 2003, and the comment of a certain journalist was right on target when he described it as "a war manual" for our country. With this as a turning point, the moral education to prepare the nation emotionally for war suddenly gained strength. Textbook rewriting by the government and the Ministry of Education exemplifies this. Having been unaware of this government's posture, as Medoruma Shun's essay in the *Ryukyu Shinpo* of August 4, 2007 points out, I can only say that I was a model of unfortunate naivete.

In 2004, as I indicated earlier, a former military academy classmate of Commander Akamatsu visited Akamatsu's younger brother, Akamatsu Hidekazu, and advised him to file a lawsuit. Upon Akamatsu determining to do so, this was immediately relayed to former Commander Umezawa. Following this, a group of lawyers, self-designated as a Yasukuni cheering section, also joined in. (One of the plaintiff's lawyers, Ms. Inada Tomomi, who is second on the list of attorneys, is a member of the House of Representatives who is currently gaining public notoriety for her part in the prerelease screening of the film *Yasukuni* for the members of the Diet.)

In 2005, the Liberal View of History Research Group, led by Mr. Fujioka Nobukatsu, selected "Okinawa Mass Suicides" as a theme for a postwar 60 year historical retrospective, and in May of the same year they conducted field surveys on Tokashikijima and Zamamijima Islands. Immediately following this, the lawsuit was filed in Osaka District Court, and many members of the Research Group and the Society for Writing New Historical Textbooks were deployed to attend the hearing.

In March of 2007, the Ministry of Education directed that high school history textbooks to be used during the next year would deny the involvement of the military in the "mass suicides," and the textbooks were subsequently rewritten. The lawsuit filed by Mr. Akamatsu and Mr. Umezawa was one of the reasons listed for this denial. In Ginowan City, Okinawa in July of the same year, an "Okinawa Citizens' Protest Demanding Cancellation of Textbook Revisions" was held with 110,000 participants (6,000 others participated in the Yaeyama Islands and Miyako Islands, according to the conference organizer). The effect of the Okinawan response was unmistakable. By the end of the year the Ministry, while avoiding directly saying that "the military had forced the deaths," had approved a request from 6 textbook companies to restore the expression "military involvement."

On March 28, 2008, Osaka District Court Chief Justice Fukami Toshimasa acknowledged that "The former Japanese military was deeply involved" in the mass suicides, stating that "Though it can't be determined whether or not the former wartime commanders ordered the mass suicides, military involvement can be sufficiently confirmed." The chief justice determined that there were no grounds for slander and dismissed the claims of the lawsuit on the basis that "there was legitimate data and rationale" in a statement regarding "those responsible for the incident," referring to the former commanders anonymously. The side of the former commanders has appealed the ruling.

I am mentally prepared for the trial to continue in higher courts, but the most important thing I learned over the two and a half years of trial is that the words I give in testimony in court, when used in the written judgment, have greater actual power than anything I have felt in the 50 years I have been writing. I am reconceiving my notions of self-awareness regarding living as a writer.

Though as an elderly writer my time left is limited, through this trial I also newly resolved that as long as the words "beautiful death for one's country" continue to be revived, despite the transparency of the shameful intent of the users of these words, I will place resistance to them at the core of my work.

Oe Kenzaburo Writer, born 1935, in Ehime Prefecture, in 1994 received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Scott Borba works in international relations in a Japanese government office. He translated this article for Japan Focus.

This is a slightly abbreviated translation of an article that appeared in Sekai (World) *in June 2008. Posted at* Japan Focus *on October 5, 2008.*

Update: On November 1, 2008, The Mainichi Shimbun reported that The Osaka High Court rejected an appeal in a defamation lawsuit filed against Oe Kenzaburo and the

publisher of Okinawa Notes over descriptions of mass suicides in the Battle of Okinawa during World War II. The plaintiffs have appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Updated November 14, 2008.