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—
early 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
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 odori
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
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