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In This Corner of the World: Animated Landscapes of Hiroshima and Kure in the Present Tense

Abstract

This paper examines the seemingly harmless, taken-for-granted everyday gestures that make up the fabric of the animated film *In This Corner of the World* (2016). Based on Kouno Fumiyo's[1] manga series (2007–2009), the film takes pains to depict the actual artifacts, practices, buildings, historical events – most importantly, those landscapes that exist today in Hiroshima and Kure, the two localities of wartime memories portrayed in it. The made-up world of Kouno's fictional world is brought to life by screenplay writer and director Katabuchi Sunao, whose attention to details helps us understand that the memories of war are firmly traceable in the here and now.

1. Introduction

With the older generation fading away and fewer witnesses remaining to talk about the traumatic era of the Asia-Pacific War (1931–1945), what role can animation and manga play in molding a view of the past that is ethically meaningful? Individual memories may turn into fictionalized and historical narratives, in which case the viewers or readers become consumers of a memory culture. Alison Landsberg (2004) has argued that through "mass-mediated experience" gained from, for example, cinemas, tv mini-series, and memorial museums, one can experience and be connected to the past, and even identify with the characters that survive a traumatic event (19). "Prosthetic memory,"

1 Following the tradition, Japanese names are written with surnames first, followed by given names. The English translation of the manga is provided by the author unless otherwise noted.

as Landsberg calls it, like a prosthetic arm or leg that is inevitably less than the real thing, can be worn to effectively become part of one's body, or in this case, one's memory. By the same token, I would assert that an animation or manga created by artists who do not have first-hand experience of a war can transmit the essence of the traumatic event to audiences far and wide. A case in point would be Kouno Fumiyo's manga series, *In This Corner of the World* (2007-2009), especially in its animated form. The animation film played a crucial role in communicating to a wide range of audiences coming from different generations and economic, social, and political backgrounds the need to deal with and remember a difficult past.

This paper briefly outlines the history of the war manga genre, situating Kouno's work within this historical framework. I will then proceed to demonstrate that the animation film's screenplay writer and director Katabuchi Sunao's understanding and sensitive handling of Kouno's intent in her seemingly apolitical manga, on which the animation film is based, play an important role in successfully communicating Kouno's quiet message to the so-called *senmu-sedai*, or the generation without experience of a war. Katabuchi pushed to the fore, albeit in a subdued manner, Kouno's insightful understanding that war is always lurking right around the corner, here, now, and in the everyday. Kouno's manga and Katabuchi's contribution in its animated version provides Landsberg's "prosthetic memory" of the Hiroshima–Kure everyday life at the end of World War II.

2. Comic Magazines, Comic Books, and War Narratives

According to a survey in 2000 that NHK (Japan Broadcasting Cooperation) conducted among members of the younger generation with neither firsthand nor secondhand knowledge of the Asia-Pacific War, animated films and comic books, not classroom instruction, shaped their views on war memories (Makita 2000, 5). Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen*, which first appeared in 1973 in the weekly comic magazine *Shōnen Jump* [Young Boy's Jump], and the 1988 critically acclaimed Takahata Isao's animation film of Studio Ghibli, *The Grave of Fireflies*, immediately come to mind. When, in 2020, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper asked teenagers and those in their twenties to name a creative work on the Asia-Pacific War that left an indelible impression on them, these

two works—*Barefoot Gen* and *The Grave of Fireflies*—continued to come in first and second (August 30, 2020). Relatively direct in their portrayal of the tumultuous wartime era, they are often used in 'peace education' instruction and hold a firm place in the national narrative even today.

Among those manga artists who openly acknowledged that their personal war experience had an undeniable impact on their creative work were manga artists Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989), Mizuki Shigeru (1922–2015), and Nakazawa Keiji (1939–2012). Tezuka, Mizuki, and Nakazawa lived through the Asia-Pacific War era, and in publishing their narratives throughout the postwar years, they established the war manga genre.

Tezuka was nine years old when China and Japan entered war for the second time. He was thirteen when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 and entered the Pacific War (1941–1945) with the United States. In the 1980s, he depicted the World War II era in *Message to Adolf*. He also conveyed wartime messages in different eras in other popular manga series, ranging from the story of a robot (*Astor Boy*) in the 1950s and 60s to that of a doctor (*Black Jack*) in the 1970s. The 2007 special exhibit on "The Origin of Tezuka Osamu Manga: Drawing on War Experience," held at the National Showakan Memorial Museum in Tokyo, showcased his achievements (Showakan and Tezuka Production 2007).[2]

Another manga artist, Mizuki, known for his famous *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro*, or *Kitaro of the Graveyard*, depicted his own experience of barely surviving the war after being drafted to serve the Imperial Japanese Army in his *So-in Gyokusaiseyo* (Onwards Towards Our Noble Death). This was published in 1973 in comic book form and includes a description of how his left arm was blown off during the air raids in 1943 while he was at Rabaul, now part of Papua New Guinea island. As Mizuki wrote in the afterword, "90 percent of the story is based on facts" (2018 [1973], 470). Today, his 'horror manga' drawings are used in sign plates and on the walls of the Peace Memorial Museum for Soldiers, Detainees in Siberia, and Postwar Repatriates, which is an exhibition hall in Shinjuku, Tokyo, subcontracted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication.

Nakazawa, a native of Hiroshima, is perhaps best known for his 'anti-war' or 'anti-nuclear weapon' manga, telling the story of *hibakusha* (atomic

2 Special exhibit, "Tezuka Osamu no manga no genten: Senso taiken to egakareta senso," March 14–May 6, 2007.

bomb survivor) in *Barefoot Gen*. Wrote Nakazawa, "Gen is me, myself" (2008, 16). *Barefoot Gen* was turned into an animation film in 1983 and the manga magazine series was published in comic book form, totaling ten volumes in all, and completed in 1985. Some considered aspects of *Barefoot Gen*, such as the graphic drawings of the Japanese Imperial Army's brutal actions against the people of China, the raw images of ghostly bodies after the atomic bombing, and his blatant criticism of the late emperor, 'inappropriate' for today's children. In 2013, when the board of education of Matsue city in Tottori prefecture decided that *Barefoot Gen* should be pulled off the shelves of school libraries, it caused such a controversy that the board later retracted their decision. There is no stopping of the spread of *Barefoot Gen* outside of Japan, either. It has been translated into more than twenty languages, including Esperanto, Chinese, and recently Arabic, allowing its universal message to be shared with the larger international community.

However, with survivors of the atomic bomb aging, the war generation quickly disappearing, and manga artists like Tezuka, Mizuki, and Nakazawa, whose readers were mostly school children at the time, gone, it was becoming increasingly clear that the war manga genre could only benefit from adopting innovative approaches. As if in response to such a need, a new group of manga artists emerged. In contrast to the hard-core, straightforward depictions of the Asia-Pacific War as represented by the works of Tezuka, Mizuki, and Nakazawa are Kouno Fumiyo's manga drawings, featuring young female protagonists depicted in her soft and almost old-fashioned 'girly touch.' They portray the effects of war more indirectly. Her earlier works, *Town of Evening Calm* and *Country of Cherry Blossoms* (2003–2004), were translated into English and published as an anthology for the international audience in 2007, and other translations in Korean, French, Mandarin, and Portuguese followed (Kouno [2003] 2009). Much has been written about this anthology, which portrayed Hiroshima ten years after the atomic bombing, including its aftereffects (Ichitani 2010; Takeuchi 2016). The artist carefully maintains focus on capturing the everyday details of the survivors' lives, including their trauma and social stigma that are passed onto the family members of the next generation.

Kouno's anthology received the 2004 Grand Prize for the Manga Division in the Japan Media Festival, organized by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, and the 2005 Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize Creative Award. Kouno's work became even more popular when her manga series *In This Corner of the World*

was published as a three-volume comic book, which received the 2009 Excellence Award in the Japan Media Festival before it was turned into an animation film. Not since Miyazaki Hayao's *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) has an animation film received so much attention and enjoyed such a long run in Japanese theatres as *In This Corner of the World* (2016).[3] Although Kouno had no firsthand experience or memory of war, she produced stories for adult readers by taking up the theme of war memories in her own imaginative and creative way, which multiple other resourceful female manga artists also did.[4] Together, they succeed in bringing the wartime era back to life in ways not attempted by their predecessors.

Kouno is a member of the so-called *senmu-sedai*, or generation without experience of a war, and she took a different approach to preserve the memories of war that were rapidly showing signs of fading. Kouno was born in Hiroshima in 1968 and raised there. She often visited her grandmother in the nearby city of Kure, where her maternal relatives lived. As Kouno wrote in the 'afterword' of *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms*, being neither a hibakusha nor a second-generation hibakusha, and having no close relatives who could talk to her about their experiences, she avoided taking up the theme of Hiroshima and the atomic bombing until a comic magazine editor suggested it. After moving to Tokyo, however, Kouno realized that people outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not know much about the devastation caused by the atomic bomb, not because they were avoiding the topic, but because "they never had the opportunity to learn about it even if they wanted to" (2009 [2003], 103). Kouno felt she could provide such an opportunity.

As an artist who had no experience of a war herself, Kouno was aware that her depictions of the destruction wrought by the war would not be perceived

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3 A sequel to the 2016 film with a 40-minute added footage, *In This Corner (and Other Corners) of the World*, was screened in 2018. It was based on the same series by Kouno Fumiyo and directed by Katabuchi Sunao.

4 The winners of the 2015 Grand Prize of Cartoon division from the Japan Cartoonist Association were both female manga artists, Ozawa Yuki and Kyo Machiko. Ozawa's *Atokata no machi* (City of Traces, 2014-2015) is a manga on the air raids in Nagoya city, and Kyo Machiko's *Cocoon* (2008-2010) features the Battle of Okinawa in the Asia-Pacific War, while her *Ano-ne* (2012) is based on an encounter between Anne Frank and Adolf Hitler. Other notable manga include Ishikawa Maki's *1945, A Teenager's War: The Atomic Bomb and Yokohama Air Raid* (2004) and Miyauchi Saya's *Shirohata no shojo* (The girl holding the white flag), a story of the Battle of Okinawa that took place in June 1945.

as being as real as those portrayed by her predecessors. However, Kouno more than offsets this 'lack' by conducting meticulous and detailed research of the era with an eye to bringing the everydayness of the wartime back to life. She succeeds in portraying important aspects of the war that are curiously absent in the works of her predecessors: that daily life did not end with the beginning or the end of a war, and that not everyone was behaving according to the imperial government's expectations, including its plan of world order.

Although Kouno wanted to tell her story in a historically and culturally informed way, she knew she had to be resourceful in order to cater to an audience who had little knowledge of what happened during the war. Recreating the scenes that the war generation witnessed was no longer an effective means of helping readers of the *senmu* generation develop an empathic understanding of the war. In a conversation featured in a magazine with the manga artist Nishijima Daisuke, author of the immensely popular *Diên Bien Phu* (2007–2016), Kouno stressed, as follows: "If we only emphasized the catastrophic nature of war, we could only reach those who like to hear about it" (2016c, 33).

This concern is also in line with that of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in undertaking its third renewal art project, completed in the spring of 2019. It was no longer a question of intensity—some thought the mannequin dolls, whose skin was melting like tattered clothing, was too intense and grotesque, while others did not—as it was of effectiveness and validity. As Nabeshima Yui (2018) has documented in detail, the museum decided to remove the mannequin dolls after a heated debate that involved the citizens of Hiroshima, the *hibakusha* community, and even the city mayor. The emphasis was shifted towards bringing the war experience closer to the audience as something they could immediately relate to and feel empathy towards. As Amy Sodaro (2018) has also demonstrated in her book *Exhibiting Atrocity*, the emerging new form of memorial museums calls for generating Landsberg's 'prosthetic memory' mediated by exhibits that can bring intellectual, emotional, and moral impact in the here and now. This coincides with Kouno's approach.

Kouno has resisted being labeled an 'anti-war manga' artist on numerous occasions (2012, 231). Nor does she want to be perceived as a 'memory keeper' of Hiroshima's history. She believes that "war memories cannot be owned" by a certain group of people, that is, by those who have firsthand experience, but rather, need to be continuously narrated and expressed by a diverse group of artists through different media (Kouno and Ozawa 2015, 190). At the 20th

anniversary event of the Hiroshima Manga Library, the only public manga library in the country, Kouno voiced her position yet again: "None of us [speakers at this symposium] have experienced a war, so we all have an equal right, even an obligation, to produce a narrative about the war, don't we?" (April 22, 2017). However, regardless of Kouno's intentions, by depicting the 'everydayness' of the wartime era that fails to coincide with the ideology propagated by the Japanese Imperial Government, her graphic narrative in effect becomes an 'off the record' historical documentation of a wartime world that did not always succumb to the state's deceptive accounts of it.

The success of Kouno's manga and its animated version *In This Corner of the World* came about through a series of fortunate circumstances. Originally, *In This Corner of the World* was released as a manga series in a bi-weekly comic magazine *Manga Action* between January 2007 and January 2009. The magazine's target audience were men in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. Because the magazine cover of *Manga Action* regularly featured pin-up girls in bathing suits, one might easily imagine female comic fans feeling reluctant to purchase the magazine. This does not mean that the story was written predominantly for men, but that it initially found its readership among males. Predictably, from the outset, Kouno's manga did not quite blend in with the rest of the magazine. Her drawings and stories were reminiscent of girls' comic books that were popular in the 1960s and 1970s and almost too gentle for the magazine. Consequently, after the first issue of the series, *In This Corner of the World* was almost always featured at the very end of the magazine as if to invite its readers to read it before closing the magazine.

In fact, because Kouno's *In This Corner of the World* manga series was perceived to be too temperate and lacking in drama, the animation production company MAPPA initially faced difficulty in raising the funds necessary to remake Kouno's manga series into an animation feature film, according to the company's Planning Department Head, Maruyama Masao (NHK March 3, 2017). Fortunately, this time lag also gave the production team more time to prepare for the film, allowing them to visit the places where the events in the narrative took place, create sketches for the background scenes, and conduct interviews with those who lived at specific locations (Maruyama and Maki 2016, 68-69). According to the Production Committee records, the Committee soon thereafter raised part of the financing through crowdfunding, which reached its goal of collecting two million Japanese yen, or approximately two hundred thousand U.S. dollars, in just eight days. Although this amount hardly covered

the production costs, it was enough to show the prospective sponsors that there was a real demand for the film, that is, that there were "ten thousand people who would pay two thousand Japanese yen" to see the manga series turned into an animation film (*In This Corner of the World* Production Committee 2016, 7). The visibility of the fans and their voluntary actions in spreading the word to those who were not necessarily animation fans was critical, and so, from the start, the animation's marketing strategy had as its target the adult group.

Had Kouno's *In This Corner of the World* not been made into an animation film, the larger populace might not have been as exposed to her narrative. As Oguma Eiji, a historical sociologist, asserts, manga narratives no longer construct "a shared awareness" and mass identification of a larger middle-class group; weekly or bi-weekly manga magazines today are highly segmented by age, taste, and perhaps even class (2017, 13).

Add to this the decline of the publishing industry at large and the dwindling of the sheer number of weekly or bi-weekly manga magazines, and the difficulty for any one manga narrative to reach the general public becomes evident. However, manga can be "indicators of social values and norms," particularly in Japan, as Tsurumi observed (2000, 171). In this regard, the animation film *In This Corner of the World* has been transformed from a piece of entertainment for a small group of manga readers into a commodity for a much wider audience from different backgrounds. This allows them to feel that they are part of a larger history, sharing social values and norms, thanks to the propagation of the manga narrative via its animation film version.

The war manga genre as we know it today is more expansive and inclusive than it used to be. While legendary manga artists, such as Mizuki and Nakazawa, created the genre by depicting the wartime years they lived, the more recent manga artists can take on numerous war-related themes, only one of which is to depict the war itself. *In This Corner of the World*, for instance, is not about Hiroshima and the dropping of the atomic bomb per se. Kouno purposely draws her narratives from the off-center, the center being the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. In fact, the atomic bombing is not even treated as a major incident, because people in other cities, including the neighboring city of Kure, were not informed of what happened in Hiroshima during the Pacific War. Instead, the story centers on the massive air bombing that Kure experienced, including the incendiary and time-delayed bombings, and on how people led their lives before, during, and months after the war ended.

3. Animated Landscapes and Places Matter

Both the manga *In This Corner of the World* and its animated version, provide a localized picture of the wartime experience, thereby successfully reflecting the differences in experience that the citizens of Hiroshima and Kure underwent. Both cities are in Hiroshima prefecture. This approach demonstrates a more dynamic view of wartime memories, providing a historical graphic narrative that takes place on the home front, where women were responsible for taking care of a series of culture-specific household tasks. The animated film highlights the slightly off-center artistic expressions, such as the characters speaking in their local dialects of Kure or Hiroshima, which are somewhat different from one another, the lesser-known facts of everyday life that are documented in detail, and a depiction of landscape that is more than just a backdrop against which the narrative events take place.

Katabuchi Sunao, the screenplay writer and director of the two-hour animated film *In This Corner of the World*, was pivotal to the success of the film. It is fair to say that Katabuchi's success in interpreting Kouno's 'intent' in drawing her manga of wartime everyday life was directly responsible for the success of the animated film itself. He received numerous awards for transforming Kouno's manga into animation, one of them being the 2016 Blue Ribbon Award. This was the first time movie critics and writers decided to give a best director award to an animation director.

For example, Katabuchi saw that in Kouno's work landscapes mattered almost as much as the characters. He confessed that when he first read Kouno's manga, he felt that both his popular TV manga series *The Famous Lassie* (1996) and her *In This Corner of the World* shared a defining similarity: they stuck to the details of the time and place (Katabuchi 2016, 92). By adding landscapes in color that were about 80 percent hand-drawn and 20 percent digitally reproduced, Katabuchi preserved Kouno's original soft touches from her hand-drawn manga, the manga frames, and the color-page ending of the black-and-white original (Hayashi 2016, 83). This meant that unlike the mostly black-and-white original manga, the animated landscapes in color played a much more prominent role than in the original manga, all to foreground the historical, social, and political context of the narrative.

To give the film a multi-layered historical context, the focus is on Kure, which is neither too far from, nor too close to, Hiroshima. The audience will

be watching the scenes that take place in Kure without being able to completely escape imagining what happened in nearby Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The dates of the escalation of air raids in Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and other cities, of the sinking of the 'invincible' battleship *Yamato*, and of the Allied Powers's landing in Okinawa are in the back of our minds while we watch the animated scenes of the characters' everyday lives in Kure. Like a countdown to the dropping of the atomic bomb and the end of the Asia-Pacific War, the dates and their significance appear on the screen as they do on the pages of the original manga presentation. Life goes on in this corner of the world, and women needed to be creative in preparing dinner even when no food was available at the market.

3.1 The Naval Port Kure

Kure is a naval city with a military port, located in the Inner Sea of Seto in Hiroshima prefecture. The animation is narrated through the main character, Suzu, who is an 18-year-old woman. Suzu marries Shusaku, who works as a secretary for the Navy Court Martial at Kure's Naval Base while her siblings and family live in Hiroshima city. Although these two locations are only approximately 25 kilometers, or 15 miles, apart, marriage meant leaving familiar faces and places, with transportation being far more inconvenient then than it is today. As becomes a naval city, men in military uniforms are not uncommon. Shusaku wears a stand-up collar uniform, not as a military man but as a civilian, while his father wears a *kokuminfuku* (national uniform), also as a civilian aviation engineer. Marrying into an ordinary family, Suzu lives in a house on the corner of a hillside in Kure, and from the nearby terrace fields she can see the harbor and the warships stationed there.

Historically, the building of battleships supported Kure's prosperity. Kure had been building large battleships since the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) and well into the Asia-Pacific War, while the United States was preparing for airstrikes by building large-sized B-29 Superfortresses. What symbolizes the location and the animation scenes depicting it is the appearance of the battleship *Yamato* in the harbor, along with *Musashi*, *Yamato*'s sistership, *Aoba*, *Atago*, and *Yukikaze*, to name a few. As the story develops in the film, the audience cannot become completely oblivious to the final destiny that awaits

the 'invincible' battleship *Yamato* and the heavy cruiser *Aoba*. Historically, *Yamato* failed to complete its reckless mission to Okinawa. *Aoba*, on which Suzu's childhood friend boards as a naval seaman, was also destroyed by American airstrikes. However, like most Japanese at that time, the characters watch the technologically advanced battleships in the harbor with pride and in the firm belief that these battleships would change the course of the war and bring the country to victory.

A date appears on the screen— "April 1944"—and Suzu and Shusaku are both sitting at the top a hill on the terrace fields, viewing the harbor together. Shusaku points his finger toward the harbor, naming the ships, the aircraft carriers, the submarine tender, and the U-boat from Germany. Suzu has just returned from visiting her family in Hiroshima, thus feeling a bit homesick and melancholic, when suddenly a large ship enters the harbor, and the following exchange ensues:

Suzu: "Shusaku-san, what is that? Is that a ship?"[5]
Shusaku: "That's *Yamato*. The world's greatest warship, born from the orient's number one shipyard."
Suzu: "There's people on it, too?"

Then, the animation zooms in to get closer to *Yamato*. We see and hear navy men talking, some raising their voices to reach other seamen on board. A small fishing boat passes by, accentuating the scale of the large battleship.

Shusaku: "Yes. About 2,700 people."
Suzu: "Two thousand ... seven hundred people?"
Shusaku: "That's right, 2,700 people. Tell them, let's welcome them [back] to Kure."
Suzu: "They cook for 2,700 people every day and do the laundry?"

Katabuchi's film consistently shows Kouno's claim that wartime reality was an extension of the everyday. Kouno's original manga, in two facing pages, shows the battleship *Yamato* from a distance, as viewed from the terrace field with Suzu and Shusaku in the frame (Kouno 2017 [2008], 110-11). There is no mention of the number of men on board, let alone any scene with Suzu worrying about who is going to take care of the seamen's food and laundry. Here, Katabuchi even

5 Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are from the animation film's subtitles.

adds a short close-up scene of the men on board and makes sure that the seamen on *Yamato* are visible everywhere—on the deck and on different floors, one of whom sends a flag signal that can be decoded by those who are familiar with the signals. According to historical records, *Yamato* returned to Kure once a month, and this—in the animation film—was one of those days, April 17, 1944 (*Chugoku Shimbun* Sep. 29, 2016). We are reminded, thanks to Katabuchi's contribution, that almost three thousand men, who had to eat and do their laundry, as Suzu rightly imagines, were on board when *Yamato* left for its final mission the following year. Like the kamikaze pilots, the men on *Yamato* would embark on an impossible mission against the Allied Powers in Okinawa, never to return. This short, inserted scene reminds the viewers that people's lives would be lost, not just the battleship that everyone took so much pride in.

Remaining faithful to Kouno's insistence on historical accuracy, Katabuchi adds another short landscape scene suggesting that *Yamato* leaves the Seto Inland Sea for good the following year. After a series of air raids in March and April of 1945, Suzu spends an anxious night in the community shelter, and morning arrives. Suzu is outside, hanging the laundry to dry. Butterflies are flying and birds are singing, when suddenly, she sees a contrail in the sky. Suzu flips her body backwards, trying to follow the contrail with her eyes: "Never seen that before," says Suzu in the film. The view of Suzu bending her body backwards is drawn in such a way as to suggest that this is how she looks from the ground, and it gives the readers and viewers a sense of precariousness, with the wide sky in view. According to Sumida Chiho, a curator at Kure Art Museum, Kouno drew the contrail after reading a 'memory note' left by a Kure local on April 6, 1945 (Sumida 2016). In the manga, a vertical frame from the top of the page to the bottom of it focuses on what Suzu saw in the sky, and then, we turn to the next page and see Suzu bending backwards in a large frame. In two smaller frames below, her father-in-law is explaining in scientific terms how a contrail is made, leaving the readers to wonder whether something serious is happening.

Katabuchi emphasizes in his film version the historical detail that Kouno's manga presentation merely suggests. In the animation film version, the audience hears the sound of an aircraft engine after Suzu follows the contrail with her body bent backwards. Presented from the point of view of the pilot, a scene involving a large battleship surrounded by numerous smaller battleships emerges, and it is closely followed by an image of a camera lens shutter, a

'click' sound, and then another 'click.' With these click sounds, the audience is encouraged to suspect that the pilot must have taken several photographs of the battleship *Yamato* in the harbor. The contrail Suzu sees in the animation film was 'in reality' produced by a B-29 reconnaissance plane. According to an *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper article of July 4, 2006, Katabuchi generated the scene in the animation film by reproducing a real photograph taken 5 hours before *Yamato* left the Inner Sea of Seto for its last mission in Okinawa. Found in the United States National Archives, the photograph was later exhibited at the Yamato Museum in Kure in 2006.[6] With the unobtrusively added scene based on archival research, the battleship *Yamato* that Suzu and Shusaku are portrayed as seeing from a distance on "April 6, 1945" in the animation film would no longer represent pride, but instead, foreshadows the terrible final days of the Asia-Pacific War.

As Lee (2016) has demonstrated, Kure's identity is inseparable from the battleship *Yamato*, and myths and memories of the war's tragedy live on in the minds of Kure's citizens and beyond. The myth of *Yamato* as a cultural symbol of spiritual strength and rebirth of post-war Japan remains strong to this day. However, it is important to note that Kouno's narrative maintains a certain distance from any kind of ideologically driven position. In fact, not having a fixed dichotomy of aggressor and victim leaves little scope for ready criticism. The reader cannot dismissively treat the war era as something of the distant past with no connection to the present. By making the Hiroshima-born protagonist Suzu marry into a family who live in the navy military city of Kure, her affiliation is to both Hiroshima, whose citizens suffer horrendously because of the war, and Kure, which ultimately prospered because of it and took pride in taking part in the war effort. Hence, the narrative blurs the line between those who benefitted, and those who suffered from the war, making it difficult to take sides in a simplistic way. Through Suzu, the main character, we are led to imagine the men on the battleship Yamato led no less an everyday life than did the citizens of Hiroshima – or anywhere else in the world. The seamen had to eat and do laundry, just as we must, today.

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6 According to *Asahi Shimbun* (2006), the photo was obtained upon a request made by Kudo Yozo, a high school history teacher and representative of *kūshu sensai o kirokusurukai, zenkoku renraku kaigi* [national network of preserving records of air raids and war disasters].

3.2. Air Raids in Kure

Historically, in addition to battleships, Kure produced military aircraft and other weapons during the Asia-Pacific War. Kouno's manga depicts Kure as a strategically organized military city with a chart showing how the structure of the Kure Navy Base evolved throughout history: the Hiro Naval Arsenal, Kure Navel Arsenal, Hiro Aircraft Factory Departments directly attached to the Navy Base, and all the other divisions and factories that produce the weapons (Kouno 2016a [2009], 11-14). The drawings of the various aircrafts produced in Kure are accompanied by lyrics of a 1934 military song that factory workers at the time sang: "With stars shining above at dawn . . . we strive to improve our skills, a unified determination and goal . . . we carry our glorious duties" (Kouno 2016a [2009], 13-14). In the film, Suzu's father-in-law, who builds aircraft engines as a civil engineer, sings the same military song when he is with Suzu and her niece while they are trying to take cover from the heavy air raids. In short, Kure and the military are inseparable.

A 'third voice' that exists in Kouno's manga but not in the animation animated film complicates this picture. In the manga pages where the pictures of various aircrafts and the quotations of the military song appear, the viewers see an ordinary middle-class nuclear family, looking up at the sky with a smile, the mother holding a parasol in her hand and her daughter pointing her finger at the sky. Perhaps she sees an aircraft. A third-party voice without a hint of local dialect says, "What is a dream to some is . . ." and the sentence is completed in the following left-hand page, in which an aerial view of the Hiro Naval Aircraft and Arsenal Factory area fills the entire page— "a nightmare to others" (Kouno 2016a [2009], 14-15). The two-page spread suggests that these aircrafts have bombed other parties, just as the citizens of Kure are being bombed by the Allied Powers. In other words, this 'third voice' expresses the understanding that the labels of 'aggressors' and 'victims' are not fixed or easily identifiable.

In both Kouno's manga and its film version, the air raids are portrayed as an everyday occurrence. According to John Dower, more than 65 percent of Tokyo residences were destroyed and sixty-six major cities throughout Japan were heavily bombed in the air raids during the Pacific War (1999, 45-47). Kure, too, was heavily bombed—14 times, to be exact, from March 19 to August 14 in 1945; about two thousand citizens were killed during the July 1–2 air raids

alone (Yamato Museum 2015, 76-77). Each time an air raid alarm went off, people went through a routine, as depicted in both the manga and animation versions of Kouno's narrative: "04: 50, March 29, 1945 ... Ready air raid gear! Put out all fires! Remove slide doors! Grab survival kits and head to bomb shelters!" The same routine is repeated, but not with equal urgency: "22: 10, April 1, 1945. I can't see anything ... oops! sorry! (meow) whose cat is that?"; "23: 45, April 5, 1945 ... [a child in the bomb shelter] I'm getting tired of air raids." Kouno and Katabuchi recognize the human propensity to normalize extreme circumstances and begin to let their guard down when air alarms occur frequently, particularly when they turn out to be false alarms.

Everyday psychology also governs those activities that should support the war effort on the home front. In another scene of the film, on "March 31, 1945," women are putting on their sashes that read, 'Greater Japanese Women's Association for the Protection of the Country.' They are getting ready to support the war effort by cheering and sending off drafted men. In a low voice, a woman says, "Poor Mrs. Kariya. She lost her husband. Now her 17-year-old is being drafted." The women line up and wave the national flag unenthusiastically and, in a depressed tone, congratulate the drafted soldiers and family members before rushing off to the bomb shelters as the air raid alarm goes off. In the manga version of the same scene, a woman on her way to send some young men off to war, murmurs, "This is so depressing" (Kouno 2016b [2009], 6). Although women supported the home front war efforts by joining the 'Greater Japanese Women's Association for Protection of the Country,' not everyone was equally enthusiastic about their 'duties' devised by the imperial government. In Kouno's narrative, we see that human psychology would not always conform to the expectations of a state. People sometimes do not even take seriously the orders of the *kenpei*, or military police, and are depicted as being their ordinary selves, regardless of the imperial government's ideology.

While human psychology can unwittingly defy the dictates of any single ideology, essayist Okabe Itsuko's (1923–2008) well-known essay, "The Woman Aggressor" (2008), also reminds us of the ordinary citizen's vulnerability. Okabe, having received military education since primary school, recalls how she could not understand her fiancé when he told her, upon receiving his draft notice, that "he did not want to die for the emperor" (2008, 94). The following day, she sent him off at Osaka station, waving the national flag with

enthusiasm. Okabe's fiancé was killed during the Battle of Okinawa, and she describes how only years later she realized what she had done. Okabe reminds us that on any given day, ordinary people leading honest lives can be involved in a war, even supporting it. The ordinary citizen is highly capable of becoming an 'aggressor,' to use Okabe's title for the essay. Whether reluctantly, dutifully, or unthinkingly, when people follow the state's orders, they become an Okabe or a character in *In This Corner of the World*.

4. Documenting Hiroshima

Suzu was brought up in the seaside of Eba, a part of Hiroshima city that has a view on the Inner Sea of Seto. Her family is involved in selling nori, or dried seaweed sheets. The first scene of both the manga and the animated film opens with a view of nori being dried under the sun and the ocean breeze blowing in from the Inner Sea of Seto. Suzu, still a child, is on her way to sell the nori to a restaurant in Nakajima Honmachi. Nakajima Honmachi was once the liveliest commercial district in Hiroshima city until the area was completely demolished by the atomic bomb. Katabuchi carefully recreates the streets of the area in his animation by conducting interviews, examining photographs, and engaging in archival research. He worked especially closely with Nagakawa Mikio, a member of a citizen group, the Hiroshima Fieldwork, whose objective was to interview the former inhabitants of the Nakajima district and publish booklets on the area (Katabuchi 2019, 105).

The outcome of Katabuchi's efforts is noteworthy. In the animation film, viewers see the Morinaga chocolate and caramel candy sold in the stores, the Hamai family's barber shop, and the Aioi bridge, the target landmark that the bombardier of the aircraft "Enola Gay" aimed at when he dropped the atomic bomb. Suzu walks through the commercial district, and when she leans on the handrail of the rather large 'Taishoya' kimono store building to rest, the feature film's theme song sung by the musician Kotoringo in her distinctive floating, whispering voice sets the tone of the animation. From the outset, we are reminded that there was once a lively city.

The actual Nakajima Hondori is located within 100 to 700 meters from the hypocenter of the blast and occupies the northern part of today's Hiroshima Peace Park. When we walk through the park, we can find a memorial plaque,

also known as the Map Restoration Monument, that shows the name of the households, movie theaters, small shops, and a department store, where people spent their everyday lives. Accordingly, an attentive viewer of the animated film would slowly recognize that Suzu is walking through today's Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. When Suzu revisits the area after she has married, we see her walking through the Kamiyacho intersection in Hiroshima city, which is lined with modern buildings and street cars. Suzu is drawing a picture of the Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, and this time the drawing of the hall from the manga is presented close-up and in color. Then, when the time comes for Suzu to return to Kure, Suzu says, "Sayonara [goodbye] . . . sayonara, Hiroshima," which makes the readers and viewers sense another kind of farewell with Hiroshima that is destined to happen with the dropping of the atomic bomb (Kouno 2017 [2008], 104). In these scenes of Hiroshima, the manga readers and the animation viewers alike realize that the Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall that Suzu draws a sketch of will later become a world heritage site, the Atomic Bomb Dome. And the large kimono store 'Taishoya,' where Suzu rests, is the only other building that survives the atomic bomb.

In this way, because the names of the geographical locations in Kouno's *In This Corner of the World*—for example Kure, Eba, Kusatsu, Mt. Haigamine, and Hiroshima—exist to this very day, the manga and its animated version bring the past into the present. Precisely because the graphic narrative focuses on Kure's everyday life, Kouno's narrative as animated under Katabuchi's direction becomes not of a wartime past, but one that happened at a time and place that is within the manga readers' and animation viewers' comprehension and reach. The scenes, dialogues, and even the pauses set against a backdrop of familiar views and locations invite us to imagine how war is always a stone's throw away in a subdued, profoundly ominous way.

4.1. The dropping of the atomic bomb

The portrayal of the dropping of the atomic bomb in Kouno's story highlights the difference in the experiences between those who lived in Kure and those who lived in Hiroshima city. It is August 1945, the month the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In contrast to the air raids in Kure, the depiction of the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima is far less

dramatic. In fact, the critical moment is almost unnoticeable in the manga, consisting of just a small, white, blank frame located at the bottom of the page, sandwiched by two other frames. The frame on the right of the blank one is a drawing of Suzu's left hand on a basket, her traveling bag. The frame on the left shows Keiko, her sister-in-law, being distracted by a flash, and in a speech bubble, a question mark (Kouno 2016b [2009], 75). On the next page, a matter-of-fact conversation between Suzu and Keiko continues.

A neighbor: "Keiko-chan,[7] did you see a flash just now?"
Sister-in-law, Keiko: "I did. Was it lightning maybe? It's such a nice day out though."
Suzu: "... Could, could I ask you to wash this *monpe,* after all?" (Kouno 2016b [2009], 76)

When the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima, Suzu in Kure is, on the surface of things, mundanely asking her sister-in-law if she would wash a *monpe*, a pair of pants for women, which she plans to take with her to give to her elder sister. Kure has undergone heavy air bombings and Suzu is not sure whether she wants to stay there with the Hojo family. Preparing to leave for Hiroshima city that day, Suzu, at the last moment, decides to postpone her visit. Suzu still needs to ask Keiko to wash the *monpe* because by the time this scene unfolds, Suzu's right hand has been blown off by a time bomb. But Suzu also hesitates to make this request, because the time bomb that blew off Suzu's right hand also killed Keiko's daughter, who was holding that very right hand. Predictably, Keiko and Suzu's relationship is temporarily strained, but they both come to terms with their very real, very profound, losses.

Suzu: "and .... Can I stay here?" Suzu physically gets closer and holds Keiko's arms.
Keiko: "Ok, ok, I understand, but don't come so close, it's embarrassing."
(Kouno 2016b [2009], 76)

Just then, a loud rumbling sound in the ground is heard. The entire family in the house rush outside to see what has happened. When the readers turn the page, they see what looks like 'an anvil cloud' in the sky, which takes up an entire page (Kouno 2016b [2009], 78). When we think of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima city, most of us probably imagine it to be a mushroom cloud, but in reality, the people in Kure only saw an anvil shaped cloud (Kouno

7 The suffix 'chan' is added mostly to girls' names to express feelings of endearment.

2012, 234) [8]. The manga and the animation film not only portray this reality accurately but also show that all sorts of tragedies, conflicts, and reconciliations were taking place in the wartime everyday lives of Kure's citizens.

5. Conclusion: Being Ordinary in an Extraordinary, or Abnormal, World

When *In This Corner of the World* received the Excellence Award in 2009 in the manga division of Japan Media Arts Festival, the judges provided the following reason for conferring the award:

> Although the story is based on real life during wartime, it is amazing that this work is *not ideological* but profoundly universal, and it has become a Shōjo manga, that is, one that primarily targets girls, which ignites every reader's heartbeat. (emphasis added, Japan Media Arts Festival Archive)

We might agree with the judges at the Agency of Cultural Affairs, who view her work as being unideological. However, judging from a scene describing an exchange between Suzu and Tetsu, Suzu's childhood friend, as he is about to return to his battleship, *Aoba*, after a short holiday with Suzu's family, Kouno is clear about what she does *not* want, regarding wartime memory:

> For you, Suzu, to take care of this household here and for me to protect this nation in the battleship *Aoba*, are no different; they are just activities we engage in because we have to. Think of it all that way and keep at being ordinary and decent in this world, won't you? If I die, don't lump me with all the other 'fallen heroes' and praise me for dying for the country. Laugh and remember me. Remember me and smile. If you can't do that, please forget. (Kouno 2016a [2009], 87-88)

Kouno rejects glorification, idolization, and hero worship. After the war ends, towards the end of the story, the same message is repeated with the portrayal of a completely wrecked battleship *Aoba*, half sunk, appearing in the harbor. Suzu passes by *Aoba* without acknowledging Tetsu. Tetsu, standing in front of

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8 Kouno referred to the photo exhibited at the Yamato Museum. The photo was taken in Yoshiuracho (today's Wakabacho) in Kure city soon after the atomic bomb was dropped. For photo, see Yamato Museum, ed. (2015), 78.

Aoba, is talking to Suzu with his eyes directed towards the sky. "You must have been so shocked when you lost Harumi [the daughter of Suzu's sister-in-law, Keiko] . . . but please remain sane and ordinary in this world." When Suzu replies "Yes," he goes on to repeat, "If you can't do that, please forget about me" (Kouno 2016b [2009], 125). Whether battleships sink and people die in war, Suzu is depicted as carrying on the memories and telling the stories of the people she encounters in her life.

Notably the Frankfurt School, and more recently, scholars such as Marianne Hirsch, have argued that in thinking about 'postmemories' of a catastrophic and traumatic experience such as the holocaust, the "break, between then and now, between the one who lived it and the one who did not remains monumental and insurmountable" (2012, 86). All memories are mediated. As Hirsch has pointed out, 'postmemories' of the holocaust were mostly shaped by men of the first generation, such as Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, and the second generation, including comic artist Art Spiegelman (1992; 2012, 98). If animated films such as *In This Corner of the World* are capable of prompting the audience to imaginatively experience an extraordinary event through the eyes of an ordinary young woman who thinks her everyday thoughts in the midst of extraordinary circumstances, they would realize that even at wartime, food had to be cooked and the laundry had to be done. When Suzu lines up to receive the rations in the film, we hear her say, "Even in war, cicadas cry, and butterflies fly."[9] This is also to say that cicadas crying and butterflies flying is no guarantee that the 'then' is so distant from the 'now.' We realize that 'then' and 'now' are extensions of one another.

Moreover, because the shape of clouds that people saw in the sky, the view of the battleships in the harbor on a given day, the kinds of candy sold in stores, and the military songs sung in the animation are based on historical facts and meticulous research, the fictitious is not quite as fictitious, either. Kouno's message on the back of first volume's cover is telling: "To the me, in all the other corners of the world." Kouno and Katabuchi inform me that Suzu is me, myself, in the here and now.

9 The original manga only shows Suzu getting into line to pick up the food rations and sees a signpost that announces that there will be no sugar rationed after August 1944 (Kouno 2016 [2008], 11).

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