

Chapter 3

KNOWING AND NOTICING



All knowledge is local, no matter what its pretensions.
—Renato Rosaldo, “A Note on Geertz as a Cultural Essayist”

Local people don’t know, but local people notice.
—Professor Kenji Arasaki
Ecotourism Lecture, 6 January 2011

Introduction

Okinawan scholars, elders, and nature lovers today are self-consciously concerned with the preservation and dissemination of local knowledge.¹ Professor Yokota, an Okinawan scholar who advised me throughout my fieldwork, refers to this phenomenon as *jimotogaku* or “placeology”: the study of place, based on “the principle that knowledge of place equals knowledge of self.” The question of what constitutes “local” and “knowledge,” and the ongoing negotiation of these intellectual categorizations, are the subjects of this chapter.

Ethnographic study of ecotourism in Okinawa provides a useful lens through which to examine discourses of local knowledge production because ecotourism discourse frequently distinguishes between those who know and those who don’t know. For example, on every tour there are novice customers and expert guides (e.g., peace guides at memorials in the south and nature interpreters in the north). My fieldwork revealed that the “knowers” are not necessarily local residents and the “non-knowers” are not visiting tourists. The fluidity of these identity markers and their associated bodies of knowledge in the context of ecotourism, and with respect to the politics of knowledge production more generally, calls into question the place of knowledge assumed to be local. The shifting positionalities of many of my informants

blur the classical anthropological distinction between “experience-near” and “experience-distant” (Geertz 1983) forms of knowledge by shrinking the distance, both geographic and conceptual, between the experiences of nearby locals and distant researchers.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the pervasive power of the intellectual distinction often made between these categories of social actor, despite its failure to adequately sort the people making the distinction. I analyze how certain kinds of knowledge about the environment are actively made and kept local through intentional community engagement, and conclude by revisiting the local/researcher binary in order to consider the place of local knowledge within the academy.

When I began my fieldwork, I quickly developed the impression that those who work in ecotourism wear many different hats. I saw ecotour guides at Ministry of Environment–sponsored town hall meetings, and once shared a kayak with the director of the Naha branch of the ministry while on a community-oriented ecotour of the Gesashi River in Higashi Village. One of my senior colleagues at the University of the Ryukyus commuted nearly four hours most days of the week so that she could teach in the Department of Tourism Sciences while living in Yambaru and keep up her activities with the Kunigami Tourism Association and the Forest School. Though each business card I received designated a different occupational title, the collaborations I witnessed suggest that people’s practical roles and functions in these social circles were much more nuanced and frequently overlapped.

Two of the most common categorical divisions I encountered were researchers (scientific experts, often from mainland Japan or abroad) and locals (Okinawans). The following discussion of the intellectuals involved in promoting different aspects of nature-based tourism provides a sense of the intellectual landscape that informs discourses of cultural and natural heritage, as well as environmental knowledge production in Okinawa. The following three conversations reveal how the distinction between local and researcher is problematized by the positionality of the speaker.

Researching Locals

I sat in a white-walled lecture hall at the Okinawa International Center (OIC) in Urasoe listening to Professor Arasaki discuss the roles of various actors in Okinawa ecotourism promotion. His lecture was delivered in English to a group of recently arrived JICA trainees from CARICOM countries including St. Lucia, Grenada, and Belize. The twelve trainees all worked for the tourism industries in their home countries in positions ranging from strategic marketing to parks management.

In his Powerpoint presentation, Professor Arasaki grouped the key players as follows: locals/interpreters, travel agents, administrators, and researchers. His explanation of why researchers are crucial to the development of ecotourism in northern Okinawa caught my attention: “Local people don’t know, but local people notice.” By this he meant, for example, that Okinawans may not historically have known the Yambaru kuina’s biodiversity significance, “but local people notice”—that is, most people living in Yambaru would be able to tell you roughly where to find one or at least pick out its call amidst the biosymphony of the forest.

Professor Arasaki emphasized the need for collaboration between “noticing” locals and “knowing” researchers who hold critical new and marketable information about the biodiversity and significance of Okinawa’s semitropical forests, oceans, and rivers. Ideally, he explained, researchers, whom he described as academic advisers on local resources and management, would team up with nature interpreters² to create the most informative, enjoyable tours possible. When describing locals, he explained their value by stating that “they are very *near*,” as opposed to the others involved. This statement seems obvious when taken literally, but beyond geographic and physical closeness, his words also imply a certain psychological and spiritual intimacy between locals and nature.

Arasaki bridges the role of researcher and local; born and raised in northern Okinawa and educated in Okinawan universities, he became a scholar of tourism science and frequently presents at academic conferences in mainland Japan. His professional objectives are to educate groups of foreigners about Okinawa’s contributions to the practice of ecotourism and to learn about diverse international sustainable tourism development strategies in turn. In short, he is a local who both knows *and* notices.

In a speech at Nago Museum in March 2011, Mr. Yamato, a researcher and dolphin expert at the museum, made the statement, “We don’t notice but others notice.” At first glance, these words seem to directly contradict Professor Arasaki’s characterization of locals. Both men are highly educated scholars who grew up in Yambaru. By “we don’t notice,” Yamato was lamenting his observation that many residents of the area are unaware of the value of the natural and cultural resources found in their own backyards. In this case, the “others”—those who do notice—are visitors or outsiders who are much more likely to remark on the stunning red blossoms of the *Deigo* tree (*Pinus luchuensis*, Indian Coral Bean) or be surprised by the sight of what they view as the “cute” mongoose dashing across the road in broad daylight.

Like Professor Arasaki’s work on ecotourism, Yamato’s knowledge of dolphin hunting, a northern Okinawan practice found only rarely in other parts of Japan (discussed in Chapter 4), is what constitutes him as a researcher. By his own definition, his knowing and noticing dolphins, and his formal pub-

lication of that knowledge in a book on the history of whaling in Okinawa, make him less local. Both scholars articulated an affective difference between the environmental sensibilities of a Yambaru resident who has heard of or seen a plant or animal around town, and one who regards the same biota as a meaningful cultural or natural resource to be shared with and preserved for the next generation (and for tourist consumption). Their mutual concern with identifying who is doing the noticing of these resources reifies the distinction between local and researcher also problematized by their own mixed identities.

The Localized Researcher

My experience is different from your experience.
—Dr. Karen Magik, coral activist
Interview, 15 January 2011

Dr. Karen Magik is an American environmental activist, marine biologist, and self-described “scientific consultant” who lived on Okinawa fighting to save coral and *Fukugi* (*Garcinia*) trees for more than twenty-five years. Magik is well known throughout the island for her vehement proclamations about the need to protect Okinawa’s coral reefs. We met on a sunny winter day at the Churaumi Aquarium, one of Okinawa’s most popular tourist attractions, where she worked as the only foreign researcher in an office full of mainland Japanese and Okinawan marine scientists.

We sat on the steps outside the front entrance to absorb the subtle warmth of the sunshine, and I asked her to tell me more about her lifelong love of diving. She stated confidently that, when underwater, “My experience is different from your experience.” Magik was referring to hobby and tourist divers in general, but she gave the example of Okinawan divers in Onna-son, a relatively tough northern village that is home to many underemployed “hooligans” with bleached blondish hair and even the occasional taboo tattoo. For these divers, she asserted dismissively, the leisure recreation activity was more about showing off their new gear than it was about experiencing the wonders of underwater life “up close and personal.”

Magik did not see all subjective diving experiences as equal. In her view, her qualifications as a researcher—her formal training and academic expertise on coral—are what granted her access to this privileged, awestruck experience of nature. She had lived in Yambaru longer than most of the local divers had even been alive. She knew where the country back roads went, where to buy the freshest *umibudō* (Okinawan seagrapes, also known as “poor man’s caviar”), and which beaches were least frequented by tourists.

In many ways, this American researcher was a local. But Magik, who delineated a clear experiential hierarchy in relation to scuba diving, identified two salient differences between herself and most Okinawan: 1) level of familiarity with particular forms of scientific knowledge about the natural world and 2) degree of comfort moving in the scholarly communities that generate this knowledge.

The examples of Arasaki, Yamato, and Magik illustrate the clearly constructed yet pervasive distinction between researcher and local in Okinawa. Each of these informants' worldviews hinged on their acceptance of this categorical divide to express his or her viewpoint—despite embodying elements of both identities. Professor Arasaki constructed his distinction along a dichotomous scale of *awareness* of a particular plant's or animal's physical location versus *understanding* of its global scientific significance. Mr. Yamato used his knowledge as a researcher to advocate for a grassroots revitalization of characteristically “local” activities, such as dolphin hunting, for the purpose of maintaining a sense of community pride in the city of Nago. And finally, Dr. Magik articulated the local/researcher divide in terms of the quality she attributed to the dive experience.

Locating “Local Knowledge”

In December 2009 I attended a *Yuntaku-kai* or “community chat” session in the Hiji neighborhood of Kunigami Village. A Tokyo-based environmental consulting and research group specializing in environmental impact assessment, environmental surveying, and environmental planning and design had been hired by the prefectural office of the Ministry of Environment to coordinate a series of facilitated chats in Yambaru. We met on an unusually stormy night, and the rain beating against the glass windows of the town hall gave the otherwise sterile multipurpose room an almost cozy feel.

I sat at a round table with roughly fifteen male retirees and one woman who had gathered to review a map they had created during a nature walk that fall. The colorful, hand-drawn map was the size of a large poster and was taped to a whiteboard at the front of the room. On the map were tacked cutout images of the plants and animals the group had identified during the walk. Taketo Tsuchiya, one of the consultants from Tokyo, stood next to the map and moved the images around as if to complete Nature's jigsaw puzzle. The volunteers directed his placement of each piece as they collectively re-created memorable sightings from their walk. Once the many hand-drawn and photographic images of plants and animals were overlaid on the village map, participants were asked to share what they knew about the ecological collage. This discussion did not take the form of a question-and-answer ses-



FIGURE 3.1 • Northern Okinawans Dine and Chat During Community Gathering, Kunigami

sion between consultant and local; rather, the participants talked freely to one another by telling stories that inevitably harked back to their youth.

“We used to eat that!”

Over the course of the discussion, one of the most frequently repeated phrases I heard was, “We used to eat that!” One particularly jovial older man told a story about pigs: “We used to use their bladders as volleyballs at end-of-year parties. The only times when anyone could afford meat were big festivals, Obon³ and the New Year. We didn’t throw anything away! We ate everything. There wasn’t much to eat, so we ate it all.” Another man recounted eating the *Ryūkyū Kōmori*, a bat so big its English name is “Ryukyū Flying Fox.” This left everybody rolling in nostalgic laughter.

With these stories emerged a distinct mode of speaking. Many of the participants used the Okinawan names for the plants, animals, and places they discussed, such as *atemoya* (sugar apple) or *goya* (bitter gourd), and included specific northern Okinawan dialect variations such as *hiitu* (short-finned pilot whale), pronounced “*pitu*” elsewhere in Okinawa, and *Kunjan*

(Kunigami Village). Mr. Tsuchiya wrote frantically on the board to keep track of the local vocabulary as it emerged, and his boss took backup notes from the side of the room. The group debated the etymologies and proper “old-fashioned” usage of these words, and I sensed their bittersweet frustration over trying to recall parts of a language that they had heard as children but could not speak as adults. By the end of the session, the walking map was overwritten with terms from the Yambaru dialect of Okinawan.

As the discussion drew to a close, two participants reflected that the minutiae of their daily lives today were sometimes difficult to remember—but the past was very clear. They jokingly attributed this to the aging process, but in a more serious vein one man added: “This is why it’s especially important to conduct some kind of oral history with the elders, even if they may be going senile.” Another man mentioned the recent loss of a particularly knowledgeable older woman in the community, noting the urgent need for participants to chat with folks even just ten years older than themselves. He wanted to keep this natural history alive for tourists, visiting Japanese student groups, and especially Okinawan schoolchildren. Just as the group fell silent in reflection, a man in his sixties pointed to the only forty-something man in the circle, teasing him: “... because the only thing *you’re* going to remember is video games!” The laughter continued into the night as we dined on piping hot Okinawan-style *oden* (a hot pot dish of sweet-salty broth served with pig’s feet, greens, and chunks of giant white radish, flavored with spicy American-style mustard) and *muuchi* (a bright purple yam- or black sugar-infused Okinawan version of Japanese *mochi*, pounded glutinous rice cakes).

The participants’ chat expressed the deep linkages they perceived between knowledge of place, in the form of local plant and animal identification, and knowledge of self, through language and history reclaimed. Locals were tasked with first noticing the details of the natural world around them and then providing the experiential context that turns these details into legible cultural knowledge. In many ways, however, the format and framework for discussion felt imported. During a planning meeting for these sessions, a Yambaru Wildlife Center employee expressed concern over the number of English loanwords being used to explain the chatting process to participants past sixty years of age. Examples of potentially obscure words included: ワークシヨップ (workshop), テーマ (theme), アイデア (idea), コメント (comment), アイスブレイク (icebreaker), マインドマップ (mindmap), and キーワード (keyword), many of which, she pointed out, had perfectly good (if less fashionable) Japanese equivalents. The consultants facilitated the discussion but, as outsiders, were also there to learn. Local knowledge was reconstituted through conversations and cross-comparison of childhood memories, but also benefited outside researchers. The deliberate process by

which this local knowledge is achieved demonstrates how knowledge is kept local, much as scholarly knowledge is self-consciously produced to address more “global” concerns.

Chatting for the Future

In March 2011, I attended the fourth and final community chat session in the series sponsored by the Ministry of Environment. About twenty-five residents of Kunigami County gathered to discuss environmental and community health challenges faced by the area. At the top of the list were long-stay tourist recruitment, youth retention, and employment strategies (discussed in Chapter 5). Participants were mostly retired men, but there were also a few women and a few young male public employees.

The approximately three-hour meeting was replete with flow charts, bullet points, and broad objectives related to community growth and sustainability. The assembled group was quiet until one man volunteered the words of his 99-year-old neighbor: “To restore the region is to love the region.” Machiko Kakazu, a Ministry of Environment employee who works at the Ufugi Nature Museum in Kunigami, seamlessly linked community restoration and tourism by building on his comment: “We must take it as our premise that we *want* tourists to come, and we want their presence to turn into work for the youth.” The retiree nature interpreter who had led me on a Treasure Box⁴ tour of the Yambaru forest the year before added, “There is something special about every place, and I really want this island’s people to learn how to speak well about its unique traits.” Each of these reflections advocated a sort of grassroots pro-tourism attitude meant to encourage community members to know their village as a guide does, and to notice their surroundings as a tourist does.

Mr. Oku, director of the Naha Division of the Ministry of Environment, concluded the formal meeting by talking about the importance of implementing environmental regulations in the area: “This is a good place, so let’s protect it. We should take hold of nature as a resource and use it well.” He stressed that his purpose was not to push the Ministry of Environment’s agenda on the area, but rather to listen to the objectives of locals and assist them in taking action by training guides and making rules. He summarized three key themes from the meeting as follows: community power, connections (between rivers, oceans, and mountains), and consensus building.

Afterward I was asked to share my impressions as an outside observer. I noted politely how passionate everyone seemed to be about serving their community, but I later admitted privately to Mr. Chinen (director of the Kunigami Environmental Education Center’s Forest School, also affiliated

with the Kunigami Tourism Association) that I had not really followed the flow of the meeting. The first community chat I attended was much more straightforward in its purpose: to sketch the cultural and natural landscape of the area by creating a walking map of Hiji Village. Chinen took me aside and in low tones told me:

In my opinion, here is what's really going on: one, the town office's job is to make money, and two, the Ministry of Environment's job is to make rules. But no matter what happens, this village will go on. These people are just trying not to lose the wisdom of the area. We are doing this to preserve the knowledge (*chie wo nokosu tame ni yatteiru*). We have joined up to keep this village going. If you think of it this way, this meeting becomes much easier to understand.

Soon the traditional Okinawan feast that concluded most community meetings I attended appeared, and I knew that people's tongues would loosen up as they drank beer and awamori. We passed the microphone around the table as we ate, listening to short speeches, individual reactions to the group chatting experience, and a few jokes. Among the most poignant of the sentiments to emerge from this jovial roundtable were "Of course you go crazy when you can't feel nature! (*Yappari, shizen ni furenai to atama ga okashikunaru!*)"⁵ "We want to keep the population up! Keep the young people here," and "Let's work to raise up the village, but without destroying nature." Mr. Teruya, another Ministry of Environment employee, added, "Most people stay for just one night ... we want six-night stays in Kunigami!" A sixty-something woman from nearby Sosu Village chimed in: "Please can someone in charge bring us a bus? There's no bus between Kunigami and Sosu. We want to improve Sosu, and then visitors can come to Sosu too! It's an amazing place!" "Aha also has great views!" someone from Aha echoed. One man likened the villages in Kunigami area to the contents of Cup Ramen: "Mixing many different ingredients together makes for an interesting place."

Soon people were laughing loudly and talking amongst themselves, not pausing to listen to whoever held the microphone. Teruya stood up and declared, over the hum of eager chatter, "Most people think of ecotourism as going into the mountains or looking at a Yambaru kuina, but we at the Ministry of Environment also think about the culture connection. We are concerned with protecting the environment, and one way to do that is to keep people out entirely. Another way is to regard nature as a resource, a tool. Who would destroy their own car? Or house? We must think of nature in the same way."

Mr. Chinen spoke next, and gave a direct response to what he called my "naive question" about the purpose of the gathering. On the subject of not seeing the "big picture" context for these community meetings, he reflected that "Eight years ago we began talks about building the Forest School," and at

that time a student had asked, ‘Why is nature important?’ Well, in Yambaru, nature equals culture,” was Chinen’s response. He acknowledged the ups and downs of the nationwide village revitalization movement (*mura okoshi undō*), but added proudly that “there is no minus for the village caused by the Forest School.” He concluded by calling for a community-based, grass-roots approach to revitalization: “It’s not the national government, it’s not the prefectural government—we do it!” Everyone applauded.

Chinen introduced me to Ms. Hamakawa, another mainland Japanese environmental consultant who had been hired to sit in on the meeting. Hamakawa compared Yambaru to the Ogasawara Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage site⁶ also combating invasive species. She began speaking in metaphor: “There is something in the wind and the waves, the wind is blowing, you can feel it really strongly, something is lost.” She reached her hand down in front of her chest as if plumbing her core and said, “We need to pull this [spirit] out from our DNA, to get back our unique character for all of Japan.” I encountered the deep feeling that “something is lost” frequently when speaking with informants over the age of fifty, who tended to frame their concerns in reference to the health of the ocean.

Hamakawa never used the term “globalization” to describe the regional and national loss of Japanese character, but she implied that some form of worldwide phenomenon was to blame for this change. When I went to ask her more about what she meant by “unique character,” as if on cue, two young, slightly inebriated town workers interjected with an Okinawan language lesson for me: “*Andii-san, Icharibachoodi!* Do you know what it means? ‘Once we’ve met we are siblings.’” In this small moment, through this small gesture, they fought the loss of an endangered language by invoking the informal friendliness often thought to distinguish Okinawans from mainland Japanese.

Though I could not follow every discussion, I found the meetings helpful for conceptualizing the formalized spaces through which residents of Yambaru come together to tackle social and environmental problems in their communities. Chinen’s explanation of the gathering led me to conclude that simply assembling a group of concerned citizens and engaging them in conversation, argument, and laughter with one another was just as vital to keeping the village going as any consensus-based grand conclusion or resolution that might result from the meeting.

Meta-anthropology

Is local knowledge production simply a matter of collecting new and old things? By what process does noticing become knowing, and who benefits

from the production of this knowledge? I ask these questions of myself as an outside researcher and of my local informants, who further complicated these social and political categories for me when I noticed them doing my job.

Mr. Yamato invited me to attend what I thought would be a nature walk through the neighborhoods of Nago City. I turned up at the Nago Museum on a Wednesday afternoon in March wearing my yoga pants and a pair of hiking boots. I was ready to experience nature. I entered the lecture hall where everyone was gathering to find neatly ordered rows of chairs filled primarily by older men, a few women, and a few younger males dressed in the light green jumpsuits worn by city workers. Everyone faced forward, glued to a Powerpoint projection at the front of the room that read “Everyone Learns Together in Nago.” Four well-dressed men from the Yambaru villages of Ginoza, Higashi, Oku, and Nakijin sat in the front row, going over their presentation notes.

The meeting was not a walk, it turned out, but a summary review of the last two community walks that had been organized by the museum. We began with a silent prayer for the victims of what would soon come to be known as the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster,⁷ which had struck just a few days before on 11 March 2011. Before the prayer, the organizer added that in addition to the tremendous loss of human life, many precious historical archives had been washed away by the tsunami that followed the earthquake in northeastern Japan.

The first presenter opened by asking, “How should we understand this vast Yambaru? Even in our own heads, there are many different ways to think about the area.” This question was surprisingly similar to the one I was formulating: “How do *they* understand this vast Yambaru? Even in their own heads, there are many different ways.” Strange as it felt to become just one more brain in a room full of placeologists, I was relieved to be in good company.

The neighborhood walking project had been conceived as a grassroots experiment to determine the “scenery we want to pass on 100 years from now,” as well as an opportunity to educate local youth who “don’t notice” the intrinsic or touristic value of their surroundings (although Yamato noted that it was primarily retirees in their fifties and sixties who participated in these kinds of museum events). Volunteer walkers were asked to identify and record the presence of buildings, rocks, and other natural things in their respective villages. Charming historic sites were not the only places of interest; as if in disbelief, one walk leader asked his group, “What is this building *doing* here?” He pointed toward a new and controversial chain mall just completed in Nago.

In a play on words, these walks were cleverly referred to as “*Aruki*,” which means both “to walk” and “to write something down.”⁸ Participants were

encouraged to record the stories of older residents and to borrow the black and white photographs they encountered along the way. They were further asked to determine the types of resources they found and to report back to the museum. The walls of the lecture hall where we sat were covered with these old photographs, alongside photographs of the walk itself. Gazing at the collection, one late middle-aged participant commented wistfully, “All I can say is I’m feeling nostalgic.”

The methods of inquiry the village walkers described are familiar to any social anthropologist: circle the village, borrow the photo albums of people living in the area, and actually go to the place and walk around. One presenter even used an English loanword, calling what they were doing “*Fiirudowaaku*” (fieldwork). Clifford Geertz (1983: 167) has called ethnography a “to-know-a-city-is-to-know-its-streets approach to things,” and my informants had embraced this technique. I suddenly found myself tasked with constructing a story about people constructing stories about themselves.

During his summary presentation, the Ginoza Village Museum representative stood and remarked, “We’re working to train the imaginations of participants in the walks so they can effectively show how things used to be here.” “We discovered that the resources of this region are still asleep,” the representative from Oku Village added. One of the key concerns voiced was that, in as few as ten to fifteen years, the things they had discovered might no longer be there. One woman suggested transferring their findings to a DVD that also documented their methods, in addition to putting their walking data on the town website as a form of living history. This comment sparked a collective brainstorm that erupted into debate over how to involve more young people: “They use computers, and could listen to the older people’s stories while also teaching them how to use the computer,” another woman offered. Those present agreed that it would be a good chance to share information between different generations who might not otherwise communicate about the past.

A second objective of the walks was to connect Yambaru’s village museums with a broader audience. Yamato reminded everyone that the self-selected group in the room, which included faithful museumgoers and a number of academics, was not typical with respect to its level of concern for and interest in cultural and natural preservation. With this sobering comment, the two hours allotted for formal presentation and discussion were up, and we began rearranging the chairs and tables to allow for the much-anticipated banquet.

In a matter of minutes, and with the help of *awamori* and Orion Beer, the mood in the room shifted from quiet and contemplative into jovial and joking. As I munched on boiled leeks and *juushii* fried rice balls mixed with boiled vegetables, a young female museum intern sat down beside me and asked me, “What’s the difference between a museum and a vegetable stand?”

I thought perhaps this was the beginning of a bad joke, but she was suddenly very serious and concerned: “Whether they sell things, and freshness! What do you want to do *now*? What do you want to know *now*?” She called Japanese museums “stoic,” and praised American museums for doing a much better job of appealing to a broad range of people, especially children, and for being interactive.

Yamato asked me to introduce myself to the group, and when I mentioned that I was studying ecotourism the conversation quickly turned to a discussion of tourism and museums. One Nago resident argued that, unlike the typical mass tourism scene in the south (he was alluding to Naha and the southern World War II memorial circuit), “Yambaru still has a lot of potential for development.” Yamato quickly interjected: “Yes, but if you do not have a purpose, things become unclear. This purpose is jumpstarting tourism as a resource. We must connect with tourism, but our research, our work must come first. Otherwise, we have nothing to share.”

Walking as Knowing

Movement ... is not adjunct to knowledge ...
Rather, the movement of walking is itself a way of knowing.
—Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, *Ways of Walking*

Aruki memory walks make strange the familiar by mobilizing village walkers to notice things new, old, and different about their home place. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (2008: 2) argue that a way of walking “does not merely express thoughts and feelings that have already been imparted through an education in cultural precepts and proprieties. It is itself a way of thinking and of feeling, through which, in the practice of pedestrian movement, these cultural forms are continually generated.” Hayden Lorimer and Katrin Lund (2008: 186) similarly emphasize walking as a form of social encounter, a “complex weave where collecting happens on foot in the midst of epistemic ambition, and emotional and embodied response.” For my informants, as for these anthropologists, walking is a profoundly creative and social activity.

Aruki village walkers strive to know their own ordinary surroundings by noticing new things amidst an everyday perspective. These walkers collect experiences, memories, and material objects through dynamic movements specific to a particular time and place. By placing them in the role of student, *Aruki* walks and community chats encourage Okinawans to view their own everyday environment like a tourist and, in many ways, like an ethnographer.

Localizing Scholarly Knowledge

Scholarly language can become so local (i.e., specialized) as to require translation across disciplines. Clifford Geertz describes ethnography as a “craft of place” that “work[s] by the light of local knowledge” (1983: 167). If, as Renato Rosaldo (1997) claims in an interpretation of Geertz’s work on cultural interpretation (an intensely local intellectual engagement), *all* knowledge is local, then under what pretense can the researcher’s “etic” interpretation be integrated with the local’s “emic” experience?⁹ As discussed earlier in this chapter: What happens when the researcher is also a member of the community s/he is studying? (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986). Perhaps less commonly, what can we learn about ethnography from a local researcher who is pursuing a parallel endeavor by practicing a comparable methodology? Geertz likens “Being There” to a “postcard experience,” but adds that it is “Being Here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read” (Geertz 1988: 130). How do I localize my fieldwork knowledge for you, my scholarly audience? Can I simply circle the library and re-tell the inside jokes of theory? Or is it all just turtles back and forth?¹⁰

Identifying experience-near versus experience-distant¹¹ forms of knowledge is as much a question of locating or grounding different perspectives as it is of distinguishing between subjective phenomena (i.e., love, illness) and theorized abstraction (i.e., object cathexis, disease). The scholarly experience of theorizing a social phenomenon also demands an ethnographic context. In *Local Knowledge*, Geertz (1983: 16) writes that it is from “seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. If interpretive anthropology has any general office in the world it is to keep re-teaching this fugitive truth.” The dual positionalities of Professor Arasaki, Mr. Yamato, and Dr. Magik can be reconciled if we consider them local examples of the forms scholarship has locally taken (and by “we” I mean myself and my imagined community of scholarly readers).

Part of my interest in the politics of place-based knowledge production in Okinawa derives from my anxieties over placing the universally particularized forms of knowledge produced by anthropologists. I bring this discussion to bear on the community practices I observed during fieldwork in order to attempt Geertz’s call for a “largeness of mind” (1983), without which the limits of locality might evade reflexive interrogation. Historian Robert Kohler (2006, quoted in Ogden 2011: 112) develops the term “residential knowledge” to distinguish between the “global” and “particularistic” forms of knowledge that tend to dominate scientific and rationalized global

discourses of natural history. Residential knowledge creates a space for an “experiential epistemology” that diverges from scientists’ theory-producing knowledge because it can come only from “living in a place”—from “*living* there.” Ethnographic research, I learned, is not the exclusive purview of the anthropologist; communities can conduct fieldwork that integrates globalizing themes of cultural and biological diversity. Even the most universalizing theory has its place.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have problematized a dominant discourse that informs ecotourism development in Okinawa: that local knowledge is the domain of locals who depend on outside researchers for the verification and valuation of this knowledge in a more global context. Following Celia Lowe (2006: 162), I have tried to avoid the temptation to “read nature and identity as a determining relationship . . . or as a carceral relationship, for example in the figure of the ‘local person.’” I have also tried to transcend the value-laden poles of “science” and “indigenous knowledge” (Walley 2002) by presenting figures who occupy both spheres of thought. Lowe (2006: 163) explains that her informants’ “nature-making” means “tracking emergent rationalities and practices of thought rather than codes found in the mind.” I muddle the binaries of local/non-local, knower/non-knower in a similar fashion by illustrating, from the ground up, the intentional (re)production of these categorical identities and their associated bodies of knowledge.

Sustainable development specialist Tighe Geoghegan’s analysis of community-based resource management discourse offers an important critique of the practices of consulting firms and governing institutions such as the Ministry of Environment. Geoghegan sees a danger in importing outside concepts designed to enhance a community’s capacity for certain forms of tourism development: these models further a misleading discourse of the “global environment”—a world in which “all people have a right to participate in decisions about the future of the world’s natural patrimony” (Geoghegan 2013: 115). Even models designed to increase stakeholder participation, such as the community chats, risk weakening stakeholders’ voices by undermining informal networks in favor of new and less effective participatory organizations (128). While such possible outcomes must be considered, my findings suggest that the community and development models put forth by consultants and Japanese government officials resonated with Okinawan participants’ familiar cultural and commensal practices. Chatters and walkers in Yambaru exercised their agency by personalizing prescribed activities with enthusiasm and a sense of community and personal empowerment.

Geertz (1983: 58) writes that “the ethnographer does not, and ... largely cannot, perceive what his informants perceive. What he perceives, and that uncertainly enough, is what they perceive ‘with’—or ‘by means of,’ or ‘through’ ... or whatever the word should be.” By examining the community processes through which local knowledge is aggregated, I have shown how many Okinawans’ self-understanding is shaped (at least in part) by the tourism imperative.

Existentialist Michael Jackson (1998) compares the act of “storying” (chatting) to “journeying” (walking), suggesting that, while storytelling is motivated by “self-expression,” stories are by definition “relational” and intersubjective (Jackson 1998, quoted in Skinner 2012: 14). Self-understanding in Yambaru is cultivated through performative acts of chatting and walking. Placeology in Okinawa is practiced through facilitated engagement with the natural environment, rather than by less fluid factors such as geographic proximity, ethnic background, or educational level. In the next chapter, I explore the problem of creating and negotiating interspecies intimacy through touristic forms of engagement with nature.

Notes

1. “Local knowledge” was most commonly referred to as “local information” (*jimoto no chishiki*) or “local wisdom” (*jimoto no chie*).
2. For further discussion of nature interpreters, see Chapter 5.
3. *Obon* is a Buddhist All Souls Day during which families reunite to honor departed ancestors. Throughout Japan it is generally celebrated for three days in mid-August based on the solar calendar. Okinawans follow the lunar calendar, so their festivities fall at a different time each year.
4. For a description of this community-based ecotour, see Chapter 5.
5. For further discussion of the human need for nature, see the section “Biophilia” in Chapter 5.
6. As of late 2016, Japan’s Ministry of Environment is in the process of registering Yambaru as a UNESCO World Heritage site for natural assets. By 2018, the 17,300-hectare national park should be able to enforce a 790-hectare special protection zone banning plant and animal collection, along with a 4,402-hectare special zone free of building development (Jiji 2016).
7. In Japanese, the 2011 triple disaster (which included an unprecedented 9.1 magnitude earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor emergency) is referred to as 東北地方太平洋沖地震 (*Tōhoku-chihō Taibeiyō Oki Jishin*). Approximately 20,000 people were killed (CNN 2016).
8. In Japanese, 歩き (*aruki*) “to walk,” becomes ある記 (also pronounced *aruki*) “to write something down.” These guided walks are reminiscent of the 1980s student peace education program outlined in an alternative tour book for bases and battlefields called *Aruku, miru, kangaeru Okinawa* (“Okinawa to Walk, Look At, and Think About” (Figal 2012:

- 72). This book, authored by the Okinawa High School Teachers' Union and the Peace Education Research Committee, was designed for mainland Japanese students on what are now extremely popular, largely standardized school field trips known as "peace study field trips" (*heiwa gakushū*). Other common destinations include the sites of the World War II U.S. atomic bombings, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
9. These anthropological concepts have also been construed as inside/outside, first person/third person, phenomenological/objectivist, and cognitive/behavioral (Geertz 1983: 56).
 10. Of course, Geertz's (1973: 29) original allusion to the interpretation of cultures is that it is turtles "all the way down." Here I change directionality to avoid implying a hierarchical relationship among emic and etic forms of knowledge, whose differences are not meant to be "normative" in the field of anthropology (Geertz 1983: 57).
 11. Geertz adopts psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut (1971) terms, "experience-near" and "experience-distant," when he writes: "An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone—a patient, a subject, in our case an informant—might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another—an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist—employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims" (Geertz 1983: 56).