

# Striving for Land, Sea, and Life: The Okinawan Demilitarization Movement

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## Abstract

Okinawa Prefecture, the southernmost and most recently added administrative region of Japan, comprises the 169 islands of the Ryūkyū Archipelago, an island chain between Kyūshū (the Japanese mainland) and Taiwan. In the last two centuries, Okinawa has undergone significant changes in political regimes that make clear how this place and its people must be understood as distinctive from those in other parts of Japan.

Along with the global indigenous movements, Okinawan activists began to address various themes under international legal framework. This paper discusses major military-related issues affecting Okinawa, including human rights violations and environmental effects, and it examines the range of Okinawan voices and actions directed against these issues. This paper explores how the Okinawan anti-military activism has evolved from a local resistance to part of the global indigenous movement. This examination aims to show intersections of Okinawan indigeneity, historical social movements, and the global indigenous movement.

On April 25, 2010, over 90,000 people gathered in Yomitan Square to call for the removal of the U.S. military bases from Okinawa. It was one of the largest post-war rallies against the occupation, and it was mainly targeting a plan by the U.S. Marine Corps to relocate Futenma Air Station to the Henoko coastal area. In September 2009, then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama proclaimed that the station would be removed in order to reduce the burden on the prefecture. Okinawans rallied in support of the long-awaited change; to say “NO!” to the imposition of the U.S. military bases on the island. Borrowing the idea of “a yellow penalty card” from soccer, people wearing yellow T-shirts, caps and scarves, with umbrellas, filled the Square and gave a warning to the government to reconsider its conduct. There were many who, while personally supportive of this rally could not physically join it for various reasons. Some were caught up in a 10-kilometer traffic jam leading up to the Square. Other chose to express their support by wearing the color yellow at work (“Funtema,” 2010). Men and women, young and old, stood up together to demand the demilitarization of Okinawa.

At the same time, outside of Okinawa, activist groups supported the protest in different ways, in a show of solidarity. For example, in Shinjuku, Tokyo, approximately 1,250 people gathered in a park in a public appeal declaring: “NO BASE OKINAWA [*sic*],” spelled out by making “human letters” with the participants holding candles in their hands. In Chiyoda, Tokyo, 1,000 people representing the Tokyo Okinawan Association and the Association of Okinawan Antiwar Military Landowners, Kantō Chapter marched in demonstration. In San Francisco, too, a non-governmental organization, Women for Genuine Security, assembled protesters and members from eight other NGOs, and held a meeting to call for the reduction of the U.S. military bases.

In front of the Japanese embassy in Washington D.C., people showed their opposition by holding up banners saying “Close Base [*sic*],” and “Save the Dugong.” Organized by a U.S.-based environmental group, Network for Okinawa, the protest was held on the same day of the convention in the prefecture. The people of Honolulu showed their opposition by holding the

Sunset Candlelight Peace Vigil for Okinawa. Led by third- and fourth-generation descendants of Okinawan immigrants in Hawai'i, and also included local residents of Native Hawaiian, Filipino, and Korean ancestry, along with Chamorro from Guam, who showed their solidarity in opposing militarization on small islands. With the rapid development of this increasingly global network, the Okinawa diaspora's strong desire for a demilitarized homeland has spanned generations and crossed oceans. The Okinawan demilitarization movement stepped onto another stage.

This paper demonstrates how Okinawan struggles against the U.S. military occupation have moved to take part in the global indigenous movement. Indigenous identification, although a new component within the political ideology for Okinawans, draws upon a historical understanding of their communities' connections to lands, cultures, and spiritualities. In this paper, I refer to the peoplehood model for the definition of "indigenous" people that was suggested by Jeff Corntassel. The peoplehood matrix consists of four essential factors of sacred history, ceremonial cycle, language and place as a basic lens through which to understand indigenous ways of sovereignty (Corntassel, 2003). Corntassel's (2003) peoplehood model emphasizes the linkage of indigenous identity and cultural perspectives and places importance on interrelatedness and balance of the four key factors.

This paper begins with a brief summary of major military-related issues affecting Okinawa, including human rights violations and environmental effects, and it examines the range of Okinawan voices and actions directed against these issues. What are the core values directing their claims and forms of resistance? How does each act relate to Okinawan identity and their distinct way of being? I discuss how indigeneity has influenced Okinawan anti-military activism. Then, looking at different activist organizations and their networks, I explore how the Okinawan social movement against militarization has evolved from a local resistance to part of the global indigenous movement.

I argue that the prior existing framework of Okinawans, as an "ethnic minority group," has limited their range of autonomy to within their small prefecture of Japan. I argue that the adoption of an indigenous framework to examine Okinawan political articulations and movements would both expand understanding of the place and its people and inspire the people of Okinawa to regenerate possibilities for their political mobilization. Hints of Okinawans' latent interests in political liberation via self-determination are present in their cultural philosophies and collaborative works with other indigenous peoples. This paper aims to show intersections of Okinawan indigeneity, historical social movements, and the global indigenous movement.

This study combines indigenous historiographical methods and discourse analysis. Examining language and representations of demilitarization movements, I analyze discourse as ways that construct particular knowledge(s) with regard to specific historical situations. I gathered data needed to analyze Okinawan discourses, practices of political resistance, and the articulation of indigenous identity from texts including legal documents, testimonies, and institutional reports. Most of these primary sources were obtained online from major Japanese and Okinawan institutions' websites. In addition, I examined and analyzed data from websites, weblogs and other social networking sites, created and managed by NGOs, activist groups, and individual activists.

As far as research ethics are considered, I hereby note a personal sensitivity about how I position myself as an Okinawan researcher, as per the underlying power relationship between the researcher and the researched. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, claims that research is a way to ideologically create and legitimize imperialism

and colonialism. As an indigenous Okinawan researcher, I use these qualitative research methodologies while I situate myself in between, as both “insider” and “outsider” to the research object community. For indigenous researchers, decolonizing research means “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 39). This paper reflects my responsibility as an Okinawan person, towards the decolonization of methodologies for conducting research. My research then attempts to add understanding of indigenous cultural values and ways of being that come along with and is inseparable from political self-determination.

### **Military Colony Okinawa**

Okinawan struggles against militarization began with the Battle of Okinawa during World War Two. In the summer of 1943, planning to make the prefecture a bulwark, the Japanese military started seizing land and constructing its military stations across the islands. The Japanese military used them as a “fortress” during the war, seeking to delay the American invasion of mainland Japan. Beginning with the U.S. military invasion on the islands in March 1945, the battle on the ground lasted for three months and claimed approximately 150,000 Okinawan victims; one fourth of the Okinawan population at the time. The U.S. intended, with its invasion, to separate Okinawa from Japan and to occupy the land as part of their military expansion and enforcement in the Pacific (Arashiro, 2011, p. 260). Japan abandoned Okinawa to the United States following its unconditional surrender, as a spoil of war. Playing an important strategic role for the U.S. military, Okinawa was called “the Keystone of the Pacific.”

During and after the battle, Okinawa residents were detained at a prisoner-of-war camp. While there, the U.S. military occupied the air stations originally constructed by their Japanese counterparts to use prior to entering a battle, and they seized land to build additional military facilities. The military forcibly usurped the land with bulldozers and threw out local landowners who resisted surrendering (Arashiro, 2011; Arasaki, 2000). Those who were deprived of their residential plots and farmlands had no choice but to relocate to other places. Losing the lands once relied upon for their livelihood, some Okinawans had to find jobs with the military or emigrate to find work in another country (Arashiro 2011; Arasaki, 2000).

In 1953, under the U.S. Civil Administration (USCAR), the U.S. unilaterally announced a policy to rent the land themselves with very cheap leases for an indefinite period.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. government’s forceful expropriation of land and purchasing plan triggered an island-wide protest among Okinawans. Known as the “all-island struggle,” the protest was a big social movement by Okinawans for the protection of the land and in opposition against the U.S. military occupation (Arashiro, 2011; Arasaki, 2000).

Suffering from the impact of this undemocratic land seizure, as well as frequent accidents and crimes committed by the military personnel, Okinawans started to strongly push for its reversion in negotiations with the Japanese administration. The former governor of Okinawa Prefecture, Masahide Ota, in his book published a year before the 1972 reversion, explained “Okinawa’s heart,” which laid at the root of the reversion movement. Three important principles of the reversion movement were 1) protect peace without war, 2) ensure human rights, and 3) gain autonomy (Ota, 1971, p. 3). The main goal that Okinawans sought through the change of political administration was the self-determination to protect their people’s peaceful life style.

In contrast to Okinawans' wishes and philosophies, the reversion proceeded as both the Japanese and U.S. government had planned. They kept imposing the U.S. military bases on Okinawa, as "the Keystone of the Pacific," under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. According to Article VI of the Treaty, both countries agreed upon the following:

For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [MOFA], 1960).

After the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japanese administration, the U.S. military bases were partially consolidated and reduced. Yet, 20% of the Okinawa Island, a total of 11% of the Okinawa Prefecture, is still occupied by U.S. military facilities (Figure 1). Ota criticized the unfair burden of hosting the military. If the purpose of the military bases in Okinawa, according to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, is for the protection of all of Japan, then they should be evenly divided all over the country (Kōbunken, 2005, p. 163). There is no valid reason for 75% of the U.S. military forces in Japan to be found within Okinawa.

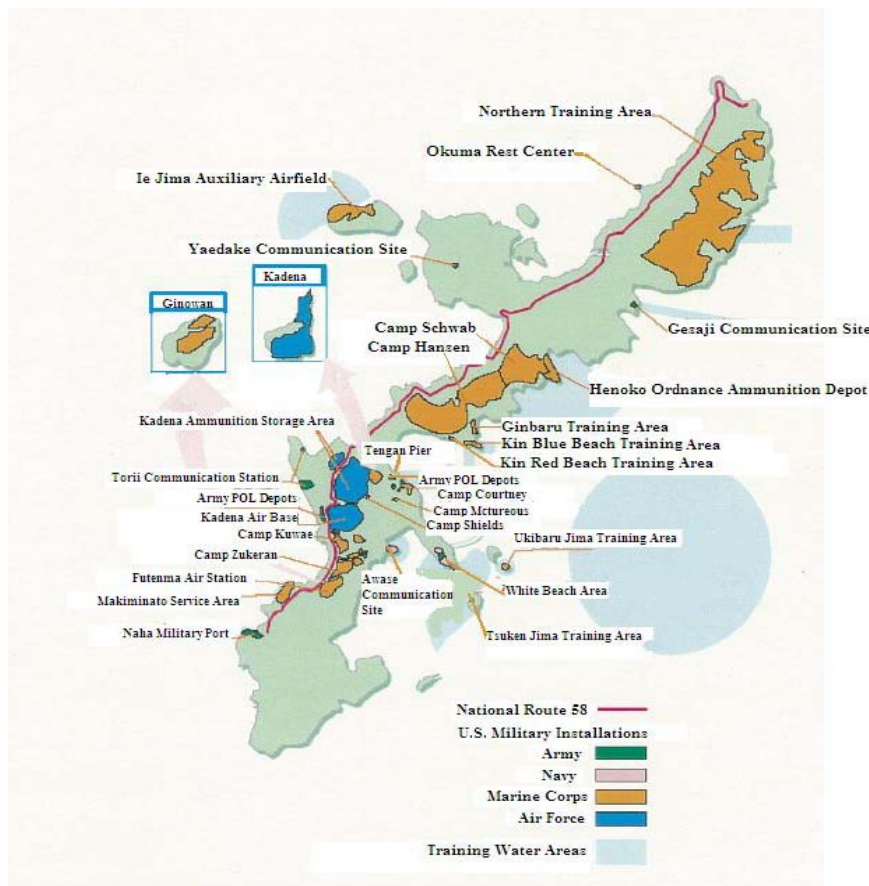


Figure 1. Map of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa. (Okinawa Prefecture).

Even after the end of the Cold War, America's military occupation in Okinawa continued, based on the Japan-U.S. Declaration on Security in 1996, which emphasizes the importance of

the U.S. military in Japan for the “security environment of the Asia-Pacific region.” The Ministry claims:

[O]n the basis of this review, the Prime Minister and the President reaffirmed their commitment to the profound common values that guide our national policies: the maintenance of freedom, the pursuit of democracy, and respect for human rights (MOFA, 1996).

Okinawans ask: “Whose human rights are respected?” The “profound common values” that the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed upon in the Treaty were not necessarily shared by local residents, who were negatively affected by the presence of the U.S. military. Okinawan historian Moriteru Arasaki (2000) states that their enormous presence in the prefecture is a result of “America’s global strategy and the Japanese government’s policy of confining bases to certain areas” (p. 115). The United States, in order to expand and maintain its status as a military superpower in the Asia Pacific region, stayed in the best military host state in Japan. Japan, meanwhile, succeeded in its economic and social development after WWII, under the protection of the U.S. military and also through the sacrifice of Okinawans.

Emphasizing the prefecture’s strategic importance and also the necessity of the Security Treaty to insure the security of Japan, the central government has been reluctant to move the military out of Okinawa to other prefectures. The former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Taro Asou, commented on the relocation plan of Futenma Air Station by saying that it is necessary to continue the U.S. military presence in order to insure Japan’s safety, especially because of Okinawa’s geographically efficient position (Kōbunken, 2005).

However, Tomohiro Yara (2009) a journalist from Okinawa Times, upon interviewing a U.S. Marine officer, revealed the presumed “geographical importance” of Okinawa to be a fiction (p. 24). The officer stated, “[Our base] does not need to be in Okinawa. The U.S. Marine Corps have the abilities to perform their duties even if they are stationed in Kyūshū or Guam” (Yara, 2009, p. 230).<sup>2</sup> The Japanese government’s long promoted argument for “the geographical importance” of Okinawa’s hosting the U.S. military is falling apart, and its discrimination towards Okinawa is beginning to come to light.

Calling Okinawa a “military colony” of both the U.S. and Japan, Okinawan journalist Kensei Yoshida (2007) criticizes U.S. military imperialism as well as Japan’s national backing of it (p. 6). The occupation on Okinawa has been supported by the political discrimination against the island, rather than by its “geographical importance.” Yoshida further questions whether Japan itself might be a military colony of the United State.

It is very clear that there’s a big difference in views between the decision-makers in the central government and Okinawans, in their interests and understandings about the land, the sea, and the people of Okinawa. Many of the inappropriate comments, reasoning, excuses and gaffes by the Japanese and U.S. government officials reveal their failure to truly recognize and respect that there are people living in Okinawa (Kōbunken, 2005, p. 71).

Still annoyed and swayed by decisions that the centralized Japanese government makes, Okinawans have started to question the purported benefits gained through the reversion, which was expected to empower their autonomy and secure their human rights, without the military. In a small island in the Pacific that has a long history of social movements, how do the demilitarization and the people’s indigenous-centered movements for self-determination intersect? Okinawan indigenous advocates seek a form of self-determination that would overcome structural discrimination and enable them to protect the place they live, the source of their culture, and the foundation of who they are. Indigenous-framed resistance against

militarism is a continuous effort to overcome the adverse legacy of colonial rule. Among many debatable issues regarding the military occupation and different approaches to the demilitarization of Okinawa, this paper looks at human rights and ecological impacts of militarization.

### **Violation of Women's Rights**

One of the big negative outcomes that the U.S. military presence has created includes the frequent accidents and crimes committed by military personnel. According to statistics attached to a confidential report, titled "Civil Affairs Related Basic Issues and Okinawa's Reversion," which was released by the Foreign Ministry, in the five years from 1964 to 1968 under the U.S. Military Administration, a total of 5,367 crimes were committed in the prefecture by military personnel ("Foreign," 2011). This includes 504 violent crimes, such as murders, robberies and rapes. Only 33.6% of all the crimes committed, however, actually resulted in prosecution. The number of recorded crimes committed there by U.S. military personnel in 2010 was 71, which means that approximately 14 times more crimes were committed in 1970 ("Foreign," 2011).

Under the military administration, Okinawa lacked both the jurisdiction and the right to arrest a U.S. soldier accused of committing a crime (Arasaki, 2000, p. 100). Because of the extraterritoriality of U.S. personnel, many often escaped heavy punishment while their Okinawan victims ended up crying themselves to sleep, in silence. Without proper legal protection for Okinawan civilian lives, their reversion to Japanese administration embodied a hope to demilitarize the land and gain civil rights under Japan's post-WWII "Peace" Constitution, which promised renunciation of armed forces with war potential.

Although Okinawans did gain jurisdiction over crimes by off duty soldiers following the 1972 reversion, the U.S. still possesses jurisdiction when incidents happen while the soldier is on duty. Should a U.S. commander issue proof to affirm that an accused soldier was on duty at any given time, there is nothing Japan can do. As long as a suspect stays within the U.S. military area, Japan is not allowed to investigate or arrest the suspect (Arasaki, 2000, p. 125). While numbers of reported crimes by military personnel decreased since the reversion due to the shift of jurisdiction from the U.S. military to the Japanese government, the structural violence caused by the military existence in Okinawa has not changed.

In 1995, three Marine servicemen kidnapped and gang-raped a 12-year-old Okinawan girl. After the crime occurred, Okinawa Prefectural Police gathered various evidentiary facts to prove the accused servicemen's involvement in the case, and requested to issue an arrest warrant. However, as per the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), Okinawa police could not issue it while the accused military personnel were in the custody of the U.S. Accordingly, it delayed any further investigation and arrest of the accused (Yoshida, 2007, p. 107). Such disadvantages and unfairness outraged the Okinawans and led to another large demonstration against U.S. militarization. Okinawan demands converged over two major claims: one, to realign, reduce, and eliminate the U.S. military bases in Okinawa; the other, to re-examine the SOFA, which privileges the U.S. military personnel to remain exempt from Japanese law.

### **Okinawan Women's Demilitarization Activism**

While activism is strong and there are many social movements against the military occupation in Okinawa, it is only since the 1995 rape case that women's activism started

attracting public attention. Considering the high number of military-related crimes against women, Okinawan women's groups have pointed out a gendered and sexualized power relationship that the presence of U.S. military creates in Okinawan society.

Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence (OWAAMV) is a non-governmental group consisting of women who protest against the violation of women's rights by the military (Takazato, 2005). Suzuyo Takazato (1996), who worked as a counselor for women for the group, learned that a large number of women in Okinawa were physically and mentally affected by targeted violence related to the military (p. 4). From her counseling experiences, Takazato (1996) states that negative physical and psychological effects on women by the war and the military were not yet understood well enough to provide proper protections and provisions for them. She also points out that the majority of rape cases happening in Okinawa trace back to U.S. military personnel.

Looking at militarism from a feminist perspective, Takazato and members of OWAAMV argue that militarization on Okinawa has created a "gendered space" of violence. Takazato proclaims, "Okinawa is the prostituted daughter of Japan. Japan used her daughter as a breakwater to keep battlefields from spreading over the mainland until the end of World War II. And after the war, she enjoyed economic prosperity by selling the daughter to the United States" (Gerson, 1996).

While both governments, Japan and U.S., have justified the imposition of the military on Okinawa in the name of "security," women's groups critically challenge the fundamental meaning and implications of this concept. Seeing evidence of a high involvement of military personnel in violence and crime overall, women activists claim that human rights of Okinawans, especially pertaining to women and children are not protected. Rather, they are being violated by the military. Takazato (1996) strongly criticizes their presence as functioning to maintain a paternalistic society and global hegemony by way of armed force. Such a paternalistic society imposes incitement to sexual abuse on women as due to being "women's fault" or "temptation," without recognizing the violence-governance structure that the military has created in Okinawan society (Takazato, 1996).

In her book, revealing voices of Okinawan women who survived the post-war period, Takazato (1996) describes how the military has taken a patriarchal role to create a gendered and sexualized Okinawan society. Under the severe living conditions after the war and without men in their household, women have become the primary breadwinners in many families. Some have been pressed into the sex industry to make a living; orphans have been sold into labor.

When the Vietnam War brought economic prosperity to Japan by supporting the U.S., it also increased the business generated for and by the commercial sex industry. For Okinawan women, this would, unfortunately increase the threat of sexual crimes against them, and their potential enslavement by the sex industry. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military bases in Okinawa were used as hubs from which troops flew and made sorties between Okinawa and Vietnam. The mental conditions of many returning soldiers, among whom a number had endured near-death experiences in Vietnam, were unstable (Takazato, 1996). As if to shake off feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and fear, soldiers lavished their money toward buying the sexual services of women. Soldiers lined up in front of prostitute hotels, carrying wads of dollars and condoms (Takazato, 1996). As might be expected, following the War, the number of biracial newborn babies jumped sharply.

Takazato's observation and interaction with Okinawan females critically examine the situations and structured violence that the presence of U.S. troops has brought to post-war

Okinawan society. She points out that the economically poor societies were hard-pressed to provide an outlet for the soldiers' frustrations (Takazato, 1996, p. 29). Hosting both the military and a commercial sex entertainment industry catering to American soldiers, even the everyday life of the local community became militarized. Violations of women's and children's security became chronic. Takazato (1996) emphasizes that the military presence brings up not only issues about geo-political security and its functionality, but also its impacts on an especially unwilling host society (p. 30).

The main aim of the Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence group has been to dismantle structural violence against women by calling for demilitarization. Through Okinawan women's perspectives and experiences, OWAAMV's protest activities and workshops repeatedly use three statements to emphasize negative impacts of the military on a community:

- 1) the military is a form of structural violence,
- 2) the military threatens a peaceful society,
- 3) peace and the military cannot coexist (Takazato, 2005).

OWAAMV's activities include holding workshops, sending out and exchanging information among other cooperative NGOs, observing court proceedings on U.S. soldiers' rape cases, and building up networks with people outside of Okinawa. After the 1995 rape incident, Takazato (1996) also established and served as a representative for Rape Emergency Intervention Counseling Center Okinawa to give counseling support to victims of sexual abuse (p. 35).

Demilitarization movements by women's groups like OWAAMV criticize the very nature of military presence and actions that violate the human rights of women. Although the women's groups have actively organized and participated in protests to bring attention to the oppressive situation and militarized everyday life faced by women in Okinawa, activists have sensed a gap in the understanding of crisis between people in Okinawa and Japan. The majority of people in Japan do not share the negative impacts that Okinawan women have incurred through the military presence. While the daily lives of Okinawans are already militarized, the presence of the military is extraordinary for people in Japan. Okinawa continues to be viewed as simply a small island far away, where the Japanese government can impose noise, crimes, violence, and pollution in order to protect its security. People in Japan choose not to see the military issue as their own problem; rather, they distance themselves from the U.S. military by regarding it as just Okinawa's prefectural issue (Takazato, 1996, p. 20).

Adopting a feminist approach, these women's groups advocate abolishing violence against women and dismantling the structure of violence. As Okinawan women's groups sought to appeal to the rest of Japan, they also began to report the violation of human rights of women and children by the military in international arenas. In the summer of 1995, a group from Okinawa consisting of 71 women participated in the World Conference on Women in Beijing (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 209), joining more than 40,000 women from all over the world who gathered to discuss rights of women. They began to break the wall of silence and raise their voices (Takazato, 1996, p. 5).

A group there from Okinawa spoke out about the frequent (reported and unreported) crimes against women by the U.S. military individuals and discrimination regarding women's and children's rights. In the case of those women who have children with U.S. military personnel, financial support for either mother and/or child is not guaranteed, even should a father abandon a family. Participating in the international conference, Okinawan women shared further experiences, and finally felt they were "fitting in a right place" (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 224). Their voices were heard and respected by women from other military colonies such as South



Korea and Puerto Rico. Building up the global network of women from other U.S. military hosting communities, these Okinawan women opened a way to build a society with no military or violence.

Since the 1995 rape case and formation of OWAAMV, international advocacies and demonstrations by Okinawan women have become especially active. In 1996, Takazato led Okinawan women on a two-week Peace Caravan across the U.S. The group visited San Francisco, Washington, New York and Honolulu, and held more than 15 forums within two weeks (Takazato, 1996, p. 190). Meeting with representatives of UN member states, a senator, and a congressman in the U.S., they appealed for assistance to remedy Okinawa's struggle. Moreover, by also visiting non-governmental organizations and local citizens' groups working for peace and human rights, the caravan broadened their networks at the grassroots level (Takazato, 1996, p. 194).

Okinawan women galvanized other NGOs in different regions to work together against their own military occupation. In 1997, hosted by OWAAMV, the international "Women, Militarism, and Human Rights," forum was held, including participants from Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and the United States (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 210). The U.S.-based organization Women for Genuine Security (WGS) was then founded to strengthen such women's international networks fighting militarism by providing translation services, sharing frameworks to understand the localized structures of race, gender, class, and nation, and also hosting international workshops.

Influenced by Okinawan women's activism, the WGS connects individuals and organizations from other U.S. military host communities such as Hawai'i, Guam, South Korea and Puerto Rico. On their website, WGS states: "we began in 1996 when women from Okinawa (Japan) appealed to us, as women living in the United States, to take responsibility and speak up about the impact our military forces have on other countries" (WGS).

In 2000, the International Women's Summit was held in Okinawa, with members of WGS present from the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Korea, U.S., and mainland Japan. At the meeting, participants discussed militarism and security from feminist perspectives. Questioning "security" as maintained through the military, women in the summit redefined it to represent four principles:

- the environment in which we live must be able to sustain human and natural life;
- people's basic survival needs for food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education must be met;
- people's fundamental human dignity and respect for cultural identities must be honored;
- people and the natural environment must be protected from avoidable harm (WGS).

Okinawan women's international activism has taken small but sure steps to work together with women in other regions. Takazato says, "When we talk about 'relocation' of bases, we think of the people of a host community. We don't want others to have the same suffering as the Okinawans have experienced. We call for demilitarization, not relocation" (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 229). Beyond their own national boundaries, local anti-military movements by feminist groups link to a global demilitarization movement.

It is also through a women's organization that Okinawans first started to participate at the United Nations, and formally lay claim to their human rights under international law. Policies regarding the U.S. military use and exploration of land have continued to regard Okinawans unequally with Japanese, and Japanese domestic laws offer no redress against discrimination

towards Okinawans. Following this engagement, other Okinawan activists started to take international approaches to asserting what are understood as indigenous rights.

When military and security issues are discussed, members of OWAAMV, including Takazato, have resolutely validated women's perspectives on the U.S. military occupation. In line with Takazato's description of Okinawa as "Japan's prostituted daughter," feminist movements had primarily focused on achieving women's equality within the existing patriarchal society. The indigenous movement, however, promoted a fundamental questioning of the relationship between this daughter and her erstwhile father. Okinawan advocates for self-determination want to be free from any existing colonial mechanism that has previously established a patriarchal society to oppress women.

Cynthia Enloe (2007) describes diverse experiences of militarism by women, Okinawan women's experiences of militarization are different from those of non-Okinawan Japanese women who may live next to Yokohama Air Base, or to white American women who actively advocate for women's security in the United States. The U.S. militarization and demilitarization in Okinawa intersect with gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and indigeneity complexities. Extending the Okinawan feminists' resistance to the violent space that the military creates, their indigenous demilitarization approach calls for the return of the aforementioned "prostituted daughter" to mother earth, and for the protection and well-being of all such daughters.

### **Environmental Destruction and Global Networking**

Another major issue is the bases' negative impact on the islands' natural environment. Since the Battle of Okinawa, the presence of the military facilities continues to damage and contaminate the land and the ocean. Its negative impacts on people's daily lives are beyond any doubt.

For example, although it has been 68 years since the Battle, more than 2,000 tons of unexploded ordnances remain buried in the soil. As to the environmental issue, in 1995 and 1996, over 1,500 bullets containing depleted uranium were used for firing practice at Tori Shima shooting range (Arasaki, 2000, p. 118). This fact was revealed a year after the firing practice, through a report from the U.S. ambassador to the Foreign Ministry of Japan. Three weeks after that, the news finally reached Okinawa Prefecture from the Japanese government (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 47). It has since become known that radioactivity from the employment of depleted uranium may have caused serious diseases like Gulf War Syndrome and children's cancer in Iraq (Arasaki, 2000, p. 118). While many local Okinawans already suspected that depleted uranium would cause harm, the U.S. military long denied any negative effects upon the human body and surrounding environment could result from its firing practice, despite their use being restricted to only a few specific firing ranges on the mainland U.S (Ryukyu, 2003, p. 45).

In addition to the firing exercise fields, environmental pollution was confirmed to have occurred in the military's communication facilities. In 1996, approximately 120 tons of polluted sludge, highly contaminated with PCBs and mercury, was found at the former site of the Onna Communication and Training Center (Arasaki, 2000, p. 118). The discovery was made five months after this land was released from the U.S. military use. It was revealed when the Department of Sanitary Facilities of Okinawa Prefecture conducted an investigation in response to a request by local Okinawan farmers to use the soil for fertilizer. Because the site had already been returned, the U.S. military refused to remove the sludge it created (Ryukyu, 2003, p. 41). The occupation and abuse of the land have not only threatened the natural environment, but also

continue to undermine the maintaining of healthy living conditions for local residents and future generations as well.

Other communities have suffered from environmental pollution caused by military activities, much like Okinawa. Grassroots groups that have worked through environment conservation mechanisms, much like with feminist frameworks, have joined an international network in the global ecological movement and expanded their fields of protests to reach international communities.

Okinawans saw a connection with the people of Vieques, for one comparison. Vieques, a similar “military colony” which belongs to the United States’ Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is an island in the Caribbean Sea. Two-thirds of its land, surrounding airspaces and coastal areas had been occupied by the U.S. Marine Corps (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 107). Its occupancy of the Vieques brought negative impacts upon the natural environment and worsened frictions between residents and military personnel. On the east side of the island, firing practices had been carried out since 1947. Like those on Tori Shima in 1995, depleted uranium bullets were similarly used in Vieques in 1999. At the west side of the island, contamination of the returned land was reported (Makishi et al. 2000, p. 129). Exasperated by the military’s abuse, local residents organized the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) in 1993. They put forth four main objectives: the demilitarization of Vieques, land restitution, environmental clean-up, and development, and then carried out campaigns of civil disobedience against the U.S. military (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 123).

The first encounter between representatives of Okinawa and Vieques occurred at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in New York, in 1997. Kaori Sunagawa from the Okinawa Environmental Network (OEN) participated in NGO session of the UNGASS and sought to build up a global network with other environmentally-concerned people that included the representatives of Vieques. Three years later, organized by OEN, the International Environment NGO Forum was held in Okinawa. Members of CRDV flew to the island from Vieques to participate in the forum and reported on the abuse of their own island by the U.S. Marine Corps. Grassroots activists from Okinawa, in turn, visited Vieques in 2001 for the purpose of supporting the local opposition to the U.S. military training at a referendum (Ryukyu, 2003, p. 135). Sharing similar experiences, Okinawa and Vieques forged a tight bond in supporting each other’s communities toward their mutual demilitarization and environmental protection goals.

In 2003, the Vieques people’s wish finally came true and the U.S. Marine Corps left Vieques. When U.S. Marine Corps General James L. Jones expressed his concern about the international effects of local protest movements against the U.S. military, referring to the referendum on Vieques (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 135), Okinawans’ solidarity with its people must have been one of his concerns. By building up global networks, local peoples of both islands learned from each other’s activities and continue to seek strategies to resolve the military issues. Although the political backgrounds of Okinawa and Vieques are different, the peoples of both have shared the same goals for demilitarization and regaining their peaceful and clean lands.

### **Construction of the U.S. Base in Henoko Plan and Indigenous Alliance**

In December 1996, following the large civilian protests against the U.S. military occupation in Okinawa, the closure of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma was agreed upon by the United States and Japan in the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO).

However, following a long discussion about the dangerousness presented by the Futenma Station and realignment of the U.S. military, the U.S. and Japanese governments have shifted the focus of the initial agreement from the return to the relocation of the Air Station. Instead of its total return, the governments planned to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps by building a replacement facility at Henoko Bay area in the northern part of Okinawa.

Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu Nakaima repeatedly criticized the plan as it completely disregarded the people's opposition. Moreover, for the Okinawan people, the process of agreement between the two states has been questionable and unreliable. The governments of Japan and the U.S. both lack accountability to the public, which has increased Okinawan distrust toward them ("Governor," 2011).

On April 27, 2012, The U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee released a joint statement of the revision to the Realignment of the U.S. Forces. In the statement, the Japanese government announced they are delinking the issues of the relocation of the Marine Forces from Okinawa to Guam and land returns from the issue of the moving of Futenma Air Station to Henoko. Encountering strong opposition from Okinawa, the Japanese government has attempted to reduce the U.S. military burden there; however, the governments have continued to assert that the relocation to Henoko "remains the only viable solution that has been identified to date" (MOFA, 2012). Although the Japanese government ostensibly showed sympathy to Okinawans, the statement revealed that both governments fail to respect the will of the people for the unconditional return of the land.

Any planned relocation can expect negative impacts on the environment. The Henoko marine area is located in a central region of the habitat of dugong, an endangered mammal noted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and recognized as a Japan's national natural treasure (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 102). It is a matter of great concern that the construction of a new base at Henoko would destroy this habitat of not only the dugongs but other marine creatures as well.

Dugong Network Okinawa (DNO) has actively worked to protect the environment from damage by the military. Through a fund-raising campaign for the dugong, the group aims to protest against construction of new military bases and develop publicity and educational activities for dugong protection (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 184). The group has organized international dugong symposiums and invited guest lecturers, who work for the protection of dugongs, from other areas of the world such as Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand ("Henoko," 2009). Moreover, the group has participated in conferences of International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and reported the crisis of dugongs and the possible negative impacts on their habitat by U.S. military base construction (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 184).

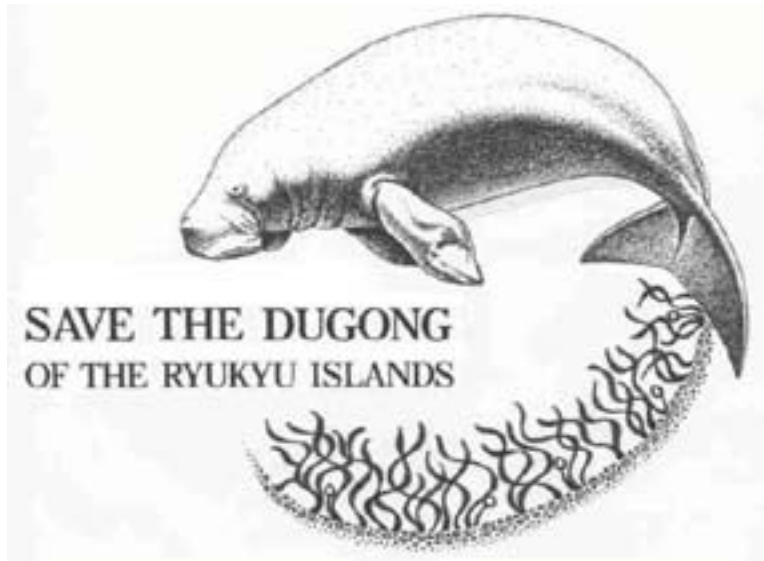


Figure 2. An Image of a Dugong. (Dugong Network Okinawa, 2010).

To show their opposition to the relocation plan proposed by the governments, local Henoko residents started carrying out sit-in protests. Community elders participated in sit-ins held on the shore, while young opponents sat in on boats on the sea to watch the construction closely.

In 2008, Yoshikazu Mashiki from DNO filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) with international support and led to a win for the “Okinawa Dugong” case in San Francisco. As a member of UNESCO World Heritage treaty, the United States has an obligation to protect cultural heritage. Since dugongs are protected under Japan’s Cultural Assets Preservation Act, which is equivalent to the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the U.S. District Court ruled that the base construction on Henoko Bay would violate the NHPA. In addition, the Court requested the DOD to submit an environmental impact assessment (DNO, 2010; Okinawa Dugong et al. v. Robert Gates et al., 2008).

As activists have worked for demilitarization internationally, there is an interesting factor among Okinawan demilitarization protests that expresses their indigeneity. Their appeal is not only for environmental protection, but also to protect their cultural and spiritual connection with the place. The planned relocation, if enacted, is likely to disturb Okinawans’ ontological relationship with nature and their guardians. Henoko is a beautiful natural coastal area with healthy coral reefs designated a one of “500 Important Wetlands in Japan” by the Environment Ministry (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 102). The ocean has been an important life source for the residents of Henoko and they make their living off of it. The dugongs and other marine life are part of their ecological way of being and the cultural lifestyle.

Along with their marine biological significance, dugongs play a very important role as Okinawa’s cultural treasure. They appear in Okinawan mythology and creation stories, and tales of dugongs have been transmitted as part of community genealogies from generation to generation. In Northern Okinawa, dugongs are considered to be the ancestors of human beings, and they are worshiped as messengers of the gods at traditional ceremonies. Dugongs have also often been sung about in ritual songs and enshrined at ritual sites (Dugong, 2010). For example in Ogimi Village of Northern Okinawa, *Ungami*, a ritual ceremony is held in July on the lunar

*Striving for Land, Sea, and Life*

calendar to welcome gods from mountain and ocean (“Jugon,” 2011). Noro, who conducts ritual ceremonies, worship gods by singing chants about dugongs. This song says:

<i>Yei yei</i>	Yei yei
<i>Wan du nire gami yu</i>	I am the god from <i>Niraikanai</i> , far sea.

<i>Yei yei</i>	Yei yei
<i>Jan nu kuchi tuyai</i>	Riding on a dugong, taking its mouth,

<i>Yei yei</i>	Yei yei
<i>Itu magui</i>	Let’s go home to the land of god. <sup>3</sup>

At the sit-in site of Henoko, elders give prayers toward the ocean as if they ask for help and strength from their ancestral spirits (Ryukyu, 2006).

In the current military protests at Henoko and within the peace movements across Okinawa, the dugong has symbolized the people’s political resistance. Since 2006, the community initiative with young local musicians held “Peace Music Festa!” several times in Henoko. The project committee subtitled a 2010 event “We Can See the World From the Henoko Bay,” and called on the public to demonstrate against the military issue through the power of art and music. Performances were open to any genre of music, from rock to traditional folk music, and dances from the community (Peace). The event links the core elements of the land, sea, living creatures, and the spiritual world, beyond genres. Although it was officially just a musical event, through the performances, per that theme, its political import demonstrated how these can connect to each other.

Due to its huge impact on the endangered dugong’s habitat, the demilitarization movements in Henoko are often focused on an environmental approach; however, using an indigenous approach, it is important to carefully look at the relationship of people, animals, nature, place, culture, and spirituality. Considering the roles that dugongs and the ocean play in indigenous Okinawans’ peoplehood matrix, the cultural significance of the place for Okinawans should also be respected as an important political claim.

Through the relocation issue in Henoko, local people started to think more critically and internationally about the ways in which military bases have impacted the natural environment and people’s lives. Okinawans started to gather together, motivated not only to protect their living environment, but also in their perseverance toward securing a cultural coexistent with its natural environment. The Henoko movement triggered awareness of the importance of interrelatedness and indigeneity to Okinawans.

To protect the symbolic “messengers of god” and also protest against the construction of the new base, elderly people in Henoko have carried out a daily sit-in since April 19, 2004 (“Henoko,” 2009). The women of Henoko formed a protest group named *Jannu no Kai*; *Jan* meaning dugong in Okinawan, and also *Jan* from *Jeanne d’Arc*.

As they fought to protect dugongs and the Henoko Bay area, a member of *Jannu no Kai*, Tomi Mashiki, found another global connection through their demilitarization activities. She and other members were invited to talk about the military issues of Henoko by Hawai’i Okinawa Alliance (HOA). Through her visit and interaction with HOA members, Mashiki found many similarities between Hawai’i and Okinawa in terms of histories, current political issues, and indigenous philosophies in relation to nature (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 190). She sympathizes with the indigenous people of Hawai’i about similar experiences which resulted in the deprivation of their lands by the U.S. military as well.

An indigenous Hawaiian woman who is a member of HOA emphasized the need for cooperation by saying that although there are some differences, Hawaiians and Okinawans share many similarities as indigenous peoples of the Pacific who have been burdened by others' military bases. "If Hawai'i and Okinawa can connect together and reject militarization, we can build a peaceful world" <sup>4</sup> (Makishi et al., 2000, p. 197). Learning from and feeling stimulated by HOA's activities in Hawai'i, where there is a diversity of ethnic groups, *Jannu no Kai's* interactions with this counterpart raised their consciousness with regard to indigenous issues and inspired them to forge networks among other islanders in an Asia Pacific from Guam and the Philippines.

The Obama Administration's proclamation regarding the relocation of U.S. Marine Forces from Okinawa to Guam, while presented as a solution to many Okinawan concerns, failed to respect the rights of Guam's own indigenous peoples. It has, however, helped to strengthen solidarity between the Okinawan and Chamorro peoples in their shared struggle for demilitarization. As part of the realignment of its forces, the United States government had announced the relocation of approximately 4,500 Marine personnel to Guam, with another 4,000 to be rotated among Australia, Hawai'i and the Philippines.

By keeping their focus on demilitarization, rather than realignment, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands have reaffirmed their solidarity and commitment to protect their peoples and land. In 2011, Matsushima joined members of Guam's delegation to UN Special Committee on Decolonization. Describing the relationship of Guam and Okinawa as like that of sisters and brothers, he petitioned for their demilitarization, in accordance with the United Nations decolonization principles (UN Special Committee on Decolonization, 2011).

These "sisters and brothers" have held "family meetings" to solidify their resolve to pursue an Asia Pacific without militarism. In 2011, with peace movement activists from Japan, Korea, Hawai'i, Guam, Palau, the Marshall Islands and the Philippines, the annual Japan Peace Conference was held in Okinawa. These activists produced a joint statement to demanding that the U.S. put an end to its militarization in the Asia-Pacific Region. Chamorro representatives from Guam explained the problematic non-self-governing status of the U.S. territories in the region, and petitioned for support of their rights to self-determination while also urging transnational solidarity among peoples (Japan, 2011).

For Chamorro and Okinawan activists, both struggling against the myth of "U.S. deterrence" in the Asia-Pacific region, the common concerns comprise infringements on their autonomy, justice, peace, safety, human rights and natural environment, as brought on by the U.S. military. A big obstacle, they agree, is their ascribed "minority group" status within host states. Their challenges include needing to speak out about the local concerns and issues across the borders of nation-states. Connecting all their concerns, seeking indigenous community alliances has strengthened relationship between Okinawan and Chamorro activists, in their shared commitment to decolonize both places and peoples and to empower each to work toward securing a sustainable living environment.

Growing active participation of indigenous people in international organizing presents a collective challenge against the existing political ideologies and governing system of nation state (Barker, 2005). Within an ethnic minority framework, which promises protection of minority culture, the entitlement rights of self-determination over place has often been disregarded. Advocacy on their "indigenous" identity are not limited to protecting their distinctive culture or to preserving their languages. What indigenous peoples are trying to regain is the physically,

economically, culturally, and spiritually balanced well-being of their people and the place that is an essential source of indigenous development (Engle, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

As Okinawans connect to other communities, globally, that host military bases, one factor that makes them successful in linking with this network seems to lie in the shared values of those peoples, including also common experiences and goals. Most of these groups have been marginalized as minority and/or indigenous peoples, in their country. Because of their peripheral status, their claims have not been heard much when the nation-state's they inhabit make political decisions, especially regarding the military and international security issues. Common experiences of being subjugated by political authorities and, in response, participating in global social movements, move them forward in their quest to gain justice through the decolonization of their homes. Manfred Steger describes locally-based, globally-focused justice movement groups as "ordinary people [who] struggle together to overcome steep concentrations of undemocratic power" (Steger, 2008, p. 122).

In their resistance against militarism, Okinawan people have protested in a variety of non-violent ways. Some have pointed out how the colonial structure of the military that supports a patriarchal society and permits or even encourages violence against women; others have worked for demilitarization through emphasizing their indigenous ontology and relationship with nature, as well as connecting the local and global. Although these groups have approached demilitarization of Okinawa from different frameworks at the local level, they have all participated in the global discourse. Each group may have its own goals to achieve, but one big aim shared by local and global activists is to self-determine how people(s) relate to each other and how they care for their places.

At the Sunset Candlelight Peace Vigil for Okinawa on April 25, 2010, Kyle Kajihiro, a representative of the American Friends Service Committee, Hawai'i Area Office, also stated, "We are the islanders of the Pacific. Our ocean should not separate us; it should connect us. We work together in solidarity for peace without military"<sup>5</sup> (Nago & Yonamine).

Global expansion of the U.S. military to their lands brought global anti-military sentiments to many small communities. Today, a shared status of "military colony" connects and unites peoples together across the ocean to challenge militarism. Continued networking with global communities and organizations will help Okinawans to further understand the historic and potential impacts of militarism, and to rethink how their approach, as an indigenous people, might serve their goals of self-determination and justice. The increasing of such networks among local communities with their global counterparts has obscured the borders of the local and global.





Figure 3. Activists seek demilitarization. Taken by Megumi Chibana on January 10, 2010.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Land Expropriation Act.

<sup>2</sup> English Translation by Megumi Chibana.

<sup>3</sup> I extracted the chant from a documentary program *Umi ni suwaru: Henoko 600 nichi no tataikai* by Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting. (2006). English translation by Megumi Chibana.

<sup>4</sup> English Translation by Megumi Chibana.

<sup>5</sup> English Translation by Megumi Chibana.