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Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence: An Island Feminism Reclaiming Dignity

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The year 2020 marks several anniversaries of significant events for global feminist peace movements that have problematized sexual violence related to armed conflicts. One of them is the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, known more widely as the Beijing Conference, named after its location. Also named after this location is the outcome document of the conference, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which identifies critical areas of concern in achieving the human rights of women. Among the twelve critical areas of concern is the recognition that sexual violence in armed conflicts is a violation of human rights (United Nations, 1995).

Another anniversary is the 20th anniversary of the Women’s International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery during World War II, often referred to as the Tokyo Tribunal on the “Comfort Women” System, which was held in Tokyo. It was organized through the cooperation of civil society organizations from Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other countries to bring justice to the survivors of military sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army.

Finally, it is also the 25th anniversary of the official launch of Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence (*Okinawa Kichi Guntai wo Yurusanai Koudousuru On’natachi no Kai*, hereafter, OWAAMV), a feminist peace movement in Okinawa that has addressed the problem of sexual violence by U.S. service members stationed in Okinawa and that has called for the demilitarization of security from a feminist perspective.

Today, feminist peace movements are at a critical juncture at the global, regional, and local levels, facing even further intensified militarization in many places, including Okinawa and other islands. The massive military build-ups in Henoko and Takae are being pushed by the governments of the United States and Japan despite clear objections lodged through democratic means by the people of Okinawa, and the long-running non-violent direct action of resistance, which has lasted for over two decades, among other examples.

It is now worth examining what feminist peace activists have done and the meaning of their activities that have worked towards halting militarization and violations of the basic human rights of women. I am suggesting we turn our eyes to the history and activi-

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ties of OWAAMV, trying to conceptualize them because I believe that the efforts of OWAAMV for the past 25 years have deep implications for today's feminist peace movements and their future.

Twenty-five years ago, in September 1995, the Beijing Conference was held at the end of two cycles of the Decade for Women, which was started in 1975 by the United Nations to increase focused policies to achieve the human rights of women and to improve the status of women around the world. The UN Conference is remembered for having involved the largest participation of civil societies out of all the UN-organized women's conferences. It attracted over 30,000 civil society participants from all over the world to its NGO Forum held in parallel with the intergovernmental meeting. The actual site of the NGO Forum was not in Beijing but in a city called Huairou, about 50 kilometers away from Beijing. Despite the long distance from the UN member states' conference, the NGO Forum became a site that inspired many women from many parts of the world, who realized that transnational solidarity was possible.

Among the NGO participants at the Beijing/Huairou NGO Forum was a delegation of 71 women from Okinawa, who had been officially organized by the Okinawa Prefectural government. Under the liberal Masahide Ota's prefectural administration Suzuyo Takazato, a then Naha City Assembly Member, served as the delegation leader. After preparing for participation for a year, the delegates brought 11 thematic workshops and exhibits on the human rights issues that women in Okinawa had faced, including gender inequality in labor and patriarchal cultural traditions, among others.¹⁾ One of the workshops was devoted to the problem of sexual violence by U.S. military personnel on women and girls in Okinawa. It was titled *The military: Structural violence and women* (NGO Forum Peking '95—Okinawa *Jikko Iinkai*, 1995). It contributed to identifying a loosely connected range of various women's groups in Okinawa that have called for the elimination of sexual violence by the military, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Okinawa, the closure of the U.S. bases, and the demilitarization of security. These women would launch OWAAMV in November of 1995 after they had returned from the NGO Forum of the Beijing Conference, much inspired by their interactions with feminist activists around the world (Takazato, 1996).

For over 20 years, I have been active in feminist peace movements in Japan and other places. Since I learned about and met OWAAMV members in 1996 in New York, I have worked with them in Okinawa, on mainland Japan, and in many other locations internationally to draw more attention to the problem of sexual violence by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa and the adverse impacts of long-term foreign military stationing on the people living just a fence away from an active foreign military, and to increase calls for the demilitarization of security (Akibayashi & Takazato, 2010). Throughout these years, as a Japanese mainland feminist peace activist/researcher, I have conducted action research on the OWAAMV organization and the women who have made the OWAAMV movement. In this article, from this standpoint, I will seek to answer a question that I have contemplated for a long time: What have I learned from OWAAMV? In other words,

what have OWAAMV movements shown to those in feminist peace movements around the world? Particularly, I am interested in understanding how their problematizing of sexual violence by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa helps us to see the problem as well as the challenges to solving these problems.

These questions mean that I am not only documenting OWAAMV activities but I am also after the meaning of the OWAAMV movement. I intend to argue that OWAAMV members' thinking and activities have formed something that I recently started to consider calling an *island feminism*, which suggests a challenge to the interlocking of military violence and colonial violence in its fundamental critique and a challenge to patriarchy. Here, the concept of "interlocking oppressions" put forward by the Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) helps to illustrate the endeavor of the OWAAMV women as I believe the concept captures more fully the complexity of the workings of multiple oppressive powers upon women living on islands who have theorized their own historical experiences from a feminist perspective.

The Origins of OWAAMV

On November 8, 1995, Suzuyo Takazato and other members announced the launch of OWAAMV in Naha. This official launch of OWAAMV followed a series of actions to protest another incident of sexual violence committed by U.S. service members stationed in Okinawa. This incident of sexual violence occurred on September 4, 1995, and became a high-profile sexual crime by U.S. service members.

The first collective action was a press conference on September 11, 1995, convened by the NGO Committee of the Beijing NGO Forum delegation to express their deep anger at the rape of an Okinawan girl by two U.S. Marines and a Sailor. Since then, those women, who would go on to form OWAAMV, have organized various actions. On September 23, 1995, together with other previously established local women's groups, they organized the "Okinawa Women-Children-Islanders against Military Violence" rally. On September 27, members issued a public statement to appeal to the mass media, mainly from the Japanese mainland, which had started to interrogate residents in the small community where the rape victim lived (Takazato, 1996, pp. 198-200). These OWAAMV members, who had been active in the advocacy of women's human rights regarding rape and other forms of sexual violence, were aware of the social stigma imposed on victims of sexual crimes in the community. They realized the immediate need to call for the protection of the young victim (NGO Forum Peking '95—Okinawa *Jikkō Inukai*, 1995).

After the official establishment of OWAAMV was announced on November 8, OWAAMV members organized the "12-day Sit-in Demonstration" from November 9 through 20 at the Peace Square in Naha, in which between 30 and 69 women participated every day. There, they expressed their deep anger at another occurrence of sexual violence committed by U.S. military personnel and called for the protection of the human rights of women and children in Okinawa. To the Japanese government, they called for

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severe punishment of such sexual crimes and for a revision of the United States-Japan Status of Forces Agreement. They gathered 511,963 signatures on a petition during the sit-in demonstration. On November 17, 1995, a delegation of 25 members of OWAAMV visited the Japanese Foreign Ministry in Tokyo to directly hand over the petition and a statement addressed to then Foreign Minister Yohei Kono protesting the September 4 rape and demanding the closure of U.S. military bases and a withdrawal of the U.S. military from Okinawa.

As one of the core members of the Beijing/Huairou NGO Forum delegation and OWAAMV, Carolyn Francis (1999), an American missionary who lived in Okinawa from 1988 to 1999, described the establishment of OWAAMV:

Realizing that their activities could not continue indefinitely under the structure of the “Beijing ’95–Okinawa Committee,” on November 8, 1995, these women established a new organization called Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence (OWAAMV). At their first general meeting on November 29 [*sic*], over 100 women, including teachers, full-time homemakers, part-time workers, young mothers, retired women, university students, elected officials, and women in prefectural and municipal governments joined the organization. Two co-chairpersons and a steering committee were elected for a six-month period, until the time of the next general meeting. Keiko Itokazu, a prefectural assembly member, and Suzuyo Takazato, a Naha City assembly member, were elected co-chairpersons, and they have continued to serve in that capacity since then.

The goals approved for the first 6-month period were: 1) To organize study meetings throughout Okinawa on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, in terms of the concerns of women as outlined in the Beijing Conference’s Platform for Action; 2) To provide information on Okinawa to persons elsewhere in Japan and overseas, particularly in the U.S., using some of the new network established at Beijing; 3) To attend all military rape trials in Okinawa; and 4) To travel to the U.S. to inform American women about the problem of military violence against women in Okinawa (including Okinawan women, Filipinas working in bars and clubs around the bases, women from mainland Japan in Okinawa who become victims, and women in the U.S. military and dependents of American military forces who are victimized). (pp. 191–192)

The material they later prepared to distribute on the first America Peace Caravan in February of 1996 gives a brief description of the evolution process for OWAAMV. It also articulates a clear connection between their mission, the Beijing Platform for Action, and their accounts of experiences at the Beijing/Huairou NGO Forum:

“Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence” was organized on November 8, 1995, as an outgrowth of the participation of 71 Okinawan women in the Beijing Women’s Conference NGO Forum last September. We base our position on the section of the Platform of [*sic*] Action approved by the Beijing Women’s Conference that clearly states: “Rape that takes place in a situation of armed conflict constitutes both a war crime and a crime against humanity.” We are proceeding on the premise that the same holds true for Okinawa, which has long suffered a foreign military military [*sic*] presence. Okinawan women have resolved that we will no longer tolerate this violence and violation of human rights, and have thus petitioned the Japanese government to consolidate the U.S. bases and withdraw U.S. military personnel,

review the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the Status of Forces Agreement, and award full compensation to all victims. We have conducted a signature campaign, engaged in a 12-day sit-in demonstration, and visited the both Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue our appeal. We have received wide support for our efforts from women throughout Japan.

Addressing the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum in her capacity as the Honorary Chairperson of the U.S. Delegation, Hillary Rodham Clinton lifted [*sic*] specific examples of human rights violation suffered by women in countries around the world, and issued an appeal to the women of the world, declaring, "If human rights are not protected, women's dignity cannot be guaranteed," "Women's rights are human rights," and "As we face the 21st century, let us break the silence." We issued this same appeal to women from around the world who gathered at our NGO Forum workshop on "Military Violence and Women in Okinawa." (Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence, 1996b)

Propelled by urgency and anger, and inspired by the solidarity they recently had nurtured at the Beijing/Huairo NGO Forum, these feminists in Okinawa started a feminist peace movement that would continue to this day.

My first encounter with OWAAMV members occurred in New York in February 1996 on one of the stops of their first America Peace Caravan. The Caravan was an endeavor to engage in dialogue with U.S. citizens on what their military does outside their country, in Okinawa.²⁾ More precisely, the women of OWAAMV wanted to ask U.S. citizens if they knew of the sexual violence committed by U.S. military personnel stationed in Okinawa that women and girls in Okinawa had been exposed to since U.S. forces first landed on their island in 1945. The 13 OWAAMV members intended to communicate information about their lives and the burdens they bore in a locality that has hosted U.S. military bases for over five decades.

On the two-week speaking tour, they visited such cities as Honolulu, San Francisco, Princeton, and New York. They visited university classes and community meetings organized by many citizens' groups. In New York, they were invited to a graduate course class by the feminist peace educator/scholar Betty Reardon at Teachers College, Columbia University, where I sat in the audience as one of the students. I felt it must have been a long trip for them to come to New York from Okinawa. By a "long trip," I mean not only the physical distance but also the psychological distance that required bridging to accomplish their purpose: to have dialogues with U.S. citizens. In general, U.S. citizens did not know much about the activities of their military, even domestically let alone outside of their country in the "Far East" region of Japan and the smaller islands of Okinawa. These women were, however, motivated by their anger at what had happened, not only to the young victim of the September 4 rape but to all victims of sexual violence by military personnel, reported or not.

Contrary to my concerns, they made a powerful presentation on the current and historical situations of Okinawa from the perspective of women living in close proximity to an active military, arguing that the U.S. bases should be removed and that ultimately all militaries be abolished. They described clearly the relationship between sexual violence

against women in Okinawa by U.S. service members and the “structural violence of the military” through the organization and training of the military, pointing out that sexual violence is a form of in-built violence in the organization of the military:

The abduction and rape of an elementary school girl by three U.S. military personnel that occurred in September 1995 makes us realize that we must change the situation of living side by side with military bases and military personnel in an atmosphere of constant fear and tension, so that our children may grow up in a healthy environment. During the 50 years since the U.S. forces landed in Okinawa, untold numbers of girls and women have been attacked by U.S. military personnel. These crimes of sexual violence must be seen not merely as crimes committed by individual soldiers, but as crimes produced by the military system. We feel deep anger when we realize that most of these crimes have been ignored. At the same time, we issue a strong appeal for the implementation of a public system to heal the deep wounds of the victims and restore their human rights. (Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, 1996a, p. 1)

I had learned about the crime even in New York shortly after it was reported in Japan as it was also widely reported in the United States. During the presentation, I recognized one of the members, Teruko Kuwae, a coordinator of the America Peace Caravan and the former chief of the Women’s Division in Okinawa City, whose article on the rape in a Japanese progressive weekly journal I had read. The article took the form of a letter to the victim apologizing as one of the older generations of Okinawan women for not having done enough to remove the U.S. military bases that had been occupying their lands for over fifty years despite their efforts and struggle (Kuwae, 1995). I told Kuwae that I had read the article and had been very moved. She took my hands and said, “Let’s work together in our resistance.” Since then, I have worked with them and conducted action research on them.

OWAAM Activities: Sexual Crime Chronology and the Rape Emergency Intervention Counseling Center Okinawa (REICO)

While there have been many activities over the almost 25 years of history of OWAAMV, several key activities illuminate the crystalized thoughts of the OWAAMV women. In this article, the focus is on the following two activities: compiling a chronology of sexual crimes and violence by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa, and establishing and running REICO, a private rape crisis center. (Another activity, building transnational solidarity, which was also specified in their initial mission statement described above, will be separately discussed in a later section of the article.)

Chronology of Sexual Crimes by U.S. Service Members Against Women in Okinawa

The message at the press conference announcing the launch of OWAAMV bore their strong sentiment and rage against the long history of sexual violence by U.S. service members in Okinawa: “Enough is enough.” Although not many sexual crimes were pub-

licly remembered in Okinawa, OWAAMV members were clear about the long history of sexual crimes. Due to this situation, they started a project of compiling sexual violence chronologically to make the history of sexual violence visible.

Sexual violence, in general, is the kind of crime that shows a large gap between actual occurrence and official statistics because of the greater stigma imposed on the victims than the perpetrators. Also, as Harumi Miyagi, an OWAAM member and a historian points out, Okinawa Prefecture's history of U.S. military direct occupation from 1945 to 1972, when most of the rest of Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952, poses a fundamental question about the official statistics. Official statistics about the sexual crimes of U.S. military personnel under the U.S. military occupation did not exist (Miyagi, 1999, p. 10). With these limitations in mind, the members of OWAAMV started the project. The first version of the chronology was published in 1997 with no more than a 10-page list of sexual assault cases the OWAAMV had found in official statistics, newspaper sources, and other resources (Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, 1997).

As the project went on, the chronology has been revised 11 times, and the latest version (number 12) contains over 30 pages listing hundreds of sexual assaults in Okinawa from the landing of the U.S. military that started the Battle of Okinawa in April 1945 until 2017 (Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, 2017).³⁾

The chronology is an on-going project, and members of OWAAMV, such as Harumi Miyagi, Suzuyo Takazato, and Yoko Fukumura, have continued to gather information from various sources. Recently, more data has been found in U.S. military archives. They have also been researching the community history records of local municipalities.

Questioning the official statistics, researchers reject the notion of viewing the chronology as a representation of mere numbers. While this project may not have a tangible goal of determining the number of rape cases, it instead has offered a perspective to understand the relationship between sexual violence and war, and further, the military. From her experiences of being a social worker for women in Naha and helping women victims of sexual violence including prostitution, Takazato offered some observations on the characteristics of the U.S. military violence in Okinawa as follows:

Immediately after the end of the Asia Pacific War in 1945 when the U.S. military started direct occupation of Okinawa and those who survived the fierce battle were put into relocation camps, any women could be a target of assault any place, any time. There were cases of assault at home, in fields, near the river, even at a hospital. Generally, suspects were not found or held, let alone punished. Multiple perpetrators assaulted a woman, and family members or friends who tried to help her were injured or killed. After the people of Okinawa were released from relocation camps around 1948 and reconstruction of the community started, women in prostitution were targeted more often and repeatedly, if they escaped, being killed.⁴⁾

These are the details that form an initial introduction to the analysis of the chronology done by grass-roots feminist historians in OWAAMV.

REICO

REICO was also started in November 1995 by some of the members of OWAAMV. It is the first rape crisis center, public or private, in Okinawa. While OWAAMV handles more visible activities and addresses public policies such as security, REICO offers first-hand support for those who suffer sexual violence. Both OWAAMV and REICO derived from the feminist challenge to patriarchy. REICO operates by taking phone calls, providing an emergency shelter, and introducing clinical psychiatrist service. Volunteer staff, who have received special training, take calls from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays.

At REICO's 16th anniversary symposium in 2013, Takazato, the REICO representative, shared the story of how REICO was started, which was also related to the 1995 rape and the young victim's courage. Takazato introduced the story she learned in 1995 and the determination of her and her colleagues:

When the young victim went through the crime scene inspection after she had reported the case to the police, a female police officer was concerned at the difficulty of going through the inspection and tried to console the victim; she replied, saying that she would do this because she did not want any other girls to experience the same. Having worked in the social welfare section in Naha City, I had known that there was no place, public or private, where victims of sexual violence could consult. Listening to the victim's voice, we determined to open a rape crisis center, and we did. (*Okinawa Ken & Goukan Kyuen Senta Okinawa*, 2013, p. 20, my translation from Japanese)

REICO's activities themselves have expanded in scope to include specialized protection of children by operating a branch of Child Assault Prevention in Okinawa, Okinawa CAP. CAP itself was originally started in the United States in 1978 after a sexual assault case. It has a standardized program and was introduced to Japan by Yuri Morita, an activist, in 1985 (Okinawa CAP Center). The Okinawa branch began in 1996 in cooperation with members from OWAAMV and REICO. Okinawa CAP now has several staff members and conducts workshops for children as well as adults at schools, community centers, and others locations around Okinawa Prefecture including, of course, remote islands (Okinawa CAP Center).

REICO has received public funding support for years, but it is never enough. As a public advocacy organization as well, they have been part of a national network lobbying for opening a One-Stop Center, a public service center where victims of sexual violence can receive all services, including legal, medical/psychological, and financial help. The Japanese government adopted a policy to establish a One-Stop Center in each of the country's 47 prefectures in 2014 (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2015). Okinawa Prefecture opened its own One-Stop Center in 2015.

Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts as an International Norm

Sexual violence has been a central issue that feminists have addressed. Feminist peace

activists/researchers view sexual violence as a peace issue as well. Following Johan Galtung's (1969) definition of peace, which laid out the theoretical foundation of multiple dimensions of peace as an absence of direct/personal and indirect/structural violence (discrimination, poverty, etc.) for wider conceptualization, sexual violence clearly shows that violence has multiple dimensions. It is a direct and personal violence where the perpetrators are visible and physical/direct violence is imposed; it is also an indirect/structural violence where harm is done in discrimination against women or femininity. Galtung (1990) later added the concept of cultural violence to complement how cultures legitimate structural violence. The concept of cultural violence sheds light on the aspect of impunity of sexual violence that those who tackle the problem have identified as a significant and essential problem of sexual violence, that it is not being recognized as wrongdoing. The comprehensive nature of the concept of violence by Galtung has proven helpful.

However, feminist peace researchers who are contemporaries of Galtung have already posed questions that, though the comprehensive concept of peace may successfully offer a wider understanding of peace and violence, in the practice of peace research, sexual violence as a peace issue, for example, has been neglected (Reardon, 1985; Boulding, 1988). In furthering the critique of peace research and the movement itself, Reardon theorized that war is a social institution that legitimizes the use of coercive force and the military in solving disputes and differences (Reardon, 1985). In the radical feminist movement, Susan Brownmiller's (1975) detailed account on rape as a manifestation of power and control contributed, though it stops short of a structural analysis of the relationship between rape and armed conflicts, to furthering the issue of rape in the field of international relations and peace research.

From the late 1980s onward, feminist researchers in international relations started to argue that women's lives mattered in international relations. Cynthia Enloe, a feminist international political science researcher, has written extensively on how women's lives are militarized and rape is an issue of international politics (Enloe, 1990; 1993; 2000). She argues that rape is an instrument of national security and has detailed cases of militarized rape in such countries as the Philippines, where U.S. military had been stationed until they closed their two major bases in 1992 (Enloe, 2000).

J. Ann Tickner, a political scientist, also cites sexual violence in armed conflicts to criticize mainstream international relations theories for failing to capture the reality that in armed conflicts, women and children civilians are more likely to be killed and that sexual violence is neglected in these theories (Tickner, 2001).

Feminist movements and feminist scholarship have influenced each other. The international community is also turning its focus to the sexual violence issue. The most suitable area is human rights. Since a clear recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation was made in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations, 1979), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, violence against women has become an essential part of the

agenda for achieving the human rights of women. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993 also proclaims that violence against women is a violation of human rights (United Nations, 1993). These efforts to create an international norm about sexual violence led to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which recognizes sexual violence in armed conflict as a violation of the human rights of women (United Nations, 1995).

As the international community turned its focus to sexual violence in war, there were large scale cases of intentional sexual violence perpetrated during conflicts: the conflicts in Yugoslavia and the conflict in Rwanda. In both cases, systematic large-scale sexual violence was sensationally reported internationally. When these two conflicts, Yugoslavia (1993) and Rwanda (1995), were tried in International Criminal Tribunals, the prosecutors were successful in trying sexual violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity. These trials have resulted in the creation of an international norm that sexual violence related to armed conflicts is a human rights violation, a punishable war crime, and a crime against humanity.

Women in Okinawa also experienced sexual violence during the Asia-Pacific War. This sexual violence was known euphemistically as the “comfort women” system and was military sexual slavery controlled by the Japanese military.

The Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM) is a small, private museum located in Tokyo that features materials and research on the “comfort women” issue and arguably covers the issue more widely and deeply than any other establishment. WAM was opened in 2006 by about 20 people who had played central roles in convening the International Tribunal on Military Sexual Slavery During World War II by the Japanese Military (Tokyo Tribunal), a people’s court organized by civil society organizations from Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other countries to bring justice for the survivors of the “comfort women” system, in which women and girls from the Asian region were enslaved by the Japanese military. Although the practice of comfort stations was surely known among Japanese soldiers, close to 70 survivors from eight different countries and regions attended to give testimonies about the Japanese Imperial Military’s widespread practice of comfort stations in 2000 in Tokyo’s *Kudan* Hall (VAWW-Net Japan, 2002).

At the time of the 2000 Tokyo Tribunal, a history research group in Okinawa had already identified over 130 locations of comfort stations on the islands of Okinawa Prefecture during the Asia-Pacific War.⁵⁾ This was because Okinawa would soon become a combat site between the U.S. and Japanese militaries.

OWAAMV and WAM in 2012 jointly created an exhibit titled “*Guntai wa Josei wo Mamoranai: Okinawa no Nihongun Ianjo to Beigun no Seibouryoku* (The Military does not Protect Women: Japanese Military Comfort Stations and Sexual Violence by the U.S. Military in Okinawa)” (Women’s Active Museum, 2012) as a part of a series of WAM exhibits. Among the many historical research results in the 2012 exhibit, one drew more attention. That was the personalization of the sexual chronology, expressed from the viewpoint of the victim. Instead of listing the facts, the exhibit told us how sexual vio-

lence was experienced from the eyes of the victim. What was striking through this form of exhibit was the everydayness of the crimes. Sexual violence by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa is committed when the society is at “peace.”

In both cases, the experiences of sexual violence in Okinawa pose a very important point about the problem of the military, as long argued by the women of OWAAMV. OWAAMV activities tell us that we need to analyze the military itself if we are serious about the elimination of sexual violence in war.

Transnational Solidarity

The UN Decade for Women: From Nairobi to Beijing/Huairou

Some members of OWAAMV had previously organized a group with UN conferences on women such as the Nairobi Conference⁶⁾ in mind. Members of Okinawa Women’s Group ’80 (*’80 Okinawa On’natachi no Kai*, hereafter OWG ’80) had been active since the 1980s, and some of the members participated in the Nairobi NGO Forum, presenting a workshop on the problem of prostitution serving the U.S. military in Okinawa. Yuki Shimabukuro, a former Okinawa prefectural government employee, and Chieko Aguni, a former Naha municipal government employee, were both founding members of OWAAMV. They established OWG ’80 together with Takazato and other OWAAMV members. They recalled the process of establishing OWAAMV and its relationship with OWG ’80 in a conversation reported and published by Yayori Matsui (1997). Matsui, who was a leading Japanese mainland feminist journalist, supported women’s movements in Okinawa for a long time and was also instrumental in connecting Okinawan women such as Takazato with feminists in other Asian countries. Matsui had developed solidarity with these feminists in other Asian countries in the 1980s when she was chief of the Singapore bureau of the *Asahi Shimbun*. On the 25th anniversary of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan from U.S. military occupation in 1997, during an interview with OWAAMV members, they shared the meaning of the reversion and its impacts on their willingness to be connected with feminists outside Japan. Having returned from Tokyo to Okinawa around the time of reversion in 1972, Aguni remembered being inspired by the women’s liberation movement in Tokyo and felt propelled to form a group of women to be connected with international activities as part of the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985), which was to promote the human rights of women. They ran a notice to recruit other women to form a women’s group, which was the beginning of OWG ’80. In 1981, Takazato returned from Tokyo to Okinawa and joined OWG ’80. They also created a women’s group to address prostitution in Okinawa, calling for closer attention to the experience and perceptions of men, the clients of the sex industry. It was Shimabukuro and Aguni who participated in the Nairobi NGO Forum in 1985 to introduce the problem of prostitution around the U.S. bases in Okinawa. The network of OWG ’80 was developed into the first Naha City Unai Festival in 1985 (Matsui, 1997, p. 6).

These accounts provide us with a background of the perceptions of women about

Beijing/Huairou NGO participation and the development of their transnational solidarity.

The Evolution of the International Women's Network Against Militarism (IWNAM)

As OWAAMV has expanded its international networks since its launch, many groups and organizations have collaborated in OWAAMV activities. Previous to the launch of OWAAMV, there were joint efforts by Takazato and Francis to reach out to civil societies outside Japan. Their scope of activities had already included communities affected by the U.S. military presence in the Asian region, particularly with women in the Philippines. In the mid-1980s, at the initiative of Takazato and Francis, Holding Hands with Asia (*Ajia to te wo tsunagu kai*, hereafter, Hands with Asia) was started. One of the major activities of Hands of Asia included communicating with the Buklod Center in the Philippines to learn about military prostitution near U.S. military bases. Hands with Asia supported women in prostitution to gain economic autonomy by providing sewing machines for these women to engage in income-generating activities (Takazato, 1996).

Prostitution has become an institutional part of the U.S. military's presence in South Korea as well. Similar problems faced by women in Okinawa also existed in South Korea. In 1986, a Presbyterian church started to support an organization for women involved in prostitution in camp towns. The organization was established in the city of Uijongbu, near the DMZ, which divides South and North Korea and thus has a concentration of U.S. military bases. The center is called My Sister's Place (*Durebang*.) In 1989, Takazato and the then director of My Sister's Place, Yu Young Nim, were among some 20 activists from overseas U.S. military base host communities who participated in the speaking tour Voices of Hope and Anger, organized by the American Friends Service Committee to visit different U.S. cities. Since they shared similar concerns and problems vis-à-vis sexual violence by U.S. service members, they started connecting with each other.

When OWAAMV members planned the 1996 first America Peace Caravan, they were put in touch with different groups in the United States. Martha Matsuoka, a Japanese American activist/researcher who had studied at the University of the Ryukyus, put the OWAAMV members in touch with a group in the Bay Area of California. Among the members of the Bay Area group was Yoko Fukumura, a graduate student in Okinawan women's history (Fukumura & Matsuoka, 2002). Other connections existed in the Bay Area. Margo Okazawa-Rey, a feminist scholar/activist and herself Amerasian, born to a Japanese mother and a U.S. military civilian worker, had conducted research on camp town prostitution and the Amerasian issue in Uijongbu (Okazawa-Rey, 1997), and was thus a part of the My Sister's Place community. She was quickly connected with the Okinawan women who visited San Francisco on their first America Peace Caravan.

With these multiple connections, in 1997, a network called the East Asia-U.S. Women's Network Against Militarism, inspired by the OWAAMV women's activities, was established, calling for redefining security from a feminist perspective to assure the security of women and children. Members included women from Okinawa, mainland Japan,

South Korea, the Philippines, and the United States. The main organizations involved included OWAAMV, My Sister's Place, WedPro (Women's Education, Development, Productivity, and Research Organization) in the Philippines, the Buklod Center, a United States-based group who would later identify themselves as Women for Genuine Security, formed by the United States-based feminists introduced above, and a few mainland Japanese feminists such as Matsui who had founded VAWW-Net Japan and Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center in Tokyo.

Affirming that IWNAM solidarity developed since 1997, the first working meeting was held in Okinawa, titled "the Human Rights of Women and Children." In the following year of 1998, the network members decided to meet in Washington, D.C., to expand their activities to include lobbying the U.S. Congress. These actions were also meant to create an opportunity for those in the host communities of U.S. military bases to directly address U.S. Congress members and citizens to let them know about the U.S. military activities overseas. The meeting was titled "Redefining Security for Women and Children."

In 2000, the third meeting was again held in Okinawa with the theme "International Women's Summit Meeting: Human Security." This meeting had a political motivation backed by a decision rather quickly made in the previous year at the Hague Appeal for Peace in the Netherlands, held towards the end of the 20th century as an opportunity for civil society to call for the next century to be a peaceful one. OWAAMV members formed a delegation to organize several panels on such issues as the human rights of women and environmental damage. During the Hague Appeal for Peace, they learned that the Japanese government had announced that they would host the next G8 Summit meeting in Nago, Okinawa. Suspecting that this was a political decision by the Japanese government to counter objections to Henoko military base construction in Okinawa, the OWAAMV women were determined to challenge the dominant political discourse.

As discussed and agreed to during the process of preparing for the International Women's Summit in 2000, they argued that there were four necessary conditions for human security:

1. The environment in which we live must be able to sustain human and natural life.
2. People's basic survival needs for food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education must be met.
3. People's fundamental human dignity and respect for cultural identities must be honored.
4. People and the natural environment must be protected from avoidable harm. (International Women's Summit, 2000)

The 2000 meeting in Okinawa contributed to deepening the understanding of the concept of security with the above four conditions. It also marked a time in which there was a significant development in deepening the understanding of colonial violence against island people. Maria Reinat-Pumarejo from Puerto Rico, who had closely worked with the Vieques Women's Alliance, joined the network. This expansion of the network

occurred because of the protest movement in Vieques, Puerto Rico, against the U.S. Navy presence. This protest movement had been triggered in 1998 by an accident resulting in the death of a Vieques civilian worker, David Sanes. After this meeting, the network changed its name to the International Women's Network Against Militarism (IWNAM).

The network had subsequent meetings in 2002 in South Korea, 2004 in the Philippines, 2007 in San Francisco, 2009 in Guam, and 2017 in Okinawa. A Hawai'i-based women's group joined in 2004, and Guam/Guahan sent a delegation in 2007. Feminists from Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, and Guahan joining the network deepened its understanding of the history of military violence and colonial violence.

Conclusion: An Island Feminism Untangling the Interlocking of Patriarchal Violence, Military Violence, and Colonial Violence to Reclaim Dignity as Island Women

The OWAAMV movement also challenges the patriarchy within peace movements as well as the patriarchy within the Japanese and Okinawan cultures as fundamental obstacles to achieving peace. While patriarchy within the dominant political system itself (and the military) has been discussed by feminist political theorists such as Carole Pateman (1991) or V. Spike Peterson (1992), feminist peace researchers argue that the peace movement as well is imbedded in the same system of patriarchy (Reardon, 1985; Boulding, 1988).

OWAAMV members, too, criticized the rapidly growing peace movement in Okinawa in 1995 that protested the 1995 rape, referring to their perception of male peace activists as undermining the issue of the safety of women and children. They felt an urgent need to solidify their movement to address militarism and patriarchy (Akibayashi and Takazato, 2010).

OWAAMV shows what it means to live on an island. Okinawa is often described as "an island of military bases." As the host of the largest volume of U.S. military bases in Japan in terms of land area, the number of troops, and the longest and most intensive history under U.S. military direct occupation in Japan, Okinawa surely deserves to be recognized as the island of U.S. military bases.

Takazato also uses this phrase "an island of military bases." However, her analysis goes beyond these descriptions of the physical presence of the U.S. military. She reflects on how U.S. military activities, particularly training and soldiers' behavior off-base, have brought violence against the people of Okinawa. In other words, she has problematized the long-term military stationing and the unequal structure between the sending nation and the host nation, embodied in such political deeds as the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, which stipulates the legal status of U.S. troops stationed at overseas bases.

In one of her interviews, she describes citing the 2012 gang-rape case where an Okinawan woman was assaulted by U.S. service members who had stopped off in Okinawa for a few days on their way from a U.S. mainland base to Guam. They were staying out-

side the base facility in a local hotel and assaulted an Okinawa woman. Takazato questions why these soldiers, who had never been to Okinawa before, did not stay on the base but were permitted to leave the base and assaulted a local woman. She has made a connection between the culture of stationing U.S. military overseas and the violence they have committed against people, particularly women in the host community.

I want you to think about the meaning of the stationing of the military and the presence of the living soldiers themselves. When the [U.S.] military is deployed to different countries and regions, those soldiers may feel that they are pursuing some noble mission. In achieving such a mission, they may think that hostility against the enemy, dominating, invading, and occupying them are also part of the mission. Not all soldiers may feel that way and there may be some who resist such notions. But these are in fact the mission of the military itself. What happens when the military with such a mission remains [in the host community]? It means that soldiers feeling dominant power, occupying power, and a sense of superiority [to the people of the host community] are present. (Takazato, 2017, p. 111, my translation from Japanese)

This interlocking of military and colonial violence on a small island like Okinawa is described in terms of U.S. military strategy. An American anthropologist on military base communities, David Vine, explains that the U.S. Navy's Strategic Island Concept, developed during the early stages of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, was designed to secure U.S. hegemony and resulted in occupying small islands in the Pacific region and beyond. The belief in naval power and the necessity of building large-scale military facilities meant that the dispersed communities of small islands were chosen as the sites for military build-up. Those islands already had been colonized for centuries, in some cases, and were politically dispersed and thus easier to expropriate as lands and other resources (Vine, 2009).

Other women on islands have also contributed to conceptualizing the interlocking of colonial violence, military violence, and the underlying patriarchy. In the anthology titled *Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearisation*, edited by Zohl de Ishtar and Katie Dewes, members of the international feminist peace organization Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in New Zealand/Aotearoa and women from Pacific Islands including the Marshall Islands, Belau (Palau), and Bougainville chronicled the history of their islands being colonized and then used for nuclear testing for decades (de Ishtar and Dewes, 1998). A chapter of the book shows a map of nuclear tests titled "Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific" (pp. 34–35). The book also highlights the impacts of such colonial and military violence on women and gendered aspects of their lives, particularly the damage to the reproductive health and rights of women in the region.

Darlene Keju (or Keju-Johnson) of the Marshall Islands was among the women who shared an oral history-like story in *Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearisation*. In fact, the small booklet was dedicated to Keju, who died of a kind of rare cancer at the age of 45 in 1996. Keju's life as a pioneer in health policies to protect the

people of the Marshall Island is more detailed in her biography, *Don't Ever Whisper* (Johnson, 2013), in which her struggle against nuclear testing and the health damage that it caused to people on the islands is a clear analysis of the interlocking nature of colonial and military violence, the patriarchy within their community, and what feminist peace researchers have identified in global politics (Enloe, 2000; Tickner, 2001; Runyan, 2019).

Ritsuko Sakiyama is one of the original members of OWAAMV and has been a well-known journalist covering the cultural activities of Okinawa for many decades. As a journalist, she has visited nearly all the inhabited islands of Okinawa to document the different lives of all the people in Okinawa, and she calls attention to the issue of a diverse Okinawan society and her hopes for a cherishing of the diversity:

Okinawa has always been preoccupied with the U.S. base problems and very busy dealing with them, but we need to give more consideration to the lives of smaller islands and preserve their lives. They live in less developed situations. Otherwise, they can be absorbed by the more powerful. . . . The real Okinawa is a diverse society in which diverse people live. I strive for an Okinawa where all of us feel safe.⁷⁾

The OWAAMV movement is a feminist peace movement that has distinctive implications that need to be conceptualized. The history of the establishment of the OWAAMV in 1995, their original political understanding of their situation, and their political demands to close the bases and shift the paradigm of security for women and children demonstrate their call for reclaiming dignity. A closer look at the four conditions of security advocated by OWAAMV and developed in solidarity with feminist peace activists reveals OWAAMV's perspectives on feminism, which I am tempted to call an island feminism to reclaim dignity. They argue that the four conditions need to be achieved for women on militarized and colonized islands, whose livelihood and wellbeing, which are at the core of one's dignity, are being denied. The four conditions show concern about children, who are the future generations, yet as Reardon (1985) explains, their futures are disrespected by the social institution of war and the military violence that supports this institution.

When the women in OWAAMV stood up and spoke up in 1995, they started to shape an island feminism to unlock the interlocking of colonial violence, military violence, and patriarchy.

Notes

- 1) The workshop and exhibit themes were: Women and the environment; *Uji* dyeing; The military: Structural violence and women; "Comfort women" issue in Okinawa; Action for abolition of nuclear weapons; Enforced relocation to the "Malaria" area in war time; Women and peace; Traditional cultural practice and discrimination against women; Aging society and social welfare; Women and work/labor; and The *Unai* (Sisters) network.
- 2) The members of the first America Peace Caravan are: three coordinators, Suzuyo Takazato, Teruko Kuwae, and Carolyn Francis; other members, Eiko Ginoza, Toshiko Kubota, Hiromi Minamoto, Satoko Miyagi, Toshiko Miyagi, Mayumi Tengan, Sumiko Toguchi, Mitsue Tomiyama, Emiko Utsumi, and Sueko Yamauchi; and two female reporters from Okinawa Times and Ryukyu Shimpo (Okinawa Wom-

- en's America Peace Caravan, 1996).
- 3) The chronology has a Japanese version and an English version. Only the Japanese version has numerical editions. The English version has been revised almost in correspondence to the Japanese version's revisions but does not have numerical versions. Here, the version number is the one given to the Japanese version.
 - 4) Interview by the author on November 3, 1999 in Naha, Okinawa. My translation from Japanese.
 - 5) The results of the research were presented by a historian, Yuki Fujime, during the 2000 Tokyo Tribunal (VAWW-Net Japan, 2002).
 - 6) World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace held in Nairobi, Kenya.
 - 7) Interview by the author on December 9, 1999 in Naha, Okinawa. My translation from Japanese.

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