

Trampled Islands - Bases, Violence and Unheard Voices 蹂躪された島—基地、暴力、届かぬ声

Shinjo Ikuo

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

Trampled Islands - Bases, Violence and Unheard Voices

Shinjo Ikuo, introduction by Gavan McCormack

In September 1995, the Okinawan problem in its present acute form originated from the rape of a 12-year old school girl by three US servicemen. The prefecture galvanised in fury and elicited a pledge the following year from the two national governments that Futenma Marine Air Station would indeed be returned "within five to seven years." Sixteen years on, there is no sign whatever of that happening; instead Futenma's runways are reinforced, the base's military functions upgraded, and plans for a new ("substitute") base in the north, at Henoko, are pressed forward in the face of islandwide opposition.

"Futenma" and "Henoko" were the major focus of the Okinawan struggle during the decade and a half that followed. Now they are joined

by "Osprey." During the environmental impact study required for the Henoko project, the government of Japan deliberately withheld any mention of the planned impact of an entirely new type of aircraft that the Pentagon planned to introduce, the MV22-Osprey (VTOL, or vertical take-off and landing) aircraft, eventually informing Okinawan local government of it by a cursory one page fax in 2011. The Osprey is not only a significant upgrade on existing helicopters, twice as fast, carrying three times as much load, and with an operational radius four times greater, but it also has a poor safety record, including two crashes and one emergency landing just in 2012. Okinawan outrage grew. All 41 of the prefecture's city and town and village assemblies, and the Okinawan parliament (the prefectural assembly), passed resolutions of opposition, and 101,500 people gathered in a mass meeting in September 2012 to make clear that the prefecture spoke with one voice. Yet the two governments were undeterred.



"No!" placards during September 9 anti-Osprey Rally

With all other avenues exhausted, Okinawans resorted to the direct action (referred to below) by sitting in at the Futenma camp gates late in September. The Ospreys, however, were delivered, and took to the Okinawan skies from 1 October.

On 16 October, while the prefecture still seethed over the Osprey being thrust thus violently upon it, another rape - of an Okinawan woman by two sailors - was reported. It was reckoned to be the 130th rape or attempted rape by US servicemen in the 40 years since Okinawa reverted from the US to Japan. Since many go unreported, the actual figure is presumably much greater. As in 1995, Okinawa exploded in anger. Again, the US government and Pentagon officials bowed in apology, promising it would not happen again. Two weeks after they had imposed an 11 pm curfew, and promised better moral guidance for the soldiers, at around 1 am on 2 November, a blind drunk sailor made his way into the 3rd floor bedroom of a 13 year old Okinawan boy, assaulted him violently, and then fell to the street below.

The Osprey imposition and the latest rape and intrusion incidents reinforced in Okinawan minds the seamlessness and violence of the base system; neither streets nor skies were safe. They seem to have concluded, as Professor Shinjo makes clear below, that the politics of bases is also the politics of rape and violence, and that the only way to stop crimes by American soldiers is by closing the bases. For many Okinawans that now means all the bases, nothing short of the demilitarization of Okinawa. (GMCC)

Deepening Resistance and Refusal - US

Bases in Crisis

I felt an unspeakable horror at hearing the comment by people from the Department of Defense immediately following the recent rape case to the effect that it happened "at the worst possible time." Might there be some rapes that are well-timed?

Such a remark showed not the slightest trace of capacity to empathize with the pain and terror suffered by the victim. Nor was there the slightest sign of reflection upon the nature of the society in which we live, incapable of reform and imposing silence and endurance upon victims who bear the wounds in their hearts from having suffered in the same way in the past. What it shows is precisely the obsession to maintain the Japan-US security system as shaped by the [2005] "Agreement for Transformation and Realignment of US Forces in Japan," and the fantasy that national defense can be accomplished by US forces in Japan, (with the Japanese Self Defense Forces already under their command).

It is only those who can be insensitive to the anguish suffered by the people of Okinawa, intoxicated by words such as national defense and national interest, filled with the illusion of a Japan-US alliance that is in fact nothing but Japanese servilely following the United States, who can trumpet that necessity. They are all the same: the former Foreign Minister. Machimura Nobutaka, who said in the National Diet of the brave woman who responded to the rape incident by calling for removal of [all the] bases that hers was a "partial and distorted view," and who, when inspecting the site of the crash of the helicopter on Okinawa International University [in 2004], praised to the skies the technical skill of the helicopter pilot, and Tanaka Satoshi, former head of the Okinawan branch of the Ministry of Defense, who said in relation to the Henoko environmental assessment process, "when you

are about to rape someone, do you say, ‘Now I am going to rape you?’” What these cases reveal is a deep-seated pathology, the profound perversion of secretly desiring the pain of others while desperately denying one’s own responsibility for causing that pain.

Those who hyper-inflate over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island territorial brouhaha ignited by Governor Ishihara are prisoners of more-or-less the same ailment. Such people are seriously convinced that they can rationalize the enormous harm inflicted on the people of Okinawa, including the rape, in the name of national defense.

However, there is not one single reason why we who live in Okinawa should endure harm in the defense of a Japanese state that is already crumbling. To the contrary, it is national defense against which we must defend ourselves. The sentiment now shared by many that a stop must be put to the harm of military rape is related to this.

Armies as Instruments of Violence

I think at least two things have become clear from the present incident. First is that there is no brake on the rampage of the military that is the instrument of violence under the Japan-US military alliance. Second is that the Okinawan people’s resistance and rejection of that military rampage is now deeper and broader than ever before.

That latter change in particular, which includes the inescapable demand for dissolution of the security treaty with the US and complete closure of the bases, gathers strength day by day. This momentum resonates profoundly with the pain of the rape victim and has become a solidarity of fundamental resistance to the military hegemonism and statism that causes

such harm. On this point, the overwhelming voices of opposition to the Osprey deployment are in tune with the anti-base movements of Henoko and Takae, and respond directly to the deep anger over the present rape incident. This rejection and resistance begins to be directed against all bases and military forces and the Japan-US security treaty system itself. That indicates a profound change.

Furthermore, it is important that this change also involves an evolution in the direction of direct democracy - the barricade of the Futenma camp gates and the continuous opposition demonstrations. The resolute, thoroughly non-violent resistance of the Okinawan people demonstrates our right of survival at the very point where the Japan-US security treaty system tramples on it, and armies and police forces are fundamentally powerless when confronted with the right to basic human rights. The fact is that just having one hundred or so people sitting in at each of the camp gates was enough to plunge the Okinawan police into confusion and to immobilize the bases. Now that we are continually surrounding the bases, adopting various stratagems, seeking peace by means of non-violent resistance and sharing the pain of the rape victim, the US bases face a threat to their existence.

For a Peaceful Existence

Late in September, just before the rape incident, I was participating in the sit-in siege at the Oyama gate of Futenma Base. We were confronted, across the fence, by US soldiers who had a scared look about them even though they were intimidating us. My thoughts turned to one particular US soldier, one of the three guilty of the 1995 rape. After having served his time, back in the US this man again raped a university student and then committed suicide.

Such a death was not an “accident.” This soldier, who had incorporated violence within himself and was unable to stop himself from raping again, was eventually driven to kill himself. He was killed by the monster that is the army, the instrument of state violence. Recalling the disturbingly high rate of suicide among Self Defense Force soldiers and the high levels of crime, suicide and illness on the part of US soldiers returning from Iraq, it is necessary to address the problem of the military from the perspective of the violence that comes home full circle to the perpetrators.

When armies say they are protecting people in fact they are targeting them. Only by getting rid of the bases and abolishing armies can military rape be rooted out and peaceful existence achieved.

Author

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Translator

Gavan McCormack is an Asia-Pacific Journal coordinator and co-author, with Satoko Oka Norimatsu, of *Resistant Islands - Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.