



Okinawa Responses to Rape and Murder by Former US Marine

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A 20-year-old woman missing since late April was found dead on May 16, 2016. The suspect is a former Marine who is a civilian employee of the U.S. military at Kadena Airbase. Local police report that he confessed to the woman's rape and murder, and told them the location of her corpse. This crime comes barely six weeks after a U.S. sailor assigned to Camp Schwab was arrested for the rape of a Japanese woman in a Naha hotel. Following that crime, Lt. General Lawrence Nicholson, III Marine Expeditionary Force commander, visited Prefectural Governor Onaga Takeshi to "express my deepest regret and remorse at the incident."

What General Nicholson called "the incident" is one of more than 500 crimes designated as heinous under Japanese law, including approximately 120 rapes, committed by U.S. forces in Okinawa since it reverted from U.S. military occupation to Japanese administration in 1972. As Takazato Suzuyo points out in her interview below, the 120 reported rapes are only "the tip of an iceberg" since most rapes in Okinawa and elsewhere go unreported.

The April rape and murder was committed on the eve of President Obama's highly publicized trip to Japan for the G-7 Summit and a visit to Hiroshima for a speech advocating nuclear weapons reductions. Shortly after Obama's arrival, he held a meeting with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to discuss the rape and murder in Okinawa. During their stern-faced appearance before the cameras that followed, Abe told reporters "this is an unforgivable crime, and I have expressed our anger." Obama expressed his "deepest regrets."



Yet official efforts were already underway to downplay and trivialize this latest atrocity as “the Okinawa issue” (沖縄問題), and not the responsibility of the Japanese and U.S. governments for imposing 73% of the American military presence in all of Japan on this small island prefecture. Expressing his hope that the crime would not affect Obama’s trip, Japan’s ambassador to the United States Sasae Kenichiro remarked dismissively that “the Okinawa issue is the Okinawa issue [and] should not overshadow the fundamental objective of the alliance.”

After the March rape, General Nicholson made what turned out to be an empty promise to tighten discipline and prevent a recurrence. Following the rape and murder in April, the 30,000 U.S. troops in Okinawa have been ordered not to drink alcohol off-base or visit clubs and bars.

Conspicuously absent is any mention of proposed changes in the U.S. military presence that might lighten Okinawa’s disproportionate burden of bases. Such was not quite the case after three American servicemen raped a twelve-year-old girl in 1995. Following highly publicized consultations between the U.S. and Japanese governments, it was announced that the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station would be closed. But this turned out to be a bait-and-switch when it was revealed that plans were simply to move what former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called « the world’s most dangerous base » to another location in Okinawa. Two decades later, with Okinawans resisting the new base construction, Futenma remains open and active.

In the statement and interview below, women in Okinawa reject meaningless apologies and cosmetic curfews, demanding withdrawal of American forces as the only way they can live safely in Okinawa.

Known victims of sexual violence perpetrated by the U.S. military: The tip of an iceberg

An Interview with Takazato Suzuyo on the rape and murder of Shimabukuro Rina



Former US Marine
Kenneth Shinzato, 20 May 2016

The male suspect—a civilian employee of the U.S. military, formerly a member of the U.S. Marines—has been arrested on suspicion of disposing of a corpse. Heinous crimes committed repeatedly because of the presence of U.S. military bases have taken the worst possible form. We asked Takazato Suzuyo of Women Against Military Violence to put this crime in the historical context of human rights violations against the Okinawan people subjected to structural violence from a permanently stationed military.

No end to crimes and accidents involving the US military.

When Okinawa was returned to Japan [in 1972], U.S. bases in Okinawa went from constituting 50 percent of all U.S. bases in Japan to 70 percent. Among them, the vast majority of Marine forces were concentrated in Okinawa, circumstances in which crimes were bound to occur.

18 percent of Okinawa's land is bases, but this is just the amount of land that is cordoned off with fences where U.S. soldiers and employees live and work. Anyone associated with U.S. forces can pass through the fences freely, unlike us citizens. As a result, all of Okinawa has been sacrificed to the U.S. military. Under these circumstances, most of the victimisation has occurred outside the bases rather than inside them.

Okinawan Women Against Military Violence points out that reported crimes are only the tip of the iceberg.

Since U.S. military occupation of Okinawa ended in 1972, there have been more than 500 heinous crimes, and approximately 120 rape cases, but these figures do not reflect the many victims who don't report the crimes. There is no official data for the period before 1972. The group Women Against Military Violence has been collecting information about sexual assault from that time based on data from newspapers and documents as well as evidence from the occupation-era Government of the Ryukyu Islands. In the 71 years since the Battle of Okinawa, large numbers of Okinawan women have been victims of sexual violence.

In 2005, when a 10-year-old girl was the victim of an indecent assault, a woman came forward to report that 20 years previously when she was a high school student, she had been raped by three American soldiers. In a letter to the then-Governor Inamine Keiichi she wrote, "American soldiers are roaming our streets unrestricted. Close the bases immediately!" She did not take the case to court, so it is not included among the 120. I wonder how many more victims are invisible in the available figures? There are social factors that stop victims from prosecuting or raising their voices, and I think they enable the crimes of American forces stationed here. We must view these statistics in the context of this reality.

After the rape at a Naha hotel in March, another woman came forward to tell that she had become pregnant after being raped by a U.S. soldier a year earlier. Parents also reported that their middle-school daughter had become pregnant after being raped, but that they had terminated the pregnancy without notifying police.

On May 20, the day after the suspect was arrested, 16 women's groups held a press

conference and presented their written demand to both the Japanese and U.S. governments to close the U.S. bases.

We had discussed the option of treading softly for a time in consideration of the victim and her family because the circumstances of the crime were so heart-wrenching. But when we thought of why it had occurred, we knew we could not remain silent. On the day of the arrest, we decided to get together on very short notice and speak out.



Media coverage

Fear-mongering insinulators on television ask why a woman would walk alone in the dark place where the victim went missing, implying that she was somehow at fault, and obscuring the fact of a heinous crime committed.

Media coverage perpetuates this “rape myth,” not only when the U.S. military is involved, but by persistently questioning the responsibility of sexual assault victims. Ignored is the difficulty of finding one’s voice when overcome with panic. Victims are repeatedly asked how much they resisted, which only compounds their suffering in Japan where the crime of rape is inadequately addressed. The media should report on this issue without invading the privacy of victims, their families, and others.

How we should view official responses from the U.S. and Japan.

While the victim was still missing, I was much surprised to hear Washington’s response emphasizing that the potential suspect was not military, but civilian personnel. On the one hand, officials were denying any connection to the crime, yet clearly stating that the U.S. government was involved.

We now see the emptiness of the pledge by III Marine Expeditionary Force commander Lt. General Nicholson, after the March rape in Naha, to “tighten discipline” and “prevent recurrence;” and, of his claim that Japan and the U.S. military are “good neighbours.” The violence emanating from the bases must end now!

Following each crime, we protest and a temporary curfew is put in place until the uproar dies down. but then another crime is committed. These measures are only an expedient to placate opposition voices. Meanwhile, the U.S. military remains as soldiers stationed here are replaced one after the other.



Denouncing structural violence within the military.

In 2012, the Department of Defence announced that in one year there were an estimated 19,000 sexual assaults inside the U.S. armed forces. The rape of a woman soldier by her superior officer that she reported at a press conference in Washington had occurred on a base in Okinawa.

Soldiers in the Battle of Okinawa, as well as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, have been trained to use their weapons for killing those said to be their enemies. This is true of all armies. Trained to impose their will by force, they are sent to the battles. To wage war, they must lose their humanity. The perpetrators of crimes in Okinawa should be held responsible, yet the unequal Status of Forces Agreement remains in effect and U.S. troops are not reduced. Thus the ultimate responsibility for these crimes lies with the U.S. and Japanese governments. There is no solution other than the withdrawal of troops. The so-called "consolidations and reductions" proposed in the past will only result in redistributions. It is because forces were not withdrawn after reversion that crimes and accidents continue to this day.

May 20, 2016

Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States

Ms. Caroline Kennedy, United States Ambassador to Japan

Mr. Lawrence D. Nicholson, United States Military Okinawa Area Coordinator (OAC)

Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan

Mr. Yoshihide Suga, Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan

Mr. Takeshi Onaga, Governor of Okinawa Prefecture

Letter of Demand to Mourn the Victim of the Murder linked to a Former U.S. Marine, to Fully Investigate the Circumstances, and to Immediately Withdraw U.S. Military Forces from Okinawa.

Yesterday, May 19, a woman who had been missing since the end of April was found dead, and a former U.S. Marine was arrested as the suspect in her murder. As we face the horror of this crime with rage and pain welling up within us, we grope for words.

But we've also begun to hear remarks from those unresponsive to our outrage. They seek to downplay this horrible crime and evade their responsibility, treating it as part of a political game. In such circumstances, we cannot be silent, and have gathered here to raise our voices.

First of all, we mourn the loss of a precious life that has been taken from us. We demand that people who cared for her not be deprived of the time and occasion to remember her.

We cannot calm our raging hearts as we try to imagine the terror and agony she must have felt. Those of us who live in Okinawa are shocked beyond words as we recognize that this could have happened to us. So we stand together in pain and suffering.

Countless times we have been hurt by statements and attitudes that demean the victims of military violence in Okinawa, where the continuing presence of military bases and troops has been forced on us for decades. We strongly demand that the dignity of the victims be respected.

In mid-March this year, a U.S. sailor sexually assaulted a woman at a hotel in Naha. At that time, Lt. General and US Military Okinawa area commander Lawrence D. Nicholson apologized to Okinawa Prefecture's Governor Takeshi Onaga. "Today, I come here to represent 27,000 uniformed members, 17,000 families, 4,000 civilians, 50,000 Americans." A mere two months have passed. The U.S. military has failed again to keep its promises to "enforce strict discipline" and "take preventive measures." Their empty pledges have no credibility.

We have always insisted that the military is an organization of structural violence and does not protect human security in times of war or peace. Military bases and troops have profoundly destroyed human bodies and spirits inside and outside the fences around them. We urge each and every member of the U.S. forces, civilian employees of the military, and their families in Okinawa to join us in mourning and outrage, and to voice your protest in solidarity with us. Please do not act as if this has nothing to do you.

We strongly urge both the U.S. and Japanese governments, US military forces, and Okinawa Prefecture to face the reality imposed by the presence of bases and troops, and to take actions responsibly. For these purposes, we demand the following of them:

1. We demand that those who have been close to the victim receive a proper apology and care.
2. We demand that the facts of the incident be thoroughly investigated, and that the perpetrator be rigorously punished.
3. We demand that all military bases and troops in Okinawa be withdrawn so that we can achieve a truly safe society for the people living here.

Signers:

Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, Committee for One-Stop Assistance Center, Rape Emergence Intervention Counselling Center Okinawa (REICO), Group on Gender Issues, Women's Groups Liaison Council Okinawa, Japan Womens' Council I Okinawa, New Japan Women's Association Okinawa, Okinawa Prefecture Mothers' Congress Liaison Committee, Okinawa Teachers Union, Okinawa Senior High School Teachers Union, Okinawa Association of Retired Teachers, Okinawa Association of Retired Senior High School Teachers, SEALDs

Ryukyu, Mothers Against War Okinawa, Naha Broccoli, Citizens Group Wankara, Peace Camp Okinawa Preparatory Committee, Project Disagree, Concerned Students in Okinawa Prefecture, Nago Council against the Construction of the U.S. On-Sea Heliport and for Peace, No Helipad Takae Resident Society, We Planning, Okinawa Korea People's Solidarity, WILPF Kyoto, Citizens' Association for the Study of International Law, Yomitan Network for Opposing the Strength of Torii Station and Making the Best Use of the Municipal Ordinance of Village Autonomy, "Start from here, now", Okinawan Studies 107, Hawaii Peace and Justice, HOA: Hawaii Okinawa Alliance, *las barcas Journal*, monaca (Movement of Nonames Against Campus Abduction), linagu Women's Group to Support Mayor Inamine and Nago City Government, Anna Group in Miyako, Tida no Fua Group to Make Peaceful Future for the Islander Children, Okinawa Prefectural Association for Popularization of the Peace Constitution, Okinawa Civil Liberties Union

May 22nd, 2016

Translation by Emma Dalton

Introduction by Steve Rabson

Takazato Suzuyo is a long-time feminist peace activist who has analyzed the interplay between sexism and militarism from the experiences of women in Okinawa and is a founder of Okinawan Women Against Military Violence. Her work has inspired global feminist peace movements for structural understanding of violence against women. She helped create Okinawa's first rape crisis center to provide hotline and face-to-face counseling to victims of sexual violence. In 1995, she played a key role in mobilizing a mass protest against US military bases in Okinawa following the rape by three US servicemen of a twelve-year old girl.

*Steve Rabson is Professor Emeritus, Brown University and an Asia-Pacific Journal Contributing Editor. A former U.S. serviceman on Okinawa, he is the author of *The Okinawan Diaspora in Japan: Crossing the Borders Within*, University of Hawaii Press.*

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