

Balloons and Tape as Hate Speech: American and Japanese Rightwing Responses to the Okinawan Anti-Base Movement

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Introduction

Communications scholar Herbert Schiller wrote about the "informational infrastructure"[3] that the centers of social and political power have and can easily access to get their positions heard, understood, and hopefully accepted by mainstream society. Such is the case with the ongoing issue of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma in Okinawa and its planned relocation to Henoko, an area in the northern part of the main island presently enduring a kind of environmental assault in the name of economic development and national security.

In the face of popular opposition to the Henoko plan, both official U.S. military propaganda as well as local unofficial news sources have been necessary tools used in the manufacturing process of hoped-for public consent to the controversial relocation policy. In Okinawa, the discourse practices through which the appearance of consent is conjured up by the powerful has exposed troubling flaws in both the system and its representatives who appear willing to obscure the results of democratic processes. Character assassination is but one tactic.

Reinforcing the Rightwing Narrative Across Cultures

In appearing on Channel Sakura[4] (日本文化チャンネル桜 *Nihon Bunka Channeru Sakura*) television, a rightwing media outlet, Robert Eldridge, then Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff of Government and External Affairs for the U.S Marine Corps, suggested in a January 2015 interview that the protest movement in and around MCAS Futenma (as well as in Henoko) is motivated by local hatred and bigotry.[5] Yet, despite his efforts, it appears that the power of the informational infrastructure can cut in two distinctly different ways.

The powerful, like Mr. Eldridge, have been able to use, over the past few years, these unofficial media to undermine the reputations of those who actively oppose the policies and plans that he officially represents. Yet these media can also serve to injure the very reputations of those who use these forms of public expression irresponsibly. Such has been the case with Eldridge whose misleading remarks together with his recent actions led to a dismissal from a rather coveted position in the Marine Corps public affairs hierarchy.[6]

According to the *Ryukyu Shimpo* and *Okinawa Times*, Eldridge was punished for leaking surveillance video footage of the arrest of Yamashiro Hiroji, leader of the protest movement at Camp Schwab.[7] Evidence of the leak surfaces in a very curious location. Readers may wonder how Tedokon Yasunori, a regular panelist on Channel Sakura and leader

of the Heart Clean Project (HCP), came to receive the official footage as it is presently featured, in part, on his own personal Youtube channel.[8]

Personal YouTube channels as well as Channel Sakura disseminate the mythology now being constructed around the protests against the proposed relocation of MCAS Futenma. Jon Mitchell points out, for example, that Channel Sakura "... is widely known for its glorification of Japan's role in World War II and for airing shows that deny the Japanese military forced Korean women into sexual slavery." [9] Worth noting is the channel's propensity to trade on conspiracy theories so as to engender public fear and deepen the nationalistic enthusiasm presently gaining some ground in public discourse.

For his part in the mythmaking, Tedokon has appeared, reciprocally, in an Armed Forces Network (AFN) Okinawa morning radio show.[10] Concerning the wider protest movement, he suggested on December 22, 2014, through his interpreter (Eldridge), that "most of the protestors come from the mainland," (i.e. communists that should be ignored), and suggested to the young generation in Okinawa that they should join the community where military members and local people have built good relationships so that they can enjoy and respect both cultures, and Americans and Okinawans can then express their mutual gratitude for each other's presence.

One could argue that the spread of this media narrative is really just a reflection of the ethical debilities in the Washington-Tokyo plan for Henoko. Distractions, mis-directions, and fabrications are part and parcel of the folklore

needed periodically to underpin the plans of the powerful, especially when those plans clash with the public will expressed in political elections. Douglas Lummis puts it thus: "That the Okinawan voters had set their will against the new base was absolutely clear." [11]

Beyond the infrastructure itself, another actor in the process of mythmaking is Tedokon. As an unofficial local representative of the U.S. Marine Corps, Tedokon organizes the Heart Clean Project (HCP) the stated aim of which is to "heal the hearts of the military members and their families who have been hurt by the hate speech and hate crime." [12] Also, besides his activities with the HCP, Tedokon is active with the Osprey Fan Club, a reaction against the widespread anger and dissent that shook the island in 2012 when the first Ospreys landed at Futenma.

While propaganda has the power to create the sense that reality is an illusion (and vice versa), the words that Eldridge and Tedokon have used to frame the seventeen-year protest create an illusion that the people protesting are intent on precipitating wholesale civil insurrection. The reality, though, appears quite different.

The 'Haters' - *Kamaduu gwa tachi no tsudo*

Who are these purported hate-filled communist bigots converging on the fence line of Futenma each morning and maintaining a 24-hour 'round-the-clock presence? Our initial contact with one element of the wider anti-base movement on the island reveals surprising results. One dimension of the movement happens to feature, primarily, concerned daughters, mothers, and grandmothers, who,

because of prior harassment, prefer to remain anonymous and yet remind us through their work with *Kamaduu*, of the injustices they have seen perpetrated by U.S. forces long protected by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) under provisions outlined in the Japan-US Security Treaty.

According to one member we interviewed early on, *Kamaduu* is a traditional Okinawan female name. *Kamaduu* is also *Uchinaguchi* (Okinawan language) for 'kitchen'. This member has been engaged in the protest since 1997, when Prime Minister Hashimoto and Ambassador Mondale announced the joint plan to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko and after Nago City, subsequently, voted in a referendum to reject the government's plan. The democratic process played out in Nago City during that time is something they value highly, and defend today. The local democratic defense of Henoko from this joint plan, though, began appearing on the fences around Camp Schwab as red ribbons tied to the chain-links signified local warnings that the plan must stop.

The name they give this present form of expression now under attack at the fence near Nodake Gate, as well as in the media, is the "Fence Movement for the Lives of Okinawans." Our interviewee stressed that they do not want to be known strictly as protestors but as people who are seriously concerned about the lives of their fellow citizens and about educating people on the Japanese mainland about the significant and sobering responsibilities that come with national security. When the present arrangements for security were hammered out decades ago between America and Japan, not one single Okinawan, she notes, was asked for his or her opinion on how that security arrangement would develop, what it would actually look like in Okinawa.

She points out that, "When you look carefully at history, you cannot ignore some indisputable facts: the people of Okinawa have *never* [her emphasis] agreed to being 'hosts' - their word not ours - to the U.S. military, but it is patently obvious, if someone simply looks around and acknowledges this reality in the great concentration of U.S. garrisons, that Okinawa is a colony, not truly a prefecture in the common sense of the word." It is evident to the larger protest, even beyond *Kamaduu*, that the present Washington-Tokyo arrangement for security stands as a symbol of decades-long discrimination. She went on to underscore her frustrations with the members of the Heart Clean Project, who presently undertake activities with their so-called "Fence Clean Project":

"We affix colored tape in order to communicate our steadfast support for the lives and the dignity of Okinawan people. So, we don't want these people [the fence cleaners], whose minds also seem to be occupied by this long colonial history, to remove our expressions. They continue to claim that the tape we affix disturbs the scenery of Okinawa, but it is obvious that it is the bases that are disturbing the scenery. Just have a look at these fences topped with barbed wire! It is these fences and what they are protecting that obscures, indeed destroys, the natural environment. It is the base that is creating all these various levels of noise pollution, high- and low-frequency waves that distress our mental and, thus, physical health. It is the base that is launching and dropping the helicopters and dangerous fragments which can kill people. It is the base that is polluting our land with chemicals and still denying their culpability. It is not we, armed with the weapons of packing tape, who are dangerous. We are just trying to create an Okinawa that allows future generations to decide their own

direction. We will be happy to remove the tape ourselves that we have applied but after the base is gone, so we ask them [the fence cleaners] to cease their activities."

The Organization of Free Association

As it turns out, these local citizens who share the *Kamadu* ideal also happen to share the very same goals and happen to appear at the same time in the same location to speak about the unfairness of the status quo. Their free speech appears in their humble hand-scrawled signs that say as much, which seems a far cry from hate speech. In one member's sign, she is happy to press forward with Okinawa's alternative proposal. The top expression reads "Keeping MCAS Futenma in the same place" = No; the middle expression reads "Rebuilding a new base inside Okinawa" = No; "Rebuilding a new base outside Okinawa but somewhere else in Japan" = Yes.



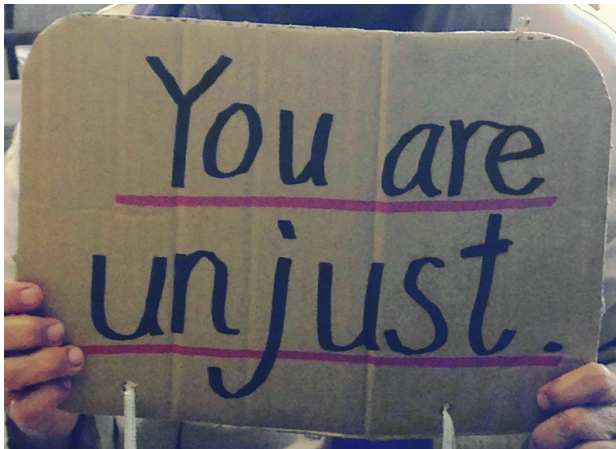
They vigorously and explicitly reject the terms 'activists', 'group', or 'collective.' Each person, according to our interviewee, is the leader.

Like the Occupy Movement, there is no particular figurehead in Okinawa that the media can point to and attempt to tear down as the chief. *Kamadu* emerged originally as an expression of great concern among local women over the outrage engendered in Okinawan society by the 1995 rape of an elementary school girl at the hands of three American military men in Kin Town, just south of Henoko. This incident was the spark that set the simmering local anger ablaze from decades of marginalization, and people across the island awoke to speak out against it. They describe the struggle as one against well-entrenched social injustices. The rape typified a long unjust, albeit complex, situation that had taken hold in local society and one that the women want people to remember.

Another member recounts the words of her inspiration, Martin Luther King, who spoke powerfully about injustices in the 1960s when she was much younger. She reminds us of how King electrified his audiences when he spoke of institutionalized discrimination. She tells the Marines, especially African-American Marines who pass by where she protests, "We have a dream of no bases in Okinawa." She feels that these words will resonate mostly distinctly with African-American service members who have known firsthand the injustices of discrimination, and she also hopes that her borrowing King's ideas aren't misconstrued as disingenuous or belittling to those who hear her express these sentiments in English. She communicates through these simple signs, symbols, and words she feels are universally understood.

When asked what she feels about Eldridge's portrayal of the protest movement, she is entirely mystified by the characterization in the media that her fellow mothers and grandmothers are rabble-rousers who hold

power enough to bring down the forces of militarism with hatred and invective. If she hated anything, it is the unjust conditions (signified in her sign) that have taken shape before her eyes.



during this period.



Weaponised Packing Tape

These sentiments are reinforced by the tools of home hardware, which the women draw upon to communicate their stand. Red and yellow packing tape fixed on the chain-link fences that surround the gated military communities serves to remind everyone on both sides of the fence that the destruction of Henoko with the closure of Futenma is, without question, unjust. The traditional color chosen by the protest in 2010 against the bases was yellow, a color chosen to signify caution, and a sign to the U.S. military that its aircraft must take serious precautions when flying over Okinawa's densely populated areas. Yellow also serves to signify caution to the Tokyo-Washington network as it considers its joint plans for the prefecture and moves to impose its collective will on the local people. Because of its universal recognition as a sign of prudence, attention and vigilance, yellow was deemed to be the ideal color for the movement

In 2012, shortly before the MV-22 Osprey arrived in the face of powerful local opposition, the protest added another symbolic representation to its public face. The color red was to signify a desire to stop, to terminate the plans that the military had developed to base its accident-ridden aircraft at Futenma. The patent absurdity of bringing such a dangerous aircraft to the world's most dangerous airfield, as observed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,^[13] drove local people to action. Red was the color of choice to express the movement's desire to stop and think.

The women who embrace the *Kamaduu* concept hold onto the Clintonian assurance of 2000, that America will "consolidate" while "reducing [its] footprint" on the island - words "specific enough to sound genuine while vague enough to promise nothing."^[14] For those old enough to remember the past, the presence of the base itself stands as a permanent footprint on the collective consciousness when "the 1955 rape

case, and the forceful eviction of the Isahama farmers by U.S. bulldozers and bayonets, ... finally woke Okinawans to the need to act to protect their own dignity and rights."^[15] These women we interviewed also want to see that promise realized through closure.

Apart from Internet video media, various right-wing blogs (some reportedly ideologically akin to the LDP, see [here](#) and [here](#)) have featured hasty criticisms of the women associated with the *Kamadu* concept. (An earlier version of this paper suggested that there was a connection between Channel Sakura and the Happiness Science Party. We have since received a communication from Happy Science stating that there is "no connection whatsoever." We have decided, therefore, to redirect the critical analysis to the central theme of the paper.) Contributors to these alternative media form part of the Japanese public discourse that constructs the impression that packing tape is an illegal weapon in the hands of women who want to speak out.

Among them, are *Nihonjin Nara Shitte Okitai Koto* (Things You May Want to Know if You are Japanese)^[16]. Another piece in the same blog features an unsigned article that complains about the *Ryukyu Shimpō* and *Okinawa Times* and their purported refusals to frame *Kamadu* as a band of outlaws.^[17] Another blog that goes by the name, "Is There Democracy in Okinawa?" pitches *Kamadu* in a recent feature article as a group of terrorists. The author (alias Hijai) characterizes one previous *Kamadu* protest with balloons as a "terrorist act."

To challenge possession of the airspace that aircraft from Futenma use, which is directly over houses, schools, churches, and hospitals

just outside the borders of the base, *Kamadu* floated balloons (1 meter in diameter) to protest the near-constant disturbance of these aircraft on the civil peace. It should be noted that this demonstration followed all laws regarding democratic process, that formal paperwork had been filed with the local government, that newspapers had been notified, and a press conference held to invite all members of society and the military community to take part. Letters in English describing the event were also sent to members of the military. During the demonstration, our interviewee points out, one military cargo plane diverged from its normal flight path and feigned flying directly into one of the balloons. Photographs taken during this military aerial maneuver have since been used by rightwing bloggers who falsely suggest that *Kamadu* used its balloons as weapons, a suggestion so absurd as to defy all logic.



The blogger omits these facts as well as the U.S. military's own instructions (which it routinely ignores) regarding safe entry and exit corridors for aircraft. A 2008 letter to former Ginowan City Mayor Iha from General Goodman, addressing recent city complaints at

the time, clarifies the Marine Corps' position on flight safety:

We are extremely sensitive to the concerns of our neighbors in our local community. Our entry and exit routes from the helicopter pattern at Futenma are specifically designed to avoid over-flying the local schools and some cultural areas when possible. Our pilots operating at Futenma are instructed on these routes and the reasons behind them, and do a good job of avoiding over-flight of schools, hospitals, and cultural areas whenever possible.[18]

At the site of the protests, near Nodake Gate in Ginowan City, the defense of MCAS Futenma from these mothers and grandmothers takes a number of forms. The establishment has concluded that a multi-national contingent is necessary to combat the threat posed by the forces of *Kamaduu*. Therefore, on the scene each day are (a) Japanese security guards (clad in Ray Ban sunglasses and wielding expensive cameras) contracted by the U.S. military; (b) American military personnel in civil attire specializing in crowd analysis and the identification of potential terrorists, (c) Ginowan City police; (d) Okinawa Prefecture Police; and (e) members of the rightwing Heart Clean Project.

Their success in defending the sanctity of the camp's fences comes from the tight network of local communications, which assures that the security guards, U.S. personnel, or rightwing fence cleaners can quickly notify the Ginowan City police of all infractions. Like any occupying force in a war zone, the defenders who first catch sight of the dreaded enemy are tasked to sound the alarm and to call in reinforcements from the nearby police station.

The Ginowan City police, for their part, are noted for their speed in appearing on the scene with cameras ready to film any woman threatening the serenity of the fence with packing tape. These defenders of the status quo share the same logic and labor in concert to discourage the work of the women, to criticize and characterize their efforts as hateful and terroristic.

Along with criticism comes periodic harassment. One member recalled a morning when she was intimidated by hooded sun-glass-wearing bullies who, ironically, used threatening speech to dissuade her and frustrate her efforts. Though she felt threatened by these actions, she was also emboldened by the memory of Martin Luther King and civil rights demonstrators standing up in the face of segregationist contempt and violence. Another time during a small evening prayer meeting, which included singing gospel hymns, other members recalled being accosted by a large American man who described them as "bitches" and opined that they should "express their grievances with Tokyo, not America."

Another interviewee reported that being physically and verbally harassed by Ginowan City police when she tried to use tape to signify protest on the fence. One officer, who had been standing behind her, grabbed her hand forcefully as she affixed some tape to the fence, whereby the metal of the fence cut her fingers. These are the actions of civil servants in uniform sworn to protect the common good.

Conclusion

Finally, there are the memories of Mr. Eldridge, who, as a young man, had endeared himself to local people while conducting his doctoral research in Osaka. He appeared at the time to be caring and genuinely concerned about the plight of Okinawans. Our interviewee was astonished to learn that he had recently portrayed the people as bigots guided by their passions rather than logic to live in a society where democracy and reason rule.

For their part, the women of *Kamaduu* thoroughly understand the flawed reasoning their critics use to portray them and because of it are able to feel pity for them and remain calm when confronted. When opportunities present themselves, they find relief in posing well-reasoned questions that their tormentors evidently have little capacity to answer. If these bases, they ask, are so important to the defense of Japan, why aren't they distributed throughout Japan? Why must the great majority occupy our small parcels of land and space? To these questions, the bullies who come to harass never fail to walk away thwarted by their inability to answer.

When former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye pointed to the vulnerability of the bases in Okinawa in the face of Chinese advances in ballistic missiles,[19] perhaps it is worth discussing, too, why Tokyo and Washington continue to insist on the Henoko plan. Does this great concentration of military force on this island make any sense today?

In the opening of this article, we referred to balloons and packing tape as the preferred tools of protest and the characterization that their uses constitute hate speech. Yet, if hate speech offends, threatens, or insults groups, based on race, color, religion, national origin,

sexual orientation, or disability, we ask how questions posed in a reasonable tone, or balloons floated in the wind, or tape placed on fences qualify as offensive, threatening, or insulting.

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References

[1] In his paper, "How Does Positionality Bias Your Epistemology," David Takacs asks, "How does who you are shape what you know?" Born and raised in Okinawa, I only came to understand the gravity of the occupation of my homeland by U.S. military forces when I engaged in a conversation with an elderly Canadian woman in Nanaimo who was very well informed about the post-WWII world in which we live. She asked me where I was from, and I replied, "Japan." She was curious to know which part and asked where. I said, "Okinawa." Her reply was an epiphany for me, "Oh, so you're from America." Though she believed that all Okinawans also spoke English, she was right about the extent of our own relative blindness to the structural discrimination we are born into. Like the tides, the wind, and rain, the U.S. bases are a part of the scenery that becomes normal as we live and grow. It is not until we begin to question this strange normalcy that we encounter an awakening and ultimately if we dare to question it, a resistance from those who are happy to accept this kind of normalcy. This is how what I know has come to shape what I am, a person who wants to continue pressing forward with hard questions about these present conditions.

[2] Some readers may question how a foreigner holding a position of relative influence in a Japanese institution of higher learning can justifiably be engaged in research that critiques local systems of dominance and coercion. The Christian University in Okinawa declares that truth is a universal aspiration and condition to real peace, all of which prompt me to draw upon my military experience, studies of human language, and observations of how language is used to fortify systems of unfairness.

[3] Schiller, Herbert "U.S. as Global Overlord: Dumbing Down, American-Style" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1999.

[4] Visit the site [here](#).

[5] The full interview can be accessed [here](#). One sector of the Japanese public that appears to sympathize with the extremism (*netto-uyoku*) voiced by neo-nationalists also reveals various levels and forms of support in social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and blogs) for Channel Sakura. Though expressing conflicting ideas about Emperor worship, Article 9 of the Constitution, the status of foreigners, the perceived Chinese threat, and attitudes toward the U.S. military presence, overtly disparate right-wing organizations also maintain common reinforcing interests with regards to current conditions of militarism in Okinawa, particularly as specified by the Japan-US Security Treaty. Image and video content in the following social media appear to substantiate the associations among members of the Channel Sakura, the Heart Clean Project and the Osprey Fan Club: See the blog [here](#), and the SNS [here](#) and [here](#).

[6] The article is available in Japanese [here](#).

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Further details can be found [here](#).

[9] Mitchell, Jon, "In appearance on far-right TV, U.S. official calls Okinawa base protests 'hate speech'," *The Japan Times*, February 16, 2015.

[10] Efforts to acquire a full transcript of the interview on AFN are ongoing.

[11] Lummis, Douglas "Okinawa State of Emergency" *Counter Punch*, February 19, 2015.

[12] Further details may be found at [Real Okinawa](#).

[13] Further details may be found [here](#).

[14] McCormack, Gavan and Yonetani, Julia (2000). "The Okinawan Summit Seen from Below," *JPRI Working Paper* 71.

[15] Tanji, Miyume. *Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa* (London: Routledge 2006), 76.

[16] For further details, visit [Things You May Want to Know if You are Japanese](#).

[17] For further details, visit [Is There](#)

[Democracy in Okinawa?](#)

[18] Further details of the background in the city's complaint and the Marine Corps' response can be found at [Ginowan City Office](#).

[19] For further details, visit [Project Syndicate](#).