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Okinawa, Guåhan and Hawai ‘i : Feminist Insights into the Linkages between Colonization, Militarism and COVID-19

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[Interview]

Okinawa, Guåhan and Hawai‘i: Feminist Insights into the Linkages between Colonization, Militarism and COVID-19*

Interviewer: Margo Okazawa-Rey**

Interviewees: Suzuyo Takazato,*** Lisa Linda Natividad,****

Ayano Ginoza,***** Kim Compoc*****

MO: Margo Okazawa-Rey

ST: Suzuyo Takazato

LN: Lisa Linda Natividad

AG: Ayano Ginoza

KC: Kim Compoc

Okazawa-Rey [MO]: Hi, everyone. I am Margo Okazawa-Rey, welcoming you to Women’s Magazine. I’m here in Berkeley, California, acknowledging and appreciating that we are on occupied Ohlone territory and thanking the ancestors for another day in this beautiful place. My show is about broadcasting the voices of feminist activists and scholars from around the world concerning issues important in their location. My purpose is for us in the Bay Area in the US to connect the dots between “there” and “here” among feminists and women across the globe and to stand together with the goal of solidarity. If you listened to the previous show about COVID, that was a perfect segue for us because our show today is also about COVID. We will be discussing the role of the US military in the spread of coronavirus in Okinawa and Guåhan—most of you know it as Guam—and Hawai‘i. I am in conversation with long-time Okinawan feminist activist Suzuyo Takazato. She served as Naha City Council member, is a founder of Okinawa Women Act

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Against Military Violence, and has devoted her life to working for demilitarized, genuine security for women, girls, for people of Okinawa, and far beyond. Also, in conversation is Lisa Natividad—we heard her on the show before—is a professor of social work at the University of Guåhan and long-time activist working for decolonization of Guåhan. We also have Kim Compoc, who is a professor of history at the University of Hawai‘i West O‘ahu. Finally, we will be in conversation with Ayano Ginoza, who is a professor at the University of the Ryukyus, who will add to the conversation by analyzing the current conditions from an island studies perspectives. We are fortunate to have all four guests on the interview. Please sit back, listen, and ask yourselves how we must think about the relationships between here and there; how we think about genuine security.

The four have been talking about this issue of the military spreading the coronavirus, and in their places, which are islands, a few infections can be quite serious. It would be wonderful if you could each speak just for a little while. What’s the latest news in Okinawa, in Guam, and in Hawai‘i? Suzuyo, would you like to start?

Takazato [ST]: Yes. Today is August 25. Actually, we protested to the US embassy in Tokyo about how the US military in Okinawa rents an off-base hotel to isolate soldiers moving from the United States to Okinawa. The soldiers stay two weeks in isolation before they are allowed to move around. So what the military did was rent an off-base hotel. In Okinawa 15 percent of our main island of Okinawa has been used by US military bases and about 45,000 people are there, and we have 1.4 million population living in a small area, so it means that the US military has more space, and yet they’re renting a hotel outside the base to keep their personnel, dependents, their families. We were so shocked and felt threatened to learn about this practice. We thought this is disrespect of Okinawan people’s human rights and livelihood, so we wrote this protest statement, and we had fifty-four organizations supporting it, and we handed it to Defense Bureau of Japan in Okinawa. But the Defense Bureau, is not standing for us. They are standing for the US military, saying that the US military has a strict policy. Yet many individual soldiers and personnel are outside of the bases, without masks, which made us so angry and threatened. That was on July 15 when we submitted this statement. Prior to that, US personnel celebrated Independence Day on July 4 and 5. They held big parties even using our neighboring parks. They had continuous vacation using our national parks without any permission of using parties them for the parties, even though Okinawa is an island, and we have been keeping strict to protect from coronavirus infections. For sixty-eight days we had zero infection until the beginning of July. Because of the US troops, and of another Japanese government policy to support tourism, the “Go-to-Travel Program” that started from July 22 and encouraged tourists from other prefectures to Okinawa, Okinawa now has the highest infection rate in all Japan.

MO: Oh, my goodness.

ST: Yeah. We are suffering.

MO: Yes. The US military uses local hotels for a two-week quarantine period to protect their own people on the bases from infection through that kind of policy and through the July 4 celebration, when they used the parks without any permission, basically occupying Okinawa in more ways than just the bases by themselves, which is already a bad situation, and the Japanese government encouraging tourism. That's not a good time for tourism.

ST: Yes. So, our prefectural governor Tamaki is suffering. Tamaki is asking Japanese central government to have all tourists checked for COVID-19, before they land the airplane. But the central government said there is no such rule. We are scared because Okinawa consists of small islands, and their medical measures are inadequate. Now, coronavirus is affecting other small islands as well.

MO: A very serious crisis. Speaking of small islands, let's go over to Lisa in Guam. What's happening in Guam?

Natividad [LN]: Oh, I can relate to Suzuyo's frustration and concerns because in so many ways it's the same script that's played out in Guåhan. When we look at what's happening on Guåhan, as well as Okinawa and other militarized communities, where there are military bases, we have to remind ourselves that when we look at the US military and the issue of coronavirus, there is little transparency. One of the things I find comforting is visiting the "worldometers.info" site. If you click in the US, it gives you the total cases and numbers of death and so forth of the US military. As of the moment, which is August 25, as Suzuyo has shared, the military count of total cases is 52,455. New cases in the past twenty-four hours were 1,217, and the total deaths was at almost 80. We know the military is experiencing coronavirus and perhaps even at higher rates because of close quarters of a lot of their activities, especially and particularly those who are on naval ships. Our initial frustration with the US military pivoted around the docking of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, wherein their commander had sent distress signals for help because people were sick with the virus, and he was afraid of their potential death. In the end, roughly fifty percent of that ship had tested positive for COVID, close to 2,000 cases. Guam is a small island. Our total population hovers around 160,000, so when you infuse 2,000 into a community of 160,000, I don't care what safeguard you put in place; there's no way our community is not going to be impacted. Of course, nobody is talking about that. It's been several months. Now we are starting to see those military numbers and cases on the military bases as one of the biggest, I call it, epicenter of the COVID on the island. The USS Theodore Roosevelt was the first part of the story. The second part mirrors what Suzuyo is sharing with regards to the leasing of hotel rooms for quarantine. We had the same experience: multiple hotels out in town were used to set up quarantine for military members. If you were on the Theodore Roosevelt and it was time to dock on Guåhan, you

are given a test. If your test was negative, they put you in a hotel in Tumon, which is the center of our downtown district for tourism. And then, of course, as you can imagine, with the high incidence on that boat, people were getting off the ship, testing negative, and then developing symptoms and testing positive within a week or two or three because they say incubation period is up to three weeks. So, the spike went from a hundred something cases to around 2,000. You can imagine how much of the coronavirus was swimming out in our town. Of course, we avoided Tumon like the plague because we were petrified even though the government, ours as well as military brass, kept assuring us that it would be safe. That’s sort of the second reverberation, if you will. What we saw next was people that were transiting to Guåhan on military orders not connected to a boat for different activities. They were also being quarantined out in our communities as well in the hotels, but given free pass to leave the hotel to go to work on the base and come back to the hotel. You think they’re gonna eat, right? Where are they going to eat? They have no kitchen, so they are going to all the different restaurants. Our local public health agency had to generate a list of contact tracing all the places contaminated because of their visits. That also infused the numbers, bigger than what we had before because our own numbers off the base were in the single digits every day, five, six, which proportionately for 160,000 community, it’s not something to dismiss, but it’s not like what we have now. We’ve seen more than fifty percent of our cases just in this past month. What’s happening even just over the weekend was upsetting for me. The island, I think a month or so ago, or maybe two months ago, was designated as a safe haven for military ships to come, to have R&R. Safe haven means it’s a place where if you are a military ship, it’s safe to visit with low cases of COVID, so it’s safe for you. These are the sailors not homeported here. These are ships that they are tired of floating around in the ocean, and they want to come to shore, and so okay, Guåhan is a place we can go, so we are just like keep messing your base; if you’re going to do that, stay in the navy base. Well, we see footage, because of course a lot of local people work on the base, and there is no restriction across the gate, which is what’s very frustrating for me. If we are going to allow the military to take that risk, allow these big numbers of COVID cases or potentially big numbers of casses be in the base and off base, what we, as the local community, should be able to do is to say, “Okay, fine. We are going to close the traffic on and off the base so that your COVID doesn’t cross the boundary to our community.” But of course, because of our political status, akin to a colony, a US territory, our governor and our government does not have the authority to do something like that.

MO: How about Hawai‘i, Kim?

Compoc [KC]: Just like with Okinawa and Guåhan, Hawai‘i’s economy is dependent on militarism and tourism, both of which are unsustainable and radically stupid in the context of this pandemic. That’s the phrase I like to use radical stupidity because that’s what we have in terms of the government’s response. In terms of the numbers, as of October,

we have 14,000 infected and 184 dead. Our population in Hawai'i is 1.4 million, so considerably bigger both in terms of population and land base. We could be at zero if we could shut down tourism and militarism altogether. As island people, our geography should make us more protected from this virus. But of course, we are not allowed to be left to ourselves. We have to contend with this massive military/tourism complex that violates the sovereignty of the people and the land. To be clear, I'm not native Hawaiian, which is important to say because the Kānaka Maoli people are the ones who need to define what sovereignty means. But as a Filipina, I share the sense of outrage that island people have no say over their land, that Washington gets to decide our fate (more bases, more military) or multinational capital (more hotels, more corporate agribusiness). It is frustrating. Even in this context of COVID and this unprecedented global pandemic, there's no tangible shift in priorities to human needs and protecting the environment. As we have said again and again, genuine security is what is needed; genuine security is common sense if we are serious about survival.

As Suzuyo-san and Lisa have pointed out, the military has been secretive with their [COVID] numbers. They are incubating the virus on these ships and ignoring the risk they pose to everyone, throwing big no-mask parties and violating their own rules. They say they are "protecting" us, but they are the super spreader. They do what they want with a sense of arrogance and entitlement that makes the rest of us infuriated.

On a positive note, I would say we are doing a good job exposing those contradictions. People are becoming more comfortable critiquing the military, and our efforts are getting more press. Many of us in Women's Voices, Women Speak have been doing work with Cancel RIMPAC Coalition. That's where our efforts have gone in terms of addressing COVID through our demilitarization work. RIMPAC stands for "RIM of the Pacific Exercises," which are war games held in Hawai'i every other year, hosting dozens of countries to come and bomb these islands and sink their battleships off the shores of Kaua'i. The military industrial complex also comes; it's a big gunshow where countries get the message that they need billion-dollar weapon systems to be considered an advanced, developed nation. All these people play tourist in all the ways we've talked about, demanding sexual labor from women like they have for the last couple of centuries. We were not able to get the Navy to cancel RIMPAC, but it was scaled back from six weeks to two weeks, and our petition got over 11,000 signatures. The press gave us pretty good coverage. They also limited their exercises to "at-sea" only, which is a small victory for us, but we like to stress we are concerned about sea life and the whole ecosystem, not just the human impacts of the military on land. We were happy that the green sea turtles were nesting in Waimanalo this summer, a total miracle made possible because the amphibious assault exercises were cancelled.

The work on RIMPAC is also the perfect opportunity to talk about solidarity, and our

connections to the rest of Oceania and Asia. We had two incidents worth mentioning: the Jose Rizal naval ship, where soldiers were infected in the Philippines came for RIMPAC, and the incident with the Thai military who came to Hawai‘i, then went back, and six of their soldiers tested positive. We were able to shine a light on how their language of “regional security” and “international cooperation” is nonsense, especially in the context of COVID. When Joseph Pemberton was here last month, our opportunity as Filipinx in Hawai‘i to rise up and express our outrage about Duterte, who released him early from prison. There’s been organizing about the human rights situation in the Philippines. You may remember Pemberton is the one who was convicted of killing Jennifer Laude in Olongapo back in 2014. He killed her by drowning her in a toilet bowl, claiming transphobia as his defense. This is a reminder about the so-called sovereignty of places like the Philippines and Korea, where independence is recognized but the government is still doing the will of Washington, and through the rapes and murders of women, we see what the US version of freedom and democracy looks like.

As a US state, I imagine people might think Hawai‘i has more of a voice than Okinawa and Guåhan in getting Washington to listen. But our so-called leadership here is all in the pockets of the military industrial complex—100%. And our governor, who is Okinawan heritage, won’t stand up to the military at all.

MO: Guåhan and Okinawa are similar in terms of power relations to the governments.

ST: Two days ago, the newspaper reported the navy ship Roosevelt was affected by COVID-19. They planned to come to Okinawa first, thinking that there is enough space in Okinawa for 3,000 US personnel to stay. But they reconsidered, thinking that it might cause problems, so they stopped [those plans]. They went to Guam.

MO: This is why it is important to have—

LN: Those connections. As if that wasn’t problematic enough. This past weekend, we “hosted” another ship, which is the USS Ronald Reagan; again, thousands of people on our shores. I’m not saying they necessarily have COVID, but what was disturbing is we had local people that work on the base or that have military privileges because they are military connected, and they were on the base, and they were taking footage of gatherings where they were not required to wear masks or use any protective gear. They gather in clumps of people, meanwhile. Not only do they have free license and free rein off their ship to do what they want, our governor puts us on lockdown because last week we saw the biggest spike ever. In one day, we had 105 positive cases for coronavirus. That’s the biggest single day cases we ever had. Remember, our population is 160,000, so of course, our governor is locking us down. Over the weekend, she gave us 12 hours so you could get what you need before lockdown. Now we are in lockdown for the week. We were not

allowed to leave our house. The same week that soldiers were not only called into port, but they were allowed to walk around irresponsibly like that, not being held accountable.

MO: So the local people are held accountable but not the military personnel. They have the free rein to do whatever they want except if they test positive, but the problem is you don't know because of the incubation period who is really positive or not. I think both of these situations, Guåhan and Okinawa, are classic examples of colonial relationship, Okinawa's relation to the Japanese central government and in relationship to the US government, the relationship between the US and Japan, and of course, Guåhan is still a colony. Are there specific ways that the situation is impacting women in your location?

ST: First of all, coronavirus affects women. Many single mothers work in low paid, unstable work, for instance at night clubs and other places. These stores and clubs and bars are closed, so they cannot work. This specifically hurts single mothers with children whose school being closed have to eat lunch at home because having lunch at school was helpful for children in low-income homes. We have kind of shops open, free lunch for those single mothers, and many students are affected because when they pass the exam to the universities and colleges, they so much depended on their income by their part-time job as waitress and others, but now it's closed so they can't have those incomes in Japan and even in Okinawa. Some women students decide to quit studying, so I called the president of Christian University and said they shouldn't drop any students because of coronavirus; they should prepare scholarships or any other way to support individual students because many women are suffering from their economic life. My granddaughter, who has a part-time job at a restaurant as waitress was affected. When her employer was tested positive, while she and other employees awaited their PCR results for a month, she lived away from her mother. Her test came back negative, but during that period, she had no income.

KC: Yes, all of these issues resonate with our situation in Hawai'i. The economy is so dependent on tourism, so when the governor shut down tourism, things went into crisis. To be clear, we need to tell the tourists to stop coming because every time they stop, our COVID numbers stabilize. But we need universal basic income; otherwise, people are in crisis. The hotel workers have suffered with shutdown. We were paying attention to the situation in Guåhan, when the military used the civilian hotels for their quarantine. The situation for those workers really brings the importance of our work into focus. Here we have the military, a harbinger of death in the first place, bringing more death through COVID. Then we have the tourist hotel, an extension of the colonial relationship, providing "service" jobs and cheapening indigenous cultures. Then we have the housekeeping job, usually done by non-unionized women. Everything you want to know about how Americanization will accelerate insecurity. Radically stupid in general, and dangerous for women. Also, the vast majority of hotel workers in Hawai'i are Filipina and Micronesian

women, and those are the communities hit hardest by COVID. A Filipina friend of mine had two different people die in her apartment building in Kalihi, a predominantly Filipino neighborhood. Where I work at UH-West O‘ahu, we had our first student die from COVID two weeks ago, also of Filipino background.

Hawai‘i’s Comission on the Status of Women has gotten some international attention for a report they did on a feminist economic recovery plan, centering on where women work and how they are uniquely affected. It’s worth reading, although I don’t know if Hawai‘i should be given any credit for implementing those suggestions! COSW has also done a good job sounding the alarm about femicide, particularly in Makiki, another working-class neighborhood in Honolulu. It’s important to stress the gendered dimension of being trapped in the house all the time, particularly when unemployment is high, and people are getting evicted everywhere. In Hawai‘i, our houses are very cramped, and homelessness is epidemic. Where I teach, we had a student, Kayla Holder, and her baby Kainoa; both were killed in March, allegedly by the baby’s father. Holder was a Black/Latina pre-med student who was in the Army reserves, another connection to military violence. We also had a PhD student in nursing at UH who was killed, Mary Guo, allegedly by her partner. These murders happened within six months. It’s so hard to fathom: two women of color, students headed for the medical professions, murdered through intimate partner violence in the middle of a pandemic. Holder also was a powerful student leader who spoke up at the legislature about health disparities for Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. This is a reminder of how COVID is exacerbating patriarchal violence and making our goals for gender equality and justice harder to attain.

MO: Both. If you are a student, you are affected, economically, or are a low-income mother, single parents, etc.

ST: For single mothers, we are opening many volunteer stores, and people bring material for food, and they make lunch box to distribute to—

MO: Local people.

ST: Local people are volunteering.

MO: Lisa, what about in Guåhan?

LN: Yes. The same kind of impact is happening in terms of the downturn of the community. I mean the economy, of an island of 160,000. I keep using that as the frame of reference. We have over 40,000 unemployment claims filed. You can imagine economically what that’s going to look like when all those unemployment dollars run out. To add a little bit of caveat in terms of our colonial status, unemployment insurance is something that

we've never had. So you know how that's a baseline for US states when you lose your job; you file for unemployment, your life goes on, you adjust, and you get a new job; we've never had that option. Unemployment because of COVID is the first time that we've been able to file for unemployment insurance because of the CARES Act. The number of people filing is over 40,000 in a community of 160,000. Our two primary economies are tourism, which has disappeared, and militarism. We know those dollars don't flow in. We are in a bad economic situation. The other part that's impacting women, of course, is with all of this home quarantine: there is the potential for domestic violence; it is happening in these homes. Not only are children impacted, spouses are impacted; domestic violence is on the increase. That's clear. I think that's a global phenomenon. The third difficult piece is that children are being, you know, the schools are obviously not able to have face-to-face contacts, so on the one level, you have children having to be home, and of course the burden of home schooling these kids, even when you are employed and working from home, is a responsibility that generally falls on women. I have a colleague who's on sabbatical from the university, and she is home schooling six children. The blessing is being on sabbatical during that time, but the expectation of women is to be able to do that as well. Another connected issue is that because our level of poverty is high, many families in our communities do not have connectivity. You have kids, girls, boys, all of them trying to do online school on a cellphone, driving to places to try and catch Wi-Fi. That's the gravity of the situation. It's an unfortunate time all around. We need to figure out how to do something for the quality of the education for kids this year because as a territory, we rank, if not at the bottom, in the bottom five in comparison to the rest of the United States; we are already at a serious disadvantage. You have this COVID experience where access to education is nil. One of the projects that we are doing in our organization called "I Hagan Famalao'an Guåhan," which is the daughters of the women of Guåhan, is yesterday we purchased laptops, and we are going to do lending service to families that are not able to access that, and we are also going to give them Wi-Fi cards, so they can get connectivity, so they can access educational medias. But that's how ground zero a lot of our suffering is.

MO: Right. When you can't depend on your government for support, that's what people do. It's what people are doing in Okinawa, supporting the low-income women and children and are providing them lunch; and Lisa, what you are saying, sharing laptops. Clearly, this is a situation that's structural. We already talked about your relationship to your governments and your relationship to the military, so if we bring it back to the citizens, people like us, what do you need the most from us now, given the seriousness of what's going on? I know in Okinawa you've been trying to stop the construction of a new base for a long time, but it still seems to keep moving forward. But in this moment, in the most immediate sense, what can we do? People here in the US who care about the situation that's terrible and familiar in both places.

ST: Now because of COVID-19, we need to protect our people from spreading, so we stopped sitting protests since last week; we stopped, but those in charge of everyday responsibility, I am responsible on Wednesday, so I go to the gate and check whether these dump trucks or concrete mixers, how many are going to work, because government is still forcing to continue this landfill work. The day before yesterday, we also went to the Defense Bureau office in Okinawa to demand they stop all the construction and also the amount of budget allocated for the new construction should be shifted to coronavirus prevention and for those who need aid economically, so we are demonstrating a good, big movement to stop construction and use this budget to support coronavirus affected. However, even a few days ago when we went to their office, they maintained that in order to avoid the danger of the Futenma Air Station, they need to construct a new base. It’s a twenty-four-year-old argument that they are still using today. We need to stop this construction. Why do we need to build up militarism so much to prepare for war?

KC: Being in Okinawa, we were so inspired by the tenacity of the movement there, the “kayaktivism” on Oura Bay, and the elders sitting in protest at Camp Schwab. Whether by land or by sea, the Okinawans show you how it’s done! During RIMPAC, we weren’t able to do that same level of protest. But we were able to do a caravan with our cars painted with slogans, and drive around the island to spread our message. We used that tactic also for the justice for Jennifer Laude action. There have been some actions for Black Lives in solidarity with Breonna Taylor recently, and folks have been good about social distancing.

Here in Hawai‘i, I think the genuine security agenda needs to happen at two levels: at the police/local level and the military/global level. In Hawai‘i, we’re at the intersection between the domestic and the foreign policies both highly militarized. More work needs to be done to link the movements for Black lives/defund the police with the movements to protect island nations/defund the military. In Hawai‘i, people say that the police are different here, not as racist as on the continent, probably because there’s fewer white people. But the truth is, our police budget is the same, our police are trained in the same way, and we have little transparency. People are starting to organize to raise awareness, but the Honolulu police department has already had an increase in their budget. This is happening all within a year of the stand-off at Mauna Kea, where the state spent over \$9 million protecting the interests of the Thirty Meter Telescope, this massive industrial project on top of one of the most sacred mountains in Hawai‘i. That received more international attention than any event in Hawai‘i’s recent history. We still have to work hard to keep central the genuine security lessons—the police and military cannot keep getting a blank check every time they go to the legislature. So many ways that our budget priorities are not in alignment with survival and peace.

MO: Recently, the UN secretary general has called for a global cease fire. Stop the mili-

tarism, drop all of that because it is such a serious time right now, and resources can be used for things that you described, for example. Lisa, what about on your end?

LN: I echo what Suzuyo-san is saying. There was an effort in the US at one point, calling to move the military money, now more than ever. We, like Okinawa, are undergoing massive military buildup, in preparation for the transfer of marines from Okinawa to Guåhan. Nothing stops their construction, not COVID, not finding ancestral remains, nothing at all. Nothing that would cause any human to pause has caused it to pause. If we have to find some silver lining in COVID, this experience is a defining moment for humanity, I think, the world over. It is going to come to the point where Congress is going to have to decide between militarism and human need. Maybe it's still not at that point, but that point will come. In terms of what the US base folks could do to assist is to pressure Congress in terms of shifting those funding streams because it's so destructive to our communities in a time where people don't have jobs. As Suzuyo has described, the pressure of even food, for children not to be able to eat school lunch program resulting in them being hungry. I mean that's unacceptable in this day and age, so it's going to come down to those kinds of choices, and I hope that through pressure and through advocacy we will be able to shift the military money to focus on human needs and human security and genuine security.

MO: Right. In the US, this is exactly the moment. There's a whole movement to defund the police, but to open that frame and say police are part of the military apparatus; let's defund the whole thing. Transfer the money to things that human beings on the planet need to survive. This is, as you said, Lisa, a defining moment, I think, in human history. I don't think that's an exaggeration. What do you want us to remember?

LN: So for us in Guåhan, I end with a reminder. While the United States justifies its massive, immense militarism with the goal of democracy, even on the "US soil of Guåhan," that democracy doesn't exist. This is an oppressive system with minimal basic rights, and that the military is the hammer with which it exercises its own interests in terms of globalization. You can look and reframe the agenda, the military agenda, and recognize the harms it's causing to the communities that it bumps up against.

MO: We, in the US, have to see that. Suzuyo, what about you? What do you want to tell us?

ST: I think the people in the US, I hope they sometimes think about what their military are doing on other soil, how it affects others' soil. I feel that big fire in California, the US as a government has to pay more attention to protect their people or their land and how to keep them safe. Even in the United States, people are suffering.

MO: Thank you both for helping us connect all the dots, Okinawa, Guåhan, USA. It's a pleasure even though the news is so depressing many times; it's a pleasure to talk with you and to be reminded that we need to keep redefining what is genuine security.

Suzuyo connected us in Okinawa. You also heard from Professor Lisa Natividad, who's at the University of Guam. They each spoke about the specific ways in which the US military personnel are central in spreading COVID in both Guam and Okinawa. You heard both of them talk about how the numbers have spiked since the military have appeared in their respective locations. The problem in Japan, of course, is compounded by the Japanese government encouraging tourism, and in fact, subsidizing tourist activities, and Okinawa is one of the favorite tourist spots, especially in summer because of the scuba diving and coral and all those things. I would like to welcome Professor Ayano Ginoza, who is connected to the island studies program, a brand-new program. She is at the University of the Ryukyus. Welcome to Women's Magazine, Professor Ginoza. It's great to have you.

AG: Thank you for having me. As to the recent situation in Okinawa in relation to the US military, speaking from an island studies perspective, I feel that the issues Suzuyo, Lisa, and Kim have illuminated have a lot to do with the notion of paradise, going to islands of paradise. I've read that US military personnel's remark, "I'm from California. We are on lockdown, so we can't go anywhere. But it's like a paradise in Okinawa. You can buy beer, and walk on the street drinking or on the beach, and have parties. Nobody complains." The military means opportunities for international travel, and Okinawa is imagined as their destination for rest and recreation (R&R). That is a subtropical foreign island of a constructed drawing notion for the US military personnel to militarized islands like Okinawa, Guåhan, and Hawai'i.

MO: So for soldiers, it's adventurous and paradise. Wasn't it also an R&R spot during the US war in Vietnam and kind of the launch pad also?

AG: Yes, that has been an important issue not fully addressed in island studies or academia. Those subtropical islands in the Asia-Pacific serve as their resting spot where they prepare and reinvigorate for the war, where they might be seriously injured or even die.

MO: In fact, the sex industry in Thailand is directly the result of in the beginning, Thailand having been a big "rest and recreation" spot for US military personnel. The connection between serving young men and places "for recreation and rest" has been tied in with local economies and a location in relation to a war or in relation to bases.

AG: The notion of R&R has long existed in the military and been considered as a "necessity" for the military institution. Most R&R sites were built in former US colonies or

militarized locations for the soldiers to relax, release stress, and alleviate frustrations. As documented in the International Women's Network Against Militarization, sexual violence against local people tends to occur against women, young girls, and sexual minorities. However, linkages between colonialism, women, and long-term US military hosting nations are rarely addressed by the local media. Even if they were discussed in local and US media, they are often limited to heinous crimes against the local people, with the perpetrators being a "few bad apples" instead of a structural and hyper-masculine violence.

MO: Yes, there is a whole lot assumption here about a certain kind of muscularity, where sexual release and so forth are important for military preparedness, and that's been consistent across the ages where rape is justified and all those kinds of things that we are seeing in Okinawa, Philippines, and Korea. Violence against women is seen as preparation for war.

AG: In addition, islands are often considered as feminine while military as masculine, and islands are assumed to take on a "traditional" gender role to serve and heal the military when they come from war/work. Such a notion of patriarchal gender roles has been in existence for a long time throughout the history of colonization of Asia and the Pacific islands.

MO: I was thinking, also, it's not just they are islands. It's the islands plus they are colonized islands, even though the situation of Okinawa in relation to Japan is a little bit different than the situation of Guam to the US; nonetheless, the countries in the islands are together because of colonial project. Can you talk a little bit about how that plays out in Okinawa?

AG: Okinawa plays a crucial role for Japanese national security. Since Japan was deprived of its own military after WWII, although they have a self-defense force that has an equivalent war readiness to the military, the government justifies hosting of the US bases in Japan as a must to maintain safety and security of the Asia and Pacific. Hence, as Suzuyo mentioned, Okinawa is burdened with seventy percent of the total US bases in all Japan, although it is only 0.6% of Japan's total land area. The history of Ryukyu-Okinawa documented that Okinawa existed as an independent Ryukyu Kingdom for centuries and was militarily colonized and racially discriminated against by Japan. Its name was taken away, and it was renamed Okinawa. Given that, it is not an overstatement to say Okinawa is in a colonial state. Further, with such high percentage of the US bases in Okinawa against the will of Okinawans, we are doubly colonized. Both nation-states tactically use the geopolitical location of Okinawa as a nation of islands that is further away from Tokyo and Washington to silence the voices of Okinawans. For instance, Tokyo or Washington demands, as Suzuyo and Lisa talked about, the US military remains privileged to not release any information about the COVID pandemic situation inside the

bases. The SOFA, Status of Forces Agreement between Japan and the US, continues to protect the US military in foreign countries, not the local people.

MO: Yes, that speaks to the political relationship between the two countries. For listeners who are not aware of this, SOFA, the Status of Forces Agreement, is the binding agreement between the host country and the US military. In it, certain conditions are laid out regarding what the US military is responsible for, and what the host country is responsible for. All of this is negotiated politically and behind closed doors and in secret. Local people never get to participate in making the decisions about that. The important part that's been discussed in other conversations is the ways in which, particularly in East Asia, the US military personnel basically operate with impunity. They can commit all kinds of violations against local people but are not held accountable thanks to SOFA. Could you give us the brief history of the Japanese colonization of Okinawa in case our listeners don't know that history?

AG: Okinawa existed as its own independent country known as the Ryukyu Kingdom for hundreds of years until it was colonized by Japan in 1879. During World War II, Japan designated Okinawa as the last battleground for Japan and the US. One fourth of Okinawans were killed in the war, including those who were forced to commit suicide by the Japanese military. Many were women or families that had women and girls. After the war, Emperor Hirohito declared that Okinawa would be under US occupation for twenty-seven years until 1972, while Japan's occupation by the US lasted only seven years.

MO: That's a huge difference and clearly is an example of the unequal relationship of Okinawa as a colony of Japan, one of the things, I think, that is important and that was brought up by both Suzuyo and Lisa. That is the way in which this coronavirus has impacted women. They both talked about losing jobs, and this includes not just as housewives and mothers, particularly single mothers, but students who are dependent on part-time work. Can you talk a little bit about maybe some of the economic and social impacts of coronavirus on Okinawan women?

AG: Okinawan women, after the war in particular, having lost men in the war, were at the core of rebuilding the economy in Okinawa, and they still occupy an important part of the economy, especially in the tourist section, which is the main economy in Okinawa. Tourism is significantly impacted by pandemic and also domestic violence, which is on the rise during the pandemic.

MO: This is so consistent. Everyone I've interviewed in the last three shows has spoken exactly what you are talking about, the increase in violence against women, especially husbands beating up their wives out of frustration or whatever the reasons are. As the coronavirus is spiking, so is the violence against women, and of course the economic

aspects of it. From your perspective, as somebody who studies what's happening in Okinawa as an island, and I think the point you made about the specificity of being in a paradise island shapes so much of the decisions made by the central government because they are an island, but they are attached to Japan even though the people of Okinawa have spoken consistently about getting rid of the US bases. The Japanese government has refused. In fact, there's been a big struggle around the construction of the new base in Henoko. What's to do about this? Particularly for the US base listeners, what should be our role in supporting Okinawan people, supporting the opposition to the US bases? Is there a way that we can make that connection? As you know, since you've lived in the States, things outside the US are often ignored by many people in the US. They don't even know about it. How should we be thinking about it in light of the defund the police movement that's part of Black Lives Matter? What's the connection between demilitarization and defunding the police?

AG: I feel saddened and upset by the news of police shooting against Black people in the US. I joined a Black Lives Matter march with my family in front of a US military base in Okinawa with a sign in hand. My daughter also had a sign that she made. There were many cars driving by us going in and out of the base. At first, they didn't even read the signs or seemed to show no interest, perhaps being disappointed by a thought that we were protesting against the US base existence in Okinawa again! But as soon as they read the signs, they started to honk at us, waved their hands, and even smiled at us in support. That march was organized by a woman who has roots in the Black and Okinawan communities, her family, and friends. Moments like this are important occasions to realize how your issues are mine too, despite national and language barriers. Okinawans are also marginalized in Japan like many of the US soldiers who serve in the military, who are racial, sexual, and socioeconomic minorities.

MO: That's amazing. The kinds of connections you are been talking about, human connections, kind of going deeper into what's happening in both sites, with poverty disproportionately affecting young men and women of color, all the working class and poor, is an important connection you are talking about. For our listeners, I think it's exactly those kinds of connections that we need to make if we are to address both sides of the ocean, so to speak, deal with demilitarizing Okinawa and other places where the US military is and also demilitarizing the US by defunding the police and so forth. Anything else you want us to think about in relation to what's happening in Okinawa with COVID in particular but the base issues in general?

AG: I have been seeing an increase in online communications because of the pandemic. I think this is the moment that we can connect using social media and the internet in general. We can maybe spread the word by doing such activities, and it can start from the five of us here, and what we are doing here hopefully reaches more readers and listeners. I'm

hoping that people from the US can also speak to us.

MO: You know solidarity has to go both ways, so Okinawan people supporting the Black Lives movement, and people in the US, especially people of color, supporting demilitarization; that would be a good reciprocal solidarity to build together, wouldn't it?

AG: Yes, Indeed.

MO: News about the US military spreading COVID has been reported on NPR and in the UK Guardian. Today, you had the chance to listen to Suzuyo Takazato, Lisa Natividad, Kim Compoc, and Ayano Ginoza, real voices of feminists representing the most affected people in Okinawa, Hawai'i, Guåhan. We have a chance, in this moment, of calling for the defunding and dismantling of the police, to make the connection between here and there. Think about the police as a local segment of the national military apparatus, the military actors we face directly. What would it take to dismantle the institutions altogether? Imagine all the ways in which nearly \$2.5 billion per day the US spends on the national military could be used. This amount doesn't even include the billions spent by the cities for the police, but the bigger question is: What values must we embrace in order to be able to imagine our vision of genuine, life-affirming security? That's it for today's show.

A very special thanks to our engineers and to my guests. I'm Margo Okazawa-Rey. Coronavirus infections are multiplying all over, so take all necessary precautions, and because of everything going on around us and in the wider world, please let's stay deeply connected to our loved ones and comrades. I insist: stand steadily in your purpose. Love even more deeply. Dance, of course, and play and find your joy.