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PACS 602: Re/Presenting Oceania  
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### Reflection Paper #1: Yuntaku and Art-Making with Okinawan Grassroots Movement Leaders



(Okinawan movement leaders who shared their personal stories and in what ways they have been involved in U.S. military resistance in Okinawan. Holding the sign they made that day.

L-R: Hiroshi Ashitomi, Takuma Higashima, Hideki Yoshikawa)

Yuntaku is the Okinawan word for “talk story” as we say in Hawai’i, which basically means to sit around in a casual setting and talk. On this day, Friday Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup>, we sat with Okinawan Grassroots Movement Leaders who shared with us the reason they came to Hawai’i – to spotlight the ongoing community resistance to U.S. military expansion in Okinawa. This casual talk story was meant as a way to share stories with other leaders across the Pacific and make protest signs for the protest that was planned the next day. The protest was to be outside of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the message was that the IUCN is lacking on an analysis of military buildup and the effects it has on the environment in the Pacific.

This casual talk story turned into a time to share and connect with cultures across the Pacific, as we had activists from Hawai’i, Guam, Japan, Brazil, Korea and many other places present. We connected not only on our efforts of military resistance in each respected area, but also on the shared understandings that land, culture and respect of life are values that drive our ways of living.

We spent the first hour sitting in a circle, facing each other, and sharing where we come from,

why we were there that day, and whatever else we wanted to share about the Pacific or U.S. Military resistance. This first hour was so important to me. The personal stories that were shared were so inspirational and I felt the love and the connection that each person was putting out for us. Old friendships were reignited, and new friendships sparked. Getting to know each other, and caring for each other is such an important aspect of movement building. And just as important, or even more important so, it's part of our journey of being human and honoring each other, who we are, where we come from, and what we stand for. To be heard and held in this space was really the biggest takeaway that I got.



(Activist Christine Ahn shares how she organizes demilitarization work in Korea and worldwide.)

Many personal heroes of mine were present that day, including Christine Ahn, who is pictured above. Although she is based in Hawai'i currently, Christine travels with her demilitarization work. She was present at the last IUCN meeting that happened on Jeju Island in South Korea 4 years ago and she was there again to protest the American military presence in South Korea and the Pacific. Christine has been a peace activist for many years, and she is one of the co-founders of Women Cross DMZ, which she talked about here as well. As stated on the Women Cross DMZ website as of Sept. 17, 2016, they are "a global movement of women mobilizing to end the Korean War, reunite families, and ensure women's leadership in peace building." The years of commitment that she has put towards peace-

building over numerous years is really an inspiration to me. And throughout all the activism she does, she is one of the nicest, sweetest people you will have met. She carries a lot of energy and optimism with her, which is refreshing and nice.

Everyone continued to speak in this manner. Another person who spoke was Kenneth Gofigan Kuper, who organizes Oceania Rising at University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and is also a Center of Pacific Island Studies graduate. He comes from Guahan, and is currently based in Hawai'i for graduate school. I've seen him share poetry on Guahan liberation previously, which I thoroughly enjoyed. His knowledge and dedication to Guahan is very inspiring, and his dedication to learn the Chamoru language to its fullest is amazing. As I am learning my own indigenous language, te reo Ma'ohi, it is always helpful to see people who learn a language and come to master it over the years. Hopefully I can be at that place one day, as well.

I shared my personal dedication to Oceania as I am from Hawai'i and my ancestors come from Tahiti. I feel a part of the land here in Hawai'i as it helped raise and nurture me, and I honor the land where my mother is from – Tahiti. I love to see people who care about this region, who speak about it with passion, and who invest in the future of this place for the tamari'i (children) to come. My biggest inspiration in going to these events is the Nuclear Free and Independent Movement (NFIP). I've seen the power that Oceania has when the people come together with care for her. With the enormous help of the NFIP movement, nuclear testing by the French was stopped in Tahiti. And so I feel it is now my responsibility to carry on that care for Oceania that was established during the NFIP movement.

At the end of the circle, the visitors from Okinawa were able to share their stories. One activist, Hiroshi Ashitomi has been involved in the movement with Okinawa for many years. He's also been in solidarity with the Pacific for a very long time and he started by saying that he is returning to Hawai'i after 10 years. The last time he came was with the Network for Okinawan Women for protests against the Stryker Brigade (U.S. military buildup of army infantry) that was happening in Hawai'i. He was familiar with the Hawai'i-based demilitarization activists that were present that day (Aunty Terry

Keko'olani and Kyle Kajihiro) and I enjoyed seeing them talk about their long-standing relationships and how they have progressed in their areas over the years.

We ended the Yuntaku by creating art for the protest the next day and continuing to talk with each other in smaller groups.



Pictured left above: Aunty Terry searching for art supplies

Pictured right above: Aiko Yamashiro, who co-organized the event, holding a sign that was created that day by Kyle Kajihiro. This sign pictures the Dugong, which are marine mammals found in Henoko Bay in Okinawa. They are being threatened by the proposed U.S. Military base in Henoko Bay. Okinawan activist, Hiroshi Ashitomi stated that these animals are sacred in their culture, and there are many

reasons to work towards preservation of the dugong for Okinawa.

Themes that we cover in Re/representing Oceania came through at this event. In class we have studied themes of who represents Oceania, and who has the power in those representations. Starting with colonization, we see that the Pacific starts to become represented by Westerners and colonizers in many ways – maps, writing, art, etc. And colonizers had power in those representations, such as Gauguin. He painted Tahitian life and women through a European lens, and made those representations available to the French and European, and now his representations are known world-wide.

With this event, we are in the Ao Fo'ou Ta: A New Time, as Vilsoni Hereniko has written about in his essay, “Representations of Cultural Identities.” During this new time, Pacific Islanders are able to represent themselves. The Yuntaku shows that Pacific Islanders are taking agency of what is going on in our lands, and creating regional identities. We are building relationships across Oceania, on our own terms. We are representing Oceania with our own voices and we are saying things like “No Military Bases in Henoko Bay,” and “Free West Papua.”



Pictured above are all the activists who were present that day to share and encourage each other's struggles towards freedom and self-determination in our homelands. I feel extremely grateful to have shared my time with these folks and look forward to doing further work with them in many different ways.