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Base Built in the Middle of ‘Rice Fields’: A Politics of Ignorance in Okinawa

Hidefumi Nishiyama

Geography Research Unit, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of ignorance in contemporary imperial geopolitics and the political geography of islands. Ignorance and imperialism have gone hand in hand since as early as the European age of ‘discovery’. The idea of empty spaces empowered earlier European colonial expansion by ignoring the existence of non-white indigenous people and communities. A few centuries later, the cartographic discourse of empty spaces still appears to be at work today in islands such as Okinawa where US bases have been stationed since the mid-twentieth century. The paper conducts a study of ignorance, or an agnotological study, of Okinawa. There has been a growing interest in studies of ignorance in the past few years, notably in sociology, science and technology studies, and studies of race and racism. Yet, ignorance as a focal point of analysis seems to be underdeveloped in studies of geopolitics and islands despite that the production of ignorance contributes to the maintaining of existing imperial spatial orders. The paper particularly examines the dominant discourses of US officials around the history of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which often ignore, or disguise at best, the colonial foundation of military bases in Okinawa.

Introduction

Ignorance has increasingly drawn scholarly attention across disciplines in recent years. In the traditions of social sciences and humanities, much emphasis had been placed on the production of knowledge. ‘Philosophers love to talk about knowledge’, as Robert N. Proctor (2008) puts it. Yet, as ignorance studies, or ‘agnotology’, as well as studies of race and racism have explored, the analysis of ignorance has been shown to be as crucial as the analysis of knowledge for understanding social and political processes (Gross and McGoey 2015b; Proctor and Schiebinger 2008; Sullivan and Tuana 2007). Contrary to the conventional view that ignorance is the mere absence of knowledge, ignorance is increasingly conceptualised as something people and institutions actively *produce*; ignorance is something to be *practiced* and has social and political implications. Not only is each enquiry always

CONTACT Hidefumi Nishiyama  hidefumi.nishiyama@oulu.fi  Geography Research Unit, University of Oulu, Oulu 90014, Finland

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necessarily selective, but also what is unknown is consciously produced. Moreover, as Charles W. Mills (2007) emphasises in his writing on ‘white ignorance’, there are collective efforts to ignore historical events in which a particular social group reproduces their dominant position over others in the present. Ignorance as a focal point of analysis has been relatively underdeveloped in studies of geopolitics and political geography more broadly. Studies of geopolitics have long focused on the politics of knowledge and how particular knowledge is produced to serve certain political ends. As geographers as well as international relations scholars (for example, Campbell 1998; Ó Tuathail 1996) underscored since the 1990s, knowledge has been conceptualised as something that *writes* global space. Against this tradition, there has recently been a call for bringing ignorance as an analytical focus. As Tom Slater (2019, 20) puts it: ‘Geographers, whether radical or not, have traditionally and justifiably been concerned with epistemology – the production of knowledge. But in 2018, this by itself seems insufficient. How is *ignorance* produced, by whom, for whom, and against whom?’

Following the theoretical and methodological frameworks informed by a range of studies of ignorance, this paper conducts a study of ignorance, or agnotological study, in the context of islands and in doing so, it aims to contribute to the existing political geography of islands. As Alison Mountz (2015) reports, emerging scholarship on islands by political geographers shows that studies of islands offer critical insights to the understanding of space, power, and politics. Today, islands such as Diego Garcia, Guam, Hawai’i, and Okinawa host US military bases and facilities, without which contemporary American military operations cannot be archived, and thus, cannot be understood. Sasha Davis (2015), for his part, explores how islands are important sites not only for the spatial understanding of power but also for understanding how imperial order is contested. Outside the discipline of geography, anthropologists and interdisciplinary island studies scholars also underscore that islands are crucial strategic sites for American geopolitics (for example, Baldacchino 2013; Lutz 2009; Vine 2015). Yet, despite the proliferation of literature in this field, little has been discussed about how ignorance plays a role in the geopolitics of islands and how it contributes to the imperial formation of global space. In this paper, I examine the active, ongoing, production of ignorance in militarised islands and show how it contributes to contemporary geopolitics. I argue that the analysis of ignorance is important for understanding the geopolitics of islands not simply because militarised islands – perhaps most notably Diego Garcia – are typically neglected in media discourse (Vine 2015, 3) and sometimes in critical writings on contemporary imperialism (inter alia Gregory 2004), which tend to concentrate their attention on the theatres of war, leaving old and banal colonialisms in islands understudied (Davis 2011). It is also important because ignorance is continuously produced by US officials and serves the reproduction of existing imperial

spatial orders. I show this through a case study of Okinawa, particularly focusing on the ongoing production of ignorance concerning the history of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

It should be noted that the production of ignorance sometimes overlaps with that of knowledge, which entails the marginalisation of particular peoples, places, histories. Across the Pacific islands, the production of knowledge continues to order and normalise colonial relations. In Hawai'i, for instance, US dominant narratives as narrated in museums and memorials naturalise the presence of US military, and in doing so, they render American colonialism and dispossession of the islands unintelligible (Ferguson and Turnbull 1998, 43–76; Gonzalez 2013; Herman 2008; Ireland 2011). In Japan, school textbooks have repeatedly downplayed the history of Japanese imperial violence against Okinawans, including incidents of 'mass suicides' during the Second World War in which the islanders were ordered to kill each other by the Japanese military. Some were killed directly by the Japanese military on allegations of spying, while others killed each other as they were convinced by the military that they would be slaughtered and raped by Americans if they surrendered (Aniya 2008; McCormack and Norimatsu 2018, 15–50). Selective representation can indeed be understood as a type or component of ignorance and, in this respect, the politics of ignorance intersects with the politics of memory and forgetting (cf. Bell 2006; Legg 2007; Till 2003). Yet, forgetting is a subset of ignorance; as Proctor (2008, 2–3) notes, ignorance is generated not only by forgetting but also apathy, disinformation, neglect, secrecy, and so on. Similarly, the white ignorance that Mills explores is 'a form of not knowing (seeing wrongly), resulting from the habit of erasing, dismissing, distorting, and forgetting about the lives, cultures, histories of peoples whites have colonized' (Bailey 2007, 85). The reason for my focus on ignorance that is actively produced is to delineate the role of the production of ignorance rather than just treating ignorance as a by-product of knowledge through marginalisation.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section discusses the theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying ignorance. It begins with a discussion around the ideas of empty spaces and empty islands that were constructed in cartographic discourses and practices since earlier European imperialism. The section then synthesises critical writings on empty spaces with more recent literature in agnotology and ignorance studies and highlights the important relations between power and ignorance, which can be juxtaposed with the theoretical framework of power-knowledge that has widely been adopted from earlier writings of critical geopolitics to recent geographical studies of islands (for example, Ó Tuathail 1996; Davis 2015, 15). The second section conducts what may be characterised as an 'agnotological' discourse analysis of US official statements around the history of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The section specifically looks at recent statements on the foundation of the base. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma is located in

the middle of densely populated residential areas in Ginowan City and has long been criticised by local residents. In the past few years, US officials have repeatedly produced ignorance around the fact that the base was originally built in the middle of 'rice fields', implicitly blaming local residents for creating its current dangerous conditions. In doing so, they completely ignored the military's requisition of land during and after the Second World War. Drawing from their discursive production of ignorance, I argue that the powerful does not only produce ignorance but the production of ignorance is also an integral part of their identity – as security provider rather than as the cause of insecurity – and reinforces the existing power and security relations between the US military and Okinawa. The paper concludes with a note on resistance to ignorance and its relation to the question of demilitarisation and decolonisation. While there are different opinions towards the presence of US military among Okinawans (for example, Inoue 2007; Nishiyama 2019), ignorance concerning the history of Marine Corps Air Station has been challenged by local residents and organisations who demonstrate the pre-war existence of people and communities in the place where the base was built. Their counter-narratives, I suggest, are more than correcting the history of this particular area in Okinawa; they are an important step for the demilitarisation, and decolonisation in effect, of Okinawa.

Writing an Empty Space through the Production of Ignorance

Ignorance was constitutive of earlier European imperialism when ignoring the existence of indigenous people, which was manifested in the idea of 'empty', 'new', or 'unknown' spaces, as part of their colonial expansion. As Irvin C. Schick (1999, 48) notes, the 'unknown' lands were, somewhat contradictorily, included in the production of earlier global maps, which were only to be 'discovered' and appropriated by Europeans. Cartographic discourses and practices around the idea of emptiness have long been problematised by scholars across disciplines. Drawing from the case of Australia, Simon Ryan (1994), for instance, argues that representing a previously 'unknown' space as a blank in maps is an active practice of erasing that space and people who had long inhabited that space. By referring to emptiness, it also legitimised such erasure and simultaneously the implementation of a new order by Europeans (Ryan 1994, 116). It was a form of the production of geographical ignorance that empowered, and was empowered by, the European invasion and territorial acquisition of non-European lands. The idea of 'discovery' produces a similar type of ignorance, the idea that is prevalent in the context of Christopher Columbus' landing on the Americas. 'By saying that Columbus discovered America, we somehow imply that there was nobody there before him, thereby tacitly suppressing the memory of the millions of people who were actually living there at the

time of his arrival' (Zerubavel 2005, ix). For the millions of indigenous people, as Eviatar Zerubavel (2005, 3) notes, the 'discovery' was not a beginning; rather, it marked an end. Walter D. Mignolo also notes that the writing of empty or new spaces out of ignorance went hand in hand with colonisation. Mignolo (1995, 259) argues:

That lands and peoples unknown to a European observer should be called "New World" simply because the observer had no prior knowledge of them brings to the foreground the larger issue of the arrogance and ethnocentrism of observers for whom what is unknown does not exist. Misunderstanding went together with colonization. Once something was declared new, and the printing press consolidated the idea among the literates, the descriptions of people for whom nothing was new about the place they were inhabiting, except for the arrival of a people strange to them, were suppressed.

Cartographic discourses and practices then contribute to the imperial ordering of space not only through their production of knowledge but also through their production of ignorance. Or as Schick (1999, 48) puts it, the imperial ordering of space is conducted through 'unknowledge', which he defines as 'socially constructed lack of knowledge, that is, a conscious absence of socially pertinent knowledge'. It is different from the conventional understanding of ignorance as mere absence of knowledge, which does not recognise its active construction and process. The writing of empty spaces is such active production of ignorance, or indeed unknowledge, which rather paradoxically incorporates what is (allegedly) not known into the realm of knowledge. Following Ryan and others discussed above, Schick (1999, 49) argues that the cartographic production of ignorance is 'the enabling of colonialism' because it makes certain parts of the world lands that are 'awaiting discovery and eventual appropriation'.

Similarly, Oceanic scholars argue that the European and American imagination of the Pacific as empty was, and in many ways still has been, constitutive of the colonisation of the Pacific islands. CHamoru scholar Michael Lujan Bevacqua (2010, 67) writes: 'The emptiness is precisely what has made it so crucial in the making of empires'. Not only were the Pacific islands constructed as empty and made available for Western expansion by earlier European explorers, but indigenous peoples in places like Guam and Hawai'i also continue to be ignored in contemporary hegemonic discourse. The 'American-Pacific fantasy' continue to remove the islanders' ability to be sovereign and independent of the West and the United States (Bevacqua 2010, 78). Negating their ability to govern by themselves contributes to the idea of 'inevitable' dependency of the islands and islanders on the West and the United States in particular. As Tongan and Fijian writer Epeli Hau'ofa (1994, 150) argues in his influential essay, the Pacific islands are regarded as 'too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centers of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise

above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations’.

The critiques of the ideas of empty spaces and empty islands can benefit from the literature of ignorance studies or ‘agnotology’ (Proctor 2008) that offer more elaborated theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying ignorance. Historian of science Robert N. Proctor (1995, 2008) proposed agnotology as a theoretical framework to study the production of ignorance and its social and political impacts. Ignorance is not just a native state, which an individual eventually overcomes by acquiring knowledge. Instead, it is a construct that people passively and actively make. On the one hand, ignorance is passively produced through selective choice: ‘inquiry is always selective. We look *here* rather than *there* [...] the decision to focus on *this* is therefore invariably a choice to ignore *that*’ (Proctor 2008, 7). On the other hand, ignorance can be also made actively, which bears resemblance with the aforementioned critical writings on ‘empty spaces’. Proctor argues that ignorance can be also understood as a ‘strategic ploy’: ‘certain people don’t want you to know certain things, or will actively work to organize doubt or uncertainty or misinformation to help maintain (your) ignorance’ (Proctor 2008, 8). ‘Ignorance can be an actively engineered part of a deliberate plan’ (Proctor 2008, 9). Accordingly, Londa Schiebinger (2008) suggests:

Agnotology traces the cultural politics of ignorance. It takes the measure of our ignorance, and analyses why some knowledges are suppressed, lost, ignored, or abandoned, while others are embraced and come to shape our lives. Ignorance is [...] an outcome of cultural struggles.

More recently, a number of studies under the broad category of ‘ignorance studies’ have also explored the production of ignorance. Some of them particularly pay attention to power relations and the structure of domination in order to understand how the powerful seek ‘to deny, justify or simply ignore the reality of past and present atrocities against the less powerful’ (Gross and McGoey 2015a, 5). Their studies are, implicitly or explicitly, inspired by the earlier writing of Charles W. Mills and his suggestive concept of the ‘epistemology of ignorance’.

Mills wrote *The Racial Contract* (1997) to mark that the modern idea of social contract completely neglects its racial dimensions. The crucial transformation in the establishment of society is not, argued Mills, from natural man to civil/political man as the social contract theories suggested. Rather, it is the transformation of human populations into white and non-white, demarcating and excluding ‘the permanently prepolitical state, or perhaps better, *non-political* state ... of non-white men’ (Mills 1997, 13). In other words, the establishment of society, as understood in social contract theories, is founded upon the denial of its racial formations. Recognising and understanding such denial is, for Mills (1997, 18), an epistemology of ignorance, that is, ‘particular

patterns of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made'. Although he does not discuss further his theorisation of ignorance in the book, Mills retrospectively clarifies his point and what it means to study an epistemology of ignorance in his later writings. In his discussion of 'white ignorance', Mills (2007) states: 'What I want to pin down [...] is the idea of an ignorance, a non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in which race – white racism and/or white racial domination and their ramifications – plays a crucial causal role'. Linda Martin Alcoff (2007, 47) elaborates on Mills' account by saying that his epistemology of ignorance provides a 'structural account of the nature of oppressive systems' that systematically deploys the production of ignorance. Alcoff (2007, 47) continues:

The structural argument focuses not on *generally* differentiated experiences and interests, but on the *specific* knowing practices inculcated in a socially dominant group. [...] the structural argument argues that whites have a *positive* interest in "seeing the world wrongly", to paraphrase Mills. Here ignorance is not primarily understood as a *lack* – a lack of motivation or experience as the result of social location – but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group.

The underlying question for studies of ignorance is, accordingly, the question of power and the reproduction of power relations, not in the Foucauldian manner but in its inverted form. Not only does power interplay with knowledge but there are also intersections between power, knowledge, and ignorance. Nancy Tuana (2008, 109–10) argues:

[T]racing what is not known and the politics of such ignorance should be a key element of epistemological *and* social/political analyses, for it has the potential to reveal the role of power in the construction of what is known and provide a lens for the political values at work in our knowledge practices.

I would like to add to this question of power in the politics of ignorance by suggesting that there are what may be characterised as 'power-ignorance relations' just as much as there are 'power-knowledge relations' (Foucault 1979). By power-ignorance relations, I emphasise that the analysis of ignorance is not just to 'reveal the role of power' or 'the power dimensions of ignorance' (Tuana 2008, 111). The relations between power and ignorance are not unidirectional; ignorance is not just produced by power. Instead, as the next section of this paper explores, the relations between power and ignorance should be understood as *mutually constitutive* in that the production of a certain type of ignorance contributes to the reproduction of existing power relations. This is not to say that 'ignorance is power'¹; rather, particular power relations are reproduced through the exercise of ignorance.

In his recent contribution to *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, Mills (2015) reminds us that there is still what he calls 'racial erasure'

to this day, that is, ‘the retrospective whiting-out, the whitewashing, of the racial past in order to construct an alternative narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination’. Collective amnesia about events in the past – ranging from the fact that race and racism were central to Western modernity and that white supremacy was a global system to the existence of non-white communities in ‘virgin’ territories before European ‘discoveries’ – continues to persist in the present (Mills 2015, 220–5).² Such retrospective erasure is relevant to the understanding of geography and geopolitics as it has spatial implications in the imperial formation of global space. Perhaps more crucially, there is an urgent need to examine practices of spatial erasure, and the reproduction of power relations through these acts, as they are still actively engaged by state officials in the context of present-day islands such as Okinawa to which this paper now turns.

Spatial Erasure of the Past in the Present: US Official Discourse on Marine Corps Air Station Futenma

Okinawa, now a Japanese prefecture, consists of an archipelago located between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Its main island *Okinawa hontō* (‘Okinawa main island’, hereafter Okinawa Island) and surrounding islands were formerly unified as the Ryukyu Kingdom prior to Japan’s colonisation of the islands in the late nineteenth century. During the Second World War, Okinawa became one of the bloodiest battlefields in the Pacific theatre of the war, which resulted in over 200,000 deaths. The majority of the deaths were Okinawans: out of roughly 188,000 Japanese deaths, over 122,000 were Okinawans (Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, undated). After the war, both Japan and Okinawa were occupied by the Allied Forces. However, while the Allied occupation lasted for seven years in Japan’s main islands, it continued for another two decades in Okinawa. The San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed in 1951, between Japan and the United States, which resulted in Japan regaining sovereignty in the following year. However, the very same treaty included the provision that the US retains the right to exercise powers over Okinawa and Okinawans. Okinawa continued to be under US military occupation until 1972 when it was ‘returned’ to Japan. Under the military government, bases and military facilities were built, primarily on Okinawa Island. While there has been some reduction of military facilities on the island in the past few decades, none of the changes are significant enough to alter the militarised reality of Okinawa. According to the 2019 prefectural report (Okinawa Prefecture 2019), there are 33 US military facilities in Okinawa, which occupy 187 square kilometres, 8.2% of the total prefectural land. The concentration is much higher on Okinawa Island: nearly 15% of the island is occupied by the US military. With the heavy presence of the US military, Okinawa, along with other islands across the world such as

Diego Garcia, Guam, Hawai'i, and Puerto Rico, contributes to the formation of contemporary imperialism (inter alia Vine 2015).

Among the bases on Okinawa Island, Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (hereafter Futenma Air Base) is the arguably most well-known base, which former US secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld once described as 'the world's most dangerous base' (cited in Vine 2015, 264). Futenma Air Base is relatively small (about five square kilometres in size) but is known to be dangerous because it is located in the middle of densely populated residential areas of Ginowan City (Figure 1). Military planes and helicopters depart from, and land on, the base every day. In addition to permanent noise, local residents face risks and dangers as accidents related to the military base continue to happen. The helicopter crash into Okinawa International University in August 2004 exemplifies the magnitude of insecurity they face in their everyday lives.

Due to such conditions, security concerning the location of Futenma Air Base has been questioned, if not explicitly criticised, and a plan for its relocation has been debated among the prefectural government, Japan, and the United States. It is such contested security debates where a particular form of ignorance is repeatedly produced and comes to serve the maintenance of the existing imperial spatial orders. A recent press briefing on the Navy at the Pentagon is illustrative in this regard. On 2 May 2018, the United States Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer, the Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John M. Richardson, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps General Robert B. Neller gave a force posture update in the Pentagon briefing room. After



Figure 1. Aerial view of Futenma Air Base in 2018. Courtesy of Ginowan City.

delivering a short address on the current state of the Department of the Navy, the high ranking military officers received and answered questions from reporters. Towards the end of the briefing, one reporter asked about the delayed relocation plan of Marines at Futenma Air Base and the current security issues concerning the base. Neller, the then highest ranking officer in the Marines, replied to the reporter, outlining several reasons for the delay. In his reply to the question concerning the security issues, Neller emphasised that the base is there for ‘their [Okinawans’] security’ and that the base was originally built on an empty land where there were no people. He said:

Futenma Air Base is very old. It goes back to World War II. And if you look at pictures, Futenma when it was built was – there were no people living within several kilometers. Now the cities around Futenma are right up to the fence (U.S. Department of Defense 2018).

It is not clear which pictures Neller was referring to, but Okinawa Prefectural Archives stores a number of photographs of Futenma dated from 1945. For example, [Figure 2](#) is an aerial view of Futenma, which was taken on 30 June 1945, approximately three months after the American invasion of Okinawa and a week after the end of the main battle in Okinawa. It shows the ongoing construction of Futenma Air Base with bulldozers clearing land. As can be seen (or not seen), the image does not show people around Futenma Air Base, at least not so visibly. In this sense, Neller’s comment may seem to reflect on the actual construction of Futenma Air Base.



Figure 2. Futenma Air Base under construction. The image was taken on 30 June 1945. Source: Okinawa prefectural archives.

However, what images such as this do not capture, and what Neller ignores, is the historical context of war and invasion. Photographs of the construction of Futenma Air Base do not capture the fact that the US military requisitioned the land for building bases after battle. Neller completely ignores this. Many local residents in Okinawa were forced to flee during the conflict. Approximately 240,000 people were affected by the construction of bases and had their land appropriated by the military across Okinawa (Sellek 2003, 82). In addition, the military installations more or less coincided with the repatriation of people from Okinawa who had been abroad at the time of the end of the war. This further increased the concentration of people in Okinawa. Neller's ignorance was immediately criticised by local media and officials. *Okinawa Times* (Heianna 2018) reported the high-ranked official's comment as 'remark ignoring historical facts'. *Ryukyu Shimpo* (Zaha 2018) also published a similar article immediately after Neller's statement. At the municipal level, Ginowan City 2018 held a meeting concerning Neller's statement and demanded the US official withdraw his comment and apologise. Soon after, Okinawa Prefecture Assembly (2018) also released a similar demand. Nevertheless, neither of the demands has been met to this day.

Neller's publicly released ignorance in 2018 is not an anomaly. In fact, the ignorance of the history of Futenma Air Base has been repeatedly produced by US officials in the past years. In December 2010, Kevin Maher, the Director of the Office of Japan Affairs and former U.S. Consul-General of Okinawa, produced similar ignorance during his lecture at the Department of State.³ Maher's lecture has previously drawn attention among Okinawans as well as in the existing literature due to his comment describing Okinawans as 'lazy' (Vine 2015, 257). The lecture is worth revisiting as it illustrates not only the official's racist attitude towards Okinawans but also another discourse of spatial erasure. Or perhaps better, Maher's racist statement should be understood as a spatial practice together with his allegation of empty land.

Speaking to fourteen students from the American University who were planning to visit Okinawa to learn about issues related to US military bases there, Maher described how Futenma Air Base was built 'in the middle of rice fields'. He said:

I was the Consul General in Okinawa until 2009. It is said that a half of U.S. bases in Japan is located in Okinawa, but the statistic only includes bases used exclusively by the US Military. If all bases, US bases and bases jointly used by the US and JSDF, are considered, the percent of bases in Okinawa is much lower. The controversial bases in Okinawa were originally in the middle of rice fields, but are now in the middle of towns because Okinawans allowed urbanization and population growth to surround United States facilities (cited in Peace Philosophy Centre 2011).

More recently, similar ignorance of Futenma Air Base was reproduced by a Japanese novelist, Naoki Hyakuta during a Liberal Democratic Party's study

group in 2015 (Ryukyu Shimpo 2015). Like Neller's statement, Maher ignored the existence of local people before the military land requisition: as a local newspaper (Okinawa Times 2015) reports, there were at least ten *aza* (village sections) and over 9,000 people were living in the area by 1925. In fact, a former chief of the Section of Culture in Ginowan City Board of Education, Goya Yoshikatsu, documents that 14 village sections were appropriated for building Futenma Air Base (in Yamazaki 2017, 26). Moreover, Maher implicitly blamed Okinawans – emphasising that it is Okinawans who 'allowed urbanization and population growth' – for creating the current conditions around the base. After blaming Okinawans for their responsibility for the (in)security issues of Futenma Air Base, Maher continued to describe Okinawans as 'lazy' and 'masters of manipulation and extortion' in the lecture. He also attributed their higher-than-average divorce and drink-driving rates to 'Okinawa's culture of drinking liquor with high alcohol content' (cited in Peace Philosophy Centre 2011). The twofold colonial spatialisation appears to be in operation in here, which bears some level of resemblance with the discourse of empty spaces in earlier European imperialism. As Mills (2007) among others has noted, the idea of empty spaces in places like the Americas and Australia was in part made possible because completely different (from European) rules applied to native people, which allowed ignoring their existence. Racialising and 'othering' natives become integral to the idea of emptiness. To put it another way, 'othering' was part of cartography. As Schick (1999, 34) has suggested, 'to assert that Asians are inscrutable or Africans lazy, orientals lascivious or Native Americans cruel, is to produce maps'. Maher's racist slur 'others' Okinawans (from Americans as well as from Japanese), which produces the imaginary distance between 'here' and 'there', distancing him and other Americans and Japanese from 'lazy' and 'manipulative' Okinawans. Combined with his comment that the base was built 'in the middle of rice fields', Maher's lecture can be seen as a form of agnotological, and racist, spatialisation that not only justifies the continuation of the presence of Futenma Air Base but also 'othered' Okinawans who are allegedly lying (about the history of Futenma) and who are now made responsible for risks and dangers they face. It is also important to note that Maher's, as well as Hyakuta's, production of ignorance is situated in a pedagogical setting where a study group gain 'knowledge'. In this sense, Maher 'taught' ignorance about the history and geography of Futenma Air Base and other military bases in Okinawa.

There is also another way in which ignorance and geography interplay here. Maher's comment quoted above shows the problem of scale in the production of ignorance. Scott Frickel and Abby Kinchy (2015, 176) suggests: 'Another way that ignorance attaches to place is through spatial processes of geographical exclusion: some places do not attract the attention of science, resulting in the non-production of knowledge about those places'. That is to say, 'ignorance can be produced by aggregating or disaggregating data in ways that mask evidence of existing patterns' (Frickel and Kinchy 2015, 179). Maher

alleged that the heavy presence of bases in Okinawa is much less severe when calculated at a larger scale, which includes *all* military (including the Japanese Self-Defence Force) facilities in Japan. Such re-scaling of the distribution of bases ignores the degree of concentration and the percentage of bases in each area within the country. As of today, seventy per cent (not a half) of US bases are still located within Okinawa, which counts for less than one percent of the entire Japanese land (Okinawa Prefecture 2019). This type of ignorance was produced by ‘aggregating data at an inappropriately large scale’ (Frickel and Kinchy 2015, 179).

Other US official discourse around Futenma Air Base produces doubt and uncertainty rather than explicit ignorance. On 4 September 2012, at his inaugural conference in Okinawa, the U.S. Consul-General Alfred R. Magleby stated that ‘[i]n the course of history, it is mysterious why houses are concentrated around the airport’ (cited in Yomitan Village Council 2012). Even though Magleby, unlike others mentioned above, did not directly distribute historical inadequacy concerning Futenma Air Base before it was built, by producing doubt around its history and present condition, he equally ignored the fact that the military requisitioned the land where people used to live. By describing the present condition of Futenma Air Base as ‘mysterious’, Magleby neglects the agency of the US military in creating dangerous situations. In doing so, Magleby implicitly suggests that, like Maher’s statement two years earlier, it was local people who came to live around the base. Equally important to note is that calling something ‘mysterious’ produces the idea that the causes for the existing condition are something not known or cannot be known.

All of these discourses by US officials consistently neglects the contributing factors to the current conditions of Futenma Air Base, most of which, if not all, are closely related to the wartime and post-war military occupation. Conversely, ignoring that the military was the cause of existing risks and dangers to local residents helps to maintain the idea that US military bases in Okinawa are there for the protection of Okinawans (and Japanese); it helps to maintain the identity of the US military. Perhaps, it is even necessary for maintaining such an idea as recognising that the military themselves created the conditions for insecurity of Okinawans would conflict with its own identity. Recognising the military as a perpetuator and as a coloniser would reverse the existing power and security relations between Okinawa and the US military, which produced the current imperial geopolitical spatial orders. In this sense, there are not just the power dimensions in the (re)production of ignorance in which the powerful produces ignorance for their favour. The existing power and security relations are also reproduced by practicing ignorance. Oppressive systems both produce ignorance and are reproduced by ignorance.

The production of ignorance concerning the history of Futenma Air Base also contributes to the reproduction of the (post-)imperial relations between Okinawa and Japan. Since the 1972 ‘reversion’ of Okinawa to Japan to this day,

there has been no significant effort made by the Japanese government to redistribute US bases across the country (except a brief moment under the leadership of Yukio Hatoyama whose effort was nevertheless unsuccessful). Ignoring the military requisition of land by the United States, together with blaming Okinawans for creating the dangerous conditions in the Futenma area, contributes to downplaying the responsibility of the (former) empire (i.e., Japan) who, at least in part, made the very military requisition possible by incorporating Okinawa into the empire and disposing of the islands upon the post-war recovery of its sovereignty.

A large part of Ginowan was literally emptied by the US military during the war and in the following years for base construction; and it still continues to be emptied to this day. It continues to be emptied not by bulldozers and physical force but by particular forms of ignorance that are produced and reproduced by US officials. The production of ignorance plays an important role in the constitution of Okinawa's colonial present, which is exemplified by the heavy presence of US military and by risks and dangers local residents continue to face.⁴ The idea of empty spaces empowered earlier European imperialism, and the colonisation of the Pacific islands in particular. The coloniser created the myth of the 'deserted islands', which 'allows outside powers to override local concerns and construct island landscapes as a marine borderland bristling with militarized fortifications' (Davis 2015, 9–10). This idea still continues to contribute to imperial geopolitics today, not by creating a new space for discovery, but by *retrospectively projecting a new space of the past in the present*. In doing so, the existing power and security relations between Okinawa and US military are reproduced whereby the latter's ongoing *de facto* military occupation is justified for the promotion of national, regional, and international security.

Ignorance and Decolonial Struggle in Okinawa

If ignorance (re)produces oppressive systems, suggests Alcoff (2007, 57), a study of ignorance must demonstrate the alternative. Oceanic scholarship has long challenged dominant (i.e., Eurocentric and US-centred) epistemologies of islands. Hau'ofa (1994) called for a radical rethinking of the Pacific islands not as small, remote, and dependent, 'islands in a far sea' but as 'a sea of islands'. While the former conception affirms the centrality of European and American powers, the latter conception refocuses our attention on the Pacific islands themselves, bringing the histories, cultures and voices of the islanders into the centre of analysis. Or as Bevacqua (2010, 102) puts it:

According to the colonial/Western epistemological cartography, the ocean is a source of weakness that limits and isolates people in the Pacific. Here the Pacific is a vast wasteland that the peoples inhabiting it have no hope of navigating or conquering, thus being condemned to always dependent existences. Re-imaging the Pacific, then, requires a refusal of this colonial gaze, so that the ocean is a source of strength, something that

binds together our islands and, rather than stripping us of possibility and sustainability, in fact generously offers it to us.

This re-imagining, refusal to the colonial gaze, and bringing the voices of the islanders, for Bevacqua (2010, 103) is ‘an essential component of decolonization’.

Against the production of ignorance by US officials (and at times right-wing Japanese people as in the case of Hyakuta) concerning the history of Okinawa, and that of Futenma Air Base in particular, people in Okinawa continue to challenge the retrospective colonial gaze. The retrospective making of empty spaces has prompted local residents and institutions to produce counter-narratives concerning the history of Futenma Air Base. As already mentioned in the article, responding to the discourse on empty spaces or ‘rice fields’, local newspapers such as *Okinawa Times* and *Ryukyu Shimpo* have released reports that show the pre-war existence of local residents and communities in the area where the base was built. There have also been initiatives by local organisations to restore local histories. The Aza-Ginowan Hometown Association (*Aza-Ginowan Kyōyū-kai*), for instance, created a DVD entitled ‘Pre-war Villages Image Movie’ (*‘Senzen shūraku imēji mūbī’*) based on existing maps, photographs, interviews and oral history (Ryukyu Shimpo 2016). Using computer graphics, the film shows that the land where the base is currently stationed was in fact home to many Okinawans and there are several cultural heritage sites within the territory of the base. As political geographer Takashi Yamazaki (in Yamazaki 2017, 37) suggests, the restoration of cultural heritage is an indirect form of resistance. Attempts to protect cultural assets can challenge occupation and help to project a future without occupation. Just as much as direct actions (for example, through a sit-in), fighting against ignorance by reinstating local histories is crucial for a demilitarising, and in effect decolonising, process.

It should be noted that the voices of Okinawa are plural: there are different opinions towards the presence of US military among Okinawans. Some Okinawans implicitly, if not explicitly, support the presence of bases, perhaps most notably, due to economic prospects they are thought to bring (for example, Inoue 2007). This can be also seen in the recent Nago mayoral election that took place in February 2019. Nago is a city in the northern part of Okinawa Island and is home to Oura Bay in Henoko that is the current relocation site for Futenma Air Base. The highly anticipated election divided local residents into pro- and anti-base factions, which eventually resulted in the election of a conservative-government-backed (pro-relocation) candidate. Furthermore, the binary understanding of Okinawa – Okinawa as a whole being anti-base as opposed to the pro-base stance of the United States and Japan – and

Okinawans – reducing Okinawans to *either* pro-base *or* anti-base – cannot capture complexities embedded in living on the militarised island. Drawing from Ann Laura Stoler’s (2009, 255–60) concept of the ‘politics of disregard’, I Nishiyama (2019) suggested elsewhere that some Okinawans comply with the militarised status-quo, and with the relocation plan in particular, due to the combination of a poor local economy and the economic prospects of bases, whilst still embracing a demilitarised future. Fighting against ignorance concerning the history of Futenma Air Base may not directly challenge *de facto* military colonialism in Okinawa as a whole; it may help demilitarising the Futenma area but may not hamper its relocation to Henoko. Nevertheless, fighting against ignorance can, I suggest, contribute to a demilitarising and decolonising process in Okinawa. To say that there were in fact people living in the area where Futenma Air Base is today is not just to correct false information about this particular area; it can be understood as an attempt to decolonise Okinawa insofar as it illuminates that the existing base was made possible by the military requisition of land during the war. Reinstating the history of military colonialism underscores that the underlying problem is not simply risks related to the location of Futenma Air Base but, more importantly, the military colonisation of the formerly independent lands, which cannot be resolved by the relocation of the base to another site within the island. In this sense, a site of ignorance is a site of decolonial struggle. The analysis of ignorance is therefore not only for understanding how ignorance constitutes the ongoing colonial relations and imperial geopolitics across the world; it is also important to, as Mills (2007) would put it, eliminate them.

Notes

1. Proctor seems to suggest this conception when he claims ‘[i]f knowledge is power (which is sometimes is but not always), then to dismantle certain kinds of power may require the reintroduction of bodies of ignorance – hence impotence – in that realm’ (Proctor 2008, 22). Following Foucault (1990, 43), I suggest that power and ignorance are not the same thing; instead, importance lies in relations between them.
2. Proctor (2008) also problematises collective amnesia in his introduction of agnotology.
3. The lecture was arranged by David Vine for a group of students for their study trip to Okinawa (Vine 2015, 255).
4. Here I borrow the term ‘colonial present’ from Derek Gregory (2004).

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