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Representations of “Okinawa” in Major U.S. Newspapers : A Focus on US Military-related Issues in Okinawa (2012 - 2014)

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Representations of “Okinawa” in Major U.S. Newspapers: A Focus on US Military-related Issues in Okinawa (2012-2014)

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Key words: Okinawa, U.S. military, U.S. newspapers

本論は、米国主要新聞2紙（ワシントン・ポストとニューヨーク・タイムズ）による2012年から2014年までの在沖米軍基地関連報道に焦点をあてた「沖縄」の表象分析である。普天間航空基地移設問題、米海兵隊MV-22オスプレイ垂直離着陸輸送機の普天間航空基地への配備、名護市長選、沖縄県知事選の報道に関する米国紙のメディア・フレームを抽出し、これまでの傾向との類似点と相違点を検証した。「日米同盟重視」、「中国と北朝鮮の脅威」を強調するメディア・フレームは両紙に通底しているが、ニューヨーク・タイムズとワシントン・ポストのジャーナリストによる記事や社説に沖縄の人々の声を反映する報道が顕著になってきた。しかし、未だ在沖米軍基地関連報道には、米軍関連事件・事故や地位協定、思いやり予算等の報道、環境問題に関する報道が極端に少ないかあるいは皆無で、事実に基づいていない情報もある。米国の読者が両紙から沖縄の実情を理解するには、沖縄の歴史、文化、社会背景事情を詳述する報道が必須である。

I. Introduction

It is always surprising to learn that most of the people I encounter in the U.S. know little or nothing about Okinawa, despite the fact that it has hosted U.S. military bases for more than 70 years. It is undeniable that

Okinawa has sunk into oblivion among the American public even though the U.S. Government has kept insisting that Okinawa is geopolitically crucial as a “keystone of the Pacific” ever since the U.S. military occupation started in 1945 with the end of the Battle of Okinawa. Primarily due to this public ignorance of Okinawa, it might be natural that very few Americans know that there are 32 U.S. military facilities as of March 2015 with about 50,000 American military personnel, dependents and civilians living on the island.

In addition, the Americans who know a little about the U.S. military presence on Okinawa tend to question why Okinawans strongly protest the U.S. bases on their soil. I have an impression that it is quite common that many American citizens want to have military bases in their community, expecting growth in the local economy. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to recognize that this is not the case with Okinawan economy. Therefore, insofar as Americans hold the conviction the military bases contribute to the local economy by hiring local residents to work on the military bases, and by military personnel spending money on local goods, and by providing jobs for local construction companies, Okinawa’s determined opposition to the U.S. military presence is beyond their comprehension. Finally, most of American citizens have no idea about how military training is conducted in Okinawa: they must assume that the military training in Okinawa is as “safe” for Okinawa communities as it is in the U.S. homeland. However, in reality, military training has adversely affected Okinawan lives because Okinawa islands are very small, with a population of over 1.4 million people excluding the U.S. personnel. It can be assumed that the general public in the U.S. has almost no chance to learn about Okinawan issues regarding the U.S. military presence in Okinawa.

Under such circumstances a question emerges: how have U.S. newspapers described "Okinawa" for American readers so far?

In his book *Okinawa to Beigun Kichi (Okinawa and the U.S. Military Bases)*, Hiromori Maedomari poignantly points out that there are too many pieces of misinformation about the "U.S.-Japan security alliances" and the "Futenma Issue." Such misinformation is propagated as fact and consequently covers up the truth and facts about those issues. This functions to discourage Japanese citizens from learning about them because the "U.S.-Japan security alliance" and the "Futenma Issue" are complex issues whose core and essence made even more absurd with nonsensical logic used by military officials, politicians and bureaucrats (H. Maedomari, 2). It is safe to surmise that the U.S. media are also responsible for this propagation of misinformation about "U.S.-Japan security alliance".

In this paper, I am going to explore the representation of "Okinawa" in two major U.S. newspapers: (1) the *Washington Post* (WP), (2) the *New York Times* (NYT) from 2012-2014. However, because most of the articles on Okinawa or Okinawa-related matters focus on the U.S military presence in Okinawa, I will discuss the media frame of U.S. military-related issues in Okinawa and gaps between the media frame and the real plight of Okinawans.

Okinawa was under U.S. military occupation for 27 years after W.W.II. Even after Okinawa reverted to Japanese rule in 1972, 73.9% of military installations exclusively used by the U.S. Forces in Japan (USFJ) is concentrated on the Okinawa islands, as of March, 2015, which constitutes 0.6% of Japan's total land area. The U.S. military occupies 18.2% of the main island of Okinawa (Okinawa Prefecture, 2016, 2). Okinawa's total population of 1.4 million counts for less than one percent of the

total population of Japan. The voices of Okinawan residents are often disregarded by the Japanese Government and media.

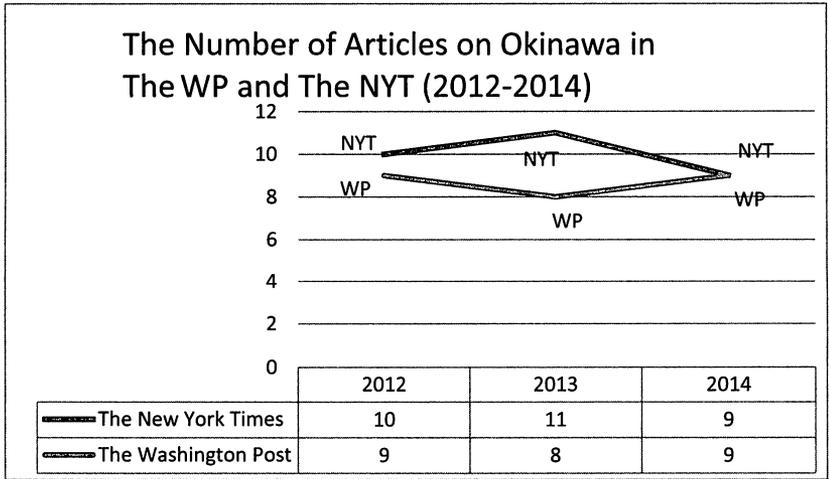
Many residents in Okinawa prefecture have long felt that they shoulder a heavy burden of U.S. military bases. They demand the total withdrawal or reduction of the U.S. bases or at least the relocation of the bases to outside of Okinawa.

II. The Data Collection

I have selected articles from the NYT and WP since they are considered politically influential to American readers and they have correspondents or special contributors in Japan. They also influence other media agendas.

Using the key terms “Okinawa,” I searched within the database lexis.com and retrieved hundreds of articles, then selected articles relevant to the representation of Okinawa and the current U.S. military-related matters in Okinawa.

I have selected nine articles, two editorials and one essay from the 2012 WP, eight articles and one editorial from the 2013 WP, nine articles from the 2014 WP. From the NYT, I have selected 10 articles, one editorial and two opinion pieces for 2012, 11 articles and one editorial for 2013, nine articles, three editorials, four opinion pieces from the 2014 NYT for the analysis.



Graph 1. Number of relevant articles appearing in *The Washington Post* (WP) and in *The New York Times* (NYT) for a three-year-period from 2012 to 2014. Database: Lexis.com

III. Media Frames

Journalists tend to frame news to simplify complex issues in order to convey them to the readers. Dietram A. Scheufele from the University of Wisconsin-Madison points out that “media frames are important tools for journalists” and that “framing is therefore a means of presenting information in a format that fits the modalities and constraints of the medium” (Scheufele, 1862). Shanto Iyengar argues that “framing refers to the way, in which opinions about an issue can be altered by emphasizing or de-emphasizing particular facets of that issue” (Iyengar, 254). When this concept is applied to the U.S. media representation of U.S. military-related issues in Okinawa, it emphasizes positive facets of the U.S. military presence and de-emphasizes negative facets. Inevitably, this influences the opinions of U.S. readers about the military presence in Okinawa.

IV. Overview of the WP and NYT reporting from 2012 to 2014

The main subject of the “Okinawa” articles in the WP and NYT between 2012 and 2014 are related to: the Futenma relocation plan, the Osprey deployment in Okinawa and the mayoral and gubernatorial elections in which voters elected opponents of the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko, Nago, in the northern part of the Okinawa mainland. In my analysis, there are two main underlying frames in the analyzed articles: the importance of the U.S.-Japan military alliance and the instability in the Far-East region. Then there are six frames in the issues of the Futenma relocation plan as follows.

A. The significance of the U.S.-Japan alliance, as the “linchpin” of security in the Far East

Japan is often described as “Washington’s most important Asian ally” (NYT 1/14/2012), and “the largest Asian ally to the United States” (NYT, 2/3/2013). In most articles the United States of America is described as “Japan’s postwar protector with 50,000 military personnel in Japan” (NYT 2/9/2012). On April 30, 2012, President Obama called the U.S. – Japan alliance the “linchpin” in a joint-statement with the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda on the purpose of relocating 8,000 U.S. Marines from Okinawa to other bases in the Western Pacific. On May 1, David Nakamura writes for WP that “The Marine Corps Air Station in Okinawa is seen as critical to counterbalancing China’s aggression in the region, but the noisy base has caused tension with Japanese residents in the crowded urban area” (WP 5/1/2012). It is unclear who sees the MCAS Futenma as critical to counterbalancing China’s aggression in the above article. The writer does not mention specifically who, however, the

readers may assume that this is the supporting statement for President Obama's argument. A freelance journalist and expert on Marine Corps on Okinawa, Tomohiro Yara, argues quite the contrary. He argues that Okinawa is not necessarily in the strategic area, from a military point of view, as has been recognized for a long time by the U.S. and Japanese governments. For example, for Marine Corps to be deployed to North Korea, it needs amphibious assault ships which are not docked in Okinawa but at the U.S. Naval base in Sasebo, Nagasaki. Therefore, when a crisis occurs, the amphibious assault ships first have to head south to Okinawa from Nagasaki to have Marine Corps and supplies on-board and then be dispatched to areas of conflict (Yara, 16). This fact negates the validity of U.S. and Japanese governments' assertion that Okinawa is a geographically strategic point. However, this kind of analysis has never appeared in the U.S. media in the scope of my research.

B. China as "Rising China" and Korea as "Nuclear-Armed North Korea"

The WP maintains that "The U.S.-Japanese alliance is seen as essential to deterring Chinese efforts to dominate the region and reinforcing U.S. and South Korea troops in the event of a war with Korea" (4/27/2012 WP). Moreover, the necessity of the alliance is reinforced with the description of China and North Korea as a "rising power" and a "threat in the region" respectively.¹ In my previous studies, I examined the framing of the Futenma issue in the WP and NYT between 2009 and 2010. This framing of China and North Korea has not changed in either papers' reporting since 2009 (K. Maedomari, 2012, 6). It seems to me that the U.S. media swallow the U.S. administration's view making much use of "rising" China

and North Korea as “a threat in the region” as justification for maintaining or even cementing the U.S.-Japan alliance.

C. Six media frames for the Futenma relocation plan:

News frame 1. MCAS Futenma: A long standing irritant in Japan, and the delay in the plan is damaging to U.S.-Japan relationship

As for the Futenma relocation plan, it is described as the issue that has long caused problems with the U.S.: “troubled base-relocation plan” (NYT 2/3/2013), “a long standing irritant in Japan” (NYT 3/23/2013). In citing a senior State Department official, the WP’s position is that “the failure to come to an agreement on the closure of the Futenma air base” is “hindering the overall American-Japanese alliance” (WP 4/26/2012). The WP also states that MCAS Futenma is “seen as critical to counterbalancing China’s aggression in the region, but the noisy base has caused tension with Japanese residents in the crowded urban area” (WP 5/1/2012).

News frame 2: Former Prime Minister Hatoyama’s inability to move the U.S. base outside Okinawa ignited Okinawan anger

When referring to the Futenma relocation issue, the NYT almost always mentioned former Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama’s inability to proceed with his political promise to move U.S. bases out of Okinawa. They also empathized with Okinawans who felt betrayed by him and that therefore their trust on him was lost. This was the major news frame for the NYT when Hatoyama was in office between 2009 and 2010 because he won the election promising to remove the U.S. bases from Okinawa only to resign 10 months later after breaking the promise. He intended to relocate MCAS Futenma to another prefecture in mainland Japan or to

move the base outside Japan in order to reduce the military burden on Okinawa. In my analysis, the U.S. and Japanese media were too critical of Hatoyama who was trying to accomplish such a huge task, one which no other politicians have attempted to carry out since making such political promises could pose a risk to their political careers.²

News frame 3: The U.S. and Japanese governments have tried and will continue to try to "reduce the burden on Okinawa"

The WP stresses the point that the U.S. is doing everything it can to meet the demands of Okinawan residents. In this frame, it is the Okinawa residents who are trying to ruin such efforts, thus, preventing the relocation dispute from being resolved. This news frame can be seen in almost every article as follows: "Washington has tried for years to close the base there and relocate it in a less populated northern area of the island, but Okinawans oppose the construction of any new bases and have blocked those efforts" (WP 10/18/2012).

A crucial point that the above passage points out is the fact that the Futenma issue is not merely about the relocation of the Marine Corps operation to an existing base, at Camp Schwab in Henoko, but is also about the construction of a new, fortified base. There is no discussion as to why the MCAS Futenma has to be "relocated" within Okinawa. "Relocating" or "building a new military facilities" on the island does not reduce the burden on Okinawa.

Also, by inserting quotes from Japanese and U.S. government officials, U.S. newspapers reiterate the mantra of "reducing the burden on Okinawa." In reality, not much of the burden will be reduced. Even after the proposed return of the five U.S. military facilities in the southern

half of the mainland Okinawa, in terms of land area, only 0.7% of existing 73.8% of the military facilities exclusively used for the U.S. military will be returned. Instead of reducing the burden, the U.S. military and the Japanese government are increasing the burden with this relocation plan. Twelve Ospreys, tilt-rotor aircraft, were deployed in Okinawa on October 2, 2012 just before the above article was published, and now 24 Ospreys are deployed in total, despite the fierce local opposition.³

News frame 4: Henoko is the only viable solution for the relocation of MCAS Futenma

Almost all the articles are written on the premise that Henoko, a less populated area in the northern part of Okinawa, is the only plausible relocation site for the “world’s most dangerous air station,” which is now in the middle of a city. However, there is almost no mention of the fact that no other prefecture in Japan wanted the U.S. base in their backyard: They had the mindset of a NIMBY. Even though many in mainland Japan support the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty, they never want dangerous military facilities close to them. It is nothing but a self-centered insistence that they want security but have no will to share the burden.

Furthermore, there is not much mention of the environmental destruction and of endangered species, which inhabit Henoko bay. There is no mention of the close proximity to residential areas, either. Thus, the readers of these articles, especially American readers who live in much more spacious areas than Okinawa, might imagine a situation similar to those in the mainland U.S. or Hawaii, where military bases are far away from residential areas. In fact, the new base in Okinawa is planned to be only a few miles away from the closest residential area. Therefore,

excluding such pieces of information might influence the whole picture of the issue and be likely to inculcate serious misconception in the readers' minds.

News frame 5: MV-22 Osprey (widowmaker) helicopter deployment: Overreaction or a legitimate concern?

While the WP reported the demonstrations opposing the Osprey deployment in Okinawa on Oct. 2, 2012, using texts from AP, the NYT placed an editorial on Sept. 15, 2012, even before the deployment, not only to question the Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft deployment in Okinawa but also to show Okinawans' discontent with the situation. Also, the NYT had a 960-word article by Martin Fackler, a former correspondent in Tokyo, after the Osprey deployment in Okinawa on Oct. 2, 2012.

The WP mentioned Okinawan's concerns toward the aircraft, but the passages give the impression that Okinawans are overreacting to the history of military accidents. One example of the articles is as follows: "Even a six-inch-long metal rod falling off an Osprey into the ocean near Okinawa and doing no harm in June received media attention, given the circumstances". The article continues to say:

" Many are still upset by an Aug. 13, 2004, CH-53D helicopter crash on an occupied building at Okinawa International University in which U.S. Marines cordoned off Japanese authorities for seven days. No civilians were injured in the crash, but rallies against U.S. aviation have continued there ever since including a "die-in" protest last summer on its ninth anniversary" (WP 7/11/2014).

While the WP appears to insinuate the Okinawans' overreactions to the above incidents, the NYT is more sympathetic towards the Okinawan situation regarding the Osprey deployment. It refers to the grave concerns of Okinawans, gives a brief explanation of the reasons for the concern, a history of Osprey crashes and suggests that the U.S. should listen to Okinawans' voices and deploy the Ospreys somewhere else, not in Okinawa. (NYT 9/15/2012 editorial).

From a local media researcher's perspective, I received the impression that the WP's subtle phrasing using "even" and "but" reflects the writer's positive predisposition toward the Osprey deployment in Okinawa. On the contrary, though briefly, the NYT editorial and article mention the above facts. This reporting offers readers more information to explain why Okinawans are against the Osprey deployment.

News frame 6: MCAS Futenma is a symbol not only of an unfair base burden but also of a history of discrimination by Japan

It is important to note that there are not only news frames that work against the will of Okinawans, but there is also a frame based on the perspectives of Okinawans. This news frame is set by a couple of journalists for the NYT and WP, namely, Martin Fackler, the former NYT Tokyo bureau chief, and Anna Fifield, WP Tokyo bureau chief. These two journalists seem to be aware of a history and current situation of Okinawa from various standpoints.

For example, Fackler describes the feelings of many Okinawans, saying that they "want bases out, not merely relocated"(NYT 2/9/2012). He takes further steps to illustrate the reasons for such sentiment on the part of Okinawans by inserting several paragraphs about the history of

Okinawa in his articles. He describes the contentious issue of the mass suicides of Okinawans forced by the Japanese soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 (NYT 2/9/2012). The Japanese media have avoided and would avoid writing about such facts saying there is no ground for the "allegation" by the survivors of Japanese soldiers giving orders to commit suicide rather than being captured by the U.S. soldiers. Having visited Okinawa 25 times in 13 years since 2009 (Fackler, 2016, 247) and conducting interviews in both Japanese and English, Fackler has been able to research a history of Okinawa in-depth and included the voices of not only experts, but also voices of ordinary citizens including anti-base protesters and pro-base citizens

Similarly, in 2014, Fifield wrote four major articles on Okinawa, all of which I analyzed as reflecting the real plight of Okinawa. She has written articles from 655 words to 1198 words in length, whose topics focus on the gubernatorial election in Okinawa in November, 2014. Fifield interviewed Takeshi Onaga, an opponent of the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko, who defeated the then governor Hirokazu Nakaima in the election by a majority of 360,820 against 261,076 votes for Nakaima. In the following interview the question and frustration that most of the people in Okinawa has borne in their minds emerge.

If the U.S.-Japan security alliance is so important, Onaga contended, then all of Japan should be sharing it. "When we complain about Futenma being in Okinawa, we are asked if we like the U.S. or are we anti-U.S.? We are asked if we are against the Japanese government," he said. "How are we supposed to live like this?" (WP 11/15/2014).

She continues to give readers an historical account of Okinawa: annexation of Okinawa by Japan in 1879 and the Battle of Okinawa. Then she gives readers reasons why many Okinawans protest against the U.S. military presence: “Ordinary Okinawans complain about the risks involved with having huge military bases on their island, including accidents, crime and aircraft noise” (WP 11/15/2014). Fifield continues to touch upon the Okinawan economy by quoting Onaga: “Onaga contends that Okinawa’s revenue from commerce far outweighs what it earns from the bases” (WP 11/15/2014).

The U.S. military-related income has declined from 15% of the Okinawan economy in 1972, to 5% today. Although Fifield does not mention the ratio in this article, bringing readers’ attention to this fact could help close the knowledge gap between the locals and the readers in the U.S.

By presenting the above mentioned facts that have been pushed out from the previous frame of the U.S. military-related issues, these two journalists could be perceived as building a newer frame for the U.S. readers to gain knowledge about Okinawa. Looking from an Okinawan perspective, this media frame is effective in conveying the situation surrounding the Henoko issue because readers can learn something about the historical and social background to the current situation. On the other hand, from the perspective of those outside Okinawa, this issue might be perceived as a Japanese domestic issue, in which the U.S. or international community does not necessarily have to interfere. Before 2012, this was one of the media frames for the U.S. papers: the U.S. military-related issues in Okinawa are domestic issues for Japan, which the Japanese government has to negotiate with the Okinawa prefectural government.

V. Deemphasized facts about U.S. bases in Okinawa.

News Frames: Information gaps to those outside Okinawa

Although there is a news frame sympathetic toward Okinawan anti-military voices, the absence of relevant information may lead American readers to misunderstand the full impact of the U.S. military presence on local residents, the economy, and environment. Major gaps include:

- A. Few references to SOFA, military-related Crimes and Accidents
- B. No coverage of "host-nation support" or the "Sympathy budget"
- C. Misinformation about massive subsidies from the Japanese government to Okinawa prefecture
- E. Misinformation alleging that the Okinawan economy depends on the US military presence
- F. Inadequate coverage of environmental pollution

The above facts are crucial in understanding both the plight of Okinawa and the reasons for Okinawans to protest against the U.S. military presence in Okinawa.⁴

Conclusion:

As a result of the U.S. media framing of the issues related to U.S. forces in Okinawa, there have been misunderstandings among people in the U.S. As Catherine Lutz keenly points out, there are two assumptions among the people of the U.S. regarding the U.S. military in Okinawa and other parts of the world. One assumption is that the U.S. military presence on foreign soil is regarded as a "security gift" to the "host" nations from the U.S. The second is that "the countries are receiving these gifts free of charge and the U.S. is paying for the security costs of other countries" (Ryukyu Shimpo 3/15/2015). As many Okinawan and Japanese citizens

believe, the latter is not the case in Japan, which has spent a great deal of tax money to maintain U.S. military bases on Japanese soil. Such major discrepancies in the recognition of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa among people in the U.S., Japan, and Okinawa seem to have prevailed for at least the past 20 years.

Although the recent reporting in the two U.S. papers I analyzed from 2012 to 2014, is picking up the voices of residents of Okinawa and anti-base protesters more than their previous reporting, I believe it imperative to include more in-depth reporting of the history, culture, and society of Okinawa in order to put the impact of U.S. bases in Okinawa in context. For example, no newspaper article reported that Okinawan people are deeply concerned about the future risk that Okinawa will suffer a nuclear strike because of the U.S. military bases concentrated there. Full, unfiled facts are also important. Analyzing the emphasized and de-emphasized facts presented by certain media frames allows not only researchers but also citizens to enhance their awareness of the issues. I hope this awareness could lead many others within and outside Okinawa to question what they learn from the media and work towards the reduction and closure of the U.S. bases therein.

Notes

- ¹ There were also articles that involved the Senkaku Islands issues. Although those articles contain the word “Okinawa”, I excluded them from my analysis for this paper because their focus is not on the representation of Okinawa. However, I believe that those articles imply the threat of a military build-up by China, which may lead the readers to recognize the significance of U.S.-Japan alliance.
- ² Instead of gaining support, he was confronted with cruel media coverage because no other prefectures wanted such a dangerous air station in their backyard and his plan stalled. Most of the Japanese mainlanders and the media at that time did not see these issues from an Okinawans’ standpoint. The Liberal Democratic Party, which lost to Hatoyama’s Democratic Party of Japan in the 2009 election,

and the Japanese media were successful in directing Okinawan anger toward Hatoyama's administration. I argued that the U.S. newspapers' criticism and mockery against Hatoyama did a favor to the Japanese newspapers in making him look like an incompetent leader (K. Maedomari, 2012, 11). Moriteru Arasaki argues that what the Hatoyama administration aimed at accomplishing was the correction of structural discrimination against Okinawa (Arasaki, 2012, 9). He also points to the "brain freeze," in the Japanese mass media as a reason for the collapse of the Hatoyama administration (Arasaki, 2016, 139). Arasaki asserts that the Japanese mass media have "kept chanting 'Not to hurt U.S.-Japan alliances'" toward the Prime minister. Japanese politicians even from the Democratic Party of Japan and bureaucrats did not support Prime Minister Hatoyama (Arasaki, 2012, 9). The media's comments on the Futenma issues were all in the same tone that his intention would destabilize the U.S.-Japan alliances. After retiring from politics, Hatoyama established a research institute called "East Asia Community Institute" in Okinawa in an attempt to solve the U.S. Military base issues in Okinawa.

³ As Beverly Horvit, associate professor of Journalism at the University of Missouri, stated in her paper, "Okinawans' Voices Heard in Rape Crises Coverage," from 1990 to 2005, U.S. administrations tended to voice one message: "The U.S. bases in Okinawa were vital to strategic interests, but the U.S. and Japan will work to minimize the bases" (Horvit, 43). From the standpoint of an Okinawan media researcher, this political stance, emphasizing the significance of the U.S. bases and efforts by U.S. and Japan to reduce the burden on Okinawa, continues to be the main voice from the U.S. administration, which is reflected in the U.S. elite newspapers from 2012 to 2014.

⁴ See my previous paper entitled "Complicit Amnesia or Willful Blindness? Untold Stories in U.S. and Japanese Media." Eds. Daniel Broudy, Peter Simpson, and Makoto Arakaki. *Under Occupation: Resistance and Struggle in a Militarised Asia-Pacific*. 2013. pp.112-137.

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