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Author(s)	Dollin, Ashleigh
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Indigenous Peoples' use of media as a form of self-representation: analysis of Japanese government and Ainu discourses relating to the issue of Ainu ancestral remains repatriation

Ashleigh Dollin (Masters Course, School of Education)

<SUMMARY>

Discourse and representation has the power to influence how we understand reality through the creation of cultural norms. Furthermore, the way dominant discourses frame the Ainu reality within Japan can have a profound effect because the majority of ethnic Japanese lack meaningful contact with Ainu people to make their own informed decisions. One controversial issue through which this can be examined is Ainu ancestral remains repatriation. As there is extensive discourse relating to this issue from both the dominant government perspective and the Ainu perspective this study aims to uncover the conflicting discourses present in modern-day Japan and how these affect power relations between the Ainu and ethnic Japanese populations. Additionally an analysis of how the Ainu are using documentary as a form of self-representation is included. This research intends to fill current gaps in academic literature relating to Ainu use of media and representation issues.

Introduction:

Brief introduction into the problem, background and motivation of the study

We live in a world surrounded by discourses disseminated through institutions such as the media, government bodies, and education. The representation of concepts, people and ideas through language and discourse and our exposure, interaction and interpretation of these representations is a key part of the social practice within which we construct meaning (Hall 5). It is through these meanings that we build our various social identities, a sense of belonging and culture. The discourses that we come across in our day to day lives tend to draw attention to dominant ideologies and versions of reality that are deemed as *normal* or *superior*, whereas other versions of reality are often omitted and deemed as *irrelevant* or *inferior* (Fleras 13). It is also through this so-called framing of reality by dominant institutions that power structures within society become clear. Kerstin Knopf, scholar of Indigenous media, argues that “whoever is in power has control over discourse and wields power through discourse” (192). The way Indigenous Peoples are represented by outsiders is a salient issue for Indigenous Peoples world-wide (Wilson and Stewart 2008). Not only do representations created by outsiders result in the construction and propagation of harmful stereotypes and demonization of Indigenous Peoples, they also impact Indigenous Peoples identity formation and how they perceive their place in society thus contributing to internalised oppression (Knopf 2018; Fleras 2011).

In the context of Japan, dominant discourses relating to Ainu people and their issues are particularly powerful because a majority of the mainstream Wajin Japanese (ethnic Japanese) population lack meaningful contact with Ainu people to make their own informed decisions about the Ainu reality. Kayoko Kimura, a scholar whose focus is on Ainu research, points out that according to a survey completed in March 2016, 74% of Japanese have never been exposed to Ainu people or their culture (2018). Thus, the consequent significance of papers such as this is that it has the potential to bridge gaps in knowledge through the deconstruction of dominant discourses and publication of Ainu discourses.

As a reaction to years of hegemonic, harmful misrepresentation and neglect by dominant institutions Indigenous Peoples around the world have been creating their own media in an act of self-representation (Fleras 1947; Wilson, Stewart (ed.) 2008). Indigenous media occupies a multi-faceted space and has been used in many ways, including entertainment through to activism, at times produced for Indigenous audiences in Indigenous languages but also at times intended for broader national and international audiences. Although this complex nature makes it hard to define, Indigenous media scholar Pamela Wilson loosely defines Indigenous media as, "...forms of media expression conceptualised, produced, and circulated by Indigenous Peoples around the globe as vehicles for communication, including cultural preservation, cultural and artistic expression, political self-determination, and cultural sovereignty" (Wilson et al. 1).

Although a relatively new field, Indigenous media studies has recently received much interest from scholars, critics and global activists and there have been international symposiums and workshops held to address the issues of Indigenous media and to offer skills training for Indigenous Peoples to help them join these industries (Wilson and Stewart 2008).

Regardless of this recent interest in the field, there has been little study completed on Indigenous use of media in Asia as a whole (see Wilson P. et al. 2014 for a summary of Indigenous media studies in Asia). In the current media landscape in Japan, Ainu produced media tends to be seen at a grassroots level through the forms of radio, newspaper and documentary and has been used to preserve and teach Ainu language and to challenge dominant representations of Ainu issues. According to the World Indigenous Report (Berger 2019) "there has been increased attention for Ainu culture in popular media as well as discussion to feature Ainu culture as part of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics. This increased attention has led to discussions about proper representation."

One highly controversial issue currently facing Ainu people is Ainu ancestral remains repatriation. This relates to Ainu remains which were stolen from Ainu graves for the purpose of research from the Meiji Era (1868-1912) until the 1960s (Shimizu 2018). Most of these remains are still housed in Japanese universities, museums and other institutes and there is a plan to move them all to a shared charnel facility in the new National Ainu Museum being built in Shiraoi, Hokkaido and expected to open in April

2020. An in-depth background into the issue will follow, however it can be said that this is an extremely painful issue for the Ainu people which signifies for them one salient representation of their continued domination by mainstream Wajin Japanese. This topic has been selected because there is extensive discourse from the Japanese government and universities which constitute the dominant narrative and provide material for analysis of mainstream paternalism and silencing of the issues, but also because in the past three years Ainu producers have created two powerful documentaries responding to this issue and empowering the Ainu perspective through self-representation; 「八十五年ぶりの帰還・アイヌ遺骨 杵臼コタンへ」 (*Repatriation, 85 Years Later*) and 「ホシツペアンナ 先祖の魂 故郷へ還る」 (*Hosippa = An Na, Ancestral Spirits Return To Their Home Village*). To my knowledge this work addresses these issues academically for the first time.

Aims and Objectives of the study

The main aim of the study is to critically analyse Japanese government and Ainu discourses relating to the issue of Ainu ancestral remains repatriation. Additionally, an analysis of how the Ainu are using documentary to create an alternative discourse relating to the issue will be included. By focusing on the power of discourses to shape society and cultural norms this research aims to uncover the conflicting discourses present in modern-day Japan and how these affect power relations between the Ainu and Wajin Japanese populations. By doing so, this research intends to fill current gaps in academic literature relating to Ainu use of media and representation issues.

Research questions

For this research two areas were analysed. Firstly, how do the Japanese government and Ainu discourses frame the Ainu ancestral remains issue? Specifically, what are both discourses trying to naturalise / normalise, what incongruencies exist between the two, and what does this tell us about power relations within Japanese society? Secondly, in the context of the Ainu ancestral remains repatriation issue, Ainu created documentaries were analysed through the following questions; What social practice and cultural significance could these documentaries represent, and what does this alternative discourse tell us about power relations within Japanese society?

Position of the researcher

This research situates itself between constructivist and critical theory paradigms in the sense that, ontologically, it accepts that the world is made up of multiple realities and there are multiple ways to formulate a scientific explanation to a phenomenon. The reasoning for this is that it has been proven that people interpret representations, images and film differently depending on a variety of historical, cultural

and social contexts (Monaco 2000). However, the research also concedes that the world functions on hidden and overt power structures and “the world is being orchestrated by people and institutions in power positions who try to maintain the status quo and subsequently their positions of power” (Jennings 44). In light of these two paradigms, it is the intention of this research, through the theories of discourse and representation, to highlight power relations and normative aspects of the dominant Japanese discourse and the resistant Ainu discourse. However, the research accepts that these discourses and indeed the two Ainu created documentaries will be interpreted and experienced differently depending on a person’s own individual way of viewing the world. “There are different ways of seeing the world, and the critical task is to differentiate between the social effects of those different visions” (Rose 9).

Another important aspect that is related to these paradigms is the concept of reflexivity as a research practice. In other words, the “way researchers (should) acknowledge their own subjectivity and its effects on the production of scientific knowledge” (Zienkowski 6). Thus, an examination of the researcher’s position is necessary.

Part of my motivation to pursue this line of inquiry is related to my work experience at Australia’s national Indigenous Television broadcaster, NITV where I worked as an associate producer and librarian in the news and current affairs team for two years. Through my work I witnessed first-hand how increased exposure to Indigenous discourses within the Australian media landscape could foster self-empowerment and break down stereotypes and discrimination. This was achieved through an increased awareness of Indigenous issues as told by Indigenous Peoples which lead to education and more open conversation surrounding these issues for both Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians. I also became aware of how often one-sided the mainstream media landscape is in Australia and thus dominant perspectives are often naturalised and normalised in Australian culture.

Although my research will be in part informed by this background it is important to stress that the Australian media landscape and Indigenous Australian context is very much separate from the Japanese media landscape and Ainu context. I also approach this topic with the knowledge I have gained having lived experience in Hokkaido, Japan. During my time here I have observed the media representations of Ainu contemporary issues and historical narratives, attended Ainu ancestral remains repatriation ceremonies and re-burials and spoken with people about this issue during field work. I also supplement my research with secondary sources relating to Ainu representation and Japanese discourses.

Context of the study:

Ainu ancestral remains repatriation movement

Since the mid-Meiji era (1868-1912) and continuing until the 1960s Japanese researchers desecrated Ainu gravesites and excavated ancestral remains and burial artefacts for research purposes

(Ueki 2008; Siddle 1996). According to an official survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter; MEXT), 1637 Ainu individuals were removed and housed at 12 universities throughout the nation of Japan (MEXT 2013). Furthermore, 12 museums or other institutions house 76 sets and 27 boxes of unclassified bones (Kimura 2018). Ainu activists have been calling for these remains to be returned to the soil they were removed from and for an official apology from the universities implicated in the removal. In 2012 there was a conciliation agreement as the result of a legal case by Ainu plaintiffs against Hokkaido University for the return of Ainu ancestral remains. This opened up the possibility for community members to petition for the return of ancestral remains; however, most of them still remained housed at universities and as of November 5th 2019, the process of transferring them to a shared charnel facility located at the new National Ainu Museum and Park scheduled to open in Shiraoi in April, 2020 began (Hokkaido Shinbun 2019). As of the writing of this report the only universities implicated in the removal of these remains to have issued an official apology have been Keiō University and Sapporo Medical University (Sankei News 2018; NHK 2019).

Historically the desecration of Ainu graves for the sake of science is closely linked to discourses which legitimised the colonisation and economic development of Hokkaido and subordination of the Ainu (Siddle 76). Beginning around the 1890s, Japanese scholars and intellectuals became interested in studying the origins of the *Japanese race* and thus devoted themselves to establishing a Japanese *sense of nation* (Siddle 82). Along with the expansion of physical anthropology and social Darwinism, Ainu studies gained popularity thus leading to the Ainu being viewed through the lens of *race* and this discourse perpetuated the stereotype of the Ainu as an *inferior* and *dying race*. Through this perceived inferiority the domination and exclusion of Ainu from participation in economic and political matters was legitimised (Siddle 76), their destitution being attributed to shortcomings in their racial makeup rather than the process of colonisation (Weiner 15). Furthermore, as reflected through the presence of a racialised, inferior Other, concepts of Japanese *superiority*, *civilization* and *modernity* were propagated (Siddle 85). Scholars were closely tied to authority and power within society and their actions were justified through the lens of science. “Colonial domination ensured that Ainu could not protect their ancestral and sacred grave sites from widespread destruction, or prevent scholars from entering their communities and homes with impunity” (Siddle 85). It can be understood that physical anthropology and the removal of Ainu ancestral remains was not only hurtful for the people trying to protect their ancestors’ graves but led to the construction and perpetuation of harmful discourses relating to Ainu identity which legitimised discrimination of Ainu and still represents a deep-seated pain that has been passed down through Ainu families from generation to generation.

Representation issues of Ainu

Although representation issues are common among Indigenous Peoples globally, for the purpose of this study it is important to take a closer look at the context unique to the situation for Japan and Ainu. As established earlier the expansion of Ainu studies, social Darwinism and physical anthropology inspired many of the early discourses relating to the *superior race* of the Japanese and *inferior dying race* of the Ainu (Siddle 2001; Weiner 2009). The dominant discourse of Japan's modernization and how *Hokkaido* came to be, where terms like *colonisation* and *conquest* were replaced with *development* (*kaitaku*) and *progress* (*shinpō*), served as a way to erase the painful history of Ainu dispossession (Mason 2). Furthermore, there have been varying representations which have aligned the Ainu with derogatory imagery including, barbarians, dogs, and former natives (Siddle 2001). These constructed imaginings of the Ainu and Japanese race were strengthened through many institutionally disseminated discourses that not only legitimised discriminatory policies towards the Ainu but also translated to a legacy of oppression that has seen many Ainu live as marginalised citizens of Japan. "By the beginning of the twentieth century, the activities of scholars, educators, colonial officials and journalists ensured that the image of an inferior 'dying race' informed both government policy and public opinion" (Weiner 29).

Although the latest development in Ainu policy, the Ainu Policy Promotion Act passed in May 24th 2019, has made possible the official recognition of Ainu as Indigenous Peoples of Japan, the construction of a National Ainu museum and a push to boost Ainu cultural promotion, might look like progress for Ainu rights on a surface level, these too have their critics (Kimura 2018, Morris-Suzuki 2018). Some issues of contest include the minimal Ainu collaboration in the creation and promotion of these plans (Morris-Suzuki 2018) and the lack of provision of Indigenous rights such as self-determination which is recognised by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Kimura 2018). To my knowledge and at the writing of this paper, research is yet to be conducted on current attitudes or understandings of Ainu culture and issues among the majority Wajin Japanese since the government has made this latest move to boost promotion of Ainu culture. However, in recent years the majority Japanese population perception of Ainu issues has been one of "indifference and a lack of knowledge" (Weiner 36, 37). Therefore, with a lack of collaboration with Ainu in the construction of official representations of Ainu issues and the lack of knowledge as held by the majority of Wajin Japanese, it can be argued that further education, as told on Ainu terms or with greater Ainu collaboration, is necessary in order to breakdown issues of misrepresentation and discourses of oppression and silencing. As the ancestral remains repatriation issue is one of both historical and present-day relevance it will be used as a basis to focus the analysis of Ainu representation issues in this paper.

Indigenous use of media as a form of self-representation

Indigenous media is often produced with the aim to make culture visible for strategic political purposes (Wilson and Stewart 2008). Indigenous peoples are creating unique media outside of dominant media industries which challenge the assumptions and workings of mainstream media as well as political rhetoric perpetuated by institutions such as the law, government bodies and education (Bredin and Hafsteinsson 1).

Dominant discourses not only impact the way Indigenous Peoples are perceived in the broader social context, but also impact how Indigenous Peoples view their place in society. This can have a strong influence on identities, experiences, opportunities and outcomes at both individual and group levels (Fleras 2011). Without self-representation Indigenous people and their reality become objects to be manipulated, excluded or used as entertainment by the mainstream media and discourses (Fleras, 2011). Thus, Indigenous self-representation through media was born out of a need to challenge and breakdown dominant discourses and socially constructed images of Indigeneity for the non-Indigenous public and Indigenous Peoples alike. Indigenous self-representation is empowering as it gives Indigenous people the opportunity to control the framing of their issues on their terms (Fleras, 2011).

Theoretical framework:

Critical discourse analysis as an approach

Critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) has its roots in the works of Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk, who developed an understanding of the discursive nature of power relations by stating that power is transmitted and practiced through discourse. With this idea we can thus study “how power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse” (as cited in Machin; Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 272). CDA aims to better understand the role of discourse in the reproduction of social inequality and its relevance and effectiveness is measured by how much it can contribute to social change.

The focus of a CDA approach is on the linguistic character of society and cultural processes and structures, specifically the relationship between discourse and social power. “[S]uch an analysis should describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimised by the text and talk of dominant groups or institutions” (Van Dijk 84). In discourse such processes might be present on the level of inclusion and exclusion of information.

CDA attempts to “expose strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends” (Machin 5). By denaturalising the language, we can thus reveal assumptions and normalised ideas which can signify what kind of power interests lie within a text (Machin 5).

By conducting CDA one can attempt to reveal not only the social practice with which dominant narratives are produced discursively but also how particular narratives were or are contested (Rose 142). For there of course is more than one narrative present within society. Michel Foucault stresses in his work that there are in fact many discourses trying to compete against each other to have a strong effect. He claimed that “where there is power, there is resistance . . . a multiplicity of points of resistance” (95).

This research is focused on both the authoritative account and how the account is contested, thus CDA methodology will be employed both on the Japanese government discourse and the Ainu discourse to reveal what kind of representations are being employed, what power relations can be construed from these representations and what kind of social impact they might produce.

Key concepts:

Representation

To understand representation, it is important to think of culture as a set of practices which is concerned with the construction and exchange of meanings with representation occupying an essential part of this process (Hall 2003). Representation is the production of meaning through language, language here being understood in a broader sense than what we read, write and speak but rather, “a symbolic practice which gives meaning or expression to the idea of belonging to a national culture, or identification with one’s local community” (Hall).

The importance of meaning, or more importantly the interpretation of meaning and how we represent it, is that it has the power to influence the way people behave in their everyday lives (Rose 2002). It gives us our sense of identity, can strengthen difference between groups and create social norms. It has the power to decide which reality or worldview is normal, and thus should be included and accepted in society, and which is abnormal, and should be excluded and denied in society.

There are three common approaches to analysing representation, *reflective*, *intentional* and *constructionist*. This paper adopts a constructionist approach because it enables one to frame their argument around how meaning is constructed in and through language (Hall 2003). Furthermore, as the main focus of this study is how mainstream discourses and representation of the Ainu in Japan have contributed to and maintained power imbalances and oppression of the Ainu and how the Ainu in turn are using discourse to contest these representations, within the two schools of constructionist theories of representation this paper prioritises a discursive approach, which is focused on the *effects and consequences* of representation (Hall 2003).

Discourse, absence and power relations

Directly related to representation is the theory of discourse which takes on a slightly broader scope. Discourse can be understood as ways of referring to or constructing knowledge. In other words, conventional modes of seeing and talking about concepts and people, which in turn influences the way we act. Although representation is intentional, one creates a representation, the actors in discourse are dispersed and thus discourse is not necessarily intentional. Discourses are constructed and propagated through the repetition of a representational pattern.

Foucault focused on the concept of power tied to discourse. He was particularly interested in our tendency to divide things into normal and abnormal categorisations and how certain languages or knowledge are given a higher status of truth over others (as cited in Ritzer 2007; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983: 48). Herein lies the intertwined relationship between power and knowledge; as Foucault claims, all knowledge is discursive, and all discourse is saturated with power. Although power is everywhere there are dominant discourses and the strength of the social effect they can wield depends on assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true (Rose 2002).

Foucault theorised that to break down discourse to its basic elements it is important to focus on its function rather than its form. “It is a multi-layered, context-dependent and socially constitutive practice that can be described at various levels of linguistic, textual, semiotic and sociopolitical organization” (Zienkowski 2). Thus, data which can be considered as discourse can be broad in scope ranging from textual and verbal forms of language, to multimodal data and observations of social practices.

Another aspect of discourse is silence or absence of discourse. Foucault argued that silence is a form of oppression and a key element in the application of the discourse of power-relations whereby various groups and various behaviors of people are marginalised by society (Bindeman 2017).

Data:

Collection and selection of data

When selecting data, the focus was narrowed to the issue of Ainu ancestral remains repatriation; thus, reports directly relating to this issue were extracted. Search terms utilised were *Aimu*, *ikotsu* (*remains*), *hone* (*bone*), *henkan* (*repatriation / return*).

Government discourse and Ainu discourse

Data from the following sources were extracted to analyse the Japanese government and Ainu

discourses:

Japanese Government discourse	Ainu discourse
Official reports from Japanese government. (Ministry for Ainu Policy Promotion, MEXT, Advisory Council for Chief of Cabinet)	Academic articles featuring quotes or written by Ainu people
Official reports by Hokkaido University	Oral testimony during lawsuit against Hokkaido University (as cited in Hirata et al. 2020)
Upopoy (new National Ainu Museum) promotional material, official reports	Press releases / press conferences
Government Press releases	Quotes from <i>Kotan no Kai*</i> and <i>Monjoken*</i> websites. *These organizations are to be explained below.

Ainu created media

「八十五年ぶりの帰還・アイヌ遺骨 杵臼コタンへ」
(*Repatriation, 85 Years Later*)

「ホシッパアンナ 先祖の魂 故郷へ還る」
(*Hosippa = An Na, Ancestral Spirits Return To Their Home Village*)

Findings:

Government discourse

By analysing the government discourse relating to Ainu ancestral remains the only documents that directly relate to the issue were government reports on the MEXT and Ainu policy promotion websites. Promotional materials relating to the new National Ainu Museum mention the memorial space but do not include any information about the ancestral remains to be stored there (National Ainu Museum and Park 2018).

In the reports available on government websites they acknowledge the carelessness with which researchers handled remains after they were brought to the universities (MEXT 2013) and discuss the process with which Ainu people can apply for repatriation of ancestral remains (MEXT 2016). The plan to move the remains to a shared charnel facility is discussed in a positive light. They state that the government will ‘take the lead’ to consolidate the remains into a Symbolic Space that is ‘the heart of the Ainu people’— this being how they are representing the new National Ainu Museum— so that a dignified memorial service will be possible (MEXT 2011). A document relating to the 10th Ainu Policy Promotion Conference held by the Ainu Policy Promotion Working Group in 2018 heavily focusses on plans and conceptions for the new National Ainu Museum (MEXT 2018). While discussing Ainu remains housed at university campuses the focus is on the future of what to do with the remains. There is no reference to the illegality (Ueki 2008; Hirata et al. 2020) in which they were taken or the pain it caused (MEXT 2018).

Included in the same document is a section titled “main opinions of the Ainu people”. In relation to Ainu ancestral remains the Ainu opinion listed here is that, in order to maintain an “early memorial environment” the remains should be aggregated to the facility and the memorial should be promoted. They also note the opinion that remains should be thoroughly returned to their respective communities and that there is strong resistance to research conducted on said remains. These opinions were collated from a government-initiated survey at briefing sessions ahead of the establishment of the new National Ainu Museum. It is not clear how many people answered the survey or how the survey questions were framed (MEXT 2018).

As there is very little mentioned about the issues relating to the Ainu ancestral remains and nothing about the history of the issue the government discourse is in a sense normalising the transferal of remains to the new Symbolic Space as something positive that the government is doing for the Ainu. However, if we closely examine the government discourse there seems to be little contribution from the Ainu themselves. Although the government did hold briefing sessions with the Ainu ahead of the commencement of the new National Ainu Museum, the Ainu voice is barely represented in the government discourse. In a 39-page document relating to the new National Ainu Museum only one page includes opinions of Ainu people which are from the aforementioned survey (MEXT 2018) and there are certainly no quotes from Ainu leaders in any of the materials collected for this report. It has been claimed that this is representative of the lack of input the government allows the Ainu to have on issues that relate directly to themselves, something that is also evident in the conception and promotion of the new Ainu policy (Morris-Suzuki 2018).

The language used in this document, when it is not neutrally stating facts, can be seen as paternalistic and is representative of how historically, governments have misrepresented Indigenous Peoples and their issues, claiming to know what is best for Indigenous Peoples without much consultation with the people themselves. This can be construed as an example of how representation of Indigenous Peoples often fails to capture their complex subjective nature as people with rights and in fact perpetuates the objectifying image of them as *two-dimensional problems with needs* (Fleras 2011). In this case the government perceived need is based on what to do with the ancestral remains housed on university campuses, the solution being transferal to a shared charnel facility in the new National Ainu Museum in Shiraoi. As we will see in the Ainu discourse the issue is much more complex than this one-size-fits-all solution.

Ainu discourse

By referring to the Ainu discourse relating to ancestral remains it becomes clear that this is a painful and at times polarizing issue for the Ainu¹. Among those in favor of the transferal of Ainu ancestral remains to the new National Ainu Museum are several district level Ainu Associations and the Ainu

Association of Hokkaido (AAH), the largest single Ainu organization (Kimura 2018). However, it is important to note that “80-90% of the recognised Ainu population do not have any input into the policies of the Association. It is, therefore, not a representative body for the community as a whole” (Morris-Suzuki 2018). In opposition to the transfer are Ainu activists, members of the Kotan Association (Kotan no Kai), the Urahoro Ainu Association and the Karafuto Ainu Association (Mainichi Shinbun 2018) who are calling for the ancestral remains to be returned to the soil of the kotan (villages or tribes) they were taken from. In addition, they are calling for an apology and acknowledgement for past wrongdoings from the universities in question (Shimizu 2018; Hirata et al. 2020; Fujino 2017; Igarashi 2019).

In oral testimony during a lawsuit against Hokkaido University in 2012, Ainu elder Jonoguchi Yuri recalls her mother singing in Ainu language and repeating the words; “It’s unforgivable that the graves have been dug up,” “It’s outrageous that human remains have been taken away. Elders, please forgive us” (as cited in Hirata et al. 2020). At the same lawsuit Ainu elder Hatakeyama Satoshi made it clear during his oral testimony that the situation of the Ainu remains having been removed illegally and housed at university campuses is an “unbearable situation“ and “not only were the human remains taken illegally, their removal caused deep sadness and strong anger. I demand an apology” (as cited in Hirata et al. 2020). The testimony made by Ainu elders can be taken as oral proof of the ongoing pain and deep-seated anger that this issue is causing Ainu people not only in the present day, but it is also representative of generational trauma that is being passed down through Ainu families.

In addition to oral testimony, more oral proof of the anger felt by the Ainu can be found at press conferences and protest actions held by Ainu communities and their supporters. These are often complemented visually with Ainu activists and supporters holding banners that read “return the Ainu remains to the Kotans.”

Regarding the transferal of ancestral remains to the shared facility in Shiraoi, Ainu elder and chairperson of the Kotan Association Shimizu Yuji said, “this agenda is a political one which must be halted at all costs” (Shimizu 2018). For the Kotan Association the transferal of these remains to a “concrete mausoleum in a major tourism complex under the control of the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism” cannot be considered repatriation (Morris-Suzuki 2018). Some Ainu have also raised the point that different kotan have different rituals for ancestral remembrance, thus it doesn’t make sense to store them all in the one facility and conduct a ‘one-size-fits-all’ memorial service in Shiraoi (Kimura 2018). Finally, there is also strong resistance to the possibility of continuation of research on ancestral remains.

It is clear that the Ainu are trying to raise awareness surrounding their issues on their own terms. They are resisting dominant discourses by creating alternative discourses through the use of press

conferences, protests and media as we will see later with the two documentaries created in relation to this issue.

Incongruencies between the two discourses

By looking at both discourses stark incongruencies across the two stand out. Through Foucault's theories of dominant and resistant discourses it can be said that the Japanese government discourse represents the dominant while the Ainu represents the resistant. The Japanese government discourse being part of a powerful social institution which, because it represents the state, has the coercive power of being able to claim absolute truth (Rose 2002). If taken at face value the discourse surrounding the new National Ainu Museum and its shared chanel facility built for the purpose of a respectful memorial service for Ainu ancestors could be taken as something positive for the Ainu. It only takes a look into the Ainu perspective, including protests, legal battles and press releases to start to see the cracks in this shiny representation.

The government discourse has the dual effect of silencing past wrongdoings and the current extent of the issue and normalising government efforts to deal with the issue. This has the potential to promote social inequality as the Ainu voice and Ainu rights are not being taken seriously or into account. Although we cannot know whether the government is aware of the intricacies of the issue, for example the different ancestral remembrance rituals for different kotans, one thing that is clear is that the oppositional Ainu voice is not being taken into consideration. This lack of collaboration or presence of the Ainu voice has a powerful effect in perpetuating cultural norms relating to Ainu issues which is strengthened by the fact that most people in Japan do not have a meaningful connection with Ainu people to allow them to make informed decisions.

Another finding from this analysis is that the Ainu as well are trying to create and disseminate an alternative discourse in an effort to contest this representation on their own terms. This will be further developed by the following analysis of Ainu created documentary.

Ainu use of media as a form of self-representation

This analysis does not intend to assume how the audience of these documentaries will interpret the message that is being conveyed (Monaco 152), nor the intentions of the producers in creating this media. Rather the aim is to analyse these documentaries through the lens of cultural significance as an Indigenous form of media, the social practice of self-representation and how these documentaries contest power relations in Japanese society.

Indigenous media often acts as an assertion of cultural and political sovereignty as it directly addresses the politics of identity and representation by engaging and confronting mainstream political forms (Wilson and Stewart 2008). Both documentaries were produced in conjunction with the Kotan Association and The Hokkaido University Declassified Document Research Group whose intentions are

to disseminate information about the Ainu ancestral remains repatriation issue from an Ainu perspective. *Repatriation, 85 Years Later* was directed by a filmmaker working with the Ainu, Fujino Tomoaki, while *Hosippa = An Na, Ancestral Spirits Return to Their Home Village* (hereafter referred to as *Hosippa = An Na*) was directed by former television station employee Igarashi Takahiro. The content of both documentaries offers an alternative discourse that directly challenges that of the dominant government discourse relating to the issue. In this context it can be argued that they constitute an example of Indigenous media. Furthermore, the form of documentary as self-representation is particularly powerful as it puts a human face to the issue, making the gravity of the situation that they are representing all the more visceral. “There is a substantial difference between a description in words (or even in still photographs) of a person or event, and a cinematic record of the same. Because film can give us such a close approximation of reality, it can communicate a precise knowledge that written or spoken language seldom can” (Monaco 2000).

Although both documentaries share similar themes they are presented slightly differently. *Repatriation, 85 years later*, follows Ogawa Ryukichi and Jonoguchi Yuri on their lengthy legal battle with Hokkaido University and eventual successful repatriation of ancestral remains to the Kineusa kotan. *Hosippa = An Na* follows the story of Sashima Masaki, who upon hearing the news of Ogawa and Jonoguchi also takes up the fight to have the ancestral remains returned to his kotan. *Hosippa = An Na* also shows how the Ainu community in Urahoro had to actively learn certain cultural practices that had almost been lost for the sake of the return of the ancestral remains.

Unlike *Hosippa = An Na*, *Repatriation, 85 years later* does not use narration, rather relying on visual representations and quotes from the main characters to tell the story. Where it needs to fill in more information still images and text are used. Furthermore, its storyline follows a chronological order. *Hosippa = An Na*, on the other hand, uses narration and the storyline is less chronological; rather, it jumps between different themes or sub-stories throughout the film. These sub-stories are connected to Sashima’s own development, emotionally and conceptually, with how he relates to the Ainu ancestral remains repatriation issue and offer the audience extra information to help contextualise the issue.

Both documentaries start and end in a similar way, each commencing by visually representing the Ainu’s struggle to have Ainu ancestral remains returned to their respective kotan. Although in both documentaries they do show successful repatriation, each ends on the note that the battle has only just begun and that they will continue to fight until all remains are returned. *Repatriation, 85 years later* finishes with the quote; “This is the start, from now this path will continue from the second to the third and so on,” while, *Hosippa = An Na*, ends on the quote; “The fight for the Urahoro Ainu has only just begun.”

As discussed earlier, the dominant discourse surrounding the issue of Ainu ancestral remains repatriation can be construed as one of silencing as it excludes any mention of the painful historical context of the issue. Although it does mention briefly that the bereaved wish to have the remains returned to their respective communities, its main focus is on the transferal of the remains to the new memorial facility in Shiraoui. Therefore, the cultural significance of the two documentaries can be seen in the sense that they act as a visual embodiment of the Ainu discourse in order to challenge the naturalizing effects of the dominant mainstream Japanese discourse and disseminate information about how the Ainu conceptualise and experience this issue in the present day. By creating documentary as a form of self-representation, this can be a social practice that empowers the Ainu voice.

Although both documentaries approach the same issue through different stories there is one theme that they have in common, the juxtaposition between the Ainu elders' anger and the universities neutral unresponsiveness. An analysis of some key examples of how this is visually portrayed in each documentary will follow.

Repatriation, 85 Years Later

Throughout this documentary interviews with Ogawa and Jonoguchi visually portray the gravity of the issue as they go through a lengthy and emotionally distressing process to be granted repatriation of ancestral remains to their kotan from Hokkaido University. The attempts to have a conversation with the university are fraught as the university refuses to respond to their correspondence. One particularly distressful juxtaposition is portrayed in a scene where the two Ainu elders and their supporters peacefully approach Hokkaido University to try and start a conversation and they are met with four security guards blocking the entrance into the university administration buildings, leaving the two elders stranded first in the snow outside the building and then in the cold stone foyer. Eventually when a university employee comes to speak to them, he sits there, listens to an exasperated Jonoguchi speaking about the issue of repatriation and does not offer any comment. Eventually when someone asks, "Why won't you let us in? Why did you call four security guards?" His response is "I won't answer but I will take your opinion on board" (Fujino 2017).

Although we do not see scenes from within the court it is clearly represented in the documentary that it wasn't until the Ainu plaintiffs instituted a lawsuit against Hokkaido University that the university started to address the issue. Another example of the neutral nature in which the university approached the issue is represented during the repatriation itself. While a document is passed between a Hokkaido University official and Ogawa to signify the official nature of the repatriation the official simply states the fact that the remains have been repatriated without any word of apology or acknowledgement of the nature of the issue.

The neutral language and business-like manner with which the university addresses the issue is in stark contrast to the emotive gravity that is displayed from the Ainu within the documentary. The use of interview and soundbites from press-conferences clearly portray this Ainu perspective. These are supplemented with Jonoguchi singing a heart-wrenching song in the Ainu language which had been passed down in her community expressing the despair of a young Ainu woman who had been torn away from her home to a life of forced labor, visions of the preparations for repatriation, scenes from the ancestral remembrance ceremonies and an emotive speech by Alaskan Tlinget elder, Bob Sam, who too has had to fight for repatriation of his own ancestors' remains. By including this vision, the complex nature of the issue which is absent from the dominant discourse is being displayed.

Hosippa = An Na

The focus of this documentary is on unpacking the issue from the Ainu perspective and it clearly represents this through the use of narration and some strong words from Sashima Masaki's nephew, Sashima Hiromasa. It begins by posing the question, "What would you think if your ancestor's remains were to be taken without permission?" By encouraging the audience to think about the issue and relate it to their own life experience, this method can break down hegemonic cultural norms which often represent Indigenous peoples as being an *inferior* or *abnormal* part of society.

As a practice of self-representation, the repetition of certain themes through narration emphasises certain aspects of the Ainu perspective. A clear example of this is the repetitive use of the word for ancestor's soul or spirit (*senzo no tamashii*) in replacement of the word for remains (*ikotsu*), thus emphasizing the spiritual reality for many Ainu people in relation to ancestral remains. These remains do not only represent ancestral bones which were stolen, they are the ancestor's soul and they need to return home to the earth of their kotan.

In relation to the current situation facing the Ainu community, this documentary is quite direct with how it represents opposition to the government's position. Regarding the memorial facility being built in Shiraoi they say that the government has ignored the Ainu's wishes, and that for the Ainu, who culturally live with nature and must then return to nature, the transferal of the ancestral remains to a memorial facility is nothing but a humiliation. Sashima says that the government's plans will mean that all Ainu will have to go to Shiraoi to perform *icarpa* (ancestral remembrance ritual) and this is very painful (Igarashi 2019).

Mistrust surrounding the official discourse as presented by Hokkaido University is represented through Hiromasa who recalls his interaction with Hokkaido University staff during the repatriation process. Boxes containing ancestral remains from Hokkaido University have had numbers attached to them. When he inquired about the names of the individuals that they were repatriating the Hokkaido

University staff member said he couldn't share the information because it was *personal information*. Hiromasa goes on to question the validity of this and to what motive is the confidentiality serving.

Finally, although both documentaries apply different approaches in how they represent the Ainu discourse it becomes clear that Ainu ancestral remains repatriation is a salient issue for Ainu people and a representation of years of discrimination and oppression that still continues today. The majority of universities' unresponsiveness and refusal to apologise, coupled with the Ainu's dissatisfaction with the government's plan to transfer the remains to the new shared memorial facility in Shiraoi constitutes a disconnect between the Ainu discourse and the dominant discourse. These documentaries have the two-fold role of empowering the Ainu voice and raising awareness to the plight of the Ainu through the dissemination of information relating to this issue from the Ainu perspective. Considering this information is largely absent from the government discourse these documentaries can also serve the purpose of breaking down power relations within Japanese society by challenging normalising discourses.

Conclusion:

As discussed, dominant discourses wield power through assumptions of truth and the categorisation of certain people, versions of reality or concepts as superior and others as inferior. Often informed by cultural hegemonies, dominant discourses represent a 'truth' or image of their Indigenous objects that severely deviates from a self-perceived 'truth' or image. Knopf states, "the results are misrepresentation of Indigenous issues at best and devastating stereotypes at worst, which encourage demonizing of Indigenous cultures in mainstream thought as well as physical violence against Indigenous people" (2018). Dominant discourses promote social inequality and also have an impact on how marginalised peoples form their identities and perceive their place in society.

Through analysing the dominant Japanese discourse relating to the issue of Ainu ancestral remains repatriation it appears that there has been little input or collaboration with Ainu people. Discussions about the history of the issue, the nature in which the remains were taken and the current painful impact it is having on the Ainu are non-existent. Also, the majority of universities involved continue to refuse to apologise (Hokkaido Shinbun 2019). Instead the government is focusing on the transferal of remains to a shared charnel facility in the new National Ainu museum as a positive step forward for the "dignity of the Ainu" (MEXT 2018).

By comparing this to the Ainu discourse we get a much more complex and detailed picture. It is clear that this is a painful and at times polarising issue for the Ainu. Activists are calling for the remains to be returned to *kotan* and for the universities involved to acknowledge past wrongdoings and apologise. There are also many voices who are against the transferal of remains to the new National Ainu Museum including those of the Kotan Association and the Karafuto Ainu Association (Mainichi Shinbun 2018).

It can be said that the two documentaries are representative of Indigenous media and self-representation as an empowering and socially significant practice. The documentaries stand as a visceral, emotive representation of the issue of Ainu ancestral repatriation as told from the Ainu perspective on their own terms. By creating an alternative, resistant discourse to the dominant discourse incongruencies present between both discourses become obvious and this can result in more diverse education around Ainu issues for Ainu and non-Ainu people alike. Therefore, the creation of media is one way in which the Ainu can address and breakdown harmful, dominant discourses which continue to misrepresent Ainu issues.

As discussed, Indigenous media has the potential to challenge dominant discourses, deconstruct cultural norms and disrupt historically oppressive power relations within society through the act of self-representation and making culture visible. As the majority of mainstream Japanese people lack meaningful contact with Ainu people there is a high potential that they gain their information about Ainu issues through dominant discourses. This allows institutions like the government, law and education to frame discourses relating to Ainu with or without Ainu collaboration, thus further strengthening cultural norms and power relations. If the Japanese media landscape was to open up to more voices from Ainu people through Ainu-created media and collaboration with Ainu people this has the potential to inspire the deconstruction of cultural norms, harmful stereotypes and misrepresentation. With more Ainu created media it opens up the possibility for Ainu people and their issues to be represented on their own terms and respected as complex, culturally diverse subjects, rather than 2-dimensional objects to be manipulated.

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ⁱ Although there is disagreement within the Ainu community in relation to the repatriation of Ainu ancestral remains, the messages portrayed in the two documentaries still constitute an important example of self-representation and Ainu discourse.