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Contextualising N. G. Munro's Filming of the *Ainu Bear Ceremony*

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*The nature that remained unchanged from antiquity
has vanished before we even noticed.
Where are those who used to leave pleasantly
in camps and mountains?*

Yukie Chiri, *Ainu Shinyōshū* (1933)

Introduction

After a struggle lasting many years and led by several Ainu associations, the Diet, Japanese parliament, eventually recognised the Ainu as the indigenous people of Japan. This took place in 2008, only one year after the United Nations issued the "Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples". I have the impression that this historical landmark fuelled the interest in Ainu culture in Japan and some documentaries were released soon after: *Tokyo Ainu* (Hiroshi Moriya, 2011) and *Kamui to ikiru* (Hideki Komatsu, 2011). In 2012, I had the chance to attend a private screening of Moriya's *Tokyo Ainu*, arranged by Alejandra Armendáriz, a Japanese Cinema researcher who would later become a Japan Society staff member and with whom I have maintained a long friendship from then on. Probably prompted by this revival of Ainu culture, I enrolled in Ainu language courses at Waseda University, established connections with members of the Ainu community and engaged in the production of the full-length documentary *Ainu. Pathways to Memory* which was released in 2014.

Delving deeper into the visibility and dissemination of Ainu culture, I noticed that it was essential to find out about prior cinematic representations of the Ainu. Surprisingly, I discovered that the recent films on the Ainu people were not a new phenomenon; far from it, the long period of discrimination and policies of assimilation to the Japanese culture and way of life contrasted with an extraordinary visibility that

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the Ainu had before World War II.¹ As a result of a European fascination with the Ainu, they are featured in *Les Aïnous à Yéso*, comprised of two of the earliest thirty-three moving images ever shot in Japan, which were filmed by the French operator François-Constant Girel in 1897. After that, the Ainu were depicted by a number of Western film operators (Centeno 2017; 2015; Okada 2007).

Then, I came to know of the documentaries made by the Scottish physician Neil Gordon Munro which were extraordinarily inspiring. Munro produced the last works among a wave of Western documentaries prior to the Pacific War. In March 2017, I was invited to an event organised by the Japan Society in partnership with the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) and held at SOAS, in which Munro's *The Ainu Bear Ceremony* (1931) was screened alongside extracts from the documentary I directed; *Ainu. Pathway to Memory*. This was a bold and inspiring proposal that enabled the setting up of dialogue between the last pre-war documentaries and probably the first documentary film after the war. The event also allowed me to watch the different versions of the film that Munro had made on the Ainu bear ceremony —provided by George Barker, who at the time was working at the RAI—.

This text seeks to contextualise Munro's work by focusing on the footage he shot on the bear festival, framing his role within the documentaries made on the Ainu before World War II. This research is intended to reveal why Munro's documentary work presents a qualitative leap in the pre-war representation of the Ainu, and to explore how he inaugurates a new Western approach to this minority, surpassing previous moving images aimed at astonishing audiences with exotic images of "primitive people".

Ainu bear ceremony in films

The *iyomante rimse*, bear festival, is one of the best-known ceremonies and a distinguishing mark of Ainu culture, although it is part of the cult of bears that is found extensively in circumpolar cultures (Irimoto 2014: 3). *Iyomante* in the Ainu language

¹ Collections of Ainu material culture, photographs and paintings proliferated in European museums of the time. For an account on these collections see Kreiner (1993: 25-30).

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means "sending off" and *rimse* literary means "dance". The Ainu belief system was based on spirituality in nature, and animals and plants were considered the embodiment of *kamui*, or spirit of species. The bear was the reincarnation of the Mountain God and the festival –together with the salmon ceremony- was their most important hunting ritual, in which spirits who have visited the *ainumoshir*, the Ainu homeland, were sent back to the world of deities.

Ainu bear ceremonies have been documented by Japanese explorers since the early 18th century and it's not surprising that it was portrayed in several documentaries before the war.² Pre-war films on the *Iyomante rimse* were shot by Japanese and Western explorers between 1917 and 1936. However, by the time all their films were made, the Ainu were suffering from a long-standing cultural assimilation promoted from the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) under the slogan *bunmei kaika* ("civilisation and enlightenment"). In Hokkaido, the Development Commission, established in 1869, encouraged the acquisition of the Japanese language, culture and way of life. Ainu assimilation was officially enacted in the 1899 *Hokaidō kyūdojin hogohō* ("Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Law") (Ainu Bunka 7). Many Ainu customs and traditions were forbidden, farming was encouraged to the detriment of traditional hunting and many migrated to cities become labourers for the Japanese factories and fishing industry.

As a consequence, less and less *iyomante* were held for their original purpose and in their original form. The first one was a festival filmed by the Russian-American Benjamin Brodsky in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, in 1917, which was added to his *Beautiful Japan* (1918) and *A Trip through Japan with the YWCA* (1919). These *travelogues* consisted in a diverse range of images of Japan, in which the sequences of the "primitive Ainu" served as a counterpoint to Japanese modernisation (Centeno 2014; 2015). However, these images are deceptive: the cub in Brodsky's film is visibly too young for ceremony and indeed the ritual sacrifice, which was the most important part of the festival, is not included in the montage. The little bear was probably taken out of the cage just to be filmed before the camera.

² Images of the bear festival date back to 1710, when Mitsumiya Kanzan published *Illustrated Stories about Ezo*. Kodama Sadayoshi published *Scenes from Ezo Country* in mid-18th century and Hatta Awakimaro published *The Natural Wonders of Ezo Island* at the end of the same century. All contain valuable images depicting the process of the ceremony.

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To what are these mismatches due? By the time Brodsky reached Hokkaido, the bear ceremony was in rapid decline. According to Loos and Osanai (1993: 244-245), the belief in sending-off spirits remained only in children's games by the 1920's. Traditional customs and rituals were preserved only in remote villages, which had been subject to less Japanese pressure but also fell outside the cinematograph scope (Siddle 1996: 127). Some festivals were still captured by documentary cameras, but they were merely performed to meet the demands of outsiders, those of both Japanese and foreigners (Ogawa 1997; Muñoz González, 2008: 109; Sjöberg 1997: 133-134). Brodsky shot his footage in Shiraoi, which was one of the places where documentary-makers before the war had filmed the bear ceremony, with the exception of Munro.

Shiraoi was a main settlement of the Ainu population in Hokkaido and became a destination for explorers seeking an encounter with these people from the late 19th century onwards. Its inhabitants started to arrange cultural exhibitions for the visitors and these villages became a sort of early tourist resort. Early explorers filmed these ethnic performances, presenting a primitivism deprived of any symbolic charge. Many Ainu considered these representations humiliating and disrespectful, as was noted in a tourist guide of the 1920s: "Many thoughtful Ainu people are ashamed to perform the old manners of their ancestors for money amidst the laughter of spectators. They consider it disrespectful to their forefathers."³

Early documentaries contributed to the construction of a distorted imagery of the Ainu people, which projected a romantic view of their apparent life linked to traditional culture and neglected the reality of their poverty, discrimination and cultural assimilation. Japan was immersed in vertiginous changes of all kinds during those years. Ainu labourers in industry and services increased while urban population doubled in Japan between 1910 and 1935 (Gluck 1985: 283). Socialist organisations proliferated during Taishō democracy and these liberal ideas resonated in the Ainu community, which created the progressive association *Kaiheisha* (Siddle 1996: 131). However, documentaries at the time neglected the reality present behind these images. Filmmakers did not capture the present life of the Ainu but attempted to bring their past back to life before the camera.

³ *Tourist guide to the Ainu Life*, Hokkaido Government 1927, p. 12.

New approaches in early Shōwa era (1926-1941)

During the 1920's, remarkable film activities flourished through the work of amateur filmmakers who had purchased small-format cameras (Nornes 2003: 15). In this context, a professor of zoology at Hokkaido Imperial University, Hatta Saburō, made praiseworthy efforts to renew the cinematic image of the Ainu. In his 34-minute documentary, *Life of Shiraoi Ainu* (Shiraoi Ainu no seikatsu, 1926), there is concern to transfer the Ainu people to the present.⁴ Thus, he filmed women using the new water supply and men carrying goods and engaged in their everyday life. Hatta combined these scenes with examples of their traditional culture, including the *iyomante rimse*, as well as an Ainu wedding ceremony, a funeral, and an *asircep-nomi* —celebration of salmon harvest- and elderly people weaving *attus* —traditional garments made of vegetable fibre.

However, in early-Shōwa period, there was a proliferation of socialist and liberal ideas. The leftist Ainu association, *Kaiheisha* was illegalised and in this new scenario, Inukai Tetsuo made *Bear Festival in Chikabumi near Asahikawa-city* (Kinbun no kumaokuri girei, 1936). He filmed the *iyomante rimse* in Chikabumi, where *Kaiheisha* had been founded. It is likely that his films were politically motivated and sought to give visibility to the Ainu problem in a context where fascist ideas were becoming increasingly predominant in politics. Chikabumi was known for its stubborn opposition to Japanese authority throughout several territorial disputes (Emori 1996: 116-119). Inukai had participated in activities for the preservation of Ainu culture and knew some *ekashi*, local Ainu leaders. In a way, these Ainu images joined the movements of proletarian art between late-1920's and early 1930's, seeking to respond to the increasing pressure to show cinematic views of Japan as a unified nation under the emperor. However, the Ainu movement was temporarily silenced with the outbreak of the conflict in China in 1937 (Owell 2004). Ethnographic films were replaced with propaganda documentaries and the last film featuring the Ainu of this period was

⁴ To know more on this film see Hatta (1926)

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Northern Compatriots (Kita no dōhō, 1941)⁵ shot by the female director Tazuko Sakane, who filmed the Ainu in Hokkaido as a shifting people living "inside" the big imperial family (*tennō kazoku*) and thus, inverting the traditional concepts of "outside" (*soto*) and "inside" (*uchi*) in the Ainu representation.

Munro's Scientific Approach

Munro's voice was authoritative and his films provided a close gaze on Ainu culture in this period. He developed a scientific approach, initiated by Hatta, seeking to categorise and explain the elements of Ainu material culture. Munro had studied medicine in Edinburgh and travelled in India before arriving in Japan in 1891 to work as a physician in Yokohama and later in Karuizawa. He combined medicine with his interest in Japanese prehistory, about which he published several books at the beginning of the 20th century (Munro 1906; 1908; 1909; 1911). Munro visited Hokkaido on several occasions, between the 1890s and 1920s. Then, his main interest shifted from prehistory to Ainu culture. His manuscripts on the Ainu were partially published in the book *Ainu: Creed and Cult*, edited by B.Z. Seligman in 1962, who was a widow of Charles Gabriel Seligman, a professor at the London School of Economics, with whom Munro maintained a long correspondence.

Both in his manuscripts and documentary works, he shows a profound insight into the life of Ainu people and their cultural tradition. He moved to Nibutani, Hokkaido from 1930, a village with a majority Ainu population, after obtaining a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to continue his research on their culture, and remained there until his death in 1942. Munro developed his research by opening a clinic with his wife, a Japanese nurse, in which he offered free treatment. That allowed him to gain the

⁵ El film está perdido y hay discrepancias en la fecha de estreno. Abe Mark Nornes anota la fecha 1937 mientras Hikari Hori apunta a 1941. La fecha aportada Hori parece más plausible atendiendo a la biografía de Sakane donde se puede encontrar información referida a la producción y la sinopsis del film. Tazuko Sakane, «Kita no doho Zatsukan», *Bunka Eiga* 1n^o1, enero 1941, pp. 74-75 y «Kita no doho», *Bunka eiga* 1 n^o5, mayo 1941, pp.53-54. Cfr. Abe Mark Nornes, *Japanese documentary film: the Meiji era through Hiroshima*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003 p. 3; Hikari Hori, «Migration and Transgression. Female Pioneers of Documentary Filmmaking in Japan», *Asian Cinema*. Mayo 2012. vol 16 n1. pp.89-97.

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confidence of the Ainu and to meet his informants (Seligman 1992: xii-xiv). Among his ethnographic work, Munro recorded Ainu language, translated songs and legends and wrote descriptions on ceremonies and rites, which he occasionally filmed and photographed, sometimes by himself, at other times alongside a professional photographer.

Munro was determined to complete an account on Ainu culture, and in 1938 sent his manuscripts, together with a series of photographs, to Seligman, who had arranged to publish them in a book. The photos were deposited at the Royal Anthropological Institute but the text was not fully prepared for publication and correspondence with Seligman was abruptly interrupted by the beginning of the war in 1941, one year before Munro's death. Eventually, the collection of Munro's manuscripts was not published until 1962, in the book *Ainu Creed and Cult*, which is a compilation of texts, articles, and information scattered in letters written to Seligman, focusing only on those texts revolving around rituals and beliefs.

Munro's Documentary Work

Munro shot films on ceremonies held around Nibutani, relating to a wide range of topics: fertility, pregnancy, parturition, spirit possession, the treatment of diseases, ritual dancing, beer-straining and the bear ceremony. Thus, his documentaries become the last register of ancestral rituals such as the *Uepotara*, Ainu **xorcism**, which he filmed in *Uepotara: A Traditional Exorcism Rite of the Nibutani Ainu* (N.G.Munro no Nibutani ainu no akuma harai no gishiki – Uepotara, 1933). Munro had already described this ritual in some of his manuscripts collected by Seligman (Seligman and Munro 1996: 99-111).⁶ Another festival that he captured in Nibutani was the *Chisenomi*, or the house-warming ceremony, which he had explained previously (collected in Seligman and Munro 1996: 74-86) and eventually filmed in *Chisenomi* (N. G. Munro Nibutani Ainu no Chisenomi, 1934). Several companies in Japan, *Tokyo Cinema*, ECJA and SMF, restored these documentaries —together with Hatta Saburō's *Life of Shiraoi Ainu*— and were screened at Yamagata Documentary Film Festival in

⁶ For a more detailed account on this ritual in Batchelor (1901: 313-323).

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1993. *In Our Own Eyes / First Nations' Moving Images (Sekai Senjūmin eigasai)* del Festival Internacional de Cine Documental de Yamagata de 1993.⁷

Unlike most of the adventurers who had filmed the Ainu to that date, Munro was not an adventurer who passed through Ainu villages and merely captured the first encounter with an exotic culture. He had studied the Ainu culture for thirty years before settling in an Ainu village for the last twelve years of his life. Munro was not only aware of the structural discrimination against the Ainu, but also denounced their poverty and harsh living conditions. He elaborated a report for the Hokkaido Government, denouncing the degrading Japanese treatment of the Ainu, which he considered similar to class prejudice against the *burakumin*, the cast of untouchables (Munro 1918: 13). According to B. Z. Seligman (1992: xiv), Munro's goal was not only to give an account of his observations but also to show the world, and specifically the Japanese, that the Ainu were not savages with absurd superstitions. His films were made to document and explain the last vestiges of a fast vanishing culture; however, there was a political demand inherent in these images, and he used all resources available to demonstrate that they had a cultural heritage of their own that deserved to be known and preserved.

The Three Versions of the *The Bear Ceremony*

The most remarkable event documented by Munro is probably the Ainu bear ceremony filmed in 1930 for two reasons: First, it presents the most relevant festival for the Ainu both in terms of symbolic and identity value. Second, it has been the only one of his films to have come out of Japan. Ironically, while Munro witnessed the *iyomante rimse* on several occasions, he never wrote on this ceremony, which is a noteworthy omission in *Ainu Creed and Cult*, a compilation of Munro's manuscripts, which specifically revolves around Ainu rituals and spirituality.⁸

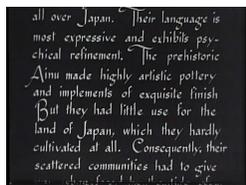
⁷ A recent documentary *AINU Past and Present. Things Revealed by Dr Munro's Movie* (2006, made between 2005 and 2006 by Junko Uchida and members of the National Museum of Japanese History (Rekihaku) with the assistance of Tokyo Cinema Inc, explores Munro's films and photos.

⁸It was S.M. Seligman who added an account of the film as an appendix of the compilation book, in Seligman 1996: 169-172

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Munro probably shot the *iyomante rimse* on 25th December 1930 with the light Eyemo camera in 35mm, which was suitable for filming outdoors. It seems that the film was presented at University of Hokkaido the same year (Uchida 2007). He counted on the collaboration of Seitaro Kayano, the father of Sigueru Kayano, the first Ainu to be given a seat in the Diet and key figure for the postwar revival of Ainu culture. Seitaro Kayano had also participated in Munro's aforementioned documentaries, *Uepotara* and *Chisenomi*. His family is deeply linked to the history of the Ainu documentary film. His son, Shigeru made a number of documentaries in the 1970s alongside the documentary maker Tadayoshi Himeda (Centeno 2017; Okada 1998). Shigeru claims that in these films, he reproduced forgotten ceremonies driven by his father that he had seen in Munro's films (Kayano 2007).

In 1932, Munro added the intertitles and completed the film in 16mm under the title Inukai Tetsuo made *Bear Festival in Chikabumi near Asahikawa-city* (Kinbun no kumaokuri girei, 1936). with the support of the production company J. Osawa and Company. Sometimes it can also be found under the alternative titles *The Ainu Bear Festival*, also *Divine Dispatch*, or by the Japanese translation *Iyomande. Kuma Okuri*. Unlike the earlier Western adventurers who filmed the Ainu, he had nothing to do with the film industry and had no training in cinema. As a consequence, this first version of the film presents a clumsy montage that neglects basic editing techniques. Its format is closer to that of scholarly essay than a cinematic narrative. Intertitles are replaced by long texts which pervade the documentary and are only interrupted by short scenes which often last few seconds. However, unlike in previous film representations, Munro is not an intruder; he enters the scene integrated as just one more aspect of the mise-en-scène and explains every single detail, providing graphs and drawings accompanied by specific terminology and definitions.



Divine Dispatch Commonly Called the Ainu Bear Festival (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931).

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Munro dissects traditional culture and displays a battery of concepts. He begins with the *ongami*, a ritual salutation; then continues with the *inau*, wands cut from living trees and whittled to special forms, which are offerings to gods and gods' messengers. Munro provides a typology and usages –*Hash Inau*, *Chehorokakep*, *Kike-paras*, *Chikube-ni Kamui*, *Shirikura Inau*; *Ikubasui*, moustache-lifters but also message sticks that serve to pass the drink to the *kamui* (deities); *hebere*, ritual arrows ; *Nusa*, a groups of *inau* arrayed outside the sacred East window of Ainu houses; and types of *kamui* (spirits), such as *Shiramba Kamui*, the "holder of space", *Pase Kamui* (or *Kamui Fuchi*), "the Divine Ancestress" or Goddess of Fire.



Divine Dispatch Commonly Called the Ainu Bear Festival (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931).

Then, Munro explains the section into which the bear ceremony is divided: First, millet is pounded into flour to make special dumplings- Second, ball-cakes are made to be thrown like confetti. Third, the day before the sacrifice, friends gathered and give offerings at *Kamui Fuchi*, and other household deities are revered. The post to which the bear will be tied is firmly fixed and adorned with evergreens representing immortal life. Fourth, vessels of Japanese lacquer with food and drink are set out and the walls are covered by sacred mats and ceremonial swords. Fifth, boiling soup –*inau-korashkoro*- and millet beer are prepared for the feast. Prayers are offered to the bear still kept in a cage.



Divine Dispatch Commonly Called the Ainu Bear Festival (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931).

Sixth, the bear is noosed and guided outside, while people await the bear's arrival with songs. Seventh, after a round or two, specially decorated arrows with

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harmless points are shot. Eighth, the bear is tied to the *tushok-ni* while a bowman prays for a quick and easy dispatch with his real arrow. Ninth, the bear is sacrificed by bamboo-pointed arrows and an *ekashi*, Ainu leader, prays for the welfare of the parting spirit. Tenth, the passing of the spirit is signalled by the flight of magic arrows and the ritual imitation of strangling with the dead bear. Eleventh, as it was a female bear, its body is decked with a necklace and the skinning and dividing of the body proceeds according to traditional ritual. Praise is offered while sacred fire burns at the place where *Shirakamba kamui* is hoped to come.



Divine Dispatch Commonly Called the Ainu Bear Festival (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931).

Twelfth, the feast starts; elderly people dance *tapkara* (lit. "doing claps"), singing and reciting legends until morning. Thirteenth, The Ainu drink the bear's blood calling it a divine medicine. Ancestral spirits are addressed with offerings of drink. Fourteenth, children play at tug of war, once a magic rite, and dances continue, including the crane dance. Sixteenth, at dawn, the head of the bear god is taken out to the *ram nusa*, where the fire is burning and prayers are made to the *Shirakamba kamui* and the spirit of the bear. The elders dance a *tapkara* as a farewell.



Divine Dispatch Commonly Called the Ainu Bear Festival (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931).

Munro donated the film to the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), where it was shown on the 10th January 1933. RAI made a new edition in 1961, with the assistance of the Nuffield Foundation and Edinburgh Film Productions, under the title *The Ainu Bear Ceremony*, in which the original length was significantly reduced, from

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52 to 28 minutes.⁹ Essentially, all of Munro's written texts were removed in this second version and replaced with a voice-over giving it a more conventional format for screenings. Some scenes were shortened, and a couple of new images were added, mainly a part of the opening scene in which a group of men perform a ritual greeting, *ongami*, surrounded by women sitting in a circle.



The Ainu Bear Ceremony (edited in 1961)

A third version of the *iyomante rimse* filmed by Munro was edited in 1965 by the Japanese company *Tokyo Olympia Eigasha* which entitled it *Iyomante. In a Mysterious and Lyrical Land*. The documentary was shortened to 25 minutes and intertitles were also removed and replaced with a voice-over. The structure remains roughly the same, although a number of new images are added from the remaining 35 mm footage that Munro hadn't sent to England. Those are mainly added to the first ten minutes and included a map in the opening sequence, landscape of Saru River Valley, Ainu *chise*, traditional houses, female tattoos, close-ups to Ainu children, a scene on women's life, carrying water and wood, a toddler, weaving, and men transporting trunks on horse carriages, canoes and a water supply.¹⁰



Iyomante. In a Mysterious and Lyrical Land (edited in 1965)

⁹ The film was digitalised and commercialised in a DVD edited in 2012.

¹⁰ Munro's **films, together with Hatta, Inukai's are available for viewing** at the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples (Hokkaido Ritsuhoppō Minzoku Hakubutsukan) and Shimonaka Memorial Foundation (Shimonaka Kinen Zaidan).

The "Artifice"

It is also a remarkable fact that unlike previous shootings of the bear ceremony, Munro did not film the bear ceremony in any of these "tourist resorts" but in Nibutani. He just filmed the activities carried out by the Ainu community living there, which was crucial to provide the film with high degree of realism and accuracy. Munro's versions of the *iyomante rimse* are also important because they allow the comparison of the regional differences with other visual documents. The festival captured by Munro, as well as all those filmed in the aforementioned documentaries, belongs to one of the three existing types of bear ceremonies according to Irimomto (2014: 85-162). However, we should note that even in this case, his work was not completely free from the cinematic 'artifice'; some aspects of the *iyomante* filmed by Munro were specifically prepared to be captured before the camera. Indeed, *Muroran Mainichi Shimbun* reported that filming the ceremony was Munro's initiative (Ogawa 1997).

The ceremony was conceived so cinematically that the feast was shot in a *chise*, a Ainu traditional house, artificially opened at the top. According to Uchida (2007), there is a photo in the Rekihaku (National Museum of Japanese History) that shows a house with no thatch on its roof. This was probably done in order to have enough natural light for shooting, since electricity hadn't yet come to Nibutani. This means that the *iyomante* took place in a sort of film set created for the occasion and this was confirmed by Shigeru Kayano who saw the shooting when he was a child (Kayano 2007).

This shows how, to an extent, these images also project a deceptive reality. In this regard, Uchida (2007) notes that when the film was screened for a group of elderly women from Nibutani, belonging to the same generation as those girls appearing on screen, some members of the audience recognised one of the tattooed women in the film who, in reality, was without any tattoos. In addition, they noted some of the tattoos seemed to have been artificially painted black. The truth is that the practice of tattooing women around their mouths had almost disappeared at that time, as a consequence of the prohibitions in 1871 and again in 1876 (Ainu Bunka 2011: 7). As a consequence, it

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is likely that the onscreen images featured tattoos that had been painted just for the shooting.

Also, there are a couple of inconsistencies in B.Z. Seligman's explanation on how the ceremony took place (Seligman 1996: 169-172) and the research carried out by Uchida (2007). First, Seligman writes that the cub was reared in Nibutani, Uchida asserts that the two-year-old bear was not reared in the town as they had been in the past, but brought from the nearby Asahikawa city. Second, Seligman claims that the ceremony was held at the best house in the village, and assumes that it should have been that of the *kotan* chief. However, since Uchida and Kayano noted that it had no thatch on the roof, it is likely that what we see onscreen is a sort of film set that had been adapted for the shooting.

Conclusion

However, besides some adjustments implemented to meet cinematic requirements, which are not always explicit on screen, the extraordinary value of Munro's shooting is incontestable. While earlier documentaries sought to present primitive Ainu stuck in their traditions and thus provided decontextualised and ahistorical images of another time, whose main goal was to shock cinema audiences, Munro had a significantly different approach. Even if he barely captured Ainu everyday life in modern society, Munro presents an authoritative and honest account. He acknowledges in a title of the first version of the film that this culture was disappearing and that Ainu were living modern lives. It is also true that while Munro's documentary was more concerned with capturing the last specimens of a vanishing culture than denouncing their social exclusion, there is, inherent in his work, a political motivation; to enhance the visibility of this minority and support their right to be respected.

As a great connoisseur of the Ainu culture, he probably shot the most authoritative film on the bear festival ever made. He structured the shooting and montage according to the festival stages and systematically filmed every aspect of the ceremony as a careful documentation of a cultural heritage that he was aware was in

Reference: Centeno Martín, Marcos P. "Contextualising N. G. Munro's filming of the Ainu Bear Ceremony", *Japan Society Proceedings*, 2018, pp. 90-106 (version of the manuscript accepted on 13.03. 2018)

serious danger of extinction. Unlike in prior Western approaches, he limited himself to shooting the material aspect of the festival but made great efforts to transmit to the audience its spiritual dimension. As a consequence, Munro's footage is an extraordinarily valuable piece of ethnographic material, which has played a key role in the preservation of the Ainu cultural legacy for future generations.

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