Global Issues and Language Education: Reflecting on Contested Place Names

John Guy Perrem
Muroran Institute of Technology

Abstract
The language surrounding place names that students encounter through maps, textbooks, listening material or other media are rarely examined beyond being simple indicators of a particular location. This paper delves beyond the locational into the social and political complexities which can surround place names. By doing so the aim is to deepen the potential for understanding how the seemingly banal can be replete with socio-political complexity and simultaneously provide learning opportunities. Three geographic strands are presented in the paper within which the contested nature of place names is explored. Firstly, Hokkaido, Japan, and the replacement/disappearance of Ainu place names. Secondly, Northern Ireland and the struggles in both physical and cartographic terms regarding the naming of the city Derry/Londonderry. Thirdly, the paper turns towards the southern USA and controversially named Confederate monuments. Relevant pedagogic activities are also presented that are connected to each preceding geographic strand.

Keywords: Geography, global issues, language, map, place names, socio-political issues

Introduction
As language educators in Japan maps and place names often feature in lessons and textbooks that are connected and interwoven in myriad ways. These place-based connections range from country profiles in intercultural lessons to reading comprehension pieces about cities or reference points for particular accents. Maps and place names provide students with focal points. For example, in a lesson on the UK a teacher may project a map and allow students to absorb the names and geographic elements of that country through listen and repeat activities. However, the language of place names, the material and physical reality of those places on the ground, and how maps are constructed are not without nuance or complication. Here then, we find an opportunity to expand our student's knowledge regarding the contested language of place names both in a local Japanese context and from wider international perspectives. From a Global Issues viewpoint, language education is not a hermetically sealed bubble separate from the politics and meaning that unfolds in everyday life around the world. By presenting Japanese students with opportunities to learn about the complexity of initially banal seeming place names we can instill additional layers of depth and nuance into language learning scenarios.

The question may emerge "Why is this relevant to language study?" The answer is that place names have power and that power has the capacity to instill both action and

emotion in people in consequential ways. In recent and heart wrenching times arising from the war in Ukraine this is evidenced in the linguistic contestation over Kyiv (derived from Ukrainian Київ) versus Kiev (derived from the Russian Киев) issue. Similar renaming contestations occur in different ways in both historical and contemporary contexts and with different groups and cultures. For example, in Hokkaido cases arose related to the discrimination of Ainu people and similarly in Okinawa with the Uchinanchu people. In Europe, Northern Ireland in the UK has ongoing and fiercely contested place name issues, such as 'Derry' versus 'Londonderry'. While across the Atlantic in the United States consistent nomenclature battles arise surrounding lingering names and monuments in public spaces linked to the civil war Confederacy. These preceding examples illustrate how widespread contested place name issues are and therefore worthy of consideration in our language teaching in Japan.

By developing students understanding of the contested nature of place names it can provide them with a new analytical lens with which to approach words which they encounter and maps they read on their language learning journey. A key idea here is that "description is never value neutral, it always comes with a framing assumption" (Schein, 2009, p. 380). As language educators in an interconnected and challenging world there are pedagogic responsibilities and opportunities to equip students with tools to interact with language in innovative ways. This paper will present examples that can be used in the language classroom in practical ways and allow educators to integrate contested place names into their teaching if they so wish.

This paper provides a Japanese, European and American example of contested place names, as well as practical classroom activities to accompany each example.

Attachment/Aversion to Place Names

People become emotionally attached or develop aversions to place names, words and objects of meaning throughout their existence. The preceding elements can become contested if competing cultural discourses vie for dominance (Brown and MacGinty, 2001). This connection or aversion of people to place names, words and objects does not emerge from a void, but rather from positive or negative interactions between others and oneself, and oneself and the relevant landscape. For example, if you think of your own connection to important places then certain places may become visible before you in your geographical imagination. These places are personalized based upon your life and how it has unfolded and are intertwined with elements such as time and cultural discourses. These connections can be benign, as in the connection to the name of a certain street you like, a negative connection from experiences in childhood, or the sense of social connection shared on an everyday basis at a particular place with others. These moments of inception for connection are the mechanisms of meaning through which people actively form emotional attachment to place names. These connections can have real world impacts if they are felt strongly in contested scenarios. They can lead to linguistic and symbolic tensions becoming segregators, causes for positive social change or lead to material changes in the landscape.

Hokkaido and Ainu Place Names

Let us begin from a Japanese perspective in Hokkaido. The Ainu are an indigenous people who originally dwelt throughout Hokkaido and its northern neighbors of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (Aoki, 2002). The Ainu language had several regional dialects (see Figure

2) and was passed on through oral traditions. The Ainu people have endured many challenges surrounding forced assimilation and discrimination as a result of what Hamada (2015, p. 43) describes as a "hegemonic narrative" from the state. This marginalization has meant that Ainu culture, and thus language, has suffered an ongoing precarious status as well as associated social and economic equality gaps in society.

Following the annexation of Hokkaido in 1868 the Ainu language was prohibited and cultural assimilation processes were undertaken by the Japanese government. This saw Ainu traditions curtailed, Ainu children being placed in Japanese schools and the substitution and adaptation of Ainu place names throughout Hokkaido. Research has shown that "as Japan passed through the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa periods of its modern era, in most cases, most place names derived from the Ainu language came to be written in kanji, which are logographic Japanese characters of Chinese origin. Some place names were replaced with different names, some were lost entirely, and others were simply forgotten" (Hokkaido Museum, 2019, 10). The changing or adaptation of Ainu place names into kanji completely shifted the original meaning in many cases. For example, 'meman pet' in Ainu means 'cool river' but the Japanese name 'Memanbetsu' incorporates the kanji 別 meaning 'separate'.

Figure 1
An early 1859 map entitled 'Tōzai Ezo sansen chiri torishrirabezu' by Matsuura Takeshirō. The map shows mainly katakana interpretations of places prior to being replaced by kanji. Source: Japan National Diet Library Digital Collections.


This process of place name replacement, and in some cases adaptation, has seen consistent progression and is linked with the geographic spread of Wajin (ethnic Japanese) settlers throughout the island of Hokkaido (Hamada, 2015). It was noted in the 1980's by Sibata (1981, p. 265) that "it is common knowledge throughout Japan that the place names of Hokkaido originated from the Ainu language. But no one seems to have paid enough attention to the fact that recently these place names are being replaced by Japanese

names". How were these names chosen? We can gain an insight into this process from the Hokkaido Museum's 5th Special Exhibition which was entitled 'Re-examining Hokkaido Through its Place Names: Place Names in Hokkaido and Place Names Derived from the Ainu Language'. The associated literature for that exhibition notes that: "some are named after place names elsewhere in Japan, or after leaders of the development efforts, reflecting Hokkaido's history of collective immigration. Other place names were selected to inspire confidence in regional products. In some cases, existing place names have been changed to represent new points of view" (Hokkaido Museum, 2019, 11).

Why does replacing place names in Hokkaido matter? The answer here is that place names are valuable resources culturally and that place names tell us something not only about the "structure of and content of the physical environment but also how people perceive, conceptualize and classify" (Thornton, 1997, p. 209). An example of the replacement of Ainu place names in Hokkaido can be seen through an historical comparison of maps. For example, an 1896 national map of Obihiro, located in central Hokkaido, provided place names in the Ainu language, but a corresponding map in 1976 showed an increase in Japanese place names of 65% (Sibata, 1981, p. 264). This huge percentage shift illustrates the wider process of place names in the Ainu language that have been replaced by Japanese. As Sibata (1981, p. 273) notes, traditionally "there has been no effort by the Japanese to retain Ainu place names in contrast to what was the case in Hawaii with the retention of place names of Hawaiian origin".

Figure 2

Map of pre-1945 distribution of Ainu languages and dialects throughout Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Source: Wikimedia, Creative Commons License.
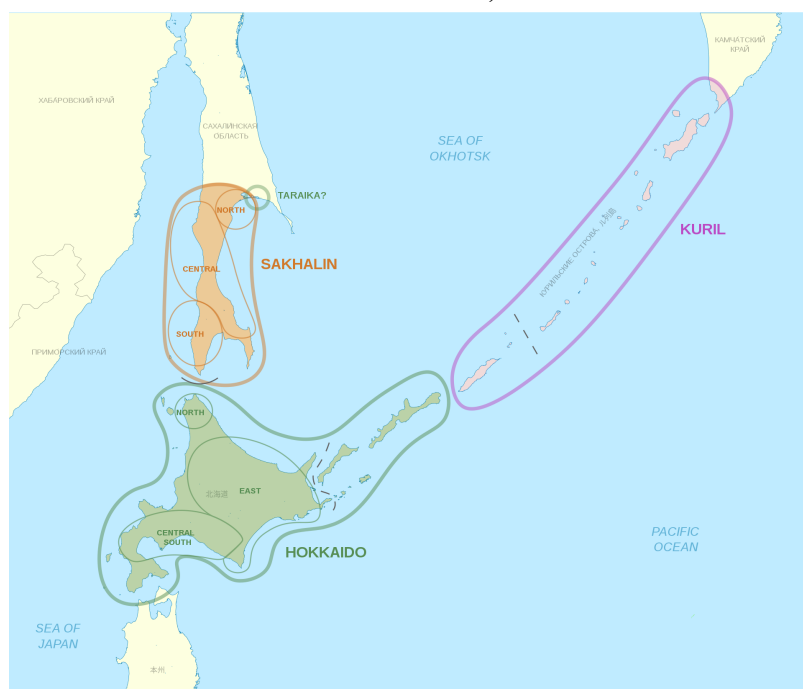
It is important to bring such matters to the attention of our language students in Japan to avoid the "homogenization of multiethnic Hokkaido histories" (Hamada, 2015, p. 43). More recently, efforts have been made by the national government of Japan to

address the plight of the Ainu people and take account of Hokkaido's heterogeneity. This has included a 2008 recognition of the Ainu people as indigenous and a greater promotion of Ainu culture through cultural spaces, such as the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park which opened in July 2020.

Activity 1. Paraphrasing Partners: Ainu Edition
Step 1. In this activity students can gain an appreciation for and learn the meanings of Ainu place related terms. In Paraphrasing Partners students describe a word in English and their partner must try and guess the correct answer in Ainu.
Step 2. Teach the following 10 Ainu terms and meanings:

- epis = beach

- ni = tree

- ota = sand

- pet = river

- poro = large, many

- ru = road

- siatuy = ocean

- sir = island, mountain

- suma = rock

- to = lake, bog

Step 3. Break the class into pairs.
Step 4. Ask the pairs to janken and losers to close their eyes.
Step 5. Winners look at the board.
Step 6. Write the meaning of one of the Ainu terms on the board.
Step 7. Erase the word after 5 seconds viewing time.
Step 8. Winners must describe the meaning of the Ainu term to their partner without saying the term itself.
Step 9. Losers must guess the correct Ainu term based on their partner's description.
Step 10. Once you judge enough time has elapsed have the partners switch roles and repeat with a new term.

Northern Ireland's Contested Place Names
The United Kingdom consistently features in textbooks and English language learning materials for Japanese students. However, many students in Japan are unaware of any of the political complexities which unfold in different parts of the UK. Thus, we have an opportunity as educators to deepen Japanese student's knowledge of a place they consistently encounter in their English language learning journey through exploring contested place name issues in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, tensions and contestations exist across polarized political positions and are manifested in linguistic disagreements about the symbolism of nomenclature on maps and in the materiality of public urban space. The legacy of these contestations carves up maps, streets and broader sections of cities into symbolically and physically separated enclaves. The reasons for such separation are rooted in frequent violent interactions which different communities inflict upon each other as well as intra-community acts of violence, such as punishment beatings, for those assessed to be in breach of an assumed political code (Jarman & Bryan, 1998).

In order to understand the tensions in Northern Ireland surrounding contested place names we need to understand some context about that society. The republican/nationalist community seek to establish a united 32 county Ireland. At present the island of Ireland is split into two countries, as six counties in the north east of the island form the separate country of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is also a separate country in its own right with a semi-functioning devolved parliament, but is also simultaneously part of the United Kingdom. The loyalist/unionist community seek to preserve Northern Ireland´s position as part of the United Kingdom and do not wish to see a united Ireland. There is great variety within the levels of emotion, action and violence in both communities regarding the issue of sovereignty and national partition and the language around such factors. Republicans and loyalists represent the hardline elements and have traditionally constituted the largely now defunct paramilitary organizations such as the IRA (Irish Republican Army) or UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force).

Figure 3

Peace wall located in Belfast, Northern Ireland to keep communities separate. Source: David Dixon, Creative Commons License.


Ongoing inter community contestations occur in Northern Ireland regarding place names on maps. These place name contestations are evidenced in the actual signs pointing to places in the landscape on the ground and within the maps that are produced in different countries from different political perspectives.

To illustrate this highly problematic issue of contested place names in Northern Ireland I will use the City of Derry as an example. As noted previously in this paper,

"description is never value neutral, it always comes with framing assumption" (Schein, 2009, p. 380). Derry comes from the word 'Doire' in the native Irish language which means a 'grove of oak trees'. Following the British colonization of Ireland, and especially Northern Ireland where a majority of British settlers resided, the names of places were altered to reflect British colonial power over space.

Figure 4

(Left) Google Maps has Londonderry on top and Derry underneath. Source: Google Maps, Creative Commons License. (Right) Map showing the name Derry only. Source: Wikimedia: Creative Commons License.
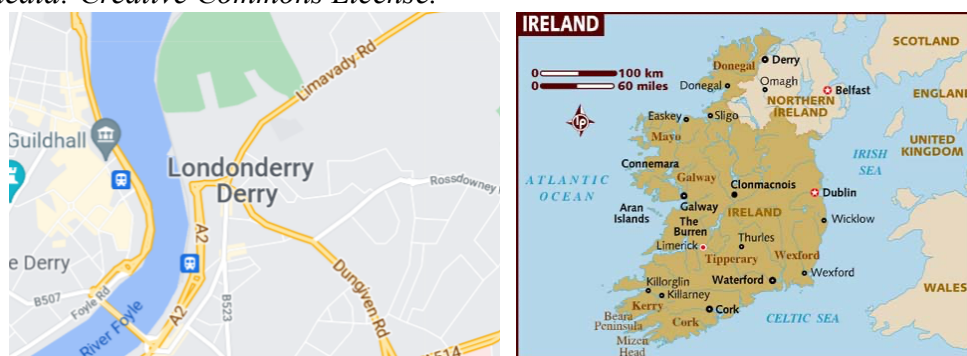
So, Derry or Doire became 'Londonderry'. This new name was adopted in the structures of power, legally and in the maps generated officially by the British government. This works on a symbolic level in the geographic imagery that emerges by placing the capital of another country (London) at the start of another city (Derry). Other examples of name changing that occurred in the south of Ireland prior to its establishment as a free state and then a republic were: Cobh in County Cork which was changed to Queenstown and then reverted back to Cobh (1922), Kingstown became Dún Laoghaire (1921), King's County became County Offaly (1922), Queen's County became County Laois (1922) Kingwilliamstown became Ballydesmond (1951).

Due to the historically troubled nature and ongoing inter community strife in Northern Ireland, the issue of naming for Derry continues to drag on. This enshrining of colonial names in legal and cartographic terms, and also amongst the empowered colonial population is not isolated to the Northern Ireland and has occurred in many countries that have been colonized (Culcasi, 2012).

Geographic nomenclature lends a sense of legitimization and 'the official' to discourses surrounding space. The official name of the city, Londonderry, is contested within the city itself by republican/nationalist populations (those seeking a united Ireland between the Republic and the North) and defended by loyalist/unionist populations (those seeking the North of Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom). In the Republic of Ireland counter-mapping occurs but on a national level. The maps produced there refer to Derry or Doire, the signposts similarly south of the border refer to Derry and the media also refer almost exclusively to Derry in their reports. In Northern Ireland the state media, BBC NI refers to Londonderry, as do the signposts and maps generated within the UK. Increasingly a dual approach has been adopted, for example, Google Maps uses Londonderry/Derry.

Figure 5

(Left) Republican/nationalist graffiti blocking out the London part of the sign. Source: Sean Mack, Creative Commons License. (Right) Loyalist/unionist graffiti blocks out Derry leaving only 'London' visible. Source: Wikimedia: Creative Commons License.


The contested nature of the name is clearly visible in Northern Ireland and along the Republic's border through graffiti on road sign posts which blocks out the 'London' part of the signs leaving only Derry visible and the converse is also true for elements of the unionist community which will block out the Derry part to leave London visible. The examples of the signposts directly below are clear examples of how landscape is discourse materialized surrounding nomenclature.

The symbolic boundaries in the landscape of Northern Ireland (Shirlow, 2003) can also be readily seen in flags attached to high vantage points and at junctures such as roundabouts and high lighting posts (Bryan & Gillespie, 2005). These statements seek to dominate the surrounding landscape for the relevant group. These flag placements can be considered what Schein (2009, p. 383) labels as "tactical interventions" in the landscape. In essence, the flag placements are injections of the groups own cultural beliefs into that particular location in space and aims to transform that point into an outpost of republican or loyalist identity. From that outpost, their own social, political, linguistic and geographic discourse then flows out as a layer upon the visible landscape. The specific display of flags includes the Republic of Ireland´s tricolor of green, white and orange for republican/nationalists and the Union Jack of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland as well as the individual Northern Ireland flag for loyalists/unionists.

Figure 6

(Left)The tricolor of the Republic of Ireland. (Middle) The flag of the United Kingdom. (Right) The flag of Northern Ireland. Source: Wikipedia, Creative Commons License.
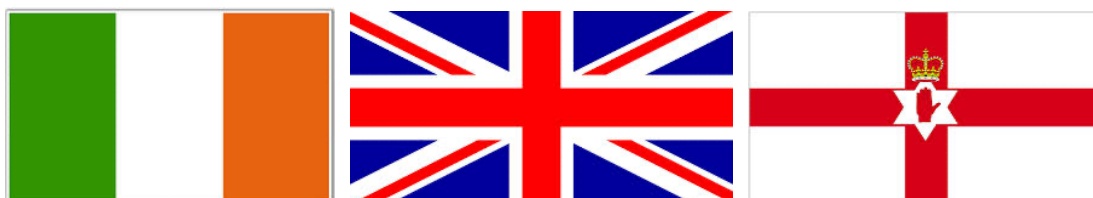
Activity 2. Pictionary for Places
Step 1. Teach the flags for the countries of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This can be done by showing flag images and doing a listen and repeat activity.

● Required flag images: Union Jack flag, English flag, Scottish flag, Welsh flag, Northern Irish flag, Republic of Ireland flag.

Step 2. Show maps of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Do listen and repeat for each of the countries (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Rep. of Ireland).
Step 3. Explain to students that in this activity they will draw a picture and their partner must guess what it is in English.
Step 4. Divide the class into pairs.
Step 5. Distribute a sheet of A4 paper to each pair.
Step 6. Ask the pairs to janken and losers to closes their eyes.
Step 7. Winners look at the board.
Step 8. Show an image of one of the flags or maps for 3 seconds.
Step 9. Hide the image and ask the losers to open their eyes again.
Step 10. Say "Go" and the winners can begin drawing the flag or map.
Step 11. The losers must guess the correct place in English.
Step 12. Partners swap once you think enough drawing time has elapsed.

Activity 3. Derry/Londonderry: Giving Your Opinion Activity
Step 1. Explain to the students that they will do a 'giving your opinion in English' activity on the Derry/Londonderry naming dispute. Show the following video from YouTube (English subtitles option is available):
https://youtu.be/wP_WEfEa2IU
Step 2. Break the class into groups of four.
Step 4. Distribute a sheet of A3 paper divided into quarters to each group (the other side of the paper will be used later too).
Step 3. Write the key question on the board/project:
        "Should Derry in Northern Ireland be called Derry, Londonderry or both?"
Step 4. Give students 5 minutes individual thinking time to write down their opinion on their quarter of the A3 paper.
Step 5. Next, give 10 minutes talking time for groups to discuss their opinions in English together.
Step 6. Ask for volunteers/select students to share their opinions in English with the class.

The United States and Confederate Monuments
The final contested place name example brings us to the southern United States. This example provides Japanese students with an opportunity to think about how socially consequential the naming of monuments after people can be for historically discriminated against groups and deepens their understanding of the complexity of the United States as a country. Across many states in the USA, contestations and intensifying protests have emerged in recent years regarding the racialization of landscape through names. This includes the nomenclature across a range of things, from statues, to military bases, to public buildings linked to the civil war (1861-1865) Confederacy. The Confederacy

sought the perpetuation of slavery and an enshrining of racism into everyday American life. The contestation in these cases is for officialdom to "acknowledge a long-standing absence, perhaps even suppression of slavery, race and racism" (Schein, 2009, p. 377) by the renaming or removal of racist monuments found in the landscape of many southern cities.

The contestations over place names which honor Confederate figures has especially gained momentum as a counterweight to white supremacist rallies, such as the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, white supremacist crimes, such as the 2015 Charleston church shooting, which saw the racially motivated murder of nine African Americans, and the murder via police brutality of George Floyd in 2020.

Figure 7
Hundreds of marchers rally at the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue, in Richmond, Virginia on September 16, 2017 to counter pro-Confederate statue demonstrations. The sign in the foreground says "Heritage of Hate." Source: Wikimedia, Creative Commons License.

The argument on the part of the protestors against naming which honors the Confederacy is that it preserves and spreads a white supremacist legacy from the civil war era. This racialized naming legacy serves to alienate African Americans and other non-white minorities. Gathering momentum on the part of the protestors has seen many Confederate monuments torn down or relocated with estimates that nearly 100 were removed in 2020 but that 704 still remained in place in 2021 (Triesman, 2021). Prominent examples of renaming places are evidenced in the upcoming (2022) changing of the U.S. military base names from Fort Bragg to Fort Liberty and from Fort Benning to Fort Moore. Both Bragg and Benning were prominent generals in the Confederate States Army.

Figure 12
The controversial statue of Confederate general John Hunt Morgan in Lexington Courthouse Square prior to its relocation to Lexington Cemetery. Source: Wikimedia, Creative Commons License.

An example of statues which were named and built in honor of Confederate figures but which were ultimately removed as a result of the Charlottesville rally can be seen in Lexington Courthouse Square in the state of Kentucky. The public space of the Courthouse Square, part of which is referred to as "Cheapside", was historically in constant use for slave auctions, whippings, public floggings as well as rallies for Confederate Decoration Day (Schein, 2009, p. 385). Two statues honoring confederate military men named John Hunt Morgan and John C. Breckinridge were prominently displayed in the square until 2017 when they were removed and subsequently installed as decorations in Lexington cemetery where both men are buried. These names of Confederate military men being honored through statuary represented the materialization of a racialized society which witnessed the mob lynching of an African American man in the square which they overlooked as late as 1920 (Schein, 2009, p. 389). Prior to the relocation of the John Hunt Morgan statue from the courthouse square it became a focal point for local anti-racism discussions after it was marked with 'Black Lives Matter' in spray-paint (Scheller, 2015).

Activity 4. Confederate Monuments: Giving Your Opinion Activity
Step 1. Explain to the students that they will do a 'giving your opinion in English' activity on the Confederate monuments in the USA issue. Show the following video with the former Mayor of Lexington Jim Gray as listening practice (closed caption option available for English subtitles).
https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4680187/lexington-mayor-jim-gray-relocation-confederate-statues
Step 2. Rotate members in the groups of four from Activity 3 so new members are present in each group.
Step 4. Ask the groups to flip over the sheet of quartered A3 paper used in Activity 3.
Step 3. Write the key question on the board/project:
        "What should happen to statues that honor Confederate leaders?"

Step 4. Write/project the supporting sentences below to help focus opinions:

● Remove the statues from public space. Why?

● Keep the statues in public space. Why?

Step 5. Give students 5 minutes individual thinking time to write down their opinion on their quarter of the A3 paper.
Step 6. Then give 10 minutes talking time for groups to discuss their opinions in English together.
Step 7. Ask for volunteers/select students to share their opinions with the class.

Conclusion
Introducing English language students in Japan to contested place names in different locations and contexts can serve to offer valuable insights into the complexity of seemingly banal words on maps or in landscapes which they may encounter during their language learning journey. Furthermore, it can aid in developing their understanding of places in more nuanced ways. This is especially valuable for gaining an appreciation of countries where English is spoken as real places beyond a narrow focus pertaining solely to language. In this way language is connected to social and political facets of life. Valuable reflective opportunities also exist regarding considering place names within Japan as demonstrated in the Hokkaido example with the Ainu people. This paper established how often taken for granted elements, such as place names can be starting points for gaining new perspectives.

References
Aoki-Poisson, B. (2002). *The Ainu of Japan*. Lerner Publications.
Bryan, D., & Gillespie, G. (2005). Belfast Flags, Boundaries and Bunting: The Landscape of Territory. Building Material, (13), 24-29.
Brown, K., & MacGinty, R. (2001). Public Attitudes toward Partisan and Neutral Symbols in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, (10), 83-108.
Culcasi, K. (2012). Mapping the Middle East from Within: (Counter-) Cartographies of an Imperialist Construction. Antipode, 44 (4), 1099–1118.
Hamada, S. (2015). Ainu Geographic Names and an Indigenous History of the Herring in Hokkaido. The Canadian journal of native studies, 35, 43-58.
Hokkaido Museum (2019). Re-examining Hokkaido Through its Place Names: Place Names in Hokkaido and Place Names Derived from the Ainu Language [Special Exhibition Commentary] 1-12. 190811place_names_Hokkaido_english.pdf
Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (1998). From Riots to Rights: Nationalist Parades in the North of Ireland. Coleraine: Centre of the Study of Conflict, 1-75.
Schein, R.H. (2009). Belonging through Land/Scape. Environment and Planning A, 41(4), 811-826.
Scheller, H. (2015, August 3) John Hunt Morgan statue spray-painted with 'black lives matter'. *Lexington Herald Leader*.
https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/counties/fayette-county/article44607117.html
Shirlow, P. (2003). Who Fears to Speak: Fear, Mobility, and Ethno-sectarianism in the

Two Ardoynes. The Global Review of Ethnopolitics Special Issue: Northern Ireland, 3(1), 76-91.

Sibata, T. (1981). *Sociolinguistics in Japanese Contexts: Contributions to the Sociology of Language*. DeGruyter.

Thornton, T. F. (1997). Anthropological Studies of Native American Place Naming. *American Indian Quarterly*, *21*(2), 209–228.

Triesman, R. (2021, February 23) Nearly 100 Confederate Monuments Removed In 2020, Report Says; More Than 700 Remain. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2021/02/23/970610428/nearly-100-confederate-monuments-removed-in-2020-report-says-more-than-700-remai