Filmmaker, Lawyer, Indian Chief: The Negotiation of Identity in an Indigenous Film Festival

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Filmmaker, Lawyer, Indian Chief:
The Negotiation of Identity in an Indigenous Film Festival

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Masters of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Since colonial contact, indigenous peoples have been predominantly represented by community outsiders. As a result, native peoples have rarely had a primary, or even collaborative role, in the production of these representations. However, in the last two decades, there has been an unprecedented proliferation of indigenous created films and the festivals that feature them. The Denver Indigenous Arts and Film Festival is an annual festival that exclusively showcases films made by and with indigenous peoples. The festival’s 2009 theme of “Telling Our Stories” emphasized cultural control of representation and the transmission of traditional knowledge.

In this thesis, I show that unlike ethnographic filmmakers, indigenous filmmakers have been able to critically engage issues of identity due to their personal connection to home communities. Furthermore, many indigenous filmmakers, having had complex bicultural life experiences, are positioned to express hybrid identities relevant to the contemporary challenges of native communities. Based on research I conducted throughout 2009 with the Denver festival, this thesis explores ways in which indigenous filmmakers have expressed these issues through their films and audience interactions. The festival itself is discussed as a locus of identity discourse, comprising many commonalities as well as key differences in relation to other indigenous film festivals.

Key words: indigenous film, identity, film festival, ethnographic film
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................................ 1
Terms ................................................................................................................................................ 6
Chapter Synopses ......................................................................................................................... 9

Chapter Two: Background ........................................................................................................... 12
  Colonial Roots of Indigenous Representation in Anthropology ........................................... 12
  Ethnographic Film .................................................................................................................. 20
  Indigenous Rights Movements ............................................................................................. 47
  The Politics of Indigenous Identity ......................................................................................... 56
  Indigenous Film ...................................................................................................................... 76

Chapter Three: Research Design and Theory .......................................................................... 80
  Field Site: The Denver Indigenous Arts and Film Festival ................................................. 80
  Previous Research ............................................................................................................... 82
  My Research ......................................................................................................................... 83
  The Paradigm of Critical Indigenous Theory ....................................................................... 85
  Justification .......................................................................................................................... 88
  Methodology ........................................................................................................................ 91
  Ethical Considerations .......................................................................................................... 93
  Film Theory ............................................................................................................................ 96

Chapter Four: Indigenous Film and Identity ........................................................................ 104
  Analytical Framework .......................................................................................................... 105
  Science, Postmodernism, and the Catch-22 of Identity Representation ............................ 107
  Authorship and Authenticity in Indigenous Film ................................................................. 111
  Rhetoric and Genre in Ethnographic and Indigenous Film .............................................. 124
  The Expression and Production of Hybrid Identities ............................................................ 139

Chapter Five: Indigenous Film Festivals ............................................................................. 166
  Variety of Festivals ............................................................................................................... 167
  Institutional Affiliation, Mission Statement, and Film Selection ...................................... 171
  DIFAF Film Selection .......................................................................................................... 177
  The Indigenous Filmmaking Community ............................................................................. 187
  Identity Discourse in the DIFAF ............................................................................................ 189
  The Emerging Indigenous Film Festival Circuit ................................................................. 195

Chapter Six: Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 198
  Summary of Key Findings ..................................................................................................... 198
  The Identityscape: A Synthesis ............................................................................................. 201
  Research Limitations ........................................................................................................... 204
  Disciplinary Implications and Future Research ................................................................. 204
  Resituationing Ethnographic and Indigenous Film .............................................................. 206
References Cited ............................................................................................................. 211
Films Cited .................................................................................................................. 226

Appendices .................................................................................................................... 230
  Appendix A: DIFAF Program .................................................................................... 230
  Appendix B: Festival Director Interview Questions .................................................. 233
  Appendix C: Filmmaker Interview Questions ............................................................. 234
  Appendix D: Audience Survey .................................................................................. 235
  Appendix E: Festival Director Informed Consent Form ............................................ 236
  Appendix F: Filmmaker Informed Consent Form ....................................................... 237
  Appendix G: DIFAF Submission Form ....................................................................... 238
  Appendix H: NMAI Submission Form ....................................................................... 241
  Appendix I: ImagiNative Submission Form ............................................................... 245
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When I volunteered at the Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival (DIFAF) during the fall of 2008, I had never heard of a native film festival. However, I had a special interest due to fieldwork I had previously conducted with an Australian Indigenous media outlet\(^1\). During the DIFAF, I was able to view films that challenged the representation of indigenous peoples I had encountered in film, both in theatres and the classroom. What I found immediately compelling about the festival was the level of engagement by filmmakers and audience members in the Q&A sessions after the screenings.

Over the next year, I conducted my thesis research with this festival. Run by a law and policy research institute, the DIFAF showed films over a six-day period in October of 2009, centering on the theme of “Telling our Stories.” The festival brought in filmmakers to participate in question and answer sessions, panels, and informal discussions. These filmmakers have developed hybrid identities that reflect extensive experiences living in both native and outside communities. Through the methods of participant-observation, film analysis, interviews, and surveys, I gathered data on ways in which identity discourse is engaged within both the films and the festival itself. Specifically, I discuss how these filmmakers engage in Sandy Grande’s (2004) critical identity discourse, “red pedagogy,” which emphasizes the specific challenges associated

\(^1\) In this fieldwork with Goolarri Media Enterprises in the Kimberley region of Australia, I explored how contemporary Indigenous musicians have integrated aspects of traditional culture. Hosting a daily radio show, I interviewed several musicians on air for Goolarri as well as for my own research (Lempert 2007).
with hybridized indigenous identities. These discussions are contextualized through an analysis of ethnographic films and how they differ from indigenous films.

Historically, anthropologists have held primary control over the direct representation of indigenous peoples through the written and visual ethnographic canon. However, the crisis of representation in anthropology, indigenous rights movements, as well as the emergence of films made by indigenous peoples have challenged the role of ethnographic filmmakers in native representation. By the 1970s, many ethnographic filmmakers were incorporating the input of native subjects in the creation of their films, attempting to reduce the power disparity involved. Anthropologists also began to study unique ways in which indigenous peoples have created their own films. A well known early example of this was Worth and Adair’s *Through Navajo Eyes*, in which the ethnographers “handed over” the camera to Navajos in 1966 in order to analyze native produced films (1972).

While early ethnographic film collaborations such as this one have been criticized for their continued focus on the anthropologist’s desire to retrieve specific information from a group, later collaborations have emphasized the expressed political needs of the people involved (Ginsburg 1995). For example, in the late 1980s, ethnographic filmmaker Terence Turner’s films with the Kayapo focused on their fight for sovereignty and resources (1991). This collaborative process was based on an indigenous collective agenda. Sometimes co-creating films with the Kayapo, and other times documenting their independent filmmaking process, Turner argued that issues of authorship and authenticity were less important than the actual impact that films have had on indigenous peoples.
As video equipment became relatively inexpensive in the 1980s, indigenous peoples began creating films independent from ethnographic projects. The production of indigenous films has steadily increased in the decades since and today there are hundreds, spanning every genre and style. The emergence of these films has created significant debate within the discipline over the ethical role of anthropologists in representing indigenous peoples. Turner has argued that anthropologists are the only individuals properly trained in cross-cultural methods, and still have a crucial role to play in analysis (Turner 1995:103). Others, such as ethnographic filmmaker Jay Ruby, have claimed that only indigenous films can address the problematic colonial ties brought to light by postmodernist critiques (1995:80). He suggests that ethnographic filmmakers should only make films regarding their own cultures (81). Anthropologist Rachel Moore grounds the conversation by maintaining that film is always biased, regardless of who the filmmaker is (1992).

Furthermore, Faye Ginsburg, a leading scholar in indigenous media studies, contends that differences between the ethnographic and indigenous film genres are not as distinct as they may appear. She states that “indigenous media and ethnographic film are related but distinct projects” in that they both are intended to “communicate something about that social or collective identity we call ‘culture,’ in order to mediate (one hopes) across gaps of space, time, knowledge, and prejudice” (1995:265). She argues that the concrete division between “us” and “them” has itself been based on an essentialist perspective regarding indigenous peoples (265). As Ginsburg notes, ethnographic and indigenous films are both able to express aspects of culture. In this thesis, however, I
argue that only native filmmakers are able to engage deeply with contemporary indigenous identities, due to the connections to their home communities. Conversely, I also show that ethnographic filmmakers, when dealing with their own cultures, can engage issues of identity as well.

Since colonization, traditional and outside communities have become increasingly intertwined. As a result, many indigenous peoples have developed hybrid identities that have incorporate their connections to native communities, as well as to a multitude of other life experiences. As identity is the expression of the internal-mental perspective as experienced and expressed by individuals (Shohat and Stam 2003), indigenous filmmakers are positioned to engage critical indigenous identity discourse, or what Sandy Grande has termed ‘red pedagogy’ (2004).

Not only are indigenous filmmakers able to address issues of critical identity discourse, but the films themselves also serve as sites of the production and negotiation of identity itself (Ginsburg 2004). As will be shown, these filmmakers are able to transcend the simplified savage-noble and traditional-modern binaries that have served to essentialize native peoples. Furthermore, their combined efforts have created a complex landscape of possible identities and ways of being that simultaneously respect pre-contact traditions while adapting to current realities. They also address the unique concerns of indigenous communities in which the goal is often to gain sovereignty from, rather than equality within, nation state societies.

As a result of centuries of acculturative pressures stemming from colonization, indigenous communities face many challenges today relating to issues of identity,
including blood quantum requirements, intergenerational shame, youth risk behavior, as well as loss and degradation of native land (Niezen 2003). The bicultural and hybrid identities of indigenous filmmakers have poised their films to engage these contemporary issues, while ethnographic films remain biased toward an insider-outsider, or emic-etic, analysis of distinct categories within holistic groups, such as the structure and function of rituals in an isolated population (Harris 1999). Indigenous films challenge the relevance of these disciplinary notions in terms of their ability to address contemporary indigenous issues, as native filmmakers occupy “dual positions” as an “insider-outsiders” that do not fit coherently within the traditional ethnographic model (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164).

In this contemporary context many indigenous filmmakers have attended film school, lived in a variety of communities, and conducted extensive research in preparation for their films. Therefore, treating these filmmakers as though they are representative of a homogeneous group that is somehow separated from mainstream society no longer makes sense. In relating to the work of Worth and Adair (1972), it also not the case that “handing the camera over” will allow one to see “Through Navajo Eyes.” Therefore, et is imperative that anthropologists engage these films not as emic data, but rather as critical works presenting valid and valuable complementary perspectives to ethnographic films.

The paucity of critical engagement with indigenous film speaks to a larger pattern of holding native peoples to a double standard regarding their personal and academic works. This is partly a result of “the whitestream notion of Indian as romantic figure, not
Indian as scholar and social critic – a predisposition that works to favor cultural-literary forms of indigenous writing over critical forms” (Grande 2004:102). Grande notes that:

Bookstore shelves are brimming with Native legends, poems, novels, and short stories, but are relatively barren of critical studies of contemporary American Indian life. In short, the obsession with identity politics has pressured American Indian intellectuals to succumb to the vision of who they are supposed to be instead of who they are. [Grande 2004:104]

This lack of attention is also mirrored in the limited commercial success of indigenous films, notwithstanding rare exceptions such as Chris Eyre’s (Cheyenne-Arapahoe) Smoke Signals (1998). In the context of mainstream representations that continue to stereotype indigenous peoples, many film festivals dedicated to screening only indigenous films have developed over the last twenty years. In addition to assisting filmmakers in networking and promoting their films, these festivals also provide a locus for personal engagement in critical identity discourse with audience members and other filmmakers. This thesis is meant to further anthropological engagement with indigenous film and festivals in regards to issues of identity.

**Terms**

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines “indigenous” as “having originated in and being produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment” (2010). However, when applied to peoples, the term is notoriously controversial. As asserted by Niezen, the ambiguity of this term, while sometimes disorienting
Is in some ways preferable: a rigorous definition, one that in effect tried to close the intellectual borders where they were still porous, would be premature and, ultimately, futile. Debates over the problem of definition are actually more interesting than any definition in and of itself. [Niezen 2003:19]

This thesis deals with these intellectual borders of indigeneity, and speaks to the ways in which categories such as “indigenous” can often serve to oversimplify the identity of individuals and communities. Kuper (2003) and Suzman (2002) have accused the term itself of being essentialist and primitivist in nature. However, Guenther poignantly addresses the fact that indigenous “identity and self-representation are vital elements of the political platform of (many peoples) who are engaged in an often desperate struggle for political rights, for land, for a place and space within a modern nation’s economy and society” (1999:17). For anthropologists concerned with the ethics of representation, these issues are of vital importance.

One of the most challenging practical issues in discussing indigenous peoples is defining exactly who is indigenous, as these definitions have real effects on policies (Niezen 2003). There are disagreements between various definitions regarding how genetically indigenous one is, how individuals view themselves, as well as the origin and type of the society they were indigenous to. United Nations Special Reporter to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has provided a useful pragmatic definition that reads:

Those which having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their
continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. [Martinez-Cobo 1984]

This definition emphasizes the individual’s perception of his or her own identity as well as the expressed desire to be involved in traditional culture and community. Mihesuah (1998) makes the distinction between genetic multiheritage, and the actual identity(ies) one defines him or herself by. This is applicable to my research in which indigenous filmmakers often reference the challenges in navigating multiple identities. I will use this as a working definition within my work and as a baseline in which to dialogue with other definitions.

The many other terms used to refer to indigenous peoples each carry their own set of issues as well. I have chosen to use the terms indigenous and native interchangeably to refer generally to groups around the world. Unlike other widely used terms including aboriginal, first nations, and first peoples, these are the most commonly used terms in discussions of indigenous film and do not have regional connotations (Alia 2010:xix). When discussing the indigenous peoples of North America, I use the terms Native American, American Indian, and Indian interchangeably. While acknowledging the historical inaccuracies of the term “Indian,” it is widely used, and sometimes preferred by many Native American scholars (Grande 2004). Also, indigenous and native are not capitalized, except when used in reference to Australian Indigenous peoples, as this is the accepted convention within scholarly discourse regarding native film (Dowell 2006).
Chapter Synopses

Chapter 2 outlines the academic, social, and technological context that led up to the emergence of indigenous filmmaking, tracing indigenous representation from the colonial period up to the present, with a particular focus on the “crisis in anthropology.” I draw connections between indigenous rights movements of the 1970s and identity discourse. I engage indigenous and postcolonial perspectives on identity, including Grande’s (2004) conception of a ‘red pedagogy’ and her critique of mainstream multiculturalism discourse. I discuss how these histories have shaped the development of indigenous film up to the present. While I discuss indigenous history and film in general, I refer primarily to North American examples, due to the festival’s disproportionate inclusion of North American indigenous films.

Chapter 3 begins with an introduction to my research site, the 2009 Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival. I then discuss previous research before laying out the nature and purpose of my research and my paradigm, critical indigenous theory. I then state my research questions and their relevance to the previously discussed literature. I articulate how I utilized the methods of participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and statistical analysis in gathering and analyzing my fieldwork data. I also discuss the important ethical considerations of this research including beneficence, confidentiality, and privacy. Finally, I provide a background of relevant film theory that will inform my analyses of films in the festival.

Chapter 4 begins with an analytical framework in which to address issues of identity in indigenous and ethnographic films. These issues are discussed within the
context of what I term the Catch-22 of identity representation. I then draw on the data I gathered from my fieldwork in order to discuss films in terms of authenticity, hybrid identities, community, and meaning across genres. I cite filmmaker interviews, as well as indigenous and ethnographic films spanning many styles in order to ground my arguments in specific examples. I also discuss the ways that indigenous filmmakers have been able to express issues of hybrid identity that relate to contemporary issues that are relevant to native communities.

Chapter 5 begins with a brief history of the origins and backgrounds of several indigenous film festivals. Drawing on my data, I discuss the impact of sponsoring institutions and mission statements on the selection process for these festivals. I then analyze the common themes and qualities of the films selected for the 2009 DIFAF. I then draw parallels to Dowell’s (2006) work on the ability of indigenous film festivals to foster a supportive native filmmaking community. I also show how the Q&A sessions during DIFAF were able to engage issues of identity due to an intimate setting and a particularly receptive audience.

Chapter 6 reintegrates my findings and analyses within the scholarly literature. I present a summary of my key findings before providing a synthesis that draws upon the work of Grande (2004), Ginsburg (1994), and Appadurai (1990). I then discuss the limitations of this research and the need for further case studies on indigenous film festivals, as well as anthropological engagement with indigenous films as critical works on identity. Finally, I resituate both ethnographic and indigenous film in light of my
findings, arguing for a pragmatic model of representation that is anchored in the priorities of indigenous peoples.
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

Colonial Roots of Indigenous Representation in Anthropology

By the time ethnographic film emerged in the early 20th century, there was already a well-established legacy of indigenous representation in anthropology with deep intellectual roots in the European period of colonial expansion. The scientific racism of this time was born out of contradictory stereotypes of native peoples as simultaneously fierce and savage, as well as innocent and pure. Feminist scholar Anne McClintock (1995) has discussed this ambivalence of indigenous colonial discourse through an analysis of 18th century art depicting contact and conquest. She has argued that these indigenous representations were more about the colonizers’ own fears and desires than the native people themselves, “suspended between a fantasy of conquest and a dread of engulfment” (27). This savage-noble conception of indigenous peoples has continued to influence their representation both within and outside of anthropology. While this model has slowly fallen out of favor within the discipline, it is still seen widely in popular representations (Friar and Friar 1972; Bird 1996; Kilpatrick 1999).

Despite the advancement of indigenous rights and self-representation, native peoples have remained among the very poorest throughout the world since colonial contact (Bodley 2008). For example, in the United States, reservations have among the highest rates of health issues, poverty, and crime (Champagne 1999). The colonial legacy for native peoples is not simply theoretical, but rather presents itself through everyday
challenges. The savage-noble dichotomy continues to foster misunderstandings about indigenous peoples that have real cultural and political implications on their communities (Bodley 2008).

In order to understand how this persisting model arose, I will outline the historical and philosophical context of the colonial era. This period was a time of vast change in the European intellectual climate, encompassing the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment. These movements were influenced by contact with indigenous peoples. As McClintock contends, native peoples were generally framed within the context of their implications in regards to European philosophy and religion. One of the primary challenges that many European thinkers faced at this time was how indigenous peoples fit into their current understandings of Christianity. There was great debate as to their relationship to Europeans and even humanity itself. Saint Thomas Aquinas viewed indigenous peoples as “imperfect humans” and therefore, natural slaves (Erickson and Murphy 2008:31). This was reflected through policies enacted by these European nations to “save” native peoples: forcing them to become Christian and abandon their own ways (32). This strategy not only fit their Christian worldview, but was also used as a justification for taking slaves, land, and resources. In this way, the savage-noble binary began partly as a rationalization for inhumane imperial policies.

The Scientific Revolution challenged many Christian ideas of the time and provided a framework for the development of anthropology as a social science. At this time, French rationalism and British empiricism introduced the concepts of deduction, induction, and mind-body dualism. Cartesian philosophy suggested that everything could
be understood in a rational manner. Known as positivism, this led to the idea that science was objective and value-free, a view that was held by many leading scholars into the later half of the 20th century (35). This worldview has led to great intellectual success in astronomy, with thinkers such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton revolutionizing the field. Although their ideas were controversial in relation to Christian teachings, they did believe in a God that created the universe. Within this “Newtonian” philosophy, the universe was likened to a clock, with God as the clockmaker (38).

During the Enlightenment, European thinkers began applying these principles to the social world. While the watchmaker metaphor largely resolved the inconsistencies between astronomy and Christianity, the problem of human diversity was far more political, directly relating to governmental policies regarding colonies. Many still held the Aquinian view that indigenous peoples were “lower” forms of humanity. The political philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ infamous depiction of “primitive man’s” existence as “nasty, brutish, and short” was based on his social contract theory (Hobbes 1668). This posited that without strong governments to control people, their primal selfish instincts would lead to chaos and savagery. His ideas were largely influenced by the violence he witnessed during his life, including the English civil war in the 1640s.

While Hobbes ascribed negative qualities to human nature, others viewed it as a set of positive characteristics that were corrupted by society. Coined as the “noble savage” by John Dryden and associated with Rousseau, this concept framed humans as having fallen from a state of perfection to corruption due to social influences (Erickson and Murphy 2008:39). This view romanticized native peoples and positioned them as
remnants of an Eden-like state of nature. Still presented in films such as Avatar (2009), this stereotype has been associated with an overly positive attitude towards native peoples, reading their cultures as sustainable, spiritual, and morally wise. However, the subtext of this view is that indigenous peoples are easily tempted by the modern world and are passively fragile in their nobility. It suggests that the destruction of indigenous societies was inevitable, even if it was regrettable (Bodley 2008).

The savage-noble stereotypes have had significant political implications for indigenous peoples. In Victims of Progress, John Bodley (2008) describes the discourse between political “realists,” who see the destruction of indigenous culture as inevitable, and “idealists,” who view the survival of indigenous cultures as morally imperative. He argues that while the realist perspective has dominated political policy and debate for hundred of years, it is a “self-serving political opinion, not a well-founded scientific judgment” (2008:253). Indigenous representations created in the West have often served to reinforce the “realist” myth of inevitable destruction by reproducing savage-noble stereotypes. The pervasiveness of these images in our popular media today shows the extent to which this has not dissipated (Bird 1996; Kilpatrick 1999).

While the Hobbesian and noble savage perspectives on human nature may seem to be polar opposites, they have both shared the primitivist conception of human nature as essentialized (Adams 1998:75). Primitivism was a perspective that understood pre-colonial societies as more “pure” than modern societies. Franz Boas divided primitivism into two main types: historical, which espoused a downward progression, and cultural, which championed simplicity as preferable to complexity (76). These concepts have been
used to both glorify and condemn indigenous peoples as well as civilization itself. However, like the savage-noble dichotomy, it relies on an essentialized “othering” of native peoples.

Conversely, the philosopher John Locke’s concept of the “blank slate” suggested that human nature has been primarily influenced by environmental factors. Locke’s ideas contest Hobbes’ emphasis on the dominance of innate and violent human instincts, as well as the conception of the noble savage (Erickson and Murphy 2008:38). Although the blank slate is currently viewed as an extreme argument for nurture over nature, it was an important precursor to the concept of culture. Harris argues that the concept of culture did not even exist as we know it until the Enlightenment (1968:59). The Jesuit Father Joseph Lafitau and other missionaries used this idea to create an inventory of cultures and traits that was considerably less ethnocentric than preceding collections (Erickson and Murphy 2008:39). However, the blank slate was also melded with Christian ideas, and used to justify the forced education of indigenous children.

The American Captain Richard H. Pratt, longtime superintendent of the Carlisle Indian boarding school, famously stated, “kill the Indian, save the man” (Calloway 2008:383). As a “realist,” Pratt believed that Native American cultures were doomed and that assimilation was their only option. Ward Churchill (2004) describes how this sentiment was representative of many colonial governments in the 19th century that were attempting to eradicate indigenous cultures through forced boarding school attendance. In many ways Carlisle foreshadowed many of the issues of identity ambivalence that currently shape Native American life. The children were forbidden to speak their
language for years, were given haircuts, and made to wear uniforms. Although Jim Thorpe would graduate from Carlisle to become one of the most accomplished Olympians of all time, his success was the exception and not the rule. While some graduates moved to cities and become urban doctors and lawyers, others returned to their home reservations with mixed success. Many Horses, a Lakota who was taken to the school at the age of 14 recounts his own challenges in returning home: "Five years I attended Carlisle and was educated in the ways of the white man… When I returned to my people, I was an outcast among them. I was no longer an Indian." As discussed in Chapter 4, issues of returning to, and being accepted by, native communities remains an emotionally charged issue.

Throughout the 19th century, a general sense of “racial” superiority took hold in European empires (Erickson and Murphy 2008:62). Colonialism had reaped huge economic rewards for imperial powers while indigenous populations, as well as the Ottoman Empire, had largely been defeated (Bush 2006:17). The British were particularly dominant during this time, becoming the first modern superpower (19). During this Victorian age, native peoples were displayed like animals to the general population. Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman, of the Namaque in southern Africa, was a famous example who was paraded through town for her sexualized features (Rydell 1999). Throughout the 1800s and into the early 1900s, indigenous peoples were commonly shown in “human zoos” and world’s fairs throughout Europe, molding popular thought regarding native peoples. As Historian Barbara Bush discusses, “such representations were not estranged from reality. As ‘colonial knowledge’, these images informed policies
and thus impacted in a concrete way the lives and identities of the colonized” (Bush 2006:155). This is shown through the official motto of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, “to see is to know” (Rydell 1984:44). It was during this time that many Enlightenment ideas declined in popularity and influence.

The discipline of anthropology formed in this colonial intellectual climate and until the last few decades “has been the social science that studies dominated colored peoples – and their ancestors – living outside the boundaries of modern white societies” (Willis 1972:123). Naturalists of the time including Charles Darwin went on expeditions sponsored by the colonial governments. Darwin’s conception of natural selection would eventually be used to show that races are not biologically meaningful. Currently, the overwhelming majority of biologists and anthropologists view race as an arbitrary and non-scientific way of categorizing peoples. (Smedley and Smedley 2005). However, at the time, Darwin’s work was used incorrectly to promote the conception of racial superiority of white Europeans. The theoretical framework of this period was termed “cultural evolutionism,” which supposed a hierarchical progression of social evolution from the “lowly savage” to the “civilized” nation state. This was typified by Lewis Henry Morgan’s Ancient Society (1877).

Morgan’s model was based on the ideas of Enlightenment-era universal historians. Searching for Newtonian “laws” in the social realm, thinkers such as Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, Giambattista Vico, and Auguste Comte had created stage-sequenced models for human history (Erickson and Murphy 2008:38). These positivists sought to “catch social science up” with physics and astronomy, which now had well-
established laws and explanations. Morgan continued the tradition of placing native peoples as the “lowest” or “first” stage of humanity. Morgan and Edward Burnett Tylor took the less essentialist view that while indigenous peoples represented the lowest stage of social evolution, they could progress to other stages as well (49; Morgan 1877). These schemas served to justify the colonial project by denying or demoting the humanity of indigenous peoples.

These models of humanity were reflected in the world’s fairs of the time. Raymond Corbey describes these representations of natives by ethnologists as “characters in the story of the ascent to civilization, depicted as the inevitable triumph of higher races over lower ones and as progress through science and imperial conquest” (1993:341). Often curated by ethnologists, they were often the public’s only interaction with indigenous peoples. In this sense, these mock ethnographic human zoos may be viewed as a sort of precursor to ethnographic films. This positivist scientific racism represented in the work of Morgan and Tylor was still dominant within anthropology during the turn of the century when the first ethnographic films were being created.

This early history of anthropological theory and the roots of the discipline are important in setting the context for the emergence of ethnographic film at the beginning of the 20th century. As shown in the next section, the presentation of native peoples in their own cultural settings was a vast improvement in representation from the mock performances at world’s fairs. While they would continue to be misrepresented in many ways, ethnographic films at least showed native peoples in the settings and context in which they actually lived. Furthermore, the lack of audio technology in early films
provided a presentation of indigenous peoples without the narration that often served to
dehumanize native peoples. However, while scientific racism began to lose credibility
during the early decades of the new century, I show how remnants of anthropology’s
colonial origins may be seen throughout the history of ethnographic film up to the
present.

**Ethnographic Film**

*A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.*

- Kenneth Burke

The nature and purpose of ethnographic film has changed in parallel over the last
century along with ethnography itself (Hockings 2003:13). In a sense, ethnographic film
may be considered a subgenre of documentary film. While many documentaries speak to
culture and are of interest to anthropologists, only some of these films have been
presented as ethnographic in nature. Anthropologist Peter Loizos summarizes the criteria
for distinguishing ethnographic films from documentaries, as defined by Karl Heider
(2006) and Jay Ruby (1995): “They should be films about whole cultures or definable
portions of cultures; informed by implicit or explicit theory of culture; explicit about the
research and filming methods they have employed; and using a distinctive
anthropological lexicon” (Loizos 1993:7). Since ethnographic films are largely defined
by ethnographic methods, the history of these films mirrors the history of anthropology as
a discipline.

While ethnographic films have maintained a commitment to the truthful
representation of culture, the nature of truth in representation has been a subject of great
debate within anthropology. In particular, the “crisis of anthropology,” which reached its height in the 1980s, represented a fundamental change within mainstream anthropology, challenging the politics of power involved in research as well as the ability of ethnographers to show whole cultures (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999).

Over the last century, the discourse in ethnographic film has shifted from a focus on the scientific and aesthetic aspects of films, to the more applied issues of power and politics (Heider 2006). As anthropology moved from the colonial project of salvaging “vanishing cultures” toward a more collaborative model, the roles of anthropologists and the indigenous peoples they study have changed as well. Furthermore, as indigenous film has emerged, the anthropologist’s very role in creating films has come into question (Ruby 1995).

While “ethnographic film began as a phenomenon of colonialism,” cinema itself was born out of a colonial project (Shohat and Stam 2002:117). When motion film technology developed in the late 1800s, it was expensive and available only to those with large amounts of capital: including governments, companies, and wealthy individuals. Therefore, early filmmakers “rarely questioned the constellation of power relations that allowed them to represent other lands and cultures” (121). These filmmakers did not use ethnographic methods, often knowing little if any context regarding the filmed culture. Film became a powerful colonial tool in which nationalism could be solidified by showing the otherness of “exotic” cultures to the general population, letting them “see and feel ‘strange’ civilizations” (122). This colonial gaze showed off the interwoven frontiers of science and imperialism. Through selective editing, native societies were
represented for colonial purposes. Furthermore, the development of montage techniques created the illusion of a cultural holism that could be filed away. However, early colonial films did lend a certain indexical credibility to anthropology, as this was the first time the general population of Europe was exposed to native peoples (123).

Early ethnographic filmmakers were engaged in a debate on the relative importance of aesthetic and scientific aspects of their works. Karl Heider, in his book *Ethnographic Film*, discusses a tension or conflict between two ways of seeing and understanding, two strategies for bringing order to (or imposing order on) experience: the scientific and the aesthetic. The evolution of ethnographic filmmaking has been a continuous process attempting to reconcile this tension and achieve a fertile synthesis. Ideally, ethnographic films unite the art and skills of the filmmaker with the trained intellect and insights of the ethnographer. [2006:ix]

This quote relates to the dialectical relationship that has existed between written ethnography and ethnographic film (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999:118). While written ethnographies have traditionally attempted to document and explain cultural “truth” through a well-established literary form, the visual and audio nature of film has provided many more stylistic options (Heider 2006:2). Heider admits that while the goal of truth may be hopelessly naïve, it remains a vitally important goal for any ethnographic filmmaker to possess (6). Having a wider appeal than written ethnography, these films have had to balance the attempt to hold audience interest while critically engaging with culture. As a result of these tensions, many films that have been considered ethnographic do not fall neatly into this category, and it is often useful to think of them as having certain degrees of “ethnographic” qualities and content (2).
Another debate regarding the relationship between ethnography and ethnographic film relates to the ability of anthropologists in representing cultural wholes. Although this was a key aspect of Ruby and Heider’s definition of ethnographic film, Patsy Asch, who co-directed several of Tim Asch’s films, has argued “it is for the monograph to deal with abstraction, and to discern patterns… while the strength of film is in its presentation of the concrete and particular” (Loizos 1993:42). However, while there have been some recent exceptions, the term ethnographic film has most often been bestowed on films made by or with anthropologists, using the ethnographic methods of the time with the primary purpose of communicating cultural aspects of a group of people. However, Loizos argues that anthropological training on cultural analysis, combined with long-term fieldwork, has tended to produce films that are less likely to be ethnographically shallow than other documentaries made by cultural outsiders (5).

Ethnography itself has a history that mirrors the developments and intellectual movements within anthropology. Although ethnography has become the primary method in cultural anthropology, the origin of this research method may be traced back to naturalists, such as Darwin and Collie, who accompanied expeditions in the 1800s funded by colonial empires (Pearce 1994). Their governments hired them to document the plants, animals, and human inhabitants of the “newly discovered” lands (Erickson and Murphy 2008:62). Thus, the study of human societies began as an extension of the natural sciences. Using the models of universal historians, early explorers categorized different “races” of humans, with western Europeans representing the highest form of humanity.
This scientific racism not only dominated the early anthropology of the 1800s, but early cinema as well (73).

By the turn of the century, anthropology was beginning to separate itself from its ties to universal historians like Morgan: forming into an academic discipline. Led by Boasian historical particularism in the United States, the goal of ethnography began to shift toward gathering data for the comparison of equally valid cultures, with the goal of discovering similarity and difference. The focus changed from grand theorizing to meticulous data collection (93). This deductive methodology remained colonial in the sense that indigenous cultures were still exoticized. However, these anthropologists documented them not for colonial control, but instead to “salvage” and archive data on “disappearing peoples” for comparative analysis. It was during this disciplinary shift that the first forerunners to ethnographic films were made (93).

**Early Films**

Due to the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining early equipment, films created by researchers during the first decades of the 20th century were rare. In 1895, Felix-Louis Regnault took footage of Wolof women in Africa making pots as part of a cross-cultural study of movement (Hockings 2003:15). While he went on to make other films with the expressed purpose of comparing cultures, this cross-cultural ethnographic film practice was not taken up again for decades. In 1901 and 1913, Baldwin Spencer recorded a significant amount of footage of Aboriginal peoples in northern Australia, but was hindered by technical setbacks (17).
Meanwhile, commercial studios emerged, recognizing the public fascination with indigenous peoples. In the U.S. “between 1910 and 1914 studios released some 900 Indian features” (Prins 2002:61). These studios took advantage of the desperation of Native Americans that had been “recently herded onto reservations, doomed to languish in boredom and abject poverty” (61). Hiring Indians to “play Indian,” these films were often the only income available to many on impoverished reservations. They were also the only native representations that many were exposed to in the early twentieth century.

The first popularized ethnographic film antecedent was Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) (Heider 2006:20). Like Boas and other early anthropological figures, Flaherty only became interested in ethnography after he arrived in the field for other work. More than his earlier films, the focus on the Inuit in this film more closely resembled Heider's conception of ethnographic films, due to the long period of time in which Flaherty lived with the Inuit (21). He spent much of the period between 1910 and 1921 traveling and residing among them. He also pioneered many new elements that would become conventions in ethnographic filmmaking. One innovation was his focus on an individual, Nanook, in order to personalize the culture. More controversially, he began the tradition of reconstructing rituals that were no longer practiced (22). Ethnographic filmmakers argue about the “authenticity” of this practice up to the present day (Turner 1995, Rouch and Feld 2003). He was also the first to show film clips to the native subjects in order to receive feedback. This was an early attempt at collaboration, which has been highly developed by many other ethnographic filmmakers since, especially in the last thirty years.
Since Flaherty lacked academic training and intellectual clout, he was not considered a true ethnographer by intellectuals of the time and was not highly esteemed in their circles. His favorite theme was “the continuously Heroic struggle of total, primordial man against infinitely powerful and hostile elements” (Balikci 1973:194). These themes were clearly seen in his dramatic intertitles throughout the film. His films continue to be criticized as naïve, distorted, and playing into noble savage stereotypes. However, within the context of the time, it is noteworthy that Flaherty established many of the conventions still used in ethnographic filmmaking (Hockings 2003:23).

In 1925, another seminal film from the decade, Grass, was released, showing groundbreaking footage of Bakhtiari herdsmen on their yearly trek to more favorable pastures (Heider 2006:24). The filmmakers, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, lacked any long-term fieldwork with the Bakhtiari and provided little information on them. However, the film is credited as containing some of the best footage of any ethnographic film ever made. As in Nanook of the North, the lack of audio narration prevented the viewer from being constantly directed, distracted, and possibly misled by the filmmaker (25). Like Flaherty, Cooper and Schoedsack have never been considered true ethnographers and their films are described by many anthropologists as precursors to ethnographic films (25).

Simultaneously within anthropology, the modern ethnographic method was being developed. Bronislaw Malinowski’s Argonauts of the Western Pacific was published in 1922, situating the anthropologist as a scientist studying both etic and emic aspects of a traditional culture, in order to discover underlying functions and structures of cultural
practices (16). Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Margaret Mead also released their first ethnographic studies in the mid 1920s (17). This early generation of ethnographers varied greatly in their methodological and theoretical perspectives. However, they were dedicated to cultural relativism and inductive reasoning, basing their theories upon vast amounts of cultural data.

While previous films contained various ethnographic elements, ethnography and film were formally synthesized by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (29). Mead had become famous for her popular Samoan ethnographic work: making it accessible without oversimplifying (1928). Bateson was known for his high aptitude for complex theoretical analysis. Already established in their careers, they carried out a joint ethnography of Balinese children in the late 1930s (29). For the first time in the discipline, they used film systematically as an ethnographic tool. Their footage and edited films were designed to complement the corresponding written ethnographies. They experimented with different strategies in using the medium of film. One was to follow a young boy named Karba from seven months to thirty-four months (29). They were also the first to use ethnographic film to explicitly compare two cultures. In *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea* (1952), they compare Bali with the Iatmul of the Sepik River in New Guinea. Interestingly, they include scenes in which they observe child behavior from a distance, while at other times introducing toys to induce rivalry (Heider 2006:127). Many of these situations would have been difficult to adequately describe through the written word. Ultimately, the primary problems with these films were of a technical nature, which kept their vision from being fully realized.
The major debates in this early history of ethnographic film have been articulated well through Mead’s writings. One commonly debated question of the time related to the degree in which these films could achieve scientific standards (Hockings 2003:3). Mead was a strong proponent of the importance of integrating ethnographic film into field research. She bemoaned the fact that most ethnographers “fail to include filming and insist on continuing the hopelessly inadequate note-taking of an earlier age, while the behavior that film could have caught and preserved for centuries… disappears” (3).

Mead admitted that the filmmaker will always partially reflect his or her own perspective. However, she points out that this problem occurs in any type of communication. One way she suggests mitigating researcher bias is by leaving a camera in the same place and perspective for long stretches of time. She argues that if this practice was to be widely and systematically adopted, a data pool of material would become available that could be “repeatedly reanalyzed with finer tools and developing theories” (10). To Mead, film was a new research instrument that improved the ethnographer’s ability to gather and communicate accurate data.

In relation to the role of aesthetics and scientific objectivity, Mead noted that while a high level of filmmaking ability helped to garner interest from students and other Western audiences, what mattered most was the careful documentation of culture. She argued that the demand for high aesthetic quality has discouraged many ethnographers from making films, while at the same time encouraged the acceptance of poorly researched films with high production values (7).
Mead and Bateson’s ethnographic films were met with mild interest at the time and few anthropologists followed up on this work for the next twenty years. It was not until the 1950s that ethnographic film became an “institutionalized scientific field, with recognized specialists and a body of criticism” (Hockings 2003:14). During this time, anthropology was beginning to splinter into divergent and concrete schools of thought. As late as 1952, Radcliffe-Brown described a meeting of preeminent British anthropologists in which a consensus was reached regarding ethnography as “descriptive accounts of nonliterate people” (Wolcott 2008:11). However, this consensus began to break down shortly thereafter (Erickson and Murphy 2008:113). It was during this period of change within the discipline that the golden age of ethnographic filmmaking began (Heider 2006:31). The work of Rouch, Gardner, and Asch in the 1950s typified this era.

It was Jean Rouch, considered the father of French verité, who led the wave of modern ethnographic filmmaking (Heider 2006:31). The verité film movement, translated as “truth film” went against the traditional method of simultaneously recording film and sound. Instead, film footage was edited separately to fit a soundtrack that included extensive interviews (Nichols 2001). His films in the 1950s on the people of the Niger River valley were unique in that they broke through the illusion of the ethnographic present and displayed the presence of the anthropologist (Rouch and Feld 2003). For example, in *The Lion Hunters* (1964), Rouch films the trip to his field site while discussing mistakes he has made during filming, such as dropping the camera when charged by a lion (Heider 2006:33). This film is also notable for his analysis that draws directly on the symbolic structuralism of Levi-Strauss (33). Through this frame, Rouch
conceptually opposed the Fulani village to the bush of the lions, stressing the contact zone between these two symbolically charged regions (33).

Although previous filmmakers attempted to present cultural differences and similarities, they avoided controversial subjects such as colonial power relations (Heider 2006:32). Rouch’s films, on the other hand, confronted these head on. A seminal example is *Les Maîtres Fous* (1953). In this film Rouch explores the symbolism behind the Hauka movement, which was the ritual mimicry of colonial officers by Songhay workers from Mali. Interestingly, this film managed to offend both British authorities who have charged it as mocking them, as well as Africans who accused this film of exoticizing the native peoples (Fergeson 2003). The film was even banned in many African countries at the time. In addition, there has been great controversy over the accuracy of Rouch’s interpretation of Hauka as an expression of African traditions regarding the stealing of power through possession. Anthropologist James Fergeson (2003) has contested this perspective, arguing that Hauka was simply a way of earning the respect of the Europeans. This controversy highlights the difficulty that ethnographic filmmakers face when interpreting the meaning of rituals, especially in the context of highly unequal colonial power relationships.

Rouch gave Flaherty credit for “experimenting with cinema in real life” as well as interacting with the natives he was filming (Rouch and Feld 2003:12). Rouch furthered collaborative methods by not only receiving native feedback during filming, but also including them in the writing and editing of his films (Loizos 1993:13). He and others in the cinema verité movement believed that “film truth” was not absolute knowledge of the
subject, but rather a document of the encounter between filmmaker and subject (Nichols 2001:118). This is shown in his film *Jaguar* (1955) which was about the journey that young Niger men make to the Gold Coast (now in Ghana) in order to have adventures and bring home stories. Reflecting on the film, Rouch comments that “we made it up as we went along. It’s kind of a journal… we were playing a game together” (33). After filming, Rouch brought the unedited footage to the young men and they edited and added a soundtrack collaboratively in a studio. This depth of native inclusion in the editing process was unheard of at the time, and remains rare.

Rouch has been both celebrated and criticized for injecting surrealism into ethnographic filmmaking, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. His most ardent critics accuse him of continuing “the ideology of colonial cinema, and thus the colonial project in general – which is to show the colonized as quaint, primitive, and exotic” (Rouch and Feld 2003:20). In his interviews, he often paid homage to the famous surrealist leader, André Breton (Stoller 1992:53).

Rouch’s surrealist influences took on different forms. In films such as Jaguar, he often had no plan for certain scenes, echoing Breton’s conception of automatism, or mindless improvisation, in art. In other films, such as *Les Maîtres Fous*, he tapped into the surrealist call to startle and transform the viewer. When he first showed this film, he was advised by several of his French filmmaker counterparts to destroy it, as it was seen to be overly graphic, vile, and even racist (Stoller 1992:50). Particularly offensive were scenes in which Hauka members drank the blood of a sacrificed dog. However, Rouch viewed this film not as a window into reality, but in the surrealist fashion, as an “array of
unsettling images that seek to transform the audience psychologically and politically” (50). Ultimately, he wanted his European and American audiences “to confront its ethnocentrism, its repressed racism, its latent primitivism” (53)

Both ahead of his time and a product of his time, Rouch’s work connected to colonial representations as well as foreshadowed postmodern reflexivity. He valued in-depth ethnographic research and the ability of fiction to express truth. He believed that the “fly on the wall” technique of earlier filmmakers “denied what all ethnographers are forced to learn; that realities are co-constructed and that meanings always change as contexts of interpretation change, continually revealed and modified in numerous ways” (16) Rouch famously stated that:

For me, as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already the transition from the real world to the imaginary world, and ethnography, the science of the thought systems of others, is a permanent crossing point from one conceptual universe to another; acrobatic gymnastics, where losing one’s footing is the least of risks. [20]

Two other filmmakers of the 1950s, John Marshall and his student Robert Gardner, pioneered the creation of ethnographic film specifically for use in the classroom (Loizos 1993:14). Marshall’s Bushmen film The Hunters was released in 1958 and has become one of the most viewed ethnographic films of all time. However, it has been criticized for being “written” in the editing room. It was the product of a significant amount of footage that was edited at Harvard University. During the editing, a story was created so that the film would have a narrative structure (Heider 2006:35).

The problematic nature of this editing method was the resulting researcher bias. The anthropological theories on hunter-gatherer societies at the time held the Hobbsian
view that they lived on the edge of survival. This belief was reflected in *The Hunters*. By the early 1960s, studies such as Richard Lee’s on the Bushmen showed that the !Kung and other hunter-gatherer peoples often lived with an abundance of food and plenty of leisure time (Lee 1968). Although *The Hunters* has been criticized as fundamentally flawed, it has provided an interesting example of how influential the preconceived notions of anthropologists can be in the overall narrative of their works. In addition, even its critics recognize that the film set a new standard of production value in ethnographic film, largely explaining its popularity (Heider 2006:35).

Robert Gardner, the editor of *The Hunters*, would go on to make several films himself, including *The Nuer* (1971), which was made in order to give students a sense of the culture that Evens-Prichard’s (1956) work made famous. Like Marshall, Gardner has been applauded for the high production value and broad appeal of his films, while criticized for a general disregard for ethnographic elements (40). For example, in *The Nuer*, Gardner shows an initiation ceremony of young Nilotic boys into manhood. However, he does not explain the various steps of the ceremony that have been well documented by Evens-Prichard and others (Heider 2006:5).

Tim Asch began making films in the 1950s as well, with an intended classroom audience in mind (43). He would become one of the most prolific ethnographic filmmakers of all time and is best known for his work with Napoleon Chagnon. Together, they created many short films on the Yanomamo of Brazil. Several of these films, most notably *The Feast* (1969) and *The Ax Fight* (1975), have become classics shown to many thousands of undergraduate students. In his notorious book, *The Fierce People* (1968),
Chagnon argued that the Yanomamo society had been genetically selected for violence, claiming that large numbers of men were killed in warfare and those that had murdered subsequently had more offspring.

While their popularity in terms of teaching aids is widely recognized, the Yanomamo work has been the subject of great ethical controversy. Patrick Tierney, in his book, *Darkness in El Dorado* (2001), famously charged Chagnon and his team of several serious ethical violations. *The Ax Fight* in particular has been criticized as having been staged in order to fit Chagnon’s conception of a “fierce” people (1968). In this book, he applies a behavioral-science model to frame the Yanomamo through their warfare (Loizos 1993:24). Chagnon has been accused of inciting violence by rewarding groups for their aggression and providing weapons of war (Borofsky 2005:3). Like Marshall, Chagnon has been charged with biasing his films with his own preconceptions of indigenous peoples. While Marshall projected his ideas regarding the difficulty of survival for the Bushmen, Chagnon frames his representations of the Yanomamo as a society based on conflict and war. Not only have these films been accused of deliberate staging, but some have even argued that if the Yanomamo were violent, it is largely due to their contact with Westerners (Barofsky 2005).

Furthermore, there is evidence that this particular group of Yanomamo had experienced previous violent conflict with the U.S. military, and that they were not a representative sample. Tierney also states that Chagnon was devious in his collection of sacred kinship names. In addition, the blood Neel collected has still not been returned as promised, violating Yanomamo custom. While earlier films had used staging and fiction
in order to tell a story, this was the first accusation of clear ethical, and possibly criminal, malpractice (3). Tierney’s work has become a recent nexus of fierce debate within anthropology and has been criticized by many as relying too heavily on circumstantial evidence and conjecture (23). This experience has been relevant to Asch in terms of how he reflects upon it in the latter part of his career when he argued for indigenous created films (Asch et al. 1991).

Although there exists a diversity of ethnographic films in the first half of the twentieth century, they have generally fit into a similar discourse. The great majority of these films and the debates surrounding them have been concerned with the recording of native cultures for posterity. Whether the motivation for “salvaging” these cultures was for disciplinary data or teaching purposes, the goal of creating these films was to record the culture (Balikci 1973:193). This positivist foundation led to a discourse that centered on the idea that one could capture the “true” essence of a culture from the outside through film. In Writing Culture (1986), Clifford and Marcus argue that simple documentation has never been possible in ethnography. Rather, fieldwork is “always anchored to a large extent in subjective, sensuous, experience” (32). The focus on documenting, analyzing, and explaining culture during this time was still rooted in the colonial exotification of cultures. Issues of research bias were discussed only in terms of tainting the objective truth of the films.

**The Crisis in Anthropology**

New ideas began to emerge regarding ethnographic filmmaking during the civil rights movements of the 1960s. In this politically charged environment, issues of power
and politics became emphasized, challenging the previous focus on science and aesthetics. Anthropology itself began to undergo what has been labeled by many as the “crisis of anthropology” (Erickson and Murphy 2008:180). The process of salvaging cultures for archival purposes was no longer considered an adequate motivation for conducting ethnographic work, and was considered an impossible task by others such as Clifford and Marcus (1986). As in other disciplines, the basic paradigm “grounded in the Enlightenment project of rationality and objectivity and intimately bound up in the history of Western imperialism” was unraveling (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999:116).

Building on the work of feminist anthropologists that had begun to question the influence of representational power within discourses, this new movement was termed postmodernism (Erickson and Murphy 2008:180). Defining their ideas in opposition to modernist conceptions of upward progress, postmodernists critiqued the ethnographic presentation of cultural wholes as a form of representational domination (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999:117).

Postmodernist thought fundamentally changed the way anthropologists represented indigenous peoples. The analyses of Michel Foucault (1977) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) on the relationship of authority and knowledge has had a particularly significant impact in the discipline (Erickson and Murphy 2008:181). Jean-François Lyotard (1984) went as far to suggest that the goals of science, objectivity, and the cross-cultural tradition itself be rejected outright. Others, including Marcus (1990), argued that ethnography, the core research method, had to be fundamentally reconsidered. However, Rachel Moore (1992) maintains that most anthropologists have taken a less extreme
view: that traditional anthropological theories should and could be amended in light of these methodological and ethical issues. These and other academics demanded that reflexivity be integrated into research in order to wash off the sins of colonialism from which anthropology emerged. These influences ultimately led to the wave of innovation in ethnographic film beginning in the 1970s with the work of Barbara Myerhoff, Turner, and others (Loizos 1993).

However, as postmodernists have “theorize(d) against ‘certainty,’ they have tend(ed) to advocate a negative pedagogy, one more identifiable by what it stands against than what it stands for” (Grande 2004:22). This is in part due to the relationship of postmodernism with poststructuralism, which relies upon the methodology of deconstructive critique in order to show internal inconsistencies of a text (Erickson and Murphy 2008:180). As will be discussed, films such as O’Rourke’s *Cannibal Tours* (1988) and Trihn Mihn-ha’s *Reassemblage* (1983) are examples of ethnographic films that effectively deconstruct Western assumptions while lacking a deep engagement with the native peoples themselves. Furthermore, postmodernist scholars have questioned the purpose and underlying assumptions of ethnographic film. While Rouch engaged indigenous collaboration and used innovative surrealist and French verité techniques, these scholars questioned the fundamental purpose of ethnography itself (Banks and Morphy 1997:26). Trihn Mihn-ha’s films in particular violated the conventions of film in order to demonstrate the somewhat arbitrary but powerful authority that ethnographies convey (Loizos 1993).
The reevaluation of anthropology occurred for multiple reasons. As greater numbers of indigenous people worked their way through prestigious academic systems, native voices began to emerge in professional organizations. Film scholar and director Fatimah Rony has attacked ethnographic film for treating indigenous peoples as fetishized exotic objects (2006:5). As Edward Said, in his seminal text, *Orientalism* (1978), argued that “the exotic is always already known” beforehand and anthropologists often confirm their own expectations through fieldwork (6). Furthermore, Rony called for a decolonization of anthropology’s model of placing cultures into “complete holistic volumes” (2006:7). These critiques were aimed at many early ethnographic films including Marshall’s and Chagnon’s, whose work attempted to describe whole cultures through their films (Heider 2006).

Said was associated with another movement labeled postcolonialism. Like postmodernism, it dealt with the problematic “othering” of non-Western cultures. However, while the focus of postmodernism and poststructuralism has been on *deconstructing* texts, postcolonial scholars analyzed how subaltern cultures themselves have *resisted* as well as *influenced* colonizing cultures. Indian literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced the useful concept of “strategic essentialism” as a way of describing how the subaltern combine their voices into larger groups in order to increase their collective power (Spivak 1993). Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has argued that the very act of studying subaltern groups in terms of marginalized-dominant peoples perpetuates a binary system. Instead, he argues that hybrid conceptions of power are the most destabilizing to cultural imperialism (Bhabha 1994). McClintock (1995) also warns
against falling into the discourse of binaries, such as colonizer-colonized, self-other, and dominance-resistance.

Anthropologist Abu-Lughud has even suggested that “culture” may be used, like race, to holistically essentialize entire groups. She has suggested that anthropologists instead write “ethnographies of the particular” that “write against ‘culture’” (Abu-Lughod 2006:467). As these scholars’ theories relate to the creation of new representations of marginalized peoples, they are useful in thinking about recent ethnographic and indigenous films. These postmodern and postcolonial theories will be crucial for creating an analytical framework in Chapter 4. In particular, post-colonial theorists have developed a discourse that takes into account the ability for subaltern and marginalized peoples to “decolonize representation… (and the) crude dichotomy(ies) between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ at the heart of contemporary race discourse” (Bush 2006:54). These relate particularly well to indigenous films, which also challenge these binary discourses (Ginsburg 1995).

The Rise of Indigenous Collaboration

As in ethnographic writing, many filmmakers continued to search for increasingly reflexive methods in order to represent the “other.” This was in response to postmodern and postcolonial critiques of traditional anthropology. This pursuit led ethnographic filmmakers not only to acknowledge their influence in film, but also collaborate with their indigenous subjects. Meanwhile, among film theorists, there had been a split between those who maintained that the filmmaker should remain invisible, while others...
argued for the acknowledgement of their presence and influence (Bordwell and Thomson 2010).

Rouch was part of the latter group, known as the French New Wave movement. This movement was defined by its rejection of following conventions, especially in terms of editing and narration (Marie and Neupert 2003). His films contrasted with the majority of earlier ethnographic films, in which a seemingly omnipotent and omnipresent narrator commented on the culture (Rouch and Feld 2003). By the 1970s, prominent ethnographic filmmakers, including Asch and Myerhoff, were experimenting with interactive techniques; indigenous subjects in their films spoke for themselves, as opposed to a third person narrator (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999:120).

One relevant film made during this transition was *Trobriand Cricket* (1975). It was on the appropriation of the English game by the colonized islanders. While the anthropologist Jerry Leach provided almost constant narration regarding the Trobrianders, there are elements of the film that showcased the changing priorities of ethnographic film (Loizos 1993:37). The Trobrianders were not simply playing a colonial game, but were also expressing their own culture through their interpretation of the game. With the exception of Rouch’s work, previous ethnographic films attempted to edit out cultural change due to colonization in order to show “pure” societies. This film was one of the first to embrace and focus on the effects of and resistance to colonization. However, as will be discussed in chapter 4, even this film played into the tendency of ethnographic filmmakers to over-generalize and essentialize.
It was only a matter of time until anthropologists would “hand the camera over” to their subjects. The earliest attempt at this resulted in Worth and Adair’s book titled *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972). These anthropologists were interested in whether the Navajo had a recognizable visual grammar and if so, hoped to discover it by having them create their own films (Heider 2006:47). During the summer of 1966, Worth and Adair trained a group of Navajo to use the equipment without teaching them about Western film conventions. While the project has been criticized for not including Navajo input in film analysis, the project pioneered the idea that indigenous created films could be used as raw ethnographic data for anthropologists (48). However, it is important to note that these films were not considered by Worth and Adair as ethnographic in and of themselves.

Tim Asch’s transition throughout this period may be seen as a microcosm for the field as a whole. Dissatisfied with many elements of the Chagnon collaborations on the Yanomamo, Asch set out to create new films that improved upon these. He wanted to make sure that there was no way that the subjects in his films could be perceived as “backwards or strange” (41). To accomplish this he attempted to carefully explain any behavior that he thought would seem unusual to Western viewers, as well as including the personal thoughts of indigenous people. These new films on Balinese culture in the 1980s were largely successful in terms of Asch’s goals (42). *Jero on Jero* (1980), as well other films in this series, focused on the spirit medium and healer, Jero Takapan. After this series of films, he published *Jero Takapan: Balinese Healer* (1983), which was one of the first ethnographic texts that focused on the process and technical details of ethnographic film collaboration (Ginsburg 1994:6). By 1991, Asch went back to the
Yanomamo with the expressed purpose of having the natives create their own films. Asch wrote at the time that he began to question his “role as an outsider representing their life and concerns to the wider world” (Asch et al. 1991:102). He stated that the issue of who should represent whom seemed much more complex to him than it did in 1968, and that he was now more interested in films made by the Yanomamo that “they think represent who they are and how they live today” (103). Describing his change in perspective, he stated that:

Anthropologists have a special advantage, being outsiders to a culture. Their distance from their subjects as well as the comparative framework of the discipline afford anthropologists a privileged understanding that insiders to a culture rarely seem to have. Moreover, the discipline in methodically studying culture yields insights that are different from the more intuitive insights that insiders have. At the same time a goal of anthropology has been to understand and represent, as much as possible, the insider's point of view. Yet, in reflecting upon the accomplishments of the field of ethnographic filmmaking, I cannot avoid the conclusion that we have, by and large, fallen short of the goal of making visual records that convey aspects of culture at once from the insider's point of view and with the privileged understanding of cross-cultural knowledge… The reasons for our lack of success, I think, have to do mainly with the facts that our own biases and preconceptions ultimately cloud our ability to see and say anything about another culture from an insider's point of view, and our relative outsider status means that we can never really know enough to be able to represent aspects of another culture the way they are experienced by members of that culture. [Asch et al 1991:103]

In the 1990s, anthropologists began to discuss how ethnographic filmmakers should proceed forward in their work considering the fallout from postmodernism. Much of the ensuing debate centered on the role that anthropologists should have in films. Many scholars, including Lutkehaus and Cool (1993), argued that anthropology still held a valuable cross-cultural perspective, which could be improved through collaborative methods that would account for issues of power. Elder (1995) has maintained that the
term collaboration itself is vague and used generally to refer to many different power relationships: often to any inclusion of subjects within the film process. She argues that true collaboration “creates an open space for dialogue: a space for filmmakers to learn to pose the questions they do not originally know to ask, a place where film subjects select the fragments of their reality they deem significant to document, and a moral place where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representation” (Elder 1995:94).

Others such as Jay Ruby have taken the position that the time for the anthropologist to be authoring ethnographic films had passed (1995:78). Instead, he argued that their primary role was to either hand the camera over to indigenous peoples or for ethnographers to film their own cultures. In this view, anthropologists could still make films regarding the process of indigenous filmmaking. Rachel Moore brought attention to one of Rouch’s points, that film itself has always been a surrealist method of communication that creates the illusion of wholeness using careful editing and montage. Therefore, all films may be biased, whether authored by anthropologists or indigenous peoples (1992:16). In addition to the abstract issues of power and representation that the “crisis of anthropology” brought to the forefront, there arose a significant discourse on the practical political effects regarding the native peoples in these films. In the context of an increasingly politically active indigenous rights movement, the question of “what do films do for the subjects?” began to become prioritized over “what do films do for the discipline?” It is through this political lens that many anthropologists have taken a more pragmatic perspective of the debate than postmodernists. Led by Turner’s (1991)
collaborative work with the Kayapo, these anthropologists argued that what mattered most were actual material effects of film.

Turner’s films in Brazil ranged from including the Kayapo in the creation and editing of the films, to training them to make their own films (70). Turner’s focus in filmmaking was on the actual political effects that the films had on the Kayapo’s goals of autonomy. To Turner, film was a tool through which the Kayapo’s political agenda could be advanced. Therefore, his decisions regarding the level of collaboration in his films were guided by what was likely to be most politically effective. Like Flaherty and Rouch, he has been criticized for his use of cultural reenactments in his films. However, Turner has argued effectively that since this has served the Kayapo’s interests well, offending anthropological sensibilities is a superficial objection (74). He has pointed out the bias of many anthropologists in attempting to visually capture untouched and “pure” native peoples. He was been critical of ethnographic filmmakers and theorists who claim that anthropologists are primarily engaged in colonial power relations whenever they are involved in films (1995:103). He views this perspective as focusing on the wrong questions. Instead of addressing general issues of power, Turner argues that anthropologists should be concerned with specific issues of power for the indigenous people involved. Turner made the case that an imperfect film, which creates positive political change for an indigenous group is more effective, and consequently “better,” than a film that is only theoretically ethical (104).

While most ethnographic film work in the last few decades has involved some level of mutual collaboration between filmmaker and subjects, there are a variety of
perspectives on how this is best achieved. Barbara Myerhoff has argued that the ideal collaboration creates a “third voice” in which neither the anthropologist nor the indigenous voices dominate, but where both collaborate equally (Ruby 1991:19). While Ruby expressed agreement in theory, he argued that this collaborative situation is difficult to achieve, as the anthropologists have generally had more expertise and control in production (1995:81). Elder argued that this “middle ground” is nevertheless where the best ethnographic films are created, stating that she does not “believe… that the problem of in-depth representation is grounded in the insiderness or outsiderness of the filmmaker. Rather, it lies in the relationship of the power between filmed and filmer” (Elder 1995:3). Furthermore, she declared that ethnographic films should not be considered as documenting the true essence of a culture, but rather as a record of the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed. Her own films tend to follow this premise by including little to no cultural explanation or narration (4).

Rony argued that even after the crisis in anthropology, the intellectual divide between the West and the “other” has remained intact (2006:13). The creation of films about our own culture has been proposed by Ruby as one strategy for breaking down this divide. Myerhoff’s later work provides a rare example of an ethnographic filmmaker doing just this. After writing her award winning book, *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians* (1974), she planned to conduct research with Chicano immigrants in Los Angeles. However, Myerhoff (1978) reconsidered this after being asked why she did not study her “own people,” and thus began a research project with the elderly Jewish community in Venice, California. The resulting book, *Number Our Days* (1983), was
especially sensitive to the isolation and mistreatment of her subjects (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999:121). In the film by the same name, she stated that she wanted to focus on the elderly Jewish community, commenting that “someday I will be a little old Jewish lady” (1978).

Two years into her work with the Jewish community, Myerhoff was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. While her earlier work had shown an active commitment to reflexivity, the illness motivated her to further highlight her own experiences in the community. In her final film, In Her Own Time (1986), she documented her own relationship with this orthodox Jewish community, and her own quest for “miracles.” Though she expressed neither belief nor skepticism in regards to orthodox Jewish rituals, she took part in many that were aimed at healing and cleansing her body. Tragically, she passed away before the film was released.

Myerhoff’s transformation in the latter part of her life highlights the significance that identity has on ethnographic filmmaking. The more that she identified with her subjects, the more personal her work became. As a Jewish woman, she identified with and in many ways belonged to the community she was studying. There was still some perceived distance, however, which was revealed in her comment that she would someday “become” one of them (1978). After her illness, she identified more with her subjects’ existential crises regarding death and the failings of their bodies. The filmmaker-subject power dynamic itself was challenged, as it was the anthropologist who was seeking help from her subjects. In her final work, Myerhoff most closely approached the “third voice” that she had argued for as the ideal ethnographic film dynamic (Ruby
Despite the fear by many scholars that one loses objectivity when studying his or her own culture, her films have been highly regarded by academics and are considered seminal works in gerontology (Moody 1988:9).

The rise of indigenous collaboration in ethnographic film highlights the attempts of anthropologists to address the issues stemming from the crisis of representation. Collaboration been used to refer to very different relationships between ethnographic filmmakers and indigenous peoples. While anthropologists disagree on the ideal relationship, most agree that ethnographic filmmakers are vulnerable to their own preconceived notions of native peoples as exotic. While issues of representation and misrepresentation have academic implications within the discipline, they have played an active role in the lives of indigenous peoples who have been engaged in ongoing struggles for material and cultural rights.

**Indigenous Rights Movements**

_The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice._

- Martin Luther King Jr.

While the “crisis in representation” was causing anthropologists to reconsider issues of representing the other, indigenous peoples were organizing into localized movements to fight for their cultural and material rights. It is crucial to understand this political history, as it framed the context in which indigenous films emerged.

Unlike other disparaged minorities, indigenous peoples have had the organizational disadvantage of being largely isolated from each other. Many groups living relatively traditional lifestyles did not have the cultural precedent or technology to
communicate and organize with other native groups. Therefore, it was often the “white educated” urban indigenous people who have been able to fight most effectively for rights (Hendry 2005:58).

Gaining momentum at the end of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, Hendry shows that the focus of indigenous rights has generally shifted from land issues to a more holistic model based on indigenous sovereignty in all dimensions of life (60). A significant emphasis has been placed on language survival, youth education, and self-determination in the areas of health, welfare, and self-government. The American Indian Movement (AIM) is one prominent example of how indigenous rights movements have progressed. This movement is particularly relevant to this thesis, as most films at the DIFAF were made by and about Native Americans.

**Native American Rights**

As with other civil rights movements, AIM has been well known due to the dramatic events that unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s. However pan-Indian political activism goes back to the 1880s revitalization movement in which the ghost dance religion spread among many groups in an effort to resist the effects of reservation allotment and the boarding school system on their cultures (Cobb and Fowler 2007:xiii). Over the next 70 years, individual tribes frequently protested governmental actions. However, it was the creation of the “urban Indians,” following the World War II draft and land loss due to U.S. House Concurrent Resolution of 1953, that set the stage for large-scale political organization (Calloway 2008:456). The Native Americans who had been displaced into cities were often not accepted by reservation nor mainstream
societies. As a result, they formed strong urban community centers, bonded as much by a pan-Indian identity as their tribal affiliations. Ironically, the very policies that were meant to terminate native resistance to acculturation put into motion what would become one of the strongest indigenous rights movements (457). The Southwest Regional Indian Youth Council and other Native American political organizations began to coalesce around specific causes, especially environmental degradation of tribal lands (Calloway 2008).

During the 1960s, the tribal sovereignty that was technically provided through treaties in the 1800s began being utilized by a new generation of native academics and lawyers (467). In 1968, Native Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul set up AIM to be a neighborhood watch group, as the Black Panthers had done in Oakland (459). The time was ripe for political movement, and the organization quickly spread to many urban communities around the country (Cobb and Fowler 2007). Native lawyers found that according to many treaties, tribes could reclaim unused surplus federal land. In 1969, after Alcatraz prison in San Francisco Bay was decommissioned, a small group of Sioux Indians shortly occupied the island before being taken away by U.S. marshals. AIM was launched into the public mind later that year when a large organized occupation of the island was staged, lasting 18 months (ix). Over the next decade the movement reached a critical mass, culminating in several standoffs with the federal government, including the siege at Wounded Knee and the taking over of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office in Washington D.C. (x).

AIM was crucial in the change of U.S. policy towards Native Americans. An era of unprecedented self-determination legislation followed. In the 1970s alone, the
reservation termination policies were reversed, sovereignty and treaty rights were officially recognized, and tribes were allowed to expel the BIA from their lands. Due to sustained political pressure, this trend has continued in the decades since. Native American delegates began sending non-voting delegations to the United Nations in the 1980s, eventually helping to craft the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Bills regarding the rights of tribes to have gambling operations, preserve their language, and repatriate bodily remains and artifacts were passed as well (xix). The 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), along with other protective acts, has put stringent regulations on native material culture.

However, it has been difficult for tribes to control representation in light of laws protecting the freedom of speech and it has remained legal to utilize virtually any indigenous representation (U.S. Department of Interior). For example, the American Indian Cultural Support website cites that while many schools have changed their disrespectful Native American mascots voluntarily, thousands have not and are under no legal obligation to do so. While libel laws protect individuals, groups do not have these same protections (Brown 2004:235). However, the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. in 2004 was an important milestone, serving as an example of native community curation and self-representation for the American public.

Much of the progress that has been made legislatively has not translated into significant improvement for Native Americans. Sociologist Duane Champagne (Chippewa) maintains that “reservation life continues to be characterized by high levels
of health risk, low life expectancy, high child mortality, and excessive rates of alcohol and substance abuse… diabetes and weight control are especially severe” (1999:226).

Furthermore, there is a plethora of racialized disinformation about the causes of these conditions. For example, the widely believed idea that Native Americans metabolize alcohol differently than other ethnic groups is only supported by one study, which has been criticized as “highly flawed in its use of controls and other methods” (229). The popular image of the “drunk Indian” has had real impacts in reservation health programs, with a disproportionate amount of funding going to alcohol programs. As a result, initiatives aimed at reducing the use of tobacco, of which Native Americans have the highest rate of use in the nation, have repeatedly been underfunded (258).

While the improvements for many Native Americans over the last few decades have been largely symbolic in nature, there have been isolated cases of significant progress in sovereignty and resource control. Many tribes have opened casinos in the wake of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988. The most successful, the Pequot Foxwoods resort, now makes over a billion dollars a year in revenue, and uses much of this money to fund native schools, provide excellent health care, and invest in cultural revitalization projects (Calloway 2008). While this example is atypical of most reservations, other reservations have benefited from the legislation resulting at least in part from the AIM movement.

Although only Native Americans in the United States have received official recognition of sovereignty through their particular history and treaty laws, other indigenous rights movements around the world have developed in parallel. They have

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2 With the exception of Native Hawaiians.
fought for and gained rights in a multitude of arenas including land, education, fishing, hunting, and gambling (Burger 1987:87). Indigenous groups in Central America, Australia, and Canada have had particularly active movements. Furthermore, an “international indigenist” identity has developed around recent advancements in international organizations including the United Nations (UN) (Niezen 2003).

Indigenous Rights on an International Scale

_The Declaration does not represent solely the viewpoint of the United Nations, nor does it represent solely the viewpoint of the Indigenous Peoples. It is a Declaration which combines our views and interests and which sets the framework for the future. It is a tool for peace and justice, based upon mutual recognition and mutual respect._

- Les Malezer (Chair of the Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus)

As is often true of international human rights laws, international indigenous rights have lagged far behind many in regional and national arenas. However, in 2007, after sitting within various committees since the 1980s, the UN passed the powerfully symbolic Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Steiner et al. 2008). In order to understand how this nonbinding resolution came to fruition, it is necessary to trace the history of indigenous rights in the international realm. As in national indigenous rights movements such as AIM, real progress internationally has only been made after indigenous regional groups and grassroots organizations have put pressure on national and international bodies (Cobb and Fowler 2007:292).

The history of indigenous human rights on an international scale begins at the end of World War II, when in 1948, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was passed. Motivated in part by the horrors of the war, and Nazism in particular, the
document was revolutionary at the time, granting universal rights to all individuals. While the declaration was legally nonbinding, it was hoped by many at the time that it would become customary international law, and it has in fact become an influential basis for enforcing indigenous rights (Steiner et al. 2008:172). This declaration set into motion what can be called the rights strategy, in which the state “has positive obligations (to protect, promote and provide for rights) as well as negative obligations (to abstain from violations)” (Borchgrevink and McNeish 2007:05).

For the next few decades, there was little international legislation regarding indigenous human rights. The Convention No. 107 and Recommendation No. 104 in the International Labor Organization (ILO) were the next major pieces of international legislation to be enacted. These were largely considered assimilationist polices and were not replaced until 1989 by the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention 169), “which fleshed out a wide variety of legal rights for indigenous peoples whose home states ratified the Convention” (Koivurova 2008:1).

Building up to the ILO Convention were grassroots indigenous rights movements such as AIM that gained widespread recognition in the 1960s, during the era of U.S. Civil Rights. These regional and national movements were aided by organizations such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 1968, Survival International in 1969, and Cultural Survival in 1972 (García-Alix and Hitchcock 2009:100). These efforts led to the UN Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which authorized a study titled “The Problem of
Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations” in 1971. An outgrowth of this process in
the UN was the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP)
in May 1982, which met annually in Geneva, Switzerland until 2006, with the charge of
producing a set of human-rights standards relating to indigenous peoples (101). In 1993,
the WGIP drafted the first version of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous
Peoples under the guidance of many indigenous representatives. The declaration draft
went through several complex changes over the next 14 years. Most importantly in this
context are the compromises that were made along the way and the reasons they were
necessary for ratification.

There were several points of contention that nation states objected to before the
declaration was ratified. Concerns brought up by states regarded confusion on specific
definitions of indigenous peoples, the possibility that the declaration would incite more
ethnic violence than it stopped was also voiced, and the difficulty in enforcing cultural
rights. By and large, the main point of contention that put the declaration in a stalemate
for years had to do with self-determination in article 31 (103). It stated:

> Indigenous peoples, as a specific form of exercising their right to self-
determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters
relating to their internal and local affairs, including culture, religion,
education, information, media, health, housing, employment, social
welfare, economic activities, land and resources management,
environment and entry by non-members, as well as ways and means for
financing these autonomous functions. [Koivurova 2008:13]

This article was fought for by the indigenous peoples in the WGIP specifically
because it opened up the door for autonomous control over land and the creation of new
indigenous states. This threatened the resources of nation states, which were well aware
that their forbearers had taken land by force. Eventually, this article was rewritten to limit self-government to “matters relating to their internal and local affairs,” so that indigenous peoples could not declare their national independence (Davis 2008:5). However, even after watering down the declaration, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand voted against its passing. Still, the declaration easily passed with 143 states voting for it, 11 abstaining, and 4 (above) voting against it.

In trying to understand why four of the most powerful countries containing some of the most active indigenous rights movements voted against the weakened bill, it is important to note that these countries represent core powers in the world system with much to lose with regard to resources. Also, they have had especially influential indigenous rights movements. In the context of this thesis, it is noteworthy that these four countries also have particularly active indigenous film histories.

Despite the limitations of this declaration, its success shows just how much “the indigenous-rights terrain has changed” (Corntassel 2008:115). The declaration was the first UN legislation that formally recognized indigenous collective rights, not only with regard to self-government, but also in relation to the murkier area of cultural rights. This represents a “sea change” from what were mostly negative rights to positive rights. Now protected was the “capacity to express, develop, and direct: to engage in culture” (Holder 2008:14).

Among many promised human rights, article 17 of the declaration decreed that “indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages… (and that) state-owned media (should) duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity” (Stewart
During the drafting of the declaration, there was a workshop that brought together journalists, filmmakers, academics, lawyers and many others to focus on creating “new information models through which (indigenous voices) may be heard” (Wilson and Stewart 2008:21). The workshop took this official view of indigenous media:

(Indigenous media is) an indispensible tool to promote Indigenous identity, language, culture, self-representation and collective human rights, and as a vehicle for communicating regional, national, and international issues to Indigenous communities as well as conveying community concerns to a wider public. [Wilson and Stewart 2008:21]

While it remains to be seen what effect this non-binding resolution will have on the ability of indigenous peoples to control their own futures, this declaration showcases both how far indigenous rights movements have come, while simultaneously revealing the powerful institutional resistance which they still continue to face from the most powerful countries.

**The Politics of Indigenous Identity**

As indigenous rights movements have differed from those of other minorities,’ so too have identity politics. While there has been significant legislative progress in the U.S. since AIM, centuries of governmental policies designed to take land and promote acculturation have led to the complex Native American identity landscape that exists today. Sandy Grande, a leading scholar on Native American identity and political thought, discusses the “crisis” of American Indian identity in her seminal book, *Red Pedagogy* (2004). She describes how Western models based on “left-essentialism,” which
is roughly analogous to the noble savage conception, and postmodernism are inadequate, and that there is

a need for an indigenous theory of identity – one historically grounded in indigenous struggles for self-determination, politically centered in issues of sovereignty, and spiritually guided by the religious traditions of American Indian Peoples. The aim is to develop an emancipatory theory – a new Red pedagogy – that acts as a true counterdiscourse, counterpraxis, counterensoulment of indigenous identity. [Grande 2004:95]

In *Culture and Identity*, Lindholm states “with the exception of Native Americans, we live in a community of immigrants who proudly proclaim their distinctiveness from one another and their autonomy from the past” (2001:4). Grande’s ‘red pedagogy’ is an attempt to account for the particular cultural and historical context of native peoples. Furthermore, Grande argues that a “left-essentialism” has been constructed around “the predominant image of the American Indian – the nature loving noble savage, (that) persists to serve the whitestream need to escape the deadening effects of modernity” (101). Grande further posits that this brand of essentialism is based on a logic which forces one to submit proper credentials before offering an opinion, arguing that the politics of location privileges an unexamined set of authentic experiences as the foundation for authority. In other words, “‘truth’ is constructed as a function of identity” (97).

(This) essentialism fails… to theorize the relational character of identity by denying the historicity and social comprehensiveness of American Indian subjectivity. It fails to account for the ways indigenous peoples are forced to negotiate incoherent and other conflicting pressures on identity formation. And, perhaps most important, it fails to provide an explanatory critique of the persistent colonialist forces that undermine tribal life and consequently to provide the transformative knowledge needed to disrupt their hegemonic effects. [Grande 2004:104]
This essentialism has largely stemmed from an artificially implemented racialization of culture. Before European contact, “most tribal classifications had been based on kinship and culture,” while the U.S. governmental blood quantum policies “introduced categories of race into Indian country” (Champagne 1999:11). Ward Churchill (Keetoowah) notes that this point is not simply a matter of semantics, arguing that “Native peoples have for the most part always maintained relatively high degrees of sociocultural inclusiveness and consequent reproductive interactivity (interbreeding) among one another” (1999:41). Furthermore, “thousands of ‘white Indians’… had either married into, been adopted by, or petitioned for naturalization as member-citizens of indigenous nations” (41). Churchill argues that the Western idea of race serves to essentialize Native Americans and distorts the tribal reality of group identity based on a variety of cultural factors (45).

The racialization of Native Americans was legislated during the allotment acts of the late 1800s (Grande 2004:97). These policies were designed to force Indians to adopt European conceptions of individual land ownership, and subsequently assimilate them into white society (50). In order to do this, federal agents from the BIA went to tribal areas and recorded “how Indian” each individual was through an ambiguous system of blood quantum. The agents also changed Native American names, which were difficult for them to pronounce, for recordkeeping purposes. Even though these lists are flawed and incomplete, those who cannot trace their ancestry to the census records of this time are often unable to gain membership to a federally recognized tribe. Furthermore, many
other tribes are not even federally recognized (12). The historian Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw) describes the complex terrain of Native American identity:

Because of assimilation, acculturation, and intermarriage with non-Indians, American Indians have a variety of references to describe themselves: full-blood, traditional, mixed-blood, cross-blood, half-breed, progressive, enrolled, unenrolled, re-Indianized, multi heritage, bicultural, post-Indian, or simply “I’m _______ (tribal affiliation). [Mihesuah in Champagne 1999:13]

Grande admits that postmodernists have helped to “uncover the ways in which… ‘universalist’ theories have operated to normalize whiteness” (Grande 2004:107). These scholars have also articulated how “‘identity’ is shaped and determined by social and historical contingencies, not by some checklist of innate, biological, or primordial characteristics” (de Lauretis 1989). However, the assumption of many postmodernists that individuals are “struggling to define their place within the larger democratic project” does not fit within indigenous goals of sovereignty. Unlike critical scholarship on other minority groups that focuses on how minorities fit into systems of power, many indigenous peoples are more concerned with fending “off the global capitalist forces that crave indigenous cultures (while) at the same time… operate to destroy all that sustains indigenous communities” (Grande 2004:107). Grande argues that postmodernism “primarily serves white America… (and that) the notion of fluidity has never worked to the advantage of indigenous peoples” (112). Native Americans “are neither free to ‘reinvent’ themselves nor able to liberally ‘transgress’ borders of difference, but rather, remain captive to the determined spaces of colonialist rule” (113).

Grande argues for a discourse that breaks out of the essentialist-postmodernist duality, “that addresses the political need for sovereignty and the socioeconomic urgency
of building a transnational agenda” (114). She suggests using the postcolonial notion of “mestizaje” (Darder et al. 1997; Sleeter and McLaren 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997; Valle and Torres 1995). Literally meaning a person of mixed ancestry, mestizaje discourse centers on a self-conscious hybrid identity, in which the individual “willfully blurs political, racial [and] cultural borders in order to better adapt to the world as it is actually constructed” (Valle and Torres 1995:149). However, while the conception of the mestizaje envisions “an anti-imperialist theory of subjectivity,” it is still based in part on a “liberated” self, prizing individual rights over sovereignty and connections to place and land (Grande 2004:117). Grande argues against a “reduction of difference to matters of discourse,” engaging in critical consideration on how hybrid identities “both further and impede indigenous imperatives of self-determination and sovereignty” (115).

Ultimately, Grande’s development of a ‘red pedagogy’ “operates at the crossroads of unity and difference that defines this space in terms of political mobilization and cultural authenticity, expressing both the interdependence and distinctiveness of tribal peoples” (118).

**Indigenous Rights and Identity**

The pan-Indian AIM movement utilized what Spivak (1993) has termed “strategic essentialism” in order to create political solidarity and influence for Native American peoples. This movement helped to create a nationalized native identity that has not replaced regional identities, but has rather been integrated into a hybridized identity.

Similarly, Ronald Niezen, in his book *The Origins of Indigenism* (2003), discusses how an “international indigenism” has developed since the 1980s in
conjunction with a worldwide solidarity movement. Consisting of networks of indigenous
groups, NGOs, and a variety of other organizations, the cohesion of this grassroots
movement has been tenuous. However, the shared history of “conquest, genocide,
ethnocide, and political marginalization” has provided common ground on which to link
shared interests. In addition, as a liberation movement, ‘international indigenism’ stands
apart from other movements, including those of decolonization, anti-apartheid, and civil
rights. “Each of these was in some way fixed upon a goal of equality” within larger
systems, while indigenous movements have generally fought for independence from these
systems (17). Rather than erase differences between peoples, “their principal goal is
rather the recognition of distinct collective rights” (18).

A primary goal of the “international indigenism” has been to generate political
power for collective rights: bolstering the self-determination of specific cultural groups.
Niezen describes the international indigenous identity as “part of a sifting continuum or
bricolage of identities ranging from the individual actor to the family, clan, tribal group,
language group, village, region, province, nation, and not least of all, international
affiliation” (12).

In recent decades, indigenous leaders from around the world have gained entrée
into international bodies: most notably the UN. Representing a shift from the
confrontational and often violent protests of Wounded Knee and the Mohawk Standoff,
indigenous peoples began using the “international bodies of states to overcome the
domestic abuses of states themselves” (16).
In early 1973, a white man was charged with only second-degree manslaughter for the outright murder of a Lakota man. After protests to this injustice were prohibited by the corrupt Pine Ridge Tribal Chairman Dick Wilson, many members of the poverty-stricken reservation decided to take action. With the assistance of AIM members, several hundred Native Americans seized control of a church, trading post, and museum near the infamous massacre site at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. For 71 days, Indians and U.S. agents exchanged fire and demands, resulting in the deaths of two Native Americans, Buddy LaMonte and Frank Clearwater. This standoff brought increased national attention to the burgeoning American Indian Movement and held special symbolic importance due to its location near the infamous massacre site (Smith and Warrior 1996).

The Mohawk land dispute, involving an armed conflict with the Canadian government near Oka, resulted from the plans of developers to build a golf course on sacred land. This incident garnered national attention to its cause and resulted in multiple films, including Alanis Obomsawin’s (Abenaki) feature length documentary, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, seen by hundreds of thousands of people around the world (NFB website).

**Native American Identity Politics and Creative Expression**

Human beings are driven not only to struggle to survive by making and remaking their material conditions of existence, but also to survive by making sense of the world and their place in it. This is a cultural production, as making sense of themselves as actors in their own cultural worlds. Cultural practices of meaning making {performative subject constitution} are intrinsically self-motivated as aspects of identity-making and self-construction: in making our cultural worlds we make ourselves. At least for those who have moved out of economic subsistence, perhaps the balance has tipped from instrumental to expressive struggle, so that humans are concerned more with the making of their cultural world than
with the material world. Even in their material struggles for survival, they grapple with choices in “how to go on,” so as to deal with the maintenance of a viable cultural identity and its distinction and acknowledgement from others. [Willis 2000:xiv]

As Grande (2004) points out, much of Native American identity discourse is in reaction to mainstream representations in Hollywood and academia. Creative expressions through film, writing, and art have given native peoples the chance to speak for themselves. For the general public, the visual medium is dominant over the written word with regard to indigenous representation. As John Berger states in *Ways of Seeing*, “seeing comes before words” (1972:1). This fact both emphasizes the problem with the dominant influence of Hollywood misrepresentations, as well as the importance of indigenous film in identity discourse.

However, the politics of identity become extremely complex in discussing indigenous film. Not only are the content of these works understood within the milieu of essentialized identity politics, but also the issue of authenticity in authorship has greatly influenced how they are received. As Willis explains in the quote above, not only are indigenous peoples struggling for material survival, but they also face constant threats from those who have attempted to eliminate, as well as appropriate their cultures. Despite these formidable challenges, creative expressions have been used effectively by indigenous peoples to not only express political perspectives and alternative histories, but also to affirm, construct, and reimagine their identities (Ginsburg 1995).

Native Americans have often been held to a double standard regarding their personal and academic works. This is partly a result of “the whitestream notion of Indian as romantic figure, not Indian as scholar and social critic – a predisposition that works to
favor cultural-literary forms of indigenous writing over critical forms” (Grande 2004:102). Both Grande (2004) and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (2008) have discussed their experiences of simultaneously receiving pleas for their life stories along with rejections of their critical works. For Native Americans “the game is rigged” in that the left-essentialism rampant in many sectors of academia and the arts has valued their cultural experiences while negating their ability to produce credible critical works (Grande 2004:103).

This mainstream obsession with native autobiographical experience relates to what Vine Deloria Jr. (1997:2) termed the “wilderness theme park”: the white voyeurism of native peoples in controlled settings (Grande 2004:102). Gloria Bird, a Spokane Indian professor of the arts at the Institute for American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has likewise argued that critically acclaimed native writers are not given the prestige which respected white authors receive (Cook-Lynn 2008:339).

Conversely, while Native Americans have had a difficult time gaining entrée into mainstream creative communities, there has been a great influx of those claiming to be Indian, further complicating this identity landscape. The popularity of being considered a Native American has greatly risen since the 1960s (Nagel 1995). Sociologist Joane Nagel argues that the tripling of those who identify as American Indian on the census since civil rights is mostly due to “minority switching,” in which those who had previously identified as non-native have changed their ethnic identity. She identified the root causes of this as stemming from changes in federal Native American policy (notably the termination and relocation acts which increased “urban” Indian populations), changes in
American ethnic politics, and an increase in Native American activism. Grande argues that “ethnic fraud” may also be to blame, in which people have identified as Native American for access to scholarship funds and to increase the perceived cultural capital of writers and artists (2004:109). Grande states that even laws such as the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 primarily help “to protect whitestream consumers against the purchase of ‘fraudulent’ goods,” as Indians who are not federally recognized have in many cases been unfairly criminalized (110).

As with the previously discussed problematic nature of racialized blood quantum in defining tribal membership, the politics of Native American identity have led to extensive debate within native communities over the relationship of politics and art. Cook-Lynn laments that “today, American Indian artists, novelists, poets, and scholars who are publishing their own works seem to take an art for art’s sake approach. There are astonishingly few exceptions” (2008:341). She maintains that indigenous art should “give thoughtful consideration to the defense of our lands, resources, languages, and children. (Art should conduct) the intellectual work in and about Indian communities that will help us understand our future” (343).

She argues against the sentiment that “to be critical of the work of fellow Indian writers is a function of jealousy or meanness… (and suggests that) there could be a dialogue about what is good or bad and why, but only a few have a stomach for it” (342). This echoes the sentiments of indigenous filmmakers I have spoken with (remaining anonymous for reasons of confidentiality) on the way that in general, indigenous films have been held to lower standards than other genres, with comparisons drawn to the
“special Olympics” (personal communication). These same filmmakers argued that the root cause of this phenomenon has been racist in nature, based on the idea that indigenous peoples can only achieve a certain level of artistic accomplishment. Cook-Lynn argues that:

Scholars in Native intellectual circles must resist the flattery that comes from many corners, defend freedom, refute rejection from various power enclaves and resist the superficiality that is so much a part of the modern-urban voice. We must work toward a new set of principles that recognizes the tribally specific literary traditions by which we have always judged the imagination. [2008:344]

There has been significant debate regarding the effect that media has had on indigenous peoples and cultures (Ginsburg 1995). Much of the literature in the 1990s focused on how media expose indigenous cultures to western society and ultimately taint them. These arguments often betray an underlying idea that “‘we’ and ‘they’ are separate, which in turn is built on the trope and mystique of the noble savage living in a traditional, bounded world, for whom all knowledge, objects, and values originating elsewhere are polluting of some reified notion of culture and innocence” (Ginsburg 1995:263). Anne McClintock, in *Imperial Leather* (1995), provides a useful vocabulary for discussing this phenomenon through her terms, “anachronistic space” and “panoptical time” (36, 40). Anachronistic space is a location that attempts to show the past through the illusion of a panoptical, or all-seeing perspective.

Recent research relates to the “shift in the past few decades to the command of mass media technologies by Indigenous peoples as they have appropriated the technologies of the dominant society and transformed them to their own uses in order to
meet their own cultural and political needs” (Wilson and Stewart 2008:3). This is what Harold Prins refers to as the “Indigenization of visual media” (2004:516).

**The Field of Indigenous Media**

*Just because I hold a white man’s camera, that doesn’t mean I am not a Kayapo. If you were to hold one of our head-dresses, would that make you an Indian?*

- Mokuka (Kayapo)

Asch’s discussion on the importance of indigenous narrative films demonstrates how much the field of ethnographic film had changed with regard to indigenous film by the early 1990s:

Whether these films and others like them are some of the most powerful records of particular cultures at particular times because they were made by insiders, or because they were made in the narrative tradition is not a question I can resolve here. That fictional representations approach the truth more closely than do documentary representations is not the point I want to assert here (although that may be so). Both forms of representation are worthwhile. We need not choose one over the other. My central point, in addressing the success of some narrative filmmakers in different cultures, is that those with an insider's knowledge often seem to be the only ones with enough knowledge of how their culture works to make a good representation; and these narratives provide examples of how insiders can have the critical insight into their own cultures, if even subliminally, to say something about how those cultures work that goes beyond the intuitive knowledge that most people have about their own societies. Furthermore, narrative representations made by insiders are valuable because they are cultural documents, which are of the society they represent. [Asch et al 1991:103]

In the early 1990s it became apparent that academic debates on ethnographic film did not take into account the wide variety of indigenous films that had little to do with anthropologists or ethnography. It was during this time that a discourse on the significance of indigenous created films moved to the forefront in visual anthropology.
Postmodern critiques of ethnographic power relationships were no longer adequate to discuss these new representations. Ginsburg states that the lack of analysis of such media as both cultural product and social process may also be due to our own culture’s enduring positivist belief that the camera provides a ‘window’ on reality, a simple expansion of our powers of observation, as opposed to a creative tool in the service of a new signifying practice. [1995:258]

A new literature on indigenous media developed around these emerging independent and highly collaborative works, defined as “a means for indigenous people to negotiate self-identity and representations of social, cultural, and political themes that transcend boundaries of time space, and even language.” The term “indigenous media” has been preferred by Ginsburg over “indigenous film,” to emphasize the mediation that takes place in these productions (Singer 2001:9). While noting Ginsburg’s important points on the matter, in this thesis I have chosen to use “indigenous film” in the majority of this thesis for the sake of clarity.

The field of indigenous media grew out of the sub-discipline of visual anthropology, which was engaged with the postmodern issues of power and visual representation. Corresponding to the development of inexpensive and portable video equipment, this became a time of great opportunity for indigenous peoples to make their own films (Wilson and Stewart 2008:3). The field of indigenous media has engaged with the meaning and significance of indigenous media, in terms of both process and product. Rather than focus on the relative authenticity and validity of ethnographic and indigenous representations, Ginsburg has argued more positively for developing a framework that will allow us to think of the different but related projects of ethnographic film and indigenous
media in relation to each other, to help expand and refine the broader project of representing, mediating, and understanding culture through a variety of media forms. To do so requires attending to both ethnographic and indigenous films as representations of culture and as objects that are themselves implicated in cultural processes. [Ginsburg 1995:2]

Ginsburg has advocated for an approach in which ethnographic film and indigenous media are viewed as complementary instead of in competition with each other. She has likened the simultaneous considerations of these multiple perspectives to a “parallax effect,” an analogy to the three-dimensional vision we gain from having two eyes (8). She notes that

What these works share with the current practices of ethnographic filmmakers… is that they are not about re-creating a preexistent and untroubled cultural identity ‘out there.’ Rather they are about the process of identity construction. These are not based on some retrieval of an idealized past but create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life. [Ginsburg 1995:265]

While articles and conferences on indigenous media studies became common in the early 1990s, it was not until 2008 that the first edited peer-reviewed volume was published on the field, titled *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics* (Wilson and Stewart 2008:2). Also, although most of the contributing scholars have been anthropologists, others in film studies, art, and communications have been involved as well. Ginsburg provides a concise summary of the potential power of indigenous media as offering

a possible means – social, cultural, and political – for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption. The capabilities of media to transcend boundaries of time, space, and even language are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social
ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions. [Ginsburg 1995:262]

One of the key concepts in indigenous media studies has been the focus on how indigenous peoples negotiate bridging the identities of past cultural heritage with those of contemporary society. Many contemporary indigenous peoples have felt stuck between worlds, neither fully accepted by their traditional communities nor “modern” society (Duran and Duran 1995:15). Singer has associated this feeling with the holding of contradictory belief systems, which “functioned as a continual source of conflict for Indians about their identity” (2001:7). In the U.S., governmental policies over hundreds of years have generally been enacted with the goal of destroying native culture (Calloway 2008). Although governmental policy has improved since the AIM movement, the centuries of systemic violence and cultural genocide have left many Native Americans with a complex relationship to their identities (Ginsburg 2002).

Moving away from the turf war over anthropological authenticity, Ginsburg and others began exploring ways in which identity was being constructed through the films themselves. Ginsburg stated:

For Aboriginal producers, the goal of their media work is not simply to maintain existing cultural identities, what some Aborigines have called the ‘cultural refrigeration’ approach. The production of new media forms is also a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies… Young Aboriginal people who are or will be entering into production are not growing up in a pristine world, untouched by the dominant culture, nor do they want to assimilate to the dominant culture. They are juggling the multiple sets of experiences that make them contemporary Aboriginal Australians [Ginsburg 2002: 283].
Indigenous films have been engaged with this “process of ‘negotiation’ with the settler nation, a kind of intercultural bargaining that has shaped the emergence of such work” (258). The unique political and cultural concerns have led to indigenous films that pose different questions than ethnographic films regarding what is important to learn within film. Ginsburg makes this point by providing a relevant vignette of Worth and Adair’s *Through Navajo Eyes*:

Adair explained that he wanted to teach some Navajo to make movies… When Adair finished, Sam thought for a while and then… asked a lengthy question, which was interpreted as, “Will making movies do sheep any harm?” Worth was happy to explain that as far as he knew, there was no chance that making movies would harm the sheep. Sam thought this over and then asked, “Will making movies do the sheep good?” Worth was forced to reply that as far as he knew making movies wouldn’t do the sheep any good. Sam thought this over, then, looking around at us he said, “Then why make movies?” [Worth and Adair 1972]

This field of indigenous media developed partially in response to the growing academic literature from across the humanities and social sciences regarding the ways in which indigenous peoples had been misrepresented, especially in Hollywood (Bird 1996). Generally, these critiques have revealed how big budget films present native peoples as one-dimensional caricatures based on colonial fantasies. However, these critiques have not stopped problematic big budget films from being released. Hollywood films from the last two decades have tended to be “sympathetic” toward indigenous peoples, favoring noble savage stereotypes over the barbaric and wild. Films such as *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and *Pocahontas* (1995) are popular examples of this representational tendency (Kilpatrick 1999:124).
For all of their “good” intentions, Hollywood filmmakers were still not producing balanced representations with complex native characters. This has been partly due to a lack of understanding regarding their subjects when “telling a story about” native peoples (179). However, the primary reason that these films remain problematic is that they have been “as much about the lives and fantasies of the white male filmmakers” as the indigenous peoples they are suggested to represent (Gerster 1995:48). The success of Avatar (2009), now on track to make more money than any other film in history, reveals that these fantasies continue to remain popular. As with many Hollywood films about native cultures, it stars a white male who “goes native,” gets the prettiest girl, and then goes on to save her culture (Vera and Gordon 2003).

Flaherty’s reconstruction of cultural practices set the stage for what has been termed ethnographic fictional film. Such filmmakers have not simply recreated aspects of culture, but have written scripts and plots inspired to varying degrees by native cultures, using indigenous actors and settings (Heider 2006:26). While these films have tended to be more popular among the general public than ethnographic films, they have often been exploitative, conveying racist undertones. One of the most famous ethnographic fictional films was Uys’ The Gods Must be Crazy (1980). These films, when made by filmmakers who are neither anthropologists nor indigenous themselves, tend to portray native peoples as either noble and frail, or savage and mindless.

Gerster argues that a primary reason that Hollywood recycles these misrepresentations of “a conquered people” is that these formulas continue to make money (1995:47). She points out that independent films, indigenous or not, have
provided more accurate representations. For example, the non-native Jonathan Wack’s 
*Powwow Highway* (1988) had no white hero and highlighted “contemporary reservation
problems, such as unemployment, poverty, and corporate and government attempts to
take tribal resources, all from an Indigenous perspective” (Gerster 1995:50). It even made
light of the way in which media distorts indigenous representations. However, non-native
films that do not conform to stereotypes are rare. One reason that *Powwow Highway*
was able to capture an indigenous perspective is that it was based on David Seals’ (2003)
novel by the same name, and that Seals had been highly involved with AIM for many
years (Gerster 1995:151). However, despite critical acclaim, the film made little money
and was only in theatres for a short time. This supports Gerster’s argument that due to
commercial success of misrepresentations, non-native filmmakers continue to use these
stereotypes in their indigenous representations.

Focusing on how media victimized indigenous cultures through misrepresentation
has been seen by many indigenous scholars as playing into the tendency of outsiders to
focus on native “plights,” disregarding native agency (1969:1). In the last twenty years,
the primary scholarly discourse has shifted from critiques of Western films to the ways in
which indigenous peoples have been actively creating films that express their own
identities and political perspectives (Wilson and Stewart 2008).

Emphasizing the diversity of style among these films from around the world,
indigenous media scholars also began discussing the extent to which indigenous films
could be considered as a cohesive genre. Lumping together films made by relatively
isolated groups, independent indigenous films, and big-budget films with indigenous
input, creates, as previously discussed, a “fuzzy” category (Nichols 2001:21). Wood has argued that due to the diversity of indigenous films, it has been “impractical to seek a single perspective for thinking about all (of them)” (2008:103).

However, Ginsburg links diverse indigenous films together through the conception of a general indigenous aesthetic within Appadurai’s mediascape (Ginsburg 1994; Kilpatrick 1999). Ginsburg’s following discussion of Aboriginal film in Australia addresses a framework for conceptualizing indigenous film as a cohesive genre:

I have found it helpful to think of Aboriginal media as part of a mediascape, a term created by Arjun Appadurai to account for the different kinds of global cultural flows created by new media technologies and the images created with them in the late 20th century. Appadurai argues for situated analyses that take account of the interdependence of media practices with the local, national, and transnational circumstances that surround them (Appadurai 1990:7). Using such a model for indigenous media helps to establish a more generative discursive space for this work, which breaks what one might call the fetishizing of the local, without losing a sense of the specific situatedness of any production. The complex mediascape of Aboriginal media, for example, must account for a range of circumstances, beginning with the perspectives of Aboriginal producers, for whom new media forms are seen as a powerful means of (collective) self-expression that can have a culturally revitalizing effect. [Ginsburg 1994]

Drawing on the concept of the mediascape, Ginsburg argues that indigenous films have been connected through an aesthetics based not on form or style, but rather through a shared “desire to envision and strengthen a ‘cultural future’… for themselves in their own communities and in the dominant society” (1994:365). Parallels may also be drawn between the style of many feature indigenous films and local oral storytelling traditions (Wood 2008:97). I use these concepts in Chapter 4 in order to frame the analyses of indigenous films.
As with the recent success of indigenous rights movements internationally, there has also been an explosion of international indigenous media in the last decade. Valerie Alia describes this “new media nation,” in which a highly connected indigenous mediascape has promoted “culturally specific revitalization initiatives, along with a broader pan-Indigenous agenda” (2010:xxi). It has been linked to the “explosion of Indigenous news media, information technology, film music, and other artistic and cultural developments” (7). However, this is not to say that individual groups have given up their own identities. Instead, Alia suggests the use of W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness” in understanding this juggling of identity (8). She invokes James Clifford’s argument that “the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressed intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, and locales” (1997:255).

Alia discusses indigenous peoples as being part of the “fourth world,” which speaks to their generally marginalized status (14). Also referencing Appadurai’s “scapes,” she explains how media generally move along the mediascape from the power core to the periphery, while people generally move along the ethnoscape from the periphery to the core (15). The new media nation, however, has had the opposite effect, with indigenous media often travelling from the indigenous periphery to the core of society. Alia ascribes a high importance to indigenous film festivals in the transmission of indigenous perspectives of identity into mainstream society (151).
Indigenous Film

*To govern ourselves means to govern our stories.*

- Aboriginal Film and Video Alliance

It was within the context of a charged political climate that indigenous film emerged. When handheld cameras became relatively inexpensive in the early 1980s, indigenous filmmakers were prepared with political messages and a basic understanding of filmmaking from collaboration with anthropologists. As discussed, these collaborations, beginning with Worth and Adair’s 1966 project, *Through Navajo Eyes*, tended to assume that analyzing films made by native peoples would provide insight into a larger cultural perspective.

Many early indigenous films grew out of previous ethnographic film projects. For example, later in their careers, Turner and Asch trained their previous “subjects” to create their own films (Asch et al. 1991; Turner 1995). However, indigenous peoples also began to create films without the involvement of anthropologists. Regional organizations, such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association and the Native American Public Telecommunications, were created with the goal of spreading and supporting local indigenous media productions. By the end of the 1980s, indigenous peoples from around the world were appropriating filmmaking for their own political and creative purposes (Wilson and Stewart 2008:4).

Over the last two decades, a vast library of indigenous films has been created. As with the genre of ethnographic film, indigenous film has been difficult to define. This is due to the fact that indigenous film has more to do with the filmmaker-subject...
relationship than the format or style of the film itself. As Nichols points out, all film genres are “always relational or comparative,” and therefore must exist as “fuzzy concept(s)” (2001:21). The issue of authorship within indigenous film is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

These films span nearly every cinematic genre and have been created for a multitude of reasons. Many groups, notably the Kayapo, have created political films meant to further their fight for resource rights by appealing to the general population (Turner 1995). Larger indigenous political groups such as the Zapatistas of Mexico, have also used film for their own political purposes (Halkin 2008:161). Filmmakers such as the Maori Dean Te Kupu Hapeta describe media as “our nonviolent way to wage war” (161). However, not all indigenous filmmakers have viewed their work as inherently political.

Indigenous filmmakers have also attempted to change past stereotypes of indigenous peoples by presenting alternative histories and complex native characters (Wood 2008). Others have wished only to tell a good story. However, it is notable that “indigenous filmmakers have made hundreds more documentaries than feature films, in part because producing a documentary is generally cheaper and easier, but also because what many filmmakers want most is to carefully record the unique cultural practices of their people” (93).

Indigenous feature films began emerging in the 1990s. The successful 34 minute narrative film, Harold of Orange (1984), was an important precursor to these features, with a screenplay written by the writer-activist Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe). This film was well received by many indigenous writers for the poignant yet humorous way it
addressed the contradictions and stereotypes that indigenous peoples face today, from urban tribal religion to anthropology museums (Silberman 1985). However, indigenous films did not reach a large general audience until the late 1990s. Films such as *Smoke Signals* (1998), *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), and *Whale Rider* (2002) demonstrated that projects created with indigenous involvement could be commercially successful as well as critically acclaimed (Wood 2008:7). While they have varied greatly in their level of indigenous participation, all of these films were “hits” and have generally been received well by indigenous scholars: showing an unprecedented complexity of history and identity in commercially successful films (8).

*Smoke Signals*, in particular, was celebrated for its commercial breakthrough and its indigenous cast and crew. Chris Eyre directed this story of a young Coeur d’Alene man who went on a journey to bring back his father’s ashes. Richard Warrior (Osage), Director of American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, recounts his experience of attending an early showing of this film:

Most of the people at that screening were American Indian teenagers. The film was much anticipated among those who have charted the progress of Native American film so I watched eagerly… The young people I saw the film with were enthralled, seeing reasonable facsimiles of themselves and their lives on the big screen – most of them, for the first time. I remember thinking that it was like they were watching *Star Wars*… but rather than special effects and a galaxy far, far away, what those young people in Tempe and thousands of filmgoers that summer saw was pretty much new to them: American Indian actors playing American Indian characters, saying words written by American Indian screenwriters, and following direction from an American Indian director. [Singer 2001:vii]

However, while *Smoke Signals* has been a relative commercial success, it is the exception rather than the rule. Since indigenous films often depend on attendance by non-
indigenous audiences to make a profit, filmmakers wishing to make a living off of their work have also had to think about the commercial appeal to outsiders. Singer notes that “the Indian audience alone is not enough to support most productions, even if every Indian saw the movie twice… It’s the cold mathematical reality of genocide” (2001:133).

One of the challenges in commercial Native American film has been in appealing to many audiences without the loss of cultural specificity (133). For example, some native reviewers have argued that Phil Hall’s The Doe Boy (2001), a Cherokee coming of age story, was not “Indian enough” (Singer 2001:133). However, too much specificity may alienate non-native viewers. As more films have begun obtaining funding from Native American tribes and organization, the reliance on non-native viewership has decreased. Recent examples include Chris Eyre’s company, Seven Arrows Signature, and the Pequot tribe, which have both funded indigenous features (134).

This chapter has set up the context for my research with the DIFAF. Indigenous film and the festivals that highlight them have been shaped by the history of native representation in anthropology, beginning during colonization and continuing throughout the history of ethnographic film. In Chapter 4, I go into greater detail on specific indigenous and ethnographic films, and their relation to each other.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORY

Field Site: The Denver Indigenous Arts and Film Festival

The Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival (DIFAF) is one of only 20 annual or semi-annual festivals of its kind in the world (Dowell 2006). The DIFAF has been running for six years and the seventh is being planned for September of 2010. During the first year, only a single film, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), was screened. Coors Brewing Company, the original sponsor of the DIFAF, has been joined by several other local companies and organizations in the years since, including sponsorship from the Southern Ute tribe, Recovery Act grants, and local media outlets.

Each year the festival has had a central theme, and within this theme, different nights have focused on particular geographic regions. The festival’s mix of documentaries, features, shorts, experimental, and student films have taken place at several venues around the city, serving to make it accessible to a variety of demographic groups. Specifically, the directors have attempted to attract the indigenous community of Denver.

The theme of the 2009 festival was “Telling our Stories.” It took place over six days in five locations, including two museums, a medical center, a college, as well as an elementary school. A total of 16 films were screened, including two by Tracey Deer (Mohawk), shown in a post-festival event (Appendix A). My fieldwork with the DIFAF
during 2009 included collaborating with the festival directors on festival preparation, as well as collecting interview, audience, and film data from the festival itself.

The two directors who run the festival, Jeanne Rubin and her husband Mervyn Tano, have been organizing the festival since its inception. They also run the International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management (IIIRM), a Denver based law and policy institute, which sponsors the festival. The IIIRM works on projects “designed to empower native peoples by examining the role the law can play in establishing and enhancing indigenous peoples' control and management over their lands and resources” (DIFAF 2008). Rubin and Tano developed the film festival as part of their mission statement, believing that since film is “the most expressive medium we have for communicating messages about who we were; who we are; and who we are striving to become… (that this) undergird(s) all the work we do” (DIFAF 2008).

This policy perspective is reflected in the selection process, which does not require that a filmmaker be indigenous, and is more focused on film content. However, Rubin and Tano have stated that they prefer to accept the work of indigenous filmmakers when possible. This contrasts with the ImagiNative festival in Toronto, in which only indigenous created films are included and the message is less important than filmmaker ethnicity.

After volunteering at the 2008 DIFAF, I accompanied Jeanne Rubin, the festival director, to the 2009 National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Film + Video Festival in New York City. In addition to the public film programs, I attended a conference of indigenous film festival directors from around the world, whose
presentations and discussions have provided perspective into how the DIFAF fits into the context of other festivals. I was able to discuss the films with Rubin: gaining insight into her perspective on indigenous film selection. Several films at this festival were ultimately chosen for the DIFAF.

**Previous Research**

There is a lack of research on these festivals within academia, as only a single peer-reviewed journal article has ever been published specifically on an indigenous film festival, “*Indigenous Media Gone Global: Strengthening Indigenous Identity On- and Offscreen at the First Nations\ First Features Film Showcase*” (Dowell 2006). Drawing on transcripts from the 2005 NMAI festival in New York City, Dowell discusses the organization of the festival, specific common themes among the films, and the way it served to unify the indigenous filmmaker community and promote collaborative projects.

Although several indigenous film festivals have been mentioned in books, no formal research as been conducted on them (with the exception of Dowell) (Kilpatrick 1999; Singer 2001; Ginsburg 2001; Wood 2008; Alia 2010). Notably, Alia (2010) does discuss the innovation represented in the ImagiNative festival program. Also, both Alia (2010) and Ginsburg (1995) discuss indigenous film festivals in terms of their key role in Appadurai’s “mediascape.\(^3\)” Singer (2001) provides the most in-depth research on the history of indigenous film festivals to date. The discussions of these festivals in the work

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\(^3\) For more on Alia, Ginsburg, and Appadurai see Chapter 2.
of Kilpatrick, Singer, Ginsburg, Wood, and Alia has been anchored in more general discourse on indigenous media.  

**My Research**

In this thesis, I explore how indigenous filmmakers navigate, as well as express, issues of identity and community in the films shown at the 2009 DIFAF. This question gets to the heart of Malinowski’s definition of what anthropologists “do,” which is “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (1922:25). Noting the difficulty of expressing this insider point of view, Wolcott urges ethnographers to put a greater emphasis on attending “to the richness of detail *internal* to the account” (2009:141). While ethnographic filmmakers have succeeded in expressing cultural features to a large audience (Heider 2006), Asch (1991) notes that they have largely failed in expressing how life is “experienced by members of that culture” (1991:103).

Asch suggests that indigenous perspectives “seem to be the only ones with *enough* knowledge of how their culture works to make a good representation” (1991:103). However, there has been relatively little focus on representations by indigenous peoples themselves (Ginsburg 1995:258). Indigenous scholars such as Grande (2004) and Cook-Lynn (2008) have suggested that this is due to the overwhelming control that non-indigenous peoples have had over representations. They also argue that outsiders have tended to project their own biases and fantasies onto these representations, even in collaborative relationships.

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4 For more on the field of indigenous media see Chapter 2.
Identity, which is defined by Shohat and Stam (2003) as the “internal-mental perspective,” is key to the ultimate anthropological goal of expressing the native perspective (Malinowski 1922; Asch et al 1991; Wolcott 1999). Since indigenous peoples began creating significant numbers of films in the late 1980s, anthropologists have debated the value and role of these films in relation to ethnographic films (Asch et al 1991; Ginsburg 1995; Elder 1995). Rather than engage in discourse on the relative anthropological value of ethnographic films and indigenous films, I will instead focus specifically on ways that each are able to engage issues of identity (Ginsburg 1995:264).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the perspective of indigenous filmmakers through their films in the 2009 DIFAF, in order to highlight their insights on indigenous identities. Furthermore, these filmmakers existing in “liminal bicultural spaces” (Ginsburg 1994) occupy “dual positions” as “insider-outsiders” (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000). Therefore, the expression of hybrid identities (Ginsburg 1994) in their films positions them to engage with critical indigenous identity discourse as outlined by Grande (2004) in Chapter 2. Specifically, this thesis addresses the following three research questions:

• How are issues of identity expressed differently by ethnographic and indigenous filmmakers?

• How do expressions of identity in the 2009 DIFAF engage in a critical indigenous identity discourse?

• How do these expressions relate to contemporary issues indigenous communities currently face?
The first question addresses the aforementioned lack of research on the expression of identity in indigenous film and positions these findings in relation to the ethnographic film project as discussed in Chapter 2 (Ginsburg 1995). The second question explores how these hybrid expressions of identity contribute to Grande’s (2004) ‘red pedagogy’. Finally, the third question engages the relevance of these films and their identity discourse with the contemporary challenges faced by indigenous communities today. I draw upon semi-structured interviews with the festival directors and filmmakers, film analyses, and audience surveys. These questions are contextualized by the background in Chapter 2 on ethnographic film, indigenous identity politics, and scholarly discussions of indigenous film.

**The Paradigm of Critical Indigenous Theory**

The overarching paradigm in this thesis has been critical indigenous theory (Denzin et al 2008:14). This perspective comes out of critical theory, a mode of inquiry that has roots in the Frankfurt school. Developed by Horkheimer, Adorno, and continued by contemporaries such as Habermas, critical theory heavily considers the history of the oppressed (16). Eric Wolf’s *Europe and a People Without History* is an excellent example of this perspective (1982). Although critical theory grew out of Marxist ideas concerning material production and ideology, the paradigm has largely moved away from the political predictions of other Marxists. However, it has generally retained the Marxist frame of demarginalizing the oppressed in order to more toward equality in terms of
power and wealth within society. However, for many indigenous communities, separation from state societies is the primary goal.\footnote{For more on the unique concerns of indigenous communities see Chapter 2.}

Denzin (2008) and Grande (2004) argue that the influence of postmodernism in critical theory has also been problematic. Reacting against the essentialization of earlier scholars, postmodernists have demonstrated a sometimes-obsessive need to intellectually deconstruct all perspectives. As a result, they have generally ignored “questions of subordinate cultures from the specific location of racialized populations themselves” (Darder et al. 2003:17). As Grande argues, while postmodern notions on the fluidity of identity may apply to “white” people, native peoples have been limited in their ability to transgress these borders\footnote{For more on Grande’s “red pedagogy” see Chapter 2.} (2004:107). As a result, although postmodern scholars often espouse interest in native peoples, their work is often not relevant to their lived experiences. The postmodern language itself has also been charged as being unnecessarily verbose and elitist, creating a new form of oppression (Denzin et al. 2008:9). Indeed, the greatest failure of critical theory has been the “inability to engage indigenous scholars” (Kincheloe and McLaren 2007:11). As a corollary, “indigenous scholars have been reluctant to engage critical theory” (Grande 2008:316).

Critical indigenous theory makes use of the critical theory framework while incorporating indigenous perspectives regarding goals and methods of research. Also known as “red pedagogy” (Grande 2004) or “decolonizing methodologies” (Smith 1999), the focus is on de-centering Western modes of thinking about research and history. In order to address elitist postmodern theory, these scholars suggest local rather than
overarching theoretical paradigms (Denzin et al. 2008:9, Smith 2000:229). Specific political, community, and cultural contexts are prioritized in critical indigenous theory.

This paradigm also takes into account fundamental differences in Western and native modes of understanding. It focuses on the questions of “Who writes for whom? Who is representing indigenous peoples, how, for what purposes, for which audiences?” (Smith 1999:37). Furthermore, the agency of individuals and communities is privileged, as opposed to issues of victimhood. As an “outsider” using this perspective, it is important for me to situate my own identity and social position in relation to the research in this thesis (19). As a white middle class male from the United States, I have subsequently received what McIntosh terms an “invisible knapsack” of privilege (1998). Therefore, as a privileged outsider, it has been especially important to ground this work in the perspectives of native filmmakers.

One way of reducing my bias was to conduct preliminary research. When I attended the 2009 NMAI Film + Video Festival, my focus was on asking filmmakers what aspects of indigenous film they thought were most important to understand. I consistently received responses relating to the expression of identity from the perspective of indigenous peoples. One filmmaker remarked that “people have been telling us who we are for hundreds of years. It’s time that people listened us tell talk about who we are” (personal correspondence, anonymous). By attending several panels, engaging in discussions with filmmakers, and viewing dozens of films, I took extensive notes on the important themes that emerged in the festival. The following themes were most commonly expressed:
This preliminary fieldwork on indigenous perspectives laid the foundation for my research on the production and expression of identity within film. Instead of relying only on scholarly discussions regarding “what matters,” critical indigenous theory emphasizes the importance of engaging indigenous perspectives in research. This increased my confidence in the extensive use of Grande’s ‘red pedagogy,’ which addresses these themes directly. Throughout this research, I rely on this paradigm, grounding my findings in indigenous perspectives and the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

**Justification**

Shohat and Stam’s discussion of *polycentric multiculturalism* focuses on the need to promote marginalized discourses in order to move toward a more equitable world (1995: 359). They describe this perspective as “a long overdue gesture toward historical lucidity, a matter not of charity, but of justice. An answer to the stale, flat, and unprofitable complacencies of monoculturalism; it is part of an indispensable re-envisioning of the global politics of culture” (359). As argued by Ginsburg, indigenous films are aligned with the goals of polycentric multiculturalism by dealing with the issues of marginalized peoples (1995:72). Furthermore, as some of the most marginalized
peoples in the world, indigenous critical discourse should be among the most emphasized. This quote from Dustinn Craig (White Mountain Apache-Navajo), director of *4 Wheel War Pony* (2008), sums up Shohat and Stam’s argument from a native perspective:

> We exist within that framework that has been created over the last century. Native peoples have been omitted from the circle of story telling, in literary form or photography or formal studies like anthropology and sociology. So for native people to step forward and stake a claim in these processes, it is not just a priority, but a necessity if we are to reclaim our stories to validate our ways of viewing the world. I think that by doing that we are sort of actively telling the world that we exist, we are relevant, and we have continued right along side you, even though we have dealt with great losses and the aftermath of the effects of conquest. [Dustinn Craig]

Like Craig, Ginsburg argues that indigenous film and other expressions of identity are vital for the cultural future of indigenous peoples (1995). Noting the lack of work on indigenous film, Ginsburg argues:

> The “central problem” that has accompanied the development of Aboriginal media – that is, the need to develop a body of knowledge and critical perspectives to do with aesthetics and politics, whether written by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people, on representation of Aboriginal people and concerns in art, film, television, or other media. [1995:259]

This thesis responds to Ginsburg’s call for critical perspectives on indigenous film. It also recognizes Grande’s call for an engagement with critical indigenous identity politics, as discussed in Chapter 2, as well as helps to fill a large research gap regarding the study of indigenous film festivals.

Furthermore, critical indigenous theorists, including Denzin (2008) and Grande (2008) have argued for the need to move away from research that reinforces the dominant Western narrative that indigenous peoples desperately need help (Grande 2004). Bhabha
(1994) and McClintock (1995) have also noted that the binary discourse framing indigenous peoples through colonizer-colonized and victim-agent serve to reinforce current power relationships. In fact, most significant advances in indigenous rights have been rooted primarily in native community activism, which avoids these types of discourse, focusing instead on specific and complex situations (Cobb and Fowler 2007:292). This is difficult, as there is a fine line between reasserting victimhood and the decision of indigenous peoples to “make colonizers confront and be accountable for the traumas of colonization” (Denzin et al. 2008:12). While it will be important to acknowledge the problematic nature of these colonial misrepresentations throughout this thesis, I will focus primarily on the creation of representations by and with indigenous peoples.

Over the last few decades, academics have written numerous critiques on popular films that represent indigenous peoples as one-dimensional (Clifton 1990; Bird 1996; Meyer and Royer 2001; Briggs et al 2007). Whether these representations take the form of noble or wild savages, they are stereotypes nonetheless. However, the criticism of these “gazes” has been studied extensively (Wilson and Stewart 2008). Conversely, my field site provides a rare opportunity to consider perspectives on a multiplicity of indigenous films and their filmmakers (Ginsburg 1995:263).
Methodology

Participant Observation

Malinowski is well known for formalizing the participant-observation model of ethnographic research (Malinowski 1922:173). Spending many months immersed within a culture, he melded these experiences living among his subjects with anthropological theory and analysis. Similarly, my research was not confined to the week of the festival, rather it began when I received University of Denver IRB approval in the spring of 2009 and it has continued beyond the conclusion of the film festival. Throughout the year, I was involved with all aspects of the festival planning, including film screenings, funding, venue decisions, and promotions. This access was possible due to my key informants Jeanne Rubin and her husband Mervyn Tano. These film festival directors have singlehandedly run the festival for the six years of its existence and provided me with a detailed history. They also served as gatekeepers in the research; informing me of appropriate behavior and decorum (Hefferan 2005:34).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviewing made up the largest segment of my data. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the festival’s organizers as well as filmmakers. Semi-structured interviewing methods focus on questions framed around themes, but remain flexible to new topics that are brought up during the session (Lindlof and Taylor 2002). My interview choices were not randomly sampled, as they were limited to the two festival directors, and the filmmakers they selected to attend the DIFAF (Ervin 2005:169). All interviews were relational and reflective (Vilhelmsdottir 2005:136).
I interviewed the festival organizers, who are also my key informants, both before and after the festival. While we had several informal meetings, I conducted three official interviews. The first took place in the summer before the festival, the second approximately one week after the festival; and the third in the late spring of 2010. In each of these interviews, I focused on film selection, issues of identity in the festival, and the history of the DIFAF and IIIRM (Appendix B).

I also interviewed filmmakers to gain insight into the ways in which they see themselves within the context of the festival. My key informants helped me to snowball sample these individuals, as they have established relationships with them and know their schedules. I picked up each filmmaker from the airport, and engaged in general discussion before asking them to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews with filmmakers revolved around the themes of indigenous identity in film, connection to their community, and their perspective on indigenous festivals (Appendix C). During the festival, I formally interviewed Sterlin Harjo, Dustinn Craig, Jeffry Silverman, and Tracey Deer. I also drew upon the work of Dowell (2006) regarding the 2005 NMAI festival, as well as the extensive interviews of indigenous filmmakers available on the NMAI website.

**Audience Surveys**

Surveys were the primary way in which I gained knowledge of the attitude and opinions of the audience. The surveys were attitudinal as well as demographic. They included four demographic questions, three Likert scales, and three open ended questions (Appendix D). The universe of my sample included everyone who attended an event at
the festival. As I have been in charge of handing out and collecting the surveys at two festivals, I have some insight as to the bias of my actual sample. I would estimate that in this past festival, around two-thirds of all the surveys were returned. This is far below the ninety percent threshold that true sampling requires (Chang 2005). It is also important to note that the surveys we did receive were not random. It is likely that individuals who felt strongly about the festival were more likely to take the time to fill them out and hand them in. Therefore, this non-probabilistic sample should be understood as providing only restricted generalizations and carrying less weight than a truly random sample (77).

Statistics

On the audience survey, I asked individuals to rank their interest in indigenous film, indigenous rights, and independent film festivals on a scale from 1 – 5. The purpose of this was to use quantitative methods to quantify the motivations for festival attendance. In order to statistically test the ordinal data from these Likert scales, I first converted them to interval data. While there has been some controversy over ordinal-interval data conversion, recent debates has favored the reliability of this practice (Conyers, personal communication). This allows for the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA), which measures the relative variation between data sets, accounting for sample size and standard deviation. All of my tests use critical values based on an alpha of .05 in a two-tailed test. The results of these tests are summarized in Chapter 4.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the complex and longstanding ethical issues that have confronted anthropologists as discussed in Chapter 2, it is vitally important to consider these issues
when conducting research. My research has addressed the key ethical issues of beneficence, confidentiality, and privacy. By volunteering at the 2008 festival, and conducting preliminary groundwork during the 2009 NMAI festival, I gained a sense of how much access was appropriate in order to balance research goals while remaining as non-invasive to the festival as possible.

Beneficence is a cornerstone principle of ethics. Whiteford and Trotter discuss beneficence as both minimizing harm as well as maximizing justice (2008:73). Through volunteering at the 2008 festival as well as discussions with Rubin, I have made every attempt to avoid causing any harm in this festival. However, as I dealt with non-vulnerable populations, my focus in the principle of beneficence has been maximizing justice. On the macro scale, as Shohat and Stam have argued, promoting marginalized discourses is key to long-term issues of representation (1995: 359). However, it has also important to help out on the micro level within this festival.

When I volunteered for the 2008 film festival, I was in charge of handing out surveys. I was also in charge of taking a count of the audience and making sure that we were on schedule to begin screenings. After the festival ended, Jeanne Rubin informed me that this had in fact been helpful, as it allowed her to have more conversations and networking opportunities during events. In 2009, my contribution to the festival expanded to making airport runs for filmmakers, posting advertisements, and developing a spreadsheet of all local potential fundraising sources. These activities helped me to meet ethical standards of beneficence without biasing my data or methods.
Confidentiality is another key principal in conducting ethical research (Whiteford and Trotter 2008:64). Due to the fact that there are very few indigenous film festivals and only one in Denver, it will be impossible to conceal the identities of the festival directors. Furthermore, the filmmakers are public personalities who are directly traceable to the festival and their films (Ervin 2005:37). Therefore, in my informed consent forms, it has been important to clearly explain the impossibility of confidentiality. However, the audience data has been kept confidential and will remain anonymous. While the survey data has been digitalized into a password locked file, the survey forms and any connected names will be destroyed upon the completion of this thesis.

Privacy is another key ethical principal. Therefore, all interviews were conducted away from others. When total privacy was not possible, I carefully checked to see if anyone related to the festival was in the room. This is important for a couple of reasons. One, it might be difficult to be honest about certain topics when one knows that others can hear them. More importantly, if an interested party overheard the interview, they could potentially be offended or upset (Ervin 2005:37).

It was crucial in my research that everyone understood exactly what he or she was consenting to when participating. For this reason, I had the festival directors and filmmakers fill out informed consent forms (Appendices E and F). Whiteford and Trotter note that these forms are extremely important for ethical research because they provide “a framework for addressing all other ethical issues… through effective communication” (2008:65). These forms clearly explain the key ethical principals of beneficence, confidentiality, and privacy.
Film Theory

Outside of anthropology, there is an extensive literature that has developed regarding the understanding and analysis of films. The work on documentary film will be particularly useful in creating an analytical framework, as it deals directly with issues of truth, representation, and rhetoric in films. Bill Nichols, a leader in this field, argues that “every film is a documentary” in that it provides evidence on the filmmaker and his or her culture (2001:1) He outlines several perspectives that help to understand how films “work.” His examination of the positionality of the filmmaker and the rhetorical modes within film fit into Ginsburg’s emphasis on “cultural mediations more than formal qualities” in native films (Ginsburg 1995:259). Instead of focusing on formal technical details, this framework will elucidate the meanings conveyed through film.

Nichols divides all films into two categories of documentary: wish-fulfillment and social representation (2001:1). Wish fulfillment documentaries, otherwise known as fiction, “make the stuff of imagination concrete” (Nichols 2001:1). Documentaries of social representation, otherwise known as nonfiction, “give tangible representation to aspects of the world we already inhabit and share” (1). While the former rely on our suspension of disbelief, the latter try to instill belief (2). Films labeled as documentaries fall into this category. These categories are, however, not mutually exclusive, with much gray area between them. One way that they ostensibly can be divided is through the use of actors (5). Fiction generally relies on professional theatrical performances, while non-fiction relies on non-professionals. However, it might be argued that non-professionals as well as professionals "perform," i.e., that they also alter their behavior for the camera.
This example shows how the distinction between these two film categories can become blurred.

There are three primary groups involved in any non-fiction: filmmakers, subjects, and audiences (Nichols 2001:13). The relationship between these three groups greatly defines the way that the film creates a specific representation. “I speak about them to you” is the most common relationship in ethnographic film. In this classic scenario, the I is an outsider who takes on a voice-of-God in the film. The “speak about” refers to the fact that the film is representing others. “Them” implies a “separation between speaker and subject” in which the narrator does not belong to the group being studied (15). The “you” refers to a separation between the audience and the other two groups. The audience in this case is a passive general audience. This can vary as the filmmaker may or may not choose to acknowledge the viewers (16). This model of filmmaker-subject-audience is particularly useful in discussing differences between indigenous and ethnographic film in Chapter 4.

While there are many other relationships between these groups, “I-we speak about us to you” will be particularly relevant for many indigenous films (Nichols 2001:18). In this formulation, the filmmaker identifies with the subjects in the film. Also known as “auto-ethnography,” the filmmaker is communicating something about himself and his culture to “outsiders,” often for political reasons. The Kayapo of the Amazon have been particularly active in advocating for their rights through film (Turner 1995). In many cases, indigenous filmmakers are also directing the film towards “us,” or the filmmakers’ home community.
Nichols also articulates how all films, fiction or non-fiction, make some type of argument for the viewer to accept their reality or ideas (2001:5). Documentary films, like their ethnographic counterparts, often argue that they authentically address “the world” and not an imagined world (2). Documentary films make arguments through differing rhetorical strategies. Nichols presents six modes, or general styles of documentary film. They show the way that the filmmaker is making an argument and building trust regarding authentic representation (100). The order of their presentation relates to their approximate chronological introduction into common use in the world of film. Although the styles are often distinct, filmmakers may use more than one of these modes in a film. These rhetorical modes hold a key role in the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 4.

The first three modes respectively relate to the filmmaker’s position as an artist, omnipotent observer, or participant. The poetic mode relies primarily on building a mood or tone, rather than explaining or describing a situation (Nichols 2001:105). The expository mode is the most common in documentary and relies on the classic “I speak about them to you” filmmaker-subject-audience relationship. It “emphasizes the impression of objectivity and well-supported argument” (105). Using the observational mode, the filmmaker attempts to present an event as though the audience is actually there. With minimal cuts and a lack of narration and sound effects, this mode “de-emphasizes persuasion to give us a sense of what it is like to be in a given situation” (116).

The final three rhetorical modes respectively situate the filmmaker with the filmed subjects, the political context, and the film’s audience. The participatory mode requires filmmakers to gain experience living with the subjects of the film. Most
ethnographic films rely at least partially on this mode. Unlike the observational mode, this style locates the filmmaker within the film as a social actor. Interviews are also often incorporated into these films (Nichols 2001:121).

The reflexive mode emphasizes the problems and issues with representation itself. Films do this in different ways. Some address this directly, while others use uncommon techniques to point out the illusion of realism that films usually create through editing. This mode does not seek to add new knowledge to existing categories, but rather to “readjust the assumptions and expectations of its audience” (Nichols 2001:128). Reflexive films generally attempt to either draw attention to the form of documentary films themselves, or to the world around us.

The performative mode questions the epistemology itself. By engaging what knowledge is and how it is known, performative films show how “the world is more than the sum of the visible evidence we derive from it” (Nichols 2001:134). These films often showcase the chaos and confusion of events that other films attempt to order into a coherent narrative (137). Their ultimate goal is not to inform, but rather to alter the audience’s perspective on an issue, situation, or event.

For this thesis, it is particularly important to understand how films address social and political issues. One major point of contention in the field relates to the representation of people as either victims or agents (Nichols 2001:139). An example can be seen in films made about factory working conditions in the early 20th century. Activists critiqued many of the journalistic documentaries made during this era, because they displayed worker “plights” that the government should address. Independent and
activist filmmakers, however, have often taken a different approach, showing workers as standing up for their rights and in some cases even striking. This collaborative process allowed the workers to express voice and agency within the film. Some have even argued that portraying the workers as victims naturalizes their problems as inevitable (141).

Most literature on representing identity within documentary film relates to the creation of, or opposition to national identity. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, filmmakers began creating documentaries that addressed “history from below” (Nichols 2001:152). This new focus on the marginalized led to an era of films addressing the concerns of many oppressed groups, including indigenous peoples. Collaborative filmmaking was also becoming more common during this time, and the “objects” of the film were now acting as co-constructers, reclaiming lost histories and pointing out injustice from their point of view. Relying on reflexive and performative modes, filmmakers such as Trinh Minh-ha have sought to help viewers understand, without explaining and defining. Rather than creating new categories, many recent films explore the negotiation across and between social identities (161). Many indigenous films focus on “an examination of the realities of contemporary Aboriginal experience” which involve the negotiation and production of hybrid identities (Ginsburg 2005:268).

Films addressing issues can generally be divided into two categories: social issue and personal portrait documentaries (Nichols 2001:163). Although the personal portrait documentary, with a focus on subjective and personal understandings has become more common, the social issue documentary, focusing on objectivity and filmmaker distance, has remained the primary convention (164). The history of ethnographic film has been
largely shaped by a dialectic between these styles of filmmaking. However, most have prioritized the distanced social issue perspective (Heider 2006). Indigenous film however, has generally had the converse orientation, emphasizing individual perspectives on identity and community (Ginsburg 1995). Nichols’ conceptions of the filmmaker-subject-audience relationship, rhetorical modes, victimhood vs. agency, and the construction of identity within films will be crucial in understanding what indigenous films “do” in relation to what ethnographic films “do.”

Reviews are the most common ways of discussing film. They summarize the plot while providing general commentary. Usually, they are written so that readers can decide whether they would like to see the film in the first place (Monaco 1994:389). Though they contain a level of evaluation on how well the film seemed to “work,” they tend to express this as an unsupported opinion (Bordwell and Thomson 2010:443). With analysis, the writer supports arguments regarding the film while drawing upon specific references. Unlike reviews, there is less of a need to summarize the plot in analysis. Rather, the goal is to understand how the film uses cinematic techniques and rhetorical modes to persuade or move an audience. As in the discussion of any creative expression, there is a tension between the opposing elements of form and function.

With this in mind, the film theorist Sergei Eisenstein suggests three general levels of analysis (Monaco 1994:391). On the form end of the spectrum is the close-up view, which “breaks down film into parts… (and) resolves the film into its elements” (391). On the other extreme is the long-shot perspective, which situates film within social and historical context. In the medium-shot, one is focused on the human scale of the film.
This is the level in which most people generally consider films. Within film studies, there has been a trend to move from a strong focus on form to a larger consideration of function (191).

In the context of my project, I will focus my discussion of film towards the function end of the spectrum, as suggested by Ginsburg (1995). While I will note techniques that stand out, their use will be framed within the context of understanding the human and historical aspects of the films. Most important will be the understanding of how the filmmaker expresses his or her identity and community within the film. While the filmmaker’s reading of their film is only one of many, in the context of understanding the expression of identity, it is a particularly important perspective (Shohat and Stam 2003). Since I will have extensive interview data with some of the filmmakers in the festival, I will be able to use this data as support in my analyses. The larger context of indigenous film in relation to ethnographic film, as discussed in Chapter 2, will also be crucial in understanding the films within the festival. These categories and analytical techniques from the literature on film will serve as essential tools in this thesis for creating a balanced and critical analytical framework.

Finally, it is imperative to keep in mind that these techniques rely, at least to some extent, on Western modes of understanding film. Wood and others argue that “Many – though not all – Indigenous films are … better understood as instances of specific older visual and oral Indigenous arts than as expressions of aesthetic traditions associated with western film” (2008:104). As these concerns are critically important, I address the
limitations and biases of using Western film theory throughout Chapter 4, and integrate indigenous perspectives on the relationship of storytelling with film.

In the next chapter, I draw upon my data from participant-observation, interviews, film analyses, and audience surveys in order to engage my research questions regarding ethnographic and indigenous film. In my discussion of the films in the festival, I will seek to strike a balance between analyses of the films themselves, the perspectives of filmmakers, and the background discussed in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER FOUR: INDIGENOUS FILM AND IDENTITY

In this chapter, I draw on the data I gathered from my fieldwork at the DIFAF to analyze indigenous and ethnographic films with regard to their ability to address hybridized contemporary indigenous identities and community issues. In order to discuss indigenous filmmakers and their films, it is important to set up a clear analytical framework. This framework is anchored in Faye Ginsburg’s call for the development of a discourse on indigenous film based more on cultural mediations than formal qualities (1995:259). As discussed in Chapter 2, she uses Appadurai’s conception of the mediascape to analyze the importance of indigenous media in the process of “reproducing and transforming… identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions” (262).

The ability of indigenous film to explore past, present, and future identities positions it within Sandy Grande’s call for the development of critical identity discourse “historically grounded in indigenous struggles for self-determination, politically centered in issues of sovereignty, and spiritually guided” (2004:95). James Clifford notes that “the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressed intercultural frontiers of nations peoples and locales” (1997:255). Furthermore, indigenous filmmakers are situated in the “dual position” of “insider-outsiders” along these liminal contact zones. Therefore, they can address a variety of hybrid identities (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164).
As indigenous communities face increasing acculturative pressures from national cultures, issues of identity along these intercultural frontiers address many of the most challenging issues these communities face. Indigenous films are not only able to discuss these issues, but also enable indigenous peoples to “envision what the late Eric Michaels called a ‘cultural future’ (1987), some ‘third path’ along which possibilities can be imagined other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism” (Ginsburg 1995:72). Accordingly, Shohat and Stam have called for the promotion of these marginalized discourses as no less than a matter of justice.7

Analytical Framework

Identity, the expression of the internal-mental perspective, is a particularly subjective and broad concept (Shohat and Stam 2003). Therefore, I have identified three specific perspectives on identity in which to frame these analyses, focusing on the issues that elucidate “cultural mediations more than formal qualities” (Ginsburg 1995:259). This also follows a general trend in film studies to move from issues of form to those of function8 (Monaco 1994:391).

The first issue I have identified is the presentation of identity “as it is,” or what could also be considered a “non-reactive” frame. This issue of authenticity engages authorship as well as film genre and style. Ethnographic filmmakers Jay Ruby and Tim Asch have argued that while ethnographic filmmakers have certain insights, they have

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7 For more on Shohat and Stam see Chapter 3.
8 For more on identity and Ginsburg see Chapter 2. For more on Eisenstein see Chapter 3.
not been able to accurately express these issues due to their position as outsiders\(^9\) (1995:78; 1991:103). Others have even argued that identity can only be expressed by indigenous peoples (Asch et al. 1991; Grande 2004; Deer; Craig).

The second issue is the expression of identity in relation, reaction, or resistance to the process and history of colonization. Ginsburg notes that indigenous films have been engaged with “a process of ‘negotiation’ with the settler nation, a kind of intercultural bargaining that has shaped the emergence of such work” (258). Concurrently, Ward Churchill argues for an indiginist perspective that advocates for indigenous rights and sovereignty, that anyone, regardless of ethnicity or background should champion (1993). However, Homi Bhabha (1994) and Anne McClintock (1995) have warned that discussing indigenous peoples within binary frames such as colonizer-colonized, victim-agent, and dominance-resistance perpetuates these very power structures. Bhabha calls for hybrid conceptions of power in order to destabilize cultural imperialism (1994). I will discuss these ideas through a comparative analysis of Jerry Leach’s ethnographic film *Trobriand Cricket* and Dustinn Craig’s (White Mountain Apache) *4 Wheel War Pony*. Craig is able to address identity in relation to colonization while avoiding the colonizer-colonized binary; instead, he creates what Ginsburg calls a third cultural path\(^10\) (Ginsburg 1995:72).

The third issue is identity in relation to the homogenizing pressures of both national cultures as well as pan-indigenous identities. Grande (2004) and Churchill (1993) have argued that indigeneity has been racialized due to representations that

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\(^9\) For more on indigenous identity see Chapter 2.  
\(^10\) For more on Churchill, Bhabha, and McClintock see Chapter 2.
validate conquest. They note that policies regarding blood quantum requirements by the United States and Canadian governments have further served to racialize identity. Abu-Lughod maintains that within anthropology, the propensity to discuss cultural wholes serves to further racialize these groups. She proposes an “anthropology of the particular” that “writes against culture” (2006). Spivak, however, argues that a certain amount of “strategic essentialism” can be self-consciously used by indigenous peoples in order to consolidate political solidarity and power. The categories of “indigenous film” and “indigenous film festivals” will be discussed within this frame.\textsuperscript{11}

The balance between writing against culture and a strategic essentialism is a key component to Grande’s ‘red pedagogy,’ which “operates at the crossroads of unity and difference that defines this space in terms of political mobilization and cultural authenticity, expressing both the interdependence and distinctiveness as tribal peoples” (118). Tracey Deer’s \textit{Club Native} (2008), a documentary on issues of blood quantum and membership in a Mohawk tribe will provide an excellent anchor for this issue.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Science, Postmodernism, and the Catch-22 of Identity Representation}

In this section, I situate indigenous film in relation to perspectives taken by ethnographic filmmakers, drawing on Faye Ginsburg’s work with indigenous media. While Ginsburg has discussed how both indigenous and ethnographic films may be understood within the same analytical frame, I contrast these genres in order to highlight the extent to which each is able to address identity. I discuss the bias of traditional

\textsuperscript{11} For more on Grande, Churchill, Abu-Lughod, Spivak, and the racialization of identity see Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{12} For more on Grande’s ‘red pedagogy’ and the issue of blood quantum see Chapter 2.
ethnographic film toward focusing on clearly defined cultural groups and how this has changed since the crisis of representation. In order to engage identity, I argue that it is necessary for a filmmaker to have personal experiences and connections with their filmed community and topic. While ethnographic filmmakers have been able to engage identity in their own communities, this only reaffirms the need for a personal connection. Accordingly, indigenous filmmakers are best able to engage issues of identity in native communities. Therefore, I argue that in order for anthropologists to address native identities, they must critically engage indigenous films.

In his seminal work, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski states that the goal of ethnography is “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (1922:25). Identity, the “internal-mental perspective” is therefore a primary concern to the goals of the discipline (Shohat and Stam 2003). However, Asch comments “I cannot avoid the conclusion that we have, by and large, fallen short of the goal of making visual records that convey aspects of culture at once from the insider's point of view and with the privileged understanding of cross-cultural knowledge…” He ascribes this failure to the position of ethnographers as outsiders who can “never really know enough to be able to represent aspects of another culture the way they are experienced by members of that culture” (Asch et al. 1991:103).

While the different ethnographic traditions have become increasingly reflexive due to the influence of postmodernism, the creation of categories comparing cultural differences as defined by outside researcher remains “at the heart of all anthropology” (Wolcott 2008:139). As will be discussed in this chapter, even collaborative and reflexive
ethnographic films have tended to focus their research around issues of power and representation as defined by anthropological discourse.\textsuperscript{13}

Many of the debates around the crisis of representation in anthropology have had to do with the type of research ethnographers believe should be conducted. For example, Marvin Harris, in *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times*, stresses the importance of using scientific methods in order to “get it right” (1999:60). Much of his research relates to differences between perceived individual motivation for behavior and actual causes for behavior. An excellent example of this model can be seen in his work “*The Myth of the Sacred Cow*” (1965). In order to do such work, anthropologists such as Harris have relied on the emic-etic research model, in which an anthropologist first studies what is known about a culture, then lives within the society to gain insight into the insider perspective, and finally uses anthropological theory to explain how culture “really” works from an outside perspective (1999:62). In this model of fieldwork and analysis, maintaining distance from one’s subject has been vital for anthropologists in reducing their research bias (60).

Postmodernists have accused traditional ethnographers, and the larger project of science itself, of being colonial in nature (Lyotard 1984; Thornton 1988). In an ironic Catch-22, the more ethnographers engage intimately with their subjects in order to decolonize methodologies, the more they risk projecting their own (possibly colonial) fantasies onto their work (Clifford 1986). While reflexive and collaborative ethnographers have attempted to find a middle ground between objectivity and

\textsuperscript{13} As I discussed in Chapter 2, Turner and Asch offer notable exceptions.
subjectivity, their position as outsiders has produced mixed results (Asch et al. 1991; Ruby 1995).

To avoid the problem of subjectivity, most ethnographic filmmakers have tended toward addressing topics that lend themselves to scientific methods (Heider 2006). Analyses of the structure and function of cultural practices have worked particularly well within the traditional emic-etic model (Loizos 1993). As outsiders, ethnographers are positioned to consider functions of cultural practices within a larger context than typically understood by individual actors. However, this has biased ethnographic descriptions toward focusing on cultural features that can be studied through this distanced methodology (Asch et al. 1991). Asch describes this shortcoming specifically in relation to ethnographic film:

Anthropologists have a special advantage, being outsiders to a culture. The distance from their subjects as well as the comparative framework of the discipline afford anthropologists a privileged understanding that insiders to a culture rarely seem to have. Moreover, the discipline in methodically studying culture yields insights that are different from the more intuitive insights that insiders have. At the same time a goal of anthropology has been to understand and represent, as much as possible, the insider's point of view. Yet in reflecting upon the accomplishments of the field of ethnographic filmmaking, I cannot avoid the conclusion that we have, by and large, fallen short of the goal of making visual records that convey aspects of culture at once from the insider's point of view and with the privileged understanding of cross-cultural knowledge... The reasons for our lack of success, I think, have to do mainly with the facts that our own biases and preconceptions ultimately cloud our ability to see and say anything about another culture from an insider's point of view, and our relative outsider status means that we can never really know enough to be able to represent aspects of another culture the way they are experienced by members of that culture. [Asch et al. 1991:103]

As issues of identity are among the most subjective aspects of culture, they do not lend themselves to anthropological methods (Ginsburg 1994; Shohat and Stam 2003).
However, they constitute a primary role in Malinowski’s description of the anthropological mission as grasping the “native’s point of view, his relation to life, (and) his vision of the world” (1922:290). In the novel, *Catch-22*, the bombardier John Yossarian is confronted with a paradox in which in order to get what he wants he needs not be in the situation he is in (Heller 1961). Similarly, Asch (above) argues that anthropologists wanting to understand identity, the “internal-mental perspective,” are unable to access this perspective *due to* their relative position as community outsiders.

Furthermore, while it is difficult for ethnographers to address issues of identity, it is even more challenging to address hybridized indigenous identities (Ginsburg 1994:376). Due to the complexity and subjectivity of identity at “intercultural frontiers,” emic-etic notions of insider and outsider become obfuscated (Clifford 1997:255). However, indigenous filmmakers occupying these liminal spaces of identity do not face this Catch-22. In the next section, I explore how indigenous filmmakers with hybrid identities do critically address identity in these liminal cultural spaces (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164).

**Authorship and Authenticity in Indigenous Film**

In this section, I focus on the first issue I identified in my analytical framework: the ability of indigenous filmmakers to present indigenous identity “as it is.” I draw upon Nichols’ filmmaker-subject-audience framework and scholarly perspectives on authenticity of identity expression. I also incorporate the views of indigenous scholars and filmmakers. Like the term “indigenous,” the categories of “indigenous filmmaker”

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14 For more on Nichols’ filmmaker-subject-audience model see Chapter 3.
and “indigenous film” are ambiguous, serving various functions and agendas (Niezen 2003:19). The way that these terms are used is contingent on the relationship of authenticity and truth. As established, the ability to authentically represent identity is largely a function of the personal experiences of the filmmaker.

I frame this discussion through the tension between Abu-Lughod’s “anthropology of the particular” and Spivak’s “strategic essentialism.” The categories of indigenous film(maker) exist in this tension between the benefits and challenges of labeling a large and diverse group. For example, Grande notes that the label of indigenous is often used to validate the authenticity of cultural stories, while at the same time it is used to delegitimize critical works (2004:103). However, she also notes the practical advantages of solidarity in framing the hybrid identities of indigenous peoples through a cohesive critical discourse (95). Throughout this chapter, I address how this tension is seen from the perspective of indigenous filmmakers in the DIAFF. I also explore the relationship between films that have these labels and the actual indigenous control of the content.15

The term “indigenous filmmaker” hinges on the ethnicity and identity of the filmmaker. These identities are often complex, as filmmakers vary in terms of native lineage and connections to their communities. While a “full-blooded” filmmaker from a native community could unquestionably be considered an indigenous filmmaker, many do not fit perfectly within these parameters. Like blood quantum requirements for Native American tribal membership, it becomes difficult to navigate this either-or category for individuals who have a mixed history of ethnicity and connection to communities. However, filmmakers who exist at “intercultural frontiers” with the “dual position” of

15 For more on Abu-Lughod, Spivak, and the essentialization of indigenous identity see Chapter 2.
“insider-outsiders” are best able to explore issues of identity within film\(^{16}\) (Clifford 1997:255; Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164).

The term “indigenous film” is even more ambiguous. As discussed in Chapter 3, it can refer to a number of relationships within the filmmaker-subject-audience model (Nichols 2001:13). While the great majority of ethnographic films use I-them-us, indigenous films are most commonly in the form of I-us-us. In this formulation, the filmmaker identifies at least to some extent with the subjects in the film. However, as will be discussed, indigenous film may also take other forms, including I-us-them and we-them-us.\(^{17}\)

**Indigenous Authorship**

As discussed in Chapter 3, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both the filmmakers attending the 2009 DIFAF and the festival directors.\(^{18}\) Throughout the following chapters, I will refer to interview data I collected at the 2009 DIFAF. For clarity, any non-cited quotations from the festival directors (Jeanne Rubin and Mervyn Tano) or filmmakers (Sterlin Harjo, Dustinn Craig, Jeffry Silverman, and Tracey Deer) should be assumed to be interview data. Quotes from question and answer sessions during the festival will be noted as Q&A.

Many indigenous filmmakers and advocates proclaim the moral imperative for including indigenous peoples in the representations made about them. These voices echo

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\(^{16}\) For more on indigenous identity, including issues of blood quantum and hybrid identities see Chapter 2.

\(^{17}\) For more on ethnographic and indigenous film history see Chapter 2. For more on Nichols see Chapter 3.

\(^{18}\) For more on these interviews see Chapter 3.
Shohat and Stam’s polycentric multiculturalism, which calls for the promotion of marginalized discourses as not “a matter not of charity, but of justice” (1995: 359). Ethnographic filmmaker Jay Ruby has argued that the moral burden of representation is so high that only indigenous peoples should be making films regarding their cultures (1995:78). During the keynote speech at the 2010 High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology, Ava Hamilton, president of the Native American Producers Alliance, remarked that, “after centuries of others speaking for us, it is time for us to speak for ourselves.” Dustinn Craig concurs, declaring, “There has already been 100 years of non-native peoples representing native peoples. I think that an indigenous film must be made by indigenous people. Period. There is no need for whites ‘to go and speak for us.’”

However, there is more than a moral imperative for the inclusion of indigenous film in anthropological discourse. As Asch notes, indigenous filmmakers are often the “only ones with enough knowledge of how their culture works to make a good representation” (Asch et al. 1991:103). He makes the point that to truly get the insider’s perspective on identity, it is necessary to have the insider express it him or herself (103). This sentiment is shared by many indigenous filmmakers as well. For example, Tracey Deer (Mohawk), director of Club Native, describes her film on blood quantum requirements for membership as

only possible because I was from that community. I don’t think anyone from the outside could have come in and made those films. I grew up in it and I know from personal experience the intimate layers that are involved in identity, and membership, and belonging, and the politics of all of it. I’ve lived it, and I’m still living it. I’m still trying to figure out “who am I? What are my responsibilities as a Mohawk person?”
Sterlin Harjo (Seminole-Creek), director of *Barking Water*, furthers this point, commenting that “If someone’s interested in the subject of indigenous peoples, then why not get it firsthand? Because that’s the truth, and it’s from their experience, instead of someone looking in at them.” He went on to note that “there are a lot of dangerous things that happen when someone’s not telling their own story… where white men are better Indians than the Indians… In a sense, Indians just become props in the films.” As noted by Grande (2006) and Prins (1997), Hollywood representations contain essentialized stereotypes for the purpose of white “escapism” (Grande 2004:101). Craig expands this criticism, maintaining that “Indians are a caricature in American history and society. We are an emblem of many things. We Indians have never had control over what it is that we embody. It is always outsiders that spread those characteristics around.”

However, the extent to which this is true of anthropological representations has been the subject of much debate in relation to the crisis of anthropology.¹⁹ Tracey Deer comments that for many indigenous filmmakers, “especially when you’re talking about ethnographic film and all the expropriation of our own image ever since moving pictures started, there is a camp that believes that only indigenous people should be making film.” Deer notes that the anthropological goal of communicating the insider’s point of view as outsiders “is impossible and ethnographic filmmakers therefore screw it up by putting stuff out into the world.” Specifically, she noted the problems with representing indigenous identity, commenting, “I do think there are some limitations of how authentically you can explore a subject. I wouldn’t think to fly into Jamaica and make a

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¹⁹ For more on the crisis of anthropology see Chapter 2.
film about the Jamaican identity. There is no way that I should be the one making that film. A Jamaican should be making that film.”

Deer’s comments support Shohat and Sham’s argument that identity is something expressed by those who experience it, as opposed to something that can been observed and interpreted (Shohat and Stam 2003). However, unlike painting and other crafts, films are made by large groups of people performing many tasks. If, in order to be labeled an indigenous film, everyone on the crew had to be native, there would be very few. Chris Eyre, director of *Smoke Signals*, has observed that “a lot of times people want to have an all-Native crew—it's like this utopia—if we just had a Native caterer and a Native PA, and I can be the producer, and we have the Native actor, then everything would be great.” (NMAI website).

Craig notes that “It’s not that simple in practice. For example, in *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, it was made by a 50-50 native and non-native staff. In addition, *Rabbit Proof Fence* was non-native but they really made it right. They even did casting the right way. But these films are the exception.” As Craig notes, casts and crews usually consist of a variety of native and non-native individuals. Craig’s comment speaks to a pragmatic view of indigenous film, valuing as much indigenous involvement as possible, though placing an emphasis on control of content rather than the percentage of indigenous staff.

As will be discussed, this debate may be seen in the selection process of indigenous film festivals. For example, while the DIFAF and the New York NMAI film festivals prefer indigenous involvement, they are focused more on the content of the film. Conversely, in the ImagiNative festival in Toronto, either the writer, producer, or director
must be indigenous. Harjo takes a similar perspective of the ImagiNative festival, saying that “For me it’s always been that it was made by an indigenous person and that’s it. If it’s made by a non-indigenous person, it’s not an indigenous film. It is something exploring indigenous themes. I think we need to make films about anything we want.” Concurrently, Craig also notes that “I think there is nothing wrong with saying we want native authorship. We want native direction, native perspective. I don’t care how tight you are with the community. I don’t care how many years you have spent there. Your film is not a native film.” However, even in the ImagiNative festival, the filmmaker could be the only indigenous individual on the entire cast.

Furthermore, several indigenous filmmakers maintain that this native perspective is integrated into all the work they produce, by the very nature of their cultural identity. Cedar Sherbert (Kumeyaay), director of Soy Pedro, Somos Mixteco (2007), discusses how in fact every filmmaker carries a certain perspective: “I'm a Native American filmmaker. It's who I am. I can only speak for what I know. Scorsese is still an Italian American filmmaker. Woody Allen is a Jewish Brooklynite filmmaker. It's always going to be in my work; it's what makes me unique” (NMAI website). Similarly, Andrew Okpeaha MacLean (Iñupiaq), director of Sikumi (On the Ice) has remarked, “My Iñupiaq culture is a part of the films I make because it is a part of who I am” (NMAI website). Craig notes that “though it might not be overt… a lot of the work I create is very inspired by where I come from. It’s connected to that part of me.”

It has been established that an indigenous perspective is necessary for a deep engagement with identity, and that while a fully native staff is still rare, indigenous
involvement in film has been steadily increasing (Wood 2008). However, as there is an extraordinary diversity of indigenous peoples in the world, what, if any, unifying perspective do all of these filmmakers share? Craig notes that “more than anything, what native peoples share is the history of “having been conquered peoples.” Harjo notes that while there are key differences, this common history has resulted in a coherent “perspective” that native people share, due to many commonalities in their histories. This strategic essentialism (Spivak 1993) connects to Niezen’s conception of an “international indigenism,” in which the shared history of “conquest, genocide, ethnocide, and political marginalization” has provided common ground on which to link similar interests (2003:17). Like Grande (2004), Niezen notes the importance of recognizing indigenous goals of sovereignty as opposed to equality within larger systems20 (17).

Furthermore, due to this shared history of colonization, indigenous peoples have generally been held to a litmus test regarding the “purity” of their heritage, whether through blood quantum, knowledge, or community connection (Grande 2004). Grande argues that this is because the identity of indigenous peoples remains embedded with remnant colonial notions of the other (Bhabha 1994). As a result, the conception of the “indigenous” is essentialized in many filmic representations by outsiders.

However, the strategic essentialism of the terms indigenous film(makers) by filmmakers and scholars is based on the common colonial histories of indigenous peoples. Throughout this chapter, I use these terms to point to films that have been able to address identity due to the personal connection between filmmaker and the filmed community. Furthermore, these categories provide anchor points for discussing

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20 For more on Spivak, Niezen and Grande see Chapter 2.
indigenous film festivals as well as prestigious independent film festivals such as Sundance.\textsuperscript{21} As will also be shown, this strategic essentialism unites indigenous filmmakers into a cohesive and supportive community of artists who make films that do tend to “write against” essentialized conceptions of culture.

**Indigenous Control of Content**

Ginsburg argues that in order for identity to be authentically expressed through indigenous film, the native filmmakers must be given artistic freedom to express themselves (Ginsburg 1994). While most indigenous filmmakers have been able to make the key decisions in their films, there are cases in which they have been pressured by institutional agendas (Wood 2008). Conversely, there are also instances in which indigenous communities do have control over films made by outsiders. In this section, I show that while indigenous authorship often correlates with native control, this is not necessarily the case (Cook-Lynn 2008:336)

Dustinn Craig’s film *4 Wheel War Pony* was largely in response to his experience directing and producing the PBS documentary *Geronimo*, part of the 2009 *We Shall Remain* series. While at PBS, he experienced what he considered as institutional racism. Although he was technically in charge of the film, Craig recalls intense pressure from upper management at PBS to conform the story of Geronimo to what Craig perceived as containing historical inaccuracies fitting into left-essentialist fantasies. After this experience, he decided to only create films on his own, garnering independent funding. Like Grande and Lynn-Cook, Craig argues that while mainstream institutions were eager

\textsuperscript{21} For more on indigenous film festivals see Chapter 5.
to capitalize on the image associated with hiring indigenous filmmakers, his critical scholarly contributions were not taken seriously. Reflecting on the experience, Craig remarked that “It was great having the good public television deal, money, time and a staff, but after a hundred years I still couldn’t tell my own story.”

Grande describes this “brand of essentialism (as) based on a logic which forces one to submit proper credentials before offering an opinion,” arguing that the politics of location privileges an unexamined set of authentic experiences as the foundation for authority. In other words, “‘truth’ is constructed as a function of identity” (2006:97). Therefore, while a personal relationship with a community is crucial for the expression of identity, indigenous peoples can also be used by organizations in order to authenticate their own version of history and identity (97). In the following comment, Craig discusses both the ubiquity and problematic nature of essentialist representations in validating conquest:

I think that most materials today serve and seek to validate conquest. Our American ideals (freedom, liberty, democracy) are the very things that were taken from indigenous peoples. We can’t dwell too much in the past grievances. We must find our place in the world in both victory as well as defeat. The validation of conquest seeks to rationalize away conquest and abuse by making it seem inevitable. Native Americans and people of color have been denied access to these popular representations. Filmmaking is necessary in order to reclaim our history. To say “we exist and we are relevant.”

Craig’s experience with PBS speaks to Grande’s discussion on the danger of equating truth with identity (2004:97). As Craig notes, natives can often be “used to validate the production, so that people can stand before audiences and proclaim authenticity.”
However, there are also cases in which indigenous communities have had control over the content of films by outsiders. An early classic in which an outsider collaborated with an indigenous group was the 1969 film *You Are On Indian Land* (NFB website). This film uses an observational documentary film style to show a blockade along the border of the United States and Canada. This was in protest to the application of customs laws to the Mohawk reservation, which was illegal according to the Jay Treaty of 1794. While Mort Ransen was technically the producer and director, the idea for the film came from Mike Mitchell, a native member of the National Film Board’s (NFB) Indian film crew (Ginsburg 1999). Both a main character and the narrator, this film was an early precursor to indigenous controlled film, as Mitchell pitched the film idea and organized the crew to film the blockade. This influence can be seen in the film as Mitchell consistently reminds the police of the presence of cameramen and the message that viewers will receive. In addition, the reliance on the observational rhetorical mode, with minimal cuts, gives the impression that very little editing was done by Ransen after footage was taken. Although even the observational mode relies on heavy editing, the impression of simply “showing what happened” is conveyed nonetheless. Ginsburg argues for the historical importance of this film in catalyzing native peoples “then and now to think about their history and about their need to represent their claims and to take up cameras themselves in order to tell stories that can make a difference” (1999:67).

The inclusion of indigenous voice in *You Are On Indian Land* was a rare occurrence during the late 1960s. Historian Rick Moore has noted that this film happened through a mix of good luck by Mitchell and the National Film Board (NFB) executive
producer George Stoney’s willingness to “circumvent NFB rules” (NFB website). The NFB native film crew itself was a rare early federally funded location of indigenous film production. Another classic NFB film made around the same time, *The Ballad Of Crowfoot* (1968), was particularly noteworthy. Featuring a ballad about Crowfoot written by Micmac filmmaker, singer, and songwriter Willie Dunn, the film shows images of Crowfoot and other Plains Indians, throughout his life (NFB website). This was one of the first films to truly feature total control by an indigenous person and has also been called the first Canadian music video. *The Ballad of Crowfoot* was a landmark film in terms of native control of content. However, when contrasted with *You Are On Indian Land*, one can see the increased production value and resources that often accompany the productions by non-native filmmakers.

There is also a history of indigenous communities approaching outside filmmakers and controlling content while utilizing the resources and training of outside filmmakers. *The Makah Nation: A Whaling People* (2002) is a recent example of a film made by an outsider with community control. Reviewed at every stage by the Makah, they ultimately had control over the vision and final product of the film. David MacDougall’s *Goodbye Old Man* (1975) is another example. To fulfill an old Aboriginal man’s last request, that a film be made of his pukumani (bereavement) ceremony, MacDougall structures the film based on what the family thinks the old man would have wanted (Barbash et al. 1996). In addition, Turner’s films on the Kayapo were based on the community’s priorities (Turner 1995).
However, there are other examples in which an outsider has teamed up with one side of a divisive community issue. One such film is Julia Dengal’s *Cowboys, Indians and Lawyers* (2006). This film is about the controversy over the construction of a dam project called the Animas-La Plata on the Southern Ute reservation. Approved almost 40 years ago by the U.S. Congress and two tribal councils, the tribal government has recently begun advocating for the completion of the project. After Sage Remington, a Southern Ute activist, accused the council of corruption, he joined forces with a group of white environmentalist supporters. For Remington, this was part of a lifetime of activism, including involvement in the AIM occupation of Alcatraz and other demonstrations. The film chronicles Remington’s fight to prevent this dam project from coming to fruition. Dengal’s own fight against the environmental degradation of indigenous land is part of a larger environmental concern about the negative effects of dams. This film shows the problematic nature of an outsider representing the voice of a native community that is sharply divided. However, what makes this film particularly interesting is the way she addresses the problematic nature of her own position as an outsider.

While indigenous perspectives are necessary for an engagement with identity, the inclusion of indigenous individuals, even as filmmakers, does not necessarily mean that the representations will authentically engage identity. As seen in Craig’s experience making *We Shall Remain: Geronimo*, other factors such as institutional power can distort representations for a variety of reasons. Echoing Grande (2006), Craig has related the tendency for historical victors, represented by large institutions, to want to validate that history through representation.
Harjo notes that “There have been really respectful filmmakers that are non-native that have made films about natives. These work best when they don’t try to speak for native peoples.” This neatly summarizes the ability of outsiders such as MacDougall and Turner to facilitate indigenous expressions. Through collaboration at all levels of the filmmaking process, the indigenous groups are able to retain true control of the film content. However, Dengal’s film showcases the difficulty of expressing a coherent indigenous perspective in a situation where the community itself is greatly divided.

This section has outlined the effect of authorship on the general ability of filmmakers to address issues of identity. However, within both ethnographic and indigenous film, there are a variety of film styles and traditions. In the next section, I explore how films in both genres express identity within the diversity of both indigenous and ethnographic film genres.

Rhetoric and Genre in Ethnographic and Indigenous Film

In this section, I apply my framework to show how the expression of identity plays out in various film styles in ethnographic and indigenous film. This provides a context in which to discuss both of these genres in the rest of this chapter. First I use Nichols’ framework in order to lay out the different ethnographic film styles that have developed since the crisis of anthropology. Then I discuss how indigenous filmmakers use both documentary and narrative film styles to express identity.

Ethnographic Film Styles

In Chapter 3, I outlined Nichols’ (2001) six filmic rhetorical modes in discussing how films make an appeal for the authenticity of their representations. In this section, I
apply these modes to the diversity of ethnographic film styles that have emerged since the crisis of anthropology. I will briefly review these six modes. The poetic mode refers to the filmmaker as artist, building a mood rather than presenting a situation. The expository mode refers to the filmmaker as omnipotent observer, emphasizing “the impression of objectivity and well-supported argument” (105). The observational mode refers to filmmaker as participant, using minimal cuts and overdubbing to give the viewer the impression of the situation as it was experienced. However, even in this mode filmmakers may be editing significantly. The participatory mode refers to the filmmaker as a social actor, at least temporarily, of the filmed community. The reflexive mode refers to films that question issues of representation. Finally, the performative mode refers to filmmakers who question the basis on which meaning is constructed in film at all, presenting “the chaos and confusion of events that other films attempt to order into a coherent narrative” (137).

While all ethnographic films use the participatory mode, they vary greatly in terms of their use of other modes. In terms of their positionality, ethnographic filmmakers have emphasized their roles as observer and participant over that of an artist (Nichols 2001). Margaret Mead, one of the key founders and innovators in ethnographic film history, bemoaned the emphasis on aesthetics at the expense of accuracy; one prominent example being Marshall’s The Hunter, known for its production quality though it was “written in the editing room” (Hockings 2003:7). To counteract this trend, Mead suggested that ethnographers set up long-term fixed cameras, and in the tradition of

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22 For more detail on these rhetorical modes see Chapter 3.
observational cinema, minimize cuts (10). However, this commitment to avoiding researcher bias also precluded any engagement with personal identities.\textsuperscript{23}

Many traditional ethnographic films utilize the observational and participatory modes, but ultimately rely heavily on the expository mode to make their arguments. For example, in \textit{The Ax Fight},\textsuperscript{24} the conflict is first shown without any comments from the filmmakers, as though the audience is there. Chagnon is also shown somewhat as a participant in the community. However he ultimately provides a play-by-play explanation on why this conflict occurred, basing his arguments on his own perceptions of the Yanomamo as “fierce” people (1968). Leach’s \textit{Trobriand Cricket} relies on a similar structure, showing long stretches of the adapted game, then providing a detailed analysis (2002). Leach even writes that his film can be thought of as divided between the initial display of cricket and the rest of the film, in which the game is analyzed (39). While these films incorporate emic data (comments by native subjects), they are dominated by the theorizing of Chagnon and Leach.

There \textit{is} a substantive history of ethnographic films that varies from this expository tradition. One perspective could be generally characterized as the attempt to capture the native’s point of view with social scientists as the intended audience. For example, in Marshall’s \textit{N’ai: the Story of Kung Woman} and Asch’s \textit{Jero on Jero}, the filmmakers engage individual histories. Out of context, the representations of N’ai and Jero seem to fit with Abu-Lughod’s conception of “anthropology of the particular,” anchored in individual circumstances (2006:467). However, these films were made in

\textsuperscript{23} For more on Margaret Mead’s films and her perspective on ethnographic filmmaking see Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{24} For more on \textit{The Ax Fight} see chapter 2.
order to gather emic data in the context of larger projects on distinct cultural populations (Heider 2006). As a result, N’ai and Jero are ultimately presented as *examples* of other individuals in their culture. This assumption is akin to Ruth Benedict’s conceptions of culture and personality, in which everyone in a society shares key elements of personality within an overall gestalt (1934). As a result, they do not achieve Lughod’s goal of “writing against culture” and instead tend to reinforce the study of holistic groups (1993).

There *have* been cases in which anthropologists engage the reflexive mode. However, this reflexivity tends to most effectively analyze Western attempts at understanding the other, rather than addressing the effects of representation on indigenous identity (Heider 2006). For example, in *Cannibal Tours* (1988) O’Rourke follows ecotourists on their travels to New Guinea for cultural tourism, exposing their preconceived notions regarding indigenous peoples. Relying heavily on the observational mode to make his argument, O’Rourke highlights the cultural ignorance of these tourists. While he succeeds in questioning the perspective of outsiders, the film does not engage the personal views of the native peoples who are being exoticized.

Minh-ha’s *Reassemblage* (1982) was an experimental film on her West African fieldwork, consisting of a non-narrated montage of images, forcing the viewer to create meaning (1997). She has stated that she refuses to write “about a culture,” taking Lughod’s “writing against culture” to heart (Abu-Lughod 2006:467). It is one of the few ethnographic films to utilize the performative mode, which seeks to question the way audiences think about the knowledge of a subject and the making of meaning itself (Nichols 2001). For example, she intentionally disrupts the flow of audio, visual, and
narrative structure in order to show the arbitrary control that filmmakers have in cultural representations (Foster 1997).

Collaborative films also challenge the traditional etic-etic research model. Turner’s Kayapo films, for example, involve native input and priorities throughout the production and editing process (Turner 1995). The goal of these films was to further a public relations campaign with the general population of Brazil and the government in order to fight for land and resource rights. While successful in their goals, these films do not represent how the Kayapo actually understand their own identities, but rather how they wanted outsiders to perceive them (Turner 1995). Like the work of Flaherty and Rouch, the films exist in a grey area between fiction and documentary. For example, in some films, the Kayapo performed traditional customs no longer practiced, in clothes no longer worn. However, Turner provides a pragmatic model of representation that is less concerned with authenticity than with the actual effects that films can have on furthering an indigenous agenda (1995). Instead of the traditional ethnographic film reliance on the expository mode to explain culture through theory, Turner uses a mix of expository, observational, participatory, and reflexive modes based on which combination best serves community needs.25

While ethnographic filmmakers have addressed issues brought to light by the crisis of representation, their position as community outsiders makes it problematic to engage identity due to the aforementioned Catch-22 of identity representation. For example, Turner is able to further the Kayapo political agenda by expressing traditionally “pure” identities that do not account for the actual impact of acculturating colonial forces

25 For more on Turner’s film project see Chapter 2.
(1995). In addition, the personal explorations into N’ai and Jero are ultimately part of monographic projects to catalog particular cultures (Heider 2006). While O’Rourke does involve native peoples in his film, it is ultimately a critique of the tourists and the overall mindset of modernity, not an engagement with the way cultural tourism interacts with indigenous identity and community issues (Tilley 1997). Although Minh-ha’s film effectively questions the foundational structure of meaning in ethnographic film, like Cannibal Tours, it critically engages the problem of expressing cultural identities, but not identity discourse itself (Minh-ha 1996).

However, as previously discussed, the connection of indigenous filmmakers to their communities positions them well to critically engage with identity. In the past, anthropologists such as Worth and Adair considered indigenous films as emic data: treating the selected Navajos as a representative sample of a distinct homogeneous group (Ginsburg 1995:67). However, the connection of indigenous filmmakers to a multiplicity of communities and traditions positions them neither as part of a consistent group, nor as pure insiders or outsiders. These filmmakers are able to address a variety of hybrid identities from what Brayboy and Deyhle describe as the “dual position” of an “insider-outsider” (2000:164).

When the reflexive mode is applied to ethnographic films regarding one’s own community, anthropologists have been able to critically engage identity. As suggested by Ruby (1995), this auto-ethnography avoids the Catch-22 of engaging identity. In a sense, ethnographic filmmakers become indigenous to the cultures they are studying. For example, the 2009 Eurorama Ethnographic Film Festival in Trento, Italy focused on “the
frontiers of Europe, immigration and post-socialist Europe between tradition and modernity” (Eurorama). These filmmakers were able to engage identity by dealing with issues pertinent to their own national cultures and identities. Like indigenous filmmakers, they do this through a combination of personal experiences, community relationships, and formal research. For example, in Katrine Philp’s (Sweden) Book of Miri, Philp explores a Swedish librarian’s search for identity through her blog and the community she has subsequently fostered online (Eurorama). Myerhoff’s In Her Own Time (1986) is another example of an ethnographic film that is personally reflexive, as she engages in the meaning and identities of elder members in the Orthodox Jewish community in relation to her own life and illness. Philp and Myerhoff are able to engage issues of identity because the filmmaker has a personal connection with the community and topics involved.

Since the crisis of representation, anthropologists have been asking new questions, relating to the agendas of indigenous communities, incorporating their input, and challenging outdated anachronistic representations. Ethnographic filmmakers have been able to record life histories, further indigenous political agendas, and even engage the identities of their own communities. However, while using reflexive and performative modes on their own cultures has provided avenues of identity engagement, they have generally not been successful at expressing indigenous identities (Asch et al. 1991:103). However, ethnographic filmmakers, including Philp and Myerhoff, have been able to engage issues of identity by making films on communities to which they are culturally

26 For more on Myerhoff’s films and reflections see Chapter 2.
connected. Similarly, indigenous filmmakers have been able to address issues of identity through films regarding their own communities and cultures.

**Indigenous Film Styles**

Ethnographic films have generally been limited by the requirements that they appeal to social scientists and should be “about whole cultures, or definable portions of cultures; informed by implicit or explicit theory of culture; explicit about the research and filming methods they have employed; and using a distinctive anthropological lexicon” (Loizos 1993:7). As discussed previously, some ethnographic filmmakers have challenged these requirements and intended audiences. However, even experimental ethnographic filmmakers cannot avoid the fact that they are speaking about others, attempting to represent a culture that is known only academically (Nichols 2001).

Indigenous filmmakers are not limited to ethnographic film requirements, the audience of anthropologists, nor the I-them-us relationship. Furthermore, they are able to speak personally about the communities to which they belong. Conversely, indigenous filmmakers, free from these limitations, have been able to express identity through a variety of rhetorical modes and film genres. Furthermore, they have been free to explore both fiction and non-fiction film techniques. As discussed above, the position of ethnographic filmmakers as outsiders has prevented them from engaging indigenous identities. As Asch notes:

> an insider's knowledge often seem to be the only ones with **enough**
> knowledge of how their culture works to make a good representation;
> and… have the critical insight into their own cultures, if even
> subliminally, to say something about how those cultures work that goes
> beyond the intuitive knowledge that most people have about their own
> societies. [Asch et al. 1991:103]
In this section, I discuss how indigenous identities are expressed through various film styles and rhetorical modes. I first address the ways indigenous documentaries use personal community connections to anchor larger histories and issues of identity. Then I discuss narrative indigenous films that rely on embedded meanings that are connected to oral storytelling traditions (1995).

*Indigenous Documentaries*

Virtually all ethnographic films are documentaries (Heider 2006:2). Heider, Ruby, and Nichols describe the genre as technically a subgenre within documentary films (Loizos 1993:7, Heider 2006:2). While Nichols argues that “every film is a documentary” in that it provides evidence regarding the filmmaker’s personality and culture, he makes a critical distinction between fiction and non-fiction (2001:1). Even ethnographic filmmakers who have included elements of fictive reenactments (including Flaherty, Rouch, and Turner) have still relied primarily on the documentary observational mode (Heider 2006).

While ethnographic filmmakers base their work in scholarly research, the positionality of indigenous documentary filmmakers allows them to anchor their work in their own personal and cultural connections to an issue. This distinction is analogous to Nichols’ division of documentaries into two general rhetorical styles: social issue, which anchors the film in research; and personal portrait films, which are anchored in an individual narrative (163). While ethnographic films generally rely on the social issue style, I will explore how indigenous documentary filmmakers are able to mix social issue
and personal portrait through the first person, third person, as well as community perspectives.

Like ethnographic films, many indigenous documentaries are in the third person, such as *Little Caugnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back* (2008). This resembles an ethnographic film, using a mix of stated history, historical documents, and interviews to discuss a historical situation. However, what separates this work from ethnographic films is the positionality of the filmmaker to the filmed community, as both insider with personal connections as well as an outsider who has conducted extensive historical research (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000). Director Reaghan Tarbell follows her own personal family history in order to discuss the native community of Mohawks in Brooklyn. Rubin has called this film “a wonderful example of how different the story is when it comes from somebody in the community.” Far from being an isolated film, Tarbell is a recent example in a long history of Mohawk control of content, going back to Mike Mitchell’s influence on the 1969 film, *You Are On Indian Land*, and continuing up to other contemporary filmmakers including Tracey Deer. Using expository and participatory rhetorical modes, Tarbell deals with issues of community identity.

Unlike ethnographic films, many indigenous films use the first person perspective, including *Mémère Métisse, Delicacies of the Land*, and *Soy Pedro, Somos Mixteco*. These filmmakers are able to explore identity through a personalized journey and first hand account of their own identity as well as that of others in their community. Janelle Wookey, in her film *Mémère Métisse*, explores issues of shame thorough her grandmother’s denial and eventual reclamation of indigenous heritage. She is able to
engage the issue of intergenerational shame through the arc of a personal portrait narrative. Wookey discusses storytelling as having been:

>a key ingredient of Native culture for centuries. Today, that tradition is carried on mainly through film, a medium of great importance to this culture. As masters in the art of storytelling, Natives have produced films that have had a great effect on many people—films that have worked both to create awareness of the challenges they face, and to empower, inspire pride, action and support for the Native community. [NMAI website]

The exploration of personal identities has allowed indigenous filmmakers to present serious issues without victimizing their subjects. As Ginsburg states, this engagement in Grande’s ‘red pedagogy’ is not the salvage work that anthropologists have often done, but rather are the creation of a “cultural third path along which possibilities can be imagined other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism” (Ginsburg 1995:72). For example, in *Under the Open Sky* (2007), Matías uses the observational mode with little narration, invoking the voice of a community. Relying primarily on the observational mode, this film documents the negotiation of wages and social benefits of poverty stricken miners with the Canadian transnational company Goldcorp Mining. This film does not frame the miners as victims; rather it shows them laughing and joking at the repeated “final offers” of the mining company. Director José Luis Matías (Nahua) comments on the importance of filmmaking by those from the community:

>For some time now, people foreign to our culture have been making films from a different perspective. They would do fieldwork in the countryside for a week or a month, but they don't grasp the depths of our people, and they're never going to—because it's something that is lived, that is felt. When we make film from within, it's because we've felt it. So, it is very

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27 Wookey’s engagement with intergenerational shame is discussed in detail in the next section.
important that nowadays we are able to tell our own stories as indigenous peoples. [NMAI website]

Bhabha (1994) has emphasized the importance of not framing representation in terms of the colonizer-colonized binary, as this reinforces the conception of natives as victims. Correspondingly, in each of these documentaries, when issues of colonization are addressed, the filmmaker has presented the subjects as active agents, as opposed to victims. The framing of indigenous peoples as agents is a crucial component to Grande’s ‘red pedagogy’ (2004), and in opposition to what Deloria Jr. has called the “plight” mentality (1969:1). In Mémère Métisse, Wookey emphasizes how the impact of discrimination on identity can ultimately be overcome. In Under the Open Sky, Matías shows the small group of miners successfully and lightheartedly negotiating higher wages with the mining company. While indigenous documentaries are able to anchor issues of identity in the personal connection to their own experiences and history, the next section addresses how other indigenous filmmakers rely on connections to community to embed issues of identity within narratives.

Embedded Meanings though Narrative

Nichols describes fiction as wish fulfillment documentaries that “make the stuff of imagination concrete” (1). However, Asch notes that indigenous narratives have often been among the more authentic representations:

That fictional representations approach the truth more closely than do documentary representations… may be so. Both forms of representation are worthwhile. We need not choose one over the other. My central point, in addressing the success of some narrative filmmakers in different cultures, is that… narrative representations made by insiders are valuable because they are cultural documents, which are of the society they represent. [Asch et al. 1991:103]
Concurrently, Wood argues that indigenous narrative films are “better understood as instances of specific older visual and oral indigenous arts than as expressions of aesthetic traditions associated with western film” (2008:104). Maori filmmaker, Merata Mita has commented on the connection of filmmaking to oral traditions, saying “I think it’s a mistake to cast aside whatever has served us so well in the past, to think that, because we are writing scripts for film, that this something totally different, that we don’t need those lessons of the arts of storytelling that we got from our oral tradition” (Dowell 2006:380). She advocates for the use of these oral traditions as a cultural resource from which to draw on when making films.

In her article, Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media, Ginsburg draws on her work with Aboriginal Australians to describe the ways in which meaning is encoded within indigenous films using oral traditions:

Urban Aboriginal producers working in bicultural settings have embraced an embedded aesthetic as a strategic choice. Their efforts to develop an alternative approach to their work, while emerging from their experiences as Aboriginal Australians, are nonetheless self-conscious; the Western aesthetic conventions of the dominant society are culturally available to them as well. [Ginsburg 1994:376]

Ginsburg’s argument for these embedded aesthetics provides a frame in which to view the narrative films in the festival: both through western conventions as represented by Nichols’ film theory, as well as oral story telling practices. Drawing upon these traditions, narrative films are able to show multilayered meanings, as Basso discusses in his book on Apache storytelling, Wisdom Sits in Places (1996). Dustinn Craig describes the importance of layered storytelling:
Stories have many meanings, as Basso shows. There are surface level understandings and then many layers beneath that. They make up the landscape of the moral universe. Stories are a way of talking about things without having to talk about things.

In Craig’s experimental film, *4 Wheel War Pony*, he embeds several layers of meaning. He is able to create a dense film that encodes personal, communal, historical and representational issues into an 8 minutes. His film relies on previous knowledge that one could only gain from living in the community, or background information from Craig. His film utilizes the performative mode, by juxtaposing images and clips that force the audience to question their preconceptions of Apache skateboarding.

*Sikumi (On the Ice)* exists within an Inuit film tradition that has drawn upon embedded meanings. Citing Ginsburg’s work on embedded aesthetics, Avi Santo has argued that the meanings within Inuit video have been “essential to its cultural and political goals of sustaining and reviving Inuit culture” (2004:379). Furthermore, he states that “Inuit media productions not only teach Inuit about their culture, but how to practice it” (379). Referencing the context of Inuit film history, Rubin has argued that MacLean speaks to the isolation of the Inuit peoples and “why it is so important for people to get along in small communities and how devastating it would be to be sent away. In a more modern context, this means being sent away is a prison.”

The film teaches cultural values by embedding them in the film. After an Inuit hunter witnesses another Inuit murder a man from his community, he must decide whether or not to report him. Although he is faced with the guilt of leaving the murderer’s family without a breadwinner and threats from the killer, he ultimately demands that they report what had happened. This film explores the difficulty of
weighing moral decisions; ultimately teaching that one must abide by the principle of justice over all others. By showing how an Inuit man faces a moral quandary, and ultimately chooses the safety of the community over the freedom of an individual, MacLean ties his film to this embedded Inuit film tradition.

As shown in this section, the expression of indigenous identity can occur through a wide variety of film styles. However, while documentary, narrative, and experimental films can all express identity, they do so in different ways. By grounding their work in personal experiences, indigenous documentary filmmakers have been able to speak to the issues of identity relating to larger social and historical issues. Chris Eyre, director of *Smoke Signals*, calls documentary his “favorite form because the proximity to reality is so much closer than narrative” (NMAI website). Concurrently, narrative and experimental indigenous filmmakers have been able to embed meanings, using poetic and participatory rhetorical modes to connect to viewers. In our interview, Mohawk filmmaker Tracey Deer commented on the advantages of each:

I feel that both types of storytelling can be extremely dynamic. Documentary is real people. Real emotion. I’m not writing it. This is straight from their hearts, and to be the one sharing that moment with them, and them allowing me to share that moment with a larger audience is such an incredible honor. In narrative film you have so much more control to say exactly what you want to say. You can have it say whatever you want and whatever you don’t want. Ultimately, I think there are people who are affected by documentary and people who are effected by narrative films. I don’t think people necessarily jump back and forth between the two, which is why it’s so important to have both.

In the next section, I draw upon the three issues outlined in the analytical framework in order to show how identity is expressed through these different frames. I
discuss how filmmakers use rhetorical modes and film styles in order to express identity through these overarching issues.

**The Expression and Production of Hybrid Identities**

In her work with Aboriginal Australian filmmakers, Ginsburg describes the production of identity in indigenous film as “a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies.” She goes on to argue that these filmmakers live in neither a “pristine world, untouched by the dominant culture, nor do they want to assimilate to the dominant culture. They are juggling the multiple sets of experiences that make them contemporary Aboriginal Australians” (Ginsburg 2002:283). Similarly, in this section I discuss the way that indigenous filmmakers juggle their own multiple sets of experiences in order to produce films that engage these various identity spaces. Occupying dual positions of insider-outsiders (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000), their resulting “hybrid” works (Ginsburg 1994) engage critically with issues of native identity (Grande 2004).

Sandy Grande has identified key qualities of a critical identity discourse in her book *Red Pedagogy* (2004). She has critiqued current multiculturalist identity politics as essentializing indigenous identity and disregarding the unique priorities of native peoples. Mainstream multiculturalist discourse often assumes that indigenous peoples “live in a white world” in which they must assimilate (Mihesuah 1999). However, this ignores the goals of many indigenous individuals and communities of keeping their own cultural identities. Instead of ascribing to an acculturative stage sequenced model (McFee 1968),
Grande’s discourse focuses on hybrid identities, allowing for the continual renegotiation of identity.

As discussed in the analytical framework, I have identified three primary ways that indigenous filmmakers frame identity in their works, (1) through issues of homogenizing forces, (2) in relation, reaction, or resistance to the process and history of colonization and (3) through an attempt to show contemporary realities that are not based on either of these issues, but rather a non-reactive representation. In this section, I discuss these three issues specifically in terms of films shown at the 2009 DIFAF, incorporating interviews with filmmakers. They will be shown to speak to larger issues of indigenous filmmaking in terms of the tension between Abu-Lughod’s (2006) particularism and Spivak’s (1993) strategic essentialism. While Abu-Lughod points out the dangers of essentializing cultures, Spivak argues that marginalized groups can increase solidarity by self-consciously organizing around specific commonalities.

In each of these three sections, I also connect the main framing issue with challenges facing indigenous communities. The ability of indigenous filmmakers to imagine cultural futures that transcend binary discourses positions their films not only to address contemporary issues, but also provides models for dealing with them (Bhabha 1994; Grande 2004; McClintock 1995).

**Homogenization Frame**

As discussed in Chapter 2, indigenous peoples face increasing homogenizing pressures from national cultures. Grande (2004) and Churchill (1993) note that due to the

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28 For more on these three frames see analytical framework.
history of U.S. blood quantum requirements for Native Americans, increased pressure for resources on native land, as well as a host of other factors, indigenous communities are struggling to address ever-changing issues regarding the meaning and requirements of cultural belonging and membership. As a result, native communities and families are engaging in what I have described as the tension between Abu-Lughod’s particularism and Spivak’s strategic essentialism. Due to both intermarriage and the cultural integration between indigenous and other communities, native peoples continue to face challenges in defining their identities. The question of “who belongs?” has subsequently become increasingly controversial within native communities and families.

Blood Quantum

Before European contact, “most tribal classifications had been based on kinship and culture.” The U.S. governmental blood quantum policies “introduced categories of race into Indian country” (Champagne 1999:11). These blood quantum requirements served to create an artificial dividing line between those who belong and outsiders, defining native identity by the percentage of “blood” or genetic lineage. Many families and individuals with mixed heritages have subsequently faced challenges in proving their legal and social standing within reservations communities. Canada, like the United States, has had its own particular history with these requirements.29

In Club Native, Tracey Deer explores debates surrounding blood quantum, “racial” intermarriage, and membership on the Mohawk Kahnawake reservation. Deer is a Mohawk who has been heavily involved in her community throughout her life and

29 For more on issues of identity around blood quantum see Chapter 2.
currently owns *The Eastern Door*, the reservation newspaper. This documentary addresses the difficulties of being part-Mohawk and the experience of feeling alienated from the only community that many of these individuals have ever known. She also addresses the concerns of full blood Mohawks regarding the limited resources available to tribal members.

This third person documentary shows extensive interviews and family interactions of mixed blood families and individuals. This film relies on the trust and personal relationships Deer has with several Mohawks she has known for much of her life, as well as her vast experience within and outside of the reservation. As she notes, “I think the films I’ve made have only been possible because I was from that community… I grew up in it and I know from personal experience the intimate layers that are involved in identity, and membership, and belonging, and the politics of all of it.”

The roots of the conflict over Kahnawake membership relates to the history of the Canadian blood quantum policies and an “understanding of inter-group and intra-group dynamics of identity as well as the interplay between the two” (Ouellet-Décoste 2010:57). The Indian Act was enacted by the Canadian parliament in 1876, defining Indians as “any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band; any child of such a person; and any woman lawfully married to such a person” (Department of Justice, Canada 1876). Not only was this act problematic in “racial” terms, but it also created a double standard of membership for men and women. Men could marry as they pleased and remain in the community, while women had to lawfully marry a registered Indian man. Over the next century, the legislation was heavily amended, continuing the
“confusing and shifting federal regulations concerning Indian Status and periodic re-
definitions of the criteria of Indianness under the Indian Act” (Alfred, 1995).

The sexist and racist provisions in these acts were not addressed until Bill C-31 in 1985 (Ouellet-Décoste 2010:42). This bill gave native status to Indian women who had married non-Indians as well as their children. Additionally, it recognized the rights of tribes in establishing their own membership requirements (42). For the first time in Canada, one could be federally recognized but not recognized by an Indian nation. However, many indigenous nations, including the Kahnawake protested Bill C-31 for “the lack of consultation in the legislation’s design phase and the complete lack of consideration for impacts upon the social and political life of the communities in the implementation phase” (Alfred 1995).

Beginning in the 1940s the Mohawks had independently asserted their own rights to control membership. This was made concrete in 1981, when “a moratorium on mixed marriages was established, followed by the implementation, in 1984, of the Kahnawake Mohawk Law, which set a requirement of 50% ‘blood quantum’ or more for future registration” (Alfred 1995). This caused great controversy for many in the community, as it was argued that these requirements were founded on colonial blood quantum requirements (Ouellet-Décoste 2010:43). This resulted in the passage of the 2003 Membership Law, replacing blood quantum requirements with that of having four Mohawk great-grandparents (Mohawk Council of Kahnawake Membership Department 2007). Many in the community have argued that this law merely replaced one version of blood quantum with another, causing continued community debate.
Ouellet-Décoste (2010) argues that the decision of the Mohawk nation to keep blood quantum requirements is embedded in the political positioning of the nation to increase its sovereignty (44). Kahnawake has been among the most politically active in Canada with the ultimate goal of “complete autonomy and the realization of the Mohawk right to self-determination” (Alfred 1994). In order to achieve this, Mohawk leaders have felt the need to define their nations in opposition to the Canadian state.

In her film, Deer argues that membership requirements are very different from those of pre-contact, in which their “society was determined through the clan of the mother and was based on commitment to culture, the knowledge of the Mohawk language and a sense of belonging” (Deer 2008). Having conducted extensive research for the film, Deer frames the current situation as “self enforced genocide.” She contends that due to intermarriage, Mohawks will eventually define themselves out of existence if they continue to use blood quantum in determining membership. Churchill, in his discussion of the similar U.S. policies, similarly argues that the racialized system of tribal enrollment based on blood quantum of at least a quarter has rendered Native Americans as “self-colonizing… (and) self-liquidating” (1999:56). While in 1999 only four percent of federally recognized native peoples had less than a quarter blood quantum, this is projected to top 59 percent by the year 2080 (56). Like Deer, Craig also comments on the problematic requirement of blood quantum:

In history, you find that there are a lot of different ethnicities that could fit within native culture and there was an acknowledgement and acceptance that “you are one of us as long as you are with us.” It was as though a state of being, a state of mind was more important than any individual genetic component to being native.
Deer’s film begins by asking members of the Kahnawake community the seemingly simple question of what it means to be a Mohawk. She receives no clear answers, with one subject responding, “I cannot grasp on anything that makes me Mohawk. I have no idea what it means to be Mohawk.” The film goes on to explore issues of membership based on the unique history of blood quantum requirements in Canada, and the Kahnawake community in particular. By personalizing the suffering of those who have been threatened or forced to leave the community, Deer hopes to depoliticize what she calls the community “fundamentalist” support of blood quantum. Like Ouellet-Décoste (2010), Deer argues that the traditionalism espoused by the Kahnawake tribal council is motivated more by political positioning than a true commitment to pre-conquest cultural revival (57). She takes the position that the tribal council is essentializing Mohawk identity, but not in a strategic way for the long-term benefit of the community.

Deer echoes Bhabha and McClintock’s argument that discourse framed through binaries serves to reinforce power disparities. During the Q&A, she noted that many in the community have framed the issue of membership in terms of the binary native/non-native categories. Like Grande, she argues for a discourse that takes into account the complicated hybrid identity positions in which many in her community find themselves. During our interview, Deer framed the film in terms of Ginsburg’s (1995) “cultural future,” saying that film is “important for getting that discussion going, about ‘who are we?’ and more importantly ‘who do we want to be?’” She staked the position that a membership based on blood quantum lessens the responsibility of members to keep up
cultural traditions. During the Q&A, she stated that the key question facing her community is, “Do we want to remain a unique cultural people that still has that connection to our traditions?” During our interview, she took this question further, stating that “the topic of identity in our communities is the big question in our communities, because we are at a time and a place in history that we are getting beyond the point of just basic survival.” Deer has expressed her main goal as opening up dialogue, viewing film as one way, along with editorials through her newspaper, of drawing attention to important issues (Q&A).

However, unlike Julia Dengal’s depiction of Sage Remington in *Cowboys, Indians and Lawyers*, Deer does not position herself against others in her community. Although she disagrees with those who advocate for blood quantum requirements, she presents other sides of the community debate as valid. Deer noted, “We are very divided. I’m on this side, but our intentions are both the same. We both want what is best for our community, but our vision is different.” She hopes to open the debate to possibilities of membership beyond blood quantum within her community, and has moved back to the reservation to become a Mohawk community leader (Q&A). Her dual position as an insider-outsider, devoted to her community, is what ultimately positions her to serve as a cultural broker regarding one of the most challenging issues facing Native Americans (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164).

*Intergenerational Shame*

While Deer’s film focused on the conflicts regarding who gets to be included in an indigenous community, other films address the desire of many to be disassociated with
their indigenous heritage. The history of cultural genocide in North America has in many cases led to self-denial and even self-hatred in terms of native identity (Duran and Duran 1995:25). For many native people, their indigenous identities are deeply associated with negative connotations of institutional and social discrimination (Champagne 1999). Morissette has shown that due to these experiences, “a generation of native people have been left with haunting memories and deep emotional scars” (1994:381). After this is internalized it is difficult to change, with the effects often transferring through generations (Duran and Duran 1995:25). In relation to indigenous film, Dowell notes that

It is not surprising, given colonial efforts to disrupt indigenous family structures – such as in the policy to remove mixed-race Aboriginal children from their families in Australia, or the residential school system in the United States and Canada – that many indigenous directors use media as a way in which to recuperate indigenous community structures and to make central the intricate dynamics of indigenous family life in film narratives. [Dowell 2006:377]

Ginsburg (1994) notes that such films are able to play a key role in the “production of identity,” helping to negotiate painful issues regarding identity and creating new models to deal with them. The most effective strategies for overcoming these challenges involve reconnecting with culture in order to replace a “shame-based cultural identity” with one based on pride (Marriott 1999).

Janelle Wookey’s (Métisse) Mémère Métisse (2008) addresses these issues of intergenerational shame and discrimination as métisse, or partially indigenous, Canadian people. The film chronicles Wookey’s successful attempt at understanding and eventually changing her grandmother’s denial of her indigenous heritage. Having embraced her own métisse heritage, Wookey is eventually able to garner her grandmother’s explanation on
how discrimination and shame from her youth continues to affect her identity. Rubin, the festival director, describes the film’s broad appeal as a “real universal story. Lots of people her age were raised to be ashamed of their culture, ashamed of who they are. It was such a personal story, but she also delved into the broader cause of why her grandmother had these issues: eventually to see her grandmother embrace her culture.”

In the film, Wookey demonstrates the power of Marriott’s (2009) pride-based cultural identity in the transformation of Wookey’s grandmother. After much continued denial, there is one moment in particular that greatly changes the grandmother’s attitude: attending an indigenous program with small children. Dancing and being involved in native activities with the children, Wookey’s grandmother finally agrees to get her indigenous identity card, supporting the efficacy of Marriott’s (2009) pride-based theory. Ultimately, this provides a model for a cultural future for those who have experienced, or have family members who have experienced, these issues (Ginsburg 2004:365).

As shown, issues of identity surrounding homogenizing forces often create conflict within indigenous communities and families. While some, such as the Mohawks in Deer’s film, have struggled to gain community membership; others, such as Wookey’s grandmother, have chosen to reject it. These films highlight Clifford’s conception that “the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressed intercultural frontiers of nations peoples and locales” (Clifford 1997:255). These frontiers of identity, in the liminal spaces between clear cultural boundaries, are navigated in these films. Both Deer and Wookey express possibilities of
hybrid identities “other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism” (Ginsburg 1995:72).

Colonization Frame

This section addresses films that engage identity in relation to colonization. The work of Bhabha (1994) and McClintock (1995) on binary discourse will therefore be critical in framing this section. These scholars argue that the use of colonizer-colonized, dominance-resistance, and victim-agent conceptions perpetuates a binary system that favors the powerful. Instead, Bhabha proposes the promulgation of hybrid conceptions of power in order to destabilize contemporary cultural imperialism. Grande (2004) further argues that breaking out of the victim-agent and traditional-modern binary identity discourse is crucial for creating a ‘red pedagogy’ that accounts for contemporary hybrid indigenous identities. These scholars argue that discourse within these binary frames, no matter how well intentioned, will ultimately reinforce these power relationships.

In order to demonstrate these concepts, I contrast Dustinn Craig’s 4 Wheel War Pony with Jerry Leach’s ethnographic film, Trobriand Cricket. Craig’s experimental juxtaposition of film, images, and animation starkly contrasts with Leach’s traditional ethnographic film style. However, each of these films explores a similar cultural situation: the appropriation of a Western-associated activity into an indigenous group, resulting in increased cultural sovereignty. Craig’s film explores the relationship between the Fort Apache reservation skateboarding culture and the pre-contact Apache warrior system, while Leach’s film is about the adaptation of cricket by Trobriand islanders in response to British colonization.
However, while Leach’s film frames the Trobrianders in terms of the colonizer-colonized binary, Craig is able to express hybrid conceptions of power. Furthermore, he engages in the production of hybrid identities that form a “third path” of identity construction (Ginsburg 1995:72). Due to his dual position as an insider-outsider (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000), I will show how Craig is able to engage in Grande’s (2004) critical indigenous identity discourse by challenging these binary notions. His work helps to develop new Apache identities, drawing from both pre-contact and contemporary traditions. While Craig explores issues of hybrid identity, Leach’s film is not able to engage issues of identity, instead, framing this cultural occurrence through the analysis of materials, movement, and ritual.30

*Trobiand Cricket*

*Trobiand Cricket* (1976) was made by anthropologist Jerry Leach with the help of filmmaker Gary Kildea, and was one of the earliest ethnographic films to address issues of cultural hybridity (Leach 2002). As in Rouch’s *Les Maîtres Fous*, Leach addressed the response of indigenous peoples to colonization. However, due to the film’s use of traditional holistic ethnographic conventions, the film is framed through binary understandings of power and identity (Bhabha 1994).

The Trobriand Islands represent a particularly crucial position in the history of ethnography, serving as the location of Malinowski’s seminal work, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1916), as well as several other classics (1915; 1926; 1935; 1944; 1948). Almost in homage to Malinowski, *Trobiand Cricket* is a manifestation of Malinowskian

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30 For more on Ginsburg and Grande see Chapter 2.
traditional ethnography at its best. In this case, an anthropologist who had done extensive ethnographic fieldwork with a particular culture identified an interesting cultural practice, and conducted an emic-etic analysis. He shows extensive footage of cultural practices and Trobriander perspectives before providing his own analysis based on academic research and historical context.

Through this methodology, Leach was able to illustrate how the Trobriand version of cricket contained many of the rituals previously practiced in Kayasa war games. For example, Leach describes several ways in which it is guaranteed that the visiting team always loses the game, as is customary in Kayasa (Leach 2002). Through several examples, Leach demonstrates that unlike Indian and Caribbean cricket, Trobriand cricket has been altered so much that it is essentially a new game (Weiner 1977). As with most ethnographic films relying on an emic-etic analysis, the film primarily uses the observational, expository, and participatory rhetorical modes. Leach shows substantial footage of the game, as though one was actually present. Meanwhile, he explains to the viewer the underlying functions and meanings of the game, drawing on interviews only as supporting data. While Leach mentions that he has had extensive research experience, he relies little on the participatory mode, rarely showing himself as a participant in the film.

However, while Trobriand Cricket does follow traditional ethnographic film methods, its engagement with culture change does distinguish it from previous ethnographic films such as John Marshall’s The Hunters, which assumed a timeless ethnographic present (Heider 2006:101). Loizos argues that Trobriand Cricket provided a
“strong contrast to the images of non-European peoples as defeated, subjugated groups, apparently facing extinction at the hands of more robust aggressive systems” (1993:38). However, Leach presents their culture change as happening homogeneously throughout all Trobriand society (36). There is minimal engagement in the film with how colonization and global capitalism has fractured and reformulated identities. Leach’s optimism further suggests that the subversive appropriation of cricket led to victory for the people over colonizing forces (37). While the film does show the agency of the Trobrianders, it is still enmeshed in the binary opposition of colonizer-colonized, framing cricket only in relation to colonial forces (38).

The lack of engagement on identity enables Leach to omit the larger political Trobriand context. The indigenous Kabisawali movement, which began in 1968, was engaged in violent conflict with the colonial government during 1973, the year of Trobriand Cricket’s filming. Furthermore, while this movement was indeed anti-colonial, it also promoted some development and even set up a bank, a hotel, as well as cultural tourism ventures (Jolly 2003). While Weiner has noted that the Trobrianders have held on to much of their cultural sovereignty, the complexity of identity and divisions within Trobriand society did not match Leach’s framing of the wholesale rejection of Western influences (Weiner 1988).

4 Wheel War Pony

Unlike Leach, Craig does not frame film through colonizer-colonized binary discourse. During our interviews and the Q&A, he frequently discussed the problem of “validating conquest” in both indigenous and ethnographic film. His work shows a
commitment to addressing issues of colonization through Bhabha’s ideas of hybrid conceptions of power and identity (1994). Ginsburg describes how these “mediations are not simply repair or salvage work; they enable Aboriginal people to envision what the late Eric Michaels called a "cultural future" (1987), some ‘third path’ along which possibilities can be imagined other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism” (Ginsburg 1995:72). *4 Wheel War Pony* is born out of this perspective and is about more than a mixture of cultures. Craig addresses possibilities for this “third path” of future Apache identity:

> On the surface, this film may seem to depict White Mountain Apache youth borrowing pop culture in place of their own, when it is actually their ancient Apache culture of young men, manifesting itself within skateboard culture, resulting in a very distinct blend of two cultures that are both indigenous to the Americas. [Craig, mission statement]

Unlike Leach, Dustinn Craig has not attempted to create scientific distance between himself and his film. Rather, he has included images of himself skateboarding, with his family, working on skate park construction, and in the process of filmmaking. However, framing Craig as an “insider” in relation to anthropologists as “outsiders” would be a vast oversimplification. Rather, he is in the dual position of being an insider/outsider (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000). While Craig has strong ties to his home community, he is also a trained filmmaker, has lived in many cultural contexts, and conducted in-depth academic research on Apache history and culture. It is his experience both within and outside of his home community that has enabled him to engage in complex issues of hybrid identities (Grande 2004).
During our interviews, Craig described his childhood on the Fort Apache reservation and his involvement since. Throughout his twenty years of skateboarding in the reservation community, he has been mentored by older Apaches and mentored two generations of youth skateboarders himself. However, he also spent much of his life in the Navajo capital of Window Rock (he is half Navajo), as well as other non-reservation cities around the country.

Craig took up filmmaking as a teenager in order to record the skateboarding culture of the community. After his first child was born, he decided to become a professional filmmaker. Due to the success of his short film *I Belong to This* for the PBS series, Matters of Race, he received the National Video Resources Media Artists Fellowship in 1995 to fund his own films. He has become known for his experimental style, including a three-screen installation film in the Heard Museum’s exhibition “Home: Native People in the Southwest.” As director and producer of the 2009 PBS documentary *We Shall Remain: Geronimo*, he drew upon his million-dollar budget in Boston to conduct in-depth academic research into Apache history. His dual position as insider/outsider can be seen in his reflections on this experience (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000):

I got to live it for one year and I got that taste, and I want to continue with that. I can exist and operate in that realm of privilege, but I’m not comfortable there. I know I’m not a part of that. Especially when you’re dealing with the stories of native people, how can you expect people with that level of privilege to empathize and really understand why certain things are so important. Why there is such a great need to not use certain images. They are so far removed from our experience, in our own marginal communities.
Craig simultaneously acknowledges the benefits of working with PBS as well as the difficulty of creating authentic representations with individuals who have no personal connection to indigenous communities. He has noted that due to this lack of connection, outsiders have tended to “show that this conquest has been for the greater good” and have validated and rationalized “the complete violation and destruction of many nations’ abilities to be self-sufficient, to be self-determined, to be autonomous.” However, like Grande (2004), Craig notes that indigenous authorship does not guarantee otherwise, and that “even natives usually just validate conquest” by framing issues in terms of binary power relationships (Bhabha 1994).

Frequently referencing anthropologist Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), Craig has been deeply interested in the relationship between Apache and Western ways of knowing. He makes the case that connecting the present with the past in Apache society is crucial for imagining futures for his community:

There is this whole world that the Apache used to live in before conquest. It was like a bubble of reality and everything happened inside that. Today we live in a different bubble. All of our anger about the bubble, our hopes, dreams, everything today is in that bubble, even if we rebel against it. We can’t go back to how it used to be. All we can do is realize that that is where we came from and use that knowledge to create a new bubble in the future that will be neither like the old one or the current one.

The perspectives that Leach and Craig bring to their work lead them to frame their films differently. In Trobriand Cricket, by focusing on specific features that differ from British cricket, Leach frames his film as “normalizing whiteness,” situating Trobriander changes only as a “response” (Grande 2004:101). Conversely, Craig normalizes Apache
skateboarding as a hybrid and unique Apache cultural form, choosing not to situate it in opposition to U.S. skateboarding culture.

Craig’s film frames issues of acculturation, colonization, and hybrid identities as actively navigated by Apaches. This fits within Grande’s (2004) call for representations that frame indigenous identities through positive issues of identity and not what Deloria Jr. ironically refers to as the “plights” (1969:1) of indigenous peoples. Craig notes that:

As people with a history of incredible stories of hardship and defeats, it is difficult to find one’s place in a world that is always authored by the victors, by the powers that be… It would be easy for us to feel sorry for ourselves. It is easy to acknowledge that we live in despairing times, but there is a lot of strength and inspiration that lies in our history. For me I believe in that strength in our community and our cultures. We are the legacy of that.

This shows his conscious engagement with Grande’s (2004) balancing act between taking colonial histories into account, while not focusing on native “plights.” He also reaffirms Shohat and Sham’s contention that the promotion of marginalized discourses, such as indigenous film, are part of a matter not of justice (1995:359). Conversely, Leach presents the Trobrianders as a cultural whole, forced to cope with and adapt to outside systems of power. While the film shows how the culture has changed, it does not engage any individual identities or address the divisive cultural context of the time (Jolly 2003). Conversely, by framing Apaches as agents of their own destiny within a complex historical context, Craig presents a landscape of possibilities for future Apache identities.

Through 4 Wheel War Pony’s experimental style Craig directly confronts issues of representation. Showing a constant flux of juxtaposed images and sound, the film draws on the performative rhetorical mode, forcing viewers to question their
preconceived notions of Native American skateboarding (Nichols 2001). In the film, footage of youth using the reservation skate park is juxtaposed with recreated footage of Apache scouts. There are also scenes in which the scouts are skateboarding, connecting to Apache cultural traditions, as opposed to U.S. skateboarding. However, by not explicitly defining the nature of these connections, Craig challenges the viewer to actively engage these concepts (Nichols 2001). Echoing Jean Rouch’s comments on Les Maîtres Fous, Craig states, “I want my film to have an impact, to reach its target, to get people to think. That’s how I look at the filmmaking process, writing, and art. And that’s difficult. I know that’s just one view. Some people like the idea of just producing.”

While Leach meticulously articulated the function of the cricket game in order to clarify its purpose (Kildea and Leach 2002), Craig’s film creates more questions than it answers, opening up a space for new possibilities of being. For example, Craig purposefully breaks the illusion of the ethnographic present. While the Apache scouts are sometimes presented as stoic, in other scenes they are shown as laughing and playing with skateboards and toy guns. In this way, Craig constantly presents and breaks the filmic illusion of showing what McClintock (1995) termed anachronistic space and panoptical time. By juxtaposing traditional Apache identities with the modern connotations of skateboarding, Craig forces viewers to break out of the traditional-modern binary frame that native peoples are most often presented through (Grande 2004). This is akin to Minh-ha’s *Reassemblage*, in which she cuts out sound only to show the arbitrary control that the filmmaker has on cultural representations, drawing attention to the way that film defines meaning through editing (Foster 1997).
As previously discussed, indigenous films are able to express identity through a variety of film styles, including documentary, narrative, and experimental. Similarly, each of these styles is also able to address contemporary indigenous issues. Like the documentaries by Deer and Wookey, Craig’s experimental film is able to address contemporary challenges faced by indigenous communities. Through his film, interviews, and Q&A sessions, he actively engaged with one of the most tragic and important issues facing Native American reservations today: the negative risk behavior of native youths (Bearinger et al 2005).

**Risk Behavior among Reservation Youth**

Reservations face some of the highest risk rates of all youths in the United States. They “have the highest suicide rates of all ethnic groups... and suicide is the second leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native youth” (Borowsky et al. 1999:573). Reservation youth are also faced with extremely high levels of interpersonal violence (Bearinger et al. 2005:270). Also, Native American “youth tend to initiate substance use at a younger age, continue use after initial experimentation, and have higher rates of polysubstance use” than the general population (Beauvais, 1992; U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment [OTA], 1990).

Duran and Duran argue that researchers studying Native American issues of risk behavior have left out issues of identity confusion and disparity (1995:178). They maintain that for native youths considering suicide, “the person’s relationship with the sacred is nonexistent, and suicide serves a purpose similar to that of alcoholism… (filling) a hole” (178). This is akin to Marriott’s (2009) push for ascribing identity
through pride rather than shame. This is supported by the work of Bearinger et al., whose longitudinal research has identified that belonging to a prosocial peer group is the most correlative protective factor against negative risk behaviors (2005:270). Prosocial behaviors are defined by Brief and Motowidlo as “positive social acts carried out to produce and maintain the well-being and integrity of others… such as helping, sharing, donating, co-operating, and volunteering” (1986:710).

The Apache skateboarding community has provided a prosocial environment for the teenaged male youths on the Fort Apache reservation. Craig argues that because the complex system for becoming a man was largely lost during colonization, the skateboarding community has performed the similar and vital functions of focusing the energy and purpose of male teenagers. He maintains that young men “need a shield from the bad parts of society they are prone to falling into.” The skateboarding community has provided a setting for these prosocial protective factors. While this is supported by the work of Bearinger et al., who argue that prosocial peer groups are effective protective factors, this is also supported by Craig’s own experience on the reservation: “When I was in high school there was this older skateboarder who didn’t drink, and that had a huge impact on me. He looked out for me and in a way he was a shield for me.”

During the Q&A, Craig solemnly revealed that while films “can play a huge role in helping that process, ultimately it is just overwhelming to be aware of the obstacles that lay in the path of youth in native communities.” The following comment speaks to Craig’s balance of optimism and realism in addressing the state of the youth wellbeing on the Fort Apache reservation:
It’s a very charged film for me on many levels. It represents a lot of pride but it’s laced with a lot of despair. Lots of those kids are dead. They’ve committed suicide. They’ve committed homicides. They’ve had their remains scraped off the highways from drunk driving related accidents. Some of them are survivors. Some of those kids are completely washed away by alcoholism and drug addiction. So you are seeing these young men in the prime of their lives. There is a resilience and a strength.

Craig’s production of Apache hybrid identities in this film has taken an active role in providing what Ginsburg (2004) has discussed as a “third way” of imagining indigenous identities. Facing extremely high rates of suicide, drug use, and violence, the identity of youths on the Fort Apache reservation is literally a life or death situation. By drawing upon traditional Apache beliefs and customs, and melding them with contemporary reservation realities, Craig is able to play a part in imagining Apache cultural futures that actively undermine destructive binary discourse.

“Non-Reactive” Frame

While the Craig states that he wants his films to “have an impact, to get people to think,” other filmmakers express what is termed the “non-reactive” frame. This perspective takes Bhabha (1994) and McClintock’s (1995) aversion to binaries to heart, not wanting to explicitly address issues of homogeneity or colonization. Unlike Deer and Craig, Sterlin Harjo does not portray any particular political or ideological goal. As expressed through his film, Barking Water (2009), and his comments in interviews and Q&A sessions, his dedication is to “simply telling a story” (Q&A). However, drawing upon Ginsburg’s embedded aesthetics, I argue that filmmakers with a non-reactive perspective can still express issues of identity that relate to contemporary indigenous issues. While Harjo advocates for what he calls “non-reactive” films that are story based,
interviewing him revealed a more subtle perspective, in which he prefers to embed political issues deep within the narrative rather than confront them directly.

Ginsburg notes that although many indigenous films do not address colonialism directly, they carry important embedded messages regarding not only cultural traditions, but also of resistance to larger power structures (1994:376). Harjo affirms this, stating:

My feeling is that first and foremost you have to have a good film. You have to do it like Bob Dylan. His songs are great to listen to. Anyone can listen without even paying attention to the words and enjoy it. He also slips in these lines fighting power and authority, but that only works because it is high quality to begin with.

As in Ginsburg’s work with “urban Aboriginal producers working in bicultural settings,” Harjo has “embraced an embedded aesthetic as a strategic choice.” Likewise, he has developed “an alternative approach to (his) work, while emerging from (his) experiences as (a Native American), are nonetheless self-conscious; the Western aesthetic conventions of the dominant society are culturally available to (him) as well” (Ginsburg 1994:376). This was demonstrated in an interview, when Harjo described both his excitement at learning cutting edge techniques in film school as well as his lifelong love for the stories of older native people.

Harjo’s film, *Barking Water*, is about the final road trip of a dying man and his ex-lover. Harjo is able to explore issues of the loss and destruction of Native American land without explicitly addressing them. The film showcases his position that “fighting power and authority” must be embedded within “a good film.” Furthermore, he states that “Indians don’t stand around talking about being Indians; they have better things to do.”

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31 For more on issues of Native American land loss see Chapter 2.
As an example, in the following exchange the main characters briefly discuss their dream of owning land:

Frankie: I want to buy land. Let’s get some land.
Irene: Okay.
F: Where are we gonna get the money?
I: I don’t know.
F: Wouldn’t that be something to have our own land.

My family lost most of ours.
I: This is our land.
F: What do you mean?
I: This is our land.

The characters do not reference the reasons they have lost their land nor exactly why this is still their land, and the subject is quickly changed after this exchange. However this short conversation is subtly critical of the history of U.S. governmental policies. The degradation of the land that Native Americans have kept through the reservation system is also embedded in the films. For example, as the two are driving by an industrial plant on the reservation, Irene comments, “What a disgusting sight that is. All the people who live near that place have either got cancer, or have family members who have died from it.” Frankie replies despondently, “I don’t want to talk about it,” to which Irene snaps back, “You should want to talk about it. Even if it’s too late for you, think about those young ones.” This short scene expresses the sentiment that it is important to avoid becoming jaded about negative things that have happened in the past, since the youth still need to be protected.
However, these embedded political messages are rare throughout the film, which consists mostly of personal humorous moments between the two ex-lovers. Echoing Deloria Jr.’s (1969:1) aversion to Indian “plights,” Harjo states, “When you put something negative like that out there, it isn’t good for anyone. It’s not about the struggle, it’s about the celebration.” Furthermore, while Ginsburg (2004), Deer, and Craig have expressed confidence in the ability of film to make an impact, Harjo states, “You can’t make a film and change how everyone feels about Native Americans. I can just tell a story, and hopefully that helps, but I can’t change the whole perspective.”

Harjo’s commitment to authentic storytelling is also seen in his use of the observational rhetorical mode (Nichols 2001). This mode, in which a filmmaker attempts to convey a sense of the situation simply “as it is,” is rare in narrative filmmaking. Like Flaherty, Rouch, and Turner, Harjo re-creates cultural moments in order to capture them on film, 32 what Rouch called “experimenting with cinema in real life” (Rouch and Feld 2003:12). For example, in one scene, Frankie and Irene visit the house of “Aunt Do,” who is actually Harjo’s aunt. In preparation for the scene, Harjo explained the background of the film’s characters and instructed the family to treat these characters as they would close friends. The film shows them spending the evening with Harjo’s family, including the recounting of true family stories. Like in Rouch’s Jaguar, Harjo recreates a situation that he views as representative of an authentic situation in order to incorporate it into his film. Furthermore, Harjo reflects that, while he meant simply to tell a story, “The further I get from the films, the more I realize they are about my life” (Q&A).

32 For more on the controversy around cultural reenactments in these films see Chapter 2.
While Harjo takes a decidedly less political stance than other filmmakers, such as Deer and Craig, he is nonetheless able to address issues of identity relevant to native communities by embedding these meanings into the narrative itself (Ginsburg 2004). In this section I have shown that indigenous filmmakers with a variety of perspectives on framing identity (homogenization, colonization, non-reactive) have been able to express relevant contemporary issues of identity (blood quantum, intergenerational shame, risk behavior among youth, land loss and degradation) through different film styles (documentary, experimental, narrative). As discussed, this wide variety of identity expression is possible due to the personal connections these filmmakers have to their home communities. Each has a vested interest in seeing his or her community succeed and has personally dealt with issues of contemporary indigenous identity. Although each of these filmmakers deals with serious contemporary indigenous issues, I have argued that each of their films avoids victimizing indigenous peoples (Deloria Jr. 1969). Furthermore, by transcending binary discourse (Bhabha 1994), these filmmakers engage in the production of hybrid indigenous identities (Ginsburg 2004) as well as Grande’s (2004) ‘red pedagogy.’

As shown in this chapter, the way that indigenous filmmakers express issues of identity in their films stems from several factors. I have shown that, due to the Catch-22 of identity representation, one can only represent identities with regard to a community that he or she is culturally or personally tied to (Grande 2004). While ethnographers have engaged issues of identity through films within their own cultures, only indigenous films have been able to address native identities. Furthermore, indigenous films have been able
to express these issues through multiple film styles, using a variety of rhetorical modes, from expository documentaries to narratives with embedded meanings. Therefore indigenous films, in engaging issues of native identity, provide anthropologists with a dynamic resource for this otherwise elusive set of issues. Ultimately, it is the ability of indigenous film to engage in contemporary indigenous issues that makes it such a particularly compelling site for anthropological engagement.
CHAPTER FIVE: INDIGENOUS FILM FESTIVALS

*If a DVD falls in a forest, does it make an impact?*

- Jeanne Rubin (DIFAF Director)

Until recently, anthropologists, museums, and independent film festivals were the primary distributors of indigenous films. During the 1990s, native films began being shown in independent film festivals such as Sundance, which added a Native American program category in 1994 (Singer 2001:94). The success of *Smoke Signals* in the 1998 festival represented a watershed moment for indigenous film (Wood 2008). Soon, many independent festivals had indigenous sections, setting the stage for the creation of many indigenous film festivals. Over the last decade, the number of festivals dedicated exclusively to indigenous films has steadily increased.

Indigenous film festivals serve many of the same functions as other independent festivals. They provide a network for connecting filmmakers to a variety of audiences as well as opportunities for professional development, networking, and inspiration (Dowell 2006). These functions are especially important for the indigenous filmmaking community, as they have the significant disadvantages of lack many established actors, a limited audience, and few Hollywood connections.

However, these festivals also serve the unique and important function of providing a space in which indigenous filmmakers can engage identity discourse with others in the film community as well as diverse audiences. I will show how differences in
festivals, based on their institutional affiliations and mission statements, result in various engagements with indigenous identity. Specifically, the selection processes of these festivals highlights the relative importance the festival directors ascribe to indigenous authorship as opposed to native messages and themes.

In addition, I highlight how the small size of the Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival (DIFAF) has provided a space for intimate engagement with filmmakers on issues of identity. In addition to my work with the 2009 DIFAF, I also draw upon Dowell’s (2006) research on the 2005 First Nations-First Features Film Showcase at NMAI in New York, as well as my own experience at the 2009 NMAI festival to discuss the ways that indigenous film festivals provide a location for supporting the indigenous filmmaker community.

**Variety of Festivals**

Currently there are approximately 20 indigenous focused film festivals in the world, few of which take place annually. Festivals have taken differing perspectives through their selection of films regarding the relative importance of filmmakers’ indigenous ethnicity and as native themes. For example, the NMAI, American Indian festival in San Francisco, and the DIFAF do not require filmmakers to be indigenous. Although they prefer this, their emphasis in selection relates to indigenous themes in the films. The American Indian festival’s mission is to encourage “native filmmakers to bring to the broader media culture the Native voices, viewpoints and stories that have been historically excluded from mainstream media.” Conversely, the ImagiNative festival

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33 For background on the DIFAF see Chapter 3.
has required all filmmakers to be indigenous, yet is relatively flexible on the subject
matter of the films. The festival’s stated mission is to “reflect the diversity of the world's
Indigenous nations and illustrate the vitality and excellence of our art and culture in
contemporary media” (ImagiNative website).

These festivals are important to indigenous filmmakers for several reasons. The
festivals have served as primary sites of intersection within the indigenous mediascape:
connecting filmmakers from local communities to regional and national audiences
(Ginsburg 1995:259; Alia 2010:xxi). Through panels and Q&A sessions, the filmmakers
have been able to intimately interact with audience members regarding who they are and
why they made their film. This is largely why “For many indigenous producers, these
festivals, as events that reinforce indigenous identities, are venues that are preferred over
more ‘high profile’ mainstream institutions” (Ginsburg 1995:258). The festivals also
encourage future filmmaking by linking filmmakers with prospective fundraisers and
other creative people. In larger festivals, awards are given out that can provide
professional legitimacy to filmmakers in terms of receiving future financial and
institutional support.

As sites that bring together a variety of indigenous film, filmmakers and
audiences, these festivals are also rich, but so far underutilized, anthropological research
sites for engaging indigenous film. Not only are a variety of indigenous films shown at
these festivals, but they also provide a setting in which filmmakers can interact with
audiences in Q&A sessions. Furthermore, as will be shown, these dialogues have the
potential of engaging in critical issues of contemporary indigenous identities.
While there has been a great rise in the number of festivals in the past decade, some became established as early as the 1970s. In 1975, Michael Smith (Choctaw) founded the American Indian Film Festival in Seattle, which has continued annually in San Francisco. Smith would later go on to found the American Indian Film Institute, both sponsoring the festival and putting out publications that highlight native actors and films (Singer 2001:94). NMAI had its first Film + Video Festival in 1979 (nativeneetworks). Their semi-annual festivals have become primary networking events for indigenous filmmakers in the Americas over the last three decades. The 2009 festival screened over 60 films and was attended by several hundred people, many of them involved with indigenous film production and funding. As both the American Indian and NMAI festivals began before indigenous filmmaking became common, much of their festival programming has included collaborative ethnographic films, and other video by non-natives (NMAI website). Over the history of indigenous film festivals, there has been a general trend toward larger festivals as well as the inclusion of higher percentages of indigenous created film.

In 1991 the native-sponsored Dreamspeakers Festival in Edmonton, Canada was founded. That same year, the Two Rivers Native American Film and Video Festival in Minneapolis also had its first festival. Native Arts Circle, the artistic advocacy group that sponsored the festival described it as follows:

The vision was to bring to our community a Native film and video festival that honors the richness of our cultures while celebrating the strength of the native spirit. As we began to organize we found many creative people who were honoring this spirit. When we spoke with them and learned of their work, it became apparent that the messages and stories they were telling were ones that all people need to hear. Their stories reveal the
endurance of our cultures and our connections to our earth mother… these new storytellers and visionaries of our people… are using their gifts to describe in our own words and images who we are as Native people. They are helping us to reclaim our identities while challenging others to rethink their perceptions of us. [Singer 2001:95]

In 1993, the Native American Producers Alliance (NAPA) was formed at this festival. They organized in response to the difficulty for native peoples in gaining employment in key production roles (Singer 2001:97). Thus, it is required that one be a registered member of a federally recognized tribe to be a member. Ava Hamilton, President of NAPA, has argued for the important role of indigenous film festivals. She discussed the difficulty of commercial viability for native films. One problem she identified was that “Hollywood is unionized, which makes it nearly impossible for indigenous filmmakers and crews to break in.” She located this difficulty as resulting from the remnants of racism. Due to disadvantages in competing for commercial sources of funding and promotion, she maintained that “The showing of our films depends on indigenous film festivals and other special screenings.”

NAPA sponsored the Imagining Indians: Native American Film and Video Festival in Scottsdale, Arizona that year. Victor Masayesva Jr., whose film Imagining Indians (1992) came out the previous year, served as the artistic director. He described this early indigenous film festival “as the start of Native American initiatives to shape the models of our self-awareness” (Singer 2001:9). The concluding statement by a panel at this festival read: “Each of us has a language, an identity, and culture that belong nowhere else in the world except where we come from and that’s who we are. Where we
live, where we come from, defines us. We determine who we gift, because when we gift any part of our culture, we’re gifting part of ourselves” (97).

A large festival such as ImagiNative that screens strictly indigenous made films has only been possible in the last decade, as there are now enough native films to consistently fill up such a festival. Each indigenous filmmaker I spoke with cited the ImagiNative festival as their favorite, due to its focus on the future directions of indigenous film.

**Institutional Affiliation, Mission Statement, and Film Selection**

Institutional affiliations are crucial in shaping the mission statements, selection process, and other key decisions in indigenous film festivals. As discussed in Chapter 3, the DIFAF is one of only 20 annual and semi-annual native festivals in the world. It runs for approximately one week each fall, taking place in a variety of venues in the Denver metropolitan area. Sponsored by IIIRM, a law and policy institute, the DIFAF has been directed by Jeanne Rubin and her husband Mervyn Tano since its inception. The IIIRM works on projects “designed to empower native peoples by examining the role the law can play in establishing and enhancing indigenous peoples' control and management over of their lands and resources” (DIFAF 2008). One might wonder why a law and policy institute, generally associated with practical issues, would devote labor and resources to a film festival. This question is answered on the festival website:

“Why,” you may ask, “is a law and policy research institute organizing a film festival?” We're involved because film, especially good film, and especially film written, made, and directed by indigenous peoples, because it is perhaps the most expressive medium we have for communicating messages about who we were; who we are; and who we are striving to
become. These messages undergird all the work we do whether it's examining the societal impacts of genetic research, or looking at roles indigenous peoples can play in warning and educating the public of long-lived environmental contamination, or developing different approaches for protecting native intellectual property rights. [IIIRM]

This mission statement showcases the connection that Rubin and Tano make between indigenous representation and the effects of legal policies and politics on communities. In particular, the quote stresses the importance the festival directors place on identity discourse. “Communicating messages about who we were; who we are; and who we are striving to become” parallels Ginsburg’s (1994) conception of film as a location of identity production and expression. Tano, who is Native Hawaiian, wrote the above quote as part of his belief that “art can bridge the gap between politics and culture in a tribe. It’s important to recognize the arts. They are central to creating cohesiveness to politics” (Tano, Q&A).

Furthermore, Tano describes the power of film in “creating identity, creating consensus. Amassing that power, for good or ill, being able to unleash that power.” This perspective is aligned with Ginsburg’s work on the ways film can actively promote the “production of identity” for communities (Ginsburg 2004). This perspective is reflected in the selection process, which prefers, but does not require that a filmmaker be indigenous, and is more focused on the message of the film itself (Rubin). On the form for film submission, there is no place for a filmmaker to indicate their personal ethnic identity (Appendix G). However, the form does include the following questions:

- Which indigenous people(s) is this film about? Describe the extent of native participation (be specific).
• If this work was produced with or for an indigenous organization, please describe and provide the organization’s contact info.

The effects of the law and policy institute may be seen throughout the festival selection. Tano notes that this “is not the only way of defining an indigenous festival. But given that we are a law and policy institute that deals with indigenous issues, when we developed the concept of the film festival, content mattered, because that is what we are about as a law and policy research institute.” In the following comment, Tano describes the specific importance of promoting discourse around issues of sovereignty:

One of the guiding principles of the institute is to support tribal sovereignty. Faced with the same situation, two tribes can take very different courses of action. It’s not our role to say who is right and who is wrong. When we are looking at an issue, we are trying to get the best information out. We are not trying to push development or not push development. There is a similar policy with film. It has to be subjective about which film gets in, we have to make those cuts.

This focus on indigenous issues is reflected in Rubin’s comment, “Of course we want as much indigenous involvement as possible. However, you don’t want to exclude a good film simply because they are not indigenous.” Furthermore, she notes that films often have a variety of indigenous and non-indigenous crew configurations; therefore “it’s very arbitrary to say that the director has to be a native person, because at what point do you say it is the director but not the producer, the producer not the writer?” Along similar lines, Craig argues that

Festivals who have contact with native people have an obligation to include as many native produced films as possible. Obviously there can always be the exception in which a festival includes Rabbit Proof Fence for example, which has high quality production, but hopefully in the future it will be all native content.
The DIFAF entry requirements and questions are nearly identical to the NMAI festival (Appendix H). The NMAI festival was a collaboration between the New York MoMA, the Smithsonian’s NMAI, and New York University (Dowell 2006:376). Representing museums and a university, these organizations all have a history of collecting, presenting, and analyzing indigenous films. Sterlin Harjo notes that due to these affiliations “NMAI puts subject first, before they put story. They very much support the struggle of indigenous people.” He suggests that many festivals focus too much on the “plights” of indigenous peoples. Praising the ImagiNative festival that allows for any subject to be explored by an indigenous filmmaker, Harjo further shows his preference toward embedded, rather than overt messages within film as well as festivals.34

Faye Ginsburg (director of the New York University Center for Media, Culture, and History) was one of the key curators of the NMAI festival (376). The event was the result of Ginsburg and others’ aspiration of creating a “venue where the remarkable achievements of indigenous directors could gain visibility within prestigious mainstream venues… (and) create an environment in which (regional) audiences could encounter the directors and their extraordinary films” (379). However, these curators did not select films. Rather, the selection committee consisted of four indigenous filmmakers: Chris Eyre of Smoke Signals acclaim; Zezinho Yube (Hunikui); Fred Rickard (Cree); and Nanobah Becker (Navajo).

As in the NMAI festival, the DIFAF policy was to prefer screening as many indigenous created films as possible, and native filmmakers directed all but one of the films: Jeffry Silverman’s For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska (2009).

34 For more on Harjo’s non-reactive perspective see Chapter 4.
Silverman finished this film after director Phil Lucas (Choctaw) passed away during editing. Similarly, the 2009 NMAI festival included the activist film *Owners of the Water: Conflict and Collaboration over Rivers* (2008), a collaboration between anthropologist Laura R. Graham, David Hernández Palmar (Wayuu), and Caimi Waiassé (Xavante).

The ImagiNative Film and Media Arts Festival began in 1999 with a focus on the inclusion of experimental and nontraditional indigenous films from around the world (Alia 2010:151). It is one of the few festivals that requires that “an Indigenous person must have held a key creative role on the project as a writer, director, or producer” (Appendix I). The submission form requires at least one of the individuals in these roles to declare their specific indigenous identity and community. In order to avoid excluding those who may not meet certain technical definitions of being native, one is only required to self-identify. Unlike the aforementioned festivals however, the form does not include questions regarding the inclusion of indigenous topics organizational affiliation. In addition to the requirement regarding indigeneity, films are selected based on:

- Artistic excellence
- Innovation in representations, content, aesthetic form and genre
- Relevance of the work to the Indigenous community and to general Canadian audiences as a whole

This selection process is congruent with the mission statement of celebrating “the latest works by Indigenous peoples on the forefront of innovation in film, video, radio, and new media” (Appendix I). The festival is run by the non-profit Centre for Aboriginal Media (CAM), which “devotes itself to the professional support and development of
Aboriginal peoples in the media industry” (ImagiNative website). The goal of CAM is to “provide necessary exposure to Aboriginal filmmakers and multimedia artists whose work is not widely accessible” (ImagiNative website).

This festival has built a reputation over the last decade in highlighting the future of indigenous filmmaking. In addition to film, this festival has also showcased websites and radio programs that are also included in the indigenous mediascape. For example, Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s website, wepinasowina.net, was presented as an “ongoing commentary about identity” where she defines herself as “a Vancouver-based halfbreed multi-interdisciplinary artist” (Alia 2010:153). The website explores the incompleteness of any individual’s ascribed identity. It features a forum for visitors to post their own thoughts regarding the experience of navigating liminal identities. The Australian weekly indigenous radio program Kiss My Black Arts was also included. The featured segment was on the subject of “Indigenous Gay and Lesbian events of Mardi Gras week in Australia.” ImagiNative’s inclusion of new media and rarely discussed issues of indigenous sexuality show the importance of this festival as an innovative and safe space (154). Alia’s analysis of this festival is supported by Harjo, commenting that “it celebrates the up-and-coming new and fresh voices. It doesn’t sway from that.” Furthermore, Deer describes ImagiNative as “the festival for seeing where native filmmaking is heading.”

As the DIFAF festival is born out of a law and policy institute, Rubin and Tano connect the festival to these issues. While preferring indigenous authorship, they ultimately chose films that spoke to certain issues and themes. Using my analytical
framework from Chapter 4, I analyze this festival’s focus on the framing of identity through their film selection process.

**DIFAF Film Selection**

By contrasting the institutional affiliations, mission statements, and film selection criteria of these three festivals, it is apparent just how influential these factors are in the festivals. However, their biggest influence is ultimately through the films that are actually selected in the festival. In this section, I present my analysis of how the DIFAF selection criteria manifested in the selection of the 2009 festival program. Drawing on my participation in film selection as well as detailed interviews with Rubin and Tano, I have organized this section into patterns that became apparent in this process.

Each year, the festival has a specific theme. The 2009 theme was “Telling Our Stories.” Rubin comments that “Our themes have been broad and are not meant to exclude.” Furthermore, she connects the current one with past themes of “identity” and “place,” commenting that there are no films that could not have fit within any of these. Rather than exclude, the purpose of the theme is to “provide a focus for discussion after the film and get people thinking.” Through participation in the selection process as well as interviews with Rubin and Tano, I have identified their selection criteria (beyond minimal production value) as relating to diversity, authenticity, uncommon stories, and documentaries that mix personal portrait with social issue perspectives.

It is also important to note the background knowledge and experience of the festival directors who are making these selections. After studying anthropology as an undergraduate, Rubin received her law degree from Stanford and has focused her career
on Indian law, with a particular emphasis on gaming and commerce. She served as Special Gaming Council to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe from 1992-99, where she advised and represented tribal officials on many issues related to commerce. She has also consulted with Maori tribal organizations and served as a policy analyst with the Administration for Native Americans in the Department of Health and Human Services (IIIRM).

Her husband, Mervyn Tano, is the president of the IIIRM. An attorney as well, he has worked on indigenous issues since the early 1970s, motivated in part by his native Hawaiian heritage (personal communication). He has served as director of planning and budget for the Administration for Native Americans, as well as multiple positions at the Council of Energy Resource Tribes. He has also participated in several national advisory boards for governmental agencies regarding native resource management, environmental impact, and public health (IIIRM). Both Rubin and Tano bring their extensive legal background to the selection of films. Their emphases on issues regarding indigenous law and policy are not only influenced by the sponsorship of the IIIRM, but also their lifelong personal and professional experience with these issues.

Sixteen films were selected for the DIFAF, including a post-festival screening that featured Tracey Deer’s documentary Club Native (2008) and her short narrative film, Escape Hatch (2009). Concurrent with the goals and mission of the IIIRM of address indigenous policies, all of these films explicitly or implicitly spoke to themes and concerns of native communities. With identical requirements to the NMAI festival, the film selection is similar. In fact, while we were attending the New York festival, Rubin
commented that “it is much easier to select films and contact filmmakers when I am able to attend this festival first.” Indeed, nine (64%) of the films were selected from the NMAI festival. Conversely, many of the films selected in the ImagiNative festival in Toronto did not address native themes. For example, five music videos by Laura Milliken (Ojibway) featured native artists, though their songs and accompanying videos do not address native issues or themes.

Diversity of Genre, Geography, and Perspective

Rubin notes that while “Some film festivals limit their geographic range, we take a more global view of indigenous film.” The DIFAF includes native films from all over the world, including the Australian film Karlu Karlu: Devil’s Marbles (2008). Rubin notes a particular desire to highlight films from Latin America. In the following quote, she discusses the ability of NMAI in locating, screening, and selecting films:

It’s a good venue to see a lot of films in a few days. One of the things I like about NMAI is that 50 percent of all the films are slated to be from Latin America, and it’s hard to find those films. The filmmakers are also there, and they have translators on site. You can get the permission right then and there.

Film selection was complicated by Jeanne’s desire to balance the inclusion of documentary, short, feature, experimental, and student film. Ultimately, there were a total of eleven documentaries, four narratives (including one feature length), and an experimental film. Within the documentary films there were four in the first person, six in the third person (including two student films), and one community voiced.

Craig’s 4 Wheel War Pony is an example of a film that appealed to Rubin partly due to its experimental style. Viewing this film at the NMAI festival, Rubin notes that
“Just visually I thought it was great. You don’t see many films like it. There is not a lot of native experimental film like that with no narrative.” However, another key consideration in film selection is the potential engagement of the filmmaker during Q&A sessions. After talking with Craig, Rubin states that “I knew immediately that I wanted to screen it. Talking to him, he had so much to say about how and why he made the film that I knew absolutely that I wanted him. I invited him to come because I knew that having him there would add depth to the experience.” She was particularly interested in Craig’s discussion of his experience directing the PBS documentary *We Shall Remain: Geronimo*.35

Rubin and Tano also view the inclusion of youth films and programs as a key component to the diversity in the DIFAF. Tano notes that not only does this inclusion help promote self-confidence for young filmmakers, but also “engages intergenerational discussions. Camille’s (film) is an excellent example. It is a way of promoting the transfer of tradition. It acts as part of a system that encourages intergenerational communication. A way of laying out family history, and therefore community and tribal history.” During a student program, 13-year-old Camille Manybeads (Navajo) was able to personally show her film, *In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman* (2009), to elementary students at the Highline Academy in Denver. Jeanne comments that this commitment to diversity of style and engagement with youth films has been strong throughout the festival’s history:

> It was important for us from the outset to have educational programs and to have student programs. In the first film festival, we only went for three days: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We had five films in the evening. We had two documentaries the first night, a feature film on Saturday, and two documentaries on Sunday all in one venue. Even in that small start we had

35 For more on Craig’s experience making this PBS film see Chapter 2.
a student program, where we worked with Denver Public Schools and the Office of Indian education and we had a class of American Indian kids.

**Authenticity**

The subject of representational authenticity is another criteria that has been discussed with regard to selection. Rubin notes that “the process of selecting a film is very subjective and part of that subjectivity is to say ‘is this an authentic reflection of a tribe, of a community?’” For example, Rubin vividly recalls her interest in Harjo’s explanation during the NMAI festival, of his incorporation of “real” family and community situations in his film. Rubin commented that “When you talk about a film being an expression of life experience, how much more real to life can it get?” As with Craig, Rubin invited Harjo to the festival immediately after viewing it at NMAI and talking with him. In the following comment, Rubin notes the particular subjectivity involved in ascribing authenticity to narrative films: “When you think about indigenous films as presenting an indigenous perspective, it is easier to pinpoint in a documentary. But with a narrative this is somebody’s life experience being expressed in a story. I had that sense with this film.”

Rubin notes that the film festival is “trying to move away from the era where an outsider comes in and makes a film about other people. I’m all for collaboration, but it has to be a true collaboration.” Rubin defines authenticity by its reception in the representative community. She comments, “It’s always important if an individual or community being depicted from someone from the outside, that it is being received well. Otherwise it’s not a film we want to have. If it’s not seen to be authentic by the community we don’t want it.”
This perspective is demonstrated by the way that Silverman’s *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska* was treated during the selection process. While it does rely on an expository explanation of Native Alaskan history, it also incorporates interviews with indigenous scholars and eyewitnesses. It also utilizes a docu-drama style to focus on and re-enact specific cases of discrimination, as well as the life of Alaskan Native activist Elizabeth Peratrovich. Seeking to find out how the film had been received in its represented community, Rubin called several Alaskan native individuals. She also contacted family members of those shown in the film, including Roy Peratrovich, son of the Peratrovich’s in the film, who remarked that “it was an excellent and accurate depiction.” Rubin noted that had she received any negative feedback from the associated community or family, they would not have screened the film.

*Uncommon Stories*

Nichols describes the increase in films addressing the reclamation of “histories from below” over the last few decades (2001:152). Eric Wolf, in *Europe: A People Without History* (1981) further argues that history is falsely written to paint Europeans as actors and indigenous peoples as victims, ignoring the significant impacts that native peoples have had on world history. Accordingly, the inclusion of films that portray uncommon alternative histories and the hidden roles of indigenous peoples in history was a prominent theme in the selection of films in the festival.

One example of this was the selection of Silverman’s *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska* (see above). Rubin notes that “what really drew me to this story is that it is one people don’t know.” Specifically, she notes the significance of
highlighting the native Peratrovich’s role in the creation of the earliest civil rights legislation in the United States (Silverman 2009). Echoing Wolf’s work, Rubin discusses the importance of representing indigenous involvement in historical events, saying “there are many ways of telling history, and usually indigenous peoples are left out.”

Another film that showed a history from below was *Barking Water*. Rubin describes this portrayal of reservation life as “a chapter of history that doesn’t make the history books. If people don’t learn it from this film where are they going to hear it? That’s part of the decision making in how we select these films.” She noted the rarity and importance of having a story centered on two native characters in old age and a man’s “journey to have (his) last farewell.” Rubin argues that this film sheds light on the double disadvantages individuals face as both native and elderly in the United States.

Rubin’s inclusion of *Karlu Karlu: Devil’s Marbles* was an example of a film that highlighted the importance of native perspective in film. The story of an Indigenous Australian man’s quest to have a sacred rock returned to Aboriginal land consisted largely of his personal discussion on the importance of land in their culture. Rubin noted,

> With some films there are certain things that strike me. One of the things I really liked about it was that it illustrated how important that one rock was. It was used for a marker by an outsider. You look at the landscape, and it wasn’t the biggest rock. But that’s where it belonged and it was important. And it was important to get it back. People from outside the community wouldn’t have any clue about the importance of getting that rock back. I think that it’s a perspective that people don’t often get to hear. Where else are they going to hear this?

These film selections highlight the DIFAF’s commitment to showing “histories from below” and connect back to the sponsorship by a law and policy research institute. Framing indigenous film as “part of the marshalling of political power,” the focus on
hidden stories helps to engage a critical identity discourse that can ultimately contribute to “creating identity, creating consensus, amassing that power for good or ill, and being able to unleash (it)” (Tano).

Hybrid Personal Portrait/ Social Issue Styles

As discussed in Chapter 4, hybrid social issue/personal portrait styles were incorporated into all of the documentaries selected by Rubin and Tano, relying on individual stories to anchor the engagement with larger histories and issues. Six of these filmmakers addressed their own situation in particular. Rubin notes that these films are not only “the filmmaker’s story, but (also) all the other stories that are encapsulated.” While Rubin did not note this hybrid style as an ironclad criterion, it shows up in all the screened documentaries.

In both Wookey’s Mémère Métisse and Sherbert’s Soy Pedro, Somos Mixteco, the filmmakers invite us into their own world and showcase the issues of intergenerational denial of identity and immigrant working conditions. Wookey and Marshall present their films as personal perspectives on an issue. These films typify the ability of indigenous films to succeed in “writing against culture” by particularizing their representations through a personal story. This positions them to address widespread cultural issues, without suggesting that their stories are representative of a whole culture (Abu-Lughod 2006:467).

In Tarbell’s (Mohawk) Little Caughnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back and Manybeads’ In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman, the filmmakers draw upon their personal family histories in order to speak to important events in Native American history. Tarbell
traces her family from the reservation through their move to the urban Mohawk community in Brooklyn. In chronicling the story of her childhood and the lives of her family as well as others in the community, she speaks to the experience of maintaining cultural distinctiveness within an urban setting. Citing this as yet another “story that people don’t know,” Rubin notes the personal nature of Tarbell’s film:

It’s the story of how they ended up in Brooklyn. It’s so personal. It’s also the story of the women and the children, not just the men. I liked getting the women’s perspective of making a home in the 10-square block community. So many folks started at the boarding house. You also get a sense of her finding out her own family story among the larger slice of history. To me it’s a wonderful example of how different the story is when it comes from somebody in the community.

_In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman_ follows Manybeads’ personal reflections on her great great great grandmother’s experience in the Navajo Long Walk, as told to her by her grandfather. Manybeads presents a recreation of what this may have been like, and uses this personal connection to anchor a general history of the Long Walk. While the films of Wookey and Sherbert focused primarily on their own story, these two films use their personal histories as a starting point for explicitly addressing historical situations. Rubin describes the decision to include it in the festival: “We thought it was such an accomplishment for a 13 year old to put together a 30 minute documentary. I like how it came out of her interview with her grandmother. From that interview she thought about what it would have been like.” This comment shows not only the preference for including films that have an element of personal portrait style, but also the festival’s focus on youth filmmaker support and development.
These documentaries all focused on the filmmakers’ own personal experiences in relation to an indigenous issue. Matías and Rojas’ *Under the Open Sky* and Deer’s *Club Native* instead draw upon the experiences of a large group of individuals within their communities. In *Under the Open Sky*, the filmmakers rely primarily on the observational mode in showing the process of negotiation with a large mining company. Featuring no narration and minimal background information, the filmmakers give the impression of narrative authority to the actions and opinions of the community members.

In *Club Native*, Deer also relies primarily on the observational mode, featuring the life stories and perspectives of several Mohawk women and their fight to belong to the community despite requirements regarding blood quantum. In both of these films, a community voice is fostered, giving the impression of de-emphasizing the opinions of the filmmaker. Deer comments that “you never know what people are going to tell you in a documentary. It’s exciting not to know the direction the film is ultimately going to go.”

As in the previous four documentaries, Deer make no suggestion that the perspective she is showing is held by the entire community. She even makes it clear that the Mohawk community is deeply divided over the issue of blood quantum, and many do not share the view she has shown. These qualities are also apparent in the non-documentary films in the festival. As discussed in Chapter 4, Craig’s *4 Wheel War Pony*, Harjo’s *Barking Water*, and Deer’s *Escape Hatch* each present indigenous peoples as actively navigating hybrid identities within bicultural environments without framing the characters as victims.
The Indigenous Filmmaking Community

*Connections are being built by indigenous producers who have been organizing a transnational indigenous network via film festivals.*

- Faye Ginsburg (1994:376)

Dowell (2006), in the only peer-reviewed journal article focused on an indigenous film festival, draws attention to the way that the 2005 NMAI film festival has played a key role in the creation of a community of indigenous filmmakers. Dowell argues that the festival provided “A crucial social role off-screen to provide a practice through which new forms of indigenous solidarity, identity, and community are created” (Dowell 2006:376). Beverly Singer (Tewa-Navajo), in *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*, has stated “we need to support each other and in turn feel ourselves supported. We draw energy at these meetings and return home ready to work on new productions” (2001:97).

Furthermore, Dowell notes that the NMAI film festival “enabled the participating indigenous filmmakers to see each other’s work, which can be difficult to access in the remote home communities of several filmmakers, as well as to discuss the commonalities and differences they each face in working in their respective First Nations communities and countries of production” (Dowell 2006:380).

These findings have been supported by my own regarding the 2009 DIFAF. Deer notes that indigenous film festivals

unite us. They bring all of us together to discuss what is going on in our various communities and the issues we are struggling with. It builds a community of filmmakers. While our business is competitive, we really support each other. We are all competing for the same money, and want the same slots on TV. We are all up against each other, but it doesn’t get in the way.
Despite the competition for a limited amount of funding, Craig maintains that “Our native film community takes great pride in the success of those who do well.” Filmmakers suggest that this stems from the support network created at these events. Harjo comments that “The network and community that has grown out of all of these festivals is what has really been great and inspiring. I have dear friends now who I know are going through the same stuff I am going through and making films elsewhere.” Deer further supports this, noting that these festivals “make me feel like ‘okay I’m going to be able to sit down with my colleagues for a little bit, hash it out, celebrate, and feel like I’m not just one lonely indigenous filmmaker out doing my thing. I’m a part of a larger community.’” She maintains that this support is especially important for indigenous filmmakers who often “receive the message of ‘This is boring. White people don’t want to hear it’” from studios and funders.

However, filmmakers have also noted that this strategic essentialism often causes many to stereotype their work (Spivak 1993). Harjo describes his own evolution in his feelings on being labeled an indigenous filmmaker:

It was really difficult at first. I didn’t want to be a native filmmaker. I wanted to be a filmmaker. I hated when people introduced me as that. But what happened is that I started traveling with people, with friends to these festivals and got to be friends with all of these indigenous filmmakers and made a really strong bond with a lot of them. All of a sudden we were in this group together, and all of a sudden we inspire each other. We live all over the world and it’s always so inspiring to know that they are out there making their films and struggling to get their films on screen just like I am. I became really proud of being part of that group. It’s kind of a love/hate thing. Parts of it annoy me but it’s great in that I’m associated with this group of filmmakers that are really exciting. I like that side of it.
Overall, my research supports Dowell (2006) and Singer’s (2001) argument for the importance of indigenous film festivals in creating and maintaining a sense of community and camaraderie among native filmmakers, despite their intragroup competition for limited resources. However, while the filmmakers in the DIFAF unanimously agreed that this is an important function of indigenous film festivals, due to the relatively small size of this festival, this effect is likely diminished. While NMAI, San Francisco, and ImagiNative bring in dozens of filmmakers, the DIFAF had the resources to bring in six. Furthermore, due to their different schedules through the week, it was rare that more than three filmmakers were at any single event.

However, in the next section, I show how the DIFAF filmmaker-audience interactions were particularly effective at engaging issues of identity, due to both the selection of films containing native issues, the small intimate venues, the willingness of filmmakers to share personal feelings, and an audience primed to engage these issues.

**Identity Discourse in the DIFAF**

Six filmmakers personally attended the 2009 DIFAF. These filmmakers engaged in many roles: introducing films, responding to questions from the audience, participating in public panels, leading class discussions, as well as making themselves available before and after screenings. Also, as in the NMAI festival, filmmakers took part in “evening events, conversations over coffee, and late-night celebrations” (Dowell 2006:380). The hybrid identities of the indigenous filmmakers uniquely positioned them to engage in a critical identity discourse. Furthermore, the relatively small sessions of the festival fostered intimate filmmaker-audience interactions.
Most often, filmmakers have no control over the way their films are interpreted. The ability to interact with audiences provides a rare opportunity for filmmakers to give supplementary context and background for films. For dense experimental films such as Craig’s *4 Wheel War Pony*, filmmaker explanation is particularly helpful, especially to audience members who know little about native skateboarding or Apache history. Not only did the Q&A clarify and inform the audience, but Craig notes that it also helped “me understand how audiences understand the film as well as refine my own ideas and help me to figure out what I think.” In other cases, the ability to discuss the film after screening provided an opportunity to learn details about filming, which enrich the meaning of the film. For example, Harjo explained how several scenes in *Barking Water*, including a family gathering, were essentially unscripted and the actors were family and friends being, more or less, themselves.\(^\text{36}\)

Film festivals, however, are not meant only to benefit filmmakers, but also to present uncommon perspectives to audiences. In the case of the DIFAF, the filmmaker-audience interactions are particularly important to the mission statement focused on “communicating messages” and “educating the public” (IIIRM). Therefore, the festival directors have attempted to attract a variety of native and non-native audiences from the Denver area. In the closing event of the festival, Jeanne Rubin proclaimed, “we want this to be a citywide center for native diversity (and therefore) we really are getting into different neighborhoods.” Indeed, the DIFAF was able to attract specific demographics by coordinating the screening of culturally specific films and venues. For the opening night, Rubin made a special effort to attract native peoples. She chose to hold the

\(^{36}\) For more on Harjo’s re-enactment methods see Chapter 4.
screening at the Nighthorse Campbell Native Health building on the Anschutz medical campus. Fry bread and mutton stew were provided by Tocabe, a local native-owned restaurant. The screened film, *Barking Water*, dealt with issues of indigenous health and even included a scene in which fry bread was prepared. This event *did* attract the highest percentage of self-identified indigenous audience members (37%), which was 46% of the total native attendance for all six days of the festival. Harjo noted that he was impressed by the high native turnout, linking it to particularly poignant questions. Another event took place at the Museo de las Americas and featured films from the Latino community. This event drew the highest percentage of self-identified Latinos (33%).

Rubin discusses the difference between native and non-native audiences: “There are people that come and the issues and stories are new to them. Then you have a lot of native people in the audience who relate on a very personal level.” However, while native audience members may very well have related more personally to the films, the survey results showed that the population of the festival audience as a whole was interested in indigenous issues as well as film and festivals. Audience members were asked to rate their interest in three categories on a Likert scale of 1-5: indigenous film, independent film festivals, and indigenous rights (Appendix D). After applying an analysis of variance to these data, I found that there was no difference between audience interests in these categories (alpha = .05, two-tailed test). Averaging above 4 out of 5 for each category, these survey results suggest that the audience was primed to engage the indigenous issues implicitly and explicitly addressed in these films.
This is further supported by the interactions between filmmaker and audience. In many instances, the films themselves served as a starting point for engaging in more general issues of indigenous identity and politics. For example, during the student screening of *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska*, Silverman and Professor Dr. Meronto used the film to discuss the extent to which indigenous peoples have gained equality. This initiated a long class debate over the difference between legal and actual equality, motivating several students to engage these issues.

Several filmmaker-audience interactions in the festival related to the pressures that indigenous filmmakers feel to either reinforce or react against stereotypes. During the question and answer session after *Barking Water*, Sterlin Harjo stated his position that indigenous films should not react against colonization and stereotypes. After receiving a request to go into detail regarding this point, he explained that reactive films “forget about the heart and joy” of indigenous peoples.\(^{37}\) Harjo expounded that when films are situated in terms of opposition, indigenous filmmakers are “still in the business of misrepresenting” themselves. Like Bhabha (1994), Harjo argues for indigenous films that break out of the colonizer-colonized binary frame. However, interest in indigenous rights was apparent during filmmaker-audience interactions, as most conversations generally spoke to what could be considered reactive issues regarding indigenous representation and cultural sovereignty.

During a panel session at the Center for Visual Arts, the festival directors, filmmakers, and audience members engaged in discussions over the pressures of indigenous artists to conform to either traditional or contemporary stereotypes. Initiated

\(^{37}\) For more on Harjo’s perspective see Chapter four.
by a question from the audience, this dialogue was essentially about the pressures from artistic institutions against the expression of hybrid identities. Visiting artist, Dr. Melanie Yazzie, stated that “Individuals tend to feel pressure to self identify as one or the other…but filmmaking is important because it has a potential to break out of this binary.” An indigenous art student in the audience concurred, noting that “it seems hard to find the middle ground. Either it has to be contemporary and edgy or traditional and stereotypical.”

As previously discussed, the engagement of indigenous films with hybrid identities allows filmmakers to address the challenges of contemporary communities. After the screening of Club Native, sponsored by the DIFAF, Tracey Deer provided an analysis of the issues of identity and blood quantum in significantly greater depth than in her film. While the film implicitly suggested that blood quantum requirements should be abolished, she was much more assertive about this during the question and answer session. She explained that she believed that blood quantum requirements must be changed if the community is to survive, discussing in detail the pre-contact Mohawk requirements for community membership.

Deer also provided details to audience questions on the political favoring of the tribal council that occurs in borderline blood quantum cases. She also went into detail about her personal involvement in the issue, which was largely left out of the film, commenting that her worst fear is that this film will put the “women involved in danger of expulsion or violence” (Q&A). Updating the audience on what has occurred since the film, she revealed that there are currently individuals she knows personally who are being
forcibly removed from the community. Through films and the newspaper, she hopes to help support these community members.

In each of these Q&A sessions, Rubin encouraged filmmakers to discuss their film, along with any personal connections or thoughts they wished to share. Rubin notes that these “personal statement’s at the beginning of the Q&A’s are very important for engaging issues of identity.” For example, during the final night of the festival at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS), Diane Benson (Tsinglit) (actress and writer in For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska), opened the Q&A by discussing her personal experiences with racism as well as the debilitating injury her son sustained in Iraqi combat. Following her comments, an insightful discussion was begun regarding the current state of indigenous politics and rights in Alaska. During this discussion, Benson, Silverman, Rubin, Tano, and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh (DMNS Curator of Anthropology and introductory speaker for the film) engaged with audience members on these issues. Rubin later commented that this personal introduction “gave the audience permission to ask difficult personal questions, quickly moving beyond superficial post-film Q&A.”

Similarly, after Harjo discussed his own experiences with losing family, audience members at the screening of Barking Water responded in kind, with one individual breaking into tears over the way it spoke to the experience of her own father’s death. Besides leading to an excellent discussion over the state of reactive filmmaking in the indigenous community, Harjo later called the woman’s comment “one of the biggest
complements I have ever received… and the kind of the compliment that keeps me making these films.”

The Q&A sessions at the 2009 DIFAF allowed filmmakers to engage discussions regarding the “impact of indigenous media on cultural identity” (Dowell 2006:380). The festival setting promoted further discourse on indigenous identities beyond their films. While the films themselves meet the requirements for Grande’s ‘red pedagogy,’ these discussions in real time between filmmakers and audiences brought these this discourse to life. Furthermore, as Dowell (2006) notes, the festival provides a locus of support for the indigenous filmmaking community, which is crucial in the imagining of cultural futures (Ginsburg 2004).

**The Emerging Indigenous Film Festival Circuit**

This chapter has provided a general overview of a few prominent indigenous film festivals in terms of their institutional affiliations, mission statements, and film selection policies. In this analysis, two general perspectives on film selection may be seen, in which festivals stake out positions on the relative importance of indigenous issues and authorship. The “issue-focused” festivals, represented by NMAI and the DIFAF, mandate a film’s connection to indigenous issues, while preferring indigenous-created content. “Authorship-focused” festivals, represented by ImagiNative, mandate native ethnic identity, while leaving all aspects of content open.

Although the distinctions in this typology are applicable, the overlap between them is also considerable. As shown in this chapter, “issue-focused” festivals such as the DIFAF remain flexible to the inclusion of films that are indirectly related to native issues.
For example, both NMAI and the DIFAF highlighted *Barking Water* in their programs even though this film contains only embedded references to indigenous issues. Also, the “authorship-focused” festival, ImagiNative, will technically accept films in which *only* one director, producer, or writer is indigenous. This typology represents a general preference regarding the relative emphasis of authorship and issues. Many films appear in both types of festivals, including *4 Wheel War Pony* and *Barking Water*, which were screened at the DIFAF, NMAI, as well as ImagiNative.

Ultimately, each festival is able to excel in different areas. As discussed, indigenous filmmakers have noted that they prefer “authorship-focused” festivals such as ImagiNative, since they are not pressured to address indigenous issues and stylistic, as well as technological innovation, are highlighted. That being said, all the work of native filmmakers, by definition is eligible in these festivals. However, other festivals also have important roles. As explored by Dowell (2006), the NMAI festival is able to serve as an important connecting point for supporting the community of indigenous filmmakers that has developed through the circuit of indigenous film festivals. Also, with the resources of the Smithsonian behind them, the festival is well known for locating and screening Central and South American native films from remote communities, such as *Under the Open Sky*. As a result, other festival directors, such as Rubin, are also able to locate these un-promoted films.

While lacking NMAI’s resources, the relatively small DIFAF has fostered intimate filmmaker-audience interactions that engage issues of identity. This assertion has been triangulated by the festival director, filmmakers, audience surveys, as well as
my own impressions. The evocation of individual life experiences by filmmakers in their opening comments “gave permission” (Rubin) to both audience and filmmaker to discuss issues of identity that are personal by definition (Shohat and Stam 2003). Furthermore, statistical analyses from the audience surveys support the hypothesis that audience members arrived at the festival already interested in these topics, and were primed to engage them.

Ultimately, festivals should be judged on their ability to execute the stated missions, as well as their transparency in this process. In this regard, each of the festivals provide a website that clearly states the festival’s mission, supporting institutions, as well as the basic requirements for submission. Echoing Ginsburg’s (1995) “parallax effect,” it is more productive to frame these festivals as mutually enriching to each other, providing a diversity of opportunities and audiences for native filmmakers. For example, within a few minutes, Harjo recalled how he had been inspired at ImagiNative, reconnected with the native filmmaking community at NMAI, and personally touched and engaged at the DIFAF. As a result of this diversity, an indigenous film festival circuit has emerged, whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The overall goal of this thesis has been to explore how indigenous filmmakers have expressed issues of identity at the 2009 DIFAF, both within their films and through audience interactions. In order to contextualize this work within an anthropological frame, I compared how these issues have been expressed through both ethnographic and indigenous films. Like the festival, I focused particularly on Native American films and issues. I critically framed indigenous identity using Sandy Grande’s (2004) ‘red pedagogy,’ which has summarized the work of many critical indigenous theorists in addressing the unique histories and complexities of indigenous conceptions of self. This thesis has also explored how these expressed issues in native films and festivals have been able to address some of the larger historical challenges for native communities that have stemmed from colonization.

Summary of Key Findings

In my findings, I established the Catch-22 of identity representation: a paradox in which it is argued that anthropologists cannot effectively investigate the identities of cultures they are not a part of, due to the fact that they lack a personal connection to these communities. This conception builds on the work of Tim Asch (1991), who has written extensively on the failure of ethnographic film in representing the native’s perspective. Drawing upon Ginsburg’s (2002) work on the hybrid identities of Aboriginal filmmakers, I showed that indigenous filmmakers have been able to express issues of identity as a
result of their connection to native communities. To support the assertion that identity expression is a function of the “I-us” filmmaker-subject relationship, I have described both the failure of various ethnographic film styles in expressing native identity, as well as the success of indigenous filmmakers in expressing identity across filmic genres.

Furthermore, I explored how indigenous filmmakers in the DIFAF addressed issues facing native communities, including blood quantum requirements, intergenerational shame, youth risk behavior, and the loss and degradation of indigenous lands. These specific contemporary issues were conditioned by the perspectives of the filmmakers and as such are key components in the negotiation and production of identity in their films. While other perspectives can also address these issues, native filmmakers hold the unique ability to speak to their interaction with identity.

After tracing the history of indigenous film festivals, I discussed the influence that sponsoring institutions have on film festival mission statements and film selection. Contrasting the DIFAF with the NMAI and ImagiNative festivals, I found that each of these festivals possess differing strengths in their programs. Through the preliminary work of Alia (2010), which was supported by my interviews and conversations with filmmakers, ImagiNative’s focus on avant-garde indigenous media has made this festival an internationally renown showcase for the most recent innovations in native filmmaking. As shown through the work of Ginsburg (1996) and Dowell (2006), the NMAI festival has been successful in fostering a supportive community of indigenous filmmakers, often leading to collaborative projects. As the DIFAF selection requirements were almost
identical to NMAI’s, this larger festival provided an excellent venue for Rubin to view recent native films, talk with filmmakers, and select films for the Denver festival.

Through interviews with the festival directors as well as participant-observation, I found that the DIFAF selection process was largely guided by the issue-focused goals of the IIIRM, along with the legal backgrounds of Rubin and Tano. Like Grande (2004), the festival directors emphasized the importance of the connection between visual representation and the welfare of indigenous peoples. Sharing Turner’s (1995) pragmatic view of representation, Rubin and Tano have remained flexible regarding the involvement of non-natives in film production, focusing more on the film itself than issues of filmmaker identity. However, like many contemporary ethnographic and native filmmakers, the festival directors have acknowledged that indigenous filmmakers are uniquely positioned to speak to issues of community and identity (Asch et al. 1991; Ruby 1995; Turner 1995).

Furthermore, the relatively small size of the DIFAF positioned it to serve as a location for intimate filmmaker-audience interactions that went beyond the films themselves, engaging hybrid identities and addressing contemporary native community issues. This critical engagement during Q&A sessions and panels can be attributed to the efforts of the filmmakers, festival directors, as well as an interested audience. This success was partly a result of the highly personal opening statements that filmmakers made before taking questions. Encouraging this personal engagement, Rubin facilitated the filmmaker-audience interactions by framing key questions and themes to begin the session. Furthermore, the high overall interest in native film, independent festivals, as
well as issues of indigenous rights provided an engaged and informed audience. This was supported through the statistical analyses of my survey data. The combined efforts of the filmmakers, festival directors, and audience members resulted in the engaged discussions of Deer on homogeneity and blood quantum; Craig on colonization and reservation youth welfare, and Harjo on the primacy of storytelling that avoids reacting to history.

Ultimately, indigenous films and festivals serve a variety of agendas and may convey a number of perspectives. Throughout this thesis, I have focused specifically on the way that identity is expressed, due to the important ramifications these issues have on native communities today. The lack of anthropological engagement in this area has further underscored the need to carry out this research.

The Identityscape: A Synthesis

Throughout this thesis, I drew upon the work of critical indigenous theorists, anthropologists in the field of indigenous media, and postcolonial scholars. As noted, both Ginsburg (1994) and Grande (2004) have called for the development of hybrid indigenous identity discourses that transcend binary discussions of traditional-modern and victim-agent. However, while Ginsburg frames this in terms of engaging indigenous media, Grande’s ‘red pedagogy’ frames this discussion in relation to contemporary challenges that indigenous communities face. Appadurai’s (1990) work with “scapes” provides a framework with which to synthesize these concepts.

In his article, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” Arjun Appadurai develops a model of five “scapes”: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes (1990:6). He describes the suffix “scape” as
allowing one to address “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” which are “navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations… (that) are the building blocks of… imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai 1990:7). Appadurai noted that this suffix could be strategically applied to other areas, allowing one to “evoke certain technologies or institutions without confining them to a single location” (2006:14). Accordingly, I use the term “indigenous identityscape” to refer to the complex landscape of hybrid native identities, negotiated both within and among individuals as well as communities.

This concept draws heavily from Grande’s (2004) conception of a ‘red pedagogy’ that locates hybrid native identities at “the crossroads of unity and difference… expressing both the interdependence and distinctiveness of tribal peoples” (118). ‘Red pedagogy’ acknowledges what I have discussed as the tension between Spivak’s (1993) strategic essentialism and Abu-Lughod’s (2006) concerns about the essentialization of culture. Framing identity as multifaceted and hybridized, Grande also accounts for Bhabha (1994) and McClintock’s (1995) critiques of binary discourse as reinforcing dominant power relationships. She also poignantly notes that native essentialization places certain limitations on “liberally transgressing” identities the way that postmodernists suppose. Rather, the identityscape emphasizes Grande’s pragmatic connections between native identity ambivalence and the current challenges that indigenous communities face. This concept also accounts for Grande’s discussion of the
unique priorities of native communities in gaining independence from state and global systems of power. While all ethnicities could be discussed in terms of an identityscape, ‘red pedagogy’ highlights these unique aspects of indigenous identity.

Ginsburg (1994) has utilized Appadurai’s mediascape in order to argue for an indigenous film aesthetics based not on form or style, but rather on a shared “desire to envision and strengthen a ‘cultural future’… in their own communities and in the dominant society” (365). However, rather than focusing on cultural “mediations,” the indigenous identityscape is anchored specifically in issues of identity. This term connects Ginsburg’s work on identity and media with Grande’s work on identity and community issues. Put more simply, this term speaks to the interconnection between the expression of identity through film and contemporary challenges in native communities. The identityscape conceptualizes a continuous landscape of hybrid indigenous identities that is constantly shifting both within and between individuals and communities.

Within this framework, the expressions of indigenous filmmakers play an active role in the flow of the imagined worlds of identity, subverting what Appadurai calls the “imagined worlds of the ‘official mind,’” which is saturated with images of indigenous peoples as caricatures (Appadurai 1990:7). Bringing together filmmakers and engaged audiences, indigenous film festivals serve as loci within not only the indigenous mediascape, as noted by Ginsburg (1994), but also the indigenous identityscape. At these festivals, the landscape of native identities is engaged and navigated through films as well as filmmaker-audience interactions.
Research Limitations

In many ways, the DIFAF served as an excellent research site in which to gather data on indigenous film and film festivals. To frame the advantages and limitations of this fieldsite, I will contrast it with the NMAI festival I attended in spring of 2009. Due to the small size of the DIFAF, I was able to gain in-depth access into the process of film selection that may not be possible in a larger festival. In addition, while NMAI and other large festivals show several simultaneous screenings over a few days, the DIFAF had no overlapping events over several days. This allowed me to be present for virtually every moment of the festival.

My research limitations were largely due to issues of sampling. My sample of four indigenous filmmakers is relatively small for conducting social science research. Therefore, I have supplemented and triangulated my data through similar work done by Dowell (2006) and others. However, while there were far fewer filmmakers at the DIFAF than NMAI, the relaxed pace provided ample time to conduct in-depth interviews with each individual. Sampling was also a limitation in my survey data. Due to the busy social setting in which audience surveys were distributed, I did not receive the 90 percent return rate required for true sampling confidence. Therefore, my survey results may be skewed toward respondents with particularly positive attitudes regarding the festival.

Disciplinary Implications and Future Research

Indigenous film festivals provide ideal settings to promote marginalized discourses through further anthropological research on indigenous filmmakers and their works (Shohat and Stam 2003). They serve as rare locations in which to view many
indigenous films, as well as to conduct interviews with filmmakers who are often geographically separated from one another. Also, as Dowell (2006) and I have discussed, the festivals themselves serve as cultural settings, fostering a supportive community of indigenous filmmakers, while also providing a location for critical engagement between filmmakers and audiences. While this thesis has begun to create a comparative framework in which to understand these festivals, more case studies are needed to develop a scholarly literature.

While Dowell focused on filmmaker communities and I have focused on identity, there are numerous avenues for research within these festivals. As both of our projects were guided by the strengths and foci of the respective festivals, further research may be inclined toward other topics. For example, the ImagiNative festival is noted by Alia (2010) as addressing recent innovative trends of indigenous media. Alia’s preliminary work on this festival sets the stage for future research engaging this topic and location.

The findings of this thesis support the contention that indigenous films should be critically considered within anthropological discussions of indigenous identity. Embodied in the conception of the indigenous identityscape, the connections between native films, identities, and community issues are rich and vital areas for future research. This work also has implications for applied anthropologists in the field, who are committed to understanding the issues of native communities. Indigenous films can provide key insights into the issues of identity involved in the work of these scholars. This critical engagement with identity is crucial in advocating for effective policies that are sensitive to complex cultural contexts. As someone who is personally interested in applied cultural
anthropology, the connection to these pragmatic issues has been of particular significance to me.

**Resituating Ethnographic and Indigenous Film**

*The anthropologist comes out to Native American reservations to make observations. During the winter these observations will become books by which future anthropologists will be trained, so that they can come out to the reservation years from now and verify the observations they have studied.*


Drawing on the work of Turner (1995) I argue for a pragmatic model of ethnographic filmmaking anchored by indigenous, rather than anthropological priorities. However, the Catch-22 of identity representation prevents these anthropologists from critically engaging issues of identity. As I have shown throughout this thesis, I argue that due to their dual positions as insider-outsiders, indigenous filmmakers *have* been able to critically engage these issues (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000:164). Therefore, their films should not be treated as data, but rather as critical works on identity. Finally, I use Ginsburg’s (1995) “parallax effect” to frame ethnographic and indigenous films not in competition for representational authority, but rather as complementary critical perspectives on aspects of native cultures.

Reflecting the sentiments of Deloria Jr. (above), Nichols has argued that at their worst, ethnographic films have been “about a desire to know other people and other cultures… and making other people elements in the ethnographer’s arguments” (Loizos 1993:206). The ethnographic filmmaker Jay Ruby has even argued that, due to the heavy moral burden of authorship, the time for anthropological representations of indigenous
peoples has passed (1995:78). While it is tempting for many to vilify ethnographic films, this should be resisted. However, while there is still a role for ethnographic film, the time has passed for ethnographic films based solely on the traditional methods and personal interests of anthropologists. As discussed in Chapter 2, a new generation of ethnographic filmmakers has engaged these representational challenges, often with great success (Lutkehaus and Cool 1999). Many of these anthropologists have been able to integrate native priorities throughout the film process.

For example, Terence Turner has provided a non-theoretical, pragmatic model in which to address these representational issues. Having worked with the Kayapo on ethnographic film projects since the 1980s, Turner’s collaborative projects have developed around Kayapo defined priorities of land and resource sovereignty (Turner 1995:105). This process was based on an expressed indigenous agenda. Both co-creating films with the Kayapo, as well as facilitating their independent filmmaking process, Turner has argued that issues of authenticity and truth are less important than the actual effects films have on communities (102). Through his work, Turner has helped the Kayapo effectively further their fight for material and cultural sovereignty from the Brazilian government.

While not every ethnographic film is situated to result in such direct tangible results for the community involved, anthropologists can still engage in filmmaking projects that incorporate true native involvement and control. Noting that collaboration has been used to refer to any level of subject involvement, Elder (1995) proposes a model of filmmaking that creates space for an “open dialogue… where subjects and image
makers can mediate their own representation” (94). Furthermore, this attempt at balancing indigenous and anthropological voices has been described as the “third voice” by Myerhoff (1978). These scholars envision a true collaboration that incorporates native involvement in multiple aspects of the filmmaking process. Using innovative methods, many contemporary ethnographic filmmakers have strived to achieve this ideal, sharing true control over the film design and content.

The history of anthropology has been formed by outsiders attempting to understand unfamiliar cultures. Accordingly, Malinowski and others developed participatory ethnographic methods to conduct scholarly work as outsiders. While many continue to debate the ethical and representational issues of anthropological work, what is clear is that the distinctions between outsider and insider are becoming increasingly blurred due to the global interconnection of media and communication. No longer do anthropologists find “lost tribes” deep in the jungle. Rather we live in a world where anthropologists themselves are likely to be indigenous.

Furthermore, the priorities of anthropologists have changed as well. As a result of the crisis of representation, it is no longer acceptable within the field to research other cultures simply out of curiosity, especially at the cost of their well being. More and more, anthropologists are concerned with the priorities of indigenous peoples and the implications of their research on native communities. Innovative ethnographic filmmakers, going back to Rouch, and continuing today through the work of Turner and others, have strived to break out of the strict insider-outsider framework and instead anchor their work in native priorities. However, while these innovations have addressed
many of the ethical concerns of representation, due to the Catch-22 of identity representation, their continued position as outsiders has prevented anthropologists from engaging issues of identity that inform the contemporary challenges of native communities.

The work of indigenous filmmakers both highlights and addresses these limitations within anthropology. While ethnographic filmmakers have struggled with issues of hybrid identity, indigenous films have critically engaged them. Fitting into neither the traditional anthropological roles of ethnographer nor “native” subject, these indigenous filmmakers and their works further challenge anthropological distinctions of emic and etic. In their films, the binary conceptions of insider-outsider and traditional-modern are replaced with “‘third path(s)’ along which possibilities can be imagined other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism” (Ginsburg 1995:72). Instead of framing indigenous peoples as fighting to remain unchanged by the influences of the modern world, native filmmakers celebrate the ability of their cultures to adapt to new circumstances while retaining their cultural identities. The skateboarders in Craig’s 4 Wheel War Pony are not simply Apaches who skateboard, rather they have integrated skateboarding into their cultural traditions. Wookey, in Mémère Métisse, does not struggle with being partly native, but instead takes pride in the possibilities of this hybrid identity space and effectively shares this perspective with her grandmother. In Harjo’s Barking Water, characters switch between modern and traditional contexts so seamlessly that these distinctions disappear altogether.
As discussed, indigenous film festivals hold an important role in not only promoting and disseminating native films, but also serve as active locations of identity engagement. For anthropologists interested in the important relationship between indigenous identities, representation, and native community issues, these festivals provide rare opportunities to engage the larger indigenous identityscape. Filmmakers, interacting with engaged audiences, use their works as starting points to critically discuss the challenges their communities face and the related underlying issues of identity.

Ultimately, ethnographic and indigenous films are able to critically engage in different aspects of culture. As Ginsburg (1995) has argued through her conception of the *parallax effect*, these genres can provide complementary and mutually enriching representations of indigenous peoples. The cross-cultural training and distanced analyses of ethnographers position their films to investigate cultural practices whose purpose and meaning are often unclear to the practitioners. Appropriately, there is an active discourse regarding the ethical issues of this work. However, despite the ability of indigenous films to deeply engage in issues of hybrid identity, and subsequently, to address many of the contemporary issues indigenous peoples face, there has been relatively little anthropological work regarding these films as critical works nor the festivals that highlight them. Within a pragmatic model of representation, these films hold a vital position for informing as well as furthering anthropological discourse on the indigenous identityscape. In order for the discipline to remain relevant to native communities, it is imperative that anthropologists move beyond any limiting disciplinary conventions that serve to prevent an active and critical engagement with indigenous film.
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Cooper, Merian C., and Ernest B. Schoedsack  

Costner, Kevin  
1990 Dances With Wolves. 181 min. Tig Productions.

Craig, Dustinn  
2008 4 Wheel War Pony. 10 min. BetterOnes Productions.

Craig, Dustinn, and Sarah Colt  
2008 Geronimo, part of the American Experience: We Shall Remain Series. 84 min. PBS.

Deer, Tracey  
2008 Club Native. 78 min. National Film Board of Canada.

Deer, Tracey  
2009 Escape Hatch. 18 min.

Dunn, Willie  
1968 The Ballad Of Crowfoot. 10 min. National Film Board of Canada.

Eyre, Chris  
Flaherty, Robert
1922 Nanook of the North. 55 min. MOMA.

Gardner, Robert, Hilary Harris, and George Breidenbach
1971 The Nuer. 73 min. Documentary Educational Resources. Watertown, MA.

Gabriel, Mike, and Eric Goldberg
1995 Pocahontas. 81 min. Walt Disney Feature Animation.

Graham, Laura, David Hernandez Palmer, and Caimi Waiasse
2008 Owners of the Water: Conflict and Collaboration over Rivers. 30 min. Documentary Educational Resources. Watertown, MA.

Harjo, Sterlin
2008 Barking Water. 85 min. Lorber Films.

Kildea, G., and J. Leach

Kunuk, Z.
2001 Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner. 172 min. Igloolik Isuma Productions and the National Film Board of Canada.

MacDougall, David
1975 Goodbye, Old Man. 70 min. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Studies.

MacLean, Andrew Okpeaha

Mann, Michael
1992 Last of the Mohicans. 112 min. Morgan Creek Productions.

Manybeads, Camille
2009 In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman. 27 min. Haine’s Productions.

Marshall, John
1956 The Hunters. 73 min. Film Study Center of the Peabody Museum. Harvard University. Cambridge, MA.

Marshall, John
Masayesva Jr., Victor  
1992 Imagining Indians.

Matias, Jose Luis and Carlos Peres Rojas  
2007 A Cielo Abierto (Under the Open Sky). 38 min.

Mead, Margaret, and Gregory Bateson  
1952 Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea. 17 min. NYU.

Mihn-ha, Trihn  
1983 Reassemblage. 40 min.

Myerhoff, Barbara, and Lynne Littman  
1983 Number Our Days. 29 min. Direct Cinema.

Myerhoff, Barbara, and Lynne Littman  
1986 In Her Own Time.

Obomsawin, Alanis  
1993 Kanhsata:ke: 270 Years of Resistance. 119 min. National Film Board of Canada.

O’Rourke, Dennis  
1988 Cannibal Tours. 70 min. Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.

Philp, Katrine  
2010 Book of Miri. 28 min.

Pilkington, D.  
2002 Rabbit-Proof Fence. 94 min. Miramax.

Puhipau and Joan Lander  
2008 Na `Ono O Ka `Aina/ Delicacies Of The Land. 9 min.

Ransen, Mort  
1969 You Are On Indian Land. 37 min. National Film Board of Canada.

Redroad, Randy  

Rouch, Jean and Damoure Zika  
Rouch, Jean
1953 Les Maîtres Fous. 30 min. Documentary Educational Resources. Cambridge, MA.

Rouch, Jean
1964 The Lion Hunters. 68 min. Documentary Educational Resources. Cambridge, MA.

Schmidt, Karl
2002 The Makah Nation: A Whaling People. 19 min.

Sherbert, Cedar
2007 Soy Pedro, Somos Mixtec/ I am Pedro, We are Mixtec. 20 min.

Silverman, Jeffry Lloyd
2009 For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska. 56 min. Blueberry Productions, Inc.

Tarbell, Reaghan
2008 Little Caughnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back. 57 min. Mushkeg Media.

Trantor, David and Jampin Blackhat
Karlu Karlu: Devil’s Marbles.

Uys, Jamie
1980 The Gods must be Crazy. 109 Min.

Wacks, Jonothan

Weise, Richard
1984 Harold of Orange. 30 min. Film in the Cities.

Wookey, Janelle

Worth, Sol, and John Adair
1966 Navajos Film Themselves Series. NYU.
APPENDICIES

Appendix A: DIFAF Program

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INDIGENOUS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
444 South Emerson Street
Denver, Colorado 80209-2216
303-744-9686
film@iiirm.org, www.iiirm.org

Aloha and mahalo nui for your support of the Sixth Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival. This year our theme is “Telling Our Stories.”

We like stories, storytelling, and storytellers for several reasons. In our work we’ve advocated storytelling as an important “cultural control” that native peoples have traditionally used to inform, warn, and govern. We’ve also studied storytelling as a way of transmitting traditional knowledge. But the International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management is a law and policy research institute so we ask forbearance for the sometimes highly academic, coolly dispassionate approach we’ve taken to stories, storytelling, and storytellers.

We hope you’ll see the stories that are being told during the Sixth Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival as evidence of another side of the Institute—a more passionate, a more personal side. Like Jeffry Silverman and Diane Benson, the creative force behind For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska and Camille Manybeads Tso, the young writer/director of In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman we know that the stories of our heroes are too often untold and will be told only if we do the telling. We love stories like these because they let us know that a young Alaskan Native woman fighting against discrimination or a great-grandmother who survived the Long Walk are just as heroic as warriors and just as worthy of emulation.

And as I watched Barking Water and 4 Wheel War Pony I could not help but think of Fernand Braudel, who advised, “Do not believe only the actors which make the most noise are the most authentic—there are other, quieter ones too.” Their stories also need to be told. We are pleased that you’ve joined us to hear their stories.

Mervyn L. Tano
President
Jeanne M. Rubin
Film Festival Director

EXPAND YOUR HORIZON
Kaiser Permanente Proudly Supports the 6th Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival.

Kaiser Permanente
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

6:00 p.m. - Barking Water
9:00 p.m.  6:00 Reception hosted by Tocabe  6:45 Welcome
           7:00 Film and Q&A with Director Sterlin Harjo
           Cosponsor: Centers for American Indian and
           Alaska Native Health, University of Colorado Denver
           Nighthorse Campbell Native Health Bldg., Shore Auditorium
           13055 East 17th Avenue, Aurora 80045 (Seating Capacity: 100)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

6:00 p.m. - Celebrating the Indigenous Roots of the Latino Community
8:00 p.m.
   • Recuento: Homecoming
   • A Cielo Abierto/Under the Open Sky
   • Soy Pedro, Somos Mixteco/I am Pedro, We are Mixtec
     Cosponsor: Museo de las Americas
     Museo de las Americas, 861 Santa Fe Drive, Denver 80204

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

Noon - Youth, Film & Culture Education Program
2:30 p.m. Special screening for Metro State and DU Students (see page 13)
           Cosponsor: Indigenous Alliance @ Metro and Native American Studies,
           Political Science Department, Metro State College
           Starz FilmCenter, 900 Auraria Parkway, Denver 80204

6:00 p.m. - Currents: Native American Forces in Contemporary Art
9:00 p.m.  6:00 - 9:00 Reception & Art Exhibit
           6:30 - 7:00 Panel: Art as Political Statement
           Zia Meranto, Ph.D, Professor of Political Science and Director Native
           American Studies, Metro State College; Mervyn Tano, President,
           International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management;
           Melanie Yazzie, Associate Professor of Art, University of Colorado
           and one of the featured artists in the Currents exhibit
           Cosponsors: Center for Visual Art, Metropolitan State College of
           Denver and Rocky Mountain Indian Chamber of Commerce
           Center for Visual Art, 1734 Wazee Street, Denver 80205

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

2:30 p.m. - Youth, Film & Culture Education Program
3:25 p.m. Special screening for Highline Academy students (see page 13)
           Highline Academy, 7808 Cherry Creek Drive South Unit #304
           Denver 80231
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS (CONTINUED)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16 (continued)

7:00 p.m. - Shorts & Documentaries - from the U.S. & Canada
9:00 p.m.  
  • Little Caughnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back
  • In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman, Q&A with Director Camille Manybeads Tso
  • Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run/Walk, Q&A with Directors Derek Brown & Mattea Wellnitz
  • 4 Wheel War Pony, Q&A with Director Dustinn Craig
  Starz FilmCenter 900 Auraria Parkway, Denver 80204

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17

5:00 p.m. - Barking Water
6:45 p.m.  
  Shorts & Documentaries - from Around the World
  • Karlu Karlu: Devil’s Marbles
  • Sikumi (On the Ice) • The Boundary of Moab
  • Na ‘Ono o ka Aina/Delicacies of the Land
  Sponsor: Pilani Hawaiian Civic Club
  • Mémère Métisse/My Métis Grandmother
  • 4 Wheel War Pony, Q&A with Director Dustinn Craig
  Starz FilmCenter, 900 Auraria Parkway, Denver 80204

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18

6:00 p.m. - For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska
8:30 p.m.  
  6:00 Film and Q&A with Producer/Writer/Director Jeffry Lloyd Silverman and Writer/Actor Diane E. Benson
  8:00 Dessert & Coffee Reception
  Cosponsors: Denver Museum of Nature & Science Department of Anthropology, Adult Programs, and Native American Resource Group Denver Museum of Nature & Science, Ricketson Theater, 2100 Colorado Blvd., Denver 80205

TICKET INFORMATION

Starz FilmCenter
General Admission: $9.50
Student & Seniors: $7.00 DFS Members: $6.00

Center for Visual Art
General Admission: $10 Students: $5
Free for CVA and RMICC members & with Metro State ID

Museo de las Americas
General Admission: $5 Members & Students: $3

Nighthorse Campbell Native Health Building Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Free (Suggested Donation: $10, Students $5)

FESTIVAL PASS FOR ALL EVENTS: $35
Appendix B: Festival Director Interview Questions

The theme of this year’s festival is called “Telling our Stories” Why do you think it is important for indigenous people to tell their own stories.

- Why did this become the theme for this year’s festival?

Why did you start the festival?

- First year just “The Fast Runner” sponsored by Coors
- Why this first film? Why did it expand?
- Why doing festival as a law/policy institute?

Labels:

- Who is an indigenous filmmaker and what is an indigenous film?
- Importance of specific or flexible definitions?
- What are the challenges/benefits of these labels?

How would you describe the selection process?

- NMAI, unofficial entries, etc., labels of indigenous, trying to get diverse perspectives, encouraging the young filmmakers.

How are indigenous film festivals important?

- Fighting stereotypes? Decolonizing history?
- Do they foster a sense of community/networking between filmmakers and/or audience members?
- Or anything else (helping young filmmakers, etc)

What are you looking for in the audience response?

- Do you have a specific audience in mind for the film? (indigenous?)
  - Different audiences at different venues?
- What do you want the audience to take away from the films/festival?

How has the festival changed over the years?

- Due to learning what works?
- Due to increased funding?

How do you feel the festival went this year?

- What were the biggest successes and what did you learn from and will change aspects of next year’s festival?
Appendix C: Filmmaker Interview Questions

The theme of this year’s festival is called “Telling our Stories” Why do you think it is important for indigenous people to tell their own stories.

- What is your personal view in telling your story?

Do you identify yourself as an indigenous filmmaker?

- What are the challenges/benefits of this label?
- How does this relate to your filmmaking process?

What does indigenous film mean to you?

- Importance of specific or flexible definitions?

How are indigenous film festivals important?

- Do they foster a sense of community/networking between filmmakers and/or audience members?

What are you looking for in the audience response?

- Do you have a specific audience in mind for the film? (indigenous?)
- What do you want the audience to take away from the film?

How does this film festival compare to others?

- Indigenous and non indigenous festivals
- Do you present your film differently at a non-indigenous film festival?

May I contact you if I have any follow up questions?
Appendix D: Audience Survey

Please rate your interest in the following:
*(1 being not interested and 5 being extremely interested)*

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Why is it important for indigenous peoples to tell their own stories through film?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Have any of the films (or the festival itself) changed your perceptions in any way?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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What did you get out of the Q and A discussion after the film?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________

How does label of indigenous affect the way that you think about the film(s)?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix E: Festival Director Informed Consent Form

I agree to take part in an interview for this research project. I understand that any comments I make may be included in a masters thesis through the University of Denver. I understand that this research is being done as part of a study of the Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival. I understand that as a public figure, my real name will be used in the publication. I understand that I will receive no monetary compensation for this interview. Also, I understand that I may stop the interview at any time for any reason. You must be 18 to participate.

Print and sign your name if you agree to the above statements.

Print

________________________________
Signature

________________________________
Date
Appendix F: Filmmaker Informed Consent Form

I agree to take part in an interview for this research project. I understand that any comments I make may be included in a masters thesis through the University of Denver. I understand that this research is being done as part of a study of the Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival. I understand that as a public figure, my real name will be used in the publication. I understand that I will receive no monetary compensation for this interview. Also, I understand that I may stop the interview at any time for any reason. You must be 18 to participate.

Print and sign your name if you agree to the above statements.

Print ______________________________________

Signature __________________________________

Date _____________________________________
Appendix G: DIFAF Submission Form

International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management
6th Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival

CALL FOR ENTRIES

IFAF 2009 SUBMISSION RULES AND GUIDELINES

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL
The International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management seeks submissions for the 6th Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival to be held in Denver, Colorado, October 13-18, 2009. The Festival showcases films by and about indigenous peoples from around the world. Our theme for 2008 is “Telling Our Stories.”

SUBMISSION DEADLINE & ENTRY FEE
All submissions must be received by August 8, 2009. The regular entry fee is $20 per submission. The entry fee for full-time students is $10 per submission. Fees must be submitted in U.S. currency. Please make checks payable to IIIRM. Visa, MC accepted.

INDIGENOUS ARTISTS PREFERENCE
IFAF prefers to exhibit works by indigenous artists.

GENERAL GUIDELINES
Multiple entries will be accepted, but each entry must be submitted with its own Entry Form, Entry Fee, Agreement, and screening DVDs. Entries missing any of the elements below may not be considered for selection. We will not accept compilation DVDs.

CHECKLIST FOR SUBMISSION
• Completed Entry Form.
• Two projection quality DVDs for each work submitted.
• Filmmakers’ bio (please include contact information, filmography, and tribal or indigenous community affiliation).
• Press materials, if available.
• Completed Agreement Form.
• Entry fee.

SELECTION
The selection team of the Festival will select and invite all productions and media-makers at their discretion. Those selected will be notified via e-mail on or about September 10, 2008. We recommend that you confirm receipt of your entry via email to jeannerubin@iiirm.org.

SHIPPING
All submissions must be sent prepaid including any applicable customs fees to:

International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management
Attention: Film Festival Director
444 South Emerson Street
Denver, CO 80205-2216
U.S.A.
Telephone: 303-744-9686

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS
Screening copies must be a DVD in NTSC format. Screening DVDs must be labeled with title, running time, year created and contact information (name, phone number, email). DVDs will not be returned. All non-English language works must have English subtitles. If your work is selected, you will have the option of submitting a BetaSP version for exhibition at the Festival.
International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management
6th Annual Indigenous Film & Arts Festival

CALL FOR ENTRIES
SUBMISSION FORM 2009 – PART I

Title: ____________________________________________________________
(please provide title in the original language and the English translation)

Exact Running Time: ______________________ Year Copyright: __________

Name of Entrant: ______________________ Year Released: __________

□ Filmmaker □ Distributor □ Other ______________________

Format of Screening (Exhibition) copy, if selected: □ DVD □ Beta SP

PRODUCTION CREDITS: (Please include tribal affiliations for indigenous participants.)

DIRECTOR INFORMATION:

name (first, last)
organization
street address
city, state, zip code
country
phone
fax
e-mail
www

DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION:

name (first, last)
organization
street address
city, state, zip code
country
phone
fax
e-mail
www

PRODUCER INFORMATION:

name (first, last)
organization
street address
city, state, zip code
country
phone
fax
e-mail
www

Filming Location: ______________________ Country of Origin: ______________________

Filmmaker is a full time student ___ Yes ___ No at ______________________ (school).
CALL FOR ENTRIES
SUBMISSION FORM 2009 – PART II

SYNOPSIS: Brief synopsis (100 words or less), including how the film relates to the 2009 Festival theme:
“Telling Our Stories”. Optional: You may attach a longer synopsis (up to 250 words) on a separate page.*

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Which indigenous people(s) is this film about? Describe the extent of Native participation (be specific).*

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If this work was produced with or for an indigenous organization, please describe and provide organization’s contact info.*

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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*Narrative information (above) may be attached on separate pages.

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PREMIERE STATUS: If selected, this work will be a premiere for (check all that apply):

World _____  North America _____  USA _____  Colorado _____  Denver _____
Appendix H: NMAI Submission Form

15th NATIVE AMERICAN FILM + VIDEO FESTIVAL

CALL FOR ENTRIES

SUBMISSION RULES AND GUIDELINES 2010 - 2011

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL


WORKS WILL BE CHOSEN BY A SELECTION TEAM MADE UP OF NATIVE AMERICAN MEDIA MAKERS AND CULTURAL ACTIVISTS AND THE PROGRAM STAFF OF THE FILM AND VIDEO CENTER.

SUBMISSION DATES

ALL DEADLINES ARE POSTMARK DATES

SUBMISSIONS OPEN: MONDAY, JANUARY 4TH, 2010

SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE: THURSDAY, JUNE 3RD, 2010

ELIGIBILITY

WORKS MUST HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AFTER JULY 2008

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

EACH ENTRY MUST INCLUDE ALL THE REQUIRED ITEMS LISTED BELOW. ENTRIES MISSING ANY OF THE ELEMENTS BELOW MAY NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR SELECTION. FOR ENTRIES THAT ARE WORKS-IN-PROGRESS, PLEASE PROVIDE A LETTER STATING WHEN THE EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE WILL BE AND WHEN PRESS MATERIALS WILL BE SENT.

NOTE: WE DO NOT RETURN SUBMISSION PREVIEW COPIES. NO ENTRY FEE IS REQUIRED.

- COMPLETED SUBMISSION FORM
- TWO DVD COPIES MUST BE SUBMITTED FOR EACH FILM OR VIDEO WORK. ENTRY COPIES WILL NOT BE RETURNED.
- OFFICIAL SCREENING COPIES (BETA SP, DVD OR QUALITY DIGITAL VIDEO) MUST BE SUBMITTED WITHIN FOUR WEEKS OF ACCEPTANCE NOTICE.
- PRESS MATERIALS, INCLUDING PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILMMAKERS' INFORMATION. FILMMAKERS' INFORMATION INCLUDES CONTACT INFORMATION, BIOGRAPHY, FILMOGRAPHY, MEMBERSHIPS(S) IN MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND TRIBAL OR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY AFFILIATION.
- COMPLETED AGREEMENT FORM

MULTIPLE SUBMISSIONS

WHEN SUBMITTING MORE THAN ONE WORK, EACH TITLE MUST HAVE ITS OWN SUBMISSION FORM, AGREEMENT FORM, TAPES, OR DVDS. DO NOT SEND A COMPILATION VIDEO OR DVD.

SELECTION

THE SELECTION TEAM OF THE FESTIVAL WILL SELECT AND INVITE ALL PRODUCTIONS AND MEDIA-MAKERS AT THEIR DISCRETION. THOSE SELECTED WILL BE NOTIFIED VIA E-MAIL, REGULAR MAIL, AND/OR PHONE ON OR ABOUT OCTOBER 29, 2010. PLEASE DO NOT CALL FOR THE STATUS OF YOUR ENTRY. ENTRIES NOT SELECTED WILL BE NOTIFIED VIA REGULAR MAIL ON OR ABOUT NOVEMBER 8, 2010. IF YOU HAVE AN INQUIRY OUTSIDE OF YOUR ENTRY STATUS, PLEASE SEND YOUR QUESTIONS BY E-MAIL TO NAFVF@SI.EDU OR BY FAX TO 212-514-3725.

SHIPPING

ALL SUBMISSIONS MUST BE SENT PREPAID INCLUDING ANY APPLICABLE CUSTOMS FEES TO:

15TH NATIVE AMERICAN FILM + VIDEO FESTIVAL
SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
ONE BOWLING GREEN
NEW YORK, NY 10004

Tel: 212-514-3737 • Fax: 212-514-3725 • Email: nafvf@si.edu
www.nativevoicesnetworks.si.edu
### Section 1: Basic Information

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Section 4: Production Credits  (As they appear on screen, please be sure to include tribal affiliations for Native participants.)

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:  
PRODUCER:  
DIRECTOR:  
CAMERA:  
WRITER:  
SOUND:  
MUSIC:  
RESEARCH:  
EDITOR:  
PRINCIPAL ACTORS(S):  
FILMING LOCATION:  
PRODUCING ORGANIZATION:  

Section 5: Content Information

Please write or attach a brief (less than 50 words) Synopsis:

WORK SUBJECT MATTER (Choose up to three major subjects):

- ACTIVISM/RESISTANCE
- AFRICAN AMERICANS/BLACK INDIANS
- AGRICULTURE/HERDING
- ART/ARTISTS/WRITERS
- BEFORE CONTACT/FIRST CONTACT
- CHILDREN/PARENTS/FAMILIES
- COMMUNITY LIFE
- CRAFTS/TECHNIQUES
- CULTURAL PRESERVATION
- EDUCATION/BOARDING SCHOOL
- ENVIRONMENT/SACRED LAND
- FOOD/COOKING
- GAMES/SPORTS
- GENDER/SEXUALITY
- HEALTH/HEALING
- HISTORY
- HUMAN RIGHTS/VIOLENCE
- HUMOR/IRONY
- HUNTING/FISHING/GATHERING
- IDENTITY
- JUSTICE SYSTEM(S)/LAW
- LANGUAGE
- LEADERS/ELDERS
- LOVE/RELATIONSHIPS
- MEDIA/MAKING: VIDEO/RADIO
- MIGRATION/BORDERS
- MILITARY/VETERANS
- MISSIONARIES
- MUSIC VIDEO
- MUSC/DANCE/DANCE PERFORMANCE
- NATIVE BUSINESSES/CASINOS
- NATIVE MEDIAMAKER
- NATIVE PLANTS
- NATURAL HISTORY
- PORTRAITS/PROFILES
- POWWOWS/CELEBRATION/FESTIVALS
- REPATRIATION/MUSEUMS
- RESERVATION LIFE
- RITUALS/CEREMONIES/SACRED WAYS
- SOVEREIGNTY/TREATIES/Self-Governance
- STEREOTYPES/DISCRIMINATION
- STORIES/LEGENDS/TALES
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE/RECOVERY
- TRADITIONAL VALUES/WAYS
- TV SERIES/MADE FOR TV
- URBAN LIFE
- WORK/LABOR
- YOUTH ISSUES
- YOUTH MEDIAMAKER

15th Native American Film + Video Festival
Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
One Bowling Green, New York, NY 10004
Tel: 212-514-3737 • Fax: 212-514-3725 • Email: nafvf@si.edu
www.nativemedia.org

page 3 of 5

243
Section 6: Indigenous Involvement
WHICH TRIBE(S) IS THIS WORK ABOUT? DESCRIBE THE EXTENT OF NATIVE PARTICIPATION (BE SPECIFIC).

WAS THIS WORK PRODUCED WITH OR FOR AN INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATION? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE AND PROVIDE THE ORGANIZATION’S CONTACT INFO.

Section 7: Language Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE(S): (CHECK AND/OR SPECIFY)</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>SPANISH</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE (SPECIFY)</th>
<th>OTHER LANGUAGE (SPECIFY)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN IS:</td>
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<td>OTHER SPOKEN LANGUAGES ARE:</td>
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<td>THE WORK IS ALSO AVAILABLE FOR AUDIENCES WHOSE PRIMARY LANGUAGE IS:</td>
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Section 8: Logistical Information
WHICH PREMIERES HAS THIS WORK ALREADY HAD? WORLD □ U.S. □ N.Y. □ D.C. □ NONE □
WHO HOLDS THE BROADCAST RIGHTS AND WHEN DO THEY EXPIRE? WHAT IS THE COPYRIGHT CITATION AS IT APPEARS ON THE SCREEN?

PLEASE BE SURE TO SEND THE REQUIRED ITEMS LISTED UNDER THE "SUBMISSION GUIDELINES" SECTION OF THE CALL FOR ENTRIES RULES AND REGULATIONS 2010-2011 PAGE AND A SIGNED AGREEMENT FORM (PAGE 5)

FESTIVAL DATES: MARCH 31 - APRIL 3, 2011

15th Native American Film + Video Festival
Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
One Bowling Green, New York, NY 10004
Tel: 212-514-3737 • Fax: 212-514-3725 • Email: naafv@si.edu
www.nativenetworks.si.edu

244
Appendix I: ImagiNative Submission Form

imagineNATIVE's 11th annual Film + Video Submission Form
Deadline: June 1, 2010

October 20 - 24, 2010
Toronto • Canada
www.imagineNATIVE.org

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL
The imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival is an international festival that celebrates the latest works by Indigenous peoples on the forefront of innovation in film, video, new media and radio. Each fall, the festival presents a selection of the most compelling and distinctive Indigenous works from around the globe. The festival’s screenings, parties, panel discussions, and cultural events attract and connect filmmakers, media artists, programmers, buyers, and industry professionals. The works accepted reflect the diversity of the world’s Indigenous nations and illustrate the vitality and excellence of our art and culture in contemporary media.

AWARDS
All entries selected for the festival are eligible for awards. Awards presented will include:

$1500 The Alanis Obomsawin Best Documentary Award
$1500 Best Dramatic Feature
$1000 Best Indigenous Language Production Award
$1000 Cynthia Lickers-Sage Award for Emerging Talent
$1000 Best New Media
$1000 Best Short Documentary
$1000 Best Short Drama
$1000 Best Canadian Short Drama
$1000 Best Experimental
$500 Best Music Video
$500 Ellen Monague Award for Best Youth Work

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS
imagineNATIVE considers film, video, and new media works made by Canadian and international Indigenous artists. To be eligible, an Indigenous person (ie. self-identified as Indigenous, Aboriginal or First Peoples and their descendants) must have held a key creative role on the project as a writer, director, or producer. Indigenous communities, First Peoples, and Aboriginal Nations are those that are self-identified as having a historical continuity with societies that developed on recognized territories before colonization or transformation of that region into a nation-state and may consider themselves distinct (with often unique cultural, linguistic, traditional, social and other characteristics) from other sectors of the societies or nation-states now prevailing on those territories.

The festival strives to represent a diversity of ideas, themes and genres in its programming. The festival prioritizes works that balance unique content, cultural and social relevance, and a creative approach to form characterized by innovative expression, distinctive style, and personal vision. Priority is given to works that have not yet been broadcast in Canada or on the internet. International and Canadian premiere status is also a consideration. Dramatic or documentary series, news reports, extended reportage, television magazine formats, and information programming or segments (such as PSAs) are not eligible.

RULES
1. imagineNATIVE exhibits Indigenous-made works only (ie. an Indigenous person must have held a key creative role on the project as a writer, director, or producer).
2. Films must have been completed after January 1, 2008.
3. Dramatic or documentary series, news reports, extended reportage, television magazine formats, and information programming or segments (such as PSAs) are not eligible.
4. All non-English language films must have English subtitles for final viewing and English transcripts for the programmers.
5. Preview and exhibition tapes must have no commercial blacks or broadcaster promos.
6. Each film must have its own screening copy and submission form. Compilations will not be accepted.
7. The deadline for submissions is June 1, 2010, but if your work is not ready for screening by June 1 and you wish it to be considered for this year’s festival, please contact programming@imagineNATIVE.org immediately.
8. Read the submission instructions carefully before submitting.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS
imagineNATIVE charges no submission fees. Please send the following post-marked on or before June 1, 2010:

- Completed and signed submission form OR complete the online submission form at www.imagineNATIVE.org.
- Preview DVD (region one) OR VHS (NTSC) clearly labelled with the title, running time, year completed and contact information. DVD is the preferred format.
- Two or more stills (JPEGs or TIFF files, minimum 300 dpi) on CD or emailed to programming@imagineNATIVE.org or uploaded via our online submission form. Please use the title of the work as the file name.
- Short and long synopses, director’s biography, and the biography of the key Indigenous person associated with the work.
- Press kit, clippings or trailer.
- Label the outside of your package FOR CULTURAL PURPOSES – FESTIVAL PREVIEW ONLY – NO COMMERCIAL VALUE. Do not value the package any higher than $5 Canadian.
- imagineNATIVE will not pay customs’ duties, cash on delivery or any other charges incurred during shipping, and will return the package to the sender.
- Do not send submissions in fibre-filled envelopes as the dust can damage tapes and viewing equipment.
- Preview tapes/DVDs will not be returned unless specifically requested and a self-addressed envelope with Canadian postage is provided.

Please note:
- There is a separate form to submit new media and radio works. Please contact programming@imagineNATIVE.org to receive the applicable form.
- Participants will be notified by email of the selection results.
- It selected for the festival, exhibition copies must be sent in by September 10, 2010.

Please contact programming@imagineNATIVE.org for more information.

401 Richmond Street West, Suite 349 • MSV 3A8 • Toronto • Ontario • Canada
T: 416 585 2333 • F: 416 585 2313 • www.imagineNATIVE.org
Film + Video Submission Form

To be eligible, an Indigenous person (i.e., self-identified as Indigenous, Aboriginal or First Peoples and their descendants) must have held a key creative role on the project as a writer, director, or producer. This submission form is for FILM and VIDEO only. To submit
new media works and radio shows, please contact programming@imagineNATIVE.org for the applicable form.

1. PROJECT INFORMATION

a) Title of Film/Video

b) Title in English

c) Country of Origin

d) Running Time (hh:mm:ss)  e) Year Completed

f)  
   - color
   - black & white

g) ImagineNATIVE’s mandate is to program works written, directed, and/or produced by Indigenous artists (as defined in eligibility). Therefore, it is essential that the key Indigenous person(s) associated with the work be clearly stated in one of the following roles:

   - Director
   - Producer
   - Writer (please fill out section 7)
   - Other (please fill out section 7)

If other, please explain:

h) Please check ONLY ONE category for your work – this will be used to select the applicable category for competition.
   - Documentary (50+ mins)
   - Short Documentary (less than 50 mins)
   - Dramatic Feature (50+ mins)
   - Short Drama (less than 50 mins)
   - Experimental
   - Music Video
   - Do Not Include this work in Competition

i) If you are an emerging artist, would you like your work to be considered only in the emerging category for competition? (Please note that you will not be eligible for competition in any of the above categories by selecting yes):
   - Yes
   - No

j) If you are 25 years of age and under, would you like your work to be considered only for the Ellen Monague Best Youth Award? (Please note that you will not be eligible for competition in any of the above categories by selecting yes):
   - Yes
   - No

k) This work will be a premiere in:
   - World
   - Ontario
   - North America
   - Toronto
   - Canada
   - None

l) Previous Festival Screenings:

m) If this work has been submitted to other upcoming festivals, please list them below:

n) Awards won:

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246