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North American Indigenous Cinema and its Audiences

Brian de Ruiter

Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swansea University

2013

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This dissertation examines the fictional and non-fictional films of Sherman Alexie, Chris Eyre and Zacharias Kunuk in the larger context of the development of North American indigenous cinema and its audiences. It examines the relation of the films to mainstream cinema and representations of North American indigenous populations by drawing on a wide range of critical responses. After the introduction, which surveys the literature in the field and demonstrates the need for the present study, Chapter One will discuss the persistence of stereotypical representations of Native Americans in cinematic texts and the manner in which they continue to influence people's perceptions of Native Americans. Chapter Two focuses on Sherman Alexie's *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* as conscious and sophisticated responses to these stereotypes which offer a new sort of dialogue regarding Coeur d'Alene and Spokane identity. This chapter also looks at the relation of the films to the texts from which they originated. Chapter Three looks at the wide range of filmic texts directed by Chris Eyre, and his exploration of contemporary Sioux and Navajo identity, particularly the complex problems of representing spirituality, while Chapter Four focuses on shamanism as represented in the fictional filmic texts of Zacharias Kunuk. Chapter Five provides an account of the funding of indigenous cinema, and the problems that can potentially arise in production and distribution if not connected to government sources of funding. Chapter Six examines how *A Thousand Roads* and *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* utilises images connected to indigenous identity for their own political purposes. The conclusion of this dissertation will provide a brief assessment of the current state of North American indigenous cinema.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted In substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where corrections services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Introduction - Setting the Stage for North American Indigenous Cinema

This introduction has multiple purposes. Firstly, it will provide an analysis of the existing literature on North American indigenous cinema to demonstrate how this dissertation contributes to the field. Secondly, it will establish the parameters for this dissertation. Although the dissertation will rely on film reviews to ascertain audience reception to North American indigenous cinema, it is important to recognize the strengths and limitations inherent in the manner in which film critics have decoded the images projected in the films examined here. Following this discussion on media studies, the introduction will provide a brief biography of the three directors featured in the dissertation. An examination into the background of Sherman Alexie, Chris Eyre and Zacharias Kunuk will explore their primary objectives when engaging in cinematic dialogues with indigenous populations and the dominant society. Finally there will be a summary of the six chapters that comprise this dissertation.

Scholarly Assessments of North American Indigenous Cinema

The release of *Smoke Signals* in 1998 was met with academic and critical acclaim, and has been followed by feature films directed by other Native and Inuit directors eager to project self-representative images of their respective race. Yet, despite this upsurge in North American indigenous feature films, there has been limited coverage of North American indigenous cinema from an academic perspective. Randolph Lewis acknowledged this absence of literature on Native American directors when researching for his text on the career of the Abenaki director Alanis Obomsawin.[1] Within the last four years, there has been an increase in literature that examines North American indigenous film within a broader context of global indigenous film and, more specifically, literature focusing on Zacharias Kunuk and Isuma. Prior to this increase in literature examining North American indigenous cinema, works by Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, Ward Churchill, Beverly Singer, Randolph Lewis and, to a lesser extent, Edward Buscombe were the key sources to explore this topic.

Despite the fact that the bulk of Jacquelyn Kilpatrick's text, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Films* focused on Euro-American depictions of Native Americans, Kilpatrick devoted the last chapter of her book to examining Native directed documentaries and Native written screenplays for feature films. In this section, Kilpatrick focused on Native writers N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa) and Thomas King (Cherokee/Greek) and how their literary accomplishments led to films that were not widely distributed. Kilpatrick focused on directors Victor Masayesva, Jr. (Hopi), A.A. Carr (Navajo/Laguna Pueblo) and George Burdeau (Blackfeet)

[1] Randolph Lewis, *Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native American Filmmaker* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), XIII

as she asserted the productions created by these individuals were characteristic of Native American cinema. This statement is clearly an indication Kilpatrick believed documentaries were the main genre created by Native American directors. Kilpatrick ended her examination by focusing on *Smoke Signals*, which she believed deserved praise for its widespread appeal and positive reviews from film critics. Kilpatrick believed if Natives who worked behind the camera could develop a more favourable relationship with Hollywood primarily based on a Native perspective, films would have a greater potential to project a representation of Native Americans that could be admired by both races.[2]

Edward Buscombe's book *"Injuns!" Native Americans in the Movies* primarily consisted of an examination of how Native Americans were depicted in North American and European popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Buscombe's book looked at the different ways Euro-Americans depicted their Native characters on film, whether it was through negative stereotypical images or the more culturally sensitive movies.[3] Despite the fact Buscombe focused on Euro-American appropriation of Native American identity in film, his book was not exclusively restricted to Westerns as he examined depictions of Natives in literature, theatre, painting, Wild West shows and the tourist industry, specifically in the American Southwest. Given the various numbers of writers and artists who used formulaic representations of Natives in their work, it is understandable how a monolithic image of Native Americans was reinforced. Buscombe's examination of movies about Native Americans concluded with three films: *Smoke Signals, Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2000) and *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002). In this brief section, Buscombe concluded that "an Indian cinema is possible."[4]

Despite the fact Ward Churchill's book *Fantasies of the Master Race* focused on the methods by which Euro-American literature reinforces and legitimises the colonial system, the final chapter examined stereotypes of Native Americans perpetuated in films. Although Churchill accused Euro-American films of reinforcing an image of the sexualized, primitive Native possessing little culture, he did acknowledge some Euro-Americans were capable of creating "a genuine break with convention in its handling of Indian themes," citing films such as *Rancho Deluxe* (1975), *Clearcut* (1991), *Silent Tongue* (1993) and *Dead Man* (1995) to illustrate his point.[5] Churchill also noted the works of Native American directors Duke Redbird (Ojibway), George Burdeau, Bob Hicks (Muscogee Creek) and Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) "have greater potential" than their Euro-American counterparts in creating respectful and realistic images of Native Americans, but Churchill, like Kilpatrick, recognised the films of these directors were

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[2] Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 178-233.
[3] Edward Buscombe, *"Injuns!": Native Americans in the Movies* (Cornwall: Reaktion Books, 2006), 16.
[4] *Ibid.*, 147-150.
[5] Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: literature, cinema, and the colonization of the American Indians* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 203.

not widely distributed.[6] Churchill was hopeful that the works of Chris Eyre and Greg Sarris[7] would rectify the erroneous and simplified images Euro-Americans perpetuate of Native Americans on the big and small screens.[8]

Beverly Singer's book *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens* examined Native participation in the development of films and provided a brief summary of the works of up and coming Native directors.[9] Singer set the stage for her analysis by looking at Native identity and how European cultural intolerance and commercialisation of the Native image negatively impacted this identity. Singer cited the ideas of Vine Deloria, Jr. (Sioux), who advocated for Natives to become involved in the film and television business in order to acquire some degree of representational sovereignty, since she believed this control would allow for resistance against assimilation and create self-respect among Native communities. This appeal for representational sovereignty was followed by an examination of the efforts of Natives to become involved in directing and acting in the twentieth century. Singer praised the work of James Young Deer, an early twentieth century Winnebago director,[10] for his ability to match the quality of movies created by Western filmmakers, but at the same time, she admitted that Young Deer's work followed stereotypical images of Natives combating Euro-Americans.[11] Such a statement clearly simplifies the work of James Young Deer,[12] but it leads to an interesting question regarding Singer's opinion of his work. Did she praise the images Young Deer projected for the way they depicted Native Americans or did she praise Young Deer for being one of the first Native American directors to have mainstream success? The tone of the language suggests that it is the latter, leading one to conclude Singer was more concerned with concepts of representational sovereignty as opposed to the images Young Deer created. Singer's examination also acknowledged the critical roles of Harold Preston Smith (Mohawk), who assisted in the development of the Native American Workshop, and Will Sampson (Creek), who was involved in the creation of the American Indian Registry for the Performing Arts, in creating greater opportunities for Native Americans in front of the camera.[13] Singer provided a brief biography of some Native Americans who she believed to be integral to the development of Native American film both in front of and behind the camera.[14]Singer concluded her study by examining the following

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[6] *Ibid.*, 203-205.
[7] Greg Sarris wrote the screenplay and was the co-executive producer for *Grand Avenue.*
[8] Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race,* 206.
[9] Beverly Singer, *Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
[10] The authenticity of James Young Deer's native identity has been called into question. See Matthew Sweet, "The First Native American Director: Or was he?" *The Guardian,* Sept. 23, 2010.
[11] Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens,* 15-16.
[12] For a more complete interpretation of James Young Deer's work, See Andrew Brodie Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians: Silent Western Films, American Culture, and the birth of Hollywood* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003).
[13] Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens,* 21.
[14] Some of the Natives that Singer briefly examined include: Bob Hicks, Sandra Osawa, Phil Lucas, Chris Spotted Eagle, George Horse Capture, Larry Littlebird, Larry Cesspooch, Milo Yellowhair, Diane Reyna,

six documentaries that she believed were the forerunners to *Smoke Signals*: Victor Masayesva's (Hopi) film *Hopiit* (1982), Sandra Osawa's (Makah) film *Lighting the 7th Fire* (1994), Arlene Bowman's (Navajo) film *Navajo Talking Picture* (1984), Randy Redwood's (Cherokee) film *High Horse* (1994), Loretta Todd's (Metis/Cree) film *Hands of History* (1994) and Beverly Singer's (Navajo/Tewa) film *A Video Book* (1994). Singer's analysis of documentaries is evidence that Native American documentaries have been examined in depth, but the study of Native directed feature films is still minimal.

Randolph Lewis' text on Alanis Obomsawin is the first monograph dedicated to examining the work of a Native American director. Lewis chose to examine Obomsawin since he believed she is the most prolific Native filmmaker in North America and her films highlight the persuasive abilities of documentaries on the audience. Lewis' book looked at several of Obomsawin's earlier films and ascertained three themes from these works: the powerlessness of Native children against racism, the significance of pan-tribal unity in the face of discrimination and oppression, and the continuous conflict that has existed between Natives and Euro-Americans. Lewis examined the use of documentaries as a medium to draw attention to problems and rally the population to enact some degree of social reform. Lewis drew connections between the creation of Mi'kmaq solidarity and pride through the development and screening of Obomsawin's film *Incident at Restigouche* (1984). Lewis commended Obomsawin's work *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child* (1986) and *No Address* (1988) for their ability to affect social change at provincial and regional levels by influencing policies that improved the social lives of Native youth in Alberta and the homeless in Montreal respectively.[15] The creation and screening of Obomsawin's documentaries present Natives an opportunity to engage in an active dialogue with Euro-Americans and allow some degree of representational sovereignty to exist for Native communities.[16]

While Buscombe[17] and Singer[18] briefly examined the works of indigenous populations in the Arctic, a more detailed examination can be found in Ann Fienup-Riordan's text *Freeze Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies* and the work of Michael Evans. Fienup-Riordan's work is primarily devoted to the development of the Euro-American image of the Eskimo, but she included a chapter that examined indigenous media in Alaska with such works as the *Sky River Project, Alaska Native Magazine* and *Heartbeat Alaska* and the television station KYUK. One of the primary

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George Burdeau, Conroy Chino, Hattie Kaufman, Eva Hamilton, Ruby Stookis, Harriet Skye, Mona Smith (Dakota), Allen Jamieson, Melanie Printup Hope, Malinda Maynor, Derron Twohatchet.

[15] Lewis, *Alanis Obomsawin,* 142-145.

[16] *Ibid.,* 189.

[17] Edward Buscombe's text *Injuns!* Summarized the film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* in two sentences.

[18] Beverly Singer's text *Wiping the War Paint off of the Lens* devoted approximately two pages to the Northwest Arctic Television initiative to produce a number of documentaries dedicated to an examination of Inuit traditions and lifestyles, and the influential role the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation played in the development of Kunuk's cinematic career.

objectives of *Alaska Native Magazine* was to examine ordinary Eskimos in non-stereotypical lives in order to counter romanticised Euro-American images of Eskimos. *Heartbeat Alaska* possessed a similar objective to *Alaska Native Magazine* in attempting to achieve representational sovereignty and provide Euro-American audiences an image that challenged their previous conceptions of Eskimos.[19] Michael Evans' text *Isuma: Inuit Video Art* examined the development of Isuma and its ultimate goal to construct self-representative images that convey Inuit knowledge and culture to local and global audiences.[20] Michael Evans' book *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* is more directed toward the work of Isuma and the development of Isuma's first feature film. His text acquainted the reader with the cultural context in which *Atanarjuat* was developed and provided an analysis about the creation of Isuma. Evans recounted the ethnographic research undertaken by Isuma to preserve eight variations of the Atanarjuat saga[21] and explained to the reader that the purpose behind the film's deviation from these variations was an attempt to stress forgiveness.[22] He also provided the reader with a brief summary of Inuit culture so they could better understand the cultural nuances presented in the film. His analysis of film reviews of *Atanarjuat* presented to readers not only positive comments from international critics regarding the cinematography and ethnographic material of the film, but also negative comments from critics who failed to appreciate the film's slow pace. As will be demonstrated in the fourth chapter, critical response to *Atanarjuat* is far more complex than Evans' assessment recognised. Overall, the agenda of Michael Evans when writing this text was to provide "a deeper and clearer understanding of – and appreciation for – this groundbreaking film."[23]

In less than a decade, the focus of academics has changed as an increasing number of books and academic articles analysing North American indigenous feature films have become available. Houston Woods' text *Native Features* examined indigenous cinema in English-speaking settler societies, but this analysis, in some ways, was a modest attempt to ascertain characteristics of indigenous cinema. Woods argued the main motivation behind the works of indigenous filmmakers is to preserve indigenous cultures and languages, and attempt to enter into a dialogue with the dominant society to contest stereotypes the dominant society has constructed of indigenous populations.[24] Even though the format of Woods' text used a regional approach in examining the works of indigenous directors in English-speaking settler societies, he reserved a chapter for Chris Eyre and Yolngu actor David Gulpilil. Woods provided high

[19] Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1995), 172-176.
[20] Evans' text focused on the early documentary work of Kunuk and his first feature film *Atanarjuat.*
[21] The number of accounts Isuma claimed to have collected of the Atanarjuat saga varied from seven to ten.
[22] Michael Evans, *The Fast Runner: Film the Legend of Atanarjuat* (Winnipeg, Man.: Bison Books, 2010), 63-85.
[23] Evans, *The Fast Runner,* xix.
[24] Houston Woods, *Native Features: Indigenous films from around the world* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 72.

praise for Eyre, citing him as the "most prolific indigenous feature film director in the world,"[25] which challenges the emphasis Barry Barclay placed on Maori filmmakers in driving forward the concept of indigenous cinema. While Woods examined this desire on the part of indigenous filmmakers to engage in a dialogue between their own respective communities and the dominant society, his work failed to assess whether the dominant society is receptive to the images these indigenous directors assert.

This dissertation has two primary functions. Firstly, it assesses what messages the subaltern[26] is conveying to both the periphery and the colonial centre. Secondly, this dissertation shifts the focus away from whether the subaltern

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[25] *Ibid.*, 27.

[26] One of the objectives of post-colonial studies has been to re-centre the voice of the colonised in order to hear their words as they explore history, culture and identity. In her study "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak made a number of assertions that are important to consider when discussing the subaltern. Firstly, Spivak drew attention to the fact that academics should refrain from viewing the subaltern as a homogenous group since they are "irretrievably heterogeneous" (Consult, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg [Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988], 79). This question leads one to ponder whether the multitude of subaltern identities can be conveyed to the broader population. Furthermore, if such a daunting task can be accomplished, the next question put forward concerns who will speak for the subaltern. Secondly, Spivak expressed concern over the manner in which academics have tried to recover the voice of the subaltern, as attempts to do so have become problematic. Spivak was adamant that the "subaltern cannot speak,"(Consult, Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 102) since the texts that recount the actions of the subaltern were written by the colonial or the subaltern elite, leading her to conclude that subaltern consciousness "will probably never be recovered" (Consult, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *The Blackwell Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Anthony Elliott [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999], 251). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin summed up the debate nicely what post-colonial theorists face in their discussion of the question posited by Spivak: "The debate is a struggle between those who want to align themselves with the subaltern and those who insist that this attempt becomes at best only a refined version of the very discourse it seeks to displace." Although this contentious debate exists, one of the main objectives is to recover the voice of the subaltern in order to better understand the agency colonised populations possessed in their interactions with colonialism (Consult, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, "Issues and Debates," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 2nd edition, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin [New York: Routledge, 2008], 11). Jenny Sharpe's research into Indian history has led her to question the ability to locate a subaltern voice, as she concluded these voices have been either "inauthentic" or highly problematic. She acknowledged that the models that academics have used to locate the subaltern voice "remain inadequate" as the subaltern remains "irreducible and yet ultimately irretrievable" (Consult, Jenny Sharpe, "Figures of Colonial Resistance," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 [Spring, 1989]: 152). Although Spivak's assertions have had their supporters, her findings have been challenged from a number of perspectives. Ania Loomba argued that in order to uncover the voice of the Indian female, one should not exclusively focus on the widows who were killed, but upon those who refused to participate in the *sati* (Consult, Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* [New York: Routledge, 2005], 196). Homi Bhabba also challenged Spivak's insistence on the mutability of the subaltern by arguing that one can locate the colonised voice "through the native's strange questions" as they reveal "what they resisted in questioning the presence of English – as religious mediation and as cultural and linguistic medium" (Consult, Homi Bhahha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 [Autumn, 1985]: 101). Benita Parry argued that the positions of Spivak and Bhahha are problematic since the former's analysis promotes "deafness to the Native voice," while the latter's analysis "reduces the problem of representing difference to the demand for different and more favourable representations." Parry maintained the colonised population can engage in a dialogue with the hegemonic centre through intellectuals such as Fanon, who "can answer colonialism back" (Consult, Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9, no. 1 [1987]: 39-46). In regards to this dissertation, one needs to question whether or not Chris Eyre, Sherman Alexie and Zacharias Kunuk speak for the subaltern. Although the works of these three directors would not be characterised as subaltern voices in the mind of Spivak, it is a useful exercise to conceptualise subalternity within a relational hierarchy to the dominant society. If one conceptualises the subaltern exclusively as the "lowest of the low,"

can speak, to whether the dominant society is listening, and how they decoded the signs the subaltern projected in film. This is an important field of study, as Julie Cruikshank recognised, because indigenous populations are interested in determining "how depictions of culture translate across cultural boundaries."[27] While there has been an increase in the number of scholarly texts discussing North American indigenous cinema, Randolph Lewis[28] and Sam Pack[29] recognised analyses examining how audiences decoded and negotiated with North American indigenous self-representative images has been a topic overlooked in academic discourses until recently. Studies conducted by Theo Van Alst, John Mihelich and Arnold Krupat examined audience reception to indigenous feature films, which will be addressed in the chapters to follow. For the moment, it is important to examine Pack's works since the academic attempted to fill this gap in scholarship by assessing audience responses to films focusing on Navajo identity. In the first study, Pack assessed Navajo audience receptions to the non-Navajo directed films *In the Heart of Big Mountain, Broken Rainbow, The Return of Navajo Boy,* and *The Lost Child.* Although the Navajo questioned the images non-Navajo directors constructed of Navajo identity, they recognised the entertainment value of watching images they could relate to.[30] In a second study examining representations of the Navajo, Pack concluded, "native-authored texts do not provide a means of taking control over one's own image because the viewer interprets the film according to existing stereotypes of his or her culture."[31] To an extent, Pack is certainly correct. An examination of film reviews focusing on the works of Sherman Alexie, Chris Eyre and Zacharias Kunuk will demonstrate how many Euro-American and Native American reviewers approached these films through a perspective that was heavily influenced by stereotypes. Although it is evident that stereotypes influenced the manner in which critics decoded films, Pack's

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then we mute the voices of those who have the means to speak, as Fernando Coronil astutely noted, "restricting analysis to the study of mute subject positions continues a history of silencing such voices. Engaging with subaltern subjects entails responding to their presence within silenced histories, listening for voices- and to silences-within the cracks of dominant histories, if only to widen them" Consult, Fernando Coronil, "Listening to the Subaltern: The Poetics of Neocolonial States, *Poetics Today* 15, no, 4 [Winter, 1994]: 657). Because these three directors are connected to North American indigenous populations that have been marginalised, and have suffered from psychological problems and image appropriation due to colonialism, one can conclude that they represent subaltern voices. But as Spivak correctly warned, one should not conceptualise the subaltern in a homogenous fashion. Therefore, it is important to note that these three directors represent three distinct voices from the millions of voices that exist among North American indigenous populations that challenge the colonial centre. This is a perspective that Ania Loomba would agree with, as she maintained, "in order to listen for subaltern voices we need to uncover the multiplicity of narratives that were hidden by the grand narrative..." (Consult, Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism,* 200).

[27] Julie Cruikshank, "Negotiating with Narrative: Establishing Cultural Identity at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 99, no. 1 (Mar., 1997), 65.

[28] Lewis noted the absence of detailed studies examining the "intercultural function" of film, which can be assessed by studying audience receptions to films. Consult, Randolph Lewis, *Alanis Obomsawin,* 118.

[29] Pack recognized there are few studies focused on Native American reception to films that appropriated Native American identity. Consult, Sam Pack, "Watching Navajos Watch Themselves," *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no. 2 (Fall, 2007), 111.

[30] Pack, "Watching Navajos Watch Themselves," 124-125.

[31] Sam Pack, "Constructing the 'Navajo': Visual and Literary Representations from inside and out," *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 151.

assessment is a bit pessimistic and generalised, for reviewers have demonstrated an ability to locate a preferred reading of a cinematic text suggesting one should look beyond the simplistic conclusion formulated by Pack. As such, the purpose of this dissertation is to carry on the dialogue revolving around audience receptions to North American indigenous cinema and to complicate the analysis Pack has provided to this field.

Media studies tend to describe audience receptions as "passive" and "homogenous," which is a problematic perspective,[32] particularly when dealing with the politicised nature of North American indigenous cinema and the different racial backgrounds of film critics. It is not surprising there are diverse reactions to North American indigenous cinema given the nature of film and the fact that media researchers tend to view film as open texts subject to multiple readings and dependent on the position of the observer.[33] Although media researchers can agree there are multiple interpretations to visual texts,[34] the notion that there is a preferred reading is met with controversy. One of the primary reasons for this controversy rests with the concern that media researchers cannot be certain the preferred reading of a visual text can be located.[35] This is a very real concern when assessing the preferred reading for television episodes, newscasts and film, particularly since the endings of *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* were purposely designed to be ambiguous. However, due to the extensive interviews indigenous directors have provided in public forums, in addition to the publication of screenplays and press kits, one can be relatively certain they located a part of these filmmakers' agendas.

Film reviews are valuable sources in which to assess audience receptions to North American indigenous cinema. Since film critics tend to be the first individuals invited to screenings, they possess a significant degree of control over informing the public about the contents of a film in the opening week of its release. *The Wall Street Journal* estimated that a third of the American public consult film reviews before viewing a film,[36] suggesting critics do play a role in influencing the American public, but their role as influencer and/or predictor remains a contentious debate among audience researchers.[37] Research has indicated that while film critics play a minimal role in creating publicity and

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[32] Sonia Livingstone, *Making Sense of Television: the psychology of audience interpretation* (New York: Pergamon, 1990), 23.
[33] Livingstone, *Making Sense of Television,* 20; Virginia Nighingale, *Studying Audiences: the shock of the real* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 35.
[34] Shaun Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: the ethnography of media consumption* (London: Sage Publication, 1993), 17.
[35] *Ibid.*, 28.
[36] Jehoshua Eliashberg and Steven Shugan, "Film Critics: Influencers or Predictors," *Journal of Marketing* 61, no. 2 (April, 1997): 70; Suman Basuroy and Subimal Chatterjee and S. Abraham Ravid, "How Critical are Critical Reviews? The Box Office Effects of Film Critics, Star Power, and Budgets,"*Journal Marketing* 67 (October, 2003): 103.
[37] Jehoshua Eliashberg; Steven Shugan; "Film Critics: Influencers or Predictors," 68-78; Morris Holbrook, "Popular Appeal versus Expert Judgements of Motion Pictures," *Journal of Consumer Research* 26 (September, 1999): 144-155; Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee, S. Abraham Ravid, "How Critical are Critical Reviews? The Box Office Effects of Film Critics, Star Power, and Budgets,"*Journal Marketing* 67 (October 2003): 103-

persuading the public to attend mainstream films, their role in bringing publicity to independent films is more critical.[38] This dissertation will utilise multiple Euro-American and Native America newspapers in order to assess critical reception to North American indigenous cinema.

The use of Native American newspapers to ascertain Native attitudes to the works of Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie is an under-utilised resource, but is nonetheless an important one due to the influential role these media outlets play within Indian Country. Judging from his notes, Houston Woods' use of *The Native Voice* or *Indian Country Today* was limited while researching for his text *Native Features. Indian Country Today* is owned by the Oneida tribal council and represents the views of that political body. [39] *News From Indian Country* characterised itself as "an independent, Indian-owned, reservation based business...and is the oldest national Native newspaper in the United States in compact form."[40] This newspaper prides itself on its ability to incorporate the perspectives of Native tribes throughout the continent into its work, thereby presenting itself as a pan-tribal paper. Despite that this newspaper prints a limited number of editions on an annual basis, it is attempting to reach a broader audience through the development of a media network. *The Native Voice,* a newspaper established in 2001, prides itself as being "the nation's largest native-owned independent newspaper... [it is] ...America's most influential must read Native newspaper for all ages."[41] The founder of this newspaper, Frank King, equates his media outlet with the traditional Lakota *eyapaha*, as he sees his paper presenting a truthful and unbiased position.[42] The decision on the part of these Native presses to print articles that discuss North American indigenous cinema demonstrates they are eager to engage in a dialogue about self-representative images.[43] Although reviews printed in these papers tend to be rather favourable to the cinematic texts under discussion, a minority of the reviews printed in the Native presses can offer negative criticism of the images Sherman Alexie and Chris Eyre have constructed.

The newspaper *Nunatsiaq News*, a news outlet equally under-utilised by academics, will represent the perspective of Nunavut in this analysis of the feature films directed by Zacharias Kunuk. This media outlet also manages a website written in English, suggesting it not only wants to cater to an Inuit audience, but also to secure a Euro-American audience. Although *Nunatsiaq News* is one of the larger newspapers in Nunavut, one should not conclude it speaks for all communities of Nunavut since there is evidence to indicate some communities feel the paper

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117; Peter Boatwright, Suman Basuroy, Wagner Kamakura, "Reviewing the reviewers: The impact of individual film critics on box office performance," *Quant Market Econ* (2007): 401-425.

[38] Peter Boatwright, Suman Basuroy, Wagner Kamakura, "Reviewing the reviewers," 421.

[39] Catherine Robbins, *All Indians Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 2162 (Kindle Edition).

[40] "About Who NFIC/ICC Is," http://indiancountrynews.net/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=26 (accessed August 15, 2011).

[41] *The Native Voice* http://www.nativevoicemedia.com/about.html (accessed August 15, 2011).

[42] Robbins, *All Indians Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos),* 2173 (Kindle Edition).

[43] *The Native Voice* has been involved in discussing Eyre's fictional filmic text since the paper was founded.

does not adequately express their opinions.[44] Although the newspaper is based in the Nunavut capital of Iqaluit, it is owned by Nortext Multimedia and employs non-Inuit in writing positions.[45] Despite that Nortext is a southern based company, it has demonstrated a desire to promote Inuit culture through the publishing of its *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series and the text *Memory and History in Nunavut.*[46]

There are limitations to relying on film reviews to assess audience receptions to North American indigenous cinema. Firstly, while this dissertation attempts to examine film reviews by Euro-American and Native American reviewers of different genders, it should not be used to gauge the attitudes of the popular audience. Morris Holbrook argued film critics have a greater appreciation for films that construct unfamiliar and "challenging" images than the general public.[47] Although research conducted in this dissertation suggests greater complexity in the way film critics decode filmic texts than this previous statement suggests, Holbrook's comment indicates film critics and popular audiences decode images differently. Due to the methodology employed, this dissertation will only make claims to assess film critics' responses to North American indigenous cinema. Secondly, film reviews are a snapshot of an individual's opinion toward a film and are capable of changing over time. Despite these limitations, the use of film reviews to assess audience receptions is still methodologically valid since these reviews offer examples of how segments of the population decode North American indigenous self-representative images.

While this dissertation does not attempt to engage in a debate regarding whether or not film critics are influencers or predictors, it will attempt to assess the discourses film critics have constructed around North American indigenous cinema. There are three major discourses critics have constructed of North American indigenous cinema: The first discourse focused on concepts of authenticity and accountability critics claim Native American directors insert into their respective works. The second discourse is interconnected with stereotypes, which can entail praising a film's ability to deconstruct stereotypes. Film critics may have also been influenced by stereotypes when they were decoding the images these films project, thereby preventing them from locating the preferred reading of a film. The third discourse constructed by film critics is the desire to locate aspects of a film they are familiar with and believe they can identify with. Arnold Krupat and Shari Huhndorf[48] recognised film critics attempted to locate universal themes in *Atanarjuat,* which stemmed from a desire to understand "film in Western terms."[49] A positive or negative review from

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[44] Valerie Alia, *Un/Covering the North: news, media, and aboriginal people* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 73.
[45] *Ibid.,* 143-144.
[46] Nortext. http://www.nortext.com/portfolio.htm (Retrieved on August 22, 2012).
[47] Morris Holbrook, "Popular Appeal versus Expert Judgements of Motion Pictures," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 26 (September 1999): 148.
[48] Shari Huhndorf, "Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner: Culture, History, and Politics in Inuit Media," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (2003): 822-826.
[49] Arnold Krupat, *All That Remains,* 142-143.

a critic appeared to be dependent on whether they could locate "universal" themes.[50] In her assessment of stereotypes that exist about Indians, Devon Mihesuah stated, "Apparently many Euro-Americans cannot watch a movie about Indians unless it is really about Euro-Americans."[51]Although a comparative analysis of Gary Arnold's reviews of *The White Dawn* and *Atanarjuat* may suggest the validity of this statement, Euro-Americans view film in a more complex manner than Mihesuah's assessment suggests. Euro-Americans do not necessarily need to be the protagonist in a film for Euro-American audiences to appreciate it so long as they could decode imagery in a way that is familiar to them. This is not an indictment against all film critics as some genuinely attempted to decode a film according to the preferred reading and take into account information presented in interviews and press kits before they wrote their review, but there is enough evidence to conclude the "imagery Indian" still exists in the minds of film critics.

Introducing the Directors

This dissertation is designed to critically asses how the cinematic works of Sherman Alexie (Spokane-Coeur d'Alene), Chris Eyre (Arapaho-Cheyenne) and Zacharias Kunuk (Inuit) enter into a dialogue with the dominant society and indigenous communities over issues of stereotypes, identity politics, community and colonialism. Each of these three directors has formulated images that enter into a dialogue with the images the dominant society has constructed of North American indigenous identity. These three directors were selected for several reasons: they are from diverse cultural backgrounds and are recognisable names in the genre of film they respectively direct. The contributions of these three individuals to either *Smoke Signals* or *Atanarjuat* illustrate they are instrumental in establishing North American indigenous cinema. Chris Eyre has delved into the mystery genre with his direction of *Skinwalkers* (2002), and *A Thief of Time* (2004), and has also demonstrated a canny ability to direct dramas such as *Smoke Signals, Skins* (2002) and *Edge of America* (2003). Eyre was also associated with the National Museum of the American Indian through his directorial role in *A Thousand Roads* (2005); a short drama focusing on four indigenous people living in diverse geographical areas in the Americas. Eyre's last high profile work to this date has been his involvement in the documentary series *We Shall Remain* (2009). In addition to his directorial credits, Eyre also produced *Imprint* (2007), a film directed by Euro-American director Michael Linn set on the Pine Ridge Reservation. This film will be examined when assessing the images Eyre has constructed of the Oglala Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Sherman Alexie has only taken one foray into the director's chair with his film *The Business of Fancydancing,* but he has been offered opportunities to turn *Reservation Blues* and *Indian Killer* into cinematic adaptations. These proposed adaptations have

[50] Film critics writing for *Smoke Signals, Skins, Edge of America, The Business of Fancydancing, Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* wrote positive reviews that highlighted the "universal" nature of the plotline.
[51] Devon Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1997), 14.

never materialised due to undisclosed reasons, although one can speculate about the possibility of irreconcilable differences between Alexie and the production companies over issues of control. Zacharias Kunuk has directed films that focus on a localised Igloolik Inuit identity such as *Atanarjuat,* a film that examines an Igloolik legend and was met with favourable reviews from the majority of film critics, and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* which examines a shaman and his family who negotiate with the presence of the Christian religion in Igloolik. The fact North American indigenous filmmakers have worked in a variety of genres indicates Kilpatrick's assertion that documentaries are representative of the productions of Native American directors is outdated and needs to be modified. Before this dissertation moves on, it is important to provide a brief background of the three directors this dissertation will focus on.

Sherman Alexie

Although Alexie was born in 1966 on the Spokane Reservation, the author has had a problematic relationship with the Spokane community, as he recognised his outspoken, opinionated personality and his strong desire to leave the reservation created friction between himself and the community.[52] Alexie's decision to attend Reardan high school, situated away from the reservation, intensified feelings of conflict between Alexie and the Spokane community. Attending a predominately White high school led Alexie to conform to some of the cultural trends in the school, including cutting his hair,[53] which the writer/filmmaker acknowledged was a difficult decision. Alexie received a scholarship to attend Gonzaga University with the goal of earning a degree in either law or medicine, but his heavy drinking forced him to drop out of school and return to the reservation.[54] Alexie believed his life turned around early one morning when he woke up on the street after a night of heavy drinking and decided to enrol in Washington State University. The professor who Alexie credited most for changing his life is Alex Kou, who introduced him to a collection of Native American literature entitled *Songs from this Earth on Turtle's Back.*[55] This anthology not only introduced Alexie to some of the hardships that exist on the reservation, but also demonstrated the "joy and happiness" present in Indian Country.[56] Although the success Alexie achieved through his literature and films has not radically

[52] Charles Teters, "Sherman Alexie: Poet, Novelist, Filmmakers," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 55.
[53] Erik Himmelsbach, "The Reluctant Spokesman," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 33-34.
[54] Doug Marx, "Sherman Alexie: A Reservation of the Mind," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 18.
[55] There is some degree of mutual respect between Kou and Alexie since Alex Kou wrote the introduction for the re-issue of Sherman Alexie's text *The Business of Fancydancing.*
[56] Tomson Highway, "Spokane Words: Tomson Highway Raps with Sherman Alexie," in *Conservations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 25.

altered Spokane attitudes toward him,[57] the writer/filmmaker has found his work appreciated by the broader Native American community.[58]

It becomes difficult to disentangle Alexie's real-life experiences from the profiles of his characters and their experiences when engaging in a critical discussion of Alexie's cinematic work. This last statement is best exemplified by the author's self-identification with three characters: Seymour Polatkin, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-The-Fire.[59] Alexie's self-identification with Seymour Polatkin is easy to recognise, and has been the focus of critical and popular discussion, as will be discussed in the second chapter. Alexie's self-identification with Victor and Thomas is a little less obvious, but the writer acknowledged that "both characters are me, essentially...There's a jock me and a geek me. A cynical, angry me and an optimistic, cheerful me [sic]."[60] A significant number of the symbols encoded in *Smoke Signals* derive from Alexie's personal life and interests, including the scenes dealing with Jesuits, who Alexie greatly admires,[61] basketball, and alcoholism, which greatly influenced the earlier stages of Alexie's literary career. Sherman Alexie has also demonstrated a fondness for including symbols associated with popular culture into his films, as the writer/filmmaker contends popular culture is interconnected with Native American culture and identity.[62]

Alexie is hopeful that literature can be utilised to discuss the effects colonialism continues to exercise on Native American communities.[63] The Spokane writer/filmmaker is aware of his privileged position that allows him the "luxury" to discuss political issues he believes affects Native American communities,[64] and claims to have been aware of the interconnected nature of politics and race, and their destabilising effects on Native communities at a young age when he started to question why his family was forced to wait in line to get food.[65] Throughout his literary career, Alexie has dealt with issues that negatively impact Native communities, including historical and collective trauma, poverty and displacement. Alexie hopes his literature and films will open a dialogue with the dominant society

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[57] Erik Himmelsbach, "The Reluctant Spokesman," 32-33.
[58] *Ibid.*, 34.
[59] Kelly Blewster, "Tribal Visions," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed., Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 80.
[60] Gary Arnold, "The right 'Signals,'" *The Washington Times,* July 10, 1998.
[61] Duncan Campbell, "Voices of the New Tribes," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed., Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 114.
[62] Matt Dellinger, "Redeemers," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed., Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 123.
[63] Williams Cole, "Sherman Alexie in Conversation with Williams Cole," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed., Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 108.
[64] *Ibid.*, 111.
[65] Alexie noted his first awareness that he was living under colonialism was when he was forced to wait in a long line for food with his parents. Consult, Diane Thiel, "A Conversation with Sherman Alexie by Diane Thiel," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed., Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 138.

regarding the problems that continue to exist in Indian Country, but he admits this dialogue will be difficult to achieve since the American public is reluctant to challenge the American grand narrative.[66]

Chris Eyre

Although Chris Eyre is a Native American of Arapaho-Cheyenne descent, it is critical to recognise that he was raised by a Presbyterian foster family in Oregon. It was not until his late teens that he embarked on a journey of self-discovery to Oklahoma in order to become familiar with his indigenous roots. Attending film programs at the University of Arizona and New York University, Eyre was recognised for his cinematic abilities with his short film *Tenacity,* which received recognition from the film community. The success Eyre achieved with *Tenacity* prompted him to participate in the Sundance Institute's Directing Workshop in 1995, which helped to establish the foundation for his award-winning film *Smoke Signals.*[67] Despite this emphasis on his Native roots, Eyre constructs his self-identity as "an amalgamation of two worlds, and I think looking at two sides of things that I can't separate has given me that sensibility called 'humanity.'"[68] Eyre's work continuously revolves around his sensibility of humanity, which the director applies to a Native American cinematic identity. Although Eyre believes he is a product of two worlds, this emphasis on his Arapaho-Cheyenne roots "has influenced" his "work in everyway" as the director continuously illustrates a desire "to touch Native people" with his films.[69]

Despite Houston Woods' assertion that Chris Eyre's work is designed to depict "contemporary Indian peoples…living non-stereotypical lives,"[70] Eyre acknowledged in an interview that he does not "consciously say" he "is going to dispel stereotypes."[71] This admittance certainly frees his hands when dealing with Native American spirituality and identity in his films, which is one reason film critics expressed divergent views of his work. However, Eyre's interest and focus on contemporary Native American identity can be correctly construed by academics as a desire to contest decades of Hollywood films that focused on historical Native American identity. Eyre's motivation to focus on Native American contemporary identity leads to perhaps one of the director's more controversial statements, "It [Hollywood depictions of Indian identity] is the one arena that Hollywood or, for that matter, most America can't portray. And the reason they can't portray it is because they don't know it." Eyre speculated one of the reasons Euro-Americans cannot "accurately" depict contemporary Native American identity is because Native American culture is

[66] Erik Himmelsbach, "The Reluctant Spokesman," 33
[67] Woods, *Native Features*, 28.
[68] As quoted in Houston Woods, *Native Features*, 28.
[69] "Chris Eyre," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0WKn1c8s3A
[70] Woods, *Native Features,* 29.
[71] "Chris Eyre," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0WKn1c8s3A

continuously in a state of flux subject to internal and external influences.[72] Eyre may have backed away from this statement as he teamed up with director Michael Linn to create the independent film *Imprint,* a thriller that depicts contemporary Oglala Sioux identity on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Eyre's claim can be problematic since it reduces the contributions non-Natives have made in writing the screenplays for *Skins, Imprint, Skinwalkers, A Thief of Time* and *Edge of America*. Eyre's above mentioned quotation can also be problematic on a second level. Eyre was willing to point out the inability of Euro-American directors to depict Native American contemporary identity on film since he was eager to position Native American directors as the only mediators who can bring Native American contemporary identity to Native and non-Native audiences. Such a perspective is problematic and reduces the complexities of Native American contemporary identities. Why should someone believe an Arapaho-Cheyenne director can accurately depict contemporary Navajo society? As will be discussed in the third chapter, one should not assume a Native American director can construct accurate depictions of different tribal cultures.

The depiction of Native American spirituality on celluloid can potentially be a contentious issue, as directors struggle to determine how to depict spirituality in their filmic texts. Native American communities have often expressed displeasure with artists who violated community rules by revealing too much of a tribe's sacred traditions. Part of the reason for this displeasure is derived from non-Native anthropologists who have learned of Native American traditions and published them without the tribe's permission. In recent decades, anthropologists have demonstrated greater accountability when dealing with Native American spirituality, however, the New Age movement has commercialised from fabricated Native American ceremonies and spirituality. Hollywood has also appropriated Native spirituality, often constructing either stereotypical images or inaccurate and completely fabricated rituals. One of the concepts director Victor Masayesva Jr. (Hopi) argued is part of Native American filmmaking is accountability. This accountability is derived from a relationship between the filmmaker and the elders of the community to identify what is and what is not permissible to depict on screen.[73] Eyre expressed his uneasiness in depicting Native American spirituality on screen, "I'm not an expert on Native American religion. I just know what I believe....I wouldn't do ceremony in my films because I don't know how to capture it. It's subjective. Those who exploit it do a disservice to it."[74] Although Chris Eyre has expressed concern about depicting spirituality in a respectful manner in his filmic texts, the Arapaho-Cheyenne director has demonstrated he will sacrifice cultural accuracy in order to create a film that can appeal to broad audiences.

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[72] *Ibid.*
[73] Elizabeth Weatherford, Victor Masayesva Jr., "To End and Begin Again: The Work of Victor Masayesva Jr.," *Art Journal* 54, No.4, (Winter, 1995): 51.
[74] Julien Fielding, "Native American Religion and Film: Interviews with Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie," *Journal of Religion and Film* 7, no. 1 (April, 2003) http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol7No1/nativefilm.htm (accessed August 15, 2011).

Zacharias Kunuk

Zacharias Kunuk was born in 1957, shortly before the Canadian government began its relocation programs designed to herd Inuit populations into northern communities in an attempt to assert sovereignty over its Arctic periphery. During the 1960s the Canadian government intensified its attempt to assimilate the Inuit populations by giving Inuit families money to send their children to schools administered by missionaries. Kunuk's parents sent the future filmmaker to one of these missionary schools in Igloolik. Kunuk expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to develop his artistic side at this school, but spoke of his negative relationship with the missionaries.[75] An avid film watcher, Kunuk sculpted art in order to pay for admission to watch Western genre films screened in Igloolik.[76] Initially identifying with the American soldiers in their quest to quell Indian uprisings, Kunuk later reconsidered this position, "As I got older and saw myself as an aboriginal person, I learned that there's two sides to every story."[77] In the early 1980s, Kunuk earned enough money through selling his sculptures to provide the funds necessary to travel to Montreal to purchase video equipment.[78] Kunuk's interest in filmmaking originally came from his personal desire to film his father's hunts,[79] but the Inuk believed film could provide a greater social function in conveying aspects of traditional culture to Inuit society.

The IBC was instrumental in the development of Isuma as it brought the four founding members together and provided an opportunity for Kunuk to develop a personal aesthetic to filmmaking. Despite this opportunity to participate in media-making at the IBC, Kunuk wanted to move away from the standard news programs that were a large part of the IBC schedule, opting instead to create dramatic films that reflected Inuit perspectives and culture. Kunuk met Cohn though a filmmaking training program offered in Iqaluit and a mutual respect for each other's work ultimately developed, leading Cohn to follow Kunuk back to Igloolik.[80] Questions are directed at whether or not Isuma reflects an Inuit perspective since Norman Cohn, who is one of the key individuals involved in the creation of Isuma's work, is a *Qallunaat.*[81] Michael Evans believed it is not a matter of being born an Inuk that determines whether the Inuit are achieving self-representation through the works of Cohn. For Cohn it is more crucial for one to be immersed in the culture and depict the Inuit in an emic way than to genetically be an Inuk. Evans supported the belief Cohn's

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[75] Evans, *Isuma,* 59.
[76] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture," Universite de Montreal, Montreal, November 28, 2002. http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html
[77] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture," Universite de Montreal, Montreal, November 28, 2002. http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html
[78] Evans, *Isuma,* 60.
[79] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture," Universite de Montreal, Montreal, November 28, 2002. http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html
[80] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture," Universite de Montreal, Montreal, November 28, 2002. http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html
[81] This is an Inuit term meaning "non-Inuit."

work is an example of Inuit representational sovereignty due to his attachment to the community and culture. Kunuk was not simply dissatisfied with the style and content of television shows demanded of the IBC, but also directed frustration at the corporation over budgetary and bureaucratic problems, which prompted him and Apak to sever ties with this corporation and create Isuma. Norman Cohn and Pauloosie Qulitalik were receptive to Kunuk's appeals to leave the IBC and assisted Kunuk and Apak in the creation of Isuma.[82]

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter is designed to demonstrate how various stereotypes are perpetuated and reinforced in American society, and how the image of the Native American is used for diverse colonial and nationalistic agendas. Problematic patterns Euro-Americans utilised in previous centuries to conceptualise Indian identity continue to exist, and influence the manner in which film critics have decoded signs in North American indigenous cinema. Academics, actors and psychologists have identified these colonial images as a reason for the mental health problems Native American communities currently experience. Native American filmmakers and academics have argued these images fail to reflect the reality in Indian Country, leading them to promote the need for self-representative images.

The second chapter examines Sherman Alexie's objectives for entering into a cinematic dialogue with the dominant society. Alexie's two cinematic texts, *Smoke Signals*[83] and *The Business of Fancydancing,*[84] construct complex characters that attempt to define Indian identity and examine the varying interactions that Natives enter into with White people. *Smoke Signals,* which focuses on contemporary Coeur d'Alene identity, deconstructs images about Native Americans in a humorous manner and offers a critique about present-day colonialism, image appropriation and the internalisation of stereotypes. *Smoke Signals'* employment of humour appears to have resonated positively with film critics. Film critics attempted to conceptualise the alienation between Victor Joseph and his father Arnold Joseph within familiar terms by labelling this relationship as being "universal." Although *The Business of Fancydancing* engages in a dialogue about Spokane identity, in many ways it tackles fundamental issues of Native American identity by highlighting potential tensions and conflict not only within a community, but on a racial level. Critical reception to *The Business of Fancydancing* was divided based on several factors. Film critics who were able to locate familiar themes in this filmic text gave the film a more positive review than those who failed to locate familiar or relevant themes. Secondly, it is apparent some film critics criticised the unconventional film narrative *The Business of Fancydancing* employed and the tensions and conflict between characters present in the film.

[82] Evans, *The Fast Runner*, 32-41.
[83] *Smoke Signals*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Chris Eyre, 89 minutes, Miramax Films, 1998, 1 DVD.
[84] *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.

The third chapter examines how Chris Eyre constructed contemporary cinematic identities of the Oglala Sioux and the Navajo in his films *Skins,*[85] *Imprint,*[86] *Skinwalkers,*[87] *A Thief of Time*[88] and *Edge of America.*[89] Eyre has acknowledged he is more concerned with developing complex contemporary Indian identity rather than entering into a dialogue that discusses the broad array of stereotypes connected to Indian identity. This has allowed the Arapaho-Cheyenne director to utilise stereotypes as he saw fit. Eyre's negotiation with Native American spirituality is a little contentious since the Navajo have expressed some disagreement over *Skinwalkers'* depiction of Navajo medicine men. Despite this flaw in the images Eyre constructed, the Arapaho-Cheyenne director's work is important for Native American communities due to the messages they convey about community cohesion and the importance of Native American spirituality. The messages *Skins, Imprint* and *Edge of America* conveys to Native communities entails that each community member needs to take steps to help the community overcome obstacles if and when they are in a position to do so. The ending of *Edge of America* demonstrates community cohesion can be achieved even in some of the poorer Native communities. Although the depiction of Native American spirituality on-screen can be a very contentious issue, the manner in which Eyre incorporated spirituality into his filmic texts achieves three important objectives. Firstly, these texts establish the relevancy of Navajo and Oglala Sioux spiritual traditions in an age in which greater inclusion of Native American culture and spirituality is advocated for in the education system. Secondly, *Skinwalkers* re-appropriates the image of the Anasazi to demonstrate this tribe, which is frequently discussed in the context of "vanished," continues to exert a presence on the land. Thirdly, *Skins* and *A Thief of Time* demonstrate that mythical characters such as Iktomi and Kokopelli exist and exercise a powerful influence in contemporary society. Critical reception to these five films are diverse, as critics constructed broad generalisations of the cultural and spiritual images projected in these films, focused on stereotypes and directed praise at these Native American productions by discussing the acting and directorial talent, and how these films constructed "non-stereotypical" images.

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[85] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.
[86] *Imprint,* produced by Chris Eyre and Michael Linn, directed by Michael Linn, 84 minutes, Linn Productions, 2007, 1 DVD.
[87] *Skinwalkers,* produced by Craig McNeil, directed by Chris Eyre, 100 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.
[88] *A Thief of Time*, produced by Craig McNeil, directed by Chris Eyre, 94 minutes, Granada Film Productions, 2004, 1 DVD.
[89] *Edge of America*, produced by Willy Holtzman and Chris Eyre, directed by Chris Eyre, 106 minutes, Showtime, 2005, 1 DVD.

The fourth chapter examines Isuma's objectives of re-centring the importance of shamanism in three of their filmic texts: *Atanarjuat,*[90] *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*[91] and *Shaman Stories.*[92] In the dialogue the Inuk filmmaker created with the dominant society, Kunuk offered a more complex depiction of Inuit historical identity than Flaherty's documentary *Nanook of the North* created. Perhaps more importantly for the Inuk filmmaker, Kunuk attempted to engage in a dialogue with Inuit audiences over the importance of shamanism, as he attributed the socio-economic problems Inuit communities face to the decline in the number of Inuit following this form of spirituality. Such a dialogue is controversial among Inuit communities, but Kunuk hoped his filmic texts would demonstrate to the Inuit the benefits of shamanism historically and its relevancy in contemporary society. The benefits shamans can bring to Inuit society are explored in Kunuk's documentary *Shaman Stories* as eight elders discuss their experiences with shamans and/or shamanism. Although *Shaman Stories* was primarily directed at the Inuit audience, *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* were directed at national and international audiences. *Atanarjuat* demonstrates Inuit shamanism played a critical role in Inuit historical identity as it was used to oust evil and restore community cohesion. Critical reception to *Atanarjuat* attempted to locate "universal" themes, discuss the film in terms of binarism or highlight the film's ethnographic content. The ethnographic content that film critics centred their discussion around includes aspects of Inuit culture popularised by *Nanook of the North,* which had the effect of marginalising or omitting unfamiliar aspects such as shamanism. Kunuk's second feature film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* centres its discussion on the manner in which Igloolik Inuit, including Avva and his party, negotiate with the Christian religion. Critical reception was less enthusiastic to *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* than to *Atanarjuat* as Kunuk's second feature film lacks the action present in *Atanarjuat* and critical reception failed to locate "universal" themes in the film. However, critical reception continued to discuss *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* in terms of a familiar framework that revolved around "inevitable" cultural destruction on a generalised level.

The fifth chapter examines public sources of funding and/or distribution Kunuk and Eyre have utilised for their filmic texts *Atanarjuat* and *We Shall Remain.*[93] Although government funding for North American indigenous cinema has been criticised by Native and non-Native filmmakers and academics, this funding allows North American indigenous directors to construct images to negotiate with Hollywood constructed images and challenge the American

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[90] *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner,* produced by Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn and Paul Apak Angiliro, directed by Zacharias Kunuk, 161 minutes, Igloolik Isuma Productions, 2002, 1 DVD.

[91] *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* produced by Norman Cohn and Zacharias Kunuk and Vibeke Vogel and Elise Lund Larsen. Directed Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, 112 minutes, Igloolik Isuma Productions, 2006, 1 DVD.

[92] *Shaman Stories,* directed by Paulossie Qulitalik and Zacharias Kunuk, 48 minutes, Igloolik Isuma Productions, 2003. http://www.isuma.tv/lo/en/isuma-productions/angakkuiit-shaman-stories

[93] *We Shall Remain,* produced by Sharon Grimberg, directed by Chris Eyre *et, al.,* 450 minutes, PBS, 2009, 3 DVDs.

grand narrative. Although some filmmakers believe public funds allow indigenous filmmakers the ability to criticise the policies and attitudes of the dominant society, Canadian and American governments use these films for their own respective purposes. Canadian public funding for Inuit cultural initiatives has been used to support Inuit communities economically, stress Canada's multicultural policies and promote the development of a partnership between the Inuit and the Canadian government in which the government can reinforce its sovereignty over the Arctic. PBS was also instrumental in developing the *We Shall Remain* series, which hired Chris Eyre to direct the first three episodes. *We Shall Remains'* connection to PBS allowed the series to be broadcast across the United States and in parts of Canada, and to be incorporated into the American education system. Although *We Shall Remain* was designed to challenge the American grand narrative and demonstrate complexities in Native-White relations, critical reception has continued to focus on stereotypical and familiar images.

The sixth chapter assesses the attempts by indigenous populations to construct a cinema that is either based on a pan-indigenous identity or enter into a political dialogue with issues connected to indigenous identity. The focus of this chapter will be on *A Thousand Roads*[94] and *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change.*[95] Chris Eyre's construction of pan-indigenous identity in *A Thousand Roads* enters into debates about identity politics and the complexities of indigenous identity in the Americas, which ties into the broader agenda of the National Museum of the American Indian. Although *The Native Voice* attempted to promote the film to broad audiences by highlighting the film's "universal experience" and "authenticity," Euro-American critical reception accused the director of projecting romanticised images. Inuk director Zacharias Kunuk's documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* utilises the words of Inuit elders to enter into politicised debates about climate change at the United Nations and the Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival. Although the primary focus of *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* allows four Inuit communities an opportunity to voice their views on climate change, the documentary also enters into a dialogue about Inuit hunting practices. While critical reception praised Kunuk's documentary for its discussion on Inuit observations on climate change, it failed to discuss the documentary's criticisms of scientific knowledge in the Arctic, Inuit observations of Arctic wildlife, and Inuit hunting practices and ethos.

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[94] *A Thousand Roads*, produced by Scott Garen and Barry Clark, directed by Chris Eyre, 40 minutes, National Museum of the American Indian, 2005, 1 DVD.
[95] *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change,* directed by Zacharias Kunuk, 54 minutes, Igloolik Isuma Productions, 2010. http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/inuit-knowledge-and-climate-change

Chapter 1 - Establishing the Context of North American Indigenous Cinema

This chapter has two primary purposes. Firstly, it examines concepts of stereotyping and applies them to the images that colonial discourses have constructed of Native American identity. Given the focus of this dissertation on Native American directors, this chapter will pay particularly close attention to cinema, one of the principal mediums through which stereotypes have been conveyed to the broader American population. The images Hollywood has constructed of Indian identity have the potential to reinforce an assumed validity of these images to non-Native audiences. Secondly, it assesses strategies Native communities have utilised to negotiate with these colonial images. Native Americans have not been passive victims to the images constructed of their race as actors have played roles in influencing Indian on-screen and off-screen identities while Native activists and Native presses have been critical of the negative cinematic and television images created for popular consumption. In order for North American indigenous directors to deconstruct the stereotypes that exist in American society, they need to enter into a dialogue with the dominant society and construct images that negotiate with these Hollywood images.

The Construction and Perpetuation of Stereotypes

Academics have recognised that stereotypes are an "inevitable consequence" of an individual and/or collective to classify people into an easily recognisable manner,[1] particularly during scenarios in which individuals and collectives need to familiarise themselves to new environments or during periods of high anxiety.[2] Stereotypes have the tendency to minimise or erase distinctions among individuals as they depict a collective in a homogenous fashion. One of the problematic issues regarding stereotypes is their presumed validity among the dominant society since they are rarely questioned.[3] Although it is recognised stereotypes are employed as a means to make sense of one's surroundings, it is also apparent that the construction and perpetuation of stereotypes can contribute to the development of Euro-centrism and assist in the development of

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[1] Martha Augoustinos and Ian Walker, "The Construction of Stereotypes within Social Psychology: From Social Cognition to ideology," *Theory and Psychology* 8, no. 5 (1998): 629, 631.
[2] Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18, no. 1 (2002): 170.
[3] Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: the politics of representation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4.

colonial enterprises. Stereotypes are utilised to construct social boundaries[4] between the dominant society and the colonised population,[5] and are instrumental to re-confirming the superiority of racial characteristics of the dominant society and its system of governance while pushing indigenous populations onto the fringes of social life.[6]

In addition to constructing social boundaries, cultural signifiers that colonial discourses construct of indigenous populations permit them to be "entirely knowable and visible" to Euro-American populations.[7] Furthermore, these images construct boundaries that facilitate the employment of binary images, which essentialises indigenous identity into a set of characteristics and places it in opposition to the dominant society. These images reinforce boundaries by normalising the behaviour of the coloniser at the expense of making the behaviour and actions of the colonised appear deviant.[8] Abdul Janmohamed noted the identity of the self is interconnected with the perceived identity of the colonised, and a "genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture."[9] Furthermore, Janmohamed recognised "the imperialist is not fixated on specific images," but simply utilise images at his/her discretion for the purpose of imperialistic enterprises.[10] If these constructed images between coloniser and colonised are significantly different and are accepted as reality, it would ensure "the process of civilising the natives to continue indefinitely."[11]

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[4] Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar defined social boundaries as "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities." Consult, Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no.1 (2002): 168. Although it is recognised that the relationship between Euro-Americans and Native Americans was not as one sided as popular discourses maintain, the balance of power increasingly moved in favour of Euro-Americans as Euro-American colonisation expanded farther West.
[5] Pickering, *Stereotyping*, 48.
[6] Pickering, *Stereotyping,* 3-5, 134. This was also recognised by Martha Augoustinos and Iain Walker, as they argued that stereotypes can be "used to justify and legitimise existing social and power relations within a society." Consult, Augoustinos and Walker, "The Construction of Stereotypes within Social Psychology," 630.
[7] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 101.
[8] Pickering, *Stereotyping*, 7.
[9] Abdul Janmohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference," *Critical Inquiry* 12: no. 1, (Autumn, 1985): 65.
[10] *Ibid.,* 68.
[11] *Ibid.,* 68.

Academics have identified two important patterns to understanding how the dominant culture has conceptualised Indian identity. Firstly, studies conducted by Robert Berkhofer and Celeste Lacroix[12] have shown the dominant society has continuously manipulated and reinforced past images that date back to the earliest European contact with Native communities for their own political, social and economic agendas.[13] Secondly, Berkhofer concluded the Euro-American conceptualisation of Native American identity has been self-reflective, as the dominant society creates,

> the description, interpretation, examination, and manipulation of the Indian as an image and person were and are inextricably combined in White minds, the scholarly understanding of past and present White images becomes but the latest phase of centuries-old White effort to understand themselves through understanding Native Americans and vice versa.[14]

The self-reflexive nature of Euro-American articulation of Indian identity has led Berkhofer and Daniel Francis[15] to conclude that the Indian is a Euro-American "invention." Philip Deloria's research has identified the tensions present within American society as it has demonstrated "an inability to deal with Indian people."[16] Despite these tensions, Deloria believed the image of the Native American has been interconnected with American identity politics; "the performance of Indian Americanness afforded a powerful foundation for subsequent pursuits of national identity."[17] Through his assessments of religious and scientific texts, artistic forms of expression and government policies, Berkhofer recognised Euro-Americans have conceptualised Native American identity based on three primary modes of thinking. These modes of thinking not only became fundamental components in which Euro-Americans conceptualised Indian identity for centuries, but as will be demonstrated through this dissertation, continue to shape how Hollywood films depict Native American identity and influence the way critical reception has decoded filmic images.

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[12] Celeste Lacroix, "High Stakes Stereotypes: the emergence of the 'casino Indian' trope in television depictions of contemporary Native Americans," *Howard Journal of Communications* 22, no. 1 (Jan. – Mar., 2011): 1-23.
[13] Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), xiv.
[14] *Ibid.,* xvi.
[15] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011).
[16] Deloria recognised this anxiety was rooted in appropriating Native American connections to the land, "Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape they had to destroy the original inhabitants." Consult, Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5
[17] Deloria, *Playing Indian,* 7.

Firstly, Euro-Americans have constructed the Indian image based on broad generalisations that minimise Indian tribal differences and foster the construction of a monolithic Indian identity. Furthermore, this mode of thinking has allowed Native American identity to be locked into a static position that is continuously situated in opposition to Euro-American identity.[18] This conceptualisation of Indian identity as a single monolithic entity has allowed Euro-Americans to come to the erroneous conclusion that one tribe could speak for all other Native tribes. Furthermore, this mode of thinking has also hindered attempts by the American government to formulate policies for Native Americans since it assumed the same policy is applicable to all Native tribes.[19] The utilisation of these broad generalisations was central to nineteenth century evolutionary anthropological thinking that attempted to situate global cultures into a hierarchical ranking determined by Euro-American standards.[20] Although academics have been more accepting of cultural plurality with the development of cultural anthropology in the twentieth century, this out-group homogeneity has manifested itself in the minds of some film critics who continue to refer to specific Native American directors and filmic characters as "Native Americans" or "Indians," instead of referring to their tribal affiliations.[21] Furthermore, some film critics have discussed images connected with spiritual traditions in very general terms, describing these images as simply "Indian" spirituality.

Secondly, Euro-Americans have had a tendency to use social norms present in their society to evaluate Native societies, which has resulted in locating and focusing on images connected to Native American deficiencies. This emphasis on deficiencies was demonstrated in earlier colonial writing as colonists such as Cotton Mather characterised the tribes they encountered as a lowly race that, at times, followed the wishes of the Devil and worked to corrupt all of humanity. Despite the emergence of scientific means of investigation such as anthropology, psychology and craniometry, these disciplines retooled past images of Indians developed from Christian cosmology without drastically altering or challenging them. While these scientific outlooks

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[18] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 23-29.
[19] *Ibid.,* 152.
[20] *Ibid.,* 54.
[21] Examples include; Annette Insdorf, "Smoke Signals," *Whole Earth,* June 22, 1998; Christopher Kelly, "The Business of Fancydancing," *Knight Ridder/Tribune Services*, September 11, 2002; Dan Webster, "Alexie shines in director's chair, 'Fancydancing' erases any doubts about author's expertise at filmmaking," *The Spokesmans-Review*, January 20, 2002; Jonathan Curiel, "'Fancydancing' doesn't sidestep Indian issues/Loyalty conflicts with success," *SF Gate,* August 30, 2002; Paul Sherman, "Film's plot dances fancy for naught in 'Business,' *The Boston Herald,* November 27, 2002; Debra Johnson, "Redford's 'Skin' pic sell worldwide," *Daily Variety,* September 11, 2003.

attempted to assess Native American origins and situate them within a general study of humans, they were used to emphasise racial variance and perpetuate stereotypical images of Native American inferiority in order to reconfirm power relations and justify paternalism. Berkhofer also identified the image of the "degraded" Native American, who came into contact with Euro-American society and exhibited "the vices of both societies,"[22] which further promoted Native American deficiencies. These nineteenth and twentieth century American policies were constructed based on notions of White society's view of what Native reforms should entail and how Native Americans should function in white society. American politicians and officials also argued American westward advancement would be beneficial to Native Americans as it would force them to either relocate to continue pursuing traditional lifestyles or assimilate.[23] An assessment of these American policies led Berkhofer to conclude, "so long as Native Americans remain Indians in White eyes, then so long will White policy makers treat them as a problem and seek to bring them into the mainstream of United States society."[24]

Thirdly, the image Euro-Americans have constructed of Native Americans has centred upon Euro-American moral judgements, which perpetuates binarism and results in American society conceptualising Native Americans as either noble or savage. The development of the Noble Savage appeared in early French literature as French philosophers used this image to evaluate Euro-American society.[25] Although early colonial thought, particularly Puritan thought, conceptualised the Indian in terms of savagery, nineteenth century American writers romanticised the Noble Savage image to develop a distinct form of identity and nationalism to differentiate the United States from Great Britain and for commercial profit. American romanticism highlighted the noble nature of Native Americans prior to or at the point of European contact, recognising the Native needed sympathy since their exposure to European civilisation would ultimately cause them to perish.[26] American cultural expressions did not simply conceptualise Native identity in terms of the Noble Savage, as American popular culture recycled images of Native American savagery. Berkhofer concluded the "moral values" of the artist or writer determined whether the Indian was depicted as either noble or savage.[27] This binarism also influenced American expansionist policies since the American government believed the Noble Native assisted

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[22] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 30,
[23] *Ibid.*, 114-152.
[24] *Ibid.*, 194.
[25] *Ibid.*, 25-27.
[26] *Ibid.*, 86-92.
[27] *Ibid.*, 103.

in its endeavor to bring civilisation to the North American continent, while the savage Native hindered these expansionist policies and could be killed.[28]

Constructing a Hollywood Cinematic Identity

One of the primary reasons some images of the Native American have been embraced by popular audiences is due to their repetitive conveyance through low culture, particularly in cinema. Stereotypical images were present in early ethnographic films as this genre was heavily influenced by concepts of romanticism due to their objective to depict a "pure" and "authentic" indigenous culture before it "disappeared."[29] Therefore, the foundation of ethnographic films was based on the erroneous and popular belief Native cultures were on the verge of extinction. Furthermore, both John Price and Jacquelyn Kilpatrick realised the film industry constructed Native American identity around stereotypical images that highlighted aggressiveness, violence and sexuality that reinforced notions of a monolithic Native American culture.[30] In addition to the abovementioned images, Kilpatrick also recognised Hollywood often imposed images that highlighted Native intellectual deficiencies or spirituality.[31] Other academics have entered into this discussion of stereotypes or other problematic images constructed by Hollywood,[32] which included the appropriation of Indian identity by Euro-American protagonists and the focus on historical Native American identity. Ward Churchill found the focus on Indian historical identity particularly problematic since it robbed Indians of a contemporary identity and facilitated a national amnesia regarding treaty obligations and socio-economic problems.[33]

Research has indicated Hollywood's construction of a Native American cinematic identity has been dependent on diverse social factors, demands from audiences and developments in cinematic technology.[34] Both

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[28] *Ibid.,*118, 148.
[29] Joanna Hearne, "Telling and retelling in the 'Ink of Light': documentary, cinema, oral narratives, and indigenous identities," *Screen* 47, no. 3 (Autumn, 2006): 307-308.
[30] John Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 2 (Spring, 1973): 153.
[31] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* xvii.
[32] Ralph Friar and Natasha Friar, *The Only Good Indian...The Hollywood Gospel* (New York: Drama Bok Specialists/Publishers, 1972); Michael Hilger, *From Savage to Nobleman: Images of Native Americans in Film* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2002); Buscombe,*"Injuns!" Native Americans in the Movies.*
[33] As discussed in, Matthew Pettit, "Confronting Misrepresentation," in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen: A Sense of Memory and High-definition Inuit Storytelling,* ed. by Gillian Robinson (Montreal: Isuma, 2008), 175.
[34] Consult, Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians;* Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures" Research conducted by Clint Wilson II and Felix Gutierrez has indicated that this statement is applicable to the

Kilpatrick and Price concluded earlier filmic representations created more complex images of Native Americans than films of the 1920s and 1930s partially due to the inclusion of Native Americans both in front and behind the camera, and the development of plotlines that allowed for the presence of Native heroes and the existence of miscegenation.[35] Joanna Hearne recognised this decision to include more Native Americans into the production of films both in front and behind the camera was derived from popular criticism that films constructed "inauthentic" depictions of Indian identities.[36] Despite the existence of these complex images, Kilpatrick believed the savage Indian images exercised more influence over the popular imagination in the 1920s and early 1930s than the more noble images. The introduction of sound into the film industry reinforced the mentally deficient Indian image as Indian characters either seldom spoke or were given basic, grammatically incorrect lines to speak.[37]

National and international developments in the latter half of the twentieth century tremendously influenced the manner in which Hollywood portrayed Native American identity. Native American participation in the Second World War brought past images of Native savagery into question while McCarthyism led filmmakers to challenge accepted notions of Indians.[38] These events/attitudes contributed to the development of more "positive" stereotypical images of Native Americans. The Vietnam War and the civil rights protests allowed Native Americans to become symbols utilised by directors to voice opposition against American intervention in Vietnam or advocate for greater rights for minorities.[39] Indian filmic identity in the 1960s and 1970s was based on romanticised images connected to Indian spirituality, while other films were used to bemoan the oppression and impoverished conditions Native Americans were subjected to, leading to the development of "a formula that recycles and modifies the images of the noble savage."[40] In his survey of Western genre films in the twentieth century, Michael Hilger concluded the filming techniques and the images

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manner in which American movies portrayed other racial groups, including Asians, African Americans and Latinos. Consult, Clint Wilson II and Felix Gutierrez, *Minorities and Media: Diversity and the End of Mass Communication* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

[35] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indian,* 19; Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," 154-156.

[36] Hearne, "Telling and retelling in the 'Ink of Light,'" 316.

[37] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 19-37.

[38] Kilpatrick believed filmmakers constructed images depicting the Indian as "a respectable human" in order "to shake up preconceptions without getting blacklisted themselves." Consult, Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 58.

[39] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 50-67.

[40] *Ibid.,* 71.

encoded in *all* films, "reduced...[Indian characters]...to the extremes of Noble Red Man or the Savage."[41] One should be cautious not to view all Hollywood filmic texts in such a simplistic manner as Kilpatrick's reading of these films has contested such a generalisation. Although Hollywood continued to construct single dimensional Indian characters, the film industry demonstrated it could, at times, construct multidimensional characters as demonstrated by Old Lodge Skins (Chief Dan George) in *Little Big Man* (1970) and Chief Bromden (Will Sampson) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975).

Due to a greater presence of Native Americans in the media and feelings of "White guilt," Hollywood developed a number of "sympathetic films" in the 1980s and 1990s. These two decades witnessed a greater discussion of Native treaty rights and sovereignty, appropriation of Native American identity for sport mascots and economic conditions on the reservations. Although a greater Indian presence in media helped to construct images of contemporary Native American identity in films such as *Clearcut* (1993), even this film projected problematic images, including the manner in which it depicted Native American spirituality and the film's perpetuation of the stoic Indian. Although Hollywood insisted the films of the 1980s and 1990s constructed more "accurate" depictions of Native American identity, these "sympathetic" films continued to utilise familiar stereotypical images that included the savage and/or stoic Native American, romanticised images connected to Native American spirituality and the presence of the sexualised Native American female. The majority of Hollywood films in the 1980s and 1990s focused on historical Native American identity and used a Euro-American in the role of the protagonist. Despite Kilpatrick's recognition stereotypes continued to exist in Hollywood films in the late twentieth century, she believed films such as *Dead Man* (1995) and *The Sunchaser* (1996) developed their respective Native character "as a full realised human being with a culture of significance that is neither denigrated nor glorified."[42] The images these two films projected of Native American identity allowed Kilpatrick to have some optimism for future Hollywood depictions of Native Americans.

While discussions have centered around the role power relations have exercised in imposing images upon subordinated and marginalised groups,[43] Native American communities have exercised agency in

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[41] Hilger, *From Savage to Nobleman,* 9.
[42] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 156.
[43] Edward Said argued this within the context of the Middle East, as he contended the primary reason the British, French and the United States were able to impose their image over the Orient was due to their respective abilities to secure domination over this region. Consult, Edward Said, *Orientalism,* 94. Said's thesis

challenging images that have been imposed on them by Hollywood and other mediums. Research has demonstrated how Native American actors influenced the images Hollywood has constructed of Native American identity through multiple avenues; the relationship of some Native actors with directors, the signs encoded in films or using the publicity Native actors received from participating in film to advocate for Native causes. Luther Standing Bear recognised Hollywood directors such as Thomas Ince were open to Native American input into their works, but unfortunately the collaboration these two individuals envisioned never materialised. Michelle Raheja argued Minnie Ha Ha and Molly Spotted Elk were able to challenge popular images of Native American females in various ways. While Ha Ha was able to construct characters who failed to fit into audience conceptions of the Indian princess or squaw, Molly Spotted Elk's character deviated from standard Hollywood narratives that depicted female characters romantically involved with a Euro-American male or dying.[44] Although Rosenthal recognised Native actors were unable to exert a significant degree of influence in altering Hollywood's depiction of Native Americans, he believed the absence of Native American actors in these Hollywood films may have led to "even more demeaning" images of Native American identity.[45]

Although Rosenthal and Raheja demonstrated awareness of Indian actors who held some position in mediating with Hollywood's construction of Indian identity, they both recognised Indian participation in film has allowed actors to influence off-screen Indian identity. Various Indian agencies, including the War Paint Club, First Americans and American Registry of the Performing Arts, appeared throughout the twentieth century in urban centres such as Los Angles to support wage increases, encourage greater inclusion of Native actors in film and promote Native American culture.[46] While Raheja recognised Spotted Elk reinforced sexualised Native American images with the buckskin wardrobe she wore in *The Silent Enemy*,[47] Spotted Elk was able to utilise her stardom to secure a position as a public lecturer, giving her the ability to convey more

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has been criticised for his choice of sources and failure to assess how German images contributed to the study of power relations and orientalism. Consult, Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1982 and Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: a critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007). Furthermore, critics have argued Said failed to recognise that the people of the Orient resisted and negotiated with the images British, French and Americans imposed on the Middle East. Consult, Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 46-47.

[44] Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, visual sovereignty, and representations of Native Americans in film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 979 (Kindle Edition).

[45] Nicholas Rosenthal, "Representing Indians: Native American Actors on Hollywood's Frontier," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Autumn, 2005): 347-349.

[46] *Ibid.*, 342-344.

[47] Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 979 (Kindle Edition).

complicated images of Indian Country to the dominant society.[48] Aside from the on-screen identities Nipo Strongbear[49] and Luther Standingbear[50] created, they were also involved in political activism and worked to secure the franchise for Indian communities. Rosenthal believed Native American actors have been important mediators between Native American communities and American society as their "prestige and recognition…led to additional opportunities for the articulation of Indian culture and identity, by fostering connections to people and resources and increasing the influence of Indian activists."[51]

In addition to Native actors exerting influence in negotiating with on-screen and off-screen images of Native American identity, Native activism has protested and/or sought legal redress against images considered to be damaging to Native American identity and self-esteem. One of the earlier protests against the images projected by Hollywood involved a group of Native Americans marching on Washington in 1911.[52] Leonard George was extremely critical of the influence Hollywood images have exercised over the dominant society's conception of Indian identity, "In hindsight, we can say that native people of North America were oppressed by three major forces. These were government, religion, and Hollywood…[Hollywood] established in people's minds an image of Indians so powerful and controlling that even today it is hard to rise above it."[53] Filmic images have not been the only point of contention between Native communities and the dominant society. Further protests have occurred through appeals to the Oklahoma legislature in 1960 over the Native American image promoted on television,[54] Native legal action against the use of demeaning Native American inspired mascots,[55] and the denunciation by AIM and the National Congress of American Indians against Native American and Euro-American commercialisation of Native American spirituality.[56] Throughout the twentieth century Native American communities have become increasingly aware of the dominant society's

[48] *Ibid.,* 623.
[49] Rosenthal, "Representing Indians," 345.
[50] Rosenthal, "Representing Indians," 345; Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 402 (Kindle Edition).
[51] Rosenthal, "Representing Indians," 347
[52] Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 345 (Kindle Edition).
[53] Leonard George, as quoted in Rosenthal, "Representing Indians," 347.
[54] Friar and Friar, *The Only Good Indian,* 259.
[55] Cornel Pewewardy, "Playing Indian at Halftime: The Controversy over American Indian Mascots, Logos, and Nicknames in School-Related Events," *The Clearing House* 77, no. 5 (May-June, 2004): 180-185.
[56] Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (Summer, 2000): 335.

misappropriation of Native American images and its detrimental effects on Native American social, cultural and political lives.

Joanne Bedard, concerned about the influence stereotypes have exercised on Native American communities, posited the question, "What then happens to a culture whose symbols are chosen by outsiders, by those who do not understand its deepest beliefs, structures and ways of life?"[57] Native American academics and actors have cited Hollywood imagery and its failure to reflect diversity as having negative effects on self-esteem in Native American communities. In his examination of urban Native American identity, Donald Fixico recognised that negative images promoted by Hollywood films have had a detrimental effect on Native youth self-identification, leading to the development of inferiority complexes and forcing them to question their Native American identity. Fixico attributed some of the substance abuse problems urban youths face to the prevalent nature of stereotypes and the Native belief that these stereotypes must be emulated in order to be accepted as Native Americans.[58] Ben Cardinal (Cree) was critical of Hollywood's perpetuation of Indian historical identity and its frequent use of images linking poverty to reservations, and advocated for roles that depict contemporary Native Americans from middle and upper class backgrounds.[59] Nathaniel Arcand (Cree) expressed his frustration with the stereotypical roles available to Native American actors, "I'd like to see more contemporary roles for aboriginals like a gay lawyer or something."[60] The significant number of Hollywood films focusing on Native American poverty is problematic for Native communities as they have had a detrimental effect on Native American self-esteem. Enoch model and actress Crystle Lightning commented on this lack of self-esteem among some of her family members by recalling the tragic events that occurred on her reservation,

> In the past year, four of my cousins have committed suicide. One of my cousins hung herself and she was only 13 years old. Another one shot himself in the head. The kids on the reserves don't see any good things, any good people around them. They can't take it anymore and just end their lives. It makes me so mad. I don't see anybody trying to do anything. They just sit around and pretend it's like a regular thing...[61]

[57] Joanne Bedard, "Foreword," in Deborrah Doxtator, *Fluff and Feathers: An Exhibit on the Symbols of Indianness* (Brantford: Woodland Culture Center, 1992), 5.
[58] Donald Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 35-39.
[59] Noel Taylor, "Natives who are actors are finally starting...," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 24, 1991.
[60] "Aboriginal actors try to bury stereotypes," *Canadian Press NewsWire*, May 23, 1996.
[61] "Young Actress wants more than Hollywood Stereotypes," *Windspeaker* 14, no. 1 (May, 1996): 14.

Lightning partially attributed this low self-esteem to the images Hollywood has constructed of Native Americans since these movies have reinforced negative images of her race. Lightning hoped to rectify this problem by undertaking acting jobs that promote more realistic images of Native Americans in a contemporary setting.[62] Gary Farmer (Cayuga), who has been involved in many Hollywood and independent films, agreed with Lightning's assessment: "Poor self-image is one of the biggest problems facing native communities."[63]

Academics have discussed the detrimental effect of stereotypes on Native American communities and opinion appears divided on how to rectify the dilemma they face. S. Elizabeth Bird has recognised the hegemonic influence stereotypes appear to exercise over the popular imagination, and concluded it would be difficult to dispel them.[64] Gulriz Buken placed the primary onus of dispelling the generalisations that have been articulated about Native American identity onto Native Americans: "The heavy burden falls on the shoulders of Native American craftsmen, writers, poets, dramatists, artists, producers, directors, educators, lawyers, and entrepreneurs to expose what it is like to be[a] Native American citizen in contemporary America...Native people need to infuse the diversity of their cultures into such image making."[65] This notion of agency ties into Bird's contention that Native Americans will continue to be the victims of problematic images as long as Euro-Americans maintain control over the construction of the Native image.[66] Unfortunately for Native communities, Clint Wilson II and Felix Gutierrez have correctly recognised that Hollywood films are designed to make money and will only produce the images popular consumption desires and advocates for.[67] Until this desire for more complex image occurs, Native American cinema will primarily be relegated to micro-productions funded by public and tribal sources of funding.

Although it was previously noted that the general population rarely questions stereotypes, academics have recognised it is imperative that the dominant society becomes more aware of Native American culture and identity to become better equipped to dispel problematic and generalised images. While the above discussion

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[62] "*Ibid.*, 14.
[63] "Images on screen promote aboriginal clichés," *Canadian Press NewsWire*, February 12, 1997.
[64] S. Elizabeth Bird, "Introduction: Constructing the Indian, 1830s-1990s," in *Dressed in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* S. Elizabeth Bird (ed.) (Boulder: Co.: Westview Press, 1996), 6.
[65] Gulriz Buken, "Construction of the Mythic Indian in Mainstream Media and the Demystification of the Stereotype by American Indian Artists," *American Studies International* XL, no. 3 (October, 2002): 48.
[66] Bird, "Introduction," 4.
[67] Wilson and Gutierrez, *Minorities and Media,* 103.

has revolved around the manner in which stereotypes have affected Native American self-identification, Devon Mihesuah argued the perpetuation of Native American stereotypes is not only problematic for Native Americans who are the objects of these stereotypes, but also for the dominant society as it continues to embrace these stereotypes as fact. She maintained the dominant society suffers from "ignorance" as they are unable to conceptualise Native American identity outside of Indian cultural signifiers and stereotypes.[68] Moon Lee *et al.* recognised concerted efforts need to be taken to educate the dominant society in order to mitigate the influence problematic images of other races exercise on the popular imagination. [69] Walter Fleming argued the deconstruction of stereotypes can only be accomplished through knowledge and awareness of the dynamics of Indian identities; "Learning about other cultures, their histories, and their beliefs gives students a basis for judgement that goes beyond generalizations."[70] Jesse and Matthew Steinfeldt are optimistic that Native American stereotypes can be mitigated by educating popular society about the damaging effects these images hold on Native Americans,[71] but as will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, stereotypes have played a crucial role in the manner in which film critics conceptualise Native American identity.

Although Native Americans were participants in numerous positions of filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s, stereotypical images of Native Americans continued to persist, leading Native Americans to advocate for representational sovereignty. Representational sovereignty offers one avenue available to Native communities to address problems of self-esteem and to educate the American population about stereotypes. Eduardo and Bonnie Duran recognised self-representative images will facilitate feelings of trust between Euro-Americans and Native Americans and challenge internalised stereotypes among indigenous communities.[72] While the two psychologists did not specifically advocate using self-representative filmic images as a means to boost self-esteem, they recognised that control over the Indian image is required as such control can be beneficial to Native American self-identity. Cayuga actor Gary Farmer stated the only avenue available for Native Americans to change these stereotypes is to exercise representational sovereignty by holding influential

[68] Mihesuah, *American Indians,* 118.
[69] Lee, *et al.*, "Television Viewing and Ethnic Stereotypes," 108.
[70] Walter Fleming "Getting Past Our Myths and Stereotypes about Native Americans," *Phi Delta Kappan* 72,no. 7 (March, 2007): 57.
[71] Jesse Steinfeldt and Matthew Steinfeldt, "Multicultural Training Intervention to Address American Indian Stereotypes," *Counselor Education & Supervision,* 51 (March, 2012): 17-32.
[72] Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 69, 108, 136.

positions behind the camera. In an article written in 1991, Gary Farmer stated this degree of representational sovereignty would take "a long time."[73] Ted Jojola concurred with Farmer's opinion as he recognised the only way Native Americans will be able to reclaim their own image and protect their religion is by making their own movies.[74]

Constructing a North American Indigenous Cinematic Identity

In the last two decades, an increasing number of Native Americans have assumed the director's chair to construct feature films, short films and documentaries. These directors have a daunting task ahead of them due to the proliferation of stereotypes throughout a century of Hollywood films. Kobena Mercer noted the "burden of representation" that currently exists within the film industry makes indigenous filmmakers feel obligated to "correct *all* representations in one film."[75] However, it is not realistic for indigenous directors to enter into a cinematic dialogue with all misrepresentations in one film or throughout the entirety of their cinematic career. Due to these constraints, indigenous filmmakers need to be selective in the images they choose to enter into dialogues with the dominant society. James Clifford posed a series of questions that strike at the main problems of representation and counter-representations: "Should criticism work to counter sets of culturally produced images such as those of Orientalism with more 'authentic' or more 'human' representations? Or if criticism must struggle against the procedures of representation itself, how is it to begin?"[76] It is evident that Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie have attempted to counter Hollywood representations by constructing images that can articulate complex contemporary Native American identities for the consumption of the popular audience. In essence, these two directors want to convey the humanness that exists in Indian Country to the dominant society.

One commonality present in the fictional cinematic texts of Eyre and Alexie is the positioning of indigenous characters into the role of the protagonist. This focus on Native American protagonists is a radical

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[73] Noel Taylor, "Natives who are actors are finally starting...," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 24, 1991.
[74] Peter Rollins; John O'Connor, "The Study of Hollywood's Indian: Still a scholarly frontier?" in *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the American Indian in film*, eds. Peter Rollins and John O'Connor (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1998), 3.
[75] This quotation is taken from Kerstin Knopf paraphrasing of an unpublished interview with Kobena Mercer. Consult, Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 60.
[76] J. Clifford as quoted in Pauline Strong, *American Indians and the American Imagery: Cultural Representations across the Centuries* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), 12.

deviation from the manner in which Hollywood constructed its films.[77] This construction of a Native American protagonist has offered Eyre and Alexie a greater ability to construct complex Native American characters that interrogate and deconstruct the binarism that colonial discourses have attached to indigenous identity. Negotiating with popular fixation on the noble and savage dichotomy has been one objective Eyre has wished to advance, as the Arapaho-Cheyenne director believes "if we're going to humanize the Indian world, the first thing we have to do is look at ourselves."[78] For Eyre, one needs to recognise the positive and negative aspects of Native American identity, including the specters of alcoholism and poverty in order to humanise Native American on-screen and off-screen identities. This is a position Sherman Alexie can certainly agree with, "to humanise somebody you show everything. Everything. The best of who they are and the worst of who they are."[79] Alexie believes this humanising depiction of Indian identity will decrease levels of hatred and, in turn, improve intercultural relations between Indian communities and the dominant society.[80]

Although Eyre and Alexie have mutually constructed complex characters, their characters deviate from one another in fundamental ways, which, taken as a whole, demonstrates the diversity Native American identity entails. Alexie's characters experience identity crises whether through the internalisation of stereotypes or a lack of attachment to the reservation. Krupat's assessment of Alexie's literature recognised that "although his Indians may identify themselves as Spokane or Coeur d'Alene, displaced Navajos, Lummi, or perhaps Lakota, none of them has a strong sense of traditional tribal culture or language."[81] This statement, for the most part, is equally applicable to Alexie's cinematic work. Alexie's cinematic reservation does not revolve around traditions and spirituality.[82] One could certainly construe the character of Thomas in *Smoke Signals* as Alexie's

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[77] Despite that Kilpatrick praised *The Sun Chaser* and *Dead Man* for their depictions of complex Native American characters, the two films possessed Euro-American protagonists.
[78] Jeff Strickler, "'It takes an Indian to tell Indian stories'; When filmmaker Chris Eyre journeyed to the Pine Ridge reservation for 'Skins,' he found not only poverty, but a wealth of human spirit," *Star Tribune,* October 11, 2002.
[79] Timothy Harris, "Seriously Sherman: Seattle's Favorite Pissed Off Poet Talks about Truth, Terror, Tradition, and What's So Great about American Anyway?" in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie*, ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 133.
[80] *Ibid.*, 133.
[81] Arnold Krupat and Michael Elliott, "American Indian Fiction and anti-colonial resistance," in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literature of the United States since 1945,* ed. Eric Cheyfitz (New York: Columbia, 2006), 166.
[82] Alexie believes the presence of some Euro-American writers in the field of Native American literature and the popular desire for romanticised images force Native American writers to conform to Euro-American expectations. Of particular concern for Alexie is the literature that focuses on Indian spirituality, which he has labeled as the "corn pollen, four directions, eagle-feathers school of Native literature," since these are "expected

desire to mock medicine men and the romanticism that surrounds their image. Gloria Bird's assessment of *Reservation Blues* bemoaned Alexie's failure to incorporate tribal specific traditions and elders into the novel, concluding this text "omits the core of native community."[83] While Bird highlighted the role traditional cultures continue to exercise in defining Indian identity, Alexie would argue otherwise, as indicated in his conversation with American journalist Jim Lehrer, "I think the primary thing that people need to know about Indians is that our identity is much less cultural now and much more political."[84] While Alexie has minimised the presence of Native American traditions and spirituality in his work, Chris Eyre has asserted the importance of medicine men and spirituality in his filmic texts. In every fictional film he has directed to date with the exception of *Smoke Signals,* Eyre positioned medicine men into the role of protagonist or as characters attached to the protagonist. In addition to the presence of these medicine men, mythical beings of different tribal cultures continue to exert influence on the reservations and, at times, influence the actions of the characters.

Secondly, the construction of a contemporary Native American identity further allows Native American films to contest notions of erasure that popular discourses have imposed on Native American identity. Joanna Hearne recognised that Eyre and Alexie have positioned their Native American characters as spectators of Westerns to act as a means to "exemplify the very intergenerational future that the genre refused to envision for indigenous nations."[85] The construction of a contemporary Native American identity conveys to Euro-American society the strength and survival of these Native American communities, allowing them to establish a presence. This presence becomes critical to developing a dialogue with the dominant society over pertinent questions that affect Native American identity and communities, including image appropriation, treaty obligations and land settlements. Furthermore, the fictional works of Sherman Alexie and Chris Eyre align with

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images" and demonstrate a desire to capitalise off of spirituality. Consult, Jessica Chapel, "American Literature: Interview with Sherman Alexie," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* 98. Alexie feels it is important to avoid constructing romanticised depictions of Native American identity since these stereotypical images can unintentionally result in feelings of hatred directed at Native communities. Alexie maintains the conviction that it becomes increasingly difficult for the dominant society to hate Native Americans if they are depicted with humanising qualities. Consult, Timothy Harris, "Seriously Sherman: Seattle's Favourite Pissed Off Poet Talks About Truth, Terror, Tradition, and What's So Great About America Anyway?" in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* 133.

[83] Gloria Bird, "The Exaggeration of Despair in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues,*" http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/gbird/poems/RezBlues.html

[84] Sherman Alexie, *Jim Lehrer Show,* PBS, July 9, 1998.

[85] Joanna Hearne, "Indians Watching Indians on TV: Native Spectatorship and the Politics of Recognition in *Skins* and *Smoke Signals,"* in *Visualities: Perspectives on Contemporary American Indian Film and Art,* ed., Denise Cummings (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 44.

Gerald Vizenor's (Anishinaabe) concepts of sovereignty, as the writer conceptualised sovereignty as asserting a Native presence outside of Euro-American "simulations."[86]

Near the end of his text *The White Man's Indian*, Berkhofer posed the question, "to what extent can new meaning be infused into the old term [Indian] to cancel old prejudices and invent a new evaluate image?"[87] In order for Native Americans to avoid erasure and/or negotiate with stereotypes, Louis Owens believed Native American artistic expression needs to enter into a "frontier zone," which he defined as "the zone of trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question...to control and subdue the dangerous potentialities of imagined Indians."[88] Although this frontier zone is designed to contain and control, it should also be viewed as re-appropriating, negotiating and re-inscribing new meanings to past and contemporary symbols and images that both the centre and periphery use and recognise.[89] The re-appropriation of these images allows indigenous filmmakers the opportunity to inscribe their own meaning into signs and symbols the dominant society is familiar with for their own diverse purposes. One of the strengths of *Smoke Signals, Skins* and *Imprint* is their ability to re-inscribe images present in *Dances with Wolves* with alternative meanings.

Conclusion

It is evident stereotypes have played an influential role in how the dominant society has conceptualised Native American identity and have greatly affected Native American self-identification. As Berkhofer's work demonstrated, Euro-Americans have been following problematic patterns in their conceptualisation of Indian identity. These patterns may be difficult to deconstruct since they have permeated many levels of American society for centuries. Furthermore, as Berkhofer, Francis and Deloria demonstrated in their respective texts, the image of the Indian has been interconnected with self, which suggests American society may need to re-evaluate itself before it can alter the manner in which it conceptualises Indian identity. While stereotyping is an inevitable response to establishing relations between two groups, the forms these stereotypes adopt are not fixed

[86] *Ibid.*, 181.
[87] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 196-197.
[88] Owens, *Mixed Blood Messages*, 26.
[89] Stuart Hall stressed the need to continuously engage in a "re-telling of the past" in order to contest the image the dominant society imposed on colonial populations. Consult, Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Film and Theory: an anthology*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 706-707.

and often negotiate with competing images. Native Americans have not been passive to Hollywood's appropriation of their identity as Native actors have influenced the construction of the Indian image on-screen while Native protests have sought to alter these images through governing bodies and the judicial system. The creation of self-representative feature-length films is one of the latest strategies Indians have employed to negotiate with stereotypical images constructed about their race. The academic and popular discourses surrounding Native American self-representative images have demonstrated a belief these images can contribute to solving issues regarding self-esteem and take part in a dialogue about Native American identity. The increasing presence of Native American self-representative images has led Sonny Skyhawk to express optimistically, "Not since James Young Deer, a Winnebago in the silent [film] era, have Native Americans been poised to take control of our image."[90] An assessment of the film reviews of *Smoke Signals* printed in the Native presses has revealed his optimism is shared throughout Indian Country.

Although Native Americans have exercised a degree of representational sovereignty, which has allowed them to develop and participate in a frontier zone, one needs to question how film critics will decode these images. At this point one needs to consider Clifford's question regarding whether "one [can] ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring and textualizing in the making of interpretative statements about foreign cultures and traditions?"[91] Augoustinos and Walker believed stereotypes connected to the other "are so ingrained that their activation is automatic and their inhibition requires time, effort and conscious attention."[92] Although critical responses have recognised Native American identity can exist in a contemporary setting, they continue to frame their interpretation of these filmic images according to other stereotypes, which has prevented some critics from ascertaining the preferred reading of a film. The film reviews interrogated in the subsequent chapters suggest critics have attempted to locate familiar images within these filmic texts including "universal" themes, which came at the expense of ignoring the cultural specificities of these plotlines. This desire on the part of these critics to locate familiar themes also led them to focus on stereotypical images

[90] Sonny Skyhawk, as quoted in Nicholas Rosenthal, "Representing Indians," 351.
[91] J. Clifford, "Orientalism," *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (May, 1980): 209-210.
[92] Augoustinos and Walker, "The Construction of Stereotypes within Social Psychology," 631.

and discuss characters in terms of binarism at the expense of recognising complexity in these filmic representations.

Chapter 2 - The Many Faces of Sherman Alexie: Exploring Identity and Relations in Smoke Signals and The Business of Fancydancing

At first it may seem odd to focus a chapter around the cinematic works of Sherman Alexie since the Coeur d'Alene-Spokane Indian is far more recognised for his literary works. Despite Alexie's desire to write fictional prose, the writer has demonstrated an enthusiasm for film. In an article designed to publicise the release of *Smoke Signals,* Alexie stated, "I really love movies. I always have. I love movies more than I love books, and believe me, I love books more than I love every human being, except the dozen or so people in my life who love movies and books just as much as I do."[1] Although Alexie has expressed criticism about Euro-American appropriation of Native American identity, the Coeur d'Alene-Spokane writer/director has demonstrated an appreciation for some Hollywood and independent films, including *Little Big Men* and, to a lesser extent, *Pow Wow Highway.* Alexie's foray into the film industry was motivated by his desire to reach a broader Native and non-Native audience, and to convey complex images of Native American identity that deviates from "expected" images that have been circulating in popular culture. The reservations Alexie has constructed for his cinematic and literary texts have certainly not gone uncontested. In her criticism of Sherman Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues,* Gloria Bird criticised the author for perpetuating colonial images through his homogenisation of Native American culture by failing to discuss "anything uniquely Spokane."[2] Arnold Krupat also recognised Alexie's desire to shy away from incorporating tribal specific aspects of Native culture into his work, but also believed the "most powerful force" at Alexie's disposal is his ability to challenge colonialism through negotiating with stereotypes and by conveying the complexity of Native American identity to the dominant society.[3] Furthermore, Krupat and Michael Elliot recognised Alexie's literary works have been designed to discuss concepts of Indian identity and what that entails.[4] These last two statements and their applicability to cinema will be the focus of this chapter.

In multiple ways, *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* are two filmic texts that discuss and interrogate Native American identity through different strategies. The former film utilises a familiar buddy filmic

[1] Sherman Alexie, "Making Smoke," *Aboriginal Voices,* (May/June, 1998), 42.
[2] Gloria Bird, "The Exaggeration of Despair in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues,"* http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/gbird/poems/RezBlues.html
[3] Krupat, Elliott, "American Indian Fiction and Anticolonial Resistance," 168.
[4] Arnold Krupat and Michael Elliott identified a desire to discuss "what is an Indian?" and its relation to colonialism as one of the primary foci of Alexie's literature. Consult, Krupat and Elliott, "American Indian Fiction and Anticolonial Resistance," 166.

plot structure whereas the latter is an unconventional film narrative. The former utilises humour as a strategy to discuss Native American identity whereas the latter is a drama deliberately designed to make the audience feel uneasy with some of the projected images. Whereas the former became a major success among popular audiences, the latter had a small audience due to its limited theatrical release. Although film critics were able to locate themes they deemed "universal" in both films, critical reception to *Smoke Signals* appears to have been more positive than *The Business of Fancydancing* due to the humour embedded in the film, its conventional plot structure and critics' willingness to translate the father-son relationship of Victor and Arnold into familiar terms. But despite these differences, both films discuss Native American identity, and the complexity this identity entails, through two protagonists who represent the storyteller and the warrior. Both films utilise female characters in an attempt to mediate relations within the community or within a family. Furthermore, both films examine inter-racial and intra-racial conflict, although, granted, *The Business of Fancydancing* brings these conflicts to the forefront in a more direct way than *Smoke Signals. Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* are two important filmic texts that construct a dialogue with the dominant society, exploring issues of Indian identity and the diverse manner in which Native Americans and Whites interact with one another.

The Birth of Native American Indigenous Cinema: Smoke Signals

The development of *Smoke Signals* was a momentous event in the history of Native American filmmaking since Sherman Alexie and Chris Eyre were able to write and direct a film that constructed self-representative images appreciated by both Native and non-Native audiences. Sherman Alexie was aware of the importance of developing a film that resonated with popular audiences as he was hopeful *Smoke Signals'* financial success would encourage the funding and development of future Native productions.[5] Although the foundation for *Smoke Signals* is based on Alexie's short story, "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona," there are significant differences in the images the literary and cinematic texts respectively project. *Smoke Signals* de-emphasises images of poverty and youth drinking, and projects a greater emphasis on the presence of female characters and the relationship between Victor (Adam Beach) and his father, Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer). In one of the earliest academic assessments of *Smoke Signals,* Jacquelyn Kilpatrick concluded, "In significant ways, it [*Smoke Signals*] falls into the clichéd stereotypes of mainstream Hollywood films; its saving grace is that the Native Americans are shown as

[5] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 230.

contemporary humans with contemporary problems, emotions, and reactions."[6] The analysis of *Smoke Signals* that follows demonstrates greater complexity to the film than Kilpatrick was aware of since it engages with multiple issues, discussing colonialism, how stereotypes and popular culture affect Indian self-identification, and how the dominant society conceptualises Indian identity.

Debatably, the most significant manner in which the cinematic text deviates from "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona" is the way *Smoke Signals* emphasises the dysfunctional family dynamics in the Joseph household. While Victor is estranged from his father in the short story, this issue is not explored to the same degree as it is in the cinematic adaptation. The focus on the estrangement between Arnold Joseph and his family is crucial since it discusses the effects of colonialism on Native families and, judging by reviews discussed below, was one of the aspects of *Smoke Signals* critics enjoyed. Although these reviewers had a tendency to highlight the "universal" nature of the father-son relationship, there was no discussion within their reviews of the effects of colonialism on the relationship between Arnold Joseph and his family. A nuanced reading of *Smoke Signals* reveals a few critical scenes that link colonialism to family dysfunctionalism. The scene that sets in motion Arnold's detachment from his family is a Fourth of July party held at the Builds-the-Fire's house. At this party, a drunken Arnold accidently starts a fire in the house of Thomas' parents, resulting in their death. This scene was designed to force audiences to rethink power relations and consider what the Fourth of July - "White man's independence day"- means to Native Americans. Perhaps one can extrapolate more from this scene, and suggest Alexie was attempting to link the establishment of the American state, which subjugated numerous tribes through westward advancement, to the beginning of Native displacement.[7] The house fire that kills Thomas' parents is the first instance in which displacement is demonstrated in *Smoke Signals.* The second instance occurs when Arnold Joseph, who is filled with grief over his involvement in the death of Thomas' parents, leaves the reservation and never returns.

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[6] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 230. Jhon Warren Gilroy also recognised the importance of using Native American protagonists, but unlike Kilpatrick, Gilroy argued *Smoke Signals* is an important filmic text for its ability to subvert stereotypes. Consult, Jhon Warren Gilroy, "Another fine Example of the Oral Tradition? Identification and Subversion in Sherman Alexie's Smoke Signals," *Studies in American Indian Literatures,* Series 2, 13, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 23-42.

[7] The topics of family displacement and orphans have been consistently situated in Alexie's writing as the writer believes, "anybody who's been colonized, they're in the position of an orphan." Consult, Dave Weich, "Revising Sherman Alexie," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009),171.

One of the fundamental images *Smoke Signals* discusses is the concept of the vanishing Indian, which has played such a pivotal role in influencing government Indian policies and popular conceptions of Native American identity. There are numerous instances throughout *Smoke Signals* that discuss the concept of vanishing, which ties into Arnold's decision to leave the Coeur d'Alene Reservation. Arnold notes how magical he feels to Victor and how he can make the White people and their influence over Native Americans "disappear." At this point, Arnold states his magic is so powerful that he can make himself disappear. This last statement perhaps reflects Arnold's belief that he and his problems with alcohol are a product of this colonial system. During a conversation with Victor over the disappearance of Arnold Joseph, Thomas (Evan Adams) asserts Arnold will never return to the reservation, and substantiates his answer by citing a popular literary and filmic reference that invokes the image of the vanishing Indian, "When Indians go away, they don't come back. Last of the Mohicans..."[8] This apprehension about Indians vanishing is further reinforced when Victor decides to recover his father's ashes, prompting a worried Arlene, Victor's mother, to make her son "promise" he will return to the reservation.[9] Victor's return to the Coeur d'Alene Reservation breaks the cycle of vanishing, demonstrating that contemporary Native American identity continues to exist and can mediate with the White world successfully despite popular beliefs that have argued otherwise.

Alexie decided to utilise *Smoke Signals* as a means to negotiate with stereotypical images of poverty that have been circulating in filmic texts pertaining to Indian reservations. Alexie noted he and Eyre were "conscious of photographing the reservation in beautiful ways...[since]...contemporary films about Indians always highlight the poverty, the ugliness of reservations."[10] While this statement was made in the context of discussing the cinematography of the film, it clearly indicated the mentality of the screenplay writer as he was developing the film. In "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona," there are two specific passages that demonstrated the poverty on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation that were deleted or modified in the cinematic adaption: Thomas's residence in HUD housing and the passage that outlined the financial constraints the Tribal Council was experiencing since it could only provide one hundred dollars for Victor to recover the ashes of his father.[11] These two specific depictions

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[8] *Smoke Signals*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Chris Eyre, 89 minutes, Miramax Films, 1998, 1 DVD.

[9] This dialogue between mother and son gives Arlene an opportunity to mock treaties as Victor promises to write down on paper he will return. This statement prompts Arlene to state, "No way! You know how we Indians feel about treaties." Consult, *Smoke Signals*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Chris Eyre, 89 minutes, Miramax Films, 1998, 1 DVD.

[10] Sherman Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 158.

[11] Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 60-73.

of poverty were not added into the cinematic adaptation. A number of reasons can explain the motivation behind these changes, including the mutual desire of Alexie and Eyre to move away from the image of poverty that popular culture has associated with Native American reservations. One of the cinematic techniques Eyre utilised in *Smoke Signals* to demonstrate socio-economic diversity was his concept of subtle diversity, which has entailed constructing diverse representations of Native Americans and reservation life in non-direct ways. Eyre has recognised the problematic nature of continuously focusing on images of poverty since such depictions have had a tendency to construct only a single dimensional or "over simplified" representation of Native American identity. This desire to depict diversity was one reason Eyre decided to use a middle-class house as the dwelling of Thomas and his grandmother (Monique Mojica).[12] The decision to eliminate the passage in the short story that dealt with the financial constraints the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Council was experiencing not only demonstrated a desire to move away from images that depicted poverty, but also reflected the changing economic situation on the reservation. Between the publication of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and the shooting of *Smoke Signals,* the economic situation of the Coeur d'Alene Reservation has been altered due to the construction of the Coeur d'Alene Casino Resort.[13] Although Alexie has acknowledged the economic benefits casino gambling has brought to the inhabitants of some reservations, he still maintains that Native communities with casinos suffer the "same social problems."[14] By removing these images, *Smoke Signals* has demonstrated that the problems Native communities face are not exclusively restricted to poverty as Native Americans also suffer from psychological problems associated with colonialism, image appropriation and stereotyping.

Despite the efforts of Alexie and Eyre to deviate from stereotypical images of poverty, some critics still conceptualised the Coeur d'Alene Reservation as being impoverished. Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat characterised the setting of *Smoke Signals* as "Idaho's poverty-stricken Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation" in their review.[15] Stephen Hunter's review of *Smoke Signals* also ignored or missed the subtle diversity Eyre attempted to create on the reservation, suggesting the critic was heavily influenced by stereotypes when decoding the film's images,

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[12] This scene was discussed in the commentary of *Skins.* Consult, *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

[13] http://www.cdacasino.com/about-us.php

[14] Dave Weich, "Revising Sherman Alexie," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 171.

[15] Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, "Smoke Signals," *Spirituality and Practice* http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=1376

> Both old man [Arnold Joseph] and boy [Victor Joseph] are Coeur d'Alene, whose lives are bounded by the bleak reservation fences in northern Idaho. There's not much going on there – a running gag shows a reservation radio station traffic reporter lounging by the side of a barren highway and calling in, "Nope, no traffic yet" – and life on what amounts to a federal dole was worked out predictably: a vicious cycle of hopelessness, alcoholism and abuse.[16]

The manner in which the film negotiates with scenes of alcoholism will be discussed below, but there is very little in the film that would indicate the Coeur d'Alene Indians are living off the federal government. It is true there are scenes of broken-down cars, or cars that only drive in reverse on the reservation, but those images serve a functional purpose to engage in a humorous way with Native and non-Native audiences. Secondly, in response to Hunter's comment regarding the hopelessness on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, while the film does centre on family estrangement, there are elements that discuss family cohesion as demonstrated by the relationship between Thomas and his grandmother. Community cohesion is also exhibited as Thomas provides Victor with the necessary funds to travel to Phoenix in an attempt to heal the rift between the two men. Although Victor shuns Thomas at the beginning of the film, the journey the two Coeur d'Alene males take not only leads to a reconciliation between Victor and his father's memory, but a strengthening relationship between the two males.

Although her presence in the film is minimal, probably one of the more instrumental characters in *Smoke Signals* is Suzy Song (Irene Bedard). Suzy Song is the woman who discovers Arnold's corpse in his trailer following her return from a business trip and notifies Arlene Joseph (Tantoo Cardinal) of her discovery, which prompts Victor and Thomas to embark on their journey to recover the ashes of Arnold. The Suzy Song character was not written into the short story, "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona," and her presence in the film remains somewhat enigmatic as audiences are not aware of her tribal identification, nor positively sure of her relationship with Arnold Joseph. In the original screenplay for *Smoke Signals,* Suzy had a much more visible presence,[17] but Harvey Weinstein cut some of her scenes and dialogue to create a more "mysterious" female presence in the film, which he believed enhanced her relationship with the audience.[18] Alexie appears to have initially agreed with this decision, "[The deletion of Song's early scenes] radically changed the tone of the film and of Irene Bedard's

[16] Stephen Hunter, "'Smoke Signals' From the Heart," *Washington Post,* July 13, 1998.
[17] In the screenplay, Suzy is introduced to the audience rather early in the film. After the credits are displayed, the audience would see Suzy returning from a trip and discover Arnold's corpse in his trailer. Consult, Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay,* 10-13. Alexie and Weinstein agreed to delete this scene since they wanted to introduce her to the viewers at the exact moment she is introduced to Victor and Thomas. Consult, Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay,* 155.
[18] This may have limited the engagement film critics had with this character since she was not mentioned in numerous reviews.

performance as Suzy Song. She is now much more mysterious and magical because we see her less."[19] But Alexie later realised it was a mistake to delete some of the dialogue between Suzy and Arnold in scene seventy-five of the screenplay since the final film version fails to acknowledge Suzy Song is a Mohawk. Alexie feared this editing would have a detrimental effect on critical reception to the film, "Indian critics, especially Indian women critics, will notice that Suzy doesn't seem to have a tribe. I mean, we wanted her to be mysterious, but not that mysterious."[20] The mysterious nature of Song's character can and did expose the film to charges of romanticisation as Charles Flowers commented on this point in his review of *Smoke Signals*.[21] The mysteriousness that Alexie constructed with the character of Suzy Song is addressed and deconstructed in *The Business of Fancydancing.*[22]

The degree to which Suzy Song assists in the reconciliation between Victor and Arnold was minimised in the film compared to her role in the screenplay. In the screenplay, Suzy uncovers a picture of Arnold and his family as she is going through Arnold's belongings after she discovers his corpse. When Suzy turns the picture over, the audience realises there is nothing written on the back of the picture. This scene was designed to interconnect with a future scene in which Suzy prompts Victor to go through his father's belongings. The scene entails Victor discovering the picture, and when he turns the photograph around, the audience would see the word "home" written on the back. These two scenes were meant to imply Suzy wrote the word on the back of the picture, demonstrating her awareness of the estrangement between Victor and Arnold, but more importantly, her desire to engineer a reconciliation between Victor and his father's memory. Since the scene showing Suzy's discovery of the picture was cut from the final version of the film, the audience is left to conclude that Arnold wrote the word on the back of the picture, thereby minimising the role of Suzy in this reconciliation. The deletion of this scene suggests Alexie and Eyre wanted to assert Arnold's attachment to his family and the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, and also his recognition that he could not return there.

Although much of Suzy's dialogue and scenes were cut from the final version of the film, she continues to exert a confident attitude and is critical to the film's plot, which ties into Alexie's desire to construct "strong" female

[19] Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay,* 155
[20] *Ibid.,* 163.
[21] Charles Flowers, "'Smoke Signals': The Great Red Hope Movie," *Seminole Tribune,* September 11, 1998.
[22] In one of the earlier scenes of *The Business of Fancydancing,* Seymour is reading his short story "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel," that discusses Indian stereotypes, including the stereotype that "Indians always have secrets."

characters.[23] In her assessment of the female characters in *Smoke Signals,* Angelica Lawson argued, "the women in the film act as catalysts for both narrative and character development, furthering not only the movement of the plot but the growth of self-understanding and mutual bonds between the central male characters."[24] While Lawson's conclusions may be stretching at times, particularly in her assessment of the roles Velma (Michelle St. John) and Lucy (Elaine Mills) played in the film,[25] her evaluation of Suzy Song captured the importance of the character, "[Suzy] is a catalyst for the resolution that must take place. Her presence and stories force a critical turning point in Victor's understanding of his father and himself."[26] Suzy plays an instrumental role in the film as she explains to Victor why Arnold left the reservation, convincing the young man to rummage through his father's belongings. Victor's exploration of his father's trailer home leads him to find a picture of Arnold and his family, which appears to be an important moment in Victor's reconciliation with his father's memory.

In her assessment of thirty-four Hollywood films depicting Native American women, M. Elise Marubbio concluded "the Celluloid Maiden figure works as a racial formation that reinforces cultural narratives of nation building and national identity. These narratives exclude the racial Other from the overall image of the nation and, often inadvertently, condone acts of violence against women of color."[27] Marubbio believed the Celluloid Princess not only engages with audiences through her "sexually exciting" aesthetics and yet un-debased nature, but justifies the notion that the White hero needs to save the Celluloid Princess, thereby affirming the necessity of "paternalistic" intervention of the state. The Sexualized Maiden demonstrates the anxiety of the dominant society toward "sexually aggressive" women and miscegenation, as she exhibits the flaws of both races.[28] Furthermore, since the 1970s, aspects of the Sexualized Maiden and the Celluloid Princess have been amalgamated to form the Celluloid Maiden; a figure that attempts to "deconstruct…the myth of the frontier," by positioning the White male "as an

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[23] John Bellante and Carl Bellante, "Sherman Alexie, Literary Rebel," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), 13.
[24] Angelica Lawson, "Native Sensibility and the Significance of Women in *Smoke Signals,"* in *Sherman Alexie: A Collection of Critical Essays,* eds. Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 95.
[25] Lawson believed Velma and Lucy enact the role of "guides who start the two men on their journey." However, the two women do not offer any advice that assists the two men on their journey. Consult, Lawson, "Native Sensibility and the Significance of Women in *Smoke Signals,"* 101.
[26] Lawson, "Native Sensibility and the Significance of Women in *Smoke Signals,"* 101.
[27] M. Elise Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: images of Native American women in film* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 21.
[28] *Ibid.,* 7-13.

amalgamation of two worlds."[29] Marubbio believed various films "highlight the racial realities in contemporary [Native] communities," and concluded these texts continue to assert images that demonstrate "white dominance, historical violence, political power, and desire for a particular national identity."[30] Although Marubbio believed *Naturally Native* embraces concepts of colonial dominance by depicting violence against Tanya when a White male tries to rape the Native woman, the academic recognised the film deviates from the standard Celluloid Maiden narratives due to Tanya's ability to escape death. The images projected in *Naturally Native* and other films with Native Americans occupying important behind-the-camera positions assessed in Marubbio's examination[31] led her to conclude, "whether intentional or not, [the use of imagery connected to the Celluloid Maiden] underscores how deeply inscribed the figure and mainstream stereotype are in American culture, and how successful the colonising process has been in encouraging Native Americans to reaffirm such a figure."[32]

Although Marubbio briefly discussed how the images of *Naturally Native* partially conform to the narrative of the Celluloid Maiden, she failed to enter into an in-depth discussion of how *Smoke Signals* perpetuated this narrative. An assessment of the images *Smoke Signals* projects of Suzy Song will demonstrate this film complicates Marubbio's notions of the Celluloid Maiden. Marubbio recognised the beauty of Irene Bedard triggers an automatic recognition in the dominant society that she is a Celluloid Maiden.[33] Although Irene Bedard was cast specifically for her ability to read lines "well" in scene seventy-five,[34] it was written in the notes of the screenplay that the role should be given to a "very attractive" woman.[35] Even though the Celluloid Maiden is defined by her beauty, it should also be acknowledged there is more to Song's character aside from her appearance. Cox's reading of Suzy Song correctly noted her sexual engagement with her "best friend's boyfriend," and her theft of a purse from an elderly woman demonstrates her flawed character behaviour, which in essence "humanizes" the character.[36] Song's sexual encounter with her roommate's boyfriend complicates Marubbio's conception of the Celluloid Maiden since

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[29] *Ibid.*, 17.
[30] *Ibid.*, 221-222.
[31] The two Native directed films Marubbio assessed include *Naturally Native* and *Smoke Signals.* Although Marubbio identified *Smoke Signals* as fulfilling these patterns, the academic failed to engage in an in-depth discussion about the film. Marubbio also examined *Grand Avenue* and *Dance Me Outside,* which were directed by non-Natives Daniel Sackheim and Bruce McDonald respectively. Although *Grand Avenue* and *Dance Me Outside* had Euro-American directors, Native Americans occupied key positions behind and in front of the camera.
[32] Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden,* 223.
[33] *Ibid.*, 223.
[34] Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A screenplay,* 163.
[35] *Ibid.*, 10.
[36] James Cox, "This Is What It Means to Say Reservation Cinema," in *Sherman Alexie: a collection of critical essays,* eds. Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 83.

there is no mention of her having this relationship with a White male and there is no reference of violence being committed against her character. Despite this sexual transgression, one certainly should not view Suzy Song as a lustful woman as the film deviates from the standard Hollywood norms that develop intimate relations between the leading male and female characters.[37] Perhaps Gary Arnold was expecting such a romantic encounter to ensue given the language he used to describe the encounter between Victor and Suzy, "The smoldering Victor seems to be primed for neo-Byronic passion and some kind of liberating blow up, but he doesn't even get to make much headway with the leading lady, Irene Bedard."[38] While no violence is committed against Suzy Song, there is violence committed against Arlene Joseph as Arnold assaults his wife during an argument about their drinking habits. However, this scene fails to completely align with Marubbio's notion of the Celluloid Maiden since the violence is not committed by a Euro-American male, but by a Coeur d'Alene male, suggesting this scene is more about the effects of colonialism than "cultural narratives of nation building."

Another significant manner in which *Smoke Signals* deviates from the short story is Victor's relationship with alcohol, which ties into the broader themes of alcohol awareness in the film. Although Gloria Bird criticised Alexie for "sensationalising" alcoholism in *Reservation Blues* and the novel's capitalisation "upon the stereotypical image of the 'drunken Indian,'" she recognised it is a "dilemma…to accurately represent our communities without exploiting them" when depicting alcoholism in Native American forms of artistic representation.[39] Although alcoholism has a drastic effect on the Joseph and Builds-the-Fire households, Arlene and Arnold recognise the dangers of alcoholism and begin their own respective steps toward alcohol recovery. The manner in which each character mediates their respective relations with alcohol would permit the audience the images necessary to negotiate and deconstruct the drunken Indian stereotype. Witnessing the effects of alcohol on his parents contributes to Victor's refusal to drink, which is a departure from how the character is portrayed in "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona." In this short story, the reader becomes aware of the effects of alcohol on Coeur d'Alene youth and community dynamics as a drunken Victor beats up Thomas, "When they were fifteen and had long stopped being friends, Victor and Thomas got into a fistfight. That is, Victor was really drunk and beat Thomas up

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[37] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 283.
[38] Gary Arnold, "'Smoke Signals' fades without fire," *The Washington Times,* July 3, 1998.
[39] Bird, "The Exaggeration of Despair in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues,"* http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/gbird/poems/RezBlues.html

for no reason at all."[40] In the cinematic adaptation, this unprovoked attack is still present, but it is motivated by Thomas questioning Victor as to why Arnold left, unintentionally insinuating it was because of Victor. Throughout *Smoke Signals,* audiences witness scenes in which Victor demonstrates hostility and anger against his parents' drinking, leading him to throw beer bottles against the side of Arnold's truck. Victor's decision to abstain from drinking is highlighted in a scene near the end of the film to good effect. When Victor is questioned over the validity of the charges against him for drinking and driving and assault, Victor states to a sheriff that he has "never had a drop of alcohol in my [Victor's] life. Not one drop." This statement is extremely important on two levels. Firstly, it challenges the stereotypical image of the drunken Native American in a humorous manner, particularly when the sheriff asks, "What kind of Injun are you exactly?" Thomas' reply that he and Victor are Coeur d'Alene Indians reaffirms Indian identity can exist without alcohol.[41] While this scene provides a powerful tool to engage the audience in a debate over Indian identity and alcohol, it is not the only scene that accomplishes this objective as the dialogue between Velma and Lucy also reveals how humour can be utilised to detach Indian identity from alcohol. While the two women are driving backwards through the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, Lucy asks Velma for a beer to which Lucy responds, "We don't drink no more, remember?" and Lucy settles for a Coke. Although Philip Heldrich noted Alexie used Diet Coke to "mock" alcoholism in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*,[42] his statement is applicable to *Smoke Signals* as the Coke Lucy asks for serves the same mocking purpose.

Although *Smoke Signals* deals with alcoholism in very complex ways, the research John Mihelich conducted with youths[43] and college students has demonstrated the power some stereotypes continue to exercise among these demographic groups. Mihelich was concerned about how many of the respondents focused on the drunkenness of Arlene and Arnold Joseph despite Mihelich correctly concluding the film focuses more on rehabilitation and abstinence than alcohol abuse. Although the youths who watched *Smoke Signals* were able to recognise Native Americans can exist outside the historical identity that popular culture has imposed on them and

[40] Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight In Heaven,* 65.
[41] Kerstin Knopf also recognised the difference between the manner in which the two texts depict Victor's drinking (or lack of drinking). Knopf also concluded that Victor's refusal to drink and the sheriff's initial questioning of this is a powerful means to deconstruct the drunken Indian stereotype. Consult, Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 254-255
[42] Philip Heldrich, "'Survival=Anger X Imagination': Sherman Alexie's Dark Humor," in *Sherman Alexie: a Collection of Critical Essays,* eds. Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 29.
[43] These youths were between eight and fourteen years old, although Mihelich did not reveal how many youths were involved in his research sample.

accept Native American contemporary identity, the youths still focused on stereotypical images of the drunken Native.[44] Only a few students enrolled in Mihelich's college level sociological courses were aware of the existence of *Smoke Signals*. Of the students who saw *Smoke Signals,* only a minority of them believed the film projected positive images of Native Americans as the majority of the students directed their attention to images that connected Native identity with alcohol. Through these results, Mihelich concluded,

> the tenuous nature of popular culture to transform hegemonic images…[Native American films] cannot stand alone in their efforts to educate the public and transform dominant images. Popular culture, while an effective, immediate, and widely consumed agent, has, at times, only a fleeting effect, lasting only the time that passes between its consumption and the consumption of the next unrelated element. Popular culture is consumed as entertainment, not as a learning tool.[45]

Mihelich's conclusions regarding the film's ability to deconstruct stereotypes were a bit pessimistic and drawn from limited data. Despite that the majority of his sample group was drawn to the drunken image of Native Americans, they also recognised Native Americans do exist in a contemporary period, which was a response Alexie and Eyre wanted to nurture when developing *Smoke Signals.*[46] Secondly, while Mihelich's research drew attention to the persistence of negative stereotypes in American society, it should be recognised that not all of the students focused on the negative stereotypes, indicating these stereotypes can be contested among youths and college-level students. It should also be recognised this data was drawn from only two samples of people who were in their early 20s and younger, and was not indicative of larger societal views of the images the film projected.

Although Mihelich's conclusions discussed the reaction of children and college students to the images of alcoholism present in *Smoke Signals,* an assessment of film reviews has shown critics have decoded these images in diverse ways. Stephen Hunter's review, linking alcoholism to the perceived boredom of the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, highlighted Arnold Joseph's ability to drink beer "by the gallon,"[47] but failed to discuss the anti-alcohol images *Smoke Signals* projected, which as discussed above is problematic. Although Dan Webster's review of *Smoke Signals* labelled Arnold's character as "hard-drinking," he too failed to discuss the anti-alcohol images the

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[44] John Mihelich, "Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film," *Wicazo Sa Review,* 16 no. 2 (Autumn, 2001): 133-134.
[45] *Ibid.*, 134.
[46] Sherman Alexie characterised *Smoke Signals* as "revolutionary" as the highly acclaimed writer stated, "What is…groundbreaking about the film is that the characters in it are Indians, and they're fully realized human beings. They're not just the sidekick, or the buddy, they're the protagonists. Simply having Indians as the protagonists in a contemporary film, and placing them within this familiar literary, and cinematic structure, is groundbreaking." Consult, Dennis West; Joan West, "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie," *Cineaste* 24, no. 4 (Fall, 1998): 28-30.
[47] Stephen Hunter, "'Smoke Signals' From the Heart," *Washington Post,* July 3, 1998.

film projected.[48] This fixation of engaging with images of alcoholism was not exclusively restricted to these reviews printed in Euro-American presses. A review printed in *Indian Country Today* focused on and engaged with images of alcoholism present in *Smoke Signals* while failing to discuss the film's anti-alcohol message, "The film takes a more depressing side of reservation life and *dwells* [my italics] on alcoholism, poverty and hopelessness."[49] While these specific film critics focused on stereotypical images of Native American identity in their respective reviews, the majority of film critics did not discuss alcoholism, demonstrating an awareness among critics of the complex nature in which *Smoke Signals* examined this issue.

Arguably one of the greatest strengths of *Smoke Signals* is its ability to enter into a dialogue regarding stereotypes by constructing two Coeur d'Alene protagonists who internalise their own stereotypical notions of what an Indian is.[50] The use of the buddy formula plot structure and the dialogue between Victor and Thomas also allows *Smoke Signals* to engage in a debate about the internalisation of stereotypes among Native Americans, which Alexie has identified as being a problem in Native communities. Alexie believes stereotypes are problematic, not only because they facilitate feelings of hatred between groups, but also due to the damage they inflict on self-identity,

> You can never measure up to a stereotype. You can never be as strong as a stereotypical warrior, as godly as a stereotypical shaman, or as drunk as a drunken Indian. You can never measure up to extremes. So you're always going to feel less than the image, whether it's positive or negative. One of the real dangers is that other Indians have taken many stereotypes as a reality, as a way to measure each other and ourselves.[51]

Alexie is aware of the powerful effect television has had on Native self-identification and stereotypes, which is demonstrated in *Smoke Signals* through the manner in which Victor and Thomas model their own behaviour and attitudes from filmic and television images.[52] Lori Taguma identified the relationship between Victor and Thomas as "a fresh outlook on the ways Native people need to interact with each other."[53] Although the film critic did not elaborate on how *Smoke Signals* projected a "fresh outlook," the dialogue between the two characters has brought problems regarding the internalisation of stereotypes to the forefront and has interrogated what it meant to be an Indian.

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[48] Dan Webster, "Clear Signal Ovation at Festival Greets Alexie's Film 'Smoke Signals,'" *The Spokesman-Review,* January 17, 1998.

[49] "'Smoke Signals' must drift across racial lines," *Indian Country Today,* September 21, 1998.

[50] Gilroy, "Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition?" 26.

[51] Ase Nygren, "A World of Story-Smoke: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* 148.

[52] Gilroy, "Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition?" 28, 34-36.

[53] Lori Taguma, "All-Native film has fresh perspectives," 41.

Smoke Signals discusses how Native Americans can potentially internalise a warrior mentality due to family dysfunctionalism and continuous exposure to the warrior image broadcasted on television. In terms of his physical appearance, Victor is a good-looking, athletic male who demonstrates very masculine traits,[54] which facilitates the development of a warrior mentality. Victor is very reluctant to discuss his father and tends to lash out against Thomas every time he mentions Arnold, which demonstrates Victor's lingering hostility toward his father for abandoning him and his mother. This anger is also demonstrated when Suzy tells Victor that she loves Arnold as a daughter would love a father, prompting the young Coeur d'Alene male to exclaim, "So he had you fool too." This attraction to the warrior persona is also demonstrated by Victor's television viewing habits. *Smoke Signals* contains two scenes in which Victor is watching an old Western on television, and in each of these instances images of either US soldiers or Indian warriors are shown on the television screen. It is evident the young male believes a warrior mentality is the best strategy to interact with the world and tries to convince Thomas to adapt the same mentality, "get stoic…you got to look mean or people won't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean."[55] The warrior persona Victor utilises in his interaction with White people led Gilroy to correctly note, "Goaded on by the assumption that all must end poorly for him as the doomed, tragic figure, he is prepared to fight, even in a situation where resistance is futile."[56] Although Victor fails to embrace this stoicism throughout the film, this specific dialogue is important since it demonstrates Victor's belief that stoicism should be used when engaging with the White world, though unbeknownst to Victor that he is internalising one of the stereotypes designed to rob Native Americans of their humanity.

Thomas represents the storyteller, who is attracted to romanticised depictions of Native American identity as demonstrated by his silent admission that he has watched *Dances with Wolves* at least one hundred times. Thomas' story-telling persona can be construed as an attempt for the Coeur d'Alene youth to locate a place of respect in the community. Thomas' personality and appearance clearly demonstrate he is not the warrior Victor is as he wears a three-piece suit, large glasses and ties his hair into braids, which to an extent feminises Thomas, particularly in scenes that show him with his grandmother, who puts her hair into similar braids. Thomas' persona of

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[54] Kirsten Knopf believed Victor embodies these masculine traits since he is simply an observer of his mother preparing the fry bread in contrast to Thomas who plays an active role in cooking the fry bread. Consult, Knopf, *Decolonizing Lens of Power,* 266.

[55] This assessment of Victor's internalisation of the warrior image is also present in Gilroy, "Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition?" 28,34.

[56] Gilroy, "Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition?" 28.

the storyteller engages with different characters on the reservation with diverse results. While Thomas' physical appearance, clothing and mannerism prevent him from acquiring the respect of Victor and the young males on the reservation, his interaction with Coeur d'Alene female characters is different. When Thomas offers to trade Lucy and Velma a story for a ride to the bus stop, Velma warns, "better be good." This comment demonstrates there are no assurances they will be entertained by Thomas' story, but unlike the males, the two female characters are willing to listen. The two women are clearly in awe after Thomas tells them a story that involves Arnold Joseph being on the cover of *Time* magazine for assaulting two national guards, leading them to inquire whether the story is true. Gilroy recognised that one of the commonalities associated with the characters in *Smoke Signals* was a need to "interrogate the truth of Thomas' stories," which he argued was designed to complicate simple binaries of "truth and lies." [57] For the most part, this statement is accurate, although Thomas' grandmother complicates it through her faith in the validity of her grandson's stories. The elderly woman asks Thomas upon his return from Phoenix to tell her "what happened, Thomas? Tell me what's going to happen." This specific dialogue perhaps demonstrates there is still an attachment to traditionalism among elders in the community. [58]

Academics have identified the scene that depicts Victor and Thomas travelling to Phoenix on a bus as being one of the more crucial parts of the film for its ability to discuss stereotypes and invert them as a means of resistance. Although there are very few scenes in *Smoke Signals* that depict interactions between Euro-Americans and the two Coeur d'Alene males, the scenes that do exist were designed to demonstrate how stereotypical images frame the way the dominant society conceptualises and reacts to Native American identity. The first scene on the bus was designed to demonstrate Euro-American unfamiliarity with contemporary Native American identity as every White person on the bus is staring at Victor and Thomas as they board the vehicle and walk down its aisle to their seats. Victor and Thomas decide to sit beside a blond female who is participating in an assortment of stretching exercises, prompting the question from Thomas, "Are you a gymnast or something?" At first, the gymnast is inquisitive, asking whether Thomas and Victor are Indians, demonstrating her unfamiliarity of Indian identity outside of the cultural signifiers that popular culture has associated with Native American identity. The gymnast, who was an alternate on the American gymnastic team, discusses her anger that she failed to compete in the 1980 Olympics due to the American boycott of the games to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. When the would-

[57] *Ibid.*, 37.
[58] Readers can see this connection between elders and traditions through the character of Big Mom in *Reservations Blues* and an unidentified elder taking a sweat bath in *The Business of Fancydancing.*

be Olympian discusses her troubles, Victor lashes out against the woman claiming she did not experience any loss due to her status as an alternate and the un-likeliness that she would have competed, completing his rant by stating, "You ain't got nothing to complain about so why don't you just be quiet." This last comment can engage with different audiences in multiple ways depending on their position.[59] Firstly, Euro-Americans may interpret Victor's reaction as a manifestation of his anger at the abandonment and death of his father. Native audiences may interpret this in a similar manner, particularly since single-parent families are a problem on some reservations, but they may also be able to extrapolate an additional meaning to this comment by considering the effects colonialism has had on Native American cultures and community cohesion.

Academic scholarship has focused on the interaction between Victor, Thomas and the two cowboys since this is also an important scene designed to demonstrate Euro-American attitudes toward Native Americans. Alexie remarked on the importance of this scene in the screenplay of *Smoke Signals,* "We probably spent more time editing this scene than any other, trying to create tension with various cuts."[60] As Victor and Thomas re-board the bus after a brief layover, the two Coeur d'Alene males discover two Euro-American travellers, in stereotypical "redneck" attire, occupying their seats. A brief encounter ensues in which one of the cowboys, utilising racist slang, tells Victor to take "Super Injun there, find yourself somewhere else to have a powwow." The two Coeur d'Alene males retreat to the back of the bus, which conjures up images of racial segregation,[61] land dispossession[62] and the potential[63] marginalisation that can occur when Native Americans enter the White world.[64] Victor and Thomas maintain their dignity through a discussion that centres on John Wayne as Victor states the actor never shows his teeth, leading Victor to conclude there is something wrong when a man never smiles. Through this dialogue, Victor and Thomas

[59] Victor's reaction is different to Cathy's remarks in "This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona." In the short story, when Thomas states, "Sounds like you all got a lot in common with Indians," the reaction among the three travellers is, "Nobody laughed." Consult, Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,* 67.
[60] Alexie, *Smoke Signals: a screenplay,* 161.
[61] Academic texts haven drawn attention to this scene, noting the segregation it is suggesting. Joanna Hearne claimed Victor and Thomas' forced relocation to the back of the bus demonstrates the creation of a "segregated social space of the American South in the Civil Rights era, but also echoes the federal policies of Relocation and dislocation of Native tribes." Consult, Joanna Hearne, "John Wayne's Teeth," 195.
[62] Armbruster-Sandoval identified that "the stolen bus seats are a metaphor for stolen land." Consult, Armbruster-Sandoval, "Teaching 'Smoke Signals,'" 103.
[63] The word *potential* is used since not all of the Indians are segregated on the bus. Observant viewers of *Smoke Signals* will notice that Chris Eyre, in a cameo as a bus passenger, is the first person to get off the bus in Phoenix, which suggests at one point, he occupied a seat at the front of the bus.
[64] This marginalisation is also seen as Arnold Joseph and Suzy Song live outside of Phoenix, although this may suggest a self-imposed marginalisation from White society.

are attacking cowboys and Whites who adopt the attitudes of cowboys, by mocking an influential figure in American Westerns to demonstrate "the cowboys don't always win." John Charles argued this is a powerful scene for the manner in which it deconstructs the image of the stoic Indian and transfers it onto John Wayne, thereby leading audiences to question "just what kind of hero would always hide the humanity of a smile in order to look tough."[65] The act of imposing a stoic image on John Wayne, an image that has been utilised to deprive Indians of their humanity, essentially robs the actor, primarily associated with killing Indians on celluloid, of his humanity.

The final instance in which *Smoke Signals* depicts Thomas and Victor mediating with the White world entails the two Coeur d'Alene Indians talking to the sheriff over charges that have been levelled against Victor by Burt Cicero following their car accident. Although academics have identified this dialogue between Victor, Thomas and the sheriff as crucial to negotiating with the drunken Indian stereotype, it also plays an important role in indicating power relations between Whites and Indians, and aids in the healing between Victor and his father's memory. After Victor tells the sheriff the charges are "bull shit" and informs the sheriff he has never drank alcohol in his life, the sheriff tells Thomas and Victor that Burt's wife has made a statement against her husband, citing he is "an asshole" and refuting the charges. The sheriff informs Victor there is no longer a case against them indicating the Indians finally won one against the White world.[66] After the sheriff informs the two Coeur d'Alene Indians that the charges are dropped, he questions Victor and Thomas about the urn. Victor's answer that it is his "father" brings some degree of self-awareness to the protagonist, but more importantly, ends the use of his warrior mentality as he no longer lashes out against people.

Chris Eyre's personal website acknowledges the major success *Smoke Signals* has had among Native Americans, claiming "nearly every Native American living in Indian Country has seen" the film.[67] This ability to reach a broad Native audience has been important to Alexie. Recognising a small percentage of his literary audience has been Native Americans, Alexie's entry into the world of cinema was motivated by his desire to reach a greater

[65] John Charles, "Contemporary American Indian Life in 'Owl Song' and 'Smoke Signals,'" *The English Journal* 90, no. 3 (January, 2001): 55.
[66] This desire to win one against the White world is one of the underlining themes of the film and is demonstrated when Arnold tells Suzy that he and Victor beat the Jesuits in a game of basketball. The story turns out to be false, demonstrating another example in which the Natives lose.
[67] http://www.chriseyre.org/

portion of this demographic group.[68] Alexie has recognised films have the potential to smooth over lingering tensions between himself and some of the people on the Spokane Reservation, "even those who didn't like my books much loved the movie [*Smoke Signals*], so the power of film was certainly revealed in that."[69] Sherman Alexie was a little apprehensive about the Native American response to *Smoke Signals* since the film minimised direct indictments against colonialism in order to appeal to broader audiences.[70] While some may have been critical of Alexie's pandering to a broad audience,[71] this approach is certainly beneficial to Native American participation in a cinematic dialogue with the dominant society over the importance of stereotypes. As Jhon Warren Gilroy correctly noted, the deconstruction of these stereotypes can only take place if the dominant society is aware of their existence and is offered alternative images in which to negotiate with these stereotypes.[72] As will be discussed below, Native and non-Native audiences, for the most part, were appreciative of the images that *Smoke Signals* projected.

While it is not possible to ascertain the degree to which Native American viewers flocked to watch *Smoke Signals,* the Native American press directed a significant amount of attention at the film. *Smoke Signals* also received a great deal of attention in the Canadian Aboriginal magazine *Aboriginal Voices,*[73] although this may partially be the result of Gary Farmer's presence in the film and his attachment to the magazine. Lori Taguma highlighted how the "characters are all believable representations of contemporary Indians," leading the film critic to conclude that the film projected a "fresh perspective."[74] This statement is problematic since these characters, particularly Thomas, failed to echo "believable representations of contemporary Indians," perhaps reflecting an erroneous belief on the part of the film critic that all Native American self-representative images were accurate

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[68] John Purdy, "Crossroads: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 38

[69] Chapel, "American Literature: Interview with Sherman Alexie," 97.

[70] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 230.

[71] Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval believed film should be utilised for political purposes, "I respect the open-ended conclusion [of *Smoke Signals*], but I wish Alexie and director Chris Eyre would have openly said, 'What is left after forgiving our fathers, is reparations – meaning, returning lands that the United States stole so long ago.'" Consult, Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, "Teaching 'Smoke Signals': Fatherhood, Forgiveness, and 'Freedom,'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 134-135.

[72] Gilroy, "Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition?" 30.

[73] Kellen Martin, "Medicine Man," *Aboriginal Voices,* (January/February, 1998), 171-174; Lori Taguma, "All-Native film has fresh perspectives," 41; Sherman Alexie, "Making Smoke," *Aboriginal Perspectives* (May/June, 1998), 42-43.

[74] Taguma, "All-Native film has fresh perspectives," 41.

reflections of Native American life.[75] Despite this flaw in her comment, the film critic was correct in her recognition that the film represented an "important turning point" through its projection of Native American self-representative images. It seemed that Indian Country recognised the film's success could provide greater opportunities to create self-representative images and potentially construct an intercultural dialogue between the dominant society and Native communities. Flowers praised *Smoke Signals* not only for using Native American actors and for its ability to construct self-representative images, but for its ability to generate interest in Native American directed films that could potentially lead to greater opportunities for Native American directors.[76] An article printed in *Indian Country Today* recognised the importance of appealing to broader audiences to create a fan base that would result in more Native American directed films. The reviewer argued the success *Smoke Signals* achieved contested paternalistic discourses that promoted the belief Native Americans were incapable of creating self-representative images.[77] Minnie Two Shoes also believed the appeal of *Smoke Signals* rested in the film's ability to bring Indian and non-Indian viewers together through laughter and sadness.[78] Rather than criticising Alexie for failing to create a strong indictment against colonialism, the abovementioned critics approved of the film since its on-screen content and success among popular audiences could potentially lead to greater opportunities to create future self-representative images.

Alexie's target audience has not been exclusively restricted to Native Americans as he has admitted he wants his work to be viewed by as many people as possible.[79] Although critical responses to *Smoke Signals* failed to unanimously praise the film,[80] it is evident the majority of the film critics in the Euro-American presses responded to

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[75] For Gloria Bird, the assumption that *all* Native forms of self-expression are an "accurate representation" of a tribal culture is problematic as she recognised the fallacies and dangers behind such an assertion. Consult, Gloria Bird, "The Exaggeration of Despair in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues,*" http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/gbird/poems/RezBlues.html

[76] Charles Flowers, "'Smoke Signals': The Great Red Hope Movie," *Seminole Tribune,* September 11, 1998.

[77] "'Smoke Signals' must drift across racial lines," *Indian Country Today,* September 21, 1998.

[78] Minnie Two Shoes, "Smoke Signals: Everyone gets the message," *News From Indian Country,* August 31, 1998.

[79] Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 230.

[80] Both Gary Arnold and Paul Sherman expressed reservations about *Smoke Signals.* Gary Arnold believed the film "gauche and platitudinous but also playful and amiable enough to counterbalance the amateurish shortcomings and to disarm criticism." Consult, Gary Arnold, "'Smoke Signals' fades without much fire," *Washington Times,* July 3, 1998. Paul Sherman opened his review of the film by stating, "In order for a comedy-drama to work, the comedy and drama have to maintain a delicate balance. Otherwise it ends up feeling strangely out of whack, as 'Smoke Signals' does. This comedy-drama is usually funny when it tries to be. The trouble is that when it's supposed to be dramatic, it's often dull." Consult, Paul Sherman, "'Smoke Signals': and the rest is history; smoke clouds 'Signals,'" *The Boston Herald,* July 3, 1998.

it favourably. Given that *Smoke Signals* was promoted as the first feature film directed by a Native American director, it was not surprising that issues connected with representational sovereignty dominated the discourse about the film in the national and local media. Although critics have recognised the importance of the film's construction of self-representative images, there was a split on whether they believed this degree of representational sovereignty was critical to the film's success. Some critics have argued the primary reason for *Smoke Signals'* success rested on the film's status as the first feature film to construct self-representative images of Indian identity.[81] These critics failed to recognise the importance of this film to enter into dialogues about stereotypes and the effect these images have exercised on Native American identity. Other film critics have argued the strength of the film lay not exclusively with *Smoke Signals'* unique position as the first feature film developed primarily by a Native cast and crew, but by the on-screen content.[82] These critical responses deserve greater attention since they have correctly identified the film's humour and ability to negotiate with some stereotypes as a means to discuss identity and to appeal to broad audiences.

Native communities have employed humour for a wide range of functional purposes related to resistance, coping strategies and facilitating communication. Vine Deloria's work highlighted how Native American humour has been directed at Christopher Columbus and George Armstrong Custer, two individuals interconnected with Native American history and colonialism.[83] The mocking of Columbus unites Native communities on a pan-tribal level as all Native tribes have felt the effects of Columbus' legacy of discovery. Although George Custer was defeated at the Little Big Horn by the Cheyenne and Sioux in 1876, this defeat has been important to Native communities as a whole since it "represented the Ugly American of the last century and he got what was coming to him."[84] Filmmaker Neil Diamond (Cree) emphasised the importance of using humour as a means to illustrate Native Americans as multidimensional people, "If you can make them laugh you can hold their attention and they will learn

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[81] Mal Vincent gave *Smoke Signals* a relatively positive review, but concluded his review by stating: "'Smoke Signals' is not a great film, but, markedly, it is the only film we have about young people who are still growing up on a reservation." Consult, Mal Vincent, "Wit, Charm Propel 'Smoke Signals' *The Virginian-Pilot,* September 12, 1998. Robert Denerstein also recognized that an underlying explanation for the film's success was the significant degree of Native talent in the development of the film, concluding his review with the statement: "It's about time" Native Americans achieved this degree of representational sovereignty. Robert Denerstein, "'Smoke Signals' sends up wit, emotion," *Rocky Mountain News,* July 10, 1998.
[82] Janet Maslin, "'Smoke Signals' Lighthearted, Look at Life on the Reservation," *Daily News,* June 28, 1998; Jeff Strickler, "'Smoke Signals; is about Indians, but it deserves a wider audience," *Star Tribune*, July 3, 1998.
[83] Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (London: Macmillan Company, 1969), 146-151.
[84] *Ibid.,* 148.

we are just human beings...We are not more savage than anybody. We are not more noble than anybody. We're funny people."[85] While Alexie has directed humorous statements at Columbus and Custer to remind audiences of the lasting effects of colonialism and to express Native American hostility toward colonialism, Alexie is aware of the functional purpose of humour in order to cope with conditions that exist on some reservations. Alexie has come to the conclusion that humour is not only effective in facilitating intercultural communication, but can be utilised as a coping mechanism in which to deal with the harshness present on some of the reservations throughout the United States.[86] Alexie believes humour is essential to opening up a dialogue about difficult issues although he has questioned whether the use of humour "changes things, or changes anybody who is listening to me."[87] Although an assessment of critical reception has demonstrated the humour embedded in *Smoke Signals* failed to win over positive reviews from all film critics, it has allowed some critics to engage in a discussion about the deconstruction of stereotypes.

Critical reviews of *Smoke Signals* have recognised the film's use of humour was designed to privilege Native audiences and to appeal to broad Euro-American audiences. Alexie has demonstrated a desire to privilege the Native audience with some of the humour present in the film, particularly in the scene in which Velma and Lucy were driving backwards in their Chevy Malibu.[88] Alexie believed Native Americans would have some affection for this scene since cars on reservations tend to be broken down. This privileging of the Native audience was recognised by Jeff Strickler, who commented on the utilisation of "rez humor" in *Smoke Signals*, a term that recognises the humour privileges the people who are familiar with conditions on the reservation.[89] But in order for humour to be effective in deconstructing stereotypes, it needs to be appreciated by non-Native audiences as well. The majority of the film critics who examined *Smoke Signals* acknowledged the humour present in the film whether they characterised it as "self-deprecating"[90] or "wry,"[91] thereby illustrating its importance to them. Bob Mondello believed that the "...quirkiness counts for so much that a whole scene can be devoted to the glories of fried bread and that someone

[85] Isha Thompson, "Reel Injun shows Native people are real funny," *Windspeaker* 28, no1 (April 2010): 15.
[86] Marx, "Sherman Alexie: A Reservation of the Mind," 19.
[87] Weinmann, "Hold Me Closer, Fancy Dancer," 150.
[88] Stephen Schaefer, "Message received – American Indian filmmakers send 'Smoke Signals' the way it's intended," *The Boston Herald*, July 2, 1998.
[89] Jeff Strickler, "'Smoke Signals' is about Indians, but it deserves a wider audience," *Star Tribune*, July 3, 1998.
[90] William Arnold, "Alexie's 'Smoke Signals' A Funny touching Alice of Native American Life," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 3, 1998.
[91] Janet Maslin, "'Smoke Signals' Lighthearted, Look at Life on the Reservation," *Daily News*, June 28, 1998.

can be driving a car exclusively in reverse on highways and byways alike without anyone ever commenting on that fact."[92] William Arnold highlighted the effectiveness of humour in his review of the film, "But it's [*Smoke Signals*] extremely well done: cleverly scripted, almost perfectly cast (Beach has the stuff of a major star), alternately funny and touching, and thematically very effective, communicating its serious message - the plight of Native Americans - with an ingratiating, self-deprecating humor, rather than off-putting anger."[93] These comments suggest the humour present in the film resonated positively with these specific film critics.

Critics have identified the humorous dialogue between Victor and Thomas as being useful in locating and deconstructing stereotypes about Indian identity. Jeff Strickler's review highlighted the film's ability to deconstruct stereotypes, "The film's pedigree is evident in its setting: It rebuts Hollywood cliches to provide the first cinematic look at the life of contemporary American Indians."[94] Stephen Schaefer noted *Smoke Signals'* use of functional humour was designed to negotiate with and deconstruct popular images of Native stoicism.[95] The fact that these critics recognised Native Americans can be funny is evidence of the film's ability to deconstruct stereotypes of Indian stoicism. Although critics recognised *Smoke Signals* was designed to deconstruct stereotypes connected to Indian identity, one needs to question whether these critics were able to recognise all of the stereotypical images the film entered into a dialogue with, particularly since the language used in these reviews was too vague to assess which stereotypes critics could identify. Stephen Hunter's assessment of *Smoke Signals* exemplifies this statement well. Although the critic acknowledged the film's desire to engage and negotiate with stereotypes, Hunter's review also focused on images that linked the reservation to poverty, thereby conceptualising the reservation in a stereotypical way.

While film reviews highlighted *Smoke Signals*' humour and/or its ability to negotiate with and deconstruct stereotypical images that have been connected to Indian identity, many film critics have shown a desire to translate *Smoke Signals* into familiar notions of familial estrangement. Despite the film's focus on displacement, academic[96] and popular discourses have argued the father-son relationship explored in *Smoke Signals* was universal. This ability

[92] Bob Mondello and Linda Wertheimer and Noah Adams, "Smoke Signals," *NPR All Things Considered,* June 26, 1998.
[93] William Arnold, "Alexie's 'Smoke Signals' A Funny touching Alice of Native American Life," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* July 3, 1998.
[94] Jeff Strickler, "'Smoke Signals' is about Indians, but it deserves a wider audience," *Star Tribune*, July 3, 1998.
[95] Stephen Schaefer, "Message received – American Indian filmmakers send 'Smoke Signals' the way it's intended," *The Boston Herald,* July 2, 1998.
[96] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 237-284.

to locate themes critics deemed universal was one of the reasons critical response to *Smoke Signals* was so favourable. Dann Gire certainly appreciated the "universal" nature of the plot, "its [*Smoke Signals'*] universal theme of flawed, disappointing parents and the damaged kids they leave behind transcends all racial barriers."[97] Stephen Hunter also commented on the universal themes of the film, "Despite the ethnic specificity of the setting, what these smoke signals are really saying is that the awkwardness between fathers and sons is universal."[98] Dan Webster discussed how "the core theme of 'Smoke Signals' could apply to any ethnic group...In the end, 'Smoke Signals' is a story of father-son reconciliation."[99] The belief that *Smoke Signals* examined universal themes is a reading that Alexie has not agreed with,

> When a white reviewer says *Smoke Signals* is universal, what he's [and presumably she's] saying is that *white* people can get this and that *white* people are the judges of all that is universal, when white Americans constitute a tiny, minuscule percentage of the world's population. That statement is making the assumption that white stories are universal, that white culture is the template by which all other art is measured.[100]

Alexie's concerns are certainly warranted. Although all populations and cultures explore issues between fathers and sons, these issues are not similar to the ones *Smoke Signals* explored. *Smoke Signals* explored concepts of displacement through the relationship between Victor and Arnold, which are not themes the dominant society can relate to in the same manner as Native communities.

This erroneous belief that *Smoke Signals* examined universal themes was not exclusively restricted to the Euro-American press, but was also promoted in the Native American press. An anonymous writer for the Native newspaper *Indian Country Today,* commented on the universal nature of the film, "'Smoke Signals' weaves a tale of fathers, friends and forgiveness that captures the American Indian experience while transcending it to relate a poignant universal, contemporary story."[101] Minnie Two Shoes also believed *Smoke Signals* "brings recognition of the common experiences and bonds we all have with our families, Native and non-Native."[102] Since these specific reviews were designed to advocate the need for more Native American directed films to be developed, it was not surprising these articles promoted *Smoke Signals* as possessing universal themes. By utilising a strategy designed to

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[97] Dann Gire, "Through the 'Smoke' Director Chris Eyre cuts to the chase in this impressive character study of the American Indian culture," *Daily Herald,* July 3, 1998.
[98] Stephen Hunter, "'Smoke Signals' From the Heart," *Washington Post,* July 3, 1998.
[99] Dan Webster, "Clear Signal Ovation at Festival Greets Alexie's Film 'Smoke Signals,'" *The Spokesman-Review,* January 17, 1998.
[100] Kelley Blewster, "Tribal Visions," 80.
[101] "From the heart of Native America," *Indian Country Today,* September 7, 1998.
[102] Minnie Two Shoes, "Smoke Signals: Everyone gets the message," *News From Indian Country,* August 31, 1998.

attract broad audiences to a film that viewers may find relevant to their own lives, audience attendance for *Smoke Signals* will increase, which may lead to future opportunities for Native directed films.

The Business of Fancydancing: Mediating Relations with the Spokane and Whites

Although Sherman Alexie has received multiple offers to adapt his novels onto celluloid, his hopes of becoming a director did not reach fruition until the release of his independent film, *The Business of Fancydancing*. Despite that Alexie appropriated the title he used for his first collection of published poetry as the title of the first feature film he directed, there are few commonalities between the two texts. Although Dean Rader noted Alexie's film *The Business of Fancydancing* is autobiographical[103] and is employed as a forum for self-criticism, the film tackles larger issues. *The Business of Fancydancing* engages in a dialogue with three fundamental issues that can potentially overlap. First, *The Business of Fancydancing* discusses what an Indian is. On the Spokane Reservation that Alexie created for the film, there are many different Indians including full and mixed-blood Indians. The second fundamental issue this film revolves around concerns the question of one's attachment to the reservation and how this attachment or, in the case of Seymour, lack of attachment defines Spokane identity and creates conflict. The audience witnessed the importance of the reservation to Arnold's life in *Smoke Signals,* a life he yearned to return to but could not due to his feelings of grief and regret for the accidental killing of Thomas' parents. An attachment to the reservation is explored in greater depth in *The Business of Fancydancing* through the manner in which Spokane characters, particularly Seymour (Evan Adams), Aristotle (Gene Tagaban) and Agnes (Michelle St. John) negotiate their relationship with one another and to the reservation.[104] Alexie has acknowledged that one of the issues he wished to explore through film is the tension that could potentially develop between an artist and an Indian

[103] Although there are certainly elements in *The Business of Fancydancing* that are autobiographical, there are also significant differences between Sherman Alexie and Seymour Polatkin. Sherman is a straight, married man who attended Reardan high school, while Seymour is homosexual and attended the reservation high school at Wellpinit. Also one of the characters in the film, who is played by Sherman Alexie, notes Seymour's work is not humorous, which is certainly not the case with Alexie's writings. Sherman Alexie also noted in the commentary to *The Business of Fancydancing* that the film is "not as autobiographical as some people think."

[104] Dean Rader's assessment of *The Business of Fancydancing* discussed the complex characters that Alexie created in the film, "[*The Business of Fancydancing*] undermines the liberal stereotype of the mystical Indian poet-shaman at one with language, land, and the spirit world. It also shatters New Age images of Indians living in harmony with each other and nature. On Alexie's celluloid reservation, Indians fight, bicker, get high, and avoid work. But they also write poetry, play the violin, fall in love, and dance. In other words, like everyone else, Indians fully embody human contradictions, as do their writers (and filmmakers)" Consult, Dean Rader, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian art, literature, and film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 167.

community.[105] The third issue *The Business of Fancydancing* explores is the differing relationships that develop between the White and Native worlds.

Seymour Polatkin is a world famous Spokane poet who has made an impression on the Euro-American world through his writings, but his relationship with the reservation, and the inner turmoil this creates, is the central focus of *The Business of Fancydancing.* It is evident Seymour enjoys the publicity he receives from the White world as the majority of the audience members present at his poetry readings are White. It is also evident that Seymour enjoys engaging with fans of his work, meeting up with high profile dignitaries and discussing the conditions of the reservation for an outsider audience. Seymour lives a seemingly comfortable life with his Euro-American boyfriend in Seattle, but he never completely separates himself from the Spokane Reservation[106] despite continuing to feel superior to the people there and having not visited the reservation in years. Seymour cannot disassociate himself from the reservation because it is the source of his poetry that allows him to occupy a position of privilege and act as a mediator between the Spokane and the Euro-American audience. This is a realisation Seymour is perhaps uncomfortable with acknowledging as demonstrated by his evasiveness when an interviewer asks him about the source of his poetry. When the unnamed, assertive interviewer (Rebecca Carroll) acknowledges a statement made by Primo Levi, within the context of Jewish Holocaust survivors, that only the "liars, cheaters and thieves" survived the Nazi concentration camps, she asks Seymour whether he is a "liar, cheater or thief." Although Seymour acknowledges he is a liar, there is a slight pause before he replies he is not a thief, suggesting he is aware that he is stealing stories from other people on the Spokane Reservation but, at times, has difficulty admitting it. Although Seymour believes, or at the very least wants to believe, that he has achieved literary success on his own without "help from any of these goddamn Indians here," he does acknowledge he has used Aristotle in his stories quite regularly. Perhaps such an action reflects Seymour's belief that he is not "Indian" enough for his Euro-American audience.

The audience truly sees the complexity of Seymour's relationship with the reservation and with his own self-identification through the final scenes of the film. As Seymour is leaving the funeral, the Spokane poet encounters a doppelganger sitting in the driver's seat of his car. As the doppelganger (or perhaps the real Seymour) drives away, the other Seymour remains on the reservation. Perhaps this scene was designed to indicate a part of an

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[105] Weinmann, "Hold Me Closer, Fancy Dancer, " 102.

[106] One interviewer in the film estimates ninety-five percent of Seymour's literary work focuses on the Spokane Reservation.

individual will always remain on the reservation regardless of why they leave. This speculation is supported by an analysis of lyrics of the song "Osinilshatan" Agnes sings while Seymour is leaving.[107] As this is happening, a series of shots show Seymour stripping himself of his fancydancing regalia, which is symbolic of stripping himself of his tribal identity, and returning to Seattle to be with his White boyfriend. This ending was intentionally designed to be ambiguous. The interpretation of these scenes and the emotions they create are also dependent on the viewer. Alexie stated in the commentary of the film that these concluding images created "a happy ending" despite Seymour "giving up tribalism of defining yourself by one group of people." Perhaps this comment speaks to Alexie's self-satisfaction with his literary career and his decision to live in Seattle as opposed to living on the Spokane Reservation. This reaction was completely contrary to the comment expressed by Evan Adams on the film's commentary as the actor thought these images presented the audience with "a sad ending" since Seymour is renouncing his tribal identity.

While Seymour is able to engage successfully with the dominant society through his poetry, the majority of the Native views exhibited in the film take a negative and, at times, hostile view toward Seymour's work. Two sources reveal Native American attitudes to Seymour's literature: Indianz.com and the Spokane Indians on the reservation. Indianz.com, a website designed "to provide you with quality news, information, and entertainment from a Native American perspective,"[108] offers only a single statement on Seymour's work in the film, "Seymour Polatkin is full of shit." While the statement does not indicate why the website believes Seymour is full of shit, an obvious deduction from this comment is that the website is not appreciative of Seymour's work. This comment perhaps questions the poet's ability to discuss issues connected to Indian identity or, at the very least, life on the reservation. While the broader Spokane community is critical of Seymour due to his frequent writing of reservation

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[107] Lillian Alexie translated the following lyrics into Spokane for use in *The Business of Fancydancing*:

Who are you when you turn your back?
Where do you go when you leave here?
You can't hide from your truth
Can't run from where you belong
Some things you can't choose
Sometimes you can't have it all
I know your dreams remind you
Where you belong
Memories hold you tight
When there's no comfort in white arms
Loneliness will bring you back
Where you belong

[108] "Indainz.com." http://www.indianz.com/about.asp

life without visiting the reservation in years, Seymour does have one defender on the reservation in the form of Agnes.

With academic attention focused on the homosexuality present in *The Business of Fancydancing,* it is not surprising the character of Agnes has received minimal attention from academics. It can be argued that her character is crucial not only for her ability to be an inter-mediator between Seymour and the Spokane community, but demonstrates Alexie's desire for a strong, complex female character. Michelle St. John recognised her opportunity to engage with and deconstruct stereotypical images of Native females in her role as Agnes, "The importance of creating a strong, intelligent, independent Indian woman was not lost on me. Though it seems like a no-brainer, Agnes' mere existence flies in the face of all that Hollywood has told us, and the world, about who we are. She has her own story and her own issues with identity, and she has made a bold choice to go home and stay there."[109] St. John's assertion that Agnes violates Hollywood norms is correct, forcing Marubbio to modify her conclusion regarding "how successful the colonizing process has been in encouraging Native Americans to reaffirm such a figure [Celluloid Maiden]."[110]

Agnes is Spokane on her paternal side and Jewish on her maternal side, which is why she is burning sage and reading from the Kaddish when audiences first meet her character preparing Mouse's (Swil Kanin) body for the wake. The use of this prayer demonstrates Alexie's desire to attempt to privilege Spokane and Jewish audiences by providing a clue as to Agnes' racial background,[111] while hoping to fool other audience members into believing Agnes is citing a Spokane prayer.[112] The first time Seymour meets Agnes and is informed about her racial background, he makes the joke that she has "tribal numbers tattooed on one arm and death camp numbers tattooed on the other." This comment acknowledges Agnes' parents are associated with two races that have experienced their own traumatic pasts,[113] although Agnes' biracial identity and its potential conflicts are not explored in depth in *The Business of Fancydancing.* The relationship Seymour develops with Agnes is fundamental to Agnes' desire to

[109] Sherman Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing: A screenplay,* 132.
[110] Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden,* 223.
[111] The Native American audience is privileged during a scene that depicts Seymour performing a shawl dance, which is a hint offered about Seymour's sexual orientation.
[112] *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.
[113] Perhaps this is Alexie's recognition that "everybody's pain is important," as he made this statement in an interview with Ase Nygren. Consult, Nygren, "A World of Story-Smoke,"146-147. Alexie further explored this in *The Business of Fancydancing* when a Spokane asks Seymour how many funerals he has been to off the reservation. Seymour's answer of forty funerals acknowledges the trauma that homosexual males experience with AIDS.

reattach to her Spokane roots, which eventually results in her returning to the reservation and assuming a role of leadership there. Mouse finds Agnes' return to the reservation odd since normally the "smart Indians move away from the rez."[114] It is interesting that Agnes is able to reconnect with her Spokane roots due to her return to the reservation, and it is important to note she is the only character in *The Business of Fancydancing* who uses Spokane language. Perhaps Alexie is suggesting residence on the reservation allows people to embrace tribalism, which is substantiated by the concluding scenes that depict Seymour giving up tribalism as he is leaving the reservation. Alexie and Adams' idolised Agnes' character for her decision to return to the reservation to help her people, as the writer/director labelled her a "hero" while the actor called her "the moral centre of the film."[115]

The romantic relationship Agnes forms with Aristotle allows her to become the mediator between Seymour, Aristotle and the rest of the Spokane community when the poet returns to the reservation to attend the funeral of Mouse. Not only does Agnes defend Seymour's poetry against the attacks from the community, but she defends Seymour's right to be on the reservation to attend Mouse's funeral, arguing that he is still a Spokane and that Mouse was his friend. Film reviews from both Leta Rector and Haro-online expressed complimentary opinions of Agnes, as the former critic labelled her as the only Indian character "to root for" while the latter anonymous critic believed she is "one of the few people there who feels no ill will towards Seymour."[116] The language utilised by these two critics suggests they were drawn to Agnes' character because she does not exhibit any animosity toward Seymour or any of the other characters. Agnes defends Seymour against the rest of the Spokane community by stating Seymour's poetry serves a purpose of informing the American population that Native Americans still exist. Perhaps Alexie adopted this strategy as a way to quiet his Native critics, suggesting his work serves a similar functional purpose. Although Agnes admits she is not entirely comfortable on the reservation and acknowledges her relationship with Aristotle is one of the reasons she stays, Agnes is willing to contest Seymour's claim that the reservation is "a prison."

The life on the Spokane Reservation is certainly not romanticised in *The Business of Fancydancing* as scenes of substance abuse are present throughout the film through the characters of Mouse and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle in the first half of the film. One question that circulates the Spokane Reservation asks, "How many funerals

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[114] *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.
[115] *Ibid.*
[116] "The Business of Fancydancing," www.haro-online.com/movies/business_of_fancydancing.html

have you been to?" The Spokane responses tend to give an unspecified number of "too many," indicating the poor socio-economic conditions and substance abuse that exists on the reservation. While these scenes may play into popular conceptions of the poor socio-economic conditions on the reservation, images are present throughout the filmic text that indicates the reservation is a place of hope. Audiences become aware of Aristotle's decision to quit drinking and of Agnes' decision to return to the reservation to help educate the Spokane children. Furthermore, audiences are exposed to images of middle-class houses, and the happiness that exists on the reservation, including children laughing and playing tag, and relationships that form between the characters. All of these images combined were designed to challenge Seymour's belief that the reservation is a prison. Melissa Anderson's review of *The Business of Fancydancing* failed to decode these images, as the critic chose to focus on stereotypical images of substance abuse on the reservation, "Seymour says the rez is a prison. Not so much in *Fancydancing* contradicts his view, what with the consumption of rubbing alcohol and gas huffing - scenes of abjection that have provided the fodder of his poems."[117]

One of the more intriguing aspects of *The Business of Fancydancing* is the manner in which the film discusses issues of homosexuality and Native American identity. In an interview with Aileo Weinmann, Alexie discussed the tension he hoped to create in constructing Seymour as a homosexual character,

> The idea of what happens when you switch tribes like that. Where are your allegiances? And, especially when you think about being gay – gay people being universally hated around the world – then you're really leaving your tribe in all sorts of ways. And so I guess I upped the dramatic impact: not only moving to the city, not only being a writer, but also being gay. You know, he's leaving his tribe physically, and culturally, and spiritually, and sexually.[118]

Cinematic works prior to the release of *The Business of Fancydancing* provided an opportunity for Alexie and Eyre to engage in issues related to homosexuality, but for unknown reasons the two filmmakers refused to engage in this discussion. The screenplay for *Smoke Signals* notes the two girls involved in the car crash are lesbians, but the dialogue indicating their sexual orientation was cut from the final version of the film.[119] The novel *Skins* acknowledges the presence of homosexuality on the Pine Ridge Reservation as the murderers of Corky Red Tail raped him prior to his death.[120] These references to homosexual engagement are not present in the cinematic adaptation of *Skins,* possibly due to Eyre's belief that the scene would have been too graphic for the viewing public.

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[117] Melissa Anderson, "The Business of Fancydancing," *Village Voice.* http://www.villagevoice.com/2002-10-15/film/film/1/

[118] Weinmann, "Hold Me Closer, Fancy Dancer," 104.

[119] Alexie, *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay,* 128.

[120] Adrian Louis, *Skins* (Granite Falls, Minnesota: Ellis Press, 2002), 42-44.

The Arapaho-Cheyenne filmmaker has recognised that "literature and film are mediums that deserve different attentions...I didn't want to take my characters to points I couldn't redeem them, and so there were things that I cut. When you do it in live action they resonate a lot harder."[121]

One criticism Quentin Youngberg[122] and Gabriel Estrada[123] believed could potentially be directed toward Alexie's construction of Native American queer identity is the failure on the part of the writer/director to explore homophobia on the Spokane Reservation. Although these charges are valid, one should not assume Alexie failed to include elements of homophobia into *The Business of Fancydancing* because he is unaware that it exists on the reservation. Alexie wanted to use *The Business of Fancydancing* as a text that opens up Native communities to issues of homosexuality, "Part of me writing about gay people in this movie [*The Business of Fancydancing*] was a larger social effort. I knew a lot of Indians will see this movie, and there's *a lot* of homophobes in the Indian world, so I wanted to slap them in the face a bit."[124] While this comment accounts for the presence of homosexuality in *The Business of Fancydancing*, it does not explain why there is no discussion of homophobia in the film. One can offer two possible answers for Alexie's decision not to engage with issues linked to homophobia. Firstly, Alexie may have wanted to show Native audiences that homophobia is not the only response available to Native communities when encountering homosexuals. The lack of discussion among the Spokane to Seymour's sexual orientation indicates that homosexuality is not a deviant behaviour in this film and not the primary source of contention between Seymour and the Spokane.[125] Secondly, it is possible the tensions resulting from Seymour's sexual orientation may have detracted from Alexie's desired focus on Native-White relationships and from the tensions between an artist and the Spokane community.[126] This explanation possesses some validity as Alexie has noted *The Business of Fancydancing* "is not a gay movie."[127] This is an issue Evan Adams has agreed with since he believes the film focuses on issues interconnected with Spokane identity rather than exploring standardised issues connected with

[121] Janice Command, "Movie Preview: 'Skins' shows Native as complex humans," *The Circle,* October 31, 2002.
[122] Quentin Youngberg "Interpenetrations: Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie's The Business of Fancydancing," *Studies in American Indian Literatures,* 20, no. 1 (May, 2008): 72.
[123] Gabriel Estrada, "Two-Spirit Film Criticism: Fancydancing with Imitates Dog, Desjarlais Alexie," *Postscript,* June 22, 2010.
[124] Weinmann "Hold Me Closer, Fancy Dancer: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie," 104.
[125] Youngberg, "Interpenetrations," 73.
[126] *Ibid,* 102-103.
[127] *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.

homosexuality, including homophobia and "coming out."[128] Although Adams and Alexie have maintained the main focus of the film is not about homosexuality, Quentin Youngberg correctly noted *The Business of Fancydancing* captured the attention of the queer market through its participation and acclaim at queer film festivals.[129] Furthermore, the website www.epinions.com classified *The Business of Fancydancing* as a queer film by positioning it in the queer category and discussing all of the homosexual images the film projects.[130]

It is important to assess the images of homosexuality present in *The Business of Fancydancing* since homosexuality plays such a pivotal role in understanding the different means in which Native Americans interact with the White world. Quentin Youngberg argued that the presence of "homosexuality within a nexus of other themes…renders an understanding of sexual conflict as indispensible to understanding the racial tensions in the film."[131] Youngberg believed Seymour is filled with a certain degree of self-hate as he is a "sell-out" to his own race, which is exhibited by the tension present in the poet's relationship with Steven (Kevin Phillip). Furthermore, he believed Steven represents "both lover and enemy to Seymour" as the union between the two males "accentuates the difficulty of such relationships and the manner in which social and political conflicts almost always inhere in relationships of desire."[132] One of the key pieces of evidence the academic cited to substantiate his claim is the phone call Seymour receives at three a.m. informing him about the death of Mouse. When Steven tells Seymour that the telephone call is for the poet, he states his reasoning for such a deduction, "Because White people don't call each other at three a.m." The remaining dialogue between the two characters demonstrates the racial tension Youngberg identified,

> Seymour: Only a white person would say something like that.
> Steven: Funny how that works, isn't it: you being a racist jerk and yet still finding the need to get me naked.
> Seymour: I just pretend you're Custer.

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[128] *Ibid.*
[129] Youngberg, "Interpenetrations," 71.
[130] The fact that the reviewer noted Seymour's sexual orientation three separate times also suggests that he or she was catering their review to a homosexual audience. Consult, "Poetry in Motion, Poetry in Living: The Business of Fancydancing," www.epinions.com/review/mvie_mu-1122767/content_562886512260
[131] Youngberg, "Interpenetrations," 71-72.
[132] *Ibid.*, 67.

Although Youngberg's recognition of this racial tension is correct there is also tenderness in the relationship between the two gay lovers that Alexie wanted to bring out.[133] One scene entails a conversation Steven has with Seymour while the latter is in a bathtub. After Seymour reads a poem to Steven, he invites his lover to join him in the bathtub. The final scene of the film also demonstrates this tenderness as Seymour leaves the reservation to return to Steven who is lying in bed. One could make the supposition that the relationship Alexie constructed between Seymour and Steven is a small part of a larger dialogue in which *The Business of Fancydancing* explores issues surrounding inter-racial relations between Euro-Americans and Native Americans.

The Business of Fancydancing examines a second inter-racial relationship that contributes to Alexie's larger agenda of demonstrating the different relationships between Native Americans and White people. While the relationship between Seymour and Steven is exclusively restricted to an urban environment, the relationship between Mouse and an un-named Euro-American woman (Cynthia Geary)[134] only takes place on the Spokane Reservation. Although her relationship with Mouse does not occupy a significant part of the film,[135] it is worth examining Alexie's intentions when writing this character into the film and the potential conflict among audiences this relationship could create. In the commentary of *The Business of Fancydancing,* Alexie stated the intended function of Teresa's character, "I wanted this blond not to fit in in [sic] the movie and be sort of stand out and make people uncomfortable."[136] Although Teresa is the target of some of Mouse's jokes about White people, the eulogy Teresa provides, in conjunction with a series of images depicting Mouse and Teresa in bed, indicates a romantic connection between the two. Alexie recognised the presence of Teresa on the Spokane Reservation can create some questions and tensions, particularly the scenes that depict the two in bed since audiences may experience some apprehension toward mix-raced relationships.[137] The relationship between Mouse and Teresa is interesting and demonstrates a belief that White people and Native Americans are not inherent enemies, and that White people can

[133] Alexie noted, "There has to be some happiness in this guy's [Seymour's] life. So that's what I tried to do, bring in a little more happiness, tenderness." Consult, Dan Webster, "Alexie eschews Hollywood for 'Fancydancing,'" *The Spokesman-Review,* July 5, 2002.

[134] The name of this woman is not given in the film, but the screenplay identifies her as Teresa. She is a Unitarian minister, although audiences would not be aware of this since she is wearing ordinary clothing at Mouse's wake.

[135] Alexie acknowledged that they were forced to delete the majority of her scenes due to the length of the movie, but the director also noted her presence on his filmic reservation, "stood out too much and made me [Alexie] too uncomfortable." Consult, *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.

[136] *The Business of Fancydancing*, produced by Larry Estes and Scott Rosenfelt, directed by Sherman Alexie, 103 minutes, FallsApart, 2002, 1 DVD.

[137] Not one of the film reviews assessed dealt with this particular scene nor entered into a discussion about the presence of Teresa's character on the reservation.

be useful in temporarily[138] alleviating some of the pain Native Americans face on the reservation.[139]

Although the relationships Seymour and Mouse have with White people demonstrate an attempt to meditate with the White world and the joys that can potentially be found within these inter-racial relationships, Aristotle demonstrates a rage toward the White world that he finds difficult to contain. This rage is an issue Alexie has discussed both in interviews[140] and through his literary text *Indian Killer.*[141] The character of Aristotle demonstrates Spokane Indians can possess a hostile and, at times, violent attitude toward White people. While Aristotle seems eager to be leaving the reservation to attend St. Jerome University, as demonstrated in the home video shot at the beginning of the film, he quickly realises "there is nothing here" for himself and Seymour off of the reservation, concluding "we don't belong here." When Seymour rejects Aristotle's pleas to return with him to the reservation "to get drunk like Indians,"[142] Aristotle threatens his friend for his self-important attitude and his desire to be with White people rather than his own people. For this attitude, Aristotle views the poet as an enemy, threatening, "The next time I see you, I'm going to hurt you." Although the audience views images of a hopeful Aristotle on his way to university at the start of the film, the audience learns there were tensions between Aristotle and the White world that predated his enrolment at St. Jerome. Aristotle recognised the test he wrote to qualify for university was "culturally biased" and needed extra power to write it, as the student conceptualised the manner in which he answered the questions on the test as killing Columbus and Custer. It is evident from his behaviour during the test that Aristotle believes that a warrior mentality is needed to handle Euro-American society. The film further displays Aristotle's warrior tendencies as he viciously beats a stranded Euro-American motorist, pushing his friend Mouse "to earn his feather" and beat the helpless man as well. Alexie felt this scene was important since it demonstrates Indians "still have a little bit of animosity toward the average white folks" as the development of this scene offered an opportunity to demonstrate "Aristotle's rage at the world." Adams' also felt this scene served a purpose for Native audiences

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138 The word *temporary* is used since Mouse ultimately commits suicide, indicating Teresa's relationship with him could not bring lasting happiness.

139 This is an assessment that Jan Johnson would probably agree with as he noted a change in the manner in which Alexie wrote about colonialism, "Perhaps after expressing his anger and frustration at the effects of colonialism in many of his works, he [Alexie] is now offering possibilities for healing this painful legacy." Consult, Jan Johnson, "Healing the Soul Wound in *Flight* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,*" in *Sherman Alexie: a collection of critical essays,* eds. Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 233.

140 Sherman Alexie was recorded as stating, "Take any brown person, from Bryant Gumbel to Colin Powell to the Chicano guy working at the restaurant – they've all wanted to kill a white person. All of us. I guarantee you," Consult, Blewster, "Tribal Visions," 73.

141 Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 113.

142 This is perhaps Alexie's desire to further the dialogue of the potential internalisation of stereotypes by Native Americans.

since, as he correctly noted, it allows Indians to choose which character they want "to identify with the most," when they are viewing the film.

Due to *The Business of Fancydancing's* nature as an independent film with a limited theatrical release, the film was not critically discussed in the press to the same degree as *Smoke Signals*. Although one of Theo. Van Alst's stated intentions for his examination of *The Business of Fancydancing* was to examine audience receptions to the film, his analysis of this topic was brief and superficial. Examining eight film reviews, Van Alst concluded,

> A survey of the film's reception in the popular realm finds a wide spectrum of mixed reviews that coincidently (?) get better the farther they recede from the Metropole, and the closer they get to Washington State (Alexie's "home-turf," e.g. he was an ardent fan and supporter of the now-fled Seattle Supersonics) and the Spokane Reservation where the film is set.[143]

Although Van Alst's conclusions possess some merit,[144] an assessment of reviews not examined by the academic and a more nuanced reading of the reviews examined in his study will offer a more complex interpretation of audience reactions to *The Business of Fancydancing.*

One of Alexie's objectives in *The Business of Fancydancing* was to make people feel uncomfortable, which he has achieved to some extent. As discussed above, Agnes' ability to smooth over tensions on the Spokane reservation was one of the reasons Rector and an anonymous critic for Haro-online.com enjoyed the character. There are two instances in which critics potentially felt uncomfortable with the images Alexie constructed. Many of the film critics made some reference to the unnamed female who conducted interviews with Seymour and Aristotle in their reviews of the film, labelling the woman as "a snot,"[145] "hostile," or as being "aggressive" and "antagonistic." Jeffery Anderson greatly disliked the aggressiveness of the interviewer in his initial viewing of *The Business of Fancydancing*, but the critic ultimately concluded, "the point of the scene comes through and it works."[146] Although the reporter was acknowledged in several reviews, most critics did not express the opinion that

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[143] This assessment of film reviews failed to explain why newspapers based in L.A. provided contrasting reviews of the film. Theo. Van Alst, "Sherman Shoots Alexie: Working with and without Reservation(s) in The Business of Fancydancing," in *Visualities: perspectives on contemporary American Indian film and art,* ed. Denise Cummings (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 89.

[144] Van Alst was correct in his recognition that *The Business of Fancydancing* received very positive reviews from newspapers based in the state of Washington.

[145] Leta Rector, "The Business of Fancydancing," *News From Indian Country,* November 15, 2002.

[146] Jeffery Anderson, "Fancydance Fever," www.combustiblecelluloid.com/2002/busfancy.shtml

the character's attitude negatively detracted from the overall quality of the film.[147] While the reviews have not allowed for a firm conclusion to be formed on this issue, Alexie stated in the director commentary of *The Business of Fancydancing* that people expressed their anger at the aggressiveness of the interviewer. Although several film critics acknowledged the presence of the interviewer in their respective reviews, few critics discussed the scene that entailed Aristotle attacking a stranded Euro-American traveller. Leta Rector was one of the few critics to discuss this scene and expressed her discomfort over it,

> I certainly hope that audiences do not think this film is representative of either character type. I don't think most Rez Indians think they can expunge 500 years of injustice by perpetuating injustice on fellow humans asking for a helping hand when they're helpless...Aside from Agnes, in this film there is no one to root for (except I was rooting for that poor white man who was battered for some kind of sicko thing.)[148]

In addition to Rector's disgust for this scene, her review noted a "fullblood Indian guy...[found the scene] very disturbing."[149] The Native response to this scene is interesting since it has demonstrated some concern about images that can convey a hostile Native image, and has demonstrated how Alexie's focus on conflict and tension can potentially create a negative opinion of *The Business of Fancydancing.*

Of greater concern among these critics was the disjointed nature of the plotline as the film failed to follow conventional Hollywood-style narratives, which some critics identified as one of the drawbacks of the film. Alexie intentionally constructed an unconventional narrative in order to develop a film that was completely different from *Smoke Signals,* "'Smoke Signals' is, by and large, a very straightforward film and very comfortable in the sense that it works in a very recognizable genre – the road movie. I tried to make this movie [*The Business of Fancydancing*] which is a poet, feel like a poem."[150] Paul Sherman's review of *The Business of Fancydancing* was very critical of the poetic structure of the film, "But while poems don't have to flow cohesively, a movie should." This specific criticism contributed to Sherman's overall negative rating of *The Business of Fancydancing.*[151] Mitchell Elvis,

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[147] Jonathan Curiel, who noted the aggressiveness of the interviewer, still concluded *The Business of Fancydancing* was "ultimately satisfying to watch." Consult, Jonathan Curiel, "'Fancydancing' doesn't sidestep Indian Issues/Loyalty conflicts with success," *SF Gate,* August 30, 2002.
[148] Leta Rector, "The Business of Fancydancing," *News From Indian Country*, November 15, 2002.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] Dan Webster, "A new direction; Author Sherman Alexie tries his hand at movie directing in 'The Business of Fancydancing, which will premiere next week at the Sundance Film festival," *The Spokesman-Review,* January 6, 2002.
[151] Paul Sherman, "Film's plot dances fancy for naught in 'Business,'" *The Boston Herald,* November 27, 2002.

writing for the *New York Times,* was also critical of the film's "fragmented" plotline.[152] Maitland McDonagh believed the fragmented plotline problematic, and recommended, "Alexie might have been better served by conventional film structure."[153] While this unconventional narrative was deemed problematic by the above critics who gave *The Business of Fancydancing* a negative review, other critics were willing to give the film an overall positive review despite that they also criticised the film's unconventional film narrative. Although an anonymous critic for epinions felt the disjointed nature of the plot forced audiences "to pay attention or you will get lost," he or she ultimately enjoyed the artistic nature of *The Business of Fancydancing* and believed it forced audiences to "think."[154] Jonathan Curiel also believed the continuous flashbacks could potentially be disorienting to audiences, but ultimately endorsed the film.[155]

An assessment of film reviews has demonstrated that positive or negative views of *The Business of Fancydancing* were partially predicated on whether the film critic could locate familiar themes or those relevant to them. Probably one of the more positive reviews *The Business of Fancydancing* received was from Dan Webster, "In the end, the film, anchored by the performance of Evan Adams as Polatkin, speaks volumes about the impossible necessity of returning home, and about how the home of your childhood never completely leaves you – even when it's disappearing in your rear – view mirror for the last time."[156] Alicia Anstead was also trying to translate the film into familiar terms, "The pace can be overtly slow at times, but Alexie forces viewers into the narrative, in part because it feels so intimate to the insider. Indeed, a certain insider status is at the heart of this film…It's a piercing look into Indian life, gay life, grief, loss, ritual and at the universal questions: Can you ever go home? And does love have the power to heal?"[157] Although *The Business of Fancydancing* explored concepts of returning to the reservation, the belief that the film depicted this topic as universal is problematic since it has ignored the inner turmoil Seymour experienced between his attachment to the reservation, Spokane culture and continuing his life in Seattle. These are decisions the dominant society would not grapple with to the same degree as Seymour.

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[152] Elvis Mitchell, "A poet finds his past is just where he left it," *New York Times,* October 18, 2002.
[153] Maitland McDonagh, *"The Business of Fancydancing,"* movies.tvguide.com/the-business-of-fancydancing/136200
[154] "Poetry in Motion, Poetry in Living: The Business of Fancydancing," www.epinions.com/review/mvie_mu-1122767/content_562886512260
[155] Jonathan Curiel, "'Fancydancing' doesn't sidestep Indian Issues/loyalty conflicts with success," *SF Gate,* August 30, 2002.
[156] Dan Webster, "Alexie eschews Hollywood for 'Fancydancing,'" *The Spokesman-Review,* July 5, 2002.
[157] Alicia Anstead, "'The Business of Fancydancing' offers a piercing look at a complicated life," *Bangor Daily News,* August 26, 2002.

Although the above film critics were able to locate themes they believed were universal, other critics provided a negative review of the film since they believed the film lacked themes that were "universal" or relevant. Christopher Kelly cited Alexie's inability to develop universal themes as one of the major flaws found in *The Business of Fancydancing.*[158] In his review of the film, Paul Sherman was highly critical of the film's failure to develop themes that he felt were important, concluding his review with the question "why should anyone care?"[159] The critic failed to recognise that the images and themes *The Business of Fancydancing* constructed can be important to Native Americans throughout the United States as the majority of the population lives off the reservation and may encounter similar problems Seymour faces in the film.

Conclusion

Although Alexie recognises he has achieved success through his poetry, short stories and novels, he believes he has been "unable to combine my [Alexie's] literary sense and screenplay structure into a fully winning formula yet. And I don't know that I'll ever be able to."[160] While *Smoke Signals* was able to reach a broad audience, Alexie was disappointed with the final version of *The Business of Fancydancing,* as he labelled the film "a bomb."[161] Although Alexie was self-critical of the quality of his last film, both *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* serve a functional purpose in discussing Native American identity. *Smoke Signals* enters into a discussion about colonialism, the internalisation of stereotypes and how these stereotypes affect the manner in which the White world conceptualises Native American identity in a humorous fashion. Although the Native presses promoted *Smoke Signals* to broader audiences by claiming the film examines "universal" themes, critical reception to *Smoke Signals* in the Euro-American presses appreciated the humour. Furthermore, critics writing for Euro-American presses appreciated the father-son estrangement plotline, as they claimed these problems were "universal." *The Business of Fancydancing* highlights conflict between an artist and the Spokane Reservation, and discusses diverse relationships between Spokane and Euro-Americans. Reviews of *The Business of Fancydancing* were mixed as some film critics were able to locate "universal" themes while others failed to find such themes.

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[158] Christopher Kelly, "'The Business of Fancydancing,'" *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service,* September 11, 2002.
[159] Paul Sherman, "Film's plot dances fancy for naught in 'Business'," *The Boston Herald,* November 27, 2002.
[160] Matt Dellinger, "Redeemers," in *Conversations with Sherman Alexie,* ed. Nancy Peterson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 125
[161] Sherman Alexie, "Three Reasons Independent Film Will Survive: A Challenge to the year's highest-grossing moviemakers" (February 3, 2003). http://www.moviemaker.com/directing/article/three_or_more_reasons_why_independent_film_will_survive_3268/

Critical reception commented negatively on the unconventional nature of the plotline, although some critics overlooked this issue and still gave *The Business of Fancydancing* an overall positive rating. Sherman Alexie's involvement in dialogues about Native American identity has led Evan Adams to conclude, "Sherman has managed to almost single-handedly dismantle the popular and populist image of American Indian. He's given us a voice."[162] Although the Salish actor was eager to express his admiration of Alexie, this comment marginalises the contributions other Native American directors have made in negotiating with and deconstructing popular stereotypes of Native American identity. The reviews outlined in this and following chapters demonstrate that critics continue to view Native Americans in stereotypical ways, which indicates "*dismantle*" is too strong of a word. There is no doubt Sherman Alexie's work has given Native Americans the ability to enter into a dialogue with the dominant society about aspects of Native American identity, but the filmic works of Chris Eyre have also been critical in negotiating with stereotypical images.

[162] Duncan Campbell, "Voices of the New Tribes," 116.

Chapter 3 - Constructing Community and Spirituality: The cinematic works of Chris Eyre[1]

Native American indigenous cinema was developed as a means to create self-representative images that negotiate with Euro-American colonial images and rectify some of the psychological difficulties Native Americans experience due to historical trauma and present day colonialism. One of Chris Eyre's primary objectives is to construct complex contemporary images of Native American characters. The assertion of a contemporary identity on celluloid is interconnected with contemporary political and socio-economic concerns as these films make the American public aware that Native Americans continue to exist in their society. Despite that Eyre has demonstrated a strong desire for Native communities to view his work, the director also wants to cater to the non-Native society. This desire to appeal to the non-Native audience ties into Eyre's broader strategy of creating films that generate interest in Native self-representative images in the hope future opportunities to create filmic texts will materialise. The images of the Oglala Sioux and Navajo embedded in *Skins* (2002), *Skinwalkers* (2002), *Edge of America* (2003), *A Thief of Time* (2004) and *Imprint* (2007) offer audiences complex images of these two tribal cultures.

Eyre's films convey multiple messages for Native audiences, interconnecting spirituality to resistance, community dynamics and connection to the land. Firstly, Eyre's work projects complex images of Oglala Sioux and Navajo identities by developing characters in a variety of different socio-economic positions and with differing levels of attachment to their tribal spiritual beliefs. Secondly, Eyre's work constructs obstacles individuals must overcome and recognition of the need for community cohesion. In *Skins,* audiences become aware of the socio-economic problems that are created due to the commercialisation of Oglala Sioux drinking addictions by packing stores in White Clay. In *Imprint,* audiences become aware of the problems in the justice system that convict innocent Oglala Sioux teenagers on murder charges. Furthermore, both films enter into a discussion about the Wounded Knee massacre, and how the Oglala Sioux have mediated with this event. Although there is an indictment against the effects of colonialism in both *Skins* and *Imprint*, both films demonstrate one cannot simply blame colonialism and racism for the obstacles the Oglala Sioux face since community members also need to take responsibility and help each member if they are in a position to do so. *Edge of America* continues this dialogue as the film demonstrates the Navajo on the Three Nations Reservation can overcome obstacles and achieve success on the basketball court, which results in community cohesion that fosters stronger intercultural relations. Thirdly, Eyre's work reaffirms the

[1] A part of this chapter will appear in an upcoming text on Native nationalism published by Peter Lang.

importance of spirituality to contemporary Native communities as a form of resistance and establishes a connection to the land. Eyre's cinematic work recognises the existence of spirits/deities in the form of Iktomi and Kokopelli, and attributes great power to them. Aside from recognising the presence and power of these spirits/deities, Eyre's filmic texts utilise spirituality to establish an ancient and continuous connection between Native Americans and the land. *A Thief of Time* re-appropriates Anasazi identity in order to show the Anasazi continue to assert a presence on the land. Although some Navajo have been critical of Eyre's depiction of medicine men in *Skinwalkers*, Eyre's body of work demonstrates a degree of accountability to depicting spirituality on-screen while adhering to the wishes of the community in which he was filming.

Critical reception to these five films discussed below was diverse, but an interrogation of film reviews has revealed the emergence of a number of patterns. Firstly, critics focused their reviews on familiar images whether it was through a discussion on Native American deficiencies or translating these images into more familiar images present in popular culture. Secondly, these critics constructed broad generalisations as demonstrated by critical discussion of *Skins* or discussions of Native American spirituality in *Skinwalkers* and *Imprint.* It is evident many critics found the spirituality embedded in *Imprint, Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* interesting, although they discussed this topic in a generalised manner. Thirdly, these critics attempted to promote Native American cinema, whether through praising the acting and directorial abilities of Native Americans or discussing the importance of constructing non-stereotypical images that engage with Hollywood imagery.

Negotiating Oglala Sioux Identity in Skins

The cinematic adaptation of Adrian Louis' novel *Skins* provided an opportunity for Chris Eyre to re-appropriate the images that have been constructed of the Oglala Sioux in popular and media discourses. For Eyre, it was crucial that the filming of *Skins* took place on the Pine Ridge Reservation in order to catch the spirit of Pine Ridge. Eyre was appreciative First Look Pictures agreed to film *Skins* on the Pine Ridge Reservation as opposed to a site in Canada, even though it meant the production costs would be higher. For Chris Eyre, there is also a personal attachment to Pine Ridge because his wife is from the reservation, and the production of the film at Pine Ridge would give a small financial boost to a community Eyre has a personal attachment to.[2] Pine Ridge is an important

[2] Eyre stated that the Pine Ridge Reservation lacked the accommodations necessary to allow the cast and crew a place to stay while filming *Skins*, dictating that they sleep at an alternative location. Despite that they did not lodge overnight on the reservation, the community was able to financially benefit through the employment of local actors

site due to its connection to the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 and for its close proximity to the Black Hills, which several tribes including the Sioux and Cheyenne have a spiritual attachment to. For Native Americans in general, the site of Wounded Knee has a symbolic significance as it was the battleground between Native American activists, Federal government agents and the tribal council under the control of Dick Wilson in 1973.[3] Although the Pine Ridge tribal council was initially reluctant to co-operate with the production of the film, they were reportedly impressed that Graham Greene agreed to play the role of Mogie.[4] Eyre decided to use the Pine Ridge Reservation as a battleground to negotiate with the noble and impoverished stereotypes that have been associated with Oglala Sioux identity in popular culture.

Eyre's main agenda in his release of *Skins* was to re-appropriate the images of the Sioux that *Dances with Wolves* constructed. *Dances with Wolves*, which was the highest grossing Western in Hollywood history with estimated earnings of over 184.21 million dollars,[5] depicts Lieutenant John Dunbar's encounter with the Sioux following his voluntary transfer to Fort Sedgwick "to see the frontier…before it's gone." Dunbar establishes a strong connection with the Sioux and comes to a new understanding of himself through these intercultural experiences. Dunbar adopts the name Dances With Wolves, a name the Sioux confer upon him, and marries a Euro-American female who was adopted into the tribe after her family was killed by a group of Pawnee. While the film depicts a strong, proud image of the Sioux, the film ends with a brief description outlining how the "Sioux submitted to white authority at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The great horse culture of the plains was gone and the American frontier was soon to pass into history."[6]

Native American responses to *Dances with Wolves* have been diverse ranging from Louis Owens' condemnation of how the film appropriates "everything of value in the indigenous world as a prelude to eradicating

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and the use of houses. Consult, *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

[3] One of the few references *Skins* makes to the siege of Wounded Knee in 1973 involves a scene in which Rudy hits his head on a rock/Iktomi while he is pursuing the murderers of Corky Red Tail. After this incident, the audience sees a number of images including a group of AIM activists at Wound Knee. The audience would have to be familiar with this photograph in order to make the connection.

[4] Jeff Strickler, "'It takes an Indian to tell Indian stories;' When filmmaker Chris Eyre journeyed to the Pine Ridge reservation for 'Skins,' he found not only poverty, but a wealth of human spirit," *Star Tribune,* October 11, 2002.

[5] This is the figure Angela Aleiss cited in her text *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies.*

[6] *Dances with Wolves*. Produced by Kevin Costner and Jim Wilson, directed by Kevin Costner, 181 minutes, Tig Productions, 1990, 1 DVD.

and replacing the actual Native,"[7] to more complimentary views of the film's depiction of Sioux identity. Chris Eyre has expressed a high opinion of *Dances with Wolves* on a number of occasions, but ultimately concluded the film is problematic since it was not directed by a Native American director[8] and constructed a romanticised depiction of Oglala Sioux historical identity.[9] Although Eyre has emphasised the need for Native Americans to construct self-representative images, he does not advocate for Euro-American directors to stop creating films that focus on Indian identity. The director is concerned about constructing a more equal balance between Euro-American constructed depictions and Native American constructed depictions.[10] Eyre's construction of an Oglala Sioux identity offers an opportunity for audiences to see the fate of the Oglala Sioux once Dunbar and Stands With A Fist leave the Sioux camp.

Skins projects an image of an unromantic contemporary Oglala Sioux identity that deviates from the romantic imagery present in *Dances with Wolves*. *Dances with Wolves* projects images of noble Sioux warriors in their picturesque encampments as opposed to *Skins,* which depicts images of dilapidated houses on the Pine Ridge Reservation and drunken Sioux roaming the streets of White Clay, Nebraska. One agenda Eyre wished to advance during the development of the film was not only to demonstrate that the Sioux in *Skins* are the same tribe also depicted in *Dances with Wolves,* but to construct a more complex depiction of Oglala Sioux identity than the blockbuster film provided: "My [Eyre's] movie [*Skins*] is not about romanticising Indians…My characters are flawed in the most beautiful way. They are flawed in the human way."[11] Eyre constructed a bridge between the two films through the casting of Graham Greene for the character of Mogie.[12] While Russell Means (Oglala Sioux) resented the fact that he was not given a chance to audition for the role, and criticised Eyre for being controlled by Hollywood,[13] the casting of Greene was an excellent choice not only for the humanity he brought to the character of

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[7] Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*,123.
[8] Prairie Miller, "Smoke Signals: Director Chris Eyre Interview," *Star Interviews*, January 1, 1998.
[9] Jeff Strickler, "'It Takes an Indian to tell Indian stories;' When filmmaker Chris Eyre journeyed to the Pine Ridge Reservation for 'Skins' he found not only poverty, but a wealth of human spirit," *Star Tribune,* October 11, 2002.
[10] Prairie Miller, "Smoke Signals: Director Chris Eyre Interview," *Star Interviews*, January 1, 1998.
[11] "Chris Eyre Interview," *Stumped Magazine.* http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/interviews/chris-eyre/ accessed Aug. 29, 2012.
[12] Joanna Hearne believed *Skins* entered into a direct dialogue with *Last of the Mohicans,* but Eyre's comments about *Dances with Wolves* and Green's attachment to the film suggests the director was entering into a discussion with the film *Dances with Wolves.* Consult, Joanna Hearne, "Indians Watching Indians on TV: Native Spectatorship and the Politics of Recognition in *Skins* and *Smoke Signals,*" 41-72.
[13] Russell Means discussed the problems he saw with Hollywood and how Native American actors and artists were not given an opportunity to perform in films and at casinos. Given the tone of his letter, it seems Means' criticism of

Mogie, but because Greene represented a link between *Dance with Wolves* and *Skins.* In *Dances with Wolves,* Greene was cast as the medicine man Kicking Bird, who brings Dunbar into the camp of the Sioux and exercises an influential presence in the community. Greene's portrayal of Kicking Bird depicts a very proud, independent person, who is fundamental in establishing a connection between Dunbar and the Sioux camp. In *Skins,* Greene's character shows one possible effect of colonialism and historical trauma on Sioux identity through his strong addiction to alcohol and the health problems that accompany heavy drinking. But audiences miss the point of Greene's character if they simply reduce him to being an alcoholic since there is more to Mogie Yellow Lodge. Mogie represents a human character with not only his personal failings, but also his own concerns, his humour and some degree of joy that allows him to face his own mortality by the end of the film.

While much of the discourse in film reviews of *Skins* has privileged the poverty that exists on the Pine Ridge Reservation, these are readings that overlooked Eyre's filming aesthetic of "subtle diversity." The documentary style montage at the beginning of *Skins,* which contains scenes of drunken Sioux being locked up in jail and images of dilapidated houses, sets one of the tones the film adopts. While these images establish a point of departure for the film, Eyre's depiction of the reservation offers more complexity than the opening scenes provide. One becomes aware of the state of the art hospital located on the Pine Ridge Reservation where Mogie is treated for his burns and his liver disease, albeit these facilities do not play a featured role in the film. While Eyre was eager to highlight the poverty that exists on the reservation, he was also eager to depict the strengths the reservation has to offer. The depiction of positive aspects of the Pine Ridge Reservation has been welcomed by Oglala Sioux, such as Su Anne Big Crow. She believed mainstream documentaries such as *Tragedy at Pine Ridge* only shed light on the negative aspects of the reservation without looking at any of the positive aspects of Pine Ridge.[14]

A second aspect to Eyre's strategy of subtle diversity included the depiction of complex Oglala Sioux identity by constructing characters who occupy different socio-economic positions. The character most critics focused their attention on is Mogie since he conforms to preconceived notions of life on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Mogie is a chronic alcoholic, who cannot afford to buy beer, forcing him to request money from his brother or to

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Eyre was motivated by the fact that he and his son were not given the opportunity to audition for any of the roles in *Skins*. "A Russell Means Commentary on the Hollywood Indian!" *The Native Voice,* February 8, 2004.
[14]Tim Giago, "*ABC News:* Reflecting on the Obvious at Pine Ridge," Oct. 19, 2011 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tim-giago/abc-pine-ridge-reservation_b_1014022.html. Accessed July9, 2012.

steal alcohol from the packing stores. Mogie is also a single parent[15] who presumably cannot take care of his son since Herbie (Noah Watts) lives with his aunt. Despite the limitations to Mogie's abilities to care for his son, Herbie still loves his father and is present at his bedside at the hospital when his father dies. The depiction of Mogie as a single parent helps to reflect some of the realities on the Pine Ridge Reservation since 65% of the children on that specific reservation reside in single parent households.[16] While the presence of Mogie's character in *Skins* may lead some audience members to conclude alcoholism is a way of life on the Pine Ridge Reservation, it is certainly a stereotype that has not been internalised by all Native communities nor is it a stereotype endorsed by the film. Native informants who took part in Malcolm Holmes and Judith Antell's assessment of drinking perceptions recognised the drunken Indian stereotype fails to reflect the reality of the overall population of reservations.[17] Although film critics focused on the levels of poverty the film depicts, a nuanced reading of *Skins* indicates a stable life can be achieved on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Rudy (Eric Schweig) is a tribal officer, an occupation that provides him with a decent income, which is reflected in the house he resides in and the truck he drives. Eyre even joked about Indians not possessing a "gold card,"[18] while he was watching a scene that depicts Rudy buying the can of paint he will use to vandalise Mount Rushmore. Rudy's possession of this card further reminds audiences of Rudy's middle class status.[19] In addition to the depiction of tribal police officers, the reservation Eyre constructed for *Skins* also has a staff of highly trained doctors to assist in the medical problems encountered on the Pine Ridge Reservation, demonstrating Pine Ridge is not simply a home to the poor as popular and media images have suggested.

Skins' depiction of the relationship between Mogie and Rudy clearly emphasises human qualities as there is a feeling of love and compassion between the two brothers in their effort to reconcile with one another after it is revealed Mogie is dying. Eyre did an excellent job establishing a brotherly relationship at the beginning of the film by using a flashback to depict the two brothers in their youth. One scene depicts Rudy coming out of an outhouse screaming in pain after a spider in the form of Iktomi bit his testicles. While Mogie is carrying his brother on his

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[15] In the novel, the reader is aware that Herbie's mother died of an overdose.

[16] This data was collected in 1990. For a fuller discussion on this topic, consult, Gary Sandefur and Carolyn Liebler, "The Demography of American Indian Families," *Population Research and Policy Review* 16, no. ½ (Apr., 1997): 95-114.

[17] Malcolm Holmes and Judith Antell, "The Social Construction of American Indian Drinking Perceptions of American Indian and White Officials," *The Sociology Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (spring, 2001): 161.

[18] The camera focuses on the gold card for a brief moment so that audiences can clearly see this card and are given ample time to digest this image.

[19] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

back to seek help, he tells Rudy that he "would only save a brother's life once, then after this, he was on his own."[20] Although this is an important scene and will be revisited at the end of the film, the majority of the first half of *Skins* focuses on the alienation between the Yellow Lodge brothers.[21] It is evident Mogie's drinking addiction has contributed to this alienation between the two siblings. At the start of the film, one can infer Rudy is ashamed of Mogie's alcoholism as he does not invite Mogie to participate in the football game at the tribal police picnic. On the other hand, there are indications this alienation is mutual as Mogie barely acknowledges his brother in White Clay and refuses to come to the picnic until he is told free alcohol will be served. This refusal speaks to a broader problem between the two brothers as Mogie feels hostility toward Rudy and the rest of the Oglala Sioux police force, demonstrating some of the dynamics present within the community.[22] Despite this brotherly alienation, Rudy never forgets how his brother helped him after his incident in the outhouse and decidedly attempts to save his brother from alcoholism, although the methods Rudy utilises in this task are very questionable. First, Rudy sets fire to the packing store that supplies Mogie with alcohol, but the results prove disastrous since his brother had broken into the store. Mogie is severely burned by the fire, and while he is in the hospital being treated, an examination discovers he has a terminal health problem. The relationship between the two brothers shifts to one of reconciliation after it is discovered Mogie is dying from years of alcohol abuse. The scene depicting Mogie's wake not only captures the emotion of the actors involved, but demonstrates the love the two brothers felt for one another. The film ends with Rudy fulfilling Mogie's wish to vandalise Mount Rushmore by throwing red paint down the side of George Washington's cheek. This is an important scene in the film despite that it has received a lot of criticism from film critics and audiences, but Eyre has insisted this scene depicts Rudy "honoring his brother."[23] As Rudy is leaving Mount Rushmore Monument following his vandalisation of the site, the audience witnesses a series of flashbacks that foreground the relationship between Rudy and his brother. One of these flashbacks consists of the younger Mogie carrying Rudy on his back, reminding the audience how this relationship was established at the beginning of the film and the love the two brothers have for each other.

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[20] *Ibid.*

[21] The novel cites a number of reasons this alienation between the two brothers exists. One passage includes Rudy seeing Mogie ejaculate on their mother, who was passed out from drinking too much, leading to a sense of disgust and hatred toward his brother. This alienation continues into their later years as Rudy has sexual relations with Mogie's wife.

[22] At one point in the film, Mogie refers to the tribal police as "dipshits and dildos," particularly since they are continuously arresting him.

[23] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

Eyre's objective to depict his characters as human was not exclusively limited to the relationship between the Yellow Lodge brothers, but can also be discerned by examining the images he constructed of the broader community of the Pine Ridge Reservation. If one examines Rudy's actions while under the influence of Iktomi, one would realise these actions are mostly directed at targets away from the reservation, such as Mount Rushmore and the packing store at White Clay. These targets of Rudy's wrath are designed to either solve the alcohol problems on the Pine Ridge Reservation or to honour his brother. For the Oglala Sioux, the Pine Ridge Reservation, including the site of Wounded Knee, is their community.[24] Eyre's images were designed to demonstrate that amongst the poverty that exists on the reservation, a sense of community is present,

> They [outsiders] see the poverty and some of the oppression, and the thing that they don't see, which I think this movie captures wonderfully, is the love, the wealth of love, the wealth of the spirit, the wealth of ceremonies that happen in people's houses or basements, the medicine men and the sundancers, and the love of community, the love of family, the love of children...I think that's what's missed a lot of times in movies about Indians is being able to identify the love and the spirit that I see.[25]

This quotation is very important as Eyre was exercising his privileged position in the Pine Ridge Reservation to assert an authoritative knowledge of the dynamics of the community. But Eyre's depiction of the love embedded in the community can be a bit difficult to discern particularly when audiences are exposed to scenes of domestic violence, murder and the unconcerned nature of a family as they discover the corpse of Verdell Weasel Tail (Gary Farmer) in a bear trap, set to prevent thieves from breaking into their house. If one is willing to look past those scenes, there are elements of the cohesion and caring nature of the community that rallies around tragedy. Mogie's wake best demonstrates "the wealth of love" the Pine Ridge Reservation exhibits as the gymnasium where the wake is held is full of people in tears. Eyre reported there was so much emotion present among various actors in the scene that actual tears were shed. At the conclusion of the film, this community relationship is further reinforced on a more individual level as Rudy provides cigarettes to two destitute Oglala males outside of a store.[26]

One of the major themes *Skins* examines is the effect colonialism and instances of historical trauma have played in shaping Oglala Sioux identity. Although *Skins* does not specifically focus on the Wounded Knee massacre, the film, in conjunction with the manner in which *Imprint* incorporates the massacre of Wounded Knee into its plot, demonstrates this event is significant to the Oglala Sioux on multiple levels. One exchange between Mogie, Rudy

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[24] Although the documentary *Hidden America: People of the Plains* utilises stereotypes, it demonstrates that there is a sense of being and place that exists on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

[25] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

[26] *Ibid.*

and Herbie demonstrates the anger Mogie possesses toward the effects of colonialism when discussing the Wounded Knee massacre. Rudy begins his discussion of this event by outlining how the American government outlawed Native American spiritual ceremonies, leading to resistance among the Sioux population. At that point, a solemn Mogie takes over the narration. His account discusses the manner in which the American soldiers of the Seventh Calvary, "Custer's old command," attacked and murdered defenseless Sioux, who sought refuge at Wounded Knee. Mogie notes that although American Horse's testimony in the Wounded Knee investigation condemned the actions of the soldiers, the Seventh Calvary were decorated for their actions.[27] Graham Greene played this scene well, as his character shows non-Native audiences that historical trauma continues to affect the Sioux of Pine Ridge.

In addition to this indictment against colonialism, one can certainly detect Eyre's disgust at the manner in which towns bordering the Pine Ridge Reservation, specifically White Clay, Nebraska, have capitalised on Oglala Sioux addiction to alcohol. Referring to these packing store owners as "merchants of death" Eyre is very critical of the quantity of alcohol these owners sell to the Oglala Sioux coming from the Pine Ridge Reservation. *Skins* identifies alcoholism as one of the root problems of the Pine Ridge Reservation. While the film implies the murderers of Corky Red Tail are either drunk or impaired by drugs when they kill the teenager, the film is more direct in outlining the effects of substance abuse on family dysfunctionalism. Alcohol not only strains the relationship of Rudy and Mogie with their father, but also strains the relationship between Mogie, Rudy and Herbie, demonstrating the intergenerational problems associated with alcoholism. But the effects of alcohol addiction are not exclusively restricted to the Yellow Lodge family as Rudy is called in to stop a "drunken brawl" between a couple who also have a baby present in the room. These scenes project a powerful message that differs from the opening montage; while the montage primarily consists of images of individual drunken males, these two scenes focus on the destabilising effects of alcohol addiction on the family.

Although Eyre is highly critical of the packing store owners in White Clay for selling large quantities of beer to the Oglala Sioux, he recognises the Oglala Sioux must take action to overcome the cycles of alcoholism, community violence and poverty. One of the characters Eyre used to conceptualise concepts of self-help and resistance is the Lakota trickster Iktomi. Dean Rader's reading of Iktomi's influence on Rudy is quite correct, "the film draws a map of Rudy's life as a testing ground for Iktomi's duality of purpose: foolishness and insight, bravery and stupidity, truth and consequence...Rudy embraces the trickster spirit of Iktomi, how Rudy not only mirrors

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[27] *Ibid.*

Iktomi's stupidity and wisdom, but actually becomes a trickster himself."[28] Eyre established the role of Iktomi fairly early in *Skins,* as Rudy recognises the trickster in its spider form on his return from beating the two youths responsible for the death of Corky Red Tail. While the audience watches Rudy wash the shoe polish off his face, they listen to a narration of how Iktomi connects to Rudy for the first time at the age of ten when it bites the protagonist's testicles in an outhouse. Iktomi exerts a greater degree of influence on Rudy after he hits his head on a large rock while in his pursuit of the two individuals who murdered Red Tail. The audience sees a variety of contemporary and historical images of Sioux followed by an image of Iktomi in its spider form running on the sink Rudy used to wash the shoe polish off his face. Ed Little Bald Eagle (Myrton Running Wolf), the medicine man who Rudy consults on Iktomi, is not the stereotypical image of a medicine man since Eyre purposely selected a younger male to play the role to challenge audience conceptions of who medicine men can be.[29] Audiences may have trouble identifying this character as a medicine man, although he does give Rudy an important piece of advice that not only links Iktomi to the rock, but attests to the power the trickster possesses, "Human beings don't control anything, spirits do."[30] In the film the audience may come to the conclusion Rudy sets fire to the packing store of his own volition since he proceeds with this act of arson after he witnesses his brother make a drunken fool of himself on national television. Such a reading minimises the influence Iktomi exerts in the film as a form of resistance. Following Rudy's act of arson, he approaches the medicine man who rhetorically asks, "Ready to get that Iktomi off your back?"[31] Although this ceremony is conducted, Iktomi continues to influence Rudy's actions throughout the film and reaffirms the belief spirits do control the world. The audience sees Iktomi one last time walking on the paint that will be used to vandalise Mount Rushmore. This is an important scene as it demonstrates Iktomi continues to guide Rudy in the honouring of his brother.

The manner in which Eyre depicted spirituality in *Skins* allowed the director to be accountable to Sioux spirituality while also privileging the Oglala Sioux audience. In shooting a healing ceremony conducted to limit the influence Iktomi exercises over Rudy, Eyre demonstrated accountability by refusing to permit the audience into the

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[28] Dean Rader, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian art, literature, and film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 104, 107-108.
[29] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.
[30] This worldview is also reflected in the novel as Rudy recognizes, "human beings did not rule the world; spirits did." Consult, Adrian Louis, *Skins* 132.
[31] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

sweat lodge. Eyre was willing to film the individuals who were participating in the ceremony outside of the lodge, but as the participants entered the sweat lodge, the director opted to cut to a black background and insert Lakota speech so that audiences could get the impression that a ceremony was taking place. This utilises one of the better cinematic strategies in terms of possessing accountability when depicting indigenous spirituality, unlike films such as *Black Cloud*, which takes the audience into the sweat lodge to become witnesses to the vision Black Cloud experiences.[32] The method utilised by Eyre privileges the Oglala Sioux since it allows those who have experienced this ceremony to not only understand what it entails, but to be aware of what is being stated. In this way, Eyre has permitted the Oglala Sioux access to the spiritual realm while excluding the non-Oglala audience.

Despite Eyre's statement that *Skins* "is the most commercial Indian movie ever made due to the presence of Lakota spirituality and culture in the film,"[33] it is evident most critics failed to recognise all of the cultural and spiritual nuances of the film. Although Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat recognised the crucial nature of Iktomi to the film,[34] most film critics failed to either recognise the presence of Iktomi in *Skins* or failed to recognise the importance of Iktomi to the film's plot. While the novel explicitly establishes direct connections between Rudy and Iktomi, whether Rudy is having sex with his cousin's wife[35] or setting the fire at the packing store,[36] the connections are a little more subtle in the cinematic adaptation, but are still present. The film review written by Vinette Price best exemplifies this unawareness of Iktomi, "Rudy is unsure what drives him to become a vigilante. But in order to right some of the wrongs, Rudy takes the law in his own hands to seek retribution. First he avenges the death of a friend. Next he takes on the distributors of liquor by setting fire to the store."[37] This statement is incorrect since the protagonist was aware Iktomi was influencing his actions, prompting him to seek advice from Ed Little Bald Eagle. This critic clearly demonstrated a lack of awareness of the influence Iktomi exercised over Rudy. Marley Shebla's assessment of *Skins,* which mentioned the spider biting incident, failed to make the connection between Iktomi and Rudy's vigilante action.[38] This absence suggests Shebla was either unaware of the influence Iktomi exercised over Rudy or unaware of the importance of Iktomi in Oglala Sioux culture. Alexandra Frank's review of *Skins* also

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[32] *Black Cloud,* produced by Karen Beninati and Andrea Schroder, directed by Rick Schroder, 97 minutes, High Maintenance Films, 2004, 1DVD

[33] Tania Casselle, "Eyre exposes the heart and muscle beneath 'Skins,'" *Indian Country Today,* September 11, 2002.

[34] Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, "Skins," *Spirituality and Practice,* http://spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=5126

[35] Louis, *Skins,* 101

[36] *Ibid.,* 124.

[37] Vinette Pryce, "Scars of Wounded Knee fester in 'Skins,'" *New York Amsterdam News,* October 2, 2002.

[38] Marley Shebla, "Skins," *News From Indian Country,* September 30, 2002.

omitted the influence Iktomi exerted over Rudy, "Rudy begins to suffer from stress resulting in a bump on the head he suffered while investigating the murder of local Indian youth [sic]."[39] There are two possible reasons as to why these critics failed to address the presence of Iktomi in their assessments of the film. An improper grounding in Lakota spirituality has led to a limited ability to understand the nuances of the plot and an inability to recognise the presence of Iktomi. Secondly, critics may have missed or disregarded the dialogue between Rudy and Ed Little Bald Eagle since the medicine man failed to align with Western preconceived notions of what a medicine man should look like.

Aside from this accountability to spiritual practices in film, Eyre has recognised the powers Iktomi exercises should not be taken lightly by anyone, particularly filmmakers. Eyre expressed his concern about utilising the trickster in his film, particularly during the scene depicting Mogie's wake. The filming of the scene involved Graham Greene lying in a coffin, which was eventually closed and taken out of the gymnasium while the actor was still in it. While Greene was uneasy to participate in such a scene, he ultimately conceded, but Eyre discussed in the commentary of the film that special steps were taken after the scene was shot in order to avoid incurring the wrath of the trickster. Although Eyre acknowledged prayers were regularly conducted on the set, the coffin was destroyed by fire and a prayer was conducted after shooting this specific scene. These actions not only demonstrate the integration of spirituality into the practice of filmmaking, but also Eyre's recognition of the existence and power of Iktomi.[40]

Chris Eyre wanted *Skins* to be accessible to a significant portion of the Native American population, prompting him and First Look Pictures to promote the Rolling Rez Tour. The Rolling Rez Tour involved a portable movie theatre, complete with popcorn maker, which travelled to various Native American reservations to screen the film for the local population for free. One of the more critical stops for Eyre and the Rolling Rez Tour was the Pine Ridge Reservation since the community was so helpful during the production of the film. The Rolling Rez Tour was the only opportunity some members of the reservation had to view the film as the reservation lacks a theatre. M.J. Pecos, the president of First Look, was not troubled about the loss of revenue from these free screenings because he believed most people who watched the film through the Rolling Rez Tour were unable to purchase a movie ticket and lacked the means to travel long distances to a theatre. Pecos was optimistic that the Rolling Rez Tour and the

[39] Alexandra Frank, "'Skins': Coming to a theatre near you," *Seminole Tribune,* July 5, 2002.
[40] *Skins*, produced by Jon Kilik and David Pomier, directed by Chris Eyre, 84 minutes, First Look International, 2002, 1 DVD.

subject matter of the film would generate a discussion in American society, arguing "as long as you can continue to have people talk about your film and be forceful about how great it is it really helps you at the box office."[41] Although the film was discussed in the American press, *Skins* failed to generate a substantial profit. The five million dollar film, which was co-produced by the APTN, only earned approximately $239,000.[42]

Although Eyre and the actors involved in *Skins* wanted the film to convey to the American public the love that existed on the Pine Ridge Reservation,[43] the majority of the film critics simply focused on images of poverty within the film. Overall critical reception to *Skins* was dependent on whether or not the film critic approved of Eyre's use of images of poverty throughout the film. Although Judy Ettenhofer, Janice Page, Moria Macdonald, Rob Thomas and Robert Denerstein provided positive or average reviews for *Skins,* the language employed in their respective reviews privileged the poverty the film depicted at the expense of marginalising the familial love. In her review entitled, "Poverty's Painful Truths," film critic Judy Ettenhofer commented, "To capture the stark poverty and bleakness of the Oglala Sioux Reservation, Eyre filmed the movie on location, with all of the hardships that imposed on his crew."[44] Ettenhofer was clearly focused on the aerial views of dilapidated housing and statistical information about socio-economic problems on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and failed to focus on Rudy's comfortable house as well as the state of the art hospital. Janice Page's discussion of the film privileged the statistics that highlighted the unemployment and alcohol problems on the reservation, demonstrating the critic's attention was on the poor socio-economic conditions.[45] Moira Macdonald also highlighted the images focusing on poverty in the film without discussing any of the familial love present in *Skins.*[46] Rob Thomas' review focused on similar imagery without examining the positive aspects of the Pine Ridge Reservation that the film explored, "As depicted by Eyre, the poverty-stricken reservation is a horrible place to live..."[47] Although Robert Denerstein's assessment of *Skins* acknowledged the presence of "brotherly love" in the film, the critic devoted the majority of his review to the

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[41] William Keck, "Director takes 'Skins' to Native American people," *USA Today,* August, 21, 2002.
[42] *Skins* fared poorly in the box office partially due to the film's limited theatrical release as it was only shown in eighteen theatres. Consult, "Skins" http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0284494/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus
[43] Amanda Siestreem, "'Skins': the Rolling Rez Tour, Live from New York," *Indian Country Today,* October 9, 2002.
[44] Judy Ettenhofer, "Poverty's Painful Truths," *The Capital Times,* October 23, 2003.
[45] Janice Page, "Tragedy and Warmth Mix in 'Skins,'" *The Boston Globe,* October 11, 2002.
[46] Moira Macdonald, "Skins," *The Seattle Times,* October 3, 2002.
[47] Rob Thomas, "'Skins looks below the surface of reservation life," *The Wisconsin State Journals,* December 12, 2002.

poverty on the reservation, and concluded with the statement, "Life on the reservation – it's not pretty."[48] With the exception of Judy Ettenhofer's review of the film, the above reviewers directed criticisms at some aspect of the plot and/or acting, but still praised Eyre's ability to depict the poor socio-economic conditions that existed on the Pine Ridge Reservation and provided the film with an overall positive or average review. This tendency on the part of film critics to focus on images of poverty is problematic since it has obscured the positive elements of the Pine Ridge Reservation that the Oglala Sioux have wanted to showcase. Sue Ann Big Crow and Tom Giago[49] have been highly critical of media portrayals of Pine Ridge that simply focus on the poverty of the reservation, and had hoped the American population would focus on the pride and sense of community that exists. Judging from the comments above, it was difficult for some film critics to see the community spirit Eyre had hoped to convey when images of poverty and the death of one of the protagonists due to alcoholism are present in the film.

While the abovementioned film critics approved of the manner in which Eyre utilised images of poverty to discuss conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Paul Sherman and Gary Arnold criticised the film partially for the politicised message these images conveyed to the American public. A review in *The Boston Herald* did not offer a glowing assessment of the film as film critic Paul Sherman rated it two out of four stars for its politicised nature and the over-the-top depiction of Mogie "as a victim."[50] Sherman concluded his review of the film by stating:

> The desire to throw in the kitchen sink is understandable when there are so few movies made by and about American Indians. But next time around, let's hope Eyre has enough confidence in his characters and in audiences to sympathize with them without being forced a laundry list of reasons to care.[51]

Paul Sherman's primary criticism derived from his belief that the politicised message of the film overpowered the drama, particularly the opening montage that discussed the conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation. But the critic misread the intentions of the film with his comment that *Skins* portrayed the Sioux as "victims of race," as Eyre consciously tried to avoid this reading, stressing the Sioux needed to take steps to help themselves. Gary Arnold's review in *The Washington Times* was more scathing in its condemnation of the film as the critic only awarded the film a half star out of a possible four. Gary Arnold heavily criticised the decision of Rudy to become a vigilante and

[48] Robert Denerstein, "Brotherly-love tale saves 'Skins' but lack of coherence, fan appeal, undermine tale of reservation life," *Rocky Mountain News,* September 27, 2002.
[49] Although Tom Giago has been very critical of images constructed of the Pine Ridge Reservation, he noted in an e-mail to me that he has not viewed *Skins.*
[50] Paul Sherman, "Despite good intentions, 'Skins' gives mixed signals," *The Boston Herald*, October 11, 2002.
[51] *Ibid.*

believed it was foolish to desecrate Mount Rushmore in a "futile gesture of defiance."[52] Arnold was also heavily critical of the film's frequent depiction of poverty, leading one to believe the critic considered the high levels of poverty on the Pine Ridge Reservation as being inauthentic.[53] Eyre would contest this statement since he used actual houses on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the production of the film, demonstrating this type of poverty does exist on this specific reservation. While some reservations have been able to construct a strong economic base, poverty continues to be a very real concern on other reservations, particularly at Pine Ridge. The critic dismissed the film as having "nothing for a mainstream public or a discriminating public, but it might pass for a rallying cry and poster movie among dissidents."[54] The reviews by Sherman and Arnold are interesting since they have shown a potential backlash could develop from critics when issues of poverty and alcoholism are brought to the forefront in films.

Though many of the film critics constructed their reviews around the poverty existing on the Pine Ridge Reservation, some film critics, to varying degrees, were able to decode the film according to aspects of its preferred reading. Phil Villarreal's review of *Skins* has illustrated he was aware of Eyre's objective to deconstruct stereotypes of life on the Pine Ridge Reservation, "Rudy fashions himself a sort of Indian superhero who belies stereotypes. He rarely touches alcohol and has a well-paying job."[55] The manner in which Tania Casselle decoded the images present in *Skins* has allowed her to recognise the preferred reading of the film. Casselle's review, which was heavily reliant on comments Eyre expressed to the media, noted *Skins* was a "complex and compelling movie, tender of heart if tough in stance, with moments of raw emotional intensity and flashes of dry humor."[56] Other film reviews realised Eyre was attempting to establish a loving relationship between Mogie and Rudy, although this recognition was broadcast by inserting interviews Eyre conducted about *Skins*[57] or relegated to only a brief sentence or two in the review.[58]

[52] Gary Arnold, "Many Reservations about the movie 'Skins,'" *The Washington Times,* September 27, 2002.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Phil Villarreal, "'Skins' speaks an angry truth," *AZ Daily Star,* October 11, 2002.
[56] Tania Casselle, "Eyre exposes the heart and muscle beneath 'Skins,'" *Indian Country Today,* September 11, 2002.
[57] Janice Command, "Movie Preview: 'Skins' shows Natives as complex humans," *The Circle,* October 31, 2002; Jeff Strickler, "'It takes an Indian to tell Indian stories'; When filmmaker Chris Eyre journeyed to the Pine Ridge Reservation for 'Skins' he found not only poverty, but a wealth of human spirit," *Star Tribune,* October 11, 2002; Tania Casselle, "Eyre exposes the heart and muscle beneath 'Skins." *Indian Country Today,* September 11, 2002.
[58] Robert Denerstein, "Brotherly-love tale saves 'Skins' but lack of coherence, fan appeal, undermine tale of reservation life," *Rocky Mountain News,* September 27, 2002; J. Frank, "A Review of the movie Skins, directed by Chris Eyre," *The Native Voice,* August 29, 2002.

Film critics have also constructed a problematic discourse that simplified reservation life by making sweeping generalisations about conditions on reservations. Although Chris Eyre stated the images constructed in *Skins* "aren't [applicable to] all Indians, and this isn't every reservation,"[59] critical reception, whether positive or negative, created these generalisations. Such generalisations were constructed in Vinette Pryce's review of the film: "'Skins' speaks to the many sociological issues that plague the Native Indians."[60] Alexandra Frank, writing for the *Seminole Tribune,* believed *Skins* did "a great job in portraying the struggle that a Native American Indian, living with today's society ills, must deal with on a daily basis." The critic further stated, "If you are a non-Native, take a Native friend with you, in case you have any questions about something you do not understand. I'm sure your friend will be glad to give you some insight into any questions that you may have." [61] This statement is problematic as the critic erroneously assumed all Natives would be familiar with the conditions that exist on the Pine Ridge Reservation and would have insights into Sioux culture.

The Construction of Oglala Sioux Identity in Imprint

Critical responses to *Skins,* which focused on the poverty of the Pine Ridge Reservation at the expense of discussing the community spirit and familial love, may have motivated Eyre to construct additional images of the Pine Ridge Reservation. It is imperative to end this examination of the images Eyre constructed of the Oglala Sioux with a discussion of *Imprint,* as the film projects a different series of codes that popular audiences are not familiar with when engaging with images of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Although Eyre was not the director of this film, he injected some input that persuaded Michael Linn to construct a thriller that revolved around the Pine Ridge Reservation.[62] The images Eyre constructed of the Pine Ridge Reservation in *Imprint* deviate from the images constructed *in Skins* in several important ways. There are no scenes of dilapidated houses in *Imprint.* In *Imprint,* the first image audiences view of the Pine Ridge Reservation is the comfortable farm house of the Stonefeather ranch. Even the panorama views of the Pine Ridge Reservation at the end of the film lack the images of dilapidated houses present in *Skins'* opening montage. In addition to minimising the depictions of poverty in the film, *Imprint* also minimises images connected with alcohol and/or substance abuse that are present throughout *Skins.* Despite that

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[59] Judy Ettenhofer, "Poverty's Painful Truths," *The Capital Times,* October 23, 2003.
[60] Vinette Pryce, "Scars of Wounded Knee fester in 'Skins,'" *New York Amsterdam,* October 2, 2002.
[61] Alexandra Frank, "'Skins': Coming To A Theatre Near You," *Seminole Tribune*, July 5, 2002.
[62] Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: redfacing visual sovereignty, and representation of Native Americans in film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 161.

Skins and *Imprint* project differing images of life on the Pine Ridge Reservation, both films send a similar message; although colonialism has had detrimental effects on the Oglala Sioux, they need to take steps to solve the problems they face. Although *Imprint* was an independent film with a limited audience, the images the film projects complicate mainstream popular images of the Pine Ridge Reservation, which have tended to depict the reservation as a home for alcoholics and impoverished people.

From the introduction of the film, *Imprint* constructs a critique of the Euro-American justice system and how it can lead to injustices against innocent Native people to satisfy the demands of the American elite. The premise surrounding the film involves Shayla Stonefeather (Tonantzin Carmelo) prosecuting a second degree murder case in which Robbie Whiteshirt (Joseph Medicine Blanket), an Oglala Sioux teenager from the Pine Ridge Reservation, is accused of killing the wife of a senator. The opening scene conveys the contentious nature of the trial as a reporter remarks upon the hostility from Native communities directed at the proceedings since the jury is comprised primarily of Caucasians and the teenage defendant is being tried as an adult. Although Robbie is linked to the site of the murder, Frank Whiteshirt (Russell Chewey), who is the brother of the defendant, testifies that the woman was assailed prior to Robbie's arrival and a Caucasian male was seen fleeing the site of the crime. One of the tactics Shayla uses to help secure a guilty verdict is to persuade the jury that Frank Whiteshirt "would do anything to protect" his brother, even if it meant "lying in court." Essentially this scene positions Shayla against the Pine Ridge community specifically and, on a broader level, the Native American community for her role in securing a guilty verdict. This positioning is further reinforced by Frank Whiteshirt, who notes in an interview that Native Americans do not receive justice "in the white system" and that "traitors like Shayla" only make Indian positions in American society more precarious "in this genocidal war."[63] By the end of the film, the audience and Shayla learn that Robbie, who was killed in an attempt to escape, was setup in order to secure a swift conviction. When Shayla confronts her boyfriend, the future senator hopeful Jonathan Freeman (Cory Brusseau) about his role in bribing a witness to secure a guilty verdict, he attempts to murder her.

Shayla's return to the reservation to attend her dying father's birthday brings her into contact with the resentment of the Pine Ridge community. This resentment is partially shown as an unknown vandal spray paints "go home apple" on her car, indicating the Pine Ridge is not her home. Shayla's mother, Rebecca Stonefeather (Carla-

[63] *Imprint,* produced by Chris Eyre and Michael Linn, directed by Michael Linn, 84 minutes, Linn Productions, 2007, 1 DVD.

Rae), also recognises a change in her daughter as Shayla reprimands her mother for selling a portion of the family's buffalo herd to keep a community-based business named Shady Tree afloat. Rebecca chastises her daughter for such a thought and accuses her of changing from the "little girl who used to save all of her change in a jar because she wanted something to hand the man outside the supermarket. What happened to the little girl who wanted to come back and help her people?" This exchange between the two lead female characters foregrounds the belief that colonialism and racism may create problems for the Oglala Sioux, but the failure of the Oglala Sioux to help one another to overcome obstacles perpetuates the problems. Shayla argues the Oglala Sioux experience problems because they throw everything they receive away, leading her to conclude the primary obstacles on the Pine Ridge are "self-inflicted." While Rebecca can agree with her daughter on this issue, she argues that the problems are the result of the educated and privileged Oglala Sioux who are in a position to help the community but refuse to. By the end of the film, Shayla realises her privileged position offers her an opportunity to help other members of the Pine Ridge Reservation, which she demonstrates by giving a seemingly impoverished man something to eat as she is leaving a store. Therefore, the movie concludes in a similar fashion as *Skins,* with the recognition that each member is a greater part of the community and needs to assist others when they are in a position to do so.

The filming of *Imprint* also offered Eyre an opportunity to re-inscribe signs circulating in popular culture with a different meaning. One of the main objectives for Eyre during the production of *Imprint* was to develop images that allow audiences to challenge *Dances with Wolves'* final scene that characterises the Oglala Sioux as a defeated people forced onto the reservation because the buffalo are "gone."[64] Eyre was repeating his strategy of using his films that focus on Oglala Sioux identity to negotiate with and complicate the images embedded in *Dances with Wolves*. One of the first glimpses the audience views of the Pine Ridge Reservation is the scene that depicts Shayla driving to her parents' ranch. In this scene, audiences observe a herd of buffalo wandering on the grounds of the ranch, indicating the buffalo have not disappeared as the images in *Dances with Wolves* have insisted.

One of the signs present in *Imprint* that is not easily deciphered involves a wolf depicted as a silent observer to Shayla's actions in several different scenes throughout the film. Shayla's first view of the wolf takes place in a scene in which she observes it standing on a ridge with a herd of buffalo roaming nearby. The scene gives

[64] *Dances with Wolves*. Produced by Kevin Costner and Jim Wilson, directed by Kevin Costner, 181 minutes, Tig Productions, 1990, 1 DVD.

the indication there is something special about the wolf as it disappears from Shayla's view as a buffalo passes by. Once the buffalo exits from Shayla's line of sight, the wolf is gone. In one scene, the wolf beckons Shayla to the Wounded Knee cemetery, which is the site where the victims of the 1890 massacre are buried. At the cemetery, Shayla encounters the medicine man (Dave Bald Eagle), who attempted to purge the Stonefeather house of evil influences in an earlier scene. The dialogue the two individuals construct is critical on multiple levels. While it reminds audiences of the trauma the Oglala Sioux continue to experience due to the massacre, it constructs the notion that Sioux identity, both past and present, is interconnected with a specific piece of the land. Secondly, this scene demonstrates contemporary Oglala Sioux have an attachment to their ancestors which they are potentially able to connect to depending on their connection to the community. This scene constructs recognition that the Oglala Sioux draw insights from the victims of the Wounded Knee massacre to help determine how to best overcome certain situations. This recognition is critical for Shayla to begin her journey to re-establish a connection with the community of Pine Ridge. What is pivotal is the role the wolf plays in bringing Shayla to the cemetery to help her along her journey of reconnection to the Pine Ridge community.

The choice of using a wolf to help Shayla reconnect with the Oglala Sioux is interesting and one could construe it as an attempt to mediate with the image of Two Socks in *Dances with Wolves.* In *Dances with Wolves,* Dunbar's relationship with Two Socks is important to the lieutenant not only for the wolf's companionship, but due to the fact the wolf's "keen eyes and ears never fail to alert [him] when something is wrong." But the relationship is a little more complex than the companionship it offers to Dunbar as Two Socks becomes a witness to Dunbar's appropriation of Oglala Sioux identity.[65] In *Imprint,* Shayla does not formulate a friendship with the wolf, but the animal acts as a guide to the source for some of her answers to reconnect with the Sioux community. This ability to reconnect allows Shayla to decode the signs at the Stonefeather ranch and allow her to survive Freeman's murder attempt.

Despite that several critics grounded their engagement of *Imprint* by discussing the entertainment value of ghost stories and/or the appropriation of Native American spirituality in Hollywood films, few of the film critics highlighted the manner in which *Imprint* utilised spirituality as a way to discuss Oglala Sioux connections to the land and the carnage of an unsettled past. Part of the reason these critics failed to enter into this discussion may

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[65] *Ibid.*

revolve around the manner in which they generalised in their summation of the plotline. Many of the film reviews either failed to acknowledge that Shayla was returning to a reservation[66] or generalised the setting of the film as "an Indian reservation."[67] The sweeping generalisations these critics constructed are problematic since they have prevented these critics from understanding the importance of the Wounded Knee Massacre to the Oglala Sioux and the connections they continue to possess with their ancestors. Although critics failed to discuss any specific cultural aspects of *Imprint,* some film critics were willing to highlight how the integration of "Native spirituality" helped to construct a unique plotline that deviated from standard suspense films.[68]

Imprint also utilised a strong, assertive female protagonist, who returned to the reservation to become reattached to her Oglala Sioux roots. The depiction of a strong lead female character was appreciated in academic[69] and critical discourses. Winsh-Bolard thought the film "never descends into a familiar cliché of a chic film. Tonantzin Carmelo (into the West) portrays Shayla as a strong, opinionated woman torn between living with her people and working for them, and having a career within the dominating culture."[70] Lise Balk disagreed with this opinion. Balk was willing to discuss Shayla's re-connection with the reservation, but the film critic believed the Oglala Sioux lawyer represented one of the problematic stereotypes that the film projected,

> The one troubling tone of this film, interestingly enough, is that it does act out one stereotype. Writer/director Linn does demonstrate his active compassion for and understanding of the culture of Indian country. IMPRINT makes a point that the 'lost' daughter must forsake her attraction to all things 'White' and come home in order to completely find herself and fulfill her destiny... The story itself does, however, perpetuate a particular belief that these worlds, and their people, must remain separate in order to remain whole.[71]

This is a problematic reading that failed to acknowledge the film concluded with Shayla leaving the reservation to return to Denver, presumably with the intention of continuing her law career. While the images present in *Imprint* may conform to the patterns Marubbio recognised for the Celluloid Maiden, the film is still an important text that demonstrates the complexity that exists in Indian Country. The fact that Shayla was willing to re-connect with her

[66] James Wegg, "Selective, troubled memories," (2007). http://www.jamesweggreview.org/Articles.aspx?ID=875 ; Justin Felix, "Imprint," February 10, 2009. http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/37219/imprint/ ; John Shatzer, "Imprint," (2007). http://www.gutmunchers.com/Imprint.html
[67] Jeremy Biltz, "Imprint," February 2009. http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/36448/imprint/
[68] Consult, John Shatzer, "Imprint," (2007). http://www.gutmunchers.com/Imprint.html; Jeremy Biltz, "Imprint," February 2009. http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/36448/imprint/; "Impact," 2007, http://www.hometheafterinfo.com/impact_(2007).htm
[69] Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 145-168.
[70] Linda Winsh-Bolard, "Imprint," *Wiggly Socks Movie Reviews,* April 4, 2007.
[71] Lise Balk, "Imprint makes an impact," *The Native Voice,* March 14, 2007.

traditions and continue her successful law career in Denver has allowed the film to be positioned in opposition to *The Business of Fancydancing* since it demonstrated urban Native Americans can maintain a connection to the reservation and still reside in an urban area.

Filming Tony Hillerman: Examining Identity and Spirituality in A Thief Time

The relationship between the Navajo and Hillerman has been very complementary. Hillerman believed the Navajo hold a high degree of respect for his work as he noted his novels are part of the school curriculum on the Navajo Reservation and the author believed Navajo children enjoy reading his work.[72] Although Hillerman recognised that a small minority in the Navajo community have been highly critical of his work,[73] the author believed one of the reasons the Navajo generally appreciated his novels is because he approached their culture with a certain degree of respect. Hillerman felt comfortable writing about the Navajo since he believed Navajo "ceremonies are not secret" and, therefore, felt he was not violating their culture.[74] Although Hillerman can be faulted for his integration of Navajo skinwalkers into his plotlines, which he recognised made traditional Navajo uneasy, he earned the respect of the Navajo Nation as they allowed him to participate in a position of honour at a parade and commemorated his depiction of their tribe by giving him the designation "Special Friend of the Dineh."[75]

Tony Hillerman's appropriation of Native American identity, particularly Navajo identity, has created much controversy in Indian Country. Criticism directed toward the author can be classified into two broad categories. The first category entails criticism against a Euro-American writer appropriating Native American voices. The second criticism is directed at Hillerman's simplistic portrayal of Navajo identity. Keeshig-Tobias and Sherman Alexie represent the first strain of criticism. Although Keeshig-Tobias (Anishinabe) has given credit to non-Native writers for studying Native issues prior to the introduction of Native writers in the 1970s and 1980s, she believes non-Native writers should bow out of writing this genre as Native writers have established themselves in the literary world.[76] Sherman Alexie has also been an outspoken critic of Hillerman's work as he has repeatedly labelled it "colonial writing," and sees the Euro-American writer as an obstacle to the emergence of future Native

[72] "The roots of Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee," *Chicago Sun-Times,* September 13, 1998.
[73] Hamlin Hill, "Tony Hillerman Interview," *South Central Review* 12, no. 1(Spring, 1995): 35.
[74] "The roots of Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee," *Chicago Sun-Times,* September 13, 1998.
[75] Tony Hillerman, *Seldom Disappointed,* 253.
[76] Kenneth Williams, "Cultural Appropriation and Aboriginal Literature," *Windspeaker* 14, no. 11 (Mar., 1997): 18-19.

American writers.[77] Alexie argues the images Hillerman constructed of Navajo culture continue to reaffirm popular imagery of the Navajo, and therefore, "don't really question any assumptions about Indians."[78] Ward Churchill and Sam Pack represent the second category of criticism that has been directed at Hillerman's work. Ward Churchill believed Hillerman's representation of Chee is condescending to Navajo traditions, even if the academic erroneously simplified Chee's desire to become a medicine man to "being curious but perpetually baffled by the sheer and often perverse stupidity imbedded in the culture of which he is supposedly a part."[79] Pack was also highly critical of Hillerman's depiction of the Navajo: "Hillerman selectively chooses to convey to his readership that which he finds appealing and simply discards anything that contradicts his romantic image."[80] Furthermore, Pack questioned the motivation of the Navajo to award Hillerman with the designation "Special Friend of the Dineh," speculating they were more appreciative of the increase in tourism that the author's novels has generated rather than the "authentic" Navajo image his work projects.[81]

Although the Navajo have taken steps to construct self-representative images, the popular images that have been constructed of the Navajo revolve around Tony Hillerman's appropriation of Navajo identity, tourist paraphernalia and media reports that convey stereotypical and/or demeaning images to the dominant society.[82] One of the pertinent questions that research conducted by Christopher Dole and Thomas Csordas has revolved around is defining Navajo identity in a contemporary period.[83] This research has revealed how individual Navajo are attracted to different internal and external cultural flows, including the manner in which they negotiate with three of the major religions/forms of spirituality that exist on the reservation: Navajo traditionalism, the Native American Church and Christianity.[84] The Navajo Reservation Eyre constructed in *A Thief of Time* possesses characters who negotiate between traditionalism, non-traditionalism and/or Christianity. While Eyre's films *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* fail to meet the criteria of Navajo self-representative images, they do enter into this dialogue about Navajo identity politics as they construct diverse images individual Navajo can potentially gravitate to and identify with.

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[77] John Bellante and Carl Bellante, "Sherman Alexie, Literary Rebel," 6.
[78] Williams Cole, "Sherman Alexie in Conversation with Williams Cole," 108.
[79] Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race,* 84.
[80] Pack, "Constructing 'The Navajo,'" 143.
[81] *Ibid.,* 151.
[82] For a discussion of Navajo in the media, consult, Thomas Csordas, "Ritual Healing and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Navajo Society," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 1 (Feb., 1999): 5-8.
[83] Christopher Dole and Thomas Csordas, "Trials of Navajo Youth: Identity, Healing, and the Struggle for Maturity," *Ethos* 31, no. 3 (Sept., 2003): 357.
[84] Thomas Csordas, "Ritual Healing and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Navajo Society," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 1 (Feb., 1999): 371-374.

PBS's decision to turn *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* into television adaptations was motivated by a desire from the top echelons of the corporation to create a program that reflected the diversity of the American population, despite that it did not reflect the Caucasian, middle to upper class audience of PBS.[85] Pat Mitchell, who was the president of PBS and is part Cherokee and Creek, clearly noted the importance of adapting the Hillerman novels for television, "The commercial guys won't take a chance on something they don't see as mainstream. We saw 'Skinwalkers' as a great way to modernise our 'Mystery!' series and reach a broader audience."[86] This statement certainly has merit given the failure of *The Dark Wind* to generate financial success and the problems that occurred on the set between the Navajo, Hopi and the filming crew. Although Hillerman reserved judgement on the film while it was in production,[87] the author expressed his disapproval of the cinematic adaptation of *The Dark Wind* after its release.[88]

Chris Eyre was presented with the daunting task of adapting Hillerman's novels *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* to the small screen due to the degree of spirituality that is present in Hillerman's novels. The production of the cinematic adaptation of *The Dark Wind* revealed tensions can develop if a director fails to accommodate tribal wishes. Errol Morris noted a high degree of tension on the site of *The Dark Wind*, but he attributed this tension to the unstable relations between the Hopi and Navajo.[89] Although tensions resulting from the land transfer between the Hopi and Navajo may have created an added dimension to the problems of shooting *The Dark Wind*, the traditional faction of the Hopi was angered by the treatment of Hopi spirituality and ceremonialism in the film. These images have added further weight to Victor Masayesva Jr.'s conviction for the need to have copyright laws apply to the depiction of Hopi culture and spirituality.[90] One could clearly accuse *The Dark Wind* of violating the sanctity of Hopi and Navajo spiritual practices as it depicts Hopi ceremonialism and a Navajo Stalking Way Sing.[91] In defence of Morris, this Stalking Way scene was written into Hillerman's novel,[92] but the director could easily have omitted this scene from the film and still maintain the integrity of the plot. Everette Keezer took exception to

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[85] "PBS looks more diverse than ever," *Oakland Tribune*, January 13, 2004.
[86] Rick Steelhammer, "PBS image draws viewers," *Sunday Gazette-Mail*, February 2, 2003.
[87] Tony Hillerman, Mario Materassi, "The Case of Tony Hillerman: An Interview," *Journal of the Southwest*, 50, no. 4 (Winter, 2008): 453.
[88] "The roots of Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 13, 1998.
[89] Philip Gourevitch, "Interviewing the Universe," *New York Times Magazine*, August 9, 1992, http://www.errolmorris.com/content/profile/bhot_gourevitch.html (accessed March 5, 2010).
[90] Linda Castrone Scripps-Howard, "Indians: Say Films Distort Their History," *Albany Times Union*, May 12, 1994.
[91] *The Dark Wind*, produced by Patrick Markey, directed by Errol Morris, 111 minutes, Lion's Gate, 2003, 1 DVD.
[92] Tony Hillerman, *The Dark Wind* (New York, Harper Torch, 2001), 249-254.

this scene, "It's bogus and goofy. Chee prays to become some kind of supercop. Indians aren't supposed to pray to become super, or rich, or pretty. It's not good from [sic]. It's like other spiritual practices, you have to pray with humility."[93] Aside from the difficulties that could arise from depicting Navajo spirituality on celluloid, Hillerman was also initially sceptical about the feasibility of adapting one of his novels into a television adaptation, "I thought, 'How the hell are they going to get a television audience to understand the Navajo cultural stuff without making it a seven-hour movie or without doing any serious damage to my notions?'"[94] Ultimately, Hillerman appreciated the manner in which Eyre depicted the Navajo "cultural stuff" on-screen as the director was able to construct a film that projects a positive portrayal of Navajo identity.

The production of *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* provided Eyre with an opportunity to depict Navajo characters in very diverse occupations ranging from professions in law[95]and medicine, which included both Navajo medicine men and Western-trained doctors. Eyre's filmic Navajo reservation also has gangs, which is an aspect of reservation life people are unfamiliar with, particularly film critic Ted Cox, "Yet if 'Skinwalkers' takes care to depict the Navajo as well-rounded people, true to life, it doesn't make the same effort to avoid stereotypes when it comes to teenage thugs. Even Navajo gang bangers, it turns out, listen to rap music."[96] Cox's review failed to offer an alternative for the kind of music Navajo gangs would listen to, as the critic demonstrated a lack of knowledge about how different Native Americans have used Western culture to construct their own identities. Secondly, Eyre's films demonstrate the complexity of Navajo identity by depicting Leaphorn as an individual who was raised in Phoenix with little attachment to his Navajo roots. The diversity in characters led Woods to conclude, "sometimes, in fact, both films [*Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time*] feel more like character studies than the suspense thrillers they aspire to be."[97] Hillerman was originally uneasy with this alteration in Leaphorn's character profile, but he came to accept it as the author reasoned, "By portraying Leaphorn as a Navajo who had never been on a reservation, it made sense that he would grill Chee about Navajo beliefs. This way, viewers can understand the culture, too, without

[93] Everette Keezer, "Review of Tony Hillerman's The Dark Wind: Lou Diamond Phillips blamed," *The Ojibwe News,* February 4, 1999.
[94] Marisa Guthrie, "More than skin deep; Wes Studi brings layers to his role as a detective in PBS' 'Skinwalkers'," *The Boston Herald,* November 22, 2002.
[95] This is demonstrated by Janet Pete, a Navajo lawyer played by Alex Rice. There is also a Native American judge in the film played by Chris Eyre.
[96] Ted Cox, "'Mystery!' on the rez PBS series widens its horizons with Tony Hillerman's 'Skinwalkers,'" *Daily Herald,* November 22, 2002.
[97] Woods, *Native Features,* 36.

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having to sit through a four-hour movie."[98] But while Hillerman spoke of these changes in a positive way for their ability to communicate Navajo cultural content in a simpler format to the audience, one should also acknowledge these images project a complex depiction of Navajo identity illustrating it can be very traditional, as is demonstrated by Chee's character, or non-traditional, as Leaphorn's (Wes Studi) character shows. These two contrasting personalities can at times lead to tensions between Leaphorn and Chee, particularly given Chee's reluctance to approach corpses and for his suggestion that a skinwalker was responsible for the death of the medicine man Roman George. Richard Benke's review of *Skinwalkers* suggests he was heavily influenced by stereotypes of the Navajo when the critic was assessing the relationship between the two law enforcement agents: "The story revolves around the fraternity of Navajo medicine men, and a series of mysterious deaths among them. Junior officer Jim Chee, who's studying to become a medicine man himself, is better suited to investigate than Leaphorn. There might be friction if they were Anglo cops, but harmony is important to the Navajo."[99] Furthermore, critical reception has attempted to understand these two characters by applying familiar images to them. Film critics Caryn James[100] and David Konke[101] compared Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn to Mulder and Scully from the *X-Files.* Such a comparison is problematic since it has failed to take into account the importance of traditions to Navajo communities and the struggles to preserve and pass them on to future generations.

Although it appears the attachment of Chee and Leaphorn to Navajo traditionalism operate on opposite ends of the spectrum, there are other characters featured in the television adaptations that occupy varying positions on this spectrum. One such character is Janet Pete (Alex Rice). Pete, a Navajo lawyer who is western educated, is ambitious and wants to pursue a career away from the reservation. Despite her desire to leave the reservation, she is knowledgeable of Navajo traditions as she is seen participating in a Navajo curing ceremony in *Skinwalkers.* Emma Leaphorn (Sheila Tousey) also complicates some of the personalities in the film. She returns to the reservation in order to mentally prepare for her battle against cancer, demonstrating her awareness of the importance of Navajo traditions and sense of place. Perhaps more importantly, this scene was designed to negotiate with Euro-American

[98] Suzanne Ryan, "PBS Brings 'Mystery!' To The Reservation," *The Boston Globe,* November 21, 2002.
[99] Richard Benke, "Solving crime, the Navajo way," *The Record,* November 22, 2002. Marisa Guthrie disputed this perspective in her review of the film: "He [Leaphorn] has no patience for his partner's [Chee's] paranormal notions, his frustration is evident in his constantly clenched jaw and cold stare." Marisa Guthrie, "PBS show digs into American 'Mystery,'" *The Boston Herald,* November 24, 2003.
[100] Caryn James, "Old Navajo Ways and New Meet in a Mystery," *New York Times,* November 22, 2002.
[101] David Kronke, "'Skinwalkers' offers something new in mystery genre," *Daily News,* November 24, 2002.

notions of deficiencies that suggest Native Americans are only on the reservation because they cannot live in urban environments.[102]

The drastic alterations that occurred in the adaption of *Skinwalkers*[103] to the television screen resulted in a greater focus on Navajo spirituality and medicine men than was written in the literary text. *Skinwalkers* centres on the killing of medicine men, which Hillerman understood and appreciated: "It's hard to make an interesting movie about Medicare Fraud."[104]Although the portrayal of medicine men in *Skinwalkers* has been criticised by members of the Navajo community, the film still serves a functional purpose of highlighting the importance of medicine men in Navajo society and the relevance of Navajo traditionalism. There are two scenes that may lead audiences to question the power and rituals of medicine men: The first instance occurs when the four medicine men fail to cure the sickness afflicting the Obsidian Springs community. The film makes the distinction that the source of the lead poisoning afflicting the community resulted from a *bilagaana* disease, and could not be cured by medicine men. The second instance entails the failure of Wilson Sam's ritual to protect him from Dr. Stone's murderous rage as Stone plotted to kill the four medicine men for their failure to cure the illness. Although these scenes question the power of medicine men and traditional Navajo ceremonialism, there are other scenes throughout the film that were designed to mediate and assert the importance of Navajo traditionalism and medicine men. Chee experiences a vision in which Wilson Sam, Roman George and Roosevelt Bistie appear and inform the Navajo officer about the importance of medicine men as the Navajo community loses important knowledge every time a medicine man dies. The message and the faith some Navajo possess in their traditions are reaffirmed at the end of the film as Jim Chee and Janet Pete participate in a ceremony to heal Emma of her cancer. The fact that Emma appears in *A Thief of Time* demonstrates the validity of Navajo healing ceremonies.[105]

An assessment of the differing ways in which Eyre and Hillerman constructed their respective mysteries demonstrates Eyre's desire to use *A Thief of Time* to validate the existence and power of chindi. This desire is

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[102] One such stereotype entails the belief Native Americans are unable to cope with conditions away from the reservation and are therefore restricted to this specific piece of land. Consult, Alexis Tan and Yuki Fujioka and Nancy Lucht, "Native American Stereotypes, TV Portrayals, and Personal Contact," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74, no. 265 (1997): 267.
[103] Hillerman's novel *Skinwalkers* possesses a Navajo doctor who uses emotionally unstable people to murder individuals investigating health-care fraud on the Navajo reservation.
[104] Marisa Guthrie, "PBS show digs into American 'Mystery,'" *The Boston Herald,* November 2, 2002.
[105] Although Emma is still alive at the conclusion of the novel *Skinwalkers,* Hillerman decided to kill off her character.

demonstrated in the scene in which Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal disappears and the scene in which Officer Chee (Adam Beach) stumbles upon the corpses of two pot looters. Hillerman, although attempting to construct a mystery that revolves around Navajo culture, did not encode an abundance of supernatural elements into either scene. In Hillerman's novel, the scene in which Friedman-Bernal goes missing was written in the following manner, "Just then she [Friedman-Bernal] heard the whistle again. Just behind her. Not a night bird. No sort of reptile. It was a melody the Beatles had made popular. 'Hey, Jude,' the words began. But Eleanor didn't recognise it. She was too terrified by the humped shape that was coming out of the moonlight into this pool of darkness."[106] While this scene does establish a mystery as to the fate of Friedman-Bernal, it deviates radically from the manner in which Eyre constructed the mystery. In Eyre's television adaptation, Friedman-Bernal sees a female Anasazi apparition after she turns in the direction from which a noise originated. The scene ends there and audiences are left to ponder who/what is the apparition and whether it plays a role in the disappearance of the archaeologist. Although audiences are led to believe the apparition played a role, the concluding scenes of the film indicate the apparition had nothing to do with Friedman-Bernal's disappearance. The second scene in which Eyre depicted a ghost involves Chee's discovery of two individuals both involved in the illegal excavation of Anasazi bones. In the novel, Chee is aware of the presence of chindi in the area of the disturbed bones, but there is not an actual visible manifestation of a chindi. Ultimately, the author wrote the scene as a simple conventional mystery with little supernatural twists; Chee discovers the two corpses who were clearly shot.[107] Again there is a slight deviation between the manner in which the novel and the television adaptation handle this scene. In the television adaptation, as Chee stumbles upon the two corpses, their eyes are a milky white shade and they have strange marks on their faces. After this discovery, Chee spots the Anasazi apparition, prompting him to have a sweat to cleanse the corpse sickness from his body. The question regarding whether these two individuals died of supernatural causes is discovered later in the film, as it is revealed Randall Elliot killed them using more conventional methods. This explanation does not account for the meaning behind the apparition that either excited[108] or disappointed[109] critics since the apparition is never directly explained in the film. It is also crucial to recognise as well that the chindi is not simply visible to Navajo individuals, but

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[106] Tony Hillerman, *A Thief of Time* (New York: HarperTorch, 2001), 16.
[107] *Ibid.*, 94-96.
[108] Leta Rector believes the failure to properly explain the presence of chindi in *A Thief of Time* made the plotline "fuller, eery – and scary!" Consult, Leta Rector, "TV movie on PBS; A Thief of Time," *News From Indian Country,* March 5, 2004.
[109] Philip Burnham cited the failure to explain the presence of chindi as a weakness of the plotline of *A Thief of Time.* Consult, Philip Burnham, "'A Thief of Time' by Tony Hillerman," *Indian Country Today,* August, 4, 2004.

makes its presence known to the Euro-American archaeologist Friedman-Bernal. In this respect, one can construe the chindi is not simply a figment of superstitious Navajo beliefs, but is an actual entity that can manifest itself to anyone.

One of the interesting dynamics of *A Thief of Time* concerns the manner in which Eyre utilised the apparition of an Anasazi female to assert an indigenous connection to the land that transcends time and space. Eyre's utilisation of a chindi demonstrates the director's desire to assert a Native American imprint on the land. Scholarship has noted the symbolism behind the utilisation of ghosts in artistic representations act as a means in which to recognise and discuss the violent encounter between indigenous populations and Euro-Americans.[110] However, in this case, there is no violent clash between European colonialism and Native Americans since the Anasazi either left the region or were absorbed by other tribes prior to European contact. In both instances, audiences see the apparition in places where the skeletal remains of the Anasazi are disturbed. Although one can decode the apparition as an observer to the violations of Anasazi gravesites by grave looters and archaeologists, it is possible this apparition is sending another message. Popular memory has a tendency to associate the cliff houses and petroglyphs as the only imprints left behind by the Anasazi. Eyre's re-appropriation of this ghostly apparition has constructed a bridge to link the past with the present and to inform audiences the Anasazi have established a spiritual imprint on the land.[111]

The second manner in which Eyre used spirituality to highlight the existence and power of indigenous spirits is situated in the scene in which Chee is talking to Amos Whistler (Joseph Runningfox) and Slick Nakai (Graham Greene) over the location of a pot Amos recovered. In some respects, this passage from the novel is very similar to the scene from the film. Amos tells Chee the site of where he uncovered the pot that was of interest to the missing archaeologist, but refuses to go there because he heard a flute. As the discussion continues, it is learned Amos refuses to lead Chee into the canyon since he is afraid of encountering Kokopelli.[112] The novel ascribes the flute Amos heard to Brigham Houk, who was playing his flute in the canyon,[113] thereby providing a less supernatural answer to the flute Amos heard. It is on this point the novel and the television adaptation slightly

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[110] For a discussion of ghosts and their meaning, consult, Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 145-160.
[111] Michelle Raheja noted a similar conclusion in relation to the manner in which *Imprint* utilises spirituality and ghosts, "Because spirituality and the figure of the ghost have been employed to filmically equate absence and alterity, an examination of Indigenous filmmakers' use of these images serves as a way to reinhabit and reimagine colonized terrain." Consult, Raheja, *Reservation Reelism,* 148.
[112] Tony Hillerman, *A Thief of Time,* 224.
[113] *Ibid.,* 303.

diverge. In the television adaptation, Amos reveals he discovered the pot at Navajo Mountain, but is reluctant to go there since he believes the chindi is at the site. When Slick tries to convince Amos that praying to Jesus would protect Amos against the powers of the chindi, Amos counters by saying "I pray to Jesus, it's the chindi, he's been here a lot longer than Jesus." This statement is significant since it demonstrates the power of the chindi is even stronger than Jesus due to its long occupancy on the land and cannot be entirely displaced by Christianity.[114] While Amos is one individual who has attempted to negotiate between Christianity and traditionalism, he recognises that on the Navajo Reservation, and possibly North America in general, the power of Navajo/indigenous traditionalism supersedes the power of Christianity. When Chee prods Amos further in regards to what he witnessed on Navajo Mountain, Amos replies, "It's not what I saw. I heard a flute." The film does not ascribe the noise of the flute to Brigham as was written in the novel, suggesting the existence and power of Kokopelli is in fact real.

While the contentious relationship between the crew of *The Dark Wind* and the Hopi was previously discussed, it is important to examine how Eyre's filming of *A Thief of Time* tried to minimise the tension present on site by adhering to some of the rules the communities laid out. In the commentary for *A Thief of Time* Chris Eyre and Roy Wagner noted the tribal council did not permit filming in the core sections of Jemez Pueblo, which observes "a closed village policy due to the lack of tourism facilities and out of respect for the privacy of those people who live there."[115] The film crew was also prohibited from filming a specific mountain that possesses a spiritual significance to the local indigenous community. These two requests were honoured by the filming crew. Furthermore, the commentary for *A Thief of Time* reveals a discussion took place regarding whether or not the interior of a sweat lodge should be filmed. In the end, Chris Eyre and producer Craig McNeil agreed the interior of the sweat lodge would not be filmed in order to be accountable to this private ritual. Moreover, there was also a desire to create some sort of accuracy when depicting Southwest Native culture, as demonstrated by the petroglyphs created by the filming crew of *A Thief of Time* to enhance the visual effects of their film. The accuracy in which the filming crew created these symbols of spirituality was deemed appropriate by the local indigenous population, who retained them to use as an educational tool for filming techniques.[116]

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[114] In Hillerman's passage, Amos also seems to be reluctant to face the chindi despite the fact that he is a Christian, but the manner in which Eyre constructed this recognition between the powers of Jesus and chindi is more direct and effective than the novel.
[115] Pueblo of Jemez, www.jemezpueblo.org (accessed July 29, 2011)
[116] *A Thief of Time,* produced by Craig McNeil, directed by Chris Eyre, 95 minutes, PBS Pictures, 2004, 1 DVD.

Critical reception to *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* in the Native and non-Native presses have highlighted the talent of Native Americans both in front and behind the camera. Leta Rector gave a favourable review for *Skinwalkers*: "it is a satisfying show and you shouldn't miss it."[117] Rector provided this positive review due to the good chemistry between Wes Studi and Sheila Tousey, the unpredictable ending, but perhaps more importantly, the skill of Chris Eyre, who worked tirelessly to complete the filming of this adaptation in less than a month.[118] Rector complimented the acting talent in *A Thief of Time,* describing Wes Studi's performance as a "tour-de-force" and praised the actor's ability to bring humanness to the role.[119] The review for *A Thief of Time* printed in the *Seminole Tribune* directed praise at Eyre's ability to offer a "unique mix of talent which combines Hollywood, PBS, the independent film community, and international distributors."[120] Tony Atherton, writing for *The Ottawa Citizen,* praised the acting abilities of Adam Beach, and attributed the success of Beach's performance in film to the proliferation of opportunities for Native actors to participate in Native American-themed television shows in Canada.[121] Caryn James' review of *Skinwalkers* also complimented Chris Eyre's ability to create a quality movie, "[the] movie's most distinctive touch comes from its director, the Indian filmmaker Chris Eyre, who brings to it the deliberate pace evident in his feature."[122] Although one can attribute this acting talent to the participation of Wes Studi and Adam Beach in Hollywood productions, the recognition of the talent that exists in Indian Country demonstrates the success Native actors have achieved in film and the potential success Native American productions can have in the future.

PBS attempted to provide American audiences context in which they could understand some of the images projected in *Skinwalkers* through a webpage that discussed the importance of Navajo medicine men, sings and sand paintings.[123] Although PBS wanted to convey to American audiences aspects of Navajo culture in *Skinwalkers,* the images this film projected led to some criticism from the Navajo Reservation. These Navajo have questioned why Wilson Sam was so terrified of the skinwalker stalking him when he possessed the ability to fend off the entity and

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[117] Leta Rector, "Skinwalkers premiers at Native Cinema Showcase," *News From Indian Country*, September 15, 2002.
[118] *Ibid.*
[119] Leta Rector, "TV movie on PBS: A Thief of Time," *New From Indian Country,* May 3, 2004.
[120] "Tony Hillerman's Skinwalkers: Hexes, Homicide, and Hillerman," *Seminole Tribune,* September 27, 2002.
[121] Tony Atherton, "The return of the native casting: Adam Beach plays a Navajo detective on an American edition of PBS Mystery!" *The Ottawa Citizen,* November 21, 2002.
[122] Caryn James, "Old Navajo Ways and New Meet in a Mystery," *New York Times,* November 22, 2002.
[123] Caitlin O'Neil, "Traditional Healing." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/mystery/american/navajoland/healing.html

have also expressed concern with the actors' inability to speak Navajo properly.[124] This latter concern is valid given that Adam Beach admitted the difficulty he encountered in learning the language.[125] Despite these cultural and linguistic inaccuracies, Pack believed the Navajo audience still found the film entertaining as "they seemed surprised and even somewhat grateful that their culture was even portrayed on film at all."[126] Other Navajo critics have not been so generous as they have advocated that Navajo traditions should be depicted as accurately as possible given the limited opportunities Native directors have been given to project images of the Navajo to broad audiences.[127]

Chris Eyre is aware of the criticisms that have been directed at his television adaptations of the Hillerman series and attempted to address them in two ways. Firstly, he noted the film's schedule, time constraints and limited budget prevented him from casting Navajo actors in the roles of Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn, and opted instead to use seasoned actors Adam Beach and Wes Studi.[128] Critical reception discussed above indicates Eyre's choice of actors was relatively successful since critics approved of the acting talent in the film. Secondly, Eyre was not interested in using his work as an educational tool despite critics' insistence since the Arapaho-Cheyenne director was more interested in using these two films as a means to attract greater interest in Native American self-representative images. As the above discussion noted, Eyre was cautious and respectful when depicting spirituality on-screen as he did not want to infringe upon and violate people's spiritual practices. Furthermore, Eyre demonstrated in the production of *A Thief of Time* that cultural accuracy was important as the filming crew attempted to depict the petroglyphs correctly, but he has recognised cultural accuracy, at times, needs to be sacrificed in order to develop a film that could appeal to broad audiences. Moreover, Eyre has also expressed his reluctance in depicting Native American culture on screen as he acknowledges it is "really hard not to put real culture in this series. I steer clear of that. It's about entertainment."[129] Despite this uneasiness in the director, the images of Navajo spirituality present in *Skinwalkers* contributed to the film's positive reception as it was viewed by more than 12 million viewers, making it the highest-watched program on PBS for 2002. The success that films such

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[124] Pack, "Watching Navajos Watch Themselves," 124.
[125] Tony Atherton, "The return of the native casting: Adam Beach plays a Navajo detective on an American edition of PBS Mystery!" *The Ottawa Citizen,* November 21, 2002.
[126] Pack, "Watching Navajos Watch Themselves," 124.
[127] "Smithsonian film fest kicks off with world premier of Hillerman's 'Thief of Time,'" *The Native Voice,* December 28, 2003.
[128] *Ibid.*
[129] *Ibid.*

as *Skinwalkers* have achieved led Gloria Goodale to conclude there has been increasing acceptance of indigenous directed films among popular audiences, and correctly noted the optimism that is currently present in Indian Country over the potential for Native American self-representative images.[130]

Given the interest Euro-Americans have exhibited in Native American spirituality, particularly south-western Native spirituality, it is not surprising that reviews of *Skinwalkers* would focus on the cultural and spiritual aspects of the plotline. Caryn James and David Kronke were interested in skinwalkers as the two critics discussed this topic, albeit briefly and in a generalised way.[131] Caryn James appreciated the film's ability to interweave aspects of "Indian" [132] culture and spirituality into its plotline since American audiences have "rarely" been exposed to this facet of Navajo society. David Kronke discussed the educational value of *Skinwalkers* as he broke his rating of the film into two categories: "entertainment value" and "informative value." The entertainment value was awarded only two and a half stars, while the educational value was rated slightly higher at three stars,[133] demonstrating the critic believed *Skinwalkers* was more valuable for its educational rather than entertainment value. Given the brevity of the film review, it was difficult to ascertain what aspects of the film Kronke felt were educational. Kronke's assessment would be correct if he believed the educational value of *Skinwalkers* rested strictly on the film's ability to construct a forum in which audiences could learn the complexity of Navajo identity. If Kronke believed the film was accurate in depicting Navajo cultural ceremonies and traditions, then his conclusions were faulty and may have been based on two assumptions. Firstly, Kronke may have assumed Eyre would be accountable in depicting Navajo culture accurately since he is a Native American. Secondly, Kronke may have assumed Eyre would be well versed in Navajo culture simply because he is a Native American. These two views are problematic since they were predicated on assumptions. The latter assumption is particularly problematic since it assumed any Native director could construct informative images of any tribal culture, which promotes out-group homogeneity.

Tony Atherton's review of *Skinwalkers* has also demonstrated the critic enjoyed the spiritual aspects of the film, but it appears he had an assumed belief that Native American spirituality and ceremonialism are the same.

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[130] Gloria Goodale, "Native American dreams; Native peoples are gaining wider acceptance in Hollywood with critical favorite 'Fast Runner' and PBS's new 'Skinwalkers,'" *The Christian Science Monitor,* November 22, 2002.
[131] Both film critics described Navajo skinwalkers as "shapeshifters," thereby minimizing the complexity of Navajo skinwalkers. For a detailed description of Navajo skinwalkers, consult, Clyde Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962).
[132] Caryn James, "Old Navajo Ways and New Meet in a Mystery," *New York Times,* November 22, 2002.
[133]David Kronke, "'Skinwalkers' A 'Mystery!'" *LA Daily News,* July 30, 2002.

Atherton's review was designed to demonstrate Canadian audiences would be in a better position in understanding the images *Skinwalkers* projected than American audiences: "It [Aboriginal mysticism] will probably seem like a novelty in the U.S. In Canada, however, this seemingly exotic combination is old hat, after a strong series of *North of 60* mystery movies on CBC." *North of 60,* a Canadian television series that was broadcast from 1992 to 1998, was set in the fictional Dene community of Lynx River in the Northwest Territories. The success that this series achieved among Canadian audiences led to the development of five made-for-television movies that examined an assortment of issues ranging from the effects of residential schools to the development of the community's economy. *Dream Storm* was the only *North of 60* film that contained substantial amounts of "Aboriginal" mysticism in the plotline,[134] and the images the film projected were completely different from the sings and sand paintings present in *Skinwalkers.* Given the vast differences between the manner in which Eyre and Stacey Stewart Curtis constructed their own respective forms of "Aboriginal" mysticism, there is no reason to believe that Canadian audiences would be at a greater advantage to understand the imagery present in *Skinwalkers* than American audiences. Atherton's assertion is very problematic since he has conceptualised Aboriginal spirituality in a general way that failed to recognise that different tribes have different traditions, even if they were inaccurately portrayed in film.

Although Eyre interwove Navajo spirituality into the plotline of *Skinwalkers* for commercial reasons, which has contributed to the success of the film, it is evident from some film reviews that critics were not entirely satisfied with Eyre's use of Navajo spirituality. Ted Cox's review of *Skinwalkers* best exemplifies this perspective, "[*Skinwalkers*] might be a little too respectful...[as it]...delicately tiptoe around Navajo culture, where a show like, say, 'The X-Files' in its prime would take a freer hand in playing with the myths and using them to enhance drama."[135] Although Cox may not have seen anything wrong with exploiting and commercialising off Navajo spiritual practices, Native American communities have objected to such a practice. As discussed earlier, the depiction of spirituality on celluloid has been a contentious issue in Indian Country, and needs to be handled with respect. Cox's suggestion was based on a lack of understanding or ignorance of these issues, as well as a desire for filmic representations that can cater to the Euro-American or, at the very least, his desire for the exotic.

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[134] *Dream Storm,* produced by Tom Cox, Doug MacLeod and Jordy Randall, directed by Stacey Stewart Curtis, 91 minutes, Alberta Filmworks, 2001, 1 DVD.

[135] Ted Cox, "'Mystery!' on the rez PBS series widens its horizons with Tony Hillerman's 'Skinwalkers,'" *Daily Herald,* November 22, 2002.

Philip Burham's review of *A Thief of Time* asserted his belief that Native American directed films should have a functional purpose in conveying politicised and/or educational messages to the American public. Although Burham's review was critical of the "poorly developed characters," one of the main criticisms he directed at *A Thief of Time* was at the film's failure to enter into a politicised dialogue about protecting Native American cultural sites,

> This film could have been an important vehicle to both entertain and educate, but falls short of the mark. Many questions go unanswered such as who was the chiidii [sic] (ghost) and what was his/her role in the murders? How does desecration of American Indian cultural artifacts affect the whole of society or, most importantly, why our sacred sites should be protected?[136]

Burham's statement regarding the need to protect Native American spiritual sites is completely valid. The restrictions placed on archaeology work on reservation lands attests to the increasing legal clout Native American tribes have exercised since the 1970s in order to protect the remains of their ancestors and items deemed to have sacred significance. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) has allowed Native tribes a means to seek the return of the remains of their ancestors and sacred items stored in museums and educational institutions in the United States that receive federal monies.[137] Despite the passage of the NAGPRA, issues related to the importance of studying ancient skeletal remains continue to be a topic of debate. This statement is evidenced by the discovery of the Kennewick Man and the controversy that revolved around whether anthropologists should have access to these remains to study or if they should be repatriated to Native tribes in the vicinity of their discovery. Native American concerns are not simply restricted to the return of their ancestors held in museums, but includes recovering cultural artefacts that fall outside the reach of the NAGPRA. There is also growing concern that Native American cultural goods continue to be sold on the black market, and that tourists continue to use Native American religious sites in an inappropriate manner. While Eyre's television adaptation of *A Thief of Time* highlights the problems of illegally excavating pottery and skeletal remains on the Navajo Reservation, it fails to discuss the flaws in laws designed to protect these sites. The fact that the main perpetrator of the illegal grave looting is killed in *A Thief of Time* implies the law is upheld and justice in this matter will always prevail. But Eyre would contend that *A Thief of Time* was designed more to attract and entertain audiences as opposed to conveying a politicised message to the American public, illustrating divergent views between Eyre and Burnham on the primary objective of the film in this specific case.

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[136] Philip Burnham, "'A Thief of Time' by Tony Hillerman," *Indian Country Today,* August 4, 2004.
[137] Russell Thornton, "Who Owns Our Past? The Repatriation of Native American Human Remains and Cultural Objects," in *Native American Voices: A Reader* 3rd edition, eds. Susan Lobo, Steve Talbot and Traci Morris (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2001), 318.

One of the major commonalities present in critical reception to *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* has been the recognition that Eyre was able to construct complex images of Navajo identity that demonstrated the humanness of these characters. As previously mentioned, Rector believed Studi's acting talent brought a certain degree of humanness to the role of Joe Leaphorn. Furthermore, Rector also directed praise at the character of Delbert, even if he played a limited role in *A Thief of Time*, due to his ability to challenge the stoic Indian stereotype. David Kronke recognised the diversity that existed among the different characters in *Skinwalkers*, which he believed could potentially result in audiences having a greater understanding of the Navajo.[138] Even reviewers who were highly critical of certain aspects of these television adaptations recognised the films' depiction of complex Navajo identities. Ted Cox recognised *Skinwalkers* "depict[s] the Navajo as well-rounded people, true to life,"[139] while Philip Burnham acknowledged that *A Thief of Time* offered a myriad of different "people and personalities not often seen on prime time television – contemporary Native people in contemporary roles."[140] It is true that film critics for *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* were, at times, influenced by stereotypes of the Navajo when decoding the films' images and/or willing to conceptualise the films' protagonists within familiar terms. Nevertheless, critical reception to *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* has demonstrated film critics could recognise, even if discussed in problematic terms, the complexities and the humanness that existed on Eyre's Navajo Reservation.

Race, Identity and Basketball: Edge of America

Edge of America, which is based on the non-fictional success the Lady Chieftains basketball team achieved at the New Mexico state championships, provided Eyre an opportunity to discuss issues connected to race that were not previously explored in his filmic texts. Although Eyre wanted *Edge of America* to speak to a female audience the director did not want to limit the film to this demographic group, "[the film] has an appeal to a wide audience, like 'Smoke Signals.'"[141] Although *Edge of America* was broadcast on Showcase and received little attention from film critics, this filmic text is intriguing in the way it approaches stereotypes and identity politics. One of the more intriguing aspects of *Edge of America* is the film's focus on the interaction between minority groups, which is an aspect of the reservation Eyre did not explore in his previous works. The reservations in *Skins, Skinwalkers* and *A*

[138] David Kronke, "'Skinwalkers' Offers Something New in Mystery Genre," *Daily News,* November 24, 2002.
[139] Ted Cox, "'Mystery!' on the rez PBS series widens its horizons with Tony Hillerman's 'Skinwalkers,'" *Daily Herald,* November 22, 2002.
[140] Philip Burnham, "'A Thief of Time' by Tony Hillerman," *Indian Country Today,* August 4, 2004.
[141] Lise Balk, "New Film By Director Chris Eyre Opens Sundance Film Festival; Robert Redford Introduces 'Edge of America,'" *The Native Voice,* February 8, 2005.

Thief of Time are the exclusive domains of Native Americans, with occasional interaction from Euro-American tourists or archaeologists.[142] Such a depiction of a homogenous reservation masks the racial complexity that exists in reality, as reservations tend to be a more heterogeneous grouping of individuals of full and mixed-blood Indian descent as well as various other racial groups. Although the novels *Skins*[143] and *Skinwalkers*[144] incorporated minorities into their respective plotlines in a limited capacity, these characters were substituted for Native American characters in Eyre's adaptations. One of the fundamental messages *Edge of America* broadcasts to the American public is that race relations are not a "black and white" issue.[145]

Edge of America demonstrates that intercultural communication and tolerance are not only problematic in relations between the dominant society and Indians, but also between African Americans and Indians. It is evident Kenny Williams (James McDaniel) is guilty of making many mistakes when dealing with the Navajo[146] on the reservation as he recommends a female basketball player cut her hair and insults an elder by intervening in a healing ceremony when Baby is believed to be witched. Both of these actions are against Navajo traditionalism. It is evident Williams is very ignorant of Navajo customs and conditions on the reservation, but for the most part, he is willing to learn and adjust to his surroundings. Audiences can gain a better understanding of how to achieve stronger intercultural communication skills through Williams' trials and errors. Perhaps one of the larger stereotypes *Edge of America* deconstructs is the belief that Indians are tolerant of different racial groups.[147] Although audiences are able to witness glimpses of racial intolerance between Indians and African Americans in Eyre's previous work,[148] they see it more prominently in *Edge of America* when Williams arrives on the Three Nations Reservation. The attitude of the Navajo population toward Williams demonstrates they too are unfamiliar with African American identity and

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[142] *Skinwalkers* depicts a scene where a European couple is mugged and their car is stolen by a Navajo gang member. The scene mocks the idea that all Navajo, and by extension, Native Americans are identical. When the European female is asked if she could describe the car thief, she says "All's the same. They were Injuns, like the two of you."
[143] An African doctor attends to Rudy's head injury. Consult, Louis, *Skins,* 43.
[144] Hillerman created a Chinese-Cambodian character in *Skinwalkers* to treat Chee's gun-shot wound. Consult, Hillerman, *Skinwalkers,* 268.
[145] This message is conveyed through Williams' dialogue with Franklin after the basketball coach bails Franklin out of jail. Williams reveals his trip to the reservation is a way to escape a traumatic event in which a Euro-American male, who was assisting a stranded Williams on a highway, was hit and killed by a truck. This incident shattered Williams' worldview as he learned racial relations are not as antagonist as he thought they originally were.
[146] Although Eyre failed to specify which tribe the film depicts, this chapter will refer to these characters as Navajo since in the film centres on the real-life events that occurred on the Navajo Reservation.
[147] Tan and Fujioka and Lucht, "Native American Stereotypes, TV Portrayals, and Personal Contact," 174-175.
[148] Although African Americans are not present in *Skins,* one of the Oglala Sioux youths who Rudy attacked describes his assailant as a nigger.

base their attitudes of this race on stereotypes and television. Franklin (Eddie Spears) greets Williams with a rapper salute as Williams is walking through the hallway of the high school, creating problematic assumptions and generalisations that all African Americans are rappers. As Williams is introducing himself to his English class, Franklin asks if Williams' first name is Kareem. Throughout the film, Franklin is antagonistic to Williams, partially due to the coach's mentoring relationship with Carla (Delanna Studi), Franklin's girlfriend, and how Franklin believes Williams is continuously disrespecting the basketball team through his disciplining of the girls on the basketball court. In addition to depicting Navajo and an African American male on the Three Nations Reservation, *Edge of America* also features a white male, Leroy McKinney (Tim Daly), who is Carla's father. Although Leroy works in a factory, it is evident that it is a low-paying job since he also lives in a trailer and cannot afford to buy his daughter a fifty-dollar pair of running shoes. But it is also interesting how Eyre decided to depict this character as an alcoholic, applying the images that Hollywood has used to highlight Native American deficiencies onto Euro-Americans. Leroy has had his drivers' license suspended for drinking and driving and also feels a need to buy beer even though the reservation is dry. Furthermore, it is evident Leroy's drinking places a strain on his relationship with Carla as the father is antagonistic toward his daughter when she confronts him over his drinking.

Another important aspect *Edge of America* discusses is the relevance of Navajo traditions and the importance of preserving these traditions for the next generation.[149] The reservation has very traditional characters such as Mother Tsosie (Geraldine Keams), who is a traditional weaver and leads the girls in healing ceremonies. Mother Tsosie is one of the major characters on the reservation and represents the initial adversary to Williams as she is reluctant to let her daughter Baby (Trini King) attend school, which would allow her to qualify to play on the basketball team, since she believes school attendance would hinder her daughter's ability to practice a Navajo traditional lifestyle. Cuch (Wes Studi), the mechanic/bus driver, also practices Navajo spiritual traditions. Cuch is one of the primary individuals Williams deals with on the reservation due to his frequent need for a mechanic. But the need is mutual as Cuch wants Williams to coach the Lady Warriors, partially because his niece Marissa (Deanna Taushi Allison) and her friend play on the team. The fact that Cuch, who is a former student of a BIA institute, embraces Navajo traditionalism demonstrates the failure of BIA policy to assimilate all Native children. Cuch does

[149] This concern is shown in the documentary *Rocks with Wings* as adults and basketball players recognise the need to preserve Navajo traditions, but also recognise a Euro-American education is needed to earn a stable living. Consult, *Rocks with Wings,* produced by Rick Derby, directed by Rick Derby, 113 minutes, Shiprock Productions, 2001, 1DVD.

not simply offer his mechanical skills to Williams, but offers him spiritual advice as he takes Williams out to the desert and tells the basketball coach that he needs to locate and feel at home somewhere. This scene is extremely important since it challenges and mocks some of the cultural assumptions the dominant society possesses about Native American spiritualism and connection to the land. As the two men conclude their discussion, Williams asks Cuch if they are at a "sacred site or something," to which Cuch replies, "this is just a big rock."

The students of the Three Nations high school also reflect the diversity that exists on the reservation. The reservation is home to a few punks as Franklin is more interested in avoiding school and listening to rap music, but the young Navajo male has dreams of leaving the reservation. The Lady Warriors represent a myriad of different personalities from Shirleen (Misty Upham), who has hopes of playing basketball and getting a college scholarship, but gets pregnant putting her hopes in jeopardy. Carla's aspirations are a little more difficult to discern as the young female applies herself to her schoolwork in order to continue playing basketball, but appears reluctant to leave the reservation. Baby demonstrates that students can also be traditionalists as she participates in a be-witching ceremony when she is having trouble competing on the basketball court, and also has a Navajo charm tucked into her sock while playing. This diversity allows Native females to identify with different characters in the film, which is one of the strengths *Edge of America* offers to Indian Country. While these characters seem to have diverse personalities, they are all drawn together through the sport of basketball and the desire to compete to win the state championship.

Although *Edge of America* depicts complex contemporary Navajo characters, the film also projects images of the low living standards that exist on the Three Nations Reservation, which can expose the film to charges of playing on stereotypes. The images of poverty are apparent early in the film as Kenny Williams observes an assortment of trailer houses and homemade basketball nets when he arrives on the reservation. These images of poverty are similar to those present in *Skins,* but whereas *Skins* demonstrates that Oglala Sioux can achieve middle-class status, it is more difficult to locate the middle-class in *Edge of America.* Williams is visibly disappointed when he is shown the trailer home he will be residing in for the duration of the term. The principal, Homer Horton (Michael Flynn), responds to Williams' displeasure at his new accommodations by stating, "Trailers fit in with life on the rez," thereby noting the high level of poverty that exists on the reservation. Furthermore, the principal refuses to live on the reservation, which demonstrates that few financially secure people live there. As the film progresses, Williams adapts to life on the reservation, as he learns the secret that spreading garbage bags out on top of the

trailer's roof will help keep the heat in. Although *Edge of America* projects images of impoverished living standards, one of the bright spots of the reservation is the Three Nations high school, which is a very modern-looking high school with a radio station. It is also interesting that the only Three Nations resident who does not live in a trailer is Mother Tsosie, demonstrating individuals who are deeply rooted traditionalists and the spiritual centre of communities can live comfortable lifestyles.

Despite that *Edge of America* highlights the low living standards on the reservation, it did not draw the same degree of negative criticism that *Skins* received. One explanation that may account for this difference in reception is the tone each film adopts. *Edge of America* projects an uplifting message suggesting that despite poverty, hard work can overcome obstacles and lead to community cohesion. The final scene, which depicts the Navajo community welcoming the Lady Warriors to the reservation, emphasises the community cohesion that basketball brought to the Three Nations Reservation and minimises all the other problems the reservation faces. *Skins* begins with a montage consisting of dilapidated housing, and provides a list of statistics that highlight the poor socio-economic conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation, giving the film a politicised tone that critical reception gravitated to. Furthermore, *Skins* directly focuses on problems connected to alcoholism, which is a contentious issue in both Native and non-Native societies, whereas *Edge of America* minimises discussion on this topic. The death of Mogie, and the fact that the packing store Rudy burnt down is being rebuilt in a larger form, demonstrates the problems on the Pine Ridge Reservation are very serious and continue to exist even after the film ends.

One of the primary themes present in *Wings of Rocks,* a documentary examining the success of the Lady Chieftains, is the notion that the victories the team achieved on the basketball court helped to construct community cohesion.[150] This same premise is reflected in *Edge of America.* The earlier scenes in *Edge of America* demonstrate a defeatist attitude or resignation that exists among the student population on the reservation, which is best exemplified in the story that Carla tells Williams in English class. The story entails three Natives running off a cliff, who have the ability to change their shape into the words that they shout. Whereas the Lakota and the Apache respectively shout buffalo and eagle, and transform into a buffalo and eagle as they are jumping off the cliff, the Three Nations boy simply shouts "shit." Franklin is also aware of the problems that exist on the reservation, and believes that it is in his and Carla's best interest to leave. The audience also gets the sense that there is a lack of

[150] Navajo residents exhibited pride in the fact that the Lady Chieftains were able to win multiple state championships.

support among the student body, particularly for the Lady Warrior's basketball team as they are mocked by both the students and the school's radio station. This negative attitude among the student body changes once Williams starts coaching the Lady Warriors and they start winning. These wins allow for the development of self-esteem to grow among the girls on the basketball team and allow the entire community, regardless of race, to come together to support the team.

Edge of America demonstrates how success on the basketball court can facilitate cohesion on both a familial and community level. The development of familial cohesion is demonstrated in the case of the McKinney household as Leroy provides Carla with money to go shopping in Salt Lake City as the team is leaving for the Utah State Championship. This is a significant departure from the earlier exchanges he had with his daughter as he previously refused to buy her a pair of shoes. *Edge of America* also depicts community cohesion as the entire Three Nations Reservation is rooting for the Lady Warriors while playing to qualify for the state championship. Despite that the Lady Warriors lost in the championship game to Zion, the Navajo community still welcomes the Lady Warriors back to the reservation as heroes. As Williams steps off the bus, Mother Tsosie drapes a blanket over him and tells the basketball coach, "The basketball is round, like mother earth." Ginia Bellafante's review of the film sarcastically labelled this line as the film's "concluding wisdom," demonstrating the film critic missed the point of the film. In order to locate the primary message of *Edge of America,* one needs to return to a series of statements Mother Tsosie makes in the context of her weaving. While Tsosie is discussing her weaving on the school's radio station, she states that "imperfection is beauty." Moreover, while Tsosie is discussing the same topic with Williams when the coach is attempting to persuade the woman to reenrol her daughter into school, she states that "flaws keep feet on mother earth."[151] While some may scoff at the notion that imperfection is desirable, Mother Tsosie recognises the importance of imperfection as such a message conveys to Indian Country positive outcomes can still be accomplished through imperfections. This may explain why Eyre chose to deviate from the non-fictional account

[151] The origins and use of references to Mother Earth is a contentious topic as Sam Gill's research attempted to ascribe a more recent date to the use of the phrase while Jace Weaver's research discovered its use in the seventeenth century. Regardless of when this phrase was first used, popular culture has attached it to Native American identity. Consult, Sam Gill, "Mother Earth: an American myth," in *The Invented Indian: cultural fictions and government policies,* ed., James Clifton (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 129-144 and Jace Weaver, "Notes from a Miner's Canary," in *Defending Mother Earth: Native American perspectives on Environmental Justice,* ed., Jace Weaver (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 1-28.

of the Lady Chieftains upon which this movie is based.[152] This notion of accomplishment through imperfection is best demonstrated by the Navajo reception of the Lady Warriors despite losing the championship game in Salt Lake City.

Discussions of *Edge of America* in the Native presses have revolved around two primary themes: the manner in which the film negotiated with stereotypes and the desire to advertise this film to broader audiences. *The Native Voice* printed a series of articles that discussed *Edge of America* in order to generate publicity for the film. *The Native Voice* printed an interview with DeLanna Studi, which briefly acknowledged her work on *Edge of America*.[153] Another article printed in *The Native Voice* discussed the reception of the film at the Sundance Film Festival, foregrounding the importance of creating self-representative images by quoting Robert Redford's introduction of Chris Eye, "I wanted to introduce this film because Chris is such a special person…I think the Native American story should be told by Native Americans."[154] After the film review summarised the plotline, the critic congratulated Eyre for his ability to avoid typical spiritual stereotypes of Native American identity and display the complexity of Native American life,

> Geraldine Keam plays the traditional mother to one of the players. [sic] 'Baby,' and provides the spiritual balance to the characters, dispensing wisdom without stereotype or hype…The Lady Warriors inspire us to embrace the richness of our diversity in pursuit of our common goals, and 'Edge of America' shows that Eyre is ready to take us to the next level with him as he discovers what it means to embrace the diversity within ourselves.[155]

While the film did not play too much on stereotypical images of Native American spirituality, it used imagery that non-Native audiences have associated with Native spirituality such as the phrase "Mother Earth." Furthermore, this above comment is very interesting for it revealed the optimism that existed on the part of the critic that Eyre will have future opportunities to construct self-representative images of Native American communities.

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[152] The Lady Chieftains won multiple state championships, which the Navajo community spoke about with pride in *Rocks with Wings.*

[153] The newspaper article highlighted *Edge of America* "had the distinction of being the Festival's opening night film in Salt Lake City" and the importance of Native American self-representational images. Consult, Lise Balk, "An Interview with DeLanna Studi (Cherokee); Standout talent of Chris Eyre's Showtime Television picture, Edge of America," *The Native Voice,* December 2, 2005.

[154] Lise Balk, "New Film By Director Chris Eyre Opens Sundance Film Festival; Robert Redford Introduces 'Edge of America,'" *The Native Voice,* February 8, 2005.

[155] Lise Balk, "New Film By Director Chris Eyre Opens Sundance Film Festival; Robert Redford Introduces 'Edge of America,'" *The Native Voice,* February 8, 2005.

David Melmer's review of *Edge of America* brought up two important issues that academic and critical discourses have interconnected with Native American cinema: the manner in which the film negotiated with stereotypes and the desire to promote this film as having universal applications. Melmer was adamant that *Edge of America* was still a "rewarding" film despite that it cannot compete against Hollywood blockbusters and was probably not the film "America wants to see about Indian country."[156] Although Melmer correctly acknowledged that the film negotiated with romanticised images of Native American identity, he recognised the film continued to perpetuate some stereotypes: "There was enough stereotypical nuance and language to go around, but it was all part of the learning process, part of the fun."[157] Although Melmer failed to specify which stereotypical images *Edge of America* continued to perpetuate, it is possible he was referring to the film's projection of poverty on the Three Nations Reservation. Secondly, although Melmer recognised this film would not reach broad audiences due to its independent status, the critic promoted the themes in this film as being applicable to everyone, "This is not a film about basketball, and especially not about a savior coming to an American Indian community to rid them of their demons. This is a movie about real people that just happens to be set on a reservation."[158] Although this film was "about real people," the images and themes the film developed are not applicable to all people since it explored Navajo identity and the racism that afflicts minority populations.

While the abovementioned reviews in the Native press highlighted the community cohesion *Edge of America* promoted, Ginia Bellafante's review of the film drew attention to the antagonistic relations that existed between the reservation's racial groups, minimising the film's message of the importance of community cohesion. Bellafante's discussion of *Edge of America* focused on two themes: the tensions present on the reservation and Williams' attempt to instil discipline in the basketball team. After her discussion of these themes, Bellafante concluded, "'Edge of America' by the playwright Willy Holtrzman, aims to be a liberal treatise on the politics of achievement. What it delivers instead is a reactionary message on the dispersion of bourgeois values – an indictment of go-getterism as a perverting influence now stampeding the ranks of the lower classes."[159] But it is clear that Bellafante misread the film, and her comment possibly reflected her attitude on the "politics of achievement" within American society. While the Navajo adults and female students seemed to believe Williams was too hard on the

[156] David Melmer, "From the 'Edge of America,'" *Indian Country Today,* February 4, 2004.
[157] *Ibid.*
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] Ginia Bellafante, "Lessons in Life and Basketball, Now on a Reservation," *New York Times,* November 21, 2005.

basketball team, there was recognition that the hard work had paid off to get them to the Utah State Championship. Bellafante's reading of the film motivated Tim Daly to contest her review in the *New York Times*,

> It's [*Edge of America's*] the story of people coming together, realizing that their cultural baggage isn't worth the weight, and that everyone's assumptions can be wrong. It's clear that Ms. Bellafante knows nothing about, and has no interest in life on the reservation beyond casinos and the money they generate. And that issues of race are of no interest to her unless they are divisive. Too bad she is so personally vacuous that she completely missed the more enlightening themes in this film.[160]

It is evident Bellafante's review missed the film's focus on community cohesion, but perhaps more importantly in a discussion of Native American indigenous cinema, missed strategies the film utilised to discuss stereotypes and identity politics in Indian Country, which was one of the strengths of the film.

Conclusion

An analysis of the five films above demonstrates Eyre had three primary objectives. Firstly, Eyre wanted to showcase the complexity of Oglala Sioux and Navajo identities by constructing characters in diverse socio-economic positions with varying degrees of attachment to their tribal spirituality. Eyre also stressed in *Edge of America* how teamwork, hard work and pride can lead to success, which develops community cohesion and fosters intercultural understanding. The depiction of Navajo identity in *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* demonstrates the socio-economic diversity that exists on the Navajo Reservation. Secondly, Eyre wanted these filmic texts to open a discussion of issues contemporary Oglala Sioux face, and to demonstrate the importance and need for community cohesion on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Thirdly, Eyre highlighted the importance of Native American spirituality for diverse purposes. Eyre constructed spiritual characters such as Iktomi or Kokopelli to either offer a powerful form of resistance or demonstrate the irremovable presence of Native American identity on the land. Although the focus of Eyre's fictional works was on depicting Oglala Sioux and Navajo contemporary identity, Eyre's post-2004 filmic texts created greater diversity of Indian filmic representations by focusing on historical and contemporary identity of diverse tribes in *We Shall Remain* and *A Thousand Roads,* respectively.

Critical reception to these five films consisted of differing opinions, but an interrogation of these sources has demonstrated patterns exist that can potentially affect the manner in which critics have decoded a film. It is evident that film critics were influenced by stereotypes when decoding the above-listed films, which potentially

[160] http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/301307/Edge-of-America/overview

prevented them from ascertaining the preferred reading of these texts. Although some critics translated these films in problematic ways, they were able to recognise *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* depicted complex Navajo characters. Probably the most divisive film Eyre directed to date is *Skins.* Although the majority of critics simply focused on the deficiencies present in the Pine Ridge community, critical reception was divided over whether they approved of the images Eyre depicted of poverty and/or alcoholism. Moreover, critical reception constructed broad generalisations of Native American identity, whether they were discussing conditions on the reservations or Native American spirituality. This tendency to construct generalisations and/or their ignorance of conditions and the histories of the Navajo and Pine Ridge reservations potentially prevented critics from understanding the nuances of these filmic texts. Finally, film critics wanted to promote Native American cinema to broad audiences, which entailed praising the acting and directorial talent, discussing the benefits of self-representational images or the use of film to deconstruct stereotypes.

Chapter 4 - The Films of Zacharias Kunuk: Negotiating Inuit Identity and Spirituality for Inuit and Qallunaat Audiences

Although Hollywood has not appropriated Inuit identity to the same degree as Native American identity, stereotypical and inaccurate images of the Inuit are present in Euro-American popular culture. Despite their limited presence on celluloid, Wendell Oswalt argued the Inuit "are one of the most exotic peoples anywhere."[1] In a similar fashion to Native Americans, Inuit have been vocal in their demand for self-representative images in order to engage in a dialogue with Hollywood's appropriation of Inuit identity. Academics have teased out several themes from an examination of the fictional and non-fictional films of Zacharias Kunuk: a desire to preserve and promote Inuit culture, a desire to negotiate with the images constructed by *Nanook of the North*[2] and a desire to assert Inuit political aspirations and sovereignty over land.[3] In order to fully understand the manner in which *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* negotiate with Inuit audiences, it is important to understand how Western culture and colonialism have affected Inuit communities. This chapter includes a discussion of how shamanism has been constructed and utilised in Kunuk's filmic texts *Shaman Stories, Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen.* Firstly, Kunuk has entered into a cinematic conversation over the (mis)appropriation of Inuit identity by films such as *Nanook of the North* to demonstrate the complexity of Inuit identity. Kunuk's fictional filmic texts were designed to demonstrate that Inuit culture does not simply consist of hunting and igloo making, as the Inuit have a unique and complex spiritual system that *Nanook of the North* failed to discuss. Secondly, and probably most importantly from the position of the Inuk director, the development of fictional and non-fictional films has offered Kunuk an opportunity to re-centre the importance of shamanism to the Inuit and engage in a discussion about this controversial form of spirituality with Inuit communities.

Inuk director Zacharias Kunuk has been able to garner some degree of success from national and international audiences with his film *Atanarjuat,* although his second feature film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* was met with a more moderate reception. Critical reception to *Atanarjuat* was positive as critics were able to locate themes they felt are "universal," attracted to familiar ethnographic content and conceptualised the plotline in terms

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[1] Wendell Oswalt, *This Land Was Theirs: A study of Native Americans,* 7th edition (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 68.

[2] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 315-345.

[3] Shari Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas: the transnational politics of contemporary native culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 71-104.

of simple binarism. The desire of film critics to locate and discuss familiar themes came at the expense of marginalising discussion on less familiar themes such as shamanism. Critical reviews of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* were more willing to enter into a dialogue with the images connected to shamanism than they were in *Atanarjuat,* but this was not surprising given the direct nature in which the film dealt with this topic. Although critical reception was willing to engage with images of shamanism, these film critics provided simplistic analyses of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* by concluding the film depicted "cultural destruction" due to the "White" man.

Appropriating Identity: The Inuit in popular culture

Ann Fienup Riordan's analysis of Euro-American appropriation of Eskimo and Inuit identities on celluloid argued the Euro-American construction of the Eskimo image depended less on the realities of the Arctic and more on how Euro-Americans constructed their own identities and agendas. Although Europeans were aware of the existence of the Inuit through sixteenth and seventeenth century travel narratives, interest in the Inuit increased in the nineteenth century as British explorers seeking a Northwest Passage to Asia and whalers came into greater contact with the Inuit. To a large extent, the images Euro-Americans have imposed on the Inuit were based on how the Inuit interacted with their environment. Inuit who were able to survive the Arctic conditions were viewed as "noble survivors" whereas those who perished were seen as corrupted by Western colonialism and deserving of sympathy. Although colonial discourses have imposed a savage image on Native Americans, Euro-Americans have not conceptualised Inuit identity in terms of savagery. Two reasons can account for this difference. Firstly, the Inuit represented a romanticised life due to their perceived "uncorrupted" nature, leading people to view them as "primitive" as opposed to "savage."[4] The foundation for this romanticised view was partially based on the Euro-American belief that they could "learn from them [Inuit] what had been lost yet perhaps could be regained."[5] Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Euro-Americans have simply viewed Inuit lands as a source of furs to be acquired through co-operation with the Inuit. Although conflicts have occurred between the Canadian government and Inuit communities over issues of sovereignty and the enforcement of laws, there was very little Euro-American settlement in the Arctic, and thus little competition for land and resources. Due to this limited interest in Inuit lands, there was minimal conflict between Euro-Americans and Inuit, thereby minimising the need to depict the Inuit as

[4] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame,* XVIII-11.
[5] *Ibid.,* 14.

savage. Euro-Americans have justified their acquisition of Inuit lands simply by depicting the Inuit as incapable of governing themselves, thus reinforcing this need to adopt a paternalistic policy over the Inuit.

Although Robert Flaherty was not the first to depict the Inuit on celluloid, his film *Nanook of the North* has certainly been the most popular twentieth century appropriation of Inuit identity. Flaherty was exposed to the Arctic through his employment with Alexander McKenzie as he was contracted to discover potential iron ore sites in northwest Quebec. It is not surprising Flaherty took advantage of these opportunities since he fancied himself as an explorer who was more interested in travel and exploration than academics. Flaherty's frequent journeys to the Arctic gave him an inclination to create a film about the Inuit; however, it took him several years to find a financial source to undertake such an enterprise. In 1920, John Revillion, an entrepreneur with economic interests in the Hudson's Bay area, provided Flaherty with $53,000 to create *Nanook of the North.*[6] The film attracted some interest following its showing in New York in the summer of 1922, through Pathe, a distribution company associated with several short films dealing with Native Americans.[7] Advertisement for the documentary consisted of linking it to symbols popular audiences associated with Inuit life including a dog sled team and igloos, which contributed to the documentary garnering $251,000 in its first four years in theatres.[8] Scholars have referred to this interest in *Nanook of the North,* and by extension, Inuit life, as "Nanookmania"- a period that, for a brief time, witnessed further cinematic depictions of the Inuit, and contributed to a limited degree of influence over American consumerism.[9] Unfortunately for the production companies Universal and MGM, the praise awarded to *Nanook of the North* failed to carry over into their Inuit inspired films. MGM's $935,000 budgeted film *Eskimo* did not fare well among movie goers as it only raked in $699,000,[10] despite film reviewers insisting this film would give Euro-American audiences a glimpse into the lives of the Inuit. The desire to create large budget films about the Inuit evaporated with the financial loss *Eskimo* (1933) experienced. Furthermore, Hollywood producers were reluctant to incur travel expenses to shoot films in isolated locations. Nearly three decades passed before Hollywood appropriated Inuit

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[6] Richard Barsam, *The Vision of Robert Flaherty: The Artist as Myth and Filmmaker* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,1988), 12-16.
[7] *Ibid.*, 57.
[8] Barsam, *The Vision of Robert Flaherty,* 26; Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame,* 57; Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A very short introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 636 (Kindle Edition).
[9] Shari Huhndorf, "Nanook and his Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 125.
[10]Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood movies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 45.

identity in the film *The Savage Innocents* (1960), indicating sporadic interest in this indigenous population from the dominant society.[11]

In the post-WW II era, several different colonial images were developing or reinforced about the Inuit, which included depicting them as hostile and a social problem. Farley Mowat's text *People of the Deer* was influential in constructing a bleak picture of starving Inuit populations in the Arctic as it condemned the Canadian government, the Hudson's Bay Company and Christian missionaries for their inattention toward these problems. The Canadian government and the HBC contested Mowat's depiction of the Inuit through media outlets, including *The Beaver* magazine, arguing *People of the Deer* was plagued with factual errors and over-exaggerations. Although Mowat admitted various segments of his book were fictionalised or exaggerated, *People of the Deer* continued to hold an influential position in American and Canadian societies. Mowat was not alone in his condemnations as Richard Harrington's text *The Face of the Arctic* and Henry Larsen's report to the Canadian government reported similar conditions. Increasing condemnation of Canadian treatment of its Arctic populations forced the government to organise a conference designed to rectify the declining costs of furs, which decimated the local Inuit economy, and to solve the deteriorating health of the Inuit population. The images Mowat and the other abovementioned individuals constructed of Inuit communities have challenged the romanticised images of the Inuit that were constructed by filmic texts such as *Nanook of the North.*[12]

Although filmic depictions of confrontational and, at times, violent Inuit have been negotiating with the romanticised image of Inuit identity, these images were contested by the Production Code Administration. This confrontational attitude is present in *The Savage Innocents,* as Inuk's anger emerges in the scenes in which Kiddok leaves the camp with the woman he covets, Imina, and when a missionary refuses to eat Inuk's best food and "laugh" with his wife.[13] Despite the ludicrous depiction of Inuit characteristics and society, the film was hailed by some critics for its authentic portrayal of the Inuit, suggesting these critics were grossly ignorant of Inuit culture.[14] A

[11] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame,* 85-116.
[12] Alan Marcus, *Relocating Eden: the image and politics of Inuit exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1995), 16-21.
[13] *The Savage Innocents,* produced by Maleno Malenotti, directed by Nicholas Ray, 110 minutes, Gray Films, 1960, 1 DVD.
[14] This ignorance continues to exist among film critics as they failed to recognize the breaking of taboos in the film.

second film that demonstrates the Inuit possessing the capabilities for violence is *The White Dawn,*[15] a film that won the approval of critics for its "fiction of realism."[16] Film critic Gary Arnold expressed mixed reactions to the images present in *The White Dawn.* Arnold noted his interest in historical Inuit identity, his desire to witness "authentic" Inuit culture and his appreciation of the cinematography of the film. Arnold criticised *The White Dawn* for failing to develop the film's drama and its Euro-American characters properly,[17] which aligns with Mihesuah's conclusions that White people are only interested in films that deal with White issues. Although film critics appreciated the images constructed about the Inuit in *The White Dawn,* the film was severely criticised by the PCA over images of sexuality and violence, demonstrating resistance from the PCA over the changing image of the Inuit. The R rating the PCA awarded to *The White Dawn* created a debate among media and religious organisations that contested the rating, and eventually brought enough pressure to bear on the PCA to adjust the rating to PG.[18] Gary Arnold advocated for this change of rating, arguing, "'The White Dawn' is as likely to corrupt the young as a subscription to The National Geographic. Why penalize serious filmmakers for depicting a way of life accurately when you don't penalize the hacks ['Dirty Mary Crazy Larry and '99 44/100% Dead both received a PG rating] for their gratuitous brutality?"[19]

Framing Nanook of the North

Nanook of the North has been the most enduring and influential Euro-American appropriation of Inuit identity, and is an example of how a film can construct a forum to discuss the politics of representation by academics and the popular press. *Nanook of the North,* which revolves around an Inuk hunter and his family's attempt to survive in the Canadian Arctic, emphasises popular activities and symbols Euro-Americans have attached to Inuit identity, including hunting and igloos. Part of the popular appeal of *Nanook of the North* in the first half of the twentieth century rested on the film's construction of a "virtual space" that allowed viewers to "conquer" the Arctic without actually travelling there. Prior to the advent of film, lectures were the primary medium in which the dominant society could gain some knowledge of exotic cultures, but the high-ticket prices restricted admittance to

[15] Although the Inuit are initially welcoming of the stranded whalers, relations between the two groups become hostile, resulting in the Inuit killing the whalers. Consult, *The White Dawn,* produced by Martin Ransohoff, directed by Philip Kaufman, 110 minutes, Paramount Pictures, 1974, 1 DVD.
[16] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame,*
[17] Gary Arnold, "'The White Dawn': A Memory," *Washington Post,* August 11, 1974.
[18] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame,* 130-132.
[19] Gary Arnold, "'The White Dawn': A Memory," *Washington Post,* August 11, 1974.

the more affluent members of society. Film allowed popular audiences the opportunity to enter the exotic worlds previously restricted to them, which *Nanook of the North* provided.[20] Critic responses to *Nanook of the North* praised the film. A review in the *New York Times* provides some insight into why the film achieved success: "And people want character in their hero, courage and strength, quick and sure resourcefulness and, for them, a friendly disposition."[21] Although *Nanook of the North* was well received by film critics, the film's depiction of Inuit identity was not praised by everyone as Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson was highly critical of the cultural inaccuracies of the film and its dramatisation of Inuit life.[22]

Academics have asserted multiple and, at times, conflicting opinions regarding the images Flaherty constructed of Inuit identity in *Nanook of the North*. Iris Barry, David Macdougall and Richard Barsam praised Flaherty's ability to allow the dominant society the ability to become immersed in Inuit culture. The film garnered great recognition by the Museum of Modern Art, which listed it in its collection of "the most meaningful and the best of motion pictures made during the last years."[23] Iris Barry expressed some concern that future directors would not be able to live up to the standards set by *Nanook of the North*.[24] David Macdougall, who was aware of the dramatisation of a number of scenes in *Nanook of the North,* praised Flaherty's work as he contended the film "remains one of the most valid and effective summations of another culture yet attempted on film."[25] Richard Barsam, one of Flaherty's more recent biographers, believed *Nanook of the North's* ability to "immerse" audiences into Inuit culture was critical to the success of the film.[26] At the same time, one should question what audiences are being immersed in. *Nanook of the North* revolves around scenes of hunting, construction of igloos and the interaction between Nanook and his family all within the confines of a snow-covered, barren environment. The images *Nanook of the North* projects conform to the expected images Euro-Americans have developed of the Inuit, indicating *Nanook of the North* was designed for Euro-American audiences. What about the other aspects of Inuit identity such as spirituality and Inuit community dynamics? These are some of the aspects of Inuit identity that

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[20] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: projecting the nation* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 41-58.
[21] "The Screen," *New York Times,* June 12, 1922.
[22] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame*, 48-49.
[23] Iris Barry, "The Documentary Film: Prospect and Retrospect," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 13, no. 2 The Documentary Film 1922-1945 (Dec., 1945): 2.
[24] *Ibid.*, 4.
[25] David Macdougall, "Prospects of the Ethnographic Film," *Film Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Winter, 1969-1970): 19.
[26] Barsam, *The Vision of Robert Flaherty,* 27.

Atanarjuat and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* examine in order to convey greater complexity of Inuit identity to southern audiences.

While the above-listed academics praised Flaherty's depiction of the Inuit, more recent criticisms of *Nanook of the North* have challenged his relationship with the Inuit and have accused Flaherty of promoting colonialism through his film. Fatimah Tobing Rony argued Flaherty's promotion of participatory filmmaking has blunted some of the criticisms directed at the filmmaker's dramatisation of numerous scenes throughout the film. One of the reasons Rony believed *Nanook of the North* was so successful was because of "the creation of the myth that Flaherty had produced for the first time a form of cinema paralleling participant observation."[27] The basis of Rony's criticism rested on her failure to uncover Inuit sources to confirm Flaherty's claims to participatory filmmaking, which is hardly convincing evidence. Despite this lack of evidence, Rony challenged the friendly relationship Flaherty boasted of possessing with the Inuit at Port Harrison, arguing the Inuit did not collaborate with the filmmaker "out of [the] love" that Flaherty claimed existed.[28] Perhaps more problematic for Rony is the manner in which *Nanook of the North* supports colonial discourse and embraces a notion of taxidermy designed to make the "dead look alive and the living look dead."[29]

Furthermore, academics have accused Flaherty of constructing images in *Nanook of the North* as a means to validate colonial control over the Arctic. Jeffery Geiger recognised one of the objectives of travel films was to create an imaginative imperialist enterprise in which isolated lands and cultures could be conquered from the theatre.[30] While Geiger did not directly apply this concept to *Nanook of the North*, Shari Huhndorf criticised Flaherty for constructing multiple and, at times, conflicting images of the Arctic and Inuit to justify colonial control. The depiction of the masculinity of Nanook and the femininity and domesticity of Nyla was used to demonstrate the naturalness of these gender roles and to reinforce them in the south. Although Nanook is masculinised through his engagement with the environment, the Inuk hunter is feminised in his relationship with the trader, symbolising power relations and colonial control over the Arctic. Flaherty's images show the struggle with the environment is the most formidable adversary for Nanook, thereby absolving colonialism of the consequences of its actions in the

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[27] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 109.
[28] *Ibid.*, 118.
[29] *Ibid.*, 126.
[30] Geiger, *American Documentary Film,* 51.

Arctic. Although the trading-post scene depicts the paternalistic nature of colonialism, it demonstrates Inuit could be corrupted by too much Western influence.[31] These competing images in *Nanook of the North* led Hunndorf to conclude that the film advocates for "the need of modern colonial culture at once to claim its innocence and to enact its dominance" over the Arctic.[32] Patricia Aufderheide believed the images in *Nanook of the North* may seriously hamper Inuit political aspirations as they advocate for the need of paternalistic policies directed at the Inuit.[33] These problematic images of Inuit deficiency have continued to influence the manner in which popular Canadian attitudes conceptualise the Inuit as a poll conducted in 1997 revealed fifty-one per cent of Canadians believed Aboriginal and Inuit populations were "not…ready to govern themselves."[34]

Canadian media discussed the importance of *Atanarjuat* contesting the "condescending" images Flaherty constructed in *Nanook of the North,* but this mode of thinking appears to have been predicated on the belief that these images are a severe misappropriation of Inuit identity. Katherine Monk's comments, describing Inuit reaction to *Nanook of the North*, provide an excellent point of departure to open a discussion about Inuit reception to the film, "To this day, the film [*Nanook of the North*] is considered a landmark event to film historians – and nothing short of a cultural offence to the people of the North."[35] It is curious what sources Monk consulted to formulate this conclusion. This comment may also indicate the critic wanted to speak for the Inuit. While some Inuit have spoken out against various images present in *Nanook of the North*, the Inuit response to these images have been far more complex than Monk's assessment indicated.

Inuit reception to *Nanook of the North* illustrates the complexity regarding opinions of this film, and raises further questions about the benefits and disadvantages of image appropriation in the early twentieth century. Although the existence of participatory filmmaking in the development of *Nanook of the North* has been called into question, academics have acknowledged the Inuit crew exerted some influence over the final product of the film. Rony credited the cinematography, one of the main attractions of *Nanook of the North*, to the Inuit camera crew.[36] Ann Fienup-Riordan took Inuit involvement in the development of *Nanook of the North* one step further, stating that

[31] Huhndorf, "Nanook and his Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture,"137-143.
[32] *Ibid.*, 143.
[33] Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, 703 (Kindle Edition).
[34] Evans, *Isuma,* 195.
[35] Katherine Monk, "Revolution from the True North: Why a groundbreaking film of love, murder and revenge made by aboriginals in Canada's Arctic is winning praise all over the world," *The Vancouver Sun,* April 6, 2002.
[36] Rony, *The Third Eye,* 115.

"what Flaherty filmed reflected the Inuit image of their past."[37] Although the Inuit have expressed objections to some scenes in *Nanook of the North*, they do not entirely condemn the film since it provides a visual record of the people who lived in Port Harrison in the early twentieth century and demonstrates the outside world is interested in the Inuit. Based on these reasons, Nowkawalk has concluded *Nanook of the North* is a great film. The Inuit have realised the film and its appropriation of Inuit identity is an integral part of the history of the community that they cannot ignore.[38] At his Spry lecture, Kunuk expressed his opinion of *Nanook of the North,*

> Robert Flaherty did his documentary about 500 miles south of our community. I saw one particular scene with a kayak where a woman is coming out of the back of the kayak. After she comes off, then another woman comes out from inside and another boy comes out holding a puppy. That's a set! I am really glad he did record that culture at the time. We are doing ours further north.[39]

Although scholarly discourse and the popular press have been highly critical of the depiction of Inuit identity in *Nanook of the North,* one should not assume Kunuk's work was designed to reject the images constructed in Flaherty's film completely. Arnold Krupat maintained the position that Kunuk ultimately enjoyed *Nanook of North,* even if the Inuk director did not entirely appreciate all of the images in the film,[40] and recognised the Inuk director used the film as a point of departure to open his discussion of Inuit identity for international audiences.

Inuit Shamanism and Contemporary Inuit Society

It is evident that Zacharias Kunuk's filmic work was aimed at negotiating with Euro-American constructed images of Inuit identity and at entering into a discussion about identity politics. In a question posed to Kunuk regarding the difficulty of altering Euro-American colonial images of the Inuit, the filmmaker responded with the following words: "The burden was tremendous for us. For the first time the Inuit are not part of the background, and the words coming out of their mouths are not just noises that are meant to sound like how White men thought that Inuit should sound."[41] Kunuk's fictional filmic texts have been designed to complicate Euro-American conceptions of Inuit identity by demonstrating they are human with their own unique spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, the Inuk

[37] Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame*, 54.
[38] Laurel Smith, "Chips off the Old Ice Block: *Nanook of the North* and the Relocation of Cultural Identity," in *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity,* eds. Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 109-111.
[39] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture," Universite de Montreal, Montreal, November 28, 2002. http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html
[40] Arnold Krupat, *All That Remains: varieties of indigenous expression* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 161.
[41] Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, interviewed by Walter Chaw. http://filmfreakcentral.net/notes/fastrunnerinterview.htm (accessed September 30, 2011).

director has also employed film to enter into debates with Inuit communities over identity politics and the preservation of culture. This agenda is partially reflected in Isuma's mission, "to preserve and enhance Inuit culture and language; to create jobs and economic development in Igloolik and Nunavut; and to tell authentic Inuit stories to Inuit and non-Inuit audiences worldwide."[42] In interviews conducted with Doug Alexander[43] and Cheryl Patten,[44] Kunuk revealed how crucial it is to pass on traditional Inuit knowledge to their children. Identity politics are at the centre of *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* as these cinematic texts were designed to engage in dialogues with Inuit communities about the benefits of shamanism, Inuit attitudes to this form of spirituality and to challenge Christian discourses that have promoted negative views of Inuit shamanism.

In his examination of contemporary Inuit identity, Edmund Searles recognised Inuit strategies to reinforce traditional culture have been designed to emphasise "perceived" differences between them and *Qallunaat*.[45] Louis-Jacques Dorais and Shari Huhndorf believed these differences are not only important for concepts of self-identity but also have a political dimension since they can potentially be the foundation in asserting demands for self-government.[46] Searles noted a conscious attempt has existed on the part of the Nunavut government to highlight these differences through the promotion of Inuit traditionalism in the education system, the judicial system and through film.[47] Although Searles believed defining Inuit identity based on traditional cultural practices can be problematic and runs the risk of marginalising some Inuit in Nunavut,[48] he contended Inuit traditionalism "continues to be a source of empowerment and authority."[49] Kunuk exhibited some concern for Inuit cultural identity in an interview he conducted with Doug Alexander. Alexander was eager to discuss Inuit contemporary identity when he asked the Inuk director, "How different are today's Inuit from those represented in your film?" In response, Kunuk stated, "Today's Inuit are just like anybody else nowadays. We all go to work, go to the office, turn on the computer and check our email. The kids go to school from nine until four. At the weekends, people get together and we all go

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[42] "Isuma." www.isuma.tv/hi/en/isuma-productions/about (accessed November 10, 2010).
[43] Doug Alexander, "Zacharias Kunuk Q&A" *Geographical,* April 1, 2002, http//www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-84966816.html (accessed June 12, 2010).
[44] Cheryl Petten, "Documentary visits spiritual past of Inuit," *Windspeaker* 21, no. 9 (Dec., 2003): 29.
[45] Edmund (Ned) Searles, "Anthropology in an Era of Inuit Empowerment," *Critical Inuit Studies: An Anthology of Contemporary Arctic Ethnography*, 92; Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 85.
[46] Louis-Jacques Dorais, *The Language of the Inuit: syntax, semantics, and society in the Arctic*, 272-273; Shari Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 93.
[47] Edmund (Ned) Searles, "Anthropology in an Era of Inuit Empowerment," *Critical Inuit Studies: An Anthology of Contemporary Arctic Ethnography*, 97-98.
[48] Searles, "Anthropology in an Era of Inuit Empowerment," 97-100.
[49] *Ibid.*, 98.

out hunting."[50] While this comment was undoubtedly an oversimplification on the part of the Inuk director, it is indicative of Kunuk's views on contemporary Inuit identity, suggesting he believes the differences between the Inuit and *Qallunaat* are becoming minimal. Kunuk has recognised re-centring shamanism has two functional purposes: to offer an opportunity to solve the socio-economic problems in Inuit communities and to highlight the cultural differences between the Inuit and *Qallunaat*.

The introduction of Christianity into Inuit communities during the twentieth century led to syncretism between Inuit shamanism and Christianity, and contributed to the development of self-doubt among Inuit communities regarding the validity of their spirituality. Libby Dean highlighted the detrimental effects of this doubt on Inuit culture and identity, "Doubt nearly killed Inuit culture. Doubt and the subsequent loss of cultural continuity are the source of what ails many communities in the North today."[51] Self-doubt is not the only concern of the Inuit as substance abuse and suicides have also presented challenges to their communities. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1995 determined suicide rates among Inuit communities across the Canadian Arctic were 3.9 times higher than in non-Inuit communities.[52] Research conducted by Laurence Kirmayer, Christopher Fletcher and Lucy Boothroyd noted high rates of suicide continue to occur among this demographic group due to "the effects of rapid social, cultural, and economic change on Inuit peoples in the Canadian north have contributed to the increasing rates of destructive behaviour through their impact on personal and community identity and sense of wellness."[53] One strategy that Kirmayer, Fletcher and Boothroyd proposed in an effort to create greater community cohesion and to rectify some of the socio-economic problems in Inuit communities is the construction of a forum that would allow Inuit youths access to the knowledge that elders possess. Kirmayer, Fletcher and Boothroyd believed the transmission of this traditional culture would help Inuit youths adjust to the cultural changes that continue to occur in the Arctic.[54]

The last three decades have witnessed a greater demand to re-centre the importance of shamanism in Inuit communities in order to reassert a stronger traditional Inuit identity and to rectify some of the socio-economic

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[50] Doug Alexander, "Zacharias Kunuk Q & A," http//www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-84966816.html (accessed June 12, 2010).
[51] Libby Dean, "Doubt and Enduring," in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen: A Sense of Memory and High-definition Inuit Storytelling,* ed., Gillian Robinson (Montreal: Isuma, 2008), 196.
[52] Laurence Kirmayer, Christopher Fletcher, Lucy Boothroyd, "Suicide among the Inuit of Canada," in *Suicide in Canada,* ed., Antoon Leenaars *et. al.,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 189.
[53] *Ibid.,* 207.
[54] *Ibid.,* 205-206.

problems in Inuit society. Mishak Allurut is one representative of this position. In a letter he sent to the editor of *Nunatsiaq News,* Allurut highlighted the benefits of shamanism to the Inuit in the past, making the assertion that shamanism should be reasserted in present-day Inuit society.[55] This opinion is gaining more adherents, particularly among younger artists who are integrating shamanistic themes into their artwork.[56] Aupilaarjuk, an Inuk Catholic, has advocated for the need to promote the integration of shamanism into Inuit society so that the people of Nunavut could "follow the Inuit way of life."[57] Some Inuit believe one of the reasons the Inuit have been experiencing problems with alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide is because shamans no longer exercise the influence they previously held.[58] Zacharias Kunuk aligns more closely to this perspective as he has stated in interviews his belief that a revival of shamanism will greatly benefit Inuit society and does not waiver from the belief various stories elders have recounted of shamanistic powers are true.[59] Kunuk's father experienced the consequences of supporting a shaman during a quarrel with community members. Following the shaman's death, Kunuk's father was forced to flee the community to avoid potential reprisals for his support of the shaman.[60] Despite that shamans were both respected and feared in Inuit society, an article printed in *Windspeaker,* designed to promote Kunuk's documentary *Shaman Stories,* primarily focused on positive aspects of shamanism, reinforcing the Inuk director's belief that shamans acted as a form of social control in society.[61] This statement could be read as a critique against the residential school system, which attempted to convert the Inuit from their shamanistic beliefs and led to residential school syndrome among Inuit communities. It is perhaps equally accurate to suggest the Inuk director has been more interested in generating a discussion about shamanism and highlighting how this form of spirituality can benefit Inuit society.

Although there has been an increasing demand for reasserting shamanism into Inuit society, there continues to be reluctance on the part of elders to discuss this issue due to the influence Christianity has exerted over the Inuit. Tungilik and Kopat have been reluctant to discuss shamanism with Inuit youths as they believe shamanism is a

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[55] Mishak Allurut, "Views on Shamanism," *Nunatsiaq News,* September 17, 1998. http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut980930/letters.html (accessed September 23, 2012).
[56] Ingo Hessel and Dieter Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction,* 43.
[57] Jarich Oosten and Frederic Laugrand and Cornelius Remie, "Perceptions of Decline: Inuit Shamanism in the Canadian Arctic," *Ethnohistory* 53, no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 467.
[58] Frederic Laugrand, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity: transitions and transformations in the twentieth century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 32; Jarich Oosten, Frederic Laugrand and Cornelius Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 467.
[59] Cheryl Petten, "Documentary visits spiritual past of the Inuit," *Windspeaker* 21, no. 9 (Dec., 2003): 29.
[60] Evans, *Isuma: Inuit Video Art,* 57.
[61] Cheryl Petten, "Documentary visits spiritual past of the Inuit," *Windspeaker* 21, no. 9 (Dec., 2003) : 29.

"bad" influence on them.[62] This attitude may reflect the influence some Christian ministers continue to exercise over Inuit communities, as they have connected demonic rituals to shamanism in their discussions with their congregations.[63] Christian elders have been critical of any action that would lead to a revival of shamanism since they consider it an out-dated form of spirituality associated with demonic rituals.[64] This reluctance is a cause for concern since Inuit youths are convinced life experiences and knowledge of shamanism need to be shared and transmitted to future generations.[65] From 1996 to 2008, the Nunavut Arctic College introduced a series of programs designed for elders to share and discuss their experiences and knowledge with younger Inuit. Although these programs offered great opportunities to preserve Inuit knowledge, the elders did not feel comfortable discussing their perspectives on shamanism in an academic environment, and preferred to conduct a conversation about this topic in a more familiar setting. While the elders who participated in these workshops were willing to acknowledge shamans continue to exist and exert their powers, they were quick to disassociate themselves from any potential accusations of possessing shamanistic powers by asserting their Christian faith. Inuit elders have argued that it is now nearly impossible to disassociate the influence Christianity exercises on Inuit communities since it has become an integral part of their identity.[66]

Kunuk has demonstrated a desire to engage directly with Inuit audiences over shamanism, which led the Inuk director to create the documentary *Shaman Stories*. During his Spry lecture, Kunuk discussed his motivation for the development of this documentary,

> Since Christianity came up North, they use Shamanism in opposition to Christianity and made it really look bad. Our young people are very interested in this subject. The subject cannot be closed because of religion. Catholics and Anglicans almost banned telling stories, or even doing drum dance thirty years ago, but now it's slowly coming back. It's still very touchy subject. I'm doing my part to try and bring it back through TV. When I interview elders, our elders are telling me that Shamanism was not all bad. Some of it was good.[67]

Although Kunuk has recognised the uneasiness that exists among the Inuit in discussing shamanism, the Inuk director was hopeful that the dialogue he could create with Inuit elders would highlight the beneficial aspects of shamanism to contemporary Inuit society. Kunuk insists the main reasons he was able to open this dialogue with the

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[62] Both of these individuals used the adjective "*bad*" to describe shamanism. Consult, Oosten, Laugrand and Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 470.
[63] Oosten and Laugrand and Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 467.
[64] Laugrand, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity,* 33.
[65] Oosten and Laugrand and Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 470-471.
[66] Laugrand, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity,* 20-35.
[67] Zacharias Kunuk, "Spry Memorial Lecture." http://www.com.umontreal.ca/spry/old/spry-kz-lec.html

elders is due to a certain degree of trust he has established with the interviewee.[68] Of the eight participants interviewed for *Shaman Stories,* seven were interviewed in their houses, most likely in an attempt to create an atmosphere of comfort for these individuals. Some individuals were even willing to go so far as to acknowledge that they are shamans, which contrasts with the responses given by the elders who participated in the Nunavut Arctic College program discussed above. All those interviewed for the documentary affirmed their belief that shamans continue to exist and exercise influence over Inuit society. The aesthetics of *Shaman Stories* links shamanism to other aspects of traditional Inuit society. While the audience listens to - or, in the case of a *Qallunaat* audience, reads - the words of the elders, the audience views scenes that deal with traditional aspects of Inuit society such as igloo building and hunting, creating a feel that shamanism is a natural and traditional part of Inuit life. Despite that *Shaman Stories* acknowledges shamans could be benevolent or evil, the stories avoid in-depth discussions of the negative aspects of shamanism as the interviews focus mainly on how shamans protect and benefit the Inuit.[69]

Constructing Spirituality: Atanarjuat The Fast Runner

While critics and scholars have recognised Isuma's work revolves around a desire to preserve Inuit culture, one can certainly infer from the onscreen content of *Atanarjuat* that Isuma wants to engage in a discussion with Inuit society over shamanism. The writing of the script for *Atanarjuat* was a combined effort on the part of Paul Apak Angilirq, Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn to create a film that focused on an Inuit legend that appears to have been widespread on Baffin Island, although it exists in multiple variations. Paul Apak Angilirq acknowledged his fascination with the Atanarjuat legend while he worked at the IBC, and approached Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn about the possibility of translating the legend into a cinematic production.[70] Kunuk stressed his personal attachment to the *Atanarjuat* legend, and the importance of this legend to the Igloolik community in an interview with Doug Alexander, "This particular story has been passed down from generation to generation. It`s a famous story in our area. It was taught to me as a little child and I never forgot it."[71] Angilirq engaged in extensive ethnographical research as he interviewed between eight to ten elders in order to record their own variations of the

[68] Cheryl Petten, "Documentary visits spiritual past of the Inuit," *Windspeaker*, 21, no. 9 (Dec., 2003): 29.
[69] *Shaman Stories,* directed by Paulossie Qulitalik and Zacharias Kunuk, Igloolik Isuma Productions, 2003. http://www.isuma.tv/lo/en/isuma-productions/angakkuiit-shaman-stories
[70] Nancy Wachowich, "Interview with Paul Apak Angilriq," http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/isuma-productions/interview-paul-apak-angilirq
[71] Doug Alexander, "Zacharias Kunuk Q&A," http//www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-84966816.html

legend.[72] Although the film is based upon an Inuit legend, there are substantial differences between the collection of legends Isuma accumulated and the plotline of *Atanarjuat.* The first difference involves the visible presence of shamanism in the plotline of *Atanarjuat*, which is not present in the legends. Apak believed one of the reasons shamanism is not present in the oral accounts of Atanarjuat is because it was assumed by the audience and the storyteller that shamanism played a role in the legend without being directly referred to. This assumption is no longer valid for contemporary Inuit thereby dictating the need to give shamanism a more visible presence in the film for Inuit audiences to recognise. Arnold Krupat speculated the shaman Tungajuak represents Euro-American "colonial incursion" in the Igloolik region.[73] The integration of shamanism into the plotline of *Atanarjuat* created some apprehension among the actors as Kunuk noted, "In *Atanarjuat's* shaman scenes, people didn't even want to act it, because they thought they would go to hell."[74] Secondly, although every legend Isuma collected of the Atanarjuat saga concludes with Atanarjuat slaying Oki, Kunuk modified the story to avoid this bloody outcome as the Inuk director wanted to stress that "revenge is not the subject, the subject is sharing."[75] In order to help minimise cultural and linguistic inaccuracies in *Atanarjuat*, Isuma recruited two additional elders, Herve Paniaq and Pauloosie Qulitalik, to assist in writing the script to ensure Inuit social protocols and language were properly observed in the film.[76]

The press kit released with *Atanarjuat* stressed the importance of shamanism to historical Inuit society and the importance of preserving this knowledge on film. Kunuk highlighted in the "Director's Statement" that *Atanarjuat* was designed to illustrate how Inuit communities "confronted evil and fought back."[77] Although this section failed to make direct connections between shamanism and its use in expelling this evil, Kunuk went into greater discussion of the importance of shamanism to Inuit communities in the section of the press kit "Roots of the Project,"

> When missionaries came…they proclaimed shamanism was the devil's work. But they didn't look into what the shamans felt, or how they gave life to the dying, visited the dead, found trails over land and underground or took flight through the air. When the missionaries forced their religion on us, storytelling

[72] Nancy Wachowich, "Interview with Paul Apak Angilriq," http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/isuma-productions/interview-paul-apak-angilirq
[73] Krupat, *All That Remains,* 151-153.
[74] S.F. Said, "Everyday White," *Sight & Sound* 16, no. 9 (2006): 39.
[75] Doug Alexander, "Zacharias Kunuk Q&A," http//www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-84966816.html
[76] Nancy Wachowich, "Interview with Paul Apak Angilriq," http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/isuma-productions/interview-paul-apak-angilirq
[77] *Atanarjuat* press kit. http://www.isuma.tv/sites/default/themes/atanarjuat/files/Atan_presskit.pdf

> and drum dancing were almost banned. Our film *Atanarjuat* is one way of bringing back lost traditions. I have never witnessed shamanism. I have only heard of it. One way of making it visible is to film it.[78]

The language utilised in this section of the press kit is revealing, particularly since it demonstrates Kunuk is very critical of the attitudes missionaries held toward shamanism. Furthermore, it demonstrates Kunuk's awareness of the need to preserve images related to shamanism on film. The integration of shamanism into *Atanarjuat* facilitated the emergence of a dialogue about the positive aspects this form of spirituality can potentially have on Inuit society. If Krupat's speculation that the evil shaman represents British colonialism is correct, one could reason the message behind *Atanarjuat* is that shamanism represents the only avenue available for the Inuit to rectify the problems caused by colonialism.

Although the final version of *Atanarjuat* does not include all of the images connected to shamanism that were written into the original screenplay, shamanism still occupies a significant part of the film. *Atanarjuat* discusses a number of aspects related to shamanistic powers, including the belief in reincarnation, telepathic contact between shamans and the potential benefits and divisions that shamans can bring to communities. *Atanarjuat* uses this last point to open up the film, as the presence of an evil shaman, Tungajuak (Abraham Ulayuruluk), demonstrates the problems shamans can bring to communities. Tungajuak is involved in a struggle with the community leader Kumaglak (Apayata Kotierk), killing him and handing control over the community to Kunaglak's son Sauri (Eugene Ipkarnak), who coveted the leadership position. Sauri's ascension to the position of leader greatly changes the dynamics of the community as the shaman Qulitalik (Pauloosie Qulitalik) leaves while Tulimaq (Felix Alaralak), the father of Atanarjuat (Natar Ungalaaq) and Amaqjuaq (Pakak Innuksuk), is marginalised from communal life. Qulitalik's sister, Panikpak (Madeline Ivalu), is concerned about the future of the community and chooses to remain to monitor the presence of Tungajuak. Although Tungajuak assists Sauri's ambition to seek power, his influence continues to be present as he influences the actions of Sauri's son, Oki (Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq). This presence is felt by Panikpak when Oki and Atanarjuat are engaging in a head-punching contest to determine who will take Atuat (Sylvia Ivalu) as their wife,[79] which prompts her to telepathically communicate to her brother that Atanarjuat requires his help. With Qulitalik's assistance, Atanarjuat is able to triumph over Oki in the contest, leading to a certain degree of peace in the community as Atanarjuat, Atuat, Amaqjuaq and Uluriaq (Neeve Irnguat) leave to form their own camp.

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[78] Doug Alexander, "Zacharias Kunuk Q&A," http//www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-84966816.html

[79] Although Atanarjuat and Oki engage in this contest, it is important to recognise that Atuat still has a choice over who her husband will be, which was missed by film critic James Verniere.

Conflict between Atanarjuat and Oki resurfaces after Atanarjuat takes Puja (Lucy Tulugarjuk), Oki's sister, as his second wife since Atuat is too pregnant to accompany the Fast Runner on his hunt. When Atanarjuat beats Puja for breaking Inuit social norms by engaging in sexual intercourse with Amaqjuaq, Puja flees to Oki, claiming Atanarjuat attempted to kill her for no reason. Oki decides to kill Atanarjuat and Amaqjuaq, which leads to further intervention on the part of Qulitalik to rescue the Fast Runner. Although Oki is successful in killing Amaqjuaq, Qulitalik uses his shamanistic powers to distract Oki so that Atanarjuat can escape. As Atanarjuat is running across the Hecla Strait to escape Oki, an unknown figure coaxes Atanarjuat to jump across a break in the ice, telling the Fast Runner to "just keep running and you'll find it!" Atanarjuat eventually arrives at Qulitalik's camp, where he finds a safe haven until he can recover from his ordeal. While Atanarjuat is recovering, Oki seizes control of the community by murdering his father, which is a concern for Panikpak, who telepathically tells Qulitalik to return to the community to expel the influence Tunagjuak exercises over it. Qulitalik uses his powers to conjure up a rabbit, which an unsuspecting Oki eats. After Oki eats the rabbit, his attitude toward Atanarjuat is altered as he welcomes his adversary and Qulitalik into his camp. Atanarjuat builds a qaggiq, and invites Oki and his friends to participate in a feast, giving Atanarjuat an opportunity to kill Oki, but the Fast Runner decides to spare his adversary, claiming "the killing stops here." Later that evening, Qulitalik summons Tunagjuak back to the community, allowing Qulitalik and Panikpak to defeat him, thereby ending Tunagjuak's influence over the community. The film ends with Panikpak banishing Oki, Puja and their followers in order to restore community stability and protect that cohesion for future generations. The final message demonstrates the stabilising influence that shamanism can bring to communities facing social disruption from foreign influences.

Although critics have recognised and highlighted the novelty of *Atanarjuat* being the first feature film to be directed by an Inuk in their respective reviews, one cannot simply attribute this as the primary reason critical reception to the film was highly positive.[80] Critical responses to *Atanarjuat* were examined in studies by Michael Evans and Arnold Krupat, but a further interrogation of film reviews will add to the discussion of how film critics have decoded the images the film projected. Michael Evans chose to break down the critical responses to *Atanarjuat*

[80] Peter Howell, "O Canada, O Cannes," *Toronto Star,* April 20, 2001; Sid Adilman, "Inuit movie suddenly hot," *The Toronto Star,* June 1, 2001; Mal Vincent, "'Runner' Doesn't Move Fast, But It is An Engrossing Film. (Daily Break) (Review)," *The Virginian-Pilot*, August 10, 2002; David Ansen, "Movies: The Ice Capade: A review of the epic awarded the Camera d'Or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival for best first film. ('The Fast Runner (Atanarjuat)')," *Newsweek*, June 24, 2002; James Verniere, "'Fast Runner' not fleet enough to dodge apathy," *The Boston Herald*, June 21, 2002.

into a number of different categories, including praise over the educational value and the cinematography of the film.[81] Krupat's examination of the audience of *Atanarjuat* categorized them into three primary groupings: the Inuit audience, the audience that accepted Kunuk's invitation to attempt to understand his construction of the Inuit world from an Inuit perspective and the larger audience that were "either unwilling or unable to alter their habits of perception."[82] DeNeen Brown's review of *Atanarjuat* aligned more with the second audience Krupat identified. The critic not only discussed the off-screen dynamics of community filmmaking in the development of *Atanarjuat*, but demonstrated an awareness of the on-screen content regarding the consequences of violating taboos and *Atanarjuat's* ability to contest the happy Inuit stereotype.[83] While Brown showed an awareness of the on-screen and off-screen dynamics of *Atanarjuat,* this awareness was not replicated in most film reviews. The majority of the critics centred their reviews on attempts to locate and discuss familiar themes and images, while omitting or minimising discussion on less familiar topics such as shamanism.

One of the more common critical responses to *Atanarjuat* was a desire to translate the film into familiar themes and images.[84] An interrogation of film reviews for *Atanarjuat* has revealed numerous film critics were willing to promote the notion the film possessed "universal" themes.[85] These critics may have insisted on the

[81] Evans, *Atanarjuat,* 88-100.
[82] Krupat *All That Remains,* 132-133.
[83] DeNeen Brown, "The Direction of True North; For His Film of an Inuit Parable, Zacharias Kunuk Stayed Close to Home," *The Washington Post,* August 1, 2002.
[84] This reaction was noted by Arnold Krupat in his text *All That Remains* and by Shari Huhndorf in her article "Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner: Culture, History, and Politics in Inuit Media."
[85] Arnold Krupat provided a list of critics who believed *Atanarjuat* promoted universal themes. Consult, Krupat, *All That Remains,* 143. Additional reviews include, "Into the mystic, via the Far North," *The Vancouver Sun,* April 20, 2002; David Spaner, "Inuit film is a universal story," *The Province,* April 12, 2002; Peter Jull, "On first viewing Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner," *Arena Magazine,* August 1, 2002; Loren King, "'Runner' captures epic sweep of Inuit life," *The Boston Globe,* June 21, 2002; Jen Kopf, "Step into the Inuit culture with 'Fast Runner,'" *Intelligencer Journal,* March 14, 2003. Although most of these critics held favourable reviews for *Atanarjuat,* one should not assume this ability to locate "universal" themes dictated a positive review of the film. Gary Arnold's review of *Atanarjuat* held a condescending and, at times, racist view toward the cast and crew of *Atanarjuat.* Arnold attempted to understand the film through familiar terms by drawing attention to the universal nature of the plot, but it is clear from his opening comment that he failed to grasp the plot given the brief and, at times, mistaken synopsis he presented. This error in the synopsis probably derived from Arnold's admitted failure in "differentiating one seemingly pivotal character from another." Arnold also felt a need to mock the names of the actors and the appearance of Atuat, "When summarizing this plot without a handy set of credits, it's tempting to refer to all the male characters as 'what's his name.' The women are somewhat easier to get straight. Atuat, for example, has a crooked grin and squinty eye, rather like Popeye and his father." It is worth revisiting Arnold's review of *The White Dawn,* since an assessment of his reviews for both films demonstrates a greater willingness to engage with *The White Dawn* than with *Atanarjuat.* While Arnold's review of *The White Dawn* emphasised the film's depiction of "authentic" Inuit culture, this praise was not offered to *Atanarjuat.* Although it is impossible to ascertain the reason Arnold held these views, one may be able to speculate the critic believed the images constructed by Euro-Americans are more "authentic" than Inuit self-representative images or the film critic was completely uninterested in the film

existence of universal themes embedded in *Atanarjuat* since this notion was promoted in the "Director's Statement" and "Roots of the Project" section in the film's press kit.[86] Isuma's promotion of universal themes in *Atanarjuat* most likely derived from a desire to generate greater Euro-American interest in this film, which has helped to facilitate funding for future projects. Krupat correctly recognised these perspectives are problematic since Western society is not governed by the same laws and taboos present in Inuit society, nor are Western religions similar to Inuit shamanism. Although Krupat noted that emotions of jealousy, hate and revenge are universal, he recognised these emotions have been presented in an Inuit context and that "the Inuit 'style,' in its full authenticity, can't possibly be universal any more than any culture-specific 'style' can be universal."[87]

Furthermore, critics were willing to translate *Atanarjuat* into familiar Western literary and filmic texts and legends. This desire to compare the themes present in *Atanarjuat* to familiar visual and literary images is also problematic since it has constructed generalizations and/or has ignored the cultural specificities between each of these texts. Josh Larsen attempted to compare *Atanarjuat* to familiar texts in Western literature, "[the film is] as familiar and powerful as a Shakespearean tragedy or Homer's epic 'Odyssey.'"[88] Elizabeth Barr's review of *Atanarjuat* drew comparisons between themes embedded in the film to those present in Shakespeare novels.[89] Although Jen Kopf acknowledged that *Atanarjuat* "is like little else seen in movies to date – giving some of the first light of film to Inuit storytelling," her review discussed how "the story itself is familiar, resounding with many of the same themes found in myths worldwide."[90] Such a generalised perspective clearly missed the point of the cultural specificities that exist in different legends around the world. Mal Vincent also conceptualised the film in ways that seemed familiar to Western audiences. While Vincent believed the film had "universal appeal" and categorised Puja as "any B-girl Hollywood," he recognised the importance of Inuit self-representation as he described the film as "a rarity - an example of film's ability to reveal cultures and regions that have been unrepresented in the past." [91]

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since it is not about Euro-Americans. Consult, Gary Arnold, "'Runner' a wilderness escape," *The Washington Times,* June 22, 2002.

[86] *Atanarjuat* press kit. http://www.isuma.tv/sites/default/themes/atanarjuat/files/Atan_presskit.pdf

[87] Krupat, *All That Remains,* 147.

[88] Josh Larsen, "Beyond the Blockbusters: Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)," *The Sun* – Naperville, Illinois, September, 13, 2002.

[89] Elizabeth Barr, "Clearly Canadian; Stunning Inuit Film 'The Fast Runner' Abounds with Beauty," *The Buffalo News,* July 26, 2002.

[90] Jen Kopf, "Step into the Inuit culture with 'Fast Runner,'" *Intelligencer Journal,* March 14, 2003.

[91] Mal Vincent, "'Runner' Doesn't move fast, but it is an engrossing film," *The Virginian-Pilot,* August 10, 2002.

In addition to attempting to locate familiar themes and emotions within *Atanarjuat,* film critics have also discussed the ethnographic content of the film.[92] Characterizing *Atanarjuat* as a combination of "'National Geographic' hosts Greek tragedy in the Arctic tundra," James Verniere primarily viewed the value of the film for its ethnographic content. However, the film reviewer was not interested in discussing the complexity of shamanism, but directed his review on more familiar aspects of Inuit culture and identity, "several Inuit men carve an igloo, shaving blocks of ice and using snow as mortar with the skill of Gothic stoneworkers. Among the other engrossing details are Inuit hunting practices and the Inuit diet." It is evident from this focus on igloo construction and hunting that Verniere had *Nanook of the North* on his mind, "[one could] learn much of this [igloo construction and hunting] from Robert Flaherty's landmark 1922 documentary 'Nanook of the North.'" Aside from this interest in ethnographic content, Verniere delved into judgmental comments of Inuit culture, describing the film as "set against a backdrop of a macho culture in which survival is everything, women are chattel and a man's standing is determined by how much he is feared."[93] This comment has demonstrated the critic wanted to judge Inuit cultural norms based on Euro-American standards. Furthermore, this comment has demonstrated the critic misread the film as he ignored the scene that depicted Atuat having a choice over who she would take as her husband and the scene that depicted Panikpak restoring order to the community by banishing Oki and Puja. The critic clearly ignored statements present in the film's press kit that were designed to convey to *Qallunaat* audiences the influential role women exercised in society.[94] Phil Villarreal also restricted his discussion of the ethnographic content of *Atanarjuat* to familiar cultural practices of igloo building and hunting.[95] While these critics were willing to note these familiar aspects of Inuit culture in their reviews, they were less willing to engage with images of shamanism, which was an important aspect of *Atanarjuat.*

Although the press kit emphasised the presence of shamanism in *Atanarjuat*, film critics chose to avoid discussing Inuit spirituality in their respective film reviews. The critical reviews of *Atanarjuat* either failed to acknowledge the presence of shamanism[96] or briefly acknowledged that a shaman was the source of evil that

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[92] Huhndorf recognised the desire of film critics to locate ethnographic content in *Atanarjuat.* Consult, Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 72.
[93] James Verniere, "'Fast Runner' not fleet enough to dodge apathy," *The Boston Herald,* June 21, 2002.
[94] *Atanarjuat* press kit. http://www.isuma.tv/sites/default/themes/atanarjuat/files/Atan_presskit.pdf
[95] Phil Villarreal, "Spellbing 'Fast Runner' a timeless tale of survival," *AZ Daily Star,* July 19, 2002.
[96] James Verniere, "'Fast Runner' not fleet enough to dodge apathy," *The Boston Herald,* June 21, 2002; Gary Arnold, "'Runner' a wilderness escape," *The Washington Times,* June 22, 2002; Loren King, "'Runner' captures epic sweep of Inuit life," *The Boston Globe* June 21, 2002; David Ansen, "Movies: Ice Capade: A review of the epic

penetrated the community.[97] This omission is problematic since these critics failed to identify one of the primary causes behind the disruption of community cohesion in *Atanarjuat.* The review written by Roger Ebert has demonstrated this point well: "The film is about romantic tensions that lead to tragedy within a small, closely knit community of people who depend on one another for survival, surrounded by a landscape of ice and snow."[98] Equally problematic are the critical reviews that focused exclusively on shamanism being the root cause of the evil, without acknowledging the importance of shamanism in banishing evil from the community. These reviews failed to recognise the benefits shamans can bring to Inuit communities,[99] which could potentially reinforce images that demonise Inuit spiritual practices.[100]

Perhaps one of the more important images *Atanarjuat* negotiated with was that of the "happy-go-lucky" Inuit image that has been perpetuated in the film *Nanook of the North.* Inuk critic Angus Cockney praised *Atanarjuat* for its ability to open up a dialogue with the dominant society over the complexity of Inuit identity and to contest the "happy-go- lucky" Inuit image. Cockney characterised *Atanarjuat* as being "unique" since it "shows that Inuit can be jealous, can covet, can lie, hate and kill. There is, it seems, a 'bad' side to the Inuit." Cockney positioned the images constructed in *Atanarjuat* in opposition to the Euro-American constructed images of the Inuit for the purpose of praising the benefits of self-representative images: "I must commend the film's director Zacharias Kunuk, on his courage and determination to portray another side of the Inuit. Some may not want to accept this side, but the notion of Inuit being non-confrontational had to be challenged. It took an Inuit to show the world what we truly are: human."[101] This statement is a bit problematic since the critic omitted that other films have constructed hostile images of the Inuit, such as *The White Dawn,* and perhaps suggests the critic believed only an Inuk could

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awarded the Camera d'Or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival for best first film," *Newsweek,* June 24, 2002; Phil Villarreal, "Director of 'Fast Runner' grew up hearing of legend," *AZ Daily Star,* July 19, 2002.

[97] Ann Hornaday, "Fascinating 'Atanarjuat': Legends of the Thaw," *The Washington Post,* June 21, 2002; Mary Pols, "'Atanarjuat' ('The Fast Runner')," *Contra Costa Times,* June 19, 2002; Terry Morris, "At the art houses; Arctic survivors outlast cold-hearted evil," *Dayton Daily News,* August 9, 2002; Elizabeth Barr, "Clearly Canadian; stunning Inuit film 'The Fast Runner' abounds with beauty," *The Buffalo News,* July 26, 2002.

[98] Roger Ebert, "'Fast Runner' patiently unravels Inuit legend," *Chicago Sun-Times,* June 28, 2002.

[99] A review by Joseph Cunneen recognized how shamanistic powers are used to oust the evil from the community, but he incorrectly labelled the expulsion of the shaman as an "exorcism," demonstrating some desire to translate the scenes into familiar Catholic rituals. Consult, Joseph Cunneen, "Ancient lessons: Inuit epic stands out among summer alternatives," *National Catholic Reporter,* July 5, 2002.

[100] The depiction of an "evil" shaman has been present in Inuit inspired Hollywood movies as demonstrated in *The White Dawn,* as the film positions this character against the three stranded whalers, thereby showing shamans as an adversary to *Qallunaat.* Critical focus on the negative aspects of shamanism in *Atanarjuat* perhaps reflects an ongoing pattern of characterizing shamans as evil.

[101] Angus Cockney, "Yes, we Inuit are confrontational too: Finally, a film that shows our bad side," *National Post,* May 10, 2002.

convey complex images of Inuit identity to the dominant society. The critical reviews assessed did not exhibit any difficulty in recognising and accepting the confrontational persona that the Inuit could take due to the directness in which Kunuk constructed this image in *Atanarjuat*.

Despite critical recognition and acceptance of the film's projection of a confrontational Inuit identity, critical responses have constructed a problematic discourse that ascribed binary opposing characteristics to the main characters in *Atanarjuat*. This notion that Atanarjuat embodied purely good characteristics was based on a misreading of the Atanarjuat legend as the story has been used as a form of social control in the Igloolik area. Kunuk noted the rhetorical questions he was asked in his youth, "Do you want to be like Atanarjuat...How do you want to lead your life when you grow up? Do you want to be like Atanarjuat and break taboos and bad things will happen to you?"[102] Due to this unawareness of the violation of these taboos, film critics have had a tendency to label the plot of the film as an epic clash between good and evil, which probably to the dismay of Kunuk, missed the complexity of the lead character's personality and actions.

Film reviews printed in Nunavut and southern-based papers have had a tendency to discuss *Atanarjuat* in terms of binarism. The film review of *Atanarjuat* written by Aaron Spitzer printed in *Nunatsiaq News* acknowledged that the actors of the film were "pretty good," and then briefly discussed how each character embodied binaristic opposing characteristics.

> The star of the movie is Nataar Ungalaaq, who, as the young, charismatic, fleet-footed Inuk hunter Atanarjuat, is impossible not to like. Menacing him throughout the movie is the envious, spiteful Oki, played-in a somewhat hammy style-by Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq. But stealing the show with their acting talent are the two leading ladies: Sylvia Ivalu, and, particularly, Lucy Tulugarjuk. With subtlety and genuine feeling, Ivalu plays Atuat, Atanarjuat's kind and demure first wife. Tulugarjuk, on the other hand, cunningly carries off the role of Puja, Oki's sister, who is Atanarjuat's impish, simpering, deceitful second wife.[103]

Film critic Tom Dawson also conceptualised the plot in terms of binarism, "Robustly acted by its Inuit cast, 'Atanarjuat – The Fast Runner' succeeds as a mythic drama of good versus evil, in which the desires of an individual have to take secondary importance to the harmony of the group."[104] This interpretation of the film was based primarily on the closing scene as an understanding of Inuit culture would reveal that Atanarjuat's courting of Atuat violated Inuit taboos and threatened to destroy community stability. In this instance, the desires of the

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[102] DeNeen Brown, "The direction of the true north; for his film of an Inuit parable, Zacharias Kunuk stayed close to home," *The Washington Post,* August 1, 2002.
[103] Aaron Spitzer, "Atanarjuat wows local crowds," *Nunatsiaq News,* March 1, 2001 http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut010331/nvt10323_07.html
[104] Dawson, 2002, as quoted in Evans, *Atanarjuat*, 93.

individual were placed over the wellbeing of the community. Terry Morris also conceptualised the plot structure of *Atanarjuat* as "the story of good outlasting evil."[105] While these film critics interpreted *Atanarjuat* in terms of binarism, they were able to see past the happy-go-lucky stereotype to recognise the Inuit were capable of perpetuating evil deeds, thereby demonstrating limitations to the influence images constructed by *Nanook of the North* have exercised on the imagination of film critics. However, this binarism is problematic since it has compartmentalised Inuit identity into two opposing categories, thereby depriving the Inuit of their humanity, and preventing critics from engaging properly with important characters in *Atanarjuat.* Due to this desire to discuss *Atanarjuat* in terms of binarism, few of the critics were willing to engage in a discussion about Amaqjuaq (Pakak Innuksuk). Not only was Amaqjuaq the friend and protector of Atanarjuat, but he also betrayed his brother's trust and engaged in sexual relations with Atanarjuat's second wife, Puja. The actions of this character have been instrumental in demonstrating the complexity of Inuit identity. Critics have either ignored the presence of Amaqjuaq,[106] or only briefly acknowledged his presence[107] or characterised him as "noble."[108] Only a fraction of the reviews assessed acknowledged Amaqjuaq's transgression with Puja and recognised the manner in which this character added complexity to Inuit identity.[109]

The Inuit response to *Atanarjuat* has been the most difficult to extrapolate although scholarship has assumed Kunuk was successful in appealing to this audience. Krupat believed "no barriers" existed between the images present in the film and the Inuit audience.[110] In order to substantiate this opinion, Krupat relied primarily on Kunuk's testimony of Igloolik audience responses and the statement from the Premier of Nunavut, Paul Okalik, who

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[105] Terry Morris, "At the Art Houses: Arctic survivors outlast cold-hearted evil," *Dayton Daily News,* August 9, 2002.
[106] Peter Jull, "On first viewing Atanarjuat, the fast runner," *Arena Magazine,* August 1, 2002; David Ansen, "Movies: Ice Capade: A review of the epic awarded the Camera d'Or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival for best first film," *Newsweek,* June 24, 2002.
[107] Gary Arnold, "'Runner' a wilderness escape," *The Washington Times,* June 22, 2002; Loren King, "'Runner' captures epic sweep of Inuit life," *The Boston Globe*, June 21, 2002; DeNeen Brown, "The direction of the true north; for his film of an Inuit parable, Zacharias Kunuk stayed close to home," *The Washington Post,* August 1, 2002; Ann Hornaday, "Fascinating 'Atanarjuat': Legends of the Thaw," *The Washington Post,* June 21, 2002; Mary Pols, "'Atanarjuat' ('The Fast Runner')," *Contra Costa Times,* June 19, 2002; Jen Kopf, "Step into Inuit culture with 'Fast Runner,'" *Intelligencer Journal,* March 14, 2003; Terry Morris, "At the art houses; Arctic survivors outlast cold-hearted evil," *Dayton Daily News,* August 9, 2002; Elizabeth Barr, "Clearly Canadian; stunning Inuit film 'The Fast Runner' abounds with beauty," *The Buffalo News,* July 26, 2002; Joseph Cunneen, "Ancient lessons: Inuit epic stands out among summer alternatives," *National Catholic Reporter,* July 5, 2002; Phil Villarreal, "Director of 'Fast Runner' grew up hearing of legend," *AZ Daily Star,* July 19, 2002.
[108] James Verniere, "'Fast Runner' not fleet enough to dodge apathy," *The Boston Herald,* June 21, 2002.
[109] Robert Ebert, "'Fast Runner' patiently unravels Inuit legend," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 28, 2002.
[110] Krupat, *All That Remains,* 133.

congratulated Kunuk for an impressive film.[111] The Commissioner of Nunavut, Peter Irniq, issued a comment through *Nunatsiaq News* that also directed praise at Kunuk's directorial talent and at the film's ability in "documenting Inuit culture and language, the Inuit way."[112] Given the nationalist position Shari Huhndorf located in *Atanarjuat*, it was not surprising that Paul Okalik and Peter Irniq would hold high opinions of *Atanarjuat*. There was no coverage of *Atanarjuat* in *Inukitut Magazine,* which was also not too surprising given the magazine's connection to the IBC and Isuma's hostile stance against this broadcasting corporation.[113] Although *Nunatsiaq News* printed a number of articles about *Atanarjuat* and Isuma's proposed idea to develop action figures based on the characters of the movie,[114] very few articles discussed the Inuit response to *Atanarjuat.* One review written by Aaron Spizter acknowledged that crowds in Iqaluit were appreciative of the images projected in *Atanarjuat,* but this review only discussed Inuit reactions in a generalised way. While Spizter highlighted the positive reaction of Inuit audiences to the film, it is important to recognise the potential tensions that can result from discussing Inuit shamanism, particularly with Christian and elderly Inuit populations. Kunuk noted the contentious nature of discussing shamanism in Inuit communities during his Spry lecture and acknowledged to Justin Shubow that the elders in Igloolik were uneasy about engaging in a dialogue about shamanism through film.[115] It is evident research is needed to assess Inuit perspectives of *Atanarjuat* further, and it is hypothesised such research would reveal greater complexity to Inuit responses to the film than has been previously acknowledged.

Negotiating with Christianity: Examining The Journals of Knud Rasmussen

In the 1920s, Knud Rasmussen, an ethnographer of Danish/Inuk descent, participated in his Fifth Thule Expedition in order to collect Inuit legends and record their cultural practices. The results of the expedition were of interest to the American national media in the 1920s[116] and continue to fascinate American, Danish and Inuit populations. Rasmussen was a celebrated explorer in Danish society during the inter-war years and became the recipient of an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Copenhagen.[117] The obituary the *New York Times*

[111] *Ibid.,* 140.
[112] Peter Irniq, "Congratulations to Zach Kunuk," June 1, 2001.
www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut010630/letters.html
[113] A discussion on this topic is present in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.
[114] Miriam Hill, "Action figures next step for Atanarjuat," *Nunatsiaq News,* April 5, 2002.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut020405/news/nunavut/20405_6.html
[115] Justin Shubow, "Cold Comfort," February 28, 2003.
[116] *The New York Times* ran a number of articles that examined this expedition.
[117] Titiraqtaa Robert Petersen, "Kunu Rasmussen," Inuktitut, (Summer, 1979), 63.

printed for Rasmussen not only recounted his ethnographic accomplishments, but quoted the remarks of the Danish Prime Minister, Thorvald Stauning "Rasmussen was one of the best men Denmark ever bred."[118] Canadian Inuit populations continue to stress the importance of Rasmussen's expedition since it recorded aspects of Inuit culture that may have been lost, and for demonstrating the Canadian and Greenlandic Inuit share a similar cultural heritage.[119] Although Rasmussen wanted to publish an account of the Fifth Thule Expedition in Inukitut, the explorer/ethnographer died prematurely before his project could come to fruition. In some respect, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* is the fulfillment of Rasmussen's desire to translate part of his notes into Inukitut,[120] although the film focuses on a localised event from an Igloolik Inuk's point of view. Since the motivation of Rasmussen's expedition was to record traditional Inuit culture and mythology, Rasmussen did not conduct an in-depth examination of the effects Western technology and culture were having in the Arctic region, including the influence Christianity was exercising among Inuit communities.[121] The strength of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* rests in its recreating the manner in which Avva negotiates with the Christian religion, and for its ability to construct a dialogue with contemporary Inuit society over representations of shamanism. Kunuk was hopeful *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* "will probably make a lot of Inuit think twice about what has happened."[122]

The Journals of Knud Rasmussen was designed to convey to international audiences the spiritual changes the Inuit were experiencing in Igloolik while Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* was being created. This focus on the tensions that exist between Avva's (Pakak Innuksuk) party and the Christian leadership of Igloolik was designed to highlight that the obstacles the Inuit faced were not simply due to the harshness of the Arctic environment as promoted by Flaherty. The audience is aware of the tensions between traditionalists and Christians from the perspective of the Inuit in Avva's camp relatively early in the film as Rasmussen (Jens Jorn Spottag) asks why Avva's camp resides so far away from Igloolik, and in response, a number of women start singing Christian hymns followed by laughter. Although these women do not appear overtly concerned about the presence of Christianity in Igloolik, it is a concern that weighs heavily on Avva's mind for the duration of the film. The first time Rasmussen asks Avva to take Peter Freuchen (Kim Bodnia) and Therkel Mathiassen (Jakob Cedergren) to Igloolik, Avva

[118] Knud Rasmussen, explorer, is dead," *The New York Times,* December 22, 1933.
[119] Petersen, "Kunu Rasmussen," 64.
[120] *Ibid.,* 59.
[121] Laugrand, *Inuit and Christianity,* 4. This practice was not unusual since Boas also ignored Western cultural influences in Inuit society. Consult, Oosten and Laugrand and Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 450.
[122] Said, "Everyday White," 39.

demonstrates reluctance to assist the ethnographers. When Natar (Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq) agrees to take Freuchen and Mathiassen to Igloolik against his father's wishes, Avva "gently chides"[123] his son, "Our family doesn't work for Whites like some do. But everyone sees how much my son wants to help you who speak and act like Inuit."[124] Despite his initial reluctance, Avva ultimately agrees to take Freuchen and Mathiassen to Igloolik, resulting in drastic consequences for the shaman and his daughter Apak (Leah Angutimarik), who is also a shaman, which are foreshadowed throughout the remainder of the film. One instance of this foreshadowing entails a scene depicting Apak having sexual relations with an unseen man in the spiritual world. When the man is revealed to be Umik (Samueli Arnmaq), Apak wakes up and hears the wailing of the spirit helpers. During their journey to Igloolik, a severe storm "worse than normal" forces the party to camp, leading to a debate over their next course of action. Although Avva recommends the idea of aborting the journey to Igloolik, Freuchen is insistent they carry on since Avva promised to take them to the Inuit community.[125] Natar is also supportive of the idea of continuing the journey to Igloolik since they are not sure whether there will be an available food supply if they retraced their path. Once Avva's party arrives at Igloolik, the tensions between Umik and Avva are apparent to audiences as Avva refuses to shake the man's hand and sets up camp away from the community.

The Journals of Knud Rasmussen projects multiple images that engage in a discussion with contemporary Inuit attitudes about shamanism. Kunuk wanted *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* to enter into a dialogue with Christian discourses that have labelled Inuit shamanism as demonic and inferior to Christianity. One of the central scenes of the film involves a fourteen minute dialogue between Avva and Rasmussen, as Avva provides the ethnographer the story of his birth, the development of his shamanistic powers and the importance of observing taboos in society. When Rasmussen questions Avva further about the need to observe taboos, Avva discusses how Inuit follow taboos to ensure good weather for hunting and appease the spirits of animals after a hunt.[126] While Rasmussen appears to be the primary on-screen audience to Avva's stories, the Inuit are the primary off-screen audience as this dialogue humanises Avva and demonstrates, contrary to missionaries' views, that there is nothing demonic about his shamanistic powers. The exploration of taboos is critical to the plot of the film as is demonstrated when Avva's party reaches Igloolik in a precarious state. Apak attributes the desperate condition of the camp to the

[123] These are the words the screenplay used to characterise the tone of Avva's words to his son.
[124] Kunuk and Cohn, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," 300.
[125] This scene demonstrates the ethnographers need the Inuit to complete their journey to Igloolik, which draws attention to a Euro-American dependency on Inuit populations and contests notions of Inuit inferiority.
[126] Rasmussen's reports noted that parts of this dialogue occurred after Avva sent his spirit helpers to his sister.

violation of a taboo, which entailed her hiding a miscarriage so she would not have to observe certain protocols. Avva and the other members of the camp attempt to appease the spirits for Apak's violation of the taboo, demonstrating the important role shamans play as inter-mediators between spirits and humans. One may speculate that the failure of the spirit helpers to rectify the problems in the camp may have created a degree of self-doubt within Avva. It would be a mistake to conclude this doubt is the motivation behind Avva banishing his spirit helpers since the Inuk shaman informed Rasmussen of previous failures on the part of his spirit helpers to come to his aid, yet the shaman still maintained faith in his beliefs. By putting the focus of Avva's conversion on his need to get food from the Igloolik community and a desire to survive, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* does not attribute Avva's renunciation of his spirit helpers to a belief that Christianity is a superior religion to Inuit shamanism.

Although the final scene of the film depicts Avva banishing his spirit helpers, a nuanced reading of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* reveals codes that indicate the Inuit are negotiating with the Christian religion to fit it into their society and adapt it to their agendas. In the scene in which Nuqallaq (Natar Ungalaaq) is proclaiming the rules of Umik's camp, one does see indications that the Inuit practice of wife swapping still exists although it is highly regulated by Umik, "Satanasi tempts Inuit with his old taboos but Jesoosie saves Inuit with only Ten Commandments. Do not hunt on Sunday but come to church to pray. Do not share wives and husbands with another man or woman but only if Umik The Prophet gives his permission to share your spouse."[127] Historical documents indicate Umik used Christianity as a means to control the Igloolik community, as it helped him regulate the food supply and access to females.[128] The scene that depicts Anguillianuk (Apayata Kotierk), Avva's friend, bringing Avva food to eat also demonstrates Inuit cultural and spiritual practices continue to survive in some form when Christianity came to Igloolik. Mathiassen's recognition of a peculiar cross that Anguiliannuk has in his possession prompts the Inuk to acknowledge it as a powerful amulet, demonstrating the Inuit continue to attribute power to shamanistic objects. After Mathiassen inappropriately asks if Anguiliannuk[129] is a shaman, the man states in a solemn tone, "I used to be one. I was not too strong, but able. Then one day I heard a priest. He talked about Jesus and doubt came into my mind…The next time I tried to call them, my helping spirits wouldn't come. Now I'm not a

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[127] Kunuk and Cohn, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," 337.
[128] Furthermore, Xavier Blaisel *et al.* argued that Umik's religious movement was designed to "transcend the dilemma of being either a shaman or a Christian." Consult, Xavier Blaisel, Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, "Shamans and Leaders: Parousial movements among the Inuit of Northeast Canada," *Numen* 46 (1999): 380-383.
[129] After Mathiassen asks this question in the screenplay, it is pointed out that "Mathiassen, after all, is only a White Man, and doesn't know any better." It is considered improper for one to question whether an individual is a shaman in Inuit society for such a question will usually receive a negative response.

shaman anymore."[130] The fact that Anguillianuk breaks out in laughter following the story suggests he is mocking his supposed conversion to Christianity. As will be demonstrated below, film critics either failed to notice or chose to ignore these images and/or dialogue, opting instead to interpret *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* in problematic terms.

The manner in which *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* depicts the interaction between Inuit shamanistic beliefs and Christianity is far different from the manner in which this interaction was originally written into the screenplay. The original screenplay developed a meeting between Rasmussen and Avva upon the latter's completion of his trip to Baker Lake. The screenplay noted the presence of white flags around the camp and a crucifix in Avva's igloo, suggesting the Inuk had adopted Christianity.[131] The dialogue constructed between Rasmussen and Avva was designed to show that Avva sent his spirit helpers to his sister, indicating shamanism continues to survive in the Arctic.[132] Furthermore, this dialogue was intended to illustrate that Avva's exposure to Christianity did not lead to his complete abandonment of his shamanistic beliefs,

> RASMUSSEN But then...you still hold on to your old beliefs? What about the Christians?
> AVVA Yes of course. But their Jesus beliefs are very strong too. And who is to say we are right and they are not correct? We embrace joy, they embrace suffering. We love life, they love death. We live connected to all things, they live only with Jesus. Who is to say they are wrong to believe these things? Do not human beings suffer more misery than joy? Are we not dead longer than we live? Do we not feel safer alone with Jesus than wandering lost in the uncertain mystery of all things?[133]

Since this scene was deleted from the final version of the film, audiences simply see Avva banishing his three spirit helpers to an unknown location, aligning with popular notions that Inuit shamanism no longer exists. The elimination of these scenes from the final version of the film suggests Kunuk and Cohn wanted to create a degree of sympathy for Avva from the *Qallunaat* audience by highlighting the disruptive influence Christianity inflicted on Avva. As will be discussed below through an interrogation of critical reviews of the film, the two filmmakers were successful in achieving this sympathy as critical reception generated broad conclusions about the film depicting the complete destruction of Inuit shamanism.

Film critics for *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* have had a tendency to draw comparisons between this filmic text and *Atanarjuat* as they have argued the film failed to create the action that was present in *Atanarjuat.* Leslie Felperin was very blunt in her opinion of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, "[its] glacially paced and

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[130] *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* produced by Norman Cohn and Zacharias Kunuk and Vibeke Vogel and Elise Lund Larsen, directed Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, 112 minutes, Isuma Productions, 2006, 1 DVD.
[131] Kunuk and Cohn, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," 340-341.
[132] Avva's admission that he sent his spirit helpers to his sister was reported in Rasmussen's notes.
[133] Ibid., 346-347.

structurally lumpy" plotline would allow it "to generate about as much commercial interest as walrus meat."[134] Critical reviews of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* also failed to locate a scene that resonated with them as powerfully as a nude Atanarjuat running across the Hecla Strait in *Atanarjuat.*[135] Although *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* failed to receive the same reception as *Atanarjuat*, film critics still felt there were scenes in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* that held some appeal for audiences. It was not surprising given the focus of the film on Inuit shamanism and Avva's interaction with the Christian religion that most of the critical discussion directed its attention on this aspect of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. Critical responses to the images present in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* can be categorised into three groups, which do at times overlap: the reviewers who were fascinated by the depiction of spirituality in the film, the critics who failed to understand the nuances of shamanism and the critics who created broad, simplistic generalisations by insisting the film depicted the "collapse" of Inuit shamanism in the Arctic as a result of "White" intrusion. This last response was not surprising given the growing criticisms that have been directed against colonialism in the post-WW I era for its disruptive influences on indigenous cultures.[136]

It was evident from an examination of audience responses to *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* that a diverse group of people could appreciate the cultural and spiritual aspects of the film regardless of whether they were academics or film critics.[137] Critical reception to *Atanarjuat* has demonstrated that film critics were not too

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[134] Leslie Felperin, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," *Variety*, September 10, 2006.

[135] David Ansen labelled this scene as the film's "highlight." Consult, David Ansen, "Movies: The Ice Capade: a review of the epic awarded the Camera d'Or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival for the best film," *Newsweek* (June 24, 2002). Mary Pols rhetorically asked in her review, "How often do you see a naked man fleeing for his life over the ice?" (Consult, Mary Pols, "Atanarjuat," *Contra Costa Times,* June 19, 2002). Robert Ebert stated, "It is one of those movie sequences you know you will never forget." (Consult, Robert Ebert, "'Fast Runner' patiently unravels Inuit legend," *Chicago Sun-Times,* June 28, 2002), Other reviews that noted this specific scene include: Maurie Alioff, "From the Edge of the Earth," *Take One* (September 1, 2001); Jen Kopf, "Step into the Inuit culture with 'Fast Runner'," *Intelligencer Journal,* March 14, 2003; DeNeen Brown, "The Direction of True North; For his film of an Inuit parable; Zacharias Kunuk stayed close to home," *The Washington Post* August, 1, 2002; Terry Morris, "At the Art House; Arctic survivors outlast cold-hearted evil," *Dayton Daily News*, August 9, 2002; Mal Vincent. "'Runner' Doesn't Move Fast, but it is an Engrossing Film," *The Virginian-Pilot,* August 10, 2002; Phil Villarreal, "Spellbinding 'Fast Runner' a Timeless Tale of Survival," *AZ Daily Star,* July 19, 2002; Desson Howe, "'Fast Runner' a Stunner," *The Washington Post,* June 21, 2002.

[136] Huhndorf, "Nanook and His Contemporaries," 132.

[137] Similarly to *Atanarjuat,* Inuit reception to *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* is difficult to ascertain. Isuma planned to screen the film in fifty-six Canadian Arctic and Greenland communities. (Consult, Sara Minogue, "*The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* unveiled this week-end," *Nunatsiaq News,* March 10, 2006. Consult, http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/60310/news/nunavut/60310_04.html), but Isuma decided to cancel its tour after screening in sixteen communities since funding for the tour by the Nunavut government failed to materialise. Consult, Sara Minogue, "No funding, no tour, Isuma says," *Nunatsiaq News* April 14, 2006. http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/60414/news/nunavut/60414_14.html. *Nunatsiaq News* printed one review

interested in Inuit spirituality, but the reviews for *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* have indicated critics were more willing to engage with images of shamanism. Rachel Attituq Qitsualik recognised Euro-Americans have exhibited a strong fascination with Inuit spirituality, reducing Euro-American interest in shamanism into two primary categories: a romanticised longing for a form of spirituality that can construct a relationship between self and environment or a desire to view exotic beliefs.[138] Academic and critical reception to *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* has demonstrated a desire to discuss exotic cultural traits. For Elizabeth Weatherford, the manner in which the film depicted Inuit spirituality prompted her to label it as "one of the most outstanding achievements this past year in native film."[139] Leo Goldsmith, an internet film critic, experienced "endless fascination" with the scenes that focused on Inuit spirituality, but acknowledged, "we are not necessarily asked to understand or identify with the Inuit world."[140] Although Goldsmith exhibited interest in the cultural aspects present in the film, the critic adopted a problematic belief that the film depicted the destruction of Inuit shamanism.

Although Norman Cohn insisted "this is a film [*The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*] made for audiences and I don't think it's the slightest bit different for Inuit audiences or non-Inuit audiences,"[141] it was clear from the remarks of film critics that there were challenging parts in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* to a non-Inuit audience. One cannot blame Kunuk for his desire to privilege the Inuit audience given that his work has been designed to discuss specific issues pertinent to Inuit society. Several scenes posed potential problems for some film critics to decode properly: the scenes that depicted Apak engaging in sexual intercourse with her dead husband in the spirit plane and the final scene that depicted Avva banishing his three spirit helpers. The scenes depicting sexual intercourse on a spiritual plane between Apak and her deceased husband caught the attention of Geoff Pevere[142] and Maurie Alioff. Maurie Alioff found this scene a bit problematic to understand, "typically, the movie does not spell out whether she [Apak] is remembering, dreaming, hallucinating or making actual contact."[143] This scene may seem

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that discussed the film, but the review failed to offer any comments on *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, opting instead to quote remarks made by *The Globe and Mail* film critic Rich Groen and *Now* film critic, Glen Sumi. Consult, Arthur Johnson, "Isuma's new flick gets respectful, but not rave reviews," *Nunatsiaq News*, September 15, 2006. http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/60915/news/nunavut/60915_07.html

[138] Rachel Attituq Qitsualik, "The Unspeakable Tradition: part one," *Nunatsiaq News*, June 15, 2001. http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut010630/nunani.html

[139] Maurie Alioff, "Falling Forward Into an Icy World," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2006.

[140] Leo Goldsmith, "The Journal of Knud Rasmussen," http://notcoming.com/reviews/knudrasmussen (accessed August 15, 2011).

[141] Victoria Aheam, "Inuit film gives audiences some northern exposure," *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 9, 2006.

[142] Geoff Pevere, "Myth meets Reality," *The Toronto Star*, September 29, 2006.

[143] Maurie Alioff, "Falling Forward Into an Icy World," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2006.

peculiar, even bizarre, to film critics and the general Euro-American audience, but it may be more understandable to Inuit audiences, assuming they have a solid grounding in shamanism.[144] One scene Leslie Felperin believed might be difficult for Euro-Americans to understand fully was the final scene in which Avva renounced his three spirit helpers,[145] which was significant since it demonstrated how Avva negotiated with the Christian religion.

It is evident a significant number of film critics have decoded the images present in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* in a simplistic manner as they believed the film highlighted the complete destruction of Inuit shamanistic beliefs. The popular belief held by ethnographers and whalers in the nineteenth century concluded that Inuit shamanism would disappear as greater contact between Euro-Americans and Inuit occurred. Jarich Oosten, Frederic Laugrand and Cornelius Remie argued such a belief has been perpetuated in academic and popular discourses,[146] the latter of which was reflected in the following film reviews. Film critic Keith Uhlich stated *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* "pushes forward, deeper and deeper among the ruins of a culture cast *fatally* adrift by modernization."[147] Film critic Erin Oke wrote, "what is fascinating and devastating about the film is watching the beginning of the cultural transformation and seeing what will be *lost* [my italics]. "[148] Furthermore, some critics also believed this destruction was an "inevitable" process. This type of thinking has aligned with popular beliefs that indigenous cultures must give way to Euro-American culture. Mubarak Ali insisted *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* "recreated something of meaningful [sic] that *vanished* [my italics] almost a hundred years ago…this death –of tradition, of a time – is manifested in the film's magnificent final sequence as Avva, after his family's *inevitable*[my italics] acceptance of Christianity, mournfully farewells the spirits who have guided him all his life."[149] Michael Joshua Rowin believed *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* "draws toward a disastrous confrontation with the *inevitability* [my italics] of Christian takeover."[150] This view is problematic since it has reduced the Inuit characters

[144] For an excellent text on shamanism, consult Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy* (London: Arkana, 1989).
[145] Leslie Felperin, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," *Variety,* September 10, 2006, http:www.variety.com/review/VE1117931535?refcatid=31 (accessed August 15, 2011).
[146] Oosten and Laugrand and Remie, "Perceptions of Decline," 447.
[147] Keith Uhlich, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." .http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/the-journals-of=knud-rasmussen/2479
[148] Erin Oke, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." http://exclaim.ca/Reviews/Film/journals_of_knud_rasmussen-zacharias_kunuk_norman-2
[149] Mubarak Ali, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1134
[150] Michael Joshua Rowin, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." http://www.reverseshot.com/article/journals_knud_rasmussen

to passive objects, robbing them of the agency Kunuk wished to foreground in this film,[151] and failed to acknowledge how different Inuit negotiated with Christianity. Perhaps more importantly, the critic demonstrated a gross ignorance of conditions in the Arctic as Inuit shamanism continues to survive in the Igloolik area.

A second problematic discourse constructed in film reviews was the notion that the "White Man" was responsible for the collapse of Inuit spiritual traditions. This perspective has aligned with Clifton's recognition that popular thinking has tended to situate White and indigenous groups into "adversarial" camps,[152] but such a perspective is problematic since it has minimised the complexity involved in the spread of this "insidious"[153] religion. In his desire to condemn colonialism, Maracle placed Knud Rasmussen at the forefront of the dislocation of the Inuit community, "the shifting of power from the shaman to Rasmussen pulls the cultural rug out from under the community's feet...Rasmussen usurped the shaman's place in his own world."[154] This reading of the film was not only contrary to the historical record but also to the manner in which Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn designed the film to be read.[155] What Maracle failed to acknowledge was that Rasmussen was not just learning from the Inuit, but the intercultural exchange was mutual as the Inuit were just as eager to learn from Rasmussen and his party. In this respect, Kunuk inverted the ethnographic lens by making Rasmussen the object of Inuit curiosity.[156] Randall King's review of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* also attributed the "destruction" of Inuit culture to colonial forces, thereby failing to recognise the complex process in which Christianity spread through Arctic communities,

> The events that occur in the film The Journals of Knud Rasmussen are momentous. It's a movie about nothing less than the collapse of an ancient culture. But because that culture is in the Arctic, taking place within the sparsely populated Inuit communities of the Far North, the movie doesn't approach the subject with the sturm and drang of the historical epic. In fact, the subject is broached with surprising delicacy. Co-directors Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, who last collaborated on the first Inuit feature Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner, choose to submerge the audience in the culture of shamanism before demonstrating how it is derailed by the white man and the driving force of Christianity.[157]

The critic created broad generalisations about the film depicting the "collapse" of Inuit culture as a whole instead of realising the film focused on the Inuit negotiation with Christianity on a localised level. Unfortunately, King was not

[151] This agency was recognised by Libby Dean as she commented on how individual members of Avva's party made decisions that allowed for their survival. Consult, Libby Dean, "Doubt and Enduring," 199-200.
[152] James Clifton, "The Indian Story: A Cultural Fiction," *The Invented Indian: cultural fictions and government policies* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 40.
[153] This is the adjective Leo Goldsmith used to describe Euro-American culture and its effects on Igloolik.
[154] Lee Maracle, "Mapping Our Way Through History: Reflections on Knud Rasmussen's Journals," in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* ed. Gillian Robinson (Montreal: Isuma, 2008), 19-20.
[155] Norman Cohn, "When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt," in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* ed. Gillian Robinson (Montreal: Isuma, 2008), 159.
[156] Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 100.
[157] Randall King, "Warm Heart, Frozen Surroundings," *Winnipeg Free Press,* August, 11, 2006.

the only film critic guilty of constructing these broad generalisations.[158] While King correctly recognised the tone of the film discussed Inuit mediations with Christianity "with surprising delicacy,"[159] the film did not attribute the "collapse" of Avva's shamanistic beliefs to the presence and interference of the "White man." The only White men the film depicted were Rasmussen and the Euro-Americans who accompanied him on his Fifth Thule expedition. Rather than implicating these men in the spiritual struggles Apak and Avva were exposed to, the film primarily depicted them as curious observers.[160] *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* did not depict missionaries in Igloolik, as Umik, leader of the community's Christian faction, welcomed Avva and prohibited him from receiving food from the community without praying to God. While some film critics were eager to condemn Euro-Americans for the "destruction" of Inuit culture, the message in the film was far more complex than these critics recognised as Umik used Christianity to strengthen his control over the Igloolik community. Furthermore, while critics may have blamed Freuchen for pushing Avva's party onto Igloolik, one must also recognise it was Natar who agreed to take Freuchen and Mathiassen to Igloolik, and also agreed with Freuchen to continue their journey to Igloolik during the winter storm.

Conclusions linking the manner in which the characters negotiated with Christianity to the broader indigenous experience with Christianity and colonialism are also problematic. The reviewers who promoted this belief have failed to realise the nuances of each individualised experience with Christianity, and have reduced the complexities in which individual cultures and actors resisted these colonial processes. Liam Cullin characterised the film as being "visually impressive" and endorsed it by stating "this is a film which should not be missed by any member of the aboriginal community who is interested in gaining insight into the struggle of their ancestors to maintain their traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs at the turn of the century."[161] This comment is interesting for two reasons: it was based on the erroneous assumption that all indigenous populations experienced the same difficulties in the loss of their culture as the Inuit experienced, suggesting this reviewer conceptualised White-

[158] Other film critics who made this generalisation include; Mark Harris, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." http://www.stright.com/article-34316/journals-knud-rasmussen, Bruce Kirkland, "'Journals' tells a truly tragic tale," *Toronto Sun,* September 29, 2006.
[159] It is speculated part of the reason Kunuk was delicate with the handling of Avva's renunciation of his spirit helpers is because the Inuk director was concerned about offending Christian Inuit.
[160] Bibles preceded the presence of Christian missionaries in Igloolik, and at the time *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* is set, missionaries were not present in the area surrounding the Inuit settlement. Consult, Laugrand, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity,* 46.
[161] Liam Cullin "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen." http://www.thebestmoviereview.com/movie/movie-reviews/rating-8--8.5/1898/the-journals-of-knud-rasmussen (accessed August 15, 2011).

indigenous relations in a generalised way. Secondly, Cullin's comment perhaps suggests that one reason he enjoyed the film was because it depicted Euro-American oppression over Inuit populations and, by extension, according to Cullin's overgeneralisations, the entire North American indigenous population.[162] Lee Maracle believed the images *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* projected of Avva's negotiations with Christianity were also applicable to other indigenous populations, "The next time someone asks, 'What happened, why are Aboriginal people so violent?' I will simply say, 'Watch *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen.'*"[163] Although one can fault these readings for their reductionist nature, they were the type of readings that Cohn wanted to nurture from the indigenous audience, "as community-based filmmakers our first audience is Inuit of Igloolik and other Inuit or indigenous people who recognize the story as their own."[164]

Conclusion

Through his feature films *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* and his documentary *Shaman Stories,* Kunuk has entered into dialogues over the issue of shamanism with Inuit and *Qallunaat* audiences. Kunuk used *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* to negotiate with the images present in *Nanook of the North,* as the Inuk director wanted to convey to national and international audiences the complexity of Inuit identity. Kunuk's dialogue with Inuit communities has stressed the benefits shamans can bring to communities as he maintains their presence can rectify some of the socio-economic problems that exist. In some respects, these two filmic texts send different messages to the Inuit community. *Atanarjuat* conveys to Inuit communities that shamanism can restore community cohesion while *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* contests colonial discourses that demonise shamans and promotes the superiority of the Christian religion.

In his examination of the Arctic in the Canadian popular imagination, Daniel Francis concluded that "as the North gains its own voice, and ceases to be exclusively a place about which people in the south fantasise, the master narrative will have to change to accommodate it."[165] This statement is perhaps too optimistic. Although film critics have praised *Atanarjuat* to a greater degree than *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* critical reception to both films attempted to translate these filmic texts into familiar terms. For *Atanarjuat*, film critics attempted to locate themes

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[162] *Ibid.*
[163] Maracle, "Mapping Our Way Through History," 22.
[164] Cohn, "When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt," 159.
[165] Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: myth, memory, and Canadian history* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 171.

they believed were universal and conceptualised the characters in terms of binarism. This desire to locate familiar images came at the expense of marginalising or ignoring unfamiliar images such as Inuit spirituality. Although critical reception to *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* failed to locate "universal" themes, film critics attempted to translate the plot into simplistic terms by concluding the film depicted the destruction of Inuit culture by Euro-Americans, thereby failing to recognise subtle signs indicating the Inuit negotiated with and adapted to Christianity.

Chapter 5 - "I Scratch Your Back, You Scratch Mine": North American Indigenous Cinema and Funding

The failure of Native American films to attract large audiences has affected the ability of North American indigenous filmmakers to secure the funding larger Hollywood productions are capable of procuring. Although large sums of funding are not available to North American indigenous directors, they have access to public, tribal and personal sources of funding. These sources of funding do not promote a vibrant indigenous film business,[1] but they do allow North American indigenous communities to present self-representative images on television, in film festival circuits and in limited theatrical releases. Although some Native tribal governments have access to funds that permit them to enter into cinematic dialogues with the dominant society, their participation in these dialogues tend to be limited and centre primarily upon furthering specific tribal interests.[2] Sherman Alexie's experience in independent filmmaking has demonstrated the hardships of collecting monies needed for filmmaking and the negative criticisms that can be potentially directed at films developed on micro-budgets.

In reference to the abovementioned reasons, public funding and distribution have been essential for the development of Native American documentaries and fictional films. Academics and indigenous filmmakers have been critical of public sources of funding due to the limited sources available, the paternalistic nature of the funding system and its desire to promote colonial agendas. While some of these criticisms have simply been rhetoric designed to promote the need for self-representative images, there is some validity behind these remarks. But it should also be recognised public sources of funding have allowed North American indigenous communities to construct less marketable self-representative images Hollywood would not promote. In return, governments have used these filmic texts for nation-building, asserting sovereignty and projecting the ideal image of a nation. This chapter explores the relationship between public funding and/or distribution and indigenous film production by examining two filmic texts: *Atanarjuat* and *We Shall Remain.*

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[1] Kerstin Knopf believed North American indigenous film "has not been able to develop" because Native American communities are still colonised and the geographical proximity of Native communities to Hollywood forces them to conform to "Hollywood practices." This statement underestimates the need for a strong financial base on which to engage in cinematic dialogues with the dominant society. Consult, Kerstin Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 53.

[2] Please consult the texts of Jacquelyn Kilpatrick and Mary Lawlor for a discussion of how the Pequot utilise film to promote Pequot cultural continuity and the benefits of tribal gaming.

The allotment of funds that have been directed at North American indigenous filmmakers tends to be very minimal, relegating indigenous filmmakers to the realm of documentary filmmaking. Zacharias Kunuk challenged public funding constraints to direct fictional films such as *Atanarjuat. Atanarjuat* has been utilised by certain groups for their own specific agendas. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kunuk has utilised film as a means to open up a dialogue with Inuit society over shamanism. The Canadian government has used indigenous populations and film to support its policy of nation-building by promoting indigenous culture, healing the rifts developed between indigenous communities and past Canadian assimilation policies and, more specifically in the case of the Inuit, upholding Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. Although the Canadian government provided funding for *Atanarjuat*, Isuma has maintained a critical stance against the Canadian government over funding procedures and against the IBC over questions of authorship of filmic texts.

In the United States, PBS has been active in presenting perspectives of marginalised peoples to the broader American population. *We Shall Remain,* a documentary series that focused on five specific historical events that occurred between Native communities and Euro-Americans, has offered Native Americans an outlet in which to challenge the American grand narrative by constructing a more complex depiction of Native American history than the general population is familiar with. The connection between *We Shall Remain* and PBS provided the series with the necessary funding outlets and a distribution network that allowed it to be broadcasted across the United States and to be integrated into the American education system. Despite concerted efforts to promote the complexity of Native American-White relations in *We Shall Remain,* critics still gravitated toward familiar images and stereotypes, and conceptualised these relations within a framework restricted by binarism.

Who can fund North American indigenous cinema?

The Business of Fancydancing provides an excellent point of departure for a discussion on Native American filmmaking and funding. Sherman Alexie is one filmmaker who opted to develop a film using personal monies and funds procured from networking. One of the main criteria that Alexie has striven for in his films is creative freedom to explore Native American identity without the pressures placed on production companies to romanticise it. In an interview with Charlene Teters, Alexie noted his appreciation that Shadowcatcher Entertainment "deferred to our judgements in the material. The producers did a great job making sure we told the

story right, but what is on screen, for better or worse, belongs to Chris and me."[3] Following the acclaim *Smoke Signals* received in both the popular press and box office, Sherman Alexie was courted by Hollywood production companies to turn *Reservation Blues* and *Indian Killer* into cinematic adaptations. These projects failed to come to fruition for unspecified reasons. To date, *The Business of Fancydancing* is the only film that was developed with Alexie occupying the director's chair. Sherman Alexie's film festival contacts[4] and his personal wealth gave him the opportunity to have full control over the final production of *The Business of Fancydancing,* although admittedly, he was forced to create the film on a shoestring budget of $200,000. Larry Estes noted the strategies Alexie used to be cost efficient were designed "to keep people off his back"[5] during the shooting and editing of *The Business of Fancydancing.*[6]

To some extent, this desire to produce an independent film on a micro-budget has had a direct impact on the critical reception to the film. Although reviews written by Stephanie Earls[7] and Dan Webster[8] did not negatively comment on how the micro-budget affected the overall aesthetics of *The Business of Fancydancing*, Elvis Mitchell was more critical. Elvis Mitchell recognised the low-budget nature of *The Business of Fancydancing*, making note of the poor picture quality of the film in his review.[9] Mitchell was not the only film critic who commented on the low-budget quality of the film as both Jeffrey Anderson[10] and Hazel-Dawn Dumpert[11] cited the poor picture quality resulting from the low cost digital video Alexie opted to utilise to keep production costs within his limited budget. *The Business of Fancydancing* was not simply hampered by its low-budget, but also by its limited distribution due to the film's very limited theatrical release and its failure to attract a high-profile distributor. These problems prompted

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[3] Charlene Teters, "Sherman Alexie: Poet, Novelist, Filmmaker," 56-57.

[4] Sherman Alexie, interviewed by John Nesbit, 2002 Interview. http://oldschoolreviews.com/articles/alexie.htm (accessed May 19, 2010).

[5] Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing: A Screenplay,* 125.

[6] Larry Estes noted these strategies consisted of assigning individuals associated with the set multiple jobs and cutting scenes from the original screenplay. Consult, Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing: a screenplay,* 125.

[7] Stephanie Earls, "'The Business of Basic Filmmaking' – Poet shows the advantages of taking back the process when his 'The Business of Fancydancing' is screened at the Yakama," *Yakima-Herald Republic,* June 14, 2002.

[8] Dan Webster, "A new direction; Author Sherman Alexie tries his hand at movie directing in 'The Business of Fancydancing' which will premiere next week at the Sundance Film Festival," *The Spokesman-Review,* January 6, 2002.

[9] Elvis Mitchell, "A Poet Finds His Past Is Just Where He Left It," *New York Times,* October 18, 2002.

[10] Despite negative comments directed at the cinematography of the film, Jeffrey Anderson still gave the film a favourable review overall. Consult, Jeffery Anderson, "Fancydance Fever," www.combustiblecelluloid.com/2002/busfancy.shtml

[11] Hazel-Dawn Dumpert, "Stranded and Swept Aside," October 23, 2002. http://www.laweekly.com/2002-10-31/film-tv/stranded-and-swept-aside/

Alexie to comment, "that it's impossible to theatrically release a truly independent film now."[12] This limited audience has been of particular concern to Alexie on both a personal and functional level. Alexie has stated in past interviews that it is his goal to have his work viewed by as many people as possible, but the limited theatrical release and distribution restricted the size of the audience for this film. Perhaps more importantly, this limited audience has prevented *The Business of Fancydancing* from engaging in a dialogue with a large segment of the dominant society, thereby minimising the influence of this filmic text in negotiating with stereotypes.

Public sources of distribution, particularly when these films are broadcast on PBS, have provided indigenous filmmakers with an outlet to enter into a dialogue with a broader portion of the North American public. It is difficult to generalise about the degree of funding indigenous populations are eligible to secure from government sources. A reliance on public funding for North American indigenous cinema is clearly more prevalent than Robert Stam and Ella Shohat gave credit for: "Although *occasionally* [my italics] supported by liberal governments or international support groups, these efforts [of indigenous films] are generally small-scale, low budget and locally based."[13] Stam and Shohat's statement is applicable to indigenous filmmakers in some settler societies and filmmakers in Third World countries as public funding has not been made available to them for a number of reasons. *The Copenhagen Post* reported Danish regulations precluded public funding for productions originating in Greenland, forcing the production company of the Inuit film *Nuummioq* to sell a substantial portion of its assets to finance its production.[14] An interview with leading Nigerian director Eddie Ugbomah revealed his problems of securing funding due to government inefficiency and the unwillingness on the part of financial institutions and businesses in Nigeria to provide finances for such productions, partly due to the widespread corruption of filmmakers. Due to this unwillingness, Ugboma has been forced to draw primarily from his own personal wealth to develop his movies,[15] an issue government funding for North American indigenous cinema has allowed North American indigenous directors to circumvent to some degree.

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[12] Sherman Alexie, interviewed by John Nesbit, 2002 Interview. http://oldschoolreviews.com/articles/alexie.htm (accessed May 19, 2010)

[13] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "From the Imperial Family to the Trans-National Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization," in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary,* eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 150.

[14] "Greenland's First Feature Film Set to be Screened," *The Copenhagen Post Online*, September 24, 2009. http://www.cphpost.dk/news/international/89-international/470005-greenlands-first-feature-film-set-to-be-screened.html (accessed May 2010).

[15] N. Frank Ukadike and Eddie Ugbomah, "Toward an African Cinema," *Indiana University Press Journal* 63 (1994): 150-156.

Although artists such as Sherman Alexie have been able to circumvent the need for public funding in their capacity as directors, North American indigenous cinema is currently so intertwined with public funding and distribution that it becomes difficult to imagine the existence of this cinema without the availability of these sources. In this respect, due to the limited number of indigenous sources of funding, Native directors have been forced into a position of dependency on Canadian and American governments to secure the funding necessary to construct filmic representations. In Canada and the United States, government support for North American indigenous cinema has existed since the 1960s, and this support has continued to increase into the twenty-first century through the National Film Board of Canada, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network in Canada, and the Public Broadcasting Station in the United States. The resources the Canadian and American governments have supplied to indigenous documentary work and film are two examples that contest Stam and Shohat's statement about government funding and indigenous film production. Well-known indigenous directors Chris Eyre, Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki), Zacharias Kunuk, and Victor Masayesva Jr. (Hopi) have received funding from public sources and institutions created by government legislation for their respective works. While critics may argue government funding of cultural programs has been designed to appease indigenous populations from demanding greater political autonomy, evidence indicates that, at times, the agendas of the Canadian government and indigenous populations have coincided. Part of the reason this funding has been directed toward indigenous populations is due to the recognition that indigenous populations have been marginalised. It is hoped the ability to construct self-representative images will allow indigenous populations to speak to the dominant society and minimise this sense of marginalisation. It has also been recognised that video can be utilised to perform salvage ethnography, particularly in the Arctic, as there is a drive to help preserve Inuit traditions and the words of elders. Although public funding and distribution have played a substantial role in the development of North American indigenous cinema, there are problems associated with this form of funding as it is not widely accessible.

In the late twentieth century, a pessimistic attitude arose among North American indigenous filmmakers regarding their accessibility to funding. Jamie Monastyrski commented on this difficulty, "These days it's not about the telling of a good story or creating art for art's sake – it's about that elusive hunt for financing which is a movie in itself."[16] Publically funded agencies, such as the Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT), have accepted proposals from Native American directors, but the number of proposals they continue to receive severely

[16]Jamie Monastyrski, "Where's the Money! Native Filmmakers Struggle with the Screen," *Aboriginal Voices* (October/November, 1999): 33.

limits their ability to finance all of them. In 1998, it was reported this organization granted funding to only 10% to 15% of the proposals that came through their offices, illustrating funding requests for films vastly exceeded funding capabilities.[17] One of the problematic issues revolving around the NAPT is that non-Native filmmakers have also been eligible to receive monies, which decreases the amount of funding available to Native directors.[18] Not only has the NAPT been swamped with film proposals, the National Endowment for the Humanities has also received more applications than it can possibly provide grants for and is frequently under threat of having its funding slashed. Director Sandra Osawa (Makah) believed part of the problem is related to the lack of Native personnel at the top echelons of these organizations to help co-ordinate the distribution of funds to Native directors.[19] Another reason Osawa cited to explain this limited funding is that "Native directors have the potential to threaten the status quo. It's not in the best interests of the people who hold the purse strings. The foundation of this country is based on myth. We are not in that inner circle, so we remain on the outside hammering at the door."[20] While the first statement has support from Kerstin Knopf, who argued the government funding allotment system reflects "paternalism" since "most often the monies are not given directly to Indigenous filmmakers,"[21] the second statement is more problematic to substantiate. Public sources of funding have allowed indigenous directors in Canada and the United States the ability to challenge the grand narrative of these two countries.[22] While Heather Rae (Cherokee) was under the impression the film industry will be more accepting of images that challenge the popular image of Native Americans in the near future, such a prospect is certainly not guaranteed. Kerstin Knopf highlighted the problematic nature of developing Native American self-representative images that contest or modify ingrained stereotypes since these images have become "dependent on the mainstream market and Western notions of marketability,"[23] to receive wide distribution. Canadian and American public sources of funding, to a large extent, have provided indigenous

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[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 65.
[19] Monastyrski, "Where's the Money!" 34-35.
[20] *Ibid.,* 35.
[21] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 64.
[22] Since her first directorial project in 1971, Obomsawin has achieved a prolific career as she produced over twenty documentaries dealing with Native American issues that have fit in with the broader agenda of the NFB to allow "marginalized communities" to express their concerns regarding their situation in Canadian society. Obomsawin's objective is to bring attention to social problems, racism and the failure to recognise and honour treaties between Native communities and the provincial and federal governments. Zoe Druick concluded that her documentaries "contribute to a larger government dialogue about the meaning and organisation of a federal system." Consult, Zoe Druick, *Projecting Canada,* 27-28.
[23] Knopf, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power,* 74.

filmmakers with the funding and distribution networks in which to exercise some degree of artistic freedom without pandering to concepts of marketability.[24]

Public Funding and the Promotion and Preservation of Inuit Culture

Since the nineteenth century, Canadians have expressed a special interest in the Arctic, which has played an instrumental role in the creation of a Canadian national identity. The cult of the North was promoted by Canada First in the late nineteenth century as the group used northern characteristics to help distinguish the new nation of Canada from the United States. Although few Euro-Americans have experienced direct contact with the Arctic, this geographical region and the images constructed of it continue to persist in the mindscape of Canadians.[25] In the mid-twentieth century, the Canadian government initiated a policy to fund Inuit artists, which was consciously designed to further differentiate Canadian identity from American identity.[26] Despite growing concerns this funding would force the Inuit into a dependent relationship with the federal government, the "clever promotion and marketing, and political and bureaucratic support has resulted in a high degree of acceptance (though not any great understanding) of Inuit art as a quintessentially Canadian symbol."[27] Although Canadian society has appropriated several Inuit symbols for their own purposes, Canadian governmental policies were designed to assimilate Arctic populations and relocate them to isolated Arctic settlements to support Canadian claims of sovereignty over the area. These colonial policies have had a detrimental effect on the Inuit as residential school syndrome severely crippled Inuit culture. The federal government has been attempting to rectify the problems associated with its past policies through programs designed to preserve and promote Inuit culture. While the government has supported the Inuit out of humanitarian reasons, it has been able to achieve its own agendas in the Arctic through its support of Inuit cultural and political agendas.

The Canadian federal government has shown an interest in promoting Inuit cultural initiatives and providing a framework through which Inuit culture can be transmitted. Former Canadian Prime Minister Jean

[24] This statement does not apply to *Atanarjuat* as the film projects several images that are marketable to Euro-American audiences, including its focus on historical Inuit identity. This statement is more directed at Isuma's non-fictional work, which is far less marketable and in continuous need of government funding.
[25] Francis, *National Dreams,* 152-156.
[26] Ingo Hessel and Dieter Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), 186. Monika Seibert believed *Atanarjuat* displays "Canada's cultural specificity against American hegemony." Consult, Monika Siebert, "*Atanarjuat* and the Ideological Work of Contemporary Indigenous Filmmaking," *Public Culture,* no. 3, (2006): 548.
[27] Hessel and Hessel, *Inuit Art,* 186-187.

Chretien recognised the importance of showcasing Canadian treatment of the Inuit to the world: "Canada is showing the world, once again how we embrace many peoples and cultures. The new government of Nunavut will reflect this diversity, incorporating the best of Inuit traditions."[28] Even before this statement was made, the Canadian government worked to promote Inuit culture through the IBC, which receives its funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. The IBC was created as part of a greater strategy to promote "the richest and enduring cultures in our nation, the Inuit of Canada, in...Inuktitut" as this corporation acts as "a window to the Arctic by producing...programming by Inuit, for Inuit."[29] The development of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in the 1970s partially evolved due to the initiative of Inuit leaders who were concerned about the increasing Western influence that could potentially have detrimental effects on Inuit communities. The eight-month experimental period with the Inukshuk program confirmed the ability of the Inuit to utilise visual media and telecommunications for their own benefits.[30] Debbie Brisebois has contended the IBC was successful in its mandate to help preserve Inuit culture, but limited monies available prevented the IBC management from developing long-term objectives and expanding its operations.[31]

Although there is evidence to suggest the Inuit have been appreciative of the IBC, cut-backs have plagued this corporation, making it increasingly difficult to fulfil its mandate. Aimo Nookiguak, a former IBC manager in Iqaluit, believed the Inuit have greatly benefitted from the information they could access through satellite television that linked Inuit communities together and to southern programming.[32] A study conducted in March 1983, indicated eighty-five per cent of the Inuit sampled tuned into the IBC for at least an hour on a weekly basis, while over sixty per cent wanted more programs available at night. The survey's results led Brisebois to conclude, "clearly, ...[there is]... a strong mandate for the IBC from its audiences."[33] A subsequent study carried out in 1984 revealed a ten per cent increase in the number of Inuit who tuned into the IBC for at least an hour on a weekly basis.[34] Further studies carried out in 1985 and 1988 revealed Inuit audience numbers maintained the same levels as previously recorded in the 1984 survey. The IBC has also attempted to construct Inuit directed programs utilising an Inuit aesthetic. After a

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[28] Berger 2006, as quoted in Samantha Arnold, "Constructing an Indigenous Nordicity," 110.
[29] "Inuit Broadcasting Corporation." http://www.inuitbroadcasting.ca/about_e.htm (accessed September 15, 2011).
[30] "History of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation." http://www.inuitbroadcasting.ca/history_e.htm
[31] Debbie Brisebois, "The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation," *Anthropologica, New Series* 25, no. 1 (1983): 109-112.
[32] Marianne Stenbaek, "Forty Years of Cultural Change among the Inuit in Alaska, Canada and Greenland: Some Reflections," *Arctic* 40, no. 4 (December, 1987): 307.
[33] Brisebois, "The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation," 114.
[34] Debbie Brisebois, *Whiteout Warning: Courtesy of the Federal Government* (Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, October 1990), 8.

two-year assessment of *Qagik,* Kate Madden concluded "that different cultures could produce television programming that reflected their distinct cultural values rather than being clones of the dominant power,"[35] demonstrating that IBC programming has not simply mimicked southern-based programs, and has attempted to mould its programming around Inuit desires. Despite this positive reception to the IBC, a substantial federal cutback in February 1990 resulted in the loss of approximately twenty-five per cent of the budget designed to create IBC programming, which has limited the IBC's ability to fulfil its mandate. Indigenous media makers were concerned the unexpected nature and the speed at which these cuts occurred marked a radical departure from the support the Canadian federal government previously provided for indigenous media.[36] The IBC has also been reluctant to seek commercial advertisement to supplement its budget since it maintains such action would make it "indistinguishable from Southern television...and the entire point of aboriginal television will be lost,"[37] demonstrating a desire to create a broadcasting corporation unique to the Inuit.

Indigenous populations in Canada and the United States have recognised and praised the steps the Canadian government and Canadian publically funded institutions have taken to finance and distribute indigenous self-representative images. This national and international recognition demonstrates the Canadian government has achieved success in projecting the notion it works in cooperation with its indigenous populations in promoting and preserving their cultures. David Newhouse recognised the tremendous gains Native communities have made in economics, politics, arts, health and education.[38] In his discussion regarding the advances Aboriginal populations have made in the arts in Canada, Newhouse made reference to the establishment of the APTN and the Canadian Native Achievement Foundation, which brought Aboriginal television and video to Canadian audiences.[39] Beverly Singer praised the collaborative efforts between Canadian indigenous populations and the Canadian government in developing the IBC and the APTN, which have aided in disseminating indigenous self-representative images.[40]

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[35] Kate Madden, "Asserting a distinctly Inuit concept of news: The early years of the Inuit Broadcasting corporation's Qagik," *Howard Journal of Communication* 8, no. 4 (1997): 311

[36] Debbie Brisebois, *Whiteout Warning: Courtesy of the Federal Government.* Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (October, 1990), 9-10.

[37] *Ibid.*, 11.

[38] Although Newhouse recognized these gains are the result of popular recognition of Aboriginal marginalization and support for Aboriginal demands, he believed Native American communities will need further support in order to achieve their full objectives. Consult, David Newhouse, "Aboriginal Problems and the New Indian Problem," in *Canadas of the Mind,* ed., Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 293, 298

[39] Newhouse, "Aboriginal Problems and the New Indian Problem," 294.

[40] Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*, 57-58, 93.

Academics have also attributed the IBC to the growing sense of community the Inuit experienced in the 1980s, which contributed to the development of Nunavut in 1993.[41]

Canadian initiatives to support Inuit culture have not been restricted to the development of the IBC, but have included additional strategies promoted through the Oral Traditions Program, which is connected to the Education, Culture and Employment Ministry. In 1993, this ministry earmarked $70,000 for distribution to nine organizations devoted to the preservation of Inuit and Native cultures situated in the Northwest Territories. Out of the nine organizations that received funding, Kunuk's organization Igloolik Isuma Video received $11, 285, second only to the Dene Cultural Institute, which received $11,700.[42] These policies of promoting indigenous cultures were continued under the Paul Martin Liberal government, which also promoted Inuit culture in the Northwest Territories. The Education, Culture and Employment Ministry stressed the importance of fostering cultural development in its October 2004 *Northwest Territories Arts Strategy: A Holistic Approach to a Vibrant Arts Sector*:

> Through this Arts Strategy, we have outlined current and future initiatives that will move us towards achieving our vision, "*To secure the stability of a vibrant Arts sector that is integral to the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the NWT, and contributes positively to the quality of life within the NWT.*"[43]

This strategy outline called for a program that placed emphasis on fostering the arts in elementary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, and facilitated their exportation to international communities.[44] This goal was reiterated in the progress report *Northwest Territories Strategy* in 2006, as it emphasised a desire to create an environment conducive to fostering interest in the arts at the elementary level.[45] The Student Financial Assistance (SAF) Program has also played a role in assisting students to go to school, but this assistance has not played a dramatic role in developing cinematic talent since only two of the total forty-four recipients of the SFA Program in the academic year of 2004-2005 enrolled in programs dealing with the media. This total number decreased in the next academic year as not one student in the SFA Program enrolled in the media program. This does not mean Inuit culture has not been promoted; in fact, teachers in the Northwest Territories have been expected to familiarise themselves with Inuit culture by examining literary works and artwork for forty-five hours through the Teacher Education Program and the Aboriginal Language and Culture Instructor Program with the expectation that they can

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[41] Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 86.
[42] "Funding to Ensure NWT oral traditions stay alive," *Windspeaker* 11, no. 13 (September, 1993): 3.
[43] Northwest Territories Arts Strategy, *A Holistic Approach to a Vibrant Arts Sector,* 2004, 1. http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/PDF_File/Arts_Strat_Final.pdf (accessed May 10, 2010).
[44] *Ibid.*, A1, A2, A3, A4, A7.
[45] NWT Arts Strategy, *Progress Report*, 2006, 3. http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/PDF_File/Arts%20Sratergy/Arts_Strategy.pdf (accessed May 10, 2010).

transmit this knowledge to their students. The report believed cultural development in the Northwest Territories would lead to improved physical and mental health among students and create some degree of unity in the community.[46]

Public monies directed at Isuma and Inuit cultural initiatives have played into the broader concerns of extending Canadian influence into the Arctic. This Canadian desire to assert a strong claim in the Arctic has partially resulted from continued American violations of Canadian sovereignty over its Arctic territories since the late 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Canadian government decided to project itself to national and international audiences as deviating from past assimilationist policies and adopting a policy of collaboration with its Inuit populations. The creation of the territory of Nunavut was a long drawn out process motivated by the Inuit desire for political autonomy, but the Canadian government entered into these negotiations to construct a "new partnership" with indigenous populations. Part of these negotiations entailed land claim settlements that resulted in a survey of Inuit historical migration patterns, which Samantha Arnold argued has allowed the Canadian government the ability to reinforce its own claims to sovereignty over the Arctic.[47] Former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney recognised the interconnection between promoting Inuit culture and asserting a political interest in the Arctic when he stated at the ceremony that witnessed the birth of Nunavut,

> In the course of this transition, we will redraft the map of Canada…But our collective achievement is far more than a simple exercise in cartography. *It is, at its core, an act of nation-building.* Step by step, agreement by agreement, we are advancing towards a set of common goals: strengthening the economic, social, and political foundations of the north, and enriching an ancient and cherished culture – the Inuit culture.[48]

Although some aspects of the Nunavut agreement are still debated, the creation of Nunavut has allowed the Canadian government the ability to project to national and international audiences its authority to "assume a leadership role in the north" and "construct a new basis for national unity at home."[49]

Although Shari Huhndorf's assessment of the fictional and non-fictional films of Isuma recognised that these texts assert Inuit nationalist claims to the land, it is also important to recognise the Canadian government has also benefited from these claims. One manner in which Huhndorf substantiated her argument is through the use of a map posted on the *Atanarjuat* website that is designed to chart the various migration routes of the characters

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[46]*Ibid.*, 8-27.
[47] Samantha Arnold, "Constructing an Indigenous Nordicity: The 'New Partnership' and Canada's Northern Agenda," *International Studies Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (Feb., 2012): 105-112.
[48] Brian Mulroney, 1993, as quoted in Arnold, "Constructing an Indigenous Nordicity," 112.
[49] Arnold, "Constructing an Indigenous Nordicity," 109.

throughout the film. This map serves a symbolic purpose as it visually re-appropriates Inuit territory in the same manner in which *Nanook of the North* asserts Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic for its own nationalistic purposes. The presence of this map on the website led Huhndorf to conclude, "connections between land and culture ground contemporary Inuit nationalism in the geography of Nunavut, and they give the imagined community a long and distinctive history."[50] In addition to charting the migration patterns of the Inuit, the map also reveals the path of Atanarjuat in his flight from Oki across the Hecla Strait; one of the contested routes of the Northwest Passage over which the Canadian government has been attempting to reinforce its sovereignty.[51] While the *Atanarjuat* website broadcasts the historical migration routes of the Inuit to national and international audiences for Inuit purposes, this map also serves the interest of the Canadian government. As Samantha Arnold's research established, the Canadian government has shown an interest in promoting its own sovereignty over the Arctic by promoting Inuit land claims over the area. In this way, *Atanarjuat* acts as a vehicle in which to broadcast Canadian claims of sovereignty over this contested Arctic region to national and international audiences.

The Canadian press praised the positive reception *Atanarjuat* received on the international stage as the movie won several awards at international film festivals, and used the film to highlight the contributions Canada has made to global filmmaking.[52] In her assessment of *Atanarjuat,* Monika Seibert noted the film was "well positioned to serve the needs of the Canadian national cinema developing in the age of multiculturalism…[and]…contribute[s] to an ongoing Canadian effort to shape a national cinema by locating Canada's diverse communities within the imagined national community."[53] Although Huhndorf correctly noted *Atanarjuat* "challenge[s] the nation-state,"[54] Canadian critics discussed how *Atanarjuat* has played an important role in reinforcing Canadian identity. An anonymous review of *Atanarjuat* printed in *The Vancouver Sun* emphasised the importance of this film to Canadian national identity: "For those who haven't seen *Atanarjuat* - and if you care what it means to be Canadian, you should…"[55] This comment is interesting since it interconnected Canadian identity with Inuit cultural distinctiveness, highlighting Canada's multicultural policy and relating the importance of the north to Canadian identity. John

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[50] Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 92.
[51] "The Legend on the Land." http://www.isuma.tv/lo/en/atanarjuat/the-legend-on-the-land#
[52] Katherine Monk promoted this perspective with her statement: "No aboriginal film tradition had ever given birth to its own narrative feature. Not here. Not anywhere." Consult, Katherine Monk, "Revolution from the True North: Why a groundbreaking film of love, murder and revenge made by aboriginals in Canada's Arctic is winning praise all over the world," *The Vancouver Sun,* April 20, 2002.
[53] Monika Siebert, "*Atanarjuat* and the Ideological Work of Contemporary Indigenous Filmmaking," 547.
[54] Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas,* 76.
[55] "In to the mystic, via the Far North," *The Vancouver Sun*, April 20, 2002.

Griffith was more direct in his correlation between *Atanarjuat* and Canadian cultural identity, "It's [*Atanarjuat*] a Canadian film, with a Canadian cast, crew and location. It tells a Canadian story that just happens to have universal applications. The last time I checked, that's a cornerstone of our national cultural policy. *Atanarjuat* isn't part of the Heritage Canada mission statement, it is the mission statement."[56] The chief executive of Nunavut Films, Derek Mazur, also identified this Canadian desire to watch Inuit films that promoted a "Canadian identity" to a global audience.[57] Although these critics connected Inuit self-representative images to reinforcing Canadian identity, Seibert recognised the promotion of these perspectives can potentially marginalise discussions of colonial oppression due to a perceived belief that indigenous populations are participating in Canadian society as equals.[58]

Isuma and the Struggles of Funding

While the above discussion focused on how the Canadian government has supported Inuit cultural and political initiatives for the benefits of both parties, Isuma has directed animosity toward the Canadian government. Much of this hostility has also been directed at the IBC as Isuma has criticised this corporation for its colonial agenda, and for its paternalistic and inadequate funding procedures. Cohn's criticisms against the IBC have been direct as he has accused the IBC of constructing colonial discourses that argue "authentic" Inuit culture no longer exists and that Inuit society currently consists of "a victim-laden morass of abuse and social problems in which a dead culture leaves people unable to cope with modern life."[59] What is even more problematic for the director/cinematographer is that the fulfilment of these agendas and the transmission of these images to Inuit society have been occurring through Inuit voices.[60] While some of these charges have merit,[61] it is also true the Inuit have

[56] John Griffin, "Inuit hit still out in the cold: Atanarjuat is the biggest thing to happen in Canadian film in years: it deserves star treatment," *The Gazette,* October 20, 2001.
[57] Guy Dixon, "Out in the cold: the struggle of Inuit film," *Globe and Mail* December 30, 2011. http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/out-in-the-cold-the-struggle-of-inuit-film/article4197448/
[58] Siebert, "*Atanarjuat* and the Ideological Work of Contemporary Indigenous Filmmaking," 543-544.
[59] Michael Evans, *Isuma,* 123-124.
[60] *Ibid.,* 123-124.
[61] Despite that the Inuit were recognised in the Canadian Constitution of 1982 as an indigenous population that is distinct from Metis and Aboriginals, the Inuit populations have been marginalised and ignored in Canadian meta-narratives that were promoted by major collective memory projects funded by philanthropists and public funding. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the Charles R. Bronfman Foundation and the Canadian Broadcasting Company embarked on two ambitious projects designed to create a collective memory through the retelling of multi-perspective histories in order to minimize division within Canada. While the attention of these two projects were focused on healing the rifts between English Canada, French Canada and Aboriginal communities, the *Heritage Minutes* program and the documentary series *Canada: A People's History* virtually ignored incorporating contemporary Inuit identity. An analysis of the images these two projects constructed leads one to erroneously conclude the Inuit no longer exist.

been appreciative of the programs the IBC broadcasts and that its existence has played a crucial role in the development of a Nunavut imagined community. Kunuk's criticism of the IBC has revolved around the economic and bureaucratic marginalisation Inuit producers in the Arctic have experienced. Inuit producers have argued the location of the IBC's main offices in Ottawa has prevented its top echelons from fully comprehending the needs of the producers. Furthermore, critics have argued the location of the main offices has prevented Inuit from obtaining high positions in the IBC unless they exhibited a desire to relocate. Part of this criticism revolves around the problems Kunuk encountered in his attempts to purchase equipment during his employment at the IBC.[62] Despite the stated goals of the IBC to protect and support Inuit culture, Kunuk and Cohn continue to argue their production company provides them the control necessary to best promote and strengthen this culture, and position themselves as the best mediators to convey Inuit culture to the Inuit.[63] Although Evans believed Isuma maintains an "antagonistic stance towards Ottawa and the South,"[64] he correctly noted the main point of contention between Isuma and the IBC revolves around the question of who has the power to construct representations of the Inuit.[65] Although Isuma has been willing to position the images it constructs in opposition to the images projected by the IBC, the production company's agenda to promote and preserve Inuit culture[66] and language is clearly compatible with that of the Canadian government.

Although Isuma has been very critical of the IBC and suspicious of the government's agenda in the Arctic, the production company has been the recipient of much needed public funds, which as Michael Evans correctly pointed out, has been critical to its sustainability.[67] In the initial stages of *Atanarjuat's* development, Isuma employed the popular press as a forum in which to criticise the Minister of Heritage, Sheila Copps, and the Canadian government for its lack of support of indigenous cinema. One unnamed source from Isuma stated,

> In the past 10 years of professional film-making with our programs shown in 16 countries and serious festivals, no executive from Telefilm, CTCPF, CBC CRTC, Canadian Heritage or any other participant in the national-broadcasting system has ever visited Igloolik to see where, how and why we work as we do: to meet our staff, our writers, our actors ; to see for themselves our daily reality, our different way of working, of storytelling, of Inuit 'corporate culture'.[68]

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[62] Evans, *Isuma,* 124.
[63] *Ibid.*, 203.
[64] *Ibid.,* 127.
[65] *Ibid.,*133.
[66] It is difficult to ascertain the IBC's stance on depicting filmic and television images of shamanism. An e-mail sent to the IBC regarding this topic was not returned.
[67] Evans, *Isuma,* 136.
[68] Matt Radz, "Inuit film frozen out: Arts bureaucrats fudge on funding for Nunavut project," *The Gazette*, October 17, 1998.

The lack of support the Canadian government showed to Isuma during the development of *Atanarjuat* is a topic Kunuk and Cohn continue to revisit in public lectures and through the media. The initial problems Cohn and Kunuk faced in securing funding for *Atanarjuat* led Cohn to label the whole procedure as discriminatory against large budget indigenous films. Since *Atanarjuat* was ineligible for the funding reserved for English and French language films, they were forced to seek money reserved for indigenous films, which has a maximum funding allotment of $100,000. Cohn believed the $100,000 cap on indigenous films relegated indigenous cinema to micro-productions. After a series of delays in obtaining the funds for production, which also involved a brief round of layoffs for people working on *Atanarjuat*, Kunuk and Cohn received the funding to complete the film partially due to recognition from the NFB of the problematic funding allotment system.[69] Telefilm and CTF respectively provided $537,000 and $390,000 [70]and Kunuk and Cohn were able to secure support through the Aboriginal Filmmakers' Program, which was sponsored by the NFB.[71] The NFB circumvented its existing policies that prohibited the funding of fictional films by labelling *Atanarjuat* as an ethnographic film. This funding was not only essential for the development of the film, but also for the development of Igloolik as the employment rate was at 40% at the time of *Atanarjuat's* production. Igloolik residents were selected to play acting roles, which not only deviated from past Hollywood practices of employing Asian actors to play Inuit characters, but was also a conscious decision designed to employ the residents of Igloolik.[72] The $927,000 funding provided by Telefilm and CTF allowed the community to find employment in positions in front of and behind the camera, which helped to economically and socially develop the community,[73]while at the same time, taking steps to preserve Inuit culture. Monies devoted to the production of *Atanarjuat* not only fulfilled the Education, Culture and Employment Ministry's desire to preserve and promote Inuit culture, but also helped to improve the economy of the Igloolik community. The funding the Canadian

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[69] Evans, *Isuma,* 129-131.
[70] Faye Ginsburg, *"Atanarjuat* Off-Screen: From 'Media Reservations' to the Word Stage," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (December, 2003): 829.
[71] Maurie Alioff, "From the edge of the earth: Zacharias Kunuk's Atanarjuat," *Take One,* June 1, 2005.
[72] Nancy Wachowich and Paul Apak Angilirq, "Interview with Paul Apak Angilirq." http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/isuma-productions/interview-paul-apak-angilirq
[73] Faye Ginsburg, *"Atanarjuat* Off-Screen: From 'Media Reservations' to the Word Stage," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (December, 2003): 828-829.

government provided *Atanarjuat* was critical to the development of the film, particularly since the Nunavut government failed to provide any funding.[74]

Sources of Funding for Documentaries in the United States: Public Broadcasting Station

The Public Broadcasting Station was set up by the Johnson administration in 1965 in order to bring non-partisan educational programming to American audiences. One objective PBS has shown an interest in advancing is to allow American audiences an opportunity to view images of minorities and provide a forum for intercultural understanding.[75] Patricia Zimmermann identified public broadcasting as being an essential service since the major media networks would not allow minority groups an opportunity to construct self-representative images.[76] PBS has provided a forum in which to broadcast independent documentaries that challenge the American grand narrative and allow minorities an opportunity to negotiate their own respective identities.[77]

The most contentious issue revolving around PBS is that of funding and the debates concerning the defunding of the broadcast station. The structure of PBS has made its financial situation rather unstable, as guidelines outlining sources of funding for this station have not existed since its first broadcast in 1967. PBS's ambiguous funding position has made it vulnerable to changing political currents as the sustainability of the corporation is susceptible to budget cuts,[78]which in turn affect the amount of money PBS can access for Native Americans and their works. The Reagan administration slashed federal monies devoted to the arts by fifty per cent in 1981, which Zimmermann argued limits the dialogue from the periphery to the centre.[79] While critics Laurence Jarvik[80] and Bob Dole[81] both argued PBS is able to generate enough revenue through merchandising and no longer requires federal funding, Patricia Zimmermann argued the debates that revolve around the defunding of PBS are

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[74] Sophie, McCall, "'I Can Only Sing This Song to Someone Who Understands It': Community Filmmaking and the Politics of Partial Translation in 'Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner,'" *Essays on Canadian Writing,* (Fall 2004): 16.
[75]B.J. Bullert, *Public Television: Politics & the Battle Over Documentary Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1.
[76] Patricia Zimmermann, *State of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 743 (Kindle Edition).
[77] *Ibid.*, 491.
[78]Bullert, *Public Television*, 17.
[79] Zimmermann, *State of Emergency,* 599 (Kindle Edition).
[80] Laurence Jarvik, "Fiscal Questioning about Public Broadcasting," in *Public Broadcasting & the Public Trust,* eds. David Horowitz and Laurence Jarvik (Los Angles: Center for the Study of Popular Culture, 1995), 259-265.
[81] Bob Dole, "Barneygate," in *Public Broadcasting & the Public Trust,* eds. David Horowitz and Laurence Jarvik (Los Angles: Center for the Study of Popular Culture, 1995), 265-267.

more about limiting minority access to a media outlet than about concerns over funding the arts.[82] Although James Day believed PBS possesses great potential, he noted the existence of this broadcasting station continues to be threatened since cable television can provide more engaging programming than PBS. This increase in competition is problematic for PBS since only the more financially viable networks will be able to survive.[83]

The funding and distribution of Native American films and documentaries on PBS is contingent on a number of factors, including the popularity of the topic. Despite that *Dances with Wolves* has been criticised by Native American critics, including Louis Owens, part of the reason PBS has been committed to Native American programming revolves around the interest this film generated of Native Americans in American popular culture. This popularity may have given the proposals of Native directors an advantage in the production of their works. After all, the competition can be intense as it is estimated PBS accepts approximately 5% of the proposals received by the station. The chance for the acceptance of a proposal increases if a high-profile director is involved in the project,[84] which is why the recognition Eyre has received for his work *Smoke Signals* was crucial to the development of the documentary series *We Shall Remain*. But the development of *We Shall Remain* and its distribution on PBS was also dependent on the support of philanthropic foundations, which have recognised the need for Native Americans to become involved in a dialogue about their history with the dominant society and thus insert that dialogue into the education system.

We Shall Remain and the Construction of Native American History

The broadcasting of Native perspectives of history to Native and non-Native communities has been one strategy utilised by Native tribes to resist colonialism and reclaim identities. Noting there are two forms of history, the "official" history promoted by colonial governments and the "real" history promoted by colonised populations, Ngugi wa Thiongo argued colonised populations have been continuously contesting colonial perspectives of history in order to undermine colonial rule.[85] While it is important to recognise historical interpretations are not as simple as Thiongo perceived them to be, it is acknowledged the conveyance of Native American perspectives of historical events is important to challenge the American grand narrative and to position Native Americans into that grand

[82] Zimmermann, *State of Emergency,* 774 (Kindle Edition).
[83] James Day, *The Vanishing Vision: the inside story of public television* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 350-351.
[84]Bullert, *Public Television,* 12-22.
[85] Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Moving the Centre: the struggle for cultural freedoms* (London: J. Currey, 1993), 98.

narrative as active agents. Burke Hendrix recognised the American grand narrative is problematic since it does not focus adequate attention on the wrongs committed against Native Americans such as assimilation and dispossession of land.[86] He believed the American grand narrative needs to be altered in order to reconcile relations between the American population and Native communities, and to help construct an environment in which Native communities can feel respected and build self-esteem. In order to accomplish this goal, Hendrix believed it is important to construct a forum in which "to debate the character of history and reach a mutually acceptable understanding."[87] He argued that initiating legal action to redress land claims and treaty rights will allow for a discussion that challenges the grand narrative by allowing Native communities to recount their version of history;[88] but in order to alter the American grand narrative, the general public needs to be aware of alternative views. The *We Shall Remain* series is one of several projects designed to complicate the American grand narrative by conveying Native American perspectives to the public through television and cyberspace.

The Ford Foundation and the Arthur Vining Davies Foundation, two philanthropic institutions closely connected to PBS, were partially responsible for the development of *We Shall Remain*. The Ford Foundation, which was founded by Henry and Edsel Ford over seven decades ago and played an instrumental role in the creation of PBS, has worked to address some of the socio-economic problems that exist around the world. The mission statement of the Ford Foundation illustrates a desire to create socio-economic progress for populations, partially by engaging in a dialogue and creating a forum of co-operation with individuals who have been marginalised in society or live in impoverished conditions.[89] It is important to note the finances of the Ford Foundation have not been exclusively directed at Third World countries, but are also provided to populations residing in the United States. The creation of *We Shall Remain* has illustrated the Ford Foundation's commitment to improving the quality of education in the United States as the foundation provided approximately $400,000 for the creation and promotion of the documentary series.[90] That the Ford Foundation provided financial support for this project illustrates the importance it has placed, if not on Native American media, then at least on the importance of Native Americans asserting their own historical perspectives as this institution only issues 1,600 grants out of 40,000 requests on a

[86] Burke Hendrix, "Memory in Native American Land Claims," *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (Dec., 2005): 772.
[87] *Ibid.*, 774.
[88] *Ibid.*, 771.
[89] "Our Mission." http://www.fordfound.org/about/mission (Accessed May 19, 2010)
[90] "Events." http://www.fordfound.org/grants/grantdetails?grantid=2811 (Accessed May 19, 2010)

yearly basis.[91] The Arthur Vining Davies Foundation, which was also a donor to the documentary series *We Shall Remain,* has illustrated a strong desire to improving the quality of education in the United States and promoting the benefits of public television.[92] The amount of "capstone" funding available from this foundation can vary anywhere from $100,000 to $400,000.[93] In order to receive funding from this foundation, it is necessary a project achieves "lasting educational value" and secures a broadcasting agreement with PBS.[94] These conditions illustrate the critical role PBS has played in determining which projects can potentially receive funding from philanthropic institutions.

The documentary series *We Shall Remain* was designed to re-centre the role of Native Americans in the development of American history as each episode began with the statement, "It is a story at the heart of America, one richer and more surprising than we've been told."[95] The series' executive producers opted to utilise a hybrid approach, which entailed using historical re-enactments and "talking head" academics. This documentary series also provided an opportunity for Native scholars and descendants of the Native historical figures under discussion to express their perspectives on Native American history. This approach presented challenges for Eyre since his previous body of work focused entirely on depicting Native American contemporary identity. This series consists of five episodes that examined historical events that have played a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between the dominant society and Native American communities, but Eyre was only involved in directing the first three episodes. The first episode opened the series by examining the deterioration in relations between Plymouth colony and the Wampanoag in the seventeenth century. The second episode dealt with American expansion into Shawnee lands and the failure of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa to organize a pan-Indian alliance that could challenge American westward advancement and preserve an independent Indian confederacy to the east of the Mississippi River. The third episode examined the refusal of the Andrew Jackson administration to recognise Cherokee sovereignty in Georgia and the debates that took place among the Cherokee on whether to relocate to the west of the Mississippi River or to contest Georgian claims to sovereignty over Cherokee lands.[96] All three of these episodes conveyed the complexity of Native American identity on individual and collective levels. Secondly, the aesthetics of

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[91] "About Us." http://www.ford found.org/about-us (Accessed May 19, 2010)
[92] "About the Foundations: Purpose and Organization." http://www.avdf.org/organization.htm (Accessed May 21, 2010)
[93] "Foundations Programs: Public Television." http://avdf.org/FoundationsPrograms/PublicTelevision.aspx (Accessed May 21, 2010)
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *We Shall Remain,* produced by Sharon Grimberg, directed by Chris Eyre *et, al.,* 450 minutes, PBS, 2009, 3 DVDs.
[96] The fourth episode, directed by Dustinn Craig and Sarah Colt, examined Geronimo's refusal to accept reservation life and his fight against the American government. The final episode, directed by Stanley Nelson, outlined AIM's occupation of Wounded Knee and the emergence of Native Americans into American political consciousness.

these three episodes, which consisted of sweeping aerial views of landscapes, have asserted the importance of land to Native American identity.[97]

The episode "After the Mayflower" began by discussing the amiable, oftentimes cautious relationship that developed between the Wampanoag and the pilgrims of Plymouth colony. The presence of these foreigners caused a debate among Wampanoag sachems on how to proceed with the Pilgrims, but Massasoit, concerned over the threat from the Narragansett, sought to enter into a relationship with the Plymouth colonists. This agreement, the first treaty between a Native community and European power, was structured around mutual defence, trade and relinquished control of Patuxet to the Pilgrims. "After the Mayflower" discusses the tensions that developed due to greater intercultural contact, the continuous pressure to cede land to the English colonists, a declining Wampanoag economy and an increasing number of Wampanoag moving into praying towns. Perhaps more fundamental for the Wampanoag was how they started to think of their relationship to the land in a different way.[98] The increasing pressures placed on Wampanoag lands and concerns over tribal sovereignty forced Massasoit's son Philip to launch a war against the English. Philip was eventually defeated as the Mohawk allied with the English, which demonstrates Native American society was not one monolithic entity as each tribe acted in its own best interests.

The episode "Tecumseh's Vision" deviated from standard narratives popular culture has clung to in order to present a more complete picture of Shawnee dynamics on the eve of the War of 1812. Firstly, the documentary re-centred the importance of Tenskwatawa, which was a departure from how the standard Canadian narratives of the War of 1812 produced by CBC and the NFB depicted this figure since they erased the Shawnee Prophet from their historical interpretations of the war. Secondly, "Tecumseh's Vision" has complicated earlier historical interpretations of Tenskwatawa, which, as Alfred Cave noted, previously vilified the Shawnee Prophet:

> As writers throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century elaborated and embellished Drake's portrayal of the Shawnee brothers, there emerged full blown a study of opposites: Noble Tecumseh, Vicious Tenskwatawa, the Good Indian and the Bad.[99]

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[97] This use of landscape shots is a filming strategy not unique to Eyre. Steven Leuthold noted George Burdeau and Victor Masayesva Jr. have also employed this cinematic technique in their respective works. Consult, Steven Leuthold, "An Indigenous Aesthetic? Two Noted Videographers: George Burdeau and Victor Masayesva," *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 40-51.

[98] Jessie Little Doe stated in "After the Mayflower," "What people felt for a millennia, 'This is my land, and my land is me, and I am it,' obviously because we come from it, and we eat from it and things die, they go into the land, and we eat from what grows from there. So when we say land it's just 'ahh-key' – land. But if you say 'my land,' you have to say 'na-tahh-keem.' This means that 'I am physically the land, and the land is physically me.' And after Europeans were here for about 70 years, people started, you started to write 'na-tahh-key,' which is so sad, because that means 'I am not necessarily part of the land anymore. It can…my land can be separated from my person."

[99] Alfred Cave, "The Shawnee Prophet, Tecumseh, and Tippecanoe: A case study of historical myth-making," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 22 (Winter 2002): 637.

Eyre's documentary was designed to demonstrate the pressures Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa were under in resisting American expansionism and to foreground the importance of Tenskwatawa in the ideology of pan-tribalism that developed in the early nineteenth century. The documentary placed land at the centre of Shawnee life as Tecumseh was concerned American treaties with indigenous communities would leave the Shawnee without a homeland. After the Treaty of Grenville in 1795, Tecumseh made the assertion that all tribes control the land, and not one chief had the authority to cede land over to the Americans.

Eyre also used the relationship between Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa to humanise the two Shawnee brothers. This bond was an aspect Eyre wanted to stress: "My work has always been personal rather than what I perceive as historic...I felt like Tecumseh and Tecumseh's brother had such a similar arc as my two characters in Smoke Signals, Victor and Thomas, that it was like a buddy movie—and in this case it was a brother movie."[100] The American destruction of Prophetstown created divisions between Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa since the Shawnee Prophet disobeyed his brother's advice and ordered an attack against Harrison's forces. The scenes that depicted the aftermath of the battle focused on the forgiveness Tecumseh offered to his brother, demonstrating the strong relationship between Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa. The scene detailing the death of Tecumseh at the Battle of Moraviantown also demonstrated Eyre's desire to humanise the relationship between the two brothers as it showed Tenskwatawa with his brother prior to Tecumseh's death. The emotional bond between Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, which was evident on Tecumseh's face, not only demonstrated the strong relationship between the two brothers, but humanised these historical figures as well. This "human touch" was recognised by critics such as Doug Cuthand who appreciated Eyre's construction of a historical Native identity that could "break away from the old stereotypes" and depict Natives as humans.[101]

"The Trail of Tears" episode discussed the intra-community conflict present among the Cherokee when the government of Georgia sought to open up Cherokee lands for Euro-American settlement. The episode clearly established the spiritual and historical connection of the Cherokee to the land in Georgia as the narrator recounted a Cherokee myth about the formation of the land, "The wings of the Great Buzzard had carved the mountains and the valleys; Ukenta, the horned serpent, had made his frightful marks on the tall rocks; the Creator had set the first man

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[100] Robert Benziker, "The other Founding Fathers," *The Santa Fe New Mexican,* August 22, 2008.

[101] Doug Cuthand did not direct this comment at the "Tecumseh Vision" episode specifically, but directed it at all five of the series' episodes. Consult, Doug Cuthand, "Series depicts Native American history as it was," *Star Phoenix,* April 17, 2009.

and woman in this very place." This historical connection to the land was reinforced in a statement made by Cherokee historian Theda Perdue, "Christians had been cast out of their own Garden of Eden, but the Cherokees lived in their Eden. It's the land that they believed their ancestors had always inhabited." The documentary focused on the differing strategies the Cherokee employed to mediate with the threat the state of Georgia represented to Cherokee lands. John Ross advocated for using legal action to preserve Cherokee land rights, and when that failed, to stall land transfer until a more Cherokee friendly administration occupied the White House. The Ridge faction opted to sign Cherokee land over to the Georgia government and some of the Cherokee voluntarily relocated to Oklahoma. The agreement was declared valid despite that the Ridge faction represented only a minority of the views in the Cherokee community, which forced the remaining Cherokee to relocate to Oklahoma, leading to the death of 4,000 people. This treaty created hostility among the Cherokee and led to the murders of Major Ridge, John Ridge and Elias Boudinot - the individuals who were responsible for signing Cherokee lands over to the state of Georgia.

Eyre has hoped the *We Shall Remain* series would transcend race and open up a dialogue between Native and non-Native American audiences about the complexities of Native American histories.[102] Julianna Brannum, who co-produced the Wounded Knee episode, has also been hopeful the series would allow Euro-Americans to "come away with a better understanding of Native people and how we struggle over centuries to maintain our cultural identity and our integrity."[103] The executive producer of *We Shall Remain,* Sharon Grimberg, has been optimistic the series would create "a new conversation about Native people…[and that]… Americans will totally get a new perspective."[104] There is evidence to conclude some Native Americans were able to connect with the documentary series on a personal level, which Eyre can certainly appreciate. During the screening of the "Trail of Tears," a Cherokee male was overwhelmed as his recognition of the Cherokee language used in the episode triggered memories of his grandparents who used to converse in Cherokee.[105] The documentary also prompted Wes Studi, who played the role of Major Ridge, to reassess his perspectives of Cherokee history. Prior to his work on the "Trail of Tears" episode, the Cherokee actor thought the murders of Major Ridge, John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were "justifiable" since he believed these three individuals betrayed the Cherokee by signing the Treaty of Eocha. Since

[102] Elizabeth Jensen, "PBS series told from Indian point of view," *The Virginian-Pilot*, April 12, 2009.
[103] "Remote Controlled: Documentary Revisits Wounded Knee Standoff," *AZ Daily Star*, April 5, 2009.
[104] Talia Whyte, "PBS series spotlights Native American past," *The Boston Banner*, April 9, 2011.
[105] Rick Romancito, "Up Front," *Taos News*, August 13, 2009.

his work on the "Trail of Tears" project, the Cherokee actor has recognised the pressures the three men were under to sign the agreement with the American government and reserves judgement over their actions.[106]

When assessing film critics' responses to *We Shall Remain,* it is perhaps important to understand James Clifton's recognition that "the standard Indian narrative is factious because in the minds of narrators and audiences it divides the whole population into adversarial groups and explains and justifies their opposition to one another."[107] While Eyre and Brannum have expressed hope that the historical narratives constructed in *We Shall Remain* would alter this oppositional thinking, Native and non-Native responses to the series have indicated this was not entirely the case. Although Joyce Greene (German-Seminole) believed the documentary series highlighted the hardships Native tribes struggled through, she failed to acknowledge the inter- and intra-tribal conflicts this documentary series also emphasised.[108] This suggests she continued to conceptualise the historical relationship between Native Americans and Euro-Americans within a framework of "us" versus "them." Mark Feeney, writing for *The Boston Globe,* viewed the documentary in a similarly simplistic way: "Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson are portrayed, not inaccurately, as villains. Tecumseh and Geronimo are seen in heroic terms."[109] This perspective is problematic on several levels. Firstly, Feeney conceptualised Native American-White history within a binary framework of good Native people and bad White people that failed to recognise the complexity of these relations. *We Shall Remain* was comprised of numerous scenes that have allowed audiences to view both races working together for a common policy, albeit for their own interests,[110]which challenged the binarism this critic promoted. Secondly, this critic failed to recognise the complexities of Apache opinions of Geronimo, who has been primarily remembered for his resistance against the American government, but has also been blamed for causing hardships on the Apache for this resistance.

Critical reception to "Tecumseh's Vision" has demonstrated a tendency on the part of critics to focus exclusively on Tecumseh's role in the development of a pan-Indian confederacy at the expense of marginalising or ignoring the role of Tenskwatawa. This desire to focus on Tecumseh has stemmed from the image he has fulfilled of the romanticised Native American warrior. Terry Rugeley characterised popular views of Tecumseh in the following

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[106] Robert Nott, "Beyond leather and feathers," *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 24, 2009.
[107] James Clifton, "The Indian Story: A Cultural Fiction," 40.
[108] "Poster Promoting PBS Documentary," *States News Services*, November 21, 2009.
[109] Mark Feeney, "Series aims to show the Indian side of things," *The Boston Globe*, April 13, 2009.
[110] Examples include showing English colonists were supportive of Philip and the Wampanoag in the episode "After the Mayflower." "Tecumseh's Vision" examines Shawnee chief Black Hoof, who opposed Tecumseh's resistance policies and advocated for accommodation with the American government.

manner, "One of the most romantic of all figures is the great failure who almost succeeds. Perhaps this explains America's enduring fascination with Tecumseh...[who]...soon after his death he appeared as the heroic savage who represented all the best of man's natural qualities."[111] Due to this romanticisation of Tecumseh in popular culture, it was not surprising critical reception to *We Shall Remain* focused on this figure at the expense of marginalising Tenskwatawa. Feeney's review has demonstrated the critic was more willing to highlight Tecumseh's role in the development of a pan-Indian confederacy as opposed to recognising the crucial contributions of Tenskwatawa to its development. Several other film critics also marginalised Tenskwatawa's actions in the development of the pan-Indian confederacy by focusing exclusively on Tecumseh,[112] suggesting the attention of these critics gravitated to more familiar and/or romanticised images. This focus on Tecumseh also obstructed the ability of these critics to ascertain the preferred reading of the text. "Tecumseh's Vision" highlighted the importance of Tenskwatawa's message for individual and collective revival, and stressed how the Prophet's words and actions enticed Indians from many tribes to come to Grenville and Prophetstown. The documentary noted Tecumseh did not gain the prominent position that these critics have attributed to him until after the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809 when he "stepped out of his brother's shadow."

There have been further problems connected to the way Feeney decoded the images projected by *We Shall Remain.* Feeney's interpretation of the series has led the critic to conclude, "The people you're rooting for are all doomed. To be sure, there's some variation on the basic themes of betrayal, slaughter, and defeat."[113] This specific comment has demonstrated the belief Native Americans have been victims despite that the "Wounded Knee" episode presented a different perspective. Although the "Wounded Knee" episode noted a reign of terror followed AIM's departure from Wounded Knee, the episode ended on a note of hope as it recognised the occupation of Wounded Knee and the media publicity it brought to Native American concerns led to the entrance of Native Americans into politics and created Native American educational and cultural institutions. This focus on the doomed Native American was a reading Sharon Grimberg, an executive producer of *We Shall Remain,* had hoped audiences

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[111] Terry Rugeley, "Savage and Statesman: Changing Historical Interpretations of Tecumseh," *Indiana Magazine of History* 85, no.4 (December, 1989): 289-291.
[112] This is also seen in "Poster Promoting PBS Documentary Series – "We Shall Remain" – Available Online and for Check-Out at Local Army Libraries," *States News Service,* November 21, 2009; Talia Whyte, "PBS series spotlights Native American past," *The Boston Banner,* April 9, 2009; "Film series screening set for April 15," *US Fed News Service,* April 11, 2009; Robert Nott, "Beyond leather and feathers," *The Santa Fe New Mexican,* April 24, 2009; Doug Cuthand, "Series depicts Native American history as it was," *Star Phoenix*, April 17, 2009.
[113] Mark Feeney, "Series aims to show the Indian side of things," *The Boston Globe*, April 13, 2009.

would reject after watching the series since it was designed to emphasise the agency Indian communities exercised in their respective mediations with Euro-Americans.[114]

PBS has utilised the internet to help open up a dialogue with the American public about issues pertinent to Native American communities *We Shall Remain* only partially addressed or failed to explore.[115] The website seeks to educate audiences regarding contemporary aspects of Native American life such as preservation and promotion of language, issues surrounding Native governance and strategies for possible economic development, which are concerns Native communities currently possess.[116] The decision to utilise cyberspace reflects the recognition multiple mediums need to be employed to reach a broader audience and that cyberspace can create a suitable forum for educational purposes. The website offers teachers a guide that highlights approaches that can be utilised to teach the contents of the documentary to students, [117] and demonstrates how these episodes can coincide with the National Council of the Social Studies Curriculum Standards.[118] This desire to include the documentary series into the classroom curriculum was not surprising given the funding the Arthur Vining Davies Foundation provided for its development and the emphasis this foundation has placed on education. The teacher guide for each episode drew attention to the complexity of Native American history by asking questions directed at exploring intra-tribal conflict in order to demonstrate the lines of conflict were not as simple as Euro-American versus Native American.[119] For the "Tecumseh's Vision" episode specifically, questions were designed to lead students to recognise that the attempted pan-Indian confederacy was not simply the work of Tecumseh, but also involved Tenskwatawa. Although an examination of critical reception to the documentary has shown people either focused on familiar images or continued to conceptualise relations between Native Americans and Euro-Americans simply as two antagonistic

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[114] Becky Krystal, "A Native perspective on U.S. history," *Edmonton Journal,* April 12, 2009.
[115] It is important for the website to discuss the obstacles present day Native communities face since the documentary series does not examine Indian issues after 1973.
[116] "Native Now." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/native_now/ (accessed May 15, 2010).
[117] "We Shall Remain: Teach and Learn."
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/beyond_broadcast/teach_and_learn (accessed May 15, 2010).
[118] "We Shall Remain: Curriculum Standards."
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/beyond_broadcast/curriculum (accessed May 15, 2010).
[119] Such questions include, "What was the relationship of the Wampanoag with nearby Narragansett tribe?" and, "What turned the tide in favor of the English during King Philip's War?" Other activities are designed to explore inter-tribal divisions: "During Tecumseh's time, not all Native peoples were united in their views of the Americans. Divide the class into two groups. One side will take the accommodationist position of Shawnee leader Black Hoof, and the other will take the pan-Indian confederacy position of Tecumseh, Each group should research and discuss their assigned stance, then choose one student to present the group's position."

camps, there is hope this series will educate the next generation of Americans to recognise the complexity that exists within Indian Country and Indian dealings with Euro-Americans.

Conclusion

Public sources of funding and distribution can potentially present its own sets of challenges to indigenous filmmakers as it can be a complex process to secure these funds. While public funding has allowed indigenous directors the ability to construct self-representative images, governments can potentially use these images to achieve their own respective agendas. For the Canadian government, indigenous film has given indigenous populations a voice to critique the Canadian government, but has also allowed Canada to project an image of itself as a multicultural nation and to assert Canadian interests in the Arctic. Although the images that have been constructed with public funding are not always ideal, as demonstrated in the depiction of the Inuit in *Canada: A People's History,* there is a genuine concern on the part of the Canadian government to provide funding to preserve and promote indigenous culture for which some indigenous audiences have been appreciative. Kunuk's experiences with public sources of funding have led Isuma to be highly critical of the Canadian government, but the simple fact remains Kunuk needs public funding to continue to develop filmic representations. Chris Eyre's experience with sources connected to public funding and distribution has allowed the director's work to reach a broad audience and eventually to become integrated into the American education system with the objective of re-centring Native American perspectives to history and to challenge the American grand narrative. One alternative to relying on public funding is the use of personal funding to develop film, but this option is open to a restricted few, and the limited budgets of these films can potentially lead to negative comments directed at the film. Independent films also have difficulty finding a distributor, which limits the film's ability to enter into a dialogue about stereotypes circulating in American society.

Chapter 6 – Promoting Identity and Politics in A Thousand Roads and Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change

Within the last decade, an increasing trend has emerged among filmmakers such as Barry Barclay and academics such as Houston Woods to promote the concept of indigenous cinema. North American indigenous populations have employed various methods to promote their own respective works and forge links with other indigenous populations around the world through the internet, television and participation in film festivals. Both *A Thousand Roads* and *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* offer examples of how indigenous directors have attempted to construct pan-indigenous identity either on-screen or through discussion of issues popular culture has interconnected with indigenous identity. *A Thousand Roads* is connected to the politics associated with the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and how that specific institution has constructed and represented Indian identity and history. The film discusses socio-economic and cultural diversity among indigenous populations in the Americas, and emphasises the importance of a sense of place. Furthermore, *A Thousand Roads* engages in a dialogue with Native and non-Native audiences through the utilisation of romanticised images, and minimises discussion regarding the horrors colonialism inflicted on historical indigenous identity and continues to exercise on Native communities. The film conveys to the dominant society the importance of land to contemporary indigenous identity in a non-confrontational manner. Although *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* centres around issues interconnected with climate change, it also constructs a politicised dialogue directed at Inuit treatment of Arctic animals. This dialogue is conducted through Inuit elders who convey personal stories and observations about the changing environment and Inuit relationship with the wildlife. The presence of *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* on the Isuma website, and at both the United Nations and Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival, has allowed the documentary the ability to engage not only in a periphery to centre dialogue, but a periphery to periphery dialogue.

Pan-Indigenous Identity and Fourth Cinema

Although global interest in indigenous cultures continues to increase in the twenty-first century[1] it remains problematic to develop a definition for indigenous peoples as attempts to do so have become either too

[1] This statement is partially quantified by the increase in the number of web pages that mentions the term "indigenous cultures." Jeffrey Sissons' Google search of "indigenous cultures" displayed 86,200 results in 2006.

exclusionary or too inclusionary. Jeffrey Sissons recognised collective groups have a tendency to self-identify themselves as indigenous based on their relations to the state,[2] which allows for a certain degree of fluidity in the term indigenous. Francesca Merlan recognised increasing globalisation has affected how countries conceptualise the term "indigenous" as it has become a "more open definition based on self-definition, participation, and acceptance."[3] Merlan used the case study of the Sami to demonstrate this point as she noted the Sami population constructed a collective "indigenous" identity partially based on an attachment to ecological conservation and through their entrance into the World Council on Indigenous peoples. The strategy of linking Sami identity to cultural concerns expressed by indigenous communities allowed the Sami to transcend its designation as a "minority" group in Norway to become recognised as an "indigenous" group. The increasing concerns of indigenous populations in settler societies about possible assimilation and denial of treaty rights has motivated the construction of pan-indigenous organisations such as the World Council on Indigenous Peoples and the Inuit Circumpolar Council in the 1970s.[4] Aside from this growing desire to connect with one another through non-governmental bodies, pan-indigeneity has also been expressed through less formal groups that discuss resistance to colonialism, maintenance of cultures, and more pertinent to this dissertation, discussion of cinematic images and filmmaking strategies.

In his survey of film, Robert Stam recognised the existence of a cinema created by the people of the "Fourth World," but their participation in this cinema was limited. Stam believed for the most part, these indigenous populations fulfilled the capacity of collaborator in ethnographic productions but rarely fulfilled the capacity of director; thereby concluding full control over content was an elusive reality. Stam's brief account of indigenous filmmakers made reference to two films: *Smoke Signals* and *Once Were Warriors,* making note the latter film was able to attract a degree of international attention. Stam also made special reference to the existence of indigenous media, which has a well-developed presence in the North American Arctic, Australia and the Amazon.[5] Stam failed to ascribe any common characteristics between the productions of indigenous populations, although this is understandable since he only listed two films produced by indigenous directors and provided only a brief overview of indigenous media. Such an examination of the characteristics of Fourth Cinema would be

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A similar search conducted on December 8, 2012 revealed 1,740,000 results, demonstrating over a one hundred percent increase in web pages that explore this topic. Consult, Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples,* 56 (Kindle Edition).

[2] *Ibid.,* 151 (Kindle Edition).

[3] Francesca Merlan, "Indigeneity: Global and Local," *Current Anthropology,* 50, no., 3 (June, 2009): 306.

[4] *Ibid.*, 307-308.

[5] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden: Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000), 283-285.

superficial and incomplete if it rested exclusively on the abovementioned indigenous productions. While one may question Stam's decision to insert only these two films specifically into his analysis of indigenous cinema since there is an assortment of indigenous films to choose from, his recognition of Fourth World cinema demonstrates it has growing relevance in the academic world.

While Stam refused to engage in a discussion of the characteristics of cinema constructed by indigenous populations, Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay established a set of characteristics that defined Fourth Cinema. In his speech at Auckland University in 2002, Barclay proposed the need for a different category of cinema that distinguished the works of indigenous filmmakers not only from First and Second Cinema, but the cinema from populations that liberated themselves from colonial control in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Barclay felt the characteristics film theorists ascribed to Third Cinema were inadequate to describe fully the cinematic productions of indigenous directors in settler societies due to the position of indigenous populations "outside the national outlook."[6] Although Barclay did not wish to discuss indigenous populations in a homogenising manner, he believed the broader criteria of a Fourth World population should include "the ancient roots" and the recognition "the ancient outlook persist[s]."[7] Both *A Thousand Roads* and the documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* utilise the language Barclay associated with Fourth Cinema for their own diverse purposes.[8]

Negotiating Out of Oppression: The NMAI and A Thousand Roads

Before an analysis of *A Thousand Roads* can take place, one must study the objective of the National Museum of the American Indian as the film's message is interconnected to the museum's agenda and politics. In 1989, the US Congress decided steps should be taken to recognise and support Indian issues by establishing three centres to display and research Indian history and discuss contemporary Indian identity.[9] In 1994, the Alexander Hamilton Customs House was converted into the George Gustev Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian. The George Gustev Heye Center was criticised by Patricia Penn Hilden for its failure to discuss oppressive government policies and for constructing a historical Indian identity that failed to give recognition to

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[6] Barry Barclay, "Celebrating Fourth Cinema", *Illusions* 35 (Winter 2003) http://kainani.edu/hwood/HawPacFilm/BarclayCelebratingFourthCInema.doc (accessed March 4, 2010).
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Although these two films use the language that aligns with characteristics of Fourth Cinema, Barclay would probably not view these two films as examples of Fourth Cinema since they are not feature-length films.
[9] Rader, *Engaged Resistance,* 208.

contemporary Indian identity.[10] The second phase of the National Museum of the American Indian was the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center in Suitland, Maryland in 1998 to help facilitate research on past and present Indian issues.[11] It took approximately fourteen years of intense debates before the grand unveiling of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. Great consideration was taken to ensure several tribes were consulted on the final construction of the National Museum of the American Indian. Elders in Canada and the United States decided the NMAI should commemorate and honour indigenous cultures as opposed to emphasising the disastrous effects of colonisation on indigenous communities and notions of victimry.[12]

The opening of the National Museum of the American Indian at the National Mall in Washington D.C. in 2004 was met with much excitement as a number of guest speakers highlighted its importance to explain issues of Indian history, identity and survivrance.[13] The architectural aesthetics of the NMAI takes on the appearance of a "wind-sculpted rock formation" while its architectural layout makes reference to "specific celestial references, such as an east-facing main entrance and a dome that opens to the sky."[14] The surrounding grounds of the NMAI were designed to embody "a theme that runs central to the NMAI – that of returning to a Native place."[15] Although criticism of the NMAI does exist, as will be discussed below, Dean Rader believed the location and architectural design of the NMAI offers the building an opportunity to engage with Americans as an "activist text." Rader believed the architectural design of the NMAI represents an important form of resistance since the building fails to conform architecturally "to past iconic structures in order to imbue their buildings with the values of that era, the architects of the NMAI looked to nature in order to encode their building with the value-laden icons of movement, reciprocity, beauty, and interconnectedness."[16] Rader further suggested the location of the

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[10] Patricia Penn Hilden, *From a Red Zone: Critical Perspectives on Race, Politics, and Culture* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 2006), 75-99.
[11] "Archive Center." http://nmai.si.edu/explore/collections/archive
[12] Deborah Madsen, "Walking the Walk/Talking the Talk: On Survivance, Spatial Narrative and the National Museum of the American Indian," in *Place and Native American Indian History and Culture,* ed. Joy Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 139-140.
[13] This is a term that has been utilised by Gerald Vizenor, which entails, "an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories…Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry." Consult, Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: narratives on Postindian survivance* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.
[14] "Architecture & Landscape." http://nmai.si.edu/visit/washington/architecture-landscape/
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Rader, *Engaged Resistance,* 213.

NMAI is a form of resistance as its position beside the capitol building demonstrates Indian removal policies have failed to keep the Indians to the west of the Mississippi River.[17]

Although the National Museum of the American Indian received great praise when it opened, one should not allow this praise to overshadow the criticisms that have been directed at the museum. These criticisms have included the institution's failure to incorporate major tribes into its exhibits,[18] and its decision to ignore the importance of Indian gaming to economic sustainability on reservations despite the significant financial contributions Indian casinos have made to the museum.[19] Perhaps the largest criticism by Natives and non-Natives has been directed at the NMAI's focus on the celebration of Native contemporary cultures as opposed to discussing the traumatic pasts of Native communities.[20] The American Indian Movement has been very vocal in its criticism regarding the NMAI's conscious decision not to highlight colonial oppression, as Clyde Bellecourt (White Earth Ojibwe), one of the co-founders of AIM, stated, "They [NMAI] should have a wall to speak about the holocaust of tribes who disappeared. They don't say who was responsible for it. Our history is not being told."[21] For over four decades, AIM members have targeted symbols and national monuments connected to the "discovery," settlement and colonisation of North America, including the occupations of the Mayflower in 1970 and Mount Rushmore in 1971, and participated further in the protests that occurred during the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' trans-Atlantic voyage. These criticisms directed at the NMAI are yet another strategy adopted by AIM to challenge the American grand narrative by bringing issues linked to historical trauma, violence and colonialism to the forefront.

Although there is controversy over how the NMAI has represented history and contemporary Indian identity, both Debora Madsen and Dean Rader asserted the NMAI is a form of Indian survivance, and challenges concepts of museumology and historical Indian identity. Debora Madsen discussed one of the primary objectives of the museum has been to highlight the "survivance" of Native Americans by engaging in a dialogue that

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[17] *Ibid.,* 212.
[18] Charles Pope, "D.C. Museum of Indian hailed as long overdue," *Deseret News,* September 21, 2004; Ryan Basen, "National Museum of the American Indian," *The Roanoke Times,* November 7, 2004.
[19] Charles Pope, "D.C. Museum of Indian hailed as long overdue," *Deseret News,* September 21, 2004; Ryan Basen, "National Museum of the American Indian," *The Roanoke Times,* November 7, 2004.
[20] Deborah Madsen, "Walking the Walk/Talking the Talk," 148-149; Charles Pope, "D.C. Museum of Indian hailed as long overdue," *Deseret News,* September 21, 2004; Ryan Basen, "National Museum of the American Indian," *The Roanoke Times,* November 7, 2004.
[21] Clyde Bellecourt as quoted in Deborah Madsen, "Walking the Walk/Talking the Talk," 149.

demonstrates tribal presence and cultural continuity.[22] Both popular and academic critics of the NMAI have recognised few artefacts in the museum's vast collection are actually put on show for the public, which has been one strategy utilised by the museum to break with conventional museum displays. The NMAI consciously chose to limit the number of historical artefacts on display since it wanted to engage with the general public over issues of cultural continuity and contemporary Native identity rather than historical Native identity.[23] Rader believed the NMAI has further deviated from standard museum practices by hosting multiple cultural performances designed to set the tone of the NMAI and inform the "visitor…how the vast, globular text of the museum should be read."[24] Rader believed the focus on cultural continuity informs the public that Indian identity is not only continuously in a state of flux and negotiating with external forces, but is comprised of a plurality of identities that cannot be reduced to a monolithic identity.[25]

Before this chapter embarks on a discussion of *A Thousand Roads,* it is important to recognise the efforts the NMAI has taken to construct a forum in which to showcase North American indigenous cinema. In May, 2005, the NMAI partnered with many other organisations in New York and Washington to help develop the First Nations\First Features Film Showcase. While Kristin Dowell believed one of the functions of the showcase was to construct a forum in which directors could build a network and discuss filmic strategies, it is important to foreground some of the themes Dowell identified with the showcase. Dowell believed the indigenous films promoted at this showcase explored themes related to oral storytelling, family relations, traditional cultures, urban identities and a spiritual relationship with the land.[26] The NMAI's participation in the showcase demonstrates the museum has recognised indigenous film can be used to convey these themes to broader audiences. Not only have these themes been central to the objectives of the NMAI, but are also discussed in the museum's signature film *A Thousand Roads.*

The mission statement of the NMAI highlights the importance of the museum to collaborate with non-Natives and Native Americans in "advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere – past , present and future…"[27] This desire to develop inter-racial collaboration was also an important

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[22] *Ibid.,* 150.
[23] Rader, *Engaged Resistance,* 216.
[24] *Ibid.,* 216.
[25] *Ibid.,* 220.
[26] Kristen Dowell, "Indigenous Media Gone Global: Strengthening Indigenous Identity On-and Offscreen at the First Nations\First Features Film Showcase," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (June, 2006): 376-381.
[27] "Mission Statement." http://nmai.si.edu/about/mission

aspect in the development of *A Thousand Roads,* and determined how *The Native Voice* discussed the film. Producer Scott Garen and executive producer Rick West (Cheyenne) recognised the importance of selecting a Native American director to film the project, choosing Chris Eyre due to his ability to work with individuals who have had little to no acting experience.[28] In an interview with Lise Balk, Rick West highlighted how a Native American director was instrumental in creating a non-romanticised depiction of indigenous culture. Since the language West used in this interview is critical for further discussion on concepts of authenticity later in this chapter, it is necessary to quote his dialogue with Balk,

> Native Voice: One of the most significant things to me about this film, besides the fact that It's [sic] extremely beautiful and moving and poetic, is that it has realism of Native life woven into it.
> West: Well yes, correct! I think that was one of our highest aspirations. I remember talking, at the time we hadn't even brought on Chris and Joy, and we were talking with, I call them the boys in black...from Hollywood (Barry Clark and Scott Garen whom I think the world of). And we were discussing this concept. And really, initially, it was a little bit (sub-consciously) romantic and poetic, It [sic] was full of sweeping landscapes, soaring eagles and walking elders is the way I put it.
> Native Voice: <laughter> So, you needed the Indian people to give you the dose of reality check.
> West: That's right.[29]

Scott Garen also recognised it was "important to have a Native voice" when developing *A Thousand Roads,* leading to his decision to hire Muscogee Creek writer Joy Harjo. One of the primary goals Harjo and Eyre mutually possessed was to depict the subjects in this film as humans in a contemporary setting. Furthermore, one can detect commonalities between the messages *A Thousand Roads* and the NMAI both project, as the film engages in a discussion about cultural continuity, socio-economic and cultural diversity, and an indigenous sense of place.

A Thousand Roads fulfils the museum's mission statement as it depicts the diversity of indigenous populations in North and South America. Lise Balk recognised the interconnected nature between the NMAI and *A Thousand Roads* in her discussion of the film,

> Under the watchful eye of NMAI Director Rick West, *A Thousand Roads* successfully fulfills the challenging goals of the film, which are also the goals of the museum, to speak to both the cumulative ancient experiences of Native people and the modern realities of living cultures. The NMAI opted for a creative and organic approach, Integrating [sic] storytelling form and cultural content through four dramatized slices of life of tribal people from each of the four directions.[30]

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[28] Although Alex Rice and Jeremiah Bitsui are both accomplished actors, Riana Malabed and Honorato Nanatay had no acting experience prior to their work on *A Thousand Roads.* Nanatay is an actual Quechan medicine man, who was given a significant degree of freedom to choose how he depicted Quechan medicine practices in the film, demonstrating Eyre's desire to film tribal spiritual issues in a respectful manner.
[29] Lise Balk, "Hollywood Meets Real Native Life, Prayer and Cultural Connection in New Film; An Interview with NMAI Director Rick West (Cheyenne) on A Thousand Roads," January 14, 2005.
[30] Lise, Balk, "Muskogee Poet Joy Harjo Partners with Hollywood on NMAI's special new Film, A Thousand Roads," *The Native Voice,* February 11, 2005. This acknowledgment that the film achieved the objectives of the

One manner in which *A Thousand Roads* contributes to this dialogue regarding complex indigenous identity is through the film's emphasis on the existence of different tribes as audiences are exposed to Salish, Inupiat, Mohawk, Navajo and Quechan characters. This film adds diversity to Eyre's filmic body of work since he previously focused on Navajo and Oglala Sioux identity: two tribes that are well established in visual and media representations. Popular unfamiliarity with tribes to the east of the Mississippi River is demonstrated by the comments expressed in a newspaper article printed in the *Washington Post:* "Very few Indians live here [Washington] anymore. They left for parts west long ago, but some of their teachings remain."[31] Although Houston Woods recognised the depiction of several diverse tribes with their own cultures in *A Thousand Roads* as a strength of the film,[32] it is important to elaborate on Woods' analysis of the film to highlight three important aspects of Eyre's filmic text. Firstly, the fact that the producers and Eyre chose tribes from extremely different geographical regions allows the film to highlight the cultural specificities of each depicted tribe. For the Inupiat, the film stresses the importance of the whale to their identity, which clearly has little relevance for the Navajo in the American Southwest. The Andean medicine man using condor feathers in his healing ceremony would not be replicated in Alaska as the condor is not indigenous to that region. Through these diverse images, *A Thousand Roads* is able to successfully challenge the monolithic notion of Native American culture held by popular society. Secondly, *A Thousand Roads* is able to challenge the notion Indians no longer exist in the eastern United States. Thirdly, the film demonstrates Native populations do not exclusively reside in the United States, but are scattered in different countries throughout the Americas. To some extent, in order to fully comprehend this revelation, the audience is required to possess some background information. While most audiences are aware the Andes are situated outside of the territorial boundaries of the United States, it is more difficult to situate the Mohawk stockbroker's geographical location of birth. Mohawk populations exist in both Canada and the United States, and it is not until Amanda Cook (Alex Rice) reveals she is from Kahnawake that audiences can identify her as a Canadian Mohawk, assuming they are aware of where Kahnawake is. Although an educated audience would

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NMAI can also be found in, Lise Balk, "Hollywood Meets Real Native Life, Prayer and Cultural Connection in New Film; An Interview with NMAI Director Rick West (Cheyenne) on A Thousand Roads," *The Native Voice,* January 14, 2005; "A Thousand Roads to show at the 2005 Native Voice Film Festival: Chris Eyre directs signature film of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian," *The Native Voice,* April 29, 2005; "A Thousand Roads to Premier at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival," *The Native Voice,* January 14, 2005.

[31] Annie Fullman, "Prayer Groups in Patterson Fellows Rituals of Indian Purifying," *Washington Post,* August 10, 1997, as quoted in Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians,* 123.

[32] Woods, *Native Features,* 39.

understand more of the nuances of the film than an uneducated audience, the film is still effective in projecting the diversity of indigenous cultures in the Americas to popular audiences.

In addition to demonstrating the cultural diversity of indigenous life in the Americas, the film also demonstrates Native Americans can occupy various socio-economic positions that reflect the reality of Indian Country. As discussed in the third chapter, one of the primary objectives of Chris Eyre is to construct complex, contemporary Native American images. Within the film, audiences are exposed to Amanda Cook, a female stockbroker in Manhattan, Johnny Chee (Jeremiah Bitsui), a Navajo youth who is on the edge of embracing gang-life, Dawn (Riana Malabed), a young Inupiat girl, and Don Santos Condori (Honorato Nanatay), a Quechan medicine man. For the purpose of this discussion, it is important to focus on the characters of Amanda Cook and Johnny Chee. The character of Amanda negotiates and deconstructs the stereotypical Native American urbanite image, which entails "a poor full-blood Indian living in a city who has been victimised by urbanisation. He [or she] is undereducated or lacks sufficient training or skills, and seems out of place in the city."[33] These characteristics are not representative of Amanda's character profile as she is a confident, successful stockbroker working in a high rise office in Manhattan and feels comfortable in the city. Amanda is a character who can boost self-esteem and provide the positive role model that is needed in Indian Country as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Johnny represents another aspect of reservation life that has become a growing problem over the last decade as evidenced by the existence of 225 reported gangs in 2009 in Indian Country compared to 75 gangs in 1997.[34] The NMAI has taken an interest in gang-life by sponsoring the Artist Leadership Program, which is designed to "rebuild cultural self-confidence" by encouraging artists to research and depict conditions that exist on the reservation, including gang-life.[35] The vignette pertaining to Johnny Chee was designed to offer Native American youths an alternative to gang life by highlighting how cultural continuity and an attachment to place can "give you everything you need."

One of the strengths of *A Thousand Roads* is the film's ability to link the importance of cultural continuity to Native American identity. One of the commonalities all four vignettes share is the ability of the main characters to speak, or at the very least, understand their tribal languages. Furthermore, the film projects the belief that an attachment to tribal cultures can help alleviate the problems indigenous populations encounter in their

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[33] Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America,* 26.
[34] Robbins, *All Indian Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos)*, 774 (Kindle Edition).
[35] "Artist Leadership Program." http://nmai.si.edu/connect/artist-leadership-program/

daily lives. Although Amanda is experiencing a stressful day working on third quarter reports and is unable to meet her sister for dinner, the stockbroker is able to reconnect with her tribal culture through Mohawk language by conversing with a Mohawk male she encounters on the streets of Manhattan.[36] This chance encounter with the Mohawk male reawakens Amanda's connection to her family and culture as audiences view her near the end of the film staring at a picture of her and, presumably, her grandmother in traditional Mohawk regalia. In the vignette that examines Dawn's experience in Port Barrow, an exchange between the Inupiat girl and her grandmother (Mary Ann Warden) reawakens a connection between Dawn and her ancestors. Although the Inupiat child is initially reluctant to embrace aspects of Inupiat culture, such as eating whale meat, which the narrator links to Inupiat identity, she is seen at the end of the film embracing her family and the larger Port Barrow community. The vignette examining Navajo youth identity foregrounds the importance of the Blessing Way ceremony conducted for Johnny as changing his outlook on life as he becomes more family and spiritually oriented.[37] The vignette examining the Quechan medicine man also demonstrates cultural continuity as the narrator informs the audience Don Santos Condori's "medicine goes back thousands of years." The decision to explore contemporary Quechan identity was a wise choice on the part of the director, writers and executive producers of *A Thousand Roads* since the film is able to re-appropriate symbols popular culture has used to stereotype indigenous populations as a vanished race. The footage of Machu Picchu the film employs is useful since the site is very recognisable in popular culture and has not only become a symbol of the sophistication of Incan civilisation, but a symbol of what has been inappropriately labelled the demise of Incan civilisation. While the political entity known as the Incan Empire no longer exists, *A Thousand Roads* makes a direct connection between Don Santos Condori and his "Incan ancestors" to demonstrate continuity. These four vignettes link to the broader message that tribal cultures form an integral component of Native identity regardless of gender, age, occupation and location.

A Thousand Roads highlights the importance of historical attachment to the land and establishes the importance of a sense of place to indigenous identity. Establishing this sense of place is important to contest Euro-American conceptions of Indian identity as Gerald Vizenor noted, "The *indian* was simulated to be an absence, to

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[36] *A Thousand Roads*, produced by Scott Garen and Barry Clark, directed by Chris Eyre, 40 minutes, National Museum of the American Indian, 2005, 1 DVD.
[37] *Ibid.*

be without a place."[38] This focus on sense of place also ties into the manner in which Troy Johnson has conceptualised indigenous identity: "Sense of Place is the key to being an Indigenous Person."[39] This cosmology is highlighted in the vignettes that examine Dawn, Johnny Chee and Don Santos Condori. Dawn becomes aware of the importance of place to Inupiat identity as her grandmother tells her "our people have lived here for thousands of years," and through this specific piece of land, the Inupiat are connected "to all who came before."[40] Through these two statements, the film acknowledges the long occupancy of the Inupiat on that specific piece of land and the importance of this land to Inupiat identity. In the vignette pertaining to Johnny, the narrator tells the Navajo youth "everything you need is here in the land of your people," while Johnny is contemplating his future with his friends. In regards to Don Santos Condori, the narrator also constructs a link between the medicine man and the land, "This is how it has been for thousands of years, in villages built of the rocks of your Incan ancestors…the city of your ancestors is a source of your strength."[41] This projection of a sense of place conveys to non-Natives the importance of land to Native American identity and creates a potential point of departure for a discussion over issues connected to sovereignty and treaty rights in a non-confrontational manner.

In order to assess the complex nature in which *A Thousand Roads* speaks to diverse audiences, it is necessary to discuss James Lujan's opinions of the NMAI. James Lujan believes the NMAI fails to focus on the important issues of contemporary indigenous identity in the Americas. Furthermore, he believes it is pointless from a Native American standpoint to assert the notion a contemporary indigenous identity continues to exist since such a point seems obvious. For Lujan, the pertinent question that should be focused upon is "why we're still here?" While Lujan believes the NMAI serves a functional purpose in informing "ignorant and racist" Euro-Americans that Native Americans continue to exist, he maintains "this is a museum of the Indian and by the Indian, it's just not necessarily a museum for the Indian."[42] Since it was previously established *A Thousand Roads* is an extension of the NMAI, one could postulate Lujan would direct the same criticism at the film. After all, *A Thousand Roads* fails to answer his question regarding why Native Americans continue to exist. But perhaps

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[38] Gerald Vizenor, as quoted by Joy Porter, "Introduction," in *Place and Native American Indian History and Culture,* ed., Joy Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 21.
[39] Troy Johnson, "American Indians, Manifest Destiny, and Indian Activism: A Cosmology of Sense of Place," in *Place and Native American Indian History and Culture,* ed. Joy Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 71.
[40] *A Thousand Roads*, produced by Scott Garen and Barry Clark, directed by Chris Eyre, 40 minutes, National Museum of the American Indian, 2005, 1 DVD.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] James Lujan, "A Museum of the Indian, not for the Indian," *The American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. ¾ (Summer- Autumn, 2005): 516.

Lujan was under the mistaken impression that all Indians are just like him when he stated the NMAI has nothing to offer the Native audience. As discussed in the first chapter, some Native Americans living on reservations and in urban environments lack the role models to boost their self-esteem, which this film can provide through the character of Amanda Cook and her successful career. Secondly, the images *A Thousand Roads* projects can inspire Native Americans, who live in urban environments and potentially feel detached or alienated from their tribal culture, to seek inspiration to reconnect with their culture and community.[43]

Writers for *The Native Voice* have repeatedly stated the NMAI was designed to speak to both Native and non-Native audiences. *A Thousand Roads* has had a tremendous burden placed on it since it was estimated that a significant number of the four million annual visitors to the NMAI, who have had little exposure to depictions of Native American identity outside of Western genre films, would watch the film.[44] Scott Garen[45] and Rick West[46] tried to promote the relevancy of this film to non-Native audiences by asserting the position that *A Thousand Roads* projected "universal experiences." This is a problematic assertion. Firstly, the film looked at different aspects of Native American cultures, whether depicting the blessing way ceremony for Johnny or the connection of the Inupiat to the whale. Secondly, *A Thousand Roads* relayed the importance of sense of place to Native American identity, which are issues the dominant society cannot relate to in the same way as each indigenous person.

Although Jana Sequoya Magdaleno termed "authenticity" as a "figment of the imagination,"[47] the term has continued to possess significant meaning in North American society and can be used by directors and film critics to promote a film. The notion *A Thousand Roads* projected an "authentic" Native voice was referenced in three of the articles *The Native Voice* printed about the film. In his discussion with Frank King III and Lise Balk King about *A Thousand Roads,* Chris Eyre discussed the vignette of Amanda Cook, and how her conversation with the Mohawk male in the Mohawk language "really triggers this woman's history, or, her sense of her self."

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[43] The projection of romanticised images to Native American audiences could be potentially problematic since Native Americans may internalise these images.

[44] Lise Balk, "Hollywood Meets Real Native Life, Prayer and Cultural Connection in New Film; An Interview with NMAI Director Rick West (Cheyenne) on A Thousand Roads," *The Native Voice*, January 14, 2005.

[45] "Joy Harjo and Scott Garen review their collaboration on A Thousand Roads with The Native Voice at the Sundance Film Festival Filmmakers' Lounge," *The Native Voice,* February 11, 2005.

[46] Lise Balk, "Hollywood Meets Real Native Life, Prayer and Cultural Connection in New Film; An Interview with NMAI Director Rick West (Cheyenne) on A Thousand Roads," *The Native Voice,* January 1, 2005.

[47] Jana Sequoya Magdaleno, "How (!) Is an Indian? A contest of stories, Round 2," in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States,* eds. by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 284.

Although Eyre's summation of the plot structure prompted Lise Balk King to comment on the "authentic" nature of the film, Eyre avoided discussing *A Thousand Roads* in terms of authenticity.[48] Although West was willing to make such claims to *A Thousand Road*'s authenticity, one needs to question West's conception of authenticity. Before Chris Eyre signed on to direct the film, *A Thousand Roads* consisted of, even if unconsciously, romanticised images of sweeping landscape shots, eagles and elders. West believed these images were "inauthentic" since he felt a need to bring in Chris Eyre to direct the project. However, the sweeping landscape scenes have remained in the finished project, and the film still romanticised the interconnected nature between Native Americans and animals as a crow was used to help Johnny connect with his Navajo traditions. The audience also witnessed scenes of a condor flying in the air as the narrator of *A Thousand Roads* discussed how Don Santos Condori used the power of the condor in his medicine. In the case of Dawn, audiences viewed scenes of the "walking elders" West was critical of as Dawn's grandmother helped her connect to Inupiat identity. Audiences are still able to view the same images in *A Thousand Roads* that West claimed were inauthentic before Chris Eyre agreed to work on the project. The difference between the original version of *A Thousand Roads* and what has changed in the final version of the film was the authorship of the text. Perhaps that a Cheyenne-Arapaho director was responsible for creating these images gave them a different meaning in the mind of West, suggesting he believes authenticity is interconnected with concepts of self-representation.[49]

While critics for *The Native Voice* and some people involved in the development of *A Thousand Roads* believed the film projected an authentic image of indigenous identity, non-Native critics have recognised the film's romanticisation of Native American identity. Ann Hornaday's review for *The Washington Post* has indicated she was aware of the film's goal to illustrate the complexity of Native American lifestyles, but she believed such a lofty goal has developed "a portrait that either glides superficially over a complicated history or labours under too much symbolic weight." Such a criticism appears to be unavoidable when attempting to condense the diversity of indigenous culture in the Americas into a short forty minute film and to focus on only one narrative would betray the goals of *A Thousand Roads*. Originally, the film was to include nine vignettes, but Eyre and the executive producers opted to cut half of them out of the film, illustrating Eyre's awareness of the need to balance the substance of each vignette with the number of vignettes put into the film. The director of the

[48] Frank King III, "Director Chris Eyre Inspired by Filmmaking Journey on A Thousand Roads A Native Voice Exclusive," *The Native Voice,* January 14, 2005.
[49] Dean Rader would probably agree with this position as the academic noted, "Authenticity is a façade – we are what we make people believe we are." Consult, Rader, *Engaged Resistance,* 156.

NMAI believed this short film would be the first exposure of many non-Natives to Native American contemporary identity, which placed an enormous amount of pressure on Eyre to show non-Natives the cultural plurality of Native American lifestyles. Despite this criticism, Hornaday applauded the makers of *A Thousand Roads* for refusing to engage in a discussion about the negative effects American westward advancement and colonialism have inflicted on Native American communities, even if she believed the film "too often succumbs to contrived, didactic romanticism."[50] While Hornaday's review was critical of the romanticised images embedded in *A Thousands Roads,* Peter Hanson welcomed the images Eyre created in the film. Hanson showed an awareness that *A Thousand Roads* was designed to depict the diversity and importance of indigenous traditions in a contemporary world. Although Hanson recognised critics of the film may accuse Eyre of creating "heartening, sun-kissed images" that "sand the edges off modern Native life," the film critic believed these images projected "respect and unity." Furthermore, Hanson was also willing to avoid overt negative criticism of these images since Eyre's larger body of work "powerfully depicted the rigors of reservation existence."[51]

The review by Hanson has posited a very valid point, and perhaps it is important to revisit this notion of the "burden of representation" indigenous filmmakers have felt obligated to address. It would be difficult for any film, particularly a short drama such as *A Thousand Roads,* to address all of the stereotypical images that exist about Native American identity. However, when one looks at the large body of work Eyre has accomplished in his filmic career, audiences get a wide perspective of the complexities that exist in Indian Country. Ward Churchill argued one of the reasons the dominant society has been unwilling to acknowledge the existence of contemporary Native American identity was because it forced the dominant society to revisit the broken treaties and violence associated with colonisation.[52] *A Thousand Roads'* construction of contemporary Native American identity omitted the negative consequences of the collusion between Native and Euro-American cultures, which has facilitated a non-confrontational discussion on Native identity with the dominant society.[53] This is important

[50] Ann Hornaday, "'Thousand Roads': Paved With Good Intentions," April 12, 2005.
[51] Peter Hanson, "A Thousand Roads." http://www.filmthreat.com/reviews/7029/
[52] Churchill's perspective on this issue is discussed in the first chapter.
[53] Perhaps more importantly, the film serves a function of welcoming tourists, who are unfamiliar with contemporary Indian identity, to the NMAI. Prins believed unequal power relations between Native communities and the dominant society have forced indigenous populations to seek other strategies to "stir outsiders into action on their behalf." This mobilisation of outsider support is designed to ensure the protection and promotion of Native culture and to assist in broadcasting Native American land rights. The use of the romanticised image is not simply appealing to the dominant society, but also to Native American populations due to its ability to "successfully promote native rights" and its ability to construct "indigenous self-understanding as victims." Consult, Harald Prins, "Visual Media and the Primitivist Perplex: Colonial Fantasies, Indigenous Imagination,

since it was assumed audiences would have little exposure to contemporary Native American identity, and a focus on issues related to oppression and historical trauma may have created a negative reaction among the dominant society. Furthermore, while critics have criticised *A Thousand Roads* for its romanticised images, the film is an important text since it deconstructs other stereotypes and complicates Native American identity by depicting multiple tribal cultures and contemporary Native Americans in diverse socio-economic positions.

Isuma: Engaging with Qallunaat through Cyberspace

Despite the positive benefits technology can bring to indigenous communities, one has to be cautious of its pitfalls. The issue of incorporating satellite and internet technology to disseminate media has become an interest of academic concern about the effects of *glocalisation* on indigenous communities scattered around the world. Furthermore, academics have been concerned Western influence will penetrate into isolated indigenous communities thereby putting the integrity of indigenous cultures at risk.[54] This trepidation may be a moot issue as studies have illustrated Western programming is not embraced on a global scale as previously believed by scholars in the 1980s.[55] Despite apprehensions that greater Western exposure may promote assimilation, the benefits to isolated communities of employing satellite technology, at least for the present, have outweighed the costs. This can be demonstrated by examining the case study of the Inuit and how they have utilised television and internet for their own purposes.

Academics have discussed the potential effect the introduction of new technologies in the Arctic can have on Inuit communities and identities. The introduction of television into the Arctic led the Inuit,[56] academics[57] and the IBC[58] to debate the negative effects[59] and the benefits of Western programming to Inuit

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and Advocacy in North America," in *Media Worlds: anthropology on New Terrain,* eds., Faye Ginsburg, *et al.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 58-74. While this first reason may be applicable to the agenda of the National Museum of the American Indian, the concept of victimry is a notion the museum attempts to disassociate from Native American identity.

[54] Faye Ginsburg, and Lorna Roth, "Case Study: Indigenous Television," in *Tele-visions : an introduction to studying television,* ed. Glen Creeber (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), 146.

[55] For a brief historiography of Western media and its effects on global audiences, consult, Michael Curtis, "Globalisation," in *Television Studies*, ed. Toby Miller (London: BFI, 2002), 43-46.

[56] Despite that Mary Simon, the president of ICC, was critical of the violent images that television would spread among the Inuit, she recognised the potential of this technology in disseminating educational and cultural programs to the Inuit population. Marianne Stenbaek, "Forty Years of Cultural Change among the Inuit in Alaska, Canada and Greenland: Some Reflections," *Arctic* 40, no. 4 (December, 1987): 307.

[57] Marianne Stenbaek also believed Inuit management over the IBC has allowed the Inuit the ability to develop programs that "re-affirmed" Inuit culture "on their own terms." Marianne Stenbaek, "Forty Years of Cultural Change among the Inuit in Alaska, Canada and Greenland," 300, 307, 309.

identity. The same debates occurred when the Inuit were hooked up to cyberspace.[60] Although Nelson Graburn believed the introduction of the internet to Arctic communities would have detrimental effects on the Inuit population, severely challenging Inuit control over their own culture and society,[61] more recent scholarship by Neil Blair Christiansen has shown these concerns are not entirely warranted. A broad assessment of Inuit use of cyberspace by Christiansen recognised the Inuit use the internet to "affirm and reproduce their offline identities online."[62] Although Christiansen was aware internet access is unevenly distributed among Arctic communities[63] and is an expensive form of communication and entertainment,[64] many of the Inuit believe the internet has been far more beneficial in asserting Inuit identity in a global forum than its potential risk to Inuit identity.[65]

Isuma is aware of the benefits the internet can bring not only to creating a periphery to core dialogue about Inuit identity, but in archiving its documentary films for future viewings and promoting its feature films *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen.* Faye Ginsburg's examination of Isuma has led her to praise this company for their use of "digital technologies in the interests of storytelling as a way to generate broader understanding of their histories and cultures, for wider audiences but, most importantly, for their own cultural futures."[66] *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* both utilised websites to convey to audiences some of the cultural dimensions of the plotlines so audiences would have a better grasp of the films. Faye Ginsburg studied the website used by Isuma while the film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* was in production, and noted it possessed biographies of the actors involved, writings from a reporter and anthropologist, and Quick-time film showing the creation of the film.[67] The website[68] is currently running seven years after the release of the film, with

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[58] The IBC has employed concerns about the detrimental influence of Western television on Inuit identity to advocate for the necessity of its very existence. http://www.inuitbroadcasting.ca/history_e.htm
[59] Nelson Graburn expressed apprehension about the potential detrimental effect of visual media on Inuit identity if southern television flooded the region. This is discussed in, Valeria Alia, *Uncovering the North: news, media, and aboriginal people* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 110.
[60] This chapter will use the term "cyberspace" as Faye Ginsburg believed the term "Digital Age" carries connotations of "inequality that characterise access (or lack of access) to resources, technological and otherwise, around much of the globe." Faye Ginsburg, "Rethinking Documentary in the Digital Age," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 1 (Autumn, 2006): 129.
[61] Pettit, "Confronting Misrepresentation," 180.
[62] Neil Blair Christiansen, *Inuit in Cyberspace: embedding offline, identities online* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2003), 92.
[63] *Ibid,* 54, 59.
[64] *Ibid.,* 65
[65] *Ibid.,* 110.
[66] In her assessment of Aboriginal use of cyber-space, Ginsburg also examined the website *US Mob* and *Raven Tales.* Faye Ginsburg, "Rethinking the Digital Age," in *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics,* eds. Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 294.
[67] Ginsburg, "Rethinking the Digital Age," 295-296.

all of the information reported by Ginsburg and the quick-time footage stored in an archive. Ginsburg labelled this project as "an incredible Web site...beautifully designed in every sense," illustrating her contention Isuma continues to be on the cutting edge of technology.[69]

Not only has Isuma recognised the importance of cyberspace to reaffirm cultural identity and as a viable tool for self-promotion, but also to promote indigenous video to create a periphery to centre dialogue and a periphery to periphery dialogue. The use of the internet has allowed indigenous media to have a voice without participating in film festivals, which can be an expense some filmmakers cannot afford. Furthermore, Isuma TV developed a forum for the dissemination of indigenous film in order "to assist people to listen to one another, to recognise and respect diverse ways of experiencing our world, and honor those differences as a human strength."[70] While Isuma TV has stressed the importance of indigenous participation on its website for uploading films and for critiquing existing works on its website, it recognises the importance of Euro-American participation as receptors of these images and for providing feedback.[71] It is evident the people who log onto Isuma TV have primarily been Euro-American populations residing south of the 60 degree latitude line as the Isuma TV website has created a landscape in cyberspace where the Euro-American desire for observing foreign culture can be accessed from the comforts of home, internet cafes and educational facilities.[72] Although G. Mosquera expressed doubts on the ability of indigenous populations to sustain a continuous periphery to periphery dialogue,[73] Isuma has utilised cyberspace with the objective of sustaining this dialogue. Isuma TV has invited indigenous populations around the world to participate in uploading their videos for a global audience, but such participation has been geographically limited to indigenous populations in the Americas and the Arctic.[74]

Contesting Scientists: Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change

Zacharias Kunuk's entry into the debate on climate change in the documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* seems almost natural since the dominant society has associated indigenous identity with

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[68] Live From the Set: *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen.* http://www.sila.nu/live (Accessed February 5, 2011).
[69] Ginsburg, "Rethinking the Digital Age," 295-296.
[70] "Isuma TV." http//www.isuma.tv/hi/en/about-us (accessed May 3, 2011).
[71] "Isuma TV." http//www.isuma.tv/hi/en/about-us (access May 3, 2011).
[72] A one month observation of the location of the people who logged onto the Isuma website indicates the majority of people reside in North America and Europe.
[73] This is discussed in, David Slater, "Post-Colonial Questions for Global Times," *Review of International Political Economy* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1998): 647-678.
[74] This statement is based on an assessment of the videos present on the Isuma TV website.

environmental concerns, and the ICC has been actively involved in monitoring and assessing climatic change in the Arctic. The ICC, founded in 1977, has asserted the desire to "develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment," as one of its primary objectives.[75] This desire to safeguard the Arctic environment is also present in the Inuit Circumpolar Charter, "THAT international and national policies and practices should give due consideration to protection for the Arctic and sub-Arctic environment and to the preservation and evolution of Inuit culture and societies."[76] One manner in which the ICC has attempted to achieve its goals of protecting the Arctic environment is to assert the validity of Inuit traditional knowledge on climate change.[77] Arctic Climate Impact Assessments (ACIA) have been instrumental in linking Inuit identity to climatic concerns by using the image of the Inuit for its own purposes. Marybeth Long Martello argued more recent ACIA studies replaced scientific reports previously used in these studies in favour of utilising Inuit observations of climatic changes in the Arctic to reach a broad audience.[78] One should not come to the erroneous conclusion that the ACIA and other organisations concerned with climatic changes have been speaking for the Inuit as they have not only collaborated with the ACIA, but have initiated studies that have provided them a voice in the debate surrounding climatic changes. [79] This Inuit participation into the discussion of climate change has clearly been beneficial to the Inuit as the ACIA 2005 report and the ACIA *Impacts of a Warming Arctic Highlights* have conveyed to audiences the importance of hunting to Inuit cultural survival,[80] which is an issue that has been minimised in propaganda created by animal rights activists against Inuit hunting.

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[75] "Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)."
http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?auto_slide=&ID=16&Lang=En&Parent_ID=¤t_slide_num=
[76] "Inuit Circumpolar Council Charter."
http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?auto_slide=&ID=374&Lang=En&Parent_ID=22¤t_slide_num=
[77] "Responding to Global Climate Change: The Perspective of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference on The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment."
http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?auto_slide=&ID=267&Lang=En&Parent_ID=¤t_slide_num=
[78] Marybeth Long Martello, "Arctic Indigenous Peoples as Representations and Representatives of Climate Change," *Social Studies of Science* 38, no. 3 (June, 2008): 352-358.
[79] "Climate Change."
http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?auto_slide=&ID=385&Lang=En&Parent_ID=¤t_slide_num=; Martello, "Arctic Indigenous Peoples as Representations and Representatives of Climate Change," 358-359.
[80] The importance of hunting to cultural survival is discussed in, *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment: Highlights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. Consult, "AMAP." http://www.amap.no/

Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change, directed by Zacharias Kunuk and Ian Mauro, is a multilayered text[81] that allows Inuit elders from Igloolik, Resolute Bay, Iqaluit and Pangnirtung to inform audiences of their own respective memoryscapes. The purpose of this documentary is to establish a dialogue with the *Qallunaat* audience about their perspectives on climate change at a localised level, and the dangers the Inuit face due to global warming and changing behavioural patterns among the polar bear population. This film humanises Inuit concerns regarding the effect of climate change on the security of their communities and the continuation of their cultural activities. *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change,* and its broadcast via the internet, is important to these four Inuit communities for two interconnected reasons. Firstly, this video and its presence on the Isuma TV website gives these four communities the means to enter into a dialogue with some scientists who marginalise Inuit perspectives.[82] Secondly, *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* gives Inuit elders a sense of self-worth, an objective of Kunuk's broader agenda as he maintains, "the Inuit have much to offer the rest of the world."[83] In addition to the above stated agenda, *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* has ulterior motives as it discusses the detrimental effects of scientific monitoring systems on Arctic wildlife, contests scientific knowledge about the Arctic and counters *Qallunaat* claims about Inuit cruelty to animals.

The documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* is not the first time Kunuk used video to convey the importance of Inuit hunting practices for reinforcing Inuit cultural identity, as he examined this topic in *Bowhead!*[84] *Bowhead!* demonstrates Kunuk's desire to engage with the *Qallunaat* audience[85] over the violation of the bowhead hunt ban by three Inuit in 1994 and the alteration in the law, which permitted one bowhead hunt in Nunavut territory on an annual basis. The documentary demonstrates the integral part of bowhead hunting to Inuit culture by discussing Inuit stories and noting the presence of bowhead bones in Inuit historical material culture. *Bowhead!* contrasts the importance of the bowhead to Inuit culture with the European desire to hunt bowhead whales simply for profit. The documentary shows a series of historical images and discusses how European overharvesting of the bowhead whale for commercial profit has placed the bowhead population in a

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[81] The documentary criticises the Nunavut government for centring its economy on mining in a subtle manner as it makes references to the fact that the mining industry is having a detrimental effect on seals and the environment. The documentary does not specifically mention mining in Nunavut and most audiences, who are unfamiliar with Nunavut's economy and Kunuk's critical stance against Nunavut for allowing this mining to occur, would probably assume this documentary is simply an indictment against mining outside of Nunavut territory.
[82] Laugrand, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity,* 14.
[83] Evans, *Isuma,* 28.
[84] *Bowhead!* directed by Zacharias Kunuk, 52 minutes, Igloolik Isuma Productions. http://www.isuma.tv/lo/en/isuma-productions/arviq-bowhead
[85] This is one of the few documentaries directed by Kunuk that is narrated in English.

precarious position. These themes of Inuit hunting practices and Euro-American endangerment of Arctic wildlife are also present in *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change.*

The *Qallunaat* press has been critical of Inuit hunting practices and, at times, has constructed an inaccurate image of the Inuit and their relationship to the Arctic wildlife. George Wenzel recognised the strategies proponents of the sealskin ban have utilised to mobilise public opinion against Inuit hunting practices. These strategies have included using photos that either depict the helplessness of the seal population and/or vilify the Inuit. Unfortunately for the Inuit, these images have been designed to marginalise the cultural importance of this hunt to Inuit communities and create popular sympathy for the seal. Wenzel recognised opponents of the seal hunt have structured their arguments around the recognition that hunters tend to use modern technologies, thus allowing them to kill more seals than traditional hunting methods allowed previously. Furthermore, critics have argued the Inuit desire for economic gains from hunting seals has motivated them to increase the number of their kills, thereby depleting the seal population.[86] Wenzel argued these criticisms force the Inuit to abandon their technology and "either [live in] an antipodean 'Nanook of the North' state of being that is historically impossible and culturally non-adaptive or cultural assimilation."[87] Concerns of how Inuit hunting practices have been depicted in the media are also the focus of Valerie Alia's work. Alia was extremely critical of a reporter's writings of the hunting practices of the Holman Island community. The results of this brief journey, which were published in *The Telegraph,* constructed a negative portrayal of the Inuit as "merciless" who hunt for their own benefit with little regard for the community. Unfortunately, Alia's research has demonstrated these erroneous conclusions are not an isolated incident as they continue to be propagated throughout the media. Alia termed these articles that have erroneously and negatively depicted indigenous populations as "Imputed Filth," which contributes to and reinforces negative attitudes readers may hold toward these populations. [88]

Although the EU instituted a sealskin ban in 1983, it decided to take greater steps to prevent Inuit hunting of seals and proposed a ban on seal products, which was contested by the Canadian government. Inuit communities exhibited concern when it was revealed the EU was proposing a ban on seal products, leading the Inuit to discuss this proposed ban in the media. An editorial printed in the *Globe and Mail* commended the Canadian government for supporting Inuit hunting, but challenged animal rights activists to undertake "any real

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[86] George Wenzel, "Inuit Sealing and Subsistence Managing after the E.U. Sealskin Ban," *Geographiske Zeitschrift* 84, no. ¾ (1996): 131-138.
[87] *Ibid.,* 139.
[88] Valerie Alia, *Media And Ethnic Minorities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 47.

effort to understand the Inuit way of life, or to take any real steps to avoid inflicting harm on us."[89] The Inuit have taken any threat to the maintenance of their hunting seriously as they contend hunting is a critical part of Inuit culture and identity. Most EU members disregarded Inuit concerns as the EU Parliament passed its proposed ban on seal products with an overwhelming majority of 550 to 49 votes.[90] Shortly after this vote occurred, Canadian Governor General Michelle Jean travelled to Nunavut to contest the ban on seal products, arguing the seal hunt is a vital part of Inuit cultural identity.[91] A survey indicated over eighty per cent of Canadian respondents believed the Inuit should be allowed to continue their seal hunts,[92] demonstrating strong support for the Inuit in Canada. Despite this support, the overwhelming majority who voted for the seal products ban in the EU Parliament suggests the Inuit need to make greater efforts to convey the importance of Inuit perspectives on the Arctic wildlife and their hunting ethos to international communities.

Although *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* does not enter into a direct dialogue with the EU seal products ban in 2009, it does challenge the reasoning behind the erection of the seal products ban. The ban was created as a result of scientific assessments that argued the harp seal population is in decline and the belief the Inuit are cruel to the wildlife. *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* devotes over fifteen minutes to discussions on Inuit observations and interactions with the wildlife, indicating the importance of these topics to Kunuk. There are two different ways this documentary engages with *Qallunaat* concerns regarding Arctic wildlife and Inuit hunting practices. Firstly, *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* questions the validity of scientific knowledge in the Arctic and argues scientists are responsible for harming Arctic wildlife. The Inuit comment on how the tracking of the polar bear population by scientists has had a detrimental effect as these animals are no longer able to hunt properly. Other Inuit make reference to stories regarding the discovery of dead polar bears, which were the result of overdoses from tranquiliser drugs administered by scientists. The Inuit argue it is not climate change that is affecting the polar bear population, but the role scientists play in the Arctic. Furthermore, Inuit knowledge contradicts scientific claims particularly in regard to the assertion the polar bear population is endangered as the Inuit argue the polar bear population in the Arctic is increasing and poses a potential risk to Inuit populations.

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[89] "Inuit on sealing: We want your mind, not your money," *Globe and Mail Online,* March 11, 2009.
[90] "Inuit bid to overturn EU seal ban fails," *Nunatsiaq News,* September 15, 2011.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674bid_to_have_seal_ban_overturned_falls/
[91] "Alex Panetta, "GG eats seal to show support for Inuit" *Nunatsiaq News,* May 29, 2009.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/2009/905/90529/news/nunavut/90529_2190.html
[92] "Most Canadians back sea hunt: poll," *Nunatsiaq News,* June 21, 2010.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/210610_most_canadians_back_seal_hunt_poll/

This dialogue asserts the experiences and knowledge of Inuit hunters, and positions them as the most informed people on changes occurring in the Arctic, while marginalising scientific claims about Arctic wildlife. Secondly, the documentary establishes the notion Inuit hunting practices are connected to Inuit historical identity and continue to make up a sizable portion of the Inuit diet. Due to these reasons, the Inuit assert that hunting is critical for their survival. The Inuit also enter into a dialogue with *Qallunaat* concerns over Inuit overharvesting of animals in the Arctic by arguing they never hunt more than they need and cruelty to animals violates Inuit hunting ethos.

Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change was well received among the *Qallunaat* audience partly due to the outreach program Isuma initiated. The website www.isuma.yv/IKCC(../../../../IKCC was instrumental in creating publicity for the film, and resulted in an invitation being extended to Kunuk and Mauro to participate in the Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival, and to screen a segment of their documentary at the UN while discussions on climate change were taking place.[93] The Conversations with the Earth[94] aims to end the marginalisation of indigenous populations on issues regarding climatic change by asserting their respective knowledge on climatic conditions. One strategy it has utilised to accomplish this goal is the promotion of the Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival. The inauguration of the Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival in 2009 consisted of twenty-two short documentaries that examined the relationships indigenous populations from Third World and settler societies possess with their environments. The mission statement of the film festival demonstrates a desire to project a spiritual connection to the land and an authoritative knowledge on climatic conditions on a localised level,

> The traditional knowledge of many communities embodies a deeply spiritual and ancient relationship with the earth's systems and cycles. Traditional songs and languages, clothing, architecture, foods, motifs, daily rituals and mythological epics are encoded with local survival information. By sharing these indigenous stories of vulnerability and adaptation, we also share ideas on how ancestral wisdom is being incorporated into adaptation strategies. By cherishing the value of traditional knowledge we can discover how best to adapt to a changing climate.[95]

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[93] Marlo Campbell, "From Igloolik to Copenhagen: documentary project brings the Inuit perspective on climate change to the world stage," *Uptown.* http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/inuit-knowledge-and-climate-change/ikcc-story-winnipegs-uptown

[94] An assessment of the language present in the "core beliefs" of the Conversations with the Earth demonstrates this organisation possesses an indigenist position, "Traditional and indigenous communities depend on a healthy relationship with the Land and therefore possess a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and practical experience in adapting to long-term changes in their environment." Consult, Conversations with the Earth, http://www.conversationsearth.org (accessed October 10, 2012)

[95] Indigenous Voices on Climate Change Film Festival, December 9-13, 2009.

This stated intent aligns with the message *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* attempts to convey. Furthermore, Kunuk and Mauro developed a webcast on Thursday evenings from 20:00 to 22:00 Igloolik time in order to interact with *Qallunaat* audiences over the content of their documentary or answer any questions regarding climatic concerns in the Arctic.[96]

Although the results of the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference were received with mixed reactions,[97] critical responses to *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* were relatively positive.[98] The manner in which these reviews discussed this documentary suggests critics were eager to engage in a discussion that revolved around familiar images that connected Inuit interaction with the land. Although a report by the CBC discussed how the film agreed with scientific conclusions regarding the impact of climate change on the Arctic, it failed to acknowledge Inuit disagreements with scientists over the polar bear population.[99] Guy Dixon's assessment of the documentary highlighted Kunuk's ability to act as a mediator through whom the elders could express their thoughts about climate change to the international audience. Dixon expressed admiration for the documentary as the critic used adjectives such as "groundbreaking" and "invaluable" to describe *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*. Kenton Smith's assessment of the documentary was also positive as the critic discussed the importance of Inuit elders passing on their knowledge of climatic changes occurring in the Arctic.[100] Although Dixon and Smith acknowledged the contentious belief held by Inuit elders that the earth has tilted on its axis, both critics attempted to reaffirm Inuit observations that the sun sets in a different location by citing atmospheric refraction as the cause.

Despite that reviewers of the documentary were willing to engage with *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* on issues related to the impact of climatic changes on the environment, there was less willingness to engage with Inuit claims that scientists were responsible for the problems Arctic wildlife has been experiencing.

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[96] Marlo Campbell, "From Igloolik to Copenhagen: documentary project brings the Inuit perspective on climate change to the world stage," *Uptown*. http://www.isuma.tv/hi/en/inuit-knowledge-and-climate-change/ikcc-story-winnipegs-uptown

[97] For a result of the conference and some reactions to it, consult, Daniel Bodansky, "The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference: A Post-Mortem," http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/rome2007/docs/Copenhagen_Climate_Change.pdf

[98] It is possible that individuals who do not believe in the validity of global warming may be highly critical of the message this documentary projects, but the reviews examined appeared to all support the validity of Inuit knowledge on climate change.

[99] "Film festival brings Inuit perspective to climate conference," *CBC News*, December, 9, 2009. http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/film/story/2009/12/09/kunuk-film.html

[100] Kenton Smith, "The human face of climate change," *Uptown*, November 4, 2010.

Guy Dixon's review of *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* was one of the few reviews to discuss this aspect of the documentary, and his review only devoted two sentences to this issue,

> Contrary to what conservationists and scientists say, the elders interviewed in the film believe the polar-bear population is increasing. They say more bears are finding their way into communities, and the animals are being traumatized by scientists, who are putting radio collars around the bears' necks and doing other research that disturbs their natural life, usually spent in almost total isolation and silence.[101]

Perhaps Inuit knowledge is only valid when it confirms what science is attempting to confirm, namely climatic changes occurring in the Arctic? After all, critics were more inclined to ignore Inuit observations that contested scientific knowledge. Perhaps critics felt uncomfortable about this Inuit indictment against the manner in which scientific research has been conducted in the Arctic. Judging from the comments posted by readers of the article "New documentary recounts bizarre climate changes seen by Inuit elders,"[102] there appeared to be a genuine concern among viewers about the potential effects climatic changes will have on them. This may suggest viewers of the documentary were more concerned with discussing issues of direct relevance to them at the expense of marginalising or omitting discussions on less relevant matters such as the polar bear population. While this is speculative, it is evident film critics were more willing to engage with images that discussed Inuit knowledge of their environment than with those that challenged scientific conduct and knowledge in the Arctic. It will be interesting to determine the long-term effect of *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* on discussions of climate change and Inuit hunting practices, and whether Kunuk will revisit this topic in the future.

Conclusion

Both *A Thousand Roads* and *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* attempt to assert themselves into politicised debates through the utilisation of images the dominant society has connected to indigenous identity. *A Thousand Roads* not only exhibits the diversity, both culturally and socio-economically, of Indian Country, but defines indigenous identity and connects the importance of land to this identity. Although *The Native Voice* attempted to construct broad appeal for the film by promoting *A Thousand Roads* as "authentic" and claimed the film possessed "universal experiences," Euro-American critics believed the film romanticised Native American identity. *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* not only allows the Inuit from four communities to discuss their

[101] Guy Dixon, "New documentary recounts bizarre climate changes seen by Inuit elders," *Globe and Mail,* October 19, 2010. http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/new-documentary-recounts-bizarre-climate-changes-seen-by-inuit-elders/article1215305/
[102] *Ibid.*

observations of climate change in the Arctic, but also to enter into a debate regarding Inuit hunting practices and the role these practices play in reinforcing Inuit cultural identity. Isuma's utilisation of cyberspace has allowed Kunuk to construct a dialogue with international communities and organisations, including the United Nations, over issues that affect these four Inuit communities. While film critics were willing to engage with the images that connected the Inuit to the environment, they were less eager to engage in discussions with the Inuit over their hunting practices and knowledge of polar bear demographics.

Conclusion - Looking into the Future of North American Indigenous Cinema

This dissertation has discussed the objectives of North American indigenous directors Sherman Alexie, Chris Eyre and Zacharias Kunuk as they have used filmic texts to open up a dialogue with indigenous and non-indigenous audiences. This dissertation has demonstrated that stereotypes of Indians permeated many levels of American society and continue to influence the manner in which American society conceptualises Indian identity. Berkhofer has recognised that American society conceptualised Native American identity by focusing on Indian deficiencies, using Euro-American moral evaluations that contribute to the development of binarism, and creating broad generalisations of Native American culture that minimise tribal differences. Hollywood's appropriation of Inuit identity has also created problematic images that focus on Inuit primitiveness, the happy-go-lucky Inuit or depicting the Inuit as a social problem. These images have a tendency to construct Inuit identity based on extremes, which deprives the Inuit of their humanity. Academics, Native Americans and Inuit have promoted the necessity of constructing self-representative images in order to negotiate with Hollywood images of North American indigenous identity, and to address some of the psychological and social problems these communities experience. Furthermore, the construction of a Native American contemporary identity on celluloid allows Native communities to negotiate with the images Hollywood has constructed of historical Native American identity and to avoid erasure.

The two filmic texts of Sherman Alexie are designed to discuss the effects that stereotypes and an attachment to the reservation have on Native American identity. *Smoke Signals* examines the effects stereotypes have had on Native American self-identity as Thomas and Victor grapple to define what Indian identity actually entails. *The Business of Fancydancing* demonstrates the importance of the reservation to reinforcing tribal identity by examining the manner in which Seymour, Agnes and Aristotle negotiate with their own respective identities. Furthermore, these two filmic texts demonstrate the different strategies Native Americans utilise in their interactions with the White world, which allows Native audiences to identify with different characters. Moreover, both *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing* attempt to engage in a discussion about Native American identity with the dominant society, as these filmic texts construct complex identities that negotiate with the single-dimensional images projected in Hollywood films.

Although Chris Eyre's work is not specifically designed to contest stereotypes, his primary objective is to assert the complexities of Native American contemporary identity. The focus on complex identity is demonstrated by developing characters in diverse socio-economic positions that possess differing attachments to tribal traditions. One strategy Eyre has utilised in his cinematic dialogues is to negotiate with the images constructed in *Dances with Wolves,* specifically those that depict the Oglala Sioux as a defeated, conquered people. Although *Skins* and *Imprint* acknowledge the detrimental effects that colonialism wrought on the Oglala Sioux, both filmic texts discuss the importance of community cohesion and recognise the Sioux need to assist one another when in a position to do so. *Edge of America* is also designed to engage in a dialogue with Native audiences over the importance of community cohesion, and the benefits and pride this cohesion can bring to a community. Secondly, Eyre's filmic texts demonstrate that Native American spirituality forms an integral part of Native American identity. Furthermore, *Skins* and *A Thief of Time* use mythical characters to enact resistance and/or to demonstrate an ancient and un-erasable link to the land. In addition, Eyre explores the complexities and diversity of indigenous identity in the Americas, conveying the messages promoted by the NMAI to Native and non-Native audiences through his film *A Thousand Roads.*

Although the focus of Eyre's work centres on Native American contemporary identity, Eyre has also directed texts examining historical Native American identity for the PBS documentary series *We Shall Remain*. The broadcast of *We Shall Remain* on PBS provided the series access to a distribution network that allowed it to be broadcast across the United States in order to permit the series to challenge the American grand narrative. Furthermore, *We Shall Remain* conveys to American society the complex relations between Native American and Euro-American communities, and re-centres important historical figures that have been marginalised or vilified in previous historical interpretations.

Although the feature-length filmic texts of Zacharias Kunuk are designed to appeal to national and international audiences, *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* discuss issues linked to shamanism with Inuit society. Shamanism continues to be a controversial topic in Inuit society as some Christian elders have been reluctant to discuss this topic. *Atanarjuat* demonstrates that shamanism is needed to restore community cohesion against disruptive foreign influences. *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* enters into a dialogue with Inuit audiences against Christian discourses that continue to demonise Inuit shamanistic practices. Furthermore, Kunuk's filmic

works engage in a dialogue with *Qallunaat* audiences over Hollywood's appropriation of Inuit identity, particularly with *Nanook of the North,* by conveying the complexity of Inuit identity to national and international audiences. Although Kunuk's work has opened up a conversation about shamanism with Inuit audiences, the Canadian government has also benefited from funding Inuit cinema since it demonstrates to the world its support for indigenous cultural and political initiatives, which in turn, contributes to nation building and promotes multiculturalism. Kunuk's documentary *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* also conveys Inuit concerns over climatic changes in the Arctic, and enters into a discussion about Inuit hunting practices and ethos with international communities.

Interpreting Film Critics

Using Berkhofer's conclusions as a model, this dissertation has identified problematic patterns in critical reception to North American indigenous cinema. Firstly, some film critics have constructed broad generalisations of Native American identity and culture that failed to identify directors and filmic characters by their tribal affiliations. Furthermore, critics have discussed depictions of spirituality in *Imprint* and *Skinwalkers* in an equally generalised manner that promoted out-group homogeneity. Secondly, film critics have focused on Native American deficiencies. Critical reception was drawn to images that promoted the poor socio-economic conditions that exists on reservations, despite concerted efforts by Eyre and Alexie to project more complex images of reservation life in *Smoke Signals, Skins* and *The Business of Fancydancing.* Furthermore, some film critics emphasised Arnold Joseph's drinking habits without recognising that the film promotes messages related to alcohol recovery and abstinence. Although a minority of critics discussed Arnold's drinking habits, a focus on Oglala Sioux and alcohol was more prominent in critical discussion of *Skins.* This focus on images of alcoholism, unfortunately, marginalised critical recognition of familial and community love that Eyre wished to foreground in the movie. Thirdly, film critics conceptualised some characters in terms of binarism as demonstrated by critical reception to *Atanarjuat* and *We Shall Remain.*

Aside from being influenced by the above modes of thinking when decoding filmic images, it is evident critics also attempted to translate these images into more familiar terms. This need to make indigenous filmic texts feel more familiar was demonstrated by film critics' attempts to locate universal themes in *Smoke Signals, The Business of Fancydancing* and *Atanarjuat.* Film critics who were able to locate these universal themes usually gave

the film a more favourable rating than critics who were unable to locate these themes. As demonstrated in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, the desire to locate familiar themes and images could potentially come at the expense of marginalising or omitting discussion of important themes the director wished to foreground. Furthermore, this desire to locate familiar images led critics to translate characters into more familiar figures present in popular culture. It is evident from an interrogation of film reviews that film critics felt more comfortable discussing familiar images, as demonstrated by critical reception to the *We Shall Remain* episode "Tecumseh's Vision." Film critics directed their attention at Tecumseh at the expense of marginalising or omitting Tenskwatawa's role in the development of a pan-Indian confederacy. Critical reception also discussed *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* in familiar terms of cultural destruction due to the "White" man, which a more nuanced reading of the film would contest.

Critical reception not only discussed the images these North American directors constructed, but also discussed the mechanics of film-making and plot structures. Film critics appreciated more conventional film narratives, such as the buddy road trip formula utilised by *Smoke Signals,* while unconventional film narratives employed by *The Business of Fancydancing* received more negative criticism. Furthermore, some film critics were highly critical of the low-budget nature of *The Business of Fancydancing* and Alexie's use of digital video to shoot the film. Although several film critics voiced their opposition to the unconventional film plot and/or the low-budget quality of the film, some were still willing to give *The Business of Fancydancing* an overall positive review. This suggests that some critics privileged the importance of images and themes over plot structure and a film's budget.[1] Additionally, critical reception of *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* recognised the acting talent that was present in Indian Country, leading to some degree of optimism about the potential future of Native American cinema.

The Native American press had divergent views on the filmic representations that Alexie and Eyre constructed. There was a desire on the part of these Native presses to promote Native American cinema, which included praising the acting and directing ability of Native Americans or promoting experiences in the film as "universal." Zacharias Kunuk and Rick West recognised audiences are more interested in films that they could translate into familiar terms and/or find relevant to their lives, which is the reason they respectively promoted *Atanarjuat* and *A Thousand Roads* as "universal." Not all directors were willing to promote their films as "universal," as Sherman Alexie directed criticism at people who viewed *Smoke Signals* in such a way. One of the

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[11] Although film critics recognised the low-budget nature of *Imprint,* they still appreciated the plot twists and the use of spirituality in the film.

common responses present in the Indian press was that these filmic representations contest stereotypes or depict these characters as "believable," as demonstrated by Native reaction to *Smoke Signals, Edge of America* and *A Thousand Roads.* As noted in this dissertation, some of these claims are problematic, but they indicate a desire on the part of the Native press, particularly *The Native Voice,* to promote the "accuracy" of these filmic images in comparison to Hollywood images.

Although there was a tendency on the part of the Native press to praise these filmic images, there were a few reviews printed that were critical of these films. Leta Rector was concerned one particular scene in *The Business of Fancydancing* would send problematic messages to Euro-American audiences about the potential for unprovoked violence Native Americans are capable of. Furthermore, the Navajo community has expressed its opposition to some of the images constructed in *Skinwalkers,* as they contested the film's depiction of medicine men and noted the inability of the lead characters to speak Navajo properly. Philip Burnham was also critical of *A Thief of Time* since the film failed to discuss the looting and misuse of Native American cultural sites. The criticisms the Navajo community and Burnham directed at *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* respectively tie into broader concerns about the "burden of representation," as a belief exists that Native directors need to use their films to construct accurate reflections of a culture or convey specific messages to the dominant society since Native communities are not afforded many opportunities to do so through film. Although Eyre was aware of Navajo concerns about the depiction of their culture in *Skinwalkers*, he stressed the importance of projecting filmic images of Native Americans that will generate interest in film. Eyre was hopeful the popularity of these images would result in further opportunities for Native American directors to create filmic images.

At this point, it might be best to revisit Berkhofer's question posited in the first chapter regarding the ability of images of the Indian to create "new meanings" for American society.[2] Although the above analysis suggests critics have continued to conceptualise Indian identity through the stereotypes Berkhofer identified, some of the reviews demonstrate some film critics have decoded these images according to the preferred reading of the filmic text. These critics usually incorporated interviews from the directors and information present in press kits of films into their reviews. Furthermore, although critics for *Skinwalkers* created problematic assertions in their reviews, they were able to recognise the complexity of the Navajo characters. Although these are small successes for North

[2] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 196-197.

American indigenous directors, they are successes. It is hopeful that future North American indigenous productions will carry on the dialogue that Alexie, Eyre and Kunuk have engaged in to allow audiences to see greater complexity in North American indigenous identities.[3]

Although this dissertation has focused on some of the foundational texts that comprise North American indigenous cinema, there is still a wealth of topics future scholarship could focus on in this field. Too many North American indigenous directors exist to make this dissertation a final and complete analysis of the topic. Valerie Red-Horse, and her connection to the Pequot Reservation, would make for a fascinating analysis. The work of Shirley Cheechoo (Cree) is clearly worthy of an examination as she has exerted a strong presence at film festivals. Unfortunately, Cheechoo failed to respond to a request for an interview by the student in order to incorporate her views on Native American cinema into an upcoming publication on Native directors.[4] This lack of response illustrates the problematic nature of studying North American indigenous cinema since not all directors are receptive to interview requests. One future avenue of study could entail ascertaining Inuit reception to *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* since evidence suggests some discomfort exists among the Inuit about shamanism. Although the introduction of this dissertation has demonstrated excitement from the academic community about the potential effect Native American self-representative images could have in mediating with Hollywood's effects on Native self-esteem, comments made by Eyre suggests not all Native communities want to participate in these cinematic dialogues.[5] The attitudes of specific Native communities to the development of North American indigenous cinema would make for an interesting study. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged one cannot make definitive statements at this time about the careers of Chris Eyre, Sherman Alexie or Zacharias Kunuk as all three directors are middle-aged and, hopefully, will direct more feature films in the future. The dynamics of North American indigenous cinema and its relationship with the dominant society will interest and frustrate scholars for years to come.

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[3] Wes Studi appeared somewhat optimistic that continuous representations of Native Americans working and living in a contemporary setting might alter audience perceptions of Native Americans as Euro-Americans reassess the validity of colonial images. Consult, Gloria Goodale, "Native American dreams: Native peoples are gaining wider acceptance in Hollywood with the critical favourite 'Fast Runner' and PBS's new 'Skinwalkers,'" *The Christian Science Monitor,* November 22, 2002.

[4] This e-mail request was sent to the contact e-mail address for the Weengushk Institute. I received confirmation that my e-mail was received and relayed to Shirley Cheechoo.

[5] Eyre expressed disappointment with the failure of tribally-owned casinos to provide funding for filmmaking and also noted a group of Shawnee did not want to participate in the filming of "Tecumseh's Vision."

The State of North Indigenous Cinema Now and in the Future

Native American presses were hopeful the critical and popular praise awarded to *Smoke Signals* would translate into future opportunities for Native American directors. Although Eyre has had opportunities to direct future projects, none rivaled the success *Smoke Signals* achieved in the box office. Mathew Fleischer believed one of the reasons the success of *Smoke Signals* has not been duplicated is partially due to the deterioration in the relationship between Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie following the success the two artists experienced with the film.[6] Fleischer believed their combined talent on the production of films is a necessity as he stated Sherman Alexie's film *The Business of Fancydancing* was "missing Eyre's directional precision," while Eyre's films *Skins* and *Edge of America* "lacked Alexie's artistic edge."[7] Fleischer was not naïve enough to believe the unpopularity of Native American indigenous cinema is solely related to the falling out of these two artists as he noted the unpopularity of the images Native American directors assert and the clash between distributors, directors and writers over their respective agendas hinder greater development of films.[8] Fleischer attempted to substantiate this latter point by using a quotation from Chris Eyre, "...I don't think a lot of people see value in telling stories about modern Indians...but I don't see the value in films that show the past. They all end up the same way – the Indians die."[9] The past four years have witnessed a dry spell for Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie in the cinematic world. *The Business of Fancydancing* is the only film that Sherman Alexie has directed, suggesting his experience in developing independent film soured his desire to create more cinematic texts, while Chris Eyre's last high-profile project examining Native American identity was *We Shall Remain* in 2009.

Perhaps one of the more devastating blows to North American indigenous cinema occurred in the last two years with Isuma filing for bankruptcy. The financial trouble that Isuma was experiencing was broadcast in the pages of *Nunatsiaq News.* Since the beginning of production on *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen,* Isuma has been highly critical of the inadequate funding that the Nunavut government was supplying for the development of film, which led to debates that centred on competing visions over the direction the Nunavut economy should take. Both Cohn and Kunuk believed the Nunavut Department of Economic Development and Transportation was more

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[6] Mathew Fleischer, "Gone with the Wind," 229.
[7] *Ibid.,* 229.
[8] *Ibid.,* 230-231.
[9] *Ibid.,* 230.

concerned with exploiting Nunavut's natural resources than in creating a vibrant film industry.[10] The two filmmakers argued that video production not only employed over one hundred people at peak periods, but also helped to construct and broadcast Inuit culture, which Cohn stated, "Nunavut needs." Cohn further contended Nunavut will only have a vibrant film industry if the territorial government provides the financial incentives to attract production companies.[11] Tensions between Isuma and the Nunavut government continued to intensify as Cohn and Kunuk threatened to shoot *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* outside of Nunavut and boycott the Nunavut film symposium held in 2003 to protest the government's failure to provide financial incentives to Isuma and to create a Nunavut Film Commission.[12] Although the Film Commission was eventually established, Cohn still expressed his displeasure in the manner in which the Nunavut government handed out potential rebates, "This has really offensively pissed me off...For 15 years we have been lobbying for a small pot of money in Nunavut dedicated specifically to film making as well as a professional set of guidelines for a film agency."[13] It may be beneficial to return briefly to Sandra Osawa's belief that one of the reasons Native American film is not developing at a quick pace is because Native people are not handing out the funding. The case of Isuma demonstrates that even Inuit making decisions about cinema have difficulty funding Inuit cinema, suggesting there are greater issues involved in public funding of film than simply allowing minority groups a voice.

The case of Isuma also demonstrates production companies can run into financial trouble if not supported by regional and federal governments. Isuma has been in financial difficulties for years, as failure to receive rebates from the Nunavut government forced the production company to downsize its staff in Igloolik severely.[14] Isuma, which recognised the difficult nature of operating a production company in a declining economic environment, filed

[10] Denis Sequin, "Freeze Frame," *Canadian Business*, vol. 78, no. 17 (August 29-September 11, 2005). 45-46.
[11] Denise Rideout, "Nunavut filmmakers plea for recognition, support: Movie producers say their 'cultural industry' is being ignored," *Nunatsiaq News,* March 23, 2001.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut010331/nvt10323_09.html
[12] Denise Rideout, "Filmmakers look outside territory of Nunavut landscapes," *Nunatsiaq News,* April 5, 2002.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut020405/news/nunavut/20405_7.html
[13] Arthur Johnson, "Fast Runner crew fumes over slows subsidies," *Nunatsiaq News,* March 18, 2005.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/fast_runner_crew_fumes_over_slow_subsidies/
[14] Sara Minogue, "Isuma closes Igloolik office after Nunavut Film rejects funding proposal," *Nunatsiaq News,* June 3, 2005.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/50603/news/nunavut/50603_14.html

for bankruptcy in 2011.[15] Although Cohn and Kunuk contested the reported amount of money their production company was indebted for,[16] they acknowledged that they need to be more innovative in utilising the latest technologies in order to avoid future monetary problems. With the bankruptcy of Isuma Productions, the two filmmakers decided to focus on developing internet connections to Arctic communities in order to distribute online films. [17]

Despite that Alexie and Eyre have not directed recent filmic texts that explore Indian identity and Isuma was forced into bankruptcy, one should not end this dissertation on a pessimistic note. The recent blockbuster successes of *The New World* (2005), *Apocalypto* (2006), and *Avatar* (2009) have clearly shown popular culture is still interested in Native American themes. New technologies are continuously being developed to make North American indigenous films more accessible to a wider global audience. Academic interest in this field of study is growing as evidenced by the decision of Randolph Lewis and David Delgado Shorter to create a new book series devoted to the indigenous directed films *Smoke Signals, Navajo Talking Picture* and *The Fast Runner*. This series will also include monographs that focus on films by non-indigenous directors such as Bruce Beresford, the director of the high-profile Canadian historical drama *Black Robe*, and Mel Gibson, the director of the blockbuster *Apocalypto.*[18] This greater popularity may reduce the reliance of North American indigenous directors on sources of public funding whether from their own or foreign countries. As Native American reservations continue to develop their economy and infrastructure, more financial support may be available for Native American directors, if tribal councils are willing to devote their resources for these productions. Native American indigenous cinema may become an economically viable industry allowing a greater number of North American indigenous people to participate and assume the director's chair. There is clearly a wealth of potential for North American indigenous cinema within the next couple of decades. This enthusiasm and promise was recognised by Seminole director Tracy

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[15] Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, "Igloolik Isuma Production clarifies its financial status," *Nunatsiaq News,* July 22, 2011.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674igloolik_isuma_productions_clarifies_its_financial_status/

[16] An article in *Nunatsiaq News* claimed: "Renowned Inuit film company drowns in debt…Isuma now appears to carry debts that appear to range between $700,000 and $900,000, owed to a variety of creditors."Cohn and Kunuk claim this statement is a gross overestimation of their debt. Consult "Renowned Inuit film company drowns in debt," *Nunatsiaq News*, July 6, 2011.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674renowned_inuit_film_company_drowns_in_debt/

[17] Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, "Igloolik Isuma Production clarifies its financial status," *Nunatsiaq News,* July 22, 2011.
http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674igloolik_isuma_productions_clarifies_its_financial_status/

[18] Evans, *The Fast Runner,* xi.

Rector, who believed the interest of Native American youths coincided with those of the dominant society, which could potentially create "the next wave in Native cinema."[19] Perhaps in the near future, there will be a Native American director who occupies the director's chair for a Hollywood feature film. This is an exciting period for North American indigenous cinema as more films, albeit on a smaller scale than feature films, are being developed, proving North American indigenous populations are active participants in the filmmaking community. Furthermore, the presence of Native American and indigenous film festivals provides networks and a forum in which to further develop filmic strategies and promote indigenous cinema.[20]

[19] Fleisher, "Gone with the Wind: A Decade after *Smoke Signals*, success Remains Elusive for Native American Filmmakers," 231.

[20] There are numerous film festivals that promote Native American cinema, which include: American Indian Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Dreamspeakers Film Festival, ImagineNATIVE Film Festival.

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