

THE DEPICTION OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURES AS OTHER IN
CONTEMPORARY, WESTERN NATURAL HISTORY FILM

by

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GLOSSARY

Ecological Imperialism – Term originally used to describe the conquering of native peoples by disease and technology introduced by Western invaders; more recently used to describe the use of Western notions of conservation as a form of neo-imperialism and control in developing countries.

Frontier Mythology – The belief in the late 1800s, described by Frederick Jackson Turner, that the frontier had been the key to shaping national character and that Americans needed to look to the frontier past for guidance in modern times.

Imperialist Nostalgia – The feeling of loss, described by Renato Rosaldo, when a people is modernized or otherwise changed that is experienced by the people who study or otherwise interact with indigenous cultures and are in fact the ones who brought about the change.

Salvage Ethnography – The practice of anthropology that reached its height in the mid-1900s that was concerned with preserving indigenous cultures, often through film.

Taxidermic Ethnography – In film, the reconstruction of a “lost” culture with the purpose of capturing a more “authentic humanity” described by Fatimah Tobing Rony; related to Salvage Ethnography.

Teddy Bear Patriarchy – Donna Haraway’s term for the white-male dominated monopolistic and capitalistic culture of the United States, especially during the early part of the 20th century.

ABSTRACT

Images of the indigenous other have always been used in accord with the imperialistic movements of the Western world. Filmmakers continue to use the basic model of depicting people of indigenous cultures as exotic and more primitive than people of Western cultures with the effect of validating Western values and reinforcing the perceived superiority/authority of Western values over other value systems. This form is readily apparent in the treatment of the indigenous people of Africa in natural history films from the inception of the medium to present day. I will examine films from the 1920s through the present day. If filmmakers are to create successful natural history films that incorporate people of indigenous cultures, they must critically study the histories and mythologies that inform these films in order to avoid making the same mistakes.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, film has been used to study the world around us, including people. First employed by science to examine the nature of movement in both humans and other species,¹ the masses quickly adopted cinema as a form of entertainment. This dichotomy, this tension between science and spectacle, exists to this day. Among the first movements in film that attempted to straddle these two seemingly disparate worlds was the travelogue, or safari film, of the 1920s. In these films, the filmmakers portrayed people of indigenous cultures as exotic “others,” more primitive man, which served only to add to the *mise en scène*, bringing a taste of the exotic to Western audiences. Portraying indigenous cultures in this way also had the effect of validating the belief system of Western viewers. During Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency (1901-1909), the “back to nature” movement was in full swing; it began over a concern for conserving the country’s natural resources, mainly for the rejuvenation of the urban middle and upper classes.² The mentality was that in order to combat the moral, spiritual and physical deterioration of Western society brought about by industrialization and cosmopolitan living, people, mainly white males, needed to return to their more “savage” roots. Yet, those savage roots were still considered more civilized than other savages – anyone that was not white (and male). Frederick Jackson Turner, a historian during this era, published a paper on the importance of the American frontier in shaping the character of the nation: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.”³ His frontier

thesis put into form the idea that man must regress to progress.⁴ This “frontier mythology” was one of the driving forces behind these types of films in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵

In the 1950s, during the Cold War, there was a growing concern over the loss of individuality and even humanity as a whole that led filmmakers, artists and anthropologists to look to nature as savior of Western man’s more “primitive” self. This idea affected films of this era in much the same way that the frontier mentality affected films in the early part of the twentieth century. I will argue that most recently, the conservation movement, in the form of ecological imperialism, has the same effect on films of the 1970s through present day.

While contemporary attitudes may be less overtly imperialistic, the sentiments of these earlier movements can still be found in contemporary natural history films, reflecting the ever-present, yet seemingly disparate themes in Western culture of returning to a more primitive self to save our souls from the ravages of modernity while at the same time reinforcing our knowledge that we are technologically and morally superior to all “others.”

As I watched [Africa Extreme](#)⁶ in 2001 at the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival, I sat in disbelief as I saw the way the filmmakers depicted the native African people that were in the film as part of Michael Fay’s MegaTransect expedition.⁷ In my mind, it harked back to the days of Martin and Osa Johnson, the popular and alternately famous/infamous (depending on the source) adventurer-filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ I was intrigued that a film made over seventy years after the Johnson’s film

Simba⁹ could be so similar (albeit less overt) in the patronizing way it portrayed native people. Seeing the parallels between these films has led me to further examine the ways in which filmmakers depict people of indigenous cultures in natural history films. I will concentrate on the depiction of the indigenous people of Africa in natural history films from the 1920s to present day. I concentrate on Africa because it has a long history of both being imperialized and being the darling “Dark Continent” for people of the Western world. Many filmmakers have used Africa as setting and subject in films ranging from “scientific” to sensational.

Visual anthropology is undergoing a “crisis of representation”¹⁰ to this day and many filmmakers who consider themselves ethnographic filmmakers are examining the complex issues of how to balance their artistic vision with the responsibilities of portraying people of different cultures. I do not believe that most natural history filmmakers are thinking critically about these issues. Ethnography at its most basic level is the descriptive study of people¹¹ and thus any film dealing with people could be considered ethnographic. Whether considered an ethnographic film or a natural history film, filmmakers should learn to think about these issues in a critical way. Only then will Western natural history films be able to move towards a more accurate, less imperialistic and patronizing portrayal of people of indigenous cultures. The first step is to examine the history that informs these portrayals and the films that illustrate them.

CAMERA AS GUN; IMAGE HUNTING AS IMPERIALISM

Frederick Jackson Turner and Frontier Mythology

In April of 1891, the United States Census Bureau published a pamphlet stating that as of 1890, there was no longer a discernible frontier line.¹² The publication of the census data marked the official beginning of the end of the frontier as Americans had come to know it. By this time, people widely held the belief that the American West, in the form of the frontier, was the shaping force of national character in the United States; the myth of the frontier as “Garden of the World” had been part of the nation’s folklore for many generations.¹³ The first person to put this idea into the form that became known as the “frontier thesis” was Frederick Jackson Turner, a young historian. In 1893 he published his seminal paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.”¹⁴ In it, he theorized that the characteristics of American people and institutions were shaped by contact with their environment, most notably the Westward moving frontier of settlement, rather than evolving from European “germs.”¹⁵

Turner believed it was possible to see social evolution taking place by looking from West to East in the United States. The frontier settlements pushed from East to West, forcing pioneering men to revert back to their most basic roots for survival. After regressing, these men conquered the land and eventually civilized it. Thus, the most primitive settlements were on the Western edge of the frontier; further West lay the untamed lands of the “savages;” further East lay the culmination of “civilization.”¹⁶

Teddy Roosevelt essentially agreed with Turner's thesis, but while the hero of Turner's frontier was the agrarian, the hero of Roosevelt's was the hunter.¹⁷ The "wilderness hunter/Indian fighter" embodied the ideals of progressivism that Roosevelt held in high esteem; as Richard Slotkin states, "[According to Roosevelt] The law of nature required that less progressive races—and classes—give way to those that embodied the germs of progress."¹⁸ The "wilderness hunter/Indian fighter" was also the main character in the hearts and minds of most of the American public; he was a much more romantic and fantastical figure than the rural farmer.¹⁹ The idea of conquering an unknown land inhabited by wild animals and natives made the wilderness hunter a mythical hero; he lived in a more primitive state but not as a savage, rather as an agent of civilization. Slotkin describes the "wilderness hunter" hero: "He was American ambivalence personified: he reproached commercial values by his purifying regression to the primitive; but that regression itself was justified to us by its contribution (through Indian-killing) to a progressive future."²⁰

Where would the "wilderness hunter" hero go once the frontier had been conquered? Where would American character and values be tested and strengthened? The crisis of the closing of the frontier brought many questions to the forefront of the national conscience. Many of the upper class elite found the answer abroad, in countries where civilizing forces had seemingly yet to conquer all of the frontiers, wild animals and native inhabitants included in places such as Africa, Asia and Latin America.²¹

Teddy Roosevelt and the Safari

Theodore Roosevelt was the first American president to have much of his life chronicled on film.²² Developed in the late 1800s for use in science, the motion picture camera came into more widespread use as entertainment shortly before the time that Roosevelt assumed the presidency.²³ Because he was in front of the camera's lens so often, Roosevelt was sensitive to the power of the moving image. He knew firsthand how the motion picture could be either a tool for education or appropriated as entertainment for the masses; in 1901, a film called "Terrible Teddy, the Grizzly King" satirized Roosevelt as a self-promoting animal killer.²⁴ Roosevelt championed the educational side of motion pictures and actively denounced any kind of nature-faking.²⁵ For Roosevelt, authentic nature was the antidote to the negative effects of modern industrial society.²⁶ Faking nature, in film or in writing, was part of that same consumer society and thus a perversion.

In March of 1909, Theodore Roosevelt set out for a safari in Africa under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.²⁷ He and his son "collected" thousands of animals as specimens for the National Museum in Washington D.C.²⁸ He hired close to two hundred native porters,²⁹ without which, the safari would have been impossible. In addition to hunting game, Cherry Kearton, a renowned natural history photographer from London, filmed Roosevelt's expedition with a motion picture camera.³⁰ Kearton would go on to film many other motion pictures in Africa and Roosevelt verified his trustworthiness: "Any photograph presented by him as of a wild animal can at once be

put down as having been taken under precisely the circumstances which he describes. His work, therefore, is of first-rate scientific importance.”³¹

Roosevelt in Africa, premiered in the United States in April of 1910 to mixed though mostly unenthusiastic reviews.³² *Roosevelt in Africa* consisted of thirty-six scenes that showed everything from Roosevelt planting a tree in front of the Bombay Trading Company’s office, to native African performances, to wild footage of animals.³³ Cherry Kearton underwent hardship and faced danger in obtaining this wild footage and thus received praise for his bravery, skill and strength of character, even more so than the great white hunter.³⁴ Roosevelt stated, “it is not a very hard thing to go off into the wilderness and kill an elephant..., it is a very hard thing to get good photographs of them.”³⁵ This new breed of hunter used the camera rather than the gun to capture and control, though not kill, his prey. A 1910 review of *Roosevelt in Africa* in the New York Times describes the wild footage in terms that clearly evoke the hunt:

A picture of a young Serval cat was taken under great difficulties. The operator lay in hiding eight hours waiting for the animal to appear. Another shows the deadly African ground spider waiting near its hole for its prey. Even a large land turtle did not escape the camera man.³⁶

Roosevelt admired the characteristics that the cameraman-hunter possessed. He believed strongly that the “strenuous life” was the remedy for the waning physical and moral character of men. This new cameraman-hunter embodied all of the traits that Roosevelt and other white males valued in what Donna Haraway refers to as “Teddy Bear Patriarchy.”³⁷ In the world of Teddy Bear Patriarchy, killing is the way life is created, not through birth,³⁸ thus marginalizing anything considered female, including nature.

In Teddy Bear Patriarchy, taxidermy is the main mode for the representation of life; animals must die by the hands of Western white males and then be reconstructed by the same hands.³⁹ Taxidermic dioramas reinforced the racial, familial and social hierarchies that were central to the thinking of Roosevelt and other members of the white male aristocracy in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰ Haraway states:

This is a spiritual vision made possible only by their death [African animals] and literal re-presentation. Only then could the essence of their life be present. Only then could the hygiene of nature cure the sick vision of civilized man. Taxidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction.⁴¹

Though the cameraman-hunter was not killing his prey, he was capturing it and exercising control over his quarry both wild animal and native human, much the same way that taxidermy allowed the taxidermist to control nature through reproduction.

Big game hunting in Africa and other non-Western nations was born out of the imperialistic agendas of the Western world. Harriet Ritvo states about Britain's menageries in the nineteenth century:

Collections offered diversion and occupation in lives that could often seem confined and boring. And they were constant reminders of the hunting expeditions during which they had been procured, a symbol of the force and power that supported and validated the routinized day-to-day domination of the empire...[and about taxidermic collections] Rows of horns and hides, mounted heads and stuffed bodies, clearly alluded to the violent, heroic underside of imperialism.⁴²

If big game hunting acted as an imperialist allegory for the countrymen back home, then motion pictures taken on safaris such as *Roosevelt in Africa*, hammered home the point. These films not only portrayed the thrill of the hunt but also explicitly portrayed the African natives as inferior to the great white hunters and thus Western civilization as a whole.

Safari films of the 1920s and 1930s

Martin and Osa Johnson's film Simba: The King of Beasts (1928) provides a clear example of the mythology of the "wilderness hunter" hero embodied by the cameraman. The focus of the film is on the bravery and intrepidity of the two adventurer/filmmakers. The filmmakers turn the attention back to their own daring even during the climatic lion-spearing scene towards the end of the film. Warriors from the Lumbwa tribe set out to spear lions, have success once, the second escapes them, and Osa, Martin focusing the camera on her, shoots the third charging lion just before it reaches them.

Time and again, the Johnsons link the image of the camera both visually and textually (in the intertitles) to the gun. The filmmakers cut together shots of themselves with wild footage of animals, Martin filming while Osa stands at the ready, rifle in hand. The Johnsons created much of the danger through staging scenes and editing, rather than having actually experienced it in the field.⁴³ The Johnsons hired Lumbwa tribesmen for the lion-spearing scene and used automobiles to contain the lions for spearing.⁴⁴ Martin also purchased footage of an actual Maasai lion hunt and edited it into the sequence.⁴⁵ In The War, The West and The Wilderness, Kevin Brownlow states:

They [the Johnsons] were obsessed by adventure, in the Theodore Roosevelt sense, and aimed exclusively for thrills. Their 1928 production *Simba*, although made under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History, resorts to the full range of editor's tricks to extract the greatest punch from the material.⁴⁶

An article in the New York Times by Martin Johnson, published shortly after his return from Africa, states, “In the following article he relates the simple pleasures of life far removed from the high road of civilization and describes the strange adventures in hunting wild game with the camera.”⁴⁷ The American public embraced the new mythology of the frontier, this time in the form of Africa with the cameraman as its conqueror.

If the cameraman was metaphorically conquering Africa’s land and wildlife as a new frontier, he was also metaphorically doing the job of the “Indian killer.” The Johnsons’ portrayal of the indigenous Africans strips them of dignity and historical context, silencing their voices. The intertitles speak for them. The text refers to them as “half-savage blacks,” “half-civilized” and having reached “the pastoral stage.” One intertitle referring to herdsmen states, “Here was the age-old story of Man emerging from savagery.” The indigenous people thus become a living example of social evolution.

In accordance with this view of natives as inferior, lower on the ladder of human advancement, the filmmakers often equate them with wildlife. One sequence shows wild animals at a waterhole. The sequence begins with an intertitle that reads, “There is always a customer at the water hole, first come the natives.” Shots of native people bathing and drinking precede a long sequence of wild animals “waiting their turn” and eventually congregating at the water hole. The scene portrays indigenous people as more akin to wildlife than other humans. In another sequence an old man tries to open a beer bottle at a village celebration. The filmmakers refer to him as the “village soak” and

repeatedly cut back to shots of him attempting to get the bottle open. Once he accomplishes this and begins to drink, the filmmakers hold the shot so long that the viewer begins to think they are watching a clever trick performed by a monkey in a zoo. This technique is similar to the feeling that Robert Flaherty creates in Nanook of the North⁴⁸ when he shows Nanook biting a record at the trading post. Again, these images equate native people with wild animals. This equation places a comfortable distance between Western viewers and the indigenes.

If Martin and Osa Johnson marginalize the African natives in Simba, then the female African is doubly marginalized. The Johnson's cast women as sexual objects. The filmmakers refer to a young woman with short hair, native dress and sagging bare breasts as "Just a little black flapper." An intertitle reads, "All the scenery looks better after the rain" and is followed by a shot of another young, bare-breasted woman facing the camera. The intertitle, "The short skirt movement has gone about as far as possible" precedes a shot of the grass skirts of two young women posing for the Johnson's camera. Text refers to a tribal queen as "a great executive—but really no beauty." An intertitle that precedes shots of a native woman sitting in front of a mirror putting some of Osa's white makeup on her face reads, "Osa's maid got what she thought was an idea." The film portrays tribal women as inferior to Osa, but Martin casts Osa herself in the end as the All-American woman, baking a pie. By marginalizing both native Africans in general and native African women in particular, the Johnsons' films assure the stability of the myth of the frontier as the testing ground for the white male.

Released in 1930 complete with sound, Africa Speaks! provides another example of the frontier mentality transplanted in Africa. As in the Johnsons' films, the visuals and narration repeatedly equate the camera with the gun and with the hunt. In one scene, one of the white cameraman-hunters comments that the blind they are sitting in reminds him of a duck blind back home. The other replies, "That's practically what it is except that we're hiding a camera instead of a gun." Narration states that even some of the best pictures escape their cameras and over a shot of the two white men, one with a camera the other with a gun sneaking up to film lions feeding, the narrator says, "Shooting the prowlers of the plains with a camera is much more difficult than with a gun and brings one in closer contact with them." Again, the skill and bravery of the white cameraman-hunter is the main focus of attention.

Like Simba, Africa Speaks! silences the voice of the native people. Though Africa Speaks! provides more background information on tribal customs, the filmmakers depict the native people in many of the sequences more like wildlife than human. One of the most notable of these scenes occurs early in the film. The white men bribe a native to lead them to another area of the veldt. They use salt for a bribe and talk about how difficult it is for the natives to find enough salt, hence its value. One of the white men holds his arm out and exaggeratedly pours salt into his outstretched hand. He says, "They love it, like a child loves candy." The film cuts to a shot of a native person warily approaching. Once he reaches the white men, he grabs a handful of the salt and puts it to his mouth. The next shot is a close up of his face looking into the camera with wide eyes, the lower half of his face covered with white salt, pouring from his mouth. He nods his

head emphatically and says, “YAH!” That this is meant to be comical is even more apparent by the following line of dialogue: “We’d better bring plenty of water, something tells me he’s going to be plenty thirsty!”

The filmmakers portray natives as animal-like savages and use them for comic relief. As in Simba, the filmmakers marginalize the native females even further. They refer to the women as “curios” and equate them with cattle in one segment. When visiting a native tribe in which the women wear lip plates, the narrator, a male who chuckles during much of the film’s narration, talks about their horribleness and says, “What won’t a woman anywhere do to be in style?” When a young man trades for a wife, the narrator says, “Anyway the boy isn’t particular. He’s saving up to buy one with a nice big saucer hip...I mean lip. So this girl will do in the meantime.” In an earlier sequence where the filmmakers meet the leader of the “Pygmies,” the narration says suggestively over a shot of two girls sitting in a way that covers their bodies and giggling, “These are the queens. They are very modest and shy [chuckles] when the king is around.” The narration’s wording is problematic in Africa Speaks!, but perhaps even more damaging is the narrator himself. Lowell Thomas was a highly respected radio journalist in the 1920s (and well into the 1970s) and his voice lent authority and credibility to Africa Speaks! and the claims it made.⁴⁹ Using such a well-known and respected voice only furthered viewers’ sense of the film as an objective account of native life.

Using the native Africans as comic relief and sexual objects, Africa Speaks!, like Simba, reinforces Western stereotypes and validates Western belief systems. With the

frontier of the American West closed, Africa became the new mythological frontier for Americans, where white men went to test their mettle. Just as written accounts of the American frontier rallied the spirits of kinsmen back east, filmed accounts of Westerners' exploits in the African wilds sparked the imagination of the public back home and reassured them of the continued superiority of Western society. These films doubly reassured the white male audience; not only were they superior to other races, but women as well. By marginalizing the "other," these early films served to uphold Western belief systems, rather than challenge them.

THE CAMERA AS PATRIARCHAL TOOL

Salvage Ethnography and the Cold War

In the climate of the Cold War during the 1950s and 1960s, many Western anthropologists, artists, writers and filmmakers began to turn their attention to our “primitive” past. There was a growing concern about a loss of individuality, humanity and culture due to nuclear war, communism and a rise in technology.⁵⁰ In their book on the images of *National Geographic*, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins talk about the magazine’s imagery during the Cold War:

The *Geographic* contributed to softening the entrance to the nuclear age with articles such as ‘Nevada Learns to Live with the Atom’ and ‘Man’s New Servant, the Friendly Atom.’ In the meantime, the non-socialist third world continued to be portrayed as simple, childlike, and friendly—in the words of one caption, as ‘Paradise in search of a future.’⁵¹

In the minds of many ethnographers and anthropologists, “civilization” threatened this paradise and they rushed to preserve what they considered to be “vanishing cultures.” This movement, called salvage ethnography, was not born out of a selfless desire to preserve other cultures, but rather out of a need to save some mythical notion of a “primitive man” that served to provide not only a model of a more natural society, free of the spoils of modernity, but also as validation for Western superiority.

Imperialist nostalgia⁵² was an underlying force in the concept of salvage ethnography. Feeling a sense of remorse about the modernizing changes that occurred in “primitive” cultures, anthropologists and ethnographers attempted to “salvage” and often recreate them, though they themselves embodied the changing forces. This idea existed

earlier in the century as well,⁵³ beginning with Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North⁵⁴ and still photographs such as those of Edward Sheriff Curtis and the anthropology of Franz Boas.⁵⁵ These ethnographers employed what Fatimah Tobing Rony calls taxidermic ethnography.⁵⁶ In taxidermic ethnography, the culture that one is preserving must already be considered dead, thus filmmakers used artifice, or taxidermy, to create a more "authentic" culture; their films embodied the myth of the "authentic first man."⁵⁷

Although this trend of salvaging cultures already existed in ethnography in the early twentieth century, the atmosphere during the Cold War saw a revival of salvage ethnography this time made all the more urgent in the Nuclear Age. Ethnographers made films with the belief they were preserving cultural data on disappearing peoples for future generations to study. They believed that the only suitable native to record was an "authentic" native.⁵⁸ Anthropologist Jay Ruby states, "When photographed or filmed, natives were asked to remove any physical evidence of the actual circumstances—that is, Western clothing and ornaments—and 'perform' authentic reproductions of their former lives."⁵⁹ The films made in this era by Robert Gardner (Dead Birds), John Marshall (The Hunters), and Timothy Asch (The Ax Fight) represent this type of ethnography.⁶⁰ Ruby describes their motivations: "They all felt the urge to filmicly salvage some of the cultures that were presumed to be disappearing (an assumption that, of course, proved false and deeply offensive to those cultures that survived in spite of having been salvaged)."⁶¹

Salvage ethnography provided another means of control in the form of paternalism. Its basic tenet implied that the white man, master of civilizing forces, was

capable of preserving “less evolved” cultures. This time the mythological hero is the white intellectual adventurer/savior rather than the “wilderness hunter/Indian killer”. The myth requires that people of indigenous cultures exist outside of time and history with no will of their own, as passive victims in the march of civilization.

In Mythologies, Roland Barthes describes myths as being created by a second-order signification.⁶² The images and language of salvage ethnography create the basis for the myth of “authentic first man.” The second-order signification occurs when we introduce to the images the false belief that native people exist without history. The myth of the authentic first man is contingent on the belief that indigenous people exist without a history prior to white-man’s arrival. The myths of Africa as the Dark Continent and Africa as white man’s burden are also created by the false belief that indigenous people exist without history. The characters who figure in the mythologies evolve into different characters i.e. the “wilderness hunter, Indian killer” changes into the “white intellectual adventurer/savior.” The basic myth, however, remains the same: Western culture is superior to native cultures.

Salvage Films of the 1950s

In 1956, the BBC aired a six part series titled The Lost World of the Kalahari.⁶³ In this series, writer Laurens van der Post brought viewers along with him to Africa on his search for the Bushmen of the Kalahari. This series as a whole is an excellent example of salvage ethnography of this era. Interestingly, policy also followed the salvage mode during this period and the “salvation” of the “Bushman” became a popular

cause. By 1960, lobbyists successfully promoted a “Bushman Reserve.”⁶⁴ The idea of a reserve for indigenous people equated the Bushman to a wild animal and emphasized the supposed need for separation to prevent contamination by the outside world. This reserve, more so than preserving the Bushman culture, preserved Western notions of social structure; the “authentic/primitive” man must remain that way, outside of time, existing to provide a measure of the advancement of Western civilization and also to provide a remedy for its excesses.⁶⁵ Anthropologist Edwin N. Wilmsen sums the idea up well, “The question of whose heritage was encased in the sanctified landscape of the Kalahari Game Reserve has never been in doubt.”⁶⁶

The films in the series The Lost World of the Kalahari portray the Bushman in a Romantic manner. Episode 4, called “Life in the Thirst Land,” covers the first meeting of van der Post’s crew and the native Bushman. The film begins with van der Post in a studio standing in front of a large map of Africa. He explains the background of their journey and plots the group’s course on the map. The entire film cuts between footage shot in the field with the native people and van der Post in the studio explaining different aspects of their culture. Like the earlier films of the safari film era, this film effectively silences the voice of the native, even though viewers can overhear some of the native men speaking in the background in certain sequences. The white males speak for everyone; van der Post does his own narration. The narration invokes a large part of the Romanticism, “It was a lovely natural scene with the sense of all belonging to it. And the Bushman families sitting happily in the sun as they’ve sat for centuries with hardly a belonging of any kind in our sense of the word...No one seemed to have heard of time.”

Again, the filmmakers portray the indigenous people as being without time, existing outside of the pressures of history. The filmmakers reinforce ahistoricity through narration time and again throughout the film, “All she owns she can gather together in one shawl, take it on her shoulder of a moment’s notice and set out with her hunter on their journey without end.” Van der Post incessantly refers to the native people as “our Bushmen” and when van der Post’s group visits a neighboring tribe, he compares them with what he considers his own Bushmen, “as pure,” but different. Also, it is quite obvious from the natives’ distended stomachs and the effort they put into gathering food and water that these people lead a hard life, but the narration consistently romanticizes every aspect of their existence.

“Life in the Thirst Land” does not use the native people as comic fare, but instead marginalizes them by portraying them as the mythological, primitive first man. However, like earlier films, this film further marginalizes the female native. In his voice over, van der Post refers to many of the natives by their tribal name, giving the translation as well. He speaks about many of the men by name, but of the women he names only two and one small girl and he refers to them by their beauty:

One of the most pleasing sights that day was Scent of Gazelle loving the baby of a young girl with yellow skin and Mongol face of classical Bushman purity. We have our first glimpse too of the great, unmarried beauty of this group of people, Lips of Finest Fat. She was talking coyly to a friend in the morning sun.

This last line of narration is over a shot of Lips of Finest Fat from the waist up, bare breasted, turning from side to side as she speaks to her friend. Van der Post goes back to her many times throughout the film and refers to her often as “the unmarried beauty.”

Van der Post refers to the other woman who is named as someone's "lovely sister." Other women in the film remain nameless. The narration in one sequence of the film harks back to the language of Martin and Osa Johnson's Simba: "And when I offered one of the old ladies a cigarette, she was coy as a flapper about to have a first smoke." As in the films of the Johnsons, this film marginalizes the native female as "other" even more so than it does the native male. The women are for the most part unnamed, exotic beauties used to titillate Western audiences.

Yet again, the filmmakers silence the voice of the native African. The key difference between these films and the films of the 1920s and 1930s is the underlying mythology. The mythology evolves as attitudes towards indigenous people and wild places change. This time the white intellectual adventurer/savior usurps the "wilderness hunter/Indian killer"; mythology of the "authentic first man" usurps the mythology of the frontier. This shift reflects Western attitudes during this period: instead of conquering places and people through violence, the native man must be preserved as a symbol of humanity's salvation. Though their mythologies have different characters, the end results are the same. Indigenous Africans remain inferior to Westerners on the scales of social and civil evolution, captured and controlled by the filmmaker's camera for the enjoyment of Western audiences.

Ecological Imperialism (Paternalism) and the Conservation Movement

Though salvage ethnography marked ethnographic films made in the 1950s and 1960s, natural history films of the era and into the 1970s operated under a different

philosophy. Traditionally, as in salvage ethnography, Westerners perceived native people as closer to nature. This perception implied that native people were protective of natural resources while at the same time in need of protection themselves.⁶⁷ However, by the mid-1900s most indigenous tribes had contact with Western colonialists and many adopted some form of Western dress and customs. Nostalgically, Westerners perceived these “contaminated” natives as less authentic, thus further from nature.⁶⁸ These indigenous people were unequal to whites, yet they were no longer authentically native.⁶⁹ These indigenous people became (in Western eyes) a sad half-breed, inferior to both whites and “pure” natives. As conservationism grew after World War II many natural history films removed not only the presence of Westerners, but of people altogether.⁷⁰ Filmmakers portrayed Africans as the main threat to Africa’s ecological splendor and either removed them from their films completely or showed them as the menace to wildlife that Westerners perceived them to be.⁷¹ International environmental organizations advanced conservation policies in Africa that echoed those sentiments; Africans were incapable of advanced thinking, unable to manage their own lands and thus a threat to the preservation of Africa’s flora and fauna.⁷² Some films in the mid to late 1960s began to show Africans again but this time as mute assistants to white game managers. This portrayal is prevalent in Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom, a popular television series of the 1960s (through the 1980s). Again, the white man in the form of “intellectual adventurer/savior” comes to the rescue, this time not to save vanishing cultures from the corrupting hand of “civilization,” but to save the environment from indigenous people. The white man needed to protect Africa’s land and wildlife and to

teach native people Western conservation strategies so that they might eventually appreciate nature in the same, more enlightened way. Historian Gregg Mitman states, “Nature was a global resource, to be put under the watchful eye of ecologists and opened to the view-seeking tourists from the First World.”⁷³

Ecological imperialism continues to inform both conservation policy of and films made about the developing world, especially Africa. Though informed by different mythologies, natural history films made from the 1970s to the present are strikingly similar to the safari films of the 1920s and 1930s in the way they silence the voice of the African people. Both of these types of films as well as the salvage ethnographies of the Cold War period serve as a source of control through the reinforcement of the paternalistic and neo-imperialistic notions of the Western world.

Conservation Films of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s

Produced from 1963 through the 1980s, and hosted by Marlin Perkins and Jim Fowler, the Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom television series provides an example of ecological imperialism in film. In accordance with the views of conservation policy-makers, these films portray native Africans as inferior to Westerners on many levels. Conservationists perceived them as incapable of appreciating the wildlife in the way necessary to preserve it and thus silenced them on matters relating to management. Thus Westerners silence the native African twice: in matters of conservation as well as in the films that deal with conservation as the subject matter.

Many episodes from the Wild Kingdom series such as “Hippo” (approx. 1968), “The African Game Catcher” (1983), “To Catch a Giraffe” (approx. 1968?) and “Luengwa Valley—Last Home of the Elephants” (1981), to mention a few, show native Africans as mute assistants to a wide array of game wardens, wildlife managers, conservationists and biologist/zoologist types, all white Western males. The films often refer to these men as the most knowledgeable about Africa’s wildlife, the best game wrangler, et cetera and the films attribute the authority of these men to the fact that they have lived in the area for several decades. No mention is ever made of the experience of the African natives. The films reinforce the idea that indigenous Africans do not have anything of value to add to the conservation discussion. The assistants always stand in the background, nameless and often times faceless in the way the filmmakers compose the shots. When a “management action” takes place, such as the culling of a baby hippo from the river with a road grader in “Hippo,” the filmmakers focus on the bravery and exploits of the white wildlife managers, though many native Africans assist. In this scene, native men ride on the road grader and one is at the wheel. The native driver is never named in voice-over, the white men in the scene never refer to him by name and he never speaks, only takes direction. The only other time Africans appear in this episode is when an angry hippo charges out of the water and onto the shore. As a large group of African men scatter up the riverbank, the head and shoulders of a white man with a gun appears in front of the camera and he stands his ground as the hippo rushes past while another man off camera says, “He’s charging! This is trouble! He’s after the Africans watching on the bank!” Though there were white men on the bank as well, (the man with

the gun, the cameraman), he does not say, “He’s after the *men* watching on the bank!” The filmmakers in this series, like the safari films of an earlier era, often portray natives as cowardly, frightened of their own land and the animals that inhabit it, while the white man appears brave and confident, standing his ground to protect everyone, including the frightened African natives.

In “Luengwa Valley—Last Home of the Elephant,” Marlin Perkins meets Norman Carr, a white, English-born man who, Marlin tells the audience, has lived and worked in the Luengwa Valley for forty years and knows it “as no other man does.” Norman then proceeds to talk about his history and introduces his companions who will accompany himself and Marlin on their travels through the area: a white male named Robin Pope, who drives the vehicle, and a native African man named PenDani [sic], a game guard, who sits in the rear of the vehicle. The only close shot of PenDani that the filmmakers use is the one that accompanies his introduction. He never speaks. Throughout the remainder of the film, the filmmakers show him only in wide shots of the vehicle traveling at a distance. Often times the filmmakers compose the shot as if purposely cutting him out of the frame, while they frame in the other three white men. Robin Pope, the driver, also never speaks, but unlike PenDani, the filmmakers frame him into most of the shots of the vehicle.

This visual censorship of PenDani is indicative of an underlying conservation mythology. The film portrays native people as incapable of advanced thought, dangerous to their ecology and implies that indigenes must be taught by the great white intellectual adventurer/savior how to maintain their wild-lands. White expatriates remove them from

any discussion about wildlife management protocol and the films further remove them by showing them as mute assistants to the great white male, ignorant of the ways of their land and afraid of it as well. As for the native female, she does not exist. In fact, the female of any race or culture is not a part of these films and many others of this era. This territory belongs to white males. This white patriarchy echoes earlier films and is dangerous because while the characters driving the mythologies change, the underlying meaning does not. While filmmakers and Western audiences may perceive change in their handling of native peoples, i.e. no longer overtly mocking them, when scrutinized, the underlying message remains the same: Western culture and values are far superior to those of native peoples of the developing world.

A film produced in 1979 by Jacques and Philippe Cousteau as part of The Jacques Cousteau Odyssey series provides an interesting example of ecological paternalism. The film, produced in two parts called “The Nile” exhibits some improvements in the way it portrays African people, yet retains a sense of the paternal. “The Nile” follows Jacques and Philippe and the rest of the Cousteau team members on a journey up the Nile in a search to study the impact of man on the river. Again, the myth of the white intellectual adventurer/savior is the underlying mythology. Much of the film shows the Cousteau team in heroic situations; the group flies in dangerous areas, approaches a violent waterfall, rescues a baby crocodile and enlightens the natives when members of the team set up a tank to film fish in. The film portrays these men as selfless investigators into an ecological crisis rather than as part of the problem.

Though informed by this mythology, “The Nile” represents a strange melding of the romanticism of salvage ethnography and the paternalism of ecological imperialism. Often times throughout the film, the Cousteau team informally interviews native Africans and the audience hears the native person’s response to questions about themselves and their life. In one extraordinary moment, the Cousteau team brings its rubber boat next to native men in a canoe. A Frenchman, most likely Philippe, speaks to the men from off-camera. One of the native African men asks in English, “Is this man pottering us [filming us]? Is he pottering us? Is he taking our picture?” The Cousteau team’s reply is “Yes.” The conversation continues and the viewer learns where this (unnamed) man is from and why he is fishing on the river. Showing this interaction is an important step because it shows that the native Africans being filmed do not exist outside of history. In earlier films, filmmakers often portray natives as incapable of understanding Western technology, the exception being the Johnson’s Simba that includes shots of natives as part of the camera crew (though the film resorts to portraying natives as technologically inferior in the bottle-opening scene). In addition, “The Nile” allows the native man in the boat to speak about why he left his home to fish on the river. He has a historical context. The filmmakers show that native Africans are aware of the developments of other cultures and part of a wider context. The filmmakers’ inclusion of this scene is only a fleeting improvement in the film’s portrayal of native people. In an early, opening sequence of Part I over shots of hippopotami, cranes, and a native woman with her face painted and silhouettes of native dancers, the omniscient narrator talks about the ten month Cousteau journey over which the team, “will encounter the endlessly various lives

still sustained by the river, some of it little altered since prehistoric times.” This last bit of narration falls over the shots of native people. Philippe says in voice over as they travel through the grasslands, “Year by year, with growing haste, Africa strides out of an ancient world, into the present. Still as we move through these open savannas I feel myself almost a stranger, a tourist in another time.” When the Cousteau team meets the king of the Shilluk tribe in Part II, the king remains unnamed and the narrator says, “Like the river itself, the king of the Shilluks too is a symbol of eternity.” Again, this film, like earlier films, more often than not, portrays indigenous Africans as existing outside of time, as the “authentic first man.”

The film in the form of Philippe’s voice over and the voice of God narration refers to the native Africans as “distant children far from home,” “good-natured,” “exultant tribesmen,” and “a healthy, cheerful people.” The filmmakers reduce Africans to a symbol for all native Africans, pleasant and child-like. Throughout the film, the filmmakers equate the indigenous African cultures with the wildlife that will be displaced or destroyed if the damming of the upper Nile continues.

While the filmmakers of “The Nile” made slight improvements in their representations of indigenous peoples, the white male as intellectual adventurer/savior reigns supreme. His mythology and that of the mythology of the “authentic first man” remains in place, virtually unchallenged.

Films of the 1990s to the Present

Produced in 2001 by National Geographic, Africa Extreme is a strange hybrid of both good and bad aspects in the filmic treatment of indigenous African culture. I chose to examine this film because it is astonishing to see how little filmmakers have changed their portrayals of native people since the 1920s. Over seventy years after the Johnson's Simba, Africa Extreme uses a different mythology with much the same result: validating rather than challenging the ideals of its Western viewers. This film follows Dr. Michael Fay on an expedition called the MegaTransect.⁷⁴ True to the conservation mythology, which I discussed earlier, the MegaTransect was an attempt by a white Western male to “save” African forests and wildlife, this time through documentation and publicity. Dr. Fay, a scientist with the Wildlife Conservation Society, began the MegaTransect in 1999.⁷⁵ The National Geographic Society and the Wildlife Conservation Society sponsored the expedition.⁷⁶ The unique feature of the MegaTransect was that Dr. Fay walked twelve-hundred miles through the forests of Central Africa documenting anything and everything in his path.⁷⁷ Dr. Fay completed the expedition in 2001.⁷⁸ Partly because of the MegaTransect, the president of Gabon, Omar Bongo Ondimba, established thirteen national parks and according to the Wildlife Conservation Society, raised millions for Congo Basin development.⁷⁹

The film Africa Extreme displays some relatively progressive thought in its treatment of indigenous African people. The filmmakers allow many native Africans to address the camera directly. The filmmakers translate the interviews via voice over;

viewers can hear the personal thoughts of an individual, rather than the filmmakers attempting to attribute thoughts and feelings to an individual meant to represent an entire culture or tribe. In one particularly enlightened sequence, the filmmakers (through omniscient narration) bring up the issue of development and allow three different native men to voice their opinions on the issue. Two of them say they would like the forestry companies to come develop their villages, while one disagrees. Though the subsequent narration virtually negates the pro-development opinions, at least the filmmakers showed viewers that the issue of developing the forest is multi-faceted and that the indigenous people have different opinions about the way their lives progress.

A Congolese researcher is part of the expedition in Africa Extreme. The filmmakers introduce him by name, Yves Batsu [sic], and show him collecting samples, taking notes and trekking through the jungle. Early in the film, the filmmakers briefly interview him about the MegaTransect. This interview is very important, because traditionally, filmmakers cast indigenous people only as either part of the *mise en scène*, as porters, or faithful, subservient companions to the white man. By interviewing Yves Batsu, the filmmakers show the audience that indigenous people are more than scenery or assistants. Though several of these stereotypes abound in Africa Extreme, it is significant that the filmmakers chose to give camera time, albeit brief, to an indigenous researcher.

Even with these improvements, Africa Extreme often disappoints. The main focus of the film is yet again based on the myth of the white intellectual adventurer/savior enlightening the natives and saving what they cannot. Not only is the adventurer/savior

saving wildlife, but in this film he is also saving the indigenous people. The film shows Fay entering the village of Makao, accompanied by omniscient narration that states, “Fay is known and respected in Makao. His conservation efforts helped turn this village around.” As he greets villagers and films children with his camera, Fay, in voice over, says, “You know, when we first arrived here in 1989, this village was full of ivory poaching and ivory poachers. Everyone was still unemployed, none of the kids were in school and there was no healthcare and yet ivory was flowing out of this village everyday.”

Nick Nichols, a photographer with National Geographic, is also part of the expedition. The filmmakers overlay footage of Nichols photographing villagers playing drums with his own voice over: “The whole exercise is not only to document the wildlife and show that it needs to be saved, but to try to show traditional Africa with dignity.” Immediately following this sequence, the filmmakers cut to still photos of tribal people in the middle of the screen, complete with film sprockets and the sounds of a camera clicking and whirring. They use this technique later in the film with wild animals. It literally shows the capturing of life with the camera. This technique equates indigenous people with animals and portrays the white male as capable of capturing both (on film) for the Western viewer.

While making some improvements, the film retains the mythology of the white intellectual adventurer/savior and the stereotypes that accompany it. The main focus of the film is the bravery and vision of Fay whom the filmmakers portray as almost god-like throughout the film, and to a lesser extent the strength and endurance of Nichols. Even

Yves Batsu, the Congolese researcher, drops out of the expedition mid-way. Other than the brief interview at the beginning that lent this film a semblance of progress in the portrayal of native people, the only other time that the filmmakers give Batsu any screen time is when Batsu can take no more and must quit while Fay, the white American pushes heroically onward. Although the indigenous people this time have a voice, it is drowned out by the much louder and more authoritative voice of Western society.

In 2004, the BBC produced a six-part series that aired on the Discovery Channel in the fall of 2005. Going Tribal followed British explorer/adventurer Bruce Parry on his journeys to live with indigenous tribes around the world. In the premiere episode, “Dangerous Game: The Suri,” Parry lives with an African tribe called the Suri, who are famed for their traditional stick fights. Parry also examines the effects of the Sudanese civil war on the Suri people: an influx of automatic weapons into their (and their enemies’) territory.

This film, and the whole series in fact, is quite different from other films that deal with indigenous cultures. It still retains the underlying mythology of the white intellectual adventurer by necessity of its storyline...Bruce Parry is a white Western adventurer out to live with different indigenous tribes and experience their ways of life, the more hardships and exoticness, the better. However, it is no longer the myth of the white intellectual adventurer/*savior*. Parry and the filmmakers occasionally slip back into the savior mythology by referencing the changes that traditional cultures are undergoing, but the filmmakers do not romanticize the past or lament the changes occurring to these people. The filmmakers do not portray indigenous people as living in

a vacuum. The filmmakers give the natives histories and contexts. These films focus on not only Parry's exploits, but also on the native people themselves.

In "Dangerous Game: The Suri," as in all of the other episodes, native men and women alternately address Parry, the camera and each other. The filmmakers subtitle their dialogue, even when the people are not directly answering one of Parry's questions, thus revealing their normal conversation. Often times, in addition to subtitling, a translator in the field with Parry translates in real time. Subtitling and translation by an on-screen translator is effective because the viewer sees the different native people as individuals, not as an archetype representing an entire culture.

In one sequence, Parry sits down and talks to Nabala, his host's wife, about her lip plate. She tells him it's an old tradition and no one is sure when it started. She explains how the plates serve as a measure of wealth...the larger the plate, the more cattle a woman's family receives when she is married. Then Parry, in voice over, talks about how some women reject lip plates. Another young woman tells why she refused to have her lip cut when she was young ("it makes you dribble") and when asked if that means her family won't receive cattle when she marries, she replies, "If a man likes me, he'll give cattle." By choosing to let the native women speak for themselves about their own situations, the filmmakers break out of the traditional mode of portrayal of indigenous peoples. Allowing the women to speak about their lives is an effective way for the filmmakers to challenge Western viewer's conceptions (or misconceptions) about the "Other."

Parry also participates in many of the tribe's daily activities such as drinking cattle blood and homemade beer and even letting Nabala and a group of women give him a decorative scar, like they give themselves. Throughout, the native people laugh at his squeamishness, cheer his willingness to try what they do and give him a fair amount of good-natured ribbing. Parry's stated reason for visiting the Suri tribe is to learn to stick fight. When the king of the area says that he does not want Parry to fight (because if he is injured, the king will be blamed) Parry defers and in voice over says that he's secretly relieved because the king allowed him to bow out and retain his honor. The filmmakers break the mold of earlier films by portraying the white Western male as inferior to the native African male and even to some degree, the native woman. This portrayal is a complete reversal of the traditional hierarchy that starts with native women at the bottom, then native males, then white women and at the apex, white males.⁸⁰

Part of the positive appeal of "Dangerous Game: The Suri" is that Parry makes it clear to the viewer and the native peoples what he is doing and what his intentions are. Early in the film, Parry explains to the camera that they have sent word to the king to ask for permission to stay in the village and film and have offered to pay for the privilege. He occasionally speaks to the cameraman, not just the camera. He also places the tribe in a historical context, talking to tribal members and the camera and allowing tribal members to talk about their recent history (the Sudanese civil war and the arrival of automatic weapons) and how it affects their lives.

Despite these improvements, there are still a few reminders of earlier mythologies. At the beginning of the film in voice over, Parry says, “I’ve come here to live with the Suri people—because I want to understand their way of life—before it’s too late.” This statement seems to draw from salvage ethnography. During the lip plate sequence the voice over says, “Some girls are beginning to realize just how unusual the custom is.” This line of narration highlights the exoticism in a negative way. He occasionally refers to the village as, “my village” and much of the focus of the film is on his daring. By focusing on him in these ways, the film relates back to the films of the Johnsons. Though the filmmakers allow Parry to slide lower in the hierarchy at many times throughout the film, he ultimately retains his rank at the top. Nonetheless, the film itself is a vast improvement over many other films dealing with native cultures, allowing the voices of the indigenous people to come through and be heard.

The way the Discovery Channel promotes the series is more problematic. The spots they produce for the show retain the mythologies and stereotypes of older films. The commercials previewing upcoming episodes use sensationalism and inflate Parry’s role as white adventurer/explorer in savage lands. These commercials use the native body to provide exoticism. The natives are reduced to symbols of the exotic rather than people, much less individuals. The tag line on a number of these spots is, “Get in touch with your inner native.” Even the opening sequence of the series is wrought with the idea of getting back to a more primitive self. The opening is a highly stylized recreation and consists of a white male (shown only from the back and in profile) walking through a jungle in the semi-dark as painted native faces peek through leaves and native feet splash

through mud. Gradually the man removes his shirt, covered in sweat and there is a large tattoo of a spiral on his shoulder (the show's logo). He seems to be undergoing rituals and eventually emerges naked in front of a roaring fire where the series title, Going Tribal is emblazoned. While the series itself may be more enlightened than most, the promotion of the series is just as stereotypical and mythologized as earlier films dealing with indigenous cultures.

TOWARDS A MORE ENLIGHTENED PORTRAYAL

Fatimah Tobing Rony discusses in The Third Eye how focusing a critique on white filmmakers also marginalizes indigenous Africans by presenting them as specimens that represent an entire people, ignoring the fact that they are actors and not just bodies in front of the camera.⁸¹ While I acknowledge that the indigenous people in these films indeed have a “gaze,” a subjectivity of their own, I believe it is important to concentrate on the way that Western filmmakers portray them in order to provide a model of “what not to do.” In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate how the ways that contemporary filmmakers portray indigenous African cultures is little changed from the 1920s. Films that continue to be informed by these mythologies, be it the myth of the frontier, the myth of authentic first man, the conservation myth or some combination of the three, can only be detrimental to Western audiences’ views of indigenous cultures by continuing to validate Western belief systems that hold up Western values as the ultimate cultural attainment for people worldwide.

Filmmakers must be cautious when making images of any people. Filmmakers control people via their image; it no longer belongs to the subject. Filmmakers can abuse this power a number of ways. By portraying native Africans and people of other indigenous cultures as merely *mise en scène* as so many natural history films do, filmmakers equate the native people to wildlife, making them less than human, removing their voice and any cultural/historical context they have. Portraying indigenous people as more primitive in a more primitive time, as in the myth of “authentic first man,” is just as

detrimental. The filmmaker strips the people of any larger context, implying that they are separate from time and history. Adding any sort of salvage rhetoric removes people from their context in modern history. Using ecological imperialism through film, portraying outside Westerners as more knowledgeable and experienced about the land of an indigenous people without giving the natives' experience any weight is also a means of control. Portraying native people as less intelligent about the ways of their own lands is paternalistic. Doing so shows native people as subject to white male authority. All of these methods of portrayal are ways for Western filmmakers and audiences alike to silence and control their subjects.

Many ethnographic filmmakers interested in the ethics of filming people of indigenous cultures are increasingly advocating the appropriation of video technology by native people to represent themselves.⁸² While I agree that appropriating the technology is a valuable step in representation for native filmmakers, I do not consider it viable for this discussion. Most Western natural history filmmakers operate within a very closed network of broadcasters, pandering to Western popular audiences, allowing little room for experimentation. I believe that it is possible for Western filmmakers to strike a balance. Filmmakers can give native people a voice by allowing them to speak to the camera, to the filmmakers and off camera as well. I believe that another key to achieve this balance is through self-reflexivity of the filmmaker. Reflexivity can be as subtle as allowing native people to acknowledge the camera, or as obvious as the use of reflexivity in Going Tribal. Portraying native people as "historifiable" rather

than “ethnographiable” is an important distinction; Fatimah Tobing Rony discusses the difference:

The people depicted in an ‘ethnographic film’ are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only too recently were categorized by science as Savage and Primitive, of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives.⁸³

Though an exact model for making a film that is completely non-imperialistic in its portrayal of indigenous people is difficult to develop, it is possible to come close, as I noted of the Going Tribal series. I believe that awareness of the myths and histories that inform the portrayals of native people is the first step in improving those portrayals. When filmmakers gain that awareness, they may learn to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and begin to show more enlightened depictions of indigenous people.

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