SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND DOCUMENTARY FILM STORYTELLING FROM AN ABSÁALOOGE PARADIGM

by

Álahúzha Ítchish

Camille Mona Höwitaawi del Duca

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Science and Natural History Filmmaking

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

November 2020

KINSHIP

Montana State University is sitting on my Absáalooge family's traditional lands, but also on the traditional lands of the Niitsítpiis, Cheyenne, Salish Kootenai, Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, and Shoshone-Bannock. May the land and the people find healing together and remember the seven generations who came before, and the seven generations who come after in all that we do.

My name is Camille Mona Höwitaawi del Duca, Álahúzha Ítchish. My mother is a German Immigrant and my father comes from a multi-ethnic background. My adopted Absáalooge Grandfathers are Larsen Medicinehorse and Larry Kindness. My adopted Absáalooge mother, and the co-creator of my thesis film is Sha Eh Gush, Peggy White Wellknown Buffalo. I acknowledge and respect the decolonizing methodologies and traditional Absáalooge teachings that I am applying in my work. This project is one of mutual aid and I am grateful for the time creating with my Ihgaa. I also want to note that I am using an expanded phonetic orthography of the Absáalooge language rather than the spelling laid out by the Crow Language Consortium (Apsáalooke) because someone unfamiliar with their orthography will pronounce the word incorrectly.

Ahó to Grant Bulltail, an Absáalooge elder who stars in a short film analyzed in this paper. I did not get the chance to meet you before you followed the spirit trail to the other side camp, but your film helped clarify ideas crucial to this paper and for that I am grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I propose that contemporary documentary films that depict Native American cultures should tell the story from that culture's perspective, centering relationality instead of perpetuating hierarchal thinking. My methodological approach to both this paper and my film *The Roads of Healing* is based on the work of Indigenous Research Methodology scholar Shawn Wilson, whose work prioritizes relationality and aims to have the final product benefit the community. I have done my best to respect and follow the Absáalooge protocols taught to me by my relations. In this paper, I will discuss the colonial impact of Eurocentric documentary representations of Indigenous people on Native Americans through an analysis of *Beyond Standing Rock* (2018) and *What Was Ours* (2016). I will then demonstrate how aspects of the Indigenous worldview can be expressed in documentary filmmaking through an examination of *Fast Horse* (2018) and *Return to Foretop's Father* (2019), concluding my study with an analysis of my own film *Roads of Healing,* which I propose as a model for documentarians who are working to decolonize Eurocentric nonfiction filmmaking. In doing so, I will illustrate how systemic racism perpetuated by euro-centric documentary filmmaking practices can be challenged by embracing an Indigenous paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Native Americans have been legally and culturally designated by colonizers as inferior to people of European descent. This cultural colonization of Native Americans was reflected in law. In 1823, Native Americans were ruled unable to control their own land on the grounds of cultural and religious inferiority in the court case *Johnson vs. Mc'Intosh*. This ruling is the origin of contemporary Native American social and environmental justice issues as it set the precedent that Native Americans do not have sovereignty over their own land. Instead their land is held "In Trust" by the federal government so that tribal members have to get permission before taking actions such as selling natural resources and leasing their land for agricultural purposes. The exploitation of both land and indigenous people is the platform upon which colonialism was built and is sustained. This is both reflected in and perpetuated by Eurocentric storytelling, especially in documentary film.

In this paper, I propose that contemporary documentary films that depict Native American cultures should tell the story from that culture's perspective, focusing on the values and protocols of the Indigenous culture rather than on those of colonial culture. This is crucial in order to avoid perpetuating systemic oppression of Indigenous worldviews. By embracing cultural protocols, relationality, and basket storytelling structures, as well as by building land as a character, filmmakers can take a step out of Western storytelling and help negate the ongoing colonialization of Indigenous people.

The long history of colonialism's extractive forces on Indigenous people are perpetuated through extractive film practices. In traditional practices, Indigenous people

rely on their environment to sustain their lifestyle as well as connect with the land in spiritual ways. Whereas extractive practices destroy the land and negatively impact Indigenous people's ability to sustain themselves, extractive documentary filmmaking depicts a culture for the benefit of people outside of the community the information originated in. Therefore, my methodological approach to both this paper and the film I co-created, *The Roads of Healing,* is based on Indigenous research methodology, especially on the work of Indigenous Scholar Shawn Wilson, which prioritizes relationality and assures that the final product benefits the community. To explore indigenous approaches to storytelling in terms of form and function, I studied the style of non-fiction essays written by Indigenous writers and listened to the oral traditions of my Apsáalooke relatives. The result of my research led me to the decision that I had to co-create the short film titled *The Roads of Healing* with Peggy Wellknown Buffalo, the founder and director of the non-profit Center Pole, clan mother, and the woman with all the best ideas behind the film.

In this paper, I will discuss the colonial impact of Eurocentric documentary representations of Indigenous people on Native Americans through an analysis of *Beyond Standing Rock* (2018) and *What Was Ours* (2016). I will then demonstrate how aspects of the Indigenous worldview can be expressed in documentary filmmaking through an examination of *Fast Horse* (2018) and *Return to Foretop's Father* (2019), concluding my study with an analysis of the film I co-created *The Roads of Healing,* which I propose as a model for documentarians who are working to decolonize Eurocentric nonfiction filmmaking. In so doing, I hope to illustrate how the systemic racism perpetuated by

western-centric documentary filmmaking practices can be challenged by embracing Indigenous cultural protocols, relationality, and basket storytelling structures in the production of documentary films about Indigenous cultures.

HISTORICAL BASIS OF SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND FILM

A Primer on Systemic Oppression of Indigenous People

In this section, I will apply a Systems Theory approach to systemic oppression of Indigenous people. Systems Theory investigates the component parts of a system in the context of the relationships they have with each other and with other systems, and how oppression can be self-perpetuating. I will then introduce the option of disposing of the colonial system by working from Indigenous paradigms. In *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, a system is described as "a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. The system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the system's response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and that response is seldom simple in the real world" (Meadows, 2). As this quote suggests, understanding the complexity of a system is a prerequisite for changing the system itself. Therefore, if the goal is to halt systemic oppression or environmental degradation, first we must understand what forces feed its existence.

Hossay points to the economic drive behind oppression in his book *Unsustainable: A Primer for Global Environmental and Social Justice*. When the people with power and wealth prioritize making more money above the wellbeing of large populations of people, money-making interest outweigh people. We live in a world where the rich are getting richer, and 36% of the world's population live in poverty. Hossay says "The World Trade Organization, the great colossus of international institutions, is redefining the world to guarantee their ecosystems, social justice, and a generally livable

planet are trampled by a determination to redefine the world for corporate interests. And so sovereignty, the right of a nation to determine its own priorities and fate, and democracy, the right of the people to govern their own lives, are pushed aside" (83). As Marxist Theory maintains, there is an undeniable economic incentive for oppression because the capitalist system requires perpetual growth and profit (Marx).

In the United States, a disguised economic justification was used to demote Indigenous people and their paradigm to below the paradigm of colonizers. As Gilio-Whitaker argues, "the idea that European religious and cultural superiority gave the US the superior right of title to land by virtue of discovery, while Native nations merely possessed the right of occupation, or usufruct rights" (Gilio-Whitaker, 25). She goes on to state that Indian law had racist origins that were motivated by European desire for more land and wealth. The Christian ideologically based Doctrine of Discovery, a legal document that established spiritual, political and legal justification for colonization, gave Christians the right to seize land from non-Christians. This evolved into the United States managing Native American lands by assuming the role of trustee over those lands (Gilo-Whitaker, 37-38).

The tradition of colonizing Indigenous people started with the brutal takeover of indigenous Europeans by the Roman empire. The techniques they used to conquer were those of cultural genocide, eliminating a certain way of life in order to further the reach of those in power. These techniques have been used repeatedly by Europeans in the eras since then, with Spanish conquest of South and Central America, and English imperial conquest of Ireland and occupation of Scotland and Wales. Through all of these

genocides, storytelling has been a tool that has been used by colonizers to rationalize their own actions.

The United States continued that tradition through the Doctrine of Discovery discussed above, with its implications of superiority over Indigenous people of North America. The story of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny ensured the deadly pairing of a legal framework with religious commandments to expand and dominate the Indigenous people and the land. Settlers were told that it was their God-given inevitable destiny to expand westward, and the power of that story was the driving force behind the genocide of the remaining Native Americans in the West. Not only did it justify the breaking of treaties and land grabs, it also legitimated the forced assimilation and "Kill the Indian, save the man," policies.

The events that transpired at Standing Rock in 2017 demonstrate that there continues to be an inextricable link between Environmental and Social Justice for Indigenous people. Land, people, connection to the cosmos, and worldview are all inextricably linked in typical traditional Indigenous culture. Taking land and extracting resources from the land is somewhat equivalent to the horrors Europeans would experience if invaders came in and burned Notre Dame, torturing and killing its priests, and enslaving all of the people of the community. That kind of horror is understandable to the western world view yet equating that to energy extraction may seem far-fetched to people unfamiliar with how linked land, people and connection to cosmos for traditional Indigenous worldviews are.

Scientific research is done from within a worldview, and that worldview impacts the results, which in turn impact the worldview in a self-perpetuating system. The dominant paradigms in scientific research today can be placed in four categories: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Positivism perpetuates the idea of a singular truth that those in power can define and control. Post-positivism perpetuates the idea that through objectivity we can see the world and encourages emotional distance and lack of connection. Critical theory perpetuates the belief that reality is influenced by cultural and social values. Constructivism perpetuates the belief that reality has been shaped by individual perspectives (Wilson, 35-37). Understanding these four dominant research paradigms are important as they reflect the overall paradigms of dominant culture and give us something to compare an Indigenous paradigm.

The characteristics of the dominant paradigm that create self-perpetuating oppression are identified as perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, defining progress as bigger/more, a belief that objectivity can exist, and a right to comfort (Jones and Okun). Jones and Okun labeled the dominant paradigm as the White Supremacy Culture; yet I believe these characteristics can be applicable to more than just racial issues as they play a crucial role in the creation of the binaries and hierarchies that are used to justify the dominant paradigm.

The dominant paradigm's core characteristics explain European settlers' justification for the genocide committed against Indigenous peoples. As Gilio-Whitaker argues, "racism is imbricated with colonialism in a logic that, as EJ geography scholars Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood claim, 'situates white supremacy not as an artifact of history or as an extreme position, but rather as the foundation for the continuous unfolding of practices of race and racism in settler states'" (Gilio-Whitaker, 25-26). Although racism plays a crucial part in how the current dominant system works, we need to look at other parts of the system to better understand what purpose systemic oppression serves.

In order to determine what purpose systemic racism serves, we need to look at who benefits from the current system and ask how they maintain power. From a systems theory standpoint, answering these two questions will determine the purpose of the system and what rules are in place that perpetuate they system. Key characteristics of the system of oppression are discussed in *Unsustainable: A Primer on Global Environmental and Social Justice*; "Built into this world-view was a hierarchy of humanity that identified Europeans as superior and thus not only endowed by God and nature with the right to control and exploit the earth's resources but also endowed with the 'natural' right to control and exploit the earth's people. . . Such interpretations of the natural order were used to justify a system of privilege and exploitation – legitimating a violent, and soon to be global, system that enriched and empowered a small minority and forcibly enslaved or impoverished the majority of the earth's people." (Hossay, 45). Extrapolating this to the characteristics of dominant culture, we add hierarchical power structures, the existence of

truth (and Christian dominance), and defining value of all things by their worth to those in power. Hierarchical binaries give power to people belonging to wealthy, white, heterosexual, Christian, and male demographics and perpetuate the beliefs at the root of oppression. Land, non-human living things, and people that do not belong to demographics with power are commodities to those with power. Now that we have identified key characteristics of systemic racism, white supremacy culture, and colonialism, we now turn to how this system has impacted Indigenous people in the United States.

Native Americans have suffered genocide and continue to suffer cultural genocide at the hand of the current colonizing system. Genocide is defined as the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular ethnic group with the aim of destroying that group. The structural genocide of Native Americans started through war, massacres, forced removal from ancestral lands, placement on reservations and then evolved into assimilation policies that "remove children from families, imposition of citizenship, religious conversion, and blood quantum policies, among others" (Gilio-Whitaker, 50-51). Today, most Native American cultures have lost large portions of their tradition knowledge at the hands of assimilation. Killing people is not the only way to destroy an ethnicity, the hierarchical binaries that oppress cultural values other than western ones erase a culture just as effectively. Cultural eraser is not the only loss to the Indigenous worldview, the loss of land is just as fraught.

There is an inextricable link between environmental and social injustice, and this is especially true for Indigenous people, who's culture defines their relationship with the

land as relational. Relationality implies a set of protocols in which both, or all, parties must adhere to. To demonstrate that for those who are not familiar with relational thinking, it's akin to that hill over there being a cousin. There is cultural protocol in which your cousin gives you the gift of food and you, in return, will honor your cousin with songs, sharing your food, and praying for the health and wellbeing of that cousin. Not only do you have relationship with that hill, you have a responsibility to that hill akin to the responsibilities you have to your human family. Over the last 15,000 years or so, Native Americans have been developing symbiotic ways of living with the land, and that ancestral knowledge is the key component of their culture (Gilio-Whitaker, 36). When colonial culture comes in an destroys land and removes natural resources in a way that doesn't also benefit the land, it is killing yet another relative. This demonstrates that commoditizing of the land is also a direct affront to people who hold an Indigenous worldview.

Taking the connection of social and environmental injustice into account, systemic oppression will continue until there is no longer economic pressure on people to exploit the land. Until that changes, we are all still being colonized: "In settler colonialism, which is viewed not just as a historical event but also a structure designed to eliminate the Native via physical and political erasure, the purpose of political control and domination is to gain access to territory" (Gilio-Whitaker, 24). This is still taking place, as colonial pressures are leading to corruption in tribes, where many take advantages of situation that would give them the opportunity to give their families financial stability. The acknowledgement that present-day colonialism, white supremacy

culture, and systemic oppression are all deeply interrelated can be a daunting realization, one that demands that those with any amount of privilege and power ask themselves what they can do to help dismantle the systems that perpetuate oppression.

With the context of systemic oppression laid out before us, we have to ask "how then can US society come to terms with its past? How can it acknowledge responsibility? The late Native historian Jack Forbes always stressed that while living persons are not responsible for what their ancestors did, they are responsible for the society they live in, which is a product of that past," (Dunbar-Ortiz, 218). In taking responsibility for the past, we must take a look at our current system and identify ways in which it perpetuates this oppression, then change it.

Eurocentric Representations of Indigenous People

In the previous section, I discussed the ways in which Eurocentrism has systematically oppressed Indigenous cultures. Paternalism is defined as people with power restricting the autonomy and responsibilities of the people they have power over in the supposed best interest of those they can exert their power on. Paternalism is a symptom of hierarchical binaries and the typical the lens through which documentary filmmaking has represented Indigenous cultures. Hierarchies, paternalism, assumptions of truth, and uplifting the voices of assimilated Indians will be the focus of my analysis of representations of Indigenous people in documentary films.

An integral part of the western, or European, worldview is hierarchy. This vertical power structure creates chains of command, government structures, structural tiers in the workplace, and even impacts the way families typically function. Power hierarchies are built into every aspect of western life. Before European intervention, many Indigenous People, especially in the Rocky Mountains and plains areas, functioned with horizontal power structures that were more like collaborative webs with power structures that were constantly changing. Upon the creation and enforcement of Indian Policy, the horizontal power structures were replaced with vertical hierarchies that forced Native Americans to function in the European way. Communal life was broken up with land allocations that forced families to become nuclear, those families were given the choice to commoditize their land or starve, and traditional ways of governance were replaced first by Indian Agents who often withheld commodities to those who opposed their power and then with democratic governments which are fraught with nepotism today. Despite this, horizontal

family and societal structures still exist on some level. Globally, there are still some cultures that successfully maintain horizontal power structures despite colonial capitalist influences, such as the Zapatistas. The western paradigm makes the assumption that vertical power structure exists everywhere, and this assumption is reflected in film.

When western culture is used as a filter to understand indigenous cultures, there are inherent assumptions made that, intentionally or unintentionally, erode Indigenous traditional worldviews. Mainstream cinema routinely depicts Indigenous cultures as having the same vertical power structures seen in the western paradigm. An example of this is in the Disney film *Moana* (2016), when Maui, a whitewashed bro version of a Polynesian demi-god, calls Moana a princess and she corrects him by specifying that she is the daughter of the village chief. By projecting European standards onto Polynesian people, the Disney franchise encourages us to think of a princess and a Polynesian chief's daughter as the same, even though Western and Polynesian cultures are very different. This kind of assumption tends to perpetuate Eurocentric thinking because it encourages people to view other cultures through the lens of Caucasian value systems and beliefs. Assuming sameness simultaneously gives the Western thinker the right to relate to the foreign culture, while at the same time justifies white culture as superior because of the dominance it achieved. This cultural dominance is what sparks paternalism.

This kind of condescending and paternalistic stance is also apparent in the feature film *Dances with Wolves* (1990). The main character, Lt. Dunbar, makes friends with the Lakota and eventually decides that he is going to live with them. Towards the end of the film, he tells the Lakota that a large number of white people are going to migrate to the

plains that they call home and that they need to prepare for this eventuality. At the end of the movie, Lt. Dunbar is declared a traitor by the U.S. army, but in typical martyr style he leaves the Lakota tribe to try to make peace with the U.S. government. While renouncing the Western way of life, the "solution" of Dunbar going to make peace is paternalistic and individualistic. The fact that Dunbar, the white man turned Indian, is the only one who can go make peace with the U.S. government seems to imply that the Lakota are unable to advocate for themselves and that they need to be rescued by the white man.

Similarly, to fiction filmmaking, mainstream documentary films such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) tend to create stereotypes about Indigenous cultures. For example, *Nanook of the North* blatantly depicts Inuit culture as primitive, showing Nanook explore objects from the Western world with the naiveite of a child. The most prevalent example of this is the scene in which Nanook is introduced to a gramophone and he is portrayed to have no concept of what it is, and even puts it in his mouth like toddler exploring the world through taste. What the audience does not know is that at this point in time, Inuit people have had a lot of contact with Europeans and have adopted much of their technology. Even without blatantly paternalistic directing, anthropological studies of Indigenous cultures via films tend to encourage condescending attitudes. They dramatize the lives of their subjects and Westerners benefit from the superiority of being able to watch and judge their behaviors objectively, from a distance. This filmmaking approach uses Indigenous groups as an object of study, dually creating separation from the audience and encouraging superiority through the act of unilateral observation. This

directly contradicts the core Indigenous paradigm value of relationality, which we will discuss more in the Indigenous Methodology section.

An atrocious mistake made by modern fiction films is the use of white actors for Native roles, such as Johnny Depp in *The Lone Ranger* (2013). Representation of Indigenous people in film is a long-standing problem that is only aggravated when white actors are chosen to play non-white characters. The casting of white actors in leading roles serves to erase the existence of Natives and paint them as non-central to the story by implying that white people are the only ones who can be protagonists in film. This could have easily been avoided had they cast a Camanche as Tonto.

Another negative trope used in Eurocentric filmmaking is the assimilated Indian, someone who is Indigenous but embraces the western worldview. This is done in the film *Beyond Standing Rock* (2017), in which Mike Olguin from the Southern Ute Tribe is interviewed as a supporter of natural resource development on the reservation. The tribe is at odds with the federal government not because they oppose natural resource extraction, but because they want to do it themselves. Mike states “we want to make sure the people have benefits. For our grandchildren’s grandchildren” (*Beyond Standing Rock*, 2017). Immediately after Mike’s interview, the documentary stacks three interviews from white people that state how lucky the Ute’s are to have these natural resources to exploit and that their profits ensure that they can protect their land. This section of the film is presenting the case from the Western vantage point that the Ute’s are succeeding in pulling themselves out of poverty through economic means. This series of interviews hits on all of the faults of Eurocentric documentary filmmaking. Hierarchical binaries present

in the power status of Mike, a Ute Indian, vs the three white people interviewed imply that Mike's opinion as an Indian is irrelevant without the approval of white opinions. Paternalism also exists in the same dynamic, as the approval of the white interviewee's also seemed more important than Mike's. Looking at the section as a whole, it assumed that economic development through natural resource development is a positive for the tribe. Finally, Mike's stance that natural resource development can be done in a respectful way is a direct contradiction to the core Indigenous Paradigm value of reciprocal relationships with the land. The use of so many white voices to speak about indigenous issues implies that this is not an Ingenious issue, or that Indigenous people are not at the heart of this issue. Instead, it is a white issue that the filmmaker used Indigenous people as objects of reflection to explore the topic.

As in *Beyond Standing Rock* (2013), it is fairly common for there to be a lack of Indigenous ownership in the stories told about them. Stories that should center Indigenous people, and have major decisions made by those people, instead are controlled by white people. As discussed in the previous section, white supremacy culture does not support the sharing of power. As in *Dances with Wolves,* even stories about what Indigenous people experienced center a white person, making the story a white person's story instead of an Indigenous one.

Paternalism is easily discerned in the film *What Was Ours* (2016). The film follows the journey of a few people from the Arapaho and Shoshone tribes who are working to regain some level of ownership of sacred items that were taken from families around the time the tribes were placed on Reservations and forced to convert to

Christianity. The film portrays the white people who took artifacts as well-meaning archeologists, rather than people who were paternalistic and financially benefiting from the forced assimilation of Arapaho and Shoshone people. At the end of the film, the church that now owns the sacred items allowed a casino to temporarily house the items in an exhibit. Interviews from tribal members depict the tribes as grateful to for this development and understanding that they don't have the right to regain ownership of their items. By portraying the Arapaho and Shoshone tribes as grateful that the white church people let them borrow back their artifacts for a museum exhibit, rather than demanding back their sacred bundles, this film perpetuates colonialism.

Although paternalism might take many forms, its outcome is the same. When someone from a western paradigm watches a film such as *Beyond Standing Rock* and *What Was Ours,* their assumptions that the Western paradigm is the only way of seeing the world is perpetuated. Film stories told from a Western vantage point tend to perpetuate white supremacy culture. Therefore, in order to avoid paternalism and other ways of perpetuating oppression, documentary filmmakers need to become aware of their own ideological assumptions and strive for a deeper understanding of the Indigenous cultures they are portraying.

APPLYING INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

The Indigenous Paradigm and Film

Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* and Warburton and Washuta's *Shapes of Narrative Nonfiction* were crucial for framing the production process of my film from an Indigenous paradigm. In this section, I will discuss my methodology, which incorporates Indigenous Research methods and non-fiction writing from Native authors, and then explain how I will apply it to the making of the film I co-created, *The Roads of Healing*. Distilled from Indigenous non-fiction writing and Indigenous Research Methodology are four key components to storytelling from an Indigenous paradigm: assumptions of dynamisms instead of static facts, land as a character, relationships being central to the story instead of the individual, and a non-linear story structure.

As discussed in the previous section, assumptions of truth have played a role in both perpetuating hierarchal binaries and assumptions that the truths defined by those in power apply to all people. In searching for key aspects of an Indigenous paradigm that could be applied to film, assuming dynamism instead of static facts seemed to both reflect the Indigenous paradigm as well as work in contradiction to the assumptions of the Western Paradigm. In the book *Shapes of Native Non-Fiction*, Warburton and Washuta speak of colonized non-fiction stories of Native people demonstrating an emphasis on the information, or facts, that Native authors can provide to their readers. The alternative they propose is to shift the emphasis to the how the story is told and how it shapes the content, which "destabilizes the colonial demand for factual information about Native life in favor of a framework that insists upon an understanding of indigeneity as a dynamic, creative,

and intentional form which shapes the content that is garnered through its exploration" (Warburton, Washuta). Eurocentric culture's fascination with universal "truths" allows Western thinkers to neatly place Native American cultures in a little box of stereotypes and then expect all Natives they meet to fit that mold. I propose instead that the stories we tell about Indigenous cultures shift the emphasis toward the telling of the story, instead of communicating cultural facts.

Another aspect of an Indigenous worldview that is crucial for approaching storytelling from a Native American perspective is portraying the land as its own character. The land needs to be an active participant in an Indigenous film; it needs to be a strong character in some way. Land's status as an active participant in stories should also be recognized for its importance in Indigenous worldview, according to which land is a relation. As discussed in *A Primer of Systemic Oppression of Indigenous People,* Indigenous worldview typically has culturally specific protocols that come from centuries of a people living with a place. Cultures evolved to incorporate harmony with the land. Just like human relations, people receive gift from the land and have a responsibility to give gifts in return. In Apsáalooge culture specifically, there are river and place specific ceremonies that demonstrate this reciprocity. As mentioned before, there are not vertical hierarchies in the Indigenous paradigm; thus, human life is not more important than anything else in the universe. As Warburton and Washuta argue "As a critical component of setting, place is not the stage upon which events occur but is rather an active participant in those events. This acknowledgment of the power inherent in place, which

must exist in all elements of setting, appears in oral tradition and in contemporary writing" (Warburton, Washuta, introduction).

In order to better understand the difference between relationality and an individualistic approach, we must turn to Indigenous scholars who have laid the groundwork for research*ing* - emphasis on the doing - in an Indigenous way. *Research is Ceremony* describes the Indigenous Research Paradigm as a circle whose constitutive parts (ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology) are deeply interrelated; "the entire circle is an indigenous research paradigm. Its entities are inseparable and blend from one into the next… The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships" (Wilson, 70-71). The below figure is the visual representation of the Indigenous Research Paradigm that Wilson adopts in his book. Not only do the ideas and actions of this approach need to be deeply interconnection, but the people participating in said research need to co-create a reality and accountability to each other and the work. Applying this to filmmaking, relationality demands that film subjects become active participants in the not only the making of the film, but also in the idea construction, creation of protocols, and the purpose of the finished film. Informed consent for this process is a minimum, with non-hierarchical collaboration being the ideal. If the director of the film maintains power over the product, then the film moves toward extraction rather than mutual accountability.

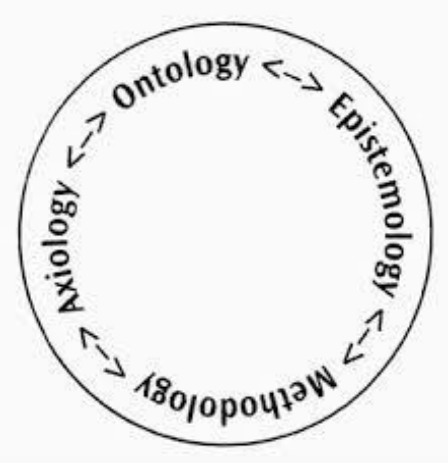

Figure 1. A circular representation of the Indigenous Research Paradigm as outlined by Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony* (70).

In the previous section *A Primer of Systemic Oppression of Indigenous People*, I discussed how research done from a Western paradigm tend to perpetuate the dominant system, because Eurocentric epistemology is used to understand the world. A crucial difference between the Western and Indigenous Paradigms is who is centered in regard to knowledge. In dominant paradigms, knowledge centers the individual. This means that the purpose of seeking knowledge is to benefit the individual, and that it's up to the individual to decide what truth is. On the other hand, in an Indigenous paradigm, "knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of the knowledge. . . I argue that using an Indigenous perspective is not sufficient, but that Indigenous research must leave behind dominant paradigms and follow an Indigenous research paradigm" (Wilson, 38). Therefore, to tell a story from an Indigenous paradigm, knowledge seeking and distribution for individual benefit must be discarded and a relational view replace it.

At the heart of an Indigenous approach to knowledge is the notion of relationality. As Wilson explains, “The … relational way of being [is] at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (Wilson, 80). He goes on to express that relationships with people, land, ideas and cosmos all need to be taken into account when telling stories from an Indigenous Paradigm. In *Shapes of Native Non*-Fiction, Warburton and Washuta describe how the Indigenous paradigm plays out in story structure using the concepts of Coiling, Plaiting and Twining. These three techniques may differ in the approach to storytelling, but they all have the same goal of creating a story that is perceived as a harmonious whole within the context of the land on which they occur. Coiled stories have a central point, typically a place, in which the other elements of the story are built around and connect back to. They also “appear seamless. ‘Coiling begins at the center of a basket and grows upon itself in a spiral rounds, each attached to the round before.’ Coiled baskets can be woven so tightly that they can hold water; these essays, seamless and generally not fragmented in their approach, are constructed using transitional gestures that unify content far ranging in time, place, and meaning,” (Warburton, Washuta, introduction).

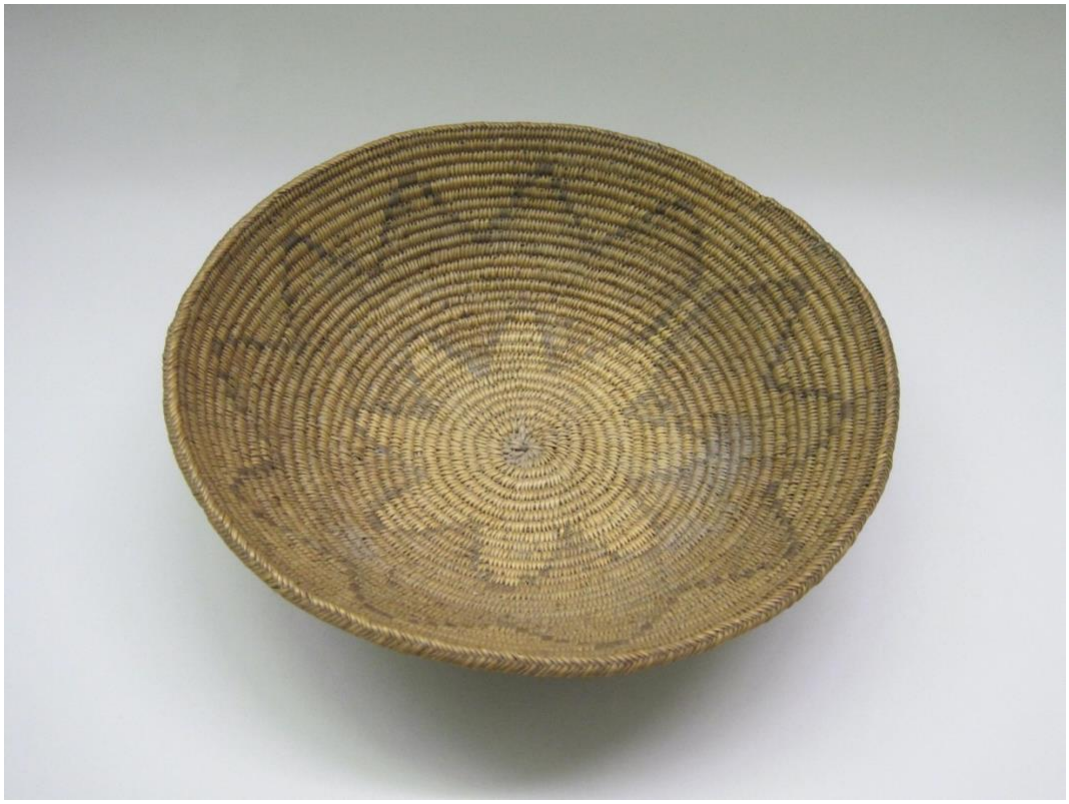

Figure 2. Coiled Basket – Ts'a (Navajo artist).

In applying the notion of 'coiling' to film, this could be achieved by centering a place in the story, and then using transitional shots that show the passing of time between sub-sequences, straying from use of chronological orders of events. With the place being central to the story, there is creative freedom in choosing how to pursue the story of a place. It could be the story of the relationship between one person and that place, showing a person's memories of the place and what that place does for that person. It could also be a story from the perspective of the place, and its relationship with other things. Moments from far ranging places and times could be coiled together, totally disregarding linear time, to create a story that demonstrates symbiotic relationships that make up the individual weaves of this coiled basket.

Figure 3. Plaited basket with stamped design (Mohegan-Pequot artist).

Regarding the notion of ‘plaiting,’ this structure describes a conversation between two aspects of the same story. Each aspect moves in its own direction and is given attention for a short amount of time before transitioning to the other aspect, again and again until the story container is complete. In the words of Warburton and Washuta, “Plaiting is for fragmented essays with a single source. ‘In plaiting, or checkerwork, two elements are woven over and under each other at right angles.’ Because the weft and warp are often identical in appearance and material, weft and warp can be indistinguishable in a flat piece, though the weaving itself is visible. For this reason, we apply this term to essays that are segmented in structure and include material from a single source, usually the author’s lived experience,” (Warburton, Washuta, introduction). If applied to filmmaking, plaiting could be realized by having a single narrator telling two different stories in sequences that trade off with one another. The

stories should be interwoven in a way that, by the completion of the film, create a single narrative that feels both whole and richer because it is being told in two ways. Each section could be separated with a moment of black screen to communicate a change in topic, or a new weft or warp in the film.

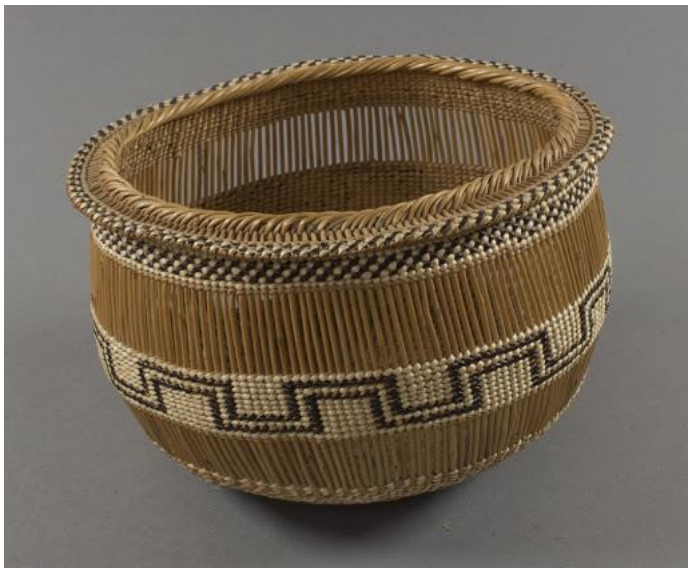

Figure 4. An open work twined basket (Hupa artist).

With respect to ‘twining’, the structure is created with one story strand, such as a historical timeline or something as predictable. Around the structural story strand are woven two or more different story strands that create their own patterns that are both directly woven into the structural strand and can be unrecognizable as the same basket. Warburton and Washuta state “Twining is for essays that bring together material from different sources. ‘Twining work begins with a foundation of rigid elements, or warp rods – around which two, and sometimes three or four, weft elements are woven. The wefts are separated, brought together again, and twisted. The action is repeated again and again, building the basked.’ We apply this term to lyric essays that combine the author’s

personal experience and narrator perspective with research material," (Warburton, Washuta, introduction). Twining assumes interrelatedness to topics that may not seem to interconnect upon first glance. Yet with this story structure we could tell stories that make the assumption that today's events are built around the bones of something bigger and more predictable than the immediate story. Upon revealing the context, or structural strands, of the story, the intricate weaves, or woven story strands, directly in front of us take on a new deeper meaning. When applied to the process of filmmaking, twining could be achieved by bringing together many disparate voices to show how a specific historical event, such as Assimilation Policy sending kids to boarding school, still have resounding impacts on people today.

In order to step outside of the self-perpetuating Western paradigm when telling stories about Indigenous cultures, filmmakers must emphasize relationship with people, land, ideas and cosmos in a non-hierarchical way. I hope I was able to demonstrate how rejecting chronological narrative structures through the use of coiling, plaiting and twining in the telling of stories about Indigenous peoples can help to achieve the above relations. In the next section, I will be discussing story structure theory through the analyses of *Fast Horse* (2018) and *Return to Foretop's Father* (2019), which successfully capture a part of the Indigenous worldview basket story structure, land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking.

Analyzing Indigenous Worldview Illustrated in Film

In this section, I will analyze the documentary films *Fast Horse* (2018) and *Return to Foretop's Father* (2019) to determine to what degree they have told a story from an Indigenous Worldview. In order to do so, I will identify the ways in which these films use the concepts introduced in the previous section; basket story structure, land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking.

Fast Horse (2018) is a short documentary film that was officially selected for showing in 16 film festivals. To build context, the film starts with a beautiful sequence of the main character, Cody Big Tobacco, jumping rope by a tipi. It immediately sets the film in the context of his homeland, the Siksika Nation in Alberta, Canada. The sequence quickly shifts to Cody riding through the Canadian landscape, then first-person perspective of riding in an Indian Relay race in black and white, all cut to tension-building music. The film then follows the main character as his team prepares to compete at the Calgary Stampede. At the end of the film, Cody gets hit by a rival horse as he transitions horses in a competition and finishes last.

Regarding the story structure, the film has aspects that could be considered coiling, as horse riding is the center point of which the rest of the film connects back to. The narrative is not told in linear fashion; instead flashbacks from the race are intermingled throughout the film to build tension. Various aspects of horse life are shown, such as training, feeding, family passing on knowledge, and family life. However, land is not portrayed as a separate character in this film, but rather as settings in which the story takes place. The lack of attention to how the land participates in this venture

leave a crucial hole in this film as a reflection of the worldview. An emphasis on dynamisms over static facts was shown in that the purpose of the film was not to convey to the viewer cultural facts about the Siksika and Indian Relay Races, rather it invited the viewer to share in Cody's experience in his first race. It also demonstrated a cultural dynamism when Cody lost the race, as he was not upset about it and instead expressed excitement for the act of racing itself, instead of focusing on an attachment to winning. By showing that Cody held himself accountable to his relationships with his family, his team, cultural traditions, and his ancestors, the film adequately demonstrates relationality. Relationality is expanded upon in a scene in which Cody's wife and children watch him riding and voice to their support for him and their gratitude that racing is a family tradition.

Documentary film *Return to Foretop's Father* (2019) is an Indigenous environmental call to action that follows Grant Bulltail, an Absáalooge elder and medicine man, as he travels to Foretop's Father, called Heart Mountain by Westerners, to perform a pipe ceremony. The narration in the film is made up of Grant Bulltail reading a letter he wrote to the audience, discussing a time when Natives were free. In the letter, he shares his thoughts about his grandpa being a free man before being put on a reservation, nature being polluted, addiction to drugs and technology, and how we all need to learn how to reconnect with the earth. The film also takes time to explore Bulltail's personal history and show him speaking at an environmental conference.

The non-linear story structure used in this film has aspects of twining, with the letter Bulltail reads to the audience serving as the structural strands of the basket, and his

trip to Foretop's Father, the unnamed environmental conference, his personal history, and land as a character serving as the intwined story strands. The letter is identified as the structural strand because not only is it returned to throughout the film, but it provides the structure that leads from one topic to the next.

This film does an incredible job of portraying the land as a character. In one sequence, a thunderstorm builds as Bulltail angrily speaks of needing to reconnect with the land and harmonious ways of living with the earth. It is clear that this film displays the land as a character that breathes and feels as in the moment that Bulltail speaks his anger, lightning strikes, a violent expression of anger held by the land because of the diminishing connections with humans. He also Bulltail refers to, "a time when the earth was not so angry;" (*Return to Foretop's Father*, 2019). Bulltail demonstrates the spiritual relationship with the Foretop's Father while interacting with his surroundings, "it is a sacred place to my people. The mountain contains energy, but you must embrace the land in order for it to release itself to you," (*Return to Foretop's Father*, 2019). This statement not only portrays the land as a character, but also speaks to the reciprocal relational protocols between the Apsáalooge and the mountain.

Both dynamisms and static linear thinking are expressed in this film, which can reflect the state of tension in which the Apsáalooge worldview exists and interacts with the Western worldview and traditional knowledge is lost. In the letter Bulltail reads, he speaks of how the changes in nature and youth frustrate him. The way it is phrased it implies that change is what frustrate him, which would reflect an resistance to change and attachment to static truth that is more prevalent in Western worldviews. On the other

hand, he speaks of Absáalooge religion as “harmony and living in peace with the land and the universe,” (*Return to Foretop’s Father,* 2019) and dynamisms is integral to harmony.

In this documentary film, relationality is expressed through Bulltail’s narrated thoughts on his connection with the land, ancestors, and buffalo. Yet, the film also touches upon the notion of individualism as Bulltail is not shown interacting with his family; in fact, his family wasn’t shown in in the film at all, only briefly mentioned at one point in a title slide. This again demonstrates the tension between Absáalooge worldview and the ever-encroaching Western paradigm.

To conclude this film analysis, I also would like to point out that the captions on the Youtube version of the film commit microaggressions. The captions repeatedly say, “singing in foreign language,” when the language is not foreign at all, quite the opposite as it is a native language. If anything, English is the foreign language here. This use of caption is another way to “other” the Absáalooge people by not stating what language they are using. The implication of failing to state that the language being spoken is Absáalooge, is that the only thing that matters is that it isn’t English. This perpetuates the hierarchical binary that Native Americans, their language, and their culture are inferior. Instead, subtitles that state the exact language being spoken should be used.

In this section, we analyzed the level to which the films *Fast Horse* (2018) and *Return to Foretop’s Father* (2019) approached their story through an Indigenous paradigm by looking at the degree to which they used basket story structure, land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking. Film is a creation from the

Western paradigm, and that paradigm is ever encroaching on Indigenous paradigms, but it seems that aspects of the Indigenous paradigm can be translated into film form. In the next chapter, we will discuss the methodology Peggy and I used in telling a story from an Absáalooge worldview and turn an analytical eye to how well it met the above criteria of using basket story structure, land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking.

STORYTELLING FROM AN ABSÁALOOGE PARADIGM

Methodology

In terms of this film's methodology, my goal is for it to be both effective and just, and this is why I decided to adopt Indigenous Research Paradigm while working with Peggy Wellknown Buffalo and others at her non-profit, Center Pole. Furthermore, considering that not all Indigenous cultures are the same, I have followed the Absáalooge protocol to produce my thesis film. To illustrate the significance of using Indigenous Research methods and the Absáalooge protocol in the production of *The Roads of Healing*, I will discuss a case study where filmmakers left Peggy feeling exploited by neglecting to approach the production process from a Native American perspective.

Because relationality is at the heart of the Indigenous worldview, a relationship built on trust, mutual accountability, and respect must be built between the filmmakers and their subjects. According to Wilson, "The knowledge that the researcher [or filmmaker] interprets must be respectful of and help to build the relationships that have been established through the process of finding out information. Furthermore, the Indigenous researcher has a vested interest in the integrity of the methodology (respectful) and the usefulness of the results if they are to be of any use in the Indigenous community (reciprocity)," (Wilson, 77). Therefore, at the beginning of a project involving Indigenous subjects, filmmakers should determine how their methodology builds respect between them and 1) the topic of the film, 2) the subjects of their film, and 3) the people on their crew in order to embrace the notions of relationality, respect and reciprocity. In short, filmmakers working with Indigenous communities should ask in

what ways they are contributing to the relationship with their subjects, and if the growth and learning that is taking place is reciprocal (Wilson, 77). The answers to these questions should make it clear that their film subjects, as well as the land, are benefiting in concrete ways both from the final product and the process of making film. When you give something good, you will get something in return.

There is an inextricable link between social and environmental justice, and parallels can be drawn between injustices committed on an environmental front and a social one. The book *As Long as Grass Grows* does an excellent job of outlining the link between environmental and social justice. The book introduces the term "extractivism" to describe corporate activities that pull resources from the earth with no reciprocity and assault humanity's ability to sustain themselves in the future. Gilio-Whitaker recognizes that this assault is not just felt by Indigenous people, but by everyone not in the 1 percent. She argues that that there can be no environmental justice through a capitalist system and that "Indigenous peoples' pursuit of environmental justice (EJ) requires the use of a different lens, one with a scope that can accommodate the full weight of the history of settler colonialism, on one hand, and embrace differences in the ways Indigenous peoples view land and nature, on the other. This includes an ability to acknowledge sacred sites as an issue of environmental justice—not merely religious freedom—and recognize and protect sites outside the boundaries of reservation lands or on aboriginal lands of nonfederally recognized tribes" (Gilio-Whitaker, 12). Extractivism, in the context of documentary filmmaking, refers to the act of coming into a community, pursuing a story, and leaving. If people participating in the film did not have a say in what story is told, do

not directly benefit from the story being told, and consent is not continually sought throughout the process, then the film is extractive. Extractivism is committed regularly in the methodology of contemporary documentary filmmaking if the filmmaker is using typical methodology.

To avoid perpetuating Eurocentric depictions of Indigenous cultures, it is crucial that a filmmaker builds a meaningful relationship with his/her subject. As Wilson points out, "Family is seen as of the utmost importance for many Indigenous people. Family is what holds us in relationship as individuals and bridges us as individuals into our communities and nations," (Wilson, 86). Therefore, it is important to start this relationship with talking about family history and determining if the filmmaker and subject have mutual relatives. If mutual relations do not exist, the process of building accountability is slow and may take years. During this process, it is paramount for the filmmaker to treat her/his subjects as relations. Additionally, filmmakers must build and maintain relationships with landscapes, ideas, and the spiritual world in a good way. According to Wilson, "Knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us. . . The space and therefore the relationship between people or between people and their environment is seen as a sacred key concept within many Indigenous peoples' spirituality. . . This is why research itself is a sacred ceremony within an Indigenous research paradigm, as it is all about building relationships and bridging sacred spaces," (Wilson, 87).

Shared power is an important aspect of a respectful working relationship. In filmmaking from a Western paradigm, the director and producer have decision making

power over the film. In filmmaking from an Indigenous paradigm, it is important to break down the hierarchy that puts someone in a power position above other people. All major decisions should be made collaboratively, and the filmmakers should continually be asking for consent from the participants in the story. As discussed in the Systemic Oppression of Indigenous People section, vertical hierarchies perpetuate oppression and powerlessness. If the intent of the story is to empower people and an Indigenous worldview, the power structure in the making of the film has to change. This need for change is demonstrated with my methodological case study of the making of the film *Crow Country, the Right to Food Sovereignty* (2020).

The concepts of relationality, mutual aid/reciprocity, accountability, and shared power are all easier to understand in the form of a story of these protocols being ignored. Tsanavi Spoonhunter is an Arapahoe filmmaker who was pursuing her graduate degree at Berkley when she contacted Peggy about participating in her film. She directed and produced the film *Crow Country, the Right to Food Sovereignty* (2020). Upon arriving to the Crow Reservation, Spoonhunter did not give Peggy a gift, she did not sit with her and drink coffee, and did not show any interest in getting to know Peggy. She hid away with her cameraman and spoke mostly of logistics after arriving in Garryowen. Spoonhunter's manner while filming was "professional," but Western professionalism does not come off well around people whose lives center around relationality. Furthermore, during the editing process, she did not send cuts and check in about how Peggy and the Center Pole were portrayed. She did send a final cut after the film was complete, therefore Peggy did not get the impression that the filmmaker wanted feedback. When the film was

completed, Peggy was informed that she could not share a private link with the donors to her NGO until the following year, after the film had made its rounds on the Film Festival circuit. When Peggy finally confronted the filmmaker about the lack of reciprocity, Spoonhunter justified her behavior by claiming that the whole community would benefit when many people saw this documentary in film festivals. Ultimately, Peggy withdrew her consent to be a subject in the film. Yet, because she had signed a waiver, the filmmaker ignored Peggy's withdrawn consent. In other words, Spoonhunter disempowered Peggy by deciding on her own what was best for the people involved in the project. By failing to embrace a non-hierarchal positive relationship with her film subjects, *Crow Country, the Right to Food Sovereignty* ended up perpetuating Colonialism.

Relationality, mutual aid/reciprocity, accountability, and shared power are all crucial for a methodology that reflects an Indigenous paradigm rather than a colonial one. I am reminded of a saying an old colleague introduced to me from my days working in Outdoor Education, the Golden Rule is treating people how you want to be treated, but the Platinum Rule is treating people how they want to be treated. The commoditization of precious metals aside, the concept of learning how to show a person that you respect them is one that has stuck. In the next section, I will analyze how the film I co-created with Peggy Wellknown Buffalo fits an Indigenous Worldview and the methodology used.

The Roads of Healing: Filmmaking to Embrace Change

In this section, we will introduce the film I co-created with Peggy Wellknown Buffalo, and reflect on its methodology and content with the characteristics discussed in previous sections. Methodology will be discussed in terms of relationality, mutual aid/reciprocity, accountability, and shared power. Observations of content will be based on basket story structure, land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking.

The ideas for the film *The Roads of Healing* were conceived one night at the 2019 Crow Fair when my dad introduced me to his longtime friend and former employer, Peggy Wellknown Buffalo. I had been searching for a thesis topic that would allow me to step into the realm of an accomplice, not just an ally to those experiencing oppression but to throw my lot in with them. My dad had been trying to convince me to go back to my birthplace and reconnect with family on the Crow Indian Reservation. The first couple ideas, and subjects, did not work out. I finally told him that I felt called to work with a woman, preferably a Kaula (grandmother). He immediately thought of Peggy and brought me over to her Crow Fair camp. Upon hearing that I was looking to make a film, Peggy suggested four possible film ideas and told me to give her a call after I thought about it. A month later, I had no idea what idea I would pursue, but I made plans with Peggy to come spend a weekend at the Center Pole and see where it went. Long story short, I spent a weekend every month there for four months until the Corona virus pandemic shut down the country and we all went into quarantine. This interrupted filming, but Peggy and her partner invited me to intern for the Center Pole over the

summer and finish the film in my free time. I happily accepted and spent 5 months living and working with Peggy and the Center Pole family.

The film itself was shot over the course of a year and its story has changed many times. I believe I have over 30 hours of footage, some of our interviews went on for hours. The conversations Peggy and I had kept coming back to the topics of intergenerational trauma, systemic oppression, health, food, history, corruption, and environmentalism. One day she turned to me and said "I think the film needs to be about the sacredness of food. How it can heal us." From that, I started editing together cuts of the film that tried to encompass the breadth of what food sovereignty would do for the Absáalooge. It felt overly simplistic just to make a film about food scarcity, as it failed to connect the traumas of the Absáalooge forced onto reservation, traditional ways of living and food acquisition being outlawed, boarding schools, broken treaties, forced assimilation and conversion, drug and alcohol abuse, and internalized oppression. It felt dishonest to dive deeply into only one of the issues Peggy faces. With this in mind, Peggy and I created a film that uses food as the structural strand of a twinging type basket story, and the rest of the above-mentioned topics as the woven story strands that may seem unrelated but are very much an integral part of the story of food on the Crow Indian Reservation.

Food was also an integral part of the methodology and protocol used in the making of the film. Reciprocity has been stated as a core value in Indigenous Filmmaking Methodology, and that expressed itself through the sharing of food since the beginning. Peggy was generous in feeding me every time I came to visit, and I took to cooking meals

and bringing her coffee. Peggy taught me that you always accept a gift, and it's seen as a cultural slight if someone offers you food and you refuse. Reciprocity was built into the film as I was determined to pursue a story that would benefit Peggy through showing her organization's funders a piece of the work that they do, while fully acknowledging that I benefit from being given free rein to use the film for my thesis. The content of the film also has the potential to benefit all Absáalooge if some are motivated to pursue food sovereignty. It is my hope, as well as Peggy's, that this comes to pass. A piece of reciprocity built into Absáalooge culture is giving food away when good things have happened in your life. So, after the film is completed, I will go back to the Center Pole and put on a feed for Peggy and all that participated.

Relationality was also identified as a key aspect of Indigenous Methodology, and I believe was one of the most successful parts of the project. One of the first things Absáalooge do when they meet someone is ask where they're from, and then try to determine if they have shared relations. Going in, I knew that at a bare minimum, I needed to be treating the people I was working with as relations. Part of being a good relation is building and maintaining trusting relationships, helping with the work around the house, cooking, helping elders walk across ice and get into vehicles, role modeling for kids. I brought my family with me when I went to visit and made it clear that I was not there to make a film then disappear. My efforts were recognized, and Peggy traditionally adopted me into her family.

Accountability and shared power are next on the list of values built into this methodology. I emphasized informed consent in my interactions with Peggy. When I

spent the first few months of the process directionless, Peggy knew about it and didn't put pressure on the project. I repeatedly asked if I could film someone or something in particular. I sent rough cuts to everyone in the film and asked for consent to use the images I captured, instead of asking consent forms to be signed beforehand. Besides the online thesis database, the film will not be posted on the internet or submitted to a film festival without approval of all people. Informed consent and collaborative decision making are all ways in which we shared power. I feel the most apparent way that this shared power is communicated is doing away with the title of director in the credits of this film. The power is shared and claiming the status of director would send the message that the making of this film had a hierarchical power structure that did not reflect the actuality of the project. Instead, the film is being describes as a co-creation between Peggy and myself. Without Peggy, this film would not have happened, and the content is as much her creation as it is mine.

I also have a responsibility to recognize the ways in which I hold power in this project. I belong to many collective identities that hold more power in the current system than Peggy and most of the other people we worked with. My mother is a German immigrant from a wealthy family, and because of that I have the privileges of education, looking like a white person, and a collection of experiences that are not possible without privilege. My father is from a working class, multi-cultural background and was adopted Absáalooge long before I was born. Because of him, I was born with several Absáalooge grandfathers, uncles, and the family that came along with them. One of my earliest memories was moving to a white neighborhood at the age of 4 and being "othered" by the

white children because I spoke with an Absáalooge reservation accent mixed with a German accent. Through the process of making this film, I have reflected on my own identity repeatedly. I have had to ask myself what it means to be white, or multi-cultural, or even Absáalooge. My first day filming with Peggy I introduced myself to some of her relatives, sharing that one of my grandfathers was Larsen MedicineHorse. The man replied "oh, so you're Crow." To which I replied, "by adoption." He in turn stated "Yes, you are Crow." I then realized that my concept of race and cultural identity had been wholly constructed by white culture. In Absáalooge culture, the people you adopt as your family are just as much your family as those you were born with. Because of the way I look and growing up with limited contact with my father and his culture as a teenager, I was indoctrinated with being white. When I reconnected with my father and Absáalooge culture in my 20's, that self-concept has changed, and will continue to change as I learn more about my family's ways and the ways in which traditional adoption pull me out of white culture.

I desired to be intentional with my own privilege, ideology, and filmmaking experience while working on this film with my mom. I realized that even being contentious, I was apt to make mistakes and missteps. I made a point of requesting feedback early on in our working relationship, and then after Peggy asked to adopt me, I set filmmaking aside for a time and set about learning how to be a good relation. I did not want to make the mistake so common in Eurocentric filmmaking of putting the white person at the center of the story, and so I adopted a go-with-the-flow approach. Most days I didn't film at all, instead I worked alongside everyone else giving out food and

completing the hundreds of other tasks needed to make the Center Pole run. I cooked, cleaned, drove a food truck, packed food boxes, built relationships, listened to the stories of elders, helped the kids with their homework, and fed the horses. When there was conflict with my little siblings who are young and still living with my father, I brought them to live with us at the Center Pole. Peggy treated my family as her family, and visa versa. Then, when something that felt important to either Peggy or myself happened, the camera would come out and I would film. I did not direct the story. Instead, life unfolded before us and we chose when to pull out a camera and talk more about food and the systemic oppression Peggy and other Absáalooge have been facing their entire lives.

The story structure in *The Roads of Healing* can be qualified as a twined basket structure. We use food as the structural strand of a twinging type basket story, and the woven story strands take the form of land as a character, demonstrating dynamism, and relational thinking. Painting land as a character, without anthropomorphizing it was an interesting challenge. The solution came when I was told that some people are given ceremonial songs by the spirits that live in the land, and then experienced it myself. Instead of trying to project emotions into thunderstorms or give it a voice, I gave the land a heartbeat in the form of a drum beat, and then let it whisper a Sundance song to the audience through the wind, but like my personal experience hearing the music in the mountains. The land has its own life, but as humans we can only experience it through our interactions with it, much like how our understanding of other humans are limited and we gain a piece of understanding through interaction.

I chose to create moments in which the separation between the different twining pieces became obvious. Peggy's narration is one weave, written script is another. The changing of the seasons and showing sunrise to sunset several times over shows the passing of time, the story jumps from a moment to another moment at some undetermined point in the future to disregard a linear timeline while still acknowledging cyclical patterns of the earth. The story of Peggy's time in boarding school was told in the wintertime, which is the culturally appropriate time to tell stories. There are moments in which the screen is black, and the only sense being used is auditory, or there is written information that is being emphasized by being placed over a black background instead of B-roll. These choices create moments that may feel like they break from the overall stylistic feel of the film, but I would argue that they are just another weave within the overall pattern of this basket story.

Absáalooge round dance, hymns, and sundance songs were used in a way that reinforced the culture. Round dance is a social dance, and that song was used to show relationships between people, land, and issues of systemic oppression being experienced. Peggy sung a Crow hymn that she helped create 40 years ago while paired with images of corn. The hymn was created to help Absáalooge people practice and use their language in church, and in this film it's placement with Indigenous corn symbolizes the need to practice traditional food ways to help the culture survive. The sundance songs used at the beginning and end of the film speak to the spiritual nature of this pursuit.

An emphasis on dynamism over static facts was expressed through two-fold. First, through intentionally allowing for incongruencies in the film, such as the

contradiction between Peggy's desire to eat healthy foods, but the majority of the foods being eaten are pretty unhealthy. This contradiction expresses dynamisms as Peggy is contemplating change for her community, but not yet living it. Second, through the lack of factual information on Absáalooge culture. I did not translate what was happening in the film to the audience. I gave the audience context through stating relational information on a person in a lower third title but did not explain cultural activities. This context was also crucial for the last content related topic of relationality. Even though we spend the most time with Peggy in this film, I did not her to be the only person in this film, as that would perpetuate an individualistic perspective. Instead, footage of her grandchildren, clan uncles, workers, and partner are used, and they participate in the weaving of the story through their actions, prayers, and ideas. Dynamisms is also reflected in the title of the film. *The Roads of Healing*, as opposed to the roads to healing, imply that sovereignty is a journey, not a destination. The ways in which this film discusses healing show one person's experience and are not meant to be definitive.

Ultimately, the methodology and content of the film *The Roads of Healing* have been shaped by the published works of Indigenous thinkers, Peggy, and my personal experience.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed the historical basis of systemic oppression and how film perpetuates it, Indigenous Research Methodology and non-linear story structures defined by Native authors. We have used these ideas as the basis of analyzing documentaries with Native subjects and then extrapolated them into a methodology that emphasizes values prevalent in Indigenous worldviews. That methodology was then applied to the film that I co-created with Peggy Wellknown Buffalo, *The Roads of Healing*, to discuss how relationality, mutual aid/reciprocity, accountability, and shared power made its way into the methodology used in making the film. We then discussed how the content in *The Roads of Healing* reflect the components of an Indigenous paradigm, including non-linear basket story structures land as a character, emphasis on dynamisms, and relational thinking.

During this process, I learned a lot about the history of how oppression was built into the systems that make up the United States. I learned a lot about characteristics of the dominant paradigm we all live with to some extent, and how the values perpetuated in that paradigm support the hierarchical binaries that make up white supremacy culture. Coming to terms with these realizations have inspired me to reflect on the ways in which perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, defining progress as bigger/more, a belief that objectivity can exist, and a right to comfort take shape in my life, and how I may be unintentionally perpetuating white supremacy culture and colonialism. The making of this film led to adopting family

and putting a lot of energy into creating a film that I am proud of. I am sure that there is still a lot for me to learn in being an accomplice to social and environmental change, but this thesis demonstrates the learning culminating over the last year.

I hope that this paper and *The Roads of Healing* can serve as a reflection tool for other filmmakers considering working with Indigenous communities. Ideally, upon reaching the end of this paper, they would be asking themselves how they may be unintentionally perpetuating systems of oppression, and how they can adopt pieces of the Indigenous paradigm, the methodology discussed in this paper, and ideas for non-linear storytelling.

REFERENCES CITED

Beyond Standing Rock. Directed by Brian Malone. Fast Forward Films. 2017.

Dances with Wolves. Directed by Kevin Costner. Tig Productions. 1990.

Dunbar-Oritz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014. Print.

Fast Horse. Directed by Alexandra Lazarowich. Handful of Films. 2017.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Random House, 1970. Print.

Gilio-Whitaker, Dina. *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2019. Print.

Hossay, Patrick. *Unsustainable: A Primer for Global Environmental and Social Justice*. London: Zed Books, 2006. Print.

Hupa artist. *Open Work Twined Basket,* 1900/1930. The Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection. *Portland Art Museum*. http://portlandartmuseum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=38477;type=101

Jones, Kenneth and Okun, Tema. *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups.* 2001. *Showing Up for Racial Justice.* Web. 18 November 2019.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR. 1887. Web. 10 October 2020.

Meadows, Donella. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Hartford: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008. Print.

Moana. Directed by Ron Clements, John Musker. Disney. 2016.

Mohegan-Pequot artist. *Plaited basket with stamped design*, 1820/1840. *Kravis Discovery Center*. https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/71510

Nanook of the North. Directed by Robert Flaherty. Pathé Exchange. 1922.

Navajo artist. *Coiled Basket – Ts'a*, 1903. *Brooklyn Museum*. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/16296

Pirsig, Robert. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. New York: HarperTorch, 2006. Print.

Return to Foretop's Father. Directed by Preston Randolph. Cactus Pro Films. 2019.

Rosenow, Doerthe. *Un-making environmental activism: beyond modern/colonial binaries in the GMO controversy.* 2018. *Taylor & Francis ebooks*. Web. 6 February 2020.

The Lone Ranger. Directed by Gore Verbinski. Disney. 2013.

Warburton, Theresa and Washuta, Elissa. *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays by Contemporary Writers*. 2019. *Kindle ebooks.* App. 6 February 2020.

What Was Ours. Directed by Mat Hames. Vision Maker Media. 2016.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2008. Print.