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VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INDIGENOUS FILM FESTIVALS: A CASE STUDY ON
THE NATIVE CROSSROADS FILM FESTIVAL

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VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INDIGENOUS FILM FESTIVALS: A CASE STUDY ON
THE NATIVE CROSSROADS FILM FESTIVAL

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic documentation of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, an annual multi-day cultural event in Norman, Oklahoma that features a selection of indigenous films. I argue throughout this thesis that The Native Crossroads Film Festival creates an interrelated and complex arena for the engagement with and enactment of visual sovereignty. Through its component parts – the organization of the festival, the films featured, the audience members, and the panel discussions the Native Crossroads Film Festival expands the scope of visual sovereignty beyond what Indigenous filmmakers themselves create. In conducting my research, I used several interconnected methods, including participant observation during two of the festivals, data analysis on four student interviews, and coded data analysis on the 2017 footage taken of the series of panel discussions attended by the Indigenous directors, producers, actors, University of Oklahoma professors and visiting professors. Two overarching themes I identified include Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy. I argue that these themes are methods of enacting a type of interdependent sovereignty by engaging the audience and broader communities with the vision of the filmmakers and the festival committee.

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Introduction

When a visitor walks into the Native Crossroads Film Festival, they have different sensations of what the film festival is like. For instance, if someone came to the Sam Noble Natural History Museum's auditorium during the morning session, the atmosphere is quiet, and the ten or twenty people present are sitting all over. Towards the afternoon, (especially during the musical performances in the 2018 Native Crossroads), more people are attending the event, about double or triple the morning sessions. Moreover, during the evening features, many of the seats are filled with University of Oklahoma students and faculty, and the friends and family of the filmmakers and actors. The Sam Noble Museum auditorium can fit 200 people at the most. However, if someone waited until the last feature to attend the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival, they would have been surprised to find that they would have to stand during *Rumble: Indians Who Rocked the World* (2017). Those of us who came early enough to grab a seat just kept looking in wonder at all the people who kept coming in. I was excited to see that every single seat was full. It was the first time I had witnessed that in either of the 2018 or 2017 film festivals. Yes, I thought, at that moment, *this is what this film festival needs to keep going strong*. Full attendance meant more people would tell others how impressive and inspirational the Native Crossroads Film Festival truly is. More people create more exposure to Indigenous media and the diversity of perspectives it represents. The collaboration between the Native Crossroads organizers and the visiting Indigenous¹ (and non-Indigenous²) filmmakers is what makes this

¹ In the context of this thesis, I use the terms Indigenous and Native American often. When I refer to Indigenous filmmakers, I mean both Native American filmmakers and Indigenous filmmakers from other areas of the world. I purposely capitalize 'Indigenous' in recognition of Indigenous peoples gaining acknowledgement for their rights, especially in media representation.

² While I acknowledge that there are nuances in the term, Indigenous, and it is part of numerous discussions of which films are considered Indigenous and which are not (see Wood 2008; Redroad cited in Marubbio 2013), my usage throughout this thesis is referring to societies that

film festival possible. Their films, their stories, their desires, and their hopes are shared between themselves and to the film festival audience. The audience is an essential part of the relationship between the filmmakers and the world. For these are the people who laugh together, cry together, and become inspired together in the open space of the Native Crossroads Film Festival & Symposium.

The Native Crossroads Film Festival & Symposium started in 2013 and is an annual event. I conducted participant observation during the 2017 and 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festivals at the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma. There were several key differences between the two years. The first main difference is that in 2018 Native Crossroads organized a separate research symposium before they featured any of the films. In 2017, for every section of short films or a featured short and featured film, there would be a panel session between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, scholars, and other people involved with the film process. While there were panel sessions for the 2018 film festival, due to time constraints, they were much shorter in duration, and there was less opportunity for audience engagement compared to the year before. In 2018, there were more feature films than short films on the schedule. Even though the event extended to three days in 2018, with several musical performances included with the films, it was a very tight schedule to maintain. Therefore, if audience members had questions or wanted to talk to the Indigenous filmmakers, they would have to catch them during the breaks. This set-up restricted valuable audience interaction with the filmmakers.

My initial goal for this study was to analyze the audience's reactions to the festival and

were formally colonized by Western civilizations. The Indigenous viewpoint is diverse, and continues to be determined by Indigenous communities from their own criteria through the cultural process (Turner 2002).

Indigenous produced films using a limited form of reception theory (Holub 1984), while also acknowledging the problems of audience reception for Anthropology (Hughes 2011). However, since I only interviewed four students from the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, they would not be entirely representative of the film festival audience. I decided to do a ground-up approach using the interview data and panel member video footage to tell me what is important about the film festival and interviewees' and panelists' interest in it rather than coming in from a top-down approach by testing an anthropological theory. As a result, I have devoted two separate methods chapters in this thesis: one chapter for the interviews and another chapter for the analysis of the panel video footage.

In conducting my research, I used several interconnected methods. My methods include participant observation during two of the annual Native Crossroads Film Festivals held at the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma, data analysis on four student interviews, and coded data analysis on the 2017 footage taken of the series of panel discussions attended by the Indigenous directors, producers, actors, University of Oklahoma professors and visiting professors.

I argue throughout this thesis that the Native Crossroads Film Festival creates an interrelated and complex arena for the engagement with and enactment of visual sovereignty. Through its component parts – the organization of the film festival, the films featured, the audience members, and the panel discussions the Native Crossroads Film Festival expands the scope of visual sovereignty beyond what Indigenous filmmakers themselves create. For example, during the coding process of the interview data and the panel member footage, two reoccurring themes emerged: Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy. These themes are methods of enacting a type of interdependent sovereignty by engaging the audience and

broader communities with the vision of the filmmakers and the festival committee.

In order to understand the significance of these themes, I summarize in the introduction the foundational bodies of literature of visual sovereignty, the Indigenous Media Movement, and Indigenous film festivals. I argue that there is a potential use of film festivals as anthropological sites to study the intertwined strands of social and cultural processes interacting between the Indigenous filmmakers and the film festival audience. We should understand the interdependency of the Indigenous Media Movement and Indigenous film festivals to highlight the importance of maintaining distribution for Indigenous films, provide a mediating space for exposure to Indigenous issues for people not familiar with them, and to showcase the Indigenous filmmakers' visual sovereignty.

Visual Sovereignty and Indigenous Film Festivals

When I first mentioned my interest in writing my thesis based on Indigenous film festivals, an anonymous individual said to me: "All they do is watch films and talk about them. So, what?" However, once that comment finished processing in my mind, something clicked. Film festivals cannot be that simple. Especially Indigenous film festivals. There must be more. Otherwise, why would people take the trouble and effort to organize these events, and why would people be interested in going to these types of events? If people were only 'watching' and 'talking' about films during film festivals, then they can perform these actions more quickly in the comfort of their homes in front of their TVs, computers, or smartphones. Nonetheless, since there are over 3,000 active film festivals in the world (Follows 2013), clearly there is an interest and an investment in film festivals.

In this section, I introduce visual sovereignty as practiced by Indigenous filmmakers and the film medium. I also illustrate how Indigenous film festivals fit into the filmmakers enacting

visual sovereignty. Michelle Raheja was the first to contrive the technique of visual sovereignty through the film medium. Visual sovereignty, Raheja argues, is the space between “resistance and compliance wherein Indigenous filmmakers and actors revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure ethnographic film conventions, at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created by these conventions” (Raheja 2013, 60). In Raheja’s point of view, visual sovereignty is a technique to rupture structures of cinematic dominance and stereotypes of Indigenous peoples (Raheja 2013). Contemporary Indigenous filmmakers use visual sovereignty to break misrepresentation of their people by creating films that more accurately portray current and historical Indigenous lives or create films that are used by the Indigenous community³ for educational or recording purposes. However, visual sovereignty is not a new phenomenon. For instance, Raheja claims that visual sovereignty emerged as early as Nanook (Allakariallak) laughing at the camera in Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) when he was supposed to be the stoic hunter (Raheja 2013, 60). Laughing or otherwise showing emotions that were not in the script was discouraged during the early days of filmmaking, so Raheja argues that Allakariallak might have laughed despite knowing it would displease Flaherty. However, Griffiths (2002, 200) point out that due to the absence of textual or paratextual clues as to the actual relationship between the filmmaker and the people filmed in many early ethnographic films, scholars should be cautious before making definite conclusions as to who had visual sovereignty in the early era of filmmaking. For the brevity of this chapter, I

³ In Raymond Williams’ *Keywords*, he notes that various definitions of a community includes “a state or organized society, the people of a district, the quality of holding something in common, as in a community of interests, a community of goods, a sense of common identity and characteristics (Williams 1983, 75).” In the case of Indigenous filmmakers, they connect with each other in *a community of interests* through the passion of filmmaking, but they also belong to organized groups of people connected through kinship, history, heritage or nationality. It is the latter that I will be referring to throughout this thesis unless I indicate otherwise.

have focused on Indigenous filmmakers and visual sovereignty.

Indigenous filmmakers use visual sovereignty to navigate through critical issues such as land rights, language revitalization, and heritage preservation, by employing editing technologies to “stage performances of oral narrative and indigenous notions of time and space that are not possible through print alone” (Raheja 2013, 62). Indigenous filmmakers strive to “engage in creating images and narratives about their present lives, in ways that connect them to their histories and communities, and that direct them toward a future” (Ginsburg 1998, 188).

I argue that the production of Indigenous media is only half the picture. The other half involves the audience of Indigenous media. Indigenous media without an audience does not accomplish the goals of the film creators. These goals may include changing the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, creating educational films, or calling for action or support on a current Indigenous issue. For example, some filmmakers will use their peers as their audience as a call out for support on an issue. In the film *Nikamowin* (Song) (2007), Kevin Lee Burton created a Cree experimental film with visual and aural film aesthetics inspired by how he hears as a Cree speaker. Burton intentionally made the soundscape unsettling for his peers, young Cree artists, and filmmakers living in urban areas, to encourage them to start learning and speaking their languages (Dowell 2013, 158-171).

While several Indigenous filmmakers create their films exclusively for their communities; some search out a diversified audience of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. However, since Indigenous films do not tend to show up on mainstream media, or popular streaming platforms such as Netflix and Hulu due to lack of funding, they often use alternative distribution networks. Film festivals, especially Indigenous film festivals, provide an outlet for the circulations and screenings of Indigenous films to reach out to a broader audience (Córdova

2012, 63-64). Also, as Amalia Córdova described, Indigenous film festivals are “meeting grounds” (2012: 64) for Indigenous filmmakers. Not only do these film festivals provide recognition for the filmmakers and their communities, but they strengthen awareness of various crucial Indigenous social and political issues (Córdova 2012, 64) to the film festival audience. Thus, the availability of Indigenous film festivals for showcasing Indigenous films is essential for the Indigenous filmmakers to show their films to an interested audience, and to highlight the variety and spectrum of Indigenous film media.

The Iterations of Culture and Visual Sovereignty

Within the different bodies of literature of Indigenous media, ethnographic film, and visual anthropology, there is a long-running debate about the notion of culture. Raymond Williams (1985, 1-4) was the first to note the complexity of the word culture, and he traced the genealogy from the Latin form, *cultura*, which meant cultivation or tending. During the Enlightenment era in Germany, the word, *Kultur*, became associated with civilization. Johann Gottfried Herder pluralized the word into “cultures” in his argument to speak for the cultures of different nations around the world becoming overrun by “European subjugation and domination of the four quarters of the globe” (Williams 1985, 2). The pluralized use of “culture” eventually trickles down to Franz Boas’s cultural relativism theory, which he developed from Gottfried Herder, along with Wilhelm Dittely’s goal of science: *Verstehen*, “to understand,” other cultures (Williams 1985, 2). Thus, culture as a concept has multiple layers influencing the word’s meaning from different social projects. Each layer of meaning has a distinct, hidden ideology developed for various historical movements and thus, inconsistent agendas get smuggled into the meaning of culture. For this thesis, I adhere to, interpretative anthropologist, Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture as a “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a

system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1973, 89) .

However, I believe the multi-layered concept of culture can cause conflicts and miscommunication between visual anthropologists and Indigenous filmmakers. Although both are confronting the history and consequences of some of the political agendas embedded in the cultural process; visual anthropologists and several Indigenous filmmakers seem to be working within different meanings of culture. This is a significant problem when budding anthropologists are taught only one layer of culture and then use it as an umbrella term for all their research. For example, my first introduction to the concept of culture is the most quoted definition of culture, originating from the first sentence of Edward B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*. Tylor’s (1996, 26) classic definition of culture is that “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Tylor’s definition of culture was influenced by his belief in the psychic unity of humankind, as the “the uniform action of uniform causes” (1996, 26). Not only did Tylor believe in the meaning of culture as a single body of information, but that human groups had different evolutionary and hierarchical levels of culture. Therefore, Tylor proposed that “survivals” be used to classify cultural traits into a ranked order. Survivals are the cultural traits that have continued from “a new state of society” from an “older condition of culture” where the newer culture evolved from (Tylor 1996, 35). These early anthropological foundational ideas about the cultural stages of evolution, such as Edward B. Tylor’s “survivals,” Herbert Spencer’s “survival of the fittest,” and Lewis Henry Morgan’s “ethnical periods,” (savagery, barbarism, and civilization) were all used in ways that endorsed and aided imperialism and racial superiority by

people in power. These critical ideas about the process of culture, unfortunately, provided fuel for the colonial project's excuse for conquering minority peoples, using technical tools such as cameras to document their victories and subjective proof of superiority.

Colonial agendas became embedded in anthropological practices under the mask of culture. For instance, during American anthropology's early goals of salvage ethnography, anthropologists traveled to the remote areas of the U.S. to create visual documentation of the diversified Native American Indian range of lifestyles and beliefs. This world was believed to be "destined to be destroyed in the name of Manifest Destiny" (Prins 2004, 510). The camera objectified colonized peoples, such as the Native Americans, by fusing realistic imagery of their lifestyles with fictional imagery to create an imagined, exotic "Indian" world that never existed (Prins 2004, 506-507).

The exotic Other imagery intensified when anthropologists became involved with the exhibits of world's fairs. However, media anthropologist Allison Griffins (2002) argues that the anthropologists had less control over the exhibits of world's fairs than museum exhibits due to conflicts with the world's fairs organizers. The anthropologists had to sacrifice their scientific objectivity to provide their exhibits with the lure of entertainment. However, this plan backfired because the world's fair management ended up emphasizing anything about the Indigenous peoples that was bizarre and exotic (Griffins 2002, 50).

Consequently, the Indigenous peoples displayed at the world's fairs were "perceived no differently to the commodities surrounding them" (Griffins 2002, 47) and viewed as evidence of evolutionary progress for civilized societies. As Griffiths argued, curious onlookers consumed the behaviors and appearances of otherness from Indigenous peoples while reminders of imperial might infused the world's fair exhibits (Griffiths 2002, 46). This act of looking or spectatorship

is as Huhndoft (2000, 137) argues, “a masculinist dream of colonial mastery.” Images created of Indigenous peoples caused them to exist in the ‘ethnographic present,’ where they had little or no acknowledgment of their subjectivity, their voice and often reduced to objects organized to “evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress” (Mitchel 1992, 295). For example, Edward S. Curtis’s photographic portraits of Native Americans modeled on romanticized nineteenth-century paintings (Griffiths 2002, 238). Curtis painstakingly erased all the evidence of contact between Native Americans and Euro-Americans (i.e., use of feather bonnets, masks, and costumes regardless if the individual lived in a community that used them), thus, as Griffiths (2002, 238) points out, creating “homogenized and petrified notions of ‘Indianness.’” Therefore, one of the reasons why many Indigenous filmmakers strive to use visual sovereignty in the form of screen media (Ginsburg 2002, 40) is to integrate their people in continuity with the present. Griffiths (2002, 79) argues that Indigenous peoples viewed as exotic objects are what led to the western world to become gawkers of the Other. The exotic Other as a re-occurring theme continued in ethnographic film from Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) to John Marshall’s films of the Ju/’hoansi living *stone age* lives in the Kalahari Desert. Additionally, anthropologists Tim Asch and Napoleon Chagnon’s films also featured the Yanomamo as the *fierce* people solving disputes with force, taunts, and threats as shown in the 1975 ethnographic film *The Ax Fight*.

After post-colonialism, many scholars from former colonized countries start to challenge long-held core beliefs and practices in anthropology. The two tracks of anthropology, the salvaging of distinct cultural forms and the use of cultural critique to reflect our own culture, plus ethnography, anthropology’s great asset, was brought into question. Anthropologists, such as Clifford Geertz, also critiqued the discipline. These critiques resulted in the period in

anthropology called the Crisis of Representation. As explained by George Marcus and Michael Fisher (1999, 8), the Crisis of Representation rose “from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality.” Special attention emphasized on the use of ethnographic authority. James Clifford (1986, 25) explained that ethnographic authority was part of a complicated process, akin to the multi-layered meaning of “culture.” Ethnographic writing itself is murky because there are “multiple subjectivities and political constraints beyond the control of the writer” (Clifford 1986, 25). In response to these dynamic forces, ethnographic writing constituted authority as kind of a defense mechanism. The cost was that the defense mechanism involved “an unquestioned claim to appear as the purveyor of truth in the text” (Clifford 1986, 25). The use of ethnographic authority was problematic and raised questions within the politics of representation about who has the right to critique other people, in what circumstances, and why. These questions involving the politics of representation does lead to the enactment of visual sovereignty because Indigenous filmmakers and their communities⁴ choose how to represent themselves using filmic conventions.

Visual anthropology did grapple with the politics of representation several decades before the Crisis in Representation period in anthropology (Nakamura, 133) with anthropological filmmaker Jean Rouch’s shared anthropology (2003, 100-102), and giving access to the camera to Indigenous peoples to see and attempt to understand from their perspective what is essential to their worldview (e.g. Worth and Adair’s Navajo Film Project). Visual anthropology can also provide “critical insights into how culture and social relations are mediated through cinema, television, and video” (Ginsburg 1998, 184) such as when Indigenous media challenges hegemonic and homogenizing structures in dominant societies to argue for “cultural integrity,

⁴ Not all Indigenous filmmakers successfully collaborated, or reached an understanding with their communities (see Lowe cited in Hearne and Shlachter 2013, 278).

authenticity, and diversity of people living in mass societies” (Ginsburg 1998, 187). Indigenous peoples sometimes use ethnographic film archives as a source of inspiration (Griffiths 2001, 328) towards creating their media. Ethnographic research can also bring an exploration of multiple levels of identification in the politics of media-regional, national, and transnational (Ginsburg et al. 2002, 6), and the failures and successes that occur by studying the social fields that structure these engagements and the ways the audiences engage with media (Ginsburg et al. 2002, 13). Visual anthropologists can intervene in academia and wider debates about media and cultural imperialism, or the dangers of cultural homogenization represented by globalization. The documentation of local uses and meanings of media of comparative political economy of media production and consumption show the persistence of cultural difference while also reflecting on the “subject and objective conditions of identity formation as a means of ‘representing reality’ (Ginsburg 1995, 73).

The tension between science and the popular representation of stereotypes, causes many anthropologists to experience iconophobia. Iconophobia is the detachment between anthropology and visual anthropology due to a fear of films corrupting theories of human difference (Taylor 1996, 125-126). Ginsburg noted that the well-known names of ethnographic film (Robert Flaherty, Jean Rouch, Robert Gardner, John Marshall, Tim and Patsy Asch, and David and Judith MacDougall) are not fully acknowledged in anthropology due to the fact that “film and video are still regarded as transparent representations or ‘research documents’ rather than forms of knowledge production in their own right” (Ginsburg 1998, 179). I believe that visual anthropology must break the iconophobia from other anthropologists by being extra careful with the consequences of filming another person’s image. Otherwise, past mistakes will repeat themselves as people become examples of exotic cultural difference. For instance, the Inuit, the

Ju/'hoansi, and the Yanomamo are examples of peoples whose images slipped out of the film directors' control and used in unexpected ways. Early filmmaker Robert Flaherty's framing of the Nanook character and his family is an example. He tried to show the Inuit as individualistic, rugged, and courageous. As I viewed *Nanook of the North* (1922), I interpreted Flaherty's framing as depicting the Inuit as animal-like, (eating raw seal meat, biting the record, using the same frame shots of the Inuit infant with the puppies). Images such as this contributed to popular opinions that the Inuit were a childlike people and "already dead" (Rony 1997, 116), vanishing from the onset of civilization brought in by colonial conquest. By portraying Indigenous peoples as living an anachronistic lifestyle, the real issues are overshadowed such as poverty, poor health, and lack of political control. Early filmmakers such as Flaherty may have been avoiding these issues in the goal of escapism from the modern world. They were seeking the idealist image of people who lived in a simpler, harmonious, remote, and isolated world. By framing people such as the Ju/'hoansi in a frozen romanticized utopia, they were using time as a distancing device between themselves from Indigenous peoples (Fabian 1985, 16). The filmmakers imported their opinions and politically correct lenses onto the Indigenous peoples' lives without their input or advice. Thus, these non-Indigenous filmmakers created idealized stereotypes, such as the noble hunters, without considering the ramifications of the film on the people who were the 'studied.' As anthropologist Alcida Ramos (1987, 299) pointed out, the anthropological tradition of using film as a tool for portraying objective reality above everything had downplayed the "anthropologist's social responsibility" towards the peoples who were studied and thus, feeding the faith that the truth can "make one free of responsibility." Thus, I argue that the use of ethnographic film and visual anthropology methods did little to re-frame the notion of culture from Tylor's survivals until anthropology reevaluated their research practices.

Although anthropology and visual anthropology shifted their research practices and took notice of the consequences of past ethnographic films, the silver lining is that due to some of the early collaborations between visual anthropologists and Indigenous peoples, the tools for Indigenous media was established, and visual anthropology developed to critique the discipline of anthropology as a whole. One of the best examples of a collaboration between visual anthropology and the creation of Indigenous media is the Navajo Film Project. In 1966, anthropologists Sol Worth and John Adair collaborated with seven Navajo community members from Pine Springs, Arizona (Peterson 2013). Worth and Adair trained basic film camera techniques to the Navajo community members so that they would create films through their perspective. Later, each of the short films the Navajos created and edited were studied as “ethnographic text” (Prins 2004, 515) to determine which parts of the films are Navajo and how the participants’ sense of being Navajo affected the films (Peterson 2013, 35). The experiment was based on Worth’s argument that other anthropologists viewed film and photography as “records *about* culture” rather than studied as phenomena of culture (cited in Gross 2016, 6). While the Navajo Film Project was a step towards Worth’s vision, I agree with visual anthropologist, Leighton Peterson (2013), that studying what was specifically Navajo in the films is a sign of viewing culture as a set of traits, an “outmoded anthropological frame” (Peterson 2013).

Therefore, the collaboration between anthropologist Terence Turner and the Kayapo people may serve as a better indicator of a change in ethnographic film practices. Turner describes that the Kayapo has been able to employ video representations to “strengthen their sense of cultural identity and the continuity of cultural traditions” (Turner 2002, 80). For instance, the Kayapo used video cameras for several different functions that fit their local

aesthetics and local needs while also speaking out to the larger audiences (Wilson and Stewart 2008, 2). They made video records of their major political confrontations, and tours to Quebec to support the Cree Indians, video records of internal political events, and enacted for the camera all the activities of village life they deemed essential to a good community (ceremonies, home-building, soccer games) (Turner 2002, 86-87). By creating themselves as part of a fully established, normal society, they are creating a social reality in an instance of what Turner explained as “spontaneous reflective mimesis” (2002, 87). Thus, the Kayapo were acting as themselves on camera for themselves. Turner (2002) also noted that the Kayapo’s production of their social and political reality is a multivocal process, for each of the participants draws in different ways from their cultural stock (ideas, symbols, tropes, and values). Therefore, rather than an outsider like Turner determining what was Kayapo in the films, the Kayapo did that themselves. Therefore, the Kayapo became mediators during the cultural process of video-making.

Indigenous filmmakers who create films not only for their communities but also to express their perspective to a broader audience are cultural mediators. Indigenous filmmakers not only use film to convey their interpretations of culture but they “are turning Western filmmaking techniques into an instrument for the dissemination of anticolonialist media” (Knopf 2008, 358). Therefore, Indigenous filmmakers are cultural activists, for they challenge past portrayals of their people by “creating new models of collective self-production locally, nationally, and regionally” (Ginsburg 1998, 183-187). However, during this study, I have observed that for many Indigenous filmmakers, their interpretation of culture is closer to the classic viewpoint of Tylor in that they view their nations with a set of cultural traits that differentiate themselves from other Indigenous peoples. For instance, the Chickasaw Nation sponsors film production, but their main

goal is to “share Chickasaw stories from the Chickasaw perspective” (Miller, panel discussion, 2017). Their perspective involves what they determine are the cultural traits that make up what and who is Chickasaw. This perspective is transferred into what Ginsburg (2002) refers to as screen memories which are developed by Indigenous filmmakers to create their filmic representations. The process of Indigenous filmmakers engaging in the cultural production of film media does involve using visual sovereignty, and how Native Crossroads interprets culture in their selection of Indigenous films are interrelated with the goals of the Indigenous Media movement.

Indigenous Media Movement & Indigenous Film Festivals

Indigenous media, as loosely defined by Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart (2008), are forms of media expression that are conceptualized, produced, and created by Indigenous peoples. This thesis highlights the Indigenous media featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival and the interchanges between the audience and the panel members with the films and the overall film festival structure. However, there needs to be recognition for the Native Crossroads Film Festival for their role for increasing awareness and support for the Indigenous Film Media Movement along with the achievements of the Indigenous Media Movement.

Indigenous media emerged as Indigenous peoples sought to gain control of the observer’s position behind the camera so that the “object-the cinematic representation of culture-appears to look different than it does from the observational perspective of ethnographic film” (Ginsburg 1998, 65). While there are many studies of the representations and stereotypes of Indigenous peoples by dominant media, there is a shift in how Indigenous peoples have appropriated the technologies of dominant societies and used them to meet their own cultural and political needs (Wilson and Stewart 2008, 3). Ginsburg (1995, 65) calls these “slightly different angles of

vision” that Indigenous filmmakers create in their films the parallax effect. By studying the parallax effect of Indigenous and ethnographic films, Ginsburg argues that films can present the complexity of culture because films are themselves representations of culture. Thus, films are also objects that are “themselves implicated in cultural processes” (Ginsburg 1998, 65).

Therefore, Indigenous media helps “realign a long-outdated paradigm of ethnographic film built on the assumption of culture as a stable and bounded object, and documentary representation as restricted to realist illusion” (Ginsburg 1998, 73).

The assumed spectators for most ethnographic films, until the last couple of decades, have been white middle-class male straight audiences (Ginsburg 1998, 66). Sol Worth criticized anthropologists for utilizing film and photography only as ways to make records about other cultures instead of seeing films as “phenomena of culture in their own right, reflecting the value systems, coding patterns, and cognitive processes of their maker” (Gross 1981). Indigenous filmmakers “bring an unexpected perspective to ‘classic’ works” (Ginsburg 1998, 66) as they replace positivist models of knowledge with more interpretive and politically self-conscious approaches. Indigenous films like Zacharias Kunuk’s *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio’s *Seven Songs from the Tundra* (1999) and Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr’s *Ten Canoes* (2006) which are seemingly filmed with an ethnographic lens, but they are films told using Indigenous storytelling forms. Houston Wood (2008, 97) categorizes four distinct story forms used by Indigenous filmmakers: 1) The films tend to translate culturally specific oral stories, 2) focus more on groups and communities than individuals, 3) presents a multidirectional time, and 4) relies on styles of shot selection and editing that differ from dominant film preferences. Zacharias Kunuk’s (Inuit) *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* has all the Indigenous story forms as described by Houston Wood. What is

interesting in the case of his film is while the film is set in the ancient past, during the credits, there are numerous pictures of the actors and actresses riding snowmobiles, listening to music players, and doing other contemporary modern activities. I interpret this as an act of visual sovereignty of director Zacharias Kunuk playfully critiquing traditional ethnographic films by saying that his people still exist and interact with the present.

The Indigenous filmmakers tend to interact with their tribal communities (and other tribal communities they are 'guests' to), and many of them also interact with film festival organizers to distribute their films to a wider audience, which in the case of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, are the Native communities in Norman, Oklahoma and the Oklahoma City area. Therefore, not only do Indigenous filmmakers seek to change mainstream society's limited perspective on the diversity of Indigenous peoples, their contemporary experiences, and their stories, but they must also be a part of the "transmission of culture" goal of a community (Crane and Angrosino 1992, 183). By creating films for their communities (for educational purposes, documentation of elders and events, etc.) and for themselves as an expression of art, or to increase awareness of Indigenous issues such as environmental, spiritual, Indigenous political rights, and language revitalization, Indigenous filmmakers are transmitting the stories, their perspectives on life and the world, and cultural values to the younger generations. It is the choice of the Indigenous filmmakers if they wish to share and distribute their creations through film festivals.

Although it has only been the last twenty years that the Indigenous media movement has intensified; there had been independent films made by Native Americans since the 1960s, such as the creation of bio-documentaries (Sands and Lewis 1990, 390). One example of a Native American bio-documentary is a Hopi film called *Hopitt* (Hop-eet) directed by Victor Masayesva

in 1981. This is a little-known film because it is a pure Hopi film. Everyone speaks in the Hopi language. There is no plot, no explanation, and no interpretation (Sands and Lewis 1990, 388). Masayesva explained that a German broadcaster commissioned the film, so the ‘paying’ audience was German (Knopf 2008, 155), but he applied a Hopi approach and included the language because he insisted that the film was the “language of that experience, so it had to be in Hopi” (Knopf 2008, 155). Films like *Hopitt* are good portrayals of Native American life, but they will not be seen or understood by mainstream audiences. I doubt that this type of film will succeed in changing the mainstream audiences’ view of Native Americans, but *Hopitt* was Masayesva’s exercise in visual sovereignty. He made a film for the Hopi people. The film was screened locally in Hopi communities. Since some children were not fluent in Hopi, Masayesva did create a version with English subtitles in 1985. The subtitles do not provide a one-to-one translation. They served to summarize or generalize information. Masayesva explained that he provided summaries and did not translate the lyrics of one song in the film because of “cultural taboos” (Knopf 2008, 155). Thus, as an insider, Masayesva paid respect to his culture’s rules, he knew what he could film and what he should not. I believe that is an essential quality of visual sovereignty for current Indigenous filmmakers today and something lacking in representation of Indigenous peoples in mainstream media.

For instance, during most of Hollywood’s history, Native American actors and directors had to work and live within strict institutional, legal, and ideological boundaries imposed and enforced by the dominant culture. Despite the restrictions, they did manage to find ways to work within the film conventions and limitations of the times to earn a living and to subvert Hollywood hegemony on-screen and off-screen. According to Raheja (2010, 20), there are tales of Native American actors refusing to act dead when they were shot on film sets and often

replaced revolver blanks with live ammunition. These acts of pride can be a form of visual sovereignty, and these “Hollywood Indians,” Raheja (2010, 21) argues, serve as trickster figures, and contemporary Native American filmmakers could learn from them. For the most part, these Native American directors and actors are erased from the public’s knowledge of cinematic history. They are still relatively unknown. There are not any biopics or feature films made about the early founders of Indigenous media in the United States. There is barely any information on them. Only a few scholars such as Michelle Raheja and Angela Aleiss (2005) managed to dig deep into archives and newspaper articles to piece together the early history and the roles of Native Americans in the film industry.

Meanwhile, most of mainstream America has no idea about these directors and actors’ forgotten stories. Unfortunately, this truth echoes throughout the world regarding Indigenous representation on film. It will take continuous dedication from Indigenous filmmakers, recognition from venues such as film festivals, and access to a variety of Indigenous films for the tide to change on the misconception of Indigenous peoples in the past and present.

Nevertheless, it is essential to understand the Indigenous filmmakers’ act of visual sovereignty since they do not have to explain every behavior in their films. While I agree with Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart (2008, 5) that the production of Indigenous media is the “first line of negotiation of sovereignty issues for control of land and territory, subjugation and dispossession from colonization, ethnicity and minority status, local and traditional knowledge, cultural self-identification, and recognition by others,” I also acknowledge Indigenous media’s secondary goal of preventing cultural disruption by using the film process to articulate and enhance the filmmakers and their communities’ own cultural practices (Ginsburg 1995, 70). Therefore, there will be times in Indigenous films where no explanation is given for culturally

specific behavior, versus in classic ethnographic films, everything was explained for the benefit of the viewer. In *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, there are no interpretive filming techniques such as an expert narrator leading the audience through one cultural trait to another. Instead, during the opening scene, one of the characters sings a song (subtitled for non-Inuit spectators) about the song itself can only be understood by someone who understands the cultural context of the story. This is a cue that the film's narrative and details may remain incommensurable to the audience unless they are Inuit (Raheja 2013, 74). *Atanarjuat* is an example of a film that presents Inuit cultural practices on Inuit terms and does not have to make compromises to non-Inuit audiences. The non-Inuit audience will have to figure out the narrative themselves. In the case of Indigenous film festivals such as Native Crossroads, the organizers seek out a diversity of Indigenous films that include films that might be challenging for the audience to comprehend but are representative of the Indigenous media movement.

Indigenous Film Festivals as Anthropological Sites

Anthropologists should consider the cultural impact of film festivals on the current movement of Indigenous media and the influences and contributions to future Indigenous filmmakers and allies. The study of festivals is central to understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of global cinema and international cultural exchanges. Not only is there a growing number of film festivals which feature films from independent filmmakers, but there is also a growing movement of Indigenous film festivals in the United States and Canada, as well as around the world. The Dreamspeakers Festival in Edmonton, the imagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival in Toronto, the Terres en Vue/Land InSights First Peoples Festival in Montreal, the Native American Film and Video Festival in New York City, the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco, the Sundance Institute's Native and Indigenous Institute at the

Sundance Film Festival, the Message Sticks Festival in Australia, National Geographic's All Roads Festival, and the Wairoa Maori Film Festival in New Zealand are a few examples of international indigenous film festivals that showcase the work of Indigenous filmmakers and are vital sites where Indigenous filmmakers can network and collaborate with each other, the sponsors of the film festival, and the audience (Dowell 2013, 212-213). The American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco is the oldest Indigenous film festival in the world (Córdova 2012, 69). It was founded in 1975 by Lakota activist Michael Smith in response to the surge in Native American political and cultural recognition. The American Indian Film Festival occurs annually and primarily screen films by or about Indigenous peoples of Canada and the U.S. (Córdova 2012, 69). In contrast, the Native Crossroads Film Festival features films from all over the globe in recognition of the global Indigenous media movement, and not purely focused on Native American produced media.

Currently, there are 67 Indigenous film festivals in the world today (Imagine Native 2016). However, there are few anthropological studies on film festivals and even fewer on Indigenous film festivals. What few exist are brief articles which serve mainly as descriptions of the main events and dialogue between the Indigenous filmmakers and their audience. For example, Maria Paz Peirano went to an Indigenous film festival in 2015 in Berlin and reported on the events that transpired there. Peirano (2015, 92) observed that the festival facilitated intercultural dialogue between filmmakers, advisors, audiences, and guests. The festival not only created a place for the dissemination of Indigenous cinema but also provided an arena where mainstream artistic values and programming politics were contested (Peirano 2015, 92). Salma Monani (2011, 286) analyzed the 2011 Native Film + Video Festival in New York City as an eco-testimonial encounter because she claims that Indigenous film festivals are strongly

reflective of the environmental concerns and hopes of Native peoples. She also suggests that the ecological engagements place them in environmental film festivals. After attending the Native Crossroads Film Festival for two years, I agree with Monani that Indigenous film festivals, or at least Native Crossroads, do feature several films emphasizing environmental concerns such as the oil pipelines and clean water. However, the Native Crossroads Film Festival also features a diversity of Indigenous films from comedies to drama to animation shorts to documentaries, thus illustrating the broad spectrum of Indigenous created film content.

From an anthropological perspective, the assortment of Indigenous films featured in Indigenous film festivals initiates the opportunity for mapping out cultural exchanges between a non-Indigenous audience and the Indigenous filmmakers through film. Moreover, the audience does not have to be primarily non-Indigenous for cultural exchanges to happen. For example, in the Native Crossroads Film Festival, Indigenous films from all over the globe are featured, but most of the Indigenous audience are from various Native American tribes in Oklahoma, or Native students originating from other states. Therefore, the Indigenous audience members are engaged in learning about other Indigenous peoples of the globe, their struggles, and their perspectives, while also experiencing what Indigenous media is capable of. For instance, media anthropologist Kristin Dowell (2006) showed how Indigenous directors in New York and Washington, D.C., used the First Nations/First Features Film Showcase as a launching pad to strengthen social networks and share their expertise and experience. Indigenous media production is part of an arena of cultural production in which filmmakers and activists alter the “visual landscape of mainstream media” (Dowell 2006, 376) to formulate Indigenous solidarity, identity, and community. Through their cinematic visions, audience members are invited to view the filmmakers’ perspectives, as they seek to counter dominant media misrepresentations of

Indigenous people, and to ultimately end the distorted popular image of Indigenous peoples as an “entertaining anachronism” (Bataille and Silet 1980, 43).

Indigenous film festivals have numerous facets to be studied as anthropological sites. Not only do they provide cultural exchange spaces in a comfortable environment, but there are several approaches an anthropologist can investigate depending on their research goals. For instance, Kristin Dowell, who is a leading anthropological scholar on Indigenous films, focuses on the off-screen, behind-the-scenes, social processes of Aboriginal media production (2013, xiii). Dowell studies film festivals as well and dedicated a chapter to the IMAGENation Aboriginal Film and Video Festival in her 2013 book, *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast*. The IMAGENation festival, like the Native Crossroads Film Festival, provided a screening venue which raised visibility for Indigenous media, especially in highlighting the work of emerging Indigenous Canadian filmmakers. According to Kristen Dowell, IMAGENation was a “central annual Aboriginal cultural event that brought the community together and created an Aboriginal social space in which to tell Aboriginal stories to Aboriginal audiences, while reflecting Aboriginal cultural values through its programming, planning, and enactment” (2013, 23). Unfortunately, due to funding struggles, IMAGENation dissolved and left a hole in Vancouver’s Indigenous media world and the urban Indigenous community (Dowell 2013, 49). IMAGENation left an imprint on future Indigenous filmmakers, and a few of them organized the first annual Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival in 2011 that has become IMAGENation’s successor (Dowell 2013, 49). While Dowell primarily investigated the behind-the-scenes production of Indigenous media and specific Indigenous film festivals as they engage in visual sovereignty, in this thesis, my research centers on the viewpoint of the film festival audience as they engage with the various perspectives from Indigenous media

and the pursuit of visibility of Indigenous political issues.

Film festivals have been discussed as important arenas for strengthening social networks and cultural production for Indigenous filmmakers and activists (Dowell 2006; Monani 2013; Peirano 2016), but they have not been used for reception studies. There have been several reception studies based on Indigenous experiences to non-Indigenous produced films (Leuthold 1995; Pack 2013; Shively 1992), but not in the context of a film festival where the audience is primarily non-Indigenous. I was unable to conduct a full reception study at the Native Crossroads Film Festival due to time constraints, and there are several dilemmas regarding anthropologists and media reception studies (Gray 2010; Hughes 2011). However, a long-term study of specific Indigenous film festivals about Indigenous peoples using films and other sources of media to amplify their voices is not outside the realm of possibility.

Indigenous media provides alternative ways of recognizing and engaging ways of “knowing, being, and relating” (Wilson and Stewart 2008, 31) within the filmmakers’ own “local cultural distinctiveness” (Wilson and Stewart 2008, 31). Therefore, by shifting attention to how Indigenous media opens to new possibilities for mediating culture and its representations (Ginsburg 1998, 73), Indigenous films can be recognized as cinematic mediations of the culture process. Indigenous film festivals are also public forums for examining cultural exchanges between the audience and the films, and these film festivals also serve as conduits for the “articulation and growth” of the transnational community of Indigenous film and video (Córdova 2012, 68). Not only do these film festivals work to create more visibility for Indigenous filmmakers and Indigenous communities, but they are spaces for debates around “rights and representation, creating links of support and exchange and facilitating circulation” to other Indigenous communities and beyond the film festival environment (Córdova 2012, 68; Dowell

2006).

However, the recognition of where visual sovereignty is used and when it is not is problematic. Like the concept of culture, sovereignty has multiple layers of meanings and is communicated differently depending on who is defining it and for what purpose. For instance, Cattelino notes that Indigenous peoples' perspective of sovereignty is different from the way the United States government views sovereignty. Within Indigenous nations, Cattelino reminds us, there is a core belief in leadership that others are more important than oneself. This belief is embedded in the Indigenous perspective of sovereignty, and it is "entangled in material and ethical relationships of obligation and reciprocity" (Cattelino 2008, 190). These different beliefs between the U.S.'s assumption that Indigenous sovereignty means complete autonomy and Indigenous governments of interdependent sovereignty creates tension. This is particularly difficult when Indigenous nations must be federally recognized as nations due to a set of criteria based on cultural traits different than the overall U.S. culture, while other Indigenous nations that do not meet the criteria have to struggle to be recognized. Cattelino argues that this is beyond question for recognition for sovereignty because Indigenous nations such as the Seminoles already recognized their interdependency from interactions with others, including other sovereign nations.

I call attention to the fact that since sovereignty is expanded upon in other ways adjacent to politics, the use of 'sovereignty' in the context of visual media and cultural rights are sometimes entangled with each other. For example, during the 2017 discussion panels of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, cultural sovereignty was mentioned by Chickasaw scholar Amanda Cobb-Greetham. Cultural sovereignty is a social movement coined by filmmaker Beverly R. Singer (Tewa/Diné) (2001) that involves trusting in the older Indigenous traditions

and their adaptation to Indigenous peoples' lives in the present. Cultural sovereignty includes Indigenous rights and traditions as agreed to by treaties, speaking native languages, practicing traditional methods of food harvesting, the gathering of medicinal herbs, and using animals for ceremonial purposes (Singer 2001, 2). Even though they are separate forms of sovereignty, visual sovereignty and cultural sovereignty are interrelated at least regarding Indigenous film. For instance, several years before the foundation of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, Amanda Cobb-Greetham argued that that Chris Eyre's (Cherokee/Arapaho) and Sherman Alexie's (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) film, *Smoke Signals* (1998), is significant as a symbol of cultural sovereignty since it challenges mainstream society's simplified depiction of Native Americans by creating popular culture from an Indigenous point of view (Cobb 2003, 207-208). Cobb's use of cultural sovereignty, in this case, seems close to visual sovereignty. These ambiguities with the different types of sovereignty cause difficulty in determining how one should define concepts such as visual sovereignty and then to locate it in the context of a specific communication medium such as film. Perhaps these ambiguities can be further explored anthropologically within the social space of Indigenous film festivals.

Conclusion

Indigenous film festivals such as Native Crossroads are necessary to serve as social spaces between Indigenous filmmakers and the film festival audience. This is paramount because these specialized film festivals may be one of the few opportunities people have for experiencing Indigenous produced content not hindered by mainstream society's misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. The Native Crossroads committee selects films every year and tries to bring in Indigenous filmmakers to be part of the panels not only to combat the long legacy of distortions of Indigenous peoples but to provide an environment to establish relationships

between audience members, scholars, and Indigenous filmmakers. Additionally, the Native Crossroads Film Festival acts with visual sovereignty because it showcases the hopes, dreams, struggles, and self-expression of Indigenous peoples provided by Indigenous filmmakers not only in North America but as part of the global Indigenous movement.

Through ethnographic research, analysis of interviews, panel videos, and participant observation, I have provided four main chapters. Each chapter focuses on one aspect of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. In chapter one, I provided the contextual information and brief history of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the goals and relationships of the Native Crossroads Film Festival committee (Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism or Advocacy), and the sponsors' role for contributing to a cultural event that is free for the audience. I also analyze the Native Crossroads Film Festival marketing program designs which encourage people to join the annual event, but the designs are correlative to the different annual themes. These themes are chosen by the Native Crossroads committee to correspond to the trends of Indigenous films and their content matter (Nelson, personal communication, 2018).

The second chapter focuses on the films featured in the 2017 and 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festivals. Most of the featured films shown fit into increasing awareness and encouraging activism or advocacy for various Indigenous issues such as violence towards Indigenous women, environmental conflicts, human rights violations, and the importance of conserving lifestyles and traditions to pass down to future generations. It is to the credit of the Native Crossroads committee for their selection of a diverse spectrum of Indigenous films to include entertaining films. However, while several of the Indigenous films are more centered on the entertaining aspects of storytelling, often there tends to be an underlying message as I will discuss further in chapter two.

The significance of whether the members of the audience do understand Indigenous struggles from the films is crucial for the future of Indigenous media and Indigenous film festivals. Amalia Córdova argues that film festivals play a crucial role in “conveying a sense of solidarity with indigenous struggles” (2012: 64). In order to see if that is true, one must ask the audience if they are connecting with the Indigenous struggles reflected in the films. In chapter three of this thesis, I interviewed four University of Oklahoma students who attended the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival. I analyzed their responses to highlight whether they were affected by the Indigenous issues shown in the films, and their agency in spreading their support for Indigenous films and the Native Crossroads Film Festival. In the fourth chapter, I analyze the panel videos from the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival based on two coded themes: Visual Sovereignty and Bodies in Motion. These themes emerged from the transcription recorded from the panelists’ conversations with each other and with the audience. For the most part, their interactions reflect the main goals of the Native Crossroads Film Festival: Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy.

By the end of this thesis, my argument about the relationships between the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the goals of the film festival committee, the interconnected ideas of the Indigenous films, and the roles of the audience and panelists as part of the enactment of visual sovereignty should be valid. My hope is this thesis initiates future research on Indigenous film festivals, and perhaps someone will carry on a long-term research plan for the Native Crossroads Film Festival, specifically, as Native Crossroads grows and develops in relation to the growth and expansion of Indigenous media.

Chapter 1: The Native Crossroads Film Festival

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the importance of the Native Crossroads Film

Festival & Symposium. The Native Crossroads Film Festival acts as an arena for Indigenous media to be shown towards a broader audience. Indigenous films are shown in a comfortable, non-competitive social atmosphere, to celebrate Indigenous filmmakers use of visual sovereignty, and to ignite conversations among the panelists with the film festival audience.

In this chapter, I focus on several aspects of the organization of Native Crossroads. First, I describe and discuss the Native Crossroads committee's intention to become a crossroads for Indigenous media. Then, I acknowledge the sponsors' reciprocal role in maintaining the existence of Native Crossroads. Last, I examine Native Crossroads' use of marketing to encourage people to participate in the film festival, and how the committee chose each theme to highlight an issue or goal of Indigenous peoples. Each vital element discussed in this chapter does contribute to the development of the Native Crossroads Film Festival in becoming a venue for Indigenous filmmakers to connect with their audiences.

Intention of Design: Becoming a Crossroads

The Native Crossroads Film Festival & Symposium started in 2013. The founding members were Victoria Sturtevant (director of Film & Media Studies at that time), Kristin Dowell (assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma at that time), Karl Schmidt (digital media lab manager in Film & Media Studies), and Dr. Joshua B. Nelson (Associate Professor of English), who is enrolled with the Cherokee nation, and was affiliated faculty with Native American Studies and Film & Media Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Nelson is now the director of Film & Media Studies.

The founding members developed the name, "Native Crossroads," after discussing several ideas of what they wanted to accomplish with the festival and whom they wanted to engage. Their "core base" is Native audiences (Nelson, personal communication, 2018).

Although the primary audience is the Native students and members of the Native communities in Oklahoma, the films featured in Native Crossroads and the panel discussions that follow contribute to spreading awareness of various global Indigenous issues involving political and religious rights, environmental concerns, and their heritage. In the context of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the main participants consist of Indigenous filmmakers, the audience, the sponsors, the organizers, and the panelists. Each has a role in the development, maintenance, and extension of increasing the awareness of Indigenous issues and encouraging activism and advocacy.

The organizers believe that to encourage social change among the mainstream society, Native Americans, international Indigenous peoples, and other minority audiences is to persuade them that issues facing Indigenous peoples matter to everyone. This is the key to the development of the concept of the festival becoming a ‘crossroads’ (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). Therefore, the festival has a dual purpose: to encourage Indigenous viewers to celebrate and take pride in their Indigenous identity and for non-Indigenous viewers to move beyond their limited spectrum of Indigenous cultures within North America and in other countries (Parker 2016). Interactions from scholars and Indigenous filmmakers also contribute to these ‘crossroads’ during the panel discussions.

The concept of crossroads is vital to the original organizers of the film festival. For instance, to gain a better understanding of the organizer’s choice of the concept of ‘crossroads’ to be part of the name of the film festival, it is important to consider the location of the Native Crossroads film festival and its significance. Thirty-Nine Native American tribes call Oklahoma home, but only five originate from the area: the Osage, Caddo, Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita (Bentley 2003). This does not even count how many people identify as more than one Native

American tribe or are from a tribe from another state. Native Americans are part of Oklahoma's population at 9.2% (U.S. Census 2016). They are the second highest minority in Oklahoma, and the first are Hispanics who surpassed the Native Americans in 2010 (ICT Staff 2012). Therefore, as Dr. Joshua Nelson explained:

"Native people and non-Native people literally crossroads every day, especially in our state, and this festival is a place for people who don't normally talk to each other to learn about each other and take away a new perspective (Parker 2016)."

Within the "crossroads" of the festival, audience members face a variety of Indigenous issues and perspectives within the social space of a film festival. The film festival provides an open atmosphere that highly encourages dialogue across cultural differences between the films, the Indigenous filmmakers, the audience, and the panel members, and thus, it provides an opportunity for people to understand each other better and gain new perspectives.

Native Crossroads situates academics, media creators, and community and tribal organization representations into a dialogue to advance their discussions in these fields while also engaging the audience to share in these discussions. The festival provides an arena for diverse perspectives, and to extend the work done in the media, the academy, and communities (Native Crossroads 2017b). The festival aims to be entertaining, scholarly, and educational. Each year's event is focused on a chosen theme of "pressing importance" to Indigenous people, globally and locally (Native Crossroads 2017b). For example, the 5th Annual film festival displayed features, short films, animation, and documentaries in relation to the festival's theme: *Bodies in Motion*, while the following year was focused more on Native Americans and Music; thus, the theme became *Rhythms*.

In 2017, the University of Oklahoma Film & Media Studies Program and the University of Oklahoma Department of Native American studies hosted the 5th Annual Native Crossroads

Film Festival & Symposium. It was held at the Kerr Auditorium in the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History on April 7th and in the College of Law Auditorium on April 8th, 2017. The 2017 film festival was organized by four key individuals in the University of Oklahoma. The information about the main organizers was provided to the public in the Native Crossroads Film Festival program guide and their website. This is the only glimpse of the behind-the-scenes work the audience members are aware of unless they know the organizers or are volunteers. Dr. Joshua Nelson was mentioned already as one of the founders, and he continues to spearhead the film festival, and serves as one of the main announcers. Dr. Amanda Cobb-Greetham (Chickasaw) serves as a Coca Cola Professor and the Director of Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Caetlin Benson-Allott was Director and Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of Oklahoma at the time. The crucial last individual is Mr. Karl Schmidt. He is the Digital Media Lab Manager for the Film & Media Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma. His roles include working with undergraduate film students and faculty with their classroom and research media needs. Schmidt is one of the founding members of the Native Crossroads Festival team, and his primary role is the graphical, promotional, and media needs for the festival.

The organizers also recruit volunteers that include faculty and staff who work closely with students in Native Studies, and student groups who spread the word about the film festival through social media networks. These volunteers, including two of the participants I interviewed, are essential in Native Crossroads building their connections from within Native studies and Film & Media studies, especially when members of the faculty, staff, and students move from the University of Oklahoma campus, but they still maintain their support for the Native Crossroads Film Festival through social media. They will remember the experience of

volunteering for Native Crossroads and incorporate that experience into support for indigenous issues more broadly.

The Native Crossroads Film Festival is free and accessible to everyone, not just students. It is a public event, even though from what I observed in 2017, the audience consisted primarily of University of Oklahoma students, and the Indigenous directors who came to the festival to promote their films but also to watch the films made by other film directors. Also, during the *Te Ata* (Tay'Ah-Tah) feature screening on Friday evening, April 7th, the first two rows of the auditorium were filled with members of the Chickasaw Nation. Not only were they showing support for a feature film sponsored by the Chickasaw Nation, they were showing respect for the legacy of Mary Thompson Fisher, (stage name *Te Ata*, meaning "Bearer of the Morning"), who was an accomplished Chickasaw actor, writer, and teller of Native American stories throughout her more than 60-year career (Chickasaw Nation 2017). While features such as *Te Ata* are produced with an Indigenous perspective and the primary audience is Native, or in *Te Ata*'s case, Chickasaw, there is a desire for these features to appeal to the larger, pan-tribal audience. Dr. Nelson emphasized (personal communication, 2018) that "simply getting the films seen by Native audiences is important to us, as is doing it for free, and helping inspire Native people, especially from Oklahoma, to become filmmakers by providing models, outlets, connections, and training." The "local dimension" (Dr. Nelson, cited in Parker 2016) is what the organizers sought to distinguish Native Crossroads from other film festivals. They encourage students to become involved in the film festival, not only to show them that there are careers and scholarly opportunities available in the Film & Media studies field but to establish connections between the students, Indigenous filmmakers, and the representatives responsible for producing and distributing the films. Therefore, by building connections through the "crossroads," all who have

involved share the hope of contributing to and supporting Indigenous media in Oklahoma with a network extending nationwide and globally.

Sponsors' Role: Webs of Relationships

“Native Crossroads is free to the public, but it’s not free!” (Native Crossroads 2018). This statement underneath the heading of “How Can I Support the Festival?” on the Native Crossroads website broadcasts their call to action to support the film festival through donations, liking on Facebook and Instagram, telling friends and family, and attending the film festival. While the event is free to students and the public, Native Crossroads requires funding to “bring the best in Indigenous media to Norman” (Native Crossroads 2018) from sponsors. These sponsors are another strand of intersections in Native Crossroads whose agendas and support of Native Crossroads must be recognized as a conduit for the distribution for Indigenous media.

Native Crossroads receives significant funding from the offices of the Provost and the College of Arts and Sciences, the Norman Arts Council, and from the Chickasaw Nation (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). Since 2013, Native Crossroads has received funding and support from other foundations, tribal nations, individuals, and several departments from the University of Oklahoma. The list of sponsors⁵ exists in every program guide issued by Native Crossroads on their official website, and they are acknowledged frequently by Dr. Joshua Nelson during the film festival. Without the support of these organizations and individuals, there would

⁵ During the 2017 and 2018 Native Crossroads film festivals the presenting sponsor was the Chickasaw Nation. The other sponsors were the University of Oklahoma College of Arts & Sciences, the University of Oklahoma Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, the University of Oklahoma College of Law, the University of Oklahoma Department of English, the University of Oklahoma Department of Communication, the University of Oklahoma College of Law, Dr. T.W. Adams Distinguished Alumni Lecture Program, Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jeanne Hoffman Smith, and The Norman Arts Council (Native Crossroads 2017a; Native Crossroads 2017b).

not be a film festival. The relationship between the sponsors and Native Crossroads requires reciprocity.

Reciprocal exchange is a concept that if someone gives something of value, it must be returned. Marcel Mauss, a French sociologist, examined this process in *The Gift* by using published secondary scholarship on societies from around the world, particularly the potlatch in the Pacific Northwest. In the process of reciprocity, there are three obligations involved: Obligation to Give, Obligation to Accept, and the Obligation to Reciprocate (Mauss 1990, 50-54). One is obligated to give to preserve a social relationship with an individual or a group. If the individual is bestowed something, they will accept the gift because they cannot afford to lose face in the perspective of the giver (Obligation to Accept). The one who accepts the gift is also expected to give back a gift to the original giver (Obligation to Reciprocate). This process is expected to lead to other exchanges of gifts to maintain a social relationship.

While Marcel Mauss focused on the way that the exchange of objects between groups of people builds relationships, in the context of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the exchange involves ideas and perspectives between the films, audience members, and panelists. The reciprocal exchange of ideas featured in the films and the panel discussions are supported by the sponsors of Native Crossroads, who fund the film festival and are interested in the development. The film festival will reciprocate this support by maintaining their relationships with the sponsors throughout the years as they build *crossroads* into the webs of social and business relationships between the Native Crossroads organizers, Indigenous filmmakers, audience members, and the panel members.

While the relationship between the sponsors and Native Crossroads is part of the system of the reciprocity of ideas and support, the other part of the system at play is that they are

interdependent. Their interdependence is comparable to Jessica Cattelino's (2008, 17) description of the interdependence between the Seminole people and other sovereigns through economic exchange and political and legal negotiations. In Cattelino's ethnography, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*, she argues that relations of interdependence can characterize Indigenous sovereignty. With their involvement in casino gaming, the Seminole Tribe had to develop and maintain their relations of interdependence with other tribes, local non-Seminole residents, with the state of Florida, and with the federal government. Cattelino argues that these interdependent relations reinforce Seminole political distinctiveness through economic development. Economic development, in turn, supports Seminole cultural projects. The revenue goes back into their community.

Cattelino urges scholars to "attend to the sophisticated ways that indigenous groups-and, by extension other nations, assert their sovereignty in part through interactions with others" (2008, 190). The Native Crossroads Film Festival is dependent on others to function. The organizers must work with the sponsors, the University of Oklahoma, the Chickasaw Nation, volunteers, visiting directors and producers, professors, and the overall Norman, Oklahoma community. In return, the Native Crossroads Film Festival and Indigenous filmmakers receive recognition, funding, and donations. All these interlocking and fluctuating strands of interdependent relations create structural frameworks for Indigenous filmmakers to flourish. Indigenous filmmakers who present their films at the festival do not exist in a vacuum outside of their films. They rely on their communities, relationships with other Indigenous filmmakers, and film festivals.

Indigenous filmmaking in settler colonies started as a "cinema of duty" (Knopf 2008, 59) in the hopes of becoming visible to the mainstream society. Many Indigenous filmmakers still

take it upon themselves to tell buried or forgotten stories, to educate their people and the mainstream society about their history, culture, beliefs, and to correct the misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples, and to highlight current issues.

Marketing: Program Guides

Most Indigenous filmmakers lack the resources to create unique tours and traveling theaters for their films (i.e. Chris Eye with *Skins* (2002) cited in Wood 2008, 92). Therefore, Indigenous filmmakers travel the film festival circuit (Jordanova and Rhyne 2009) to promote their films, win awards, gain recognition, and find ways to distribute their films to their communities, non-Indigenous advocates, and with other Indigenous communities throughout the globe. Meanwhile, the Native Crossroads organizers and volunteers must use marketing and social media to encourage people to come to the film festival and become participants of the Native Crossroads Film Festival in support of Indigenous media. In this section, I present the Native Crossroads Film Festival program guides from 2013-2017. Each of the program guides also corresponds to the featured themes of the Native Crossroads film festival: Native Families, Native Futures; Homelands; Women's Voices, Women's Visions; Elements; and Bodies in Motion. Each theme corresponds to a significant Indigenous issue and echoed in the years following. Since these Indigenous issues and concerns are relevant now and, in the future, it makes sense that Native Crossroads continues to pay homage to them. Also, throughout these program guide designs, there are visual cues that only natives (or people who know enough about Native Americans) will understand. These cues are what novelist Sherman Alexie calls "Indian trapdoors" (Cobb 2003, 222). These are the jokes and references Native Americans will understand and fall into the trap door, while many Euroamericans will walk over them without realizing that they missed anything of importance.

A well-known example is Thomas-Builds-the-Fire's (Evan Adams, Salish) T-shirt displaying the words Frybread Power in the 1998 film *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre dir., Cheyenne/Arapaho). That symbol is intentional in the film even though the frybread shirt does not move the plot forward, and it is a nod to frybread's conflicted status as a reminder of the relocation of Native Americans and a symbol of perseverance, Native American pride, and unity (Miller 2008). If a non-Native individual did not know the significance of frybread for many Native Americans, they would not fathom the dry humor with the Frybread Power T-shirt.

Therefore, my analysis of these program guides is based on my interpretations as a non-Indigenous individual. However, I draw the connections between what is presented as an 'eye-catcher' and how the imagery relates to the Native Crossroads film festival's indigeneity in relation to their intention of expanding the Indigenous media community to current students and the public outside of the University of Oklahoma.



Figure 1. *Native Families, Native Futures* Program Guide. Courtesy of Native Crossroads.

The first Native Crossroads' theme in 2013 was *Native Families, Native Futures* (Figure 1). When I first saw this design, I thought it was an abstract representation of The Medicine Wheel (also known as the Sacred Hoop). However, it also looks like an abstract film reel design. Since symbols can be usually be interpreted in several different ways, I would not be surprised if the design represents a medicine wheel, a film reel, and the intersecting lines inside the circle to represent the 'crossroads' aspect of the film festival.

Various Native American plains tribes have used the Medicine Wheel for health and healing. The Medicine Wheel represents the Four Directions (East, West, North, and South) which are interpreted differently by various Native American tribes. The Four Directions can also represent the stages of life (birth, youth, adult (or elder), and death), the seasons, aspects of life (spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical), elements of nature (fire/sun, air, water, and earth), animals (such as the eagle, bear, wolf, buffalo, and many others), and ceremonial plants (tobacco, sweet grass, sage, and cedar) (U.S. National Library of Medicine 2018). Usually each of the Four Directions in The Medicine Wheel is depicted by a distinctive color, but in the depiction used in this program guide and the years since 2013, The Medicine Wheel is in one color (although not the same color from year to year, it changes to fit aesthetically with the background imagery of the program guide. Although the choice for The Medicine Wheel symbol as appropriated for the Native Crossroads Film Festival is monochrome, it can also represent one color, one race, one people: Humanity. So, while the Indigenous peoples in Oklahoma, the U.S., and in other countries of the world are fighting to be heard, recognized, maintain (or reclaim) their heritage, and looking towards the future of their peoples, they are still part of humanity.

The second program design is a landscape photo, and it represents Native Crossroads' 2014 theme: *Homelands* (Figure 2). The Medicine Wheel from the first program is incorporated

in this design with the film festival's name: Native Crossroads Film Festival & Symposium. Although the photo credit is absent, as is the location of the mountains shown; it is reminiscent of the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge and Mount Scott which are located just to the northwest of Lawton, Oklahoma.



Figure 2. *Homelands* Program Guide. Courtesy of Native Crossroads.

Homelands and sacred landscapes have significant meanings for many Indigenous communities. As Navajo journalist Valerie Taliman commented, “certain places in the natural world—mountains, rivers, forests, springs, canyons, mineral deposits, rock formations, echo canyons, lava tubes, craters, and areas where spiritual events occurred or medicines grow—are among sites sacred to Native peoples” (2002, 23). They also represent religious, political, environmental, and a constant reminder of the effects of imperial colonialism (which still lingers in the present day, cloaked in government policies).

Even while seeing mountains from other areas in the world portrayed in Indigenous films, the mountain imagery can evoke a connection to their homeland. For instance, during the panel discussion of the featured film *El Sureño del Mara 'akame (Mara 'akame's Dream)*, directed by Federico Cecchetti, at the 2017 Native Crossroads film festival, Dr. Dustin Tahmahkera commented on his feelings about one landscape:

One very particular image that stood out to me. It happened in about 15-20 minutes in the film there is suddenly a shot of these very large rocks, very sizable rocks and that took me as a Comanche to about half an hour or so away from here where we have a very close resemblance to some rocks in Mount Scott in the Wichita mountains. (Tahmahkera, panel discussion 2017)

Indigenous peoples' reverence for nature as a bedrock for their beliefs, traditions, and cultures has unfortunately become a stereotype. The harmony with nature trope is heavily used in environmental campaigns such as the infamous "Crying Indian ad" sponsored by Keep America Beautiful. As described by Robert Baird (2012, 69-85), the ad featured on television in 1971 and featured actor Iron Eyes Cody wearing Plains Indian buckskin and padding a canoe through pollution and litter. He turns to the camera (the audience) and cries at the devastation. While the "Crying Indian ad" was very evocative and effective in catching people's attention to the consequences of pollution, it bolstered another stereotype of Indigenous peoples: The Ecological Indian. The idealization of the Ecological Indian cultivated from literature and cinema continues to penetrate the "collective psychological rallying point within our long lamentation of our annihilation and transformation of nature" (Baird 2012, 74) especially in outsider-made films that were intended to praise Indigenous peoples, such as *Walkabout* (1971), *Little Big Man* (1972), and *Dances with Wolves* (1990). In these films, the non-Indigenous directors incorporated the idealized, ecologically friendly, past representations of Indigenous peoples to criticize their own modern, industrialized societies as being too repressed, too unspiritual, or too

environmentally damaging (Wood 2008, 72-73). The Ecological Indian as a wise, spiritual, and natural native serves the commercial needs of the non-native cultural industry more than it conjures a better understanding of Indigenous belief systems (Leuthold 1995; Wood 2008). Thus, Indigenous filmmakers subvert the Ecological Indian image by using visual sovereignty to highlight their perspective on what homelands and sacred landscapes mean to them and their communities.



Figure 3: *Women's Voices, Women's Visions* Program Guide. Courtesy of Native Crossroads

The third program represents the 2015 theme, *Women's Voices, Women's Visions* (Figure 3). Although the artist(s) who contributed their artwork are not credited in the program guide; it is a striking portrayal of two faceless women and a pair of piercing eyes staring back at the viewer from the back cover. In my interpretation, the faceless women represent the Indigenous

women in the past who were forced to remain voiceless, and in many instances forgotten. The haunting eyes on the back cover speak back without words; they are the ‘visions’ of women. They are speaking back against the unfortunate misrepresentation of Native American women in cinema, and in American history in general.

In the history of cinema in the United States, there has not been a very kind or realistic depiction of Native American women. As film historian Michael Hilger (1986) notes, the Indian woman is usually portrayed as dark, beautiful young “exotic” maiden or “Indian Princess,” who becomes enamored with the white man and falls in love with the white male protagonist instead of an Indian. Popular media has also denied American Indian sexual identities and transformed the sexuality as either hot Indian male stud or hypersexualized Indian princess (or squaw) (Bird 2001, 62-98). Thus, the beauty of the Indian body is coupled with romantic nostalgia and the “doomed Indian” stereotype and has been a crucial element in the objectification and dehumanization. Elizabeth Bird argues that although there are recent developments in Indigenous filmmaking that counter these misrepresentations, these stereotypes are still entrenched in popular imagery such as Disney’s *Pocahontas* (1995), the Indian Maiden on the Land O’ Lakes butter, and the nearest Halloween warehouse for the ‘typical’ Native American costumes (Bird 2001, 62-98). This constant oversexualized image of the Indian Maiden is one that female Native filmmakers must contend with as they try to gain visibility within the film arena, and they must find ways to use their visual sovereignty to subvert the Indian Princess image.

One way of female Native filmmakers' resistance is by using media production to strengthen their kinship and family ties and inspiring their daughters, sisters, and mothers to all be part of the filmmaking process (Dowell 2013, 118-119). In Canada, there has been some good direction in creating films that featured Indigenous women as human beings. For example, in

1986 there was a series of four one-hour television movies called “Daughters of the Country.” These films told four different stories of Métis women from the eighteenth century to the present. The stories are told from the women’s point of view, and they depict “ordinary women who face human dilemmas that are not defined by their ethnicity” (Bird 2001, 87-88). These types of films can be used as a banner to encourage Indigenous women to be proud of not only their Indigeneity, but in their roles as mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, aunts, daughters, girlfriends, and sisters. By acknowledging and featuring films made by Indigenous women, the Native Crossroads Film Festival committee is showing support for these filmmakers in their quest to tell stories from their perspectives.



Figure 4: *Elements* Program Guide. Artwork by Hock E. Aye Edgar Heap of Birds. Courtesy of Native Crossroads

The fourth program guide represents the 2016 theme: Elements (Figure 4). The design

features the “Nuance of Sky” artwork by Hock E. Aye VI Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho). The artwork was originally featured in Heap of Birds’ exhibit: Nuance of Sky held at the Pomona College Museum of Art in 2013 (Pomona 2013). The following is Heap of Birds’ explanation for the significance of blue in relation to Indigenous spiritual and artistic practices:

Blue, flowing at our feet and flying above our heads, brings a positive, all-encompassing life-giving presence in Nuance of Sky...It is the blue continuum that we seek to participate within and maintain. Much like the passage of azure color overhead and upstream, art and artists make offerings via this exhibition. Let us honor natural elements duly recognized along with the many individual hearts that speak together visually. (Pomona 2013)

I interpret “Nuance of Sky Blue” as meaning that no matter where an Indigenous person is located, even in a cubicle surrounded by plain, stark white walls, there is a blue sky above. Plus, I have taken a course about Contemporary Native American Artists by Hock E. Aye VI Edgar Heap of Birds, and I remember that he was musing about blue skies in relation to other artists' work. While I cannot prove that was what he thought when he created this design for the program, the memory most likely influenced my interpretation.

The abstract design of the front cover also reminds me of the *Homelands* program guide. I can see blue skies, mountains, and grasslands on the cover. If the *Homelands* program guide were taken and transformed into abstract art instead of a photograph, it would be like the *Elements* program guide. This is as far as I can go with interpreting this design and theme. This design and theme were more difficult for me to grasp. Perhaps if I were at the Native Crossroads Film Festival in 2016, I would have understood the connection between “Elements,” this artwork design, and the film festival. However, since these designs, which are also used for flyers and the website, are meant to capture the interest of people passing by and encourage them to visit the film festival, I think using a design that is too abstract will only cause questions. For instance,

“Elements” can have different interpretations. Do they mean spiritual elements? Elements of one’s life? Perhaps the “natural” elements Edgar Heap of Birds mentioned in his explanation for “Nuance of Sky” was the theme? It is not clear to me what the theme was supposed to convey. It might be an Indian Trapdoor that I am walking by and not comprehending. This would mean that other non-Indigenous people probably did not understand the message either. The *Homelands* and *Women’s Voices, Women’s Visions* designs made sense even if I did not know about Indigenous peoples’ connections with landscapes and the invisibility of Indigenous women.

While the 2016 film festival is in the past, one should keep in mind that getting people to become interested in Native Crossroads and attending the event is half the battle. Native Crossroads can feature the most spectacular Indigenous films ever, but it does not matter if there is not an interested audience present. Since the Native Crossroads committee wishes to attract students to the film festival, I suggest that the ‘eye-catching’ design must be intriguing and entertaining, and still reflect the theme the organizers chose for that year. The next program guide design does fit the criteria.

The last program guide cover featured here is 2017 *Bodies in Motion* featuring art from local artist Steven Paul Judd (Kiowa/Choctaw), “Not So Fast Kemo Sabe.” The theme, *Bodies in Motion*, refers to the “continuously contested site of the Indigenous body in history, sports, politics, the environment, and popular culture” (Native Crossroads 2017b). The theme was chosen partially from out of Dr. Nelson’s scholarly research in the “valences of the body in Indigenous film” (Personal communication to author, February 2, 2018), and to highlight work produced by Indigenous female filmmakers. I argue that there is a deeper layer underneath the ‘Indigenous body’ as portrayed physically and emotionally than through the interactions between the Indigenous characters on the screen. *Bodies in Motion* also indicates the desire for activism

from the filmmakers. The activism can come in a variety of ways using images and the film medium.

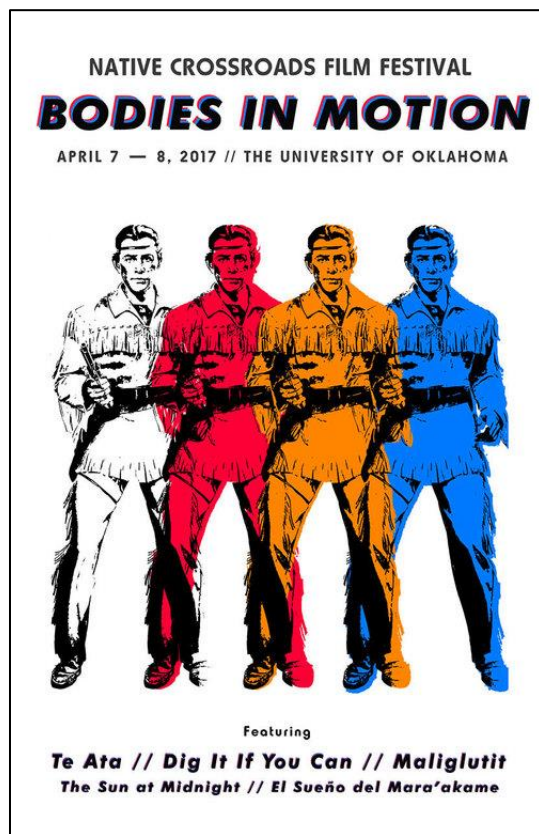


Figure 5: *Bodies In Motion* Program Guide. "Not So Fast Kemo Sabe" by Steven Paul Judd. Courtesy of Native Crossroads.

One key concern for Indigenous filmmakers is the long legacy of The Hollywood Indian, an idealized figure like the Ecological Indian. For instance, Jay Silverheels (Mohawk), famous as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* television series, worked behind the scenes in the Indian Actors Association in the 1960s through his Indian Actors Workshop (Raheja 2010, 243). The workshop trained Native American actors and advocated for an increased and stronger Indigenous representation on film and in television. Therefore, for Judd to portray Jay Silverheels as Tonto, this is an inversion of how Tonto is typically regarded as the ‘sidekick’ to The Lone Ranger. Here, the Tonto character is speaking out: “Not So Fast,” and his gun is exposed and directed

towards us. Tonto is ready to speak out against the inadequate representations of Native Americans in Hollywood. After all, most Native Americans do not recognize the Hollywood Indian as themselves, and thus, they “begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian” (Deloria 1969, 86). Thus, to escape from the shadow of the Hollywood Indian, Indigenous artists and filmmakers create their visual sovereignty through film to represent their perspectives, stories, and heritage.

These program guide designs illustrate some of the concerns and issues that are relevant to the Indigenous peoples of the world such as environmentalism, cinematic representation, and Indigenous rights. The ‘eye-catching’ imagery chosen specifically for each film festival’s theme serves a dual purpose: To attract people to come and check out the film festival, and to reflect the main concerns of the Native American communities in Norman, Oklahoma, and their connection with other Indigenous communities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and other countries.

Conclusion

The Native Crossroads Film Festival is part of the growing Indigenous media movement that is happening also in Australia, New Zealand, and South America (Diamond et al. 2009). This growth of Indigenous media is a challenge to mainstream dominant cultures’ portrayal of the “other,” (Leuthold 1995, 155). The Indigenous communities are presenting their own alternative media portraits through their worldviews shaped by ideology, history, and life experiences, but they are not trying to take over the mainstream culture’s film industry. As director Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho) stated in the documentary, *Reel Injun*: “You don’t always have to make great representations of Indian people. We’re not asking for that. We’re not asking to be, you know, nobles or righteous or good all the time, we’re asking to be human” (Diamond et al. 2009). Indigenous filmmakers from all over the world infiltrate, decolonize, re-

appropriate, and diversify the cinematic arena for their stories, their struggles, and their hopes.

The Native Crossroads Film Festival is designed to provide an arena for Indigenous filmmakers, scholars, and the audience to be part of the Indigenous media movement as they seek to find solutions and show support for Indigenous rights. Therefore, 'Crossroads' is an appropriate name for an Indigenous film festival. Native Crossroads does operate as a social space for intersecting ideas, interactive local Native communities, students, sponsors, University of Oklahoma faculty, and visiting scholars and filmmakers. By watching the films and attending the panels, non-Indigenous audience members are learning and expanding their knowledge of Indigenous issues and perspectives. Meanwhile, the Indigenous students and community members show pride in their identity and interact with the Indigenous characters and political issues in the films.

I provide the contextual information of the Native Crossroads Film Festival for the benefit of all who reads this thesis. While some of the readers might have participated in the past Native Crossroads film festivals, every year is a bit different. This is consistent with the different themes of the film festivals, the variety of featured films, and the diversity of perspectives presented by the panel members and the filmmakers. For instance, in the 2017 film festival, the films and discussions emphasized the Indigenous body and motion, while in 2018, the films and discussions focused on Indigenous people and their performance in music and dance.

This analysis of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the films, and the events provide perspective to the concerns of the filmmakers and the film festival organizers and their efforts to build or maintain connections. Within the space of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the organizers, students, and community members are recognizing Indigenous filmmakers use of visual sovereignty through the diversity of their viewpoints based on their own experiences and

feelings regarding Indigenous issues and perspectives. In a sense, all the individuals involved, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous are all part of a transcommunality which involves the development of alliances based on mutual respect from individuals who come from different ancestral locations (Ramirez 2007, 86). They gather in the same space, the film festival, to watch Indigenous films not only as a source of entertainment, but to show support and the willingness to learn.

Chapter 2: The Films

The main draw of the film festival is the films. The Native Crossroads Film Festival staff selected an impressive diversity of films. In two or three days, the audience was exposed to twenty films from Mexico, Canada, Australia, Brazil, the United States, and a few that were made locally in the state of Oklahoma. Indigenous films are attractive to film festival audiences because they represent alternative and more ‘truthful’ perspectives of Indigenous peoples than the stereotypical Hollywood mythical Indian. For the interests of a college campus, these films provide the support of diversity in films, the education in cultural relativity, entertainment, and provide more visibility to Indigenous people in Oklahoma, in North America, and globally.

In this chapter, I discuss some of the films featured during the 2017 and 2018 film festivals. Any of the films featured in the film festival can be analyzed in depth, but due to the constraints of this chapter, I am focusing on the most evocative and relatable films. However, when it comes to interpreting films and the filmmakers’ intentions and goals, there is not only one interpretation. While some aspects of my interpretation may align with someone else’s, there will always be disagreements. After all, films are experienced on several sensual and emotional levels, like seeing live performances on stage or participating in performative activities. Therefore, the interpretations of a film depend on the viewer’s background (such as Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous), life experiences, aesthetic taste, and knowledge of the subject matter. Technical factors such as camera angles, composition, lighting, editing can also influence the viewer’s unconscious perception of the film (O’Connor 1998, 31-32). However, since this is an anthropological analysis of the films featured during the 2017 and 2018 years of Native Crossroads, I will not elaborate on the technical details of each film. Unless the audience is full of film students, scholars, and film directors, it is presumed that the audience who attended the

Native Crossroads Film Festival would not analyze each technical detail of the Indigenous films they are experiencing.

On the other hand, having a diversity of interpretations of a film reveals the multiple layers each film has through its infranarrative. Infranarrative is the subtext of a film (Dick 1975, Dick 2005, 187). It is the story, the message underneath the surface plot of a film, or as Bernard F. Dick (1975, 125) claims, “the myth beneath the story line.” The infranarrative is the result of the various associations the audience identifies with from the screen within the main narrative. Examples of some the associations can include the issues that the characters are experiencing, or the character development as a result of the experiences. I believe that these associations are essential in understanding how and why people interact with the films they are watching. Thus, the interactions transform into positive reinforcement for support for Indigenous issues, activism, and cultural understanding. Throughout this chapter, I will note the infranarratives of the Indigenous films featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival, observe how they interact with the film festival themes of 2017 and 2018, and discuss how they interrelate with visual sovereignty.

During the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, the films are the most interconnected with the festival’s theme (“Bodies In Motion”) and with Native Crossroads’ two main goals: Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy. While the filmmakers had motivations and specific messages, they wanted to convey to their audiences using visual sovereignty; it is the curation of these films by the Native Crossroads organizers that contribute to the community development between the audience members, the sponsors, the organizers, and the visiting Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers. For the 2018 film festival, the theme was “Rhythms.” It focused on Indigenous people and their influence on music and dance, but the

sense of ‘rhythms’ is applied towards nature, harmony with others, and in life. Although the theme in 2018 was different, many of the films did resonate with the Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism goals of Native Crossroads as I will explain using a selection of the films as examples in the next two sections of this chapter.

On their website, Native Crossroads (2017a) claims to focus on international Indigenous media, but many of the films were made in the U.S. and Canada. The film festival also privileges films made in Oklahoma by Indigenous filmmakers from Oklahoma (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). I presume the reason most of the films are from the U.S. and Canada is that even with the use of Indigenous languages in several of the films that were selected, they are subtitled in English. Therefore, the Native Crossroads Film Festival committee must consider the accessible ways for the audience to be able to understand and watch the films. They cannot account for everything, and perhaps they should not. I believe that it is better for the organizers not to over explain the films in their program guides, nor the panel member discussions following each section of the films during the 2017 film festival. By not overexplaining everything that happens in the films, the audience can experience and grapple with multiculturalism in the context of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. As defined by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam:

Multiculturalism means seeing world history and contemporary social life from the perspective of the radical equality of peoples in status, potential, and rights. Multiculturalism decolonizes representation not only in terms of cultural artifacts-literary canons, museum exhibits, film series-but also in terms of power relations between communities. (Shohat and Stam 1994, 5)

Thus, the film festival encourages the audience to watch the films and try to interpret and relate to the films from their perspectives, and yet open themselves up to broaden their knowledge about the issues, concerns, and stories these films provide about the Indigenous people in

Oklahoma, in the U.S., Canada, and globally. However, underneath the film festival's goals and the committee's curation of the films, the act of visual sovereignty is the thread that holds Native Crossroads together and connects the festival to the Indigenous filmmakers and the film festival audience.

Increasing Awareness

Since the Native Crossroads Film Festival is a representative of the Indigenous Media movement, the organizers are keenly aware that the films they choose every year must be relevant to the same issues the Indigenous filmmakers want to convey to their audiences. These issues include water and land rights, tribal identities, misrepresentation from the mainstream society, passing down Indigenous knowledge to young and future generations, and relations with governments and their policies. Often the calls to the issues portrayed in the films are standing side-by-side with themes identifiable to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals of the audience such as environmentalism and self-identity. Since films invite people to become immersed in their stories, they possess the power to expand the experiences of the audience and thus, translate the problems experienced by Indigenous peoples into specific and personal situations, making the audience relate to and identify with the issues whether they are from a different community than the film portrays or coming from a non-Indigenous perspective.

One of the most recognized goals of many Indigenous filmmakers (and of Native Crossroads) is to increase awareness of Indigenous media as being beyond a classic ethnographic documentary. However, whenever a camera is used to frame people, objects, and events, it is always about something (MacDougall 2005, 3). Every filmmaker, including an Indigenous filmmaker, has an "inherent cultural bias," (Gross 1981) whenever they create a film involving people, particularly of people from a different culture from the filmmaker. Therefore, people

should not assume to view filmic images as evidence about the external world. Film images always reflect human decisions and technological constraints. Filmmakers, for the most part, choose where, when, and what the camera films, and edit the footage into a condensed film product, thereby creating a new reconstruction of reality and the film becomes what Taussig (1993, 16) terms the “mimicry of the real.” The mimicry of the real is the constant back and forth of what is real and what is the copy. This process goes so quickly that the audience and the filmmakers lose track of what is real. For instance, in every film, especially in documentaries, some parts are left out, rearranged, and added. Yet, due to the indoctrination of watching documentaries from early elementary or pre-school with ‘educational’ television and films, many people have become accustomed to learning new skills through watching videos or documentaries, so filmed sequences of Indigenous practices are assumed to be “opportunities for more learning” (Wood 2008, 65) rather than considering the full agenda of the film’s purpose. Many moviegoers have come to expect Indigenous peoples to be presented in certain ways due to the long legacy of stereotypes cultivated by Hollywood films, literature, and tourist traps. As Comanche writer Paul Chaat Smith observed, “The movies loom so large for Indians because they have defined our self-image as well as told the entire planet how we live, look, scream, and kill” (2009, 37).

Therefore, for people who are watching Indigenous films to learn about the ‘facts’ of an issue, or how people live their lifestyle and culture, they need to understand that the films are subjective. The camera only shows an interpretation of the events that are happening or have happened. The edits of the film are controlled by the directors and editors. Non-Indigenous audiences should not treat every Indigenous film with filmed sequences of cultural practices as the only source of knowledge of the people who are represented. Some Indigenous filmmakers

are aware of that. For instance, during Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh and Sylvia Olsen's discussion on the making of their film, *Kuper Island: Return to the Healing Circle* (1997), which focused on hundreds of Coast Salish families and their testimonies of the residential school experiences, Welsh commented that:

No matter what the film was about, there was always an undercurrent—a subterranean stream that ran beneath the surface—stories told after the camera was put away that spoke of the devastating impact of residential schools on Indian people and the “code of silence” that kept that experience locked inside the minds and hearts of those who had lived it. (Welsh and Olsen 2003, 147)

Akin to the infranarrative concept Bernard Dick spoke of, Welsh speaks of the ‘undercurrent’ story. Only the undercurrent story is revealed beyond the camera. Indigenous people will be there after the film is finished after the camera is put away. These undercurrents are the continuing impacts of past and present colonial experiences of marginalized people who have suffered, survived, and continue to exist despite assimilation, genocide, and acculturation. The awareness of these provocative experiences is essential in understanding why many Indigenous filmmakers strive to throw the stone of change in the status quo of the dominant society and cause ripples.

The Native Crossroads Film Festival offers the audience the opportunity to experience the diversity of the Indigenous point of view. However, the difficulty with experience is that any one individual only experiences their own life, received by their consciousness. No one can ever fully comprehend another's person's experiences, and everyone censors or represses parts of their own experience or finds they are not fully aware of or can articulate an experience (Bruner 1986, 5). Is it a paradox for Indigenous filmmakers to strive to express their experiences, many of which are culturally constructed, to an audience that will not fully understand them?

For people to overcome the limitations of individual experience as they watch Indigenous

films, they will have to make the effort of understanding that there is a long legacy of misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, what they will see on the screen is a part of humanity that is fighting for visibility for their lives, their discarded histories, and their future. By interpreting the Indigenous filmmakers' expressions of themselves and the people they represent, ideally, the film festival audience can understand the Indigenous perspective. Many Indigenous filmmakers hope that their films create a humanism to their characters, good or bad so that the audience can feel a connection towards the Indigenous characters on the screen.

There are also intergenerational differences in what an Indigenous audience member can connect to from these films. For instance, the older members of the Indigenous audience who were forced to residential schools pressured to forgo their culture, their language, and their self of indigeneity can relate to these between-world experiences from their own lives. Their parents and family members often silenced Indigenous identity in themselves and their children. They did not want their children to be discriminated against (Dowell 2013, 118). However, Indigenous media can bridge the intergenerational and cultural gaps caused by these colonist policies and inspire the younger members of Indigenous families and their communities to learn about cultural knowledge and confronting contemporary Indigenous issues.

Nonetheless, for some non-Indigenous people, it requires more exposure to Indigenous media than others to gain an understanding between themselves and Indigenous people. Almost everyone comes in with expectations of how a movie should look and feel. Depending on the experience of an individual in the audience, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, with Indigenous media, their expectations can either be reinforced or broken. If an individual came to the film festival expecting to see Native American people all living on reservations, or allotment land in the background setting of the films, then they would find that Native Americans live in

urban settings, too.

The film festival provides an informal, communal, and open atmosphere that is different than when an individual is at home watching a film on television or a computer or smartphone screen. Whereas watching films in a festival, the individual is interacting with the films' messages differently. An audience member is taking in the textual meanings of the films while surrounded by other people who are also processing the same meanings. While I agree with Carole Roy that seeing films in a festival context means that the new knowledge absorbed by the audience is "constructed within a community" (Roy 2016, 10), people will interpret or remember these films in different ways. Not a single audience member will have the same experience even if they all saw the same film(s). These films do allow the audience to reflect on the issues, such as the Keystone Pipeline and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, without having to take a position immediately or publicly. The introduction to the issue to the audience members who were not aware of the Indigenous stance can give them time to think and discuss with others informally. They are not required to engage in a debate on the issue at the film festival, which can be intimidating for many people encountering the issue for the first time (Roy 2016, 10).

Many of the featured films do express crucial Indigenous issues, such as Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs's (Mohawk) Canadian short film, *Stolen*, about a 14-year-old native girl, Shayna Hill, who runs away from her group home and disappears. The film was roughly inspired by the recent murders and attacks on Native American girls, and although it is only eight minutes, it shows a significant glimpse into a Native girl's life before becoming one of the 1200+ Missing and Murdered Indigenous women in Canada (Native Crossroads 2017b). The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women issue are affecting the Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States. Despite all the Native American courses I had taken while I was an undergraduate,

watching this short film was the first contact I had with the controversy. Therefore, the film and Jacobs's discussion regarding the inspiration of the film during the panel and her wish to spread awareness of the issue did strike an emotional chord within me, as it probably did with other members of the audience. Jacobs did have a personal investment in the film. For instance, the actress who performed the role of Shayna Hill was Jacobs's own youngest sister, (Jacobs, panel discussion, 2017) who, at the time, was similar in age to Tina Fontaine (Sagkeeng) when she was pulled from the Red River in 2014 in Winnipeg (Greenslade 2018).

The other films during the Native Crossroads 2017 film festival that are related or call for attention to The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women issue are Amos Scott's (Tlicho) *AKOO* and Katherena Vermette (Métis) and Erika MacPherson's short film, *this river* which focused on the Red River in Winnipeg. *AKOO* and *this river* are two Indigenous made films that were made in different genres (*AKOO*-horror and *this river*-documentary), but they both connect to the same infranarrative of the missing Indigenous women even though *AKOO* was subtler than *this river*. In *this river*, the documentary shows the Indigenous perspective of the overwhelming experience of searching for a loved one who has disappeared, and it directly relates to the missing Indigenous women as the Indigenous peoples throughout the Red River relate their wish to find their loved ones' bodies and find closure in their lives and hearts. In *AKOO*, two young men try to take advantage of two young native women, but a strange being intervenes. This being is Caribou Leg Woman. She usually does not protect anyone, and she tends to kill everyone according to Amos Scott (panel discussion, 2017). Amos Scott used his visual sovereignty, or, as he said during the panel discussion, "empowering creative choice" (Scott, panel discussion, 2017) to turn a monstrous supernatural entity into a savior for Native American women to keep them from disappearing. The term, *AKOO*, means 'watch out!' (Native Crossroads 2017b). This

is not a warning to save the young men in the film, but to those who wish to harm Native American women.

For several of the films in the 2017 and 2018 Native Crossroads film festivals, the focus is on environmental sovereignty. Some films are more upfront about environmental sovereignty than others, depending on the filmmaker's intentions. For instance, in the short documentary, *Reclaiming Sacred Tobacco*, directed by Leya Hale (Dakota/Dinè), several Minnesotan American Indian communities share their reclamation of traditional practices regarding tobacco to educate their youth, and other Indigenous tribes to promote home-grown tobacco rather than commercial tobacco. This is a case of an Indigenous documentary whose primary audience is not the non-Indigenous people, but for the Indigenous people themselves. It calls out to other Native American tribes that tobacco can be grown and used in Indigenous ways, free from colonist influences. Therefore, this film highlights the relationship between visual sovereignty as a tool to feature other forms of Indigenous sovereignty. That is one way in which Indigenous filmmakers and their communities challenge the preconceived notions of 'Indianness.' They are fighting against and tearing down stereotypical Indian images such as Iron Eyes Cody's performance of a crying Indian of a vanishing environment during the Keep America Beautiful campaign in 1971.

Iron Eyes Cody's iconic image during the ad campaign *is* very believable to the dominant society because that image "did not spur [the] audience to question the preconceived notions about what constituted Indianness" (Raheja 2010, 136). The emphasis *is*, as in the present tense, rather than *was* as in the past tense, is because many non-Indigenous people are still raptured by the image that all Indigenous people are involved with highly evolved spiritualism and environmental harmony. The reality is that throughout history, Indigenous people have incorporated both aspects of living with and working against nature that did not always adhere

towards successful adaptability, conservation, or harmony (Krech 1999, Baird 2012, 74). The Crying Indian ad-fueled the notion of the 'Vanishing Indian.' While the surface layer of the commercial pleaded people to join in and clean up the environment, the undercurrent layer revealed that while Rousseau's idealized Noble Savage is too late to save, the environment can still be liberated (Raheja 2010, 124).

The newer Ecological Indian stereotype is created by the myth-making machine that shows Indigenous people as anything but fully human (Smith 2009, 23). Once again, Indigenous filmmakers have another preconceived notion to strike down, that of the Vanishing Indian. Indigenous peoples are not vanishing, and all the efforts that various governments have tried to terminate, assimilate, and acculturate them through methods such as the Relocation Program have backfired and have contributed to pan-Indianism (Moise 2002, 22-27). This form of resistance is woven into the storylines of many Indigenous films. For example, Kelton Stepanowich's (Métis) short film, *Gods Acre*, featured during the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, is a Canadian enviro-identity film featuring an Indigenous man who is determined to protect his home at all cost. When two men visit Frank near the beginning of the film, informing him of the dam that will cover his land and house in water, he stands silently, but not wholly 'voiceless.' Frank stands his ground in protest. One of the most stirring scenes of the film is when Frank, played by Lorne Cardinal (Cree) fights to save his photographs and himself from the rising waters. Despite his near drowning, Frank survives and will rebuild his home. He will not vanish.

Despite the false generalization of all Indigenous peoples in harmony with the environment, many Indigenous peoples do protest industry practices that threaten their lifeways and pollute the Earth. In recent years, one of the critical environmental issues that several

Indigenous filmmakers have trained their cameras on is the Keystone Pipeline and the Standing Rock activists at the Dakota Pipeline. Three of the films shown in the Native Crossroads Film Festival in 2017 and 2018 directly focus on the pipelines are Kyle Bell's (Thloptlocco)'s *Defend the Sacred*, Sterlin Harjo's (Seminole-Muscogee) *Ordinary Human Being*, and Trevor Carroll's (Ojibway) *No Reservations*.

Defend the Sacred and *Ordinary Human Being* are both experimental documentaries. They focus on the Indigenous peoples' involvement during the ongoing movement to stop the building of the oil pipelines on reservation land or to risk water sources on reservation land. In *Defend the Sacred*, Kyle Bell attempts to "capture the spirit" of Indigenous people at Standing Rock (Native Crossroads 2017a). The brochure the Native Crossroads committee put together giving the synopsis of the films used the intriguing phrase "capture the spirit" in describing *Defend the Sacred*. On the one hand, this phrase recalls, the use of cameras for decades in capturing the "vanishing" races of Indigenous peoples, yet on the other hand, Kyle Bell documented the spirit of Indigenous peoples rebelling against the trampling of their rights. Kyle Bell used visual sovereignty to film Indigenous people protesting the rupturing of their lifestyle and belief systems. *Ordinary Human Being* focused on the Indigenous peoples at Standing Rock. Clearly, not only was the Standing Rock issue important to several Indigenous filmmakers, but the fact remains that there are at least two short documentary films that focus on the people themselves rather than the pipeline. Therefore, these films inform the audience that the Indigenous peoples are critical to the human drama unfolding amidst the political trappings of the environment, and the consequences of modernity. These films are really about the people themselves, their stories, and their struggles.

No Reservations confronts the pipeline debate from a different angle than the other films.

It is a trickster film, a witty political satire that flips the debate upside down. *No Reservations* invokes laughter from the audience, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, by displaying the absurdity of the political processes that happened. The film's trailer asks the audience: "What if the moccasin was on the other foot?" As an example, there is a scene where the demolition team's 'Indian' leader (performed by Lorne Cardinal) who oversees tearing down the house of Mr. and Mrs. Whiteman greets them with a wide eye-to-eye grin. Expressing mock surprise, he exclaims during the couple's protests, "Where you not at all present at the consultation meetings we've had over the past two years? We're building a pipeline!" This dialogue is significant when one learns that the Standing Rock Sioux tribal leaders argue that the federal government did not engage them during the permitting process, which is a federal law requirement (Worland 2016). Many other scenes in the film evoke laughter as the audience watches as Mr. and Mrs. Whiteman and their community try to protest the building of the pipeline through their homes with a comedic flair. Like the people sitting around me in the Native Crossroads Film Festival, I was drawn into the trickster story and did not draw the parallels between the film and the pipeline issues while watching the film itself. However, the *No Reservations* film kept surfacing through my consciousness more so than the other documentaries whenever I read or heard anything about the pipelines. *No Reservations* struck a chord with me. Its absurdity made sense. Thus, an Indigenous film does not have to be somber, or even spiritually beautiful to get its point across. The films, even if they are about controversial issues, can be humorous.

While many of the Indigenous featured films in the Native Crossroads Film Festival were focused primarily on spreading awareness of Indigenous issues, many of the films encouraged viewers towards activism. The activist did not have to include all the viewers to go and become political leaders. Frequently, the message in the Indigenous films is to take pride in being

Indigenous and going forth showing that pride a diversity of ways. This is what Native Crossroads and the Indigenous filmmakers seek to communicate through the films.

Encourage Activism and Advocacy: Bodies in Motion

The 2017 theme, *Bodies in Motion*, refers to the “continuously contested site of the Native body in history, sports, politics, the environment, and popular culture” (Native Crossroads 2017b). The theme was chosen partially from Dr. Nelson’s scholarly research in the “valences of the body in Indigenous film” (Nelson, personal communication, 2018), and to highlight work produced by Indigenous female filmmakers. While examining the films featured in the film festival, I can see the thematic outlines of the goal the organizers were aiming for, yet, I argue there is a deeper layer underneath the ‘Indigenous body’ as portrayed physically and emotionally than through the interactions between the Indigenous characters on the screen. *Bodies in Motion* can also indicate the level of activism from the filmmakers.

From my perspective, *Bodies in Motion* is a symbol of Indigenous filmmakers not only changing the representation of the Indigenous body on the screen, but also providing role models for the youth of Native communities. For instance, many elder Native Americans are concerned with the effect of film stereotypes on the youth from the role models mainstream Hollywood films are providing (Leuthold 1995, 163). Instead of learning about their own culture from their elders and family, young Native Americans imitate movie portrayals of Indians such as wearing war paint (Leuthold 1995, 163). These films can also create lower self-esteem for both youths and adults alike with almost constant reminders of the “Lazy Indian,” the “Drunk Indian,” and the “Savage Indian” (Leuthold 1995, 154). Therefore, Indigenous filmmakers must combat against the stereotypical media and imperialist nostalgia by creating films that show that they are people, not stereotypes or romanticized fantasies. These filmmakers are protesting Hollywood

with every film they create that features fully developed Indigenous characters, films that rivet around crucial issues, and stories that inspire their people and future generations to be proud of who they are and where they come from. Fortunately, the Indigenous filmmakers are not alone, for their films can express their desire to spread awareness of these issues, serve as a call out for activism, and express their perspectives towards the film festival audience.

Although, sometimes the best method of establishing an emotive connection to the audience is not always dependent on whether the audience understands everything that happens in an Indigenous film. Many Indigenous films featured in *Native Crossroads* are experimental and encourage the audience to emotively engage with the film without being told how to understand and interpret it. Even if the audience does not have ways of adequately expressing their confused flux of feelings regarding a film, that does not mean that they cannot attempt to process the whirlwind of entwined emotions that lead to an immersive experience of a film. For instance, during Stephen Page (Yugambeh)'s Australian experimental drama film, *Spear*, the film portrays what it means to be an Aboriginal man in the modern day. The techniques used were physical dance movements, minimal spoken dialogue, hip-hop music, and traditional Aboriginal songs. The film was 84 minutes long, but the screening felt like decades in the theater seat. It was an exhausting, but exhilarating experience.

Despite the lack of narrator context and character voice dialogue in *Spear*, the audience can still understand what the film is about. The main character traverses two identities of being an Aboriginal in an urban environment and being a young man undergoing his journey of becoming an adult. The expressive nature of the body movements and facial expressions of the characters were enough to communicate the struggle of the main character fighting against the oppression of the dominant culture's society and the rough urban lifestyle. The main character

also was walking a tightrope between his familiar Aboriginal world and the unfamiliar modernized world.

The ‘walking in two worlds’ is a common theme in mainstream films featuring Indigenous people. As Taíno editor and scholar José Barreiro points out:

Many times the media superficially portrays Native Americans as in between two worlds or that once a Native American enters the so-called modern world, he ceases to be identified as a Native person. The media portrays this an either/or proposition, but it’s not as simple as that...Native American culture is a work-in-process. (cited in McMaster and Trafzer 2004, 232)

While all cultures are works-in-process, Indigenous peoples have usually been existing in a stagnant time capsule, never changing. Therefore, when Indigenous filmmakers choose the same theme in their films, they are not copying mainstream filmmakers, they are using the trope to connect the characters in their films to their audience. For the Indigenous members of the audience, several can probably relate to the feeling of being out of place or ‘exoticized.’

On the other hand, some Indigenous people do resent the ‘walking in two worlds’ trope of Indigenous films. For instance, Paul Chaat Smith (2009, 34) argues that ‘walking in two worlds’ is a movie that is “constantly being remade, a paradigm, a way of thinking, and a way of living” that is the ultimate explanation for what “ails red people in these confusing times.” Smith believes the notion of ‘walking in two worlds’ is a myth that does more harm than good in the long run. He may be right. Nonetheless, it is a popular device to express the Indigenous Experience to young Indigenous people and the non-Indigenous. Does this myth work? I believe it does invoke a feeling in some people in what could be interpreted as understanding.

However, ‘being in two worlds’ can be interpreted in a different way than the filmmakers might have intended based on the audience’s personal experiences. For instance, the films *El Sureño del Mara’akame* (*Mara’akame’s Dream*) and *Spear* both involve the trope of indigeneity

as being part of two worlds, but, I, as a non-Indigenous audience member, experienced the narratives differently than probably most of the Indigenous audience. I still experienced a connection to the films as someone who had lived in rural surroundings with a rural mindset only to be thrown into the city life without a clue on how the crosswalk lights worked. However, that is as far as I can go with my connection. The Indigenous audience members would also have felt laughter, sadness, and joy in several different layers depending on their background. The film *El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream)* is an example of an Indigenous main character who undergoes several conflicts with himself and the world surrounding him. The audience's relation to the conflicts of the main character can influence the interpretation of the film.

El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream) (2016) kicked off the festival on the morning of April 7th. The film centers around a young Huichol, named Nieri. Nieri's dream is to travel with his music band to perform in a concert in Mexico City. However, his father is a Mara'akame (Huichol shaman), and he wishes for his son to become a Mara'akame to help people. Nieri's father believes that Nieri must find the Blue Deer in his dreams to begin the path on becoming a Mara'akame and follow the Huichol tradition. Nieri disobeys his father and travels to Mexico City where he becomes lost in the strange and unfamiliar urban environment. Ultimately, Nieri finds the Blue Deer and discovers his vision.

In *El Sureño del Mara'akame*, the central conflict centers on Nieri's life choices that are part of every teenager's path of becoming an adult, but there are several layers to his conflicts as part of the infranarrative: 1) He is an Indigenous person who wants to follow a non-traditional Indigenous path: a musician rather than a healer: 2) He is a teenager who rebels against the status quo (his father and the community's expectations): 3) He is not interested in identifying himself as Huichol: and 4) He is an Indigenous person who experienced the dominant society's exciting

and dangerous world: Mexico City. Similar to the main character in *Spear*, Nieri has to transverse, between the Huichol world and the urban world. That is the main narrative, but elements of the infranarratives of these films involve sovereignty.

Like the environmental films I discussed in the previous section, *Spear* highlights two kinds of sovereignty, or more precisely two modes of visual sovereignty: film and dance. I would say that dancing is an act of performative visual sovereignty because it is an expressive physical and emotional act that not only can be entertaining, but sacred, spiritual, a form of storytelling, or an act of protest. Aishinaabe filmmaker Lisa Jackson declares that dance is “a form of creative rebellion and resilience that offers hope for renewal and healing” (Dowell 2013, 113).

Indigenous film production and the finished films can also provide an outlet for renewal and healing. For instance, multitudinous Indigenous films revolve around the subject of healing from the ruptures of colonialism, grief, and mental illnesses. For example, Amy Malbeuf’s (Métis) short experimental film, *The Length of Grief: The Daughters of Métis Mothers*, involves the grief of two Métis women who support each other on their path to transcendence and healing (Native Crossroads 2017b). The most memorable moment in the film is the sharp, poignant sound of the scissors as they cut through the grieving woman’s hair. That sound is particularly powerful when members of the audience understand the importance of hair and its power in a multitude of Indigenous cultures. Unlike the forced cutting of hair Indigenous children suffered during their boarding school experiences, this instance of cutting hair is part of a choice. That cut is the element of sacrifice to the grief and loss the woman is experiencing.

An example of an Indigenous film shown at the Native Crossroads film festival that highlights mental illness and healing is Madison Thomas’s (Ojibway/Métis) *Exposed Nerves*. Another powerful short experimental film, *Exposed Nerves* is a contemporary dance film like

Spear. Instead of a narrative of a young man traversing dual worlds; *Exposed Nerves* involves a young Indigenous woman expressing her “bipolar reality” of happiness and depression as she undergoes on her healing path through the movements of her life (Native Crossroads 2017b).

The films that focus on healing not only call out to the Indigenous members of the audience who may be suffering, or have undergone similar experiences in the past; they inspire people to bear witness and participate in the conversations these films initiate. As Christine Welsh said:

I see the film as the beginning of a conversation that will continue...For me, there's no point in making a film that puts answers up on the screen. When you put an answer up there, the viewer doesn't have to do anything. I think films need to be open-ended-to invite reflection and to begin conversations. The storytelling is about people picking up the story that's the purpose of it. Yes, you learn something from it, but it goes on, it doesn't end there. (Welsh and Olsen 2003, 153)

Therefore, Indigenous filmmakers ask the viewers to take part in the serious conversations about Indigenous peoples not only as activists but to also better understand their involvement of being part of Indigenous experiences. However, not all Indigenous films are serious affairs, and they can be inspiring and fun to their audience. The next section presents the theme of the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival and its correlation to the goals of Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy in the 2017 theme.

Creating Inspiration: Rhythms

While this chapter was in development and the connections between the two film festival events were under contemplation, it became clear several of the films from 2017 could have easily fit into 2018's film festival. Thus, in this section, several films are included from 2017's film festival into the *Rhythms* theme. They are interconnected because the Indigenous films themselves are interconnected into their relatable themes, stories, characters, and messages.

While *Bodies in Motion* primarily focused on increasing awareness of Indigenous issues

and calling for activism, *Rhythms* focused more on how Indigenous people live their lives through music and the ‘Native Sound.’ *Rhythms* is a different theme than *Bodies in Motion*, but they do often correlate. The documentary film *Dig It If You Can*, also directed by Kyle Bell, focuses on Steven Paul Judd’s (Kiowa/Choctaw) life as an emerging Native Pop artist and filmmaker. The film was shown in the 2017’s Native Crossroads Film Festival, and its purpose for being featured can be interpreted in several ways. On the top layer, the film is meant to inform people about Steven Paul Judd’s artwork and motivations of being an artist who experiments with almost every medium and interjects pop culture work with a ‘Native bent.’ The layer underneath is the purpose of inspiring the audience, and is emphasized during Judd’s voiceover before the ending of the film:

I think that if you have a dream [pause], you can do it. If you really, really have that dream, and you’re willing to sacrifice, and you map out a plan, then you’re not going to fail. And even if you did fail, I think it’s worth it. It’s worth trying to go for that dream. (Judd, panel discussion, 2017)

While the ‘message’ of pursuing that dream is familiar to everyone, here it is especially orientated towards Indigenous young adults. Finding the rhythm or purpose of one’s life is especially difficult for a young Indigenous individual who must navigate between all the complicated cultural layers of their own lives. Therefore, while *Dig It If You Can* fit into the *Bodies in Motion* theme and the call to inspire ripples into the following year’s theme of *Rhythms*.

The Indigenous filmmakers are also saying to the young Indigenous people, ‘hey, we make films from our perspective, and so can you!’ They are inspiring Indigenous people, especially young adults, in the audience of their films to go out and extend the circle of influence of Indigenous beliefs and values through film, art, music, and other forms of media. For instance, a common type of film featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival is biopics. These biopics

are broadcasting the use of visual sovereignty because the Indigenous filmmakers and frequently their communities (such as members of the Chickasaw Nation), choose whom to feature in the biopic. These biopics serve not only to inspire the audience but to provide essential role models for the youth. Several of these role models were entertainers, political leaders, musicians, and artists who influenced and challenged their industry's boundaries to create opportunities for other Indigenous people to participate and to leave an imprint. The influences these Indigenous role models created are still reverberating among their people today. An example of these films included in the Native Crossroads roster is *Te Ata*, *Rariihurru* (The Letter), *Mankiller*, and *Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World*.

Te Ata is a 2017 feature film biopic that was sponsored by The Chickasaw Nation. *Te Ata* (Tay'Ah-Tah) is a film based on the true account and legacy of Mary Thompson Fisher, (stage name Te Ata, means "Bearer of the Morning"), who was an accomplished Chickasaw actor, writer, and teller of Native American stories throughout her career which spanned more than 60 years (Chickasaw Nation 2017). The film emphasizes the obstacles Te Ata (Q'orianka Kilcher, Quechua-Huachipaeri) overcame, which includes racial suppression, personal doubt, and her father's (Gil Birmingham, Comanche) disapproval in her career choice. Te Ata provides an excellent role model (although idealized) for Indigenous women to follow their journeys.

Rariihurru (The Letter) is a short film directed by Randi LeClair (Pawnee) and produced by Todd Fuller; it is a showpiece film used to garner support for a full-length feature film. *Rariihurru* (The Letter) is based on Todd Fuller's book, *60 Feet Six Inches and Other Distances from Home: The (Baseball) Life of Mose YellowHorse*. Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Mose YellowHorse was the first full-blooded Native American in the major leagues (Native Crossroads 2017b). Although it was a short film, the scene that I remember the most is the

interaction between Mose (Elijah Pratt, Pawnee) and his brother. His brother encouraged Mose to accept the opportunity to play baseball.

While *Te Ata* and *Rariihurru* (The Letter) screened in the 2017 film festival for *Bodies In Motion*, they do represent role models who made a difference in their communities, by doing what they love to do, whether performance or sport. However, they also show elements of the Rhythms theme because both Te Ata and Mose YellowHorse showed delight in what they were doing and shared their enthusiasm to their audiences. Recall my argument that there is another layer to the *Bodies in Motion* theme. Likewise, *Rhythms* too can be interpreted as rhythms of life, and perhaps the rhythms of passing down knowledge (stories) from one generation to the next. After all, not all the films featured in the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival featured music or performative arts. For instance, *Mankiller*, directed and produced by Valerie Red-Horse Mohl (Cherokee), features Wilma Mankiller, who was Cherokee Nation's first female principal chief, and not an artist or a musician; her influences still inspire Native American women. Hopefully, showings of the documentary will cause a "Scully Effect" on Indigenous women to participate in the politics of tribal councils. In brief, the Scully Effect is based on a recent 2018 research study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute and J. Walter Thompson Intelligence that the character Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) from the television show *X-Files* was a favorite nationwide in the 1990s-2000s and revived in recent years. In the study, it revealed that 50 percent of young women who are involved in STEM careers today were influenced by the logic-driven, believable FBI forensics specialist if they were highly interested in the show. Therefore, it is possible that a real role model like Wilma Mankiller could inspire the same effect on young Indigenous women.

Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World (dirs. Catherine Bainbridge and Alfonso Maiorana) was the main advertised film event during the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival.

During the screening, every seat was filled, and people were standing on both sides of the auditorium to watch the documentary film. *Rumble* was a hit for the festival because everyone, whether Indigenous or not, can relate to music. While we all have different music tastes, everyone tends to remember the songs that shaped their childhood and later adulthoods, and music can bring nostalgia and create *communitas*, a term Edith Turner (2012, 2) defined as: “a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows.” *Rumble* enticed a large crowd to the film festival because not only did the audience enjoy learning about the Indigenous musicians that changed the music industry in the United States, but they took pleasure in hearing and seeing their Indigenous role models perform on the big screen. Even though several of the Indigenous artists have passed on, their influence will inspire generations of Indigenous youth to create music that is reflective of themselves and their heritage but also adapting to the changing technological ways to produce the emotive Indigenous soundscape. In closing, the messages from these biopics and documentaries to the Indigenous audience is not only that the Indigenous peoples have a wealth of stories to offer on the big screen, but also that youth should follow their journeys and make a difference for their communities.

Conclusion: Curation and Network Building

While Indigenous filmmakers are part of a “community of artists that come armed with their voice, vision, and hope” (Bissley and Nicholson 2003, 90); they do depend on the distribution and support from films festivals such as Native Crossroads to gain traction in spreading their stories and calls to action to as many people, particularly Indigenous peoples, as possible. Thereby, Indigenous filmmakers must establish networks for the distribution of their films. The Native Crossroads Film Festival committee is one such network, and they will cultivate these relationships to achieve their hope for the future: Becoming the Native center for

Indigenous filmmaking in Oklahoma.

There are parallels between what the Native Crossroads Film Festival is trying to achieve: becoming the Native center for Indigenous filmmaking in Oklahoma, and the early history of Hollywood. For instance, several early filmmakers were against the monopolization of filmmaking by Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company (known as The Trust). The Trust controlled the production and distribution of films and controlled the exhibitors by threatening to cut off the supply of films if they distributed any films not approved by The Trust. Several filmmakers, including Cecil DeMille and Jesse L. Lasky, left for California to get away and established their filmmaking center in Hollywood (DeMille 1959, 75-78).

Hollywood companies have used their agendas to further their ideals so often in their films that there is little room for Indigenous media and the diversity of ideas. Indigenous media has to offer. Therefore, Indigenous media is moving away from Hollywood, (along with some of the non-Indigenous filmmakers), to establish their filmmaking centers. Several of these centers are developing completely independent of Hollywood, and therefore, they have nothing to do with the mainstream circuit. These centers are for the distribution of Indigenous films to their communities, other Indigenous tribes, and non-Indigenous people who are interested and supportive of the Indigenous communities and their rights to self-representation, their concerns, and their stories as their people.

While Indigenous films are produced every year, the Native Crossroads Film Festival committee can only curate some film screenings in the annual event. First, they look through which films have come out in the previous year. Second, they seek to understand how these films might be connected, with themes that they feel are of "scholarly and social significance" (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). Third, the committee seeks out films that have

Indigenous people involved in critical positions of creative control (i.e., directors, producers, cast). The other factors they consider are balancing the different intersecting strands of diversity: gender, geographical, and tribal. These factors do correspond to the growing global movement of Indigenous people's rights in the realms of gender, geography (land claims), tribal (heritage, cultural transmissions to youth), and sovereignty (political and visual).

The Native Crossroads committee also discusses the artistic, political, and cultural merits of the films, and how well they predict the films will be received by the audience (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). Therefore, the committee must *consider* the audience's reactions to the films presented in the film festival; otherwise, they will risk losing the support of donors and University of Oklahoma students. Although the festival itself is free, organizers must rely on the audience's satisfaction and interest in the films. In return, when an audience member is satisfied with the film festival, they will spread the story of their experiences to friends, family, and colleagues through word-of-mouth and social media. Thus, awareness is spread of the existence of Native Crossroads and its importance to Indigenous media. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the Native Crossroads Film Festival in enacting visual sovereignty will depend on whether the Indigenous issues were able to be transferred to the film festival audience. The next chapter offers an analysis of the reactions and responses of four participants who attended the Native Crossroads Film Festival.

Chapter 3: Methods Part 1-Interviewees' Reactions

Central to my argument is that the Native Crossroads Film Festival is enacting visual sovereignty by acting as a conduit for Indigenous media to be shown to a boarder audience, thereby building interdependent relationships. In the previous chapter, I discussed how many films featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival fit into the Native Crossroads committee's agenda of supporting Indigenous filmmakers and their enactment of visual sovereignty. This approach is part of the committee's goals of Increasing Awareness of Indigenous issues and Encouraging Activism or Advocacy. In this chapter, I question whether the Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism or Advocacy goals are communicated through to the film festival audience. By analyzing the reactions of my participants to these goals, I argue that they provide insight for understanding and supporting Indigenous issues through the emotional and intellectual exchanges of the textual meanings of the films and the audience.

This chapter focuses on the four interviewees (Heidi Hiltz, Zoe Nichols, Joleen Scott, and Dakota Larrick) who attended the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival and commented on which films they found the most intriguing or inspiring in response to Native Crossroads' goals of increasing awareness and encouraging activism. In this chapter, I provide the "voices" of the interviewees, delve deeper into how they responded to the activism messages from the films and the overall structure of the film festival, and analyze how their interactions and insights are crucial to the visual sovereignty aspect of the film festival.

Before I conducted the interviews, I attended all the panels and films during the two-day event as part of my participant observation. I wanted to be part of the audience and view the film festival without knowing how Native Crossroads worked behind-the-scenes. My initial idea for the thesis was for it to be a reception study between the film festival audience and the Indigenous

films shown at the film festival. However, since I only contacted four students during the film festival and obtained their permission (first verbally and later officially on signed forms approved by the Internal Review Board), I adjusted this thesis from a reception study to a case study. By analyzing the data I gathered from the interviews and the 2017 panel video footage, I could see which coded themes emerged the most and figure out if these themes correlate with The Native Crossroads Film Festival's goals of Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy.

The ethnographic interviews were open-ended, and the respondents could take as much or as little time discussing each of the points as they chose. These are the questions I used for the single audio interview, in-person interview and the email interviews:

1. How did you hear about the festival?
2. Please tell me more about what made you decide to visit the festival.
3. What are some of the elements that would influence you to return to the festival in the future?
4. What did you like about the festival?
5. Do you have any suggestions on how the festival could be more appealing?
6. Would you recommend the film festival for your family, friends, or colleagues?
7. Did you learn anything specific from the films?
8. Are you interested in seeing more films like the ones at the festival?
9. Would you go to other Indigenous film festivals?
10. Should there be more films festivals available to students?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

In response to the goals conveyed through the films that were featured (Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy), my interviewees experienced specific emotional connections to the films and the overall film festival. These emotional connections and the interviewees' responses to the goals of Native Crossroads and the films influence their collective desire to see the film festival grow, develop, and become more beneficial for Indigenous filmmakers and to the surrounding Norman community outside of the campus of The University of Oklahoma.

Increasing Awareness

One of the objectives of the Native Crossroads Film Festival is to feature Indigenous films involving increasing awareness of relevant Indigenous issues towards an interested film festival audience. As part of their objective to increase awareness, Native Crossroads provides films that relate to relevant, current issues among Indigenous peoples worldwide. These issues include water and land rights, tribal identities, misrepresentation from the mainstream society, passing down Indigenous knowledge to young and future generations, and relations with government policies. Ideally, the relevant, current issues communicate through the film medium to the audience members of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. Once the film festival audience is exposed (or made more aware) of an issue from the Indigenous filmmaker's perspective, and if they identify with the film, they are more likely to support Native Crossroads and the filmmakers.

The personal engagement with the awareness of Indigenous issues creates a potential launching pad for activism. For Indigenous filmmakers to encourage activism among the audience members, they must increase the awareness and the importance of the issues through their films. To accomplish this, they build a foundation of information and ideas for the audience to connect with. Then, the audience will either spread awareness beyond the Native Crossroads Film Festival or by taking the next step and become activists themselves or at least become advocates. Through the films, narratives, and relatable characters, the audience generates reflective thinking in response to the portrayal of the conflicts, and an interest in learning more about the issues such as environmentalism, sovereign rights, cultural identities, and so forth. For instance, Zoe Nichols, in response to my question of what elements would influence her to return to the festival in the future, said that films "relevant to current issues" (Nichols, unpublished

interview) would prompt her to continue to attend the event. Nichols cited Leya Hale's (Dakota/Diné) *Reclaiming Sacred Tobacco* as an example of what she had learned from a film featured at Native Crossroads. In Leya Hale's film, the Minnesotan Native communities are reclaiming their traditional practices of tobacco from colonialism and educating their people on the harmful practice of using commercial tobacco in sacred traditions (Native Crossroads 2017b). By untangling the difference between commercial tobacco sold in stores and homegrown tobacco, the Minnesotan Native communities hope to promote a healthier lifestyle for future generations (Native Crossroads 2017b). In response to the film, Nichols expressed that she "honestly did not know that there was a difference between commercialized tobacco and sacred tobacco that the Native Americans use for their cultural events and ceremonies" (Nichols, unpublished interview). While Nichols did not explain further why the tobacco film's message of promoting a healthier Indigenous lifestyle for future generations affected her specifically, she emphasized the importance of the Native Crossroads Film Festival featuring Indigenous issues four times in her interview with me. Thus, the fact the films expressed Indigenous issues caused Nichols to identify with the increasing awareness goal of Native Crossroads.

However, we should not assume that everyone attending the Native Crossroads Film Festival is familiar with Indigenous issues. The audience's reactions from the increasing awareness aspect of the films depend on the amount of familiarity with Indigenous issues they had beforehand. Through the analysis of my interviewees' responses, I argue there are different levels of reactions towards the portrayal of Indigenous issues in the films. For instance, there are several members of the film festival who have very little knowledge of current conflicts within Indigenous communities. None of the students I interviewed would have fit into that category, but there was at least one member of the Native Crossroads Film Festival audience who would

not have had much exposure to Indigenous film and the issues they represented. More than likely, these audience members benefited the most knowledge from the films.

Then, there are the audience members who identified as Indigenous, but through education, an evolving interest in various Indigenous lifestyles, or have developed relations with specific Indigenous communities, then, they may already be familiar with specific Indigenous issues. For instance, although I had never attended an Indigenous film festival before *Native Crossroads*, nor am I identified as Indigenous, I am aware of the contemporary conflicts many Indigenous people face daily, such as the mistreatment by colonialist and imperialistic governments and the continual struggle in their recognition as people. I am not alone in this positioning. Dakota Larrick, as a fellow anthropology student at The University of Oklahoma, and one of the audience members I interviewed, also observed the films with an awareness of Indigenous issues already in her mind:

"I study anthropology at OU, and through that, I have realized that historically, Indigenous peoples in the Americas have had very little-to-no say in how they're typically portrayed in a film. The films shown at *Native Crossroads* were Indigenous in conception and production, which is such a meaningful turn, both for those involved and wider audiences" (Larrick, unpublished interview).

Although Larrick was already aware of Indigenous peoples' unheeded voices in the history of cinema, she did recognize the significance of Indigenous films as an element of the Indigenous media movement using visual sovereignty to highlight their cultural sovereignty. Larrick recognized the films as "Indigenous in conception and production" (interview). This is an example that the Indigenous filmmakers and *Native Crossroads* are transmitting their visual sovereignty effectively to the audience. Like Zoe Nichols, Dakota Larrick also commented that she enjoyed and learned quite a bit from the films. While she did not cite any specific films, Larrick acknowledged that "every film was a unique expression of individual and cultural

identities" (Larrick, unpublished interview). This acknowledgment supports the type of representation of Native Crossroads, Indigenous filmmakers, and Indigenous peoples are seeking through their act of visual sovereignty.

There are also many Native students, scholars, and community members who are quite aware of the issues portrayed in the films, but they are supportive of the struggles Indigenous people face globally and can still learn a specific Indigenous individual's or community's perspective. One of the most known issues related to the film medium is the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. As an effort to change the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, the Native Crossroads committee actively searches out Indigenous films relating to current issues and contemporary Indigenous lives. In curating these kinds of film, they are making themselves relevant and attractive to Indigenous viewers and supporters. As interviewee, Joleen Scott, articulated:

"This type of representation is super important for the Native community because it puts us in the here and now, instead of stuck in the past in some bizarre *Dances with Wolves* or *Avatar* stereotype" (Scott, unpublished interview).

Note that Joleen Scott is critical of cinematic films such as Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). One of the main issues many Native Americans have with Hollywood produced films like *Dances With Wolves* is that it romanticized 19th-century Plains Indians lifestyle: living in teepees, riding horses, and hunting buffalo. The romanticized 19th-century lifestyle is not contemporary for the Native American groups in the plains region, or anywhere else in the North American continent, and so, they become frustrated when non-Natives ask them if they live in teepees and hunt buffalo like in the movies (Leuthold 1995, 160). Unfortunately, this is just one of many examples of the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples throughout the world.

I believe that through the efforts of the Native Crossroads' curation of the films to increase awareness of contemporary Indigenous issues, each audience member who becomes an activist or an advocate of Native Crossroads becomes an extension of Native Crossroad's theme: *Bodies in Motion*. The reason why the increasing awareness aspect of the Native Crossroads Film Festival is significant is that the more support Native Crossroads and the Indigenous filmmakers have from other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, the more empowerment they will achieve. This is one of the ways in which the Native Crossroads Film Festival enacts visual sovereignty. A major pathway for increasing awareness is through communication between the Indigenous filmmakers and the audience. There must be interactions between the films' messages and the film festival audience so that they can become informed and engaged with Indigenous issues. Furthermore, there needs to be recognition from the film festival audience for the importance of Indigenous people using visual sovereignty to control their representation through the film medium. As interviewee Heidi Hilts stated:

"I think it's really important that Indigenous people are getting to take back their own sovereignty through film and I think it's really important that we celebrate Indigenous actors and filmmakers and producers. I just want to like the support that so that's why I like going to the festival" (Hilts, unpublished interview).

If the film festival audience members become supportive of the Indigenous issues brought forth by the films and panelists, then they can use their agency to further spread awareness and garner support beyond the film festival environment. This can be accomplished through venues such as social media, volunteering in Native Crossroads, or by becoming filmmakers, and then collaborating with others to create films with a similar impact and influence towards future audiences. Thus, they can contribute to the circle of communal ideas, concerns, and hope for the future for Indigenous peoples.

Encouraging Activism and Advocacy

During my attendance at the Native Crossroads Film Festival, I observed that one of the goals projected to the audience is the encouragement of activism and advocacy. In the last chapter, I discuss the underlying meanings of the film festival's theme, *Bodies in Motion*. From the sample of the films created by several Indigenous filmmakers, the theme of *Bodies in Motion*, I argue, can be interpreted as a form of activism produced by the Indigenous filmmakers. Their films interpret a way of encouraging activism and advocacy among the viewers of their films. For example, some of the Indigenous filmmakers, especially Steven Paul Judd and Kyle Bell, worked to provide visual role models as Indigenous artists reclaiming their visual representation. Not all the films featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival correlated to my observations, but it is the foundation for the discussion of whether or not the audience recognizes the efforts of encouraging activism and advocacy for Indigenous peoples, not only in the state of Oklahoma but globally.

During the interviews with the University of Oklahoma students who attended the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, there exists the desire to support the film festival and the Indigenous filmmakers. For instance, when I asked each of my interviewees if they would recommend the film festival to their friends, family, and colleagues, they all responded positively. They would recommend the film festival to everyone they know, as Joleen Scott told me: "I recommend all the time" (Scott, unpublished interview). Dakota Larrick brought her fourteen-year-old sister to the Native Crossroads Film Festival to experience the Indigenous films. Her sister loved the experience. Larrick expressed that they would visit the film festival in the future if they are still around the Norman, Oklahoma area and would invite all their close friends (Dakota Larrick, interview). By bringing a family member, Larrick wished to share her

interest in Native Crossroads and the issue of Indigenous visual sovereignty. This action shows Larrick to be an advocate in that respect. By bringing in her sister to experience the film festival, Larrick exercised her agency and support for Indigenous media by doing her part in spreading awareness of Native Crossroads' existence.

While my four interviewees' opinions should not be generalized to the rest of the film festival's audience, in their conversations with me, they *all* expressed concern for the various Indigenous issues featured in the films. For instance, Nichols emphasized in her interview that Indigenous issues need to be discussed more for the "larger population." She believes that more exposure to people outside of the University of Oklahoma about these issues will cause people to understand and become more accepting of different cultural experiences and coexistence (Nichols, unpublished interview). Further, in the interview, Nichols explained in more detail why she would recommend the film festival:

"I would recommend this film festival to my family, friends, and colleagues because it is very interesting and I feel as though these issues need to be spoken about more to the general public and I find that through film, people who are not familiar with the issues involving Native Americans and the preservation of their culture, are more open to listening and better comprehending what goes on within the Native American world and what they all have to deal with on a daily basis" (Nichols, unpublished interview).

By recommending the Native Crossroads Film Festival to others, Nichols becomes an active agent in spreading the awareness of Native American issues and the preservation of their cultural beliefs to the "general" public, rather than the information stopping at the film festival. As Nichols stated, these issues need to be "spoken" out to people who are not familiar with the problems Native Americans (and other Indigenous peoples in the world) face in their daily lives. Spreading awareness of these issues and establishing connections with the Indigenous communities are the interdependent bridges that should continue to be built and maintained between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples.

As a result of the persuasive themes of the Indigenous films, an audience can become the embodiment of the desire to enact social change. I argue that the supportive audience member will, in turn, start to influence their social circles and extend the ideas that featured in Native Crossroads. The people they influence will become interested in Native Crossroads, visit the film festival in the following year, and if convinced about the importance of Indigenous issues, rights, and visual sovereignty, then they, too, will spread awareness and become open to discourse regarding Indigenous peoples. So, in this regard the Native Crossroads Film Festival's work of visual sovereignty becomes about through network building. This process creates an interdependent circular movement that is seen in how Dakota Larrick and Heidi Hilts became involved with Native Crossroads.

Dakota Larrick became involved with the Native Crossroads Film Festival because her roommate was in a Film & Media Studies course involved in organizing the event. Larrick helped her roommate with advertising through social media (Larrick, unpublished interview). As a result of becoming involved with Native Crossroads, Larrick understood more of what was happening behind-the-scenes and could formulate insights on how Native Crossroads could improve and advertise themselves better in the future. For instance, Larrick spoke of reaching out to bigger audiences, "especially beyond just the college environment" (Larrick, unpublished interview). Not only will the films featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival be given a chance to showcase their messages, stories, and Indigenous talent further, but economically speaking, more support from people also means more chance of grants. More grants will enable the Native Crossroads committee to provide transportation and housing for more Indigenous filmmakers to come to the event and allowed the Indigenous filmmakers to interact with the film festival audience. For instance, Heidi Hilts inform me that the Native Crossroads committee

wanted to bring Zacharias Kunuk (Inuk) who directed *Maliglutit*, which was the last feature shown in the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival. However, that did not work out because the expense of bringing Kunuk to the film festival would have cost a large percentage of the budget (Hilts, unpublished interview).

Heidi Hilts had a more involved role in the organization of the Native Crossroads Film Festival than Dakota Larrick. She oversaw social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to advertise the existence of Native Crossroads and to encourage people outside of the University of Oklahoma campus to attend. While Hilts had to attend Native Crossroads as a requirement for her Digital Storytelling course, she was glad she was 'forced' to go (Hilts, unpublished interview). Hilts' experience of watching Indigenous films as part of the audience made her realize the importance of *supporting* and *celebrating* the Indigenous Film Media Movement. Thus, the experience enforced Hilts' knowledge of the act of visual sovereignty and transformed her into becoming an advocate for Indigenous media. For instance, Hilts received an editing job for a documentary that was created by a few graduate students in the Film & Media department (Hilts, unpublished interview). Hilts was able to get the editing job because of her connections through the Native Crossroads Film Festival. This is an example of Native Crossroads building connections between Indigenous filmmakers and members of the audience. In turn, Hilts might be able to support Indigenous filmmakers in the future. As for the Native Crossroads Film Festival itself, Hilts provides her perspective as a volunteer for its improvement.

Hilts expressed to me that the Native Crossroads Film Festival needs more exposure. She quotes one of her professors who described Oklahoma as "Indian Hollywood" (Hilts, unpublished interview) operating as one of the nodes of the distribution of Indigenous media in the United States. Hilts' comment reflects my point from the previous chapter about the

development of independent film centers outside of Hollywood, and Native Crossroads as a link to the interaction between Indigenous filmmakers and their audience. Hilts explains the link between Oklahoma as the Indian Hollywood and the importance of the Native Crossroads Film Festival:

“This is kind like this weird place where all these Indigenous people interact because they were all forced to come here, and they’re still here, and there’s so many of them, hence they are all trying to make films and stuff, and it’s cool in how it brings filmmakers from all over the world, and films from all over the world. I think a lot of students don’t really get the importance of that and I don’t really know how to stress the importance of that to students, but I think that if you just try to get people to come, and you make it seem like a fun, cool thing, they will understand the importance of it after they go. It’s just about getting them to come to the film festival” (Hilts, unpublished interview).

As Hilts pointed out, the challenge is bringing students from the University of Oklahoma campus to Native Crossroads and expressing the *importance* of Indigenous films. I emphasized in the previous chapter that most Indigenous films focus on increasing the awareness of Indigenous issues such as environmentalism, maintaining and passing down cultural heritage, and media misrepresentation. If there is no audience for these films, then the films will lose their effectiveness in addressing Indigenous issues to the audience, and consequently lose the potential for future support. Therefore, as Hilts suggests, the primary strategy in trying to include more students in attending Native Crossroads is to advertise and convince students that the event is not only important in terms of Indigenous filmmaking in Oklahoma, but on a global scale.

Hilts is not alone in showing her concern for the future of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. From the viewpoint of an audience member, Zoe Nichols commented that while the Native Crossroads Film Festival is “very appealing,” she noted that there needs to be more advertisement ahead of time to gain a larger audience (Nichols, unpublished interview). Once again, the concern for more exposure is reflected by an audience member who enjoyed and cares about the future of Native Crossroads. Nichols repeated her statement about more advertisement

when I asked if there should be more film festivals available to students. This emphasis is significant and not an isolated opinion. Since I have evidence from two audience members who are concerned about attendance at the Native Crossroads Film Festival, it is something that should be considered for the survival of the event. Larrick also noted that if Native Crossroads can at least keep on annually in the years to come, she would be “thrilled” (Larrick, unpublished interview). When I asked Hilts for her recommendations for the Native Crossroads Film Festival to improve, she did not hesitate in recommending that there needs to be more flyers and posters around Norman outside the university campus. Also, radio announcements on networks such as The Spy, and possibly multiple screenings at multiple venues, resulting in a more significant, more exciting event that will entice students from the University of Oklahoma and the community outside of campus (Hilts, unpublished interview). Hilts commented that she did not think people attend film festivals if they are not filmmakers themselves (Hilts, unpublished interview). Nonetheless, considering the other interviewees I interviewed were not filmmakers, and they attended Native Crossroads, plus many community members from various Native American communities came in support of the films proves that there is some diversity in the makeup of the Native Crossroads audience. However, the audience can expand further in terms of the primary audience the Native Crossroads committee is targeting: the students.

One problem for the lack of student attendance is when the Native Crossroads committee chooses to schedule their film festival. For instance, the film festival happens when there is just a little more than a month left in the spring semester when students are hunkered down and finishing projects and papers, reluctant to free up their schedules. Additionally, during the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival, it occurred on the same weekend as the Norman Medieval Fair. The Norman Medieval is a long-established event that hugely involves the community of

Norman and in the surrounding Oklahoma City area. If a student only has time to go to one event that weekend, they will choose either the Medieval Fair or Native Crossroads, or even some other event entirely. I witnessed this firsthand when I noticed the lack of student attendance during most of the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival. However, I saw many more Native community members, academic scholars, and people supporting the Indigenous filmmakers (primarily family members and friends). For instance, during the Chickasaw Nation's *Te Ata* feature screening at the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, the first few rows of the auditorium were filled by members of the Chickasaw Nation. If the primary audience for the Native Crossroads Film Festival is students, as the committee has claimed (Nelson, personal communication, 2018), then perhaps they should change their strategy of attracting their intended audience.

The increased usage of social media as an advertising tool could help in bringing more students to the film festival. The social media platforms Hilts oversaw during her volunteering for Native Crossroads played a central role in advertising the film festival in recent years. Hilts said that when she started her position as the social media manager, Native Crossroads did not have an Instagram, a YouTube page, and the Twitter account was not very active. Since then, Hilts claimed that those accounts and followers have become more active, but

“I would really like to see it *grow*. I would like to help it grow even though I'm moving away after I graduate, but I would love to come back and come for the festival and help out and volunteer and stuff. This festival brought out a lot of major actors and filmmakers and the Indigenous filmmaking community, and I think it's really important for these people to have a *voice*, so I want to be supportive of that” (Hilts, unpublished interview).

Hilts emphasized the words “grow” and “voice” in her interview with me. She is supportive of not only the Native Crossroads Film Festival but also for the Indigenous filmmakers the film festival strives to bring recognition for. Since Hilts and Nichols expressed their concerns about

the future of the Native Crossroads Film Festival and its further development, they are fulfilling a role for this film festival. If they had just attended the film festival and had no opinions, then the significance of the Indigenous filmmakers using their visual sovereignty, here Hilts described as “voice,” is at least getting through a little to the audience. Another technique for Indigenous filmmakers to grab their audience’s attention is through emotional connections.

Emotional Connections

In this section, I discuss how the films can evoke emotional connections to the audience, from my interviewees’ point of view, and whether these emotive ties enforce support for the Indigenous films, or for the Native Crossroads Film Festival itself. Anyone who has ever reacted from a film, video, piece of music, written text, or oral communication knows the variety of emotional sensations that can materialize. Nonetheless, these sensations, these structures of feeling (Williams 1978), are mystifying. Raymond Williams’ concept of a “structure of feeling” is part of the delicate balance between the forces of the structure of the agency, and the forces of the social process and the willing, experienced individual (Williams 1978). The structure of feeling indicates the contradiction that a person's experiences (feelings) are informed by collective and historical prejudices, expectations, fears, desires, conventions, institutions, laws, and social processes, all at the same time (Williams 1978). However, these structures of feelings (or structures of experiences) cannot be pinned down. They are elusive and do not have clear brackets. The only knowledge of them is through relationships and reading between the lines. By bringing forth the slippery concept of feelings which are essential to our lives, how emotions alter a person’s viewpoint is opened to critique. For instance, we know that there are emotional interactions between viewers and films. Films can invoke expressions of happiness, anger, sadness, confusion, and some that come in an inseparable bundle. Sometimes the same film can

cause different reactions to individual viewers. The individual's own life experiences and sense of aesthetic forms these reactions. A film may show a scene that is familiar and humorous to one audience, but an audience from a different background may not understand it. Individuals can also react differently to a film based on their own past emotional experiences.

It is through looking at Williams' ideas of structures of feeling, which inspired me to include this section on the emotional connections my interviewees have described between themselves and the films featured in the Native Crossroads Film Festival. These emotive resonances are an essential part of understanding how much and which parts of the Indigenous films transmit through to the audience. I argue that by creating an emotional connection between the films and the audience, the messages of the Indigenous films can influence the audience members to become activists or advocates. For this chapter, I focus on the key emotions that were felt by my interviewees: humor, inspiration, and sadness to the Indigenous films. These provocative emotions are insightful in how my interviewees and the audience connected with the films and interacted within the structures of feeling in the atmosphere of the Native Crossroads Film Festival.

Humor serves several purposes in the lives of Indigenous people (Ramirez 2007: 73) which can also be extended to Indigenous films as well. For example, humor is an excellent technique for Indigenous filmmakers to connect with Native audiences, often with the use of "Indian trapdoors" (Cobb 2003, 222). These are the references Indigenous people understand, and they can vary from Indigenous oriented humor to political issues such as broken treaty rights. For example, during our interview, Heidi Hilts pointed out that while many of the featured films do express serious issues, several of the Indigenous filmmakers do incorporate humor into

their films, but not everyone in the festival will understand the humor (Hilts, unpublished interview).

Humor is not experienced by everyone equally. It does depend on the individual's sense of aesthetics and life experiences. For example, during the screening of the last short film on the second day of the 2017 film festival, Hilts had an epiphany that separated her from the rest of the audience. The short film was *Konãgxeka: O DilÚvio Maxakali* (*Konãgxeka: The Magical Flood*, directed by Isael Maxakali (Maxakali) and Charles Bicalho. The experimental animation film tells the Maxakali tale of the Great Water sent by the Yãmîy spirits who flooded the region and served as a warning against human greed and selfishness. During the screening, the audience was hushed, except for two moments. The first moment happened when the fishermen gave Otter their three biggest fish. One fisherman did not, so Otter abruptly left. There were some chuckles from the audience, with one woman on the far end of the theater laughing very loudly. The other moment was during the end. The end came suddenly, with no explanation. As a result of this unexpected, abrupt ending of the short film, there were gasps of surprise from the people sitting around me, and the same woman who had laughed earlier, exclaimed, "What?" After Heidi Hilts told me that she was the one who laughed throughout the short film, I asked her why the film made her laugh:

"Well, before I had watched it, I was told by someone else that had watched it that it was a dark comedy and I kind of went into it with the idea, and he told me like what was going to happen and stuff in it so I went into it with certain expectations" (Hilts, unpublished interview).

Akin to the concern from various Indigenous filmmakers in trying to change mainstream society's idealized expectations on what is considered Indigenous as shaped by the camera (Smith 2009, 4); Hilts did have expectations before she saw the film. However, these are not the same type of expectations. Rather than coming with a generalized idea of Indigenous peoples,

she came in with expectations on the film itself. That fact had separated her from the rest of the audience, who presumably did not know what to expect.

Thinking back on that moment, Hilts, admitted not only did she learn about the Missing Native Women in Canada, but that she also discovered the film festival audience's ideas about Indigenous people through their reaction to *Konāgxeka: O DilÚvio Maxakali* (Hilts, interview). Hilts expanded this idea to the overall feeling of people visiting the Native Crossroads Film Festival: "I think some people go into this with a really serious mindset, and they don't realize that like [she leans in closer to me and whispers] *Indigenous People are People, too. They have a sense of humor. They make jokes in their films*" (Hilts, unpublished interview). This is significant proof that these films are representing Indigenous people as people, not a relic of history, and one of the film festival audience members recognized that reality. That is one of the main goals that Indigenous filmmakers want to convey to non-Indigenous people. Fortunately, humor has the power to transverse racial boundaries, even though there are jokes that are context dependent.

Additionally, being able to laugh is part of one's right to be human. As Marilyn LaPlante St. Germaine (Blackfoot) beautifully stated in her essay about Native Americans and the importance of humor (St. Germaine 2002, 67): "Humor is as essential in American Indian life as breathing is for life. Survival without humor must be very agonizing." Laughing among other people creates a sense of solidarity. As Winnebago anthropologist, Renya K. Ramirez noted: "Native notions of belonging include expressive elements of culture, such as humor, that are inextricably linked to Indians' fight to be respected in all spheres of life; such notes are integral to strengthening urban Indian community" (Ramirez 2007, 73). During the Native Crossroads Film Festivals, there were several times when I could feel the solidarity, especially during times

of audience members laughing together. This does not just occur among the Indigenous members of the film festival audience. At the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival, I witnessed the entire auditorium was roaring in waves of laughter during the *Captivity Narrative* (dir. Jason Asenap, Comanche/Creek) film and that was the same night that every seated was filled until there was standing room only for the screening of *Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World*. I believe that anthropologist Edith Turner would agree with me that moment is an example of *communitas* which she defined as “a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows” (Turner 2012, 2). When Hilts laughed during a moment when no one else did, there was no sensation of *communitas*, and she felt awkward. Even though she admitted to me later that if someone had not told her that the *Konāgxeka: O DilÚvio Maxakali* film was meant to be interpreted as a dark comedy, then she would have reacted the same as the rest of the audience, afraid to laugh (Hilts, unpublished interview).

The other two types of emotive connections to discuss in this section are the sense of inspiration and the sense of feeling sadness from some of the Indigenous films. Zoe Nichols expressed both emotions. First, Zoe Nichols said she felt inspiration from Steven Paul Judd’s artwork featured in the film, *Dig It If You Can*: “I really enjoyed how the artist would incorporate his Native American culture into popular aspects that America glorifies. The artist and his story were very inspiring” (Nichols, unpublished interview). Not only did Nichols recognize from the documentary the focus of local Native American artist, Steven Paul Judd’s vision of incorporating a “Native slant” (Bell 2016), or a “Native kind of vibe” (Murg 2016) into his artwork; but she acknowledges Judd’s use of visual sovereignty as an Indigenous artist by pointing out that Judd injects his Native American identity to twist around the mainstream

society's. This level of engagement is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of what is communicated between Indigenous films and the audience.

Another feeling experienced by Nichols from watching Indigenous films is sadness. After the 2017 screening of Erika MacPherson's short film, *this river*, Nichols recalled that although she missed the beginning of the film, she said: "I never really put much thought into how law enforcement might not take a Native American individual seriously when it comes to a missing person case involving the River. It was heartbreaking" (Nichols, unpublished interview). In Nichols's statement, "heartbreaking" codes for the emotive response of Nichols as a viewer who is engaging with what she sees on the screen. Not only does she experience this emotion, but Nichols connected it to what she learned most from the Native Crossroads Film Festival. By showcasing films that aid the audience to remember significant Indigenous issues, such as the loss of voice in law enforcement cases, through their emotions is a step forward in understanding whether the films are reaching out to the audience effectively.

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned Raymond Williams' Structures of Feeling. I argue that the feelings expressed by the interviewees do relate to Williams' Structures of Feeling. They did come to the Native Crossroads Film Festival as participants with expectations shaped by their backgrounds, prior experience with Indigenous films, and knowledge or lack of knowledge of Indigenous issues. Through the Native Crossroads Film Festival, they did engage with the films they saw, often through their feelings evoked by the films. Not only did they come away from the film festival learning more about Indigenous issues, and become more supportive, and understanding of Indigenous people, but they exercised their agency in engaging with the films as they were watching them. I argue that by paying attention to the reactions between the audience and the Indigenous films, the Native Crossroads committee and the Indigenous

filmmakers who visit the film festival can further enrich their connections with the audience and build a kind of interdependent visual sovereignty.

Conclusion

Viewing a film does not occur in a socio-cultural vacuum (Gray 2010, 130). Depending on the specific historical, social, or religious contexts of the audience's background, and the individual's past experiences will determine the understanding of films. Outside factors, such as someone's interpretation of a film can influence the expectations of a filmgoer, and thus, affect their reaction to a film. Therefore, the film festival audience has agency in the viewing of the Indigenous films at the Native Crossroads Film Festival. If a film is considered a type of text that is read by the audience, then the audience is engaging with the films, mainly if they stayed for the panel discussions after the films, as I discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Furthermore, the reactions of the films from the audience can potentially influence the Indigenous filmmakers' decisions on their next films. Alternatively, in the case of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, audience response can potentially impact what types of films will be chosen to be featured in future years. Not that there should not be any experimental, surreal type films such as *Spear* - the audience needs the opportunity to view the broad range of Indigenous films that exist as a result of visual sovereignty. Indeed, as Joleen Scott states: "Native films don't have to explicitly be only on "Native" content, but can be anything, and still be Native" (Scott, unpublished interview). Therefore, having films made by Indigenous directors or created by Indigenous people whether it is a soap opera comedy, or even an action film featuring a Native American superhero, film festival audience members such as Joleen Scott would be intrigued in viewing these types of Indigenous films.

The diversity of Indigenous films expands the frontier of Indigenous filmmakers using visual sovereignty, and the Native Crossroads Film Festival audience should respond positively. By continuing to showcase a diverse set of Indigenous films annually, the Native Crossroads Film Festival creates a social space for the audience to experience the diverse spectrum of Indigenous issues, stories, and characters to engage in and think about long after the film festival is over. Through the responses by Heidi Hilts, Zoe Nichols, Joleen Scott, and Dakota Larrick, I believe the goals of the Native Crossroads Film Festival of Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy is being transmitted somewhat through to the audience. Whether or not the audience interprets the Indigenous films exactly is not the focus here, but whether they recognize and are willing to support Indigenous people's rights and Indigenous filmmakers act of visual sovereignty. There is no question that several of the films featured are for entertainment, but as anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker argues: "All entertainment is education in some way, many times more effective than schools because of the appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect" (Powdermaker 1950, 14). Hence, the use of film's appeal to the emotions and the potentials of recognizing that the feelings from the Native Crossroads Film Festival audience are significant not only to the Indigenous filmmakers and the Native Crossroads committee but to anthropologists and other scholars studying the effects of media transmission.

However, it is also imperative to note that during the interviews, all the interviewees responded positively to the Native Crossroads Film Festival (Larrick, unpublished interview; Nichols, unpublished interview), the diverse range of the Indigenous films (Hilts, unpublished interview), and the use of a different theme every year (Scott, unpublished interview). There is a shared concern for the survival of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. If they were indifferent to

the film festival, then they would not have voiced their concerns to me. While there is an anonymous survey conducted by the Native Crossroads committee every year; in-depth discussions between members of the audience and the Native Crossroads organization are not included. Whether their concerns involved the advertising of the Native Crossroads Film Festival or attracting a more diverse film festival audience; these concerns from members of the film festival audience should be acknowledged. Therefore, in-depth ethnographic interviews can be beneficial for developing better communication between the Native Crossroads committee and the film festival audience.

Chapter 4: Methods Part 2-Panel Discussions

Throughout this thesis, I argue that the Native Crossroads Film Festival & Symposium creates an arena for the engagement with and enactment of visual sovereignty. The Native Crossroads committee, the selected Indigenous films, the audience, and lastly, the panelists are all components of this visual sovereignty project. This chapter focuses on an essential part of Native Crossroads: the panel discussions. The panelists interact with the film festival's goals of increasing awareness and encouraging activism among the film festival audience. The panel discussions are why the Native Crossroads organizers are insisting that the film festival is a symposium (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). The organizers are committed to tying scholarly conversations into a film festival that reflects social change among Indigenous people worldwide (Nelson, personal communication, 2018).

The Native Crossroads organizers carefully select the panel members, which include academic scholars, filmmakers, and other representatives of film production. They aim for a diversity of perspectives and a balance of gender. For instance, during the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival, there were five male scholars, seven female scholars, and five of the scholars identified as Native American according to the biographies they provided in the film festival brochure (Native Crossroads 2017b). As for the filmmakers who are panelists, there were four male, three female, and five who identified as Native American or Indigenous. There were also artists and perspectives from the marketing and executive sides of filmmaking. All in all, there was diversity represented in the panel discussions.

The Native Crossroads Film Festival committee seek to align the panelists' intellectual and artistic interests with the content of the screened films (Nelson, personal communication, 2018). There were several different kinds of scholars who were involved in the panel discussions

following the films: historians, art historians, Native Studies professors, English professors, writers, a cultural geographer, and Native media scholars. These scholars brought a wide range of academic interests and motivations to the Native Crossroads Film Festival. Having a variety of scholars from different fields is necessary for obtaining diverse perspectives. However, these perspectives do have to resonate with the Indigenous films and the issues they depict. For example, a chemical engineer would not be helpful unless they were bringing in an Indigenous viewpoint on chemical engineering and their specialty correlated with one of the screened films. Nonetheless, my investigation starts with the questions of whether these scholars are communicating with the audience and the other panel members and transmitting the intentions of Native Crossroads effectively. Even if not all the scholars are consciously relaying the objectives of the Native Crossroads, they are still an essential part of the film festival.

There were seven panel discussions during the Native Crossroads Film Festival of 2017. After a feature film, a set of short films, or a featured film with a featured short, a panel discussion followed. The panel members were a part of the discourse between the films, the organizers, and the audience members. During the discussions, the panel members draw upon their knowledge and experiences in their mental interplay with the films they saw (or in some cases, created) and in their interactions with the audience. The audience responds with their questions to the panel members to gain clarification and insight into the films they viewed, particularly the behind-the-scenes stories about the films' development.

However, in the 2018 Native Crossroads Film Festival, the time allotted for panel discussions was severely cut. One of the primary reasons is that the Thursday before the screening of the films on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, there was a separate scholar symposium event, which was still part of the film festival. The attendance at the symposium was rather

scarce, as it was mostly scholars and a couple of students. The second reason is that there needed to be more room for performative events involving several Indigenous artists with 2018's recognition of the diversity and talent of Indigenous people in music. These performative events include musical performances by Indigenous musicians such as Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache) and Timothy Nevaquaya (Comanche), a performance by the Native Praise Choir, and a live musical orchestra presented by the OU School of Music (accompanied by Ortman and Nevaquaya) during the screening of the silent film *A Day In Santa Fe*.

While the performative events were spectacular, and the audience reacted to them positively; I argue that the loss of the panel discussions affected the level of direct engagement between the audience members and the filmmakers. Not only do the panel discussions provide the opportunity for audience members to contribute their questions or comments they have with the films with the scholars and filmmakers, but this engagement develops a higher level of materializing and understanding what the Indigenous films are showing. As I have argued in chapter two, these films are reflecting the Indigenous filmmakers' act of visual sovereignty and the increasing awareness of specific Indigenous issues such as heritage, Missing Native Women, and the pipeline conflicts. Therefore, the analysis presented here from the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival panel discussions is significant in determining the relationships between the panel guests and the audience by noticing the coded themes that emerge from the discussions. This section divides between two main coded themes: Visual Sovereignty and Bodies In Motion, followed by the observations and communication between the panelists and the audience, and then a discussion on the relevance of these conversations to the film festival.

In this chapter, I describe and analyze the central back-and-forth exchange of ideas, insights, and questions, which occur between the scholars, the panel organizers, the Indigenous

and non-Indigenous directors, other people who were involved in the filmmaking process, and the audience. From a transcription I created from the panel video footage, I selected specific quotes from the panel members to illustrate the two coded themes.

The interactions between the panelists and the audience are significant because they create a venue for the main intentions of the Native Crossroads Film Festival: Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy. By analyzing and delving deeper into the interactions between the panel members and the audience, the flow of ideas and discussion of filming techniques is detected. Thereby, we can understand whether the audience and panel members can effectively communicate with each other in the space of the Native Crossroads Film Festival.

Visual Sovereignty

While the specific words “visual sovereignty” was not uttered by any of the panelists, several of the various discussion topics do revolve around visual sovereignty as Indigenous filmmakers practice it and as it was acknowledged by scholars at Native Crossroads. Several coded words emerged from discussions that indicated the use of visual sovereignty. They were Indigenous soundscapes, Indigenous knowledge (inclusive), and Indigenous representation on film. These coded signifiers also correlate to the community aspect of the Native Crossroads Film Festival and the 2017 theme: *Bodies In Motion*.

Dr. Dustin Tahmahkera, a Comanche professor of the North American indigeneities, critical media, and cultural sound studies in the Department of Mexican and American Latina/o Studies at the University of Texas (Native Crossroads 2017b), introduced the concept of his current research, Indigenous soundscapes through film during the first panel discussion after the screening of *El Sureño del Mara 'akame (Mara 'akame's Dream)*. However, Dr. Tahmahkera did

not define the academic meaning of Indigenous soundscapes to the audience, but he did draw several examples from several films during the Native Crossroads Film Festival, including the *El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream)* film. For instance, he suggested that the non-Indigenous director, Federico Cecchetti, might have implored the audience to listen to how the Indigenous “soundscapes and soundways would follow the lead character” (Tahmahkera 2017a). Dr. Tahmahkera referred to a moment near the beginning of the film to illustrate his point. There is a scene where the main character, a young Huichol named Nieri, is listening to mainstream “Rock ‘n Espanola” (Tahmahkera 2017a), but his father, a traditional Huichol shaman, violently removes the earplugs so that he will pay attention to the chants he and the elders were vocalizing in tune with their work. Dr. Tahmahkera explains from his perspective that when Nieri is listening to mainstream music and later attempts to perform with friends in a small band, his voice is “very much in training, sounds very weak, and we never really get to hear him sing until the very end” (Tahmahkera 2017a). The “very end” Dr. Tahmahkera is referring to is not just the end of the film, but the end of Nieri’s transformation between a novice fighting against the traditions of his people to acceptance and understanding of the shaman traditions amidst the modern, urban world. Thus, it was after the transformation, Nieri gained the ability to sing confidently within the Indigenous soundscapes of the Huichol people.

From the examples Dr. Tahmahkera drew throughout the panel discussions, I surmise that Indigenous soundscapes are related to visual sovereignty. By the context of Dr. Tahmahkera’s discussion, I define Indigenous soundscapes as the processes of sound techniques purposely chosen by Indigenous filmmakers to represent the indigeneity of their people. Indigenous soundscapes can also be accomplished by the non-Indigenous filmmakers who are working with Indigenous people represented in film such as Federico Cecchetti. However, I question whether

it was necessary to spend a considerable amount of time during the first panel on Indigenous soundscapes. A discussion on Indigenous soundscapes can be beneficial, especially if it was mentioned in conjunction with the dialogue regarding Indigenous music in the 2018 theme, *Rhythms*. However, the audience did not respond to Dr. Tahmahkera with questions or comments about Indigenous soundscapes. Some of the audience members are more curious about other topics. For instance, one of the female audience members asked the panel members of the *El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream)* what they knew about the director Federico Cecchetti and his background with the Huichols. Dr. Laurel Smith had no answers to this question; instead, she answered with her questions about Cecchetti: "Who is the filmmaker? Who was his crew that he worked with? And what was that like to reach out to that community and saying, hey, we want to do this film and here is what we are highlighting and what was that like? What in that film was characterized by that sort of collaboration or not?" (Smith 2017). Smith then turned to the panel organizer, Amanda Cuellar, expecting her to answer with some knowledge of Federico Cecchetti. Cuellar shared with the audience what she knew. Cecchetti spent time with the Huichol community in the Sierra Mountains when he was developing a short film for his college degree. Because of his developed relationship with the community, Cecchetti decided to make a feature film of the Huichol community, the *El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream)*. Cecchetti is currently working on another film with another Indigenous group in the northern part of Mexico. I do not know if this information was adequate for the audience member since her question came after Dr. Tahmahkera's assumptions about Cecchetti's intentions. Based on the context of the question and answer format of the panels, at least one member of the audience wanted to know the facts behind Cecchetti's motives to work with the Huichols, especially since he is not Indigenous.

If Cecchetti had attended the film festival, as other filmmakers did, he would have been able to answer the audience member's question. Not all the filmmakers of all the featured films shown in the Native Crossroads Film Festival can attend due to several reasons, i.e., cost of travel, availability, and other life commitments. However, there should be as much research done as possible on the background of the films and the filmmakers so that the scholars and panel organizers can communicate with the audience when the filmmaker is not present at Native Crossroads.

The second coded phrase that emerged from the panel discussions and related to visual sovereignty is Indigenous knowledge. Discussions about Indigenous knowledge and how much should be inclusive emerged from several of the films shown because it is an essential topic to explore and understand. This discussion is significant not only from the non-Indigenous point-of-view but also from other Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have different reasons and methods of choosing which parts of their localized cultural knowledge is inclusive. For instance, Dr. Laura Smith commented on the shaman father "narrating the land as they were moving along" to Nieri in *El Sureño del Mara'akame (Mara'akame's Dream)* (Smith 2017). The panel organizer, Amanda Cueller, followed up on that by acknowledging that the elders make a pilgrimage every year to "discuss or narrate significant things" of each specific place of the landscape to the younger generations (Cueller 2017). While neither mentioned "Indigenous knowledge" specifically in the conversation, the knowledge of sacred landscapes is an imperative issue regarding discussions of Indigenous roles in protecting or maintaining environmental landscapes and their heritage. This is significant when knowledge of the landscape is passed down orally from generation to generation, but it can be bewildering to imagine the stories and lessons when there is nothing left of the landscape except for a large

shopping complex. Vine Deloria Jr., in the introduction of his 1972 book, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, described a time “before interstate highways” when “it was possible to observe the places up close, and so indelible memories accrued around certain features of the landscape because of the proximity of the place and because of the stories that went with them” (Deloria Jr. 2003, xv). Deloria Jr.’s father would point out features of the landscape and their stories, including details that “other people had missed or never knew” (Deloria Jr. 2003, xv). Deloria Jr. made the parallel that once the American Indian Movement had gained momentum in the 1970s, the restoration of such sacred sites and ceremonies were paramount. The recognition of inclusive Indigenous knowledge embedded in sacred landscapes is a subject that is emphasized in most Indigenous films and reflected to the audience. This recognition is not only for the Indigenous members in the audience who can be inspired by the stories on the screen and the comfort in knowing that other Indigenous groups also have similar issues and resistance but also in reaching out to the non-Indigenous audience in the hopes of an improved understanding between them.

Sacred landscapes are not the only area for the inclusiveness of Indigenous knowledge. Specific parts of an Indigenous language are inclusive. During the first panel discussion, Dr. Tahmahkera brought up a specific example from *El Sureño del Mara’akame (Mara’akame’s Dream)*. There is a section of the film where the elders are singing and chanting. There are no subtitles provided for the non-Huichol audience. Due to the sacredness of the words spoken on the screen, the songs are not translated for a broader audience. Many scenes are cut or modified in the editing process. Therefore, there is a reason why each scene is chosen for the final film product and then viewed and interpreted by the audience. Non-Huichol people should not know the exact meaning of the words, but Cecchetti still includes the audience as a witness to the moment in the storytelling.

The third coded phrase I will discuss in this section that signaled visual sovereignty during the panel discussions is Indigenous Representation. The process of Indigenous people determining how they are represented as a people and as individuals is one of the essential uses of visual sovereignty (Raheja 2010). As an illustration, filmmaker Amos Scott (Tlicho) during the panel discussion of the short film “Stolen” (dir. Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs, Mohawk) and the feature film, *The Sun at Midnight* (dir. Kirsten Carthew), expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to work on a film where the two Native American characters conveyed “full, emotional reactions and character development” (Scott 2017b). Scott smiled at the audience and said that he would like to see more films with those qualities because he believes they are “rarely seen on screen” (Scott 2017b). Due to the long and complicated legacy of one-dimensional visual representations of Indigenous peoples throughout the years, Scott’s comment is not without precedent. Most Indigenous filmmakers have enacted visual sovereignty when deciding how to represent their visions or their people. However, the difficulties lie within the obstacles of mainstream expectations of Indigenous people (Deloria 2004) and the viewpoint that their films tend to be “authentic Indigenous views” (Wood 2008, 22) rather than products of culture (Ginsburg 1998). Often, Indigenous filmmakers want to be considered equal to other filmmakers (Steven Paul Judd cited in Harjo 2016), and for their films to be viewed seriously.

One technique that is discussed during the panels and used by Indigenous filmmakers is re-appropriation. To combat the legacy of layers of appropriation by mainstream societies, Indigenous filmmakers (and other artists) achieve re-appropriation by using in-jokes, references, and specific methods of storytelling. For instance, during the panel discussion of *Spear* (dir. Stephen Page, Yugambeh), the panel organizer, Sunrise Tippeconnie (Comanche) and Maya Solis (Pascua Yaqui/Blackfeet), who is the Coordinator for Sundance Institute’s Native

American and Indigenous Program (Native Crossroads 2017b), examined the use of Page's re-appropriation in the film. There is a scene in *Spear* where there are several Australian Aboriginal dancers solemnly dancing to British comedian Charlie Drake's 1961 hit song "My Boomerang Won't Come Back." It is a compelling composition. Sitting in the Native Crossroads Film Festival audience, I was not familiar with the song, but it seemed so bizarre to have that song in the background with the dancers. The tune was more than "sonic wallpaper" (Deloria 2004, 184, 222); it was a form of protest and appropriation. Dr. Tippeconnie informed Solis and the audience that the Australian broadcasting company did ban the song after several complaints from the Australian Aboriginal peoples (Tippeconnie 2017). Solis commented that the film's exploration of the "blatantly and physically obscene" composition of the song and dance movements was quite fascinating as a form of re-appropriation (Solis 2017). Dr. Tahmahkera mentioned the irony in that the song was banned by the ABC broadcasting company in 2015 just as the film was being produced (Tahmahkera 2017). I doubt it was ironic. Page most likely chose the song in the sequence as a form of signaling the Indigenous audience a reminder of the continuing popularity of offensive songs.

I also argue that Indigenous filmmakers participating in the process of filmmaking is a form of re-appropriation. Since the invention of the video camera, and photography before that, Indigenous peoples have been placed in specific filmic frames that denote their humanity, their agency, and the social reality of their current lives. For this reason, Indigenous filmmakers and photographers re-appropriated the technology and use visual sovereignty to tell their own stories and control their media representation.

Bodies In Motion

Not surprisingly, the theme of the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival: *Bodies In*

Motion, did come up several times during the panel discussions. However, there were at least two conflicting interpretations of the theme by the panel organizers, scholars, and Indigenous filmmakers. One interpretation involves the use of the Indigenous “body,” physically or spiritually in film, while the other interpretation involves the levels of activism produced by the Indigenous directors. These contrasting interpretations emerged when several of the panel organizers attempted to lead the discussions to relate to the Indigenous “body,” in film, yet due to misunderstandings between scholars and filmmakers, the filmmakers often related their role in the discussions to the specific film they were commenting on or how they were involved in the film production. In other words, they drew upon their pool of knowledge to answer the questions the best way they could. However, for the most part, their interpretation of the films and the Indigenous “body” is more aligned with activism than the representation of the Indigenous body through film. For instance, during the panels, several of the Indigenous filmmakers discussed their concerns with several current Indigenous issues highlighted in their films such as disappearing Native American women, environmentalism, and creating inspiration for Indigenous youth. These are the same issues I have discussed previously in chapters two and three. However, in this section, I will point out the significance of the comments made by the Indigenous directors regarding their perspectives on the issues via their films.

There were several films in the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival that directly or indirectly dealt with the disappearing of Native women. For the sake of brevity, Devery Jacobs’s (Mohawk) and Amos Scott’s (Tlicho) comments will suffice. During the panel that occurred after the viewing of the short film *Stolen* and featured film, *The Sun at Midnight* (dir. Amos Scott), the panel organizer (Destiny Guerrero) asked Jacobs if casting her younger sister in the *Stolen* short film was difficult given the subject matter. Jacobs addressed the audience and spoke

of her experience as a school counselor and working at the Native Intervention Shelter at Montreal (Jacobs 2017). A result of Jacobs witnessing the “flaws in the social work system” and inspired by the case of Tina Fontaine in Winnipeg, she wrote and created *Stolen* as her homage to “all of our stolen sisters” (Jacobs 2017). Jacobs acknowledged that the film was also a result of her desire to combine her passion for film and Indigenous women with the activism she does (Jacobs 2017). Again, I would argue that Jacobs’ effort and passion in the creation of *Stolen*, is not only an example of her using visual sovereignty, but she encouraged activism as well. After all, Jacobs made the film to flag the issue of the Missing Native Women directly to her audience. *Stolen* was an example of directly addressing the issues even though it is not a documentary.

Amos Scott’s *AKOO!* is an example of a short film that both addresses missing Native women and incorporates activism into the discussion of the film; this is the spirit of the *Bodies In Motion* theme. Before Jacobs talked about her homage to the Missing Native Women, Scott spoke of his decision to “repurpose” the legend story of the Caribou Leg Woman (Scott 2017a) in the last panel of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. As Scott (2017a) stated during the panel, the Caribou Leg Woman usually kills everyone she comes across. When I was viewing the film, I interpreted the Caribou Leg Woman as protecting the Native young women from being stolen by the two Caucasian men. This “stolen” aspect of the story is referring to the Missing Native Women issue as discussed in chapter 2. During the panel discussion after the short films, Amos Scott revealed that he intentionally made the character into an anti-hero, which he termed as an “empowering creative choice” (Scott 2017a). Therefore, at least to me, Scott’s intentions about the Caribou Leg Woman did successfully transmit from the short film to at least one member of the audience. Also, the fact that Scott used visual sovereignty to convert a traditional villainess character into a protecting (although still dangerous) character is reflective of the *Bodies In*

Motion theme in two ways: 1) Although Amos Scott did not directly address the Missing Native Women issue, it is clear from the *AKOO!* short film that he did allude to the issue and 2) Scott's acknowledgment of his empowering creative choice (i.e., enacting visual sovereignty) is part of his activism as an Indigenous filmmaker.

Following the activism strand of the Missing Native Women issue, environmental issues emerged several times in the panel discussions several films focusing on Native water rights. For instance, during the discussion following the short film documentary *Sacred River*, Kyle Bell, who directed the film, brought up a significant point as part of his inspiration for the film's subject. Bell was contacted by actor Adam Beach (Saulteaux) and convinced to make a short film about the Dakota Access Pipeline protest in Standing Rock (Bell 2017a). In Bell's perspective, he saw that the "spirituality of all the Indigenous people" was more important than the legal battle or the legal issues of the pipeline (Bell 2017a). Similar to the duality of activism expressed by Devery Jacobs in her short film, *Stolen*, Kyle Bell featured the activism of the people at Standing Rock while also using visual sovereignty to frame the film from Indigenous peoples' point-of-view of the conflict. Therefore, Bell used the film medium to provide his argument that we must not forget the spirituality and humanity aspects of Indigenous peoples' side of the protest. I believe Bell's film is an excellent reminder to us all that the human side of a conflict should always be up front and center.

Following the belief of water as sacred and the need to protect it, Amos Scott commented during a panel held later that afternoon:

"In Canada, we do also fight for our water rights, and it's something across North America I think we continue to fight because water is so sacred as Indigenous peoples believe, in this part of the world and in all places in the world. Water is a super important issue to watch out for" (Scott, panel discussion, 2017b).

This comment reflects the contrasting perspectives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

peoples on the issue of water rights. While, for the most part, non-Indigenous people recognize that water is essential to life, yet the sacred aspect of it is probably a foreign concept (apart from holy water within the Catholic tradition). Unfortunately, since there was time running out on the panel, the panelists did not delve deeper into the implications of water as sacred versus water as a commodity. However, it does introduce a different meaning of water to the audience who may not have thought of water as anything different than a necessity for life. Thus, the opening of this discussion may initiate a conversation between non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people over the conflict of resources.

A positive interpretation of the *Bodies in Motion* theme expressed by the panelists was their emphasis on film as a method of galvanizing and inspiring Indigenous youth. Kyle Bell's documentary, *Dig It If You Can*, which features local artist and filmmaker, Steven Paul Judd (Choctaw/Kiowa), was created with that youth-focused inspiration in mind (Bell 2017b). During the panel after the viewing of the documentary, Bell commented with a smile on his face: "I just wanted to make something that's fun and quick. Sort of inspiring for other people watching it get inspired" (Bell 2017b). There is a two-way connection here in Bell's statement. Bell created an inspiring film, but he is also inspired by watching people in the audience become inspired by something he created. Therefore, he will continue to create inspiring films in the future. Then, Dr. Nelson (who usually sits in the audience) asked Bell and Judd what the most important aspects of filmmaking are they wish to share with the audience (Bell 2017b). Bell replied: "If you know what you want to do, just do it. And the stories that are around you, you need to start there, that's what I did" (Bell 2017b). Through this statement, he is emphasizing the locality of unique stories that surround everyone. For the young students in the audience, he is extending encouragement to pursue their dreams. I would argue that he is also signaling to the young

Indigenous students that they do not have to start with an extravagant idea for a film but should film the stories they know. As for Judd, he emphasized collaboration, to “find people who are better than you” (Judd 2017). He recognizes that he does not have the knowledge and skills for every aspect of filmmaking, and computer software such as Photoshop. Therefore, Judd tries to find “people that are like-minded that enjoy making things and probably not getting paid [laughs]” (Judd 2017). Judd’s advice is significant advice to the students in the audience. It is the passion that counts and working with good people can be inspirational in of itself. Add that statement to Judd’s pleasant, lively personality, and the audience will take notice. Thus, the audience might be inspired to spread inspiration and creative ideas to contribute to the support of Indigenous activists or to become activists or advocates themselves.

During the panel Steven Paul Judd was on with Kyle Bell, every story he told brought out waves of laughter from Indigenous and non-Indigenous members alike. Thus, his personality was transmitting good vibes to the audience, and in turn, they might support and appreciate his future film and art projects. As a personal example, I had never heard of Steven Paul Judd before I went to the 2017 Native Crossroads Film Festival and saw the *Dig It If You Can* documentary. Since then, I have supported Judd’s artistic achievements and followed him on social media. He is an inspiration to me, and I am sure I was not the only person in the film festival audience that was intrigued and willing to support his work. Whether putting braids on the Marvel character The Incredible Hulk, creating a Native American anti-hero in *Ronnie BoDean* (2015), writing a fictional book about Native self-identity (*The Last Powwow* with Thomas M. Yeahpau), or photoshopping the Star Wars X-Wing fighters into a historical photograph, what I find inspirational is that Steven Paul Judd is creating what he wants and is honest with himself. Seeing the vision of a successful and prolific Indigenous artist on the screen and then discussed

by Indigenous filmmakers with the audience is an inspirational process that promotes a beneficial connection. Young Indigenous or non-Indigenous filmmakers or artists can view the film and take with them the perseverance of older filmmakers who have struggled for a long time to achieve their goals and passions. For Indigenous filmmakers such as Steven Paul Judd and Kyle Bell, fostering and sharing that inspiration through their film and artwork is to be congratulated. The Native Crossroads Film Festival has recognized Judd and Bell by presenting their films to the audience for several years at present of writing and will most likely continue to feature their work to provide the opportunity for different people to view the films and to engage with the filmmakers.

There are times during the panel discussion where the first interpretation of the *Bodies In Motion* theme is in sync between the panel organizer and the panelists. As an illustration, Sunrise Tippeconnie began his panel by using academic jargon:

“...literal transpositions of bodies and motion...you guys, had any first general thoughts about that specific theme in relation of what we have just seen, is there any observations that you have made of the body, motion, the Indigenous body maybe the individual body versus the collective body? So maybe a bit more corporal versus spiritual?” (Tippeconnie 2017).

The responses from Maya Solis (Coordinator for Sundance Institute’s Native American and Indigenous Program) and Dr. Tahmahkera differ. For instance, Solis tried to answer Tippeconnie’s question by telling the audience her recent experience at a Maori film festival in New Zealand. First, she described the moko tattoos the Maoris have. Since Solis had viewed *Spear* shortly before the panel discussion, she connected the ending ceremony dance for the moko with the dances in *Spear*. Solis ended her comment with an insight she shared with the audience, that we are walking alongside not only with other Indigenous people but also alongside “our ancestors” (Solis 2017). Solis also pointed out that the film resonates with Indigenous

people because it shows symbolically, that Indigenous people are constantly in movement, either forced movement or “moving forward in terms of self-determination and sovereignty” (Solis 2017). It is meaningful that Solis moved from a physical connection to a spiritual connection not only because Tippeconnie alluded to that in his question, but in the layers of meaning implied in Solis’s voiced insights. These layers of meaning are: 1) It is part of many Indigenous peoples’ beliefs that rituals involved with the body relate to the spiritual. There are interdependent. 2) Indigenous people are not alone in their lives. Many Indigenous peoples are mindful of their ancestors’ teachings and traditions. 3) Indigenous people are moving forward. These insights are significant for the audience because they are positive reinforcement for Indigenous peoples to keep moving forward even though not everyone may agree. As the coordinator for the Sundance Institute, Solis may be in tune with the prevalent desire of several Indigenous filmmakers to create inspiration and hope through their films.

Dr. Tahmahkera’s response has a similar pattern to Solis, but he starts with the connection between the “Native Crossroads” film festival name and a recurring theme in Indigenous films: search for identity (Tahmahkera 2017b). The connection he makes involves characters in Indigenous films who are searching to develop their identity and come across a crossroads, particularly in terms of confronting colonization and Indigenous history. This symbol of recognition between a panelist and the Native Crossroads Film Festival is crucial in maintaining the relationship between all the parties involved in the event (scholars, filmmakers, audience, and the Native Crossroads committee members) as discussed in chapter 1.

Then, in response to Solis’s comments about how Indigenous people are always in motion and moving forward, Dr. Tahmahkera mentions transmotion. Transmotion is the “sense of native motion and an active presence” and “*sui generis* sovereignty” (Vizenor 1998: 15).

Transmotion is the academic version of what Solis described. Solis's and Dr. Tahmahkera's parallel comments highlight the same concept of transmotion but interpreted in two different ways. Having different perspectives on the panels is crucial because the film festival audience does consist of scholars, students, visiting filmmakers, and community members outside of the university campus.

Dr. Tahmahkera also emphasizes the importance of Indigenous people moving forward, particularly in Indigenous cinema. Indigenous cinema "does not always have to be dependent on colonization" (Tahmahkera 2017b). Indigenous cinema is about Indigenous peoples using their voices in performative ways to engage with their history and the histories of non-Indigenous peoples (Tahmahkera 2017b). For this reason, the significance of the diversity of Indigenous cinema is necessary to reflect on the complexity of the Indigenous peoples, their relations with non-Indigenous peoples, and enacting visual sovereignty by expressing the Indigenous point-of-view via the film medium.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in chapter 1, there is a reciprocal relationship and exchange of ideas and perspectives between the Native Crossroads Film Festival committee (in their selection of the films featured), the Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, and the panelists. In this chapter, I have highlighted the main themes of visual sovereignty, community, and the film festival 2017's theme of *Bodies In Motion* in the discussions between the panelists. These exchanges of ideas between the panelists reflect the audience members, who in turn, pose questions that open the dialogue towards new directions. Thus, I argue that the panel discussions are a crucial crossroads within the organization of the Native Crossroads Film Festival, and they should remain in the schedule as the diving board for open dialogue for the Indigenous issues featured in

the films.

The panels allow the audience the opportunity to express questions or comments to the panelists, a crucial part of the way in which the Native Crossroads Film Festival incorporates the members of the audience and thus enacts visual sovereignty. While the audience can still glean elements of the Indigenous filmmaker's vision and recognize how they choose to represent themselves or their people, the feedback from the presence of the filmmakers and the panelist scholars who are familiar with the filmmakers is essential. The feedback establishes connections that can benefit the filmmakers and audience members in the future. By having the audience members ask questions to the panelists, and allowing the panelists to discuss the films, this engagement process has the potential to spread the theme *Bodies In Motion* beyond the Native Crossroads Film Festival environment via the audience, who in turn, may spread the ideas by mentioning the films, becoming activists, or supporting Indigenous activists.

Conclusion: Future Directions

I began this thesis and this journey by asking: what is essential about the Native Crossroads Film Festival? What are the connections between the featured films and the audience, and what are the ideas, hopes, and inspirations oscillating between the Indigenous filmmakers and the audience? In the hopes of discovering the answers, I drew from the various angles of the organization of Native Crossroads; the Indigenous films featured, a sample of the audience's perspective, and finally, the filmmakers and scholars who attended the panels. During my investigation of the data from the interviews and the panel video footage, I observed two reoccurring themes emerging: Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy. These themes, I argue, reveal the way in which the Native Crossroads Film Festival is fostering Indigenous visual sovereignty in Norman, Oklahoma.

While Raheja and Kristin Dowell have focused on visual sovereignty with Indigenous filmmakers and their communities, I argue that visual sovereignty goes beyond the film process. In the case of a film festival, especially an Indigenous film festival, the audience members experience the efforts of the filmmakers' vision as they engage with the complexities of an Indigenous point-of-view through the film medium. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the interactions between the Native Crossroads Film Festival, the featured Indigenous films, the audience members, and the panelists all contribute to Indigenous visual sovereignty. The Native Crossroads Film Festival committee's efforts in their choices of a variety of Indigenous films fosters visual sovereignty by celebrating the ever-expanding spectrum of Indigenous media and building community around it. The Native Crossroads Film Festival strives to initiate conversations between scholars, Indigenous filmmakers, and the film festival audience by providing panels where the audience can ask questions and take part in the discussions of the

films. Even if the audience members do not stay for the panels, they may think about what they have seen, and discuss the Indigenous films and their messages to their colleagues, family, and friends. Thus, spreading the conversation and interest in Indigenous films and the peoples they represent beyond the film festival environment.

As I am finishing this thesis, I did briefly attend the 2019 Native Crossroads Film Festival. Their theme was *Futures*. I feel the theme is appropriate, not only for the future of Indigenous media and the people the filmmakers represent but also the future of the Native Crossroads Film Festival. For instance, what kind of technological changes might affect film festivals? In this era of remote viewing via the Internet, it is not surprising that there have been attempts for virtual film festivals. About three or four years ago, there was a Virtual Film Festival website, but it is currently inactive. However, a successful example is the 2018 PBS Online Film Festival that took place from July 16-27. Viewers watched 25 short films and voted on which ones they enjoyed the most. I conducted a basic Google Search when media anthropologist Gordon Gray mentioned virtual film festivals since he did not include examples (Gray 2010, 98). My Google Search came up with two variable results on actual virtual film festivals while the rest of the results focused on virtual film festivals where there are discussions and viewings of films created through the virtual reality technology. The reason why there might not be more virtual reality film festivals available is that people probably still prefer the atmosphere of watching films with a physical audience. Film festivals are not just physical spaces for people to view films with limited distributions but are social spaces as well.

Current technologies such as virtual reality headsets may change the experience of film festivals soon, as media anthropologist Faye Ginsburg asks:

What happens to the group experience of viewing and talking together that we so value as part of the distinctive sensibility of film festivals-and the social worlds they create-when

viewers are sitting individually immersed in a 3D version of life on another part of the planet, wearing Oculus Rift headsets that isolate each audience member in his or her own experience? (Ginsburg 2017, xv)

I share Ginsburg's concern with virtual reality isolating audience members and disconnecting them from the communal atmosphere of film festivals. However, I believe in the value of Indigenous film festivals as social zones where the audience shares a physical space and engage in a unique, enriched environment where they can laugh and cry together in reaction to the films. Therefore, I do not see these technologies as a threat to physical film festivals. There is value in having a way to view these films outside the film festival environment. At the very least, it is valuable to give people a chance to view these films if they cannot adjust their schedules or travel to attend an Indigenous film festival. However, from my experience, there is a tremendous difference between watching an Indigenous film on a streaming service or on DVD alone versus experiencing the same film as part of a lively Indigenous film festival atmosphere. If given a choice, I would much rather experience an Indigenous film in a film festival because I want to support the Indigenous filmmakers in their endeavors, and I enjoy being part of the feeling of *communitas* (Turner 2012) during the film festival. As I have shown in this thesis, developing this feeling of *communitas* is part of the way in which the Native Crossroads Film Festival is enacting visual sovereignty.

There are various ways in which future researchers could expand on the research I have done here on the Native Crossroads Film Festival. I am not an Indigenous scholar. Although I watched the Indigenous films and can relate to some of their struggles and applauded the accomplishments Indigenous people have achieved, my perspective is from an *etic* viewpoint rather than an *emic* one. An Indigenous researcher may study the Native Crossroads Film Festival and be able to compare between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members'

reactions towards the featured films. A future research study may be able to determine if the goals of Increasing Awareness and Encouraging Activism and Advocacy is getting through to the film festival audience more accurately with a full reception study. These are but a few possibilities.

There are a plethora of possibilities for future research for in-depth studies of Indigenous film festivals. While there is emerging anthropological research in film festivals, such as Aida Vallejo and María Paz Peirano's 2017 *Film Festivals and Anthropology*, the focus is primarily on ethnographic film festivals rather than Indigenous film festivals. Therefore, further ethnographic studies centered on Indigenous film festivals themselves would help anthropologists and film scholars understand more clearly the impact from Indigenous film festivals towards the growth of Indigenous media, and more precisely how much impact the films themselves have on the film festival audience. This knowledge may enable Indigenous film festival organizers to gauge their impact on film festival audiences. The organizers may also be able to aid in developing connections between Indigenous filmmakers and members of the film festival audience that may result in collaborations or funding on future films. In-depth comparative studies may also prove useful. After all, due to my location, I focused on an Indigenous film festival held in the U.S., but there are other Indigenous film festivals globally which may operate differently. Perhaps someday, the various Indigenous film festivals may establish stronger connections between themselves and enable collaborations to enhance the film festival experience for everyone involved. For instance, one film festival in one country may exchange films and local filmmakers to another and therefore develop a similar cross-cultural relationship as several cities in the U.S. have with sister cities in other countries.

The critical lesson to be learned from this case study of the Native Crossroads Film

Festival is that there is potential for Indigenous film festivals studied as social and cultural sites where visual sovereignty is expanded amongst the film festival audience. These film festivals are more than physical spaces where people watch Indigenous films and discussed them later.

Indigenous film festivals are an alternative distribution network for Indigenous filmmakers to share their creations not just to be judged, but to be enjoyed and spark conversations. After all, Indigenous filmmakers are artists, and as philosopher and psychologist John Dewey (1931, 144) pointed out: “One of the essential traits of the artist is that he is born an experimenter.”

Therefore, as Indigenous filmmakers continue to experiment and use visual sovereignty to push the boundaries of what is the Indigenous perspective, the audience of these films can take part in their role as receptive supporters who are willing to engage in unfamiliar territory. It is reciprocal. From the audience’s point-of-view, Indigenous film festivals are comfortable and exciting social spaces where they can view films not easily accessible and engage in the stories and messages from the Indigenous perspective. Anthropologists Aida Vallejo and Maria Paz Peirano (2017, 3) expressed the goal of their book, *Film Festivals and Anthropology*, as “a site for the encounter of anthropologists and film scholars,” and I hope this thesis serves as a similar site for the encounter of anthropologists, film scholars, and Native Studies scholars. At the very least, this thesis can operate as a launching pad for another student or scholar who decides to research the growth and development of the Native Crossroads Film Festival in the years ahead.

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