

University of Otago



A Balance of Perspective in Global Society: An Argument for  
'Reverse Ethnography' in Documentary Film.

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## **Abstract**

Globalization is a unifying force spreading a predominantly neoliberal culture that is eradicating the world's cultural diversity. It is directed by transnational powers, notably states and corporations, largely networking their influence through mass media. Television and associated visual media represent the most influential form of media, emanating from points of capital and political power with huge influence over recipient culture. Ethnographic documentary film emerged from the foundations of globalization with a core objective of documenting the unrepresented and disappearing indigenous cultures for aesthetic, imperial and scientific values. Scientific ideology during the 20<sup>th</sup> century pressured ethnographic documentary to minimise subjective influences and incorporate methods that adhered to scientific methodology. Pressures failed to yield results and post-modernism yielded a move to new ways of managing what became an accepted innate subjectivity in the genre. These moves however limited the application of ethnographic documentary into mainstream media while continuing to fail academics insisting on a scientific approach. Traditionally ethnographic documentary acts as a subjective statement about an 'outside' indigenous culture communicated by a filmmaker to an audience, the latter two sharing a common cultural sphere and its corresponding subjective reality. By contrast reverse ethnographic documentary is based on observations of globalized society by indigenous cultures. It communicates across cultural spheres rather than internally and allows indigenous peoples' input on the emerging global culture. It allows the positioning of our own subjective reality in the context of others and offers a more faithful understanding of the observer's subjective reality. Allowing indigenous cultures to do ethnographies of other cultures will strengthen their ability to identify with and protect their own cultures in the same way traditional ethnographies have done for the West by positioning themselves against others. It offers a balanced, multidimensional

communication between global society and traditional cultures providing outside representation, social self-reflection, cross cultural education and the sharing of ideas. The film made as part of this thesis, *Sacrificial River*, is about the coming together of two cultures around a story of a dying river and an investigation of how western culture developed its current relationship to the natural world. It aims to demonstrate the benefits of reverse ethnography documentary.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Thesis Rationale and Background**

Essential to understanding the rationale behind the argument put forth in this thesis, is the understanding of certain wide-ranging issues influencing cultural diversity and cultural representation in a world being unified by globalization. 'Global society' is centred on a consumer culture striving for economic growth and bound by ever powerful and connected systems of media. Globalization is making many aspects and influences of daily life common for an increasing percentage of peoples of the world (Appadurai, 1990; Spitulnik, 1993). Competing forces such as states and corporations are driving and directing globalisation, which is the spread of neo-liberal transnational consumer culture. These competing forces are typically vying for influence, power and money on the global stage (Appadurai, 1990; Harvey, 2005; Sinclair, 1997). The mass media, largely responsible for global 'flows' of culture as well as propagating ideological, political and corporate influence in this competitive arena, have become a battleground for states, corporations and other powerful elements of society (Appadurai, 1990; Ashuri, 2007; Pickard, 2007; Leung and Huang, 2007). Because such powerful forces dominate mass media, and operate on such competitive terms, it is difficult for those cultures on the periphery of global society, to act as a force of influence (Ginsburg, 1991). Instead those societies and their associated neoliberal cultures wielding or generating the most capital typically dominate and hence contribute virtually all input into these global 'flows' (Featherstone, 2006; Pickard, 2007).

Global media have infiltrated the vast majority of the world cultures, replacing and changing original forms with the ideologies of the sponsors or creators of the media (Featherstone, 2006;

Appadurai, 1990; Spitulnik, 1993). Citizens centred within the expanding ‘global society’ have been positioned, largely by mass media, to consider the peoples of cultures not associated to the ideologies of neo-liberal consumer culture, as ‘others’ (Fürsich, 2002; Brantlinger, 1990). Wade Davis (2010) notes that within this enveloping term the ‘others’, are included thousands of different indigenous cultures. With cultural diversity comes diversity of knowledge, ideas and possibilities. Yet for the vast majority of the world’s indigenous cultures, representation within global mass media is inadequate or nonexistent (Fürsich, 2002; Spitulnik, 1993; Diawara, 1988; Ginsburg, 1991). Indigenous cultures are powerfully affected by the influence of global media, which has become a major cause of their erosion. This is despite the fact indigenous peoples are under represented in global media (Spitulnik, 1993). Global society’s major forces of influence, wealthy corporations and state powers, have failed to recognise this erosion of culture and act upon protecting the cultural wealth of the world’s indigenous societies (Davis, 2001).

Humanity as a whole faces serious challenges including a global food crisis, terrorism, famine, the mass extinction of flora and fauna, and climate change. Zuckerman (2010) states; “...*the real problems of the world, the interesting problems to solve are global in scale and scope, they require global conversations to get to global solutions. This is a problem we have to solve.*” The diversity of human culture and the spread of possibilities it brings when shared globally, may be crucial to our finding solutions to such issues (Davis, 2010; Castells, 2008; Padel, 2007, UNESCO, 2002). This point was highlighted in article 7 of *UNESCO’s Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2002) where it states “*Creation [of ideas] draws on the roots of cultural tradition*”. However, we are losing this cultural tradition and the knowledge it brings at a rapid rate. We are facing what Wade Davis refers to as “*ethnocide*” (Davis, 2010) or the extinction of human culture. This is

dramatically reducing our cultural resource base and with it the knowledge and wisdom of hundreds of thousands of years of cultural evolution.

*“...her greatest fear [before she died] was that as we drift towards this blandly amorphous generic world view, not only would we see the entire range of the human imagination reduced to a more narrow modality of thought, but that we wake from a dream one day having forgotten that there were even other possibilities.”*, Margaret Mead (quoted in Davis, 2010).

Whilst some, like Margaret Mead, have focused on the tragedy emerging in what has been to date an inability of the globalising cultures and powers to preserve these ‘other’ cultures, there is another way to consider this situation. We might see in our current global situation, an urgency to reposition these ‘other’ indigenous cultures within the framework of global society in ways that not only assist them in their own self-preservation, yet also assist in protecting the emerging global society from the dangers of a narrow or limited perspective. Padel (2007) states: *“Perhaps, if one thing can save our species hurtling to a collective global suicide through the nightmare of over industrialization, it’s ...[by] making our own society the subject of an objective analysis from the view-point of other cultures, and drawing on this insight...”*. This idea has been considered by the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) *Declaration On Cultural Diversity* which outlines *“Main Lines of Action”* including; **“3. Fostering the exchange of knowledge and best practices in regard to cultural pluralism with a view to facilitating, in diversified societies, the inclusion and participation of persons and groups from varied cultural backgrounds.”** Global society needs to diversify and incorporate cultural influence by making avenues for indigenous cultures to input into global media ‘flows’.

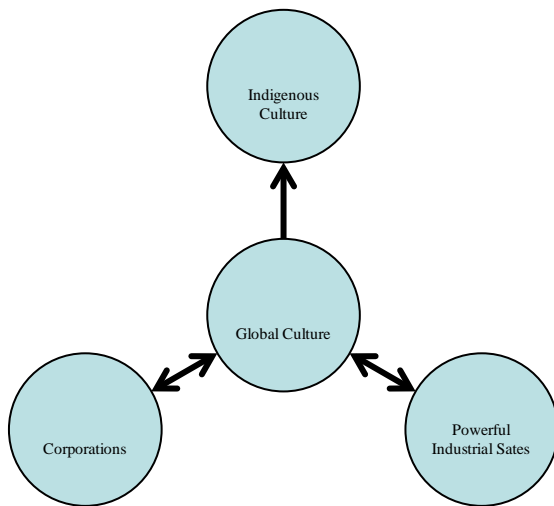


Fig 1.1 CURRENT FLOW OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE

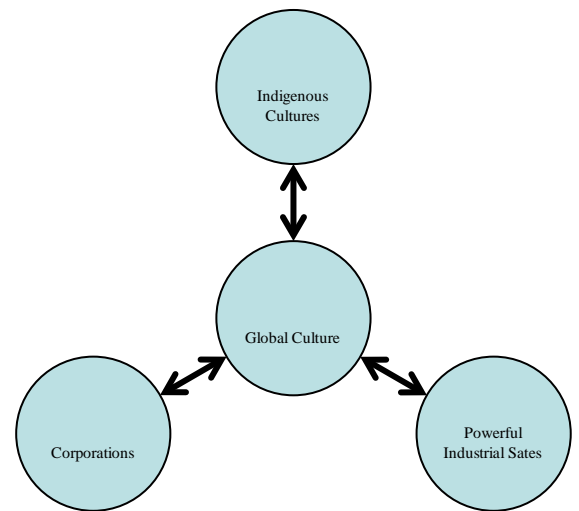


Fig 1.2 REQUIRED FLOW OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE

UNESCO’s declaration lists the following as the twelfth “*line of action*”: “*Encouraging the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks...*” (UNESCO, 2002). Global media needs a diversity of cultural representation and perspective in order to protect cultural diversity. Two complimentary lines of action to address this issue are studied in this thesis. These are both described in chapter 5 and discussed further in chapter 6. The first looks at maintaining cultural diversity through supporting cultural recognition, cultural perspective on global society and independent voice. It focuses on offering non-globalized cultures the opportunity to ‘command’ their own perspective, making independent observations and comments on globalized society(ies) and the issues they and all humans alike face. The second line of action focuses on finding opportunities for these cultures to express their cultural perspectives through accessing the networking power and influence of popular and academic media such as journal articles or ethnographic video productions. Ethnographic documentary addresses this second line of action with the ability to present the perspective of indigenous cultures, to the world in academic and popular forms. Ethnographic documentary can

provide these ‘other’ cultures access into the world’s most influential and pervasive forms of mass media (Csikszentmihaly and Kubey, 2002; Ginsburg, 1991; Sullivan, 1993; *BBC*, n. d.; Waterson, 2007; *BBC World News*, n. d.; *CNN International*, n. d.).

Documentary film is a versatile and flexible communicative form. It moves between news and entertainment whilst still being communicated and perceived as a source of factual information (Jenssen, 2005, La Marre and Landreville, 2009). This gives it access to a wide range of market niches and allows it to provide a good basis for communicating human culture (Aufderheide and Nisbet, 2009; Whiteman, 2009). It is important that a documentary produced for the public audience is popular enough to reach, and thereby influence, a significant portion of the potential market. Suitably, such documentaries are often labelled ‘popular’. They can be contrasted with their academic counterparts whose role it is to further the understanding of the subject rather than profit from, or successfully communicate subjective propaganda to, the audience. Popular and academic forms often merge roles. Within the fields of ethnography and anthropology, ‘popular’ documentaries are regularly used within all levels of academia (Eubank, 2003; Ruby, 1996; Worth, 1981). Broadly speaking, documentary film depicting another culture is known as ‘ethnographic documentary film’ (Landy and Shostak, 1984). My analysis is designed to improve the production of ethnographic documentary film in ways that benefit both popular and academic genres and their respective agendas. Both genres can be dealt with by addressing common problems, such as underlying issues of subjectivity (Ruby, 1996; Staples, 2005), with common solutions. In addition to providing a theoretical argument I aim to demonstrate the theory in a practical work through the making of a 25-minute documentary film called *Sacrificial River*. This film demonstrates the way reverse ethnography operates through the telling of a true story, which contrasts indigenous and Western cultural relationships to nature.

Ethnographic documentaries have traditionally been produced about indigenous culture, by (and for) industrialized/imperial societies. Unsurprisingly the genre remains haunted by the colonial attitudes of imperialism (Appadurai, 1990). Jhala and Passagrilli (2008) highlight this fact describing ethnographic documentary film as seen by Western societies as: “*a filmic depiction of the attitudes and interactions of old, remote, and small societies, those barely surviving the process of modernization*”. Landy and Shostak (1984) argue that in the past, ethnographic films primarily explored ‘otherness’, focusing on difference in culture between industrialised and indigenous culture as a point of interest. The ‘us’ versus ‘them’ approach evolved as a basic structure of ethnographic work, especially in those popular forms aimed at the public arena. Such attitudes are echoed through the genre of ethnographic documentary film today. Landy and Shostak (1984) write: “*...the form and language of such films communicate difference, but rarely do these films confront the significance of the interaction between different cultures.*”

Change must take place in the way ethnographic film is produced so it allows true interaction between cultures. If not, ethnographic film will continue to mask and misrepresent (and thus fail to provide global society access to) the true perspectives and wisdom of indigenous cultures. Ethnographic documentary film must find a way of restructuring itself, moving away from the colonial past and offering indigenous culture an equal platform in which they can participate in cross-cultural communication on a global stage. A core problem to achieving this lies in the existing imbalance in cultural perspective being provided by mass media. This imbalance has arisen for a number of complex historical reasons. Partially rectifying the balance is quite achievable in the genre of ethnographic film. This can be done through a ‘reversal of roles’, meaning representatives or ‘ethnographers’ from indigenous societies analyse and produce documentaries on those cultures that lie centred within ‘global society’. These global cultures includes those that have traditionally

played the ‘observer’ roles such as British, the American or French (Appadurai, 1990), as well as the many developed nations now connected by finance, trade and communications to the neo-liberal consumer based ideology of global society (Fotopoulos, 2001; Steger, 2005). In this ‘reversal’ of ethnographic documentary film, the targeted audience is also the ‘observed’, an important concept for communicating directly between cultures as shown below.

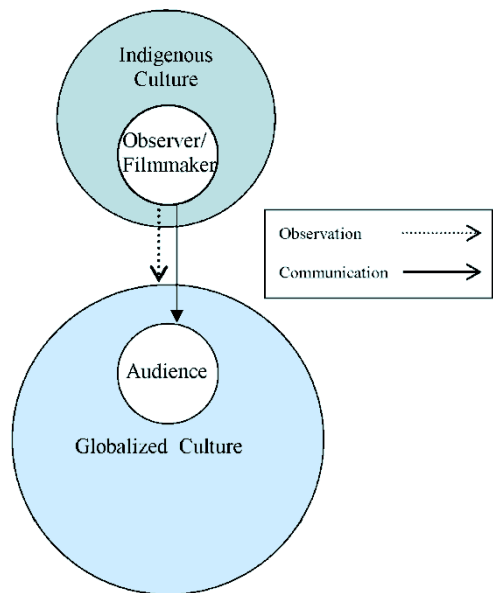


Fig 1.3 REVERSE ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM MODEL

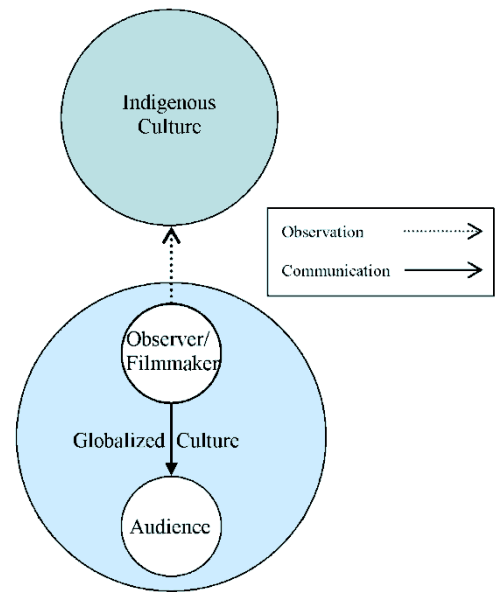


Fig 1.4 TRADITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM MODEL

This ‘reversal’ of ethnographic film, shown in Figure 1.3, is appropriately termed ‘reverse ethnography’ (Buzard 1997; Pratt 1986). In this thesis I will put forward arguments to demonstrate how reverse ethnography, applied to documentary film, assists in doing the following (note: these changes can be expanded to virtually all forms of ethnographic media from journals to film);

- changing the current ‘us’ versus ‘them’ approach, born in European imperialism and built upon by modernism, into a cross cultural debate where media operate as a platform for ‘discussion’ over aspects of cross-cultural interest;



- changing a global media system (currently and historically emanating from ethnocentric powerbases of cultural propaganda) that conforms and destroys cultural diversity, into a global system of interchanged ideas and facts. One that capitalises on cultural diversity by providing global society a resource for fresh and diverse approaches to understanding and overcoming issues common to all humanity;
- changing the culture of a ‘global society’, born from the emergence of capitalism and adhering to increasingly common and connected social discourses, into one that is self-reflective and formed from a diverse, dynamic and ‘fair’ representation of human culture;
- changing a system where cultural diversity is eroded by media to one where it is protected by media through a process of positioning the culture of interest in the position of ‘observer’, allowing them to define themselves by analysing globalised societies.

## **Linking Thesis and Artefact**

The creative component of this thesis is a 25-minute film titled *The Sacrificial River*. The purpose of the film is to demonstrate through practical application, the argued benefits of reverse ethnography in a popularised form. The film isn’t what would be described as a pure ‘reverse ethnography’. Rather it demonstrates the ‘process’ of change between the traditional approach to ethnography as shown in Figure 1.4 to the model of reverse ethnography shown in Figure 1.3. As I was obliged to produce the film for my thesis, I could not put the production into the hands of the ‘other’ culture. I therefore adjusted the structure of the documentary, so that it allowed the audience to see the effects of reverse ethnography, whilst not having the indigenous culture produce the film itself. This allows me to highlight many of the failures of traditional ethnographic documentary film

in addition to many of the benefits of the 'reverse'. The transition between the two models, from traditional to reverse, flows towards the resolution of the film's narrative. One crucial element of the creative component is for the audience to experience what is explained in the thesis. This includes, for example, the psychological effects reverse ethnography can have on the audience when they themselves are the 'observed' culture in the film. This forces the audience to self reflect and reposition their culture in context with another.

The idea to write about 'reverse ethnography' came out of an idea to investigate the causes behind an environmental disaster in Australia. In 2008 Australia's largest river system, the Murray Darling, became a national issue as huge social and environmental problems began emerging due to the lack of flows down the river. These problems were caused by drought and over irrigation. During this investigation I decided to ask for the opinion of some indigenous people who lived in arguably the worst environmentally affected area, located at the end of the river system. These people are known as the Ngurrenderi. It was at this point that I became personally exposed to the process of reverse ethnography. The perspectives the Ngurrenderi gave me were completely unexpected, making me to change the way I viewed the issues surrounding the river system and to contemplate my own way of seeing the world. So, in effect the film's storyline follows my own developing insights into my own culture through trying to understand the perspectives of another culture. It was a story that developed during the production of the film. The perspectives on many aspects of life given to me by members of the Ngurrenderi forced me to question my culture's relationship (or lack thereof) to nature. Investigating my own culture, its history and how it affected my own perspective on the natural world, I came to realise my own differing subjective reality. From that point I was able to open myself to the subjective reality of the Ngurrenderi people. This finally led me to attempt to experience a previously inconceivable, yet completely logical solution

to the environmental problem I originally intended to document. It perhaps offers a philosophical solution to all environmental problems created by humanity. This is where the film ends.

*Sacrificial River* therefore focuses on contrasting human relationships, drawn out of differences in cultural subjective realities between the natural world and both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Australia. The natural centrepiece of comparison between cultural relationships to nature is the unfolding story of the Murray Darling about which indigenous and non-indigenous history and perspectives are played out. Much of the film focuses on the way we as humans treat the nature and so the issues surrounding the Murray Darling river system are key to this focus.

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Murray Darling river system suffered from acute water shortage and reduction of flows due to climate change induced drought and excess irrigation (Kingsford et al., 2009, Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists et al., 2008). At the end of the river lies a series of massive lakes that have formed in place of what might normally be a delta. They include the largest system of freshwater lakes in the southern hemisphere known as the Lower Lakes. A saltwater lakes system, named the Coorong, exists on the seaward side of the freshwater lakes. The Coorong is separated from the freshwater lakes by a series of long weirs. These were built during the 1930's to stop salt water from encroaching on irrigation waters further inland during dry periods. The Coorong lakes stretch for over 100 kilometres down the coast. The small mouth of the Murray Darling system is located between the Coorong and the Southern Ocean. Upstream flows from the Murray River rarely make it to the mouth and so evaporation in the Coorong causes seawater to flow back into the lakes bringing in saltwater and causing rapidly rising salinity levels. These levels have approached levels as high as the Dead Sea in parts of the Coorong.

On the inland side of weirs, the freshwater lake system has also had problems. These freshwater lakes were, until 2008, always maintained above sea level and hence were always above the levels of the saline Coorong. However, due to lack of upstream flows, these lake levels fell well below sea level, exposing the lakebed's anaerobic muds. These muds, when exposed to oxygen, turn any new water entering the system dangerously acidic. In addition, this acid releases toxic heavy metals from the substrate forming a deadly combination for the lakes biota (Kingsford et al., 2009, Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists et al., 2008). The lakes at the end of the Murray Darling system are listed under the Ramsar Convention (the convention on wetlands of international importance, especially as waterfowl habitat) and are feeding grounds for hundreds of thousands of migratory waders. The loss of water flow and the consequential degradation of the lakes has devastated wader numbers placing the RAMSAR listing under threat and putting the Australian government under national and international pressure to improve conditions. Many other flora and fauna are also disappearing in large numbers (Kingsford et al., 2009).

The region has been home to Aboriginal Australian for over 35 000 years, so people have been a permanent fixture in the ecosystem of the lakes since their creation at the end of the last glacial period (Ingman and Gyllensten, 2003; Isaacs, 1987). Some groups remain connected to the area, living in settlements around the lakes. The close association of these people to the lakes led me to incorporate their perspective into the story. It was what ultimately turned my attention to reverse ethnography as a point of study for my thesis. The Aboriginal people of the region managed to survive with a complete dependence on the river and lakes for food, water and shelter, for tens of thousands of years. Despite this, in less than 200 years, European settlers and the society they founded have caused huge disturbance to the system. Virtually all waters in the system are polluted, natural flow regimes inhibited and the system's biota suffering declines in abundance and diversity

(Kingsford et al., 2009). The long Aboriginal history, and their 'story' of a sustainable relationship with the river and lakes, gives these people an authority to comment on the failures of modern society in this area. A tribal leader, 'Matt', became the representative for these people in my documentary. As the filmmaker I came to represent the subjective position of modern society in Australia, a society and culture with close ties to its British, European and Western colonial heritage.

The film *Sacrificial River* plays on subjectivity and reflexivity. In the film, the interview with Matt, takes myself as the filmmaker, from the position of the 'observer' to the 'observed'. Meanwhile, Matt's initial position as the 'observed' in this initial interview, also changes and becomes that of the 'observer' when his analysis forces me to turn the camera onto my own culture and subjective reality. *Sacrificial River* incorporates the filmmaking process into the story as a reflexive tool. This exposes the subjective positioning of myself as the filmmaker, a process that has become a tool for dealing with subjectivity in ethnographic films, notably by filmmakers such as Jean Rouch (Nannicelli, 2006). A 'behind the scenes' view, presents the audience with another level of reality in documentary. It helps reveal the subjectivity and role of perspective in the filmmaking process. In addition to helping expose subjectivity, depicting process has become a popular add-on, providing extra insight and entertainment value in today's film media (e.g. 'behind the scenes' or 'the making of' chapters included on most modern DVD's). The entertainment value of exposing the production process has been understood since the dawn of ethnographic documentary, as highlighted by Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) or Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). The use of reverse ethnography in *Sacrificial River* has been in conjunction with techniques addressing subjectivity and perspective including exposing the camera, filmmaker

and the development of thought process along with associated influences that led to the creation of the narrative.

Prior to my initial interviews with Matt from the Ngurrungeri tribe, I had thought his focus would be on attacking others (government, farmers, environmentally damaging tourist operators etc.) for the demise of the natural assets of his traditional lands. Yet in my first interview with him he was very philosophical in his approach to my inquiry and quick to bring modern Australian society's relationship to nature under question. This was where he turned the inquiry onto my own culture and indeed onto myself. Matt showed me he wished to help Australian society overcome the issues he saw. His keen interest was in teaching people to reconnect to nature according to the wisdom of his people's customs. It was clear to me that he saw this as one of his primary goals in life. There was clearly a lot he saw in his culture that he wished to offer to Australia's modern society. The disconnection with nature he noticed in the Australian public, including to a degree even in his own people, was something he saw as the anthropogenic induced cause of all environmental issues caused by our society including the environmental damage caused to the Murray Darling system. He often used the phrase 'caring for country' when referring to the need to focus on addressing the relationships or attitudes of people to nature in considering environmental issues.

I visited Matt and other members of the Ngurrundgeri at Camp Coorong several times over a two-year period. During my visits I witnessed a lot of deep emotion related to the environmental issues unfolding on around their traditional lands and waters. There was clearly a deeper connection between the indigenous community of the region and their natural world than I had recognised in the non-indigenous community of Australia. As an ecologist I had previously identified myself,

relative to the average Australian, as having a close relationship to the natural world. Realising that my relationship was in no way as deep as those of Matt's people, despite my environmental education and childhood growing up in a bushland environment, forced me to question the differences between the traditional indigenous culture of Australia and the post industrialised neo-liberal culture that now dominates the nation. I wanted to know why we were so disconnected from the natural environment. For example, why don't we see the biota of the region as Matt explained his people did, as an extended family? Why do we look at everything through economic perspectives? Why do people lack emotion when seeing the country they call home, with all its native flora and fauna, severely eroded in its capacity to support healthy ecosystems? It seemed strange to ask such questions until I started to inquire into the history of mankind. For most of human existence all societies were hunter-gatherers so it makes sense at one point we all had common perspectives on the natural world (Diamond, 1997; Flaherty, 1973). What was the change in our attitude towards the natural world and when did it occur in our cultural history? These questions moved my story into an unearthing of story of civilisation, a story that has the 'river' at its centre.

The story follows an investigation into the change in the relationship to nature that occurred during the Neolithic revolution and the rise of civilisations in the Middle East. It was from here that the change from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle to an agricultural lifestyle began over 10 000 years ago, before it later spread to Europe (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 1989; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 2000; Diamond, 1997; Flannery, 1973) from where it was eventually carried to Australia. Thus it can be argued that it was from this point in history and place that modern industrialised and 'developed' societies, like that of Australia today, began. *Sacrificial River* investigates the change in human culture that occurred during this time and how it possibly developed over time into an

erosion of the relationship between people and the natural world in modern societies such as my own in Australia.

Being forced to reposition my perspective on the issues surrounding the Murray Darling system to one that investigated the foundations of modern society's problematic relationship to the natural world was powerful. It allowed me to escape many of the subjective constraints that my own society had over my view of the world. Reverse ethnography, being forced to have your own culture seen and shown to you from another perspective, proved to be a powerful experience for me. I also saw the dangers of reverse ethnography. Traditional ethnography does not include the observed culture as part of the intended audience. Reverse ethnography does. Hence the audience could potentially be alienated if the observer was too critical. These were dangers that Matt avoided when giving his perspective. His advice was honest and delivered in a positive manner. It was provided with a desire to offer constructive advice as opposed to making an attack. This allowed his perspective to take a positive, protagonist role in the story telling. Considered diplomacy is crucial for a reverse ethnography to be effective, a point I was aware of in the production of *Sacrificial River*.

It is the very fact there are sensitivities and tension when one culture observes and directs their analysis at another (as in the case of a reverse ethnography) that provides entertaining viewing. This helps in the production of a popular narrative, and is important when considering the role of popular ethnography in providing global society other cultural perspectives. I believed these benefits it would function very well in assisting me achieve my objectives of putting indigenous culture and perspective into the mainstream media.



## **Aims**

Previously I outlined the need for indigenous cultures to have a representative voice in global society. I suggested that mass media provided the best grounds for providing indigenous cultures a 'voice' in global society. I then argued a case for investigating reverse ethnographic documentary film as a way of doing this. In the main body of my thesis I will address the following avenues of inquiry:

1. I will reveal the forces and processes that make mass media such a powerful tool for cultural representation in global society and how mass media currently effect and represent indigenous culture, with particular focus given to global television broadcasting.
2. Why do we want to understand other cultures? I will look at the emergence and development of ethnography, from its origins to its modern forms, to see why we have historically wanted to gather knowledge on other cultures. I will discuss the linkage of ethnography and film and the serious problems it faces today in representing other cultures. I will also look at some of the solutions to these problems put forward over the last century and analyse their successes and failures.
3. What is 'ethnography' and 'documentary'? The definition of 'ethnography' has become used increasingly loosely over the last century. I will argue for a definition based on the communicative function of ethnography in society. I will argue the same communicative function is imperative in defining 'documentary'. Documentaries function not as a way of 'documenting' some kind of reality yet rather as a way of making a 'statement'

communicated as true (regardless of whether it is true or not). Redefined as such, documentary can be seen to operate in a world connected through mass media by statements. Such statements are in fact subjective realities and these statements are made from a small number of the world's many thousands of cultural 'realities'. I will show how traditional ethnographic documentary film operates within this system of global statements.

4. There is clearly a failure in global media to provide a balanced representation of the world's human cultures and their subjective realities within global society. Accepting reality is subjective and knowing how to find another culture's subjective reality requires we let go of the task of creating an objective reality and instead task ethnography to create a dialogue structure between cultures in global media. This would allow globalised culture to be assessed by those cultures on the periphery of its influence and allow those in the global society to be positioned as the 'observed culture' with the peripheral culture functioning as the ethnographer or 'observer'. Positioned as 'observed' and audience combined, consumers of the ethnography are offered a position from which they can relate to, learn from, be entertained by and be critical of, the ethnographer's observations. This functions to serve reflexivity, the understanding of subjectivity, and the maintaining of integrity by the filmmaker. I then look at balancing these cross-cultural statements to achieve a global society based on a broader, richer and more representative mix of subjective reality and cultural diversity. With the requirements for improving ethnographic documentary outlined, reverse ethnography is presented as a potential solution to fulfilling these requirements.

5. How is reverse ethnography able to be applied as a scholarly solution for those studying other cultures? By presenting several examples of documentaries using reverse ethnography I argue ways in which reverse ethnography and its application can solve issues of understanding other cultures particularly those surrounding dealing with subjectivity in the creation of ethnography.

The film *Sacrificial River* produced as part of this thesis aims to demonstrate practically, how reverse ethnography operates to address the points to be considered above.

## Chapter 2: Globalization And Mass Media

### A Culturally Unifying Force

Globalization is a homogenizing force that works on many levels. These are proposed by Takis Fotopoulos (2001) as the following:

- Economic globalization: centred on deregulation of commodity, capital and labour markets leading to a neo-liberal global culture;
- political globalisation: transnationalism against statism where control over culture, ideology and economy is transferred to global society as opposed to states;
- ideological globalisation: Western democratic values, human rights etc;
- technological globalisation: such as the spreading of new communications technology to global markets;
- social globalisation: the homogenisation of life based on a culture of individualism and consumerism;
- cultural globalisation: the worldwide homogenisation of culture which is controlled largely through media and advertising.

Culture is defined in *The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition* (n.d.) as: *The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next.* Under such a definition, and considering the definitions of globalisation by Fotopoulos (2001), I would argue that 'culture' incorporates technological, social,

ideological and economic elements and hence cultural globalization would be an all encompassing term which defines globalization in its broadest sense.

Globalization of culture is not only a unifying process. It is also a destructive force, culminating in the elimination of cultural diversity (Davis, 2001). Referring to the world's human cultures as the 'ethnosphere', Davis (2010) argues its conservation is as important to the wellbeing of the planet as health of the biosphere. What's more the ethnosphere, as he claims, is under an even greater threat. He states, "[It] is humanity's great legacy, it a symbol of all that we are and all that we can be as an astonishingly inquisitive species... just as the biosphere is being severely eroded so too is the ethnosphere and if anything at a far greater rate". Fifty percent of the world's cultural diversity faces extinction (Davis, 2001). This issue was recognized by the 190 member states of UNESCO, who in November 2001, adopted by acclamation, a Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. This was in response to the cultural challenges of globalization. In line with Davis's argument, Article 1 of the declaration points out that; "*cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.... it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.*" (UNESCO, 2002)

What is the process of globalization unifying these cultures into? Fotopoulos (2001) argues that globalization results in the spread of neo-liberalism and consumerism. This is explained as a contemporary stage of capitalism defined by four indicators: the privatization, deregulation, liberalization, and globalization of markets (Harvey, 2005; Mies, 1998; Pickard, 2007). It is here that the greatest forces of globalization lie. It is here that we find the forces that need to be negotiated if we are to find the solutions to the elimination of the world's indigenous or non-globalized cultures.

## **The Globalizing Powers**

Capitalism, by way of seeking and competing for markets through the promotion of products and services, spreads demand and therefore consumerism (Appadurai, 1990; Featherstone, 2006). Coupled with this spread comes regulations and practices which support free trade and economic growth in the forms of liberalism (Pickard, 2007; Fotopoulos, 2001). The drive of international trade led by transnational corporations offers new technologies and universal products to all peoples across the globe. These consumers, following the manufactured desire to have more of what is available to consume on the international market, adapt lives and focus in order to earn and consume more. This focus turns people, societies and ultimately their cultures, further toward consumerism. The common bond of consumers worldwide, are the ideologies and influences to lifestyles promoted and generated by products and services created by international corporations (Appadurai, 1990). The consumer culture of global society is created, promoted and delivered to people worldwide through this process. However there is a cost to this spread of consumerism and all its luxuries: the erosion of much of the diversity of traditional forms of human culture.

The access of corporations to global markets has been made over centuries by both negotiation and force. In a period of mercantilism in Europe, the first transnational corporations worked in large part for national interests. They even fought wars and claimed international territories on behalf of their states. In return, national armed forces were used by imperialistic nations (such as England and France) to protect and expand their international trade. It was competition for trade between European nations that truly awakened the era of colonialism during the last millennium. Cultures around the globe were often forcibly brought into this global network of trade with European colonial empires and their cultures were consequentially influenced.

Western languages, religion, political ideology and systems etc. moved throughout the world via the connections (and enforcement) of empires and their trade (Appadurai, 1990; Winseck and Pike, 2007).

Most modern international corporations originate from Europe or the United States, and Appadurai (1990) argues that what this situation has created is an ethnocentric force of globalisation dominated by those with technology and capital. This has resulted in a global consumer society that has been dubbed 'capitalist imperialism' (Featherstone, 2006). Trade came to be the strength of empires and the driving force of globalization. The global spread of demand for products produced by international corporations was also supported by associated states. Increased trade from corporations based in their borders led to financial gains via tax revenue as well as increased political and cultural influence abroad.

As global culture spreads it moves into practically all elements of society. It affects everything from family to state politics through its "*spread of cultural reproduction*" (Appadurai, 1990). In many ways this renders existing political borders and economic barriers as irrelevant (Steger, 2005). This is especially apparent today, as trade systems have moved from state centred mercantilism into free trade systems supported by liberalism (Neomercantilism, n. d.). As international corporations and international trade have become more independent from the state, political powers have been forced to look further beyond state borders in order to influence the forces that are affecting their people and governance (Appadurai, 1990; Pickard, 2007; Castells, 2008). This has led to states forced to participate in what Castells (2008) sees as "*the emergence of a global civil society*". To highlight this point, Castells (2008) quotes Ulrich Beck (2006) in his book *Power in the Global Age* (p. 249), "*What we are witnessing in the global age is not the end of*

*politics but rather its migration elsewhere. . . . The structure of opportunities for political action is no longer defined by the national/international dualism but is now located in the 'global' arena."*

Nations resisting the forces of globalisation delivered by mass media must attempt to manage what Appadurai (1990) calls global '*flows*' of culture in order to protect themselves from a force deemed as powerful enough to threaten even national sovereignty (Appadurai, 1990; Pickard, 2007). In what is called the "*China syndrome*", nations too open to global '*flows*' risk being threatened not by only cultural change alone. They also risk revolt against the ruling political system from their people. Looking at the other end of the spectrum, those nations that over inhibit global '*flows*', such as North Korea, ultimately find themselves internationally isolated (Appadurai, 1990). Countries like China, however, have the power and capital to counter such forces, and influence flows of culture. This is not the case for most indigenous societies (Ginsburg, 1991).

## **The Role of Mass Media**

Arguably the most influential force behind the spread of global culture are global media. These include television, film, recorded music, radio, press, internet etc. (Spitulnik, 1993; Appadurai, 1990; Ashuri, 2007). Mass media have progressively colonized the cultural and ideological sphere and are arguably undermining the field of anthropology as well as the cultures represented (Spitulnik, 1993). Castells (2008) adds more weight to this argument, stating that since the industrial revolution, the public (now global) sphere, has become largely organized by mass media. The advent of the internet has dramatically increased this power of media to globalise the world's culture (Gereffi, 2001).



Mass media not only communicate ideas, their powerful influence shapes our global society. The links that connect this global society are formed and maintained by mass media. The society is part is located within these connections, a concept aligned to Anderson's (2006) notion of imagined communities. The media are colonizing the world's public, global and cultural spheres, creating links between peoples that unite them. To a large degree the survival and influence of culture requires the management of media, making this 'sphere' ever more inclusive (Spitulnik, 1993).

Levy and Sznajder (2002) believe that global media today will facilitate a "*shared consciousness*" and "*cosmopolitan memories*". These will span international borders. This may suggest better cross cultural communication and understanding on a global scale, however Appadurai (1990) rejects such an idea arguing that this forming of a 'shared consciousness' is created by those ethnocentric forces with highly developed technology and substantial capital. Any forming of 'cosmopolitan memories' or a 'shared consciousness' simply constitutes the result of globalisation and the diminishing of cultural diversity (Appadurai, 1990; Featherstone, 2006).

Mass media create common experiences and offer common perspectives on so many aspects of life for peoples across different cultures they can create the common elements of our global culture. It follows that those countries with more capital dominate international media and hence form the centre points for the creation and spread of this global culture (Featherstone, 2006). The spread of consumerism by mass media is assisting neo-liberalism to dominate the ideology of the emerging global society (Pickard, 2007). Thus, media powers, centred in a handful of wealthy nations, have effectively spread worldwide, a culture of consumerism and neo-liberalism (Appadurai, 1990; Anagnostou, 2006; Featherstone, 2006; Halter, 2000; Pickard, 2007).

Television media and more specifically international television broadcasting and satellite control, were the cause of international disputes during the 1970's and 1980's. Unwanted transborder reception along with competition for limited satellite capacity and orbital space slots, became issues of international dispute. They were fought out in international forums, such as UNESCO. The disputes arose from a real fear that the 'alien' ways of life and values, represented in Western news, entertainment and advertising were a deliberate strategy to undermine the national sovereignty and cultural integrity of other nations. It was feared that dominance over satellite technology by wealthy nations would give the media powers the means to communicate unwanted messages into developing countries without available legal resistance. As new countries were integrated into global media and communication systems these developing nations were "*undercut by structural inequities*" (Pickard, 2007) such as high costs, foreign owned infrastructure and an imbalance of foreign media. Most media were being produced by the wealthy nations (and the organizations and corporations within them) owning and controlling the systems (Pickard, 2007; Sinclair, 1997). Pickard (2007) highlights the point of concern these nations had at the time stating: "*...over 80 countries and approximately 2 billion people in the global South had gained their independence after years of decolonization and, in some cases, armed struggle, only to be undercut by workaday mechanisms, including international communications*".

Studies make clear that any such fears over the influence of transborder mass media, such as television broadcast, were valid with mass media shown to be largely responsible for the emergence of homogenized mass culture, i.e. globalisation (Spitulnik, 1993). This can be demonstrated through the close links of mass media to popular and modern consumer culture. Specifically, mass media have led to the fragmentation of communities, the erosion of cultural values and the singularisation of standards of artistic expression. This was proved to affect elements of culture such as the social

construction of gender relations and “*communal and domestic space*” as well as concepts of time and rhythms in daily life (Benjamin, 1936; Jay, 1973; Spitulnik, 1993). Ironically, it is this power of mass media Wade Davis (2010) argues should be seen as the most effective and potential force for promoting indigenous culture and thereby preserving cultural diversity around the world.

## **The Power of the Box - Television**

*“Television is too important a topic, too powerful a medium, too much a destructive force for us to sit back and do nothing. Rather than allow foreign culture to come in and cover us like a blanket through television, we could use television to celebrate and strengthen our national culture. Before we as a people of one nation can respect one another we must know one another’s ways. This is not going to happen if foreign programs and foreign movies become the only common factor that we experience through watching television.”* The Former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea Paias Wingti quoted in Frank Senge Kolma’s story *The Box That Changed Our View of Life* (1991).

Watching television has grown into an immensely common human pastime. From 1971 to 2010 the number of households worldwide with television increased from under 300 million to 1.2 billion. In 2010 cable television households numbered at 355 million worldwide (Worldwide Cable TV Households Continue to Grow as Cable Operators Expand Offerings, 2006). In 2002, on average, individuals in the industrialized world were reported to spend three hours a day watching television (Csikszentmihaly and Kubey, 2002). With such figures it is self-evident the globalizing force that television broadcast has become over recent decades. What’s more, television stands above other media in the strength of its delivery. Studies show that as humans we find it very easy

to accept the visual signals, such as that which we receive from television, as true (a function that evolved so we may react quickly without question to our environment) (Bargh, 1989; Gilbert, 1991). This has given creators of television a powerful tool of influence over global populations.

It is not surprising that there has been strong resistance to the influence of international media by sovereign states. Even between close allies such as the US and Canada, the issue of maintaining control over media independence has been deemed more important than issues such as trade, a point noted by Hoskins and McFayden (1990). They refer to the exclusion of television programming from a past Canada-US Free Trade Agreement with an explanatory quote from Katz and Wedell, (1977) who write “*it is often argued that trade in television programming modifies the culture and development of the importing nations*”.

It can be argued, however, that efforts or concerns over transborder broadcasts, have been outweighed by an active absorption of international media. United States television programmes, sold cheap to global markets, easily outcompete local productions in other nations. This is due to the fact these programmes are ‘preferred’ by the audiences of local broadcasters. For example, in Italy it was reported that in 2006 its five most popular TV series were all U.S. productions, all being selected and broadcast by national broadcasters (TVBlogit, 2006). It also seems the public naturally look to incorporate knowledge and perspective from other cultures. During the 1980’s, when China was still very much closed to the rest of the world, a light hearted and stereotypically English language education programme called *Follow Me* was broadcast. It soon gained a following of a reported 500 million nightly viewers who were often witnessing insights into Western culture for the first time. As the *BBC* reported, the show’s popularity was due to the fact that it “*offered a window to a contemporary world beyond China’s borders*” (*BBC*, n. d.). This curiosity to

understand the 'other' is clearly a factor that supports the driving force of globalization. Ethnocentric media producers exploit this curiosity. They inevitably spread culture from those wealthy states that dominate global media production to all those looking beyond their borders (Spitulnik, 1993). What is found beyond the border is an ethnocentric, neo-liberal, consumer culture driven global media that simply perpetuates what it presents for its own gain rather than the true diversity of culture that exists around the world (Pickard, 2007). People's curiosity to see beyond one's borders has been a significant factor for the success of transnational television broadcasting. Unfortunately, however, it offers curious viewers a very tiny slice of the cultural perspectives the human race has to offer (Appadurai, 1990; Davis, 2010; Spitulnik, 1993).

Today global television channels can penetrate virtually all corners of globe. The US cable/satellite *Discovery Channel*, for example, is self-reported to be distributed to 431 million homes in 170 countries worldwide (*Discovery Channel*, n. d.). Like most globally distributed television, *Discovery Channel* is produced with the markets producing the largest revenue in mind (namely the U.S. and Europe). By default it therefore broadcasts content primarily adapted for Western cultures to audiences in all 170 countries (Pickard, 2007). Global television broadcasting demonstrates the power of mass media to spread Western culture to the world. Yet not all global television content is driven by market forces. Much of it is designed to influence market forces.

Global news channels have similar coverage to channels like *Discovery Channel*. Britain's *BBC World News* broadcasts to over 200 countries and territories worldwide. It has an estimated weekly audience of 76 million viewers and is available in 276 million homes (*BBC World News*, n. d.). Based in the United States, *CNN International* is another global news (and documentary) channel accessible to more than 200 million households in over 200 countries and territories

worldwide (*CNN International*, n. d.). When considering the importance of international news in the political landscape, these channels are considered essential state assets. *Channel One Russia* is the biggest Russian-language TV channel. It reports a global audience of 250 million television audiences. In the paragraph outlining the company's mission statement, it is written that *Channel One Russia*, "allows Russian-speaking audiences across the world to keep abreast of what is going on in Russia and see global events from the Russian perspective" (*Channel One Russia*, n. d.). The national interests are clearly defined and the idea is not new. Recently Australia opted to invest in producing an internationally broadcast channel, *Australia Network*. The idea of the channel is to broadcast Australian perspectives internationally as a form of self-promotion. It competes against other states' international channels such as Russia's multilingual language news broadcast *Russia Today* or Britain's *BBC World*. The *Australia Network* has a mission statement similar to that of *Channel One Russia* containing the line: "...to provide a television and digital service that informs, entertains and inspires our (international) audience with a uniquely Australian perspective" (*Australia Network*, n. d.).

In a globalized world where influence over global media 'flows' means power and influence, investing in mass media is important. It allows a nation's or society's perspective to be promoted. Sovereign states are willing to invest large sums of money in order to compete with other global news networks. Yet indigenous cultures, along with poorer states, are not in a financial position to compete in this arena and hence their cultural or social perspective is not heard (Ginsburg, 1991). The political power of global television broadcasting has become a struggle for cultural and ideological influence. It highlights the power of media and perspective in the spread of culture and influence around the globe. This struggle for influence has been particularly focused on news and documentary broadcasting.

## Dominant Forces in Global News and Documentary

In 2005 Russia invested hundreds of millions of dollars into various forms of public diplomacy. This included mass media such as television and newspapers. For example, through funding monthly news supplements, Russian interests were promoted in various newspapers around the world. Funding was also used to pay for the international news and documentary channel called *Russia Today* (Finn, 2008). The *Russia Today (RT)* channel cost US \$360 million to run during its first year in operation (*RT (TV network)*, n. d.). Unlike *Channel One Russia*, *Russia Today* is broadcast in multiple languages including English, Arabic and Spanish. The critics argue it is “a breathless cheerleader for the Kremlin” (Finn, 2008; *RT (TV network)*, n. d.). Despite such comments, the persuasion of the medium is both powerful and subtle. In January 2009 *Russia Today* was awarded a ‘Silver World Medal’ for ‘Best News Documentary’ with its documentary *A City of Desolate Mothers* from the New York festivals (*RT (TV network)*, n. d.). The documentary was broadcast shortly after the conflict in Georgia, between South Ossetians and the government military. It does not need to step away from presenting an honest story in order to make a powerful political statement on the side of the South Ossetian resistance and the Russian intervention into the war. The story is told from the unique perspective of the mothers of South Ossetian men and boys killed by Georgian government troops. Interestingly and pointedly, it offers an English telling of the conflict. Russian intervention into the conflict allowed the region to effectively break away from the state of Georgia. This intervention was heavily criticized by the West (*RussiaToday*, 2008). *A City of Desolate Mothers*, by presenting a perspective on the side of the mothers of the South Ossetian sons killed in the conflict, has the audience empathising with those on the opposite side to that which the US government was supporting, without creating controversy. It is a good example of the power and the benefits of being able to control the perspective in global news and

documentary media. However, it also shows that global news and documentary, put into global society, is biased towards the motivations of the creators and/or sponsors of the media. Are we then to ask not, “*what channel do we wish to watch?*” but “*whose perspective do we wish to see?*”

International news and documentary broadcasters are criticised by el-Nawawy and Powers (2008) who state that “*...media organizations are increasingly being treated as ‘actors’ within international conflicts.*” They argue that superior and dominant media coverage allowed the United States and its allies to gain international persuasion and generate support for their armed forces, by peoples and governments around the world, during international conflicts. This was the case, for example, during the first Gulf war. During this conflict blatantly one-sided *CNN* newscasters, who were presenting to a global audience, spoke of Iraq as the “*enemy*” (Shohat and Stam, 1994). This imbalance in perspective has been countered by more recently emerging international news channels. *Al Jazeera English*, the 24-hour English-language news and current affairs channel, headquartered in Qatar (*Al Jazeera English*, n. d.) was created with the agenda of, as the company’s corporate profile states, “*balancing the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere. The channel aims to... challenge established perceptions*” (*Al Jazeera*, n. d.). Will Stebbins, an *Al Jazeera* Washington bureau chief, is quoted as saying, “*News in the U.S. clearly comes from a very culturally specific viewpoint that eclipses many important stories and issues. We want to provide different points of view from around the world*” (Tischler, 2007).

*Al Jazeera* has been the forefront of the global news and documentary propaganda wars. They can be considered as having been the strongest opposition to the Western perspective (Monbiot, 2008). During the ‘invasion’ of Iraq in 2003, their coverage often infuriated U.S. leaders. Defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld labelled *Al Jazeera’s* reporting as, “*vicious, inaccurate, and*



*inexcusable*” (*Al Jazeera*, n. d. b). According to British press reports, President Bush even considered in 2004, bombing *Al Jazeera*’s headquarters in Qatar (Monbiot, 2008). In a possible show of how threatening these global media propaganda wars are to national political interests, the U.S. military did in fact bomb *Al Jazeera* bureaus, twice, once in Kabul, and once in Baghdad where a reporter was killed (Tischler, 2007). It must be recognised, however, that despite arguments coming out that the Pentagon was given the locations of the sites, the United States stated the bombings were accidental (Tischler, 2007; Tahboub, 2003). In an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, the wife of the man killed in the bombing, Dima Tareq Tahboub, argues that: “... *the US bombed Al-Jazeera because it was angered by reports that did not confirm its one-sided picture of the war*” (Tahboub, 2003). Global news and documentary television broadcasting has become the site of intense political struggle. Clearly the influence of the medium is one taken very seriously by political powers.

In global society, state influence over media can be measured against the huge forces of corporate media. Corporate media powers, with their self-serving interests, are seen as threats to cultural and state sovereignty. Rupert Murdoch’s purchase of *STAR TV* shares in Asia during the 1990’s caused concern from the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahatir, who is quoted as telling the UN General Assembly in 1993: “*Today they broadcast slanted news. Tomorrow they will broadcast raw pornography to corrupt our children and destroy our culture... Why has Mr Rupert Murdoch bought a 64 per cent stake of Star TV for US\$500 million? If he is not going to control news that we are going to receive, then what is it?*” (Hawkes, 1995). Empire building nations have long used all forms of media as a means of documenting the countries and peoples they sought to control and exploit (Shohat and Stam, 1994). For a country such as Malaysia, which in the past endured centuries of European colonial rule and imperialistic torment (Ken, 1965), such sensitivity

towards outside influence is likely seen as a form of further imperialism and might serve to explain Mahatir's comments. Malaysia's perspective to global media was shown by Pickard (2007) to be similar in many other countries. China's government in fact took control over its nation's satellites and forced the removal of the BBC channel. This, however, came after Rupert Murdoch declared in a public speech (following the purchase by News Corporation of the rest of STAR TV in 1993) that: "*(telecommunications) have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere ... satellite broadcasting makes it possible for information-hungry residents of many closed societies to bypass state-controlled television channels*" (Monbiot, 2008). Corporate interests are political in their own right and so both state and corporate powers can be shown to dominate the struggle for control over perspective in the global 'flows' created by the world's media.

In such a competitive environment what place is there for indigenous culture to express a view of how they see the world to the global community? Moreover, how do indigenous cultures defend themselves against the persuasiveness and pervasiveness of global media and the interests of the corporate and state powers in control? It is argued that indigenous peoples can offer little resistance to these globalising forces of media (Castells, 2008; Davis, 2001, Ginsburg, 1991). Few indigenous cultures are afforded the capital by governments, to produce their own media as a defence against the cultural influence of outside corporate and state owned media organizations (Ginsburg, 1991). The Imparja people of Australia, however, are one indigenous people given this opportunity by the national government in order to help them protect their culture. The Imparja people are well aware that they may lose their cultures to television. Here television has apparently kept its original nickname, "*the third invader*", following the first two invasions, Europeans and then alcohol (McGregor, 1988). In an interview by Faye Ginsburg (6<sup>th</sup> July 1988, cited in Ginsburg, 1991), Freda Glynn from the Imparja people explains the importance of attempting to balance the

influence of mass media and television: *“TV is like an invasion. We have had grog, guns and diseases, but we have been really fortunate that people outside the major communities have had no communication like radio or TV. Language and culture have been protected by neglect. Now, they are not going to be. They need protection because TV will be going into those communities 24 hours a day in a foreign language-English. It only takes a few months and the kids start changing... We’re trying to teach kids you can be Aboriginal and keep your language and still mix in the wider community and have English as well. At least they will be seeing black faces on the magic box that sits in the corner, instead of seeing white faces all day long.”*

The broadcasting of film and video is recognised as the most effective means of communicating culture of indigenous Australia into the consciousness of modern Australian society (Ginsburg, 1991). The same view is taken in neighbouring New Zealand, where television broadcasts act as a centrepiece for preservation and promotion protection to their indigenous Maori culture. *Maori Television* states very definitively the forces from which it seeks protection, stating that its promotion of Maori language and culture *“supports a unique New Zealand identity within a global society”* (*Maori Television*. n. d.).

But what about the world’s many other indigenous cultures also at threat from globalization? Most do not live under the governance of wealthy nations who offer and can afford expensive cultural protectionism measures (not to suggest that these people are always afforded such rights). How can global media, in its current competitive and capital driven format, be utilised in a way that will protect and communicate these cultures rather than conform them to a homogenous, neo-liberal global culture led by corporate and state powers?

## Online Solutions or More of the Same?

Could the emergence of online media or ‘new media’ provide any substantial improvement in balancing the cultural perspectives in global media ‘flows’? Zuckerman (2010) argues that it doesn’t stating: *“It turns out that new media isn’t necessarily helping us all that much... We end up in these filter bubbles... where we see the people that we already know and we see the people that are similar to the people that we already know and we tend not to see that wider picture... This wasn’t how the internet was supposed to be.”*

Whilst there is no doubt that the internet provide an open door to mass media to almost all cultures regardless of their access to capital Zuckerman’s point is that it is the manner in which we are interfacing with the online world that is affecting the ability for the internet to combat globalisation decreasing cultural diversity. To highlight his point we can turn our attention to search engines and social media interfaces. The most popular website at the time of writing, accessed daily by over 40% of the world’s internet users, is the search directory *Google* (Alexa, n. d.; Alexa, n. d. b). Alexa points out that when we look online, we use search engines, which bring people specifically to what they were looking for. Thus people aren’t forced to look beyond their own reality. The most common online interface after the search engine *Google* is the social networking site *Facebook* (Alexa, n. d.) accessed daily by over 30% of the world’s internet users (Alexa, n. d. c). Social networking sites like *Facebook* are places where people looking for serendipity, tend to interact. However, these sites allow group mentality to take over the direction of media that is consumed. *“You end up flocking with a lot of people who are probably similar to you, who have similar interests and its very very hard to get information from the other flocks, from the other parts*

*of the world where people are getting together and talking about their own interests.”* Zuckerman (2010).

Although the infrastructure of the Internet gives the appearance of offering users global connections, when we look at what is happening (i.e. where the data is created and consumed), the connections fail to deliver. Zuckerman points to the fact that when considering the top ten users (nations) of the Internet, more than 95% of the news readership is on domestic news sites. This is despite the fact that we now have access to newspapers around the world. So though we may be aware that we are all connected, the reality is that we are choosing to remain locally focused in what Zuckerman calls a state of “*imaginary cosmopolitanism*”. We must find ways to get people to consume other global perspectives online.

Although ‘new media’ provides individuals with the free and easy ability to upload media that can then be viewed by internet users around the world, the reality is that the internet is being dominated by specific sites such as *Google* and *Facebook*, which direct the market in ways that make it a challenge to have this content viewed. As Zuckerman (2010) explains, serendipity is no longer occurring online. In fact, traditional sources of media may have offered more diversity in cultural media. Television news broadcasts, newspapers etc have an editor who ‘chooses’ the content we consume. They take a degree of the ‘choice’ away from the viewer as to what they see and the perspective they take and in this way are more powerful promoters of change. Would the average person seek news stories if they weren’t collected and presented to us by journalists and editors? ‘New media’ simply seems to allow us to consume more of what we want and from the angle we want to see it from. Traditional forms of media delivered a degree of cross-cultural media (even if the perspective was ethnocentric) to the consumer. New media, however, doesn’t

necessarily facilitate cross-cultural exchange of perspectives on the world we live in as it offers the consumer too much choice or it allows users to aggregate in tight social circles. So whilst 'new media' offers change in the media platform, which makes access and creation of media accessible to billions of people around the world, it does not seem to offer global society a balancing of cultural perspectives.

## Chapter 2: Ethnography Meets Documentary Film

### The Need to Understand Other Cultures

Human culture is an artefact of our own evolution as a species. Yet we are abandoning cultural diversity within our species as the emerging global culture spreads. Wade Davis asks us to consider what we lose from allowing cultures to be lost in this way. *“And its humbling to remember that our species has been around for perhaps 600,000 years, the Neolithic revolution which gave us agriculture, at which time we succumbed to the cult of the seed, the poetry of the shaman was displaced by the prose of the priest, we created hierarchy, specialization, surplus, is only 10000 years ago... the modern industrial world as we know it is barely 300 years old. Now that shallow history doesn’t suggest to me that we have all of the answers for all the challenges that will confront us in the ensuing millennia”* (Davis, 2010). What Wade Davis and others who study human culture recognise, is that indigenous cultures are being lost in the face of globalization. There are reported to be over 370 million indigenous people in 90 countries, living in all regions of the world. These peoples contribute in a huge way to humanity’s cultural diversity, with more than two thirds of its languages, and untold amounts of traditional knowledge, as stewards of some of the world’s most biologically diverse areas (Davis, 2010; United Nations, 2010).

UNESCO’s Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002) highlights the importance of maintaining the diversity of human culture. Article 3 in the declaration states: *“Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence”*. Article 7 considers our cultural heritage as *“the*

*wellspring of creativity” stating: “For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations...”*

The declaration specifically recognises the caretaker role that many of these indigenous peoples play in caring for some of the world’s most biodiverse regions, highlighting the importance of their ecological knowledge and connection to these places. Regarding the issue of climate change, the declaration states indigenous peoples must play “*a central role in developing adaptation and mitigation efforts to this global challenge*” (United Nations, 2010). The need to understand other cultures is largely based on the benefits these cultures can give to humanity as whole. Indigenous cultures provide humanity a vital resource of knowledge and perspective. This is in addition to the purely aesthetic value we might associate to their preservation. However, the aesthetic value that we place on the preservation of human culture is not new.

During the years of empire expansion in the 1800’s it was recognised that globalization was threatening the existence of other cultures. It was during this time the first ‘ethnographers’ began to document the cultures of peoples being conquered by either the United States or European countries. According to Jacob Gruber (1970) who coined the term ‘salvage ethnography’ to describe those works recording the disappearing cultures (Salvage Ethnography, n. d.), one of the first ever statements that recognized the destruction of native peoples cultures was made by the report of the *British Select Committee of Aborigines* in 1838. In response to this report Gruber quotes an address by James Cowles Prichard’s before the *British Association for the Advancement of Science* in 1839: “*Wherever Europeans have settled, their arrival has been the harbinger of extermination to the native tribes... The psychology of these races has been but little studied in an enlightened manner; and yet this is wanting in order to complete the history of human nature, and*



*the philosophy of the human mind. How can this be obtained when so many tribes shall have become extinct, and their thoughts shall have perished with them?"* (Gruber, 1970)

What was outlined in the United Nations declaration echoes these same concerns, yet despite such long-term and international recognition, the loss of human culture continues. It was ethnographers that were the first to recognise this issue. What role does ethnography continue to play in understanding the issues faced by indigenous cultures?

## **Ethnography: A History of Documenting the ‘Other’**

The word ‘ethnography’ is usually used in one of two ways. The first means the practice of ethnography: this is when the stereotypical cultural anthropologist goes out and does fieldwork. The second use denotes a text describing and analysing or interpreting the practices, values, and/or beliefs of a group of people. This ethnography usually refers to a written book, but it could also be a shorter written piece or a documentary video (Ruby, 1975; Spitulnik, 1993; Marks, 1995). I deal with the definition of ethnographic documentary later.

Anthropologists became the first ethnographers. In studying cultural anthropology, individuals worked with indigenous peoples and attempted to make empirical observations of their culture. Franz Boas is considered the father of anthropology in the United States and as an ethnographer he introduced the idea that culture should be understood in terms of its own beliefs and history, which meant an ethnographer needed to get a very good holistic understanding of the culture. Boas shares his reputation with Bronislaw Malinowski, who worked with tribes in New

Guinea in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He devised the importance of ‘participant observation’, which has become a foundation to the current method of producing ethnography. Malinowski published the famous *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922. It is stated that at this point modern anthropology was born (Appadurai, 1990).

During the emergence of anthropology the idea of integrating and understanding ‘other’ cultures contrasted to the worldviews of European societies whose ethnocentric and colonial attitudes had developed over centuries of empire expansion (Appadurai, 1990). After 1500, Western maritime and trade interests, along with the development of aggressive large-scale societies in various parts of the world, began to overlap. Commerce, conquest and migration emerged as empires pushed their influence and power abroad causing societies and cultures to overlap. This process accelerated after the start of the industrial revolution in Europe, which created complex colonial orders centred on European capitals and spread throughout the non-European world (Bayly, 1989). Advanced weaponry allowed ‘empire building’ states to expand empires into the lands of other peoples with relatively little resistance. Trade and power of nations grew hand in hand with the exploitation of these other peoples and their lands being paramount to such strategy. It led to the indigenous peoples being seen as ‘others’, their lands and often their labour a resource to be exploited (Appadurai, 1990; Bayly, 1989; Buzard, 1997).

The first ‘ethnographers’ were explorers and traders sent to bring back information about lands the colonial powers sought to include within their empirical realm (Buzard, 1997). This information about other peoples helped imperial nations exploit indigenous lands and negotiate political and strategic moves. It allowed empires to govern these areas with more confidence. Whilst ethnographers played an important role in providing the empire with information about other

cultures (Buzard, 1997), indigenous peoples from the outset were excluded from having a ‘voice’ in the descriptions of their own cultures and histories, despite being written about by their colonial observers (Appadurai, 1990). Instead, indigenous peoples were held under an umbrella of conquering, classifying, identifying, dividing and owning. The knowledge and interpretation of culture gathered by empirical expansion, is argued to have been the force that positioned ethnography in Euroamerican ethnocentric worldview. This was a process of empirical expansion that reached its peak by the beginning of the 20th century. This complex and overlapping set of “*Eurocolonial*” lands set the stage for a new form of intercultural communication (Appadurai, 1990; Buzard, 1997). The first ‘ethnographies’ or writings of other peoples, for popular reading came into production during the industrial revolution. Printing press technology and capitalism led to ethnographic stories being popularised through reports of adventure and conquest (Appadurai, 1990).

This first use of mass media to communicate ethnography only served to highlight difference between colonial peoples and their indigenous counterparts, creating an ‘us versus them’ by drawing boundaries on Western culture through marginalising the ‘others’. This has been referred to as “*dialectically generated nationalisms*” (Appadurai, 1990). Said (1979) highlights such use of ethnography by making the point that the idea of ‘orientalism’ was not much to do with categorising, defining or understanding the people of East Asia (the ‘Orient’), as it was defining the cultures of the West. These popular forms of ethnography Anagnostou (2006) refers to as “*popular folklore*”.

Anagnostou (2006) argues that popular folklore might have some cause in the current form of ethnographic analysis. The early popular ethnographers placed themselves in the third person

perspective and denied indigenous people a voice. Instead these people had their representation left to the discourse chosen by the author. So, unsurprisingly, colonial discourse saw non-Westerners as savages inferior to the West. This stigma is, and has been for many decades, echoed in popular ethnographies throughout the Western World (Anagnostou, 2006). This has caused the blending of anthropology and folklore. Ethnography and anthropology were 'framed' by these historical discourses and yet, from this point, anthropology would seek scientific legitimacy to represent the folk in an objectifying third-person authoritarian voice. For these reasons, the idea of 'us and them', observer and observed, formed within the foundations of cultural 'flows' that exist within the global community today (Anagnostou, 2006). Appadurai (1990) states; "*the revolution of print capitalism, and the cultural affinities and dialogues unleashed by it, were only modest precursors to the world we live in now*". Media powers have, since the formation of these foundations, only exacerbated the imbalance and ethnocentricity of these global 'flows'.

So it was the 'popular folklore' of ethnographers employed by expanding empirical empires, the revolution of print capitalism and finally mass literacy in the European homelands that saw the creation of the foundations of ethnography in global mass media today (Appadurai, 1990; Buzard, 1997). During the last century there was a technological explosion. It would expand the dissemination round the globe of the ethnocentric media of the West. This was media that continued to carry the faults of the age of imperialism, which would result in the decline in the number, health and diversity of indigenous cultures (Appadurai, 1990). Leading the expansion from print was the invention of cinema.

## The Birth of Documentary Film and a New Tool for Ethnography

This earliest ‘documentary film’ was ethnographic in nature. It depicted the human activities of those from other cultures, such as Muslims praying and was used to extract frames for movement analysis. The author of the work was Felix Renault. Renault’s work (unlikely to have been projected publically) came before the Lumiere brothers made the first public projection of cinema. It was considered scientific work of a ‘biological nature’, an approach anthropologists took towards the study of other cultures during the early period of modernism in European history (Marks, 1995). Photography, invented in 1839, was welcomed by anthropologists as a tool for use in the documentation of evidence (Jenssen, 2005). Such use of film expanded into the sequencing of images and the work of Renault. Six months after Renaults work was produced in 1895, the Lumiere brothers made the first public projection of moving images (Marks, 1995).

Cinema’s invention changed anthropology and ethnography. It was seen to have a sense of truth and immediacy. This led to a sense of promise over its potential effectiveness in scientific application (Rabinowitz, 1993). It was considered that cinema would have the ability to support, what at the time were, the positivist assumptions that objective reality is observable. Reality could not only be observed but it could now be captured on film “*without the limitations of human consciousness*” (Ruby, 1996).

But these expectations would be undermined by other potentials of cinema, entertainment and propoganda (Jenssen, 2005). Cinema was quickly adopted to the telling of stories leading to its rise in the entertainment industry (Rabinowitz, 1993). More importantly when considering its ultimate influence as a force of globalisation, cinema could also be shown to carry ‘intent’ (Ruby,

1996). It soon became more than just the realm of entertainment. It became a powerful tool of propaganda (Jenssen, 2005). The new invention of cinema quickly became popular, proliferating rapidly in its early days. Interestingly, the countries where it did so (Britain, France, Germany and the U.S.) all happened to be among the world's imperial countries with clear interests to "*laud the colonial enterprise*" (Shohat and Stam, 1994).

Cinema emerged at a time when imperialism was becoming popular within the working classes of Europe and the US. These films became "*diverting entertainments*" and helped fight against and neutralize issues of class struggle by creating a sense of national solidarity in the populous. They told stories of "*colonialism, conquest and adventure*" (Shohat and Stam, 1994). Cinema "*fed on the global mood of self-indulgence*" that came with the heights of colonialism (Jimenez, 2005). Two examples of such filmmakers were Martin and Osa Johnson who were very popular in the U.S. during the early twentieth century. They travelled to many different countries and represented the self-perceived superiority of the Caucasian race over other races. The Johnson brothers communicated these attitudes to the indigenous peoples with whom they interacted (Staples, 2005) and to the audiences their documentaries attracted at home. The narrative became more important than fact. Culture was 'created' by Hollywood scriptwriters who provided the filmmakers a fully approved script for them to follow when they arrived in the foreign country to start shooting. The prewritten scripts ensured "*fidelity to executive preconceptions and to popular folk models of the lives of people exotic to the West*". The way ethnographic documentary was being popularised caused concern for anthropologists and traditional ethnographers (Ruby, 1996).

Meanwhile, due to the views of Malinowski and other reforming thinkers of the time, anthropology was making a change in the way it 'viewed' indigenous culture. The transformation

from the 19th century natural science into a 20th-century ‘humanistic’ science saw an attitude emerge in ethnography much different to the ‘scientific’ approach seen in the use of the first ethnographic film of Renault (Hockings, 2003; MacDougall, 1978; Marks, 1995; Nichols, 1994). This is highlighted in Malinowski’s statement regarding the aims of ethnography as “... *briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world*” (Malinowski, 1922). The idea had emerged to study another culture by seeking its ‘subjective reality’ rather than apply scientific methodology and epistemological ideals. It would be a new concept for anthropology but not one that would be accepted by all. In any case, popular ethnographies began to emerge that told stories of indigenous peoples on a more personal level. These would enter the commercial ethnographic film market with attempts to produce feature-length films that would represent the lives of indigenous peoples in an entertaining form. This was usually done showing life as a struggle for survival (Ruby, 1996). This new form of ethnographic film that attempted to get the audience to sense the emotional struggle for survival was thought to be able to bridge the Western ‘us’ and the native ‘them’. Ethnographic film was seeking to get closer to its subject (MacDougall, 1978; Ruby, 1996).

Edward S. Curtis began this move with his film about the Kwakiutl of British Columbia *In the Land of the Headhunters* (1914). Contrasting to other ‘ethnographic’ films of the time, this film ‘kindly’ considered the emotions of these people, humanising and allowing the Western audience to empathise with the ‘other’. Colonial attitudes, and perhaps the fear of indigenous peoples, were cast aside. The focus was not on the dominance or bravery of the colonial ethnographer. Following *In the Land of the Headhunters* was Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*. Here, the ‘other’s’ culture became the subject of fascination and respect (Ionushi, 2010). Flaherty cast aside much of the colonial attitude, focusing interest on the culture of the Inuit rather than in his own society’s

colonial dominance and cultural superiority over them. In this film questions were raised about the abilities of indigenous cultures. What could the West learn from these people? How did they survive in such a punishing environment? New lines of humanising respect had been drawn between the ethnographer and the indigenous subject. The structure, however, of producing ethnography, with an ‘us’ and ‘them’ had not changed, despite the observed attempting to get closer to, and empathise with, the subject (Ionushi, 2010). But what were Flaherty’s motivations? It was clear they were not to give the Inuit a voice. The film did not depict their current reality. Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* was attempting to empathise with the Inuit’s ‘traditional’ way of life however Inuit culture of the region had already changed significantly under colonial influence. Flaherty made great efforts to remove traces of his own culture’s influence over the Inuits in the film (Ionushi, 2010). Why? What would benefit from seeing these people in their original dress for example that was of such great importance? It seems that ethnography was attempting to capture a disappearing past before it was too late.

Margaret Mead saw ethnographic films as having an important role as they could “*preserve cultural rituals in danger of extinction*” (Mead 2003). Films like Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* had a job of attempting to record what were disappearing cultures. It was known as ‘salvage ethnography’, (this perhaps explains in part, Flaherty’s desire to remove traces of Western culture from his film *Nanook of the North*) (Ginsburg, 1991). In fact Ginsburg (1991) argues that, “*ethnographic film was originally conceived as a broad project of documenting on film the ‘disappearing’ life-worlds of those ‘others’-non-Western, small-scale, kinship-based societies-who had initially been the objects of anthropology as it developed in the early twentieth century*”. This attitude resonated through ethnographic filmmaking over the remainder of the twentieth century. It seemed a natural reaction for people to preserve human culture with this tool. ‘Salvage



ethnography' was also proven to be able to draw large television audiences with the production of series such as the *Granada's Television* series, *Disappearing World* (Ruby, 2005). Interest in the cultural 'other' had been proven to exist, as had an interest in their protection. 'Salvage ethnography' would become a source of development and motivation in popular ethnographic film but would fail to offer indigenous cultures a true and significant 'voice' in global media 'flows'.

Documentary film became the most important tool for salvage ethnography in the 20th century. Some peoples went to great lengths to record cultures in order to preserve their memory. From 1950-59 John Marshall shot more than 500,000 feet of 16 mm colour film on Sans Bushman culture, producing what remains the most comprehensive visual ethnography of any traditional preliterate society (MacDougall, 1978). It led to the production of the first North American ethnographic film to get a global audience in *The Hunters* (Ruby, 1996). During the same period the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) sponsored film expeditions to Africa. Through such sponsorship, Edgar Queeny, who curiously was neither a filmmaker nor ethnographer, made films on the native peoples. These films broke with an established tradition in African expeditionary cinema, such as those established by the likes of Martin and Osa Johnson (Staples, 2005) by leaving himself out of the films. Abandoning reflexive techniques, he instead began to use 'observational techniques' similar to those advocated by ethnographers (Staples, 2005). Queeny took both the content and entertainment value of his films very seriously, employing both Hollywood scriptwriters and anthropologists to help him (Ruby, 1996; Staples, 2005).

These early ethnographic films had technical and cost restraints. Equipment was large, heavy and expensive so filmmakers such as Queeny worked on films that were carefully planned (Staples, 2005). High costs also encouraged the development of studio based film productions such

as *Tarzan* that moved to fill the niche of cultural media for the West (Prins, 1997). Competition with studio productions, along with the equipment constraints, resulted in much of Queeny's work to be scripted. Some ethnographic filmmakers, such as Flaherty in his attempts to record a 'preservation' of pre-colonial Inuit culture, even had scenes acted (Staples, 2005).

This all changed with the development of new motion camera technology in the late 1950's. Cameras became lighter and able to record sound in-sync with picture (Da-Rin 2004; Diniz, 2008). A journalistic style to ethnographic film emerged. The film became more about what people said in the moment than the preconceived shooting script, allowing films to be made on location (Prins, 1997). It also allowed teams to go further afield (Marks, 1995). The camera became more viable as a tool of ethnographers who had developed a practice of spending long periods of time 'emerged' in the culture they were studying making observational notes. Suddenly they could record their observations for all to see (Prins, 1997).

At the start of the 19th century the term 'science' came into use for knowledge that was supposed to be certain. The natural sciences, empirical and experimental in form, became distinct from the humanities. The scientific method was highly respected during the period of modernism and so the humanities, where knowledge that was thought or imagined, became less respected as forms of inquiry for understanding the world (Jenssen, 2005). Humanities were made up of philosophy or formal arts such as literature and music. Biology and mathematics were positioned within the sciences. Anthropology was initially positioned in the sciences. It associated itself in the natural sciences. Over time, during the period where the genre was 'humanised' by the likes of Malinowski, anthropology moved towards the social studies (Jenks, 1995; Jenssen, 2005).

Social studies were positioned between the sciences and the humanities and were thus caught up in conflicts over what was legitimate knowledge. There was a move to scientific methodology and the discovery of 'objective realities'. It was argued that social science should be restricted to the study of 'real facts' and based on a methodology of using 'neutral observation' made from a distance. The attempt was made to remove the subjectivity of the ethnographer or anthropologist (Jenks, 1995; Jenssen, 2005). Attempts to devise ways to create empirical data from such observations led to the concept that there existed normative principles underlying all activities undertaken by societies. These normative principles, it was believed, could be extracted by close observation and analysis. Hence video footage was seen as a highly effective tool in recording the essential details of this data gathering and information generating theory (Marks, 1995).

'Observational cinema' was valued as being a mimic of the anthropological practice. These films have been stated as being the "*jewels in the crown on the ethnographic film canon*" (Banks, 1992). This 'observational cinema' style required shots to be long with natural sounds and without cuts so occurrences could speak for themselves (Prins, 1997). As Adams (1979) points out, in this style of ethnographic filmmaking, neither observer nor observed should be affected by each other's presence, and nor should they communicate. "*The ethnographer is not the 'authority' for the events in the sense that 'life' or 'God' authorizes a fiction film. The ethnographer plays a dual role with a certain conflict of interest: he transcribes a set of circumstances and his interpretation of them. To this extent he is an 'authority', but one who can be questioned - by inquiring precisely into the gaps and discontinuities of his data and his interpretation of them.*" Barsam (1992) states that: "... *ethnographic filmmakers seek ... not to create a cinematic illusion of truth, but rather to recreate a physical and psychological verisimilitude.*" In other words, they seek, as in science, to find ways to argue that they are closer to the truth. Film, with its ability to record detail so well, became

considered an ideal data collection tool for ethnographers and anthropologists. Despite the promise for objective and detailed data collection; despite the commitment to provide factual data without creative input (Henley 1999); and despite the base in ethnographic research (Hockings 2003), academic forms of ethnographic film are considered no more objective (and often less) than traditional written ethnographies (Rouch, 2003). Why? Rouch (2003) argues the 'subjective eye' exists more in what is chosen and the order and angle of which is shown than the capabilities of the media. He writes: "*In both written and documentary ethnography, the presence of the author or director determines the text, the scenes, the selection of the interviews, and the takes and the cuts; and the final script represents the choices of whoever tells the story*".

Quite clearly, an ethnographer must filter aspects of observation for communication. All aspects, angles and hours cannot be communicated regardless of the medium in which they are communicated. Therefore an ethnographer must ask important questions about 'what' they want to communicate and to 'whom' (Prins, 1997). This realisation caused ethnographers to disregard the concept that film could be used to collect neutral or objective data in ethnography. Many turned their focus onto film's innate ability to communicate concepts and perceptions, albeit using a degree of artistic expression in such a powerful way. A challenge to the 'constructedness' of ethnographic film emerged (Fürsich, 2002). In art, the subjective power of creation is elevated; in science, the subjective influence must be minimized (Jenssen, 2005). Ethnographic filmmakers embracing the 'art' of the medium would help cause ethnographic filmmaking to become highly polarised. Meanwhile, anthropology and ethnography, embroiled in a losing debate over the search for 'objective truth', was forced to question its scientific origins (Marks, 1995). Functionalist and structuralist traditions of anthropology began to be undermined (Jenssen, 2005). Postmodernism emerged strongly influencing the social sciences including ethnographic film (Marks, 1995). The

naive notion that film could record 'objectively neutral data' lost support with time. It was eventually realised that film (and later video) had such an ability to give the perception of truth that it turn had the ability to generate whatever perception the filmmaker chose to communicate. How could the viewer be sure they were seeing the subject's reality? The filmmaker could manipulate the powerful medium of film, one that seemed so real, so easily. The focus would have to fall on the filmmaker's own subjectivity in order to rescue ethnographic film's role in communicating the culture of the 'other' to the audience, be they academic or public (Marks, 1995).

## **Ethnographic Film in Crisis**

Postmodernist movements forced the questioning of the modernist epistemological assumptions that had thus far been built into the foundations of ethnography and ethnographic filmmaking (Prins, 1997). Prior to these movements popular and artistic forms of ethnographic film had already taken an alternative path. Ethnography would follow two opposing and polarising directions in the search for understanding the 'other'. Scholarly forms, blaming the lack of an "*all encompassing theory-an anthropology of visual or pictorial communication*" would struggle to find purpose and place in representing mainstream anthropology. The anthropological mainstream would, in effect, be represented by popular forms of ethnography that acknowledged the "*centrality of the mass media in the formation of cultural identity in the second half of the twentieth century*" (Worth 1981).

This divergence actually started early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as ethnographical filmmaking conventions evolved from their simple, single-take episodes of human behaviour, into creative

forms that tended to interfere with the assumed scholarly needs for researchable data (Ruby, 1996). It would be the start of a conflict that would begin with the likes of Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), which infamously brought into focus the ease in which objectivity could so easily fall to the wayside in place of drama. Whilst standard texts on ethnographic film stated the need for the 'fly on the wall' approach, with the camera invisibly observing the activities taking place before it (Leger, 2007), Flaherty had intervened in the actions and culture of the Eskimo's he was commissioned to film. Tomaselli (2003) argues that this was done in order to achieve dramatic effect but as pointed out earlier, the ambitions of the film to act as a 'salvage ethnography' likely had greater influence over Flaherty's decision to conduct recreations. The motivations seem, however, to be mixed because, as Tomaselli noted, Flaherty's attempts to recreate the Inuit culture were poor. For example, Flaherty had the Inuit wearing clothing that to an unknowing audience 'looked' traditional, yet the clothing was taken from another unrelated traditional culture. So clearly the desire to create dramatic effect participated in Flaherty's ethnography. The desire to entertain or attract an audience is seen by academics to undermine the authenticity of ethnographic film. Tools commonly used for dramatic effect in the creation of cinema have been identified as distorting reality. These include mood music, slow motion, long shots and close-ups (Landy and Shostak, 1984, Tomaselli, 2003).

The human voracity for drama and story was not something that could be stopped. Dramatic effects became more and more commonplace in ethnographic films (Tomaselli, 2003). This pushed the genre, especially in the mainstream, further from having any credibility as a communication of objective truth (Ruby, 1996; Tomaselli, 2003). As Flaherty once noted: "*Sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit*" (Barsam, 1988). Yet did Flaherty really not consider the entertainment value of his films to the public when he dramatised his documentaries? I

suggest it unlikely. Despite this, drama would be quite a conscious tool for French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch and his ground breaking work that emerged decades later (Nannicelli, 2006). Perhaps Flaherty's concept of 'true spirit' was a realisation that engaging the audience, and using tools of drama to allow them to 'feel' the life from another perspective, the perspective created by the art of the author and the reality of the 'other', was more important than the emptiness that can be communicated through the emotionless details made using a scientific approach. What is it to know if we can't feel?

The strongest argument against Flaherty's stance was that the audience was presented with self-advocating 'truth'. Flaherty and others created ethnographic documentary films, which like all documentaries, made claims that they were representing 'truth' (Landy and Shostak, 1984). Hence it seems reasonable that they remained open to criticism for failing to be objective or scientific. Moreover, from a moral perspective, few in his audience would have recognised the 'lies' created by his dramatic effects, as he would be the first to attempt to document and present life in cultures such as the Inuit to the West. Flaherty, and many after him, deceived the trust of a naïve audience. It was a point of criticism that would motivate ethnographic filmmakers, led by the likes of Jean Rouch, to seek out ways to expose their subjectivity (Nannicelli, 2006).

Jean Rouch and other ethnographic filmmakers, who emerged during the 1950's and 60's, refused to adhere to the dogma of observational cinema. They revolutionised the genre of ethnographic film developing, for example, reflexive techniques that exposed the subjective positioning of the filmmaker and his or her interaction with the subject (Mortimer, 2007). It would bring them under attack from academics. It would seem that Rouch and others, by using the term 'ethnographic' to describe their films, were treading on claimed territory. These acclaimed

filmmakers were 'advancing' in directions the scholars in the traditions of ethnography opposed. Ruby (1975) writes: *"While it may flatter some members of our profession to think that anthropology has so captured the public's attention that filmmakers and distributors who know virtually nothing about our field seek validation by identifying with us, it is clear that the majority of these films were not intentionally produced to be ethnographic, nor do they in any way meet conventionalized expectations of what constitutes a valid ethnography."*

Many argued for the applications of the term 'ethnographic' to a film to be considered only on scholarly grounds under strict scientifically guided parameters. Others saw it from a far more liberal perspective. Surely, ethnography could also be argued to pertain to works that portray human culture, without the scientifically orientated ties to data collection (Landy and Shostak, 1984). The debate over how culture's should be interpreted and communicated using such a public and powerful form of media was, and remains, passionate. It was difficult to categorise all those who claimed their films to be ethnographic, together. There were valid arguments against those who claimed their films were justified in being labelled ethnographic, however filmmakers like Jean Rouch are argued to have been revolutionary figures of the genre. Landy and Shostak (1984) write: *"From the films of Robert Flaherty to those of Jean Rouch and Jean-Louis Bertucelli, filmmakers have entered the domain of the anthropologist and sociologist, in some instances naively, in many others with unexamined ethnocentric attitudes, and, in a few instances, with the objective of correcting, if not altering, the ideological assumptions upon which many ethnographic films are based."*

During the latter half of the last century the academic world of ethnographic filmmaking had been increasingly forced to reassess its own foundations. Criticisms from postmodernist reformers



were angled back at those advocating the 'scientific' ideology of neutral observation methods. These critics included practicing academics in the form of anthropologists as well as ethnographers working with film. Their rationale came from the argument that pure 'observational' filming gave the audience no context and simply could not be communicated without some form of interpretation which in itself was subjective, thereby undermining the point of using the observational techniques (Adams, 1979). It is hard to argue against such perspective. What purely observational film is in reality not subjectively dealt with either by the mind of the viewer or the person interpreting the footage for another? Many ethnographic filmmakers realised that their work did not comply with the impossible demands of the literature. They saw they were creating recreations of these cultures (Jenssen, 2005) and so, guided by theoretical perspectives that developed in semiotics and structuralism, started to become self-conscious about their own positioning (Prins, 1989; Prins, 1997). This questioning was not only placed on ethnographic film. It would come to influence all forms of ethnographic media resulting in the questioning of the manner in which the West interpreted indigenous cultures. For example, such questioning led to ethnographic filmmakers having their films viewed and critiqued by the indigenous subjects in the production process (Jenssen, 2005). Ethnography was plagued with the need for reform yet held back by 'scientific' ideology. Such failures in the attitude, philosophy and resulting methodology forming the epistemological foundations of anthropology and ethnography would undermine both disciplines. One such famous example, which is addressed in more detail later on, concerned Margaret Meads *Coming of age in Samoa* (1949), which, decades after its production, was claimed to be false by the subjects of her work (Heimans, 1988). Traditional models of research seem to have failed one of the most famous works of ethnography. Jenssen (2005) argues that the criticisms received by ethnographic film were merely a reflection of these failures of traditional ethnography. The counter

attacks by ethnographic filmmakers rebelling against the failure of these ‘scientific’ traditions were merely a precursor of the changes to come.

Can we truly know anything to be true? Does ‘objectivity’ exist as anything more than just a concept? This was a topic of questioning that came to light during the latter half of the 20th century and one that would revolutionize the epistemological foundations of anthropology and ethnography (Eitzen, 1995). Philosophers doubting the existence of ‘objective’ reality beyond perhaps the most scientific fields, such as mathematics or physics, denied social sciences of their ability to record ‘objective reality’. Eitzen (1995) states, “... *even if there is a concrete, material reality upon which our existence depends (something very few actually doubt) we can only apprehend it through mental representations that at best resemble reality and that are in large part socially created.*”

This change that took place during the 1970’s and 1980’s, succeeded in creating a major shift in the field of ethnography. It began with the likes of Clifford Geertz (1973) who described culture as “*a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life*”. His ideas caused major changes by anthropologists and ethnographers who started to base their work on the use of ‘interpretive anthropology’ rather than that of pure observation. Geertz’s work forced scholars to conclude that the study of other cultures was associated as much to the arts as it was to the sciences. This idea (emerging from movements of postmodernism) ‘shook up’ the confidence in the epistemological foundation of traditional ethnography. How would the discipline seek to understand other cultures now? It had previously orientated itself towards the sciences and their methodology for achieving objective data sets. Now these ideas were removed, leaving the discipline without a foundation. (Geertz, 1973; Heider, 1977). Despite so much destruction in the

foundations of ethnography, the inherent subjectivity in ethnographic film (and ethnography), would at long last be accepted, even if it was uncomfortable “... *it is inconceivable that an ethnographic film could be made in such a way that it did not distort or alter or select its images of reality... it gets us nowhere to ask if a film is subjective, or if it distorts reality. The answer to both questions is yes*” (Heider, 1977).

Ethnographic film lost its academic base of legitimacy. The documentary film genre on which the sub-discipline sat, had at this stage been exposed for its unavoidable subjectivity and subsequently attacked for its undeserved representation of truth (Marks, 1995). But what was truth now in the age of post modernism? Leaders in the field of documentary distanced themselves from claims of objectivity with many supporting the definition for documentary, “*a creative treatment of actuality*”. This definition was made by John Grierson, the same man who is claimed to have coined the term ‘documentary’ (Corner 1996).

Those who saw ‘the truth’ as being overshadowed by ‘the creative’ didn’t welcome this definition. Jenssen (2005) describes some of the backlash as a “*fear of the magic inherent in the film medium*”. Such attacks, however, only served to intensify the debate. Traditional ethnographers advocating strict scientific principles with ethnographic film being limited to physiological features of behaviour and technological aspects of cultures maintained their position (Jenssen, 2005; MacDougall, 1978). Popular ethnographic films, those most influencing the public, suffered the freedoms of subjectivity. Meanwhile, in a genre where objectivity was increasingly argued as impossible to achieve (Marks, 1995), the other side continued to fight for what philosophers defined “*a lost ideal*” (Geertz, 1988). Ethnographic film, losing attachment to the solid foundations of the sciences and yet still without the freedom of the arts, fell into a chaos of identity.

Robert Gardner (1987) characterized ethnographic film as “*the wilderness of a troubled game*”. Likewise Bill Nichols (1991) opened his article on ethnographic film by declaring the genre “*in trouble*”. Some even wondered: “*Has the visual anthropologist become superfluous?*” (Feitosa, 1991) Yet, with no other direction to follow, it is not surprising that scientific or structuralist approaches to ethnographic filmmaking were still advocated. Heider (1977) thought that though it was not possible to “*get at the absolute truth*”, in order to maximize the degree of ‘ethnographicness’ one could adhere to certain techniques in cinema and behaviour that would improve the film and bring it closer to representing the ‘objective truth’. Sidestepping the subjectivity debate, others argued that ethnographic film must adhere to scientific rigour and take account of the manner in which meaning is produced (Marks, 1995). Ruby (1975) writes; “*a filmic ethnographic work must include a scientific justification for the multitude of decisions that one makes in the process of producing a film*”. For many involved in ethnographic film, letting go of the search for a methodology that would reveal ‘objective truths’, did not come easily. Despite the upheavals of poststructural and postmodernist movements, many remained convinced that cultural studies should continue to get as close to ‘objective truth’ as possible through scientific methodology in the collection and compilation of data. Marks (1995), looking for ways to untangle ethnographic film from its epistemological roots in the natural sciences, highlights the point that the attempt to create reliable data collection using film is troublesome. The idea of removing the subjective explanation of events creates only further problems. What Marks puts forward instead is the idea that ethnographic film needs to experiment with form and content and look towards an idea of ‘evocation’ rather than ‘representation’ . He quotes Douglas Harper who could see a future where “*ethnography has moved from a kind of positivism to a stance of eclectic experimentation*” (Harper, 1989 in Marks, 1995) a stance where it could free itself of its scientific epistemological roots.

With ethnography and anthropology having been left “*shaken by a general loss of faith*” (Geertz, 1988)(by what some would argue was in many ways caused by the very use of film in anthropology and ethnography (Jenssen, 2005)), self-awareness in the discipline resulted. But this era of self-awareness that Loizos (1993) described as a process from innocent realism to self-consciousness, had reached far beyond ethnography and ethnographic film. Self-awareness pervaded even the most artistic genres of film. A good example of this new self-awareness came from French Marxist filmmaker and theorist, Jean-Luc Godard, who proposed that all film form is a reflection of cultural ideology. Hence, all films produced in a ‘capitalist’ culture, reflected, through their subjectivity, capitalist culture and could be classified as “*capitalist films*” (Henderson, 1970-71). MacDougall (1978) supports Godard’s point, arguing that films serve to tell us as much about the societies that made them as those, which they portray, in the same way that a rock painting can be analysed not for the message it was intended but for the details contained within it about the culture from which it was made. In a sense, the expression of culture, regardless of the film’s content, was inevitable. The culture that was being expressed, however, was not that of the subject. The expression was that of the filmmaker. The subjective reality of the filmmaker not only couldn’t be ignored, it became part of the film regardless. Where then, did this leave the subject? What of the indigenous cultures and their subjective realities? According to the arguments of MacDougall and Jean-Luc Godard it seemed the culture of the indigenous cultures been written into the minds and memories of millions using the language of our own culture’s subjective reality.

Whilst the subjective positioning of the academic ethnographic filmmaker was being realised, so were the negative effects of early 20th century ethnographies (Prins, 1997). The patronising colonial manner in which indigenous peoples were treated in films was communicated to huge audiences. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Martin and Osa Johnson produced ‘ethnographic’

films marketing themselves to the general American public. Their interpretation and interaction of other cultures reflected the colonial attitudes of the time. The naive notion that film could record 'objectively neutral data' took time to become disintegrated. West at the time. Pygmies were called 'monkeys' and 'niggers' and prodded to get sick on European cigars. The Johnsons treated African peoples as a form of wildlife despite the fact they undoubtedly were fed and sheltered by them. They positioned narratives in a colonial context that left them always in a position of authority (Shohat and Stam, 1994). Prins (1997) writes, "...*who pays for these fantasies? The audience, for sure. But, more importantly, the indigenous peoples whose cultures are being reduced to televised fodder*". Perhaps what Prins did not consider was how these films, ironically, failed so dismally to communicate the culture of their subjects, whilst succeeding to communicate the racist and colonial attitudes of their own society. These highly popular ethnographic films and others of similar character changed the attitudes in Western society toward indigenous people and wrote false memories about indigenous culture that echoed through generations (Fabian, 1983; Fürsich, 2002; Levy and Sznajder, 2002; Rabinowitz, 1993; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Waterson, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2006). Filmmakers would attempt to reverse the damage. Ethnographic filmmaker John Marshall dedicated years to the cause. His fight was headlined by his series *A Kalahari Family* (1951-2001). Marshall made attempts to document the negative political impacts of media 'myths' about indigenous peoples. He encouraged filmmakers "*to try to show reality*" noting that the 'realities' created on behalf of other peoples are communicated to all peoples including our leaders (Prins, 1997).

Popular ethnographic films like those of the Johnson brothers were not alone in being attacked for their colonial, racist and ethnocentric attitudes. Academia also received heavy criticism. In fact when 'postmodern' criticism was at its height, some cultural studies scholars in the

U.S. criticized anthropology as being the “*handmaiden of colonialism and racism*” (Bill Nichols, 1994; Ruby, 2005). Ethnographers were attacked as providing third party ‘authoritarian’ representation. They were pressured under the accusation of misrepresentation, to amend these errors using various strategies. This included reflexive ethnography where subjects and informers are involved often in the authoring process. These pressures filtered through to innovative ethnographic filmmakers and resulted in the emergence of what was called *cinema verité* (meaning ‘true cinema’)(Anagnostou, 2006). But the foundations for *cinema verité* had been laid down long before postmodernism emerged. This was achieved by a Russian cinematographer Dziga Vertov, who in the 1920’s created a radical new style of cinema called *Kino Pravda* (also meaning ‘cinema truth’).

## **New Ideas and New Perspectives**

The crisis of representation following the postmodernist movement saw the emergence of new approaches for transmitting anthropological understandings in film (Ginsburg, 1991). However decades before these movements, experimental cinema forms had exposed reflexive techniques, presenting the audience with the ‘behind the scenes’ of cinema production. In 1929 Dziga Vertov produced what was said to be “*the first major assault on cinematic illusionism*” with his film *The Man with a Movie Camera*. This ultimately led to the evolution of a new age of cinematography that would seek to provide the audience different perspectives on reality. These changes would also seek to show how reality is created by the camera operator. *The Man with a Movie Camera* is a dawn to dusk documentary where Vertov makes the point of exposing the role of the camera and the camera operator in presenting the subject, in this case, life on the streets in Russia. In fact

Vertov makes the camera and the camera operator 'central characters' of the film (Prins, 1997; Vertov, 1929). We see the cameraman climbing a bridge, tower and other structures to get footage. Later, footage of a man wheeling a cart overhead from ground view is followed by footage from above exposing Vertov getting up from the lying on the street with his camera after the cart passes over. Vertov even artistically reveals the mechanics of the camera, comparing it to a human eye. He shows how the camera generates responses from the people he films on the street. In one case he films people sleeping on the street who awaken with a surprised response to see him there. In a final scene Vertov takes the reflexivity a step further revealing an audience in the cinema, watching his film (Vertov, 1929). It was a powerful and groundbreaking display of reflexive techniques in cinema and one that would influence generations of filmmakers to come.

Allowing the audience to be aware of the role of the camera in the production of a documentary was a technique used previously by Flaherty in *Nanook of the North* (1922). It had never been done to the same extent though. Unlike Flaherty's film on the Inuit, which contained a partly contrived narrative and was theatrical in nature, Vertov sought to leave the theatre and enter life itself by using hidden shots of life untamed by narrative (Rabinowitz, 1993; Vertov, 1929). Whilst Flaherty, who was influenced by colonialism, engaged in an 'us' and 'them' mentality with his work (Nannicelli, 2006), the work of Vertov's *Kino Pravda* was in effect an auto-ethnographical work. It diminished the 'us' and 'them' allowing the camera, cameraman and subject to be explored simultaneously through their respective interactions. *The Man with a Movie Camera* opened up a 'rawness' to cinema that inspired the development of new forms of ethnographic film referred to in the previous chapter, that would deal with subjectivity in new ways by attempting to remove any ethnocentricity or cinematic theatrical divisiveness yet still allowing freedoms such as flowing narratives typically not considered adequate by traditional ethnographers (Jenssen, 2005). Arguably



the most well known of these developments was that genre that came to be known as *cinema vérité* led by Jean Rouch.

At the time of its development, *cinema vérité* was closely aligned to another form of cinema known as 'direct cinema' (Rabinowitz, 1993). Both movements were a reaction against the "contrived, didactic and melodramatic" forms of the time. *Cinema vérité* and 'direct cinema' would seek to get closer to reality and reveal aspects of life never before captured on film (Callison, 2000). They would also rely on light portable cameras that would get them away from traditional 'sets' that dominated the era before them. Realising the ability of the camera to lie, these two genres attempted to overcome the subjectivity of the filmmaker and the camera. However, in dealing with the latter issue they would diverge (Callison, 2000).

*Cinema vérité* and 'direct cinema' would influence a new age of ethnographic filmmakers emerging during this period, who were less constrained than those adhering to the traditions of written representation and scientific methodology. They would experiment with creative solutions to the issues surrounding subjectivity and representation, such as ethics and questions of epistemology (Ginsburg, 1991; Callison, 2000). 'Direct cinema' would attempt to deal with subjectivity in the camera and the filmmaker by controlling camera technique. These 'observational techniques' as Prins (1997) refers to them, have similarities with the more 'scientific' ethnographic films, however direct cinema was adapted to popular narratives. 'Direct cinemas' observational approach was described as representing "an effort to pierce through the individualistic reconstructions of reality ... in order to bring audiences closer to events as independent witnesses" (MacDougall, 1978). His goal was to "mimetically record reality as it exists before the neutrally

*observing camera. This implies a detached objectifying shooting style preferably with wide angle lens and long shots and certainly no montage*” (Prins, 1997).

Whilst ‘direct cinema’ attempted to keep the camera unseen or unnoticed by the subject so as not to interfere in any way with the events it was recording (Callison, 2000), *cinema vérité* did not. By contrast *cinema vérité* followed in the footsteps of Vertov, exposing the existence and influence of the camera in the film (Prins, 1997; Callison, 2000). Accepting the interference of the camera, *cinema vérité* would attempt to demystify and deconstruct the observational technique, uncovering the subjective influence of the filmmaker. This was done by taking on a reflexive approach and allowing the camera’s influence to be seen (Prins, 1997). Hence, despite their parallel objectives, *cinema vérité* and ‘direct cinema’ were in this way diametrically opposed (Callison, 2000; Jenssen, 2005). The dynamic form of *cinema vérité* would open the genre to more experimentalism with subjectivity. This was the key point of difference between ‘direct cinema’ and *cinema vérité*. *Cinema vérité* did not, as ‘direct cinema’ did, seek to escape its subjective positioning (Jenssen, 2005). Leading *cinema vérité*’s development, filmmaker Jean Rouch avoided some of the illusion that using a camera could create.

Rouch emphasized the presence of the filmmaker, the effect it had on the subjects and the editing techniques (Fürsich, 2002). As previously mentioned he supported using Vertov’s reflexive techniques over traditional methods of ethnographic filming believing it allowed him to get “*closer to the truth*” (Nannicelli, 2006). He thought that the camera’s presence could provoke what he called a “*cine-trance*” in which subjects revealed their culture (Ruby, 1996). Rouch argues against the observational technique, stating his earlier ‘observational’ ethnographic films were revoked for the fact they “*observe [Africans] like insects*” (Nannicelli, 2006). It was Rouch’s idea to evoke

'truth' by using the presence of the camera and the creation of certain situations (in a manner similar to today's popular forms of reality television). In addition, adhering to Rouch's own principles, the use of the camera and its influence and interaction over the subjects was always shown (Marks, 1995), which according to Rouch made the influence of the camera more open and honest. Rouch was made famous as an ethnographic filmmaker for his ability to break free of the 'ethnocentric gaze' (Nannicelli, 2006). But it seems that rather than break free of any gaze (which would suggest he had somehow avoided the innate subjectivity attached to the role of 'observer'), he allowed the gaze to be revealed and the subject's reaction and interaction to be exposed and considered. Many of these techniques were derived from those reflexive techniques formed by his predecessor Dziga Vertov's *Kino Pravda*. Another of his predecessors, Robert Flaherty, who some call 'the father of ethnographic film' (Nannicelli, 2006), had in many ways pioneered the idea of having the camera a part of the production in a form called 'the participant camera' (Prins, 1997). Rouch however, by allowing the people to speak for themselves, went a step further than both Vertov and Flaherty. He and removed the idealism and didacticism that existed in *Nanook of the North* (1922). Rouch used the reflexivity of the camera and camera operator in far more practical ways than in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) which was highly artistic. Rouch focused on providing allowing the filmmaker and subject to interact in ways that allowed respectful relationships to develop between the two and in ways that could be clearly seen by the audience. This offered his typically African subjects and their culture a more authentic voice (Marks, 1995).

Reflexivity has had its critics. Adams (1979) argued that 'reflexivity' only acknowledged the presence of the filmmaker and not the authenticity of the film. It was labelled as a tool of deception offering only the 'illusion of completeness' by creating "... a nest of Chinese boxes, an infinite regression, in which the actuality of events tends to recede". Adams (1979) continued,

arguing that reflexivity leads the audience to assume that the “*processes and conditions of communication have been understood.*” From this critical viewpoint, reflexivity in ethnographic films only provides a false sense of transparency. I would tend to disagree with these arguments, as although reflexive techniques could be used to create such illusions, it would rely on the motivations of the filmmaker to consciously deceive the audience. Furthermore, considering the ‘events to recede’ by the use of reflexive techniques is understating the ‘event’. The argument put forward by Adams (1979) suggests the primary ‘event’ lies in the actions of the subject and the secondary ‘event’ is the process of filming these actions etc. However the way in which Rouch framed his films for example, created a single event, which included the actions of the subject and those of the foreign film crew. The focus was as much on the interaction, an interaction that must be seen as an ‘event’ for the subject. People’s typical routines, habits and character change with the introduction of an outsider. It would be unimaginable that having guests from another culture, along with tools of observation such as cameras, could occur without causing self awareness inducing changes to daily life. The interaction is a unique event and cannot be interpreted as normality. Perhaps we could extrapolate therefore, that the methodology of ‘direct cinema’ with its ‘fly on the wall approach’ would serve to allow natural observations to take place and hence be a better option. Perhaps in some circumstances this is true. Yet it would have to be an almost deceitfully inconspicuous operation, where the subject was entirely unaware of their being filmed, for them to be completely ‘at ease’ and able to have the ‘event’ separate from the observation. I argue that Rouch, who recognised the centrality of the open and honest ‘event’, was correct in constructing reflexivity into his ethnographic films. Besides, it was the interaction between cultures that was taking place in front of the camera that exposed ‘subjective reality’ as a concept so well, in both observer and observed (Nannicelli, 2006).

The reflexivity of ethnographic documentary film, of course, can be approached from different angles and varying degrees. The reflexivity in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), was playful, entertaining and seemingly 'spur of the moment'. The same can't be said when considering complex reflexive techniques used in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961). This film has been identified as the first *cinéma vérité* film. It combined the ideas of Flaherty with those of Dziga Vertov (Ruby, 1996). In this film, Rouch and Morin turned the 'ethnocentric gaze' back onto the streets of Paris, with discussions and interviews with working class Parisians. Questions were posed to unexpected citizens such as "Are you happy?" that were designed to evoke depth and truth in the response of the subject. *Chronique d'un été* took reflexivity to a new level. Rather than merely acknowledging the presence of the filmmaker, the subjects were allowed to view the footage and comment on its authenticity. The subjects would in fact collaborate throughout the film (Adams, 1979; Rouch and Morin, 1961; Ruby, 1996). This work would revolutionise ethnographic filmmaking, moving the genre into considering collaboration between the 'observer' and the 'observed'. It was an approach that Rouch himself would spend almost forty years developing. Eventually he would share the role of director with his subjects (Ruby, 1996).

Rouch, through collaborating with his subjects, avoided issues of personal subjectivity. He thought of it as "*putting the subjectivity into the hands of the other*" (Nannicelli, 2006). The concept had been referred to as 'shared anthropology' (Nannicelli, 2006), 'shared cinema' (Prins, 1997) or 'participatory cinema' (Fürsich, 2002). The concept started with the likes of Flaherty who, during his filmmaking, had conducted screenings for his subjects. For Flaherty it was a way to be sure the subject would understand and accept what he was doing, helping him gain their trust and assistance (Nannicelli, 2006). Rouch's idea was far more developed. He would collaborate with his subjects

during the entire project from start to finish. It was, as Rouch describes, the only way he believed such ethnographical filmmaking could be done ethically (Jenssen, 2005).

The start of Rouch's career was "*a race towards presence*" which capitalised on new technology to get ever closer to the subject (Diniz, 2008). By reflecting and incorporating his own subjectivity into his films, it may be argued that he created the idea of 'shared anthropology'. It was as though Rouch wished to step away from his position as the filmmaker, and take a role in a self initiated collaboration that resulted in an obscuring or blending his subjectivity with his subject in the production of the ethnography (Nannicelli, 2006). Nannicelli argues that though Rouch himself was influenced by the colonial attitudes of his predecessors and society, he made concerted efforts to move away from these attitudes by allowing his African subjects to collaborate and to have their own 'voice' in his documentaries. Prins (1997) argues that Rouch's respect for his subjects and his development of 'shared cinema' or 'shared anthropology', broke down the colonial divide and offered these cultures a 'voice'. However, most of Rouch's work limited the 'voice' offered to his subjects to be an expression of their own society and culture. It was a degree of autoethnography that was offered by Rouch to balance their representation by a French ethnographic filmmaker to a Western audience.

Rouch certainly hasn't been the only innovator in ethnographic film. Others have attempted to find new ways to deal with issues of subjectivity and representation. Indeed representation, or who speaks on behalf of whom and with what right, had become an important question during postmodernism (Jenssen, 2005). Scholte (1972) argues reflexivity is only the first step and that ethnographic works should in being "*evaluative and liberating*" (Prins, 1997).

Such idealism was what led to a concept known as ‘visual sovereignty’, allowing the subjects of ethnographic films to represent themselves and create documentary films on their own cultures (Stoller, 1992). These documentaries, known as ‘autoethnographies’, extended the degree of autoethnography offered in Rouch’s collaborations. Autoethnographies were promoted by filmmakers such as Eric Michaels (1987) who advocated their production by indigenous peoples in Australia. Autoethnographies produced by and for the people of the same indigenous culture, Stoller (1992) explains, “*permits the flow of indigenous knowledge about such key issues as land rights, language acquisition, and preservation by narrativizing local and international struggles.*” These ethnographies help indigenous communities protect their existing cultures as well as develop their own position or perspective on history. They do not, however, effectively communicate to, or influence, other cultures. Most importantly they do not focus on cultural self-promotion or contribute cross-cultural critique into the system of global communications that helps form our global society and its culture.

Whilst developments such as reflective techniques emerged to deal with subjectivity (accepted by these people to be innate in the production of ethnographic film), the search for methods to carry out a scientific extraction of objective truths using film continued to be a goal for some ethnographers following the movement to post-modernism. Such work included the design of randomized sampling techniques in film to overcome the subjectivity of framing and temporal selection (MacDougall, 1978). These designs had merit under certain principles yet still produced data that, despite being scientifically gathered, was still unfiltered and required subjective methods of analysis to interpret. In fact it is this lack of appropriate methodology for extracting analysable data about culture from film (along with what I would argue to be misguided belief in the scientific

method's applicability in the discipline) that continues to inhibit the use of the video or film camera in analytical research (Ruby, 1996).

Underscoring all issues surrounding the limits of the medium to act as a tool of scientific data collection were the colonial attitudes that continued to adhere to an 'us' and 'them' approach. Unlike Rouch, those adhering to the 'scientific' approach could never truly claim to avoid the 'ethnocentric gaze' (Mortimer, 2007). In addition, films using 'scientific' techniques lack traditional narratives and are therefore impeded in their ability to access global media 'flows'. Even if the 'scientific' techniques were proven suitable as a way to use film and video to gather scientific data about indigenous cultures, the resulting films, with such a small audience, would still fail influence the cultural diversity global culture. What is the purpose of studying other cultures? If central to the intent of the ethnographer is the desire to communicate alternative cultures to an audience, then the size of the audience could be considered a crucial factor in determining the success of the communication. The popular arena is where public opinion can be changed. Ethnographers must consider the needs of the viewer if they are wishing to attract a wide audience. Using more popular narratives, Rouch would endeavour communicate to the public, all the while maintaining his objective to develop ethnographic film from a scholarly position.

Rouch used his 'shared cinema', and his reflexive and evocative techniques, in ways that helped create some structure to his documentaries. This structure assisted in moulding together a form of narrative that would engage the audience (Prins, 1997; Nannicelli, 2006; Callison, 2000). Despite the fact that creating a narrative means applying and accepting the subjectivity of the creators, it is argued by scholars that the narrative plays a vital important role in communicating to the audience (Eubank, 2003). Indeed, narrative is at the core of the way people, "*think, remember,*



*experience emotions and are persuaded*” and hence has been used to enact change in society (Eubank, 2003). Without the narrative thread, traditional ethnographic films would not only fail to communicate effectively to the public (Adams, 1979), they would also fail to communicate as an educational resource with teachers in the classroom argued to heavily preference ethnographic films with a narrative (Eubank, 2003).

Jean Rouch, realising the need for narratives to engage the audience, began developing a genre that came to be known as ‘ethnofiction’ (Nannicelli, 2006). Ethnofiction was said to be originally a concept derived from Flaherty’s 1926 film *Moana*. This work of salvage ethnography focused on recording the culture of a group Samoan island people that was rapidly changing due to colonial influence. This ‘salvage ethnography’ was also expected by Flaherty’s funders to gain a large audience. Perhaps this is why Flaherty created a fictional narrative and attempted to recreate the culture in its pre-colonial context (Doros, 1998). In his analysis of Flaherty’s *Moanna*, which combined reconstructions of culture with popular narratives, John Grierson coined the term ‘documentary’ for the first time (*Moana*. n. d.). Documentary was never originally a term applied to films that presented absolute truth. Hence, it is not surprising that later Grierson defined the term ‘documentary’ as “*the creative treatment of actuality...*” (Quoted by Eitzen, 1995).

Using fiction was useful to Flaherty on multiple counts: allowing him to script shots, keeping costs of equipment down; attract and entertain large audiences using dramatic narratives and; show and communicate culture past and present in the context he chose. In the same way Rouch used fiction to give him the freedom to explore and expose culture. Importantly, it allowed him to avoid the ‘minefield’ of issues and responsibilities that nonfiction prescribed (Nannicelli, 2006). Rouch would take ethnofiction and make it his own. He would not work on recreating

cultures for ‘salvage ethnography’ or the exotic appeal. Instead he created narratives of the present into which he placed his subjects, allowing them to act out their situation as though it were real. *Moi, un Noir* (1959) was one Rouch’s first attempts at such ethnofiction. It followed a group of young Nigerians who leave the Savannah to work in the Ivory Coast ending up in a poor region of Abidjan, “*lost and rootless in modern civilisation*”. The adventures found within this tale, using characters and events created in collaboration with his subjects, would expose aspects of culture and society that Rouch believed could only be shown through the narrative.

Rouch would still maintain his reflexive techniques in his ethnofictions. In Rouch’s *Jaguar* (1967), three protagonists from Niger travel to the Ivory Coast to seek adventure and wealth. Rouch enters scenes as the characters are being filmed and comments on the film’s creation as the story unfolds. While ‘objective reality’ isn’t captured in the images on the screen, the subjective reality (the perspective of life through experience and emotion) is effectively communicated through the narrative form. The story allows the experience and feelings of young men who venture on these long journeys to be ‘felt’ by the audience. In this way, the improvisations by Rouch and his subjects/actors were intended to reveal more about people’s lives than any authoritative documentary could (Staples, 2005).

Ethnofiction has been used for centuries as a way of allowing others to experience alternative realities. It is also a way of avoiding the issue of subjectivity that non-fiction documentary has been forced to contend with (Nannicelli, 2006). In fact Prins (1997) goes further to argue that techniques used by Rouch to avoid the issues of subjectivity, also avoided those realities that exist between indigenous cultures and their post colonial West: “...*postmodernisms such as reflexivity and ethnofictions may be manifestations of a false consciousness, representative*

*of a new world order ideology blurring our vision and distracting our attention. How really revealing are our reflexive stances? What do they really tell us? Showcased in the global market of televised culture, do they expose the real disparities of wealth and power? Or are they allowing us to suspend our belief by cinematically pretending that there is friendly community between 'us' and 'others'.*"

It was a valid point put forward by Prins yet possibly over critical. There is no doubt that Rouch, through his creation of 'shared anthropology' created films that were influenced by the relationship he shared with his subject. Yet highlighting 'disparities' is only a further act of vandalism. Would the right thing be to communicate that which colonialism created and on which the likes of the Johnson brothers focused, or would it be the right thing to communicate that which colonialism failed to see: the shared humanity of both Western and indigenous culture. Media propagates the messages it creates and Rouch created not the cultural divide Prins would identify with but a respectful relationship between cultures. Prins doesn't recognise how Rouch addressed the failures of his own culture. With *Chronique d'un été* Rouch turned to reflect on his own culture. Later he moved into the genre of ethnofictions. His ethnofictions evolved from dramas or re-enactments within African culture, to ones where Africans came to explore European culture. Rouch focused on the result of the colonialism yet his films were not aimed at highlighting injustices or failures. They focused on manipulating the viewer to understand the subjective realities of the 'other'. In my view this is a way to avoid the very issues colonialism created.

These new ethnofictions that allowed the African to investigate European culture form early examples of a genre of ethnography that became known as 'reverse ethnography'. *Petit à Petit* (1968), and *Madame l'eau* (1992) both tell stories of Africans investigating elements of European

culture. *Petit à Petit* (1972) is story about a member of a firm in Ayorou (called *Petit à Petit*) who goes to Paris. His firm wishes to build a multistorey apartment block. His mission is to figure out how people live in such structures. This reverse ethnographic parody blurs the boundaries of documentary that exist between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and between ‘art’ and ‘science’ by bringing together truth and fiction in “*ethnographic fantasies built around historical and social realities, complete with a cast of fictional characters*” (DeBouzek 1989; Staples, 2005).

Whilst Rouch describes his ethnofiction as allowing him to “*get closer to the truth*” (Nannicelli, 2006), I argue it was the ability to change the subjective reality through which life is viewed, that got him closer to the truth. This occurred in two ways. First, the power of fiction allowed him to act out reality from the position of his own choice. In many respects, these ethnofictions functioned like ‘reality television’ where narratives were created alongside reality through the manipulation of characters, environment, goals and obstacles. Secondly, fiction allowed Rouch to ‘act as if’ the real ethnographers were the African characters in the films. These were pseudo reverse ethnographies. As director he was playing a significant role in controlling these entertaining investigations of his own European culture. A true reverse ethnography would have required Rouch step back from playing a significant role in the production, allowing the indigenous voice and investigation to be independent in the production of the film. Whilst maintaining control of the production in the role of director, fiction allowed him to offer alternative subjective truths. In this position Rouch could create films that exposed to the audience their own life, history and culture all from a unique and alternative perspective.

When the production and therefore perspective of an ethnography is maintained from within the sphere of Western culture an alternative perspective to the one created is ultimately what the

postcolonial cultures lacked. Werner Herzog, understanding this, took on the challenge of producing a 'reverse ethnography' on behalf of indigenous peoples of South America who saw their history of colonisation from a different perspective. Herzog's film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* (1973) was based on written accounts on the journey of Spanish explorer Lope Aguirre, yet told from the perspectives of indigenous South Americans during the Spanish conquests. It shows colonial exploration not as heroic or endeavouring to civilize the 'New World', but as an endeavour filled with violence and cruelty in the name of material gain and religious conversion (Weaver-Hightower (2006)). It is a reverse ethnography, based on a true story. Because it is a recreation, Herzog has the flexibility to go behind the line of the 'other', allowing the audience to view history from their subjective reality or perspective. *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, like Rouch's reverse ethnographies, was produced through the assistance of a Western director or producer who helps interpret and represent the view of the 'other'. A 'true' reverse ethnography would be produced in an entirely independent fashion by the indigenous 'other'. I found no examples of any well-known and 'independently produced' reverse ethnographic work in my research. Yet reverse ethnographies produced under the 'direction' of western filmmakers such as *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* (1973) have managed to lead the way in demonstrating the ability of this genre to combat and balance the dominant ethnocentric and Western perspectives on history (Buzard, 1997). And of course reverse ethnographies have been proven do far more than simply provide an alternative angle to historical events they address. They call on audiences to question *all* histories, by questioning the subjective views from which they were told. They ask one to consider how might it have been seen from another angle? (Weaver-Hightower, 2006). And of course we require new angles to be exposed by reverse ethnographic films that not only look to balance perspectives on history, but also look to balance perspectives of the future with the reality of the present.

## Chapter 4: Function and Definition of Ethnographic Documentary

### Ethnographic Documentary Film: A Loose Definition with Focus on Function

Ethnography is defined as: “*the study and systematic recording of human cultures; a descriptive work produced from such research*” (Meriam-Webster, 2010a). But this single definition does not reveal the debates surrounding its use, especially regarding ethnographic film. How to separate ethnographic film from other types of film has been debated for decades. As a result, there is confusion over what criteria should be used to evaluate films. There is also a lack of established norms, which would allow audiences to separate ethnographic film from other types of film (Ruby, 1975). Anthropologist Professor Paul Henley states “*ethnographic documentary is something of a hybrid form, standing provocatively at the boundary of ethnography and cinema. For this reason, it has been the subject of endless controversy, with those coming at the form from an academic anthropology background attempting to minimize the amount of cinematic language that goes into the making of a film, and with the professional filmmakers doing everything they can to avoid burdening their works with what they consider pedantic ethnographic detail. For this reason, some people regard it as a profoundly problematic form*” (Flores, 2009).

As discussed in Chapter 2 film was first used in ethnography as a tool to descriptively record data (Ruby, 2005). It moved on soon after its invention to follow two lines of development that continue today. The first is as a tool of ethnographic art and narrative, first represented by works such as those of Flaherty. The second line of development was as the tool of cultural data collection as in the works of Regnault (MacDougall, 1978). So on one hand we can get a definition of ethnographic film such as this provided by Goldschmidt (1972) which closely aligns itself to the

traditional and 'scientific' practices of ethnography: *"film which endeavours to interpret the behaviour of people of one culture to persons of another culture by using shots of people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the cameras were not present"*. On the other side of the debate lies the following by Bill Nichols, opening up the definition to the arts. Ethnographic films, he says; *"are extra-institutional, ... address an audience larger than anthropologists per se ... may be made by individuals more trained in filmmaking than in anthropology, and accept as a primary task the representation or self-representation of one culture for another"* (Nichols, 1994). Buzard (1997) presents the dilemma of the definition being too open to a 'looser' interpretation stating: *"If we take 'ethnography' in the loose sense of the study of a people's ways, then what utopian work-with its detailing of (imaginary) alien social practices-isn't ethnographic?"* Heider (1976) suggests the same point, that almost any film about human beings could be considered ethnographic because regardless of subject matter the creation of its presentation contains human perspective: *"It is probably best not to try to define ethnographic films. In the broadest sense, most films are ethnographic-that is, if we take 'ethnographic' to mean 'about people'. And even those that are about, say, clouds or lizards or gravity are made by people and therefore say something about the culture of the individuals who made them (and use them)"* (Heider, 1974). Attempting to counter the ambiguity that comes with such wide-open interpretations Ruby (2000) argues for a restricted definition that defines an ethnographic film as *"one made by a trained ethnographer/anthropologist as a means of conveying anthropological knowledge obtained from field work"*. However a review of the relevant literature suggests that this is a minority opinion and the liberal use of the term in line with Nichols and others has continued (Ruby, 2005). The term 'ethnographic' has been applied liberally even by the American Anthropological Association which has used it to cover what Ruby (2005) argues is *"virtually any social documentary presenting an empathetic portrait of some aspect of a culture"*. 'Ethnographic' has even been applied to fictional

works like the Italian Neo-Realist works of the late 1940s (Ruby, 2005). Ruby (2005) writes the following: *“I submit that in the minds of many anthropologists, visual anthropology as ethnographic film is more associated with documentary film than with mainstream cultural anthropology”*. In accordance to Ruby’s statement MacDougall (1978) argues that ethnographic films *“cannot be said to constitute a genre, nor is ethnographic film-making a discipline with unified origins and an established methodology”*. MacDougall supports the argument that ‘ethnographic film’ does not constitute a genre by pointing to the fact that fiction films may be seen as ethnographic in their depiction of other cultures. So I will use Landy and Shostak’s (1984) suggestion that the primary project of ethnographic film exists in its interpretation of one culture to another, hoping not to offend those such as Ruby (1975), who have argued that there *“has been a sense of ‘hijacking’ of the term ethnography...”* Considering this thesis addresses the impacts of media on human cultural diversity a definition that focuses simply on function, I believe, is most appropriate.

## **Documentary as a Statement: A New Definition for a New Age**

Defining the word ‘documentary’ is also complex. I will seek to redefine this term as I believe that current definitions do not function to draw clear lines between what is ‘perceived’ as documentary and fiction film.

Several issues can be found in definitions of documentary. These surround its association to ‘fact’ and to ‘documenting’. The Webster’s Online Dictionary (2010) defines documentary as, *“a film or TV program presenting the facts about a person or event”*. Immediately we can find issues



with such a definition that adheres to the 'factual' association of documentary. The standard case against such a definition is put forward by the question: "What is fact?" Identifying with the word 'fact' creates the need for associating 'documentary' to something that is objective even though it is well argued that all documentaries fail in some way to be objective (Jenssen, 2005).

John Grierson, who coined the term 'documentary', defines it as: "*the creative treatment of actuality*" (Grierson, 1966). This is still argued as being one of the "*most serviceable*" definitions of 'documentary' (Eitzen, 1995). The issue with this definition is that it fails to isolate fiction from non-fiction films. Whilst this definition successfully negotiates the tricky association of documentary to 'fact', in doing so it fails to explicitly identify the difference between documentary and fictional films. It would be certainly possible to argue that many (or even all) fictional films with their allusion to fact may align to this definition.

To confront such issues Eitzen (1995) turns the question of "*what is documentary?*" to "*when is documentary?*" by putting forth the notion that a documentary film is a film to which the question "*Is it lying?*" can be applied. It brings us closer to the point of definition in allowing us to think about how 'documentary' is being communicated and perceived. But this definition fails to separate fiction film from documentary film. The film *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sanchez, 1999) was publicised by the producers using a website with what appears to be 'real' evidence supporting their claim that the film was made using 'real' footage (The Blair Witch Project, n. d.). This forced the audience to ask the same question Eitzen (1995) poses despite the fact it was a scripted fiction film with actors and not even a recreation (The Blair Witch Project, n. d.). Eitzen's argument also falls short when applied to fiction films based on a true story such as *Frost Nixon* (2008). This film was argued by some to be a faithful re-enactment of events

surrounding President Nixon's interviews with David Frost. Others argue they believe the movie contains inaccuracies (Drew, 2008). These people were asking, "Is it lying?" yet this film is classified as a 'historical drama film' (Frost/Nixon (film), n. d.). Posing the question, "Is it lying?" cannot define 'documentary'.

Nichols (1997) puts a definition of documentary film as: "*a broad category of visual expressions that is based on the attempt, in one fashion or another, to 'document' reality*". The Meriam Webster Dictionary (2010c) also signifies the importance of 'documenting' in its definition: "*of, relating to, or employing documentation in literature or art; broadly: factual, objective*". The argument, that the central objective of documentary makers as being 'to document' reality can be disputed. John Grierson first used the term 'documentary' when stating Flaherty's recreations of the daily life of a young Polynesian in *Moanna* had "*documentary value*". He argued it was the *presentation* of the film as 'truth' that gave it more appeal to the audience (Grierson, 1926). The representation of truth and the interpretation of truth, not truth itself, were highlighted by his comments. Documentary, perceived in the mind of the author and the viewer, has also certainly changed since those days. In the past, entertainment or interest in a documentary could arise from the audience merely being given the privileged access to witness places and people never seen before by the public. Today documentary does more than present the audience with a view on the previously unseen. It now: "*in complex ways engages and empowers dimensions of the public*" (Aufderheide and Nisbet, 2009).

'Engaging and empowering' the audience has moved documentary film into new territory. Many documentaries today seek as their primary objective to act as a voice of propaganda, or to educate on social issues. One of the most famous cases was shown in the documentary *An*

*Inconvenient Truth* (2006), which served to support Al Gore's campaign to bring social and political movement worldwide to addressing climate change (Murray and Heumann, 2007). Alternatively, the documentary may have an objective to attack or defend special interest groups as in the case of pro-creationist film *Unlocking The Mystery Of Life* (Allen, 2003), or the anti firearms lobby in *Bowling For Columbine* (Moore, 2002). Surely these films are more arguments than attempts to 'document' reality. 'Documentary film', defined by the act of 'documenting' might be argued to find itself more appropriately represented by news media programs which report events. And if we are to suggest that 'documenting' can be appropriately placed as a secondary objective then it could be argued that films based on historical events such as *Frost Nixon* that can also be seen as 'documentary'. While films such as *Frost Nixon* or *Bowling For Columbine* tell compelling stories they could be loosely argued to incorporate into their objective 'an attempt to document reality'.

Even though there are clearly difficulties in definition, (Juel, n. d.) recognises that: "*We seem to know quite well and instantaneously what a documentary is*". This is despite the fact that the traditional differences in editing style between documentary and fiction films are breaking down (La Marre and Landreville, 2009). To explain how documentary and fiction might be differentiated La Marre and Landreville (2009) put forth the argument that one is 'based' in fiction and the other not.

How does the viewer naturally differentiate between documentary and fiction? I would put forth the idea that the basis of communication intended in the production of the film holds the key to answering this question. A documentary, as opposed from fictional films, is a form of communication, which the author wishes to be interpreted as fact. Documentary relates to a form of

statement about the world. The word ‘statement’ is defined by Oxford Dictionaries (2010) as being: “*a definite or clear expression of something in speech or writing. 2 a formal account of facts or events...*”.

Meriam-Webster (2010b) defines ‘statement’ as:

*‘1 : assertion... b : a report of facts or opinions’*

*‘3 : proposition’*

*‘6 : an opinion, comment, or message conveyed indirectly usually by nonverbal means <monuments are statements in form and space — O. B. Hardison, Jr.>’*

Those elements, ‘statements’, can form a larger statement typically in the form of a narrative. The person making a statement would be intending to communicate in a manner that would be perceived as truth (even if this is truth of opinion). When a story is being told, the person talking is allowing a certain freedom of imagination in the listener. A focus is put on the greater metaphor, message or emotional journey carried by the narrative. The characters and events are merely tools for the cause. Even if fiction is based on truth it is ‘released’ to the imperative of the story experience, whereas in documentary, as in spoken statements, it is not.

Looking at ‘story’ and ‘statement’ one clear difference can be identified. This is the intention of how the film, as a form of communication, is interpreted is predetermined. This in turn directs the way one communicates. Whether the intention is to focus on story or statement is what the audience and filmmaker will ask themselves. In the end this common question drives the

production to have a form so that the audience is not left confused as to whether it is ‘documentary’ (a statement) or ‘fiction’ (a story).

Confusion between the forms could occur, for example, if a documentary mixed perceived truths with obvious fictional elements. Such an occurrence would clash with the expectations of the audience. The audience either expects truth or they release its importance. This is shown by research demonstrates that if the audience interprets the film as being a documentary, i.e. what I describe as a statement or series of connected statements, then they require that film to have a high level of ‘reality’ when compared with what they would ‘know’ about the outside world. Otherwise they reject the narrative and disengage. La Marre and Landreville (2009) write: “*theoretically...the perceived factual narrative (i.e., documentary) would require a higher degree of external realism than the fictional version. Simply put, if audiences expect a documentary to include a factual account of events, low external realism would violate their expectation and call the film’s validity into question*”. A historical re-enactment La Marre and Landreville (2009) argue, doesn’t call the films validity into question when external realism is low. So *Frost Nixon* (2008), despite its apparent historical accuracy and even questioning by the audience over its truthfulness, was given, due to it being told as ‘a story’ the freedom by audiences to move away from its factual roots, without them disengaging. The truth was not important. The story was.

Documentary classified as a ‘statement’ can be interpreted by the audience as a potential source of information. Fiction films don’t ask this of the audience (Pouliot & Cowen, 2007). This affirms documentary’s role in its ability to “*record, reveal, or preserve*” (Renov, 1993b) even if we are not recording truth. A statement of course, communicated as truth, can still be a lie. Considering all the above points I will define documentary when applied to film as: a series of

connected statements communicated as fact, expressed through a form of visual media and typically supported by audio.

## **Mass Media and Global ‘Statements’**

Ethnographic documentary, based on the definitions I have proposed, acts as a ‘statement’. This statement can be communicated through the media with the potential to reach across the globe. Documentaries, and the statements they make, have the ability to influence the perceptions people have of the world around them. Gilbert (1991) cites and supports Bain’s (1859) dictum: “*The great master fallacy of the human mind is believing too much*”. This is especially the case with the powerful form of media that is film and video. It mimics our own visual perception of the world, which makes it so convincing yet doesn’t represent any one reality. It actually allows one’s perception of reality to be broken into pieces that can be put together in new ways and both communicated and perceived as truth (Jenssen, 2005). As Prins (1997) points out “*the medium is not the message*”. However the manipulation of the medium has the ability to make the message a perceived statement of ‘truth’ in the public sphere that not only influences perceptions, but also the direction of humankind into the future as a globally connected and integrated species.

Mass media can act as propaganda and be intentionally used to influence the public by communicating a viewpoint that is linked to an agenda. Ethnographic cinema, have been used by political leaders such as Hitler and Stalin as a form of propaganda to ‘manipulate’ the minds of the public so as to move their support or loyalty in the desired direction of governance (Jenssen, 2005). But was such propaganda conscious or deliberate? Might they have truly believed they were

communicating fact to an ill-informed public rather than twisting the or manipulating the truth for their own cause? From our perspective it clearly is propaganda yet we must be aware of our own subjectivity in taking on such views. We must ask ourselves whether or not any documentary, which proposes to inform the viewer about an aspect of the world, might be labelled as propaganda. In the case of Hitler or Stalin, could such uses of the medium be labelled 'education' as opposed to propaganda if those who directed its content believed it to be true? In the U.S. ethnographic films are commonly used as teaching aids, whereas in the U.K. they are more commonly broadcast (Ruby, 2005). Could these films be considered as propaganda if they were created under a commercial agenda? What about salvage ethnography? Salvage ethnographies, as previously argued, create agendas that influence the production of the film. Besides, which documentary can claim not to have an agenda of some description that would influence the documentary's production and thus the audience? These are tentative lines that I am drawing however it seems very difficult to completely isolate propaganda from all forms of documentary. There is no single true perspective on any issue or aspect of the world regardless of how 'close to the truth' a documentary may claim to be. It is clear that documentary communicates a subjective viewpoint and thus in some form acts as propaganda and this point is coupled with the argument that film is 'the perfect tool' in influencing the way a people views their society (Shohat and Stam, 1994).

The point to make is that all 'statements' put through the media are subjective, despite the culture or organization from which they are derived. All these 'statements' made through the media impact the perceptions of reality within the audience. Filmmakers effectively create perceived reality by making these 'statements' and communicating them using the powerful media of video or film. Yet, as I have argued in the previous chapter, these 'statements' are mostly made by people or organizations of those cultures or societies in which global media is produced. Documentary

provides an avenue that can be used to access the persuasive global communication that is mass media. It, for example, has the potential to allow 'other' cultures to participate in the "constructivism" of our own global society through influencing our 'reality', thereby culture and individual lives (Jenssen, 2005). When the filmmaker's imagination is projected in the form of video/film and audio, what has become imagined becomes a creation of reality (Jenssen, 2005; Eubank, 2003).

Whilst I argue that it is difficult to separate documentary from propaganda there are differences in intention. There is an increasingly strong movement in the deliberate use of documentary to stand up for and argue support for a single cause in society (Berry, 2003). A good example of this is the recent release of a documentary by Joe Berlinger, *Crude*, (2009). This film showed the immense power documentary has to make global 'statements' with an agenda in support of indigenous cultures against even the wealthiest of corporations. *Crude* is a documentary that effectively seeks to generate public awareness about the effects of a multinational oil company and its operations in the Amazon, on local tribes. The documentary, which aims to draw attention to the cause of the indigenous tribes, has won multiple international awards and garnered huge international awareness for the issue. The documentary was released prior to environmental lawsuits brought against the oil company by the local peoples (*Crude*, n. d.). In this example it is shown how documentary actually enters the global media as a 'statement'. In this case the 'statement' serves to attack a transnational and globalizing power and defend against the views of the indigenous peoples by creating awareness and influencing opinion in the minds of people across the globe about the issue.



Documentary is increasingly seen as a way to use the documentary genre (with its association to ‘truth’ and access to mass media) to make ‘statements’ to the audience. Such documentary films have an agenda to address in society. Documentary has moved from doing more than simply providing public knowledge. The manner in which Aufderheide and Nisbet (2009) argues documentary today “*engages and empowers dimensions of the public*”, may be both local and global at the same time (Berry, 2003; Kuwayama, 2004). Unlike so much of the media forms or genres today (for example international news media), documentary film (and video) does not require vast amounts of capital to compete on local or even international stages. Documentary can be created by foundations or peoples operating as an “*uncommodified*” section of society. This has been a reason why documentary has developed an activism genre where groups vying for social influence use it as one of their most effective tools. It makes sense to use such a productive, popular and persuasive medium to promote the change in social consciousness. It explains the rise of an organisation such as *Abbas of Witness*, which specifically trains human rights groups to make documentaries to serve their cause (Arthur, 2005). It could be proposed that people using documentary to argue their cause have taken advantage of the documentary genre. Films such as *The Mystery Of Life* (Allen, 2003) and *Crude* (2009) exploit the power documentary to be believed. Yet documentary used as a tool of debate in society may be eroding the integrity of ‘documentary’ as they are not so concerned with truth or even how they balance their ‘subjective realities’ around a topic so much as they are concerned with the effectiveness of the statement to convince the audience of their argument (Berry, 2003).

In many ways, documentaries such as those made the effectively start a social movement or change social perspectives and which exploit the medium to give truth to only one subjective view of the world, are the kind Rouch and others, by balancing and dealing with subjective realities,

attempted to move ethnographic film away from. Yet such use of documentary is proving highly popular, largely because it seems they take a single subjective view on topics that often are already highly politicised in society. Michael Moore, a left winged and highly political activist produced three films (*Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *Sicko* (2007)) attacking the right winged elements of U.S. politics and society that all are included in the top 5 grossing documentaries of all time (*Box Office Mojo*, n. d.). These films unashamedly take a side in a social debate and use the power of the documentary genre, and the power of global media, to make 'statements' that will convince the audience of one subjective view in these debates. In fact what enables Moore to make such popular films, is that they take a side and make 'statements' on social issues that have already gained massive attention in the media. What makes Moore so popular is the unique and controversial angle he takes on these issues, yet so much of the promotion about the issues have been achieved by the political parties, organisations and corporations he then attacks. This trend in documentary towards the promotion of an argument rather than a balanced reflection on the world might be seen to correlate to the same trend argued previously to be seen in global news media broadcasting.

Yet what of Rouch and his attempts to expose subjectivity? Documentary is increasingly being used to convince the audience to accept one subjective perspective over all others. Used in this way it does not seek, like Rouch, to expose the subjectivity of the filmmaker and their perspective on the world. Nor does such use of documentary attempt to balance this subjective perspective with the perspectives of the film's subjects. Yet these documentaries are providing countering perspectives to those put into the global 'flows' by those with capital to dominate the media. Spurlock, M. (2004) showed how an independently produced documentary, made with a small budget could significantly counterbalance the powerful marketing capabilities of a global

corporate giant. *Super Size Me* (2004), is about Spurlock's 30-day, *McDonald's*-only food regimen, aimed at spotlighting the nutritional value (or lack of same) of fast food. The film grossed more than \$25 million worldwide and spawned a media nightmare for *McDonald's* and the entire fast-food industry. It attacked a global restaurant chain and the fast food culture of the U.S. It became a box-office hit, rating in 2010 as the thirteenth highest grossing documentary of all time (*Box Office Mojo*, n. d.) and led to the *MacDonald's* in the U.S. to remove their largest servings from their menu (Young and Nestle, 2007). Would this film have had such an effect if it balanced the corporate focus and ideology of *MacDonald's* with his own? I feel it is unlikely. The two sides would have neutralized the controversy this film generated. As Ruby (2005) points out, films like Rouch's, which dealt with exposing and attempting to balance subjectivity, were not popular enough in the public sphere to significantly influence popular ethnographic filmmaking. And despite the acclaim that Rouch received as a filmmaker his documentaries did not influence the global society like those of Michael Moore or Spurlock whose films, I believe, reveal an important point. The viewer likes to hear an argument that takes one side and is entirely subjective. It seems subjectivity should not be exposed but exploited. So perhaps the way for people with a small amount of capital to have their perspective considered in global society through the use of documentary film is to be subjective and to take sides on a public issue that has already generated its own publicity. This approach, taken by the likes of Moore and Spurlock, has allowed independent voices access to global media, which are currently overwhelmingly dominated by the subjective 'statements' of a dangerously small and elite proportion of global society (Castells, 2008; Davis, 2007; Sinclair, 1997; Ginsburg, 1991). At least taking this approach offers the chance for a diversity of views to make it into the global 'flows' and global culture where for now the voices of 'other' cultures are not being heard.

## **Domination of a few Subjective Realities**

*“For the most part, we think of truth not as some real and existent thing, but rather as a relative matter of how one views the world—that is, as a matter of opinion”* (Stoller, 1992). The world is in the eye of the beholder and ‘truth’, as Stoller sees it, is purely subjective. This concept is important if we are to appreciate the need for diversity in human culture. Wade Davis refers not just to individual truths or subjective realities, he also points out that different cultures generate different ways of seeing the world, stating that: *“... the world in which we live in does not exist in some absolute sense, but its just one model of reality”* (Davis, 2001). One the issues we face in an ever connected ‘globalized’ world is the increase of peoples who see reality from the same perspective due to what Stuart Hall (1997) called *“a dominant regime of representation”*. This ‘regime’ are the powers controlling mass media.

Appadurai (1990) argues the centres of media influence are determined by centres of common or similar language and/or location that have the most capital invested in media production stating: *“it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics.”* However, according to Kuwayama (2004), from an anthropological perspective, the ‘centre’ of the ‘world system’ are the United States, Britain and, to a lesser extent, France. The rest of the world, including his home country Japan, constitutes the ‘periphery’. So the study of culture and the spread of this knowledge (and its perspective) have been derived from these former colonial powers. Those cultures culturally ‘different’ to the Western nations from which the traditions of anthropology and ethnography were born, have since become ‘periphery’ cultures. Due

to this imbalance in the power relationship between the centre and the periphery, Kuwayama (2004) believes that the centre is able to force its views and its interpretations on the rest of the world. These nations that Kuwayama identifies, as well as being imperial powers, were leaders in the world in ethnographic film for most of last century (Jhala and Passagrilli, 2008). These written and film ethnographies have in many ways created the world's cultural history as one seen from a Western perspective (Weaver-Hightower, 2006) and so over the last century a handful of Western countries became responsible for reporting on and representing the world's cultural diversity (Landy and Shostak, 1984).

What were the motives of these Western ethnographers in their recording and communicating of other cultures? Marcia Land and Stanley Shostak (1984) listed them as follows: *“anthropological and sociological research, the fascination with ‘exotic’ and unusual cultural practices, and the interest in economic development at the behest of private corporations or governments.”* Clearly these ethnographies were shaped by these motives and the societies and cultures from which they were derived. Yet it wasn't the subjectivity of what they recorded that was important. It was how this subjectivity dominated early media, and hence formed the dominant and narrow perspectives of the global society that emerged from Western societies and culture. From within the thousands of cultures around the world, one culture had developed to have its subjective view of the world dominate, and ultimately influence nearly all others (Davis, 2001).

Reminded by the arguments by Jean-Luc Godard that films made in a capitalist society will produce only 'capitalist' films (Ruby, 1975), the perspectives of those in industrialized society, that indigenous societies were simple and inferior, were communicated in all Western ethnographies in either subtle or conspicuous form. Imperial attitudes were built into ethnographic works. Such

attitudes were perpetuated into global society through global media that emanated from the West to the rest of the world (Jhala and Passagrilli, 2008; Musser, 2006a; Musser, 2006b; Staples, 2005; Wakeham, 2006; White, 2003). Controlling the messages and perspectives that the media propagate has long been in the interest of governments, and ethnographic cinema was actively used by European imperialist powers to strengthen nationalism and social identification during the colonial period (Shohat and Stam, 1994). 'Statements' about the world and its cultures communicated by global media, have in this way created highly subjective and Westernised perspectives on the world's indigenous cultures in ways that continue to greatly influence the view of global society today (Jenssen, 2005).

The fact is control over the perspective of the media is highly lucrative for any person or organization interested in manipulating or controlling the view of the public. The powerful influence of mass media allows those with control over its dispersal, to dominate the 'subjective realities' of entire populations (beyond and within the borders of their own nations). A good example occurred in Venezuela during the coup in 2002 by anti-Chávez supporters and political opposition fighters. During this coup, private news media, allegedly in support of the anti-Chávez supporters, broadcast images of several Chávez supporters firing their guns at targets off screen followed by footage of wounded and murdered anti-Chávez protesters. However, the sequence was cut using scenes from different moments in time with cleverly chosen angles that made the sequence appear as it was filmed in the moment. Reality had been created and was later proven in a documentary made by Irish filmmakers to have been falsely edited together (in fact Chávez supporters were shown to be firing in self defence at unseen attackers from the opposition). The sequence became 'evidence' presented by the private news media and leaders of Chávez's opposition, to blame Chávez and his supporters for the violence that left 19 people dead in the

streets of Caracas. The footage, repetitively broadcast in Venezuela around the world, was used to justify the removal of Cha´vez from government (Schiller, 2009).

Using media to control the ‘subjective reality’ of a society is a cornerstone of political success (Jenssen, 2005). Where political control is paramount as in the case of a dictatorship, the force of mass media needs to be very tightly controlled as they can either support or dangerously undermine political and social control (Appadurai, 1990). In 1993 the Chinese government reacted to perceived threats by media powers taking control over its nation’s satellites and forced the removal of BBC channel. This followed a speech by Asian STAR TV owner Rupert Murdoch where he declared: “*(telecommunications) have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere ... satellite broadcasting makes it possible for information-hungry residents of many closed societies to bypass state-controlled television channels*” (Monbiot, 2008). As argued earlier, controlling ‘flows’ of media and culture within state borders is increasingly difficult (Ashuri, 2007). As those powers that control the media, struggle for influence over these global ‘flows’, indigenous peoples and their cultural perspectives are effectively sidelined from participating in global media thereby silencing the perspectives and wisdom they offer global society (Davis, 2010; Spitulnik, 2003; United Nations, 2010). Instead, the global audience is forced to see the world through the eyes of these dominant representations. These dominant representations themselves are only pseudo realities for the cultures they represent as they are created by media controlled by corporate and state objectives that present realities different to those of the public (Aufderheide and Nisbet, 2009). So globalisation through media is not only a spread of Western culture. It is a spread of a pseudo form of Western culture created by those with control over media.

The decline of balanced news and documentary in recent decades has been caused by the commercialization of media and the resulting increase in both profit demands as well as number of channels broadcast (Adams, 1979; Fürsich, 2002; Miller, 2006). The pressure to make more and therefore cheaper programming to accommodate the extra channels, has limited the time and money available for television production. Under these conditions, ethnographic documentaries have waned in their ability to adequately represent alternative perspectives. The increasing profit expectations by news and documentary channels has also been to blame for what has been a blurring of boundaries between information and entertainment (Adams, 1979; Fürsich, 2002). *Disappearing World* (BBC) was a series that focused on the documentation of indigenous tribes and their cultures threatened by globalisation. Launched in the 1970's, the series had a large budget, which was justified by a large audience and hence could provide the expertise of trained anthropologists to assist in the series production. But the big budgets that allowed a quality ethnographic documentary series like *Disappearing World* to be produced have gone. The new style of documentary reverts to specific subjective qualities aimed at commercial success with design around advertising slots and the ease of channel surfing with the 'remote control'. Due to these factors, broadcasters today are unwilling to pay for or broadcast the less commercially targeted films (those that don't fit today's commercial models and expectations) (Adams, 1979; Fürsich, 2002). Global television broadcasters are unwilling to show documentaries made by ethnographic filmmakers that follow in the traditions of the likes of Jean Rouch or John Marshall. This means the global media sharing public are not exposed to alternative and more representative perspectives and realities emerging from different cultures (Kilborn, 2004; Prins, 1997; Zoellner, 2009).

International journalism has suffered a similar fate. Zuckerman (2010) states that 35% of nightly news broadcasts in the United States during the 1970's was international news. During the



first decade of this millennium the figure sits at only 12 – 15%. He argues: “*The world is in fact getting more global, its getting more connected, more of our problems are global in scale, more of our economics is global in scale and our media is less global by the day.*” According to Alisa Miller, CEO of Public Radio International, U.S. news networks have reduced their foreign bureaus by 50 percent. She stated that at the time of her talk, the only media representatives that could be found in Africa, India or South America (three massive areas of the world) were in Nairobi in Kenya and New Delhi and Mumbai in India. Moreover each of these bureaus were represented by a single person. In her webcast on TED.com, Miller (2006) said that in February 2007, U.S. news accounted for 79 percent of all network/television. Russia, China and India accounted for less than one percent. News stories in the U.S. are recycled from centres such as *Reuters* and the *Associated Press* and as Miller argues, this means they are not written in a way that facilitates the ability of local readers to relate to their content stating: “*Everything is becoming all the more relative in this highly globalized world. Though there are a few organizations and publications out there working to fill this void, this burden cannot be shouldered by only a few*”. What we need, according to Miller, are better perspectives.

Zuckerman (2010) states that the task lies in the hands of people who have their feet in the culture of the viewer and the subject and therefore can understand how to tell stories about other cultures in ways that will relate to and engage the audience. These people need somehow to. Understanding both means they can make the story interesting and relevant to the audience. These people Zuckerman (2010) calls “*bridge figures*”. Those *Rueters* and *Associated Press* journalists, who generate international news stories for a global audience, are not (and cannot be) targeting the relatedness of an international issue to a local or even national market. Perhaps this is why international news media is not popular in the United States. If international news stories were

written in a way that related to specific audiences, international news would become more popular (Miller, 2006, Zuckerman, 2010). These same issues can be applied to ethnographic documentary.

Effective communication between peoples requires the understanding and power of perspective. An ethnography is the investigation of a culture that is unavoidably made from the context of another culture. It is important that ethnography put its observations in context with the culture and perspectives of the audience. An ethnographic piece of media such as a new report on an international issue, will fail to attract an audience if it is not 'speaking' to them in a manner that will let them see how and why the story could be seen as important is relevant to their lives. Despite this much of the world receives foreign media. How is this interpreted? In the case of the United States, with its huge export of media (CNN International, n. d.; Discovery Channel, n. d.; TVBlogit, 2006) we must wonder how the messages or statements about the world, carried in the broadcasts, are perceived by those outside the United States? Could it be that other cultures misinterpret or even resent U.S. culture due to the fact the media messages aren't speaking to them? How would a U.S. documentary, news programme or drama be produced differently if it was designed to specifically attract an Indian market for example? Subjectivity is not only unavoidable. It must not be attempted to be avoided. It must be embraced and understood and become the focus of attention in designing ethnographic media. If the audience cannot put the ethnography in context, i.e. if the subjective reality of the audience is not considered and the ethnography is not targeted at communicating to this audience, it will likely be misinterpreted or unattractive and thus fail as an effective communicative form of media. To see evidence of this we can look to the world of global advertising and popular media (Ashuri, 2007; Sinclair, 1997).

There have been more failures than successes amidst global brands that attempt to create a 'singular' global marketing strategy or message. More success is gained when the strategy is reversed and when campaigns for transnational companies are localized (Sinclair, 1997). The model that sells newspapers, where the question the editor must ask on behalf of the reader is "*how does this story relate to me?*" works in the same way for global marketers. Thus it is not surprising that it functions in the same way for global television broadcasters. Even broadcasters forced into collaborations with other broadcasters in other countries in order to attract sufficient funding to produce a show, demand that shows be reshaped for their audiences (Ashuri, 2007). People and cultures want to be communicated to personally. Global media needs to be considered in the way it allows a balance of cultural perspectives to permeate global 'flows', as well as considering the effectiveness of these 'flows' to communicate to other cultures and their subjective realities. Global media, especially that with ethnographic content, needs to be adapted for the audience. If not, then the media will either fail to 'speak' to the audience or force the audience to change their perspective, thereby increasing the singularity of global culture. Global television broadcasts, such as those made by or on behalf of international broadcasters like *Discovery Channel* or the *BBC*, are produced with perhaps one or two markets in mind even though they receive viewers from cultures all over the world (Ashuri, 2007; *Discovery Channel*, n. d.). When we talk about mass media and the communication of culture, as Heider (1974) argued, everything is ethnographic. All media contains human and cultural perspective. It all communicates and propagates this perspective to the audience. So for ethnographic media to offer an emerging global society influence from a balance of cultural perspectives we need media to be produced by, and for, a range of cultures. Ethnographic media has a long way to go in order to achieve this balance.

## How Ethnographic Documentary Speaks to the Global Community

It is ironic that ethnography has attempted to speak ‘objectively’ on behalf of the ‘other’ from within the confines of a post-industrial subjective view of the world (Landy and Shostak, 1984; Marks, 1995; Ruby 1996). Michael Hertzfeld (1985) writes of ethnographers: “...*we all too easily forget to give the villagers themselves a voice. Indeed, the very act of writing ethnography presupposes that the villagers’ ideas belong to the level of description rather than of theory, and this obscures their ability to draw on a theoretical (or at least conceptual) capital of their own*”. Whilst the study of Western culture has fallen within the philosophical and abstract realms of art and theory, indigenous cultures have been offered technical forms of analysis (Hertzfeld, 1985; Marks, 1995). Would ethnographers have considered applying ‘observational’ methodology to understand modern European cultures?

Though Herzfeld’s comment was insightful enough to recognise that the analysis of an indigenous culture requires the same respect and style of analysis we might give those of our industrialized societies, it was in no way a proposal to give indigenous peoples a voice that would provide them an equal platform between their own culture and that of the ethnographer. I would argue that the development of ethnography is lacking proper reform. The foundations of the manner in which we consider other cultures have not moved far enough to offer a true voice to indigenous peoples. Neither ethnography, nor ethnographic documentary, were ever based on any philosophy of creating a global or international platform from which cultures could communicate and learn from each other for the benefit of each other’s cultures. (Appadurai, 1990; Featherstone, 2006; Ginsburg, 1991; McGregor, 1988; Pickard, 2007). What I believe we must consider, as a foundation for ethnography, is the idea that ethnography should form a communication between peoples that

operates on equal terms sharing ideas, knowledge and perspectives of the each other's cultures and the world. What caused the West to think indigenous cultures should be studied differently to the way we would investigate industrialized cultures? The West, and the globalised society that has emerged from its influence, is still bound by perspectives born in the colonial attitudes of the past (Appadurai, 1990). There is also an ethical issue in the practice of globally representing a culture from the subjective position of an outsider. Indigenous cultures are studied by those in the industrialised world, and this knowledge communicated via various media, without the indigenous peoples having control over, or the ability to publically respond to, these ethnographies (Hertzfeld, 1985).

The development of 'reflexive techniques' can be shown to have failed in their attempts to balance perspective in ethnographic film and allow the indigenous subject a 'voice'. 'Shared cinema', for example, moves to put the ethnographer and the subject on more equal standings, however they operate within parameters of the films production. For example, in the reflexivity of a film such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), the advice given by the Inuit subjects to Flaherty on how they considered his portrayal of their culture does not represent a 'voice'. The film itself was an investigation and a statement made by a representative of Western culture for Western culture (Raheja, 2007). If the Inuit were to have had a voice of equal standing, i.e. if we were instead to imagine the Inuit were to have had the technology, expertise and capital to travel and make a film about some aspect of the world and communicate it to the industrialized world at the time, what would they have said? Where would they have travelled? What would they have investigated and why? The point is we do not know. Reflexivity does not offer indigenous peoples a true 'voice'. They do not truly represent themselves nor do they have the authority and freedom to choose subject matter and audience. They are asked to participate and assist in the creation of another

culture's 'statement' and their input is a reaction to circumstances imposed upon them. This 'voice' that Hertzfeld (1985) refers to is nothing more than this the role outlined above. How can we provide these cultures the same opportunity to speak to the world through mass media like the representatives of the industrialized societies?

Autoethnographies, allowing indigenous cultures to produce ethnographies on their own cultures, may be an answer. They have been argued to offer indigenous societies a defence against the effects of globalization, as well as being used to assist in the academic study of these cultures (Buzard, 1997). However, an autoethnography cannot be compared in function in global media 'flows' to the ethnography of an industrialised society. Unlike an ethnography, an autoethnography is clearly not an exploration and critique of the 'other'. At least not by the filmmakers. Typically initiated by and produced for a globalized audience they operate as a way to observe, or learn about issues surrounding, indigenous cultures from a new perspective (Buzards, 1997). The audience being the 'true' observer, observer and observed roles remain the same as traditional ethnographies. This surely does not constitute a 'voice' in global society or therefore a representative 'voice' for indigenous culture within the global 'flows' carried by mass media to the global community.

The traditional ethnographic film model (Figure 1.4) functions to identify other cultures in ways that can be considered as relevant to the knowledge that the ethnographer seeks to gain about the world for his or her own culture or society. It is a form of communication between cultures initiated and motivated by industrialized society. It does not operate with the view of questioning what indigenous peoples wish to say about the world around them. Rather ethnography seems to have developed from the simple ethnocentric desire to negotiate ones 'place in the world'. Said (1979) observed this phenomenon when considering the way the Western trading nations bound up

Asia into the term 'orientalism'. Said argues this was not a way of defining the (obviously highly diverse) Asian states or cultures. Rather it was a way of distinguishing the boundaries of their own Western culture and a way of defining their own place in the world. This phenomenon can help explain the traditional ethnographic model. Wilton Martinez (1992) did a study that provides evidence to the argument that ethnographic films tend to reinforce the ethnocentric attitudes. The study suggested that it wasn't the 'other' the audience were identifying with, rather it was the identification of their own culture, achieved by contrasting themselves with those of the 'other culture' through the shared cultural subjectivity of the filmmaker. Shared cinema, through its collaborative design, helped resolve some of these issues. However 'shared cinema' still is bounded by ideas of the initiator and maintains the ethnography to communicate an investigation of one 'other' culture to be presented to an audience of the filmmaker's culture (Mortimer, 2007). Though Rouch is quoted as describing 'shared cinema' as a creation by the filmmaker that is a "*celebration of a relationship*" (Nannicelli, 2006), it is a relationship engineered and initiated by the filmmaker in order to assist in making a statement to his or her audience. It has not been created for the indigenous culture to have the same freedom of expression and ability to project into the global sphere as is held by Western ethnographic filmmakers.

The issue is clear: ethnography is a form of pseudo 'cross-cultural' communication where the consumer and the producer of the communication are from the same culture. The industrialized societies produce ethnographies, representing through global media, the indigenous subject from the perspective of the ethnographer. People in the industrialised societies, who are of the same culture as the ethnographer, then consume this ethnography. Except for authentic autoethnographies, ethnographic documentary films operate as statements about indigenous cultures to the world which, as Bill Nichols explained, may be made "*by individuals more trained in*

*filmmaking than in anthropology, and accept as a primary task the representation or self-representation of one culture for another”* (Nichols 1981, quoted in Landy and Shostak, 1984).

The issue of dealing with subjective reality when representing another culture has underscored the crisis in the genre and driven the experimentations and developments seen with the likes of *cinema vérité*. However, it might be understood that the problem behind the crisis lies in the communication structure and not in the methodology of representation undertaken by the ethnographers as Waterson (2007) would claim. Landy and Shostak (1984) argue that the problem in ethnographic film is that it fails to “*confront the significance of the interaction between different cultures*”. They argue that the failure arises when ethnography creates an ‘us and them’ style of inquiry which they see as an inquiry into cultural ‘otherness’.

How can the inquiry into ‘otherness’ be criticised when subjectivity is unavoidable? The interaction between cultures is significant but investigation into ‘otherness’ is part of this interaction. I argue that problems lie in the structure of ethnography. The structure fails to allow indigenous cultures to participate in the exploration of ‘otherness’ that could be applied to their investigation of industrialised societies. The structure also fails to offer indigenous cultures the chance to contribute perspectives into global media. It is the structure of ethnography that positions itself so deeply in one culture from where only one subjective reality of the world can be explored, that fails to confront the “*significance of the interaction between different cultures*” (Landy and Shostak, 1984). It is not the idea of ‘otherness’ itself. First ethnography needs to form a structure, which dissolves any centrality. Yet, ethnography, in its traditional structure, forms a ‘conversation’ about a perceived ‘other’, between the ethnographer and the audience. It does not allow the interaction of cultures to develop into a proper dialogue. It operates (shown in Figure 1.4) from a



central cultural perspective, a cultural perspective that emerged in the West (Kuwayama, 2004). Global society needs the powers controlling its media to relinquish the 'voice' of ethnography, 'let go' of their dominance of ethnographic communication and perspective, and share it with other cultures.

Most communication between cultures, and the major force of globalisation, is taking place via the world's mass media (Spitulnik, 1993; Appadurai, 1990; Ashuri, 2007). With mass media having markets ethnocentrically focused on the markets in the world wealthiest industrialised nations such as the U.S., the idea that the world's vast cultural diversity may have their subjective realities, their unique perspectives and their unique cultures, participating in global 'flows' and the developing global culture by way of ethnographic film is highly contestable (Featherstone, 2006; Appadurai, 1990; Pickard, 2007; Spitulnik, 1993). Societies participating in the creation of a global society need to reconsider the approach to how we study, communicate and preserve human cultural diversity in ethnographic documentary. Primarily, the emerging global society must become aware of its own self as an independent culture that has emerged with its own unique subjective view of the world. Thus for thousands of cultures we must realise we are the 'other' (Davis, 2001). To contest the spread of ethnocentric views of the world via mass media we need media to work with a balance of cultural subjective realities.

## Chapter 5: Creation of a New Model for Ethnographic Documentary

### From Objective Reality to Balanced Subjective Reality

James Surowiecki makes the argument in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* that the mean of a group of individually independent decisions is far more accurate than any one individual in the group, even when most people in the group are not well informed or rational (Sunstein, 2004). Surowiecki argues that when our imperfect judgments are aggregated without anyone individual decision being influenced by another, our collective intelligence is generally excellent. Does our global society allow a wide variety of culturally independent perspectives to be expressed? No one subjective reality may be correct, but the balance of as many cultural subjective realities that act on the formation of a global society formed by globalization would, according to Surowiecki, allow global culture to be 'wiser'. Could ethnographic documentaries, rather than attempting to create what Barsam (1992) called "*a physical and psychological verisimilitude*" for an individual culture in a single ethnographic production, find a verisimilitude for an emerging global culture using this idea of 'the wisdom of crowds' by considering how to balance the world's subjective realities or cultural perspectives in global mass media?

Ethnographic documentaries are, as Errol Morris puts it, neither true nor false. They are simply "*movies*" (cited by Adams, 1979). Attempts to present absolute objective truth in ethnographic film have failed (Marks, 1995) and movements to balance or avoid issues of representation and subjectivity have developed into ideas such as 'shared anthropology' or 'shared

cinema', however as discussed in the previous chapter, even these forms of ethnography are communicated from the filmmaker to his or her own society or ones within the globalizing sphere of globalized/industrialized societies. Indigenous peoples are not balancing such forms of communication by producing their own ethnographies on industrialised/globalised societies. Rather, they absorb our own autoethnographies (Diawara, 1988; Ginsburg, 1991; Sullivan, 1993). Indigenous peoples might make their own autoethnographies that they consume themselves, however these generally constitute a form of culturally 'internal' communication. Ethnographic films in the mainstream media are all produced from one subjective sphere. If subjectivity cannot be avoided then at least a balance of subjective realities from a variety of cultural perspectives could be argued to better serve the emerging globalized world (Eitzen, 1995; La Marre and Landreville, 2009).

Factual audiovisual media function as a 'third eye', used by the public to interpret and make sense of the world (Shohat and Stam, 1994). The media that emanate from a central and dominating neoliberal culture only serve to spread that single globalizing culture through other cultures. This influences peoples' perceptions or subjective realities; as Gilbert (1991) explains, "*organisms need not question percepts, because percepts are for the most part faithful representations of reality*". Having mass media, global 'flows' and a global culture formed from a balance of our species cultural diversity would really rely on media to expose global society to as many cultural perspectives as possible. Logic follows that, following Surowiecki's formulation, a variety of independent perspectives would allow global media to communicate a more accurate truth. Achebe (1989) puts it more simply: "*[I]t is arguable whether we can truly know anything which we have not personally experienced. But our imagination can narrow the existential gap by giving us in a wide range of human situations the closest approximation to experience that we are ever likely to*

get.” We need to create global media that communicate as many independent cultural perspectives as possible.

It is not only about the balancing of ideas. Cultural diversity gives global society options and a resource of variation on ways of doing things to improve our society. A compelling example was given by Derek Sivers (2010) who stated: “... *sometimes we need to go to the opposite side of the world to realise assumptions we didn't even think we had and realise the opposite of them may also be true. So, for example, there are doctors in China who think that it's their job to keep you healthy. So any month that you are healthy you pay them and if you are sick you don't have to pay them because they failed at their job. They get rich when you're healthy not sick.*” Global society under a single cultural perspective will fail to take advantage of the wealth of ideas, opportunities and wisdom that exists amidst the diversity of human culture and so diversifying cultural perspectives that influence global society is vitally important. Incorporating this principle into ethnographic documentary by using dynamic and multiple representations is a principle Stuart Hall (1997) describes as one that contests “*a dominant regime of representation*”. Banks and Morphy (1997) call for ethnographic documentary to “*transcend the political nature of presentation and to rethink its strategies for engaging with the world*”. I propose that Hall's idea of obscuring domination of a single perspective should not be applied to within the boundaries of the documentary itself. It should, rather, be applied, to the system through which the documentary communicates by maintaining dynamic and changing cultural representations into the global media ‘flows’. This means balancing the subjective realities carried in global media ‘flows’ using a variation of cultural perspectives on humanity and global society.

This call to balance subjective realities hasn't been one isolated to intercultural representations and communications such as ethnographic documentary. It also applies to social documentaries that communicate within societies including global society (Aufderheide and Nisbet, 2009; Whiteman, 2009; Schiller, 2009; Kilborn, 2004). Such movements have led to the emergence of 'documentary activism'. This style uses documentary to counter and correct mainstream programming by media powers allied to government and big business, with a central idea of providing a platform for the airing of independent perspectives (Kilborn, 2004). Yet there has been mainstream success with 'documentary activism' through films such as those of Michael Moore. We need such successes through the 'activism' model to be taken up by indigenous cultures to counter the dominant perspectives underscoring globalizing media 'flows'. Fürsich (2002) notes that a single culture can't be represented by a single perspective. Global society too cannot be represented by a single, or a few, dominant cultural perspective/s. A developing global society must incorporate the thousands of potential cultural perspectives.

It is still the aim of ethnographers to provide indigenous cultural 'realities' a voice for the benefit of the ethnographer's society through furthering the search for knowledge about the world. Thus ethnography seeks to provide society with new perspectives or new subjective realities on the world and human culture (Flores, 2009). Anthropologist, Paul Henley is a professor at the Granada Centre, which focuses on educating students in ethnographic documentary. He argues, the aim of education is to provide students the ability to "*communicate a particular understanding, a particular vision, of a given cultural reality*". Or as MacDougall himself has argued, documentary not only has the ability to show alternative subjectivities, it also works between them: "*to construct a way of looking at the world that is inter-subjective and, finally, communal*" (1998b). So we can look to balance subjective realities by providing global ethnographic media a 'blend' of

independent cultural perspectives. Or perhaps, as MacDougall argues, by portraying varying perspectives within a single documentary. However I would contend that any such documentary requires both cultures to be exposed to analysis, not simply a shared analysis of one culture. And perhaps this is best done by offering a variety of perspectives within the global 'flows' rather than within a single ethnography for, as argued before, when considering the success of documentary activist films in the mainstream media, a balance of perspectives within a documentary may possibly neutralise the 'statement' and make the documentary less popular. Unfortunately the current mode of representation erodes such possibilities. As I have argued, this is because most representations in ethnographic documentary global media emerge from our own ethnocentric cultural and hence subjective sphere. How can we see alternative subjective realities, when they are made from this perspective?

The crisis that arose in ethnographic documentary stems from the idea of representing the 'voice' or perspective of another culture. If one represents their own perspective, the truth of their own subjective reality is self-contained. Attempting to interpret and then represent another's subjective reality denies the people of a given culture the ability to have their own 'voice' heard. The representations that ethnographies have traditionally been, have denied indigenous peoples the communication between cultures of their own true subjective view on the world. The subjective views and misinterpretations formed by the ethnographer become communicated to the world through ethnographies (Rabinowitz, 1993; Spitulnik, 1993; Waterson, R. 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2006). Fabian (1983) argues that ethnographers must move away from this 'positivist' approach with alternatives to the current ethnographic approach by advocating "*a turn to language and a conception of ethnographic objectivity as communicative, intersubjective objectivity...*" In many ways it could be argued that Rouch with his 'shared cinema' was adhering to ideas of finding what

Fabian called “*intersubjective objectivity*” by creating a relativity of subjective truth (Feld 1989). However, I would argue that it was not until Rouch saw his ethnofictions play out across cultures that he escaped the issues of representation. This allowed a ‘natural’ form of communication to emerge between both European and African culture through his ethnographic films. When proposing Rouch allowed a ‘natural form’ of communication, it would be as if we were to imagine ethnographic documentary as a statement that was made in a conversation between two groups of peoples or representatives of them. How would a traditional ethnography appear? Clearly, it would be one-sided with one side would avoid being observed. Rouch managed to overcome this issue in his ethnofictions by allowing cross-cultural dialogues where both cultures are exposed and open to questioning by the other. Ethnographic documentary requires something similar. I believe we need what Habermas (1984) proposed as a “*coercion-free discursive context*” in order to establish a form of communication that functions like “*ideal speech*”. It is a model that allows both cultures to discuss matters of culture and interest from equal platforms that he considers a “*normative model*” for knowledge production and democratic decision-making. How do we achieve this in ethnographic documentary?

## **Identifying the Missing Perspective**

When Jean Rouch moved away from the ‘minefield’ of ethnographic documentary, avoiding issues of subjectivity and representation by moving into ethnofiction, he discovered a new freedom in his ethnographic filmmaking. This freedom allowed him to balance subjectivity and hence reveal the subjective realities of both Western ‘us’ and the indigenous ‘them’ in a new manner. Rouch’s ethnofictions would include what has been argued to be the first ethnographic film to observe

Western culture from another cultural perspective (Nannicelli, 2006). *Petit à Petit* (1969) was Rouch's first 'reverse ethnography', though it contained a fictional narrative and was therefore more specifically a 'reverse ethnofiction'. As outlined in Chapter 3, in this 'African' investigation into Parisian culture, Damouré from Niger decides to build an apartment block and goes to Paris to investigate "*how people can live in houses with more than one storey*". Reporting home on his study, Damouré's letters to his companions in Africa about Parisian culture are interpreted as being so strange his companions believe he has gone mad. They send for his rescue. This highlights Rouch's attempt to make his ethnofiction show the people of Europe as 'others'. The European audience are exposed to a 'reverse' or 'outside' ethnographic perspective. It is one that sees their own Western culture as being so bizarre that Damouré's companions cannot accept the reports by Damouré as reality. They come to the conclusion instead that Damouré has gone crazy showing to the audience that what is normal for one culture is crazy for another. The subjective 'eye' had been turned back onto the West.

Rouch uses this 'reverse' model again in another of his ethnofictions *Madame l'eau* (1992). This time the same character Damouré, who plays a farmer from Niger, needs water for his rice fields however the river is dry. He decides to go to Holland to find out how to build a windmill. He heads to Holland by plane taking his donkey with him. During a visit to a university he meets a young engineer with expertise in windmill construction. Damouré asks to be taught the whole system stating: "*I know the Europeans only too well. It's done, they go, and two days later it's broken and you are left to sort it out*". Here Rouch plays on perspectives identifying how both sides can be ridiculed from the position of the subjective 'other'. The Western audience would certainly find highly strange the decision to bring a donkey to Holland by plane. On the other hand Damouré ridicules the lack of common sense in European culture when he clearly identifies with aid projects



that have failed due to lack of support after construction. Understanding the history of European development projects in Africa, Damouré insists on receiving information about the whole system of the windmill. Both cultures are exposed to questions by the other that reveal the benefits to sharing cultural perspectives.

*Petit à Petit* (1969), and *Madame l'eau* (1992) allowed Rouch to expose his own European culture from the perspectives of alternative realities. Perhaps Rouch was mostly concerned in showing Europeans the existence of their own subjectivity through these films. As fiction films, they may have escaped issues of subjectivity that have traditionally been imposed on ethnographic documentary, however they were limited by the fictional story and its creation by a subjective mind. We would be wise to ask whether Rouch's ethnofictions were the subjective reality of West African culture or were they a creation of a subjective reality by a Western author's perspective on the represented culture's reality? In any case, by turning the perspective, conceived or real, onto the audience and the European West, the importance of subjectivity in ethnography is revealed. At last we are allowed to see past the subjectivity of the Western ethnographer and at the same time understand how the subjective 'eye' exists without relation to objective truth. This is highlighted by seeing how the European is 'seen' by the African perspective. And so even though the fictional genre places the ethnographic content under the veil of another layer of subjectivity, this time in the creation of the narrative itself, the flexibility of the fictional narrative gives the ethnography the ability to come close to another's subjective reality.

Rouch's 'reverse' ethnofictions analysed differences between cultures in a way that formed a duality of reflexivity. This was created by having both cultures being observer and observed on equal platforms. This allowed a closeness or a commonality between the cultures that resembles EP

Thompson's (1968 cited in Tomaselli, 2003) notion of 'experience'. Thompson describes a mechanism by which to reduce the distance between observer and subject (though I argue we are both subjects in an ethical and healthy communication); "*by looking at intersubjectival, observer-observed (both 'us' of 'them' and 'them' of us') interactions, and of the nature of negotiations which engage and lessen these kinds of separations*". Allowing the audience to understand the fact that each culture has its own subjective reality is crucial. It teaches the audience that the concept of 'other' can be applied to each and every culture. This actually gives both cultures a common trait, the experience of being the strange 'other'. Furthermore, I argue that understanding one's own subjective reality allows the ethnographer to identify it and better consider its effect on the production of ethnographic work. It can have the same effect on the audience in considering their own subjectivity and the way it affects their attitude towards other cultures. Highlighting subjectivity by balancing our own with those of 'others' was what Rouch effectively did through his 'reverse ethnographies'; ethnographic cinema finally allowed the 'other' to speak back at us.

*"The dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a mechanical 'cine-eye ear' which is such a 'participant' camera that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things"* (Rouch, 1975). I imagine Vertov and Flaherty would have wished this imagined technology to allow them to see into indigenous culture. However I don't believe that an indigenous culture, understanding that they were able to communicate with sound and vision all they saw and experienced to the rest of the world, would today choose to film themselves in their day to day life. This is merely an extension of the same ethnocentric attitude. What would this offer the indigenous culture? It is not simply about allowing indigenous peoples to film themselves as if it were some kind permissive gesture. Given independence to create ethnographies, would another

culture necessarily want to create an autoethnography? Perhaps they might rather investigate and comment on those cultures and societies they do not understand, especially those most affecting their own? I would suggest many would prefer to investigate other aspects of the world in the way Rouch suggested through his ethnographies, and in the way Western culture has sought over the centuries. The curiosity of humans to investigate the 'other' or the unknown is surely universal. Furthermore, could we not suppose indigenous peoples, affected by globalisation, might like to make statements into the global society? Would they not, knowing how, take advantage of the powers of the mass media as a way to serve their own interests as we often do in creating our 'statements'? If so, where are these ethnographies? Is this not the missing link?

When considered as cultural equals it is simply ethically sensible to exchange observational and interpretive roles between cultures. Surely all cultures share the same desires of understanding the world around them including other cultures? And why wouldn't we allow this curiosity from all peoples to expand into the global sphere of mass media? If Brantlinger (1990) was correct in saying "*In order to understand ourselves, the discourses of 'the Other' – of all the others – is that which we most urgently need to hear*" then perhaps we need to start asking for outside opinions on the global culture we are all forming in this ever connected world. This global culture is what Pratt (1986) calls the "*metropolis*" with all other cultures the "*periphery*".

		WHO IS REPRESENTED	
WHO REPRESENTS		Periphery	Metropolis
	Metropolis	Ethnography as practiced by Malinowski and followers; study of 'traditional cultures'	'Metropolitan Autoethnography'
	Periphery	Auto Ethnography as described by Pratt	Reverse Ethnography

Figure 1.5 Pratt's (1986) model of Periphery and Metropolis (from Buzard, 1997)

In Figure 1.5 we can see the four modes of ethnography as described by Pratt (1986). Pratt was describing ethnographic texts as one in “...*which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others...*” (Pratt, 1986). The metropolis is of course a blend of cultures, mostly derived by those variations within its borders, but limited by the common factors of Western culture. Globalisation is essentially a large variety of cultures, new ones forming all the time, yet all based on and connected by a single foundation, neo-liberal capitalism (Appadurai, 1990; Harvey, 2005; Pickard, 2007; Sinclair, 1997). The periphery includes thousands of vastly different and highly evolved human cultures (Davis, 2001). The ‘periphery’ needs to balance the blend of cultures in the ‘metropolis’ with a true representation of human culture or a balance ‘subjective realities’. Figure 1.5 shows that ‘reverse ethnography’ can help to create this balance.

## **Reverse Ethnography - Balancing Subjective Reality of Global Society**

Reverse ethnography is difficult to define. However Buzard's (1997) idea of the 'periphery' vs 'metropolis', suggests the definition is derived from ethnography made between those cultures inside and outside industrialized societies. There have been changes to cultures, once considered as the 'periphery'. This has occurred as industrialization and global connectedness has increased through trade, travel and communications (Appadurai, 1990). Traditionally reverse ethnography has been considered the observation of traditional cultures by their former colonisers (Padel, 2007). These relationships and the industrial 'state' of former colonised societies have changed. In many cases, former subjects have seen their societies and cultures transformed by colonialism into Western capitalist societies. Traditional lifestyles in such cases only exist in remnant form (Davis, 2001; UNESCO, 2002). This would suggest a moving of former 'periphery' cultures into what is considered the 'metropolis'.

As such, we can now consider the 'metropolis' to be synonymous with our globalized society. This places the indigenous, non-Westernized cultures on the 'periphery'. There are obviously various states of a culture or a society where they may contain differing blends of the 'periphery' and the 'metropolis'. Many indigenous peoples now live within the context of overruling Western societies and these peoples, such as the Maori of New Zealand or the indigenous peoples of North America, would find themselves in this situation. They are still independent indigenous cultures in many aspects, yet obviously ones very much adapted to the societies they live in. So cultures may range from those derived directly from the European and American industrial revolutions to those that are to this day without significant influence from

globalizing forces, such as a few remaining indigenous hunter gatherer tribes of Ecuador which have little or no contact with outside culture (Davis, 2001). Reverse ethnography is the ethnography of those cultures from which industrialization, colonisation and ethnography emerged. These are cultures in the 'metropolis'. Reverse ethnography is made on these cultures by those indigenous cultures still existing in part or in whole, on the 'periphery'. It is the fact that these 'other' cultures have differing foundations to their culture and the manner they survive, that I would argue makes their perspectives are so valuable. They offer an outsider's perspective on an expanding 'metropolis' or global society. These perspectives offer a counterweight of diversity to the singularity that is forming at the centre in the 'metropolis', where cultural diversity is rapidly being lost through the interconnectedness of peoples and places and the domination of neoliberal perspective through the globalising powers of trade and media (Appadurai, 1990; Castells, 2008; Pickard, 2007; Steger, 2005 UNESCO, 2002).

The further we step into the periphery to look at indigenous cultures, the further the 'percepts' become from our own reality. For example, anthropologist and journalist Wade Davis reflects on the indigenous peoples he has studied and speaks of how different to our own globalized perspective their perception of reality is. This includes a people known as the *Barasana* who, due to living in dense rainforest do not distinguish the colour green from blue as both canopy and sky equate to the heavens. He also talks of the *Waorani* people of the Equadorian Amazon who, when looking for specific plants in the forest, state they find them by listening. Davis explains that apparently "*you take each of the 17 varieties of a single species and they sing in a different key*" (Davis, 2010). We probably could not conceive of such ways of 'seeing' the world until we are shown. The fact is as a single culture we become blind to all the possible ways human have evolved to see the world.

*“When these myriad cultures of the world are asked the meaning of being human they respond with 10000 different voices and its within that song that we all rediscover the possibility of being what we are...”* (Davis, 2010).

When we receive knowledge about other cultures from an ethnocentric and singular viewpoint we risk becoming ‘blind’ to their knowledge. Until postmodernism there was a strong belief by Western ethnographers and anthropologists that their systems of knowledge were superior to those peoples they studied. This impeded any sense of self reflection or a sense of ‘learning’ from other cultures (Marks, 1995). I would argue such attitudes have persisted in popular ethnography dominating mainstream global media. Wade Davis points out that: *“even those of us sympathetic with the plight of indigenous people view them as quaint and colourful, but somehow reduced to the margins of history as the ‘real world’ meaning ‘our world’, moves on”* (Davis, 2001). ‘Our world’ is sacrificing tens of thousands of years of cultural evolution and all that has been learnt in this time across thousand of different cultures due to our failure to open our culture’s subjective view of the world to the wisdom of other cultures (Davis, 2010; UNESCO, 2002).

Reverse ethnography is not simply a reverse of ethnography. It allows the comparing and contrasting of culture and society by allowing the audience or consumer of the ethnographic work to be the subject of the ethnographic analysis. This is not the case with ethnography where the audience and ethnographer are of the same culture. Of course it must be realised that it is likely that in an ethnography, the intended audience might be the audience that forms the most profitable market. In a reverse ethnography the most profitable market is of course the subject in the form of the ‘metropolis’. Regardless of the rationale for having the audience and the subject as one in a

reverse ethnography it has some huge benefits. These can be shown by the (2009) BBC production *Meet the Natives*. This series allowed the British audience to see themselves through the lens of a foreign ethnographer in the form of indigenous hunter-gatherer tribesmen from the Pacific. The ‘peripheral’ traditional indigenous pacific tribe culture investigated, and presented to, the ‘metropolis’ of a Western culture. A ‘traditional’ ethnography would have reversed subject and ethnographer without changing the audience. This was the first time such a project had been undertaken. Channel 4 stated that they hoped the series (which aired in 2009) would “*act as a counterpoint to programmes like BBC’s ‘Two’s Tribe’*” (BBC, n.d.). The *Two’s Tribe* series was produced in the traditional ethnographical documentary format, with British explorer, Bruce Parry, living amongst and attempting to understand remote indigenous cultures from around the world (BBC, 2008). Channel 4 deputy head of documentaries Simon Dickson said: “*It’s about time we turned the mirror on ourselves...While we’re often baffled and amused by the customs of communities on the other side of the globe, this series will show that some of our rituals... look pretty peculiar to outsiders too,*” (BBC, n. d.). *Meet the Natives* as the *The Independent* (2007) reported, marked “*a scientific first*”, stating that “*...until now, anthropology has always been a one-way street; alien cultures have never ‘gone native’ over here.*” The show was structured around the visit to Britain by a delegation of Kastam tribesmen from a tiny South Pacific Island called Tanna. For a month, operating their own video cameras, they investigate the “*strange and alien inhabitants*” of a modern Western British culture (*The Independent*, 2007). By being investigated, the ‘authority’ was placed in the hands of the ‘others’. The indigenous peoples offered their perspective on many aspects of British culture. For example, they were amazed that the British spent most of their lives working. They were critical of what they saw as the breakdown of the family unit. They saw the homeless as a failure of the family and society to support those for whom they are responsible. One day during rush hour on London Bridge the Kastam representatives tried



to talk to people passing by. It was rather unsuccessful. They were left bewildered by the stressful and unfriendly lives of these British folk. In the end they offered a fascinating and brutally honest criticism of British culture. They saw the British had lost the most important things in life in: “*love, happiness, peace and respect*”.

Anthropologist Kirk Huffman says: “*One of the problems of our modern world is that for too long we’ve regarded these cultures as a sort of exotic creature, thinking how primitive they are... But I’ve spent 18 years living with them, and there’s a lot we can learn. They are much more open-minded, and interested in the big questions. In the West, we are obsessed by little things. Our culture is all about how: to travel faster, to live longer, and make more money. Smart cultures are more about why. They are more reflective. That’s what they can teach us.*” (*The Independent*, 2007). Reverse ethnography allows us to see ourselves from another perspective and question our own lives in the ‘metropolis’. And, perhaps, we in the globalised society of the ‘metropolis’ are missing some of these bigger questions, and unable to see the bigger picture.

Reverse ethnography can also help global society become more understanding and accepting of cultures alien to their own. A reverse ethnography can, by placing the audience in the perspective of the ‘other’, help us realise our common humanity. When allowed to see through the eyes of another culture, we are relieved of the fear and the myths surrounding the unknown. This is especially true with the fears that we may have created of other cultures through media surrounding topics such as terrorism (Appadurai, 1990). *The New Americans* (KEF, 2009) is an ethnographic documentary series that shows the above argument for reverse ethnography. The series follows new immigrants to the U.S. It acts as a reverse ethnographic documentary by having the participating subjects become observers of their new country. This is undertaken through the unfolding of these

people's lives as they are followed during their emigration into the U.S. from four different countries of the world. This reverse ethnography was made to engage white middle-class audiences while appealing to a diverse audience with a broad range of ideologies about immigrants and immigration. The focus on U.S. culture and a look on how it is perceived and encountered by new immigrants, puts this culture under a spotlight. It is shown, from this outside perspective, to be 'strange' and full of imperfections despite its promise for a better life (Kemmit, 2007).

The reverse allows the dominant perspective of the audience to be influenced simply by putting the audience in the seat of the 'observed' or 'other'. This is a place of self-reflection for the audience that can be artfully played to allow other cultural perspectives to be 'seen' by the public. *The New Americans* was able to counteract the suspicion towards immigrants in the United States after 9/11 (KEF, 2009) through its reversing of perspective and reversing of ethnography. The series has been recognised for how effectively the film countered ethnocentric unbalanced negative views of immigrants from other cultures (quoted by KEF (2009)):

*"As each character invents a life against obstacles significantly unlike those faced by Europeans coming to America, audiences must drop their sentimental conceptions of immigration and submit to the new ideas and images that are so judiciously and artfully rendered here."* — Virginia Hefferman, *The New York Times*

*"...Chicago documentarian Steve James and his team deliver a film that is at once epic and intimate, universal and specific. The triumph of 'The New Americans' is that it reminds us of a truth too easily forgotten: Immigrants are all of us."*

—Steve Johnson, *Chicago Tribune*

*“In the post-9/11 era, when many immigrants are looked upon with distrust, The New Americans offers a fresh perspective...a powerful and deeply personal documentary.”* —Suzanne Ryan, *Boston Globe*

All the quotes above talk of change in understanding. The series places audience in a narrative that follows perspectives outside their own, yet one that allows the United States culture to be central to the film. This allows for the audience to see their culture and the issue of immigrants from another perspective. It also allows them to relate to the story because it is a side to a story played out in their own society. This is the power of being observed from the reverse. From another perspective we are reminded of our common bond of humanity with these peoples who share hopes and dreams like ourselves.

Reverse ethnography allows us to balance perspectives on global issues. By allowing the subject to be the audience reverse ethnography directly addresses a global market leaving only the skills of the filmmakers to create films that will be attractive to the market. This contrasts with traditional ethnographic documentary which, in the need to attract an audience and find relevance between the Western or globalized audience and the peoples under observation, often turns to “*otherizing*” these cultures and seeking extremes (Anagnostou, 2006). Reverse ethnography, however, is offered a ‘direct’ link between content and the audience. There is immediate relevancy to the audience, making reverse ethnography, I believe, a good way to access global markets with indigenous perspectives.

## Chapter 6: Discussion - Reverse Ethnography as a Solution

### Cultural Protection through Self Identification

Will Anderson, the producer of *Meet the Natives*, originally worried that, when the series finished and the Kastam tribesmen who investigated British culture returned to their island of Tanna, they would be “*corrupted by our influences*”. However as Anderson explains, because they got to see British and Western culture in its true light, and formed a view against moving towards this culture and modern capitalism: “... *if anything, Kastam culture is stronger than ever*” (*The Independent*, 2007). Can reverse ethnography assist in the protection of indigenous culture from the singularising influence of globalization? Could we argue that the Kastam culture is now better protected against globalization because they were given the opportunity to openly observe the ‘metropolis’? Perhaps investigating and seeing the truth of how life is in a modern, globalized society such as Britain’s (as the position of observer) is the best form of protection for indigenous cultures from influences such as mass media.

What the Kastam witnessed and learned was that the wealth and associated luxuries of neo-liberal success comes at a ‘cost’ to lifestyle. The Kastam people seemed unaware of such costs until their involvement in making the series. It causes one to reflect on what is communicated, via the media, to indigenous peoples about the nature of life in a Western or globalized society. It is argued that what is portrayed is a false and an idealised reproduction of Western lifestyle. This is a view created by the popular demand of the market and coupled with the powers of advertising, which these indigenous cultures then consume (Anagnostou, 2006; Ashuri, 2007). Reverse ethnography counters these effects of media by allowing a culture to see the ‘costs’ of moving towards a

globalized society and culture. The Kastam tribesmen were able to witness British culture and its failure to appeal to aspects of their own view of what was important in life in: “*love, happiness, peace and respect*”. They weren’t sold ideal representations of British life through exposure to popular media emanating from the West.

Media can romanticise aspects of society. I suggest that allowing the indigenous people to be ethnographers of the industrialised world allowed them to experience the reality of what life might be like if they were to follow the patterns of globalisation. I believe they were able to return to their island of Tanna with a new appreciation and understanding of their own culture. More importantly, I believe the Kastam representatives were able to realise what aspects of their society and culture were superior to British and modern global culture. Surely this would allow them to ‘see’ what they have to protect. Playing the role of ethnographer in a reverse ethnography has definite benefits for indigenous cultures.

Today, most indigenous societies are first exposed to the ‘metropolis’ of globalized society through the seductive tendrils of globalisation in the form of trade and media (in the cases where change was not forced). Such contact occurs between the ‘metropolis’ and the ‘periphery’ before indigenous societies get an honest look at the type of culture they might be influenced by or adopting (Steger, 2005). Could it be that rather than the ‘metropolis’ coming in from the outside of an indigenous culture promoting the luxurious temptations of modern world, indigenous cultures should be first allowed the chance to truly investigate the culture of influence? Reverse ethnography offers this possibility for peripheral cultures. Given the chance to do a reverse ethnography would an indigenous culture wish take the first steps to world a globalized culture based on consumerism knowing the consequences to aspects of life such as working hours and family life? If reverse

ethnography could allow indigenous cultures to investigate what globalization is offering them before they choose to be drawn in on its initial influence, could it serve to protect indigenous culture? Could the opportunity to critically analyse another culture allow a culture to also realise the benefits or advantages of one's own culture? Moreover could being the author of an ethnography allow the culture help to define and hence create an awareness of self that might then be identified as something tangible to protect?

It has in fact been argued that we shape the boundaries of our own culture by analysing other cultures. Fürsich (2002) states that: "*One of the most influential and enduring themes in cultural studies is the critique on representations of the 'Other'. This refers to a whole range of theoretical writings and studies about how 'our' identity is shaped by distancing ourselves from some perceived or assumed 'Other' with regard to ethnicity, race, class or national difference*". Ruby (1996) described the study by Wilton Martinez (1992) as "*distressing*", where the effects on ethnocentrism in his students were tested before and after viewing ethnographic films was studied. The results gave surprising results indicating an increase in the ethnocentric attitudes of the students following the viewings. It seemed the students had created a stronger identity of 'self' through viewing ethnographies defining the 'other' as Fürsich (2002) would later describe. The purpose of the viewings had been intended to improve the students respect for these indigenous people's lifestyles, however it served the polar opposite. Ethnographic films communicate the 'subjective realities' of the filmmaker and their cultural perspective more so than that of their subjects. Berry (2003) argues ethnographic film helps us find our position in the world around us so as to better place ourselves to counter the forces around us. The argument by Berry is in step with the observations made by Anderson (*The Independent*, 2007) on the Kastam people who, following their reverse ethnography on British culture, saw their culture grow "*stronger than ever*". It could

therefore be proposed that ‘reverse ethnographies’ (when viewed by the peoples of the ethnographers) could provide the same results for indigenous cultures investigating and reporting on the globalized, developed cultures of the ‘metropolis’.

Reverse ethnographic films allow an indigenous culture, such as that of the people of Tanna, to compare and contrast their own culture with that of the developed world. Having a ‘peripheral’ culture to investigate the ‘metropolis’ allows it to investigate, understand and communicate the reality of being drawn into the neo-liberal global culture. It also is argued to assist the ‘periphery’ to define itself as a given culture and realise the benefits of its culture against the now defined ‘other’ of the ‘metropolis’.

### **A New Role for Reverse Ethnography - Realising One’s Own Subjectivity**

Perhaps one of the greatest hurdles for any culture needing to construct a healthy appreciation of those other cultures with which it integrates, is in realising it’s own subjectivity. Neo-liberalism, the consumer culture that is integrated into the foundations of our ‘global society’ is a barrier to such a realisation (Appadurai, 1990; Spitulnik, 1993). Global society must realise the subjectivity underpinning its very foundations in order to deal with preserving and respecting global cultural diversity (Davis, 2001; Davis, 2010; Fotopoulos, 2001; Harvey, 2005). If we wish to act on preventing the loss of human cultural diversity we first need to recognise that our connected ‘global society’ (although containing obvious variation) has common cultural aspects that unite our subjectivity (Fotopoulos, 2001). It is in effect a single culture that has evolved to singularise fundamental aspects of cultures around the world (Appadurai, 1990; Featherstone, 2006;

Fotopoulos, 2001). It exists still within and alongside many thousands of other unique human cultures (Davis, 2010). Despite the ‘scientific’ parameters we place on our observation of the world, our view is subjective (Eitzen, 1995; Heider, 1977; Marks, 1995). Thus, we need to realise that there are thousands of other legitimate ‘perspectives’ on how we should live and see the world (Davis, 2001; Davis, 2010; Sivers, 2010).

The ‘reversal’ of ethnographic documentary has been used in an attempt to provide the audience with this realisation. Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin made one of the earliest attempts. They produced a filmic study of what was called “*this strange tribe living in Paris*”, turning the ethnographic gaze back upon the ‘metropolis’ at the moment of decolonization in his film *Chronique d’un Été* (1960). This film highlighted the point that the perceived ‘reality’ of French society, especially in context of its French colonised counterparts in Africa, is unique and subjective. The mere fact the word ‘strange’ was used to describe the film’s unique reflective perspective on French society and culture draws to attention the ethnocentricity of the French. It shows that ‘strange’ is how the French had perceived the colonised people of Africa. In this context, what exists as ‘strange’ could be considered that which lies outside our own subjective reality. It was similarly a highlight point of the promotion for ‘*Meet the Natives*’ (2009) in an article by *The Independent* (2007): “*For centuries, anthropologists have travelled overseas to live among ‘strange’ tribes and observe their ‘colourful’ ways.*” The article continues, turning the word ‘strange’ to a similar descriptive, ‘odd’ and using it as a way to compare the ‘reverse’ perspective and make the audience realise they, in this documentary series, will be the ‘strange other’. “*But rarely has it been tried the other way round. So what happened when a group of South Pacific islanders spent a month in Britain to study our own odd little lives?*” The use of the word ‘strange’ and ‘odd’ displays a recognition that we operate from a perspective whereby we are not aware of



our own subjective reality. By identifying to the audience that those in the ‘metropolis’ are seen from another perspective as ‘strange’, it highlights the fact that each culture has its own subjective reality and that either all cultures, or no cultures are ‘strange’. The appeal of reverse ethnography is that it allows the audience to realise that their ‘reality’ is subjective. It allows them to see how unique and strange they are to other cultures. This is a powerful way to decentralize the ethnocentricity in the ‘metropolis’ of global society.

The realisation of ‘subjective reality’ between cultures is not only required for the present (especially between those of the ‘metropolis’ and those of the ‘periphery’). It also has an important role in dealing with history. Reverse ethnography in documentary can function to help restore or balance historical ethnographical records. This is very important where, due to historical colonial dominance, one culture has silenced or distorted the other through the dominance of perspective in ethnographic media (Rabinowitz, 1993). A ‘reverse ethnography’ called *BabaKiueria* (1986) was successfully aimed at achieving this. This film, showed ‘white Australians’ from the perspective of Aboriginal Australians, highlighting the faults ‘white Australia’s’ subjective reality, both past and present. An important point to include is that *BabaKiueria* managed to do this in a way that did not alienate ‘white Australians’. The documentary allowed the important messages to be expressed by using entertaining satirical humour to keep the content light hearted. *BabaKiueria* reverses the historical roles of ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australians allowing the perceptions of Aboriginal Australians surrounding the colonisation of their lands to be understood by ‘White Australia’.

The opening scene shows ‘Australian white native’ families enjoying a barbeque in a harbour-side park when a group of uniformed ‘black’ people arrive in boats, much to the fear of the ‘white natives’. A black officer approaches the white families asking, “*What do you call this*

place?” They reply “*Barbeque Area*”, which becomes the name (spelt incorrectly) of the country. The entire film plays on this role-reversal. It is essentially a ‘reverse ethnography’ in the form of a satirical ethnofiction. It does however use historical ‘truths’ and reverses them so that European Australians have their lands invaded by the blacks in a fashion that mimics Australia’s colonial history. It not only deals with alternative perspectives on the history of Australian colonisation by the British. It also presents many contemporary Aboriginal issues by showing ‘white’ people as a minority, the unequal treatment of ‘whites’ by the police, the removal of ‘white’ children from their families and ‘white’ families being forcibly moved by the government. What makes this film powerful is this use of reverse ethnography to enable the non-Aboriginal Australian audience to see the ‘subjective reality’ of Aboriginal Australians, past and present. Reverse ethnography has the ability to place the audience in the perspective of the ‘other’. The effectiveness of *BabaKiueria* to balance historical ‘realities’ between Aboriginal peoples and colonial and post colonial settlers in Australia led it to win the 1987 United Nations Media Peace Prize.

Realising our own inherent subjectivity also gives us cause to see the impotence of the debates over objectivity in documentary. Subjectivity, I argue, should not be avoided. It should be balanced. We need to move away from ethnography attempting to communicate ‘truths’ and instead focus on ensuring no one culture loses sight of its own subjectivity, nor the importance of that of the ‘other’.

## **A Solution for Scholarly Ethnography?**

The point has been made that the search for 'objective truth' in ethnographic film is a theoretically implausible concept and a practically impossible task (Geertz, 1988; Eitzen 1995; Rorty, 1991). Marks (1995) furthers the point, arguing the pursuits of ethnography and ethnographic film have been impeded by their association to the ideals of 'objectivity'. He blames the traditional association of ethnography to the natural sciences for this misdirection. The then default argument to disassociate from the expectation of communicating 'objective truth', however, has left ethnographic film unbounded by constraints (Prins, 1997). Considering subjectivity as an 'open slather', removed of its epistemological foundations, would surely leave ethnography equally unlikely to receive recognition as a mechanism for understanding the peoples and cultures of world we live in. What direction should ethnographic documentary film head from a scholarly perspective?

Though I support the strong claim that there is no single objective truth common to all when we are dealing with human culture (Eitzen 1995; Geertz, 1988; Rorty, 1991), I would argue that there is an are independent 'objective truths' that ethnographers can seek to balance. Truth is argued to be subjective (Geertz, 1988; Eitzen 1995). These subjective truths can be found in the perspectives of people that are unique and specific to individual, culture and time. If we consider subjective perception to be the objective truth (i.e. the experience of a person is as close to reality as we can ever get) then one's subjective reality in a given time is itself objective and should be the focus for expression or communication in ethnographic film. The close relationships that form between peoples bounded by a common culture allow them to share in common perceived realities. The creation of ethnography should seek this subjective truth, both of the individual and the

common perceptions uniting individuals that define a culture. The field of ethnography should ensure that it offers ways to assist in balancing these subjective realities between peoples and cultures. This must be achieved to diversify the cultural influence of ethnographic media absorbed by a global society and also to follow in the idea by Surowiecki (Sunstein, 2004) that argues the closest truth is found by the average of a diverse range of independent perspectives.

*“What we see, as we survey documentary, is a huge variety of forms, genres, styles, purposes and intentions, which reflect the need that people have for independent testimonies of the world”* (Kilborn, 2004). The ‘expression’ represents one’s subjective reality and the ‘collective’ helps us understand, as Kilborn argues, the reality of our own culture. So understanding another culture may work in the same manner. While today ethnographic film is still seen as information about the ‘other’, it is not information we should seek. Information should be placed in the context of the perspectives that are the foundation of one’s reality. For example, understanding details about a religion is irrelevant if one cannot be allowed to experience the subjective reality of the believer. The ‘objective’ of the study of culture should be the search for experiencing ‘other’ perspectives on reality. This perspective comes clearly from the position of the person creating the communication form. Thus subjectivity, expressed by the ethnographer, becomes the new ‘objective truth’. Kilborn (2004) writes; *“... while the dominant culture of the multiplexes has become mired in the fantasy of puerile wish-fulfilment, with its bully-boy violence and loveless sex, the loss of realism finds an answer in the return, if not of realism properly speaking, then at least the visible evidence of social reality, in all its postmodern ambiguity and confusion”*. It is not a search for objective truth that the ethnographer needs to seek. It is an expression of how they perceive the world. As Kilborn (2004) argues, even ethnographic media that is *“mired in the fantasy of puerile wish-fulfilment”* presents the audience with a social reality through the reflection of the culture of the creator of the

communication. Seen from this perspective the only 'truth' is the subjective reality of the ethnographer, and hence the ethnographer and their culture become the subject matter of greater importance in the search for cross-cultural study. If we wish to study another culture's subjective reality, they in turn need to be the creators of the ethnography or order to express it.

Coupled with this, the audience need to either be part of the culture or society forming the subject in order to maintain a point of reference from which to analyse and position the ethnographer and their background culture. In *Meet the Natives*, the Tanna tribesmen are amazed that in Britain women are treated as equals in a relationship. For the British audience this expression about their own culture reveals several things. It makes them aware that their view of relationships is subjective and not a universal reality and so it teaches the viewer about their own subjective position and subjectivity in general. Secondly, the reaction of amazement from the Tanna tribesman to this aspect to British culture reveals to the audience that men and women are not treated as equals in Tanna and that the Tanna tribesmen themselves are suddenly becoming aware that their own view of relationships is subjective and not universal. Simple details such as the strength of their reaction to this realisation about relationships in Britain offers details of the way the Tanna tribesmen experience life. It certainly seemed a deeply engrained aspect of their culture and society to view men as dominant figures in relationships as judged simply by the degree of amazement they exhibited when they saw that this was not the case in Britain. We have to ask the question, would an anthropologist or ethnographer have judged the depth of feelings behind this aspect of their own culture if they were to observe the Tanna tribesmen in their own lives? Without the Tanna people being tested by crossing the boundaries of their own cultural realities would an outsider have been offered the chance to experience the sensitivity of emotions and reason behind these boundaries? Finally, as mentioned in the last chapter, we see that the Tanna representatives

are suddenly shown their own subjectivity and uniqueness of their culture through the experience of studying another. Male dominance over women in society was clearly something they had perceived as universally common until then. These revelations allow them to realise and define their own culture. By turning the camera onto our own culture and placing it in the hands of those we wish to understand, we are given an effective point of reference to compare and contrast and to begin to comprehend the power of perspective and the dynamics of human experience. Reverse ethnography shows us how we may actually begin to better study other cultures and their subjective realities.

Reverse ethnography operates as both an effective tool for scholarly inquiries as well as public education. *The New Americans* (KEF, 2009) is a documentary series that presents the audience with four different perspectives of United States culture. These come from the positions of new immigrants into the U.S. *The New Americans* acts as a reverse ethnography as the immigrants are free to express their true perspectives on emigrating from their respective cultures into the U.S. In this way the audience is given an outsider's perspective on their own culture. The show focuses on the perceptions versus the reality of life in the U.S. as both imagined and experienced by the four new arrivals. For the U.S. audience (the intended market as the show was produced and broadcast by PBS in the U.S.) it is a reflection of themselves from other perspectives that allows them to experience the subjective reality of people from different cultures. As stated before, because the audience's place and culture are the subjects of a reverse ethnography, the audience is provided a point of reference and point of interest from which they can then compare and contrast themselves to the 'other' perspective and therefore to the subjective reality of the ethnographer. It gives, in the case of *The New Americans*, the U.S. audience a relative position and role in the series. The audiences play the part of the society and culture that creates the fears and dreams, the successes

and failures, the conflicts and resolutions, for the four outsiders. Playing this role serves to educate as well as entertain the audience.

In fact the benefits of having the audience as the subject of an ethnographic documentary are many. It allows the audience to realise how their own culture is perceived from the position of an outside culture and enables the audience to see and empathise with the ethnographer's own subjective reality. It also opens the audience to the idea that humanity is made a great variety and number of 'realities'. It teaches the concept of subjective reality to the audience and how what is true or real to one person or culture is different to that of another. It finally exposes the manner in which the subjective realities (be they false or not) of life, society and culture in the audience's own country are communicated to people in the 'outside' world.

*The New Americans* opens in a refugee camp in Benin in West Africa, presenting the life of an individual, Israel Nwidor, forced from his home by conflicts that are motivated by the activities of multinational oil companies. He is on his way to becoming a U.S. citizen. But the Nigerian refugee we are presented with, shows us immediately how his subjective reality is different by his reflection on what his expectations for his life in America are. "*My idea of America has only been from the films that I watch. Now that I am going to America, I think that I will be just like Eddie Murphy—Coming to America.*" His comment reveals the failures of mass media coming out of the United States to truly represent reality. It is more of the "*puerile wish-fulfilment*" that Kilborn (2009) describes which, taken literally by the culture of the 'other', creates false perceptions. The failure of global media to communicate the realities of U.S. society and culture, and the danger and power of the media's influence, are exposed. The 'reverse' angle of this ethnographic series onto society and culture in the U.S., a society the audience understand and are part of, shows them quite

simply how little of the 'real' Western 'American' life this Nwidor understands. Perhaps it also forces the audience to question if aspects of their own culture are just folklore, an idea Anagnostou (2006) considers an important and problematic influence on ethnographic work. Is the U.S. culture a 'mythical' creation itself of popular media? In this case the audience may ask themselves if the idea of the 'American dream' that Nwidor was deceived into believing, is something they themselves falsely believe.

A reverse ethnography where the audience and subject are one can cause the audience to reflect and question their own 'realities'. As the series unfolds, Nwidor has his misperceptions come to fruition and he now faces the tough reality of his new life. Through this process Nwidor's own culture is exposed as it brings him into conflict with the new culture in which he finds himself forced to survive. Finally, the clash of Nwidor's old perceptions of U.S. culture, those absorbed through mass media, and the new perceptions that come through the reality of his life in the U.S. clash continuously through the series. As stated before, this exposes the current and historic weakness of global media to communicate culture. It also forces the audience to ask what they think they might 'know' about the world, including other cultures, that is also based on false perceptions communicated to them by mass media. In these complex and interwoven ways reverse ethnography can help to improve global media's ability to communicate cultural realities between cultures.

The issue of 'truth' in ethnographic film is not only an issue of dealing with the way subjective reality influences how the audience perceives another 'other' culture. There are questions of integrity that require consideration. How can we be sure the filmmaker isn't simply fabricating the truth? The issue of fabricating another's culture for the benefit of the 'production' has existed since the birth of ethnographic film, starting with the likes of Flaherty's 'setups' in *Nanook of the*



*North* (Ionushi, 2010). When the filmmaker and the audience are of the same culture the filmmaker will likely be communicating his or her ethnography to an audience that knows nothing of the subject or their culture. This offers the filmmaker a dangerous freedom to express certain 'creativity' in their work their work that may not truly relate to the subject's cultural reality (MacDougall, 1978) even though as a form of visual media in the form of documentary it is likely to be interpreted as 'truth' (La Marre and Landreville, 2009; Pouliot and Cowen, 2007).

With a reverse ethnography the issues above are naturally resolved because the audience and the subject are one and so the observing culture and filmmakers cannot rely on the ignorance of the audience if they wish to attempt to feign the truth. How could for example, the tribesmen from Tanna in *Meet the Natives* seek to express aspects of their experience of British culture that were invented for the benefit of story when the audience themselves are British? It would be impossible for them to be overly 'creative' in their ethnography. Could, for example, the tribesmen have exaggerated the lavishness of life for the average British working class person when the audience is British? Now consider the same question if the audience was from Tanna? In the latter case it might have made for a more exotic and exciting experience for the audience of Tanna. The need to have a critical audience to ensure the honesty of the ethnographer is clear. Reverse ethnography by nature of having one culture communicate directly to the same culture being observed impedes or at least highlights dishonesty.

Reverse ethnography also combats other issues of integrity that may arise. These are not always issues that are formed by the author of an ethnographic work. Ethnographers and anthropologists alike can come across problems in gathering data when the subjects offer limited, conditional or false information about their culture. Tomaselli (2003) discusses the issues that arise

in 'observer-observed' relations between ethnographers and the Sans bushmen. Tomaselli notes that, without having a role or an investment in the ethnography of which they are subjects, the information they give to the ethnographers or anthropologists is highly conditional and often to some degree contrived. As he puts it, they have "*stories to tell and stories to sell*". They give information based on what they believe the observer wants to hear and on what they have been paid. Information becomes a commodity, which they are careful to give away for the right price. This distorts the information the ethnographers receive and therefore communicate. *Babakiueria* sought to show that the colonised subject will often say what the ethnographer wants to hear, with the Smith's responding politely to her questions in what seems to appease Duranga and the views of her dominant culture, despite the suffering and oppression caused by the Duranga's people. Perhaps the 'truth' would be deemed as risky.

In other cases, as previously argued, the observed subject may simply lie in order to deceive to the observer. This allegedly occurred in one of the world's most famous anthropological studies by Margaret Mead. The evidence was presented in a documentary, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, Directed by Frank Heimans (1988). Heimans' evidence supports the controversy created by anthropologist, Derek Freeman's refutation of Margaret Mead's *Coming of age in Samoa*. Margaret Mead's study famously made the claim young Samoan women lacked the sexual inhibitions and competition of the West. This led to the questioning of Western cultural values (Heimans, 1988). It was followed by the production of her book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. The ethnographic work would greatly influence the values of the Western world, providing a strong argument for sexual freedom in society. Yet many decades later, Australian anthropologist Derek Freeman put forward evidence that Mead's work was based on a practical joke made by her young female subjects. In the documentary Heimans gathers witness statements from the women interviewed by Mead (and later

Freeman) to confirm Freeman's argument (Heimans, 1988). Based on the evidence put forward in this documentary, Meads famous study and ethnographic work was based on a large amount of false evidence given by her female subjects. The society in fact is shown to have strong and strict values surrounding young women remaining virgins prior to marriage (Heimans, 1988). How did this occur and remain unnoticed for so long? The issues lie in having both ethnographer and audience as primary and secondary observers of a culture they knew little about (this was especially the case when the study was undertaken in the 1930's). Furthermore, if the subject does not form the audience, then what counters a subject's freedom or ability to lie to the ethnographer? Especially when, as in this case, all subjects collaborated in the lie? If the work had been directed at the people of Samoa then, under such an arrangement, it could be supposed her false evidence would have emerged rather quickly. But unfortunately the ethnocentricity of cross-cultural study does not equate to cross-cultural communication. Reverse ethnography can be shown to counter such problems shown by Margaret Mead's study. With the audience and the subject as one, reverse ethnography functions to communicate between cultures thus eliminating many issues of integrity that arise from traditional methods of ethnography.

Another issue that can erode the integrity of an ethnography occurs in the honest misinterpretation of culture made by the observer. In *Babakiueria* the presenter and ethnographer, Duranga visits a betting agency where men go to bet on races. She makes the interpretation of this 'ritual' as one of religious value stating: "*Their austere design, their complete lack of decoration or adornment, gives no clue to the huge sums of money which pass through these doors everyday, as the followers of this religion exchange their donations for these small prayer tokens*". She explains more of what she sees as the men watching the television with their betting slips in silence and anticipation. Duranga explains in a voiceover: "*And then they pray. They pray for success, for*

*wealth, for happiness, and they believe that the future course of their lives will be foretold by watching some trained horses run around a large circle.*” There is no deception from either observer or observed. Yet clearly her interpretation is simply wrong. This is the point the film is trying to make about ethnography. The film is showing how, in the past, Aboriginal culture has been poorly interpreted without correction due to both ethnographer and audience being based in the ‘metropolis’ of ‘white Australia’. The title of the film itself, *Babakiueria*, is a satirical pun aimed at presenting the errors of misinterpreting the ‘other’ and in part, the arrogance of failing to question the interpretation adequately. It is an error of the model of ethnography that can be exposed and corrected through the model of reverse ethnography shown in Chapter 1, Figure 1.3.

What *Babakiueria* also exposed, was how reverse ethnography works to solve the same problems with ethnography that it sought to expose. The structure of a reverse ethnography highlights honest errors created in ethnography through a difference of subjective reality. Although this subjective view may be wrong, the errors are perceived and become a way for the audience to see the subjective view of the ethnographer. The subjectivity becomes part of the interest and helps expose the audience to the perspectives of the ethnographer of the ‘periphery’ (Adams, 1979). Therefore they are simply shown the ‘subjective reality’ of the ‘other’ through the mistake. *Babakiueria* was a film aimed at the ‘white’ Australian audience. Thus, when Duranga expresses the subjective interpretation of white Australian culture, her errors are not seen by the fictional ‘black’ audience to which she explains her observations (a point the film is trying to make about traditional ethnography made by the West), however, they are immediately witnessed by the ‘real’ Australian audience watching *Babakiueria*. The issue with having the ethnographer and the audience from the same culture is highlighted by Duranga and her fictional ‘black’ audience.

*Babakiueria* shows how ethnography has failed by allowing such poor interpretations to be communicated as truth to an unknowing audience from an ‘outside’ or representative ethnographer.

Through reverse ethnography, misinterpretations are apparent (and often humorous) to the viewer and only serve to expose the ethnographer’s own culture’s subjective reality. Duranga’s interpretation of the men in the betting agency exposed her own subjective reality to an audience (being those of the observed culture) perfectly positioned to do so. It allows us to study the ethnographer (Duranga) and her culture’s subjective reality. The study of the ethnographer’s culture, by the audience, and through the subjectivity of their expression in their ethnography, is the direction I feel ethnography needs to go in order to deal with all the issues ethnography currently faces. Reverse ethnography creates a model for creating ethnography that functions in this way.

The reverse ethnography model exposes to the audience Duranga’s misinterpretation of an act of gambling as a religious act (understanding the film was ethnofiction and cannot be taken seriously in its detail). What aspects of Duranga’s own subjective reality can we ascertain from this observation? It might be that her culture was not accustomed to the traditions of gambling in their male populations? Or perhaps that sex-segregated religious practices is an assumption due to its deep history in her own culture? Allowing the ‘other’ in producing a reverse ethnography, to cross the boundaries of their own culture in their attempt to understand that of the audience, allows the observed audience to see these boundaries to the ethnographer’s culture. This was very much synonymous with the way the audience were exposed to the ethnographer’s cultural boundaries when the Tanna tribesmen in *Meet the Natives* revealed their own cultures view of male dominance in relationships through their reaction to the sexual equality of relationships in Britain. Essentially reverse ethnography allows the reaction of the ethnographer through the interpretations (and

misinterpretations) of their observations of the audience's culture to educate the audience by acting as a window directly into the subjective reality of the observer's culture.

Duranga's analysis of the activities by 'White Australian's' in the betting agency also brings the audience to question their own culture and see it from another perspective. In Australia, the sight of men in a betting agency would unlikely encourage one to question why such an action is taking place. The reverse angle, however, can make what seems so acceptable to be questioned. It causes the audience to both reflect on their own culture and to understand better the mistake they might make too oversimplify or inadequately categorize another culture when studying theirs. It also highlights how their own subjectivity can lead to them making assumptions of other cultures that are erroneous, and may educate the audience to be more critical of ethnographic content.

*Babakiueria* raises various issues that cause, and arise from, the misinterpretation of culture. As Weaver-Hightower (2006) points out, *Babakiueria* regularly questions the ability of current models of inquiry used in anthropology and ethnography to understand another culture. It also displays the failure of ethnography and anthropology to influence society and their governments in interpreting, respecting and empathising with indigenous colonised cultures. This is shown when in the film the teenage girl is taken from the family forcibly by the government to go and live with a black family. This act represents a reversal of the Australian government's policies during periods of the last century. After this happens, Duranga, who has lived with the family for 6 months studying them, says she understands how they must feel losing their daughter stating: "*Parting with a loved one is never easy, ... I said good-bye to my mother recently when she went on holiday. So I know how they feel.*" It isn't just government policy. It is the attitude of those in the 'metropolis' that makes such government policy possible, which Duranga's comments highlight. Interestingly

Duranga asks the family if they consider the removal of their daughter as “*the price of progress*”. And supporting Tomaselli’s (2003) argument that the indigenous peoples will often feel compelled to tell us what we want to hear rather than the truth to their feelings, the family answer, “*we do*”, contrary to their obvious pain and anger. The film shows how our own unawareness or denial of our subjectivity impedes us from being able to understand the ‘other’. Weaver-Hightower (2006) explains the film’s position on matters of cross-cultural study, “*Could we ever, it seems to ask, know anything beyond the fantasy we want to see reflected back at ourselves?*” There are limitations to the traditional models of studying other cultures. These limitations are derived from the strong ethnocentric perspectives of a dominant Western culture. This ethnocentricity (which is universal and not limited to Western cultures) impedes ethnographic media and its ability to communicate the alternative subjective realities of indigenous cultures. Yet reverse ethnography exposes our own subjectivity, making the errors of the current model of ethnography, and the solutions to them, simultaneously and blatantly apparent.

And so, can ‘reverse ethnography’ lead ethnography documentary film out of what Gardner (1987) described as the “*wilderness of a troubled game*”? Perhaps it could also help the traditions of ethnography and anthropology in the same way? It is worth considering.

## Conclusions

My objective in this written component of my thesis was to highlight the importance of reverse ethnography in its application in the genre of documentary film. There is a need for ethnographic documentary to be developed so that it may function in helping counter the decline in human cultural diversity caused by globalisation. It also needs as well as offering ethnographic documentary and ethnography in general a potential solution to a decade's long dispute over how best to deal with and understand issues surrounding subjectivity in studying other cultures.

Global mass media, in particular audiovisual media, are responsible for the process of globalisation that is responsible for both the unification and eradication of human culture. Wealthy state and corporate forces largely control the spread and representation of culture through mass media, which serve as a powerful tool to influence the public in favour of their respected interests. Both states and corporations use mass media for international/global influence. In general, on a global scale the wealthier bodies have the greatest influence. The cultures and persuasions of these bodies have created an environment where the communication of human culture through the connected media networks, is limited to wealthy consumer based societies. These societies are traditionally aligned with historically powerful state bodies (especially those of the West) and early state orientated multinational corporations which historically have been responsible for physically spreading neo-liberal consumer culture to peoples across the globe through trade, colonialism etc. Ethnographic documentary has to date failed to offer traditional cultures a significant representative voice in global media. This has resulted in a continuation of an imbalance of cultural representation being presented via documentary and mass media to the developing global society. This imbalance in cultural influence can assist in the erosion of indigenous cultures, which are often passively (and



actively) absorbing global media and the cultural perspectives they promote. Ethnographic documentary (and ethnographic media as a whole) has essentially failed to communicate effectively against the weight. This imbalance in cultural influence can assist in the erosion of indigenous cultures, which are often passively (and actively) absorbing global media and the cultural perspectives they promote. Ethnographic documentary (and ethnographic media as a whole) has essentially failed to communicate effectively against the weight of 'western' media', to global society, alternative cultural perspectives or 'subjective realities' derived from the world's numerous indigenous cultures. Thus ethnographic documentary currently fails to effectively to assist in maintaining the cultural diversity. Nor does it effectively promote the richness of cultural perspective that a diverse representation of culture in global media 'flows' could potentially offer global society.

Ethnographic documentary has its roots in the academic study of indigenous human culture in anthropology and ethnography. This in turn has a history associated to the ideology of the natural sciences and its belief in objective truths found through the use of the scientific method. It is now accepted that this association with the natural sciences and to the search for objective truth through the scientific method is inappropriate for the study of anthropology and ethnography. Inherent subjectivity in the field of humanities is unavoidable and the traditional 'observational' approach applied to the study of indigenous cultures, despite developments, has failed to avoid subjectivity. Despite this the ethnocentric and colonial tradition of observation continues to be practiced and even advocated. This has greatly impeded the study and understanding of human cultures and corrupted the ability of ethnography to communicate alternative subjective realities of other cultures to the public and has led to serious issues and debates surrounding the integrity of ethnographic

work. This has especially been the case with ethnographic documentary whose creative visual format exposes the power of subjectivity and manipulation of media.

Another major issue faced by ethnography in its traditional form is that it is completely one-sided. It operates from within the 'metropolis' of the ethnographer's culture from where the ethnography is created, using observations of the 'other'. The audience and the ethnographer are from the same culture. In traditional ethnography the focus is placed on improving the methodology of the observation following a belief that subjectivity needs to be removed in order improve its understanding of the 'other'. However this traditional 'model' of ethnography operates from a place where the audience does not perceive the inherent subjectivity because they sit within the same ethnocentric sphere. It thus fails to open any true form of cross-cultural communication or dialogue. In this traditional model of ethnography the 'observer' and the 'observed' are not able to exchange roles in a way that would create a natural and equal platform for communication. These one-sided dialogues enter global 'flows' of information through media affecting the perspectives the viewers have on indigenous cultures. It thereby narrows or singularises the cultural perspectives of those in the global society.

Reverse ethnography has a foundation in the form of its communication that offers to solve many of the issues traditional ethnography addressed. The expression of subjective reality can be seen best in the ethnographer (or the observer). The true expression of subjective reality comes from the ethnographer's observations and can be contrasted and compared effectively when the observed culture is that of the audience or reader. So reverse ethnography provides an effective formula to study human cultures with their diverse array of subjective realities. Reverse ethnography offers cultures outside global society a voice in both popular and academic media. It

offers global society and culture the chance to have an outsider's perspective on itself through observation, commentary and suggestions. This would add possibility, dimension and diversity to global society and the search for solutions required for global issues. The role of 'observer' in the production of ethnographies of other cultures has been strongly argued to be a tool of self-identification and protection for the 'observing' culture. Hence by allowing cultures threatened by globalization, to produce a 'reverse ethnography' and reversing of the traditional cultural roles of 'observer' and 'observed', it can be argued they would be provided cultural protection.

In looking at academic production of ethnography and ethnographic documentary more specifically, reverse ethnography offers solutions to issues involving the study and understanding of another culture's subjective reality by allowing the observer to be the culture studied and thereby analysing a true expression of their subjective reality measured against ethnographer's culture. Witnessing a documentary in which their own culture is the 'observed' culture, the scholar is best positioned (I argue) to study the culture who is doing the observing. When actually being part of the observed culture, the viewer can make comparisons of perspective on human life and hence more closely and objectively understand the other culture's subjective reality. Being both the 'observed' and the 'viewer', in the case of ethnographic documentary, the scholar can study the observations made by from the observing culture about their own culture. The ability to compare and contrast cultural realities is improved when the culture observed is that of the scholar. The same can be said for the viewers of popular forms of ethnographic documentary. With the audience witnessing an outsider's perspective of their own culture, they are best positioned to see the subjective reality of the indigenous observer. From this position they are offered a 'relativity' enabling them to contrast and compare culture and perspective on aspects of life they are culturally attached to.

The position of the observed also in the seat of the viewer in a reverse ethnography functions importantly to maintain the integrity of the communication. Traditional ethnography suffers from ethnographers falsifying or being too creative with their ethnographic work. It also suffers when the observed culture falsifies or manipulates the information they offer to ethnographers. Thirdly the traditional model of ethnography suffers from genuine misinterpretations of the other culture. Having both ethnographer and audience as part of the same culture creates all of these issues as the audience or the reader is not part of the observed culture and is unlikely to be able to identify manipulation, falsifying or misinterpretation of facts. The ethnographer essentially avoids having their work analysed by the subjects they represent. By contrast, producing an ethnographic work with the observed culture as the audience impedes such errors. Reverse ethnographies operate in this way. They allow falsifying to be exposed and misinterpretations to become insights into the ethnographer's own subjective reality. In effect reverse ethnographies allow one to use the understanding of their own culture as leverage for maintaining the integrity of the ethnography and for unmasking what the other culture perceives thus bringing one closer to understanding the subjective reality of the 'other'.

Reverse ethnography exposes the audience to the existence of their own subjectivity. This occurs through witnessing the alternative or even misguided perceptions of their own culture by the ethnographer. The audience can then understand how they might themselves have misguided perceptions of 'others' due to their own subjective realities. This helps to remove our ethnocentricity: a point human cultures often fail to achieve and one necessary for global society's ability to maintain and benefit from the diversity of human culture that exists today.

What we finally must consider are the real reasons we must maintain the diversity of human culture that exists today. Consider what enabled life on earth to survive. Diversity. When change impacts survival, increased diversity results in increased possibilities than some will have the capabilities to prosper even if others are doomed by their inability to adapt. Culture represents our adaption to the world as humans. The diversity of culture we have and its ability to transform allows us to survive in a range of vastly different environments. It is key to our survival. If one culture fails the ways of another offer possible solutions. Cultural diversity and adaptability for humans in the same way genetic diversity is key for the survival of other species. I argue that if we eradicate our own cultural diversity, we are eradicating our own chances of survival. In today's world, reverse ethnography offers a powerful tool in combating this grave dilemma.

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