



Abstract Title: Addressing colonial trauma through Mi'kmaw film representation

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Introduction

Intergenerational colonial trauma, such as the loss of territory, culture, and language, is associated with poor mental health among Indigenous people. Intergenerational trauma has led to a suicide rate for Indigenous youth that is the highest in the world (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003). The extent to which cultures connect with their past and secure control over their future has been termed "cultural continuity," and identified as key to preventing Indigenous youth suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008) by enabling communities "to create a cultural life that young people judge worth living" (Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007, p. 393).

Film viewers have difficulty distinguishing historical fact from what they see onscreen, absorbing colonial portrayals of Indigenous people, cultures, and history (Seixas, 1994). Indigenous self-representations can reverse this colonial gaze, Indigenizing film in ways that support cultural continuity.

Objective

This project explores how Mi'kmaw directors Indigenize film in ways that undermine the colonial gaze and address the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

Methods

Interviews were conducted by a Mi'kmaw scholar with three Mi'kmaw directors: Bretten Hannam (North Mountain, 2015); Jeff Barnaby (Rhymes for Young Ghouls, 2014); and documentarian Cathy Martin (The Spirit of Annie Mae, 2002). The named films were analyzed for how they challenge the ongoing erasure of Mi'kmaw territory, language, and culture. This analysis was triangulated with director interviews, and results were member checked with participants for validation.

Our research questions asked, 1) How are Mi'kmaw directors representing Mi'kmaw characters? 2) What techniques of Indigenization do Mi'kmaw directors favour in their work? And 3) How do the techniques and work of Mi'kmaw directors correspond to research on cultural continuity?

Results

Hannam, Barnaby, and Martin represent Land in ways that reaffirm Indigenous relations to territory. They use Mi'kmaw language in ways that normalize and centre Indigenous worldviews. And finally, they reject the hierarchical binary gender system imposed by boarding and residential schools in favour of Indigenized gender roles, supporting two-spirit identity and women's leadership.

Conclusion

These films embody elements of cultural that have been identified as reducing Indigenous youth suicide. Indigenized film may counter the colonial gaze in ways that support cultural continuity.

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