Indigenous communities across the globe have used film as an effective medium for resistance and a way to tell their own stories. The Māori of New Zealand have produced a strong film industry that embodies community, collaboration, and reciprocity to empower their people. I plan to research how the personal experiences of Māori filmmakers Barry Barclay and Merata Mita have influenced their application of community in their films. I will focus on the role gender plays in community representation in their filmmaking processes and how their legacies inspire young Māori in the New Zealand film industry today. I want to explore under represented filmmaking communities to better understand my own struggles as a biracial filmmaker and to advocate for minority representation in media.

Fourth Cinema, a term coined by the late Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay, marks a significant shift in the academic theory of cinematic arts, transitioning from the “Third (so called ‘third world’ Cinema)” structure to a separate genre for Indigenous peoples residing in settler colonial, developed nations like New Zealand (Barclay 1). In its simplest definition, Fourth Cinema is Indigenous filmmaking for an Indigenous audience. Māori Fourth Cinema began in 1970s New Zealand with the Māori civil rights movement known as Ngā Tamatoa (Murray 16). Barry Barclay was a key figure in this group, using film as resistance against the settler colonial politics of the New Zealand government. He saw film as a way to engage oppressed Māori communities and to give back to them, forming the foundations of Fourth Cinema practices in community-based filmmaking and reciprocity for the Indigenous groups involved in the production (Murray 16). Communication by the community for the community is more important than pleasing a global audience. Controlling the production and display of images of their own peoples enables Māori to speak for themselves and to themselves without the interruption of white Western ideology and its damaging stereotypes of the ‘savage’ native so often employed by mainstream media.

Barry Barclay and his female counterpart, Merata Mita, emphasize the importance of making films within the Māori community. April Strickland’s article “Barry Barclay’s Te Rua: The Unmanned Camera and Māori Political Activism,” discusses Māori filmmakers articulating “talking in”, a method of presentation that draws upon and speaks to those with intimate knowledge of a culture, thus resisting the need to explain Indigenous culture to a Western/global audience, or “talking out” (Strickland 147). While describing this form of communication, Strickland fails to explain how gender affects the process of “talking in”, especially in regards to a female Indigenous filmmaker such as Merata Mita and how her gendered experiences differ from the perspective of a man like Barry Barclay. “Talking in” dispels the “politics of staring”, or the gaze of white society into Indigenous/minority cultures according to Kirsty Bennett’s paper on “Fourth Cinema and the Politics of Staring” (2006). Even though Bennett touches upon the sexualized gaze of the female Indigenous body when a film is “talking out”, he does not elaborate on the reverse; how do Māori women use the camera as a means to communicate their experiences and struggles when “talking in” to their own people? Additionally, there is a staggering imbalance between the amount of books published on Barclay compared to Merata Mita, whose film career is usually summed up into a single book chapter such as “Lives of Their Own” in New Zealand Filmmakers by Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray. The academic study of Māori Fourth Cinema emphasizes the communication of filmmakers to their tribes, but lacks in the analysis of how gender affects reciprocity of that information. It is important to understand Merata Mita’s contribution to Māori cinema as a female filmmaker and how her experiences as a woman influence the role of community in her work. If it is crucial to celebrate the differences of Indigenous filmmaking compared to Western cinema, then it is equally important to understand how gender shapes the filmmaking framework in Māori Fourth Cinema.

In my own research, I plan to focus on community and its influence on the production and narratives of Māori films, specifically analyzing how gender impacts community portrayal the filmmaking process. I will be making a side-by-side comparison of two key figures in Māori Fourth Cinema, directors Barry Barclay and Merata Mita, who spearheaded the movement in New Zealand. Have the individual experiences of their Māori communities influenced their filmmaking and future Māori filmmakers? And how do Mita’s experiences as
a Māori female filmmaker suggest that her understanding of Māori tikanga (culture or custom) and community manifest distinctly in her films opposed to those of Barclay’s?

In the form of an analytical academic essay, I will be juxtaposing Barry Barclay’s and Merata Mita’s production methods, funding, narrative topics, and personal aesthetic, with a concentration on the impact of gender on community representation in their filmmaking techniques. I have chosen to study one example of both documentary and fictional film from each of their collections. For Barclay, I will analyze Ngati (1987) and The Kaipara Affair (2005), and for Mita, I will use Mauri (1988) and Patu! (1981). All four films represent key, groundbreaking examples of Barclay and Mita’s work dealing with the Māori community, all of which will be available to me in the USA and New Zealand. When viewing and analyzing the films, I will be taking notes on their distinct mise-en-scène (visual design aspects of image on screen) and its relation to Māori tikanga, displays of community organization and communication, and the gender representation in each film.

For my research, I will travel to Wellington, New Zealand, in order to access the Māori Taonga Collection of films and images at the Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision New Zealand Film Archive (NZFA). This collection possesses archived films (from feature-length to home video), extra footage, and printed documentation from Māori filmmakers and communities starting from the early 1900s. I have contacted Lawrence Wharerau at the NZFA, confirming that I will have access to the collection and proper training on how to handle Māori images according to the Archive’s kaupapa upon arrival. At the NZFA, I will be selecting and analyzing images, interviews, critiques, distribution/circulation records, and unreleased footage from Ngati, The Kaipara Affair, Patu!, and Mauri available in the Māori Taonga Collection, specifically recording instances and examples of gender and its effects on the directors’ filmmaking structure. In preparation for archiving, I have met with Janet C. Olson at Northwestern University Archives, who has briefed me on foundational skills about archival research for my trip to the New Zealand Film Archive.

When in New Zealand, I will conduct an in-person interview with Māori screenwriter and playwright, Briar Grace-Smith. As a contemporary influenced directly by Mita and Barclay, I will be interviewing Ms. Grace-Smith about the impact that these two filmmakers have had on her decision to work in the New Zealand entertainment industry as well as the role gender plays in her screenwriting. This interview will help me gauge the importance and legacy that both Merata Mita and Barry Barclay have had on a new generation of Māori filmmakers in New Zealand. Additionally, I will also interview Tainui and Libby Stephens, directors of the Māoriland Film Festival in Otaki, New Zealand, who personally knew Barclay and Mita. My interview with them will assist me in gaining an intimate knowledge of the filmmakers’ lives and influence on Māori cinema and community.

I believe that I am qualified for this research due to my having studied abroad in New Zealand during Winter/Spring 2014. I took intensive courses on New Zealand Cinema and Māori Society/Culture while at Victoria University of Wellington, where I built a strong foundation in the film and Māori Fourth Cinema analysis needed for my current research as well as the basic knowledge of te Reo (Māori native language). Additionally, I completed RTVF courses at Northwestern University that center around film analysis and critique, including RTVF 220: Media Texts, RTVF 313: Documentary Film Theory & Criticism, RTVF 353: Film, Media, & Globalization, RTVF 379: Unruly Women; these are all film classes that have taught me the foundations of film analysis, especially dealing with minority and underrepresented cinemas, ultimately culminating in research paper format.

With my senior year at Northwestern University approaching, I would like to apply my research project and experience into organizing more Indigenous cinema events on campus, ranging from screenings, guest speakers, and a possible collaboration with Block Cinema to coordinate NU’s first Indigenous film festival. My interest in attending graduate school has increased with the devotion I have already put into this project, so I view it as a great introduction into creating a strong graduate thesis focusing on Indigenous cinema. I hope my research will help bring awareness of the silenced voices of minority and Indigenous peoples, and that it will inspire more students to work toward making a freer society for those voices to flourish now and for generations to come.
Bibliography


Appendix

A. Filmography

Works Cited


_Mauri_. Dir. Merata Mita. 1988. Film.
