Derry, Ken. "Reinvented rituals as medicine in contemporary Indigenous films: *Maliglutit*, *Mahana* and *Goldstone*." *Reassembling Democracy: Ritual as Cultural Resource*. Ed. Graham Harvey, Michael Houseman, Sarah M. Pike and Jone Salomonsen. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 193–210. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350123045.ch-011>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 14:47 UTC.

Copyright © Graham Harvey, Michael Houseman, Sarah M. Pike, Jone Salomonsen and contributors 2021. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Reinvented rituals as medicine in contemporary Indigenous films: *Maliglutit*, *Mahana* and *Goldstone*

Ken Derry
University of Toronto

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great. Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

Keri Hulme (Māori), *The Bone People* (1986: 4)

Copyright © 1983 by Keri Hulme. Reproduced
with permission of Pan MacMillan through PLSclear

Introduction

The horrifying (and wholly un-democratic) violence of European colonialism has included racism, land theft, rape, child abuse, slavery and genocide. This violence in many ways has been made possible by stories. As Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkene (2009) points out, the ‘story of imagined White superiority’

Thank you to the editors of this volume (Graham, Jone, Michael and Sarah) for their help with an early draft of this chapter. I also want to thank all the organizers of REDO for including me in their 2017 event in Oslo. Many of the participants had been meeting already for a few years and knew each other well. I was very much an outsider and this was a new academic world for me, but everyone was incredibly supportive and welcoming. I found spending a few days listening to a host of smart and thoughtful people discuss the ways in which ritual can literally help improve the world to be a wonderfully profound and moving experience. Being part of that meeting also connected me – as rituals tend to do – to this new community, some members of whom I remain in grateful contact with.

has justified and encouraged hateful colonial attitudes and actions for centuries, and ‘continues to have disastrous effects on the health and well-being of Indigenous people’ (3). Such stories are so powerful because they both shape and reflect the worlds in which we live, as ‘humans in every society construct and articulate their shared reality in the form of narrative’ (13). Which is to say: ‘We *are* our stories’ (13).

Again, colonial myths are predicated on the conviction that European cultures are inherently better and deserve to supplant those in colonized lands:

Believing that Indigenous epistemologies were merely pagan superstition, the colonizers sought to eradicate those epistemologies by imposing ‘modern’ education and Christian evangelism. Their goal was to eliminate Indigenous cultures and bring modernity and progress to Indigenous peoples. (5)

At a certain historical point, colonial stories assumed that the elimination of Indigenous cultures had in fact taken place. And so as Tewa/Navajo scholar and film-maker Beverly Singer (2001) points out, these stories either ignore Indigenous people entirely or ‘refer to us in the past tense rather than as people who inhabit the present’ (2). But Indigenous people of course *do* inhabit the present and continue to suffer the ongoing effects of colonial stories and the acts they support. These effects include the loss of people, land, languages and traditions, as well as what Episkenew has termed ‘postcolonial trauma’ (2009: 9). This trauma has resulted in depression, poor health, self-loathing, addiction, academic failures, isolation and violence. This violence is directed ‘rarely against the settlers but rather against oneself, one’s family, or one’s community’ (8–9).

Episkenew asserts that modern Indigenous stories can challenge colonial myths and in doing so act ‘as “medicine” to help cure the colonial contagion by healing the communities that [colonial] policies have injured’ (2). These stories highlight flaws in colonial cultures themselves (5–6) while also ‘reclaiming the Indigenous knowledges that colonial policies attempted to eradicate’ and ‘validating Indigenous ideas, values, and beliefs’ (16). In such ways, stories can help to overcome the dissolution of Indigenous communities, reconnecting people with their histories, traditions and each other. To describe this effect Episkenew refers to Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver’s (1997) notion of ‘communitism,’ a neologism that mixes ‘community’ with ‘activism’ (xii). When Indigenous stories are medicine, in other words, they heal by pushing back against harmful colonial ideas and practices, and by ‘reconnecting Indigenous individuals to the larger whole’ (Episkenew 2009: 12). Even stories that do not address colonialism

directly (or at all) still fundamentally oppose colonial myths. They do this not only by affirming the value of Indigenous people and traditions but also by simply and crucially pointing to their continued existence – Indigenous cultures have *not* in fact been eliminated.

Critically, the *form* in which these stories are told is very often a colonial one. Episkenew, for instance, specifically focuses on Indigenous literature in English. Joy Harjo (Mvskoke) and Gloria Bird (Spokane) (1997) refer to the Indigenous use of colonial media as ‘reinventing the enemy’s language’:

‘Reinventing’ in the colonizer’s tongue and turning those images around to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers as a process of decolonization indicates that something is happening, something is emerging and coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression It is at this site where ‘reinventing’ can occur to undo some of the damage that colonization has wrought. (22, 24; see Episkenew 2009: 12)

In reflecting on the similar use of film to tell Indigenous stories, Beverly Singer (2001) explains that this activity ‘is part of a social movement that I call “cultural sovereignty,” which involves trusting in the older ways and adapting them to our lives in the present’ (2). And in line with Weaver’s notion of communitism, Singer sees Indigenous films as ‘helping to reconnect us with very old relationships and traditions’, to ‘revive storytelling and restore the old foundation’ and to ‘threaten traditional practices of Hollywood filmmakers, who often advanced their careers by creating distorted and dishonest images of “Indians”’ (2).¹

In the fall of 2016, I had the tremendous privilege to see three powerful Indigenous movies at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF): *Maliglutit*, *Mahana* and *Goldstone*. Each of these films in their own way arguably functions as medicine in Episkenew’s sense. In addition, they not only use the colonial medium of film to tell their stories, but all three movies represent a different take on the genre of the American western. They also feature *characters* using colonial tools and practices, together with Indigenous traditions and epistemologies, as part of their own process of overcoming the specific challenges they face. In this chapter, then, I examine the ways in which these three films explore the Indigenous mixtures of traditional and colonial practices – reinvented rituals – that may help Indigenous peoples heal from the varying traumas of (ongoing) colonial violence.

Two quick notes about terms: first, the kind of cultural interconnections I’m looking at are most often referred to as ‘hybridity’. The scholar who has arguably had the greatest influence on discussions of hybridity and colonialism

is Homi K. Bhabha, particularly in two key essays: 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse'; and 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817'. However, I am not discussing 'hybridity' as Bhabha does. In my own readings I find that Indigenous scholars and film-makers rarely if ever use the term 'hybridity', and so I will similarly avoid it here. The word too often implies that there is such a thing as a 'pure' or 'unmixed' culture, that all cultures have not in fact always been in flux for all sorts of reasons. This is a point that Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko makes in her acclaimed novel *Ceremony*:

The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle's claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing. (1977: 132)

Another reason for not talking about 'hybridity' in this chapter is that the kinds of inter-cultural practices that I see in the films I am discussing are critically dissimilar from what Bhabha examines. For Bhabha, the colonized engage in 'subversive mimicry', appropriating colonial cultures in order to reveal their inherently problematic nature and to disrupt the colonizers. The three films I am looking at, however, show characters sincerely valuing certain colonial products, acts, media, and so on, using them constructively for their own purposes and not only (and sometimes not at all) to undermine colonialism itself.²

The second term to clarify is 'democracy'. Any discussion of democracy in relation to Indigenous people will be somewhat fraught, to put it mildly. Most of the Indigenous communities that existed at the time that Columbus set sail were eventually colonized, killed or enslaved by democratic powers. In addition, one recurring feature of democratic societies has been that they do not in fact regard all citizens equally. In the United States, for instance, voting at one point was specifically restricted to male property owners of European descent. And enfranchisement is not necessarily better, as it can be a tool for assimilation rather than representation. Until 1985, the Indian Act of Canada specified that any person officially designated as First Nation, Métis or Inuit who gained the (colonial) right to vote also *lost* their Indigenous status and rights. In many instances this shift was not a matter of choice – an Indigenous person was automatically enfranchised if they obtained a university degree, for example, or joined the Canadian armed forces.

Another concern regarding democracy is that it does not reflect the traditional governance structures of many Indigenous communities. To say that 'democracy' is the ideal to which these communities should strive is itself a very colonial act. That said, the refusal to allow Indigenous people to fully participate in the larger (colonial) democratic societies of which they are now a part is of course also an act of ongoing violence and colonization. Also, there certainly *have* been democratic Indigenous societies. One of the most well known of these is the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy, which some have argued influenced the development of American democratic theory and practice (Grinde and Johansen 1991). The U.S. Congress in fact passed a resolution in 1988 recognizing the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy to the American Constitution and Bill of Rights.

For the purposes of this discussion I will be considering how Indigenous films both depict and embody reinvented ritual practices that are 'democratic' in the broad sense of helping to resist tyranny, oppression and the unjust concentration of power in the hands of a few. These reinvented rituals can also empower the Indigenous people who practise them to create healthier, safer, more sustainable communities that involve not only all people but also the larger other-than-human world.

Maliglutit

Inuk film-maker Zacharias Kunuk made history in 2001 with his first non-documentary film, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, which was based on an Inuk legend and was the first movie written, directed and acted entirely in the Inuktitut language. It won the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival that year, and in 2015 *Atanarjuat* was voted the best Canadian movie of all time in a TIFF poll of international film-makers and scholars (CBC 2015).

Kunuk's *Maliglutit* (*Searchers*) is also entirely in Inuktitut. This time, however, he turned elsewhere for his story inspiration, deciding to remake John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). Ford's movie begins in 1868 and famously tells the story of what happens after a Comanche attack on a Texas homestead, during which most of the settler family is killed and the two daughters are kidnapped, one of whom is found dead soon after. John Wayne plays the brother of the home's murdered patriarch, and the movie focuses on the years he spends searching for his remaining niece and for vengeance against the men who took the young women. In the end, both of his searches are successful.

There are similar elements in the plot of Kunuk's film, but key alterations transform its meaning. *Maliglutit* takes place in 1913 in the snow-bound far north, a very different wilderness than the West Texas landscape of the original *Searchers*. The most important change is that this is not a movie about Indigenous-settler conflict; all of the people involved are Inuit. The villains of the piece are four men who are disrupting local communities. These men are shown as selfish and lazy, taking what they want rather than taking responsibility for themselves or working with others for the benefit of the community. The foursome come upon a family while the father Kuanana and his older son Siku are out hunting; they kill the Kuanana's parents and younger son Anguti, and kidnap his wife Ailla and daughter Tagaq as their own new 'wives'.

In contrast to these men, Kuanana and his family share everything and work together for the benefit of the group. They also live in a way that depends on both traditional practices and knowledge, as well as on colonial tools. In order to decide where it is best to hunt, the grandfather performs a ritual to receive guidance from the spirit Apisaaq. Kuanana and his son set out the next morning in search of caribou – armed both with Apisaaq's advice *and* with two pieces of modern technology, a small telescope and a rifle. Kuanana uses these same tools when searching for the men who killed his family and kidnapped his wife and daughter, along with other traditional ones – a spear and his father's spirit helper, the loon Kallulik.

In the end this communal and culturally dynamic approach is as successful with the four murderers as it was with the caribou. Working together with his son, wife and daughter, Kuanana makes use of telescope, rifle, spear and Kallulik to defeat the corrupt men and reunite his family in joy and grief. It is worth

Figure 11.1 Kuanana searches. Benjamin Kunuk as Kuanana. *Maliglutit (Searchers)*. 2016. Courtesy of Isuma Distribution International.

noting that while all four of the murderers are killed in the end, the film takes care to present these deaths as necessary to free the two women – that is they are not acts of revenge, unlike the killings in Ford's movie. Similarly, the protagonist of Kunuk's early film *Atanarjuat* chooses not to exact revenge on his enemies by killing them – which, again, is unlike what happens in the original (oral) version of the story. As Kunuk explains, 'Revenge is not the subject [of the film], the subject is sharing' (Alexander 2002: 106).

Mahana

Set in the early 1960s on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand, *Mahana* adapts the novel *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies* (1994) by Witi Ihimaera, Māori author of *The Whale Rider* (1987).³ The project paired Scottish screenwriter John Collee with Māori director Lee Tamahori and was Tamahori's first New Zealand production since the groundbreaking *Once Were Warriors* (1994). That earlier film was set in the 1990s when it was made, and in fact Ihimaera himself sees *Mahana* 'as being a precursor film to *Once Were Warriors* – it shows the generation before *Warriors*' (Wild Bunch 2016: 4).

Mahana includes several direct references to traditional Hollywood westerns, including *3:10 to Yuma* (1957) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). In a number of interviews, Tamahori has discussed his film's relation to the genre:

Mahana is shot like a western, specifically a 1950s American western. I've always loved the western because it's like a simple morality play, laid out in a way that a child who didn't know the difference between right and wrong could watch it, and see exactly who is right and who is wrong. New Zealand Maori in the 1950s loved US westerns. They loved to go and watch them because they were all farmers, and rode horses, and loved to wear western hats and pretend they were cowboys. I wanted to get a touch of that across in this film. It's not a western but it evokes that feeling. (Johnston 2016)⁴

One way in which the film differs from a western is that in fact it is *not* a simple morality play. Although the apparent villain is Tamihana Mahana, the patriarch who tears his family apart, much of his violence – like that of Jake Heke, the abusive father in *Once Were Warriors* (also played by Temuera Morrison) – is facilitated by colonialism. The old man's desire for colonial status and power manifests most obviously in his bitter feud with Rupeni Poata, the head of another Māori family. Specifically, the two men have for decades competed for the sheep-shearing contract from the settler Collins family. The toxic impact

of colonial social and economic structures on the community is evident in the opening scene of the film: both families speed to the funeral of the Collins patriarch to gain an advantage in obtaining the new shearing contract and almost kill each other racing to cross a bridge only wide enough for one car.

Once upon a time, Tamihana and Rupeni were also rivals for the affection of a young woman, Ramona. She had loved Rupeni, which we first discover when her grandson Simeon finds a photo of the two of them from years ago. Eventually we learn that Ramona married Tamihana after he raped and impregnated her. Tamihana's ugliness is also revealed in his battles with the members of his own family, particularly Simeon. In a critical scene, Simeon defies his grandfather's command to stop going to the movies in town; in response, Tamihana drags him out of the house, throws him down the front stairs, kicks him and tries to shear his head like a sheep. He is only stopped when his own son, Simeon's father Joshua, strikes Tamihana – which leads him to banish Joshua and his family from Mahana land.

The healing of this family, the ending of their fighting with each other and the Poatas, involves a blending of settler and Māori practices.⁵ These practices are fuelled at first by the deeply communal – and explicitly non-patriarchal – approach that Joshua and his family bring to their new situation. They work together using colonial tools and equipment to build up their own farm and sheep-shearing enterprise, while Ramona sings to the bees to reassure them that her family won't cut down the wildflowers on their new land; in return for this kindness the bees tell Ramona that they will provide the sweetest honey. That Ramona is often the standard-bearer of Māori tradition is not surprising given

Figure 11.2 Ramona sings. Nancy Brunning as Ramona Mahana and Sienna MacKinlay as her granddaughter Gloria. © 2016 The Patriarch Limited. Courtesy of WILD BUNCH SA.

her *moko kauae* (chin tattoo), which links her to her ancestors and stands in clear and pointed contrast to the Christian cross that Tamihana has put above their bed.⁶

The final transformative ritual moments come at Tamihana's funeral, which takes place with everyone in European dress clothes at a *wharenuī*, a traditional Māori meeting house. The funeral is disrupted by the arrival of the Poatas performing a *haka*, a group ritual traditionally carried out as a precursor to battle and to mark important events, including funerals. The act in this case suggests both possibilities; to the extent that the *haka* is indeed meant in part as a rebuke against Tamihana, the gesture is completed by Rupeni's statement to his rival that he is glad the old man is finally dead: 'You cast too long a shadow. Take it with you, and leave us in the sun.' At this point Simeon interrupts a brawl that threatens to erupt between the men of the two families, revealing that Tamihana had raped Ramona years before and so she had to marry him despite her love for Rupeni. In English and in Māori his grandmother confirms the story and also affirms that many good things came from their union – including her children and grandchildren.

Another critical act performed at the funeral is the *hongi*, the Māori greeting, between Rupeni and Simeon, and then Rupeni and Ramona, after Ramona's speech. The *hongi* involves two people touching their noses and foreheads to each other and traditionally exchanging *ha* (the breath of life). This ritual demonstrates the ending of the Mahana–Poata feud and starts to (re-)build the bonds between the families. It is also an implicit rebuke to colonialism and the role that settler society has played in the feud. The first time we see the act performed between members of the two families is after Simeon's class visits a New Zealand court. They witness three Māori who do not speak English – including a young Poata boy – tried and convicted in quick succession, with no one present to translate for them. The trials are wholly colonial rituals, in other words, allowing no Indigenous element. Afterwards, Simeon addresses the judge: 'If no one can speak Māori here, how can we Māori possibly defend ourselves?' Afterwards Rupeni finds Simeon and pulls him in for the *hongi*, saying: 'You spoke well today. You spoke on behalf of all of us.'⁷

Mahana does not end with the final *hongi* between Rupeni and Ramona. Instead, once the dust has settled somewhat from the revelation about Tamihana's assault on Ramona, the scene shifts to Simeon sitting on the steps of the *wharenuī*. He is approached by the girl he likes, Poppy Poata, who asks if he wants to go see a film with her. She tells him that the movie stars Elvis and is directed by Don Siegel, who Simeon immediately identifies as the director

of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956).⁸ This, amazingly, is how Tamahori concludes *Mahana*: by showing us how much two young Māori know about film, how much they *care* about it and how they use it to help bridge inter-Indigenous divides between them, divides created in part by the same colonial culture that produced the films.

Goldstone

Goldstone is Kamilaroi film-maker Ivan Sen's sequel to *Mystery Road* (2013), which once again focuses on Australian Aboriginal police detective Jay Swan. For both films Sen was not only writer and director but also editor, director of photography and composer. *Goldstone* opens with a series of old colonial photographs. These images show European men in front of tents and shacks in the wilderness; Aboriginal people in Victorian clothing; early frontier towns in the process of construction; a line of Chinese labourers; European men digging, looking for something in the earth; five Chinese women in formal Chinese clothing; and a group of European men, with camels, and a few Aboriginal men dressed traditionally. The man in the centre sits on a camel lowered to the ground and has his hand on the head of an Aboriginal man as if he owns him. Showing these photos takes just over a minute and offers an extraordinarily powerful and economical introduction to the film. Sen has not only given us a snapshot (so to speak) of certain aspects of early Australian colonization – aspects directly and specifically relevant to *Goldstone* – but he has literally reframed these images within his own camera. We are looking at an Indigenous view of a colonial view, which is what the film as a whole also gives us. When the last photo is done, the film's title appears.

After the title screen we see Jay arrive in the frontier town of Goldstone, searching for a missing young woman named Mei. He slowly unravels deep-seated capitalist corruption, as the dishonest, murderous mayor (Maureen) has been working with similarly criminal leaders of both the mining company (Johnny) and the local Aboriginal Land Council (Tommy), all of whom hope to profit from a new land deal that would allow the mine to greatly expand its operations. To them, people and land represent only resources to be exploited for personal gain. It is in this context that young women are brought in from China as sex workers for the company's male employees. Jay eventually discovers that Mei was one of these women, dying from exposure when she tried to escape her unbearable circumstances.

Jay begins *Goldstone* as a broken man in many ways, struggling with unknown demons that have come to plague him since the end of the previous film. He is estranged from his ex-wife and mourning his recently deceased daughter. He is depressed and usually drunk and appears almost entirely directionless. His commitment to justice – particularly for the lost and disenfranchised – remains unwavering, however, and seems to be what keeps him moving as he slowly comes to understand what happened to Mei.

As much as Jay finds value in pursuing his case, the key to him more fully regaining his sense of meaning and belonging is local Aboriginal Elder Jimmy. Jay is shocked to learn that Jimmy knew his father who, it seems, was part of Australia's 'Stolen Generations', one of possibly more than 100,000 children who were removed from their families by the government during the first seven decades of the twentieth century.⁹ Jimmy also takes Jay in a dugout canoe through a landscape that is filmed to suggest timelessness, a world away from the selfishness and corruption of Goldstone. Water and land fill the screen while Jimmy's song fills the speakers. The landscape includes traditional Aboriginal rock paintings, which often depict creation events connected to that specific place and to the ancestors who lived there. The fact that Jay's father is also from this place means that Jay has, unexpectedly, come home. As Jimmy's daughter Maria tells him: 'This land, you belong to it.'

Ultimately Jay is able to make some progress in fighting both his personal struggles and town corruption by engaging in ritual practices from very different cultures: he follows colonial police procedures while participating in traditional Indigenous acts that link him to the sacredness of the place in which he finds himself, both literally and spiritually. In following these intertwined paths he must similarly rely on both the Aboriginal Elder Jimmy and the very non-Aboriginal local cop, Josh. And just as he learns from Jimmy to watch and protect the birds, he uses his rifle to watch and protect Josh when killers have trapped him.

As with *Maliglutit* and *Mahana*, *Goldstone* plays with the genre of the Hollywood western. The film's press kit indicates that Sen himself refers to the film as a 'Neo Western' (Dark Matter Media 2016: 4) and that he used 'the iconography of a classic Western to flesh out the character of Jay and to bring a particular visual style to the film, as evidenced in wardrobe, location and production design' (7). In an interview with Emmet O'Cuaná (2013), Sen also makes it clear that, in his view, Indigenous people inherently disrupt genre norms: 'You could probably make ten genre films in this country [Australia] and if at least one of the lead roles is an Indigenous role, it's going to be unique. That

Indigenous character is going to bring a unique perspective, which the genre hasn't had before. So there's real currency in chasing genre with Indigenous perspective.'¹⁰

Goldstone represents a play on another genre as Sen also refers to the film as an example of 'Outback Noir' (Dark Matter Media 2016: 4), combining Aboriginal perspectives with film noir. Like traditional noir, *Goldstone* does not end happily in several ways.¹¹ While Jay and Josh have some success, Maureen and Johnny go unpunished and many good people are hurt or killed, including the Elder, Jimmy. The picture of life that the film paints is bleak in many ways. Despairing of ever being able to overcome the cruelty of her dead-end existence, one character offers a classic noir lament: 'The world is what it is. You cannot change it. You cannot bargain with it.' Initially trying to justify not doing anything about the problems in his town, Josh himself says that all Jay really accomplished in his previous case (from *Mystery Road*) was to kick up a bit of dust that just settled down again. The movie clearly sides with Jay, though, who responds that at least the dust 'is a little bit thinner'.

This is, it seems, one of the Indigenous twists that Sen is putting on film noir. When we think only of ourselves, things will inevitably end badly for everyone. When we think of others, though, when we recognize our true *place*, our actions can have some small, but real, value. We may not be able to do much, but this is more than nothing. Regarding noir's notoriously pessimistic outlook, Foster Hirsch (1981) remarks: 'In all the films where characters are pressed by circumstances, there is no way out as the protagonists stare mutely at lives of absolute dead-ends' (180). While *Goldstone* does not end happily or neatly, Josh and Jay are not at dead ends. Josh puts in a transfer to another town, by the

Figure 11.3 Jay finds his place. Aaron Pedersen as Jay Swan. *Goldstone*. 2016. Courtesy of Arclight Films.

ocean, 'to clean a bit of this dust out of me'. And Jay gets back in the canoe, alone this time, and goes home.

Conclusion

In each of these three very different films, set in different times and places, the Indigenous protagonists learn (or reaffirm) the value of community, of sharing resources, of thinking of others before oneself. At the same time they learn to push back against those who use the power they have to cause suffering. All of these points about community, thoughtfulness, power and violence are also tied to colonialism in some form, implicitly (in *Maliglutit* and *Mahana*) or explicitly (in *Goldstone*). These films highlight the ways in which selfishness is fundamentally violent and anti-democratic, how it disrupts the critical relationships that form communities and how the selfish also suffer in the end.

One way in which this point is made in each film involves sexual violence against women. Many commenters have of course noted the historic links between patriarchy and colonialism (e.g. Jaimes Guerrero 2003; Hanson 2009). But the films also empower the women who are assaulted. Even though all three movies focus on male protagonists – and were written and directed by men – the women are not simply victims of violence but active participants in resolving their circumstances. It may be Kuanana and his son who set out after the murderers of *Maglitutit*, but the women play a pivotal role in reuniting the family – unlike what happens in the original *Searchers*. As Cian Cruise (2017) points out, 'Their escape from the torment of the marauders is only possible with each member's contribution. This isn't the story of one dad saving his womenfolk from other bad men, but a community coming together to heal the rift caused by one violent act.' Similarly, Ramona in *Mahana* may have been forced to marry Tamihana after he rapes her, but when he exiles Joshua and his family she goes with them to her old home on her own land. Her husband forbids this, but she rebukes him: 'Even *your* power', she snaps, 'has its limits'. The corruption in *Goldstone* would never have been exposed, and stopped, if it had not been for Mei's original courageous escape attempt. Her death is what brings Jay to the town. And it's not Jay who convinces local police officer Josh to finally see the corruption himself, but another of the women brought to town from China who defies her captors by telling Josh the truth.

Depicting women with agency in these films is one of the modifications they are making to the Hollywood western. Another is of course the presentation

of Indigenous people as complex, fully human beings. In traditional westerns like Ford's *The Searchers*, 'Indigenous people are presented as dehumanized demons and a white man's vengeance is a righteous act' (Cruise 2017). Such films both reflected and provided further support for racist, genocidal views and acts. Offering realistic, affirming and whole portrayals of Indigenous people is one of the simplest and most powerful ways in which *Maliglutit*, *Mahana* and *Goldstone* can function as 'medicine' in Episknew's sense.

One critical way in which these films show the full humanity of Indigenous people while also emphasizing the importance of community is through inter-Indigenous conflict. In some ways this violence is connected to the self-inflicted harm that Jo-Ann Episknew identifies as resulting from postcolonial trauma. Certainly some of the battles between Indigenous characters in *Mahana*, and all of them in *Goldstone*, result from colonialism. But this is not the case in *Maliglutit*. In fact Zacharias Kunuk has specifically said that the villains in his film are not committing post-contact crimes, as 'wife stealing may be as old as Inuit culture itself' (Kingulliit Productions 2016: 3). This seemingly straightforward narrative idea radically re-figures classic tropes and their underlying meanings:

Gone is the racial conflict at the core of Ford's film. The marauders in *Maliglutit* are Inuit men who have been exiled from common society. This means the crimes aren't committed against "the Other," but members of one's own community. The simple act of dehumanization is not possible in this context, when one shares custom, creed and code. This choice makes the film more harrowing and thought-provoking. If we could do this to ourselves, then what other dark deeds are we capable of? (Cruise 2017)

These movies do not essentialize Indigenous and non-Indigenous people or behaviours as 'good' or 'bad'. Individuals who belong to either group can and do behave deplorably, while others do what is right. What determines whether one's actions are valued or not is whether they serve the community or instead benefit a few while harming many.

Another way in which Kunuk, Tamahori and Sen appear to be Indigenizing movies is by decentring people in some respects. All three of their narratives are, in important ways, about how certain landscapes at times present challenges for survival. In each film Indigenous people manage by working *with* their environment – asking the loon spirit for help, singing to the bees, paddling through ancient waters in the dessert. These actions are contrasted dramatically with those who try to dominate their world and take what they want, like the four Inuit murderers, or Tamihana Mahana, or the mining company.

Visually, each film reinforces this point by frequently showing how small people are in contrast to their environment. In discussing Ivan Sen's use of drones for filming, Arrernte/Arabana actor Aaron Pedersen (who plays Jay Swan) explains that he is part of a long tradition: 'All the Indigenous paintings throughout history, they were always a bird's eye view ... it's the Indigenous way of storytelling' (O'Cuana 2016). In discussing the setting of *Goldstone*, Sen called it 'the most incredible landscape I've ever shot ... it was absolutely the most ancient, stunning [landscape] ... the drone is there the whole time and you can see the age of this continent and the people moving around on it and the shadows' (Thwaites 2018). When he presented his film at the TIFF in 2016, Sen further said that he intended his overhead drone shots to offer a perspective in which people are simply part of a much, much larger whole.

As exemplified by these three movies, Indigenous film-makers are reinventing traditional storytelling in ways that involve colonial tools and forms while at the same time reinventing those very tools and forms. They have literally taken control of the lenses that frame them and their stories, lenses that have caused (and continue to cause) tremendous harm:

Indians have been misrepresented in art, history, science, literature, popular films, and by the press in the news, on radio, and on television. The earliest stereotypes associating Indians with being savage, naked, and heathen were established with the founding of America and determined by two factors: religious intolerance for cultural and spiritual differences leading to the destruction of Native cultures, and rejection of Indian cultures as relevant subject matter by traditional historians in the writing of U.S. history. (Singer 2001: 1)¹²

Figure 11.4 Ivan Sen's Indigenous perspective in *Goldstone*. 2016. Courtesy of Arclight Films.

This, again, is the colonial myth that Episkenew critiques, from which all of us need to heal. Significantly, all three movies under discussion take steps in this direction in part by presenting us with Indigenous characters who resolve problems by looking through colonial lenses: Kuanana tracks his enemies with a telescope; Simeon starts to understand his family's pain when he finds the photo of Ramona and Rupeni; and Jay saves Josh's life after watching him through his rifle scope. Reflecting on the use of lenses in *Maliglutit*, Darrell Varga (2019) comments: 'The history of cinema, like the history of colonization, is the expression of control through the gaze, the act of looking. The association of shamanism with vision is not a simple counter-culture trope but here is expressive of the project of decolonization.'¹³ *Goldstone* makes this same point with its opening photographs that repeat the well-worn colonial myth of European greatness and Indigenous insignificance; these photos are placed within a very different story the film tells about the colossal harms that continue to result from colonialism and the ways in which Indigenous people, practices and epistemologies matter.

All of this brings us back to the reinvented rituals championed by each film that involve both Indigenous and colonial elements. The point is not that all products of colonial cultures are selfish or violent; they are not all 'bad'. The point instead is that these products are tools that can be used to help *or* to hurt. In this respect, *Mahana* clearly sides with Simeon's argument against his grandfather, Tamihana, that despite their many faults and the damage they have done, Hollywood films can nevertheless be meaningful for Indigenous communities; they can connect people and create relationships. Speaking about *Goldstone*'s protagonist, Ivan Sen remarks: 'The power of film is similar to the power of Detective Jay Swan, to bring cultures together, the world together' (Dark Matter Media 2016: 6). Indigenous films, that is, can both depict and facilitate healing.

As Episkenew (2009) argues, however, this healing is not sufficient if it does not have a material, democratic impact on society – which is to say, 'healing without changing the social and political conditions that first caused the injuries would be ineffectual' (17). Such change can happen through various means related to the notion of story-as-medicine. In their critique of the colonial myth, Indigenous films can 'implicate settler readers by exposing the structures that sustain White privilege and by compelling them to examine their position of privilege and their complicity in the continued oppression of Indigenous people' (17). They can also empower Indigenous people and bring them together through the recognition and affirmation of their vital, whole humanity.

It is not simply the representation of Indigenous people (and settlers) that matters: it is the *process* of representation and particularly the fact that this process is controlled by Indigenous people themselves. This control gives Indigenous film-makers both a literal and a political voice.¹⁴ And this control is key to the power of the reinvented rituals of *Maliglutit*, *Mahana* and *Goldstone*. These acts – like Kuanana firing a rifle or Jay following police protocols or Simeon discussing *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* – are the specific result of the *Indigenization* of colonial artefacts, systems and knowledges. This shift in context and perspective is central to the impact of all these reinvented rituals. This shift is what enables the rituals to function as a resource for democratizing societies, to push back against the harmful effects of personal and systemic violence while working to reaffirm and recreate healthy, reciprocal and just relations among various peoples as well as the other-than-human world.