

KEWEKAPAWETAN: RETURN AFTER THE FLOOD  
A FILM ABOUT THE ANNUAL GATHERING AT SOUTH INDIAN LAKE, MANITOBA

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM PRODUCTION

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

December, 2013

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## Abstract

“In the long run what is useful is what survives,  
revives, comes to life in different contexts.”<sup>1</sup>

The people of South Indian Lake Manitoba are slowly leaving behind a long period of social crisis brought on by the damming of their namesake lake in the 1970's. The environmental devastation still exists, but the community returns to their original village site once a year for a gathering called *Kewekapawetan*, meaning “going back” or “looking back” in the Cree language. My film documents my interactions with family members at this gathering in 2008, and uses archival and found footage spanning fifty years, to show how this yearly event represents a positive cultural change for the community. As the filmmaker, I am not only documenting these subtly monumental events; I am also tracing my own disconnected personal history to this place. Central to the story is my father's unwillingness to return to his family home that he left a long time ago, and my own desire to forge new bonds with this “home” where I have never resided. For the community, revisiting the place where our grandparents lived brings hope for the future after a long period of despair. In parallel, my film documents my personal hope that I will be one day be able to reunite my family.

## Dedication

This film is dedicated to my father, Douglas Dysart. Despite his reluctance to be involved, he allowed me to interview him for this film.

I am forever thankful.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the participation of several people at South Indian Lake on this project. William and Hilda Dysart and their children were very helpful to me in providing insight, materials and moral support. In addition, I would like to thank the organizing committee of the 2008 Kewekapawetan gathering for allowing me to film the events.

I would like to acknowledge the support and patience of my thesis supervisor Phil Hoffman who saw me through many different variations of this film. In addition, I am incredibly grateful for the thoughtful comments offered by my thesis committee members Brenda Longfellow, Ali Kazimi, John McCullough and Michael Greyeyes.

Cory Generoux also deserves an acknowledgement for his willingness to participate in the project by braving the wild roads from Saskatchewan to northern Manitoba in the summer of 2008 to offer additional camera support. His friendship and creative suggestions were very valuable. My sound designer Teresa Morrow is acknowledged as an integral part of the overall final stages of this film. Thank you so much for your numerous hours of effort.

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## Introduction

The current location of the town called South Indian Lake is just a few miles from the village site where my grandparents lived until a major hydro-electric project, called the *Churchill-Nelson River Hydro Project* threatened to drown the community, and they were forced to move. This forceful dislocation, the flooding of the lake they once used as a source of sustenance, and the drastic change in lifestyle that resulted, drastically reduced the quality of life for the people who live there. One could argue that the community has been in crisis for more than three decades, although there are events that take place that encourage healthy changes in the community. The Kewekapawetan gathering is an example of an event that represents a shift towards the health of the community. My film, *Kewekapawetan: Return After the Flood* documents some of the events that took place in and around my family's encampment at the 2008 Kewekapawetan gathering and places it in the context of the community's early engagement with the crown corporation named *Manitoba Hydro*, as well in relation to my own family connection to the community. The film about South Indian Lake has been influenced by my academic background in post-colonial studies and interest in experimental ethnography. As a post-colonial work, I do not mean to imply that colonialism has been relegated to the history books. Rather, "to truly achieve post-colonial status for nations and a global community" we must "as individuals...embark on personal voyages of introspection."<sup>2</sup> This documentary shows both the voyage of some South Indian Lake community members as they go back to their original village site and

is also my own personal introspective voyage into the relationships I have with my family.

## The People of South Indian Lake - A Brief History

As long ago as anyone remembers, the people at South Indian Lake were successful hunters and fishermen living approximately 1100 km north of Winnipeg, in a small remote village. Though the community had been racially-integrated for generations with non-native immigrants to the north, the community was remote and had no government infrastructure. The Hudson Bay Company has records from the area going back to 1805.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960's the Cree people living on South Indian Lake were members of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (formerly Nelson House First Nation) despite living outside of that reserve's boundary on the shoreline of the lake 80 kms away. In 2005, some members of the community broke away from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and created a separate First Nation called O-Pipon-Na-Piwin First Nation.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1960's, the community of South Indian Lake was told by the provincial government representatives that the lake was going to be flooded as part of a massive project that would provide power to the rest of the province. The plan was to divert the powerful Nelson River into the Churchill River using South Indian Lake as a water reservoir. At one time the plan was to raise the level of the lake by as little as seven feet<sup>5</sup> above normal. At another time the plan was to raise the level to thirty-five feet above normal.<sup>6</sup> It was said to be inevitable that their village site would go under water and the people were forced to move their village to accommodate the flooding. Historically, the lake had been the source of sustenance for the people, however the impending flood of

water threatened to change the lake and the surrounding land permanently.

Consequently, the project threatened the ability of people to subsist off of the land. By 1974, several communities came together to fight the proposal, under the name The Northern Flood Committee.<sup>7</sup> An official public hearing was held in Winnipeg in 1969, but failed to offer justice for the communities affected.

While there were multiple scientists at the hearing that argued that the ecological and social effects of the proposal would be devastating,<sup>8</sup> the Manitoba Hydro corporation argued that there was evidence indicating that the proposal to build the dam was the most economical and thus, the most desirable.<sup>9</sup> At that time the territory in question was not a reserve recognized under the Indian Act, and there was confusion as to whether or not the people there had any rights to the land. In *Aboriginal Peoples and Natural Resources in Canada*, Claudia Notzke explains that the people of South Indian Lake were treated as squatters on Crown Land, despite the fact that many of the Cree people held treaty rights as a result of the signing of Treaty Number 5 in 1908.<sup>10</sup>

This was a pivotal point in the history of South Indian Lake. The entire community was forced to relocate to the other side of the lake. In exchange, they were promised roads, government services, new houses, running water and electricity. After relocation, the jobs were few and far between, the newly built houses were insufficient for the climate, and the electricity was expensive. To this day, the community does not have the infrastructure for running water and the roads have not been paved.

The water level of the lake often fluctuates well beyond the levels that were promised by Manitoba Hydro when the flooding started. Originally, the corporation agreed to limit the rise and fall of water to three feet. However they continually exceeded that stipulation and then they eventually gained permission for these greater fluctuations.<sup>11</sup> By 1991, the lake was raised by five meters (approximately 16.4 feet).<sup>12</sup> To this day the rising water level continues to erode the shoreline, causing tree debris to fall into the lake. As was reported in *Canadian Geographic Magazine* in 1991:

Trapping and hunting has been disrupted, habitat and migratory patterns of birds and animals have been severely altered. Forest have been turned into swamps. Mercury, leached mainly from the soil, has been released into the food chain.<sup>13</sup>

The life-cycle of fish has been interrupted, because the never-ending turbidity of the water causes silt to bury the fish eggs. The hydro-electric project brought drastic changes to the environment that led to the end of the community's independence. The self-sufficiency that was part of the community's identity quickly began to be replaced with an influx of government services.

## My Connection To South Indian Lake, Manitoba

My father, Douglas Dysart, was born in South Indian Lake in 1944 as one of the many children of Robert and Mary Dysart (née Moose). My Cree lineage goes back through my grandmother's line, and my grandfather was one of the few non-native men who went to South Indian Lake for the fishing and trapping and decided stay.<sup>14</sup> For reasons my family can only speculate about, my father was sent away at age fourteen to go live in Saskatoon with an older brother he did not know. To this day, my Dad rarely speaks of his youth or our Cree heritage. This has caused me some stress throughout my life and led me to make many efforts to forge connections with his side of the family. Although I began this film with the intention of making it solely about the Kewekapawetan gathering, it inevitably became about exploring my place in my father's family and my relationship to this "home" in which I have never resided.

## Intentions and Themes

Around the world indigenous peoples survive in regions that have been destroyed by powerful alliances between industry and governments. There are a plethora of films that document the displacement of indigenous people as a result of hydro-electric projects. The Narmada Dam in India and the Three Gorges Dam in China are well-documented examples of major hydro projects that have had a devastating effect on the environment and the people who reside near it. In the 2006 documentary film *Green Green Water* by Dawn Mikkelson, South Indian Lake is subject to the scrutiny of environmentalists and social activists, because residents recently voted to approve the beginning of yet another hydro project that will have untold effects on the surrounding areas. For decades, journalists and documentarians have been telling the horrible stories of destruction and social crisis, leaving the local and personal stories of existence, resistance and persistence unexplored. What has not been well documented are the stories of people who are working very hard to encourage the health of the community through cultural events like the Kewekapawetan gathering.

South Indian Lake is the place where I derive my Cree heritage but it is a place that I slowly came to know better as an adult. When I began making this film in the fall of 2007, I had been to South Indian Lake three times. I had piecemeal experiences at South Indian Lake, but throughout my youth I was in contact with various members of my family, some of whom are characters in my film.<sup>15</sup> Throughout my life, my mother collected

newspaper articles about the lake and the community, which fuelled my interest in knowing more about the place and finally getting to know my extended family better. I was uncomfortable with being a distant observer of what was happening there, and wanted to know more. As a young person growing up in British Columbia, I focused my studies on indigenous issues, anthropology, environmental issues and sociology. In hindsight, I believe those endeavors were all in an attempt to find myself closer to South Indian Lake.

In her Massey Lecture, entitled *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside: Laboratories of Social Change*, Doris Lessing notes that it is through literature and history, as the two great branches of human learning, that one “may learn how to be a human being”<sup>16</sup> by “knowing how to judge an idea from the point of view of long-term human memory. It is these people, who have access to this vast perspective, who can “think about what is going on in the world... try to assimilate information about our history, about how we behave and function [and] advance humanity as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> Coming from a long line of family archivists on my mother’s side of the family, I understand the value of my impulse to be an aggregator of materials and records, in the interest of the endeavor called “greater understanding.” In presenting my personal story of attempting to reunite my Dad with our family alongside the story of the community’s efforts to rejuvenate traditional activities, it becomes apparent that I’m drawing links between the past and the present, the personal and the political. My film represents the connections that I’ve made and the greater understanding that I’ve gained.

Throughout the film there is a recurring theme of returning, as I present the Kewekapawetan gathering and explore my connection to the place, to its history, and to my connection to my Cree cultural heritage. On one hand, the film is a historical look at the environmental and social impact of a hydro-electric project, and the ways in which a community can evolve to survive in the middle of an environmental disaster. Yet the inclusion of the storyteller (me) with deep ties to the subjects (my family/ my community) gives the film shades of autobiography (mine), and biography (my Father's). And though the film is thematically an environmental story where First Nations rights to land and cultural survival are central, this is not a traditional activist piece. Importantly, the film favors sentiment over dissent, healing over activism and moving forward with an eye towards the past. It's not a film relying on scientific facts to give it weight. Nor am I making comparisons to other communities facing similar environmental issues. We see what happened not through a detached lens, but through an intimate one. We see in action how arbitrary decisions by government bureaucrats have long-term effects on real people. Most importantly, I aim to create an understanding of why teaching the youth traditional activities such as throwing gill nets, cleaning fish and preparing moose nose to eat are part of a wide range of activities that are central to the overall healing of the community. There was a time when it was assumed that people who are affected by environmental destruction would leave the area. History has shown that although some individuals may temporarily depart, many more keep their ties with their traditional

territory. Keeping these connections to the land inhabited by family is an integral part of indigenous identity and world-view.

## Reclaiming Voice/ Rejecting Outdated Ways of Thinking

We are seeing now an example of the price a society must pay for insisting on orthodox, simple-minded, slogan thinking.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1960's one of the slogans that represented a widely held perspective in Manitoba was: "*Growing to beat '70.*" It was a saying that summarized the government's policies as the sixties were giving way to the seventies and rapid economic growth was universally celebrated as the solution for poverty, hunger, unemployment, and inflation.<sup>19</sup> The drive to promote economic progress even at the detriment of the environment is part of the backdrop for the story of survival that I am telling in this film.

Within the archival footage at the hearing, this slogan is brought up as a potential reason why Manitoba Hydro was so insistent on their proposal for the project. One of the speakers in the 1969 footage who was arguing against the proposal exposes the underlying belief that justifies the destruction of the lake and the community at South Indian Lake:

It has been said that this type of community represents a dead-end way of life.<sup>20</sup>

In the twentieth century, there was a pervasive sentiment in North American society that it was necessary to accept technological developments and that traditional ways of life were outdated. Within this perspective, "progress" was desirable and new

technologies were to be adopted by forward-thinking governments. Along with the assimilationist policies of our federal government, this perspective created a negative situation for the people of South Indian Lake.

The Kewekapawetan gathering demonstrates that by embracing traditional hunting and gathering practices, they are once again finding value in their roots. As a result, they are becoming active participants in contemporary society of their own making, rather than remaining victims of what is called progress. On the level of community we are able to assert our own cultural and family identities by revisiting the locations where our grandparents lived, and leave behind the outdated negative beliefs that previously affected the history of this place. On a personal level, by revisiting the original village site and taking part in such an event, the psychological distance between me (as an outsider) and my family (as insiders) is diminished. "They" and "I" become "we" who share common and identities.

## Filmic Materials

This film combines four types of footage from three different time periods. The background story of the film is represented by footage I discovered at the Manitoba Archives in Winnipeg recorded in 1969. Shot in both South Indian Lake and in Winnipeg in 1969 on 16mm black and white film stock, this footage was recorded by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). I have also used additional CBC news video footage from the 1980's documenting the devastating results of the hydro-electric project. These clips were discovered at the Manitoba Archives in Winnipeg in 2007. Despite knowing it's origin, I treat this footage as "found footage" as there is little information to support it. There are no precise dates on the recordings, nor are the names of the people integrated into the footage.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally I have two types of footage shot on HDV taken in 2008. The first is a single conversation that I had with my father in 2008 at his home in Las Vegas, Nevada. The second set of HDV footage shows interviews and events at the original village site at South Indian Lake, taken during the third iteration of the Kewekapawetan celebration in the summer of 2008. Lastly, the film includes supplemental archival photos of the home my father knew as a child between 1944 and 1958, as well as several family photos taken when my Dad took my sister and I to South Indian Lake in the summer of 1988.

## Structure and Style

Overall this film is comprised of three main parts that primarily occur chronologically from the 1960's to Kewekapawetan gathering in 2008. With the exception of a few flash-forwards in time to 2008, the first third of this film takes place almost entirely in the late 1960's when the community was informed about the coming of "the flood." This first section of the film brings the audience into the hearing where the community learns about the hydro-project proposal.

This first portion of the film relies heavily on the black and white footage of the hearings that took place in the old Anglican church in South Indian Lake and also in Winnipeg in 1969. In the South Indian Lake segment, the Manitoba Hydro representatives speak through a translator, and then some of the community members stand up to voice their concerns. Just as the people of South Indian Lake were made aware of the encroaching development in their territories, the viewer is slowly made aware of their plight via these filmed hearings. Just as the people of South Indian Lake were forced to learn about their future through an English to Cree translation, the audience of this film experiences these translated proceedings as they did. Although the church would have been a familiar building for the people in 1969, the setting of this scene is unsettling and unfamiliar because the hydro representatives make presentations in English that focus on the electrical potential of the lake using maps and charts to

explain their plan. The placement of the camera at the back of the room behind the heads of the people gives the viewer the sense that this presentation was an overwhelmingly foreign experience for the people. The camera person attempts to zoom in on the map but due to the thick cloud of smoke that hovers over the audience, the map remains unclear, ironically illustrating how obscure the proposal was to the people.

In this first section of the film, we see footage that shows that there were additional voices of dissent against the hydro-project. Sociologists, water resource management experts, and biologists who studied fish warn of the trees and debris that will clutter the lake causing dangerous currents and unsightly damage. The scientists explain that the continual rise and fall of the water level (and subsequent erosion of the shoreline) would disrupt the ecosystem in the lake. A continually eroding shoreline would disrupt the hatching of fish eggs, reducing and changing the fish. Through these voices of reason we come to understand that the people of South Indian Lake have a lot at risk because their lives center around these established ecological patterns.

The second and shortest part of the film is a compilation of news footage and voice over from the 1980's that acts as a bridge providing a summary of information describing the devastation caused by the flood. This bridge is what I call the "grieving section." It is a bold and jarring segment that is significantly shorter than the other sections. This section mirrors the quick and overwhelming way in which the community was irrevocably altered by the flooding. More experimental in style, the grieving section is mainly

comprised of CBC news stories from the 1980's that exposed the devastating effects of the dam on the lake, the fish, the health of people and, consequently, the destruction of their social fabric.

The grieving section is meant to do two things. Firstly, it was meant to provide a summary of factual and scientific information that explains the widespread negative effects that came as a result of the flooding. Also it was meant to be such a change of style that it takes the viewer out of the mindset of the first section, ready for another major switch in pace and flow. It is a reworking of the mass-produced news footage that was made by and for a southern audience. The viewer is bombarded with facts and evidence of technological decay. Through this montage of news debris, the decay dissolves itself, leaving room for the cultural renewal represented in section three.

Combined, parts one and two set the stage for the third section that is almost entirely about the Kewekapawetan gathering that took place in 2008. Here I've set up a framework where the transition to a peaceful and serene setting at the gathering from the tense environment of the hearings is smooth, understandable and perhaps most importantly, heavy with significance.

The third part of the film takes place at the gathering on the original village site during the summer of 2008. As people return to camp on their family territories and gather together to talk about the old ways, there is a renewed sense of pride of place and

a lifting of community spirit. These days at the gathering are filled with games, fishing and socializing over food. Although seemingly mundane, these activities are a sign of resilience and an indication of the shared goal of cultural renewal.

Throughout the three chronological sections however, I have interrupted this historical look at South Indian Lake with two types of contemporary scenes from 2008. The audience is given small visual samples of activities taking place at the gathering, to foreshadow the subtlety and slow pace involved in camping at the original village site. I also “sprinkle in” segments of a conversation that occurred between my father and I in 2008. In this scene, I surprise him with photos of his childhood home that he hadn’t seen for fifty years, and ask him to tell me about what he remembers. These are poignant moments where I attempt to persuade him to return to South Indian Lake with me, and where my own role as filmmaker and family historian is explained. Rather than using audio narration, I use titles on the screen to explain the history, and my thoughts and feelings.

While doing research on the film, I became aware of the similarities between the sound of rushing water and the resulting electricity that it can create. In the parts of the film where I’m drawing attention to the damage that the flooding brought to northern Manitoba, I made a point to work with the combination of water sounds and electrical sounds to heighten the drama that is unfolding.

## Transfer of Archival Footage

While researching at the Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg in 2007, I found an hour and a half worth of black and white 16mm film that belonged to the CBC but were transferred to this provincial archive. Having been in storage for so long the film was deteriorating so much that I had difficulty convincing the archivist to transfer it to tape for me. Of course, I argued that film has no value unless people can see it, and I expressed to her the utmost urgency in making sure that the community of South Indian Lake be able to have access to the footage. As far as I knew, no one in my family had ever had a chance to see the film footage. It seemed to me incredibly valuable for the community to have access to the records of their family members in the early days of the resistance to the project. From these archives, I also received copies of news stories from the 1980's, photos, and some written records. Although outside the scope of my MFA thesis project, one of my original plans was to make copies of every archival item I found and to provide it to the Kewekapawetan committee or the local school for their own use. The transfer of material and archiving of materials is a much larger project that will involve greater collaboration with the community and I look forward to that process.

## Moving Away From My Original Thesis Proposal

Originally I had planned to make the film a 20 minute experimental documentary, using lichen as a metaphor for the resilience of the community at South Indian Lake. Lichens can survive wider extremes of temperature, radiation and drought in the harsh environments they often inhabit. Like the people of South Indian Lake, they are a robust life-form that can endure the most extreme of circumstances. Its strength may be hidden in an unassuming exterior, but its future is certain: it will continue to live. However, in the making of the film I encountered the dilemma that often plagues experimental filmmakers: the techniques of the experimental filmmaker are often inaccessible to a general public. I felt that it would be too much of a stretch to take the actions of real people and reduce it to a metaphor involving a plant. As a filmmaker with ties to the community, I am in a relationship with them that I am accountable to them as much as to myself and my artistic impulses. I realized that many of my abstract aspirations for the film would not do justice to the contemporary story of renewal and perseverance that my family is enacting through the organization of the gathering. The desire of the community for documentation of their activities as well as my own desire to explain how much this community has gone through since the flooding of the lake became the driving forces in the creation of this film. In focusing on the voice of the people of South Indian Lake both past and present, this film gives the people the opportunity to speak for themselves and for the damaged lake. It's an important step in "transforming the realities of colonialism."<sup>22</sup>

## Speaking For Ourselves/ What to Leave Out

It was difficult to figure out what archival footage to use and what to leave out. There is a social and environmental justice story that could have easily been the main focus of the film. The “green-washing” of hydro-electric power could have added another branch to this story, however the issue was covered in the film *Green Green Water* by Dawn Mickelson in 2006. The main focus of her film was the destruction left behind in Manitoba by the hydro-electric project even though it is marketed in Minnesota as a clean energy source. In contrast, my film recorded celebratory events occurring within the milieu of the environmental destruction. I could not, in good conscience, record the joyful events of the 2008 gathering and then complete a film that emphasized how the injustices of the 1960’s and 1970’s led to decades of despair. A North American film audience may like to hear a dramatic story, but the people of South Indian Lake are tired of the negative press that they were the subject of for so many years. As a family member who understands that sentiment, I decided my film must respect their overall desire to tell a positive story.

The recordings of the hearings from 1969 do not identify the speakers, which has been a significant hurdle for me to overcome in terms of making a documentary that cites reputable sources. However, this film is more expressive in style, where many historical voices are dislocated from their faces. The non-native voices from the hearings

are like voices from the past that represent something that we are leaving behind. We are leaving behind the judgment that the traditions of the people at South Indian Lake are not as important as the need for power. We are even leaving behind the idea that we should be depressed by this ignorance. We are forging a new positive future by focusing on the knowledge held by the elders at South Indian Lake.

I decided that the film was more about the South Indian Lake community than about the people from the institutions that made decisions that affected their lives. As a result, it was important for me to uncover the identities of the community members in the footage so that the value of their voices is finally acknowledged. In addition, I decided that the facts and opinions of the various experts who made statements in these recordings could be quoted in this supplementary paper as representations of the mindset of a previous era, but need not necessarily be in the film.

In the footage from *CBC Winnipeg Tape #2: Open Season - South Indian Lake*, there is an eastern European man who identifies himself as a water resource planner, who made some statements that are worth quoting at length:

The whole development was planned from the viewpoint of power only..... I merely want to emphasize that the aim of planning should have been finding the solution that would optimize the sum-total of all benefits, not just the power benefits. And that cardinal principle of water resources planning was violated.

The multiple purpose plan for the north must take into account more than the natural resource. **We have in the South Indian Lake settlements, a unique undertaking which is of great social value. It has been said that this type of community represents a dead-end way of life. Now from the view-point of planning, this shallow, negative assessment completely misses the point (my emphasis).** The point is not there will be, and indeed must be, changes in this community. The point is how can we act constructively so that the inevitable changes will be changes for the better.<sup>23</sup>

Until the very last days of editing the film, I used the above quote as voice over to sum up an overall sentiment that I wished to express in my film: that is, that traditional activities are necessary for the health of Aboriginal communities. As a whole, I wished to put forward the idea that it's unconscionable to demand that people simply adopt a new way of life to fall in line with another worldview. In the end, I decided that the use of this quote was an unnecessary "safety net" that I was using to make sure I got my point across. In the end, I relied on the editing of the footage to get the point across in a more subtle way that was in line with the understated activities undertaken by the people at the gathering.

Similarly, I chose not to use the video segment of the sociologist as he warns of the cultural depression that is inevitable once the self-sufficiency of a people has been erased. Rather than foretelling using a non-native "expert," I decided to show footage of the community members respectfully explaining the hardship they face. I chose to begin

the film with the Cree man prophesizing how the flood will cause the people to “be lost for a long while before [they] can get used to it.”<sup>24</sup> During this film, there are several other examples where the people themselves describe their situations. The telling of one’s own story is a decolonizing activity, part of a process of reclaiming one’s voice that was previously silenced.

The 1969 CBC hearing footage is so dense that I was forced to make difficult decisions to leave out interesting elements that would have affected the overall feel of my film. The footage reveals that some of the other communities affected by the flooding were not advised in a timely fashion of the upcoming hearings in South Indian Lake and Winnipeg. It also revealed that many in the community did not understand the ramifications of the proposal because of the language barrier. In addition, the lawyer for the community and the Northern Flood Committee demonstrates how the hearing was flawed and not impartial. The footage shows that the person who had the authority to make the final decision after hearing the evidence put forward by both sides, was a subordinate employee of the high-ranking Manitoba Hydro representative who argued the pro-hydro project perspective. Although the legal representative for the Northern Flood Committee made note of this conflict of interest at the hearing that obvious transgression of justice was ignored.<sup>25</sup> I feel it was not imperative to include this because exposing the injustice involved in the history of the flood was not the goal of my film. The legal language of the footage would have significantly altered the mood of the film, so I opted to leave that footage out.<sup>26</sup>

At first I felt strongly that I should name all the people from South Indian Lake so as to make their voices prominent in the film. However, aesthetically I found it a challenge to have so much text on the screen, so I resorted to naming the people from the 2008 footage in the end credits. I think that hearing their voices and seeing them speak gives the viewer a chance to feel the weight of what the interviewees are saying. Intonations in their voices, and the subtleties in their gestures are more easily experienced without a screen cluttered with text. The naming of the people in the 1969 footage is part of a larger archiving project that will be continued in future visits to South Indian Lake. I felt that if I attempted it at this point, it would be incomplete and it would inevitably privilege my family because those are the people I'm most familiar with.

## Insider/ Outsider Conflict and the Influence of Theory

Although this film project was not an attempt at doing visual anthropology, I find that my academic background in anthropology leads me to consider always who I am in relation to my subjects, and what my access is to the subjects based on my culture, family ties, access to archives and materials to make the film. I feel that it's important to note that I'm telling *a story* about the Kewekapawetan gathering, not *The Story*. I know there is a power involved in telling the story and in documenting culture.

This film is one that has me as a central character who wrestles with feeling of both belonging and the feeling of being an outsider. Throughout the making of this film, I've considered what my role is as a daughter and as a filmmaker. It has been exceptionally difficult to wrestle with the conflict between being the artist/researcher whose primary responsibility it is to make work for public viewing and personal development and as a dislocated family member who has personal responsibilities to ensure that the subjects are represented in a way that is respectful. Asking my father to tell me part of his story and recording that conversation was a very difficult thing to negotiate. It was a history that he chose to leave behind, but he graciously let me delve into his story in order that I might be able to tell mine. He may not ever watch my film, but he certainly has enjoyed seeing and reading the archival materials that I have shared with him.

Despite my family ties, I was not raised in South Indian Lake, and so in some ways, people will consider me an outsider. In this film there is a tension between dichotomies such as indigenous/ non-indigenous, northerner/southerner, insider/outsider, researcher/researched because of my position as researcher, family member and director. I am a mixed-race girl from the south, visiting the north, not raised there, but whose family “welcomes her home” when she gets there. I am a non-resident as well as a trained ethnographer. The story I’m telling can only be told when I acknowledge my own shifting social locations. The post-colonial films of Trinh T. Minh-ha are illustrative of an experimental style of filmmaking that embodies the idea of shifting social locations and subjectivity. I am interested her post-colonial film works that fall outside the conventions of anthropology. Both disciplines have moved away from the idea of that objectivity is possible in the process of representing culture.

Just like the community members, I am crossing the lake to get to the original village site to camp where my grandparents lived. However, unlike them, the idea of “going back” has another layer of significance. My journey of “going home” is a further journey, in distance and in world-view. I was not raised in or around the extensive poverty that exists in South Indian Lake, and so the psychological trauma of the last few decades is significantly less for me. I do not understand the Cree language, so I only understand half of what is being said when I am there. That being said, as a family member with deepening ties, my sense of identification with their struggles is very high.

In *Reassemblage*, Minh-ha eloquently explains her mode of dealing with the conundrum of voice and power to document via the medium of film. She says: "I do not intend to speak about. Just speak nearby."<sup>27</sup> When we "speak nearby," we necessarily reference ourselves when we represent the "other." I share her perspective that curiosity is not objective but rather a result of the subjective location of the researcher who doesn't just foreground herself in the making of the film, but asks that the viewer mediate their viewing based on social location.<sup>28</sup>

To balance my concerns about having control over the story being told, I have made a commitment to share my research and my film. In doing my research for this film I have uncovered many valuable archival resources for the community that can be made use of by anyone else who is so inclined. For example, in watching the 1969 footage, my Aunt Hilda Dysart was able to identify virtually everyone from South Indian Lake. This process was integral to the long-term value of the footage and a significant part of my process of researching this film. Fundamentally, it was important for me to do this work to make me familiar with the history and my connection to it. Also, it's important that others have access to the items I've uncovered in my research, because so many families are represented in the materials.<sup>29</sup>

As Catherine Russell explains: "The term *experimental ethnography* has begun to circulate in post-colonial anthropological theory as a way of referring to discourse that circumvents the empiricism of objectivity conventionally linked to ethnography."<sup>30</sup> My

intimate interviews with family and the foregrounding of my own story within the framework of the story of South Indian Lake is an example of such experimental ethnography. Extended beyond the confines of the discipline of anthropology: “the term *ethnography* becomes an expansive term in which culture is represented from many different and fragmented perspectives.”<sup>31</sup> As a film that employs found footage, it engages with traces of the past through recalling (interviews), retrieval (exploring archives) and recycling (repurposing news footage).

Russell notes: “In the past ethnographic filmmakers were travelers, adventures bent on documenting the last traces of vanishing cultures.”<sup>32</sup> Although we do not have the stated intention of the CBC when they recorded the 1969 CBC footage, in many ways it represents this early ethnographic practice. The footage did not name the people, relegating them to obscurity, and situating them solely in the past as representatives of a way of life that was disappearing. By relinking the image with the people in it, I’ve started to give them credit for their active social contributions. Importantly, I’ve also made space for my own personal exploration.

In terms of theoretical influence, the second section (or, what I call the “grieving” segment of this film) deserves special attention. It is visually distinctive from the other parts, because it represents a recycling of mass-produced news images from outside the community between the 1970’s and the 1980’s. This footage represents a visual history that is horrifying to the collective consciousness of South Indian Lake. This time frame

was both a time of severe social decay and a time when the community was overrun by outside news crews interested in their demise. The images were produced primarily for Canadian news consumers, and then broadcast back to the community.

The footage is valuable to my film because it is an experiment in evoking an: "alternative, invasive and dialectical forms of temporality and history."<sup>33</sup> As recycled and found images, they: "represent [sic] a profound sense of the already seen, the already happened, creating a spectator position that is necessarily historical."<sup>34</sup> I treat the 1980's news footage as "already seen" by the masses, and as part of mass commoditization of South Indian Lake's past. By enhancing the physical decay of image and sound I am actively chewing it up and spitting it out again for the masses. The montage of the second section is an attempt to make the most of its role as a record of facts about the damage done to the community. It is also meant to draw attention to the way technology failed to improve the quality of life of the community as promised. The visual decay of the video footage pays homage to the erosion of the social fabric in South Indian Lake that was brought on by new technology.

Andrei Tarkovsky claims that if the artist "aims to cooperate in enhancing the value of life, then there is no danger in the fact that the picture of reality will have passed through a filter of his subjective concepts...for his work will always be a spiritual endeavor which aspires to make man more perfect: an image of the world that captivates us by its harmony of feeling and thought, its nobility and restraint."<sup>35</sup> While Tarkovsky's

idea of "perfection" may be too grand an aim, I believe that this film shows how as a filmmaker I am tying up the ragged ends of a messy history with the intention of improving our quality of life. This is my effort at telling a beautiful story of resilience which tells a story of something "closer to perfect" than our past has been.

## Conclusion

Now that the community has embraced a return to their roots with traditional subsistence education for the younger generations, the traditional activities are enabling a new generation to find strength in revisiting an old way of life. The kids are learning to fish. Although not a lucrative pastime on South Indian Lake itself any more, fishing is a basic life-skill that is transferable to other places. Importantly, this life-skill is central to a sense of community in the north.

I believe that when we have access to pieces of the past (such as stories, newspapers, archival film, memories, and traditional skills), we are better able to understand our current state of being. It may not be possible to change our past but when we are armed with knowledge about the past we are able to good decisions about the future. My own choices led me to discover the past of my family, and as a result, I have improved relationships with both my father and his extended family.

In addition, I believe that the growing acceptance of media technologies in First Nation communities has the potential to give the younger generations the ability to define for themselves what constitutes a contemporary life without having to choose between traditions of the past and the tools of the present. As indigenous people across the world take hold of their cultural affairs and media, we are throwing off the shackles of victim-hood. We are no longer trapped by the beliefs that surround us when other

people tell our stories. Although perhaps less monumental in nature, I have become empowered to find my own connections to my family without needing the approval of my father and this has made all the difference in my life.

This film will hopefully be a reminder that the stories of destruction are often accompanied by local intimate stories of perseverance. As storytellers, as family archivists, as filmmakers and collaborators, we can free ourselves from the grip of a troubled past. Doris Lessing says "by using our freedoms" and "examining ideas from whatever source they come, [we can] see how they may usefully contribute to [our] lives and to the societies we live in."<sup>36</sup> This film will serve as an example of my use of my own freedom to collect and arrange stories and images in a way that records a positive shift in the community for our collective benefit.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Doris Lessing, "Laboratories of Social Change," in *The 1985 CBC Massey Lectures - Prisons We Choose To Live Inside* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises 1986/ House of Anansi Press, 1991), 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Hingley, "Transforming the Realities of Colonialism: Voyage of Self-Discovery," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 101.

<sup>3</sup> The Hudson Bay Company Archives. *Online Finding Aids*, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/resource/post\\_rec/post6.html#91](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/resource/post_rec/post6.html#91)

<sup>4</sup> O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation. Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O-Pipon-Na-Piwin\\_Cree\\_Nation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O-Pipon-Na-Piwin_Cree_Nation)

<sup>5</sup> "Interim License Granted To Divert Water: Premier," *Winnipeg Free Press*, (Saturday December 23, 1972), 7.

<sup>6</sup> *CBC Winnipeg Archive F3750 and F3751 Program 2: Open Season - South Indian Lake*, Video, Director unknown, (1969; Winnipeg: Archives of Manitoba, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> "Lake People Seek To Nullify License," *Unknown Newspaper clipping*, p.12.

<sup>8</sup> *CBC Winnipeg Archive F3750 and F3751 Program 2: Open Season - South Indian Lake*, Video, Director Unknown, (1969; Winnipeg: Archives of Manitoba, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> *CBC Winnipeg Archive F3752 and F3753 Program #3: Open Season - South Indian Lake*, Video, Director Unknown, (1969; Winnipeg: Archives of Manitoba, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Notzke, *Aboriginal Peoples and Natural Resources in Canada*, (Ontario: Captus Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey York, "Hydro Ignored Effects of Flood in Manitoba, Native Inquiry Told," *The Globe and Mail*, Thursday, March 23, 1989, A3.

<sup>12</sup> Larry Krotz, "Dammed and Diverted: Hydro projects in northern Manitoba have irreversibly disrupted the landscape and a way of life. Permafrost was the unknown factor," in *Canadian Geographic*. (Ottawa: Canadian Geographic Enterprises: Feb/Mar 1991), 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Allan Lobozzo, "From Maine to Manitoba," *Bangor Daily News*, Vol.95 No.35-41, 1-2.

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<sup>15</sup> I was in contact with William and Hilda Dysart, Gail and Carl Braun and their children, Arlene Dysart and her children and Leslie Dysart and his family.

<sup>16</sup> Lessing, *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Cy Gonick. *Inflation or Depression: The Continuing Crisis of the Canadian Economy*. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1975), 282.

<sup>20</sup> Unknown speaker, CBC Winnipeg Archive F3750 and F3751 Program #2: *Open Season - South Indian Lake*, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> On occasion a person is called by name in this footage. Rarely are people introduced.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Hingley, "Transforming the Realities of Colonialism: Voyage of Self-Discovery," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Speaker unknown, CBC Winnipeg Archive F3750 and F3751 Program #2: *Open Season - South Indian Lake*. Canada: Archives of Manitoba, 1969.

<sup>24</sup> The man who surmises that the people of South Indian Lake will be "lost for a long while before we can get used to it" was later identified by my Auntie Hilda Dysart as Murdo Clee.

<sup>25</sup> Unknown speaker, CBC Winnipeg Archive F3752 and F3753 Program #3: *Open Season - South Indian Lake*, 1969. Within this footage, the legal representative is called "Mr. Buckwald."

<sup>26</sup> In addition, I did not feel that it was necessary to present the side of the Manitoba Hydro representatives when they argued their points of view. It is a fact that they won the argument and the project was approved. If ever the social justice film about the history of the Nelson River Diversion is made, the voices and arguments of the Hydro officials will once again need to be heard.

<sup>27</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Reassemblage, Senegal, 1982," in *Framer Framed* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

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<sup>29</sup> I hope to be able to combine the images of the people in the 1969 footage with their names in a document for the records of the Kewekapawetan committee.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), 27.

<sup>36</sup> Lessing, *Ibid.*, 76.

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