A CULTURAL RENEWAL:

NATIVE AMERICANS IN ROAD MOVIES

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MASTER OF ARTS

By Yasemin Gümüş

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I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

A Cultural Renewal*:*
Native Americans in Road Movies

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In this thesis, contemporary Native American road films *Powwow Highway* (Wacks, 1989), *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995), *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998), and *Dreamkeeper* (Barron, 2003) are studied in terms of their relation to the formal and thematic conventions of the road movie genre. The movies are examined as social reproductions of postmodern mainstream American road picture. The films are analyzed as social texts working as cultural renewals of the texts representing American Indians in the mainstream American cinema as well as they are taken as major contributions to the road genre. In this sense, Native Americans' use of the road picture's generic patterns and contemporary tendencies in order to tell their own experiences of the road journey is investigated.

Key Words: Native Americans, Western, American Indian Movement, revisionism, road film, landscape, journey.

ÖZET

BİR KÜLTÜREL YENİLİK*:*

YOL FİLMLERİNDE AMERİKAN YERLİLERİ

Yasemin Gümüş

Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar Yüksek Lisans Programı

Danışman: Duncan CHESNEY

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Bu tezde çağdaş Yerli Amerikalı yol filmleri *Powwow Highway* (Wacks, 1989), *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995), *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998), ve *Dreamkeeper* (Barron, 2003) yol türünün biçimsel ve tematik gelenekleri çerçevesinde çalışılmaktadır. Bu filmler bir ana akım olarak American yol türünün kültürel açıdan yeniden üretimi olarak ele alınmıştır. Yukarıda sözü edilen filmler Yerli Amerikalıların Amerikan sinemasındaki temsillerine sosyal ve kültürel açıdan yenilik getirmeyi amaçlayan metinler olarak incelendiği gibi filmlerin bir tür olarak yol filmine de büyük bür katkıda bulunduğu gösterilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Yerli Amerikalıların yol filminin genel ilke ve eğilimlerini kendi yolculuk deneyimlerini anlatmak için nasıl kullandıkları tetkik edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan Yerlileri, Kovboy filmi, Kızılderili Hareketi, revizyonizm, yol filmi, arazi, yolculuk.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable debate on the representation of American Indians in the Hollywood cinema. The arguments vary in terms of the presentations of the Indians on the screen and the questioned motivations behind them. Criticized in the works of Angela Aleiss, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, and Ward Churchill among others in film studies and cultural studies, the image history of Native Americans is regarded as a history of 'misrepresentation'. These critics have argued against the fact that from the early years of Hollywood the American Indian has been shown on the screen as the dangerous 'red skin' whose existence had to be wiped out from the American frontier. Especially the western genre which has consistently dismissed the native's image by reducing his visibility into feathers, buckskins, mohawks, and smoke signals has had a crucial role in the one-dimensional representations of the American Indians.

It is undeniable that the Western has functioned as the cinematic form in which the image of the Indian appeared and disappeared symbolizing his inevitable

vanishing from the history of the American West. The most classical examples of the genre such as *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), *Two Rode Together* (Ford, 1961), or *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* (Ford, 1949) introduce the American Indian as the bloody villain and justifies his extinction by associating him with savagery, barbarity, and wilderness. And this image has been idenitified with the American Indian so much that even later films like *Broken Arrow* (Daves, 1950) or *Two Rode Together* which are thought to have been among the first revisionist films treat the issues of Indian assimilation and white misgecenation in not different ways than the earlier films.

However, any suggestions that this kind of 'misrepresentation' can be replaced by the American Indian's reconfigured images which were employed in the Hollywood cinema during the civil rights movements is as problematic as the static representations of the western genre. Kilpatrick and Aleiss comment that the American Indian's celluloid image had been initially one-dimensional and negative until it was challenged during the 1960s and 70s under the influence of the American Indian Movement.

The American Indian Movement was established in Minnesota in 1968. As an activist organization, AIM was basically modelled after the protest movements of the 60s and 70s that took place in the U.S.A. African American civil protests, gay liberation, and women's movements were influential on the Indian activism which adopted a militant cultural position like the other movements of the time. The members of the American Indian Movement struggled to gain tribal independence and cultural recognition. As a consequence of the methods and models they used to voice their political and cultural demands, their militant protests frequently appeared in visual and print media. Although their relationship with the U.S. government was not legal and the issues raised were never dealt with officially, AIM activists used every opportunity to draw public attention to the Native Americans' political, social, and economic problems. During this time, the general atmosphere of civil rights movements and their presentation in the media influenced the ways Hollywood dealt with minority groups on the screen.

The revisionist films about Native Americans such as *Soldier Blue* (Nelson, 1970), *Little Big Man* (Penn, 1970), *Billy Jack* (Laughlin, 1971), *A Man Called Horse*

(Silverstein, 1970), and *Ulzana's Raid* (Aldrich, 1972) were made during this period and received considerable praise both from Native and non-Native audiences. These films, especially *Soldier Blue, Little Big Man,* and *Billy Jack* are celebrated by Angela Aleiss and Jacquelyn Kilpatrick for paving the way for more 'accurate' and 'sympathetic' representations of American Indians in the cinema. The attitude of these movies toward indigenous representations which show American Indians as innocent people victimized by white settlers is regarded as one of the best ways in which the non-Natives could identify with the noble hero.

This thesis takes such comments as its departing point and provides a criticism to Native American representations in the revisionist films made during the civil rights movements. The first section of the Chapter I summarizes a detailed history of the emergence of Indian activism which prepared an arena for the establishment of the American Indian Movement in 1968. This section also studies the political and social results of the AIM activism both for the U.S. government and for American Indians as well as it discusses the Native American responses to American

Indian Movement and its mediated struggle.Establishing a relation between the AIM activism and the revisionist films of the period, this section is followed by the second section which offers a criticism of the approaches Aleiss and Kilpatrick adopt concerning the films *Little Big Man*, *Soldier Blue*, and *Billy Jack* which were filmed during the civil rights movements.

Chapter 1 ends suggesting that the western genre and its formal and thematic motifs must be examined in order to study the emergence and the development of the road film. The road picture's use of elements such as the car, the landscape, the journey narrative, and the couple is studied in depth in order to explore the evolution of the road film through its modernist and postmodernist periods and to form a possible point of view which could be developed concerning the Native Americans' presence in the genre.

Beginning with a discussion of *The Searchers* and *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) as classic examples of the western film, Chapter 2 studies the road genre's initial examples such as *Detour* (Ulmer, 1945), *Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, 1940), *They Live By Night* (Ray, 1949), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967), and *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1967)

in order to investigate the ways the road picture establishes its own identity by responding to important historical periods like the Depression era, World War II, and the Vietnam War and by addressing issues of domesticity, progress, wealth, movement, conformity, and rebellion.

The third chapter begins with a discussion of the postmodernization of the genre, and addresses the questions of self-referentiality, intertextuality, mass media influence on the road film and its consequent engagement with the image and the spectacle. Films like *Paris, Texas* (Wenders, 1984), *Wild at Heart* (Lynch, 1990), *My Own Private Idaho* (Sant, 1991), and *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991) are examined through particular emphasis on how these movies reflect the issues of family, sexuality, rebellion, domesticity, mobility, and media consumerism. This chapter also provides a background analysis for a discussion of the ways Native American road films are regarded as postmodern road movies.

In the last chapter, I attepmt to make close readings of contemporary Native American road movies: *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998), *Powwow Highway* (Wacks, 1989),

Dreamkeeper (Barron, 2003), and *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995) are analyzed by directing attention to how these films characterize Native American social and cultural issues within the road genre. It is suggested that the American Indians rework the road film's formal conventions by employing an ironic and self-reflexive level of criticism by subverting the formal and thematic conventions of the road genre. Native Americans take to the road in order to return home; that is, their journey is culturally oriented and it is in a sense a spiritual ceremony which is supposed to bring in recovery and a reunification with the characters' Native American identity. In this sense, their response to the landscape and the car differs from the characters'response in the mainstream road films. The last chapter also calls particular attention to the complex dynamics determining the American Indians' responses toward contemporary topics and issues.

It is necessary to state that in my selection of the road films which I refer as Native American road movies, I did not make a division between the films of Native and non-Native directors. The analysis of this work and the questions and issues addressed here focus

on Native characters and protagonists instead of Native American directors and producers.

2. THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

2. 1. The History of Indian Activism

When the American Indian Movement was established in Minneapolis, Minnesota on July 28, 1968 its first and foremost concern, as declared by its members, was to protect American Indians from police harrassment and investigate the incidents related to the deaths of Native Americans on the reservations, especially on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations where the poverty and crime rates were very high. The Movement consisted of young Native American activists many of whom were brought up in the urban cities and were college graduates. Among the most prominent members of the American Indian Movement were Dennis Banks, Russel Means, Pat Ballanger, Clyde Bellecourt, George Mitchell, Eddie Benton Benai, Bill Means and Madonna Gilbert. Soon the Indian activists began to appear in world media with their deeds and reports aimed at proclaiming their national status as independent nations and at preventing U.S. intervention in their

land issues.[1] As a civil-rights movement during the late 1960s and early 70s, American Indian activism has its roots in enduring Native American struggle for tribal lands and cultural recognition, but its emergence as a media event is closely related to the other modern civil-rights movements taking place in U.S.A. at the same time such as Black Panther Party, gay liberation movement and women's movements. In order to explain the events that had taken place during AIM's activist struggles, it is necessary to provide a background to the list of incidents and political reasons which have been commented as having lead to the shaping of American Indian Movement. My aim here is to establish links between Native American efforts to gain national and international political and cultural recognition and the militant resistance American Indians have inserted to their civil-rights causes. Since American Indians tried to voice their concerns and demands in a mediated activism, their media presence is thought to have evoked a reevaluation of their representation in the American cinema. In this way, a point of view shall be developed from which we can look at contemporary

[1] See: James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson. 1984. Chapter 7: *The Rise of Native American Militancy* in *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century.* University of Illinois Press. Pp. 157-175 Vine Deloria, Jr. 1985. *Behind The Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Decleration of Independence.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Native American road movies as postmodern reproductions of earlier media texts as examples of cultural renewal.

When the last treaties over the land issues between American Indians and the federal government were made at the end of 1860s, following the years after 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado Territory, some of the Indian lands had already been opened to homesteading for the new settlers of the Western frontier and for the construction of the railroads. During the 1880s the lands of the Five Civilized Tribes which had been titled to these tribes in "fee simple" began to be disputed over as to the allotment of these tribal territories and the opening of them for the same purposes.[2] The Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles who had their tribal lands in the eastern part of the Oklahoma territory were called as 'Five Civilized Tribes' for their quick and clever adjustment to the white settlers' life and their good relations with the homesteaders around their territories. During the 1830s they had obtained title to their reserved lands

[2] Ed. Francis Paul Prucha. 1990. *Treaty of Fort Laramie April 29, 1868.* pp. 110-114, *Annual Report on the Commissioner of Indian Affairs September 28, 1886.* pp. 169-171 in *Documents of United States Indian Policy.* University of Nebraska Press.

which meant that the U.S. government had no authority over their treaty-reserved portions of native lands. They succeeded greatly in their dealings with the land and their implementation of social and educational regulations. Nevertheless, with the 1898 Curtis Act the lands of the Five Civilized Tribes were opened to homesteading and the big portions of their reserved area were shared. Since then, The Twenty Points American Indians came up with during their protests in The March on Washington (1963), occupation of the Alcatraz island, Trail of Broken Treaties (1972), and at Oglala Sioux decleration of independence at Wounded Knee laid down the restoring of these lands and the rights to form tribal governments that are nationaly and internationaly recognized.

According to Vine Deloria, Jr. (1985) the years between 1890 and 1920 were the most difficult period for Native Americans to preserve their tribal organizations and their civil-rights as legally recognized nations; they had to continue their struggles not to lose big portions of lands any more. During this period the best example for American Indians was the passing of Pueblo Lands Act in 1924

which enabled the Pueblo tribe to claim their lands legally in the Court by bringing the case to the American public attention.[3] Pueblo people assured their land titles and water rights by organizing demonstrations. Deloria asserts that the success of the Pueblos in 1924 remained as a provoking example to other Indian tribes especially in the cases where they manifested activism and benefited from the press coverage to annunciate their rights publicly. This act is important as one of the first activist movements of Native Americans paving the way for later efforts.

Most of the twenty points the Native Americans brought up during their activist struggles covered the returning of the lands that American Indians had lost in various treaties before 1864 and some other problems they confronted in their relations with the U.S. administration. What the activists laid down as their engagements were the restoration of these lands which were culturally and religiously significant to them and their political authority over the dealings of the tribal governments with other Indian

[3] Francis Paul Prucha. 1990. *Documents of United States Indian Policy.* University of Nebraska Press.
Felix S. Cohen. 1982. *Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law.* Charlottesville, Va.: Michie:Bobbs-Merrill.

communities and other states. In this way, Native Americans could live as independent nations, not as domestic minority groups under the U.S. federal government. The Twenty Points have been regarded as American Indians' declaration of independence since then.

When Native American communities were first called to represent themselves at the March on Washington in 1963, there was not an extended Indian struggle yet. But, the militant resistancy of National Indian Youth Council which was trying to gain back American Indian rights to fish the rivers in the Pacific Northwest was pronouncing its concerns in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Many young Native Americans were already demonstrating their complaints over the fishing-rights issues in these states. Furthermore, the Poor People's March in 1968 which was another modern example before American Indian activism, arranged by Martin Luther King, and the decreasing funds of the federal government for reservation programs owing to the U.S. expenditure on the Vietnam War were among the reasons Native Americans had to incline their complaints toward the public appeal by using the media news and television programs.

However, Native American deaths by non-Natives in relation to their activist participations in these movements and to the high rates of crime and Indian arrests in the region were increasing. Therefore a group was formed by young activists in order to trace Indian murders and arrests, especially to deal with the incidents occurring in the Twin Cities in Minneapolis. This group would later constitute some of the activist members of what was to be named American Indian Movement. Meanwhile, the nationwide success of anti-war activities and civil-rights protests of other social movements were triggering American Indians to meet more often and discuss what kind of activities they would carry out to gain American public support.[4] When in October, 1969 a San Francisco Indian Center which the American Indians United organization was using as its meeting place was burnt down, Indian activists finally decided to capture Alcatraz Island, the former federal prison which was no longer in use. With crowded groups of Native Americans rushing into the area the day immediately after the young activists' landing at

[4] Peter Iverson. 1998. Chapter 5 *The Struggle For Sovereignty 1962-1980.* pp. 139-171 in *"We Are Still Here": American Indians in the Twentieth Century.* Harlan Davidson, Inc.

Alcatraz the event became a nationwide issue in a very short time.

The capture of Alcatraz Island and the public and media concern about the event made American Indian Movement able to contact some government officials as well as journalists and interviewers to discuss the issues confronting the Native Americans living both in the urban areas and on the reservations. In this way, Indian activists succeeded in guaranteeing federal funds that were necesssary for the realization of most of the development programs on the reservations; their group was also assured of funding during their capture of the island. Furthermore, after the Alcatraz occupation ended, some of the lands were returned to the tribes in Oregon and the Blue Lake areas. Thus, Alcatraz seizure remained a great success for Native Americans for some time. Reservation tribes and urban natives began to trust more in American Indian Movement; if native people had been unable to acquire land reforms through treaties, they could force the federal government by taking media attention to their causes. On the other hand, this success was gained by

violence which would encourage militant Indian activists in later incidents.

Nevertheless, according to Vine Deloria, American Indian Movement rendered the twenty crucial points less immediate under its activist and violent dealings. For him, because young American Indians were fascinated with the public attention they received, soon they were less interested in the main issues regarding Native American independence than they were in their media coverage. They seemed to fail to follow the most important part of their case to the end. Thus, Deloria asserts that The Twenty Points [5] went totally unnoticed.

"The inability of the Indian activists to discern their impact or position with respect to the federal government began to emerge in the months following the landing of Alcatraz. The very success of the activists appeared to doom them to overestimate their impact and make mistakes. Soon the only issue was landing on pieces of surplus federal property, not securing them in Indian hands through legislation or litigation. The ideological basis for demanding a restoration of tribal lands was grounded in the treaty relationship of the tribes with the United States. This basis began to erode as activists viewed the treaties as an excuse for protests and not as the basis for establishing a clearer definition of the federal relationship. One of the major problems

[5] For a list of The Twenty Points as it was proposed as a movement manifesto see: *"Preamble to Trail of Broken Treaties 20-Point Position Paper: An Indian Manifesto.* http://www.aimmovement.org/ggc/trailofbrokentreaties.html

involved with this approach was that the government had no legal relationship with the activists by which it could have justified giving them the lands they demanded."(Deloria, 1985, p. 38-39)

As the American Indian Movement demonstrations appeared in the print and visual media, the conflicts between the government and the activists were climbing. For American Indians wanted their treaty reserved lands back through unofficial media presentation and as Deloria states that they had no legal arm, their deeds began to be viewed as local protests by the officials. On the other hand, the popularity they gained through their activist politics exceeded the public credibility of The Twenty Points they were trying to proclaim. Another noteworthy side of the American Indian Movement activism was, as Vine Deloria suggests above, that this approach of the native activists were, from the point of the tribal governments who were formally recognized, endangering the treaties American Indians had been trying to building up again. Thus, the invasion of Alcatraz and American Indian Movement's activist agenda was creating a tension among American Indians as well as between Indians and the government. Rather than generating assurance on the restoration of the lands, American Indian Movement's

efforts seemed to block the ways of regaining them on an official platform although the movement was successful in calling attention to the contemporary problems Native Americans were facing.

As most of these problems were not attended to immediately and profoundly, both the issues of land reforms and civil-rights remained disturbing questions with Native Americans. American Indian Movement's rebellious struggles had to be kept alive, but under more consistent and official terms. At the same time, American Indian Movement's desire for a return to a traditional form of government was worrying the tribal governments under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Likewise, the idea that the tribal officials had connections to the federal government and they were relying on federal funds in order to support the reservations was disliked by American Indian Movement. The activists, for some reasons, believed that Bureau of Indian Affairs was a drawback for replacement of tribal lands and civil-rights and it had considerable function in the Indian arrests on the reservations.

American Indian Movement's media success had made its members famous nationally as well as among the various age groups in the different Native American tribes. Especially after the invasion of Alcatraz island, American Indian tribal and religious ceremonials were hosting both old and young crowds of people and the relations of these people to each other were gaining more strength as they came together in this kind of cultural occasion. Moreover, since they were meeting very often, they were finding opportunities to discuss the latest events and argue about what could be done under specific circumstances. Incidentally, the murder of Raymond Yellow Thunder by a non-Native American in Nebraska during the course of one of their meetings caused disorder among many Native Americans and they started seeking new ways of demonstrating the injustice American Indians faced. American Indian Movement agreed upon planning a march to Washington like the one in 1963 arranged by Martin Luther King. In this way, American Indian Movement was devising negotiations with government officials and they would consistently voice their discontent and ask for their rights. Given that their march was going to be held only a week before the Predential elections, American

Indian Movement members were thinking of demanding attention and even promises about their treaties from the candidates. Their march, which was named the "Trail of Broken Treaties" , began on the West Coast and headed toward Washington in October, 1972.[6] The Trail of Broken Treaties caravan, during its journey to the capital city, would gather as many as Native Americans from the reservations and cities where it stopped. Thus, when the caravan arrived in Washington the members of the American Indian Movement presented their official demands whose entries were assembled under the declaration The Twenty Points.

The declaration of the Twenty Points was an important event in Native American history and in the history of American Indians' relations with the U.S. government. In many ways, The Twenty Points carried a significance in which American Indians demanded their rights under official and written terms and they created an opportinity to declare these points openly to the public. Most of the twenty points were about American Indian Movement's former concerns: the returning of the lands which were taken from American

[6] Alvin M. Josephy. 1984. Part III *Tomorrow Walking Tall! The Sioux Will Rise Again: The Native Americans' Modern-Day Quest to Regain Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Control of Their Affairs and Resources.* Pp. 213-263. in *"Now That The Buffalo's Gone": A Study of Today's American Indians*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman.

Indians by means of various treaties up to 1868, the title to the reserved areas they have been living on and to the water and mineral resources, granting American Indians the authority to make further treaties with U.S. government and with other nations, tracing of violations of the treaties on both sides, revision of the water and fishing rights, and the important demand that Native Americans should be governed by treaty relations; that is, if the U.S. government finds it necessary to negotiate with American Indians under official terms, then it should first provide these terms to Indian people under which they can justify how they are governed by treaty relations. In this way, The Twenty Points had a prominence as an American Indian Declaration of Independence for everyone watching or following American Indian Movement as well as for Native Americans.

The Twenty Points also proposed cultural articles whose aspects demanded the same rights for Native Americans to keep their cultural identity alive as well as their status as independent nations. For instance, the point concerning the presence of tribal elders during the treaty processes and permitting

these people translate the treaties in order to adhere to their oral traditions asserted that American Indians had their cultural and tribal ways of dealing with issues and they should be respected too. From many ways, The Twenty Points suggested that Native Americans' social, political and civil rights should be handled in the ways they are regarded and represented as sovereign nations.

However, the presentation of the Twenty Points in Washington was not without problems. Native Americans, before finding an opportunity to introduce their causes to the public and the media, were forced to occupy the building of The Bureau of Indian Affairs due to the failure of the people in Washington to arrange accommodation for everyone who came to Washington in the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan. The members of American Indian Movement captured the building and they demanded that the government administrators should contact them and respond to the Twenty Points.

Yet, Indians' seizure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs immediately overturned the mission of the caravan by

leading to press discussions and interviews on the occupation of the building and the people inside it rather than taking the public attention to the Twenty Points American Indians had composed in Minnesota and brought to Washington. Thus, once again the issue of the treaty reforms was precluded from taking place in the way Native Americans had been planning. The members of the American Indian Movement consented to bring the possession of the building to an end on the condition that U.S. administration would evaluate the twenty points and respond to American Indians within two months.

Later the U.S. administration informed American Indians that it had evaluated the twenty points and would agree with some of them regarding the poverty programs and the revision of the fishing rights. But the government completely refused to recognize the treaty reforms, and thus the title of tribal lands and Native Americans' status as independent nations. The policy orientation of U.S. was substantially condemned by American Indian Movement and it caused demonstrations of negative reflections by many American Indians. American Indian Movement, on the other hand, was frustrated due to the interferences

on their presentation of The Twenty Points which was so crucial and vital for the rights and status of native tribes to survive as culturally and politically recognized nations in the contemporary world. The rejection of the most significant points of the declaration seemed to trigger the American Indian Movement for further activist demonstrations while this unofficial influence propelled the U.S. government to take measures against American Indian Movement which would result in the Wounded Knee incident in 1973.

The confrontation at Wounded Knee, on Pine Ridge Reservation where Oglala Sioux people lived in South Dakota, has a crucial place in Native American and U.S. history.[7] In December, 1890 with the Wounded Knee Massacre of Lakota Sioux people, the town had become historically significant for American Indians. The death of Chief Big Foot and his people on their way to Pine Ridge Agency, in the Badlands of South Dakota, has remained a severe and disturbing memory for both sides. Therefore the fact that 1973 American Indian Movement protest also took place at

[7] For a detailed summary and comment on the event see: Peter Iverson. 1998. *"We Are Still Here": American Indians in the Twentieth Century*. Harlan Davidson, Inc.

Wounded Knee had different interpretive influences on the incident's spread into the media while it, in some ways, affected its consequences.

American Indian Movement's discontent with tribal government had existed since its establisment as a protest group. But during the early 1970s American Indian Movement leaders and traditionalist tribal elders were openly voicing their dissatisfaction with the Wilson government.[8] Dick Wilson was then the head of the tribal government of Pine Ridge Reservation and he had his own group of tribal police named Guardians of the Oglala Nation (GOON). Native Americans had recently been complaining about the Wilson government's violent abuse of power on the reservation. After the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the adaptation of the tribal politics of the federal system and the tribal constitution in 1935 was rapid, if not very easy; yet, for many Native communities it was not to be much celebrated. They thought that the tribal government was after all one of the many other appropriations the U.S. government had thought beneficial for American Indians and it

[8] Tom Holm. *The Crisis in Tribal Government* in ed. Vine Deloria, Jr. 1985. *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century.* University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London.

was financially dependent on the U.S. government. Besides, Wilson's government was openly expressing its disapprobation of the policies of American Indian Movement. Wilson had even, before the Wounded Knee incident, announced that they would not let American Indian Movement leaders and its members into the Pine Ridge Reservation. This attitude of Dick Wilson and his followers was triggering the discontent of the reservation Indians who had to rely on this government to secure jobs on the reservations but, at the same time, were supporting American Indian Movement for its struggle for national recognition. Vine Deloria summarizes the beginning and the end of the situation on the Pine Ridge Reservation at the time of the incident, suggesting that: "Local rather than national issues began to weigh more heavily in the discussions by the Indians on the subject of ending the occupation." (p. 77) The questions about the financial help allowed by the U.S. government for the Pine Ridge development programs; where this money was spent, the allotment of the reservation jobs and the selection of the people who were assigned to these jobs, the difficulty of native communities to practice their religious beliefs, and the crucial problem of definition of the tribal identity which

the American administration allowed Wilson government under its own authority were the overwhelming local disputes; however, American Indians' common concern was that these problems should be attended to sooner rather than regarded as among the domestic dealings of U.S. federal system and resolved with temporary solutions.

This political and economic atmosphere was prevailing in the Pine Ridge Reservation when Wesley Bad Heart Bull, a Lakota Man, was killed by a non-Native in Buffalo Gap. The fact that his murderer was charged with a short term punishment caused tension among American Indians.[9] After this event AIM leaders Dennis Banks and Russell Means wanted to meet the traditional people in the reservation. When Banks and Means got to the Black Hills, the territory was also surrounded by Wilson's private army. In a very short time, with the demonstrations heading towards Rapid City and the protests turning into shooting from both sides, Wounded Knee became the arena of American Indian activism. When the federal police and FBI agents also began to participate in the blockade the

[9] Peter Iverson. 1998. *"We Are Still Here: American Indians in the Twentieth Century.* Harlan Davidson, Inc. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. 1984. *"Now That The Buffalo's Gone": A Study of Today's American Indians.* University of Oklahoma Press: Norman.

occupation of Wounded Knee grew into a platform of anxiety and frustration for American Indian Movement leaders and activists as well as for the U.S. government. During the 71 days of American Indian Movement and Oglala Sioux militant struggle, from February 27, 1973 to May 8, American Indian Movement was intent on explaining their causes as much as possible by sharing their thoughts via national and international press. On March 11, Russell Means declared American Indian independence on television. American Indian Movement members and Oglala Sioux people who seized Wounded Knee constantly maintained that Native American communities living in North America are independent nations and they would not let United States disaffirm their status and cultural identity. On the other hand, the U.S. Administration seemed more interested in ending the event before any militant or military incidents took place, because the occupation of Wounded Knee could, at any time, result in bigger events which would lead, in national and international media, to discussions and debates of such claims as the repetititon of history in the Pine Ridge Reservation. Although the standoff broke up on the 71th day and the U. S. Forces retired after the people at Wounded Knee left the town, the

disputes over the death of two FBI agents in the territory and the charges against American Indian Movement activist Leonard Peltier about their deaths kept the media busy long after the end of the incident.

The Wounded Knee incident, unfortunately, did not bring the results Native Americans were struggling to achieve concerning the Twenty Points. During the 71 days of the siege, American Indian Movement leaders attempted to seize public consciousness to bring their causes into the media as much as possible. However, without formal agreements on the restoration of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, their efforts largely seemed to undergo what Deloria, referring to the mediated activism of the counter-cultural movements of the time, calls as “the ideology of civil-rights.” (p. 23) The historical signification of the Wounded Knee location, especially after the American public became familiar with it through Dee Brown’ famous novel *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970), evidently played a crucial role in the media presentation of the events. Likewise, the American government was keen that the historical notoriety of what had taken place at Wounded Knee in 1890 should

not be repeated in any way; even this kind of interpretations by the local and national press would turn every attempt into worse results. Therefore, the publizising of the tribal authority and independence American Indians claimed at Wounded Knee turned into an incident, like the occupation of Alcatraz Island or the seizure of Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Although American Indian Movement never had legal relations to U.S. administration to enable them to gain their authority to self-governance, American Indians expressed their cultural and emotional separation from America. Native Americans' open rejection of federal definition of their political and cultural identity and their self-advertising this one-sided decleration has since been an example of cultural and political resistance against U.S.A. for all indigenous people and communities.

Obviously, American Indian Movement organization and the cultural and political conclusions of its activist agenda can be interpreted in various ways from different points of view. The organization's political activism revived a long-lasting fight against American government as well as it made

evident that there were considerable disagreements and conflicts between American Indians regarding what kind of a community all Indian nations desired and what kind of common needs and problems they were facing.

First of all, Native American protest during this period was a mediated one. The fact that the extensive diaspora participation of urban Indians who were educated in colleges was, in some ways, largely affected by the other modern movements of its time points to the models of protests adopted by Native Americans from black and civil rights movements. Young American Indian Movement activists borrowed their rhetoric and tactics from these movements, thus trying to take full advantage of media coverage. Therefore the media intervention in their ethnic protests had a remarkable role in identifying and determining the cases they brought to the stage.

Media characterization of the American Indian Movement seemed to disturb the federal officials for its potential to resume a native resistance which took its example from modern civil-rights movements and could trigger militant activism in other

indigenous nations living in the United States. The representations of Native Americans in the press, especially Russell Means and Dennis Banks, and their speeches on television and national newspapers reintroduced the problems of indigenous communities within the state. American government, while following a strategic approach toward the activists by proposing temporary solutions, never actually did take a concrete step toward the restoration of Indian lands. It rather regarded American Indian Movement as an 'urban movement' which should have been terminated by using clever policies in order to neutralize the militancy and effectiveness of its members and followers. Neither the contents of the Twenty Points nor the 1868 treaty were considered official cases; United States regarded these demands as parts of a general Indian 'plight', not as vital necessities concerning the political and cultural problems American Indians had to deal with in the modern world. However, the U.S. government treated American Indians as one of its domestic issues and rather than attending to the contents of the Twenty Points it continued to assign indigenous problems under such institutions like the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the responsibility of tribal chairmen. The Bureau of

Indian Affairs had been occupied during the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the discontent with Dick Wilson's tribal governance was the main event causing the incident at Wounded Knee; both of them have been criticized for failing to protect American Indian rights on and around the reservations, to install development programs and divide the jobs on the reservations fairly, to keep and operate water and natural resources among other complaints. Native Americans' growing dissatisfaction with the reservation institutions and officials had been one of the main issues which stood as drawbacks against their political, economic, and cultural sovereignty.

The American Indian Movement was an organization principally formed by young activists who grew up in cities and attended colleages. Their interests in turning back to their ancestral ties and protecting their tribal cultures united in their agreement to demand a traditional form of government, an administration type favoured by tribal elders, religious leaders, and many people living on suburban areas. These people tried to preserve their culture as much as possible and to lead their tribal and religious customs far from the American society. The

traditionalists were not in very good relations with the reservations; they thought that the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the tribal governments of the reservations were intent on an assimilation program, including the development and education programs the federal government was funding. The tribal governments which were established after the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, for traditionalist elders and fullbloods, constituted the real threat for native societies since they were formed under the U.S. federal system.[10] Therefore, an organization of young people who were determined to protect Indian rights and cultures was appreciated by the traditionalists. Especially after the occupation of Alcatraz Island, when American Indian Movement leaders expressed their legal demands and mentioned a possibility of restoration of 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, the traditionalists appreciated their activism believing that what they had been unable to achieve by negotiating with the U.S. government would be done by the organization's activists. From the traditionalists'point of view, American Indian Movement just came out at the right time when Native Americans seemed to have completely given up their

[10] Ed. Francis Paul Prucha. 1990. *Documents of United States Indian Policy.* University of Nebraska Press.

hopes for a contemporary legal status for Indian communities.

On the other hand, Native Americans living on the reservations were also critical of the tribal chairmen and their administration. The widespread poverty of the reservations, unemployment, crime rates and the alcohol abuse were drastically growing in spite of the federal funds. Local economic problems were more pressing for reservation Indians, however, in order to be assigned to the jobs on the reservations they needed the assistance of tribal governments. Thus, the appearance of a group talking about self-governance and a tribal life in harmony with nature and earlier lands was also very attractive for the native people living on the reservations. Suggesting that American Indian Movement was also functional in binding the reservation and urban Indians together, Vine Deloria, Jr. thinks that the frequent presence of American Indian Movement leaders and members on the reservations strengthened the cultural ties these people needed to reinforce:

"As more and more urban Indians joined the three major protest organizations (American Indian

Movement, the United Native Americans, and the Indians of All Tribes) they came into contact with young people who had grown up on the reservations and spoke the tribal language. This contact sparked a tremendous interest in the tribal language and traditions, and many of the urban Indians began to show up on the reservations, seeking the tribal heritage which they had been denied. They became most militant of the advocates of cultural renewal." (p. 41)

The reintroduction of the traditions, tribal customs, and languages to the young people coming from the cities and the cultural knowledge and ideas they exchanged were very important for both sides. They, by using the media, tried to challenge the ideas that American Indians were poor people living on the reservations and hillsides and they were only trying to protect their odd and mystic beliefs. The American Indian Movement members and their followers on the reservations attempted at expressing their ideas about political independence and to revive their cultures. Their coming together helped to recover the relationship between the traditionalist people living in the outside parts of both cities and reservations and the young people who were interested in regaining their cultural ties to their tribes.

2. 2. The Representations of Native Americans After Civil Rights Movements

The renewal of the relationships and tribal ties is interpreted by some critics as to have lead to some important changes in the cinematic representations of American Indians. Obviously changes could be observed in the movies with American Indian characters or issues; there were Indian-themed films made during the late 1960s and early 70s which dealt with Native Americans as individual characters or Indian nations and some of these films seemed to approach the American Indian issues and characters more sensitively and positively. Films like *Soldier Blue* (Nelson, 1970) , *Little Big Man* (Penn, 1970), and *Billy Jack* (Laughlin, 1971) tried to show Native Americans differently from how they were portrayed in the western movies. Beginning from the late 60s Hollywood's Indians were more than primitive savages of the American frontier; they were indigenous communities who had their mystic customs and beliefs and they had a lot to teach Americans about natural life, peace, brotherhood, and survival, they had their own heroes and warriors who would protect their traditions and rights, and most importantly they had

a bloody history with U. S. which was to be depicted on the screen in order to show how Native Americans had been victimized and their tribes were terminated under the great myth of the 'American West'. Thus, under the influence of the American Indian Movement's mediated activism and the general tendency of the film industry during the civil-rights movements to sell narratives which would address the audience's triggered emotions and ideas about culturally and historically crucial events, these films were regarded as true depictions of Native Americans.

It is clear that one of the main concerns of these films was to represent American Indians in 'historically accurate' ways. And, obviously, this approach was appreciated by not only film audiences but also some critics since it appeared to cleverly serve the ideals of the counterculture movements of its time. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick (1999) appreciates the efforts in these films to challenge the stereotyped images of the Indians on the screen. According to Kilpatrick, the emergence of Indian activism and its politicized criticism against the representations of native caltures broke the unchanging discourses about

the American Indian and helped to create what she calls as “the new warrior image of the native.” (p. 71) In her opinion, Arthur Penn’s *Little Big Man* is “the best of a new wave of films sympathetic to American Indians” (p. 94) while Angela Aleiss (2005) contends that “critics of America’s bloody Indian wars found their most sympathetic ally with *Soldier Blue*.” (p. 126) At this point, being ‘sympathetic’ to American Indians becomes very important for Kilpatrick and Aleiss since both critics have a tendency to embrace a romanticized presentation of Indian cultures in the cinema. The films showing Native Americans living in their peaceful life within the nature and their tribal customs until the white settlers come to the region and terminate every one of them are thus regarded to change their bloodthirsty images American audiences have watched in so many Western movies. Since, in these films, no American Indian scalps a white man or rapes a white woman, and, in fact, it is the white settlers and the U.S. army doing the most brutal tortures to natives, American audiences can finally ‘sympathize’ with the ‘noble savage’ and identify with the spirit of Indian activism.

Here I would disagree with both Aleiss and Kilpatrick in their conceptualization of the American Indian Movement's tactical media occupation for a better representation of Native Americans on the screen. In my opinion, this approach is problematic in the sense that the image of the American Indian in these movies is unchangingly depicted as Plains Indians living peacefully in the 19th century and there is no emphasis on the struggles of contemporary native people. *Little Big Man, Soldier Blue,* and *Billy Jack* are considered to be revisionist films dealing with Native American issues; but, on the other hand, the way these movies do this is confined to their representation of the American Indian and is limiting since they tend to reduce the native issues into a mediated victimization of Indian cultures.

Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* which was based on Theodore V. Olsen's 1969 novel *Arrow in the Sun* is the story of a private soldier called Honus and Indian chief Spotted Wolf's abducted white wife, Cresta who as the only survivors of a Cheyenne attack on a U.S. escort try to find their way into the white civilization and fall in love with each other after they spend days together hiding from the Indians.

During their journey in the plains to reach the nearest U.S cavalry camp both characters get to know each other. Private Honus Gent is a U.S. cavalry soldier who is devoted to his country and is happy to serve in the army. He is terribly overwhelmed by the Indian attack and the deaths of his friends in the union, he even thinks it is humiliating for him to survive while the others are dead and he blames himself for being unfaithful to his country. Cresta Lee, on the other hand, is a white woman who after having lived among Native Americans for two years does not have patriotic feelings for her country like Honus. She thinks that American Indians are very different from what white people believe them to be; they are, in fact, innocent people whose lives are threatened by U.S. army. She identifies with native people and feels for them more than she does for U.S. soldiers whose belongings she steals from their dead bodies in order to survive. But her efforts are to find her fiance who is a captain in the army.

We see the Indians only at the beginning and at the end of the film. The rest of the *Soldier Blue* tells us about the developing love relationship between Honus and Cresta. Honus, throughout the film, defends

his country's deeds since he believes in the great myth of American dream and the westward expansion of the white people. Meanwhile Cresta challenges him by telling that his country has done no good for anyone and prepares Honus and us for the end of the film which will justify her defiance towards U.S. army. Honus, indeed, survives thanks to Cresta. She seems to manage the life in the wilderness quite well now that she has learned how to live like Indians and also how Indians would act. In this way, they succeed in hiding from the Indian warriors by estimating where they might be camping and at which points they might cross. Moreover, Cresta constantly provokes Honus with her dirty tongue and sexuality which she has most probably learned from Indians since she is the only white person in the movie behaving in this way and Honus is horrified to see such a white woman. She calls American beliefs and ideals into question whenever she can show the Indian ways by disgusting Honus more and more during the film. However, they fall in love with each other despite their different views and Honus, at the end of the film, witnesses one of the most brutal battle scenes of the American history.

The ending scene of the *Soldier Blue* shows the violent attack of the U.S. cavalry on the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes which gives a fictional version of the events in the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado Territory. In this scene, in spite of the efforts of Cresta and Honus to stop the army, U.S. soldiers trap chief Spotted Wolf and destroy a whole tribe of unarmed women and children. The extent of the army's outrage and damage is enough for Honus to justify Cresta's hatred; its depiction on the screen is also efficient for white audiences to sympathize with American Indians.

What is disturbing about *Soldier Blue* is its seemingly objective approach to American Indian history. The film, however, cannot help stereotyping, this time by fixing the white society into an army of fools who is ready to do anything under a lunatic Colonel called Chivington. What is more, Native Americans in this film seem to be no more than figures who is there to do nothing but attack U.S. escorts with braided heads and war whoops and then, all of a sudden, disappear or die unarmed. Obviously, a band of Indians leaving so peacefully before the white man attacks them gives a chance to the audience

to see from the American Indian's side but this kind of a point of view does no more than justifying the idea that native people are primitive and helpless people and they need a white man or woman who will negotiate with U.S. army or government in order to protect Indians. A similar approach is employed in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man.*

Little Big Man is based on Thomas Berger's novel of the same name which, like *Soldier Blue,* takes place in the 19th century. The story is told by 121 year old Jack Crabb who begins to narrate the events by claiming that he is the only white survivor of the battle of Little Big Horn. Crabb and his sister Caroline are taken to a Cheyenne village after Indians attack their village and kill their parents. Caroline finds her way into the white society, in fact, she wants to leave the Cheyenne community after realizing that Indians do not regard her as a woman since they never rape her. On the other hand, Jack is raised by chief Old Lodge Skins; the chief teaches him about the Indian view of life and circular nature of the universe which is very different from white man's. In a very short time, Jack adopts Indian life and embraces his new identity. In a ceremony at which

he proves his strength and warrior spirit he is given his Indian name Little Big Man by the tribe. He, like Cresta in *Soldier Blue,* becomes more Indian than the Indians.

The rest of Little Big Man's story takes place while he goes between the white society and the Cheyenne tribe trying to make a living for himself. After the army's attack on their community he is saved by the soldiers under their understanding that he is a white boy. For a while he stays with Reverend Pendrake and his wife Louise, then works with a snake-oil salesman, and decides to become a gunslinger after reuniting with his sister. Understanding that he cannot be a gunslinger, he settles down to operate a store and marries a Sweedish woman called Olga. Little Big Man's staying with so many people and his trying different jobs are the results of his unbelonging to the white society who he always thinks are deceitful, greedy, and selfish. After finding out that he is cheated by his business partner, he takes his wife Olga with him and attends Ceneral Custer's stagecoach to try their chance in the west. But the stagecoach is attacked by the Cheyennes on the road and Olga is abducted by the tribe. After the attack

he decides to attend 7th cavalry in order to search for Olga. During his stay with Custer's army he witnesses several violent deeds by the soldiers. In one of the army's attacks on Indian villages he saves an Indian woman called Sunshine and then marries her only to see her and their baby being killed by U.S. soldiers. From this cavalry attack, only Little Big Man and chief Old Lodge Skins survive. His losing his family in this assault drives him into General Custer's army again only to take revenge from the white leader and his soldiers. At the end of the film, Little Big Man leads Custer and his army into Little Bighorn where armed troops of Cheyenne are hiding. General Custer and his 7th cavalry are defeated in which is known to be the Battle of the Little Bighorn or Custer's Last Stand in 1876.

Little Big Man's representation of the Indians is not without flaws. However, its representation of the white people is more problematic. While trying to save the American Indian from his bloodthirsty western image, the film stereotypes the white man putting him into a one-dimensional portrayal. Every white person Little Big Man meets during his life turn out to be bad and deceitful while native people

remain pure and innocent. *Little Big Man*'s and also *Soldier Blue*'s good Indians are Cheyenne people. Cheyenne tribes, in each film, are massacred and their races seem to have exterminated at the end, so do all Indian tribes and communities. Both movies, indeed, are reducing Native Americans to childlike Cheyennes only in order to change the stereotyped Comanches of John Ford in his western films.

The most brutal white person in the *Little Big Man* is portrayed by Colonel Custer. He is obsessively thirsty of Indian blood and he is famous for his victories he gained over several Cheyenne tribes and villages. But what is more disturbing about the portrayal of his character is the fact that he, like Colonel Chivington in *Soldier Blue,* is presented as a mad man who has his eccentric ways, crazy enough to make us think that all American Indians died only because some generals in the U.S. army wanted to clear them out from the plains. *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* are films dealing with very crucial moments of the American Indian history. However, the distance they take from history in the name of becoming more 'sympathetic' is established by reducing the historical problems into individual

choices of a few characters. Both *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* are revisionist films which fail at engaging with contemporary problems of American Indians and their struggles for political and cultural reform.

While the refigured American Indian appears as a victim in these films, his vanishing into unexistence as a noble savage, in some ways, implies a sense of white guilt toward the historical events depicted in the films. Some critics comment that films like *Soldier Blue, Cheyenne Autumn* (Ford, 1964), and *Little Big Man* serve in the best way to relieve this guilt; to see the events revised and appropriated on the screen for a white audience to whom the voice or the voiceover still belongs cannot retrieve the Indian, but it means to repair the memory of him to keep him as a nostalgic entity in order to be able to return to nature and the wilderness he had occupied. Moreover, the fact that these films were made after or during the Vietnam War implies a connection between revisionism and a a reflection of white guilt in the American cinema.

If *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* are depicting the American Indian's 'noble savage' image, Tom Laughlin's *Billy Jack* is more interested in representing the 'new warrior' the Native American made of himself in the media during the 1960s and 70s. In this film, Billy Jack is portrayed as a half-breed American Indian who is also a Vietnam War veteran. He protects the counterculture students of the Freedom School which is taught and run by his girl friend Jean Roberts. The Freedom School is a non-profit organization which accommodates young people from various ages and races. The students of this school have counter-cultural ideas and beliefs and are supporting a progressive educational system instead of strict rules and programs. The conservative townspeople express their annoyance at their hippieness which symbolizes radicalism, and thus threats the order for them. The students meet disturbance by the townspeople whenever they are in the city. Therefore Billy Jack appears any time the students need his help and protects them from getting into trouble.

He is successful in protecting the students and the teachers of the school by violence; he uses his gun

and beats people with karate blows in order not to let sheriff and the rich businessmen of the town to intervene in the education system of the school. However, things become worse when Jean is raped by the son of a very rich businessman. Billy Jack, knowing that he should interfere in order not to let the rich man cover the event, kills the son. The film ends with the students protesting the American legal system to call attention to Billy Jack's case.

Unlike *Soldier Blue* and *Litte Big Man, Billy Jack* focuses on the activist deeds of its time and reacts with the militant spirit of the American Indian Movement. At one level, the film seems to be dealing with contemporary issues regarding the education of native people on the reservations and their social externalization from white people. On the other hand, it manages to do so only by putting the young students into situations which will necessitate the intervention of a violent activist who uses his gun in order to ensure safety of the students and the reservation. The character of Billy Jack serves as a cinematic presentation, not of the native people, but of the Indian activists of the 60s and 70s. As a screen extension of the American Indian Movement

members, Billy Jack's portrayal clings to the militant spirit of its countercultural streak.

To go back to the aguments of Angela Aleiss and Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, the more 'accurate' and 'sympathetic' representations of American Indians in these films attempt to revise the celluloid image of Native Americans, yet the intended revision does not work to create a sense of cultural renewal of Indian identity and heritage which exist along with the political and social contexts American Indians are living in the present age. *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* do represent themselves as revisionist films to challenge the image of the savage Indian which was developed in the western movies. This is one of the best reasons Kilpatrick and Aleiss have to embrace these works as the best examples of resurgence of the Indian identity. Both critics dismiss the western genre as the form which created the most inaccurate and the worst representatations of American Indians in the cinema. From this point of view, the western genre should be challenged and the image should be changed in films which offer to present 19th century American Indian in historically correct and accurate ways before he completely vanishes.

It is undeniable that the western film, especially John Ford's films, helped the development of the Native American's image as the warrior of the American frontier who attacked passanger coaches and abducted white women. The Indian of the American frontier was a drawback the white man had to overcome in order to ensure his westward expansion. For the frontier represented the wilderness the white people were supposed to bring civilization, the American Indian standing in the center of this struggle was no more than one of the obstacles they encountered. And when the myth of 'How the West Was Won' began to be formulated in the cinema, the Native American appeared as a tool to signify the settling of the West. Stating that the American frontier is "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (1962, p. 3), Frederick Jackson Turner, in his *The Frontier in American History,* points out:

"In American thought and speech the term "frontier" has come to mean the edge of settlement, rather than, as in Europe, the political boundary. By 1690 it was already evident that the frontier of settlement and the frontier of military defense were coinciding. As population advanced into the wilderness and thus successively brought new exposed areas between the settlements on the one side and the Indians with their European backers on the other, the military frontier ceased to be thought of as the Atlantic coast, but rather as a moving line bounding the un-

won wilderness. The thing to be defended was the outer edge of this expanding society, a changing frontier, one that needed designation and re-statement with the changing location of the "West". (p. 41)

In light of Turner's frontier thesis, we can say that the American cinema depicted the frontier as the point of conflict between the wilderness and civilization, or between nature and culture. Therefore, the western hero was supposed to be capable of dealing with the wilderness which, in the genre's best examples like *The Searchers, The Stagecoach, or She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* took the form of a savage man, the American Indian.

When examined with the help of Robert Ray's (1985) suggestion that the Western served the frontier mythology and the ideology of space with its use of landscape and its dependence on the individualistic, outlaw hero, the representation of the American Indian in the western movies becomes significant in the sense that the Indian's relationship to the western landscape, even when it is limited, can be studied within the same genre. Since he was on the other side of the frontier, taming of the frontier meant taming of the Native American. On the other

hand, in order to follow the western myth he is supposed to realize the white man has to render American Indian and his image unchanging as opposite to the white advance and progress, thus keeping him ahistorical and and his image static. Only by doing so, the question of who is destined to possess the land would be justified by the white man. As Armando José Prats (2002) states:

> "The Indian Western inherits from frontier literature the discursive distinction between the seeing and the seen, appropriating the historical conflict with the Indian over the land, so that it may define, highlight, and extol Conquest's own values and virtues. This is another way of drawing attention to the American tendency to *spatialize* its history, to define itself continually in terms of the land or of reference to the struggle for the land." (p. 85)

The Western picture demonstrates what Prats suggests as "spatialization" of history with its use of location shooting and a constant invention of a struggle over the landscape. In this cinematic myth, the American Indian takes his place at the edges of the frontier. Whenever he appears he is the unbelonging intruding serpent of the Western Eden, therefore his appearance inevitably necessitates his disappearance. Therefore, American Indian's appearance and then his complete disappearance from

the western film, examplified in *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962), can tell us much about his contemporary relations to land.

In John Ford's *The Stagecoach* (1939) there is a famous scene shot in the Monument Valley when all of a sudden an Indian war whoop is heard and we see a lot of Indians attack a passanger coach crossing the frontier. White men in the coach, of course, protect themselves and the women by shooting the Indians. However, Indians disappear from the scene all of a sudden as quick as they appear. During the whole film, we never see them again. Because they are supposed to be hiding on the other side of the frontier, right at the point of historical and geographical conflict, the characters in the film make sure that they are safe.

In my opinion, this scene of the *Stagecoach* is the best point to start to examine the contemporary representations of American Indians in the cinema. Instead of being romanticized as the 'noble savage' and mourned over as the 'vanishing American' in films like *Soldier Blue, Billy Jack, and Little Big Man*,

the American Indian must be revisited at the point he disappeared in the Western. In other words, the representation of the Native Americans within the landscape in western films which was devised as a cultural reflection of its time could be retrieved and discussed in an examination of Native American contemporary road movies which borrow some of its generic tools from the western picture and is appropriated by native people responding to the social, political, and historical conditions of their specific cultural context. American Indian's contemporary relation to the land in the generic context of the road movie can be examined when Native Americans take to the road on the same landscape in films like *Powwow Highway*, *Dreamkeeper* and *Smoke Signals*.

3. ROAD MOVIES: IDENTITY AND LANDSCAPE

“The image remains unaltered in countless versions from the genre’s beginning - a lone man packing a gun, astride a horse, hat pulled close to the eyes, emerging as if by magic out of a landscape from which he seems ineluctably a part” (Mitchell, 1996, p. 3). The lone gunman’s identification with the landscape is one of the textual strategies of the Western to create his image as an outsider. John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956), as a classic example of the genre, shows us Ethan Edwards approaching his brother’s house on horseback leaving behind a huge “magical” landscape in the opening scene. We are first allowed to see the landscape through the open door of a house which puts a distance between us and Ethan as welll as between Ethan and his family. The family door is opened by Martha Edwards, the wife of Ethan’s brother, to welcome her brother-in-law. This long shot from the open doorway shows Ethan as a distant character emerging from the desert he seems to belong to. We first see him from the inside of the house, with a point of view over Martha’s shoulder. It is quite dark inside and the landscape lying in front of it is so bright and it

seems endless. This shot also gives us clues about Ethan's character as a man of the frontier. The outside world, for him, is different from the family life from which he constantly keeps away but to which he occasionally returns to set things straight. It is Martha who first goes out to see the "stranger" nearing them, and she holds her left hand toward her forehead trying to recognize him. Her gesture toward the open landscape before her puts the spatial as well as social distance between them in the very beginning of the movie.

Leaving the dark inside of the house, Martha is aware of her lacking of the sun and aware of the fact that the stranger approaching seems to belong to the brightness before her. This distance given by the metaphor of the threshold of a house signifies the difference between the domestic interior and the wilderness, western genre's formal divide between culture and nature. This scene serves as a threshold between Ethan's unspoken past life and the probable things that will happen in the film. With his entering into the family house we anticipate that he will be questioned as to where he has come from, and he, a man of the Western frontier, will be forced to take action

since the Western hero's entering into a domestic sphere foreshadows a near danger that will test his principles and stength as a man of the frontier. From this very scene, although Martha welcomes him with a longing kiss, we know that after being tested in his Western masculinity Ethan will have to return to the wilderness. The open landscape behind him while he is welcomed back home is brighter than the inside of the house. At the begining of the movie an off-screen voice already defines Ethan as "a man as hard as the country he is crossing!" Since he identifies with the wild part of the country, he will show a hard character toward the society throughout the film. The first sequence of the movie in which both Ethan's character and the theme of the film are presented through landscape is also a foreshadowing of Ethan's return to the open country at the end of the movie. In fact, the last scene of the movie is a reversal of the first scene. Ethan returns with his rescued niece Debbie and leaves her with his brother's neighbours where he believes she will be safe. But this time he only stands at the threshold in the center of the frame, again split between the doorway and the outside world, the dark family house and the brighter open valley before him. The Western hero, at this point, has to choose the isolated

landscape once more. He is identified with the landscape as well as he identifies with it, and domesticity has no place for him.

As a genre, the Western celebrates the American landscape in significant ways. From the genre's beginning landscape cinematography serves both as the western film's thematic and formal tradition. Formally, it creates a world with its " rhythm of landscape" (Mitchell, p. 260) which nurtures the lonely cowboy in its wilderness. The landscape in the Western is as necessary as the cowboy, his heeled boots or his horse which makes him the protector of the frontier life and which keeps him tied to its wilderness. The fact that he appears in a vast prairie when the society needs his help and he can disappear into the wilderness again makes him necessarily a part of the frontier discourse. The context of exploration of a new continent and the urbanization of the East thematically propells a tendency to create this wilderness in the Western which romanticizes the nostalgia of the frontier life. The image of the cowboy is the idealized American national identity and masculinity as well as the protector of it in classical Westerns. In relation to this, *Shane*

(Stevens, 1953) emerges as one of the most important examples of the genre.

In *Shane* the gunman's chosen distance from the domestic family is constructed through the long shots of landscape at the beginning of the movie. Like *The Searchers, Shane* in its opening scene focuses on the gunman, showing him on his horseback enabling us and the family members to view him from a dominantly domestic point of view. Indeed, in this scene a shot/reverse-shot perspective is held between the boy Joey Starrett, Shane and Joey's mother Marian as Shane nears the Starretts' garden. Though the Western cowboy is the protector of this idealized domesticity, he spends his time wandering on horseback and never seems to be in need of money or work. The vast valley in *Shane* is what calls him back, constantly reminding him of his alienation from the Starrett house. Even after Shane starts to work for Starrett, he is tested in his belonging by Rykers. As he tries to stay away from arguing with Rykers and using his gun, this is, in fact, why he appears in the town; to fight with Rykers in order to protect the homesteaders and return to the wilderness once again. This is also stressed through Marian's point of view as she watches Shane framed by

her window. The perspective of the women as the keepers of the family unit in *Shane* and *The Searchers* sets this distance more strikingly as they bring in both "ambivalance about and attraction to the family" (McGee, 2007, p. 9) the cowboy does not belong to. In these films, there is a domestic threshold which keeps Martha and Marian away from the cowboy. This threshold is physically a door or a window looking out toward the vast landscape in front of it. The Western outlaw hero should keep away from the domestic family life in order to maintain his self-restraint. He belongs to the vast landscape and is allowed to appear within the threshold when the society needs his help only to remind him once more that he cannot live among them, as in Shane's and Ethan's case. Therefore the figure of the cowboy is framed by the huge valley; but drawing a line between nature and culture through this image at the end of the film as he is seen, at the beginning, leaving it in order to return to it.

If we are to take the artistic conventions of a genre as "the formal equivalents of myth" (1985, p.16) that Robert Ray claims are deployed in every classic Hollywood genre, the Western's landscape works to memorize and revitalize the frontier mtyh and the ideal

of American masculinity. The myth of the 'winning of the West' is associated with the western conqueror's taming of the frontier which is the hard passage the American hero is supposed to overcome in order to belong to the land he has come to retain. Mitchell suggests that this idealized drifter "compels an insistent fascination that extends back to *The Odyssey*, in part by defining the freedoms that others have sacrificed for the security of civilized life" (p. 26). It is in this regard the Western cowboy's constant self-denial of family ties is valued. He represents a sense of freedom which enables him to escape at any time from any convention, be it the civilization, the family, or sexuality. In fact, his distance from these conventions and his being able to protect them only for the sake of the civilization's security keeps this "fascination" alive and nurtures a nostalgic dream of escape for others who are allowed to glimpse at this dream only through the threshold of a family house. Because the Western hero is able to go beyond this threshold and disappear in vast empty spaces, he constantly brings back the idea of an escape triggered by a desire for any kind of quest.

Avoiding any claims that the Western is an early version of the road genre, I would suggest that with its formal tools and contextual concerns the Western accentuates a sense of freedom of escape going back to the early quest motif of the literary journey narrative. The dangerous but self-restrained free life of the Western hero reminds us of the epic quests, pilgrimages, or rituals taken by many people throughout western history. This sense of freedom merges with the several meanings of the road and assumptions of travel when American characters take to a journey.

In addition to the universal promise of the road as a space for a romantic, inner, or sexual journey, the American road also stands for the movement the frontier has promised. The unsettling ever-moving nature of the frontier in American road journey is attributed to a sense of rediscovery of success and progress, thus the renewal of the movement and space. At this point, the Western maintains its importance as a predecessor of the road film with its mythmaking use of the landscape and the frontier hero. The road picture merges the Western's textual roots like the frontier, the American landscape, or the wandering cowboy and the narrative shape of the journey tradition with the contextual

roots of the Depression Era, the second World War, and Vietnam to create the cinematic form of this journey narrative which would set off as a distinct genre in 1950s and 60s to continue on American highways.

The construction of the American Interstate Highway System during President Eisenhower's term which was sanctioned by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, and the booming of the car industry encouraged the road genre to borrow and develop Western's iconography of movement and landscape. Furthermore, narrative structure of the road journey allowed the modern cinematic hero to hit the road in order to challenge the western notions of family and domesticity, thus, like the lonely gunman, to keep himself away from society and conformity. The modern road journey, in many examples of the genre, meant a rebellious escape from cultural and traditional ties the American society thought were equal to the frontier myth. In other words, the Western's divide between nature and culture began to be reflected as a boundary between rebellion and conformity which would be observed in movies like *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967) and *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969).

As the road picture began to develop its own textual strategies, it also started to redirect the road hero and his travel as a reflection of the culture and society in the genre's own terms. The concepts of the road, the journey, and the frontier were being attributed new meanings according to the dominant discourses of the time. Thus, the first contextual borrowing of the cinematic form of this fictional journey is seen in Depression Era movies like *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* (LeRoy, 1932), *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934), and *The Grapes Of Wrath* (Ford, 1940).

The Joad family of *The Grapes of Wrath* take to the road not because they are seeking adventure but because they are forced to leave their land. Their journey reflects a rebellious tension felt by many Americans during the crisis of the Depression. In this context, American frontier's promise of a constant rediscovery of wealth and success is questioned by a westward journey which proves to be an unending look for jobs and shelter. The opening sequence of *The Grapes of Wrath* shows us Tom Joad, after being released from prison, wandering around in order to find out where his family is. Not surprisingly, what he finds first is the empty field

of the family land and a strong wind uprooting the soil scattering it in the air. This rootlessness of the soil and the unsettling of the huge family seems to articulate, at first sight, the ideal, mobile individual of the American Dream on the road with his successful past behind him and a more promising future before. This is the point in the movie where notions of frontier are challenged by American mobility itself. Before they set off, the family struggles with the old grandfather trying to persuade him that they will surely find a better home and a more fertile land to sow. They, of course, need to believe that they will arrive at their destination in peace with the past as a good example before them. But Joad family has to bury the old grandfather who resists leaving his land and dies on the road to California immediately after they set off. The burial of the grandfather on a roadside powerfully reflects the nature of the American journey of the Depression Era. The structural phases of the journey itself are questioned as to who takes to the road and for what kind of reasons, the problems and the promises the points of departure and the arrival suggest, or the nature of the frustrations encountered on the road. The Joad family, with its reasons to depart and hopes to find a better home, also has to

confront the questions of the past driving them to a mobile hopeful future but, at the same time, denying them carrying with them the heritage that created these hopes. A journey set on for new hopes may not always prove to be a promising one, or a national sense of motivation will not encourage the hero with a successful past.

The Grapes of Wrath is also important for its time since it marks the period when the first machine intrusion to the land began to affect Americans before the national car industry bursted producing a sense of richness and progress. The reason of Joad family to leave their land was the fact that they were unable to grow their soil because of the drought and because agricultural machines were already doing more than the farmers could do. In his Depression era novel which is the source novel of the film, John Steinbeck (1939) carefully observes the negatif effects of the machine on the land by giving very detailed physical descriptions of the land and the machine and he narrates how American people lost their hopes because of the machine and sought the new ones on another one, the car, which would promise a home on wheels. In this regard, the westward journey of *The Grapes of Wrath* is

a repetition of the American Dream searching for a new and a more fertile home, a constant dream to reach California. In the novel, there is a moment when the movement of the nature is praised and actually a new journey is anticipated by the highway which is depicted as an eager witness to welcome the new pilgrims:

> "The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oath beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; the sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind, little spears and balls of thiny thorns, and all watinig for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement." (p.12)

This movement, in John Ford's celluloid version of the novel, becomes the myth of the frontier, yet, a darker one which refuses to nourish the mobile pilgrim to keep his dreams alive. In this movie, Ford employs American landscape in a way to show that the promise of the westward movement and expansion was itself a dream with the onset of the Depression era. The American land in *The Grapes of Wrath*, of which John Ford had a big role in creating a cinematic Garden of Eden with the help of his location shooting in Utah's Monument Valley in his canonized Westerns like *The Stagecoach* (1939) and *She*

Wore A Yellow Ribbon (1949), turns into a wast space full of cars and trunks carrying families to an unknown destination. The American Adam is no longer the self-dependent individual; now that he doesn't own his land to "grow families" as John Starrett states in *Shane,* he has to take to road again in order to find a better home. On the one hand, the meanings of the road and the the journey are ambivalent in *The Grapes of Wrath* in that the film does not let its characters identify with the landscape; instead the Depression era American individual is to meet hardships and hopelessness on the highway and the sense of the frontier remains more as a hope than as an accomplishment.

The portrayal of women on the road is also notable in *The Grapes of Wrath.* Ma is the ideal mother to the whole family: she handles sheltering, feeds the family, and most importantly encourages the men, she is, indeed, as skillful as the men in the family. She is both as clever as Martha in *Shane* and, as if foreseeing *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), as mobile and strong as Thelma and Louise. In this way, she stands in the middle of the Western's woman and the woman of the road.

Five years after *The Grapes of Wrath* was released, Edgar Ulmer's *Detour* (1945) appeared as a great contribution to the road genre. While *Grapes of Wrath* questioned the motivations and perspectives of the road hero *Detour* made a challenging attempt to upset the neatly mapped journey narrative toward the desired destination. Telling the story of a piano player, Al, who sets for California to meet his girl friend Sue and to settle down a family with her. He decides to go to California by hitchiking and is soon welcomed by a rich car owner. Al's troubles begin when he discovers that the driver has died in his sleep. After he leaves the corpse on a roadside for fear that he will be suspected as his murderer, he changes into his clothes and decides to keep going to California in his car. Shortly after, he lets Vera, whom he comes across on the road while she is hitchiking like him, into the car. After this, he is forced by Vera, who tells him that she knows what has happened to the man, to deceive the rich man's family to collect his vast inheritance. But he ends up being caught by police after killing Vera accidentally with a telephone wire in the hotel room.

Al's road deeds develop completely out of his control. Already in the beginning of the film, the road montage

of the opening scene shows us the still highway left behind as Al introduces his story to the audience and he travels in the back seat of a car. It is as if he is taken aback from his destination in the middle of his journey. In the end, we find out that he tells his story as he is taken to prison in a police car. *Detour*, in a way, looks at the traps and turnings of the road journey. The road hero cannot prevent what will happen on the road; moreover, he might be forced to change his plans according to detours and, in fact, change his identity like Al who, later in the movie, asserts that "Fate, or some mysterious force can put the finger on you or me for no good reason at all." *Detour*'s dark view of the road and its traps will later be revisited in many examples of the genre, most famously in *Thelma and Louise* when the flirting Thelma persuades Louise to welcome the handsome J.D. only in order to have their all money stolen.

In American road movies, especially in the ones filmed immediately after the Depression Era, the meaning of national ideals like discovery, success, or family roots undergoes a change. The young couple of *They Live By Night* (Ray, 1948) marry on the road and their marriage does not bring a new home for them. The most

brutal challenge to their long desired family life is directed when they learn that they will have a baby soon while they are still on the run. Being one of the most powerful examples of the genre, *I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* reflects the difficult economic situation of its time by commenting on the issues of rebellion and conformity. The famous ending of the film, as James Allen the male lead explains to his girlfriend how he survives with the simple "I steal!" successfully achieves in identifying the genre's initial concerns. After this period, economic recovery of the Second World War, the construction of interstate highway system and the influence of 50s highway boom follow their way into the road movie's generic concepts.

The genre's modern road heroes are triggered by another motivation. The motives which drove Bonnie and Clyde or the bikers in *Easy Rider* on the roads are the motion and speed of the vehicle. The construction of the American highways, the car technology Americans became more and more fascinated with created another desire for Americans who came out of the World War II as an economically triumphant nation. Thus owning an automobile and hitting the American highway represented

a high status for the modern hero whose “quest was just about to begin awaiting a new form of quest brought about by the motorways.” (Primeau, 1996, p. 22) However, if the car meant status for Americans especially after the WWII, the road attracted a young beat generation who displayed a rebellious stand toward the national ideals of their time, thus taking to the road as a critique of their culture instead of setting out on a quest in order to find revitalization of their national and cultural identity. The Beat generation’s social rebellion and cultural critique were expressed through their hippi life on the highway at a time Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road* (1957) was profusely celebrated for its praise of life on the road.

During this period, following the path movies of road crime like *Detour* (1945) and *Gun Crazy* (Lewis, 1950) opened, *They Live By Night* (1949) appears with its young couple on the run as the speed of the journey changes thanks to the technology of the car. The genre’s thematic links follow in the same speed adjusting to the changing economic and social conditions. *Detour*’ s opening scene holds the long shot of the road left behind as Al sets off from New York toward the west in order to find his girlfriend Sue who

leaves him to try her talent as a singer in California. Before she leaves, Sue tells him that they "got all the time to settle down" before they make money for a better life. Tom's journey turns out to be full of crimes he does not commit intentionally. In this sense, *Detour* is important for its denying his characters of the promise the road holds; in fact, the film's journey brings in traps to each character on the run. But in the meantime the thrill of the crime, the different road characters'coming together as a couple usually to share the same goals and the same destiny at the end of the journey and the increasing speed of the automobile begin to constitute the thematic and the formal codes of the genre.

What makes the couple come together in *Bonnie and Clyde* is the shared sense of the thrill that crime, freedom, and the car offer them. The film begins with close ups of Bonnie's face and her naked body as she watches herself in the mirror. We see her trapped in her room wandering between her bed and the mirror which suggests that domesticity is trapping not just for men, but women too. All of a sudden her attention is caught by Clyde who is standing by her mother's car trying to steal it. Clyde's apparent tendency to hit the road in

a stolen car is the force that draws Bonnie to him. After their first bank robbery, Clyde explains to Bonnie that the first time he saw her he decided she was not a girl to stay at home or to do a waitress' job. Bonnie's difference from other girls should be rewarded with a life on the road which will bring her the fame and the money she deserves. At this point, the movie's countercultural rebellious theme is reversed with its own irony. Bonnie and Clyde come together as a road couple because both of them seem to reject social norms of the family or working conditions, they reject the economic instability of the country. But their rejection becomes their desire to steal and own what they seem to criticize and makes things more instable and complicated for their journey. When they become outlaws of the highway the car becomes their home. Even when they are proud to announce to the old farmer's family who were forced by the bank to evacuate their house that "We rob banks!" what they do is no different from what the bank has done to this family. In fact, they do not criticize but reflect the changing dynamics of the 60s' culture "as it becomes transformed by transportational and representational technologies" (Laderman, 2002, p. 3) intending to show the tension between rebellion and conformity. The transportational

vehicle represents the character with its status and speed. The only times Bonnie and Clyde seem to be relieved and having fun are when they are inside the car. The car serves as the vehicle of the narrative as well as it is the sheltering technology that enables the couple to keep moving.

Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider* reflects a rebellious protest toward American social identity. Nevertheless, while Bonnie and Clyde are the modern outlaw couple of the genre, the road journey of Captain America and Billy from Los Angeles to New Orleans is a quest for America and its dynamics of cultural diversity; however, *Easy Rider* directs its journey from west to east, the opposite way to test the nation's frontier ideals and achievements. In her article *The Road to Dystopia: Landscaping the Nation in Easy Rider* (1997) Barbara Klinger calls Billy and Wyatt's journey "dystopic" since it represses the freedom of the hippie pair as they progress through the open country. What they encounter is neither a peaceful and hospitable western culture nor a wealthy and economically stable America; they are only to find threatening local territories and the dangerous roadside wilderness. *Easy* Rider's trip through the American Southwest both

reverses the generalized concepts of its time and subverts the Western genre's formal and thematic concerns to achieve its critique.

On the surface of the film, there is a sense of opening of the huge landscape employed in Westerns and 19th century American painting used in order to create a geographical sense of unity and success attributed to the discourses of frontier. Yet *Easy Rider,* through its representation of the most brutal and poorest parts of the country, declares the already closed edges of it. The fundamental ideals of the pioneer era have already been upset; there is no more pristine wilderness to conquer, and the nation's democratic discourses do not seem to help any more. They can any time be attacked, killed, or robbed.

Wyatt Captain America and Billy start off for New Orleans after they transport drugs from Mexico to Los Angeles. Hiding the money they have earned in the fuel tank of Wyatt's famous American flag bike, an obvious symbol of American freedom and the road, they resume riding to reach New Orleans to attend Mardi Gras. Their journey toward the east comes to pauses now and then as they are halted by hitchikers or when, once they are in

the town, they are taken to prison for “parading without a permit.” Meaningfully, their camp scenes on the roadsides when they rest at night powerfully evoke the western genre’s use of the camping experiences of the frontiersmen.

In their first campfire scene Billy, dressed in Native American buckskin pants, remarks: “Out there in the wilderness, fighting Indians and cowboys on every side!” In one way, they become Billy the Kid and Wyatt Earp of the 19th century, Billy the famous frontier outlaw and gunman and Wyatt an American law officer of frontier towns. Billy refers to the dangerous place where they are resting and the hostile local people around them, yet, this scene says more than this. Billy and Wyatt are searching for America, they are looking for it in the southeastern towns suggesting that the frontier has come to an end and one should seek it by going in the opposite direction to see if America has achieved its dream, if the dream of the expansion has worked. But they are unable to find the other side of the nation’s frontier even if they cross geographical borders; there are no Indians to fight with. What have remained seem to be a big gas station called Sacred Mountain, cowboys and ranchers who look more interested

in the bikers' motors, and young people from cities dancing for rain on a hillside reminding us American Indians during their Sundance ceremonies. The problem seems to be the fact that though there is not even one Indian around who would come by at night and scalp them, America is clearly not "the fine good place to be" Ethan Edwards longed to return during his five-year quest for his niece.

Moreover, *Easy Rider* achieves a great role in road genre's progress with its merging of the closing of frontier and the blow out of the image. When Wyatt and Billy are nearer to New Orleans, in their last camp scene, Wyatt remarks: "We blew it!" He expresses his rebellious disbelief in his country's ideals and future hopes in this way. Nevertheless, the last scene of the film when we are shown by a high angle long shot the image of Wyatt's exploding motorbike integrates the contextual closing of the borders into genre's advancement on its own road; that is road picture's progress into its postmodern phase, the genre's blending its own textual and contextual concerns with the image. In this way, I would suggest, as early as 1969 *Easy Rider* anticipates *Thelma and Louise* which was filmed in 1991. With its announcement of the blow-up of

the image, the movie paves the way for Thelma and Louise to explode a huge truck with their guns, though in a different context.

At this point, how the pair looks for America also represents the nature of their quest. Captain America and Billy try to find America through a motorized gaze. The American landscape is rewritten on their rearview mirrors or on their motorcycles as they encounter different realities of each city. Throughout the movie, we, as well as the characters, are frequently allowed to see the landscape on a very speedy mirror which is left behind as the characters each time set off for another city.

If Wyatt and Billy's quest is a yearning for frontier, they are sure to look for it by rejecting the ideals of the cultural era they live in. The developments in technology, automobile culture and a celebrated human-machine interface which is believed to have been born out of a fetishism of the relationship between the individual and the vehicle constitute the identity of their time. This ideological identity also marks the movie's stylistic character. Motorized movement and speed brings with it different film techniques. Merging

with the technological developments in cinema industry, the most defining aesthetic terms of the genre's modernist phase emerge, especially in *Easy Rider.* Extreme long shots of Billy and Captain America on their motorcycles and the vast topographies they pass through forces our perspective to focus on motion and speed as the "imagery and activity of the car as the foundation of narrative" (Laderman, p. 14) begin to seem mythical and magical. But this magic is upset the moment it is created by the rear-view mirror shots which make the huge landscape disappear behind in the same speed. Thus, the portrait of the landscape in the modern road movie reflects the cinematic way it is experienced. In fact, the experience itself becomes motorized and consumed in a very short time especially through distinct driving montage employed in the movie.

The movement of the characters in space also turns into an image within the frame composition. The mutually shared excitement of Bonnie and Clyde becomes apparent when they are within this composition which makes them a true couple of the road. Indulgence in mobility makes them a perfect image inside the car. Indeed, what makes Bonnie and Clyde famous figures of the mass-culture is this perfectly fitting image attributed to the status

and the power of the car. In *Bonnie and Clyde* the mechanism of myth-making on the road works as long as the couple stays as a perfect match when viewed through the frames of the car windows. The fact that the vehicles in both *Easy Rider* and *Bonnie and Clyde* are destroyed with the characters at the end of each film suggests more than a criticism toward their rebellion and the way they express it. At the end of *Easy Rider*, when Captain America is unexpectedly shot on the road, we are, from a high angle extreme long shot, allowed to see his motorcycle exploding and burning. This scene targets a fusion of character and vehicle for crime and rebellion. The vehicle stays as a threat on the highway if not destroyed with the character.

The road movie's tension between rebellion and conformity is also reflected through other perspectives. As the car becomes more luxurious and as it seems to be protecting saving the road hero thanks to its increasing speed in time, it also begins to turn into a house for the driver and his companion. For the road characters the open road lying before them also implies absence of social restrictions, thus sexual possibility. In other words, the vehicle turns into a home or a bed on wheels. This bed can accomodate two

lovers who finally become a couple in the sexual sense like in *Bonnie and Clyde.* Indeed, in this film Clyde overcomes his impotence while they are on the road. Because the car is the arena of their attraction for each other, it keeps them together and it assures the characters in it a sense power and confidence. The constant movement and speed of the auto accentuate some kind of parallel between this movement and sexual possibility.

Additionally, the sexual freedom on the road also means to bring together the same sexes. In relation to road genre's concern in social protest and cultural critique, the rebellion on the highway often becomes an attack on sexual conformity. The heterosexual couple of the road begins to transfer its place to the couples of the same sex. Postwar anxiety and Vietnam bring in the breakdown of the family, thus a resulting nonconformity and disbelief in nation's ideals. The sense of male bonding or becoming a female couple is also strengthened by the enclosed and the private space the vehicle offers. The idea of male bonding of the western genre reappears again, this time in the form of a male couple. In regard to this, *Easy Rider* serves as an

important modern example of the road genre. Especially the film's camp fire scenes evoke the Western's most classic scenes. Wyatt and Billy's night in the camp suggests more than the presence of two men sleeping in the same place; it also reminds us of the possibility of their sleeping together. This scene as important as it is, will be referenced to us in Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* in 1991 when Mike and Scott embrace each other in a camp scene in the midst of nature, this time itself becoming a classic scene of the road genre.

Terrence Malick's *Badlands* which was released in 1973 remains a remarkable contribution to the road picture. The film's young couple and their self-conscious murder spree becomes a celebrated myth shortly after they take to the road. *Badlands* features Kit and Holly as its young outlaw couple. Kit appears with his cowboy boots in his mid-twenties while Holly is only 15 years old. Probably the most distinctive feature of the movie for its time is underlined by Vincent Canby in his review for New York Times on the film's first screening in 1973. Canby writes "Kit and Holly are members of the television generation run amok." This is obviously where *Badlands* coincides with *Bonnie and Clyde* and anticipates postmodern road movies like Oliver Stone's

Natural Born Killers (1994). Kit and Holly's disturbingly cool murders and their pleasure in their awareness of their becoming public celebrities encourage the young couple, after some time, to keep on the road only to enjoy the fame. *Badlands*'s Kit and Holly are different from Bonnie and Clyde in the sense that their way of achieving media recognition is not only because their murders are not accidental; instead deliberate and without regret most of the time, but also the public, even the police are more interested in the seemingly cool way they act. When Kit is finally caught and taken into a police car toward the end of the movie, the first thing that attracts attention about him is reflected by the youngest police officer that in fact Kit incredibly resembles James Dean who was a culture icon during 1950s and died in a car race at a very early age. They are so famous because they are young and attractive, they can do what they see on TV without regret, and they have a powerful media coverage.

Indeed, in order to create their own myth, Kit leaves a couple of their belongings every time they are about to leave a place and build a rock monument before he is arrested. In this sense, their self-consciousness is

articulated through their relationship with the nature. The romanticized nature of the highway mythmaker's response to the landscape is derealizing if not mocking. In their wooden-constructed house among the trees Kit and Holly live like little animals and they strive in the midts of nature to play the game right. Their figures in the middle of the vast field are more like gothic figures than their previous counterparts searching for the wilderness. The landscape they are moving in is the popular movie culture Kit bases his identity on which is hinted at in the beginning of the film by Kit's job as a garbage collector. Even Holly's father who is killed by Kit whose job he disapproves appears as a worker on an advertising board in the middle of nowhere.

The film's journey across the Middle West is told by Holly. Her voice-over informs us about their deeds and her thoughts about the journey. In a sense, she takes Kit's role to keep the story famous; however her cold voice and senseless depiction of their murders put an inevitable distance between the spectator and her. As a mythmaker, she doesn't have the rebellious or visionary tone. Rather, her story is a disturbingly self-conscious exploitation of the mass media which serves

as an obvious power in postmodern road films to spectacularize the driver and his deeds. The fact that she is only 15 years old and she takes to the road with Kit makes her the first postmodern American youth of the road genre.

Thus, the entrance of the automobile into the road narrative, especially the status and the speed it promises to the road hero, is quickly absorbed by the genre, contributing to its iconography merging with the rebellious spirit of the road. Yet, on the other hand, such notions as the frontier, success, domesticity, and conformity are challenged as the road film progresses into its postmodern phase. In this sense, the films such as *Thelma and Louise, Natural Born Killers,* and *Wild at Heart* (Lynch, 1990) reflect how the themes and motifs of the road film work when their meanings are subverted.

4. THE POSTMODERN EXAMPLES OF THE GENRE

> A car whipped past, the driver eating and a passenger clicking a camera. Moving without going anywhere, taking a trip instead of making one. I laughed at the photographs and then realized I, too, was rolling effortlessly along, turning the windshield into a movie screen in which I, the viewer, did the moving while the subject held still.
> (Heat Moon, p. 118)

It is crucial to acknowledge the extent to which the road movie has been regarded as an overdefined genre, if we mean by this the genre's techniques and themes, its timeworn iconography to quote Michael Atkinson's phrase. (1994) According to Atkinson, the road film has already exhausted its own generic path with couples, outlaws, old people, women, and gays allowed to take the driver's seat and set on their own quest, the genre cannot afford the renewing journey for the modern nomad any more. He simply contends that with *Easy Rider*'s announcement of the closed American frontier which he thinks haunts the contemporary driver, the road journey is taken to just for the sake of affectless driving. I would, at this point, disagree and argue with Atkinson that the road film, through its postmodern examples,

has instead reached a fertile self-referential phase which is fed from its own generic store. The indispensable impulse to take to the road as a result of rebellion or a desire for some kind of quest, the car or the motorcycle as the hero's vehicle, the restless outlaw couple on the road, the landscape, and the fictional theme of the journey narrative still prevail within the genre. Nevertheless, as the road movie follows its contemporary path during the 90s, the reasons to undertake a journey and the experience of it begin to change along with the narrative structure and stylistic techniques.

The contemporary road hero's experience of the highway, and the journey undertaken bring with them new dimensions since the road and the vehicle as icons now have different implications for the road hero, be he the driver or the passenger. In this sense, the highway is still seductive for several types of road travel inheriting from the genre's previous properties and redirecting toward different meanings.

Yet, the genre's employment of intertextual narratives, self-referential quotations, alluding to a net of previous examples within itself, and its putting women,

gay couples or minorities into the driver's seat cannot be explained only by reference to a set of generic rules that have become identifiable through time. Instead, the fact that a genre can be fully defined holds the promise of reloading it with new meanings, especially by exposing it to new contexts. The stable formal conventions can be powerfully integrated with contemporay thematic links which help the genre mature.

The dynamism of the road form reflects the changing characteristics of the dominant cultural trends. Postmodern road movies like *Wild at Heart* (Lynch, 1990), *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), *Paris, Texas* (Wenders, 1984), or *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1994) reproduce the road elements by linking them to the meanings the cultural critique of the road has come to treat: for example, the meaning of mobility in these movies is reshaped in light of a contemporary cultural anxiety which is closely related with our changing concerns about family, sexual orientation, consumption, and the cultural production. These concepts gain various meanings in our everyday lives under new conditions. In this sense, the revisionist process the road movie has been undergoing is closely, if not

directly, related to its response to postmodernism in the economic and cultural sense.

Although there is no commonly accepted definition of postmodernism, the concept has been and is being interpreted in various terms. In his introductory chapter to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Fredric Jameson states that it is “safest” to use the term “postmodernism” as a concept which helps us to understand the present in relation to history; that is, interpreting the era we are living in by linking it to the historical shifts and the cultural conditions and representations the social, historical, and economic changes have been reflected through. In other words, the external cultural and economic terms and circumstances constantly demand us to reshape our interpretation of these present changes within an interdependence with history. Jameson explains the term as a “periodizing hypothesis” to explore the “cultural dominants” of the present in relation to economic necessities of the time. According to him, the present time we are living in needs to be interpreted in the light of the demands of the cultural reproduction. His postmodernism theory which is based on his Marxist disposition manifests a

perspective that objects to taking this periodization as a totally new social order; rather, postmodernism, for Jameson, is a systematic cultural reworking of capitalism, the process of the commodification of the culture through the "irrevocable changes in the representation of things" (p. ix) . In this regard, the contents of the present culture are renewed and reflected according to the economic demands the representative apparatuses have on the culture. With the advance of the machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since 1940s accompanied is a process during which Jameson thinks cultural material begins to be manufactured by machinery under capital. To quote his argument;

> "Such machines (electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses) are indeed machines of reproduction, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment (modernity) ..... In the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content — into narratives which are about the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the simulacrum." (p. 37)

It is in this sense that Jameson's argument is relevant to our concerns regarding the postmodernization of the road genre. His statements not only about the reproduction of the cultural material by machines, but also the aesthetic representation of the reproduced copies point at the mediatic and the simulational nature of the contemporary culture. The representation of images, the spectacle, does not remain as a simple fascination with or a collection of images; instead, as Guy Debord argues in his *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994), that the representation becomes "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." (p. 12) thus arriving at a point where the image loses its relation to any reality and becomes pure simulacrum. (Baudrillard, 2001) Accordingly, in the postmodern examples I will be examining in this chapter this transformation is reflected through road genre's presentation of the cultural context which powerfully contributes to the road film's contemporary progress by taking advantage of the instability of the contemporary culture and its representative stock of images.

In her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Linda Hutcheon comments that postmodernism responds to

history by revising and problematizing its metanarratives and discourses. In this sense, the boundaries of a genre could be re-examined in creative ways not by a "nostalgic return" (p. 3) to its past which laments over the exhausted frontiers of the form but by a "critical revisiting" (p. 3) of its patterns and conventions. This kind of an approach to the genre's postmodern examples can explain the productivity of its inevitable self-referentiality. The American road picture, in particular, is very much engaged with the potentialities of a revisitation because of its thematic concerns with the boundaries of the Western frontier. Thus, it does not dispraise, but celebrates a reflection on itself by which, especially, the contemporary road films deal with the image and the boundaries of the genre. This is also the point where we can position ourselves in regard to the examination of the postmodern Native American road films in the fourth chapter of this thesis. In Native American road movies like *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998), *Dreamkeeper* (Barron, 2003), and *Powwow Highway* (Wacks, 1989) characters take to the road on a cinematic landscape where they had been denied visibility in Westerns and former road films. Thus, by overlapping between boundaries and images, American Indians achieve a

cultural renewal of their own celluloid images and representations.

David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* is one of the best examples of a creative subversion of the road film. Lynch's film accomplishes this reworking by making allusions to the previous examples of the genre and exploiting every single tradition within the road picture. *Wild at Heart* situates a young outlaw couple in the center of its narrative which is structured around the running away of Sailor and Lula from Lula's mother Marietta. At the beginning the film seems to be an outlaw couple-on-the-road movie, but soon after it also turns out to be travelling within and around the genre's frontiers with flashbacks and their stories the couple's memories begins to structure the film's narrative. The hell in Lula's dreams, the woman's laugh she constantly hears, and the demonic figures she remembers or believes to have existed mock the earlier romantic implications. When Sailor tells her about her father's death, Lula sees The Wicked Witch of the East approaching them along the highway. This scene works as a mockery of road vision as well as referring to Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz*, a classic made in 1939 which employed the theme of the journey. After they see a traffic

accident on the road side and witness the death of a woman in this accident, Lula again complains about the voices she hears. She wants Sailor to find a song on the radio, and they dance on the roadside alluding to Kit and Holly's dance in the middle of the desert in Malick's *Badlands.*

Wild at Heart engages with the initial examples by looking at them through the images shown to us and to Marietta in a crystal. Like the Wicked Witch of the East in *The Wizard of Oz,* Lula's mother sees her daughter and Ripley in her magical crystal and learn where they are headed. Nevertheless, Lula and her boy friend manage to escape the mother every time she attempts to keep them apart since they are determined to follow 'The Yellow Brick Road' and restore domesticity. In this sense, the couple achieve their yearning to get married and form a family. Although Lula refers to their journey as if bursting out the spirit of postmodern road film by reflecting: "This whole world is weird on top and wild at heart!" at the end of the movie, they pass beyond all the drawbacks and ironically confirm Dorothy's statement that "there is no place like home."

The genre's self-alluding nature is also quite apparent in Gus Van Sant's road movie *My Own Private Idaho.* (1991) What makes the film an important example of the contemporary road film is its use of the landscape as a self-reflexive and allusive device. The film opens with Mike's perspective of the landscape before him, he talking to himself (and to us) contends that he knows this road, and of all the roads he knows there is no road like this. But then a rabbit passes him quickly as if all of a sudden taking him to Alice's Wonderland and Mike shouts after it saying, and rather shaking himself with this thought, that they are in fact all stuck on the same road. This scene suggests that we as well as the characters will be taken into a wonderland full of images and characters from previous road movies. In this way the movie, in its beginning, claims a new path among the genre's other examples, but a few moments later it admits that it can create a place for itself only by subverting the genre's traditions. It is at this point that *Idaho*'s lacking a sense of narrative travel can work in its own interest by focusing on the landscape and the figure of the road. One of the best moments the film takes advantage of this is when the gay couple are shown in a campside scene alluding to *Easy Rider.* Here the road movie's divide between

rebellion and conformity as well as between nature and culture is reworked through a sexually disorienting perspective. Unlike Wyatt and Billy in *Easy Rider*, Scott and Mike embrace each other before they fall into sleep, thus occupying the landscape of the Western picture in order to make a political and cultural criticism against the conservative stance of the society.The contextual concerns of the road genre rework in a way to subvert the meanings of family, nation, home, landscape, and sexuality as the contemporary road hero's experience of the highway is reflected in the present.

Wim Wenders's *Paris,Texas*, though from a European director's point of view, reflects the changing assumptions and implications attributed to the concept of the American family. The film peculiarly starts with the male lead, Travis, already on the road. We do not see him at the beginning of the movie frustrated by everyday life and its usual conflicts and constraints and being forced to take to the road for freedom. We see him four years into his journey as he is finally found by his brother, Walt, in South Texas. He is unable to tell, until half way through the film, why he disappeared all of a sudden leaving his wife and his

son. Every time he is asked about his past he looks in vain as if he himself doesn't remember what happened. He has only a picture of an empty landscape with a single a sign on it announcing Paris, Texas. This picture, as we learn later, signifies his past, reminding Travis that he bought that land to construct a home on, for it is the place where his parents first made love. But he never tells why he quit this dream and left his family. After a three-day journey on the highway with his brother, Travis arrives at Walt's house where he meets his son, Hunter. Hunter has been adopted by Walt and Anne and calls them his mother and father. From now on, Travis's journey will be directed toward the family, in contrast to the road genre's modernist narrative direction toward the road or to the wilderness.

The film opens with Travis already at the end of his four-year journey, thus the narrative structure is upset and reworked at the very begining suggesting a road story within another story. The notions of family in *Paris, Texas* accentuate a sense of family as it was reflected after the Second World War and especially after Vietnam. The narrative theme of Travis's journey which seems to be back toward the home rather than away

from it, focuses on the dissolution and the resolution of the family. Even when he regathers his family, he knows that he does not belong to it. The idea of unbelonging to a home is more than a cultural critique of a patriarchal structure of family. It is Travis's distancing himself from the family. In a sense, he is the postmodern Shane: he is aware that he has no place in domesticity, thus, has to leave after setting things right. He will, of course, not hear Hunter shouting after him "Come back Shane!"

Home in *Thelma and Louise* is depicted as a place where the patriarchal structure of society dominates. At the beginning of the film we see Thelma as a housewife whose every minute is supposed to be devoted to her husband. Louise, on the other hand, is a working woman, she seems to be the most self-reliant one, although where she finds job is the kitchen of a restaurant, not very much different from Thelma. Serving the film's criticism of male domination, home in this movie is the most restricting place for the two women; but, on the other hand, once they are outside home they become dangerous outlaws on the run. The first night Thelma and Louise freely pass their time together in a bar

concludes with Louise's killing a man who tries to rape Thelma in the parking lot. The two women, resolving that they cannot make the police believe that Louise was forced to shoot, decide to run away to Mexico in order to hide. Their weekend plans to camp at a small house on the mountains have to be cancelled; now they have to travel all the road to Mexico. What is more, Louise seems to be determined to go there without crossing Texas, the fastest road leading to Texas from Oklahoma. Later, we understand from her talk with detective Hal Slocumb that she had bad experience in Texas when he tries to assure Louise saying 'I know what happened to you in Texas'. But Louise is determined not to go to the police, and since she is sure by experience that it is no use to resign. Alluding to Tom Doniphon of *The Man Who Shot liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962) who reminds Rance Stoddard that "one needs a gun in these parts" she tells Thelma that 'they don't live in that kind of world'. Thus, they take to the road as fugitives in Louise's 66 Thunderbird convertible trying to escape from the police and reach Mexico.

Louise's car, on the other hand, is the place in which they think they can escape society and its sexual and

other limitations. In this sense, *Thelma and Louise* is also the first road film offering the driver's seat to women. But the fact that Thelma and Louise are travelling on the highway only because they are escaping from men is also ironical. Although these two women seem to be in control of the car which has been associated with masculinity, the last scene of the film when they are surrounded by police cars explicitly shows them trapped in this icon of freedom.

In her essay *The Roads to Freedom* (1991), Manhola Dargis states that Thelma and Louise become outlaws "the moment they seize control of their bodies" and their road trip is "grounded in the politics of the body" when the movie's sexual politics is compared to other three examples of the road genre: *Gun Crazy* (1950), *Something Wild* (Demme, 1986), and *Wild at Heart*. Bart Tare, the male lead of the *Gun Crazy* commits crimes as long as he is persuaded by his girl firend Annie although each time he is afraid of shooting people dead. Annie's desirous relationship with him and her constant promises to settle down after each robbery are what keep them on the road. According to Dargis, as long as there is the promised sexuality of the women, they are on the road until they are

trapped by the police. *Wild at Heart,* on the other hand, domesticates Lula with marriage and motherhood; besides her body was already conquered at early age when she was raped by her uncle. In this sense, Sailor and Lula's flight from Lula's mother and the men the mother sends to kill Sailor becomes a struggle to conquer the female body, Lula's sexuality for Sailor and the mother's love for Jonnie Farragut and Marcellos Santos. What makes Dargis's argument relevant here is that she states that in these films the female body and the road are "interchangeable" , and both are "sites each man must travel." Although this interpretation does not work in *Wild at Heart* since Lula's fate is already sealed by a rape at an early age and she gets what she wants at the end of the film, if the women's body becomes the landscape to conquer along with the landscape in some of the examples of the genre, this is the point at which *Thelma and Louise* reworks the road conventions by putting outlaw women on the highway.

While escaping from the law, Thelma and Louise enjoy the landscape during the daybreak; they are the ones to conquer it. In this sense, having control of the body means, for Thelma and Louise, having control of the road and the landscape. Although they are stuck at the

Grand Canyon, they make the decision whether to hit it or surrender. In regard to the experience of the landscape, Thelma and Louise are different from *The Searchers'* s Martha and *Shane'* s Marian who are similarly fascinated with the landscape but can only observe it at the threshold of a house as the gunman they admire fades into it. Ethan Edward's quest is about the white daughter of the family who is kipnapped by Indians and whose body should be retrieved, dead or alive, rather than leaving its control to the Indians. But whatever their end might turn out to be, Thelma and Louise would never resign to a male figure, even detective Hal who would approach them saying "Let's go home Debbie!"

*Thelma and Louise'*s scene when they are caught among police cars before they pull up at the edge of Grand Canyon powerfully evokes John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), especially its famous scene shot in the Monument Valley when the passanger coach is cornered by Indians on their horses. In this scene, the female body, both the mother and the prostitute, is surrounded by men who are trying to protect them. *Thelma and Louise,* in a sense, evokes the Western's traditional iconography but at the same time reinvents them by interchanging the women's

and men's roles in these movies. Now, the male world is the primitive, hostile, and assailent gang of attackers, but the two women, especailly Louise after exchanging her jewelry for a cowboy hat and taking the driver's seat, do not seem to be in need of men to be protected, neither to be convoyed back to home. In this respect, with the film's cowboys, outlaws, lawmen, and chasing scenes, *Thelma and Louise* reintroduces the gendered space the women have occupied on Western's landscape by giving them the control of the car and the control of their bodies as where to take them.

In *My Own Private Idaho*, the sense of home for Mike is constituted by his insistent memory of his mother. She is the missing part of his past, like Jane in *Paris, Texas* is the missing part of the family who should be retrieved. But Mike's mother is also the force which keeps him on the road. In *Paris, Texas* and *My Own Private Idaho* the memory of the past, in fact, is the memory of the family as the biggest constituting part of life. However, in postmodern road movies, we do not have a romanticized sense of family. It rather constitutes the missing or the problematic part in the identity of the characters. Mike's memory of his mother haunts him on the road, but she is reflected as an

entity directing him to the road again and again, never promising an end to come together. Thus, his missing part becomes Mike's driving force which identifies him not with a house but with the highway, just like the missing part in Travis's memory whose face he has difficulty in remembering but keeps him on the road.

Similar in David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* the memory of the family is problematic since it reflects, differently from *Paris, Texas* and *My Own Private Idaho*, child abuse and a television-sitcom family life as what is remembered after departing the family house. In *Natural Born Killers*, the image of the Mallory's family is represented in an unrealistic manner. The father unemployed and aggressive, and the mother with heavy make up on her face are portrayed in an exaggerated way as representing the contemporary American family. Nevertheless, there is also a cultural critique here which attacks contemporary family life that needs to be reimagined with the changing roles of the genders and family members. Mickey and Malory's abused childhoods are what they know and remember about the sense of family. The difference is in the televised way the family life is given in the *Natural Born Killers*. While

in the genre's modernist examples the restricting sense of the house and the family is a force to leave it, in postmodern road movies it becomes a psychological explanation for the road character's crimes and violence. But the kind of social critique is mocked in both films. Sailor and Lula are on the road escaping their family house and Lula's mother only in order to settle down and start a family. Throughout the whole movie, Lula waits for Sailor to sing Elvis Presley's 'Love me Tender' to her which Sailor mentions as the song he will sing only to the woman he will marry. Malory and Mickey get married on the highway as soon as they escape from Malory's house. Ironically enough, *Wild at Heart* ends with Sailor and Lula coming together to get married and raise their son while the ending scene of the *Natural Born Killers* shows us the couple on the road in a mobile home with a couple of children playing around. *Wild at Heart's* and *Natural Born Killer's* approach to notions of family does not attempt to repair the tension between the road and the domesticity; the films ironically seem to prefer having it in both ways.

One of the most significant ways of representing childhood and family in postmodern road movies is the

spectacularization of a burning house. At the end of *Paris, Texas* we learn that Travis leaves a burning house behind him four years ago when he first sets out on the road. The image of the burning house signifies, for him, his memory of his family which he believes was burnt down with the house until he finds them again. He in a sense repairs this burnt side by regathering his family, but does not try to recreate his own place in the family. At some level, his regathering invigorates for Travis another impulse to take to the road again.

The motif of the burning house is also one of the tools the road film borrows from the classical examples of the Western genre. John Ford in his two westerns, *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* uses this element. In *The Searchers*, it is the sight of the burning house which makes it visible to the marshal team and Ethan Edwards that Ethan's brother's house has been raided by the Comanches. Since Ethan and his friends are misdirected and fooled by the Indians, they are unable to rescue Ethan's family, they are back to home to find the burned down house with Ethan's folks slain by the Indians. It is this burnt house and Ethan's being unable to protect the family living in it that drives him on the road for five years. His efforts

to find his abducted niece Debbie and his hatred for the Indians are triggered by this memory of the burning house. Because the Western gunman has to ensure the homesteaders' security on the frontier, any attempt at attacking the family life and miscegenation which would result in the white girls' bringing up Indian families endanger the expansion of the frontier. Although Ethan Edwards does not identify with the family life and he is aware that he cannot have a part in it, he feels forced to bring back the abducted niece to her neighbour's house.

Unlike the burnt house which is set on fire by Comanches, the house in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is put into flames by the male lead, Tom Doniphon. Living in the small town of Shinbone, Tom is the Western hero who protects the homesteaders from trouble, especially Liberty Valance and his friends cause around the town. He is in love with Hallie and he builds a house in which he plans to live with his family when he marries her. But soon Hallie is attracted to Rance Stoddard who is taken to her family house by Tom after he has been beaten by Liberty Valance and his men and begins to live with them. Unlike Tom, Rance believes in law and order; he is an

attorney and he refuses to use a gun although he is often reminded by Tom that “one needs a gun in these parts.” After some time, Rance is forced to arrange a shootout with Liberty Valance after his violent attempt at killing Dutton Peabody, the selected delegate to go to the capital city with Rance. He understands that to help the territory become a state they should first stop Liberty Valance, but at the same time he knows that he is not a good match to him. The shootout takes place and Rance succeeds in stopping Liberty Valance with the help of Tom who shoots Valance from a secret corner before Liberty shoots at Rance. Everybody believes that Rance killed Liberty Valance, and their respect for him is doubled. The same evening, Tom, witnessing Hallie’s obvious concerns for Rance as she kisses him, desparingly runs his horse toward the house he has built for her and sets it on fire. In this film, the motif of house burning signifies, once again, the impossibility of the cowboy’s having a place in domesticity and bringing up a family. Like Shane who is constantly reminded of his unbelonging to Starrett house and is forced to use his gun against Rykers, Tom’s state of unbelonging causes him to destroy the house and go back to wilderness with which he truly identifies.

In *Natural Born Killers*, Mickey and Mallory set the Mallory's family house on fire after they kill the parents. In this movie, the family house prevails as a horrifying prison which leads to the terrible crimes the couple will commit on the road. The image of the house stays both as a part in the memory and as a formal tool of the genre; but this time it cannot escape a postmodernist irony and mockery. *Wild at Heart*'s house signifies the lost place of the father for the female lead, and the image of the house in flames carries with it the secret part of a murder committed by the mother. Indeed, every time the burning house appears on the screen, each character remembers why they are on the road. Sailor has to escape with his girl friend from her mother because he is supposed to know the fact that the mother set the house on fire with her lover. Lula has to run away from the mother since she knows she will never let them come together. Here, the image of the flaming house is blurred with the memory of each character in the film.But the house somehow refers to the missing part of the memory which everyone believes to be true about their own identity. There are multiple images and spectacularized memories about the same event, but no one seems to be suspicious of the reality. The representation of memory, in *My Own*

Private Idaho, is given through Mike's narcolepsy. His beliefs about his past and his missing mother are reinforced during the moments of his stupor. The characters in these movies and the audience who are watching them can never be sure of the past, whether it was really lived or was made up in the character's mind. In this sense, the image of the house in *My Own Private Idaho* also reinforces the self-reflexivity of the postmodern road film which reminds its audience of the fact that they are watching a film.

Most significantly, the car and the landscape become the bearer of these images in postmodern road movies. The car, becoming more speedy and luxurious during the 90s is still an admired vehicle, especially in *Natural Born Killers*. In the scene we see Mickey and Mallory looking at the stars and saying 'I love you' to each other, the car serves as a stage Mallory stands on the top to read poetry and profess love to Mickey. The top of the car suggests a theatre stage with lots of images and spectacles on it. Similarly, the postmodern road genre's landscape becomes a TV screen; to show us Mallory's abused childhood given a caricatural twist in Stone's movie. All the way the characters consume the landscape through images, landmarks, and the

advertisements of shopping malls, the road begins to disappear among them. It does not promise freedom or escape any more; instead it is the reminder of the places or the crimes left behind. Similarly, Mike's mother's murdering his father in a movie theatre, or Hunter's being able to recognize the missing mother only through her pictures are all mass-media references that render the road genre's depiction of the contemporary society ironical and mediated. In these examples the characters' televised confessions, popular media commentary on the riots and the mass murders, the car's transformation into a theatre stage are used in the genre's contemporary examples to tell the hero's journey narrative through postmodern notions of gender, past, family, and mass media.

In *Natural Born Killers* Mickey and Mallory's exaggeratedly caricaturized childhoods are reflected on the highway and through the landscape. When they run out of gas one night they are welcomed by an old Indian into his house. He tells them about his late wife and mentions the devil he sometimes sees in his dreams. Meanwhile, the words "devil" and "TV" are projected on Malory and Mickey's chests suggesting that they are so much spoiled by TV and they are evil. Under the

influence of a nightmare Mickey sees in the Indian's house, he kills him accidentally. After this murder, they are bitten by the snakes in the Indian's garden, and deprived of their mobility which causes their being caught by the police.

This scene is suggestive of another theme in these movies; the physical place Native Americans have occupied in Western films and contemporary road movies. In *Stagecoach,* the Indians hide behind the hills and wait in order to attack the passanger coach as it approaches. Chief Scar's tribe hides in the plains for fear that they will be shot by the ranchers. Ethan Edward's quest to find his abducted niece lasts for five years because the Comanche tribe constantly keeps changing places.

The American Indian character of the *Natural Born Killers* does not hide, but he still lives in the margins of the road and the landscape, he is depicted as someone who appears in the middle of nowhere. The exocitized representation of him with his tribal dressing and his role as a storyteller are visually stressed. But where he is supposed to occupy in the cinema, still in the 90s, remains as a question as to

how much visibility he is attributed to in contemporary America. As Prats suggests “the Indian appears at last only to confirm the inevitability of his defeat.” (2002, p. 36) Thus, he cannot go beyond the edges of the society he is allowed to appear. The scene when Malory is bitten by the snakes in the Indian’s garden suggests that the American Indian is still regarded as the serpent of the American Eden. He is ever the intruder in this garden, and even after he is killed he is symbolized and identified with the serpent.

When this scene is considered, especially its dealing with the Indian, the road films in which American Indians appear as protagonists become important. As the road picture attempts to subvert its dominant themes and traditions and become more self-reflexive, it becomes more appropriate to provide an arena for American Indians to present themselves and their contemporary concerns. In this sense, Native American road films such as *Powwow Highway, Smoke Signals, and Dreamkeeper* are the best examples to investigate the ways American Indians are represented in the postmodern road films and to examine how the issues like mobility, domesticity, experience of the road, hope, and death are reflected.

5. NATIVE AMERICANS IN ROAD MOVIES

> "Look out the window! Doesn't this remind you of when you are in the boat and then later that night you are lying looking up at the ceiling, and the water in your head was not dissimilar from the landscape, and you think to yourself, why is it that the landscape is moving, but the boat is still?" (Dead Man)

When asked, in an interview with *Cineaste,* what he thought about *Smoke Signals* as a contemporary film portraying American Indians, Sherman Alexie, the scriptwriter and the coproducer of the movie, responded: "It is a very basic story, a road trip/buddy movie about a lost father, so I'm working with two very classical, mythic structures. You can find them in everything from The Bible, to The Iliad and The Odyssey." (1998) Alexie continues saying that what makes the film "groundbreaking" is that the characters are contemporary Indians, real people living in today's world not stereotypes who lived and died in the past. Remarkably, Alexie's statement means more than defining a film and its story: he not only points at the fact that Native Americans in this film are fully realized human beings who are quite different from how they have

been represented in the most classical literary and cinematic works, but also that they are, indeed, presented as walking in and around the oldest and the most canonized texts. In other words, the film might look ambiguous in its form and content, yet this characteristic of it is what makes it significant along with other three Native American road movies – *Powwow Highway, Dead Man,* and *Dreamkeeper* – for a critical discussion of American Indian ethnic identity and cultural renewal within the road movie genre.

Chris Eyre's use of genre conventions in *Smoke Signals* situates the film well within the American road picture; he employs a narrative structure around which the story unfolds as the protaonists' journey advances. It is easy and obvious to define the movie in relation to American mainstream road films such as *Easy Rider, Badlands,* and *Thelma and Louise,* especially due to its heavy emphasis on road elements like the car, the landscape, and the couple. However, when we examine the theme, the film looks quite subversive of dominant contents of its genre. Eyre locates Native American protagonists and themes within the white American confines of the road film and by doing so incorporates them into the larger cultural context. Victor and

Thomas in *Smoke Signals* are perhaps the definitive road heros, but their journey is not associated with the archetypal values or anxieties American road characters share while they are on the road. My own contention is that the generic and cultural contribution the Native American road films hold for the genre can be examined in relation to these movies' potential as subversive reproductions of the mainstream. In this respect, the qustions as to who takes to the road, where, in which direction, and why are rearticulated from Native American perspective while the issues such as departure, arrival, chance, fate, and the road's frustrations are reemphasized in this way.

If we take films like *Detour, Grapes of Wrath,* or *Bonnie and Clyde* as representatives for their use of the genre's formal tools within an American journey narrative, postmodern road films problematize the contextual values these films are associated with. As I suggest in my second chapter, the emergence of the road genre during 1940s and 50s is closely tied to the roots of the western genre; the potential of the Western's generic motifs to offer contextual meanings especially during the Depression era, the second World War, and the Vietnam War is successfully used within the road

film. Thus, Western's use of the landscape which brings up the promise of the frontier and the ideal of American masculinity is reworked in the road films to create a tension between rebellion and conformity as well as between wilderness and domesticity.

In this sense, it becomes important to examine the American Indian's filmic representations within a genre whose predecessor has served as the form which bestowed on him the least visibility. To go back to Prats's argument, the canonical Western attributes a visual presence to the American Indian only in order to ensure his absence; that is the Western's native functions in several forms and images which symbolize the drawbacks and difficulties of the frontier and thus produces a fascination of the idea of overcoming them. Therefore, locating the American Indian in the same landscape where he is supposed to have disappeared long ago suggests a revival of American Indian cultural identity through generic appropriation.

The promise of the road genre in the sense that its formal and thematic intentions can be reidentified with Native American culture and experience is far from revisionism's appreciated potential praised by critics

like Kilpatrick and Aleiss. Instead, in Native American road films, the notions of returning home which compose the central structure of the journey work quite differently from the idea of a condemned return to the 19th century.

A close relation could be established between the counterculture movements of 1960s and 70s and the revisionism in the films Hollywood employed during this time. The modernist struggle and the media influence inserted to the civil rights movements of this period clearly compelled Hollywood to develop ideological and discursive contents that would fit well into its audiences' ideas and emotions about the crucial events of the time. The issues of black rights, gay liberation, women's movement, and indigenous struggle found their way into the Hollywood films and attracted audiences. And it is undeniable that the American Indian Movement's mediated activism worked influentially on the screen, especially in the films *Billy Jack, Soldier Blue,* and *Little Big Man.* Yet, to claim that the revisionist films of the 1960s and 70s concerning American Indian representations in the cinema offer more "accurate" and "better" images and representations of Native Americans is, to my mind,

equal to confine the Native American to the Western film. As I have discussed in the first chapter of this study, revisionism's assertions for "true" images cannot avoid being one-dimensional reproductions in the way the characters and historical events are depicted, as well as in the fact that these films fail to address contemporary issues concerning American Indians. Thus, this work attempts to distance its arguments from such claims; this chapter will comment and analyze on the ways in which Native Americans appropriate the road genre's conventions in the direction of their own responses to contemporary cultural, social, and economic contexts they live in.

Postmodern road films, like the initial and modernist examples of the genre, exhibit an interest in dealing with contextual issues. Movies such as *Wild at Heart* and *Natural Born Killers* address the notions of domesticity, mobility, crime, and sexuality within the road picture's generic topoi. In this sense, the static deep structure of the road film remains important for it allows a dynamism which signifies the cultural contexts within which these issues are reworked. The road genre does not change during its postmodern period, instead it becomes more reflexive of its own

structure: the postmodern road hero takes to a journey in which he is more self conscious of the whole experience. Indeeed, the road character is aware that the journey has already begun before him and this seems to be the most significant reason to hit the road. Contemporary road protagonists define themselves and their experience in relation to the former protagonists of the road. Sailor Ripley in *Wild at Heart* does not try to gain a fresh identity during his journey; he is content to imitate Elvis Presley whose image he grew up with. Likewise, Lula has no intentions to derive freedom from the road; she already identifies herself with Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* who vows to look for happiness in her own garden when she needs it; from the very beginning Lula does not attempt to leave 'The Yellow Brick Road'.

The road genre's maturity lets its dynamic surface structure engage in a consistent dealing with the image; the generic self-consciousness the road film has arrived allows the genre to return to its identifiable conventions. The contemporary road characters often reflect this self-awareness by referring and imitating the former road heroes and their experience. Therefore, the road genre remains conservative but, at the same

time, it allows liberation within its thematic variations. At this point, it becomes a promising arena for Native Americans to appropriate its formal tools and to emphasize cultural themes.

Postmodernism's dependence on earlier texts strengthens these films' power to orient their criticism toward the dominant topics and questions of their time; by not denying the presence of the past, postmodernism engages in a reworking which Linda Hutcheon calls "an ironic dialogue with the past." (p. 4) In other words, the contemporary examples of the road genre do not attempt to set the formal boundaries free, instead they unroot them for a creative playfulness with conventions and themes. This is the point at which Native American road movies produce an original response to the past. The self-awareness the road picture manifests toward its established conventions is enabled by the genre's employment of intertextuality, allusions, and self-referentiality.

When Native Americans take to the road as an ethnic minority group the journey they undertake reflects their cultural and social traditions and beliefs. By travelling on the same landscape they were denied to

appear in the classical examples of the Western genre, contemporary Native Americans use formal and thematic conventions of the road film in order to reproduce them for cultural renewal. By reproduction, what I mean here is an appropriated process of remaking those examples of the genre for a creative subversion which celebrates ethnic identity and cultural variation. For American Indians leave a place only in order to arrive at it at the end of their journey, the generic patterns of the road picture are assigned in this direction. Yet, the fact that the direction of the trip is determined from the very beginning does not deemphasize the significance of the themes employed in these movies. On the contrary, it is this fact which makes their return inevitable for the road characters as well as expected for the ones left back home; American Indians return because their experiences on the road are supposed to revive the old ones. In this way, the protagonists of the four movies which will be examined in this chapter travel around the central pattern of the road genre to reunite the past and the present.

Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* is based on the characters and short stories of Sherman Alexie's book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993). It is the

first film written, directed, and produced by Native Americans. The film tells the story of the journey Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-The-Fire take together to retrieve Victor's dead father's ashes from Phoenix, Arizona.

Victor and Thomas are two young Coeur D'Alene Indians who live on the reservation in Idaho. The film opens with a flashback taking us to a fire scene: It is July 4 in 1976 and the house where there was an Independence Day party the same night is burning. There are lots of Indians running for help, and we see Arnold Joseph, Victor's father, running toward the flaming house. When he approaches the house, two people appear at one of the smoky windows whom we later learn were Thomas's parents and they throw a little baby downwards. Arnold catches the baby just before it hits the ground thus saving his life. The rescued baby grows up to be Thomas who will regard Arnold as a hero and tell legendary stories about him all his life.

The story procedes with flasbacks which help us link the characters and their past and which helps Victor confront his past and his embitterment towards his father. Unlike Thomas, who is a traditionalist tribal

storyteller keen on cultural practice and Native American spirituality, Victor is a basketball player who has his own pragmatic views about his culture and the world around him. Victor does not reject his Indianness, but he never fully identifies himself with American Indian heritage. Having grown up together on the same reservation, they decide to set out together to go to Arizona, Thomas being quite eager to take the journey while Victor is unwilling and resentful to do so.

Later, through flasbacks, we learn that Arnold abandones his wife Arlene and his son Victor after the fire in 1976 which results in his becoming an alcoholic. He settles in Arizona where he spends the rest of his life and dies before Victor sees him home one more time. Consequently, Victor thinks it unfair to be sent to Arizona in order to collect the ashes of an alcoholic father who has never called them for years. But his mother persuades him to do so because there is no one else to make the journey. However, the biggest problem is that Victor doesn’t have the money he needs for the journey, so he is forced to borrow it from Thomas who gives it only on the condition that he can go with him. Thus, they set out together; Victor

reluctantly leaving home and Thomas ready to honor Arnold's spirit and to collect new stories to tell when they return.

When they arrive in Phoenix, they meet Suzie Song who introduces herself as a neighbor of Arnold and who turns out to know quite a lot about him and his past. Arnold seems to have told her many things about his family, his son, his dreams and wishes about his son, and the notorious fire. After they are given Arnold's ashes by Suzie, they decide to spend the night in Suzie's caravan in order to have rest for the next day's trip, and that night Victor hears from her that the fire in which Thomas's parents were killed was actually caused by Arnold who was very drunk after the party. Unable to face Thomas's growing up without parents and to forget the fire, Arnold abandons his family and his tribe for ever. Early the next morning, Thomas and Victor start for Idaho where they scatter the ashes into a river to let Arnold's spirit free in both worlds.

First of all, *Smoke Signals's* narrative intentions are quite obvious from the beginning. Victor, finally consenting that Thomas could go with him, assures him

that the moment they get there, they will be ready to turn back. This statement of Victor already determines the narrative structure of their journey; they are not leaving the reservation in order to find a better place to live, nor are they seeking adventure hitting the road aimlessly. Instead, Victor and Thomas are supposed to bring the road and its stories back to their reservation. In this sense, the protagonists' journey is not determined to be an individual one, it is intended to be a collective experience for their families and tribes.

Smoke Signals' dependence on fire and smoke as a generic tool works at two levels. The story of the film begins and ends with fire; the first fire causing Thomas' parents' death and Arnold's leaving home, thus forcing Victor to take to the journey, and the second fire, though we do not see it on the screen, which leaves Arnold's ashes to Victor and Thomas to be safely brought home. The theme of the fire enables the narrative to proceed, providing the characters with motives to depart and then return.

The title of the film already reminds us of the motif of fire frequently employed in the Western, and then

borrowed by the road genre, to evoke the Indian's presence around; that a Cheyenne or Comanche band of Native Americans are about to leave after attacking a homesteader's house and setting it on fire. As the reduced image of the Indian, fire, in this film, works both as the preserver and the destroyer of the past. In a sense, fire holds control of the past by devastating it only in order to help the protagonists remember and keep its memory. Thomas, identifying himself with fire, defines Victor and himself as "the children born of flame and ash." The fire also feeds the archive that helps him make his stories. Although Victor is irritated by each story about his father, this is the way Thomas represents Arnold as an Indian hero who saved his life in a fire which "rose up like General Custer."

The thematic diversity of *Smoke Signals*, however, does not prevent the film from establishing generic relations with the former examples of the road picture. Regardless of non-Native themes of the other road movies, the film frequently offers allusions and references to them as well as it refers to Native American myths and metaphors. For instance, after a little while they depart home, Victor and Thomas come

across two young Native girls, Thelma and Lucy, who drive their car in reverse along the reservation road. This scene presents a powerful reference to *Thelma and Louise* and to the female characters' subversive journey in this film which aimed to criticize the male-dominated nature of the genre. The two Cour d'Alene women driving backward across the reservation make a gesture at the white control of the driver's seat in road films by alluding to the earlier film which challenged the genre with similar intentions.

Thelma and Lucy give a ride to Victor and Thomas to drive them to the highway where they will take the bus to Phoenix. When they stop at the reservation border to let Victor and Thomas out, one of the girls warns them saying: "Do you have your passports? You are living the reservation! Here, at the begining of their journey the protagonists are warned that they are hitting the reservation borders and taking the road which have been occupied by white Americans so far, therefore they should be prepared for the difficulties the outside white world will cause them, like the fact that they are forced to sit on the back seat while they are on the bus. It is as if a strong-looking Louise is warning them against the detours and traps of the road. All the

same, the girls take Victor and Thomas into their car as Thelma let handsome J.D. inside and put themselves into trouble. But the Indian girls seem to be too much aware of this kind of trap and they charge the boys with a story, “a fine example of the oral traditions”, before they let them in.

Native American road protagonists also borrow from their own cultural materials and texts such as Native American myths and legends while they are on the road. In other words, like Kit, Lula, or Sailor who identify themselves with celebrities or actors who took the journey before them, American Indians engage in a journey which turns into an intertexture of Native American legends and myths enabling them to identify themselves with storytellers, warriors, legendary heroes, and their ancestors, both as they have been introduced to them in films and through oral tradition of storytelling. In one of the early sequences of *Smoke Signals,* we see Arnold, who is acted by Gary Farmer, asking Victor which Indian hero he likes much, Victor replies: “Nobody”. This scene works brilliantly to remind us of Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* (1995) and its Indian character, Nobody, played by Farmer himself and

it functions to enable Victor to define himself in terms of another American Indian road hero.

In the same manner, *Dreamkeeper*'s Shane begins to see his journey as a vision quest the legendary Indian heroes searched throughout history as the Grandpa introduces him with Native American stories during their journey. The legend of the Eagle Boy, the central myth the narration of *Dreamkeeper* evolves around, helps Shane to make sense of his journey in terms of a quest that should be pursued with hardship and struggle. In this sense, postmodern intertextuality revolves around Native American texts instead of depending largely on the mainstream.

The journey Victor and Thomas take strengthens their ties with their tribal identity as well as giving them a chance to revise the nature of their friendship in the end. Victor returns home with his father's ashes having come to terms with his resentment for him. However, this reconciliation is supposed to have a meaning for the community, this is not an individual journey. When Thomas returns his house, his grandmother meets him at the threshold, and, seeming to be uninterested in what has happened in Phoenix, she asks

him what will happen. The reconciliation between the father and the son is meant to bring in a new understanding of past and present which is expected to shed light on the future.

Like *Smoke Signals, Dreamkeeper* has, at its center, the story of a young Native son who is cross with his father and is forced to set out on a journey with his grandfather in order to take him to the All Nations Powwow. Pete Chasing Horse is an old Native American storyteller, one of the most knowledgeable Lakota elders living in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He knows a lot of Indian myths and legends about all the nations which he says he heard from his grandfather who listened to the stories from Black Elk. He is invited to the All Nations Powwow in Albuquerque, Mexico to share his stories with the people gathering there from all tribes. The Grandpa, as he is called by the children in the reservation, is determined to go to the ceremony but he doesn't feel strong enough to drive all the way to Mexico. He wants his young grandson Shane to go with him. Being a rebellious and restless young man Shane is not interested in Grandpa's stories so he rejects the idea of driving with him when he first hears his mother

Janine talking about it. Shane is a member of Lakota street gang Dog Soldiers and he is recently in trouble with the gang. He owes money to the gang which he has to return soon, but he is unable to do so as he spends the whole money to buy his girlfriend a ring. He, therefore, thinks about the journey as a way to go out of the reservation and thus escape the gang.

As he drives in his Grandpa's 1966 Ford pick-up truck along the highway, he listens to the stories of several Native American myths and legends. As each story unfolds on the screen, they come to life for Shane and for the audience.Produced with digital techniques, stories like Lakota story of Eagle Boy's vision quest, the myth of the Thunder spirit, and the legend of Quillwork Girl and her seven star brothers are depicted visually on the screen as we listen them form the storyteller. During this journey, Pete also makes Shane see his estranged father who was an alcoholic and left his home long ago.

In this film, like *Smoke Signals,* addiction to alcohol is presented as a Native American contemporary problem causing them physical and social difficulties in their lives. Yet, alcoholism is not seen as a disease or an

illness which could be cured. In these films the American Indian addicts himself to alcohol due to an emotional burden he cannot overcome. It is sometimes the economic conditions in the reservations leading to addiction at early age, or, as in Arnold's case, the memory of a painful event. However, the medicine, Grandpa, Philpert, and Nobody refer in the films, is not a healing for alcoholism; the only medicine that will prevent the Indian from grieving himself is the vision he is supposed to gain during the journey.

Father and son come to terms with each other after a visit in his caravan where the next day they find the Grandpa dead. Embracing his Indian identity on the road, Shane decides to go to the All Nations ceremony to fulfill Pete's aim to share stories with people from all over the world. Being the last person who has had the chance to listen to the stories from a respected tribal storyteller, he takes over Grandpa's role to become a traditional storyteller.

Like its central story, the myth of the Eagle Boy, *Dreamkeeper*'s plot follows a vision journey. According to Grandpa's story, Eagle Boy was a young Lakota man who lived in the Black Hills 1000 years ago. He

decided to seek for a vision, so the old people of his tribe left him on a mountain top without food and water for four days and nights. He was allowed to have only his buffalo rope and his secret pipe. After many struggles and difficulties which are shown through flashbacks and flashforwards in the movie, he gains a vision and becomes one of the sacred people of his tribe.

Although Shane is unwilling to take the journey and does not attempt to learn vision or spirituality at the beginning, the theme of his journey revolves around the myth of Eagle Boy. Being unaware of the influence of the native stories on himself, he becomes a vision seeker. In this sense, his quest turns out to be a sacred one. Like Thomas in *Smoke Signals* he learns stories to tell people. Above all, he gains a sense of vision to blend the traditional stories with his present experiences in order to look forward to the future. His reconciliation with his tribal identity, like Victor's, demands a meeting with the estranged father which brings together three generations; fathers, sons, and grandfathers and this makes his journey culturally significant.

Shane's arrival place does not turn out to be the physical home where he lives with his mother. The home he returns to is the Powwow ceremony, 'The Good Red Road', as the Grandpa wished him to follow. 'The Good Red Road' Pete Chasing Horse refers to several times during the film is a traditional American Indian concept which means the path native people are supposed to pursue in order to maintain their cultural identity. It is reminiscent of 'The Yellow Brick Road' of the *Wizard of Oz* and *Wild at Heart* which celebrates the idealized domesticity Dorothy and Lula want to make their way on.

In this sense, *Dreamkeeper* reverses the road genre's narrative structure; locating an American myth, the legend of the Eagle Boy who comes home with a new vision, in the centre of its story, the film follows a circular plot. Unlike the mainstream postmodern examples of the road film which have a general sense of a loss of direction like in *Natural Born Killers* or *My Own Private Idaho*, in Native American road movies this loss is reversed. The road protagonist has to leave home, usually without consent, yet this departure does not mean an eternal loss of self or alienation to himself and to his community. Therefore 'The Good Red

Road' symbolizes this essential path taken by the hero; it doesn't necessarily stand for domesticity, marriage, or conformism. It is the identity of the community and the spirit of Native American traditionalism the circular road brings him to.

For American Indians who are on the road arrival at the departing point becomes as necessary as leaving. According to American Indian beliefs, unlike those of white Euroamericans, the road journey signifies their identification with the land, not a separation or distance from it. Thus, their experience on the road is intended to be a pilgrimage during which they are cleansed of their worldly desires in a circular movement through the land. Native Americans explain natural phenomena like creation of the seasons, birth and death, or the flow of the rivers in relation to the land and its circles through the time. In this sense, the road protagonist is supposed to follow these circles and come back home ready for his blissful reentry into the traditions and customs of his tribal culture. In other words, by subverting the conventions and themes of the road genre, they aim at returning to their own conventions.

Movement on the landscape constitutes the circular nature of the narrative in the sense that the movement also signifies the response to the landscape. As a political and cultural issue, land remains as part of the Native American identity. For the road hero's perception of the landscape is associated with his ability to identify with the land, the mother of earth in Native American traditional and religious beliefs, movement on the landscape represent the dynamics of Indian belonging both to nature and to the hero' culture. Thus, the concept of movement does not manifest an economic or political progress, nor does it necessitate conquest over the land. In this sense, experience of the journey, in Native American road films, does not demand a sharing of the frontier spirit of success and progress; Native Americans are supposed to learn to define themselves in terms of the landscape and its renewal of itself. In order to do this, to read the landscape to learn the secrets of its renewing itself, Native American protagonists does not attempt to conquer it with speed as white Americans do in mainstream road movements. Since the American Indian road characters do not share with the American characters the same attraction to the car, its imagery and status, and the excitement towards the thrill of

speed. It is the natural balance and the circular time of the seasons that help the road hero find his way into reentry. *Dreamkeeper* begins with the unrooting of the land; the trees, the soil, water, rocks, and the clouds are all shaken to announce the renewal of the nature. The road hero will be guided by this resurgence; the landscape comes to life, and as Robert Nelson infers from his reading of Native American novels such as *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) and *Ceremony* (Silko, 1977) : “Stories grow out of the land just the way other forms of life do”. (p. 7) In this way, the movement on the landscape and the experience of the journey bless the road protagonist with the flow of time which brings the past and present together, thus makes the Indian a part of the ritual.

Inevitably, this reappropriation of the narrative is upset by detours of the road which make the journey hard for the protagonist. Yet, these interruptions are meant to teach the road hero lessons or give him a chance to repair relations with the people in his tribe, especially the tradtional ones or his acquaintances. In *Dreamkeeper* the gangs of Dog Soldiers manage to catch up with Shane once they are on the road and they have a quarrel which results in their fighting

and driving their car accidentally into the river. Shane, despite being very afraid of them, dives into the river to save his friends. They finally reconcile and Shane resumes driving feeling happy that he will not be in trouble when he is back home. The theme of returning home and restoration of relationships and tribal ties acquire a different level in Jonathan Wacks's *Powwow Highway* (1989). The story of the film, like in *Smoke Signals* and *Dreamkeeper,* reworks as a circular journey. Yet, it aims to arrive a settlement between an AIM activist and a reservation traditionalist. In this sense, *Powwow Highway* functions as a self-referential journey to Native American history as well as to the history of the road genre.

Powwow Highway features an American Indian Movement activist and a traditionalist taking a journey together. Based on David Seals's novel of the same title, the story is about Buddy Red Bow and Philbert Bono's trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico to get Buddy's sister Bonnie out of the jail where she is kept with her two little daughters. An American Indian activist, Buddy Red Bow lives in the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Lame Deer, Montana and works in the same reservation trying to prevent the Bureau of Indian

Affairs from forcing the tribal council to vote for new developments. He firmly believes that BIA has no good intentions in talking about new mining developmental programs on the reservation and the economic progress these regulations are claimed to bring. Being a former member of American Indian Movement, he is not very much liked by BIA; the Bureau officers, especially Sandy Youngblood, try to keep him away from their meetings with the tribal elders. When Red Bow learns that his sister has been taken to jail in Santa Fe he decides to go there but since he doesn't have a car himself he is forced to go to Mexico with Philbert.

Having the opposite character of Buddy, Philbert Bono is a calm man who believes that he is a warrior chosen by the spirits of his ancestors. The only important thing he believes he has to do is to pay a visit to Black Hills, South Dakota and gain his new name as a warrior. He manages to buy a 1964 Buick from the wrecking yard by trading drugs in order to reach Badlands in his war pony which he names 'Protector'. He doesn't decline Buddy's request to go to Mexico and save Bonnie, his childhood friend, and they take to the road together. While they are on the road, the differences between two characters cause them

frustrations, mostly on Buddy's side. And when Philbert drives into Badlands while Buddy is sleeping in the car the things begin to get complicated and humorous as they are bound to both Santa Fe and South Dakota. The road journey each character undertakes unfolds as they begin to understand each other. Getting irritated very quickly especially with Philbert's secret visions and his services to spirits at every place they seem to be passing by, Buddy soon learns to respect his beliefs finding out that he has already forgotten about religious and oral traditions of his culture. Paying their visit to Christmas Powwow in Pine Ridge Reservation where Buddy meets his old friends who were also American Indian Movement activists and faces his past as an activist, they reroute for Santa Fe. Here they meet Bonnie's friend Rabbit who is there trying to get Bonnie out. Following Philbert's plan which he makes after having been inspired by a Western movie he watches in a diner on the roadside, they try to pull the jail's wall out by a rope attached to Protector. Philbert and the girls succeed in saving Bonnie and they, all together, leave for Montana to return to the reservation. On the way back home they are followed by police cars and the chase ends in Philbert's losing control of his car and driving down the hill. Luckily,

they all survive the accident which Philbert regards was a war with the evil spirits. The film ends with the characters walking toward the highway to set out for home as soon as possible.

The film's approach toward Indian activism can be interpreted as a critical revisitation to the spirit of militancy; the past problems and struggles the AIM members tried to bring into media attention are readdressed in a contemporary setting and the validity of current activism is questioned. When Red Bow attends the powwow ceremony in South Dakota, he comes across GOON members, the private police organization Dick Wilson, the tribal chair of Pine Ridge Reservation, established to prevent Indian activists from attending reservation meetings and ceremonies. One of the GOON police remarks that he knows him from Wounded Knee in 1973, and if they see him on the reservation again, his end will be "just like his friend Peltier!" Reminding him the case of Leonard Peltier, who has been in jail since Wounded Knee occupation and has been charged with the deaths of two FBI officers, the GOONs try to keep him outside of the powwow crowd, thus excluding Indian activism.

It is possible to say that *Powwow Highway* celebrates a restoration between activism and traditionalism more than it supports a settlement between activists and American government by preferring to keep the idea of a reconciliation between the U.S government and American Indians outside its plot. Red Bow's reentry to home is intended for his reunification with his tribal identity, yet it doesn't require him to abandon his militant spirit, neither to come to terms with tribal governments with whom he is constantly in conflict. For Native Americans, the problem of confrontation with white American values and laws do not represent an obstacle they have to overcome to return home.

Powwow Highway offers a strong reference to John Ford's classic Western *The Searchers.* While they are on the road to Santa Fe in order to get Bonnie out of the jail, Philbert says: "We must be prepared for battle to go for the captive woman." Here, the stereotypical images of savagery and primitiveness which have been attributed to the American Indian are successfully challenged; the story turns into a reversal of regaining Debbie. In this sense, retrieving an Indian woman from the white society becomes as crucial as taking a white woman back from 'Commanches'.

If these three films reproduce the conventions of the road genre, Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* (1995) attempts to rework the theme of going back home by locating a white man in the centre of its journey. The film's story unfolds around the spiritual journey of a white man, William Blake, who is helped by a Native American to find his way to where he has come from, the spirit world.

Dead Man tells the story of William Blake and Nobody on their journey to the American west. Accountant William Blake sets out from his hometown Cleveland in order to get a job he has been promised by Dickinson Metalworks in the town of Machine. But when he gets there he learns that his assigned job has already been given to someone else. Discouraged in his first day at the American frontier, he walks into a bar where he buys a whisky with his last money. Outside the bar he meets Thel Russell, a former prostitute, and they together go to Thel's room where they end up in the same bed. Soon they are interrupted by Charlie, Dickinson's son and Thel's boy friend, and William Blake finds himself forced to shoot Charlie who kills Thel and directs his gun at him. However, he cannot escape being shot by

Charlie and runs out of the room to the street and rides away with Charlie's horse.

When Blake wakes up he finds himself with a Native American who is trying to pull the bullet out of his chest with his knife. The Indian who prefers to be called Nobody desperately informs William Blake that "the white man's metal is too deep inside" and announces Blake already dead. As Nobody guides him through the forest in order to help him arrive at the place where Nobody claims his spirit came from the two begin to get to know each other. Believing that Blake is the spirit of the poet William Blake whose poetry he admires, Nobody develops a liking for him and he decides that William Blake should be given a proper ceremony when he dies. Followed by three frontier gunmen hired by Charlie's father Dickinson, the two continue their journey while William Blake compounds on his murders by killing deputies, marshals, and a trader and thus gaining more and more of Nobody's friendship for killing white men.

Blake's record of murders immediately makes his name famous thus turning his image into that of a famous gunman. Cole Wilson, one of the three bounty hunters

Dickinson hires after Blake, even expresses his admiration for him admitting that he has even begun to develop respect for William Blake for killing marshals. In this sense, America, in the 19th century as it is depicted in the film, is seen as a country whose western ideals prove to have vanished long before the great myth of the frontier was created. It becomes a wasteland where a white American listens to stories about America from an Indian and hears the poetry of William Blake from him, a place where cannibalism and theft are attributed to white people. *Dead Man*, at this point, becomes important as a film about 19th century America which challenges the dominant national ideals and beliefs of its time by depicting an unpromising westward journey. The film mixes both the western genre and the road film in order to subvert the themes and motifs of the both genres. *Dead Man* can be interpreted as a road film whose story takes place in the 19th century, the period when the notions and ideas concerning the western myth of America were gradually begining to be established. Yet, with its use of the formal conventions of the western film such as the westward movement, the depiction of the industrialized city, and the representation of the frontier outlaw,

the film questions all the meanings attributed to them in the Western.

Finally Nobody manages to arrange a sea-burial for William Blake on the Pacific Ocean coast. Dressing him in Native American funeral garments and leaving him some tobacco, Nobody sees William Blake off as his canoe sails to take him to “spirit world”. But Cole Wilson, one of the frontier gunmen hired to retrieve Blake, finds Nobody on the shore, and believing that he helped Blake escape directs his gun at him. We see William Blake die as he helplessly watches the two kill each other.

*Dead Man’*s journey pattern, at this point, functions at two levels. There are two road journeys taken by two characters, but at the same time each character experiences his own quest, divided between two cultures on Nobody’s side, and divided between two worlds on Blake’s side. Disappointed by what he finds in America, William Blake cannot go back to Cleveland, he is already supposed to be dead. Thus, his journey does not arrive at a physical place, he is bound for the ‘spirit world’. Bewildered by the hostile and haunting American frontier, he experinces the rest of his journey on

horseback through the forest. Now that he is gradually dying, as Nobody tells him, there is nothing Nobody can offer him but a sea-burial. Throughout their passage in the forest, Nobody tells him native stories and his experiences both with his tribe and the white people he meets. For Nobody, his sea-burial which will guide him to his eternal resting place, is “a passing through the mirror” during which Blake will be cleansing away from his worldy experiences. Thus, his journey advances as he finds himself between white America and native traditions, as well as between living and dying. As this ‘passage through the mirror’ shapes the structure of the film, he becomes more and more identified with Native American traditions and beliefs and dies as an Indian. Yet, Blake’s identification with an American Indian is quite different from the intended feelings of ‘sympathy’ in the revisionist western films. He does not try to imitate Nobody, or he never, as a white man, mourns over his victimization. He is just granted a Native American burial which will take him to a supposedly better place than the American West.

The direction of Nobody’s journey, on the other hand, does not seem to be determined in the beginning. He tries to make his way through the forest and survive.

However, his developing liking for William Blake teaches him that he can like a white man whom he frequently calls as “the stupid white man”. Moreover, being a mixed-blood of two fighting tribes, he is wanted by none of them. Experiencing hostility both among the Indians and in the white world, he is in a sense condemned to “wander between the two worlds” as Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* comments when he sees a dead Indian unburied.

Nobody is of Blood and Blackfeet, two tribes who have been constantly in war with each other. While he is a child he is taken in a cage to Europe by white people to be shown in the entertainments. He tells Blake that all he did in Europe was to imitate white people to make them laugh, and they liked it when he imitated their ways. He is introduced to the poetry of William Blake in a schoold he was educated in Europe where he becomes an admirer of Blake. Nevertheless, he finds a way to return to America, but his relatives and the two tribes he belongs to despise him more because of the stories he tells them about the white man’s life. They name him Xebeche, He-Who-Talks-Loud-Saying-Nothing, so he prefers to be called Nobody. In his interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Jim Jarmusch, while talking about

Nobody's two unreconciled identities, makes a reference to Romeo and Juliet by pointing at the two warring families. He states that Nobody never finds the true sense of belonging in the material world. Therefore, his death at the end of the film can be interpreted as a gift granted to him by the spirit of his ancestors. Although he dies with a "white man's metal" in his body as he himself calls it, he is in a sense permitted to pass through the mirror with Blake. He unconscioulsy prepares himself for "the next level of the world" as he accustoms William Blake for his journey with Indian stories and myths.

The Native American tradition of storytelling works as a narrative device in all of the films discussed in this chapter. Native Americans tell stories to befriend people like Nobody does in *Dead Man,* to remind young Indians of their cultural identity as in *Powwow Highway,* or to keep their faith to the Great Spirit, the nature. The title of the *Dreamkeeper* even suggests that the passage to reidentification goes thorugh stories. Therefore Grandpa nurtures Shane with stories while they are on the road. This is the way he believes his grandson will keep his ties to his past and present, thus will be able to look at the future.

As the narative proceeds, generally in flashbacks especially in *Smoke Signals* and *Dreamkeeper,* the most significant tool of the narrative form appears as the tradition of storytelling, serving both generically and thematically within the general story of the film. Here, Native American oral traditions work as dreamkeepers. Being the unwearying storyteller of *Powwow Highway,* even Philbert needs to listen to stories before he sets out. As soon as he buys his car, he goes to visit the medicine woman on the reservation and asks her: “In the old days how much did it take for a warrior to get a medicine?”

As an enthusiastic traditionalist and storyteller, Thomas does not hesitate to sell his stories. When they are reminded by Thelma and Lucy that they are Cheyennes and they will have to offer, as a custom, in exchange for the drive, Thomas resigns himself to tell a story about Arnold’s saving him from the great fire. For him, the road is already full of stories and you have to borrow some of them in order to create new ones. Thus, oral tradition is kept alive as the generic store of the road film is filled with new stories which will be referred and reworked in other examples. In this way, the tradition of storytelling revives the road genre as

well as it reflourishes the tribal traditions and myths.

American Indians' experience of the road is accompanied by the car, the warrior friend as the Indian road protagonists regard it. The car, in Native American road films, does not simply function as the vehicle to hit the road. Native Americans give an identity to their cars and consider it to have a spirit of its own. For mainstream American society, the car plays a significant role as the bearer of individual freedom, mobility, and economic power while Native Americans appropriate the imagery and function of their cars according to their needs, traditions and beliefs. The significance of the car as the indicator of economic power and racialized discourse is also apparent in these films in the sense that the Indian cars are old and usually second-hand cars left to the reservation yards after being announced useless. However, Indians find ways to adjust them to their needs and identify with them as the Grandpa in *Dreamkeeper* names his old truck "Many-Miles-With-No-Muffler".

In an article entitled *Fine Ponies: Cars in American Indian Film and Literature*, Julie Tharp (2000) comments

that the car as an expression of economic identity, is the primary indicator of Native American poverty and it reflects the problems of cultural adaptation and poverty in Native American film and literature; especially the theme of car accidents affirms the car's function as "a source of danger" and shows a "dissatisfaction with the cahracters' present circumstances". I would agree with Tharp to some extent, but, in my opinion, American Indians see their identification with their cars as a way of reversing this feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration. Instead, in these films, the car is represented as the postmodern horse which is believed to be granted with a spiritual significance and identity to take American Indians to the sacred journey.

In *Powwow Highway,* Philbert, when he goes to the wrecking yard, says to the dealer that he wants "one of his fine ponies". He regards his car as a 'warrior' and alluding to the Legend of the Dun Horse, names it 'Protector'. For Philbert, it is the war pony which will guide him to South Dakota and protect him from the "evil spirits". Although it is quite an old car, Philbert doesn't seem to be interested in the 'economic identity' it reflects; he is content that he has been

able to pay for it. In this car, he visits the Black Hills, arrives in the powwow ceremony in time, and he succeeds in delivering Bonnie form the prison. At the end of the film, having rescued “the captive woman”, he appears as a true warrior who is reborn out of the flaming car. His car is the painted pony Native Americans consider to be sacred.

*Dreamkeeper’*s Grandpa, in order to persuade Shane to drive him to Mexico, promises him that he “will give him his best pony” and leaves Shane the driver’s seat of his 1966 Ford pick-up truck. Yet, Chasing Horse still prefers to have both a car and a horse, and insists that his horse should be taken to the ceremony in back of the truck. When the car breaks down on the road, they continue their journey on horseback. In this sense, Chasing Horse makes a distinction between a metal warrior and a real horse.

Smoke Signals employs the car as a tool to create ethnic humor. The film opens with a long shot of a huge landscape, and a highway extending on it. We hear a DJ’s voice as he speaks from the Krez Radio station. Contending that “it is a good day to be an indigenous” he connects us to the weather report. And we are taken

to the highway again where we see an American Indian observing the clouds on top of a car. Combining the road and the car, this scene parodies the car's celebrated mobility and by leaving it immobile on the highway imposes a very different function on it . Here, instead of becoming a war pony, the vehicle is given a very important job. It does not take warriors to their ritual journeys; it is there to inform the road heroes about the condition of the road and the weather.

The car, in this film, also functions as a vehicle for Victor to attempt to recover the American Indian's image as the drunken driver who usually dies or causes other people's deaths in car accidents. Victor, having gathered his father's ashes in Arizona, takes his father's yellow-pick-up car to drive back to the reservation. On the highway, they have an accident caused by a drunken white man who, later in the hospital, Victor and Thomas were driving in the wrong drection because they were drunk. At the police station, Victor says that he has never been drunk, and that he has never even touched the bottle all his life. Here Victor challenges the stereotypical image of the Indian as the lazy drunk as well as he seperates his fate from his father's. Having forgiven his father, he

learns to recover his embitterment by distancing himself from his father's mistakes in the past, and he tells Thomas that in order to come to terms with the past, sometimes they need accidents and wrecks. At this point, the car gains a significance as a tie between the father and the son, and it functions as to help the recovery of the road character which he experiences after the death of someone important for him and the tribe.

The American Indians learn to deal with the loss of the father during their journey. This loss is usually the physical death of someone from the community as in *Smoke Signals* and *Dreamkeeper,* or a friend, a road companion as it is in *Dead Man.* In contrast to the theme of emotional alienation the mainstream road characters experience with their families, Indian have to overcome the physical death which is supposed to bring a spiritual reborn. Instead of leaving his family to take to the road, the road protagonist is forced to depart with them unwillingly. As we have seen in this chapter, constituting the theme of *Smoke Signals, Dreamkeeper,* and *Dead Man,* the whole story of which turns around the gradual death of William Blake, confrontation with death is regarded as a natural cycle

granting the hero with bliss and spiritual medicine through his rite of passage into the recovery.

6. CONCLUSION

The last chapter of this thesis has examined the ways in which the road movies with Native American protagonists reflect the complex questions of movement and identity on the contemporary American landscape. In this chapter, postmodern experiences of mobility and landscape are explored in depth in order to mirror the nature of the journey the American Indians experience on the road. In this sense, my intention was to study the dynamics of Native American representations within the American road film by close readings of *Powwow Highway*, *Dreamkeeper*, *Smoke Signals*, and *Dead Man* and to comment, through a textual analysis, on the compound ways the American Indian identity have been studied by critics like Jacquelyn Kilpatrick and Angela Aleiss especially after the American Indian Movement. This thesis argues that such criticisms concerning the "accuracy" and "authenticity" of the cinematic representations of native people after the mediatic struggle of the American Indian Movement are problematic and suggests that the road genre can be examined in order to explore the ways the Indian

identity is presented in a contemporary time and setting.

Therefore, the first chapter, in its first section, gives a detailed history of the American Indian Movement by focusing on the historical and cultural reasons leading to the emergence of Indian militancy during the 1960s and 70s. This section, with an emphasis on the deeds of Indian activists during the occupation of Alcatraz Island, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the incident at Wounded Knee, also engages in interpreting the cultural consequences which influenced the relations of Native Americans with the mainstream American public as well as with the reservations and traditionalist people of the Indian tribes. The insistent demand of the American Indian Movement members to regain the tribal lands lost in various treaties with the U.S. government is commented as an important political and cultural tie which keeps the legacy of the American Indian identity dependent on tribal lands. This section concludes that the political struggle of the American Indian Movement gave way, on the part of Native Americans, to a reintroduction to tribal customs and identity while in Hollywood it

encouraged a tendency to present American Indians' historical struggles through revisionist films.

The second section of the same chapter argues against the appreciation the critics Aleiss and Kilpatrick invest on the revisionist films *Soldier Blue, Little Big Man,* and *Billy Jack* for presenting Native Americans in the most "accurate" and "sympathetic" ways. In this sense, the suggestion that the civil rights movements, especially the American Indian Movement and its media involvement, helped chance the celluloid image of the American Indian by replacing the Indian of the Western with the innocent noble savage in the revisionist works of 1970s is criticized. In this section, by referring to the construction of the myth of the American West and its formal and thematic reflections in the western genre, I propose that the Western's dealing with the issues of frontier and movement should be studied in depth in order to investigate the American Indian's experience to the landscape, thus his relation to the American Indian identity and traditions.

The second chapter establishes a relationship between the Western and the road film by examining the generic tendencies and the larger cultural patterns of the two

genres. Begining with the analysis of classic western films such as *The Searchers* and *Shane,* I have interpreted the notions of movement, the frontier, individuality, domesticity, and mobility and suggested that the road picture has dealt with these issues by borrowing from the Western's topoi. This chapter offers detailed analysis of films like *The Grapes of Wrath, Detour, Bonnie and Clyde,* and *Easy Rider* and examines them in relation to the reflection of themes such as the road, highway, home, sexuality, rebellion, and conformity. More specifically, the critical attention paid to the landscape and its presentation in the initial and modern examples of the road genre largely focuses on its modern reflection on the experience of the journey and the highway.

The third chapter has shown us that the issues the road film has continually reexamined - mobility, home, sexuality, geographical borders, and rebellion - have evolved throughout time and that this development is more obvious in the postmodern road films. In this sense, the characterization of the road hero from the counter-culture rebel of the modernist road films to the criminal senseless outlaw in the postmodern movies, the representation of sexual orientation and its social

and political dimensions on the screen, the experience of the journey which becomes mediated and the graphic presentation of crime and murder along with reckless fulfillment of driving have been commented as the postmodern contextual matters in the analysis of films such as *Wild at Heart, Paris, Texas, Thelma and Louise,* and *Natural Born Killers.* It is suggested, in this chapter, that the road picture's use of intertextuality, self-referentiality, generic allusions and its presentation of the image and the spectacle have played a crucial role in its maturing. It is in this way that it becomes possible the road film promises space for Native American protagonists.

As the third chapter has pointed out, the changing generic context of the road film has allowed the genre to provide an arena for the American Indian who, in a sense becoming landscape, entirely disappeared in the Western. Accordingly, the last chapter of this thesis argues that not only the generic characteristics of the road picture but also the Indian characters of the American cinema have evolved throughout time. The close readings of the films *Dead Man, Smoke Signals, Powwow Highway,* and *Dreamkeeper* have shown us the contemporary Indian and his experience when he takes to the road.

This last chapter largely examines the ways in which these films reappropriate the distinctive features of the road genre mainly through a circular narrative structure of the journey and the meanings attached to the landscape. It is reflected in these movies that the Native Americans, following their cultural and religious beliefs about the cycles of the nature, move in circles instead of setting out to arrive at a different place. One of the most suggestive characteristics of the Indian's journey is that the Indian leaves a place only in order to arrive at it again which makes his departure a ritualistic one and holds a promise for rearrival throughout the whole journey. In this sense, it is suggested that, the road hero's individual experience and the story of the journey integrates into the collective archive of traditional Indian myths and stories which befriend the protagonist and guide him on the highway. Thus, the act of storytelling which is an important tradition of American Indian culture is kept alive both through the characterization of a traditionalist storyteller in the films and by the self-referential use of Native American myths and legends as earlier texts.

This thesis has mainly argued that while the four films discussed in the last chapter fit neatly into the mainstream road picture, they, at another level, work as Native American cultural texts presenting American Indians as contemporary people. Therefore, the experience of the journey in these films have been analyzed in relation to the existing issues and problems Native American people are dealing with. The economic and spiritual identity attached to the Indian car, the collective response to the landscape and the highway, confrontation with death, and restoration of the ethnic identity through revival of Indian legends and myths are, in this sense, discussed as generic contexts shaping the structure of the native's journey. However, during this journey which gives a chance to the American Indian to appear on the landscape again, the native protagonist neither attempts to conquer the land nor is he intent on fading into the sunset once he completes his rite of passage. At this point, the road genre's narrative use of detours, accidents, deaths, coincidences, chasing, and murder work in a direction as to reaffirm the Indian's belonging with his tribal identity.

'The Good Red Road' which the Native American protagonists follow in these films proves to be the only liberating direction for the road characters although, as the postmodern generic reproductions of the mainstream American texts, the films also do not completely turn off from them. In fact, we can even suggest that the postmodern Native American road films can be interpreted as crypto-westerns which allow the Indian to occupy the same land where he was supposed to have disappeared and become visible again, this time in a contemporary time and setting. This kind of an interpretation would also enable us to follow the cycles through which Native American identity and culture has been evolving.

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