Tales of the Tribes:

Animation as a Tool for Indigenous Representation

submitted by

Tara Douglas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
Bournemouth University for the degree of Professional Doctorate (ProfD)

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Signature of Author . . . . . .

Tara Douglas

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Tara Douglas

Tales of the Tribes: Animation as a Tool for Indigenous Representation

Abstract

In India animation practice is almost completely dominated by commercial production. Much of this is outsourced to India by foreign companies, but even the animation that is produced for national broadcast shows characteristics of animation design of Western origination with regard to content, presentation and art style. Consequently, modes of commercially driven animation are dictating the expectations of the medium in India, and have become widely regarded as the normative standard.

The forces of global expansion have accelerated the arrival of commercial media entertainment into the various peripheral regions of India. The indigenous communities there have been represented by outsiders since colonial times and have no representation of their own in the medium of animation. As a consequence, young indigenous people are growing up with media entertainment that has no cultural relevance to them. It is challenging their identities and through this process, they are losing touch with their own cultural heritage.

In this research I set out to investigate whether animation is a medium that can be used to retell indigenous folktales and reconnect young indigenous audiences to their traditional narratives. The development and production of a sample collection of short animation films, *Tales of the Tribes* through participatory film-making practice presents case studies of the process of collaborating with indigenous artists and cultural practitioners from selected communities to examine these issues of representation and to investigate how adaptation can be negotiated from oral to audio visual forms of cultural expression.

The contribution to knowledge that has emerged from this research shows how the medium of animation can have a significant role for communication within and between cultures. Young indigenous collaborators are receptive to adapting their traditional narratives to the animation medium and participatory practice based on local content engages their contribution.

The practice has demonstrated that the possibilities for experimentation with local content and art forms can work to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices. In addition, the research shows that young animators in India also appreciate opportunities to experiment with little known Indian content and folk art forms.

My research delivers a practical model for animation practitioners to collaborate ethically with local communities and organisations within the context of media representation. For indigenous artists to work alongside animation practitioners to re-imagine their narratives through animation film-making empowers the voices of indigenous young people in India to tell their own story.

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I thank all the participants from the Animation Workshops in Nagaland, Sikkim, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

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Man Tiger Spirit (2011), the short animated film that is an adaptation of an Angami folktale from Nagaland, in the Tenyidie language of the Angami, with English subtitles;
Duration: 5'.59"
Directed by Tara Douglas
Produced by the Adivasi Arts Trust
Supported by the Government of Nagaland Departments of Planning and Co-ordination and Art and Culture, the North East Zone Culture Centre and Bournemouth University.

Artefact02SikkimFilmLepcha:
Nye Mayel Kyong (Paradise) (2015), the short animated film that is an adaptation of a Lepcha folktale from Sikkim, in the Lepcha language with English subtitles;
Duration: 7'.28"
Directed by Anuj Kumar and Avinash Medhe
Produced by the Adivasi Arts Trust
Supported by the Commonwealth Institute, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), the Nyamgyal Institute of Tibetology, the Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft and the All Roads National Geographic Seed Grant.

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Duration 6'12"
Directed by Tara Douglas
Produced by the Adivasi Arts Trust
Supported by the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Rajiv Gandhi University, the National Institute of Design and Bournemouth University.

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Part One (2014) of a two part documentary about the making of *Abotani*, the short animated adaptation from Arunachal Pradesh;
Duration 15'.55"
Produced by the Adivasi Arts Trust in collaboration with Lalit Kala Akademi

The film is a record of the activities and responses from participants of the pre-production workshop in Naharlagun, Arunachal Pradesh, in 2013.

Appendix07:
Part Two (2014) of a two part documentary about the making of *Abotani*, the short animated adaptation from Arunachal Pradesh;
Duration: 12’.30”
Produced by the Adivasi Arts Trust in collaboration with Lalit Kala Akademi

The film is a record of the activities and responses from participants of the animation production workshop in New Delhi, in 2014.

Appendix08:
Manjoor Jhali (2012) is a short documentary film about the pre-production of the short adaptation of a Pardhan Gond folktale from Madhya Pradesh, made by Post Graduate students of Animation Film Design at the National Institute of Design, Ahmadabad, Gujarat. Duration: 6’43”

The film documents the participants’ activities, responses and issues relating to this project.

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SampleShotsfromTaptafilm:

This folder contains 16 flash files that are sample shots from the short animated film *Tapta*, that is an adaptation of a folktale from Manipur.
Directed and animated by Dr R.K. Joykumar Singh
Supported by the Manipur Film Development Corporation (Imphal).

The clips were produced from 2013-2015.

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The promo that was made by the participants of the Animation Workshop in Manipur in 2012, for the animated film *Tapta*, that is an adaptation of a folktale from Manipur.
Duration: 0.55”.

Tales of the Tribes: Animation as a Tool for Indigenous Representation

The *Tales of the Tribes* consists of a thesis and a selection of animated artefacts and audio-visual documentation. The thesis covers the period of work from 2010 to 2015 and includes research, organising workshops, pre-production, production, post-production and initial screenings of the films that have been completed so far, to different audiences. The three animated artefacts are presented in the local language versions: Angami, Lepcha and Arunachalee Hindi, with English subtitles.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a professional doctoral thesis on the use of animation as a way to sustain and communicate indigenous stories for the future. Animation film-making practice provides the key method for the investigation and the animated artefacts that have been produced are submitted as the key evidence of the research inquiry. This research aims to produce knowledge that has functional use for indigenous artists and those working in the field of cultural curatorship, as well as for media practitioners.

Previous contact with artists from various indigenous communities in India indicated to me how multiple systems of hierarchical domination continue to marginalize their contributions to the larger socio-political setting and to silence their voice in current media. As an animation practitioner, I wanted to create films that help traditional cultures pass their narratives to the next generation in addition to enlightening audiences outside each grouping. My own attraction to working with cultural content reinforced the concern I had about the potential exploitation of indigenous cultural heritage by commercial animation producers in India.

The primary aim of this project has been to develop a method to produce animated films in the postcolonial context that would empower indigenous artists. I also wanted to investigate how I could collaborate ethically with indigenous artists to produce films

based on their cultural content. My position as a practitioner working with indigenous artists made it viable to attempt to co-create a sample collection of animated films in order to investigate the issues of sensitive representation of their cultures, and to study whether such film-making activities would be in the best interests of these groups. I also wanted to develop an ethical model for other independent practitioners to use to engage with cultural content in the future. Therefore theory underpins the practice rather than leading the doctoral process and this differentiates from a traditional research-led PhD. The practice has been a source for learning about ethical issues as well as a way to gain practical skills. This applies to me and to the artistic and technical teams that have participated.

Debates continue about the new knowledge that is generated or interpreted through artistic practice (Rust et al. 2007). Relating to the context of this research, animation production is now a successful industry and animated content is standard entertainment for children worldwide. In this study I examine what implications the absence of representation in animated film content has for young indigenous audiences. Informed by postcolonial theory (Loomba 1998) I suggest that animation as a medium can be appropriated by indigenous young people to strengthen their cultural identities.

I also study the role that storytelling plays in passing on core values and explore how these narratives can be sustained through the medium of animation. I examine the various ways that animation has been used as a medium for artists, to find methods of best practice for communicating indigenous identities. During this practice phase I have realised how ethical considerations should be at the forefront of any work that engages with cultural content. All too often, the engagement of media professionals with indigenous artwork has brought negligible benefits to the communities themselves and promoted a simplified or distorted view of indigenous cultures (Media Smarts nd). Therefore, particularly with respect to future animation film production based on indigenous content, it is essential that there is a collaborative relationship with local artists and communities even though this will, in all likelihood, be incompatible with commercial aims. However, it is worth considering two further points - that collaboration with indigenous artists does not guarantee authentic content, nor does non-commerciality guarantee ethicality. The success of the films can be evaluated according to the intention for the films to represent the original intended meanings of

the stories. In essence the participation by the community, the engagement of technical expertise and the skill of the film-maker accounts for the ethicality of the output of films.

Participatory film-making has been the method for creating these films. Local participation has mainly taken place at the research and pre-production phase of the film-making, and the primary contribution from community members has been in the story generating process. The dialogue on film-making that has taken place in the workshops is detailed in this thesis; elders from the communities have had advisory roles and the younger participants have taken part in the film-making process. I acknowledge my leading role, and that of the resource teams, in the production and direction of the film-making. On this subject, Witteveen (2009) discusses how mediated participation places the responsibility upon the film-maker in the creation of filmed narratives. In producing this sample collection of animated films, the premise that animation is a highly specialized technical process that was being introduced for the first time to participants who had ambitions to see technically proficient films, implied that although the workshops offered a safe space for experimenting and learning, the participants did not expect their animation to appear in the final film.

My input has been guided by the need to deal ethically with participants. As the aim was to create films of technical merit as well as content value, the practice has incorporated professionally embedded film-making to achieve this. This raises questions about authorship, and specifically about whose vision has come across. I maintain that the series of films deliver a combined vision, demonstrated by the deconstruction of how inputs were incorporated into the films discussed in the Findings chapter. As the local communities are projected as the primary audiences for the films, audience engagement, participation and reception is key to the success of the films. However, as the series is in production, the responses are yet to be systematically recorded and evaluated.

The aim of this particular film-making practice is to preserve the stories of given indigenous groups and to extend their oral tradition of storytelling into the medium of animation film. Frayling's (1993) analysis of research that takes place through practice to enhance the effectiveness of the medium directs the aim of this doctoral research

towards demonstrating how co-creation with indigenous artists broadens the outlook of the animator, and that developing characters and incidents that reflect the sensibilities of the group helps build the local audience appeal. This is necessary for the positive outcome of a finished product that will encourage further use of the medium in this way, and to potentially provide tangible benefits for the animation industry as a whole in the form of a new mode of film-making suitable for specific local audiences. In such research, the emphasis is both on the creative process and the end product – in this case, the five short animated films from the *Tales of the Tribes* series. Therefore, these have a central role in that research. The thesis is provided as a criticism based support of this position and an evaluation of how the doctoral research may impact upon the indigenous communities.

In essence, the research position is that indigenous cultures have value and that members of each culture have an unalienable right to influence how their stories and art forms are translated into any new media including animation.

1.1 Background to the Study

I was introduced to indigenous visual arts and storytelling with *The Tallest Story Competition* (2006), a series of five short animated films inspired by narratives and art styles from Central India and produced by West Highland Animation. The series consisted of stories that were chosen from communities with distinctive art styles that could be adapted to the animation medium. The criteria for the selection of the five artistic styles were based on their originality, their distinctiveness and their inherent simplicity which would enable reproduction in large quantities required by animation processes. West Highland Animation offered me the opportunity of work experience as an animator for this project, and I achieved the credit as the director of one of the short films of the Series, *How the Elephant Lost His Wings* (2006).

Over a period of twenty-five years from 1983 to 2008, West Highland Animation experimented with translating the Scots Gaelic oral tradition *(am beul aithris)* into short animated films. The films were made in a variety of ways, either by children, community groups and participating artists in each part of the Highlands and Islands or by professional animators at the West Highland Animation studio in the

Scottish Highlands. The primary aim of the company was to bring the Highland oral tradition to life for children through the contemporary and popular medium of animation. It was found that the workshop was a productive way to work in a community and bring together cultural interpreters, Highland artists and young animators, some of whom had a Highland background, from the new Scottish animation courses. The films were also part of Scotland's ongoing Gaelic language revitalization programme.

During this period the Director of West Highland Animation, Leslie MacKenzie, became aware that the problems faced by Scotland's Gaelic speaking minority in trying to revive their language and culture were shared by indigenous minorities worldwide. Gaelic and Scottish funders supported this interest and funded *The Tallest Story Competition* where some of the methods which had been developed in Scotland were tried out in tribal India.

However, a parallel development at this time was the expansion of the commercial animation industry, which, spurred by the large sums of money to be made, developed huge series (26 X 26 minutes became the standard). New standard practices were developed including outsourcing, with most of the production taking place in countries where this was cheaper; dubbing into multiple languages – English in particular; standardization of TV guidelines in ways incompatible with traditional story telling methods and content; a 90% targeting of the children's market and finally, universalized broadcast demand for 'globalized' content with appeal to the lowest common denominators of all cultures, as opposed to specific national or indigenous content. In the Contextual Review I discuss the challenges these changes have meant for indigenous animation film production.

The completion of the *Tallest Story Competition* led to the setting up of the Adivasi Arts Trust in 2007. This was to maximize the reach of the series by dubbing the films into vernacular languages and screening the programme to the communities from where the stories originated. In addition to Gaelic support for a screening and exhibition tour of the Scottish Highlands, a grant was provided by the Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust for multiple film screening events for 10,000 school children and village communities in Central India. This was followed by British Government support

through an ‘Awards for All’ grant for screenings for a wide variety of inner city schools and cultural centres in the United Kingdom.

The format of the series required all audiences to vote for their favourite story and provided indications of what makes an animated film successful. The Gond story, *Best of the Best* (2006) was the most popular of the collection of five, with well defined characters and narrative. This suggested that a clear, concise moral outcome, that of getting what one deserves, is popular and results in recognisable audience satisfaction when they “get” the message. The responses recorded at the screening events in India showed that indigenous audiences enjoy watching culturally relevant animation.

However, responses from the academic community following screening events in India at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the UK, raised questions regarding what was seen by some as the minimal extent of indigenous involvement in the project, as well as issues of cultural ownership.

These issues have been dealt with in the USA, Canada and Australia and some parts of Europe where protocols for working with indigenous content have been developed that include the stipulation for empowerment with roles for local people in the decision making process. But they have not yet come to the forefront for other countries including India. I felt it necessary to address these issues in the present project and, consequently, one purpose of this research practice has been to develop and produce a sample collection of animated films in India with greater community involvement. At the start of the research project, five pragmatic objectives were outlined in dialogue with Leslie Mackenzie from West Highland Animation:

1. To represent culture with authenticity.
2. To create a model of how to develop and produce cultural animation films in India.
3. To provide an introduction to digital media for tribal artists.
4. To create professional standard films.

5. To advance the aims of the Adivasi Arts Trust to engage indigenous artists in digital media and broaden the awareness of indigenous art and culture.

For the indigenous communities in India, the oral tradition of storytelling had multiple significant functions since it was an important way of imparting traditional knowledge before the introduction of formal education; the stories were cautionary and yet they were entertaining (Scroggie 2009) and they connected the people to a shared ancestry, history and geography. Along with other traditional artistic practices that included painting, sculpture, weaving, pottery, basketry, music, dance and song, perhaps the most vital aspect of storytelling was that it instilled a sense of identity and belonging that intensified group consciousness and cohesion (Sampson 1964).

Malinowski's (1948) leading studies in traditional societies in the Pacific region confirms how cultures are maintained through strict adhesion to the lore and knowledge received from previous generations: therefore the consequence of neglect can threaten the existence of local cultures. Indigenous communities in India that once lived in relative seclusion and self-sufficiency are now experiencing the accelerated exposure to consumer products and mass media entertainment through the expansion of electronic media that has been part of capitalist globalization (Appadurai 1997; Movius 2010). Alia (2010) discusses how indigenous communities worldwide have regarded television as detrimental to local cultures. In many places traditional storytelling practices now compete with popular television entertainment worldwide (Lieberman 2008; Callus 2012). Intimations about the ubiquity of animation at the margins of India has motivated my interest as an animation practitioner to investigate whether indigenous oral and visual traditions could be adapted to the medium of animation as a way to communicate these narratives for future generations. It occurred to me that for such an adaptation, the involvement of those who have insights into such traditions—elders and other members of the indigenous communities concerned—would be crucial. But would they be willing to participate? Would they consider animation as an acceptable means of telling their stories? From my practitioner's perspective, and the initial survey of literature I had undertaken at that point, I could see the value of a storytelling process in consultation with those whose stories I was planning to tell. With this emphasis on participatory practices in mind, the focus of this research was framed in the form of the broad research questions:

Can participatory practices be used to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices? If so, how?

1.2 The Indigenous Groups of this Study

The indigenous label is usually applied to the original populations that resided in often isolated geographical regions prior to colonization brought about by the influx of new dominant social groups (Ashcroft et al. 2007). In India, Scheduled Tribes are recognised by the Constitution, Article 342 (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2012) and according to the 2011 census (Ministry of Home Affairs 2011), the tribal population is just over 84 million or 8.2% of the total population. In the central belt, these people are collectively referred to as *Adivāsi* which literally translates as “original inhabitants”, a word with Sanskrit origins that was first used in the 1930s to refer to the heterogeneous aboriginal population of India (Minority Rights Group International 2008). However, the term is not universally accepted by all indigenous people in India. For instance, in the North East region, *Adivāsi* only applies to the ‘Tea-tribes’ that were brought from Central India to work on the tea plantations in Assam during the colonial era. At the same time, the indigenous groups of the North East frequently refer collectively to themselves with the English word "tribes", a term that is contested by scholars due to its roots in colonial anthropology (Atal 2009).

The term ‘indigenous people’ that appeared with the establishment of the United Nations after the Second World War (Dean and Levy 2003) is used to include all the aboriginal populations of this study, those from Central as well as from North East India. The Meitei community also represented in this research is described as an indigenous ethnic community of Manipur; however, through their conversion to Hinduism, they are not recognised as a Scheduled Tribe, and the political division in Manipur between tribal and non-tribal people is presented as a reason behind the ethnic conflict in the state (Singh 2014).

The decision of which communities to work with was determined by access to local collaborators. The previous animation project, *The Tallest Story Competition* had brought me into contact with a group of Pardhan Gond artists from Madhya Pradesh. They had created artwork for one of the short films, and expressed enthusiasm for

further experimentation with the medium of animation. Personal contacts within the fields of art and culture in Nagaland, Sikkim, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh resulted in local collaborations with these states in this project, leading to adaptations of stories from the Angami, Lepcha, Meitei and Tani traditions. What makes the North East region an interesting area for research is that it shares international borders with Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and has ethnically diverse populations and complex experiences of colonial history. These have generally resulted in notions of separateness from the rest of 'mainland' India and feelings of alienation and neglect (Chaise 1999). This led me to consider the potential contribution of cultural representation, through the medium of animation, to re-address this experience.

Collaboration with government organisations for this research was offered in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. In Sikkim, a local partner organisation was identified. That specific chapter of the project received support from the Commonwealth Foundation in the United Kingdom and from a National Geographic All Roads seed grant (see appendix 1). The National Institute of Design (India) supported the pre-production of the Gond chapter hosting an experimental workshop for post graduate students of Animation Film Design: this indicated a real interest both from the Institute and the students themselves in engaging with research on indigenous Indian art and stories for animation.

The specific groups that participated in this study exemplify a diversity of cultures, ethnic and economic backgrounds from multiple geographical locations. In most instances, the participants of the workshops were urban based young people, frequently with credentials of relative affluence that gave them access to the institutions of education and hence to the privilege of envisaging animation as an option.

1.3 The Indigenous Voice

A study of postcolonial discourse shows the advantage of self-representation for indigenous peoples. Appropriating their voice to speak for the subaltern - a term used to refer to those located at the margins with no access to the cultural imperialism (Spivak 1988), is intrinsic to the disempowerment of these postcolonial groups. Established postcolonial theoretical frameworks (discussed in the Contextual Review) also highlight

the hazards of universalizing the multiple experiences of indigenous peoples, and on this basis it has been crucial to recognise the heterogeneity of the indigenous peoples and the multiplicity of their voices. The participation and contributions by others in the participatory film-making practice is discussed in the chapter on the Findings and Discussion.

The important role of folktales in traditional cultures and the link between folktales as content for animation establishes the genre as an appropriate medium. The interpretation of this sample collection of stories has taken the inputs from members of the communities into account to demonstrate the articulation of their voices in the adaptation of the films.

Evidence recorded in the workshops during this research shows that young audiences in India are already used to watching both Indian and international animation productions. The pragmatic aim of producing a sample collection of films based on indigenous stories is to investigate whether they translate well into the medium of animation and communicate visual and story elements from the local traditions to young audiences.

1.4 The Place of Indigenous Animation in the Animation Industry

The term 'animation industry' that has become widespread in recent years usually refers to commercial animation. However, I argue that it should be used more widely to include all aspects of the animation continuum – from the artistic, through the educational to the commercial sector. In this section I explore where 'indigenous animation' fits into the animation spectrum.

The term 'animation', derives from the Latin verb 'animare': 'to give life to' (Wells 1998, p. 10) and so resonates with the intention of giving a veritable new life to folklore. Traditionally, handmade animation was created by recording sequences of single images, frame by frame. This typically involved planning and creating a series of drawings or photographing articulated models and moving the puppets by increments between each shot. When played back at the rate of 24 frames per second, the resulting

illusion of movement was a process that led film-maker Norman McLaren, to describe what happens between each frame as more important than what happens on each frame (Solomon 1987). This particular description of animation practice, discussed at greater depth in the Contextual Review, demonstrates compatibility with indigenous traditions of handmade artwork and practices that also placed the emphasis on the process. However, developments in computer-generated animation from the 1990s have challenged the direct, tactile approach of traditional handmade animation. Computer generated animation that uses virtual puppets can be seen on the screen without any pre-existing object or pro-filmic event (Surman 2003), and it now supersedes handmade animation.

The growth of the animation outsourcing industry shows how animation is dominated by companies operating globally. To date there has been no sign of provision for indigenous representation through animation in India, though there have been initiatives elsewhere, examples being *Dreaming* (1995), *Dust Echoes* (2007), *Country Lines* (2011) and the animation films made by Pintubi Anmatjare Walpiri (PAW) in Australia, *Raven Tales* and several short films produced by the National Film Board in Canada. In Hungary Ferenc Mikulás has produced a whole series of animated Hungarian folk tales, while in Scotland West Highland Animation and others produced Gaelic traditional stories and other original animations.

Raheja (2011, xii) has argued that the 'violence of invisibility' conveys a message of insignificance in the imagination of the Indian nation. In addition, the subsequent marginalization of vernacular languages and local cultures frequently leads indigenous young people to the idea that their own traditions are outdated. The young urban-based participants of this research have communicated their widespread enthusiasm for animation, citing particular Hollywood blockbusters as popular favourites (Oder, focus group 1, p.4, 36-37). However, these young people have also expressed regret at not being able to see their own cultural identities portrayed (Kayon, focus group 1, p.3, 26-27). The power of the media for normalizing ideas and emotions and mobilizing action discussed by Spencer (2006) shows how the absence of indigenous representation in India is problematic: the expanding viewing of animation by indigenous children arguably reinforces the assimilation of non-indigenous values that are at odds with their cultural paradigms and increases alienation from their own community heritage. The impact of new influences is visible in the fragmentation of

previously firm identities and in the undeniable local enthusiasm for imported animation. This research therefore accepts as a premise the need to re-imagine indigenous narratives for the younger generations.

Parallels can be seen between the marginalization of the indigenous voice from mainstream media, due to the lack of technical infrastructure, and the marginalization of animation as a medium of independent artistic expression, due to the rise of computer and commercial animation (Wells and Hardstaff 2008). In both cases, the situation has emerged from animation's commercial success, where success is defined in relation to the size of the audience and the money generated (Mackenzie, personal communication 2015). The implications of this are:

- That animation production in India excludes localized practice.
- That the form and content of animation produced lacks relevance to diverse local communities.
- That animation practitioners in India have few options for experimentation.
- That this process has a negative impact on the younger generations.

The underlying objective of this enquiry is to help resolve the absence of indigenous representation in animation by demonstrating how localized animation that is artistic, innovative and socially aware can be produced. Indigenous viewpoints are recognised from a reference point that contrasts with dominant Western attitudes. Throughout, I attempt to establish a foundation for the work that reflects indigenous paradigms and the commitment to a critical self-reflective approach to reduce the persisting colonial influence on representation. The examination of methodologies is presented in the chapter on Research and Practice Methods.

In the Contextual Review I investigate how animation has been used by other cultures, for example in East European traditions, to critique dominant political systems; how Western artists have used experimental animation techniques to expand viewers' conceptual horizons; and I draw on adaptation theory to examine how narrative film language supports the translation of stories across cultures and media platforms.

1.5 The Practice

From my position as animation practitioner, I used the workshop environment for collaboration with indigenous artists, musicians and storytellers as the best way to identify the nuances of the oral narratives and achieve sensitive representation in animation. In the workshop environment, I explored the process of working with groups adapting five local stories for the short animation film series *Tales of the Tribes*. Five regional Animation Workshops were organised for this research to achieve the objectives set out in Section 1.1. In the pre-production phase of the animation film-making process were:

- The selection of the stories.
- Their adaptation for scripts and storyboards.
- The production of character designs.
- Audio recordings.
- Animation test sequences.
- The animatic, which provided the blueprint for the making of the film.

Qualitative methods were used in the workshops to collect data relating to the research questions. Participants' engagement and feedback was captured using the method of participant observation through focus group discussions and interviews. The series of workshops for this project has evolved through a process of trial, examination and refinement and the methods of working are discussed in more detail in the chapter on Research and Practice Methods.

The pivotal aims of this project are founded on approaches that are compatible with indigenous research:

- A focus on the process over the outcome.
- The empowerment of local communities by encouraging self-representation by indigenous young people.

- A commitment to reciprocity that meant dubbing the films into local languages and screening them to the communities.
- Respecting local protocols and keeping in contact with the participating artists by informing them about the progress of the project and engaging their involvement wherever possible.

The participatory practices that are explored address the ethical and copyright issues of working with indigenous people to avoid appropriating and exploiting their voice, sound, imagery, and stories (Fung 1993). Within the context of the animation industry in India, economic rationalism and the marketing of indigenous animation present dilemmas. The perception of income generation as the benchmark of a film's success has surfaced repeatedly from all sectors of the population in India with regard to the development of indigenous audio-visual content, and questions arise as to what extent the author should use the dominant conventions of animated narrative to reach a broader audience. In contrast, the alignment of indigenous animation practice within the field of education is compatible with methodologies that affirm indigenous knowledge, are culturally and contextually situated, and encourage transformative connections between research, policy and practice (Kovach 2010).

The sophistication of contemporary animation film production indicated the need for the *Tales of the Tribes* films to achieve a professional standard of production if they are to find appeal with audiences beyond the local communities and this established the production of professional looking films as a goal. To accomplish this with minimal expense, as the project manager I invited participation from young animation professionals and semi professionals at the start of their animation careers, so that they could use opportunities to collaborate with those who had international professional experience. An informal association with the National Institute of Design in Gujarat provided young Indian animation students and recent graduates as a resource for the regional workshops and during the production of the films. The implications of this involvement are discussed in the Findings.

This research is mainly focused on the pre-production phase of the animation film-making activity. However, the films also needed to be completed and screened to assess the responses to the work. In the context of the commercial global animation industry it is almost a pre-requisite for indigenous animation to have a source of

financial support from the government. This has been provided for media organisations in Australia (the Aboriginal People's Television Network), Canada (The National Film Board) and The United States (Native American Broadcasting Corporation) (Hearne 2012) and in Scotland (Comataidh Craolaidh Gaidhlig) (Mackenzie, personal communication 2015). Therefore, Government funding in India was the most rational option for the *Tales of the Tribes* film production. However, the procedure for applying, processing and receiving Indian Government funding has provided numerous challenges.

Practice-led research requires the capacity to devise, design, fund and manage a research project. In this case, the Adivasi Arts Trust provided the foundation for raising funds and producing the films. The charitable status of the Trust in the UK has opened doors to applications for grants for eligible organisations such as the Trust in this project. However, funding is competitive. Several successful small grants have enabled the films under study to reach this point. The Trust has an instrumental role for distributing the films through its associations with other organisations in India and in the UK.

In this introduction I have outlined some of the key concepts used in this research. The context of and the important issues in the research is explored at more depth in the Contextual Review that follows. The methodological tradition is expanded in the chapter on Research and Practice Methods.

Chapter 2

The Contextual Review

The Contextual Review establishes the background to support a contemporary practice to adapt and reinterpret indigenous storytelling for the medium of animation. This chapter introduces the theoretical approaches that provide the reference point for my practice, and it is divided into two main sections, the review of literature and the review of practice. The first section begins by identifying some of the current issues that are faced by the communities of this study in order to recognise the significance of sustaining storytelling for the future generations. The review examines how indigenous peoples were represented under British colonial rulers and it looks at the interests that these representations served. The critique also shows how the historical representations that were produced continue to influence the way that these cultures are viewed today.

The study then reviews how expanding global influence has created unprecedented exposure to mass media entertainment in India, and how this globalization of the media targets mass audiences through homogenized simulations that accentuate the marginalization of local identities. In response to the current position of marginalized indigenous identification, postcolonial theory provides a conceptual framework for exploring the possibility of empowerment through self-representation.

The second section of this chapter is a review of practice that focuses on how various forms of experimental animation have been used by artists to challenge the dominant representations of the animation medium, and is suggestive of a direction for developing animation as a tool for indigenous artists in India to communicate their own narratives. The review also outlines the ethical considerations of collaboration and of cultural ownership, to present an approach for emerging animators to produce and share their own materials.

2.1. The Literature Review

2.1.1 The People of the Study

This research engages with the representation and re-interpretation of the oral traditions of specific indigenous groups in North East and Central India. A brief outline of the geopolitical landscape of the North East region conveys a picture of the challenges of entering into collaborative relationships with local communities to represent ethnic identities in this project.

It is first necessary to establish that the hybrid cultures of the North East region of India are modern, complex constructs that contrast with the essentialized, ossified images of indigenous identification perpetuated in popular print and television media. My research draws on Ribiero's (2011) analysis of how postcolonial situations contain multiple scenarios to show the hazards involved in universalizing the experiences of indigenous peoples in India. The eight states that comprise the North East are collectively populated by over 45 million inhabitants (MHA 2011) with variety of languages, ethnic origins and religions. The absence of any social homogeneity means that the various ethnic groups maintain their respective distinct identities and clubbing these states under the tag of "North East' gives rise to local aversion to such a construct.

The heterogeneous population is characterized by the same lack of cohesion that Gramsci (cited by Morton 2003) extrapolated as the reason behind disempowerment. The region accommodates over 166 separate tribes that speak a wide range of languages (IGNCA 1999), and this largely accounts for the unsurprising lack of cohesion. On the other hand, ethnic and cultural specificities were ignored during the process of delineation of national and state boundaries. From the colonial and post-colonial periods the societal boundaries became consolidated as ethno-political blocks, and the assertion of ethnic self-consciousness has become increasingly manifest in the recent years.

The mountainous terrain hampered the construction of road and railway connections in the region and the fact that the region is landlocked still contributes to isolation. However in the last 20 years, communities that once lived in relative isolation

and self-sufficiency have been challenged by the sudden impact of global integration into the modern world.

The impact of the increased introduction of market imperatives in the traditional societies and the migration and settlement of mainland people to the North East has heightened the struggles for resources and the competition for the limited number of jobs and other assets. In addition, the North East region has been characterized by poor governance, underdevelopment and lack of accountability of the funds provided by the Indian Central Government (Gill 2010).

Currently, most of the states in the region are affected by some form of conflict and the reasons for this range from separatist movements, to communal and inter-ethnic conflicts. For instance, the designation of Scheduled Tribes has meant that groups that fall into this category have access to exclusive rights and privileges, and this has led to the resentment that is experienced by the Meitei in Manipur who are not permitted to settle in the hill districts under the state Land Reform Act (Ngaihte 2015). To date, the reality that Manipur has the most insurgency groups in the region, with at least 12 that are active (CDPS 2011), has been attributed to the growing consciousness of the provincial association of distinct ethnic identity with the exercise of political power (Jusho 2004). The situation presents an urgent requirement for initiatives that promote cooperation, collaboration and the creation of spaces which allow people to express themselves in ways that reduce conflict. However, there is a risk of overlooking crucial social differences between particular ethnic groups in academic, metropolitan-based research (Morton, 2003). This affirms the imperative for extensive field research and local collaboration. This research was designed to identify regionally based organisations that could provide introductions to local artists and the expertise to verify the appropriate representation of culturally specific details in the films. As a result, the participants of the workshops that were organised for this project represented some of the dominant tribal groups in each state, with the exception of Manipur where no tribal participants were invited by local collaborators, illustrating the wide socio-cultural gaps between the Hindu Meitei of Imphal valley and the Christian tribes that has become a permanent source of socio-political rivalry.

Verghese (1997), Chaisie (1999) and Hussain (nd) explained that much of the population of the North East region is, by contemporary standards, uneducated and unemployable, and is typically faced with psychological and identity crises, emotional stress and tendencies towards religious fundamentalism. More recently, Konwar and Chakraborty (2013) have confirmed that there are still fewer quality institutions of higher education in the North East than in other regions of India. The lack of opportunity for young people in the regions of this study leads them from the rural areas to the urban centres for education and employment. In this environment their cultures are widely unrecognized, they are required to speak the dominant language and their inadequate qualifications lead to a precarious entry into the job market.

Political issues are paramount in the North East region today. On the one hand is evidence of political drives from local groups towards establishing common identity through an ongoing process of ethnogenesis, by which different groups identify common elements which are foundational in their reconstitution as a single grouping with a common history, an example being the pan Naga identity. On the other hand deep-rooted attitudes of tribalism that manifest in the allocation of benefits on communal grounds account for counteractive forces to assert separate tribal identities based on connections to geographical areas: an example is the demand by particular groups from eastern Nagaland for their own state. Both sides of this argument emerged in the discussions to develop the films: in Arunachal Pradesh the young participants wanted to be inclusive of all the Tani groups in the representation; relating to the adaptation from Nagaland, our more senior cultural guide cautioned against combining cultural elements from the different tribes in a single film.

Furthermore, in the modern Christian state of Nagaland, the rebuilding of cultural identity is visible in recent revivalist trends that draw the various social groups to their primordial cultural assets to define and consolidate their boundaries (Eastern Mirror Nagaland 2015). This newfound interest for preserving Naga culture, customs and heritage beyond the museum environment (Shikhu 2007; Joshi 2012) that brings the issues of storytelling and representation to the forefront has arguably led to the support offered by the Government of Nagaland for the production of the animated story from this state. However, the political interest for promoting one's own culture also manifests a perceptible lack of support for the cultural representations of rival groups.

2.1.2 Indigenous Cultural and Artistic Practices

An outline of the significance that storytelling and artistic practice has had for the communities of this study is vital for recognising the importance of sustaining traditions for future generations. Scroggie's (2009) study of traditional societies worldwide shows that what we now call 'folklore' was the medium through which people learnt their history, settled arguments, and made sense of the world. As representations of collective memory, folktales contain the essence of a culture. With specific reference to the North East region of India, Sentinaro and Chandra (2010) have shown that the storytelling tradition of the Ao Naga formed the basis of customs, religion and history. Identities traditionally founded in mother tongue languages, were recollected and reinforced through stories of origination that even detailed specific geographical locations. The example of the origin story of the Ao clans claims that they emerged from the rocks at Lungterok, illustrating how Naga folktales confirmed connections to the land (Mar 2011). However, a point to note is how the genuine long-term relationship that indigenous people have with the earth is distinct from particular notions of Western romanticism (Leuthold 1994) that are discussed in the review of colonial representations.

Storytelling was also a community activity: the stories that were passed down from generation to generation through oral retellings fulfilled an interactive function between the teller and the listener, and in this way they constituted a co-creative project. The role of storytelling for maintaining group solidarity and identity is significant in light of the revelations from the participants of this research about declining traditional narrative practice and the evidence of the parallel destabilization of communal identities (Verghese 1997).

The role of storytelling for social cohesion is comparable with the social function of traditional visual art practices that address aspects of collective life. Accordingly, the drive to adapt indigenous cultural content to the animation medium relates to the ambition to reconnect animation as an artistic medium of expression that links the viewer to the artist and fulfills the social function of art (Coote and Shelton

1992). The theory of adaptation underpinning the translation of oral narratives and traditional art forms to the new medium of animation is discussed in the Review of Practice.

2.1.3 The Impact of Representation through the Colonial Lens

An overview of how indigenous identities in India were portrayed during the colonial period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrates how representation by others has influenced the perception of indigenous people by audiences up until the present day.

Much of the ownership of the 'Third World' (Sauvy 1952) was divided between a few European empires until after the Second World War. Colonialism created the economic and commercial power of the West and it was justified at the time by notions of reform and progress (Stocking 1991). Under the British colonial system in India, anthropological and ethnographic studies were needed to present detailed knowledge about the local populations to facilitate British administration (Stocking 1991). They tended to produce a popular representation of the native as the idealized noble savage that can be traced back to Dryden's work: *The Conquest of Granada* (1672). The portrait of mankind from a Golden Age existing in a natural state uncorrupted by civilization echoed the Biblical image of Eden and it was related to the notion of Primitivism (Bell 1972) that celebrated the superiority of a simple way of life. The outstanding contributions to the documentation of societies of the North East region made during the colonial period include the work by Hutton (1921, 1926), Mills (1922, 1937) and von Fürer-Haimendorf (1939) that provide a unique archival record to this specific era of transistion.

Colonial attitudes towards that part of mankind untouched by civilization led to two contrasting approaches towards the indigenous populations of India. On the one hand, tribal isolation was reinforced by entry restrictions that were imposed on outsiders to particular tribal areas, for example in North East India (Kumara 2007; MDONER nd). These, to some extent, remain in place today. This policy of segregation has restricted the scope for new research.

The alternative approach was the liberal commitment to reform and civilize the 'other' (Metha 1999). By this model, assimilation was actively sought by missionary activities and the conversion of tribal peoples in India from their indigenous faiths to the majority religions (Zacharius 2010) in the nineteenth century: for example, Christian conversion in Nagaland brought education and now contributes a cohesive identity to the diverse Naga tribes (Verghese 1997). However, it also curtailed most cultural practices particularly those associated with traditional belief systems (Mar 2011), examples are the feasts of merit and the bachelor's dormitory that served as a forum for educating young warriors (Datta 2006). Those practices that were allowed to continue were largely removed from their underlying meaning and context (Barpujari 1998; Singh 2008).

The representations that were produced during the colonial period contributed to an ideology based on the purity of indigenous culture suspended in time (Smith and Ward 2000). The romanticized images that continue to influence perceptions about the people in the regions of this study are present in the marketing of tribal tourism (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997; Mohanty 2007; Barman et al. 2010) and in the images contributed by National Geographic photography and cinematic representations, of which two pronounced examples that perpetuate stereotyped depictions from Africa and Brazil are the feature films *The Gods must be Crazy* (1980) and *Emerald Forest* (1985). In India, such imagery has dubious contemporary validity in relation to the changes that these communities have experienced, and this presents the case for updated contemporary images.

2.1.4 Self-representation for the Postcolonial Context

Postcolonial theory provides a framework to read, interpret and critique the legacy of colonialism to illustrate how the hegemony of Western culture is carried forward by neo-colonial practice. In essence, the theories concerning the politics of representation that stress the need for self-representation present a strong case for self-representation by indigenous people as form of resistance to unequal systems (Loomba 1998; Smith 1999).

The Orientalist approach of cultural depiction put forward by particular artists and writers from the West that also reinforced the constructed identity of Western culture by establishing an 'Other' for comparison shows the implications of speaking for another culture: specifically, how the definition of the subject is dependent on the perceiver. Säid's (1978) critique of Orientalism has shown that these representations from Western sources served the specific purpose of justifying and perpetuating domination and exploitation. It is therefore vital to review the history of the relationship between representation and power to recognise the value of self-representation by indigenous artists. Postcolonial theory challenges the position of the expert (Spivak 1993) and the postcolonial strategy for re-interpretation to confront and reject the Eurocentric master narratives as a move towards empowering the marginalized is the primary reason for the centrality of postcolonial theory to the approach of this work.

The lasting impact of colonialism is evidenced by the continued interpretation of indigenous cultures and identities in India using Western conceptual models. Bhabha (1995) discussed how colonialisation extended beyond geographical space to ideological and cultural imperialism that viewed the world as composed of unequal cultures. In this way, the dominant Western paradigm that originates from countries with majority European populations is presented as objective knowledge (Säid 1978; Hammersmith 2007).

The subsequent destruction of non-Western ways of perceiving the world is described as 'epistemic violence' by Spivak (1988 p. 76) resulting in the inferiority complex of the colonized people (Fanon 1952; Deva 1993). That indigenous populations worldwide and in India continue to endure the psychological impact of colonialism (Fanon 1963; Bhabha 1994; De Oliveira 2009) is evidenced by their disconnection from aspects of education (Battiste 2004; Cultural Survival 2010) and their abiding representation as 'backward' people (Dean and Levi 2003; Veerbhadranaika et al. 2012). This illustrates the importance of indigenous young people reappraising their cultural heritage.

Dirlik (1994) has critiqued the prominent role of intellectuals writing in English - interestingly, many of them from India - in the formation and dissemination of the postcolonial discourse. The argument that the appropriation of the language of the colonizer gives respectability, and Bhabha's (1985) identification of ambivalence in the

compulsion by the colonized to mimic the colonizer suggest that the most marginalized, those that are referred to as the subaltern by Spivak (1988), can subvert the politics of language to represent themselves.

With reference to Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, Azu (2014) and Lalsangpuii (2015) identify low standards of English education in the North East region. This suggests that widely held expectations in India for scholarly articulation in English (Syam 2012) potentially excludes many young indigenous people located at the margins. Although some of the same issues of appropriating the dominant language apply to the visual arts and media, I propose that animation can provide an accessible medium of expression for young people to challenge and subvert the dominance of mass media.

Bhabha's (1995) theory of hybridity in the postcolonial context examines the interdependence of colonizer and the colonized to show how previously held notions of cultural purity are challenged by elaborate patterns of identification. The postcolonial situation of cultural hybridity that makes 'tradition' and 'modern' complementary rather than contradictory (Longkumer 2014) also suggests that modern indigenous young artists can explore and communicate the complexities of indigenous identity and representation using contemporary forms of mixed media and animation.

2.1.4 The Influence of Colonial Attitudes on Indigenous Art

The perception of tribal art as an archaic medium and a remnant of the past that required preservation in museums (Coote and Shelton 1992; Lenz et al. 2003) accounts for the appeal of tribal art to Euro-American audiences (Markusen et al. 2008). The influence of colonial attitudes is continued in particularly repressive Eurocentric definitions of indigenous cultural and artistic authenticity as rooted in the handmade and the rural (Errington 1998). Notions of authenticity created the demand for primitive art that spoke of pre-colonial themes, and a few art galleries in the either USA or Australia collected or displayed contemporary Native art until the 1970s (Berlo and Philips 1998; Fraser 2012).

Nelson's stipulation (cited by Young 2010, p. 35) "to live the life of an Aboriginal person" in order to produce an authentic Aboriginal work is a dubious but popular concept, and indigenous artisans are encouraged by foundations and governments to produce work for sale according to traditional aesthetics (Hutchinson 2009). However, Conklin (1997) and Wright (1998) have critiqued displays of reconstructed pre-colonial culture that deny change, putting forward the argument that the performance of essentialized identities based on symbols from the past that appeal to Western views of exoticism, is the only capital available to indigenous communities without economic or political power. In contrast, Dean and Levi (2003) have argued that when indigenous people use the media, link to the international community and become politically active they also risk being perceived as inauthentic.

Ironically, modern artists such as Picasso, Gauguin and Matisse enriched their own work through exposure to primitive art (cited by Thomas 1987); work that arguably brought no benefit to the communities. Yet in contrast, the influence of Western culture on indigenous art challenges the idea of purity (Kuotti and Nyman 2007) established by colonial ethnography. However, there is evidence of a more recent shift towards the reappraisal of the concept of authenticity. For example, Sakahàn (2013), organised by the National Gallery of Canada, demonstrated how self-representation in contemporary international indigenous art is able to challenge colonial narratives and represent parallel histories.

The example from India of the Pardhan Gonds shows how external patronage over the past three decades led to the development of complex visual artworks with modern materials (Bowles 2009). The initial contact with researchers, and in particular with the contemporary artist J. Swaminathan at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal has ultimately led to the 'repositioning' of Pardhan artists as 'non-metropolitan contemporary artists' and this has had the effect of widening the circulation of their art in a particular global circuit (Hoskote 2009). Interestingly, the more recent exposure that brought the Pardhan artists into contact with Producer/Director Leslie MacKenzie from West Highland Animation, led to their artistic involvement in the adaptation of one of their folktales for a short animation film, *Best of the Best* for *The Tallest Story Competition* series. These hybrid examples illustrate how external exposure can contribute to new developments for contemporary indigenous artistic expression that acknowledge empowerment and change.

2.1.6 Neo-colonialism and the Narrative of Globalization

The legacy of colonialism did not end with Independence (Fanon 1963) and on this basis postcolonial theories that define the effect of colonialism on indigenous culture also need to account for the relations to power that exist today.

The caste system that separates Hindu communities into four broad ranks: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, remains a fundamental feature of India's social structure and it continues to play a significant role in shaping the values of Indian society (Deshpande 2010). However, the system does not readily accommodate the indigenous populations and Mahasweta Devi (cited by Loomba 1998) has indicated how Indian attitudes towards tribes continue to replicate colonialist views of non-Western people as mysterious, superstitious, uncivilized and backward, thus locating the Adivasi on the bottom rung of the Indian social hierarchy.

The cultural assimilation of indigenous populations is widely viewed in the political context as being in the national interest of India. The argument by Gurye (1980) that the tribal populations were part of the Hindu fold continues to be popular with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Kela cited by Abraham 2015); this suggests that Christians' analysis (cited by Alia 2010, p. 155) of mass media as "institutional agents of acculturation" is relevant to the resistance towards acknowledging the separate value of indigenous identities that continues to be a feature of contemporary media representations in India.

Nkrumah's (1965) use of the term neo-colonial delineates the overarching control that is now exercised by the financial interest of the big multinational companies. The debates about neo-colonialism and globalization are contentious because of differing interpretations of the exact meaning of these categories. In the context of this research, the term 'neo-colonialism' refers to the integration of former colonies into the international capitalist economy that includes hegemony in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres (Nkrumah 1965). The critique by

Säid (1978, p. 285) concerning how “a vast web of interests now links all parts of the former colonial world to the United States” points to the spread of Americanized culture worldwide advancing a process of homogenization that arguably threatens local cultures.

2.1.7 The Legacy of Colonialism: The Animation Industry in India

An overview of the animation industry in India gives a good example of how global hegemony is exercised by transnational companies and information industries. It also locates the independent production of animated films in an environment where commercial production methods have taken small scale animation practices out of the competitive market.

The Indian economy was opened to international investment in the early 1990s and it continues to be a major player in the global IT and business-process outsourcing (BPO) market (Government of India 2014; Wipro 2014). Animation production in India is listed as an expanding industry (Nasscom 2008; The Economic Times 2012; Animation Boss 2014), and a close examination shows how this situation has been produced by the substantial trend towards outsourced productions commissioned from foreign countries. In India where labour is cheap, animation production is mostly subcontracted from American, Japanese and European studios (Lent 2001; Thomas and Rayadurgam 2005), with a more recent shift towards co-productions (Research and Marketing 2013; The Times of India 2015). This industry provides employment to many young Indian animators with qualifications from the growing number of animation institutes that have opened in the urban centres of the country (Times of India 2011).

The United States provides the most significant market for animation in the world (Tata 2010) and the commercial production of animation in India is dominated by the styles developed by foreign companies, in particular *Disney Studios*. Sarrat and Hernández (2013) further described how the production systems and aesthetic factors of the animation process have been directly impacted by the advance of digital

technologies. In India, the high cost of producing animation frequently leads investors to focus on maximum return resulting in Indian animation companies choosing to adopt the tried and tested formulas outlined below, rather than experiment with Indian content and original or folk art forms (Sen 1999; Sabnani 2005).

The borrowed aesthetic sensibility that monopolizes animation produced in India (Sabnani 2005; Yourstory.in 2014) adheres to a strict artistic and corporate protocol (Kunzle 1975; Olounda 2010; Hunold 2012) that displays the characteristics of "naturalistic style, richness of colour and shading, depth of detail in background, full musical scores, and consistent themes, narrative, and ideologies" (Artz 2002, p. 10). Consequently, cuteness, bright colours, fast action and the technical sophistication of *Disney* cartoons produced with large budgets have now become standard expectations of animation style: *Roadside Romeo* (2008) *Koochie Koochie Hota Hain* (2010) and *Delhi Safari* (2012) are examples of Indian animated feature films of this genre that exhibit the popular universal aesthetic that is further enhanced by computer technology for a generic look that has been developed for the cost effective reproduction of images on a commercial scale.

Silverman (2001) has shown how the popular appeal of techniques that include common frame universals, clever intertextualities, humour, action and impressive special effects have all been developed to promote commercial success. This Western universal aesthetic for animation contrasts with the rich diversity of local traditional art forms in India that include sculpture, wall painting, miniature painting, jewelry and textiles from classical to tribal and folk sources. Evaluation of this aim for universal appeal in animation character design (Ram Mohan, interview nd) launches a contentious debate on universalism and particularism (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997) that associates the former with modernization in contrast to the particularism of smaller, rural communities.

However, Mukherjee's (1988, p. 38) argument that "Universal is a highly approbatory term…It performs the magic trick of eradicating what may be troublesomely other", links the universal aesthetic to the marginalization of local cultures in postcolonial India. Disinterest towards systematic experimentation with local art forms reduces the exposure of young media audiences to Indian folk art, and denies the potential vitality and energy that could result from incorporating local styles. This

also implies that particular folk art forms are not available for translation to modern media: however, *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) (see picture 1) challenges this myth: the animated film was not produced in India but it references multiple Indian art forms, including shadow puppetry and miniature painting.

Picture 1: A screenshot from Sita Sings the Blues, 2008, depicting the use of shadow puppets

Studies that have been conducted into the ideologies propagated through the apparently innocent, charming medium of animation (Dorfman and Mattelart 1975; Benshoff 1992) have illuminated the example of Disney ideology that is "aggressively politically conservative, corporatist and global" (Silverman 2002, p. 21). In addition, Silverman has also spoken of how visual signifiers are interpreted uncritically by most viewers, illustrated by the example of the Disney film *Pocahontas* (1995): "*Pocahontas* has been strongly criticized for being romanticized, fictionalized, sanitized and nationalized for popular consumption" (Silverman 2002, p. 12). In essence, *Pocahontas* is an example of Hearne's (2008) identification of the stereotypical depictions of noble or villainous natives in Disney films that are aimed at making the films more interesting for viewers (Mitra 1999) and reinforcing the dominance of white American culture and values (Petschow 2014).

The representation of culture in India through contemporary animation is dominated by popular mythological narratives that are retold by characters that are based on Westernized aesthetics of cartoon design. Therefore, popular Hindu mythological adaptations made as feature films for children, examples are *Ganesha* (2005) *Chhota Bheem* (2008) and *Little Krishna* (2009), do not reflect specific narrative

and visual features of indigenous cultural heritage, particularly the vitality, authenticity and anonymity of local folk interpretations and symbolism (Shyamacharan 1993).

The examples cited above that have aimed to attract mass audiences extend beyond acculturation to show that in the drive to find commercial success, cultural hegemony results when the primary drive for profit is projected onto the animation film industry (Schiller cited by Kumar 2010). In addition, the attraction of the promise of easy jobs and fast pay that motivates many young people in India to get into debt to acquire diplomas from expensive animation schools means that they must then be ready to join the commercial system rather than explore their own ideas and cultures (Katiyar 2008; The Times of India 2011).

The *Tales of the Tribes* animation series challenges some of the attitudes that persist today in contemporary arts and media. Smith's (1999) recommendation for community projects to emphasise the process rather than the outcome has focused the *Tales of the Tribes* on participatory communication (Manyozo 2012). In this respect, the development of localized animation differentiates from the commercial industry, where the focus is on achieving production targets.

Advances in the media and communication technologies of globalization have arguably made it viable for indigenous young people to use animation as a tool to represent parallel histories in India and to question this imitation of the "best West" (Sabnani 2005). Telo's (2013) proposal for the use of new technologies for participatory film-making drives the approach for the *Tales of the Tribes* production to challenge the hegemony of commercially driven animation by introducing participatory practices to represent the multiplicity of indigenous voices that characterize the postcolonial situation. In this way, the adaptations produced for the *Tales of the Tribes* respond to films such as *Pocahontas* by exploring representation that ensures that ethnic detail is not merely providing local colour but is the central feature that gives a specific reference point through the visual design, music, dialogues and indigenous values as cultural signifiers in the film (Ashcroft et al. 1989).

Finally the development of indigenous animation is arguably more appropriately situated in the fields of art and education than in the commercial industry, where

production is motivated by profit. The disciplines of art education and scholarship support the search for innovation with rewards that are primarily symbolic (Webb 2012). Therefore, a decision to locate this animation film-making activity in the social and educational domain rather than in that of pure entertainment reduces particular compromises of commercialization that are at definite odds with indigenous ideology.

2.1.8 Expanding Markets and the Commercialization of Indigenous Culture

The growth to over 800 private satellite television channels in India (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 2014) captures the magnitude of exposure to mass media programming. In addition, the licensing of multiple cartoon television channels including *Disney Channel, Pogo, Nickelodeon India, Cartoon Network* and *Hungama TV* specifically illustrates the variety of animated content that is presented to young audiences nationwide.

The link between media consumption and identity is established in Spencer's (2006, p. 26) definition of self identity as "A negotiated space between ourselves and others; constantly being reappraised and very much linked to the circulation of cultural meanings in a society". Accordingly, the question is to what extent are indigenous young people challenged by media exposure to content that does not reflect their cultural values, stories and creative traditions? Overpowering exposure to the dominant cultures through mass media entertainment diverts attention from local cultural practices that are at the foundation of traditional societies (Brisebois cited by Buchtmann 2000; Mibang and Chaudhury 2004). In India, the absence of the recognition of their own image in the media effectively silences indigenous young people who lack their own space to express themselves.

The influence of the commercialization of art and handicraft in North East India and the removal of the cultural identities of products for greater marketability is discussed by Ao (2006) and Boro (2006). The term ethno-kitsch was used by Graburn (1996) to refer to the modern phenomena of 'exotic' tourist art; produced by indigenous

artists worldwide, removed from its traditional context and made for sale. In the case of the *Tales of the Tribes* films and, with reference to future cultural adaptations through the medium of animation, the contextualization of the narrative content and the incorporation of references to the symbolic content of indigenous art during the process of adaptation that is discussed in the review of practice, leads to more meaningful representation, thereby avoiding accusations of the production of ethno-kitsch films.

In summary, because the historical marginalization of indigenous artistic and storytelling practices has been sustained by the expansion of the global market, Ningthouja has advised that:

> "In the present technologically advanced state /scenario, people don't get time to spend telling stories to their children. And the kids too, on the other hand, are too engrossed watching cartoon network or playing games in the computers. The best possible means to attract their attention and keep them in touch with the folktales which were once narrated by our forefathers is through the medium of mass media". (Ningthouja 2013)

This observation indicates the space that exists for subverting the tools of mass media to retell stories for the postcolonial context. The artefact of this research is a media output meant to be consumed, among others, by indigenous audiences. As television broadcast would access the widest outreach for target audiences the protocols for submitting the series for broadcast on regional television channels will be investigated on the completion of the series. In addition, intended screening programmes of the *Tales of the Tribes* films in local schools will review the use of indigenous animated films for initiating discussions with young people about culture and I suggest that this method may be more successful for providing for contextualization to reveal the meanings in the films.

These theoretical findings establish the corresponding research questions of the study, which are:

> Can participatory practices be used to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices? If so, how?

To respond to these questions, the review of practice that follows looks at comparable practice for developing animated content with indigenous collaborators.

2.2 A Review of Comparable Practice

Alternative media applications have already presented some challenges to dominant content and form, and this section establishes the context for my practice in relation to existing independent media practices. Indigenous media, termed 'Fourth Cinema' by Maori film-maker, Barclay (1990) has emerged as a category of politically engaged film-making which produces images that are controlled by indigenous peoples and which represent their concerns and customs (Martens 2012; Murray 2008). Indigenous media responds to the postcolonial context by becoming a form of resistance to outside cultural domination (Meadows 2009) and a study of the genre contributes towards defining a practice which can critique forms dominant in India.

2.2.1 Indigenous Media

Singer (2001) has highlighted particular examples of Native American film-making that reflect contemporary attitudes and are not merely exhibitions of the past. Meanwhile, Leuthold's (1994) detailed examination of the work of two Native American film-makers, George Burdeau (1994) and Victor Masayesva (1992) has attempted to identify a specific indigenous aesthetic that is also relevant to the medium of animation. However, Sands and Sekaquaptewa-Lewi (cited by Leuthold 1994, p. 46) argue that the view that native filmmaking practices differ in "theme, composition and structure from those films produced by non-Indians" is simplistic because it essentializes identities rather than considering the artists as individuals. It also locates the authenticity of cultural expression in the medium used rather than in the ideas expressed.

Burdeau's work has been described by Leuthold as relatively mainstream on the basis that he made series for national broadcast, presumably targeted at majority non-indigenous audiences. His use of "sophisticated editing, multiple angle and point of view shots, and a rich palette of special effects" (Leuthold 1994, p. 42) demonstrated familiarity with the techniques of contemporary film-making. However, according to Leuthold's reading, the film-maker's technical vocabulary, combined with the content, resulted in a uniquely indigenous perspective, in contrast to the work of Masayesva that

was critiqued as romantic and sentimental. Furthermore Silberman (cited by Leuthold 1994) proposed that the two poles of representation, one that is romantic and the other that is ironic or satirical, are related to the media exposure of the film-maker irrespective of the film-maker's background. This suggests that diverse exposure to a wide variety of audio visual narrative representations can lead to a more sophisticated presentation by local film-makers that may be more attuned to transcending cultural boundaries.

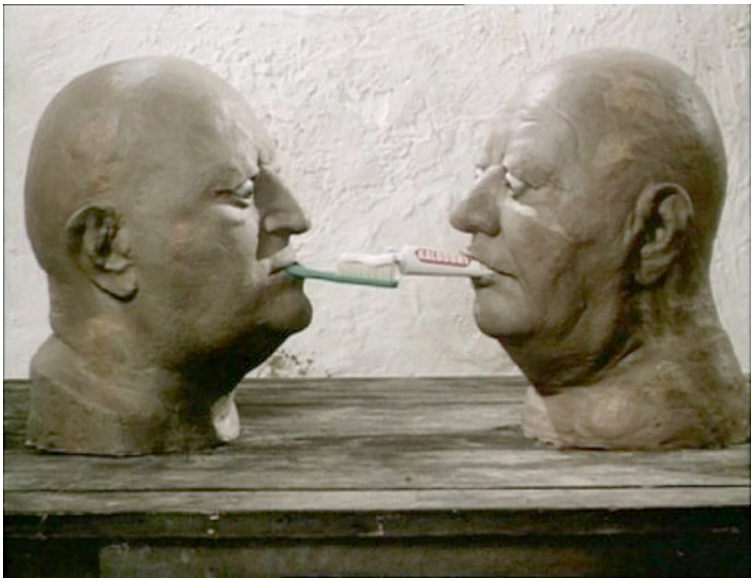
Ginsburg (1995) has argued in favour of targeting Indigenous media at intercultural viewing in order to support communication with non-indigenous audiences to help understanding, compromise and reconciliation. This aim was illustrated by an example from Australia of a local programme called *Manyu-Wana* (1989), inspired by *Sesame Street*, which included some animation designed to teach Walpiri children their own language. *Manyu-Wana* reportedly found unexpected appreciation from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who were drawn to its quirky local charm, suggesting that Indigenous media can also appeal to wider audiences.

Indigenous media projects have also been used for providing production training. For example, *The Ernabella Video Project* (1983) in Australia introduced training in video production for a group who made productions about their own culture, and the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme (BRACS) empowered indigenous communities across Australia to produce and broadcast their own television and radio programmes (Guster 2009). Such examples of Indigenous media projects exemplify the drive for empowerment that characterizes postcolonial theory, Indigenous media and participatory practice. Telo's (2013) identification of participatory film-making practices that include transparency, mutual recognition and outcomes directed towards social impact further help define Indigenous media paradigms. Building on these practices, additional stipulations for members of participatory film-making to be self-elected, have a degree of social connection and the belief that their contributions matter were also applied in the media practice for the *Tales of the Tribes* films.

2.2.2 Animation to Challenge Dominant Forms

In contrast to the development of commercial animation, Soviet policy that supported cinema as an art form in countries that were behind the 'Iron Curtain', produced interpretations of narrative and form that have brought acclaim for artistic originality. From 1947 animation studios were set up for each country and also for distinct ethnic groups. These guaranteed animators full time employment producing theatrical cartoons, public service and educational animation, children's films drawn from folk culture, and titles and special effects for features (Moritz 1997).

Even though strict censorship was maintained to guarantee that the films endorsed communist ideals and party agendas, artists learnt how to camouflage meaning with metaphor. This phenomenon can be seen in many works produced by artists from Eastern Europe: *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) (see picture 2) by Czech animator, Jan Švankmajer is an example of how mixed media provided a metaphorical language to critique the oppressive totalitarian regime.



Picture 2: A screenshot from Dimensions of Dialogue, 1982

According to Švankmajer's interpretation,

> "Suddenly everyday contact with things which people are used to acquire a new dimension and in this way casts a doubt over reality…as a means of subversion to challenge orthodox understanding." (*The Magic Art of Jan Svankmajer* 1992).

Hearne (2012) has elaborated on this concept of animation as a medium that can be used to subvert and reinvent visual codes and vocabularies to show its value for work

in minority indigenous languages. The experimental techniques used in Švankmajer's films have contributed to an appreciation of surrealistic imagery in animation and the multimedia approach to animation practice to challenge dominant modes of design and representation. However, in contrast to the political commentary of many Western artistic interpretations, the absence of evidence of a direct critique of dominant society in indigenous artistic practice suggests that analytical challenges also have cultural underpinnings. Therefore rather than expecting the subaltern emerging from indigenous communities to deliver a political critique as an expression of postcolonial self-representation (Spivak 1988) it would make more sense, in response to the question of the content of indigenous storytelling, to refer to how traditional societies worldwide communicated their history, local knowledge, and values through the genre of folktales.

The work of Russian animation film-maker, Yuri Norstein presents localized representations and forms of the folktale genre that contrast strongly with the interpretations of fairytales emptied of subversive content produced by Disney Studios (Friedmeyer 2003) such as *Shrek* (2001). The folklore theme of the personification of animals that conveys truths about human nature is found throughout Norstein's animations, and *Rabbit and Fox* (Norstein 1973) provides an example of how experimental techniques of stop-motion have been used in a short animation film based on a Russian folktale.

Picture 3: A screenshot from The Fox and the Rabbit, 1973

The film that follows the linear narrative structure common to many folktales shows how this form assists the reading of the story across cultures. The visualization through artwork created by Norstein's wife, artist and cartoonist Francesca Yarbusova

(animator nd), is influenced by folk motifs often framed by a patterned border, demonstrating how the folk visual style can be transposed to the animation medium to convey cultural distinction and identity (see picture 3). A similar approach of incorporating folk motifs and textile designs has been carried forward in the *Tales of the Tribes* collection.

Norstein used an arrangement of multiple glass planes that could be moved horizontally below a camera placed on a rostrum above to create the animation. The technique of layered 2D cutouts made from artwork painted onto acetate, with water colours applied to aluminum foil and scratched acetate achieved depth and variety in his films (Rosenberg 1991). Norstein's work shows that the technical sophistication of handmade animation is equal to digitally produced films, and his work also maintains the organic quality of folk art forms, as seen in picture 4.

Picture 4: A screenshot from The Fox and the Rabbit, 1973

The advance in computer software development that allows for compositing in multiple layers arguably makes this kind of animation somewhat easier to produce than previously. Norstein's team typically consisted of him, Yarbusova and cinematographer Alexander Zhukovsky (Fedina 2013), demonstrating how animation could also be accomplished by small teams of independent artists.

Picture 5: A screenshot from Hedgehog in the Fog, 1975

Picture 6: A drawing by Rembrandt

That Norstein acknowledges inspiration from the rich textures of paintings by Rembrandt (see above) illustrates his aspiration to produce masterpieces using the animation medium. His approach to the animated art form as a repository of spiritual and moral values that "can give people the ability to comprehend life's essence, its tragedy, in a condensed form," (Norstein, cited by Rosenberg 1991, p. 3) further reflects the paradigms of traditional artistic practice.

Norstein has won numerous national and international awards for his style and originality that breaks from Disney's perfect lines and block colour. The examples of his work show that independent animation artistry can bring professional acclaim and that artistic input from traditional sources can positively influence the design of the film. His work provides a source of inspiration for my practice and it also supports the proposal for animation as a tool for indigenous artists, with examples of approaches that are compatible with traditional artistic practice.

2.2.3 Experimental Animation Film

The new status that animation has gained as entertainment in the domain of mass communication is reflected in its production methods. An assessment made by Williams in 1963 (p. 299) that "our new services tend to require so much capital that only a very large audience can sustain them" has enduring resonance when related to the massive

investments that are now typical in mainstream animation film production (for example, *Frozen* (2013) at $150 million). His evaluation further illustrates Nandy's (cited by Pinny 1995) categorization of the techno-rational vision of the world as an insidious form of colonization: the fact that commercial animation demands quantities that small local companies are unable to produce contributes to the centralisation and homogenisation of culture and therefore operates against regional cultural productions. As the resources of commercial animation production are not available to indigenous film production pioneered by young artists in secluded areas, more accessible methods must be used. Therefore a study of how animation has been used as an experimental art form is presented in comparison with its position in the commercial industry.

When it first appeared in the 1920s experimental animation was considered as a hybrid art form. It attracted modern artists as a way of adding movement to their paintings and graphic designs (Starr 1987): *The Nose* (1963) by Claire Parker and Alexandre Alexeieff and *Free Radicals* (1958) by Len Lye are examples of such early experiments. Artists were drawn to the medium as a means of exploring their creative personalities, and practitioners commonly worked on their own or with small teams rarely seeking or finding popular success (Halas and Manvell 1959). This interpretation of animation as an experimental, transformational process further suggests how it is compatible with traditional artistic practices.

In contrast to the unity of style in 'orthodox' animation, experimental practice often combined different modes of animation - in addition to hand-drawn artwork, other techniques included pixilation, oil painting on glass, and stop-motion animation. This shows how experimental techniques can incorporate traditional artistic practices that also use a range of materials. In India in particular, the association of cartoons with entertainment for children has arguably limited the imaginative exploration of animation (Hucker cited by Jolly 1977). However, as one of the first places to introduce animation training into India in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the National Institute of Design invited animators Clair Weeks and Roger Noakes to conduct workshops in 1980 and 1984 to teach its staff of graphic designers and artists (Sabnani 2015). As one of the first animation practitioners at the National Institute of Design, Nina Sabnani went on to explore the creative use of experimental artistic styles for films based on various social issues: *Mukand and Riaz (*2008), and *Tanko Bole Chhe (The Stitches Speak)* (2010)

show how subjects such as migration, dislocation, memory and partition can be represented in animated storytelling based on folk design aesthetics.

The argument for the use of animation as a tool for artists is distinct from animation that links to merchandising for children (Davis 2001) – a description that contributed to Chatterji's (2012) skepticism about the compatibility of mythology from the Pardhan Gond tradition with the linear structure of narrative film, discussed in the section on adaptation in the next chapter. However, on the basis that abstract animations that are not located within the familiarity of formal narrative strategies are often difficult to relate to and hard to understand, I refer to Well's definition of 'developmental animation' (1998, p. 51) as a form of animation that harks back to traditional aspects of the animated film, but also seeks to embellish or reform these traditions with contemporary approaches. This approach to experimental practice gives a direction - when combined with a clear narrative structure - for animation production on a small scale by local artists.

If animation is to work as a tool for representing indigenous cultural content, the compatibilities between the animation medium and the context of indigenous narrative and artistic practices need to be established. Coomaraswamy's (1977) theory that the language of metaphysics that informs folklore is 'imagistic', suggests that the visual medium of animation may be more appropriate to represent indigenous ideologies, oral narratives and visual arts than, say, literature written in English that may not be accessible to many indigenous young people in the areas of this study. To build on this theory, Halas and Bachelor's (cited by Hoffer 1981, p. 3) discussion on how animation film is linked to metaphysical reality, specifically how it is not about how things look, but what they mean, indicates that realism is not requisite in animation. This concept is further reaffirmed in Leaf's approach to animation that was directed by the feeling it evoked over what it looked like (Leaf, cited by Schenkel 1976, p. 44), and by Purves (2010) in his identification of how animation communicates ideas that cannot be expressed in our everyday lives.

Further evidence of the synergy between animation and traditional artistic practice draws on acclaimed film-maker Norman McLaren's conceptualization that the true essence of animation is the activity that has taken place between what becomes the final frames of the film: the creation of movement on paper, the manipulation of

materials and the adjustment of a model before the act of photographing the image (Solomon cited by Wells 1998). In a similar vein but on the subject of traditional art, Bendix has pointed out that "It is not the object…but the desire, the process of searching itself that yields existential meaning" (1997, p. 17). The importance that is placed on the process in experimental animation practice and in traditional artwork can be related to workshops that emphasize the process of adaptation and collaboration, with the subsequent aim of completing the animation production later in the studio environment.

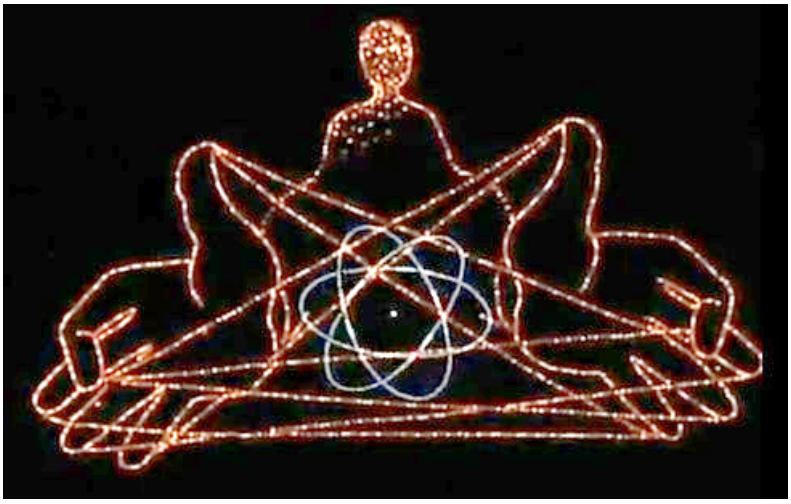
Stop-motion is executed in a real world space and it involves making and manipulating articulated models and materials in single frame increments through a method of shooting known as 'straight ahead' animation. Purves' analysis of how stop-motion allows for the emergence of the personality of the animator in the manipulation of the puppet, "The contact between a human hand and the puppet gives the animation so much soul" (Purves 2010, p. 32), shows that the process of creating experimental animation contributes to identification and vitalization. Purves also contends that stop-motion is a form of animation practice that is created by a group working together on the same project; that communication becomes intrinsic to the process and that a supportive team spirit develops that is rarely found in other animation techniques. These particular views echo similar comments about the function of traditional practices in binding indigenous societies (Shyamacharan 1993).

The Bead Game (1977) by Ishu Patel is a short animated film that illustrates how certain techniques can be transferred to the context of indigenous storytelling. Patel conducted animation workshops with the Inuit artists of Cape Dorset in the High Arctic and in this context he explained that,

> "The Inuit woman used seed beads to decorate the Hudson Bay Parkas they made… I used these tiny colourful beads to draw images, moving them frame by frame under the camera. I spent the next year exploring the theme of aggression and evolution". (Tehran International Animation Festival 2005)

The Bead Game (1977) see picture 7, was made entirely by arranging and manipulating thousands of beads, to trace evolution from single cells to a series of ever more complex creatures. In North East India, many of the indigenous communities also have rich traditions of beaded jewelry that is distinct to each tribe. The experimentation that was carried out in the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh showed that Patel's

technique presents a technical and visual approach that could be explored in a more sustained way to develop an indigenous identity for animation from this region.



Picture 7: A screenshot from The Bead Game, 1977

In conclusion stop-motion does not need to compete with the sophistication of computers; however, according to Purves (2010) a strong idea is needed before approaching stop-motion to justify the sheer effort involved. This is why the rich, meaningful content of traditional folk narratives that have stood the test of time are so appropriate. Moreover, computer technology has made independent animated film production much more feasible. While the *Tales of the Tribes* project does not suggest that indigenous animation production should be confined to handmade animation techniques, the approach adopted builds on the work by West Highland Animation that placed emphasis on storytelling and handmade artwork over software training. The preceding study of the compatibilities of indigenous artistic practice with the use of animation as a tool for independent artists leads to the question of how indigenous art and culture can be adapted to the medium of animation.

To address this question and to establish a mode for collaborative practice with indigenous communities in India, it is necessary to examine how animation practitioners have already experimented with adapting traditional content to animation and to look at the collaborations that have taken place.

2.2.4 Experimental Collaboration with Indigenous and Folk Artists

The short animation film *The Owl Who Married a Goose* (1975) by Caroline Leaf provides an example of how innovative aesthetic and technical approaches have been used in animation in the context of an Inuit narrative. The technique used in the film demanded "drawing" live-under-the-camera by manipulating sand on translucent glass, lit from below, see picture 8. This approach that utilized the simplest of materials – sand – presents a resourceful solution to the practical dilemma of introducing expensive and complex technology for indigenous artisans.

Picture 8: A screenshot from The Owl Who Married a Goose. 1975

Leaf alluded to her own initial lack of confidence in her drawing abilities, and the consequent appeal of working under-the-camera, where one image is destroyed to create the next so that when the sequence has been filmed, there is nothing left except the film, turning the process into "a one-off performance" (Leaf cited by Vladermersky 2003). Young indigenous workshop participants in India have regularly communicated their lack of confidence in drawing cartoon characters where assumptions about style are based on their exposure to commercial cartoons. Leaf's technique suggests a way of breaking away from the expectation of producing stereotyped cartoon illustrations; in a

similar way research on local art forms can also inspire young indigenous artists to develop their own artistic designs for animation.

The Owl Who Married a Goose contributes an early example of a creative collaboration between an animation practitioner and an Inuk artist Nanogak, who is credited as the designer of the film. Leaf details some of the negotiations that were involved in the process of adaptation from the text to the animation medium; including the simplification of artwork and her own influence on the interpretation of the animals in the story that has made them more anthropomorphized than was characteristic of the indigenous culture.

Leaf's unconventional approach included the decision not to use any language other than Inuit. This led her to eliminate as much of the text as possible and to emphasize the storytelling through visuals. The creation of the soundtrack involved a group of female Inuit elders with advanced skills of mimicry of arctic animals developed from traditional hunting practices, and the recordings, made in Broughton Island in the Arctic, entailed negotiating issues of cross cultural interaction and language. This illustrates the potential for incorporating unexpected local talent in productions and further demonstrates the vitality of experimentation. Leaf's approach of negotiation and adjustment shows how new interpretations in animation can be produced through collaborative practice between artists from different backgrounds and disciplines.

From India, Nina Sabnani's animation practice was inspired by the films made by Leaf (Sabnani 2013), and her film *Tanko Bol Chhe* (The Stitches Speak) (2010) is an example of collaboration with a group of female artisans from Kutch associated with the craft organisation, Kala Raksha. Sabnani has outlined how the programme generated an unprecedented sense of pride and need to share: the artisans were no longer limited to making decorative household objects, "they were speaking through their work and sharing their perspectives on life and the world" (2013, p. 80). The production of such films has the potential to bring symbolic capital to artists and animation practitioners.

West Highland Animation used young animation professionals working in the studio to include hand-drawn, 2D cut-out, 3D stop-motion and oil on glass animation techniques. Direct methods of engaging with communities were to use artists in the community and children to design or make artwork and to record Gaelic dialogues and

to write and record music. These techniques for keeping young people interested in their culture have also been transferred to the *Tales of the Tribes* production.

2.2.5 Government Support

According to Ginsburg (1991) Indigenous media production worldwide has generally been small scale, low budget and locally based. Where there has been some government support worldwide for locally produced animation, this has led to the production of original films for local audiences that have also gone on to receive international recognition. However, that fact that when government support has subsequently been withdrawn this has frequently made such work unsustainable. This highlights the important role of government support for developing culturally relevant and socially situated animation. For example, in Russia, Norstein's artistic and cinematographic development was supported by Soyuzmultfilm, the state company established in 1936 that became the most influential animation studio in the Soviet Union. In this case, the support for artistic films based on folklore illustrates the national interest for protecting and educating young audiences. However, the Soviet studio model was discontinued with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Afanaseva 2011; Voice of Russia 2011) and only Estonia was able to continue this model in a reduced form with its own government support. Subsequently Estonia has become well known in the international arena because of its continuing experimental animation practice.

In Scotland, West Highland Animation was established in 1988 with the objective of helping to sustain Gaelic culture and language, and its role in introducing me to animation film-making based on indigenous minority cultures has been highlighted in the Introduction. West Highland Animation secured funding support from cultural organisations in Scotland - notably Gaelic Television (as CTG, CCT and MGAlba) the Scottish Film Production Fund as SFPF/Scottish Screen/Creative Scotland; local councils – in particular the Highland and Western Isles Councils; Bòrd na Gàidhlig; other smaller Gaelic bodies; and EU funds – LEADER and MEDIA. However, with the creation in 2008 of the BBCAlba Gaelic TV Channel (MG Alba - gàidhlig-tv 2014) which followed the BBC's centralized sport and international

animation buy-in and dubbing policies, Gaelic Television funding was withdrawn and West Highland Animation was unable to sustain production.

During this period, West Highland Animation had produced over 70 Highland Gaelic animated films and also bi-lingual learning and research resources in the form of interactive websites, games and comic books. Similar film and animation activities occurred in the other Celtic countries in their minority language and independent animation sectors during this period (1985-2005) and Ireland has been able to build on these early animation foundations to create a strong commercial animation sector that operates in tandem to its independent and experimental production sectors.

In Canada, the National Film Board produced films about First Nations peoples that have addressed social and political issues, cultural preservation and the creative arts. In 1969, it began a programme called *Challenge for Change* to train Aboriginal people to make films about themselves. The Government of Canada and the newly created (1999) state of Nunavuk also supported an Inuit broadcasting channel for that region, and Igloolik Isuma Productions have produced several successful Inuit feature films and documentaries.

From the 1940s, the National Film Board of Canada also supported experimentation by film practitioners who challenged the hyperrealism of Disney (Slowik 2013). Leaf disclosed that the films developed under the Film Board during this period were not asked to address a mass audience, but could instead be made for small, specialized audiences, for example, people interested in the arts, members of a specific culture, school children and researchers. These films from the Film Board received worldwide appreciation testified by more than 5,000 awards including 11 Oscars (NFB nd).

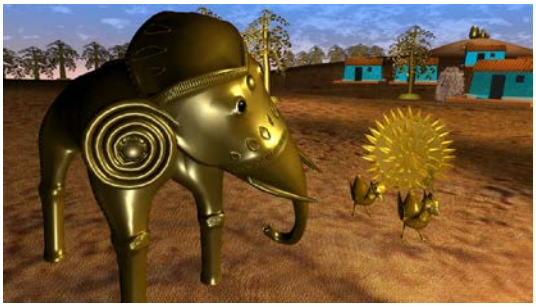
These examples illustrate how previously silent minorities have been granted more rights, particularly in broadcasting. In essence, this approach would be ideal for developing an Indian animation sector targeting specific rather than mass audiences. Looking at the vast potential resource of original Indian indigenous narratives and folk art styles, it is perfectly feasible that experimentation by indigenous artists and animation practitioners can contribute to demonstrating that traditional does not have to

mean unoriginal. However, as discussed previously in relation to the commercial industry, when the ambition to 'make films from our own culture' is replaced by economic considerations it can result in a 'globalised' way of making films in line with international 'Americanized' culture (Mackenzie, personal communication 2015). This supports the argument that Government support in India can help to free the artists to experiment more.

Indigenous media initiatives worldwide that illustrate the significance of government support also show how the media can be harnessed to empower local practitioners and communities. A parallel drive in India could be beneficial for both indigenous communities and original animation production. Indian Government support is also critical because of the credibility it offers in the regions of this study where there is a strong imperative for young people to secure government employment (Goswami 2010).

2.2.6 Developing Indigenous Animation Practice

The question is how have indigenous art styles translated to the medium of animation? Aboriginal art from Australia has inspired several adaptations for animation and some links to these are available in the references (see ABC 2007; Aboriginal Nations Australia 2012). Other examples are Gerald McDermott's films *Anansi the Spider* (1969), which combines bold, rich colour with traditional African design motifs and his film *Arrow to the Sun* (1974), inspired by folklore of the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest.



Picture 9: A screenshot from How the Elephant Lost His Wings, 2006, based on Gadwaa brass sculptures from Bastar, India

Picture 10: A screenshot from The Bonga, 2006, based on Patua scrolls from Jharkhand, India

From India, artwork using the Gadwaa, Patua, Warli, Gond and Soara styles was popular with both Indian and international audiences when adapted for animation in *The Tallest Story Competition* (2006), see pictures 9, 10 and 11. The fact that the styles were copied by non-indigenous artists indicates that there is interest for indigenous art styles in both the commercial and independent animation sectors.

Picture 11: A screenshot from The Song Bird, 2006, based on Soara painting from Orissa. India

In India many indigenous groups have recognizable artistic identities and the *Tales of the Tribes* sets out to explore whether references to local arts and crafts in animated films can contribute towards creating a cultural representation that is appropriate to the communities themselves, and if it can also provide for the contributions of traditional artists in the film-making process. Alfred Gell's (1998) analysis of how art works as a 'synecdoche' to represent the whole suggests that animated film can communicate particular cultures. His theory that the 'person' extends beyond the physical body of the individual to the objects owned by and images of that person can be applied to representation in animated indigenous narratives through specific design identities and visual cultural distinctions.

The human touch can be conveyed to the medium of animated films by referencing the material culture produced by hand from locally available materials. Using handmade artwork as part of the animation design contributes a more organic aesthetic to purely technological simulation. Rall (2010) discusses a direction for animation design based on cultural forms – though Rall also rejects enforcing an artistic dogma of "Asian authenticity". In a similar way, the *Tales of the Tribes* project does not endorse imposing notions of indigenous artistic aesthetics of animation on young artists; however, it does explore the theory that increased awareness of the possibilities of adapting traditional artistic styles rather than simply copying currently fashionable

commercial styles may inspire the young artists to bring some of this heritage into their digital work.

Malinowski's (1948) study on religion, magic, science, rite and myth demonstrated that particular knowledge is only obtainable through culturally bound rituals in traditional societies. Shyamacharan's (1993) identification of the intricate relationship between folk art and ritual, suggests that particular rituals may be appropriate to the adaptation of myths that are based on mankind's interaction with the supernatural world. For example, the engagement with ritual is illustrated by the anthropologist Hans Guggenheim (Tribal Eye: Across the Frontiers 1975) who complied with a customary animal sacrifice before commencing his project to build an experimental water granary for the Dogon community in Africa on the basis that the local people would not have had confidence in the project otherwise. As Carpenter (Tribal Eye: Across the Frontiers 1975) has outlined, the investigation of appropriate rituals is part of gaining acceptance by these people on their own terms, instead of simply demanding that they become acculturated. In this way, by acknowledging the role of ritual in traditional communities, researchers acquire a platform to transcend purely academic frameworks and embark on an intellectual challenge to connect more deeply with indigenous ideologies.

The *Tales of the Tribes* project has incorporated ethnographic practices of observation and interviewing to record insiders' perspectives that are incorporated into the artefacts. However as the films are reinterpretations of traditional content for a new medium, they do not claim to deliver ethnographies of the people or places of the study. In this project, the desire for individual authenticity (Bendix 1997) is closely associated with the aim of connecting with the values of the indigenous culture. On this basis, a brief ritualistic appeasement in keeping with the local Tani traditions was commissioned from a traditional priest in Arunachal Pradesh before commencing the animation production for the short film from that region.

Theoretical arguments about authenticity are important in the production of animated films based on indigenous cultural content because it is expected that local people will form part of the audience for these animated representations. In addition, as Liep (2001) points out, academic works can function as archives for the cultural inheritance of the group described.

The position put forward by this research is established in the existential view of authenticity - that of developing a sense of one's own identity, and then living in accord with ones sense of self (Kierkegaard 1985). In the process of commitment to understanding ourselves as dynamic rather than a fixed state of being that relates to the postcolonial context of this work (Bhabha 1994), authenticity is identified in the participatory process of creating these animated adaptations that explore identity and cultural transformations rather than aiming to capture the image of dying cultures discussed by Errington (1998) and evidenced in the photography by Jimmy Nelson (Merrill 2014).

That authenticity is problematic and unstable is attested by the various descriptions and interpretations of the concept. For instance, the term 'object based authenticity' that relates to the genuineness or realness of artefacts or events (Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Kolar and Zabkar 2010), implies that interventions from outside are regarded as interferences and 'borrowings' as adulterations. This approach, related to the outsiders' essentialized view that presupposes certainty and privileges primitivism, is also highlighted in MacCannell's (1976) concept of 'relationship authenticity' by which he presupposes the authenticity of primitive and peasant societies on the basis that do not suffer from anxiety about the authenticity of their lives. From this standpoint, Hodgson's (2007) analysis that the respondents of his research on Aboriginal cultural tourism held preconceived images in their minds as to who 'real' Aboriginal people are and what their 'authentic' lifestyle should involve, indicates how nostalgic images and the staging of local culture (MacCannell 2011) lie at the foundation of Aboriginal cultural tourism.

The reinvention of culture is a recurrent theme in anthropology on the basis that societies create traditions and accept elements from outside (Cultural Survival 1982). Therefore the recognition of particular narratives and the identification with specific characters (for example, Abotani as the ancestor for the Tani people of Arunachal Pradesh), illustrates how oral narratives that are part of a long term tradition makes them authentic to the communities. However, the willingness to adopt new materials in the making of cultural artefacts - an example being traditional Naga accessories that are now frequently made from synthetic materials due to the scarcity of the original ones - indicates that, for the communities themselves, the way the story is told is authentic only for that moment in time.

On the other hand, Fox (1997) reminds us that authenticity in a communicative situation is based on mutual trust and respectful sharing of intended meanings rather than on the materials and technologies that are used to produce the representations. The postcolonial discourse that questions any outsider's authority to speak for others (Spivak 1988) brings the issue of the authenticity of indigenous self-representation to the forefront. Participatory film-making practice fulfils the dual function of including multiple perspectives and inputs from local participants with the collaboration with outside animators. Thus it provides a viable method to deliver authentic interpretations of indigenous storytelling and art. The growing worldwide economic integration of capitalism that now includes previously isolated indigenous societies has led to contemporary representations of indigenous traditions which incorporate artists' external aesthetic expectations purely in order to fulfil commercial needs: for example, Liep (2001) discusses the production of objects for the external market that leave out aspects of local culture perceived to be moribund or uninteresting for external audiences.

The translation of oral traditions into digital media must also take into consideration external audiences' expectations in order to access the substantial investment that is required to produce animated films. This pragmatic need (that resurfaces repeatedly in the development of the films) necessarily produces tension with the issue of authenticity. On this subject, Errington (1998) discusses the changes brought about in tribal life from the pressure of modern technology, and the challenges this has presented to the traditional use of objects that is frequently regarded as a yardstick for authenticity. In the case of this animation project, as young local artists are part of the team to produce the films for local as well as wider audiences and in the process they are researching the traditional function of storytelling, this arguably contributes to the authenticity of the work.

Relating to the form and design of the film, there is evidence from the workshops of mimicry (Bhabha 1995), where local young people are frequently drawn to imitate the commercial animations that they have been exposed to rather than to look to their own designs, in contrast to how the outlook of the digital media artist may be directed towards establishing specific film-making aesthetics to contribute a recognisable visual identity to the film.

To address these issues during the adaptive process sensitivity is needed to advance synergy between the traditional and the digital artists in the collaborative environment. My position is that the project to adapt indigenous content must contribute to empowering the marginalized indigenous artist, by introducing new approaches to self-representation as well as introducing broader awareness of indigenous cultural values to non-indigenous collaborators. This brings us to the concept of authenticity in the context of the educational setting where, hopefully, a situation is created where multiple viewpoints are openly expressed and meanings are co-constructed rather than simply transmitted by an outside expert (Hadjioannou 2007 cited by McDougall 2015). In this situation it is acknowledged that the incoming researcher's knowledge of the community is relatively slight, and thus there is an imperative for constant reflection and negotiation in the treatment of content to reduce the risk of imposing an outside perspective on the design and content of the film. At the same time, workshops that incorporate research on local art forms and on the ways that indigenous art can be adapted, while also providing exposure to indigenous animated films from other parts of the world can broaden the options for young indigenous artists in India as they bring their own cultures into the medium of animation.

2.2.7 The Adaptation of Folktales

Folktales have provided content for well-known animation films including those adapted by Disney. According to Mackenzie (personal interview 2015) some of the reasons for story adaptations are:

- that folktales tend to be short stories;
- they often have a moral within the storyline;
- they illustrate how people may have the same field of experience (Datta 1983);
- dramatic narratives of conflict are graphic and vivid and hold more attention;
- they exhibit archetypal characters (the hero, villain and trickster are examples) and magical or supernatural characters that are suited to delivery through the medium of animation.

- over the years the tales have been embellished by multiple story tellers to maximize audience enjoyment;
- the original stories usually deliver satisfying endings that fulfill expectations.

Folktales, passed on by word of mouth, are typically expanded and shaped by storytellers. Adaptation through retelling has given rise to many versions of a single folktale as evidenced by the Tani folklore of Central Arunachal Pradesh (Nyori 2004) and in other stories that are shared by multiple communities in the region. This recognition that every story is a retelling (Maccabe et al. 2012), disputes theoretical arguments about fidelity that are based on assumptions of one correct original. With adaptations from one medium to another, comparisons will be generated between the source and the outcome, and yet emphasizing fidelity to the original undervalues other aspects of cinematic intertextuality as well as the creativity of the process of adaptation. Where adaptations prioritise transposition over interpretation of the source (in Wagner's 1975) terms, this risks "freezing all the action and events in an impossible simulacrum of the past made present" (Cartmell and Whelehan 2010, p83), to indicate why the stories of the past must be reinvigorated and re-imagined for the new medium to find appeal with different audiences.

Sanders (2006) distinguishes between adaptation and appropriation, where the underlying meaning and context is changed to subvert the story and incorporate new values and perspectives, as has been shown in Disney's successful adaptation formula and its link to the globalization of capitalism (Artz 2002). Appropriation motivated by political or social purposes or by economic ambitions to appeal to the lowest common denominator (Stem cited by Cartmell and Whelehan 2010) is therefore distinct from the inevitable procedure of adaptation required to translate oral or written stories into the audio visual medium.

For a film-maker working with marginalised groups, fidelity and cultural sensitivities need to be taken into account. This project investigates how adaptation from oral narratives for animated films can be managed with sensitivity to reduce the risk of falsifying the story and making it less representative of the originating culture (Eaton 2002). The approach to adaptation for the *Tales of the Tribes* films was based on a commitment to representing the values and beliefs of the cultural group and acting responsibly towards depicting cultural details (Smith and Wiese 2006). Hearne's study

(2012, p. 96) that identified the concern from indigenous animation producers towards "locating the stories in individual performances, in families, in clans and communities, and in specific geographical areas" has also guided the approach to adaptation for *Tales of the Tribes* films. However, this critique of adaptation acknowledges that the artefact can only reproduce the film-maker's reading of the original, and in the process it has been necessary to develop critical awareness to avoid traditional stereotypes.

The construct of the audience influences the presentation of films. Indigenous young people are the primary target audience the *Tales of the Tribes* films: as a community-generated production for cultural regeneration, Indigenous media practice is differentiated from forms of mass communication for mainstream society, and it bypasses the expectations to command commercial interest and large audiences as a measure for success. However, as indigenous folktales narrated through the medium of animation can also contribute to make these cultures recognizable to non-indigenous audiences, decisions made in the adaptation process have taken different audiences into account.

The *Tales of the Tribes* needed to appeal to audiences that are both familiar and unfamiliar with the original narratives. As indigenous stories are often narrated as oral epics, adaptation for the short film format implies decisions about the structure of a story and about how much cultural content needs to be explained – or omitted – for the sake of audiences. The process is vindicated by Seger's (1992) assertion that the traditional storylines can often be mystifying, and that a viewer does not have the reader's option to reread or clarify details with the storyteller.

McFarlane (1996) discussed the differences between texts and cinematic delivery: that of showing rather than telling. Earlier, Bluestone (1957) identified the effect of the camera's frame and the centrality of editing on the narrative form, and the adaptation of the oral narratives for the *Tales of the Tribes* films has primarily been a process of determining the visual narrative structure of the story. Cook and Bernick (1999) present a list of guidelines for adaptation for the medium of film including prioritizing narrative over form, attention to reducing moral and narrative ambiguity, character-driven stories, compositions and camera positions to communicate the needs of the characters and the inclusion of at least one action sequence. These have been

taken into account in the adaptation of the folktales for the *Tales of the Tribes* series of films.

Wells (2013) evaluated the ability of animation to break from realism and move beyond the limits of language. In this case, the linear structure of narrative film applied to indigenous folk narrative, makes the stories more accessible to wider audiences. However, just as the power to decide what to narrate and what to leave out influenced storytelling practices under colonialism, the dilemmas posed by adapting folktales to animation films requires negotiation between the animation film-maker and the storyteller to avoid perpetuating dominant paradigms.

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2.2.8 Cross Cultural Collaboration, Ethics and Cultural Ownership

This research project has developed a method for indigenous artists to collaborate with media professionals. The purpose of creating indigenous media project coordinators with the role of engaging collaborations with animation students and media professionals was to reach higher production standards which make it possible to communicate beyond the local communities and reach wider audiences. To elaborate, Meadows (2009) identified the dynamism that emerges from a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous people, while Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer assess the pros and cons of collaboration:

> "In the short term collaboration makes a project more difficult and time consuming, but in the long run we feel it makes the results more meaningful. The cross-cultural dimension is crucial. Many community projects (with no external dialogue) often fail to meet the professional standards to which they aspire and generally overlook important questions. Likewise many exclusively scholarly or academic projects fail to meet local cultural standards and are not acceptable to the communities from which they are derived." (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 2001, p. 60)

Participatory film-making emerges as an appropriate method of practice for this work. Participation by the community in every stage of the research supports a more comprehensive outcome and also encourages confidence from partners to conduct their

own research (Webb 2009). However, the question about the extent of the influence of the outsider on the form of the film becomes an issue which demands detailed attention in each production so that a balance is negotiated between non-interference and imparting the methods of good-film making practice. Webb's description of parallel learning between students and instructors demonstrates that this type of interaction contributes to the level of engagement of students.

In Australia, collaboration to adapt Dreaming narratives for animation that was explored by the Centre for Indigenous Studies at Monash University with the Yanyuwa Aboriginal community illustrates the potential for mutual benefits from collaboration that is set in the educational setting. The initiative was described as

> "An energising multidisciplinary and bicultural framework in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people came together to achieve something that they each thought was important and meaningful" (Bradley et al., 2011 no pagination).

My research is also directed towards "The mutual transformation of coloniser and colonised" (Gandhi 1998, p. 132) and so has a dual purpose – that of promoting a positive self image for indigenous societies and for non-indigenous individuals to realise a more positive attitude towards indigenous paradigms. Co-creative interaction with indigenous groups and receptivity to indigenous values and practices by outside participants is crucial to the aim of this project to challenge the dominant approaches towards these cultures. To address this issue, it is crucial to maintain a moderated approach in order to reduce the impulse to represent subaltern groups in a way that effectively appropriates their voice and silences them (Spivak 1988). Smith's (1999) call for negotiation as part of the process of establishing trust in collaborative partnerships for indigenous research shows that commitment is crucial for crossing cultural horizons and it preempts the issues that are likely to arise. For example, collaboration includes the risk of perceived betrayal by the native community (Evers and Barre 2001). To counteract this, sensitivity and persistence is demanded for negotiating trust from the local partners.

Other specific ethical considerations during this research project included the responsibility towards sensitive representation; the awareness of the possibility of misrepresentation and the promotion of egalitarian relationships with research partners.

Smith (1999) recommended approaches to indigenous research that take into account traditional protocols of giving and accepting respect. In traditional societies in India, village disputes were settled by a council of elder persons who commanded respect because of their age, experience, character and economic status (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976). As the authority of male and female elders is still widely regarded within clans, their role as the transmitters of cultural and philosophical knowledge is recognised by their advisory role for this research. Inviting elders from the community to participate as cultural consultants on the project communicates respect for tradition and for their position as the keepers of traditional knowledge; this also reinforces the legitimacy of internal information sources (Waterfall and Maiter 2003) that can become eroded when external information from the media is projected as the only correct version.

Studies on cultural ownership show that community ownership of property was fundamental to traditional societies and that customary law existed to control access to inalienable basic resources (Posey and Dutfield 1996). In India where symbols are specific to a particular community, respect is customary towards the symbols of other communities. Where cultural symbols and rituals are referenced, contextualization is essential (Patterson and Karjala 2003). The imperative for acknowledging all contributors is also paramount for ethical collaboration. Stipulations for copies of photographs to be given, for indigenous collaborators, assistants, guides and informants to be included and provided with relevant training, and for researchers to undergo a cultural orientation programme, are also logical preconditions for indigenous collaborative enterprises. My pre-existing experience of collaboration with indigenous artists during the *Tallest Story Competition* production and for other work by the Adivasi Arts Trust indicated that expectations that indigenous people will initiate digital media research projects and decide priorities, methodologies and procedures are unrealistic, at present, in India.

2.2.9 Non-commercialization

The contentious situation whereby collective heritage becomes products of trade is frequently perceived as threatening the spirituality and dignity of collective heritage and has resulted in misappropriation or inappropriate use (Patterson and Karjala 2003).

Arguments relating to commercialization range from Root's (1996) allegation that all commodification of culture amounts to deterritorialisation, to Coleman's (2005) evaluation of indigenous concerns that commodification should take place on their own terms. The shift from 'spaces of exception' to the logic of capital accumulation (Frow cited by Gandhi 1998, p. 61) shows how capitalist rationality is propagated by the allure of a share of the centre (Spivak 1993). At present, this research is primarily targeted at indigenous audiences and is currently positioned within the non-commercial educational domain. However, the commercialization of indigenous animated film production may need to be reviewed in the future.

The recognition of the potential commercial value of animated material raises the issue of the ownership of animated films that are based on indigenous cultural content: for example the contract that was signed in 2006 by the Tinga Tinga Artists Cooperative Society (TACS) with the UK animation company Tiger Aspect for artwork created by a group of Tinga Tinga artists from Tanzania for the *Tinga Tinga Tales* (2010) animation series, was contentious as it allowed the company to copyright the Tinga Tinga brand (Kang'ong'oi 2011).

In India, indigenous collaborators would be advised to insist on provisions for Intellectual Property Rights and prior informed consent as a condition of their agreement to collaborate. In the case of the *Tales of the Tribes* animation films, the copyright of the series is maintained by the Adivasi Arts Trust: as a registered not-for-profit organization that represents its members, this ensures that the films are not commercially exploited by others and that any future profits are utilized towards sustaining the involvement of indigenous artists in future projects in accordance with the mandate of the Trust.

2.2.10 Reciprocity and Distribution

The basic moral imperative for reciprocity that is upheld by indigenous societies discussed by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) reinforces the commitment to share the research with the community during the process of production. It also establishes an obligation to dub films into vernacular languages for organized screening events, which bring the films back to the communities from where the stories originate. Expectations

are that the sustained contact with local artists and consultants during the *Tales of the Tribes* production will assist with arranging for dubbing local language versions of the films. Posey and Dutfield (1996) review the implications of publishing indigenous knowledge and bringing it into the public domain; so approval will always be sought from local collaborators before releasing publications associated with this research.

2.2.11 Self reflexivity

This practice-led research has switched continually between the fields of practice and scholarship and reflexive thought processes show that the combination of artistic practice and scholarship nurtures increased awareness of my influence on the interpretations and the influence of the collaborations on my practice. The realization of how far my own situation has affected the perception of the research process is illuminated by Gell's (1998) interpretation of consciousness as the 'homunculus' or interpreter lodged within. Atleo (cited by De Oliveira 2009) has discussed the difficulty of becoming culturally "self-conscious"; however, this concept was dubiously applied to delineate the difference and incompatibility between indigenous and non-indigenous ways of seeing. In essence, the practice of observation and introspection that is being used in the postcolonial framework of this research to challenge the positivist standpoint and develop empathetic sensitivity (Singh, 2000) is clearly different from the colonial habit of comparing oneself favourably with the other.

Self-deception arises when our own anxieties are projected onto the subject of study (Devereaux 1967). However the experience of insecurity is common to both the subject and the researcher. Ives (2004) and Friere (2008) illustrate this by describing how alienation, doubt and incomprehension occur during periods of major social change as is the current experiences reported from indigenous communities in India. Conversely, Johnson (cited by Robben and Sluka 2007) extends the concept of liminality to include the researcher. As an outsider located in an unfamiliar environment this creates distance from the zone of cultural comfort and yet I am not incorporated into the host culture, therefore, this project introduced the context for acculturation. In both instances, preconceptions are reduced through long term interaction and a foundation of trust is built on an approach of equality and humility and the insight by all

parties that the discovery process is mutual rather than a one-sided learning experience provided by “experts”.

Säid’s (1978, p. 332) observation that “Most people resist the underlying notion that human identity is not only not natural and stable, but constructed and occasionally even invented outright” is a reminder of the constant need to review the approach to my practice to identify and question assumptions and to accommodate contrasting approaches in the shift from assuming a dominant role to accommodating a more egalitarian relationship for participatory research. The honesty of rigorous self-criticism can also raise personal doubts about the validity of one’s work, which in turn presents opportunities to overcome feelings of personal inadequacy (Hobbs and May 1996). In essence, continuous reflection and re-evaluation improves the responsiveness of the research and the research situation.

2.2.12 Conclusion

This Contextual Review has made a brief study of the historical representation of indigenous identities in India up to the present time. The disempowerment caused by the absence of indigenous representation in the field of animation has been highlighted from the context of the contemporary animation industry in India. The review has also investigated how postcolonial theory provides theoretical underpinning for alternative modes of animation and participatory practice for communicating indigenous narratives to challenge dominant practices and empower marginalized communities. The next chapter shows how the workshop model is a practical method of carrying out the pre-production of animated films in collaboration with indigenous participants.

Chapter 3

Research and Practice Methods

This research was carried out as an industry-based Professional Doctorate (ProfD). Therefore as well as meeting the standard of academic enquiry, this research is also focused on adapting and building on the previous experience of the host company (West Highland Animation) to establish a method for representing indigenous cultural identities for the Indian context.

This chapter contains a detailed account of the methods used to engage in participatory film-making with indigenous young people in India to produce the collection of short animated films, *Tales of the Tribes*. It explains how the stories were selected for developing into the short films and how narrative theory was used in the process of adaptation to create scripts and storyboards, how the character designs referenced traditional artworks and how test animation sequences were used to explore techniques of experimental animation. The complementary roles of the artists and the technicians are also discussed. The animation practice has produced three completed short films and pre-production material for the series of five films that includes film scripts and visual designs that reflect the inputs from the groups of indigenous participants, researchers and resource people.

This research takes practices into account that are recommended for indigenous research, including establishing closeness between the researcher and the subject, as well as Smith's (1999) advocacy for participatory activities. Participation promotes a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the subject, and participatory film-making establishes the method for the practice, and for the research. Alia's (2010) argument that decision making by consensus and collective action has carried greater weight in traditional societies than individual accomplishment supported the choice of this method. This also meant that collective action to redefine animation production was as important as the outcome of films. The research is influenced by the model of the co-research situation of Participatory Action Research (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009) that establishes the researched as partners in the selection of the research topic, data

collection, and analysis (McIntyre 2007). However my experience suggests that the scope of this approach has yet to be recognised in the field of media development in the peripheral regions of India.

The initial field trips provided cultural orientation and established contacts with cultural practitioners and local organisations to enable more in depth research to be carried out in workshops. The focus in qualitative research is to produce rich data (Polkington 2005) and the workshop model was used to set up a participatory environment to study the receptivity of sample groups of indigenous young people to translating their cultural material into animation. The animation film-making practice provided opportunities to study indigenous representation in a co-creative setting, and in the process, mixed methods (Creswell 2003) were used to collect data in the form of responses from participants to the issues that arose.

The traditional qualitative research methods that were used draw on ethnographic methods to collect material to contribute to answering the questions of the research. Participant observation during the workshops provided a way to merge as much as possible with local participants to be able to record observations about the engagement of young people in cultural interpretation and the adaptation of their narratives and art forms for animation. The aim of this study to produce a collection of animated artefacts that incorporate the perspectives of those studied (Meadows 2009) encourages the media professional to initiate collaboration with indigenous communities to explore and develop media practices that empower indigenous perspectives. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were introduced during the last workshop as a systematic way of recording the responses from the participants and collaborative partners as first person accounts of experience (Polkington 2005).

3.1 The Choice of Setting

Presented with a vast potential resource of traditional indigenous narratives, fieldwork began with the task of identifying suitable case studies. The parallel aim to test the viability of adapting local artistic styles for the art design of the sample animation films resulted in a focus on Indian indigenous groups with distinctive, artistic traditions that

could accommodate modification for the animation medium. To begin, *Best of the Best* (2006) illustrated below, had been voted as the most popular story in the preceding *The Tallest Story Competition* (2006) animation programme, and firm contacts with the team of Pardhan Gond artists that had created the artwork for the film made these artists with their previous experience and the proven popularity of their artwork a rational choice for an indigenous animation project based in India.

Picture 12: A screenshot from Best of the Best, 2006

The Naga tribes and the indigenous Lepcha community of Sikkim exemplified two more ethnic groups that are associated with particular characteristic traditional figurative art forms - sculpture and painting respectively, see pictures 13 and 14. In addition, existing contacts in these locations indicated their interest and their potential as local support.

Picture 13: A Konyak woodcarving of a tiger in a morung in Mon, 2009

Picture 14: A student of Thangka painting at the Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft, Gangtok, 2010

Research had identified the presence of over 30 diverse ethnic groups in Manipur (Tribal Research Institute 2012). The interaction with a small group of artists and media professionals from Manipur during an Animation Workshop held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) in Delhi in 2008 became the catalyst for a focused drive on their part to engage in the new project.

Research by Elwin as an Advisor on Tribal Affairs to the Governor of Assam in Arunachal Pradesh that culminated in the publication of *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957) was influential for establishing an approach of preservation of the indigenous belief system. This made Arunachal Pradesh a strong choice over other states where conversion to dominant religions has influenced representation. Furthermore, two volumes by Elwin, *Myths of the Northeast Frontier* (1958) and *A New Book of Tribal Fiction* (1970) promised a confirmed source for the rich heritage of folk narratives from the region.

Existing connections with these particular groups made them likely case studies to allow for the investigation of a range of ethnic backgrounds. Picture 15 shows the location of the North East states represented in the *Tales of the Tribes*. The support that was offered by the State Governments of Nagaland and Manipur provided credibility, venues for the respective workshops, infrastructural support and access to Government institutions and offices, including the facilitation of permits to visit restricted areas.

Picture 15: A map of the North East region of India, showing the areas of this research

The National Institute of Design extended support for the adaptation of the Gond story, *Manjoor Jhali* for the collection, by facilitating a three week long experimental animation workshop for post graduate students of Animation Film Design, and three

Pardhan Gond artists were invited as cultural consultants and artistic directors. (The letter of invitation for the Gond artists is included as appendix 2).

The most developed case study of the workshop model was exemplified by the last workshop of the series of five, in Arunachal Pradesh. The workshop was held at the Department of Mass Communications at Rajiv Gandhi University, in collaboration with the Centre for Cultural Research and Documentation: the benefits of partnering with an educational institution located in the town centre provided fundamental requirements that included qualified staff and participants, a power backup supply and the legitimacy of association with the Government that encouraged wider local participation.

3.2 The Participants

This study had male and female indigenous people from the North East and Central India from the age groups of 18-40 as workshop participants, animation students and media professionals as resource people, local cultural practitioners as consultants and children aged between 8-14 years from indigenous and non-indigenous origins as the target audience for the films. The number of workshop participants varied per workshop, on average there were about 15 regular attendees at each event. The decision on the age range for the workshop participants was informed by:

1) The impetus to introduce new options to young people on the presumption that they would be receptive to acquiring at least the basic technological skills required for animation.

2) The notion that participants that had yet to secure employment would be the most flexible with regard to the time commitment required for full time workshop engagement.

3) The idea that a level of maturity was required to sustain the extended engagement in the animation process that would contribute to an outcome to satisfy target audiences.

Telo (2013) has stipulated that enrollment in participatory film-making should be unrestrictive and that practitioners should self-select. In the case of these workshops

there was no specific requirement for the participants to have prior experience in animation: what was more important was their readiness to take part. The participants for each of the workshops were sourced by local partner organisations, on the basis of newspaper and television advertisements (Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland) and through institutional contacts with students (Arunachal Pradesh, Gond).

In the case study of Arunachal Pradesh, most of the participating young people were full-time MA students of Mass Communications at the Rajiv Gandhi University. The advanced level of education meant that participants were fluent in English and confident contributors in discussions, but not linguistically representative of the larger population. Less than half of the participants were female, and yet this ratio was higher than in any of the previous workshops. My analysis of the reason for the gender imbalance is that local assumptions were that the workshops were directed towards computer based animation – which further suggested that the digital space continues to be male dominated (Leaf cited by Ajanović 2002).

It was decided that the interviewees for the three focus group discussions would be sourced from the group of workshop participants. This decision was founded on the logic that the practical sessions would promote receptivity to deliberation about the issues of representation in connection with the medium of animation. With the decline in the number of participants over the duration of the workshop, volunteers for the last focus group were chosen according to availability.

3.3 Workshop Practice

The workshop model establishes a method for collaborative research practice that focuses on the primacy of experience over theory (Chabrán 1990). This is in keeping with indigenous ideologies and ways of learning (Mel 2001). A study about using animation as an educational tool locates the visual impact of the animation as secondary to the content (Lowe 2001). This implies that in developing films based on indigenous cultures, the focus should be on the quality of the content over what has been described by Darley (2000, p.103) as the business of ‘astonishing the senses’ through which technique and image prevail over content and meaning. By these criteria, the Animation Workshop model provides the best environment for developing indigenous content for

films and also reflects the social function of storytelling as a community activity, especially if it can include intergenerational dialogue to help deconstruct obscure meanings. By focusing on the process in the Animation Workshops two stories were produced - that of the artefact, and that of the making of the artefact.

The workshops organised by West Highland Animation in Scotland and Quick Draw Animation for the *Aboriginal Youth Animation Project* (AYAP) in Canada, are two examples of how this method was applied to engage young people in their own cultures through the medium of animation. As the participants were of a younger age group in the former case, the planning phase of pre-production was limited to the making of the storyboard, where story issues were decided and the main emphasis was on the production phase. In the latter case, the focus was on enhancing the employment, creative, personal, and social skill sets of the young indigenous participants from within the context of traditional values, culture, language and identity. However, at 25 weeks, the AYAP employment-training program was considerably longer than the three week time period allotted for each of the *Tales of the Tribes* workshops.

A series of five Animation Workshops were organised for this research in five regional locations: Nagaland (2009), Sikkim (2010), Manipur (2012), Ahmedabad for the Gond film (2012) and Arunachal Pradesh (2013). Three weeks duration was considered the optimum time to engage volunteers who were required to take time off from their regular activities to attend the workshops.

The workshops had the primary objective of establishing a collaborative environment to develop a collection of short animated films with local community involvement. As the workshops also aimed at empowering local artists by providing an introduction to the animation film-making process, it was logical to engage the participants in the practical experience of the initial pre-production process of animation: the selection of a popular folktale to adapt for a short film, and the adaptation for a script and storyboard, the creation of character and background designs and some experimentation by creating test animation sequences to determine the appropriate techniques to use.

Having studied animation at West Surry College of Art and Design in 1993, the decision was made that I would introduce the participants to storytelling through audio-visual media using the same teaching methods - that of starting with pre-production. The question of the appropriate level of guidance in the workshops was negotiated in an attempt to locate a synthesis between teaching and encouraging experimentation. The experimental approach to animation practice had been introduced as a form of artistic self-expression at Harvard in 1968, and according to Caroline Leaf (cited by Schenkel 1976), the class had been open to all. Drawing abilities and film knowledge were not prerequisites and there was very little formal teaching: the main goal was to create movement. Leaf (cited by Ajanović 2002) credits her own creativity to the fact that the students were largely left alone to find their own solutions. A more structured approach is compatible with conventional traditions of guru-shishya parampara (Kashalkar-Karve 2013) apprenticeship in India. Interestingly, the contrasting approaches to learning in different cultures has also been discussed by Mel (1990) in relation to the trend in Melanesian culture for knowledge to be given or provided by an external source, in contrast to how the Western learner focuses on the individual to create knowledge. Hence, the decision to include introductory lessons in the specialized processes of animation in contrast to the method of non-interference that Worth and Adair (1975 cited by Buchtmann 2000) implemented with the Navajo groups that they worked with.

As the aim was also to produce films of a professional standard of production, at least two Indian animation students or recent graduates were invited to each workshop as a resource team. The participation by animators has functioned to accomplish the practical targets of the animation pre-production. Their participation also provided cultural exposure and work experience to the animators as part of the objective of this research to raise awareness of the value of indigenous culture with non-indigenous people; it was also evidently inspiring for the young participants to work with technically skilled artists of their own age group and this contributed to their level of engagement in the participatory practices. The exchange of ideas, skills and exposure through the co-creative process in a learning environment also fulfills the traditional value of reciprocity (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991). Consequently, the daily programme for the workshops was designed to encourage reciprocal learning between the participants, researchers and animators (Rossou 2009), and to achieve a synthesis

between cultural research and the practical applications of pre-production, engagement by animators and contributions from local participants.

The fact that the workshops also provided the environment for studying the participation by young people and the issues of representing indigenous cultures through the medium of animation also connected with a directive that had been cited by Smith (1999) for approaches to community projects that place emphasis on the process. The workshop activities generated data in the form of photographs, artwork, audio recordings, video documentation and animation. These materials presented opportunities for participants to share their reality in visually captivating ways and it provided material for discussion on the findings. A daily report was also uploaded onto a dedicated blog for each of the workshops to enable supporters to follow the workshop activities. This online data-base in a digitized format is available as appendix 5.

3.4 The Pre-Production

Pre-production in animation film-making is a methodical step by step procedure that has been well defined by instructive literature on animation, for example, the volumes by Noake (1988), Winder and Dowlatabadi (2011) and Beiman (2012). In the workshops, the process that initiated with the re-enactment of the role of the narrative practitioner by participants in storytelling sessions, established a rapport between the animators and the participants. As the imperative was to select one story to develop into a sample animation film during each workshop, the shortlisted stories were pitched by the participants, and a vote by the participants was organised to facilitate the decision making process: the factors that influenced the choice of story included appropriate sentiment (Sikkim) strongly identifiable characters (Pardhan Gond, Arunachal Pradesh) and action and the potential for humour (Manipur). This democratic method of story selection was appreciated by the participants who contributed to discussions on the pros and cons of each story as material for a film.

The documentation of folktales in Nagaland during the field research and workshop for this project produced an archive of stories in addition to the one that was chosen for the animated film. In 2012, I made arrangements with a prominent local artist

in Nagaland for him to conduct an Illustration Workshop with students of Stella Secondary School in Kohima. The outcome, a multilingual book published by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) entitled *Tales of the Tribes: Folklore from Nagaland* (2013), is an example of another way that local young people can contribute to the representation of their cultures: 80% of the published copies were bought by the Government of Nagaland for distribution in schools in the state (INTACH, personal communication 2015).

Oral narratives that served specific social functions within particular cultural contexts arguably facilitate translation to accommodate new media and new audiences. In response to the participants' ambitions to communicate their culture to audiences located beyond their own community, the narrative language of film theory was introduced in the film-making process to provide a reference point for moving from one context to another. This implied a focus on developing the main characters and mapping a linear narrative based on the three act structure that most audiences now expect, through a step by step process of adaptation from the original text for an animation film script, which was used to determine the storyboard to map the sequence of shots and establish connections between the shots, characters and plot development: The script and storyboard for the Gond animation film are included as appendices 3 and 4 as samples of this pre-production material.

3.5 Narrative Structure

Campbell's (2003) study of mythological archetypes has shown that the character roles that appear in traditional narratives share universal communalities, irrespective of cultural divergence and geographical distance. Narrative structures and those underlying the structure of Russian folktales in particular, were previously identified by Propp (1928). These include a clear protagonist, an interdiction at the beginning, a goal, an antagonist, a punishment of a villain at the end and a form of closure. Although tribal folktales often do not follow a uniform plot progression, Propp's (1928) narrative structure provides a good reference when deciding how to adapt a story for an animation film script. A useful definition of narrative structure is also contributed by Wells:

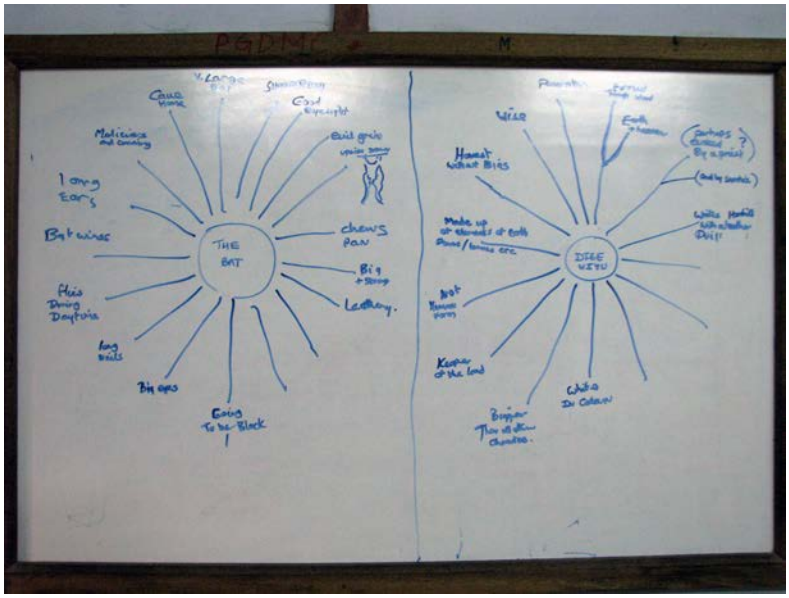
> "The idea of a story may be understood as a sequence of events taking place over a particular period of time. These narrative events are informed by a chain of causes and effects, both subtle and explicit, the ultimate outcome of which is a specific moment of resolution." (Wells 1998, p.68)

Film theory describes in detail how an oral story can be translated into a film script using narrative conventions that have been developed to convey a story in a coherent manner. The most popular and widely used of these narrative structures is the three-act structure – i.e. setup, conflict, and resolution (Field 2006). It is during the pre-production process that the oral story is 'deconstructed' and reconstructed as a script for animation. In addition, a storyboard of the film that illustrates the specific mis-en-scene of the image and the requirements of the camera (Noake 1988) and the recording of a (verbal) soundtrack, make the preparation of a timed animatic possible.

Wells has shown that the formal properties of the animated cartoon remain consistent across genres, and that shared visual conventions deploy establishing shots, medium shots and close-ups, and commitment to action and key dialogues. Content is prioritized around "constructing characters, determining comic moments and evolving the self contained narrative" (1998, p.39). In the case of adapting tribal stories, this process is mostly one of simplification helping focus on the main characters and actions of the story. However, although the conventions of orthodox animated prose are referred to in the pre-production, a commitment always exists to maintain the comprehensive integrity of the story.

Sabnani (2005) has shown that unless the translation of an oral text into a visual medium is skillfully done, it will be static. As narrative film language is a standard element of animation studies (NFTS 2014), it was a contribution that the animators brought to the participatory film- making process. Callus (2012) has observed the precarious balance between cultural specificity and Western contribution that is cautionary against the ethnocentric view that work by indigenous people only has legitimacy if it fits a Western framework and has value for the dominant non-indigenous culture. Therefore, if it is not possible to reduce the story to a simple narrative structure, without compromising the integrity of the original story, then mainstream audiences can be supported by additional textural and video documentation.

The design of the research was adaptive, and it entailed a process of trial and refinement. Lassiter's (2008) method of collaborative ethnography that incorporated commentary from consultants in the text supported the invitation of local cultural practitioners that was essential for decisions on how to proceed with adaptation. As a consequence, during the initial phase, considerable time was applied to the deconstruction of the narratives within the group to identify the cultural nuances, examine the meaning of the story and negotiate appropriate representation.



Picture 16: Mind mapping exercise in the Animation Workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, 2013

Mind mapping exercises were also introduced in the workshops to generate ideas from the entire team; subjects approached using this technique included indigenous ideologies and character development for the films (see picture 16). The scripts and storyboards were completed by the animation resource teams who were already familiar with the process. The progress of the storyboarding was discussed regularly with the participants, who were assigned the task of character design with reference to their local stylistic traditions.

Telo (2013) warned that many film-making projects that claim to be participatory are not. In each of these studies the extent and direction of the participation varied. To maximize participation, the strengths of the participants were taken into account: for example, where there were confident artists in the group, their contribution was focused

on designing and creating artwork, as was the case in Sikkim, Manipur and with the involvement of the Gond artists. The participants in Arunachal Pradesh that had no prior experience in the specialized technical processes of producing animation, showed the most confidence in negotiation and debate during discussions.

3.6 The Adaptation of Traditional Artistic Practice

Local artists were invited to participate in the workshops to explore ways of incorporating traditional practices to communicate distinctive cultural identities in the films. Research on the local indigenous cultures that included group visits to public and private collections, archives and libraries was also integral to the workshops to focus the visiting resource team and to identify content for the films. For all the films, local music, folk songs and dialogues recorded in vernacular languages have been integrated to enhance the specific cultural identities.

The workshops also included daily film screenings of existing experimental animated films by Ishu Patel, Caroline Leaf, Norman McLaren, Jan Svankmajer and Barry Purves, and other short animated films by independent studios and other minority communities. These screenings were designed to contribute integrated exposure to animation narrative, styles and techniques, and to demonstrate how animation has been utilized as an artistic tool.

It was important to identify the technique that would provide the most appropriate method of animation for each film, depending on the style of artwork, as this would simplify the process and it would preserve the integrity of the art. For example, techniques of 2D animation were suitable for communities that had traditions of painting and drawing; those that had traditions of sculpture or other handicraft could also accommodate 3D animation. For each case study, the film screenings were also focused on the technique that was considered to be the most appropriate method for the particular film: cut-out animation was presented as the most practical technique for the Gond film, stop-motion was better suited for the film from Arunachal Pradesh, representative of communities where traditional artistic practices consist of craft based

activities such as weaving, bamboo work and the handmade production of utilitarian objects.

Experimentation with handling various materials was an important component to develop confidence and originality, though this was limited by time constraints and the pressure to achieve pre-production targets. For the Gond story, the experimentation with cut-out puppets was inspired by Norstein's films: the animation students and artists designed characters with separate body parts that could be manipulated; this process showed how the technique accommodates the intricate Gond style of patterning on the character designs as illustrated in pictures 17 and 18.

Picture 17: Character design by Rajendra Shyam, from the Gond Animation

Picture 18: Experimentation with a 2D cut-out puppet of the peacock design by Rajendra Shyam, 2012

Another example of the experimentation that took place in the workshops is available in the title sequence that explored the sun-moon iconography of the Doini-Polo faith that was created by the participants from Arunachal Pradesh using beads as objects for animation, following the technique that was explored in Ishu Patel's film, *The Bead Game* (1977), (see picture 19). This exercise in experimentation served two functions: it demonstrated what was possible with the materials and it also delighted the participants to see for themselves how animation works.

Picture 19: Workshop participants experiment with animating beads in the Animation Workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, 2013

Computer generated 3D animation was the technique used to create and manipulate characters designed with reference to wooden sculptures for the film *Man Tiger Spirit*, see pictures 20 and 21. The technique of basing CGI character designs on traditional sculptures had also been used by *Raven Tales* director Simon James whose designs for the visual style of the animated characters were inspired by Haida and the Kwakwaka''wakw traditional masks (Hearne 2012). However, the link between experimental animation and sculpture identified by Wells (1998) was further explored in workshop experiments of combining different modes of animation to add textural and material variety.

Picture 20: A Naga sculpture from the British Museum collection that was used as design for the animation character, 2010

Picture 21: The main characters for the film Man Tiger Spirit, 2011

Stop-motion was incorporated into two scenes of this film to test the effectiveness of using mixed media and to increase the involvement of local participants that did not have high-end 3D software experience. For example, the title sequence for the film was made with cowrie shells (used locally as traditional embellishments to textiles, jewelry and other accessories) and animated in incremental movements captured in single frames by a novice workshop participant with assistance from an Indian student animator, see picture 22.

Picture 22: Animating a title sequence for Man Tiger Spirit, using cowrie shells, 2011

Picture 23: Animating a sequence for Man Tiger Spirit using sand as a medium, 2011

A second stand-alone sequence was created using animated sand, in reference to Caroline Leaf's film, *The Owl who Married a Goose* (1977), see picture 23. The use of mixed media further separated the films produced from the unity of style that is characteristic of orthodox cartoons (Wells 1998). The use of handmade rather than computer animation techniques is more intuitive and therefore easier for novice animators than software based animation. They also work better to create a stronger connection between animation and traditional artistic practices.

In the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh mind mapping exercises were used to define Abotani's character and his physical appearance as typical of the region yet stronger, fitter and more handsome than his brother. We referenced traditional depictions identified in studies of wood carvings by the Naga tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to create the design features of the characters of the film, see pictures 24 and 25. Since there was very little information available about the physical appearance of Dige Wiyu, it was agreed in the workshop that this character could be represented by a design inspired by a striking Wancho woodcarving of a head-hunter's symbolic ornament depicting a single head connected to a hand. These were the two elements that were critical to achieving the actions that the character would be required to perform in the film. The patterns and colouring of the wings of Tapen the Bat were influenced by Wancho textile designs.

Picture 24: A Wancho sculpture from the JN Museum collection, Itanagar, as the design for Tapen the Bat, in Abotani, 2013.

Picture 25: The animation model for Tapen the Bat under construction in the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, 2013.

Picture 26: The stop-motion character models made by Jonathan Marchant for the Abotani film, 2013

The handcrafting of articulated models that are robust enough to be able to stand a great deal of handling over several weeks during the stop-motion animation production is a specialized process, and literature is available (for example, the book by Shaw 2008) to provide access to the techniques. The character models for this animated film were constructed by British artist and animation puppet-maker Jonathan Marchant, based on the designs that emerged from research during the Animation Workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, (see picture 26). A blog was maintained during the model making phase to enable the collaborators in India to follow the progress.

3.7 Project Management and the Production of the Films

It was my responsibility to manage the project and this entailed identifying local partner organisations, applying for funding and managing the schedule of the pre-production, production and post-production of the films.

Local collaborators in the community sourced participants and cultural and linguistic expertise for the activity, and in this study it was my responsibility to submit the proposals for the workshops. As workshop coordinator, I was challenged by complex interpersonal relationships that required constant negotiation. The review of literature showed that negotiation is perceived as crucial to indigenous research (Smith 1999). I was required to constantly observe, evaluate and improve my teaching practice to suit the circumstances and to sustain a positive learning environment. Training for facilitators and participants is recommended to promote self-awareness and to gain the political, intellectual and data management skills required for participative research (Marshall and Batten 2004; Rossou 2009), and although such training was not undertaken in this research that took place under circumstances that meant I had to improvise on the spot, training should be provided for in future workshops as this will credibly optimize the participatory experience across the entire team.

At the end of the workshops the films were ready for production. This phase was anticipated to take approximately six months for each film, at a timescale suitable for student animators. This research is focused on the development phase of the animation process in collaboration with local communities. However, the production and post-production also needed to be managed to be able to deliver completed films for screenings to determine the range of responses from audiences.

The film production of the *Tales of the Tribes* series is currently being accomplished through non-commercial methods and experimentation with a variety of production models that have been determined by the availability of resources and have demonstrated an ascending scale of indigenous involvement, and this is detailed in the next chapter on the Findings and Discussion. Two undergraduate students of Animation Film Design at the National Institute of Design created the animation for the *Abotani*

film in a workshop organised in Delhi, in collaboration with Lalit Kala Akademi, in early 2014. The key details of the technical process are summarized:

- 24 frames per second were recorded from a digital still camera mounted on a tripod using a laptop computer and single frame capture software.

- A perforated ground plane enabled the character models to be firmly secured to be able to achieve the required action poses.

- The characters and foreground props were filmed against a 'blue screen', to be removed in post-production and replaced with hand painted watercolour scenic mountainous backgrounds suggestive of the landscape of Arunachal Pradesh.

- Rigs to enable characters to fly or float in the air were also designed to be removed in the post-production.

The success of my negotiated collaborative relationship with the young animators for the story from Arunachal Pradesh is evident from their self-nominated engagement for the production of the remaining film in the collection. The Pardhan Gond story, *Manjoor Jhali* is currently in the last phase of production, and it is expected that the credit as directors as well as animators in the production will provide them with the necessary experience they can use for future initiatives to represent indigenous content through the audio visual medium.

This first section has outlined the methods of practice used to extend participation and to make the films. The section that follows discusses the qualitative research methods that were used to answer the questions of the research.

3.8 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a fundamental method for anthropological data collection, and Malinowski's (1922) field work is an early assertion about its value that demonstrates how human reality cannot be fully represented by any single theory alone. Stocking (1983) has further emphasized participation as a way to reduce the inherent power

relations of the research relationship and in this research, my participation in daily events established familiarity and comfort with individuals at the research locations.

Participant observation was also the method that Elwin used to accomplish extensive documentation of indigenous cultures and narratives in India. His approach to participant observation had been to settle down amongst the people he studied and to share their life as far as an outsider could, and as Munshi (2005, p.29) observed, this gave his writing a special poignancy "that most anthropologists in India do not possess." Elwin's example shows that distance from the comfort zone in which the *habitus* was formed challenges habituated viewpoints with opportunities for personal adjustment by the researcher to the new frame of reference to prompt receptivity to unexpected insights (Bourdieu 1977), and this has been important in my research for contextualizing narratives identified from literary sources.

Because participant observation helped me to fit in and become acculturated it was suited for this research context. This method connects to human experiences to produce contextual insights on actions, thoughts, personal rituals and routines, provoking empathy towards the research subjects (Kawulich 2005). I utilized most opportunities that were presented to observe the local customs and the impact of cultural change in the areas selected for my field research. As the focus was on establishing relationships for collaboration with the people I came into contact with, sustained participation and observation had more significance than the number of people that were subject to my observations.

It was critical to observe the engagement of the young workshop participants in participatory film-making to study how animation could be used to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices. The workshops provided opportunities to discover and analyse subconscious aspects of social experience (Martínez 2012) as well as situations to ask questions to uncover meanings that resulted in notes and audio and visual recordings. The vast diversity of languages and dialects in North East India meant that I had to depend on local guides and mentors as interpreters and translators, and I was aware that they might also introduce their own biases. However, having lived in India for many years, I did have some cultural knowledge and this advised the interpretations.

Participant observation was more appropriate to accomplish the dual objective of making animated films that required technical inputs from trained animators and media professionals, than direct observation that does not require any interaction between the observer and those being studied. Participant observation was also a method that stimulated sensitization and contextualized interpretations for the visiting animators. The workshops entailed complex interactions with each other, with the participants, with the tools of the animation medium and with the physical environment, and the mutual absorption in a joint project arguably worked to moderate perceived cultural barriers. However, the main disadvantage of participant observation was the required time commitment for deep immersion (Martínez 2012) and in this research, time constraints and logistic factors limited the implementation of Elwin's long term commitment.

Using the method of participant observation, I recorded every step of the artistic process in the form of notes and audio and video documentation, from conceptualization to the assembly of the animatic, which provided the blueprint for the next phase of animation production. I have also edited two compilations from the audio visual documentation recorded during the workshops for the *Abotani* film from Arunachal Pradesh as documentaries to illustrate the workshop procedure and the issues that arose, and these are available as appendices 6 and 7. These films are not intended for public dissemination and the production quality is not of a broadcast standard. The animation students at the National Institute of Design also produced their own documentary film on the adaptation of the story for the *Manjoor Jhali* film. As decisions of what to include in this document were made by them, the short film that is included as appendix 8 captures their interpretations and priorities concerning the topics and issues.

3.9 Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Literature on data collection suggested group interviewing as the most productive method to record responses (Loftland et al. 2006), with the advantage of allowing more time for participants to reflect and recall experiences and providing contrasting perspectives. Within this research, focus groups set the occasion for 'retrospective introspection' and for participants to articulate normative assumptions (Bloor et al. 2001, p5). As it is a favoured method for delivering impressions and opinions over

facts and figures, the discussions and interviews recorded feedback from the participants about their engagement in the participatory practices for analysis on how they had reconnected with their narrative heritage.

The method was first used during the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, and drew on Krueger's guidelines for organizing focus groups. As Seidman (1991) has suggested that a sequence of three interviews is more likely to produce accounts of sufficient depth and breadth, three focus group discussions were organised as a systematic method of recording the multiple perspectives of the participants in Arunachal Pradesh, with two sessions held at the beginning of the workshop, and one at the end.

It was my responsibility to convene, conduct and record the focus groups and on average there were six participants in each of the groups. The focus groups that took place at the workshop premises in the Department of Mass Communications, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, lasted for approximately an hour each. Despite initial concerns that the focus groups would establish distance from the workshop activity and reinforce the formal relationship between the researcher and the participants, the participants were eager to volunteer for the discussions and they enjoyed the opportunity to share their views. This response matches Telo's (2013) identification of the desire to materialize interest and produce content whether or not it was part of the final product – the film. In this case, the input from participants has been taken into account.

In each case it was explained that the purpose of the group discussion was to learn about indigenous culture and of the expectations of the participants about the animation project. The participants were informed that audio recordings would be made and that the reports would not be disseminated beyond the research team. With awareness that English is not the lingua franca in the state, the questions for the focus groups were open-ended (Creswell 2003) and phrased for simplicity and awareness of the risk of confirmation bias; the questions developed by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) as a guide for debriefing were also studied prior to the interviews.

An identical set of questions that were asked of the first two groups aimed to disclose the current exposure to traditional storytelling and to popular animation, to

determine the participants' connection to their own heritage, their expectations of the animation medium and their level of comfort with regard to adaptation. The objective of posing repeated questions to two separate groups of participants was to increase the sampling and record a wider range of responses. The third focus group discussion aimed to record the variations of reactions towards choices that had been made in the workshop about the story, to verify the participants' interpretation of events and to find out how the workshop had compared with their expectations. The method of focus groups was repeated during the production phase to record the feedback from the animators.

Interviewing is a first-hand method of recording information from professionals. A face-to-face semi-structured interview was recorded with one of the local collaborators of the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh to gather feedback on the issues raised; another interview was recorded with the coordinator of the Animation Film Design course at the National Institute of Design to obtain a wider perspective on the current environment for animation and the opportunities for young Indian animators. In addition several informal discussions with select cultural consultants were documented by taking notes.

Fielding (1949) proposed that participants are more favourable to interviewers who are similar to themselves. Although my background was different to that of the interviewees in each case, the fact that I had already established a rapport and outlined the reason for the interviews with the participants beforehand, was reflected in the cooperation and the willingness to talk about the topics of discussion. The interviews were held in private and questions were open-ended so that the participants were encouraged to reflect on their perceptions (Whiting 2008). All the participants of the focus groups interviews are referred to by pseudonyms in this research to protect their identity. However, where the identity of consultants conveys their authority, their permission has been sought to use their real names.

3.10 Interpreting the Material

The first step of the qualitative analysis of the participants' views in relation to the research questions was to transcribe the recordings verbatim, and then to break the transcriptions down into sections and examine the text closely (Khandkar 2009). Polkinghorne (2005) has elaborated that once the focus group interviews have been transcribed, reoccurring themes began to emerge: in this case, each key concept in a sentence was highlighted for further examination.

The topics that were identified were significant for framing a picture of the influence of exposure to commercial animation, whether the participants experienced any sense of cultural loss and subsequent need to reconnect with their culture, the influence of participation in the workshop, their awareness of the implications of adaptation, as well as issues of wider concern, commitments and experiences. The interviews and discussions with cultural consultants disclosed information about the local political environments and the responses to the work.

To some extent, respondent validation (Bryman 1988) through which participants and partners are asked for feedback on the validity of the description, interpretation and evaluation was carried out through email communication prior to the publications that have resulted from the research, to check that the findings and impressions were congruent with their views. The fact these documents were returned with suggestions for minor technical corrections and the lack of any objection to their publication indicated that they had received approval. However, this procedure also allows for the possibility that participants felt obliged to reflect back what they think the researcher wants to be told (Chambers 1997).

The Limitations of the Methods

The methods that have been used to collect, organise and analyse the materials have presented particular limitations. The limitation of participant observation, focus groups and interviews is that the small-scale studies carried out with select groups of

participants cannot be assumed to be representative of other social groups or of societies. In addition, the commitment to retain fidelity to the subjects' viewpoint is compromised when the researcher is not always able to recognise everything that is important to their subjects (Bryman 1988).

Particular ethical issues were presented with the choice of institutional associations and venues for the workshops. The workshop participants interacted as naturally as possible within the formal educational environment and the hierarchies of this environment. However, I also acknowledge that the formal setting of the interviews may have altered the behaviour of participants. For example, the environment may have detracted from the spontaneity of the responses and the participants are likely to have felt restricted with regard to overt criticism of the system that had provided for their involvement.

Additional limitations were the impracticality of implementing pretesting or control groups and questionnaires that did not yield sufficient evidence of the commitment to investigate the core concepts of representation. For example, when questionnaires were circulated in Manipur, this method proved to be unsuccessful because the participants were unfamiliar with writing in English and often did not return questionnaires. Those that were returned tended to convey what participants considered was appropriate, rather than what they really thought.

In conclusion, the field research trips and the workshops have provided indications of the current trends, but to present a comprehensive study of the ramifications, the duration of the study would need to be extended to accommodate adjustments to the workshop process, to monitor the influence and extend the exposure to experimental animation films and to encourage active participation and reflection. The workshop practice provided for the first phase of development and adaptation for animation film, but the logistics for sustained localized animation production by indigenous artists has yet to be established. To anticipate the production and completion of animated films by indigenous artists, extended timescales are required to accommodate sustained exposure to technical processes and the range of software that is now considered as standard to produce animated films.

3.12 Ethical Considerations and Self-reflexivity

This research secured approval through the Online Ethics Checklist introduced by Bournemouth University to review research ethics. This was a straightforward process as the research neither involved specifically vulnerable participants nor did the discussions focus on any topics that were considered to be off limits. The participants of this study consented to take part: no financial or other inducements were offered to participants, and the research was not supported by any organisations, companies or individuals that have stipulated either the propagation of agenda or demands for commercialization.

Participants were informed orally of the purpose of the research and of the confidentiality of the information prior to the supervision and recording of interviews and focus group discussions. Formal consent forms were not used because they have been shown to arouse reactions of unease (Bryman 2008). The audio visual material collected constitutes a dialogue about the content of the animated films that were developed. Where documentation is shared publicly, consent has been sought and objections to online dissemination have been taken into account and acted upon.

I participated fully as a practitioner with the groups of participants, but made it clear that I was also undertaking research. The fact that I was clearly an outsider and did not have the same characteristics as the group prevented any chance of blending in seamlessly, and overt participation provided a comprehensive perspective suitable to the context of this research (Babbie 2001).

Ethical considerations are also critical to the proposal to introduce a dominant form of communication for indigenous people who have been marginalized by overbearing representations of power. My role as a 'guide' to the adaptation with reference to the language of narrative animation was necessary because a lack of a definition about what had to be done next would have contributed to a general feeling of uncertainty and indecisiveness in the novice groups (Babbie 2001). However, the assumed professional stance entailed the responsibility of repeated re-evaluation to

monitor my awareness of the personal challenges of learning how to learn, how to change, how to organise and how to act. For example, I maintain a personal commitment towards avoiding the replication of pervasive educational techniques of one way transmittance to passive students and tendencies towards standardization (Chambers 1997).

The recognition of the potential for personal transformative potential is fundamental to this research. Reason (1994b) has shown that many Participant Action Research projects are the initiative of a member of a privileged and educated group. In this context, the caution he has advised against the dangers of inflated egos is relevant to my position in this research, and this reinforces the significance of reflexive processes to reduce this impulse. Principles of ethical behaviour are commonly taken for granted. However, because this research is founded on recognising the long term effects that dominating attitudes have had on indigenous people in India, it was of primary importance to recognise how self-deception can be insidious and unconscious so that latent attitudes of dominance can be uncovered, and particular habituated reactions can be monitored and reduced. For example, tendencies that were challenged included blaming local partners and participants (Chambers 1997) and making overarching assumptions that one's own view is extendible to collaborators located at the periphery, when in fact situations are shown to be characterized by multiple views (Dirlik 1994). Therefore, this research has presented opportunities to review and adjust my approach in the attempt to align more accurately with the local paradigms and needs.

Reflective practices are vital to the researcher, interpreter, coordinator and guide to enable a review of one's presentation towards an approach of activism (Maxey 1999) to reduce the power imbalance (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009). For example, reflection provided insights on how the dimensions of dominance can be communicated by words chosen to impress and mystify, and by interruption, monopolized conversations and lecturing (Chambers 1997). I have therefore been aware of the need to develop and sustain approaches of humility, broad-mindedness and impartiality.

I am also aware that the use of English has been associated worldwide with mass consumer culture (Featherstone 1995, Chambers 1997). However, my lack of knowledge of any of the diverse local languages and my limited fluency in Hindi meant

that the workshops were conducted in English as the primary language for communication with participants, who mostly had a background of English medium education; in addition, where necessary, local collaborators with exemplary fluency in English acted as interpreters for both participants and researchers.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

My research set out to explore whether animation could be used to reconnect the young generation with their narratives to sustain the stories for the younger generations, and how the adaptation of traditional folk narratives to animation could be carried out in India in collaboration with indigenous artists. The collaborative process that was carried out during the workshops and the effectiveness of the representation that is achieved in the *Tales of the Tribes* films is examined in detail in this chapter. The workshop process produced two categories of materials: firstly the pre-production scripts, storyboards, character designs and audio and video recordings which contributed to the five completed animated films, and secondly the transcriptions of recordings from focus group discussions and interviews.

The scope of this chapter is to identify and discuss the main findings gleaned from the animation film-making practice and from the documented responses to the issues of representation that were recorded in focus group discussions with participants and interviews with our local institutional partner and consultants.

The pre-production materials listed above show just how the stories and traditional art forms were adapted, and how input from local participants was incorporated into the films. The transcriptions document how the participants have contributed to the film-making process and the overall research design of collaboration, empowerment and participation.

In the focus group discussions, the participants identified two reasons for adapting indigenous folktales into animation films:

- To sustain indigenous storytelling for the young generations.

- To raise awareness of the value of indigenous culture in mainstream society with the long term aim of contributing to the reduction of discrimination against indigenous people that continues to be reported throughout Indian culture.

Participatory practice by indigenous young people presented a way to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices and to communicate authentic cultural details for local audiences. Participation by trained animators provided the way to produced films of a high enough standard to be suitable for screening to contemporary young audiences elsewhere and in particular in the developed world.

These two issues will be examined firstly in the discussion of the findings.

4.1 Connecting to Indigenous Cultures through Animation

The workshops confirmed that the young generations in North East India are losing touch with their heritage of oral traditions. The participants had difficulty recollecting and recounting their traditional stories when they were directed to select a story to develop into each of the sample short films. A further example of the current neglect of the tradition of popular storytelling in Nagaland was that the version of the story that was chosen for the film *Man Tiger Spirit* (from Hutton's work: *The Angami Nagas* (1921))—though widely acknowledged among academics as the shared heritage of several tribes in Nagaland, including the Sumi, Chakesang and Mao as well as to the Angami—was not known to any of the workshop participants. The focus group discussion delivered the self-assessment by a male participant aged 23 from the Tagin tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, of the decline of traditional storytelling practices: "youngsters nowadays don't know about these folktales" (Takar, focus group 2, p.5, 41-42).

In Arunachal Pradesh, the participants confirmed that folktales had traditionally been related by community elders and those parents, grandparents and traditional priests are still considered as the repository of traditional knowledge. Therefore, several of the

participants took the initiative to consult their elders for stories to contribute to the workshop. One of the participants, a young woman aged 22 from the Adi tribe, explained: “when I told my parents and my uncles and aunts I discussed with them about the folktales, I asked them ‘have you any interesting folktales?’ and they told me 10-20 folktales” (Oder, focus group 1, p.8, 13-14).

The first reason that was given by the local participants for adapting their stories was that they felt that the animation medium would be a format that could help to sustain the stories for future generations. This was supported by the recognition by the participants in Arunachal Pradesh that animation could be a way to re-engage people of their own age group and younger in the oral traditions of their communities. For instance, one of the male participants, aged 24 from the Mishing tribe, stated that “animation could be a good medium to preserve these stories” (Riju, focus group 1, p.3, 2) and

> “if you make it into animation, at least for fun they will know what happened and all… they will know about it in an entertaining way, they will appreciate it” (Takar, focus group 2, p.5, 41-42).

Wells (1998) has detailed how a high degree of preparation is necessary to create animation. In the process of carrying out the pre-production for each of the short films (where all details must be examined as part of the necessary meticulous planning procedure), the workshops succeeded in leading the young participants into detailed dialogues about their culture as they deconstructed the chosen stories and re-examined them with the precision needed to re-imagine the stories and reinterpret them through the new medium. The invitation of several elders from the respective communities to visit the workshops to exercise their cultural authority and verify the translation process re-affirmed intergenerational cultural dialogue and it also promoted respect for elders; this also matched the approach to indigenous research that had been recommended by Smith (1999) and Pui-Yin Shiu (2008), and was a development from the workshops organised by West Highland Animation that had also aimed to invite a local Gaelic ‘tradition bearer’ where possible to interpret the story (Mackenzie, personal communication 2015).

In contrast to the evidence of renewed interest from the local participants in their own culture, one of the animation students, Kaushik, aged 24, expressed his

appreciation for exposure to indigenous culture from the North East, as he could then make comparisons with his own traditions from Central India. Even participants and visitors with no manifest inclination towards a future career in art or animation appreciated the value of the animation workshops as an arena for cultural discussion (Iralu, personal communication 2014). Therefore the role that animation had in this project for encouraging dialogue, both in the community and with media professionals, was an innovative approach that led the younger members into positions of inquiry in the challenge to provide information, whereas the condition of marginalization and the generation gap frequently silences them.

The workshops clearly re-established connections with narrative practices and interpretive processes in the discussions with local storytellers, thereby linking activities that affirm group cohesion to traditional narratives (Scroggie 2009; Niles 2010). In addition, the storytelling sessions, the discussions, the development of film scripts with details of location, actions and dialogues, the enactment of the characters for voice recordings and the creation of expressive character animation all showed affinity with the performance aspects of traditional narrative practice.

However, animation was not only considered as a way of preserving culture, but of reinterpreting it so that culture acquired contemporary relevance for the young generation. Interestingly, this illustrates the theory of adaptation as a re-imagination over faithful reproduction. This aspect was succinctly articulated in the one to one interview with the local partner in Arunachal Pradesh, Rimo, aged 39 from the Galo tribe:

> "I thought that it was a very good way of trying to communicate to a larger audience in an interesting way. The problem is really that culture has become a very boring and traditional word. People think of culture as 'we need to preserve culture, museumize it', so the workshop was for me something to make it relevant, make it contextual and make it accessible" (Rimo, interview 2013, p.1, 47-51).

The existing exposure and enthusiasm for animation that has been reported by the participants makes it a more dynamic medium for communicating culture than written literature, particularly in areas where there are few bookshops or libraries. The possibility of updated cultural representation through animation brought up the subject

of the kind of representation that the young generation would like to see, for as Kayon, a male participant aged 23 from the Adi tribe, said:

> "we are not like people from the past, we are also part of this present so it should elevate this kind of ideas and wisdom that could be relevant to any person on this planet, so that kind of animation we would really like to have" (Kayon, focus group 1, p.5, 58-59).

The fact that the adaptation of traditional folktales for the medium of animation was perceived as more than cultural preservation and rather as a way to "reinvent our story" (Riju, focus group 1, p.3, 3) further supports the theory of adaptation discussed in the Contextual Review. Therefore because animation is seen as a modern and engaging way to communicate culture in an entertaining way that is attractive to young people (focus group 1, p.4, 11-12) this medium can be used to make unfashionable traditional oral material interesting to them.

The fact that the material that was generated in the practical setting of the workshop in the form of scripts, plans, designs and audio video recordings incorporates inputs from the participants, shows how engagement by local people in the process of adaptation from the oral to the audio visual medium can be a way to use animation to reconnect young people with their cultural heritage. The pre-production material effectively demonstrates that animation is a tool that young artists can use to contribute to the cultural capital of their own communities. The observed appeal of cultural content in animated form also makes this an innovative way for practitioners engaged in the field of cultural representation to communicate their work to younger audiences.

4.2 Territories of Reconciliation

The marginalization of indigenous identities in India, articulated by the workshop participants, brings us to the second reason that was given by the participants for adapting indigenous narratives for animation: that of raising awareness of the value of indigenous cultures, with the overarching aim of contributing to reducing the discrimination that they report. In Arunachal Pradesh, the accounts of discrimination that were disclosed were linked to the perception of inadequate representation. The

impact of invisibility is repeated in these three illustrations by participants from three different tribes: Kargo, a young man aged 24 from the Galo tribe; Lily, a young woman aged 26 from the Nocte community and Riju who is a Mishing.

> "In our national news they talk very less about Arunachal state. Assam comes into the limelight, only during this conflict between China and India, only through this issue do they come to know about Arunachal Pradesh" (Kargo, focus group 2, p.4, 19-22);

"In our other states outside the North East people don't know Arunachal" (Lily, focus group 1, p.4, 31); and "I am considered as a foreigner in my own country" (Riju, focus group 1, p.5, 30-31).

The lack of representation of indigenous identities in the media was deplored by the participants: "we do not get to see any cultural linkage of animated movies from Arunachal Pradesh" (Kayon, focus group 1, p.3, 26) and "we need that availability" (Riju, focus group 1, p.3, 23). This indicates how the subaltern position of disempowerment that was disclosed by Spivak (1988) becomes accentuated by the lack of identity in the mainstream representations of the overarching narrative of postcolonial India to give a strong reason to build a positive image of these groups. To address the common experience of silence, animation can provide a language to communicate with young people beyond their own communities.

The participants felt that animation could work to extend the awareness of their cultural identities in mainstream society and that this would contribute to improved social integration:

> "if that person is available in animated version, at least people in Delhi, people in England would never laugh if someone visit to Delhi to Mumbai with the *podom* they will not laugh and say, 'What is that?' If it is already available in the animated version they will recognize it and say 'Oh I have seen the Xerox copy but this is the real living one. You are from Arunachal?'" (Riju, focus group 1, pp.3-4, 59-6);

And

> "we should go for some kind of animation that will tell these Arunachal people they know but not only that, beyond Arunachal so that people can recognize us" (Lily, focus group 1, p.4, 28-30).

Therefore it was clear that both participants from Arunachal Pradesh, Riju and Lily, from the Mishing and Nocte communities respectively, felt that animation could be used as a medium to explain the nuances and practices of their cultures to other young people beyond their own community.

The participants also discerned that seeing their own cultural representation would provide more opportunities for the stories to be enjoyed locally (focus group 1, p.2). In essence, they wanted to see their own environment and characters in the animated films (focus group 1, p.3): the "indigenous mind, beliefs and day to day practices should be represented through the characters" (Riju, focus group 1, p.5, 36-37), as their own narrative content in animated form would be "popular and wonderful" (Kayon, focus group 1, p.3, 33). In summary, the participants want to communicate with audiences that extend beyond their own locality to reduce the discrimination caused by the absence of their voice in the media, and they also want to contribute to the media in a positive way. This supports the argument that animation can provide an innovative tool to enable this generation to reach out and connect with other young people further afield.

The animators also provided feedback on the benefits of the exposure they had received to local cultures through this project:

> "It will help me to understand the culture of the Gond and the stories they have. It will also help me to experiment with a new media that I have not tried yet. It is a good opportunity for me to work with artisans who belong to an entirely different background" (Vijay, Questionnaire, 2012).

This suggests a social purpose for films that have local resonance to lift the morale of the young target audiences as well as to sustain the narratives: "wherever our culture is represented we will definitely feel proud for ourselves" (Riju, focus group 1, p.3, 18-19), and from the perspective of a Gond artist: "This film will promote Gond painting and sculpture. So it is a matter of joy that people will know more of Gondi culture and they will recognise Gond art and as more people get to know and appreciate this there will be more of us" (Raju, personal interview, p.3, 17-19).

For the media producer these findings assist in fathoming the repercussions of a lack of representation. They also reinstate the need for balanced imagery when developing specific content targeted at the expanding media audiences located at the periphery, as well as for indigenous media representation targeted at wider audiences.

4.3 The Complexity of Self-Representation

The findings of this research are suggestive of the complexity of representing ethnic identities in the culturally diverse North East region: "we are going through a period of history where there is a lot of fragmentation of identities, and also reconstruction of new identities and it is a very flux period right now" (Rimo, personal interview 2013, p.2, 39-41). This analysis recalls the politics of ethnic identity in Manipur that was discussed by Kangujam **(**2011) and by Jusho (2004); the politics of ethnicity in the wider North East region was also highlighted by Sharma (2012). The modification of previously firm identities in response to alignments needed to access political power in Arunachal Pradesh was further testified by the Director of the J.N. Museum, Tage Tada (Abotani Part One 2014, 02:21). He cited the example of the Tani group (represented in the animated story of Abotani) who, by the incorporation of their minority tribes into the Nyishi community, had arguably gained political power. He contrasts this with the Adi, who have instead split into smaller groups to make new demands for their own political representation.

The impact of politics on the representation of ethnic identities in the region (Singh 2011; Michael, personal communication 2012) was confirmed by the perception that "it is the politics that will decide how much you can adapt or not adapt" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p.4, 47-48). Furthermore representation in the context of the volatile political geography of this area was described as "walking on thin ice" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p.5, 6). This analysis that "it is their tribe, their identity, who am I to pass judgment?" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p.4, 40) further affirmed that local sensitivities make discrete approaches towards cultural representation an imperative for incomers. This illustrates how the researcher's understanding of authenticity was guided by the interactions with participants and with members of the

wider community to negotiate representations that are politically acceptable to the communities.

The findings show that issues of accurate and specific representation are critical to the Indian postcolonial context characterized by cultural diversity (Bhattacharyya 2003; Xaxa 2008). Hence the workshops involving indigenous artists were important for the film-making process as they provided forums to discuss and negotiate acceptable interpretations. For instance, but for the extended period of time invested in discussing ethnic representation in the workshop in Arunachal Pradesh, specific cultural nuances such as the details of attire could have been overlooked. Thus it can be argued that the representation of indigenous identities for the *Tales of the Tribes* collection could not have been accomplished by the conventional model of film-making without the participation and inputs from local artists.

The project's primary ambition of accomplishing authentic and positive representation, in particular of the issues that emerged from the groups' discussions, also included the preference for solutions which extended inclusivity, so that, where possible, the film could be representative of more than one tribe. The awareness of the sense of discrimination that results from the absence of representation clearly accounts for this sensitivity towards partiality, in particular where the representation of similar tribes is absent in the film.

The issues of representing ethnic diversity in the films were explored in the development stage, and the feedback obtained from the local participants is reflected in the animated representations. The first attempt to introduce references to multiple tribes in one film was the film *Man Tiger Spirit* (2011) based on the Angami version of a story that is common to several tribes in the Tenydie group, as well as to the Sumi. The character designs for the film were based on Konyak wood carvings that are arguably considered to be the most accomplished Naga sculptures (Wangsa 2011; School of Oriental and African Studies (nd)). However, criticism has since suggested that this logic, presented from a purely aesthetic approach, risks being misinterpreted as cultural appropriation by the Angami. A decision to include references to folktales from other neighbouring tribes in the film (for example, the Mao story of a primordial mother, *Dziilii mosiiro* at the beginning of the film (Mao 2009)), and the incorporation of textile

designs from other Naga tribes that are depicted in the landscape design were two additional devices that were explored as an attempt to extend inclusivity but this has received an ambivalent response from poet and novelist Easterine Kire from Nagaland:

> "My Naga sense of aesthetics is so ingrained that I feel you should not do it. There are many who will oppose it. Our folklore is tribally separate from each other, that is what we like to believe. If you are telling an Angami folktale do not use Ao or Sumi shawls or items" (personal communication, 2014).

In the case study of Arunachal Pradesh, the choice of a story about the popular local hero Abotani brought the sensitivity about representing multiple ethic identities to the forefront in the workshop, audio visual documentation, interviews and focus group discussions. Affinities between the folk narratives from the different tribes in Arunachal Pradesh were cited by participants to illustrate how the five tribes of the Tani group in Central Arunachal Pradesh – the Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin trace their genealogies from the common ancestry of Abotani, and they all have versions of the folk narratives centred on this mythical cultural hero (Nyori 2004).

From an artistic point of view, the story appeared to offer opportunities to showcase specific symbolic headgear and accessories to establish a definitive visual identity from Arunachal Pradesh, as had been attempted in the earlier adaptation from Nagaland. However, local advisors cautioned against depicting cultural accessories that were associated with specific tribes, purely on the basis of aesthetics. This is a good example of the significant role local indigenous cultural expertise had towards decoding representations that are acceptable to the local communities.

In practical terms two options for extending inclusivity in this film were presented by participants: either the script could be developed into hybridized adaptation to include characters and designs from other tribes (Suresh, focus group 2, p.4, 53-55), or the story could be located in a prehistoric context prior to the advent of tribe specific textiles, head gear and accessories (Takar and Kargo focus group 2 p.5, 16-18, 4-5). That the second option was chosen by consensus illustrates the power of collaborative decision making.

The issues of representation were patently the most critical with regard to the depiction of the key characters, Abotani and Yapom (Rimo, personal interview 2013, p.2, 46-47). As the improvisational approach was already shown to be hazardous, and as specific identity labels would have restricted the inclusivity of the image to a single ethnic group, a decision was made to exhibit non tribe-specific representation:

> "our characters as they have developed are neutral in a sense…It is not as exciting to see neutral characters, as a creative person I would say that it is not as exciting for me to see a neutral person…" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p4, 55-56).

This highlights the dilemma of the accuracy of representation and aesthetic decisions. During the production local recommendations about representation were increasingly taken into account, illustrating how authenticity was negotiated by the incorporation of multiple perspectives, rather than in the materials and technologies that were used.

The case studies in Sikkim and Manipur exemplified diametrically opposed positions with regard to inclusivity and the representation of neighbouring groups. In the first case, where a Lepcha story from Sikkim was adapted for the animation, the Thankga art that provided the visual identity of the film was already linked to the wider Buddhist populations of the Himalayas. To further extend the scope of representation, on the recommendation of director of the hosting institution, the Nyamgyal Institute of Tibetology, the original Lepcha folktale was bolstered by emphasizing the particular Buddhist sentiments of non-violence and the Bodhisattva tradition of a duty to help Mankind (Nagao 2010). In addition, on the suggestion of Lama Rinku Tulku Rinpoche, the four symbolic creatures of Buddhism – the Tiger, Dragon, Snow lion and Garuda - were also woven into the narrative to make the film more representative of the wider Buddhist culture of the state. Once again, this demonstrated the important role of local cultural authorities in the process of designing a film to satisfy local viewers.

In Manipur, in contrast, inclusivity was blocked in the workshop and in the animated representation of a popular Meitei story by the dominant ethnic group (the Meitei). The political tensions that account for this are described by a local cultural consultant from the Kom tribe:

> "here in Manipur everything is different between the tribes, and it has been occupied by the Meiteis who decide what is good. Tribal people should be contacted directly, not through the Meitei community as they are mostly interested in promoting themselves and because of this, tribal culture will surely vanish" (Michael, personal interview 2012, p.1).

This illustration corroborates Singh's (2011) analysis of the dominance of the Meitei and highlights how acute political tensions in an area can effectively defeat any opening for cross-cultural dialogue.

The complex issues of ethnic representation reflect the different postcolonial situations in the various areas of the study. The discussions in the workshops have shown how the current cultural and political landscape has infiltrated the films to add contemporary experiences to the traditional content so that the stories are not merely retellings from the past. I reiterate that these multiple visions of social reality captured in the process of negotiating postcolonial self- representations help establish the authenticity of these animated narratives.

My expectation is that these investments by local people in the development of the films will give the films resonance in the community. I would also argue that connecting with local points of view and artistic practices in the development phase of the film-making process empowers the local artists with new ideas from within the context of their culture. The findings show that the sensitivity of cultural representation and its wider implications must not be underestimated. The film-making practice also demonstrated how a participatory environment can encourage marginalized young people to study their own heritage. The entry into the discourse on self-representation by engaging with postcolonial theory and the examples of work by other practitioners have allowed me to develop empowering strategies for young people to enter into dialogue with media practitioners and deliver constructive narratives.

4.4 Cross-cultural Collaboration with Animators

The pre-production workshops introduced the idea that storytelling through animation could provide a method for indigenous young people to communicate about their own cultures with wider audiences using the tools of technology and the media.

Collaboration with a non-Indian researcher was perceived by the local collaborators as a good way to access this exposure. My role was therefore as a 'gatekeeper' facilitating the effort to reach wider audiences, whilst the role of local informants was to be the projects' doorway to cultural knowledge. To date there remains limited evidence of cultural representations in animation directed by indigenous producers in India. Therefore, collaboration with media professionals is presented as a way to deliver representations that also fulfill the demands of the medium. In essence, contemporary communities can be mobilized through participatory film-making practice towards developing their own media representation (Hearne 2012).

The response to the representation of indigenous identities by non-indigenous film-makers is one of reservation: according to author Easterine Kire, "no one can represent the Naga as well as the Naga himself can" (personal communication, 2014). As an animation instructor at the National Institute of Design, Sekhar Mukherjee corroborates when he says that "a story of Santhal should be somewhere heard and told and designed by a Santhal animator" (personal interview 2013, p.4, 46-47). He illustrated the point with examples of how traditional art forms such as shadow puppets and Warli art have been used to create animation for advertising by Western educated Indians from urban backgrounds (Business Standard 2010; youtube 2013), and he critiqued the removal of the designs from their cultural context that produces a 'disturbed' visual work that "becomes like a wall hanging" (personal interview 2013, p.5, 12-13). In essence, the appropriation of indigenous artistic forms is contentious (Brown 2003). However, the appreciation of these art forms by non-indigenous artists and audiences can inspire renewed evaluation of these forms by local people. As Kire observes, representations by non-indigenous artists that are rendered with sensitivity can function as a reference point for Naga animators to imitate or depart from (personal communication 2014). Nevertheless, Kire has added that confidence to enter new professions (such as in the media) comes from examples set by local role models.

Research work that is implemented with disregard for local sensitivities is viewed critically. The entrance that was recommended for outside researchers is not to come with preconceived notions, but instead to "understand the pulse and then decide how it is to be done" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p.3, 42). This particular advice reiterates the approach for indigenous research worldwide to take negotiation,

reciprocity and traditional protocols into account (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991; Smith 1999; Castellano 2004).

The method that has been outlined here that matches the approach advocated by Smith (1999) suggests that collaboration with members of the local community is the way for non-indigenous artists to engage with traditional content and art forms. The potential for collaboration with outside researchers was recognised as a way to inculcate a synergy of different kinds of people to imprint the film with the quality of "many films put together from different perspectives" (Rimo, personal interview, 2013, p.2, 20). This approach has links to indigenous media practice and the engagement of multiple voices for a more authentic rendering than a single outside representation (Iralu, personal communication, 2014).

The benefit of collaboration with visitors was articulated by one of our local partners from his perspective:

> "I think if it were only done without people from inside assisting, it would have looked wonderful but perhaps would have had problems, and if it is only the insider doing it you don't know how it will look or what will be acceptable. At the end of the day it is a film so it needs to cater to an audience, you are not making this film for you and me. So we need to find that synergy, which is the key" (Rimo, interview 2013, p.3, 26-29).

This analysis recognises a pragmatic ambition for the films to communicate coherently with audiences, and it also raises the issue of the market for the films that is discussed later in the findings. Observations recorded in the case studies of this research indicate that the involvement of resource people from outside India was perceived as conferring increased value to the workshop environment. In Arunachal Pradesh the exalted expectations of animators from the United Kingdom was attributed to embedded hierarchical structures. Therefore, the observation that: "if it is someone of your own you don't give it so much importance" (Rimo, personal interview 2013, p.3, 1) is an example of the inferiority complex that Elwin (1957) identified with detribalization and assimilation.

Previous studies of the animation process by practitioners have shown that animation is a specialized discipline that demands long term training and commitment

to produce a high quality film. This was why it was necessary to bring in young highly trained animators to the workshops and the production process. The animators were able to contribute towards the development of professional looking films that could fulfill the expectations of young target audiences. At the National Institute of Design, the focus in animation is on storytelling (Sekhar Mukherjee, personal interview 2013, p.2, 27-28); "we learn to structure the film so that every part of the film is connected to each other" (Jakie, focus group 4, p.6, 50). In this way, the inputs from the animators in the script, storyboard and technical processes help to present the stories in a format that translates across cultures. Martínez-Sierra (2012) discusses the key points that are considered as crucial in the development of a script to give entertainment value to audiences. However, the process of adaptation also introduces a contentious debate from the standpoint of translation studies on hegemony and pandering to Eurocentric value systems (Venuti cited by Katan 2009). Although this thesis does not address the scope of this debate, I reiterate the importance of continuous self-reflection to negotiate these issues of adaptation.

In India the options for young animation graduates are limited – they can make branding and promos for television or develop games or e-learning material. However, there are currently no opportunities for developing auteur animation in India (Sekhar Mukherjee, personal interview 2013, p.3, 2-3). The animators that were engaged in the *Tales of the Tribes* workshops and production gained creative work experience in animation production, in problem solving, teamwork, interpretation and design. The empowerment of the young animators in these circumstances can be evaluated in comparison with the commercial production pipeline where they are often required to do repetitive production work for the outsourced market, highlighting how this model of production differs from the commercial production pipeline summarized by Dunakhe (2014).

The responses from the local participants in Arunachal Pradesh show the appreciation and inspiration that they experienced from the interaction with the animators of their own age group:

> "It is a nice experience for me and I get to know how other people from outside our place behave and how they are and how comfortable we can be with them so it is nice" (Oder, focus group 3, p.4, 7-8);

From a male participant aged 24 from the Galo tribe:

> "We have learned character modeling using clay and some other materials. We also learn how to sketch and paint and like a movie director we edited the script and wrote the dialogues and everything" (Kargo, focus group 3, p.2, 21-22)
>
> And
>
> "From this we get a new thinking dimension" (Kayon, focus group 3, p.4, 2).

The participants were also encouraged by the interest taken in their culture, and by their own role in the production, for example the viewpoint from a young male participant from the Adi tribe was:

> "with this kind of animation projects and such new things we get ideas that we don't need to only depend on government jobs but we can also use our creative skills for employment, we can create our own employment through our creativity" (Kayon, focus group 3, p4, 3-5).

The finding corroborates Robbins' (2010) assessment that technology applied within a local cultural context is both more approachable for local people and can lead to new pathways for the development of indigenous ideas in contemporary technology. At the workshop to develop the *Manjoor Jhali* (Gond) film, which was held at the National Institute of Design between Gond artists and animation graduates, Mukherjee highlighted the benefits of self discovery for the animation students through their interaction with the Gond artists "that brought communities together" (personal interview 2013, p.7, 33-34).

Here I will briefly summarize the variety of models that were used in the *Tales of the Tribes* series (2009-2015) to show the escalating involvement from indigenous artists:

Film	**Time from preproduction to completion**	**Method**
Man Tiger Spirit (the story from Nagaland)	2009-2011	Production based at the Government run North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC) in Dimapur for three months. The screening programmes and a short animation workshop

		organised in Dimapur at the Nagaland Institute of IT and Multimedia (NIITM) with the dual objective of broadening exposure to alternative forms of animation in Nagaland and enrolling local artists in the production. Naga participants and students experimented with various forms of stop-motion animation and with 3D computer generated modelling: the fact that this early experimentation was not incorporated in the animation film illustrates how much time is required to become sufficiently familiarized with the technical processes of animation in order to be able to produce professional quality films.
Nye Mayel Kyong (the story from Sikkim)	2010-2014	Animated by young Indian animation professionals using the handmade artwork that was created by two Thangka artists from Sikkim.
Abotani (the story from Arunachal Pradesh)	2013-2015	Animated by Indian animation film design students from tribal backgrounds (Wancho, Oraon and Bodo), with inputs from non-indigenous practitioners.
Tapta (the story from Manipur)	2012-2015	The single example from the collection to be made entirely 'on location' by non tribal Meitei semi-professional animators with no further external involvement after the conclusion of the first workshop, in 2012.
Manjoor Jhali (the story from Madhya Pradesh)	2015 - 2016	The film production has just been completed. The animation team consists of three indigenous animators with qualifications from the National Institute of Design.

The main contribution of this work is to set new ground for the communication of indigenous narratives in the contemporary environment. Our experience shows that collaboration in participatory film-making practice by local artists and animation students and practitioners is a pragmatic method of producing animated films in a way that respects indigenous practices.

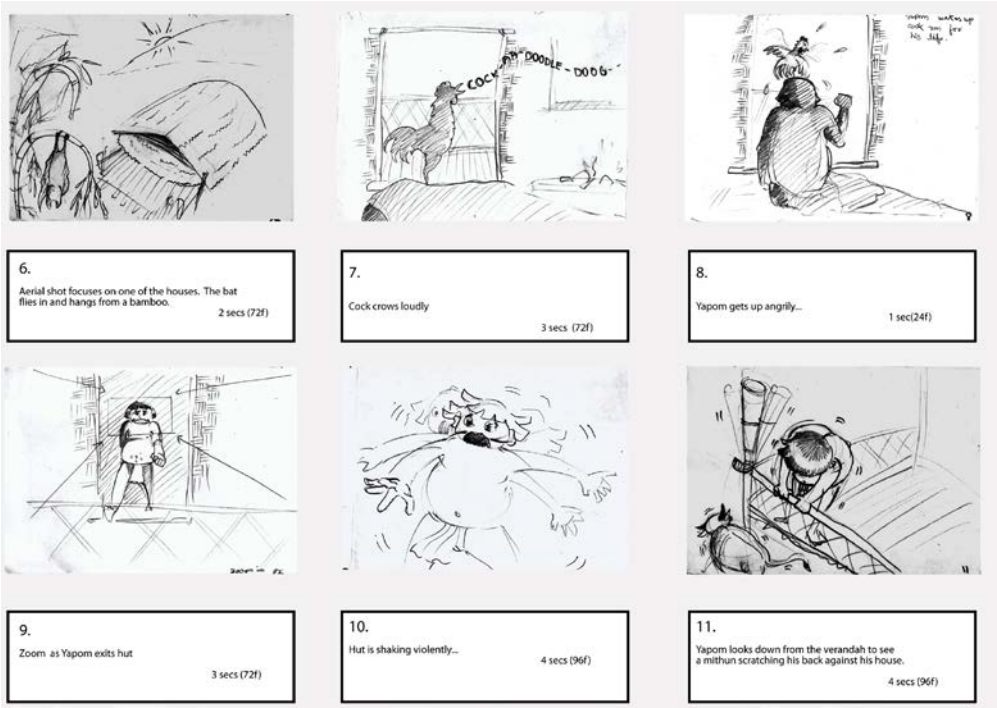
4.5 Interpreting the Story as an Animated Film

The workshop participants expected a structured narrative to their films. They also wanted their films to be accessible to audiences beyond their own cultural backgrounds, and on this basis all the films for the *Tales of the Tribes* collection were developed with reference to the language of animation film theory that is outlined by Pikkov (2010). In this section I discuss the story from Arunachal Pradesh as an example of the interpretation that was accomplished.

The elements of humour and action were already well developed in the traditional stories about Abotani from Arunachal Pradesh - they comply with the genre of the trickster tale (Backburn 2008). Several of the traditional narratives centre on the rivalry between the hero, Abotani and his brother Yapom (who is also referred to as Taro, Taki or Robo and as Buro Pacha by the Nyishi and Apatani), in which the two are continuously trying to outwit each other - and Abotani always emerges as the winner.

Making decisions about the story was a key part in the adaptation process at every stage. For example, the very first step was to discuss and verify the text from Elwin's book *Myths of the North-east Frontier of India* (1958) that provided the source material, with the local consultants. Throughout the process of adapting the narrative, the participants had to learn how to view the story in a new way by compressing time, focusing on the main characters and establishing visual links. In the *Abotani* animation film, the characters of Abotani and Yapom, the location and the circumstances were introduced in the set-up stage (Field 2005), as illustrated in the sample of the storyboard, see picture 27. The version of the story that was adapted for the animation presents three archetypal characters: Abotani is the clever younger brother who

represents an ideal, Yapom is always depicted as the fool, and Tapen is the trickster. Abotani is a character that the people of Central Arunachal Pradesh identify strongly with, for he is the ancestor from whom the Tani tribes trace their genealogy, and he represents the bringer of culture and social order.



Picture 27: A sample page of the storyboard for the Abotani film, by Wangdan Wangpan, 2013

In our version of the story the brothers live harmoniously as neighbours until conflict is ignited through a typical situation - Abotani's domestic animals stray onto Yapom's property. The conflict stage is where things start to go wrong (White 2006) and in the *Abotani* film, this transition is marked by the plot point where the protagonists decide to divide the land and live separately. The dispute over land is recognised as a primary source of conflict between the various ethnic groups of the region (Singh 2008; Fernandes 2008; Pamei 2011; Phukan 2013) and this demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the story.

The initial conflict between the brothers is reignited by the intervention of Tapen the Bat. The trickster represents the spirit of disorder, and in this particular tale Tapen is a liminal figure (Radin 1972) belonging neither to the human nor to the spirit world,

existing as a bat which is considered neither as animal nor bird. Interestingly, Lévi-Strauss (1958) also attributed the Raven's mythical status on both sides of the Pacific to a comparable position as a mediator between life and death, and Mackenzie further points out that an iconic trickster character of this kind is perfect for animation: the trickster character adds dynamism and humour and can create all kinds of absurd situations which are easily recognisable in everybody's life (personal interview 2015).

The hero of the story, Abotani has the advantage of special insight from his extra eyes that enable him to see the invisible spirit world. In some tales he is described as having four, six or nine eyes, usually in the back of his head or at the back of his feet, however in the animated adaptation, the character is portrayed with only one additional magical eye (Nyori 2004; Pilliya 2005; Dai 2011) with which he can foresee the future. All the versions agree that Abotani was deprived of his special powers, and once his eye was stolen, he was no longer able to witness the supernatural world. This shows similarity with stories related in other parts of the North East region, for example in Nagaland (Nepuni 2010). However, in the version that we selected of the story, Abotani's special eye is removed by Yapom in battle so he loses the ability to foresee the future, and this provides the climax of the conflict in the film.

In the resolution stage of the original story the conflict is resolved in various ways. Elwin's version of the Abotani story (1958) that we used as the primary reference source does not provide any details about the character of Dige Wiyu (Diig Uyu), other than the information that he is the spirit of Heaven and Earth who appears as the mediator to achieve a solution to the conflict that has culminated in the destruction of nature, and that he was white in colour. Our film narrative also includes a mythical explanation for the absence of literacy in region, attributed to Abotani's common human fallibility, exemplified by his careless consumption of the animal hide on which the script had been recorded by Dige Wiyu, at the end of the story. This is a further reminder of why the medium of animation may be more appropriate than literature for young people in the region to represent themselves.

The oral traditions reveal that the separation of the brothers and the division of the land does not achieve a permanent resolution to the conflict, since humans continue to invade the world of the spirits when they hunt in the forests, chop down trees and kill animals (Ramirez 2005). In most versions of the story the conflict with Yapom was

temporarily resolved but never completely eliminated - and this provided the reasoning for the continued traditional appeasement of spirits with sacrifices and festivals (Pilliya 2005). In the last scene of the animation, Abotani's mithun (bos frontalis), continues to disturb Yapom's new domain in the jungle, thereby referencing the Nyishi concept of the mithun as the intermediary between the village and the forest, and between humans and spirits (Aisher 2012). Lastly, the camera tracks to reveal the scale of the animation film set: on this subject, Hearne (2012) has cited examples of where the process of creating the film has been revealed and incorporated into specific indigenously produced animations, and it is a device that also reconnects to the importance placed on the process in participatory film-making practice.

4.6 Interpreting Indigenous Culture in Animated Films

In response to descriptions of cultural loss, the *Tales of the Tribes* films have attempted to incorporate indigenous ontology and cultural details into the design of the films as far as possible. To begin with, the Great Indian Hornbill (Buceros bicornis) that has special status for all the Naga tribes was woven into the film *Man Tiger Spirit*, in the role of the narrator. Embedding the character of the storyteller in the animation in this way draws reference to the role of the storyteller for imparting knowledge (Hearne 2012).

The prominent theme of three of the films: *Man Tiger Spirit*, *Nye Mayel Kyong*, and *Abotani* is Mankind's connection with nature and the supernatural. The traditional function of folktales to impart moral wisdom to children (Bascom 1954) is contained in the message of the adaptation of the Gond story for the short film *Manjoor Jhali* - be content with what you have; as one of the Gond artists related, the message still has contemporary relevance for life lived in the village (Ravi, personal interview, 2012). On the basis that such messages have wider resonance, this shows how folktales have transcended cultural boundaries (Srivastava 1974).

Finally, *Tapta* adheres to the particular genre of folktale that has a primary cautionary function, illustrated by the threat that is posed by a fictional character. I would also propose that the dominant theme of fear in this story is evocative of the mood of current political tensions in Manipur (Upadhyay 2009; Singh 2010; Khan 2014).

Mackenzie's observation about the prominence of origin myths for indigenous cultures in comparison to other cultures (personal interview 2015) was illustrated by the recurring theme of origination in the films. For example, *Man Tiger Spirit* provides a mythical explanation of the origin of Mankind, and a later reference in the same film to a Naga belief that the practice of headhunting was initiated by ants (Directorate of Art and Culture Nagaland 1989). Other myths represented in the films narrate the creation of the peacock and the origin of the iconic Karma Dance of the Pardhan Gonds in *Manjoor Jhali*, and an explanation for why bats are black in the *Abotani* story. On this subject a productive approach is to recognise the poetic, allegorical quality of mythology (Moyers and Campbell 1988) over engaging in a critique of such myths from the standpoint of a Western scientific approach.

Indigenous beliefs about omnipotent divine and supernatural entities are referenced in the depictions of Baradev, creator of the Pardhan Gonds; in the portrayal of Dige Wiyu as the arbitrator in the story of *Abotani*, and by the six immortal couples that control the weather in *Nye Mayel Kyong*. Traditional rituals of shamanism and sacrifice are woven into the narratives of *Nye Mayel Kyong* and *Abotani*. Other examples of culturally specific values in the films are the Buddhist commitment to non-violence (Der-lanYeh 2006) in *Nye Mayel Kyong* and the symbolism of Naga warrior accessories in *Man Tiger Spirit*. Commentaries on human nature are communicated by the depictions of Mankind as caring and cunning in *Man Tiger Spirit* and fallible in *Abotani*. Additional cultural details presented in the films include tribal ornaments, homes, family life, dance, music, song, food and the Naga tradition of burial pots. In essence, the multiple dimensions – time, space, sound and movement - of animation have enabled the incorporation of multiple aspects of indigenous culture. Relating this to her experience of animation production in Scotland, MacKenzie has observed that the capacity for animation to operate at various levels of meaning invites the insertion of

> "side signals which are the things that make up cultures...not complex things but little details that will appeal to the local audiences, because that is what you are doing with the digital images, you are trying to really appeal to your local audiences because you want them to be able to say 'that's right, that's us!" (Personal interview, 2015).

The folklore of Arunachal Pradesh establishes an intimate relationship between Mankind and the natural and supernatural realms (Saraswati 1995) and the *Abotani* film is a good example of how this relationship underpins societal values.

The spirits of the indigenous faith of central Arunachal Pradesh are referred to by different names, including Wiyu *(Uyu)* and, according to Galo priest Tama Mindo, (Abotani Part One 2014: 05:40) the Wiyu spirits are the guardians of nature who live in the biggest trees, the largest rock formations and in caves. Within the tribes, people need to maintain a respectful approach towards these locations and hence towards nature in general in order to sustain a harmonious relationship with the powerful supernatural world where giving offence can result in harsh punishments in the form of calamities and diseases that are attributed to the spirits (Mibang and Chaudhuri 2004). The capacity for animation to subvert and reinvent visual codes (Hearne 2012) makes it the ideal medium for representing the supernatural elements and the impossible conjunctions which are a feature of indigenous storytelling (MacKenzie, personal communication 2015).

Our animated version of the Abotani story acknowledges the interconnectedness between nature and the supernatural that is central to the ideology of the Tani communities who must appease supernatural entities prior to any undertaking (Mibang and Chaudhuri 2004). In the animation the resolution of the land dispute is celebrated with the sacrifice of a mithun, followed by the traditional practice of sharing the meat. This practice reinforces the importance given to the welfare of the community over individual self interest (Mibang and Chaudhuri 2004; Ramirez 2005). In the workshop it was decided that as the elder brother, Yapom would perform the sacrifice and that the event would take place in the morning, in keeping with custom.

Deconstruction of this type highlights the significance of providing supporting text to the films. Culturally specific stories such as the narrative of Abotani are obscure – especially to incomers - and the interpretations outlined above were deciphered in the workshop discussions with cultural elders. Screening events in schools could also function as a method to initiate discussions on culture, as was the case in these pre-production workshops, and this methodology shows compatibility with the traditional function of storytelling. This further addresses the question about how participatory

practices can be used to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices.

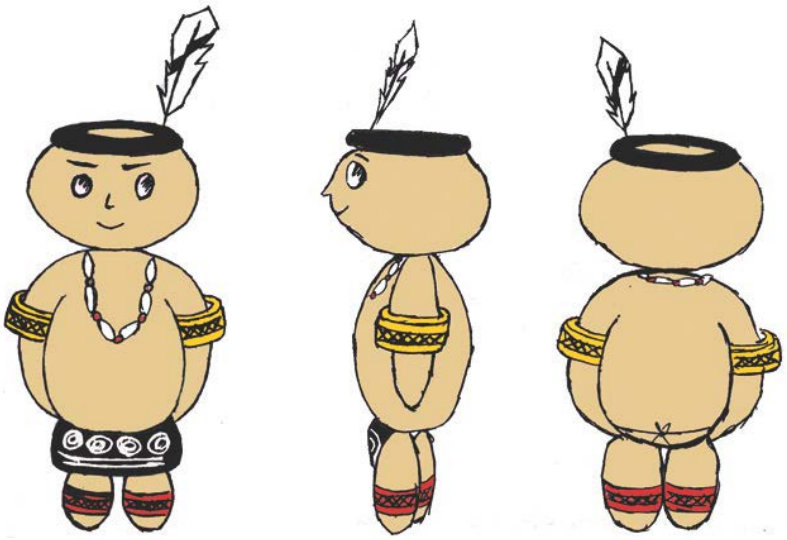
4.7 The Impact of Commercial Animation on the Making of the Films

When interviewed, the coordinator of the department of Animation Film Design at NID, Sekhar Mukherjee, highlighted the dominance of imported animation, and the influence this has on animation that is produced in India:

> "One thing is that we did not have the culture of the appreciation across the country, so there is a stereotype that the same character is doing some gag which is American" (personal interview 2013, p.4, 10-11).

The extent of the exposure to cartoons and the influence this viewing has had on the participants' expectations of the medium in Arunachal Pradesh was unexpected: "now this growing generation is watching a lot of cartoons on TV so they will expect a lot" (Kargo, focus group 2, p.3, 3-4). Particular preferences were illustrative, for example, from a male participant aged 22 from the Monpa tribe: "I would like to see something Manga style that is my expectation" (Tenzin, focus group 1, p.4, 51-52), and "we people here would love to watch some animated movies which are like *Manga* or some *Kong Fu Panda"* (Kayon, focus group 1, p.4, 55-56).

In the workshops the influence of the exposure to commercial animation was evident in the imitative work that the participants frequently presented in their own character designs. For example, in the case of the workshop in Nagaland, the designs that emerged were overtly inspired by the imported style of Japanese Manga and Anime that is popular in the region (see picture 28).



Picture 28: Character design by Lipok, from the Animation Workshop in Nagaland, 2009

The designs shown in pictures 29 and 30 are additional examples that show how the Western aesthetic of cartoon illustration was emulated by the artists in the Animation Workshop in Manipur.

Picture 29: Character design by R.K. Joykumar Singh, from the Animation Workshop in Manipur, 2012

Picture 30: Character design by Samson Meitei, from the Animation Workshop in Manipur, 2012

The animation curriculum at the National Institute of Design, that includes exposure to a diversity of films and experimental techniques (NID 2015), supports the conjecture that screenings of a wider variety of animation films leads to a more mature appreciation of content in relation to visual effects and technology in animation. This is framed by

Kaushik and Tarun, the former still a student, and the latter a graduate, both from West Bengal.

> "I got exposed in NID only. Before this, I was more interested in Pixar's films. They really have very nice animation and storytelling, but they are mainstream movies. But then when I came to NID I was exposed to these films which are as good as those films but have a different approach" (Kaushik, focus group 4, p.2, 37-40);

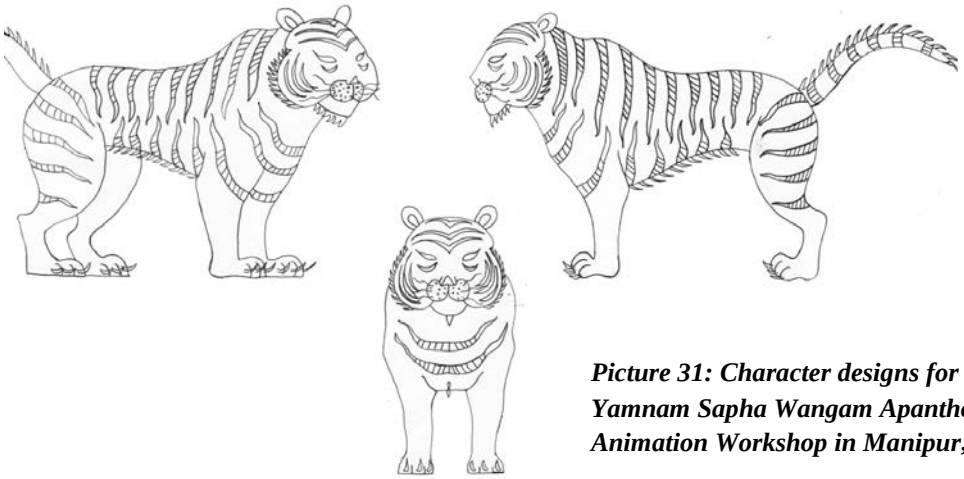
And

"A lot of visual kicks…does not amuse me much" (Tarun, focus group 5, p.2, 13-14).

In contrast, workshop participants had not been exposed to experimental animation films before the workshop, and this limited their confidence and ability to recognize the ways that the local material culture could be adapted for animation. The dominant exposure to popular commercial animation also affected their responses to experimental forms:

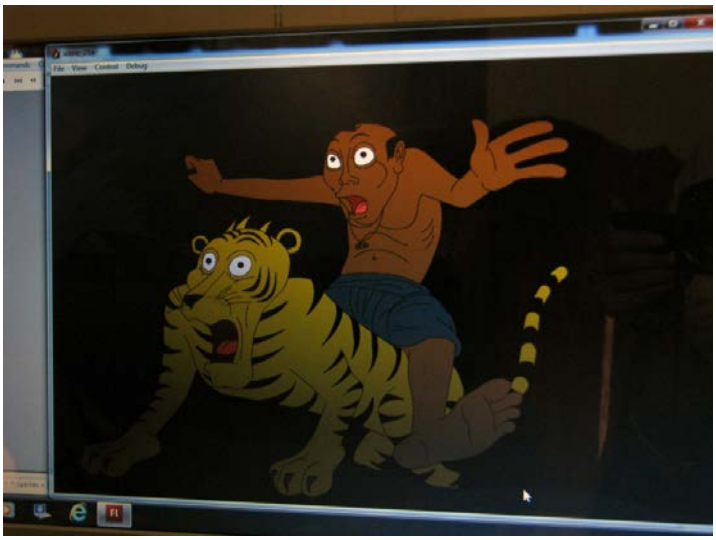
> "This clay or particular stop-motion like this thing I don't think it will work. I don't know why but these people here in Arunachal Pradesh they expect a little higher quality for it to be successful" (Kayon, focus group1, p.4, 56-58).

My influence and that of the animation resource team, on the design of the sample animated films was significant. Exposure to a wider variety of animation styles was introduced in the daily screenings in the workshops by the animators, along with exposure to the ways that handmade animation is created, and this generated ideas from the participants on how their traditional designs and artistic practices could be incorporated into the films.



Picture 31: Character designs for the tiger by Yamnam Sapha Wangam Apanthoi from the Animation Workshop in Manipur, 2012

The case study of Manipur delivered the most pronounced example of the influence of commercial animation on the form of the film that was produced. In the workshop that was held in Manipur (2012) the option to reference tribal art forms from the state was abandoned with the choice of the Meitei story and the homogeneity of the group of Meitei participants. During the workshop the resource team directed the participants to research folk art styles from the illustrated manuscripts of the Meitei cultural heritage. Nevertheless, on the conclusion of the workshop the folk-inspired character designs that had been created by an artist in the group were replaced entirely with a new set of designs by the self-nominated director of the film that were unquestionably derived from popular commercial cartoon representations.



Picture 32: Screenshot of the Tapta animation film from Manipur. 2014

Picture 33: Character design for the tiger by R.K. Joykumar Singh that was used in the Tapta film, 2015

The influence of commercial cartoon presentation was carried forward in the film production with the treatment of the artwork that included anthropomorphized animal characters, that was handled with direct reference to the commercial style of animation, qualified by the justification that this would be the most reliable formula to secure appreciation in Manipur (R.K. Joykumar Singh, personal discussion, 2013). The subsequent animation was produced through a process of creating drawings and

movement using standard 2D software and the film also incorporates humorous gags, fast action and sophisticated camera movement in accord with the director's perceived expectations of the medium: the samples of this work included as Appendix 9, can be compared with the promo, *TaptapromoWorkshop2012* that was made during the workshop in 2012.

The influence of commercial animation was also evident in the participants' expectations of the narrative. As an example, the particular version of the Abotani story that was chosen in Arunachal Pradesh was felt by a young male participant from the Nyishi tribe to have the "elements of a good movie" (Tao, focus group 3, p.1, 38-39): "it has humour, adventure and it has some fighting sequences too. This story is very nice" (Kargo, focus group 3, p.1, 34), and "it contains humour and an action sequence" (Suresh, focus group 3, p.1, 41). Therefore the expectation for the familiar linear narrative structure guided the adaptation process.

The focus group discussions with the young animators who worked on the production of the films from Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh further confirmed the extent that animation preferences in India are determined by exposure to the dominant forms of Western production. This alignment with the dominant forms through which the ideas and values of a ruling cultural class are overtly and covertly imposed and absorbed by a dominated social group illustrates how symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1984) continues to be perpetuated by mass media exposure.

In summary, much of the input from the indigenous participants and young Indian animators in this project reflects the influence of the commercially produced animation that is dominant in the Indian media. This is largely a consequence of the age range of the participants and animators. The contributions from the young people that engaged in this project reflect the issues that they currently face in an environment of market liberalization where they must compete to find well paid work. This directs their concern for the films to be marketable and to stand up to what is currently in circulation. The films therefore extend from echoes of the storytelling traditions of the past to illustrate the contemporary situation.

4.8 Design and Technique

The artists from communities that had strong figurative designs and established identities in their traditional visual depictions (for example, Pardhan Gond contemporary painting and Thangka art from Sikkim) recognised how the adaptation of their styles would contribute to the originality of the character and background designs in the respective films.

The young animators also saw the benefit of visual depiction in culturally compatible art styles in the animated adaptations. They reasoned that it would be more convincing for local viewers if character references that already existed in local art forms were used. For example, the dragon was presented as a particular character design that is almost unique in India to the Thangka artwork style used in the Sikkimese film (see pictures 34 and 35).

Picture 34: Character design by Tashi Lepcha, for Nye Mayel Kyong, the film from Sikkim, 2013

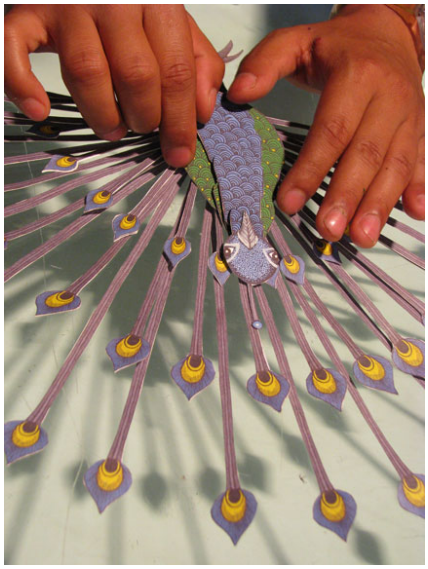
Picture 35: The handmade artwork for Nye Mayel Kyong was scanned and animated using 2D software, 2013

The student artists from Sikkim showed confidence in extracting individual design elements from traditional Thangka paintings in order to use them in their film. However, they struggled to create new designs that were not in this traditional design vocabulary – for example, the human characters in the film.

The non-Sikkimese animators also communicated their concern about maintaining the full integrity of the artwork as they recognised that artwork by trained Thangka artists would be more accurate than copies executed in the Thangka style by artists who were unaware of the visual nuances.

2D was a logical artwork choice for the two films that present Gond and the Lepcha stories, since this maintained the integrity of the art styles and facilitated the involvement of the indigenous artists who were able to create all the artwork for these films (see pictures 36 and 37). The subsequent treatment of the scanned artwork for the story from Sikkim: multiple layering of visual elements to create detailed backgrounds and the use of sophisticated camera moves that have been incorporated by the animators to promote visual interest and dynamism both reflect the wish of the animators to achieve the look that is seen in mainstream contemporary animated films. In comparison, the recent treatment of the artwork for the Gond film is more restrained.

Picture 36: Tashi Lepcha and Palzor Sherpa create artwork for the film from Sikkim, 2013



Picture 37: Animation tests with Gond artwork, 2015

In the case of the 3D films based on the cultures of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh the character designs were based on research that was carried out on traditional arts and crafts in museums, archives and private collections. Mixed media was chosen as the technique for both films; however, the film from Nagaland mainly used computer

generated 3D animation, while, in contrast, stop-motion was the primary technique used in the film from Arunachal Pradesh, with the idea that this would result in a more organic look.

The case studies of these five short films illustrate a process of negotiating a synthesis between digitally enhanced techniques and handmade artwork and animation. The visual and audio content in the form of handmade artwork and the live recordings were manipulated using software and digital effects. This was chosen as a practical way of delivering a well executed output. Each medium has practical and/or aesthetic advantages, and with the wide availability of software, a multimedia approach serves to devise a look that is not entirely uniform, but that also incorporates local textures.

When the film deviated from expectations, this was met with a mixed response. Some young people at initial screenings in Nagaland felt that the design of the film *Man Tiger Spirit* was disappointing; however, particular anthropologists have recognised and appreciated the references to traditional sculptures, and the treatment also inspired the team in Arunachal Pradesh:

> "the more and more I looked at the Nagaland film for instance, which is similar in terms of ethnic background to ours, I thought that was a very good way of trying to communicate to a larger audience in an interesting way" (Rimo, personal interview 2013, p1, 41-42).

And

> "as you have done with the Nagaland folktale animation you have taken the Naga sculptures and wood cuttings for the characters so we have from Tirap and Changlang districts they have these sculptures of human figures" (Kargo, focus group 2, p.3, 26-28).

To date, the Sikkimese film has been receiving appreciation for its artistic design based on Thangka art which has a worldwide following. The films have yet to be screened as a collection and screening events that are planned for when the programme is completed will deliver a more comprehensive assessment of their reception from local and wider audiences.

4.9 Voice Recordings and Musical Soundtrack

The soundtracks for the films were also discussed in the workshops, and the local consultants were crucial for verifying that the audio recordings of folk music for each film originated from the appropriate tribe. It was not always possible to make professional audio recordings during the workshops. Still, a decision was made to use local voice recordings rather than professional voice over artists, on the basis that the local accents would more appropriate for the local cartoon characters. In preparation for the voice recordings the participants were guided to act out the character roles and practice the dialogue delivery, a process that connected to the oral traditions.

The participants advised that "when it is in our language it creates more interest and more curiosity" (Riju, focus group 1, p.6, 35). So, for intended local and regional screenings, the workshops also provided for the translation of the character dialogues into vernacular languages as well as Hindi and English. This means that the films can be used in schools to sustain local languages where limited teaching material is available. This would mean exploring a parallel market in India to that for the Scots Gaelic films that were produced by West Highland Animation in Scotland.

4.10 A Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity

The *Tales of the Tribes* series of animated films has explored a synthesis of tradition and modernity by referencing and re-imagining traditional art, stories, songs, folk music, paradigms, customs and rituals through a contemporary multi-media presentation. The process of developing the films also engaged with the contemporary postcolonial situations of indigenous peoples: for example, the complex issues of ethnic representation, the current forms of media exposure delivered to young people in the regions of the study and their need to engage with the modern world. Relating this back to the animated adaptation of the story from Arunachal Pradesh:

> "it should have qualities that give certain ideas about our tribes, not as very remote tribes but as complex tribes that are preserving their culture but along with it is also moving ahead with development" (Kayon, focus group 1, p.5, 54-56).

This project led the local participants to think about and discuss their culture amongst themselves, with elders and with others. Their involvement also led them to discuss how their stories could be translated to a new medium and this has shown how they were approaching their culture in a new way, for example by illustrating characters that had not been visually depicted before. Therefore the workshops and the animation film practice demonstrate how indigenous cultures are simultaneously traditional and contemporary (Thomas 1987).

4.11 Cultural Animation for Indian Audiences

Descriptions by organisations such as Nasscom of animation as a booming industry in India and the growth of the number of places where animation can be studied lead talented young people to the conclusion that animation could be a viable career for them. This is the primary force that motivates young people in India to become professionally qualified (Tarun, focus group 5, p.2).

However, focus group discussions with the young animators that have worked on the *Tales of the Tribes* have disclosed an overall feeling that animated feature films produced by Indian companies lack originality. This has been attributed to investors playing safe with "an equivalent of what is a successful thing outside" (Tarun, focus group 5, 2013, p2, 54-55). Mukherjee also pointed to the lack of a culture of appreciation of animation in India that has led to stereotyped characters and derivative styles of production: "a bombardment of image" (personal interview 2013, p.4, 13-14). Commercial, computer generated 3D animation is now the most preferred animation style and indications show that this is largely because most young people in India have had no exposure to experimental techniques such as stop-motion.

The young animators found the *Tales of the Tribes* production attractive because of the originality of the folk narrative content, the exposure to specific cultural landscapes and the meaningful messages of the films. Referring to the story from Sikkim, Tarun, the graduate from West Bengal, explained that:

> "This film is very different from what we have been doing. Otherwise we are doing promotional film. Advertisement film is more about promoting the product and spinning a story around the product to highlight the product at

> the end, but this being a folktale is something very unique and culture specific" (Tarun, focus group 5, p.4, 24-27).

The student animators from the National Institute of Design wanted to be associated with the production of original animation because they saw this as a step on the path to artistic identity and recognition. The young animators also recognised the futility of attempting to compete with Pixar (Tarun, focus group 5, p.5, 18-21). They recognised that self-exploration is required for creating original work (Sekhar Mukherjee, personal interview, p.7, 29-30) and saw that they could achieve this in collaborations with indigenous artists as a method for both developing their own styles and exploring less well-known Indian content and art forms.

My primary yardstick of success for the films will be the acceptance and appreciation they find in the communities they represent, rather than the size of their mainstream audiences. Early indications suggest that, with local communities as stakeholders in the film production, the films are receiving an overall positive response with local audiences: "I think that it was very crucial that it happened here and with the kind of people that were around rather than getting people in Delhi" and – "I don't think it would have been as good" (Rimo, personal interview 2013, p.4, 22-23). This perspective corroborates analysis by Castellano (2004) on indigenous research that shows how individual perceptions are validated by community dialogue and reflection before they become collective knowledge.

The participants felt that even the elders in the community would enjoy the films:

> "People of every age in Arunachal Pradesh would love to see it, especially if it is from their own folktales or derived from it, they will love it" (Kayon, focus group 1, p.8 43-44).

I would also suggest that films that have been developed through collaborations and that take cultural ownership into account are more likely to receive an overall positive response from academic audiences.

To present these stories as entertainment for mainstream audiences, the recognised codes and conventions of narrative film theory and supplementary contextualization can assist in revealing preferred readings in the films. The focus group discussions with the animators have also disclosed their perception that films with

original, mature artistic styles and messages that have wide resonance, would find appeal beyond the typical juvenile target audience for animation in India. Relating this to the animated story from Sikkim, one of the team, an animator aged 28 from Maharashtra, explained "it will definitely work, in spite of any age group or anywhere in the world because it talks about the nature" (Sumit, focus group 5, p.7, 29-30).

Suggestions for outlets for distributing the films range from online dissemination to social media and television broadcast. Mukherjee identified the potential for the Indian public service broadcaster Doordarshan to become a primary broadcast outlet for indigenous animated films (personal interview 2013, p.5 36-37). However, this analysis is founded on the basis of the realization of the value of indigenous representation in the media, and of a method to deliver indigenous animated content for broadcast. Therefore the projection is that the sample films produced for the *Tales of the Tribes* collection can demonstrate the viability of producing animated films based on indigenous storytelling.

The general consensus was that the films would have the most impact in screening programmes organised in schools and cultural centres where they could function to launch discussions on culture. As mentioned previously, this links to the methods of dissemination that were used by West Highland Animation. For the Indian context, it was suggested that:

> "what we need is one copy of the animation movie to go to all the villages where there is no infrastructure…taking a laptop with full battery charge and show the people" (Takar, focus group 2, p.5, 6-7).

This method would provide a vehicle for elder and younger generations to share knowledge (Monash University 2012) that also exhibits compatibility with traditional storytelling practice.

Additional outlets and uses for the films that were suggested were as submissions to the plethora of international animation film festivals; to promote tourism; and for submission to institutional archives where the films would be of anthropological interest (Tarun, focus group 5, p.8, 1-2). The young Indian animators exhibited a pragmatic approach to gaining the necessary support from investors for the production of short animated films. Their suggestion that several short films could be

clubbed together to fill a standard broadcast slot is the strategy that has motivated the production of this series of five shorts.

4.12 Emerging Indigenous Animation Practice

This project has explored the potential for adapting indigenous art and culture to the medium of animation and the logical question that arises is how the emerging indigenous animation practice can be further developed and sustained. Mukherjee (personal interview 2013) has suggested a multi-pronged approach towards dissemination and securing support for indigenous animation production. Yet, he has also argued that for animation of this type that brings public benefit, Government funding is preferable to any kind of reliance on corporate sponsorship that is likely to bring more demands for commercial compromise.

The lack of training in the processes of animation was cited as the logic for the evident scarcity of local initiatives to adapt cultural narratives for new media:

> "I never thought Arunachal could make any animation films because it never came to my mind but now I have a hope that yeah it is possible and that it can be made in animation and in Arunachal" (Oder, focus group 1, p.4, 40-41).

The undeniable shortfalls in local commitment and the dwindling attendances of some participants to the workshops can also be attributed to disempowerment and the position of contested political uncertainty reflected in the postcolonial condition in the region of this study, discussed in section 2.1.1 of the Contextual Review. The limited extent of feedback and the reluctance of participants to engage in critique also mirror the phenomenon of experienced distance from the centre. That dominant representations characterized by inequalities are accepted as normal accounts for the general conspicuous absence of critical deconstruction of the messages inculcated into commercial animated films from workshop participants; for the reluctance to deconstruct and address the ethnic partiality of the workshop in Manipur; the focus on style and effects over content and the urge to compete through existing popular styles on the world stage (Appadurai, 2010): all factors that were exemplified by the case studies in Manipur and Nagaland.

Finally, my view is that the position of disempowerment also accounts for the inability of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim to produce their own animated films locally despite the potential for institutional support in these states. Nevertheless, there is no single, simple reality which all indigenous people share. Therefore, the experiences of discrimination and disempowerment that were described by particular participants cannot be assumed to apply to all indigenous groups in India. In addition, a cautious approach has been advised towards the interpretation of discrimination and disempowerment relative to dominant paradigms. Indigenous thought processes are acknowledged to contain their own sets of significant values which make it more difficult to place them into the context of Westernized analysis.

4.13 An Inventory of the Major Findings

The findings showed that:

- In most cases, indigenous young people in India are consumers of animation but they have no exposure to the creative animation process or concept of the planning required to make a film.

- There is interest in innovative approaches to interpreting culture as evidenced by the local support and the engagement by participants in the workshops.

- The workshops showed that animation is a medium that can reignite interest in traditional narratives and that animation production can provide roles for young people to interpret their traditional culture for future generations.

- The interaction with indigenous artists and cultural practitioners in a co-productive environment to deconstruct narratives, cultural meanings, values and the intricacies of representation promoted the re-evaluation of traditions across the team.

- The exposure to experimental animation inspired indigenous artists and young animators with the idea that local material cultures can be referenced and

incorporated in the animation film-making process.

- The animation could be carried out successfully through collaborations between young semi-professional animators and indigenous artists.

Finally, the findings show that animation can provide a language that speaks to all ages and transcends cultural barriers as a means for young people to communication and represent themselves in the postcolonial context. Collaboration with animators in the workshop environment is a practical method to accomplish localized animation production and raise cultural awareness. The workshops empowered the young participants by engaging their voice in the interpretation of the story for the film, by capacity building and exposure to new ideas so that the actual content of the films was largely determined by the groups' participants.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the role animation film production can play in reconnecting the young generation with existing minority cultural forms and practices in India's northeast, by studying the engagement of young artists in participatory film-making practices to produce a collection of short animation films, the *Tales of the Tribes*. In addition, the case studies of this research have demonstrated how animation can be used by both indigenous artists and by media professionals, as a vehicle for collaboration. A creative collaboration of this kind has the ability to challenge both the absence of indigenous representation in the medium of animation in India and some of the perceptions that are still widely held about indigenous culture and artistic practice. It also provides opportunities for the media professional to develop original animation content for Indian audiences that are distinctive from the Westernized representations that dominate the commercial market.

The research has drawn from existing knowledge of the representation of indigenous identities as they were imagined during the colonial period, and has critiqued the positions that these depictions served. The research has also inspected the disempowerment resulting from the exclusion of the indigenous voice in the current context of neo-colonial expansion, and it engaged with postcolonial theory to find a framework to address this silence. Finally the research has presented the popular medium of animation as a tool for young local artists to represent themselves and to re-imagine their traditional narratives for young audiences of the future.

This final chapter summarizes the key findings that answer the research questions, aims and objectives of this practice-led research. The chapter concludes by summarising my contribution to knowledge in the combined fields of developing animated content and participatory media, and the implications for future practice.

5.1 The Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

The main purpose of this research was to provide insights into the use of participatory practices to reconnect the young generation with existing cultural forms and practices. The study also aimed to understand how indigenous art could be adapted to the medium of animation. Two long-term aims had emerged from discussions with the workshop participants for converting indigenous narratives into animation films. Firstly it was their desire to recognise their own cultures in the animated television programmes they watched; there was also their parallel ambition to raise awareness about their identities by communicating their own cultures for mainstream audiences through new media. These aims were therefore pivotal in the development and production of this collection of animated films. In addition, there were the five pragmatic objectives related to the practice that were outlined in the Introduction: that of representing cultures with authenticity, the creation of a model of how to develop and produce cultural animation films in India, providing an introduction to new media for tribal artists, creating professional looking films and advancing the general aims of the Adivasi Arts Trust.

The key findings reflect the conditions of cultural change in the geographical areas of this research. Participatory film-making practice using the medium of animation was a way of reigniting interest in existing cultural practices for the participants. The issues of representation for the contemporary context, the dynamics of the participation and collaboration, reaching audiences and the workshop model that was established are discussed in the key findings.

5.2 The Key Findings

5.2.1 Cultural Change

My research has shown how both urban and rural based indigenous young people in India are now receiving unprecedented exposure to mass media entertainment and that this has brought huge changes to their lives. This finding was succinctly articulated by one of the participants, who related that “due to Westernization and modernization because of all this our culture, our food style, dress and everything we are influenced by change” (Kargo, focus group 3, p3, 37-39). Their experience of hybridity is recognised

as characteristic of the postcolonial condition; interestingly, hybridity is also evidenced in the visual arts (Sullivan 2010) including animation, in the combination of content, design and media.

Cultural transformation has brought widespread exposure to commercially produced animated programmes in the geographical areas of this research. As a consequence, animation was reported as a popular medium of entertainment by the young people who participated in this research. However, a parallel finding that shows that the young generations are increasingly becoming distanced from their oral traditions indicates a major cultural shift in light of the social and historical role that storytelling has had for these communities.

The newfound appeal of animation suggested that it was a medium that could be used by young workshop participants to engage in new cultural reinterpretations. The subsequent interest shown for participation in the animation film-making practice by local artists and young people, their contributions to discussions and the new interpretations that were produced in this study are evidence of how participatory film-making using the medium of animation can reinvigorate interest in traditional artistic practices and storytelling.

The next issue to reflect on is how images created by the use of animation, post-production software, computer technology and individual artistic interpretation as seen in the *Tales of the Tribes* animation series presents a challenge to perceptions of indigenous cultural authenticity located within definitions of the handmade and the rural. The Contextual Review showed that indigenous communities are not stagnant, and that ample evidence exists of artworks that have engaged with modern media, including the specific genre of emerging indigenous media practice. The sample films that have incorporated inputs from local young artists, the experimentation that took place the workshops and the revelations of cultural change that were recorded in the discussions and interviews show that indigenous artistic practice can also accommodate works in the medium of animation. The participatory film-making practice carried out in workshops with local artists and media professionals has shown how state of the art techniques can be combined with artistry and local traditions to produce re-imaginations of traditional stories in contemporary media for modern young audiences that reflect the changes experienced by these societies.

5.2.2 Contemporary Indigenous Representation in Animation in India

The discussion of the findings showed that from the point of view of the film-maker, indigenous narratives contain the elements that make good animation films. Therefore the next question was about the appropriate form for the contemporary media representations of indigenous narratives.

The discussions about representation that took place during the development process for each of the films were fronted by the political implications of representing diverse ethnic identities, and the priority placed by the local communities on achieving accurate, sensitive depictions. On this subject, the case study in Manipur provided the most acute illustration of how local political tensions would impact on the representation of minority groups. The discussions with the participants also established the concern that these young people have towards avoiding stereotyped depictions by updating their representation from the archaic images of the past to show how indigenous paradigms can demonstrate contemporary relevance. In this way, the animation film-making practice demonstrated the significant role of local participation for delivering representations that are acceptable to the communities themselves.

Sullivan's (2010) deconstruction of art practice as research shows how insights into indigenous art and culture may be gathered in the process of making the animation films. The works that have been produced aim to blend and combine animation practice with collective interpretation of the subject matter, and in this way I hope to have portrayed some aspects of the conceptual scheme through which specific indigenous populations of India approach their environment, and some of the complexities that these populations currently face.

The presentation of imitative designs from workshop participants and their reported expectations for particular technical and narrative solutions recognised from commercial animation reflected the impact of the dominant media entertainment and particular design aesthetics that have been developed abroad with the aim of achieving commercial success. The research that was carried out by the workshop participants on traditional art and culture was effective in providing ideas about how traditional design elements could be incorporated and adapted for the new medium to bring out a visual

identity that would be recognisable from the region. This typically found corroboration: for example, referring to the short story from Nagaland, the Director of the Wondang-ki Charitable Foundation related:

> "I am from here and I connected with the background colours and the music of the Naga folktale as they were familiar. This is why I happened to connect to it" (personal communication 2011).

Another example can be seen in the treatment of the Thangka art design showcased in the short story from Sikkim, which has met with consistent approval so far.

By combining computer based graphic techniques with traditional artistic practices a new form of multimedia representation of indigenous culture can emerge. I have argued that the multimedia approach that defines all the films in the collection can firstly draw from the richness and depth of traditional culture and then use a modern medium to translate it into a contemporary form. To achieve this, in-depth research on the context and cultural meanings of the folk narratives in literature combined with field research and collaboration with local practitioners can ensure that representations maintain the integrity of the original stories within the tradition of community cultural ownership.

In the creation of the *Tales of the Tribes* films, the practice has illustrated how a digital media artist can work with traditional artists to produce new work that challenges dominant attitudes about indigenous cultural expression. Therefore the films show how the combined skills of traditional artists and digital media practitioners can represent indigenous identities in a contemporary form.

5.2.3 Participatory Practice and Collaborative Research

The traditional folk stories that are the foundation of this research are the cultural property of the local communities and any new adaptations require local inputs as to how the cultures are represented. By using the method of participatory film-making practice to develop the sample collection of films, traditional protocols should be respected. For example, by inviting the cultural elders of the community to visit the

workshops to impart guidance on cultural issues this acknowledged the importance of their authoritative role (Smith 1999). This was also necessary for verifying cultural details to ensure the authenticity of the representation and as a commitment to representing the original meanings and functions of the stories (Smith and Wiese 2006). Therefore community participation can fulfil the role of the commissioning party: although the indigenous consultants and participants did not have the prerequisite media skills, they provided guidance for the film-maker to follow.

The participation by the local cultural consultants in the group discussions on cultural adaptation also promoted inter-generational dialogue on culture with appropriate roles for both the elders and the younger participants. Therefore the inclusion of multiple voices in the decision-making process to develop the films was more compatible with traditional indigenous approaches than the standard way that commercial animation is produced.

At the same time the exposure to commercially produced animation has led to expectations of narrative and technical sophistication from young people worldwide. Therefore to address the pragmatic aspect of how indigenous art and culture can be adapted to the animation medium and also meet the expectations of audiences, collaboration with trained animators made the production of the *Tales of the Tribes* films based on indigenous content viable.

The assistance from media practitioners contributed to demystifying the adaptive and technical processes. This was significant to be able to interpret the oral narratives for the audio visual format, and it also encouraged hands on experimentation with a variety of animation techniques to demonstrate to the group how it would be possible to adapt local cultural content for the medium of animation.

The dual-participant workshop environment that was established to develop the films was chosen on the basis that participatory film-making in workshops was suitable method to achieve pre-production that could also accommodate community engagement. Relating back to the questions of the research, the diversity within the teams and the invitation for input from the local participants was reported to be an empowering experience for them that contributed to sustaining their interest and engagement in the retelling of their cultural narratives in a modern way.

The participatory practice was also a way to investigate how indigenous visual arts could be accommodated and adapted for the digital medium, it was a pragmatic way of incorporating locally available materials and most significantly, it established specialized roles for indigenous artists in the creation of the art design of the films.

Collaborative research is expected to actively engage communities and policy makers in the research process from start to finish. Therefore, if future indigenous animation practice is to become truly community-based participatory research (CBPR) i.e. based on a commitment to sharing power and resources, protocols defining the preferred ways of communicating, the expected frequency of communications and meetings and the practical details of who will take responsibility for what must be established from the start.

5.2.4 Communicating Local Culture to Mainstream Audiences

The involvement by animators in both the pre-production and production phases addressed the second significant reason that was put forward by the local participants for translating indigenous folktales to the medium of animation: by engaging with standard professional animation practices they hoped that the films would contribute to raising awareness of the value of their cultures in mainstream society.

The *Tales of the Tribes* films are targeted primarily at indigenous audiences; however, the discussions with participants and animators has indicated that animated adaptations of indigenous folktales made to professional standards will also have entertainment value for mainstream audiences. Therefore, ongoing engagement by animators is crucial in order to deliver the final output of professional looking films.

In workshops with local artists and animation practitioners, it was possible to set up a two-way mutually beneficial experience for both groups of collaborators; there was what ‘we’ could learn from indigenous cultures and what the media professionals could teach the local participants. For instance, on the educational role of storytelling in traditional societies Scroggie (2009, p76) has added that “Story has the power to transform, reform and re-ignite”, and Ledding (2009) has further affirmed the power of story to impart values. Therefore by engaging in the deconstruction and re-

interpretation of the narratives with local collaborators, socially and culturally relevant knowledge grounded in multiple realities and experiences is established with benefits to the indigenous community in the recognition of the value of their ways of seeing.

From the point of view of the young professional and student animators who participated in this research project the original content matter and the opportunities the project gave for experimentation with interpretation and design in the animation medium was invaluable. Not only did the animators themselves become more aware of the cultures they were working with during the process of collaborating with traditional artists, but by engaging media professionals in post-production, this has also contributed to delivering production standards that aim to satisfy both local and wider audiences beyond the indigenous groups.

As animation has great potential for broad outreach, the storytelling of these sample animated films can bridge from one culture to another. Davis's theory (cited by Scroggie 2009) on the role that storytelling can have for promoting harmony in diverse societies indicates how the value of the stories can extend beyond the communities from where they originate to bring larger social influence.

The technical skills that the animators and other media professionals brought to the project enables indigenous storytellers to relate their narratives effectively to wider audiences: the preview screenings of the individual films that have already taken place indicate positive responses from audiences towards these examples of indigenous storytelling in an animated form. Therefore, in addition to reviewing the collaborative workshop model as a situation for interaction and co-creation, screenings of indigenous animated films also has the arguable potential to contribute to wider social integration.

This research has shown the interest from young people for innovative approaches to interpreting culture in the areas of this study. In addition, young people in India now enjoy watching animated films, but most have no exposure to the creative animation process. Participatory practice was a way of introducing specific groups of young people to the medium of animation from their own cultural context and to engage their contribution in the reinterpretation of their stories. By engaging with the medium in this way, the interest for their traditional narratives was reignited for these young people.

Participatory film-making using the medium of animation can be introduced in the workshop model that is outlined next. Screenings of experimental animated films introduces new ideas to young artists of how to present their narratives and art forms through the medium; inputs and guidance on the local cultural content from community elders in the role of cultural consultants produces appropriate interpretations for animated films that are designed to reignite interest in traditional narratives with local audiences. The engagement by young professional and semi professional animators makes it possible to create films that can also be screened to wider audiences to raise awareness of indigenous values.

5.2.4 A model of "how to do it"

This template lays out a model for the production of cultural animation films in India in a way that empowers the voice of indigenous young people. A workflow that implements the pre-production phase at regional locations to engage local participation provides a way of engaging local involvement in the interpretation of their folk narratives for future generations. The workshops are replicable and transferable, using the daily schedule of the workshop in Manipur that is available as appendix 10, as a reference to manage the time and subjects covered.

In summary, the key aspects of the workshops are:

- Community guidance regarding the content matter.
- Guidance from animators regarding the technical processes.
- Research on traditional art forms to promote designs that are appropriate to the representation of indigenous cultures.
- Screenings of a diverse range of animated films to widen exposure.
- References to narrative theory to help the films translate across cultures.
- Experimentation with a variety of animation techniques.
- Use of computer technology to achieve professional production standards.

At the time of this research, the resources for professional animation production and post- production were not accessible in the regions of these case studies, and the completion of the films was carried out through various models depending on the availability of support. In this way, the research has been able to demonstrate how the production phase can be carried out effectively by early career animators based at institutes or with fledgling independent studios (Jones 2014) that are interested in developing original content and design that will make them stand out. This model therefore goes beyond my practice to develop a pipeline for production that other animation practitioners can also apply for collaborative work with indigenous artists. In summary, this research has demonstrated a new model of how to develop and produce cultural animation films in India.

The encounters with multiple voices and perspectives, the inputs from cultural consultants and the rigorous implementation of self-reflexive practices leading to continuous reassessment and adaptive procedures from the researcher all assist in the authentic representation of cultures, specifically the ethics of maintaining the original meanings of the stories. The engagement of animation and media professionals as resource people in the pre-production workshops facilitated an introduction to new media for indigenous artists, and I have also shown how their involvement in this work contributes to creating professional looking films.

Reflection on the challenges of this work presents the limitation of the financial support that was available for this project as a primary hurdle. Firstly, the shortfall of financing meant that the local partner organisations needed to apply for additional funding to facilitate the workshops. Where this was sought from Government grants, it entailed a protracted period to process the respective applications. The real world constraints of having to compete in the liberalized economic environment meant that the motivation for sustained well-paid work takes precedence for most young animators over what Ryan and Deci (2000) have described as intrinsic motivation - doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable. The strict limitations of financial capital that was available to fund the experimental animation film-making process to deliver the sample collection of films meant that it was a challenge to secure commitment from good artists and animators to build new working relationships. Therefore, as this project could only offer short term engagement with less financial incentive, the conjecture is that this contributed to the reduced commitment from many

participants and the unavailability of more animators to participate as resource people in the workshops.

Several small grants were sourced from organisations based in the UK including from the Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the Commonwealth Foundation, to support this work. The case study of the *Tales of the Tribes* production continues to investigate a range of funding sources from Government and non-Government grants through applications submitted by the Adivasi Arts Trust. The continuous requirement for fundraising activities has threatened and delayed the delivery of the films. The options that were explored for crowdfunding only secured the target amount at the third attempt. Therefore, although this method did enable the completion of the short film from Arunachal Pradesh, it also demonstrated how much investment is required for ongoing social marketing throughout the entire duration of the fundraising campaign (Steinberg 2012).

The resource limitations also made consistent delivery difficult. This accounts for why just four films out of the collection of five have been completed so far. However, the remaining film is now at the end of the production phase and the series is expected to be completed in 2016.

The control of Intellectual Property has also presented issues: in the case of Manipur, the funding for the workshop and the film production was provided for by the Manipur Film Development Corporation and this organisation owns the rights to the film; as a result, a memorandum of understanding is now required to include the film with the rest of the collection for public screening events.

In summary, this research has shown the workshop model can be a way to introduce the medium of animation to young people from indigenous backgrounds through participatory film-making practice, and that this can work as a way for them to reconnect with their heritage of traditional storytelling and artistic practices. The research has also explored and outlined the ways that indigenous stories and art forms can be adapted for the animation medium for young target audiences. For this initiative to be carried forward there is a requirement for developing further support, financial backing and audiences to sustain this work.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

In this research, ideas have been presented that have helped the media professionals, participants and audiences that have engaged with this work to view culture in new ways. The contribution to knowledge about animation that has emerged shows how the medium of animation that has proven success in the entertainment industry for communicating with young people, can also have a significant role for cultural communication within and between cultures.

Although animation practice in India is dominated by the commercial industry, this research has shown that there are possibilities for experimentation with local content and art forms. The research has first shown that the young people in the areas of this study are eager to see animation that they can identify with. The practice has also demonstrated that there is a great deal of interest from young animators in India for opportunities to work with indigenous artists to develop original content for Indian animation films.

The practice has produced new artefacts and new interpretations of traditional stories, and the purpose of both the practice and the output of films in society were examined. This experience has shown that engagement with theory and different research and practice methods has had positive impact on the film-making practice and the content and form of the films. The practice-led research has delivered an overview of an indigenous genre of animation in India that places significance on transformative processes that connect with the social and political functions of art, as well as delivering an output of films.

New knowledge in the fields of art, culture and the media has been created by experimenting with various techniques of research and practice to establish a new model for collaboration between the researcher, animation practitioner and informant. As practice-led research, this work has shown that the artists – referring to myself and all others involved - are both the researchers and the objects of study (Sullivan 2010). In this capacity, the research has not only increased awareness about the diversity of indigenous cultures but has also provided insights about ethics and self-reflection.

The ways that indigenous narratives and arts can be managed within a media production pipeline was examined through the workshop model that was used to develop and produce this series of animated films. This approach to practice has contributed to sustaining the sample collection of stories by bringing together co-creative teams that include indigenous artists and young people who are already exposed to the animation medium.

It is anticipated that the publication of this research will contribute to raising awareness about the wealth of indigenous cultures in India and the potential resource of this heritage for the production of original and entertaining animated films. These contributions have primary value to the communities themselves. I reiterate that the project to adapt indigenous content for animation is neither a movement towards the commodification of indigeneity (Smith and Ward 2000) nor is the introduction of a dominant visual language - that of animation - a project to hasten assimilation of indigenous groups into the mainstream society.

5.4 Building on this Study and Looking Forward

Manjoor Jhali is the animated film - based on a Gond folktale from Central India - that still remains to be completed for the collection. There are also the linking sequences of an animated presenter who will introduce each of the films and invite the audience to vote for their favorite in the series: this format was found to be a useful way of recording the number of viewers for the earlier Indian tribal animation programme, *The Tallest Story Competition* (2006) that was produced in Scotland.

My doctoral work has primarily focused on the visualisation and animation of indigenous storytelling through digital media. The work has received considerable press coverage, and a selection of articles is available as appendix 11. The work has also received national and international peer review, and a list of conference presentations and publications that have resulted from this work is included as appendix 12 and the article, *Gond Adaptation to New Media* in the South Asianist (2014) is included as appendix 13.

When the production has been completed, the intention is to dub the films into the vernacular languages of the communities that are represented, and to travel back to the communities and record their responses to the films at screenings. Some initial responses to the work are available as appendix 14; however, a more comprehensive evaluation of the work can be documented at the screening events following the completion of the series. This work is not part of the main body of the doctoral research. Therefore, my intention is to use post-doctoral research opportunities to explore the means of widening the accessibility of animation for traditional artists to communicate their narratives. This first means making the *Tales of the Tribes* widely available.

Establishing a website to archive minority animated films with downloading options for different broadband speeds to serve the less connected areas, as well as creating an international online community to network between animation practitioners and indigenous artists worldwide is a way of building audiences and attracting support for indigenous animation films.

I would also like to see a centre established to facilitate more creative collaborations between indigenous artists and animation practitioners. In approaching these future aims, I am interested in the possibility of generating a new dialogue of interpretation in the area of indigenous artistic representations. Again, this would involve creating works based on traditional material that draw from experimental animation practice, and reflect the complexities of the contemporary indigenous situations. Examples have shown how indigenous media has emerged as a genre worldwide, indicating that provisions are also required to accommodate the representation of indigenous perspectives in the media in India.

The work showed that animated films can have a role in sustaining traditional storytelling for future generations and in helping indigenous cultures to become accessible to young audiences on a wider scale. Contributions from the young generation towards the preservation and re-imagination of their culture will raise their profile and can also promote appreciation of the value of indigenous culture with mainstream audiences. The discussion by Dix (2013) on how cultural forms are active within a society suggests that constructive, affirmative contemporary representation can

contribute to the goal of reducing the prejudice and discrimination that indigenous people currently experience.

Collaborative initiatives between indigenous artists and Indian animation practitioners can also produce original Indian content for animation. Therefore this research shows that animation practitioners and traditional artists can work together for mutual benefit. The research journey is not over and I look forward to continuing to use my creative abilities to explore indigenous storytelling through digital media.

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