

## Editorial

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Anthropological film has matured and blossomed in recent years, diversified in styles, upset conventions, pushed against established practices and created new paths for research and learning. If anthropology is, as Margaret Mead stated, “a discipline of words”, the moving image with its emotional, experiential and sensory power, is creating new audiences, new ways of perceiving culture and most critically, earning a place of recognition within the larger discipline. JAF (Journal of Anthropological Films) is now in its sixth year. During that time it has published eleven issues and brought more than sixty films to a worldwide audience. It has changed and matured, earned an expanding readership and adopted a broader, more inclusive vision of the range of anthropological films being made today.

In 2014 the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) convened an international group of anthropologist / filmmakers at the NAFA Film Festival in Isafjodur, Iceland, to discuss the possibility of creating an online academic journal exclusively for anthropological films. A key question for the group was whether such a journal should require films to be accompanied by critical texts or publish films that stood on their own. What would such a journal look like and how would it work? The consensus from Isafjodur was that publishing exemplary anthropological films on their own, free from the dominion of textual interpretation, could make the strongest contribution to the discipline. Thus, JAF was born and in 2017 took its first steps with the mission of publishing peer-reviewed films that combine research with cinema narrative to represent a given cultural reality. Creating an online, academic journal where films would be accepted and credited on par with written, peer-reviewed articles was a critical goal.

In this issue of JAF we present four films representing a wide arc of styles and approaches in anthropological film today, from the observational to the sensory to the experimental. In *Itelmen Stories*, filmmaker Liivo Niglas closely observes a family in Eastern Siberia who’s native language, *Itelmen*, is near extinction. Filmmaker Maja Novaković takes us into the quiet world of two elderly women in *Then Comes the Evening*, and their relationship of reciprocity that is far beyond conversation. In *Lode’s Code*, filmmaker Marieke Vandecasteele uses home videos, animations and present-day conversations to create an “auto-ethnographic” portrait of the perceptual world of her disabled brother. And finally, in Christopher Ballengee’s, *Sweet Tassa: Music of the Indian Caribbean Diaspora*, we learn about a musical tradition – kettle drumming -brought from India over 150 years ago by indentured immigrants and still thriving throughout the Caribbean.

We are happy to announce that a new editorial team will take over the stewardship of JAF from May, 2022. We welcome Bjørn Arntsen, University of Tromsø, Arctic University of Norway, Osmund E B Grøholt, University of Bergen, Alyssa Grossman, University of Liverpool and Leonard Kamerling, University of Alaska Fairbanks, as co-editors of JAF. Osmund E B Grøholt and Åshild S F Thorsen will continue as editorial staff. Our gratitude and thanks to the founders and departing editors, Frode Storaas and Trond Waage, who nurtured JAF through its early years and contributed much to making it a reality. We are grateful to NAFA and the University Museum / University of Bergen Open Access Publications (BOAP) for their continued institutional support.

## The Films

*Itelmen Stories*, by Liivo Niglas, 68 minutes

For generations Indigenous languages have been under pressure from dominant national cultures and the forces of colonialism. Is language the “glue” that holds a culture together? This is the question that resonates throughout *Itelmen Stories*, a closely observed portrait of a family in rural Kamchatka in the Russian Far East, whose native language is near the end of its existence. Memory and nostalgia have now displaced a rich cultural world once expressed through the Itelmen language. The old stories are still remembered but now they are told in Russian.

Filmmaker Liivo Niglas and Alaska anthropologist David Koester worked with hunters Georgii Zaporotskii (uncle Kosha) and Pavel Khaloimov, to record accounts of traditional subsistence practices in the local language and to demonstrate the almost forgotten practice of hunting sable with nets. Uncle Kosha and Pavel recall northern stories about hunting, traveling, bears crying, and drinking - but not in their native Itelmen. Vocabulary has been lost, pronunciation unpracticed, and the habit of thinking in one’s native tongue given way to the ubiquitous presence of the national language. *Itelmen Stories* is an ethnographic cautionary tale. The universality of these issues for the Indigenous world makes this film particularly poignant and relevant. Through our time with Pavel and Uncle Kosha we learn about the concomitants of language loss - the erosion of traditional livelihoods, migration to the cities, and the slow assimilation of rural communities into the surrounding culture.

*Then Comes the Evening*, by Maja Novaković, 28 minutes

On a modest farm in an isolated mountain village in Eastern Bosnia, two elderly women, Vinka and Obrenija Radić, look after their flock of sheep, cultivate fields of potato and tend to their fruit trees. They have no electricity or machinery. Their house and sturdy furniture, like the women themselves, have had a long life. This is a world of daily subsistence rounds, the routine of labor and cultural memory. Using chants and ashes they invoke magical phrases encouraged by the power of a white wedding dress, to help dispel evil forces and mitigate an ominous rain squall.

As a native of East Bosnia, the filmmaker’s eye seems especially tuned to the texture and light of this rustic landscape. Her camera approaches the relationship between the women with subtlety and respect. It carefully observes but does not invade. Her compositions are both cultural and metaphorical - the women working, the broad countryside in various moods, a bare foot covered with ants, an old wrinkled hand on the furrowed bark of a

tree. These invite viewers to draw meaning from their own experience of the film. The natural world which defines the women's lives is like a third character in this story, a frame that expresses the rich ethnographic meaning of the film. The 28 minutes of this meditation are dominated by silence which resonates strongly in a world of natural sounds. This is an old and steady relationship beyond conversation. Their words are reserved for the sheep. Not much is said but a lot is told.

***Lode's Code***, by Marieke Vandecasteele, 13 minutes

Filmmaker / anthropologist Marieke Vandecasteele describes her short experimental film as an auto-ethnographic portrait of family relationships and what it means to enter the subjective world of a person with a disability. "My brother Lode's way of thinking has fascinated me since my childhood", she writes. "I have always been intrigued by his code language, how he invents his own words, his love of rhyme and alliteration. With his own language he creates a second world. By making this film, I became a researcher of my own family". Using home videos, animations and present-day conversations between the filmmaker and her brother, the film juxtaposes layers of meaning as it draws the viewer into a world that cannot be physically filmed or seen - the perceptual space of a person with a disability.

Images and voices give expression to the singular quality of family memories, the deciphering of Lode's particularly way of being in the world and the two sibling's uneasy relationship with the inevitability of change. "I have used very few raw images of my brother Lode", Marieke Vandecasteele writes. "Instead, I delved into my subjective experience of him and the relationship with my family. Lode speaks to me with his body butterflying through the house, which is why I chose to translate his body movements into ink".

***Sweet Tassa: Music of the Indian Caribbean Diaspora***, by Christopher L. Ballengee, 58 minutes.

When slavery was abolished in the British colonies in the 1830's, the government devised a new system of indentured labor that would bring thousands of people from the British Empire to work in plantations throughout the Caribbean. In 1845 the first shipload of immigrants from India arrived in Trinidad. Until the end of this system of forced labor in 1917, an estimated 150,000 people had permanently settled in Trinidad Tobago. *Sweet Tassa* tells the story of a musical tradition brought from India over 150 years ago by indentured immigrants - Tassa (kettle drumming). After five generations, the rhythms of Tassa are very much alive, continually evolving in style and practiced widely through the islands.

Filmed in traditional documentary style, the story moves between interviews with Tassa musicians, practice sessions and performances at weddings, funerals and cultural celebrations. *Sweet Tassa* is also a film about artistic performance and the mastery of a traditional musical form. It brings us into the present day practice of a musical tradition at the center of Indian cultural and national identity in Trinidad and Tobago. It traces the Tassa movement from its roots in rural India to the Caribbean as demographics, labor and colonial power transformed a cohesive ethnic population into a vast diaspora. Can an ethnic musical tradition keep Indian cultural identity alive with the ever increasing pressures of assimilation? This is the question that *Sweet Tassa* strives to answer.

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**Call for Films:** If you have made films based on anthropological fieldwork or research, consider submitting to JAF. Both recent and previously produced films will be considered. Films published in JAF are peer-reviewed and receive recognition on par with written papers in academic journals. JAF presents your film in an academic context through open access publishing making it easily available to students and audiences worldwide.