This paper gives some examples of Indigenous and Diasporic people and how they are using visual media to present themselves to the world.

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Indigenous and diasporic media is emerging as a way to reaffirm ethnic and local values. “Media images are infused with dynamics that express the geographic dispersal of peoples, the breakdown of nation-states, the hybridization of culture, and intensified concerns about national security and autonomy in a post-Cold War world in which borders have both ended and become more desperately protected” (Sturken, 413).

Global media environments now have the power to reaffirm ethnic and local values over a homogenized national communication system. For diasporic communities and exiled people throughout the world (ethnic communities set apart from their homelands), television or internet programming aired across national boundaries can be “narrow cast” to their own communities, providing a virtual home. Programming can be targeted to a particular group, focusing on culture, history, and values – a group that is globally dispersed, without a unified geographic base. They can link viewers to a community whose geographic origin is not accessible to that group any longer due to being exiled, poor, or that the geographic location no longer exists.

“…diasporic identity is connected to and lived through cultural history and cultural remembering” (Philogene, 85). Diasporic people cannot know if they can ever return home, so use their memories and connections to reinvent their native land through artistic, physical, and spiritual ways (hand-in-hand with technology). Native Americans and other indigenous people adapt to constant change, using new ways and material to move and strengthen their societies. “Storytellers in indigenous communities are continually embracing new materials and technologies, including video and digital media. I would suggest that the shift does not threaten storytelling traditions in these communities but is merely a continuation of what aboriginal people have been doing from time immemorial: making things their own” (Hopkins, 341).
For people exiled from their homelands for political reasons, websites form a virtual location where this homeland can exist. The site eelam.com in cyberspace is the symbolic location of the diasporic Tamil nation of Sri Lanka. This site maintains and generates unity in the absence of a real geographic home – keeping the hope alive that the actual geographic place may some day be reclaimed.

In Canada, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) linked the indigenous Inuit communities together by satellites. The IBC offers indigenous programming produced and broadcast in Inuktitut, the Inuit language. These programs represent cultural Inuit values that had been dying out due to the national programming throughout Canada. IBC has helped to preserve and reinstate Canadian aboriginal cultural traditions and language practices across vast geographic distances. The IBC recognized that video shared the Inuit oral tradition of storytelling. It was also a way to correctly portray the Inuit people. Recording on video allowed the IBC to go into the communities – giving voice to the underrepresented. It was relatively inexpensive, spontaneous, and immediate. IBS creatively depicts Intuit life through drama, improvisation, storytelling, drama, reenactments, and traditional songs. They uphold the importance of community and recognize that the past continues within the present. The IBC has moved onto the internet as well. Within their website, IBC uses a typeface called Culture.ca. This typeface was created specifically for their site to reflect the typographic forms used for writing in Inuktitut.

The Zapatistas of Mexico are fighting for indigenous rights and control of the Chiapas areas against the policies and authoritarian rule of the Mexican government. The Internet has created a means to create global communities of support for political movements to spread their ideas and build support. The Zapatistas have also created an iconic global image – wearing
black ski masks. This image is a symbol for their movement and has come to represent many indigenous political movements. Souvenir Zapatista dolls – donning ski masks – can be purchased throughout Latin America. Many Zapatistas are from Mayan decent. They also use the symbol of a snail (or caracol) which has local meaning. It symbolizes taking knowledge from the heart and into the world. The Zapatistas are an excellent example of merging technology to promote and preserve indigenous culture, history, and politics.

The internet resource Native American Indian Resources was created in 1993. This site, which is no longer maintained, at one point contained links to over 300 websites that together told the story of contemporary Native Americans. This resource recognized the value of the internet for its ability to bring people together and communicate across geographical divides. The site Cyberpowwow was created by an organization called Nation to Nation as a place to gather virtually – to view artwork, read critical writings and meet and speak with people around the world. This site was to be a reminder of real places and experiences allowing all who joined to reaffirm their identity.

Alaska has begun implementing methods to teach the many forgotten indigenous languages of their communities. The common every day use of these languages declined and weakened due to religious, political, educational, and social reasons. With the establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, native Alaskans were forced to silence their languages by physical punishment and the downgrading of their language for that of English. Indigenous professionals are not attempting to resuscitate these languages within their communities.

Teaching and creating curricula proved to be difficult, as these languages were oral, and using English to create teaching material did not properly represent the oral language. For the Yup’ik language, a visual, grammatical version was established and a comprehensive dictionary
written in the 1970’s. This allowed teaching the language in all schools, including at the university level. The University of Alaska now teaches over twenty distinct indigenous languages.

Majority World is a website that champions indigenous photographers to bring their images to the mass media and help them sell their work. The imagery on the site provides unique insights into local cultures, development issues, environments, and contemporary lifestyles in diverse continents. They work to open minds through the experiences of the photographers who understand the language, the culture, and the locality because it is their own. Their mission is to create equality of opportunity for the photographers and promote their creative talent and tell their own stories.

The Australian media artist Rea uses photography, digital media and moving images to capture her subject matter – visualized art that is representations of the Australian Aboriginal people, dispossession and language loss, and the treatment of Aboriginal women. Her series of ten prints in 1992 called *Look Who’s Calling the Kettle Black* was created to acknowledge the suffering of stolen Indigenous girls, taken from their families and forced to work as domestic servants for wealthy whites. In 1999 she created *Don’t Shoot until You See the Whites of Their Eyes* to express the racism, taunts, and social and economic inequality targeted toward Indigenous people. Rea created a video, called *PolesApart*, which uses visual narratives that display both personal and political realities of the past and present. The video is against forgetting the past – it wants you to remember your family history, culture and languages.

More Cuban artwork is produced abroad than on the island. This seems to be the rule, rather than the exception throughout the history of Cuba. Cuban diasporic art is: “Eclectic and inclusive, nomadic and radicant, it defies a host of curatorial conventions. In its necessary
negotiation of history and space, it reveals the social, political, and cultural variables that influence how identity is constructed and negotiated in the contexts of movement and dislocation” (Herrera, 26). An ongoing multimedia exhibition called CAFÉ (Cuban American Foremost Exhibitions) was formed in 2001 as a venue for diasporic Cuban artists to display their work. Herrera quotes Leandro Soto: “Café, he explains, is an allegory for a social ritual that sustains itself even in exile…[It bespeaks] the intensity of the Cuban social character; yet at the same time, the act of preparing café a lo Cubano represents a cultural practice that enables Cubans – across generations – to preserve and perpetuate their cultural identities” (27-28). The theme of the first showing of CAFÉ centered on the café metaphor – relating to rupture, dislocation, cultural continuity, and transformation. This theme is close to the heart of a diasporic community and a way for artists to remember their historical history and visually recuperate their past and heritage.

The Kogi people in Colombia are an example of an indigenous community that has held on to their cultural and religious traditions – defying industrialization, population growth, and development. Their remote villages are closed to the outside world, including other Colombians and tourists. However, no matter how hard they try to shelter themselves, there are websites and videos displaying their homes and depicting their lives.

Across the globe, tribes have been the victims of colonization – battling against armies, corporations and nations for the rights to their land, their language, and even their children. A tribe is defined by its members rather than outsiders. A tribe regards themselves as having the same customs and language, and if they are descended from the same ancestors or have the same political affiliation. More than 100 indigenous tribes are thought to live in isolation from other people. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was implemented by the United
Nations in 2007. This declaration states: “Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture”. And, again, although many tribes do not access the internet, they can be quoted by others using it. This saying – a prophecy from a Cree tribe – has been quoted more than 1.9 million times online: “Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realize we cannot eat money”.

There are indigenous tribal people that are using the internet and other media to access information and enable self-representation to secure land rights. Documentaries have been created to show the impact of climate change on their homelands and way of life. Tribal people are also beginning to take part in national government. “Portraying tribal people in the national and international media is fraught with difficulty, and is open to charges of misrepresentation. This is usually because the cameraman, journalist, or photographer is an outsider and often conveys, explicitly or implicitly, his or her own views about a tribe’s culture” (Gibbon, 181). It is important that those indigenous tribes that do use media take the initiative to represent and present themselves to the world.

Indigenous people are pushing their geographic boundaries by using mainstream media to bring resources to wide audiences. “Media is our non-violent way to wage war” (Alia, 161). Rosemarie Kuptan, an Inuit broadcaster, compared non-indigenous television to “the neutron bomb, which destroyed the soul of a people while leaving the shell of a people walking around. This is television in which the traditions, the skills, the culture, the language, count for nothing” (Alia, 163). Alia quotes Verán “Armed with increasingly affordable and accessible recording technology, fiscal support, and online, broadcast, and other distribution mechanisms …Indigenous media arts, actions, and activism have an increasing ability to speak to and
influence their world – and yours” (164). The internet carries interpersonal, inter-regional, and international dialogue and brings indigenous people and indigenous media to each other, as well as to non-indigenous people. Alia uses the term “New Media Nation” to represent the explosion of Indigenous new media, information technology, film, music, and other artistic and cultural developments. It exists outside the control of any particular nation state and enables those who use it to network and access information that might otherwise be inaccessible within state borders.

Some indigenous populations are now trying to empower students to use media in their studies in order to encourage them to honor and preserve valued traditions, languages, and practices. Workshops have been created to teach the fundamentals of animation and production. Students develop a story, build scenery and characters, animate the scenes, record them frame by frame into a computer, and insert sound. The animation – or visual communication - tells stories from their own communities and traditions, such as drum festivals, stories (such as why corn has many colors), and marriage traditions.

The use of mobile camera phones has also been introduced as ways to have students in indigenous communities contribute to their own learning and to others’ learning. This media was used to capture oral storytelling, the students’ family life, and songs in indigenous languages. The results were positive and allowed the students to add meaning to their curriculum and emotion to their images and video recordings. This exercise also allowed teachers a better understanding of their students and “opened up opportunities for dialogue between teachers and students about geography, history, drama, film-making and technology” (Hartnell-Young, 291). However, teachers must also teach their students about security, privacy
of information, and making sound judgments when using mobile technologies and social networking.

Technology has allowed for cultural awakenings and revivals. Every culture is linked together in a trans-cultural world. Cultural survival depends on finding ways to both celebrate commonalities and differences. “Grounded in cultural specificities and intercultural commonalities, and committed to creative, pan-Indigenous networking, and the broadest possible dissemination of information, the New Media Nation is a catalyst for identity assertion and transformation, a multidimensional international movement, and a force for positive global change” (Alia, 184).

The book, Dignity, contains photographs by Dana Gluckstein to honor the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The book contains an introduction by Faithkeeper Oren R. Lyons, who writes: “A thousand years ago or more, the Great Peace Maker came among our people. He introduced the principles of peace, health, equity, justice, and the power of the good minds, which is to say, to be united in thought, body and spirit. He brought peace to our warring nations and he raised new leaders, clan mothers and chiefs, instructing us on our conduct and our responsibilities. Among those many instructions, one continues to resonate around the world today. He said to us, “When you sit in council for the welfare of the people, think not of yourself, nor of your family, or even you generation. Make your decisions for the seventh generation coming so that they may enjoy what you have here today. If you do this, there will be peace.” That is a profound instruction on responsibility that should be the basis for the world’s decision makers today.” (Gluckstein, 13). Gluckstein dedicates her art and the publication of Dignity to capture the strength and dignity of Indigenous people.
Works Cited


