

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Anthropologists in Films: “The Horror! The Horror!”

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**ABSTRACT** Drawing upon 53 films featuring fictional representations of anthropologists, we explore in this article the popular depiction and perception of anthropology by examining portrayals of the discipline in film. Finding that 26 of the 53 can be categorized as horror films, we examine the role of anthropologists in these films as experts and mediators for seemingly alien “others” and how this lends itself to frequently heroic depictions. We draw parallels between this work and Conradian voyages into the “heart of darkness” as well as ethical dilemmas and controversies involving real anthropologists. We argue that this body of work represents an excellent opportunity for anthropological teaching while we also implore anthropologists to play more active roles in shaping public perception of the discipline in regard to both analysis and production. [*anthropologists, movies, fiction, horror, films, anthropology discipline, engaged anthropology, ethics*]

Anthropologists have a vested interest in their collective public image. The process of building relationships with research participants to gather data, and accompanying issues of access and trust, are influenced by popular conceptions and misconceptions of what we do. People inevitably form their own personal views of academic disciplines, but perceptions are at least partially shaped by popular media representations of anthropology and anthropologists. In turn, the representations themselves are likely to have been influenced by personal views of directors, actors, and scriptwriters as well as broader notions of academia. Psychologists have explored the popular perception of their discipline through films (Schultz 2005; Young 2012), as have international development scholars David Lewis and colleagues (2013) regarding cinematic representations of international development. Recognizing the active roles they must play in public perceptions of archaeology, archaeologists have earnestly engaged with the diffuse media terrain in which the field is situated (Bonnachi 2012; Marwick 2010). In these cases, it has been noted that mainstream mass media create representations of academics and practitioners that have the scope to reach sizeable audiences, providing the opportunity to shape popular perceptions of practice. As Louise Krasniewicz (2006:10) notes, “Movies are more than just the stories they tell. They are symbolic constructs, systems of symbols that help people think, feel, and act.” While anthropologists should be encouraged to take this facet of

filmic representations seriously, we also need to be aware that fictional anthropologists are both shaped by and active in shaping these popular understandings wherever they occur.

Against a backdrop of an abundance of horror films on the list, we argue here that the widespread representation of anthropologists as having intercultural or interspecies expertise lends itself to a particular narrative purpose wherein anthropologists act as mediators. We also argue that the frequent use of travel from the urban to the “exotic” leads to an abundant use of the Conradian “heart of darkness” trope, in which the supposed “savagery” of “the other” is used to critique the savagery of Western capitalist modernity, but this filmic critique occurs in a way that still exploits indigenous peoples. We argue that these patterns, along with frequent allusions to real-world anthropological controversies and ethical dilemmas, present the possibility of using such films as an interesting pedagogical tool. We also demonstrate that there is a widespread, widely consumed body of work that both reflects public perception of our discipline and plays an important role in shaping that opinion. That being the case, we contend that more active engagement with film production and analysis and with anthropological representations in popular culture more generally is needed.

Such fictional representations of anthropology are not new occurrences. Anthropologists have long found themselves represented within popular culture. For example, Charles Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (2012) made its way into both

W. B. Yeats's (2004) poem *Sailing to Byzantium* and H. P. Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu* (1999). More recently, the book found its way onto the fictional bookshelves of Colonel Kurtz in Francis Ford Coppola's (1979) *Apocalypse Now* and of V in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's (1988) *V for Vendetta*. In addition, Rosemary Firth (1984:7) noted five distinct nods to Frazer in novels written between 1960 and 1980. References to Carlos Castaneda and Jane Goodall have found their way into *The Simpsons*. These appearances represent just a small proportion of the intersections between anthropology and popular culture. Such representations vary in their accuracy and range between the real and the fantastical, but each plays a role in shaping public perception of anthropology. It would be beneficial for the discipline to play an active role in discussing the ways in which we are represented in popular culture. Are anthropologists represented realistically? Do real-life anthropological dilemmas make their way into fictionalizations of our discipline? What dramatic purposes do anthropologists serve?

## ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN FILMS: OUR AIMS AND APPROACH

In this article, we consider how anthropologists are perceived in the popular imagination through an analysis of mainstream movies. To answer the questions with which we ended the previous section, we compiled a list of films featuring one or more anthropologist character(s). The act of making the list in itself was trickier than one might expect due to anomalies regarding filmic categories, misinformation, and resultant wild-goose chases.

We chose to look specifically at films rather than casting our net across the entirety of popular culture. Within this medium, we restricted ourselves to nonethnographic, non-documentary films, as these are of little help in our analysis of anthropologists in fictional or fictionalized films. We were open to non-English language films so long as they were subtitled, dubbed, or within the realms of linguistic competency of the authors. We also excluded films that dealt with broadly anthropological themes or ideas but did not contain an anthropologist character (*The Gods Must Be Crazy* was repeatedly suggested but ultimately rejected for this reason). While we avoided television series (this would have led to exponential growth in the task), we did watch made-for-TV movies, straight-to-video or DVD releases, and cinematic releases.

### The List

Collectively, the authors of this article have expertise across social, biological, medical, and visual anthropology. We began our lists with those films we already knew and added those suggested by friends and colleagues. We compiled the bulk of the list through searches of keywords such as *anthropology* and *anthropologist* in plot descriptions on the Internet Movie Database, Wikipedia, and Google. Suggestions from friends and colleagues were perhaps the most frustrating sources: half-remembered, title-less films, slightly incorrect

attribution of anthropological careers to characters, and a slow drip of additions to the list continued until the final weeks of the viewings. Some films turned out to be duplicates bearing alternate titles (*Laure/Forever Emmanuelle* [1976], *The Beacon/The Haunting at the Beacon* [2008]), while others (like *Alone in the Dark* [Boll 2005]) were watched in their entirety only to turn out to be devoid of anthropologists. To make our list, a film had to contain at least one character, however minor, who was explicitly identified, by themselves or other characters, as an anthropologist. Nevertheless, we encountered so many grey areas and points of contention in identifying anthropologists that the process of applying these criteria could constitute an article in itself.

We used a few important questions to help winnow our list. First, are students of anthropology anthropologists? To some extent this question was moot because most films in which student anthropologists appear also contain their fully qualified supervisors. We therefore included all films containing student anthropologists. Second, we wondered: Are archaeologists anthropologists? Outside the United States, archaeology and anthropology are considered separate (albeit linked) disciplines. Even within the United States, there are archaeology departments working outside the umbrella of anthropology departments. Consequently we took the position that archaeologists are often, but not always, anthropologists. As such, we only included those archaeologists who emically described themselves or etically were described by others explicitly as anthropologists. While Indiana Jones (who is never described by himself or others as an anthropologist) was not included, the fictionalized incarnation of Bronislaw Malinowski played by actor Tom Courtenay in *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones: Treasure of the Peacock's Eye* (1995) landed that film onto the list. Archaeologists were therefore only included on the list where an anthropological identity was clearly stated. Our third question asked: What about primatologists, sociologists, and so forth? Other disciplines that intersect with anthropology were also addressed using the emic-etic descriptive rule. While Dian Fossey is disappointingly described as a zoologist in the film *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), the appearance of a fictionalized Louis Leakey in several scenes keeps the film on our list. Incidentally this film being a biographical film, or biopic, highlights another grey area. Although based on real events, the film is a fictionalized account of those events rather than a documentary; therefore it is included.

The final list of films appears as Table 1.

A handful of films featuring fictional anthropologists eluded our efforts to track them down (and for which we mostly have only titles): *A.D.A.M.*; *Meine Tante, Deine Tante*; *Young Wild and Wonderful*; *Muffin Man*; *Basilisk*; *The Lost Tribe*; *Notes on Love*; *Jugular Wine*; *Yodha*; and *Feast*. Our experience of the constant drip-drip of suggestions while assembling our list leads us to expect that there will be others out there, and doubtlessly more will be produced in the future. Yet having searched far and wide, this appears to be the most comprehensive list of films containing anthropologists

TABLE 1.

Film title	Director	Run time (min.)	Production city: Studio	Release year
1. Agantuk	Satyajit Ray	120	New Delhi: Eagle Home Entertainment	1991
2. Adventures of Young Indiana Jones: Treasure of the Peacock's Eye, The	Carl Schultz	94	Hollywood, CA: CBS	1995
3. Altered States	Ken Russell	102	Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video	1980
4. American Geisha	Lee Philips	100	United States: Interscope	1986
5. Anaconda	Luis Llosa	89	Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment	1997
6. Avatar	James Cameron	162	Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox	2009
7. Beach Party	William Asher	101	Home Entertainment Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox	1963
8. Boggy Creek II: And the Legend Continues	Charles Pierce	94	Home Entertainment Van Nuys, CA: Avid Home Entertainment	1985
9. Call of Cthulhu, The	Andrew Leman	47	Glendale, CA: HPLHS Motion Pictures	2005
10. Candyman	Bernard Rose	99	Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar	1992
11. Cannibal Ferox	Umberto Lenzi	93	Home Entertainment Hollywood, CA: Grindhouse	1981
12. Cannibal Holocaust	Ruggiero Deodato	95	Releasing Los Angeles, CA: Grindhouse	1980
13. Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death	Jonathan Athens	90	Releasing W. Hollywood, CA: Cult Video	1989
14. Exorcism of Emily Rose, The	Scott Derrickson	119	Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment	2005
15. Festen	Thomas Vinterberg	105	Amsterdam: Cinemien Homescreen	1998
16. Fierce People	Griffin Dunne	107	Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment	2005
17. Gargoyles	Bill Norton	74	United States: Hen's Tooth Video	1972
18. Gorillas in the Mist	Michael Apted	129	Universal City, CA: Universal	1988
19. Haunting, The	Robert Wise	112	Culver City, CA: Warner Home Video	1963

(Continued)

TABLE 1. Continued

Film title	Director	Run time (min.)	Production city: Studio	Release year
20. Haunting at the Beacon, The	Michael Stokes	94	United States: Take 2 Releasing	2008
21. Iceman	Fred Schepisi	100	United States: Millennium	1984
22. In a Savage Land	Bill Bennett	115	United States: Columbia TriStar	1999
23. Instinct	John Turteltaub	126	Home Entertainment Burbank, CA: Touchstone Home Video	1999
24. Jerome Bixby's Man From Earth	Richard Schenkman	87	United States: Anchor Bay Entertainment	2007
25. Jungle 2 Jungle	John Pasquin	105	Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures	1997
26. Jungle Jim in the Forbidden Land	Lew Landers	65	Mahopac, NY: Classic Theater	1952
27. Krippendorf's Tribe	Todd Holland	94	Burbank, CA: Touchstone Home Video	1998
28. Last of the Dogmen	Tab Murphy	118	New York, NY: HBO Home Video	1995
29. Laure/Forever Emmanuelle	Anonymous	95	Stamford, CT: Vestron Video	1976
30. Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires	Roy Ward Baker and Cheh Chang	83	Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment	1974
31. Lost World, The	Irwin Allen	97	United States: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment	1960
32. Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human, The	Jeff Abugov	88	Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar	1999
33. Mistress of the Apes	Larry Buchanan	84	Home Entertainment United States: Monterey Home Video.	1979
34. Mogambo	John Ford	116	Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video	1953
35. Moscow Zero	Maria Lidon	82	Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, Inc.	2006
36. Nanny Diaries, The	Shari Berman and Robert Pulcini	106	New York, NY: Weinstein Co.	2007
37. National Lampoon's Dorm Daze 2	David Hillenbrand and Scott Hillenbrand	100	Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate	2006
38. Night of the Demon	James Wesson	92	Australia: Medium Rare Entertainment	1980
39. Night School/Terror Eyes	Ken Hughes	88	United States: Paramount Pictures	1981
40. Nomads	John McTiernan	91	Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment	1986

(Continued)

TABLE 1. Continued

	Film title	Director	Run time (min.)	Production city: Studio	Release year
41.	On the Town	Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly	98	Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video	1949
42.	Plumber, The	Peter Weir	76	London: Pathé Distribution	1979
43.	Relic, The	Peter Hyams	110	Hollywood: CA: Paramount	1997
44.	Return to Salem's Lot, A	Larry Cohen	101	Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Entertainment.	1987
45.	Serpent and the Rainbow, The	Wes Craven	98	Universal City, CA: Universal	1998
46.	Species	Ruggero Donaldson	108	Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment Inc.	1995
47.	Tenure	Mike Million	89	United States: Blowtorch Entertainment	2009
48.	Truth about Demons, The	Glenn Standring	90	Sydney: Siren Visual Entertainment	2000
49.	Throw Mama from the Train	Danny Devito	88	S. I: Orion Pictures	1987
50.	Trog	Freddie Francis	93	Burbank, CA: Distributed by Warner Home Video	1970
51.	Wild in the Streets	Barry Shear	94	Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment	1968
52.	Wishmaster	Robert Kurtzman	90	Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment	1997
53.	Zombie Holocaust	Marino Girolami	84	United States: Shriek Show	1979

Q15

Q16

Q17

produced at the time of writing. All films were watched by at least one author.

### The Reviewing Process

Because the authors watched films separately, we created an online review form (using JotForm; see supporting information online) to coordinate the reviewing process. The form called for basic descriptions of the plot and themes of the film; details regarding the name and specialization of the anthropologist character(s); a physical description of each anthropologist; their dramatic purpose; their prominence and role in the film; the “accuracy” of the depiction of the anthropologist and their research methods; whether the film confused anthropology with another discipline; whether there are similarities with real-life anthropologists or anthropological writings; and what the filmmakers or audience members see the role of the anthropologist as being. Space was also given for noteworthy quotes and other thoughts. Submissions from the online form were collated in a shared Dropbox folder and read and discussed by all authors.

### THE FILMS

The earliest incarnation of an anthropologist character that we found occurred in *On the Town* (1949). In the Gene Kelly–Frank Sinatra musical, Professor Claire Huddesen (played by Ann Miller) leads a museum-based dance while singing of her desire for a “Prehistoric Man.” The professor’s interest in anthropology was, she explains, sparked by her father, who had suggested she find an intellectual direction in which to take her more general interest in “man.” The ensuing musical number contains several problematic depictions of other cultures and relationships between men and women. Huddesen becomes a central character for the film as one of the “love interests” for three sailors on shore leave in New York. The next anthropologist figure occurs in *Jungle Jim in the Forbidden Land* (1952), part of the comic-derived series in which the actor Johnny Weissmuller extends his jungle-based antics beyond Tarzan. Dr. Laura Roberts (played by Angela Greene) explicitly identifies herself as an anthropologist, saying, “I’m an anthropologist—a specialist in man’s development.” The main function of the anthropologist in this film is to act as a MacGuffin, a Hitchcockian plot device that only really matters inasmuch as it moves the narrative forward, driving the plot toward the discovery of a race of not very big (but surprisingly hairy) giants and helping to demonstrate the Jungle Jim character’s heroism by having to be repeatedly saved by him (at one point this involves Jim punching a hippo unconscious). The degree of realism in the portrayal of anthropology in the film is somewhat undercut by the fact that Roberts’s area of anthropological expertise is giants.

There are occasional films that represent anthropologists going about their general academic life (e.g., *Tenure* [2009]), and often dramas unfold in the midst of pieces of fictional anthropological fieldwork. But more often, anthropologists in these films serve as ciphers. The real-world tendency for

anthropologists to be met with vacant stares when explaining their job to laypeople suggests a widespread ignorance of exactly what anthropologists do. As a result, filmic anthropologists are blank canvases for writers, directors, and actors. We should probably not expect all filmmakers to want to make films about the mundanities of anthropological life, as Firth (1984:7) noted of anthropologists in literature: “It soon became clear to me that none of these novelists was mainly concerned with ethnographic fieldwork or with the ethnographer’s difficulties, but used him as a kind of lay figure on which to build a romance, a thriller or a satire, against a highly exotic background.”

At its most lurid, this easy access is used for what Firth (1984:8) describes as “the use of an exotic scenario as a peg for erotica.” *Laure/Forever Emmanuelle* (1976) and *Mistress of the Apes* (1979) do exactly this, while online reviews and the current DVD cover suggest that at some point in its history the hardcore pornographic film *Young, Wild and Wonderful* featured anthropologists or anthropology students as characters, but this appears to have been edited out of the version to which we were able to gain access. A host of other movies mix sex and horror, while others such as *American Geisha* (1986; based on Liza Dalby’s [1983] ethnographic research), *In a Savage Land* (1999), and *Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human* (1999) clearly draw on popular ideas from Margaret Mead’s (2001) *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* and Malinowski’s (1941) *The Sexual Life of Savages*. While this represents a noteworthy pattern within these films, a more startling pattern leapt from the list. Even before we began watching the films, it was clear that we were going to have to discuss the relationship between anthropology and horror.

### ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN HORROR

Twenty-six of 53 films on the list are readily categorized as horror films. Compared with other genres such as comedy (seven films), erotica (three films), or musicals (three films), the horror content swamps other genres. The films range from the, by contemporary standards, very mild ghostliness of *The Haunting* (1963) to the violent extremity of *Cannibal Ferox* (1981), and they cover a wide variety of horror sub-genres including films featuring zombies, cannibals, aliens, house invasion, ghosts, vampires, sasquatches, serial killers, and demons. The taxonomic category of the horror film allows for much slippage: *Species* (1995) might be categorized as a sci-fi film; *Altered States* (1980), in which a psychologist and an anthropologist experiment with other states of consciousness, might be considered a sci-fi or thriller. With such diversity in the sources of horror, spanning the supernatural, nonsupernatural, and extraterrestrial, Kim Newman’s (2011) idea of “nightmare movies”—those that deal with fears and anxieties—is appealing. If the genre is so intrinsically linked with personal and societal fears, how is it that anthropology comes to be associated with this genre more than others? What facets of the anthropologist give rise to our ubiquity within horror movies? We came to

the conclusion that there appear to be three principal reasons for the abundance of anthropologists in horror films—all relating in some way to the deployment of anthropologists as experts in these fear-related contexts.

The first explanation is that anthropologists genuinely are, or have been, experts on the fearsome phenomena in horror movies. Whether it is seminal texts on witchcraft (such as Evans-Pritchard's [1976] *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*) and spirit possession (such as Lewis's [1989] *Ecstatic Religion*) or more recent texts such as Luise White's (2000) *Speaking with Vampires*, anthropologists have a track record for engaging with those beliefs and practices that are readily associated with fear and the unexplained. Wes Craven's film *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1998) presents a fictionalized account of a real anthropologist, Wade Davis, who investigated voodoo zombification in Haiti. While the end result is more Craven than Davis (e.g., the story veers wildly from Davis's [1987] slightly contentious account of the use of psychoactive drugs toward Craven's story of spirit possession, magic, and witchcraft), there is a clear connection between the fictional and the real anthropologist. Through dealing with myths, the occult, and supernatural forces in our research (and often doing so in a culturally sensitive way that prioritizes cultural meaning over empirical evidence of beliefs and practices), we open ourselves to fictionalized depiction of the same subject matters.

The second reason for the abundance of anthropologists in horror films relates to popular perceptions of our academic expertise in regard to other species and other cultures. In more than half of the films watched, anthropologists act as mediating experts in regard to other worlds. This takes wildly varied forms, with anthropologists acting as mediators to ghostly underworlds (*Moscow Zero* [2006], *The Haunting at the Beacon* [2008]), demons (*The Truth about Demons* [2000], *Nomads* [1986], *Gargoyles* [1972]), lizard gods (*The Relic* [1997]), vampires (*Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* [1974]), and aliens (*Species* [1995]). Beyond horror films, the anthropologist is typically cast as an expert intermediary on tribal others, a role not unrelated to real-world anthropological expertise. We have traditionally stood on the cusp between two spheres of sociocultural reality: from one, claiming special knowledge of another. Writing about the ambiguity of the category of "native anthropologists," Kirin Narayan (2009:671) writes, "Those who are anthropologists in the usual sense of the word are thought to study Others whose alien cultural worlds they must painstakingly come to know." Such claims of expertise, even when concerned with the mundane world, sometimes come close to the otherworldly knowledge of shamans, mystics, or the possessed described by the fictional anthropologist Dr. Sadira Adani in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005):

**Dr. Adani:** In my fieldwork, I've seen many people who experienced a sense of being invaded by an entity from the supernatural realm . . . Based on my study of the case file I believe that Emily Rose was a hypersensitive. A person with an unusual connection to what Carlos Castaneda called "the separate reality."

As (real) anthropologist I. M. Lewis explains, when such otherworldly knowledge is recognized as meaningful by a particular group, this confers to the holder of such knowledge a position of authority: "Transcendental experiences . . . have given the mystic a unique claim to direct experiential knowledge of the divine and, where this is acknowledged by others, the authority to act as a channel of communication between man and the supernatural" (Lewis 1989:15).

The recognition of our academic knowledge of an "other" often gives us the authority to act as channels between social worlds. In horror films, this often translates as expertise regarding a supernatural other—an extension of the recognition of our expertise in the mundane world. We take on the role of quasi-shamanic guides to these confusing other worlds, becoming the gatekeepers to "exotic," "otherworldly" knowledge. Whether this takes the form of Annie Braddock's assessment of upper-class New Yorkers' alien behaviors in the *Nanny Diaries* (2007) or Eric Stoltz's character's knowledge of Amazonian snake cults in *Anaconda* (1997), we are cast as the experts straddling multiple worlds.

This expertise is often not due to literary research or the hard-earned experience drawn from extensive fieldwork. In *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), it does not matter that for Professor Harold "this will be his first journey to Amazonia"; he is an anthropologist and therefore expert enough on the tribal "other" to be invaluable in the search for a missing film crew. Even with a local guide assisting the characters, this esoteric knowledge of rituals will somehow be of use in finding missing persons in a forest. Expert knowledge of "the other" destines us to these intermediary and protective roles. Fictional anthropologists often seem to be the appropriate people to turn to if you need someone to protect you from the supernatural. This depiction of anthropologists as quasi-mythical heroes comes at least partially from within the discipline; for example, anthropologist Albert Doja (2005:650) writes, "In the form of the standard prophetic myth of the heroic quest . . . Lévi-Strauss transformed an expedition to the virgin interiors of the Amazon into a vision quest, and turned anthropology into a spiritual mission to defend mankind against itself." Susan Sontag (1994) notes that this image of the anthropological hero is one that spread from Claude Lévi-Strauss across the social sciences and to the wider public (see also Hartman 2007). Decades after the peak popularity of *Tristes Tropiques* (Lévi-Strauss 1973), it is probable that this popular image has waned slightly.

The third reason for the link between horror films and anthropologists is, we propose, expository. As experts, anthropologists are often given the clunky lines that explain what is going on, allowing the plot to move forward. In *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (1974), Peter Cushing's Van Helsing (described by his son in the film as an anthropologist) states: "Perhaps, in some academic circles, I am acknowledged as an authority in some specialized areas, but no more than that." Once such expertise is modestly established, the anthropologist is then called on to expound. This

being a Shaw Brothers kung-fu/Hammer Horror vampire crossover, Van Helsing's role is to cross-culturally translate vampire lore and thus set up the rules for killing vampires:

**Van Helsing:** They are immensely strong and possess black powers. They abhor anything that has a holy significance. They fear the word of the Lord. In Europe the vampires walk in dread of the crucifix. Here it would be the image of the Lord Buddha.

In a deviation from standard anthropological ethics, of course, Van Helsing uses this knowledge to kill the objects of his study. Likewise in *The Relic* (1997), the anthropologist character, Dr. Margo Green, is required to do the expository work of explaining why the South American human-lizard mutant enemy, the Kothoga, who keeps attacking people in the Chicago Museum of Natural History, is eating so many brains, and she does so by bastardizing the ideas of famous biologist Stephen Jay Gould:

**Dr. Green:** It's a commonly held belief that life evolved gradually by natural selection. Dr. Fock argues that sometimes a sudden evolutionary change creates a grotesque and short-lived abhorrent species.

And later, she follows up this initial statement with the following:

**Dr. Green:** The hormones listed in this analysis of the leaf, they're all produced by the human hypothalamus. Of course, it's a much more concentrated form here. One milligram of this material is equal to more than 100 milligrams of the hormone produced by the hypothalamus.

With this explanation expounded, the detective and anthropologist can get back to the action of the horror film.

The expository expertise of anthropologists is not always scientifically grounded. Sometimes the status of the anthropologist is used to give weight to guesswork. It even happens in *Altered States* (1980), a film containing one of the best-researched anthropological characters on the list. Dr. Emily Jessop departs from her tendency to make theoretically and scientifically valid statements to drive the plot, stating:

I've got this sort of gut feeling that something phenomenological *did* happen, that there was some kind of genetic transformation. I don't know why I think this, in defiance of all rationality, but I do. And now that I do I'm terrified.

Due to the profound flexibility of our discipline and the lack of common knowledge about what we do, we can be the voice of science and the voice of gut feelings. But sometimes the gut feelings involved are of a very different type.

### CANNIBALISM, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND THE HEART OF DARKNESS

William Arens's (1979) polemic book, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, lies at the center of our discipline's debates regarding cannibalism. The book argues that socially sanctioned cannibalism by an exotic "other" was a fantasy fabricated under colonialism with weak or non-existent evidence taken for granted by anthropologists who

deserved a reprimand for their willful ignorance. More recent debates have shown there to be more complexity regarding the practice than this outright denial suggests (Goldman 1999). The publicity of Arens's book and subsequent debate it received led to the idea that cannibalism was a reaction to external pressures, making its way into what we have come to think of as the "Anthropology Cannibal Trilogy": *Zombie Holocaust* (1979), *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), and *Cannibal Ferox* (1981). Each of the "Anthropology Cannibal Trilogy" sees anthropologist characters encountering a cannibalistic, exotic other. In each, the "barbarity" of the cannibals is surpassed by the "barbarity" of the "Westerners" in the film. In *Zombie Holocaust*, the ritualistic cannibalism of the islanders is outdone in cruelty by the zombification experiments of a U.S. scientist. In *Cannibal Holocaust*, rape, murder, and destruction by the film crew justifies the cannibalism that the Amazonian Yacumo tribe enact. The film even finishes with Gloria (the film's anthropologist) asking, "I wonder who the real cannibals are?" In *Cannibal Ferox*, the Paraguayan Manioca tribe also turns to cannibalism to avenge themselves after tribe members were raped, murdered, and enslaved to mine emeralds. It ends with the surviving anthropologist publishing her thesis as "Cannibalism: The End of a Myth" in a direct echo of Arens (1979).

All three of these films use New York as a juxtapositionary civilized "us" to contrast with a barbaric "other." While perhaps slightly hamfisted in its delivery, the point being made across these films directly addresses ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, prompting the audience to ponder this statement: "If you think these cannibals are barbaric, then you should think about your own culture." This trope extends beyond the border of these three movies. The Indian film *Agantuk* (1991) contains the following exchange:

**Husband:** What about cannibalism? Have you yourself had human flesh? Is this not the most barbaric, savage, uncivilized practice?

**Uncle (the anthropologist):** No, I have not eaten human flesh, though I have heard that it has a certain taste. Yes, cannibalism is barbaric. But do you know what is even more barbaric and uncivilized? The sight of homeless people and drug addicts in a city like New York. The ability of one civilization to vanquish others by the mere push of a button. That is a hundred times more barbaric!

This "we are the savages" trope extends beyond cannibalism and is discussed in relation to the savagery of aristocratic peoples of the United States in both *Fierce People* (2005) and *The Nanny Diaries* (2007), in relation to scientists in *Iceman* (1984), hunters in *Instinct* (1999), and colonizing humans on alien planets in *Avatar* (2009). In each case, the anthropologist ends up supporting the brutalized, "savage" other. In the case of the "Anthropology Cannibal Trilogy," the anthropologists are Team Cannibal. In the case of *Zombie Holocaust* (1979), the anthropologist is made their queen. The irony of using Arens's idea regarding the fabrication of cannibalism as a starting point to show a cannibalistic "other" is perhaps lost on the those who set out to make films where



the *sine qua non* is shot after shot of mud-caked people eating intestines. While there is sympathy for the cannibals across these films, and while the anthropologists are shown to be “on their side,” it is hard to watch the films without feeling that their primary objective is to shock viewers rather than to make them question the ethnocentric construct of a cannibalistic or savage Amazonian “other.” This odd sense of the filmmakers wanting to have their cannibalistic cake and eat it too is highlighted by the highly postmodern discussion of the film within a film device in *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980).

**TV Executive:** Today people want sensationalism. The more you rape their senses, the happier they are.

**Professor Monroe:** Ah, yes, that’s typical Western thought. Civilized, isn’t it? That’s what Alan thought and that’s why he’s dead. The Yacumo Indian is a primitive and he has to be respected as such. You know, did you ever think of the Yacumo point of view? That we might be the savages?

In a film that graphically depicts gang rape, amputation, decapitation, and impalement alongside genuine animal slaughter to such an extent that the film was banned in many countries and the director was (wrongly) charged with making a snuff film, these discussions of sensationalism are as much a commentary on *Cannibal Holocaust* as the film within a film Monroe is discussing.<sup>1</sup> Yes, the viewer is being asked to reflect on their own desire to watch such a film, but this does not change the fact that it was the makers of *Cannibal Holocaust*’s choice to use the Yacumo, a thinly veiled fictionalization of the Yanomami, to make a sensationalist film about cannibalism.

The use of a cannibalistic “other” charged with saying something about the savagery of the “West” carries a strong parallel with Chinua Achebe’s (1988) criticism of Joseph Conrad. While Conrad’s defenders argue that he was inherently anticolonialist, Achebe takes Conrad to task (Achebe 1988; see also Phillips 2003) for the hypocrisy of using Africa and Africans as mere tools to say something about colonial authorities. Likewise, generic Amazonian tribespeople are cynically used here to critique apparent flaws in contemporary “Western” ways of life. The circuitous path by which “natives” are shown to become cannibals is a poor excuse for turning indigenous peoples into bogeymen.

Echoes of Conrad do not end with the lightweight version of “cultural critique” (Marcus and Fischer 1999) concerning the savagery of “the West.” The central metaphor of *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1992) is a journey upriver: the story of a voyage up the Congo is told by the narrator while on a journey up the Thames. While the framing device of travelling upriver and away from civilization is echoed across many of the films on the list, the symbolism of the boat as a vessel taking us away from civilization toward barbarity is still echoed in an era where planes might be considered the normal mode for travel to remote areas. Boat rides up rivers appear in 13 films, while sea-based boat trips appear in another five. These journeys symbolize movement toward somewhere “more natural,” somewhere less civilized. In

these contexts, the boat itself becomes a heterotopian space between two imagined spaces. The voyages they take are distancing, representing journeys toward something “other.”

The Conradesque quality of films with anthropologist figures in them reaches a peak in *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death* (1989), a film that features many of the same ideas as the “Anthropology Cannibal Trilogy” but with tongue firmly in cheek. The tone of the film is hinted at on the back cover of the DVD:

To avoid a serious avocado shortage, the U.S. government hires feminist anthropology professor Margo Hunt (Shannon Tweed) to find the man-eating Piranha Tribe who inhabit the avocado jungle of Southern California. Assisted by chauvinist Jim (Bill Maher) and a dim-witted student named Bunny, Hunt must convince the tribe to move to Malibu condos while simultaneously fending off her rival, Dr. Kurtz (Adrienne Barbeau).

Drawing both on Conrad and on Coppola’s (1979) adaptation *Apocalypse Now*, the self-awareness is clear. Rather than an exotic other, it is an avocado-forest-dwelling feminist tribe in California. The cannibalism is directed toward men and instigated by a feminist anthropologist (knowingly called “Kurtz”) who has “gone native.” While the acting may be generously described as patchy, the script as clunky, the budget as ominously low, and there is the uncritical use of the “we are the savages” trope, the film has redemptive qualities missing in the other films limited by budgets and featuring similar tropes because the Conrad-like metaphors are subverted and the obvious “cultural critiques” are deflated through parody.

In relation to the representation of Amazonians as cannibals, it is perhaps worth noting that, at the time of this writing, the release of Eli Roth’s *Green Inferno* (2013), which continues the genre, now appears to be on indefinite hiatus. But what is perhaps more noteworthy is that he showed Amazonians *Cannibal Holocaust*.

*We went in the Amazon deeper than anyone has ever shot a movie before. I went so far up the river, we went to a village where they had no electricity, no running water, and they never before had seen a movie or television [ . . . ] We had to explain to them conceptually what a movie was, and we brought a television and a generator and we showed them Cannibal Holocaust. They thought it was the funniest thing that they had ever seen, but we had to know whether they were down with it to let us in their village. [Empire 2013]*

While this is perhaps an ambiguous place to finish this discussion, it points toward the consumption and impact of these films being more complex than one might think.

## ETHICS AND CONTROVERSIES

Journalistic attention to anthropological (and wider academic) controversies leads to certain ethical violations and gray areas entering the public imagination. It should not be too great a surprise that the ethical behavior of anthropologists is scrutinized in these films. Academics are in positions of power as the producers of knowledge, and we ought to expect a level of distrust—to be critiqued and lampooned.

As academics in films, we are not alone in this. In films featuring U.S. psychiatrists, nearly half of them violate ethical boundaries, with nearly a quarter committing violations of sexual boundaries (Gharaibeh 2005).

While the anthropologist Dr. Stephen Arden does (accidentally) have sex with the alien he's hunting in *Species* (1995), the ethics of the sex lives of anthropologists is approached a little more circumspectly, through an examination of our Malinowskian and Meadian fascination with the sex lives of those we study, as in *Laure/Forever Emmanuelle* (1976), *The Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human* (1999), and *American Geisha* (1986). So while there are hints of ethical issues pertaining to anthropologists and sex, we are, thankfully, not portrayed as sexually predatory in the same way as psychiatrists tend to be. Still, we do have our ethics interrogated in other ways.

Rather than sex, death is more frequently the area in which filmic anthropologists cross moral lines. In a reversal of the "Anthropology Cannibal Trilogy," wherein anthropologists end up supporting cannibalism as a form of resistance against Western oppressors, vampires are painted unambiguously as the enemy. In *Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (1974), Peter Cushing's Van Helsing both kills vampires and teaches others how to do so through his "anthropological knowledge" of vampire lore. Likewise, *A Return to Salem's Lot* (1987) features an anthropologist killing vampires with holy water and a coffin-burning massacre. In **Van Helsing's** defense, this comes after the vampires captured him to force him to write an ethnography about them to use as a vampiric bible for future generations. Generally acts of killing by anthropologists are framed as ethically appropriate. Even in areas outside of the supernatural, this seems to hold true.

In the film *Instinct* (1999), an anthropologist played by Anthony Hopkins begins killing park rangers to protect the gorillas he is researching and with whom he has bonded (carrying faint echoes of Dian Fossey's antipoacher activism). The film ultimately portrays Hopkins's character as the hero, although it does highlight the moral ambiguity of the act through a framing device that acknowledges that he has "gone native" and questions his sanity. The ethics seem relatively clear cut within the bounds of the film. But as an anthropologist watching these films, it is hard not to see echoes of concerns about military collaboration through Project Camelot, the Human Terrain System (Price 2008), or even Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (2006), through which concerns arise regarding the use of anthropological knowledge for military repression or targeting. These issues reverberate throughout *Avatar* (2009), in which Norm, the xenanthropologist (a job description only explicit in the script), is part of a team of researchers working alongside mining corporations and the military to better understand an "alien species" in the area they want to mine for the gravity-defying mineral "unobtainium." As negotiations with the aliens are met with resistance, the military step in and their direct attack on the aliens' sacred tree is

reminiscent of military targeting that draws on anthropologically derived knowledge of native peoples' cosmology.

The ethical complexities of violence are discussed in relation to human tendencies in other films. *Altered States* (1980) explores the human propensity toward violence and features conversations that are seemingly derived from debates around *Man the Hunter* (Lee and Devore 1973), drawing parallels between human and baboons' violent predispositions:

**Emily Jessop:** Originally man was just another savannah-living primate, like baboons . . . I observed instances of predation which involved the unmistakable behavior of hunters. A pair of baboons killed a Thompson's gazelle and ate it. There was even a rudimentary communication between the two baboons, so I've become fascinated with the work being done on nonverbal communication in apes.

Likewise, the use of the Yacumo in *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) as a thinly disguised Yanomami also represents a clear, deliberate use of Napoleon Chagnon's (1968) ideas of biological propensity to fierceness.

Perhaps the most direct critique of anthropological ethics comes in the form of discussion of fakery. *Krippendorf's Tribe* (1998) and *Laure/Forever Emmanuelle* (1976) both feature anthropologists who fake their findings. In *Krippendorf's Tribe*, Richard Dreyfuss's titular anthropologist uses family members to fake footage of a lost New Guinean tribe to cover up his misappropriation of grant money. In *Laure/Forever Emmanuelle*, Professor Gualtier Morgan introduces Laure to his research of the Mara tribe as a way to promote the naturalness of free love. It later transpires that he has been fabricating the tribe's exploits by shooting footage of villagers who are not the Mara. It further transpires that the Mara do exist and that he was faking footage to protect the Mara: a complex web of meta-fakery. *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) might also be considered as part of this discussion inasmuch as an anthropologist engages with the veracity of a fabricated film.

This fakery relates to two specific real-life controversies involving anthropology: Carlos Castaneda's fabrication of data and the faking of documentary footage of the Tasaday. The former saw Castaneda retrospectively accused, years after his ethnography became a bestseller, of fabricating and plagiarizing his account of Yaqui shamanic practices (Weston 2012). The latter presented a "stone age," "lost tribe" that had been "discovered" in the Philippines in the 1970s—only for all of this to be exposed as a hoax in the 1980s (Hyndman 2002) when their supposed former isolation from wider Filipino society was widely debunked. In the case of Castaneda, the anthropologist was the perpetrator of the hoax; in the case of the Tasaday, it was an anthropologist, Oswald Iten, who was responsible for exposing the hoax. As far as the public perception was concerned, however, their appearance in *National Geographic* was for all intents and purposes an anthropological hoax.

Somewhat eerily the film *Laure/Forever Emmanuelle* is set and was shot in the Philippines in the 1970s. So while the film's Mara perhaps draw on related issues of the eroticization of the Tasaday that occurred within the media scramble to share their story (*National Geographic's* eroticized depiction of the Tasaday is noted by Hyndman 2002), the parallels between the faking of documentary footage of the (real) Tasaday and the (fictional) Mara appears to be entirely coincidental. It also predates Derek Freeman's (1983) critique of Margaret Mead, but there are clear parallels to be seen there too. As Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993) note regarding *National Geographic's* readership, the exoticized and eroticized content perhaps tells us more about the readers than those depicted. The backdrop of the real Mara controversy is almost entirely coincidental in pursuit of showing exotic-looking naked people.

## CONCLUSION

While throughout this article we have explored the popular perception of anthropologists, the prominence of ethical debates and controversies hints at the other potential use these films serve—as a pedagogical tool. While some of these films contain “strong adult themes” and might not be appropriate for student screenings, a much larger cross-section covers themes and practices that represent good starting points for debate. If you want to discuss ethnographic voyeurism, *The Plumber* (1979) provides an interesting gateway. If you want to consider the ethics of anthropological advocacy, then Richard Pryor's Malcolm X-esque anthropologist in *Wild in the Streets* (1968) or *Avatar* (2009) might be good starting points. With issues of racism, representation, academic credibility, and power imbalances present across these films, they are a wonderful aid to provoking discussion.

More often than not, filmic anthropologists appear in scenarios that are more fantasy than reality. Despite this, we adjudged that significantly more than half of the films on this list feature either “mostly accurate” or “entirely accurate” representations of anthropologists. Only seven films were judged to feature “entirely inaccurate” depictions of anthropologists. We also noted the tendency toward representing anthropological protagonists relatively sympathetically. While ethical violations occur and moral dilemmas are profuse, more often than not anthropologists in film are portrayed occupying the moral high ground. Some films reflect our own preoccupations—whether it be “heroic” self-stylings or tendencies regarding the “othering” of our research subjects. Some of these films provide savvy critiques of anthropological research practice, while at other times we are just used to drive plots along. Some films are noteworthy for just being good films (*Gorillas in the Mist* [1988], *Festen* [1998]); other films, often from the horror genre, are noteworthy in being so badly made that they become entertaining. In short, there is no singular, neat, archetypal representation of anthropologists that emerges, probably due to the fact that no such singular, neat archetype

exists in the real world. But what does emerge out of this analysis are some interesting patterns.

Among the minor patterns, we can identify preoccupations with the sex lives of exotic others, cannibalism, heroic anthropologists, and the fabrication of research. Then there are the bigger patterns: our proclivity for appearing in horror films, our functional roles as experts mediators for “the other,” and our tendency to engage with ethical dilemmas reflecting real-world controversies. These are patterns that allow for anthropological characters to appear in dramatic stories in which the heightened (often life-or-death) stakes of moral choices provide space for reflection and critique of real-world anthropological practice. This intersection of real-world ethics and fiction provides perhaps the strongest argument for why anthropologists should engage with their representations in film. If we ignore these representations of our discipline, they serve us little purpose, but if we actively engage in discussing such films—showing them to students or scrutinizing their accuracy or inaccuracy in mainstream forums—they allow us to become part of the process by which they shape people's awareness and understanding of anthropology. If these films shape and are shaped by popular understandings of anthropology, we should be more cognizant of that and join the discussion.

What might such an active engagement in the representation of anthropology as a discipline look like? Responses ought to be in some way proportionate to the accuracy or inaccuracy of the depiction of anthropologists and to the size of audience for the film (or TV show or other media). While academic publications might be one place in which praise and critique might occur, blogs, vlogs, and op-ed pieces in mainstream media would clearly play a more public role in a diffuse mediascape (Appadurai 1990) and help shape a general sense of better or worse depictions of anthropology, anthropologists, and those we study. We might also benefit from a more open flow of anthropological knowledge in the form of advice or consultancy for filmmakers. Films such as *Jungle 2 Jungle* (1997) or *Avatar* (2009) have paid anthropologists for consultancy work, but presumably not all productions will be able to budget for a resident anthropologist. Many anthropologists would probably rather not be shadowed for months in the field or lab by a Hollywood actor in search of the essence of anthropological behavior; however, had a well-meaning anthropologist cast their eye over the script for *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), they might have pointed out that the filmmakers have zeroed in on a very interesting point about cultural relativism but that it is undermined by reference to the largely debunked work of Castaneda (Weston 2012). While writing in response to anthropological depictions is one way in which anthropologists might address issues of representation, a more active engagement with filmmakers also offers potential to shape depictions. This does not necessarily demand a coordinated program of active engagement as much as an aggregation of the willing with a general understanding that this is a worthwhile endeavor.

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## NOTES

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1. A snuff film is an exploitative piece of footage that contains the real murder of a person, without use of special effects. Their existence and prevalence is a hotly debated issue.

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