

TO: Gigi M T Fiumerodo, Cultural Anthropology, 9am T/Th

FR: Angela R. Kirwin

DT: November 8, 2006

RE: Movie review of *End of the Spear* with an anthropological perspective

The 2005 movie *End of the Spear* is a dramatized account of the true story of five missionaries who were killed while attempting to evangelize the indigenous Waodani tribe in Ecuador in 1943. The story is told from the Missionarie's ethnocentric perspective that emphasizes the inferiority of the Waodoni culture to missionaries 1940's American evangelical Christian society until they became Christians and adopted the missionaries Western culture.

The images of the film showed the pre-Christian pre-Westernized Waodoni as living lives of misery, violence and immorality as they were constantly engaged in war, revenge killings, raiding other villages and were needlessly dying of treatable diseases. In the movie the traditional Waodoni weren't even good parents as they were unable to protect their children from everything from vampire bats bites to polio. In contrast, the missionary society was depicted as peaceful, safe for children, technologically advanced and medically advanced. The missionary families lived together in harmony with other families in a stationary settlement or village of nuclear single-family large Western-style homes. "The fierceness of the Waodani was legendary," the narrator said at the beginning of the film to emphasize their savagery.

Technologically the Waodoni were viewed as inferior because their traditional homes were not Western: small, impermanent, had dirt floors and were crowded with

extended kin. The Waodoni used stone age spears instead of modern guns for their weapons and they had no airplanes. In fact, they didn't have a word for airplane in their language and called it "a very big wood bee" in the film.

Spiritually and morally they were depicted as inferior to the missionaries because they were not Christian and had values that the missionaries didn't understand. The warriors killed others for reasons unacceptable to the missionaries, practiced infanticide if the child's father was killed and raided other villages for resources and wives. The Waodoni were so morally beneath the missionaries that the leader Nate at one point said, "So we can't shoot the Waodoni. They're not ready for heaven. We are."

Compared to the missionaries, the movie depicted the Waodoni as emotionally immature. Scenes in the movie showed the tribe's leader Mincaye who killed the missionary leader Nate as violent tempered, distrustful, fearful and impulsive.

Finally, the Waodoni were shown as intellectually inferior than the missionaries: they were illiterate and they believed in spirits or a personalistic disease theory and not the "modern medicine" of missionaries. After killing the five missionaries, Mincaye said, "We've conquered the spirits." Mincaye also doesn't believe his sister Dayumea is alive when she is shown to him in living with the missionaries in Western dress. "She's a spirit!," he said. The outbreak of polio in Mincaye's village is blamed on angry spirits.

*End of the Spear* is a dramatically and cinematically well crafted film, however, it denigrates a non-Protestant non-Western culture as inferior in every way.