

**FILMING FEMINIST FRONTIERS/FRONTIER FEMINISMS
1979-1993**

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ABSTRACT

Filming Feminist Frontiers/Frontier Feminisms is a transnational qualitative study that examines ten landmark feature films directed by women that re-imagined the frontiers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S through a feminist lens. As feminist feature films they countered Eurocentric and masculinist myths of white settlement and expansionism in the grand narrative tradition. Produced between 1979 and 1993, these films reflect many of the key debates that animated feminist scholarship between 1970 and 1990. Frontier spaces are re-imagined as places where feminist identities can be forged outside white settler patriarchal constructs, debunking frontier myths embedded in frontier historiography and the Western. A central way these filmmakers debunked frontier myths was to push the boundaries of what constitutes a frontier. Despite their common aim to demystify dominant frontier myths, these films do not collectively form a coherent or monolithic feminist revisionist frontier. Instead, this body of work reflects and is marked by difference, although not in regard to nation or time periods. Rather the differences that emerge across this body of work reflect the differences within feminism itself. As a means of understanding these differences, this study examines these films through four central themes that were at the centre of feminist debates during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. These are: female authorship, motherhood and the maternal, paid labour and the economy, and sexuality. The study examines whether these women's frontier films were successful at pushing the feminist agenda forward. In order to answer this question, this study uses an interdisciplinary method of analysis deploying feminist theory, feminist historiography, frontier historiography, film theory, and genre theory. The films in this study are: Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979), Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993), Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986), Merata Mita's

Mauri (1988), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993).

To my beautiful daughters, Louisa and Teresa.

And to my mother, Betty Cummins (1926-2005), who was the first person to encourage my
passion for movies.

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I wish to acknowledge the women filmmakers who are the subjects of this dissertation. When I was a young woman film student in a predominantly male department, I looked to these filmmakers for inspiration. They were, and remain, my role models. I remember where I was when I heard that Jane Campion had won the Palm D'Or in 1993 for *The Piano*, the first woman to ever do so. Without their films I may not have ever imagined myself a director. In many ways this dissertation is one long ode to these women and their films.

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Introduction: Filming Feminist Frontiers/Frontier Feminisms **(1979-1993)**

I wanted to make some sort of statement on the history of women in the west, on the interdependence of women living in remote areas. I am not into films for the sake of making films. And I feel very strongly that if you are going to make a two-and-half-million dollar film, that you should be saying something.

- Anne Wheeler, English-Canadian filmmaker, 1985¹

I think we need to do more than try to document history. I think we need to probe. We need to have the freedom to romanticize history, to say, "what if," to use history in a speculative way and creative speculative fiction. I think we need to feel free to do that.

- Julie Dash, African-American filmmaker, 1992²

The Piano is me trying to come to terms with the fact that I am a colonial."

- Jane Campion, New Zealand/Australian filmmaker, 1993³

Between the late 1970s and mid 1990s for the very first time in the history of cinema, women were breaking through long entrenched gender barriers in the film and television industries to become directors, writers and producers. In a relatively short period of time women managed to stake out a small piece of territory in a landscape that had been historically a white man's arena, particularly the feature film industry. It is a period now deemed the heyday of women's cinema and feminist film culture. Interestingly, many of the women's films that came to be associated with this heyday shared a common motif - that of a frontier space. This is particularly true for films that originated from former white settler nations. This study is interested in examining and exploring why so many women filmmakers during this time period deployed a frontier motif in their films.

Filming Feminist Frontiers/Frontier Feminisms is a transnational qualitative study examining ten landmark feature films directed by women that re-imagined their nations' frontiers as spaces for feminist agency and resistance. Produced between 1979 and 1993, the films originated from four liberal democratic former white settler frontier nations: Canada, the U.S.,

New Zealand, and Australia. All four nations have constructed their identities in masculinist frontier/wilderness myths/narratives. Though these women directors made their films within different national, cultural, political, and industrial contexts, they all re-imagined frontier spaces through a feminist (cinematic) frame, countering popular myths of settlement and expansionism. All of these frontier films were either distributed as theatrical film releases or network television movies/mini-series. In this sense, these women filmmakers aimed to tell their frontier stories in the grand narrative tradition. Despite this general commonality, however, there are a number of different feminist frontiers that emerge across this body of work. This study is interested in the construction of these different feminist frontiers, particularly in what they reflect about feminism during the time period in which they were made. A key question for this study is: what kind of contribution did these women's frontier films make to feminist scholarship, and in particular to feminist frontier historiography?

Why These Ten Films?

The ten feature films under analysis are: from Australia, Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993); from Canada, Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), and Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986); from New Zealand, Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988) and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993); and from the U.S., Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993). There are a number of reasons why these particular women filmmakers and their films have been selected for this study. Firstly, the films are all important landmark feminist films and have had influence. Secondly, the films represent a period in world cinema during which for the very first time women demanded, and were enabled, to work in the grand narrative tradition.

Landmark Women's Films

Most of these films are now deemed landmark women's films; they are award-winners, box office hits, and some have even been declared national treasures. According to the *Canadian Film Encyclopedia*, Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) "deserves its place in Canadian film history as one of the most successful films ever."⁴ As part of the CBC television four-part mini-series *Daughters of the Country*,⁵ Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986) won numerous film and television awards, and was one of the first and only programs in Canada at the time to feature Métis women in prominent roles.⁶ Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986) was honoured with awards at various international film festivals, and was noted for its non-stereotyped representations of indigenous women.⁷ The Library of Congress has recently declared Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) to be a National Treasure.⁸ Nancy Kelley's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) ranks among the top twenty highest rated broadcasts of all time in the history of PBS's American Playhouse series.⁹ Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) is considered to be one of the most important films to come out of the Australian New Wave of the 1970s.¹⁰ Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993) significantly raised the international profile of indigenous Australian cinema.¹¹ Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988) is credited with having a significant impact on developing Māori cinema, and served as a training ground for younger Māori filmmakers.¹² Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) won three Academy Awards and is listed in the U.S. National Society of Film Critics list of 100 Essential Films of all time.¹³

In addition, many of these women filmmakers are now considered important feminist film auteurs¹⁴ within women's cinema, and even world cinema. With *My Brilliant Career* (1979), Gillian Armstrong was the first woman to direct a feature film in Australia in forty-six years.¹⁵ With *Bedevil* (1993), Tracey Moffatt became the first indigenous-Australian woman to direct a

feature narrative film.¹⁶ Moffatt is largely credited with paving the way for indigenous women in the Australian film and television industry.¹⁷ With *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Julie Dash became the first African-American woman to direct a feature-length narrative film.¹⁸ Merata Mita was not only the first Māori woman to solely direct a feature narrative film, *Mauri* (1988),¹⁹ but the first female indigenous filmmaker in the world to do so.²⁰ *The Piano's* (1993) Jane Campion has been acknowledged as “one of the most important woman directors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.”²¹ Campion remains the first and only woman to ever win the Palm D’Or at the Cannes Film Festival²² and is only one of four women to ever be nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Director category. Though Campion did not win for directing, she did so for Best Original Screenplay.²³ Maggie Greenwald became one of the first female filmmakers to direct a Western for the commercial cinema with *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993).²⁴ Greenwald’s film competed at the box office with Clint Eastwood’s highly successful revisionist Western *The Unforgiven* (1993). Many of these women directors established their film careers on the success of these films, and many of the films in this study were the filmmakers’ feature narrative debuts.

Feminist Grand Narratives

*The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community.*²⁵

- Edward Said (1994)

Another key reason these ten films have been selected for this study is that they are all working in the feature-length narrative form. This can be seen as a strategy deployed by these women directors to counter dominant colonial frontier myths, particularly as constructed by the

Hollywood Western. These films demanded what Edward Said has described as “the power to narrate” on big screens with access to large audiences. It was politically significant and relevant for these filmmakers to access the global production/distribution/exhibition system to which women and subaltern people have been historically denied access. Two North American studies of gender equity in the film and television industry have revealed very depressing numbers, with respect to both Hollywood and national cinemas.²⁶ Despite these obstacles, these ten women filmmakers seemed to break through what film scholar Martha Lauzen has termed the “celluloid ceiling.” Julie Dash explains her reasons for insisting on making *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) a feature film:

It became clear that a short film would not be large enough for the story. I knew I would have to make a feature. There would be too much information, and it had to be shared.

It would take Dash over ten years to bring her African-American women’s film to the big screen. As feature film directors, these filmmakers demanded to be heard within a global media market place. However, these filmmakers’ desire to work in the feature film industry would not have come to fruition without state support.

During the 1970s and 80s a number of national film training and financing programs were put in place in order to address issues of gender and racial inequity in the film and television industries in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent the U.S. These equity programs were created in large part due to the intense lobbying by feminist and anti-racist/colonial activists and scholars, who sought to render visible the voices and histories of women and minority groups in the media. These programs can also be seen as an attempt by former white settler frontier colonies to re-invent themselves as post-modern, post-colonial states with an identity rooted in free speech and equity, as well as cultural and ethnic diversity.

In Australia the grass-roots organization, the Sydney Women's Film Group²⁷ was formed in 1971, and put enormous pressure on the Australian Film Commission to train women and fund their projects. In 1975, the Women's Film Fund of the Australian Film Commission was established. Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant Career*, 1979) explained,

The Australian Film Commission at that time funded workshops to teach women how to use a camera and do sound recording. And there was big pressure on the Australian Film and Television School to be well aware of gender when they were selecting.²⁸

Armstrong was one of the first female graduates of the Australian Film and Television School in the early 1970s.²⁹ Both Armstrong and indigenous filmmaker Tracey Moffatt (*Bedevil*, 1993) received funding through the Australian Film Commission for their early films.³⁰ Moffatt received funding from the Women's Film Fund for her award-winning *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987), which received worldwide recognition.³¹ Though a native of New Zealand, Jane Campion is also one of AFTS's alumni, graduating in the mid-1980s. Four of Campion's AFTS short films were shown at Cannes in 1985; *Peel* winning the Golden Palm for Best Short Subject Film. Campion's feature films *Sweetie* (1989) and *An Angel at My Table* (1990) both received financial backing from the Australian Film Commission.

With regard to indigenous filmmaking in Australia, the new human rights legislation brought in by the Whitlam government in 1975³² helped usher in the Film Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies³³ and the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association.³⁴ The release of two state commissioned reports addressing public and commercial media organizations and their treatment of indigenous people also ignited change. These were: *The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) and the Australian Film Commission report *Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Involvement in the Film and Television Industry* (1992) by Shirley McPherson and Michael Pope. According to *Screen Australia*:

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) outlined in its final report a number of recommendations with direct reference to public and commercial media organizations and their treatment of Indigenous people. The commission recommended that media bodies develop codes and policies for the presentation of Indigenous issues and establish training for Indigenous people. These recommendations marked a turning point in the television industry. They supported Indigenous peoples having influence over their own representation and increased their access to employment within the film and television industry.³⁵

On the recommendation of *Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Involvement in the Film and Television Industry* (1992), the Australian Film Commission established the Indigenous Branch in 1993, which coincided with the release of Moffatt's *Bedevil*.

From New Zealand Merata Mita (*Mauri*, 1988) and Jane Campion (*The Piano*, 1993) benefitted from various local film initiatives. *Mauri* received support and financing through the New Zealand Film Commission, established in 1978.³⁶ According to Emiel Martens, though the founding documents of the NZ Film Commission “neglected New Zealand’s bicultural identity, from the late 1980s the Commission started to acknowledge a commitment to Māori filmmaking.”³⁷ Mita’s previous political documentaries were funded by the Auckland Co-op Alternative Cinema, which helped produce independent, experimental, and documentary films by local filmmakers.³⁸ Though Campion had primarily worked within the Australian film context, earlier on in her career she did receive \$100,000 in development funds from the New Zealand Film Commission for an adaptation of Jane Mander’s classic *The Story of a New Zealand River*.³⁹ Campion’s involvement with this project has been the topic of much controversy, as *The Piano* shares some similarities with Mander’s novel. Film scholar Alistair Fox has traced the connections between Mander’s story and *The Piano*, concluding that though there are indeed many similarities between the two texts, Campion diverted enough from the original material to make it her own. Campion has always publically denied much connection between the two projects.⁴⁰ Though *The Piano* was shot in New Zealand and hired a primarily New Zealand crew,

however, the film was fully financed by the French film production company CiBy 2000. Remarkably, Campion and her producer Jan Chapman were given complete artistic control, rare for any director, much less an inexperienced woman director who had never worked with Hollywood stars.⁴¹

From Canada, Anne Wheeler (*Loyalties*, 1986), Norma Bailey (*The Wake*, 1986), and Sandy Wilson (*My American Cousin*, 1985) came out of the Canadian national cinema context, which is entirely state-supported and controlled. Bailey's *The Wake* was fully funded and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. According to the NFB's official website:

The NFB is a federal cultural agency within the portfolio of the Canadian Heritage Department. Initially known as the National Film Commission, it was created by an act of Parliament in 1939. Its mandate, as set forth in the *National Film Act*, 1950, is "to produce and distribute and to promote the production and distribution of films designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations."⁴²

All three filmmakers gained early directing training, experience, and financing through the NFB, including the women's film unit, Studio D, which operated 1974-1996.⁴³ Spearheaded by Kathleen Shannon, Studio D was dedicated to making films for, about, and by women. Studio D was the first fully state funded feminist film unit in the world.⁴⁴ Wheeler's earlier work was financed and distributed by Studio D as well. Many of Wheeler's NFB films received acclaim, particularly her documentaries *Great Grand Mother* (1975), *Happily Unmarried* (1977), and *Augusta* (1976), which profiled an elderly indigenous woman struggling to maintain her dignity and identity in a racist and isolating environment. Bailey's NFB documentary *Nose and Tina* (1980) tells of the troubled relationship between an indigenous woman who works as a prostitute and her alcoholic white boyfriend. Bailey's real-life documentary subject "Tina" was later cast as Cora in *The Wake*, a character who also earns her living through prostitution.

Wheeler's *Loyalties* received funding from the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation,⁴⁵ Telefilm Canada,⁴⁶ and the national publically funded broadcaster, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* also received its funding through Telefilm Canada and the CBC. All of these films were made after the advent of the Canadian Broadcast Development Fund. Established in 1984 and administered by Telefilm, the goal of this fund was "to make available a solid core of attractive Canadian programming in all categories."⁴⁷

The U.S. is the only one of these four former white settler nations that does not have a state funded cinema. This is primarily due to the dominance of Hollywood. Most national cinemas have been created specifically to counter the influence and dominance of Hollywood and American culture in order to protect regional and national cultures and identities, as well as language and history. However, independent American filmmakers like Julie Dash, who desired to tell unique and more diverse stories about real Americans have been marginalized. Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) was primarily financed through America's publically funded PBS's American Playhouse series and received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Dash initially pitched the story to Hollywood executives, but was unable to secure financing. Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) was also an American Playhouse production. The American Playhouse series represents an interesting case study in American broadcast television and independent film history. The series ran between 1982 and 1994, and was created "to counter the perception that PBS cared more about British imports such as 'Masterpiece Theatre' and 'Mystery!' than productions by and about Americans – who were the ones footing the bills. Of 181 Playhouse productions to date, more than 40 were released first as feature films, including *Stand and Deliver*, *Longtime Companion*, *El Norte*, *Testament* and *The Thin Blue Line*."⁴⁸

American Playhouse produced original American content with high production value intended for a competitive commercial film market, while also reflecting distinct American voices across the axes of gender, class, race, sexuality, generation, and region. The themes and issues featured across this series ranged from racial tension and inequity in the public school system (*Stand and Deliver*), gay rights (*Longtime Companion*), black working-class struggles (*The Killing Floor*), and AIDS (*Angels in America*).

Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) is the only film among the ten that received no state funding or support. Interestingly *Ballad's* funding came from Polygram Filmed Entertainment, an Anglo-Dutch company based in London.⁴⁹ Founded in 1980 it became a European competitor to Hollywood. In 1991, Michael Kuhn was dispatched to Los Angeles as president of PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, with the job of spending \$200 million to expand the company's filmmaking activities.⁵⁰ These filmmaking activities were not typical Hollywood fare, focusing on British and art house films.⁵¹ Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* was one of those "art house" films.

Without these state funded film training and financing programs, these women's frontier films would not have been made. Gender plays a central role here. These films are deemed trailblazing because they were made by a group of talented women who were chosen to tell stories about their nations' frontier spaces. This is the key reason this study is analyzing only women filmmakers. These women directors and their frontier-themed films represent a turning point in their nations' cinemas in which the state exerted an effort to address gender, and sometimes racial, inequity in the media. On one level, these programs could be seen as being part of a larger state agenda, one rooted in liberal post-colonial politics. Were these gender and racial equity cultural programs implemented by the state as a means of re-visioning (re-branding)

national identities rooted in frontier white settler colonial histories? Did the filmmakers themselves take advantage of these equity programs and opportunities because they were, for once, the right gender? This study is particularly interested in what kind of frontier narratives and spaces these women filmmakers, who were in many ways, the *chosen ones*, constructed.

Secondary Literature on Films

A number of these films have received significant critical attention, although not always from a feminist perspective. Campion's *The Piano* (1993) has received the most critical attention from a diverse range of political perspectives. A highly contentious text, *The Piano* is a divisional film; it has been both championed as a feminist text and condemned for its representation of Māori people. *The Piano* pushed boundaries and inspired a large-scale debate about the nature of feminist aesthetics and politics, and it is the primary reason it has been included in this study. In many ways *The Piano* is as enigmatic as its mute and strange heroine, Ada. In contrast, Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Bailey's *The Wake* (1986), Mita's *Mauri* (1988), and Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) have received very little to no feminist or anti-colonial/racist scholarly attention.

National/Regional Cinema

Only the films by the English-Canadian and white Australian filmmakers have been analyzed in the context of national cinema/identity. Both Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986) and Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) have been celebrated for developing regional aesthetics (e.g., "Prairie Gothic") and distinctly Canadian film genre traditions (e.g. the road movie).⁵² Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) has been canonized for helping revive Australian cinema in the 1970s.⁵³ Campion's *The Piano* (1993) has been a more ambiguous case, and critics have argued fiercely over its status as an Australian or a New Zealand film. This is perhaps due to *The*

Piano's French financing, its international cast, and Campion's own ambiguous nationality (her birthplace is New Zealand, but her professional and home base is Australia).⁵⁴ Irene Bessier identified the presence of an "international trope" in Campion's films.⁵⁵ Alistair Fox however argued that *The Piano* works as a New Zealand film because of its depiction of Pakeha settler history and culture.⁵⁶ Hilary Radner asserted that *The Piano* is working in the New Zealand Heritage Film tradition.⁵⁷

Interestingly, the films by the indigenous filmmakers, Mita's *Mauri* (1988) and Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993), have not been discussed in the national cinema context, despite being the first feature films directed by indigenous women. Bruce Harding places *Mauri* in the category of "bi-national cinema."⁵⁸ Bailey's *The Wake* (1986) has also received no scholarly attention in regard to its contribution to a Canadian national cinema. Although an indigenous woman did not direct *The Wake*, its narrative is driven by a Métis heroine and is highly critical of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). There has been no scholarship on Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, or Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) in regard to reflecting a national cinema; perhaps due to the fact that there has been no identifiable national cinema in the U.S. outside the Hollywood context.

Women's Filmmaking

Women's filmmaking and feminist film theory/criticism developed in tandem throughout the 1970s and 80s. The recurring debates focused around aesthetics and identity politics, and a number of these films were swept up in those debates, and even came to define feminist aesthetics, female desire, and the female lens in the cinema. Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) has been deemed a key feminist film in regard to opening up doors for other women filmmakers in both the Australian and international context.⁵⁹ Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

(1991) and Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993) have both been highly celebrated as examples of a feminist aesthetic, although only in the context of anti-racist politics or the avant-garde.⁶⁰ E. Ann Kaplan discussed both Moffatt and Dash as women filmmakers who were "changing paradigms" through their films of resistance.⁶¹ Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986) has been seen as a "feminist melodrama" engaging with hard-hitting women's issues and resisting romantic endings, although the film has only garnered the attention of Canadian film scholars.⁶² Tania Modleski praised Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) for revisioning the Hollywood Western through a female gaze.⁶³ A number of feminist film scholars hailed Campion's *The Piano* as a re-telling of Victorian Gothic romance placing female desire and pleasure in the foreground of the narrative.⁶⁴ Other scholars have argued that *The Piano* reinforced female victimization and masochism, and fell prey to the conventions of romance in which heroines find resolution in heterosexual romantic love. A few critics and scholars have accused Campion of glorifying and romanticizing rape.⁶⁵

Colonialism

The key issue for this area of scholarship has been the construction of an anti-colonial or colonial gaze, particularly in regard to the depiction of indigenous people. The film to receive the most criticism has been Campion's *The Piano*.⁶⁶ Leonie Pihama argued that: "*The Piano* provides a series of constructions of Māori that are located firmly in a colonial gaze."⁶⁷ Reshela DuPuis argued, "... the film's sexual symbolism relies heavily on profoundly racist depictions of the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand, and on culturally coded, deeply racialized representations of their land."⁶⁸ Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay claimed *The Piano* as "one of the most obnoxious films I know of from the point of view of white supremacy."⁶⁹ Other critics made the case that Campion has deployed the Māori respectfully as "a Greek chorus" or as "ironic commentators and sharp critical observers of Pakeha settlers."⁷⁰ A number of scholars

have criticized Campion for what Estella Tincknell calls an “ahistorical construction of self and identity,” which obliterates history.⁷¹

The Piano, however, is not the only film in this study to come under attack for a colonizing or Eurocentric gaze. Nancy Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, which has received minimal scholarly attention, has garnered criticism largely from the Asian-American scholarly community. Film scholars have accused Kelly of depicting racist stereotypes of Chinese men as either feminized or oppressive. Kelly has also been critiqued for her ending, in which the Chinese heroine chooses heterosexual marriage with a white man over her Chinese community.⁷² Julie Dash has been largely celebrated for her deployment of a decolonizing gaze in *Daughters of the Dust*. Caroline Brown, however, has accused Dash of silencing and objectifying the only indigenous character in the film, St. Julian Last Child, in the service of privileging the black woman’s worldview.⁷³

Though there has been very little scholarly attention given to Wheeler’s *Loyalties*, the film has been only praised for its depiction of Métis/white power relations in a post-colonial environment across the lens of gender, race and class. Brenda Longfellow argued, “It is no exaggeration to say that *Loyalties* is one of the first Canadian feature films to portray Natives not as ‘imaginary Indians’ but as complex and contradictory characters who are given a progressive narrative centrality.”⁷⁴

Methodology

Why is this study focalized around the frontier? The term *frontier* conjures up a number of images and associations. Generally, when we imagine the frontier, images of wide-open rugged landscapes and violent conflict, particularly of the “cowboys and Indians” variety, come to mind. These iconic images are strongly embedded in two interconnected narrative constructs,

American frontier historiography and the Hollywood Western. Traditionally the frontier has been associated with American historiography, in which the frontier was understood and constructed as a geographic line separating civilization from wilderness. Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis (1893) claimed that the American frontier was a line "expanding westward." Turner argued that, "the true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West." Based on the Census of 1890, Turner concluded that this Western frontier had all but closed, and this closing had created a kind of American identity crisis. Turner described the frontier as marked by a "fall line" that was pushed westward. Turner argued,

In these successive frontiers we find natural boundary lines which have served to mark and to affect the characteristics of frontiers, namely: the "fall line;" the Alleghany Mountains; the Mississippi; the Missouri where its direction approximates north and south; the line of the arid lands approximately the ninety-ninth meridian; and the Rocky Mountains. The fall line marked the frontier of the seventeenth century; the Alleghenies that of the eighteenth; the Mississippi that of the first quarter of the nineteenth; the Missouri that of the middle of this century (omitting the California movement); and the belt of the Rocky Mountains and the arid tract, the present frontier. Each was won by a series of Indian wars.⁷⁵

In Turner's Frontier Thesis, this westward expansionism was also symbolic of the figurative movement away from the old world, namely Europe. Turner's Frontier Thesis was hugely influential, establishing the model for American historiography.

American historian Richard Slotkin (1992) has described Turner's thesis as "the basis of the dominant school of American historical interpretation [which] would provide the rationale for the ideologies of both Republican progressives and Democratic liberals for much of the ensuing century."⁷⁶ Slotkin argued that American national identity has been firmly rooted in a "myth-historiography" of the frontier as violent. This violence has been depicted in the form of "savage wars," and the "hero" of those wars is always a gunfighter. Violence, personified and

emblemized by the gunfighter, has been intrinsic to the creation of an American spirit and is at the core of American foreign policy. Slotkin argued,

According to this myth-historiography, the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and “progressive” civilization.⁷⁷

Slotkin called this the “mythology of violence” and argued that it has shaped, and been shaped by, popular cultural constructs like Buffalo Bill’s *Wild West Show*, dime novels, the paintings of Frederic Remington, the novels of Fennimore Cooper and Bird, and the Hollywood Western. Slotkin paid close attention to the Western, due to its influence and enduring appeal. This study also places importance on the Western, particularly as a dominant colonial and masculinist text.

Spatially and temporally, Westerns are usually set in the American West and depict a relatively short period of time that film scholar J. Hoberman identified as “a twenty-five-year long mop-up operation between Lee’s surrender at Appomattox and the defeat of the Sioux at Wounded Knee.”⁷⁸ The Western is a genre that is quintessentially American and arguably very masculine. In *West of Everything* Jane Tompkins (1991) described the Western as a “women-less milieu.” In this “women-less milieu” white Anglo-Saxon rugged male heroes struggle to help settle or “civilize” the frontier, and this is always accomplished through gun violence. The adversaries in Westerns are either outlaws or “Indians.” In *Horizons West* (1969), Jim Kitses argued that Western themes are organized under the central dichotomy of wilderness and civilization.⁷⁹

Recently, frontier historians and cultural scholars have challenged traditional and historical constructions of the frontier. Nathan Wolski (2001) argued in his article “All’s not quiet on the Western Front – Rethinking Resistance and Frontiers in Aboriginal Historiography,” that frontier historiography has been rooted in rigid and delimiting definitions of frontiers,

particularly Turner's frontier thesis and Australian William Thomas's writings about the Australian frontier (1853), both rooted in the idea that frontiers close when indigenous active physical resistance ends or is forced to end. Wolski argued,

The necessity for broadening our ideas on what constitutes resistance and for whom, but also the subsequent need to develop a newer model of the frontier – a model which moves away from the idea of frontiers as temporally and spatially circumscribed, to one which accounts for the invisibilities, misrecognitions and fractured/ambivalent intentions which characterize the contact period in Australia.⁸⁰

Wolski advocated for a deconstruction of both the frontier and resistance, basing his argument on the work of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Applying Bhabha's theories of resistance, Wolski argued that resistance can be "intransitive," meaning not explicitly acted out in a physical way.⁸¹ Predating Wolski, these women filmmakers also expanded the traditional notions of the frontier. Like Turner these women's films establish their own theses of the frontier – through a feminist lens.

Feminist Frontier Theses

In regard to time periods and geography, these films challenge traditional notions of the frontier. Only Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) and Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) are set in the American West during the late 19th century. Not all the films are even set in the past. Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986) and Bailey's *The Wake* (1986) are set during contemporary times in Northern Canada. Champion's *The Piano* (1993) is set on an Oceanic landscape during the mid-1800s. Dash's African-American tale *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) is set on the Sea Islands off the eastern seaboard coast of South Carolina at the turn of the 20th century. Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) is also set at the turn of the 20th century, but in the Australian outback. Mita sets *Mauri* (1988) on a coastal Māori settlement during the 1950s. Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) is set in 1959 British Columbia, Canada. Moffatt's *Bedevil*

(1993) depicts the Torres Straight Islands between the 1950s and 1990s. Though these films tell tales of adventure and conflict set in iconic wide-open landscapes marked by rugged beauty, romance and danger, the conflicts are rooted in power relations across the axes of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Across this body of women's films there is much violence, but the violence is rarely between indigenous peoples and white men. Instead the violence is committed against women and/or subaltern people, and there is no lone white hero to come to the rescue. The "fall lines" in these films are metaphorical, pushing identity boundaries via feminist and anti-racist/anti-colonial agency and resistance. The frontier is constructed as an imagined place where feminist identities can be forged outside the influences of modernity, industrialization, or the colonial and imperial powers of Britain-Europe. This study will examine how and where these filmmakers construct "fall lines" as a means of expressing their feminist politics.

In many ways, these ten frontier-themed women's films construct an interesting meta-narrative about feminist agency and resistance in frontier spaces during the time period in which they were made (1979-1993). In order to capture and analyze the dissonance of these differing women's voices and women's texts, this study will embrace anti-racist feminist Elsa Barkley-Brown's notion of a "polyrhythmic" method for understanding voices and narratives from the past. In "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics" (1992), Barkley-Brown argued that acknowledging difference itself is not enough. She advocated for using African-American jazz, story quilts, and *gumbo ya ya* speech patterns as examples for a kind of narrative that allowed for different voices and multiple rhythms to be played and heard simultaneously.⁸² Barkley-Brown argued,

History is also everybody talking at once, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously. As historians we try to isolate one conversation and to explore it, but the trick is then how to put that conversation in a context, which makes

evident its dialogue with so many others-how to make this one lyric stand alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung.⁸³

The challenge for this study will be to maintain a coherent meta-narrative whilst resisting homogeneity. Anti-racist feminist Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham cautioned anti-racist feminist historians against homogeneity and universalizing. In “African-American Women’s History and the Meta-Language of Race” (1992), Brooks-Higginbotham traced race as a “global sign” through discourse, and argued against the totalizing effect of the “meta-language” of race as a dominant narrative, which obscures the role of class and gender in the stories of black heterogeneity.⁸⁴ This study will avoid constructing a dominant narrative about these frontier women's films in regards to how they construct a feminist frontier. Instead this study is only interested in rendering visible and teasing out the differing feminist politics that drive the films' narratives about women in frontier spaces.

The central method for understanding and rendering visible the way these feminist filmmakers deployed the frontier as a feminist tool is by examining their films through the key issues and debates that animated feminist scholarship during the time period in which the films were made. This study is interested in foregrounding how these filmmakers engaged with or reflected the key second-wave feminist debates. Four recurring themes, which were at the forefront of Anglo-American feminism between the 1970s and 1990, structure the chapters in this study: Women’s Storytelling and the Female Voice; Revisioning Genre; Motherhood and the Maternal; Women’s Work and the Economy; and Sexuality and Desire.

Chapter One, “Women’s Storytelling: Narrative, Genre and Voice” summarizes the key feminist debates around women’s narrative and voice construction. All these filmmakers aimed to tell their frontier-themed feminist/women’s stories in the grand narrative tradition, but they did so in varying ways, reflecting a diverse range of methods and results. This chapter will also

summarize the key literature on three genres that are referenced across this body of work: Western, the melodrama, and the horror film. These summaries are intended to provide the necessary context for subsequent chapters that focalize around how these filmmakers deployed storytelling conventions and genre codes to construct their frontier feminist narratives.

Chapter Two, “Filming Homes on the Range: Revisioning Melodrama, the Western and Horror” analyses how the filmmakers deploy and revision the Western, the melodrama, and the horror/thriller in their depictions of women’s oppression within frontier spaces. Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold* and Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo* are set during the American Wild West of the late nineteenth century, and are working directly within the Western convention, however, the Western looms large for *all* these films. The deployment of genre, however, varies depending on the filmmakers’ methods of narrative and voice construction, rooted either in revisionism or deconstruction.

Chapter Three, “Filming Frontier Spaces through the Lens of Motherhood,” examines the filmmakers’ deployment of motherhood and the maternal in their re-imagining of frontier spaces as feminist and/or feminine. Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, Mita’s *Mauri*, Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, Wheeler’s *Loyalties*, Campion’s *The Piano*, Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, and Bailey’s *The Wake* all feature central heroines who are mothers or maternal figures. Though Wilson’s *My American Cousin* and Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career* structure their narratives through the point of view of daughters, mother figures play a significant role, and the dramatic tensions are constructed around mother-daughter conflicts. These films all make the claim that motherhood matters. However, motherhood has been a central site of contention amongst feminists, particularly across the axes of class, race, and sexuality, and has been represented and theorized about as both a site of oppression and of empowerment for women. This contention is felt within

and across these films. This chapter analyses how the filmmakers reflected and/or engaged with the motherhood debates through their deployment of three recurring figures; the empowered subaltern mother, the oppressed white settler mother, and the rebellious daughter figure.

Chapter Four, “Filming ‘Women’s Work’ in Frontier Economies,” focuses on the role of gender and women’s labour (productive and reproductive) in the construction of frontier economies. Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career*, Wilson’s *My American Cousin*, and to a lesser extent Campion’s *The Piano*, foreground the exploitation of women’s reproductive and productive labour on white settler farms. In Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Bailey’s *The Wake*, and Wheeler’s *Loyalties*, the role of waged labour in the lives of marginalized and/or subaltern women is depicted. In Mita’s *Mauri*, Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, and Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, the economic marginalization of subaltern colonized communities is made central in the frame. Across these films, women’s labour and gendered economies are central issues in the films’ plots.

Chapter Five, “Filming Female Sexuality in a ‘Woman-less Milieu’: Through Her Desiring Gaze,” focuses on the filmmakers’ construction of desire in masculine and often violent frontier spaces. All the characters/heroines deploy sexuality and desire as key form of empowerment and resistance against patriarchal and/or colonial oppression. The characters’ sexual struggles are at the core of many of the tensions and conflicts in the films’ narratives. There are two general ways that these filmmakers represent the heroines’ and female characters’ sexuality and desire as feminist resistance and as emancipation in frontier spaces. First, at the level of representation, the films resist and debunk heterosexist and racist stereotypes of female sexuality, particularly those rooted in the “Madonna/whore” dichotomy. Second, at the level of the gaze, the films privilege and normalize female and/or subaltern desire in the narrative and

frame. There are two different sexuality narratives across these films, the subversive sexuality narrative and the decolonizing desire narrative.

Collectively these women filmmakers reconstructed and revisioned frontier myths through a female lens, resulting in a complex and dissonant meta-narrative. As in music, dissonance creates interest, tension, and movement. However, this is not to be seen as a weakness or a negative trait. Dissonance is in fact the life force of musical harmony, moving towards resolution. In order to construct this dissonant meta-narrative of frontier themed women's films produced between 1979 and 1993, this study will take an interdisciplinary approach, deploying methods of analysis from feminist theory, historiography, and film theory, as well as genre theory and frontier historiography.

This study will construct this meta-narrative through the lens of gender, as it intersects with race, class, ethnicity and sexuality. In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986), post-structuralist Joan Scott argued against the practice of "women's history," in which women's voices are added to the narrative. Scott argued that this kind of scholarship was narrow and meaningless. "Women and men [are] defined in terms of one another, and no understanding of either [can] be achieved by entirely separate study" (29).⁸⁵ Denise Riley's "*Am I That Name?*" *Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (1988), urged feminists away from writing a "master narrative of womanhood" because she argued "women" was an unstable category, and also because it mimicked patriarchal structures. Riley advocated for fluidity and dis-continuity in developing a theoretical model for feminist mobilization around identity and collectivity.⁸⁶ This study will also resist constructing a monolithic "grand narrative" that essentializes women and feminism.

As this study aims to analyze these frontier themed films as women's texts from and about colonial spaces and time periods, careful attention will be paid to the representation and understanding of colonialism and imperialism. This study will engage with feminist anti-colonial methods of analysis that will foreground Eurocentric and racist points of view which render silent or invisible subaltern colonized people, as well as normalizing a female gaze through the lens of whiteness. The construction of white femininity and subaltern women through a female gaze is a key issue throughout this study. Hence, it will deploy methods of analysis from key anti-colonial feminist texts. Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), a post-colonial post-structural analysis of gender oppression, analyzed how imperialism was constructed through various kinds of texts and discourses. Through her in depth, interdisciplinary analysis of popular Victorian novels, advertising, and white women's proto-feminist writing (e.g. Olive Schreiner), McClintock revealed a complex narrative about the dangerous liaisons between gender, race, and class that shaped British imperialism in Victorian Britain and South Africa. Of relevance to this study is McClintock's interconnection between the cult of Victorian domesticity and white motherhood (the angel in the house), and the invention of industrial progress. For instance, McClintock argued that the trope of white motherhood was central to the distribution and exploitation of black female labour. The role of the (white) angel in the house is a central motif across this body of women's films, although it is deployed in varying ways.

Anti-colonial scholar Enakshi Dua argued that "women of colour" (indigenous women, African slaves, and non-European immigrants) have been relegated to the "third world" position.⁸⁷ Dua examined how this third world position was constructed through colonial narratives as voiced by prominent political leaders like Sir John A. MacDonald, who declared *his*

Canada to be a white man's country. Dua argued that national discourses about white British femininity are only possible through the relegation of subaltern women to imagined dark "others" and lowly paid workers. In "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation" (2000),⁸⁸ Himani Bannjeri points to Canadian literature as a discursive method of oppression, citing the novels of Margaret Atwood, the archetypal (white) woman writer, who obliterates indigenous people by representing Canada as an "empty wilderness." This study will ask whether these filmmakers interrogate the construction of colonial identities or whether they naively engage with a simplistic liberal feminism with a blind eye to racial and colonial hierarchies in their depictions of "empty wildernesses" of frontier spaces. As most of these filmmakers are white women, some of whom explicitly represent the experiences of subaltern women, this is an important question.

The key research questions for this study are: How do the ten women filmmakers deploy the frontier motif as a political tool for feminist inquiry? What feminist and anti-racist/anti-colonial debates do the women filmmakers engage with to tell their revisionist stories, and how? What differing conclusions do these ten films imply about the place of women in the construction of frontier societies and identities? What does this body of work tell us about the range of possibilities for expressing feminist politics within popular and grand narrative forms like the feature narrative film? What is the relationship between the political economy of the film industry and "feminist aesthetics?" Does female authorship matter?

Chapter 1: Women's Storytelling: Narrative, Genre and Voice

The myths governing the cinema are no different from those governing other cultural products: they relate to a standard value system informing all cultural systems in a given society... It is possible to use icons (i.e. conventional configurations) in the face of and against mythology usually associated with them.¹

- Claire Johnston (1973)

From the early 1970s to the late 1990s feminist scholars across different disciplines and deploying a diverse range of methodologies, advocated for female authorship. As women-authored texts told from a feminist perspective these frontier women's films can be seen as contributing to those debates through their deployment of narrative, genre, and voice. All these filmmakers aimed to tell their frontier-themed feminist/women's stories in the grand narrative tradition, but they did so in varying ways, reflecting a diverse range of methods and results. In order to understand how these ten women filmmakers told their stories on the big screen, this chapter will summarize the key feminist debates around narrative construction, voice, and genre, namely the Western, the melodrama, and the horror film.

Women's Storytelling and Feminism

A major thread throughout feminist scholarship was the role of Modernity, both as a historical and imagined construct. Generally, feminists argued that the modern "master narrative" had been oppressive to women because it was linear and structured around binary divisions, such as good/bad, male/female, active/passive, and civilized/uncivilized. Feminists argued that the master linear narrative was constructed by, and for, a universal (white) male human subject, who had been normalized as an active, rational, and public figure. Essential to the fulfillment of (white) male subjectivity was the silencing and marginalization of women and oppressed "others;" the thwarting of their subjectivity. Feminists argued that the representation of women and the feminine in literature, art, and historical narratives had been rooted in oppressive

stereotypes such as the Madonna/Whore dichotomy. In order to combat this dominant and oppressive master narrative, feminists argued that women must become authors, and through their authorship, construct new mythologies, new voices, and a new language. However, feminists differed on how feminist stories and language should be constructed. These debates were primarily focused around methodology. The key question that arose from these debates was, *what constitutes a feminist text and what is its method of production?* Three differing projects aimed to answer that question; I) recuperating women's voices and texts from the past; II) reconstructing a woman-centred language; and III) decolonizing subaltern women's voices.

Recuperation of Women's Voices

The recuperation of forgotten or marginalized female-authored texts from the past aimed to reconstruct female worlds that defied preconceived notions of womanhood and femininity, rooted in the Cult of True Womanhood typified by the "angel in the house" figure. This figure was the ultimate ideal of femininity and was known for four traits: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.² These scholars argued that though these works did not overtly critique patriarchy, they foregrounded a feminine voice and point of view that expressed buried female desires and fears. Feminist literary scholars Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) resurrected the Victorian woman writer (the Brontës, Jane Austen, and Emily Dickinson), previously dismissed by traditional literary criticism.³ Feminist film scholar Claire Johnston (1973) re-discovered the lost films of Hollywood women directors (Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino) from the 1930s and 40s. Johnston argued that Arzner and Lupino decentred the male gaze and foregrounded the production of female stereotypes like the vamp and the good girl.⁴ Judith Mayne (1990) asserted, "the feminist rediscovery of Dorothy Arzner in the 1970s remains the most important attempt to theorize female authorship in the cinema."⁵ Feminist historians Carol

Smith-Rosenberg (1985) and Christine Stansell (1987) resurrected female voices from the archives in order to foreground the construction of femininity across class and race.⁶

A number of the films in this study reflect the aims of these Anglo-American feminist recuperative projects, either paying homage to Victorian female authors or reconstructing feminine worlds in which female voices and desires are at the forefront of the narratives. Jane Campion has stated numerous times that the key inspirations for *The Piano* (1993) were Victorian women writers.⁷

I am a big admirer of the novelists of the nineteenth century, from George Eliot to Charlotte Brontë. And especially Emily Brontë who inspired me for this film.⁸

Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was also a major influence, especially in the construction of Campion's enigmatic heroine, Ada.⁹ Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) is an adaptation of Miles Franklin's proto-feminist, semi-autobiographical 1901 novel. Franklin's debut novel was an international success and secured her status as one of Australia's most important female authors, a rare distinction at the time. Franklin's novel itself was deemed "the most important novel the year of Federation" in Australia, and has helped maintain Franklin's longevity in the literary world.¹⁰ Franklin was well known for her feminist principles and activism.¹¹

Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) and Maggie Greenwald's *Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) are both based on real women of the American West. Kelly's film is an adaptation of Ruth Lum McCunn's popular biography of the real Lalu Nathoy, a Chinese woman who found herself sold into slavery in late 19th century Idaho. McCunn's novel has been credited with bringing Lalu "to life" and finding a "new heroine of the West." Ms. Magazine attested, "Lalu Nathoy's courageous journey is an important contribution to the history of pioneer women."¹² Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* also reconstructed the past world of a real Western

pioneer woman, the cross-dressing Josephine Monaghan, who, like Lalu, left behind few written records. Greenwald states,

When I stumbled upon information about the real Little Jo I saw that her story was a classic Western story about a rugged individualist who carves out a place for herself in the American West. American history is full of women who did exactly that. Women came from all over the world to make lives for them-selves, the same as men did. The only thing that's known is what was published in the newspaper article when she died, which gave me the information for the beginning and the end of the story. She was a society girl who had a child out of wedlock. It's believed her sister cared for the child, or someone else may have adopted him. Her family threw her out, and somewhere between the time she left the Northeast and arrived in the West she assumed the identity of a man and lived her whole life that way.¹³

Interestingly, Greenwald, who wrote the original screenplay, constructed Little Jo's point of view through the letter writing device, conjuring the work of feminist historians like Smith-Rosenberg. These letters are written between Josephine and her sister, Helen, Josephine's only connection to her son, as well as her former life as an Eastern "society girl." The key question here is: what kinds of female voices from the past are brought to the forefront, and what can they teach us about the role of gender in the construction of white settler identities?

(Re)constructing/Deconstructing Language

Feminist historians Natalie Zemon-Davis and Joan Scott would, however, challenge the "recuperating women's voices from the past" model, shaking the very foundations of women's and feminist historiography. Both scholars would foreground the problematic, gendered nature of mainstream historiography. Scott similarly contested preconceived notions of men, women, and difference. In *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), Zemon-Davis destabilized the "grand historical narrative" by deploying an interdisciplinary method that used unofficial sources, such as folk history and ethno-cultural accounts of the peasantry. Zemon-Davis brought into question the "objective" and masculinist tradition of her central male character and primary source, the

educated and privileged Judge Jean de Coras.¹⁴ Joan Scott (1988) using French poststructuralist theory, argued that gender categories are constructions of language, and their definition varies across space, time, and cultures. Scott argued that “gender history” is a more useful project than women’s history because it does not depend theoretically on physical difference.¹⁵

Scott and Zemon-Davis’s challenges to methodologies deployed in conventional historiography seem to be taken up by Merata Mita’s *Mauri* (1988), Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), and Tracey Moffatt’s *Bedevil* (1993). These films not only foreground the marginalized or suppressed voices of women, but also those of subaltern men. The plot in Mita’s *Mauri* is structured around a troubled Māori man, Paki, a fugitive from the law who has stolen the identity of a deceased fellow Māori, Rewi. Though the female Māori voice and gaze of Rewi’s great aunt, Kara, are central to the film’s visual and sound regimes, Moffatt constructs dramatic tension around whether Paki/Rewi will escape imprisonment and find spiritual salvation. A key character in Moffatt’s *Bedevil* is Rick, an Aborigine man and prison inmate, haunted by his abusive childhood (See Figure 1). Both films foreground the marginalization and even de-humanization of indigenous men in racist white settler societies.



Figure 1: Nick from the “Mr. Chuck” segment of Moffatt’s *Bedevil*

In Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, one of the film’s storylines focalizes around Eli, an African-American man, who is tormented by the rape of his wife by a white man. Eli experiences racist oppression through the moral sanctioning of the rape of black women.

Other feminists argued that a feminist text was only possible if a “woman-centred” language was (re)constructed, one that completely broke from what Adrienne Rich (1972) identified as a “male tradition.”¹⁶ Feminists like Rich located female oppression in language, and were primarily concerned with how language suppressed the female voice. Rich argued that it was not enough for women to just write their stories, they must write with new eyes and refrain from writing with a male voice and for a male reader. Rich believed that women writers internalized their fear of male wrath and violence, which prevented them from writing with an authentic woman’s voice and re-visioning a women-centred storytelling tradition. In “The Traffic of Women: Notes of the Political Economy of Sex” (1975), Gayle Rubin argued that women must re-write the psychoanalytic Oedipal story of the family because it is a story that renders women powerless and incomplete, as both cultural and historical subjects, due to women’s lack of the phallus, the patriarchal symbol for power. Rubin linked women’s economic oppression with their sexual repression, produced at the level of language and culture.¹⁷

The French Feminists raised the question: *In what language can She speak?* They also advocated a radical new “feminine language” in order to produce a female subjectivity, in which modern Western patriarchal binaries would be de-stabilized and power relations unsettled. Rejecting patriarchy’s dependency on reason and binaries, the French feminists refuted the mind/body split, (re)envisioning women’s emancipation through a fleshy “abject” (female) body, particularly the reproductive maternal body. In “Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), Hélène Cixous advocated for a feminine language to be written in “white ink” from a bi-sexual worldview.¹⁸ In “This Sex Which Is Not One” (1977), Luce Irigaray introduced her famous “two-lips” speaking metaphor, in which her autoeroticism allows for rediscovery of the self, through an embodied voice.¹⁹ In “Approaching Abjection” (1982), Julia Kristeva argued that female subjectivity is only possible as a “pre-subject,” through a messy journey back to the body of the m(other), the site of the pre-Oedipal plot.²⁰ In “The Straight Mind” (1980), Monique Wittig proposed moving away from psychoanalytic theory, as it is embedded in dominant discourses of binary divisions.²¹

Many feminist film scholars argued that the Hollywood cinema subjugated women by reproducing a language (master script) based on “sexual difference.”²² Laura Mulvey (1975) advocated for a new “language of desire” in order to combat patriarchal discourse and power. Applying post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theories, Mulvey argued that the dominant cinema is a powerful psychoanalytic script for the patriarchal unconscious, its narrative structure founded on the binary of an active male/passive female model.²³ Mulvey identified the foundational elements of the Hollywood cinema, classical narrative construction and visual spectacle as the key devices to subjugate the female and the feminine. Mulvey argued that male subjectivity is produced through a “masculine logic” of the narrative and the erotic gaze, which enables, privileges, and projects male desire through the pleasures of voyeurism (looking), fetishism

(fragmentation), and a return to the pleasures of infancy's "mirror phase" through a "screen surrogate," his own more perfect "mirror image" in order to imagine himself whole and powerful. The male's ability to control events in the narrative "coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (63). These subjective processes are dependent upon reducing the "woman" to a silent "sign" by constructing her as an erotic and threatening fragmented object of the male desire and fear. The woman as erotic spectacle and castrated "other" (due to her lack of the phallus) occludes her power of vision and dramatic agency in the narrative. Mulvey's essay was enormously influential, igniting much debate, and is one of the most cited articles in film scholarship. Mulvey's essay was instrumental in establishing a feminist aesthetic rooted in an "anti-pleasure" and "anti-narrative" method. Mulvey herself made experimental films such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* (co-directed with film scholar Peter Wollen) as a way to demonstrate her theories. These films reject traditional narrative conventions.

Mulvey's groundbreaking essay spurred many debates about female spectatorship, the construction of the gaze, and the Hollywood genre system. Building on Mulvey, Kaja Silverman (1988) turned her attention to the construction of the female voice. Silverman argued that the dominant cinema (and psychoanalysis) had thwarted female desire and subjectivity by locking the female voice into the "interior of the diegesis, while relegating the male subject to a position of apparent discursive exteriority by identifying him with mastering speech, vision, or hearing."²⁴ According to Silverman, even when the voice-over narration is a female voice, it is usually locked into this "interiority" because the female voice is always embodied, and hence subject to the same objectifying processes of the male gaze that her body is. Silverman argued that the female voice is never "disembodied," but is forever contained and delimited as an authorial

enunciator. This embodied/disembodied dichotomy in the dominant cinema has been the central way women have been silenced.

Teresa De Lauretis (1987) advocated for a new feminist vision in the cinema rooted in what she referred to as *de*-aesthetics. De Lauretis expanded on Silvia Bovenschen's seminal article, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?" (1977). De Lauretis looked to the work of avant-garde filmmakers like Chantal Ackerman, arguing that Ackerman's work centred around the tension and drama in the everyday routines of domestic drudgery, and relegated sex acts (prostitution) and violence (murder) to the periphery of the frame. Interestingly, Ackerman has refused to be identified as a feminist.²⁵

Other feminist scholars and filmmakers advocated for the "entertainment film." These feminists argued that the construction of visual and narrative pleasure in the cinema was not antithetical to feminist points of view and stories. Claire Johnston (1973) advocated for feminists to embrace the entertainment film as a political tool. Johnston argued,

At this point in time, a strategy should be developed which embraces both the notion of film as a political tool and film as entertainment. For too long these have been regarded as two opposing poles with little common ground. In order to counter out objectification in the cinema, our collective fantasies must be released: women's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film.²⁶

Johnston argued that feminists could destabilize the (white) male gaze or foreground the production of sexist and racist tropes associated with particular genres. Feminist film scholars such as Mary Ann Doane (1987) and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1990) saw the potential in popular melodramas ("women's films") to express female desire and foreground the instability of patriarchy. Melodrama will be taken up in further detail in later in this chapter.

As advocated by feminist film theorists like Mulvey and De Lauretis, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993), and Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988)

were all working in the anti-realist and/or anti-narrative pleasure mode. They embraced a multi-voiced narrative model and a non-linear structure. In regard to stylistics, *Bedevil* and *Daughters of the Dust* employed a hyper-real aesthetic – theatrical. Mita’s *Mauri* style had more in common with a documentary social realist tradition, and deployed non-professional actors, and a prominent Māori activist, Eva Rickard, in the role of Kara.²⁷ Mita’s previous films had all been documentaries, notably *Patu!* Wheeler’s *Loyalties* (1986) and Norma Bailey’s *The Wake* share some aesthetic similarities with these more avant-garde films, particularly with Mita’s *Mauri*. However, though Wheeler and Bailey are working in the socialist-realist mode, they do adhere to the rules of linear storytelling in the classical narrative tradition. All five of these films are set apart from the more conventional films – *The Piano*, *My Brilliant Career*, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, *The Ballad of Little Jo* and *My American Cousin* – not only in regard to their aesthetics, but also to their engagement with anti-racist and anti-colonial theories. The key question here is what do these films teach us about the construction of a female gaze, and is it possible to have more than one “feminist aesthetic?”

All of these films seem to embrace Mulvey’s theories on some level. Campion’s *The Piano* is as much about the construction of a female gaze as it is about gender oppression in Victorian New Zealand, perhaps even more so. Throughout the film Campion makes references to looking relations by foregrounding the silent and enigmatic gaze of her eccentric heroine, Ada (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Ada gazing at us in Campion's *The Piano*

Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) structures its comedic narrative through the perspectives of twelve-year old Sandy, which renders her cousin Butch into an object of her desires. Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* foregrounds the white male gaze as particularly oppressive and violent. Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) foregrounds the exploitation of Lalu as an "exotic" sexual object, used for both male pleasure and economic gain. Though these films critique the construction of the gaze in the dominant cinema, they are working in the traditions of the dominant cinema. That said, not all of these films have the same level of industry production. Campion's *The Piano* had high profile stars (Holly Hunter, Sam Neill and Harvey Keitel) and had a sizeable budget (US\$7 million)²⁸ compared to Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin*, which had a low budget (CAD\$1.3 million)²⁹ and no stars.

Decolonizing Through Subaltern Women's Voices

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, anti-racist feminist theory and history was instrumental in foregrounding the embedded racism in white women's/feminist scholarship, as well as white (middle-class) women's participation in white racist processes and institutions, both at the discursive and material levels. Although they "collectively" struggled against racism, and represented anti-racist feminist voices separate from, and in opposition to, patriarchy and white

feminism, these scholars by no means formed a homogeneous group. They diverged on how to dismantle monolithic racist master narratives through theories of voice and stories of subaltern female experiences. The key themes and aims across this literature were: foregrounding black women's voices and experiences, methods for inclusivity, and understanding difference amongst black women. The key questions this literature asked were: *What methods of feminist epistemology and historiography can be developed that will not render black women silent and invisible? What constitutes difference? How can black women dismantle the white male gaze?*

In *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990), Patricia Hill-Collins revisioned the mobilization of black feminist knowledge and consciousness through black women's writing and activism, which she argued had produced a "specialized knowledge" operating outside white elite regimes. Part of Hill-Collins's interdisciplinary project involved (re)constructing a genealogy of African-American women's intellectual tradition by recuperating black women's voices from the past, both published (literary and popular) and ordinary speech acts.³⁰ Analyzing the representation of African-Americans in popular culture and film, anti-racist cultural critic bell hooks (1991) called for an "oppositional gaze" as a method to disrupt white looking relations of the dominant cinema. Gwendolyn Foster and Lola Young advocated for a black aesthetic as exemplified in the experimental work coming out of the Sankofa Film Collective in Britain.³¹ Foster did acknowledge, however, that Mira Nair's Hollywood feature films, such as *Mississippi Masala* (1991), still managed to construct a decolonizing female gaze despite working in a popular form.

Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists took issue with Mulvey's lack of acknowledgement that the gaze is white and Eurocentric. Jane Gaines (1988) argued that the psychoanalytic model "works to block out considerations which assume a different configuration,

so that, for instance, the Freudian-Lacanian scenario can eclipse the scenario of race-gender relations in Afro-American history...” Gaines cautioned against the psychoanalytic model because it universalizes and “inadvertently reaffirm[s] white middle-class norms.”³² Bell hooks (1991) similarly argued,

Mainstream feminist film criticism in no way acknowledges black female spectatorship. It does not even consider the possibility that women can construct an oppositional gaze via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism. Feminist film theory rooted in an ahistorical psychoanalytic framework that privileges sexual difference actively suppresses recognition of race, reenacting and mirroring the erasure of black womanhood that occurs in films, silencing any discussion of racial difference – of racialized difference.³³

Anti-colonial and anti-racist feminist scholars argued for the centrality of race in gender oppression. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Gayatri Spivak deployed poststructuralist methods to demonstrate the impossibility of speaking of, or for, the “subaltern woman,” both as an imagined and a historical subject. Spivak located the material oppression of the subaltern woman in Western discourse, and identified the Western intellectual as a key culprit. She used the example of the abolishing of the practice of Indian widow burning by colonial British elites, who constructed themselves as “heroic” in a narrative of white men saving “brown women” from brown men’s cultures and customs. Spivak argued that this was a linguistic device to disavow the “other” through gender. Spivak located her analysis in the exchange of meaning between speaker and listener, insisting that it is not only the speaking subject that matters, but it is also *hearing* that completes the speech act. Spivak did not see access for the subaltern woman to Western narrative structures as the solution to her voice oppression, because then she would be forced into a position of identification with her oppressor.³⁴ In “Speaking Nearby” (1982), Trinh T. Minh-ha advocated for a method that “speaks nearby,” rather than *for*, subaltern women. A documentary

filmmaker, Trinh rejected the idea of objectivity, exemplified in her groundbreaking film about women in Senegal, *Reassemblage* (1982). Trinh argued,

A speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking, in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition – these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language. Every element constructed in a film refers to the world around it, while having at the same time a life of its own.³⁵

Working across a diverse range of geographic spaces and time periods, these feminists examined the impact of nationalism, imperialism, modernity, and globalization on subaltern people.

Engaging with theories of gender oppression, class analysis, and anti-racist theory, anti-colonial feminists focused on the deconstruction and de-centring of (male) Western imperial narratives and discourses as a strategy to dismantle socio-economic processes that exploit and oppress subaltern “others.”

Another central concern for anti-colonial scholars had been the appropriation, “othering,” silencing, and essentializing of the “subaltern woman’s voice” by white middle-class feminist narratives. In “Under Western Eyes” (1991), Chandra Mohanty cautioned feminist scholars against essentializing and universalizing models with regard to the voice of the “third world woman” or “women in Africa,” and advocated that they take into account the individual lived experiences of specific women. These feminists argued that feminist solidarity is impossible without acknowledging the importance of race in the gendered, classed, and national formations of globalization.³⁶ In “A Special Third World Woman Issue” (1989) Trinh T. Minh-ha expressed concern over the lack of cooperation amongst feminists in academia, accusing white feminists of treating academic “women of colour” as the “maids upstairs,” a term she took from Spivak. Trinh strongly urged feminist scholars to deploy decolonizing methods for theorizing voice in narratives

about and within women's movements. She argued against the "double-game," in which asserting the right for access to equal opportunity and maintaining privileges helps "the master" perpetuate his cycle of oppression.³⁷

Julie Dash (*Daughters of the Dust*), Tracey Moffatt (*Bedevil*), Merata Mita (*Mauri*), Anne Wheeler (*Loyalties*), and Norma Bailey (*The Wake*) engage with and demonstrate anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist theories of voice and narrative. However, they do so in differing ways, working within a variety of production and national contexts, and deploying different film aesthetic traditions. Dash, Mita, and Moffatt prefer a multi-voiced "polyrhythmic" narration, exemplifying Barkley-Brown's method of inclusivity and heterogeneity. Wheeler and Bailey use a classical narrative structure, but are working within the social-realist tradition, evocative of the documentary. Despite these differences all these filmmakers foreground and privilege black or indigenous women's points of view as the normal place of identification in the narrative. In this sense, these five films adopt hook's idea of the oppositional gaze, Spivak's theory of the subaltern voice, and Trinh T. Minh-ha's idea of "speaking-nearby." Produced between 1986 and 1988, the films of Mita, Wheeler, and Bailey pre-date much of this literature, exemplifying Hill-Collins's idea that "specialized knowledge" can be produced through cultural production. In regard to speaking for subaltern women, these five filmmakers depict the lived experiences of subaltern women oppressed under patriarchy and colonization.

Genre: An Overview

*Genre notions – except the special case of arbitrary definition – are not critic's classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be.*³⁸

- Andrew Tudor

All of these frontier women's films feature female and/or subaltern characters that "carve out a place" for themselves (and their families) on a violent and threatening frontier space, much

like the lone hero of a Western. The home, domestic conflict, and women's issues such as rape, motherhood, female sexuality, and reproductive exploitation, are central to the films' plots, and hence all of these filmmakers deploy conventions of the melodrama, the genre known as the "woman's film." Many of these films feature a Gothic element in which villainous or monstrous figures haunt and prey upon girls and women. These monstrous figures take various forms, either as rapists, pedophiles, domestic abusers, sadists, and even ghosts. In this sense, many of the films deploy conventions of the horror film. However, these filmmakers engaged with genre on varying levels. This section of the chapter will summarize the key debates around the place of women in the Western, melodrama, and horror.

Film scholars have historically identified genre films as a reflection of a society's cultural values and customs, embedded in familiar iconography and tropes. Repetition is key to the familiarity, which is the core reason genre films are so accessible and hence popular. Film scholar Barry Keith Grant wrote, "Stated simply, genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations."³⁹ These stories of familiar characters are usually associated with themes and situations that are constructed along a binary system such as good and evil, or virginal and fallen. Patrick Phillips wrote, "It is possible to identify the binary structure of a Hollywood genre and, in the process, not just list the typical thematic issues with which it deals but locate the 'ideological work' of that genre, the particular myths it constructs and perpetuates."⁴⁰ Feminist film scholars were instrumental in identifying and problematizing how these myths have been constructed through binary divisions of gender. It is the "ideological work" made "familiar," which has proven to be most troubling for feminist film scholars. And yet, as a number of genre film

scholars have argued, genre itself has proven to be much more flexible and changeable than it seems.

The Western: The Dominant Frontier Narrative

Understanding the conventions and pervasiveness of the Hollywood Western is key to this study, primarily because it has remained *the* dominant narrative about white settlement and expansionism in a frontier space. From the silent era to the 1950s the Western was one of Hollywood's most popular genres and largest cultural exports. According to Les Brown "the Western came to dominate prime time" for most of the 1950s in American television.⁴¹ At the peak of the Western's global popularity, America was also becoming the most powerful military and economic force in the world. The wide-scale exporting of America's frontier narrative/myth not only has its roots in global capitalism, but also in American cultural imperialism.

The history of the Hollywood Western goes far back, however, preceding America's super-power status and even the advent of film and television. Richard Slotkin dates the origins of "the myth of the frontier" back to the 1700s. By 1896, the birth date of cinema, the Western was already a visually potent and iconic narrative about the America frontier, known to the masses through various accessible forms: the cheaply produced dime store novels of the 1860s, Frederick Remington's romantic paintings, and William F. Cody's "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" circus-like shows. According to historian R.L. Wilson, William Cody "Buffalo Bill" was, by the turn of the 20th century, one of the most recognizable celebrities worldwide, his Wild West shows having toured the U.S., Europe and Britain for decades.⁴²

Though Westerns do depict real historical events and people, they are more steeped in myth than in historical fact. Douglas Pye summarized the Western as highly formulaic set in a "symbolic landscape."⁴³ "The Western is founded, then, on a tremendously rich confluence of

romantic narrative and archetypal imagery modified and localized by recent American experience.”⁴⁴ J. Hoberman (1991) likened the Western to baseball.

Like baseball, the Western is a sacred part of America’s post-Civil War national mythology, a shared language, a unifying set of symbols and metaphors, and a source of (mainly male) identity. But baseball is all form; the Western is heavy, heavy on content. That the national pastime was successfully integrated after World War II while the demographics of the Western remained overwhelmingly white up until the eve of the genre’s demise—despite the fact that at least a quarter of the working cowboys in the late nineteenth century were of African descent—should alert us to the possibility that the Western was as concerned with concealing as enacting historical truth.⁴⁵

Generally, the Western is constructed around a set of binary divisions that represent universal themes such as community and individualism, law and lawlessness, civilized and uncivilized, as well as East and West. Ian Cameron argued that though the Western may appear in various guises, it is largely characterized by its setting, which is not the East.⁴⁶ Frontier (white) settlers are often the trope for Community, and the cowboy or gunman is the common trope for “rugged individualism” because he is nomadic and works alone (in a frontier space). Indigenous peoples most often represent savagery, the uncivilized, and more recently, the “vanishing” frontier itself. Richard Slotkin identifies the defining characteristic of the Western as being the “subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans” through violence; Slotkin argued that the Western is a “mythology of violence.”⁴⁷

The conflicts and tensions in the narrative are structured around a hero or anti-hero, forced to navigate and choose between these binary divisions. The dramatic climax and resolution is often constructed around the male hero’s choice of one “way of life” over the other, either moving on alone or joining the white settler community he has just saved from the “Indians,” outlaws, or corrupt industrial capitalists from the East. This is true of the early “simplistic” Western shorts of the silent era⁴⁸ and also of the more sophisticated “serious” Westerns of John

Ford, William Wellman, Sam Peckinpah, and more recently, Clint Eastwood. David Lusted refers to the Western as “male melodrama” because it is a genre “that deals with problems of homosocial identity.”⁴⁹ The Western is, if anything, a primarily male genre. However, because it is a genre that has largely been about constructing the myth of white male supremacy in frontier spaces, women have played a significant role, albeit usually marginally in the plot. As Hollywood director Anthony Mann once famously and tellingly said, “without women a Western wouldn’t work.”⁵⁰

Women and the Western

Given the pervasiveness and the power of women’s discourse in the nineteenth century, I think it is no accident that men gravitated in imagination toward a womanless milieu, a set of rituals featuring physical combat and physical endurance, and a social setting that branded most features of civilized existence as feminine and corrupt, banishing them in favor of the three main targets of women’s reform: whiskey, gambling and prostitution. Given the enormous publicity and fervor of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union crusade, can it be an accident that the characteristic indoor setting for Westerns is the saloon?⁵¹

- Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything*

The Western is not strongly associated with women. As discussed above, the Western has been largely thought a “male” genre, though “the Woman” is important. A key point in Tompkins’s argument is that the Western depicts a “womanless milieu” because women and femininity represent everything that came to be identified with “civilization.” Generally, women work in Westerns as signs across two binaries: the civilization/ wilderness, Madonna/whore, and white/indigenous dichotomies. The good pioneer woman (wife and mother or virginal daughter) is the “angel in the house” figure, rooted in the Cult of True Womanhood, representing civilization, domesticity, Christianity, education, and middle-class culture. As Susan Hayward argued, this angelic figure “had to be kept virginal at all costs.”⁵² In contrast, the “prostitute/saloon girl” inhabits masculine spaces, and is deemed “ruined” by respectable society.

Due to her association with outlaws and masculine saloon culture, she is often more vulnerable to male violence.⁵³ More often than not she is depicted as Mexican or “foreign,” meaning not Anglo-Saxon, though she is rarely indigenous or African-American. These female figures rarely if ever have dramatic agency. They serve the Western as devices, similarly to the landscape. Like the landscape, female bodies are to be protected, guarded, tamed, or violated, all in the name of civilization. Tompkins argued that women serve only one purpose in a Western, to “legitimize the violence men practice in order to protect them.”⁵⁴ Female desire in the Western is either non-existent, represented in the form of the “de-sexed” white settler farmwife/daughter, or epitomizes “sex itself,” in the form of the “hot-blooded” foreign woman, an object for (white) male desire.

Feminist film scholarship on the Western has been largely dismissive or focalized around the few Westerns that have “strong heroines.” Pam Cook (1988) argued that though the Western has had an “impoverished range of female stereotypes on offer (mother, schoolteacher, prostitute, saloon girl, Indian squaw, bandit),” it has also produced its share of strong heroines.⁵⁵ Analyzing various Westerns between the 1940s and 60s, Cook identified the figure of the cross-dressing heroine, who transgressed social conventions by rejecting traditional female roles of wife and mother. Though Cook argued that the real women of the West were rarely featured as heroines in Westerns, such as suffragettes, farmers, and professional women, “the search for realism is perhaps rather self-defeating in a genre that is more concerned with myth than historical accuracy.”⁵⁶ Through her analysis Cook highlighted the “dual contradictory role” of women in the Western, one in which she is both peripheral and central to the plots. Cook argued that female heroines like Vienna in *Johnny Guitar* (1954) could stand as feminist Western icons.

Feminine in her white dress, masculine in black shooting gear, she moves between tomboy and mother figure with ease, demonstrating and maintaining a level of control allowed to very few women. But the film’s feminism goes deeper than this, extending to a criticism of the Western’s male values.

Destructive masculine drives have gone out of control, creating a world dominated by death, betrayal, and revenge.⁵⁷

Cook's 1988 analysis is significant here because it highlights a tradition in the Western in which women are front and centre, albeit in a delimited way.

In regard to the indigenous woman and the Western, there are generally two types: the "Indian Princess" (Pocahontas) and the "squaw." The indigenous woman does not belong to the "civilized" world, and she is never "saved," although she may be martyred. She rarely has a speaking role, and is often relegated to the background in scenes in which "Indian" tribes make an appearance. Like her white "sister" the indigenous woman never has dramatic agency. Even the in Pocahontas story, the indigenous woman, in this case the "Indian Princess," is relegated to helpmate role. Rayna Green (1975) argued, "her nobility as a Princess and her savagery as a Squaw are defined in terms of her relationships with male figures. If she wishes to be called a Princess, she must save or give aid to white men."⁵⁸ Green traced the story of Pocahontas and John Smith back to old European folklore citing the 14th century Scottish ballad, "Lord Bateman and the Turkish King's Daughter" as a foundational text.⁵⁹ Maryann Oshana (1981) argued that the Western's representation of indigenous women was instrumental in depicting indigenous culture and society as inferior to the "white man's way."⁶⁰ In *Lay of the Land* (1975) Annette Kolodny critiqued the deployment of the indigenous woman figure by (white) male writers as a kind of "emblem for a land."⁶¹ M. Elise Marubbio has identified the recurring figure of the "celluloid maiden," a tragic figure and hybrid of the Indian Princess figure and the sexualized maiden, which draws on the mother-queen figure. Marubbio argued that "the reliance of mainstream culture on these myths and various depictions of the Celluloid Maiden during different eras maintains the racialized Other as an exotic or erotic danger to a homogenous national identity."⁶²

Where the indigenous woman exists on the margins of the Western, African-American women have been rendered completely invisible from the genre. African-American men were also largely absent from the Western, but started to make an appearance in the 70s and 80s, particularly in the “sympathetic Westerns” from the 70s through to the 90s. Due to this absence, there has been very little critical attention paid to the representation of African-Americans in Hollywood Western films.

The Adaptability of the Western

Despite its seeming ideological rigidity rooted in sexist and racist tropes, the Western has proven to be a fairly adaptable genre, repeatedly re-inventing itself. Examples of this are the “Pro-Indian” Westerns and the rise of the international Western. “Pro-Indian” or “sympathetic” Westerns first appeared in the 1950s and continued through into the 1990s. These films depicted “Indians” as more complex and foregrounded their unfair and oppressive treatment by whites. John Ford’s *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), Sydney Pollack’s *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972) and Arthur Penn’s *Little Big Man* (1970) aimed to critique Manifest Destiny and the “white man’s ways.” The indigenous woman, however, was still deployed as a plot device or sexual object for male viewing pleasure. Marubbio asserted that the role of the “celluloid maiden” in the antiestablishment and countercultural Westerns alike, were still rooted in the “Indian Princess” and “squaw” constructs. Maryanna Oshana also argued that the sympathetic pro-Indian Westerns were still rife with sexist tropes.⁶³

The Western’s adaptability as a genre may be due in part to its open-endedness as a narrative form. Susan Hayward argued that the Western has an anti-Oedipal structure because the hero rarely ends up with the girl. “The hero’s ‘job’ is to make the west safe for the virgins to come out and reproduce, but not with him, that is the job for the rest of the community.”⁶⁴

Douglas Pye contradicted this claim, asserting that Westerns are structured and resolved in the typical romance plot.⁶⁵ This malleability of the Western is perhaps why it has been so easily adapted by different cultures and produced within non-American contexts, particularly after the 1950s, the heyday of Westerns in America.

The emergence of the international Western took the genre outside of its American context, proving its power as a myth-making system rather than an American historical narrative.⁶⁶ There were the German Karl May Westerns produced between 1962 and 1986.⁶⁷ “Osterns” also known as “Red Westerns” hailed from Eastern Europe, but were significantly different because they were told from the point of view of an indigenous man, rather than a white man.⁶⁸ Outside of Europe there were the “Curry Westerns” from India, notably *Sholay*.⁶⁹ Sergio Leone’s Italian-made “Spaghetti Westerns” had a profound influence on the genre, and were known for expressing subversive political ideas and the destabilizing of its masculinist tendencies. Marcia Landy argued that Leone’s films,

[I]nterrogate masculinity and its discontents, its complicity with violence and power...[they] orchestrate the problematics of language, patriarchy, subalternity, masculinity, the family, social power, and the clash between rural and urban life and between tradition and modernity.⁷⁰

The Spaghetti first appeared in 1964 with *Fistful of Dollars*, and was a confluence of Hollywood (Clint Eastwood), Spain (production location), and Italy (Sergio Leone).⁷¹ It is the most influential and recognizable European Western.

Melodrama: The “Women’s Film”

Feminists have been drawn to melodrama for a number of reasons. The melodrama has been strongly associated with female-driven narratives and women’s issues, its capacity for expressing a female voice and desire, and female spectatorship. All the major feminist film scholars of the 1970s and 80s have written on the subject, most notably Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann

Doane, E. Ann Kaplan, Annette Kuhn, Tania Modleski, Christine Gledhill, Pam Cook, Claire Johnston, and Linda Williams.⁷² Using psychoanalytic theory many of these groundbreaking analyses of melodramatic texts established feminist film theory as a major branch of film scholarship.

There are two threads that run throughout feminist film scholarship on melodrama. One strain argued that melodrama has the potential for the construction of female desire and subjectivity, or at least female transgression. Linda Williams (1984) argued for the potential of transgression in the maternal melodrama genre. In her analysis of *Stella Dallas*, (1937) Williams argued,

For all its masochism, for all its frequent devaluation of the individual person of the mother (as opposed to the abstract ideal of motherhood), the maternal melodrama presents a recognizable picture of women's ambivalent position under patriarchy that has been an important source of realistic reflections of women's lives.⁷³

Claire Johnston's was the first to highlight Arzner's Hollywood melodrama films of the 1930s and 40s as progressive. Arzner's films featured prominent female stars playing strong female protagonists.⁷⁴ Johnston argued,

In general, the woman in Arzner's films determines her own identity through transgression and desire in search for an independent existence beyond and outside the discourses of the male. Unlike most other Hollywood directors who pose "positive" and "independent" female protagonists (Walsh, Fuller, Cukor and Hawkes, for example), in Arzner's work the discourse of the woman, or rather her attempt to locate it and make it heard, is what gives the system of the text its structural coherence, while at the same time rendering the dominant discourse of the male fragmented and incoherent.⁷⁵

Well-known Hollywood actress, Ida Lupino, was also an important feminist re-discovery.

Having set up her own independent film company, Lupino directed low-budget films of the 1940s and 50s that dealt with controversial women's themes such as rape, adoption, and single-motherhood. As Johnston asserted,

Lupino chose to work largely within the melodrama, a genre which, more than any other, has presented a less reified view of women, and as Sirk's work indicates, is adaptable for expressing rather than embodying the idea of the oppression of women.⁷⁶

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1990) resurrected the 1930s maternal melodramas of Marie Epstein.⁷⁷

Using psychoanalytic theories Flitterman-Lewis analyzed the strategies deployed by French women filmmakers like Epstein who worked in a masculinist French Nationalist film industry.⁷⁸

The other strain in feminist film scholarship argued that melodrama rendered the woman passive, both as a subject and a spectator. Susan Hayward concluded that, "women's films point to Hollywood's capacity to produce a female subjectivity and then destroy it."⁷⁹ Hayward has identified an "over-identification" of the household space in the melodrama's *mise-en-scene*.⁸⁰

Other scholars have also pointed to melodrama's romanticization of bourgeois consumer culture.

Annette Kuhn (1984) acknowledged that melodrama and the television soap opera were key genres to feminists because they were enormously popular with female audiences. "But how is the oppositional potential of this to be assessed? Under what circumstances can popular narrative art itself be regarded as transgressive?"⁸¹ In *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987) Mary Ann Doane argued that though the "woman's film" centers narrative identification and its structures of looking on a female protagonist, female subjectivity is repeatedly thwarted through the "masculine logic" of the narrative. Doane argued that though the female protagonists in these films seemingly have agency, they suffer in one form or another, either from broken hearts, mental illness, or disease. Differing from Laura Mulvey, Doane identified the suppression of female subjectivity through an "over-identification" of the female spectator with the images on the screen. Doane concluded that the processes of subjectivity in the "woman's film" produces incoherence and instability, a paradoxical process which involves the simultaneous construction and disavowal of a powerful female gaze.⁸²

Melodrama, “genre sérieux”

*Seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealousy incurable illness, obsession, and compulsion – these are part of the familial terrain of melodrama. The victims are most often females threatened in their sexuality, their property, and their very identity.*⁸³

- Marcia Landy

Melodrama’s long association with consumerism and “lowbrow” mass entertainment such as Hollywood “weepies,” Victorian romance novels, and television soap operas, has meant that it has rarely been considered a serious art form. Melodramas, like their troubled heroines, have been historically disavowed and dismissed by many male critics as a lowbrow form, signifying in many ways “feminine bourgeois culture.” However, there are scholars who have seen the merits of melodrama as a form that, although on the surface appears simple and middle-class, has the capacity for political discourse.

Peter Brooks’ seminal text *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1974) strongly advocated for melodrama as an important genre and the quintessential modern form. Pulling from psychoanalytic, post-structuralism, anthropological linguistics, and semiotics, Brooks saw theatrical melodrama as a form that is highly expressive of social fears and desires, as well as highly adaptable to different mediums like the novel or the cinema. Although dismissed by literary critics and intellectuals as “vulgar and degraded” lowbrow entertainment, Brooks argued that the melodrama is “le genre sérieux,” deploying Diderot’s term.

That the term cover, and in common usage, most often refers to a cheap and banal melodrama – to soap opera – need not decrease its usefulness: there is a range from high to low examples in any literary field, and the most successful melodrama belongs to a coherent mode that rewards attention, in its literal as well as in the “extrapolated” forms. What I will say about melodrama in general will, I think, be relevant to the low examples as well as the high, with the difference that, as in all art, the low is attempting less, risking less, is more conventional and less self-conscious. At its most ambitious, the melodramatic mode of conception and representation may appear to be the very process of reaching a fundamental drama of the moral life and finding the terms to express it.⁸⁴

Brooks argued that melodrama's potential for political expression is due primarily to its flexibility and adaptability. Brooks saw this adaptability is rooted in the genre's seemingly simple means of expression. Brooks argued that melodrama's "text of muteness" was its strength. Melodrama's ability to construct meaning through signs, allowed it to function on a mythical level. Brooks deployed Freud's theories of the "moral occult," the domain of the operative spiritual values, which are both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality.⁸⁵ "The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic. Nothing is left unsaid. Characters utter the unspeakable."⁸⁶ These signs can be adapted to different forms as a way for those who have little access to rhetoric to speak. These highly expressive gestures and signs are perhaps why melodrama has been so often dismissed as "low-brow" and as a genre of excess. Indeed excess is often how melodrama is identified and defined, but Brooks saw excess as a method to articulate unspeakable political and psychic anxieties. A "drama of the ordinary" for the illiterate masses, melodrama depended on grand gesture, histrionic acting, and emotional excess, rather than on the spoken word. According to Brooks this was also a way for stories to "speak" covertly.

Thomas Elsaesser's "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations of the Family Melodrama" (1972) argued a similar case for the melodrama as "genre sérieux." Elsaesser traced "the melodramatic imagination across different artistic forms and epochs" and the "structural and stylistic constants in one medium during one particular period (the Hollywood family melodrama between roughly 1940 and 1963)."⁸⁷ Elsaesser asserted that Hollywood melodrama has a "myth-making function, insofar as their significance lies in the structure and articulation of the action, not any psychologically motivated correspondence with individualized experience."⁸⁸ According to Elsaesser the melodrama can trace its genealogy back to "the late medieval morality play, the popular *gestes* and other forms of oral narrative and drama like fairy tales and folk songs."⁸⁹

Elsaesser's analysis of Douglas Sirk's use of visuals in *Written on the Wind* (1956) speaks to Brooks' point about grand gesture over the spoken word and to Elsaesser's point about melodrama's myth-making abilities. According to Elsaesser Sirk was particularly critical of the hollowness of the American Dream, and all that went with it, and expressed these political ideas in his use of mise-en-scene and montage.

...a yellow sports car drawing up the graveled driveway to stop in front of a pair of shining white Doric columns outside the Hadley mansion is not only a powerful piece of American iconography, especially when taken in a plunging high-angle shot, but the contrary association of imperial splendor and vulgar materials (polished chrome-plate and stucco plaster) create a tension of correspondences and dissimilarities in the same image, which perfectly crystalizes as the decedent affluence and melancholy energy that give the film its uncanny fascination.⁹⁰

Anti-racist feminist scholars advocated for melodrama as a popular form for expressing issues and experiences around gender and race relations. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), anti-racist scholar bell hooks identified the potential for an "oppositional gaze" in melodramatic forms, citing Oscar Micheaux's popular black melodramas of the 1920s and 30s.⁹¹ Pulling from Peter Brooks and Laura Mulvey's work on melodrama, hooks argued that Micheaux addressed black spectators in impassioned narratives that could express the "unspeakable" which was black desire in a white man's world. Bell argued that Micheaux depicted a diverse range of black experiences and images, which countered racist stereotypes from Hollywood. "Calling into question the Western metaphysical dualism which associates whiteness with purity and blackness with taint, the subtext of Micheaux' seemingly simple melodrama interrogates internalized racism and the color caste system."⁹²

Anti-racist feminist scholar Jane Shattuc also argued a case for "the affective power of the melodramatic text," focusing on Steven Spielberg's 1985 adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.⁹³ Spielberg's adaptation was a commercial hit at the box office, although divided

critics. There was much negative criticism from African-Americans, particularly in regard to the director's identity as a privileged white man. Walker insisted that "at least half the population of the individuals working on the film version would represent women, blacks and third world peoples."⁹⁴ This sort of negotiation is a rarity. Shattuc took issue with "feminist criticism's refusal to own up to the political power of affect in melodrama (even in its conservative 'happy ending' form) and, in particular, the racial implications of such a denial for the reception of *The Color Purple*." Shattuc traced the uses of sentimental plots in black fiction.⁹⁵

Across film scholarship in the 1970s and 80s, melodrama emerged as a genre that was not only historically aligned with female spectatorship but had the capacity to express political ideas, especially about gender, class, and race relations in the context of the family. Though melodrama's association with excess and "tears" has relegated it to the low-brow and the "feminine," these are the very traits that have made melodrama enduring, popular, and powerful as a myth-making form, especially amongst women spectators and female directors.

Horror

*But the feminine is not a monstrous sign per se; rather it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse that reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific. When Norman Bates remarked to Marion Crane in Psycho that "Mother is not herself today," he was right. Mother wasn't herself. She was someone else – her son Norman.*⁹⁶

- Barbara Creed, 1986

Like the melodrama, the horror film is rooted in Gothic lore and the fairy tale. However, unlike the melodrama horror has been primarily a male genre, popular with male spectators. Up until the 1980s, most writing on the horror film was by male scholars. In this sense, it has much in common with the Western. And yet, the iconography that is most associated with the horror film stands in stark contrast to the Western. Characters are driven by paranoia, fear, anxiety, and perversion. Spaces are not wide-open and free, but dark and prison-like, inhabited by monsters

and ghosts who prey upon unsuspecting innocent victims, usually young women. Why then would this genre be relevant to a study on women's films about the frontier? A number of these frontier films deploy conventions of horror as a way to address gender relations in the patriarchal family and race relations in colonized communities.

Film scholar Barry Keith Grant (1996) argued that "horror is a genre preoccupied with sexual difference and gender, even when difference is not foreground explicitly."⁹⁷ According to Grant, the key issues that have dominated film scholarship on horror have been about perverse and repressed sexuality in the nuclear family.⁹⁸ Grant argued that the "beast in the boudoir" figure stands as the "generic image" for the horror genre as a whole, "for the sexual tensions that resonate in this scenario vividly evoke the genre's dominant themes." To echo Grant's point that gender and sexual difference are a preoccupation in the horror film, a number of feminist film scholars have identified the potential of horror to express feminist ideas, if only in isolated moments. These scholars identified the potential for horror to produce the power of vision in female figures, collapsing the female object/male subject binary.

Linda Williams (1983) argued that the female look in horror films (*Phantom of the Opera*, *Peeping Tom*, *Psycho*) is privileged, because the object of the gaze shifts from herself to the monster, also an "othered" figure of difference. The woman looks, but this looking only has power if the woman's sexual desire is disavowed.⁹⁹ Barbara Creed (1986) drew on Julia Kristeva's essay, "Power of Horror," to explore how the horror film is a psychoanalytic scripting of the abject monster-mother. According to Kristeva this maternal abjection has no respect for border, positions, and rules disturbing identity, system, and order. Creed argued that this maternal abjection is reflected in the horror genre, particularly the Hollywood cinema.¹⁰⁰ Carol Clover (1987) identified the opportunity for the disruption of gender identity in horror, analyzing

the role of female heroines in the slasher-horror flick. Clover disputed Mulvey's binary model, in which the female spectator is forced to assume a transvestite position of identification. Through the paradoxical "masculine" figure of the "final girl" (the last girl standing), Clover identified the fluidity of point of view and gender identification in horror. However, Clover pointed out that these "final girls" such as Stevie in *The Fog* or Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are not feminist figures because they must suppress sexual desire in order to survive.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In order to tell frontier stories through a female or feminist lens these women filmmakers deconstructed or revisioned narrative codes and conventions of the Western, melodrama and horror. However, they did so in differing ways. Though both Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* deployed tropes of the Western and melodrama, they depict startlingly different feminist frontiers. This has largely to do with their vastly different narrative constructions. As previously discussed in this chapter, all these films generally work across two narrative models: the "anti-pleasure/anti-narrative" model rooted in avant-garde cinema, and the classical narrative model rooted in the popular cinema. Some of these films work within both of these models at once. Despite the narrative model these filmmakers chose to work in, they all seemed to take up Johnston's call for a feminist cinema that embraced "entertainment" and genre as a way to challenge "the standard value system." Subsequent chapters will examine how these filmmakers deployed narrative, voice, and genre to (re)construct feminist frontiers, and what they tell us about the role of domesticity and motherhood, labour and economy, and sexuality in feminist resistance and agency in frontier spaces and identities.

Chapter 2 – Filming Homes on the Range: Revisioning Melodrama, the Western and Horror

*... the very act of making a film like *Ballad* is so subversive that it becomes a critique. I wanted to make a Western and I knew I wanted to make a Western that had a woman as the main character. But the story does change when a woman is put at the center. And I would be a liar if I said there was not a tremendous amount of me in it. As a filmmaker, I'm working on male terrain and my subject matter is also "male terrain."*

- Maggie Greenwald¹

*The Griot² will come to a birth, wedding or funeral and over a period of days will recount the family's history, with the stories going off at a tangent, weaving in and out. I decided that *Daughters of the Dust* should be told in that way.*

- Julie Dash³

Revisioning and Deconstructing Frontier Stories

As discussed in Chapter One, these ten women filmmakers are primarily working across two feminist models of narrative and voice, deconstruction and revisionism. Deconstruction is directly focused on challenging traditional language structures, and aims to render "master scripts" irrelevant. Revisionism is a mode that does not dismantle traditional classical narrative structures, but revises those structures through an alternate point of view. It does not aim to find a new language.

African-American filmmaker Julie Dash, Māori filmmaker Merata Mita, and Australian Aborigine filmmaker Tracey Moffatt all deploy deconstructive and decolonizing methods of narrative and voice construction in order to tell stories about subaltern people in various frontier spaces at various points in history. Central to Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Mita's *Mauri* (1988), and Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993) is the deconstruction of frontier myths rooted in European historiographical traditions and a white patriarchal and colonial voice. These three films deploy many of the strategies advocated by anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist scholarship, constructing decolonizing feminist voices that speak to a subaltern female spectator. Though

these films are not working in the popular cinema, the codes of the Western, melodrama, and the horror film play a significant role in the construction of a new feminist revision of frontier spaces through an anti-racist/anticolonial lens.

Anglo-American filmmakers Nancy Kelly and Maggie Greenwald, white-Australian filmmakers Jane Campion and Gillian Armstrong, and English-Canadian filmmaker Sandra Wilson are working within the feminist revisionist model. Campion's *The Piano*, Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, Wilson's *My American Cousin*, and Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* construct their frontier narratives through the point of view of a white heroine. Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is told from the point of view of a Chinese immigrant. The central theme that recurs across these revisionist films is the dismantling of the "angel in the house," a figure Virginia Woolf (1931) urged all women writers to kill.

White English-Canadian filmmakers Norma Bailey and Anne Wheeler tell contemporary stories about the impact of colonization through the points of view of Métis women in Western Canada. In this sense Wheeler's *Loyalties* and Bailey's *The Wake* are similar to the revisionist films. Both Wheeler and Bailey destabilize the (white) "angel in the house" figure. However, in regard to identity politics, the core theme that runs across these two narratives is the role of white complicity in the colonial oppression of indigenous peoples. The main point of identification is structured through an indigenous female point of view. Like the deconstructing decolonizing films of Mita, Dash, and Moffatt, Wheeler's *Loyalties* and Bailey's *The Wake* foreground Métis female points of view and desire in the films' looking relations and voice construction, and destabilize a colonizing white male gaze. These films specifically foreground how white male violence against indigenous women is a present-day form of colonial oppression.

The Decolonizing Frontier Films

Since indigenous people are not supposed to be there – for the lands are “empty” – they are symbolically displaced onto what I call anachronistic space, a trope that gathered full administrative authority as a technology of surveillance in the late Victorian era. According to this trope, colonized people – like women and working class in the metropolis – do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency.

- Anne McClintock⁴

One key way Dash, Moffatt, and Mita constructed a feminist frontier through a decolonizing lens was to deconstruct the codes of the Western, the domestic melodrama, and the horror/thriller film. The central ways they deconstruct the codes of genre are by deploying a multi-voiced narration in a non-linear plot and infusing their mise-en-scene with subaltern iconography. Oral storytelling is featured throughout these films, where characters narrate stories from the past using subaltern methods rooted in mythic structures and rituals. These stories are not solely told through spoken word, but are also expressed non-verbally through gesture, music, and dance, as well as icons. These films speak in a kind of code intended for a subaltern viewer/listener. This approach echoes the work of anti-racist feminist scholar Elsa Barkley-Brown (1992) who advocated for a method of historiography that embraced the highly symbolic qualities and narrative patterns of African-American patchwork quilts and jazz, as well as African dialects (*gumbo ya ya*). Through this method, these filmmakers are able to foreground subaltern female desires and dismantle racist frontier tropes of subaltern and colonized women. A key theme throughout these films is saving the subaltern family/community through the voices and stories of subaltern people.

Subaltern Oral Storytelling as Resistance and Empowerment

In the deconstructive anti-racist/anti-colonial narratives the primary role of the female subaltern storyteller is to re-construct and preserve subaltern history, language, and cultural

identity with the aim of healing and soothing the suffering of colonial oppression and exploitation. The female oral storyteller speaks to a subaltern spectator/listener both within the films' plots and within the audience. A key question filmmakers Mita, Dash, and Moffatt ask through their films is: *How do (female) subaltern storytellers and storytelling preserve identity and culture, as well as re-build fractured families and communities?*

Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust

I want to touch something inside each black person that sees it, some part of them that's never been touched before. So I said, let me take all of this information that I have gathered and try to show this family leaving a great-grandmother in a very different way. And that was when I realized that I could not structure it as a normal, Western drama. It had to go beyond that. And that's when I came up with the idea of structuring the story in much the same way that an African griot would recount a family's history.⁵

- Julie Dash

As Dash states at the beginning of this chapter and in the above quote, she structures her African-American story of the Peasant family in the style of a West African griot. This was Dash's way to "touch an audience" by taking them back, taking them "inside [their] collective memories."⁶ Set at the turn of the 20th century on the Sea Islands off the coast of North Carolina, Dash focalizes *Daughters of the Dust* around a "last supper," in which most of the members of the African-American Gullah family, the Peasants, prepare to emigrate north to the mainland. This fracturing of the Peasant family is at the root of the film's narrative crisis. The central way that characters, primarily Nana Peasant, attempt to keep the family together is through the passing down and sharing of stories from the past, both triumphant and painful. These stories serve as a foundation for an African-American Gullah collective memory and identity.

Throughout *Daughters of the Dust* there are multiple oral storytellers that piece together the narrative. These are Nana Peasant, the great-great grandmother, Nana's great granddaughter, the unborn child, Viola, a Christian missionary, and Yellow Mary, the family outcast and

prostitute. These figures are introduced in the opening narration by an unidentified African-American's woman's voice:

I am the first and the last. I am the honoured one and the scorned. I am the whore and the holy one. I am the wife and the virgin. I am the barren one, and many are my daughters.

The first and the last ones are the unborn child and Nana Peazant, who both conspire to save Eli and Eula's marriage, the unborn child's parents. Only Nana can see the unborn child whom she has called forth from the land of the "old souls." The unborn child is a seemingly happy-go-lucky female child who dances and skips about as she tries to solve her "ma and daddy's problem." The problem is one that had plagued many African-American families, the rape of black women. She is the spirit of the child her mother is carrying, whom her father believes is the product of rape by a white plantation owner. It is the unborn child who introduces us to main narrative conflict – the "coming apart" of the Peazants.

My story begins on the eve of my family's migration north. My story begins before I was born. My great-great grandmother, Nana Peazant, saw her family coming apart. Her flowers to bloom in a distant land. And then, there was my ma and daddy's problem. Nana prayed and the old souls guided me into the New World.

The unborn child represents and speaks the spirit of resistance that characterizes the Peazants as a family, especially in the face of personal tragedy brought on by colonial exploitation and violence. At the end of Dash's film the unborn child offers us resolution, though it is bittersweet.

And so, on the 19th day of August, 1902, they left these islands and set out for the North, having said farewell, perhaps never to see us again. My Momma and Daddy stayed behind with Yellow Mary. Some say Eli got himself all involved with the anti-lynching issue. Some say Eula saw too much of herself in Nana Peazant, and wanted her children born on this island. They say Mama was always peculiar and Nana's roots and herbs set she off. All I know is, I was born before Nana passed on. We remained behind, growing older, wiser, stronger...

In this way, a young African-American girl guides us through the film's plot and an African-American future.

Nana as a storyteller tries to instill the importance of the Peasant's story of African diaspora and slavery into the younger generations before they leave "this place forever." Nana tells the story of slavery – a large historical story. Nana believes that "calling on the old souls" is a key strategy for resisting the racist oppression, exploitation, and violence that her descendants ("flowers to bloom") will inevitably meet in the "promised land." Nana Peasant urges her great-grandson Eli:

Call on those old Africans, Eli. Let the old souls come into your heart... 'cause you ain't goin' to no land of milk and honey.

Like an African griot, Nana narrates the past through various rituals and myths rooted in West African history, culture, and religion, such as Voodoo (Vodun). Nana's stories are highly poetic and iconographic. Nana serves as a kind of poet for her people, one that sits on a throne of sticks (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Nana on her throne of sticks in Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.

Here Nana explains how the horrors of slavery have shaped her people, but that they must look further back across the sea to understand who they are.

Our hands scarred blue with poisonous indigo dye that built up all those plantations from swampland. Our spirits numb from the sting of fever from the rice fields. Our backs, bent down forever with the planting and the hoeing of the Sea Island cotton. I was an elder. And, many years ago, as I lay in my mother's arms, I saw Africa in her face.

The other storytellers in Dash's *Daughters* are Yellow Mary (the 'whore') and Viola (the "holy one"). These two women are cousins and have lived away from Ibo Landing for a long time. They both return as "prodigal daughters" back to their family home for the last supper. Both are not family women and live independently, Viola as a Christian missionary, and Yellow Mary as a prostitute. In this way, they are diametrically opposed and there is a huge gulf between them. Viola strongly disapproves of Yellow Mary's seemingly chosen profession, as do most of the Peasant women. Dash deploys the disparate voices of Viola and Yellow Mary in a way that

helps construct a multifaceted African-American female experience. Many of Yellow Mary's stories are tragic, and speak of her experiences as a sexually exploited wet-nurse, or of the loss of her child. These experiences speak to the experience of many young female black slaves, who had the double burden of being exploited for their productive and reproductive labours.

My baby was born dead, and my breasts were full of milk. We needed the money, so I was hired out to a wealthy family... some big, supposed to be, "muckety-mucks," off Edisto Island. High-falutin' buckra. When they went to Cuba, I went with them. I nursed their baby, and took care of the other children. That's how I got "ruint" ... I wanted to go home and they keep me... they keep me. So, I "fix" the titty... they send me home.

Viola offers a completely different voice, one that reflects the experience of the sexless black woman. It is clear that Viola has used Christianity as a way to shield herself from sexual exploitation, and indeed to deny herself any kind of sexual identity. And yet Yellow Mary and Viola share a similar childhood, a culture, and a shared connection to Ibo Landing – a former slave trade outpost. On their boat trip to Ibo Landing, Viola reminisces with Yellow Mary about this past, providing us a history lesson in the process. Viola's photographer, Mr. Snead accompanies the women, including Yellow Mary's silent companion, Trula.

Viola: *"Yellow Mary, look!"* Viola points to an old shanty house on a small island. *"Uncle Spikenard lived there. Do you remember him?"* Yellow Mary does not reply. *"I guess not, I was just a young Miss too, then. He was from Africa, and just after the war, he moved from the plantation to the little house on the waterfront. Remember how Uncle Spikenard used to get angry, he'd talk funny so the children couldn't understand him? He'd speak in African words and sounds. You know, Uncle Spikenard told me, just before the war they'd keep boatloads of fresh Africans off some secret islands around here."*

Mr. Snead: *"Viola, our government banned the transporting of Africans for slavery fifty years before the Civil War."*

Viola: *"Not back off these islands. Noooo! Just before the war, they were still running and hiding salt water Africans, pure bred, from the Yankees."*

Dash's female black multi-voice narration weaves a narrative that is both about the Peasant's family struggles to remain together, despite their differences and conflicts, as well as the struggles of African-Americans to maintain a connection to their distinct culture, language, and history. Family conflicts and domestic troubles are not rooted in psychological or psychoanalytic structures as in the conventional melodrama, but rather in colonial and racist constructs like slavery.

Merata Mita's Mauri

I can unite the technical complexity of film with a traditional Māori philosophy that gives me a sense of certainty, an unfragmented view of society, an orientation towards people rather than institutions. I have an enormous responsibility to them and their descendants. I'm actually in the position of the person who carried the oral tradition in older times. It's similar to the way the Whaikoreo and the stories that are told on the Marae, keep history alive and maintain contact with the past. Carrying on a tradition means redeeming the past, redeeming the culture.⁷

- Merata Mita

Like Dash, Mita does not structure her narrative around a central figure in the classical realist manner. Mita focalizes her narrative around various characters, and their storylines are given equal dramatic and political weight. There is the elder wise woman figure, Kara Rapana, who struggles to keep her family together in the face of urban migration, inter-racial marriage, and gangs. Like Nana Peasant in Dash's *Daughters*, Kara is a guardian of her community's Māori culture, language (Te Reo Māori), and history, which she practices through ancient Māori rituals and *waiata* (traditional ancestral Māori songs, chants and laments).⁸ Another key character is the criminal Paki, who has stolen the identity of Kara's dead nephew, Rewi Rapana (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: The tormented Paki masquerading as Rewi in Mita's *Mauri*

Paki/Rewi is tormented by his shameful criminal past, especially his spiritual crime of stealing Rewi's Māori totem, and eventually seeks redemption. Another storyline revolves around Steve Semmens, a Pakeha/white land owner, and Remari Rapana, a young Māori woman, who is torn between Steve and her cousin Paki/Rewi, with whom she is passionately in love. Steve's father swindled the Rapanas out of their land, with the cooperation of the Pakeha government. A fourth storyline revolves Kara's other nephew, Willie Rapana, the leader of a gang, who is on the run from the police and rival gangs. All these storylines intersect depicting a family, and a community, in crisis.

As in Dash's *Daughters*, Mita's *Mauri* focuses on one family, the Rapana family, and their struggles against colonial structures of domination. Mita draws a parallel between the loss of Māori land and the loss of Māori youth to urban gangs, as well as the erosion of cultural identity. Though it is the 1950s, Māori communities are still fighting the Pakeha government for land rights and racial equity. These problems have created much conflict for the Rapana family,

and their stormy past. Mita's narrative follows the conventions of melodrama, but like Dash's *Daughters*, the "tales of sound and fury" are explicitly rooted in anti-colonial politics. Gestures and affect are constructed not to incite an emotional response, but an intellectual one. Characters' feelings and motivations are represented through Māori rituals, including dance, and especially *waitia*. Mita exemplifies this Māori method for "redeeming the past, redeeming the culture" in the opening birthing sequence of the film.

Shot: Medium-close angle on young laboring woman. She leans against the broad shoulder of a Paki/Rewi. Māori chanting plays in the background. Kara says, "*How are you doing, Diane?*" The woman moans. "*Push, that's it, push. It's nearly here.*"

Shot: Medium angle on white doctor who watches Kara act as midwife to the birth. Kara says to the doctor off-screen, "*You can come...*"

Shot: Long shot on Kara, laboring woman and Paki/Rewi. Kara "... *and give me a hand with the delivery.*" The doctor enters frame, seemingly a bit bewildered. Kara says, "*Hold it. Slowly.*" The Māori chanting continues.

Shot: Medium close angle on laboring woman. Kara exclaims, "*Oh, oh!*"

Shot: Close angle on Kara's hands. The doctor's says off-screen, "*Scalpel.*" Kara interjects. Her hand places a seashell in the doctor's hand. "*No, use this.*" The doctor's palm remains open with the seashell centre frame. Kara explains, "*It has cut the cords of generations.*" Māori chanting.

Shot: Medium-long shot of Willie, donning a black leather jacket enters doorway of hospital room with a big smile on his face. Baby sounds are heard off-screen. Willie's fellow gang members enter frame. They all look on at mother and child. Willie exclaims, "*Just in time.*"

Shot: Close angle on swaddled newborn baby. The Māori *waitia* is emphasized on the soundtrack. Characters off-screen speak to each in the Māori language.

Cut to: Title: *Mauri*.

The word *Mauri* translates into "life force" or spirit. This life force is the glue that keeps the Māori community and Rapana family together, and it is continually under threat. The newborn child symbolizes this life force, which has to be brought into the world in a specific Māori way. The cutting of the umbilical cord with the seashell represents Mita's Māori filmmaking, to create something with Māori tools, those tools being Māori storytelling "traditions." Kara's gesture of handing the seashell to the white doctor serves as kind of lesson in Māori culture and history, rather than a dramatic construct.

Tracey Moffatt's Bedevil

Moffatt's *Bedevil* deconstructs the codes of the Western, the melodrama, and horror. In many ways *Bedevil* can be seen as a hybrid of all three of these genres. The "ghost stories" tell of family breakdown, land dispossession, and dislocation amongst Aborigine and Torres Strait Islander communities across a post-colonial hyper-realistic landscape. Tellingly, due to its lack of realism, one white Australian critic declared *Bedevil* to be "a work of art," but not a film,⁹ as if there should be a distinction. This seems highly unfair when other films directed by high-profile (white) male "master" directors have been embraced for their narrative discontinuity and disruptive aesthetics as "innovative" and "revolutionary."¹⁰ Moffatt's non-linear structure works in conjunction with her deployment of the film's diverse range of oral storytellers, all of whom address the camera. Like Mita and Dash, these figures deploy silent gestures and highly mythic rituals to tell their stories.

There are two ways the storytellers work in *Bedevil*. Firstly, Moffatt has her storytellers address the camera, as if they were interview subjects answering questions from an off-screen interviewer, in the style of a documentary. By breaking the fourth wall Moffatt draws attention to the cinema apparatus, disrupting viewers' expectations of realism or conventional storytelling associated with the dominant cinema and foregrounding the storytelling process, and hence the construction of the gaze. By having the storytellers speak to an off-camera interviewer/filmmaker Moffatt draws attention to her own gaze, that of an Aborigine female. This works against the traditional representation of indigenous people in Australian ethnographic films, in which the point of view and gaze has been historically white and male. The second way the storytellers work in *Bedevil* is by foregrounding dissonance and incoherence. Like Dash's *Daughters*, Moffatt foregrounds oral history by deploying a diverse range of storytellers. Unlike Dash and

Mita, Moffatt's storytellers represent a diverse range of Australian identities across the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. Moffatt herself is indigenous and Irish, and was primarily raised in a white (foster) home. Moffatt's construction of these diverse points of view and voices critique the idea of multiculturalism as idyllic, harmonious, and simplistic. Moffatt's world is none of those things, and is in fact at times confusing, disturbing, and unsettling, the very essence of the horror film experience.

In the segment "Mr. Chuck" there are two narrators, Rick, an Aborigine male prisoner, and Shelley, an elderly white middle-class woman, who also knew Rick as a child. Their strange stories about Rick's childhood and the ghost of an American G.I., who drowned in a swamp, are interwoven to construct a story of post-World War 2 Australia.

Shot: Medium angle on middle-class bric-a-brac including an Aboriginal art object. The camera pans along shelving revealing some old black and white photographs. One of the photos features a young white woman flanked by American soldiers ("Yanks"). Shelley's voice-over says, "*The swamp business is the only true tragedy we've had.*" The camera comes to a pause on Shelley's face (close angle). "*During the second World War the island was full of American soldiers. Yanks, Yanks, Yanks everywhere. They were stationed here.*"

Though Shelley claims the drowning of the G.I. was the only "true tragedy" they've had as a community, she contradicts this claim when she describes Rick's abusive childhood at the hands of his violent uncle, who only ever appears in distorted shadows. Rick never speaks of his childhood in such terms, but instead talks about how the ghost of the G.I. tried to pull him into the swamp where he played with his little sisters, a swamp that would be built over with housing developments for middle-class whites.

Shot: Medium shot of Rick behind prison glass. He laughs almost hysterically. "*The ghost swamp, yeah, that was me.*"

Cut to: Wide angle of Rick being pulled into swamp.

Shot: Cut back to medium shot of Rick behind prison glass. "*I was seven at the time. I was okay. They fished me out.*" Rick starts laughing again. He presses his hand up against the prison glass, bringing attention to it.

Cut to: Close angle on bubbling muddy swamp. Rick's laughter continues over image.

Shot: Cut back to Rick in prison. The camera zooms in for a closer angle. Rick finally stops laughing. He gazes at the interviewer (off-camera). "*But I hated that place! That... island!*"

Later Rick speaks of the dead G.I.

Shot: Medium-close high angle on Rick, as a child, gazing at the G.I. helmet off-screen. Adult Rick's voice-over, "*And I was thinking...*"

Shot: Close angle on adult Rick in prison. He continues his story. "*... of that dumb G.I. bastard down below.*"

According to Rick the drowning of the G.I. is not "tragic." In reality it is Rick's story that is tragic. Even though Shelley knew what was going on (apparently everyone did), nobody intervened to help him or his sisters. The fact that a drunken G.I. driving himself into a swamp is more tragic than Rick and his sisters being neglected and abused, not to mention marginalized by encroaching white settlers on the island, is perhaps Moffatt's point. The shot of Rick in his cramped jail cell while he applies his own homemade tattoo is perhaps the most haunting and tragic image in Moffatt's film, contrasting harshly with Shelley in her comfortable middle-class bungalow.

The second segment "Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo" has three different narrators: a Chinese man, a drunken white working-class man, and Ruby, an elderly Aborigine woman. All three tell of the ghost of the little white blind girl who is known to haunt the train tracks where Ruby and her husband once lived with their young family. Ruby's telling is similar to Nana Pezant's in Dash's *Daughters* and Kara's in Mita's *Mauri* - highly imagistic and mythic. The story told by the drunken white man, who was the conductor on the train that killed the little white blind girl, is marked by haziness, confusion, and incoherence. The Chinese man functions as a tour guide telling the story of the little white blind girl as if he were speaking to a tourist. Moffatt has him address the camera while he tells us his stories, positioning us as the visitors.

Shot: Wide angle on Chinese man standing in front of train museum. He looks into the camera lens and gestures for us to come closer. The camera zooms in. He says, *“Want to hear spooky story?”* The man enters the museum.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Chinese man in museum. He bows to the camera. *“First a tour. This was once a great bristling town. And people owned vast cattle and sheep stations. Land sold for only one cent an acre. Now it’s two dollars an acre.”* The man goes onto to show us some of the artifacts such as old telephones and lamps in his museum. In this museum, however, voices are trapped in those telephones. This uncanny detail jolts us out of reality into the absurd.

In the next scene the Chinese man talks about hauntings, continuing to perform his tourist shtick. He has just told us about the suicide of a bedeviled man, who hung himself from the rafters in the barn structure. This tormented man is known to haunt the area. Theatrically gesturing with his hands, suggesting blindness and distorted vision, the man seems to perform Brook’s idea of the “text of muteness.” (See Figure 5).

Shot: Tilt down from rafters where the apparent suicide took place to Chinese man standing in the barn like structure. *“Choo, choo, choo. They hear him, but they can’t see him.”* While speaking these words the man gestures to his ears and eyes. He pauses, and remembers something. *“Wait! There is someone. An old alcoholic called Mickey. Go and see him. He knows the train story. He might be in the horrors by now. But he can yarn old, Mickey.”* He laughs.



Figure 5: Chinese man telling story about ghost in barn from Moffatt's *Bedevil*. "They hear him, but they can't see him."

Moffatt cuts to Mickey, who is visibly drunk.

Shot: Medium-long shot of Mickey standing in shabby looking kitchen. In the background is a sign that reads *beware of trains*. The tap drips. Mickey speaks. "I..." There is a long pause. "I have a friend." Another long pause. "She visits me at night." Pause. "She's a ghost, but I call it a spirit." Pause. "Who is she?! I don't want to tell who it is. But it's not the little girl." The man turns to face the camera. Spooky music plays in the background.

Shot: Close angle on a sheet of brail. "The little..."

Shot: Medium angle on Mickey, who taps his hands against his eyes. He pulls his hands away and looks outward at the wall. "These spirits...perhaps they do try to tell us something. I try to work it out. I believe in these things. I also believe in the hovercrafts. I mean... the UFO's. They've been in our family for years." Mickey hiccups and then turns to the camera.

Moffatt then cuts to her third narrator, Ruby.

Shot: Medium-long angle on two Aborigine boys who play outside their house in a highly stylized Australian outback landscape. They are startled from their playing by something in the sky. One of the boys says, "Hey look!"

Shot: Wide angle on purple sky. Three star-like objects flash like Christmas lights.

Shot: Medium angle on boys in awe of the flashing lights. "Dad!"

Shot: Medium angle on an indigenous man sitting at a table on the front porch of a house. He turns. "Dad! Dad! Quick, quick!" Exasperated, the Dad says, "What do they want?"

The father and his card-playing friend (possibly his sister) finally decide to appease the boys.

The two adults pause their card game to go look at the lights. When they do look up at the sky,

the lights have disappeared. They return to their card game. But the lights haven't really vanished. Enter the boys' mother, Ruby, played by Moffatt herself. The elder Ruby's voice however explains about the lights:

When we lived out here strange things would happen. Sometimes we'd see these things in the sky. Our old people would call them 'min min' lights. Those old Murray people, they never knew what they were. And neither did we. They just used to come.

Moffatt connects these three different narrators across this segment through strange happenings and “spooky stories” about unexplained ghost sightings and UFO's. This is not a shared history or even culture, it is a shared experience of fear, isolation, and gothic storytelling.

The third segment, “I'm Lovin' The Spin I'm In” is narrated by three storytellers, Dimitri, a Greek-Australian businessman, Voula, Dimitri's wife, and a “doomed couple,” Beba and Minnie, who perform their story through a silent ghost dance. Beba and Minnie, star-crossed lovers, are now dead, having both perished in a fire in Dimitri's warehouse. These storytellers have different motives for telling their story. Dimitri tells the ghost story to land developers, who become spooked when they find out that the land they want to buy off Dimitri is the site where Beba and Minnie died.

Shot: Close angle on a panicked Dimitri. *“Guys, guys! I can explain the whole situation.”* The land developers start to leave. *“No shit, Dimitri. Let's go.”*

Shot: Extreme wide angle. Dimitri jumps up on the ledge of the warehouse so he is above the two other men, a Greek-Australian and a Chinese-Australian. Dimitri begins to tell the story of the dead lovers. *“There were these two kids from up north, uh, from the islands I think. Beba was this islander dude, and Minnie, this hippie chick. But, guys, we're going twelve years back.”* Dimitri steps down from the ledge. He looks at the newspaper clipping that Beba's mother, Emelda, has taped to the warehouse door. *“These kids – they were in a bad way.”*

Shot: Wide angle on long grassy field. Dimitri's voice-over: *“They needed work, so I took them on.”* The Chinese land developer's voice-over: (sarcastic tone) *“Oh, you are so nice, Dimitri.”*

Shot: Medium-long angle on Dimitri. *“I'm nice, I'm nice.”*

Shot: High angle medium-long shot on land developers. They start to walk away. The Greek land developer says, *“Yeah, a real nice bastard!”*

Shot: Tracking shot through tall grasses. Dimitri's voice-over: *"It was about marriage. The whole clan were down on them. They had to get the hell out."* Distorted red images are superimposed over the grass shot.

Shot: Close angle on woman's feet pacing floor. The shot has been colour-tinted red.

Shot: Medium-long angle of man in bed, tossing in his sleep.

Shot: Long shot on Emelda as she emerges from behind a curtain of laundry. Dimitri's voice-over: *"And then the mother, Emelda, came looking for them. Found them down here."*

Shot: Close angle on woman's hands scrubbing something. *"Jeeze.."*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Emelda looking for something. *"What a fuss she caused."* Emelda approaches a wall made of wooden slats. She gazes through the gaps in the wall. Greek man yells (voice-over): *"I want to see the contract, Dimitri!!"*

Shot: Close angle on Emelda's face as she gazes through the wall. *"And then after Emelda moved in with them, that's when things got really strange."*

Dimitri's disgruntled wife, Voula, tells the story of Beba and Minnie somewhat differently.

Voula tries to explain why Emelda is so sad to her teenage son, Spiro, who is confused by

Emelda's strange ways.

Shot: Medium angle of Voula and her son gazing out the window.

Shot: Point of view shot of Emelda, who is framed through a window in the warehouse where she now lives alone. Voula voice-over: *"Let me tell you about Emelda."*

Shot: High angle wide shot of Dimitri trying to make a deal with the land developers. Voula's voice-over: *"You know she's not from around here. She's from the Torres Strait Islands."*

Shot: Reverse angle on Voula and her son, from inside the son's bedroom. *"Her people are still quite traditional in their ways. Especially concerning things like marriage. Emelda had a son."* Voula becomes sad. *"Beba."*

Shot: Crane shot – wide angle on Voula and son at window. The camera trucks down to the ground where Dimitri is arguing with the land developers. *"She was never the same after he died."*

The point Moffatt makes with the deployment of these disparate and disconnected voices across gender, race, and ethnicity is that they tell stories differently. But difference is not enough here. Moffatt intercuts these voices not in an attempt to create a coherent story, but to depict the idea of a shared past (a haunted history) that is complexly layered with differing experiences that have little in common with one another. Through methods of distancing and a dissonant multi-voiced narration, the content of the ghost story becomes irrelevant, disrupting the whole point of

horror in the first place, which is to create a believable imaginary world where monsters prey upon innocent victims. Though Moffatt does create frightening and unnerving worlds with strange and creepy ghosts, the most disturbing moments are the ones in which indigenous people, their culture, and place in the world are placed under threat. The drowned G.I., the little white blind girl, and the dead lovers serve as horror tropes, which the disparate storytellers deploy to narrate and re-construct the past. These “ghosts” are highly representational of the feelings and experiences of indigenous people, who have been subject to violence, land dispossession, the fracturing of communities and homes, as well as loss of language and culture, due to capitalist post-colonial projects such as tourism and urban land development.

Decolonizing Genre – New Kind of Iconic Landscape

Mita, Dash, and Moffatt decolonize genre by infusing their frontier landscapes with subaltern female desire and symbols. As in the Western wide-angle landscape photography is central to the mythmaking, but in these three films frontier landscapes are far from “uncivilized” wildernesses. Wide-angle photography has always been central to the Western genre,¹¹ and Moffatt, Mita, and Dash deploy it here politically. This is a key reason why the filmmakers sought to tell their frontier stories on the “big screen.” As in the classic Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s and 50s Mita’s, Dash’s, and Moffatt’s *mise-en-scene* is marked by the domestic, as well as “excess” and silent gesture through the foregrounding of culturally specific icons and rituals. “Unspeakable” female subaltern desire is expressed visually and ritualistically, a key trait of the melodrama. With regard to the horror and the Gothic, characters are haunted and often hunted, in these films, by various kinds of ghosts and “monsters.” All three films feature a ghost or ghosts that haunt characters in some way, and all work as metaphors for the horrors and the violence of colonization. These three filmmakers decolonize by deconstructing genre codes,

destabilizing popular (cinematic) narratives of subaltern people, cultures, and spaces as “anachronistic” and existing in an “anterior” time (McClintock).

Dash’s Daughters of the Dust

Julie Dash embeds her African-American Gullah Sea Islands frontier landscape in *Daughters of the Dust* with “Geechee” and West African icons and symbols in the form of clothing, food, hand gestures, games, and religious symbols, which tell a multi-layered story of diaspora, slavery, racist violence, loss, resilience, cultural memory, resistance, and collectivism in the form of family and community. Nana Peazant carries “scraps of memories” in an old tin box, memories that “keep the family ties.” She has glass jars and glass bottle trees that may not actually make real magic, but stand as reminders of “who was here and who’s gone on.” There are the indigo-dyed hands, which refer to the slave days when the Peazant ancestors were slave workers. Though not historically accurate, Dash explains the use of the indigo-dyed hands as “a symbol of slavery, to create a new kind of icon around slavery rather than showing the traditional markings of whips and chains.”¹² Dash’s landscape itself is infused with an African-American presence. Garbed in starched whites, her characters languish in old growth trees, emerge fully clothed out of rivers, and dance along epic sea-swept sandy beaches (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Eula, Yellow Mary and Trula walk along beach in Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

Set to an inspired African musical score, the opening sequence of *Daughters of the Dust* demonstrates Dash's frontier aesthetic:

Shot: Close angle of dust running through an African-American woman's hands.

Shot: Long shot of Nana Peazant bathing, fully dressed, in a river.

Shot: Wide angle of riverboat.

Shot: Long shot on Yellow Mary, wearing a white gown and veil, standing in the boat, while three African-American men row and steer.

Shot: Close angle on Yellow Mary's hand touching her St. Christopher pendant.

Title Card: *Daughters of the Dust*

Shot: Wide-angle aerial shot of Sea Islands. Title card over picture: "Ibo Landing, The Sea Islands of the South, 1902."

Voice-Off: Man chanting Islamic prayer.

Shot: Belial, his back to camera, praying to the sea.

Shot: Close-angle of Belial.

Sound-bridge: Belial's voice chanting.

Shot: Wide-angle of Sea Island topography.

Shot: Close-angle on Belial's Islamic prayer book.

The landscape in Dash's American frontier is represented by a mise-en-scene that privileges a sea island landscape marked by African rituals and mythology, as well as African-American womanhood. This landscape montage is antithetical to the Western, which has historically rendered African-American people invisible from a rural white settler frontier frame.

The mise-en-scene renders visible an African-American presence that is not constructed through the trope of slavery or urban gang violence. This opening montage establishes that the Sea Island Gullah space is a world unto itself. This separateness and isolation is established before the opening frame, with a title card that reads,

At the turn of the century, Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African Captives, remained isolated from the mainland of South Carolina and Georgia. As a result of their isolation, the Gullah created and maintained a distinct, imaginative and original African American culture.

The other glaring distinction of Dash's African-American frontier, which also seems to be making an implicit reference to the Western, is the absence of white people. Though characters tell stories about whites, they are rendered invisible and silent in Dash's frame.

Whites in fact haunt the margins of Dash's frame. Though whites are referred to throughout *Daughters of the Dust*, only as slave owners and never by name, Dash carefully renders them invisible. They are deployed similarly to the way that the horror story deploys the bogeyman, a fearsome force that lurks in the shadows, posing a threat to peace and harmony. In the Western, this was often the role played by the "Injun," a dangerous madman waiting to pounce on innocent white settlers at any moment. In Dash's narrative the bogeyman takes the form of the white rapist and the lynch mob. Eula is a victim of rape, her predator a white plantation owner. Eula knows that identifying her rapist will not lead to justice because as Yellow Mary says, "the raping of coloured women is as common as the fish in the sea," and will only lead Eli to wreak revenge against her assailant, inevitably inciting a lynch mob. As Yellow Mary cautions Eula, "he doesn't need to know what can get him killed. There's enough uncertainty in life without having to sit at home wondering which tree your husband's hanging from... Don't tell him anything." Yellow Mary has also been a victim of rape, at the hands of her white "master." Despite the beauty of the Sea Island landscape, which Dash lovingly depicts (with

cinematographer Arthur Jafa) as idyllic, it is not a safe space. Danger always looms. It's the kind of place where a "slave girl got drowned by her owner." This danger however is not relegated to a specific geographic place. The white bogeyman is behind every tree and street corner. As Eula cautions all the Peasant women before they leave for the North:

Even though you're going up North, you all think about being ruined too. You think you can cross over to the mainland and run away from it?

As in the horror and the Western genre, flesh wounds and blood, are central to the mise-en-scene. Dash does not explicitly show graphic violence; Eula's rape has occurred in the past. However, bodily wounds and scars are referred to throughout. Eula says,

We carry too many scars from the past. Our past owns us. We wear our scars like armor... for protection. Our mother's scars, our sister's scars, our daughter's scars... Thick, hard, ugly scars that no one can pass through to ever hurt us again.

We do not see these scars, and many are internal. They are not there to incite fear or anxiety in the viewer/listener. Nor are these acts of violence and bodily harm representative of conflict between competing groups ("cowboys and Indians") for territory. Rather, these wounds and scars are the silent marks of colonial domination and violence enacted upon one group, Africans, by another, white Europeans.

The other ghosts that haunt Dash's Gullah landscape are ancestors, the Ibo people (see Figure 7). Ibo Landing, which was a slave trading post, is thought to be a sacred and mythical place where a group of Ibo defied their slave captors and "walked back to Africa." Some believe they haunt the waters beneath. Eula tells the story while standing at Ibo Landing.



Figure 7: Floating statue of an Ibo slave, which serves as a constant reminder of the horrors of slavery in Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

When those Ibo got through sizing up the place real good and seeing what was to come, my grandmother said they turned, all of them, and walked back in the water. Every last man, woman, and child. Now you wouldn't think they'd get very far seeing as it was water they were walking on. They had all that iron upon them. But chains didn't stop those Ibo. They just kept walking like the water was solid ground. And when they got to where the ship was, they didn't so much as give it a look. They just walked right past it, because they were going home.

Eula's impassioned retelling of the Ibo Landing myth is contrasted by old Bilal's more realistic account. As a boy, Bilal "*came with the Ibo.*" Remembering that tragic day, Bilal asserts,

"...when they went down in that water, they never came up. Ain't nobody can walk on water."

The reality is, in fact, more horrific than the myth. This real history haunts all the Peazants.

Mita's Mauri

Mita's mise-en-scene is also marked by its wide-angle landscape shots, infused with Māori iconography and rituals focalized around land rights, cultural identity, community building, and Māori-white relations. Mita constructs iconic images that privilege Māori culture and dismantle white power and the colonial gaze. The following scene is focused around a Māori

placenta burial ritual. Mita sets the action amidst a bucolic oceanic landscape along the rugged coast of New Zealand.

Sound-bridge: Māori chanting (*waiata*).

Shot: Full-shot of Māori elders, men and women, conducting placenta burial. They perform a chant.

Shot: Wide-angle shot of landscape. On horseback, Steve Semmens, a white man, enters the frame.

Shot: Close-angle on Steve gazing at the Māori placenta burial ritual.

Shot: Medium-close-angle on Kara chanting.

Shot: Wide-angle on Māori elders surrounded by epic Oceanic landscape. Steve continues to approach on horseback.

Shot: Close-angle Kara watches Steve approach. She continues chanting.

Shot: Full shot of Māori group. Keeping his distance, Steve passes them by in the frame.

Shot: Close-angle Steve stops at a distance, and gazes with curiosity at ritual.

Shot: Close-angle Kara continues to chant. She returns Steve's gaze.

Shot: Close-angle Steve gazes back, but then turns away and gallops off on his steed.

Shot: Close-angle on Kara gazing at Steve galloping away.

Shot: Full shot male elder delivers a speech in Māori language. The others listen.

Sound-bridge: Male elder continues speaking.

Shot: Close-angle on Kara as she buries placenta in the trunk of an old tree.

Shot: Close-angle on Kara's hands burying placenta.

Shot: Wide-angle moving shot of bird flying along a New Zealand coast line.

Like Dash, Mita frames her New Zealand landscape through an idyllic and sacred lens.

For Mita the land is not only a space where Māori rituals are conducted and practiced, but also one that is intrinsic to those rituals. When Steve Semmens, the son of white landowner, encroaches on the placenta burial ritual, Kara stops him in his tracks with her powerful gaze, denying him access to the space. This is telling because everyone in the scene knows that old Mr. Semmens, Steve's father, has duped the Rapana family out of their land. The white male gaze is foregrounded as intrusive, and hence, rendered less powerful. Paki/Rewi admonishes Steve shortly afterwards. "*You may own everything else around here, but not this place!*"

Throughout *Mauri* Mita deploys Māori icons and practices as a way to decolonize frontier spaces, such as the wide-angle shot of Willie's gang arriving onto his Aunt Kara's homestead in a chain of cars. Though the gang-members have been corrupted and scarred by

their underground criminal existence, Kara embraces them like long-lost children, kissing them as they enter her home. Another example is the emotional scene between Kara and Willie, in which Kara presents her troubled and hardened nephew with a Māori pendant, offering him spiritual protection. Though the Māori pendant cannot protect Willie from murder, it ensures his spirit will find its way home. Mita integrates both Māori and Pakeha rituals in Remari and Steve's elaborate wedding sequence.

Shot: Long shot of Remari, dressed in a white bridal gown, and Steve dressed in a formal suit and top hat. They stand in front of small white church. A barbed wire fence is in the foreground. They smile and wave. Off-camera the wedding guests celebrate. Confetti rains down upon them.

Shot: Close-angle on Māori boy chanting. He is dressed in Māori regalia.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Māori girls chanting and gesturing, also dressed in Māori regalia.

Shot: Medium shot on Māori girl chanting and gesturing. The camera pans to reveal more Māori children participating in the celebratory ritual.

Shot: Wide angle on wedding party walking arm in arm in a procession line toward the camera – the oceanic landscape in the background. The bridesmaids wear long pink dresses and carry pink bouquets. The groomsmen wear formal black suits and grey top hats.

Shot: Long shot of wedding guests awaiting the arrival of the wedding party in the open air. The Māori children's chanting continues over the soundtrack.

Shot: Wide angle on wedding party walking arm in arm in a procession line toward the camera – the oceanic landscape in the background.

Shot: Moving medium angle on Māori children chanting. They continue to perform a dance-like ritual with hand gestures.

Shot: Close angle on elderly Māori woman watching the children perform.

Shot: Close angle on a blond-haired white child dressed in Māori regalia.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Remari and Steve walking in procession toward their guests. Remari smiles broadly.

Shot: Wide angle on entire Māori wedding clustered in front of a Māori Meeting House. Children continue to perform. The wedding guests wait, as the wedding party approaches the meetinghouse (see Figure 8).

Rather than Maori spaces being represented as “anachronistic” and stuck in “anterior time,” Mita depicts them as places that resist white imperial surveillance and intrusion.



Figure 8: Remari and Steve's blended wedding, which integrates Maori and Pakeha marriage rituals in Mita's *Mauri*

Tracey Moffatt's Bedevil

Using the codes of horror, Moffatt foregrounds the way indigenous people are constructed as monstrous “Others” in Western discourse. In horror the Other is always the monster, a distorted manifestation of society’s fears and anxieties. Here Moffatt echoes the feminist analyses of horror by Linda Williams and Barbara Creed, who argued that in the horror genre the monster’s difference (not being human) is aligned with the sexual difference of the female heroine. Both the monster and the woman are othered for their difference; the monster in fact doubles for the woman. Moffatt’s work also reflects the work of film scholar Bill Nichols who aligned ethnography with pornography. Nichols equated the two forms because both depend on a controlling gaze that silences and objectifies the primary “actors.” Nichols wrote,

Both pornography and ethnography promise something they cannot deliver: the ultimate pleasure of knowing the Other. On this promise of sexual or cultural knowledge they depend, but they are also condemned to do nothing more than make it available for representation.¹³

The irony of Moffatt's film is that it is not an ethnographic film, nor is it a real horror film. Rather, Moffatt seems to channel theories about those genres and forms. Through this channeling Moffatt renders visible the deployment of gender and race tropes in the demarcation of frontier space, and the construction of a white settler frontier identity. However, Moffatt is careful not to represent indigenous people as victims, and whites as "monsters." Moffatt breaks down the white/indigenous binary division, as we see in so many genre films. The *real* monster here is colonial expansionism, which has been a literal horror story for Aborigine and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. At the centre of this horror story is the breakdown of subaltern families and communities.

Bedevil also opens with landscape shots of a hyper-real desert frontier, a sequence that is underscored by the ironic use of horror movie music, Bernard Hermann style.¹⁴

Shot: Close-angle over-head tracking shot moves through desert plants and weeds toward a murky bubbling swamp. Subjective camera tracks around swamp.

Sound: Eerie music and swamp sounds.

Shot: Medium-long shot three Aborigine children walk through a desert landscape, squeezing between trees and weeds.

Shot: Long shot camera tracks around murky bubbling swamp.

Shot: Medium-long shot children continue walking.

Shot: Long shot of swamp.

Shot: Long shot children approach swamp and come to a stop at its edge. They sit down and divvy up candy from a plastic bag.

Shot: Close angle on swamp's bubbling surface. Distorted sounds of predatory animals dominate the soundtrack.

Shot: Long shot children continue to divvy up their candy. Camera tilts down to the bubbling surface of the water. Children are reflected in the water. Ominous music plays.

Shot: Close angle follow shot of a child's feet walking along a fallen tree trunk, which bridges the swamp.

Shot: Close-angle over-head shot of swamp's bubbling surface.

Shot: Long shot children walk along tree branch over the swamp. The children come to a stop halfway along. They sit on the branch. The boy, Rick, dangles his legs in the murky water. Rick tosses his candy into the swamp, as if he were feeding something.

Shot: Medium shot Rick tosses candy into swamp.

Shot: Close angle candy dropping into swamp. Distorted animal sounds.

Shot: Extreme long shot children are suspended over the bubbling swamp on tree branch. Rick continues to drop candy into swamp. Rick leans over into swamp to retrieve his candy.

Shot: Close angle Rick's arm reaching into swamp. Steam rises from water's surface.

Shot: Close angle on girl gazing at Rick struggling to retrieve his candy from the swamp.

Shot: Close angle Rick's arm continues to reach into swamp. Rick struggles against something from below.

Shot: Over-head shot of Rick as he is pulled under into the swamp.

Shot: Close angle on girl, as muddy water splatters all over her.

Shot: Medium long shot of swamp. Camera whip-tilts upward to frame treetops. Sound of Rick struggling and horror music is foregrounded on the soundtrack.

Rather than using wide-angle shots and emphasizing the expansiveness of the Australian frontier, as depicted in countless Australian "horse films," Westerns, and ethnographic documentaries, Moffatt depicts landscapes as shallow spaces, claustrophobic and eerie. Moffatt constructs *Bedevil's* opening through a narrow-angle aesthetic, framed through a subjective lurking camera,¹⁵ used here to emphasize crowding and confinement.¹⁶ Moffatt's aesthetic is rooted more in the visual and sound conventions of the horror film and melodrama, than the Western.

The Revisionist Frontier Films

I loved those raw granite mountains, loved getting above tree line and seeing miles and miles of wild land, I loved the high elevations, the thin dry air, the way the stars and the sky sparkled through that aridity, I loved the independent self-sufficient attitude of the Western people I met, they seemed different in a basic way from the people I knew in working class Massachusetts where I grew up. I loved the way their eyes seemed accustomed to looking out over vast distances. I loved the way horses were a part of life there.

- Nancy Kelly¹⁷

There are two key tropes that are deployed across these revisionist frontier films: wide-open frontier landscapes and Victorian women's fiction. Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979), Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) re-imagine frontier spaces as places for feminist agency and resistance by revising tropes of the Western, the domestic melodrama, and the Gothic horror film. These films work in

the popular narrative film tradition, and therefore adhere to a classical linear narrative structure and Hollywood realism. The key device these filmmakers deploy to revision popular genre tropes is the destabilization of rigid binary divisions along the lines of gender. This is done in two ways. Firstly, the filmmakers and their heroines transgress traditional female roles in a patriarchal culture by their deployment of frontier space, in a sense “invading” it. Secondly, the filmmakers structure the films’ looking and sound regimes through a female gaze and voice.

Female Transgressions of Frontier Spaces

All of these frontier heroines are on the surface of the plot “damsels in distress,” who suffer under patriarchal oppression, albeit to differing degrees. However, the filmmakers resist depicting their heroines as victims or martyrs. They are shown, rather, as female figures of resistance. The key way the films’ heroines resist patriarchal oppression is through their subversion and transgression of frontier spaces. In many melodramas, Westerns, as well as horror pictures, women are generally confined to, and identified by, interior spaces (homesteads or saloons). Throughout these films the heroines dare to cross borderlines that separate “civilized” and “uncivilized” spaces. As in the Western these frontier spaces pose serious physical threats to the heroines but not in the form of “Indians,” outlaws, and bad weather. Rather, the villains and dangers of the frontiers appear in the form of (white) patriarchal figures of authority. Like the silent lone hero in the Western, these frontier heroines navigate wide-open spaces in order to achieve their goals. Their goals, however, are focalized around liberation from patriarchal oppression rather than expansionism. In this sense, the female protagonists fit into the convention of the feisty heroine, which has been a mainstay of the Victorian melodrama, the Western and the horror; the difference in these films is that these heroines do not pay for their feistiness with their submission or death.

As in the Western, both classic and revisionist, wide-open and empty spaces are a key motif throughout the films' *mise-en-scene*, representing freedom of movement and economic independence. The films' *mise-en-scene* is marked by the movement and journeying of the heroines across and through "masculine" frontier landscapes, not only as "gifts" to be exchanged amongst powerful men (Rubin, 1975), but as independent agents driven by their own various desires, albeit forbidden and disavowed ones. These frontier heroines risk and even endure the wrath of patriarchal punishment, often violent, in order to act out their desires on a frontier space. Wide-angle frontier landscape shots, strongly associated with the Western, set this body of films apart from the other feminist films. The films' landscape photography is iconic, and asserts that frontier spaces were never a "women-less milieu" (Tompkins, 1992).

Jane Campion's The Piano:

In *The Piano*, Ada is the victim of an unhappy marriage, in which her sadistic and land hungry husband barter away her treasured piano, emotionally neglects her, attempts to rape her twice, and dismembers her finger. Wide-angle shots of the New Zealand landscape are a central feature in *The Piano*. These shots celebrate the wild and epic Oceanic environment, emphasizing its rough terrain, especially for whites. Indeed Campion represents Ada, and her piano, as foreign out-of-place objects exported to the new world for "civilizing" purposes (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Ada and Flora sit on the beach amongst their cargo, including the piano (in a crate) in Campion's *The Piano*

Ada and the piano's strangeness are alluded to throughout Campion's film. Transported against her will, Ada is out of place in the eyes of both her new husband and his Māori neighbours. Like her piano on the beach, Ada does not belong, she is not meant to be there.

Shot: Wide-angle of interior of forest. It is dark and misty, almost mystical. Māori and white men carry Ada's piano through the difficult forest terrain up a hill. They suddenly accidentally drop the piano. While on the ground, the piano makes a kind of moaning sound, as if it were alive. Spooked, the Māori men back away, fearful of its strangeness.

Ada is like a lost soul who ended up in the wrong place. Perhaps this is the reason Ada never shares the frame with Māori women, visually suggesting that Ada and Māori women cannot inhabit the same space, a white settler space. However, Ada does not seem to embrace her white settler homestead either. She seems to belong to neither the wild New Zealand frontier nor her husband's cramped white settler homestead. Ada seems to belong somewhere in between, in an "elsewhere-ness," like an otherworldly creature from a fairy tale. Indeed, Campion seems to channel the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers or Perrault, more than she does actual colonial history. Like the moors in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the landscape in *The Piano* is almost a mythical place where strange and horrific things happen.

Campion deploys the tropes of horror through the Gothic fairy tale. A number of film scholars have analysed Campion's references to fairy tales, particularly *Bluebeard*.¹⁸ As in Wilson's *My American Cousin*, Campion's *The Piano* features an amateur theatre production in the background of the plot, the white settler community's staging of the Bluebeard fairy tale.¹⁹ Though seemingly unrelated to the plot, Campion deploys *Bluebeard* as a parallel story to that of Ada, Stewart, and Baines. Most of the community is involved with the production, with Nessie as the virginal bride, the local minister as Bluebeard, and Ada's daughter, Flora, as an angel. The local white settler women play Bluebeard's murdered wives. Ada, Stewart, and Baines are not involved with the production, as they will act out their own kind of "Bluebeard" drama, mirroring the fairytale's plot (an arranged marriage, domestic violence involving an ax, a key, and betrayal of trust). Campion constructs the narrative's climax and resolution to parallel *Bluebeard's*, in which Stewart, the enraged and jealous husband attacks his wife with an ax, "clipping her wings," as he describes it. Stewart commits this violence against Ada after he discovers she has inscribed a piano *key* with a love note to Baines, and hence betrayed his trust. As in the Bluebeard fairy tale, the key is what proves the bride's undoing. Though we never see the ending of the Bluebeard stage production in the film, Ada, like Bluebeard's bride, manages to escape her violent husband and hapless marriage. Campion never shows us the ending of the stage production because the Māori spectators disrupt the show, believing it to be an actual display of wife-murder. Unlike the white settler audience members who sit passively watching the gruesome horrors of domestic violence, the Māori men want to help the young woman (Nessie) who is seemingly being murdered behind the curtain. In this sense, Campion subverts the colonial script of white men saving brown women from brown men (Spivak). Here it is the

“brown men,” Maori men, who attempt to save a white woman, Bluebeard’s wife, from a white man, Bluebeard.

Campion’s deployment of the *Bluebeard* fairy tale functions as a kind of meta-narrative about the “good pioneer woman” in frontier spaces and nations. Through Campion’s explicit reference to *Bluebeard*, the film saves itself from falling into trap of popular cinema in which female desire is thwarted in subservience to an Oedipal script. By going back to the source of all melodrama, the pre-modern folktale, Campion bypasses the Hollywood “women’s film,” a form focalized around female sacrifice. Though on the surface *Bluebeard* seems to be cautionary tale about marriage and patriarchy, Perrault himself saw the story as one in which the innocent young wife asserts her power, and is not a victim. Perrault wrote,

It is easy to see that the events described in this story took place many years ago. No modern husband would dare be half so terrible, nor to demand of his wife such an impossible thing as to stifle her curiosity. Be he ever so quarrelsome or jealous, he’ll toe the line as soon as she tells him to. And whatever colour his beard might be, it’s easy to see which of the two are the master.²⁰

In her analysis of the Bluebeard fairytale, literary critic Kari E. Lokke argued, “This tale of the wealthy, seemingly chivalrous aristocrat who murders seven young brides and inters them in his cellar brings together violence and love, perversion and innocence, death and marriage in an unsettling combination.”²¹ In Campion’s tale, Ada is both victim and master. Though Stewart’s violence is a form of victimization of Ada, she does manage to escape her loveless and oppressive marriage. Ada does this not with a weapon or even with the help of Baines, but by the sheer power of her own will.

Maggie Greenwald’s The Ballad of Little Jo:

In Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Josephine is banished from her home, shunned by middle-class society, forced to give up her illegitimate child, almost sold into prostitution, and

nearly raped twice. Her only hope against sexual violence and exploitation on the (white) male-dominated frontier is to mutilate her beautiful face and cross-dress as a man, an illegal offense at the time (see **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Greenwald represents Josephine's journey from abandoned and fallen damsel in distress to autonomous "frontiersman" visually through her trajectory across and within the frontier space of the American West. Afforded little safety from rape and sexual exploitation as an unprotected "vagrant" female on the frontier, Jo finds independence and belonging by masquerading as a man. With this masquerade however comes danger because "dressing improper to your sex" is a crime in the wild west. The idea of being found out is a constant threat for Jo, and one she must ward off by working just as hard as any man. Greenwald emphasizes Jo's trials and tribulations while acquiring the skills and physical strength required to make it on a hostile frontier.

Shot: Close angle on rock. A pick ax enters frame, slamming down upon the rock.

Shot: Tilt up from rock to Jo welding the pick ax, which is much too heavy for her. She heaves the pick ax up and slams it down again, a grimace across her face.

Shot: Medium angle on pick ax getting stuck in ground. Camera tilts to Jo struggling with it.

Shot: Full angle on cart being pushed across rough and craggy terrain. The front wheel gets stuck.

Shot: Long shot of Jo pushing cart in the pouring rain. She gives the cart a push and proceeds to fall down in the slippery muck.

In order to escape suspicion, Jo finds jobs that are isolating like sheep herding. Though the land is rough and unfamiliar to Jo, it is not as threatening as white male figures that pose the greatest danger of all. Greenwald represents this threat in the film's opening title sequence.

Shot: High angle medium shot of woman's parasol moving forward. A dirt road surface is visible, but the woman's face and body cannot be seen in the frame at first. The woman's skirts come into view. The title: *The Ballad of Little Jo* appears across the screen.

Shot: Wide angle back view on Josephine Monaghan as she walks (away from camera) alone along a dirt road carrying a travel bag and her parasol. Trees and bush surround the road. She is dressed like a respectable Victorian lady. A man on horseback rides toward her. He slows his horse down, as he passes her, turning his head to stare at her.

She does not acknowledge him. He rides out of frame. Another rider crosses frame. A man driving a horse-drawn wagon comes up behind Josephine. Two other men on horseback approach from the opposite direction. The wagon driver does a double take when he passes Josephine, who continues walking. The riders approach Josephine, and bring their horses to a stop. They leer at her. One of the riders says, "*What do we have here?*" They begin to circle her. The other rider says, "*Woo-wee! What's a pretty little filly like you travelling all alone?*" Josephine ignores them. They start to ride off. "*So long, little lady.*" As they gallop off, they give a few backward glances. She continues to walk along the road, seemingly unaffected by their attentions. More horse-drawn wagons enter the frame stirring up road dust.

Nancy Kelly's Thousand Pieces of Gold:

In Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Lalu is sold into sexual slavery by her father to Hong King, a saloon manager, in the late 19th century Idaho of the American West. Kelly revolves the plot of *Thousand Pieces of Gold* around Lalu's journey from a slave to a free independent woman. Lalu's main stated desire throughout Kelly's film is to purchase her freedom and return to her family in China. Lalu's goal, though seemingly unattainable, is what drives her to resist Hong King's sexual exploitation, reject Charlie's romantic attentions, and finally to become an independent business woman, by operating a laundry business and managing a boarding house. Though Kelly's film is set on the American frontier and appears to be working in the Western genre tradition, Kelly emphasizes loneliness and desperation in the film's iconography. Though the film does feature the epic landscapes of Idaho, these are empty, seemingly devoid of indigenous people. Here Kelly blurs the binary division between "civilized" and "savage," and in fact the Chinese seem to stand as a substitute for the "Indians."

Kelly depicts the small Idaho mining town more as a camp. Kelly's frontier iconography is not comprised of rural homesteads, Protestant churches, the courthouse, and the general store, but rather tents, makeshift wooden structures, unfinished walking planks, and the saloon. Instead of white settlers, cowboys, lawmen, outlaws, and "Indians" there are only disparate groups of

disenfranchised Chinese men, impoverished white men, and prostitutes. Hence, Lalu must navigate a predominantly male realm where she has no friends or family, as even the local Chinese have disdain for her because she is a “Northerner.” The interior spaces in Kelly’s film are not domestic, at least not in the familial way. Kelly deploys three main interior spaces that represent Lalu’s journey from slavery to independent woman: Hong King’s saloon, Charlie’s homestead, and the miners’ boarding house, all male homosocial environments.

Though saloons and boarding houses are often featured in traditional Westerns, Kelly depicts these places through a feminist lens. Saloons are often the site of much male violence and gunplay, whilst “saloon girls” parade around the competing alpha males. Though in Kelly’s film, the saloon is the site of violence, it is primarily sexual violence – not gun violence. It is in the saloon where Hong King repeatedly rapes Lalu. It is in the saloon that Hong King ties Lalu to the bar whilst he offers her up for “pokes.” It is in the saloon that Lalu is forced to be “China Polly,” a sexual object for male pleasure. Though Lalu manages to avoid being a “hundred men’s wife,” rape is a constant threat. Lalu’s relationship with this homosocial frontier is represented in the scene in which Lalu first arrives in town.

Shot: Wide angle on centre of mining camp. Chinese and white men assemble at various buildings, talking and doing business. There are no women in sight.

Shot: Full shot on Lalu and Jim (Li Po) approaching centre of town on horseback. Lalu gazes at her new surroundings with trepidation. Numerous donkeys loaded with goods Jim is delivering trail behind (see Figure 10).

Shot: Long shot on group of men, Chinese and white, gazing at Jim and Lalu as they approach.

Shot: Long shot of men languishing with two women, one partially dressed. Some of the men gaze toward the direction of Lalu and Jim. One of the men remarks, “*Looks like you’ve got competition.*”

Shot: Cut back to: Full shot on Lalu and Jim (Li Po) approaching centre of town on horseback. A woman’s voice off-screen says, “*China Polly.*”

Shot: Cut back to: Long shot of men languishing with two women on the front porch of a wooden structure, one partially dressed. Sound-bridge from previous shot. The woman sitting in a rocking chair says, “*Yeah, I heard he was bringing one in.*”

Shot: American shot of group of men. A young man gazes toward Lalu and says, “*Hey look, there’s Hong King’s Chinese girl.*” The two other men turn their heads, fascinated by the new arrival. The camera follows as one of the men walks toward Lalu and Jim. “*Well, well...*”



Figure 10: Lalu and Jim approach the Idaho mining camp, which will become Lalu’s home in Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*

Gillian Armstrong’s My Brilliant Career:

The plot of Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career* is structured around Sybylla’s journey from girlhood to womanhood whilst she pursues her desire to become a writer in turn of the 20th century Australia. Sybylla’s journey is marked by the different places she traverses over the course of a year, starting and ending at her family’s ramshackle bush farm, Possum Gully. The entire journey is structured as follows: Sybylla as Unmarried Daughter at Possum Gully – Sybylla as Debutante at Grandma Bossier’s grand estate *Caddagat* – Sybylla as Lover at Harry Beecham’s grand estate Five Bob Downs – Sybylla as Governess at Barney’s Gap, the McSwatt’s muddy bush farm – Sybylla as Unmarried Novelist at Possum Gully. Like the classic Western hero, Sybylla chooses to remain unmarried in order to pursue her goals. Armstrong concludes her

film with a breathtaking wide-angle sunset shot, reminiscent of the Western. Though Armstrong does construct narrative conflicts in domestic troubles and romantic couplings, Sybylla spends a good deal of her time in epic Australian frontier spaces. Armstrong's frontier space is vast and empty (and devoid of any indigenous peoples). Like the Western hero, Sybylla seems to prefer the outdoors to the domestic sphere, which Armstrong depicts as either confining and dull (*Caddagat* and *Five Bob Downs*) or the site of rural domestic drudgery (*Possum Gully* and *Barney's Gap*). Despite Sybylla's desire to be a part of "the world of art literature, and music," Armstrong depicts her as most alive whilst climbing trees, taking long walks and dancing in the rain (see Figure 11).



Figure 11: Sybylla celebrating the rainfall amidst a drought, which has brought hard times to her family in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*

It is Armstrong's wide-open landscape that offers Sybylla escape from the middle-class marriage market. Armstrong depicts this with much humour in the Frank Hawdon proposal scene.

Shot: Follow shot of Sybylla walking. A wooden fence is foregrounded in the bottom edge of the frame. The background setting is the bush. Sybylla has a serious and determined look upon her face. Bleating sheep dominate the soundtrack. Sybylla comes to a stop and then climbs up onto the fence. She sits facing the bucolic empty landscape. A man's hand comes into the left side of the frame, and pulls on her long braid. It is Frank Hawdon. Startled Sybylla turns.



Figure 12: Sybylla pushes Frank into the sheep pen after refusing his proposal of marriage in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*

Shot: Medium 2-shot of Frank and Sybylla. Frank climbs up onto the fence beside Sybylla. He is dressed in an expensive English suit, and wears a large hat with an insect net. Unlike Sybylla who is dressed in a simple cotton dress and a straw sunhat, he seems very out of place. Frank speaks first. *"I enjoyed myself last night. I thought we got on jolly well together. Didn't you?"* Sybylla doesn't reply, but scowls. Frank is oblivious to her cool reception. He climbs over the fence to sit beside her. The background is made up of hundreds of sheep. *"Miss Melvyn - Sybylla. I've been thinking."* Sybylla starts to smirk, as if she were laughing at him. *"Well, looks aren't everything and... and um..."* Sybylla interrupts. *"Would you get to the point, Frank."* The sheep continue bleating, killing all chances of romance.

Frank goes on to propose marriage to Sybylla, who replies by pushing Frank off the fence to join the bleating sheep (see Figure 12). Sybylla trudges off alone away from Frank and the sheep. Armstrong sets Sybylla's second marriage proposal in wide-open spaces as well, but this time with Harry Beecham. In one of the final scenes of the film, Sybylla rejects the rich and handsome Harry, whilst covered in mud, her hair gone wild in the wind and the dust. Armstrong visually aligns Sybylla's feminist spirit to her relationship with the wide-open landscape, which does not try to contain or delimit her.



Figure 13: Butch posing in front of the stolen red Cadillac in Wilson's *My American Cousin*

Sandy Wilson's My American Cousin:

Wilson structures the coming-of-age story, *My American Cousin*, through the eyes of twelve-year old Sandy, who spends much of her time racing around the epic (and empty) British Columbia landscape pursuing the attentions of her older American cousin Butch. Like Sybylla in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* and Ada in Campion's *The Piano*, Sandy feels confined and delimited by domestic chores and societal expectations, and finds freedom on the open roads, particularly in Butch's (stolen) red Cadillac, much to the dismay her anxious parents. Wilson deploys speed as an important trope in the film, representing American glamour and sex (see Figure 13). In many ways Butch functions like the lone Western hero who blows into town and then moves on out, without a second glance backward. Unlike a typical Western, Wilson's story is not told through the lone hero's point of view. He is in fact rendered an object of female desire.

As in a Western, Butch's arrival at Paradise Ranch stirs things up, particularly Sandy's teenage sexual desires. Therefore, Wilson constructs the film's conflicts in the familial, though they are played out on the open roads against the majestic backdrop of British Columbia, a kind of virginal land. Wilson aligns Sandy's (white) virginity with the land, and both are seemingly under threat from young males and/or Americans. Throughout the film, Sandy's parents worry about the young male cherry pickers. "*And stay away from those pickers!*" Butch, in fact, refers to Sandy and her mother, Kitty, as cherries. "*One's too ripe and the other's too green.*" Later when Butch's father visits the Wilcox's farm he immediately sees an opportunity for economic exploitation. Major Wilcox is in a vulnerable position because his cherry orchard is a financial failure, and he is close to selling out.

Transgressing the Frontier through Female Voices and Silences

A key theme that is common throughout these revisionist feminist films is the suppression and silencing of the heroines' voices by patriarchal structures. All of these heroines experience issues with communicating or being heard, both literally and figuratively. Though these films feature female silence and communication issues, the filmmakers foreground the suppression of the female voice in the soundtracks of their films, echoing the work of Kaja Silverman (1988) on the female voice in the cinema. Central to Silverman's arguments is that the female voice is always embodied, which means it has little or no discursive authority. According to Silverman it is the disembodied voice that has the most authority. Silverman deploys Irigaray's (*This Sex Which is Not One* and *Speculum*) theories of "feminine language," in her analysis of Hollywood sound regimes.

The female subject, on the other hand, is excluded from positions of discursive power both inside and outside the classic filmic diegesis; she is confined not only to the safe place *of* the story, but to the safe places *within* the story (to positions, that is, which come within the eventual range of male vision and audition). Both

constituents of the surveillance system – visual and auditory – must be in effect for it to be really successful. To permit a female character to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes which define woman as “enigma,” inaccessible to definitive male interpretation. To allow her to be heard without being seen would be even more dangerous, since it would disrupt the specular regime upon which dominant cinema relies; it would put her beyond the reach of the male gaze (which stands in her for the cultural “camera”) and release her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze enforces.²²

One important method the filmmakers use throughout these revisionist frontier films is the disembodied female voice, primarily through the devices of voice-over narration and the voice-off. These devices establish the heroines as not only the leading protagonists in the narrative, but as authorial voices. Throughout these films the male voice is rendered ineffectual or silent, and is often relegated to interior spaces. This is particularly true of powerful patriarchs. Another key way these filmmakers foreground the female voice is by rendering “visible” female silence.

Jane Campion's The Piano

Voice and sound are central to Jane Campion's *The Piano*. The central heroine, Ada, is a mute (interestingly by choice), and must speak through her seven-year old, who renders Ada childlike in the eyes of her husband and the larger settler community. Despite Ada's muteness, which is her defining characteristic, Campion opens and closes *The Piano* with Ada speaking to us directly in voice-over narration. It is the only time we hear Ada's “speaking” voice in the film. Though Ada's father has shipped her and her daughter Flora off to New Zealand, we never hear him and only see a glimpse of him; his specular power diminished. Despite the power he wields over his daughter and granddaughter, Campion affords him very little screen time, and no dialogue. The film's opening exemplifies Campion's use of the female voice as both disembodied and enigmatic.

Shot: Extreme close angle on Ada's eyes peering through her own fingers. She gazes into the camera lens. Ada says in voice-over: *"The voice you hear is not my speaking voice, but my mind's voice."*

Shot: Close angle distorted subjective point of view shot through Ada's fingers.

Shot: Cut back to previous shot. Ada's V/O: *"I have not spoken since I was six years old."*

Shot: Wide angle on Flora on her pony. Her grandfather holds the reins. Ada's V/O: *"No one knows why. Not even me."*

Shot: Medium-long angle crane shot of Ada crouching under a tree. She stands, and the camera trucks upward, Ada falling out of frame. Ada re-enters frame, now a high angle bird's-eye-view vantage point. Camera follows Ada as she walks along the grass. Ada's V/O: *"My father says it is a dark talent. And the day I take it into my head to stop breathing will be my last."*

Ada's narration may be strange but it has dramatic agency. The next lines she speaks are: *"Today he has married me to a man I have not yet met. Soon my daughter and I will join him in his own country. My husband said my muteness does not bother him."* From here the dramatic action is set in motion. What will bother Ada's husband however is her will – a will that is so powerful he cannot suppress it, though he certainly tries. And though Ada is mute, her will has so much power it eventually "speaks" to Stewart. In the film's climactic scenes, the confrontation between Ada's husband Alistair and her lover Baines, in which Alistair holds Baines at gunpoint, Campion foregrounds Ada's voice.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Stewart. *"Has Ada ever spoken to you?"*

Shot: Medium-long angle on Baines, sitting on side of bed. Alistair is on the edge of the frame, a gun pointing at Baines. *"You mean in signs?"*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Stewart. *"No, words. Have you ever heard words?"*

Shot: Medium-long angle on Baines. *"No, not words."* Alistair voice-off: *"You never thought you heard words?"* Baines shakes his head no.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Stewart. He touches his head with the hand that isn't holding the gun. He says, *"I heard it here. I heard her voice here in my head. I watched her lips. They didn't make the words, but the harder I listened, the clearer I heard her."* Baines off-screen says, *"You punished her wrongly."*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Baines. *"It was me - my fault."*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Stewart. *"She said, 'I'm afraid of my will, of what it might do. It is so strange and strong'. She said, 'I have to go. Let me go'."*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Baines. Stewart off-screen, *"Let Baines take me away. Let him try and save me."*

It is Ada's voice (in Stewart's head) that in the end saves Baines, Ada's daughter, and herself from Stewart's mad rage, which leads him to chop off Ada's finger with an ax. Ada's voice is so powerful it transcends conventional speech and discourse. Ada is a kind of enigmatic feminine spirit, a kind of "dark talent," the sort from tales of old. However, unlike classic Gothic melodrama or even horror, *Campion* does not disavow Ada's voice (and silence) as Other or monstrous. It has the power to block patriarchal violence.

Maggie Greenwald's The Ballad of Little Jo

Voice is also foregrounded in Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*. Josephine uses her voice as a key part of her construction of "Little Jo." Voice is in fact a matter of life and death. If Josephine fails to convincingly sound masculine, she knows she will be arrested for "dressing improper to her sex" or banished or perhaps even killed. As she witnesses, the (white male) residents of Ruby City are not above lynching as a way of dealing with misfits. This voice is gruff, clipped, commanding, and unemotional. It is exemplified in the following scene between Little Jo and her new Chinese house servant, Tinman Wong (Tien Mien Wong).

Shot: Two shot long angle on Little Jo and Tinman. Tinman places a fork and knife in front of Little Jo. Little Jo sits stiffly, like a "rough-around-the-edges" man would. "*Thought the meal was supposed to be ready when I got home.*" Tinman replies, "*I did not know what time. Tomorrow it will be ready.*" Tinman rushes around in the background and then presents a plate of food to Little Jo. Little Jo takes a bite. "*Needs pepper.*"

The "Little Jo" voice is never polite, never hesitant, and never apologetic, unlike Tinman's voice. Tinman's voice on the other hand has no authority and power in society. Indeed, it is Little Jo who talks Frank Badger and his drunken racist friends out of lynching Tinman, although she also uses her gun to emphasize her point. "*Cut him down, Frank!*" Frank complies. Saving Tinman from the lynch mob is just another strange act that sets Little Jo apart from the

other white rough necks in town. However, no one discriminates against Little Jo because *he* is in fact one of them – white, male, and propertied. This is the irony in the film. Though Josephine’s masculine voice helps her to hide as Little Jo, it also makes her more visible. As a white man and property owner, Little Jo can vote and even run for political positions, which makes her a legitimate subject in the eyes of society. This social visibility is of course dangerous for Josephine, and for Tinman. Danger always looms close to the surface.

Greenwald never completely silences Josephine’s real voice, her feminine voice. Though the residents of Ruby City never hear this voice, a few privileged people do: Josephine’s sister Helen, Little Jo’s lover Tinman, and us. Though Josephine has been banished from her home and “society,” she keeps up letter correspondence with her sister, who is raising Josephine’s child. Greenwald uses the letter-writing device throughout the film, which we hear in voice-over narration spoken by Josephine. The letters between the sisters give Jo a connection to her former life as a woman, as well as her role as a mother. Jo’s sister does not forfeit Josephine’s motherhood, as society has forced her to do. Interestingly, Josephine’s banishment is voiced through the household patriarch. *“I want that whore out of my house! Out of my sight! She and her bastard can die in the street!”* This patriarchal damnation is echoed later in the film by Percy, someone who becomes a father figure to Little Jo, and who learns of Little Jo’s real identity after reading one of Jo’s sister’s letters.

Shot: Close angle on Percy’s hand offering a letter. Jo’s hand comes into frame, and takes the letter. Camera tilts up to Jo’s face, gazing at the letter. She glances at Percy, and then down to the letter. She then turns to read the letter. Camera pulls out to reveal Percy in the foreground, rubbing his eyes. Jo’s V/O: *“Dear Sister, I have laid awake nights picturing you in your wild wanderings with your boy pressed tightly in my arms. I have prayed to a merciful God to keep you safe and unharmed.”* Jo puts down the letter. Jo is out of focus in background of the shot. Jo asks, *“You read it?”* Percy does not look at Jo, but faces away from her in direction of the camera. *“You made a fool out of me, JOSEPHINE.”* Jo removes her hat. *“I didn’t intend to do that, Percy.”* Percy continues, *“I took you in, thinking you were such a pathetic boy. I was going to make a man out of*

you.” Jo replies, “*You taught me a lot, Percy. You gave me guidance, helped me learn to survive...*” Percy pauses and then turns to face Jo. “*But, you’re a female.*” Percy stalks toward Jo. “*And a whore at that, if I understood that letter correctly.*” Percy grabs Jo and tries to kiss her. He then attempts to rape her.

Though Jo and Percy have formed a “father-son” bond of sorts, as soon as Percy discovers Jo’s true identity through the sister’s letter, Little Jo ceases to be a person in his eyes. Greenwald’s use of the letter-writing device is common to the melodrama, particularly in Hollywood women’s films of the 1940s and 50s. It is rarely used in Westerns. Mary Ann Doane argued that devices such as letter writing in melodramas construct a “presence-in-absence” effect, which involves the heroine being separated from her object of desire.²³ In the case of Jo, her desired object is her son, whom she has been separated from. According to Doane, in many cases, the women’s film “activates an entire apparatus of waiting, near misses, separations and accidentals meetings.” In regard to the letter-writing device, deception, particularly around identity, is a key trait.²⁴ In contrast to the 1940s women’s film, Greenwald deploys the sisters’ letter correspondence as social commentary on Jo’s suppression of her female/feminine voice, rather than a melodramatic device to covertly express female desires.

Nancy Kelly’s Thousand Pieces of Gold

The silencing and suppression of the female voice is foregrounded in Kelly’s *Thousand Piece of Gold*. As a Chinese woman in the primarily English-speaking American West, Lulu has to overcome language barriers. Lulu discovers early on that learning the white man’s language is essential to her survival, especially with regard to resisting sexual exploitation and gaining financial independence. In fact, it is not until Lulu learns to speak like a white man, that she finds the tools for resistance and agency. Charlie, her white male lover teaches her the two words she will use as her mantra throughout her enslavement to Hong King – “*no whore.*” Here Kelly

seems to be espousing the “no means no” slogan of the anti-rape campaign of the women’s movement. Though Hong King rapes Lalu for his own pleasure, Lalu manages to convince Hong King not to make her “one hundred men’s wife.” In this sense, words have power, although they are white men’s words taught to Lalu by a white man, one who has personal motives for keeping Lalu out of the prostitution game. (Charlie has no qualms about visiting the other prostitutes in town). Lalu’s Chinese mother tongue is rendered powerless throughout the film. When Lalu speaks Chinese it is either not understood or intercepted by Hong King through his interpretation for the white “demons.” Even the letters Lalu writes to her family back in China are never answered.

Gillian Armstrong’s My Brilliant Career

Armstrong opens and concludes *My Brilliant Career* with Sybylla reading/writing from her autobiographical novel, which she asserts, unapologetically, is “all about *me*.” The narrative follows Sybylla’s book structure, which represents the development of her identity as a young Australian female writer. Sybylla has to discover who “me” is as she takes on various personas throughout the film; bush farmer’s daughter, servant, debutante, entertainer, governess, and eventually writer. Through this discovery journey, Sybylla takes on various types of female voices across the class divide, discovering that none of them have much power. Sybylla realizes that to truly be a “me,” to become a full subject, she must never speak in any of these female voices. She finds herself by writing “all about me.” In this sense the film is an indictment of the power of words and voice. As Sybylla writes,

So, now I’ve written it all down. Why? To try and make sense of it. It may come out sounding like a couple of nails in a rusty tin pot. My ineffectual life may be trod in the same round of toil. But I want to tell everyone about my own people. How I love them and pity them, pity us all.

In regard to the male voice though, Armstrong exposes the gender inequity in a patriarchal system, male voices are accorded little power on (or off) screen. Sybylla's father never speaks in the film, though he has enormous power in her life. When he does appear in the frame, it is as a small figure in wide-angle landscape shots, or on the periphery of the interior shots, sitting in a chair looking haggard and exhausted. Armstrong renders Frank Hawdon a complete fool throughout the film; he speaks in a clipped upper class British accent. Harry Beecham's voice is the only strong male voice in the film, although it never has the power of persuasion. When Harry does make his very earnest and emotional marriage proposal, Sybylla does not bend to his will. Even when he promises anything she wants, Sybylla can only reply with "*I'd destroy you.*" Even Sybylla's Uncle Jamie is told to hold his tongue by his mother, the grand matriarch Grandma Bossier, with whom he still lives. It is Sybylla's mother's and grandmother's voices that are assigned authority in the sound regime of the film. This will be examined in further detail in the next chapter on motherhood and the maternal.

Sandy Wilson's My American Cousin

Wilson's *My American Cousin* foregrounds the female voice, deploying the tropes of romance and melodrama, albeit through a comic lens. The film is bookended with Sandy's voice-over narration, excerpts from her top-secret diary, which express her perspectives and desires from a teenage point of view. However, the film is not exclusively constructed through a teenage vision. In fact, the film opens with a layering of different diegetic and non-diegetic female voices.

Shot: Wide-angle bird's-eye-view shot of the isolated Wilcox home at night, situated at the edge of a lake amidst epic British Columbia landscape. A woman's voice sings, "*Some enchanted evening.*" Camera zooms in to a closer view of house. Sounds of children. Sound bridge of Sandy's voice, "*Dear diary...*"

Shot: Close angle on a page from Sandy's diary. Sandy continues, "*NOTHING EVER HAPPENS!*" The words are printed out in big letters across the page. Camera zooms out to reveal Sandy sitting in her bed. The song *Some Enchanted Evening* continues playing. There is a sound bridge: Sandy's mother's voice says in an overtly dramatic manner: "*From now on you have a hold over me!*"

Shot: Long take. Interior shot of Kitty, Sandy's mother, in her robe turning down the lights and tidying up living room area. She carries a script from Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* in her hand. She walks determinedly toward the camera. The camera follows her as she approaches her husband, John Wilcox, hunched over a calculator. "*John, you're always adding up numbers and we still never have any money.*" John replies, "*Well, if it hadn't been so cold this winter we would have come out ahead this year.*" Kitty yells at the kids to settle down. She turns her attention back to her husband and offers him a look of exasperation, perhaps meant for both the kids and him. Kitty walks away leaving John to his calculator. Here the patriarch, "The Major," is framed sitting dejectedly in a chair hunched over his adding machine.

The ironic use of the song about love and enchantment underscores the idea of domestic bliss.

Though Sandy's father has a significant presence in the film, his voice is also attributed little power in the sound of the film. He is apologetic, his voice lacking authority or confidence.

Revising The Myth of The Frontier Through a Decolonizing Lens: White Complicity

The key way Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986) and Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986) differ from both the revisionist and deconstructing films is in their exploration of how white complicity is constructed by, and enables, colonial oppression and violence. Though Wheeler and Bailey are white filmmakers, they both have roots in social issue documentary, specifically at the National Film Board of Canada, and had previously made documentary films about the Métis community.²⁵ The social realist aesthetic is antithetical to the Hollywood "dream machine." As in the case of Mita's *Mauri*, the "everyday" is privileged in the frame, and Wheeler and Bailey often cast real people over professional actors. Like the deconstructing films, Wheeler and Bailey privilege the role of a matrifocal community and family over individualism. Both Wheeler and Bailey structure their films through a Métis female point of view. Their themes are rooted in indigenous community agency and resistance. However, like the revisionist frontier films,

Wheeler and Bailey's films follow a linear structure and adhere to genre and classical narrative conventions.

As with melodramas, Wheeler and Bailey structure their films' conflicts around an adversary, a villain, who preys on women and children. In these films the villain is in the form of a powerful white patriarch. In Wheeler's *Loyalties* the villain is Dr. Sutton, a pedophile-rapist, and in Bailey's *The Wake* it is Officer Crawford, a racist cop. Both men are authority figures, and wield power, not only over women and children, but also over other men, both indigenous and white. As in the Western, these powerful men also wield their power over frontier spaces, and they do it through their authority-status and through violence. In Bailey's *The Wake*, Officer Crawford seems to think he owns the roads he patrols, and has a reputation for harassing and "beating up on" Indians whenever he can. In Wheeler's *Loyalties*, Dr. Sutton is the owner of a large area of land, formerly belonging to indigenous peoples. Dr. Sutton lets his Métis nanny and her family picnic on his land seemingly out of generosity, although he is in fact acting out of his own selfish perverse drives as a child serial rapist. Dr. Sutton will later rape Roseanne's teenage daughter, Leona, on that land. Complicit white characters are privy to the crimes and racist violence that these powerful white patriarchs commit not only against indigenous people, but also white women and children. Wheeler and Bailey construct white complicity at the centre of the films' narrative crises.

Wheeler structures *Loyalties* around Lily's gaze and voice, which shifts from a colonizing masculine logic to a decolonizing one. This shift represents Lily's and the narrative's dramatic arc. As in most of the revisionist films, the "angel in the house" figure is a central trope. Here it is represented not only as a patriarchal construct but also as a colonial one. Lily's unhappiness is not rooted in her unfulfilled dreams, stifled by her "gilded cage" or her forced re-

location to a remote Canadian frontier, but by her performance as the “angel in the house,” which renders her as the perfect front for her husband’s sexual deviances and crimes. However, the “angle in the house” role renders Lily’s gaze and voice powerless. Wheeler depicts this in various ways. One of the key (silent) shots in the film frames Lily in front of her bedroom mirror wearing child-like pigtails and a nightgown. For a moment Lily actually contemplates playing into her husband’s perversities by dressing up like a little girl. After gazing at herself as a “child,” Lily takes out the pigtails, and sighs. The “unspeakable” has been spoken in one disturbing silent gesture and shot. Lily not only tries to see herself through her husband’s distorted gaze, she passively resigns herself to remaining invisible and silent. This is one of the key moments in the film, when we realize Lily isn’t the “damsel in distress” we initially thought she was. Instead we realize she is just weak and passive. By depicting Lily as weak, our identification and empathy begins to shift entirely to Roseanne, an impoverished Métis single-mother of two.

Unlike Lily, Roseanne is the moral centre of Wheeler’s narrative. She and her family are victimized by colonial oppression and violence. Roseanne is poor and she suffers physical abuse at the hands of her boyfriend, Eddy, who is just another frustrated unemployed Métis man. Unlike Lily, Roseanne is not passive, although she seemingly has less power than Lily in regard to socio-economic status and race. Wheeler positions Roseanne as the moral centre in various ways. From the first moment Roseanne meets Dr. Sutton, she is wary of him. After she suffers a beating from Eddy in the local Tavern, Dr. Sutton is called to Roseanne’s “rescue.” Treating her wounds, Sutton acts the perfect gentleman, although he’s flirtatious. On the surface, Wheeler depicts Dr. Sutton as the “good guy” who takes pity on the poor battered “pretty” Indian woman, just another mistreated and downtrodden “squaw.” Sutton appears the antithesis of Eddy, who is uneducated, unemployed, alcoholic, violent, and indigenous. However, Wheeler soon dismantles what Spivak

calls the “white men saving brown women from brown men” script. Roseanne immediately distrusts Sutton, although she doesn’t express this lack of trust verbally. Instead, she practices a few decolonizing strategies of resistance. After each flirtation Roseanne stares Sutton down. By her unwavering gaze she refuses to be an object of his white male desire. Because Wheeler has set us up to identify and empathize with Roseanne in the narrative, we accept her judgment about Sutton. He is no white knight come to rescue anyone. He is the “beast in the boudoir.”

Wheeler visually subverts the colonial script of “white men saving brown women” in the final scenes of the film. After Roseanne and Lily discover to their horror Dr. Sutton raping Leona, Roseanne turns to Lily and screams, “*What kind of woman are you?! Bitch!*” Like Roseanne, we can’t believe Lily has remained silent and complicit about Sutton’s violent criminal past. Lily’s silence and passivity is as much to blame for the rape of Leona, as is Dr. Sutton’s deviance. Finally, after witnessing the realities of her husband’s perverse desires, Lily does the thing she knows she is supposed to do. She turns her gun on Roseanne and tells her to “*get out.*” At first we assume Lily is going to protect her husband yet again, but her gesture of aggression towards Roseanne is not one of complicity, it is one of courage. It is the only way to protect Roseanne, not from Sutton but from herself. Through this gesture of violence, Wheeler reworks the lone hero’s act of gun violence at the end of the Western leading to justice and retribution. However, the real act of heroism on Lily’s part is to turn her husband in, and then ask for Roseanne’s forgiveness. Wheeler’s final shot of the film represents feminist resistance through female collectivity, across the lines of race and class. Roseanne and her mother Beatrice invite Lily and her children into their small cramped home. This imagery was deployed in the promotional materials for the film (see Figure 14).

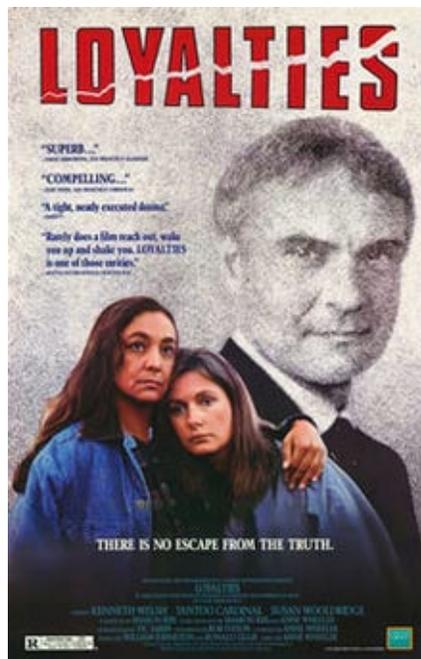


Figure 14: Roseanne embracing the distraught Lily in promotional materials for Wheeler's *Loyalties*

Bailey's *The Wake* focuses on similar issues to *Loyalties*, Bailey's story centers on Joan, a young Métis single-mother, who enters into a relationship with Jim, a well-intentioned white RCMP officer, causing tensions between her and her close-knit Métis community. Bailey's film subverts the sentimental tendency of romance and melodrama. Here romantic love is neither depicted as all-powerful or tragic. Rather Bailey plays with the conventions of the romance, as well as the Western, here to explore the theme of white complicity in the colonial oppression of indigenous people.

Bailey constructs white complicity in the figure of Joan's lover, Jim, the RCMP officer. In many ways Jim functions as the contemporary version of the classic lone hero cowboy type, and romantic leading man, but in the figure of the "good" cop. Most Western narratives are driven by the good guy/bad guy dichotomy, but Bailey dismantles such binaries. Though Jim's

partner, Officer Crawford is a racist bully who asserts his domination through violence, Jim, like Lily in Wheeler's *Loyalties*, passively stands by and watches, albeit with a sense of guilt and powerlessness. Here Bailey seems to pose two questions: Who is more to blame, the active bully or the bystander? And how is complicity embedded in racist oppression? Like Dr. Sutton in Wheeler's *Loyalties*, Officer Crawford bullies the powerless and the voiceless, such as Donna and her younger siblings, as well as Donna's fellow Métis teenage friends. Crawford even bullies Jim because he is lower ranked in the force. The RCMP hierarchy ensures a system of silence and obedience amongst white men of authority. On Bailey's contemporary frontier there is no space for "good guys." Jim wants to protect his job more than he wants to protect Joan, Joan's children, or Donna and her friends, all who end up dead at Crawford's hand. However, like Wheeler, Bailey never represents Métis characters as voiceless victims.

Bailey's mise-en-scene is marked by powerful iconic images of Métis resistance and empowerment as a community. As with Wheeler's frame in *Loyalties*, community resistance is privileged as a means of decolonizing frontier spaces. Bailey privileges the theme of Métis community bonding in her frame. Bailey's opening images are of a Métis wedding/wake, and the closing images are of a Métis wake, held for the teens tragically driven to their deaths by Officer Crawford. Bailey introduces us to Joan, dressed in bridesmaid pink, helping a young groom push his car out of snow bank. Later on at the wedding/wake, Joan, still dressed in her pink dress, gets into fisticuffs with her absentee husband in the snow, who refuses "to let into" her because she has "five or six brothers" inside. Though Joan's brothers have little dialogue, Bailey infuses her mise-en-scene with their presence. Bailey's method is exemplified in the film's final scene. The scene depicts two actions, a guilt-ridden Jim driving to the wake for the Métis teen at the Métis community centre, and Jim being barred from entry to the wake by Joan's brothers. Joan is inside

mourning with her children, and her cousin Donna, who has survived the “accident.” There is no dialogue, only gesture. The brothers stand in unison barring Jim’s entry. Jim is not permitted to relieve his guilt or share his grief on their territory. Dejected and guilt-ridden Jim drives away from the wake, and, hence, his relationship with Joan. Bailey’s last image is a wide-angle shot of Joan’s brothers protecting the entrance to their community’s place of gathering and mourning.

Conclusion

“This was a love story where a heroine turned the guy down. And it seems quite strange now, but truly twenty-five years ago that was like a completely radical thing to do - for the happy couple not to end up together and for the woman to be the one who actually made the decision. I remember Greater Union, they were one of the investors, and who distributed the film in Australia, and David Williams was the head of Greater Union, and in every way was passionate about the film, but he was very nervous when we were making it. I did have some meetings where he said he wasn’t sure about that ending. He felt it might make audiences angry, and especially might make women angry. I said, David I really believe in the end. People will understand Sybylla’s point of view when she says ‘not now.’ If you’re a real romantic you can believe, okay, well maybe she’ll run into Harry in ten year’s time walking down a street in Paris, and there he’ll be.

- Gillian Armstrong²⁶

It’s like with The Piano, I was asked to give my opinion of that, and my opinion of it wasn’t that high. There are other works of Jane Campion’s that I like better. So I was out of line with the rest of the world who deemed it to be a masterpiece or a work of art or something. I thought that the Māori characters were very flawed. ... They were sort of draped around the shrubbery and stuff like some kind of spectacle, you know, hovering. And I thought to myself, my gosh, the Māori are a hovering kind of people.²⁷

- Merata Mita

How do the different sub-groupings of these women’s frontier themed films reflect or rather frame feminist theories of genre, narrative and voice? In the decolonizing frontier films (Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, Mita’s *Mauri*, and Moffatt’s *Bedevil*) and the revisionist-decolonizing films (Wheeler’s *Loyalties* and Bailey’s *The Wake*), key Western tropes are deconstructed and destabilized in order to foreground subaltern female points of view and experiences. Across these five films the ignoble/noble savage and the Indian Princess/Squaw dichotomies are dismantled, and white men, the traditional “heroes” of the frontier, along with

their helpmates, white women, are rendered passive, silent or invisible. However, *Daughters* at times seems to hold onto the long-held myth of the “vanishing Indian” through its portrayal of St. Julian Last Child, the Cherokee Indian who runs away with Iona. Dash has been criticized for her representation of indigenous people in her film. In regard to the Gothic and horror, Wheeler, Bailey, and Moffatt rewrite the codes of the horror in order to render visible how colonial violence and exploitation, as well as white complicity, still prey upon and haunt indigenous communities.

Where these two groups of films differ is in their aesthetics. The key way Dash, Moffatt, and Mita construct a subaltern female point of view is through a non-linear multi-voice structure, rooted in oral storytelling practices and rituals with strong ties to the different subaltern cultures and histories depicted in the films. Wheeler and Bailey construct a narrative driven by a Métis female perspective, but they are not multi-voiced and move the Métis male characters to a peripheral place in the story. Made for television, these two films were not aimed at the art-house market and would have been pressured to construct accessible narratives with one central protagonist aimed at a female audience. In many ways Bailey and Wheeler adhere to the conventions of the “weepie” made popular in the 1940s, but also exemplify the political power of melodrama through their condemnation of white complicity and a conclusion that privileges Métis female knowledge and lived experiences.

In the five revisionist films, the female voice and desire are a foreground concern, and focus on the individual. These films take up the challenge posed by Mulvey, de Lauretis, Doane, Silverman, et al, that female desire is not possible in the entertainment cinema. Greenwald, Champion, Wilson, and Kelly revision the melodrama as a “genre sérieux,” and deploy its many devices and conventions to construct female voices and desires, although in these cases outside

the domestic domain. The filmmakers challenge the Western's key trait of being a "womanless milieu" by structuring their frontier stories through female points of view and experiences. The key problem with these filmmakers' revisioning of the frontier is that it is a space devoid of indigenous people, except of course for Campion's *The Piano*, where the representation of the Maori people is problematic to say the least. Interestingly, even in the Westerns under study here, Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* and Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, there is no indigenous presence. This is curious because other marginalized groups are represented here, such as prostitutes and the Chinese. In one somewhat heavy-handed scene in Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, a freed black man makes his one and only appearance in the film, his sole purpose being to inform Lalu that slavery is illegal. Perhaps the Chinese are supposed to serve as a substitute for indigenous people, as if there can be only one oppressed marginalized subaltern group. Or perhaps the films fall into the trap of accepting the "vanishing Indian" myth, as Dash does. In one particularly disturbing scene in Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, a gang of (white) thugs murders an entire family of Russian white settlers. The scene is bloody and violent, and perhaps rooted in historical fact. However, without Greenwald making any reference to the mass slaughtering of indigenous people on the frontier, the film ends up rendering invisible that central part of frontier history. Did Greenwald want to skirt around Little Jo's complicity as a white settler in the colonization of the frontier? Here the conventions of the Western kick in. The white "male" protagonist has to remain heroic and untainted by colonial violence.

Chapter 3: Filming Frontier Spaces Through the Lens of Motherhood

I am not a big authoritative voice on the set. I have heard film-directing equated to a large army with the director as colonial, but I see it as a large family with the director as mother.¹

- Anne Wheeler, *Loyalties*

I prefer narratives to documentaries because of my mother. She'd come home from work, and I'd say, "Would you come downtown? There's going to be a film showing that we made." She'd reply, "Is it a documentary?" And I'd say "Yeah." "Oh, I'll see it later," she'd reply. So I never forgot that. She was tired and wanted to see a movie. It was like, I'm not getting out of this bed to go down the street to see a documentary." She wanted to see a story.²

- Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*

For Edith.

- Jane Campion dedicated *The Piano* to her mother.

Across this body of women's frontier films mothers play a central role. Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988), Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986), Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) all feature central heroines who are mothers. Though Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985) structure their narratives through the point of view of daughters, mother characters play a significant role in their daughters' journeys toward selfhood. In Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991) there are no mothers, although maternal figures play an important role. These filmmakers construct visual and sound regimes through a female desire that is overridingly maternal. This maternal desire often animates the films' plots, and a number of the films are working within the conventions of the maternal melodrama. Within these films the filmmakers deploy the motif of motherhood and the maternal as a key method to reimagine a frontier as space for feminist resistance and agency. However, the filmmakers represent motherhood and the maternal in differing ways, revealing conflicting attitudes and feelings about

its role in feminism. These tensions and differences reflect and engage with many of the debates around motherhood that were at the forefront of the women's movement and feminist scholarship preceding and during the period in which the films were made.

The Motherhood Debates

*Whatever the approach, motherhood is a barometer for the analysis of differences between feminists, as well as a prime site for feminist intervention.*³

- Erica Burman

Within feminism, motherhood has been a polarizing issue. Feminist were divided over how and why the role of motherhood and the maternal figured in women's struggle for feminist agency and resistance against gender inequity and oppression. The key division was between second-wave white liberal feminists and anti-racists/anti-colonial feminists who had profoundly different histories and cultural connections to motherhood and the maternal. However, even within second-wave feminism there were strong divisions mainly across the theoretical divide.

Second-Wave Feminist Scholarship

Some second-wave feminists argued that the role of motherhood had been co-opted by patriarchy as a central tool for maintaining gender oppression, not only in society, but also within the home. These feminists sought change through redefining, re-imagining or reconstructing motherhood and the maternal through an anti-patriarchal lens. Some of the key themes that emerged out of the motherhood debates within second-wave scholarship were: the oppressive role of motherhood, the "cult of motherhood" in Western culture and discourse, and the reclaiming of the maternal. These themes are reflected across a number of these frontier films.

"The Problem With No Name"

In 1963 Betty Freidan's seminal text *The Feminine Mystique* helped ignite the second-wave woman's movement. Freidan identified women's delimited role as a mother in the home as

the “the problem with no name.” Her solution to the “problem” was for women to seek “female fulfillment” outside the household, through the pursuit of education and “meaningful work.”⁴ Freidan’s call to action was largely aimed at white middle-class women, and was taken up by the white liberal feminist movement of the 1970s. These feminists argued that gender equity in society was only possible through gender equity in the home.

Many feminists argued against biological determinism that asserted women were indelibly tied to their reproductive bodies and had a natural instinct and affinity for mothering and caregiving. These feminists argued against the culturally upheld belief that women were born to be mothers. They maintained that this was not only unhealthy for women, but for society as a whole. Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) noted “that the sexual division of labour reflects assumptions about female and male biology which link female roles to childbearing and mothering and male roles to history-making.”⁵ In fact, Dinnerstein argued that the intense mother-child bond is not only problematic for women’s wellbeing, but also unhealthy for the child.

Central to the structural weakness built into our species’ life is an imbalance between the overwhelming sturdiness of the mother-infant pair and the fragility of the father-infant pair. It is this imbalance – given the mental complexity of human young – that makes the internal stresses of the parent-child triangle so fatefully hard to handle. The special and exclusive bond between women and children underlies the half-recognized monstrosity implicit in the mermaid and the minotaur myths. We lean heavily on this bond; yet it is part of a congenital deformity that we must outgrow before it kills us off.⁶

Nancy Chodorow (1978), using Freud’s Oedipal Complex, argued that the way we are mothered is fundamentally linked to the sexual division of labour and gender inequality.⁷ In the

Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories Lorraine Code claims Chodorow’s scholarship “shaped American feminist thinking about female and male psycho-sexual development and women’s apparently natural desires to bear and raise children as contributors to women’s oppression.”⁸

Jane Lazarre (1976) saw the necessity of foregrounding and rendering visible the everyday

realities of pregnancy and mothering, debunking rigid stereotypes of the “good mother.” In her autobiographical *The Mother-Knot* (1976) Lazarre offered a very honest account of the fears, anxieties, and joys of motherhood. Though Lazarre argued there can be fulfillment in becoming a mother, it is rife with unspoken difficulties and isolating. Maureen T. Reddy highlights Lazarre as “one of the few writers to take as her central theme maternal subjectivity.”

I read *The Mother-Knot* that first time greedily, hungrily, thrilled to find affirmation of my own ambivalence, my powerful love for my son, and my utter despair that I would ever be free of his demands again.⁹

Shulamith Firestone took a more radical approach. In *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970), Firestone argued that women were disadvantaged in society by “barbaric” reproductive processes related to childrearing, and advocated for scientific solutions in reproductive technologies, better state-run childcare facilities, and women’s access to birth control. Firestone strongly maintained that in order for women to gain socio-economic equality they must gain ownership over their own bodies.¹⁰ Many feminists, however, argued that it was not enough or even possible to re-structure society in a more gender equitable way without addressing culture constructions, i.e., gender stereotypes.

Institutionalized Motherhood

She is intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.¹¹

- Virginia Woolf (1931)

Virginia Woolf saw the necessity of “killing” this all-sacrificing angel she described above in order for women to break free from patriarchal oppression and control, and in order to become writers, and hence, full subjects. Interestingly, Woolf was never a mother herself, and

largely attributes her success to that fact. Anglo-American white feminists in the 1960s and 70s took up Woolf's call for change. Like Woolf they viewed the "angel in the house" as *the* site of women's oppression, identifying the "cult of true womanhood" as in fact the "cult of motherhood." The cult of motherhood was seen to be rooted in Christian morality, in which women were placed on a pedestal as mother, but only if they were selflessly devoted to their children, sacrificial, and invisible. Feminists argued that such gender stereotypes, deeply rooted in Western culture and language, were to blame for gender inequity and oppression because they normalized and naturalized motherhood as a female calling.

In *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), Ann Oakley identified women's oppressive role in the household as wife and mother as culturally constructed.¹² Oakley argued that the economic dependence of the "housewife" on the "head of the family" was a key element in the patriarchal family and the economy. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Adrienne Rich argued that motherhood under our modern patriarchal system had become a patriarchal institution, but it had been ingrained in our minds as a "sacred calling" and "natural." Rich argued,

Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self. Motherhood is "sacred" so long as its offspring are "legitimate" – that is, as long as the child bears the name of the father who legally controls the mother. It is "woman's highest and holiest mission," according to a socialist tract of 1914; and a racist southern historian of 1910 tells us that "woman is the embodied home, and home is the basis of all institutions, the buttress of society."¹³

Gayle Rubin (1975) advocated for feminists to resolve the Oedipal crisis of culture, in which "the mother is unavailable to either child because she 'belongs' to the father."¹⁴ Within these scripts the mother can never be a full subject. Rubin argued,

The children discover the differences between the sexes, and that each child must become one or the other gender. They also discover the incest taboo, and that some sexuality is prohibited – in this case, the mother is unavailable to either child because she “belongs” to the father. Lastly, they discover that the two genders do not have the same sexual “rights” or futures.¹⁵

A Maternal Lens

Other feminists advocated the reclaiming of the maternal and motherhood as a site for women’s empowerment and resistance. Rich argued for the “pre-patriarchal” features of motherhood, stating that women’s desire, knowledge, and power is rooted in a female maternal body. Rich wrote,

The loss of the daughter to the mother, mother to daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy, but there is no presently enduring recognition of the mother-daughter passion and rapture.¹⁶

The “French Feminists” were strong advocates of re-constructing language through a maternal lens. Like Rubin and Rich they advocated for a rewriting of Oedipal scripts, which had traditionally disavowed and marginalized maternal “embodied knowledge.” Hélène Cixous (1976) advocated for “white ink”, a revolutionary writing that was rooted in the maternal body. Cixous argued,

It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was “born” to her.... In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes.¹⁷

In “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini” (1975) Julia Kristeva reclaimed the maternal as a site of empowerment and female subjectivity; Kristeva wrote the essay while pregnant with her son. Expanding on and challenging the work of Lacan, Kristeva argued that female subjectivity was only possible by rejecting the Law of the Father embedded in an oppressive “paternal

tongue.” To resist patriarchal oppression Kristeva advocated for a language that is “pre-lingual” before the infant child enters the Mirror Stage (Lacan) or the Oedipal complex (Freud). This maternal space is where mother first bonds with child, before he/she sees sexual difference, but this bond is created through the child’s connection with the maternal reproductive body; it’s a corporeal language. Kristeva called this stage the “semiotic,” a pre-paternal language akin to motherhood and pregnancy “which seems to be impelled also by a non-symbolic, non-paternal causality.”¹⁸ Kristeva in general rejected all forms of authority, hierarchy and rules, and embraced a “structure” that is rooted in fluidity. Kristeva presented motherhood and pregnancy as metaphors rather than experiences.

Anti-racist and Anti-colonial Scholarship

In contrast to the second-wave feminists, anti-racist/anti-colonial feminists had a profoundly different relationship to motherhood both as a lived experience and an institution. White feminists had advocated for women to seek fulfillment and construct identities outside of motherhood or to reclaim a non-Oedipal maternal realm. However, according to anti-racist/anti-colonial feminists subaltern women have had a different frame of reference for motherhood, one constructed by experiences of racial and colonial oppression. The central questions across this scholarship were: *How have colonial forces of power impacted and shaped subaltern motherhood? How have subaltern women deployed motherhood as a site of empowerment in the face of sexism, racism and colonialism?*

Subaltern Motherhood Shaped Through Colonial Forces

Anti-racist/colonial feminists argued that white colonial forces of power had constructed subaltern motherhood in the service of capitalist and colonial projects. Subaltern women experienced motherhood as a tenuous thing. According to these feminists the success of white

settler societies was economically dependent on the white patriarchal family structure in which women were relegated to the home as “good white mothers,” as well as on the dispossession or enslavement of subaltern families, in which subaltern women were relegated to being economically and sexually exploitable.

Anti-racist/anti-colonial scholars argued that in the slave era black women had an experience of motherhood constructed through the economic goals and sexual gratification of white slaveholders. According to Patricia Hill-Collins (1992),

African-American women’s experiences as mothers has been shaped by the dominant group’s efforts to harness Black women’s sexuality and fertility to a system of capitalist exploitation.¹⁹

Historian Wilma King (1996) argued that motherhood among slave women had two characteristics. Firstly, slave women reared children alone because men (their spouses) were usually sold separately and there was an imbalance in the sex ratio on plantations. The second reason was rooted in the economic value of slave women’s reproductive capabilities, which often made them the victims of slave breeding programs.²⁰ Slave women were routinely forced to part with their children. Unlike white women slave women were expected to work like “mules” up until and immediately after giving birth, and then forced to hand their babies over to their slave owners. Slave societies were not structured around patriarchy, and therefore there was no economic need for black women to fill the role of mother in the home. There was no economic benefit to slave owners for black women to form bonds with their children, especially when many black women gave birth to the children of their white masters. Black women were property, and like any farm animal could be used to breed for profits. Unlike white women, black female reproductive duties were never tied to their “natural” role as the “angel in the house,” but their place as an exploitable object for profit or pleasure.

Indigenous women were often caught up in the tragic process of assimilation and land dispossession projects. A central way in which assimilation projects were carried out was through the disruption and destabilization of indigenous family networks, which were intricately embedded in tribal systems. In North America indigenous families and communities were torn apart, primarily through the state-funded Residential school system, in which indigenous children were taken from their homes and communities to be raised in the “white man’s way.”²¹ It is now understood that Residential schools perpetrated terrible injustices and abuses against indigenous children, many of whom suffered or died from physical and sexual abuse, medical negligence and malnutrition. These reports continue to surface in 2014. Sam Grey argued, “Institutionalization and adoption into non-Native households has had an immeasurable impact on gender dynamics in Aboriginal societies.”²² Australian-indigenous filmmaker Tracey Moffatt (*Bedevil*) had been taken from her own mother by the state, and fostered into a white family. The disruption and destruction of indigenous families was rooted in and justified by racist/colonial tropes of subaltern motherhood.

Racist/Colonial Tropes of Subaltern Motherhood

Motherhood could be denied to subaltern women due to racist, colonial and sexist tropes of subaltern women as sexually licentious and unclean or as victim figures who were the target of subaltern male violence and sexual exploitation. Anti-racist/anti-colonial feminists argued that these damaging tropes were embedded in colonial white settler discourse, and central to colonial oppression, exploitation and violence. The racist tropes of the “Mother-Queen” and the “dirty squaw” were deployed to silence and sexually exploit indigenous women, as well as carry out assimilation projects. In *The Pocahontas Perplex* Rayna Green (1975) identifies North American

frontier New World mythology as being dependent upon the racist trope of the “Mother Earth” figure in the objectification of North American indigenous women and peoples.

Thus, the Indian woman began her symbolic, many-faceted life as a Mother figure, exotic, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful, and as a representative of American liberty and European classical virtue translated into New World terms. She represented, even defended America. But when real Indian women, Pocahontas and her sisters intruded into the needs bound up in symbols and the desires inherent in daily life, the responses to the symbol became more complex, and the Pocahontas perplex emerged as a controlling metaphor in the American experience. The Indian woman, along with her male counterparts, continued to stand for the New World and for rude native nobility, but the image of the savage remained as well. The dark side of the Mother-Queen figure is the savage Squaw, and even Pocahontas, as John Barth suggests in *The Sotweed Factor*, is motivated by lust. Both her nobility as a Princess and her savagery as a Squaw are defined in terms of her relationships with male figures.²³

Indigenous women activists and scholars argued that these damaging racist maternal tropes were at the root of assimilation projects.

Anti-racist feminist scholar bell hook (1981) argued that African-American women’s status is deeply rooted in racist and sexist stereotypes established in the slave era, the “black seductive whore” or the “emasculating matriarch.”²⁴ Hooks’ book *Ain’t I a Woman?* was titled after freed-slave and anti-racist activist Sojourner Truth’s famous 1851 speech.²⁵ One of the ways black women tried to gain respect and “shift the focus of attention away from their sexuality” was by “emphasizing their commitment to motherhood.” However, as hooks argued, this did not necessarily lead to less negative stereotypes of black women.

They worked diligently at their service jobs to provide economically for their children, and demonstrated their love by incredible self-sacrifice. While their efforts were acknowledged by the American public, whites deliberately cast them in a negative light. They labeled hard-working, self-sacrificing black women who were concerned with creating a loving, supportive environment for their families Aunt Jemimas, Sapphires, Amazons – all negative images based upon existing sexist stereotypes of womanhood. In more recent years the labeling of black matriarchs emerged as yet another attempt by the white male power structure to cast the positive contributions of black women in a negative light.²⁶

These are the origins of the “black welfare mother” who lives off the system or the black “superwoman” figure who can handle any amount of oppression. Anti-racist feminist scholar Michele Williams (*Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 1979) argued that the black “superwoman” figure has been largely constructed within the anti-racist movement, but has been co-opted by white society as a reason to ignore or neglect black women’s reproductive and socio-economic issues.²⁷

Subaltern Motherhood as Empowerment

Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist scholars argued that subaltern women see motherhood as a means of empowerment and resistance against sexism and racism, both for themselves and their communities. Despite the fact that colonial forces of power have depicted subaltern cultures as “matrilineal” and “matriarch” as a way to render subaltern communities dysfunctional, “primitive,” and “feminine,” subaltern women have seen motherhood and the maternal in a multifaceted way, one that is not tied to a patriarchal nuclear family structure.

Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) advocated for “Afrocentric” motherhood, one that was disconnected from slavery. Hill-Collins demonstrated that black women had deployed Afrocentric motherhood as a means of survival and resilience, and that motherhood has been essential to the development of a black feminist consciousness. Hill-Collins identified five ways in which African-American women have deployed motherhood. One, black women have historically created-women centred networks focalized around mothers, where “bloodmothers” and “othermothers” raised children together. Two, black mothers socialized their daughters to cope with racist oppression and sexual violence. Three, black women serve as “community othermothers” in black political activism. “Grandmothers, sister, aunts, or cousins act as othermothers by taking on childcare responsibilities for one another’s children.”²⁸ Four,

motherhood was seen as a symbol of power in the black community. Five, black women understood motherhood to be a contradictory institution, in which black mothering could be both rewarding and exacting, resulting in a high personal cost.²⁹ These five deployments of black motherhood construct a multifaceted view of motherhood focalized around community building and subjectivity. Anti-racist feminist scholar Harriet Pipes McAdoo argued that in African-American culture children were often closer to the woman's fictive, rather than, blood kin relatives.³⁰

Many indigenous women activists and scholars saw motherhood as a key method of resistance against cultural genocide and land dispossession. Lisa J. Udel argued,

Native women emphasize women's ability, sometimes "privilege," to bear children. Within this paradigm, they argue, Native women's procreative capability becomes a powerful tool to combat Western genocide... and choosing to become a mother takes on political meaning.³¹

A key tool of oppression in the colonization of indigenous peoples was the implementation of patriarchy, which eroded and marginalized female power both in the family and the community.

Feminist Mestiza scholar and activist MA Jaimes Guerrero argued,

Early records indicate that most if not all tribal societies were matrilineal before the European invasion. Native women held positions of authority as exemplary leaders. Under the coercion of the American colonists, with their Eurocentric subordination of women as property, these societies changed to patrilineal and later patriarchal ways. This change has eroded Native women's matrilineal and matrifocal authority as Clan Mothers among their tribal peoples. The role of the clan mother was a position of power and knowledge, and essential to the structure of the tribe. It was only when North America was colonized that a patriarchal system was imposed, and Clan mothers lost their power to Chiefs.³²

The Maternal in Feminist Film Theory and Women's Filmmaking

In feminist film scholarship of the 1970s and 80s the representation of the maternal and motherhood was central, particularly in the analyses of the maternal melodrama of the 1940s and 50s, as well as in women's early filmmaking. Feminist film scholars focalized much of their

writings on maternal melodramas, particularly *Mildred Pierce* (1945)³³ and *Stella Dallas*³⁴ (1937). Lucy Fischer (1996) argued, "... there arose a virtual cottage industry dedicated to criticizing *Mildred Pierce*."³⁵ There were two recurring themes that emerged across feminist film scholarship: the thwarting of maternal desire and the deployment of the "good mother/bad mother" paradigm.

In *From Reverence to Rape* Molly Haskell (1974) identified Hollywood's representation of womanhood as rooted in motherhood and sacrifice, a "women's ultimate *raison d'être*, her only worth-confirming 'career'."³⁶ Analyzing *Stella Dallas* Linda Williams (1985) argued,

The device of devaluing and debasing of the actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood is typical of the "woman's film" in general and the sub-genre of the maternal melodrama in particular. In these films it is quite remarkable how frequently the self-sacrificing mother must make her sacrifice that of connection to her children – either for her or their own good.³⁷

Mary Ann Doane analyzed the maternal melodrama in *The Desire to Desire* (1987) concluding that films like *Stella Dallas* depicted the essence of motherhood under patriarchy. Doane argued,

...all of these texts bring into play the contradictory position of the mother within patriarchal society – a position formulated by the injunction that she focus desire on the child and the subsequent demand to give up the child to the social order. Motherhood is conceived as the always uneasy conjunction of an absolute closeness and a forced distance. The scenario of "watching the child from afar" thus constitutes itself as a privileged tableau of the genre, and it is clear why *Stella Dallas* has become its exemplary film.³⁸

Across this scholarship feminists saw the necessity of challenging the place of the mother in society as well as the deployment of the maternal in discourse, though there has been much criticism for their biological determinism and their white middle-class angle of vision. The other tendency was that most of these feminists saw motherhood and the maternal as oppressive, and an obstacle for gender equality. E. Ann Kaplan (1983) has described this attitude towards motherhood within the second-wave women's movement as "negative."

In regards to women filmmakers there also seemed a tendency to focalize stories and themes around motherhood and the maternal. Early pre-feminist Hollywood women directors like Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino often featured mothers as central heroines and tackled maternal issues like unwanted pregnancies, adoption (Ida Lupino's *Not Wanted*, 1949), and mother-child relations (Arzner's *Sarah and Son*, 1930). Flitterman-Lewis argued that French filmmaker Marie Epstein deployed the maternal to "say something different" from that of her French male contemporaries, directors who saw themselves as countering the dominant cinema, but who were driven by nationalist sentiment rooted in the patriarchal. Flitterman-Lewis claimed that Epstein's *La Maternelle* followed a pre-Oedipal structure foregrounding a child's point of view, and reworked the fantasy of the primal scene through female desire for the mother (maternal object).³⁹ Flitterman-Lewis wrote,

Marie Epstein shifts the focus of her narratives from the traditional masculine trajectory of Oedipal desire to desiring relations of the feminine (relations between mothers and daughters in particular) and in doing so, realigns point-of-view structures to emphasize both the *child's* vision in the primal scene and the unconscious structure of fantasy.⁴⁰

Interestingly, a very early woman filmmaker, Alice Guy-Blaché, who long preceded filmmakers like Arzner and Lupino, deployed the trope of the maternal outside "masculinist" visual and sound regimes. In a short film entitled *La Fée aux Choux / The Cabbage Fairy* (1896), Guy-Blaché depicts a modern fertility figure garbed as a corseted Cabbage Fairy who plucks wiggling newborn babies out of cabbages, metaphorically giving birth to all of them single-handedly. Although Guy-Blaché's Cabbage Fairy may not initially seem like a feminist icon, she can be read as an autonomous and powerful maternal figure. Guy-Blaché not only situates her fertility figure in a non-domestic setting, a vegetable patch with no paternal figure in sight, she also ensures that her fairy returns the cinematic gaze. Guy-Blaché and her Cabbage Fairy mirror

each other's conflated desire to (re)produce and peer through the lens. Guy-Blaché's short is often credited with being the first narrative fiction film, preceding Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon*. Guy-Blaché's lens not only depicted women's procreative powers as positive and creative forces, it literally gave birth to cinema as a medium. Guy-Blaché is now known as the first woman filmmaker to work in the motion picture film industry, and so it can be concluded that the first gaze in the narrative cinema was not only a female gaze; it was a maternal one.

La Fée aux Choux represents a dramatic contrast to the silent cinema "trick films" of Guy-Blaché's male contemporaries like George Méliès, a magician, and Emile Cohl, who was often falsely credited with having directed a number of Guy-Blaché films.⁴¹ Feminist film scholar Lucy Fischer (1996) argued that trick films reflected an anti-feminine film culture rooted in patriarchal womb envy, in which filmmakers could assert their pro-creative powers, and simultaneously contain the female body. When women were not "disappeared" in the tricks, they were either dismembered or killed in a cinematic "chamber of horrors".⁴² The trick films that did not render women invisible or depict violence towards them, featured magic that had strong procreative and reproductive connotations, such as the pulling of rabbits from hats or flowers from cones.⁴³

In the early part of her career, Guy-Blaché gained considerable influence and power, eventually owning various film companies in France and America. Guy-Blaché has been credited with directing more than four hundred one-reel films* in France between 1896 and 1907, and more than three hundred one-reel films in the USA between 1910 and late 1913. Unfortunately, Guy-Blaché was put out of business by the restructuring of the American film industry in 1917. She directed her last film, *Tarnished Reputations*, in 1920.⁴⁴ Despite a prolific film career, Guy-

*One-reel films were typically fifteen minutes in length.

Blaché's contribution to world cinema would soon be forgotten, her films disappearing from the archives for decades, including the historically important *La Fée aux Choux*. However, Guy-Blaché was rediscovered after she published her memoirs in 1976 entitled *Autobiographie d'une pionnière du cinéma, 1873–1968* (*The Memoires of Alice Guy-Blaché*; 1986).⁴⁵ This publication appeared around the same time as women were just beginning to enter film schools and receive financing for their first films. Guy-Blaché in many ways can be seen as the great-grandmother icon for women's filmmaking. Guy-Blaché's disappearance from world cinema is representative of the absence of women filmmakers in general. It would be another fifty years until women filmmakers would return to the narrative cinema in any significant way. Interestingly, taking up where Guy-Blaché left off, many of these "new" women filmmakers would construct narratives through the lens of motherhood and the maternal.

Frontier Narratives Through a Maternal Gaze

The films discussed here reflect many of the issues raised in the feminist debates about motherhood and the maternal. There are two different motherhood narratives across this work, the *anti-racist/colonial motherhood narrative* and the *anti-patriarchal motherhood narrative*. Within the anti-racist/colonial motherhood narratives, the major themes echo anti-racist/colonial feminist scholarship: saving the subaltern threatened family/community, and debunking racist stereotypes of the subaltern mother and "matrifocal" cultures. These films are: Merata Mita's *Mauri*, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil*, Norma Bailey's *The Wake*, and Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties*. In the anti-patriarchal motherhood narrative, the central figure is not a mother, but a daughter. The filmmakers represent motherhood in patriarchal households as a site of women's oppression. Though oppressed in confining patriarchal households and delimiting roles, mothers are complex characters with dramatic agency. In this sense, the

filmmakers structure the films' looking and sound regimes through maternal desire. Working within the popular cinema these filmmakers all borrow from the maternal melodrama tradition. These films are: Jane Campion's *The Piano*, Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin*, Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*.

The Anti-Racist/Colonial Motherhood Narrative: Subaltern Mothers Saving the

Threatened Subaltern Family/Community

Eli, I'm trying to teach you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life, Eli, and I'm fighting for yours. Look into my face! I'm trying to give you something to take north with you, along with all your great big dreams.

- Nana Peazant, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

In the anti-racist/colonial motherhood narratives, filmmakers deploy a decolonizing lens and counter-cinema aesthetics in order to tell stories about the loss of cultural identities and land in white settler contexts, across various periods in history. The filmmakers structure the anti-racist/colonial motherhood narrative through the points of view of stoic or heroic subaltern maternal figures. In this way the filmmakers construct an "oppositional gaze" (hooks '90) that is a subaltern maternal one. The subaltern maternal figure practices resistance through her role as a mother in her family and extended family, as well as her subaltern community. In these films the subaltern maternal figures serve as tropes or what Patricia Hill-Collins calls "othermothering" and "community othermothering" (1991). Hill-Collins argued,

Community othermothers have made important contributions in building a different type of community in often hostile political and economic surroundings. Community othermothers' actions demonstrate a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or individual actualization. Instead, the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers models a very different value system, one whereby Afrocentric feminist ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward.⁴⁶

In the subaltern motherhood narrative the role of the subaltern maternal figure involves offering comfort and solace, imparting wisdom, teaching survival skills and strategies, as well as preserving family history as a storyteller.

There are two subaltern maternal figures that emerge across these five films: the great-grandmother and the young mother, who is often a single-mother. These maternal characters serve as figures of resistance and empowerment. Their primary aim is to ensure the survival of their family and community, both facing threats from racist and colonial forces of power.

The Subaltern Great-Grandmother Figure

Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust

Julie Dash constructs the narrative of *Daughters of the Dust* with Nana Peazant, former slave and “great-great grandmother,” as the pivotal character. All of the other characters and storylines are interconnected through her. Dash sets her film over the period of one day, in which the Peazants have gathered for a Last Supper before they leave the Sea Islands for the north. It is Nana who holds the key to keeping the family together, even though they will never see her again. Nana’s refusal to migrate north is met with much anxiety by some members of the family. The Peazants see their “crossing over” north to the mainland as their only hope for socio-economic survival, but Nana insists that they not forget their past, rooted in Africa and Ibo Landing, a former slave trading post. Nana’s desire (“plan”) to give the Peazants a connection to “the ancestors” is met with resistance and even anger, particularly by Nana’s daughter-in-law, Haagar. “*I don’t want my daughters to know anything about that mess!*” According to Nana, to forget the past is to lose one’s identity, and this can only mean a kind of spiritual death of the self and the community. Nana’s desire is to reconcile the migrating Peazants with their past, and it is a

decidedly maternal one. Dash constructs a number of dramatic conflicts around Nana's maternal desire.

Nana's desire to preserve and remember the past is a source of tension between herself and some of her daughters. Haagar overtly rejects Nana's "*salt-water African*" ways as backward and pointless. Striking out in anger, Haagar says,

"Hoo-doo, Hoo-doo! Hoo-doo mess! Ain't no roots and herbs going to change nothing. Don't go and spoil everything! Old Used-To-Do-It-This-Way don't help none today!"

Haagar is so fearful and shameful of the past that her desire for the new world blinds her in regard to Nana's wisdom and the desires of her own daughter, Iona. Haagar rejects Iona's choice to stay on the island with her Cherokee lover, St. Julian Last Child. Haagar tries with all her might to stop her. Haagar believes moving forward is about forgetting Ibo Landing. Haagar says, "*Where we're going, Nana, there'll be no need for an old woman's magic.*" Yet, that is exactly what Haagar will need the most. For Nana this is a form of psychological and spiritual suicide.

Dash, however, is careful not to represent Nana as a kind of black Superwoman. Despite her queenly status as Mother Peazant, she is not all-powerful. Though Nana sits on her throne of sticks, she is also an aging former slave who has suffered greatly. This seems forgotten by some of the younger Peazants who look to her not only for answers, but miracles. This is depicted in Eli's desperate plea to Nana - "*Why didn't you protect us, Nana?*" Though Nana puts much faith in her roots and glass bottles she cannot save Yellow Mary from ruination, or Jake from imprisonment, or Eli's wife Eula from rape, or even the migration of her family to the mainland. The expectation and desire to be a pillar of strength has come at a high price for Nana. Her role as cultural preserver, historian, griot, bloodmother, and othermother has taken its toll physically and emotionally. This is depicted in the scene on the beach in which Nana breaks down while she

goes through her “scraps of memories” from her old tin-box. With her many daughters gathered around her Nana cries, “*We came here in chains and we must survive. We must survive. There’s salt-water in our blood.*” Nana may not be able to work miracles, but she can pass on the memories and stories of the ancestors.

Merata Mita’s Mauri

In *Mauri* Mita positions great-grandmother Kara as the film’s pivotal character, the one who holds the resolutions to the other characters’ problems. Mita constructs Kara as both an “othermother” in the Rapana family and a “community othermother” in her North Island Māori settlement. Kara is the primary caregiver to her great-grand daughter Awatea, and provides love and solace to her two great-nephews, Paki/Rewi and Willie Rapana, both troubled adult Māori men on the run from the law. Mita represents Kara’s “othermothering” in simple gestures like cups of tea and nourishing rustic meals cooked over an open hearth. At the kitchen table her great-nephew Paki/Rewi embraces Kara and says, “*You know being here with you is the only time I can believe in something that is better than what I’ve known in the past.*” On his prodigal return back to his childhood Māori home, Willie takes in the pleasure of Kara’s kitchen as well. While savouring a cup of tea she has made him, Willie says, “*Just the way I like it.*” For a tough Māori gang leader, the comment is poignant, particularly because only moments before he has been remembering his deceased mother. Mita also expresses Kara’s “othermothering” in more profound spiritual gestures, particularly in the scene in which she presents Willie with a special Māori pendant. This scene is the last time Kara will ever see Willie alive. Soon afterwards Willie will be gunned-down in the street by a fellow gang-member. The sequence is as follows:

Shot: Medium angle of Kara placing Māori pendant around Willie’s neck. Willie gazes at his own reflection in the mirror. The camera tracks around them. The clock ticks.

Shot: Close angle, Willie smiles proudly.

Shot: Close angle Kara peers at Willie's expression in the mirror.

Shot: Medium angle Willie turns and embraces Kara in a hug.

Shot: Medium-close angle Willie's man, Hemi, gazes enviously at Willie and Kara through the window.

Shot: Hemi's POV. Medium long angle of Kara and Willie embraced. They pull apart and walk toward the doorway.

Through this quiet scene Mita represents a profound moment in Willie's life, one in which Kara acknowledges him as a complete Māori man, despite his criminal lifestyle. Mita ensures that it is the subaltern mother who performs this ritual of honour, offering Willie some inner peace and resolution about his Māori identity.

Mita depicts Kara as a teacher/mentor figure, primarily to her great granddaughter, Awatea, teaching her how to cope as a Māori female in a racist white/Pakeha society. When Awatea asks her granny what a "tar baby" is, Kara responds, "*The opposite to white maggot.*" Kara teaches Awatea to never back down from one's oppressor. Later in the film, Kara models this kind of resistance when she stands up to the white government official who wants to make another bad land deal with the Māori community. Kara insists on calling a meeting of *their own*. In an act of resistance Kara refuses to address the white official directly, and only communicates in the Māori language. Mita has Kara "chant" a waitia to a group of Māori female elders. Through Kara's waitia Mita sends a strong message, never back down.

Mita depicts Kara's role as "community othermother" in the government-meeting scene. Kara calls a meeting of elderly Māori women after she learns the Pakeha government wants to build a rehab centre in their settlement, to be controlled by the whites. Kara is driven to protect her people and the land from further encroachment and exploitation. Mita's highly visual sequence depicts solidarity amongst subaltern women and community resistance against colonial oppression:

Shot: Long shot Māori elder women dressed in black rise up from beneath a hill. The soundtrack features a female voice singing a “waitia.”

Shot: Long shot of five Māori women, including Kara, are seated on a platform in a meeting area. Kara stands as she sees the other Māori women approaching the meeting area. Kara begins to chant a speech. The other women stand. The camera tracks out to a wider frame, revealing Māori men standing.

Shot: Reverse-angle wide shot of Māori women approaching. Epic mountains are featured in the background. The women chant a response to Kara.

Shot: Medium angle three-shot of Kara with Māori women. She continues to chant.

Shot: Wide high angle on Māori elder women approaching meeting. Māori men walk in behind them. As they all approach the meeting area, a Māori man pushes his way through the women, knocking them aside, in order to make a path for the white government official. One of the elderly Māori women nudges the official with her walking stick. The camera follows the official who is now flanked by two Māori men, dressed in suits. They come to a pause and give a quick bow to Kara.

Shot: Medium three-shot Kara chants.

Shot: Long shot, white official, his two Māori attendants, and the group of Māori elder women and men seat themselves on benches. The ocean is featured in the background of the shot.

At the end of this scene the white male official leaves unmoved by the Māori request for the government to back out of the local drug rehab project. The whole meeting has just been for show, a “public relations” stunt. Despite this seeming defeat, the Māori “community othermothers” have shown leadership and strength as a network of women against colonial domination.

Later on in *Mauri* when Kara is dying, Mita depicts Kara’s power as a community othermother in relation to Paki/Rewi. On Kara’s deathbed Paki/Rewi, desperate as the police close in on him, begs Kara, “*Tell me what I must do?*” At this point he has confessed his sin of stealing the real Rewi’s identity, including Rewi’s sacred Māori pendants, meant to protect one even in death. Despite Paki/Rewi’s crimes against one of his own, Kara doesn’t turn him away. To Kara the haunted and desperate man at her bedside is just another Māori son in trouble. Kara’s acceptance of Paki in that moment is not about forgiveness, only the dead can do that, but

her “community othermothering” role in her Māori community. However, even though Mita constructs Kara as a powerful maternal figure she resists setting her up as a black Superwoman.

Though Kara is seemingly a pillar of strength, she is also a dying woman. Kara offers Willie and Paki/Rewi solace, a place of belonging, and a connection to their Māori identity, but she cannot protect them from all the realities of racist and colonial oppression, like prison and gangs. Though Kara gives Willie his special Māori pendants, these do not have the power to protect Willie from murder. Giving Paki peace of mind does not prevent him from being hunted down and taken into custody by the police, probably to face years in prison. Even though Kara takes a stand as a “community othermother” against the government’s implementation of a (white) Pakeha-run rehabilitation centre on Māori territory, she cannot change the government’s course of action. Kara has spoken but she has not been heard, although we, the audience, have heard her. Mita’s scene here echoes Spivak’s point about the subaltern voice. It is not always enough for one to speak, one must be heard as well.

Anne Wheeler’s Loyalties

In Anne Wheeler’s *Loyalties* (1986) Roseanne’s mother, Beatrice, practices “othermothering” as a means of keeping the Ladouceurs, a Métis family, together in the face of economic disparity and systemic racism in a late 1980s Canadian “post-colonial” era. Though Beatrice has a small role in *Loyalties* Wheeler positions her character as an important maternal figure that speaks key words of wisdom about being an indigenous woman on a post-colonial frontier. After splitting from her alcoholic boyfriend Eddy, and losing her job at the Tavern, Roseanne and her three children move in with Beatrice. Beatrice provides a loving stable environment, emotional and financial support, as well as childcare for her grandchildren because Roseanne must work to support her family. In addition to helping her daughter, Beatrice is also

“othermother” to her grandson from another daughter, the irresponsible and absentee mother, Marlene. Marlene, the “bloodmother,” has seemingly abandoned her child to lead a party lifestyle. In one heart-wrenching scene Marlene returns, demanding custody of her son, but the boy doesn’t want to leave his beloved Kookum (grandmother). Though Beatrice cannot stop her daughter from dragging the boy away, she offers words of wisdom to him. *“Remember, no matter what happens, it’s not your fault. It’s got nothing to do with you.”* Roseanne steps in as another “othermother.” Roseanne hands her unhappy nephew some cash. *“Put this in your sock. Don’t give it to her, no matter what. If it gets bad, you get on a bus and get back, okay?”* Without these “othermothers” Marlene’s son would most likely end up in the foster care system.

Norma Bailey’s The Wake

In Norma Bailey’s *The Wake* (1986) Joan and Donna’s grandmother, Kookum, is a subaltern elderly wise woman who tries to live as her ancestors did – off the land and without state welfare. Kookum offers the troubled and unhappy Donna a place to stay, emotional comfort, and some important survival lessons as an indigenous woman. Donna is upset and feeling lost due to her mother’s hospitalization for diabetes and alcoholism, and the placement of her younger siblings in foster care. Bailey also positions Donna’s Kookum as an important maternal figure, imparting wisdom to her about surviving in a racist and sexist post-colonial society (see Figure 15).

Shot: Long shot. Donna’s Kookum tucks her into a bed on the couch. Donna is crying. Kookum says, *“When you feel bad, my girl...”*

Shot: Close-angle on Donna crying. Kookum, *“... don’t turn it inside. Turn it out!”*

Shot: Close-angle on Kookum. *“Get real mad! Of all my grandchildren...”*

Shot: Close-angle on Donna. Kookum, *“...all those years...”*

Shot: Close-angle on Kookum. *“There’s none like you.”*

Shot: Close-angle on Donna. She has stopped crying, and is smiling.



Figure 15: Donna (right) with her Kookum who skins a rabbit in Bailey's *The Wake*

In the final scene of *The Wake* it is Kookum's words that impart important words of wisdom about survival as indigenous women.

Shot: Three-shot of Joan, Donna and their Kookum weeping. The women have wrapped their arms around one another. Donna's "bloodmother," Cora, hovers at the very edge of the frame, only partially in the shot. Kookum says, in her own indigenous language, "*Don't take it so hard. These things have happened before. That's why we all have to be brave and love one another while we're together on this earth.*" (This dialogue is subtitled).

Kookum's are the last spoken words in Bailey's film.

In addition to Kookum, Joan's mother is another important grandmother figure in Bailey's film. Joan's mother comes to Joan's aid by helping her with childcare when Joan has to go to work or wants a rare night out to herself. Joan's mother seems eternally in the kitchen whether it is a family meeting, a wedding reception, or a wake, making tea and preparing food for anyone who walks through her door. Though Joan's mother doesn't have a large role, Bailey establishes her important place in Joan's life and the Métis community. Without her mother Joan wouldn't be able to go out to work, as she is unable to afford daycare. Joan's mother ensures that she stays off welfare and contributes to society in a positive and dignified way.

Tracey Moffatt's Bedevil

In Moffatt's *Bedevil* subaltern elder women are depicted in the "Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo" segment as a loud and exuberant all female netball team, who have come together to picnic in the bush. As they race along in the back of a truck, the women sing along to a pop song, while wearing funky sunglasses and cheeky T-shirts. Moffatt shoots these scenes with ironic humour. Deploying the style of an ethnographic documentary, Moffatt has the elder Ruby address the camera directly. At one point Moffatt has the elder Ruby wipe the camera lens with a cloth, as if to cleanse the lens. Through Ruby's gesture Moffatt foregrounds the construction of the gaze, one that has to be wiped clean first by an indigenous grandmother figure. Throughout *Bedevil* Moffatt deploys irony and humour to construct a decolonizing gaze. This is one example of how Moffatt privileges a subaltern maternal voice and gaze.

The elaborate and hybrid cooking lesson sequence is an example of how Moffatt constructs an anti-colonial aesthetic through the subaltern great-grandmother figure. In the "bush-cuisine" cooking sequence subaltern grandmothers work together collaboratively to prepare their hybrid bush meal, near Ruby's dilapidated former home, once haunted by the little white blind girl. Though Moffatt shoots the cooking scenes in a positive and fun way, she sets the action at the site of Ruby's haunting where the little blind girl used to "drive her crazy," and hence the horrific past is never fully transcended. Foregrounding the subaltern grandmother's voice, Ruby shouts out, with an undercurrent of disdain, that it's a "*bloody Queen Victoria bush-cuisine!*" Earlier Ruby has yelled to one of her teammates "*And don't forget about the wok! The wok!*" Wearing funky sunglasses, the women sauté local foods in chardonnay. They bury fresh meat they have killed in underground BBQs they have dug themselves. Ruby and her fellow maternal teammates are figures of resilience and survival, who refuse to be victims of

colonization or “primitive objects” of the ethnographic gaze. Navigating a complex “multicultural” post-colonial landscape these subaltern maternal figures deftly fuse the ways of the colonized and the colonizer (Victorian Britain) to emerge as full subjects and figures of resistance.

Imelda, in the “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In” segment of Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, is a figure of resilience, despite the fact that she is perceived as a disenfranchised “squatter” by the shortsighted land developers. As a Torres Strait Islander woman, Imelda is perceived by the other non-indigenous characters, particularly the Chinese and Greek businessmen, as an “other.” When Dimitri, a Greek immigrant shopkeeper and landlord, tries to evict Imelda from the building where he wants to put in a dance club/casino, Imelda proves a worthy opponent. Imelda is unwilling to re-locate from the place where her son Beba died mysteriously. The characters that do sympathize with Imelda are the transgendered “Frida Kahlo,” who lives in the same building complex, and Dimitri’s wife, Voula, and son. These characters are disenfranchised, all under the control of Dimitri. They see Imelda’s candle vigils for her son as a sign of resistance, and reject Dimitri’s callous meaningless business deals.

Imelda is “so sad” due to the loss of her son, Beba. Though her only child is no longer living, Imelda maintains her identity and dignity as a mother, and the memory of her lost son through the candle vigils and smudging rituals she holds every day. Moffatt constructs Imelda as a somewhat silent character, but her vigils to her lost son represent the act of remembering as a form of anti-colonial resistance. Dimitri vaguely tolerates these “strange” rituals. Though Imelda’s maternal love is a force Dimitri must deal with, it is not enough to stop Dimitri’s plans to tear down Imelda’s home. When Imelda is forcibly removed from home, she does not have the power, physically and emotionally, to fight off her oppressors – they are in fact her relatives.

The Young Subaltern Mother Figure

*We were fostered because my real mother, Dauphine Moffatt, could not look after us and she felt that it just felt right that we should be raised in a more stable environment, so it was myself, my brother and my two sisters and I was the eldest and therefore the boss.*⁴⁷

- Tracey Moffatt

Anne Wheeler's Loyalties

In Wheeler's *Loyalties* Roseanne Ladouceur, a Métis single-mother of three, is privileged in the frame as an empowered subaltern mother, in stark contrast to her white British upper-middle-class employer, Lily Sutton. As a "bloodmother" figure Roseanne mothers very differently from Lily, who seems overwhelmed by the daily demands of motherhood and middle-class domesticity. Much of Lily's anxiety and unhappiness has to do with her abusive marriage and her husband's disturbing penchant for little girls, than with motherhood itself. Throughout the film Wheeler depicts Roseanne as a wise woman figure, who teaches her children how to survive in a racist and sexist post-colonial world. However, even Lily benefits from these teachings because they are focalized around feminist resistance and agency.

Roseanne teaches and models to her teenage daughter Leona how to practice covert resistance to colonial sexism in the laundry scene. Roseanne and Beatrice only have an old hand-cranked washer, and have to hang their laundry, something both Leona and Roseanne lament about. Leona says enviously, "*I wish we had a washer and dryer.*" Roseanne decides to take advantage of her access to the Sutton's expensive appliances by bringing her family's laundry there – many garbage bags full. Roseanne doesn't tell Lily. When Dr. Sutton comes home early, he flirts inappropriately with Leona; he provocatively "helps" her by folding up some ladies underwear. Roseanne disrupts the exchange between Dr. Sutton and her daughter. She is polite, but terse with him. Through this act Roseanne models to Leona how to operate as a

disenfranchised indigenous girl in a racist and sexist world, a world in which Métis women due to their race and class are seen as economically and sexually exploitable.

Wheeler explicitly depicts white male exploitation of indigenous women in the film's disturbing rape scene. Dr. Sutton's seemingly harmless flirtations take an ugly and criminal turn when he violently rapes Leona in the woods outside his home. In the tradition of the gothic fairy tale, the man, the "good doctor," has turned into a beast. As discussed in Chapter Two, Roseanne's reaction is one of outrage, and she attempts to kill Sutton. After Lily intercepts Roseanne's act of vengeance, Roseanne can only do one thing, be a pillar of strength and tend to her daughter's wounds. Wheeler depicts Roseanne's resilience and strength as the heart of her power as a subaltern "bloodmother." This subaltern maternal resilience is beautifully and quietly realized in the following scene: the aftermath of Leone's rape.

Shot: Wide angle on Beatrice's house at dawn – misty landscape.

Shot: Medium angle on tin bucket of soapy water, a wet towel lay strewn on the floor. Beatrice walks into frame and picks up the discarded towel. The camera follows her action, as she hangs up the towel on a line in her small kitchen. Beatrice pauses for a moment, taking a moment, and then turns to her counter. She picks up a teapot and starts the process of making tea. Beatrice walks out of frame, and the camera trucks in to the living room area to reveal Roseanne holding and silently consoling her daughter, as she recovers from the sexual assault.

Shot: Wide angle on rural road. A police car enters the frame. The camera follows the vehicle as it approaches Beatrice's property.

Shot: Long shot on Beatrice and Roseanne in kitchen. Beatrice drinks tea, and Roseanne lights a cigarette. They hear the cop car drive up. Roseanne goes to the window.

Shot: Roseanne's point of view through the window – cop car drives up the side of the house.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Roseanne. *Jesus Christ.* Roseanne turns to her mother. *She sent the cops after me.*

Shot: Roseanne's POV – two police officers get out of their car.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Roseanne and Beatrice. They wait. There is a knock at the door. Roseanne stamps out her cigarette and goes to answer the door. Beatrice follows her.

Shot: Police officers' POV on front door. Roseanne opens the door, and walks proudly and protectively onto the front porch. Police Officer's voice-off: "*Roseanne.... Ladouceur?*" Roseanne looks at the cop as if he were an idiot. "*Think I changed my name, Marvin?*"

Shot: Over-the-shoulder shot from Roseanne's POV. The two cops glance at each other awkwardly. *"We had a complaint.. uh... Mrs. Sutton..."*

Shot: Medium 2-shot of Roseanne with Beatrice in background. The cop continues talking. *"... Lily Sutton?"* Roseanne replies with a shaky voice, *"Yeah."* The cop continues: *"Well, she says that... the complaint is that...her husband... that is Dr. David Sutton ... sexually assaulted your daughter last night."* Roseanne and Beatrice stand there silently shocked. Roseanne looks at the cop as if she didn't hear him correctly. The cop continues talking: *"Now as you may be aware..."* Roseanne closes her eyes. *"A spouse is not entitled under the law to press charges against a marriage partner when ... uh, the incident involves a third party. In other words Mrs. Sutton cannot lay charges against Dr. Sutton, but she suggested that you..."* Roseanne nods her head, tears coursing down her tired face. *"... might be willing to lay charges?"* Roseanne nods her head. *"Yeah."* The cops repeat Roseanne's response. *"Yes? Yes?"* Roseanne nods her head.

Shot: Wide angle on Beatrice's property. Roseanne's voice-off: *"Yes."*

In a rare moment of poetic justice Roseanne's opportunity to speak, and to be heard, is presented to her by white male cops. The irony is that Lily's privileged white voice has no power against her villainous husband. It is Roseanne's subaltern maternal voice that trumps those of both Dr. Sutton and his wife Lily. Wheeler also privileges Roseanne's gaze and voice in the film's visual and sound construction. While the cops explain the law to her, Wheeler keeps the lens on Roseanne, capturing every expression on her face. In that long take Wheeler and the actor, Tantoo Cardinal, manage to express volumes about the horrific treatment of indigenous women by white forces of power in frontier settings.

Hence, Wheeler avoids depicting Roseanne or Beatrice as Super-mothers or Earth mother figures. Though Roseanne is a strong mother, she is still unable to protect her daughter from rape. In fact, Dr. Sutton rapes Leona when Roseanne is out at the local drinking hole celebrating Lily's birthday. Leona has been left in charge of the younger children while Roseanne and Lily take the night off from motherhood. Wheeler resists representing Roseanne and Lily's "night out" as parental negligence, however. Both women believe that Dr. Sutton is far away on a fishing trip with friends. Unbeknownst to the two mothers, Dr. Sutton has decided to come home early. The women discover Dr. Sutton assaulting Leona, but they are too late. The damage has been done.

The rage, guilt, and pain Roseanne feels, and will feel most likely for the rest of her life, is an example of the kind of cost subaltern mothers pay in a racist and sexist frontier society.

Wheeler depicts the important role of “community othermothering” through the character of Roseanne. Despite the fact that Lily’s husband had raped Roseanne’s daughter, Roseanne still invites her and her children into the ramshackle home she shares with her mother Beatrice. Lily may be privileged and “very white,” but she is also now a single-mother running from an abusive marriage. Financially Lily doesn’t actually need support, she is wealthy enough to afford her own place, but Lily and her children are emotionally traumatized. Beatrice and Roseanne offer the emotional solace and healing Lily and her children so desperately need. Lily has revealed earlier in the film that she doesn’t have much of relationship with her own mother, who lives thousands of miles away in England. In the final scene of the film, set amidst the “untamed” Northern Alberta landscape, Lily arrives at Beatrice and Roseanne’s house with all four of her children packed in the car. The normally pristine Lily is a mess. Roseanne sees her pain and shame, and instructs Lily’s children to go into the house. “*Go with Kookum. She’ll take care of you.*” Lily says to Roseanne, “*I couldn’t stay. He’s still there.*” Roseanne embraces Lily, like a sister, one mother to another. Roseanne says, “*Don’t worry about it. We got plenty of room, eh.*” Wheeler frames the two mothers in a medium two-shot while they embrace. Wheeler has the women exit frame together. Wheeler cuts to an extreme bird’s-eye-view wide angle of Beatrice’s dilapidated wood-frame house. Roseanne and Lily walk into the house together, arm in arm. It is unclear what will happen to Dr. Sutton, but it doesn’t matter. Wheeler constructs the film’s resolution in the solidarity between the mothers, which has managed to cross the lines of race and class. This resolution only becomes possible when Lily refuses to be complicit in patriarchy and colonization.

Tracey Moffatt's Bedevil

In the “Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo” segment in Tracey Moffatt’s *Bedevil* young Ruby’s post-war indigenous family includes extended family members. Ruby lives by the tracks with her husband, her sister-in-law, two boys, and a baby. Throughout the segment it is unclear who the “bloodmother” is to the children. The sister-in-law works along with Ruby’s husband on the railway tracks, and so it is possible that Ruby is caring for some of her children. Both women look after the children in what seems to be a happy home, until the appearance of the ghost of the little white blind girl. Moffatt deploys indigenous motherhood and mothering practices as a device to dismantle the codes of horror and ethnographic films. In regard to the horror genre, Moffatt seems to take up Barbara Creed’s article, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection” (1986). Using Julia Kristeva’s *Power of Horror*, Creed examined the monstrous-feminine in the horror film in relation to the maternal figure and what Kristeva termed, “abjection,” that which does not “respect the borders, positions, rules,” that which “disturbs identity, system, order.”⁴⁸ In this “horror story,” a non-reproductive white female child is the monster, not the mother. In regard to ethnographic film, with its Eurocentric history of “othering” subaltern women in “primitive” societies, it is the gaze and voice of the subaltern mother that is rendered knowledgeable, privileged over the two male storytellers, a Chinese museum curator and a drunken elderly white man.

Norma Bailey's The Wake

In Bailey’s *The Wake*, Métis single-mother Joan not only looks after her own young children, but also takes in her teenaged cousin, Donna, after Donna’s mother Cora, is hospitalized for alcoholism and diabetes. Bailey resists judging Cora as a “bad” mother, who has three children she can barely care for, and who works as prostitute to make ends meet. In the eyes of

white society, however, Cora is a bad mother, just another “dirty squaw” who lives off the system. However, Bailey’s other single-mother, Joan only shows support for Cora, never condemning her. Joan saves her condemnation for white men, the guys who buy Cora’s sexual services. Joan offers her support and help to Cora by acting as “othermother” to Donna. Bailey depicts Joan’s othermothering in the scene in which Joan helps Donna prepare for the Mardi Gras Beauty Pageant. While cutting down a bridesmaid’s dress for Donna, Joan imparts important coping and survival skills to her.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Donna’s muddied pink satin bridesmaid shoes. Joan’s hands pin up the hem of the pink bridesmaid gown Donna wore earlier in the film to a wedding. Joan asks, *“Where do you want the hem? Above the knee or below the knee?”*

Shot: Medium angle Joan looks up to Donna. Donna’s hands hold up part of the dress. Donna replies, *“Below.”* Joan nods okay. The camera follows Joan’s arm as she places pins at the bodice of the dress. Joan is framed out of the shot. Donna is central in the frame. *“I don’t know if I want to do this, Joan. I don’t know if I want to go through with all this stuff right now.”* Joan stands up to face her somber cousin. *“Hey, come on. You don’t have to take the whole weight of the world on your shoulders. Gotta have a little fun too. And don’t forget, the time Mardi Gras comes around, Cora... she’ll be out of the hospital, and you’ll be all together again.”* Donna, *“Yeah, but...”* Joan interjects, *“No but. Come on, take a look.”* The camera follows Joan as she leads Donna to a mirror. Donna can’t bring herself to look. Joan says admiringly, *“You’re a real pretty girl. Everybody’s hustling tickets for you like crazy.”* Donna looks down and says, *“I need shoes.”* Joan replies, *“Well, you go to welfare. You get a voucher for winter boots and trade them in for shoes. It’s easy.”*

In Bailey’s simple yet dramatic staging, Joan teaches Donna that life isn’t all duty and disappointment. In the face of despair, one finds ways to feel good about one’s self. Joan wants Donna to compete, not only for Donna, but also for her own Métis community that is rallying behind her.

Throughout *The Wake*, Bailey features the community othermother as a recurring figure. She appears at weddings, wakes, and other family gatherings feeding and emotionally supporting members of her community. Bailey sets these gatherings in people’s modest homes and community centres on the reserve. In Bailey’s frame these women are more than just background

players handing out plates of cookies and sandwiches, they are figures of resistance providing support and a sense of belonging to their community. Bailey depicts Joan's "community othermothering" role in the scholarship-meeting scene. Joan meets with other mothers from the Métis community to discuss and plan special scholarships for accomplished Métis high school students. These "community othermothers" see their role as leaders initiating their own programs in the face of government "handouts."

Near the conclusion of *The Wake*, Joan takes on a "community othermother" role when she tries to bring about justice for her people. When Joan learns that her lover, Jim, a white RCMP officer, is implicated in the tragic deaths of four Métis teens, she tries to intervene. Joan puts aside her individual needs and desires in order to help Jim do the right thing.

Joan: *"You've got to make out a report. God, it's going to be hell to pay from both sides. But you can do it. I'll help you."*

Jim: *"Joannie, I... I can't do that. I can't. I can't make some kind of public statement. That would be the end of me, and Crawford... Look it was a terrible, terrible thing that happened, but me making some kind of public statement isn't going to bring those kids back!"* (Joan pulls away from Jim). *"All that'll happen is that I'll lose my job. It's everything I ever wanted."*

Joan: She turns and stares at Jim in disbelief and anger. She spits at his feet, and then walks out the doors.

Here Bailey frames Joan as the empowered one, with the condemning voice and gaze of the mother. When Jim refuses to step up and expose his partner, Officer Crawford, for his role in the deaths of the teens, Joan takes on the role of judge and jury. Joan walks away from her desire for Jim for her own sense of dignity, for her role as "bloodmother" to her children, and for her role as "community othermother" to her own people. On Bailey's frontier there will be no forgiveness given to white oppressors. Subaltern maternal desire trumps all other desire.

Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust

In *Daughters of the Dust*, Dash constructs the young subaltern mother as a highly revered figure, one with great moral authority and wisdom. In Dash's frame young subaltern mothers are empowered figures. Despite being a victim of rape, mother-to-be, Eula, embraces her reproductive body, not as a sign of shame or burden, but one of empowerment. It is Eli, her husband, who feels shame and anger at the sight of Eula. He says, "*When I look at her, I feel I don't want her no more.*" In a key moment in the film Eula is framed in long shot. In the frame Eula is dressed all in white and flanked by old growth trees, and stretches her body into a dance pose, accentuating her pregnant belly. In that moment the spirit of her unborn child runs into her body. Eula smiles and wraps her arms around her belly, cradling the unborn child. Eula's maternal love is so powerful that it can overcome the shame and horror of the rape, a form of colonial domination. Eula is also the one who tries to bring a stop to all the family bickering and animosity. Eula delivers an impassioned speech to all her family members while gathered on the beach for the last supper trying to urge them to accept the "ruin" Yellow Mary. Eula says,

If you love yourselves, then love Yellow Mary because she's a part of you. Just like we're a part of our mothers. A lot of us are going through things we feel we can't handle all alone. There's going to be all kinds of roads to take in life. Let's not be afraid to take 'em. We deserve them 'cause we're all good women. Do ya... do ya understand... who you are?! And what we have become? We're the daughters of those old dusty things Nana carries in her tin can. We carry too many scars from the past. Our past owns us. We wear our scars like armor for protection. Thick hard ugly scars that no one can pass through or ever hurt us again. Let's live our lives without living in the folds of old wounds.

The "community othermother" Viola, a Christian missionary who brings Bible lessons from the mainland, plays a role, although she has no children of her own. Viola imparts the words and teaching of Jesus Christ, a (white) God that the Peasant children know little about. Viola sees Christianity as a strategy to help young African-American women and girls avert sexual

exploitation and crime, something Yellow Mary and cousin Jake, a convict, have been unable to do. Dash represents this in the following scene set on the beach:

Shot: Wide-angle on Viola surrounded by children of varying ages. She has just finished reading from the Bible. She says, *“You know when I left this island...”*

Shot: Medium-long shot Viola speaks to the children. *“... I was a sinner and I didn’t even know it. But I left this island, touched that mainland, and...”*

Shot: Wide-angle shot of Yellow Mary standing on the shoreline gazing out towards the sea. Viola’s voice-off, *“And fell into the arms of the Lord.”* The camera tracks out to a wider frame. A child asks, *“What they got out there anyway, Viola?”*

Shot: Medium-long angle Viola with children. *“Life, child. The beginning of a new life.”*

Shot: Medium shot young teenaged girl with parasol. *“Who they, out there?”*

Shot: Medium-long shot Viola with children. *“Jesus Christ, baby. The son of God.”* Viola looks out towards the same sea as Yellow Mary.

There is another scene in which Viola gives “lady lessons” to the Peasant girls on the beach. Dash deploys this scene as a commentary on how black women are expected to perform white femininity. Through these lessons Viola teaches the young women how to sit, stand, and walk “properly.” Yellow Mary stands as an example of what happens to young African-American women if they do not act like “proper” white ladies. They get raped and “ruined.” Viola’s teachings stand in contrast to Nana’s teachings, which are rooted in embracing the “old souls.” Nana teaches customs and the ways of “the old souls” to maintain one’s identity and cope with the trauma of the painful past, one marred by slavery and racist violence. Viola’s teachings are about the future, the modern white world. Viola says, *“Nana was never educated, all she knows are simple things, things that people told her a long time ago.”* Nana does not want to stop her family from migrating to the mainland, but she doesn’t believe they should forget about African ways of healing, dreaming, speaking, and being. Later, Nana and Viola’s disparate teachings will merge, represented in Nana’s “voodoo hand” scene.

Shot: Extreme wide angle (bird’s-eye-view shot) of the Peasant family gathered around Nana. Nana walks toward Viola, and takes her Bible. Nana says to everyone, *“We done took old Gods and given ‘em new names. They saw it all here that day, those Ibo.”*

Shot: Close angle on Nana's hand tying a "voodoo hand" tightly onto the Bible.

Shot: Extreme wide angle. Nana holds the Bible with the voodoo hand up to everyone. "This hand, it's from me, from them, from us. Same soul as you all."

Shot: Extreme close angle on Nana's hands holding the Bible and voodoo hand. She says, "Come children, kiss this hand full of me."

Though Viola is initially upset by Nana's "heathen" gesture, she does eventually kneel down and kiss Nana's voodoo hand and Bible, a hybrid symbol of African-American-ness. Everyone except Haagar kisses the hand. Nana not only blesses her children before they leave Ibo Landing forever, but teaches them how to integrate the two seemingly disparate worldviews of the colonizer and the colonized in the new world.

Merata Mita's Mauri

In *Mauri*, being a mother is not only deemed as an important role and experience as a woman, but also essential to the survival of the community as a whole. Reproductive power is emphasized throughout the film. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Mita opens her film with a birth scene, which is depicted in a highly ritualistic and reverent way. In the Māori community the figure of the "bloodmother" is held in high esteem. In stark contrast these young mothers are not part of a nuclear patriarchal family unit. They are part of a community, and may or may not be formally married. One of Mita's central characters, Remari, conceives a child out of wedlock, which is seen by the community in a positive light. Indeed Remari's reproductive power brings empowerment to her community because her "love-child" with Paki/Rewi will inherit the Semmens land – a form of restitution for the Rapanas.

Throughout the film Mita positions Remari as confidant and wise, and fiercely protective of her family and Māori community. Remari, like Kara, also serves as moral and political watchdog, guiding men like Steve and Paki/Rewi to do what's right. She has no qualms about reprimanding Steve or Paki/Rewi, and she has little to no fear of authorities. In the following

scene Remari stands up to a local cop who is close on Paki/Rewi's tail. Remari and Steve have just helped Paki/Rewi avert the police who are hunting him down.

Shot: Night. Wide angle of forested area with police car in foreground. Remari emerges from the dark interior of some trees. She carries a lantern and thermos. In the foreground of the shot the cop swings open the door of his patrol jeep. Remari and the cop approach each other.

Shot: Medium angle on older cop who is slumped in the seat of the jeep, having a catnap on the job.

Shot: Full shot on Remari and cop. Remari, smiling says, "Want a cup of tea?"

Shot: Over-the-shoulder (Remari) Medium angle 2-shot. The young cop says, "What's this?"

Shot: Reverse angle. Remari gestures toward her thermos. "An offer of a cup of tea." She keeps her frozen smile in place.

Shot: Back to angle on the young cop. He looks down at Remari's thermos, then off-screen, and then up Remari's body. "That all you offering, love?"

Shot: Back to angle on Remari. "Mrs. Semmens to you..."

Shot: Back to cop. Sound-bridge: Remari continues. "PIG." The cop drops his grin. Suddenly, the cop's attention is caught by something off-screen. "Out of the way!"

Shot: Wide angle on house. A figure gallops away on horseback.

Shot: 2-shot of cop and Remari. The cop leaps out of the frame. "You BITCH!" Remari calls out, "Go Rewi! He's seen you!"

Shot: Wide angle Rewi gallops out of frame.

Shot: 2-shot of cops in jeep. The young cop starts up the engine, and drives off in pursuit of Rewi. As the jeep drives away, the frame shifts to reveal Remari watching from the side of the road.

The Anti-Patriarchal Maternal Narratives

And I do believe that why we have so few real women artists at all levels in history is because women bear the children and finally they bear the conscience about having those children. As much as men can say "oh but they could have had nurses and this and that" I think a lot of women's major creative energies have gone into bringing up children. I personally believe that it is a huge commitment to bring a life onto the earth, and that's probably one of the reasons why in a business as taxing as the film business there are so few women directors.⁴⁹

- Gillian Armstrong

The anti-patriarchal maternal narratives are Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979), Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). Most of these films are structured through the point of view of a daughter figure. Though the

central heroine in Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* is biologically a mother, she is forced to forfeit motherhood when she is banished from her home and society for having a child out of wedlock. Little Jo spends most of the film childless. In Campion's *The Piano*, though the central heroine, Ada, is biologically a mother, she functions more like a daughter figure than a maternal one.

The dramatic conflicts are constructed around the daughter's desire to break free from patriarchal oppression as a means of finding her voice and subjectivity. A key strategy the daughter heroines deploy in order to resist patriarchy is to reject the role of mother or rebel against their mothers. Indeed, most of the mothers that appear across the anti-patriarchal narratives are represented as oppressed figures constrained and confined by the demands of reproductive labour within (white) patriarchal households (Friedan, Firestone, Dinnerstein). Motherhood is not a site of resistance and empowerment here, and hence why most of the daughter figures do not aspire to be their mothers. However, despite this seemingly negative portrayal of motherhood as an oppressive or delimiting role for women, Campion, Wilson, Armstrong, Kelly, and Greenwald structure their narratives through a maternal logic, echoing the theories of Rich ("pre-patriarchal features of motherhood") and the French feminists who turned their lenses to the "pre-lingual" features of the maternal body. Maternal desire often drives the films' plots, and structures the films' gaze and acoustic regimes. As Campion, Greenwald, Armstrong, Wilson, and Kelly are working in the popular cinema and are constrained by a "masculinist" logic inherent in classical narrative cinema (their funding would have been dependent on it), this maternal logic functions outside the films' plots. In this sense, the maternal functions somewhat covertly, and is expressed as "excess" in the mise-en-scene and soundtrack,

similarly to the Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s and 50s. These films channel the codes of the maternal melodrama, but through a feminist critical eye.

Maternal sacrifice is a key theme here, but not in service of the patriarchal household or heterosexual romance. In regard to female and gender stereotypes, the filmmakers' portrayals of mothers are never one-dimensional and never fall into the three main mother paradigms in Western Christian culture: the all-sacrificing angel in the house; the over-indulgent mother, satisfying her own needs; and the evil, possessive and destructive, all-devouring one (Kaplan). There are also a number of male characters that function like maternal figures. At the level of the plot many of the mother figures are enabled with dramatic agency in the heroine's/daughter's journey toward subjectivity. Hence, across these films the filmmakers privilege maternal desire as the driving force, thwarting masculinist and patriarchal desires. Across the anti-patriarchal narratives, two maternal figures animate the maternal logic of the films' plots, as well as their visual and sound regimes: the white settler mother and the wise maternal elder.

The White Settler Mother Figure

The white settler mother is an unhappy oppressed mother figure that is either overburdened with reproductive labour or dominated by a powerful patriarch. Her role as a mother is conflated with her role as a dependent in an inequitable marriage. Though she is generally a sympathetic character, she is often at odds with her rebellious daughter. The white settler mother represents everything the daughter fears and resists. She appears across all these films except Greenwald's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, which depicts a frontier on the cusp of becoming a white settler society. Despite her inferior status as a disenfranchised woman, the white settler mother is empowered in the narrative as a dramatic agent. Her maternal desire animates the films' plots, iconography, and sound regimes.

Gillian Armstrong's My Brilliant Career

In Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, there are two oppressed housewife figures, Sybylla's mother and Mrs. McSwatt, both bush farmers' wives. Mrs. Melvyn, Sybylla's mother, is the disgruntled farmwife of a failed farmer, who openly disregards Sybylla's desire to be a performing artist and a writer. Due to their financial problems, Sybylla's desires seem completely unrealistic and even selfish in her eyes. This is a source of much tension between mother and daughter. This tension is depicted in the following scene in which Mrs. Melvyn tells Sybylla they can't afford to keep her anymore.

Shot: Close angle on Sybylla as she plays the family's out-of-tune piano. She hums along. Sybylla's mother enters the frame. She stands beside the piano, her hands folded in front of her. She waits. Sybylla ignores her.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Mrs. Melvyn, looking displeased and worried. "*Sybylla, I want to have a talk with you.*"

Shot: Close angle on Sybylla, still playing, while Mrs. Melvyn is in background of shot. "*Talk away.*" The camera follows Mrs. Melvyn's hand as it comes down upon Sybylla's hands on the piano keys. Sybylla stops playing. Mrs. Melvyn pulls her hand away, and Sybylla slams the piano case down.

Shot: Long shot Sybylla sits at the piano, arms crossed. Mrs. Melvyn stands beside her. She takes a moment, and moves away from her angry daughter. She wrings her hands. "*You're a young woman now, and...*" Mrs. Melvyn raises her hand to her mouth. She seems distraught. "*I have been thinking about this a great deal.*" With a pained expression, she says, "*We can't afford to keep you any longer. Do you think you could earn your own living?*" Sybylla keeps her back to her mother. "*Of course.*" Mrs. Melvyn asks, "*And how would you do that?*" Sybylla turns and announces, "*I'd like to be a pianist.*" Mrs. Melvyn sighs with exasperation, "*Oh Sybylla! That takes years of practice and you know we can't afford it.*" Sybylla replies, "*You've thought of something already, haven't you?*" Mrs. Melvyn nods.

Mrs. Melvyn goes on to explain that she has arranged a position for Sybylla as a general servant.

This is of course unacceptable to Sybylla. Sybylla directs her anger at her mother, despite the fact that the family's financial problems are due to the father's mismanagement and implied drinking problem. As an impoverished woman with too many mouths to feed, Mrs. Melvyn is placed in an impossible situation as a mother. Despite her seeming coldness towards Sybylla,

Mrs. Melvyn acts out of maternal desire when she writes her own mother, the wealthy cattle station matron “Grandma Bossier,” for help with Sybylla. This action leads to an invitation from Grandma Bossier for Sybylla to stay with her at “Caddagat.” The invitation from Grandma Bossier sets Sybylla off on a tumultuous journey toward selfhood, in the end leading Sybylla back to Possum Gully, where she will be able to write her novel, the one she starts at the beginning of the film.

Mrs. McSwatt is the other maternal agent in *My Brilliant Career*. After Sybylla fails to play by Grandma Bossier’s rules, rejecting, not one, but two marriage proposals, she is sent away from Caddagat to work as a governess at the McSwatt’s prosperous bush farm. Sybylla’s parents owe the McSwatts money, and so Sybylla’s labour is given as payment. Mrs. McSwatt is an almost hyper-maternal figure, seemingly less burdened by motherhood, even though she has many children. Though Mrs. McSwatt is a minor character in the film’s plot, she plays a key role in Sybylla’s journey. When Mrs. McSwatt misinterprets Sybylla’s feelings as romantic for her eldest son, who is promised to another farmer’s daughter, Mrs. McSwatt takes pity on Sybylla and sends her back home, wiping the Melvyn’s debt clean in the process. Mrs. McSwatt is also motivated by her maternal desire to keep her son away from Sybylla, who, as an impoverished Melvyn, can offer no promising family connection. Without the McSwatt debt Sybylla doesn’t have to go into domestic service or even get married. Hence, Sybylla is free to reject Harry’s marriage proposal and truly felt affections in order to stay with her mother at Possum Gully and write her novel.

Sandy Wilson’s My American Cousin

In Wilson’s *My American Cousin*, there are two white settler mothers who serve as dramatic agents in the narrative, Sandy’s mother and Butch’s mother, Dolly. Though the two

women may be *just* 1950s North American housewives, they both seem to have an identity and life outside of the home. This is largely due to their access to the car, a key symbol of post-war North American culture and identity. It is the car that enables the two mothers to move across frontier landscapes and the narrative, rendering them as dramatic agents. Wilson deploys the car as a vehicle for maternal desire. Both mothers reclaim their “lost” children using the car. Butch’s mother uses the car to reclaim her “lost” son, and her lost red Cadillac, revealed at the end of the film to be “*mommy’s car*.” This revelation of maternal ownership renders Butch a boy, rather than the man he pretends to be. Interestingly, after Dolly’s arrival at Paradise Ranch, Butch seems to lose his sexy James Dean swagger. Under his mother’s gaze, Wilson renders Butch into a scared kid who screwed up – stealing a car and getting a girl pregnant. Dolly also sabotages Sandy’s plans to run away with Butch in the red Cadillac, when she drives away with him in the father’s car. Dolly is at the wheel, while Butch looks on helplessly at Sandy, left alone at the side of the road. It is Butch’s father who drives the red Cadillac now, a kind of foretelling of what the future Butch will become, a dominating American patriarch. This shot represents the (American) patriarch’s power, a power that usurps the mother’s ownership of material possessions, although not that of her child.

Kitty also reclaims her “lost” child by car. In the final scene of the film, after a dejected Sandy has been “abandoned” by Butch at the side of the road, Wilson brings Kitty into the frame, driving her station wagon. Kitty gives her daughter some advice about boys (“*they’re just buses, there’s always another one coming along*”), and then offers her a ride. Wilson has mother and daughter drive off together, but not back home. They go to Kitty’s dress rehearsal for her lead role in *Hedda Gabler*. In this way, Sandy’s mother replaces Butch, Sandy’s so-called rescuer and romantic interest. Kitty’s desire to have Sandy with her is fulfilled at the end of the film, a desire

that has been resisted by Sandy throughout. Sandy is exactly where she should be at her age, with her mother, although not in the domestic sphere, but in a car on the wide-open roads that wind through the rugged landscape of British Columbia.

Jane Campion's The Piano

In *The Piano*, Campion's deployment of the maternal is quite complex. On first glance the maternal figure in *The Piano* is the white settler mother Ada. However, Ada's actions are not driven by maternal desire, but rather by her fetishistic desire for her "lost" piano, and later, her sexual desire for George Baines. Hence, in *The Piano*, the mother lacks maternal desire. Though Ada could be construed as a "bad mother," selfishly concerned with her own desires and pleasures, Campion resists this monolithic representation. Instead Campion constructs Ada as a rebellious daughter, who subverts the rules of the patriarchal family. Ada's maternal desire is displaced onto Flora, her seven-year old child, constructing a kind of role reversal between mother and daughter. (One of the first things Stewart says to and about Ada, is, "*You're small. I didn't think you'd be small.*") This "small-ness" can be linked to Ada's inferior or child-like status in the Stewart household. Indeed, Ada has the same legal status and rights as that of her daughter. Sold into marriage by her father against her will, Ada immediately rejects Stewart, the man her father has chosen for her. Like the rebellious heroines in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* and Wilson's *My American Cousin*, Ada subverts her role as the dutiful daughter. Ada's rejection of Stewart is really a rejection of her iconic role as the white settler wife in the patriarchal household, one conflated with the role of mother. Ada subverts the role of the white settler mother figure, rooted in the "angel in the house" trope. This mother role is taken up by Ada's daughter, Flora, as a means of ensuring the success of the family. Campion depicts the role reversal between Ada and Flora in the wedding portrait scene.

Shot: Medium-long angle 2-shot of Flora and Ada. Ada is reflected in the mirror, wearing her bridal attire. Flora stands beside the mirror facing her mother with a scowl on her face. “*I want to be in the photograph.*” Ada doesn’t reply.

Later after the portrait session is over, Ada literally rips off her mock-wedding gown, which is held at the back by ties. The wedding dress seems more like a costume than a real dress. Like a costume its sole purpose is to help in a performance or masquerade. Ada rejects performing the role of Alistair’s willing wife. Instead Ada can only think of her beloved and abandoned piano. It is Flora who experiences and expresses the desires that Ada should have as a new bride. Unlike Ada, Flora longs to be a part of the portrait, a visual representation of the family. Though Ada clearly loves and cherishes Flora, she does everything she can to prevent the success of the family. Under Stewart’s control Ada knows she will suffocate, and so out of self-preservation she rejects her husband’s affections and pursues an illicit and immoral sexual “arrangement” with her husband’s business partner, Baines. Campion depicts Ada’s preference for Baines as an act of rebellion, although a very risky one. Much of the film’s tension is constructed around Ada’s transgression.

With an unruly mother acting like a rebellious daughter, Flora takes on the qualities of many of the mother figures in the other anti-patriarchal films, particularly Wilson’s *My American Cousin* and Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career*. Driven by her desire to save the patriarchal family, Flora shifts from helping her mother to trying to control her, especially in regard to her mother’s relationship with Baines. Flora wants her mother to play by the rules of patriarchy, and accept her role as white settler wife. This creates a rift between mother and daughter, a relationship that seemingly had no issues previous to migrating to New Zealand. Here the patriarch comes between mother and daughter. As Ada and Baines become more involved and attached to one another, Flora becomes more attached to Stewart. When Ada is with Baines, Flora is not needed

for her communication skills (her ability to speak and sign) or her companionship, as Flora seems to be the only person Ada can relate to. Flora is in fact barred from entry into Baines's homestead where Ada conducts her "music lessons." Flora is threatened by Baines. Hence, driven by her desire to "save" the family from ruin, Flora betrays her mother's trust, not once, but twice.

The first time Flora betrays her mother is in the "tree cleansing" scene. Stewart is punishing Flora for kissing and rubbing herself up against tree trunks (a kind of sexual practicing she learned from the Māori children). While scrubbing down the tree trunks, Flora explains to Stewart why Baines still doesn't know how to play the piano, despite all the lessons. "*She never gives him a turn. She just plays what she pleases. And sometimes she doesn't play at all.*" Stewart asks, "*When's the next lesson?*" Flora tells him, "*Tomorrow.*" Stewart decides to spy on Baines and Ada, confirming his suspicions that they are indeed having a sexual affair. This leads Stewart to imprison Ada in the house, boarding up all the windows and barring the door from the outside. (This is quite perplexing to Aunt Morag, who can't imagine how that will keep the Māori out). While Stewart is boarding up the windows, Flora instructs him where to place the boards. Pointing to the window Flora yells, "*Here Papa!*" Ada tries to ignore what is being done to her, but Flora decides to give her a talking to, as a mother would to a child. As Stewart hammers away Flora says, "*You shouldn't have gone up there, should you? I don't like it, and nor does Papa.*"

The second time Flora seemingly betrays her mother is after Ada promises Stewart not to see Baines again. Stewart permits Ada some limited freedom, no more barred doors and windows. However, Ada can't forget about Baines, and reneges on her promise. Champion represents Ada's resistance to Stewart's commands through the following piano key scene.

Shot: Close angle on side of piano key Ada has dislodged from her piano. She has burned in the message, "*Dear George, you have my heart. Ada McGrath.*" (her maiden name). Ada wraps the key in a handkerchief.

Shot: Long shot Ada is silhouetted behind hanging sheets. Flora's wings hover at the bottom of the frame. She is talking to her dolls. "*And be quiet!*"

Shot: Medium angle on washtub. Flora's hands scrub her dolls' clothes. "*You just have to be naked until, I finish washing and drying your clothes.*"

Shot: Ada emerges from behind the sheet, carrying the piano key behind her back. She approaches Flora, who continues talking to her dolls in a motherly voice. Ada bends down and hands Flora the piano key. In sign language, Ada asks Flora to take the key to Baines. Flora shakes her head. "*No, we're not supposed to visit him.*" Ada pleads with Flora. Flora turns stern on her mother and places the piano key down, refusing to obey her wishes. Flora returns to hanging up her dolls clothes. Angered, Ada grabs the piano key and forces it into Flora's hands. She pulls the child up and tells her "*Go.*" Flora marches off seemingly following her mother's orders.

The scene reflects a power struggle between mother and daughter, with Ada trying to assert her power as the adult in the relationship. However, Flora knows her mother's relationship with Baines threatens the family, so instead of delivering the piano key to Baines, she delivers it to Stewart, "*Papa.*" Enraged with violent jealousy and possessiveness, Stewart turns into a real Bluebeard, chopping off Ada's finger with an ax.

Though Flora's actions seem like betrayals rooted in her desire for a "normal family" in the patriarchal sense, Campion manages to render Flora's actions as subversive. They in fact lead to Ada's salvation. Like Sybylla and Sandy, Ada is a lost daughter inadvertently saved by a maternal figure, who in this case is Flora. Though Ada is victimized by Stewart's violence, Flora's actions lead Stewart, Ada, and Baines to confront the reality of their relations: that Ada will never allow her will to be possessed. Once this revelation is made, Flora resumes her role of the daughter. After she has delivered her mother's severed finger to Baines as a warning from Stewart, Flora retreats into a screaming child. She can't form any words. Rather than returning back to Stewart, Flora remains with Baines and Hira, from whom she receives comfort and

solace. Campion never judges Flora, and neither does her mother, Ada. Flora is after all, as Hira reminds Baines, “*just a little girl*,” a fact that everyone in the film seems to have forgotten.

At the end of the film Flora, Ada, and Baines form a new kind of family, one that has in Hira’s words “gone beyond the veil.” In this new family Ada learns how to speak again – like an adult. Baines and Ada continue their passionate relationship. And Flora embraces her new role as the daughter. Campion represents this in the last image of Flora, which captures her in a moment of child-like bliss. Shot in slow motion, Flora performs cartwheels in a garden with whimsical abandon. Campion’s final image of Flora mirrors the scene on the beach with Baines and her mother from early on in the film. This is the key scene in which Baines realizes his desire/love for Ada. While Ada plays her beloved piano against an Oceanic landscape, Baines gazes longingly at her, and Flora frolics happily in her white petticoats, cart-wheeling across the sandy beach. It is the only other moment in the film where Campion permits Flora to be the daughter.

Maggie Greenwald’s The Ballad of Little Jo

In Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, there are two white settler mothers: the Russian immigrant mother, and Jo, herself, although she must conceal her identity as both a woman and a mother. Though Jo must don the masquerade of a frontiersman living with his Chinese male house servant, Greenwald never lets us forget that Jo is a mother, one who has painful maternal longing for her lost child. Jo’s maternal longing is expressed in the letter writing between Jo and her sister Helen, who is raising Jo’s child. Greenwald deploys these letters as a device to construct maternal desire through the films’ soundtrack. Though these letters seem somewhat inconsequential, they are instrumental in Little Jo’s connection with the past and her identity.

“Dear Jo, it’s been so long since we heard from you. Laddie gets bigger every day. He’s already such a handsome little man. You’d be so proud of him. Jo, he’s asked for you so much, and longed for you so terribly, that I finally told him you had died.”

The death of Laddie’s mother is in fact the death of “Josephine Monaghan.” Soon afterwards, Jo commits the final act that will make her a true man, she engages gun violence with thugs from the Eastern company, which wants to buy up all the land, including Jo’s. She kills two men, although she breaks down afterwards. However, despite Little Jo’s “manly” act. Greenwood ensures maternal desire remains a driving force. Over the film’s credits a woman’s voice sings,

*My sweet son,
The blue of night has fallen.
I can’t be by your side.
Only son,
It’s hard to take the leaving,
But for your sake I’ll lie.
In my hand feels a silver dagger
If you need my knife,
In my heart,
Like a thorn of gold,
Ever you abide.
And it’s true,
The life that I am leading
The law will not uphold,
And it’s true,
And even though it could change,
I would not change it now.
In this wild place,
Where the roads end.
I’ve been both lost and free.
My hands are hard but so strong
They touch more tenderly
Laddie, baby, the boy I leave behind me
The man I’ll never see.
In my dreams, I dream
That you are with me.
Constantly.*

The other white settler mother is the Russian immigrant mother, who has travelled with her large family to America to build their homestead. Unfortunately, the land the Russian family

has claimed is desired by the ruthless and corrupt Western Cattle Company. Though Jo is a loner and keeps her distance from the other (male) miners and farmers, she does form a bond with the Russian family, especially after she learns that they are to be neighbours. Jo is in fact the person who helps the family find their homestead – a vacant lot in the middle of nowhere. A very maternal figure, the Russian mother has what Jo can never have, a close bond with her child. Here Greenwald deploys the Russian mother as a way to emphasize Jo's yearning for her own child, someone she will never know or teach things to. However, Jo and the Russian mother share something – they are both “others” in the eyes of society. As an impoverished Slavic non-Anglo immigrant woman, the Russian mother would have been deemed “foreign,” and most likely feared and even despised by farmers like the racist Frank Badger. Indeed, the Russian mother is tragically slaughtered along with many of her children by the Western Cattle Company's hired guns. The murder of the Russian mother is one of the most heart-wrenching scenes and one of the major turning points in the film. Greenwald emphasizes her death through extensive shot coverage of the murder scene, and the use of slow motion.

Shot: Close angle on Little Jo's hand holding a bunch of wildflowers. The camera tilts up to Jo's face as she gazes with disbelief at something. The camera pans over to reveal the bloodied dead body of the Russian father strewn on the ground. The camera roams across the Russian homestead only to reveal the dead and bloodied bodies of the children. The camera cranes upward over the thatched roof of the house. Surrounded by three hired guns the Russian mother frantically tries to escape. Rather than killing her at first they toy with her, diabolically laughing.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium angle on Russian mother's skirts as she tries to flee the hired guns.

Shot: Slow motion Medium angle on horse's galloping legs as a hired gun pursues the Russian mother. The Russian mother's anxious breathing is foreground in the soundtrack.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium angle on Russian mother's skirts as she continues to run for her life.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium angle on horse's galloping legs as a hired gun continues to pursue her.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium angle on Russian mother's skirts as she continues to run. She exits frame.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium angle on horse's galloping legs. Camera tilts up to the hired gun. He wears a hooded mask. He raises his rifle, takes aim, and fires a shot.

Shot: Slow motion. Long shot of Russian mother falling to the ground.

Shot: Slow motion. Medium-long shot frontal angle on Russian mother as she falls to the ground. A gunshot wound in her chest is visible. She falls to the ground.

Shot: Slow motion. Long shot of Russian mother falls.

Shot: Medium angle on Jo, who has witnessed the murder from the hidden vantage point of a laundry line. A handmade quilt and bed sheet frame Jo's face, as she gasps from shock and horror. Jo turns away to hide from the hired guns.

Shot: Long shot of the lifeless body of the Russian mother. One of the hired guns circles her body, examining his kill. One of the killers yells, "Let's go!" The Russian mother's killer exits frame.

Shot: Extreme wide angle on hired guns ride off together. The chimney smoke from the Russian family's house enters the foreground of the shot.

Here Greenwald suggests that in the wide-open spaces of the frontier danger always lurks, but not in the form of angry "Injuns," but rather in the form of big business. The Western Cattle Company wants to obliterate any obstacles in their way of acquiring land and power. This scene asks the essential question: But what about the American ideals of free land and opportunity? Greenwald seems to suggest that these American promises are myths, refuting Frederick Jackson Turner's seminal "Frontier Thesis" (1893). Turner explained the American frontier as a space marked by stages of advancement in which "primitive society" evolves to a "civilized" state of "settled farm communities" and eventually to the "factory system." This evolution of the frontier was deemed natural and necessary to manifest destiny. On Turner's frontier there are no cold and calculated slaughtering of settler mothers by corporate thugs. On Greenwald's frontier no women and children will be protected from capitalist greed and expansionism.

The Maternal Wise Elder Figure

Grandma Bossier: Now listen to me, Sybylla. In a few years he'll (Frank Hawdon) come into quite a large fortune in England. He comes of a very good family, and he'll make someone an excellent husband.

Sybylla: Well, it won't be me.

Grandma Bossier: Do be realistic, child.

Sybylla: Well I am. To begin with, I don't love him.

Grandma Bossier: That is not the point.

Sybylla: It is to me.

Grandma Bossier: Sybylla, do you want to be a burden on your family forever? With no status in decent society or a home of your own?

Sybylla: I will not be married off to someone I detest by YOU or anybody!

Grandma: Bossier: At times I fear for you, my girl. You are rude to your elders and betters, and often lack all gentility. (Pause) Very well. You may not be prepared to apologize to Frank, but I expect you to apologize to ME - when you have regained your... humour. And your manners!

- My Brilliant Career

There are two maternal wise elder figures that recur across the anti-patriarchal maternal narratives: the “Mother of the Empire” figure and the elder and/or subaltern wise-woman figure.

I borrow the term “Mother of the Empire” from feminist historian Julia Bush who has examined the construction of maternal imperialism in the colonies.

Queen Victoria, of course, represented the ultimate maternal icon, the ‘Great White Queen,’ and ‘Mother of the Empire’ whose loving care for her colonized subjects was deeply imbued with superiority and controlling power as it was with a sense of Christian duty. For Victoria embodied maternal imperialism at its most authoritative, and through her royal status resolved the paradoxes implied by strong female rule accompanied by a conservative outlook on gender roles.⁵⁰

In these films, the “Mother of the Empire” figure is generally an unsympathetic character, primarily motivated by maintaining the status quo. Her power is rooted in her associations/relations with (white) colonial patriarchs and her privileged status in society as a British female authority figure. Her feminine identity is rooted in the old world, in this case Britain and Queen Victoria, and she sees herself as an instructor in the art of proper (British) white femininity. She is generally at odds with the films’ heroines, who balk at her old fashioned and stuffy ideas or reject traditional female roles in the patriarchal family. The Mother of the Empire’s agency is constructed through her desire to assert her influence over the heroine. Strangely, even though this controlling figure aims to maintain the “Law of the Father,” her

actions often inadvertently lead to the rebellious daughter figure realizing her desires. This is further evidence of the conflicted views on motherhood and the maternal by the films' directors.

The elder and/or subaltern wise-woman figure is different from the Mother of the Empire figure. In contrast, she is generally a sympathetic figure and functions as a helper to the heroine by offering support, advice, and key knowledge. Though she seemingly has a minimal purpose in the films' plots, she is vital to the heroine's journey. This figure is similar to the subaltern great-grandmother figure in the anti-racist/colonial narratives, but has a far less prominent role, and is not represented through an anti-racist/anti-colonial lens.

Gillian Armstrong's My Brilliant Career

In *My Brilliant Career* Grandma Bossier is a Mother of the Empire figure. She represents everything her granddaughter, Sybylla is not, and even detests. Needless to say Sybylla and her grandmother clash, a classic old world vs. new world conflict. In Grandma Bossier's world, beauty regimens, poise, and female cultural refinement are essential to finding a wealthy husband – like Frank Hawdon or Harry Beecham. With the fortitude of a military commandant, Grandma Bossier oversees and orchestrates Sybylla's transformation from a wild unkempt bush-farmer's daughter to a poised and proper young lady with the sole purpose of preparing Sybylla for the marriage market. Grandma Bossier's work is in vain, however, because Sybylla has no intention of ever marrying. She wants to "have a career." Both characters realize they stand for very different values and ideas about womanhood. Grandma Bossier tires of Sybylla's notions about female independence, and finally sends her back to Possum Gully. Though Grandma Bossier's banishment of Sybylla from "Caddagat" seems initially harsh, her actions inadvertently lead Sybylla to the McSwatts' busy and muddy farm, which eventually leads Sybylla back to Possum Gully, her family farm. Grandma Bossier's actions ironically help

Sybylla realize her stated desire to “have a career”, as well as aid in her tumultuous journey toward womanhood.

Sandy Wilson’s My American Cousin

In Wilson’s *My American Cousin*, Sandy’s grandmother, Granny Wilcox, is also a Mother of the Empire figure. She has a similar bearing to Grandma Bossier, although she does not have the same level of wealth and social status. She also has a much smaller role in the narrative; she appears in only one scene. The purpose of Granny Wilcox seems to be more comic device than anything. However, despite this minor role, Wilson deploys Granny Wilcox as a way to construct a brief feminist commentary about old world British femininity. Despite the fact that it is 1959 Granny Wilcox still clings to the old British Victorian rituals. This is humourously depicted in the afternoon tea scene where Sandy and her father pay Granny Wilcox a “duty” visit.

Shot: Medium angle on Granny Wilcox who offers someone off-screen a plate of biscuits. “*Another bicky?*” Off-screen Major Wilcox replies, “*Oh, no thank you.*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Major Wilcox as he sips from a delicate china teacup. Granny Wilcox off-screen says, “*Tea, Sandra?*” Sandy, off-screen, replies, “*Oh no thanks Granny...*”

Shot: Full shot. Sandy stands in the foreground with her back to the lens. Granny and Major Wilcox sit at a tea table. In the background is a majestic lake and mountains. Sandy continues, “*I think I’ll just have a glass of water.*” Sandy slouches as she speaks. Granny Wilcox replies, “*WADER? What on God’s great earth is WADER?*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sandy. Confused and irritated she replies, “*Water. In the tap, in the lake, falls from the sky...*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Major Wilcox who looks at his mother with resigned confusion. Granny Wilcox replies with feigned understanding. “*Water!*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Granny Wilcox. She puts down her cup of tea and turns to Sandy. “*Now, please let me hear you say “wa-TER” as it was meant to be spoken.*”

Shot: Medium angle on Sandy, looking bored and irritated. She exclaims in a dramatic manner, “*WATER!!*” Sandy glares at her grandmother and then turns theatrically toward the house. She marches into the house, almost colliding with her aunt. Granny Wilcox off-screen says, “*Very good. That wasn’t so difficult now was it? What these young children do with the Queen’s language...*” At this point Sandy has disappeared into the house.

Speaking in the “Queen’s language” Granny Wilcox holds court in her backyard garden, criticizing her granddaughter, *Sandra*, for her improper pronunciations and manners, while doling out cups of tea in elegant English china. This scene is set against the majestic and “uncivilized” British Columbia landscape – hardly an English garden. By framing Granny Wilcox’s British-style tea party against a rugged wilderness Wilson constructs a humorous and ironic contrast that highlights the absurdity of Granny Wilcox’s values.

Granny Wilcox’s old-fashioned ways hold little meaning or interest for Sandy. Although Wilson does not critique Granny’s British imperialism, there is the implication that Granny Wilcox’s world is on its way out, due mainly to the influence and growing seductiveness of American youth culture such as rock n’ roll, Hollywood, and fast cars, represented by Sandy’s cousin, Butch. Unlike Sybylla’s 19th century grandmother, Grandma Bossier, Granny Wilcox has little power or authority in a 20th century post-war North American society. Granny Wilcox may think she is superior to everyone else due to her *British-ness*, but Wilson represents her as irrelevant, out of step, not only with her granddaughter, but with the new world. Immediately after Sandy’s exchange with Granny Wilcox, Sandy calls one of her girlfriends to gush about the handsome Butch and his amazing car.

Jane Campion’s The Piano

In Campion’s *The Piano*, Stewart’s Aunt Morag is a Mother of the Empire figure, but perhaps the most sinister of the maternal figures across this body of work. Like Ada, Aunt Morag is a Scottish immigrant. Perhaps because of her “wild” and “primitive” surroundings Aunt Morag seems intent on maintaining her imperial British ways – and authority. Like Granny Wilcox (*My American Cousin*) and Grandma Bossier (*My Brilliant Career*) Aunt Morag deems herself superior to everyone around her, including her own daughter, Nessie, whom she bosses about in a

similar fashion to her female Māori servants. Aunt Morag sees it as her duty to bring and maintain British Victorian culture in the wilderness. Aunt Morag's actions are motivated by her desire to marry off her daughter Nessie, whilst also maintaining the status quo. There are two ways Aunt Morag does this. Firstly, she attempts to match-make Nessie and George Baines, and secondly, through gossip, publically discredits the enigmatic Ada, the object of Baines's desire.

In this way, Campion constructs Aunt Morag as a kind of "Bluebeard's helper," although she has less power and is deployed as a humour device throughout the film, similarly to Wilson's deployment of Granny Wilcox. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Campion's film has been analyzed as a feminist revisioning of fairy tales, particularly *Bluebeard*. Rose Lowell-Smith identified the figure of a female helper in *Bluebeard* as neither evil nor good, but an enigmatic and ambiguous figure who in the end despite her strangeness and grotesqueness, ends up helping the heroine find her way.⁵¹ Aunt Morag plays a similar role to Bluebeard's female helper in that she is aligned through family ties with Ada's husband, Stewart. Throughout the film Campion depicts Aunt Morag as a gossipy old crone, who seems intent on raising doubts and suspicions in Stewart's mind about Ada's mental health and ability to perform her "wifely duties." She even criticizes Ada's piano playing. That said, Aunt Morag does not really do anything to hurt Ada. Campion seems to use her as a comical contrasting figure to Ada. Steeped in old world Victorianism, she is like Granny Wilcox and Grandma Bossier, a relic from the past. The staunch Victorian British values she upholds seem stale and, given the setting, absurd. In comparison Ada's attitudes toward marriage, sex, and family are decidedly modern. Tellingly, part way through the film Aunt Morag simply fades from the frame.

In contrast to Aunt Morag there is Hira, an elderly Māori wise woman, who serves as a dramatic agent through her involvement in the Ada/Baines affair. Hira is George Baines's friend,

and possibly domestic servant, although the nature of their relationship is somewhat ambiguous. Due to the fact that Baines has “gone Native,” adopting Māori ways and tattoos, Hira’s relationship with Baines seems more personal, even motherly. Working within the fairy-tale format of the film, Campion constructs Hira as a “fairy godmother” or fertility goddess figure. Hira is “woodland fairy” to Aunt Morag’s “Bluebeard’s helper.” Campion depicts Hira’s fairy-ness in the following scene:

Shot: Camera pans along a Māori canoe where naked Māori children sit. The setting is bucolic. The camera pauses at Hira, who is seated on a large branch of a tree extended out onto the water. She is positioned above everyone else in the frame. A naked child is seated beside her. Baines, positioned below Hira, scrubs his laundry at the edge of the river. Hira says, “*You need a wife. It’s no good having it sulk between your legs for the rest of your life.*”

Shot: Medium angle of laughing Māori woman holding a child, who also laughs.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Baines. He smiles, but does not reply.

When Baines reveals he already has a wife living back in England, Hira tells him, “*You need another wife. Such a treasure should not sleep on your stomach at night.*”

Campion’s representation of Hira could be interpreted as rooted in a racist “Native Earth Mother” trope, and certainly film scholars have criticized Campion’s representation of the Māori (as discussed in the Introduction). However, Hira’s association with nature and the erotic could also be seen as part of the film’s repeated referencing to the fairy tale, a form in which preternatural woodland mythical creatures play a key dramatic role in the destinies of the hero and heroine.⁵² Fairies, particularly fairies like Queen Mab, wielded great power and influence in the lives of others, often through maternal or fertility powers. Queen Mab can be traced back to Hera, the Greek Goddess of marriage and the life of women.⁵³ Like a fairy godmother, Hira (Hera) is instrumental in bringing the two lovers, Ada and Baines, together, and keeping the villain (Stewart) at bay. An Ada/Baines scene, in which Ada responds to Baines’s lovemaking, follows the Baines/Hira scene by the river, the first time she has done so, reflecting a shift in their

relationship. As if following on Hira's words, Baines begins to desire Ada beyond the "arrangement" that has made him "*wretched*" and made her a "*whore*." Baines wants Ada as his lover/wife. Later when Stewart attempts to confront Baines about his relationship with Ada, Hira bars Stewart from entering Baines's front door.

Hira also comes to the aid and protection of a traumatized Flora, after she has been forced by Stewart to deliver her mother's bloody dismembered finger to Baines.

Shot: The framing is tight, but the camera follows the action. Trying to get information out of a hysterical Flora, Baines shakes her. Flora screams, "*He chopped it off!!*" Baines is frantic. "*What did she tell him? What did she tell him!*" Hira enters the frame and takes Flora away from Baines. Hira says in Māori, "*She's just a little girl.*" Flora is weeping. Baines is framed out of the shot. Hira cradles Flora and speaks to her soothingly in Māori.

Shot: Medium angle on Baines, who is seething with anger. "*I'm going to crush his skull.*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Hira and Flora, who screams, "*NO!!!*" Hira gazes at Baines with disdain. She continues to soothe Flora, rocking her in her arms. Flora warns Baines, "*He'll chop it off!!!*"

Shot: Medium angle on Baines who punches a nearby tree.

Baines does not seek revenge on Stewart, but remains with Hira and Flora at his homestead. Hira is clearly more than just a device or a racist trope. Her influence is felt throughout the narrative. Hira's subaltern maternal voice is privileged at the end of the film, as a kind of sendoff to Ada, Baines, and Flora as they depart on their new life together. As the Māori war-canoe carries the newly formed family and piano out to sea, Hira sings a lament (*waitia*) against the roaring of the waves. It is Hira's last act of influence, setting up Ada's attempted suicide, and the drowning of her beloved piano. Framed as a central figure in the shot, Hira sings,

You are like seaweed drifting in the sea, Baines. Drift far away, drift far beyond the horizon. A canoe glides hither, a canoe glides thither, but you though will journey on and eventually be beyond the veil.⁵⁴

Nancy Kelly's Thousand Pieces of Gold

In Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Li Ping is an elderly Chinese man who runs "The Golden Flower of Prosperity," which serves as a general store and the central hub for the Chinese community in town. Li Ping is known as a wise man and a healer who provides medical facilities, as well as letter-writing services to his primarily Chinese patronage. Though Li Ping is not a mother or subaltern grandmother or even particularly "maternal" he serves as a counter figure to the more "masculine" Chinese male characters in the film; the capitalistic patriarch, Hong King, and Lalu's lover, Jim. Li Ping doesn't engage in any of the more "male" jobs or activities available in the town, such as mining, drinking, gambling, and "whoring." In fact, Li Ping is rarely seen outside of the feminine-sounding "The Golden Flower," until the end of the film when he is driven out of town along with all the other Chinese. Though Li Ping, Hong King, and Jim are all marginalized Chinese men in a racist frontier, Li Ping is the only male in the film who does not see Lalu as a sexual object or a commodity. Li Ping is the first and only man, white or Chinese, that Lalu encounters whose gaze is neither oppressive nor desiring. Li Ping sees Lalu first and foremost as a "daughter," not a prospective wife or whore.

As mentioned in the Introduction some scholars, such as Janey Chu, Peter Feng, and Hyun-Li L. Kang have taken issue with Kelly's representation of Chinese masculinity. These scholars have argued that though Kelly was well-intentioned in foregrounding the Chinese immigrant experience in the West, her representation of Chinese males is constructed through a Eurocentric and even racist gaze. Indeed, Kelly's primary concern is patriarchy, not race. Truly Li Ping's character is the only "positive" depiction of the Chinese, other than Lalu. However, there are very few "positive" depictions of men in the film, as even Charlie is somewhat weak

and motivated by sexual desire. It is interesting that Kelly chooses to represent the only positive male in the film as a subaltern “feminine” wise man.

In many ways, Li Ping functions in the narrative in a similar way to Hira in Campion’s *The Piano*. Like Hira, Li Ping is a minor character, but has a significant role in his subaltern community. Like the subaltern great-grandmother figures in the anti-racist/colonial films, Li Ping provides the central heroine with much needed guidance and solace in a sexist and racist society. Like Kara in Mita’s *Mauri* and Nana in Dash’s *Daughters*, Li Ping has held onto the old world, in this case China. In stark contrast to Hong King and Jim, Li Ping only dresses in Chinese clothing and practices Chinese customs (i.e. acupuncture), and all of Li Ping’s dialogue is in Chinese with English sub-titles. Hong King and Jim have turned their backs on China and have adopted a more American frontier identity. Jim dresses like a cowboy and Hong King like a successful middle-class entrepreneur. As Hong King says to Lalu, “*For me China is nothing but ghosts.*” In contrast, Li Ping helps Lalu keep her connection to her family back home by writing letters for her.

In regard to Li Ping’s dramatic agency in the film’s narrative, Kelly constructs Li Ping as an active character, even though Li Ping only appears in the film for a few scenes. These scenes, however, function as key turning points in Lalu’s journey to freedom and full subjectivity. When Lalu first comes upon Li Ping’s “Golden Flower of Prosperity,” it is a transformative moment. Before discovering Li Ping Lalu is depressed, lonely, and desperate. She has already threatened suicide, and sees no way out of her prison as Hong King’s slave and concubine. Li Ping offers Lalu temporary escape from Hong King’s oppressive construct of “China Polly,” the new name and identity he has imposed upon her. By maintaining her Chinese identity, Lalu is empowered to assert some autonomy and resist Hong King’s complete objectification/victimization of her as a

sexual commodity, something he bought for “*fifteen hundred dollars.*” Through Li Ping’s support, Lalu resists the role of victim, finding dignity, solace and a sense of belonging. At the end of the film, after Lalu has rejected Charlie’s offer to come live with him at his homestead by the River of No Return, Lalu is set to migrate to San Francisco with all the other dislocated Chinese. Framed among expelled Chinese men, Lalu rides off alone. She meets up with Li Ping as she rides out of town. It is Li Ping who sways Lalu into confronting her true desire and the woman she has become.

Shot: Medium angle Lalu stops to speak with Li Ping. “*At home we often went away, but we always came back.*”

Shot: Medium angle Li Ping sits in a wagon. “*Lalu, have they answered your letters or replied to the gold you sent?*”

Shot: Medium angle Lalu’s silence confirms that her family has never answered her letter.

Shot: Medium angle on Li Ping. “*Sometimes it is better to drink the soup of forgetfulness, to cross the river to be born on the other side.*” Li Ping signals to his driver to leave. Li Ping departs with the exodus. Lalu watches him drive away.

Li Ping’s words of wisdom inform Lalu’s decision to turn around and return to Charlie, or as she phrases it to Hong King, “home.” She refuses to be a “dead ghost” and decides to make a new life on her own terms as neither a “China Polly” nor a Chinese daughter (“thousand pieces of gold”). Again through Li Ping, though Lalu may not transcend marginalization as a Chinese woman, she is empowered to reinvent herself (*to cross the river*) as a subaltern frontiers woman. The last frame of the film is a wide-angle image of Lalu standing alone near her homestead at the edge of the river, countering classic Western iconography in which the American frontier was a “white settler” and masculine space.

Maggie Greenwald’s The Ballad of Little Jo

In Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Ruth Badger, the tough-as-nails middle-aged wife to Frank Badger, plays a key role in Little Jo’s life. Though Ruth is a white settler farm wife and

mother, she functions as a maternal wise-woman figure, rather than a Mother of the Empire figure. This is primarily because the film is set in the late 19th century American West, and the U.S. is no longer a colony. Ruth Badger seems to be one of those real women of the West that feminist historians had been trying to foreground in frontier historiography. Josephine Monaghan was herself a real woman of the West, one who had captured the imagination of Greenwald. Though Ruth has a small role, appearing only once in the film, Greenwald gives her dramatic agency. Like Li Ping and Hira, Ruth provides support to the central heroine, Little Jo, in this case through her healing skills and her influence over her hotheaded and racist husband.

The first time Ruth helps Little Jo is when she comes to the rescue of Tinman, who suffers from weak lungs. Through her healing knowledge, Ruth is able to help Tinman fight off a bad attack, literally saving his life. Here Greenwald privileges Ruth's maternal knowledge and power. In a montage sequence Ruth's healing methods are depicted in elaborate detail.

Shot: Medium-close angle Ruth's hands rip a white muslin into narrow strips.

Shot: Medium-close angle Ruth gazes at Tinman with concern.

Shot: Close angle Ruth's hands apply some black tar onto the muslin strips with a knife.

Shot: Close angle Ruth's hand cuts an onion into thick slices.

Shot: Medium-close angle on the bottom of Tinman's feet. Ruth has tied the onion slices to the soles of his feet with the muslin strips. Camera tracks up his body. Ruth finishes tying the muslin strips with tar onto his chest. The camera pauses on a close-angle on Tinman, as he lies unconscious with strained breathing.

Shot: Close-angle Ruth's hand mixes herbs in a mortar and pestle.

Shot: Medium angle Ruth's hand spoon feeds Tinman one of her homespun mixtures. She has to practically force it down his throat. The camera tilts up to Ruth's face. She says soothingly as if she were speaking to one of her own children, "*Come on there, little fella. Come on back.*"

When Little Jo and Frank bring Ruth the pine branch she has requested, Frank asks quietly (rare for Frank) if Tinman is going to make it. Ruth replies, "...*he's got one foot on the other side.*"

Greenwald's film explicitly contrasts Ruth's homespun maternal knowledge with capitalist and masculinist power by associating the Tinman healing sequence with two key

turning point scenes in the film. While Ruth continues to heal Tinman, Frank gives Little Jo a letter from her sister, Helen. In Helen's letter, she informs Jo that she has finally told Jo's son, Laddie, that his mother is dead, solidifying Jo's final relinquishing of her maternal and hence feminine identity. The arrival of Mr. Gray, the owner of the Western Cattle Company, and his family follow this scene. In this scene Jo reveals that she is selling up. Frank is enraged, and pulls his usual Western tough guy tactics, all involving gun violence. He punches Jo and pulls a gun on the Mr. Gray.

Shot: Medium angle over-the-shoulder 2 shot. Aiming his gun at Jo, Frank brandishes him like a wayward son, "*You're the one I otta shoot, you puny bastard, helping them squeeze me.*"

Shot: Reverse angle. Jo gazes defiantly at Frank.

Shot: Reverse angle. Frank says with disappointment, "*My God, boy, I thought you'd amount to somethin'.*" Ruth appears in the doorway of Little Jo's house.

Shot: Reverse angle Little Jo looks down in shame.

Shot: Long shot, over-the-shoulder of Mrs. Gray, also a mother, as she gazes at Little Jo, Frank and Ruth. Frank bellows, "*Ruth!*" Ruth replies "*Yep,*" in a resigned manner, as if she has been bellowed at her whole life. There's no denying she's as tough as Frank, tougher even. Still holding his gun, Frank swaggers over to the well-dressed Gray family.

Shot: Medium 2 shot of Mrs. Gray and her son. She appears nervous at Frank's approaching.

Shot: Medium angle Frank, who takes off his hat, perhaps as a gesture of courtesy to Mrs. Gray. Frank threatens, "*When you come to my house Mr. Gray, either give your wife and kid guns or leave 'em home.*" Frank walks away in disgust.

Shot: Medium 2 shot on Mrs. Gray, with tears of fear in her eyes. Her son gazes at Frank.

Shot: American shot Frank passes as Ruth closes Little Jo's front door, carrying her healing bag in her arms. She gazes at Little Jo, who enters the frame. Pull focus on Little Jo as she turns to face the Gray family.

Shot: Medium 2 shot Mrs. Gray and her son. Mrs. Gray returns Little Jo's gaze, and then looks down in shame and defeat. She knows what it's like to get bullied. Mr. Gray enters the frame, readying the horses' reigns.

Shot: Medium 2 shot Little Jo in foreground, Ruth in the background. Ruth says, "*Seems a shame.*" Jo turns on those words. Ruth shakes her head in disappointment and exits the frame.

Shortly afterwards, when it is revealed that Ruth's healing remedies have helped Tinman fight off his deathly attack, Jo comes to the conclusion that she shouldn't sell her property to Mr. Gray.

Ruth's words, "*seems a shame*" have resonance beyond just amounting "*to something*." In these scenes Ruth's maternal knowledge is privileged, and her actions have dramatic agency leading to Jo's decision to fight the Western Cattle Company with everything she has. In this sense, Ruth helps Jo realize her desire to build and keep her "home" with Tinman.

Conclusion

What story do these filmmakers collectively tell us about the place of motherhood in the formation of feminist frontier identities? How do these films reflect the literature about motherhood and the maternal from the 1970s to the 1990s?

In the anti-racist/colonial motherhood narratives the filmmakers deploy subaltern motherhood as a tool for feminist anti-racist empowerment and resistance. Dash, Mita, Moffatt, Bailey, and Wheeler depict their subaltern maternal figures as empowered both in the films' plots and the films' visual and sound regimes. Across these films subaltern mothers must confront great and almost insurmountable challenges, as well as failures and profound losses. Hence, the filmmakers resist monolithic and one-dimensional stereotypes like the myth of the black Superwoman and the Native Mother-Earth. They also resist deploying the trope of maternal sacrifice (Williams, Doane) as a means of reverence, which has been a central trait of the Hollywood maternal melodrama and a device to subvert female desire. These frontier subaltern mothers pay a high price for resisting racial and colonial oppression, but they are never victims; they are survivors. Through these maternal figures, the filmmakers debunk racist and colonial stereotypes of subaltern women and subaltern family structures.

In the anti-patriarchal maternal narratives, Campion, Greenwald, Wilson, and Armstrong deploy the maternal and motherhood quite differently from the filmmakers of the anti-racist/colonial narratives. A common thread throughout these motherhood films is that the

filmmakers seem somewhat conflicted about motherhood, which was a key trait of Anglo-American feminism in 1970s and 80s. Though these filmmakers were working across different national and industrial contexts, they are all white Anglo-American women of roughly the same generation, born between the years 1947 and 1955. During the second-wave women's movement, while heated debates about motherhood were happening, Campion, Greenwald, Armstrong, Kelly, and Wilson were all young women. Like the daughter heroines in their films, these women filmmakers appear to identify with the position of the daughter, and express a kind of ambivalence about the role of motherhood in feminist politics. As E. Ann Kaplan argued,

... at that time feminism was very much a movement of daughters. The very attractiveness of feminism was that it provided an arena for separation from oppressive closeness with the Mother; feminism was in part a reaction against our mothers who had tried to articulate the patriarchal "feminine" in us, much to our anger. This made it difficult for us to identify with Mothering and to look from the position of the Mother.⁵⁵

Hence, the realities of motherhood are depicted as oppressive and sacrificial, harkening back to the old Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s and 50s. And yet, these filmmakers revision the maternal melodrama through a feminist lens. Through their deployment of a maternal logic in the films' visual and sound regimes, these filmmakers disavow patriarchal scripts.

Chapter 4: Filming “Women’s Work” in Gendered Frontier Economies

In our culture the same thing has been done to Asian men that’s been done to women. In Westerns, they’re extras, they’re in the background, or they’re in the kitchen. They’re asexual, and they’re slaves who work their whole lives taking care of white men. I felt the two would connect with each other through a similar experience of life. And by the time they connect in the story it’s not like she’s the man and he’s the woman; she is absolutely the woman. They just happen to do jobs that are not conventional jobs.¹

- Maggie Greenwald

“My baby was born dead, and my breast were full of milk. We needed the money, so I was hired out to a wealthy family... some big, supposed to be, ‘muckety-mucks,’ off Edisto Island. High-falutin’ buckra. When they went to Cuba, I went with them. I nursed their baby, and took care of the other children. That’s how I got ‘ruint’... I wanted to go home and they keep me... they keep me. So, I ‘fix’ the titty... they send me home.”

- Yellow Mary from *Daughters of the Dust*

Ada: “The Piano, it’s mine. It’s mine!”

Alistair: [Slams down fist]. “We can’t go on like this! We’re a family now. We all make sacrifices, and so will you! You WILL teach him [George Baines]. And I will see to it!”

- *The Piano*

All the central heroines across this body of films are exploited and oppressed by and within frontier economies, either as housewives, slaves, servants, or poorly paid labourers. The female and/or subaltern characters’ resistance to their economic exploitation and oppression is at the core of all the films’ narrative conflicts. The two themes that are at the center of these characters’ economic exploitation on the frontier are domesticity and geographic isolation, both of which structure the films’ frontier iconography. Many of the depictions of economic exploitation and oppression represent issues that were at the centre of the women’s movement in the 1970s and 80s, such as gender pay equity, equal access, as well as the rendering visible of the undervalued and unpaid labour of women in the home. As in the case of motherhood, there are differing experiences, histories, and attitudes about labour in frontier economies, both productive and reproductive.

Feminist Scholarship on Women's Work and Gendered Economies

Second-Wave Feminist Scholarship

Feminist scholars argued that the economies of modern industrialized capitalist nations were highly dependent on a private/public dichotomy divided along the lines of gender. Feminists argued that “women’s work,” unpaid domestic labour, was not only necessary for the survival of the family unit, but for the survival of the economy as a whole. Male workers could only be fully exploitable if they had dependents they were expected to provide for. In this sense, the patriarchal family was a construct that was not “natural,” but beneficial to male members of the ruling class, rendering men dependent on a pay cheque and women dependent on a man. In turn “women’s work” such as housework, childcare, and food production was rendered “naturally feminine,” and in the process rendered completely invisible. In her seminal work *More Than a Labour of Love*, Meg Luxton (1980) argued that because women’s work has always been performed out of love for their families it is often deemed “natural” to being a woman. In this sense, housework was not quantitatively considered “work,” and hence not measured as “productive labour,” making it invisible. This invisibility and “naturalness” rendered women’s work “endless,” and hence more exploitable within the economy.² Luxton argued,

Domestic labour seems to be invisible. It is neither understood nor recognized as work. For example, women asked: “Do you work, or are you a housewife?” Women who do both wage labour and domestic labour are described as “working wives” or “working mothers,” as if to deny that what they do in the home is also work. When women themselves are asked to describe what they do, they often have no name for it.³

Marilyn Waring (1988) argued that the exploitation of women’s unpaid reproductive labour is enabled by a sexist system of national accounting based on the private/public binary. This binary model systematically renders invisible not only the domestic labour of women, but women

themselves. Waring argued, “the people who are visible to you as contributors to the economy are the people who will be visible when you make policy.”⁴ Waring advocated for a new economic model based on a qualitative model rather than a quantitative one.⁵ These feminists sought to render visible women’s work, as a means of rendering visible women’s contribution to the economy. These feminists attested that it is only through visibility that women can ever hope to attain full equity in society.

Feminist frontier historiography also sought to render visible the economic contribution of the farm wife’s unpaid reproductive labour in the construction of white settler societies. According to Canadian historian Kathryn McPherson (2000), there have been two recurring depictions of the farm wife in feminist historiography: the hardy farm wife who is emancipated through farm work, and the overburdened farm wife who is oppressed by the demands of farm and domestic labour. Some historians have represented frontier life for (white) women as emancipatory because women took on more “masculine” jobs and roles, rendering the gendered division of labour artificial. McPherson wrote,

Echoing Turner’s theme of frontier equality, various authors have claimed that because homesteading was so difficult, and because homesteads so often failed, the work of women was vital. That bachelors failed to “prove up” their homesteads more frequently than did married men, stood for some testimony to the value of women’s work.⁶

Examining the 18th century writings of the British writers and immigrants, Catherine Parr Traill and her sister Susanna Moodie, literary scholar Elizabeth Thompson (1991) identified this hardy farmwoman figure as a pioneer woman archetype in Canadian fiction.⁷ Thompson identified the stoic “pioneer woman” archetype as both “a lady” and a hard-worker, willing to “rough it” in order to help make her husband’s or father’s farm a success. Through her lady-like code and “labour of love” the good pioneer woman was deployed to “civilize” masculinist frontier spaces,

“plagued” by marauding (white) males prone to drinking, gambling, and violence, not to mention miscegenation. On the other hand frontier life was also depicted as oppressive for women, “distinguished by the unique gender inequalities it proffered.”⁸

Anti-racist/colonial Feminist Scholarship

[T]he cult of domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance, belonging properly in the private, “natural” realm of the family. Rather, I argue that the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities – shifting and unstable as these were – and an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise.⁹

- Anne McClintock (1995)

Nanny knows that being treated as ‘mules uh de world’ lies at the heart of Black women’s oppression. As dehumanized objects, mules are living machines and can be treated as part of the scenery. Fully human women are less easily exploited.

- Patricia Hill Collins (1991)¹⁰

Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist scholars argued that subaltern women experienced economic exploitation and oppression very differently from white women. Firstly, anti-racist/colonial feminists argued that the public/private split was not a reality for subaltern women because frontier economies were highly dependent on their lowly paid or slave labour. In contrast to the farm wife’s unpaid invisible “labour of love” in the patriarchal settler family unit, subaltern women’s labour was practiced outside of the home in the public sphere. Subaltern women often performed “man’s work” in public spaces for example as field slaves or factory labourers. Subaltern women’s labour has also been strongly associated with either slavery or lowly paid jobs as maids, cooks, seamstresses, nurses, child-minders, and even sex workers. Unlike middle-class white women, subaltern women had access to the public sphere as slaves and workers, but as anti-racist/colonial scholars have argued, this association with the public sphere has rendered subaltern women as “mules uh de world.” The labour experience of subaltern women stands in stark contrast to the Betty Friedan’s (1964) call to women to find more “fulfilling work” outside

the home. Hence, anti-racist-colonial feminists argued that the frontier labour economy has not only been divided along the lines of gender, but also along the lines of class, race, and ethnicity.

Secondly, anti-racist/colonial feminists have argued that this division of labour across lines of class, race, and ethnicity was largely constructed through discursive means. Subaltern women were deemed more economically exploitable on the frontier largely because they were not part of a white patriarchal settler family. As discussed in the Introduction, anti-racist/colonial scholar Enakshi Dua argued that national discourses about white British femininity are only possible through the relegation of subaltern women to imagined dark “others” and lowly paid workers. Subaltern women were also rendered economically exploitable by the racist and colonial construction of them as more sexually licentious than white women. The construct of the subaltern women as overtly sexual has been discussed in Ch.2 and Ch. 3. Bell hooks (1981) argued that the American slavery system was economically dependent upon this racist construct.

Hooks argued,

The shift away from the image of white woman as sinful and sexual to that of white woman as virtuous lady occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of enslaved black women – just as the rigid sexual morality of Victorian England created a society in which the extolling of women as mother and helpmate occurred at the same time as the formation of a mass underworld of prostitution. As American white men idealized white womanhood, they sexually assaulted and brutalized black women.¹¹

The most notorious example of the sexually licentious black woman is represented in the “Hottentot Venus,” a real African woman who was exhibited to prove that black people were more “primitive” and dangerous than whites. Writing on the Hottentot Venus, Evelyn M.

Hammonds argued,

This southern African black woman was crudely exhibited and objectified by European audiences and scientific experts because of what they regarded as unusual aspects of her physiognomy – her genitalia and buttocks. [Sander] Gilman argued that Sarah Bartmann, along with other black females brought

from southern Africa, became the central image for the black female in Europe through the nineteenth century. The “primitive” genitalia of these women were defined by European commentators as the sign of their “primitive” sexual appetites. Thus, the black female became the antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty and was relegated to the lowest position on the scale of human development. The image of the black female constructed in this period reflected everything the white female was not...¹²

Anti-racist/colonial feminist historians argued that the construct of black slave women as “primitive” was directly connected to their exploitation on the plantation. In the slave era plantation owners also deployed slave women’s reproductive bodies for economic gain in such horrendous practices as forced breeding programs. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) argued,

Efforts to control Black women’s sexuality were tied directly to slave owners’ efforts to increase the number of children their female slaves produced. Techniques such as assigning pregnant women lighter workloads, giving pregnant women more attention and rations, and rewarding prolific women with bonuses were all used to increase Black women’s reproduction. Punitive measures were also used.¹³

Rendering the slave woman as sexually exploitable for economic gain was only morally acceptable because of the construction of slave women as “animalistic.”

Indigenous women have also been deployed for economic gain, such as in the fur trade era in Canada. Canadian feminist historians have argued that indigenous women were extremely important to the fur trade due to their knowledge and skills for surviving off the land, not to mention the political connections they helped form between different tribes through inter-racial marriages. Feminist historian Silvia Van Kirk’s (1984) seminal work on indigenous women in the fur trade foregrounds their economic and political roles. Van Kirk argued

Thus, through marriage, many a trader was drawn into the Indian kinship circle. In return for giving the traders sexual and domestic rights to their women, the Indians expected reciprocal privileges such as free access to the posts and provisions.¹⁴

Van Kirk pointed out that without the aid of indigenous women, white fur traders would not have survived, and the fur trade would not have flourished as it did. Van Kirk argued,

As in other preindustrial societies, the Indian women's role also extended well beyond domestic maintenance as they assisted in specific fur trade operations. With the adoption of the birch bark canoe, especially by the North West Company, Indian women continued in their traditional role of helping in its manufacture. It was the women's job to collect annual quotas of spruce roots, which were split fine to sew the seams of the canoes, and also to collect the spruce gum that was used for caulking the seams. The inexperienced and understaffed Hudson's Bay Company also found itself calling upon the labor power of Indian women, who were adept at paddling and steering canoes. Indeed, although the inland explorations of various Hudson's Bay Company men such as Anthony Henday and Samuel Hearne have been glorified as individual exploits, they were, in fact, entirely dependent upon the Indians with whom they traveled, being especially aided by Indian women.

Van Kirk's groundbreaking research helped counter racist constructs of the "dirty squaw" discussed in previous chapters. It is now well known that a number of the fur trade marriages ended in the abandonment of indigenous women and their children, after they proved to be an economic and social liability. This abandonment was deemed morally acceptable in Christian white society because inter-racial marriage was deemed less real or binding primarily due to the depiction of indigenous societies and women as morally inferior. After the fur trade, indigenous women were not easily integrated into the mainstream frontier economy. The skills they had been valued for were no longer of any use to white colonizers. Indigenous women came to be seen as lazy and unkempt housekeepers, who were frequently "on the road" rather than in their home. Being on the road frequently became associated with prostitution and immoral behaviours.¹⁵

One way for subaltern women to resist sexual exploitation was through "respectable" hard work. Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham (1993) defined the term "politics of respectability," which was used as a political strategy by African-American women who aimed to achieve gender equality and racial uplift. Brooks-Higginbotham argued,

Especially in the roles of missionary or teacher, black church women were conveyers of culture and vital contributors to the fostering of middle-class ideals and aspirations in the black community. Duty bound to teach the value of religion, education, and hard work, the women of the black Baptist church adhered to politics of respectability that equated public behavior with self respect and the advancement of African-American people as a group. They felt certain that “respectable” behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the black lower classes’ allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.¹⁶

In Métis communities there has been a tradition of women selling their handicraft items, such as moccasins, baskets, and clothing. This skilled work was seen as decent paid work for which Métis women garnered a certain degree of respect and could help support their families. As Sherry Farrell Racette has argued,

Women’s production was a critical component in Métis communities. They converted the meat and hides, obtained through men’s labour, into commodities of pemmican, tanned robes, clothing, and decorative items. They continued subsistence production for their own needs while simultaneously producing for a market, managing both resources and the means of production.¹⁷

Many of the issues and themes that animated these debates about women’s work and frontier economies are reflected across these films. A central theme across feminist scholarship has been to render visible the economic contribution of women on the frontier. As historian Sarah Carter lamented,

After nearly decades of increasingly sophisticated work in women’s and gender history, popular and academic narratives of the West continue to privilege the masculine and to be dominated by the powerful images of the whiskey trader, the Indian chief, cowboy, Mountie, missionary, stalwart pioneer, farmer, and politician.¹⁸

To echo Marilyn Warring, without rendering women’s role in the economy, women will never become visible as full subjects. Across these films women’s work is featured as a central element in the films’ frontier iconography. The frontier economy and paid and unpaid labour are represented across a range of points of view – as both emancipatory and oppressive. Economic

oppression and exploitation of the films' female and/or subaltern characters is central to the narrative conflicts. There are three different frontier economy narratives: the *white settler household narrative*, the *wage labour narrative*, and the *subaltern settlement narrative*.

The White Settler Household Narrative

There's no use for me. I've no training, no money... I haven't any time to study or practice. There are just two states of existence, work and sleep.

- Sybylla, *My Brilliant Career*

John, you're always adding up numbers and still we never have any money.

- Kitty Wilcox, *My American Cousin*

Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* (1985), Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979), and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) are white settler household narratives. The filmmakers construct the films' points of view through a heroine who is a white farmwife or daughter, and economically dependent on a husband or father. The dominant theme that runs throughout these films is the oppression of farm women in the home through the exploitation of their unpaid productive and reproductive labour and their iconic value as "good (white) pioneer women" (the angel in the house). These filmmakers render visible the farmwife's significant economic contribution on white settler farms, and secondly, they dismantle the trope of the "good pioneer woman," which was integral to the exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labour. A number of the films' narrative conflicts are constructed around the heroine's resistance to her economic exploitation and iconographic objectification as a "good pioneer woman" in order to pursue her desires. The filmmakers resist deploying white women as "civilizing" devices, rendering gendered frontier roles unstable. The filmmakers also resist representing patriarchs as reliable and successful "breadwinners."

The filmmakers represent the white settler farms in their narratives as economically vulnerable. In Wilson's *My American Cousin*, the Wilcox family runs a fledgling cherry orchard

business, “Paradise Ranch,” in 1959 British Columbia. One of the first lines of dialogue in the film, spoken by Sandy’s mother, Kitty, is, “*John, you’re always adding up numbers and we still never have any money.*” In Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career*, Sybylla’s family-operated cattle station is on the brink of financial ruin due to drought in 1899 Australia. The Stewart homestead in Champion’s *The Piano* is cash-poor and un-cleared in 1850s New Zealand. Stewart also has bad relations with his Māori neighbours, whom he is trying to swindle. Hence, these filmmakers also render visible the instability of (white) patriarchy and white settler economies.

Representing a “Labour of Love”: Rendering Visible the Invisible

In the representations of the heroines’ unpaid domestic labour, the filmmakers deploy three themes: domestic confinement, geographic isolation, and endless work. In Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career*, Sybylla must earn her keep by performing backbreaking farm chores, in addition to helping her over-worked mother meet the endless demands of a large impoverished family. Sybylla is also “hired out” to pay off her father’s farm debts to the more successful McSwatt family. In Wilson’s *My American Cousin*, twelve-year old Sandy is expected to help her mother raise the younger children, care for her disabled brother, and can cherries. In Champion’s *The Piano*, in order to procure more land, Ada’s husband, Stewart swaps Ada’s piano, her only possession, for land with George Baines. As part of the land deal Stewart forces Ada to give Baines “free” music lessons.

Sandy’s Wilson’s My American Cousin

In Wilson’s *My American Cousin*, Kitty and Sandy’s work is confined to the house. Though the house is located in a majestic “untamed” Canadian frontier, both mother and daughter are confined to the home. Wilson foregrounds and contrasts the female confinement to the male characters’ labour, which occurs outdoors amidst the majestic landscape. Sandy detests this

gendered division of labour, and desires to be outside the home. Sandy's yearning to be outdoors is depicted in the following sequence:

Shot: Full shot, Sandy and her family (five siblings) pose for a photograph in front of Butch's red Cadillac, parked amidst mountains, forest and lake. Sandy makes "bunny ears" behind one of her brothers' heads. Butch is off-screen as the photographer. He says, "*Got it.*"

Shot: Medium angle on Butch with camera. Sandy enters the frame, Butch hands her the camera. Sandy's father, off-screen says, "*Danny and Eddie, come along now. Butch, it's time to get up to the orchard.*"

Shot: Wide angle, Major Wilcox exits frame, followed by two of his able-bodied sons (one of his sons is wheel-chair bound) and Butch. Kitty puts her apron on again, which she had taken off for the photograph. "*Sandra, we've got lots of cherries to can this morning.*" Despondent, Sandy replies, "*Come on mom, can't I stay out a little while longer?*"

Shot: Medium angle on Butch who has returned to his car to get his transistor radio. He finds a song that he likes. Kitty off-screen says, "*No, I need you in the kitchen. Come.*" Butch exits the frame, leaving an epic post-card landscape shot of the British Columbia interior.

Shot: Wide angle on Sandy as she pushes her brother in his wheelchair toward the house.

Wilson sets the following scene in the cramped Wilcox kitchen; where Sandy helps her mother, Kitty, can cherries. Two of Sandy's young sisters, not old enough to help, are also present. In this scene Sandy questions her mother about her youth and dating whilst they work. Kitty reminisces about her youth while she literally sweats over a large hot cauldron, the bucolic landscape teasing through the kitchen windows. A few scenes later Sandy and her mother will engage in a full-blown fight, leading Sandy to stomp out of the house and threaten to run away. The issue that has led mother and daughter to quarrel is freedom. Kitty seems more than happy to see her daughter go, and even taunts her with words she will soon regret, "*Go right ahead!*" Wilson frames the final shot as a medium-long angle on Kitty in her kitchen, exasperated and shaken by the fight, her hair coming undone. Kitty grabs her cooking timer, and angrily turns it off. Wilson's deployment of such a simple domestic gesture is ironic because in truth Kitty is actually powerless to control her own time. It is determined by children's needs, housework, and

farm chores, a never ending around the clock work day. By ending the scene on the disgruntled Kitty, over burdened by time and work, the film visually foregrounds Kitty's domestic labour, not as a "labour of love," but as drudgery.

Wilson's scene of confinement and mother-daughter conflict contradicts the idyllic family portrait taken only moments earlier by Butch. Despite the representation of Kitty Wilcox as the disgruntled 1950's housewife, Wilson resists representing her as a sacrificial angel. Kitty voices her dissatisfaction with her life. When Sandy complains to her father that her mother is always picking on her, Major Wilcox says with resignation, "*Now you have to understand that your mother grew up in a quiet house, and she always thought she'd be a librarian. Having all you children is a bit much for her sometimes.*"

Gillian Armstrong's My Brilliant Career

Money is a central concern for all the characters in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*. Sybylla's family is plagued by drought and farm debt. As an unmarried grown daughter, Sybylla is perceived as a burden to her family, who can't afford to keep her any longer. Though Sybylla is useful to her mother in running the home and family, she has a younger sister, Gertie, who is old enough to fill Sybylla's shoes in the family. The reality is that the Melvyns can't afford to keep two grown daughters, who, unlike the grown Melvyn sons, cannot pull their weight as ranch workers; these sons will most likely inherit the farm. Without any marriage prospects, Sybylla's parents see no other option than to send her into domestic service. To Sybylla this is a fate worse than death. She desperately yearns to pursue her artistic goals such as writing, singing, and playing the piano. Throughout *My Brilliant Career*, Sybylla's artistic aspirations are thwarted by the demands of the family farm and financial problems. Armstrong represents this conflict in the

opening sequence of the film. While Sybylla attempts to write her novel, a dust storm picks up, sending the Melvyns into a state of panic.

Shot: Sybylla's POV shot through farmhouse window where her father and brothers struggle to herd cattle safely away from a dust storm. Despite the extreme change in weather, Sybylla continues writing. Sybylla's voice-over narration, "*I have always known...*"

Shot: Closer angle on Sybylla's father and brother, struggling to wrangle the cattle. Sybylla continues, "*...that I belonged...*"

Shot: Medium-long shot of Sybylla through windowpane, which reflects tree branches swaying in the wind. The wind gets stronger. "*... to the world...*"

Shot: Long shot on Sybylla's father and brother struggling with a stubborn bull. "*...of art...*" Sybylla's father yells, "*SYBYLLA!*" Sybylla ignores her father's call.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sybylla through windowpane. "*... and the world...*"

Shot: Long shot of wagon pulled by horses approaches, framed from Sybylla's perspective through doorway of house. The dust storm worsens. "*...of literature and music...*" The camera pans across doorway onto a wall, revealing various drawings and post-cards that have been pinned up. Sybylla's mother's voice is heard off-screen, "*SYBYLLA!!*" "*... and the world of culture and elegance.*" The camera pauses at another doorway. The wagon comes into view. Sybylla's mother leans her body toward the house. "*SYBYLLA!*" The dust storm is in full swing (see Figure 16).

Shot: Close-angle on Sybylla lost in thought.



Figure 16: The dust storm in full swing in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*

Here Armstrong visually depicts two opposing worlds, Sybylla's imaginary world of "culture" and the realities of Possum Gully, the Melvyn cattle station. Though Sybylla believes herself to "belong" to the former, her artistic talents and aspirations have no economic value to her family. Indeed that is why the piano in the Melvyn's parlour is out of tune. A piano has little use for a large impoverished family like the Melvyns, except to fill their daughters' heads with what Sybylla's burned out father describes as "*notions of grandeur.*" Sybylla is useful for her domestic labour, and when that is not enough to warrant "keeping her" she must be sent away, either to work for a wage or be offered up on the middle-class marriage market, via Grandma Bossier.

It is only when Sybylla enters the privileged worlds of Harry Beecham's *Five-Bob Downs* and Grandma Bossier's *Caddagat*, where Sybylla's artistic talents prove more valuable. However, even in these sophisticated and refined realms of privilege and culture, limitations are firmly set on Sybylla's artistic aspirations. In Grandma Bossier's world, young ladies display their artistic talents as a means to catch a husband, no more. Hence, when it is suggested that Sybylla is talented enough to "go on the stage," Grandma Bossier is enraged. "*I would rather*

have you go about on the streets like a common prostitute than go on the stage!" Sybylla's artistic talents are only valued for their iconographic worth on the middle-class marriage market. Sybylla soon learns that Grandma Bossier's world of elegance and "culture" is as confining and delimiting as Possum Gully, perhaps even more so. Women like Grandma Bossier and Aunt Helen are "angels in the house" trapped in the gilded cage, further symbolized in the film by Aunt Gussy's exotic bird collection and her bird feather paintings. Armstrong represents this confinement through her depiction of interior and domestic spaces in the mise-en-scene.

Shot: Over-head angle, "bird's-eye-view," of Sybylla and Aunt Gussy standing inside a large exotic birdcage. They are feeding the birds. Sybylla comments "*Beautiful creatures.*"

Shot: Medium-close angle, Sybylla looking up at birds in the cage. "*They're fortunate, aren't they? Every day they get their food.*" Aunt Gussy replies, "*As long as I remember.*" Sybylla sighs. "*Never have to look for water in a dried up creek. Or scratch for a living. Like all our countrymen, forced on the road to beg.*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Aunt Gussy. "*Perhaps they're meant to balance the ugly things of life.*" Aunt Gussy sticks a feather in her hair, and laughs.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sybylla, who laughs.

Shot: Wide-angle, Sybylla and Aunt Gussy in birdcage. They open the cage door and exit. They walk back into Aunt Gussy's mansion, a different kind of cage for different kind of "bird."

During her stay at *Five-Bob Downs* Sybylla tries out the feel and fit of Aunt Gussy's "cage"/mansion, but realizes nothing is worth giving up one's freedom for, even the handsome Harry Beecham.



Figure 17: Large pillars at Harry's Five Bob Downs create a prison-like frame in Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*

Though Harry is the classic “prince charming,” Armstrong deliberately counters his appeal with a *mise-en-scène* that depicts domestic spaces, even opulent ones, as prisons, foregrounding frames with bars and harsh verticals (see Figure 17).

When Aunt Gussy asks Sybylla if she would “*fancy living*” in a house like Five-Bob Downs, Sybylla says, “*No, I'd get lost.*” This is the reality of what Harry actually has to offer Sybylla, but as Sybylla knows, she would lose herself if she accepted him. Sybylla is on a journey to find out who she is, not get “lost” in romantic notions of love and marriage. Armstrong seems to make a point of this not being a “rags to riches” Cinderella story.

Jane Campion's The Piano

In Campion's *The Piano*, Ada is not as much the over-burdened farmwife exploited for her reproductive and productive labour. Though Ada must do some domestic labour, as she has no apparent servants, Campion never depicts this work on screen. Campion emphasizes Ada not as worker, but rather as a commodity, an object to be traded and possessed by men for her iconic and economic value. Campion represents Ada as a commodity by identifying her with her piano, the central visual motif that anchors the film. Throughout the film Ada and the piano are

identified as objects for exchange. Campion opens her film with Ada being “shipped off” by her father. *“Today he married me to a man I have not yet met. Soon my daughter and I will join him in his own country.”* When Ada and Flora do arrive in Stewart’s “own country,” a sea-swept untamed Oceanic frontier, the sailors treat mother and daughter like cargo. Like Ada’s piano and other possessions, Campion has Ada and Flora carried to the beach on the shoulders of the sailors, and unceremoniously deposited with no one to meet them (see Figure 18).



Figure 18: Ada and Flora are carried on sailors’ shoulders to the shore in Campion’s *The Piano*

Stewart also treats his new wife as a commodity to be traded amongst men. When Stewart finally does arrive to greet his new bride, along with Baines and Māori workers, he looks her over, and comments on her as if she were an object. *“You’re small. I’d never thought you’d be small.”* Despite the fact that Ada and Flora have traveled thousands of miles and have had to spend the night on the beach alone, Stewart never asks how she feels. Stewart is more concerned about her “value” and what she has brought with her, immediately demanding a description of the contents of her trunks and suitcases. Instead it is Baines who is concerned about Ada’s welfare. When Stewart asks him what he thinks, as if he were assessing a horse, Baines replies, *“She looks*

tired.” Stewart is less generous. He says, “*Well, she’s stunted, that’s one thing.*” After the men have discussed Ada’s qualities, or lack thereof, Stewart goes about organizing his Māori workers and Ada’s possessions. Campion emphasizes Ada’s status as commodity in a medium-long angle of Ada and Flora standing against the choppy ocean waves, part of the piano crate looms in the foreground. Although the piano crate is only partially in the frame, the words “*A. McGrath*” written in big bold letters are a dominant graphic element in the shot. Campion’s deployment of Ada’s name, her maiden name, visually identifies the piano as Ada’s possession, and also symbolically represents Ada McGrath as commodity herself, one that Stewart has “bought.” Despite this marker of ownership, Stewart still abandons the piano on the beach, much to Ada’s dismay. The piano’s abandonment on the beach mimics Ada and Flora’s earlier abandonment by the sailors.

Stewart’s abandonment and rejection of the piano is rooted in his capitalist values, seemingly the only thing that motivates him to act. Stewart claims that the piano is “*Too heavy.*” What he really means is that the piano is not worth the trouble and expense to bring up from the beach. We soon learn Stewart is land hungry. The piano has no economic value for Stewart, and therefore he sees no use for it, despite the fact that his wife is obviously very emotionally attached to it. Ada wants the piano for its cultural and even emotional value. Stewart doesn’t need the piano for its “civilizing” purpose, as he now has Ada, an educated white middle-class woman, albeit a mute one, though that defect doesn’t seem to bother him much. In fact, Stewart agrees that Ada’s muteness makes her like a pet that is “*quite silent.*” It is only when Baines offers to swap Stewart 80 acres of land for the piano that Stewart agrees to “rescue” it from the beach, where it would inevitably decay. However, Baines’s offer is conditional on Ada giving him music lessons. Stewart is more than willing to swap both his wife’s piano and her “services” in

order to get his hands on Baines's land. It is not Ada's labour/services that Baines really wants however. He wants Ada as an object of desire, for his own pleasure. Campion represents Ada's value as a pleasure commodity in the sequence following the scene in which Stewart tells Ada her piano has been given to Baines, and that she must teach him:

Shot: Extreme close-angle on piano tuner's hand caressing the piano. He comments upon the make, "*A Broadbent. A fine instrument.*" The camera follows his hand and tilts up to his face, revealing that he is blind. He starts sniffing. The camera follows as he bends down close to the piano, continuing to sniff. He says, "*Scent.*"

Shot: Medium-angle on Baines gazing at the piano. The piano tuner comes into the foreground of the shot, but Baines remains privileged in the frame through the technique of shallow-focus. The tuner begins to tune the piano. Baines sips his tea.

Shot: High-angle extreme close-shot on piano interiors. The camera moves across the interior of the piano's body.

Shot: Over-head wide shot of Ada and Flora sitting in the forest. Ada gazes outward. Flora gazes up at the sky. Crane shot, camera moves down and into Ada, coming to rest on her face in a medium-close angle.

Campion's visual juxtaposition of the piano with Ada links them as objects of (Baines's) desire. Both the piano tuner and Baines treat the piano as if it were a woman, a woman they desire. This is depicted in Campion's mise-en-scene through the piano tuner's gestures, such as his caressing and sniffing. His referring to the piano's *scent* anthropomorphizes the piano into a sexual object. Campion's visual connection between Ada and the piano echoes the earlier scene in which Ada and Flora are treated like cargo on the beach.

Campion's representation of Ada as a valuable possession to be used in economic exchanges between men is further emphasized by Stewart's entrapment and containment of her. Campion deploys the frame-within-a-frame device when shooting Ada, who is framed through doorways, picture frames, mirrors, windows, and even a camera lens in the wedding portrait scene. Campion's visual device is reminiscent of the highly stylized melodramas of Douglas Sirk and Werner Fassbinder. Later, when Stewart has learned of Ada and Baines's affair, he will literally imprison Ada in the home, barring the doors and windows from the outside.

Interestingly, Campion sets Stewart and Ada's scenes primarily in the interiors of their homestead. Campion only sets two scenes between Stewart and Ada in an exterior. The first one is set on the beach when Stewart collects her and Flora among the other merchandise he has ordered. The other scene is when Stewart attempts to rape her. In both scenes Stewart treats Ada as if she were a possession, not unlike the land he has procured unethically from the Māori.

Subverting the Trope of the “Good Pioneer Woman”

Across the white settler narrative films the heroines' status as “good white pioneer women” is dependent on their association with, and containment within, a patriarchal family, and a domestic space, where their time and labour can be accessed, monitored, and controlled. In order to achieve their desire for full subjectivity, the white settler heroines access exterior and masculine frontier spaces, those outside the domestic realm. This is done at great risk, creating dramatic tension in the films' plots. To place themselves in frontier spaces compromises not only the heroines' physical safety, but also their status as “good,” because their acts of desire are deemed transgressive by patriarchal law. To lose one's status as a “good white woman” means social and economic marginalization, rendering oneself vulnerable to male sexual exploitation and violence. This is a risk all these heroines are willing to take. As if echoing Virginia Woolf, the filmmakers subvert the “good pioneer woman” trope at the level of the plot, and within the films' visual and sound regimes. Hence, these filmmakers construct a new kind of frontier iconography, one in which (white) heroines invade masculine territory, one where their time and labour is not controlled and contained by a dominant patriarch.

Sandy Wilson's My American Cousin

In Wilson's *My American Cousin*, discontentment with and confinement within domesticity dominates the visual and sound regimes. Wilson represents this in the opening

sequence of the film (see Chapter 2). In Wilson's mise-en-scene, both Sandy and Kitty are framed within domestic spaces, ironically surrounded by vast and dark frontier space, suggesting both boundless space and the unknown. However, both mother and daughter lament about their lot. Sandy's complaint suggests a life of stagnation and boredom, a place where "nothing ever happens." Kitty's lines from Ibsen's play – "*from now on you have a hold over me*" – refer to the unequal power dynamics in a relationship. (Kitty is preparing for her role in a local amateur production of *Hedda Gabler*). Kitty recites Hedda's bitter and angry words about power whilst unenthusiastically performing domestic labour. Soon afterwards Kitty laments to her tired-looking husband about the family's financial problems ("*we still never have any money*"), which threaten the future of Paradise Ranch. In this one sequence, Wilson renders the patriarch, John Wilcox, and the family farm, as unstable, rigid, and oppressive.

Wilson's deployment of *Hedda Gabler* is apt here because Ibsen's famous play is structured through the point of view of a repressed, bored, and angry privileged housewife who tries to manipulate the various men in her life, albeit with devastating consequences. Wilson sets the comical "running-lines" scene in the Wilcox kitchen, another site of women's domestic labour. Here Wilson makes mockery of the "good pioneer woman" figure.

Shot: 2-shot medium-long angle on Sandy and Kitty. Sandy reads from Ibsen's play, "*From now on you have a hold over me.*" Kitty repeats, "*From now on you have a hold over me.*" Kitty wipes up the kitchen counter. Sandy continues to read in a deep "masculine" voice. "*My dearest Hedda, I shall not abuse my position.*"

Shot: Close-angle on Kitty. "*In your power all the same, at the mercy of your will and demands. And so a slave, a slave! No. That I cannot tolerate. Never!*" Kitty pauses and then makes a few mental notes. She takes off her apron and walks over to her red purse. The camera follows her into a medium-long angle. She continues, "*I can hear perfectly well what you are saying. But, how am I going to get through the evenings out here?*" Kitty finds her lipstick and takes the cap off.

Shot: Close-angle on Kitty at kitchen mirror. She resumes her role as mother. "*Now Sandra, please make sure that Ruth and Pixie get to bed on time.*" Kitty turns to the mirror and applies her lipstick.

Shot: Close-angle on Sandy. Kitty's voice off-screen, "*And I don't want you hanging around those pickers.*"

Shot: Close-angle on Sandy, giving her mother a look. "*Okay.*" She turns her gaze to the script. As Mr. Brack she reads, "*We shall have a very pleasant time together here, you and I.*" Kitty's voice-off, "*That is what you're looking forward to, isn't it Mr. Brack? You as the only cock in the yard.*" Sandy looks up at her mother.

Shot: Close-angle on Kitty. She returns her gaze to the mirror. Raising two fingers to her temple, she takes aim and shoots, making gunfire sounds for effect.

Shot: American-shot Kitty and Sandy. After her mock-suicide Kitty turns away from the mirror and moves towards her red purse. Sandy reads, "*Shot herself...shot herself in the temple! Think of it! By merciful God, one doesn't do that sort of thing!*" Kitty readies herself to leave the house. "*Bye Sandra. Don't forget to put away the laundry. Tell your father I'm gone. I'll be back around ten.*" Sandy replies, "*Bye mom! Break a leg, knock 'em dead.*" Kitty exits the house. Once her mother is out of sight Sandy picks up her mother's lipstick and applies it to her own lips, whilst standing on her tiptoes at the kitchen mirror where her mother committed mock-suicide.

Though on the surface Wilson's deployment of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is played for comic effect, the play, a tragedy, is a scathing critique of bourgeois values and patriarchy, and is one of the first texts to feature a feminist heroine. Literary critic Joan Templeton makes a connection between Hedda Gabler and Hjørdis from *The Vikings at Helgeland*, since the arms-bearing, horse-riding Hedda, married to a passive man she despises, indeed resembles the "eagle in a cage" that Hjørdis terms herself.¹⁹ It is through her role as Hedda that Kitty (and Wilson) voices discontent about the role of the bourgeois middle-class housewife within patriarchy, echoing and underscoring Sandy's rebellion against the dutiful daughter role. Even if the viewer is not familiar with Ibsen, the lines Kitty recites are so "melodramatic" that they serve as a humorous contrast to her "boring" life as the wife of an overwhelmed cherry farmer.

Jane Campion's The Piano

In *The Piano* Campion subverts the "good pioneer woman" through various devices, primarily Ada's muteness and sexual indiscretion. As previously discussed, Ada is useful to Stewart, and the other whites, for her iconographic value, as a beacon of European culture and

Christian morality. Ada and Flora are there to bring order to an “uncivilized” homosocial masculine frontier space over-run with “ignorant,” cultureless, and immoral white men, like George Baines. Hence, when Stewart barter Ada as a teacher, he is killing two birds with one stone. Stewart gets his land and Baines gets “civilized.” However, Campion constructs the dramatic tension around Ada’s subversion of her “civilizing” role. The key way Ada does this is by prostituting herself to Baines in exchange for the piano. The two make a secret deal in which Ada can earn back her piano one black key at a time. *“One black key for every visit? That’s considerably less.”* Unlike Stewart, however, Baines is willing to compromise. In her act of resistance Ada manages to get revenge against her husband, gain back her piano, and subvert the sacrificial “angel in the house.” By having Ada “performing” half-dressed for Baines’s pleasure, Campion visually and thematically links both characters with the Western. Like the typical saloon girl, Ada is paid for entertaining (through her music) and sexually servicing transient lonely white men (cowboys). Through Campion’s representation of labour/property exchange, Ada is transformed from frustrated frontier farmwife into frontier “saloon girl.” Campion represent this shift in the proposition scene, set in Baines’s homestead, a dark and unkempt masculine space.

Shot: Establishing shot, Baines’s bachelor homestead. Flora is on the porch playing with a dog.

Shot: Medium-close angle, Baines listening to Ada playing the piano, while pacing around her. He stops and looks.

Shot: Baines’s POV of Ada’s neck. Camera tracks in. Baines places his hand on Ada’s neck, leans in and kisses it.

Shot: Close angle reverse shot, Baines kissing Ada on the neck.

Shot: Medium angle, Ada pulling away from Baines. She gasps in shock. She holds her hand to her mouth. The camera follows her as she moves away from Baines. Though she is surprised by Baines’s actions, she does not leave his house.

Shot: Medium-close angle, Baines. *“There’s a way you can have your piano back. You want it back?”*

Shot: Medium-close angle, Ada. She returns Baines’s gaze. She waits.

Shot: Medium-close angle, Baines. *“I’d like us to make a deal.”*

Shot: Medium-close angle, Ada listening. “*There’s things I’d like to do while you play.*”

Shot: Medium-close angle, Ada turns away, somewhat disgusted by Baines’s implied suggestion. She begins to leave.

Shot: Medium-close hand-held camera on Baines. “*If you let me you can earn it back.*”

Shot: Medium-angle, Ada starts to collect her things, jacket and sheet music.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Baines. “*One visit for every key.*”

They continue to barter. Ada makes her own demands. One visit for every *black* key, “considerably less.” Baines agrees.

Through this scene, *Campion* transitions Ada from an ordinary frontier farmwife in a loveless marriage to a prostitute. She stages this transition in a masculine frontier space, Baines’s bachelor homestead. *Campion* shoots the scene in low-key lighting suggesting illicit or illegitimate actions. The fact that Ada has been hired to “perform” music and sexual acts for Baines, aligns her with the “saloon girl” (see Figure 19). Through *Campion*’s lens Ada is both whore and wife, thwarting both patriarchal tropes.



Figure 19: Ada “performs” for Baines while half dressed

Gillian Armstrong’s My Brilliant Career

In *Armstrong’s My Brilliant Career*, Sybylla consistently subverts the role of the good pioneer white woman by taking on the persona of an Irish peasant girl. Throughout the film Sybylla plays this role in the company of men who perceive her as potential “wife” material.

This Irish peasant girl persona is one strongly associated with low-class and ethnic, and hence “othered,” femininity. This “othered” femininity is deemed “improper,” the opposite of the “angel in the house.” As the Irish peasant girl, Sybylla flirts openly with men, sings pub songs, and accesses exterior frontier spaces without proper male protection. The very first time Sybylla meets Harry Beecham she pretends she is one of Grandma Bossier’s kitchen girls. Armstrong sets the scene in and near an apple blossom tree amidst a bucolic landscape.

Shot: Wide angle on landscape. Sybylla is in a tree picking blossoms, whilst singing a folk song. Harry Beecham arrives on horseback. He is drawn to Sybylla in the tree, and diverts his direction. Harry dismounts his horse.

Shot: Low-angle on Sybylla in tree from Harry’s POV. Sybylla continues singing the folk song. Harry enters frame, only his legs are in the shot. He bends down and looks up at Sybylla balanced on a tree branch. Sybylla finally notices him and stops singing. She pushes her skirts down, and accidentally knocks the ladder down. She is now stranded in the tree. She tries to regain composure.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sybylla. Harry off-screen says, *“Do you, um, need a hand?”* Sybylla returns his gaze straight on. *“No thank you.”*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Harry. The camera follows as he rises. He smiles smugly. *“You’re new here, aren’t you? Do you work in the kitchen?”*

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sybylla who glares at him. She decides to play along. She says in a faux-Irish accent, *“I’d be obliged to ya, sir, if you’d take yourself out of the way. Unless you want me foot in your big fat face?”*

Shot: Medium-close on Harry grinning devilishly.

Shot: Medium 2-shot on Sybylla climbing down from tree, while Harry attempts to help her. She slides down against his body, her skirts rising above her waist. Harry grips her around the waist, quite happy with Sybylla’s unladylike position.

Shot: Long shot on Sybylla struggling out of Harry’s grip. Harry says, *“How about a ... a reward?”* Sybylla replies, *“Let me go.”* Harry hesitates and then pushes her away, a little roughly. He bends down and helps Sybylla pick up the blossoms she has dropped. Sybylla says, *“You should be ashamed, a gentleman like yourself peepin’ and pryin’ on innocent girls. You’ll have me sacked you will.”* Sybylla smiles flirtatiously and then runs off.

As the Irish serving girl, Sybylla can be flirtatious with Harry, something she could never do in Grandma Bossier’s drawing room.

Armstrong follows Sybylla and Harry’s flirtation with the scene in which Sybylla is dressed and preened by her Irish maid, Bidy, a real Irish serving girl, in preparation for one of

Grandma Bossier's dinner parties. Sybylla is being readied so she can be presented to eligible and wealthy bachelors, Harry Beecham included. The dinner party scene also requires Sybylla to take on a persona, one that has been cultivated by her Grandma Bossier and Aunt Helen. However, after the dinner Sybylla brings out the Irish peasant girl again, entertaining the men with ribald pub songs. This seems to be a deliberate resistance against unwanted marriage proposals. Sybylla has made it explicitly clear that she doesn't want to get married or have children. As Sybylla dances with one of her suitors, the pompous Frank Hawdon, she sings a song she has learned in a pub.

*There were three drunken maidens
Lived on the Isle of Wight
They drank from Sunday morning
Nonstop till Saturday night
Then Saturday night did come around
The girls, they wouldn't go home.
Then those three drunken maidens did push the jug about.
Then where are your feathered hats?
Your clothes so rich and fine?
They've all been swallowed up, boys
In tankards of good wine.
And where are your maidenheads?*

Though all of Sybylla's male admirers are enchanted with her unusual "hidden talents," Grandma Bossier and Aunt Helen are not. When Sybylla's Grandmother learns of last night's "bacchanalian debauch" she is fuming. Sybylla has broken a serious social rule, one that defines "good white women" as beacons of civilization and refined culture.

Ironically, and tellingly, Armstrong has Sybylla play her classical pieces on her old out-of-tune piano in her family's run-down parlour at Possum Gully, nary a wealthy suitor in sight. The recurring piece played by Sybylla is Robert Schumann's "From Foreign Lands and People" (1838), part of his Kinderszenen collection, a piece that is quite dreamy. Sybylla plays Schumann for herself, as a means of artistic expression and escape. At Grandma Bossier's Caddagatt,

Sybylla only plays and sings pub songs, in what can only be seen as an act of rebellion. How she came to know the words to those songs also raises a few eyebrows. Sybylla refuses to be constructed as the overworked farmwife or the lady of leisure playing insipid music. As Sybylla asserts at the beginning of Armstrong's film, she wants to be the heroine of her own story, with her own "brilliant career."

The Wage Labour Narrative

Joan's mother: *You never listen to me. Look you got a decent job, you got the kids, you got me to look after them. You got a nice place there.*

Joan's uncle: *Yeah, Joanie. You take up with this white man, you're gonna lose that place.*

Joan: *For Christ's sake, I'm not going to marry him!"*

- *The Wake*

Norma Bailey's *The Wake* (1986), Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991), and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) are the wage labour narratives, which are structured through the point of view of unmarried and marginalized heroines. These heroines are not part of a patriarchal family and must work outside the home, primarily in low-waged and low-skilled jobs, in order to support themselves and their families. These women are forced to develop strategies of resistance against sexual exploitation in masculinist frontier spaces. It is important to note that these heroines are not career oriented or goal-driven women, with lofty aspirations to succeed in the (white) male professions. The waged labour heroines *must* work. Nor do they harbour yearnings for artistic expression suppressed by a masculinist culture. These heroines are just trying to survive in a hostile frontier environment in which male sexual and racist violence threatens them at every turn.

The excerpted dialogue from Bailey's *The Wake* above touches on the key themes and issues that run across the waged labour narratives, differentiating them from the white settler narratives. The role of "decent work" in the lives of colonized or marginalized women in frontier

spaces plays an important part not only in their economic independence, but also as a means of protection from sexual exploitation from white men. Throughout these films, the filmmakers depict the “taking up” with white men as ideologically aligned with prostitution and potentially dangerous. As Joan’s uncle warns his niece, it can mean losing one’s home and/or children, and hence, status as a “decent” woman. Earning and maintaining the status of “decency” through waged work is one of the central strategies these heroines deploy to resist economic oppression and exploitation in white masculine frontier spaces. The other key difference between the white settler narratives and the wage labour narratives is the filmmakers’ representation of domesticity. Due to their race, class, or sexual transgressions, becoming a wife in a white settler family is not an option for these wage labour women. In these narratives the filmmakers depict a more harmonious domestic space, which is in fact often a space for solace and escape from labour oppression, economic exploitation, and male violence, though not always. Significantly, despite the heroines’ strategies of resistance through “decent work” and the home, all these filmmakers depict the frontier as an extremely violent place.

“A Decent Job”: Anti-racist Strategies Against Sexual Exploitation

You can’t sell my flesh to ghosts! I belong to you. I won’t be hundred men’s wife!

- Lulu to Hong King, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991)

The key strategy these heroines deploy for resisting (white) male violence and sexual exploitation is through “decent work.” Working in a decent “occupation” affords these women some dignity and respectability in a sexist and racist frontier culture, which has historically constructed, colonized, and marginalized women, including unwed mothers, as sexually “available” and licentious. Most of the waged labour heroines are explicitly presented with prostitution as a potential means of income. Though they all have different kinds of dreams and desires, these heroines are bound by their desire to make a living at “decent” work, meaning *not*

prostitution. Though these women may be identified as “the laundress” or “the nanny,” these identities are not represented as oppressive in the same way the “farm wife” identity is oppressive to white women. Rather these women must struggle against a very different gendered identity, one that has been constructed through a racist and imperial lens.

The waged labour heroines are forced to work in or navigate across frontier spaces in order to access labour and economic opportunities. Unlike white settler farmwives, these women are, ironically, more “visible” on the frontier, and are afforded more freedom of movement. The filmmakers set power struggles in the waged labour narratives in white masculine frontier spaces between white men and colonized/marginalized women. This visibility and mobility is in stark contrast to Armstrong’s, Campion’s, and Wilson’s depiction of the restricted mobility of the white farm wives in their films. However, colonial forces of power delimit these heroines’ visibility and mobility through institutionalized racism and violence. Though these heroines may seemingly have more freedom than white farmwives and daughters who are tied to the home, their spatial visibility and mobility mean they are more vulnerable to white male violence and exploitation, and also more suspect for illicit behaviour and inferior morality. The filmmakers represent these frontier spaces as highly contested spaces frequented and policed by racist and/or “marauding” white men, as well as figures of authority. Interestingly, these films are set across very different time periods, ranging from the late 19th century to the late 20th century.

Nevertheless the filmmakers represent these “contact zones” between white men and waged labour women as spaces where white male supremacy is asserted and inscribed across female bodies. It is in these contact zones that the heroines must construct strategies to avoid sexual exploitation, particularly from white men. The heroines’ “decent” jobs provide them with some

semblance of protection, serving as a means to avert the male imperial gaze, even though most of these heroines are placed under the authority of white men in the workplace.

Norma Bailey's The Wake

In Bailey's *The Wake* Joan, a Métis single-mother, works as a grocery store clerk in order to pay the rent and feed their kids. Though Bailey sets her film in contemporary times (1986), Joan must still contend with the stereotype of the "squaw," especially as a single-mother and with no live-in male protection. Though we never see Joan's boss, the roads Joan must travel on to work every day are controlled by white cops, some of whom are known to "beat up on Indians." It is the same road white "johns" travel on to visit Joan's impoverished cousin Cora, forced to sell her body in order to feed her three kids. Bailey does not shy away from the realities of prostitution. Bailey depicts Cora and Donna's grim life in one of the film's most disturbing and tragic scenes. Donna has just returned home from school, and has just passed by a white man leaving her house – one of her mother's "johns."

Shot: Medium angle on Donna who walks into the hallway of her house. She stops when her attention is caught by something. She gazes off-screen.

Shot: Full shot on Cora lying unconscious on a disheveled bed. Her bedroom is a mess. She wears a simple cotton nightgown. Donna walks into the frame. Her little brothers and sisters watch TV in the living room.

Shot: Medium shot, Donna gazes down at her mother's body on the bed. She approaches her with caution, not knowing what to expect. Donna turns her gaze out the window and says, "*You bastard.*" Donna is referring to the "john" she saw leaving her home moments earlier. Donna turns her gaze to her mother. "*Mom?*"

Shot: Full shot on Donna leaning over Cora, still unconscious. Donna pulls down her nightdress, and then covers her with some blankets. "*Mom?*"

Shot: Close angle, Donna's POV on Cora. Donna leans into the shot. "*Jesus.*" Donna's hands pull the blankets up to her mother's neck. "*Mom?*"

Shot: Medium angle on Donna still trying to cover up her mother's unconscious body, a body she just sold to a white man. Panicked Donna yells to her friend, "*Marlene!*"

Shot: Full shot on Donna trying to tend to her mother. "*Get the ambulance.*"

In this scene Bailey renders the “white john” into what he is, “a bastard.” Donna is given the voice to judge and condemn the nameless and faceless white man. She blames him for her mother’s current state, which is probably not directly his fault. Donna blames white men in general for what her mother has become, an alcoholic whore who turns tricks in the home while her kids watch TV. Throughout the scene, Bailey has Donna repeats the word “mom,” as if to assert Cora’s identity first as a mother rather than a whore. Though Cora does work as a prostitute and is an alcoholic, Donna honours her with the label “mother” and condemns the white “john” with the label “bastard.” In this scene the white male desiring gaze is rendered invisible, although it remains a powerful and dangerous presence in the lives of Donna, Cora, and Cora’s other children.

Late in the film after Cora is released from the hospital and gets new medication for her diabetes, she tells her cousin Joan excitedly that she has a new job at a local Laundromat, and she is getting her kids back. The new decent, albeit low-paid, job means a steady income, but also means respect and dignity for a person who has been degraded and exploited so badly it is a wonder she has any hope left at all.

Anne Wheeler’s Loyalties

Like Joan in *The Wake*, Roseanne in Wheeler’s *Loyalties* is a Métis woman struggling to make ends meet. At the beginning of Wheeler’s film Roseanne works as a waitress in a rowdy tavern, a setting where she is often the object of the male desiring gaze. However, Roseanne maintains strict boundary lines between waitressing and “entertaining” her male customers. Roseanne will not even cross this boundary line for her boyfriend Eddy, who while intoxicated attempts to fondle her. Roseanne rejects his advances, and Eddy blows up in anger, punching her in the face, and getting arrested for assault. This incident is a major plot point, as it causes

Roseanne to lose her job. The scene also allows Wheeler to depict Roseanne's strict work ethic, and her strong desire to be seen as a good worker over a sexual object in a public space, particularly a very male public frontier space – the tavern.

Losing her job inadvertently leads Roseanne to her job as the Sutton's nanny/domestic servant. Dr. Sutton initially hires Roseanne to help his British wife "settle in." Though Roseanne is wary of Dr. Sutton, who seems a little too friendly, she accepts his offer. Unemployed and with three kids to feed, Roseanne has few options in the remote northern community of Lac La Biche. The irony is that in an effort to find a decent job Roseanne walks unknowingly into the snare of a rapist and a pedophile. Wheeler depicts Roseanne and Leona's vulnerability in the scene in which Dr. Sutton "helps" fold the laundry.

Shot: American shot on Leona in the laundry room folding clothes. She hears someone approach and looks up startled.

Shot: Medium angle on Dr. Sutton, smiling. He says, "*Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you.*" He walks toward Leona.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Leona smiling self-consciously. She looks down.

Shot: Medium angle on Dr. Sutton's hands as he picks up a pair of women's underwear. He slowly begins to fold it. The camera tilts up to his face. "*So, today is washing day, is it?*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Leona. She nods, but is unable to speak. She gazes down from embarrassment. Dr. Sutton's voice off-screen says, "*Where's Lily? Do you know?*" Leona shrugs her shoulders.

Shot: American shot on Leona and Dr. Sutton standing in close proximity to each other. Roseanne's voice off-screen says, "*Shopping,*" answering Dr. Sutton's question. Roseanne enters the frame. She positions herself between her daughter and her employer, and picks up the folded laundry, including the underwear Dr. Sutton fondled. She gives Leona a disapproving look. Dr. Sutton moves away from the laundry machines, giving Roseanne the space to organize her clothes. The camera follows as Dr. Sutton moves to the doorframe leading into the rest of the house. Roseanne says, "*Just don't stand there, Leona. Get the other stuff out of the dryer.*" Leona is framed out of the shot. Roseanne grabs her garbage bags filled with clean clothes and makes her way to the doorway where Dr. Sutton stands. She tries to move past him, but he blocks her from exiting. "*I thought perhaps I could give you a ride home.*" Roseanne says, "*That's okay, I've got my truck.*" Dr. Sutton abruptly brings his hands up to Roseanne's neck and face. "*Let me see that.*" He wants to "examine" the wound she received the night Eddy beat her up.

Shot: Medium angle over-the shoulder on Roseanne who pulls back from Dr. Sutton's touch. She glares at him knowingly. He says, "*It's coming along very nicely.*"

Shot: American shot on Roseanne and Dr. Sutton, still blocking the doorway, one arm barring the way. Roseanne ducks under his arm and exits the laundry room. Leona enters frame, carrying garbage bags of laundry. As she follows after her mother, Dr. Sutton intercepts. Putting on his best "gentleman" act, he says, "*I'll take that. It's too heavy for you.*" He takes the bags from Leona.

Wheeler constructs Roseanne's use of direct eye contact and protective gestures as her only form of resistance against Dr. Sutton, and in fact all white men. Roseanne sees through Dr. Sutton's gentlemanly charm, and so he must resort to more explicit forms of sexual aggression like touching and blocking doorways. Through these gestures Dr. Sutton sends a clear message to Roseanne – *I own you*. There is no doubt that Dr. Sutton's behaviour goes far beyond harmless flirting, he's a real threat. Though Roseanne knows Dr. Sutton holds power over her as her employer and a privileged "respected" member of the white settler community, she does not allow him to claim physical or sexual access to her or her daughter. Unfortunately, Leona is very naïve. In contrast to her mother Leona is rendered completely passive by Dr. Sutton's dominating gaze and voice. Leona can't return his gaze and she doesn't speak through the entire scene. She is literally speechless in his presence. This is a much different Leona from the one who speaks quite freely in her own home. As in the rest of the film, Roseanne's critical empowered (maternal) gaze is also a judging gaze, a gaze that condemns Dr. Sutton for what he is – a sexual predator who preys on powerless subaltern females. Even Lily says of Roseanne, "*I feel like she's always judging me.*" In many ways this is Roseanne's sole dramatic purpose in the film – a lone "Greek chorus." Leona is safe as long as Roseanne is there to protect her.

Nancy Kelly's Thousand Pieces of Gold

In Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, slavery is a major theme. The central heroine's trajectory is from slave to independent woman, one who is able to support herself financially.

Like Ada in Campion's *The Piano*, Lalu is traded between various men, first her father to slave traders, and then to Hong King, and then later to Charlie Beamus, who wins her in a card game. Kelly renders visible the commodification of Lalu, both as a sexual object and also as labourer. Lalu's conflicts are primarily with Hong King, who sees Lalu as an investment in the saloon he manages for Charlie Beamus. He aims for Lalu to earn him a profit over and above the fifteen hundred American dollars he paid for her by prostituting her out to his saloon patrons. As a Chinese woman, Lalu is deemed an exotic commodity in a mining town where the only other women are white. Hong King names his new commodity "China Polly" in order to emphasize her exoticness. Lalu, however, has mistakenly assumed that she has been sold as a bride, not as "one hundred men's wife." When she learns of Hong King's plans, she resists by refusing to bend to his demands, fighting back with a knife and then threatening to commit suicide. Hong King's business partner Charlie Beamus steps in and convinces Hong King to rethink his plans for "Polly." Charlie says, "*You keep her for yourself, King. Anyone can see she'd make a lousy whore.*" Charlie also points out to Hong King in a heated moment, "*You don't own her! Now you can't own a person. It's against the law – those days are gone. You break the law, you'll never get your citizenship papers.*" After Charlie has quelled his anger he wraps his arm around Hong King, man to man, and says, "*If she won't be a whore, let her earn her keep some other way.*" Throughout the conversation Lalu waits anxiously for her fate to be decided while keeping the knife blade pointed at her own body, the one Hong King thinks he owns. Charlie's words of wisdom temporarily save Lalu from being a prostitute.

Lalu however must still fight for her freedom from Hong King, and manages to transcend her enslavement through hard work. After Charlie wins her in a card game, Charlie offers her his home as a place to stay before she earns enough to return to China. Lalu refuses Charlie's sexual

advances, and wants only a platonic relationship with him. While living with Charlie Lalu starts her own laundry business, which becomes quite successful. Soon afterwards she takes over managing and cooking for a local boarding house for miners, the ones who had sexually harassed her while she was Hong King's slave. Through decent work, Lalu is able to transcend the "China Polly" image Hong King created, and gain the respect and admiration of the townsfolk.

Maggie Greenwald's The Ballad of Little Jo

In Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, unwed mother Josephine has few job options as an unskilled fallen "society girl." Jo's survival in the "Wild West" is dependent on her ability to masquerade as a man and hold down "male" jobs; she works as a miner and shepherd before she buys her own "bachelor" homestead. Josephine deploys her various jobs as a way to escape rape and prostitution. Even before Josephine leaves her society world, her father labels her a "whore" (for having a child out of wedlock) branding her unfit for the marriage market. In the late 19th century this is a form of shunning and banishment. While on the road, having left her child in the care of her sister, Helen, Josephine is labeled a "female vagrant" by the treacherous peddler who associates this low status with sexual availability, prompting him to sell her to marauding soldiers, who later attempt to gang rape her. As a "female vagrant" with no employable skills, Josephine is vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence. Josephine becomes a man because it is safer and offers her the chance of making a living without selling her body.

Domesticity: "You got a nice place there"

The heroines in the waged labour narratives are not part of a patriarchal family, but run "households" on their own without the support of a male "breadwinner." There is no strict division between masculine and feminine work, productive and reproductive labour. The heroines are not involved in gender power relations in the home, because none of these heroines share a

domestic space with husbands or fathers. Domestic spaces in these narratives are generally represented as places of solace and respite from a hostile white masculinist frontier world.

In Wheeler's *Loyalties* and Bailey's *The Wake* the domestic spaces are female-headed, where grandmothers provide emotional support and childcare for their working daughters. Both heroines have male lovers who are only invited into their homes and bedrooms temporarily. In Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Lalu shares and journeys across different kinds of "living spaces," but none of them can be described as domestic arrangements. As Hong King's slave, Lalu lives in the saloon, where she serves many men, all of them white, including Charlie Beamus. Later she shares a temporary home with Charlie, but in a platonic arrangement, in which Lalu earns her own money doing laundry. As the boarding house manager and cook, Lalu shares a living space with (white) miners. Each living arrangement represents a stage in Lalu's transition from slave to waged worker to wife. This last role is not dramatized on screen, but referenced only as an epilogue note at the end of the film. Lalu is neither wife nor lover to any of the men in any of these spaces. The power relations are based on Lalu's socio-economic status. In Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, the home is represented as a space where Jo can be *herself*. Jo does share the space with her Chinese male servant and lover. Their relationship becomes a romantic one, albeit one that is highly taboo. In this space Tinman performs all the "female" jobs that Little Jo has never learned to do, as either a "society girl" or a frontiersman.

Though the waged labour narratives represent the heroines as economically independent and "good providers" to their families, they do not do it alone. Their ability to hold down "decent jobs" and have a "nice place" to live is dependent on the social networks they form and maintain with other working-class and colonized women, either as friends or as extended family members. These women provide the heroines with a range of support from childcare to food production to

the sharing of knowledge and skills, most of which fall into the category of “women’s work.” In these films the heroines deploy “women’s work” as a means of resistance against colonial and racist exploitation, as well as a means of sustaining themselves independently.

In Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Bertha, the German prostitute, passes on valuable knowledge and skills to Lalu, which prove pivotal to Lalu’s economic survival as a “free” woman. Ironically, it is Bertha who teaches Lalu how to bake an apple pie. The baking lesson scene manages to advance the plot and at the same time dismantle the Western’s gendered “good pioneer woman”/whore dichotomy. The image of a prostitute wearing an apron with floured hands teaching a “Chinese slave girl” how to bake an American apple pie is rife with irony. Lalu will deploy her new skill to make American style food in her job as cook for the white male residents at the miners’ boarding house. The baking scene links these two characters as marginalized immigrant women forced to navigate a dominant white male culture that aims to exploit them for both pleasure and profit.

In Wheeler’s *Loyalties*, Roseanne is able to “make ends meet” through the support of her mother Beatrice, with whom she shares a home. Beatrice provides both her daughters with childcare and even money when need be. Beatrice’s support is represented through simple gestures of “home comforts” like her offerings of cups of tea. Joan in Bailey’s *The Wake* is tapped into a large Métis community who share what meager resources they still have left with each other. Though this community is economically disenfranchised and haunted by land dispossession and dislocation, they help each other in multiple ways. In community gathering scenes Bailey frames trays of sandwiches and cups of tea in close angles or in the forefront of the frame. These trays of food are also prepared out of love, the love of the community. Donna’s Kookum teaches her how to hunt and skin a rabbit. Joan remakes Donna’s pink bridesmaid gown

into an “above the knee” dress she can wear as a contestant in her high school’s Mardi Gras Beauty Queen contest. Joan’s dressmaking skills give Donna the confidence to compete with dignity and pride. Joan doesn’t sell her sewing skills in the job market, but deploys them as a means of reproductive labour to keep her family together. In this sense, Joan’s sewing for Donna is a real “labour of love” and a means of Métis female resistance.

Filmmakers Wheeler, Bailey, Greenwald, and Kelly do not represent wage labour as a magical shield, but rather as a strategy in conjunction with other methods of resistance, particularly in the forming of support networks amongst other marginalized or colonized women. Joan has the support of parents, brothers, and other extended family members. Roseanne has the support of her mother Beatrice and her Métis women friends. Little Jo forms bonds with the Russian homesteaders and Tinman, her live-in Chinese servant, who later becomes her secret lover. Lalu finds support in Bertha, a local prostitute and Li Ping, an elderly Chinese man who runs the general store. Through these bonds, the heroines can avoid “taking up with white men,” a fate on par with prostitution.

The filmmakers are careful not to depict the waged labour homes as idyllic or completely safe havens. The invasion of waged labour heroines’ homes is also a constant threat, particularly in regard to racist violence and rape. There are a number of key moments across these films that evoke this threat. In Bailey’s *The Wake*, Cora’s home is constantly invaded either by white cops or white “johns,” drawing a parallel between the two figures. Officer Crawford throws Donna, Cora’s daughter, to the floor when he breaks down the door after Donna discovers her mother has gone into diabetic shock and calls 911. Donna has barred the door to the authorities because she doesn’t want to be put into “care,” separated from her mother and siblings. Joan agrees to take Donna in, so she won’t have to go the foster home where that white guy “is feeling everyone up

all the time.” In this heart-breaking scene, Cora and her children are treated like criminals, violated and “roughed up,” the white cops turning their “home” into a racial war-zone. In Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Lalu must carry a weapon in order to avert rape from the white miners she serves in the saloon, and later in the boarding house, where she works as a cook. In Greenwald’s *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Jo and Tinman live under constant fear that the local white settlers will discover their forbidden, loving relationship, which they carry on in the privacy and protection of their shared homestead. On the frontier Little Jo is known as a “frontiersman,” and Tinman as lowly Chinese servant. In the domestic space, they are lovers and confidants. Jo and Tinman know that if anyone discovered the true nature of their relationship they would be in grave danger.

Greenwald, Bailey, Wheeler, and Kelly’s films are all set in the North American West, between the time periods of the late 1880s, the Wild West era, and the mid-1980s, a “post-colonial” era. Despite this variation in historical and national context, the filmmakers depict their heroines’ experiences within frontier economies similarly. There is nothing very “post-colonial” about the way the Métis heroines in Bailey’s *The Wake* and Wheeler’s *Loyalties* experience oppression on their late twentieth century Western Canadian frontier. In the eyes of white society Roseanne, Cora, Donna, and Joan are still “dirty squaws” and “Indian princesses” to be exploited by white men. Across these four films, waged labour is represented and deployed as a strategic method for feminist resistance against racist and sexual exploitation. As women with low socio-economic status and racialized “others,” they must navigate frontier spaces with less protection from the state, rendering them more vulnerable and more exploitable than farmwives and daughters under the protection of a propertied white patriarch. Through waged labour these

heroines are able to exert some level of agency in and resistance against very oppressive and even violent white masculine frontier spaces.

Regarding the role of white settler women in the oppression of subaltern and working-class women, only Wheeler's *Loyalties* represents them as oppressors. Though Lily in *Loyalties* is complicit in her husband's criminal behaviour, Wheeler depicts her sympathetically as an oppressed middle-class housewife, trapped in a loveless marriage with a sexual predator. Except for Wheeler's *Loyalties*, white settler women play a very small part in these films, relegated to the margins of the narratives and the frame. In the wage labour narratives the filmmakers deploy the theme of frontier economies to foreground how frontier space was not only gendered, but how it remains gendered across lines of race, class and sexuality.

Subaltern Settlement Narrative

Mr. Semmens: "Agh! I've told you a thousand times you're not marrying that dirty black whore!"

Steve: "I'll knock your bloody teeth in!"

Mr. Semmens: "They put her up to this. It's a trick. We'll lose everything! Look son, you can root her on the side. You don't have to marry her. I mean, why buy a cow when you can milk one through the fence?"

Steve: "Sometimes I feel like killing you."

Mr. Semmens: "What about the farm? The land? Everything? They'll take the lot!"

Steve: "It was never ours. You and the council jacked up the sale of that land from under their feet!"

- Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988)

The subaltern settlement narrative is structured through the points of view of indigenous or black communities who struggle against economic exploitation through the dispossession of their land, forced migration to isolated and economically marginal frontier spaces, and/or enslavement. These films are Mita's *Mauri* (1988), Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), and Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993). Dash, Mita, and Moffatt structure their subaltern settlement narratives and iconography around the theme of subaltern resilience within a white settler society. The

filmmakers depict the entrapment and feminization of subaltern males as key methods of colonial domination over subaltern communities. “Women’s work” is not represented as demeaning or oppressive, but as a source of cultural pride and connection to the past. Unlike the white settler and paid labour narratives, the subaltern narratives are not structured through the point of view of a central character, but rather through multiple characters, emphasizing the central place of community in the resistance and survival of subaltern settlements in frontier economies.

In Mita’s *Mauri*, the Rapana family has been dispossessed of their land by the Semmens, a white settler family. With few economic opportunities many of the Māori characters have been driven from their isolated close-knit Te Mata settlement, and consequently their Māori culture and identity. In Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, the Peasant family is torn apart by a controversial migration north to the mainland, where a younger African-American generation hopes for socio-economic betterment unavailable to them in their remote Gullah community of the Sea Islands. In Moffatt’s *Bedevel*, Aborigine and Torres Strait Islander families are torn apart and “Bedeveled” by various imperial capitalist projects like World War 2, railway development, land speculation, and the tourist industry.

As in the white settler and paid labour narratives, Dash, Mita, and Moffatt represent the economic exploitation of subaltern people by foregrounding their delimited access to the frontier economy as controlled by colonial forces of power. One of the key themes that recurs across these films is the rendering of subaltern spaces and men as “feminine.” The filmmakers represent the “feminization” of subaltern men and communities around the tropes of geographic isolation and morally sanctioned confinement, such as the Reservation, the slave plantation, or prison. Dash, Mita, and Moffatt foreground how these frontier sites of confinement and imprisonment render subaltern communities and men passive, silent, and invisible in the larger frontier

economy. The filmmakers foreground how the colonial construction of subaltern womanhood as more “primitive” and less “civilized” than white womanhood, enables colonial forces to delimit subaltern communities’ access to frontier economies. Hence, these filmmakers subvert the “angel in the house” trope. The filmmakers deploy counter-cinema devices to deconstruct these colonial deployments and structures of gender and race in frontier spaces and economies.

These filmmakers are careful not to represent subaltern people as victims. In fact, the representation of subaltern people as victims has been a problematic code of the Western, particularly the revisionist “sympathetic” Westerns. Though these filmmakers foreground the victimization of subaltern people in frontier economies in their frame, strategies of resistance are made central in the films’ plots and iconography. As in the white settler and the paid labour narratives, the films’ characters’ resistance to oppression and economic exploitation is a core conflict. The filmmakers construct acts of resistance in community action, rather than the action of individual heroines.

The “Feminization” of Subaltern Frontier Communities and Spaces

Like the farmwife in the white settler narratives, the characters in the subaltern settlement narratives are geographically isolated within places of confinement, delimiting their access to frontier spaces. This delimiting renders the subaltern characters economically dependent on white paternalistic systems of authority. This dependency and passivity, in turn, “feminizes” these subaltern communities and spaces enabling colonial forces of power to justify corrupt and immoral land deals and forced relocation and captivity.

In Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, the Peazants, descendants of “African captives,” are literally cut off from the mainland, rendered dependent on their backbreaking work as sharecroppers, a close cousin to slavery. In Mita’s *Mauri*, the Rapana family struggles to subsist

on what little land they still own after generations of corrupt land deals with the “Pakeha.” Their shrinking Te Mata Settlement has been literally pushed to the edge of the sea. In Moffatt’s *Bedevil* segment “Mr. Chuck,” Rick is an imprisoned Aborigine man. In “Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo,” an Aborigine family lives along a railway track, seemingly stranded in the middle of nowhere, cut off from the larger community as well as the “modern” world. In “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In,” Imelda, an elderly Torres Strait Islander woman, is physically forced from her home to make way for a new development project. Contrary to colonial white settler discourse, this economic deprivation through geographic isolation and captivity threatens to destroy these subaltern communities’ way of life, which is dependent on their once free access to, and movement across, the land. This delimited access to the frontier structures the films’ iconography.

Exploitation and Resistance of Subaltern Men

As in the paid labour narrative the filmmakers depict subaltern subaltern males as disenfranchised. What differentiates the subaltern settlement narrative is that subaltern men are central characters, and their oppression and exploitation animates the films’ plots and iconography. *Mauri*’s plot revolves around the character Paki, a hunted and haunted Māori ex-con, who has stolen the identity of the deceased Rewi Rapana. A central storyline in Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* revolves around one of the Peasant men, Eli, who is tormented by the rape of his wife, Eula, by a white landowner. Eli’s rejection of his wife and the child she is carrying propels the spirit of their unborn daughter into the world of the living in order to solve her “*ma and daddy’s problem*.” Eli is also tormented by the fact that he has not protected his wife from this violence, and that the system will do nothing to see that justice is served. In this sense, Eli is powerless. The *Bedevil* segment “Mr. Chuck” revolves around an incarcerated indigenous man, Rick, who, as a child, was attacked by the ghost of a white American G.I. Rick is haunted by his

horrible abusive childhood, at the hands of a violent uncle. As a prisoner he has no power. Moffatt depicts this powerlessness in the scene in which Rick appears with bruises and bandages, the result of a prison beating. Despite their powerlessness in the system the filmmakers avoid depicting the subaltern male characters as fictional devices or iconic background figures, so common to the Western. The filmmakers construct these men as active characters in the films' plots and iconography.

Resistance is particularly difficult for subaltern men, primarily because they are so heavily policed and surveyed. Any act of resistance they pursue must be performed in non-legitimate, underground, or covert ways. This kind of resistance is represented by practicing Māori rituals and way of life, and by cultivating an intimidating physical exterior and persona. Through these bodily acts of resistance, these characters see themselves as protectors and defenders of their land and Māori women.

Maintaining an indigenous way of life is used as a means of resistance against capitalist and colonial expansionism in Moffatt's *Bedevil*. In "Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo," Ruby's husband is a stoic and imposing figure, who still manages to hunt, although his hyper-realistic hunting grounds are now haunted by the ghost of a little white blind girl, not to mention wire fences and the railroad, delimiting the movement of wild animals. In Mita's *Mauri*, Paki/Rewi finds some inner peace by living off the land. In an elaborate sequence, Paki/Rewi hunts a wild boar, skins it and then prepares it for cooking. His kill is made as a peace offering to Uncle Willie and his gang, which they accept. In Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, the African-American male characters develop covert methods of communication through secret hand gestures and resilience training through fighting games. The gestures and "games" represent both the past and the future. They

are rooted in African rituals and myths, but they indicate a “street language” and culture that these men will need in the urban world where they hope to find economic opportunity.

The subaltern male characters cultivate “tough-guy” personas as a means of resistance. As with colonial authority figures of power like cops, the subaltern male characters have imposing physical appearances and know how to engage in combat. In Mita’s *Mauri*, Uncle Willie and his gang members have cultivated intimidating street-gang personas by wearing leather jackets and carrying guns, but also maintain their cultural identity with Māori tattoos. They use their gangster personas to ensure Steve Semmens, a white man, has honorable intentions in regard to their cousin, Remari. Uncle Willie only gives his permission because he knows that’s how the Rapana family will get their land back. Mita shoots this scene in a nighttime exterior, the only illumination being the pit-fire, emphasizing the men’s association with a criminal underworld. Mita frames the scene through Steve’s perspective, representing his trepidation and inferiority to the Māori tough guys that surround him.

Shot: Wide angle, Steve puts down a case of beer in front of Willie, two of Willie’s men and Remari at a fire pit. Steve takes off his hat and sits down in between Willie and Remari. The other gang leaders remain standing looming over Steve.

Shot: Close-angle on Remari as she smiles at Steve. Willie off-screen says, “*Rumour has it, you might be part of the family one day.*”

Shot: Tight low-angle on Steve and Willie, while the two gang-members, including Hemi, hover over them in a dominating position. A large bald guy opens beer bottles with the side of an ax. Willie says, “*If you play your cards right, that is.*” Steve nervously glances at the gang members opening his beer. He turns to Willie, “*What do you mean? I love her.*” Willie leans in, “*It’s not enough.*” Steve turns his gaze toward Remari.

Shot: Close-angle on Remari, who returns Steve’s gaze. Steve off-screen says, “*I’ll do anything for her.*” Willie off-screen says, “*That’s beginning to sound more like it.*” Steve replies, “*My father’s always on at me about her, but he won’t stop me.*”

Shot: Tight low-angle shot on Steve and Willie, while Hemi and the large bald guy hover over them in a dominant position. Steve says, “*I want to marry her.*” Willie looks toward the fire reflectively. “*Pity about your old man. A bullet through the head would have been cleaner. Then again he would have suffered for his sins, if you get my drift?*” The gang members continue snapping the caps off the beer bottles with the ax, right over Steve’s head.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Willie, but Steve is partially in frame. *“In more practical terms, mate, what are you willing to give her? You?”* Steve turns toward Remari.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Remari staring into fire.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Steve, Willie partially in shot. Steve says, *“Everything.”* Willie says, *“Everything?”* Steve returns his gaze, and repeats, *“Everything.”*

Shot: Reverse angle on Willie, who turns to one of his men. *“Give him a drink, bro.”*

Shot: Medium angle on Hemi. The large bald guy looms in background of shot. Hemi takes a long swig from his beer bottle.

Shot: Medium angle on Steve who waits politely to be offered a drink.

Shot: Medium angle on Hemi, who continues drinking. He finishes and then aggressively pushes the same bottle at Steve.

Shot: Extreme low-angle medium-long angle on Steve as he accepts Hemi’s bottle. He almost wipes the lip of the bottle with his hat, but reconsiders.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Hemi following Steve’s every move. Hemi glares at him with hatred.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Steve who returns Hemi’s gaze. Willie stands in background of shot, watching the heated exchange. Steve meets the challenge and takes a drink from Hemi’s bottle.

Shot: Medium angle Hemi attempts to lunge at Steve, but Willie anticipates this move and grabs Hemi, pulling him away from Steve, who wouldn’t stand a chance against Hemi.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Steve as he turns to Remari. *“Walk you home, Remari.”*

This is not to say that Dash, Mita, and Moffatt represent their subaltern male characters as overly heroic. The subaltern male characters’ methods of resistance do not always protect and defend, and they certainly do not quell subaltern male rage. In Moffatt’s “Mr. Chuck,” Rick acts out his rage against white society by stealing from a white woman’s (Shelley’s) store and ripping apart the chairs in a movie theatre that now sits over the swamp where he played with his sisters. Later when he is an adult in prison, Rick gets caught up in a prison fight and applies tattoos to his body, a potentially deadly practice. The self-tattooing shot is framed with a shaky hand-held camera, as used in documentary or ethnographic films. Ironically, the “ethnographic” image “teaches” us about “post-colonial” indigenous male prison culture, rather than the popular subject of “primitive” culture. Out of frustration and despair, Eli, in Dash’ *Daughters of the Dust*, smashes Nana’s glass bottle tree, an African symbol that was supposed to protect them all. Dash shoots this moment in slow motion, emphasizing the significance of Eli’s destruction of the

African Gullah symbol. Through this act of rage, Eli is destroying a part of himself. In Mita's *Mauri*, despite the fact that he loves Remari, Paki/Rewi repeatedly lashes out at her. Remari represents everything Paki/Rewi cannot have and be, a complete man. Remari is able to see past Rewi's rage, and take the only thing he has to offer her, his body and a baby. The filmmakers depict subaltern male rage as rooted in resistance, but it is often self-destructive.

Subaltern Domesticity

Iona, with the greatest respect for yourself, and the Peasant family, I beg that you stay here on this island. Please do not leave me in this flood of migration north. I feel if I lose you, I will lose myself. Consider the memories that we share growing up together. We are the young, the eager up from slavery. Eager to learn a trade, eager to make a better life for ourselves and our children who will follow.

- St. Julian Last Child's letter, *Daughters of the Dust*

In stark contrast to the white settler narratives, Dash, Moffatt, and Mita represent the domestic sphere as a site of resilience and resistance to both patriarchal and colonial forces of power. The filmmakers depict subaltern domestic spaces as places where characters find temporary relief from oppressive conditions on the frontier, where they are rendered more vulnerable to imperial surveillances, violence, and entrapment. This is not to say domestic spaces are conflict-free zones. However, the core conflicts are rooted in mechanisms of colonialism and racism, rather than in patriarchy. Subaltern domesticity is not structured around oppressive gender roles, in which women are subjected to patriarchal dominance and control. In the subaltern narrative, domestic spaces are sites of female empowerment, rooted primarily in the maternal. This empowerment is enabled through the preservation of culture and language, as well as the thwarting of the white "angel in the house" trope, historically deployed by colonial forces of power to render subaltern women more suited to hard labour or as more sexually licentious. The empowerment of language and culture is constructed through reproductive labour, "women's

work,” and (female) rituals. This empowerment renders subaltern women less exploitable – economically and sexually.

Contrary to the wage labour narratives, Moffatt, Dash, and Mita resist representing the economic and sexual exploitation of subaltern women in the films’ iconography and thematic structures. In Dash’s *Daughters*, Eula’s rape is told to us as back-story. Yellow Mary tells of her sexual exploitation by her white male employer, whilst working as the family wet-nurse and nanny. Nana also speaks of the racist violence she endured as a plantation slave. Dash does not depict these racist acts of violence and exploitation on screen however. Mita and Moffatt also resist depicting images of subaltern women as victims. Instead, all these films construct their iconography around the theme of resilience. One of the ways these films depict subaltern women’s resilience is through the trope of “women’s work.”

The filmmakers suggest that through “women’s work” isolated and economically impoverished subaltern communities can thrive and be nourished, as well as remain connected to their own cultures. This “women’s work” often involves a careful balancing of subaltern cultural practices and “modern” technologies, without subverting them into assimilation. Dash, Mita, and Moffatt privilege images of “women’s work” in the frame, such as food and handicraft production, even though they are not directly related to the films’ plots.

In Mita’s *Mauri*, Kara teaches Awatea how to harvest locally grown flax leaves and then how to weave a “kete” from them.²⁰ When Awatea finishes her kete, it is an important moment for her. Kara exclaims excitedly, “*Your first kete!*” In Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, the domestic spaces are rich with Gullah traditions, handcrafted baskets, and homemade African-American quilts, artifacts now found in American “heritage” museums. In these African-American domestic spaces brightly coloured walls are decorated with newspapers, and the rooms

are filled with dried flowers and herbs. However, domesticity is not a conflict free zone. Eula and Eli's domestic situation is far from ideal, and near the brink of collapse.

Shot: Close angle follow shot, Eula's hand reaches up and pulls down a piece of newspaper that has been stuck to the wall as decoration.

Shot: Close angle, Eula gazes out her bedroom window, and then down to her hand.

Shot: Medium close angle, Eula's hand holding piece of newspaper in front of her pregnant belly. In her other hand she holds a tin can.

Shot: Medium angle from exterior of house, Eula looks at piece of paper. Eli enters frame. He stops in the middle of the room.

Shot: Close angle, Eula turns to face Eli. She holds up the paper.

Shot: Medium angle, Eli's gaze turns to the piece of paper Eula holds up for him to see. He looks away, and then walks toward Eula, who is now blocked by the window frame. Eli is central in the frame.

Shot: Long shot Eli, stands close to Eula but they do not touch. He asks her to name the identity of her rapist. She refuses. Eli lurches as if to strike her.

Shot: Medium close angle shot through window, Eli pulls Eula into an embrace.

Shot: Over the shoulder shot of Eli, Eula privileged in the frame gazes at Eli. Eli pulls away from Eula, and takes her by the shoulders.

Shot: Medium close angle shot through window, Eli steps away from Eula and tells her "*the dream's all gone.*" He stomps out of the room.

Shot: Long shot Eula, stands by the window, despondent.

Shot: Exterior wide-angle landscape shot, Eli runs away from the camera.

In the "Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo" segment in Moffatt's *Bedevil* an indigenous woman, Ruby, and her family, which includes her dark-skinned husband, her sister-in-law, and various children, live tranquil and seemingly happy lives. Simple pots of tea, the delivery of household supplies via the train, and Ruby's husband's returning home from a hunt, represent a safe and peaceful domestic space. However, the peaceful space is disturbed by the invasion of the ghost of the little white blind girl, tragically killed on the railway tracks near Ruby's home. The little white blind girl haunts Ruby as she happily goes about doing her everyday domestic chores like clearing dishes and hanging laundry.

Subverting the White Angel in the House

As in the white settler narrative Mita, Moffatt, and Dash depict the "angel in the house" trope as oppressive. However, in the subaltern settlement narrative this figure of white femininity

is not just oppressive to women, it is oppressive to subaltern communities. Dash, Mita, and Moffatt represent the marginalization of subaltern communities in frontier economies as rooted in the colonial and sexist deployment of the white “angel in the house” trope. Through this trope colonial forces constructed subaltern women as less “feminine,” and hence less moral, than white women, rendering them more exploitable, both economically and sexually. These filmmakers subvert “white femininity” as a means of deconstructing colonial structures of dominance.

In Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, the white angel in the house trope is subverted through two figures: Shelley in “Mr. Chuck,” and the ghost of the white blind girl in “Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo.” Both white female characters suffer from a kind of blindness. In her child-like state and status, the blind girl haunts the property of Ruby’s family home. We never learn the name of this ghost, and Moffatt depicts it as more of a doll, than a human being. In this sense, Moffatt dehumanizes her. The little white blind girl’s visual association with the railroad is rife with meaning, pointing to white women’s complicity in colonial and capitalist projects, like the building of the railway, which proved highly disruptive to indigenous hunting practices, and way of life. Moffatt represented this complicity through the girl’s blindness and ultimately her death – she isn’t a real woman, but a patriarchal and colonial construct. Moffatt sets the following sequence in a wide-open landscape that has been divided up by fences and railways, reminiscent of Western landscapes. The ghost of the little white blind girl stalks the physically imposing Stompie, Ruby’s husband, as if he were a wild animal. The sequence is as follows:

Shot: Close angle, Ruby’s husband, Stompie, walking, carrying a kangaroo carcass over his shoulder. He hums.

Shot: Medium angle, Stompie’s arm carries a spear at his side.

Shot: Wide shot high angle, Stompie treks along the hyper-real bush land landscape.

Shot: Medium long angle, Stompie comes to a broken wire fence. He steps over it.

Shot: Medium angle Stompie, continues walking. He comes to a stop and looks down at the ground.

Shot: Stompie's POV. A tiny doll with a white face lies at his feet. He bends down and picks it up, turning it over.

Shot: Medium angle, Stompie throws the doll down into some bushes. He continues walking.

Shot: Medium angle, camera follows kangaroo carcass swinging from Stompie's shoulder.

Shot: Medium close angle on Stompie's bare feet walking across cracked ground.

Shot: Wide over-head shot, Stompie continues walking.

Shot: Medium long, Stompie continues walking. The wind picks up and his hat flies off his head.

Shot: Medium angle, Stompie's feet in fresh earth. The doll lies in the dirt. He bends down, but does not pick it up. He buries it under the dirt with his foot, as if he were afraid of touching it. He exits frame.

Shot: Wide over-head shot, Stompie runs across land.

Shot: Wide over-head shot, Stompie, different angle, running. He stops, and looks around as if he were being chased by something. He seems lost. He turns in the opposite direction.

Shot: Wide over-head shot, Stompie, running across cracked land.

Shot: Long to medium shot as Stompie runs toward camera and comes to a stop. He looks up at the blazing sun.

Shot: Close angle on sun.

Shot: Medium to long shot, Stompie runs away from camera.

Shot: (Quick cut) Close angle on sun.

Shot: Medium-long to long shot as Stompie runs away. He looks down and stops.

Shot: Stompie's POV, close angle on doll.

In Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, symbolic objects of white femininity are foregrounded and subverted in the frame. Dash uses the tattered and muddy cotton parasol that Yellow Mary, Trula, and Eula find on the beach as an ironic visual reference to white femininity, one that is worn and abandoned. It is a femininity that must be constantly protected from the sun and the elements, in order to remain as white skinned as possible, the ultimate sign of Euro-American "beauty." Dash foregrounds the skin tone issue through the character of Yellow Mary, who is lighter skinned than some of the other Peasant women, like Viola, Eula, and Haagar. However, this lightness of skin is a constant reminder of white dominance and invasion, as it is most likely the outcome of rape by white men. Fairness of skin in the Peasant family is loaded with shame

and pain. As Eula and Yellow Mary sit under the torn parasol, Yellow Mary speaks of identity and courage.

Shot: Wide-shot pan along beach of Peasant family languishing after their “last supper” feast. Yellow Mary off-screen says, “*Once I saw a pink satin case for jewelry for rich women in a shop window.*”

Shot: Long shot, Eula and Yellow Mary sit under the parasol. Yellow Mary, “*And you turned it on its side and the music come out.*”

Shot: Medium angle two-shot, Eula and Yellow Mary. Yellow Mary says, “*I could not afford that case for myself. And I didn’t ask nobody to buy it for me, you know. But in my mind I put all those bad memories in that case, and I locked ‘em there.*”

Shot: Medium high-angle on Trula looking at the exposed roots of a tree on the beach. Yellow Mary off-screen says, “*So that I could take them out and look at them when I feel like, and so I could study ‘em when I want to, and figure it out, you know. But I didn’t want ‘em inside of me. I didn’t want ‘em inside of me.*”

Shot: Medium angle two-shot, Eula and Yellow Mary. Yellow Mary says, “*I don’t want nothing in that case or no body outside that case tell me who I am or how I should feel about me.*” Eula gazes down and places her hand protectively over her belly.

In Mita’s *Mauri* the white “angel in the house” is subverted through Steve Semmens and Remari’s mixed race marriage. Though Steve could just “root her on the side,” as has been the custom of white colonizing men, he wants Remari as his wife and the legitimate mother of his children, even the children he has not fathered. Remari, a confident and self-possessed Māori woman, takes the place of the angel in the house. However, Remari as Steve’s wife will not sacrifice her identity as a Māori woman or sever her ties with her close-knit Māori community. It is Steve who must make the concessions to be accepted into Remari’s Māori family and community. Steve must accept Willie Rapana’s terms for marrying Remari, accept Remari and Paki/Rewi’s lovechild as his own, and learn to speak *Te reo Māori*.²¹ This subversion of the “angel in the house” is visually represented in the elaborate wedding ceremony scene, which privileges Māori symbols and practices over those of the whites, *Pakeha*. Mita has Remari dressed in a traditional European white wedding gown and veil, which contrasts with Remari’s Māori identity, and power in the marriage. It is through Remari’s marriage to Steve that the

Rapanas get the land back, and Steve understands that. This is what Steve means when he vows to Willie that he will give Remari “*everything*.” The wedding ceremony symbolizes not only a thwarting of the “angel on the house” figure, but is representative of Māori restitution.

Conclusion

*Nineteenth-century colonial discourses which drew distinctions between primitive/barbarous societies and civilized/Christian ones allocated a special place to white women as bearers of culture, morality and order.*²²

- Marilyn Lake (1998)

Across these frontier films the filmmakers depict frontier economies as gendered. All of these filmmakers deploy the theme of “women’s work” in frontier economies as a means of revisioning or deconstructing traditional frontier iconography and myths. In stark contrast to the Western the filmmakers do not structure their narratives through the point of view of a lone white male hero, and the conflicts are not constructed around a garden/desert dichotomy. However, as exemplified in the excerpts from Campion’s *The Piano* and Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* cited at the beginning of this chapter, the filmmakers’ depictions of gendered frontiers differ across the axes of race and class.

One of the recurring figures that emerge across these films is the “good pioneer woman.” However, the filmmakers deploy this figure differently as a means of reflecting upon economic oppression and exploitation of women and/or subaltern people. In the white settler narratives Campion, Armstrong, and Wilson deploy this figure to foreground the exploitation of white settler farmwife’s unpaid reproductive and productive labour. In the waged labour narratives Wheeler, Bailey, Greenwald, and Kelly depict the good pioneer woman trope to foreground the marginalization of subaltern women, who are forced to engage in work outside their homes. Though paid labour renders these subaltern women vulnerable to male exploitation and violence, it does provide them with some respectability in a society that has deemed them sexually

licentious. In the subaltern settlement narratives Dash, Moffatt, and Mita deploy the good pioneer woman trope as a way to foreground the oppression and exploitation of subaltern communities and identities rendering them vulnerable to land dispossession, urban migration and loss of identity.

Chapter 5: Filming Female Sexuality in a “Woman-less Milieu”: Through Her Desiring Gaze

If Sybylla could have a good fuck with Harry it would have been a very happy ending. I mean, really I thought that it would have been the best thing to happen to them, but of course it couldn't because of the times and that was the tragedy. It could have been a great affair but unfortunately they would have had to get married. Every time she looked at him she knew she wanted him, that she desired him, but she knew that for a life together he was the wrong person and he'd never understand her. Basically a lot of it was about sexual tension and that was something that we found in the book that I don't think Miles understood about herself. It's a difficult project to translate a book written by a sixteen year old.¹

- Gillian Armstrong, *My Brilliant Career*

The rape scene in Loyalties we kept until the last day of the shooting. And of course everybody was terrified of it. I was dreading it because I knew very clearly in my mind what I wanted, and the scene wasn't nice. Everybody had anticipated it for five weeks. What is it going to turn out like. We knew that this was the soul of the film.²

- Anne Wheeler, *Loyalties*

Across these frontier films the female and/or subaltern characters pursue or express their desires or (re)construct their sexual identities outside patriarchal and racist/colonial contexts as a means of feminist agency and resistance, posing a serious threat to the status quo. In many ways these heroines deploy sexuality and desire like the classic Western hero who asserts his desire in order to stake out territory and a (white) male identity in “uncivilized” spaces, even if it means walking into the line of fire. Through their heroines and other characters, these filmmakers subvert and transgress constructs that have traditionally and historically sexually objectified and exploited women and subaltern people. These sexual subversions and transgressions create much conflict and tension in the narratives, sparking male anger and violence, represented by male colonial and patriarchal figures of authority (e.g., cops, property owners, soldiers, and doctors). These male figures of authority have jurisdiction over the “uncivilized” spaces in which these characters express their desires and sexualities, and enforce moral codes and laws in the form of

imprisonment, restriction of movement, sexual exploitation, and violence. Rape is a recurring theme across this body of work.

Feminist Scholarship on Sexuality and Desire

*Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. Like the capitalist organization of labor and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it has evolved. But if the disputes between labor and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged.*³

- Gayle Rubin, 1984

Feminists argued that this “modern sexual system” was at the root of women’s and subaltern people’s oppression, and sought to challenge, dismantle, and re-vision it. However, feminists were divided along differing lines in regard to methods of resistance. Within second-wave Anglo-American feminism, lines of morality and the law were drawn, primarily between two groups, the anti-pornography feminists and the pro-sex feminists. These debates became identified as the feminist “sex wars,” and aimed to establish a “correct” kind of sexuality that did not objectify or exploit women. In many ways the feminist sex wars reflected the debates that occurred within feminist film scholarship around issues of aesthetics, often referred to as the “pleasure wars.” The French feminists focalized their arguments around language, rather than laws and ethics, advocating for a feminine sexuality that operated outside “masculine parameters” or heterosexuality. Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists argued that subaltern women were doubly sexually oppressed through a (white) heterosexist gaze that was racist and colonizing. They sought to dismantle racist and sexist stereotypes of subaltern women and break the code of silence around socially sanctioned rape. Feminists deploying queer theory envisioned sexuality outside the confines of gender categories. The filmmakers’ depictions of female and/or subaltern sexualities reflect many of the key debates about sexuality and desire in feminist scholarship during the period in which the films were produced.

The Second-Wave Feminist “Sex Wars”

*Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice.*⁴

- Robin Morgan, 1974

The second-wave feminist “sex wars” were generally between Anglo-American feminists, divided into two groups, the anti-pornography feminists and the pro-sex feminists. Though all feminists saw the necessity of dismantling and revisioning “traditional” codes and rules of sexuality rooted in heterosexist patriarchy, they did not see eye to eye on how sexual desire, pleasure, and identity should operate within gender relations. These feminists were generally divided around the issue of censorship and sexuality laws.

Anti-Pornography Feminism

The anti-pornography feminists focused their arguments around sexual exploitation of and violence against women, and aimed to change laws. They argued that gender equity was impossible if women were placed in submissive, passive, or servile positions in the sex act and sexual relations. These feminists argued that patriarchy was rooted in men’s predatory sexual behavior and was a key source of women’s oppression. This feature of patriarchy was epitomized, and in fact, dependent upon the institutions of pornography and prostitution, which always rendered women into sexual objects.

Andrea Dworkin (1979), a leading voice in the anti-pornography movement, referred to pornography as “a kind of nerve center of abuse.” A victim of sexual abuse and exploitation herself, Dworkin spearheaded the anti-pornography movement with her highly influential *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979).⁵ Dworkin argued that porn and prostitution “normalized” male desire as predatory and violent, which encouraged and incited the rape and prostitution of women. Dworkin along with Catherine MacKinnon sought to outlaw pornography

as an institution, which they argued was a violation of women's civil and human rights.⁶

MacKinnon (1989) wrote,

Dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity. So many distinctive features of women's status as second class – the restriction and constraint and contrition, the servility and the display, the self-mutilation and requisite presentation of self as a beautiful thing, the enforced passivity, the humiliation – are made into the content of sex for women. Being a thing for sexual use is fundamental to it.⁷

The extreme changes in censorship laws that the anti-porn feminists lobbied for would bring about harsh fines and constraints to *all* producers of anything featuring “pornographic” material, including lesbian erotica, some of which was produced and consumed by women and feminists.

The anti-pornography feminists leaned dangerously close to anti-feminist right-wing conservatives who lobbied for rigid censorship laws and strict social controls over an individual's sexuality. In addition, the anti-pornography feminists were accused of making sweeping generalizations about heterosexual male desire as always predatory and of a violent nature.

Though the anti-pornography feminists argued that there was a direct connection between porn consumption and sexual violence against women, this could never be proven conclusively.

Pro-Sex Feminism

Like the anti-pornography feminists the pro-sex feminists sought to dismantle patriarchal heterosexism, but not through laws or moral rules about sexual pleasure. The pro-sex feminists argued that sexual desire and pleasure was a fundamental aspect of women's subjectivity, and placing restrictions on sexual acts and defining “correct” pleasure was as oppressive as patriarchy. These feminists were often referred to as the “anything goes” feminists. In contrast to the anti-pornography feminists, the pro-sex feminists were in support of sadomasochism, commercial sex between adults, the consumption and production of pornography, and

intergenerational consensual sex. The pro-sex feminists argued these sexual practices and experiences were not inherently negative for, or oppressive to, women. They also argued that female submission and passivity in the sex act did not necessarily lead to women's victimization and exploitation, and was a potential source of sexual pleasure and fulfillment. Using Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) Gayle Rubin identified these regulatory laws as rooted in "sex negativity."

Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force (Weeks, 1981). Most Christian traditions, following Paul, hold that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much. In turn, this idea rests on the assumption that the genitalia are an intrinsically inferior part of the body, much lower and less holy than the mind, the "soul," the heart, or even the upper part of the digestive system (the status of the excretory organs is close to that of the genitalia). Such notions have by now acquired a life of their own and no longer depend solely on religion for their perseverance.⁸

Rubin argued that this "sex negativity," which permeates all modern Western Christian culture, was the foundation for a "sexual value system," in which human sexuality had been compartmentalized into "good" and "natural" sex vs. "bad" and "abnormal" sex. Rubin asserted that this system is organized in a sexual hierarchy. Rubin wrote:

According to this system, sexuality that is "good," "normal," and "natural" should be ideally heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female. Any sex that violates these rules is "bad," "abnormal," or "unnatural." Bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial.⁹

In conjunction with the pro-sex feminists, the French Feminists examined how women and the feminine had been othered within a Western patriarchal phallogentric language. They advocated for women to embrace the female body, understood and experienced outside of

“masculine parameters.” Luce Irigaray (1977) argued that female sexuality is “plural,” and therefore complex and varied.

But *woman has sex organs just about everywhere*. She experiences pleasure almost everywhere. Even without speaking of the hysterization of her entire body, one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined – in an imaginary centered a bit too much on one and the same.¹⁰

Generally speaking however, French feminists like Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixious advocated for a maternal female body, rather than a sexual one.

Other feminists advocated for lesbian desire as a means of feminist agency and resistance. French feminist Monique Wittig, also a novelist and poet, foregrounded the lesbian body as patriarchy’s true “other.” Wittig’s *Le Corps lesbien* (1971) is a collection of poems in which “*j/e* (I) and *tu* (you) violently tear each other to pieces in the process of love. The slashed pronoun *j/e* enacts women’s violent entry into language.”¹¹ In her essay “The Straight Mind” (1978) Wittig argued,

For heterosexual society is the society which not only oppresses lesbians and gay men, it oppresses many different/others, it oppresses all women and many categories of men, all those who are in the position of the dominated.¹²

Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980) expanded on Rubin’s work by arguing that a key way patriarchy has oppressed women is through enforced heterosexuality. Rich argued,

Whatever its origins, when we look hard and clearly at the extent and elaboration of measures designed to keep women within a male sexual purlieu, it becomes an inescapable question whether the issue feminists have to address is not simple “gender inequality” nor the domination of culture by males nor mere “taboos against homosexuality,” but the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic, and emotional access. One of many means of enforcement is, of course, the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility, an engulfed continent which rises fragmentedly into view from time to time only to be submerged again.¹³

Rich advocated for a vision of “lesbian existence” that went beyond just sexual intimacy, to a political and emotional bond between women, especially in regard to resistance against “male tyranny.” Rich envisioned lesbianism as “a direct attack on male right of access to women.”¹⁴ In this sense, a lesbian existence is of great benefit to all women, not only lesbians. Out of the work of feminists like Rubin, Rich, and Wittig came “queer theory,” a body of scholarship that would challenge not only the construction of sexuality and desire, but also gender identities.

Queer Theory

Queer theorists problematized and destabilized a heterosexual worldview rooted in binary gender identities: “femininity” and “masculinity.” A key inquiry for feminists using queer theory was: *who is the “she”?* Julia Creet argued,

Queer theory posits a critical rethinking or “querying” of the ideological, psychological, and bodily economies which shape sexual identity, gender and desire. Whereas modern “homosexuality” had its genesis in an imposed scientific category with its own clear-cut mechanisms of surveillance and control, and “gay” and “lesbian” have been self-defined terms with fairly clear political parameters, the most recent reincarnation (reclaiming) of the term “queer” carries with it considerable ambivalence and uncertainty.¹⁵

A key feminist scholar who emerged out of and helped pioneer queer theory scholarship was Judith Butler. Expanding on the work of the French feminists, particularly Wittig and Irigaray, as well as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Butler (1988, 1990) turned her lens away from “women’s voices” to (subversive) voices of difference that destabilize naturalized dualistic notions of gender identity and heterosexuality. Deploying psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, namely Althusser and Foucault (*A History of Sexuality*), Butler argued that gender identity, maintained through the naturalization of sexual difference, is in fact a volatile identity constructed by discourse and dependent on the compulsory mimicry and repetition of pre-scripted or ritual performances of femininity and masculinity articulated by and through the lived social

body. Butler identifies oppression through these “naturalized” scripts (stories) inscribed through psychoanalytic descriptions of femininity as “masquerade.” Butler argued for gay and lesbian voices because they tell a different kind of story, such as those told by drag-queen artists who parody femininity and masculinity. They embody a queer worldview. These parodist texts deconstruct and foreground the imitative structure of gender as well as its contingency, and have proven effective in demonstrating how discourse and culture are inscribed on and through the body.

Sexuality and Anti-Racist/Colonial Feminist Scholarship

Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist scholarship was focalized around themes that examined the double-oppression of subaltern women by a heterosexist and racist gaze. Anti-racist/colonial feminists argued that this white colonial male gaze had constructed subaltern women as “whores of the nation.” These feminists argued that this racist and sexist construct was essential to colonial forces maintaining racial dominance over *all* subaltern people, not only women. A recurring theme throughout the films under study here is breaking the code of silence around subaltern women’s sexual exploitation and rape.

Subaltern Women as “Whores of the Nation”

Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists argued that black, indigenous, and other disenfranchised women were constructed as the “whores” of the nation, always available for white man’s sexual exploitation and violence. Anti-racist feminist Evelyn M. Hammonds (1997) argued that white women were expected to be passive virgin-like “de-sexed” Madonna’s, who only performed the sexual act for pro-creative purposes in their reproductive duty as good frontier wives. “White women were characterized as pure, passionless, and de-sexed, while black women were the epitome of immorality, pathology, impurity, and sex itself.”¹⁶ Bell hooks (1981) argued

that the rape of black women was socially and culturally sanctioned in white society through this dichotomy. Hooks argued that the slavery system was ideologically and economically dependent upon it. According to hooks, it was the construction of black women as “sexual savages” that gave white men and even black men the permission to rape black women. “An animal cannot be raped.”¹⁷ As discussed previously, racist and colonial tropes like the “Hottentot Venus” were used to justify the moral sanctioning of the rape of black women.

Anti-colonial feminists argued that indigenous women were also constructed as “whores” and as sexually licentious. Writing about the Australian context, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) argued,

The rape and sexual abuse of Indigenous women by white men is tolerated in society because the imagined sexual promiscuity of indigenous women is perceived as biologically driven. Indigenous women are positioned as being either primitive or exotic sexual objects. As primitive sexual objects they are seen to be closer to animals than white women and therefore naturally predisposed to sex in any form, which is one reason why Indigenous women find it difficult to report rape.¹⁸

However, black and indigenous women were not only victimized by white male sexual predators. They also experienced sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of black and indigenous men from within their own communities and families.

The “Politics of Silence”

A central issue for anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists has been the code of silence about subaltern women’s sexual exploitation and rape. Patricia Hill-Collins (1991) referred to this as a “politics of silence.” The embedded silence around black and indigenous women’s sexuality within their own communities has been a central issue in anti-racist feminist scholarship and activism. As discussed in Chapter Four, the “politics of respectability,” which was used as a political strategy by African-American women who aimed to achieve gender equality and racial

uplift, contributed to this “politics of silence” around black women’s sexuality. Racial uplift was indelibly bound to religion, primarily through the black Baptist Church. The anti-racist movement began in the Church, particularly the black women’s church movement discussed in Chapter Four. A key figure that emerged from the black women’s church movement was the “super moral” black woman, strongly rooted in the Cult of True Womanhood. Like the “angel in the house” or the “good pioneer woman,” the super moral black woman is chaste, passionless, and de-sexed. Black women reformers saw this figure as a way to be seen in the public as respectable, countering the negative and dangerous representation of the black “Jezebel.” The construct of the “super moral” black woman however was oppressive, and helped breed a culture of silence and repression.

Silence around black women’s sexuality has been as problematic and oppressive as the rigid and racial stereotypes discussed above. Patricia Hill-Collins (1990, 2000) identifies three reasons why there has been such institutionalized and internalized silence about black women’s sexuality. Firstly, there is the suppression of black women’s voices by dominant groups who control the schools, news media, churches, and government. Secondly, there is a taboo against discussing sexual abuse and violence that implicates black men, and hence “violates norms of racial solidarity.” Thirdly, black women have seen the benefits of remaining silent about their sexuality. Hill-Collins wrote,

This secrecy was especially important within a U.S. culture that routinely accused black women of being sexually immoral, promiscuous jezebels. In a climate where one’s sexuality is on public display, holding fast to privacy and trying to shut the closet door becomes paramount. [Darlene Clark] Hine refers to this strategy as a culture of dissemblance, one where Black women appeared to be outgoing and public, while using this façade to hide a secret world within. In contexts of violence where internal self-censorship was seen as protection, silence made sense.¹⁹

The racist heterosexist tropes of the “Hottentot Venus” were used to render subaltern women as sexual objects, justifying their systematic and morally sanctioned rape by white men. One of the key ways subaltern women have tried to hide the shame of rape and sexual abuse and to combat negative constructions of black and indigenous sexuality as “deviant” or “primitive” is through a shared code of silence. This strategy of survival, however, has meant there has been much suppression of the truth and silence constructed around female sexuality within subaltern communities. Hence, subaltern women have had to combat two issues surrounding their sexuality, the “politics of silence” and hyper-visibility.

Feminist Film Theory

Three highly influential texts of the 1970s identify two strains of feminist film scholarship that permeate these films, Hollywood’s sexist female stereotypes, and the sexist (white) male gaze. In *From Reverence to Rape* (1974, 1987) Molly Haskell argued that women were cast as either virgins or whores, and rarely anything in between. Haskell argued,

One of the definitions of the loss of innocence is perhaps the fragmenting of that unified self – a split that is different, and emblematic, not only for each sex, but each era. My own split, between the way I saw myself (as a free agent) and the way I was expected to behave (as a lady, deferential to authority), was reflected, as such things often are, in the movies, and in the parallel split in the movie heroines. It was a split that brought up to date the age-old dualism between body and soul, virgin and whore.²⁰

Marjorie Rosen’s *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (1974) also focused on female stereotypes in Hollywood, and like Haskell narrowed her attention to the representation of white women. Rosen argued,

We overplay. Overdress. A floozy dress or tight pants tell the whole story. Or a platinum wig. Or spectacles or cleavage.²¹

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey (1975) argued,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance codes for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziefield to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. Mainstream film neatly combines spectacle and narrative.²²

Mulvey's essay permeates these films in various ways, especially across the axis of race. The key way these filmmakers construct female and/or subaltern desire and sexuality is through the revisioning and deconstruction of the (white) male gaze, *the* dominant gaze of the popular cinema, rooted in heterosexist and racist ideologies.

Frontier Sexuality and Desire Narratives

At the level of narrative, the filmmakers resist and debunk heterosexist and racist/colonial stereotypes of women and/or subaltern people. At the level of the gaze, the filmmakers privilege and normalize looking relations that are informed by female, lesbian and subaltern desire, countering a male heterosexist imperial gaze. The filmmakers represent a diverse range of "female" desires and sexualities across this work, culminating in a complex mosaic. The following section will examine how the filmmakers depict female and/or subaltern desire and sexuality as a means of feminist resistance. Across these films two different sexuality and desire narratives emerge: the "subversive sexuality" narratives and the "decolonizing desire" narratives.

The Subversive Sexuality Narratives

The "subversive sexuality" narratives are: Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* ('79), Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* ('85), Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* ('91), Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, and Jane Campion's *The Piano* ('93). Across these five films, the filmmakers reflect the issues and themes that animated the sexuality and gender

identity debates of second-wave Anglo-American feminist scholarship of the 1970s and 80s. The films' central heroines resist what Adrienne Rich referred to as "compulsory heterosexuality" by embracing either a "lesbian existence" or engaging in what Gayle Rubin identified as "bad" or "abnormal" sexual desire. Though their heroines are oppressed in differing contexts the filmmakers deploy the "uncivilized" and wide-open spaces of the frontier as a place to re-imagine female sexuality and desire outside what Irigaray identified as oppressive "masculine parameters."

As subversive sexuality heroines, Sandy, Sybylla, Ada, Jo, and Lalu/Polly, engage in various social taboo and/or criminal sexual behavior, such as adultery, sex outside of marriage, commercial sex, and miscegenation. All these acts are punishable in one form or another, either through the wrath of a husband, father, pimp, or law enforcer. As discussed in Chapter 2, all of these heroines are daughter figures who rebel against patriarchal oppression. As sexual rebels, they subvert the "dutiful daughter" figure, which is expected to be passive and virginal. The over-riding sexual taboo that all these heroines cross, however, is the one forbidding active female desire. This is not to say that these heroines do not enter heterosexual relationships, they all do on some level, but they do so outside the confines of marriage or socially sanctioned arrangements. Except for Lalu in Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, all the heroines are white women.

The heroines' pursuit of, or engagement with, subversive sex and desire constructs much tension in the films' narratives, primarily between the heroines and patriarchal figures of authority. The Western frontier is after all, as Tompkins argued, a "womanless milieu." Despite the high risks associated with engaging in "bad sex," such as shunning and male violence, it is one of the primary ways these heroines re-imagine their frontier identities. Like the marauding

(white) cowboy of the Western, these heroines actively deploy their sexuality as a way to mark frontier space as their own. In this way, the heroines take on a masculine position in the films' narratives. Like the cross-dressing Josephine Monaghan they assume a position that is neither traditionally masculine nor feminine. This is how the filmmakers manage to subvert the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. In stark contrast to how the Western has depicted female sexuality, no one is strictly a "good pioneer woman" or whore (the saloon girl), even when they are forced to work as a sexual slave as in the case of Lalu in Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, or willing sell themselves as in the case of Ada in *The Piano*. Despite these similarities, these five films differ in regard to their representation of "correct" female sexuality and desire, reflecting the feminist "sex wars."

The sub-heading "subversive sexuality" has been deployed because these five filmmakers via their heroines aim to subvert the classic Hollywood depiction of female desire and sexuality. There are two ways the filmmakers construct the subversive sexuality narratives. Firstly, the films privilege and normalize active female sexual desire outside of heterosexual marital relations. Secondly, the films render the heroines' (male) love interests as objects of female desire. This is accomplished through the construction of an active female gaze.

Gillian Armstrong's My Brilliant Career

Though Armstrong's heroine, Sybylla, is dead set against marriage and motherhood, she still desires and even pursues the handsome Harry Beecham. Sybylla may not be interested in finding a husband, but she is certainly interested in men. Her status as a virgin and a "lady," albeit one who is impoverished, comes under threat when Sybylla shows little regard for her grandmother's ideas about decorum. Sybylla is very concerned about her freedom, and one of the ways she expresses her idea of freedom is by flirting with and teasing men, especially Harry

Beecham, shocking her elders in the process. Throughout the film, Sybylla and Harry engage in a flirtatious relationship that is deemed inappropriate and even dangerous by Sybylla's family and Edwardian British society. By examining *My Brilliant Career* through the lens of sexuality, it becomes clearer how Armstrong, informed by 1970s feminism, departs from Miles Franklin's 1902 Edwardian text. Armstrong manages to depict Sybylla's female gaze as active and desiring without imposing postmodern ideas about sexuality; there is no sex outside of marriage here, and in this sense Armstrong remains faithful to Franklin's text. Hence, Sybylla's sexual desires are depicted in highly visual ways that operate outside the film's plot.

Sybylla's carefree attitude about sexuality is depicted in the pillow fight sequence.

Sybylla challenges Harry to a pillow fight within and across Five Bob Downs, the large estate Harry will one day inherit, which is currently overseen by Aunt Gussie, Harry's maiden Aunt.

Shot: Extreme wide-angle, Sybylla and Harry swipe each other with their pillows.

Shot: Medium-long angle, Sybylla chases Harry.

Shot: High angle long shot, Sybylla pursues Harry. She breathes heavily. Harry slows down, and lets Sybylla take another swipe at him. He grabs hold of her pillow. He begins to twirl her around as in a dance, while he repeatedly swipes at her. Sybylla falls to the ground, having lost her footing. She lies face down exhausted from their roughhousing. Harry picks up her discarded pillow, circles about and then throws it at her on the ground. He comes to his knees, also exhausted, and then flops to his back. He still clutches at his pillow. The two lie in the tall grass, spent.

Shot: Medium-long angle, Sybylla gets up, grabbing her pillow and takes one big swipe at Harry, who proceeds to grab hold of the other end, pulling her down beside him. Laughing, she rolls on her back. Harry tucks the pillow under his head and relaxes.

Shot: Close angle, while lying in the grass Sybylla gazes at Harry.

Shot: Harry gazes back, with a big smile on his face.

Shot: Sybylla continues to gaze at Harry but her expression has become more serious. She then turns away.

The sexual overtones in the scene are obvious. The film's poster for the theatrical release used a still from the pillow fight scene (see Figure 20).



Figure 20: Pillow fight scene, used in *My Brilliant Career*'s promotional material

The whipping incident in Harry's den is another example of how Armstrong constructs Sybylla's desire as active, even to the point of being aggressive. After Sybylla has deserted Aunt Gussie's boring and uptight ball in favor of the servants' barn dance, Harry comes in search of Sybylla, only to find her dancing with a male "peasant." Harry is enraged at Sybylla's reckless behaviour, whilst simultaneously being aroused by her passionate and rebellious nature. Harry decides to take charge of her and the situation and drags her away from the barn dance, and her male companion. Armstrong turns the tables quickly, however, when Sybylla proves to be just as aggressive and angry as Harry.

Shot: Long shot on Harry as he drags Sybylla roughly from the barn dance to the night exteriors. Sybylla struggles in his hold. *“Harry, let me go.”* Harry exudes rage, but remains silent. He makes his way to a door.

Shot: Medium-long shot as Harry bangs open the door to a man’s den, throwing Sybylla roughly into the room. Sybylla is out of the frame as Harry glares at her with lust and anger. He turns and closes the door calmly, but firmly. Sybylla off-screen says, *“Didn’t you like me dancing with the peasants?”* Harry replies, *“I’m not going to make a big thing of this.”* He stalks toward her. Sybylla off-screen, *“I disgraced you, didn’t I?”* The camera follows Harry’s movements, bringing Sybylla into the frame. He says calmly, *“I have to go away for a few days.”*

Shot: Medium angle on Sybylla. *“Oh? More shearing somewhere else?”* Sybylla picks up a riding crop. She’s fuming mad. Harry off-screen says loudly, *“I must be told if it’s yes or no?!”* Sybylla handles the riding crop. *“What’s the question?”*

Shot: Medium angle 2 shot. Harry yells, *“Bloody woman!”* He moves toward her. They are framed in a medium-close angle now. *“I thought... I thought we should get married!”* Sybylla looks a little dumbfounded. *“Well, what a handsome proposal!”* She walks away from him. Harry turns to follow her movements, which are anxious. She says, *“How could anyone say no?”* Harry replies with disdain, *“How dare you?”* He stalks toward her fervently. Sybylla stands her ground. He grabs her by the waist, and tugs her into him. He is about to kiss her, but she raises her riding crop and whips him across the face with it. Harry rises from the blow, holding one side of his face. Sybylla looks shocked at her own behaviour.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Harry who stares down at his hand, where there is blood. He gazes at Sybylla with utter amazement. His bewilderment soon turns to anger. He snatches the riding crop from out of her hand, hurting her in the process. Sybylla winces. She holds her hand, bringing it to her mouth. She stares at Harry with fear and regret. Harry’s back is to the camera now. Sybylla closes her eyes, ashamed by her rash actions. Harry backs away from her, leaving the frame. Sybylla realizes she has done something she can never take back. She walks to a bench and plunks down. She gazes up at Harry anxiously.

Shot: Medium angle on Harry, who wipes the blood from the side of his face. He turns his gaze to Sybylla.

Shot: Medium high angle on Sybylla with her hands held tight at her chest, her head bowed down. *“Harry, I...”* She squeezes her eyes shut and shakes her head. *“I’m sorry.”* Harry off-screen says, *“It’s my fault. It was stupid of me.”*

Shot: Medium low angle on Harry who gazes at Sybylla with empathy and concern, not to mention a little amusement. *“I should really get back to my guests.”*

Shot: Long shot (master shot) of Harry and Sybylla in the den. It is a very masculine space, with a wall of rifle guns, hunting paraphernalia, prized mounted fish, a settee, and some books. Harry opens the door and walks out with a dignified and gentlemanly air. He leaves Sybylla alone with her stinging hand and regret. Sybylla cries.

Armstrong infuses the whipping scene with sexual frustration on a number of levels.

Firstly, Sybylla refuses to submit to Harry as either a sexual object or a wifely figure because she

is afraid of losing herself. Both characters are constrained by the mores of the times, and are expected to behave according to strictly defined roles assigned to their class and gender. Harry is especially cognizant of these roles, and knows they cannot consummate their relationship until they are married. Though Sybylla would never make Harry a very good society wife, due to her rebellious nature and her upbringing, he is driven to have her. Secondly, though the scene has echoes of a romance novel, Armstrong turns the scene into a statement about feminist resistance and agency. Sybylla desires Harry, but she refuses to submit to his anger and his attempts at seduction. Located in such a masculine space, surrounded by guns and whips, Armstrong seems to set up Sybylla and Harry as worthy opponents rather than lovers, battling each other for control of the gaze. Sybylla will never submit. And as long as they inhabit patriarchal spaces together, they will never be equals, or happy. As Sybylla says to Harry at the end of the film, *“I would destroy you.”* The message Armstrong seems to construct here is that women must walk away from heterosexual desire if they truly ever want to have a voice and identity, echoing the pro-sex feminists of the Anglo-American movement in which female sexuality is only possible outside “masculine parameters.”

Sandy Wilson’s My American Cousin

Listen I got this American cousin staying with us. (pause) Yeah. (pause) California. (pause) Honest. He’s way cuter than Barry Bent. (pause) I’m not joking. And his car is so fabulous. I’ve never seen anything like it – no joke!

-Sandy talking to her girlfriend on the telephone from *My American Cousin*

Wilson’s representation of sexuality in *My American Cousin* is very tame, primarily because the film was aimed at the family entertainment market. As in the case of Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career* there is no sexual content on screen; the closest we get is Butch and Shirley Darling’s kissing scene in a stolen red Cadillac. Despite the marketing limitations Wilson would



Figure 21: Sandy's secret nighttime reading in Wilson's *My American Cousin*

have had to contend with, she still constructs her twelve-year old virginal heroine as a sexually curious female. Wilson constructs Sandy's sexual curiosity through a desiring gaze, which is primarily directed toward her older and glamorous cousin Butch, who exudes, and performs, masculine sexuality in the James Dean and Elvis Presley Hollywood tradition. Indeed, the film opens with Sandy lying in her bed gazing at images of Hollywood movie stars with the aid of a flashlight; she is supposed to be asleep (see Figure 21). Sandy's active desiring and inquisitive gaze provides much of the film's comedy, and is the key way Wilson constructs her commentary about female resistance and agency in white settler patriarchal spaces, in this case the majestic landscape of British Columbia.

Wilson sets many of the film's scenes in which Sandy pursues her teenage girl desires in the exterior locations like dusty rural roads, shimmering lakes, and mountainous cliffs. It is in these spaces that Sandy commits various risky acts, such as breaking curfew, stealing car keys, fighting with her overworked mother, and hiding from her exasperated and distraught father. Through the deployment of the colour red, Wilson and her production designer, add an erotic or sexual dimension to the mise-en-scene.

In one scene Sandy sneaks into the backseat of Butch's stolen red Cadillac, in an attempt to evade her frantic father, after she has escaped the house in order to attend the Dominion Day dance. A key backstory element here is that Butch has run away from home because he has gotten a girl "in trouble," and wants to divert responsibility. Though Butch does not act as a sexual predator toward Sandy (he has made it clear he's not interested in her), he is a reckless and sexually active teenage boy driving his mother's stolen car. Sandy ends up riding alone with him in the middle of the night.

Shot: Full shot (through windshield) as Butch drives along dark highway. He tries to find a radio station, but he can't get any reception (due to the fact that he's in the "boonies"). Suddenly Sandy peeps her head up from the backseat. She says, "*Can I ride in the front seat now?*" Butch is startled. "*Where did you come from?*" Butch pulls to a stop. He turns to Sandy and shakes his head, although he's clearly amused by her impish behavior. Butch starts to comb his hair. "*Boy, are we gonna get it.*" Sandy replies, "*Yeah, I know. Let's run away from home.*" Butch continues to comb his hair. "*You and me?*" Sandy implores, "*I'm serious.*"

Shot: Medium angle 2 shot of Butch and Sandy (in foreground). Butch turns to his cousin. "*Got any money?*"

Wilson films the scene for laughs, and through the humour Wilson manages to render Butch into a non-threatening sexual force. The real threat is Major Wilcox, Sandy's father, whom they both fear ("*boy are we gonna get it*"). It is the (white) patriarch who poses the greatest threat to Sandy's sexuality and desire, not in the sense that it will be exploited, but that it will be suppressed by him. The sexy and aimless Butch represents everything that Major Wilcox is not. He is older, but not an authority figure. He's fun and rebellious, and completely unconnected to domesticity. Butch doesn't want to "do the right thing." This intrigues Sandy. Wilson explicitly foregrounds Major Wilcox's somewhat uptight (and British) attitude toward sexuality and desire in the "birds and the bees" scene.

Shot: Wide angle of the "Paradise Ranch" delivery truck driving along road surrounded by majestic forest. Major Wilcox's voice-over, "*I think the time has come for me to talk to you about um... males and females... together. I'm afraid it's a very complicated*

business.” The truck pauses and then turns a corner. Sandy’s voice-over, “*Yeah, I know. Me, Thelma, Sue, and Lizzy talk about it all the time.*” Major Wilcox, “*Ah.*” He clears his throat. The truck stops near a postbox. Sandy jumps out of the truck, gets the mail from the postbox.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sandy as she gets back in the truck with the mail. She leafs through it.

Shot: Medium-close angle Major Wilcox clears his throat again. He looks embarrassed. He says, “*As I was saying to you...*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Sandy flipping through a copy of *National Geographic*. He continues, “*The attraction between the male and female is natural and necessary to the continuation of the species.*” Sandy gives her father a sideways glance and then rolls her eyes. A buzzing bee is foreground in the soundtrack. Sandy stifles a laugh.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Major Wilcox, who gazes outward, unable to make eye contact with his daughter. “*The female excites the male. And once it’s excited the man is overcome with... uh...*” The Major searches for the right words. “*...Uncontrollable urges.*”

Shot: Medium-close, angle Sandy turns to her father with an incredulous look. “*Uncontrollable urges?!*”

Shot: Medium-close, angle the Major is growing more uncomfortable by the second. “*Yes, they’re rather difficult to explain.*” He puts his aviator sunglasses on and starts up the engine of the truck. He clears his throat again.

Shot: Wide angle bird’s-eye-view shot of truck driving along rural road surrounded by forest and lake. The Major continues his sex talk. “*You can see it when a bull knows there’s a cow nearby. That bull will break through fence, wire, a door, walls, anything that stands between him and that cow.*” The camera pans the path of the truck as it drives off in the distance. Sandy’s voice chimes in. “*You mean you were like that with mom?*” The Major replies, “*No of course not. Well, not exactly.*” Sandy replies, “*Sounds complicated, dad.*” The Major says with a sigh, “*Yes, it is. Well, it’s good to have the chance to talk with you like this.*”

The Major’s sex talk is rooted in middle-class patriarchal notions of sexuality. According to Sandy’s father, sex is about procreative duty, not pleasure, and only men have sexual urges, and these urges are “uncontrollable.” The woman hence is there to receive the sexual advances passively, and it is her duty as a reproductive body to do so. The Major is of course depicted as a comic figure, someone we can roll our eyes at too. The Major’s “words of wisdom” are represented as old-fashioned and even ridiculous.

There are no “bulls” in the film. The “uncontrollable urges” seem to come from the female characters. Sandy and her buddies can’t seem to contain their excitement in the presence

of Butch, who manages to send all the females around him into fits of arousal. Even the cool and collected Shirley Darling, Sandy's nemesis, ditches her steady and loyal boyfriend Lenny to have a secret tryst with Butch. The middle-aged and married Gladys Rutherford, who has a crush on Sandy's father, can't seem to contain her amorous feelings in public whilst on the dance floor, even though the Major gives her no encouragement. All of these girls and women pursue, flirt with, and seduce their male objects of desire despite the risks of gossip, male violence (Butch and Lenny duke it out over Shirley), a father's punishment, and a boyfriend's broken heart; even the Major becomes an object of desire, which is also a great source of humour. The rendering of the male characters as objects of female desire is a device deployed by Wilson to construct the film through a desiring female gaze. This is vividly depicted in Butch's near striptease by the lake.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Butch submerged in water. He waves his wet jeans in the air, having taken them off while in the water. "*Hey, come back in!*" He laughs tauntingly.

Shot: Long angle 4-shot of Sandy and her three friends sitting in their bathing suits on the shoreline gazing at Butch in the water (see Figure 22). They giggle nervously. Sandy says, "*What if he gets an uncontrollable urge?*" Thelma, "*Yeah, we'd get in trouble.*" Other friend, "*Oh my gosh!*"

Shot: Over-the-shoulder of Sandy and friends gazing at Butch submerged in the water. Butch says, "*Hey girls, don't ya want to have some fun?*" Lizzie says, "*Yeah.*" Sandy turns to her, "*Lizzie, don't you dare!*" Butch says, "*I'm coming to get you!*" He then leaps out of the water, and the girls scream. Butch laughs. He's put his wet jeans back on under water. He struts out of the water in front of his twelve-year old admirers.



Figure 22: Sandy and her friends gaze at Butch, the object of their teenage desires.

Across *My American Cousin* there are clear echoes of second-wave “pro-sex” feminism. Though the film is family oriented and comedic, Wilson constructs a feminist commentary about female sexuality and desire that exists outside “masculine parameters.” The female characters are stuck in a remote white settler community in 1959, a place where “nothing ever happens,” but Wilson represents them as actively pursuing male love interests (or just sex) outside the domestic sphere and marriage. In contrast to Major Wilcox’s ideology that sex is procreative, sex and desire through a female gaze is fun and a way to assert one’s resistance to domineering patriarchs and strict moral codes of female conduct. Female characters do not face any real punishment for acting on or pursuing their sexual desires, but rather assert a level of control over the males in their lives, either by setting boundaries as Shirley does with Butch or confounding and confusing them as Sandy does with her father.

Nancy Kelly’s Thousand Pieces of Gold

Sexuality and desire are central to Lalu’s resistance and agency in Kelly’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*. In the American West of the late 19th century, Lalu/Polly, a woman who has



Figure 23: Lulu reluctantly dances with Charlie, while the other saloon patrons look on.

sexual relations outside of marriage and is kept as a concubine, is very low on what Gayle Rubin identified as the sexual hierarchy in patriarchal societies. Though Lulu is a victim of sexual exploitation and rape, Kelly constructs Lulu as an active desiring subject. This is exemplified in the dancing scene in which Lulu is forced to dance with Hong King's saloon patrons. Lulu makes it clear that she is unhappy about being passed around like an object (see Figure 23).

There are two ways Kelly constructs Lulu's female subjectivity: by normalizing and foregrounding her gaze, and by positioning her male love interests as passive recipients of that gaze. Lulu's desire for other men, namely Hong King's Chinese employee Jim, is one of the key ways she asserts some control in her life and resists her oppressors, namely Hong King. Though Hong King may "own" Lulu's body, and use it for his own pleasure and as a commodity to be sold, Lulu's desire isn't conquered. Even when Lulu is still the property of Hong King, she manages to offer her body and heart to Jim, who has fallen in love with her. Lulu's sexual agency is represented as positive and renders her an active heroine. Pursuing Jim as a love interest however comes with great risk for Lulu. Despite Lulu's resistance to being a slave and a

“whore,” Hong King is a powerful patriarch, one who will not be challenged lightly, and he asserts his authority and power in all ways. Kelly represents Hong King’s power in Lalu and Jim’s love/sex scene; Hong King is positioned as voyeur. Jim has just offered to buy Lalu from Hong King, who has set the price at \$3000, double what Hong King originally paid for her, and Jim has agreed to the price.

Shot: American angle as Jim descends the stairs from Hong King’s “office.” He pauses at the bottom of the stairs, considering the conversation he has just had with Hong King. Jim’s attention is drawn off-screen when he hears a door open.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu as she enters from her room, carrying a lantern. She gazes at Jim.

Shot: American angle on Jim, who gazes back at Lalu. Jim moves toward her.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu, who continues to gaze at Jim. Jim enters frame, and pauses in front of Lalu. Over-the-shoulder angle of Jim, as Lalu gazes at him. She smiles and then leads Jim into her bedroom.

Shot: Full shot on Lalu and Jim making love in Lalu’s bed. As Jim and Lalu kiss, Hong King peers through the doorway, spying on his “property.” He gazes at them in bed for a few moments and then closes the door quietly, so as not to be heard.

Despite being seen as commodity to be bartered between men, Kelly manages to render Lalu’s gaze as the “normal” one. After this scene Hong King, enraged, decides to sell Lalu to the white saloon patrons; Lalu calls them “ghosts.” Hong King ties her to the bar, and offers her up to the men. Lalu is never actually prostituted because Charlie Beamus intercepts Hong King’s actions by offering to play cards for her, which Hong King agrees to. Charlie does end up “winning” Lalu, and saving her from Hong King. Despite being “rescued” by Charlie, Lalu does not see herself as a passive victim or even indebted to Charlie. Kelly depicts Lalu’s resistance to (white) male desire and her victimization in the scene following the poker game. Having freed Lalu from Hong King, Charlie brings Lalu back to his homestead, but Charlie is drunk and tries to possess her.

Shot: Medium angle on Charlie and Lalu as they enter Charlie’s homestead. Charlie picks Lalu up, giddy from his winning and because he is drunk. He twirls her around. Lalu eyes him with trepidation, and does not embrace him. “*We beat him, Polly. I won!*”

While pawing at her with intense male desire, Charlie says, *"It has been a long, long time since I won."* Lalu appears distressed and leery of Charlie. Noticing her apprehension, Charlie says, *"Come on, what's wrong?"* He walks away from her. Lalu glares at him with fear.

Shot: American angle on Charlie, who moves toward the table to get himself another drink. *"Say, you're not scared of me, are ya?"*

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu, who continues to gaze at Charlie with fear. She appears like a caged animal.

Shot: American angle on Charlie who pours a drink. Half to himself, he says, *"No."*

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu. Charlie enters the frame, carrying the drink. He offers it to Lalu. *"Say you, say you like a drink, huh?"* Lalu turns her face away from him.

Charlie drinks from the glass. He returns his gaze to her. *"Come on, just a little one, huh?"* He pushes the glass toward her face, trying to force her to take the drink. Lalu knocks the glass from his hand, and turns away from him. Charlie grabs her around the waist and attempts to kiss her. Lalu struggles against his drunken advances. He groans. She flinches. Charlie tries to restrain her, and says, *"I'm no Hong King. You got nothing to be afraid of."* They continue to struggle. Lalu says, *"You just like them."* Charlie presses her. *"Look I staked everything I own on you. I'd like a little appreciation."* Lalu manages to escape his grip. She exits the frame. Charlie looks bewildered by Lalu's rejection and distress.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu, who glares at Charlie with fear. She is breathless from the struggle.

Shot: American angle on Charlie who picks up bags of money, his winnings from his poker game with Hong King. *"You want money for it? Is that what you want?"* He throws the money down on the table in anger.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu, who declares, *"I am not a whore!"*

Shot: Medium angle on Charlie, who starts to get more angry. He says, *"I ruined a man for you! I thought you'd be happy!"* He starts to circle her.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu, who treads cautiously away from him. Charlie reaches out and grabs her by the arms. While gripping her tightly, he shakes her. *"Look, if I hadn't won, there'd be a hundred men!"* Lalu pulls out of his grip. *"Then I'd die and leave this place!"* Charlie yells, *"Polly, you're with me now!"* Lalu responds with, *"You win me from Hong King! Then you gamble me away to someone else, like cow, like sheep."*

Charlie pleads, trying to caress her *"No, no, you don't know what you're saying."* Lalu pushes his hands away. *"You want Chinese slave girl? That what you want?"* This seems to sober Charlie up. He says, *"No. I don't want a Chinese slave girl."* He walks away from her.

In stark contrast to the oppressive and predatory Hong King, Lalu's male lovers, Jim and Charlie, are depicted as more passive males who do not assert their dominance over Lalu; they in fact often acquiesce to Hong King, even when they disagree with him. Though both men want to "buy" Lalu from Hong King (Charlie manages to win her), Kelly manages to subvert their gaze

and render them as passive. As a poor Chinese immigrant, Jim is a powerless subaltern male who has a subservient position to Hong King. Without citizenship papers Jim is a vulnerable male, one with no permanent home; that vulnerability is dramatized near the end of the film in the sequence in which the whites drive all the Chinese out of town. As a propertied white man, Charlie is not powerless, but he is depicted as weak or afflicted because he is an alcoholic, haunted by his experiences in the Civil War and the notorious Andersonville prison camp. Charlie's problems plague him so much that he has handed over the management of his saloon to Hong King. Afflicted males and alcoholism are common to the melodrama. On male weakness in the melodrama, Susan Hayward wrote,

Through a portrayal of masculinity in crisis, melodrama exposes masculinity's contradictions. The male either suffers from the inadequacies of his father (*Rebel Without a Cause*), or is in danger of extinction from his murderous or castrating father, or finally, he fails in his duty to reproduce (the family), or simply fails his family.²³

Charlie has no immediate family. He tells of being at Andersonville as an eighteen year old boy, but never speaks of his own family. Analyzing some seminal melodramatic films from the 1950s, Thomas Elsaesser identified the deployment of alcoholism as a key trope for masochism in the melodrama. Elsaesser wrote,

This typical masochism of melodrama, with its incessant acts of inner violation, its mechanisms of frustration and over-compensation, is perhaps brought most into the open through characters who have a drink problem (*Written on the Wind*, *Hilda Crane*, *Days of Wine and Roses*).²⁴

Though Charlie has helped Lalu get out of her hell with Hong King, she does not desire Charlie until later in the story, after he has stopped his excessive drinking, and Lalu has found a place of her own. Tellingly, it is while Charlie lies unconscious and near death, after he has been shot down at the Chinese New Year celebrations by anti-Chinese protestors, that Lalu realizes she has

feelings for him. The following scene follows directly after Lalu has saved Charlie's life, extracting a bullet from his face and nursing him back to health.

Shot: Medium angle on Charlie as he lies asleep on the grass, his head resting on a saddle.

Shot: Long shot on Charlie asleep on the grass by the river. Lalu enters from corner of frame. She carries some freshly caught fish in her hand. She approaches Charlie quietly. She whispers, "*I found dinner.*"

Shot: Medium angle on Charlie still sleeping soundly. Lalu off-screen says softly, "*I found dinner.*" The fish are dangled in Charlie's face. He awakens to fish tails tickling his nose. He makes a face in disgust.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu laughing, still dangling the fish.

Shot: Medium angle on Charlie still lying on the grass, now laughing. He wipes the fishy stuff from his face.

Shot: Medium angle on Lalu who continues to laugh.

Shot: Medium angle Charlie who sits up. "*Come here.*" He reaches for Lalu.

Shot: Medium angle, Lalu bends toward Charlie, exiting frame.

Shot: Medium 2 shot Lalu joins Charlie. She wipes the fishy stuff from his lips. Charlie takes Lalu's face in his hands and kisses her. Lalu returns the kiss.

Shot: Long shot, Lalu and Charlie are in an embrace. Charlie leans back bringing her on top of him. They continue to kiss, and Charlie flips her to her back.

Kelly's representation of Lalu as a feisty heroine with a desiring gaze seems to channel Anglo-American pro-sex feminists and feminist film scholars of the 1970s. Some scholars have accused Kelly of a Eurocentric point of view or of erasing the issue of race. L. Hyun-Li Kang argued that the film,

...allows a revisioning of U.S. history that not only incorporates but relies upon the dark, female body to redeem the American myth of manifest destiny and its white male actors.²⁵

Though Kang conceded that Kelly's film does not reproduce stereotypes of Asian women as either sexually licentious or "dragon ladies," rooted in Orientalism, he did argue that a white male heterosexist gaze constructs the film's point of view and resolution. Kang saw Hong King as rooted in the racist stereotype of Chinese men as villainous traders of female bodies. I would concur with Kang here. Hong King is very one-dimensional, and seems to be deployed as a convenient device, a foil for the heroine. Though Charlie and Jim are both depicted as passive

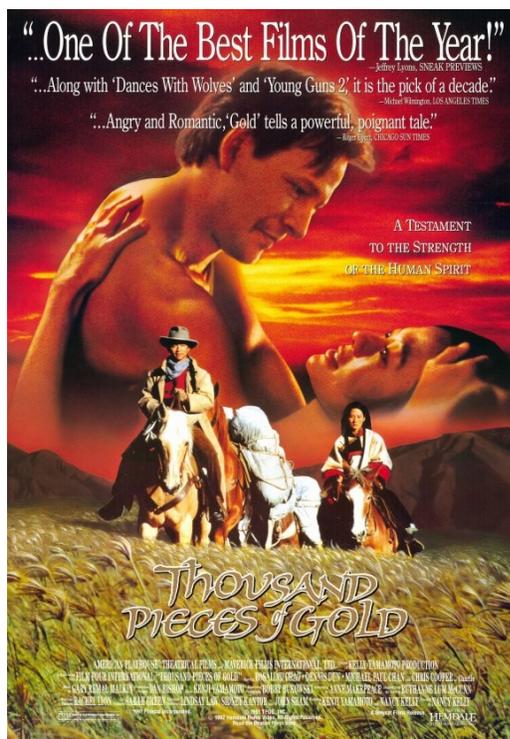
males, Jim is also depicted as inferior to Charlie, socially, emotionally, physically, and hence racially. Kang took issue with the film in that it deploys the Asian female body as a way for men to assert power and territorial rights, which is depicted in the poker game where Charlie and Hong King play for Lalu as the prize. Kang saw Lalu's choice to stay with Charlie over fleeing with the other Chinese (all men), as a resolution rooted in white supremacy.

Though I do not agree that a white male gaze structures the film's point of view, Kelly seems ambivalent in regard to the role of race in the sexual objectification and exploitation of Lalu. Though Lalu's female gaze is desiring and active, it is not decolonizing. Kelly does not normalize the deployment of Lalu's body as a way for men to assert power over each other, but rather renders that process visible through a female gaze (her own).

However, Kelly does not address the role of race in the sexual objectification of Lalu. Indeed, the only other women in the town are prostitutes, all of them white. They are also objectified, but there is no attention to how whiteness renders the white prostitutes less desirable when Lalu arrives. Indeed, Lalu only has currency as a "celestial angel," not just a female body, to the white miners. Interestingly, the Chinese men in the town deem her unattractive because of her large feet and northern Chinese features. Lalu is sold as an exotic (Oriental) object for white male pleasure, but whiteness itself is not problematized or deconstructed here. In the end Charlie's desire for Lalu is rendered normal. However, Kelly's film resists falling into a colonial discourse "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak). Lalu in many ways saves herself from a life of slavery and prostitution, and on her own terms. Even when she finally agrees to stay with Charlie, after rejecting and refusing him numerous times, Kelly's final frame of the film mirrors the opening frame, with Lalu alone on the landscape, not with Charlie. The image is a powerful one, and stands in stark contrast to the image of Charlie and Lalu locked in a

romantic and naked embrace on the film's VHS cover, an image that never appears in the film.

(see Figure 24)



**Figure 24: Promotional material for Kelly's
*Thousand Pieces of Gold***

Maggie Greenwald's The Ballad of Little Jo

As a 19th century white “society girl” Josephine surely would have known the great risks she was taking when she had sexual relations outside of the marriage bed. Josephine’s one and only transgression is enough to render her a “whore” in her eyes of her father and society, leading to her banishment from polite society. Without her socio-economic status and the cocoon of a patriarchal family Josephine is rendered vulnerable to male sexual violence (the soldiers, Percy) and exploitation (the old street peddler). Though Josephine finds solace and protection through her masculine masquerade as Little Jo, she must suppress her sexuality in order to survive.

However, this proves difficult, particularly after Jo hires Tinman as her live-in male servant. We know it is only a matter of time before Tinman discovers the truth about Little Jo. Indeed, this happens after a few scenes in which they come into close proximity to each other – Tinman inadvertently touches Little Jo on her backside. They soon enter into a sexual relationship, although neither has a dominant position. Greenwald suggests that the equity in their relationship has to do with their status as marginalized others. It is through the character of Tien Me Wong (“Tinman”) that Jo is able to act on her sexual desires – outside of a patriarchal context. These desires are of course dangerous and extremely subversive, because in 19th century America miscegenation was a criminal act. In the following scene Greenwald draws a parallel between Jo’s experience as an outcast white woman and that of a Chinese man, both of whom have experienced oppression and marginalization on the American frontier.

Shot: Medium-close angle, Jo lies against Tinman in the bed. Jo’s hand rests on the long black hair along his scarred chest. The camera tilts up to reveal Tinman’s face. Jo asks, “*Who are you, Tinman ?*” He replies, “*You are the mystery one, Mr. Jo.*” Jo gazes up at Tinman .

Shot: Medium angle, Jo and Tinman study one another.

Shot: Medium-close angle two-shot. Jo notices a wound on Tinman ’s ribs. “*Who did this to you?*” Tinman replies, “*Hoodlums in San Francisco.*” He then points to another scar. “*White men in mining town.*” He leans forward to show her his back. “*Railroad boss.*” Jo’s caresses his back.

Shot: Close-angle on Jo. Tinman crosses the frame as he leans back into the pillow. He brings his hand to the scar along her face, but she pulls away. He asks, “*And this?*” Jo doesn’t answer. She takes his hand and guides it away from her scarred face. She reaches over him.

Shot: Medium angle, Jo reaches across Tinman to open a drawer of her bedside table. She retrieves a box and then places it on his lap. She opens the lid and pulls something out.

Shot: Close angle on Jo’s hand retrieving a small portrait of herself as a society girl, the one taken by the photographer who fathered her child. She shows the portrait to Tinman . Off-screen Tinman says, “*Who is this society girl?*” Off-screen Jo laughs sardonically.

Shot: Medium-close angle two-shot on Jo and Tinman . Jo says smiling, “*It’s me. Can you imagine?*” Tinman shakes his head, while studying the portrait. He says, “*I like you much better as you are.*” Jo turns to him and asks, “*Why?*” He replies, “*This white girl would never do this to me.*” Jo laughs.

Shot: Close angle on Jo's society girl portrait. Tinman glides his thumb across its surface.

This scene is a major plot point in the film, and one of the few times Jo is depicted as happy. By setting this intimate scene in Tinman's bed, after he and Jo have made love for the first time, Greenwald foregrounds sexual desire as a key strategy for Jo's agency and resistance against an oppressive society that deems her a "whore." Though Jo has become somewhat settled in her rural community, accepted as the "peculiar Little Jo," she has kept her distance from people out of fear that her true identity will be discovered. Tinman is the first person Jo actually connects with, outside of Percy, but this is only after they become sexually involved. Before Jo and Tinman become lovers, they have had an impersonal servant/employer relationship. Jo is in fact hostile towards Tinman, primarily because she aims to keep him at a distance. When Tinman does discover Jo's secret, he is surprised, but also accepting, not to mention intrigued. Jo had previously secretly admired Tinman's masculine beauty. This is represented in Tinman's bathing scene.

Shot: Long shot on Jo as she opens the corral and leads her horse out. She pauses when something catches her attention. The camera trucks into her, emphasizing her gaze. The camera pauses at a medium shot. Jo looks on longingly.

Shot: American shot on Tinman's reflection in water while he bathes in the lake. The camera tilts up to reveal a shirtless Tinman washing himself, his long hair flowing in the breeze. His body bears a number of scars, but is well formed and seemingly strong.

Shot: Medium angle on Jo, who drags her gaze away from the half-naked Tinman. She knows she shouldn't be staring at him *that way*. She turns to mount her horse.

Shot: American shot on Tinman still washing himself. His eyes are closed, and he seems lost in the sensations of his rustic bath.

Shot: Medium angle on Jo astride her horse. She continues to stare at Tinman longingly.

Shot: Long shot on Jo. The camera follows as she trots toward Tinman.

Shot: Long shot, high angle, Jo's POV on Tinman bathing. The camera's movement suggests Jo's movement. Tinman looks up.

Shot: Medium shot low angle on Jo as she looks down at Tinman. She continues to ride slowly, as she gazes at him, but now through guarded authoritative eyes. There is no hint of longing or lust. She says sternly, "*I left you some mending.*"

Shot: Long shot on Tinman, who continues to wash his body. He returns Jo's gaze and nods, "*Yes Mr. Jo*" (see Figure 25).

Shot: Medium-close angle on Jo who continues to hold her gaze of authority on Tinman. She rides out of frame.

Shot: American shot on Tinman who gazes at Jo curiously, but then turns his attention to his bathing again. After a moment he looks up to watch Jo leave, looking somewhat perplexed. There's something strange about *Mr. Jo*.



Figure 25: Little Jo's POV of Tinman bathing

Though Jo is on one level in a position of power over Tinman, this is only because she is in drag. Underneath the clothes, she is as powerless and marginalized as he is. In Tinman's bed Jo is neither the "society girl" in the photograph nor the reclusive frontiersman "Mr. Jo." Both are social and cultural constructs. Tinman is also neither the "feminized" subservient cook nor a "the ravisher of women." These racist and gendered constructs are foreground in the film as just that, *constructs*.

Greenwald draws parallels between the Jo and Tinman characters as a way to foreground the inter-connection between sexist and racist constructs. Greenwald visually connects Tinman and Jo through the scars on their bodies, scars that tell personal histories of sexist and racist/colonial oppression on the frontier. There is also a similarity between Jo's attempted gang rape and the near-lynching of Tinman. Both characters are violently assaulted and victimized because they are marginal and alone. Both times the assailants are angry white men who have

drunk too much. Though Jo seemingly saves Tinman, he comes to her aid as a companion and lover, curing her of loneliness and isolation.

The desire that Jo and Tinman share for one another is a subversive desire that exists outside what Rubin refers to as “good sex.” Despite the fact that Jo finds some semblance of happiness in her relationship with Tinman and it is heterosexual, there is great risk in it. Jo expresses the reality that underscores their secret illicit relationship, “*Do you know what would happen if they knew about us? They’d kill us.*” Here Greenwald foregrounds the issue that sexual desire outside the confines of marriage and patriarchy is deemed subversive, and when it crosses racial boundaries, it is extremely dangerous. Greenwald constructs this as a key source of dramatic tension in the film.

Jane Campion’s The Piano

Campion’s *The Piano* is about the sexual awakening of an eccentric and unhappy Victorian woman. Most of the film’s narrative conflicts revolve around Ada’s sexual discovery and desires, and the film is the most sexually explicit in this study. Campion’s film, though set in the mid-19th century, explores the central issues of female sexuality and desire that dominated second-wave feminism. Both work and motherhood play a more peripheral role in the narrative. Campion foregrounds sexuality and desire as the driving force behind Ada’s resistance against patriarchal tyranny and even as a cure to her self-imposed muteness. Ada finds herself through sexual desire – it is how she becomes a full subject and journeys toward adult womanhood. Of all the films in this study, Campion’s film seems to be most concerned with the construction of the female gaze in cinema. In this sense, the film seems to be more about the history of cinematic desire than the history of white (Pakeha) settlement in New Zealand. Like her enigmatic heroine

Campion's gaze is transgressive, rendering passive an oppressive male gaze and subverting the codes of romance.

Like Lalu in Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Ada is traded amongst men as a sexual object. Despite Ada's objectification by her father, her husband, and Baines, she, like Lalu, resists her oppressors through a desiring gaze. On the surface, it would appear that Ada willingly prostitutes herself in order to earn back her piano, her only form of expression and pleasure, though Ada doesn't seem to get much pleasure from anything. In the melodramatic tradition she is seemingly a sacrificial female victim, who almost masochistically pursues her own exploitation. However, Campion shifts Ada's goal from being masochistic to being exploratory. Ada's curiosity about sexual pleasure and desire drives the film's visual regimes.

Shot: Medium-close angle Ada is lost in thought. She is gazing at something. The camera follows her action as she gets up from the table and walks over to her piano. The camera follows her hand as it glides along the keys. She strokes the piano lovingly.

Shot: Extreme close angle on piano keys as Ada pushes down with her fingers. An inscription is revealed, "A loves D," on the side of one of the keys.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Ada's hands as they play the piano. The camera moves toward her face.

Shot: Close angle over Ada's shoulder as she plays. She abruptly stops, and then turns to look behind her, as if she heard something. She contemplates.

Shot: High angle medium-long shot on Ada as her hand again strokes the piano keys, but doesn't play. She plays a few notes and then stops again. She pulls her hands away from the keyboard.

Shot: Long shot on Ada walking determinedly through the forest, with Flora following after her in a panic. Ada is on her way to Baines's homestead. Flora tries to stop her mother. Flora cries, "*Wait! Wait!*" Ada turns to Flora and disciplines her. She signs, "*Go back. Don't you dare follow me!*"

By entering into a sexual "arrangement" with her husband's business partner, Baines, a married man, Ada engages in what Rubin identified as "bad sex," the kind that is punishable. Ada's sexual relations with Baines are not only "bad" because they represent adultery and prostitution, and are hence non-procreative, they are illicit because of Baines's identification/association with subaltern "others," the local Māori. This is represented by

Baines's Māori tattoos, which are unfinished, suggesting Baines's transitional status, as someone who is neither white nor indigenous.

In the following scene Baines and Ada are in the midst of their arrangement. Baines has fallen in love with Ada, and wants Ada to desire him. Up to this point Ada has desired neither Baines nor her husband. It is not until Baines takes on a more "feminine" role that Ada is able to develop desire for him. Campion deploys a subjective camera to dramatize Ada's shift from passive sexual object exchanging sex for payment (in the form of piano keys) to a subject with an active and desiring gaze. Campion deploys this scene as a turning point in the film.

Shot: Close angle on Ada's fingers pressing down on keys of piano. She isn't playing anything.

Shot: Medium-long angle, Ada sits at piano, but she is turned to face Baines. She asks with a gesture whether she should play or not.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Baines sitting in a corner hunched over looking forlorn. He returns Ada's gaze and says solemnly, "*Play what you like, play what you like.*" He casts his eyes downward.

Shot: Medium-long angle of Ada at piano. She sees Baines isn't himself. She turns her attentions to her piano and begins to play. The camera tracks out as she plays. While playing she looks over her shoulder, and is distracted by something. Off-screen there is some shuffling. Ada stops playing. She gazes about the room. She waits, and then rises from the piano. She cautiously walks toward the camera, trying to listen for clues as to where Baines has gone. The camera follows her movements as she approaches an area concealed by red flowered translucent curtains. She slowly peers around the curtains to try to get a better view. She then moves to another part of the room, where there is another set of red-orange coloured curtains. Unable to see through them, she pulls one of the panels aside, and peers into the space. She is suddenly startled by a sight, and gasps. She pulls away.

Shot: Medium-long shot, reverse angle, Ada quickly moves away from the curtained area, giving herself some distance. She stops however and turns to face the area. Now in an over-the-shoulder shot, Ada watches as Baines draws the curtains to reveal himself completely naked. He stands there in his full glory.

Shot: Medium angle, Ada nervously bites her nails and casts her eyes downward to avoid seeing Baines naked. Baines off-screen says, "*I want to lie together without...*"

Shot: Medium angle, Baines continues, "*... clothes on. How many would that be?*"

Shot: Medium angle on Ada who seems confused and anxious, as she considers Baines's offer. She gazes directly at him, and holds up five fingers twice.

Shot: Medium angle on Baines who nods, "*Yes, ten keys.*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Ada, now holding up ten fingers. She remains anxious.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Baines as he pulls back another set of curtains revealing a bed. He sits down on the edge and gazes up at her.

In this sequence Campion constructs Baines as the object of the gaze. Ada peers at Baines around corners and edges as if she were at some peep-show. Her searching gaze is active and inquiring. It says, "*What is he doing behind those red curtains?*" In a kind of mock striptease Baines reveals himself naked to Ada and the camera by drawing back the curtains. Though Baines has power over Ada, Campion frames him in a "feminine" way. Baines is rendered vulnerable by his full-frontal nudity and passive as he remains at a distance from Ada, patiently awaiting her decision. This is in stark contrast to Baines's earlier attempt to "seduce" Ada by sniffing her clothes, and then getting aggressive with her, literally ripping at her bodice and hungrily smothering her with kisses. It is only after Baines has taken on a more "feminine" passive position that Ada agrees to "lie together" for ten black keys (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: Ada and Baines's love scene framed by the red curtains

The Decolonizing Desire Narratives

As far as this place is concerned we never enjoyed our womanhood... Deep inside, we believed that they ruined our mothers, and their mothers before them. And we live our lives always expecting the worst because we feel we don't deserve no better. Deep inside we believe that even God can't heal the wounds of our past or protect us from the world that put shackles on our feet. Even though you're going up North, you all think about being ruined too. You think you can cross over to the mainland and run away from it?

- Eula, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

Eula from Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* makes her impassioned speech on the beach to her large extended Peasant family, a family that also comprises her Sea Islands Gullah community. Eula, who has been victimized by rape, speaks a truth that most of the women have buried – so deeply that when it is spoken it serves to break “the shackles” of silence that now enslave them as “ruined” black “others.” Speaking this truth is essential to black and indigenous women transcending and healing from hundreds of years of colonial sexual exploitation and violence.

Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Mita's *Mauri* (1988), Bailey's *The Wake* (1986), Wheeler's *Loyalties* (1986), and Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993) are decolonizing desire narratives. Anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists have argued that the sexual exploitation and abuse of black and indigenous women's bodies was a key method deployed by colonial forces of power to oppress subaltern communities. These five films reflect the key issues and themes that occurred within the sexuality and gender debates of anti-racist/anti-colonial feminist scholarship, as well as queer theory and feminist film theory. Through these films the filmmakers break the "code of silence" around the sexual violence and exploitation of black and indigenous women. Evelyn M. Hammond's concept of "politics of articulation" is exemplified within the visual and sound regimes of the decolonizing desire narratives.

The decolonizing desire narratives are marked by three key elements that animated anti-racist/colonial feminist scholarship: the sexual violence and exploitation of subaltern women by colonial and racist forces of power, the code of silence that has surrounded that violence, and subaltern/female desire. Through their decolonizing desire narratives these five filmmakers from a diverse range of socio-ethnic backgrounds re-imagine and/or deconstruct frontier spaces through an anti-racist/colonial female gaze. The characters in these films assert themselves as sexual beings, without being rendered as "deviant" or "primitive." Though these characters suffer sexual exploitation, abuse, and even rape, they refuse to be silent or "invisible" through an imposed hyper-visibility on the frontier. There are two ways the decolonizing desire narratives construct narratives that practice a "politics of articulation" around subaltern female desire and sexuality in frontier spaces and cultures. Firstly, the films privilege and normalize subaltern female sexuality and desire in the films' construction of the *mise-en-scene* and the use of montage techniques. Here female subaltern desire is not only represented as a key method for female

subjectivity, but also for the effective anti-colonial and anti-racist agency and resistance within subaltern communities. Secondly, the films render passive or dismantle a white male heterosexist gaze. White colonizing men are depicted as violent, predatory, sexually deviant, or weak. In contrast to the subversive sexuality narratives, white men are rarely objects of desire. Male love interests in these narratives are primarily non-white subaltern men. The exception is Jim in *The Wake*. As disenfranchised and racially marginalized men, the male love interests do not have an oppressive colonizing gaze. This is not to say these men are perfect mates, they are not. Due to the oppressive conditions of the frontier, they harbour pain and struggle with issues of unemployment, crime, substance abuse, anger, and violence.

Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust

Cousin: "What kind of woman is she? Yellow Mary's no family woman, she's a scary kind of woman."

Myown: "She's a new kind of woman."

- *Daughters of the Dust*

In Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, there is a marked absence of a desiring white male gaze to render black women into "Venus Hottentots." And yet, its felt absence functions like a ghost, haunting the margins of the frame. Dash also renders the rape act absent in the frame, even though it is a central theme in the film. The absence of a white male desiring gaze and rape does not mean Dash de-emphasizes their historical significance in African-American women's history. The rape of Eula is a major storyline, the source of Eli and Eula's "problem." Rather than featuring the rape act as a spectacle and vilifying the white rapist, Dash foregrounds the internal anguish, shame, and oppressive silence around rape and the sexual exploitation of black women. It is the source of much conflict within the Peasant family. One key conflict is between Yellow Mary, a "fallen woman," and many of the Peasant women, who judge Yellow Mary for her

shameful lifestyle back on the mainland. These women function as “super moral” black women, who have chosen silence and denial about sexuality and desire as a means of survival. Dash depicts the place of shame and silence around black women’s sexual exploitation in the African-American community in the scene where Yellow Mary and Viola are greeted by her Peazant relatives at Ibo Landing. There is marked difference in the ways these two different women are received by their family.

Shot: Extreme wide angle on beach of Peazant men, women and children. A woman’s voice screams joyfully, “*Viola! Viola!*” One of the elderly Peazant mothers runs across the frame screaming Viola’s name repeatedly. The other Peazants stop what they are doing and turn their attention to Viola’s sobbing and ecstatic mother. Viola enters frame and embraces her mother. Mr. Snead, the photographer, stands a few paces back. The Peazant family gathers around the emotional mother-daughter reunion.

Shot: Extreme wide angle on Yellow Mary and Trula approaching beach area from a different direction to that of Viola and Mr. Snead. Haagar’s daughter Iona and a girl named Myown accompany the two women.

Shot: Wide angle of Peazants. The camera trucks in as they turn their gazes to the approaching Yellow Mary and her entourage. Haagar is centre frame. She gestures to another Peazant woman, who turns to stare at the approaching party. She says, “*That Gussie’s daughter, ain’t it?*”

Shot: Wide angle on Yellow Mary, Trula, Iona, and Myown walking happily together.

Shot: Medium-close angle on peasant woman. “*Old man Peazant’s granddaughter done come home.*”

Shot: Wide angle on Peazant family. The Peazant woman continues speaking to Haagar. “*Oh, she got ruined. Yellow Mary gone off and get ruined.*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Peazant woman, who continues to stare at Yellow Mary. “*What that she got with her?*”

Shot: Medium-close angle on Haagar. She yells, “*Iona!*”

Shot: POV shot long angle on Yellow Mary, Trula, Iona and Myown. Haagar screams, “*Iona!*” Iona runs out of the frame toward her mother.

Shot: American shot of Haagar who is flanked by Viola and other members of the Peazant family. She glares at Yellow Mary with contempt. Iona enters frame and obediently comes to her mother. Haagar says, “*You go warn Nana Peazant. It’ll likely kill her to see this heifer has returned.*” Iona says, “*But, Ma, I don’t think...*” Haagar ignores her daughter and stomps toward Yellow Mary. She exits frame. The other Peazants follow her lead. Viola, who has separated herself from the prodigal Yellow Mary, hugs her Bible firmly in front of her. They all glare at Yellow Mary with disapproval.

Shot: Close angle on Viola gazing at Yellow Mary. “*All that yellow wasted.*”

Shot: Long shot, Yellow Mary and Trula approach the group. Yellow Mary smiles when she comes closer. She pauses in front of the group. She peers through the groups and

spots someone she recognizes. She flashes a big smile, and says, *“Is this the same little girl I used to rock in Gussie’s yard?”* Eula moves through the group to greet Yellow Mary.

Shot: Medium-long angle, Yellow Mary and Eula embrace warmly. Yellow Mary is overcome with joy.

Shot: Low angle American shot on Haagar and other Peasant women glaring at Yellow Mary. The same Peasant woman who spoke earlier says, *“That shameless hussy.”*

Within the Peasant family Viola, the Christian Missionary, is accepted and warmly received by her relatives, whereas Yellow Mary, a prostitute, is met with much disapproval and even rejection, except from the younger females like Iona and Eula. Women like Haagar and Viola see Yellow Mary through a damning gaze that constructs her as a sexual object, a “shameless hussy,” rather than the traumatized and lonely person that she is. These family women distance themselves from “scary” and “new kinds” of women like Yellow Mary and Trula because they represent everything all African-Americans on the frontier fear, the over-exposure of the black female body as a sexual object – the “Venus Hottentot” of Ibo Landing. Later Eula challenges this construction of Yellow Mary, a construction that in reality could be applied to all of them. Even the rigid Christian missionary Viola is vulnerable to such racist use, because the black female body is the way white oppressors inscribe their dominance over the whole group. As Eula says in her impassioned speech on the beach, *“... we’re all good women. We’re the daughters of those old dusty thing Nana carries in her tin can.”*

In regard to the depiction of female desire, *Dash* features a number of lovers throughout the film. Iona and her lover St. Julian Last Child, a member of the Cherokee Nation, represent a kind of forbidden love. It is forbidden not because it is a mixed-race relationship but because it is the reason Iona does not want to leave the Sea Islands for the North. This is a source of tension between Iona and her mother, Haagar. It is why they must keep their relationship secret. Some critics have found fault with *Dash*’s representation of St. Julian Last Child, arguing that he is

erotized as an indigenous “other,” literally rendered silent in the sound regimes of the film.²⁶ Indeed St. Julian is a romanticized figure, the hero on a white horse. However, neither Iona’s nor Dash’s gazes sexually objectify him. Rather, Dash foregrounds black female desire, not as oppressive, but as emancipatory. In the following scene Dash resists deploying the traditional shot-reverse-shot method for shooting love/sex scenes in which historically the female love interest has been the object of the desiring gaze.

Shot: Long shot, St. Julian Last Child leads his white horse along the beach.

Shot: Medium angle on Iona gazing off-screen. She turns and stares into the camera lens, somewhat seductively.

Shot: Long shot, St. Julian continues walking along beach with his horse. Iona enters frame and runs into his arms. They embrace each other.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Iona and St. Julian embracing. She pulls back and they talk to each other. Their dialogue is rendered silent to the musical score. They smile at one another.

Shot: Medium angle over-the-shoulder of Iona as St. Julian leans in to kiss her. They embrace again.

At the film’s conclusion Iona must choose between going North with the other Peazants or staying with St. Julian on the Sea Islands. Iona’s desire for St. Julian is so powerful that she chooses to stay with him. Dash resists representing Iona’s desire as “animalistic” or “primitive,” rather Dash constructs female desire outside the racist and patriarchal parameters.

Shot: Medium angle on woman’s feet pacing on planks of a dock.

Shot: Medium angle on Iona pacing. She scans her surroundings looking for someone. She sighs and seems worried.

Shot: Extreme wide shot of St. Julian galloping on his white steed. Nana’s voice-over, *“In this quiet place...”*

Shot: Extreme wide shot of Peazants gathered at the docks. Nana’s V/O, *“...simple folk knelt down and catch a glimpse of the eternal.”*

Shot: Medium angle on Iona with a sister who waves to Nana. Iona looks sad.

Shot: Medium angle on Nana, who watches her family board their barge. She nods toward them with tears in her eyes. Nana’s V/O, *“Mornin’ would begin...”*

Shot: Wide angle on Peazants at barge. They wave at Nana. Nana’s V/O, *“... for my children and me.”* Iona slowly boards the barge with her sister. Nana’s V/O, *“They would carry my spirit. I would remain here...”*

Shot: medium angle on Daddy Mac standing on barge. He looks outward. Nana’s V/O, *“... with the old souls.”*

Shot: Medium-long angle on Haagar and another Peasant woman.

Shot: Long angle on St. Julian galloping through fields. Only the body of his horse is in the frame. He is the knight-in-shining-armour figure come to the rescue.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Nana. She turns as if she senses something. The wind picks up. The music swells. The camera tracks into Nana as she tries to see something in the distance.

Shot: Long angle on St. Julian riding.

Shot: Extreme wide angle on Peazants about to embark on their journey. St. Julian enters the frame on his horse.

Shot: Long angle on Peazants in barge. Iona sees St. Julian. She turns to kiss her sister, and then leaps out of the barge.

Shot: Medium angle, slow-motion shot of Iona's feet running.

Shot: Wide angle on Peazants in barge as Iona runs toward St. Julian (off-screen).

Shot: Medium-long angle on Haagar, who suddenly notices that Iona has left. She gets up to bring her back. She runs out of the barge.

Shot: Wide angle, Iona approaches St. Julian sitting on his horse. Haagar follows after them.

Shot: Medium angle on Peasant family members looking on. Haagar's voice off-screen, "Iona!"

Shot: Long shot, Daddy Mac restrains Haagar from pursuing her daughter. "Iona!"

Shot: Medium-long angle on Iona and St. Julian astride the horse. Iona clings to St. Julian with tears in her eyes. St. Julian rides off.

Shot: Long shot, Daddy Mac continues to restrain Haagar, as she sobs for the loss of her daughter.

Shot: Long angle and slow-motion shot, St. Julian and Iona gallop into the frame, riding amongst the old growth trees, passing Nana along the way.

Shot: Medium-long angle on Nana who holds her indigo-stained hand to her heart, as St. Julian and Iona pass her by. She turns and watches them ride away.

Shot: Medium-close follow shot on Iona and St. Julian galloping across the frame.

Shot: Bird's-eye-view-shot, St. Julian and Iona ride away.

Here Iona and St. Julian choose a desire that is far from the gaze of the "super moral" black woman, which has suppressed black female desire and sexuality.

Merata Mita's Mauri

In Mita's *Mauri*, Remari's desire for Paki/Rewi is a key storyline. Mita constructs Remari's desiring gaze as active. Though Paki/Rewi has told Remari that he can never be with her, she still pursues him. As the wise elderly Kara says, Remari has the "hots" for him. Remari is not coy or ashamed of her desire for Paki/Rewi, it is part of who she is. Mita represents

Remari's sexual agency in a decolonizing way. This is exemplified in the campfire lovemaking scene.

Shot: Close angle on Remari who gazes at Paki/Rewi. *"What's eating you then?"*

Shot: Close angle on Paki/Rewi looking into the fire. *"None of your business."*

Shot: Close angle on Remari, who is ticked off. *"So, it's none of my business? Well, what are ya, queer or something?"*

Shot: Close angle on Paki/Rewi. He turns abruptly and then starts to laugh.

Shot: Close angle on Remari, not amused. She stands up.

Shot: Paki/Rewi watches her. Remari off-screen says, *"Well prove it then."* Rewi looks up at Remari. *"Don't be stupid."*

Shot: Close angle on Remari, gazing down at Paki/Rewi. *"Come on. Come on, let's see if you're man enough to get it up."* Paki/Rewi says off-screen, *"It's not that."* Remari challenges him, *"Isn't it? Do you know what it's like to be horny?"*

Shot: Close angle on Paki/Rewi. He thinks about it. *"All right."*

Shot: Long shot Paki/Rewi stands up, meeting Remari's challenge. He takes her hand, and kisses her fingers. *"Have it your way."* He suddenly roughly places her hand on his crotch.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Remari, over-the-shoulder of Paki/Rewi, who laughs mockingly. Remari gazes at him with astonishment.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Paki/Rewi, who says with anger, *"What's the matter? You wanted to know if I had any didn't you?"*

Shot: Medium-close angle over-the-shoulder of Paki/Rewi on Remari who remains silent. Paki/Rewi says, *"Look, just let things be."* Remari says softly, *"What do I have to do to get through to you?"* There is a moment of silence between them. Remari takes off her jacket. *"Look at me! I'm here now. I'm real."*

Shot: Medium-close angle, Paki/Rewi replies, *"Look, it's got nothing to do with you, with sex. It's something else. I'm not free."*

Shot: Medium-close angle over-the-shoulder of Paki/Rewi on Remari. *"You're married?"* Paki/Rewi shakes his head no. Remari asks, *"Well, then what?"* Paki/Rewi turns to her, *"I'll only hurt you."* Remari says desperately, *"I'm hurt now. You couldn't hurt me anymore than you're hurting me now."* Paki/Rewi says, *"I'm sorry."* Remari sighs, *"You're always bloody sorry."* Paki/Rewi sounding anguished says, *"I'm not the man you think I am."*

Shot: Close angle on Paki/Rewi, who says, *"I'm just not good enough. I can't..."* Remari's hands come into the frame, touching Rewi's shoulder. She says, *"Don't."* Remari's hands cup Paki/Rewi's face. *"It's all right."*

Shot: Close angle 2 shot of Remari and Paki/Rewi, their heads close together. She says, *"It's all right."* Paki/Rewi cries, *"God, I'm burning up. I need to tell someone."* Remari says quietly, *"You're not ready."* They embrace gently. Remari strokes his neck. Paki/Rewi breathes heavily. He says, *"Remari."*

Shot: Close angle on Rewi over Remari's shoulder. Still embraced Paki/Rewi says passionately, *"Remari. Just don't let me go."* They kiss.

Shot: Long angle on Paki/Rewi and Remari passionately kissing. Smoke rises from the campfire. They tumble to the ground together, the campfire flames in the foreground of the frame. Pull focus on flames.

In this scene Mita constructs Remari's desiring gaze as neither "primitive" nor "animalistic," even though Mita frames her amidst nature and fire. Remari refuses to be either an eroticized "Indian Princess" or a "dirty squaw." Mita makes this explicit when Remari declares, "*I'm real!*" Conversely, Paki/Rewi also refuses to be some desired object. It is only when Paki/Rewi renders himself vulnerable with his fears and emotional needs that the couple can make love and realize their desire for one another. This is a desire rooted in subjectivity, not oppressive gender or race relations.

Mita is also very careful in her construction of Steve Semmens, the local white man who desires Remari. In order to destabilize a white male colonizing gaze, Mita renders Steve passive. Steve is a white man who doesn't want to oppress or sexually exploit Māori woman, although he is constantly encouraged to do just that by his unstable father. Steve refuses to be a colonizer. In fact, Steve commits a radical act by asking for Remari's hand in marriage. Hence, Steve does not gaze at Remari as some "dirty black whore" he can "root on the side," historically a common practice amongst white settler men. The following scene represents Mita's construction of the white male gaze.

Shot: Wide angle on epic Oceanic landscape. As Steve enters from corner of frame, astride his horse, a pick-up truck comes to a stop along the side of the road. Steve rides toward the truck. Rewi gets out from the driver's side.

Shot: Long shot on Rewi at truck. Remari is in the front passenger seat. Pointing his finger at Steve, he yells, "*You stay away from here!*"

Shot: Long shot on Steve astride his horse looking worried at Rewi's aggression. He says, "*I didn't mean to offend.*"

Shot: Long shot on Rewi at truck. Rewi says, "*You might own everything else around here, but not this place.*" Remari gets out of the truck. (Steve is being chastised for previously intruding on a Māori burial ritual). Steve off-screen says, "*Sorry.*"

Shot: Long shot on Steve astride his horse. He tips his hat to Remari. He begins to descend his horse. He says apologetically, "*I didn't realize...*"

Shot: Wide angle on scene. Steve continues to descend his horse. “... *that they were... uh... that, that... they were down there.*”

Shot: Long angle two-shot on Rewi and Remari, who chastises him. “*You were brought up here. You should know better.*” Remari turns away. The camera follows her movements.

Shot: Long shot on Steve holding the reins of his horse. He steps forward. Anxiously he asks, “*Can I see you later? It’s important.*” Steve moves toward the frame. Remari off-screen says, “*I don’t know, we’re busy.*”

Shot: Medium-long angle on Remari, Steve partially in frame. Māori elders, including Kara, gather around the truck, along with Rewi, who look on with curiosity at the exchange between Remari and Steve. She finally turns toward Steve, “*Okay, later.*” She turns away.

Shot: Deep focus medium-close angle on Rewi gazing angrily at Steve, Kara and the Māori elders, in background. Steve off-screen says, “*But, you haven’t said when.*” Kara moves toward Rewi, who looks about ready to kill Steve. Kara leans into Rewi and says, “*If you don’t like it why don’t you do something about it?*” Rewi replies, “*Like what?*” “*Like marry her.*” Rewi shakes his head, “*No. I can’t.*” This admission is painful for him. Kara says, “*You keep pushing her away. It’s cruel to watch.*”

Shot: Long shot of Steve with his horse. “*But you haven’t said when.*”

Shot: Long angle on Remari as she helps the elders onto back of the truck. Exasperated, she says, “*I did. I said later.*”

Shot: Medium angle on Steve, who seems forlorn and frustrated. Realizing he won’t get the answer he’s looking for, he mounts his horse.

The film resists using shot-reverse-shot between Remari and Steve. Mita destabilizes Steve’s gaze by showing other members of Remari’s Māori family and community continually interrupting their exchange, including Steve’s male rival for her attention, Paki/Rewi. Steve will have to go through Remari’s family before he can actually get to her.

Mita further destabilizes the colonizing male gaze through her depiction of Steve’s father. Mr. Semmens Sr. is a racist and sexist villain, who is intent on destroying the Rapanas. One of the ways he attempts to do this is by rendering Remari into a “whore.” As he exclaims to his lovesick son, “*She’s a spook!*” Mita renders Mr. Semmens’s gaze powerless by depicting him as absurd and insane. He seems driven by pure racist hate, something Steve must transcend, and does.



Figure 27: Mr. Semmens dressed as a scarecrow (right) with his son, Steve

Throughout most of the film Mr. Semmens is either having deranged fits or dressing up as a scarecrow (see Figure 27).

Anne Wheeler's Loyalties

In Wheeler's *Loyalties* Métis female sexuality and desire is foregrounded in the frame as active and empowering, even though the female Métis characters are treated like “whores of the nation” by other characters in the film. Wheeler depicts this empowered Métis female desiring gaze through Roseanne's resistance to being seen as a “whore” and her desire for Eddy, her troubled Métis boyfriend and the father of two of her children. Though her relationship with Eddy is far from ideal – he has been jailed for assaulting her in a drunken state – Roseanne is never a passive object for Eddy's desiring gaze. Wheeler is careful not to represent the Roseanne/Eddy love story through a Eurocentric and Hollywood lens. Wheeler constructs a complex relationship that has been plagued by issues such as alcoholism, poverty, unemployment, and land dispossession. This is depicted in the scene in which Roseanne and Eddy make future plans together, in between their love making. Shot in one long take, Wheeler resists using the typical shot-reverse-shot technique used in love scenes. The long take is often used as a “democratic”

shooting device, resisting privileging one gaze over the other. It is common to the documentary.²⁷

Shot: Medium-close angle on two photographs attached on a bedroom mirror. One of the photos is of Eddy. The camera pan-tilts down along the wall. Roseanne's voice off-screen. *"The only difference between her and me is money. But, what a hell of a difference. Maybe I should go back to school too."* Eddy laughs (off-screen). *"And take what? How to keep your mouth shut 101."* Eddy laughs again. The camera pauses on Roseanne and Eddy in bed together. She wears his shirt, and he doesn't wear one at all. Roseanne playfully punches him. *"Shut up about my mouth!"* Eddy laughs again. He leans in for a kiss. *"I love your mouth."* They kiss. Roseanne gazes at him. *"Are you going to stop asking me Eddy?"* Eddy replies, *"What's the matter now?"* She says, *"The problem between you and me."* Eddy leans over Roseanne aiming for more action. He says seductively, *"I don't see no problem."* As Eddy makes his move, Roseanne says, *"I'm going to go talk to Mavis at the bar. And if she'll give me my job back, I'm going to take it."* Eddy pauses and then flops back onto the pillow. He doesn't like that piece of information. He takes a drag of his cigarette. *"Why? I make enough money."* *"Because I want to. I like it. In all these years we've been together Eddy, I've never fooled around on you once. So what's the big deal?"* Eddy thinks about it. Roseanne rises to a sitting position. Eddy turns to her. *"I'll give it a try, Rose. But you've got to stop putting me down all the time. You gotta stop telling me and everyone else what a loser I am."* Roseanne thinks about it. *"I'll give it a try, Edward."* They embrace and kiss, leaning back down into the bed.

Roseanne's explicit articulation of her loyalty to Eddy, a Métis man who has abused Roseanne in public and struggles with alcoholism, is not only about forgiveness, but also acceptance. Roseanne is only able to make this declaration and act on her desires for him after Eddy has cleaned up his act. This occurs after he's stopped drinking and gotten himself enrolled in a skills training program with family housing. Hence, Roseanne's desire for Eddy is not rooted in some masochistic "victim" identity, but has the power to heal. Eddy's sense of self-worth is made possible partly by Roseanne desiring him, and only him. This scene stands in stark contrast to the bedroom scene between the Suttons, in which David is unable to "perform." Lily feels demoralized and undesirable. David then finds his way down to the beach where he knows Leona is camping out with her family.

Wheeler constructs Dr. Sutton's sexually predatory gaze as a deviant, although powerful, one. As discussed in Chapter Four, Wheeler constructs moments where Roseanne challenges Sutton's colonizing male gaze. Roseanne has been resisting this colonizing sexual gaze her whole life, and it is written in every silent gesture and damning gaze she deploys. Roseanne's resistance to Dr. Sutton's predatory behavior is constructed in the shot-reverse-shot dialogue sequences between them.

Norma Bailey's The Wake

In Bailey's *The Wake*, a desiring female Métis gaze is foreground in the frame and normalized (see Figure 28). Like Roseanne in Wheeler's *Loyalties*, Métis single-mother, Joan, has an empowered gaze. In contrast to *Loyalties* Joan desires a white man, the RCMP officer,



Figure 28: Joan's desiring gaze in Bailey's *The Wake*

Jim.

Joan's desire however is depicted as misdirected and even wrong, because the object of her gaze is complicit in the deaths of four Métis teenagers. In this sense, Joan is not empowered by her desire, she is led astray by it. *The Wake* seems to be a cautionary tale about systemic racism and colonial violence. Joan's Métis family and community deem Joan's relationship with

Jim to be both dangerous and disloyal. The history of white men in positions of power sexually exploiting indigenous women in Canada is long and tragic, and it is an on-going problem even in a so-called “post-colonial” society. Bailey represents this history primarily through the character of Cora, Joan’s cousin, who is a sex worker. Despite the risks and rifts Joan’s choice of lover creates, Joan doesn’t let anyone dictate who she should and should not desire, as depicted in the following scene:

Shot: Extreme wide-angle shot of Joan and Jim on Joan’s front stoop. She is in her dressing gown and slippers. They embrace.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Joan and Jim embracing and kissing. Smitten, they giggle in between kisses. Jim manages to pull himself away, and say good-bye. The camera now over her shoulder, Joan watches Jim walk away. Jim turns around to gaze at Joan. He turns around and walks to his truck.

Shot: Long shot, Joan happily watching Jim depart. After a few moments Joan turns and goes back inside her house out of the wintry cold air.

Shot: Medium shot on Joan as she enters her kitchen from the outside. She smiles to herself. Becoming self-conscious, she ties the belt around her robe. She walks over to the counter to pour herself a cup of coffee. Donna is at the stove cooking eggs. Joan is about to talk to her, but Donna gives her the cold shoulder. Joan notices the rebuff, and sighs.

Shot: Donna places the plate of eggs in front of Joan’s son. Donna helps herself to some toast, all the while ignoring Joan.

Shot: Medium-long angle, Joan at counter eyes Donna almost guiltily. She walks over to the fridge to check the time. Joan’s romantic escapade has officially ended. Feeling awkward, she joins Donna at the table. Donna keeps her eyes downcast. Joan smiles at her son.

Bailey manages to normalize Joan’s desire for Jim, even if it is dangerous. Bailey carefully avoids depicting Joan as either the “dirty squaw” or a Pocahontas figure, the Indian princess who aids white men.

The other key way Bailey constructs a decolonizing desire narrative in *The Wake* is through her rendering of the male white gaze as violently dangerous, just like Dr. Sutton’s gaze in *Loyalties*. Throughout the film the threat of rape looms. Bailey depicts this dangerous gaze in the high school fight scene.

Shot: Full shot on Donna walking with her girlfriend and two boys in the snowy parking lot of their high school – they are all Métis. In the background white teens mingle and mill about. One of the Métis boys says, *“Hey, Donna, there’s your competition.”* He is referring to the Mardi Gras Pageant that Donna is competing in. Donna and her friends look off-screen.

Shot: Medium moving shot on white teenage girl, flanked by white teen males. They come to a pause in the parking lot.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Donna. She turns her gaze away from the white girl and looks downward. Métis boy off-screen says, *“I hear her old man is going to buy her a car if she wins.”*

Shot: American-full of Donna’s competition and other white teens in a circle smoking. Donna’s girlfriend says off-screen, *“He’s a dentist.”* One of the white boys turns to gaze off-screen. He takes a drag of his cigarette and yells, *“Hey Donna! You wanna?”* His friends laugh at his stupid joke.

Shot: Medium shot on Donna walking away. She turns her gaze briefly toward the taunting white teens, but then ignores their jibes.

Shot: American-full shot on white bully who continues to harasses Donna. *“Hey, you wanna go, eh? You wanna go?”*

Shot: Medium moving shot on Donna. She turns sharply toward them. *“Fuck-off asshole!”*

Shot: Medium-close shot on white bully. *“Oh come on, Donna, the old lady must have taught you a couple of tricks, eh?”* The white bully then sticks out his tongue and makes a sexually lewd gesture with it.

Shot: Full shot, the two Métis boys charge through group of students toward the white bully. They begin to attack the white male teens.

Shot: Donna and her girlfriend get in the truck.

This scene continues with a full-on fight between the whites and the “Indians.” Donna and her friends manage to get away in the truck, but not until after the Métis boys have given the white boys a beating. Even surrounded by friends and Métis male “protectors” Donna is rendered the “whore.” The slur however is not only against Donna but her Métis friends, who are looking to Donna, who is pretty and smart, to win the local beauty competition. By publicly marking Donna a prostitute, the white kids assert their dominance over the Métis kids in their school and the community as a whole. However, though Donna says and does very little, she calls her white tormentor for what he is, an “asshole.” Here the white male desiring gaze is represented as dangerous and wrong. When the Métis boys retaliate in Donna’s defense they are standing up against white male sexual exploitation of all indigenous women. The scene is set-up so that we

cheer for the “good guys” (the Indians) who are Donna’s friends, not the white bullies and their complicit white female “cheerleaders.”

Donna resists the role of the whore/“squaw” by competing in the Mardi-Gras Beauty Queen Contest at her school, wearing a “below-the-knee” pink dress cut down from a bridesmaid’s gown by Joan. The shot of Donna standing alongside privileged white girls, desperate to win, not just for herself, but for the dignity of her family and her Métis community, represents Donna as a figure of resistance against racist and colonial structures which construct her as her mother’s daughter, a “whore.” In one shot the film dismantles the “dirty squaw” or “Pocahontas” dichotomy.

Tracey Moffatt’s Bedevil

Moffatt’s *Bedevil* foregrounds and privileges subaltern desire and sexuality primarily in the segment “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In,” through the characters Minnie and Beba, the tragic mixed-race couple, and the cross-dressing “Frida Kahlo.” As ghosts, Minnie and Beba haunt the warehouse where Imelda, Beba’s mother, and “Frida Kahlo” live on borrowed time. The landlord, Dimitri, a Greek immigrant businessman, aims to convert the warehouse into a casino, a potentially more profitable venture. However, Dimitri’s plans are threatened by the memory of the Minnie and Beba tragedy, a story that Imelda keeps alive with newspaper clippings and an ever-burning candle vigil by the warehouse’s red loading door. Though we never entirely get the whole story from either Dimitri, his wife Voula, or Imelda, it is understood that Minnie and Beba were “cursed” lovers because they broke cultural sexual taboos by marrying outside of their communities and cultures. As Dimitri says, “*It was about marriage, the whole clan were down on them. They had to get the hell out.*” Because Minnie and Beba chose to break these laws they were outcasts, and ended up working for Dimitri and living in the warehouse where they died

under mysterious circumstances. Moffatt depicts the power of Beba and Minnie's desire in the following deal-making scene.

Shot: Wide angle on parking lot sandwiched between Dimitri's sandwich shop and the warehouse. Dimitri stands with the two businessmen. He is arguing with the Greek businessman. The Chinese businessman is on his mobile phone yelling at someone. "Frida Kahlo" enters from the opposite end of the frame. She walks purposefully toward the warehouse. "Frida" catches the attention of the Chinese businessman, who pauses from his phone conversation to stare at "Frida," who in turn ignores the men. "Frida" opens a side door.

Shot: Medium angle on "Frida" opening the door. "Frida" turns to gaze at the businessmen.

Shot: American shot, "Frida" in background gazes at the three businessmen. Dimitri and the Greek businessman continue arguing about zoning laws. The Chinese businessman looks stunned. "Frida" enters the warehouse. The Chinese businessman turns to the other men and says in reference to "Frida," "*What was THAT?*" Dimitri tries an avoidance technique. "*That's a nice phone. Is that the latest model...?*" The Chinese businessman turns away from Dimitri in frustration and resumes his call. He says into his phone, "*Call you back.*" He hangs up.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Chinese businessman. He turns to Dimitri. "*I asked you if you still had anyone living there, DIMITRI.*"

Shot: American shot on three men. Dimitri tries to laugh off the question. "*I... I can see that you would...*" While Dimitri tries to fumble through an answer, the Greek businessman turns his attention to a news clipping about the "mysterious deaths" of the "doomed couple," Minnie and Beba, that has been pasted onto the outside of the warehouse's red loading door. He moves toward it. "*What's this, Dimitri?*"

Shot: Close angle on Dimitri who turns his gaze sharply in the direction of the news clipping.

Shot: Medium angle on Greek businessman, who rips the clipping off the door.

Shot: Medium angle on Dimitri who is beginning to panic. He says to the Chinese businessman, "*Twenty-four hours and they're out of here! Yeah, twenty-four hours tops!*"

Shot: Medium angle on Greek businessman, holding the news clipping in his hands. "*You had trouble here a while back.*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Dimitri glaring at the Greek businessman, who says off-screen, "*Yeah! I remember!*"

Shot: Medium angle on Greek businessman, who hands the clipping to the Chinese businessman. "*It was in the paper. See look!*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Chinese businessman, who gazes down at the clipping.

Shot: Medium-close angle on Dimitri who glares at the Chinese businessman, who says, "*What...*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Chinese businessman, who backs up a bit. "*What trouble?*"

Shot: Medium-close angle on Dimitri. “Guys, I can explain the whole situation.” The Greek businessman says off-screen, “That’s shit, Dimitri. Let’s go.” He crosses the frame.

The scene makes explicit that the marginal sexuality represented by the “Frida Kahlo” figure and the subaltern desire represented by the mixed-race lovers Minnie and Beba are bad for business. “Frida,” Minnie, and Beba live on the edge of society because they do not follow the rules. Minnie is referred to by Dimitri as a “hippy chick,” and Beba is identified as a “Strait Islander guy.” These labels and identifications are used to explain why there was all that “trouble.” We are never properly told what happened to Beba and Minnie. When Dimitri tells their story (to his business associates) he does so without any plot details. Dimitri represents the lovers as being in a “bad way,” a stormy relationship plagued by strange and primitive “clan” practices.

Shot: Camera travels through tall grasses. Dimitri’s voice-over explains, “*It was about marriage.*” Red flashes of bodies moving are superimposed over the grass. Suspenseful music plays. Dimitri continues, “*The whole clan were down on them. They had to get the hell out.*”

Shot: Red tinted medium shot of Minnie’s feet pacing the floor. She comes to a stop.

Shot: Red tinted long shot of Beba lying restlessly in a bed.

Shot: Red tinted American shot of Imelda peeking through hanging laundry. Dimitri continues, “*Then the mother, Imelda, came looking for them. Found them down here.*”

Shot: Red tinted medium shot on Minnie’s hands crushing herbs/plants into a bowl. Her wrists are adorned with multiple bracelets.

Shot: Red tinted medium-close shot on Imelda cautiously approaching Minnie and Beba’s living space. Dimitri says, “*What a fuss she caused.*”

Shot: Red tinted medium-close shot on Imelda peering through wood slates. Dimitri’s V/O, “*And then...*” Dimitri’s story is interrupted by one of the businessmen’s voices. He shouts out, “*I want to see a contract, Dimitri!*” Dimitri continues his story, as if he can’t stop himself. “*After Imelda moved in with them that’s when things got really strange.*” The camera trucks into Imelda’s face as she gazes at Minnie and Beba.

Moffatt constructs Minnie and Beba as characters that can express themselves through dance, a highly visual form, somewhat akin to melodrama. This form of expression stands in stark contrast to Dimitri’s reconstruction of the past, told through a non-indigenous male voice, and one that is quite gossipy. Through Dimitri’s narrative, Beba and Minnie are “othered,”

depicted as “primitive” and “animalistic.” Through Dimitri’s story (and Western eyes) Beba and Minnie are violent, sex-crazed, and Godless – made evident by their engagement with witchcraft. According to Dimitri, Minnie seems to bear the brunt of the blame for what happens to them. When Voula, Dimitri’s wife, continues telling the lovers’ story she says, “*Well, they weren’t happy. Minnie, Minnie would act crazy. And get him all worked up. Then you’d hear them start.*” Through Voula and Dimitri, Minnie is represented as a “Hottentot Venus” – she even performs a seductive wiggle for Dimitri. This all seen through the retellings of Voula and Dimitri, a somewhat unhappily married couple who practice morally and politically correct heterosexuality in the confines of a patriarchal working-middle-class family. Dimitri and Voula are rendered as unreliable storytellers, a common device used in mysteries and horror. Moffatt prompts us to ask the question: who is the real monster here?

Through the characters of cross-dressing “Frida” and the doomed lovers Moffatt foregrounds the sexual hierarchy within white settler communities, one divided not only by gender and sexuality, but also by class, race and ethnicity. Though Dimitri, Voula, and the “minority” businessmen are themselves ethnic and racial minorities, they have power through their patriarchal heterosexuality and class privilege. They position themselves as not only dominant, but morally right. They are disgusted by and fearful of “Frida” and spooked or mystified by the Minnie and Beba story. In fact, their expansionist and capitalist dreams are threatened by “Frida,” Beba, and Minnie, because they represent everything that goes against heterosexist colonialism. Frida and the lovers are constructed as “other” by Voula and the businessmen, primarily due to their sexuality and desire. However, unlike popular depictions of “subaltern” and marginalized (and illegal) desire, these characters are represented as the persecuted, the shunned, and the exiled. Moffatt does not construct identification or empathy

with Dimitri, Voula, or the businessmen. Rather we are positioned to identify with their teenage son, who is sympathetic, intrigued, and drawn to the Minnie, Beba, and Imelda story. When Voula and Dimitri's son joins Minnie and Beba in a ghost dance, he crosses over to the other side, rejecting his father's way (the law of the father).

In Moffatt's *Bedevil* there are very few appearances by white men, and hence, the white male gaze is very peripheral, although it certainly haunts the frame. In "Mr. Chuck" there is the ghost of the white American G.I., who haunts the swamp where Rick and his sisters play. The G.I. apparently drove his jeep into the swamp one night while he was drunk, a shameful way for a soldier to die. Like the ghost of the little blind white girl in "Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo," the American G.I. ghost does not speak and he rarely opens his dead eyes, layered in swamp muck. He is of course a hybrid-version of the classic "swamp monster" in Hollywood horror B-pictures and the "bunyip" of Australian indigenous mythology. In "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine" Barbara Creed makes reference to *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) in her discussion of abjection and the horror film. Creed argued that the concept of the border "is central the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject. In some horror films the monstrous is produced at the border of human and inhuman, man and beast, like *Creature from the Black Lagoon*."²⁸ The bunyip is a mythical creature in indigenous folklore that inhabits swamps, billabongs, creeks, riverbeds, and waterholes. They are known to jump out from under the water to attack their prey, either animals or humans. In *Bunyips: Australia's Folklore of Fear* Robert Holden wrote,

The bunyip, a lurking presence in the depths of the billabong, is one of the most enduring and terrifying of Australian-Aboriginal beliefs. Oral tradition, pictographs and ground-carvings testify to an age-old belief in a large amphibious man-eating creature; and ever since colonization reports have emanated from equally terrified settlers telling of encounters with this Australian nightmare. Early nineteenth century scientific interest in the bunyip was

frustrated by the readiness of some Aboriginal people to identify all manner of strange skeletons, unearthly sounds from the swamp and frightening encounters as proof of the bunyip's existence. This diverse range of "evidence" for the bunyip only became more confusing when Europeans realized that the Aboriginal people held it in such dread that were "unable to take note of its characteristics."²⁹

Moffatt seems to be channeling the bunyip and swamp monster trope through her American G.I. ghost. In the scene where Shelley tells about the American G.I. there is a blocking of the white male gaze.

Shot: Blurry blue image as if one were looking through an unfocused kaleidoscope. Shelley's voice-over is laid over the image. "*Then one night a poor G.I...*" Very briefly a close angle of the G.I. ghost, covered in swamp muck, is superimposed over the blurry blue background. It fades in and out quickly.

Shot: Close angle on Shelley in her home. She continues to tell her story. "... *whom I knew drove his tank straight into the quick sand swamp... sank... without a trace and was never found.*"

Shot: Close angle on black and white photograph of Shelley as a young woman flanked by numerous G.I.s. One of them holds her hand. A black G.I. smiles and waves at the camera. They appear to be at a party or in a bar. The camera zooms in closer to Shelley in the photograph. She is smiling brightly at the camera. Shelley's voice off-screen continues, "*The children in the area have always told tales about him...*"

Shot: Close angle on G.I. in photograph, framed in profile. His eyes are somewhat obscured. He has been caught mid-action of spitting water at someone. He is framed at the periphery of the photograph. The camera swish-pans to reveal that he is spitting at Shelley. Shelley's voice off-screen says, "*The ghost of the G.I...*"

Shot: Close angle on Shelley in her home. She continues speaking. "... *pulling them in.*" She raises an eyebrow and smiles, as if she doesn't believe such tales.

Shot: Close angle on G.I. in photograph, his spitting frozen in time. An image of his ghost, covered in swamp muck, is very briefly superimposed over the photograph. Again his eyes are obscured.

Shot: Medium angle on Shelley standing, gazing out a window.

The swamp is also the site where a new suburban housing project is under way, a project that employs working-class white men. White children visit their father on site, donning matching clothes and play tool belts. White working-class wives bring their husbands lunch. Rick, an Aborigine and his little sisters stand by and watch while the white community builds over "wild" frontier space, and the haunted swamp. A group of white house-builders, a white woman, two

white children, as well as Rick and his little sisters have gathered around the G.I.'s helmet and belt, which has been fished out of the swamp by one of the house-builders.

Shot: Close angle on murky swamp water under wood planks of a newly built platform. Steam rises from the black water. Animalistic monster sounds emerge over image.

Shot: Close on adult Rick in prison. He laughs demonically.

Shot: Rotating shot of G.I. helmet and ammunition belt. It has been cleaned and displayed as if it were in a museum.

Shot: Medium-close high angle on Rick as a child sitting with group around the muddy G.I. helmet and ammunition belt. Rick gazes up.

Shot: Medium close low angle of white man, the father of Rick's two white friends, staring down at Rick in a menacing and sexually predatory manner. He is blond, well dressed and clean cut. The sound track features animalistic monster growls and horror-style music. The blond man turns his gaze away from Rick.

Shot: Medium close angle on Rick, who continues to gaze up at the blond man with a blank expression on his face.

Shot: Close angle on blurry silhouette of blond man. He turns his head in profile

Shot: Medium close angle on Rick who continues to gaze up at the blond man.

Shot: Close angle on blurry silhouette of blond man. He sticks out his tongue in an animalistic and sexual way.

Conclusion

*[I]t's not often you see sex on screen that's designed to be pleasurable for the woman.*³⁰

- Jane Campion, *The Piano*

A central aim for these filmmakers was to construct a desiring female gaze that rendered female and/or subaltern desire as normal and active. There have been so few films that depict female desire at all, and when it has been depicted it has often been through a (white) male point of view. Historically, in the dominant cinema sexually active or desiring female and/or subaltern characters have been commonly deemed and represented as *femme fatales* or "animalistic." Though the heroines' sexual "deviations" expose them to peril in the narrative, the plot resolutions are not constructed around their punishment, reformation or death, as they typically are in classic Hollywood cinema. Jackie Stacey (1990) writing on the *femme fatale* figure in popular film argued,

Originally a character constructed in French romantic literature, the femme fatale in film is particularly associated with film noir and the thrillers of the 1940s and 1950s. Like her predecessor, the vamp of the 1920s, the femme fatale is primarily defined by her desirable, but dangerous sexuality – which brings about the downfall of the male protagonist. Typically, the femme fatale combines glamour and sensuality with driving ambition or self-interest. She lures men into a web of intrigue and robs them of their willpower and rationality, exploiting her irresistibility to make them collude with her schemes. Since the power of the femme fatale comes at the expense of men, nothing less than her destruction can control the threat she poses to the patriarchal order. The story often constructs the sexually powerful woman as a threat to the male/moral order, so justifying her loss of power as necessary to the reestablishment of that order. Whether she is murdered, rendered symbolically powerless, or unconvincingly married off, the femme fatale’s punishment is necessary for narrative closure.³¹

In the “subversive sexuality” narratives the filmmakers focalize their revisionism around the construction of active female desire that challenges heterosexist ideology. The heroines represent sexual freedom as an individual right, essential to women’s emancipation as full subjects. Though the heroines do suffer for acting on their sexual desires in an oppressive heterosexist patriarchal society, through violence or confinement, their sufferings are represented as the necessary struggle for emancipation from patriarchal oppression.

The decolonizing desire narratives aim to destabilize colonial structures of power. They claim that subaltern female sexual freedom is not only essential to subaltern women’s subjectivity, but also crucial for the survival of the community or race of people. These films do not represent “heterosexual marriage” as necessarily oppressive. This is largely due to the fact that subaltern communities were, and are, not structured around the patriarchal family. As anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist historians have demonstrated, the lack of “marital status” was often deployed by colonial forces of power as a way to justify constructing subaltern women as morally inferior and sexually deviant. One key aim across the decolonizing desire narratives was to deconstruct and destabilize highly sexualized colonial tropes like the “dirty squaw,” the

“Indian Princess,” the “Venus Hottentot,” and the “Super Moral Black Woman.” Another key aim was to render the white colonizing gaze as passive and foreground its violence.

Conclusion: Filming Feminist Frontiers/Frontier Feminisms

Film has the power to destroy myths and demystify those areas of knowledge that are mystified. The powerfully negative aspects of film, Hollywood in particular, is the way it spreads Western culture and ideology around the world. This is because of the commodity nature of film in the hands of capitalist countries, especially the USA, which leads to the insidious effect of corrupting the indigenous and ethnic values of other peoples.

- Merata Mita, Māori filmmaker, 1981¹

I've always described My Brilliant Career as soft feminism but it probably has taken its message to a much wider audience than most of the small independent women's films. But there's always been criticism that implies that because I'm a woman filmmaker I should be fulfilling a certain criteria. I find it very annoying and just as sexist to say that as a woman I should only be making films about women and about women's themes, and that they should portray women as always showing the positive sides of sisterhood. But at the same time, obviously, I do feel a real moral obligation to the woman's movement, of which I am a total supporter, which means I would always worry about doing anything in my films that put women down in a sexist way, and I am conscious of that when I'm both writing and shooting my films.

- Gillian Armstrong²

It is a weird lullaby and so it is; it is mine.

- Ada from *The Piano*

In many ways these women's frontier films can be seen as "weird lullabies" because for the first time in the history of cinema, women had access to film financing and training programs implemented to address gender inequity in the film and television industries. These frontier films were the result of these programs and initiatives, and stand as important female-authored texts for that reason alone. But they are enigmatic as well. They are enigmatic because they do not simply or cohesively construct a feminist narrative about the frontier. Across these frontier women's films two general aims were apparent: firstly, to work in the grand narrative tradition, and secondly, to destroy and demystify frontier myths. These two aims, however, were realized in varying and differing ways, from Armstrong's box office hit, *My Brilliant Career*, to Moffatt's avant-garde *Bedevil*. As reflected in Armstrong's quote about her film's "soft feminism" there seems to be a direct co-relation and an uneasy tension between the commercial viability of a film

(to take its message to “a much wider audience”) and its “moral obligation to the woman’s movement.” In addition, as discussed across this study and reflected across these frontier women’s films, the “women’s movement” has meant different things to different people. As stated in the introduction to this dissertation this study set out to answer a set of research questions. These were: How do the ten women filmmakers deploy the frontier motif as a political tool for feminist inquiry? What feminist and anti-racist/anticolonial debates do the women filmmakers engage with to tell their revisionist stories, and how? What differing conclusions do these ten films imply about the place of women in the construction of frontier societies and identities? What does this body of work tell us about the range of possibilities for expressing feminist politics within popular and grand narrative forms like the feature narrative film? What is the relationship between the political economy of the film industry and “feminist aesthetics?” Does female authorship matter? A central question here is: *were these frontier women’s films (“weird lullabies”) successful at pushing feminist agendas forward?* The answer to this central question is reflected in how the filmmakers deploy the frontier in order to imagine and construct feminist identities in former white settler societies/nations. In many ways these filmmakers construct frontier theses in the vein of Frederick Jackson Turner (1893) and the Hollywood Western.

Turner famously argued that American identity had been indelibly formed through the frontier experience itself.

The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom-these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.³

Like Turner, these women filmmakers imagined feminist identities in white settler societies/nations by depicting both the real and imagined frontier experiences of women living and working as wives, mothers and daughters, as well as workers, paid, unpaid, and enslaved. This study examined the filmmakers' depictions of women on various frontiers through four themes that were at the centre of feminist scholarship and the women's movement between the 1970s and early 1990s: genre, voice, and narrative; motherhood; work and the economy; and sexuality. By examining the films through these four themes this study rendered visible three different feminist frontier theses.

Campion's *The Piano*, Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, and Wilson's *My American Cousin* construct their feminist frontier thesis around rendering visible the role of women in frontier spaces, albeit primarily white women. The filmmakers focalize the experiences of these frontier women around patriarchal oppression. On this feminist frontier domesticity is depicted as *the* site of women's oppression, where men exploit women's reproductive and productive labours, and where female voices and desires are disavowed. In Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (a term of affection Lalu is given by her father) Lalu is not oppressed in a traditional white settler domestic context, but is exploited for her sexuality and labour by a patriarchal figure, Hong King. Across these films mothers are oppressed figures, and motherhood itself is depicted as a patriarchal trap. All the films feature young rebellious heroines, all daughter figures, who reject the role of dutiful wife and doting mother, seemingly answering Virginia Woolf's call to "kill the angel in the house." The key way the filmmakers depict resistance and agency is through the heroines' transgressive acts of rebellion, often through displays of sexual desire, in masculine (saloons) and/or wide-open "uncivilized" frontier spaces, debunking the myth of the "good pioneer woman." Though all

these filmmakers destroyed the myth that the frontier was ever a “women-less milieu,” their frontier revision is delimited.

As discussed throughout this study these filmmakers do not render invisible the role of race in the construction of the angel in the house figure and the role of white femininity in gender oppression within white settler societies. As Chandra Mohanty argued,

White liberal capitalist patriarchies have always been the focus of feminist resistance. But to fully appreciate and mobilize against the oppressive rule of the state, the relations of rule of the state must be understood and analyzed in terms of gender, class, and sexual as well as racial formation. In fact, this is essential if we are to explain why the state is a significant nexus for the mobilization of feminist constituencies in overwhelmingly racialized cultures.⁴

Nor do the films demystify the myth of “rugged individualism” perpetuated in the Hollywood Western or Turner’s frontier thesis. All these female trail-blazers act alone in their risky pursuits to forge a new world order for themselves, but both the family and the community play a marginal role. In regard to feminist aesthetics the filmmakers rendered visible female authorship and the female voice by destabilizing a masculine logic in the films’ visual and sound regimes, but worked within the conventions of the popular cinema. Were these concessions consciously made in order to appeal to a more commercial market? Perhaps. There certainly is a co-relation.

In Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, Mita’s *Mauri*, and Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, frontier feminist traits are formed through struggles within and against sexist, racist, and colonial structures such as slave plantations and reservations, which have rendered subaltern women vulnerable to white male sexual exploitation and violence. On this subaltern frontier women find empowerment through motherhood and mothering, their reproductive bodies, and collectivity, including the family structure. Indeed, the domestic is often the site of refuge from colonial violence and oppression of “the road” (*The Wake*). Feminist aesthetics deconstruct classical Hollywood narrative conventions and genre codes. A key narration device deployed throughout these films

was oral storytelling practices and structures like Nana's Gullah stories in *Daughters of the Dust* and Kara's Māori laments in *Mauri*. By deploying such cyclical multi-voiced oral storytelling forms the filmmakers could privilege non-European myth systems. In the process the filmmakers debunk the idea that history is linear. The limitations of these films are that they did not reach a wide audience, and therefore have not had the same level of influence to destroy myths on a large scale. Though these films construct a feminist frontier that model Mohanty and Mita's mandates, they were not far-reaching.

Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* and Norma Bailey's *The Wake* are hybrids of the two other feminist frontiers. They do foreground race in the construction of oppression of women in frontier spaces and focalize their narratives around subaltern mothers. Though both films work in traditional classical narrative structure and deploy the codes of melodrama, horror, and the Western, they do so in a way that foregrounds white complicity in the colonial oppression of subaltern women and communities. Bailey and Wheeler debunk the good pioneer woman as a racialized colonial construct, whilst adopting Claire Johnston's call for feminists to deploy the "entertainment film" politically. Both films were aimed at large audiences, albeit within Canada. Due to Canada's limited distribution system, these films had difficulty gaining access to a global media market, and perhaps were less constrained in regards to aesthetics and politics.

Despite the limitations of the revisionist popular films, like the enigmatic Ada in Campion's *The Piano*, and indeed all the resisting heroines across these films, these filmmakers troubled the idea of the frontier. The films depicted the frontier as a complicated and messy space, not the rigid structure Turner imagined in his famous Frontier Thesis, a specific geographic marker identified by indigenous/European conflict zones. Across this body of women's frontier films, frontier spaces were not tied to geographic boundaries and historical timelines. The

historical setting for *Daughters of the Dust* and *My Brilliant Career* was the early 20th century, while *My American Cousin*, *Mauri*, *Bedevil*, *Loyalties*, and *The Wake* were all set on a mid-to-late 20th century frontier. By re-imagining frontier spaces outside these confines, the films could foreground the way women and subaltern people continue to be colonized. Frontier spaces, in Nana Peasant's words, were "no land of milk and honey." The contact zones in these frontier films are not marked by armed conflict, but other kinds of violence and threats. Conflicts take place in domestic spaces, situated on a frontier, and are rooted in familial relations. The filmmakers locate the root of these familial problems in gender oppression, such as the labour exploitation of white settler farmwives or the sexual exploitation of subaltern women. The films collectively render visible the role of the domestic as well as the "angel in the house" figure in the construction of white settler societies and identities. As anti-colonial historian, Anne McClintock, (1995) argued "the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities and an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise." Interestingly, all these films pre-date McClintock's frontier thesis.

A key aim of this dissertation has been to exemplify how dramatic film (speculative creative fiction) can be an important tool in feminist mobilization. Traditionally, feminists have turned to the documentary form to express feminist politics. Perhaps this has been due to financing, but there does seem to be a tendency to regard fiction, particularly popular fiction, as less serious or political. All of these films could serve as excellent teaching tools not only in feminist film theory classes, but also in feminist history and theory courses. This is not because these are perfect feminist texts. Some would argue that they are far from it. They are important feminist teaching texts, not for only what they include in the frame, but for what they leave out of the frame. The popular films like Campion's *The Piano* and Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*

exemplify how Hollywood genres like the Western and the melodrama can be subverted in order to construct a feminist gaze. As discussed and demonstrated, both these films have limitations, and yet they offer us a glimpse into the possibilities for a popular feminist cinema, in much the same way Doane argued the Hollywood “women’s films” of the 1940s did. Though both Greenwald and Campion go beyond the films in Doane’s study, they do not push the feminist agenda forward in the way Mulvey or hooks imagined and called for. And yet, this study does not conclude that those delimitations are rooted in genre or classical narrative structures. Wheeler and Bailey’s films both prove this is far from the case, although they certainly never reached the large audiences that Campion, Armstrong, and Greenwald did. The more “art house” films like Moffatt’s *Bedevil* and Mita’s *Mauri*, which reflect anti-racist and anti-colonial politics, push the boundaries, or rather the “fall lines” outside of what many might consider a coherent narrative, at least to “western eyes.” Their films speak not only to a female spectator, but to a subaltern one, and perhaps exclusively so, because they deploy storytelling structures that are rooted in culturally specific forms and rituals. And this is really the crux of this dissertation’s conclusion. These films operate on differing feminist levels because they speak to different spectators. This study has analyzed how these different filmmakers reached out to their target audiences, and what methods they deployed to do so. The visual (in this case cinema) can serve as a form of theorizing.

This study argues that the grand narrative tradition can have great value for feminism. In many ways these filmmakers collectively seemed to answer Claire Johnston’s (1973) call to action for feminists to embrace the entertainment film. Though a few of these films belong in the “art house tradition” like Moffatt’s *Bedevil*, they all aimed for a theatrical release market. By working in the *grand narrative tradition* they could reach a wide audience and open the debate on

a large public platform that reached out to ordinary women, feminists, and men, about what constitutes feminism, a feminist film, and even a film. In this sense, these women's frontier films can be deployed to bridge theory and practice. I have had interesting responses to these films when screening them to rooms full of young women and men. The reactions are always diverse, but they always get everyone talking about the underlying issues, whether that be domestic violence or the oppression of black men. I remember vividly after a screening of *Daughters of the Dust*, one black female student asking me with such feeling, "Where can I find more films like that?" I wished I could have.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much more research is needed in the area of women's filmmaking, particularly in regard to women working in popular and mainstream markets – the big screen. In the past decade there have been a number of studies on women filmmakers, but these tend to focus on art-house, documentary, or experimental cinema. There has been very little work that examines how women directors navigate the popular media industry to tell stories about women and feminist concerns. Of the few women filmmakers working in dramatic film and television industries, even fewer have received any scholarly attention. Without this attention at the scholarly and critical levels, these filmmakers' work can quickly disappear from the national and global cinema landscapes, consequently becoming forgotten in cinema history and feminist consciousness. Indeed, Wheeler's *Loyalties* has gone out of print and has never been released on DVD. This issue is as relevant today as it was thirty-five years ago when Gillian Armstrong set out to make the first feature film directed by a woman in forty years in Australia. According to recent studies by Marcia Lauzen and Rita Francicelli, women are still very poorly represented in the key creative positions (director, writer, producer, cinematographer, and editor).

To echo Elsa Barkley-Brown's (1992) idea of polyrhythmic narrative in which "multiple rhythms" are played "simultaneously," this study aimed to reconstruct a multi-voiced meta-narrative comprised of the voices of different female filmmakers working within a diverse range of storytelling traditions such as the Hollywood Western, the African griot, Māori *waiata*, social realism, and avant-garde cinema. Analyzed collectively, a dynamic dialogue emerged, although it was not a dialogue rooted in "collectivity," but rather difference. However, this study fights against the fear expressed by Barkley-Brown that "all this attention to the differences among women will leave us with only a void, a vacuum, or chaos..."⁵ This meaningful dialogue can be instrumental in bringing about change, and it is often fraught with, or marked by, dissonance. The power of film is not only to construct meaningful stories that preserve culture, history, and identity, but in its ability to create meaningful dialogue, shift ideas, and reimagine new practices.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Linda Kupecek, "Loyalties: Anne Wheeler's Film Family," *Cinema Canada*, October 1985: 6.

² Houston A Baker, "Not Without My Daughters," *Transition*, 57 (1992): 163.

³ Ruth Picardi, "Notes on a Grand Winner," *The Observer*, 17 (October 1993): 3.

⁴ "My American Cousin," *The Canadian Film Encyclopedia*, (<http://tiff.net/CANADIANFILMENCYCLOPEDIA/content/films/my-american-cousin.>)

⁵ *Daughters of the Country* is a four-part dramatic series funded by the National Film Board of Canada. The series features stories about Métis women, set across different historical moments in Canada's development as a nation. Set in the late 1770s, *Ikwe* is about an Ojibwa woman married off to a white fur trader. *Ikwe* must endure separation from her family and tribe in order to help her white husband set up a post. Set during the 1850s, *Mistress Madeleine* focuses on the devastating impact changes in Hudson Bay policies had on the Métis common-law wives of white male employees. Set during on the Prairies during the depression, *Places Not Our Own* focuses on an impoverished and dislocated Métis family struggling to make ends meet in a racist society. Bailey produced the entire series, directing two of the four films, *Ikwe* and *The Wake*. The National Film Board of Canada, <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/our-collection/?idfilm=51678>.

⁶ *The Wake* also won a Best Film award at the American Indian Film Festival. *Native Networks*, http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/esp/rose/bailey_n.htm. *The Wake* won numerous Canadian television awards (Gemini) for Best Pay Television Dramatic Series, Best Writing in a Dramatic Program or Mini-Series (Sharon Riis), Best Performance by a leading Actress in a Dramatic Program or Mimi-Series (Victoria Snow), and Most Promising Actress Award (Diane Debassige). The film also garnered awards from the Yorkton Film Festival and the Festival of Films and Videos by Women. "The Wake," *The National Film Board of Canada*, <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/our-collection/?idfilm=16800#nav-prix>.

⁷ Marc Gervais, "Cannes 86 – The Year of Revelations," *Cinema Canada*, July/August 1986, 7. "Well crafted, superb in its handling of acting, and rich in its human (feminist) insights, *Loyalties* captures life at Lac La Biche in Northern Alberta and the complexities of cultural adaptation. It may well be the best dramatic portrayal of contemporary Canadian Indians yet seen."

Loyalties has won multiple awards, and was instrumental in establishing Wheeler as one of Canada's most important women filmmakers. Wheeler has been awarded six honorary doctorates and the Order of Canada for her contributions to Canadian filmmaking. "Anne Wheeler," *The Canadian Film Encyclopedia*, <http://tiff.net/CANADIANFILMENCYCLOPEDIA/content/bios/anne-wheeler>.

⁸ Library of Congress, National Film Registry, http://www.loc.gov/film/registry_titles.php.

"O Magazine included *Daughters* among its 50 Greatest Chick Flicks, and in 1999, the twenty-fifth Annual Newark Black Film Festival honored Dash and *Daughters of the Dust* as being one of the most important cinematic achievements in Black Cinema in the twentieth century." "Julie Dash," Women Make Movies, <http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/makers/fm128.shtml>.

⁹ The distributor J & M Entertainment sold the television rights for *Thousand Pieces of Gold* to every country in the world. “Smitten: A Love Story about Art,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/smitten/credits.html>.

¹⁰ Paul Byrnes, “My Brilliant Career,” *Australian Screen*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/my-brilliant-career/clip2/>. ASO film curator, Paul Byrnes wrote, “The film remains one of the high points of the ‘new wave’ of Australian cinema in the 1970s and a leading influence on women who followed in film in the 80s and 90s.”

¹¹ Liz McNiven, “A Short History of Indigenous Filmmaking,” *Australian Screen*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/collections/indigenous-filmmaking/>.

¹² “Merata Mita,” *New Zealand On Screen*, <http://www.nzonscreen.com/person/merata-mita/biography>. Mita states, “What you gain from Māori people is an incredible intensity and passion about the work being done.”

¹³ “Jane Campion,” *New Zealand On Screen*, http://www.nzonscreen.com/search?utf8=✓&search_text=jane+campion&search=search. *The Piano* has been included alongside such world cinema classics as *Citizen Kane*, *The Godfather*, and *Casablanca*.

¹⁴ “The French word *auteur* means ‘author’ and appears in a type of film criticism that sees the director as the controlling force in a film, as an artist who infuses the entire work with his/her personality and point of view...” Konigsberg, Ira, *The Complete Film Dictionary: 2nd Edition* (New York: Penguin Reference, 1997), 24.

¹⁵ Kuhn and Radstone, *The Woman’s Companion to International Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 21-22.

¹⁶ “Bedevil,” *Women Make Movies*, <http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c109.shtml>.

¹⁷ McNiven, “A Short History of Indigenous Filmmaking,” *Australia Screen*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/collections/indigenous-filmmaking/>.

¹⁸ “Julie Dash,” *Women Make Movies*, <http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/makers/fm128.shtml>.

¹⁹ “Merata Mita,” *New Zealand On Screen*, <http://www.nzonscreen.com/person/merata-mita/biography>. “*Mauri* is the only the second feature film drama to have a Māori woman director (1972’s *To Love a Māori* was co-directed by Ramai Hayward and husband Rudall).”

²⁰ Emiel Martens, “Māori on the Silver Screen: The Evolution of Indigenous Feature Filmmaking in Aotearoa/New Zealand,” *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 5, no. 1 (2012): 4.

²¹ Alistair Fox, “Jane Campion,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0039.xml>.

²² “A brief history of the Palm d’Or,” *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/festivalHistory/goldenpalm.html>.

²³ “Jane Campion,” *New Zealand on Screen*, <http://www.nzonscreen.com/person/jane-campion>.

²⁴ Tania Modleski claims that *The Ballad of Little Jo* is “the first Western written and directed by a woman since the silent era” (2). “Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls: An Interview with Maggie Greenwald” by Tania Modleski and Maggie Greenwald. *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (Winter, 1995-1996): 2-11.

²⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xiii.

²⁶ For statistics relating to the Hollywood cinema see Lauzen, Martha M, “The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind the Scenes Employment of Women in the Top 250 Films of 2012,” *Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film*, San Diego State University, <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html>. “In 2011, women comprised 18% of all directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors working on the top 250 domestic grossing films. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 2010 and an increase of 1 percentage point from 1998... Women accounted for 5% of directors, a decrease of 2 percentage points from 2010 and approximately half the percentage of women directors working in 1998.”

For the Canadian cinema, see Rina Fraticelli’s study *Women In View on Screen 2010-11 Film Report* (October 2012), <http://www.womeninview.ca/news/wiv-news/women-in-view-on-screen-4/>. “At institutions that have a clearer ‘market’ mandate, the number of projects submitted involving women directors is lower: 16% at Telefilm Canada – Feature Film Fund / 27% at the Canadian Television Fund, while the rate of acceptance is similar to the rate of application (Telefilm: 13% / CTF: 27%). At these institutions, women’s projects account for under 15% of the total budgets: 11% at Telefilm; 10% at the CTF; 14% of the budgets at SODEC (The Société de développement des entreprises culturelles) for 28% of the projects (2005-2006).”

²⁷ The Sydney Women’s Film Group was formed in 1971 with the aim of training women filmmakers, and making and distributing films on subject matter ignored by mainstream media. The activities of the SWFG were instrumental in raising the skills, confidence and participation of women in Australian filmmaking. The SWFG’s first project, *Film For Discussion*, directed by Martha Ansara, Jeni Thornley and others, was commenced in 1971 and released in 1973. One of the first projects screened was *Woman’s Day 20C* (1972), directed by Margot Knox, Virginia Coventry, Kaye Martyn and Robynne Murphy, a portrait of a housebound mother addicted to barbiturates. “Australian Film and Television Chronology,” *Australia on Screen*, <http://aso.gov.au/chronology/1970s/>.

²⁸ Rochelle Siemienowicz, “Love, Lust & Lies: An Interview with Gillian Armstrong,” *Australian Film Institute* (May 2010), http://www.afi.org.au/AM/ContentManagerNet/HTMLDisplay.aspx?ContentID=10727&Section=Love_Lust_and_Lies_An_Interview_with_Gillian_Armstrong

²⁹ Armstrong was one of twelve, along with Phillip Noyce and Chris Noonan, selected for the inaugural year of the AFTRS. Her graduation films *Satdee Night*, *Gretel*, and *100 A Day* won numerous awards and were selected for the Sydney Film Festival and Grenoble International Festival of Short Films in 1974. “Gillian Armstrong,” *The Big Screen Symposium*, <http://bigscreensymposium.com/speaker/gillian-armstrong/>.

³⁰ The Australian Film Commission has been replaced by Screen Australia. Screen Australia is the key Federal Government direct funding body for the Australian screen production industry. Its functions are to support and promote the development of a highly creative, innovative and commercially sustainable Australian screen production industry. Screen Australia was created under the Screen Australia Act 2008 and from 1 July 2008 took over the functions and appropriations of its predecessor agencies: the Australian

Film Commission (AFC), the Film Finance Corporation Australia (FFC) and Film Australia Limited. "Who We Are," *Screen Australia*, http://www.screenaustralia.com.au/about_us/Who-We-Are_pg.aspx.

³¹ Lisa French, "An Analysis of *Nice Coloured Girls*," *Senses of Cinema*, Australian Cinema, Issue 5 (April 2000), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/5/nice/>.

³² The same year that the Australian Film Commission established the Women's Film Fund (1975), the Whitlam Government had implemented human rights legislation in the form of the *Racial Discrimination Act* of 1975. "These legislative and policy changes were brought about by growing pressures from Aboriginal activists to abolish racist segregation policies, which had become unpopular on the global stage. This act helped create new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This was the real beginning for Indigenous self-representation and self-empowerment in the arts." "A Short History of Indigenous Filmmaking," *Screen Australia*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/collections/indigenous-filmmaking/>.

³³ Ibid. "In the early 1980s, the Film Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, now the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) employed a number of trainees. With a background in commercial television, Ralph Rigby, AIAS Video Fellow in the 1980s, facilitated rural and remote Aboriginal community access to video technology. In doing so, he enabled Indigenous peoples to tell their stories in their own way."

³⁴ Ibid. "CAAMA aimed to utilize *audiovisual* technology for cultural maintenance, self-expression and empowerment. Soon after, CAAMA moved into television broadcasting with Imparja Television. As a result CAAMA became the first Indigenous organization in the world to own a television station. In 1987, Aboriginal people in remote areas of central Australia voiced their concerns about the influence of mass media on their cultures. The Australian satellite Aussat was being launched and Aboriginal people requested resources to enable them to broadcast local material in their own languages. They also sought to control the content broadcast within their communities. In response, the federal government introduced the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme to deliver radio and television to rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The New Zealand Film Commission is a crown entity established in 1978. "We invest in feature films, short films, script and career development and marketing and promoting New Zealand films and filmmakers both here and overseas. We are committed to telling New Zealand stories through the medium of film." Regarding Māori filmmaking the NZ Film Commission states, "We actively encourage and support work with Māori and Pacific Island content and themes. We provide funding directly to Te Paepae Ataata as an alternative development pathway for Māori filmmakers." "About Us," *The New Zealand Film Commission*, <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/about-us>.

³⁷ Martens, "Māori on the Silver Screen: The Evolution of Indigenous Feature Filmmaking in Aotearoa/New Zealand," 4.

³⁸ Mita's documentaries were made through the Auckland Co-op Alternative Cinema. They were *The Hammer and the Anvil* (1979), about the trade union movement (1979) and *Karanga Hokianga Ki O Tamariki* about the Hokianga Catholic Māori community. "Merata Mita," *New Zealand on Screen*, <http://www.nzonscreen.com/person/merata-mita/biography>

³⁹ Alistair Fox, *Jane Campion: Authorship and Personal Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 241.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 108-09.

⁴¹ Andreas Furler, "Structure is Essential/Absolutely Crucial/One of the Most Important Things," in *Jane Campion Interviews*, ed. Virginia Wright Wexman, 91-95 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 93.

⁴² "Mandate," *National Film Board of Canada*, <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/about-the-nfb/organization/mandate/>

⁴³ Sandy Wilson directed the NFB documentary *Pen-Hi Grad* (1975). "Pen-Hi Grad," *National Film Board of Canada*, http://www.nfb.ca/film/pen_hi_grad/.

Anne Wheeler directed the award-winning Studio D documentary, *Great Grand Mother*. Wheeler's other films at the NFB were *Happily Unmarried* (1977), *Augusta* (1978), *Teach Me to Dance* (1978), *One's a Heifer* (1984), *A Change of Heart* (1984) and the feature docudrama *A War Story* (1981), narrated by Donald Sutherland, which explores her father's experiences as a doctor in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp during WWII. "Anne Wheeler," *National Film Board of Canada*, <https://www.nfb.ca/explore-all-directors/anne-wheeler>. Norma Bailey directed numerous documentaries for the NFB, including *The Performers* (1980), which won the Jury Prize for Short Film at the Cannes Film Festival. "Norma Bailey," IMDb - International Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0047425/>.

⁴⁴ Due to government funding cuts Studio D closed its doors in 1996. See: Vanstone, Gail, *D is for Daring: The Women behind the Films of Studio D* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2007), 11-12.

⁴⁵ "In 1981, the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, the first provincial film-funding agency in English-speaking Canada, opened its doors for business. Headed by entertainment lawyer Lorne MacPherson, the AMPDC started as a development lending bank, expanded into partial equity financing, and in its 15 year existence, invested \$16-million in Alberta projects." Kupecek, Linda. "Alberta Onscreen: Why fight for an indigenous film industry?" *Alberta Views*, Jan/Feb 2000, 18.

⁴⁶ The Government of Canada established the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1967. It would be re-named Telefilm Canada in 1984, "to better reflect the full range of its activities in film and television." In 1986 the Feature Film Fund was created "aimed at supporting works by Canadian filmmakers. This fund is to play a decisive role in the growth of Canadian cinema." Their mandate is "to foster and promote the development of the audiovisual industry in Canada." *Telefilm Canada*, <http://www.telefilm.ca/en/?q=en>.

⁴⁷ Colin Hoskins and Stuart McFadyen, "The Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund: An Evaluation and Some Recommendations," *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 12, no. 1 (Mar. 1986): 227-253.

⁴⁸ Judith Michaelson, "PBS's Playhouse Faces prospect of Fading Role," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1994.

⁴⁹ It was the film branch of the highly successful and powerful music company - Polygram.

⁵⁰ Patrice Apodaca, "Screen Play: PolyGram Hopes to Bolster Its Hollywood Presence With Purchase of Once-Venerable ITC Entertainment," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 21, 1995.

⁵¹ Polygram Entertainment films included *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill*, *Dead Man Walking*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking*

Barrels, Elizabeth, Trainspotting, and Priscilla, Queen of the Desert. "Michael Kuhn," *UK Jewish Film*, <http://ukjewishfilm.org/people/michael-kuhn/>.

⁵² Susan Lord attributed *Loyalties* with helping shape a "Canadian Gothic" in "Prairie cinema." Lord, Susan, "Canadian Gothic: Multiculturalism, Indigeneity, and Gender in Prairie Cinema," in *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture*, eds. Sheila Petty, Garry Sherbert, and Annie Gerin, Annie, 399-420 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2006). See also: Wood, Robin, "A Canadian (Inter)National Cinema: William MacGillivray's Life Classes," in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, eds., William Beard and Jerry White, 232-241 (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2002). Christopher Gittings identified *My American Cousin*'s contribution to the Canadian road movie tradition. Gittings, Christopher E., "The Road Movie: My American Cousin, Highway 61 and Goin' Down the Road," in *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation*, 150-153 (London: Routledge, 2002). See also: Veronneau, Pierre and Jane Critchlow, "Canadian Film: An Unexpected Emergence," *The Massachusetts Review* 1, no. ½ (Spring 1990): 213-226. This article also makes reference to Anne Wheeler.

⁵³ See: D. Bruno Starrs, "Unlike mainstream: Towards a definition of the Australian art film" in *Creative Nation: An Australian Cinema and Cultural Studies Reader*, eds., Amit Sarwal & Reema Sarwal, 54-72 (Delhi, India: SSS Publications, 2009). Dermody, Susan and Jacka, Elizabeth, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Vol.2* (Currency Press, Sydney, 1988). Prescott, Nicholas, Adrian, "All we see and all we seem..." Australian Cinema and National Landscape. *Understanding Cultural Landscapes Symposium*, 11-15 July 2005.

⁵⁴ See: Annabel Cooper, "On Viewing Jane Campion as an Antipodean," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, eds., Hilary Radner, Alistair Fox, and Irène Bessière, 279-304 (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2009). Crofts, Stephen, "Gender and Nationality in Four Countries' Reception of *The Piano*," in *Jane Campion's The Piano*, ed. Harriet Margolis, 135-16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Moine, Raphaëlle, "From Antipodean Cinema to International Art Cinema," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, ed. Radner, Fox, and Bessière, 189-204.

⁵⁵ Irene Bessier, "Jane Campion and the International Theme: From *Portrait of the Lady* to *An Angel at My Table*," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, ed. Radner, Fox, and Bessier, 157-173.

⁵⁶ See: Alistair Fox, "Puritanism and the Erotics of Transgression: The New Zealand Influence in Jane Campion's Thematic Imaginary," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, ed. Radner, Fox, and Bessière, 103-122. See also: Neill, Anna, "A Land Without a Past: Dreamtime and Nation in *The Piano*," in *Piano Lessons: Approaches to The Piano*, ed. Felicity Coombs, 136-47 (London: John Libbey & Company Ltd., 1999).

⁵⁷ Hilary Radner, "Screening Women's Histories: Jane Campion and the New Zealand Heritage Film, from Biopic to the Female Gothic," in *New Zealand Cinema: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Alistair Fox, Barry Keith Grant, and Hilary Radner, 259-275 (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2011).

⁵⁸ Bruce Harding, "'The Donations of History': *Mauri* and the Transfigured 'Mauri Gaze': Towards a Bi-national Cinema," in *New Zealand Cinema: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Fox, Grant, and Radner, 219-237.

⁵⁹ See: Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed, and Frida Freiberg, ed. *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Richmond, Australia: Greenhouse Publications, 1987). Creed, Barbara, "Women's Cinema in Australia," in *Australia For Women: Travel and Culture*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Kelin, 185-87 (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1994). Francke, Lizzie, "What are you

girls going to do?" *Sight and Sound* 5, no.4 (1995): 28-29. Robson, Jocelyn, *Girls' Own Stories: Australian and New Zealand Women's Films* (London: Scarlet Press, 1997). French, Lisa, "On Their Own Merits: Women and the Moving Image in Australia," in *Women Vision: Women and the Moving Image in Australia*, ed. Lisa French, 11-30 (Melbourne: Damned Publishing, 2003). Bertrand, Ina, "'Woman's voice': The autobiographical form in three Australian filmed novels," *Literature Film Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1993): 130-39.

⁶⁰ Regarding Julie Dash's aesthetics see: Alison Butler, "The Politics of Location and Dislocation: Women's Cinema and Cultural Identity," in *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, 89-118 (London and New: Wallflower, 2002). Dash, Julie, with Toni Cade Bambara and bell hooks, *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African-American Women's Film* (New York: New Press, 1992). Ramanathan, Geetha. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2006). Backstein, Karen, "The Cinematic Jazz of Julie Dash," *Cinéaste* 19, no. 4 (1993): 88.

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⁶¹ E. Ann Kaplan, "Women, Film, Resistance: Changing Paradigms," in *Women Filmmakers Refocusing*, ed Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul, 15-28 (New York: Routledge).

⁶² See: Kathleen Cummins, "On the Edge of Genre: Anne Wheeler's Maternal Gaze," in *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers*, ed. Brenda Austin-Smith and George Melnyk, 67-9 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2010). Lord, Susan, "States of Emergency in the Films of Anne Wheeler," in *North of Everything: Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, ed. Beard and White. Longfellow, Brenda, "Gender, Landscape, and Colonial Allegories in *The Far Shore*, *Loyalties* and *Mouvements du désir*," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage, Kass banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault, 165-182. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁶³ Modleski and Greenwald, "Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls," 2-12.

⁶⁴ See: Kathleen Anne McHugh, "The Piano: Surrealism, Melodrama, and Mimetic Infection," in *Jane Campion - Contemporary Film Directors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Radner, Hilary, "'In extremis': Jane Campion and the Woman's Film," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity* Radner, Fox, and Bessière, 3-24. Hardy, Ann, "Jane Campion and the Moral Occult," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, ed. Radner, Fox and Bessiere, 251-276. Gillet, Sue, "'The Piano is mine. It's mine.' My (Free Association with) Jane Campion, or, the Child in the Spectator," in *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, ed. Radner, Fox, Bessiere, 233-248.

⁶⁵ Ruth Barcan, and Madeleine Fogart, "Performing *The Piano*," in *Piano Lessons: Approaches to The Piano*, ed. Coombs, 3-18. See also: Sarmas, Lisa, "What rape is," *Arena Magazine* 8 (1993-4):14. "In August, 1993, the Coalition Against Sexual Violence Propaganda newsletter carried a two paragraph review of *The Piano*, with the first paragraph condemning it as sexist and the second declaring it to be

racist. The writer lamented what she saw as the film's shift away from a depiction of two strong women towards a focus on aggressive and coercive male sexuality," (7).

⁶⁶ Harriet Margolis, "'A Strange Heritage': From Colonization to Transformation?" in *Jane Campion's The Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20.

⁶⁷ Leonie Pihama, "Are Films Dangerous? A Māori Woman's Perspective on *The Piano*." *Hecate: Special Aotearoa/New Zealand Issue*, 20, no. 2 (1994): 239-24. Pihama likened Baines's appropriation of the Māori tattoos, *moko*, as the "white man gone Native" in a similar vein to the white male characters played by Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves* (1990) and Daniel Day-Lewis in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), 127-28.

⁶⁸ Reshela DuPuis, "Romanticizing Colonialism: Power and Pleasure in Jane Campion's *The Piano*," *The Contemporary Pacific* 8, 1 (Spring 1996), 52.

⁶⁹ Harriet Margolis, "Introduction" in *Jane Campion's The Piano*, ed. Harriet Margolis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 19.

⁷⁰ Harriet Margolis summarizes the debate around Campion's deployment and depiction of the Māori in her introduction.

⁷¹ Estella Tincknell, "The Time and the Place: Music and Costume and the "Affect" of History in the New Zealand Films of Jane Campion," in *New Zealand Cinema: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Fox, Grant, and Radner, 279-89.

⁷² See: Janet H Chu, "Film and Multiculturalism: Erasing Race in Nancy Kelly's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*" in *Changing Representations of Minorities, East and West: Selected Essays*, ed. Larry E. Smith and John Rieder, 75-97 (University of Hawaii Press, 1996). Feng, Peter X, *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video*, 38-67 (Duke University Press, 2002). Kang, L. Hyun-Yi, "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies: Interracial Romance and Cinematic Subjection," *Visual Anthropology Review*, 9, 1 (Spring 1993): 5-21.

⁷³ Caroline Brown, "The Representation of the Indigenous Other in *Daughters of the Dust* and *The Piano*," *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-19. "Located on the periphery of the ensemble cast and community drama, Saint Julian Last Child, 'Son of the Cherokee Nation,' is objectified on several levels: as a male character by a female filmmaker; as a non-black by an African American; as an indigenous American by a culture asserting its own reconstituted yet distinctively foreign slave heritage,"(6).

⁷⁴ Brenda Longfellow, "Gender, Landscape, and Colonial Allegories in *The Far Shore*, *Loyalties*, and *Mouvements du désir*," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema* ed. Armatage, Banning, Longfellow, and Marchessault, 174. See also: Emberley, Julia V., "Gender, History and Imperialism: Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties*," in *Feminism, Postmodernism, Development*, ed. Marianne H. Marchand and Jane Parpart, 94-109 (London: Routledge, 1995). Lord, Susan, "Canadian Gothic: Multiculturalism, Indigeneity, and Gender in Prairie Cinema," in *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture* ed. Petty, Sherbert, and Gerin, 399-420.

⁷⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1920), 9

⁷⁶ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 10

⁷⁸ J. Hoberman, "How the West Was Lost," in *The Western Reader*, ed. Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman (New York: Limelight Editions, 1998), 86.

⁷⁹ Jim Kitses, *Horizons West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

⁸⁰ Nathan Wolski, "All's not quiet on the Western Front – Rethinking Resistance and Frontiers in Aboriginal Historiography," in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, ed. Lynette Russell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 217.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 219

⁸² Elsa Barkley-Brown, "What Has Happened Here? The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 295-312.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 297.

⁸⁴ Brooks-Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and Meta Language of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 251-74.

⁸⁵ Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History*, 28-50 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Primarily interested in power relations, Scott argued that social hierarchies are created through gender constructions as produced in language and discourse, but these are not fixed. They have in fact been adapted throughout history. "The point of new historical investigation is to disrupt the notion of fixity, to discover the nature of the debate or repression that leads to the appearance of timeless permanence" (43). Scott was decidedly against "grand narratives."

⁸⁶ Denise Riley, "*Am I that Name?*" *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988). Using post-structuralism, Riley traced the changes in the notion of womanhood and the shifting historical constructions of the category of "women" in relation to other categories central to concepts of personhood: the soul, mind, the body, nature, and the social.

⁸⁷ Enakshi Dua, "Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought: Scratching the Surface of Racism," in *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-racist Feminist Thought*, ed. Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson, 7-34 (Toronto: Women's Press, 1999). Dua resists universalizing the indigenous woman's voice or the voice of the immigrant, foregrounding a diverse range of black and indigenous women's voices, from both the past, such as Sojourner Truth, and the present in the work of Dionne Brande. Through this method, Dua constructs a multi-voiced narrative of resistance and agency. Bannjeri highlights Canada's shameful history of segregation policies in which "First Nations" are permitted to form a nation, but without a state and are subject to continual racial repression in same vein as Palestinians.

⁸⁸ Himani Bannjeri, "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation," in *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*, ed. Himani Bannjeri, 63-86 (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000).

Chapter 1

¹ Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" (1973) in *Feminism & Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 22-33 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23. See also Johnston, Claire, "Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies" (1975) in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley, 36-45 (New York: Routledge/BFI, 1988).

² Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18: 2 Part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

³ Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979). Gilbert and Gubar deployed the "madwoman in the attic" figure as a metaphor for the Victorian woman writer who was forced to become the shadow figure to the Victorian "angel in the house."

⁴ Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," 30.

⁵ Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 98.

⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, 53-76 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Smith-Rosenberg examined unpublished women's "love" letters and diaries focused around same-sex relations between Victorian American middle-class women, reconstructing a homo-social female world, in which men played a secondary role. These voices contradicted assumptions about repressed female Victorian sexuality. See: Stansell, Christine. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987). Stansell also foregrounded female desires from Victorian urban America, but those of popular class women who left no written records. Stansell focused on women's negotiation of urban spaces, such as the Bowery Girl, who straddled the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. The Bowery Girl boldly crossed into (and invaded) "male" spaces such as the street and the workplace (i.e. the factory), engendering fear and moral panic in the minds and discourses of her middle-class reformers.

⁷ Vincent Osteria, and Thierry Jousee, "The Piano: An Interview with Jane Campion," in *Jane Campion Interviews*, 124-132, ed. Wexman, 125.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, xiii and 100.

¹⁰ Jill Roe, "My Brilliant Career," in *Making Film and Television Histories: Australia and New Zealand*, ed. James Bennett and Rebecca Beirne (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 221.

¹¹ Jill Roe, "Franklin, Stella Maria Sarah Miles," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/franklin-stella-maria-sarah-miles-6235>.

¹² See excerpts from reviews of McCunn's novel at the Random House website: <http://www.randomhouse.com/book/204041/thousand-pieces-of-gold-by-ruthanne-lum-mccunn#praise>.

¹³ Modleski and Greenwald, "Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls," 7.

¹⁴ Natalie Zemon-Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983). Zemon-Davis re-told the popular story of "Pansette," a 16th century French peasant accused of identity theft. In her narrative Zemon-Davis imagined the "voice" of Bertrande de Rolls, Martin Guerre's illiterate peasant wife, a woman who would have left no official written accounts. Zemon-Davis advocated for the role of subjective "stories" in reconstructing the past.

¹⁵ "It assumes a consistent or inherent meaning for the human body – outside the social or cultural construction – and thus the ahistoricity of gender itself. History becomes, in a sense, epiphenomenal, providing endless variations on the unchanging theme of fixed inequality," Scott, 34.

¹⁶ Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," *College English* 34, no.1 (1972): 18-30.

¹⁷ Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic of Women: Notes of the 'Political Economy of Sex'" in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 27-62 (New York: Routledge, 1997). Rubin analyzed the ritual of the interfamily exchange, "traffic," of women engaging with the anthropological work of Levis-Strauss, psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan), as well as theories of Marx and Engels.

¹⁸ Hélène Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875-893.

¹⁹ Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One," (1977) in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 323-330 (New York: Routledge, 1997).

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," (1982) in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 389-392 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²¹ Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" (1980) in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Jones, 130-135.

²² Many of these feminists came out of the British Film Institute's *Screen* journal collective rooted in post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist methods of analysis.

²³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (1975) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 34-47 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

²⁵ Teresa De Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory," in *Technologies of Gender*, 127-46 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

²⁶ Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" (1973), in E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32.

²⁷ "Eva Rickard," *New Zealand History Online*, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/eva-rickard>. Rickard (1925 - 6 December 1997) was a Māori land rights and for women's rights activist. "She is perhaps best

known for leading the Raglan golf course protest in the 1970s. The Raglan protest, and others at Bastion Point in central Auckland, helped to change land legislation. If land taken for public works is no longer needed, the government is now required to return it to the original owners.”

²⁸ Box office results for *The Piano* according to IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107822/?ref_=sr_1

²⁹ Box office results for *My American Cousin* according to IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089647/business>

³⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Thought and the Politics of Empowerment: 10th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Collins looked at anti-slave activism (Sojourner Truth), women’s literature and poetry (Zora Neale Hurston), jazz (Billie Holiday), as well as the ordinary testimonies (“wisdoms”) of working-class and enslaved women, including mothers. The voice of black mothers, as heads of families or community leaders and caregivers were of particular importance to Hill-Collins’s work.

³¹ “Sankofa Film and Video was set up in the summer of 1983 by five aspiring filmmakers: Isaac Julien, Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood, Nadine Marsh-Edwards, and Robert Cruz. Graduates from various art colleges and polytechnics in London, they were part of a wave of black independent filmmakers who emerged in the 1980s, determined to tell their own stories in their own way. Sankofa was one of several collectives and film workshops supported by the Greater London Council (abolished in 1986) and the new broadcaster Channel 4 to encourage diversity. Companies such as Retake Film and Video, Black Audio Film Collective, Ceddo, and Sankofa introduced television and film audiences to new perspectives on British culture and specifically the Black and Asian experience of this culture.” Ann Ogidi, “Sankofa Film and Video,” *Screen Online*. British Film Institute, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/521843/>

³² Jane Gaines, “White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory” (1988) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 337.

³³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Books, 1991), 123.

³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 66-111 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

³⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha, with Nancy Chen, “Speaking Nearby,” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 327.

³⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” (1991) in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, 17-42 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Difference: ‘A Special Third World Woman Issue’,” (1989) in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 151-173 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³⁸ Andrew Tudor, “Genre” in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 7.

³⁹ Barry Keith Grant, ed., “Introduction” in *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), xi.

⁴⁰ Patrick Phillips, "Genre, Star and Auteur," in *An Introduction to Film Studies – 2nd Edition*, ed. Jill Nelmes (London: Routledge, 1999), 169.

⁴¹ "By 1959 there were thirty-two Western series in prime time," (272). Brown, Les, "The American Networks," in *Television: An International History*, ed., Anthony Smith, 259-284 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴² R.L. Wilson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: An American Legend*. (New York: Random House, 1998), 316.

⁴³ Douglas Pye, "Introduction: Criticism and the Western," in *The Book of Westerns*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (New York: Continuum, 1996). "The Western is set on the frontier at a time when forces of social order and anarchy are still in tension; the 'formula,' to use Cawelti's term, is an adventure story with its apotheosis of the hero who stands between opposing forces in a symbolic landscape; the plot generally involves some form of pursuit, almost inevitably ending in a moment of transcendent and heroic violence; the characters can be divided into three main groups: the townspeople or settlers; hero or heroes; villain or villains" (10).

⁴⁴ Douglas Pye, "The Western (Genre and Movies)" in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). "It is also worth emphasizing the continuity of the developing images of the West in America with much older ideas and myth. So the images of the garden connect with much earlier images – the Garden of Hesperides and other earthly paradises to be found in the direction of the sunset – and the opposition of garden and desert can easily take up the biblical images of the promised Land and the wilderness. Similarly, views of the Indian are at least partially formed from earlier images of the noble savage. –the potential sources of a number of conflicting but interrelated streams of thought and imagery" (148).

⁴⁵ Hoberman, "How the West Was Lost," 86

⁴⁶ Ian Cameron, "Foreword" in *The Book of Westerns*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (New York: Continuum, 1996) 7.

⁴⁷ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 10.

⁴⁸ Konigsberg, "One-Reeler," *The Complete Film Dictionary*, 273. "A short film, generally about fifteen minutes in silent film days and eleven minutes with sound. Most early silent films were one to two reels before the rise of the feature film."

⁴⁹ David Lusted, "Social Class and the Western as Male Melodrama" in *The Book of Westerns*, eds. Ian Cameron, and Douglas Pye (New York: Continuum, 1996). "The Western can be seen as a male action genre exploring changing expectations and notions of masculine identity through fantasy, dramatizing the psychic and emotional conflicts within and between men..." 65-66.

⁵⁰ Pye, "Introduction: Criticism and the Western," 14.

⁵¹ Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44.

⁵² Susan Hayward, "Westerns," *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*. (London: Routledge, 1996). Writing on the introduction of sex to the Western, via Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* (1943/46), Hayward argued, "Jane Russell was the first of a number of actresses to play the role of a 'smouldering', sexy, décolleté

Mexican woman. Sex was launched, but it had to be with stereotypes. Plenty of hot-blooded foreign womanhood but not ‘nice, nice Ms. American pie’ – she had to be kept virginal at all costs. Until the eruption of sex the characterization of women was fairly peripheral. The Western is a man’s movie. A man with a horse, a man in action, a loner who leaves the woman behind rather than staying. His lust for adventure far outweighs his lust for women,” (418).

⁵³ In many ways the “saloon girl” serves a similar role to the *femme fatale* in thrillers, gangster pictures, and *film noirs*.

⁵⁴ Hayward, “Westerns,” *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, 41.

⁵⁵ Pam Cook, “Women and the Western” (1988) in *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), 43. Cook highlighted Mae West’s Klondike Annie in Raoul Walsh’s *Klondike Annie* (1936), Doris Day’s Calamity Jane in *Calamity Jane* (1953), Joan Crawford’s Vienna in Nicholas Ray’s *Johnny Guitar* (1954), and Barbara Stanwyck’s Jessica Drummond Cook in Samuel Fuller’s *Forty Guns*. Cook argued that these feisty heroines dressed as men, carried guns, consumed alcohol, had sexual relations outside of marriage, and found ways to support themselves financially in order to survive in a “women-less milieu.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51

⁵⁸ Rayne Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 698-714.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* “The natives are of a darker color than he, and they practice a pagan religion. The man is captured by the king (Pasha, Moor, Sultan) and thrown into a dungeon to await death. Before he is executed, however, the pasha’s beautiful daughter – smitten with the elegant and wealthy visitor – rescues him and send him homeward. But she pines away for love of the now remote stranger who has gone home, apparently forgotten her, and contracted a marriage with a ‘noble’ ‘lady’ of his own kind. In all the versions, she follows him to his own land, and in most, she arrives on his wedding day whereupon he throws over his bride-to-be for the darker but more beautiful Princess. In most versions, she becomes a Christian, and she and Lord Beichan live happily ever after,” (698-699).

⁶⁰ Maryann Oshana, “Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth,” in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 46-50. In her analysis, Oshana highlighted the important leadership and advisory roles indigenous American women played in their communities, a stark contrast to the simplistic one-dimensional and degrading depictions seen in Hollywood Westerns.

⁶¹ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975). “Not until the end of the seventeenth century, when the tragic contradictions inherent in such experience could no longer be ignored, were the Indian women depicted more usually as hag-like, ugly and immoral,” (5).

⁶² Elise M. Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 21. Marubbio traced the Indian Maiden figure across nearly one hundred years of cinema, focusing on thirty-four films, primarily Westerns.

⁶³ Ibid. "In all these sympathetic films of the fifties and sixties there was no major breakthrough in the roles of Indian women. The women's image has remained consistently backward and static. The roles for women are clearly defined: if they are not being raped or murdered, they are usually shown as slaves, household drudges, or bodies en masse in camps and caravans. Women are most often portrayed as victims, convenient objects for men to rape, murder, avenge or ridicule," (48).

⁶⁴ Hayward, "Westerns," in *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, 418.

⁶⁵ Pye, "Introduction: Criticism and the Western." "It is as though the ending on the frontier as a clear line of settlement in the late nineteenth century and the consequent end of the unsettled West to feed the imagination meant that the twentieth century Western story must finally be about the integration into society that had become inevitable," (14).

⁶⁶ It should also be noted that the Japanese Samurai film is often deemed to be the origin for many of these International Westerns, which, it could be argued, are a hybrid of both Japanese and Hollywood traditions.

⁶⁷ Tassilo Schneider, "Finding a New *Heimat* in the Wild West: Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s," in *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson (London: BFI Publishing, 1998). The German film adaptation of Karl May's romantic vision of the West, *Der Schatz im Silbersee/Treasure of Silver Lake* was an overwhelming commercial success throughout Europe. Directed by Harold Reinl, *Treasure of Silver Lake* "became the most successful German production since the war, was distributed internationally (released in sixty countries), and did extremely well throughout Europe.... Its success was ultimately responsible for the avalanche of European (later mostly Italian) Westerns, some of which would eventually capture the American market," (142).

⁶⁸ "Red Westerns" were also known as Soviet Westerns. *White Sun of the Desert* (1969) is perhaps the best known of the Red Westerns made during the Soviet era. Vincent Bohlinger argued, "*White Sun of the Desert*, in fact, adheres very closely to what Will Wright describes as the 'classical plot' of Westerns: 'the story of the lone stranger who rides into a troubled town and cleans it up' while 'winning the respect of the townsfolk.' The film's particulars, even when altered to reflect the cultural aspects of the Soviet Union, map perfectly onto the syntax of the American Western." Bohlinger, Vincent, "'The East is a Delicate Matter': *White Sun of the Desert* and the Soviet Western," in *International Westerns: Re-Locating the Frontier*, ed. Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, 373-393 (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2014), 382.

⁶⁹ According to Madhuja Mukherjee *Sholay* can be "read as a self-conscious reworking of post-war Hollywood Westerns in terms of its visual-scape, iconography, characterization and ideological implications." See: Mukherjee, Madhuja, "The Singing Cowboys: *Sholay* and the Significance of (Indian) Curry Westerns within Post-Colonial Narratives," *Transformations: Journal of Media & Culture* Issue 24 (2014), www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/24/02.shtml.

⁷⁰ Marcia Landy, "He Went Thataway: The Form and Style of Leone's Italian Westerns," in *The Western Reader*, ed. Kitses and Rickman, 215.

⁷¹ See: Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans From Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998). Frayling argued that Leone's hugely successful spaghetti Westerns were rooted in a "'critical cinema,' utilizing the internal conventions of the genre (and extending them), in order critically to examine not so much the mythology of the frontier itself, as a later cinematic mythology, debased but still producing 'infatuated tributes.' A form of 'cinema about cinema' – but one with the potential to 'comment' as well," (40).

⁷² Seminal studies from this period are: Cook, Pam and Claire Johnston, "The Place of Women in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh" (1974), in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens, 19-27 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Doane, Mary Ann, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator" (1982) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 418-436 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Kaplan, E. Ann, "The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*" (1983) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 466-478; Kuhn, Annette, "Women's Genres" (1984) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 437-449.

⁷³ Linda Williams, "'Something Else Besides a Mother': *Stella Dallas* and The Maternal Melodrama" (1984), in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Erens, 158.

⁷⁴ *Christopher Strong* (1933), which starred Katherine Hepburn, is about Christopher Strong, a middle-aged nobleman and politician, happily married with a grown daughter. Hepburn is Lady Cynthia Darrington, a dedicated aviatrix so consumed by flying that she has no time for romance. The two fall in love, and their affair threatens Strong's marriage and career." Turner Classic Movies, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article.html?isPreview=&id=158602%7C311&name=Christopher-Strong>. *Craig's Wife* (1936), which starred Rosalind Russell, is about "a domineering woman marries a wealthy man for his money, and then uses her position to further her own ambitions for money and power." IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0027474/>). *Dance Girl Dance!* (1940) is about "two women (Lucille Ball and Maureen O'Hara) who pursue life in show business from opposite ends of the spectrum: burlesque and ballet. The film is a meditation on the disparity between art and commerce. The dancers strive to preserve their own feminist integrity, while fighting for their place in the spotlight and for the love of male lead Louis Hayward." Library of Congress: National Film Registry, 2007, <http://www.loc.gov/film/nfr2007.html>.

⁷⁵ Claire Johnston, "Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies" (1975) in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 142.

⁷⁶ Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 31.

⁷⁷ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁷⁸ Flitterman-Lewis argued that Epstein deployed tropes of the maternal melodrama to "say something different" from that of her French male contemporaries, who saw themselves as countering the dominant cinema, but were driven by nationalist sentiment rooted in the patriarchal.

⁷⁹ Susan Hayward, "Melodrama" in *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 211.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 201.

⁸¹ Annette Kuhn, "Women's Genres," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 447-448.

⁸² Mary Anne Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987). Doane argued that the heroine's identification is not, however, with an eroticized female or with the male image as spectacle, but with herself as image, placing herself in a masochistic position of identification. Rather than investing the female gaze with desire, the films' visual and sound regimes imbue it with anxiety and fear, compromising female pleasure. Interestingly, this process involves the distinction between subject of the gaze and its object to be dissolved, identifying the potential for female subjectivity, (117).

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- ⁸³ Marcia Landy, "Introduction," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 14.
- ⁸⁴ Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination" in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 58.
- ⁸⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 80.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 4
- ⁸⁷ Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University, 1991. First published in *Monogram*, no. 4 (1972), 2-15), 68
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 69
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 69
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 77
- ⁹¹ hooks, *Black Looks*, 135.
- ⁹² *Ibid*.
- ⁹³ Jane Shattuc, "Having a Good Cry Over the Color Purple: The Problem of Affect and Imperialism in Feminist Theory," in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 147.
- ⁹⁴ S. Dworkin, "The making of the color purple," *Ms. Magazine* (December, 1985), 68-70. Cited in Shultz, "The Lesbian Problem: Celie and Shug in *The Color Purple*," *Lesbian Histories*, University of Michigan, http://sitemaker.umich.edu/lesbianhistories/browse_the_essays&mode=single&recordID=0000c0a8de1200007d4e50500000133a10cfa0150c39fb8&nextMode=list.
- ⁹⁵ Shattuc. "*The Color Purple*, both as a novel as well as a film, follows the utopian tradition of the black bourgeois uplift literature tradition. The film traces the classic slave narrative structure as Celie is liberated from patriarchal enslavement while simultaneously becoming literate. Jacqueline Bobo offers strong evidence of the positive ideological influence that the film had on black women. They were 'moved' by 'the fact [that] Celie eventually triumphs in the film.' She chronicles how they 'cried,' 'became angry,' and finally 'became proud' of Celie's liberation. Bobo concludes that 'Black women have discovered something progressive and useful in the film.' This discovery was made through the emotive power of identification with the film's Utopian logic,"(148).
- ⁹⁶ Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 63.
- ⁹⁷ Barry Keith Grant, "Introduction," in *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. ed. Grant, 1. B
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid*. "Probably the most common image in horror movies, whatever the sub-genre – from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) to *Candyman* (1992), and even before that in Gothic art (perhaps most notably Henry

Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) – is what Harvey Roy Greenberg, in his essay on *King Kong* (1933) in this volume, calls the beast in the boudoir. Most often in such scenes (but not always), the monster is coded as male, the victim female. Typically, her vulnerability and sexuality are heightened because she is a comely maiden wearing a night-gown or a wedding-dress or some other light-coloured garment," (5).

⁹⁹ Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks" (1983) in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant, 15-34.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" (1986) in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant, 35-65.

¹⁰¹ Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (1987) in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant, 66-113.

Chapter 2

¹ Modleski and Greenwald, "Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls," 7.

² "The griot profession is hereditary and has long been a part of West African culture. The griots' role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people; praise songs are also part of the griot's repertoire." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/246348/griot>.

³ Karen Alexander, "Daughters of the Dust - Julie Dash, Director," *Sight and Sound* 3:9 (1991): 20-23.

⁴ *Ibid*, 30.

⁵ Dash, with Cade Bambara and hooks. *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African-American Woman's Film*, 32.

⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷ Pascale Lamche, "Interview with Merata Mita," *Framework*, 25 (Autumn1984): 3

⁸ "There are many forms of *waiata* used for different purposes including *oriori* (lullabies), *waiata tangi* (laments), *waiata aroha* (songs of love), *ngeri* (a type of chant), *manawawera* (a form of challenge), and *waiata poi* (poi songs). When performing a *waiata*, it is important to choose a song appropriate for the occasion. *Waiata* are often performed at the end of *whaikarero* (speeches) to support what has been said. They can also be sung to remove *tapu* (restrictions) or to engage, entertain, calm, or comfort the listener." Karero Māori, www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/waiata.html.

See also: *Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, www.teara.govt.nz/en/te-mana-o-te-wahine-maori-women/page-4. "There is a strong tradition of Māori women as poets and composers. In his collection of traditional Māori *waiata* (songs), Ngā mōteatea, Āpirana Ngata noted that women dominated as composers. He suggested students of the Māori language 'delve into the songs so as to discover the nature of the spirit of womankind (as expressed) in the songs they composed.'"

⁹ Catherine Summerhayes, "Haunting Secrets: Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil*," *Film Quarterly* 58, no.1 (Fall 2004): 14-24. "One (apocryphal?) story of *Bedevil*'s first screening tells how a famous figure in the Australian film industry argued quite publicly and vehemently with her husband, an equally famous film

critic, long into the opening night party and over the next couple of days. Their argument proceeded along these lines: ‘That was positively the worst film I have ever seen.’ – ‘darling, don’t be silly, it’s a work of art...It should be in an art gallery.’ This anecdote indicates the deep disquiet that people still feel when trying to understand any manifestation of Moffatt’s artistic practice – a practice that continues to stretch the boundaries of form and genre,” (14).

¹⁰ Many (male) international filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman, Robert Altman, David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, Lars von Trier, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Charlie Kaufman, all deemed important film auteurs who have made significant contributions to world cinema, have worked with non-linear and/or highly stylized storytelling structures.

¹¹ There is a long history of the Western’s relationship with wide-angle “big screen” cinematography. This goes back to one of the first films, *The Great Train Robbery*. During the advent of television, Hollywood developed wide-screen technologies in order to lure audiences back to the cinema. *How the West Was Won* is an epic Western that introduced audiences to technologies like Cinerama. Westerns were particularly suited to widescreen aesthetics due to the prevalence of landscapes and high levels of action.

¹² Dash, 31

¹³ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 225.

¹⁴ Bernard Hermann was a Hollywood music composer known for his work in the horror genre, notably on Alfred Hitchcock films (*Psycho*, *Vertigo*). His score for *Psycho* (1960), particularly the infamous shower scene, has become iconic in the horror genre. See: “Bernard Hermann,” IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002136/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm.

¹⁵ Subjective camera is a technique for employing the camera in such a way that the point of view of a specific character is suggested. The camera might be angled or tilted to suggest the character’s perspective; a panning shot might suggest his or her examination of a scene; or a trucking shot suggest the character’s movement. Konigsberg, Ira, *The Complete Film Dictionary: Second Edition* (New York: Penguin Reference, 1997), 400.

¹⁶ “Shallow space involves staging the action in relatively few planes of depth. It is the opposite of *deep space*,” (481). Bordwell, David and Kristen Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction – Fifth Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997.) “Deep space is an arrangement of *mise-en-scene* elements so that there is considerable distance between the place closest to the camera and the one farthest away. Any or all of these planes may be in focus,” (478).

¹⁷ Kelly and Yamamoto Productions, <http://kellyyamamotoproductions.tumblr.com>.

¹⁸ See: Fiona Atwood, “Weird Lullaby Jane Campion’s *The Piano*,” *Feminist Review* 58 (1998): 85–101. Abstract: “The article examines the construction of woman’s voice, gaze and desire in Jane Campion’s Oscar-winning film *The Piano*, 1993, with particular reference to the film’s central character, Ada, and to the traditional female figures which her character suggests - siren, mermaid, Little Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard’s wife. It investigates the ways in which *The Piano* interrogates and disturbs traditional patriarchal narratives, ways of speaking and seeing, and patriarchal constructions of bodily pleasure and desire; revealing these as partial, hard of hearing, short sighted and incapable of pleasure.”

See: Jaime Bihlmeyer, "Bluebeard in Jane Campion's *The Piano*: A Case Study in Intertextuality as Enunciation of Femininity in Mainstream Movies," *International Journal of Humanities* 8, no. 7: 183-190. Abstract: "The Bluebeard folktale is (re)produced in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) as the featured performance in a pageant that a minister organizes for his colonial New Zealand congregation. This construction-en-abyme is representative of intertextuality in terms of Julia Kristeva's 'affirmative negativity.' The paper explores intertextuality in *The Piano* as an agent of a multiplex and extra-lingual dialogism linked to FEMININITY and the female gaze."

See: Maria Tartar, *Secrets Beyond the Door: "Bluebeard" in Folklore, Fiction, and Film*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006). Abstract: "The tale of Bluebeard's Wife--the story of a young woman who discovers that her mysterious blue-bearded husband has murdered his former spouses--no longer squares with what most parents consider good bedtime reading for their children. But the story has remained alive for adults, allowing it to lead a rich subterranean existence in novels ranging from Jane Eyre to Lolita and in films as diverse as Hitchcock's *Notorious* and Jane Campion's *The Piano*. In this fascinating work, Maria Tatar analyzes the many forms the tale of Bluebeard's Wife has taken over time, particularly in Anglo-European popular culture."

See: Christina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. (Pittsburg: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Abstract: "*Postmodern Fairy Tales* seeks to understand the fairy tale not as children's literature but within the broader context of folklore and literary studies. It focuses on the narrative strategies through which women are portrayed in four classic stories: 'Snow White,' 'Little Red Riding Hood,' 'Beauty and the Beast,' and 'Bluebeard.' Bacchilega traces the oral sources of each tale, offers a provocative interpretation of contemporary versions by Angela Carter, Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, Margaret Atwood, and Tanith Lee, and explores the ways in which the tales are transformed in film, television, and musicals."

¹⁹ *Bluebeard* is a European folktale by Charles Perrault (*Cinderella*). The story focuses around the murderous Bluebeard, a wealthy aristocrat, whose wives keep disappearing in the confines of his castle, and his innocent new bride. Bluebeard proposes to a young virginal girl in the village, choosing her over her sisters. The sisters are relieved that Bluebeard did not choose them because Bluebeard is generally feared. After they have married, Bluebeard goes away leaving his innocent new wife with a set of keys. Bluebeard permits her to use all the keys, except one, which leads to a forbidden room. While Bluebeard is gone the young wife cannot resist temptation, and going against her husband's orders, enters the forbidden room. Inside she discovers, to her horror, the bloody corpses of Bluebeard's former wives. Bluebeard is a serial wife killer. The young wife accidentally drops the key in the pool of blood at her feet, and though she retrieves it, cannot wipe away all the blood. When Bluebeard returns he discovers the bloody key, evidence that his wife has betrayed his trust. He flies into a rage, promising to kill her. The young wife manages to escape into a tower with her sister. There the women keep Bluebeard at bay, whilst her two brothers arrive and kill Bluebeard. In another version it is the young wife who manages to kill Bluebeard herself. Either way, she escapes death and Bluebeard dies. *Myth Encyclopedia*, www.mythencyclopedia.com/Be-Ca/Bluebeard.html#b.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kari E. Lokke, "Bluebeard and *The Bloody Chamber*: The Grotesque of Self-Parody and Self-Assertion," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* X, no. 1 (1988): 7

²² Silverman, 164

²³ Doane, 112

²⁴ Doane argued, “There is however, a more ‘old fashioned’ means of articulating the effects of such a presence-in-absence: letters. The number of film titles that which invoke this method of communication testifies to its significance: *Love Letters* (1945), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), *The Letter, A Letter To Three Wives* (1948). The letter is first and foremost evidence of a crime...” Doane, 113.

²⁵ Social realist traditions are embedded in the aesthetics of Canada’s national cinema. *The Wake* was produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada (founded by John Grierson) with a long entrenched documentary, social issue film, and experimental tradition. Wheeler and Bailey both began their filmmaking careers at the NFB out West making feminist themed documentaries and shorts before they turned to long-form drama.

²⁶ Gillian Armstrong Interview. *My Brilliant Career* Special Edition DVD (2005), Blue Underground Inc.

²⁷ Peter Britos, “A Conversation With Merata Mita,” *Spectator* 23, no.1 (Spring 2003): 53-62.

Chapter 3

¹ Lupecek, *Cinema Canada*, 7.

² Michael Martin, “Making Movies That Matter: A Conversation with Julie Dash,” *Black Camera* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 7

³ Erica Burman, “Motherhood” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed. Lorraine Code (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 352.

⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1963).

⁵ Lynn Alice, “Dorothy Dinnerstein,” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* ed., Code, 136.

⁶ Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. (New York: Other Press, 1999. First published 1977 by Harper & Row, 1977). Citations are to the Other Press edition, 77.

⁷ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

⁸ Lorraine Code, “Nancy Chodorow,” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* ed. Code, 84.

⁹ Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997. First published 1976 by McGraw-Hill). Citations are to the Duke University Press edition, viii.

¹⁰ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. First published 1971 by Bantam Books). Citations are to the FSG edition.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women,” in *The Moth and Other Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1974. First published 1942), 237.

¹² Anne Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*. (London: Gower, 1985. First published 1972 by Temple Smith).

¹³ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 42.

¹⁴ Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Nicholson.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 240.

¹⁷ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: The Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875-893. Cixous argued, "My text is written in white and black, in 'milk' and 'night.' ... A woman is never far from 'mother' There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink," (881-882).

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Alice Jardine and Thomas Gora. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 305.

¹⁹ Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 57

²⁰ Wilma King, "'Suffer With Them Until Death: Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America,'" in eds., Gaspar, David Barry and Darlene Clark Hine. *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 147.

²¹ The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>.

²² Sam Grey, "Decolonising Feminism: Aboriginal Women and the Global 'Sisterhood'," *Enweyin: The Way We Speak VIII* (January 2004): 13.

²³ Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975): 698-714.

²⁴ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981).

²⁵ Sojourner Truth was a well-known African-American anti-slavery activist. She is famous for her speech later titled, "Ain't I am Woman?" which was delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851. See: Mabee, Carleton, with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993, 1995).

²⁶ *Ibid*, 70

²⁷ Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London: Verso, 1979).

²⁸ Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 119-120.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 187-215.

³⁰ Harriett Pipes McAdoo, "African-American Families," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed. Code, 9.

³¹ Lisa J. Udel, "Revision and Resistance: The Politics of Native Women's Motherwork," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* XX11, no. 2 (2001): 43-62.

³² M.A. Jaimes-Guerrero, "Native Women, Civil Rights and Sovereignty," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed. Code, 360.

³³ Directed by Michael Curtiz, *Mildred Pierce* revolves around a divorced single-mother, Mildred Pierce (Joan Crawford), with career ambitions. Most of Mildred's ambition is focused on trying to please her spoiled eldest daughter, Veda, who is greedy and generally rotten. There is a love triangle involving Mildred, her lover/husband, Monty, and Veda. Mildred is willing to sacrifice everything for Veda. The film begins with the murder of Monty. Mildred is a prime suspect and her police interrogation leads to a revelation of how Veda turned out the way she did. See: "Mildred Pierce," IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037913/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

³⁴ Directed by King Vidor *Stella Dallas* revolves around Stella (Barbara Stanwyck) a working-class woman who marries a wealthy man. They have a daughter, Laurel. Due to their class differences Stella and her husband separate. Stella is driven to make her daughter happy, and goes to great lengths to do so. However, due to Laurel's privileged childhood, class tensions develop between mother and daughter. Stella comes to the conclusion Laurel would be better off without her, leading her to make the ultimate sacrifice as a mother. See: "Stella Dallas," IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029608/>.

³⁵ Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 12.

³⁶ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974), 169.

³⁷ Linda Williams, "Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 479.

³⁸ Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, 74

³⁹ Ibid, 188-214

⁴⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁴¹ Ginette Vincendeau, "Alice Guy," in *The Woman's Companion to International Film*, ed. Kuhn, Annette with Susannah Radstone, 184-185 (Berkeley: University of California, 1990).

⁴² Fischer, 46. "Given this basic fear of imagined female powers, it is not surprising to find the iconography of theatrical and cinematic magic plagued by a rampant *hostility* toward the female subject – an animosity that we might read as directed at motherhood. In fact, it is this very aggression that makes the theory of masculine fear most plausible. If the male magician only wished to 'play' with the female subject, why has he devised for her such a chamber of horrors?"

⁴³ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁴ Vincendeau, 185

⁴⁵ “Alice Guy Blaché,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/250004/Alice-Guy-Blache.

⁴⁶ Hill-Collins, 131-132.

⁴⁷ Tracey Moffatt Interview by ABC Reporter Anne Maria Nicholson, <http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s1011482.htm>.

⁴⁸ Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant, 36.

⁴⁹ Sue Matthews, *35mm Dreams: Conversations with Five Directors About the Australian Film Revival* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1984), 163.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Katie Pickles, “The Old and New on Parade: Mimesis, Queen Victoria, and Carnival Queens on Victoria Day in Interwar Victoria,” in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past*, ed. Katie Pickles and Myra Ruthford (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 277-78.

⁵¹ See: Rose Lovell-Smith, “Anti-Housewives and Ogres’ Housekeepers: The Roles of Bluebeard’s Female Helper,” *Folklore* 113, no. 2 (October 2002): 197-214.

⁵² The fairy godmother figure, whose roots are in the figures of the Fates, uses her magic to help or otherwise support a prince or princess achieve their goals and desires. See: Clute, John and John Grant, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 330.

⁵³ In English folklore Queen Mab, queen of the fairies, is a mischievous, but basically benevolent figure. Queen Mab’s place was eventually taken over by Titania, who bears some resemblance to Hera, the Greek goddess of marriage and of the life of women. “Hera,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. 25 Nov. 2010, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/262402/Hera>.

⁵⁴ Translated into the Māori language for *The Piano* by Selwyn Mum.

⁵⁵ Kaplan, “The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*,” 466.

Chapter 4

¹ Modleski and Greenwald, “Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls,” 9.

² Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women’s Work in the Home*. (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1980).

³ *Ibid*, 11-12.

⁴ Waring is quoted in the documentary, *Who’s Counting? Marilyn Warring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics* (1995) directed by Terre Nash, National Film Board of Canada, https://www.nfb.ca/film/whos_counting.

⁵ Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted: The New Feminist Economics* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989).

⁶ Kathryn McPherson, "Was the 'Frontier' Good for Women? Historical Approaches to Women and Agricultural Settlement in the Prairie West, 1870-1925," *Atlantis* 25 (Fall/Winter 2000): 76.

⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type* (Montreal and Kingston: University of McGill Press, 1991).

⁸ McPherson, 77. McPherson argued that these contrasting views are too monolithic, and that feminist historians need to move outside the box of heterosexuality and construct their analyses through the lens of race.

⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

¹⁰ Hill-Collins cited from African-American writer, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 51.

¹¹ hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 32.

¹² *Ibid*, 250-51

¹³ Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 57-58.

¹⁴ Silvia Van Kirk, "The Role of Native Women in the Fur Trade Society of Western Canada, 1670-1830," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 7, no. 3 (1984), 9.

¹⁵ See: Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "Intimate Surveillance: Indian Affairs, Colonization, and the regulation of Aboriginal Women's Sexuality," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, ed. Pickles and Rutherford.

¹⁶ Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

¹⁷ Sherry Farrell Racette, "Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women's Artistic Production," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, ed. Pickles and Rutherford, 40.

¹⁸ Sarah Carter, Lesley Erickson, and Patricia Roome ed., "Introduction" in *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women's History* (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 4.

¹⁹ Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge: 2000, Cambridge University Press), 229.

²⁰ A "kete" is a type of basket woven from flax leaves. The "kete" has spiritual significance in Māori culture, representing the "three baskets of knowledge" brought down from the Heavens by the Māori God, Tane. (www.legislation.knowledge-basket.co.nz/kete/about/baskets.html).

²¹ This Māori term means "the language." It is an official language in New Zealand.

²² Marilyn Lake, "Australian frontier feminism and the marauding white man," in *Gender and Imperialism*, ed. Claire Midgley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 126.

Chapter 5

¹ Sue Matthews, *35mm Dreams: Conversations with Five Directors About the Australian Film Revival* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1984), 142.

² Janis Cole and Holly Dale, *Calling the Shots: Profiles of Women Filmmakers* (Toronto: Quarry Press, 1993), 247.

³ Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance. (London: Pandora, 1992), 171.

⁴ Robin Morgan, "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape," in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York, NY: Random House, 1977).

⁵ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Plume, 1989. First published 1979).

⁶ Marysia Zalewski, "Andrea Dworkin," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* ed. Code, 147.

⁷ Catherine A. Mackinnon, "Sexuality," in *Feminist Philosophy Reader*, ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), 206.

⁸ Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Vance, 150.

⁹ Ibid, 152.

¹⁰ Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Nicholson, 326.

¹¹ Julia Creet, "Monique Wittig," in *The Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed. Code, 492.

¹² Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Jones, 133.

¹³ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Feminism and Sexuality*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 135.

¹⁴ Ibid, 136

¹⁵ Julia Creet, "Queer Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* ed. Code, 413-14.

¹⁶ Evelyn M. Hammonds, "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence," in *The Feminist Philosophy Reader* ed. Bailey and Cuomo, 251.

¹⁷ hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 52.

¹⁸ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Tiddas Speakin' Strong: Indigenous Women's Self-Preservation Within White Australian Feminism," in *The Feminist Philosophy Reader* ed. Bailey and Cuomo, 366.

¹⁹ Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 135.

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- ²⁰ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, xii-xiii.
- ²¹ Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (New York: Avon, 1974), 352.
- ²² Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Kaplan, 39-40.
- ²³ Hayward, "Melodrama," in *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, 206.
- ²⁴ Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Landy, 86-87.
- ²⁵ Kang, L. Hyun-Yi. "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies: Interracial Romance and Cinematic Subjection." *Visual Anthropology Review*, 9, 1 (Spring 1993): 5-21.
- ²⁶ Caroline Brown, "The Representation of the Indigenous Other in *Daughters of the Dust* and *The Piano*," *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-19. Brown argued that both *Daughters of the Dust* and *Campion's The Piano* silence indigenous characters "in order to permit non-native women the right to speak and affirm themselves and their embattled identities," (1).
- ²⁷ "The long take or sequence shot is a lengthy shot. André Bazin, the French film critic and theoretician, has drawn attention to the related techniques of the long take and deep focus.. For Bazin both the long take and deep focus opened up the image for the spectator and involved him or her more deeply in its 'reality'," Konigsberg, *The Complete Film Dictionary*, 221-222.
- ²⁸ Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant, 40.
- ²⁹ Robert Holden and Nicolas Holden, *Bunyips: Australia's Folklore of Fear* (National Library of Australia, 2001), 11.
- ³⁰ Lizzie Francke, "An Interview with Jane Campion," in *Jane Campion: Contemporary Film Directors*, ed. Kathleen McHugh (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 160.
- ³¹ Jackie Stacey, "Femme Fatale" in *The Woman's Companion to International Film*, ed. Kuhn and Radstone, 153-54.

Conclusion

- ¹ Lamche, "Interview with Merata Mita," *Framework*, 4.
- ² Matthews, *35mm Dreams: Conversations with Five Directors About the Australian Film Revival*, 160-61
- ³ Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, 37.
- ⁴ Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, 65.
- ⁵ Barkley-Brown, "What Has Happened Here? The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," 296.

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