

**BEYOND THE WHALE:
Spectatorship, Guilt and the Politics of the "Global Imaginary" in *Whale
Rider***

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I. INTRODUCTION

Film has the ability to either subvert or reinforce cultural norms and its narrative power can either expand or limit our consciousness (hooks 2). Movies “give the reimagined, reinvented version” of reality (1). However, the film industry has long stifled the imaginative and provocative potential of film for ideological and financial reasons. Corporate Hollywood has especially been limited in its productions, preferring to maintain the status-quo through formulaic conceptualizations of life and love thus securing their bottom-line. One of the most problematic outcomes of big-budget, popular film is that it reinforces entrenched stereotypes of the non-white ‘Other’ in an effort to appeal to the deep-seated fear and fetishization of the unknown. Indeed, the western cinematic gaze has historically perpetuated the colonial construction of the ‘exotic Other’ (Marubio ix), refusing to acknowledge the complexity of identity and of their own privileged subject position. Otherness is best defined as “that which resides outside of the margins of the dominant cultural representations, outside of the social-symbolic order” (Jasper and Plate 4).

However, films are increasingly being made outside of this Hollywood environment, films which aim to explore cultural expression within its politically located context. World cinema has become the staging ground for this type of “roots narrative” (Roberts 62), where the protagonist must reconstruct her cultural traditions in an effort to maintain contemporary relevancy for the new

generation(s). Such “roots narratives” have begun to infiltrate the global consciousness, assuming the form of a supposed “global mythology, an ideological discourse about the world and humanity’s relationship to it” (62). It is within this context that the film adaptation of *Whale Rider* has emerged, popularizing a romantic, feminine, indigenous image of resistance and survival (Damer 74). Nonetheless, as world cinema and, therefore, *Whale Rider* exist within the “global imaginary” (Roberts 62), the colonial/neo-imperialistic western gaze is predominantly responsible for the mainstream popularity or commercial failure of such cinematic creations.

a) Synopsis of the film, Whale Rider

At this point, a brief synopsis of the film *Whale Rider* is necessary. *Whale Rider* is the story of a young motherless Maori girl, Paikea “Pai” Apirana (age 12) and her struggle to reclaim and reinterpret her cultural heritage. Set in the eastern New Zealand Maori village of Whangara, the ancient myth of Paikea informs the development of the story. Paikea rode the back of a whale to safety after his canoe capsized while at sea. His relationship to the whale ensured the survival of his people. It is the bloodline of Paikea that Whangara chiefs (always male) claim as their heritage. It is this bloodline that Pai believes to be her natural birth right. Her twin brother and mother died in childbirth. As a result, Pai is the only living child who can claim ownership to this bloodline, although it has never been claimed by a female descendent before.

Raised by her paternal grandparents, Pai is begrudgingly accepted by her grandfather, Koro, who blames her for the loss of her twin brother. Pai is a precocious child and a natural leader, chastising her elders for bad habits (i.e., smoking) and making a concerted effort to learn traditional songs and dances. However, Koro refuses to acknowledge Pai's preternatural leadership abilities. Thus begins a struggle for acceptance, change and respect as Pai directly challenges her grandfather and the patriarchal traditions to which he clings. Due to the cultural decay and poverty that is troubling his small community Koro sets up a school to train young boys in the art of Maori warfare in order to instill respect for tradition. It is his hope that the school will nurture a new leader to raise the community up out of the poverty that stifles its growth and toward a reconnection with the environment and culture. Pai insists on joining the school, much to her grandfather's displeasure. With the help of her uncle, Pai is able to secretly learn the special lessons developed and taught by her grandfather and masters the taiaha, the Maori fighting stick, embarrassing Koro unintentionally when she wins a local tournament (beating out her young male rivals). Additionally, she recovers a whale's tooth from the bottom of the sea, a test which none of the other boys were able to complete, which further solidifies her claims to the Paikea chieftom

Throughout the film Pai calls out to her ancestors which are represented by a pod of whales. There is a romantic and supernatural undercurrent to the film which reaches its apex upon the discovery of the whale pod on the Whangara beach. Pai blames herself for the whale's apparent suicide attempt which is

confirmed by Koro who believes her to be at fault for breaching cultural norms. Pai is deeply connected to the largest whale in the pod, representative of the Paikea legend, and she coaxes the whale to return to the ocean by riding atop its back. While her community rallies to save her from the ocean depths, Koro discovers that it had been Pai that rescued the whale tooth from the ocean. This discovery startles him into the realization that his granddaughter is the 'chosen one,' meant to lead their community out of darkness. Fortunately, Pai survives and Koro apologizes, begging forgiveness and affirms her leadership position. The film ends with a cultural celebration, where Pai is seated beside her grandfather, Koro, in an esteemed position where she presides over the festivities. Confirming the shift in cultural perspective, many women are depicted taking part in the traditionally male war dance. In the end, it is Pai's supernatural connection to the whale pod that leads to her ultimate sacrifice for the renewal of her people and the survival of their cultural heritage in its postcolonial context (*Whale Rider* 2003).

b) Purpose and Methodological Approach

What makes the film *Whale Rider* so appealing to mainstream western audiences? What does its popularity reveal about the evolving global mythology? It is important to note that this research paper is not meant to act as a critique of the film nor of the Maori traditions featured in the film, as the movie has been widely applauded by the Maori community in New Zealand (Damer 78). Rather, this paper will examine why western mainstream audiences have embraced the

film so feverishly, which is evidenced in the box office returns and mainstream critical praise for the film (IMDB). Indeed, how and why does *Whale Rider* become romanticized and feminized by the western audiences that fix their gaze upon the film? In the liminal, intercultural reality of the postcolonial, the relationship between the audience and the filmed subject is important for deconstructing the invisible and visible manifestations of colonialism that permeate the "global imaginary" (Roberts 62).

The research question and objectives for this paper have been developed from a varied theoretical foundation allowing for a fluidity of discourse that is necessary for the analysis of feminism, mythology and film. This research paper intends to build upon the deconstruction of gender, identity, myth, and the western gaze (Kaplan xvii) as it relates to cinematic depictions of indigenous femininity in *Whale Rider*. This feminist intercultural analysis of *Whale Rider* aims to unearth a rich and tumultuous discussion of guilt, cultural survival and the gendered metaphors that permeate the western gaze as it interacts with the newly evolving global imaginary. It is through the romantic juxtaposition of indigeneity, nature and youthful femininity in the film *Whale Rider* that the western audience is able to identify with the protagonist without having to admit their own involvement in the historical disenfranchisement of the Maori (Damer 78).

By universalizing the story of survival depicted in the film *Whale Rider*, the audience is able to identify with the character of Pai without guilt and without personal involvement in the historical reality of her story. Instead, Pai and her

struggle have become a part of the growing movement toward a “global mythology” (Roberts 62). Such discourse is not problematic in and of itself—it is only when such narratives are removed from their political location that issues of the power and privilege of spectatorship come to the fore.

Furthermore, the deconstruction of gender, identity and spectatorship within its political location has allowed for a broad and inclusive understanding of gender as a “position to act politically” (Alcoff 433). Without ignoring or displacing the importance of historical experiences of women as they navigate through their own lives, experiencing interlocking oppressions and contradictory or conflicting pressures from their specific families, cultures and societies (433). Identity is fluid and any discussion of gender (and spectatorship) will be fragmented and complex (433). It is this understanding that has led to indigenous resistance towards white, western feminism and its politically situated definition of what it is to be a woman: “the position of women is relative and not innate, and yet neither is it ‘undecidable’...rather, she herself is part of the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated” (434).

Despite the intercultural, globalized nature of the world today, discourse surrounding film as mythological expression, or religion and film more generally, have tended to focus on the Hollywood movie-making machine and the masculinization of the cinematic gaze, which has been heavily influenced by Freudian and Lacanian theory (Plate 3102). There needs to be a greater

emphasis on the larger existential "...questions involved in the social construction of reality through visual terms" (3102). The religious study of film is a contemporary and ever-evolving field (3097). Film is text, and films involving the juxtaposition of indiginity, nature, femininity and youth contain narratives that have largely been untapped in the academic study of religion. Indeed, the intercultural feminist study of religion in dialogue with the theoretical discourse surrounding film as mythological expression is well-suited to deconstruct the hidden yet pervasive socially-constituted sexism and ethnocentrism at the movies. Accordingly this paper will first situate the paper within a discussion of film as mythological expression, politicizing the perceived "non-threatening" nature of film as text (Trinh 677). This will be further developed through an analysis of spectatorship and the 'gaze.' The issue of 'liberal' guilt will subsequently be developed in an effort to problematize the construction of a global mythology. The culmination of this discussion will occur through an in-depth analysis of the film *Whale Rider* and how indigenous femininity is constructed by the western gaze.

II. FILM AS MYTHOLOGICAL EXPRESSION

Before a more thorough analysis of the politics of spectatorship can be undertaken, the theoretical language of cinema and mythology must be explored in order to provoke a deeper understanding of the narrative importance of film. The power of myth to create worlds, to connect the known with the unknown, fulfills our greatest existential needs (Ferrell 4). Humans are meaning-making creatures.

It is the question of 'why?' that propels mythological narratives (5). Myths are not strictly morality tales, they are complex stories which reify our hopes, desires and fears (7). However, it is important to note that there are no "eternal myths" (Barthes 110). Mythopoesis, the act of myth-making, is culturally-constituted and politically-located in history (110). Nonetheless, myth has the potential to naturalize history and this can have problematic results, as will be explored later in this paper (129).

By using myth as a "textual lens" (Doniger 7), alternative narrative sources can be unearthed as having existential importance. This opens up an entirely new world of metaphor and symbol, between "the personal and the abstract" (9), which provides for a greater understanding of how myth functions in our lives and why we create myth. Those who would declare such a broad understanding of myth invalid and superfluous fail to see the complexity of human experience and mythopoesis. Many fail to find existential meaning in non-scriptural sources due to their limited scholarly vision (Lyden 2). Culture is existentially-constructed. That is to say, existential concerns are intrinsically part of culture—they inform cultural construction.

According to John C. Lyden in his work, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals*, those who fail to see the value of non-traditional sources to the academic study of religion are much like the European missionaries who, during the period of First Contact in the Americas, refused to acknowledge Aboriginal cultural practices as having the same existential function as Roman Catholicism

(2). They were ignorant of the complexity of mythopoesis and cultural difference and their shortsightedness was corrected in subsequent centuries. However, this is not to say that all stories are myths. Rather, it is simply meant to acknowledge the fluidity and density of cultural expression, both in the past and present (3).

As a result of this complicated understanding of myth and its existential function, cinema has emerged as an exciting medium for cultural expression and the development of new mythological narratives to provide mediation between the mundane and the existentially-driven realities of our lives (Lyden 4). Before any discussion of film as mythological expression can begin in earnest, a working definition of myth must be established. One of the most commonly cited definitions of myth comes from Clifford Geertz. According to Geertz, myth provides a "set of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [and women] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of facticity that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (qtd. in Lyden 42). This definition best encapsulates how myth functions in our lives. This author does not wish to take part in a theological discussion but, rather, engage in a debate of ideas concerning mythopoesis and how myth can both distort and reaffirm ideological and cultural context.

The moving image, like any narrative technique, translates existential "abstraction[s] into comprehensible form[s]" (Ferrell 4). That is, the new mythological narratives presented in and through film are interpreted through

culture (McCabe 4). This may seem like an obvious truth yet film is often dismissed as a form of entertainment—nothing more, nothing less. This disguises the ideological and mythological messages, disallowing critical analysis of the method and message utilized by the filmmakers and, most importantly, the audience response to the narrative (Lyden 6). The existential concerns of humanity are constantly being manipulated and communicated through popular media and beyond and, thus, film analysis is critically important for understanding the *moods* and *motivations* that propel us to create, sustain and destroy the world around us (Martin and Oswalt vii). Indeed, myths,

narrate an encounter with the mysterious unknown, with terrifying or awe-inspiring or enchanting otherness. They do so by describing a sacred space and time by portraying the quest of a hero, and by probing universal problems of human existence and belief....Like myths, mythological films take people to places beyond the boundaries of the known world and require viewers to negotiate an encounter with a world elsewhere, with a world that is 'wholly other' and, therefore, sacred or religiously significant. (68).

Film has often been appropriated by cultural traditions, notably by western Christianity. The Catholic Church in America initially rejected cinema as having nefarious intentions. The Catholic Church had great influence over Hollywood with the implementation of the Hays Code during the early to mid- 20th Century. The Hays Code was a type of rule book legislated by the American government after intensive lobbying by the Catholic Church to ensure films did not degrade 'American values' (Lyden 20). When enforced, the Hays Code ensured a 'moral outcome' to any cinematic narrative. Over time the Hays Code was discarded but

its influence can still be felt to this day. Arguably, it has contributed to our desire for 'happy endings' where the villain is punished and the hero survives.

Christian traditions have since begun to incorporate filmic narratives into their communication strategies in an attempt to appeal to a wider and younger, more technologically advanced population (20). That is, film has the ability to be "religiously [existentially] instructive because it [teaches] about the human condition" (Plate 3099). This example of cultural appropriation of cinema is meant to provide proof that film has great potential to tap into the existential concerns of humankind, whether it is used as an alternative method of communication by established ideological institutions or, as will be argued in the following paragraphs, in a more abstract and less dogmatic context.

Cinema is inherently experiential. Existential meaning is not limited to scripture or the temple (Lyden 2). Undeniably, the world of film provides great insight and highlights the meaning-making nature of human beings: "we often hope and wish for a world like the one we see in the movies even though we must return to a very different world at the end of the show" (4). However, this is not to imply that meaning is only to be found in the filmic content. According to Roland Barthes, renowned mythologist, the myth, in and of itself, does not hold meaning. It is the way it is expressed and how it is received that provokes human moods and motivations (109). Myth reveals "a culture's bedrock assumptions and aspirations" (Martin and Oswald 6). If we rely on the text alone to provide

significance it would inevitably lead to judgements as to the correct and incorrect way to 'read' and 'interpret' the narrative, be it film or literature (Lyden 29).

Undoubtedly, the narrative importance of a film is made obvious by the audience response (Plate 3101). In his recent book, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals*, Lyden moves away from the examination of specific theological elements in film, preferring to explore how the audience engages with the film on an existential level and the utopian or dystopian impulses evoked by the cinematic narrative (3). Cinematic narratives are not simply texts to be read like any other. The power of film lies in its intertwining of text with image. We are "seduced by the images we see on screen" (hooks 3). The realities presented on the screen are hyper-realities, extremes, whether positive or negative (3). As such, films are able to tap into even the most die-hard atheist's existential concerns, allowing for such filmic representation to become a new "means for knowledge" (Plate 3100).

III. THE POLITICS OF SPECTATORSHIP

While film has great potential for unearthing existential truths, the act of looking at the moving image is not uncomplicated by ideological and cultural baggage. The spectator's gaze is not innocuous. There is great pleasure to be found in our looking relations. To be noticed or to notice another encourages communication and interaction. However, the 'look' has long been subsumed by the gaze. In Freudian terms, scopophilia is "taking other people as objects,

subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 59). This is based upon the infantile pleasure taken from looking at the bodies of others.

Scopophilia, thus, is thought to be sexually stimulating.

a) Subject Formation

At this point it will be useful to briefly explore Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to situate the discourse surrounding the gaze or the look within the larger discussion of subject formation and psychoanalytic thought (Silverman 1). Arguably, classical cinema has "been fully theorized in Lacanian terms" (Gaines 177). Building upon Freudian theory, Lacan distinguishes his thought through his belief that the self is discovered through language and symbol: "Lacan's return to Freud revises the Oedipal struggle, shifting the site of conflict from nature (anatomical development) to nurture (cultural signification)" (McCabe 27).

What Lacan referred to as the "mirror stage" is the major process by which this 'self' is discovered (Silverman 7). In infancy, the first external image of the body (the dominant caregiver) allows for an initial understanding of an 'I' (Silverman 7). However, this 'othered' body is revered as the Ideal-I—it is fully developed, which is quite unlike the infant's vulnerable body (Felluga 3). It is this mirror stage which will structure the psychological development of human beings for their entire lives (3). The Ideal-I provides for a stable identity, despite its imaginary and wholly external position (3). There is a gap between the imaginary and reality (the Real) in this developmental process which is filled through and by

the symbolic order (3). Neuroses emerge as a result of the varying success of the “mirror-phase” and subsequent psychic development (McCabe 28).

Humans depend upon the ‘other’ for psychological wholeness. As the individual matures, the cultural constructions of his/her community maintain the illusion of wholeness, displacing feelings of lack through socio-linguistic mechanisms which aim to control and manage self: the symbolic order (McCabe 28). When an individual enters the social world through communication with others and obedience to the structures of his community, the desire of the self is ordered and restricted in accordance with the Name-of-the-Father (Felluga 4).

According to Lacan, the “psyche can be divided into three major structures that control our lives and our desires: the Real, the Imaginary Order, and the Symbolic Order” (Felluga 1). The Real is the pristine state which resists symbolization. It is a needs-based existence (4). When the individual begins to communicate through the use of language, he/she has been “forever severed” (2) from the Real. Although irrevocably lost, the Real is still the foundational structure of our existence to which we turn, albeit hopelessly, when we confront our reality and challenge its structural components (2). Jouissance, the pleasure-pain principle, emerges from this Sisyphean pursuit since we derive both a pleasure that is painful from trying to gain re-entry into the Real (2).

The second structuring element of the human psyche is the Imaginary Order (Felluga 3). The “mirror phase” is included under this psychic umbrella (3). Indeed, the Imaginary Order is the place of ideals and fantasies and the

ramifications of their unattainable nature. When an individual is removed from the Real and has fully entered the “mirror phase” s/he is filled with a sense of lack, an anxiety produced from the understanding of self as separate from the Ideal-I and the Real (3). Throughout one’s life, the Ideal-I is sought through a process whereby the individual attempts to follow or imitate an idealized other (3). Yet this Ideal-I can never be fully realized (3).

Finally, the Symbolic Order, also referred to by Lacan as the “big Other,” is the structural system of society (Silverman 7). The Name-of-the-Father, as previously mentioned, encapsulates the rules and orders of this system: “It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (Lacan qtd. in Felluga 4). The symbolic order concerns desire. Yet this desire can only be realized in terms of the functionality of every-day existence, never fully (4). We pursue our desire for completion through our desire for ideal employment, friends, body, partner, relationships. Yet desire is not linear and will never be satisfied. Desire emerges as a function of the lack experienced by the use and development of language (4).

b) Masculine Gaze

It is from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that Laura Mulvey, in her classic essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” asserts that cinema places ‘woman’ as the desired other—the object to be looked at—with man occupying the

subject position in most if not all cinematic narratives (59). Thus, it is an assumed male spectator who 'looks' at the idealized female body, placing desires and feelings onto her image. Woman, as represented in Hollywood cinema, embodies Lacanian jouissance—women simultaneously represent the lack but are also the "site of desire" for the ever-present male subject (McCabe 34). The cinematic screen acts to engage the spectator with the imaginary by mirroring an Ideal-I (25). It is projection and assimilation of unconscious fantasy and conscious desire (25).

The scopophilic nature of cinema provides the spectator with the illusion "of looking in on a private world" (Mulvey 59). For Mulvey and her contemporaries, this "private world" was the female body. The female body is infused with the fears and desires of the masculine gaze. Fear due to the castration anxiety invoked by her lack of a penis and desire as a way to repair this feeling of lack—by creating a beautiful object to behold and control in order to distract and alleviate the anxiety associated with perceiving the feminine body (59). Mulvey believes that man cannot handle being sexually objectified so he overcompensates by refusing to acknowledge the subjectivity of woman. She becomes the site of all of his phantasmal projections (59).

Women could be spectators but their 'look' was also informed by the larger patriarchal symbolic order (Mulvey 57). That is, women must identify with the phallic male gaze as their society (and all of its products) can only be understood through this lens (57). The phallus is an empty signifier which takes on a reified status under the symbolic order that places the man, the holder of the phallus, at

the top of the power structure (57). According to this theory, women are unable to hold onto the subject position nor identify with it due to their 'missing' penis (62). Gendered identities are part of the symbolic order—they are not natural constructs but culturally imposed organizing principles. Thus, this 'male gaze' translates everything which it beholds—including cinematic narratives.

The "eternal feminine" (McCabe 34) is constructed through this gaze as white, middle-to-upper class, passive and beautiful. However, it holds within its power the castrated monster, provoking terror and needing to be punished (Mulvey 62). The spectator's gaze can be either voyeuristic or fetishistic. Fetishistic looking idealizes the beauty, placing the desired object on a pedestal where it is perfect and untouched—removed from the spoils of fear and anxiety. For Mulvey, many Hollywood movies fetishize the feminine, creating the "cult of the female star" which is far removed from the realities of women's lives. Voyeurism, on the other hand, can be sadistic: "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt, asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (62). Alfred Hitchcock is a filmmaker often cited for playing with the concept of voyeurism, specifically in his films *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963), although numerous films can be said to utilize point-of-view camera work to literally bring the spectator into the movie's mise-en-scene: we become the camera. For instance, in *The Birds*,

woman is imaged or subjugated within the narrative (either she is disciplined or subject to domination by a man). Either way she compensates the male spectator for his own anxieties about lack through a

fantasy of woman that bolsters his illusion of authority and completeness. (McCabe 27).

Mulvey is adamant that the man controls the imaginary world of film and, thus, is in full control of feminine identity, which is a microcosm of the larger societal structures dominated by the male gaze.

However, what is troubling about the analysis of the male gaze is the systematization by its advocates (Mellencamp 157). The concept of woman as a textual sign created an intangible, depoliticized theory which had deep issues with the inclusion of cultural context and different valuations of Hollywood cinema and beyond (McCabe 37). Indeed, "without history, pure, eternal theory can be abstracted; the descent into clichéd platitudes is not far behind" (Mellencamp 157).

By using gender as the limited means of analysis, the vast and varying oppressions and experiences of women outside of the white middle-class have been left on the cutting room floor (Gaines 177).

c) Western Gaze

While the male gaze is an important starting point for any exploration of spectatorship, it is far too limited in scope to be inclusive in its discourse. Mulvey's psychoanalytic approach introduced key concepts that have helped to create a more varied foundation for film criticism, such as the importance of "subject formation that could begin to understand the position of a viewing subject that is at once constituted by and constituting cinema" (McCabe 24). However, by

associating passivity with femininity, woman is denied agency. Not only is 'woman' denied agency but she is also created as if she is a homogenous entity. The gaze is constructed without complications of identity and gender—the essentialist nature of the discussion ignores race, class, sexual orientation and political location in its analysis. Indeed, to look is to have power—one need only look to the experiences of slaves who are denied the right to look at their 'master' (hooks 198).

What is different about looking at a black body versus a white body? What about gay or lesbian body? How does the gaze construct such identities? What does it say about our relations with each other? Can there ever be an oppositional gaze? These questions have been tackled by some of the leading feminist film critics of the contemporary period. From bell hooks to E. Ann Kaplan and beyond, the 'universal male spectator' has been removed from his ahistorical, ethnocentric position and has been politically and culturally situated in an effort to understand looking relations and the power of the gaze more fully.

In *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, E. Ann Kaplan offers her own interpretation of the cinematic gaze within the larger framework of "feminism, imperialism, nation and ethnicity" (xiv). Both hooks and Kaplan disrupt the traditional understanding of the gaze through their supposition that "white subjectivities...can also be destabilized when exposed to the gaze of the Other, since this is a gaze to which such subjects have not traditionally been subjected" (Kaplan xix). By deconstructing the gaze, the political location of the

spectator is acknowledged, allowing for a thorough exploration of the relationship between the viewer and the viewee (xix).

The foundational patriarchal structures of the western world continue to influence how we relate to one another, both on screen and off. However, this does not mean that cinema can only be viewed one way (hooks 5). Rather, explorations of film must explore the gendered and racialized “looking relations” (Kaplan xi) if any new ground is to be broken with regard to how we create and dismantle worlds through our understanding of the movies that inform our lives. Movies do not merely reflect culture, they make culture (hooks 9). As a result, it is of critical importance that the gaze is subjected to more than a simplistic analysis of a universal and unchanging spectator.

To further elucidate the terminology surrounding spectatorship a few key points should be made regarding ‘looking’ versus ‘gazing.’ To look is a relational process—it allows for the object to look back, therefore claiming the subject position for herself; whereas, to gaze is to subject the object to a “one-way subjective vision” (Kaplan xvi). The gaze disallows the object subjecthood—the gaze is inherently a fetishistic or voyeuristic activity (xvi). It is important to note that this discussion is not constructed as a dichotomous ‘black vs. white’ analysis. Rather, it is meant to complicate the gaze and looking relations to go beyond the binary to explore how we look at each other across and in-between racial, economic, class and gendered boundaries (xx).

Of particular importance to this paper is the concept of the western gaze. That is, "an imbrication reflective of the symbiotic relations between patriarchal and colonial articulations of difference" (Shohat 45). In her article, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," Ella Shohat passionately argues that western cinema "inherited and dissemin[ates] colonial discourse" through gendered metaphors of otherness (45). The western gaze is not only a masculine construct it is also informed by racial, economic and ideological power structures. Western spectators have been trained by popular media, particularly cinema, to perceive the non-western subject as wholly other.

Through conscious propaganda and unconscious manifestations of said propaganda, the non-western subject is feminized, fetishized and commodified as the 'exotic other,' a subject to desire and to be consumed by the ravenous spectator (45). Such propaganda uses visual culture as an effective way to maintain the cultural 'status quo' or to encourage identification with the normative ideological discourse espoused by the dominant culture, the colonial power. John Wayne Westerns and 1950s science fiction thrillers both utilize imagery of 'good' vs. 'evil' in order to firmly establish the white, male protagonist as normative while the alien other, be it extraterrestrial or native, must be killed or assimilated (Kutsuzawa 39).

IV. THE GLOBAL IMAGINARY: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

a) The Postcolonial Position

In order to fully connect spectatorship and colonization, the concept of postcoloniality must be understood in relation to colonialism and neo-imperialism. Colonial thought is determined by binary structures (us versus them). The colonizer is in control of 'speaking' which silences the voice of the colonized or, at the very least, minimizes their influence. That is to say, the "voice of authority" belongs to the colonizer (Mills 108). The dominant colonizer perpetuates his control through discourse that refuses to hear or eliminates alternative voices. Women are doubly oppressed by the gendered construction of the colonized (Kwok and Donaldson 2). Feminist postcolonial discourse theory aims to challenge colonial discourse. It allows for, as stated by Pratt, "the possibility of texts speaking against the grain" (116). Indeed, there is a re-reading of the colonial texts in order to unearth hidden or ambiguous and informative clues to the reality of the power dynamics between colonizer and colonized. For example, many colonial texts (such as Hamlet's "The Tempest") depict the 'Other' as lazy and insolent—with a very real discussion around how to ensure 'proper' behaviour and temperament and to avoid 'disobedience' by the colonized people. By referencing such rebellious behaviour, the colonial texts have inadvertently highlighted the precarious nature of colonial rule (Mills 116).

To put it simply, postcolonial discourse should act as the voice for the subjugated, the colonized. Yet, Peggy Ochoa warns that postcolonial theory can

act to simply invert the power dynamics, which maintains the dichotomous and oppressive structure of colonialism. It runs the risk of essentializing difference. A possible resolution posited by Ochoa and her contemporaries is that of existing outside of the colonized/colonizer, good/bad binary. This fringe area is thought to be a place where new methods for interacting are created that acknowledge the complexity of experience (a process of disidentification). Thus, Ochoa challenges her audience to explore postcolonialism as more than the opposite of colonial historical structures, and to create a discourse that radically reimagines the construction of theory and methodology (221).

While reading colonial texts 'against the grain' is useful for challenging hegemonic colonial discourse, the actual period of postcoloniality, the state experienced after the end of a specific period of domination, highlights the very fact that the experiences of colonialism are complex and heterogeneous (Frankenberg and Mani 293). The human experience is informed by a wealth of differing and contradictory experiences. Frankenberg and Mani acknowledge the role that Othering and racialization play in the formation of identity. That is, identity is both "relational and situated" [in a geopolitical context] (296). Nonetheless, the term postcoloniality is beneficial in that it highlights the similar experiences of racialization and Othering that can be applied across borders and periods in history (297). Thus, these shared experiences, argue Frankenberg and Mani, can provide a useful methodology for the deconstruction of oppression and

domination and acknowledges “similarity, continuity and difference” as integral to postcolonial identity formation (297).

A change in attitude and experience between colonizer and colonized will occur concurrently and/or consecutively at different points in history and this shift is political, economic and cultural in nature, and is designated postcolonial in that it implies a change in the dominating influences of the culture (Frankenberg and Mani 300). Therefore, the impact of racialization and Othering must be examined in its politically located postcolonial context. Undeniably, it is the shift in experience where postcoloniality arises that “cross-racial encounters” begin to influence the formation of new identities (301). Frankenberg and Mani define this juncture as “an axis of subject formation” and seek to qualify their argument by suggesting that there are many different discourses taking place simultaneously in the history of a people and that confrontation with white society is not the only commonality of postcolonial experience (302).

The term “postcolonial” is hotly debated due to its depiction as a type of ‘catch all’ phrase, which minimizes its political and academic relevancy (Loomba 7). As the term is meant to imply a period in time that is ‘after’ colonialism, many have rightfully argued that it makes invisible the possibility of a contemporary colonialism (Smith 98). Colonialism, the “conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (Loomba 2), it has been argued, has never vanished. Instead a new type of colonialism has emerged: neo-imperialism. Neo-imperialism creates an economic dependency and a flow of human and natural resources as both

"captive labour as well as markets for [western] industry" (6). Thus, neo-imperialism controls land, goods and people. It is neo-imperialism that informs the relationship between audience and subject in the film *Whale Rider*, as will be discussed further on.

However, the term 'postcolonial' remains, arguably, an important demarcation for theoretical discourse that involves the liminal period of decolonization and the adjustment to the continuously developing neo-imperialism (Loomba 7). Postcolonialism is a fluid means for discussing the shift from colonialism to neo-imperialism. It emphasizes the quest for cultural survival and relevancy in a world which devalues any form of difference that desires to be anything more than superficial (8). According to Smith, "imperialism frames the indigenous experience" (19). It is within this context that the white, western gaze has been further developed. As this gaze objectifies and appropriates the identities of the 'Other' which it perceives, it attempts to construct an imaginary representation of a people in order to correct its own "problems of selfhood" (Spivak qtd. in Bird 80). That is, the western spectator, discovering its privileged position in a highly-decentralized world, is confronted with a choice: to justify said position or to actively deconstruct and destabilize his or her position of power. The less psychologically difficult choice is often the road most travelled (80).

Further problematizing the relationship between the indigenous and the colonizer, and the movement toward neo-imperialism, Pratt has developed a postcolonial concept that can easily be applied to film: the concept of a "contact

zone" (7). Contact zones are meant to "invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of a subject previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories intersect" (7). It is the place of mediation and interaction with difference (7). Most world cinema can be understood as a contact zone between the spectator and the viewed subject in which the largely white, middle-aged, middle-class western audience fixes its gaze on the young, racialized non-western female. The "contact zone" has grown beyond the "confined outposts of colonialism itself" (Roberts 65) and has evolved into a global encounter between cultures, between peoples (65). However, it is important to note that postcolonialism is constantly shifting and is not meant to homogenize the theoretical discourse of the "Other" (65).

b) The Construction of the "Global Imaginary"

Global mythologizing or imagining is tantamount to "touristic viewing" (Strain 72). Travelling has always been problematic for the western subject as s/he is confronted with alternative ways of being in the world. Film has always been concerned with other worlds (72). The movie screen projects fantastical characters and settings, based in reality and beyond: "whether simulated or actual—brings the western subject face to face with the spectacle of difference, the exotic landscape dotted with wondrously 'alien' human and animal faces" (72). Capitalism was the staging ground from which cinema emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Shohat 45). As a result, commodification of the cultural

other is deeply connected with the fetishistic gaze, objectifying difference and punishing resistance (Strain 72). One of the major identifying features of the western touristic gaze is the myth of distance that is perpetuated as a marker between the subject and object, viewer and viewee, colonial and postcolonial subject position (Cain 298). The looking relation, for the objectified, fetishized and commodified other, is kept at a metaphorical and literal distance. The other is constructed by the pleasing gaze, which is exhilarated by the possibility of connection with this foreign body while never giving up its privileged position (Strain 73).

Building upon postcoloniality and the western gaze, the concept of construction of a form of global mythology is best understood in dialogue with the concept of 'liberal guilt.' The term 'liberal guilt' emerged in the American context during the Civil Right's movements in the 1960s and 70s (Ellison 345). It reflected feelings of disassociation experienced by young, middle-class white people when confronted with the anger of racial oppression and problem of a privileged position in a radical movement. It is meant to designate "a position of wishful insufficiency relative to the genuinely radical" (345). Specifically, how can the privileged place of the white subject be reconciled within the system which oppresses the racialized 'other' (346)? Although the term came into popularity during the 1960s, the concept is just as relevant in the contemporary context (345). Guilt is an awareness of wrongdoing (345). Liberal guilt is shameful feeling associated with

actions that are decidedly non-liberal—such as racist thinking and participation in oppressive institutions and activities (345).

Within the context of cinema, the western, white audience has been confronted with the devastating realities of colonialism through the emergence of world cinema (Roberts 69). Films such as *Tsotsi* (2005), *Baraka* (1992) and *Dirty, Pretty Things* (2002), which are part of the global cinematic empire, highlight the difficulty of the colonized to overcome colonization in the postcolonial context and the perpetuation of colonial discourse surrounding racialized and 'othered' bodies (69). Through explorations of extreme poverty in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa (*Tsotsi*); the globalized organ industry which preys on immigrants and desperation in order to feed the insatiable need of the colonial, white elite to consume the other whole (*Dirty, Pretty Things*); and, finally, through a series of images of war, poverty and sexual slavery (*Baraka*), world cinema provokes deep anxieties in western audiences (69). As a result, the western spectator must reassert its subject position in an effort to ensure its scopophilic desires are not reflected back upon itself. The spectator ensconced in liberal white guilt is terrified by the very thought of its own objectification (Mulvey 59).

Cinema taps into our deep-seated existential concerns with natural phenomena and the human "quest for the ideal way to live" (Ferrell 12). However, with such discussions we must be careful not to subsume the other under a Campbellian monomyth: "rather than what separates 'us' from 'them,' they [the western spectator] focus on what 'we' supposedly have in common" (Roberts 69).

There is a desperate need to compartmentalize or depoliticize such narratives under the guise of a global mythology. If instead of discrimination and violence the western gaze imagines the world cinematic narrative as dealing with adversity and renewal, existing between two-worlds, the audience is able to identify with the story without admitting their own involvement in the subjugation of the 'other' (Plate & Jasper 4). Thus, *Tsotsi* becomes a narrative of redemption and *Dirty, Pretty Things* a story of love and the courage to overcome adversity. Such existentially-meaningful interpretations are not always harmful, holding within them the possibility of imagining "new forms of living together" (3); however, by dislocating the narrative from its political and historical location, difference "become self-sameness" (Cain 302), refusing to acknowledge the complexity of identity and the experience of oppression.

Even an American film with a 'foreign,' non-white cast of characters--such as *The Joy Luck Club* (1993)—can act to provoke feelings of discomfort due to the harsh realities of intercultural interaction. Racialized bodies, that is, non-white bodies, are not often depicted as lead characters in American cinematic narratives. *The Joy Luck Club* seemed to shatter this barrier, becoming a critical and commercial success (Yin 150). However, what became apparent to Jing Yin, as expressed in her article, "Constructing the Other: A Critical Reading of The Joy Luck Club," were that the realities of the Chinese women in the film could only be understood in terms of a universal narrative of love and loss, of mother/daughter relationships. This once again promotes the ideological assertion of similarity and

the negation of cultural difference (150). Otherness is made to be safe through a process of identification that refuses to see dissimilar cultural ideologies and only rewards a 'non-white film' with praise and positive attachment when difference is subsumed under the guise of universality (151). In the end, what was constructed as a breakthrough narrative for Asian-American characters reaffirms the stereotypical and 'harmless' understanding of the orient through the western gaze which latches onto familiar conceptualizations of otherness (151). Thus, the western spectator demands assimilation or negation of difference.

The problem of liberal guilt deeply affects how the spectator constructs his or her identity. The western white liberal is constantly confronted with their privileged position, especially in the globalized environment, which provokes feelings of anxiety and unease. According to bell hooks, the oppositional gaze, the 'look' of the other, is an interrogating gaze (199). It is this oppositional gaze which confronts the spectator with its own involvement in the subjugation of non-white peoples. However, Kaplan has suggested a possible solution to the problem of liberal guilt that does not simply reverse the subject/object positioning entrenched in theory of the 'gaze' (300). Put simply, "perhaps whites researching constructions of whiteness in black [narratives] is one way for them to confront—and survive—the negativity of black subjects as part of making possible real recognition of black subjectivity" (300). By refusing to deny and, thus, oppress the 'other,' the dichotomous relations informed by the gaze can be replaced by a more interactive 'looking relation'—where subjectivity is not a 'privileged' position.

V. BEYOND THE WHALE: THE INDIGENOUS FEMININE

Postcolonial narratives such as *Whale Rider*, should elicit feelings of profound responsibility and discomfort. The community of Whangara depicted in *Whale Rider* is obviously impoverished and desperately seeking a political, social and cultural revival in the aftermath of British colonialism. It would seem surprising that *Whale Rider* has been able to generate the amount of success it has. However, as will be discussed further on, the western cinematic gaze has developed coping mechanisms which alleviate the burden of guilt or personal responsibility, allowing for the popularity of postcolonial narratives like *Whale Rider*.

It is from this larger discussion of postcolonial, white guilt that the 'guilt-free' western gaze can be elucidated. Through the romantic juxtaposition of indigeneity, nature and youthful femininity in the film *Whale Rider*, the western audience is able to identify with the protagonist without having to admit their own involvement in the historical disenfranchisement of the Maori and the cultural genocide that followed. Any form of resistance depicted in *Whale Rider* has been rendered 'palatable' by the erasure of contemporary colonial culpability in the filmic representation and, thus, the mainstream appeal of *Whale Rider* is its exotic and romantic "call to the wild" (Damer 78). The enthusiastic western audiences of this film desperately wish to be convinced that "indigenous populations can recover from European settlement, that a movie celebrating traditional Maoriness in a contemporary context relieves our consciences" (Rauwerda par.7).

The colonial binary of European/Indigenous, male/female, north/south maintains the anxiety of intercultural contact and the loss of privileged positioning and influence, also known as postcolonial settler anxiety (Cain 302). The medium of film, especially as it is interpreted by western, white audiences, allows for identification with the underprivileged in an effort to eliminate any threat to the individual viewer's sense of reality: "difference becomes self-sameness on these terms, with spectators not becoming estranged from their own bodily parameters....The film produces and reproduces its own specifically post-colonial guilt that becomes another way of consuming an-other, as spectacle" (302). It is within this context that difference is displaced in favour of a more pleasant exploration of the commonalities between the audience and the subject being viewed (Roberts 69).

In the DVD commentary that accompanies the film *Whale Rider*, producer John Barnett discusses the film as a story of a girl struggling to maintain her traditional heritage while negotiating with 'modern' encroachment. The story is concerned with love, rejection and courage (*Whale Rider*). The film is discussed in this manner in order to disassociate any possible objectionable realities—such as poverty, addiction and cultural alienation—from the popular western white audience. It is essential that such realities do not come too close for comfort, so as not to disrupt the universalized mythological understanding of struggle and triumph in the "global imaginary" (62). By universalizing the story of survival in the film *Whale Rider*, the audience is able to identify with the character of Pai without

guilt and without personal involvement in the historical reality of her story. Instead, Pai and her struggle have become a part of a global mythology—the narrative has been rendered a story of individuation (i.e., separating one's self from a parental figure) (62).

Whale Rider and films of a similar vein are often discussed as taking part in a type of “imperialist nostalgia” (Roberts 69). That is,

the object of nostalgia is not the former imperial or colonial order...but an order prior to it which colonialism was responsible, precisely, for eradicating the traditional culture and lifeways of indigenous societies...[it is] mourning the passing of what one has oneself destroyed. (69)

The western imperialist longing for the “imaginary world, the object of nostalgia” (69) constructs a romantic feminine nature that is virginal, pristine, an untapped natural environment (69). However, by exoticizing and romanticizing nature in conjunction with femininity, youth and indigeneity, a colonial discourse is perpetuated, once again silencing the reality of indigenous women, of indigenous voices (Smith 72).

The popularity of *Whale Rider* rests upon the story of Pai and it is not without relevance that she is depicted as a precocious child. The most common representation of indigenous women in film is that of the “Celluloid Maiden” which depicts a young woman who “enables, helps, loves or aligns herself with a white European/American colonizer” (Marubbio ix) and is either rewarded or killed as a result of that choice (ix). The female youth depicted in *Whale Rider*, Pai, is not a stereotypical “Celluloid Maiden.” Instead, she is a determined, courageous and

'tom-boyish' little girl who struggles against discriminatory traditions, looking to the whale for help. *Whale Rider* has been lauded by global audiences for breaking the mould of colonial representations (or lack of representations) of an eroticized "Indian maiden" (Damer 74). However, the western gaze has not allowed *Whale Rider* to exist free of colonial influences.

Although *Whale Rider* is set up to fight against patriarchal traditions, it is linked by western audiences through the gendered symbols used to construct the colonial subject (or, for our purposes, object) (Shohat 46). Pai, thus, becomes part of the majestic and untamed Whangara landscape for she is closely associated with natural imagery and, most notably, the whale. Her 'virginal body,' is fetishized by the western gaze. She is an 'exotic other' who represents the beauty of the natural world: innocent and pure, her youth allows her to tap into the historical association between nature and the feminine (Smith 99). The association between nature and femininity has its roots in the discourse surrounding early feminist activity. Men, thought of as active participants in their worlds, were associated with human culture. Women, on the other hand, were thought to be more biologically-oriented (i.e., motherhood) and, thus, passive and 'natural' (Donaldson and Kwok 15).

Nature is popularly conceptualized as indigenous, wild, virginal, untamed and, finally, primitive (Donaldson and Kwok 15). The femininity, youth and indiginity of Pai firmly place her within the "discourse of Empire," (Shohat 46) which is a familiar narrative for western audiences (46). That is, her young body is

constructed by the western gaze which perceives it as a 'mystical' and 'child-like'—further perpetuating the “metaphoric portrayal of the (non-European)...as a 'virgin' coyly awaiting the touch of the colonizer, implying that whole continents...could only benefit from the emanation of colonial praxis” (46). The indigenous female is romanticized in the story of cultural survival. Her story is deeply embedded with spiritual and natural imagery, connecting her to an exotic and other-worldly presence, further marking the female as the catalyst for change in the postcolonial period and beyond.

Consequently, the discourse surrounding *Whale Rider* and the association between Pai and the whale pod highlights a disturbing undercurrent to the western gaze. More than a virginal body, the western audience, long steeped in the realities of psychoanalytic theory, constructs Pai through a highly racist belief (whether unconscious or not) which infers that indigenous peoples are more 'animalistic' due to their evolutionary position (Donaldson and Kwok 21). This theoretical debate is more commonly referred to as the theory of recapitulation or “Haeckel's fundamental biogenetic law” which posits that “ontology recapitulates phylogeny” (Brickman 56). The theory of recapitulation developed by Ernst Haeckel emerged within the confines of sociocultural evolutionism:

At the heart of Haeckel's immensely popular recapitulation theory lay the notion that the personal development of the human individual recapitulated the beginnings of the human race, so that the one could be read as a representation of the other. With this contribution, science gave its imprimatur to the theory that European children relived the early stages of savagery and that savages lived out the infancy of the human race....

Cultural memories as well as physical features were believed to be inherited, and thereby recapitulated, by each contemporary individual. (56)

It is within this context that indigenous peoples were categorized as 'primitive,' and believed to be of a lesser evolutionary maturity, akin to an infantilized period of evolutionary development where more animalistic behaviours were experienced (57).

The theory of recapitulation emerged in the 19th century and has long been criticized as being neither biologically or socially accurate (Brickman 53). Furthermore, its blatantly racist development and discussions (masked in the guise of scientific discourse) have been deconstructed ad infinitum, with the theory being heavily dismissed in the 1930s (53). However, such theories, as argued by Celia Brickman in her article, "Primitivity, Race, and Religion in Psychoanalysis," have had a lasting impact on western thought (53). Psychoanalysis is especially noted for having roots in the sociocultural evolutionary theories of the 19th and early 20th centuries (53). Brickman argues that psychoanalysis has adopted the "colonialist conception of primitivity" in its theoretical discourse (53). It is from this psychoanalytic theoretical discourse that the theory of recapitulation has entered the mainstream consciousness, albeit unconsciously (for the most part). Western spectators are fully immersed within the neo-imperial theorizing that places the "racial other as primitive" (54), and racist evolutionary frameworks are deeply embedded within the context of the western gaze.

Through the association of indigenous peoples with an animalistic stage in human development, colonialism has constructed an infantilized and overly-simplified understanding of indigenous culture, as if monolithic. This simplification of indigenous cultural expression and cultural heritage is also a gendered construction. Primitivity and femininity have been “seen as closer to or part of nature, and therefore as outside of historical and cultural forces” (Brickman 65). Thus, while *Whale Rider* was created as cultural critique, challenging the traditional patriarchal authority of Maori cultural identity, the primitive and feminine are defined, psychoanalytically, by their apparent “desire for and submission to [this form of] paternal authority” (66). As a result of such historical influences, it is no wonder that the western audience interpretation of the film *Whale Rider* is rife with contradictory messages and images of racism, neo-imperialism and postcolonialism.

VI. CONCLUSION

Whale Rider is a postcolonial narrative that is informed and interpreted by the western gaze; a gaze which romanticizes and naturalizes a simplified understanding of indigenous cultures and colonialism. This gaze is made up of our cultural assumptions and aspirations and is never innocuous. The western gaze consumes what it encounters, including the identity of the ‘other,’ erasing the ‘other’s’ subject agency in an effort to maintain its powerful position (Donaldson 54). Is the popularity of *Whale Rider* a negative example of the “discourse of

empire” (Shohat 46) or is the film simply able to connect with people on an emotional level, tapping into the existential concerns of separation and return?

The answer lies somewhere in between.

Whale Rider allows us to enter another world—a world of dreamy landscapes and curmudgeonly grandfathers, doting grandmothers and deeply felt connections with the natural environment. It is a world that is charged with images of redemption and hope. These themes speak to a deep-seated human need to imagine, to connect to a larger world. Indeed, the discussion of the western gaze is not meant to undermine the complexity of our existential concerns. The importance of visual culture, especially film, is in its ability to communicate complex and fantastic ideas in a way that is existentially meaningful and, perhaps, awe-inspiring. Humans are visual creatures and, thus, the imaginary world of film acts as a “constructive and destructive catalyst for psychological movement on a range of interlocking emotional and intellectual levels” (Waddell 29).

However, the popularity of this small film from New Zealand is deeply wrapped up in the ideologically and existentially significant evolution of the global mythology. *Whale Rider* has been marketed as ‘magical’ and ‘universal’ with very little recognition of the cultural and community poverty and disillusionment that the protagonist, Pai, is struggling to overcome. The refusal of the western spectator to acknowledge the historical reality of Pai’s geopolitical location places her (and the Maori, more generally) in the position of spectacle—to be commodified and gazed

upon but not acknowledged as 'real' and 'complex' subjects (whether individually or culturally).

The "discourse of empire" (Shohat 46) which has been responsible for the commodification of otherness and the creation of the western subject/eastern object dichotomy is embedded within the medium of cinema. This global mythology attempts to universalize and naturalize historical realities of 'othered' peoples in an effort to ease the postcolonial anxiety and liberal guilt associated with the white, western spectator's privileged position. The western gaze is a byproduct of a discourse of conquest and subjugation. The gendered metaphors that populate the global mythology maintain the hierarchal structure of western culture, ensuring that the oppositional gaze is marginalized (Dube 105). The threat of the 'other' must be eradicated. Indiginity is constructed as 'child-like,' simplistic and feminine. The indigenous 'other's' power is minimized and made to be inferior to that of the western, virile, white subject.

The association between femininity and nature is thus transferred to the indigenous 'other' in an effort to weaken and manipulate the looking relation. Indeed, the fetishistic or voyeuristic tendencies associated with the masculine gaze are deeply rooted in racist colonial ideologies that permeate psychoanalytic theory. In order to break free from the conceptualization of the other, the object, as inferior and without subjecthood, we need to look at how we construct our cultural and individual identities, refusing to tokenize, and "envision relationships

between others, not between a primary subject and secondary object" (Jasper and Plate 5).

It is important to remember that it is not the content of the film but its popular interpretation by western audiences that provides great insight into the processes of identification in a postcolonial, intercultural context. World cinema has the potential to revolutionize our relations with one another—the formation of a "critical imagination" (Jasper and Plate 4). Yet the question remains: how do we provoke this "critical imagination" (3) an 'oppositional gaze'? I believe that the answer lies in disrupting our 'comfort zone,' traveling to other worlds and consciously refusing to participate in 'touristic gazing' thereby allowing the 'other' subjectivity. The western gaze must be complicated and challenged if we are to create new "forms of living together" that do not deny the 'other' personhood /subject formation. Indeed, "the new myth for humankind needs to be a quest, not a conquest" (Martin and Oswalt 117).

The blurring and blending of meaning and message is constantly reorganizing and reinterpreting our approaches to film (Plate 3). According to hooks, cinema is the perfect vehicle for such border-crossing (2). The motion picture industry has the potential to reach a huge segment of the world's population and it is the obligation of the western spectator to engage with the means and modes of production in order to introduce more inclusive narratives of self and community: "changing how we see images is clearly one way to change

the world" (hooks 6). Through the exploration of spectatorship and the politics of the "global imaginary," *Whale Rider* is both imaged and imagined.

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