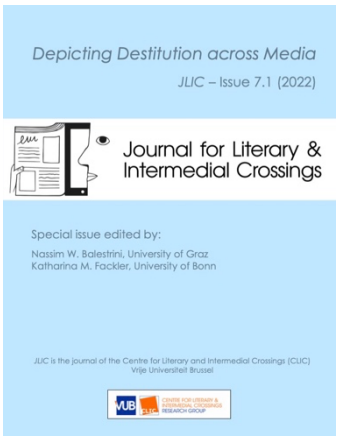

Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

ISSN: 2506-8709

Journal homepage: https://clic.research.vub.be/journal

Submit your article to JLIC

Poverty and Agency in Rural Noir Film

Susanne Rieser, Klaus Rieser – University of Graz

Issue: 7.1

Published: Spring 2022

To link this article: https://clic.research.vub.be/volume-7-issue-1-2022-depicting destitution-across-media

To cite this article: Rieser, Susanne, and Klaus Rieser. "Poverty and Agency in Rural Noir Film." *Depicting Destitution across Media*, special issue of *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. e1-48.

Poverty and Agency in Rural Noir Film

Susanne RIESER and Klaus RIESER

University of Graz

Introduction: From the Hoods to the Woods?

When cinemas finally re-opened in Austria after the 2021 lockdown, we rushed to see Chloé Zhao's multiple-award-winning *Nomadland*. We asked ourselves whether the surprise arrival of a rural noir[1] film at North America's leading cinema circuits meant that we had to reconsider parts of our article – after all, several film reviewers had classified *Nomadland* as the new film about American rural poverty in the United States. While *Nomadland* does depict rural poverty, touching on many of the chief aspects of deprivation, we found that the poverty depicted in this film often serves as a backdrop to a narrative that centers on transience and mourning. Beautifully executed and politically woke, *Nomadland* evinces a "voluntary poverty" (the protagonist repeatedly declines to opt out of her nomadic van life) which contrasts with earlier, more immediate filmic

[1] The films under consideration in this article not only share the thematic focus on poverty but also a combination of stylistic and narrative features which have encouraged us to label them "rural noir." With the choice of "noir," we do not claim that these films are uniform or adhere to a well-defined genre of "noir films." Rather, we want to open up a productive dialogue with the term "noir." Rural noir films are frequently consistent with classical noir features such as a visually and narratively 'dark' film style, a propensity for lawlessness, or characters that are disillusioned and/or dissociated from society. On the other hand, rural noir films exhibit aspects of social realist film and expand the notion of noir in terms of setting, characterization, and narration. One could, thus, conceptualize rural noir as a variation of neo-noir film in that it puts forward a bleak societal perspective which explores culture – in particular capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations – as key thematic references in non-metropolitan settings. Rural noir, just as film noir in general, portrays existential confrontations within an alienating and divided society.

representations of poverty, including Zhao's own *The Rider* (2017), a film that does enter into our analysis.

The new millennium has witnessed a reinvention of movies tagged with the keyword poverty: The locus of poverty has shifted to predominantly rural settings. Prior to the 2000s, films had equated poverty with inner-city life, crime, and the skin colors black and brown (Sherman 891). From the hoods to the woods, the new cycle of independent poverty films has overturned nearly all of these previous parameters: no more urban jungle, screeching tires, drive-by shootings, visual blaxploitation thrills set to rap beats. Instead, we are taken to humdrum places such as the Ozark Mountains, the Mississippi Delta, Louisiana bayous, the Akwesasne St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, or the South Dakota Badlands. This change in location is paralleled by a greater diversity in characters reflective of the correlation of poverty with ethnic groups as well of as the "feminization of poverty" (see Schaffner-Goldberg). The previous focus on urban male poverty in ghetto films has given way to a new interest in rural women: *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), *Winter's Bone* (2010), and *Frozen River* (2008); black rural children: *Ballast* (2008) and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012); rural Native Americans: *The Rider* (2017) and *Frozen River* (2008); and itinerant or nomadic poverty: *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), *The Glass Castle* (2017), and *Leave No Trace* (2018). This shift, hitherto insufficiently reflected in academic criticism,[2] raises several questions about the representation of poverty which we have taken as the starting point for our research: Do the representations of poverty in rural noir films correlate with the de facto conditions of poverty in the US? Do they reflect the racialized and gendered nature of poverty? Do they mirror

[2] Steven Pimpare states that, prior to his 2017 publication *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*, there had been "no comprehensive history of poverty and homelessness in the movies," and his book only includes a chapter on rural poverty (xv). Diana Kendall, too, points out that "[t]hough some scholars have examined media content in relation to race and gender, class remains largely overlooked or deeply enmeshed in the larger race/class/gender sociological paradigm in these studies" (3). Even in 2020, as Wylie Lenz affirms, poverty in American popular culture "remains underexplored" (15).

everyday situations, ranging from food scarcity to distrust of authority, faced by the rural poor? Do they portray the causes for poverty in terms of structural conditions or individual failings? Do they take a patronizing stance verging on poverty porn (Jensen 277) or do they invite empathy or identification with the point of view of those affected? In short, where and how (in terms of medium specificity) do rural noir films position their protagonists on the spectrum from victim to survivor, from martyr to warrior?

Regardless of their flaws or merits, rural poverty films deserve greater attention because they shed light on poverty, this "linked ecology of social maladies and broken institutions" (Desmond and Western 3) which has so far received scant treatment among academics. "Americas forgotten people and places" (Allen-Smith et al. 319) are not just "pockets of poverty" in a rural idyll. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, nonmetro poverty has been consistently and significantly higher than metro poverty over the past few decades for individual races/ethnicities and the population as a whole. Worst off are some so-called "nonmetro noncore" counties, i.e., counties without a "core-based" metro area – the very settings of rural noir films. Statistics reveal further that poverty rates are by far the highest for nonmetro noncore Native American families with children headed by women.[3]

In analyzing the representation of contemporary rural poverty in narrative feature films, we argue that, overall, these new films offer accurate representations of key aspects of present-day poverty and successfully create empathy and foster audience identification with the destitute. Indeed, in keeping with the genre rules of narrative films, the movies metamorphose poverty statistics into gripping narratives by means of individualizing structural problems into personal experience. Nonetheless, as we will demonstrate, rural noir does not shy away from exposing

[3] See also Albrecht et al.; Flora et al.; Struthers and Bokemeier; Summers.

audiences to the fundamental experience of poverty – notably food and housing insecurity and the constant anxiety of maintaining or losing kinship, community, or public support.[4] Rural noir films, however, do not merely depict destitution; they engage the viewers in the plight of their heroines and heroes by equipping these characters with courage, creativity, and resolve – in short, with agency. Following Stuart Hall's concept of articulation,[5] we argue that rural noir acknowledges structural causes of poverty while also granting its protagonists a life which is not solely determined by their destitution. Rather, they fulfill Desmond and Western's requirement for "any full-bodied account of life far below the poverty line" to "be open not only to pain and exhaustion but also resilience and creativity" (310). The films achieve this by combining a detached, observational glance with a narrative that allows the characters to articulate their subjectivity, in particular through their struggle for agency. Accordingly, in our analysis we focus on how accurately the films document the lived experience of scarcity, what representational strategies the films use to present the experience of poverty to the audience, and how these poetics of representation are embedded in cultural scripts such as the deserving poor.

Hence, one major focus of our analysis is on the assessment of the films against a backdrop of sociological literature.[6] Starting from accounts of the lived experience of scarcity, we look at the films' representational strategies such as casting, characterization, and focalization and at how these poetics of representation advance or subvert cultural scripts such as 'the deserving poor.' We understand these poetics of representation as intrinsically intermedial – or, to be precise, multimedial[7] – insofar as they are the product of an interaction of multiple semiotic systems within

[4] In that, they also stand in contrast to earlier 'hood films' which go beyond gang life and violence by presenting income or job insecurity, however rarely the less spectacular topics of housing and food insecurity.
[5] For an overview of the term articulation, see Clarke; for a discussion of how it can be applied to the analysis of poverty photography, see Lemke.
[6] For a comprehensive overview, see Greve.
[7] In a foundational text on cinematic intermediality, Jürgen Müller has claimed that "film is not hybrid or intermedial because it made its medial forerunners into its own contents (as was the thesis of McLuhan), but because from the

a particular text (Rajewsky 201-03; see also Rippl 8-10; Wolf 20). We will thus discuss semiotic systems such as dialogue, sound, music, *mise-en-scéne*, properties of the shot, and editing. Finally, the aesthetic repertory of these twenty-first-century films will be brought in alignment with the most iconic representation of US poverty, that is, FSA photography – in particular the work of Walker Evans.

We will draw examples from a pool of eight films, all of them released in the twenty-first century in the decade from 2008 to 2018: *Ballast* (2008), *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), *Frozen River* (2008), *The Glass Castle* (2017), *Leave No Trace* (2018), *The Rider* (2017), *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), and *Winter's Bone* (2010). These films constitute a consistent corpus in that they are all narrative films that have contemporary rural poverty as their core subject, in contrast to other filmic genres (such as action films, science-fiction/fantasy films, or union films) where other issues compete with or otherwise relegate the topic of poverty to peripheral status. Furthermore, the film selection was determined by each work's focus on specifically *rural* poverty; thus, the films analyzed herein do not include poverty-related works in other non-urban settings, such as small towns (e.g., *Gummo* [1997]; *George Washington* [2000]) or suburbs (e.g., *The Florida Project* [2017]).

Culture of Poverty?

Scholarly opinion diverges over whether poverty originates from socio-political conditions or, at least in part, from the socialized behavior of the poor themselves – that is, from either structural factors or from a so-called "culture of poverty," a term coined in 1959 by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (*Five Families*). In several of his publications, Lewis argues that under specific

very beginning we find medial interactions and interferences on almost every level. Its technical conditions, its circumstances of presentation and its aesthetic structures are all marked by these interactions" (47).

circumstances poor people tend to develop a poverty-perpetuating value system that is characterized by fatalism, distrust of institutions, and lack of class consciousness:

> The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness […]. They are like aliens in their own country, convinced that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs […]. Usually, they have neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves […]. When the poor become class conscious, […] they are, in my view, no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may still be desperately poor. (Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty" [1998] 7)

In defense of Lewis's widely criticized life history and family studies approach, David Harvey and Michael Reed assert that Lewis's work is firmly grounded in a Marxist critique of capital and its productive contradictions, and thus must be seen as "a celebration of the resilience and resourcefulness of the poor" (465). Unfortunately, Lewis's concept found its greatest resonance among budget-cutting conservatives eager to blame the 'undeserving' poor for their lot in life and was thus often ill-received in academic literature.

In fact, focusing on a culture of poverty can lead to the mistaken assumption that 'the poor' are one uniform group. Stephen Pimpare in *A People's History of Poverty in America* cautions against assuming that "poor people have more in common than not, that they share interests, beliefs, wants, complaints, or a common culture" (10). Indeed, life experiences of economically disadvantaged people vary widely according to 'race'/ethnicity, gender, health status, location, community support, educational background, and individual histories of traumatization. In other words, poverty in the US is strongly spatialized, racialized, gendered, and aged,[8] affecting some

[8] Both in non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas, poverty affects Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Natives as well as Hispanics far more than Whites (in 2019 in nonmetro areas the numbers were 30.7 %, 29.6 %, 21.7 %, and 12.7 % respectively). Poverty also affects female-headed families and children most: For female-headed households with no spouse present and with their own children, the poverty rate in non-metropolitan areas was 42.6 % compared to 10.8 % for all family types and 5.4 % for married couple families. Children under five years are the age group most affected by poverty (24 % compared to 15.4 % for all ages and 10.3% for seniors sixty-five years or older; see "Rural Poverty & Well Being").

disproportionately more than others because, "when those multiple forms [of disadvantage] clump together[,] they create a deep and enduring form of hardship" (Desmond and Western 309).

Today, in conjunction with a tendency to shift focus from class to poverty,[9] many scholars have moved past the supposed 'structural-vs.-personal failings' divide, instead looking at "the interface between culture and social inequality" (Bourgois 721) to explain poverty. Even the conservative sociologist William Julius Wilson argues that poverty persists "because of the combined, interacting effects of joblessness, deteriorating neighborhoods, [but also] the 'oppositional' culture these forces generate" (Duncan 236). Or, as David K. Shipler, author of *The Working Poor,* puts it: "the ingredients of poverty are part financial and part psychological, part personal and part societal, part past and part present" (11).

Similarly, Jennifer Sherman, in her article "Coping with Rural Poverty" points out that "struggling families will often choose only those coping activities that are consistent with local cultural ideals such as self-sufficiency, even when this means cutting back on what they consume" (Sherman 893). In her anthropological research, Sherman further finds that the moral capital accrued through the rejection of assistance translates into social capital (a higher social standing in the community) which in turn can be traded for economic capital (jobs, social support), a bartering arrangement which also manifests in rural noir films.

One particular response within 'cultures of poverty' to "the structural violence of poverty" (Bourgois 721) is a culture of resistance in what anthropologist James C. Scott has labelled "shatter zones" (7) – places of resistance to and refuge from the destructive effects of state-rule. Shatter zones, Scott observes, "are found wherever the expansion of states, empires, slave-trading, and wars, as well as natural disasters, have driven large numbers of people to seek refuge in out-of-

[9] According to Gavin Jones, this shift better enables us to recognize "both the cultural (racial, ethnic, gendered) and the socioeconomic (class) dynamics" (18) that affect the poor.

the-way places" (qtd. in Moon and Talley). In their book *Mapping the Mississippi Shatter Zone*, Ethridge and Shuck-Hall transfer the concept to the United States where they identify areas that have developed a distinct and resistant attitude to mainstream culture. Resilience, self-reliance, and distrust of authorities rank high in shatter zone cultures – and likewise in rural noir film.

Representation of the Poor: Poor Representation

Certain persistent phenotypes have characterized Western visual representation of pauperism. In "How the Poor Are Depicted," Gabrielle Emanuel classifies depictions of the poor into five categories. Firstly, she identifies the 'innocent poor,' such as the blind orphan child who cannot be blamed for their circumstances and is deserving of pity. Secondly, there are the 'poor masses'; their "sheer multitude" makes it difficult to identify with them, as they seem to have lost their individuality. A third category, according to Emanuel, are images of the 'working poor' – coalminers, peasants, washerwomen – that capture the physical toll of manual labor. Their individuality is ultimately distorted by their misery. In fourth place come the 'slovenly' or 'undeserving' poor: takers who sit back, collect handouts, live the high life. The imagery suggests that any act of charity may encourage their idleness. Ronald Reagan, in his 1976 'welfare queen' campaign, notoriously conflated indolence with promiscuity: Welfare recipients were gendered and racialized in depictions of adipose single moms ostensibly lacking in self-control. Finally, Emanuel identifies the 'holy poor' as a fifth category. Numerically, the holy poor – such as Lady Poverty or Prince Siddhartha – are a negligible category. Also, holy poverty suggests that only voluntary poverty is to be idealized. While these five genres offer a highly valuable matrix for classifying imagery of poverty, in our own analysis we propose an additional sixth category, that of the self-reliant or autonomous poor.

Western fine arts have marginalized and distorted poverty presumably because they primarily serve to provide aesthetics and beauty. Poverty representations are simply not supposed to be pleasing to the eye or, if they are, have been criticized for aestheticizing poverty (Fluck). This representational dilemma of fine arts showcasing the poor manifests itself already in antiquity. Mick Larsen, in *The Representation of Poverty in the Roman Empire,* demonstrates that, in the privately commissioned art of antiquity, the poor – shepherds, peasants, or slaves – are typically presented in a bucolic but ever-marginal manner. By contrast, Roman state or imperial art – such as friezes on arches of triumph – presents the poor in 'natural proximity' to the emperors. The visual representation of this group – almost as tall as the elite, standing upright, patiently waiting for what unfolds – suggests that they are important members in the state hierarchy: In return for imperial generosity, the *proletarii* are enthusiastic participants in a state system to which they fully belong.

In the early modern period, a vastly different depiction of pauperism is presented in Dutch artist Adriaen van de Venne's *Allegory of Poverty* (1630): His famous painting centers on a blind pauper, weighed down by an old woman and a child who both sit on top of him. Van de Venne delivers a lonely, masculinized version of poverty – a man burdened and pained but, nonetheless, shouldering the generations before and after him.

Representations of poverty changed dramatically in the age of mechanical reproduction. Photography transformed the parameters pertaining to the production, distribution, and reception of social reform iconography. From Jacob Riis's flash photography of New York's *misérables* and the FSA social photography project to Lewis Hine's images of child labor, social reform–oriented photography has faced the same issues which we find in contemporary film representations – ranging from empathetic immersion to 'poorploitation.'

In today's mainstream media, coverage of poverty is still peripheral. According to cultural geographer John McKendrick, journalists and editors regard poverty as possessing little news value. Its causes and consequences are rarely explored, as media coverage tends to marginalize accounts which confront negative public attitudes. When economic hardship is dealt with at all, the media often resort to 'poorploitation' narratives, where poverty is individualized through radically personal stories. In his publications, Martin Gilens compares the true poor to the magazine poor and finds that today the media equate poverty with race and often cast the poor as culpable for their station in life ("Race and Poverty"; *Why Americans Hate Welfare*). The stereotypical media image of the poor – black, unemployed, nonelderly – is not only incorrect, according to Gilens, but also ineffective in generating support for anti-poverty programs among white Americans. Along the same lines, van Doorn denounces the monochrome media representation of poverty in America as misleading. He found that in the roughly two decades from 1992 to 2010, 80% of the poor in the media are Black, while statistically Blacks constitute only 38% of the welfare recipients.

Poverty is also rarely depicted in narrative film; when it is, the representation is typically adjusted to narrative conventions and market expectations. Poverty is often considered as too prosaic, too dull, too unspectacular to carry a film on its own account. It is normally accommodated within other, more spectacular genres such as crime, science fiction, or fantasy film (e.g. *Hell or Highwater* [2016]; *Blade Runner* [1982]*;* or *The Hunger Games* [2012]), or it is 'exported' to remote parts of the world (e.g. *Blood Diamond* [2006]) (see Pimpare, *Ghettos, Tramps*). Nonetheless, poverty has found a handful of very powerful and immediate representations in American film history. In *Ghettos, Tramps and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*, Stephen Pimpare dedicates one out of seventeen chapters on poverty films to rural poverty.

He finds that in the few movies representing life on a small farm, from *Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *The Southerner* (1945) to *The River* (1984), misery is almost always caused by natural forces. It is triggered by storms, heavy rainfalls, floods, or crop failure – and only occasionally by a villain – but not by systemic socio-economic conditions, such as low wages, a punitive welfare system, lack of health care/childcare, or federal farm policies in particular. One noteworthy exception is *Country* (1984), in which a rural Iowan family struggles to hold on to their farm during the years of the Reagan Administration. Here the obligatory tornado appearance is coupled with the devastating effects of high-interest FHA loans, pressure by the FHA to repay the loan and reduce operating costs/expenditures, over-production and declining land values. In recent years, the cinema of poverty has witnessed fresh and intriguing representations – ranging from the box office hit *The Hunger Games* (2012) and a spate of critical new documentaries[10] to the independent narrative films which are the subject of this article.

In the remaining pages, we will look at how the rural poor manage to feed and house themselves, how they organize their social relations (from kin to the neighborhood and their community at large), how they cope with financial precarity, and how these issues are addressed in rural noir in an interplay between sound, narration, and image.

Food Insecurity and the Human–Animal Continuum

Americans living a precarious existence are concerned with food insecurity (in common parlance: hunger), defined by the Census Bureau as "not always having access to enough food to meet basic needs" (Pimpare, *A People's History* 55). Food insecurity affects more than 100 million people in the US: "Over the course of their lives, almost half of all American children [and adults] will

[10] Recent documentaries on poverty include *Waging a Living* (2005), *A Place at the Table* (2012), *Rich Hill* (2012), and the TV documentaries *America's Poor Kids* (2013) and *Growing Up Poor in America* (2020).

receive food stamps" (Pimpare, *A People's History* 56). While millions of Americans have access to USDA food assistance and nutrition programs (food stamps, soup kitchens, food pantries), these resources may not suffice or may not last long enough to meet an individual's basic needs for an entire month. At times, poor people, especially the unhoused poor, must turn to eating from waste bins.

Securing food is also a central aspect in rural noir film – an astounding fact, given that, historically speaking, people who lived in rural areas once had privileged access to food as opposed to city residents. Today, however, this representation is, in fact, accurate because many "rural and farm communities – the very places where crops are grown to feed the world – face hunger," as *Feeding America*'s annual study attests ("Rural Hunger Facts"). According to their website's 2018 statistics, rural communities comprise 87% of the counties with the highest rates of overall food insecurity, due in part to the unique challenges of living in isolated areas. These challenges include "a lack of transportation when the nearest grocery store, food pantry, or food bank is potentially hours away, job opportunities that are more concentrated in low-wage industries, and higher rates of unemployment and underemployment."

In the popular imagination, hunger is, of course, most disheartening when it affects young people, as depicted in *The Glass Castle* (based on an autobiographical account). In this film, children often go hungry or eat from trash cans and, at one point, are abandoned by their parents and forced to stay with multiple abusive relatives for weeks to ensure their food and housing security. Likewise, food is an issue in the low-budget blue-collar survival thriller *Frozen River*. Ray, a working single mom, regularly searches her trailer for coins to pay for school lunch. There seems to be nothing extraordinary about her coming home and asking her sons "Have you eaten?" to which they respond, "No, nothing was there." When on Christmas Eve there is only popcorn

and orange syrup at home, the kids indignantly declare: “This is not a meal.” In contrast to this matter-of-fact representation, food scarcity is rendered in excruciating detail in *Wendy and Lucy*. When Wendy, a woman on a road trip to Alaska in search of a job, can no longer afford dog food for Lucy, she heads to a nearby supermarket, where the sight of fresh pineapples and lush melons nearly leaves her breathless. She almost reaches out to touch one of the shiny green apples, but instead shoplifts two cans of dog food. Unfortunately, one young and overeager store clerk is resolute in setting an example, lecturing Wendy that “people who can’t afford dog food shouldn’t have a dog.” The employee, of an apparently more privileged background, cannot fathom how a dog might be the only companion and the only protection for an introverted loner. His call to the police results in a fifty-dollar fine – another blow to Wendy’s savings. Upon release, she finds Lucy gone; desperately, she sits down in a diner, ordering for herself coffee and a muffin – the only time we see her consuming food – while frantically drawing lost dog flyers. Later, at the body shop, the mechanic delivers more bad news: Her car is broken beyond repair. While he rattles on about spare parts, we see how hard it is for Wendy to process this information while watching him devour lunch, bite after bite, sometimes in extreme close-up. The incongruity between Wendy’s malnourishment and the mechanic’s comparative feast renders this scene one of heartrending empathy for the film viewer – a hearty meal so close and yet just out of reach. In this scene, Wendy is captured in close-up, backlit, and in a slight low-angle shot against a greyish background. This shot, repeated throughout the dialogue, harks back to the formative aesthetic of FSA photography such as the legendary Allie Mae Burroughs portraits and thereby partakes in a discourse of constructing the poor as common folk who are not merely reduced to their suffering (Fluck 72). The close-ups chronicle Wendy’s anxiety and invite viewers to identify with her, a fact that is

reinforced on the aural channel since there is constant low-level car noise (all those cars that have, unlike her own, not broken down).

In rural noir films, there is never much food on the table, save a handful of potatoes; there is, however, the occasional squirrel. Protagonists in *Beasts of The Southern Wild, Winter's Bone,* and *Leave No Trace* resort to foraging, trapping, or hunting to secure food. Instead of furnishing dollars, these people harness their skills. From Oregon and the Ozarks to the bayous of Louisiana, characters hunt game, catch seafood, or trap small land animals. Hunting is depicted as both a necessity and a statement of autonomy. As hunters, their awareness is heightened; their guns are loaded. It is no coincidence that the films present hunting and fishing but not gathering activities: Thorstein Veblen, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), examined the social differentiation between hunting and gathering and its intersection with class and gender. Hunting, argues Veblen, has been historically defined as a superior ('masculine') activity, as it requires excellence (swiftness, bravery, forcefulness); by contrast, gathering – largely uneventful – requires low-skilled ('feminine') diligence. Fittingly, hunting in rural noir is not only a means for meeting immediate nutritional demands, but it also portrays the hunter or huntress in a sovereign relationship to (non-human) nature. In one particularly poignant scene in *Beasts of The Southern Wild*, when the bayou residents throw a hurricane party with an opulent banquet of self-caught seafood, Hushpuppy's dad instructs his daughter how to crack crabs with her bare hands, cheering, "Beast it! beast it!" – and praising her when she finally succeeds with: "There you animal!" Here, "to beast" is a skill; "to be animal" is equivalent to being forceful and successful as the audio track suggests when the fellow residents join into the cheering, reinforced by the visual representation: the exuberant banquet, the saturated colors of the shelter, and the fast-paced rhythm of the editing.

However, such scenes of subsistence hunting can situate humans as uncannily close to animals. Their ability to survive "in the wilderness" (*Beasts of The Southern Wild, Leave No Trace, Winter's Bone*) places them in close association with the "natural world," opening the possibility of pejorative associations with the animalistic – the raw, primal, carnal, brutish.[11] As we know from animal studies, animals are often represented as 'the Other' to the civilized human, or as beasts, as models for instinctiveness, disorder, and chaos (Baker 79). This Othering effect may then be transposed onto humans themselves – to differentiate and order them socially. According to Paul, what he terms the "animal construct" ("Reading the Code" 149-51) serves not only to degrade animals, to relegate them to an inferior position, but also to rank humans, dividing them into civilized humans (rational, disciplined) and animalistic barely-humans. As Zakiyyah Imam Jackson argues in *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World,* this human–animal division further plays directly into social constructions of racial and of class differences.[12]

As opposed to the demeaning equation of poor people with animals, human–animal continuity may be framed in a more appreciative way. In *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008), Donna Haraway establishes human and non-human animals as partners who are characterized by their "co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality" (*Companion Species* 4). In fact, rural noir films often portray such human–animal continuity. Thus, animals are depicted not only as game but also as associates to humans. The different species are shown to cohabitate and to have corresponding emotions, especially fearfulness and vulnerability. For example, Hushpuppy's teacher in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

[11] This association is, of course, particularly problematic in *Beast of the Southern Wild* because Hushpuppy is black – as, for example, bell hooks has criticized. Others, for example Patricia Yaeger, disagree. In our analysis, too, the father's instruction in this film is presented as ambivalent and the empowering of a little girl seems to counter a purely racialized reading.

[12] The "racialization of poverty" may, according to Carsten Schinko, even be extended to "white trash": The semantics and iconography of poor white people from New Deal photography to contemporary portraiture, Schinko argues, make those labeled white trash so different that they seem to form another culture altogether, a race apart.

stresses that "all animals, including humans, are part of the buffet of the universe" (0:08:20), and her father always reminds her to sit down and share her food with their livestock and pets. In these films, human and non-human animals also share their physical frailty and, ultimately, their mortality. Thus, when Ree Dolly in *Winter's Bone* needs to prove to the authorities that her dad is deceased, she realizes that she is physically incapable of dragging his heavy body with her: Her only option is to saw off both his arms and pack them into plastic shopping bags to transport them to the sheriff's office. Disassembling human mortal remains is taboo in Western culture as it suggests meat packing – the slaughtering, processing, and packaging of meat from animals.[13]

In these representations, rural noir films often concur with sociological findings about food gathering in rural communities. However, as shown, a realistic portrayal also has further social effects. While on the one hand the proximity of poor people and animals casts the destitute protagonists as Others to the audience, on the other it portrays poor people as survivors and reminds us that we are all humans – and animals, too.

Securing Shelter

Securing food is not the only challenge that poor people – in reality as in film – face. They are also concerned with finding and maintaining shelter. In having a home and a postal address, one has access to safety from outside aggression and to sanitation, which, in turn, is a prerequisite for appearing 'presentable' on the job market. Thus, housing is a vital aspect for surviving and overcoming poverty but also has particular socio-politic ramifications.

Historically, poorhouses were not about alleviating poverty, but about confining poor people. Life in poorhouses was closely policed; inmates were assigned to hard labor and punished

[13] We will discuss this scene in detail in the section "Policing the Poor."

for failing to comply. In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation,* Silvia Federici meticulously describes the early history of the criminalization of poverty throughout Europe and the United States. Similarly, Steven Pimpare reminds us that 'the poor' – who do not form a coherent category – were 'invented' by typifying and categorizing "a diverse range of persons, having little in common except their poverty: infants, elderly, men, women, sick and able-bodied, sane and insane, criminals and alcoholics" (*A People's History* 43).

Nowadays, federal housing assistance programs certainly no longer punish or confine the poor in this earlier sense. However, they are not sufficient to eliminate poverty and housing insecurity. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, including data from the 2019 American Housing Survey, highlights, 75% of those who would need rental assistance do not receive it due to funding limitations ("3 in 4" n.p.). Thus, more often than not, homeless or transient people are not so by choice (and increasingly so as a result of climate disasters, such as tornadoes and wildfires).

Housing as a problem is not restricted to urban settings as is well portrayed in rural noir films. Every single rural noir film illustrates that a fixed abode is not to be taken for granted even in nonmetro settings. Although far removed from the steep mortgages and hyperinflated rental prices of large cities, each rural noir film places the issue of housing at the center of their visual and narrative construction. For example, the children in *The Glass Castle* long maintain their dream of the 'glass castle' their father has promised them. In reality, their accommodations progressively worsen – from leaking roofs and a lack of sanitation to sleeping rough and staying with violently abusive relatives. In *Leave No Trace*, Will and his daughter, Tom, live in an Oregon forest park because Will, an Iraq war veteran suffering from PTSD, cannot be around people. In fact, according to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, one third of all homeless men are vets,

a situation exacerbated at the beginning of the new millennium as soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan were found to be homeless in significant numbers (Pimpare, *A People's History* 63).[14]

For women, homelessness is particularly problematic. Historically, the term 'tramp,' when applied to females, suggested a promiscuous woman, while in reality "[d]omestic and sexual violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children" ("Housing and Domestic Violence").[15] Interactions with law enforcement for minor offences can be a determining influence here, as is the case in *Wendy and Lucy*. After being fined fifty dollars, Wendy is forced to sleep rough without her dog and wakes up in the middle of the night to a deeply terrifying situation, in which she finds a man hovering above her. In an excruciatingly long shot, the camera captures the terror in her eyes in close-up while he sifts through her belongings. The viewer is left to assume that the man steals the rest of her money and that he also assaults her. Although director Kelly Reichard deserves credit for delivering a beautiful and rare portrait of an introverted drifter, there is something deeply disturbing – even exploitative – about a sequence in which a perpetrator is never exposed while the victim is served on a platter of poverty and homelessness.

Frozen River is a suspense film about a woman who tries hard to come up with the last installment for a new trailer. The opening scene shows a prefab house – advertised as "LIVE THE DREAM *Mobile Homes Versailles"* – on the back of a truck being delivered to the single mother Ray, but, since she cannot come up with the final payment, the house is not even unloaded. Ray's husband has left the family for good after gambling away their savings for the final payment. Acquiring a new trailer home is both a dream and a necessity for Ray and her children. Their old home is run-down, the bathtub corroded, the shower head pilfered from a garbage dump, and, when son Troy tries to defrost the frozen pipes with a torch, he burns down part of the house. The

[14] For a short historical overview of the itinerant vagrant figure in American popular culture, see Schniedermann.
[15] For further data, see safehousingpartnerships.org and DomesticShelter.org.

situation is even more dire for Ray's 'business partner,' Lila Littlewolf, who in the arctic temperatures of the reservation lives in a trailer with faulty heating. *Frozen River* goes beyond exhibiting the destitution of white and Native people in frigid Akwesasne/northern Upstate New York. When smuggling illegal immigrants over the frozen river, Ray and Lila habitually confiscate their shoes until receiving their 'delivery payment' on the opposite riverbank. Without shoes, the *sans-papiers* cannot run away in such a hostile environment. The shoes serve, in miniature, as shelter for the poorest of the poor. In the end, the dangerous but lucrative activity of human trafficking secures the last payment for the "Versailles" mobile home, but since they have been caught in the act, Ray will only be able to enjoy it once she has completed her prison term. Visually, the necessity for a proper shelter is fostered by the fact that the film is set in the winter months, rendered through flat blueish-grayish colors and dim light, the effect of which is a somber, muted, at times almost lifeless atmosphere.

Beasts of the Southern Wild expands the idea of losing one's home to losing the natural environment in which one lives. The film is both a climate drama (the swampland is hit by a hurricane made possible by global warming) as well as a human and a political drama, with a levee separating and 'saving' (white) city residents while exposing the (mostly black) swamp residents to the forces of nature. After the flood has destroyed their home turf, the swamp residents immediately build a raft – in fact, an ark – for their community.

The primary storyline in *Winter's Bone* is the loss of the Dolly family home. After her father goes missing, the eldest Dolly daughter is forced to find him, dead or alive, lest the family be forced off their property. Whereas Hollywood films' 'happy endings' are typically signaled by the resolution of heterosexual courtship (Hayward 83), in most rural poverty films – as in this case – the happy ending comes about through the resolution of the housing problem.

It's Expensive to Be Poor

Turning to the subject of finances, we can, on the basis of the films' subjects, safely eschew bourgeois terminology such as bonds, assets, or dividends. Rather, next to food and housing, income represents a third major worry for poor people. As Pimpare argues, "the desire for work does not necessarily translate into the ability to work: poor Americans often have less education and fewer skills, which limits their options to jobs with low pay, few benefits and little security" (*A People's History* 102), if they find one at all. Moreover, David Caplovitz presents ample evidence that higher rates for cars, insurances, appliances, check cashing, and so on amount to a poverty tax.

Accordingly, in rural noir, cash-strapped individuals are constantly looking for jobs and other forms of income to make ends meet. For example, veteran Will in *Leave No Trace* sells his monthly prescription medication so that they can afford the food they are unable to procure through hunting and gathering. The Lakota bronco riders of *The Rider* earn some money breaking-in horses and competing at rodeo circuits, a highly dangerous endeavor that leaves some permanently disabled, greatly reducing their chances on the job market. In the Ozark mountain drama *Winter's Bone*, Ree Dolly, who aspires to stay away from the local meth economy, finds only one option to 'make (legal) money': to become eligible for the $40,000 cash bonus promised by US Army recruitment posters. Ree would indeed make a tough and successful soldier, a warrior from the underclass. But the recruitment sergeant turns her down, not only because she is underage, but because she has dependents in her family. While she is able to solve all her other problems, she remains unable to escape from "pillbilly" country, as the locality has been mocked by big pharma CEOs (McGreal) – a shatter zone plagued by long-time under- and unemployment. Providing round-the-clock care for infant siblings and a housebound mother, how could Ree possibly enter

the job market? Most of the time, there is a dearth of money in rural noir, and when there is some cash, it is more often acquired through dubious or illegal means than through wage labor.

Kin, Community, and 'Peace of Mind'

As Pimpare points out, poverty is not only "a state of material want" but also a constant struggle caused by this want, for example, the struggle to find the money for the next rent payment or a medical bill. Therefore, he concludes, poverty is "anxiety-filled," adding that "[i]t is precisely that relentless day-to-day anxiety […] that rarely appears on film" (*Ghettos, Tramps* xx). While this is certainly true for the bulk of Hollywood films, rural noir makes ample room for exposing such anxiety: Food, housing, and income insecurity are presented as incessantly pressing issues.

While policy makers define poverty primarily by income, it is more multidimensional. In particular, as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum powerfully argue in various publications,[16] the centrality of human relationships must be recognized in discourses on poverty: Being poor contributes to isolation and shame. Vice versa, relational deprivation is intrinsic to poverty, Sen finds, "and in this sense, social exclusion may be directly a part of capability poverty" (*Social Exclusion*). In fact, next to food, housing, employment, and health issues, one of the most dramatic dimensions of poverty is a lack of social connectedness (Narayan et al., *Voices: Can Anyone Hear Us* 258). These global poverty reports highlight what it means to suffer poverty: "Poverty is pain: it feels like a disease. . . . It eats away one's dignity and drives one into total despair" (Narayan et al., *Voices: Crying out for Change* 2).

As Samuel et al. argue, social isolation, in turn, easily becomes a contributing factor to the persistence of poverty, since social connectedness – the opportunity for empathic interactions and

[16] Cf. Nussbaum; Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* and *Development as Freedom*; and for an overview of their philosophy, Alexander.

reciprocity – are the "touchstone of social capital" (Sen, *Social Exclusion* 143). To have friends or kin who can share a meal, help with a car ride, or provide occasional childcare may indeed make all the difference. Moreover, "trust in others," resulting from the "[c]onnectedness within the community seem[s] to alleviate people's worries about facing adverse events in the future, and thus, seems to provide this 'peace of mind,' which may allow people to better make use of social opportunities" (Samuel et al. 6). Although kin and community can also be exploitative or abusive, they are generally of critical importance to poor people. It is easy to be independent and individualistic when one has one's own house, car, or washing machine, just as when one has access to a full bank account or affordable insurance. In contrast, people in poor areas often have to rely on kin, neighbors, and community to satisfy even basic needs. Close ties can, therefore, provide both social and, by extension, economic capital through informal borrowing and lending or mutual help. Poor people also tend to value this form of support over government assistance because sharing within the community is considered standard human practice, whereas bureaucratic routine, including enquiries and delays, is often experienced as cold and patronizing (see Pimpare, *A People's History* 28).

In keeping with the socio-historical findings, rural noir film is highly cognizant of the relevance of kin and community support. Thus, kin and community relationships are portrayed on a continuum from oppressive (violence, sexual abuse, untrustworthiness) to supportive (sharing, lending, helping out). As a consequence, in all rural noir films, verifying the trustworthiness of others is a permanent concern for the protagonists.

Perhaps the bleakest of the films under consideration here is *Wendy and Lucy*, which chronicles utter loneliness. The film stands apart from the rest insofar as it elevates friendlessness as one of the most precarious dimensions of poverty to its central focus, particularly in the

aforementioned scene in which Wendy has lost both her car and her dog. During the nocturnal assault, as critic Steven Rea describes it, "the camera closes in on Williams' face, and its look of fear and defenselessness and aching aloneness is staggering. There's not a word uttered, and yet the actress, nearly as still as a statue, practically wails" (n.p.). In almost complete darkness, the sound of screeching train wheels stands in for this silent cry.

In *Winter's Bone*, kin and community frequently overlap. The Dolly family is part of a mafiaesque kin system in the Ozark mountains that shuns outsiders. While in times of destitution (critical food and housing insecurity), other Dollys show up for support, the collective *omertà* forced upon the clan members is far from idyllic. On the conjugal level there is constant terror; within their core families the women walk on eggshells so as not to annoy their abusive male partners. It is only on the outside that the women are 'proud girls' (they gang up and brutalize Ree in a scene of rare female-against-female violence on screen). Thus, keeping causes of family conflict within the kin group is both the most obvious and the most worrisome solution for Ree. Ultimately, only the closest relatives provide unconditional mutual support. It is Ree who cares for her mom and siblings, who helps them with school, who teaches them survival skills, and who ultimately risks her life to save the family from collapse.

At first presenting considerable distrust between the protagonists, *Frozen River* argues for overcoming barriers to others and forming quasi-kin structures. The original nuclear family is shown to be dysfunctional: Ray's husband has left with their savings. Ray's 'business partner,' Lila, is even worse off, as she is a widow whose child has been taken from her by the Mohawk tribal council. However, the tribal elders, while unable to protect their members from the ravages of poverty, do provide a certain degree of support and guidance. But, ultimately, self-organized kinship leads to the best outcome. When Lila Littlewolf and the part-white (Ray), part-Mohawk

(her sons) family unite, they can finally stop their downward spiral. As a non-traditional but highly effective family, they succeed in making the last installment for the new trailer home.

Like *Wendy and Lucy*, *Leave No Trace* introduces the issue of community at first through its absence. It starts with the father, Will, and the daughter, Tom, forming a hermetically closed system that avoids external social spheres at all costs. But while this seems to be the best solution for the traumatized Will, the film traces Tom's growing realization that a wider community may be best for her. Therefore, when Will ultimately returns to his 'lonely wolf' life in the woods, Tom opts out of a secluded life in favor of a community. This resolves Tom's trajectory from the father–daughter dyad to the social group and from life in nature to life in culture. For Tom, the community not only means greater safety but also emotional support and peace of mind. These values of community in the film are signaled by growing flowers, communal singing around a camp fire, and, above all, by the fact that Tom is fascinated by and learns bee-keeping. These images suggest that fertility and hope for the future can be found in a self-organized community of like-minded people.

Similarly, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* makes a strong call for community. While the nuclear family is portrayed as unreliable (the parents are absent or terminally ill), it is the 'Bathtub community' that, however fragile, keeps things together. They protect the children, they care for animals, and they even run their own school. It is therefore fitting that the closing scene showcases Hushpuppy protesting and cheering with a crowd of fellow Bathtub residents.

In conclusion, we can say that families and personal networks feature as potentially problematic but ultimately essential in rural noir films. They are presented critically (as dens of violence, treason, and self-destructive behavior) but also in supportive functions (as they open spaces for loyalty, mutual support, cooperation, and solidarity). Most often, it is the fathers who

are presented as unreliable, dysfunctional, or even toxic. It is this *pater vacui* which in rural noir films frequently sets off closer networking among other kin or community members: Siblings take care of one another (*Winter's Bone*; *The Rider*; *The Glass Castle*), mothers and offspring assist one another (*Frozen River*; *Ballast*), destitute people form networks to avoid falling through the cracks (*Winters Bone*; *Frozen River*), and young women leave a father–daughter dyad in favor of a close-knit community (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*; *Leave No Trace*). As already mentioned, the sole film that portrays a complete lack of support (*Wendy and Lucy*) is also the bleakest.

Policing the Poor – Distrust of Authorities

Poverty is best understood not merely as material want but rather as a "correlated adversity" (Desmond and Western 308-10) or social exclusion, which Levitas et al. define as "the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas" (86). Social exclusion is maintained by law enforcement. Poor people face a disproportionate degree of regimentation and control when they have to prove their eligibility for public assistance. When poor people venture outside designated areas, they are often subjected to stop-and-frisk policies; if they become involved in illegal activities, they often receive disproportionately harsher sentences (see Edelman; Hatcher). When, in instances of prolonged deprivation, social exclusion is experienced in combination with over-policing, it may become chronic and result in a "culture of poverty," including a deep-seated distrust of authorities (as first conceptualized by Oscar Lewis). Mass media representations tend to focus on such a culture of poverty without dealing with the underlying causes of this distrust, as discussed above. This is particularly true when they expose 'sacrifice zones' or "shatter zones," distressed and neglected areas suffering from economic disinvestment that have typically been forcefully formed by nation-

building or other hegemonic forces (see Scott; Ethridge and Shuck-Hall). In shatter zones, poor people are likely to suffer not from over-policing but, rather, from under-protection; they often form social communities with their own intrinsic codes of conduct.

Correspondingly, the poor in rural noir likewise experience such policing and exhibit this resulting weariness vis-à-vis government agencies. The only institution that sometimes receives positive representation is school, although a number of caregivers prioritize informal over formal education. More often than not, filmic parents and older siblings teach their young a variety of survival skills, including alertness and distrust: Will's daughter, Tom (*Leave No Trace*), moves through the woods, hunting and foraging like Katniss in *The Hunger Games*; Hushpuppy (*Beast of the Southern Wild*) learns to fish with her bare hands. Ree Dolly in *Winter's Bone* teaches her siblings to aim at and then shoot small animals, while she also sees them off to school every day, constantly quizzing them about spelling and arithmetic. In *Frozen River,* Ray keeps reminding her older son who wants to quit school to earn some money so that they can afford groceries: "You have a job. Your job is to go to school."

Aside from education, the distrust of authorities is a pronounced feature of rural noir. While government agencies that provide assistance are virtually absent in these films, the only government officials we see are almost always representatives of local law enforcement, that is, police officers and sheriffs, who are typically portrayed as inept or even inimical forces. Avoiding, resisting, or deriding law enforcement is, in fact, a standard narrative trope in *Ballast, Beasts, Frozen River, The Glass Castle, Leave No Trace, Wendy and Lucy,* and *Winter's Bone.*

Amongst these, *Winter's Bone* showcases particularly strong anti-police sentiments. Although the women of this Ozark mountain region experience violent domestic abuse at the hands of their male partners and Ree's father was presumably killed by those same relatives, none of

them reports these incidents to the police. In fact, when Sheriff Baskin one day arrives at Ree Dolly's house, a neighbor – busy butchering an animal – slowly walks over, prominently swaying a knife in his hand. In another scene, Sheriff Baskin pulls over a car with Ree and her uncle Teardrop inside, ordering Teardrop out of the vehicle. Although the sheriff threatens to use his firearm, Teardrop remains seated, confidently playing with his rifle before he drives off. Ultimately, the film, which parades battered women and a murdered family member, sides with its characters' distrust of authorities. In a scene that follows the culmination of her quest, Ree delivers the dismembered and bagged arms of her father to the sheriff's office as proof he was not bail-jumping but is, in fact, dead. At the end of the unfolding conversation, in a low-angle shot, Ree provocatively leans against the doorframe. While she talks, her voice becomes more self-assured, even mocking, and acoustically outstanding: The ambient sound volume in the police office, which was very prominent at the beginning of the scene, is now completely absent. In contrast to Ree, Sheriff Baskin is presented at his desk in a high-angle shot, attempting to save face after the aforementioned night-time encounter with Teardrop.

> SHERIFF BASKIN: "Hey! I didn't shoot the other night 'cause you were there in the truck. He [Teardrop] never backed me down."
> Ree leans against the doorway.
> REE: "It looked to me like he did."
> SHERIFF BASKIN: "Don't you let me hear that's the story getting around."
> REE (contemptuous): "I don't talk much about you, man – ever."

Overall, the multimedial assemblage of elements (dialogue, camera position, background sound, voice) of this well-crafted scene reinforces the viewers' identification and empathy with Ree, who appears tough, smug, and self-assured. Upon further consideration, however, her dismissal of the sheriff is problematic on several levels. Although we are tempted to applaud Ree's independence and bold stance towards law enforcement, it is at the very least questionable why she would mock

the sheriff who seems to be a decent person, while all of the male neighbors and kin come across as intemperate, cruel, and abusive. At the same time, we notice that one derogatory cultural script, that of the poor as undeserving (idle, slovenly), is here supplanted by another controversial script: that of the self-reliant poor who turn away from a law-and-order society, valuing their autonomy above all else. While in real life such insistence on self-reliance and vigilante justice may boost some poor people's pride, in representational forms it risks reinforcing conservative or reactionary responses to economic inequalities by establishing that offering assistance to the poor is a pointless endeavor.

Agency: Breaking the Poverty Trap by Breaking the Law

Yet rural noir does not only present characters weighed down by poverty and anxiety. The films also assign individual agency to their protagonists, and we bear witness to their repeated efforts to break the cycle of poverty. In *The Glass Castle*, the girls follow a typical middle-class ethic of sibling solidarity, hard work, sobriety, plus – most importantly – education. Their very personal struggle leads to resounding success. Yet most rural noir films repudiate such a "rags-to-middle-class" formula. Instead, they establish a narrative where poor people expend the entirety of their life force only to reach some temporary respite from the anxiety of poverty. Even for this modest goal, rural noir protagonists habitually engage in illegal activities. Each film examined here suggests that the characters favor the option – the most effective option – of breaking out of the poverty trap by breaking the law. The legal transgressions vary from low-level infractions to felonies – from freighthopping, walkouts, shop-lifting, and small-scale Internet fraud to more serious offenses, such as extortion, meth labs operation, exploding a levee, and human trafficking. While such illegal activities do, of course, occur in a landscape with scant job opportunities –

Western speaks of the "close links between poverty, poor health, violence, and incarceration" (5);[17] in film, they serve to de-romanticize both rural environments and rural inhabitants. Instead of a bucolic atmosphere, we get harsh environments, rendered in gray tones, which are not harmonized by extradiegetic music.

One key example is *Frozen River* whose central characters – two single mothers (Ray, who is Caucasian, and Lila, who is Mohawk) – are exploiting a legal loophole to traffic migrants into the US via reservation territory (the Mohawk reservation straddles the US–Canadian border defined by the St. Lawrence River). Interestingly, the film does not depict Ray's decision to engage in human trafficking as a survival measure. As already mentioned, it is the shattering of her dream for a new trailer that pushes Ray to break the law. Left with few choices, she seizes an unexpected opportunity to earn considerable money by participating in human trafficking. Worse yet, during one of the river crossings, Ray throws out her customers' baggage, inadvertently almost killing a baby hidden inside. Thereby, Ray and Lila are not only transgressing the boundaries of state and tribal law but also the audience's sense of morality. Nonetheless, the film successfully invites spectators to identify with the two mothers, perhaps because neither is a *mater dolorosa* but rather creative, calculating, and cold-blooded.

We are also allied to the characters through specific intermedial choices. The darkness dominating the scene forces us to shift our attention to the sound. At first, we are thus restricted to listening to the voices of Lila and Ray Eddie. However, when they are on their way back – we are still assuming the baby to be dead – laid-back music inconspicuously comes up. This rare deployment of extra-diegetic music prepares for the release of tension that comes about when they (and we) discover that the baby is alive after all.

[17] On the penalization of poverty, see also Wacquant.

Crime is, however, only one aspect of poor people's inventiveness to overcome everyday struggles – what, following Michel de Certeau, we can call "tactics" (including advancing and retreating) in contrast to institutional "strategies" (214). At least in films, these tactics may also be employed in pursuit of somewhat larger goals than mere day-to-day survival. The protagonists seize every opportunity for immediate survival, but at the same time never lose track of their larger goals – of, for instance, how to obtain a new trailer, take care of family members, make a comeback as a bronco rider, or revitalize a grocery store in order to ensure food security. After being hit by a hurricane, the dislocated Bathtub community in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* immediately seeks to rebuild their own little school on a raft. Lauren Riccelli Zwicky's ecocritical reading of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* details how the Bathtub residents – also in terms of long-term survival – go about their lives in ways that are "thoughtful, conservationist and ecologically oriented" (198). It is by means of such tactical gestures that our protagonists become everyday heroes and heroines. They are resourceful, determined, kin- and/or community-oriented, attuned to the past as well as the future without becoming unrealistic larger-than-life figures.

Open Endings with a Touch of Rosiness

Rural noir protagonists are neither saints nor devils. The films refrain from presenting them as monochromatic characters and, likewise, from concluding with either cathartic tragedy or happy endings. Instead, rural noir films tend to adopt open or ambivalent endings in which the core of the matter (of poverty) is essentially left unresolved while the protagonists may experience a partial victory or at least a momentary reprieve. Ultimately, the films do not deny the persistence of factors of poverty, but they do open a window of hope, albeit a small one. These glimpses of improvement are usually signaled by narrative means (partial resolution of problems) in combination with

technical strategies such as intensifying brightness, upscaling color saturation, and – more rarely – easy-going or even upbeat musical scores.

One recurring mode of representing the realism–optimism divide in rural noir is to cast the narrative in terms of a close father–daughter bond. By contrast, a dualism/opposition is situated between fathers who will not adapt or even survive and daughters who not only survive but thrive. *The Glass Castle* is only one example of the trope according to which girls signify the future. While her father is dying from cancer, Jeannette transforms from eating from trash bins to becoming a successful writer. Most other films hold more nuanced moments of hope. In *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Hushpuppy's dad succumbs to his illness and the Bathtub residents lose their (shatter-zone) terrain. While Hushpuppy's future is thus uncertain, the film ends visually on a utopian note when little Hushpuppy defiantly leads the remaining swamp residents along the levee crest, waving huge black flags as symbols of anti-national power and anarchic resistance. A similar splitting of father-as-failure and daughter-as-promise is to be found in *Winter's Bone*: Ree finds out that her father is no longer alive, leaving her to take care of her two siblings and her incapacitated mother. She has abandoned her dream of going away, preferably to college, but with the money from the bail-bond and the house saved, she can at least maintain the family. While it remains unclear how Ree and her siblings will continue on their own, their primary needs are met for now. *Leave No Trace*, too, offers a split-solution at the end of an increasingly erratic search for a place where a father and his daughter can live in peace. When Will decides to opt out of society again and return to the woods, his daughter, Tom, embraces life with a group of welcoming people in a trailer community. It is here that Tom, for the first time, sees beauty in settled life. We watch her roaming through flower beds and herb gardens, before marvelling at a beehive and listening to their humming – a symbol of sweetness and sociality, an epitome of collaboration and community.

Open endings are also achieved when films leave the structural dilemma of economic inequality unresolved but complement the situation with strategies of cooperation. Family or community cooperation is a chief factor in the above-mentioned films, but this is particularly striking when formerly distrustful parties manage to overcome their animosity. Such is the case in *Ballast* and *Frozen River*. In *Ballast*, the three mutually mistrustful protagonists reopen and run the grocery store which may enable all three to secure food and housing. The ending of *Frozen River* is especially powerful. Single mom Ray goes to jail for three months and the family's overall economic situation has not changed in the slightest. With a conviction on her record, Ray is now even less likely to find a job. However, the main difficulties encountered in the film, the danger of losing the down payment on a trailer home and the mutual distrust between Ray and her Mohawk business partner, Lila, are both resolved at the end. While Ray is in jail, we see Lila in front of the new trailer. She watches over Ray's and her own children playing on a decrepit merry-go-round: a tell-tale image with the hint of a lighter note on the ever-revolving cycle of life (and, perhaps, of poverty?). In this final scene, the merry-go-round, so far only static, is being put in motion for the first time and both Lila and Troy Jr. are cautiously smiling. Also, spring is coming. The light is brighter, the colors more vivid, and the frozen ground is thawing (albeit now turning into mud). In a parallel editing, the delivery of the mobile home is even underlaid with soft, calm music that suggests a resolution of the main narrative problem.

The two remaining films are more radical in their refusal of a light-hearted ending. After a horrific accident, *The Rider*'s Brad struggles with giving up his identity as a bronco rider. Since a brain injury prevents his right hand from reliably gripping the reins, any future attempt at mounting a rodeo horse might kill him. Apart from his close relationships with other Lakota riders, his future looks bleak; we simply know that he will continue to struggle, as he has promised to take care of

his beloved sister with special needs. Similarly, Wendy at the end has lost her prize possession (her car) and her companion (her dog, Lucy) and is thus worse off than at the beginning of the film. All that remains is a vague symbol of perseverance. At the end of the film she hops on a boxcar, which – as we dare to hope – might finally carry her to her destination (a summer job at a cannery in Alaska), something to which she has aspired all along.

Intermediality – Photographic Models

The FSA mission to picture poverty by capturing the human face of the Depression has, over time, become the most influential model for poverty representation, epitomized in the work of Walker Evans. As Winfried Fluck states, "[…] the photography of the Farm Security Administration and similar kinds of documentary photography in the 1930s […] prevails to such an extent that it is still shaping perceptions and representations of the poor today" (81). Although this particular style of representation has often been misapprehended to be devoid of aestheticism, Fluck contends that, *au contraire*, FSA poverty iconicity is distinguished by carefully selected and highly specific aesthetic choices.

One crucial artistic decision is about posture. Evans posed portrait subjects to look straight into the lens of the camera, while keeping background low in information value. The portraits are typically taken from a camera position at chest height or eye level with no special lighting effects. Overall, these techniques serve to "establish a parity between the subject and the viewer" (Dickstein qtd. in Fluck 66). Almost one century later, we can still identify the same representational strategies (particularly portrait-like close-ups) in almost all rural noir films.

FSA portrait photographs are, furthermore, characterized by an effect of "clarity and simplicity" which is created through high-contrast shots, "clean, hard lines," "geometric precision" as well as an avoidance of artful-looking angles (Fluck 69-70). In combination, these elements

"create impressions of purity and cleanliness which in many pictures take away the dark stain of poverty" (Fluck 70), instead rendering the rural poor as icons of American resilience. This particular aestheticism, which elevates the rural poor above a rather squalid and menacing (and, we need to add, frequently racialized!) urban underclass, amounts, according to Fluck, to a pastoral mode of representation, revitalized through modernism. Analogies are abundant in rural noir film. Portraiture is typically clean, clear, decluttered. Furthermore, plain backgrounds eliminate or minimize context and depth perception, instead foregrounding individuality and identity of the portrait subjects. This is, for example, the case in *Frozen River*, where at the beginning of the film the camera pans up Ray Eddie's body (clad in a dressing gown) from the tattoo on her big toe via the pack of cigarettes in her lap to her face. The camera lingers on her face until she sheds some tears because – as we will later find out – her husband has taken off with their hard-earned savings. Similarly, later in the film, we get a lingering shot of Ray Eddie in medium close-up in front of her trailer. It is safe to assume that this particular image's correspondence to a well-established national iconic model, based on Walker Evans's portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs (1936), has prompted the decision to select it also as a promotional shot for film posters.

Rural noir films do, however, extend the FSA model by their particular medial possibilities such as sound and narration. Interestingly, most rural noir films limit themselves to the use of diegetic environmental sound, such as distant highway traffic (in *Frozen River*) or screeching freight trains (in *Wendy and Lucy*), while keeping extradiegetic music to a minimum. When they do, however, integrate extradiegetic sound, this creates particularly powerful effects. At the beginning of the film, we hear Wendy talking to her dog Lucy; at the same time, we are provided with extradiegetic sound: Lucy humming to herself in a self-soothing manner. It is established that humming is a common ritual behavior to reduce anxiety and manage self-regulation. The same

humming pops up once again towards the end of the film, when Wendy pays one last visit to Lucy. The deployment of the humming achieves a Brechtian distancing effect at moments when Wendy's situation is very fragile, preventing the audience from an overly sentimental identification, instead transforming the viewer into a conscious critical observer. This aesthetic choice reinforces the modernist looks of the visuals with a sonic distancing of the viewers.

In another medium-specific move away from photography, film's narrative potential is often employed to reinforce the aesthetic model established by FSA photography. By embedding the portraits in a narrative, the characters are framed as both particulars (individuals) and representatives (common folk who have fallen on hard times but do not succumb to despair). This narrative strategy, together with the concatenation of images, helps to counteract a victim status with one of agency since both dispositions may be attributed to the same characters in different moments of a movie. Indeed, a number of rural noir films (*Ballast*, *Frozen River*, *The Glass Castle*, *Winter's Bone*) trace a development from victimization to increasing agency.

The pastoral-modernist aesthetic Fluck attributes to the Evans photographs is still the prevalent but not the only aesthetic model of the time that is revitalized in rural noir films. Particularly, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* in its baroque exuberance departs from the Walker Evans model, as Patricia Yaeger – amongst others – argues. If one were to trace this film's style to an earlier example in photography, a more apt point of reference can be found in Helen Levitt's works. Levitt was a close associate and collaborator of Walker Evans, James Agee, and Henri Cartier-Bresson. In her street photographs, the city and the streets themselves come across as a stage which often serves as a playground for children. The images are far more dynamic than the typical Evans photographs and are often stylized after Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment." *Beasts of the Southern Wild* expands Levitt's aesthetics such as her focus on children, the stage-like setting, and

the deployment of dynamic elements through its particularly filmic means. This film flies in the face of the Dogme-style[18] representational conventions of most rural poverty films such as their bare-bone realist narration in conjunction with blueish or grey color palettes, a dearth of non-diegetic music, and abstinence of artificial lighting. Instead, this film parades saturated colors and exuberant feasts, employs highly suggestive non-diegetic music, and flaunts a narrative mixing realist with fantastic elements, including aurochs stampeding across the southern swamps.

Conclusion

Rural noir films are highly successful in their rendering of US poverty on two accounts. First, they offer nuanced and realistic portrayals of the plight of America's poor. As Pimpare argues, *Frozen River, Wendy and Lucy*, and *Winter's Bone* are "somber, slow, observational films" that "spend time helping viewers understand the reality of lives lived under harsh, brutal, insecure circumstances" *(Ghettos, Tramps* 132). This claim can be extended to the corpus as a whole. Second, these films go beyond a mere realist, detail-focused representation by inviting the audience to identify and empathize with their impoverished characters.

The films we have sampled offer fairly accurate insights into rural US poverty through their realist portrayals of housing, food, and income insecurity as well as of the significance of kinship and community support. In addition, the films provide masterly portrayals of the never-ending apprehensions and anxieties of poor and distressed people in their struggles to break the cycle of poverty. Rural noir films do not entertain fantastic resolutions for their protagonists; rather, they point modestly to some temporary respite for their sorely afflicted protagonists. While the social conditions that prompt the protagonists' plight remain transcendent, their stories (their everyday

[18] The "Dogme 95 Manifesto," written by Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, argued against technological enhancements in cinema, favoring a strictly circumscribed realism in style and content.

maneuvers as well as their tactics) are individualized. To effectively avert attempts at Othering the poor, the films' protagonists are presented as resilient and resourceful – not as superhuman (in the sense of Friedrich Nietzsche's "Übermensch"). Instead, they are characterized by sharing a "common humanity"[19] both with fellow film characters and with viewers. Such a common humanity, according to Alice O'Connor, counters the "myth of otherness" so often incorporated into the structure of discourses of poverty – that "poverty happens to *other* people, and it happens because of something *about* these people" (n.p.).

On the narrative, visual as well as audio levels, the films also prove successful. The scripts deliver characters that are convincing yet inspiring as role models endowed with agency. Not surprisingly for narrative feature films, suspense, thrills, or melodrama are added to the stories. For example, one protagonist almost kills a baby, another dismembers her dad's corpse, yet another might be assaulted any moment of the day, and still another might have a fatal equestrian accident at any minute. These suspense or spectacle elements are offset by the films' attention to continuous anxiety, tedious work, and monotonous routines. Generally, cinematic techniques in rural noir follow textbook rules of how to capture *ennui* – long takes, dull color palettes, dim lighting, side-lighting, and narrative ellipses.

We have also pointed out certain flaws in the rural noir representation of poverty, especially where it relates to the representation of government agencies. These come across as ineffective or even antagonistic and are – with the exception of educational institutions – typically rejected by the protagonists. Such depictions carry the risk of romanticizing the poor, characterizing them as *refuseniks* too proud to accept benefits, while government assistance is, in fact, a decisive factor in alleviating poverty.

[19] For the importance of such a link between the protagonists and the viewers, compare Lemke and Korte.

One may understand this narrative rejection of government agencies – and its interrelation with the other narrative and filmic devices in which it is embedded – in at least three distinct ways. First, it creates a separate, novel category of the poor: In addition to the undeserving and the deserving poor, we here find a category of *refusenik* poor which we might term the 'autonomous poor.' Unlike the conventional 'deserving poor,' the autonomous poor *do* resort to illegal activities; unlike the conventional 'undeserving poor,' they are not blamed for their predicament, which is instead shown to be caused by more general socio-economic conditions. Above all, the autonomous poor transcend the older duality of un/deserving because their *a priori* rejection of assistance renders the question of whether they deserve support irrelevant.

A second way of looking at this 'stubborn' refusal of assistance is that it casts the protagonists as beyond our political responsibility. When poverty is presented as something akin to a natural disaster, possible solutions remain underexplored and the films evoke feelings of compassion, not responsibility, in viewers – a call to take sides does not equal a call to take action. The refusal of assistance thereby translates into a narrative refusal of responsibility. Viewers are spared the recognition of their own complicity in the circumstances which keep the classes apart.

A third way of examining the autonomous poor is that rural noir avoids speaking *for* the poor. Rather, in Stuart Hall's sense, rural noir films attempt to articulate the condition of the poor. That is, the poor are not presented in a patronizing way, but they are established as equals to their audience in terms of a "common humanity" (Butter and Schinko 16). A discourse in which the poor are presented as highly self-reliant may be interpreted as a strategy to create sovereignty of identity on part of the poor. Symbolically speaking, the represented poor do not turn to the authorities (the 'benefactor') and they do not turn to us (the spectators). Instead of parading poor people as needy and putting authorities and audiences in a paternalist position, the films signal that

it is not (solely) about us or about whether and to what degree we can relate. Instead, the poor are akin to us; yet they nevertheless remain at a certain distance from us. Their identity, thus, does not entirely cater to typical middle-class cinema patrons' consumption. When spectators watch rural noir, there is always something more and something less in the represented lives than what they get to consume. This moment of decalage matches the autonomous posture that the protagonists take towards assistance; the 'articulation of the situation,' the narrative autonomy of the represented poor corresponds to the sovereignty of the representation over the reception.

Filmography

Ballast. Directed by Lance Hammer, Alluvial Film Company, 2008.

Beasts of the Southern Wild. Directed by Benh Zeitlin, Cinereach, Department of Motion Picture, Court 13 Pictures, 2012.

Blade Runner. Directed by Ridley Scott, The Ladd Company, Shaw Brothers, Warner Bros., 1982.

Blood Diamond. Directed by Edward Zwick, Warner Bros., Virtual Studio, Spring Creek Productions, 2006.

Country. Directed by Richard Pearce, Far West, Panagea, Touchstone Pictures, 1984.

Florida Project, The. Directed by Sean Baker, Cre Film, Freestyle Picture Company, June Pictures, 2017.

Frozen River. Directed by Courtney Hunt, Cohen Media Group, Frozen River Picture, Harwood Hunt Productions, 2008.

George Washington. Directed by David Gordon Green, Free Country USA, Youandwhatarmy Filmed Challenges, Blue Moon Filmed Productions, 2000.

Glass Castle, The. Directed by Destin Daniel Creston, Lionsgate, TIK Films, Netter Production, 2017.

Grapes of Wrath, The. Directed by John Ford, Twentieth Century Fox, 1940.

Gummo. Directed by Harmony Corine, Fine Line Features, Independent Pictures (II), 1997.

Hell or High Water. Directed by David Mackenzie, CBS Films, Sidney Kimmel Entertainment, MWM Studios, 2016.

Hunger Games, The. Directed by Gary Ross, Lionsgate, Color Force, 2012.

Leave No Trace. Directed by Debra Granik, BRON Studios, Topic Studios, Harrison Productions, 2018.

Nomadland. Directed by Chloé Zhao, Cor Cordium Productions, Hear/Say Productions, Highwayman Films, 2020.

Rider, The. Directed by Chloé Zhao, Caviar, Highwayman Films, 2017.

River, The. Directed by Mark Rydell, Universal Pictures, 1984.

Southerner, The. Directed by Jean Renoir, Producing Artists, Jean Renoir Productions, 1945.

Wendy and Lucy. Directed by Kelly Reichardt, Field Guide Films, Film Science, Glass Eye Pix, 2008.

Winter's Bone. Directed by Debra Granik, Anonymous Content, Winter's Bone Productions, 2010.

Works Cited

"3 in 4 Low-Income Renters Needing Rental Assistance Do Not Receive It." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,* https://www.cbpp.org/3-in-4-low-income-renters-needing-rental-assistance-do-not-receive-it. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Albrecht, Don E., et al. "Poverty in Nonmetropolitan America: Impacts of Industrial, Employment, and Family Structure Variables." *Rural Sociology*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2000, pp. 87-103.

Alexander, John M. *Capabilities and Social Justice: The Political Philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum*. Routledge, 2016.

Allen-Smith, Joyce E., et al. "America's Forgotten People and Places: Ending the Legacy of Poverty in the Rural South." *Journal of Agriculture and Applied Economics*, vol. 32, no. 2, Aug. 2000, pp. 319-29. doi: 10.1017/S1074070800020393.

Baker, Steve. *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation*. Manchester UP, 2001.

Bourgois, Phillippe. "Culture of Poverty." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., vol. 18, 2015, pp. 719-21. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12048-3.

Butter, Michael, and Carsten Schinko. "Introduction: Poverty and the Culturalization of Class." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2010, pp. 5-18. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41158479. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Caplovitz, David. *The Poor Pay More: Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families*. Free P of Glencoe, 1963.

Cartier-Bresson, Henri. *The Decisive Moment.* Simon and Schuster, 1952.

Clarke, John. "Stuart Hall and the Theory and Practice of Articulation." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2015, pp. 275-86.

De Certeau, Michel. "'Making Do': Uses and Tactics." 1988. *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, edited by Gabrielle M. Spiegel, Routledge, 2004, pp. 213-23.

Desmond, Matthew, and Bruce Western. "Poverty in America: New Directions and Debates." *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 44, 2018, pp. 305-18.

"Housing and Domestic Violence." *Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium*, 2017, vawnet.org/sc/housing-and-dv. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart: Poverty and Politics in Rural America*. 2nd ed., Yale UP, 2015.

Edelman, Peter. *Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America*. The New P, 2017.

Emanuel, Gabrielle. "Ideas & Stuff: How the Poor are Depicted." *State of Opportunity*, Michigan Radio, 2013, stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/ideas-stuff-how-poor-are-depicted-part-1. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Ethridge, Robbie, and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, editors. *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*. U of Nebraska P, 2009.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

"Rural Hunger Facts." *Feeding America*, www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/rural-hunger-facts. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Flora, Cornelia Butler, et al. *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change.* Westview P, 2004.

Fluck, Winfried. "Poor like Us: Poverty and Recognition in American Photography." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2010, pp. 63-93.

Gilens, Martin. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misconceptions and the American News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 4, Winter 1996, pp. 515-41, doi: 10.1086/297771. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

---. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. U of Chicago P, 1999.

Greve, Bent, ed. *Routledge International Handbook of Poverty*. Routledge, 2020.

Hall, Stuart. "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance." *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, UNESCO, 1980, pp. 305-45.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Prickly Paradigm P, 2003.

---. *When Species Meet*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Harvey, David L., and Michael H. Reed. "The Culture of Poverty: An Ideological Analysis." *Sociological Perspectives,* vol. 39, no. 4, 1996, pp. 465-95. doi: 10.2307/1389418.

Hatcher, Daniel L. *The Poverty Industry: The Exploitation of America's Most Vulnerable Citizens*. New York UP, 2016.

Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*. 3rd ed., Routledge Key Guides, 2006.

hooks, bell. "No Love in the Wild." *NewBlackMan (in Exile)*, Sept. 6, 2012, www.newblackmaninexile.net/2012/09/bell-hooks-no-love-in-wild.html. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. NYU Press, 2020.

Jensen, Tracey. "Welfare Commonsense, Poverty Porn and Doxosophy." *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 19, no. 3, Sept. 2014, pp. 277-83, doi:10.5153/sro.3441. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Jones, Gavin. *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945*. Princeton UP, 2008.

Kendall, Diana. *Framing Class: Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in America*. 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

Korte, Barbara. "New World Poor through an Old World Lens: Charlie Chaplin's Engagement with Poverty." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2010, pp. 123-41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41158484. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Larsen, Mik R. *The Representation of Poverty in the Roman Empire*. 2015. Ebook. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3sp0w5c4. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Lemke, Sieglinde. "Facing Poverty: Towards a Theory of Articulation." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2010, pp. 95-122. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41158483. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Lenz, Wylie. "Introduction: Poverty, Policy, Beliefs and Popular Culture." *Poverty in American Popular Culture: Essays on Representations, Beliefs and Policy*, edited by Wylie Lenz, McFarland, 2020, pp. 1-24.

Levitas, Ruth, et al. *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion*. U of Bristol, 2007. www.researchgate.net/publication/267222796_The_Multi-Dimensional_Analysis_of_Social_Exclusion. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Lewis, Oscar. *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. Basic Books, 1959.

---. "The Culture of Poverty." *Society*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1998, pp. 7-9. doi: 10.1007/BF02838122. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

McGreal, Chris. "Big Pharma Executives Mocked 'Pillbillies' in Emails, West Virginia Opioid Trial Hears." *The Guardian*, 16 May 2021, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/16/amerisourcebergen-pillbillies-emails-west-virginia-opioid-trial-. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Moon, Michael, and Colin Talley. "Life in a Shatter Zone: Debra Granik's Film *Winter's Bone*." *Southern Spaces,* Dec. 2010. doi: 10.18737/M73K6M. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Müller, Jürgen E. *Intermedialität: Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation*. Nodus, 1996.

Narayan, Deepa et al. *Voices of the Poor: Crying out for Change*. World Bank Group, 2000. documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/501121468325204794/Voices-of-the-poor-crying-out-for-change. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

---. *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us? Voices from 47 Countries*. World Bank Group, 2002. documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/131441468779067441/Voices-of-the-poor-can-anyone-hear-us. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge UP, 2000.

O'Connor, Alice. "Poverty and Paradox." *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2014. hedgehogreview.com/issues/thinking-about-the-poor/articles/poverty-and-paradox. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Paul, Jobst. "Reading the Code of Dehumanisation: The Animal Construct Deconstructed." *Polifonia*, vol. 23, no. 33, 2016, pp. 149-78. periodicoscientificos.ufmt.br/ojs/index.php/polifonia/article/view/3861. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Pimpare, Stephen. *A People's History of Poverty in America.* The New P, 2008.

---. *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*. Oxford UP, 2017.

Rajewsky, Irina O. "Intermedialität, *remediation*, Multimedia." *Handbuch Medienwissenschaft*, edited by Jens Schröter, J.B. Metzler, 2014, pp. 197-206.

Rea, Steven. "A Deft Meditation on Loneliness." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 Jan. 2009. www.inquirer.com/philly/entertainment/movies/20090123_A_deft_meditation_on_loneliness.html. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Riccelli Zwicky, Lauren. "'In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World:' Poverty and Potentiality in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *Poverty in American Popular Culture: Essays on Representations, Beliefs and Policy,* edited by Wylie Lenz, McFarland, 2020, pp. 198-212.

Rippl, Gabriele, editor. *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. De Gruyter, 2015.

"Rural Poverty & Well Being." *USDA Economic Research Service,* 2019, www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Samuel, Kim, et al. "Isolation and its Relationship to Multidimensional Poverty." OPHI Working paper 80, *Oxford University*, 2014, www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/OPHIWP080.pdf. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Schaffner-Goldberg, Gertrude. "Feminization of Poverty in the United States: Any Surprises?" *Poor Women in Rich Countries: The Feminization of Poverty Over the Life Course,* edited by Gertrude Schaffner-Goldberg, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010, pp. 230-265. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195314304.003.0009. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Schinko, Carsten. "Why Trash? Thirteen Ways of Looking at Poor (White) Folks." *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2010, pp. 143-64. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41158485. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Schniedermann, Wibke. "Precarious Mobility: Vagrancy in American Pop Culture." *Poverty in American Popular Culture,* edited by Wylie Lenz, McFarland, 2020, pp. 161-78.

Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale UP, 2011.

Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined*. Oxford UP, 1992.

---. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford UP, 1999.

---. *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny.* Office of Environment and Social Development, Asian Development Bank, 2000. hdl.handle.net/11540/2339.

Sherman, Jennifer. "Coping with Rural Poverty: Economic Survival and Moral Capital in Rural America." *Social Forces*, vol. 85, no. 2, Dec. 2006, pp. 891-913. doi: 10.1353/sof.2007.0026. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Shipler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. Vintage, 2005.

Struthers, Cynthia B., and Janet L. Bokemeier. "Myths and Realities of Raising Children and Creating Family Life in a Rural Community." *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2000, pp. 17-46.

Summers, Gene F. "Persistent Rural Poverty." *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, edited by Emery N. Castle, UP of Kansas, 1995, pp. 213-28.

Van de Venne. *Allegory of Poverty.* About 1630s, Oil on wood; 54.6 x 42.2 cm, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH, Mrs. F. F. Prentiss Fund 1960.94.

van Doorn, Bas W. "Pre- and Post-Welfare Reform Media Portrayals of Poverty in the United States: The Continuing Importance of Race and Ethnicity." *Politics and Policy*, vol. 43, no.1, 2015, pp. 142-62. doi: 10.1111/polp.12107. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. 1899. The Floating P, 2009.

Wacquant, Loïc. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Duke UP, 2009.

Western, Bruce. *Homeward: Life in the Year after Prison*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2018.

Wolf, Werner. "(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2011. doi: 10.7771/1481-4374.1789. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

Yaeger, Patricia. "*Beasts of the Southern Wild* and Dirty Ecology." *Southern Spaces*, 13 Feb. 2013. doi: 10.18737/M7K317. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.