

**ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS  
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM**

**AFTER THE END:  
REPRODUCTION AND SUBVERSION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES  
IN POST-APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVES**

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**İSTANBUL  
2021**

**After the End: Reproduction and Subversion of Gender Stereotypes  
In Post-apocalyptic Narratives**

Sondan Sonra: Kıyamet Sonrası Anlatılarda Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerinin  
Yeniden Üretimi ve Yıkımı

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Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih: 23.06.2021  
Toplam sayfa sayısı: 133

Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)

- 1) Film Araştırmaları
- 2) Cinsiyet Özcülüğü
- 3) Annelik Özgeciliği
- 4) Feminist Anaerkillik
- 5) Özen Ahlakı

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

- 1) Film Studies
- 2) Gender Essentialism
- 3) Maternal Altruism
- 4) Feminist Matriarchy
- 5) Ethics of Care

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to thank my advisor Professor Ebru Çiğdem Thwaites Diken for guiding me through the process and lending their time, support, and patience as I scrambled through this mind-opening journey. I would also like to thank all my lecturers from the Department of Media and Communication Systems for helping me find my passion and expanding my mind. I'd also like to thank my friends and family for believing in me through some trying times. Finally, I would like to pay my respect to all the powerful women I come across with, this research is directly inspired and empowered by you.

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## ABSTRACT

Within the last two decades, some post-apocalyptic narratives with progressive gender rhetoric and strong, rebellious heroines have been adapted to screen. These critically acclaimed feminist post-apocalyptic narratives managed to lead change within a genre that are commonly acclaimed to be white, cisgender, male-dominated. Through their storylines that center around the struggle for social and environmental justice in the face of patriarchy, oppression, and capitalism; and their heroines who lead the fight with not only strength and determination but also with care and compassion, these narratives succeeded to challenge the status quo, binary oppositions and value hierarchies. While seeing these representations of independent, strong and compassionate women who rebel against the patriarchal order within a genre that is commonly acclaimed to be dominated by men is extremely empowering, these narratives reproduce some gender essentialist, reductionist views of radical and cultural feminism such as women being nicer, kinder and more moral than men. This research suggests that within these narratives, while some aspects of this patriarchal gender norms are reimagined and reconstructed, some other deeply-seated ones remain unchallenged and taken for granted. In order to analyze this argument, this research will look into the ways that gender essentialist discourse have bleed into two of the critically acclaimed feminist narratives of the last decade; *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* and try to unravel hidden essentialism that may be lurking within empowerment.

**Keywords:** Film Studies, Gender Essentialism, Maternal Altruism, Feminist Matriarchy, Ethics of Care

## ÖZET

Son yirmi yıllık zaman zarfında, ilerici cinsiyet söylemi ve güçlü, asi kadın kahramanları ile öne çıkan birkaç kıyamet sonrası anlatı beyaz perdeye uyarlandı. İzleyiciler ve eleştirmenlerce beğenilen ve feminist olarak betimlenen bu kıyamet sonrası anlatılar, genellikle beyaz, natrans, heteroseksüel erkek egemen olarak kabul edilen bir tür içinde değişime öncülük etmeyi başardılar. Patriarki, toplumsal & politik baskı ve kapitalizm karşısında sosyal ve çevresel adalet mücadelesini merkeze alan hikayeleriyle ve sadece güç ve baskı ile değil, aynı zamanda özen ve şefkatle mücadeleye öncülük eden kadın kahramanları ile bu anlatılar, statükoya, ikili karşıtlıklara ve değer hiyerarşilerine meydan okumayı başardılar. Patriarkal düzene isyan eden bu bağımsız, güçlü ve yardımsever kadınları, erkeklerin egemenliğinde olduğu yaygın olarak kabul edilen bir tür içinde önemli rollerde görmek son derece güçlendirici olsa da, bu anlatılar aynı zamanda kadınların erkeklerden daha iyi, daha kibar ve daha ahlaklı olduğu gibi toplumsal cinsiyete dair bazı özcü, indirgemeci, radikal feminist görüşleri yeniden üretiyorlar. Bu araştırma, bu anlatılar içinde bazı ataerkil toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının yıkılıp, yeniden tasavvur ve inşa edildiğini, fakat bazı derinlere yerleşmiş olanların sorgulanmadan kabul edilip perdeye taşındığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu argümanı analiz etmek için, toplumsal cinsiyet özcü söylemin, son on yılın eleştirmenlerce beğenilen kıyamet sonrası feminist anlatılardan ikisine ve bu anlatılarda mevcut güçlendirilme ve cinsiyet eşitliği söylemlerine nasıl sızdığı incelenecektir; Açlık Oyunları ve Mad Max: Fury Road.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Film Araştırmaları, Cinsiyet Özcülüğü, Annelik Özgeciliği, Feminist Anaerkillik, Özen Ahlakı

## INTRODUCTION

Like many genres about survival and martial arts, post-apocalyptic movies till the next decade all have fallen into the category of male film genres. But thankfully in the last decade, many post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives with feminist outlooks and rebellious heroines have been adapted to screen, women have been put to the spotlight much more than a few times as rebels fighting against inequality, patriarchy, capitalism, oppression, and environmental destruction. Acclaimed feminist post-apocalyptic narratives like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Hunger Games*, that center their stories around the struggle for social and environmental justice in the face of patriarchy, oppression, and capitalism, have emerged. These contemporary feminist narratives manage to lead change within genres that are commonly acclaimed to be white, cisgender, male-dominated and have no intention to challenge status quo that has been privileging them through ages<sup>1</sup>. Through images of ecological destruction and social collapse that follows it, these narratives try to provide a sneak peek into the future of humanity if the existing injustices and value hierarchies had not been challenged or reimagined. It is possible to say that contemporary feminist fiction is more interested in critiquing social, cultural and economic shortcomings than in imagining a perfect world, by bridging images of future destruction with our everyday lives, feminist post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction “forces us to engage the discrepancy between what is and what could be” (Miller, 1998, p. 339). These narratives manage to shift the post-apocalyptic scene not only because of their progressive storylines but also their experimentations with portrayals of empowerment for women and even with empowerment itself as a concept. Their hero archetypes and rhetoric of empowerment are vastly different from their predecessors,

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<sup>1</sup>Although some of them like *Snowpiercer* and *V for Vendetta* challenge structures like capitalism and neo-fascism, till the last decade patriarchy has been almost invisible.

this new type of hero does not lead the fight only with brute force and determination but also with care and harmony. Unsurprisingly, this hero archetype is endemic to narratives in which egalitarian societies that have harmonious relationships with human and non-human others are promoted and encouraged. These narratives endorse heroes (generally heroines), who are morally upright even to their detriment, care for other human beings' wellness, and approach people with compassion and understanding even if they are their enemies. At the same time, they are portrayed and defined by so-called masculine traits such as strength, determination, courage and assertiveness. They incorporate what is theorized as 'caring masculinity' or 'heroic femininity'; in other words, they consolidate both 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities. Karla Elliott in her article *Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept* summarizes this concept as "a gender equality intervention [...] that seeks to integrate values and practices of care and interdependence, traditionally though not unescapably associated with women, into masculine identities" (Elliott, 2016, p.243).

It is no surprise that in the aftermath of an apocalypse, society will need a hero who will make sure that the remaining limited resources are fairly distributed, and the environment and the vulnerable are being cared for. It is a breath of fresh air to see on-screen narratives that promote social and environmental justice and heroes who lead with egalitarian values and compassion alongside courage and determination. In a way contemporary feminist narratives remind us that "the conventional "women's" values of healing, teaching, and sharing are worth upholding, [...], as tools to help us work through dystopia" (Miller, 1998, p. 344). However, it is important to ask ourselves, why now, when the fight against nature has been lost and when rebuilding is necessary, the post-apocalyptic hero changes gender. How are these so-called

feminine values such as being caring, and nurturing framed especially when they are attributed to women, and in what ways these rhetorics are empowering for women and in what ways they may prove to be restrictive? Might these discourses that we, as women, gladly celebrate as a victory for our empowerment be based on the same thinking that has been used to devalue us through ages? While there is a certain beauty and empowerment to see a woman gaining her agency back through compassion and egalitarianism, if these so-called feminine values are only being associated with women, and are attributed to women's 'essential nature', these narratives then become problematic. Essentialism is an ongoing debate within feminist circles since 1990s, while some feminists think that strategic essentialism provides a solid political ground for gender activism, others think it damages the very thing that feminism advocates for; freedom to construct one's own authentic gender identity. Cressida Hayes summarizes the four different types of essentialism that have been either employed or critiqued within feminist circles as; "(1) metaphysical essentialism, the belief in real essences (of the sexes) which exist independently of social construction; (2) biological essentialism, the belief in real essences which are biological in character; (3) linguistic essentialism, the belief that the term 'woman' has a fixed and invariant meaning; and (4) methodological essentialism, which encompasses approaches to studying women's (or men's) lives which presuppose the applicability of gender as a general category of social analysis" (Stone, 2004, p. 137). There is particularly one type of feminism that has been embracing essentialism as one of its foundational parts; radical / cultural feminism. The feminist movement is diffuse, that's why their ideological dispositions and action plans are also diverse and sometimes contradictory. "Particularly today, in the wake of the deconstruction of the many biases and omissions of the feminist movement, any attempt to pin down what

“feminism” is will necessarily be hopelessly inadequate” (Press & Liebes, 2016, p. 267). There are more than ten categories of feminist thought which seek to define the basis and objectives of feminism as a movement, but four of them are seen as the main traditions. These four categories include; liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical / cultural feminism and eco feminism. This research will focus on the ideas based on radical feminism, because unlike other feminist theories radical feminism embraces the idea of sex differences between men and women and build its tenets and politics upon it. Radical feminism emphasizes that the oppression women face is rooted in biology, and particularly in their capacity to bring forth life. While fighting against the patriarchy, violence and oppression, radical feminism also believes that female qualities that this reproductive capacity brings make women better societal participants. Radical feminism embraces so-called female qualities such as being caring, nurturing and just and states that these qualities are not only different from male characteristics such as violence, dominance and competitiveness but also should be considered as the better options. This notion of women being nicer, kinder, and morally upright, therefore matriarchy being better than patriarchy, is one of the foundational ideas of radical feminism, and remains a major part of it. This research is built upon the idea that this disposition of radical and cultural feminism on women being more caring, egalitarian and moral than men, at the end, still serves patriarchy even when it is reclaimed as empowerment. Gender essentialism historically has been used by patriarchal structures to keep women at home where their labor serves the economy without taking much in return. Whether it is used for empowerment of women or undermining them; this attribution of a fixed essence to women, necessarily, establishes standards on how to be a woman, and also assumes womanhood to be an all-encompassing and universal experience for all women

around the world. Even radical feminists who do not see these various sex differences rooted in biology, believe that they are so thoroughly ingrained in society's collective consciousness to be intractable.

Although essentialism is widely rejected by feminist theorists today, I believe the legacy of radical & cultural feminism; especially its parts that coincide with patriarchy, perseveres within popular cultural and go unchallenged because they serve neoliberal economy. Because popular culture, far and foremost Hollywood, has too little regard for revolutionary viewpoints; and generally opts out for a progressive seeming repackaging of old ideas, it is no surprise that mainstream media readily incorporates and reinforces the essentialist notion of women being nicer, more caring and moral. Both Furiosa and Katniss have been praised by the viewers because they're not some inferior imitation of hyper masculinity and virility as we generally see in female heroes in action movies. They are not stoic, emotionless, cynical like their male counterparts and female predecessors, but are nuanced characters who manage to incorporate both masculine and feminine qualities and because of that they are thought to be more authentic than the heroines that encapsulate a default masculinity. Although this praise is valid and it is empowering to see these type of protagonists on screen, it is important to ask whether this protagonists are readily acceptable for Hollywood because of their sex. It is important to inquire why when we see care and nurturance on screen outside of heteronormative coupling or paternity, the sex of the carer is female.

Therefore, this research will analyse two popular narratives that I believe are reproducing some of these gender stereotypical connections through the treatment of

their heroines and through the ways they represent them; Mad Max: Fury Road and The Hunger Games. In order to be able to show the differences and the similarities between what I classify as conventional narratives and feminist contemporary narratives. Although it is possible to make chronological classification among the narratives chosen for this research, it is not adequate to make such clear-cut distinctions between what this research names as conventional and contemporary narratives. The conventional post-apocalyptic narratives are very much alive and profitable till this day. Throughout this research the term ‘conventional narrative’ is used to categorize the post-apocalyptic and dystopian forerunners with male protagonists such as Soylent Green (1973), Waterworld (1995), I Am Legend (2007), The Road (2009), The Book of Eli (2010), and The Walking Dead (2010 - present). These narratives are classified as ‘conventional’ because they employ narrative devices that the genre of post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction traditionally employs around gender. And the term ‘contemporary narrative’ is used to categorize commonly acclaimed feminist narratives with female protagonists such as The Girl with All The Gifts (2016), Bird Box (2018), as well as Mad Max: Fury Road (2015) and The Hunger Games Series (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). The term ‘contemporary’ is borrowed from Susan Watkins’ book ‘Contemporary Women’s Post-Apocalyptic Fiction’. Watkins uses this term to make a distinction between male-authored conventional apocalyptic fiction and contemporary women’s apocalyptic writing.

In Chapter I, this research examines the history of the post-apocalyptic and dystopian genre through the six canonical post-apocalyptic and dystopian works mentioned above in order to uncover common patriarchal themes, gender stereotypes, and hero archetypes within them. Chapter II looks into the reformist narrative choices and

devices employed within the post-apocalyptic genre with the rise of on-screen feminism, the new outlooks on heavily gendered themes, the progressive representations of femininity and masculinity, as well as the new face of the contemporary hero. Lastly, Chapter III delves into gender-stereotypical and essentialist themes within two popular contemporary feminist narratives; Mad Max: Fury Road and The Hunger Games; by analyzing the rhetoric they employ about the interconnection between care, compassion, morality, and women. Since these narratives are acclaimed to be feminist masterpieces by many media outlets and the viewers; I believe, scanning these narratives thoroughly for gender stereotypical behaviours of women and feminine archetypes will unravel the most persistent essentialist and biologically deterministic presuppositions that our society has around womanhood. I'm of the opinion that the two narratives that will be analyzed within this research stand out as feminist masterpieces because most Hollywood movies in general are so very bad at handling gender. To what extent Hollywood is persistent in gender stereotyping has been recently analyzed by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen, professor of film and television at San Diego State University, in her study 'It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing Films of 2019'. Lauren's research highlights that action movies continue to be male-dominated with only 16% of the characters portrayed by women and it gets worse with science fiction with 8% of the protagonists being female<sup>2</sup>. It is evident that we probably have a very low bar to what we constitute as good feminist narratives when it comes to Hollywood movies. One of the main problems with nuanced female representation in films is just that there is not enough of it. Although this is an overarching problem in

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<sup>2</sup> Lauzen, M. M. (2020). It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing Films of 2019. The Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. [https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019\\_Its\\_a\\_Mans\\_Celluloid\\_World\\_Report\\_REV.pdf](https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019_Its_a_Mans_Celluloid_World_Report_REV.pdf)

the film industry in general, when it comes to action movies representations for women drop significantly. That seems to be the reason for why we have such low standards for incorporation of feminist ideas into mainstream action movies. With the merge of feminism with neoliberalism, feminism has become synonymous with superficial phrases like ‘female empowerment’, ‘strong women’ and ‘girl power’. While the merge proved to be useful, one fact goes unnoticed about popular culture and that is the fact that these works are created for profit, not for progression and transformation. Popular culture, since it proved to be profitable, incorporates feminism into mainstream in a way that results in ignoring the collective and structural work to be done, repackages it as slogans for girl power, and encourages individual action rather than a collective one. Women and girls have consumer power, but this consumer power unsurprisingly results in a form of feminism that works within the confines of an ineffective system and is complicit with the worst aspects of neoliberalism. Women’s empowerment is profitable, that’s why the last two decades have seen a rise in narratives revolving around strong female characters. Commodification of feminism and its integration to neoliberal structures such as Hollywood is what has come to be known as neoliberal feminism. Neoliberal feminism, while being mildly progressive, undermines some significant parts of feminism such as collective action, building alternatives to patriarchal systems and dismantling it whenever they can. In contrast, neoliberal feminism tries to exist in, navigate and achieve progress within the current systems whenever they can. “Elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255). Neoliberal feminism encourages female empowerment, agency, individuality,

freedom and choice while simultaneously distancing feminism from collective action and the call for structural change. While it's true that some individual women may succeed by working hard, being authentic and resilient to transcend patriarchy, upholding these achievements does nothing to dismantle oppression of women in general. What neoliberal feminism fails to acknowledge is that no amount of exceptional women or representations can undo the issues patriarchal capitalism brings and facilitate significant change.

This research is mainly interested in the ways neoliberal feminism coincides with and perpetuate some gender essentialist notions stemming from radical and cultural feminism around care ethics, maternal altruism and feminist matriarchalism. The oppression of women is historically normalized by patriarchy through the discourses around women's so-called innate inclinations to care for others, self sacrifice for the greater good and their essential desire for balance. Radical and cultural feminism reclaimed these essentialist virtues to be used to pave the path for women's political and social empowerment and neoliberal feminism took them to the mainstream without acknowledging their roots that originate in patriarchy. I believe the two movies that will be analyzed in this research, *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, to be good examples of this phenomenon. *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* can be seen as a furthering of the what began in the late 1990s with the TV series like 'Xena: Warrior Princess' and 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'; a neoliberal feminism that incorporates feminist rhetorics to mainstream for profit without an actual critical thought and call for structural change behind. Although it would be unfair to say that these narratives continue tradition around gendered concepts and provide no real progress around gendered discourse; their predisposition around care,

maternal instincts, and patriarchy stands in the way of a real transformation. Within these narratives what is mainly proposed is the freedom to reclaim stereotypical feminine traits, which seems empowering at first but comes at the expense of a collective fight against mandatory moral standards and compulsory care work which already governs women's everyday lives. Thus the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be a caregiver, an altruist and a white hat like she has been expected to be by patriarchal guidelines for decades. The reinforcement of the assumption of women being natural caregivers and moral compasses by neoliberal feminism is nothing surprising, because the importance of women's care work to reproduce and maintain so-called human capital is a prerequisite for a functioning neoliberal economy. That's why neoliberal feminism, hence mainstream media, is so quick to accept and reproduce rhetoric of women's empowerment based on care, nurturance and morality. Neoliberal feminism seems to be essentializing and upvaluing female empowerment constructed upon stereotypical femininity through the discourse of freedom of choice, in order to incentivize women self-regulate themselves.

But, in any case, since both *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* are listed among the top feminist box office movies in many internet articles<sup>3</sup>, classified as one by viewers, critics and academics, and hopefully pave the way for nuanced female characters and better representations for women in action movies, they deserve

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<sup>3</sup> Janes, D. (2020, Feb 28). *40 Essential Feminist Movies You Need to See*. Harper's Bazaar. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/g19037519/best-feminist-movies/?slide=25>

Bonner, M. & DiTrollo, M. (2021, May 26). *25 Feminist Movies You Shouldn't Miss*. Marie Claire. <https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/g19087182/best-feminist-women-empowerment-movies/>

Thomas, L. (2020, Feb 4). *The Feminist Movies Everyone Needs to Stream Right Now*. Cosmopolitan. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/movies/a30474724/best-feminist-movies/>

attention from feminist media studies. What makes a movie feminist is mainly debatable, but it can be said that there are some key points that most feminist media researchers would agree upon to be significant for feminism and women's empowerment "such as the presence of women in central roles [...]; the narrowness of the acceptable age-range, size, sexuality, race, and appearance of women on screen; whether women assume roles of equal power and status to those held by men; and the possibility that there has been a gradual transformation in the agenda and topics central to traditional genres, from hetero-normative families to those who are not necessarily so" (Press & Liebes, 2016, p. 267). In the most basic sense, the requirement for a movie to be feminist is female characters being able to make their own choices and be more than a love interest without losing their femininity along the way. Both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Hunger Games* are critically acclaimed as feminist by many viewers, critics and academics. *Mad Max: Fury Road*, in particular, has been the subject of many heated debates, and even has been described as a "feminist propaganda posing as a guy flick"<sup>4</sup> and called to be boycotted by men's rights activists. A quick search for the words 'Mad Max and Feminism' in Youtube reveals many videos that have been done on the subject, and a quick search done in search engines reveal many articles written on the subject. The reasons behind *Mad Max* being classified as feminist ranges from Eve Ensler, the writer of *Vagina Monologues* and self-proclaimed feminist, being a counselor for the character developments of *The Wives*; to having a cast with a lot of women with different characteristics which is unusual for an action movie. Eve Ensler, in one interview in BBC News, says "If you look at this film from an objective point of view, women are equally capable of fighting. Women have equal desires. Women are independent and

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<sup>4</sup> Clarey, A. (2015, May 11). *Why You Should Not Go See 'Mad Max: Feminist Road*. Return of Kings. <https://www.returnofkings.com/63036/why-you-should-not-go-see-mad-max-feminist-road>

have agency over their own lives. They exist without men”<sup>5</sup>. Numerous film reviews praise the film’s open attack on capitalist patriarchy; Laurie Penny, in her article “Mad Max” Is A Feminist Playbook For Surviving Dystopia’ states that “*Fury Road* reminds the viewer that the liberation of women is not just a prerequisite for social equality — it’s also a damn good story. Patriarchy, it turns out, is prettiest when it’s on fire”<sup>6</sup>. Other reviews celebrate the fact that the film not only portrays nuanced gender representation but also engages in social commentary. Jessica Valenti suggests that the film is a “call to dismantle patriarchies”<sup>7</sup> and adds “... it’s not feminist because Theron’s character gets to engage in as much violence as any other action lead, but because the world director and writer George Miller has created shows the horror of sexism and the necessity of freedom from patriarchy. That is what’s truly terrifying to some men – not that Theron has more lines than actor Tom Hardy” (Ibid.) as an answer to men’s rights activists complaining about not hearing even one line from Tom Hardy in the movie trailer. Sasha James, in her review ‘*Mad Max: Fury Road: George Miller’s Feminist Answer to His Own Franchise?*’, even goes on to say “witness the complete lack of misogyny”<sup>8</sup>. *The Hunger Games*, on the other hand, is thought to be a feminist movie solely because of its protagonist; Katniss Everdeen. Katniss, like Furiosa, is praised for being able to transcend between masculine and feminine qualities smoothly. Lisa Schwarzbaum, in her piece ‘*The Hunger Games:*

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<sup>5</sup> Youngs, I. (2015, May 24). *Eve Ensler on trafficking drama and why Mad Max is feminist*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-32824637>

<sup>6</sup> Penny, L. (2015, May 23). “*Mad Max” Is A Feminist Playbook For Surviving Dystopia*. BuzzFeed. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lauriepenny/the-fast-and-the-feminist>

<sup>7</sup> Valenti J. (2015, May 27). *Sexists are scared of Mad Max because it is a call to dismantle patriarchies*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/27/sexists-are-scared-of-mad-max-because-it-is-a-call-to-dismantle-patriarchies>

<sup>8</sup> James, S. (2015, May 16). *Mad Max: Fury Road: George Miller’s Feminist Answer to His Own Franchise?*. The Mary Sue. <https://www.themarysue.com/george-miller-feminist-answer-franchise/>

Action-film feminism is catching fire’, writes that she finds it surprising that “a female lead character who is strong and feminine, brave even when scared, compassionate even when imperfect, and respectful even when breaking with tradition counts as feminist heroism. But it does”<sup>9</sup>. And she adds; “There is a reason we delight equally in seeing Katniss dressed up (those pretty gowns!) and dressed down (that bow and arrow!)” (Ibid.). Rachel Stark, in her review ‘Why Katniss is a Feminist Character (And It’s Not Because She Wields a Bow and Beats Boys Up)’ states that Katniss is not a feminist character because of her masculine qualities such as her ability to hunt and use weapons, but because she embraces her feminine strengths such as her care for and interdependence with others. She says “But amidst the flurry of excitement over Katniss’s complete and utter BAMFness (to use the technical term), it’s easy to forget what keeps her alive is not superior strength, speed, or intelligence, but rather a characteristic that no one else in the arena embraces. Ultimately, it’s not the weapons Katniss wields but the relationships she nurtures that save her life... It’s her ability to find strength in other women—and to support them in return—that makes the girl on fire a feminist”<sup>10</sup>. Steven Zeitchik, in his article ‘The Katniss factor: What the ‘Hunger Games’ movies say about feminism, and war’ states that before Katniss Hollywood somehow couldn’t conceive a relatable, complicated heroine in a top-tier franchise<sup>11</sup>. Amelia Kahaney, in her article ‘More Katniss, Less

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<sup>9</sup> Schwarzbaum, L. (2013, Nov 26). The Hunger Games: Action-film feminism is catching fire. BBC Culture. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20131126-a-movie-heroine-revolution>

<sup>10</sup> Stark, R. (2012, Mar 21). Why Katniss is a Feminist Character (And It’s Not Because She Wields a Bow and Beats Boys Up). Tor.com. <https://www.tor.com/2012/03/21/why-katniss-is-a-feminist-character-and-its-not-because-she-wields-a-bow-and-beats-boys-up/>

<sup>11</sup> Zeitchik, S. (2015, Nov 20). The Katniss factor: What the ‘Hunger Games’ movies say about feminism, and war. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-with-hunger-games-mockingjay-part-2-t heaters-katniss-feminism-lawrence-20151119-story.html>

Bella: *The Hunger Games* as a Game-Changer’ describes Katniss as America’s “first-ever blockbuster female lead who both kicks ass and has a soul. One who — unlike Beatrix Kiddo, the marauding wife of the *Kill Bill* movies, or Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider* — is more than just an action figure with a killer rack”<sup>12</sup>. The inclination for conventional action heroines has always been to make them less threatening to male viewers because they have the power and means to challenge norms around femininity. While it is possible to make female protagonists of other genres less threatening and subservient through objectification, coupling or punishment; it is much more harder to make the action movie heroine not to be seen as a threat to the patriarchal order she by default has agency, is expected to win, and advance the plot. Bampatzimopoulos, in his article ‘Female Action Hero vs. Male Dominance: The Female Representation in *Mad Max: Fury Road*’ states that there are two methods to make action heroines seem less threatening to the male audience. The first one is over eroticization in order to undermine the impact of her actions, the second one is masculinization or defeminization so that she becomes one of the guys hence an exception to the norm. That’s why in Hollywood movies, it is hard to see characters like Furiosa and Katniss who are powerful without masculinization, and feminine without over eroticization. Action heroines traditionally subscribe either to a default masculinity like Ripley from *Alien* or to a sexual fantasy like Alice from *Resident Evil*; in contrast, Katniss and Furiosa manage to break the mold. Katniss and Furiosa are definitely one step forward at the right direction, but if we declare *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Hunger Games* to be feminist masterpieces, we’re declaring them as desirable models for deconstruction of gender politics. Yet unfortunately they lack the nuance and depth that progression around gender requires. This research suggests that

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<sup>12</sup> Kahaney, A. (2012, Feb 13). More Katniss, Less Bella: *The Hunger Games* as a Game-Changer. <https://www.tor.com/2012/02/13/more-katniss-less-bella-the-hunger-games-as-a-game-changer/>

these two progressive-seeming popular feminist narratives are filled with essentialist discourse that is deeply ingrained to mainstream cultural consciousness, and because of this reason, it is better to approach these narratives with skepticism while praising their progressive approaches to gender politics and gendered concepts.

The post-apocalyptic genre grew in the wake of nuclear warfare and was flamed later by genetic and technological advancements and climate crisis. With the realization of humankind's mass destructive power and the extent of its scientific overreaching, the anxieties around nuclear warfare, genetic manipulation, and climate change have started being played out in popular culture. It is safe to say that the plotlines of many post-apocalyptic narratives reflect the anxieties present in the cultural zeitgeist at their time. For example, globalization triggered anxieties around immigration, thus narratives on zombie apocalypses peaked; a collapse in oil prices triggered anxieties around climate change, thus narratives on disaster apocalypses have peaked. "Postapocalyptic fiction is purposefully fear inducing. But the fear produced by postapocalyptic fiction can be used for different purposes and to serve different ends" (Curtis, 2020, p. 161). One way to use fear is to "reproduce the status quo in a simpler guise" (Ibid.), and the other is to frame fear as "a necessary step towards what philosopher Jonathan Lear calls "radical hope" (Ibid.). The concept of 'radical hope' can be summarized as imagining future possibilities outside of what is in mainstream collective consciousness and taking steps to transcend the current limits of our cultural zeitgeist. As an example, earlier post-apocalyptic narratives opt out to use fear to simply restore patriarchal order as soon as possible, while later narratives use this opportunity to construct humanity anew and imagine better futures for people. Many post-apocalyptic narratives are triggered by real-life political and social

conditions, though the earlier narratives rarely make any commentary on these societal issues or analyze the role they have played in the apocalypse. Conventional narratives either focus on the human drama apocalypse brings, or the gore and violence it awakens within human beings. But thankfully, it has started to change within the last two decades with contemporary narratives and the untapped power of post-apocalyptic fiction has been realized. This new type of post-apocalyptic fiction does not shy away from commenting on important institutional problems related to gender, race and class inequality, climate change, warfare and immigration. Especially the contemporary critically acclaimed feminist post-apocalyptic narratives are definitely a step forward from their predecessors. Not only do they challenge the status quo, and present state of affairs, they also uncover and confront the underlying meaning and structures of these preconceptions.

The first two parts of this thesis are set to break down the differences between conventional narratives and contemporary feminist ones, conventional and contemporary narratives differ from each other both in terms of narrative devices they decide to employ and the subjects they choose to focus on. Contemporary feminist narratives are distinctive because they challenge and reconstruct certain gendered concepts and promote a new hero archetype. These narratives not only employ more nuanced and progressive discourses about gender, but they also redefine or at least touch upon some concepts that are important for the feminist thought such as motherhood, ethics, environmental and social justice. One of the main differences between conventional and contemporary narratives comes from their framing of the past. While conventional narratives paint somewhat a flawless pre apocalypse, contemporary feminist narratives acknowledge that our society is not perfect and

single out some existing conditions that are harmful to both human and non-human nature. Conventional post-apocalyptic narratives have no desire to challenge the conditions that bring about the apocalypse and imagine humanity anew. These narratives are rarely interested in the steps that humanity should take to avert civilization's collapse, they are mainly apolitical. That's probably because they focus on the stories of the characters that are mainly privileged; white, middle-class, cisgender men. While conventional disaster narratives ignore capitalist patriarchy's responsibility on society's current negative conditions (the biggest ones being warfare, social and environmental injustice and climate change), contemporary feminist narratives look back and keep these governing structures accountable for their role in the apocalypse, thus for the conditions we now live in. While conventional narratives focus on nostalgia and restoration of the world to its previous state before the apocalypse, contemporary narratives see the apocalypse as a chance to imagine a different future, as well as a better present for humankind and to envision and endorse a more ingenuous and egalitarian world. Since the focus of contemporary narratives is on achieving equality, they center the plotline around reconstruction rather than restoration. "[C]ontemporary women's fiction, in which questing protagonists seek 'something new': and 'something new' [...], means more than individual freedom or fulfillment - it means something radically oppositional to "the nightmare repetition" of the past" (Greene, 1991, p. 7).

Another difference between conventional and contemporary narratives is their approach to binary oppositions and value hierarchies. While in conventional narratives everything is black and white and within hierarchical structures, contemporary narratives refuse to put any single story above others. This makes it

possible to learn other characters' stories, struggles, and experiences. While conventional narratives center their plotlines around violence, gore, and the inherent evilness of humankind, contemporary narratives see violence as a given and choose to inquire about the reasons behind evilness. In contemporary narratives, fellow survivors are not others to be feared like they are in conventional narratives, most of them are just people who are trying to deal with the trauma apocalypse has inflicted. They may be ignorant, hollow or selfish, but many of them are not necessarily evil. But the conventional narratives instantly fall back on to an age-old narrative device of the wicked nature of humankind for its shock value. In these conventional post-apocalyptic narratives everything other than family, existing or made, is seen as the 'Other', fellow survivors instantly become rapists, cannibals, and oppressors. In contrast, contemporary feminist narratives "undermine ostensibly clear-cut distinctions between self and other" and "explore possibilities for alternative and non-hierarchical definitions of gender and identity within which the difference of aliens and others can be accommodated rather than repressed" (Wolmark, 1994, p. 2). Conventional post-apocalyptic narratives choose to focus on the evilness of humankind, the grotesque bloodshed, and survival in its most basic sense. Such a focus strips the narrative of any nuance, everything becomes black and white. Survival becomes about just staying alive and repopulating, fellow survivors become pure evil, the human connection becomes a thing in the past. Contemporary narratives, on the other hand, leave room for multilayered stories by not focusing solely on the gore. They tell stories of different experiences, of secondary characters, of hope and kinship. The conventional apocalypse can be said to be upholding the blood ties above all else by pitting "family values against the cannibal universe—the good guys versus the bad guys, in McCarthy's unironic terms. And so, with the end of

civilization, the age-old conflict between sexual love (eros) and love of one's neighbor (caritas) also disappears [...] the wreck of civilization reveals the inherent depravity of mankind (excepting one's loved ones) and ratifies the truth that the family is a haven in a heartless world” (Kunkel, 2008, p. 94-95). The contemporary feminist ones tell more nuanced stories within which the line between good and bad, family and kinship, as well as nature and culture blurs. Conventional post apocalyptic narratives mainly revolve around the desire and longing for the traditional two-household family; these narratives start the patriarchy's restoration process from its smallest unit. Conventional narratives generally focus on one of the most apolitical forces of all; love. Love for a child or a woman is used as a narrative device to mobilize the man and make him go out of his comfort zone. Contemporary feminist narratives, on the other hand, focus on the comradeship between people and does not force heteronormativity, love or blood ties. Such a shift in focus also makes it possible for contemporary narratives to experiment with different portrayals for women. While in conventional narratives women are made subservient to men and portrayed as incompetent, irrational, and vulnerable, contemporary ones depict strong female characters with valuable combat skills and relevant survival knowledge. While conventional post-apocalyptic narratives make women dependent on men by highlighting their inferior physical and mental strength, contemporary narratives do not exaggerate the physical and mental differences between sexes. Contrary to their predecessors, in these narratives physical strength and combat skills are depicted as a result of training rather than biology, contemporary narratives refuse biological positioning and determinism in many cases. In conventional narratives, women's vulnerability is highlighted and exaggerated to force them to go back to the domestic sphere as soon as possible and to couple with a man. The constant threat of sexual and

physical violence is one very prominent narrative device often employed by these narratives to enforce patriarchal paradigms on women. Conventional narratives disproportionately concentrate on the impending rape or repopulation, leaving women no choice but to turn back to domestic sphere. Dissimilarly, in contemporary feminist narratives the threat of physical and sexual violence is rendered almost as a given and the story is not centered around it. Within these narratives, women are not confined to heteronormative households or childcare through narratives choices that constantly threaten their bodily order or push the so-called need for reproduction. In conventional narratives, repopulation is rendered as a necessity, the ramifications of bringing a child to an uninhabitable world, or motherhood putting women's lives in danger (no hospitals and there are zombies to flee) are never discussed. Women are forced to the hard work of ensuring humanity's survival, even to their detriment. Contemporary narratives, on the other hand, do not render repopulation as a necessity and put it before the safety of the women, for that reason women are not seen as a means to reproduce but nuanced human beings. This shift from the 'very important' need for repopulation gives contemporary narratives a chance to imagine women's experiences of post-apocalypse out of the domestic sphere. Not only do the conventional post-apocalyptic narratives reinforce patriarchal norms around womanhood, they also formulate a patriarchal masculinity ideal through their protagonists. This masculinity looks like any other masculinity that can be seen in any action movie, the conventional post-apocalyptic hero is stoic, cynical, and individualistic; he only cares about his and his immediate circle's survival and sees the outside world as a relentless competition. His individualistic and cynical hypermasculine shell makes any chance of cooperation or connection impossible. Even if the narrative makes room for cooperation, the conventional hero is too set in

his ways anyways. In contrast, contemporary post-apocalyptic heroines are interdependent, caring, nurturing and open to collaboration. The conventional hero goes through the wasteland by himself, for himself or his immediate circle, in contrast the contemporary hero is a part of a collective and works with her collective for the betterment of conditions for all people not just for her circle. The conventional hero thinks ethics as a set of rules that should be obliged to and does not care who are affected in the process, while the contemporary heroine does not comply with any abstract rule and structures her ethics around people's needs and compassion. While the conventional hero acts in some questionable ways, the contemporary heroine rarely behaves in ways that are unredeemable. All these qualities that the contemporary heroines have, seem to make them more morally upright and incapable than their male counterparts, this may seem like a good thing at first glance. But with a closer look, it is possible to see some of the gender stereotypes lurking under the surface which are perpetuated by patriarchy for centuries to devalue women and confine them to domestic spheres. While analyzing these seemingly feminist narratives, it is important to pay extra attention to how the values and qualities that are deemed 'feminine' by patriarchy, that center around maternity, care and morality, is framed and portrayed. Some gender essential interconnections between womanhood and motherhood (as an extension between care ethics and morality) might be found within these empowerment narratives that prove to reinforce conventional gender stereotypes which are based in biological determinism. Since the post-apocalypse signifies a return back to basics, to analyze what is chosen to be preserved is important. What remains post apocalypse, in a way, shows us things which are so ingrained in our culture that even the apocalypse cannot make us imagine their ending. Within conventional narratives patriarchal paradigms around gender are

preserved, reinforced and even made stronger since now they're apocalypse-tested. In contemporary narratives, some aspects of this patriarchal gender norms are reimagined and reconstructed, but unfortunately some others remain unchallenged and taken for granted. This research will try to analyze how gender essentialist discourse around radical feminist concepts like care ethics, feminist matriarchy and maternal altruism might have bleed into two of the most popular post-apocalyptic contemporary feminist narratives. As mentioned above, I'll analyze two recent feminist post-apocalyptic narratives with female protagonists who lead the fight against oppression and commodification of people, patriarchy and capitalism; Mad Max: Fury Road and The Hunger Games. These narratives are chosen due to their common characteristics such as destruction of the planet and society through warfare, resource shortage and political instability. Both narratives dive deep into the matters of environmental and social injustice, dominance and value hierarchies. They have totalitarian regimes based on domination, militarism, and oppression that take all agency from the people. Their plots mainly revolve around the struggle to take back agency, violent and nonviolent ways of exerting power and redemption in the feminine. In both narratives Artemis-theme is apparent, heroines are portrayed as the protectresses of the young and the vulnerable. Both Katniss' and Furiosa's understanding of ethics is formulated around care and compassion; they are what a post-apocalyptic world needs in a hero. They are interdependent, compassionate, caring; as well as determined, strong and assertive. Their gender identities incorporate both stereotypically masculine and conventionally feminine traits, for example; they are interdependent but struggle with communication, they are stoic but emotional at the same time. They neatly transform the rhetoric around and the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic hero from an individualistic one to a collective one. They also

manage to deconstruct some passé parts of gender politics, unfortunately some deep-seated others still creep behind their character traits. While seeing these representations of independent, strong and compassionate women who rebel against the patriarchal order within a genre that is commonly acclaimed to be dominated by men is extremely empowering, I argue that these two narratives, despite their progressive seeming exteriors, reproduce some gender essentialist, reductionist views of radical and cultural feminism such as women being nicer, kinder and more moral than men, or women being natural caretakers, or their willingness to self-sacrifice for the greater good and their maternal instincts making them better social and political subjects. These concepts, although they do not seem harmful at first, are the result of centuries-old patriarchal discourses, and the very reasoning behind oppression of women. They may seem natural and can be taken for granted, they may even seem empowering; but it is the same rhetoric patriarchy used to keep women at home and to continue to benefit from their unpaid labor. That's why it is important to critically analyze contemporary post-apocalyptic feminist narratives and to be wary about hidden gender essentialism that may be lurking within empowerment.

## CHAPTER I // HISTORY OF THE POST-APOCALYPSE

### I.I. Post-Apocalyptic Narratives: An Analysis

Disaster narratives can be classified into three subgenres; apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian. While apocalyptic narratives feature the catastrophe and human drama at the exact time it's taking place, post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives focus on the human drama taking place in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Within post-apocalyptic narratives, the focus is mainly on the societal collapse that follows the apocalypse and on people who are trying to navigate a barren or an extremely dangerous landscape. Dystopian narratives take place after societal collapse starts to settle, while society is trying to pull itself together; when the societal collapse is being replaced by an extreme, almost sinister societal order. Dystopias, in general, consist of “a world dominated by technology and excessive consumerism that generates endless leisure for a decadent ruling elite and misery for a vast, starving underclass” (Tate, 2017, p. 3), commodification of human beings, surveillance, totalitarian regimes are all too common for dystopian futures. The post-apocalypse, on the other hand, comprises “a devastated earth in which this ‘technofuture’ has failed and life is simply a brutal struggle eked out by the survivors” (Ibid.), fear of the outside world, distrust in others and societal collapse are driving plots of the post-apocalyptic fiction. Contemporary feminist narratives that will be mentioned within this research can be said to be hybrids of both post-apocalyptic and dystopian imagination because they consist of both societal collapse and totalitarian regime themes. I believe hybrid fiction to be the most suitable apocalyptic subgenre to tackle the subject of gender politics because it consists of environmental and social justice themes; such as people's struggles against the harsh living conditions of the

post-apocalypse and the fight against the established structures in which inequality roams free. In a way, hybrid narratives are the ones that can best serve as “vehicles for expressing anxieties surrounding policies regarding class, race, gender, and sexuality” (Boluk & Lenz, 2011, p. 12). Hybrid narratives have to deal with both post-apocalyptic themes such as resource shortages, extreme weather events, pollution, species extinction, societal collapse, violence, and dystopian elements such as oppressive regimes, wars, strict class systems, human exploitation, and unjust suffering. Unlike apocalyptic narratives that focus on the action at the exact moment of the disaster, post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives provide both a sneak peek into the future and a deep analysis of the present of humanity. Through images of ecological and social destruction and its effects, post-apocalyptic narratives show us how our future would unfold if the current conditions and values had not been challenged or reimagined. In other words, post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives “deal explicitly or implicitly with the ecological and sociological failings of humanity” (Booth, 2015, p. 18). In many post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives, it matters very little what the specific apocalyptic event entails (unless it is tied to the solution for either survival of the protagonist or restoration of the earth). The important parts for these narratives are the pre and post-social structures; in other words, the before and after visions of humanity. Pre apocalyptic events that have the potential to lead to an uninhabitable earth or our species extinction are featured in these narratives alongside post apocalyptic effects of this new hostile planet on humankind and its societal and later economic structures. Post-apocalyptic & dystopian narratives can be described as very dark fables, with not-too-impossible plotlines, “in which homo sapiens’ technological and scientific hubris” (Martín, 2019, p. 174) or “callous disregard of itself, the environment, or some other cosmic, natural,

or social order” (Booth, 2015, p. 18) condemn the earth and the humankind to extinction, or in the best-case scenario, to slavery or hunger.

Post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives swiftly made their way towards the mainstream within the past two decades, both on the screen and the page. It can be said that this rise to the top is mainly related to our increasing anxieties around rapid advances in genetic research, the ungoverned growth of technology, fears of the pandemic, resource shortages, overpopulation, underpopulation, pollution, and climate change. These anxieties increasingly take hold of our collective consciousness and for once we see ourselves as the active agents of our doom. We realize that the apocalypse will not be something that happens to us but something we will do to ourselves and our planet if we let our current problems pile up on top of each other. Leah Heim suggests that post-apocalyptic fiction “has a longstanding custom of being demonstratively punitive” (Heim, 2018, p. 90), it generally holds anthropocene accountable for the possible damage done the planet and thus humankind and warns us about “the terror and sorrow that could be unleashed if a particular immoral societal bugaboo is allowed to snowball” (Ibid.). This immoral societal bugaboo changes from narrative to narrative, sometimes it is scientific hubris, other times it is capitalist greed, and from time to time it is militarism. But each and every time, whatever the reason is, it can be said that we come fist to fist with nature, whether it is in the form of a virus that turns people into flesh-eating zombies or resource shortages that cause war and destruction. Environmental and social destruction of any kind might be said to be the prime movers of the post-apocalyptic and dystopian imagination.

Critical analysis of the politics of the post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives is necessary, not only because it serves as a window to our perceptions around our current anxieties, but also because it is important to understand who/what survives or dies or changes post-apocalypse; in other words, what is amplified, what is missing and what is transformed. James Berger, in his book 'After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse' highlights that "the study of the post apocalypse, is a study of what disappears and what remains, and of how the remainder has been transformed" (Berger, 1999, p. 7). Storytellers can make large statements through moral winnowing by choosing what and who survives the apocalypse. Certain people, behaviors, stereotypes, hierarchies, and ideologies may be rendered unquestionably necessary for our species' survival and many others may be cast away, made invisible. Since these narratives not only unravel the gendered implications of our existing cultural zeitgeist, but also fabricate some future ones which will affect how we approach to things now; it is important to "mobilize readings of the post apocalypse through feminist, critical race, and queer lenses in order to theorize both our current politics and our potential future politics" (Gurr, 2015, p. 3). This research will analyze post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives, both conventional and contemporary ones, through a feminist lens in order to understand our past, existing, and future gender politics.

This chapter will look into the patriarchy's position and gender representations and stereotypes within the history of the post-apocalyptic & dystopian genres and try to map common themes. Post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives are commonly acclaimed to be dominated by men, and it is possible to see this phenomenon even with a superficial scanning of the history of the genre. Many narratives within the genre focus on one man's experience as the merit survivor of the apocalypse, and

survival in a post-apocalyptic wasteland is mainly assumed to be related to ‘masculine’ traits such as physical power, violence, dominance in our collective consciousness, and consequently on screen. One may wish that the apocalypse, with the accompanying societal collapse, will be that one trigger that makes it possible to level the playing field and to envision a more egalitarian society without gender stereotypes. However, in many conventional narratives, power structures quickly get re-established and become even more powerful than before now that they’re apocalypse-tested. Because the apocalypse “provides an occasion to go “back to basics” (Berger, 1999, p. 8), everything that stays within our social structures after the event is considered as of true value and as essential. The post-apocalypse presents a chance to simplify our lives and to free us from the clutters of modern life. “Because the superfluous is destroyed, only what is supposedly necessary remains” (Benkert, 2018, p. 41). That is what makes the study of post-apocalyptic narratives important, what stays signifies the things we identify with, we see as our core, our indigenous states, our natural modus operandi. Since the remainders after the apocalypse are considered to be reflecting our true natures as human beings, as men and women; analyzing them may provide an effective look back to our most prominent discourses around what it is to be human, man, and woman. Post-apocalyptic narratives “all too often reproduce conservative ideologies which shape how we “read” social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality as natural and inevitable, perhaps even necessary for our survival” (Gurr, 2015, p. 2). Many conventional post-apocalyptic narratives opt out for the narrative choice of using societal collapse as a means to legitimize the status quo. Especially around gender politics and stereotypical gendered behaviours and values, conventional narratives are too quick to fall back to the most outdated patriarchal paradigms like binary opposition, value hierarchies, and

biological determinism. This chapter will try to list some of the most gender-stereotypical themes offered by the conventional post-apocalyptic narratives and analyze the gendered implications of regression to a more seemingly primitive and thus so-called 'natural' state of humanity and provide examples from six different canonical post-apocalyptic and dystopian forerunners with male protagonists; *Soylent Green* (1973), *Waterworld* (1995), *I Am Legend* (2007), *The Road* (2009), *The Book of Eli* (2010), and *The Walking Dead* (2010 - present).

### **I.II. Patriarchy's Survival in the Post-Apocalypse**

Katherine Suggs in her article 'The Walking Dead: Late Liberalism and Masculine Subjection in Apocalypse Fictions' describes the apocalypse as "a rather peculiar narrative vehicle for the articulation of a transformative future for – or a nostalgic return to – masculine agency and authority" (Sugg, 2015, p. 793). In the post-apocalypse, life is portrayed as a state of "relentless competition" (Ibid.) and "a war of "all against all" (Ibid.). In this brutal state of the earth, 'masculine' traits like power, violence, and dominance once again rise to power since post-apocalypse is a state of survival of the fittest. "Specifically, societal collapse often marks a return to patriarchal paradigms that social structures have presumably tamed heretofore. Violence and power are once again the measure of worth" (Heim, 2018, p. 87). Because the survivor has to use whatever means (whether violent or corrupt) at his disposal to survive the apocalypse, he retreats into his hyper-masculine shell and deals with the loss by becoming stoic. He behaves in a way that goes hand in hand with the cultural narrative that emotions are a weakness. All types of emotions are shut down before they even have the chance to surface. The protagonist of *Waterworld* (1995) refuses to show empathy towards the woman and the child traveling with him (he

even wants to kill the child), the protagonist of *I Am Legend* (2007) refuses to accept hope, the protagonist of *The Road* (2009) refuses to show any kindness, even gets unnecessarily cruel under the pretense of teaching his son the ways of the apocalypse. In these narratives, it is not unusual for the protagonist to become extremely self-centered. Selfish behaviors are justified since they seem reasonable enough actions to take for ensuring the survival of oneself. In *The Road* (2009), the protagonist does not help the people who are locked down in a cellar to be eaten later by the cannibals. In *The Book of Eli* (2010), the protagonist does not help a couple that he came across, who are being set upon by a gang, even though he has the skills and the means. In the post-apocalypse survival is tied with ruthlessness, brutality is shown as a means to prove someone is fit for the continuation of their lineage. Violence is specifically tolerated and even encouraged when it is done for the protection of a child or a woman, violence becomes a way to prove one's love for one's family. This narrative choice mainly "renegotiates a return to more traditional notions of this epitomic identity paradigm of masculinity centred upon uncompromising protectiveness" (Hamad, 2013, p. 110).

The unpredictability of nature has been a major anxiety point throughout human civilization, whether it is the so-called 'external' nature that sometimes kills us with droughts, earthquakes, and viruses, or our own imperfect nature that is pretty much prone to many ethical failings and extreme hubris, or extraterrestrial nature that wants to control and abuse us for its benefit. As Cynthia Belmont puts it in her article 'Ecofeminism and the Natural Disaster Heroine'; these narratives "appeal to our worst fears about the unpredictability of natural phenomena, the consequences of capitalist greed, and the ramifications of our striving for control over every aspect of nature,

from space to the gene” (Belmont, 2007, p. 349). What nature represents in post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives is worth looking into, Kate Soper points out that in its “commonest and most fundamental sense, the term “nature” refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity” (Soper, 1995, p. 15-16); it mainly is “the idea through which we conceptualize what is “other” to ourselves” (Ibid.). The appeal of post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives mainly stems from our fears about ‘the Other’<sup>13</sup>. ‘The Other’ can be anything that has to be tamed, subdued in order for us to feel safe and sound. “The Other presents a threat to social order and bodily order. It does so because it cannot be contained or controlled. The disease is incurable, the alien or monster cannot be destroyed, or the zombie horde cannot be held at bay” (Booth, 2015, p. 18). ‘The Other’ can also become other human beings, fellow survivors turn into beings to be feared, subdued; much like aliens and zombies. The state of the outside world is framed as black and white reflecting how little trust we have in other human beings, especially men. This narrative choice is put to use almost instantly, but the role hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy or capitalism play at this rapid corruption is never highlighted or analyzed.

“The apocalypse narrative (whether in prose or on film) tends to reflect the default creed of neoliberalism, according to which kindness may flourish in private life but the outside world remains now and forever a scene of vicious but inevitable competition” (Kunkel, 2008, p. 95). Outsiders may be tolerated if only they can provide the protagonist with something of value. In *Waterworld* (1995) the protagonist tells the women and the child that he should kill them because they don’t bring anything valuable to the table and slow him down. In the post-apocalyptic and

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<sup>13</sup> This is an extension of De Beauvoir’s concept of ‘the Other’ which defines women in opposition to men. Here Booth expands the concept of ‘the Other’ to cover everything that is not heteronormative, white human male.

dystopian worlds, everyone becomes either their labor or a commodity. Since patriarchy is a system that has value hierarchies, it is not surprising for a post-apocalyptic protagonist to evaluate people based on their values and establish relationships with them based on this evaluation. So why does a post-apocalyptic hero may want to keep a woman and a child close, what value do they bring to the table? Private life, in general, is the only safe zone within these narratives, romantic relationships or the family, whether existing or made, is the only outlet for real human connection. Longing for and desire to preserve or to build a conventional family (a two-parent household in which the father is the provider and the mother is the caretaker) is another patriarchal paradigm within the conventional post-apocalyptic narratives. These narratives, more often than not, bring together a man, a woman virtuous enough to rebuild this ultimate conservative frontier. The restoration of old values start from this heteronormative understanding of family structure. Patriarchal notions, first and foremost, are reestablished, imposed and regulated within this smallest unit of society. As a consequence, such a focus on the family makes it impossible to think and represent women outside the domestic sphere. “Despite giving frequent lip service to equality of the genders, literary dystopias (and utopias, for that matter) have typically been places where men are men and women are women, and in relatively conventional ways” (Booker, 1994, p. 337).

Women with agency and authority are the first ones that take hit in the post-apocalyptic worlds, they are instantly deemed redundant and helpless. Destruction of female empowerment is a common theme within these narratives as if the apocalypse is an opportunity to go back to the good old days in which women abided by the rules of conventional femininity. That’s why within many of the disaster

narratives, while the male protagonists rise to new heights of their physical, intellectual, and emotional strengths, female characters are often reduced to disoriented and irrational weaklings even if they first appear as strong, independent career women. Women are made dependent on men in an instant; even if women survive on their own, the skill sets with which they've managed to do it are mainly invisible. Furthermore, these women that manage to survive on their own with skill sets unbeknown to us turn into damsels in distress as soon as they encounter our strong and stoic male hero. It is possible to say that “it is precisely here, in the genre of the post-apocalyptic, that the most tiring gender narratives are repeated [...] One might say that it is easier to imagine the end of the world, and the end of capitalism, than it is to think outside the structuring fantasies of gender. There must always be an active male heroism driven by a feminine fragility that appears to hold the promise of the future” (Colebrook, 2013, p. 150).

Meekness and passivity on the part of women are shown as a prerequisite to restoring order within these antagonistic and vindictive worlds. Strong, capable, opinionated female characters are made emotional, vulnerable and incompetent, are forced back to the domestic sphere and to their ‘fundamental’ roles as wives and mothers. One narrative choice which is used to make women return to the domestic sphere is the looming threat of sexual and physical violence. Gendered violence and victimization seem endemic to post-apocalyptic narratives, men are just as much of a threat as the zombies, cannibals, or nature for women. Increased possibility of assault and rape towards women is always made the center narrative. “Sexual violence is a key apparatus for the enforcement of patriarchal constructs of gender, in which male domination and superiority are maintained. While not all men use sexual violence as

an instrument of oppression and domination, the threat of force and violence underscores the vulnerability of women to the vampires as well as human men” (Hobson, 2015, p. 130). In some narratives, rape is portrayed as a twisted solution to a maddening need, sometimes as entertainment to stave off boredom, and other times as a tactic to assert power. But all have one underlying message, and the message is that women are disproportionately vulnerable on their own and they have to pair with a man to ensure their bodily order. Women are punished brutally by sexual or physical violence, if they dare to step out of the domestic realm. But paradoxically domesticity also comes with its own disadvantages. The violence that is unleashed and normalized by the apocalyptic conditions sometimes also roams free even within private life. Especially within the earlier narratives, violence towards women is portrayed as perfectly acceptable. It is possible to see instances of direct physical abuse in *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Waterworld* (1995), and even within later narratives like *I Am Legend* (2007) indirect physically aggressive behavior goes under the radar. The companionship of men does not always correspond to a safe zone, especially when a woman exhibits behaviors outside of gender stereotypes. “[W]hen women are depicted as defying patriarchal or traditional gender roles (e.g., challenging male authority, acting aggressively, refusing to submit to a male), there are consequences that may include violence perpetrated against the “offending woman” (Garland et al., 2018, p. 69). In *Waterworld* (1995), whenever the woman challenges The Mariner (even with well-meaning ‘offenses’ like using the harpoon from his boat to defend themselves), she faces some kind of physical violence, in one instance The Mariner even cuts off her and her child’s hair. This scene in particular explicitly shows that the threat to bodily order does not always come from the outside world. In *I Am Legend* (2007), a similar but more subtle threatening behavior occurs when the woman does

not back down and insists on the survivor's zone being real, the protagonist lashes out at the woman by breaking a plate but this action is brushed off as an anti-social behavior since he hasn't seen any human beings for a long time. In short, women may encounter physical and sexual violence both within the outside world and within the domestic sphere. *The Walking Dead* (2010 - present) has examples for both; Lori, who more or less complies with traditional gender roles, is nearly raped by her partner when she turns down his advancements after finding out that her husband is still alive; and Michonne, who is the epitome of the strong, capable woman, is raped by the Governor as a punishment for daring to challenge him. The ages-old dichotomy of the Madonna and the Whore is employed to reinforce what is expected of women in a world of post-apocalypse. Women who are content as wives, mothers and homemakers are portrayed as good and the ones who refuse to be content with stereotypical feminine roles are portrayed as bad. Submissiveness, obedience, self-effacement is framed as the marks of the good woman, whereas aggressiveness, promiscuity and stoicism is made to be the signature characteristics of the bad woman. And it is fairly easy to cross the line between the good and the bad since male heroes of the post-apocalypse have extremely fragile and copybook masculinities.

Another common domestic theme to pay attention to within post-apocalyptic narratives is the way motherhood is treated. Although it has been shown through empirical research<sup>14</sup> that there is no essentiality or universality to motherhood and the practice of motherhood changes from culture to culture, motherhood in post-apocalyptic narratives are more or so presented within patriarchal lines. In conventional post-apocalyptic narratives, "in order to be a 'good mother', a woman

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<sup>14</sup> Davis, A. (2012), *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945–2000*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN 978-07190-8455-3.

should place her child's physical and emotional well-being before her own needs. In effect, she should live for the child" (Åström, 2018, p. 115). Women should either provide protection, domestic labor and emotional support for children, or take the risk of being treated as inhumane monsters for not caring enough about the future of the world. Women should bear the hard work of ensuring humanity's survival. In 'The Road', the woman wants to commit suicide due to fears of being raped and eaten and wants to kill the child alongside herself in order to spare him further suffering, but faces strong opposition from the man and is told that such a talk is crazy. Not the opposition, but the later vilification of the woman clearly states that opting out from this state of responsibility and selflessness and denying one's role as a mother will never be permitted and treated with understanding or sympathy. Women who cannot / won't return to domestic realm, either commit suicide, are raped and killed, or are forced to sexual slavery. In *Soylent Green* (1973), all beautiful, young women are assigned to powerful men as 'furniture'; as a literal parcel of a luxurious apartment. In *Waterworld* (1995), the woman is nearly bartered by the mariner for tradable goods and earlier on the narrative offers herself to the mariner for sex in return for the child's protection. Women's and children's vulnerability, more often than not, stems from the same source; physical weakness. Such a focus suggests women's vulnerability is determined biologically rather than culturally. Even though women are much more experienced than children in the cultural realm, they are still as helpless as them in the aftermath of the apocalypse. Post-apocalyptic narratives exaggerate the 'essential' differences between the sexes, the most played up biological difference is physical power and strength; the second one is the capacity for reason. Within post-apocalyptic narratives, these two 'short-comings' make women vulnerable in the face of extreme conditions. Women repeatedly place themselves and

the people they're with at risk, make decisions based on emotions and either they mess everything up or don't have the resourcefulness and quick wit men have to deal with the problems of post-apocalypse. They are continuously presented as impulsive, irrational and incapable. In *Soylent Green* (1973), 'furnitures' are not equipped even slightly to cope with a little bit of physical abuse and start to cry hysterically, even though they are always under the threat of sexual and physical abuse they somehow couldn't acquire the competence and emotional resilience to deal with it. The woman in *Waterworld* (1995) perpetually positioned as a "brainless obstacle in the way of the savvy mariner"<sup>15</sup> and her actions are always portrayed as impulsive and incompetent, she shoots an enemy plane down but in the meantime wrecks the mariner's boat or spends hours to make a fishing rod but it doesn't work. Likewise in *I Am Legend* (2007), the virus that turns people into some kind of night zombies is the result of a failed cancer cure, unsurprisingly, developed by a female scientist. In *The Walking Dead*, the narrative starts to portray a female character as 'innately' irrational due to her pregnancy when she starts speaking up against the power structure that favors men in the group. *The Road* (2009) also, plays up to a dichotomy between female incompetence and faint-heartedness with male competence and resoluteness, "throughout the narrative, the mother's apparent lack of awareness of, and readiness for, dealing with disaster is juxtaposed with the man's preparedness; her emotional weakness contrasts with his dogged determination" (Åström, 2018, p. 121). From the start, when the disaster strikes, the man anticipating that there will be a water shortage starts to fill up the bathtub, in the meantime the woman asks why he is taking a bath in the middle of the night. These types of juxtapositions are frequently used within the conventional post-apocalyptic narratives to show the essential differences between the

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<sup>15</sup> Daniels, R. (2020, Jul 28). *The Case for Remaking Waterworld*. Crooked Marquee. <https://crookedmarquee.com/the-case-for-remaking-waterworld/>

sexes. In a post-apocalyptic world, the ‘very real’<sup>16</sup> need to repopulate is another narrative device that is used to make women more vulnerable. With this necessity, women are placed in a position in which they have to be protected by a fairly virtuous family man. Pregnancy is a vulnerable state, especially when there are zombies to flee, foods to scavenge or dangerous weather conditions to deal with. Even when it is over, caring for a toddler places women at a direct disadvantage for survival. Conventional post-apocalyptic narratives “view fertile women as a bio-resource for the ‘securitisation’ of imagined future subjects at the expense of their own security, or agency” (Watkins, 2010, p. 49). Many of these narrative choices, especially the ‘need’ to repopulate is never questioned within the conventional narratives, it is just taken for granted. As suspected, gender stereotypes are reinforced for both women and men, patriarchal paradigms of femininity and masculinity are never challenged, they are not even acknowledged. Conventional femininity is portrayed through the love interest or the wife, while stereotypical masculinity is mostly evident in our almighty male protagonists. The conventional post-apocalyptic hero is the embodiment of patriarchal masculine ideals, at the core of conventional post-apocalyptic narrative there lies the tale of the “solitary heroism of the stoical family man” (Kunkel, 2008, p. 91).

### **I.III. Post-Apocalyptic Hero of the Past**

The conventional post-apocalyptic hero fits perfectly to the patriarchal ideal masculine construct, he, to a tee, exemplifies masculine traits like toughness, stoicism, heterosexism, assertiveness, lack of emotional sensitivity and connectedness<sup>17</sup>. Being

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<sup>16</sup> Closing single quotation marks are used in order to indicate that I see this need as a socially constructed concept. In the post-apocalypse, reproductive rights for women are completely suspended, there is not even a little confusion around the matter of repopulation. It is given that it will be a priority no matter what, even pregnancy in a post-apocalyptic world puts women in extreme danger.

<sup>17</sup> American Psychological Association. (2018). *Harmful masculinity and violence*. <https://www.apa.org/pi/about/newsletter/2018/09/harmful-masculinity>

an individualistic, unemotional, rugged, and cynical person helps him survive the apocalypse and navigate the wasteland, but the price he pays for his survival is alienation from other people. All of the qualities that help him survive the aftermath of the apocalypse, later keep him from living within a community. He is too set in his ways to live and work alongside people, he is too individualistic and sometimes ego-centric to help build a community. In conventional post-apocalyptic narratives, encounters of the male protagonist with other people who are not dependent on him are very brief, suggesting if they were longer there would be some kind of conflict due to their harsh personalities. George Miller, director of the series *Mad Max*, in an interview done in 1985 describes *Mad Max* as “a closet human being who denied his humanity because he thought it wasn’t conducive to survival” and adds that “today’s tyrant is yesterday’s hero”<sup>18</sup>. Ego-driven hero is destined to die before he sees himself become the villain. That’s why the conventional post-apocalyptic hero either sacrifices himself for the greater good, or goes on his way, sails or rides away. In *I Am Legend* (2007), the protagonist sacrifices himself to make sure the cure might have a chance to reach the survivor's colony. In *Waterworld* (1995), the protagonist leaves the ‘Dry Land’ saying it does not feel right and he belongs to the sea. It is suggested that one other reason for the post-apocalyptic ego-driven hero to die is that he cannot win the war against nature this time, there is little to no hope to recover what was lost so the narrative allows nature to devour the hero. In conventional action narratives, the hero's primary means for problem-solving is conquest, but this time there is no one small gang of deranged individuals or a grotesque tyrant to be staved off to make everything okay, it is the entire planet. This is a quest that no man can achieve alone, so the hero dies after completing his own small quest that is somehow

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<sup>18</sup> Billson, A. (2015, May 12). *George Miller talks about Mad Max, Heroes & Tina Turner: The 1985 Interview*. Multiglom. <https://multiglom.com/2015/05/12/george-miller-the-1985-interview/>

related to the bigger challenge; recovering earth and humanity. The man from *The Road* (2009) dies from illness right after reaching the coast, Eli from *The Book of Eli* (2010) dies right after he finishes reciting the Bible to the sanctuary's leader. These protagonists, with their rugged, individualistic characters probably would not be able to fit in a social environment and to recover humanity and the planet is no job for a sole man. In *The Road*, right after The Man's death, the child meets with a family of other benevolent survivors suggesting that there is hope for building a modern civilization again. The mother welcomes the child to the family "I'm so glad to see you. We were following you, did you know that? We saw you with your papa. I'm so lucky. We were so worried about you but now we don't have to worry about a thing. How does that sound? Is that okay?" The reason why the family did not approach the father and son sooner is scattered throughout the narrative, the father's cynical personality would not let them. In conventional post-apocalyptic narratives the hero is an instrument that chaperones the symbol of innocence and hope to safety, his value is inextricably interconnected with this task he's set out to accomplish. He is a tool to ensure maintenance of morality and humanity despite its apparent collapse, but he's never there in the long haul, he dies before the restoration process starts. Alongside anti-social behaviour, there is one more reason for his death; the recovery of his humanity is not possible anymore. Contrary to a civilized society, within an inhabitable wasteland morally questionable actions are somewhat justifiable. But when time comes to rebuild a society, moral ambiguity is not something to be tolerated. The protagonists of both *The Road* and *The Book of Eli* have done morally ambiguous things; for example, in some instances they chose not to help people in need even if they have the means and the skills. These heroes simply are not suitable to make the cut since they are too damaged for redemption. The post-apocalyptic

world is unsustainable for the conventional hero because it forces him to act in ways that are decidedly anti-heroic. The death of the hero at the end suggests that, unless a more suitable hero is found, the recovery might not be possible and the progress we achieved so far with this small quest of the hero may stall out or even revert. It can be said that these heroes are ill-equipped to cope with the post-apocalypse. It seems like a shocking plot twist for a hero to be inadequate to take down something, the heroes of our collective consciousness are all mighty and powerful. But it is more shocking to see that these heroes are ill-equipped to deal with the aftermath of the apocalypse because of their so-called 'masculine' traits such as being ego-driven, suspicious, and unemotional. *The Road*, being a conventional narrative, finds its solution within a heteronormative two-parent family. Since the role of masculine traits upon survival were always apparent within the narrative, I believe, what was missing and then later completed with a conventional family were the 'feminine' traits. Suggested in a way, what was keeping the new man/hero in line and preventing him from becoming corrupt, cynical, rugged was the woman. The hero suitable to deal with the aftermath of the apocalypse, should incorporate both 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits but in patriarchy a man having 'feminine' traits or a woman having 'masculine' traits is not something to be accepted so the two-parent household is the go-to solution. The conventional hero of the post-apocalypse tends towards conservatism, this longing is symbolized through the flashbacks to the family bonding scenes. There is an emphasis on nostalgia for the world before things changed. The world before the disaster still lives within the hero's memory, civilisation as in its classical sense with patriarchal paradigms and capitalist definitions are central to these memories and "the momentum after the imagined disaster is either towards the restoration of what has been lost during the apocalypse, or focuses on nostalgic mourning for the past"

(Watkins, 2020, p. 1). The hero does not try to acknowledge or understand the causative impacts of the events leading to the apocalypse or the causes of the actions taken by others post apocalypse, simply because he was and still is in a relatively privileged position. In 'The Road', the man dismisses woman's reasons for committing suicide together as 'crazy talk' because the reasons do not shake him to his core like they do for the woman. He probably will just be killed and eaten, but the woman and the child will be raped or maybe even forced to sexual slavery, which definitely is a much more gruesome place to end up. It can be said that the conventional post-apocalyptic hero is ignorant and anti-political because he can afford it. Kunkel in his article 'Dystopia and the End of Politics' suggests that while conventional post-apocalyptic narratives manifest from serious anxieties and political problems, they are not interested in solving these problems and preventing society or the planet from collapsing. "On the contrary, they are stories of love, the strongest of all anti political forces, as Hannah Arendt once said" (Kunkel, 2008, p. 94). Their heroes are not after building a better civilization, they mainly react to the circumstances the post-apocalypse puts on their paths. In 'Waterworld', the mariner helps people to find the 'Dry Land' and finishes up a highly dangerous gang called the 'Smokers', not because it is the right thing to do or he wants a better and safer life for humankind, he does these things for the love of the child. He does not act out of moral obligation, he does not see himself as a political agent and he definitely does not do it because he feels responsibility or has compassion for humankind. None of the conventional heroes feel responsible for future generations, they fight either for themselves or for their immediate circle. Their apolitical stance is exactly why they are not fit to help overcome the apocalypse, they accomplish their conquests and wander away or sacrifice themselves in the process.

#### **I.IV. Conclusion**

This chapter tries to map out representations of women in earlier post-apocalyptic narratives, as well as the characteristics and the story arches of conventional post-apocalyptic heroes. As it can be seen from this analysis, post-apocalyptic narratives, for ages, seem to have served as a fantasy for white, middle-class men's survival and assertion of power. These narratives, more often than not, reinforce patriarchy and perpetuate the idea of women's positions and roles in a society being a biological necessity rather than a cultural construct. In these narratives, "female characters are often relegated to subservient roles in which they are depicted as sexual objects, as needing protection, or are presented as secondary characters used to enhance the storyline of their male counterparts" (Garland et al., 2018, p. 60). Women are always portrayed as better off within the domestic sphere taking care of children and the home, the longing and desire to preserve conventional hetero-normative family is ever present and is employed as a way to signal 'normalcy'. Women are determined biologically rather than culturally, vulnerability seems as an essential, inevitable, inescapable part to being a woman. Their physical weaknesses, lack of capacity for reason, emotional dysregulation are exaggerated and rendered as the norm. They are rendered as powerless, incompetent and irrational. They are forced to reproduce and to provide childcare in order to ensure the continuation of humankind. They are under the constant threat of rape and sexual slavery. They are not safe on their own or when coupled with a man, they continually face abuse out in the wasteland or in the domestic sphere. To summarize, patriarchy post apocalypse is ever present and stronger than ever, and its foundations are strengthened by biological determinism and essentialism.

The heroes of the post-apocalypse are generally men who are stripped from their emotions and humanity. They are transformed for the worse by the apocalypse, reduced to a singular instinct; to survive. They are ego-driven, cynical and rugged because they either believe they have to be in order to ensure continuity of humankind or their loved ones' survival or it is their modus operandi. They die, sacrifice themselves or ride off back to the wasteland after they accomplish the task at hand, whether it is finding a solution to a pandemic or finding land in a flooded world. The price they pay for navigating through the wasteland is their humanity, they generally are alienated, anti-social, individualistic and overall are not fit to live in a community. They do things that are so anti-heroic that redemption seems impossible for them. They are never present when the restoration process for the planet starts, since they are too set in their ways and do not get along well with other people. Their deaths or disappearance signify that even though they are adequate at navigating the wasteland, they are ill-equipped to navigate the restoration process. Especially within the latest narratives, it becomes clear that the classical ego-driven hero is not sufficient enough to handle the post-apocalyptic world, because no one by themselves is. From this realization, there stems the need to shift the focus from the agent (the post-apocalyptic hero) to the purpose (restoring humanity and the planet). The scene of the post-apocalypse is not something that can be subdued, even fleeing from it is not possible. There is no escape, the hero must find a way to live alongside the challenges it presents and work through recovering it. Thus, a new type of hero is needed, one who can restore the scene not by conquering it, but by working with it. Contemporary narratives highlight the need for a different approach to problem solving; a collective one rather than an individualistic, stoic one. Ego-driven heroes who refuse to trust,

rely on and are incapable of working with people, or conservative rhetorics demanding a return to the conventional values just cannot make it to the cut anymore. Second chapter will analyse these new, contemporary narratives and try to map out how representations of women and the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic hero has changed.

## CHAPTER II / END OF THE WORLD AS SHE KNOWS IT

### I.I. The World According to Julia<sup>19</sup>

In the last chapter, we've come to the conclusion that the old narratives and their agents fall inadequate at the face of post-apocalypse and a new kind of hero that is not ego-driven and a different type of solution that does not default to the conservative rhetorics are needed to transcend the apocalypse to restore the planet and the 'humanity'. Luckily, some contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives manage to utilize progressive rhetorics and promote different kind of heroes that do not default to a patriarchal masculine ideal. These narratives subvert some gender stereotypes (as we'll discuss in Chapter III, some deep-seated gender stereotypes still persist) and employ different and more complex representations for male and female post-apocalyptic heroes. In this chapter, we'll look into the changes in post-apocalyptic narratives, the subverted gender stereotypes, and the new heroines of the post-apocalypse. We'll do this by analyzing five critically acclaimed feminist post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives; *The Girl with All The Gifts* (2016), *Bird Box* (2018), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *The Hunger Games Series* (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Adrienne Rich, in her essay 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision', talks about a concept called 'Re-vision', and why it is important for women. She describes 'Re-vision' as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the

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<sup>19</sup> Julia is the love interest of Winston; the protagonist of George Orwell's beloved novel '1984'. This phrase is used by Margaret Atwood, while she is explaining her motivations to write the *Handmaid's Tale*, in her piece on George Orwell published in *The Guardian*. "I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view - the world according to Julia, as it were. However, this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a "feminist dystopia", except insofar as giving a woman a voice and an inner life will always be considered "feminist" by those who think women ought not to have these things". Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/16/georgeorwell.artsfeatures>

assumptions in which we are drowned we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (Rich, 1972, p. 18). Rich suggests that the change has to be radical and women have to smash the norms of the political order if they do not want to see it re-asserting itself in every revolution. They need to subvert the centuries-old rhetoric on gender in order to counter its clasp over their identities, bodies and stories. New feminist post-apocalyptic narratives try to oppose this hold of outdated gender politics over women by analyzing “the relationship that exists between structural inequalities generated by patriarchy, misogyny and racism and issues such as climate change, global capitalism and techno-science” (Watkins, 2020, p. 10). These narratives investigate how such inequalities affect different people, how they deprive people of their basic needs, thus their agencies. And also how crisis of any sort such as environmental destruction, warfare etc. does further disservice to people who are already disadvantaged. The Tesseræ concept in *The Hunger Games* exemplifies this injustice quite thoroughly, children between the ages of 12 through 18 are essentially forced to apply for tesseræ because if they do not there is a good chance that they will die of hunger. Signing up for tesseræ provides them with a year’s supply of grain and oil, but in return puts one more slip with their name in the reaping ball to be chosen as a tribute for *The Games* when the time comes. Naturally, children from poorer households apply for tesseræ much more often than their relatively richer counterparts; this puts them in a very disadvantaged position in *The Reaping*, since their chance to be picked becomes much higher. Brianna Burke, in her article “Reaping” Environmental Justice through Compassion in *The Hunger Games*, states that *The Hunger Games* tactfully address environmental issues such as the global food system and hunger and demonstrate that

“food is a social and environmental justice concern, showing that how we view the natural world—as “raw materials” to be consumed, manipulated, or contaminated according to our desires—extends to both our domestic labor practices and our use of marginalized human beings globally” (Burke, 2014, p. 544). Other contemporary feminist narratives like *Mad Max: Fury Road* also address pressing global matters of our time with the same nuanced outlook, this inclination to portray complex social issues through grotesque spectacles can be said to be the main transformative feature of contemporary feminist narratives.

Conventional speculative narratives and the future they envision mostly reconfirm the validity of the patriarchal, imperialist and capitalist structures currently in practice and focus on restoring these structures to their previous states post-apocalypse. They also ignore the role these structures play in the apocalypse, thus looking backward in a nostalgic and mournful tone. In contrast, contemporary feminist narratives clearly acknowledge the effects anthropic actions, such as human negligence for the environment, the excesses of capitalist exploitation and uncontrolled growth of techno-science, have on the apocalypse. Rather than nostalgia and restoration, they focus on envisioning different possible futures for humankind post apocalypse. Whether this future involves the collapse of patriarchy, replacing capitalism with a more egalitarian economic structure, creation of a new species, or a brand-new religion; they are progressive in a way that they don't try to condemn any 'being' to a world in which they feel unsafe and downtrodden. Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives suggest that the end can also be the beginning. In 'The Girl with All the Gifts' (2016), after a zombie (called hungries because they eat humans) apocalypse, humanity in a traditional sense becomes extinct, but also is continued through

second-generation hungries which incorporate both human and zombie characteristics. Restoration in a classical sense does not happen, but a new different species is born through the synthesis of the human and ‘the Other’. Susan Watkins, in her book ‘Contemporary Women’s Post-Apocalyptic Fiction’ calls this concept ‘The Posthuman Body’ and suggest that progressive post-apocalyptic narratives use this concept as a means to “break down false distinctions between the natural and the artificial, and the organic and the inorganic” (Watkins, 2020, p. 74) and to demonstrate how both humans and the non-humans are created from the same ‘matter’. Contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives oppose dualisms such as nature and culture, organic and mechanic and see them as construct, they avoid relying on solutions based on pureness. They do not find salvation in pure nature, a nature that exists beyond the reach of the culture. It is possible to say these narratives try to be against all binary oppositions and value hierarchies. Unlike their predecessors they refuse the divisions between human and ‘the Other’, and place equal importance on both.

By presenting physical danger (whether it is sexual violence or hunger) as a given, these narratives make room for multi-layered stories. Conventional narratives get a kick out of focusing on gore and violence and converge upon the inherent evilness of humankind. Contemporary feminist narratives, instead of fixating on the evilness of humankind acknowledge the nuanced nature of human beings. As they recognize and embrace sophisticated nature of human choice, insidious forms of mental conditioning, and subtle forces of manipulation; their stories become far more tactful and complex. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, we have the chance to learn about and empathize with Nux, one of the villains. We see how brainwashed he is from the

pseudo-religion Immortan Joe employs to make his 'War Boys' more willing to sacrifice their lives for him. Or we see how President Snow uses Reality TV to manipulate Capitol citizens' worldviews with entertainment in 'The Hunger Games'. It is evident that contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives are interested in the interpretation of evilness as much as the manifestation of evilness itself, sometimes more so. After all, when the apocalypse comes, people may or may not become corrupted, what is important is how they come to be what they are post apocalypse. While conventional narratives obsess over stories of rape, murder, and cannibalism, and center their narratives around gore; feminist narratives choose not to gloat over these actions frantically and look behind the curtain. The threat of violence is not played for its shock value, it is simply there. There are stories of physical and sexual violence of course, but they serve as background to investigate a character's motives or psychology. Humanity's self-destructiveness is not portrayed as the norm, it is countered by images of hope, solidarity, and forgiveness. The focus then becomes the delightful yet flawed goodness of humanity, especially women's. Watkins suggests calling this narrative choice 'The Maternal Imagery', she describes this concept as "gestures towards hope apparent in interactions between women" (Watkins, 2020, p. 103). Watkins emphasizes that this imagery are feminist equivalents of traditional post-apocalyptic father-son relationships which is based on the notion of restoration and maintenance of patriarchal and capitalist norms.

The most progressive part of contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives is their willingness to analyze the role of patriarchy, neo-colonialism, and capitalism played pre and post apocalypse. Not feeling safe in the world is not something new for women, people of color, queer people, and people with disabilities; thus feminist

post-apocalyptic narratives do not see post-apocalypse as this newly emerged dangerous world, they are pretty aware that it is just like our world but magnified by millions. That's why the real threat for them is not in despair and death but in the memory of unresolved pre-apocalyptic structural issues. Feminist narratives dive deep on a number of issues of specific importance for women and suggest that understanding of these issues is fundamental to unraveling capitalist patriarchy's subtle workings and patterns. Stories about different forms of colonization, enslavement, and diaspora are specifically present within these narratives, they expose and reject "one of capitalism's most brutal and necessary functions: the reduction of certain bodies into commodities for the continual expansion of wealth and hegemony" (Boulware, 2016, p. 2). Understandably, environmental and social justice themes are prevalent throughout contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, parity on the distribution of resources, the commodification of humans' bodies, exploitation of humans' labors are all important subtopics. These narratives illuminate how certain social structures prevent the poor, the colonized, mainly all people on the margins of the society from having any power over their lives or access to basic human needs.

In these narratives, survival is not sufficient if evilness pursues post apocalypse. The struggle to live through the wasteland is not worth it if a different kind of society that is not based on brutality, oppression, and dominance cannot be built. Hell is defined as "the absence of the people you long for"<sup>20</sup>. If genuine human connection and understanding are missing, the continuation of humankind seems unnecessary. In this way, these narratives move the focus from the necessity for repopulation to the necessity for kinship. Contemporary feminist narratives envision a future outside

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<sup>20</sup> Crosley, S. (2015, Jul 23). *It's the End of the World as She Knows It*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/books/review/its-the-end-of-the-world-as-she-knows-it.html>

reproductive heterosexuality, thus, a future in which women are not forced to return to the domestic sphere. This shift in focus also reflects on the methods for survival, survival is not black and white in these narratives, the fellow survivors are not the Others. Survival depends on collaboration, trust among people, care for one another not on being stoic, cynical, and rugged; being powerful of course but never brutal. Since survival is the result of a collaborative effort, every character is approached with compassion. We have the chance to hear the stories of the fellow survivors, not only the protagonist. Through Max's PTSD in *Fury Road*, we become aware of the mental health issues survivors may experience, similarly in *The Hunger Games* through Haymitch's and Johanna's (the previous victors of the Games) substance abuse we understand that there are no winners in these games, only survivors of abuse and trauma. This narrative choice that takes the focus away from Katniss to the other characters from time to time highlights that Katniss is not the only person the Games, Panem and President Snow have a tremendous effect on and that other people have gone through what she is going through. This is an ongoing narrative choice within contemporary feminist narratives, they acknowledge that the protagonist is not the only one that has been marginalized and wronged by systematic oppression. Such a focus on shared experiences points out the importance of the collective on the fight against constitutional inequalities. Structural issues like oppression just like it does not affect only one person, cannot be wiped out through the efforts of only one person, it is only surmountable through a collective effort. In 'The Hunger Games', when Katniss decides that she has to assassinate President Snow and starts traveling through the war zone to Presidential Palace with the crew in *Mockingjay: Part 1*; the war ends and rebels win before Katniss manages to kill Snow, this shift in focus

clearly suggests that this is a story about an oppressed collective taking back their agency, not just one person.

The use of religion is also different within the contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, religion is not portrayed as something to find comfort within but as a tool to legitimize oppression, and to brainwash people. Many post-apocalyptic narratives suggest that when we are stripped of any societal structures we find meaning within, we build new ones around discourses, symbols and rituals to fulfill our lives in some way. Contemporary feminist narratives, although they acknowledge humankind's need for meaning, do not interpret religion like the conventional ones. They recognize its capacity to do harm, to pacify, and to manipulate people; and also its close connection with patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. For example, in *Mad Max: Fury Road* Immortan Joe creates a religion that consists of elements of car culture and Norse Mythology to brainwash 'War Boys' for acts of violent self-sacrifice in service of himself. 'War Boys' pray at an altar made from steering wheels, paint their skin white and burn an image of a V8 engine into their chest. They believe they'll ride together with Immortan Joe in Valhalla after they die in a battle or under service of Immortan Joe. "Fantasies about riding in Valhalla and ritually chroming their mouths before engaging in violence provide the War Boys with a sense of transcendence about combat and death, reinforcing a hypermasculinity that connects earthly danger to cosmic rewards" (Fuist, 2015, p. 98). The quasi-religious rituals and symbols like steering wheels, V8 and chrome teeth clearly indicate a celebration of hegemonic masculinity and power for Immortan Joe and the brainwashed 'War Boys', but for the viewers it bespeaks of a metaphor on how patriarchy and capitalism are making us all frail and sickly to the extreme. War Boys have nothing else to find meaning within,

they do not have families, there are no friendships, no books, no plays, and on top of all they do not live very long; Immortan Joe's cult gives them a sense of superiority over the masses below the Citadel. Yet they are by no means different from the said masses, they also have traumatized minds and bodies from living in a war and famine stricken nuclear wasteland. Their cult which is formed around hypermasculine norms gives them a sense of control; but in reality, the only thing that separates them from the masses is this illusion of power and dominance. And poetically, this illusion is destroyed by Max and Furiosa, who themselves have traumatized minds and bodies, by the end of *Fury Road*.

Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives are also different in the way that they approach disability. "Critical disability theorists often locate cinematic representations of disability within the domain of fear of disablement" (Broderick & Ellis, 2019, p. 36). In many of the popular post-apocalyptic narratives, disability lurks behind the scenes as an unspoken anxiety which must be avoided at all costs since it makes masculine bodies vulnerable. Correspondingly, within conventional post-apocalyptic narratives, this very plausible part of a post-apocalyptic wasteland is mainly ignored. Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, on the other hand, either position disability as an advantage or a natural consequence of dangerous living conditions. *Mad Max* is a good example of disability being portrayed as commonplace, everyone other than fertile women are disabled both within the Citadel and the wasteland. Like in all *Mad Max* franchises, *Fury Road* reveals that bodies are fragile, even when they are the epitome of hegemonic masculinity. The impairments of the characters seem to be the direct results of the warfare and violence pre and post apocalypse. "Whereas in the majority of cinematic representation disability and trauma are typically culturally

encoded as an individual's personal tragedy, all of the characters throughout the Mad Max series have experienced trauma, loss and/or the effects of impairment. That is, in the post-apocalypse, trauma, loss and disablement is the norm—these experiences are recognised as collective and are attributed to whoever or whatever destroyed the world” (Ibid, p. 45). Even Immortan Joe, the embodiment of capitalist patriarchy, suffers from the effects of nuclear warfare (warfare that, in the best-case scenario, he enabled if not started), in the forms of respiratory problems and skin lesions. He is only able to breathe through a mask decorated with horse teeth to resemble a skeletal jaw and hides his lesions with bulletproof Plexiglass armor molded to give him a muscular appearance. In *Fury Road*, disabled people are not shunned aside, they are able to contribute to their communities by adapting specialized technologies that compensate for the limitations of their impairments. In other words, “mastery over individualised technology facilitates the re-inclusion of people with disability” (Ibid., p. 39). Characters with visible, physical impairments are never marginalized or ridiculed by their community, if anything they have specialised talents. The main protagonist of *Fury Road* is a disabled woman with a prosthetic arm, further blurring the line between disability and ability. In *Bird Box* and *A Quiet Place*, either main characters survive because of a specialised talent that is the byproduct of their impairments or building a new civilization is only possible because of them. This narrative choice is extremely important because it disavows the constructed value hierarchy between disabled and abled bodies. Contemporary narratives with their amputated, hearing or vision impaired heroes and heroines, pave the way for a more inclusive post-apocalypse.

As exemplified above, contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives manage to pave the way to more progressive future narratives. They supplant age-old patriarchal paradigms and narrative devices with new revolutionary discourses which refuse binary oppositions and value hierarchies. And the progress does not end there, these narratives also manage to subvert some stereotypes around gender by mixing gendered dualisms around femininity and masculinity. Next part will analyze how gender politics is handled within these narratives and in what ways they succeed to envision new progressive paradigms around gender.

### **I.II Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Post-Apocalyptic Narratives**

The most on the face shift within contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives are that they challenge male monopoly over power and aggression, Furiosa from Mad Max, Katniss from The Hunger Games, Tris from Divergent and Melanie from The Girl with All the Gifts, and Malorie from Bird Box all resort to violence in times of need and do without hesitation. Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives do not deny the fact that killing might be necessary in a wasteland where people have to fight over resources or for their own survival. Even the Vuvalini, the middle aged women, and the matriarchs from 'Green Place' (Mad Max: Fury Road) are not pacifists. When asked if she has killed many people with her rifle, one of the Vuvalini replies with "I've killed everyone I ever met out here" leading to the comment "thought you girls were somehow above all that". This short scene clearly shows that these narratives are more than aware that no one is above violence when stuck in a barren land. The refreshing part of all these is that these narratives do not exaggerate the physical differences between sexes, nor their ability to operate vehicles and guns, or to reason out of a situation. So-called biologically determined limitations of women are denied

within these narratives; furthermore, by not complying to them, they emphasize that these limitations are culturally determined, not biologically. Even the perceived vulnerability of pregnancy and of motherhood is challenged within these narratives, pregnancy does not keep a character from attending dangerous but necessary quests. One of the 'Prize Breeders' from Mad Max is pregnant and still a part of the action, she uses her body as a shield knowing that the villain will not harm his own child or climbs outside of the "War Rig" to help others to escape. Similarly, Malorie, the protagonist of Bird Box, goes out to a dangerous journey to get food when she is pregnant or goes on to another journey blindfolded down the river on a boat with two children to reach a safe community, without being made more vulnerable than she already is because of the children. These narratives challenge the idea of women as victims through their heroines and deny the assumptions of them being weak, emotional or vulnerable based on their biology. Furthermore, they manage to do this without putting all women in the same box. Within these narratives, some women are weak while some are not, some are corrupt while the others are not. This is mainly made possible by having more than one woman that embodies different personalities, and by not reducing women to collective identities. For example, within Mad Max, there are fifteen women and not one is like the other, furthermore, even if they have collective identifiers such as 'The Vuvalini' or 'Prize Breeders' they are not reduced to that collective identifier, their identities are free from their identifier. Within any conventional narrative, 'Prize Breeders' because of their positions as sex slaves would have been reduced a collective, who just cower in a corner and scream at appropriate times<sup>21</sup>; Fury Road manages to give them all different characters, one of them is called 'Cheedo The Fragile' she a naive girl who is very afraid of going out into the harsh

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<sup>21</sup> Mad Max: Fury Road & Feminism | Movie Rant, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VemlTSsQmKk>

wasteland, another one is called ‘Toast The Knowing’, she has some survival skills like defending herself, being able to drive and operate weapons. “The film does not judge its heroines on age and beauty: together, all of these women give the lie to the notion that there is any proper way to be female on film. Supermodels and white-haired warriors with faces like withered fruit fight side-by-side under a leader whose beauty is in no way sexualized. Together, they are formidable”<sup>22</sup>. In ‘The Hunger Games’, a similar treatment can be seen; like Katniss’ mother and sister some women are healers, like Katniss herself and the other female tributes some are warriors, like President Coin some are corrupt and like Commander Paylor some are leaders. Unlike conventional narratives, the relationships between women are not afterthoughts within the contemporary ones; they love, respect or hate each other, but they have direct relationships not through or for men. Imperator Furiosa clearly cares for and respects the ‘Prize Breeders’, Johanna (a victor from District 8) encourages and protects Katniss in the 75th Hunger Games, Malorie grows fond of Olympia in Bird Box. These women don’t compete for male gaze or for the chance to couple with a man like they do within the conventional narratives. Even when they couple, these narratives try not to “turn their love and love-making into an opportunity to re-establish the hetero-normative standards that regulate society” (Santaularia, 2016, p. 8)<sup>23</sup>. Contrary to their predecessors, private life and blood ties are not the only things that matter within contemporary narratives. They dare to envision an existence and an identity for women outside of the domestic sphere and blood ties, furthermore represent them as agents of change instead of passive bystanders, victims, wives or

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<sup>22</sup> Penny, L. (2015, May 23). *Mad Max is a feminist playbook for surviving dystopia*. BuzzFeed News. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lauriepenny/the-fast-and-the-feminist>

<sup>23</sup> In general, there are many objections to ‘The Hunger Games’ because at the end Katniss goes back to the domestic sphere and becomes a wife and a mother. While there is nothing wrong with leading a conventional lifestyle, Katniss’ declarations about not wanting to be a mother makes this end a little bit essentialist. The subject of essentialism will be discussed in the next chapter.

mothers. The protagonists of post-apocalyptic narratives are generally forced or choose to leave their homes, and on the way, they end up making kinships in the outside world. And these kinships later become the catalyst for them becoming active agents of the revolution. Familial bonds play either very little or no part in their formation, the connections they've made outside of their home transform these women into rebellious heroines they ought to be. Framing outside connections as important as family is what sets these narratives apart from their predecessors. In an interview, Donna Haraway describes kin as “those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can't-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences. I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me”<sup>24</sup>. She sees making kin as a way to mobilize people against world's inequalities and places importance on making kin as one of the most effective ways to resist injustice and suffering in a world that rips people apart from each other. It seems clear why contemporary narratives choose making kin as the primary motivator for heroines to become agents of change. Caring for something other than oneself comes with accountabilities and obligations, one of which is to make the world a better place. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss makes kin at the arena with an 12-year-old girl from District 11 named Rue, she cares for Rue before and after her death. This kinship marks the first act of rebellion for Katniss, when Rue is killed Katniss decorates Rue's body with flowers and chants a goodbye song from her district as a way to show the Capitol that these people they are forcing to kill each other, however hard they try, cannot be reduced to docile bodies. This moment provokes “Katniss' anger and the crystallization of an understanding of injustice beyond her own need to survive” (McEvoy-Levy, 2018, p. 192). Katniss gains

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<sup>24</sup> Paulson, S. (2019, Dec 6). *Making Kin: An Interview with Donna Haraway*. Los Angeles Review of Books. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-kin-an-interview-with-donna-haraway/>

political significance at this very moment, as she meditates her affection for Rue with a salute, and that salute becomes a symbol for rebellion later on. Imperator Furiosa, the heroine of *Fury Road* is also transformed through her affiliation with the 'Prize Breeders', what sets her out to start this dangerous journey that ends up with her taking over The Citadel from Immortan Joe, is her fondness for these women and her wish to end their suffering. Placing the act of making kin at the same level as familial bonds also paves the way to envision a future outside blood ties or conventional family, thus reproductive heterosexuality. Thus, even if men place tremendous importance on the need to repopulate (generally because of their own selfish reasons) women in contemporary narratives do not agree with them as they do in conventional narratives. In *Fury Road*, Angharad The Splendid, one of Immortan Joe's wives expresses her hatred with her pregnancy and at one point attempts to perform abortion on herself. While in conventional post-apocalyptic narratives motherhood is seen as the ultimate duty of a woman, contemporary narratives challenge the ethereality of it. When a woman is pregnant with a rape baby, would she have as much love for the baby as a mother who'd conceive a child because she wants to? Or is it really as holistic an act of service as it is made out to be to bring a child to an inhabitable world? The protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss, in the early stages of the story, also professes again and again that she does not want to bring a child to this world. The validity of reproduction is constantly questioned in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, the utmost importance readily given to it is interrogated.

There is no looming threat of sexual violence within these narratives, at least not in the classical sense. In conventional post-apocalyptic narratives, the plot mainly revolves around the constant threat of sexual violence towards women. In

contemporary feminist narratives, there are instances of physical and sexual abuse of course, but they don't necessarily always come from other survivors. There are one or two perpetrators but not everyone is out to rape or abuse women. In other words, the looming threat of sexual violence is not used as a plot to force women back to domestic sphere. In addition, when sexual abuse occurs, the exact moment of sexual violence is not shown on screen. These narrative assume that the viewers don't need to see the pain and humiliation these women suffered as sex slaves to understand what they are going through. In *Fury Road*, the story starts from the moment the wives are on the road, not from before when they are kept in a vault as 'Prize Breeders' by Immortan Joe. Furthermore, in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, women are not the only one that is forced to sexual slavery. In *Hunger Games*, Finnick Odair (one of the previous victors from District 5) is forced to prostitution by President Snow, we later find out that he does this to all victors who are deemed attractive and even kill their families if they do not comply.

It is important to point out that even the contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives and their protagonists are progressive, the post-apocalyptic world they paint, since it is based on the real one, is definitely not. There are many failings of humanity within these narratives, but unlike the conventional ones, these failings do not go without notice. Contemporary narratives acknowledge all the instances of patriarchy and capitalism falling short. While they are sympathetic to individuals failing short, institutionalized failings are criticized harshly, especially in areas of gender inequality, class struggle and environmental destruction. These narratives approach post apocalypse with an ecofeminist lens, they acknowledge and analyze the connection between the domination of nature and women. Basic proposition of ecofeminism can

be described as follows; for ecofeminists Western society consists of mainly two hierarchical dualisms; man, the masculine, vs. women, the feminine and culture vs. nature. Within these value hierarchies, woman and nature are thrown into a contingent relationship and seen as inferior to man and culture. From these two main hierarchical dualisms, many more emerge. “Scientific knowledge is valued over vernacular or popular knowledge; the public World of institutions and commerce is valued over the private world of domestic work and relations; abstract universalized thinking is valued over thinking linked to the particular and personal” (Mellor, 2013, p. 16). Ecofeminism suggests that these two main hierarchical dualisms and their extended implications result in women, nature and feminine to be easily despised, exploited and ignored. For ecofeminists, gender politics are closely linked to environmental politics. By reclaiming this relationship with nature and placing it within the women's liberation movement, ecofeminists reunite two struggles under one roof and provide a more overarching understanding for the roots of the environmental and social injustices present in our world. Contemporary post-apocalyptic feminist narratives, like ecofeminism, locate the ways and means for gender and environmental justice in abolishing binary oppositions and value hierarchies and encourage matriarchal and maternal politics<sup>25</sup> and ‘ethics of care’. Capitalist patriarchy is called out within these narratives, its inadequacy to provide solutions for oppression of women and destruction of the environment is acknowledged. In *Fury Road*, the wives ask ‘Who killed the world?’ both to Immortan Joe and Nux, suggesting that the post apocalypse is the responsibility of men with mindsets that put culture over nature, profit over sustainability, dominance over collaboration. Value hierarchies and binary oppositions, with the two crucial ones at the forefront (women/men, nature/culture),

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<sup>25</sup> The characteristics and possible dangers of feminist matriarchal narratives and feminist femininity will be analyzed in the next chapter.

are recognized and women's and nature's reduced positions as commodities in service of men are challenged.

### **I.III. The Changing Face of the Post-Apocalyptic Hero**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the “aftermath is a decidedly masculinized space, characterized by violence, aggression, war, and chaos” (Gurr, 2015, p. 49) and because of this, is mainly male dominated. Traditionally, its heroes are rugged, cynical, stoic and ego-driven. Their so-called soft sides such as being caring, trusting, and having compassion are either erased, or offered only in fleeting moments. Although there are not many, conventional female post-apocalyptic action heroes are also not really different from their male counterparts. Heroines of earlier post-apocalyptic narratives such as Alice from Resident Evil, Sinclair from Doomsday and Ripley from Alien, are the embodiment of second-wave liberal feminist demands for the inclusion of women in male-dominated spheres, they are structured around a ‘default masculinity’. These heroines fit the description of what Rikke Schubart calls ‘The Professional Horror Heroine’, “[...]she is not nice. Not sweet. And certainly not politically correct. She is ready to play ball with the bad guys to survive in a capitalist and patriarchal world driven by desire, greed, and money” (Schubart, 2009, p. 1). As a perfect example, Major Sinclair from Doomsday is a law enforcement officer with baggage, anger and attitude issues, gore and transgression is central to her character, she is a lone wolf who can kill many people in an instant and get into trouble a lot due to her uncompromising nature. Similarly, in the Resident Evil franchise, women's empowerment is depicted through the violence perpetrated by Alice throughout the films, she is often portrayed to be adopting the destructive masculine behaviors to break free from her ‘feminine’ vulnerability caused by her

woman body (in other words, she is not helpless in the face of rape, and can kill many people at once). Like her male counterparts, flirting with the dark side is almost a cliché act for a conventional post-apocalyptic heroine, that's to say that she can afford to be an anti-hero. For instance, Sinclair in *Doomsday* kills and decapitates the former leader of the cannibal clan and becomes their new leader. 'The Professional Horror Heroine', like her counterparts, is the epitome of hegemonic masculinity and plays by rules of patriarchy; she makes questionable or selfish decisions, resorts to unnecessary violence or behaves recklessly.

Contrary to the female protagonists of the conventional narratives, contemporary heroines are not structured around a 'default masculinity'. They know their ways around guns, can hunt animals, and drive heavy vehicles of course, but they also form social bonds, show care and vulnerability. It is not possible to say, not yet at least, that this is a post-gender world in which all women and men are free from the constraints of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' but the heroes of this era seem much less two-dimensional, and somewhat free to build their own gender identities. Old archetypal hero seems to be moving from its entirely 'masculine' position to a new position in which they are free to choose whichever behaviours seem appropriate for given situations. Contemporary post-apocalyptic heroes forge a new kind of hero who is more transgressive than their predecessors in incorporating the realms of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. 'Masculinity' performed by these heroines is not some bad imitation of virility, but a lively and authentic showcase of a 'caring masculinity'<sup>26</sup> produced by, for, and within women. Karla Elliot in her essay 'Caring

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<sup>26</sup> I've chosen to call this emerging narrative concept 'caring masculinity' because it is easier to position opposite to 'hegemonic masculinity' which is often employed within conventional post-apocalyptic narratives; the concept of 'caring masculinity' is named as 'heroic femininity' within other articles.

Masculinities: An Emerging Concept’ describes this type of masculinity as “rejection of domination” and “integration of values of care, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality, into masculine identities” (Elliot, 2016, p. 241). These heroines, contrary to their predecessors, deny ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and its harmful costs such as “high-risk behavior, lack of self care, poor health, and impoverished relationships” (Ibid., p. 246) and embrace ‘feminine’ traits such as nurturing, empathetic caring, sharing, communication and interdependence. These heroines share their power, and in doing so empower other people to rise to their fullest potentials. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss becomes the face of the rebellion as the ‘Mockingjay’, her acts of ‘caring masculinity’ mobilize people and catalyse acts of civil disobedience in all Panem. In *Fury Road*, Furiosa’s displays of ‘caring masculinity’ inspire Max to transcend his reduced, damaged humanity, help and care for people other than himself. This new type of hero also “questions our cultural obsession with independence and positions interdependence as a more productive way forward” (Broderick & Ellis, 2019, p. 65). Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives celebrate mutual reliance, reciprocity, and collaborative teamwork; in other words, the collective hero, a hero that breaks free from the hero myth and becomes both the sum of all individuals and also a new entity entirely. The collective hero consists of fragmented individuals with diverse personalities and skills all working towards a common objective. The objective of a collective hero is not to exert its will over its surroundings or conquer the scene but to transcend the ego and the individual and to act upon a shared communal goal. For example, taking back ‘The Citadel’ and building a sustainable community in *Fury Road* would definitely not be possible if any of the characters decided not to do the things they did or they are not the way they are. If the Vuvalini wouldn’t have kept the seeds, if Angharad did not shield Furiosa,

or Fragile did not manipulate the War Boys to help Furiosa kill Immortan Joe, or if Capable did not form a bond with Nux, or if Nux did not sacrifice himself, or if Max decided to go on his own way; the fight against Immortan Joe would not be triumphant. In similar fashion, the rebellion is only successful because everyone works towards a common goal in *The Hunger Games*, not one character is obsolete. A challenge as big as transforming a post-apocalyptic wasteland or taking down a corrupt government is only possible through collective effort and these contemporary narratives do a good job portraying this fact. Characters with 'caring masculine' traits seem like the main heroes because of their combat skills (and in part because this is what we're used to), but they are actually a point of entry for us into their collective. Furiosa, for example, can be described as the leader of a cohesive collective, similarly Katniss is the catalyst behind a movement. Unlike their predecessors, these heroes do not see intimacy as something that is just possible to create through familial bonds. They recognize that intimacy can be built among strangers and it doesn't have to look like a conventional hetero-normative family. This narrative choice is important because it normalizes the formation of non-heteronormative, non-nuclear families, in other words; making kin. In *Fury Road* this new kind of degendered family, the sense of 'tribal closeness' is exemplified through the bond formed between Max, Furiosa, Nux, the slave-wives and the Vuvalini. Both of the narratives, like Donna Haraway's concept of making kin, highlight the importance of human connection to transcend the post-apocalypse and in the fight against inequalities and oppression. In this way, the contemporary hero also introduces an alternative to the earlier reductive depictions of the relations between men and women. The protagonists of *Fury Road*, Max and Furiosa, find a common ground through their trauma, healing and their need for redemption. What Max and Furiosa potentially get right in their relationship with one

another is the co-creation of meaning and camaraderie through similar struggles, acknowledging the trauma and suffering of the other and helping them resolve it without giving up on themselves. Their relationship is one of comradeship, an unromanticized bond, an union around shared experiences, “arguably this is, in fact, loving the other as the self and the self as the other, the ‘brother’-hood of humanity, that the ancient Greeks considered as *philia* (as opposed to *eros*, or romantic love, and *agape*, or charity – *caritas* in Latin), which brings some measure of healing and reintegration to these traumatized characters” (Du Plooy, 2018, p. 11). For the conventional heroes, the unconscious aspects of the mind are nothing more than challenges to be overcome through rational means or suppression. In contrast, contemporary heroes find solace in sharing their struggles, Max and Furiosa’s understanding and respect for each other is what opens up the potential for redemption and healing. *Fury Road* highlights that we cannot act as our fates as men and women are separate, we should make kin with each other to overthrow corrupt structures and overcome constitutional issues<sup>27</sup>. Similar kind of comradeship is present in *The Hunger Games* also, Finnick (a victor from District 4) and Katniss share their grief over their loved ones being kidnapped and tortured by the Capitol and comfort each other. Katniss has a similar mutually respectful relationship with his stylist Cinna from the games, who turned her into the symbol for the rebellion, Mockinjay. These portrayals of comradeship among men and women are not just isolated incidents, heroes of contemporary narratives inspire people and in return get inspired. Contemporary heroes are not afraid of sharing their vulnerabilities with people, in part, this openness is what makes them inspiring to other people. Vulnerability is not looked down on in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives. The

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<sup>27</sup> Bustillos, M. (2015, May 22). *The startling humanism of Mad Max: Fury Road*. The AWL. <https://www.theawl.com/2015/05/the-startling-humanism-of-mad-max-fury-road/>

protagonists are allowed to be vulnerable, they are allowed to be human. They don't have to employ traits that are related to hegemonic masculinity in order to get respect or complete their mission. This shift from performing hegemony to embracing vulnerability is perfectly exemplified in the last scene of *Fury Road*. When Furiosa comes back to the Citadel to reclaim it, she doesn't wear her prosthetic arm. Unlike Immortan Joe, she does not resort to projecting an illusion of hypermasculinity and perfection to retain power. Furiosa takes the Citadel as a disabled female, worn out from the fight as any human being would be, but strong nonetheless. Her vulnerable (according to patriarchal paradigms) state does not make her inferior or weak. Sympathy and understanding are other traits that are not being shrugged off of contemporary post-apocalyptic heroes. While in conventional narratives heroes act cruel at worst, and ignorant at best towards everyone who conflicts with their moral codes, contemporary heroes challenge this stance of complete detachment and moral high ground. Katniss kills the boy from District 1, who joins the games voluntarily and kills many people, with her arrow so that he does not have to experience more pain at the hands of the wolf mutts released by the gamemakers. Similarly, in *Fury Road*, Capable consoles Nux, one of the War Boys chasing them to take them back to Immortan Joe, when he is insulting himself and slamming his head for not being successful on his mission. Being sympathetic and understanding of others' struggles is the main driving force behind contemporary heroes' moral stance of not being unnecessarily cruel. The following dialog between Furiosa and the Splendid summarizes the logic behind this thinking;

**Nux:** [sneaks up from behind Furiosa and strangles her with his chains] Filth!  
You traitored him!

**The Splendid Angharad:** [Furiosa holds up a knife to Nux's neck] No unnecessary killing!

**Imperator Furiosa:** This War Boy wants me dead!

**The Splendid Angharad:** We agreed! He's kamakrazee! He's just a kid at the end of his half-life!

A sense of regard for the other's struggles and well-being comes with the responsibility to do the kind thing, even if it puts oneself in danger. Katniss kills President Alma Coin, the leader of the rebellion, when she suggests organizing one last game with the Capitol's children. Katniss sees that President Coin is as corrupt as President Snow and decides to do the right thing knowing that she will be punished in some way. The heroines' stance against anti-corruption and towards compassion and understanding makes them political agents, they do not seek hegemony or power, they seek freedom and agency not just for themselves but for all of the oppressed. While conventional post-apocalyptic heroes are mainly anti-political and their stories are one of survival, restoration, family or love; the contemporary heroes are political and their stories are about rebellion, revolution and reconstruction. For contemporary post-apocalyptic heroes, the devoutness for survival and repopulation is redundant if one does not have the control of their bodies, their lives, their resources and their destinies. The journeys of heroes in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives are about transformation, from a victim to an agent. They are about shifting the power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed, starting as trying to navigate a dictatorial capitalist patriarchy and moving onto demolishing it. Contemporary heroines use unconventional, non-violent ways to resist the status quo and to assert power alongside combat. When Angharad uses her unborn child as a shield for Furiosa in *Fury Road*, she skillfully utilizes her victimized body as a means with which to fight back and confront her oppressor Immortan Joe, concurrently inverting

the power dynamics between him and herself.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in *The Hunger Games*, when the gamemakers change the rules back to having only one victor, Katniss suggests to Peeta they both kill themselves with the poisonous berries so that the Capitol cannot have a victor this year. By utilizing the “girl-driven-crazy-by-love” (Goblan, 2019, p. 119) act she manages to manipulate the Capitol’s audience to push for something that the Gamemakers and the President would rather not do. This act of defiance transforms her from a victim of Capitol’s oppression to a threat to the status quo. Katniss, like Angharad, learns to use non-violent ways to assert her agency and highlights the important truth that no one holds the strings of absolute power.

“In her now-classic “Cyborg Manifesto,” [...], Donna Haraway directs feminists to embrace the cyborg to resist the many-layered structures of patriarchal oppression in the late twentieth century” (Smyth, 2014, p. 177). Both heroines of this research signify Haraway’s Cyborg because they incorporate machines and organisms on their bodies or their identities. Haraway sees ‘the Cyborg’ as something that embodies so-called binaries of nature and culture together in its body; she describes them as “creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). Both Furiosa and Katniss can be described as Cyborgs, Furiosa because of her prosthetic arm and Katniss because of her bow and arrow, and also because of her identity as Mockingjay. Furiosa drives and shoots with more accuracy than the road warrior Max, and Katniss becomes proactive rather than reactive when she manages to obtain her bow. With these extensions they transcend the limits of nature and incorporate culture within themselves. Haraway describes cyborg as the ultimate feminist figure because she embodies many dualities

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<sup>28</sup> Penny, L. (2015, May 23). *"Mad Max" Is A Feminist Playbook For Surviving Dystopia*. BuzzFeed News. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lauriepenny/the-fast-and-the-feminist>

within herself; such as fear and hope, social reality and imagination, possibilities and dangers, past and future. She has the power to invalidate biological determinism through her capacity for mobility. Haraway writes that “the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism...[b]ut illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (Haraway, 1991, p. 152). This is best exemplified by Furiosa, from her search for redemption we can understand that as a soldier herself (her full name is Imperator Furiosa), she has done Immortan Joe’s dirty work many times before she goes out to rescue the Wives. Her prosthetic arm is a tool which Immortan Joe’s organic mechanic has built for her to do this dirty work. Because of this background story, the scene within which Furiosa kills Immortan Joe carries so much symbolism. Furiosa kills Immortan Joe by destroying his hypermasculine breathing apparatus and her arm prosthesis with the same action, Furiosa hooks her arm prosthesis to Immortan Joe’s mask and then takes the prosthesis out and throws it under a wheel. Furiosa gains her freedom by destroying a tool used by Immortan Joe to incite fear and project an illusion of power to his ‘subjects’. Furiosa removes her own cyborg identity alongside Immortan Joe’s hegemonic masculine facade, this act symbolizes a departure from Immortan Joe’s warmongering ways of navigating the wasteland. Apart from her bow, Katniss carries another cyborgian symbolism that solidifies her position as a feminist rebellion figure; through the series Katniss becomes the ‘Mockingjay’, the symbol for the rebellion, a mutated bird that is the result of the accidental mating of jabberjays (a bird species created by the Capitol to spy on enemies and rebels) and mockingbirds. “The Hunger Games highlights its hero’s metaphoric union with animals, especially the hybridized mockingjay, as a means to resist the colonial subjugation under which the teen tributes

and their districts suffer” (Smyth, 2014, p. 178). Hybridity typifies contemporary heroines’ condition, they embody ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, nature and culture, trauma and healing, victim and agent, independence and interdependence. This hybridity makes her the right hero to transcend the post apocalypse and even to stop it, not only by herself of course but as a part of a collective.

#### **I.IV. Conclusion**

Contemporary feminist narratives are different from their predecessors because unlike conventional narratives, here “the breakdown in social structures (...) allows for previously disenfranchised characters to gain power and influence based on their special skills or revolutionary leadership qualities” (Dean-Ruzicka, 2014, p. 53-54). Up until the last two decades, there had been very little representation of protagonists who are not white, male, cisgender and able-bodies in post-apocalyptic narratives. The genre belonged to the stoic, often monosyllabic, cynical male protagonists who embody all characteristics of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, thus are stripped from their need for connectedness to humanity at large. Women are generally reduced to roles such as murdered wife, rape victims, child-like savages and oversexualized villains and portrayed as vulnerable, incompetent, and emotional. For the most part, female protagonists or indeed, all female characters, were often waved aside to the boundaries of the narrative, rather than to the center. Luckily this has started to change with contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives. In later narratives, women are not idolized, minimized, infantilized or demonized but they are recognized. Not only the variety of representations for them increased but also they’ve become the main protagonists of their stories. And while becoming active agents, they've changed the formula for the hero and her journey. Even though we still don’t have the full

vocabulary for this new type of hero yet, we've started experimentation. These heroes and their narratives, at their core, challenge each and every binary opposition, and value hierarchies. These narratives look at the fringes of the society, not only to the mainstream and try to shed a light on their stories too. They are not after finding Eden somewhere else, but fixing what is broken. A statement by Max to Furiosa at their turning point on the road of fury that 'hope is a mistake, if you can't fix what's broken you go insane' perfectly summarizes the stance of contemporary narratives on recovery post apocalypse and also on interdependence. There is a reason why these new post-apocalyptic heroes are not killed at the end and their narratives are allowed to continue, the reason is that they are qualified for redemption because they did not forget their interconnectedness with others and also their responsibilities for fixing what is broken. Fixing here implies restoring human connection, responsibility for one another and communion. Both Katniss and Furiosa do not act out of vengeance, they act out of hope for a better future.

While contemporary feminist narratives are progressive, they are not completely free of sin. In the next chapter we'll discuss some unsettling parts of these narratives through two of latest critically acclaimed feminist post-apocalyptic narratives; Mad Max: Fury Road and The Hunger Games.

## CHAPTER III / FEMINIST FEMININITY AND MATRIARCHY

### I.I. Essentializing the Post-Apocalyptic Heroine

Laura Martinez-Jimenez et al., in their article ‘Neoliberalism Goes Pop and Purple: Postfeminist Empowerment from Beyonce to Mad Max’ suggests that it is better to “take a middle strategic position which does not enthusiastically celebrate women’s agentive resistance as if it were an infallible panacea” (Martinez-Jimenez et. al., 2018, p. 417). Many feminist scholars warn that, in spite of their outwardly feminist exteriors, contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives may not be as progressive as they initially seem to be, even if they do incorporate capable heroines and nuanced discourses around gender in a cultural landscape in which the heroic roles in default go to men (Santaularia, 2017). It is important to analyze where these popular narratives fall short of advancing a fully progressive discourse, in order not to fall into the trap of seeing the plot of exceptional girls in extreme circumstances as the ultimate portrayal of women’s empowerment.

Many criticisms of contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives focus on their overreliance on neoliberal postfeminist discourse. Neoliberal postfeminism can be summarized as a type of feminism that promotes “individuality, freedom of choice and women’s commercialized empowerment” (Martinez-Jimenez et al., 2018, p. 402) above everything else. Postfeminism is thought to be employed by the media to legitimize domestication of feminism through strategies of women’s empowerment that adhere to the norms of capitalist patriarchy. That is to say, postfeminism should not be deemed as pure evil since it responds to the feminist demands for greater freedom around gender identities and representations in the media, but should be approached with caution because it also depoliticized, essentialized, and

spectacularized feminism without any depth and promoted a surface-level women's liberation movement. In other words, neoliberal postfeminism encourages individual authenticity and agency in which "each feminist has the opportunity to create a world of her own choosing and does not require agreement by others on what that world should be like... as she continues to make choice after choice" (Foss & Foss, 2009, p. 45). However, it also appropriates patriarchal norms of femininity since it is based on individual displays of empowerment that either ignores or refuses the existence of power inequalities in the outer world. Heather Brown, in her article 'Postfeminist Re-essentialism in The Hunger Games and The Selection' Trilogies, suggests that even though authentic individualism appears to be liberating women from patriarchal feminine standards, it is not empowering neither to contemporary post-apocalyptic protagonists nor women in general (Brown, 2019). That is because the narrative choice of postfeminist authentic individualism is characterized by not performing femininity and used to signify an exceptional self different from 'the other women'. But even if it seems like 'not performing' challenges biological determinism since it allows women to display stereotypical masculinity, it actually essentializes the other women since they are not as exceptional and authentic as the protagonist, thus they could not control their nature. In addition to the rhetoric of exceptionality, the choice not to perform femininity seems like the result of disdain for these so-called feminine qualities, especially weakness. For example, after pre-Games interviews, Katniss lashes out at Peeta because he confesses his love for her. She states that he made her look weak. What Katniss unveils here is her revulsion for conventional femininity, in her mind Katniss equates being desired with being feminine, thus seeming weak (Hansen, 2015). Throughout the narrative, Katniss tries to distance herself from her mother who cannot take care of her and Prim due to destabilizing depression; any

remark made about her feminine side triggers her insecurities because she associates femininity with vulnerability, thus an increased likelihood of dying. Katniss's gender identity, therefore, is similar to 'Artemisian gender identity' which devalues feminine stereotypes and "rejects stereotypical femininity because it supposedly lessens the strength of young women, diminishing rather than enhancing their identities" (Hansen, 2015, p. 165).

Not only is it used to essentialize other women and perpetuates patriarchal disdain for feminine qualities, but not-performing femininity is also even used to re-essentialize the protagonists themselves. This is done through a postfeminist narrative device called 'performing not-performing'<sup>29</sup>. Even though it seems to be employed to emphasize the exceptionality of the female protagonist, 'performing not-performing' paradoxically reasserts a biologically deterministic portrayal of femininity. This purposeful rejection of feminine masquerade<sup>30</sup> when followed by intuitive acts of femininity cites an innate female nature. These narratives subtly re-essentialize the female protagonists, by following 'performing not-performing' with natural-seeming acts historically associated with femininity such as nurturing, caring, and compassion. Both Furiosa and Katniss perform not-performing femininity, meaning their performance of stereotypical masculinity is followed by instinctive portrayals of 'femininity' as defined within traditional patriarchal norms. "In The Hunger Games Katniss's refutation of performing femininity is undone in her moments of resistance where she unconsciously reveals feminine traits" (Brown, 2019, p. 737). Despite her stated disinterest in 'feminine' traits, maternity, in particular, her impulsive act of volunteering for her sister in the reaping, or her readiness to protect Rue, and care for

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<sup>29</sup> This concept is theorized by Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily E. Ryalls in their article 'The Hunger Games: Performing Not-performing to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness'.

<sup>30</sup> knowingly dressing, speaking and acting in ways to be found desirable. (Brown, 2019, p. 735)

Peeta suggest that she's unconsciously maternal. "What emerges is paradoxical: Katniss is uninterested in love and children yet presented as having the qualities to be the perfect wife and mother, almost unwittingly – these qualities are so innate and instinctive, they emerge regardless of Katniss's stated desires" (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 406). In *Fury Road*, the scene with the silent scream of Furiosa after she finds out that Green Place is no longer inhabitable carries lots of emotions, almost seems like a breakdown, and punctures the stoic and capable masculinity Furiosa is performing. It almost seems like the masculine exterior of Furiosa is torn down by this traumatic experience and the emotional and irrational core becomes visible since the decisions Furiosa makes after this point does not make much sense (decision to abandon the War Rig and drive off to the salt land with Vuvalini and the Wives). Another performing not-performing moment in *Fury Road* comes from one the Vuvalini, after saying "I shot everyone I ever met out here," suggesting that they don't really give people much of a chance and being challenged by The Dag with 'I thought you girls are above all that', The Keeper of the Seeds instantly shows the seeds she plants on different parts of the wasteland in the hopes of starting again. This dialog suggests an innate caring and peaceful female nature that has been almost stripped from the women by warmongering men, but not quite since it is buried deep in their essence.

Another narrative choice that illustrates the double-bind of postfeminism which ensures that patriarchal hierarchies remain unchallenged, is the reliance on validation from secondary male characters to make female protagonists' masculine identities more concrete. Under the guise of allyship, male secondary characters are put in positions of authoritative power as the real embodiments of so-called masculine

qualities like assertiveness, strength, and instrumentality. Brown suggests that “it is the male secondary characters which, functioning like Butler’s theory on the regulative discursive, reflect the patriarchal worldview which invests men with a social authority to construct a woman’s socio-sexual identity” (Brown, 2019, p. 735). Katniss’ acts of resistance and assertiveness, such as demanding recognition by shooting through game makers to pierce an apple in a roasted pig’s mouth, her resistance against Snow trying to reduce her identity to the Bride or killing President Coin after realizing she is also corrupt, are validated by Haymitch, Cinna, and Plutarch respectively. Similarly in *Fury Road*, in one telling scene, the weaponry skills of Furiosa are validated by Max when he hands over the gun with its final shot to her acknowledging her superior skills. Brown states that this emphasis on ‘male authoritative validation’ in post-apocalyptic narratives makes women seem incapable of creating their own identities (Brown, 2019). The power of male authoritative validation on identity formation is exceedingly evident in the relationship between Cinna and Katniss. Cinna uses clothing and style to mold Katniss to the identity of the rebel without her awareness. Similar to the old Hollywood stories about makeovers that take all agency from a woman and mold her to something men desire, Cinna uses his abilities to turn Katniss into the face of the rebellion through symbolic connections like ‘The Girl on Fire’ or ‘Mockingjay’. “[C]lothing and style exert great power in the Capitol and beyond. Her stylist Cinna is well aware of this power, as he is the trilogy’s most adroit user of clothing to create an image. Cinna uses clothing as a covert form of opposition to the Capitol” (Hansen, 2015, p. 167).

Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives seem to be perpetuating the notion of ethics of care being innate to women through their treatments of their protagonists. Ethics of

care, an ethical theory developed by first-wave feminists in the second half of the twentieth century, is the proposition that since caring for other human beings is a crucial component of humanity, it therefore can be used as a regulative guideline for building ethical societies (Lloyd, 2018). Feminists suggested that instead of privileging the dominant masculinist canon of ‘ethics of justice’, founding human morality on an ethics of care is more useful since it is a social practice performed by everyday people. Ethics of care can be summarized as “a care-focused feminist approach to ethics has as its primary task the rehabilitation of such "feminine" values as compassion, empathy, sympathy, nurturance, and kindness. It strives to make the culturally associated "female" virtue of care, for example, just as important in the moral domain as the culturally associated "male" virtue of justice” (Lloyd, 2018, p. 257). Ethics of care has rightfully been criticized for its essentialism due to its celebration of maternal identity, stereotypical femininity, and women’s nurturing qualities. Its connection with what is called civic maternalism or maternalist politics has been put into question many times. ‘Civic maternalism’ rhetoric was celebrated and employed by suffragettes as a political move, care for others and for nature was celebrated as an essential female quality and virtue to gain political power and agency that hitherto has been stripped from women. This rhetoric for the upper hand in morality is supported by integrating feminine private sphere values, in other words ‘maternal thinking’, into public politics. The driving force behind women’s civic activism has been framed as the result of the concerns they have for their children’s quality of life. In time quality of life issues extended to care and concern for the environment and future generations. Even in the instances women reject motherhood, they still retain the logic of care because the ‘maternal thinking’ is thought to be a biological consequence, not a cultural one. This framing made the room for portraying

biological child-rearing qualities (even if one does not become a mother) as the main source for the development of a distinctive moral code for women, further essentializing women's probity, integrity, nurturance, compassion, and even self-sacrifice. "Consider Katniss's decision to take Prim's place at the reaping. Even though she recognizes that the situation is unjust, she isn't moved by some abstract ideal like justice or equality" (Averill, 2012, p. 164). Instead, she is moved because she cares for her sister and she is committed to protect her. Every moral and rebellious action Katniss takes comes from her intense response to the needs or sufferings of loved ones or of people who somehow have touched her emotionally. She is not motivated by an understanding of ethics as justice, her morality comes from care. I believe this narrative choice is what makes *The Hunger Games* an essentialist story, Katniss's moral actions are the results of her maternal instincts, even if she opts out from motherhood she retains the logic of care. Her decisions to risk her life to mediate the peace in the Nut, or to kill President Coin can't be attributed to her attachment to some abstract ideals like justice, liberty, or democracy; her decisions stem from either love or an intense reaction to the suffering of others. The suffering soldier in the Nuts makes her more empathetic to District 2 and to take action towards peacemaking, the anticipation for the suffering of the children of Capitol makes her kill President Coin. Feminine traits like care and empathy are central to Katniss's moral actions, not masculine traits like justice and impartiality. A good comparison between ethics stemming from the justice perspective vs. the care perspective can be achieved by pointing out the difference between the reasoning behind the decision of Thresh not to kill Katniss. When they encounter each other at the Cornucopia, Thresh spares the life of Katniss because of the compassion Katniss extended to Rue; a 12-year old girl from Thresh's district. Thresh constructs his viewpoint on ethics around utilitarian

principles like fairness and reciprocity, Thresh believes that favors must be paid back. “Notice that this principle is abstract and universal because it says nothing about to whom the favor is owed. When Thresh spares Katniss, it’s not because he cares for her personally” (Averill, 2012, p. 167). Thresh is still willing to eliminate Katniss next time they come face-to-face, she is still his opponent. He just stays true to a universal moral code in which impartiality is like a cornerstone, that’s why his understanding of ethics does not extend to individuals. The presumed difference between approaches to ethics between the sexes can be seen behind the motivations of Thresh and Katniss. While Thresh follows abstract moral principles, like the rule of tit for tat, Katniss responds to a particular individual in need rather than being moved by obedience to an abstract moral code. It can be said that this framing of her moral positioning essentializes Katniss and perpetuates the idea of women’s moral sensibility stemming from their maternal instincts, and from their womanly virtues. Perhaps the most maternal of Katniss’ actions is to kill President Coin when she decides President Coin is also corrupt and presents great danger to the children of Panem, because she suggests to host one final Hunger Games with Capitol children as a symbolic punishment for what the Capitol has done. Another difference to mark between Thresh’s and Katniss’ morality is that Thresh’s morality is for one time and does not extend to Katniss as a person (just fulfills a principle), while Katniss’ morality is all-encompassing and does extend to all people with moral integrity or suffering from unjust structures, or oppressive forces. Katniss’s care ethic inspires her to extend compassion even to her enemies (for example to the person who shoots her) whenever she sees them suffer. Her sensitivity for the suffering of others makes her push for a cease-fire in the Nut, as she comes to see the people of District 2 are fellow sufferers

(Averill, 2012). By the time she turns into the Mockingjay, her moral compass becomes more tactful and refined, but care always remains as her guiding criterion.

Sherilyn MacGregor, in her book *Beyond Mothering Earth*, suggests that “women’s mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a caring stance towards nature. This rhetoric of “ecomaternalism,” as I call it, is pervasive in much of the contemporary ecofeminist discourse” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 4). Women are expected to protect humans and non-humans alike, the care perspective they supposedly possess as child rearers again is deemed as the evidence for a special connection, this time, with nature. Cultural ecofeminism specifically celebrates the centuries-old discourse of women having a special, spiritual connection with nature because both have a shared capacity to bring forth life. Cultural ecofeminists claim because of the reproductive power both nature and women have, women will play an important role within the liberation of nature, and “this liberation will not be based on the equal participation in culture but rather in subversion, resistance and replacement” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 44). This type of thinking perpetuates the separation between genders and reinforces the traditional patriarchal structures of binary oppositions and hierarchy of values (the very things ecofeminism itself is trying to abolish), just in reverse. It reinforces gender stereotypes that have been used to oppress women for centuries, women being more caring, more peaceable, more collaborative, less aggressive, less profit and ego-driven, less selfish, etc. This approach also portrays men as more aggressive and destructive and puts the blame for the ecological crisis on male greed and patriarchal order. Theory of gender difference also suggests that women are the ones that can cure environmental and societal ills. “For example, Françoise d’Eaubonne, who

coined the term “éco-féminisme” in 1974, argues that “the destruction of the planet is due to the profit motive inherent in male power” and that only women can bring about an ecological revolution” (Roach, 2003, p. 41).

Although it has been a while since binary thinking, alongside patriarchal and essentialist descriptions of womanhood within ecofeminist framework has been mostly discredited and updated with new progressive discourses, I’ll argue, upon deeper examination of the storylines, it is possible to find some examples of these long-standing concepts within the contemporary ecofeminist narratives mentioned here. In her critical piece on *Fury Road*, Eileen Jones states that the film employs ‘essentializing Earth Mother nonsense about women’ and that she dreaded getting to the ‘Green Place’ because she was afraid of what it would look like; “Would everyone be doing yoga when we got there? And communicating softly and understanding with each other? Or perhaps tending gardens all day, then doing fertility dances by the light of the moon?”<sup>31</sup>. The upper hand of primitive matriarchy over primitive patriarchy is pretty evident in *Fury Road*, the film opts out for familiar tropes of wise women, crones and witches with the Vuvalini, a group of a matriarchal wasteland tribe who conveniently keep seeds to plant them later when they find an inhabitable place. This association of women with the hope of the earth’s renewed fertility, taken together with the destruction, sickness and oppression men caused is evidently based in an essentialization of gender differences where men equal violence and women equal nurturing. This type of strict binary opposition undermines many progressive discourses the film conveys on environmental justice and collective fight against oppression, as well as the nuanced depictions it makes on femininity and masculinity.

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<sup>31</sup> Jones, E. (2015, May 18). *Actually, Mad Max: Fury Road Isn't That Feminist; And It Isn't That Good, Either*. In *These Times*.  
<https://inthesetimes.com/article/actually-mad-max-fury-road-isnt-that-feminist>

Privileging matriarchy over patriarchy echoes the same old dualist and value hierarchical thinking that feminism and ecofeminism has been fighting against for decades. *Fury Road* reinforces certain contemporary social expectations from sexes, some of which completely undercut the non-essentialist discourse of the film. The implication that men killed the world is another essentialist representation the film has chosen to employ. Tracy King, in her article ‘No, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is not a feminist masterpiece (but that’s OK)’, asks “In the pre-desolation *Mad Max* universe, were there no female military leaders? No female soldiers? No female nuclear engineers building bombs? If we’re to buy the aggression and survival instincts of *Furiosa* and the matriarchal, gun-toting tribe with which she eventually reunites, then we have to look past the notion of men as natural war-mongers and women as natural peace-makers. Necessity is an equalising force. But in the end, these tropes are not dismantled by *Mad Max: Fury Road*, but reinforced.”<sup>32</sup> George Miller, in an interview in 2015, admits that “Initially, there wasn’t a feminist agenda”, and that *Furiosa* is a woman because he “needed a warrior. But it couldn’t be a man taking five wives from another man. That’s an entirely different story. So everything grew out of that”<sup>33</sup>. But because Hollywood in general is so bad at representing nuanced female characters, *Fury Road*, just as *The Hunger Games*, has been celebrated as a feminist masterpiece even if it unfortunately reinforces some pretty outdated discourses on gender. The problems that may rise from perpetuating these essentialist discourses, such as women’s inherent connection to nature, their identities as nurturers and their moral upper hand on men, will be discussed below.

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<sup>32</sup> King, T. (2015, May 20). *No, Mad Max: Fury Road is not a feminist masterpiece (but that’s OK)*. New Statesman. <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/05/no-mad-max-fury-road-not-feminist-masterpiece-s-ok>

<sup>33</sup> Killday, G. (2015, May 14). *Cannes: Mad Max’s’ Tom Hardy Says He Owes Director George Miller An Apology*. The Hollywood Reporter. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/cannes-2015-mad-maxs-tom-795589/>

### **I.II. Dangers of Feminist Femininity Narrative**

Cynthia Eller in her book 'The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why An Invented Past Will Not Give Women a Future' sets out to refute a theory what she calls 'feminist matriarchalism'. Feminist matriarchy by its supporters is summarized as "the ascendancy of the Mother's way" or as "a realm where female things are valued and where power is exerted in non-possessive, noncontrolling, and organic ways that are harmonious with nature" (Eller, 2000, p. 12). Feminist matriarchs aspire for societies in which the culture centers around values described as feminine. Women who enthusiastically embrace the matriarchal narrative do so because it gives them a new and vastly improved self-image based on their 'inner goodness' and 'natural nobility'. Although there is nothing wrong with redeeming and revaluing 'feminine' qualities, which have been devalued by patriarchal thinking throughout history, reclaiming an 'innate femaleness' may not be the best way forward in the fight against patriarchal oppression since the same femaleness, and especially its reflections in sex and reproduction, are highly interconnected with structures of male dominance. Feminist matriarchy narratives are especially eminent among the realms supposedly can be restored by 'feminine' values, realms such as environmental and social justice which are in desparate need of proper balance. Messages of female specialness, incorruptibility, and integrity, as anticipated, come across as appealing to many women and make them feel empowered; but sadly there seem to be many downsides of matriarchal empowerment, first of which is the valorization of motherhood and as an extension a type of feminized womanhood. Feminist matriarchal narratives reinforce some standards for motherhood against which women will be measured. These narratives perpetuate the already established guidelines for motherhood (and as

an extension also for womanhood, since childbirth is the hallmark of what it means to be a woman) to which women have to conform, especially around self-sacrificing, and nurturance. "Women "tend to cluster," says Maureen Murdock. They "like being related, helpful, connected." [...] Women "do not use their power to dominate or to subordinate," but rather "to increase the well-being of their environment." They "are naturally inclined to assume responsibility for the welfare of others," and they prefer "a more securely ordered, fruitful, lawful, ethical, and spiritual way of life" (Eller, 2000, p. 58). Another matriarchal discourse to pay attention to here is the women's relationship with power, it is assumed that women do not seek or even want power since they are motivated by building a better world, not by egocentric reasons. This supposed benevolent connection between women and power used by right-wing anti-feminist rhetoric to validate women's absence from high-ranking, high-paying jobs, and professions. This rhetoric is used to suggest that the reason behind why there are very few women in high ranking positions in the business world is because they do not seek power and therefore are not as assertive as men. Similarly, the rhetoric of women being more caring than men feeds into the expectation of women to take responsibility for the unpaid care in the household. Correspondingly, the responsibility to take care of the environment is put on to women even if it is everyone's responsibility, not just women's. Such a connection positions women as natural caretakers and cleaners, but this time not only humankind's but also the planet's, in other words, the earth's household. As it can be seen from these examples, embracing and perpetuating good-natured feminism based on feminist matriarchal narrative and maternal altruism and ethics of care is a double-edged sword.

Identifying with feminine qualities not only reduces women's identities to caregivers and custodians but also, in a subtle but important way, strips them of their civil rights. Women are forced to prove their worth through their moral high standards to have the chance to be involved in policy and decision making. Since they are seen as the intrinsic regulators of probity in public action, they are expected to act as a magic bullet to resolve the issues our society is facing such as ecological destruction, corruption, and lack of care for one another. This results in women being seen "as instruments to achieve a broader development goal, not welcomed to public office as a matter of their democratic and employment rights" (Goetz, 2007, p. 85). Connecting women with inherent high moral values, though it is very flattering, undermines their right to just be and to just participate. This expectation from women to bring something more to the table to be able to participate in political matters is what fastens women's positions as the Other and is what makes feminist patriarchal narrative quite problematic. Essentialist notions of women's higher moral nature and the belief that they will put things in order and restore balance around public life, especially in politics, condition and position them as political cleansers, peacemakers, anti-corruption forces and climate change fighters. "Consider the justification for selecting only women provided by Commander Pedro Montoya, when training an all-female motorcycle brigade of traffic cops in Lima: 'the women are more honest and morally firm than the men. It's undeniable'. Montoya went on to posit that women are more honest because of their role in the family" (Goetz, 2007, p. 86). Enough repeated and naturalized, women's high moral sensibility now is another standard and a guideline for womanhood and especially for working women, they are expected to spruce up any public space they decide to enter, extending their housekeeping to the whole globe.

In addition, when biologically determined, moral sensibility becomes gendered in a way that removes it from the reach and responsibility of men and is offloaded to women. This gendered view on morality holds women alone responsible for cleaning up the mess made by patriarchal capitalism. It perpetuates the stereotype of “women-as-victim-then-as-agent” (Resurrección, 2013, p. 34) which encumbers women with more unpaid and emotional labor and lets men off the hook. The rhetoric of women as real victims of ecological and social crises as primary caretakers has been put to use by agents of environmental communication for years, in order to mobilize women and to prompt climate and social action. While there is a certain truth and supporting empirical data for women being affected by ecological and social crises much more than men, this rhetoric has the danger of placing the burden solely on women and making them the only agents of social and environmental action. The stereotype of ‘women-as-victim-then-as-agent’ is generally supported by the claim that women have a special connection with nature, many ecological development plans from the 90s focus on this supposed connection and even rely on it to position women as the central agents for transformation, alleviation, and the restoration of climate-affected places (Resurrección, 2013). Women’s supposed special relationship with nature draws heavily on ideas of maternal altruism, it is seen as a natural extension of their caring roles within their families as child bearers. “Gender essentialism has been used as a tool to mobilize women around a perceived characteristic that takes pride in having a more direct connection with nature that risks saying that women’s oppression is necessary to create the opportunity to gain knowledge needed to solve the ecological crisis—clearly an untenable feminist position” (Davion, 1994, p. 23). Because of their closeness to nature and because of

the fate they share with it (being exploited by capitalist patriarchy), women are assumed to have a better understanding of the importance of environmental protection, thus are also expected to educate and mobilize men. But in the meantime, men are discouraged from seeing themselves as manifestations of - and thus active participants in - nature, because of the value hierarchies between nature and culture that privileges culture (men) above nature (women). Men abstain from identifying with nature and Earthcare in any way because nature is feminized and femininity is denigrated by patriarchy.

Another concern about women's inherent moral quality rises from upholding a gender binary and simplistic conceptualizations of women as a category. The emphasis on assumed integrity and morality inherent to women and the subsequent discourse of women's gender as a useful device for good governance makes critical social differences between women disappear (Goetz, 85). The idea of an universally shared women's experience disregards many defining pillars of identity formation such as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, appearance, medical history, and family structure. By embracing the rhetoric of our undeniable moral upper hand, we risk projecting some women's prioritizing morality and caring to all women, which overlooks the complex pluralism of many women's voices. This generalization not only essentializes women but also makes them one-dimensional, and reduces them to particular material feminine traits. Women do not constitute a single interest group. Not every woman is raised the same way, faces the same type of oppression. When we assign an inherent moral sensibility to women, we also take the risk of it being abused. Rhetorics about women's probity, virtue, and self-sacrifice can be employed to eradicate personal characteristics and behaviours that would otherwise be deemed improper, or to

explain away crimes such as human rights violations, bid rigging, or speculation (Goetz, 87). Not only this rhetoric is oblivious to women's capacities for harm and injustice for political gains, but it also turns a blind eye to the different concerns raised by women of color, transnational women's movement, queer movement, and disabled women about injustices and maleficence borne of racial, class, ableist, heteronormative and cis privilege<sup>34</sup>. Theories that conceptualize women as a single interest group with the same moral values, marginalizes and eventually discards those who do not conform to gender binaries, women of color and women who are poor, immigrant women, and women with disabilities.

Another problem with women's inherent moral sensibility is its complex history with oppression. Some feminist ethicists argue that this rhetoric valorizes the burdened history of femininity associated with caring (Card 1996) since caregiving practices were shaped in the context of patriarchal oppression. The most prominent objection is that care ethics and morality is a kind of slave morality valorizing the oppression of women. The concept of slave morality comes from the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, who theorized that oppressed people have a tendency to propagate moral theories that reframe subservient traits as virtues. Slave morality takes certain typical characteristics of oppression and paints them in a better, morally viable light and then reclaims them as a way of empowerment. So, for example, 'submissiveness' becomes 'goodness of heart', 'powerlessness' becomes 'humility', 'passivity' becomes 'patience'. Feminist ethicists suggest many discourses on high morality of women are actually found upon the subversion of heavy patriarchal traditions characterized by rigidly enforced sexual divisions of labor. "This critique issues caution against

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<sup>34</sup> Norlock, K. (2019, May 27). *Feminist Ethics*. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-ethics/#ThemFemiEthi>

uncritically valorizing caring practices and inclinations because women who predominantly perform the work of care often do so to their own economic and political disadvantage”<sup>35</sup>. Feminist ethicists also suggest to look closely to who’s being cared and who’s providing the care, and whether this relationships are just and free from power imbalances. And they caution us to pay attention to the blueprint of care, and decide whether it is uplifting and empowering or it perpetuates a false understanding that associates moral maturity with self-sacrifice and self-effacement. Feminist ethicists suggest embracing our moral high ground, in a way, is accepting our history of oppression and reiterating our place as the oppressed.

Since care work is often voluntary and unpaid, it generally comes with caregivers’ social and professional detriment. This rhetoric of women’s inherent caring trait enables the exploitation of caregivers and puts more physical, intellectual and emotional labor on women. Putting responsibility on women without equipping them with the right tools, sufficient support and without challenging the subtle ways patriarchy is embedded within our everyday lives; paralyzes women rather than empowering them. B.P. Resurrección, in her article ‘Persistent Women and Environment Linkages in Climate Change and Sustainable Development Agendas’, warns about “the risks of positioning women in environmental projects and programmes that sidestep existing disproportionate workloads and gendered hierarchies. In short, the slogans that drew attention to women as the environment’s victims and caretakers did not match more complex and daily realities of resource use, power and negotiation” (Resurrección, 2013, p. 34). Caring for earth or working for a better and a fairer society comes with many additional responsibilities, many of which

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<sup>35</sup> Sander-Staudt, M. *Care Ethics*. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/care-eth/#H3>

neither are supported by our current everyday institutional structures, nor we have time for in our very busy lives. Furthermore, in the last decade or so, it became clear that the environmental crisis is not something that can be combated against with only individual action, a big transformation is necessary within our society's modus operandi and within its deep-seated institutions. Placing responsibility on women and girls and letting men off the hook result in women and girls doing additional bits men and boys are supposed to do but do not, while trying to persuade men in positions of power. Men do not act environmentally conscious or caring because they fear being perceived as gay or effeminate. Ellen Hunt states that even meaningful discussions about climate action come down to gender lines. A study by Janet K. Swim published in the journal *Global Environmental Change*<sup>36</sup> in 2019 demonstrates that men tend to attribute negative feminine traits to their environmentally conscious counterparts<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, a 2016 paper in the *Journal of Consumer Research* suggests that “men may be motivated to avoid or even oppose green behaviours in order to safeguard their gender identity”<sup>38</sup>. It is pretty clear that the feminine discourse around climate action has real life consequences and the way to go is not to strengthen these associations between femininity and greenness but to dismantle them so that men would be more willing to engage in green behaviours like carrying reusable bags or decreasing their

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<sup>36</sup> Swim, K. K. & Killis, A. J. & Hamaty, K. J. (2019). Gender Bending and Gender Conformity: The Social Consequences of Engaging in Feminine and Masculine Pro-Environmental Behaviors. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11199-019-01061-9>

<sup>37</sup> Elle, H. (2020, Feb 6). The eco gender gap: why is saving the planet seen as women's work? *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/06/eco-gender-gap-why-saving-planet-seen-womens-work>

<sup>38</sup> Brough, A. A. & Wilkie, J. E. B. & Ma, J. & Isaac, M. S. & Gal, D. (2016). Is Eco-Friendly Unmanly? The Green-Feminine Stereotype and Its Effect on Sustainable Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 43(4), 567–582. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/43/4/567/2630509>

meat consumption. And in the meantime, men and women should work towards the common goal of eradicating the inferior perception of femininity.

As Andrea Dworkin points out, “being worshiped (for most women) is preferable to being defiled, and being looked up to is better than being walked on. It is hard for women to refuse the worship of what otherwise is despised: being female” (Dworkin, 1983, p. 337). But doing so might be the way to our freedom and empowerment, and not refusing it might prove to be dangerous. Moral high ground and caring qualities of women, as exemplified above, historically were used as oppression mechanisms and even today are still being used to advocate for injustices of subtle patriarchal workings of the society. One main problem is that these concepts we claim for our empowerment, since patriarchy is still a very powerful system of oppression, become guidelines for our existence and standards for womanhood. The danger of clinging to this concept of single femaleness “is that it becomes not an ideal type that you naturally express, but one that you must live up to, whether or not it fits with your interests and inclinations” (Eller, 2000, p. 67). Any narrative on feminist ethics typically fall back on the image of femaleness that is the most readily available in mainstream collective consciousness: women as mothers and wives; as the carers of children, the household and the husbands, the ones with pure hearts and loving natures, the ones who are not defiled by material pursuits and conquest for power (Eller, 67). Feminist femininity concept is a defiant one not to be confused with the submissive angel-like patriarchal femininity that is forced on and used to oppress women, yet it has too much in common with it since it seems like it is doing too little to challenge the conventional patriarchal paradigms and essentialist notions around gender.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, I've tried to analyze contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives and how they reinforce, reproduce and subvert gender stereotypes and gendered concepts. I've come to the conclusion that although it is evident that these narratives are progressive in terms of gendered tropes, they still employ some gender essentialist discourses which historically have been used by patriarchy to oppress women and confine them to the household. Women are always praised for their high moral standards, for their compassionate, nurturing and caring qualities because these qualities are thought to be what makes a woman a good mother and a good wife. The hard work of childcare and household labor were put on women from the get-go using the rhetoric of these 'essential' qualities of women. These qualities were not seen as the consequence of culture and nurture, they are always regarded as the natural result of women's childbearing capacities. "The valorization of motherhood—as an ideal type separate from individual women's experiences of it—is a tactic that has served patriarchal cultures very well. Even as women's childbearing and childrearing activities have been named as the seat of a higher and purer morality—on the face of it, a very positive move--women have been bracketed off from historical processes, indeed from the entire project of culture" (Eller, 2000, p. 65). This rhetoric is used by patriarchy to keep women within the private sphere, and by first wave feminists to gain political power and to enter the public sphere. Both parties embraced this image of women as caring, nurturing, compassionate and ethical with different motives but through the same discourse; their capacity to bring forth life. First-wave feminists suggested that the essential qualities that make women good mothers and wives, also make them good political agents and activists. Although there is nothing wrong with these suggested qualities of women, they risk simplifying womanhood to motherhood

and creating standards for how women should be, and also saddle women with even more emotional labor as political cleaners, anti-corruption forces, peacekeepers and environmental vanguards. Although taking care of the planet and achieving social justice is a human concern not just a women's issue, it is made out to be. And I believe many contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives with female protagonists perpetuate this idea of women as primary caretakers and cleaners of the planet and the humankind. Not only these narratives reinforce this concept, they do it in a way that can be described as essentialist. Both of the protagonists of the post-apocalyptic movies mentioned in this research is acclaimed to incorporate feminist ideals. I believe this probably is an indication of the lack of female role models in our media, since both characters are just feminist in a sense that they blur the line between masculine and feminine traits, but nothing more. Many articles praise the smoothness of these characters' transition from one to the other, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, this ease seems to indicate a maternal essence beneath the masculine exteriors of these characters. These narratives essentialize the motherhood archetype through their heroines by making them disclose these so-called maternal qualities such as empathy, compassion, intuitiveness, adaptability, and inventiveness without even trying.

Motherhood archetype particularly is used to characterize women's unique capacity to care for and nurture the earth and its inhabitants. "This motherhood environmentalism, as I choose to call it, is only one of many ways that women are understood to have specific relations, as a group, to ecological awareness, action, or analysis. It is, however, a distressingly common discursive chain even within so-called Left environmentalist circles: women's concerns about nature, even if they

have eventual public appearance and impact, boil down to an obvious manifestation of natural protective instincts toward home and family. It is all about threats to the children and self-sacrifice for the sake of future generations” (Sandilands, 1999, p. xiii). This interconnection between maternal protective instincts and women can be exemplified through ‘performing not-performing’ strategy which contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives mentioned in this research frequently employ. While the female protagonists have to assimilate masculine traits in order to survive harsh conditions of the planet, hunger, or the totalitarian regime, their feminine traits surface almost effortlessly and mainly within maternalistic settings. Both Katniss and Furiosa seamlessly execute conventionally feminine maternal behaviors, behaviors that are presented as essential to their identities as heroes. Their heroism is aligned with a naturalized femininity, whenever they behave caring, nurturing, or compassionate, their hero status advances. Whenever they disclose their feminine natures with spontaneous, instinctive, and unrehearsed actions they are seen as authentic. “The implications are significant, suggesting good women are always already mothers, and their value, strength, and heroism stem from their maternal instincts and conventional heterosexual femininity” (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 407). Motherhood archetype is also used to enhance the idea of women’s moral high ground and corruption-resistant natures. Women are thought to be more ethical than men and are rendered as symbols of the moral counterpart of society’s amorality. Gender myths on women’s inherent propensity to act as conservers of family values, and guardians of nature are nothing new. Women’s high moral sensibility is used to acquire political power by first-wave feminists and later is employed by ecofeminists to mobilize women to act upon environmental crises. Women are also called to negotiate peace and conflict resolution, and to participate in humanitarian, and

post-conflict reconstruction. Women are believed to be the natural peacekeepers due to their assumed disdain for warfare, violence and domination and their compassion for humankind. Like with every other moral standing mentioned in this research, women's pacifist dispositions are seen as the result of their childbearing capabilities. Women's love for their children and their concerns over their safety is thought to be the main drive behind women's participation in peace activism. But again, this rhetoric of women's inherent pacifism "ignores the complex realities of women's experience, denying them agency and negating the spirit with which women have responded to crises" (El-Bushra, 2007, p. 131). El-Bushra in her article *Feminism, Gender, and Women's Peace Activism* highlights that women take part in warfare directly or indirectly by joining the armed forces, by encouraging men to exert violence when they see fit, by supporting nationalist agendas, or by ridiculing the faint-hearted (El-Bushra, 130). She emphasizes that '[w]omen do not necessarily speak with one voice on issues of war and peace. Clearly they are divided by political identities and allegiances, just as men are... Where women do undertake peace initiatives, these are often based on a pragmatic response to desperate situations rather than on an inherently pacifist orientation' (Ibid., p. 130-131). The idea of women's inherent pacifism, peacefulness and contempt for violence is a prevalent discourse within feminist circles, especially within feminist matriarchy rhetoric. Feminist matriarchs speculate that matriarchal people didn't engage in wars and didn't manufacture weapons, because war was against their moral code and value system. Matriarchs claim that violence entered human society when male dominance and patriarchy did (Eller, 52). Women eschewing or being incapable of violence is a common archetype within our collective consciousness, women's capacity for

violence goes against the longstanding rhetoric of women's inherent peacefulness as a result of their capability to bring forth life.

Abstaining from violence if it is not absolutely necessary is another narrative choice that essentializes women within contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives. The notion that women do not resort to violence if it is not absolutely necessary and whenever they kill it is motivated by care and concern or out of compassion for someone's suffering, is perpetuated throughout the narratives mentioned in this research. The female body is still associated with the maternal and therefore with care, concern and nurturing, thus violence acted out by women is deeply disorienting so these narratives opt out to endorse the myth of female non-violence. Not only patriarchal gender norms but also feminist thought treat female violence as a taboo, that's another point matriarchal feminism and patriarchy coincides. Matriarchal feminism embrace the idea that "the life-giving gender cannot want to give death"<sup>39</sup>, any implication of a connection between women and violence, other than women as the victims, violates the archetype of the Good Mother and seems almost sacrilegious. Such a connection touches upon something very deep and shatters a foundational keystone we have on the workings of life, the archetype of the peaceful and giving mother is that powerful. Violence is thought to be an attribute of the virile male, as a result becomes underrepresented when it is carried out by women. Violence is portrayed as mainly reactive for women, women only get a free pass for violence when they themselves or their loved ones are threatened and endangered. Violence as a concept is unpleasant and controversial, it is not something we would want to see anyone perform in real life, but choosing not to show female violence on screen is

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<sup>39</sup> Cardi, C. & Pruvost, G. (2011). The violence of women: suppressions and narratives. *Champ pénal/ Penal field* [Online], Vol. VIII. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/champpenal/8367?lang=en#tocto2n2>

acting on a game of essentialism which positions women on the side of an unearthly and never-ending pacifism. For example, Katniss wins The Games, literally a reality show/competition where children battle to the death, “while eschewing aggressiveness, a masculine trait, and showcasing a prized feminine quality, maternal instincts” (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 406). When Katniss kills it is either to save herself, or a reaction in the face of the danger to her loved ones or out of compassion. Wives from the Fury Road voice their negative opinions on violence more than once, even Furiosa do not act in any unredeemable way when it comes to violence. In contrast, male protagonists of conventional post-apocalyptic movies act unnecessarily violent, one even admits to eating babies when he was extremely hungry. It is hard to imagine a female protagonist exerting violence for her own gain; her violent actions, at their worst, come from taking revenge for the pain inflicted on her. Women, more often than not, are put to pedestal as designated moral centers and I believe this narrative choice can be read as our ongoing failure, as a society, to recognise the full humanity of women, and as an indicator of our inclination to shape women by assigning roles to them rather than exploring their complexities.

Another continuous narrative choice within contemporary post-apocalyptic feminist narratives is the appropriation of what Cynthia Eller calls ‘The Matriarchal Myth’. Eller suggests that second wave feminists have adapted matriarchal myth to their political needs and propagated it to a broad audience. ‘The Matriarchal Myth’ is the theory of prehistoric peaceful matriarchal societies that preceded the present violent patriarchal ones. Feminists advocate that to be able to live peacefully with each other and nature we should bring back the ways of these woman-centered societies and put women in positions of social and political power. ‘The Matriarchal Myth’ has a

certain appeal for feminists because it refuses the idea of patriarchy being universal through time and space and suggests that it is not the default way human societies have organized themselves. But “material evidence from prehistoric eras, such as the prevalence of female figurines, the richness of female grave goods (or the equivalence of male and female grave goods), and absence of defensive fortifications or substantial weaponry do not prove that ancient societies were woman-centered, goddess-worshipping, or even peaceful” (Eller, 2005, p. 1). Employing ‘The Matriarchal Myth’ as a narrative choice is problematic for feminist speculative fiction, because it is build on the feminist femininity myths which are exactly the same as the patriarchal femininity myths. The same old rhetoric of women’s peaceful, compassionate and ethical natures that stems from their capacity for childbearing is put to use again for betterment of the society. Feminist matriarchs adapt Darwin’s theory of sexual selection that says that sex-specific traits that will ensure continuation and betterment of human race develop, and the ones that undercut this objective are eliminated by nature. They use this extremely biologically deterministic theory to promote matriarchal societies and women in positions of power; they state that “because female humans were designed by nature to choose from among many possible mates only those that would improve the human race” (Eller, 2005, p. 5), they are fit for governance. This stance further advances the notion of women’s good demeanour and even superiority being rooted in their biology, closely linked with their reproductive capacity. Feminist matriarchalists think of their bodies as a source of wisdom and strenght, sometimes even deem it to be a more reliable source than their minds. Feminist matriarchs reinforce the patriarchal idea of a special connection between woman, her body and nature, and make the mistake of determining themselves biologically. Unsurprisingly, qualities like empathy, adaptability,

compassion are seen as the result of reproductive potential teaching women important lessons that are less available to men. Since women are capable of seeing humankind's inherent interconnectedness because of their reproductive capabilities, they are portrayed as less likely to seize power or to oppress people. Feminist matriarchalists see women as naturally good, kind and lawful human beings; and suggest that a society under women's control is what needed to assure the well-being of the humankind. As mentioned above, as always, these normalized standards for womanhood become norms which women should live up to, if they do not they are punished. If they do not put the welfare of others' before themselves, or do not sacrifice themselves, their time or comfort for the upkeep of the human race or the environment, or assume responsibility for cleaning the mess, they are deemed selfish, superficial and less than human. One might ask, what about men? What should we expect from them? Don't they have the same responsibilities for betterment of society and the human race? Turns out they do not, because they are bad when it comes to grasping oneness, empathy and bonding (Eller, 58). Feminist matriarchalists essentialize and infantilize men, they are seen as incapable of care, empathy and compassion and they seem to only thrive through aggressiveness, possessiveness, and competitiveness, to such an extent that "one wonders how women and men ever could have lived happily together, especially when what is wrong with men often seems to be quite permanent" (Eller, 2000, p. 59). Because feminist matriarchal narratives put men to the roles of either wild little boys or sinister villains, they are not expected to do the hard work of taking care of humanity and the environment, or cleaning up the mess, or to assume responsibility for the well-being of others. Emotional labor of caretaking, whether for the planet or for the other human beings, is always put on women in corporate offices, in activist circles, in both public and private spheres.

That's why perpetuating these myths on screen is not empowering but actually debilitating for humanity's growth, these myths downplay the importance of men's involvement within earth and social care work. It is not a bad thing to embrace the revolutionary potential of matriarchal narrative, or to use it to leverage a more egalitarian understanding of what makes a society, only if it does not put the responsibility just on women's shoulders. Feminist narratives employ matriarchal myth to empower women, to make them aware of their own power. But this narrative choice only makes sense on the surface: while seeming empowering, these narratives actually put more responsibility on women and make them pick up the extra slack left behind by men. It is not that men are treacherous villains who feed off women's hard work but they are unwilling to engage in care and maintenance work since patriarchy renders it as feminine thus inferior. When the media, willingly or unwillingly, acts as a legitimizing agent for patriarchal claims, it subtly undermines the revolutionary and radical potential of feminism and strips women from their power. When the media reframes care and maintenance work as the way to empowerment for women, it hides patriarchal paradigms of gender under a feminist exterior.

It is not really surprising that in popular commercial movies such as *The Hunger Games* and *Fury Road* conventional gendered tropes are reaffirmed; however, understanding how these all too common depictions effortlessly are naturalized and made mundane is important for feminist media studies because the narratives we shape, in return shape us. Making explicit what is taken for granted is beneficial since it mobilizes critical thinking and within this neoliberal post-feminist era in which neoliberalism coopts feminist discourses for its own benefit rather than women, subtle patriarchal norms sometimes go unnoticed. This research, in a way, tries to find out

“to what extent this legitimizing process is presumably mitigating, in a “friendly way,” the revolutionary and radical potential of the feminisms through its partial and possibly perverse incorporation into the mainstream pro-women discourse, and by purple-washing its intentions and trying to control the actual advance of women’s freedom and power” (Martinez-Jimenez et al., 2018, p. 402). With this research I suggest that empowerment rhetoric that is based on reframed patriarchal femininity is not doing any justice to women. Concepts such as feminist matriarchy, feminist femininity, maternal altruism, ecomaternalism etc. which are constructed on women’s essential nature and their childbearing capacity is not our way to empowerment. Gendered stereotypes upon which these concepts rest “persistently work to flatten out differences among women; to exaggerate differences between women and men; and to hand women an identity that is symbolic, timeless, and archetypal, instead of giving them the freedom to craft identities that suit their individual temperaments, skills, preferences, and moral and political commitments” (Eller, 2000, p. 8). Even though contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives are a way forward, they still don’t have the necessary depth to tackle such a complex concept as gender stereotypes. Although these narratives at times portray nuanced versions of gendered concepts, the foundations that they are built upon fall back into the age-old norms on gender, masculinity and femininity.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the scope of this project, there are limitations to what I can cover. Future research might look into other post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives such as *Handmaid's Tale*, *Bird Box*, *The Girl with All The Gifts* and trace subtle implications of gender essentialism within these narratives. Also I believe a detailed look into earlier narratives with female protagonists such as *Resident Evil*, *Alien*, *Terminator* and *Doomsday* can provide a better understanding for the evolution of action and post-apocalyptic movie heroines. As an example, *Resident Evil* even incorporates some feminist themes like “conspiracy and cynicism about global capitalism” (Harris, 2015, p. 100) by placing a multinational corporation as the villain of the story. “This placement of the multinational corporation in the role of the evil force against which humanity must defend itself coincides nicely with feminist critiques of capitalism’s prioritization of profits over people” (Ibid.). Since this research specifically focuses on gender essentialism, it overlooks many other non-essentialist ways gender stereotypes are perpetuated within these narratives, doing further research on this subject might prove to be useful. For example, Burke and Kelly in their article ‘The Visibility and Invisibility of Class, Race, Gender, and Sexuality in *The Hunger Games*’ suggest that it is important to examine women in supporting roles (most notably Effie Trinket, Katniss’s mother, Prim, other female tributes including Rue and Johanna), how Panem is structured around gender, and in what areas men and women are and are not visible. For example, on one hand *The Hunger Games* features a strong female protagonist, but on the other hand, women are missing from the Capitol's government and from the team of Gamemakers. Additionally, this research is not as comprehensive as I would like it to be on matters of interconnection between women and nature and the longstanding environmental archetype of ‘Mother Nature’.

The relationship between mother archetype and the Earth is another part of the matriarchal and maternal myths that is so prevalent that till this day it is used in calls for climate action and in environmental communication. I would love to talk more about the dangers of this constructed connection, since it subtly perpetuates the idea of mothers being unconditionally giving, all-encompassing and self-sacrificing and does the same for nature, which we all made aware by climate crisis is not true or shouldn't be assumed. The need for a more gender-neutral metaphor for the environment is evident, since “the strength of the mother archetype is that it is a universal and powerful image which communicates clearly the need for an unconditional commitment to protect and sustain the environment. Its weakness, however, ..., is that our definition of 'mother' rests on our received understanding of woman and confounds womanhood with motherhood” (Stearney, 1994, p.146). Another subject that would want to include in this research is how intersectionality is handled and portrayed in these contemporary feminist post-apocalyptic narratives. Intersectionality is important for feminist media studies since not all inequality is equal, many women experience multitude of injustices not just gender injustice. Intersectionality is another important concept I had to overlook since this research focuses on gender essentialist themes within these narratives, but I believe all of the contemporary feminist narratives mentioned in this research would provide significant insights on the interconnection between race, class, disability, sexuality, age, gender and environmental as well as social justice.

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## APPENDIX

### I.I. Plotlines of Contemporary Narratives Mentioned in the Research

*Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) is a post-apocalyptic action film co-written, co-produced, and directed by George Miller. It is set in a dystopian wasteland where modern civilisation has collapsed and resources like food, water and petrol are scarce and in control of a grotesque dictator called Immortan Joe. Every human in this hell-like society is a commodity, used for their labor or left to die. Starting with the five wives of Immortan Joe who are kept in a vault for reproductive purposes, main characters include Imperator Furiosa who is one of Immortan Joe's lieutenants, Max Rockatansky who is captured and used as a 'blood bag' for Immortan Joe's 'War Boys' because he is an universal donor, and Nux one of Immortan Joe's 'War Boys' who is brainwashed by religious rhetorics and ready to sacrifice himself in Immortan Joe's service. Other characters include 'Breeders' who are continually impregnated to produce 'War Pups' and to provide a steady source of milk, and masses of people living under the Citadel with whom Immortan Joe sometimes shares food and water but generally leaves to their own devices. Story starts when Furiosa takes Immortan Joe's Wives and escapes with them to Green Place; an idyllic place governed by 'Many Mothers' (also called The Vuvalini). After managing to ditch Immortan Joe and his 'War Boys' with the help of Max, Furiosa and the Wives encounter 'Many Mothers' and learn that the swampland they've passed one night before was the Green Place and it is not inhabitable anymore. In the meantime, one of the Wives establishes a special connection with Nux and Nux becomes one of the crew. The crew decides to go back and save the Citadel, which has abundant water and greenery Joe keeps to himself, from Immortan Joe's dictatorship and start a new civilization that is egalitarian and more harmonious with nature, with the help of the seeds 'The

Vuvalini' kept in the hopes of finding a place to grow them. Furiosa, the Wives, the Vuvalini, Max and Nux battle with Immortan Joe's forces through the wasteland, manage to kill Immortan Joe and go back to The Citadel. The movie ends with a hopeful note suggesting that The Wives and The Vuvalini will now plant the seeds and tend to the earth and share the crops with the masses of people who are living under the Citadel.

*The Hunger Games (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015)* is a post-apocalyptic action film adapted from Suzanne Collins' 2008 novel of the same name. It is set in the totalitarian, dystopian nation of Panem which is the result of some kind of an ecological crisis. Panem is divided into twelve districts ruled from the Capitol. Every district produces some resource such as food or electricity to be used by Capitol citizens. Like in the Citadel from Mad Max, the people from the districts are reduced to their labor and kept on the brink of starvation. Districts that are closest to the Capitol are the richest ones, and even they are at the mercy of the Capitol. Panem is ruled by a monstrous dictator called Coriolanus Snow who has no qualms about using extreme violence to keep districts oppressed. As punishment for a failed rebellion attempt, each year districts are forced to select two tributes, one boy and one girl, to participate in the Hunger Games. In Hunger Games, every tribute has to fight to the death to rise victorious because there could be only one victor. The story starts with Katniss Everdeen, a 16-year old girl from District 12, volunteering to take her 12-year old sister Primrose' place in the 74th Hunger Games. Katniss knows how to find food in the wilderness and how to hunt. She and fellow tribute Peeta Mellark embark on a train journey to the Capitol with Effie Trinket and one and only previous victor Haymitch Abernathy. Katniss manages to survive the 74th Hunger Games and

manages to also save Peeta with some passive acts of rebellion. In the meantime, she becomes a public figure for the rebellion through her actions such as becoming friends and allies with a young girl from District 11, not killing people from other poor districts and caring for Peeta when he got injured. She turns from Katniss Everdeen to the face of the rebellion; to the Mockingjay. In the second, third and fourth movies, rebellion forces manage to take over the Capitol and start to govern Panem themselves. That's when Katniss realizes the president of the rebellion, Alma Coin, is as dangerous as the President Snow himself and kills her. The movie ends on a positive note suggesting that there is hope for the future, Panem becomes a democratic nation in which no one is oppressed and no one is on the brink of starvation.

*Bird Box (2018)* is a post-apocalyptic horror movie that takes place after the emergence of some kind of entities that drive people who look at them to commit suicide. The narrative follows Malorie Hayes and her journey with two children named Boy and Girl to reach a safe community down the river blindfolded. The events erupt when Malorie is pregnant and visiting the hospital for a pregnancy checkup. After seeing the entities, her sister which is driving Malorie back from hospital stops midway on the road and commits suicide. Malorie takes shelter in a nearby house with about a dozen other people, they cover all the windows with newspapers and blindfold themselves whenever they go out to prevent themselves from seeing the entities. The importance of this narrative for this research lies on how it approaches pregnancy and motherhood. In this narrative, Malorie is never sidelined because she is pregnant or because she has to take care of children. For example; as the food supply runs low, Malorie joins a group of survivors on a dangerous journey

to go to a nearby supermarket when she is pregnant. And she takes another dangerous journey by herself with two children blindfolded down the river on a boat, after her partner Tom sacrifices himself protecting Malorie and the kids from people who saw entities and didn't commit suicide and now worship the entities and force other people to see them. After a very harsh journey, Malorie and the children make their way to the safe community and realize that it is a school for blind people. The name of the movie comes from the pet birds Malorie carries within a box that warns her against the entities when they are nearby.

*The Girl with All the Gifts (2016)* is a post-apocalyptic zombie film that follows the journey of a young girl named Melanie accompanied by a scientist, a teacher and two soldiers. The zombies within this film are called 'Hungries', they are mindless beings who eat humans and other living creatures. Melanie is a hybrid second-generation hungry who craves human flesh but retains the capability to think and learn. After the military base they reside is attacked by hungries, Melanie and the others decide to take shelter in a mobile laboratory which has been placed in the city by the military and embark on a dangerous journey. The reason they want to reach the laboratory is because the scientist Dr. Caroline Caldwell believes that by sacrificing Melanie to complete her vaccine research she will be able to save the human race. But in the process, Melanie realizes that she and her kind of zombie-human hybrids will be the future of the world and escapes from the laboratory. Dr. Caldwell chases after her but is killed by a tribe of second-generation Hungries who have learned to track uninfected people even when they wear blocker gel which makes them invisible to the Hungries. After fleeing the laboratory, Melanie sets the big tower of seed-pods which contains the parasitic fungus that turns humans to hungries on fire, causing it to

release all the spores and making the air inhabitable for the human race. Only one person stays human, the teacher Helen Justineau who was responsible for educating the second-generation hungries in the military base. The film ends with Justineau educating children that sit outside the mobile lab and listen to her speaking through a microphone. This narrative is important for this research because it does not opt out to the classical post-apocalyptic plot of the human race gaining back its power and dominant position in the world or finding the cure and making the world inhabitable and a safe place for themselves. The human race is completely wiped out of earth, making this narrative at least a very interesting one if not a very progressive one. This narrative dares to envision a post-human future, transforming our ages-old anthropocentric point of view.

*Handmaid's Tale (2017-present)* is a dystopian tragedy television series based on the 1985 novel of the same name written by Margaret Atwood. It is set in a world with decreasing fertility rates due to environmental pollution. This dystopian narrative, like others, has a nation ruled by a fundamentalist theocratic totalitarian regime, founded in place of the former United States in the aftermath of a civil war. This nation is called Gilead, its society is mainly organized by dominance hierarchies and social classes. In this world, women have very limited roles to play; they can be 'Handmaids', 'Wives', 'Marthas', 'Econowives', 'Jezebels', 'Aunts' or 'Unwomen' who are sent to the colonies to deal with toxic waste. The story follows one handmaid's journey named June/Offred. Handmaids are the women who are still fertile and for that reason, enslaved to give birth to high ranking officials' babies. Like in other dystopian narratives, people here also are either commodities or are reduced to their labors, except the 'Commanders'. June is assigned to a 'Commander' named

Fred Waterford and then becomes Of/Fred, she is nearly non-existent except the times of the ceremony; ceremony might basically be summarized as a government-issued rape to control child birth. June gets pregnant and gives birth to a little girl named Nicole and in the process of trying to run away to Canada with Nicole she encounters an underground rebellion organization called 'Mayday'. When the time comes, she sends Nicole to Canada and decides to stay in Gilead herself to help as many children as possible to escape. The series is not finished by the time this research is conducted, June is still in Gilead helping children and 'Mayday' using her relative privilege.

### **I.II. Plotlines of Conventional Narratives Mentioned in the Research**

*Soylent Green* (1973) is a ecological dystopian film that follows the story of the detective Frank Thorn who is investigating the murder of a wealthy businessman. It takes place in an overpopulated world in which the oceans are dying due to the greenhouse effect, people suffer from hunger and poverty due to food, water and housing shortages and are euthanized when they reach a certain age. A wealthy businessman is killed and Frank Thorn is assigned to the case, he starts his investigation from the luxurious apartment the man was murdered in. These apartments can only be afforded by the very rich people just like food, and clean water and comes with young women who are referred to as 'furniture'. These women are sex slaves for the tenants of these apartments and discarded when they get old. There is only one type of food for the poor masses that is being produced by a company called Soylent Industries, this company controls the food supply and sells the three brand of wafers, including 'Soylent Red' and 'Soylent Yellow' and the its new flavor 'Soylent Green' which is advertised as being produced by ocean planktons. As the investigation goes on, with the help of 'furniture' Shirl, with whom

Thorn begins a relationship, Frank Thorn unravels the disturbing truth about ‘Soylent Green’ that it is made out of euthanized people. The film ends with Thorn shouting “Soylent Green is people” when he is being taken to the hospital due to the injury by the murder attempt as he uncovers the truth. This canonical work of dystopian fiction is important for this research because it consists of all the classical patriarchal paradigms of a conventional dystopian movie. The protagonist is a hypermasculine man with a stoic, cynical and rugged disposition; women are incompetent, weak, vulnerable and vain. And since it is a very early narrative, physical violence against women is seen as normal and a part of life. Despite its very promising backdrop, the film follows the male protagonist and the action like its counterparts at the time and in many ways is a cop movie.

*Waterworld (1995)* is a post-apocalyptic action film which follows the story of ‘The Mariner’ who is a mutant that can breathe underwater. It takes place in a world where the earth is 7,600 metres underwater, everyone fends for themselves, there are no crops growing and everyone is under the threat of ‘The Smokers’; a gang of pirates who have access to gasoline and cigarettes. The Smokers attack the atoll which The Mariner was visiting at the time searching for a girl named Enola who is said to have the map to the ‘Dryland’ on her back as a tattoo. ‘Dryland’ is believed to be somewhere in the endless ocean and symbolizes the hope to build a civilization again. Just before the atoll is being attacked, the atoll's residents decide to drown ‘The Mariner’ in what they call a recycling pit because he is a mutant with gills and webbed feet but the execution is interrupted by the attack. A woman suggests to save ‘The Mariner’ if he takes her and a child with him on his boat while escaping. The Mariner agrees and they manage to escape after a dangerous chase with The Smokers.

In the meantime, while escaping, Helen's naive actions result in damage to The Mariner's boat and as a punishment The Mariner cuts hairs of Helen and the child violently. Another time, The Mariner throws the child into the water because she talks too much. These extremely antisocial behaviours indicate that The Mariner is another hypermasculine, stoic and rugged post-apocalyptic hero who must be reminded of what it is to be human. Unsurprisingly later in the narrative The Mariner grows fond of the child and falls in love with the woman. The child turns out to be Enola and is abducted by 'The Smokers'. While 'The Smokers' are getting ready to kill the child to take the map to the 'Dryland' of her back, 'The Mariner' comes to her rescue. And at the end, they manage to decipher the map and find the 'Dryland', but The Mariner sails away after he helps Helen and Enola to find the 'Dryland'. This narrative is important for this research because it also exemplifies how poorly women are treated in conventional narratives. Helen is portrayed as extremely incapable, shortsighted and senseless, she is nearly bartered by The Mariner for goods and threatened continuously by physical and sexual violence throughout the narrative. The narrative also exemplifies how the conventional hero is not suited to live and collaborate with other people and to make the hard work of building a society from scratch.

*I Am Legend (2007)* is a post-apocalyptic action thriller which follows the story of U.S Army virologist Robert Neville who seems to be the only human left in the world and is immune to the virus that turns people to vampiric zombies called Darkseekers. Robert Neville tries to find the cure for the virus outbreak and suffers from extreme loneliness, his daily routine consists of searching food and other supplies, going to the video store with his companion dog Sam and broadcasting radio to reach other survivors if there are any. To cope with loneliness, he pretends to have a conversation

with mannequins he placed in various spaces in the city. One day he manages to capture a Darkseeker and starts experimenting on her. Next day, while strolling the city with his dog Sam, he realizes that one of the mannequins is positioned outside the terminal instead of the local video store where he placed it. He approaches the mannequin and gets caught in a snare trap and hits his head. He gains his consciousness back at sunset and manages to free himself from the trap but is attacked by infected dogs. Sam and Neville manage to eliminate the dogs but Sam gets bitten in the meantime. Later that night, Neville is forced to kill Sam before she turns since the serum to prevent the disease he has been working on does not work on her. Heartbroken by losing his only friend, Neville ventures into the night and deliberately attacks a group of Darkseekers, trying to commit suicide. Just as he is nearly being captured by the Darkseekers, he is rescued by a pair of immune humans; a woman named Anna and her child Ethan. They go back to Neville's house and Anna treats Neville's wounds. In the morning, after he gains his consciousness back and they start to get acquainted over breakfast. Anna informs Robert about a survivor's colony and her plans to reach there, but is confronted with an uncalled for disbelief and anger. Later that night, the Darkseekers who learned the location of the house due to Anna's neglect the night before, attack Robert's house to rescue the female Darkseeker he captured. Anna, Ethan and Robert retreat and seal themselves to the laboratory in the basement where Robert treats the female Darkseeker. Seeing that his last experimentation for the cure was successful, Robert draws blood from the Darkseeker, hands it to Anna and sacrifices himself to save her, the boy and the cure. The next day, Anna reaches the survivor's colony and gives the cure to the military officials. At the end of the film, we see Anna after the recovery of the human race and the civilization is achieved, Anna gives a speech and narrates the efforts and sacrifices Robert made

to save humanity. This narrative is important for this research since it also includes patriarchal paradigms of hypermasculine male hero and naive hyperfeminine female secondary character. Like its predecessors, this narrative reproduces gender stereotypes to a tee. Robert is stoic, antisocial, cynical and rugged; while Anna is naive, incompetent and emotional.

*The Road (2009)* is a post-apocalyptic survival film that follows the journey of a man and his son through a barren wasteland who want to reach the coast thinking there will be better conditions there. On their way to the coast, we see the characters scavenge for food and supplies and try to avoid cannibalistic gangs and we get glimpses of their fairly happy lives before the apocalypse and the transformation they experienced earlier in the post apocalypse. We learn that the man had a wife who had given birth to the child after some time after the apocalypse. The woman, fearing that she will be raped and then be eaten by the cannibals, gradually loses hope and decides to commit suicide, and one day she wonders of to the night not to be seen again. The Man decides to take on a journey to the coast after this incident because he is terminally ill and soon will not be able to provide for the child. On their journey, every time when they are nearly captured by cannibals, we see The Man contemplating if he ever will be able to kill the child to spare him suffering. And it comes to the conclusion that he will never be able to do it. Throughout the narrative The Man tries to toughen up the child and behaves increasingly crueler to the people they encounter. This narrative is important for this research not only because it consists of a hypermasculine, cynical and antisocial male hero, but also because it reinforces the patriarchal paradigm of the sacredness of the conventional heteronormative family. At the end of the film, The Man's illness gets worse and

eventually he dies and the child is approached by a family of fellow survivors; a man, a woman, their two children, and their dog. The Father convinces the boy that he is one of the good guys and takes the child under his protection. This ending, in a way, suggests hope for the future since it is apparent that some families manage to stand and fight the post-apocalypse together. One of the most problematic parts of the narrative is the vilification of The Woman for abandoning her responsibilities as a mother. In one scene, The Man persuades the child who wants to commit suicide to join his mother by saying that good guys who carry the fire does keep on living. The Road has been criticized by many scholars for its post-feminist valorization of the father over the mother and its narrative misogyny.

*The Book of Eli (2010)* is a post-apocalyptic neo-western film that follows the journey of a nomad named Eli who is on a mission to deliver a copy of his mysterious book to a safe location on the West Coast of the United States. While traveling through the wasteland, Eli arrives at a crumbling town ruled by a warlord named Carnegie who is looking for a certain book that he believes will help him to exert control over his people. Carnegie has Eli as a guest and orders his partner's daughter Solara to seduce and persuade him to stay because he is extremely impressed by his combat skills. Solara cannot seduce Eli but they share a pleasant meal together before which Eli recites a paragraph from the book he is carrying. In the morning, when Solara was repeating the paragraph Eli recited to her to her mother, Carnegie overhears her and realizes that Eli has the book he has been looking for; the Bible. Eli manages to sneak away but Carnegie orders his henchmen to find and kill him and take the book. In the meantime, Solara decides to join Eli on his journey but he declines. Solara follows Eli anyways and is nearly raped and eaten by a pair of cannibals but is rescued by Eli at

the last minute. At the end, they manage to stave off the henchmen and Carnegie, reach the safe location which is a library at Alcatraz. Even though they lost the copy of the Bible, Eli recites the whole book to the head of the library and the Bible is recovered. This narrative is important for this research not only it consists of the all too common tropes of hypermasculine stoic male hero and damsel in distress, but also it involves one of the perfect metaphors for reestablishing patriarchy; recovery of the Bible which film itself suggests that has the power of manipulating and controlling people.

*The Walking Dead (2010 - present)* is a post-apocalyptic horror television series that centers around the story of deputy sheriff Rick Grimes who wakes up from a coma and finds himself after the onset of a zombie apocalypse. Since it is in its 10th season, it is not possible to narrate the details of the plotline of the series. The plotline can be summarized as the story of the leader Rick Grimes and his immediate circle of survivors who try to navigate a dangerous world that has been taken over by The Walkers and to protect themselves from not only against attacks by walkers but by fellow survivors. This narrative is important for this research because it employs an all too common narrative device to reestablish patriarchal gender roles post apocalypse; the punishment of women who divert from and do not conform to stereotypical feminine roles such as being mothers and wives. Women who date to leave the domestic sphere or behave aggressive and opinionated are immediately punished by the outside forces either by rape or murder.