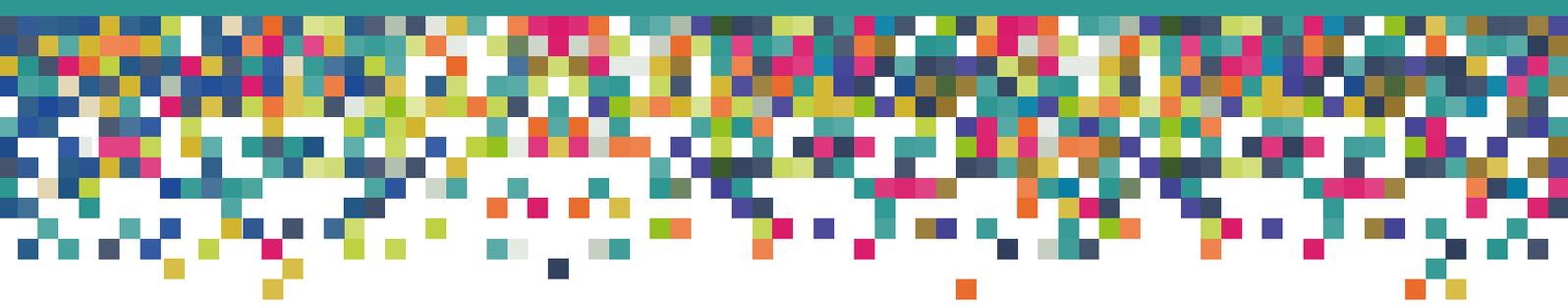




Media and  
Communications

## Media@LSE Working Paper Series

Editors: Bart Cammaerts, Nick Anstead and Richard Stupart



### **Stories of Dismantling the White Patriarchy**

A thematic narrative analysis of the imagined futures in 2015 science fiction films

KYLIE COURTNEY



Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ('LSE'), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright, KYLIE COURTNEY © 2017.

The author has asserted their moral rights.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the compilers or the LSE.

# 1 Abstract

*Science fiction films can provide audiences with images of the imagined future, often extrapolating from anxieties of the present to create this future (Nama 2008: 6; Dimitrakaki and Tsiantis 2002: 210; Larson 2008: 293). These particular imagined futures from 2015 science fiction films ‘imagined dangerously,’ challenging and critiquing the status quo in which they were made (Milner and Redmond 2015, 6). This research seeks to analyse the ways in which regimes from the imagined futures in 2015 science fiction films naturalised their power structures through mythmaking, and how these regimes were ultimately dismantled. Questioning the relationship between myths, the imaginary, and images, this dissertation argues that the pattern of narratives of White female protagonists destroying White patriarchal societies in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and *Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2*, are the result of the imaginary beginning to question contemporary myths in mainstream film. These films were selected based on their cultural relevance (Appendix A) and their ability to provide insight into how contemporary myths influence the imaginary. Theoretically underpinning this research is Barthian discourse of the bourgeoisie myth, expanded upon to include how Whiteness and masculinity similarly create their own myths. Castoriadis’ conception of the imaginary and science fiction discourses also provide a framework through which to use science fiction films as an analytical lens for the contemporary myths and imaginaries in which they were made. Through a thematic narrative analysis, this research analyses the pattern of White women dismantling White patriarchal regimes in the imagined futures of these films, ultimately arguing that these films ‘imagined dangerously’ as critiques of the status quo constructed by contemporary myths of White men in power.*

## 2 INTRODUCTION

After years of science fiction films being dominated by White male protagonists, suddenly three films were released that were financially successful, had White female protagonists, and focused on fighting the *status quo*. What was it about 2015 that these particular protagonists and narratives resonated so strongly with audiences on a global scale? This research argues that this pattern exists because of historically specific myths and imaginaries that created these films, which can now be used to analyse the myths and imaginaries that created them (Castoriadis, 1975: 284). The power of repeated themes are historically specific and help these narratives fix their meaning within society (Dimitrakaki and Tsiantis, 2002: 210). By looking at discourse surrounding myths, the imaginary, and science fiction, this research hopes to prove the power of repeated themes in analysing contemporary myths and imaginaries.

Myths are narratives that 'serve a fundamental ideological function' in naturalising power structures to appear eternal and unchanging, and they are present in many different types of media, including film (Franzosi, 1998: 530; Barthes, 1972: 132–48). They are narratives specific to sociohistorical contexts and become 'who we are, what we believe, and how we act' (Wright and Nyberg, 2013: 4). Further, myths become 'part of the wallpaper of our shared world' (Olson, 2016: 6). The question then is 'whether images produce imaginaries or if the latter, finite in number, and in some sense archetypal... could be at the origin of multiple images, that is to say of myths, legends, ancient and modern stories' (Cousin, 2016: 41). Therefore, I will argue that myths, being the wallpaper of reality, undoubtedly influence the imaginary and, in doing so, influence images of the imagined future. In analysing science fiction films from 2015, this research seeks to deconstruct the contemporary myths that influenced images of these imagined futures.

Using a thematic narrative approach, this research identifies myths present in the top-grossing science fiction films from 2015, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller 2015, hereafter MM), *Hunger Games: Mockingjay-Part 2* (Lawrence 2015, hereafter HG), and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams 2015, hereafter SW), and analyses how these myths are used to consolidate the power of the White male antagonist. Through a combination of events, characters, and settings, this analysis examines how these myths are constructed, how they are reinforced, and how they are ultimately deconstructed. This research will begin with reviewing the relevant literature regarding myths, discourses of Whiteness and masculinity, the imaginary, and the significance of the science fiction genre to provide a theoretical background for the analysis of these films.

## 3 RELEVANT LITERATURE

Three distinct bodies of literature provide the theoretical backdrop for this analysis: mythmaking, the social imaginary, and the science fiction genre. While it is beyond the scope of this research to suggest exactly *how* myths, images, and the imaginary influence one another, it will be argued that they do affect each other. This research will outline the discourses of myths, the imaginary, and the science fiction genre to suggest that, although the imaginary is influenced by the myths of society, the images

produced from the imaginary can act to challenge the very myths that influenced them. Through looking at the result of myths and the imaginary, the imagined futures in these films can provide an insight into the contemporary contexts in which they were made.

### 3.1 MYTHMAKING

Myths are stories through which individuals in society learn how to respond to their own individual conflicts. As such, myths offer a type of blueprint to guide people through life and society. Campbell argues that 'myths offer life models' in that 'the myth tells me about... how to respond to certain crises of disappointment or delight or failure or success' (Campbell and Moyers, 2001: 13). While Campbell uses 'myth' as a largely inclusive term (including American capitalist myths, Bible stories, and indigenous folklore), Barthes uses the term 'myth' to describe an instrument of the bourgeoisie to naturalise capitalism in society. He argues that mythmaking is a tool of the ruling class to naturalise their power structure since, 'the further the bourgeois class propagates its representations, the more naturalised they become' (Barthes, 1972: 166–67).<sup>1</sup>

The strength of these representations is in the ex-nomination of the bourgeoisie in that they refuse to be named, but rather are allowed to simply exist. Barthes argues that 'what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason' (Barthes, 1972: 154). With Barthes' emphasis on popular culture, this argument makes sense as he cautions uncritical consumption of popular culture, recognising the ways in which it can naturalise ideological discourse. Allowing popular culture a pass simply because it is deemed 'entertainment' or 'low culture' only exacerbates the naturalisation process of mythmaking because it excuses uncritical consumption without looking at how popular culture reinforces certain ideological stances. Barthian myths naturalise the rule of the bourgeoisie to seem universal, eternal, and natural.

However, Barthes does not take this far enough. He focuses exclusively on how class structures are naturalized but not on race or gender social power structures. In a world where there is equal access to mythmaking apparatuses, there would not be a singular identity in control of the entirety of their own representations. As it is, 'White people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image' (Dyer, 1997: 9). I will expand Barthian discourse to also look at the myths of Whiteness and masculinity to conclude that, for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Both Gramsci and Barthes saw culture as a way for the bourgeoisie to normalise their ideology within capitalist society but while Gramsci termed this 'cultural hegemony' and explained it mainly through churches, leisure, and education, Barthes focused predominantly on popular culture, which is where this research is focused (Brown, 2013: 23).

contemporary myths reflected in film, it is necessary to look at multiple aspects of the identity as they seek to marginalize those who do not fit into this mould.

Historically, Whiteness has been constructed as an 'empty' cultural space, seen as universal and as the norm, rather than a constructed and dominant identity (Frankenberg, 1993: 243). Whiteness exists as a contrast to non-Whiteness, and has manufactured this difference through sets of binaries: reason/ignorance; civilized/barbaric; and adult/infant (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998: 7; Hall, 1997: 230).<sup>2</sup> The binaries that define Whiteness, however, are fluid and in flux because Whiteness evolves with society as a whole:

*Whiteness is always shifting, always reinscribing itself around changing meanings of race in the larger society... Because such dynamics have been naturalized and universalized, whiteness assumes an invisible power unlike previous forms of domination in human history. (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998: 4–6)*

Whiteness is powerful because it is able to shift its hegemonic identity from one historical epoch to another, seeking to appear both eternal and universal. Many place the formation of the White identity from 1650-1750 because it is when White people began to identify as 'White' as compared to the 'non-White' peoples they came into contact with (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998: 5; Martinot, 2010: 17; Frankenberg, 1993: 11).

Frankenberg argues that 'whiteness comes to be an unmarked or neutral category, whereas other cultures are specifically marked 'cultural'... linking the power of white culture with the privilege not to be named' (Frankenberg, 1993: 197). Her solution is to 'make visible the processes by which the stability of whiteness...is secured and reproduced' (Frankenberg, 1993: 242–43). Barthes would agree with this, adding that 'revolutionary denomination identifies revolution and the absence of myth' (Barthes, 1972: 173). In this way, the power to not be named sets up the White identity as a universal identity against which all others are measured.

As in the construction of the White identity, masculinity is also constructed in negative terms; masculinity is defined as what it is not, as opposed to what it is (Heath, 1992: 49–50).<sup>3</sup> This tension

---

<sup>2</sup> I agree with Dyer here that the dichotomy of the terms 'white' and 'non-white' is problematic, 'as if people who are not white only have identity by virtue of what they are not,' but he comes to the conclusion that they are currently the most comprehensive terms for analysis (Dyer, 1997: 11). Ultimately, there needs to be more fluid language with which to talk about race.

<sup>3</sup> Much like the rigid language surrounding race, it should also be noted that I will use language such as 'man' and 'woman' although these words do not properly cover the fluidity of gender.

results in an anxiety formed by a 'vacuous identity', resulting in 'castration anxiety' (Rehling, 2009: 1; Mulvey, 1988: 14–15). Adhering to this vacuous identity results in narrow, accepted views of masculinity and how to be a 'man' in society. This concept of hegemonic masculinity, some argue, is the *most* accepted way of being a man, while others argue that even within hegemonic masculinity there is no one acceptable way (Connell, 1998: 4–6; Jefferson, 2002: 66; Collier, 1998: 37). It is important to recognise that, much like the social construction of Whiteness, hegemonic masculinity evolves with the historical period in which they were created and so is able to be negotiated as 'older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832–33).

Additionally, this 'hegemonic masculinity' also faces criticism as it assumes a universal conception of masculinity and not the possibility of competing dominant identities or even culturally specific dominant identities (Jefferson, 2002: 66). Some have argued that the concept of hegemonic masculinity does not overcome structuralist discourse and actually reinforces existing gender binary structures (Johansson and Ottemo, 2013: 197; Butler, 1990: 44). Bearing these criticisms in mind, hegemonic masculinity is still a useful concept when looking strictly at images of masculinity in film as films continue to celebrate and define what kind of man is a hero or villain.

While Barthes' approach to mythmaking can seem like a reductive approach to popular culture ('do all films *really* support bourgeoisie ideology?') this research agrees that, in fact, 'every story legitimates a centred point of view, a worldview, or an ideology among alternatives. No story is ideologically neutral' (Boje, 2001: 18). This conversation continues today as research recognises the 'controlling ideological work undertaken in much escapist popular culture' (Milner and Redmond, 2015: 7). By looking at the ways films seek to legitimise certain power structures, privileging certain stories over others, it becomes clearer to see how Barthian mythmaking discourse is perpetuated in film.

### **3.2 THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY**

But films are also influenced by the imaginaries in which they were created. Science fiction films from 2015 challenged the myths that created them, imagining futures where White male power structures were ultimately destroyed. Prominent theorists argue that legends, myths, narratives, and entertainment all have an important role to play in constructions of myths and the social imaginary, as a key component of the social imaginary is the formation of a unifying culture (Calhoun, 2002: 157; Taylor, 2002: 106; Appadurai, 2006a: 507). The social imaginary helps order the ways in which individuals are able to place themselves within the context of the world they live in. As such, the social imaginary 'mediate[s] collective life' through constructing acceptable and unacceptable boundaries of behaviour (Gaonkar, 2002: 4). The social imaginary does not exist solely as top-down ideological constructions from elites, but is embedded in the fabric of everyday social life: in people's

habits, their family life, and common practices (Taylor, 2002: 106; Gole, 2002: 176; Gaonkar, 2002: 10). These theorists all have different conceptions of how culture and mass media perpetuate social imaginings and yet they are similar in that they recognise that culture, mass media, and the social imagination are linked.

For Castoriadis, the social imaginary guides our material reality (Castoriadis, 1975: 145). It both shapes society and is shaped by society. He argues that the social imagination is:

*specific orientation to every institutional system... which is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world, and its relations with this world. (Castoriadis, 1975: 145)*

So while the imaginary is embedded in everyday life, Castoriadis also argues the imaginary is best analysed 'in phantasy and in similar formations that the imagination in action presents itself to observation and clinical study' (Castoriadis, 1975: 284). Through Castoriadis' contribution, the link between images and the imagination becomes clearer: images are manifestations of the imaginary that can be analysed to provide insight into the context in which they were made. But, further, this is a cycle where images can influence the imaginary, the imaginary can influence images and, underlying it all, myths operate as the wallpaper of the reality in which this all exists.

Appadurai builds on the cycle of myths, the imaginary, and images as he argues that the imagination can be both appropriated by the elites to control populations but also as 'the faculty through which collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge' (Appadurai, 2000: 231). Rather than being a static pronouncement of the status quo, the imaginary itself does a kind of work as 'a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility' (Appadurai, 2006b: 31). The imaginary can work with mythmaking apparatuses to uphold the *status quo* or, alternatively, to dismantle them.

### **3.3 GENRE AND SCIENCE FICTION**

The significance of the science fiction genre is also crucial to this discussion as there is a division within academia with regard to the standardization of genres and myths' impact on the audience: a ritual versus an ideological approach. A ritual approach suggests that the moral conclusion of the narrative acts as a means of 'allaying social anxiety' whereas an ideological approach argues that the elites 'attempt to subdue the audience by distorting the nature... prevailing social conflicts and deceiving... the audience into believing in a simplistic and ineffective resolution' (Grindon, 2012: 48). As audiences do not want to feel manipulated, seeking authentic experiences, 'the successful ritual/ideological "fit" is almost always one that disguises Hollywood's potential for manipulation

while playing up its capacity for entertainment' (Altman, 2012: 37). This, in line with Barthian mythic traditions, argues that genres seek to disguise their support of the *status quo*, naturalizing it as 'the way things are' and, subsequently, 'the way they will always be'.

Genre is influenced by audiences because, 'by choosing the films it would patronize, the audience revealed its preferences and its beliefs, thus inducing Hollywood studios to produce films reflecting its desires' (Altman, 2012: 30). Therefore conventions from popular films were reproduced to make more popular films (trying to emulate a successful strategy for more success), which lead to genre becoming a means of standardizing production (Ang, 2005: 354). This standardization has led to genres being called a 'myth model' because it allows for the continued repackaging of myths in such a way that feels 'new' and 'innovative' without compromising the underlying values that are celebrated in such myths (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2006: 52–53). Genre works beyond technical film classifications and becomes a form of cultural contract, between film, filmmaker, and audiences.

Wright takes the relationship between *status quo* and genre one step further, arguing that genre films 'serve the interests of the ruling class by assisting in the maintenance of the status quo, and they throw a sop to oppressed groups who... eagerly accept the genre film's absurd solutions to economic and social conflicts' (Wright, 2012: 60). Additionally, Wright assumes audiences accept such narratives uncritically as compared to other forms of viewing such as the critical or oppositional gaze.<sup>4</sup> Where Wright argues that genre films are ahistorical, Sobchack contends that science fiction films are 'always historicized, grounded in [their] (and our) own earthly American culture' (Sobchack, 2001: 302).

Science fiction films use contemporary influences to extrapolate what kind of future results from such historical contexts, and what kind of risk and destruction humanity might face along the way. Further, science fiction is specifically concerned with the historical significance of living during a period with the 'trauma' of collective annihilation from weapons of mass destruction 'which could come any time, virtually without warning' (Sontag, 1965: 48). In this way, science fiction is an invention of the modern age because it is grounded in the singular moment wherein scientific discovery crossed the boundary where we could now cause our own extinction.

While Sobchack's argument is persuasive, it could be further developed from Beck's work on the risk society. When applied to science fiction, it refines Sobchack's argument for the late modern age. Beck argues that 'risks are not the same as destruction... however, risks do threaten destruction. The discourse of risk begins where trust in our security and belief in progress end' (Beck, 2005: 212–13). Risks are not yet violent or destructive narratives but they speak to the possibility of a destruction of order. Additionally, the concept of risk does not exist without the knowledge of that risk. Beck makes

---

<sup>4</sup> See bell hooks' work for more on the oppositional gaze (hooks, 2015).

clear that mass media has a role to play in the dissemination of risk narratives in a system influenced by social, political, and economic institutions.

Science fiction films deal intrinsically with these risk narratives: society destroyed by technology, environmental ruin, or moral decay; but, rather than explore new risks, science fiction films often appropriate contemporary risks to cast them in a new light for contemporary audiences (Nama, 2008: 6). Therefore, to return to Wright's argument that all genre films uphold the *status quo* as the work of repressive power structures, the *status quo* perpetually informs our actions because it is embedded into the very reality in which we all exist. How filmmakers imagine the future is influenced by the contemporary myths of their time and their films can change the ways society imagines the future. These films from 2015 provide a detour from the typical White, male science fiction protagonist as the protagonists are White women. Not only does this usurp narratives of the imagined future, but these narratives specifically seek to dismantle the images of the future where White men are in power. Through new images and narratives, this could provoke change in the ways in which the future is imagined and, subsequently, lead to societal myths adapting to accommodate these changes.

#### 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Through the connections between myths, the imaginary, and science fiction, this research uses science fiction films from 2015 as a lens through which to analyse contemporary societal myths. Through thematic narrative analysis, this research follows in Frankenberg's goal: to name the narratives of power and control as dominant and constructed rather than an unquestioned norm. This research follows Castoriadis' argument that the social imaginary is best analysed through fantasy and so the overarching question is: What are the myths present in the imagined futures of 2015 science fiction films? As such, the relevant sub-questions are as follows:

**Sub-Question #1:** What myths are represented?

**Sub-Question #2:** How are these myths reinforced?

**Sub-Question #3:** How are these myths destroyed?

#### 5 METHODOLOGY

This research employs thematic narrative analysis to examine the ways in which ruling class regimes seek to naturalise their power structures in the imagined future they control. The narratives in film are not solely entertainment but also ideological constructions (Boje, 2001: 18). Further, narrative structures try to put an argument in place (Burnett, 1995: 99). To say, as Wright does, that these

narratives seek are wholly supportive of the status quo neglects the nuances of how it can support some tenets of the status quo while undermining others. As such, 'patterns of narratives [are] opportunities to view what a group of people deem important in the conduct of human affairs' (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004: 39). This is to say that the ways in which the narratives' moral dilemmas are 'solved' provide blueprints for how audiences are expected to react in similar real life situations. These themes of narratives were especially crucial to choosing which films to analyse because, choosing science fiction films from 2015, meant they were all products of temporally specific, sociohistorical anxieties.

Thematic narrative analysis was used because it places emphasis on the context of a text, focusing on "what" is said more than "how" it is said' (Riessman, 2005: 2). This is useful in finding common themes across texts. This method is widely used across media and in film in particular to link films to bigger themes like nationalism (Biesecker, 2002; Dittmer, 2011; Dodds, 2008; Hantke, 2010), gender constructs (Godfrey, Lilley, and Brewis, 2012; Voelker-Morris and Voelker-Morris, 2014; Davies, 1997), race (Nama, 2008; Kakoudaki, 2002; Gallardo, 2013; Rehling, 2009), and combinations of identity intersections (Bucholtz, 1999; Palmer, 2011; Wise, 2001).

The narrative can be differentiated between 'what is told,' story (called *fabula* by Russian formalists and *histoire* by French structuralists), and plot, further broken down to text (*syuzhet/discours*) and narration (Franzosi, 1998: 520). The plot is the events that take place chronologically within the film, the story is how these events are told to the audience, and the narration is who is telling the audience this (Paul, 2005; Chatman, 1978: 26). A further distinction that is especially pertinent to myth analysis within the narrative is that both story and plot include events explicitly shown in the film, while story also includes 'inferred events' (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 93). The inclusion of these inferred events is important because much of the history of the film-world takes place in these inferred events, such as what happened in the past to make these societies the way the audience sees them.

To place the myths within these narratives, Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that the myth is the 'lowest truth-value' of language, that 'its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story it tells' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 430). By focusing only on the narrative of film, the myth is more clearly revealed and able to be analysed. Although Barthes would argue that the audio-visual components are another layer to the naturalizing of these myths, for the purpose of this research it is necessary to focus on the narrative at the expense of visual analysis (Barthes, 1977: 39). As such, myths operate within the boundaries of film narratives in how the story is presented and in how the audience identifies to its characters.

Narratives allow us, 'through imagination, [to] enter subjunctive worlds and try on identities that we would not ordinarily be bold enough to assume' (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004: 39). Audiences are

allowed to experience the effect of 'being drawn by one's emotions into a rehearsal for a possible, imagined future that just might (but more likely never will) occur in the individual's life in the real world' (Izod, 2000: 270). In science fiction discourse especially, such moral dilemmas are central to the genre (Sontag, 1965: 45). In the images of the imagined futures, the narratives show how society could be and provides audiences a chance to hypothetically react to it through its fantasy.

It would be beyond the scope of this research to discuss both audio-visual and narrative structures of these films, especially considering the discourse surrounding film as a language. The argument that film is a language is an idea that is highly contentious in film discourse, with some comparing film with Saussure's linguistics and semiotics (Metz, 1974; Barthes, 1977) while others argued that film is strictly represented by what is visually on-screen and not linked to a discourse of arbitrary signs (Mitry, 2000; Dawkins, 2003). Other methods that were considered but ultimately discarded were: structural narrative analysis for its emphasis on the close investigation of the language of a text (Riessman, 2005: 3); quantitative content analysis for the assumption that the basic unit of film was a frame and that such frames could be systematically deconstructed to uncover certain patterns (Rose, 2016: 73; Bell, 2001: 14; Lutz and Collins, 1993: 89); and semiotic analysis for its strong reliance on deconstructing the film language and 'reading' it through relatively static codes (Bateman and Schmidt, 2013: 30–48; Hall 2006; Metz, 1974: 73–74). This research was ethically approved as it does not deal with people or vulnerable populations in any way.

## 5.1 RESEARCH SAMPLING

Each film was analysed in its entirety, focusing on the narratives that are used by the those in power to maintain control of their populations. These films were selected from 2015, not the most recent complete year of 2016, because they are more culturally relevant. Measuring success and relevancy within the cultural sphere, and within the film industry in particular, is a subject of contention because of the feedback cycle of market, audience and critical acclaim and how significant each of those variables are (Hadida, 2009; Lundy, Crowe, and Turner, 2016; Craig, Greene, and Douglas, 2005; Einav, 2007; Chang and Ki, 2005; Basuroy, Kaushik Desai, and Talukdar, 2006; Collins and Hand, 2005). Traditional measures of 'success,' were used to select the films based on box office revenues, Oscar recognition, and critic and audience reviews. Using domestic box office revenues and rankings (Appendix A), the top three science fiction films from 2015 collectively grossed \$1.37 billion as compared to \$794 million from 2016. Critics and audiences reviewed these films, on average, 19% and 13.6% (respectively) more favourably than the science fiction films from 2016. The 2015 science fiction films were nominated for a total of 15 Oscars as compared to the 2016 films' three Oscar nominations. In all of these traditional measures of 'success', the films of 2015 are deemed more successful than those of 2016.

## 5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In each film, the myths present in the imagined future were identified by how they supported the power structures held by White men. That is, what myths did the leaders perpetuate to maintain their place as head of society? In MM, this was the Cult of V8 that celebrated rigid gender roles and violent masculinity. In HG, this was the Hunger Games as part of a media spectacle that sought to remind its citizens of the failed past rebellions as a deterrent for future rebellions. In SW, this was the delegitimation of the actions of the Original Trilogy as an erasure of the successful rebels of the past. The antagonists in these films also all act to naturalize the current power structures in the films by claiming universal eternity: those in power have always been in power and will always be in power.

The narratives for each myth were then analysed through inferred and explicit events, settings, characters' dialogue, characters' actions, and subsequent consequences of those actions. Upon watching each film and taking extensive notes, a thematic rubric was created to showcase the themes from each movie and each sub-question (Appendix B). Special care was taken to look at interactions between characters as these interactions draw the audience into the world of the film, allowing the audience to put themselves in the place of the character (Sarbin, 2004:12; Izod, 2000: 270). As the films selected for analysis are parts of franchises, information from earlier films were used to provide historical context to the narratives.

## 6 ANALYSIS

This research is organized not by film but by area of inquiry as it allows the reader to draw conclusions within each sub-question. Before delving into the analysis, the films will be introduced with synopses to familiarize the reader with the world in which their narratives operate in.

The imagined future in MM places the viewer in the barren Wasteland, the result of nuclear fallout caused by the water wars where people fought over water rights to survive. Society is divided into three factions, The Citadel, Gas Town, and the Bullet Farm, which provide essential resources, water and agriculture, gas, and bullets, to the Wasteland. Each faction is ruled by a dictator: Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne), the People Eater (John Howard), and the Bullet Farmer (Richard Carter). Immortan Joe rules as a patriarchal tyrant, valuing males for fighting prowess (the War Boys) and females for breeding purposes (Breeders, and the 'prized' women are called the Wives). The War Boys are also called half-lives in reference to the nuclear fallout that has made them ill and with various bodily mutations. Those that are 'useful' are kept in the Citadel while the Wretched are those who rely on the Citadel for resources but are not valued enough to reside within its walls. Based on the technology present within the film, the Wasteland is an extrapolation of current technology in the near future. The narrative revolves around the Wives' escape from the Citadel, aided by Imperator

Furiosa (Charlize Theron), Mad Max (Tom Hardy) and, later, Nux (Nicholas Hoult). Immortan Joe and his forces chase them because Immortan Joe believes they are his property and the Splendid Angharad (Rosie Huntington-Whiteley) is carrying his child. When the Wives and Furiosa realizes there is no 'better' place out there, they return to fight for the Citadel.

In HG, the nation of Panem (North America) is divided into thirteen different districts, each with its own specific export. Panem is a nation established after a period of civil instability where one of the main goals of government was to establish a docile, obedient population. The districts came together previously to rebel against the Capitol which led to a nuclear weapon being dropped on District 13 in retaliation. The Capitol controlled the population through the segregation of districts, making it difficult for them to communicate with one another, and through the annual Hunger Games, where two children aged 12-18 from each district were sent to fight each other to the death. The Hunger Games were made into a media spectacle and were required viewing by all citizens. Now, District 13 operates as the base for rebel headquarters, led by President Coin (Julianne Moore) with Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) acting as a symbol for the revolution. This film sees the total destruction of the Capital and its leader, President Snow (Donald Sutherland), as the rebel force takes control.

SW takes place thirty years after *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* where the fall of the Galactic Empire has led to a new fascist group, the First Order, led by Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis) with Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) as a commander.<sup>5</sup> Princess Leia, now General Organa, leads the rebel group. Both the First Order and the Resistance are looking for the missing Jedi Master Luke Skywalker; the First Order believes Luke to be a threat as he is the only surviving Jedi Master who could teach a new generation of Jedi to fight against the First Order. The First Order also possesses a weapon of mass planetary destruction. The film follows Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac) and Rey (Daisy Ridley) on their journeys to the Rebellion as they fight against the First Order.

As such, the myths the leaders of these imagined futures used to eternalise their regimes are the rigid gender roles of the Cult of V8 (MM), the media spectacle of the Hunger Games (HG), and the delegitimisation of the actions of the Original Trilogy (SW). This section will look at what myths are represented, how they are reinforced, and how they are ultimately destroyed. The analysis of what myths are represented are separated by film within the sub-question to first delve into each individual imagined future. The subsequent sub-questions are not divided by film to better draw conclusions between films.

---

<sup>5</sup> Technically all *Star Wars* films start with the credit, 'A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away' but with its anthropocentric narratives and technological advancements, it appears to the contemporary audience as a possible human future.

## 6.1 WHAT MYTHS ARE REPRESENTED?

### 6.2 MAD MAX: CULT OF V8

The Cult of V8 condones hegemonic masculinity in the form of spectacular violence and relegating women to the role of Breeders. In this imagined future, men and women have rigid, pre-ordained roles in society that are exaggerations of contemporary traditional gender roles where men are the protectors and women's only contribution to society is to produce more men. The Cult of V8 is a model of how the War Boys should live their lives: as a cog in the war machine of Immortan Joe's army, until they die performing a spectacular and violent deed to gain entry into Valhalla. Women perform two roles in society: birthing more War Boys and providing mass quantities of Mother's Milk (breast milk), a source of nutrition for the Citadel. The images of the Cult of V8 come from the actions of the characters when they are preparing to chase the Wives, and when they fight throughout the film.

The War Boys recognise that they are cogs in the war machine but they celebrate this position because of the Cult of V8's rhetoric. The Cult of V8 is first seen in preparation for the chase, as the War Boys pick their steering wheels from the shrine, they say 'by my deeds I honour you, V8,' interlocking eight fingers into a v-shape in reverence (a V8 made from fingers). The interlocked fingers are a repeated gesture throughout the film, and the shrine of steering wheels and its benediction demonstrate how the War Boys place machinery, specifically a car's engine, on a religious pedestal.

The War Boys themselves identify as part of the machinery. Nux receives a 'top up' from the Organic Mechanic (Angus Sampson), where he gets an infusion of 'high-octane, crazy blood' from Max. This terminology demonstrates how the War Boys identify as part of the machine as both of these phrases are how people talk about the gasoline or oil in their cars. Additionally, the doctor is called an 'Organic Mechanic' which compares a human doctor to a mechanic of engines. Equating blood to gasoline in this context shows how the War Boys see themselves as machinery because, in the same way that gas is pumped into a car, blood is pumped into their bodies in order to run effectively.

Further proof of how the War Boys seek to mechanize themselves is in their use of chrome spray. Before they perform a stunt worthy of entrance into Valhalla, the War Boys yell 'witness me!' and spray the chrome around their mouths. Chrome is valued because it is a shiny and unmarked metal, incongruous to the rust-covered metal everywhere else in the film. The War Boys spray chrome paint into their mouths as a physical representation of their belief that they will 'ride eternal, shiny and chrome' in Valhalla. Their afterlife is waiting for them, as Nux says, 'I live, I die, I live again'. The Cult of V8 presents its eternal nature in the symbolism of the chrome spray as chrome does not rust.

The women are referred to exclusively as Breeders, with only the most beautiful of them being called the Wives. The Breeders are mechanized in their own way as they are baby-making factories, being pumped by machines for breast milk. When the Wives escape with Furiosa, Immortan Joe pursues them because the Splendid Angharad is carrying his child, he says: 'That's my child, my property'. Just as the War Boys are mechanized, so too are the women as they are not even considered people but vessels to carry children in. Immortan Joe hesitates to shoot the Splendid Angharad because he might hurt the child she carries, not for any regard to her personal safety.

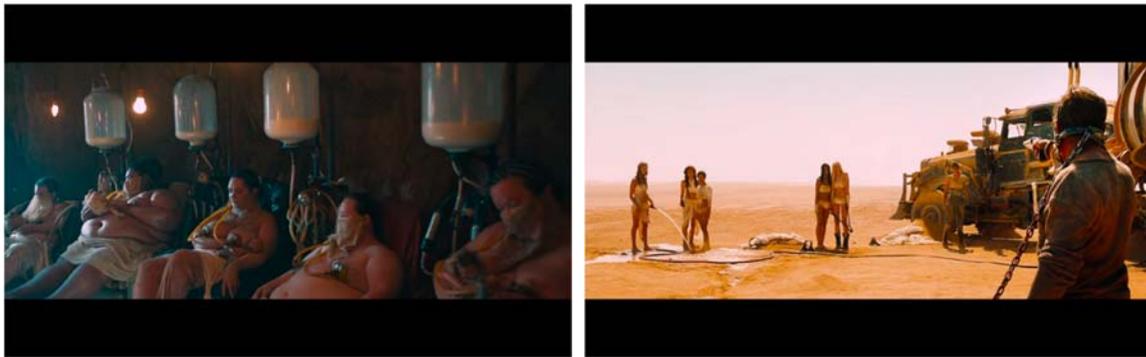


Figure 1: The Breeders (left); the Wives (right)

The exception to these rigid gender roles is Furiosa who has the privilege of driving the War Rig and leading her own group of War Boys. She is thoroughly desexualised and has adopted masculine traits to gain respect, rising among the ranks of a patriarchal society. She does not celebrate violence in the way the War Boys do, she never calls attention to her own spectacular feats. In this way, she shuns the Cult of V8 because she does not care about entry into Valhalla or Immortan Joe's approval.

The Cult of V8 celebrates a narrow form of hegemonic masculinity where recklessness and violence are revered as the only ways to gain entry into Valhalla. The War Boys are convinced that the Cult of V8 and Immortan Joe are eternal. The women are seen breeding stock except in Furiosa's case as she has thoroughly rejected the gender roles in this imagined future.

### **6.3 HUNGER GAMES: THE SPECTACLE OF THE HUNGER GAMES**

The role of the Hunger Games in the imagined future of Panem is to celebrate the defeat of rebel forces and show that the cost of rebellion is too high. The Games seek to immobilize revolutionary activity in Panem, making a spectacle of the powerlessness of Panem's citizens while also rendering the Games as eternal events in their everyday lives.

As *Mockingjay- Part 2* is the final instalment of the series, it is first necessary to look at previous films to understand how the Games escaped the Arena, moving from a spectacle of social control to the very reality the rebels operate in. From the beginning of the series, the Games are presented as infallible and eternal. There is no question that each District will put forward their children in the arena of death because the punishment for rebellion, and the prize for winning the Games, is too high. For resource-poor citizens, the risk and rewards are too great to act in any other way. For resource-rich citizens, it is considered an honour to compete in the Games and their children train for the event. This difference in preparation and attitudes means that it is very unlikely for the poor children to win the Games and so they are only sent off to die, perpetuating the rich/poor divide in Panem.

The Games are also Capital-mandated watching. This viewing system means that across Panem space and time the entire population is glued to these screens; creating an authoritarian imagined community. They are not allowed to look away as their children fight to the death. The coverage of the Games plays on every screen in Panem and citizens caught not watching by the Peacekeepers are punished. Additionally, the spectacle of the Games extends beyond the arena. The citizens watch every move in the arena, while simultaneously being watched to ensure they are complying with Capitol-mandating viewings of the Games. The spectacular nature of Panem society is clear in the name of the country itself. As many of the names are in Latin, to draw imperialist critiques in the parallels between Panem and the Roman Empire, 'Panem' comes from the Latin phrase 'panem et circenses' (bread and circuses) which is a phrase used in Juvenal's *Satire X* to deride the mob of citizens for being bribed with food and entertainment to distract from poor political leadership (Krulic, 2012; Eichholz, 1956).

*Mockingjay- Part 2* also revolves around the Games but, instead of a Capital-mandated spectacle held in an arena, the entire rebellion is positioned as another Game. When the rebel forces reach the Capital, Finnick remarks, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the 76<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games'. While his remark is construed as cynical humour, the Gamemakers (those who design the Games) are called upon to defend the Capitol as the rebel forces advance. Indeed, the feats that lie ahead of them are direct parallels to the Games themselves. As they manoeuvre in the Capitol, they face booby traps that release black ooze, shoot at them, and have to fight through genetic 'muttations' (genetically mutated organisms). All of which Katniss, Finnick, and Peeta have faced previously in the arena. Additionally, when Katniss is thought dead from a building explosion, her death is broadcast around Panem as it would have been during the Games themselves. Lastly, when Katniss and Gale sneak into Snow's mansion, silver parachutes float down from above. In the arena, these parachutes marked resources for the Tributes: food, medicine, and small gifts. The crowd of children they are launched

over all reach up to grab them because, in the Games, they always contained objects that would help them. This time, however, there are bombs that kill them.

In *Mockingjay- Part 2* the media spectacle of the Hunger Games extends to the rebel forces as their movements are televised around Panem. When Katniss is presumed death, both Snow and Coin jump at the chance to use her death for their own agendas, Snow to show the defeated rebel troops and



Figure 2: The Capitol map as a blueprint of Traps; Katniss' televised 'death'; Silver Parachutes falling on children

Coin to use Katniss as a martyr. These events show that the Games have bypassed the boundaries of the arena in which they were previously held.

The Games have become more than an annual event but part of Panem's reality. The mentality of the Games exists beyond the arena and is present in the fabric of Panem itself. The Games continually memorialise the defeat of rebel forces, ensuring Panem's citizens remember the failure of the rebels every year for the past 75 years. When the Games move into reality from the Arena, the power to change this narrative is placed in the hands of the rebels for the second time in Panem's history.

#### **6.4 STAR WARS: DELEGITIMIZATION OF THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY**

SW presents the risk of erasing history in the way the First Order de-legitimised the actions of the Original Trilogy. In erasing narratives of successful rebels, it obliterates guiding narratives for possible avenues of revolution. Without the context of history, the First Order appears as an eternal and infallible.

In this world, survivors of the defeated Empire have re-organized into the First Order, as shown from Lor San Tekka (Max von Sydow) saying, 'the First Order rose from the dark side'. The First Order has rigid, hierarchal power structures, a mind-set that promotes conformation to violent procedures, and an obsession with creating and implementing technology of mass destruction over other planet systems. The actions of the original protagonists (Leia Organa, Luke Skywalker, and Han Solo) have been reduced to legends by the First Order. Through Rey, we learn that much of the galaxy does not believe that the original protagonists' really occurred, they're only stories.

The first instance of this happening is when Finn and Rey meet for the first time and Finn reveals that the droid (BB-8) has a map to Luke Skywalker. Rey replies incredulously: 'Luke Skywalker? I thought

he was a myth'. While Rey grew up on what looks like a barren planet, Jakku is actually a hub for smugglers as there are mechanical remains from the Battle of Jakku (after the Battle of Endor). Additionally, it is in the Western region of the Inner Rim and, unlike Luke Skywalker's upbringing on Tatooine in the Outer Rim, it is more connected to the goings on of the capital, located on Coruscant. Rey's imagining of Luke as solely a myth shows the extent to which the First Order has separated the man from the myth.

When Finn and Rey meet Han Solo for the first time, they exhibit different reactions to the man in front of them. Finn asks: 'Han Solo the Rebellion General?' to which Rey responds indignantly: 'No, the smuggler!' Finn, recently escaped from the First Order, labels Han Solo as the Rebellion General because that is how the First Order sees him: as a possible threat to their agenda. Rey, on the other hand, grew up on smuggler-rich Jakku surrounded by tales of Solo's infamy. Additionally, Rey refuting Solo's role as a Rebellion General, is indicative of the extent to which the First Order has delegitimized his actions. Rey does not understand Solo's involvement in the Rebellion because the First Order has severed the links between Solo the smuggler and Solo the Rebellion General.

The next instance is when Rey, Finn and Han Solo are looking over BB-8's map to Luke together. Solo explains Luke was training the next generation of Jedis and that after an apprentice (Kylo Ren) went on a killing spree of other apprentices, Luke felt responsible. He disappeared but, through stories and rumours, it is believed he went looking for the First Jedi Temple. To which Rey responds: 'the Jedi *were* real.' Here, as the legendary Han Solo is standing right in front of her, Rey begins to understand the gaps in her own knowledge.

In Rey, there are contradictory histories: the history propagated by the First Order where Luke is just a legend unconnected to reality, and the lived experience of Han Solo who knew Luke personally and often helped him in his missions. When she finally meets Luke, her arc is completed: she has grown from only seeing the events of the Original Trilogy as legends, to understanding their role in galaxy history.

## **6.5 HOW ARE THESE MYTHS REINFORCED?**

Each leader in these imagined futures uses their myths to consolidate their power and present their regime as an eternal one. In MM, Immortan Joe reinforces the Cult of V8 through the promise of an exalted afterlife. In HG, Snow reinforces the myth of the Hunger Games through its normalcy, it has become such a routine of life in Panem that citizens no longer question its existence. In SW, the delegitimation of the Original Trilogy is furthered by the First Order to destroy rebellion narratives that other people can use as guides for their own revolutions. Each of these myths in these imagined futures are utilised to present the regimes as eternal and all-powerful.

Immortan Joe reinforces the Cult of V8 through the promise of an afterlife. Immortan Joe benefits from the War Boys adherence to the Cult of V8 both in terms of cementing his status within society and having the War Boys do his bidding. However, because Immortan Joe is both the leader of society and the prophet of this cult, it becomes unclear what is the will of the Cult of V8 and what is the will of Immortan Joe's private interests.

Spectacular violence, specifically resulting in death, is a way of gaining Immortan Joe's attention and entry into Valhalla. From the beginning of the film, it is clear that Immortan Joe is the prophet of the Cult of V8. When the War Rig is sent to Gas Town, Immortan Joe gives the following speech:

*Once again, I salute my Emperor Furiosa, and I salute my half-life War Boys, who will ride with me eternal on the highways of Valhalla! I am your redeemer! It is by my hand you will rise from the ashes of this world!*

This speech is met with the War Boys clasp their hands in the shape of a 'V'. It is clear that Immortan Joe's role in the Cult of V8 is the redeemer who determines the fate of the afterlife. His role in entry to Valhalla becomes even clearer when Nux comes up with a plan to kill Furiosa, their conversation is as follows:

*Immortan: Return my treasures to me and I myself will carry you to the gates of Valhalla.*

*Nux: Am I awaited?*

*Immortan, while spraying Nux with chrome: You will ride eternal, shiny and chrome.*

Immediately after this, when Nux stumbles and falls on the War Rig, Immortan's response: 'Mediocre!' demonstrates the consequences of failing to uphold the standard of spectacular violence. Additionally, when a War Boy yells 'Witness me!' before performing a stunt it is a way of calling to other War Boys and drawing attention to their actions. The story of that stunt will be re-told by the War Boys to Immortan Joe to gain entry into Valhalla.

The Cult of V8 has been appropriated by Immortan Joe's personal motives, masking his personal interests as those of the Cult of V8. His role as redeemer is so thoroughly believed by the War Boys that fashion themselves in his image, complete with white powder and scars from their leader (McNearney, 2015). While the Cult of V8 is the guiding myth of society, it exists because Immortan Joe has crafted it to cement his power. In the Wasteland, Immortan Joe is both political and spiritual

leader, controlling the bodies and minds of the War Boys and shaping their actions to his own interests.

President Snow does not control the minds and bodies of his citizens in the same way that Immortan Joe does. Instead of fanatic believers in a violent cult, the citizens of Panem are paralyzed as they cannot imagine anything other than the regime in which they live. Snow reinforces the myth of the Hunger Games to consolidate his power. Panem achieved the end goal of a Barthesian myth: 'to immobilise the world, [it] must suggest... a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions' (Barthes, 1972: 183). This is shown in Panem's national motto: 'Panem Today, Panem Tomorrow, Panem Forever'; and in the ways in which citizens did not dare to think of rebellion as they were haunted by the bloody failures of past rebellions. The Games operate as an annual reminder of the crushing of the first rebellion where District 13 was destroyed. This seeks to naturalise the regime of fear Snow has built because citizens are never allowed to forget the past failed rebellions. Every year, the Games eternalise that failure in their collective imaginations to prohibit the possibility of a successful rebellion.

Rather than routinely reminding people of a rebellion's failures, the de-legitimation of the actions of the Original Trilogy seeks to actively erase the existence of the rebellion itself. This is harmful to larger society as the de-legitimation of the Original Trilogy's actions means citizens of the galaxy have no real heroes to pin their hopes to. In the beginning of the film, Lor San Tekka says to Poe Dameron:

*This [the map] will begin to make things right. I've travelled too far and seen too much to ignore the despair in the galaxy. Without the Jedi, there can be no balance in the Force.*

Here, Tekka makes clear that the despair in the galaxy is widespread under the rule of the First Order. While the Rebellion seeks to balance the regime of the First Order, the true counterweight of the First Order is the Jedi as they bring hope and are the light to balance the darkness of the Force underneath the First Order.

By de-legitimising the actions of the Original Trilogy, this myth creates a larger divide between those involved with the Rebellion and regular civilians. In other words, because the Original Trilogy's actions are 'just stories,' regular civilians are less likely to be peripherally involved with the Rebellion because society is divided into those who *know* the actions occurred, as compared to those who think the actions are just stories. Ultimately Kylo Ren and the interests he serves benefit from de-legitimising the actions of the Original Trilogy because it does not allow for the galaxy to have figures of real hope, people who actually defeated the Empire. It relegates their action to fiction and stabilises the regime of the First Order.

The myths of the Cult of V8, the Hunger Games, and relegating the Original Trilogy's actions to mere legends, all serve to eternalise the regimes in each of their imagined futures. The Cult of V8 through its incentive of an afterlife and Immortan Joe as its prophet; the Hunger Games as the continual reminder of a failed rebellion; and the de-legitimisation of the Original Trilogy as a complete erasure of the rebellion itself. Each of these myths in its imagined future are reinforced by the regime to eternalise their power.

## **6.6 HOW ARE THESE MYTHS DESTROYED?**

The Cult of V8 is destroyed by the death of Immortan Joe. Furiosa is the one who kills him by sticking his breathing apparatus in the wheel of his car, ripping it from his face. Immortan Joe is ultimately killed by the machines that kept him alive: his breathing apparatus and the car itself. Additionally, it is significant that Furiosa is the one who kills him, not the film's titular character Mad Max. Furiosa, a White woman, kills him while symbolically killing the patriarchal society he created. If a man had killed Immortan Joe, it would simply be a change in leadership: one patriarchal figure taking the reins from the last. However, because Furiosa killed him, it is representative of a greater ideological change within society itself. It is not a continuous patriarchal succession but rather a disruption to the leadership of the Wasteland. As a symbolic event, Furiosa killing Immortan Joe concludes the narrative of the film with a message of a need for greater symbolic disruption of society's leadership.

Similarly, HG ends with a symbolic disruption of the reign of succession. Katniss recognises that Rebel Leader Coin utilised many of the same mythmaking apparatuses that Snow does, namely: media spectacle and the use of the Games to control and subordinate populations. The event is supposed to be a public execution of Snow: the crowd is gathered, the event is televised, and Katniss is allowed the 'honour' of killing him in front of the country. Katniss asked for this duty because, throughout the films, it has always been Katniss' actions against Snow's regime.

However, this plan is disrupted by Katniss herself as, throughout the film, she draws increasing parallels between Coin and Snow in the ways they control people. Rather than continue this regime of control under new leadership, Katniss chooses to kill the new leader before Coin has a chance to consolidate her power while the mob kills Snow. This triggers a democratic election between the leaders of the districts, an event that Coin said would come 'later' but avoided giving a definite

answer of when it would happen. By Katniss killing Coin now, and the mob taking care of Snow, the democratic election is enacted immediately and Commander Paylor (Patina Miller) assumes power.



Figure 3: Commander Paylor Leading Troops; Katniss aiming at President Snow; Katniss' arrow killing Coin

While MM's narrative concludes with a dismantling of the patriarchy, the disruption of the line of succession in HG's narrative concludes with the ascension of a black woman, unsettling both Whiteness and masculinity from the mantle of power within Panem. As compared to MM's emphasis on gender, race is a more significant lens through which to look HG power structures. Throughout the story, Commander Paylor garnered support from the masses from her hands-on approach to the rebellion, being a prominent face in leading troops and organizing supplies. In this way, although Katniss disrupts the myth of the Games, her actions lead to a greater structural change in Panem than would have otherwise occurred had she killed Snow in the first place.

Rather than an abrupt disruption, as in MM and HG, SW introduces the possibility of the fall of the First Order rather than the fall itself. By the conclusion of the narrative, the First Order still stands but the Rebellion has two new recruits and has found Luke Skywalker, which presents a huge challenge to the First Order. The actions of the Original Trilogy are shown to be real through the gradual introduction of the protagonists to the heroes of the Original Trilogy. This is narratively significant as it suggests that the next films, now that the protagonists have united with the Original Trilogy heroes, present an even greater threat to the First Order.

Finn and Rey meet the heroes of the Original Trilogy in order of increasing threat levels to the First Order. First, they meet Han Solo who, for years now, has been separated from the Rebellion as is haunted by the betrayal of his son, Kylo Ren. Solo does not present a strong threat to the First Order because he has returned to his smuggling ways, operating at the fringes of the Galaxy with not a lot of communication with the Rebellion (as shown through the stilted reunion between Solo and Leia). Next, Finn and Rey meet General Leia Organa who commands the Rebellion against the First Order. Lastly, Rey finds Luke Skywalker. The First Order has been searching for him because they believe he is the greatest threat to undermining their regime. Luke has the ability to train the next generation of Jedi and, with his propensity to the light, he will train them to fight against the dark side of the First Order. The legends of the Original Trilogy are gradually grounded in reality as the protagonists meet these heroes. The focus of this narrative is on Rey because she was not directly involved with

the First Order or the Rebellion as Finn and Poe were. She is the guide through this arc because she grew up outside the confines of these institutions and she is ultimately the one who defeats Kylo Ren.

As seen through *Furiosa*, *Katniss*, and *Rey*, these imagined futures revolve around a White female protagonist dismantling myths that serve the regimes of White men. In *MM*, this is in the ultimate death of the Cult of V8 through *Furiosa* killing Immortan Joe. In *HG*, *Katniss* prompts an election for new leadership through killing Coin and Snow dying by the mob. In *SW*, *Rey* dismantles the myths that serve the First Order by gradually understanding what really happened in the galaxy's history. Each of these narratives focuses on a White woman prompting change in a regime ruled by White men.

## 7 DISCUSSION

Three distinct themes emerge from the images of the imagined future in the films analysed: that of violent masculinity (*MM*), the media spectacle (*HG*), and the delegitimisation of history (*SW*). In all three films, these themes are utilised by White male leaders to exert control over their populations. While each film has different supporting characters, it is predominantly the White female protagonist who manages to disrupt the antagonists' regimes. So, how do these myths from the imagined future draw upon the contemporary social imaginary in which they were made? Here, it is necessary to bring together myths, the imaginary, and the image.

As stated previously, White men are over-represented both in front of and behind the camera and the 'film industry still functions as a straight, White, boy's club' (Smith *et al.*, 2016: 16). This disparity can also be seen beyond the media sphere in both politics and business. In the 114<sup>th</sup> US Congress, women make up 20% while people of colour make up 18.5% and a woman has never held the highest office of President of the United States (Manning, 2016). While Fortune 500 companies have been making progress, they are still overwhelmingly White and male with 69.2% of all board seats held by White men and 90.5% of Board Chair seats held by White men (Deloitte, 2016). White men do not have any natural predisposition to leadership positions and yet they are over-represented in the highest of positions in media, politics, and business. The status quo of White men in power is a constructed narrative helped by Barthian mythmaking in naturalising their ability to hold leadership positions. This narrative has been established as the status quo because of the ways in which White men have access to mythmaking apparatuses and utilise them to create the world in their image.

The prevalence of images of White men held strong in 2015 but the social imaginary had new ways of engaging with this myth. Rather than reinforcing the status quo, the imaginary produced narratives that revolved around White female protagonists dismantling the myth of the White man in power in the future. These films dealt with three broader themes of how White men naturalise

their power structures through traditional gender roles and violent masculinity, the media spectacle, and the de-legitimisation of history. The overarching pattern of narratives of White women dismantling White male power structures demonstrated a friction between the societal myths of 2015 and the imaginary that engaged with it. In 2015, these films pivoted toward including White women not just in the reductive role of 'love interest' but in crucially undermining the very structures of these in the imagined futures. Instead of supporting the contemporary myths that privileged White men at the forefront of these futures, the imaginary fought against those images to create new ones focused on White women dismantling White patriarchal power structures.

In providing these images of female role models, these films demonstrate a successful turn toward a new corpus of narratives: privileging White women at the forefront of images of the imagined future. As these images engage with new narratives of the future and changing structures of the imaginary, one can hope that these will help disseminate inclusive ideals to change current societal myths, providing new 'life models' for society.

Although branching out into narratives driven by White women is a step away from White male dominance, it is also necessary to recognise the way these narratives still operate under the discourse of Whiteness. As White women become more included in mainstream media, this could be an extension of a new myth evolving to maintain its invisible power structures to the detriment of people of colour. One can only hope that instead of White women being included into the club, the doors are thrown open wider to include those that live further outside the boundaries of Whiteness and masculinity both on-screen and behind the camera.

In some ways, these films show a friction between the social imaginary and the contemporary myths in which they were created. The societal myths of 2015 still privileged White men in society but these films engaged with new ways of imagining the future where these structures are dismantled by White women. The imaginary that produced these films clearly envisioned the future as White women destroying the regimes controlled by White men.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Science fiction films have the potential to disrupt the *status quo* mythmaking apparatuses by undermining the narratives of the powerful White male protagonist in an imaginary future. Through a thematic narrative analysis, this research sought to understand the pattern of White female protagonists dismantling White male regimes in the imagined futures created in 2015. An expansion on Barthesian mythmaking discourse, including gender and racial mythmaking lenses, provided a theoretical framework through which to give language to how White men became naturalised as the status quo. Discourse surrounding the imaginary sought to look further at how myths, the imaginary,

and images interact with one another. Further analysis into the science fiction genre showed how many narratives told through science fiction deal with risk and destruction, tenets which were presented in the science fiction films of 2015.

This leads us to the possibility of further research which is to ask: can these narratives be truly revolutionary within the agenda of the capitalist culture industry? Are these narratives appropriations of struggles of marginalised peoples to serve capitalist agendas (Marez, 2004)? Additionally, Hollywood studios are inviting more non-White and non-male people in front of the screen the next avenue of analysis must also take into account the quality of the representations of the non-White and non-male people. It is not enough to show them on-screen without also showing their characters can be complex and central to the narrative. Another avenue of further analysis could be to engage further with audiences and audience identification, especially within the fandom cultures of each of these franchises and the exclusionary gender divides within them. Further, how does this translate between Western culture and non-Western cultures?

The imaginary, through images, can help push societal myths past the current status quo. Through imagining new futures, avenues of disruption and re-negotiation become possible for those who have always felt disadvantaged by societal myths. Rather than continuing to patterns of:

*Narrow dystopic visions of what our society could be, new myths are required that can help us to envision and work toward a society that is hopeful, abundant, vibrant, and just.*  
(Hayes, 2015: 42)

The analysis and continued attention to the structures and patterns of images and narratives is needed to disrupt the mythmaking apparatuses and boundaries of the imaginary.

Science fiction can be a powerful tool through which to imagine dangerously, using the imaginary to disrupt the societal myths that sought to constrain it in the first place. But this is a continued process of negotiation and re-negotiation to continually include those who have never seen themselves in these imagined futures. Further, while we see White patriarchal structures dismantled, we do not see what comes after. How do we imagine more equitable forms of governance? More equitable narratives of the imagined future are a good start.

## WORKS CITED

- Abrams, J.J. (2015) *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, USA: Disney, Lucasfilm.
- Altman, R. (2012) 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,' pp. 27-41 in B.K. Grant (ed.) *Film Genre Reader IV*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Ang, I. (2005) *Watching Dallas Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. (2000) 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,' *Public Culture* 12(1): 1-19.
- Appadurai, A. (2006a) 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,' pp. 584-603 in M.G. Durham and D.M. Kellner (ed.) *Media and Cultural Studies KeyWorks*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Appadurai, A. (2006b) *Modernity at Large*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972) *Mythologies*, translated by A. Lavers, London: Vintage Books.
- Barthes, R. (1977) *Image Music Text*, edited by S. Heathm London: Fontana Press.
- Basuroy, S., Desai, K.K. and Talukdar, D. (2006) 'An Empirical Investigation of Signaling in the Motion Picture Industry,' *Journal of Marketing Research* 43 (2): 287-95.
- Bateman, J. and Schmidt, K. (2013) *Multimodal Film Analysis: How Films Mean*. London: Routledge.
- Beck, U. (2005) 'Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics and Research Programmes,' pp. 211-229 in B. Adam, U. Beck, and J. Loon (ed.) *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bell, P. (2001) 'Content Analysis of Visual Images,' pp. 13-31 in T. Leeuwan and C. Jewitt (ed.) *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Biesecker, B.A. (2002) 'Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Pulitics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (4): 393-409.
- Boje, D. (2001) *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bordwell, D. and Thompson, K. (1997) *Film Art: An Introduction*, 5th ed, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Brown, C.G. (2013) *Postmodern for Historians*, New York: Routledge.

Bucholtz, M. (1999) 'You Da Man: Narrating the Racial Other in The Production of White Masculinity,' *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3 (4): 443–60.

Burnett, R. (1995) *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media and the Imaginary*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.

Calhoun, C. (2002) 'Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,' *Public Culture* 14 (1): 147–71.

Campbell, J. and Moyers, B. (2001) *The Power of Myth*, edited by B.S. Flowers, New York: Broadway Books.

Castoriadis, C. (1975) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, translated by K. Blamey, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Chang, B. and Ki. E. (2005) 'Devising a Practical Model for Predicting Theatrical Movie Success: Focusing on the Experience Good Property,' *Journal of Media Economics* 18 (4): 247–69.

Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cobley, P. (2005) 'Narratology,' *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Collier, R. (1998) *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology*, London: SAGE.

Collins, A. and Hand, C. (2005) 'Analyzing Moviegoing Demand: An Individual-Level Cross-Sectional Approach,' *Managerial and Decision Economics* 26 (5): 319–30.

Connell, R. (1998) 'Masculinities and Globalization,' *Men and Masculinities* 1 (1): 3–23.

- Connell, R. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005) 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,' *Gender & Society* 19.
- Cousin, S. (2016) 'Images, Imaginaries, and Imaginations: French Notes,' pp. 35-47 in M. Gravari-Barbas and N. Graburn (ed.) *Tourism Imaginaries at the Disciplinary Crossroads: Place, Practice Media*, London: Routledge.
- Craig, S.C., Greene, W.H. and Douglas, S.P. (2005) 'Culture Matters: Consumer Acceptance of U.S. Films in Foreign Markets,' *Journal of International Marketing* 13 (4): 80–103.
- Daiute, C. and Lightfoot, C. (2004) 'Cultural Modeling as a Frame for Narrative Analysis,' pp. 39-62 in C. Daiute and C. Lightfoot (ed.) *Narrative Analysis*, SAGE Online.
- Davies, C. (1997) 'Modernity, Masculinity and Imperfect Cinema in Cuba,' *Screen* 38 (4): 345–59.
- Dawkins, R. (2003) 'The Problem of a Material Element in the Cinematic Sign Deleuze, Metz and Peirce,' *Angelaki* 8 (3): 155–66.
- Deloitte. (2016) 'Missing Pieces Report: The 2016 Board Diversity Census of Women and Minorities on Fortune 500 Boards.'
- Dimitrakaki, A. and Tsiantis, M. (2002) 'Terminators, Monkeys and Mass Culture: The Carnival of Time in Science Fiction Films,' *Time & Society* 11 (2/3): 209–31.
- Dittmer, J. (2011) 'American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (1): 114–30.
- Dodds, K. (2008) 'Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror,' *Third World Quarterly* 29 (8): 1621–37.
- Dyer, R. (1997) *White*. London: Routledge.
- Eichholz, D. E. (1956) 'The Art of Juvenal and His Tenth "Satire,"' *Greece & Rome* 3 (1): 61–69.
- Einav, L. (2007) 'Seasonality in the U.S. Motion Picture Industry,' *RAND Journal of Economics* 38 (1): 127–45.

- Frankenberg, R. (1993) *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Franzosi, R. (1998) 'Narrative Analysis—Or Why (and How) Sociologists Should Be Interested In Narrative,' *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1): 517–54.
- Gallardo, X.(2013) 'Aliens, Cyborgs and Other Invisible Men: Hollywood's Solutions to the Black 'Problem' in Sf Cinema,' *Science Fiction Film and Television* 6 (2): 219–51.
- Gaonkar, D.P. (2002) 'Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction,' *Public Culture* 14 (1): 1–19.
- Godfrey, R., Lilley, S. and Brewis, J. (2012) 'Biceps, Bitches and Borgs: Reading Jarhead's Representation of the Construction of the (Masculine) Military Body,' *Organization Studies* 33 (4): 541–62.
- Gole, N. (2002) 'Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries,' *Public Culture* 14 (1): 277–79.
- Grindon, L. (2012) 'Cycles and Clusters: The Shape of Film Genre History,' pp. 42-59 in B.K. Grant (ed.) *Film Genre Reader IV*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Hadida, A. (2009) 'Motion Picture Performance: A Review and Research Agenda,' *International Journal of Management Reviews* 11 (3): 297–335.
- Hall, S. (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hall, S. (2006) 'Encoding/Decoding,' pp. 163-173 in D.M. Kellner and M.G. Durham (ed.) *Media and Cultural Studies KeyWorks*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Hantke, S. (2010) 'Bush's America and the Return of Cold War Science Fiction: Alien Invasion in Invasion, Threshold , and Surface,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38 (3): 143–51.
- Hayes, M. (2015) 'Imagination as Method,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 14: 36–52.
- Heath, S. (1992) 'Difference,' pp. 47-106 in M. Merck (ed.) *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, London: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2015) *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, New York: Routledge.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T.W. (2006) 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' pp. 41-72 in M.G. Durham and D.M. Kellner (ed.) *Media and Cultural Studies KeyWorks*,

Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Izod, J. (2000) 'Active Imagination and the Analysis of Film,' *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 45 (2): 267-85.

Jefferson, T. (2002) 'Subordinating Hegemonic Masculinity,' *Theoretical Criminology* 6 (1): 63-88.

Johansson, T. and Ottemo, A. (2013) 'Ruptures in Hegemonic Masculinity: The Dialectic between Ideology and Utopia,' *Journal of Gender Studies* 9236 (September): 1-15.

Kakoudaki, D. (2002) 'Spectacles of History: Race Relations, Melodrama, and the Science Fiction/Disaster Film,' *Camera Obscura* 17 (2): 108-53.

Kincheloe, J.L., and Steinberg, S.R. (1998) 'Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring White Identity in a Pedagogy of Whiteness,' pp. 3-30 in J.L. Kincheloe, S.R. Steinberg, N.M. Rodriguez and R.E. Chennault (ed.) *White Reign: Whiteness in America*, New York: St Martin's Press.

Krule, M. (2012) 'The Hunger Names.' *Slate*.

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/03/21/the\\_hunger\\_games\\_names\\_explained.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/03/21/the_hunger_games_names_explained.html).

Larson, J. (2008) 'Limited Imagination: Depictions of Computers in Science Fiction Film,' *Futures* 40 (3): 293-99.

Lawrence, F. (2015) *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay- Part 2*, USA: Lionsgate.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966) 'The Structural Study of Myth,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 68 (270): 428-44.

Lundy, D., Crowe, A. and Turner, A. (2016) 'The Shape of Aesthetic Quality: Professional Film Critics' Rating Distributions' *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 10 (1): 72-81.

Lutz, C., and Collins, J. (1993) *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

- Manning, J. (2016) 'Membership of the 114th Congress: A Profile,' Washington, D.C.
- Marez, C. (2004) 'Aliens and Indians: Science Fiction, Prophetic Photography and near-Future Visions,' *Journal of Visual Culture* 3 (3): 336–52.
- Martinot, S. (2010) *The Machinery of Whiteness: Studies in the Structure of Racialization*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- McNearney, A. (2015) 'Now You Can Get the 'Mad Max' Look.' *The Daily Beast*.  
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/now-you-can-get-the-mad-max-look>.
- Metz, C. (1974) *Language and Cinema*, Paris: Mouton.
- Miller, G. (2015) *Mad Max: Fury Road*, USA/AUS: Warner Bros.
- Milner, A., and Redmond, S. (2015) 'Introduction to the Special Issue on Science Fiction,' *Thesis Eleven* 131 (1): 3–11.
- Mitry, J. (2000) *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*, translated by C. King. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Mulvey, L. (1988) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' pp. 14-26 in L. Mulvey (ed.) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nama, A. (2008) *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Olson, K. (2016) *Imagined Sovereignties: The Power of the People and Other Myths of the Modern Age*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Palmer, L. (2011) 'Black Man/White Machine: Will Smith Crosses Over,' *The Velvet Light Trap* 67 (1): 28–40.
- Rehling, N. (2009) *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary Popular Cinema*, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.
- Riessman, C. (2005) 'Narrative Analysis,' pp. 1-7 in D. Robinson, K. Milnes, and C. Horrocks (ed.)

*Narrative, Memory, and Everyday Life*, Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield.

Rose, G. (2016) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th ed. London: SAGE.

Sarbin, T. (2004) 'The Role of Imagination in Narrative Construction,' pp. 5-20 in C. Daiute and C. Lightfoot (ed.) *Narrative Analysis*, London: SAGE.

Smith, S., Choueiti, M., and Pieper, K. (2016) 'Inclusion or Invisibility? Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment,' *Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA): USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism*.

Sobchack, V. (2001) *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Sontag, S. (1965) 'The Imagination of Disaster,' *Commentary-Periodicals Online* 40 (4): 42-48.

Taylor, C. (2002) 'Modern Social Imaginaries,' *Public Culture* 14 (1): 91-124.

Voelker-Morris, R., and Voelker-Morris, J. (2014) 'Stuck in Tights: Mainstream Superhero Comics' Habitual Limitations on Social Constructions of Male Superheroes,' *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5 (1): 101-17.

Wise, S. (2001) 'Redefining Black Masculinity and Manhood: Successful Black Gay Men Speak Out,' *Journal of African American Men*, 3-22.

Wright, C., and Nyberg, D. (2013) 'Creative Self-Destruction : Corporate Responses to Climate Change as Political Myths,' *Environmental Politics* 23(2): 1-19.

Wright, J. (2012) 'Genre Films and the Status Quo,' pp. 60-68 in B. Grant (ed.) *Film Genre Reader IV*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

## 9 APPENDIX A: CULTURAL RELEVANCY COMPARISON

Film	Domestic Ranking	Domestic box office revenue (rounded to nearest million)	Oscar Noms	Oscar Wins	Rotten Tomatoes Critics	Rotten Tomatoes Audience
Star Wars: The Force Awakens	1	\$937,000,000	5	0	92%	89%
Hunger Games: Mockingjay- Part 2	7	\$282,000,000	0	0	70%	66%
Mad Max: Fury Road	21	\$154,000,000	10	6	97%	86%
Total	N/A	\$1,373,000,000	15	6	Avg. 86.3%	Avg. 80.3%

2015 Films

2016 Films

Film	Domestic Ranking	Domestic box office revenue	Oscar Noms	Oscar Wins	Rotten Tomatoes Critics	Rotten Tomatoes Audience Score
Rogue One	1	\$532,000,000	2	0	85%	88%
Star Trek Beyond	16	\$159,000,000	1	0	84%	81%
Independence Day: Resurgence	27	\$103,000,000	0	0	31%	31%
Total	N/A	\$794,000,000	3	0	Avg. 66.7%	Avg. 66.7%

## 10 APPENDIX B: THEMATIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS RUBRIC

	MM	HG	SW
Sub-Question #1: What myths are represented?	Hegemonic masculinity; traditional gender roles; spectacles of violence	Continued celebration of rebel's defeat; period of stasis where change feels impossible; Media spectacle	Re-writing history to erase legitimate rebellion leaders
Sub-Question #2: How are myths reinforced?	Cult of V8, promise of afterlife; Immortan Joe as prophet	Capitol-mandated HG viewing; police state	Delegitimisation of heroes; erases stories of successful rebellions
Sub-Question #3: How are myths destroyed or dismantled?	Death of male leader by female protagonist	Disruption of established power structures via the deaths of Snow and Coin; implementation of 'new' regime.	Learning the truth of history; spreading the stories of successful rebellions

**Media@LSE MSc Dissertations Series**

The Media@LSE MSc Dissertations Series presents high quality MSc Dissertations which received a mark of 74% and above (Distinction).

Selected dissertations are published electronically as PDF files, subject to review and approval by the Editors.

Authors retain copyright, and publication here does not preclude the subsequent development of the paper for publication elsewhere.

ISSN: 1474-1938/1946