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DYSTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY POST-APOCALYPTIC FILMS

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DYSTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY POST-APOCALYPTIC FILMS

A Master's Thesis

by

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Ankara

January 2019



To My Father

DYSTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY POST-APOCALYPTIC FILMS

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

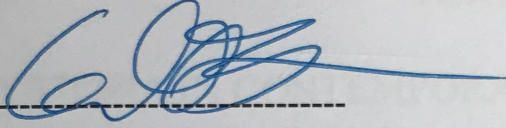
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN MEDIA AND VISUAL STUDIES

THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
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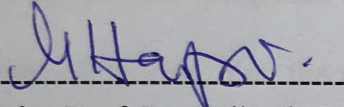
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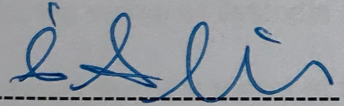
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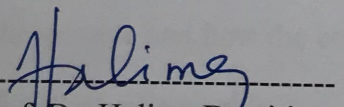
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ABSTRACT

DYSTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY POST-APOCALYPTIC FILMS

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M.A. in Department of Communication and Design

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As an inseparable integrated theme, dystopia is the dominant form of societies in post-apocalyptic worlds. Yet, the vision of this dystopian society changes based on events of the films' production time and it portrays different characteristics of the post-apocalyptic world. This study examines the ways in which contemporary post-apocalyptic films have been shaped and how they differ in characteristics of the end to the productions of previous decades. Three factors are selected as the most important elements that have shaped the vision of dystopia in these films. First, 9/11 terrorist attacks and their effect on creating the new vision of the end is argued, and *Man of Steel* (Nolan, Roven, Snyder, Thomas & Snyder 2013) is analyzed. Second, the presence of Islam in portraying dystopia is reviewed and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Mitchell & Miller 2015) is used as the case study. Third, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Blade Runner 2049* (Johnson, Kosove, Yorkin, Sikes & Villeneuve, 2017) are examined to discuss the Anthropocene and how the concept of decay of nature is interconnected to dystopia in post-apocalyptic worlds.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Dystopia, Hollywood Films, Post-Apocalypse, Religion

ÖZET

ÇAĞDAŞ KİYAMET SONRASI FİLMLERDE DİSTOPYA

Farhat, HamidReza

Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

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Ayrılmaz bir bütünleşmiş tema olarak, distopya, kıyamet sonrası dünyalardaki toplumların baskın şeklidir. Ancak, bu distopya toplumunun vizyonu, filmlerin prodüksiyon zamanındaki olaylara dayanarak değişmekte ve kıyamet sonrası dünyanın farklı özelliklerini göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, kıyamet sonrası çağdaş filmlerin nasıl şekillendiğini ve son on yıldaki prodüksiyonlarla bitim özellikleri bakımından nasıl farklı olduklarını incelemektedir. Bu filmlerde distopya vizyonunu şekillendiren en önemli unsur olarak üç faktör seçilmiştir. İlk olarak, 9/11 terörist saldırıları ve bunun yeni vizyonunu yaratma üzerindeki etkisi tartışıldı ve *Man of Steel*'in (Nolan, Roven, Snyder, Thomas & Snyder 2013) analizi yapıldı. İkincisi, distopyayı canlandırmada İslam'ın varlığı gözden geçirilir ve inceleme için *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Mitchell & Miller 2015) kullanıldı. Üçüncüsü, *Mad Max: Fury Road* ve *Blade Runner 2049* (Johnson, Kosove, Yorkin, Sikes & Villeneuve, 2017) Antroposen ve kıyamet sonrası dünyalardaki doğa bozulma kavramının distopya ile nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu tartışmak için incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antroposen, Distopya, Din, Hollywood Filmleri, Kıyamet Sonrası

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Humankind have always been dealing with the concept of death, apocalypse, and extinction in their mythological or religious beliefs and eschatological studies as well. This fear of being destroyed has led humans to create mythologies and fantasies of existence of another world after death: generally, a heavenly utopia which would fulfill all desires and provide all the pleasures to humans who deserved to be there. No matter how apocalypse happens, it would destroy humans from face of the Earth based on major Abrahamic religions, the outcome is simple: this world is going to perish with all humans and after the judgment day, all dead will resurrect and they will find their rightful place in the hereafter. Yet, this image of promised life after death was distorted by the thoughts of an apocalypse which does not eradicate the whole life on the Earth, instead, there may be some survivors who would live till their death on a planet which is no longer hospitable. From such a strong dominant sociocultural/ religious background, a new vision of the end is created in literature and later, cinema as fictional entertainments.

This thesis is framed based on three key concepts: dystopia, apocalypse and post-apocalypse, and the Anthropocene. Dystopia is an undesirable and unpleasant society or any form of social group, depicting a world which is the exact opposite of utopia. This

frightening and disastrous world is known for its harshness and social injustice towards its members. Dystopia is either the outcome or the reason of post-apocalyptic events, and it acquires different characteristics based on how the end happens. Dystopia in this thesis has three different forms; first, it is the result of the apocalypse. World turns to such a dystopian condition that it gradually goes through the disaster which marks the end of the world. Second, it is the outcome or reflection of pre-apocalyptic ideologies which made humankind to go through such a catastrophe. Third, it is the result of the apocalyptic event; no matter what the catastrophe was, the post-apocalyptic world becomes an inhospitable environment towards its residents and therefore, humans degrade to their instinctual behaviors, living like their primitive ancestors.

Apocalypse is the event which destroys the current order of the world and puts an end to humankind's presence on earth. This catastrophic event can happen in different ways, from any natural disaster to diseases and nuclear wars. But, there is a vision of apocalypse which doesn't terminate all humans, and some survive the cataclysm. This is the framework of this study, a work which is based on the idea of how these post-apocalyptic films portray the dystopian side, and what creates this social dystopian image.

The Anthropocene is a proposed era in which humankind's impact on the earth and its natural order has become a powerful force which changes the planet, therefore, it shapes nature, affects seas, changes the climate drastically, and causes the disappearance of numerous species, and putting humankind at the risk of possible extinction. So, the

Anthropocene represents the collapse of the future world by ecological downfall. The nature and its interaction with humans is so important that when this powerful link breaks, the life of humans turns into misery and disaster. This study argues the Anthropocene in two different ways: first, as the catalyst for apocalypse. In this scenario, humankind's greed and excessive use of natural resources results in the environment's destruction and leads to the apocalypse. Second, the Anthropocene can be understood as a product of apocalypse; after a human-caused catastrophe happens, nature then decays along with humans as a result, creating an anthropogenic world.

This frightening vision of the future, which implies the lack of religious hereafter, has attracted many prophecies from different people, creating a parallel concept. Often affected by real-life events and issues, the precipitating event of apocalypse has changed throughout the time, and the post-apocalyptic world, have gained different characteristics in different eras. When there wasn't much of a scientific knowledge to explain the cause of diseases natural disasters which were considered as powerful elements which can destroy humanity, the apocalypse was the result of sins people has committed. The religious story of a flood which erased every single person from the Earth except the righteous Noah and his true followers is one of the most known religious apocalyptic stories. The first representation of the new post-apocalyptic vision as a reflection of real-life dangers was at the time when the most dreadful possible catastrophic events were diseases like plague. In her novel *The Last Man* written in 1826, Mary Shelly narrates the story of an only survivor in the whole world after the contagious disease kills everyone.

Since then, the fear of living in a dead world continued to be represented by different authors in different forms in each time period.

And here comes the post 1900 era, when the idea of catastrophe is not solely an outcome of religious beliefs or fears; it also uses science and any other accessible data to create a vision of the world after the end, a world that does not resemble a promised heaven but rather hell on Earth for its survivors. This new world is hostile to people and lacks proper conditions to sustain human life. This is a post-apocalyptic dystopia, a world which is in contrast to utopia. Dystopia literally means bad place which is by no means similar to the promised heaven, and this bad place is the opposite picture to what religion and mythology had painted of the Armageddon. Dystopia finds itself in different forms and possibilities based on the way the Earth dies, and each scenario has its own characteristics. Being present in literature for a while, by the invention of cinema as the seventh art which is highly associated with literary works, the notion of dystopia and post-apocalypse gradually found their way to the silver screen.

When it comes to dystopia in contemporary post-apocalyptic films, it not only indicates a specific content and narrative, it also helps to narrow down the production time table of these films in order to focus on each era and its cinematic productions. There have been various major incidents or issues in the 21st century which carry the potential to build the framework for this study, such as natural disasters, space explorations, political scandals and clashes, wars, terrorist attacks, Anthropocene and climate change, and etc. Among all

of these possibilities, two were selected for this study because of their importance compared to others: the 9/11 terror attacks and the Anthropocene.

Chapter two reviews these terms, their history, and how they have been reflected in film and other narrative forms. By going through the dystopian post-apocalyptic films, the purpose is to discuss the classic characterization of these notions and the way they have been portrayed in cinematic works. This chapter traces the similarities and differences of these concepts over time.

9/11 is one of the most, if not the most, important events of the western world in 21st century which its effects spread to other parts of the world. A group of radical Muslim fundamentalists named Al Qaeda planned and executed a series of terrorist attack against the United States on September 11, 2001. Since then, the world has changed in so many ways, from political relations to the daily life of people all around the globe. These terror attacks led to a couple of major wars by the United States against two Muslim majority countries, Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, the fear of chaos and catastrophe became dominant in media and among people. Since as said earlier, the vision of dystopia and post-apocalypse is related to real-life events and issues, these attacks and wars created a new concept of the end for the people; a possible end and a dark world after the end. The cinema industry was not an exception, and it started to reflect these images of dystopian post-apocalyptic worlds in their productions. The argument in this chapter is to establish how dystopian post-apocalyptic films of the pre-21st century used real-life events to

produce a more comprehensible vision of the end, and how the post-21st century productions have changed because of major contemporary events and issues.

Chapter three takes two different approaches to 9/11. First, the historical aspect of the incident will be analyzed to understand the reasons and motivations behind these terror attacks, and then the response of the United States will be taken into account. By doing so, the image that these actions create as a vision of dystopia in post-apocalypse would be analyzed and discussed. The film *The Man of Steel* (2013) by Zack Snyder will be analyzed based on this notion. Second, the religious background and the form of concept it casted on the vision of dystopia would be argued. To do so, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) by George Miller would be used as the case study. The argument in this chapter is to trace the effects on the post-21st century dystopian post-apocalyptic films regarding historical and sociocultural elements and the way these elements have reflected on the films as a part of contributing factors in visualizing that disastrous world.

Chapter four is dedicated to the Anthropocene and its effects on creating a different vision of dystopia in post-apocalyptic films. The Anthropocene is a geological era of the world which marks the beginning of the end, or in other words, the condition of the world has come to the point that the end or the apocalypse has already begun, as human activities have become the dominant influence on climate and environment, and many of their effects on nature and earth are now irreversible. First, to understand the Anthropocene, a history of the term and its related concerns it brings along will be discussed. Second, the analysis will focus on cinematic adaptations of the 1954 novel *I*

Am Legend by Richard Matheson. Here, once again, Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) will be considered as one of the films using nature and its decay as the factors implying dystopia in their narrative. And finally, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) directed by Denis Villeneuve will be examined to see how this film has used anthropogenic elements in enhancing the dystopian vision of a post-apocalyptic world. The argument in this chapter is to discuss how the idea of decay of nature and the beginning of Anthropocene had found its way to cinema, and how films have started to borrow this concept to create the dystopian post-apocalyptic worlds. In other words, determine how the Anthropocene itself became a vital dystopian element to show the harshness of the worlds after the end, or establish the way how Anthropocene can lead to world to become dystopian.

Chapter II

Dystopia, Post-Apocalypse, and Cinematic Reading

2.1. Overview of Concepts

To start on dystopia and post-apocalypse in cinema, it's necessary to know their history and definition, how they relate to each other, and how they emerged in cinema. First, the chapter starts with a sketch of each term, then their history. Second, the history of post-apocalyptic films as the center of discussion will determine when and how it entered the film industry. These two different concepts are associated to each other in cinematic productions. Dystopia and post-apocalyptic genres have a strong bond to each other. Yet, not all post-apocalyptic films are dystopian, and not all dystopian films are set in a post-apocalyptic world. It's necessary to see what dystopia and post-apocalypse mean, and what do they have to do with films, and how dystopia became an essential characteristic of portrayal of the world after the end.

In sum, the purpose of this study is therefore to define dystopian post-apocalyptic films in a contemporary framework and to determine the factors which make contemporary cinematic dystopia different from films with similar themes that were made before the new millennium. In this sense, chapter three establishes the historical events and the way

religion is portrayed in the films produced after the beginning of the 21st century. And finally, chapter four is based on the idea of the Anthropocene, i.e. how that concept was introduced to cinema and helps shape a dystopian vision of the post-apocalyptic world.

To indicate the significance of this study compared to other works done in the post-21st century, most recent works are going to be discussed here. One of the latest works on dystopia and post-apocalypse is Ana Moya and Gemma López's 2017 article "Looking Back: Versions of the Post-Apocalypse in Contemporary North-American Cinema". They analyze three films produced within a four-year window, from 2007 to 2010, according to the concept of the border and the borderland, concluding that survivors of the catastrophes in their plot have become borders, and the whole world turns into a borderland. In other words, their work is basically on the way how the representation of border in post-apocalypse takes place and although the failures of nations which led the world to this catastrophe, yet the borders would be still present as binary opposites in defining the individual and social identity (Moya & López, 2017). What I discuss here is similar to the idea of borders, especially the discussion about creating an "us against them" structure in the post-apocalyptic film. But, unlike Moya and López, this work uses an ideological rather than a physical concept of border, a border which separates people based on the side they take. It shows itself clearly in the discussion on *Mad Max Fury Road* and the divide between two sides of a clash not solely based on the instinct of survival, but rather on the will and ability to live freely.

Emma Ann Harris's 2016 thesis "The Post-Apocalyptic Film Genre in American Culture: 1968–2013" uses North American cinema, like Moya and Lopez. But unlike Moya and Lopez's work, which is about the survivors and the infected of the post-apocalyptic world, Harris discusses the apocalyptic event itself, and how it is shaped around real-life events. One of the main features of Harris's work is her recognition of post-apocalypse as an independent film genre. Unlike Moya and López's work, her thesis is narrowed down to three films from three different time periods, each of which has its own film version of *I Am Legend* (Goldsman, Heyman, Lassiter & Lawrence, 2007). She argues for the coherence of narrative in this genre, despite being blended with other recognizable genres, helps to articulate the American identity, and how religious myths like Evangelical beliefs and historical events like 9/11 play an important role in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre (Harris, 2016). My idea of religion, 9/11, and the effects it had on the cinematic productions of dystopian post-apocalyptic films is similar to Harris's discussion, yet my study is significant because it is focused on the combination of them, and how 9/11 and religion became the signifying factors for dystopia in the world after apocalypse. Also, the religion of Islam is discussed here as the driving religious force instead of the images of Christianity and how it pictures the Armageddon.

Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr, and Thomas W. Rieger in "Thinking Utopia" take a different perspective to those discussed above, presenting the concept of utopia and its breakdown in the east. For them, the timing framework is defined by the collapse of the communist system, and how the dream of a utopian society failed. Although the failure of a utopian

dream doesn't necessarily mean the beginning of a dystopian society, but this failure marks an important idea of how our world has been shaped in the past decades. So, as a result, the fear of a dystopian world amplified more throughout these years. Yet, there are two basic differences to what I discuss in this work. First, the time framework is different, and while they focus on the collapse of communism, my concentration is on the attacks against the west and the way we as humans interact with our own world. Second, in contrast to their work, which talks about the fall of utopia as an ideology and suggests restoring the idea, chapter three of this thesis is about rise of a dystopian ideology and the clashes it has brought upon the modern world.

But regarding the Anthropocene and its cinema, the views are fairly distinct. Emmelhainz in "Conditions of Visuality Under the Anthropocene and Images of the Anthropocene to Come" discusses not only the Anthropocene, but also the cultural effects which come with it. While he doesn't discuss the dystopian outcome of an anthropogenic world, he advances the idea of a dystopian-dominated visual representation, even if it is a possible outcome in our contemporary world. Emmelhainz discusses about the power these images hold and the way they are presented in the media, which can be understood as an indirect reference to dystopia. Yet, the main difference between this thesis and Emmelhainz's work is the way thesis frames the Anthropocene as a part of post-apocalyptic narrative. My discussion here is not just about the power that the visual representation holds, but how the ideas which are portrayed have significant importance beyond dystopia alone. The Anthropocene in this thesis is not just a geological concept, but it presents the decay of humankind along with nature as well.

Among the scholarship on visual representation of the Anthropocene, Jennifer Fay discusses cinematic representation in particular. While Emmelhainz talks about different forms of visual representation, Fay is focused on cinematic productions of different time periods and the fear they reflect. What she discusses in her book is a close study of nature in the cinema's history, from Buster Keaton to today's films, and she explores the direct application of these films and their effects in understanding the possible future of the earth and humankind, and the way these productions challenge the assumption of people in excessive use of natural resources. What she argues in her book is the idea of how these films help humankind understand their potential for faith and their resistance to a dystopian world. My work is similar to hers in its incorporation of the idea of the Anthropocene and the way it affects humans' lives and the extent to which it changes the social order. The difference between our respective works is how the concept of dystopia is presented in each study. It is not only a view on the decay of nature; what this thesis tries to accomplish goes beyond nature to explore the social outcome of a natural catastrophe leading this world to a dystopian one.

Compared to these works, this thesis is significant in taking dystopia as the defining aspect of its corpus, studying post-apocalyptic films and the factors which enhance the notion of dystopia in the visualized form of the world after the catastrophic event leading to apocalypse. To do so, besides looking at religious and historical aspects of contemporary dystopian post-apocalyptic films, the factor of nature, its decay, and the

Anthropocene as one of the driving elements of dystopia in post-apocalyptic world are taken into account here as a primary contributor to contemporary visions of apocalypse.

2.2. Definition and History

2.2.1. Post-Apocalypse and Dystopia

Apocalypse in its religious origin means an exposure, a revelation of knowledge or something like a heavenly secret which can be adapted to worldly realities (Ehrman, 2014). But in its contemporary meaning, it refers to a massive catastrophic event leading to destruction and disaster upon the world (Gordon, 1973). Based on this notion, post-apocalypse refers to the condition that comes into being after a cataclysmic event which marks the beginning of a new era. This creates a paradox in the idea of apocalypse, which identifies a total, utter, and complete annihilation. Yet, in contemporary narrative, there is a surviving group, which is contradictory to the previous idea of apocalypse. James Berger discusses this paradox, “The end is never the end. The apocalyptic text announces and describes the end of the world, but then the text does not end, nor does the world represented in the text, and neither does the world itself. In nearly every apocalyptic presentation, something remains *after the end*” (Berger, 1999). Therefore, post-apocalyptic world refers to the remains of the world after the catastrophe, or the new order which is risen from the ashes of the dead world.

The difference between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic settings is a matter of chronological timeline: apocalyptic stories take place during the world’s end; post-apocalyptic stories are mostly about people surviving and living in the altered world. The

timeline can be distorted a bit in both directions; apocalypse frequently deals with not just the instant time period of the incident, but also what happens after that incident (Danner, 2012). An apocalypse, being an undesirable event, it normally results in an equally undesirable post-apocalyptic world. When apocalypse happens, dystopia becomes one of the outcomes of that unfortunate event which befall on Earth and humankind's world. This potential vision of the post-apocalyptic world in Hollywood brings with itself not only the destruction of the modern world, but it portrays the collapse of the ideals which this modern world, or the West, is based on. In this vision, a world which once was trying to become utopic, turns dystopian and loses all that it stood for; a representation of a future which is not similar to what people think of the Western countries in real world.

When it comes to understanding dystopia, utopia needs to be defined first. Utopia is an imaginary society or group of people which by its nature and in its characteristics has perfect merits which are perfect for its citizens (Giroux, 2003). Dystopia is the opposite of the term utopia (eu topos- a "good place", dys topos- a "bad place") (Merriam-Webster, 2013), a term first used by John Stuart Mill in 1868 at an Irish parliamentary meeting (Mill, Robson, & Kinzer, 1988). Although the opposite of utopia has been given various names, like cacotopia or anti-utopia, which sometimes reflect a different meaning (Rüsen, Fehr, & Rieger, 2007), dystopia is the term that has had the widest and most popular exposure. In this study, dystopia in its broadest meaning would be applicable to the societies from their both social and physical aspects and the way they are portrayed in the films. In fictional dystopian societies, people live an imperfect life marred by human misery, terror, and fear. These societies lack hope, and despite their setting in the near

future, the concerns and problems depicted in them are close to those of the real and present world. In almost all of these dystopian worlds, the main themes are oppression and rebellion, and the rebels are weaker than their oppressors (Rabkin, Greenberg, & Olander, 1983).

How has dystopia blended into the fiction and, later, into cinematic productions?

Fictional dystopia goes back to 1726 when Jonathan Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels*, which has the characteristics of a dystopian world such as misanthropy and deception. But it can be said the concept officially entered literature during the 19th century in works of authors like Jules Verne, Samuel Butler, Henrik Ibsen, and H. G. Wells. Among fourteen published dystopian fictions (Clute & Nicholls, 1993), only one of them was published between 1800 and 1850, while ten appeared in the last quarter of the same century. Such a sudden leaning towards the literature of dystopia is linked to the industrial revolution. With all the benefits the phenomenon brought with itself, there came a drastic change in the lifestyle, lives, and the perspective of people about their society. This world-changing process began in 1760 and completed between 1820 to 1840, transforming lifestyle from rural to urban (Horn, Rosenband, & Smith, 2010). By the mid-19th century, cities became crowded and polluted, and vicious use of labor force such as child labor was usual (Del Col, 2002). The environmental pollution changed the face of life especially in metropolises like London. This relatively rapid transition led European countries to such an extreme situation that they felt the need to regulate against pollution, created the possibility for a more severe negative change that could alter the life even harder. Such a drastic change in nature and life made the vision of apocalypse

feasible for the people. The image of decayed nature and cruel use of labor alongside the frightening conditions of living in cities and working in industries formed a sense of fear about the future world and how things going to be if it continues to transform with the same pace, creating a vision of dystopia. This echoed fear in literature, later reflected into the newest form of art named cinema, and the notion of dystopia was used in narratives of film productions. Years later, the concept found itself blended with a post-apocalyptic theme and became a vital element of these films.

2.2.2. Post-Apocalypse in Cinema

From the second half of the 20th century, cinema has played an important role in surpassing the limits of our approaches of perception, showing different and new ideas of thinking and understanding reality (Moya & López, 2017). In the 80s and the early 90s the specific concept of films (“utopian films” or “dystopian films”) became a point of discussion. Before that, some Hollywood sci-fi films and a number of European films had used dystopian framework to bring contemporary concerns to the silver screen.

Developments like industrial revolution or invention of filming camera in western countries made it rather easier to understand and use the concept of dystopia in films as it happened during the 20th century.

Nowadays, the United States and Hollywood produce the largest number of utopian/dystopian post-apocalyptic films among all the countries. Based on IMDB categories of films with dystopian post-apocalyptic themes of the 00s, out of a total number of 17, 13 were produced in the United States, 2 in the United Kingdom, 1 in Spain, and 1 in Romania. It needs to be mentioned here that IMDB may lack enough information about

other countries and their productions, or accurate themes of those films; therefore, any flaws are possible in these lists; yet despite all these flaws, IMDB is used as the main source because is the largest and most widely accessible movie database among all others. It is essential to understand the importance of this eschatological narrative in the United States' history which is partly present because of the notion of promised land and utopia. Some pilgrims and later Puritans believed in a mythological presentation of the United States as the second garden of Eden or promised land. Puritans in particular harbored a certain apocalyptic perspective on their land, believing it to be “the product of divine providence” (Cassara, 1982).

Puritans came to the newly found continent and established their own ideology to the new country, as all immigrants do. But America was not like the garden of Eden; in contrast, Roderick Nash discusses how their environment was hostile to their survival, and they had to figure out how to adapt themselves and overcome the harsh wilderness (Nash, 1982). But the myth which has survived these initial European settlements in North America is the discovery of paradise and the necessity of building utopia. This expectation of utopia in American culture and even political rhetoric eventually reached a level that claims the country as an exception in the modern world; as part of the ideology of exceptionalism, the United States understands itself to “[differ] qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions” (Koh, 2003).

Yet, when the reality fails to live up to the imagined America as an utopia or an exceptional nation, eschatological myths have the potential to morph into a prophecy for the future (Harris, 2016). Based on a report by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRIP), between 2011 to 2014 there was a 4% rise in the number of Americans who believe natural disasters are signs of the Christian apocalypse (that is, the event described in biblical texts), with now nearly half---49%---of the American population comprehending such disasters in this way (Jones, Cox, & Navarro-Rivera, 2014). This belief in the decay of nature as a sign of apocalypse contrasts the idea of the United States as the utopia; turning to an idea of apocalypse instead of salvation.

The social issues and events discussed above, such as wars and transition periods like industrial revolution, are a vital consideration for dystopian films, which include ideas of the post-apocalypse. These social issues and events as elements are important due the fact that their presence in the films defines the potential dystopian post-apocalyptic world in the way which is comprehensible for the audiences at the time of production. Because of that, the post-apocalyptic film production of each period uses the most frightening event or possibility of that time to portray the world after the end. Both World Wars and the Cold War are most important issues that world had experienced after the Industrial Revolution. So, It is logical to see their traces in cinematic productions about dystopia and post-apocalypse. Yet, there certainly are lots of other films listed under other genres beside fantasies and sci-fi with political theme and dystopia related to the World Wars and the Cold War in their core during the 60s and 70s. Still, those films in one way or

another, have used narratives from utopian/dystopian literature like the way post-apocalyptic films borrow those concepts, showing the dominant fear of that time.

The memory of World War II combined with the experience of the Cold War during 50s-70s brought on new fears for the future, because the potential for nuclear war had shaped a strict image of a world which frightened each human being. These images are shaped in part by the events during the war such as the fall of two major cities in Japan by atomic blasts; the deaths of thousands of people in battle; the starvation and killings alongside the systematic inhumanity shown to minorities like Jews in the Holocaust. But these images are also a product of a sociocultural image of the end based on religion and myths which have affected this vision of possible end so deeply. Presence of several religions and numerous cultures each with its own mythological beliefs around the world, makes this sociocultural effect on the vision of the end different in each and every one of those societies in different time periods. Since this study is focused on cinematic productions of Hollywood, the sociocultural aspects of the end portrayed in films seem to have changed slightly based on people's religious belief or the shift in the mythology of the end. It is the result of persistence of those ideas throughout the time and the fact that the industry is based on western culture and is affected by Christianity more than other religions. But, the historical events of each era make its films different to the ones before or after it. Therefore, the concentration would be on the era of production and the events and issues of that time period.

2.3. Produced Films

After discussing the definition of the dystopia, post-apocalypse, and their background, narrowing down the cinematic works based on them is done by the factors like form of apocalyptic incident, timing, and the new world after the event. The data is collected from IMDB based on dystopian and post-apocalypse keywords, and the films with both keywords are selected. It needs to be stated here that during this work, IMDB presented 184 results, and by subtracting international films, animations, games, TV shows, and short films, the results were narrowed to following tables. The reason to choose feature films of Hollywood among all these options is because of the presence of various films with dystopian and post-apocalyptic themes in different time periods, making it possible to understand how films of these themes were produced before, and how contemporary films show them in order to trace a pattern and define its change. Animations and short films don't have the same measures. Also, games and TV shows are different mediums which don't fit in this study's corpus. Search Results of IMDB labels are subject to change since all the users have the ability to edit details or add new titles, and current labels may be inconsistent with those given here, but the search results shown below are accurate through November/ 2018. Data were retrieved from IMDB because it has the largest movie database among all other websites. The table provides the number of dystopian post-apocalyptic productions for each decade in addition to the director and the apocalyptic event.

Regarding the historical and sociopolitical situation of 20th century and the presence of these films, a classification of important eras could help in identifying the major events and their effect on cinematic productions of that era. These eras are classified here as

World War I to World War II 1900-1945, The Cold War 1947-1991, Age of Networked Society and the Anthropocene 1991-1999. To begin the analysis of films of each one of these eras, it is necessary to look at the dominant idea which determines the way apocalypse happens. Charts below show the overall number of films and the reason of the apocalypse in each era except for pre-World War II, because there is just one produced film.

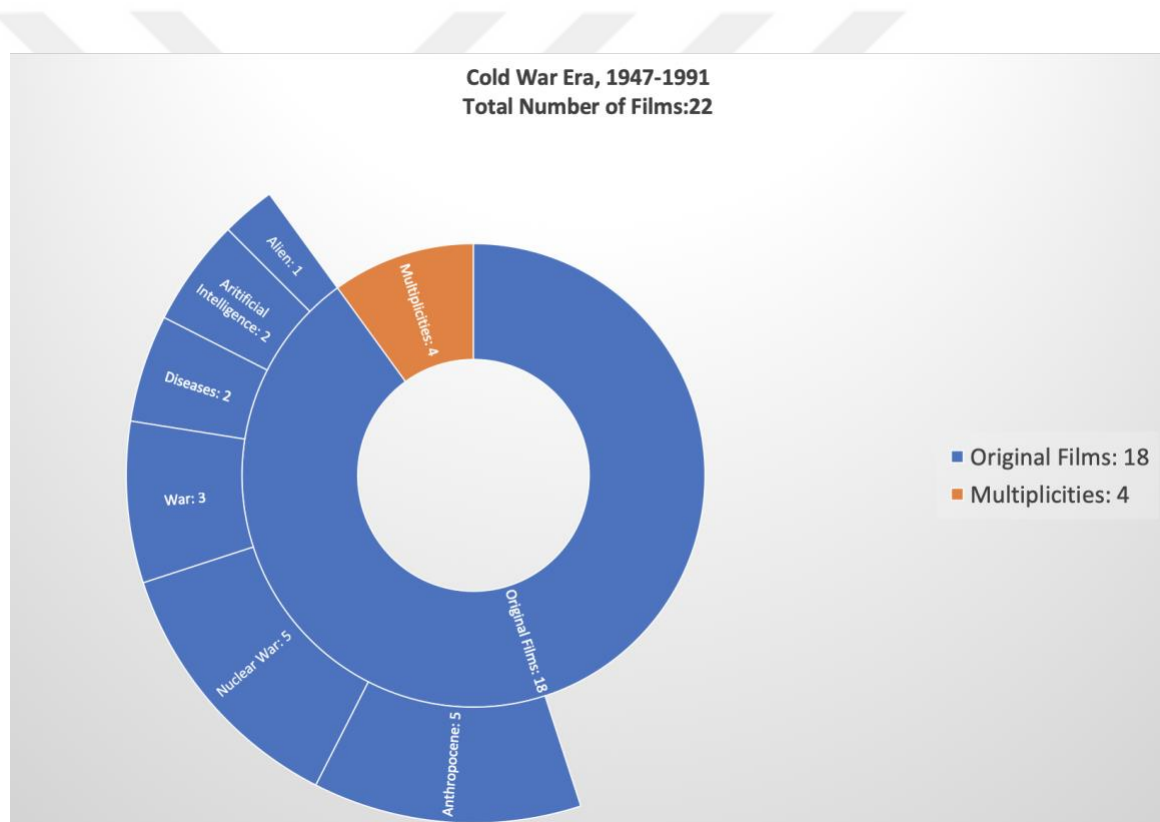


Figure 1. P.A Films of the Cold War Era and the Reason of Apocalypse.

Age of Networked Society and the Anthropocene Era, 1991-1999
Total Number of Production: 7

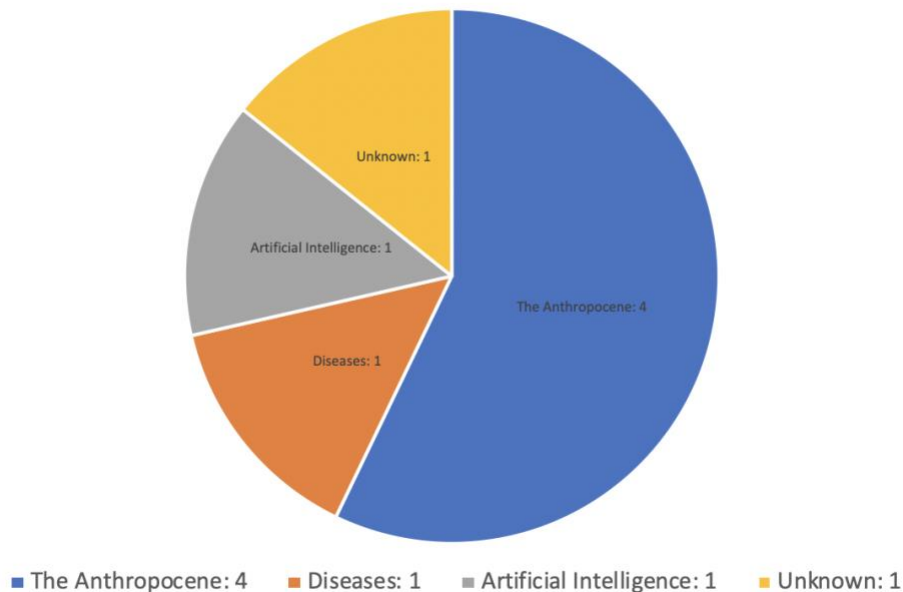


Figure 2. P.A. Films of the Networked Society and the Anthropocene Era and the Reason of Apocalypse
(There are no multiplicities made in this era)

2.3.1. Rise of Post-Apocalyptic Films

The evolution of films towards the portrayal of post-apocalyptic societies starts at the beginning of narrative in film productions. Around the turn of the 20th century, directors like Georges Méliès began to direct the first generation of films which are now known as sci-fi/ fantasy with creativity beyond their time and the use of techniques such as multiple exposures, time-lapse, and substitution splices. Almost three decades later, the first dystopian post-apocalyptic film (which are contemporary labels, and audience at that time may have not perceived them in the same way) named *Things to Come* was made in 1936 (Korda & Menzies, 1936). The film is about the world after a second world war--- still an imaginary scenario at this point in history---that has lasted so long that people don't recall why there is a war, and the society has turned to a dystopian one. This film

marks a beginning of a new subject in cinema which, after the World War II appears with increasing frequency: war, disasters, and their aftermath created an intensified fear that humankind would turn the world into a dystopian post-apocalyptic wasteland, and cinema started to visualize that fear on the silver screen. The production number of dystopian post-apocalyptic films shows a rise in number in each decade, except for 60s and 80s. Experiences of a rather long dreadful war created an easy to imagine vision of apocalypse which has reflected to cinematic works.

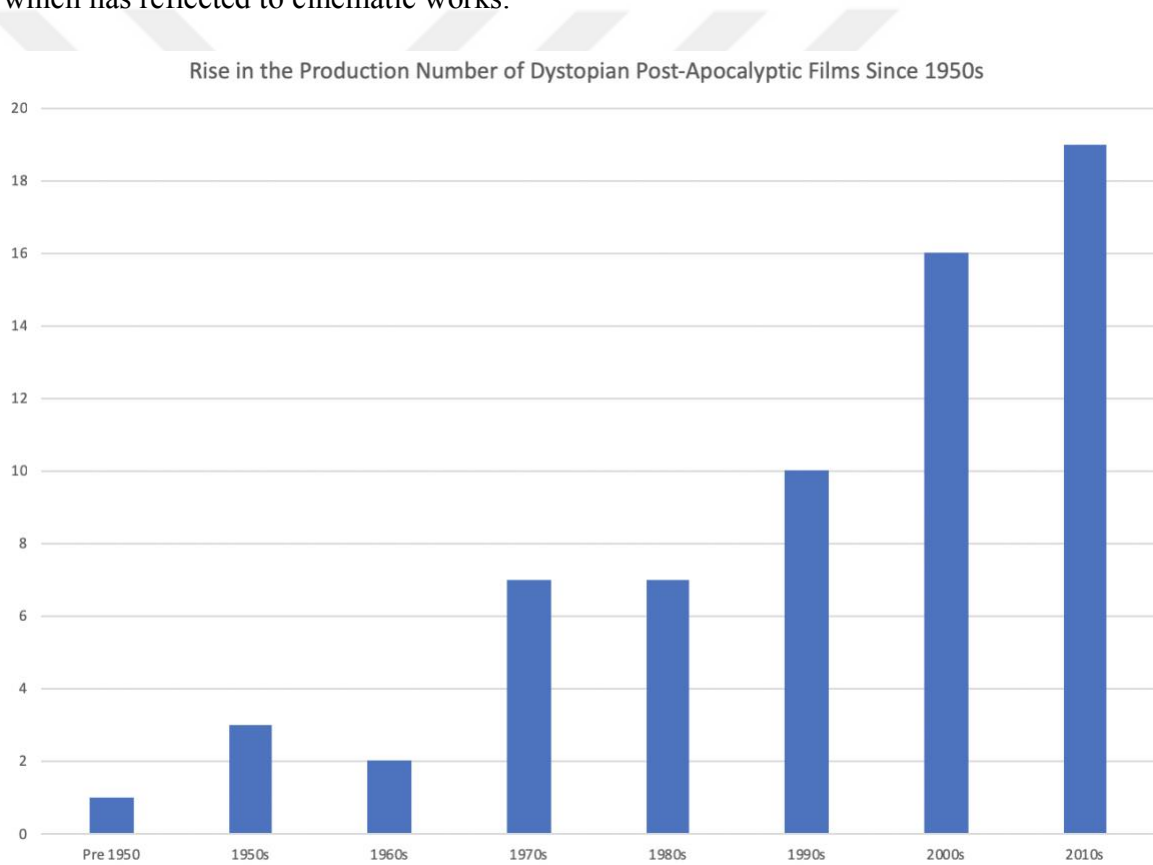


Figure 3. Rise in the Production Number of Dystopian Post-Apocalyptic Films

The numbers clearly show a distinguishable rise in public attention towards the films of the end after the 60s. The 70s marks the break for dystopian post-apocalyptic films, right after 60s which is known for its social turmoil of post-war in western countries. The 1960s decade was a period of strict the Cold War rivalry between the United States and

the Soviet Union. The technological abilities of both countries considerably increased. Nuclear weapons stocks grew, and spy satellites, or constructed orbiting objects, circled the Earth. Both the Soviet and the U.S. government spent vast amounts on defense to keep up with or get ahead of the other (“Turmoil of 1960s,” 2004). Both countries started to build shelters all around their lands and they were both at the edge of a nuclear war. This fear of another severe war with much more destructive weapons between two world powers created social turmoil that was also reflected in the film industry. This social turmoil was formed by people being in constant panic of another war which could collapse the fragile peace, and enormous psychological warfare of both countries against each other enhanced this terror.

After the first World War and suffering its terror, countries agreed to create an organization named “League of Nations” with the impossibly optimistic goal to end all wars and prevent a future potential clash among nations (Walters, 1965). Yet, after a number of years signs of clashes appeared all around the world and especially in Europe. 1933 holds an important place in the World War II timeline because of Hitler’s success in becoming the chancellor of Germany, and starting radical fascistic and racist actions against minorities like Jews and gypsies, ignoring global accords like leaving the League of Nations, and eventually occupying and invading regions and countries (Shirer, 1991). While living during such an intense time, it was inevitable for people to feel the fear of another catastrophic war.

Things to Come was produced while these conflicts were rising. The film is basically about a world war happening in future compared to real time, which continues to an extent that the people don't even remember why there is a war and what are they fighting for, and this war eventually leads to downfall of civilization by destruction and diseases. But one of the most important characters, if not the most important one, is a man named Rudolf, the Boss or Chief (Ralph Richardson), who rises to power and follows radical policies like controlling the disease by killing the infected or occupying other lands for their resources. Rudolf¹ is a German name resembling Adolf, and the titles used for Rudolf like Boss and Chief remind the viewer of ones used for Hitler, like Führer² which means leader. Following this example, the presence of elements like symbolic use of names and use of real experiences in contemporary films along with religious and historical events will be discussed thoroughly in the third chapter.

Being the only dystopian post-apocalyptic film of the first half of 20th century makes *Things to Come* the only option to analyze pre-World War II films. But after the end of the war, there came new clashes and challenges for the western societies and people of the United States and the Soviet Union. The most important challenge of all for the US government and the American people is the Cold War as explained earlier. Once allies against the common Nazi enemy, the end of war created a dangerous geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (LaFeber & Divine, 1985). Although the Cold War was not just about gaining the upper hand in military power and also included

¹ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/rudolph>

² https://www.etymonline.com/word/Fuhrer#etymonline_v_14236

space exploration programs, but an important part of this rivalry turned to the ability to destroy the opponent, which led the two countries to a mad arms race.

The American doctrine was simple: developing of atomic warheads like the ones deployed in Japan that brought an end to the World War II (“History of the Cold War,” 2009). Events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and unprecedented investment in military projects fomented this fear of a nuclear war which could annihilate the world. This unstable situation increased the fear of an apocalypse. A number of films like *On the Beach* (Kramer & Kramer, 1959) and *A Boy and His Dog* (Jones, Moore & Jones 1975) which were directed at the time used this fear by introducing the potential world after the atomic war. Each generation of films has a way of reflecting these fears through the media they consume. In the nuclear age there were alien invasion films like *War of the Worlds* (Pal & Haskin, 1953) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Blaustein & Wise, 1951), and a slew of giant monster movies - *Godzilla* (Tanaka & Honda, 1954), *Them* (Wesibart & Douglas, 1954), *The Black Scorpion* (Dietz, Melford & Ludwig, 1957), *The Giant Gila Monster* (Curtis, McLendon & Kellogg, 1959) - all of which featured antagonists who were the products of either radiation or advanced technology and who had the ability to decimate cities, just like the A-bomb (Horton, 2016). William Palmer discusses this in “History as Film Text, Film as Historical Text”:

Like the documents out of which the conventional histories are constituted, the supposed “facts” or events of history are also “texts” that “rework” reality. Both Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra stress the duty of history to study “mechanisms of diffusion” whereby “texts and other artifacts are circulated and

used in society.” In these mechanisms of diffusion, historical events, which are inevitably susceptible to interpretation as texts, are expropriated, interpreted, and “reworked” by mass culture mechanisms (books, the print media, television, films) (Palmer, 1995).

Based on Palmer’s discussion, the films are a product of the interpretation of actual historical events. It means films have the capacity to recreate the real-life events in different ways to convey a meaning which is more comprehensible to the audience.

Dystopian post-apocalyptic films are not an exception, and the real historical events have affected the narrative of these films. Considering the World War II, its aftermath, and their collective effect on the world, the noticeable rise in the production number of dystopian post-apocalyptic films in the 1970s is rooted in the historical situation of that time. Films began to depict the alternate future of the world by using present-day issues and hot topics. To elaborate use of symbolic and real-life elements, *Babylon A.D.*

(Kassovitz, Valdes & Kassovitz, 2008) will be discussed as one of the post-9/11

dystopian post-apocalyptic films. In a near future, the mercenary Toorop (Vin Diesel) is hired by a powerful criminal named Gorsky (Gérard Depardieu) to smuggle a woman named Aurora (Mélanie Thierry) from a Noelite Convent in Mongolia to New York. In return, he will receive a large amount of money and a clear UN passport with new identity. Toorop joins Aurora and her guardian Sister Rebeka (Michelle Yeoh) as they pass through the dangerous Russian lands and borders being followed by mercenaries that also want Aurora. On their journey, Toorop finds out that Aurora has exceptional gifts. Once in New York, they see on the news that the Noelite Convent has been bombed and destroyed right after they left it. When Aurora discloses that she is a virgin and pregnant

with twins, Toorop figures out that there is something uncanny behind his mission and that he and Sister Rebeka are not part of Gorsky's plans. The film illustrates both historical and religious issues of post-9/11 world in its representation of nuclear war, and the rise of terrorism. In *Babylon A.D.* terrorists have taken over the majority of the world, including Russia, and the only safe place remains the United States. The film begins with a scene of Toorop walking in the streets of the new Russia. The scenes of the film remind the audience of some of the most well-known western media coverages about potential threats against the West, and particularly against the United States.



Figure 4. *Babylon A.D.* (2007): The Wall Painting of Statue of Liberty: Film's beginning with this scene implies the anti-American rhetoric of this post-apocalyptic world

The very first image shown to the audience is a wall painting of America's iconic Statue of Liberty with a skull instead of her face. This statue is a symbol of freedom and it's designed to represent liberty (Turner, 2000). This manipulated image, with the skull as a symbol of death and mortality, shows the anti-American attitude in that post-apocalyptic setting as the statue itself is a symbol of the United States. But what this painting on the wall represents is not just an ordinary painting which is specific to the setting of the film, but it also refers to real life. Beside the clue that it gives to the audience about the people who are against America being terrorists and uncivilized, it also refers to one of the

countries which were named as the Axis of Evil by former President George Bush, Iran (Pyszczyński et al., 2006).



Figure 5. A Wall painting of Statue of Liberty in Tehran: This painting is a symbol of Islamic regime's anti-American rhetoric by manipulating USA's iconic symbol of freedom to turn it into a symbol of death. (Photo by: Atta Kenare, AFP, Gettyimages.com, Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/08/22/iranians-thoughts-on-america-walsh-trump-dnt-vpx.cnn>)

It almost became a cliché for American media to use similar footages and pictures whenever they report news or produce content about Iran. The image not only resembles a similar street painting in Tehran, which connects it to the terrorism and disastrous situation in the film, it also relates to the anti-American rhetoric of the Islamic regime. Moreover, Iran is known as one of the radical Islamic states, and the only one which has hostile policies against the United States. Yet, Iran being named as one of the countries included in the Axis of Evil, it holds an aggressive position towards America not just in politics, but also in religious rhetoric beside the media coverages like the picture above. Maybe that's the reason for including such a recognizable image for the opening of a

dystopian post-apocalyptic film: it represents anti-American tendencies, the country which stands for it, the religion of that country, and the idea of them being terrorists. In this sense, *Babylon A.D.* wraps all the fears of the post-9/11 American audience about a potential apocalypse in a single frame.

2.3.2. Rise in the Number of Post-Apocalyptic Films

One significant cinematic production of the cold war era is *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (Kennedy & Miller, 1981). The film is about a nuclear war survivor travelling the highways of post-apocalyptic Australia, years after having avenged his wife, son, and his partner who were murdered by a motorcycle gang. Former Australian policeman Max Rockatansky (Mel Gibson) , now known as "The Road Warrior", searching for sources of fuel, stumbles upon a gasoline refinery that is home to a struggling community of survivors. He later finds out the community is being terrorized by a band of brutal motorcyclists led by The Humangus (Kjell Nilsson) and his finest warrior, Wez (Vernon Wells), who hoard the gasoline from the refinery for themselves. Max agrees to help the community transport the gasoline across the highway and fight for their freedom, leading them through a deadly chase by the Humangus and his warriors.

Although the film does not deal with the catastrophic event directly, it mentions the reason why the world turned into a dystopian wasteland. Indeed, it is the fear of experiencing a nuclear war leading to an apocalypse which is based on the aftermath of the blasts in the Japan and what may befall upon the world. As Claire Curtis says “In

speaking to our fears, post-apocalyptic fiction can serve the didactic purpose of warning us away from particular behaviors. Post-apocalyptic fiction as with critical utopia and dystopia criticizes where we are now and how and what we might wish to be” (Curtis, 2010). What Curtis discusses is that post-apocalyptic fiction and film also try to portray the future we wish to avoid. In such worlds, societies have been shattered and what is left of the metropolises and populated cities are either small groups of people sticking to each other like the settlers in *Mad Max 2 The Road Warrior* or lone wanderers like Max Rockatansky, who are not willing to engage in any form of contact just to maintain their survival. This representation of the communities and the survivors after the end is a universal theme for almost all the films dealing with the apocalypse.

After the end of the Cold War, the reason for catastrophe changes, and among all the dystopian post-apocalyptic films produced in 90s, none uses a nuclear war scenario. The new generation films basically dealt with artificial intelligence, viruses, and climate change. Since the fear of a nuclear war was no longer perceived as the main threat against humanity and civilization, the catastrophic incidents portrayed on film began to reflect newer fears. “Today, speculative visions of the future in film almost obligatorily present a dystopian vision of environmental-social apocalypse”, says Frederick Buell (Buell, 2004).

The Matrix (Silver & The Wachowskis, 1999) is a different and notable case of dystopian post-apocalyptic films of 90s because it uses not one, but two catastrophic incidents of apocalypse. In this film, the war against machines, or artificial intelligence, has led humankind to make radical decisions, first to remain the dominant force, and then to

defeat the enemy. During the year 1999, a man named Thomas Anderson (Keanu Reeves), alias *Neo*, lives an ordinary life. A software technician in a reputable company by day and an underground computer hacker by night, he sits alone at home by his monitor, awaiting a sign, a signal - from what or whom he has no knowledge about. Finally, one night, a mysterious woman named Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss) seeks him out and introduces him to that anonymous character he has been waiting for: Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne). Morpheus presents Neo with the truth about his world by shedding light on the dark secrets that have troubled him for so long. The world has been destroyed and people are living in a virtual reality system which is programmed to keep them dreaming of a normal life while being captivated by machines which are using them as a power source.

Besides presenting super intelligent machines which rebelled against their creators, this film also provides a unique take on apocalypse. When the war against the machines came to a critical point, humans made a radical choice to manipulate and alter the climate to destroy the machines, a decision which backfired and allowed machines to capture humans. In other words, the irreversible events which led to apocalypse began with the manipulation of climate by creating an artificial form in the atmosphere which prevented sunlight from reaching the Earth, because the solar radiations were the main source of energy for the robots. This post-apocalyptic world therefore has two layers: a virtual reality, which is a copy of the real world, and a second layer is the one that shows a truly dystopian society: free people have to live underground to stay safe from both the machines and the harsh environment. In this sense, by controlling and misusing nature as shown in the film, we become the victims. Žižek explains in his article on *The Matrix* and

the true reality that, “Therein resides the perfect revenge of nature for our domination over it: unknowingly, we are our own greatest victims, butchering ourselves alive” (Žižek, 2006). It is similar to actions taken by humans in today’s world, in which people manipulate everything in their own favor, including nature, resulting in great harm to the environment. The series thus combines two different causes of the end, showing natural decay that follows the rise of super intelligent artificial creatures who may not need the Earth in the way humans need it. This is the miscalculation that happens in *The Matrix*: humans thought that cutting robots’ access to sunlight would bring their downfall, but instead this shift turned humans into the most desirable energy source available.



Figure 6. *The Matrix* (1999): Morpheus shows Neo the real post-apocalyptic world. This scene shows how the world is destroyed after the manipulation of climate by humans and the war with robots. This shows the result of humankind’s wrong interaction with nature, turning to an anthropogenic world.

This frame of *The Matrix* shows how a dystopian post-apocalyptic world has no sign of the alive Earth available to humankind right now. Buildings are collapsed and deserted,

the sky is covered with dark clouds which stop sunlight, and the Earth is also dead, with no sign of life. The scene also contains the shades of dark colors which resemble destruction and death, with no green or blue as they represent the presence of life. An important part of dystopia is actually the deterioration of nature and civilization by any means. But in this case, humankind's manipulation of natural orders of nature not only led to a near-extinction situation, but led to robot domination. Humankind's attempt in manipulation of climate was for destroying robots, and to turn the climate as it was after the war. But this action forced robots to find new ways of accessing energy, using humans as a power source, and it made humans slaves to them with no turning back. This anthropogenic situation is the reason behind the misery of humankind.

2.4. The New Millennium

The new millennium is the golden age of dystopian post-apocalyptic films. This century was accompanied with prophecies regarding the end and above all, the most important one being Y2K computer bug (Schaefer, 2004). Even some Christian authors predicted that this bug would trigger the dawn of global economic chaos, a tool which will be used by antichrist (the antagonist of the Messiah) to get to power ("The Apocalypse is Still Coming," 1999). This prophecy is different from previous dystopian predictions because it points clearly to technology as the trigger for the apocalypse, a concept used in the groundbreaking film *The Matrix*.

No matter the cause, dystopia also commands a more significant portion of the popular imagination; the number of dystopian post-apocalyptic films produced in 21st century until November, 2018 is almost as many as the entire 20th century.

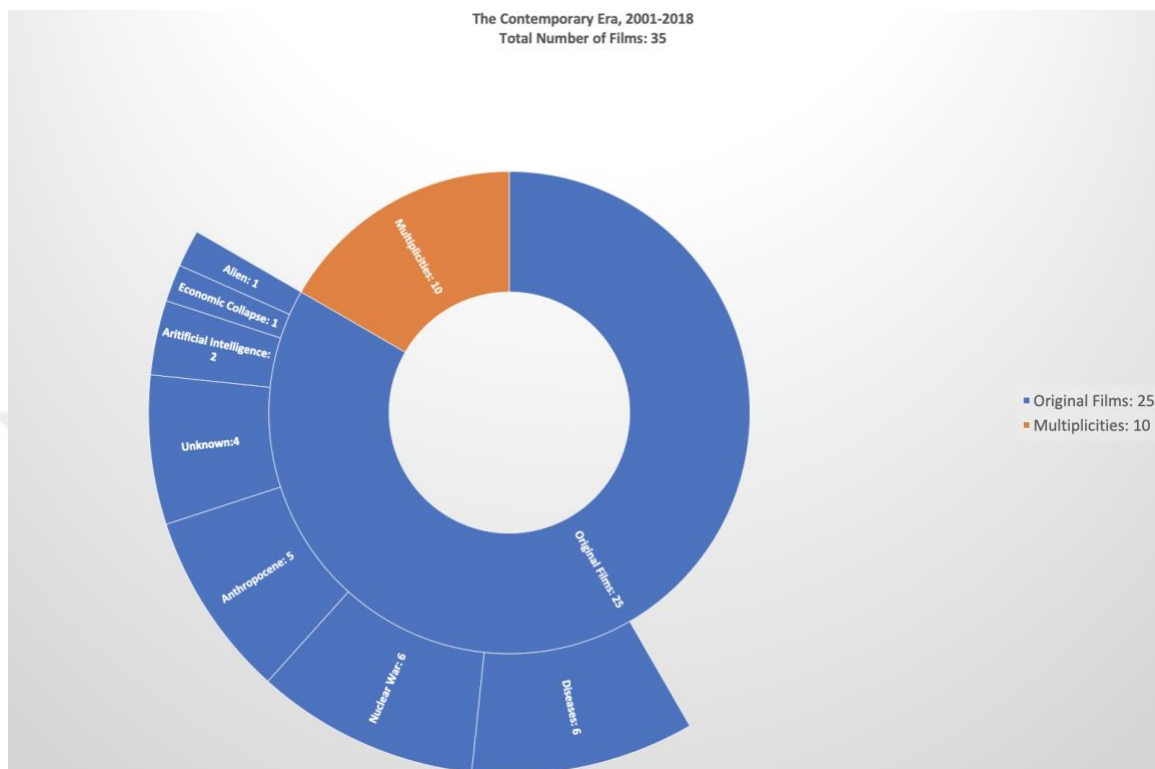


Figure 7. P.A Films of the Contemporary Era and the Reason of Apocalypse

What defines these contemporary post-apocalyptic dystopias? In general, dystopian societies are reflections of social concerns and fears that are prevalent at the moment of production. Combined with post-apocalypse, they produce an image of an dreadful ending in the future rooted in those fears. The amplified fears of the new millennium include another world war, viruses, aliens or artificial intelligence, natural disasters, and ecological problems leading humankind to near-extinction. It's true that the cinema industry had lots of limitations in producing such visual content which is verisimilar, and the recent, accelerating progress in VFX may be one of the reasons why more of these films have been produced. But, such a huge jump in the number of films after the turn of century also points to the social and political situation of the world at that point.

The new millennium experienced a terrorist attack in the United States, which was followed by two wars in the Middle East. Terrorism feels closer to home when people can hear about the latest news of attacks in a matter of seconds, and when terrorists can now attack citizens and institutions more effectively. Microbes (including viruses and bacteria) are more complex than before because of their genetic mutations and their resistance towards medicine; some of them, called superbugs, are totally resistant to any known cure (Cohen, 1992). Moreover, there is the possibility of manipulating microorganisms for creating weapons.

Majority of scientists are worried about the future of the world and what will happen with climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as a part of United nations which deals with climate change, has informed in its latest report by December, 2018 that human activity has caused a 1.0 degree centigrade raise in temperature compared to pre-industrial level. It would continue to rise up to 1.5 centigrade in a time between 2030 to 2052, which would cause major issues in sea water levels, compatibility of humans and animals, and pollution caused by the emission of greenhouse gases (“Global Warming,” 2018). These are the scenarios at hand, a vision of a world where at least one of these fears has come true and humanity has lost almost everything.

In a post-apocalyptic wasteland where the most basic needs of humans like access to water and food can be satisfied only with great difficulty, having civilization based on social ethics and humankind’s morality would be a dream which may never come true.

The post-apocalyptic fictional worlds have the dystopia within their own existence, or in other words, when the vital resources become scarce and few people can access them, people would do anything at any cost to maintain their survival. This chaotic situation in one way or another would turn any form of social group into a dystopian society. As a result, the films that are trying to show a dystopian vision of post-apocalypse by using lack of normal or accepted social behaviors may use the decay of nature as the reason for them.

When it comes to use of the elements of the decay of nature as the background of a post-apocalyptic world, Emily Auger describes Earth after the end as a despoiled, poisoned, and most of the time abandoned hinterland or as a bright desert. She then continues to explain the theme as a “symbolic emphasis on fire through images of sand, heat, sun, minimal vegetation, and the wreckage of industrial civilization” (Auger, 2011).

Anthropocene as the new state of the Earth which is the beginning of the era in which human actions have impacted the Earth’s geology and ecosystem is shown by the visual elements as Auger described. The visual representation uses scenes with hostile nature to create the anthropogenic world after the end. This era, as discussed before, brings along the possibility of the collapse of the natural order of the world because of humankind’s wrong and excessive use of nature, resulting in the fall of modern world and civilization accordingly. What makes it dystopian is the aftermath of such event which would turn the instinct of survival as the most important factor. As a result, the Anthropocene is not only affecting the physical world, but it will also mark a downfall for morality and culture. In brief, this chapter discusses the presence of dystopia, post apocalypse and the way these

two concepts are reflected into silver screen and how they have been affected by real-life events and historical issues to form a more comprehensive vision of the world after the end. The films and their symbolic use of the real issues were discussed and the framework which defines “contemporary” is set. Moreover, the presence of Anthropocene as a new element in portraying the dystopian world is argued. So, the next chapters would respectively discuss historical events and Anthropocene and the way both of them has shaped the image of dystopia in films with post-apocalyptic settings.

Chapter III

History and Religion

This chapter discusses contemporary dystopian post-apocalyptic films and two different elements which have affected their production and their narrative structure; historical events and religion. But what does it mean when the term “contemporary” comes before the “dystopia in post-apocalyptic films”? What is the exact timeline that the word contemporary refers to it in this setting? Considering numerous life-changing events in different parts of the world, one might argue that the new millennium marks the beginning of a new era in cinema as well as other parts of life. But unfortunately, this era began with a catastrophic terrorist attack against America which changed the world. So, the 21st century and 9/11 would be considered as the beginning point for our contemporary era.

Following contemporary, dystopia in even older films as one of the wildest imaginations being reflected in cinematic works, always had an important role in visual representation of the end and its aftermath. As a portrayal of people’s fear of future, the films with these themes reshape themselves with each major change in our world, showing a different form of the end. It has been affected by incidents like wars, diseases, technological

advances, and even hurricanes, with the apocalyptic end of humankind bringing end to the world in all these different ways. Yet, among all participating factors, two elements in the 21st century have led films follow a different path compared to similar events which defined dystopian and post-apocalyptic cinema for the past two decades: historical events and religious beliefs.

3.1. Historical Incident

As discussed in the second chapter, major real-life historical events affect the cinema industry, generating new forms of catastrophe according to the preoccupations of the films' contemporary audiences. As one of the most important early-21st century events, 9/11 has had an enduring impact on cinematic representation, including giving the end a new look (Dixon, 2004). The film industry as a whole, and especially the films which adopt this theme have changed their approach towards the reason of the end or the catastrophe based on the events after the year 2000. The beginning of the millennium was also the beginning of a new era of fear and terror (Pyszczyński, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003). On September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda Jihadists attacked the World Trade Center twin towers on American soil, resulting in a large death toll and disastrous mess (Dixon, 2004). According to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum³, 2,977 people lost their lives in the attacks, and the world has never been like what it used to be since that attack.

³ <https://www.911memorial.org/>

The “War on Terror” that the United States launched in the aftermath of these attacks started with the name of Operation Enduring Freedom, and it brought 23 nations under US leadership to go to war in Afghanistan (Sanchez, 2008), Iraq, and multiple terrorist groups in different countries. During and after these operations, the number of terrorist attacks increased and the fear of a chaotic world started to become reality. Table 1 shows an increase in the total number of terrorist attacks recorded from 1970 to 2016 per each year, and the biggest leap is less than a decade after 9/11.

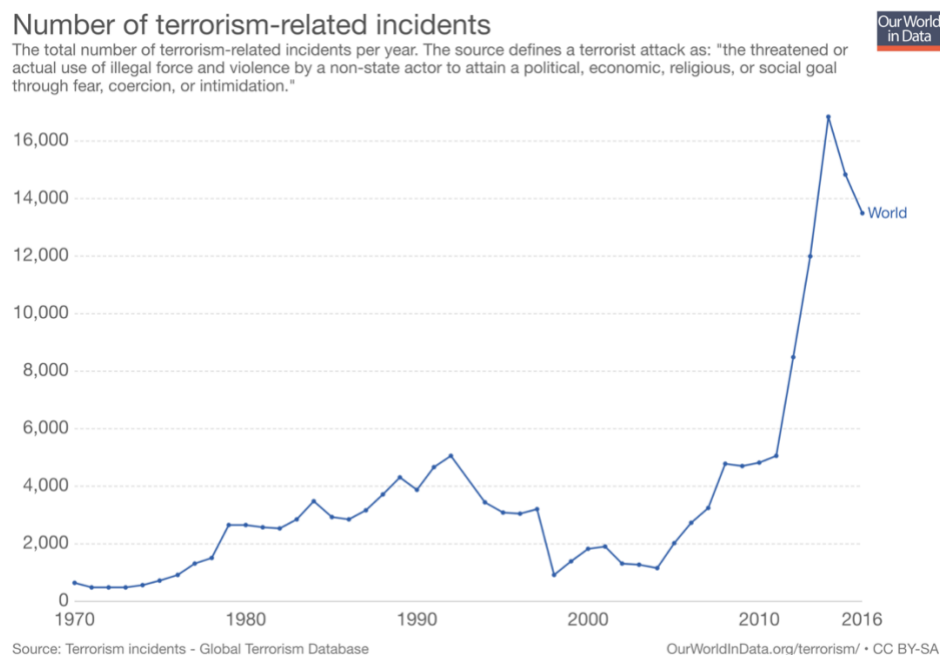


Figure 8. Number of Terrorism-Related Attacks⁴

At this time, the United States and its allies in the Iraq War failed to deter terrorism (D. Mitchell & Massoud, 2009) which made terrorist groups and militias more powerful and led the world to this dystopian-like situation. Terrorists have got bolder in their actions and their dreams. After a while, a radical Islamic group named ISIS nearly succeeded in

⁴ Ourworldindata.org/terrorism

forming a nation of their own based on pure Sharia laws by occupying vast lands in Iraq and Syria, starting to rule based on Sharia, exporting oil, and creating their own currency (Alkhshali, 2014). What happened in Iraq and Syria by the hands of ISIS was a direct outcome of American policies of war in the region that aided radical Islamists rise in different parts of the world to form a front against west; thus a dystopian society come into existence. Slavery, trade of women, beheading and torture, and so many other terrible actions were a daily part of this terrorist group's reign over those territories. 9/11 and all the events which came after that did not just affect a single region of the world, but those events did put pressure on other countries as well. Cinema, was not an exception and reflected what happened to be the most important issue at the time, and 9/11 as a turning point got its fair share of Hollywood (King, 2005).

When there is a comparison among different time periods regarding a specific subject, including cinema, looking at historical events and how they affect the industry is inevitable. Especially, with the genre of a potential fearful future, each of these events can take the humankind a step closer to that alternate reality. As discussed before, incidents of WWII and use of nuclear bombs actually made humankind aware of the cruelty of itself and potential destruction power which was never possessed by any creature on Earth (Young & Kerr, 2002). Wiping out two cities with a single bomb for each of them turned one of the worst nightmares of all time into a harsh reality.



Figure 9. Shows Hiroshima after the nuclear blast which totally destroyed the city. (Photo by: AFP Photo, 1945)

That these events shaped the image of the end and created the vision of the post-apocalypse which could be traced in the best works of coming decades. But, after World War II, for almost five decades there wasn't such an incident which had similar effect on the entire world. Of course, during this period many wars and conflicts started and ended all around the globe, yet none could be alike to the nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to show the world a mass destruction. Then, on September 11, 2001, a group of Jihadists hijacked planes and in a suicidal attacking, hitting them to the twin world trade center buildings in New York City (States, 2004).

The images taken of the attacks and after them bear similarities to those taken after the bombing of Hiroshima, though in a much smaller scale; the 31 years old twin towers collapsed in a matter of seconds, and Manhattan was filled with dust and ashes.



Figure 10. Remains of North WTC Tower: Image shows a completely destroyed site full of dust and ash. The picture of this site is similar to pictures of Hiroshima after nuclear blasts. (Photo by: Alamy.com, 2001)

“Ground Zero” refers to the WTC towers site after the terrorist attacks (Sturken, 2007).

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary the term means “the point directly above, below, or at which a nuclear explosion occurs” (Merriam-Webster, 2013), exposing that even among people and official authorities, this incident is not any less important than an atomic blast against American civilians.

The similarities between these two incidents is not limited to the imagery, the actual remains, or the naming, but extends as well to how the world changed after both of them, and in the case of cinematic productions, how films visualized these changes. After Hiroshima and during the Cold War, the vision of the end showed a wasteland with rare living creatures and unlivable conditions. Yet, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath created a different context for apocalyptic scenarios (Dixon, 2004). In the 21st

century, political clashes and wars were not the main reason for the apocalypse, but the difference in views and ideology among the people beside the governments became an important element in the storytelling. Events which took place right after the attacks and decisions which were made during those events helped this war to turn to the state of a crusade.

After the attacks, the United States launched two wars, ostensibly to fight global terrorism, each of which had as its major theater a Muslim majority country. Unlike the United States' use of nuclear bombs, which resulted in an instant end to the Asia-Pacific theater in World War II (Anderson, 2011), the war against terror continued and got even harder through the time. One factor which could be considered here is the difference between the goals of the two attacks: one was to make Japan surrender and put an end to the war, but the other launched clashes with different militias—not nation-states—linked to one another by their similar ideology. This ideological war made the impact on different fields including cinema which will be discussed later.



Figure 11. The Ground Zero Cross: A set of steel beams found among the debris of the WTC. It is named so because it resembles Christian Cross. Similar to the Crusades, this cross implies a religious war (Photo retrieved from: www.atheistapologist.com)

These attacks and the following wars have made the world less stable (Thrall & Goepner, 2017), a situation that contrasts with the post-World War II political landscape which was to maintain peace and avoid clashes, yet, the international coalition created to invade those countries was the largest ever assembled at that point in history. After such a big coalition among nations against a single enemy, it seems clear that the media had the opportunity to focus on that issue in order to keep up with those days' hot topic issue.

Hollywood tends to reflect the problems of each period of time in real-life in its cinematic works. This is more noticeable in Hollywood compared to other industries because of the number of productions, public interest in Hollywood films, and the target audience among all nations. However, this reflection of real-life events is not just a form of realism, it has been shown to be mixed with other concepts like aliens or monsters to generate an imaginative yet connected to reality world as in sci-fi films. Also, these real

issues have proved the potential to be used as driving force in politics as propaganda in Hollywood. From cinematic productions about Native American Indians to the Cold War and Soviets, a form of propaganda is noticeable in films (Fyne, 1997), which leaves no surprise to see 9/11 and its aftermath becoming a major theme and element in cinematic works. This new world of the new era with its chaotic appearance not only compelled the industry to take sides rather than be neutral in this crusade, as President Bush named it, it also inspired them of imagining a dark future.

3.2. Historical Representation

After 9/11, there were attempts to avoid direct references to the incident and even to certain generic forms of violent spectacle as well. However, after a rather short period of time, Hollywood produced not only films that had the same level of violence seen in the late 1990s, but also films precisely about the attacks (Dixon, 2004). Numerous films since 9/11 have referred to the incident by portraying Muslims as terrorists or relating the act of war to what happened in Manhattan (Veldhausz, 2017). Some imitate or recreate that event slightly or in great detail, including *Man of Steel* (Nolan, Roven, Snyder, Thomas & Snyder 2013), *United 93* (Bevan, Fellner, Greengrass, Levin & Greengrass, 2006), and *Cloverfield* (Abrams, Burk & Reeves, 2008). This recreation may be related to evoking the feelings of target audience to affect them deeper. By doing so, it will attract the viewers to watch the films which create the feeling of sympathy and help to arouse the sense of patriarchy among the American viewers. “Remembering an event, a situation, or a person can evoke a shiver of excitement, the heat of anger, or the anguish of grief. Although emotion that is activated by a memory may not be felt as intensely as

the actual experience, the recall can be enjoyable or painful nonetheless” (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). So, using 9/11 or concepts similar to what happened there, is a way of attracting people to watch the films by using notions which are tangible by the audience.

In the case of films related to 9/11, the remembered feeling is painful for many viewers who were witnesses to the event, but the narrative structures of the films tend to give the actions during the event and its aftermath a heroic victorious sense. These films build a war of good versus evil, and since the evil side is already there, the films are there to show how the righteous prevails over the wrong. So, using the notion of good vs. evil and historical event to paint an image of the evil in post-apocalyptic films not only helps the audience to feel that setting, but this usage of good vs. evil notion makes it easier to create the dystopian sense of a future in which the free world has been taken over.

Therefore, by using 9/11, films dealing with the post-apocalypse have portrayed the world after the apocalyptic incident and the new society which emerged after that to build the dystopia within both real and fictional realms. To convey the discussion further, *Man of Steel* as one of the films which directly imitates what happened back in New York in 9/11 will be analyzed.

3.2.1. *Man of Steel*

Man of Steel is one of only a few films having both apocalypse and post-apocalypse in their narratives. Kal-El (Henry Cavill), son of Jor-El (Russel Crowe) and Lara (Ayelet Zurer), is sent to Earth after his home planet Krypton comes to a complete collapse, an apocalyptic incineration. Living by the name Clark Kent, he discovers his true persona

when he is guided to become Superman: A hero committed to protect Earth from the apocalyptic harm that threatens it. However, General Zod (Michael Shannon), a military leader of Krypton, looks at Earth's fate differently and decides to destroy the current existence on the planet and rebuild Krypton there by sacrificing all humans. Superman, with the help of the US military and news reporter Lois Lane, makes an alliance to stop Zod from obliterating human existence.

Man of Steel is the sixth solo Superman film, and it is fundamentally different from the others in how it portrays the danger that confronts humanity. In *Superman*, *Superman III*, *Superman IV*, and *Superman Returns*, someone from earth (Lex Luthor and Ross Webster) are the threats to the world. In *Superman II*, it is Zod that attacks the earth. But, his intention is not to destroy the earth; instead, he wants to enslave humans and rule over them. In contrast, Zod in *Man of Steel* intends to destroy the earth and build Krypton, or his own utopia, on earth. This film finds its relevance to dystopian post-apocalyptic films in two main parts. First, being sent to Earth because of an apocalypse, Superman is framed as a Messianic figure with the burden of leading humankind to survival from the dangers of another apocalypse. Second, the catastrophic incident happening on Earth is much alike what happened in 9/11: a group of people are trying to destroy human civilization in order to build a world at odds with this civilization's ideals. These attack on humankind resembles Al Qaeda's goal in the terrorist attacks: destroying WTC to show the failure of nations collaboration, aiming to create chaos instead. In other words, Superman becomes the figure who prevents the world from a cataclysm, destruction, and a dystopian world created on the ashes of the previous one. In another Superman film,

Superman Returns (Adler, Singer, 2006), Superman (Brandon Routh) tries to prevent his human nemesis Lex Luthor (Kevin Spacey) from destroying the Earth using Kryptonian technology. But *Man of Steel* (Budget: 225 million USD) was more successful in the international Box Office with more than 30% margin⁵ (668 million dollars compared to *Superman Returns*' 391 million dollars), and *Superman Returns* (Budget: 204 million USD) is not a post-apocalyptic film; the threat of destruction is not carried out. It is worth mentioning that in the same year, another post-apocalyptic film, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Jacobson & Kilik, Lawrence, 2013) was ranked first in the yearly Box Office, although this example neither shows nor describes the apocalyptic catalytic event itself. To understand the links between *Man of Steel* and 9/11, it is necessary to elaborate the use of cities in cinema to portray dystopia.

As Barbara Mennel discusses, in early science fiction films the role of mise-en-scène is important in portraying the utopian/ dystopian image of that society. Cities in superhero movies are located in the approximate present, or a contemporary history when the real cityscape loses its important place in science fiction, since the environment which was built is losing its deep connection and relativity with modernism, utopian, and dystopian idea of urbanism (Mennel, 2008). In other words, the city shifts from its symbolic representation of a utopian/dystopian society to a reflection of an actual historical event. These films do so by borrowing the known setting and framing it as a different yet tangible location for the audience. New York (also known as Metropolis) is a crucial part of Superman's narrative; in almost all the materials out there about Superman (comic

⁵ Data retrieved from IMDB.com

books, films, series, and etc.) there is at least a trace of the city (Eco & Chilton, 1972).

But the way the city and clashes are shown in this particular film relate the viewer to the terrorist attacks that happened back in 9/11.



Figure 12. Aliens Attack Downtown from *Man of Steel* (2013): Zod, as an alien, is attacking the Earth to destroy the current civilization and to build his own world. The location of this attack, its purpose, and the fact that non-humans are attacking the earth is similar to what people think of Al Qaeda.

What makes this scene significantly close to the 9/11 is the similar spot in the city that the aliens attacked among all other possible places, the downtown. This location is the downtown area with all the skyscrapers around it, full of people, resembling the location of the WTC buildings in New York City. The demolition of a single spot and gradual spread to other places is similar to what happened when the towers collapsed and it got spread to several blocks each way. The aim of the attack to a downtown area to destroy all humankind is in another way similar to terrorists' purpose of their attacks. Their goal was, and still is, to create an Islamic state to rule the world based on their Sharia. By destroying one of the eminent institutions of cooperation among all nations, their idea was to mark a beginning to their main goal. The film also depicts an attack which spreads to other parts of the world and destroys what is on its way. Moreover, their attacking style

seems similar: both aliens and terrorists aimed for total destruction of the current civilization, not just conquering it. Demolishing the current order seems vital to building a new one.

Snyder included similar images in his film, either directly like people running from buildings collapsing, or through metaphorical imagery as the invasion of the city's most crowded part by aliens whom resemble the Jihadists, people who represent not even their fellow Muslims, people who are different than any group of people, like aliens, being there just to destroy and annihilate. These aliens have a purpose: to destroy the civilization and create a new system similar to what they had on Krypton. Likewise, terrorists of Al Qaeda had an ideology which motivated them to do the act of terror. During the scene when people are running for their life, the situation and the way they have been portrayed reminds the viewer of the 9/11 attacks.



Figure 13. Left: Characters running in *Man of Steel* (2013) is similar to the picture in the right. The collapsing buildings in the background with a cloud of dust and abandoned cars remind the viewer of the 9/11 attacks and the pictures and footages of that incident.
Right: 9/11, Running from Collapsing WTC. Photo by: AFP

The picture in the left is from a scene in *Man of Steel* where Clark Kent's coworkers are running from the buildings which are collapsing behind them because of Zod's attack.

The picture in the right is a photograph of 9/11 when one of the WTC buildings has collapsed and people are running away. There are obvious similarities between two images. First, both depict people who are running while there is a building collapsing just behind them. Second, the scene from the film shows a huge amount of dust and steel in the background similar to the real event at Ground Zero where massive remnants had covered a few blocks. Third, it seems like in both shots there are cars abandoned by their owners. Leaving everything behind simply indicates the shock during the collision, and the fact that people have got no time and they just run for their life. With this amount of similarity in such a dramatic scene of the film to the real pictures of 9/11, one could argue that this cannot be unintentionally and the director of the film used such a scene with full knowledge in order to draw a narrative parallel between the film and historical events, and to incite emotional responses. As discussed earlier, using scenes similar to real life is a method to attract the viewer and also evoke the feelings in order to create a sense of tangibility among the audience by simulating the same traumatic feelings.

The last Superman film which was produced before the new millennium was released many years before Snyder's film. *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (Globas, Golan & Furie, 1987) was produced during the Cold War, with a story based on a potential atomic catastrophe, and Superman (Christopher Reeve) is pursuing a nuclear disarmament. He later faces his enemy, "Nuclear Man". Nuclear Man (Gene Hackman) is a man-made

android (made from the genes of Superman) whose duty is to kill Superman and thus enable its creator Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman) to do what he wants to. The story here depicts a conflict between man and self, since Nuclear Man is partly a replica of Superman himself. Man vs. self means an internal struggle in which the character must overcome his/her nature and desires in binary situations like good or evil or logic and emotion (Lamb, 2008). This is a clear example of the presence of similar use of real events to portray fears in the films. Nuclear Man, a character created during the last years of the Cold War, is the personification of an atomic war in a super hero film, while he is against his own true self, the real Superman. So, *Man of Steel* is not the first one in this series to do so, and here this personification of the self is Superman's clash against his own identity, or in other words, his real true self. The concept of being against his self seems to be a crucial part of Superman in the films. At some point being forced to choose between his true identity as a Kryptonian or his obtained identity as a resident of Earth, he stands against his true self and his real identity: his nature of returning to his origins. By choosing Earth over his original identity, he as well favors the people of Earth over himself for the sake of the greater good of the righteous side.

On the other hand, *Man of Steel* displays a direct, external conflict of man against man (Lamb, 2008). The Kryptonians and their leader Zod, who are attacking Earth, represent an enemy different from normal people. This enmity is not the result of a betrayal or the foul desires of a man, which is how Superman's enemies are portrayed in films of 1987 and 2006, but rather shows an antagonist who stands against the very being of mankind, making people feel it necessary to be united against this common enemy. To elaborate in

detail, it is similar to the actions taken after 9/11 terrorist attacks, creating a group of friends and social alienation of others as enemies. People who are associated with the perpetrators of terror acquire a non-human feature. Social alienation means “a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment” (Ankony & Kelley, 1999). The film shows Superman has befriended the people of the Earth, yet at the same time he is alienated from his born identity as a Kryptonian. His efforts in saving Earth leads to the destruction of the remains of Krypton’s civilization and people. Similar alienation happened after 9/11 terrorist attacks. In this sense, Superman in *Man of Steel* demonstrates the messianic figure who saves the world against the group which is not a part of this world, a role which he had been given before and studied in characteristics now turns to real symbolic visual representations.

In an act which led world and specially media to create such a mindset, president George W. Bush stated in one of his speeches in congress, talking to nations of the world, that in this fight against terrorism, “either you are with us, or you’re with the terrorists” (Solheim, 2006), creating a black and white polar situation. With this as the political backdrop, Hollywood either used Muslims as that “other” or “aliens” which are threats to existence of mankind, or to create this other in different forms, visually or symbolically. This battle was not just against terrorism when it came to speeches, it got a religious/ideological tendencies in its core. The battle was a series of attacks started by Muslim Jihadist terrorists against the most powerful country in the world, which happens to be a

Christian majority one, leading to a war which took a different path right after president Bush called it a crusade (Bush, 2001). Eventually, not after a long period of time, this war against terrorism was considered as a serious crusade by the media too (Cockburn, 2002).

The historical crusades were nine clashes between the Christians and Muslims over the Holy lands from 1096 to 1291. These wars were named crusade because the Christian armies were carrying a cross to battlefields (Runciman, 1987). Although the first war started as a pilgrimage (Asbridge, 2012), eventually it turned into a clash between followers of two major Abrahamic religions. Holding a great importance in Christian-Muslim relationships throughout history, the Crusades also refer to military and ideological clash between these religions which has been there for centuries and may be there forever, casting a shadow on their relationship. Assuming this is a crucial factor between these religions and their relation to each other, any form of violence done by one of these sides against the other could mean a lot more than a simple act of hostility.

With attempting acts of terrorism in American soil, Jihadist Muslims have triggered the sense of rivalry between the two religions again, and in response, the United States started a couple of wars continuing up to date, wars that were against two Muslim majority countries, their governments, and the radical Islamist groups residing on their soil. Bush's speech and his naming these wars a crusade, gave the wars a validity and authenticity and created a harsh feeling towards Muslims. From a Muslim's point of view, this war was not solely against terrorism but it was meant to be against the ordinary people as a part of conspiracy theory of war against Islam which got popular after 2001 (Esposito & Shahin,

2016). Different studies have shown the number of civilian deaths in all the battles a number ranging from 480,000 (“US killed people,” 2018) to 2 million (Wilkins, 2015), only 60,000 to 80,000 being terrorists (Bump, 2016). At the same time the number of deaths among Americans were less than 7,000 in both wars⁶ (“Casualty report,” 2013). With all these, the sense of crusade didn’t just initiate among Christians, but Muslims felt the same way. This situation eased the ground for the media and especially film industry to depict the dystopian post-apocalyptic portrayal based on this new crusade. In other words, the situation turned to a real religious battle in real-life, and by watching any film reflecting similar concept, the audience could feel and experience the same tense feeling as it was going on in reality.

The righteous character in the film is there to save humanity, Superman has always had an underlying religious theme no matter which film of this series is chosen for analysis. Yet, in *Man of Steel* this role had been enhanced to a visible visual representation of the character. As an earlier example, Anton Kozlovic, an academician with researches on Christianity in films, goes through one of the earlier films named *Superman* (Spengler & Donner, 1978) and talks about religious motifs⁷ in the film. “It’s a motif I had done at the beginning when Brando sent Christopher Reeve to Earth and said, ‘I [Jor-El] send them my only son [Kal-El].’ It was God sending Christ to Earth.” It was a dramaturgical decision that made good sense, for just as Superman was literally a super-man, Jesus was “the ultimate Super Jew of his day,” the “Christian superhero,” the pop culture “God with

⁶ <http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByMonth.aspx>

⁷ Motif is any symbolic element in a narrative which recurs and by this repeats, it may lead to generate of other narrative aspects such as theme or mood (Silver & Ursini, 2004).

us” (Kozlovic, 2016). With such an integration to a religious belief, Superman’s role as the savior includes his visual representation alongside the way his character is developed in the *Man of Steel*.



Figure 14. Superman and religious imagery in *Man of Steel* (2013): Figurative crucifixion of the superhero, sacrificing his (alien) self for the sake of humankind.

In Figure 9, Superman’s posture resembles crucifixion. He is now resurrected and is going back to Earth to save mankind from the evil force of Zod. Having the planet Earth in the background is also a significant detail that shows him greater than any power on Earth; he possesses the sight and power over the world in order to protect it. His father Jor-El watching his son going to planet Earth is another Christian motif of Jesus Christ as the son of God, sent to save humankind. Importantly, Superman’s mother, Lara, is present in the beginning of the film when they send their son to Earth to save him. But, later on, it is his father that shows the right path to Clark. Similar to Christianity and the fact that even trinity includes the father and the son, but not the mother who gave birth to the son.

The resemblance is not just limited to Superman's characteristics and the way his personality has defined as a self-giving man, ready to sacrifice himself. But the very ideology of Christianity and Christ as the savior and righteous side, and the aliens as the unrighteous is traceable in narrative of these films. Although he is an alien himself, he is adopted by a human family and he is adapted to being a human, holding no potential threats against humankind. In other words, his identity is defined within our world, and he is not considered as an alien who is alienated and considered as enemy. Now he possesses the quality of an ordinary man who has superpowers rather than an alien residing on Earth.

3.3. Dystopian Faith

As said earlier, 9/11 recreated a righteous side based on historical crusade wars, forming the USA and its allies as the good side of this clash. But, the evil was not limited to the borders of one or multiple countries like the righteous; the new evil was an ideology identified as the religion of Islam. Back in late 70s and 80s there was a war between the Soviets and Afghanistan, a war in which many other countries involved in favor of one of these sides, including the United States. The fear of communism as a dangerous ideology and its spread to other parts of the world concerned Americans enough that they helped and supported Mujahedeen (an Afghani Islamic militia) in their war against the Soviet Union (Coll, 2004). The aid to Islamist insurgents was also part of America's policy in taking sides in proxy wars in order to stand against an ideology, but through this support

they unintentionally gave the power to the radicals whose doctrine came to enact its resentment towards the West.

Later, after the fall of the Soviet Union, these groups and their further actions started a new ideological war. This can be traced directly back to the beginning of the 21st century and the terrorist attacks on American soil, which can be identified as the contemporary beginning of a group known as US against THEM, or the United States of America versus Islam which started the hostility between the East [Middle East] and the West (K A Powell & Abadi, 2003). From 9/11 to this day, criminals (or terrorists) were mostly Arabs and Middle Eastern, which led to create an image of Muslims and browns known as “others” or “followers of Islam”. Therefore, for people who decide about the general agenda and policies in media, those terrorists became representatives of Islam (Kimberly A Powell, 2011). Islam is associated with what Muslims do, and it is considered as if all Muslims are supportive of each other under any circumstances, no matter what it is. As a result, any action done by any Muslim would be considered as the motivation of Islam. Consequently, this religion became a source of terror in media and respectively, among the audience of this media. The act of 9/11 terrorist attacks done by Al Qaeda’s radical fundamentalists were taken as the intent of the religion of Islam to destroy what the West and the Western culture stands for; concepts such as freedom, democracy, and equality. Therefore, to visualize a vision of a post-apocalyptic world, the religion of Islam became the main source to create the ideological aspect of the dystopia. By doing so, the side which acquired the qualities related to Islam is portrayed as the evil, and the survivors need to stand against it.

While the largest number of terror attacks are done by radical Islamists in the West and Middle East since 9/11, and terrorism itself is related to barbarism, evil, and lack of freedom (Bhatia, 2008), it is not surprising to see the media and especially films portray people, societies, and any visual representation of them using these links to make it more visible and tangible for the audience. As a result, references to Islam and its radical concepts or terrorism (Jihadists) either as direct portrayal or stereotypical reference could be found in many films. These stereotypical images entered the industry and became a cliché in portraying terrorists and their characteristics in post-9/11 Hollywood.

... although the [terrorist-oriented] films were exciting, immediate and tense in a way they were not before, the cinema of terrorism became the primary means for the political criticism (especially of what happened after the wars and justified because of issues like Guantanamo bay) and assessment of America's War on Terror Legacy. Terrorists were clearly defined as religiously inspired (as were their adversaries in the Bush government as Oliver Stone's Bush biopic *W.* made clear) and a new concern for religious and cultural sensitivity to the Muslim world infiltrated films such as *Body of Lies* and *Traitor*. And the rise of Islamic fundamentalism had given the genre (action, thriller) two new set pieces- the beheading video and the suicide bombing- the dramatization of which began to emerge as structural principles in the post-9/11 cinema of terrorism (Cettl, 2010).

As a result, post-apocalyptic films obtained the same clichés as well, leading to a different portrayal of the world after the catastrophe compared to the films of previous

decades. These new visual representations are associated with dystopia, and since they are originated in the acts of terror done by Muslim fundamentalists, they depict a certain image of Islam in their demonstration. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a prominent example of this visual symbolic representation of 9/11 as a historical event.

3.3.1. *Mad Max* Series

By becoming customary in the industry, certain depictions of post-9/11 terrorists in dystopian post-apocalyptic films became a kind of cliché. This trope used religion as the new representation of the three important characteristics of a dystopian society: barbarism, evil, and lack of freedom. To discuss how these characteristics have been reflected and connected to religion in films, I selected *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Mitchell & Miller 2015) based on two reasons. First, it is a sequel to a series of films produced in the 1970s and 1980s, which would make it easier to observe the way villains have changed in contemporary dystopian films while the trigger of apocalyptic event didn't change; and second, the film was an awards season and box office hit with more than 200 wins including six Oscars and net international gross of nearly 400 million USD (on a budget of 150 million USD), indicating its resonance with the industry and the public alike⁸.

The film is set years after the fall of civilization due to a nuclear war, the tyrant Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) enslaves survivors of the apocalyptic incident in a desert with a fortress called the Citadel, located in the heart of a mountain, which allows him to control

⁸ Data retrieved from IMDB.com

the water resources. When one of his elite warriors, Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron), helps Immortan Joe's wives escape, she finds herself allied by mere luck with Max Rockatansky (Tom Hardy), a loner and former cop. Having the advantage of being in the massive, armored truck "the War Rig", they try to outrun the brutal dictator and his brainwashed followers in a fatal chase through the Wasteland.

The whole series portrays dystopia in terms of barbarism, evil, and lack of freedom as characteristics of post-apocalyptic culture by showing a tyrant in control of water to rule over the people, and by creating an ideology to form a totalitarian evil institution. But *Fury Road* demonstrates sharp differences with the previous entries in two key areas: the role of women, and ideology. By looking at the first *Mad Max* (Kennedy & Miller, 1979) which is not a post-apocalyptic film, but rather a dystopian society in chaos, it is quite clear that what goes on in that society, with all the wrongs and problems, is not shaped around the idea of the existence of oppression towards women. Max's spouse is living freely like her husband and there is not a noticeable limit on her actions or freedom of life style.

In another scene, there is a group of youngsters including women in the neighborhood just before the gang's arrival to sabotage their party, resulting in a pursue of a couple.



Figure 15. *Mad Max* (1979): A group of men and women are partying in the neighborhood; it doesn't show any form of inequality between men and women.

There is a lady in the group, and two other women can be seen in the background walking and partying freely. The society, even though being at the verge of falling into a dystopian situation, doesn't show any noticeable obvious form of oppression on women, nevertheless there might be other forms of sexism traceable in the film.

In the second film of the series and the first with a post-apocalyptic narrative, *Mad Max: The Road Warrior*, women are represented as equal to men among the group of survivors, working together to maintain their survival in their struggle against harsh nature and hostile gangs. There are female leaders who are also among those who are in charge of maintaining the small society's discipline. Their point of view is appreciated as much as the men's ideas.



Figure 16. *Mad Max Road Warrior* (1981): Society of Survivors. The image shows a woman in the foreground where she gets attention more than men in the pic. Their clothes are similar and there is no difference between men and women in their clothing. But still, she has feminine appearance with long hair and shaped brows.

And finally, the last film of the earlier trilogy, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Miller & Miller, Ogilvie, 1985), has not only a similar perspective to toward women and their role in the society, but it also has a female character who is powerful, and in charge of a society of survivors, and in a competition with a man to take full control. Regardless of the outcome of the battle for power, Aunty Entity (Tina Turner) represents a powerful figure of women in the society, being capable of commanding and controlling the vital aspects of society. Similar to previous films, neither side wins the competition to become the proprietor of the land regardless of their gender, which could be seen as one of the ways that women have been shown in the films similar to male opponents.



Figure 17. *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985): The Queen is dressed in exposing clothes, she has earrings and her hair is long. Auntie Entity is a powerful woman and has the feminine characteristics. Partial nudity is gender-neutral, similar to *Mad Max II* (1981), which shows a sharp difference compared to the *Mad Max* (1979).

But with *Fury Road* everything about gender roles changes and women being oppressed, their rights, and their independence becomes a major theme of the film. The tyrant, Immortan Joe, not only forces captive women to produce milk, he also holds the most beautiful ones as his “breeders,” or in other words, as sex slaves. They are not allowed to leave by their own will, and they have been imprisoned not in a prison cell, but a safe to keep them away completely from the outside world. In a scene, wives are trying to break free of the chastity belts, which is a sexual domination tool. For Immortan Joe, the wives are nothing more than his exclusive sex slaves, and he owns every aspect of their lives including social and sexual relationship and their maternity. Its similarity to role of women in Islam is not visual, but rather in the nature of considering women as the commodities owned by men. Based on Islamic Sharia, women have to cover themselves

to be safe from other men, as chastity belt does; and women have to get their father/husband's permission for their social activities. If not granted, they cannot do what they want, as Immortan Joe did by imprisoning them in a safe.



Figure 18. Mad Max Fury Road (2015): Chastity Belts of Breeders. The belts are used by Immortan Joe to keep his ownership on his wives.

Islam is also criticized for treating women as lesser beings who are just created to serve men. Although it is not solely Islam which is targeted for this criticism, and it is not the only religion which is teaching these laws about women, this film could be connected to Islamic fundamentalism because of its time of production. There were three other films of this series directed by the same director decades prior, none of which includes such an image of women. Regarding the previous discussion on dystopian post-apocalyptic films being a reflection of the fears in society at the time of production, this film uses its portrayal of women to refract the image of radical Islam and project this highly gendered worldview onto the dystopia it creates. It is important to take into consideration that this film is produced when ISIS, the most horrifying radical Islamist group of our time started to occupy a large region in Iraq and Syria, starting a caliphate by promising that they will

reign basically and purely by Islamic laws, which explicitly include oppression of women.



Figure 19. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): Breeders in the left and Mothers Producing Milk in the right. Women in the film are treated as sex slaves or commodities by Immortan Joe

Indeed, the rebellion against Immortan Joe is an act of uprising against gender inequality in his male-dominated system. Emperor Furiosa and the wives' goal is to reach "The Land of Many Mothers", and their motto is to establish that they are not some kind of property to be owned by him (or anyone else), something which is directly and indirectly mentioned multiple times during the film.



Figure 20. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): The Message Written on The Wall by Breeders, showing their intention of escaping the Citadel is the way Immortan Joe is treating them; not as human beings, but as things he owns.

As a matter of fact, slavery is still allowed by Islamic law, but the reforms in most Islamic countries' laws have banned the trade. Slaves have not only been purchased freely in Islamic states in Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, their sons and daughters which were born in captivity considered slaves as well (Esposito, 2009). Also, purchasing female slaves for sex was and still is legal according to the perspective of Sharia, which was the most common reason and motive for purchasing the slaves in all Islamic history (Brunschvig, 1960). The way Immortan Joe captured and held these women and his intentions towards them is so similar to what radical Islam had described for slaves. Similar to today's reading of Islam by terrorist groups like ISIS, he owned those women and used them as sex slaves. The way he treats them as prisoners and the name he has given them, *The Breeders*, shows his perspective toward the wives as people who are dedicated to his service.

Another element about the film which is similar to Islamic Sharia is that Immortan Joe has multiple breeders, resembling polygamy in Islam. By Sharia, each man is allowed to marry up to four women known as Nikah, while it is a sin for a woman to have more than one husband. Thus, in a similar way, Immortan Joe has multiple women for himself naming them as breeders, but none of those breeders is allowed to be with another man. By forcing them to wear chastity belts, he keeps his sexual dominance over them as well⁹.

Also, unlike in the previous trilogy, Max's own story is not the main focus of the film. The main focus is rather how he comes to the aid of Furiosa and the freed captives. The film shows no women among any sections of the ruling system, except for Imperator Furiosa who does not embody stereotypically feminine characteristics. Furiosa also does not look like any of other women in previous trilogy. In the first film, Jessie (Joanne Samuel) had long hair, wearing feminine clothes (shorts and bikinis). In the second film, although their clothing is not different to men, still there are some feminine side to female characters. For instance, Warrior Woman (Virginia Hey) has long hair and very feminine shaped brows. In the third film, Aunty Entity has long hair, earrings, and exposing feminine dress with high heels. The portrayal of Furiosa is in sharp contrast to how Hollywood normally visually represents ordinary women in general; as Reema Dutt says, women in Hollywood films are held to unreachable standards of beauty, brains, body, and behavior, among other things (Dutt, 2014). By those standards, Furiosa is not ordinary at

⁹ There is another form of marriage in Islam named Nikah mut'ah which is practiced among Twelver Shia Muslims, literally meaning the marriage of pleasure which is a temporary marriage and has no limits in number (Berg, 2003). But Shia is a minority branch in Islam and the majority of the Muslims all around the world are Sunnis who don't practice temporary marriage.

all. She has very short hair, black grease on her forehead, a mechanical hand, and clothes similar to male characters of the film. This contrasts not only with previous representations of women, but her attire is also radically different from that of the breeders, implying that to gain power in the misogynistic system, like Furiosa's appearance and physical look and behavior, a woman has to use masculine (or tough) characteristics; or, if they be feminine the way breeders are dressed and behave, they will become slaves to men in such a dystopian male-dominated society.

Beside the fear of Islam over the role of women in the society as the gender, which is less important than males rather than the physical appearance, the film uses 9/11 stereotypes to deepen the dystopian understanding of a post-apocalyptic world. For instance, unlike villains in the previous trilogy, Immortan Joe has created his own religion. His soldiers or War Boys are not gathered just to maintain their survival, but to practice a holy set of beliefs or ideology, provided by the tyrant himself. His place in this systematic totalitarian society is a reminder of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Similarly Al Qaeda was more an ideology than an organization (Burke, 2004), which led the world to the catastrophic terrorist attacks to World Trade Centers and organized the terrorists to continue their battle against the West. Immortan Joe, like Osama bin Laden, has the qualities of an ideologue, ruling over his followers, the War Boys. Instead of a direct reference to Islam and Osama bin Laden, a different, ancient ideology demonstrates the blind worship of a tyrannical dictator by the believers.

Joe's cult, which integrates newly created rituals sacralizing the car culture of the War Boys with older elements from Norse mythology,

serves as a legitimizing ideology for his power. The beliefs and rituals of the War Boys justify Joe's rule over them, identifying him as a godlike figure. 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 hyper masculinity that connects Earthly dangers to cosmic rewards (Fuist, 2016).



Figure 21. Mad Max: Fury Road (2015): A War Boy attempting a suicidal attack. This is a form of aggression which was absent in the previous trilogy. War Boys are ready to sacrifice themselves for an ideology

This ideological dictatorship has similarities to Islamic radicals, not just in theory, but also as Immortan Joe and his War Boys act in the film. For instance, unlike in the previous trilogy the henchmen serving Immortan Joe show tendencies to sacrifice themselves in order to meet him in Valhalla. First, the concept of sacrifice for an ideology, or suicidal attacks is directly connected to what Islamic radicals did in 9/11, since the suicide attacks were not common among Islamic radicals except for Shiite militants before 1990, yet it was the incidents from 1996 to 2006 (and of course 9/11) that made the act of suicidal attacks become an Islamic stereotype for Westerners and

Muslims themselves (Feldman, 2006). Second, the concept of being rewarded for this sacrifice is a radical Islamic belief.

...religion provides the framework because the bombers believe they are acting in the name of Islam and will be rewarded as martyrs. Since martyrdom is seen as a step towards paradise, those who commit suicide while discarding their community from a common enemy believe that they will reach an ultimate salvation after they die (Oliveti, 2002).

So, it can be inferred that this massive violence and the ideology that justifies that violence in this film, which was absent in previous films could be connected to the potential image of a frightening future, a concept and vision which radical Muslims created in 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Alongside the act of violence itself, as Fuist discusses, there is a ritual before the violence. This ritual in the film is made up of two parts: War Boys spray chrome into their mouth before a suicide attack and then scream "Witness Me" to ask others to observe the suicide and hail them after their death. In Islam, when someone sacrifices his/her self for God, the heaven is promised as a reward for martyrdom. In other words, this act is not solely for their God, but is also a way to reach eternal salvation and live in heaven with the Prophet. An inseparable stereotype of a suicide terrorist attack is to hear the words Allahu Akbar right before it. But what does it mean? The Tekbir, is the Arabic phrase Allahu Akbar, normally translated as "God is [the] greatest". It is a common Islamic Arabic expression, used in various contexts by Muslims, i.e. the formal daily

prayers (Nigosian, 2004). The phrase had been used almost all the time by Islamic terrorists which makes people unconsciously think of a terror attack when hearing it. Likewise, War Boys screaming witness me declares the attack and their preparedness for self-sacrifice to reach their ultimate goal: rebirth alongside Immortan Joe in the halls of Valhalla.

In this chapter the main idea was to analyze contemporary historical and religious elements and their effects on cinematic depiction of a dystopian, post-apocalyptic world. As the most important historical event of 21st century to date, 9/11 was a turning point for the world's political relations and the visions of the future. This event not only reshaped the collective sense of the end and the cause for catastrophe on Earth, its religious motivations have also introduced themes and narrative structures which were absent in cinematic dystopias of the past century. Both this event and the religion of Islam itself created a new dystopian vision which is reflected in different cinematic works, *Man of Steel* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* included. In the latest Superman solo film, the way apocalypse happens resembles 9/11 in great details. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, there is more of a religious representation and the possible outcome of the most feared sides of Islam extremism. Altogether, these elements, historical events, and religious beliefs created a new vision of dystopia in the films with a post-apocalyptic setting, evolving by being inspired of real-life events to address the real-life fears of the people.

Chapter IV

The Anthropocene

One facet of the visual and contextual representations of the end and its aftermath has been the natural surroundings of survivors. In other words, nature has the potential to enhance the visual and contextual representation of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse in that world. This chapter discusses the way nature has been portrayed in these films, the decay of nature because of human activities, the collapse of nature as the reason for apocalypse, and how this visual representation connects to contemporary films. Given increasing public concern about how human activities affect the natural world, cinema has framed human activities as leading to apocalypse that brings not only the fall of civilization, but a propensity for a dystopian aftermath.

Later, terms such as Anthropocene and anthropocenema will frame this discussion, and the close readings of the chapter will include *Mad Max: Fury Road* once again, as well as *Blade Runner 2049* (Johnson, Kosove, Yorkin, Sikes & Villeneuve, 2017). The section will start with a general analysis on cinematic adaptations of Richard Matheson's 1954 *I Am Legend* novel. All these films are either sequels to previous productions in past decades, or they are remakes of an older film, categories that count as "media multiplicities" under the framework proposed by Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton

Palmer (2016). By studying these films, the vision of Anthropocene of different time periods in cinema becomes clearer. Yet, each of them shows a different form of humankind's interaction with nature and the outcome of these actions. By exploring the effects this natural decay has had on the vision of the future post-apocalyptic world, the term Anthropocene finds its own special place in the narratives of dystopian post-apocalyptic cinematic productions. Moreover, the discussion here is to go through the ways that nature and its decay have affected the image of dystopia, thereby giving post-apocalyptic films a darker and tangible portrayal. Films discussed in this chapter bring different representation of nature and dystopia on the silver screen. *Mad Max Fury Road* depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which the Anthropocene is an outcome of the cataclysmic event; but *Blade Runner 2049* shows the Anthropocene as the apocalyptic event itself. In contrast to both of these films, cinematic adaptations of *I Am Legend* portray a world without humans, but which otherwise has no signs of decay of nature. Yet, *Mad Max Fury Road* and *Blade Runner 2049* represent dystopia as an inescapable outcome of the Anthropocene in those post-apocalyptic worlds regardless of sequence of the events; both show the greed of humankind in using natural resources as a primary reason behind the creation and structuring of a dystopian world.

4.1. Dominance over Nature

As the only intelligent creatures, humans developed the ability of dominance over what exists here on Earth. Nature has never been just a habitat of humans; it is the source for all the resources needed by humans to survive and make progress throughout history.

This dominance began by using natural resources in a way that had never been used before, the first forms of mining started 2.4 millions of years ago to extract flint, probably to produce weapons (Walker & Shipman, 1997). Remains of mines found in Africa and Europe that are almost 43,000 years old are believed have been used by humans to find minerals (Commission, 1954); other, even older mines are thought to be sources of materials used to create weapons (Solecki, 1992).

Yet, in these early stages, humankind did not have the power to dominate the nature to a disastrous level. It wasn't until the industrial revolution that humans became fully able to extract natural resources to use as energy. This extraction, which can take many forms—including mining, drilling, and fracking—has continued into the present, producing overwhelmingly negative outcomes. The result was such a disaster that the rise of the cities during the Industrial Revolution brought with itself destruction of nature at so many levels. Indeed, this phenomenon is the beginning of the overuse nature by the hands of the smartest creatures walking on Earth's surface. The humankind's damage to nature continued with creating cities which occupied vast lands and turned those lands into urban spaces. Gradually to provide these metropolises with energy and basic needs, humankind started to harvest even more resources resulting in more destruction.

“And what cities! ... smoke hung over them and filth impregnated them, the elementary public services – water supply, sanitation, street-cleaning, open spaces, and so on – could not keep pace with the mass migration of men into the cities, thus producing, especially after 1830, epidemics of cholera, typhoid and an

appalling constant toll of the two great groups of nineteenth century urban killers – air pollution and water pollution or respiratory and intestinal disease.”

(Hobsbawm, 1969)

The Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of a potential apocalypse, an era of excessive use of natural resources and, at the same time, of trash and a high rate of pollution production. As an outcome of this uncontrolled pollution of Earth, numerous problems have been seen and traced which could affect humankind's life on Earth temporarily or permanently. One of these potentially irreversible effects is climate change, a change in the statistical average weather pattern of a specific part of the world which could last for a period of time from decades to millions of years (Hulme, 2016). Among all the negative effects which climate change will bring, global warming is the most concerning. Global warming is a long-term change in the average temperature of the Earth and its climate system (I, 2013). As an outcome, a massive amount of ice of both poles will gradually melt, and it will result in the rise of sea levels, endangering coastal cities and countries with lower elevation.

This immediate danger which threatens humankind's existence became one of the tangible reasons for apocalypse, and scientists have urged world leaders and all humans to take action before it's too late. If continued with this pace, it can destroy lands and cities or turn them into inhabitable places, resulting in death of hundreds of millions or even billions of people who are fighting over natural resources. It is an apocalypse, and the remaining lands will be considered post-apocalyptic world, and its survivors as inhabitants of the world after the end.

4.2. Anthropocene

Since the 1980s, climate change has become one of scientists' main concerns (Moser, 2010), which is based on the fear of human extinction. It wasn't until 2001 that finally thousands of scientists recognized this phenomenon as a threat which is getting worse (Weart, 2008). It is not the first time that climate change caused a mass extinction on Earth; the climate change as a result of a comet hitting the Earth was responsible for the mass extinction of dinosaurs, the most powerful creatures which ever dominated our planet (Ruben, 1997). If those creatures couldn't stand against that change, how could we? Humankind fears its own extinction, but this time it is not an external element that would probably cause the extinction. Humans themselves would lead their world to another catastrophe and extinction.

The themes of catastrophe and disaster are based on our instinctual fear of extinction. This fear is directly and indirectly reflected in cinematic works. After decades of discussion regarding the issue of climate change, in 2011, The Economist magazine published a short article announcing that the Holocene (which was, and some believe that still is, the geological epoch which started nearly 11,000 years ago during which all civilizations raised and the human effect on Earth had happened) is over; "Welcome to Anthropocene!". This new world is the one which would accelerate humankind's extinction (Fay, 2018).

But what is the Anthropocene? The word ‘Anthropocene’ is derived from the Greek *anthrōpos* (a human being) and *kainos* (new). The term Anthropocene was first used in the 80s with a different sense by Eugene Stoermer (Revkin, 2011), though it wasn’t until 2000s when people started to talk about it with general urgency (Fay, 2018). In 2000, this term, understood as an epoch in history of Earth marked by the profound influence of humans on geologic processes, was introduced by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (Dawson, 2016). The Anthropocene thus announces the collapse of the future through “slow fragmentation towards primitivism, perpetual crisis and planetary ecological collapse” (Williams & Srnicek, 2013). Growing interest in the Anthropocene is also reflected in scientific literature. Three new journals have recently been launched bearing the word ‘Anthropocene’ in their titles, namely, *Anthropocene* (publisher: Elsevier), *The Anthropocene Reviews* (publisher: SAGE), and *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* (publisher: BioOne). The Anthropocene is currently a subject of intense debate among scientists, including the most basic question: whether we have entered the age of Anthropocene or are we still living the Holocene (Maslin & Lewis, 2015).

4.3. Anthropocene in Cinema

Cinema has also started to use the Anthropocene and discussions around it to offer a visual image of that end. When applied to cinema studies, Anthropocene reflects the climatic disasters in a pre/post-humanity world. The term and its thematic usage is also deeply related to post-apocalyptic worlds, and climate change is indeed a common theme of the post-apocalyptic narrative. Instead of being considered as theoretical visions of a future, their economic and political systems, the Anthropocene has been used to refer to

an apocalyptic fiction of human finitude, world finitude, and the manageable problem of climate change. In the last decade, films about the world and its end have been depicted through an apocalyptic and doomsday narrative that in most cases end with moral redemption (Emmelhainz, 2015).

Sequential films like *Mad Max* and *Blade Runner* do reflect the image of the post-apocalyptic world from two different time periods: the first comes before the widely recognized emergence of the Anthropocene; the second falls within the new millennium, during which the natural sciences and humanistic focal points of the Anthropocene come full force into the cinema. By looking at how these sequential films used to portray nature in the post-apocalypse and how they are showing it today, the difference of natural world and the way humans interact with it enforces the idea that the Anthropocene has indeed begun. In other words, the conditions that belong to this new age, the Anthropocene, have shaped a new vision of the world after the end in both of these recent post-apocalyptic films. This image also creates a dystopian side of the physical world along with the social aspects of civilizations which are built on the ashes of the dead world.

Thus, the Anthropocene in cinema does not just portray a probable scenario or outcome of the end; it also envisions a dystopian society coping with the surrounding nature and the harshness it brings to the lives of the survivors. In other words, the Anthropocene has become a major element in showing the dystopia in the world after the post-apocalypse. This image is in contrast to many utopian beliefs and imageries of the future which are

believed to be the dreamland of humans whether based on religious texts or human imagination.

4.4. Anthropocenema

Related to the discussion above, the term “anthropocenema” was introduced by Selmin Kara in her work on films in the age of Anthropocene to denote the anthropogenic (2016). The category of anthropocenema includes films with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic themes which deal with the representation of nature (Kara, 2016). To elaborate more, these films present negative changes in the natural pattern of the world’s climate as leading humankind to an obscure situation. Films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, Gordon & Emmerich, 2004) and *Snowpiercer* (Jeong, Jeong, Lee, Nam, Park & Bong, 2013) directly use the natural anthropogenic disasters as the cause of the apocalypse, whereas other films like the *Mad Max* series and the *Matrix* series use it as an outcome. Moreover, films in this category try to build their narrative around scientific concerns. Issues like global warming play an important role in building the imaginary nightmarish world after the end, where the environment is harsh and not in favor of humans, and survival is almost impossible outside some specific parts of the world.

One of the ways in which dystopian post-apocalyptic films depict societies with low or no social values is by emphasizing how such societies misuse nature or what is left of it, exploiting it for their own gain. As an obvious example, in *Mad Max: Fury Road*,

Immortan Joe controls water resources, using this power to guarantee his dominance over other people. Here, extreme scarcity is not just the outcome of an apocalypse, but it has turned into a tool of dominance for an authoritarian ruler who uses the natural resources to enslave other people. Similarly, in *Blade Runner 2049*, the human race has used all the resources on Earth and expanded its territory to other planets. By enslaving humanoids, they harness the resources of other planets for themselves and try to satiate their infinite thirst for power and energy. In this case, natural decay and the need for energy have created a dystopian world in which slavery and murder are normalized. By looking at dystopian societies of post-apocalyptic films from the anthropogenic point of view, a simple but rather important question comes to mind: How do these films visually represent nature after the end, and how do these contemporary representations differ from those of previous decades?

To answer this question, it is necessary to know the triggering reasons of apocalypse to show the basic difference between anthropogenic and pre-anthropogenic scenarios. An apocalyptic incident has several catalysts: natural disasters, viruses, artificial intelligence, nuclear war or radioactive fallout, scientific miscalculation, and alien attack (C. P. Mitchell, 2001). While anthropocenema is defined by its reliance on natural disasters to cause the apocalypse, other films outside the category also envision nature in the post-apocalyptic world as an outcome of the apocalyptic event. The Anthropocene simply points out that the end might not start from force external to humans, but that they themselves are capable of creating the path to a probable catastrophic end.

4.5. Pre-Anthropocene Films

One way to find the changes in portraying nature is to compare sequential or remade post-apocalyptic films. First, the changes made in the narrative and visual representation can be traced easily and compared to those of the pre-Anthropocene films which will be more precise, since the stories are the same or following the same pattern. Second, being produced in two different periods of time shows the different concerns of the real-world reflected in these films, and changes in the portrayal of the post-apocalyptic worlds would be more traceable from one version to the next. *I Am Legend* (Matheson, 1954) is an apocalyptic novel that has been adapted to the silver screen three times in three different decades, including once in the new millennium. The novel is about a man who struggles to survive while hiding from the infected survivors of a devastating virus that turns people to vampires (though in the most recent adaptation, the infected people turn to zombies instead). The protagonist, Neville, is a scientist who is surprisingly immune to the virus, trying to discover a cure as humanity gets closer to extinction each day. The entire population of the city, and perhaps the whole world has been transformed into instinctual creatures that fear the light and try to spread their infection to any remaining living creature that crosses their path. The narrative is set three years after civilization came to an end, and the loneliness has taken a devastating toll on Neville, the protagonist. By day he searches the city for food and other supplies, and by night he attempts to find a way to reverse the effects of the virus by experimenting with his own blood.

None of the cinematic adaptations use nature to reflect the dystopian side of the end, but lack of order and chaos is the outcome of the apocalyptic event, leading survivors to this post-apocalyptic world. Nature in their world is not a threat to their survival, but it also does not provide shelter. It is the change in the natural laws which threaten humankind's existence. For survival of a civilization, there must be a male and a female. By the absence of one of these two, the other's existence fails and is condemned to extinction. This broken natural order for humankind, creates a dystopia in which the survivors lose their sense of judgment, and eventually resulting in death. In the end, the extinction of humankind leaves nature undamaged as it was before rise of civilizations.



Figure 22. *The Last Man on Earth* (1964): Nature aside from humans is shown to be unaffected by the humans' plight

Figure 17 shows an image from *The Last Man on Earth* (Lippert & Ragona, 1964), the first adaptation of the novel *I Am Legend*, that shows Morgan (Vincent Price) in the city fighting with infected survivors. But in the background, there are tall trees that show no sign of a natural disaster happening during the apocalypse or after it. It can be understood

from this visual representation that when there are fewer humans on Earth, nature can still thrive. In other words, humankind is the major force that drives nature to destruction and annihilation. And the absence of possible ecological disaster and related effects in these films supports the idea that humans are the most dangerous representatives of life on the Earth.



Figure 23. *The Omega Man* (1971): There is no sign of natural decay in the film. Trees are alive and green, and the city in the background has no sign of anthropogenic apocalypse

The same thing can be seen in *The Omega Man* (Seltzer & Sagal, 1971), the second cinematic adaptation of the same novel. There is nothing indicating natural decay except for the virus creating the disorder leading to the apocalypse. Here, neither behind the character, nor in the depth of the image which shows the city, any sign of decay of nature can be seen; and trees are still there and green is the dominant color. This is important since this color in many cultures including the Western, represents life, health, nature itself, and hope (Heller, 2009). No sign of destruction of nature is visible throughout the film and the whole film can be analyzed in the same sense. Humans have nearly disappeared and the Earth can recover from the damages humans done to it; the

catastrophe which erased the race that had the power to destroy the nature, made the survival of other forms of life possible.

So, when nature is shown to be safe and sound in these films, which theme represents the darkness or dystopian vision of the afterworld? These films and novels by their nature are about a person or a group of people and their fight for survival, and in this matter, every action, no matter whether right or wrong, could be justified for the sake of survival.

Morality shows itself as a dead and forgotten value when the survivors treat vampires/zombies as pests, who were human at one point, killing them at times when they weren't a threat to his survival and didn't have the intention to harm him. Indeed, Neville (Charlton Heston) assumed that these transformed creatures are not humans anymore, and their death doesn't matter. Indeed, it is the lack of moral issues in these adaptations that fill the absence of tyranny and decayed nature to portray dystopia within the post-apocalyptic framework. Even though there is just one known survivor and the rest have turned inhuman resulting in lack of any social groups, yet humans show the potential to turn that world into a dystopian one. It is necessary to indicate that there is a contemporary adaptation of the novel, *I Am Legend*, which is similar in the portrayal of nature in a world without humans. This adaptation is not included in this study because of the shift in the nature of infected humans in its narrative. Unlike previous adaptations that humans have turned into vampire-like creatures, *I Am Legend* shows infected as zombies. In contrast to vampires which have the ability to think and plan, zombies lack logic and

they act purely based on their instinct. So, this narrative of survivors after the end does not fit in the corpus of this study and needs to be considered independently¹⁰.

These adaptations do not deal with the nature and the Anthropocene in the way to show the decay, but rather they picture the world without humans by omitting all humans as the cause of catastrophe, or in other words, they display a dystopian post-apocalypse which is not anthropogenic. But, most of other films with themes of apocalypse and post-apocalypse picture the afterworld in a different way; regardless of their main theme, the majority of them use annihilation of nature as the catastrophic event that caused it. When we take a look at the time table, the closer we get to the 21st century, the more films use this theme. The *Mad Max* series is one of the best examples to show the difference of apocalypse in films of previous decades and the contemporary films, although the first film is not even about a post-apocalyptic world. Max Rockatansky (Mel Gibson) lives in a world that is going towards the apocalypse. It is a world where people have become harsher and less compassionate; their instincts controls their actions, and the actions have become savage and barbaric. The justice system doesn't work and to rescue the society from the danger of gangs, Max is the only one who is ready to take action. The fall of this society, which does not have the elements of a disciplined working system, is not surprising at all. This catastrophe is a man-made nuclear war, which turned the world into a post-apocalyptic dystopia. Though there is no direct connection between the story of the first film and what happens later in the second film, the lack of morality in characters'

¹⁰ Zombies are a new representation of the end, depicting a major shift in the mythology, and there are numerous scholarly works regarding zombie apocalypse films. Further discussion of zombie apocalypse is beyond the scope of this thesis. For an overview of this topic, see Jamie Russell's "*Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema*".

behavior could be taken as the root of the fall of humankind which eventually led people to a stage which ended with a nuclear war.

In *Mad Max 2* the viewer is witness to the first post-apocalyptic world of this series. Gangs which resemble punks rule the roads, and they kill people for one important thing: fuel. From the very beginning, a voiceover talks about the destruction of the world and what it turned into. This new world is not easy for people to inhabit, but the destruction of the natural habitat is not the most important reason which turned the world into an inhospitable place. The film portrays a much harsher natural living environment: a desert with no concerns about resources for survival. Actually, it focuses more on the consuming energy side of living conditions. Since the film was shot in Australia, it is expected to see deserts and vast lands with no greenbelts visible. But it will be discussed later that this factor won't be the case in the last film of the series, which does depict an actual natural resource crisis. Later in *Mad Max 2*, Max eventually joins a group of people who are extracting oil, which means having access to unlimited gasoline. This group is engaged in a war with another gang and even their fight is over the fuel.



Figure 24. *Mad Max 2* (1981): The image shown the refinery in the middle of a desert. There is not even a single tree visible in the scene, and all that can be seen is sand

One of the first noticeable things in this film is the lack of a greenbelt in contrast to the first film. The environment is much harsher, food is rare to such an extent that a snake seems like a perfect meal full of protein. The group dreams of going to a land where they can find fresh water, and the narrator tells the story as it seems they have finally got there. This pursuit of a so-called paradise is the one subject which relates to natural living standards and its importance after the apocalypse. Paradise, for them is a place that not only presents them with fuel, but also with basic resources for survival such as water and accessible food. Yet, despite their yearning to move to that paradise, survival is not totally based on natural basic resources. The fuel they own makes them powerful. That's why the war is not over water springs, but oil refineries. Being located in the middle of nowhere, the paradise could be so far that the importance of fuel is to fill the tanks in order to reach there, and that's the reason which makes everyone fight over fuel.

4.6. The Era of Anthropogenic Cinema

It's necessary to note here that *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* is not examined closely here because it seems to be set in the same world as *Mad Max 2*. But there is a 30-year gap between the third and fourth film of the *Mad Max* series, and during this time period global warming, climate change, and water crisis turned to be more and more important each year.(Weart, 2008) As a result, *Fury Road* incorporates similar themes:

Ostensibly depicting a post-nuclear-holocaust world, *Fury Road* could equally represent a future marked by climate change and the environmental issues associated with the Anthropocene – drought, pollution and severe weather patterns. We learn from the opening voiceover that there have been oil wars and then later water wars, battles fought over these increasingly scarce natural resources (Yates, 2017).

4.6.1. *Fury Road*

The primary difference in this film compared to the previous productions of this series is that the matter of natural resources starts right after the beginning of the film that the voices say:

- Why are you hurting these people?
- It's the oil, stupid.
- Oil wars.
- We are killing for gasoline.
- The world is running out of water.
- Now there's the water wars (Miller, 2015)

This shows that the film will focus on the anthropogenic side of the post-apocalyptic world. It is not solely the disorder introduced in the beginning, nor is it only the fuel that drives conflict as in the previous trilogy; scarcity of water makes this new settled world a dystopia, or in other words, it is water that drives the survivors to kill or destroy. If one considers that the films are narrated in a chorological timeline, it means that there is a relatively long period of time in the story. It is obvious in the picture below that Max has longer hair compared to previous films. If so, it can be concluded that at the beginning of the post-apocalyptic world, fuel was the resource which could guarantee survival, partly because there were still lands with fresh water and food. But, with time, these lands have dried out and fuel lost its value compared to the most basic and vital element of survival: water. Indeed, this element is now the one which is rare and harder to access, and as a result, the one who owns it, owns the people who need it.



Figure 25. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): Max is eating a two-headed lizard. Unlike previous trilogy that he had short hair and almost shaved beard, his hair in this film is long and he has noticeable beard. It may suggest that there is a specific time gap between the last film and the *Fury Road*.

Film continues with the scene of Max eating a two-headed lizard alive, which can refer to two different things: genetic mutation, and the scarcity of food. The effect of this

mutation will depend on the nature of the error and when it is read¹¹. This could also justify the absence of other animals. Most of them are killed by the radiation and some of the species that survived are now mutated. But this change in the nature of beings is not limited to animals; humans have also gone through a similar transformation in the film. This transformation is most obvious in the War Boys' appearance, which resembles skeletons with pale skins. Being in this condition is later explained in the film by calling War Boys as *half-dead*. These men are basically suffering from diseases related to radiation (there is no hint of viral disease affecting humans or animals) and the reason why they are in desperate need of blood donation is the fact that their bodies are failing to produce the essential blood. This disability is also a sign of the decay of humans' own nature. Producing blood as one of the vital duties of the human body has failed and as a result, there would be even less of a chance for people to survive this harsh environment.

In fact, the decay of nature is not limited to the natural environments, but the very biological being of Earth's creatures is under threat if nature deteriorates. Evolution is what made creatures adapt themselves to the natural order of the world, and if nature fails, there is a chance that evolution may fail too and survivors will not get adapted to new environment. So, the Anthropocene frames the newest *Mad Max* as not just a disaster befalling nature, but human beings, like other creatures, may suffer a decay in their morality and their core humanity. As the world transforms from a livable place to a battle-of-survival arena, humans may transform from healthy, well-adapted beings to

¹¹ https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/achre/final/intro_9_5.html

ones who only fight to survive. Humankind is adapted to live with the nature as efficient as possible, and by annihilation of that nature, that adaption loses its use.

Unlike the previous trilogy, *Fury Road* begins with the tough environment of the new world which is noticeable in Figure 20. The background is just sand and dark sky, a total wasteland. Contrary to the color green which was discussed before, having the dominant colors of grey and yellow imply death and disaster. In Christianity, for instance, which is one of the cornerstones of Western culture, grey is the color of ashes and destruction, and thus it is a biblical symbol of grief and sorrow (Heller, 2009). Yellow, on the other hand, is the color associated with deserts, and by its cultural implication in the West, it is the color of betrayal, duplicity, and jealousy (Heller, 2009). These symbolic representation of this color is applicable to dystopian societies, and with the dominance of yellow in the film, the mood can be connected to what this color stands for. These colors are not only important in visualizing the post-apocalyptic world as harsh as possible which is connected to death and destruction, but they also bear a meaning of the dystopian society of the world after the end. This world collapses in every aspect of human life, socially and also in natural order. This is a part of the anthropogenic visualization of the end. Nature is depicted and associated with colors which have symbolic meanings of death and decay; and seeing these colors as the dominant colors of nature indicates the annihilation of nature itself.

In this world people are not divided into groups that fight for their survival together, but they have become miserable slaves to Immortan Joe and the precious resource he has,

water. Here water is the most valuable resource, even more important than fuel.

Immortan Joe sends Imperator Furiosa on a mission to exchange water, called *aqua cola* in the film, for fuel and bullets; this shows that the specific commodities that were of most importance in the first trilogy are now less important than water, which trumps them all. They call the springs “aqua cola”, aqua meaning water and cola meaning tree, a symbolic representation of a tree, or tree of life. Immortan Joe exchanges water for fuel and bullets, but from the portrayal of the characters it is clear that Immortan Joe is more powerful than the others, and with his demand they had to join his cavalry in pursuit of Imperator Furiosa.



Figure 26. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): A View of Citadel. It shows three mountains surrounded by wasteland, yet, there are greeneries on top of each of those mountains representing life. Also, the water stream is visible, the resource that made Immortan Joe powerful.

The Citadel, the city which is located in the middle of nowhere and is ruled by Immortan Joe, represents a vision of how the Anthropocene will eventually turn the world into a dystopian, post-apocalyptic society. When it comes to the basic needs of human beings, any act in order to survive regardless of its moral or ethical aspect, can be justified by all means. In this film, the situation seems to be the same with Immortan Joe controlling the water resources to keep his dominance over the people, and the people themselves seem not to care about anything except the water, especially when they rush in a savage way to

get water if they can. In such a situation, human culture will collapse along with nature and the upcoming new world will bring new order (or complete chaotic disorder). Its survivors, if there would be any, will act based on survival instincts, and there will be competition of power as it was before the civilization.

In Figure 21, the Citadel is portrayed as three mountains close to each other. Masses of people are at the foot of the mountains rushing towards the water coming out of the mountain for a short time, when Immortan Joe wants it to. On the other hand, trees and bushes are at the top of the mountains, totally unreachable for those masses at the foothill. The mountains are symbolic as well. In many cultures and religions mountains and especially their peaks are sacred because it is closest to heavens (Naess, 1995). Moreover, the only place that live trees can be found is at the peak of the Citadel's mountains, giving it heavenly characteristics. Resources that were once available for almost everyone in the world, have now become the tool to dominate others. "Do not my friends become addicted to water, it will take hold of you, and you will resent its absence," says Immortan Joe when he opens the pipes of water for seconds. These words show that keeping people in need of water is the key to his dominance over them. The mountains at the same time resemble towers in which a king lives and the peasants are living outside. Thus, keeping his valuable resource on the top of those towers, is also a symbol of hierarchy of classes. Except for the top of the mountains, there is no visible greenbelt, and all the visible world is filled with sand and dust. This vast sandy area full is another portrayal of the Anthropocene in this world. And regarding the hierarchy of Immortan Joe and the ordinary people, the Anthropocene has already created a dystopia.

The scarcity of water here and the fact that it is in Immortan Joe's hands makes it a tool for him to build a world in which nothing matters except his crave of the infinite power over everyone.



Figure 27. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): Sandstorm. The dominant color is yellow in this scene which is a symbol of desert and wastelands. Also, the massive sandstorm shows the inhospitality of the world; it has the power to destroy anything.



Figure 28. *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015): Crow Fishers. The dominant color is dark blue and gray, none a symbol of life. In contrast, these colors with the dead trees show a dead land. People are using sticks to walk and they resemble scarecrows, seem alive but dead inside.

The anthropogenic side shown in *Fury Road* is not just limited to the Citadel; it includes the whole known world. As seen in Figure 22, life outside the Citadel equals death and destruction: an enormous sand storm which will probably eradicate anything in its way

suggests that any spot could be deadly because of natural disasters. The only place which is safe from such a massive sand storm is the mountains where Immortan Joe built his castle. These mountains are not only a source of water, but they are also a shelter for him and his subjects. With Figure 23, even though there is water, the land is dead, populated by dehumanized people who look like scarecrows and seem alive but are dead in reality. In such a tyrannical system that Immortan Joe built to enslave everyone in his own favor and interests, Furiosa decided to go on a journey to save the “wives” of Immortan Joe—his “breeders” as they are called—whom he has imprisoned in a safe.

With Furiosa navigating their journey, their goal is to reach the “green place of many mothers”; a name that reminds the viewer of “mother nature” and the symbolic connection between nature and femininity. The “green place” is not separable from the “mothers” who own the land. Nature is known as “a mother” because it gives life to the beings residing in it, and as a real mother provides a baby with her own body and self, nature gives humans life by giving them parts of its own self. Yet, here in the film the failure of the children of the nature, humans, to preserve the Earth, has led to the decay of mother nature. Of all the lands, there is just one which is characterized as green and with abundant water, and that is “the land of many mothers” which resembles the mother nature. Their way to the green place is through a desert with no living creatures except for scavengers. Sandstorms and a harsh environment is what is left of the world. The green place is the safe spot where the wives would find sanity and life again.

Yet, when they arrive they find the place has already been destroyed, even though it had initially endured the nuclear blasts. This might be considered as an outcome of the Anthropocene: nothing can survive it, even that which survived incidents as cataclysmic as a nuclear war. This dead land signifies dystopia in meaning and in soul: a world with no greenery is a dead domain leading its residents to a non-livable or at least impossible to tolerate world. It could be said that the Anthropocene would lead the surviving post-apocalyptic world to become dystopian. The harshness of this world, as explained earlier, would make humans to go back to their instinctual survival behaviors, and as a result, they will create a world with no law or discipline. This anthropogenic world will be about power of enslaving the people, and this is also one of the reasons that makes an anthropogenic world a dystopian one.

Running away from such a dystopian society and searching for “the green place of many mothers”, Furiosa and the wives on their escape find out that even that place is dead. Yet, there still is a green place left in this world, the Citadel. Their decision to go back to the Citadel is their actual journey to the real green place, and by killing Immortan Joe in the process, they conquer the land which is the only place that still preserves a piece of mother nature. After claiming the Citadel, Max leaves the group and only Furiosa and the wives get there, and they actually become the mothers who own the green place. Their journey was meant to find that place, but in reality, they conquered the mountains and they created the new “green place of many mothers”. Immortan Joe’s death and the Citadel becoming the new green place by the hands of wives and Furiosa, symbolically suggests that the only chance to survive the Anthropocene is to embrace the mother

nature and stop misuse and excessive use of natural resources. Only then, humankind would be able to escape the certain extinction or the misfortune of living in a dystopian world.

Fury Road shows visions of a post-apocalyptic world which have never seen before. But for a dystopian world in a post-apocalyptic film, George Miller applies different themes of today's concerns to reflect the outcome of mankind's actions. Starting the sequential *Mad Max* series with a chaotic world, then continuing the narrative with the war over gasoline, the latest film shows the intentions of director in portraying a different image compared to previous films, the image of a potential world which its civilization and nature were destroyed and replaced by a post-apocalyptic world which is a reflection of humankind's actions, leading them to a dystopia.

4.6.2. *Blade Runner 2049*

AI films do not engage nature as the cause of an apocalypse, but they use nature and its annihilation as one of the consequences of an apocalypse. Likewise, *Blade Runner 2049* shows a dystopian world which deals with artificially intelligent humanoids. But there is a basic difference: the presence of these humanoids has nothing to do with what happened to the Earth. Rather, the basic reason for their creation is to colonize other planets in order to harness more minerals and energy for human consumption. The world has already failed in anthropogenic terms, and the solution to the problem was to create robots to mine other planets.

The film takes place in the year 2049 in Los Angeles, portrayed as a hyper-technological and overpopulated city. The protagonist KD6-3.7, known as K (Ryan Gosling), is a Nexus 8, a Replicant—an android physically similar to a human, but smarter and stronger—who works as a Blade Runner, a category of police officer whose duty is to find and kill the rebel humanoids. Replicants live much like humans do, and K lives with a home hologram named Joi (Ana de Armas) as his only company. He is assigned to locate and kill a Replicant named Sapper Morton (Dave Bautista), but at the site K finds traces of a burial close to Morton's home, from which he unearths a mysterious box containing the mortal remains of Rachael, a Replicant missing since 2019 after she fled with a Blade Runner, Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford). When it is discovered that Rachael was pregnant, and that her child could be alive, Lieutenant Joshi (Robin Wright) orders K to find and destroy Rachael's descendant before the news can be made public and cause a mass panic. Unknown to K, Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), who creates the new generation of Nexus humanoids, orders his personal assistant, a Nexus 8 named Luv (Sylvia Hoeks), to find Deckard so that he will reveal the location of the child he had with Rachael. But the mission complicates for K when he starts to question his own false memories, wondering if he himself could be Deckard's child and not the Replicant that he thought he was.

Blade Runner 2049 connects to Anthropocene in its visual representation of the future world. Similar to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the use of color in the cinematography and CGI creates a world which is also dead. Saturated yellows and ample use of grey show a harsh environment which lacks re-productivity and life.



Figure 29. *Blade Runner 2049* (2017): K is walking towards an abandoned city. Color yellow and the sand shows the anthropogenic portrayal of the film.

In this picture, K is walking towards an abandoned city, a dead one, to find Deckard. The land is full of sand and there is a dark yellowish fog (or a sandy wind) hovering over the city. The city's remains, on the other hand, suggest a post-apocalyptic world, the world has fallen and its inhabitants are either dead or fled the remains. Either way, it is an inhospitable land for humans to live. *Blade Runner 2049* borrows the anthropogenic elements to show how a possible future world with decayed nature would turn into. Humans are using lifelike humanoids as their slaves, to whom they deny all rights. In such a dystopian world, a Replicant bringing a child to life is not acceptable since if that happens, it gives the Replicants a human-like quality, and to treat them as they have been treated would be unjust and could create confusion in the system and the society. The barren land lacks the re-production quality, and thus, it cannot resemble "mother nature", and Replicants being a creation of that world, are carrying the same characteristics, they are barren in their nature as well and they are meant to be destroyed.



Figure 30. *Blade Runner 2049* (2017): K finds a box under a dead tree which contains the remains of Rachel, a Replicant who was lost for years. The dead tree and the remains of Rachel symbolize death and annihilation.

At the beginning of the film, K finds a dead tree and a hidden object beneath it that he later discovers are the remains of Rachel's body. Trees are one of the most important cultural symbols of humanity (Peretó, 2000); they symbolize life and productivity, and human values (Le Dantec & paysages, 1996). Finding the remains of a mother, one who may have given birth to a miracle baby, beneath a dead tree suggests that this dystopian world is not going to accept the very symbol of life, giving birth, since the tree which is the symbol of recreation and life is itself dead. A dead tree marks signs of life among Replicants, and that tree itself could be the symbol of Rachel, the mother Replicant.

While Replicants were designed to be infertile, this humanoid who was not supposed to get pregnant, have become the first mother among all the Replicants ever created.

Replicants are created in the image of their creators, humans. These perfect copies have all the qualities of a human, except being fertile. The infertile creations of humankind are the mirror image of what humans have done to the Earth; their interaction with the nature caused its decay and infertility and its result was the Anthropocene. Both the nature and Replicants resemble the way humans creating an infertile world. But, the miraculous and unexpected pregnancy of a Replicant is a symbol of life outside the controllable territory of humankind. It suggests that life continues its existence when it is not accessible by

humans, or else there would be demolition. Humans are trying to find and kill the miraculous child, the symbol of life, similar to what they did with the nature; they caused nature's annihilation.

Throughout the film, K in his search to find out if his memories are real or not, meets Dr. Ana Stelline (Carla Juri), someone who creates artificial memories. When K enters the chamber, Carla is busy creating a memory of a forest.

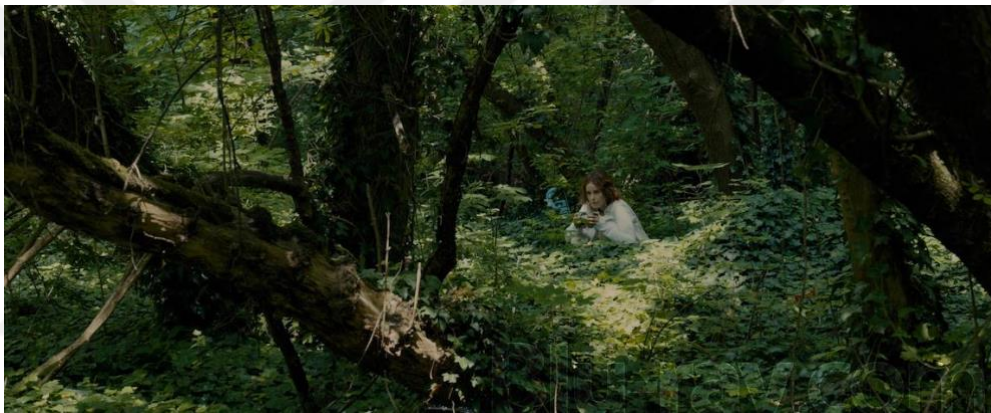


Figure 31. Blade Runner 2049 (2017): Dr. Ana Stelline Creating Artificial Memory of Forests. This scene suggests that there are no forests left on the earth, and to see one, they need to create artificial memories of them.

This scene implies the fact that there is no forest left on Earth and to see it, humans have to create a fake memory of jungles. Trees may have gone extinct and what is left of nature in that dystopian world which experienced the Anthropocene is just memories and vague images. In this sense, the memories of nature are working partly as the leverages used by humans of dystopian society, used to control the humanoids by giving them fake memories to fool them into believing that they have free will in a world which has actually enslaved them. Later in the film the audience finds out that Dr. Ana Stelline is the miracle daughter of Deckard and Rachel and she has been working with Wallace

Corporation for years, creating dreams that are implanted into Replicants. When K meets Dr. Ana Stelline for the first time, she is busy creating a memory of a forest. She gives life as a symbol of hope to something that is believed to be barren. This is parallel to what Dr. Ana Stelline really is, she herself is the hope for all Replicants and she is the symbol of life like the memory or the vision of alive nature she is creating.

By looking at the post-apocalyptic films of the post-Anthropocene era, representing the decay of nature enhances the dystopian side of those societies. The Anthropocene does not only influence the way these films visualize the world, but its essence also reflects the injustice, oppression, cruelty, and inequality towards surviving creatures in that post-apocalyptic world. In some ways, even the Anthropocene leads the world to a point where the scarcity of natural resources becomes an oppressive force to enslave others. In contrast, the stories and cinematic productions of post-apocalyptic worlds in the pre-Anthropocene era used nature as a catalyst that created dystopian worlds far less often than they do now. The role of nature in the post-apocalyptic narrative has changed with the scientific advances of the late 20th and 21st century, when scientists have been trying to impress the importance of preserving nature and saving it from excessive and irresponsible human exploitation.

Thus, post-apocalyptic films which reflect humankind's worries and problems tend to create that potentially disastrous world which has lost the chance to reverse nature's degeneration, and confronts a new world that bears the negative consequences of neglecting nature. A disaster befallen on world and nature expands to all aspects of

survivors' lives. Based on what is seen in *Mad Max Fury Road* and *Blade Runner 2049*, the decay of nature and the Anthropocene are the threats to humankind's existence. If decay of nature continues with the same pace, there would be an inevitable apocalypse, and dystopia would be the result of this event. What portrayed as the dystopian post-apocalyptic world of the Anthropocene shows the possibility of controlling the trigger for apocalypse. But, if the anthropogenic apocalypse happens, there seems to be no way out of definite dystopia that the Anthropocene brings with itself. Humankind is perfectionist by its nature, and it doesn't care if there is going to be consequences for the wild dreams; so no matter what, humans will pursue those dreams.

The Anthropocene is the consequence of decades of humans misusing nature on their way to perfection. This natural will to gain more stands against the preservation of mother nature. So, films by reflecting this behavior, show how the world will end. So far, there isn't a post-Anthropocene utopic post-apocalyptic film showing natural order without decay and annihilation. But, despite this dominant pessimism over the anthropogenic post-apocalyptic films, it seems there is always a hope to turn this process backwards; in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the wives go to the Citadel to create their own "green place", and in *Blade Runner 2049*, Rachel gives birth to a miraculous child. It seems this pessimism about the anthropogenic future is necessary to make people understand the consequences of their actions, and yet, that slight form of hope gives them drive to change, that even in the darkest conditions, the conversion is possible and they can change before it is too late.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the apocalypse and its inevitable dystopian aftermath. Considering both dystopia and post-apocalypse as notions which are highly responsive to real life events and issues, the study traces the pattern of films in and since the end of the 20th century. By setting a specific time and event as the base of discussion for contemporary films, the analysis on films as cases to track the evolution and adaption had been done. My goal in this research was to define the dystopia and post-apocalypse by means of their sociohistorical contexts and connect 21st century narratives in this area to the notion of Anthropocene as the possible and feasible reason of an apocalypse.

The second chapter of this study deals with the historical background of the terms apocalypse, post-apocalypse, and dystopia. In order to find a pattern related to the events and issues which have an impact on how people represent the end and its dystopian outcome, films of previous decades have studied thoroughly. This chapter presents dystopian post-apocalyptic films of each decade from the beginning of the cinema to track the traces of popularity and relevance to historical events, also linking the triggering event of apocalypse in the films to the major events at the time of production. Then two films selected to demonstrate the discussion on these films. As a result, the discussion

expanded to the new millennium and the events that happened and affected the whole world and its perception of the possible end.

Chapter three connects the notion of apocalypse in the popular imagination to the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 by Islamic radical terrorists. I argued that this incident has given both dystopia and post-apocalypse a new face from two different aspects. First, the historical event itself created a traumatic real image of catastrophe which was seen by billions of people worldwide. This image and the collapse of two iconic buildings created a vision of an end which uses war and terror as the reason. To analyze and see how these traumatic images have been recreated, I chose *Man of Steel* (Nolan, Roven, Snyder, Thomas & Snyder 2013) for its imagery and sequences that resemble the very attack against the twin towers in New York City.

The second goal in Chapter Three was to discuss how religion gave dystopia a new rather frightening face. Islamic terrorists attacked buildings full of civilians with hijacked airplanes, an ideological attack that cost thousands of innocent people's lives. Yet, to complete this image of the dystopian faith in the eyes of media and Westerners, my approach was to go into the details of this religion and find the characteristics which have been reflected in the cinematic works as the dystopian features of the world after the end. To do so, my choice was *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Mitchell & Miller 2015) to find elements similar to extremist ideology of Islam. My approach here was to divide this religious element into two sub-categories: treatment of women, and martyrdom. I went through the laws of Sharia regarding women, and I examined the way women have been

portrayed in the film and its correspondence to Islamic laws. Polygamy was also a part of argument to expand the discussion towards the role of women in a dystopian society. And finally, I discussed the sense of martyrdom in Islam, how it connects to the terror attacks of 9/11, and how the War Boys behave and believe similarly. Elements like divine reward, sacrifice for greater good, and the rituals before the attack were examined in their social context and in the context of this specific, fictional post-apocalyptic dystopia.

Using the horror of 9/11 in films arguably emphasizes the importance of controlling extremism in order to stop similar incidents happening. It increases the awareness of people about these forms of behavior and the result of uncontrolled rage and prejudice. But, at the same time, these films enhanced alienation of Muslim community, creating a negative image of anyone related to Islam in any way. This not only did not help to control of prejudice and extremism, but it created a severe new form of racist extremism feelings against Muslims or whoever similar to Muslims, giving Islam a dystopian quality.

The fourth chapter discusses the Anthropocene and how it has shaped a new form of dystopian image of post-apocalyptic worlds. My goal was to find differences between the films of previous decades and the contemporary films in the way they have depicted nature after the apocalypse. By discussing on its history and its connection to cinema and its effect on creating the anthropocenema, I used the concept to detect those effects. First, I discussed the utopian image of the world after the end and how these mythological-religious imageries have been distorted by the new notion of the Anthropocene. Then, by

analyzing films of pre-anthropocenema films, I tried to clarify the intended dystopian image of post-apocalypse in those films and find a pattern to compare contemporary films to them. Finally, I examined films from the era of the Anthropocene whose narrative predecessors were made before the 21st century to show how the new vision of dystopia differs from that of previous films. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Mitchell & Miller 2015) and *Blade Runner 2049* (Johnson, Kosove, Yorkin, Sikes & Villeneuve, 2017) were selected to deliver the idea. Both films deal with an annihilated Earth, and the landscape of this post-apocalyptic world is deserts, a harsh living environment, and unbearable weather. My hypothesis was that the Anthropocene itself can cause a condition leading to dystopia by creating the harsh environment. So, the scarcity of resources would give enormous power to those who own the remainder of those resources, and this leads to dystopia in two different ways. First, ownership can be used to gain power and to create a tyrannical ruling system over the masses. Second, the ordinary people who don't have access to that resource, will fail to remain civilized, and eventually, they will do anything to reach that resource in order to maintain their survival. In other words, their instinctual needs would justify any act regardless of its being morally right or wrong.

Films which deal with the Anthropocene use the worst scenario of portraying the world. These films use the decay of nature as an irreversible (or impossible to reverse) process and the outcome is a disastrous world with no morality. Existence of the Earth is highly dependent on the existence of humankind in the films, and it is defined in a way that the Earth will be dead forever if the humankind goes extinct. Yet, it is rather simple to

assume a planet which is more than 4 billion years old and went through different extinction periods, won't be able to revive after a possible anthropogenic apocalypse. It at least revived once after the extinction of dinosaurs by a meteor hit and its disastrous effects on nature, and probably the Earth can do it again. What is missing in the Anthropocene narrative is the idea of a new form of life in the anthropogenic post-apocalyptic world, independent from humans. Humankind won't live on earth forever, and one way or another, this race will go extinct. It will be a more realistic, and of course innovative perspective to portray the Earth after the extinction of humankind and start to think how the world will be like in a scenario without the presence of humans.

For future study of these notions, the presence of the similar concepts of dystopia and post-apocalypse in national cinemas might be discussed. Considering the possibility of dystopian post-apocalyptic films produced in other countries, detecting the different historical, cultural, and religious background in the films of those countries could be used as a starting point for future research. During this study which is shaped on the notions of dystopia and post-apocalypse, I couldn't find any film to suggest a utopic world after the apocalypse. Dystopia after the annihilation of current civilization (except for the Anthropocene) is not a guaranteed outcome and there is a possibility of a totally different result, yet all the films use dystopia. I would recommend a different point of view about the post-apocalyptic world, where the new civilization built by survivors is not about brutality and lack of freedom, but it is a dream-come-true society that humankind always awaited. In terms of nature and the Anthropocene, the same pattern repeats itself. Neither drastic changes in nature lead to a positive outcome, nor the films suggest a narrative of

humankind's success in reversing the decaying process of nature and creating a utopian world. Pessimism is dominant on films about the change in current world order, and that needs to be changed. If this change in narration happens and we perceive the possibility of utopia, then the idea of being doomed to death would be challenged by the tendency to create that utopic world instead of a dreadful countdown to the demolition of the world, and us as the inhabitants of this world. Any future film using this different approach to the end of the current world order will be the pioneer of hopefully many other optimistic utopian films. In the end, maybe to achieve the utopia we need to give up on the current world and build a post-apocalyptic world based on ideals we've ever had.

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