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**Contextualizing 'Survival of the Fittest' and American Politics through Young**

**Adult Dystopian Cinema**

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**Thesis submitted in candidacy for the degree of "Doctorate" in**

**Civilization**

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**Academic Year: 2023/2024**

# Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this project is my personal work and that it contains no material previously written by another person, in whole or in part, nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other academic degree or diploma of a university or any other institution.

 I also certify that the present thesis is the result of my own investigation, and it contains no plagiarism.

Ilhem Bendahmane

# Dedications

*This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, who taught me that it is never too late to chase my dreams. To my mother, without her endless love and encouragement I would never have been able to complete my work.*

# Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks to my supervisor, Prof. Daoudi Frid for his support and guidance towards the accomplishment of this work. He has given me the freedom to explore on my own while always guiding me when I needed his assistance. My profound gratitude to my co-supervisor Dr. Stefan Dolgert from Brock university of Canada for making the time to answer my questions and direct me to the right path. Thanks to both of you for contributing to this work.

My appreciation also goes to the board of examiners; Prof.Wassila Hamza Reguig Mouro, Dr. Omar Rahmoun, Dr. Fatiha Belmrabet, and Dr.Tedj Ghomri from the university of Bechar, for investing their time and patience reading this modest thesis. Therefore, I owe my professors a debt of gratitude for always making suggestions and motivating me towards scientific curiosity and research. I am immensely grateful for your time and effort.

I am also thankful for having the opportunity to travel to the University of Murcia. Spain through ERASMUS+ mobility scholarship which enabled me to meet professors and researchers who shared with me their experiences and knowledge. I want to thank Prof. Juan Cerda for his guidance throughout the beginning of my PhD and similar thanks goes to Dr. Keith Gregor, who made it easy for me during my academic visit to the university, thanks for providing guidance and assistance. Thank you all for your contribution to this thesis.

# Abstract

This research aims at contextualizing Young Adult Dystopian Science fiction cinema through two main case studies, *The Maze Runner* trilogy, and *The Hunger Games* series. Two dystopian works that focus on the concept of survival amidst an apocalypse. The core goal of this thesis is embodied on reading these two trilogies within their context while considering their time, and place of production using a post-structuralist approach. Therefore, the work is divided into four chapters, the first chapter is a historical background whereby the concept of 'survival of the fittest' and evolutionary paradigms are explored in depth, thus, it also explores the influence of Social Darwinism on American beliefs, politics, and society. In fact, the work at hand, attempted to analyze the influence some of the most prominent 19$^{th}$ century American philosophies such as materialism and pragmatism with Darwinian capitalist views while reading the narratives of the films in parallel with reality. To prove that movies can be read as allegories to politics rather than being simple entertainment, a contextual cultural approach is followed throughout the whole thesis, using Douglass Kellner's approach of reading films politically and Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding meaning through messages. This research also aims at criticizing US politics and Social Darwinist's ideas that include white supremacy, colonialism, racial projects, and economic hegemony. This is identified through the theme of totalitarianism attempting to read it through the series in parallel with US policy. As a result, this research argues that films are invaluable sources of information and are better seen as informative allegories rather than just entertaining, it

also suggests that YA dystopias are cultural artifacts that taps to our own realities and explore sensitive political issues.

# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Abbreviations

**WCKD:** World in Catastrophe Killzone Experiment Department.

**GSP**: The Generalized System of Preferences.

**YA:** Young Adult.

**SF:** Science Fiction.

**AGOA:** African Growth and Opportunity Act.

**GAO:** Government Accounting Office.

**OPIC:** Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC, US).

**IQ:** Intelligence Quotient.

**WB:** World Bank.

**IFIs**: International Financial Agency Institution.

**CIA:** Central Intelligence Agency.

**PCA:** The Production Code of Administration.

**DNA:** Deoxyribonucleic Acid.

**LSD:** Lysergic Acid Diethylamide.

**ASEAN:** The Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

# General Introduction

# General Introduction

The last few decades were marked by the surge of dystopian themes, both in the literary realm and in cinematic productions. Therefore, the sudden popularity of this genre can be relatively linked to young people and their quests in life, which inspired authors and filmmakers to focus on this category. In 2012, Lionsgate produced the very first adaptation of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, which was met with significant success, mainly among young people. Directed by Gary Ross and Francis Lawrence, the series was followed by other sequels, which indicated the continuous success it beheld. Following *The Hunger Games*, other dystopian trilogies came to the screen, including *The Maze Runner,* the first male dystopian YA science fiction to hit theaters at that time, featuring actor Dylan O'Brien as the protagonist of the story. Interestingly, these YA science fiction dystopias feature young people as changemakers and their quest for freedom against a totalitarian regime that marginalizes and degrades their lives while taking place in a futuristic US society.

Films are powerful media agents that can affect the viewers' minds, and the very essence of their perceptions of the world. For example, *The Hunger Games* franchise, taken as a media text, reflects on serious, profound matters in contemporary societies. The aspect of an authoritative system that includes children as entertainment is not something new to our world, nor is the use of humans as test subjects for a pretentious noble motive; all these instances can be seen in parallel with reality. Hence, this thesis relies on the two selected case studies that are categorized as YA dystopias; both are set in a futuristic US society where dystopian themes dominate the postapocalyptic setting of the story. Besides, the series were produced during a time of political challenges taking place within the US government, considering that they are addressed within the context of their production and other important factors the series were exposed to

that includes cast selection, setting, and film aesthetics. Nevertheless, to deal with these two texts as media accounts, a post-structuralist approach is combined with semiotics and contextualized cultural analysis. In other words, the series went through deep analytical readings that included the narratives of the texts in a broader sense, their contexts, and the influence of the period of their production. Furthermore, two major themes are tackled within this work; the first is concerned with the aspect of 'survival of the fittest' and its relation to racial formation within a futuristic dystopia, whereby it works in parallel with US politics. Thus, the second aspect this thesis deals with in the second chapter is concerned with the power of media and politics in directing people's opinions and how the movies reflect and allegorize these agendas.

The research questions to be explored in this project can be articulated through the following:

How is Social Darwinism addressed within (American) cinema, especially the concept of 'survival of the fittest' and its relation to racism in US politics?

To what extent can movies be considered political and ideological instruments? what role media plays in influencing people's minds during sensitive periods markinga political agenda?

How does the selected film series mirror American history, politics and society both of the 19$^{th}$ century and the contemporary era?

To answer the above research questions, the following project consists of two analytical chapters that follow a common theoretical framework and methodology. Additionally, each chapter has its own themes; however, they all fall under the same scrutiny, which is to observe YA dystopias as media artifacts that allegorize historical and sociopolitical US politics. The chapters serve the same complimentary purpose that

contextualizes these series within their cultural and political landscapes. The reason behind choosing to deal with these media texts in this manner is to show the influence of Hollywood blockbusters, particularly on Young Adult Dystopian trilogies and young adults through the way they articulate beyond the world of cinema. For example, in chapter one, the research focused on the pervasiveness of evolutionary thinking in the world of cinema. Despite the lack of acknowledgment of the impact of Darwinian thoughts, the aim is to prove that evolutionary trends have an impact on media productions, and the science fiction genre happens to be at the center of these illustrations. The work applies these theories to the analysis and provides examples of scenes and instances that fall under the same themes, mainly the notion of 'survival of the fittest' whereby they highlight serious issues such as white supremacy and racism and how they are represented in Hollywood. Thus, the work per se reflects the way these ideas and doctrines are demonstrated in politics.

In chapter two, the focus is put on totalitarianism and colonialism as two related themes in *The Hunger Games* series. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to exploring two influential ideals in American society seen through the eyes of Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, following her survival quest demonstrated through pragmatism as a model of American philosophy. Besides that, the thesis explores similarities between the lifestyle of the Capitol and modern America, marked by consumerism and materialism. The aspect of consumer culture and materialism in the US is another theme that can be read in parallel with the way people in the Capitol live in an ideal, extravagant society while the poor in the districts barely afford bread.

Lastly, emphasis was given to the way media and technology can be both benevolent and malevolent powerful instruments. All these aspects are combined to describe a dystopian state in the future, following a contextual cultural study. Both series

are going to be dealt with as media texts that reflect reality. *The Maze Runner* will be contextualized to locate Social Darwinian trends within the themes offered in the whole trilogy. On the other hand, *The Hunger Games* series is going to be treated as media accounts that describe a neocolonial dystopia. The subject matter of this thesis was chosen due to the influence of YA dystopian movies in recent years; they stand as a considerable account of media that can be read and politized in their period of production.

# Chapter One: a Brief Historical Background

**Chapter One: A Brief Historical  Background.**

1.1. Introduction

1.2. Social Darwinism.

    1.2.1 'Survival of the Fittest'

    1.2.2 Evolutionism vs Creationism

    1.2.3 The Rise of Eugenics

1.3. 19th Century America and Evolutionary Thinking

    1.3.1 American Pragmatism

    1.3.2 Materialism and Consumerism in America

1.4 The Beginnings of Colonialism

    1.4.1 Neocolonialism

    1.4.2 The White Man's Burden

1.5 Conclusion

## 1.1 Introduction

The influence of Darwin's evolutionary thinking on modern societies is notably seen in the way racism circulates around the world. Despite the fact that Darwinism was not the very first reason for racial discrimination to prevail, it is rather the way racism tooka scientific justification that Darwinism is responsible for. As Dennis (1995) explains in his article, Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race, "the philosophical and political underpinnings of ideas associated with racial superiority and inferiority were first given scientific legitimacy and credence with the publication of Charles Darwin's (1859) revolutionary book, *The Origin of Species*" (p.243). The influence of Social Darwinian thoughts reached multiple domains in both contemporary and 19ᵗʰ-century western societies. Furthermore, Social Darwinism has been a source of criticism among thinkers and historians, whereby each one of them provided explanations, and interpretations that are considered in this thesis.

The purpose of this chapter is to first introduce Social Darwinism and its genealogies over time, as well as how Darwin's theories emerged in 19ᵗʰ-century Britain. Therefore, to trace back the impact of his theories on other philosophers such as Herbert Spencer, an English economist, and thinker who coined the term "Survival of the fittest" in his book, The *Principles of Biology* (1864) inspired by Darwin. Spencer used the term to refer to Darwin's mechanism of natural selection, which he applied on humans. Besides, the chapter focuses on the relationship between evolutionary ideas and colonialism, mainly through the notion of the white man's burden. The core study of this chapter is to scrutinize the significance of Darwinian thought in America, following scholars like Mike Hawkins (1860-1945), and his book *Social Darwinism in European and American Thoughts*, Hawkins provides a thorough study of Darwinism and evolution in the western world, and he also focuses on America as the application of Social Darwinism

played a key element in the country's history. Thus, the chapter also uses ideas of thinkers like Richard Hofstadter (1944) and his book, *Social Darwinism in American Thoughts*, which gives a significant explanation of the reasons behind Social Darwinian thoughts in America, and why Americans embraced the doctrine in the 19th century.

The purpose behind this historical background is to introduce the implications of Social Darwinian archetypes in American politics and society as an attempt to decipher the alignments of racism with evolution and, thus, to understand the role of such ideas in the emergence of some of the most extremist ideologies of the late 19th century, such as Eugenics. Besides, to provide an explanation on why America in particular became one of the prominent places of Social Darwinian practices. Another aspect to deal with, is the link between 19th-century American popular philosophies such as pragmatism as an authentic American philosophy that was a landmark for Americans. Also, the influence of materialism as a philosophy was bitterly received by American thinkers, but it was clearly influential through consumer culture in gilded-age society. To answer these questions, this chapter dealt with the topic from historical, cultural, and political perspectives to better understand and articulate the influence of Darwin on Americans.

## 1.2. Social Darwinism

The 19th-century Victorian era marked a drastic change in Britain and European society. It was a time when science started becoming a key answer to some of the most fundamental questions about life and human existence, which created a quarrel between pioneers of scientific experiments and religious beliefs. The most prominent figure of the time was Charles Darwin and his notion of evolution.

Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882), English biologist and naturalist famous for his book "*On the Origins of Species*" (1859) he wrote it after his voyage to the Beagle, where he was making scientific observations. He is known for his evolutionary ideas

mainly that of natural selection and progress. Darwin is famously known for his controversial views on human ancestry; he claimed to be common with animals, which got him in trouble with the religious Victorian society. (Desmond, 2022 para. 1). Darwinism, which was coined after him, is not a simple concept to define. Several specialists provided some definitions, as Halliday (1971) describes the term: "Social Darwinism is that enterprise or ideology, founded in the nineteenth century, which holds social evolution to depend upon the operation of the law of natural selection of favorable heritable variants"(p389).

As Halliday stated, Social Darwinism stands on the idea that some species are superior to others. Darwin coined the term "Natural Selection" to describe the process of competition and the struggle of existence between individuals

> I think it inevitably follows, that as new species in the course of time are formed through natural selection, others will become rarer and rarer, and finally extinct. The forms which stand in closest competition with those undergoing modification and improvement will naturally suffer most (p.104).

He claims that the formation of species is fully dependent upon the law of natural selection, and extinction is sure to happen to those who fail to adapt and survive because it is beyond man's power, it is rather a natural process that follows the course of nature he adds in this regard "But Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of nature are to those of Art"(p.65). Thus, Darwin's ideas were fancied by significant thinkers at the time, which paved the way for Social Darwinism.

According to Halliday (1971), Social Darwinists used Darwin's natural selection theory in numerous fields from biology, sociology, economy, and politics; hence, each practitioner interpreted Darwin's ideas and thoughts based on a specific context. Besides,

people were searching for meaning by discovering the nature of man, which likely inclines Social Darwinism as a political and ideological doctrine; these questions and endeavors raised higher expectations and controversial opinions amongst people in society (p.392). In other words, social Darwinism was followed by its opponents, probably due to the nature of their questions and endeavors, who sought to identify certain truths about the nature of man "The practitioners themselves believed they were engaging in a serious and high-level debate about man, society, and politics. Arguably, some attempt should be made to take them seriously; one never knows what might result from this" (p.392). Moreover, the use of Social Darwinism differed from one scholar to another, but the common principle of Darwin's concept is perhaps the interference of power and competition and the relationship between individuals in society through the way they manifest power against each other, resulting in the survival of the most powerful and the downfall of the weakest. As Darwin explains, "a grain in the balance will determine which individual shall live and which shall die which variety or species shall increase in number, and which shall decrease, or finally become extinct"(p.385).

Furthermore, Darwin argued that his theory was directed to the natural world, but this did not prevent other scholars and sociologists from taking his "natural selection" doctrine and assimilating it into humans. Richard Hofstadter (1944) argues that "Darwin had been talking about pigeons, but the imperialists saw no reason why his theories should not apply to men, and the whole spirit of the naturalistic world-view seemed to call for a vigorous and unrelenting thoroughness in the application of biological concepts"(p.163), However, he contradicts his claim in his book, *The Descent of Men* (1871) "At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races" (p.192). Darwin clearly believes in the superiority of Europeans and the white race in general.

Natural selection is applied to humans as much as it is to the natural world, and it was used by imperialists to continue justifying their racist actions and opinions, as George E. Simpson argues in his article Darwin and Social Darwinism (1959) that Darwinism was used to justify "the conflicts of rival empires, the ententes, and the alliances of the "balance of power" (p.36). On that account, Gregory Clayes (2000) claims

> what unites the various forms of Social Darwinism, then, is not a specific political stance but the application of the idea of Evolution to a higher social type based on social competition between "fit" and "unfit" groups and individuals, whose "fitness" or "value" to society can be defined in several ways (p.229 p. 229).

Social Darwinism contributed to the emergence of one of the most extremist theories in history, known as the eugenic movement, which started in America and moved to other parts of Europe, mainly Germany. Simpson further illustrates that the Eugenics tried to label the term fit and unfit in society with the poor. The rich, "believing that disease, poverty, and crime are due largely to heredity, warned against the high reproductive rates of the lower classes" (p.37).

In the same vein, the term Social Darwinism indeed created controversy in the late 1980s, especially with such racist programs. Still, was Darwin a Social Darwinist? Several opinions emerged concerning this matter, despite the obvious claims of Darwin in his book *The Descent of Man* about racial inferiority. Yet, Rogers (1972) indicates that Darwin's role in the emergence of what is known as Social Darwinism is somewhat unintentional " It suggests that Darwin's theory of natural selection was simply another discovery in the natural  sciences misused to rationalize social preconceptions" which later on results in "the effect of Darwin on the cluster of ideas later called Social Darwinism thus becomes coincidental rather than instrumental"(p.265).

However, according to Simpson, Darwin was a Social Darwinist due to his interpretations in *The Descent of Man* as it has been stated before. He clearly demonstrates his views on the implications of his theory of "Natural Selection" on society and not just animals. (p.37). Besides, in his article Listening In order Not to Hear? Darwin, Politics, and Sacrifice, Dolgert (2013) further explains the link between Darwin's theory of selection and other species, including humans, through the way readers attempt to understand the notion of evolution by searching for a link between superior and inferior species, which is not the best way to understand evolution for Darwin because he denies any type of relationship and by species, he also means humans, "as Darwin explains ad nauseam in The Origin of Species, and he applies the same logic to humans in *Descent* (Origin implied that humans were included but did not explicitly state this)"(p.5).

Put simply, for Darwin, species that fail the process of natural selection are going to be eradicated "Darwin believes that spaces in "the polity of nature" are generally limited, these three varieties (or sub-species) will compete for the same ecological niche, but only one strain will survive the contest" (p.5). When Darwin's theories first appeared, it was difficult to convince his scientist's supporters to accept them. According to Lightman (2010), Darwin's evolutionary theories were popularized by other scientists. Otherwise, his theory would never be this popular, thanks to his effort in pushing his acquaintances to examine his works and draw attention to them. He figured out that the success of his ideas lay in their acceptance by the vast majority of people in Victorian society back then (p.6).

However, before reaching popularity, Darwin was criticized on how he saw progress through natural selection, they (scientists and friends) considered it vague and ambiguous, they saw that his work was lacking explanations, Darwin kept producing

several editions to reach a larger audience "Darwin tinkered with Origin during the 1860s as it went through a series of editions. Some changes reflected his response to scientists who argued that he had overemphasized the role of natural selection in evolution" (p.9). Unlike other scientists like Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), who was uncertain about natural selection (p.10), George John Romanes (1848-94), a friend of Darwin, fancied the theory of evolution and supported Darwin through his attempt to popularize evolutionary thinking in Victorian Britain. "Referred to as 'Darwin's staunchest supporter and disciple' from the mid-1870s to the end of the century by one scholar, Romanes accepted the role of presenting Darwin's ideas to a popular audience in periodicals such as The Nineteenth Century as well as in several books" (p.11).

Despite the countereffect of Darwin's ideology on societies, its widespread was forcefully influential through one of the key figures who supported it, this figure was Herbert Spencer (1829 -1930) an English sociologist who supports the notion of *Laissez faire* capitalism, he was one of the eminent figures to support evolutionary thinking and Darwin's theories of evolution. His ideas were influential both in Britain and America. His book *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862*)* left a noticeable impact on the fields of economy and sociology. He followed an evolutionary perspective in explaining  the processes of social life and the economy in general. Spencer is famously known for his term 'Survival of the Fittest' in which he used it to describe the function of progress.

Spencer and Darwin have both influenced each other. "For Spencer, then, human life was not only on a continuum with, but was also the culmination of, a lengthy process of evolution" (para.1) Moreover, Darwin and Spencer were influenced by another famous economist named John Thomas Robert Malthus (1766 -1834), an Economist and thinker from Britain whose ideas were a source of inspiration for Darwin, He argued that

"Increases in population would eventually diminish the ability of the world to feed itself and based this conclusion on the thesis that populations expand in such a way as to overtake the development of sufficient land for crops" (para.3). Spencer adopted natural selection in his Essay on *Population, Analyzing Society* (1798).

Darwin was influenced by Malthus, which was well reflected in his natural selection and struggle for existence through his argument that species are likely to expand and compete against each other for resources and survival. Which means that any "perception of stability on the part of the observer of nature had to reconcile this seeming stability with the fact (according to Darwin) that every living thing, left to its own devices, would expand until it was the only living thing visible" (p.9). In other words, due to the rapid increase in human numbers, survival is a must. It will be a struggle for life, and he depicted the idea of the strong as the fit and the weak as the unfit who is eliminated. Darwin's ideas were influenced by Malthus' claim about human's constant reproduction while the need for resources increases, which implies the limitations of populations, Dolgert (2013) argues "Darwin generalized Malthus's claim (about dire relationship between human life's tendency to reproduce geometrically while food production only increased arithmetically) to all living being (p.9).

Moreover, Mayr (1996) points out that the theory of natural selection encountered strong resistance until 1940 when the vast majority of biologists considered it reliable with reserved opinions concerning the theory of selection. (p.1). The reasons behind such reactions were because Darwin's biological claims were against the common beliefs of society. Darwin's theories proved to support a Lamarckian view concerning the inheritance of acquired characteristics to survive and natural selection happened to have the same principle: "Darwin himself, of course, believed in an inheritance of acquired

characters, and many of the later Lamarckian also believed in natural selection and actually considered themselves to be good Darwinians" (p.3). These beliefs provoked the Christian Victorian society. Creationists who believed in the divinity of humans, alongside other naturalists, were triggered by the idea of descending from apes. "This theory was refuted when evolutionists pointed out that organ isms are not types but populations, and that no population as a whole could ever be converted into a new type by a sing" (p.1).

Ultimately, Social Darwinism indeed captured the attention of intellectuals in the Victorian era. Even though it had sensitive and conflicting views amongst people and scholars, it was thus applied to justify certain ideological positions, mainly those concerned with the superiority of Europeans and racism. Hofstadter (1992) writes

> Darwinism was put in the service of the imperial urge. Although Darwinism was not the primary source of the belligerent ideology and dogmatic racism of the late nineteenth century, it did become a new instrument in the hands of the theorists of race and struggle…In the United States, however, such frank and brutal militarism was far less common than a benevolent conception of Anglo-Saxon world domination in the interests of peace and freedom. (p.176)

Evolutionary thinking was considered an ideal explanation for Victorian society.There was a fanciful belief in the independence of individuals and a support for laissez-faire, where people should compete and exhibit their best traits to reach a fruitful end, and the ones who fail are left to meet their demise. (Burdett, 2014 parag.3). Darwin's competition and struggle for existence were also adopted for colonial and racial justifications. The British empire started to expand even more after the claims of evolutionary thinking and the allegedly scientific justification of the inferiority of non-white people. It was even easier for Europeans to colonize African countries and acquire more land and resources (para.8). The theory thrived and reached different levels of

studies; Darwin's theory was not exclusive to biology but several fields, accumulating significant subjects in the social sciences and humanities.

## 1.2.1 'Survival of the Fittest'

The term 'survival of the fittest' was first introduced by Herbert Spencer in his book *The Principles of Biology* (1864)"this survival of the fittest which I have here sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr. Darwin has called natural selection, or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life" (Spencer.1864, p.164). The term is associated with Darwinism, but in fact, the concept is of much older meaning; in this context, Rogers (1972) believes that these ideas were not unique to Darwin and were related to his theory of natural selection. However, they are frequently attributed to Darwin's methodology rather than the philosophies that gave rise to them. Later, when Social Darwinists sought to understand human society through Darwin's perspective on the animal world, they developed important catchphrases. (p.265)

Other scholars argued on the emergence of the term with Spencer, as Schmider & Mutter (2011) explain that Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* (1859) had a great impact on the ideas of Herbert Spencer, a sociologist and economist. The revolutionary demise of the traditional paradigm of economic nature—which is based on the assumption of the static natural order and sees the eradication of weak individuals as a corrective for the benefit of the harmonious hierarchy of species—by Darwin's theory of evolution might lead one to interpret Spencer's introduction of the term in this way (p.45).

As it is noted above, Darwinian thoughts influenced economy as much as it did for society. The idea of sacrificing the weak permeated this philosophy, which was now associated with Spencer, for that reason, the elimination of the unfit became a legitimate goal to reach progress. Dolgert (2013) argues that

Natural selection is a cruel utility maximizer, though it maximizes utility not for individual creatures but for micro or macro units but since it selects for "the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy" and selects against all the rest, based on their 'consent' as they pursue their self-interest, we are left with a system that is in effect justified through a teleology by-sacrifice" (p.15)

Charles Darwin implied that specific species are privileged in terms of co-existence, which likely makes them the fittest. Hofstadter (1992) adds.

The most popular catchwords of Darwinism, "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest", when applied to the life of man in society, suggested that nature would provide that the best competitors in a competitive situation would win and that this process would lead to continuity and improvement (p.7).

Survival of the fittest refers to the process of human's accommodation of the environment, which likely results in their survival at best. Hawkins (1997) examined in his book *Social Darwinism and European and American thought* the main points emphasized by Spencer, giving importance to both the biological side and the aspect of co-existence and maintaining survival traits, which likely provokes the advantage of some species compared to others, putting them first at the expense of those who are condemned as weak and irrelevant to humans. Spencer referred to them as savages and primitives in his social evolution theory. To demonstrate how individuality, freedom, and morality arose during the process of evolution through a logic of differentiation, specialization, and individuation, Spencer had to depict primitives as immoral, illogical, and violent. It allowed him to create an evolutionary continuum and, using his recapitulation perspective, to replace some of the social categories at the lowest end of the continuum with more modern ones (Hawkins, p.98).

Like Darwin, Spencer made this conceptualization to legitimize and justify his ideology and "to facilitate judgements about the various social groups in question or,

more accurately, to legitimate prior judgements arising from Spencer's political standpoint" (p.99). These ideas gained massive attention among people during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, among them the quarrel between science and religion. *Gregory Claeys* (2000) argues that Darwin faced a tremendous theological debate for his claims on human existence in late Victorian Britain by the church, "which followed the conclusion that human beings had been levelled to the status of animals and deprived of special providential creation as well as any divine purpose in the perpetuation of their species (p.225)

In order to understand the link between Spencer and Darwin through their theories, Howerth, a university professor in California, explains the differences and similarities that were drawn between the two in his article, Natural Selection and Survival of the Fittest (1917) Herbert Spencer introduced the phrase 'survival of the fittest' as a similar description of Darwin's natural selection, he further explains that Darwin's co-discoverer Alfred Wallace favored Spencer's description and "urged upon Darwin the substitution of it for "natural selection" the ground of his preference being not any difference in the meaning of the two expressions, arisen from Darwin's apparent personification of nature"(p.253). Hence Russell (1866) argues, "The term is the plain expression of the fact; natural selection is a metaphorical expression of it, and to a certain degree indirect and incorrect, since, even, personifying *nature, she does not so much select the special variations as exterminating the most unfavorable ones". (Cited in Howerth, 1917, p.253)

In this stream of thoughts, Howerth insists that the phrase survival of the fittest highlights Darwin's natural selection. The former holds distinct connotations compared to the latter; he claims that Darwin embraced the phrase and even used it in his other editions of *Origin of Species*. Therefore, several opinions have occurred, where some put

the survival of the fittest and natural selection as two similar concepts. In contrast, others viewed them differently in relation to the subject of evolution. However, Howerth contends that there is a distinction between the two "it may be said that natural selection is a process while the survival of the fittest is a result; the one is a principle of limited application, the other a universal law"(p.254), i.e. natural selection is the process by which species adapt to survive. Natural selection implies the need for an application, a sort of action whereby the selection process takes place, whether by selecting or rejecting; this application is made unconsciously in a genuine manner.

Based on Howerth's explanations, natural selection comes as a process that results in survival of the fittest, arguing that natural selection includes five "the multiplication of chances, variation, struggle for existence, heredity, survival of the fittest", therefore, survival of the fittest is the outcome of the whole process. "Another outcome would be the elimination of the unfit. It would be just as correct to identify natural selection with the elimination of the unfit as with survival of the fittest "(p.254). He claims that the difference is presumably valid but not of great importance because the two elements go hand in hand." The same may not be said, however, of the distinction Iam now about to point out, for it is both valid and important. The distinction previously referred to in the statement is that natural selection is a principle while survival of the fittest is a law" (p.255).

Howerth's article indicates multiple views on the concept of survival of the fittest; he describes it as a natural law, "a law which prevails in the organic world and the social world.", thus for humans to improve, there should be "–a creation of conditions which favor a higher type of man and society." pressing on the idea that for something to develop, there is a need for a conditioning cause. He further challenges Spencer's views on progress as he quotes from Spencer's words, "progress is not an accident, not a thing

within human control, but beneficent necessity " (p.257), indicating that Spencer was wrong, and progress is indeed an unintended process, as he argues that progress is accidental insofar as it is a result of natural selection at work. Although it is governed by a powerful natural rule, it is not a benevolent necessity and is therefore subject to human control. Let's say we have enough knowledge about society to understand the conditions essential to the higher type of society's survival and, through deliberate action, create these conditions. In that situation, the upper class will enter and flourish. Similar to how knowledge is power when it comes to controlling mechanical forces, knowledge is power when it comes to social control. (p.257).

The concept of purifying humanity through Darwin's competition and survival of the fittest became quite influential and pervasive in 19th-century Europe and found their way to America likewise, and by 1900, Darwinian ideas of survival, fitness, and struggle against nature had become massively and critically influential in European and American thought (Clayes, p.224). Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection became very clear that it had its own agenda when applied to society, and the term "survival of the fittest" was thus used to justify social inequalities and racial discrimination. Hence, Social Darwinism stood against everything religious institutions advocated for; this ideology created a clash between science and religion, resulting in a longstanding quarrel.

## 1.2.2 Evolutionism vs Creationism

The relationship between science and religion has always been one of great importance and sensibility. Therefore, religious believers and scientists have had a disapproving relationship that dates back to the beginning of the 19th century and the age of the Enlightenment (Harrison, 2006,p.82). Historically speaking, the quarrel between science and religion has always been there; however, it was after the declarations

of Darwin's theory of evolution that fueled the argument between the two. To understand what happened, Reiss (2009) argues that it is  vital to tackle them separately before dealing with their relationship. He explains that the phrase "the nature of science" is usually utilized, indicating the functionality of scientific truths. It is challenging to study the nature of scientific beliefs and their foundation, and there are fundamental questions that occur every time scientists debate religion. Similarly, questions about the origins of the universe, and humanity are always at the forefront of these arguments (p.1). The majority would argue that they fall under the umbrella of science, but others would claim that "most people hold that science is but one form of knowledge and that other forms of knowledge complement science" (p.2).

Religion, representing creationism, is the opposite of science; unlike evolutionists, who believe that things evolve and pass through an evolutionary state Beck (2002) argues that creationism believes God created the earth and everything on it, while evolutionists believe it is a natural progression (para.1). In modern science, the relationship is quite different from the past; now, creationists somehow tolerate some  evolutionary claims while rejecting the absence of a deity, which is the basis of evolution. The old creationists believe in some scientific theories about the origins of men, the "old-earth creationists," accept scientific evidence for a four-billion-year-old earth, but deny that macroevolutionary changes, such as the transition from reptiles to mammals, are possible purely by natural means" (Pond, F.R., Pond, J.L. Scientific Authority in the Creation–Evolution Debates 2010 para.18).

Furthermore, Reis indicates this through a study of both John  Hedley Brooke and Ian Barbour(1990). These two scholars discussed the problem between science and religion first. For Brooke, there is no clear relationship between science and faith because he regards them separately due to their complexity.

The link between the two doctrines is just a matter of distinct interpretations and perspectives that communities mistake for a bond between the two. (p,4). Whereas Barbour admits that there is a link, and he tackled it through four main groupings, the first trait is a conflicted kinship, as Barbour (1990) "In scientific materialism, science swallows' religion, In Biblical literalism, religion swallows' science. The fight can be avoided if they occupy separate territories or if, as I will suggest, they each pursue more appropriate diets"(qtd in Reiss, 2009, p4). As the second component in his description, they can be viewed independently Barbour (1990) indicates that the proponents of this viewpoint claim that each party must respect the other's jurisdiction, attend to its own business, and refrain from interfering in the activities of the other parties because each has a distinct domain and features that may be justified on its grounds. Each method of research is limited and selective (p.27).

Barbour's third characteristic is a dialogue arguing that religion interferes with science in cases such as astronomy and the evolution of the universe, not to point out that science needs faith in this case but rather "…the point is that scientific advances can give rise (no claim is made that they do for all people) to religious questions so that a dialogue ensues" (Reiss, 2009, p.5). Hence, the last grouping in Barbour's study is one of integration, whereby science and religion blend in together (Barbour 1990, p.121)

Creationists rather criticize evolution, which is taken as the scientific explanation of human existence. Chinsamy & Plagányi (2008) argue in a journal article entitled Accepting Evolution that evolutionary theories are often regarded critically and most of the time described as "troubling" due to the challenges this theory underscores, in opposition to religious beliefs and sacred doctrines that are based on creationism (p.248). The clash between Evolution and creationism has been addressed in several domains, according to Brush (2000) the problem of teaching creationists' views on life and

evolutionary theories as well, first creation is probably not regarded as a scientific theory, and Evolution is a complicated theory to be explained, Brush explains the argument between science and religion per Weinberg (1980) that "the best defense against the creationist theory is no defense"(p34).

Nevertheless, he emphasizes that to unmind this matter is not a solution either because there will always be a quarrel that combines them. (Qtd in Brush,2000, p.34). He pinpoints further, and those creationists tend to criticize specific evolutionists' theories "creationists frequently cite biologists' criticisms of a particular evolutionary hypothesis, such as natural selection, as evidence that evolution is in itself doubtful" (p.34). Thus, one of the often-asked questions is the debate on the origins of the universe and life in general, whereby each mainstream takes particular arguments; creationists claim that God created the universe within one week; in contrast, evolutionists insist that life evolved over a billion years ago (p.34).

### 1.2.3 The Rise of Eugenics

By the late 19$^{th}$ century, Social Darwinism and evolutionary theories were fairly influential, and people found these doctrines interesting. Despite the various views, many supported Darwin's ideas indubitably. The leading evolutionary theory at the time was eugenics. According to Boulter (2017), eugenics is "an assumption that the progress of the human species could be controlled and improved through selective breeding" (p.103). Hence, based on Butler, it was a theory developed by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton (1822-1911) and Karl Pearson (1857-1936), these two evolutionists started asking fundamental questions about human existence as Daniel Kevels explains in his book *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (1995*)*, during their observation of the ecosystem's complexity and the way the natural world interacts and develops, "could not the race of men be similarly improved? Galton wondered. could not

the undesirables be got rid of, and the desirables multiplied?", could not man take charge

of his evolution?" (p.3).

From these ideas, eugenics started to take shape, with the aim of controlling

humans' breeding based on a set of specific criteria and principles, both physical and

mental. It was not until (1883) that the term eugenics was coined by Francis Galton in his

book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, pointing out that it could be

deployed on humans and not just animals. Galton suggested reducing births, and another

scholar named Pearson accompanied his political vision to reach an improved genetic

composition for humans. "He believed strongly that it could  be achieved by encouraging

statistically selected groups of men and women to reproduce" (Boutler, p.103).

Furthermore, eugenics was also employed in the middle-class women's status in Britain;

Going back to Galton and Pearson and to Eugenics as a radical movement that started

influencing people's lives and political systems as well, Hawkins (1997) argues

> Galton proposed the 'science' of eugenics in the belief that it was objectively
> possible to recognize the undesirable elements in a population and reduce their
> numbers through relevant social controls negative eugenics while at the same time
> encouraging the reproduction of the better elements positive eugenics(p.217)

Galton embraced Darwin's ideas on heredity and natural selection and used them

to support his argument for the creation of an ideal human race. He believed that applying

eugenics to populations would decrease social problems, and help perfect humanity,

which is basically done through the elimination of the unfit, but these claims were

skeptically deranged to be considered positive. Dennis (2013) argues that "His eugenics

program encouraged childbearing among the "fitter stock" of Western society,

namely its wealthy Anglo-Saxon upper classes; and discouraged it among those whom he considered "unfit," namely those of the lower classes and people of color" (p.246).

Eugenics was used to justify racial discrimination, and it is clear in the way it circulated in other parts of the world that "Historians have shown how eugenics and social hygiene programs in some countries served the interests of the practitioners in the various branches of medicine and related professions in their efforts to achieve professional status and public recognition" (p.218).

Karl Pearson, on another front, advocated for eugenics as well; he argues that humans are a part of an evolutionary organism "generated by the struggle for existence in the form of warfare" (Hawkins, p.226). In other words, competition is an investable process that should focus on the fittest, as the future of the human race is dependent upon the good traits the dominant race produces (p.227). Pearson's reasoning is emphasized through heredity, as he saw human traits to be inherited by the coming generations, for that, he supported the program of preventing reproduction between the unfit because for him, they are a threat Pearson (1912) writes "The problem is simple in the extreme. We have two groups in the community, one parasitic or the other. The latter thinks of tomorrow and is childless; the former takes no thought and multiplies. It can only end as the case so often ends the parasite will kill its host, and so end the tale for both alike" (Qtd in Hawkins, p. 228). Surprisingly, these ideas were immensely accepted and influential at that time.

In the United States of America, eugenics was tremendously popular, and Darwin's ideas were greatly embraced by American thinkers and scientists. Some of the images of eugenics in the United States, as stated by an article entitled Eugenics (2021), appear to have appeared through marriage; the authors indicate that in 1896, Connecticut passed a lawon people with mental disorders not to marry, which later on

led to the creation American Breeder's referring to the application of the program in the community: "Connecticut made it illegal for people with epilepsy or who were "feeble-minded" to marry. In 1903, the American Breeder's Association was created to study eugenics" ((History.com Editors, para.8). Similarly, in Britain, Galton and Pearson devoted their time and effort to establishing a ground that holds the ideas of Darwin to migration and human communities. Thus, Boutler argues that the latter grasped impressive attention, both from academic and political fields, to

> Improve the quality of human populations and reduce the reproduction of undesirable human characteristics. plenty of discussion about the difficulties and dangers, and plenty of suspicion about giving scientists or politicians too much power, but there was never any clear agreement among politicians about how to select either the candidates or the methods (p.103)

The eugenic program sought to allegedly purify humans based on its supporters. Still, the doctrine was opaque and had its own agenda, as such evolutionists claimed that humans inherited their mental illnesses and physical disabilities genetically, but there was no clear evidence that proves this claim; in this regard, Butler pinpoints Lankester's explanation, demanding that "before too many people jumped to too many conclusions, more should be known about the origin of human characteristics, whether they were inherited or learned"(Qtd in Butler,2017.p.104). Additionally, not all people understood what was meant by this; Lankester questioned the connotation of some terms such as 'racial quality' and 'improvement', asking for a more serious study of humans. Boutler highlights that 'intellectual eugenicists ignored Lankester's criticisms. He understood better the mechanism of congenital disabilities: "they occurred in considerable numbers of species of animals and plants. It was part of the complex process of natural selection" (p.104). He stressed upon those who wanted to interfere, explaining that mental illnesses

could occur both in the offspring of different social classes, not just the lower classes, and that it is a part of the life cycle rather than some hidden organism.

Interestingly, the genetic researchers who advocated for the eugenic program took action to see their theories experienced in society; After they established the groundwork for the program to be represented, they first had to convince people that this was a beneficial doctrine and that it could be successful. Pioneers of eugenics thought of displaying the program as an "academic discipline, which would include research demonstrating the genetic basis of certain diseases and energy, intelligence, and character" (Lynn,2001, p.10). Later, they had to subtly persuade people to accept that humans are just like other species and that they are capable of improvement. Lastly, people could fully agree on this and approve the eugenic policies when the former steps are achieved. (p.10).

Even though eugenics gained the support of both intellectuals and politicians of the early 20th century, it had quite a disapproval from others as well. Boutler remarked that genetic science was allegedly a vast world and there was no clear agenda to take upon; except for "Darwin and Weismann had provided the most useful data, and Huxley had been its most inspiring orator and educator, but the knowledge available then was basic" (p.106), so the pressure on these scientists to prove their theories was huge. Besides, religion stood as an obstacle against evolutionists and eugenicists.

There has been a challenge between the two; Boutler illustrates that Benjamin Kidd, an evolutionist at the time, insisted on the human rights of the individual. "should humanity retain the law of ancient Greece and rank each person as subordinate to the claims of the state? Kidd wrote about 'equality of opportunity' rather than the same social level for all members of a group, let alone the whole of society" (Qtd in Boutler, 2001.p106). In other words, Kidd viewed people differently; for him, individuals do not

have the same measures of success and failure, and opportunity likewise. Eugenicists' motives were to reduce illnesses and prevent pain by restraining the manifestations of the human's offspring. However, these explanations were not good enough to justify cruel and radical programs like sterilization, and selective breeding.

Others, such as, Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), a British psychiatrist who argued on the matter from another perspective, Boutler discusses that Maudsley had his skepticism about Galton's argument that humans inherit talent and personality "he favored the theory that families like the Darwin's were successful because they were privileged to have grown and developed in a favorable environment" (p107). Meaning that merits and talents are linked to the environment, individuals grow up in rather than heredity. Heredity is a set of biological processes whereby specific characteristics are passed by parents to their offspring, it has to do with the human genes and the cells, but in the case of eugenics, some argue that even mental traits are inherited, like crime for example Pearson considered it as a genetic feature that could be passed down through generations (Billinger 2014)

In the United States, eugenics as a movement was so widely spread that the eugenicists of that time started testing on people, especially immigrants', as indicated by Kevels "In the interest of reducing the proportion of the "less fit" in society, eugenicists in the United States helped restrict immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe" (p.9). Such interests paved the way for the emergence of the Nazi model and inspired Hitler's extremism, "who sterilized several hundred thousand people and, brandishing their research into the genetics of individual and racial differences, claimed scientific justifications for the Holocaust" (p.9).

Another program that took place in American facilities is known as the Intelligent Quotient, which is a series of tests done by specialists, and psychologists to measure

individual's reasoning capacities. I.Q. testing was a part of scientific racism as it is known nowadays. These hereditarians employed several tests to justify their claims; such tests were initiated by Galton, who supported heredity in order to prove the Anglo-Saxon superiority, in this line of thought, Dennis (2013) argues that

> The modern fascination with testing was partly a reflection of the growing scientism emerging among the academic disciplines, especially the social or human sciences, which were being challenged by those who viewed the techniques and methodologies of the natural sciences as representative of "true" or "hard" science (p.246).

The attempt was to prove that social sciences can be dealt with like natural sciences, mainly that of Darwin's, besides, the intelligent testing was fancied by Galton's supporters to demonstrate the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxons. "This idea, which sought validation under the rubric of Social Darwinism, was mainly an "after-the-fact" assertion-that is, Anglo-Saxons were believed superior because they enjoyed political, economic, and cultural hegemony over non-Anglo-Saxon people" (p.246). As it has been stated by Dennis, I.Q. testing was just a means to justify political ideologies and support Social Darwinism; "it simply enabled certain Whites to better justify longstanding ideological assumptions, policies, and oppressive behaviors. I.Q. tests thus became ideological weapons in the campaign to label certain persons so as to better exploit them."(p.247)

Eugenics was primarily accepted in the U.S.; it was included in some of the universities as a part of the teaching programs as a way of integration. In, Eugenics in the United States (2020), the author argues that "By 1928 there were 376 separate university courses in some of the United States' leading schools, enrolling more than 20,000 students, which included eugenics in the curriculum" (para.5). Going back to the program of the American Breeder's association, with its advocates, in 1906, the program was

established in 1906 and focused on the superiority of blood and the threat of inferior races in affecting the wellbeing of society, claiming that it will reflect on the health of the future citizen and that it must be done this way (para 5.6).

Some of the applied programs included sterilization of the mentally ill. In an essay entitled *When California Sterilized 20.000 of its Citizens*, Alexandra Stern (2016) writes, "Not too long ago, more than 60,000 people were sterilized in the United States based on eugenic laws. Most of these operations were performed before the 1960s in institutions for the so-called "mentally ill" or "mentally deficient" (para.1). This type of programs was approved and advocated for by law and government; they saw that it was a good way to improve societies and scientists were given full pardon to act upon the application in different states around the U.S. Stern writes.

> In total, 32 U.S. states passed sterilization laws between 1907 and 1937, and surgeries reached their highest numbers in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Beginning in the 1970s, state legislatures began to repeal these laws, finding them antiquated and discriminatory, particularly towards people with disabilities (para.2),

These sterilization programs were mainly done to blacks, immigrants, and people with mental disabilities; unlike what the law stated, the program was discriminatory. In another incident, Lisa Wade (2011) investigates the fact that sterilizations victims were mostly women of color "During the U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico, over one-third of all women were sterilized. And today, still, Puerto Rican women in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. have "one of the highest documented rates of sterilization in the world." Two-thirds are sterilized before the age of 30" (para.4).

Gregory W. Rutecki (2010), Forced Sterilization of Native Americans: Late Twentieth Century Physician Cooperation with National Eugenic Policies, an article that

tells the story of a heartbreaking sterilization experiment done on a young native American who has been a victim of sterilization in a health center. She "needed appendectomies and received "incidental" tubal ligations" (para.2). Hence, another form of eugenics was embodied in farm colonies that were specialized in hosting feeble-minded people and forcing them to work on farms…etc. Arnie argues in her book *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony* (2017), that there were several forms of colonies established. She explains that these colonies at first were for the own good of the disabled people to make them better citizens and help them improve themselves. Thus, the involvement of eugenicists in these acts, who saw these colonies in regard to I.Q. testing and considered them a burden, mainly through figures such as Walter Fernand, who is an admirer of eugenics as he claims, "The expense of… farm colonies for the feeble minded will be counterbalanced by the reduction in the population of almshouses, prisons and other expensive institutions" (Qtd in Arneil, p.126). Eugenics took multiple forms in American society, and as it has been stated above, this radical doctrine was prevalent and effectively applied throughout the 19th century.

Similarly, Lynn (2001) argues that the objective of eugenics is based on Galton's, depending on three traits health, intelligence, and moral character. "He employed the concept of health broadly to include not only the absence of disease, but also the presence of energy, vigor, and what he sometimes called "physique" (p.4). Therefore, Galton believed that civilization is done through improvement, and that is a complicated process, including competition and the manifestation of abilities. Galton's meritocratic vision in his book *Heredity Genuis* (1869)

> The best form of civilization in respect to the improvement of the race would be one in which society was not costly; where incomes were chiefly derived from professional sources and not much through inheritance; where every lad had a chance of showing his abilities and, if highly gifted, was enabled to achieve a

first-class education and entrance into professional life, by the liberal help of the exhibitions and scholarships which he had gained in his early youth( p.362)

Lynn adds, "civilization is better than barbarism, and that to maintain and promote an advanced civilization, the intelligence of the population needs to be improved and prevented from declining" (p.4). His study of intelligence depends on the idea that, it can change and adapt to several circumstances and fields. "Galton conceptualizedintelligence as a single general ability that is capable of being channeled into a variety of human endeavors. That has become the prevailing view in contemporary psychology" (Lynn,2001 p.5). Besides character as an essential component, Lynn discusses that it is a "syndrome of personality qualities comprising a strong moral sense, energy and "zeal" for sustained work, integrity, trustworthiness, and a sense of social obligation". (p.5) Galton truly believed in the importance of character for the continuity of human civilization; it must be improved as well.

Consequently, Galton labeled the three qualities that could be designed in one characteristic named "worth", Galton said, "I mean civic worthiness, or the value to the state, of a person…if I had to clarify persons according to worth, I should consider them under three heads of physique (including good health), ability, and character" (5). Galton viewed eugenics as a method to help improve and elevate humans based on these three qualities. Galton was immensely influenced by Darwinism and natural selection; these theories inspired his study after he did several types of research on this field. He was inspired and convinced that humans are indeed in desperate need for improvement "Galton realized that the cleansing function of natural selection, the elimination of the unfit, had begun to weaken in Britain and Western nations during the nineteenth century" (p.7). Lynn illustrates Galton's words "one of the effects of civilization is to diminish the

rigor of the application of the law of natural selection. It preserves weak lives that would have perished in more barbarous lands".

In other stages, Lynn describes how Galton reviewed the breakdown of natural selection "this was the emergence of an inverse relationship between ability and fertility," i.e., whenever talented people were giving birth, the less talent was inherited. He highlighted the fact that in the first stages of civilization, more intelligent and productive men typically had fewer children than less intelligent and enterprising men. He proposed that the main cause of this was that those who were more capable and ambitious tended to marry later or even never get married since they saw marriage and having children as a hindrance to their professions (p.7).

Galton's interpretation indicates that the law of natural selection may interfere with the talented candidates' desires and wishes, including not marrying young  and having kids who are supposed to be the selected members. Going back to Lynn's analysis, Galton tackled two proposals to fulfill this motive, first "the establishment of local eugenics associations, which eugenics enthusiasts would staff to promote eugenic principles and policies in their localities"(p.11), the following step is to select specific candidates from the society known as the 'fit' and provide them with the  right environment and finance as well so that they could have children. These people are selected according to Galton's "civic worthiness", prominent people from valuable families, as he puts it, "the brains of the nation lie in the higher of our classes" (p.11).

Furthermore, Galton proposed that the desirable  elite should be "conscious of their ethical duty to have children and thereby increase, or at least maintain,  their numbers on future generation" (p.11). To succeed in identifying this special category, he suggested that they should be considered with their elite genetic feature, Galton stated, "My object is to build up by extensive inquiry and publication of results, a sentiment of

caste among those who are naturally gifted"(p.11). Whereas negative eugenics depending on Galton's analytical studies of people and societies, deduced that there are specific families with a social and moral burden that should have their offspring controlled, if not eliminated and hijacked, "he believed that such families were "infamous" and the society would be better off without them" (Lynn,2001, p12).

The problem that occurred was how? Galton believed that it was difficult to persuade them to choose not to have children, but he believed that some kind of "coercion would be required, writing that "stern compulsion ought to be exerted to prevent the free propagation of the stock of those who are seriously afflicted by lunacy, feeble-mindedness, habitual criminality, and pauperism" (p.12). He, later on, did not clarify how this should be achieved "in the twentieth century, this prediction was realized by the sterilization laws that were widely implemented in many western nations" (p.12). Nye (1993) explains that Eugenics in America was appraised by scientists and highly supported by the government despite its cruelty.

American race theorists sought to portray the inferiority of black Americans, immigrants, and people of non-white descent by providing biological dangers of race mixing, which only made scientific racism even more prevalent. Eugenic lobbied mightily at the federal level for legislation prohibiting the immigration of inferior stock and on the state level for laws permitting the sterilization or segregation of so-called defectives (p.698). which brought to light the role of Social Darwinism and how it played a significant part in the spread of racism in American society and contributed to the drastic change of individuals' lives.

## 1.2. 19ᵗʰ Century America and Evolutionary Thinking

Darwinism as a theory started after the publication of Charles Darwin's book *"origins of species"* 1859 his explanation of the origin of life grasped the attention of that time, according to Mayr (2001) Darwin was a naturalist following a naturalistic framework; he also describes him as a pragmatist relying on experimentation and observation in his analysis. (p.489). Darwin's perception of the world was recognized as controversial and uniquely effective due to the way his theories challenged the essence of ideas and beliefs. His evolutionary thinking had an impact on philosophy as well. "The influence of Darwin upon philosophy resides in his having conquered the phenomena of life for the principles of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and morals and life" (Dewey 2016, p.3), i.e., his ideas were multidimensional, touching not only the knowledge of the nature of man but also rather transcended beyond the scope of science.

Social Darwinism permeated the world, but America in particular embraced this doctrine. In Darwinism Comes to America, 1859-1900, Loewenberg (1941) explains that Americans contributed massively to the development of evolutionary theories; "the United States supplied one of Darwin's most distinguished critics as well as one of his most influential supporters" (p.340). Going back to the 19ᵗʰ-century gilded age is crucial to comprehending the impact of Darwin's evolutionary theories on American society. It began when some of the most prominent leading thinkers of the century started adapting evolutionary thinking as their primary model, among them John Fisk (1842- 1901), a philosopher and historian who claimed that not all civilizations persist and thrive; they are rather dependent upon the notion of progress, which he sees as the law of history. (Hawkins 1997, p.107).

Another key factor that paved the way for Social Darwinism to be cemented in -

America is identified with the ideas of Spencer's "Survival of the Fittest", who saw no harm in applying Darwin's natural selection to society, especially the economy. In his, *Collected Essays in Political and Social Science* (1885), William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), an economist and sociologist who adhered to Social Darwinian thinking. Sumner regards society as an entity that requires individuals to compete against eachother to maintain survival and progress; he was mainly influenced by Spencer. His prospect implies that not all societies succeed in surviving, as it is a competition or somewhat a vicious race for resources. He reasons, "We have noticed that the relations involved in the struggle for existence are twofold. There is first the struggle of individuals to win the means of subsistence from nature, and secondly, there is thecompetition of man with man in the effort to win a limited supply" (p.84).

Sumner's ideas were chiefly predominant in America, he supported competitive thinking between individuals with an emphasis on economy, he "was the nation's leading Social Darwinist; he was also the nation's first sociologist. Sumner adopted Spencer's ideas of *laissez-faire* government, natural selection, and survival of the fittest and applied them to American society" (Dennis,1995 p. 244). Social Darwinism was promoted with the belief in progress by the creation of a materialistic world devoid of morality, which was accomplished through the glorification of racism and imperialism. "Social Darwinism was accepted in England and the United States because it supported policies and practices that both countries justified as congruent with their national interests... In the United States, Social Darwinism was directed internally toward both race and economics" (pp.245- 246).

Social Darwinism served the principles of American conservatism, which supported laissez-*faire* politics and a free market. These conservatives were businessmen and property owners, which explains the way Darwin's concept of the fittest and

competition easily prevailed and matched their thinking. In his book, *American Conservatism in the Age of Enterprise* (1951), McCloskey, an American political historian, debates on how Social Darwinism inspired conservatists regarding political economy marking the non-interference, the prerequisite for all human growth, social Darwinism greatly increased the prestige of this concept. Unrestricted industrial order would guarantee not just the best possible product in the current world, but also the best possible racial and social structure in the future. It was an interesting, sometimes even inspirational, concept. (p.26).

Conservatists employed evolutionary thinking to achieve their selfish political ambitions; it was championed by philosophers like Fisk, Sumner, and others. The doctrine was seen as a path towards progress and prosperity at the expense of the unprivileged lower class, "a system whose moral imperatives were dependent upon materialist proof" (p.27), thus, their claim is to maintain the survival of the wealthy business owners because they are the fit while leaving behind the poor unfit, while making sure to not interfere, since it would be harmful for society to alter the course of natural selection "Inequality was no longer a dismal necessity as the economists had argued; it was a disguised blessing that helped move society onward and upward"(p.28).

Interestingly, when looking at the link between conservatism and Social Darwinism, they seem to be equally synonymous and have the same principles. However, it was not the case, Social Darwinism altered the course of Democratic conservatists, especially when their principles were challenged by the idea of the new science McCloskey explains that the Darwinian apostles who adopted this stance were enthralled by what it appeared they were about to establish, namely, that the tenets of the American democratic faith were reinforced by sermons in stone and by scientific discoveries. They didn't seem to realize that by insisting on this claim, they were endangering the same

ideals they were fighting for (p.29).

In other words, Darwinism served their needs but challenged their core beliefs due to the differences between what scientific Darwinism brought against democracy, the feature of Social Darwinism that made it most devastating to democracy was not its support of the conservative position but its materialism, which, being accepted as a matter of course, undermined the arguments of the democrats" (p.29). Accordingly, Social Darwinism was both "a champion of the business ethics and as a hidden enemy in the camp of progressive democracy" (p.30). On the other hand, Hawkins argues that while Sumner accentuated the need for competition to ensure the survival of civilizations, he did not give equal importance to heredity compared to other Social Darwinists he was indeed a "determinist"(p.118) who believed in the laws of selection and evolution but was not "biological reductionistic that the laws in question operated in and through social beliefs, practices and institutions" (p.118), Social Darwinism played a major role in the exaltation of some of the leading 19th-century American philosophies, including pragmatism and materialism.

### 1.2.1 American Pragmatism

One of America's unique philosophies that dates back to the gilded age is, no doubt, pragmatism. This philosophy is known as a distinct doctrine that reflects American values and beliefs; it came as a reaction to untethered metaphysical ideas from Europe. Thayer (1981) describes pragmatism as "a method of philosophizing often identified as a theory of meaning, first stated by Charles Peirce in the 1870's, revived primarily as a theory of truth in 1898 by William James; and further developed, expanded, and disseminated by John Dewey and F.C.Schiller"(p.5).

However, the origin of this philosophy remains undetected. According to Louis Menand of *The Metaphysical Club* (2001), pragmatism came as a reaction to the distressful experiences following the civil war, which left Americans trust in democracy divided.The philosophy was first pioneered by Pierce in his essay *The*

*Fixation of* Belief (1877), and later on William James, an American philosopher who is known as the leader of pragmatism, revived philosophy, and contributed to its development (p.10).Pragmatism came as a reaction to prior ideologies such as idealism and similar ways of thinking.

Thayer pinpoints that pragmatism had such a great impact on intellectual life in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it is rather a critical movement that attempts to create positive objectives and fruitful thoughts.(p.3) Hamner (2003) explains that American pragmatism is against universalist views; he also illustrates James Kloppenburg's reasoning that pragmatism is "a valuable means of articulating the possibilities of democracy and human freedom in the age of post modernity" (p.3). Not only that, but pragmatism is well known in America because it is claimed to be rooted there. Hamner argues that its adherents were and are still essentially Americans, and it is taken as the first indigenous philosophical movement in America (p.4).

Furthermore, Campbell (2007) explains on the objectives of pragmatism that it aims at deciphering our position in the world around us, therefore, the part we play in order to decode life's meanings through experimentation and scientific empiricism; hence, as a second aim, pragmatism concerns the way we perceive the world through experiences to help improve our future. It also focuses on the importance of the community as the essence of human well-being and long –term success. (p.3). Consequently, pragmatism rejects idealism and stands with realism; it stresses the function of human beings and their vital role in the natural world; it also emphasizes self-consciousness and our subconscious as an essential pillar for our understanding. It insists on the idea that the world around us is such a vast space that we need to use our knowledge to help solve our existence. (p.5)

Darwinism, on the other hand, had an impact on the development of pragmatism; infact, Pierce and James were influenced by Darwin's theory of natural selection, they

had their own interpretations. According to Hawkins (1997), William James argued in his book *The Will to Believe* (1897) that faith and science should not be separated, which opposes Spencer's argument. He urges the application of competition between religious beliefs through Darwin's law, which will ensure the survival of the fittest (p.119). Pragmatists believed in genius, which refers to the description of natural selectionthrough the eyes of William James, whereby he argues that social evolution happens by coincidence through the process of random selection by the environment, which in turn is characterized by contingency and adaptation, and not by heredity as it has been fashioned by hereditarians. For him, the law of natural selection exists but is not solely confined to specific individuals (p.120). Menand (2001) argues that pragmatists see the world as ruled by randomness and chance (p.127) which is demonstrated through Pierce's thesis about the inconsistency of knowledge. Menand writes, "In a world that never repeats itself with exactitude, all believing is betting. Our beliefs and concepts are, in the end, only guesses about how things will behave most of the time" (p.222).

Developed by William James, American pragmatism took a cautious position towards natural selection. Lucas McGranahan, *Darwinism and Pragmatism* (2017) argues that after reviewing some of Darwin's works, James concluded that the law of selection "looked like a sorry law" (p.36) James explains how Darwin's theory lacks relevant factors to be considered accurate, perhaps due to the nature of the case and the huge timescale involved, it may never be possible to give a physically rigorous proof for Darwin's theory, complete in every connection, than now just give a binding logical proof. refute it. This may or may not be a misfortune; in any case, it withdraws the question from the authority of critics who zoologists are not but only theorists (and who have written enough nonsense on the subject), and leaves it to the skillful and erudite experts, the only ones capable of deliberation. harsh truths. opposite of each other and

decide how many probabilities constitute probabilities and how many small probabilities constitute approximations. (Qtd in McGranahan,p.36)

It is true that James did not utterly believe in the law of natural selection and its application; thus, he fully endorsed on an evolutionary perspective within his psychological philosophy "Natural selection is Darwin's guess that nature is a guesser. With the partial exception of Wright, James was the first to endorse such a doubly Darwinian perspective within the field of psychology. James was thus the first double-barred Darwinian psychologist". For that, James is known for his embracement of Darwinism, even though he had his own overlapping opinions.

Consequently, pragmatism stands upon the idea of contingency, in which change is not stable, but dependent on individuals' willingness to make alterations. In his American Pragmatism: Towards a Geographical Introduction Barnes (2008) denotes that pragmatists argued contingency should be seen as an opportunity. We  should aim to make change work for us rather than against us. So, while the Civil War was a contingent event, rather than letting it destroy the Union, it should be used as an opportunity to turn the Union into something better. But this was possible only if all Americans were prepared to adapt and to change to relinquish hitherto sacred verities and to try new ideas that, while in some cases might seem crackpot and cloud cuckoo–like, might save the nation and even improve it. (p.1546)

American pragmatism saw change in accordance  with action and not through mere theories. Hawkins argues that "Contingency and probability combined to open up a space for human action, to establish a social environment with room for reason and faith, causality and will. The pragmatist evaluation of Darwinism and its social implications were central to the construction of this theoretical perspective" (p,120). In essence,

pragmatism remained one of America's distinguished philosophies during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, other competing philosophies dominated American society, namely materialism.

## 1.2.2 Materialism and Consumerism in America

Another significant philosophy that was aptly influential during the gilded age is materialism. The aim is to analyze commentary about the effect of this philosophy on American values and social development and how it reflects American consumer culture. To demonstrate this, it is essential to trace the evolution of materialism discourse in America.

Materialism, which is also referred to as physicalism, is dependent on the fact that everything concerned with the human mind, consent, and even history is condemned by the physical aspects (Smart, 2022, para.1), Nonetheless, from a philosophical perspective, Armstrong (1978) states that "Materialism is seen with the claim that the world stands on entities labeled by physics, in which a materialist person defines himself, that everything that is real is considered visible throughout the eyes of physical components solely (p.268). The term first appeared during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but its connotations are dated back to ancient Greece Thales of Miletus (c. 580 BCE), and Democritus (*c.* 460 BCE—died *c.* 370), two Greek philosophers who are believed to be among the early materialists for their philosophical explanations of matter. In which Thales argued that the very essence of matter resides in water, Democritus, on the other hand, based his theory on atoms (Smart, 2022). However, Gassendi is well knownof his viewpoint on atoms and Christianity (Popkin, 2022)

Moving forward, materialism was famously known in France with French philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) whose paramount philosophy is mainly linked to his rejections of Descartes Meditations; his paradigm is to link God with materialist cosmology through atoms. Therefore, in England, one famous materialist is Thomas

Hobbes (1588-1679), according to Dungey (2008) asserts that Hobbes' materialistic view asserts "that matter is the only substance of reality matter produces mind, and that changes in matter are the result of di rates of motion" (p.195)

By reviewing in depth, the histography of materialism, it should be noted that the philosophy is not stable for the controversiality it holds; it is rather dependent upon changes and factors that occurred with time, which makes the term flexibly changeable. However, the aim behind this thesis is to tackle materialism as an ideology in 19th-century American society, regarding its political and social implications in America. Holly E. Rapp provides a historical background on materialism in their PhD thesis, *The Material and the Real: American Conceptions of Materialism in the Nineteenth Century* (2015), arguing that American scholarly names are absent when it comes to the chronological development of materialism in history. One significant explanation for the relative historiographical silence on materialism is the fact that nineteenth-century cultural and intellectual histories of the U.S. tend to be dominated by idealism, romanticism, and transcendentalism, all currents of thought, admittedly much more prominent, that stood in direct opposition to materialism (p.15).

Significantly, materialism had been discussed as a philosophy that contradicts American beliefs. Materialism faced several challenges in American society; it was mainly seen as an antireligious philosophy. In Abercrombie on the Intellectual Powers in *The Norther American Review* (1847), the author argues that materialism promoted reductionism, which was threatening for American culture, especially since the philosophy denied spirituality and degraded all aspects of life to materialism (p.500).

Therefore, the 19th-century progressive era was a time of wealth and prosperity. for Americans, which made material things the center of attention, and with that, materialism became a source of criticism by anti-materialists; they "argued against

materialism's prioritization of matter or the material over the spiritual, the advent of the Gilded Age and its new forms of economic upheaval updated these worries about materialism's misplaced priorities to include profit and monetary gain" (Rapp p.32).

What made materialism an unfavored philosophy was that despite the influence it had on economic life, it was still rejected as a doctrine in society. Due to the deranged ideas it had on religion, these ideas were known as radical materialism, mainly introduced by Charles Knowlton (1800-1850), a physician and philosopher who advocated for antireligion and atheism in his book *Elements of Modern Materialism* (1829), a controversial book about the anatomy of the spirit, which he labeled at the physical level, and denied any spiritual aspect. He was against religious beliefs and saw no benefits in the acceptance of a divine entity. He regarded religion and spirituality as a distraction that turns away individuals from more important matters. He also supported the idea of controlling reproduction, where he followed a neo-Malthusian idea (Meek, 2017 para. 7). On the other hand, besides Knowlton, Frances Wright (1795-1852), a social reformer who advocated for secular education, which she believed was a key to egalitarianism. Compared to Knowlton, she was less labeled as a materialist. Her insights on materialism were visible in the *Free Enquirer* radical newspaper (Rapp, p. 148). Through the works of these two prominent thinkers, materialism was seen as a volatile doctrine. Yet, materialism was prevalent in the economy and society, despite its negative connotations.

According to Robert Kohls' article, Values Americans Live by (1988), materialism in America is "to value and collect more material objects than most people would ever dream of owning. It also means they give higher priority to obtaining, maintaining, and protecting their material objects than they do to developing and enjoying interpersonal relationships" (p,11). The interest of material life was a result of the unprecedented

plethora of economic change that Americans witnessed during the antebellum era, America became a consuming culture *par excellence,* valuing wealth over virtue.

It created a gap between social classes wherein inequalities were staggeringly visible. In an essay entitled *Consumerism and Consumption,* Nancy F, Koehen (2008) argues that consumer culture first emerged in the 19th century United States; however, the connotation of consumption and its origins stretch back to the time of Thomas Jefferson. In fact, during Jefferson's utopian society, consumption would be centered on the necessities of survival, all of which could be found in the abundance of the land. His vision was strong, and it had a lasting ideological impact. However, it was not a true reflection of how the majority of Americans lived in the new country. Jefferson was one of the country's most obnoxious consumers, incurring massive debt to furnish his mansion, Monticello, with pricey goods from all around the world (p.1).

By the late 19th century, American people were able to afford many things they never had before; they "used a range of goods that they did not or could not produce themselves, including tea, China tableware, spices, calico, satins, clocks, Dutch ovens, and sugar" (p.1). This change in consumption was due to trade relations with Great Britain, which was one of the major suppliers of Northern America, and with that, Americans had more choices in goods.

Moreover, by the 20th century, massive consumption had become a normal aspect of American lifestyle, in fact, most people could afford regular goods that were once exclusive to the upper class, Thus, this does not mean that there were no poor people at that time, economic differences were still existed "Consumerism at the end of the nineteenth century looked forward rather than backward. The industrialization, urbanization, economic growth, mass production, and distribution that accelerated after 1870 greatly expanded Americans' sense of material possibility" (p.4). The result was

that Americans cared more about material life and invested more of their time in the race of affording, which weakened their spirituality, and "in their stead arose a culture organized around the production and acquisition of goods and services, focused on self-fulfillment through economic prosperity" (p.4).

In the current century, American culture is known for its mass consumption and high life standards. The United States is now an economic superpower, and that could be seen in the average wealth of individuals. However, things are not all as perfect as they may seem. As much as the consumption of goods is higher, there is still a huge gap between classes. In an article entitled Materialism and Poverty in America  (2021),Martin Greenwood explains that

> Materialism is a major factor into reasonings for inequalities in America, largely as it creates an overwhelming feeling of relative deprivation for many, due to Americas high economic status, it encourages people to calculate their wealth based on personal belongings and compare their material belongings with others (para.2)

The interest in material life expanded these economic differences between individuals, and that is seen in the way people consume luxurious goods. Consumerism is seen as a way of life in America; it is good for businesses and the economy, and people begin to believe that they are losing out when they don't purchase new items they see in advertisements. The United States is the largest advertising market in the world, and in 2018 $51.3 billion was spent on social media advertising(para.2).

Materialism plays a role in the creation of this chasm between people because not all Americans are able to afford a comfortable, stable life. Perhaps that is due to shortcomings in the system and how the American lifestyle values material things and social status more than individuals. The differences could be seen through the homeless

and poor people and how they struggle to afford food, shelter and so on, whereas, other people are busy purchasing the latest fashion clothes and brand new vehicles "The gap between the rich and poor in America is becoming increasingly prevalent, as millions of Americans don't know when their next meal is coming whilst Jeff Bezos the CEO of Amazon is worth an estimated $166 billion" (para.3). Thus, the people who are struggling are considered a burden because they fail to follow this material lifestyle, while they are exploited by the rich (para.3).

## 1.4 The Beginnings of Colonialism

The early sixteenth century was a time of expansion and the marking of territories mainly for the residents of the European continent subjugated by the crusades, and with-it racism started to take shape, justifying the invasion of other people's lands, which was a matter of controversy. As Kohn & Reddy (2017) claim, colonialism has been a critical concern for both political and moral philosophers. Ever since the crusades and the conquest of the Americas took place, it has been difficult to reconcile ideas about justice and human rights while the practices of Europeans are the complete opposite of maintaining such natural laws( p.2).

The concept of colonialism is not easy to define because it is constantly changing and encompassing other ideologies, like imperialism, which is derived from colonization,. Luthy (1961)"It would be more correct to say that colonization and colonial imperialism have been the premises of modern capitalism, which could only develop and grow in the wide-open fields of unbridled activities outside the rigid and sterilizing patterns of Euro-pean state economies stifled by privilege, monopoly and mercantilist regulations" (p.488). However, the term colonialism is usually associated with Europeans. Murrey 2020 claims that

The combination of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic domination of one group of people or groups of people by another (external) group of people. European colonialism refers to the various formulas of territorial domination effected by European powers upon non-European people (indeed, upon much of the world), from the late 1400s to the mid- to late 1900s. (p.215)

The process of colonization is not solely associated with Europe, but it is indeed an ancient phenomenon, as Ferro (2005) argues in his book *Colonization: a Global History* that prior to the European's colonialism, there were other colonizers like the Greeks and the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks…etc. (p.4). He further indicates that in order to understand the history of colonization, there is a pressing need to come close to the past history of colonized nations because of the link the colonists and the colonized have with each other; due to the misconceptions of deeming the colonized less worthy of having a history of themselves, "…they have never had a history" (p.4). Therefore, Ferro argues that colonialism influenced "We were given the rose-colored view of course, the colonists worked hard. Persecuted in his own country before setting forth, he had gone to settle down in a place to which he had been led by the Almighty"(p.4), thus, he sets forward the fallacy the colonizer strongly believed in, for the sake of spreading the ideology of colonization and even justifying it by claiming that it was their right to conquer and invade because they were blessed by a divine mission.

On the other hand, Kohn & Reddy (2017) argue that the concept of colony "comes from the Latin word *colonus, meaning* farmer" which stands on the fact that usually the action of colonization is based upon taking political residence in a certain area different from the mother country. Thus, the term imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercises power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty, or indirect mechanisms of control" (p.4) Moreover, in this regard, Ferro also insists that

The phenomenon of colonization cannot be considered separately from imperialism "that is, from forms of domination which may, or may not, have assumed the appearance of colonization" (p.5).

Colonialism is commonly referred to the missionaries the European countries had in some parts of the worldworld. Kohn & Reddy explain that

> The term colonialism is frequently used to describe the settlement of North America, New Zealand, Algeria, and Brazil, places that were controlled by a large population of permanent European residents "whereas, imperialism "often describes cases in which a foreign government administers a territory without significant settlement (p.5)

Additionally, studies in this field underline the distinction between the two terms, as Kohn and Reddy argue that academics make a distinction between colonies used for economic exploitation and colonies used for habitation. Some refer to dependencies that are directly ruled by a foreign country as colonialism and distinguish it from imperialism, which also entails direct forms of dominance. (p.6) Hence, colonialism and imperialism are two intertwined terms, holding similar traits and few differences.

Colonialism as a process has a strong link to the issue of racism, in which the white race assumed that it was their duty to civilize the non-white because they were deemed savages and dangerous to be left alone. Ashcroft et al. (1998) define racism as "a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, and which on this basis distinguishes between 'superior and 'inferior' racial groups"(p.199)

Simply put, such assumptions were first introduced by some famous scholars and philosophers who took it upon themselves to implement their ideologies worldwide, serving their agendas. Ashcroft et al indicate that the latter contributed to the application

of colonialism, especially in the notion of superiority and "Social Darwinism, in both its positive and negative implications, concurred readily with imperial practice." (p.201). Therefore, Darwinism's ideologies on race are rather a "justification for the domination and at times extinction of inferior races as not only an inevitable but a desirable unfolding of natural law" ([p. 20). Darwinism indeed contributed to the enhancement of racism and justified colonialism.

The term colonialism noticed a shift multiple times as it has been used to describe various phenomena within the same context of invasion, political and economic imperialism, and other forms of colonization. Therefore, colonialism was followed by postcolonialism, a term used to describe the aftermath of western colonialism "the term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism" (Ivison, 2022, para.1). In essence, postcolonialism refers to the after-decolonization period of the once colonized nations and their cultural, economic, and cultural struggles.

### 1.4.1 Neocolonialism

The process of colonialism does not seem to end after countries gain their independence. In fact, the control of western colonization continues to have indirect ties with its previous colonies, and that is shaped in various forms. One such phenomenon is known as neocolonialism, "an imperial practice that is anchored on the political, economic, cultural, as well as psychological dependence of former colonies on the institutions of the colonial masters. In most instances, neo-colonialism is colonialism through the back door. It is an "indirect rule" of the former dependencies. (Nwachuku, 2016 p.1)

Sandra Halprein (2020) argues that the term "was first used after World War II to refer to the continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries" (para.1).

These countries are still bullied by their former colonizers, and it can be seen mainly through malfunctioning of their economy "neocolonialism came to be seen more generally as involving a coordinated effort by former colonial powers, "and other developed countries to block growth in developing countries and retain them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labor"(para. 3).

In the last few decades, neocolonialism is still circulating in developing countries and it can be seen through the way these countries refer to the former colonial powers to help solve their political and economic instability, which is observed in "Algeria (1950–1962), Zaire (1960–1964), Nigeria (1967–1970), Pakistan1971), Somalia (1988–1990), Guinea (1991–2002), Rwanda (1994), and Sudan (2003–2012)" (Nwachuku, 2016 p.2).Thus, this form of imperialism never seems to end because these former colonizers refuse to let go of their previous colonies since they are great assets for cheap resources. On another front, despite having the necessary resources, these developing countries still suffer from economic crises and underdevelopment, which is in favor of the former colonizer. "The economic underdevelopment of former colonies feeds the appetite of the former colonial masters to continue their domination of their developing nations" (p.2).

To understand the function of neocolonialism, it is important to examine its occurrences historically and in the present day. One example of neocolonial regimes in the world is seen in how the United States establishes its imperial influence, in which it exercises power through multiple domains touching on economics, culture, and politics. In *American Neocolonialism in the Philippines,* Usha Mahajani (1974) argues that the Philippines has been under American neocolonial rule since its independence in 1946 and it was well hidden by the president of that time, who apparently was in favor of American control over his country.

The neocolonial status of the Philippines in relation to the United States has generally remained concealed behind the facade of Philippine "independence "

and "sovereignty. " Filipino presidents and other members of the Philippine establishment have helped hide the truth by proclaiming pro-Americanism as the cornerstone of their policy (p.62)

The policies of the country also played a role in the spread of imperialism and neocolonial ideologies within the former colonized country. However, in the case of the Philippines, the U.S. took control of the country after the Treaty of Paris of 1898, was a result of the Spanish-American War, which ended in the purchase of the Philippines by America for $20 million. (History.com Editors, 2022), advocating for annexation later with motivations "commercial opportunities in Asia, concern that the Filipinos were incapable of self-rule, and fear that if the United States did not take control of the islands, another power (such as Germany or Japan) might do so" (*Milestones: 1899, 1913 - Office of the Historian*, n.d. Parag. 2). In these circumstances, the U.S became the new colonizer of the country, and it was after a long struggle that the Philippines took its formal independence in 1946, only to end in the country being economically exploited by the U.S superpower.

Kenneth Andres (2021) argues that even after gaining official independence from the US, the US continued to exert neo-colonial rule over the nation through the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), two ostensibly neutral international financial institutions (IFIs). (para.1). The country was under a neocolonial regime, which took place with the Bell Trade Act of 1946 which gave the U.S. equal rights to the Filipinos to operate in the economy of the country and create their own businesses as if they were within American soil. "Not only was the Act an overt neo-colonial extension of US power over the Philippines, it was also passed under neo-colonial auspices" (para.4).

Alongside the Philippines, the United States also got involved in countries like Liberia 1862 by using the country's resources, especially gold and other minerals, despite

its independence. The country was a source of raw materials. "Various American companies flocked to Liberia and got involved in the mining of gold and the resultant private accumulation of capital through profit-making. (Kieh, 2012). The U.S. control over the country was substantially notable during the Second World War, when Africa was the playground of imperialist activities through neocolonial projects. In order to enhance its war efforts, the U.S. built an airport and a deep-water port on Liberian soil. After that (from 1945 to 1989), the U.S. took additional actions, such as providing support for a number of authoritarian regimes, continuing to use Liberia to further its strategic interests, particularly during the Cold War (by setting up a relay station for the Voice of America radio station, a CIA station, an outpost for gathering intelligence, and a conduit in order to support a number of pro-American factions in Chad and Angola), and by acting as a haven for investors (p.196)

American neocolonialism takes other forms that could be noted in the current era through the spread of cultural ideas and values. As a super economic power, the United States invests itself in the spread of neocolonial goals Molag (2021) explains, "One of the most astute concepts that illustrates the worldwide flow of American culture by mostly economic means is called "Coca-Colonization". (para.14) This concept calls attention to Coca-Cola's global pervasiveness as a symbol for the Americanization of nearly every corner of the earth." He argues that this type of globalization is a form of neocolonial pursuits, wherein the U.S. manages to control the world's economy through multinational corporations. (para.14).

## 1.4.2 The White Man's Burden
The nineteenth century was a time when deep-rooted racist ideas culminated in the most extreme forms known as white supremacy. At that time, the West was busy expanding its territories all over the world, driven by a sense of racial superiority

However, before moving on to the 19<sup>th</sup> century European expansion, it is important to provide a definition of this modern ideology. Jenkins (2021) describes it in simple words as "beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or "white," human races over other racial groups" (para.1). Simply put, white supremacy stands at the core belief of racial superiority, which is measured through the discrimination made based on skin color differences.

To understand white supremacy, race is a key concept to examine, especially its historical metamorphosis to reach its current form. the type of racial discrimination towards non-white-skinned people appear to have sociological and biological explanation, as Howart Winant explains in his article, Race and Race Theory (2000)

Race can be defined as a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process (p.172)

Racial differences have always been a matter of contention, and these distinctions have become an alibi for racial discrimination. Therefore, the ideology of racism in the Middle Ages was not the same as the current one; the concept has been established and reshaped per se. George M. Fredrickson provides an explicit historical discussion in his book *Racism* (2015), The ancient forms of discrimination were concerned with status and wealth, unlike modern doctrines. The Greeks distinguished between civilized and barbarous, but these categories were not hereditary. The Romans had a diverse population of slaves and citizens.(p.17).

Religion also had its impact on racial discrimination, Jews for example, have been under hostility for refusing to convert to Christianity (p.18), however, this malevolence

towards Jews and blacks was somehow contained due to the unity of religious beliefs "The orthodox Christian belief in the unity of mankind, based on the Bible's account of Adam and Eve as the progenitors of all humans, was a powerful obstacle to the development of a coherent and persuasive ideological racism" ( Fredrickson p.52). Yet, in 19th-century Nazi Germany, Jews were discriminated against for antisemitic reasons (p.1). This shows how the genealogy of racism transformed through time to better suit the narrow-mindedness of people and their ideologies. John Solomon, & Les Back (1996) argue that racism is "a scavenger ideology, which gains its power from its ability to pick out and utilize ideas and values from other sets of ideas and beliefs in specific socio-historical contexts" (p.213).

Racism took its current form when white Europeans started justifying their discrimination with racial hierarchy. Thus, this idea of fair skin color being a feature of civilization was not fully established until the 18th century "The modern concept of races as basic human types classified by physical characteristics (primarily skin color) was not invented until the eighteenth century" (Frederickson p. 52). Europeans started having direct contact with Africans and non-whites through colonialism; their expeditions to Africa and the east made them recognize racial differences among humans. By building assumptions consumed by greed and imperial racial projects, the white people of Europe used racial differences as a means to expand elsewhere Omi &Winant (2015) argue that

> In rising empires, the imperatives of conquest have shaped ideas about racial hierarchy, with portrayals of the strong and superior occupiers contrasted with the weak and inferior natives. In periods of social dislocation and economic decline, race has come to mark those groups who signify corruption and dilution of the national spirit and purpose (Omi &Winant 2015 p.4)

In his book, *White Over Black* (1994), Winthrop Jordan remarked about the encounter of Englishmen with Africans and how they perceived them. Englishmen's perceptions of

the peoples of Africa were related to the circumstances of contact, traditions, and special qualities of English society on the eve of its expansion. (p.4)

The wave of western colonialism contributed to the spread of racial ideologies. In his book *The White Man's Burden* (1974), Jordan explains the perception of Africans by Englishmen in details that it was the start of the beginning of colonization when the Englishmen's greed for an empire overseas and the glory of the invasion made the west realize the leverage they have on the other nations, and they made sure to use it to claim power and add more wealth and prosperity to themselves; starting from Africa to the new world.(p.3). With this colonial phase, racism started to develop. The white men already had their own assumptions about blacks and Africans, as they regarded them as inferior, which explained why they sought to take their lands. "Englishmen found in the idea of blackness a way of expressing some of their most ingrained values" (p.6).

Black skin color was viewed as a source of grotesqueness and dirt, whereas "no other color except white conveyed so much emotional impact", these racist ideologies were drastically generated in the minds of white Englishmen: "white and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and devil" (p.6). Hence, racism took a whole different turn by the age of science; racial projects started to grow deeper with European and western thoughts, and what made these ideas flourish was the emergence of evolutionary thinking.

The age of the Enlightenment was marked by the emergence of secularism; it was a time that questioned fundamental beliefs and even raised the bar high to challenge religion. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German biologist and anthropologist, claimed in his 1969 book *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* (1969) that the purest race is the Caucasian because of their beautiful features, while the other races have degenerated and divaricated. He even regarded Africans as "nearer the apes than other men" (p.187).

Such ideas helped in the spread of secular ideologies, and with so much attention given to physical traits by naturalists and anthropologists, it cleared the path for the 19th-century racial ideologies to prosper. Thus, these ideas remained in theory, and their applications were fully achieved by the 19th century: "although the racial typologies of the eighteenth century established a framework for the full-blown biological racism of the nineteenth, much of the ethnological thought of the Enlightenment was without immediate practical application" (Fredrickson p. 61).

The white man's burden, a concept used to describe the process of long-term racial ideas, originated from the famous poem written by Rudyard Kipling (1899) under the title "*An Address to the United States*". In his book, *Taming Cannibals, Race, and the Victorians*, Brantlinger (2007) argues that the poem was sent to Theodore Roosevelt as the governor of New York in an attempt to convince him to invade the Philippines, encouraging him to take over the land with honor and pride, as in the British rule over India and all the non-white territories (p.172).

The poem was a message towards the spread of the manifest destiny in the world and the colonization of the white people over the non-white. The advice Kipling proceeded with was to elevate the white race at the expense of the other races, arguing that it is their right to expand and flourish. "It has served as a lightning rod for both supporters and the opponents of imperialism, as well as of racism and white supremacy", which results in the U.S becoming an imperialist country after isolation. Besides the above justifications for racism, other reasons such as Social Darwinian drives for human purification, also grasped people's attention Ashcroft et al. (1998) suggest that

> the concept of racial improvement concurred with the 'civilizing mission' of imperial ideology, which encouraged colonial powers to take up the 'white man's burden 'and raise up the condition of the inferior races who were idealized as

childlike and malleable. The assumption of superiority, thus supported by scientific racial theory, could pursue its project of world domination with impunity(p.201).

The white man's burden is just a fancy concept for racism; it is referred to as white supremacy, which is a racist theory culminating in the previously mentioned theories whereby the white man saw other races. In the United States, the term white supremacy was supported by evolutionary thinking inspired by Darwinism, as Omi &Winant argue that the "founding fathers" of American sociology (guys like Albion Small, William Graham Sumner, and Edward A. Ross) were specifically concerned with racial hierarchy and classification, which they regarded within the lens of evolutionary theory (p.7). Social science was impacted not only by European founding fathers but also by the period's Social Darwinist currents. These men, like practically all of the early figures, believed in the uncontested white superiority of the time. (p.5)

Social Darwinism in America was one of the most influential theories during the 19th century; it stood at the core of racial discrimination and caused severe damage to the nation. It could be seen in the conflict over slavery in the South. Hawkins explains how further racial hierarchy was legitimized and supported by evolutionary thinking, He cites the geologist Joseph Le Conte (1823-1901), a social Darwinist *par excellence* who firmly believed in the superiority of the white race through survival of the fittest and strongly adhered for neglecting blacks and native Americans because for him, they failed the process of selection. "Inherited from the animal kingdom, the right of the strongest at one time naturally entailed either slavery or the extinction of the vanquished. The difference between humans and animals resided in the reason of the former, but the development of this varied according to the stage of evolution attained by each race" (p.201). Social Darwinism opened a wide door for racist ideologies to emerge and flourish under the illusion of evolutionary science.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Social Darwinism indeed played a role in the spread of some of the most radical philosophies of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The notion of fittest as a core element of Darwin's theory of natural selection has been employed as a justification to legitimize political agendas such as imperialism, hiding behind the name of science. As Hofstadter argues, "Darwinism was put in the service of the imperial urge. Although Darwinism was not the primary source of the belligerent ideology and dogmatic racism of the late nineteenth century, it did become a new instrument in the hands of the theorists of race and struggle" (p.165), As it has been stated above, Darwinism strengthened racist thinkingand provided a ground for bigoted practices to take place and prevail.

In America, Social Darwinism held a large place in the system of thought during the 19th century, and the result was the application of Darwin's thinking to society. Especially since the U.S was experiencing a time of political distress concerning slavery and discrimination. The fact that American governments accepted Darwinism during that time, explains many things about how Darwinism provided a clarification to continue discriminating other races and believing in the superiority of the white race at the expense of minorities and blacks "the Darwinian mood sustained the belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority which obsessed many American thinkers in the latter half of the nineteenth century" (Hofstadter, p.165). Nevertheless, some of the programs that took place under the name of genetic science was eugenic, which left the nation divided and devastated after a series of forced applications experimented on the so-called unfit populations without their consent.

Darwinism in America is known through the ideas of figures including William Graham Sumner, who supported Spencer's ideas of *laissez-faire* politics; he even

suggested applying population's reduction through competition and survival, Dennis (1995) writes, "positioning the peculiar institution of American slavery within Darwinist and Spencerian frames of reference, Sumner reasoned that because slavery permitted superior groups the leisure to construct and develop more refined cultures, it actually advanced the cause of humanity" (p.244).

Moreover, this chapter also tackled the influence of Darwin's theories on colonialism and the link between imperialist regimes and the concept of the  fittest. Hence, it also dealt with some of the most prominent 19th-century American philosophies, as such American pragmatism, which is analyzed through its influence on American individuals as it has been considered a paramount fixated American philosophy, that is to say, pragmatism is perhaps the first American philosophy, as Hamner (2003)  argues that its adherents were and are still essentially Americans, and it is taken as the first indigenous philosophical movement in America (p.4) .The discussion of pragmatism also includes the relationship between pragmatism and Darwin, whereby pragmatism acknowledges some of Darwin's theories in explaining the nature of life. Another important philosophy that influenced America during the 19th century and the contemporary era as well is materialism. The philosophy has been discussed in relation to consumer culture and how it resonates with contemporary American individuals.

# Chapter Two:
# Theoretical Background and Key concepts

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2.1 Introduction

2.2 Culture and Cinema

    2.2.1 Popular Culture

    2.2.2 Dystopia

    2.2.3 Young Adult Dystopias

    2.2.4 Postapocalyptic Theory

2.3 Pop Social Darwinism

2.4 Science Fiction

    2.4.1 Biotechnology in Science Fiction

    2.4.2 Science Fiction and Colonialism

2.5 Reading Films through Biopolitics

2.6 Theoretical Background

2.7 Methodology

2.8 Methods of Analysis

2.9 Conclusion

## 2.1 Introduction

Over the last few years, young adult dystopias have dominated the cinematic releases with Hollywood blockbusters that include trilogies such as *The Hunger Games*, *The Divergent, The Giver,* and many others. In fact, these movies and series as media artifacts remain among the most read accounts of contextual studies due to the nature of the themes and allegories, they address; however, they are yet to be read in political contexts, as the present work attempts to do. Furthermore, this research tackles two well-known dystopiantexts, *The Maze Runner* and *The Hunger Games*. The focal point of this research is to read these texts as media sources that carry political and social meanings. Therefore, this chapter introduces key concepts and significant scholarship related to the major themes ofthis thesis.

First, the focus is given to the concept of culture in relation to cinema by examining the connection between film and the possible cultural representations highlighted within cinematic releases, including popular culture as a key concept to understand the nature of film and media in the context of film ideology. This literature review follows the relationship between culture and cinema in producing political messages and reflects on political and historical ideologies that are found in contemporary US politics.

Moreover, as the primary goal of this thesis aligns with the concepts of dystopia and totalitarianism, two major themes addressed within the selected case studies, this chapter also provides a background study on the dystopian genre and its influence over cinema and vice versa. Nevertheless, the research also addressed theories and approaches that are key to the analysis of the selected movies; thus, such theories include contextual

cultural studies and semiotics, mainly through Douglas Kellner's approach to reading films as political media artifacts. Furthermore, the aim of this chapter is to provide a background study of necessary concepts and theories to pave the way for the analytical chapters. It includes a collection of scholarships in the fields of culture and cinema. Hence, this literature review works as a standpoint for understanding the overall work; it enlightens and introduces concepts that serve the general themes of this thesis.

## 2.2 Culture and Cinema

Culture is indeed a complex term to define; in fact, it encompasses various meanings in different contexts. Several attempts were made to provide a definition for culture. Gusfield (2006) identifies it as a vague concept that demonstrates distinct meaning from multiple factors; he also claims that the origin of the term comes from the word cultivation, in which something improves and grows under control (p.43). For that reason, culture is considered one of the most complicated concepts to have a fixed definition; it is not a stable term; it is rather interchangeable and recurrent within a larger paradigm. Therefore, Fornas (1995) argues that culture is a correspondent entity; it flows and reshapes depending on human's behaviors and communication as well (p.1)

The term culture is attributed to its use over time. In fact, in mid-19th-century Britain, culture was labeled according to the level of civilization a nation had reached, whereas savage as uncultured, "culture was a state of being to be attained, synonymous with civilization" (Gusfield, p.43); the concept is still linked to this attribution in modern days. It is also deployed in accordance with the level of creativity people perform, in fields such as art, language, science, religion, and so on, which focus on ideas rather than their connected habits (p.43). Additionally, cultural theory is also a multidimensional concept.

It is applicable to diverse domains; Fornas notes that it is "necessarily the result of communicative processes, which have to cross traditional disciplinary borders" (p.2). In a similar vein, Hall (2005) agrees on the importance of meaning as an intermediate and a key in this phenomenon called culture "culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings - the 'giving and taking of meaning'- between the members of a society or group" ( p.2), in other words, the process of understanding culture is involved with the way people create and interpret meaning through communication and interactions. The way culture circulates towards other domains is also a crucial aspect of cultural studies,; one example includes the representation of culture in media and film studies.

The intersection between culture and cinema often entails a more intense and rigorous aspect of our lives, which includes political agendas and ideological messages. Forgacs (2013) argues that this approach to culture and film is frequently concerned with how contemporary films connect, overtly or covertly, with collective anxieties and preoccupations: about gender relations and roles, 'normal' and 'deviant' sexualities, demarcations of racial difference, technological change, fears of war and terrorism, death, destruction, or ecological disaster (p.2). In addition, cinema, as a form of media, is inclinedto provide political messages and reflect current, past, and future anxieties. In his chapter "Introduction to Media Studies at the Centre" Stuart Hall (2005) claims that media influences our perceptions and contributes in conceptualizing meaning, "media content serving as a trigger into a framework which drew much more on what can broadly be defined as the 'ideological' role of the media"(p.104), i.e. media is a force "standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined, and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audiences addressed" (p.105).

In essence, media produces cultural contents that reflect ideological predispositions and influence the views of consumers. On another front, cinema isoften regarded as one of the most recurrent forms of media that holds great influence, and different genres became a source of inspiration for cultural studies analyses, mostlyscience fiction and horror movies (Forgacs, p.4). Hence, culture is known for its interference with multiple disciplines, as noted before, which also include film andcinema.

## 2.2.1 Popular Culture

As it has been established above, culture is a fluid term that could be shaped into diverse forms. One interesting type of culture in the western world is known as popular culture; it includes media objects and the entertainment industry in general, as described by Crossman (2019) "Pop culture refers to cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, cyberculture, television, and radio that are consumed by the majority of a society's population. Popular culture is those types of media that have mass accessibility and appeal" (p.1). The term is used to describe the type of media that includes entertainment and is largely consumed by the population. Popular culture is the form of culture that could be detected through Hollywood blockbusters, podcasts, music, and the visual world overall.

According to Mukerji & Schudson (1986), popular culture, or folk, refers to a set of beliefs and practices ingrained in people's traditions and customs and their political endeavors as well. It includes "readable objects, written or visual materials for which there are available traditions and criticism"(p.48). Popular culture started to develop ever since the advance of Marxist ideas in the 1960s, and the 19th century revolutionary doctrines, yet it was thanks to studies in anthropology and history that popular culture gained such admiration (p.48),

This popularity is clearly notable nowadays; in fact, popular culture has become one of the most prominent fields of analysis in cultural studies. Danesi (2018) describes it as a recognizable form of culture, known for itsfictional, musical, and entertaining forms, and it emerged first in America in the 1920s with the publication of magazines, popular movies, jazz and lyrical themes, and fashion likewise. Haselstein et al. (2001) claim that since the 1960s, popular culture has become a highly demanded topic in American studies because of visual objects like TV and media in several fields, such as politics, economy, and even democracy. There has been a long debate about the use of popular culture in American cultural studies during the modern era, which resulted in counter-- opinions and views about its relevance (p.331)

Nonetheless, success in cultural studies has been crystallized by the effect of postmodernity on popular culture. It granted readers and researchers a rich account of benefits "contribution to the field of popular culture have thus provided their readers with a wealth of case studies on a wide range of cultural materials drawn from "folk culture," "mass culture," "workers' culture,"  "regional culture," or "ethnic culture" respectively" (332).    Danesi (2018) explains in his book *Popular Culture: An Introductory Perspective* that defining the term pop culture is not an easy task, suggesting that anthropologists define it following culture. The term is also related to high culture, which refers to more profound art and special meaning, whereas low culture refers to  inferior culture, including "terms such as kitschy, slapstick, campy, escapist, exploitive, obscene, raunchy, vulgar, and the like. Many of these are, of course, applicable to various forms and manifestations of pop culture generally" (p.19).

Other implications in the study of pop culture occurred with time, such as studies in entertainment and Hollywood that are highly representative nowadays; he gave the example of the use of violence as a theme reflection upon society Danesi argues that the use of violence and the portrayal of criminality in television crime programs do not encourage greater violence or criminality in society because they contain a moral undertone that serves to warn viewers about the risks associated with both.…Since "bad guys" always pay for their transgressions in the end, violence is overrepresented in popular media with the intention of fostering respect for law and order. However, the overrepresentation created a stronger impression that violence has become the norm in everyday life (p.88).

Studies in media are considered an essential part of pop culture, introducing terms that include alienation, which could be found in literary texts and criticism and in several types of media; pop culture is not an exclusive medium, but it covers multiple domains in society (p.88). Nevertheless, Danesi discusses that Barthes initiated the use of the code in pop culture, where any popular text or performance is open for reading or, instead, decoding, as he calls it (p.17). Haselstein et al. (2001) found that there have been some significant studies to locate and identify the term popular culture, whereby cultural anthropologists have used popular culture in "overcoming their disciplinary tradition of committing their research to "peoples without history." They also notice that it emphasizes structuralism theories, which play a role in affecting cultures and people's freedom. (p.333). Consequently, with all its diversity, popular culture in the current decade relies on a set of sophisticated, complex attributes and practices that offer a wealth of analysis but are rather demanding (p.333).

### 2.2.2 Dystopia

The term dystopia first appeared in public by John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher and economist. He used dystopia in his political speech in Ireland (1868), where he denounced the Irish government and urged on building a utopian (perfect nation). He describes the government in his book *Chapters and Speeches on the Irish LandQuestion (*1870) "It is perhaps too complimentary to call them Utopians; they ought rather to be called dystopian or caco-topians.

What is commonly called utopia is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favor is too bad to be practicable" (p.109). He emphasizes the term in relation to what is known as utopia, another term that refers to an imaginative world characterized by idealism, introduced by Thomas More in his book *Utopia (*1516). He wrote this work as an escape from reality, where he idealises a communist society fully ruled by reason and criticizes 16th-century Britain (Thomas More, 2021). What should be noted is that the type of dystopia Stuart Mill described in his speech is not the same as the dystopia we currently know. Mike Ashley (2016) argues that Mill was talking about how it is not possible to establish a utopia since the foundation of its economy and social development is dependent on natural laws that may not be changed by man's will, which means that all utopias are doomed to failure from the start. His conclusion was that all utopian thinkers were dystopian since their theories were defective and impractical (para.1).

Nevertheless, Claeys (2013) claims that the term is problematic per se, and that if dystopia is taken as a negation to Thomas More's utopianism, it comes with a different set of questions, and that utopia is not the complete opposite of dystopia, because for him the term could be rendered accordingly, as he writes, "there are problems even with the idea of dystopia as the negative of "ideal" societies. Clearly, just as one person's freedom fighter is another's terrorist, one person's utopia is another's dystopia" (p.15). Claeys

puts the concept in its broader sense and claims that there wouldn't be a dystopia if utopia did not exist "Dystopia, in other words, rather than being the negation of utopia, paradoxically maybe its essence" (p.15). Dystopia became one of the most discussed genres in literature and film due to the way it reflected political and ideological concerns.

The 20th century was an epoch of immense changes, and literature, in part, had an impact on this overall shift. Particularly, dystopia paved its way through the literary realm, and dystopian fiction was mainly known for some of the most famous works by authors such as George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Yet, its early beginnings can be traced back to Émile Souvestre's *Le monde tel qu'il sera* ('The World as It Will Be', 1846), a science fiction novel that describes a world ruled by human greed, mechanization, and consumerism (Ashley. 2016 p. 4). Another interesting work of dystopia belongs to a Russian author named Yevgenii Zamyatin. His work *We* (1921), which inspired George Orwell and many others, is set in a dystopian future where humans are referred to by numbers instead of their names. It also has a typical dystopian setting whereby freedom is chained, and everything is controlled by a totalitarian government. Zamaytin's novel reflects the historical era of the Cold War. It is in fact a science fiction dystopian novel; it revolves around a postapocalyptic world (Ashley, p.6).

As a burgeoning genre, dystopian fiction has captured the attention of both readers and authors with its uniqueness. In their collection of essays, *New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media,* Isomaa et al (2020) indicate that dystopian fiction encompasses other genres and styles of writings, taking into considerations historical, political and cultural perspectives of different settings and themes as well, dystopian fiction accommodates the different historical phases of the genre, the narratives of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse, and much of so-called climate fiction (envisaging the future course of climate change partly in tandem

with environmental sciences) and those subgenres of these categories that are addressed to some specific target audience and are molded accordingly (e.g., YA dystopia)" (p.11). Hence, this hybridity that dystopian fiction characterizes is mainly rooted in the explanation of historical genre theory, whereby a genre is not static and maychange over time (p.12). Various descriptions of this genre have been provided through time; Moylan (2019) describes it as

> the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination (p.10)

As noted by Moylan, dystopian fiction tends to explore themes of totalitarianism and oppressive regimes combined with individual's struggles for freedom and a better future. It also includes social and political anxieties where humans reach a level of oppressing each other emanating from "various forms of social and political oppression; from the domination of humanity by machines, monsters, or alien species; from the imposition of norms derived from specific scientific and technological developments, such as eugenics or robotics; or from environmental catastrophe" (Claeys, p.16). Technology plays a key role in this genre; the imagination of the future provided by dystopian authors stresses the role of science in individual's lives, where they fully count on technology. Wilkinson (2010) gives reference to this matter in the famous novel*Brave New World* by Huxley that "people are generally unable to perform even small tasks for themselves" (p.24). But not all people, the protagonists, are usually in a clash with civilization and reject the utopian type of life brought by technology. As such, in Huxley's novel, the main character is independent, skilled, and courageous. (p.24)

Dystopian fiction has always been a fascinating genre, and in the current era, it still lingers. Young Adult Dystopia, another interesting subgenre that is related to dystopian fiction, is notably known for featuring young adults as changemakers and rebels against oppression. According to Scholes and Ostenson, (2013) this literary style is tremendously appealing to teenagers because they relate to such stories, where protagonists live in a dilemma and question themselves, which helps them develop their own identities. They note "Dystopian fiction features protagonists who are likewise questioning the underlying values of a flawed society and their identity within it who they are going to be and how they are going to act" (p.10). Dystopia became an outlet for authors and film makers; the genre helps us imagine what this world can turn into, and how evil can easily prevail They also pick up important current topics, trends, or problems and expand them, pushing them to the limit (occasionally), before putting them in unfamiliar surroundings for our consideration (Sargisson, p. 40)

### 2.2.3 Young Adult Dystopias

In the last few decades, interest in young adult novels has increased; thus, this style of writing has reached the world of cinema and pop culture. In fact, several Young Adult dystopias were adapted on screen, such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy and *The Maze Runner* series, as this work intends to analyze both. Isabella Brownlee (2021) discusses the sudden popularity of YA dystopias and their adaptations. She claims that movies such as *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* paved the way for other adaptations to take place, yet not all of these movies were rewarded with success (para.1). There is a common thing between all these films, whereby they feature young adult characters in a constant struggle with a corrupt system; they find themselves at the center of chaos, and they are obliged to make hard decisions just like adults. Brownlee indicates that these key features gained attention because, at some point, these films reflected some of our realities (para.2).

The sudden increase of YA dystopias, whether in pop culture or literary releases, reflects ideological matters functioning as a site of propositions that raise political questions. Pearce, Vivienne, and Hawkes demonstrate in *Popular Appeal: Books and Films in Contemporary Youth Culture* (2013) that such popularity is "due in part to the lingering legacy of 9/11 and in large measures to the various political, economic and cultural global disturbances and disasters that mark our present time" (p.5).

YA dystopias somehow manage to offer explanations for teenagers, especially when they feel a sense of nonbelonging to society. They find these books and movies related to their own lives; despite the disastrous narratives of YA dystopias, it gives them hope for a better future even in the middle of an apocalypse (p.6). Transforming such books into movies helped in gathering huge audiences for this genre, both readers and non-readers. Therefore, the success of the adaptations depends on the storytelling, the casting, and whether the filmmaker keeps the exact same story or decides to add some other elements, which is most of the time taken negatively by book fans. Brownlee claims that many of the successful adaptations are followed by a prequel, including *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and many other films that were massively rewarding in the box office, which is taken as a sign of success for the adaptation (p.4)

In "Simulation Frames: Young Adult Dystopian Cinema" Tedman (2015), provides an analysis of the adaptation of *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, a YA dystopian trilogy. She argues that Young Adult dystopian films provide a space for heroic adventures. The films de-emphasize the ideological critique associated with canonic dystopic fiction. *Divergent* constructs a cinematic analogue of Young Adult dystopian novels' metaphoric treatment of adolescent concerns (para.1). Hence, it is one of the very few successful adaptations that came to screen, as Tedman indicates: "*Divergent* is one

Of the first Young Adult films after *The Hunger Games* (2012) to bring dystopia, heroic adventure, and teen development successfully to the screen" (para.1).

Such stories are enormously appealing to youngsters, and the movies serve as another medium for transforming the story into reality thanks to filmmakers and the art of cinematography. Yet the book always remains the primary source for these movies to thrive and succeed. Young Adult fiction indulges teenagers with the real world indirectly. Basu et al. (2013), argue in *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Brave New Teenagers* that dystopian literature addresses urgent global issues such as liberty and self-determination, environmental degradation and impending catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly perilous borders between technology and the individual with its ability to terrify and warn. These dystopian warnings are condensed into thrilling adventures with compelling stories when they are aimed at young readers, who are attempting to comprehend the world and their place in it (p.1).

The themes of these novels are the main reason for their massive popularity amongst teenagers, and the narrative techniques also help readers imagine the world of the story while the focus is put on dystopian settings. Each YA dystopia has its own visual and political orientation, although there are thematic lines going through the genre that reflect how current fears and concerns are grafted onto a dystopian landscape. One of the fundamental concerns of the dystopian vision is the specter of nuclear war. environmental desolation, and novels like Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries* are a good example of all this. Julie Bertagna's *Exodus (2002)* and *Zenith (2007).* Like most YA dystopian series, they represent young protagonists in a state of destruction. (Basu et al, p. 3).

Similarly, movies have their own perspectives in claiming the dystopian atmosphere "*Divergent* makes dystopia both recognizable and appealing to its intended

demographic, through its use of style" (Tedman 2013 p.7). Therefore, the focus of these dystopian novels is centered around totalitarianism and the representation of individuals. As stated by Basu, Broad, and Hintz, in YA dystopias, inflexible and oppressive administrations are frequently enforced through the subjugation and quieting of citizens, and a few strategies are used to attain this. The rising wars in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* trilogy used (2008-2010) are almost as much physical oppression as mental control. *Little Brother's* state sponsored detainments and the implanted devices that review and control people's considerations in Elana Johansson's *Ownership* illustrated physical and mental imprisonment respectively, whereas Catherine Fisher's *Incarceron* (2007) and *Sappique* (2008) feature both sorts of limitations (p.4).

Child (2016) comments on the sudden change in YA dystopian adaptations and how the craze subsided after the huge success *The Hunger Games* saga claimed in the last few years, starring Academy Award winner Jennifer Lawrence. The adaptation was made by Lionsgate Studios, yet the success of the trilogy was not the same as other adaptations like *Divergent* as was expected, which brought this popularity to a close. Child writes, "The studio has just seen the latest installment in its follow-up dystopian saga, *The Divergent* Series: *Allegiant*, fail at the domestic box office with a return of just $29 million in its opening weekend" (p.2). The success of this genre in the movie industry is different than it has been before, but that does not mean that moviemakers will stop adapting YA dystopias on the screen. Consequently, the genre is inclined to portray the theme of the apocalypse and the way individuals struggle for survival afterwards, whichis known as the postapocalyptic aftermath.

## 2.2.4 Postapocalyptic  Theory

Post-apocalyptic fiction refers to the type of literature that describes the aftermath of a global catastrophe that ended the world as "an account that takes up howhumans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it" (Curtis  2010,5), Curtis argues that the apocalypse does not necessarily mean the annihilation of humanity; it is rather an event that causes distress and fundamental shifts in the cycle of life, where things are conditioned by violent and catastrophic situations and humans fight for survival (p.6). In religious contexts, the apocalypse is mainly associated with Christianity and Judaism, meaning "revelation…concerning the final battle between good and evil" (p.5). James Burger discusses the connotations of what is the apocalypse in his book *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (1999), he explains that the apocalypse and trauma are related concepts because they both allude to the destruction of already-existing identity and linguistic systems. They also both cause their own erasures from memory and require reconstruction using their traces, remains, survivors,  ghosts,  or  their symptoms. The  depictions  of  the  post-apocalypse  are  both  attempts  to heal  from historical traumas and their symptoms. (Berger, 1999 p.19)

Berger claims that post-apocalypse is more than just a theory, or a genre found in literature  and  film;  it  is  more  related  to  human's  capacity  for  existing  and  coping. Multiple implications have been provided to what exactly the apocalypse refers to, from biblical to historical apocalypses, human's understanding of future events, and the end of the world as such "the historical apocalypses define the future in terms of its radical distinction or separation from the historical world of the present" (Pitetti 2017, p.440). Albeit having several perspectives, they all fall under the "idea of the end" (p.441). Post-apocalyptic  fiction,  on  the  other  hand,  navigates  through  what  will  happen  after  a catastrophic event, an atomic bomb, imagining a world centered around destruction, survival, and dystopia. It usually exists between science fiction, fantasy, and

utopian/dystopian novels. Curtis argues that the postapocalyptic genre is about surviving the odds of the apocalypse; it usually features protagonists in a survival mission (p.17) He describes.

> Postapocalyptic fiction is premised on a state of nature: the hypothetical end destroys all semblance of organized political life, thus producing the conditions of the state of nature. But in order for the social contract to emerge from the post-apocalypse, there has to be some though that life can go on (p.18)

According to Burger, the premise of the apocalypse could be seen in the form of past events such as World War II and the Holocaust. Even though war has always been a part of history, these two events have been engraved in the memory of humans and the whole world. Thus, such traumatic histories are so often seen as the apocalypse (p.21). Therefore, many works in literature have been an inspiration for such real-life incidents as works of science fiction for the purpose of linking the past and the future together. "They describe spectacularly destructive events, but because they use accounts of such events to place the past and future into the same dichotomized, developmental relationship that is established in religious and secular apocalyptic historical discourse" (Curtis, p.441).

Nevertheless, Curtis describes post-apocalyptic as a didactic genre, i.e., indicates what humans should be aware of, and how to maintain their own survival amid an apocalypse (p.17). Curtis's study attempts to handle postapocalyptic accounts from a social perspective. He argues that "post-apocalyptic fiction provides a space for thinking about the social contract" (p.12), post-apocalyptic fiction describes the aftermath of the apocalypse, which results in the end of all sorts of organized and political life. But there isalways that sense of liberation and social contract.

As previously mentioned, apocalyptic themes are commonly addressed in literary studies, as they draw attention to religious, political, and cultural accounts as well. It is illustrated in cinema and blockbuster movies. In fact, as Hamonic (2017) writes in Global Catastrophe in Motion Pictures as Meaning and Message: The Functions of Apocalyptic Cinema in American Film, the genre is significantly rising; thus, several apocalyptic movies have been released in the 21st century, and the appeal of such movies is continuously increasing (p. 1). Besides that, apocalyptic cinema is inclined on demonstrating messages for the audience, such as "…"You can survive the impending cataclysm, and here's how," then cast characters in situations where they are faced with life and death choices"(p.7) and the audiences are given the chance to ponder upon such messages.

The representation of the apocalypse in film studies is usually linked to the decay of the natural world, and the struggle of individuals with the environment due to a catastrophe that caused the world huge damage. Rowland Hughes (2013) states in The Ends of the Earth: Nature, Narrative, and Identity in Dystopian Film, that movies such as *Silent Running 1971* by Douglas Trumbull focus on the aspects of the natural world and humans in the time of an apocalypse, whereby very few plants and forests survive not on earth but in outer space, and it is the mission of white American astronauts to bring life back to earth through a forestry program. Trumbull argues that the movie could be read through Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, emphasizing individualism and nonconformity, just like in many dystopian, postapocalyptic movies (p.24).

Nevertheless, Hamonic draws attention to the theme of survival, which many of these movies promote, and brings a group of individuals into harsh, deadly situations, expecting them to maintain their own lives, and survive. Thus, "In apocalyptic films, characters are either trying to prevent an oncoming cataclysm from

occurring or preparing to survive an inevitable catastrophe" (p.7), Such ideas are explored in literary studies, and apparently film makers tend to implement similar accounts of individual's survival alongside the idea of revelation.

In her book, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, Thompson (2007) offers a distinct vision of the apocalypse by drawing conclusions from several film releases. She focuses on what is known as "apocalypse dread" rather than the end of the world. She defines apocalypse dread "as that fear and anxiety about the future and about the anticipated end of the world" (p.3). She suggests that in the 1990s, different movie genres have been a part of this dread, which resides in the idea of the future that is usually consumed by existential crises. In essence, this dread is "a free-floating anxiety and ambivalence about the future that is displaced onto the specific dread embodied by each film's monster, and that dramatizes a  compulsive eschatological need to perceive and decode signs" (pp.2.3).

Thompson claims that this dread is highly present in the science fiction genre (p.11). She brings several examples to support her arguments. As she writes, "While Hollywood's disaster spectacles of the nineties suggest truly apocalyptic dread in their anxious imaginings of the end of the world, [these] case studies of hybrid horror . . . suggest more coded anxieties about family, patriarchy, religion and 'family values" (p.25), her argument suggests a different way of viewing the apocalypse but is not strongly reliableto examine apocalyptic and postapocalyptic genres.

In *Projecting 9/11: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Recent Hollywood Films* (2015) Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo argues that apocalyptic films articulate our fears and anxieties about such catastrophic events. (p.29). They claim that such movies have been on the rise ever since the events of 9/11 in the US took place, which serves the argument that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic movies could be addressed through

psychological and sociopolitical depths. Moreover, in an article entitled Why are Dystopian Films on the Rise Again? Schmidt (2014) pinpoints that cinematographers and filmmakers have always been interested in depicting science fiction genres on the screen, but the sudden appeal towards dystopian and postapocalyptic genres is quite urgent.

Albeit the common themes of destruction and chaos, they are still commonly watched, and highly influential Schmidt poses two questions concerning this matter. He writes, "Why, then, do we shell out 12, 13, 14 dollars for films that seem designed only to frighten and depress us? What species of entertainment, much less relief, do these nightmare scenarios offer?" (para.3), He suggests that these films provide a reflection upon our realities and the hard conditions humans face, wherein he explains using the movie Snowpiercer, which is based on a graphic novel, "*Snowpiercer* retrofits Lob's frozen apocalypse to our current moment, presenting it as the unintended side effect of human geo-engineering. Chemicals released into the atmosphere to cool our warming planet perform too well, rendering Earth an uninhabitable snowball" (para.5), The only survivors in the movie are the inhabitants of a nonstop train. *Snowpiercer* represents a chaotic dystopian atmosphere. Humans are conditioned to live on the train following a system of classes, the elite and the lower class. The movie indeed takes on a political stance, but it is purely postapocalyptic (para.6).

Schmidt's text notes that the conclusions that could be drawn from these dystopian, postapocalyptic movies are the acknowledgment of the apocalypse and how it could be linked to reality. As he writes, "The apocalypse lies in our mass addiction to the entertainment spectacle, an apathy-causing narcotic that cleverly implicates the very film delivering us the warning" (para.15). Another interesting theme that is found in apocalyptic theory is the depiction of the end of the world by a global catastrophe that includes a deadly man-made disease, this notion is mostly attributed to evolutionary

thinking and biowars; for that, some research has been conducted to investigate the link between evolutionary thinking and dystopia.

## 2.3 Pop Social Darwinism

The representation of Darwinian thoughts in cinema and pop culture remains few compared to other themes; but this did not prevent evolutionary trends from prevailing and influencing this industry. McNeil (2011) argues that in reviewing Barbara Creed's *Darwin's Screens: Evolutionary Aesthetics, Time, and Sexual Display in the Cinema*, she writes, "Charles Darwin is not a much-cited figure in cinema studies" (p.131), Creed highlights further on the influence of Darwin in cinema and film studies, in which she describes his role as crucial but still neglected and rarely portrayed. Darwinism's influence on early 20th-century cinematic productions resulted in a positive response, whereby many films started to tackle the notion of evolution and other Darwinian ideas (p.131). Therefore, Darwin was highly praised by poststructuralists, and his ideas were advocated by its proponents, such as the notion of man being the center of the world. Creed describes him as "the father of poststructuralist thought" (Qtd in McNeil, p.131). Darwin's ideas inspired poststructuralists because they glorify the notion of breaking free from past traditions.

Kirby (2009) explains the influence of Darwinian ideas through some films, such as *Creation (2009)*, which describes the journey of Darwin and his religious struggles. Thus, Kirby notes that the film "had a difficult time finding a U.S distributor" due to the controversial views of Darwinism and the fear of religious reactions towards it (para.2). For Kirby, the Darwinian journey through cinema started to appear in comedic shows in the 20th century. He follows the evolution of Darwin's influence on cinema, when other movies occurred like Reversing *Darwin's Theory* (*1908), The Monkey Man (1908),* and *Darwin Was Right (1924)*, therefore, Kirby claims that after *Scopes Monkey Trial* in 1925 , he notion of a human/primate connection changed from comedy to horror in cinema.

Significant post-scope films feature "mad evolutionist" characters who design evil experiments to prove their theories. (para.2). The controversy towards Darwinism in cinema continued with other film releases through time. Kirby argues that "a large number of films featuring Darwinian themes fell victim to the notorious "Hays Code" of the Production Code Administration (PCA) Office when it went into effect in the 1930s" (para.6), because many religious organizations were against any kind of promotion of Darwinism in the field of entertainment, it even pushed filmmakers to alter and remove any reference to evolution, avoiding this dilemma with religious beliefs. Furthermore, in the current age, things have changed compared to the 20th century. In fact, many filmmakers gained freedom in depicting evolutionary thoughts in their films, even though they may not focus on Darwinism as a central theme. It is in fact seen with science in films in which it is manipulated to serve despicable motives by humans; they are mostly depicted in dystopias, as Ferreira (2013) calls them "Biodystopias", she claims "works that dramatize the implementation and ramifications of the widespread and frequently unethical use of biotechnologies" (p.49). The idea of evil science is usually linked to evolutionary thinking and Darwinism.

Going back to Creed's inspection, McNeil offers an explanation of her study of Darwinism through cinematic lenses, where she points out that Creed regards Darwin as a focal point in the evolution of film and cinematic production. She writes, "Creed sees traces of Darwin throughout the history of cinema, and she is, in effect, proposing cinema as the cultural manifestation of Darwinian ideas par excellence" (p.132). Paying close attention to early science fiction, horror, and many other genres. Darwinian ideas found their way into these releases, and Creed highlights this notion excessively. However, McNeil suggests that Creed is indeed a valuable account for making the link between Darwin and cinema, and it helps raise cinematic scholarly awareness to-wards it. But as McNeil writes, "Tracing Darwin's influence is one thing, hailing Darwinian theory as the

engine for the development of cinema is quite another". (p.133).

Furthermore, the application of Darwin's ideas to cinema can be detected through significant films, and as it has been established above, science fiction dystopias happen to be the best example of Darwinism to be illustrated. In his article, The Devil in Our DNA: A Brief History of Eugenics in Science Fiction Films (2007), Kirby explains how theories like eugenics prevailed in the world of cinema despite the challenges. He discusses the notion of heredity, as it is considered a core theme for eugenics, in which films with such themes explore our urge to control the biological characteristics that make us human. A supplementary eugenic theme of scientist characters striving to modify human genetics in order to solve social issues or produce superhumans usually goes along with both the "flawed humanity" and the "evolutionary potential" themes. (p.84)

The encounter of eugenics and bioengineering themes in science fiction films indicates the influence of evolutionary thinking on the world of cinema, and the idea of creating a master human race through genetic manipulation is indeed a troubling theme that "almost uniformly support the idea that humanity's fundamental nature lies within its genome and could be improved by technological means" (p.84). It is a terrifying idea to envision the way science can follow such beliefs and apply them to reality, as it happened in the past with eugenics through Galton's ideas. Hence, the fact that cinema is addressing such themes is actually an eye-opening factor that makes us think of what would happen if these programs were applied in reality, especially when combined with the idea of the apocalypse "there are certainly many hints in the contemporary world that similar scenarios could conceivably materialize if they are not anticipated and prevented with recourse to careful deflecting measures" (p.50)

## 2.4 Science Fiction

The literary canon is rich with plentiful genres and styles of writing in which the use of techniques varies accordingly, and science fiction happens to be one of the most fascinating fields in literature and film. As a genre, it is inconsistent to define. Roberts (2005) describes "science fiction as a genre or division of literature distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature"(p.10). In other words, it is a literary genre in which the author tends to use fantastic themes combined with science, including futuristic elements that may consist of aliens, machines, and technological advances, including space and galaxies. However, when it comes to the origins of science fiction, scholarship presents several theories on this genre Bould et al.,(2009) explain that significant debates occurred regarding the origins of the genre; some argued that it originated in the U.S., others traced it back to the classical era and some linked it to Marry Shelley's *Frankenstein* … etc. but most importantly, this genre occupied the literary world as it first appeared by fans and critics as well (p.2).

In recent years, science fiction books, movies, anime, and even comic books have a large population of fans, and their themes and philosophies have gone viral on Hollywood. Therefore, going back to history, the genre's beginning started to flourish from the late 19th century until the 20th century (Bould et al.2009.p3). It became attractive to critics since its very first emergence; some attempted to classify it and understand its unique themes, Roberts (2005) claims that to grasp the real definition of science fiction, it is a must to go through two different approaches, The first is "…to attempt to encapsulate the scenarios could conceivably materialize if they are not anticipated and prevented with recourse to careful deflecting measures" (p.50)

Gunn (2010) argues that American science fiction is the source of its origins, claiming that it started in New York City in 1926. He also illustrates that in the same year there was the first publication of a science fiction magazine called Amazing Stories, which made the genre more appealing (p.1); The American version of science fiction helped in the acceptance of it among readers and authors, especially when American writers included scientific technologies, space exploration, and so on. These elements played a role in the widespread recognition of the genre.

The Age of Enlightenment also played a central motive for authors to write more science fiction books; the influence of evolutionary theories and Darwinism is another factor; Darwin's theory provided a new style of life that authors were inspired by (p.1). There has been another debate concerning which books to categorize under the umbrella of science fiction, Roberts argues, giving an example of Frantz Kafka's famous novel the *Metamorphosis*, this novel is usually labeled as a science fiction novel but in fact it has little do with the genre, because based on him science fiction comply with scientific themes as a general mode as such using scientific labs to create something just like in movies such as *Planets of the Apes*, *Frankenstein* etc., whilst Kafka's book does not focus on science exclusively; it is instead a psychological novel than a science fiction (p.4)

Science fiction nowadays is indeed at its peak; multiple publications and films are released annually with futuristic, dystopian themes that enrich the genre, even more. The Artifice magazine claims in an article on science fiction that, according to Forbes, statistics show that the genre's popularity has increased since 2010. The industry keeps on elevating each year (*Science-Fiction: Defining a Sprawling Genre.*, 2018). With this escalation, the genre is at the forefront of the most read and watched by fans, mainly due to the themes it tackles. The genre provides a futuristic vision that includes the excessive use of science and technology.

## 2.4.1 Biotechnology in Science Fiction

Ever since modernity carved its way through science, people have become more accustomed on relying upon experimentation, and technology in justifying fundamental questions. Thus, by the beginnings of the 19th century, Charles Darwin presented his evolutionary thoughts in his book the *Origins of Species* (1859), in which he focused on human species and heredity as a significant process that allows humans to inherit particular qualities, resulting in their evolution, despite the controversiality of his theories, Darwin inspired a lot of research across the world. Yet it was until the 1952 that biologists in the field of genetic engineering concluded that the DNA carried genetic information. ((Rohdes 2015, p.21). Similarly, Figg (1986) argues that modern biotechnology is usually linked to the 1950s DNA discovery by James Watson and Francis Crick. (p.29).

Moreover, the field of biotechnology or genetic technology is rather a complicated medium to decipher, at least for non-scientists, Bern describes it "Biotechnology involves the manipulation of biological macromolecules[1] or organisms in experimental procedures in order to create useful products and applications in the agricultural, pharmaceutical, health, and allied industries." (p.2). It overlaps more than it appears to have, and it is not exclusive to genetic engineering yet, "it encompasses living entities, such as microorganisms (e.g., bacteria, yeasts, fungi), animal cells, plant cells, DNA, viruses, plasmids, and enzymes. It also includes the modification of living organisms so that they can perform special functions that are useful to humans" (Figg, p.29).

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[1] It was first introduced by the German Chemist Hermann Staudinger in 1922
Macromolecules can be the result of biological processes (natural polymers) or they can be prepared using chemical reactions (synthetic polymers)

Furthermore, the representation of biotechnology in science fiction has also been an appealing subject for many scholars, whereby they attempt to fathom the link between reality and fiction, since biotechnology occupies a large place in science fiction and popular culture. Hamilton (2003) writes in an article entitled, Traces of the Future: Biotechnology, Science Fiction, and the Media "Sf texts in a variety of popular media have been active in exploring and constructing the boundaries of the biotechnological imagination" (p.269), elements of Biotechnology could be seen through multiple science fiction texts and movies as Hamilton describes it

> Many more people will watch films such as Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The 6th Day (2000),* in which a man encounters a clone of himself, or the dystopian projection of future gene therapy, *GA7TACA (1997*); or they might read Robin Cook's biomedical thriller *Chromosome 6 (1997),* about shadowy genetic experiments in the Third World, or spy novelist Ken Follett's *The 7hird Twin (1997),* in which human embryos are manipulated by dangerous masterminds (p.269).

In recent years, the line between science fiction and real science seems to blur, it is utterly common to view some of our ancient science fiction fantasies come into reality, and the process sounds appealing that many scientists admit on the effect of science fiction on our futuristic visions,   Clayton (2013) argues that the matter is not about linking genetic science to science fiction particularly, it is rather about the ethical discourse related to genetic progress, as he writes "The bioethicists examined here rely on sweeping analogies and engage in the kind of extrapolation that is the hallmark of SF.

Their underlying syntax is the question, what if? They ask us to "frame and test experiences as if they were aspects of science fiction" while enjoying the trust accorded to nonfiction" (p.320)

According to Clayton, there should be some ethical wariness while dealing with science fiction when referring to real sciences. Hence, not many people understand this relationship between science and science fiction, in fact "little attention is paid to science fiction as a symbolic resource in understanding science, regardless of its accuracy" (Hamilton, p.269). Another aspect is somehow neglected when addressing scientific studies like biotechnology, many people lack the efficient knowledge on the topic and rely on media to cover this end; therefore, science fiction stands as a mediator for that kind of knowledge and even in the field of science fiction, critics tend to focus on two significant works, Marry Shelly *Frankenstein* (1816) and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) to explain the Biotechnological research, Hopkins (1998) writes

> Most people have never read *Brave New World*, but that doesn't matter. The scores of references to *Brave New World* aren't about the book; they are about the trope connected to the book. Brave New World is a standalone reference, image, and warning about dehumanization, totalitarianism, and technology- wrought mystery-epitomized and made possible by the technology of cloning. (p.11)

On the other hand, Clayton debates on another aspect of Biotechnology and its influence on Science Fiction especially in America during the 1940s, where he mentions the role of the DNA in evolution, and how it was reflected upon science fiction writers through eugenics and mutation; eugenics had a drastic impact on American society in the first half of the 20$^{th}$ century. The programs suggested controlling selective breeding, eliminating the unfit and promoting social Darwinism. (p.223). Additionally, the appearance of eugenic engineering is rather presented within "the first wave of SF" (p. 224).

Kirby (2000) supports this argument, he writes in his article, The New Eugenics in Cinema: Genetic Determinism and Gene Therapy in *GATTACA*, in which he tackles the eugenic treatments in cinema he writes "even after the advent of genetic engineering in the early 1970s, and the bioethical concerns associated with gene therapy, this form of biotechnology was incorporated into few cinematic texts"(p.2), he also adds that science fiction literature focuses extensively on the use of technology "to make direct changes to human evolution"(p.3), these alterations involved direct intervening with the human genome, and conditioned heredity to reach a perfect human race, which could be seen through Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932) (p.3).

Although scientists at the time were still trying to decode the meaning behind genetic inheritance and heredity, science fiction was centered around evolutionary ideas and the evolution of species. This inspired writers to use genetic science in their storylines more than before, which opened doors for Darwin's thoughts to resurface and even be shaped as discussed by Clayton (2013) "genetics allowed novelists to transpose the conflict inward. Rather than externalizing the struggle among species to interplanetary warfare, SF could bring the battle down to earth, as it were, shifting the strife to the personal realm and locating superiority in mental attributes" (p.326)

Science fiction has always been a valuable source for imagining the future, regardless of the consequences, Thacker (2001) writes in his article, The Science Fiction of Technoscience: The Politics of Simulation and a Challengefor New Media Art that one Science fiction's main concern is "with the contingency involved in producing the future, as well as interrogating the constraints and limitations that enable the capacity to imagine the future" (p.156).Some elements of science fiction have already disappeared from the realm of fiction and transformed to reality, however, new things are occurring within the same context. The imaginative code of science fiction

is somehow losing its agency which results in a confusion between science and science fiction.

Thacker is concerned with the relevance of science fiction for biotechnological research he explains "science fiction is necessary in order for biotech and bio- medicine to continue constructing their narratives of technological advancement and the increasing sophistication of a biotechnology of the population" (p.157), for Thacker Science fiction plays a crucial role in stimulating innovation for scientists, in fact, "as a powerful political tool, science fiction enables the biotech industry to create a narrative of a bioinformatically based, disease-free, corporate-managed future. In doing so, it is also creating a history, a self-fulfilling narrative of progress" (p.157). In other words, science fiction is more than we think it is, and it is not constrained to fiction but in many ways, it inspires reality. It also "embeds scientific-technological concepts in the sphere of human interests and actions, explaining them and explicitly attributing social value to them" (Csicsery-Ronay,1991, p.338), For that, this fascinating genre cannot be considered a mere entertainment because it has proved to be a medium of cultural and historical articulations It is a mode of consciousness, a complicated hesitance regarding the connection between hypothetical concepts and historical reality that is developing in the present.2 In order to "implant" human doubt into the nonhuman world, science fiction (SF) orients itself within a historical perspective that maintains that science and technology actively contribute to the development of reality. (p.338).

Young Adult Dystopian SF is also one of the few genres that has been influenced by biotechnological trends. Guerra (2009) discusses this in her article: Colonizing Bodies: Corporate Power and Biotechnology in Young Adult Science Fiction, that works such as Nancy Farmer's *House of the Scorpion* (2002) which narrates the struggle of colonization and biotechnologically subgroups, where young adult clones are used as a

source of organs to supply the rich upper class (p.283). Hence, another aspect is racism and how biotechnology plays a role in creating new groups and help in their explorations. Guerra argues about oppressive systems within YA fiction "If the method of oppression is familiar, it is because biotechnology has allowed the creation and identification of a new minority group; if the victims are familiar, they are being oppressed through new biotechnical methods or denial of access to necessary biotechnology" (p.289). Sadly, Science Fiction and YA fiction Biotechnology is in most of the times addressed as an evil science for what it means to alter human life at least for what is presented in popular culture and novels, as Guerra writes "Biotechnology also amplifies sadly common evils to a new level of sophistication; slavery is nontechnically enforced, surveillance and experimentation on human subjects are rapes at the molecular level, social discrimination is genetically prompted and externally signaled" (p.289).

Biotechnology and science fiction indeed have so much in common, and their combination in literary work shows several key points. Science Fiction stands as a source of inspiration for science and the other way around, although the representation of biotechnology in science fiction is not all the time positive but still the influence is still present and clearly summarizes how the two are interconnectedly related. Thus, this work attempts to navigate the implications of biotechnology in pop culture, mainly YA dystopias.

## 2.4.2 Science Fiction and Colonialism

Science Fiction as a genre has been inclusively diverse and interdisciplinary anchored within the realm of literature and film likewise. Therefore, fundamental questions about identity, individuals, futuristic themes, and colonization have been excessively presented by this fascinating genre. Therefore, addressing issues of colonial

oppression, marginalized people, and empire are usually tackled in the field of postcolonialism, but what is notably novel, is studying science fiction from a postcolonial lens, introducing Postcolonial Science Fiction. Postcolonial theory as Langer (2011) introduces it in her book *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* "has often been constructed largely as a dichotomy between East and West, the Orient and the Occident, which is a construction that fails utterly to take into account the diversity of postcolonial experiences" (p.11). She explains that the concept of Postcolonialism has often been labeled according to the previously mentioned boundaries, whereas the theory could be applied to other significant genealogies such as Science Fiction.

Langer suggests both Canadian and Japanese contexts arguing that "Japan and Canada both have strong traditions of science fiction in literature and film" (p.12) which implies another dimension to postcolonial studies; that are present in other forms of media as well, like movies and theatre and so. Hence, "Both countries have interesting and diverse postcolonial histories" (p.12), which suggest the possible relationship drawn between the two and away from the assumptions drawn towards postcolonial writings, as being exclusive to specific areas in the world.

According to Reider's book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) the beginnings of Science Fiction as a genre coincided with the imperialist era by the mid-nineteenth century (p.3) For him the genre first prospered within countries associated with imperialism such as France and England and later the U.S, Germany, and other western countries in the twentieth century. Reid argues that "It is not a matter of asking whether but of determining precisely how and to what extent the stories engage colonialism" (p.12). However, Postcolonial science fiction which is referred to as "a hybrid genre that reflects intriguing affinities between two genres whose own parameters continue to be vigorously contested" (Hoagland and Sarwal,2014, p.5). Besides, it falls

under the same conventions with the purpose "to explore the ways in which Western scientific discourse, both in terms of technology and in terms of culture (both real cultural effects and effects on cultural production), has interacted with colonialism and the cultural production of colonized people" (Langer, 2008, p.9).

Hoagland and Sarwal (2014) explain that both genres pervaded in the literary world addressing themes of democracy, justice, and oppression. But, when it comes to their representations in popular culture, science fiction is indeed heavily present, within cinematic productions and blockbusters movies, as opposed to postcolonialism, which is rarely tackled solely in western pop culture (p.8). Another important aspect is concerned with the encounter of science fiction with the so called Third World, taken into consideration that the genre has been exclusively dominated by white males and usually viewed as a masculine genre as Roberts (2006) argues "SF was dominated by a fan culture of young white males" (p.18). Several postcolonial authors use the genre to express their diasporic feelings as noted by Hoagland & Sarwal "it is no surprise, then, that the genre has found a natural home amongst Third World writers, who are using the genre to reimagine themselves and their world, to "set the record straight" by dismantling the stereotypes that science fiction in part has helped to support, and in essence "strike back" at the empire" (p.7).

Speaking about the notion of imperialism and its link to science fiction, Rieder claims that the time of expansions by the west, was known by an era of economic settlement and extending power around the globe, which inspired authors to write about such fundamental changes the world was going through, including Cyrano and H.G. Wells. Whom they became well recognized in science fiction literature (p.2). Moreover, colonialism and imperial ideologies intertwined with evolutionary theories at the time, that were included in many sciences' fiction books, and therefore Darwin's ideas were

highly influential as Rieder writes "the complex mixture of ideas about competition, adaptation, race, and destiny that was in part generated by evolutionary theory, and was in part an attempt to come to grips with-or to negate-its implications, forms a major part of the thematic material of early science fiction" (p.4)

Postcolonial science fiction tends to set a role play within what is known as the stranger and the stranger land as Langer describes it, considering the possible encounter between the two, she argues that they are hybridized, mocked, and/or imitated by postcolonial science fiction in a Bhabhaian masquerade performance. The image of the far-off continent, whether the uncharted nation or the imperial seat, comes to imply all forms of diaspora and movement, in all directions. The figure of the alien comes to represent all kinds of otherness. Their very power, their position as the simultaneous object of desire and dread in the colonial imagination, is reversed (p.4).

Science fiction's tendency of connecting historical, colonial, and colonial agencies with futuristic parallelism, as in reflecting the past in the future. Smith (2012) argues "I argue that it is only in the recognition of what I want to call postcolonial SF's "new maps of hope" that we may ultimately justify recent claims to science fiction's status as a properly historical genre"(p.6),  In fact, science fiction has always been a genre that tackles history in a way that reflects colonialism due to the clash between civilizationsand Rieder describes the process as follows

> The work of interpreting the relation of colonialism and science fiction really gets under way, then, by attempting to decipher the fiction's often distorted and topsy-turvy references to colonialism. Only then can one properly ask how early science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses, how it reflects or contributes to ideological production of ideas about the shape of

history, and how it might, in varying degrees, enact a struggle over humankind's ability to reshape it. (p.3)

Furthermore, the status quo of science fiction and postcolonialism tends to ponder upon colonial enterprise whether by intention or not, movies such as *star Trek*, *Black Panther* and *Avatar* noticed such an attitude of imperial presence, Rieder calls it "dark subconscious". He further adds "science fiction first emerges as the underside to this set of cultural dominants, as, in a sense, the dark subconscious to the thinking mind of imperialism" (p.50). Hence, Hoagland & Sarwal (2014) claim that "science fiction is a genre that feeds off of conflicting impulses of exploration and xenophobia, conquest, and exchange, and techno philia and technophobia, to name a few" (p.9).

The genre's relationship to history is summarized through the emphasis upon social and individual issues, it has an utter attachment to the past. "In essence, the nostalgic drive of science fiction can be understood as the future made familiar. Thus, the future is relegated to mere stage dressing, as the past is obsessively revisited and reconsidered" (p.9). This mirrors what postcolonial science fiction deals with the aspect of going back to historical contexts is what makes the genre so unique and has a political and cultural dimension "Science fiction texts that draw such explicit and critical attention to how imperialist history is constructed and maintained is in part how postcolonial science fiction may be defined" (p.10).

## 2.5 Reading Films through Biopolitics

Reading films politically in this context requires a thorough understanding of concepts such as biopolitics and biopower, especially when the work at hand partly attempts at interpreting the narrative of films through a Darwinian lens. Indeed, the analysis entails a deeper understanding of the link between individuals and genealogies of power relations which in turn involves bios. Adams (2017) highlights the key concept of

biopolitics and biopower and their occurrence in modern discourse, suggesting that it is better to tackle both concepts simultaneously together with recognition to Michael Foucault's ideas (para.2). Nevertheless, Adams describes biopolitics and biopower as follows "biopolitics can be understood as a political rationality which takes the administration of life and populations as its subject: 'to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order'" (para.3), However, biopower refers to the way in which biopolitics is conducted in society, following a certain mechanism of power that determine our norms, free of control.

Somit (2009) explains the notion of involving biological concepts in explaining certain political phenomenon, he claims that it has a long history in Western political thoughts, whereby the government plays a key role as a "living organism" alongside other components

> In one version, the state is portrayed as a living organism with the various parts of the state (or government) functioning much as do the parts of the body, i.e., head, heart, arms, etc.1 Alternatively, when attention turns to the external rather than the internal life of states, the resulting relationships are treated as the inevitable outcome of the 'struggle for survival' to which all living organisms are presumably condemned(p.209).

However, by the early 19th century Social Darwinists' views on human behavior and instincts were no longer intellectually respected like before (p.209). In fact, man's genetic legacy was in decay after WWI, simply because new theories occurred. The link between biology and politics was concerned with explaining some political behaviors and tendencies in terms of biological concepts, therefore, scholarship that time argue that it is possible to alter human behavior by "altering the physiological functioning of the body" (p.210) Somit explains these connotations, he claims, that these interrelated approaches are usually underlined under the concept of Biopolitics.

Indeed, biopolitics encompasses multiple disciplines, Somit &Peterson (1998) pinpoint that it includes the method of political science whose proponents have one or more of the following convictions: 1) that Homo sapiens are genetically predisposed to certain social and political behavioral traits as a result of our species' evolutionary history; 2) that physiological factors (such as fatigue, illness, etc.) may have an impact on political behavior; 3) that physiological measures (such as voice stress analysis, eye-blink rate, etc.) may have an impact on political attitudes and potential behavior; and 4) that political science should be more concerned with biologically related issues (p. 43).

Another aspect of biopolitics is concerned with the use of power and according to Meyer-Emerick (2004), Foucault presented a governmental approach of controlling people without using force. It was done through regulating human behavior and enriching their self-discipline. Thus, this example of biopolitics is similar to the biopolitics based on political science, Foucault focuses on two aspects in his analysis, one concerned with individuals and the other on species. He insists on the level of power exercised in life, coming to the conclusion of species survival at best, Blank & Hines, 2001 write "it is species survival that is the ultimate goal" (Qtd in Meyer-Emerick p.4). However, Meyer-Emerick argues that Foucault's theory is directed to the Western world "his methodology is historical analysis versus specific examination of individual and group behaviors. He does not focus pragmatically on specific public policy issues but rather on social practices related to the regulation of population, via families for example" (p.4)

Nevertheless, this research will focus on the display of the concept of biopolitics alongside other related concepts in the selected films, the focus will be put upon issues on race and totalitarian regimes, which in turn implies a study of how biopolitics interfere. The display of race in biopolitics has been discussed by some significant authors in which each one of them focused on some points, as such McMahon's (2018) article, the

"Enigma of Biopolitics": Antiblackness, Modernity, and Roberto Esposito's Biopolitics, he discusses racial representation in biopolitics through Esposito's *Bios* noting that Esposito makes very little reference to racialization in his book regarding biopolitics, McMahon writes "Even when talking about "race" vis-à-vis biopolitics, Esposito engages in no discussion of blackness, antiblackness, slavery, white supremacy, or any other of a cluster of terms expressing the role of sociopolitical processes of racialization, violence, and domination"(p.752). Like Esposito, Foucault happens to give few attentions to racialization outside of Europe as noted by Weheliye (2014)

> Over the course of his argument about the genesis of biopolitics in the lectures, Foucault will continue to distinguish European state racism and biopolitics from those primeval forms of racism that linger in the aforementioned philosophical, geographical, and political quicksand of an unspecified elsewhere; at least, this is what we are asked to infer as a consequence of Foucault's taciturnity about the reach and afterlife of those other modalities of racialization (p.58)

Foucault's discussion of biopolitics in relation to racial issues is mainly centered around Europe. But he attempted to address the matter in other contexts where he mentioned that he did not address space, Weheliye suggests that though this would have to be a group effort, there is a task to be done to clarify the space in issue, stating where a specific process ends and what are the boundaries beyond which one may declare "something different happens."…This group effort is still being repeated in modern biopolitics and bare life discourse, but it has not yet been completed (p.58)

In the same mainstream, of locating race in biopolitical readings McMahon explains how Esposito's work, which is famously known for biopolitical discourse, it lacks the appearance of a particular concept of race, he rather explains that when it comes to biopolitics "race, rather than being a generic marker of group differentiation as it mostly is for Esposito, should be more acutely understood as processes of racialization

98

that hierarchically situate different genres of the human vis-à-vis biological existence and life itself"(p.756).

Another key point addressed by Adams is concerned with the way Foucault tackled racism. Foucault claims that the state of racism comes to an evolutionary dimension, in which the concept of power plays a key ingredient, thus it is no longer a matter of defending a sovereignty but rather a society, species, who are in need of defending. Adams uses Foucault's argument in *The Will to Knowledge* (2008) "Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital"(Foucault, p.137). Adams points that this shift of ideas gave birth to Foucault's state racism as in society will direct against itself alongside other vital elements. Adams write "State racism is thus for Foucault the essential characteristic of the modern biopolitical state: it is both the function of the modern state and that which constitutes it" (para.12).

Furthermore, Mayer-Emerick notes that Darwin's theory of natural selection is another essential key element in biopolitics, suggesting that natural selection influences both the form of natural creatures and their behavior which is referred to as ethology. The latter is another component of biopolitics (p.5). He further highlights how the theory of biopolitics focus on hierarchy, dominance, and obedience. The theory of Neo-Darwinism and human inclination towards hierarchy dates to the ancient times, and  history shows that most people were predominated by authoritarian rule. The concept of biopolitics is indeed importance for this study to decipher the impact of power and politics together.

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

This research will be guided through a post-structuralist approach in film theory, it entails that language and film representations are not stable agents of meaning, they are rather treated as contested discourses that reflect diverse narratives including in the case of this research, Young Adult dystopias in which they hold powerful, political, and ideological transcoded messages, that could be situated through their analyses as a unified media text. As Barthes (1990) describes it, the text is a "galaxy of signifiers" (p.135), multiple readings and meanings can be derived from one single text. As Sinnerbrink (2019) indicates, post-structuralism helps us view meaning differently, it locates reality within a conflicted sense of meaning moving from traditional analyses of language "to an emphasis on difference, subjectivity, culture, and politics"(p.452), post-structuralism delineates a broad understanding of the apparatus of film studies, in other words, "poststructuralism was brought to bear on the theorisation of film, film spectatorship, and film analysis, less as a specific theoretical position than as a broad methodological orientation"(p.452).

This framework supports analyzing films and YA franchises critically in which different meanings and perspectives can be drawn towards the movies. It allows us to view cinema through a political lens and navigate through multiple parallels that are underscored in reality. Therefore, a post-structuralist framework allows us the chance to tackle film as media texts that mirror historical, and sociopolitical contexts including racial issues, contemporary hegemony and the pertinent role of young people in making decisions.

The aim is to address these YA dystopias as a collective text, in which they convey meaning and tap into sociopolitical discourse. The purpose is to decode and deconstruct these films to provide social and political commentary. It is through

discussing the history of racial politics and colonialism, this research will argue on the relationship between science and racial discriminations coupled with individual's struggle with the remaining of such philosophies in the contemporary era. In other words, how racism is embedded in policies and practices. To highlight the politics of the selected YA dystopias, this research will follow both a historical and sociocultural studies of film, mainly Young Adult movies. Thus, considering these movies as a form of entertainment yet they bear political messages that could be extracted throughout their narratives especially targeting young people. The aim is to treat these YA dystopias as valuable accounts of meaning rather than just subtle entertainment. Nevertheless, in order to contextualize the politics of YA dystopias, one key element is crucial which is science fiction, in which the selected movies fall under the category of YA science fiction and dystopia.

Science fiction provides us with an image on the contribution of science in creating a chasm between humans, mainly when used by evil powers and people with political agendas which explains the history of colonialism and racism whatsoever. Take for example *Avatar* (2009), humans in the far future still have their own agendas to justify discrimination against other races, it is an allegory to what the past colonial practices in Africa, where the white Europeans used biological and scientific justifications to colonize other territories.

SF is indeed a powerful key ingredient to understand YA dystopias, when it is coupled with the theme of an apocalypse it is rendered to reflect the future, the past and the present. In the future, young people are at the center of a global catastrophe, they are usually manipulated by the government and the totalitarian society they are associated with such as in *The Hunger Games*, children are used as entertainment for the wealthy recreating an ancient Roman and Darwinian tradition where children are forced to

101

compete against each other in a bloody arena, and only one survivor is expected to come out alive. Similarly, *The Maze Runner* which presents a purely Darwinian society, in which WCKD (World Catastrophe Killzone Department), an evil scientific organization plays God and uses teenagers as test subjects to find a cure for a global pandemic that was made by them in the first place. For this reason, YA dystopias can be a better fit for sociopolitical readings and to allegorize their meanings on race, totalitarianism, and the power of media.

## 2.7 Methodology

The central analysis of this project will be guided by significant key figures in media and cultural studies. The main research will be conducted through what is called contextual cultural studies, whereby movies as a form of media play a vital role in affecting people's perceptions about the world. Douglas Kellner's book *Cultural studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995) explores the relationship between forms of media and their perceptions on humans, he argues that "the artifacts of media culture are thus not innocent entertainment but are thoroughly ideological artifacts bound up with political rhetoric, struggles, agendas, and policies" (p.93). For Kellner it is necessary to learn to read these forms of media politically to understand the possible ideologies contributed to them. Thus, this study will be conducted following a type of analysis referred to by theorists as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Scholarship in film analysis and semiotics have been concerned with how to tackle films as a social and cultural component carrying meaning. In *Multimodal Film Analysis*, Bateman, and Schmidt (2012) explore this notion through film theorist David Bordwell and his approach, thereby, Bordwell regards openly recoverable meanings to include everything from specific events and character behaviors portrayed in the story to

generic statement made relying on them. In differentiate, certainly logical implications run from traditional contextualization of the unequivocal implications, giving social valuations of the ambiguous models that are not themselves thematized within the material of the film. up to 'hidden' meanings Bordwell terms them 'symptomatic 'that are consistent with the film, but which also contact broader issues in society, reflecting the 'ideology' or concerns which the film 'unintentionally' shows (p.3).

In this intersection, it is at that point broadly acknowledged both that movies and their delineations of society are appropriate targets of basic investigation which, some of the time, movies may endeavor to be effectively basic themselves. This raises numerous openings for advantageous combinations of CDA questions and methods, and the sociocultural investigation of film, indeed although this potential has barely been tapped to date. (Bateman, 2018, p.612). In the case of YA dystopias movies, the approach followed is a critical discourse analysis, in which these movies as an element of entertainment are tackled from a cultural and political perspective, with the attempt to decipher or "transcode" their potential meanings (Kellner,2010,p.3) their historical, and sociopolitical perceptions, using a critical discourse analysis as Bateman writes " is then broadly accepted both that films and their depictions of society are appropriate targets of critical analysis and that, sometimes, films may attempt to be actively critical themselves"(2018 p.613).

Before going deeper in film representation, it is necessary to mention the role of media as an umbrella term conveying messages. By the 19th century new forms of media emerged in the western world; affecting people's minds and receptions as Kellner points "Media culture in the United States and most capitalist countries is a largely commercial form of culture, produced for profit,  and disseminated in the form of commodities" (p.16). These media artifacts are indeed a reflection to people's experiences, social and

cultural lives serving with a commercial intent so that the product is consumed by people it must resonate with their reality (p.16). Hence, new theories of analyses popularized this framework, wherein the need to read and decipher "requiring new types of media literacy to decode these new cultural forms" (p.17)

Using a Critical Discourse Analysis is done through semiotic observation "approaching film from a CDA orientation needs to be seen within the context of 'multimodal CDA', in which methods explicitly targeting ensembles of diverse semiotic expressive resources are developed" (Bateman, p.614). Moreover, discourse in this area of studies attempts to articulate meaning through semiotic expressions as mentioned by Bateman, it is an approach to read forms of media and pop culture. Stuart Hall (1997) defines discourse as a foundation of knowledge about a particular topic. It is "a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society" (p.6). By deconstructing the representational sociopolitical of film, this study will analyze discourses found in YA dystopias. Representing language, signs, and images as a context of meaning, in which discourse regulates and governs our lives and gives directions to the way we speak, communicate, and make meanings semiotically from our surroundings (Hall, 1997, p.7). This process includes notions of race, power, class, and political ideologies.

Hollywood films are powerful sites of discourse and ideology, they are easily accessible by consumer culture. Yet, carrying critical meaning these films are a source of fine-grained details "Such films, although fictional, nevertheless seek more or less explicitly to raise awareness so that the problematic practices may be challenged" (Bateman, 2018, p.622). As an account of media literacy, film analyses depend fundamentally on the type of perception given by viewers and critiques whether they see

104

the film with political lens or deem it as a stylistic theory. Bateman explains that film deconstructs "notions of historical fact with its mixture of documentary and fictional footage" (p.623). Besides, "Any deconstruction the film achieves needs then to be anchored with respect to audiences' reception practices as well as in the ways the film is constructed" (p.623). The process is fully dependent upon the viewer's perceptions, for that CDA is already performed with their interactions.

The status quo of films as a form of mass media requires extensive reading to their perception among viewers and the history behind the story produced. In this case of Y.A dystopias selected, the examination requires a more attentive approach, to decipher the targeted key element in the films. Thus, reading *The Hunger Games* using a contextual cultural study is rendered as a political account for the ideas and images portrayed within the film. These contemporary films tend to tackle relevant realities, they stand as a commercial source for the mass media, especially when the films bring such ideological questions and trigger political ideas as Kellner (1995) points on the importance of media and its influence "The media are intimately connected with power and open the study of culture to the vicissitudes of politics and the slaughterhouse of history. They help shape our view of the world, public opinion, values, and behavior, and are thus an important forum of social power and struggle" (p. 36). Kellner (2010), discusses how Hollywood movies articulate with real life politics in the US, he even provides valuable examples that serve what this project attempts to answer through the analysis of dystopia Y.A series, he writes

> Films are an especially illuminating social indicator of the realities of a historical era, as a tremendous amount of capital is invested in researching, producing, and marketing the product. Film creators tap into the events, fears, fantasies, and hopes of an era and give cinematic expression to social experiences and realities (p.5)

As mentioned above, films are powerful tools that carry meaning and draw significant parallels between the sociopolitical terrain and the capitalist world, that of the United States. Therefore, addressing these movies within their period of production also plays a key role in the analysis "we can use films to provide critical insight and knowledge about the present historical era" (p.35). Reading Y.A dystopias within their period of production provides a vivid image on their meaning and helps us examine the perception they hold among viewers and consumers, as this work will take samples of fans perspectives on social media for example supported by scholarly publications in academia as well.

## 2.8 Methods of Analysis

The selected media texts have been viewed repeatedly and each session of viewing underwent through the process of recording and feedback noting, each scene that serves the themes of this thesis was analyzed according to screen images, narratives, and speech sequences. A *mise en scene* analysis is followed whereby an emphasis is given to the position of the camera and the shots displayed on the screen, the actors, their way of dressing and their interactions, also focusing on the lightning and the cinematography.

The primary focus of this research is limited to the YA dystopias that were released between the year 2012 and 2018, therefore, during the analysis, the use of intertextuality and the reference to other media texts was employed to provide a better reflection of the movies within their genre, namely Science Fiction and Dystopia. The focus of this thesis done through reading two media texts that are combined into trilogies, *The Maze Runner, The Scorch Trials*, *The Death Cure*. This research opted for the above film series because they are scarcely tackled within academia at least when they are read and contextualized according to Darwinian thinking of survival which included biopolitics, and racial formation in Hollywood. Lastly, this research reads *The Hunger*

*Games* trilogy as a whole text, despite it being a source of scholarly inspiration for several research, the series are yet to be examined as a source of philosophical and political contextualization, *The Hunger Games*, a Science Fiction dystopian media text is heavily loaded with contemporary and historical political allegories including colonialism, neocolonialism, and economic hegemony.

Another method that was used to collect data is the examination of the fan's reviews on social media sites such as Reddit and Twitter, also online magazines like The New York Times and The Guardian. Hence, the two texts were retrieved from Netflix and passed through multiple viewing to assess the themes and elements that serve the overall goal of this thesis.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Reading movies as powerful ideological tools within the field of interdisciplinary studies including media and politics is the primary aim of this thesis. However, the challenge is in the way such movies, trilogies are tackled in their context, in other words, the current work attempts to decipher political and ideological messages that are illustrated throughout the selected media texts while current the analysis applies a set of theories and approaches to prove some parallels between the movies and reality.

A deep perusal of such theories and concepts is needed to better reflect the general theme of this thesis, thus, using a post-structuralist approach in which the text is addressed within its context and treated as a holistic element whereby characters, scenarios, and settings play a pivotal role in directing the results of the analysis. Hence, this chapter serves the purpose of laying the ground for the analysis of the two series and making the reader familiar with which approaches and visions are selected to reach the overall aim.

**Chapter Three:**

**WCKD Politics and Individuals: Exploring Survival Traits and Biopolitics in *The Maze Runner* Trilogy.**

**Chapter Three: WCKD Politics and Individuals: Exploring Survival Traits and Biopolitics in *The Maze Runner* Trilogy.**

3.1 Introduction

    3.1.1 Background

    3.1.2 Narrative Summary

3.2 Survival of the Fittest

2.2 Racial Formation in *The Maze Runner*

3.4 The Flare Virus and Zombies

3.5 Humans as Biotechnological Lab Rats

3.6 Conclusion

## 3.1 Introduction

*The Maze Runner* is a three parts trilogy, *The Maze Runner* (2014), *The Scorch Trials* (2015), and *The Death Cure* (2018). The series is an adaptation of *The Maze Runner* (2010) books by James Dashner. The first movie starts with a confusing scene showing a teenager trapped in an elevator. The boy finds himself surrounded by a group of kids who do not look surprised to see him. Later, when the story progresses, we will understand that these kids are kept inside a glade with giant walls. Thomas the new kid keeps asking questions, and his sense of curiosity drives him to discover the real purpose behind their imprisonment in such a place. The adaptation follows these teenagers' survival quest to learn what is beyond the walls while solving the labyrinth's mysteries to find out who is behind their suffering.

*The Scorch Trials* (2018), the second movie, clarifies many questions; after the kids managed to leave the Glade, they were taken by some organization that claims to save them from WCKD (World in Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department), the evil organization responsible on their imprisonment in the first place. Things develop gradually and they figure out that the world faced an apocalypse which caused the spread of a pandemic called "the Flare" that infects people and turns them into zombies or rather cranks as they are described in the movie; and that WCKD was using them as test subjects to find a cure. Furthermore, the *Scorch Trials* invites us to reflect upon how these teenagers survived an apocalypse, fleeing from a terrifying maze and biomechanical creatures, it also emphasizes on Darwinian way of thinking including competition, adaptation, survival of the fittest. It describes the struggle between individuals and the government they are associated with, also the organization that sees their bodies as a product to be consumed and harvested, however, the movies are a typical representation of a white protagonist savior, following other movies like *Avatar* 2009), *Planet of the*

*Apes* (2001), and many others. The adaptation happened to be released during an era of massive political changes in the US government, whereby, similarities could be drawn upon American society when it comes to Social Darwinism, first going back to the 19th century where the doctrine was upraised and even applied through several programs. Hence, the notion of survival of the fittest as the central theme of *the Maze Runner* could be read metaphorically in contemporary American politics as well, for example conservatives' government and Trump's presidency.

*The Maze Runner* is categorized as post-apocalyptic science fiction, YA adaptation, that introduces political and ideological genealogies, mainly Social Darwinism. It is coded through symbols, signs, and semiotic codes such as racial formation, eugenics, power relations, genetic tyranny, individual's rebellion. Another aspect that should be noted is the fact that the movies were released during a phase of YA dystopias crazes following other famous YA cinematic adaptations including *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Divergent* (2014) series, *The Giver* (2014), *The 100* (2014). However, what makes this trilogy different than the other YA sagas is mainly the representation of evolutionary artifacts through the demonstrations of power among individuals, and how the protagonist holds better traits than the other Gladers, thus, the focus upon finding a cure to save humanity which is a feature that is found mostly in Zombie movies which labels the series with other genre conventions.

Furthermore, contextually speaking and according to Kellner (1995) film should be studied ideologically within their cultural and contextual terrain, he argues

> A contextualist cultural studies reads cultural texts in terms of actual struggles within contemporary culture and society, situating ideological analysis within existing socio-political debates and conflicts rather than just in relation to some supposedly monolithic dominant ideology, or some model of mass culture that is simply equated with ideological manipulation or domination per se. (p.103)

112

The selected movies happened to address the notion of the fittest, white supremacy and the manipulation of human evolution for the creation of a master human race, along with other imaginary ideological problems. Reading the movies from a Darwinian lens specifically in the United States where Social Darwinism happens to be fancied by Republicans and the conservative party, to draw a link between the notion of survival of the fittest and American politics. This chapter will deal with three parts of the franchise with an attempt to decipher Darwinian ideas that are coded throughout the movies.

The analysis will follow a set of theories like Albert Somit (2009), whereby he takes on a biopolitical perspective in explaining the connotations of power, politics, and biology. From this point, the movies introduce a dichotomy of power relations between individuals and the power exercised by the government. In essence, the relationship between political life and biology as it has been represented through evolutionary thinking, and according to significant theorists in the field of social sciences Somit explains that

> The conviction that the white man represented the most highly evolved 'race' of Homo sapiens led, quite naturally, to the classification of cultures as 'higher' or 'lower' and to equally invidious distinctions among political regimes, with the 'Anglo-American type' being regarded as the most advanced and 'types that are found in Africa and Asia' as the least. But the Darwinians also held that states and societies, as well as animal life, underwent a 'progressive evolution toward greater complexity and greater sophistication', and this second, more optimistic, tenet is also found in present-day thinking about comparative politics. (p. 221).

Starting from the above quotation, this research aims at unveiling biopolitical relations between individuals, race, and their ideological metaphors in contemporary American politics. Reading these movies as right wings accounts of media that keep on reflecting and influencing sociocultural realities as Kellner writes "Reading films

politically, therefore, can provide insight not only into the ways that film reproduces existing social struggles within contemporary U.S. society, but can also provide insight into the social and political dynamics of the era" (p.104).

The purpose is to contextualize some of the ideologies that can be found in the trilogy, especially the ones that highlight evolutionary ideas and combine them with conservative views. As such this section aims to answer the following questions, how does *The Maze Runner* tackle Social Darwinist themes in Pop culture and make us rethink the way movies articulate within a global sense of meaning? How do these films reflect upon real life politics, especially the ones under radical right wings US government? How is the notion of race and white supremacy transcoded throughout the movies? By reading these movies regarding their historical, social, and political agendas, this research argues that *The Maze Runner* trilogy is a media account that offers a Social Darwinian perspective with a strong relation to American contemporary politics.

## 3.1.1 Background

*The Maze Runner* is a three-parts trilogy adapted from James Dashner's book saga of the same name. Directed by Wess Ball and the 21$^{st}$ Century Fox studio, the post-apocalyptic series were released during a time where dystopian craze was coming into an end.[2] However, the series still maintained a niche of popularity, it is true that it did not meet the same success *The Hunger Games* franchise reached, but it succeeded in gaining other sequels, the other YA dystopias did not attain. Each part of the series can be dealt with alone, but this research examines the whole trilogy because there are important

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[2] YA dystopias boom coincided with global political and economic issues like 9/11 attacks, they addressed topics of aggression, corrupted governmental systems, and mainly young people making changes. By 2010 the subgenre was celebrated by fans and most books were adapted into blockbuster movies, starting by the *Hunger Games*. Thus, this popularity came into an end because it did not evolve, it maintained the same themes, new releases were made each year, according to fans and book reviews, nothing new was added to the genre, it always tackled young people suffering from totalitarian regimes, experiencing the same situations.

elements in each movie that are germane and need to be highlighted together. The first instalment is the one that lays the ground for the story to be unfold, we are introduced to the main characters in the trilogy with a gloomy atmosphere full of bewilderment that keeps us asking more questions, thus, the narrative exposes the story gradually in a unique manner with well-made stunts and visuals. Interestingly, despite the presence of some critical scholarly literature that dealt with *The Maze Runner*. Yet, the series remains less discussed compared to other YA books, movies.

Nevertheless, the trilogy offers plentiful themes that could be discussed broadly, Paravano (2016) argues that *The Maze Runner* books investigate the theme of self-consciousness and character development, with the focus on trauma as a central theme, these kids are put under severe situations that lead their minds to the extreme. Saputro (2019) opted for a psychoanalytical analysis of the main character stressing upon leadership alongside other themes like anxiety, hatred, and fear. Cerqueira (2021) focuses on the representations of pandemics in YA dystopias among them *The Maze Runner* trilogy. Furthermore, the series has a humble account of scholarly discussions, fan blogs, book reviews. scholarly literature is mainly focused on the books, whereas the movies are scantly analyzed. Another important factor is the lack of scientific analysis on these movies as media accounts that offer biosocial imaginaries that have a Social Darwinian perspective, with the focus on the notion of survival of the fittest, and how they construct a world governed by Darwinian logic.

The movies provide an entrée to SF post-apocalyptic artifacts, such as the use of Zombies, biomechanical creatures, corrupted organizations, and the spread of a global pandemic. What makes *The Maze Runner* different than the other YA dystopias, is featuring a male protagonist starring Dylan O'Brian as Thomas, alongside the presence of technology combined with medicine as a central theme especially genetics and

biotechnology which could label the film in the biopunk subgenre. Schmeink (2016) argues that Biopunk is a science fiction genre that refers to a "variety of cultural practices and socio-political beliefs which centered around an anti-corporate, anti-governmental approach similar to cyber hacking, only this time with reference to genetics" (p 26).

As a YA dystopian trilogy, *The Maze Runner* could be described as a zombie, survival movie, because unlike other dystopias including *The Hunger Games, The Divergent,* the series depicts the end of the world due to the spread of a pandemic in a postapocalyptic setting. For that, it follows other zombie movies like *Train to Busan* (2016), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Resident Evil* (2002) with the focus on the genetic aspect, alluding to the influence of evolutionary thinking and Social Darwinism on literature and pop culture. *The Maze Runner* provides an image on sociopolitical anxieties with apparatus systems. In an interview with Wess Ball, the director of the movie was asked, what makes the *Maze Runner* different than other YA dystopias? He answered.

> It's that sense of mystery – I'd pitch it as *Lord of The Flies* meets *Lost*. That sense of mystery is a really big engine in our movie – what the hell is going on? And it's a mystery that doesn't fully get wrapped up 'cos we wanna save something to explore in the next movies, if we're lucky. Mystery is a really strong aspect of the movie. And probably that sense of boyhood, of brotherhood. *The Hunger Games* obviously has a lot of people trying to kill each other [laughs] and that moral dilemma, ours is about survival together. It's about a group who are placed into these circumstances and find a way out together. It's different in that regard too. (McEwan,2014, para.6).

The trilogy is centered around the theme of survival, it also serves as an examination of human nature at its most bare, following a lead protagonist who paves the way for others to survive. As the director described his influence by books such *as Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding and movies like *Lost* (2004), they all feature either young teenagers or a group of people's quest for survival. However, *The Maze*

*Runner* relies on the use of scientific experiments on human beings done by a crazy organization that claims to have a noble aim for saving humanity, at the expense of a group of disadvantaged orphan kids. This makes the trilogy bound to no genre, but a mixture of everything. Wess Ball defended his views on the movies when asked about other YA franchises and *the Maze Runner* "We were just a simple adventure, it was *Lord of the Flies* meets *Lost*. That's the way we portrayed it. We kind of left out the romance triangle stuff and other angsty coming-of-age aspects" (Lawrence,2020, para.7).

The combination of mad science with tyranny in the series is what makes the *Maze Runner* unique. The kids are trapped in a maze while hunted by Grievers, evolved biomechanical creatures that were specifically engineered by WCKD to be unleashed upon these teenagers as a part of the quest to find a cure. The spread of a pandemic that turns people into cranks after the solar system falls into destruction, chaos prevailed, and humans lost their minds. The *Maze Runner* establishes both a Lockean and a Hobbesian vision[3], inside the maze, the kids managed to create a society with law and order between themselves, whereas outside the maze, the world is filled with chaos and disorder without a social order. On the other hand, WCKD politics is fully dependent upon a Darwinian law, claiming that the only way for people to survive is to invest in the immunes and sacrifice their lives. What should be noted is that WCKD is responsible for creating the Flare as a means of population control. In the third book, *the Death Cure*, WCKD confesses that they used the Flare virus to control people and reduce the population due to the lack of resources, but the virus went out of hands. (Dashner, 2011, p. 324). In a

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[3] In his book *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes theory of the state of nature argues on the execution of a natural social order that governs the society, he explains that it is necessary for humans to follow a sovereign law which is assigned by people by choosing a man or an assembly of men to live in peace as he refers to this process as "sovereign" whereas, John Locke has a more tolerant view on the state of nature than that of Hobbes. In his book, *Two Treatises of Government* (1823) Locke argues that following a state nature as the core of morality, humans are created equal by God, and they are free to pursue their interests peacefully without any interference, or any supreme power over them except that of God.

similar manner, Foucault explains that the process of exercising power by governments is not new

> For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death. In a formal sense, it derived no doubt from the ancient patria potestas that granted the father of the Roman family the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away. (p.131)

This type of power is exercised through the deliberate spread of a pandemic that wipes away an entire population. In *The Maze Runner*, the pandemic released by the evil organization went out of control and mutated. Which makes us ask questions why would they make a virus without a cure in the first place? Just so they go back and search for an antidot and use humans to supply their scientific experiments? *The Maze Runner* offers a terrifying vision about the future, and it alludes to the real current realities. This aspect of creating a virus and then releasing it is present in other science fiction movies such as *Resident Evil*, which brings us back to the idea of controlling humanity by evil science and creating a biological war. On another point, *The Maze Runner* allures viewers to reflect on neoliberal ideals and capitalist regimes by encouraging audiences to rationalize the influence of political power and corrupted systems in the middle of a human catastrophe and suffering.

The trilogy is based on the idea of survival, and like other blockbuster films such as *Mortal Engines* (2018) which embodies the notion of the fittest and survival amidst a postapocalyptic setting, it portrays individuals adopting to situations by the creation of a law that is based on a Darwinian vision.   Thus, before analyzing the ethos of the trilogy, it is necessary to talk about the narrative of the movies.

## 3.1.2 Narrative Summary

The first part in the trilogy, *The Maze Runner* is about a group of teenagers, they were trapped in a gigantic maze called "the Glade" having no idea where they came from, what is their identity, and who put them there. The kids have established their own strange idyllic society, with their own laws. It is until the protagonist of the story Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) comes to the picture; things start to change drastically. He does not know his real name at the beginning like all the residents of the Glade. They all experienced the same thing, possessing no memories of their true identities and what were their previous lives like. The very first scene in the movie shows Thomas in a rushing elevator alone with some supplies that hold the name WCKD as a sign. When he comes to the top, he finds himself surrounded by massive walls and a bunch of kids with various ethnicities, awkwardly gazing at him. Thomas's first instinct tells him to run, he runs fast searching for a way out. Surprisingly, the group did not follow him, they just kept laughing and calling him "Greenie", which is a name given to new arrivers. Thomas finds out later that this place is a maze, and they have no way out of it.

The group of teenagers have established their own society, with Alby (Aml Atmeen) as the de facto leader because he was the first to arrive in the maze. Newt (Thomas Brodie-Sangster) as his right arm, and Gally (Will Pouter) the keeper of the builders, Minho (Ki Hong Lee) as the head of the runners, high speed kids who dare to search for a way out through small openings in the maze. Thus, the last Glader to arrive is the only female character within the maze, Teresa (Kaya Scodelario).

After several incidents, the group of teenagers managed to break free from the maze successfully, and they discover that they were a part of a Darwinian conspiracy planned by a suspicious organization called WCKD. The master mind of this operation is a scientist called Ava Paige (Patricia Clarkson), and after leaving a recorded video of her

and her team, we understand that the outside world has been demolished by solar activity, which results in the demise of the planet and the spread of a vicious pandemic named "the Flare"; a virus that attacks the brain and slowly turns its victims into bloodthirsty, hungry for flesh with an urge for cannibalism.

In the second part, *the Scorch Trials* (2015), we are introduced to new characters and new settings. After the kids succeeded in completing the first phase of the evil scientific experiment created by WCKD. They discover their value for this organization as they are regarded as humanity's last hope for finding a cure to the mutated virus "the flare", this virus is a manmade disease essentially by WCKD as a means of population control after the cataclysmic solar flare that resulted in reducing resources. Despite the purpose of this, the method of using these kids to find a cure is rather draconian.

*Scorch Trials* begins with a scene showing the group of survivors in some compound led by Janson (Aidan Gillen) who claims to save them from WCKD. Thomas and the other kids find out that they are not the only ones who have been trapped, and tested, but there are other kids who have faced the same nightmare. After being fed and clothed, the children get to know other Gladers. The movie suggests that something is not right within this compound and that Janson is hiding something. The thing is that each week a group of kids is transformed to another sanctuary, but no information is given about it. Thomas suspects something because this place is too good to be true. It is only through this kid called Aris (Jacob Lofland) they discover that the other survivors are taken to a lab to have their brains harvested for some kind of a serum, and not to a safe haven like they have been told. Thomas tells his other friends that Janson and WCKD are the same thing, eventually they plan a way to escape and succeed in leaving the facility.

Now the survivors are running fugitives through "the Scorch" encountered by a harsh, and lethal postapocalyptic desert somewhere in North America. After being chased

by a thunderstorm, they find refuge in an abandoned place where they scavenge for food and shelter. The place looks uninhabited for a second but when Minho accidentally activates a power generator, they discover they are not alone. Suddenly, they are attacked by cranks, survivors of the flare virus who were transformed into zombies. One of the kids Winston (Alexander Flores) is attacked by a crank and scratched in his stomach. They manage to flee the building afterwards and find a place to hide. The rest of the movie follows their journey in search of help and hiding from WCKD.

They find out that there is a resistance movement named "the Right  Arm" and they have the same enemy and the same purpose. But before that, they were united with a man called Jorge (Giancarlo Esposito) and his daughter-like, Brenda (Rosa Salazar), together they go on a journey to find the Right Arm, and after a long search, they locate the resistance and assemble with them in a violent gunshot against WCKD. Hence, WCKD is led to their place by Theresa who eventually betrayed the group believing that she is doing the right thing for humanity for the sake of finding a cure.

The third part in the saga, *The Death Cure* (2018), we witness a drastic change in events, and after Minho is taken hostage by the evil organization, Thomas and the group embark on a journey to save their friend. However, their first attempt is condemned by failure, but that did not stop Thomas from trying again. Followed by Newt and Frypan (Dexter Darden), together they take on a tunnel entrance, but they were confronted by cranks and almost died. Meanwhile, Minho is being tested by the mad scientists, where he is experiencing nightmares about Grievers while WCKD lunatic doctors are extracting his blood to find an antidot, supervised by Ava Paige and Theresa who feels guilty about the whole thing. Thomas and his friends manage to run from cranks but are caught between protesters, they are shortly taken by masked men, and one of them appears to be Gally whom they thought he has been dead, he offers to help them by suggesting that

their only way to Minho is through Theresa, which is not the best plan for Thomas, but he has no choice.

The final parts of the movie show Thomas, Newt, Gally and Theresa all headed towards the facility. They free Minho and the immune kids but are caught in the act by Janson who attacks them. Therefore, outside the compound, the resistance is wreaking havoc, Lawrence (Walton Goggins) releases an army of infected people upon the city, soon enough the place is under siege and chaos prevailed. Theresa finds out that Thomas's blood is the only successful cure and calls out for him to head back to the facility. Before that, Newt was infected and now he becomes a crank, he asks Thomas to put an end to it and kill him. Thomas heads back to WCKD heartbroken for the loss of his friend.

Thomas finds Ava and tries to kill her, but she is shot dead by Janson. He takes Thomas to where Theresa is preparing to extract his blood to inject him with the cure since he has been infected. Theresa is listening to the conversation between Janson and a handcuffed Thomas, Janson tells Thomas that not all people are worthy of this cure but only the ones deemed fit deserve to be saved. Theresa knocks him unconsciously and helps Thomas get out. Janson wakes up and fights them, then Thomas breaks a door holding two cranks and unleashes them on Janson who dies fighting them. Thomas and Theresa race for their lives to the top of the building and reunited with the group, yet Theresa does not make it and falls from the building and meets her end. Thomas watches her die with remorse. Thus, the ending shows Thomas and the survivors on some isolated island, a safe place that Ava had mentioned, and they make it their new home.

Throughout the three parts of the trilogy, the notion of survival of the fittest and Darwinian logic is heavily present and mentioned. Other types of Darwinian influence could be seen through the representation of individuals as commodities, which implies a

122

capitalist view. Thomas and his fellow friends have been victims of a Darwinian experience, and this aspect resonates with real life politics, especially in America. Thus, films like *the Maze Runner* addresses issues of our societies whether directly or indirectly, many signs and semiotics introduced in the film are an allusion to contemporary political problems.

## 3.2 'Survival of the Fittest'

Contextually speaking, the political elements that we find in *The Maze Runner* can be associated with real politics in US, which in particular implies on the pervasive influence of Social Darwinism on both the real and imaginary American governmental system. But before analyzing the movie's ideological artifacts, it is necessary to draw the link on Darwin's influence on American thoughts in both the 19th century and the contemporary era.

Starting from the 19th century, Darwin's doctrine of natural selection was interpreted and carved to fit social and political life. As Hawkins (1997) argues in his book *Social Darwinism in European and American Thoughts 1860.1945*, Social Darwinism came to the United States through the influence of three leading intellectuals, William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), an American liberal sociologist, the philosopher and historian John Fisk (1842-1901) and William James (1842-1910) a psychologist and philosopher. The ideas of these three figures prevailed and started having their own share of influence on American thoughts, each one of them had his own claim, but they all agreed on the legitimacy of Social Darwinism and evolutionary thinking in the society, for example Fisk notes that not all societies are worthy of progress but only the ones that reached the highest levels of civilization. (p.107) Thus, he firmly believed in "moral progress and the triumph of civilization" (p.108), his reasoning implies that change is

necessary, and it only comes through new adaptations, and the acceptance of the law of nature and selection.

Sumner on the other hand, argues that progress is related to population growth and the struggle for existence, his way of thinking is similar to Spencer's doctrine, as he had a great influence on him. He also regards two facets, one concerned with individual's struggle for existence to afford resources, and the competition that comes within this process. (p.110). Lastly, James's approach focuses more on man's genius as an essential component for progress, unlike Spencer, he argues that genius is not a hereditary gift, but it is a coincidence and randomly found within populations. Hence, he is more referred to when it comes to leading evolutionary thinking with mental and social phenomena. (p.120). Social Darwinism in America was used to justify the neglection of the weak opposed to the glorification of the ones deemed powerful, as Hawkins writes regarding the views of Spencer and Sumner "both men utilized Social Darwinism as a weapon against state intervention on behalf of people whom they stigmatized as evolutionary (and moral) failures" (p.115).

*The Maze Runner* book series were released in a period of political distress in the United States. It was an era of republicans coming to power under George.W. Bush, and the movies surprisingly came during a very similar political phase with the former president Trump. It is important to note that both presidents belong to the same party and have strong conservative views. Contextually, *The Maze Runner* can be read as a media artifact that taps into the apprehension of what political systems can do to individuals. Nevertheless, it is necessary to read the context of Social Darwinism in regard with the republican party, Robert Reich a university professor discusses this matter in his article the Rebirth of Social Darwinism (2011), he

calls them regressive rather than progressive, because for him they are trying to take America back to the 19$^{th}$ century Gilded Age. It was a time of Social Darwinists like William Sumner, where the government offered no help to aid the poor, it was a time of competition and struggle for maintenance, and only the fittest survive (para.6).

Republicans suggest offering assistance for the rich and neglect the poor claiming that it is a waste of time and money to aid the unfit. Reich provides examples about republican figures such as Newt Gingrich who follows Sumner's views on society, he calls on providing no help for the unprivileged poor class, "He calls laws against child labor "truly stupid," and says poor kids should serve as janitors in their schools. He opposes extending unemployment insurance because, he says, "I'm opposed to giving people money for doing nothing. "" (para. 10). It is no coincidence that *The Maze Runner* franchise became popular at a time of cultural and political changes that have resurfaced in America, thus, politically speaking the movies mirrors what was happening during Trump presidency.

The former president sought to execute a series of acts like regulating immigration, reducing the Obamacare act, In fact, few hours, after Trump was elected president of the United States, he signed a series of orders among them undoing the affordable care act program (known as the Obamacare, it is a plan executed by former president Barak Obama in order to offer help for the poor, and make health more affordable by lowering costs). Trump and republicans decided that this act is a burden on the American economy, and it is not the responsibility of the government to aid the poor. (Zoppo et al, 2017, para.6). This act is considered as an economic burden by conservatives, granting more freedom for business owners and idealizing the notion of *laissez faire* capitalism which in turn relies on the idea of survival of the fittest. These

acts could be seen through *The Maze Runner* franchise, mainly the last act, *The Death Cure*.

*The Death Cure*, the last movie in Wess Ball's franchise, taps into what was happening during Trump's government especially when the former president fancied the idea of building a wall to separate the US from Mexico, and prevent illegal immigration. In *The Death Cure*, WCKD which is the organization that plays the role of the government, whereby individuals who have been infected by the flare are relinquished and deemed as the unfit, they are thrown out of the last city and left to meet their own demise.

The world of *The Maze Runner* series is plainly Darwinian, and this could be noticed particularly through the manifestation of a tyrannical system that abuses power over citizens in dystopian fiction. This power is likely obtained after a catastrophic event that nearly erased humanity or as a result of a world war conflict, an environmental disaster… (Atchison & Shames, 2019, p. 85). In the movies, WCKD is the totalitarian regime that uses a Darwinian logic to control population, it gained this power by creating a virus called the flare as a means of minimizing populations, wherein only the fittest survives. "WCKD is good", this phrase is used repeatedly throughout the movies as a contradictory slogan that makes us question things in this world. In an interview with the author of the books, Dashner clarifies the intention behind him using the phrase, Fulton (2011) writes

> There was one theme built on purpose, though. It's the phrase "wicked is good." I love the concept of nothing being purely good or purely evil. I really wanted readers to question whether they could get desperate enough to do certain things. I wanted the lines blurred just enough so they might ask whether the ends ever justify the means (para. 5).

Both in the movies and the books, WCKD is presented as an entity that abuses its power in the absence of democracy, as Dashner implied in the interview, WCKD is here to manipulate the Gladers and drive them to their ends to test their abilities so that they could use them as a cure.

Throughout the three parts in the trilogy, the Darwinian law of only the fittest survives occurs multiple times. Individuals are pushed to manifest their highest potentials in the maze, paving their way through the solar flare desert, and in the last city or when they are attacked by WCKD or by zombies. They are constantly tested and evaluated. By the beginning of the first act, we are introduced to the main character Thomas who fits in with the Darwinian criteria of the fittest. Upon the opening scene, everything is dark, we hear voices in the background, and suddenly a door opens that gives the hint of something moving, like an elevator, the lights come to the picture revealing a box. The camera moves upwards, and we see Thomas for the first time, he is confused and terrified of what is happening to him. The box that holds Thomas contains supplies and the very first thing shown when the box stops is a supply container that holds the sign WCKD. Thomas is greeted by a group of kids who keep staring at him and laughing like this is not unusual to happen, Gally is the first one to talk and he calls Thomas "Greenie", a name given to newcomers. This is where everything happens, and Thomas starts his adventure in the maze.

Inside the Glade, the Gladers have built a society together and they even have a leader named Alby, the first Glader to come to the Glade. Thomas as a newcomer is still discovering how these kids are living in this place, they call the glade. He keeps asking questions, curious about who put them here. One important thing is that he has no idea who he is, it is only after few days he remembers his name, WCKD erased the memories of all the Gladers as a part of the experiment. They keep Thomas in a cage, and Alby

comes to him, the camera moves back from Alby to Thomas, Alby introduces himself "my name is Alby, can you tell me anything about yourself? Who you are? Where you came from? anything at all? (04:05) Thomas says nothing, he keeps moving his head in bewilderment, and says "I can't remember anything" Alby reassures him "it's okay, relax it happens to us all, you'll get your name back in a day or two. It's the one thing they let us keep" (04:39), he is referring to the evil organization that keeps them there. Alby shows him around and explains how things work. After a while Thomas discovers the secret of the maze and decides to become a runner.

Runners are fast paced boys who go inside the maze searching for a way out, as Newt explains to Thomas when they are sitting under a tree and the other boys are celebrating a bonfire behind them. The camera angles to Newt talking to Thomas with the fire reflection on his face in darkness. He says to Thomas "listen to the maze, it's changing, it changes every night" Thomas asks him "how is that even possible" Newt replies "you can ask the people who put us in here", this makes Thomas even more confused, and his sense of curiosity keeps pushing him to find answers. Newt says again "the truth is, the runners are the only ones who really know what's out there ", "they are the strongest and the fastest of us all, and it's a good thing too, because if they don't make it back before those doors close…they are stuck out there for the night, and no has ever survived a night in the maze" (13:20). From an evolutionary perspective, this could be understood that Thomas wants to become a part of the strongest and the fastest group because he knows that this would allow him to have answers and likely survive.

Thomas experiences flashbacks about his past, he sees people wearing white coats in a lab and he is one of them. This suggests that Thomas has a relationship with the people responsible on their imprisonment. In a horrifying scene Thomas encounters Ben who is runner in the forest, Ben is acting weird, and he attacks Thomas,

"it's your fault, I saw you, you did this"(21:34), Thomas manages to run after almost suffocated by Ben, luckily Newt spots them and knocks Ben down; they discover that he has been stung by a griever (biomechanical creatures that lurk in the maze), Alby decides that Ben should be banished because he would put their social group in danger.

They push him inside the maze to face his death. According to Darwin's explanation groups who strive to protect each other and maintain safety in corporation are going to survive and flourish "the one tribe included a great number of courageous, sympathetic and faithful members, who were always ready to warn each other of danger, to aid and defend each other, this tribe would succeed better and conquer the other"( Darwin, 1871,p.160) what the group decided for Ben is harsh and violent indeed, but for maintaining their social order and the safety of the members it was necessary, implying that it is the law of survival that Ben failed when he was stung leading him to be eliminated.

This scene invites viewers to ponder upon this law and how cruel it is but at the same time it makes us ask the question was it possible to save Ben? Later on, we see a wall full of names, and Gally is holding a stick and crossing Ben's name which shows that Ben was eliminated from the group. From another perspective, the act of sacrificing Ben for the sake of the group could be found in *The Hunger Games* trilogy but in a different way, when Katniss the protagonist steps up in front of the crowd to replace her sister Prim as a tribute for the 47th Hunger Games tradition, this is known as altruism in biology. The trilogy reflexively underlines this aspect of irremediable use of violence to survive. In brief WCKD's strategy has always been dependent on sacrifice, it started when they made a virus and decided to sacrifice half of the population and then sacrifice the kids in the maze. This is purely a Darwinian logic, as Dolgert (2013) explains in his article Listening in order not to Hear, Darwin provided a justification for natural

selection. "the more important point is the way that Darwin justifies these deaths via a kind of cost- benefit story" (p.8). In other words, Darwin saw sacrifice as a positive thing even though it is cruel, the same thing was done by WCKD scientists who believe they are doing humanity a favor by sacrificing a group of kids.

Thomas keeps having nightmares, he sees images of Ava Paige the responsible on the organization saying "WCKD is good", he also sees another girl but does not remember who she is. The next morning, Thomas discovers that Alby went down the maze with Minho, the group gather in front of the entering waiting for them, once they appear the maze starts closing in. The camera retreats from the group to Minho and Alby, also showing how the walls are huge compared to the kids and impossible to climb. At that moment they notice that Alby is hurt, and Thomas jumps in the maze in an act of braveness, but Minho says, "good job! you just killed yourself" (33:20). Alby is stung by a griever, and Minho had to carry him around the maze. Minho is overwhelmed by what happens that when a griever appears he does not bother to save Alby, he says to Thomas" you don't get it we are already dead", but Thomas did not give up and finds a way to hide Alby in the bushes.

These biomechanical creatures are created for one purpose which is to push the Gladers to use their brains excessively. Now Thomas is being hunted by a griever, he overruns the creature and reunites with Minho, this scene is grotesque and haunting. Thomas notices that the maze is changing again, thanks to his intelligence and impulsiveness he calculates the situation and lures Griever to chase him again so that it could be trapped between the changing walls of the maze. revolves around the use of violence as Darwin calls it in *The Origins of Species* (2009) "the constantly recurrent struggle for existence" (p.411), it also emphasizes on the notion of fitness and adaptation, Thomas found his way in the maze because he adopted to circumstances and that made him succeed in eliminating the threat.

130

The kids gather to discuss what happened inside the maze, they are all seated together in a circle while Gally is in the middle of the assembly, he says "things are changing, there is no denying that" the camera moves from one member to the other to highlight the speech Gally is giving "First, Ben gets stung in broad daylight. And then Alby" Gally directs his attention to Thomas "and now our Greenie, here, has taken it upon himself to go into the maze, which is a clear violation of our rules here", someone interrupts him saying Thomas saved Alby's life. Gally continues dismissively "for three years, we have coexisted with these things, and now", he looks at Thomas "you've killed one of them" (43:10), Gally is trying to maintain the laws of this society they have created, and he sees Thomas as a threat to him and to the Gladers just because he wants answers. This shift works with Darwin's description of "the fittest", "As the individuals of the same species come in all respects into the closest competition with each other, the struggle will generally be most severe between them" (p.411).

After this confrontation, a new Glader arrives at the Glade and surprisingly it is a girl, named Theresa, she is the same girl who appears in Thomas's dreams. Theresa came with a note from WCKD that says, "she's the last one ever". This describes the urgency of WCKD in finding a cure, and it reads as a sign that things are about to change completely for the Gladers. Thomas, Minho and three other kids go back to the maze to have a look at the griever Thomas killed. They extract a device from the heart of the beast that looks half mechanic and half flesh, the device holds the number 7 and under it the sign of WCKD, which later helps them find a way out from the maze.

The grievers are biomechanical creatures that were created by WCKD scientists as a means to drive the Gladers to manifest their abilities and make them compete against

each other. This is a form of evolution, even if it is not natural but it is human made and conditioned to meet the exact evolutionary environment that these creatures need to survive and thrive. These half breed creatures were designed to create a sort of threat and danger for the kids. In science fiction movies and books, it is common to meet such biotechnological creatures, just like in *The Hunger Games* (2008)*,* inside the arena the game makers unleashed the mutts, giant dogs genetically engineered as described in the books, they were mutants created by evil scientists and given the eyes of the failed tributes. They were specifically designed to kill the contenders or to drag them to the center of the arena. This scene here invites us to look at the dark side of science and how it could be harmful if used for the wrong reasons.

Towards the end of the first part, WCKD releases all the Grievers upon the Gladers, many have died trying to escape this terrifying nightmare, but the only survivors were Thomas and his circle. The last scene in the first movie, shows the kids enter a room and dead bodies are on the ground, some of them are wearing white coats which implies that they are scientists, the camera retreats to show a huge desk with computers hanging around, Newt observes "so they were watching us, this whole time"(1:10), Thomas turns the computer button on, and a video recording starts playing showing Doctor Ava Paige, she informs them of who she is and that they have successfully completed the Maze Trials, she rhetorically talks about the scorch of the sun and how the world decimated, she also mentions the virus but does not say that they were the ones who created it. The purpose here is to convince the Gladers that everything was done to them was  for a reason and that they are important to save humanity.by the end of her speech, we see her commit suicide, but it was all an act just to convince them.

The two other sequels *The Scorch Trials* and *The Death Cure* are quite different than the first part in the saga. Therefore, the emphasis on the notion of the fittest is

strongly illustrated in multiple scenes, first in *The Scorch Trials* we are introduced to cranks, people who have been infected by the flare virus. Thomas's friend was infected, and they had to give up on him because he would endanger them. This is an allusion to individuals who fail to adapt. From a contextual perspective, right wings politics in the US, suggested offering no help for people who fail to adapt to the economic system, for example the homeless in the streets and the poor, these categories can be read as cranks who are left to face their fate expecting no help from the government. In a Darwinian state of nature, you have to kill, or you will be killed, whether it is human of cranks, individuals are conditioned to do everything they can to survive. Thomas and his friends face several obstacles, when they think they are safe from WCKD, they discover that the people who saved them are WCKD (Janson and his crew).

By the end of *the Scorch Trials*, and when the kids reach the Right arm resistance, their friend Brenda is infected and she was almost shot by the leader of the Right Arm. Luckily, there was a doctor with them Mary Cooper (Lili Taylor), a former doctor with WCKD, she says that Thomas is the answer, and he would help her. The doctor injects Thomas's blood in Brenda's veins. The doctor narrates the story of Thomas and how he became a part of the organization a long time ago. She says that they used these kids because they were immune to the virus. She speaks.

> at first, we had the best intentions, find a cure, save the world. It was clear you kids were the key because you were immune but why? Eventually we found an answer an enzyme produced by the brains of the immune. Once separated from the bloodstream, it can serve as a powerful agent to slow the spread of the virus. Thomas asks, so you found a cure? The enzyme can't be manufactured, only harvested from the immune. The young, of course that didn't stop WCKD, if they had their way, they'd sacrifice an entire generation. All for this, a gift of biology, of evolution. But one meant for all of us. (1:37)

In this conversation, we notice the mention of evolution and the immune kids, WCKD used a Darwinian logic from the beginning to ensure the cure is harvested from these kids' brains, but they did not have the intention of sharing this cure with the whole population. The ending scene of *The Scorch Trials* portrays WCKD attacking the Right Arm and the kids, they were led by Theresa who betrayed her friends because she was fooled by WCKD's lie of saving humanity.

It is dark and the kids are gathered while WCKD agents are counting them as if they are some commodities, they even have special codes for each one of them. Suddenly a huge futuristic helicopter like the ones in *Black Panther* (2018) arrives, the scene shows Ava Paige wearing all white just like she is portrayed throughout the entire series, this could be read ironically to her supposedly role as a savior, she walks where the kids are and gives her orders to Janson, so they load them inside the helicopter. Ava says that this is all just a means to an end, justifying her crimes, all the torture these kids have been through is for finding a cure. Mary confronts Ava and tells her that what she is doing is wrong, Janson shots Mary before she finishes what she was saying.

Analyzing the character of chancellor Ava Paige (Patricia Clarkson) from an evolutionary lens, as the villain of the story, she exhibits selfish, sadistic traits, she hides behind an agenda and claims that she aims to save the world, but her methods tell a different story, Christiansen (2016) explains this aspect of evil popular villains from an evolutionary point of view.

Humans, like other primates, evolved to live and thrive in groups that constitute cooperative units. Moral intuitions built on a foundation of kin selection and reciprocal altruism pushed us into a hype social ecological niche by allowing us to avert the so-called Tragedy of the Commons whereby all agents are motivated to always be selfish (p.7)

Evil characters in *The Maze Runner* are driven by selfishness and madness while they hide behind their own selfish ideology, just like WCKD, Ava and Janson (Aiden Gillen) did not really care about humanity, their methods of finding a cure by any means necessary, taking advantage of their status as scientists to justify their deeds. This aspect of featuring scientists as the bad guys is quite common in science fiction movies, in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) scientists created a substance that evolves the brain and gives advance intelligence, they experimented this drug on a chimpanzee which resulted in him becoming more intelligent and eventually rebels against humans. James Clayton argues "*Rise of The Planet of The Apes* follows the righteous movie tradition, pointing out that the downfall will probably come as a consequence of our own silly ideas and actions" (para. 10). He also notes that "The implicit ideological suggestion of many sci-fi flicks is that humans should conservatively not seek scientific progress or 'play God'" (para .16).

The last movie in the trilogy centers around Thomas, when they discover that the answer to everything lies in his blood, after Theresa calls for him in the lab chamber and Janson threatens him. WCKD have planned from the beginning to find the final candidate who manifested the best adapting traits to remain immune. Therefore, Janson as an antagonist has his own cynical motives, he tells Thomas that he will be their cure supply and that the cure is not for all people. "The only question is, who will be the ones left standing?", he takes the antidote from Theresa while she realizes her mistake in betraying her friends by turning them in and trusting WCKD. Janson addresses Thomas sarcastically "Thanks to you, thanks to this, we finally get to choose the future by our own making" (01:54), following a Darwinian vision, it is a battle of the fittest, and only the ones who carve their way to the top will survive. "One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the

weakest die." (Darwin,1876 p.234). Thus, several popular movies and books have depicted this Darwinian way of thinking among other related trends, such as issues of race, ethnicity, and white supremacy.

### 3.3 Racial Formation in *The Maze Runner*

*The Maze Runner* trilogy, like other YA dystopian crazes out there is characterized by its fascinating plot, diverse cast, and strong leading actors. But that is only on the surface, in fact if you thoroughly review it, by having a look at the narrative of the films/movies, the notions of white privileged protagonists, and racial inferiority are strongly illustrated. These types of popular culture could be articulated as parallels to real life politics as Kellner (1995) argues "The forms of media culture are intensely political and ideological" (p.56), thus, following Kellner's approach *The Maze Runner* series represents critical views on racial inequalities and white supremacist artifacts that could be read as an allusion to the 21$^{st}$ century American values 2and politics which in part was influenced by Social Darwinism.

Racial representation in both popular culture and real-life societies is still a fundamental problem that needs to be highlighted. But, before diving deeper into the ramification of how the movies delineate racial issues, it is important to understand what the notion of race refers to in contemporary America as it is the focus of this study. Michael Omi and Howard Winant third edition of their book *Racial Formation in the United States* (2014) argue that "racial theory for years served mainly the interests of the powerful white settlers, slave owners, colonial and later national elites" (p.3).

This research intends to tackle the notion of race in its broader sense, not by focusing on one aspect but rather to emphasize on racial ideological dimensions and historical functions that includes biological racism, seen through film and media. *The Maze Runner* as a contemporary media account fails in presenting a new image on race,

136

despite the effort of bringing a set of diverse characters from different ethnicities, on the contrary, it ended up idealizing the white race. Further, the series are a reflection upon reality, and since it is considered as an American production, the story itself takes place within an American frontier, it requires an understanding of racial formation which in turn is referred to by Omi &Winant as "racial projects" (p.125). They used the term to describe the socio historic genome and its portrayal within the U.S institutions and how it affects the historical and political spectrums. They define it as "the process of race making, and its reverberations throughout the social order…We define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant 2014, p.109)

The series could be rendered according to what is known as the white man's burden or the white savior complex, and how it is commonly articulated through Hollywood popular movies. The white man's burden concept claims that European descents are far more superior than the other races who are described as savages, backward and it is the role of the Europeans to civilize them. This claim occurs with Darwin's logic in *The Descent of Man* "At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races" (Darwin,1874 p.192). Darwinian way of thinking promotes for racial superiority, which was celebrated by Americans during the 19th century.

Starting from the point of how characters in *The Maze Runner* trilogy are depicted, we notice a pleasantly diverse cast, with a deserved number of non-white characters portraying strong leading roles. But that does not last for long as soon as the protagonist Thomas, featuring (Dylan O'Brien) comes to the picture. The very first movie in the trilogy concentrates on Thomas, the protagonist of the series. The narrative of the

film typically follows a Hollywood tradition, where the spotlights are directed to  the white character the first time, he/she makes an appearance.

Thomas is represented as a white teenager who comes to change things and play the role of a hero savior for other races. As it is noted by  Crystal Raypole (2021) "Viewers are told that, without this character, change wouldn't happen" (para.22). Also, the need to portray these white characters passionately humanitarian with a sense of compassion "…they offer characters white viewers can relate to compassionate heroes who absolutely can't be racist, since they're working against racism" (para.22). These troubling aspects of the series invite us to ask questions about racial formation and the way racism is transcoded throughout the whole trilogy, overshadowed by a blurring utopian image.

By applying the notion of the white man's burden on *The Maze  Runner* characters, it is remarked that every character in the movies that is non-white serves Thomas as the hero of the story. In fact, there is a kind of hierarchy displayed to show diversity through multiculturalism to avoid old racial formations by imagining a future free from racism or as Jodi Melamed (2006) describes it "a benevolent multicultural invader" (p.1). However, this approach, fails in transmitting the message once those characters start to die for the sake of the white protagonist. Following a white savior complex while reading *the Maze Runner,* reveals the occurrence of strong racial projects. The first theme is the need to portray the white character as different, impulsive, and intelligent compared to other races.

The second, is portraying non-white characters especially ones of African American ethnicity as leaders but just to sacrifice them to save the white hero. The third theme is the way white characters are presented as catalysts of change and freedom

seekers as an allusion to the idea of civilizing the other. These themes serve as the idea of how films introduce racial projects and serve as an allegory to sociopolitical agendas.

The way the series brings together people from different races just to focus on one character that is typically white is a purely a political discourse. Alby who is the first to come to the Glade is casted as a black African American and he is portrayed as the leader of the group, a leader who did not find solutions for the kid's imprisonment until a white character showed up. Alby dies trying to save Thomas and the group from the Grievers after he taught him everything about the Glade and the maze, it could be understood that he handed him the leadership of the group, this is known as "magical negro trope". The concept of magical negro tropes is described by Kwame Anthony Appiah as "'the noble, good-hearted Black man or woman' whose good sense pulls the White character through a crisis" (Qtd in Glenn & Cunningham 2009, pp 136. 137), just like in *the Maze Runner*, Alby jumped into sacrificing his life to save the little kid, (Chuck Blake Cooper).

Alby's character served a purpose which is to lay the ground for the real hero to finally save the kids and find a way out of the maze, this is not a new idea to appear in movies. Alby is described as the oldest among the Gladers, which is entitled to his wisdom in making rules and protecting the society they have created. Despite all these features, the Black African American character is not given an important role compared to the white characters, which is evident when they kill the character in the first movie "they never act as "the hero" because their sole purpose is to help the White lead become a better person/leader/warrior" (Zevallos, 2012 para.7).

On the other hand, other movies have this feature of showing the non-white character as disadvantageous and in need of a white savior just like *the Blind Side* (2009) starring Sandra Bullock as the white savior character and Quinton Aaron as the poor black African American kid who is rescued by a white character. The film embodies the

notion of the white man's burden is depicting non-white people as unprivileged, poor, savages and the only way for them to be civilized is to be saved by white people. In *the Maze Runner*, Thomas is an embodiment of a white savior complex who passes through a personal crisis that makes him out of place, while he takes his role of saving others in the maze as a journey of self-discovery.

Another relevant aspect that could be seen through the movies, is the portrayal of white characters as unrealistically smart and exceptional by having a sense of curiosity and leadership just like how Darwinian way of thinking describe white people, it could be referred to as white privilege as well. In the case of Thomas, his back story explains many things about his personality. In the first movie, Thomas sees fragments about his past, he was one of WCKD, but they cast him away by putting him in the maze as a test and a punishment for his betrayal, he takes revenge by leading a revolution to take down WCKD. This idea is found in other significant Hollywood movies such as *Avatar* (2009), where white people take on a new planet and destroy everything including the indigenous culture of the native people for the sake of the allegedly called the civilizing mission.

Nevertheless, the aim behind mentioning *Avatar* is that it portrays a white character who fails in fitting in with his people and find refuge with the people on the colonized planet, wherein he helps them rise against the colonizers by becoming one of them "the hero's transformation into the alien other" (Rieder, 2011 p.47). In essence, *Avatar* is like *the Maze Runner* in the mentioned points, Rieder (2011) discusses the occurrence of these ideas in science fiction through his article, Race and revenge fantasies in *Avatar*, *District 9*, and *Inglorious Basterds* "Avatar's and District 9's antithetical renderings of the white male protagonist's achievement of sympathetic identification with the racial other reproduce a pair of polarized possibilities century" seen endemic to sf for more than a century"(p.47).

Contextually speaking, the series' representation can qualify with historical and modern racism mainly that of the United States. As a form of entertainment, Hollywood has always been a source of racial representations and propaganda with the white savior notion at its notorious peak. The movies are not so different than real life American society and politics. It could be viewed through the recent political system under republicans, white supremacy is highly appraised by conservatives under Trump administration, black African Americans are still inferior along other ethnicities. Racial inequalities in America have been the center of attention throughout the last few years, with tragic incidents against minorities like George Floyd's murder, one could not help but think that racism is not going to end in America. As Simon Clark (2020) article How White Supremacy Returned Mainstream Politics argues that white supremacists in America are still actively racist towards minorities while they aim to spread their evil agendas politically through speech "they have repackaged racist traditions in language and forms that could more easily enter mainstream political discourse" (para.7).

He also discusses the danger of extreme white supremacists' ideas, whereby these politicians justify their racist decisions by the claim of protecting the country from the surge of immigration. Therefore, if we have a look on what happened during the last presidential election, when Trump supporters refused to accept the results. We notice that America is still struggling to protect the country from racial problems. These white supremacists hide behind the ideology of American exceptionalism and that it  is important to preserve the country's uniqueness. Hence, white supremacy has always been a cornerstone ideology in the west and history proves that as Ursula Moffitt (2021) argues "White supremacy was itself a longstanding Western value. And white people don't have to be white supremacists to benefit from the ways it still shapes American society" (para.4).

*The Maze Runner* among other movies do not offer a positive image on race, it rather shows how the film industry is influenced by white supremacist artifacts and the misrepresentation of minorities. Despite the distinct races, it indicates that the trilogy uses this diversity just to become post-racial. The latter could be an allegory to political views on race and how politicians contribute to building assumptions towards the whole nation by focusing on white privileged people and neglecting other ethnicities. In this way, the series as a Science Fiction media artifact serves the purpose of burgeoning the supremacy of white people even in the far future.

## 3.4 The Flare Virus and Zombies

The zombie element found in the series is a common trademark in 21st century popular culture and science fiction. Featuring humans as bloodthirsty zombies with a postapocalyptic setting where individuals fight both the corrupted system and the environment. Thus, before dividing deeper into the analysis, it is necessary to mention its origins. The zombie creature is widely popularized to have its roots in "Haitian folklore and literature …. representing everything from the horrors of slavery, white xenophobia, Cold War angst, the fear of death, and even apprehensions about consumer culture" (Pulliam, 2007 p.724).

As Pulliam argued, zombies can be read as a representation of anxieties to our cultural and political realities, they are also seen as an allegory to slavery and cheap labor. Therefore, the creation of zombies is mostly a consequence of human deeds as Pulliam explains this in reference to Haitian folklore, and according to ethnobotanist Wade Davis who provides a biological theory to the nature of zombification in his book *the Serpent and The Rainbow (1985)*, zombies are created by a voodoo priest for a sinister intent usually driven by vengeance with the use of "a neurotoxin derived from the pufferfish"(p.724). Hence, this act results in the resurrection of that person who is neither

completely alive nor dead, only to become an undead creature, better described as a zombie and "taken away to become an uncompensated unskilled labor" (p.724).

With time, the embodiment of the zombie element in American popular culture has undergone several changes to better mirror the sociopolitical anxieties of the current age. The popularization of zombie movies reached its peak by the 2000s whereby "the genre would prove apt to address the American social and political landscape so drastically changed by 9/11" (Shemini, 2016 p.204). In essence, the subgenre is optimally suited to describe social and political anxieties in America. Shmeink argues that the current interest in the zombie film is concerned with its connection "with liquid modern society and the biopunk genre" (p.205), for him the evolution of new films coincided with the 9/11 attacks which made the subgenre more popular and a source of political and social criticism. In this account, several movies and series became famous at the time such as *Resident Evil* (2002), *I am legend* (2007).

These movies have the common element of the outbreak of zombies "as caused by genetically engineered viral outbreak, unleashed due to corporate experiments with highly contagious viruses" (Shmeink, 2016 p.206). Thus, *The Maze Runner* like many other movies in the genre centers around the idea of a manmade virus, hence, this imagination of zombies and lethal diseases are useful for the purpose of this thesis as it aligns with the flare virus and genealogies of biopolitics.

The zombie narratives in *The Maze Runner* series reflect cynical cultural consciousness about totalitarian regimes in relation to the posthuman dystopian imaginary. Wherein, the use of a disease as a way of controlling populations and regulating laws in *The Maze Runner* is not scarcely different thing from what we see especially during the Covid 19 phase. In the second act the *Scorch Trials*, we are introduced to Cranks, who are depicted as zombie like state with insane attitudes and

143

bloodlust craze, their bodies are deformed, they also have these strange veins covering their bodies which is the only noticeable diverse thing compared to the portrayal of zombies.

The anatomy of Cranks is supposed to be different than the usual zombies we see on TV, which is not clear when watching *the Maze Runner* but, in the books, differences are quite notable. Cranks can still talk and communicate in the early stages of their transformation; they are not dead yet because they can be cured unlike zombies. James Dashner (2015) tweets "Cranks are not zombies. But they were definitely inspired by zombies. The movie treatment is  perfect". Unlike Dashner's opinion, fans on social media sites like Reddit were not very satisfied with the Cranks' portrayal in the movies. One fan has stated "The cranks of the books were still people. They had emotions and were still intelligent people, even capable of speech to some degree depending on how far past the gone they were…The cranks of the movies are... rabid, unintelligent, senseless" (FionaLe Trixi,2020).

The flare virus was created by "the post-flare coalition" as a means of population control after the sun flares consumed the earth, it is also called "Virus VC321xb47"by James Dashner in his book *The Kill Order* (2012). WCKD and the government made this biological weapon because they concluded that only 70% of the world's population can survive with this rate and that it is the easiest way to reduce the number of people. Yet, the virus was allegedly created to attack the brain directly leading to a swift painless end. But this botched plan did not go as they expected which only resulted in a biological war when the virus started to mutate and WCKD realized their mistake by creating a virus without a cure.

Thomas and the group manage to find an exit from the compound after they were shocked by what WCKD has been doing to the other survivors in the lab by harvesting

their brains, and that Dr Paige is still very much alive and running the show behind the scenes. They pave their way in the desert chased by the search team and the harsh apocalyptic environment. They slip into a deserted dark building to find shelter for the night, the place looks like a mall or a shopping building. Clothes and mannequins scattered around the area; they only have flashlights to look around the place for something they can use. While everyone is discovering the space, Minho and Thomas head inside searching, and the camera shows Minho looking around for something, the light moves, and we see different items stuffed animals, candles…and a sign of danger giving a hint that something is about to happen. Minho finds a generator and he decides to turn it off while Thomas is watching him cautiously and says "wait" but Minho did not halt. The whole facility comes to light and that is when the first Crank appears and immediately start chasing after the group.

The film takes a whole different turn from evil scientists and mad doctors to the zombie genre. The coming sequence follows the fast-paced camera shots where the Gladers run for their lives while they are pursued by Cranks. Unfortunately, one of the kids is stuck between a door and a bunch of crazy Cranks who try to pull him inside, his friends manage to save him, but he gets hurt in the guts. They eventually escape the Cranks and hide for the night. One important thing about the series taking a zombie film element is the portrayal of zombies as it has been noted before, Cranks are supposed to look, and act differently according to Dashner's world. But in Wess Ball's movies, they are like zombies with their ferocity and mindless attitudes, all what they care about is hunting down other humans.

According to Darwin's law of selection, zombies can be read as the unfit individuals who failed the process of being immune to the virus and they are left to meet their end without any help by the government, in other words, they are treated as

unskilled labor or a source of entertainment for other top ranked humans. In *the Scorch Trials*, when Brenda and Thomas find themselves separated from the group and in search for the right arm, there was a scene when they meet Marcus (Alan Tudyk) who run some private business smuggling immune kids. The two kids were drugged by him, and they find themselves in some mysterious state of hallucination. There is a scene where we see Cranks being held captive inside this place and people are using them for fun. It is a sign of human capitalist standards, and how we tend to lose ourselves within a world of chaos and mass consumption, when humans become so cheap that they are used for entertaining purposes.

The zombie element also highlights the aspect of capitalism which is apparent through the way we encountered them for the first time in a shopping mall as an allusion to the economy especially that of the current age, and how everything is being treated as a commodity as Johannes Fehrle (2016) argues that recent zombie narratives have been a source of "critique capitalism" (p.530). One similar example to *the Maze Runner* series treatment of zombies is also found in other movies such as *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) where the zombies return to the shopping center because it was what they used to do as Fehrle indicates "here the genre serves as an allegory for the countercultural argument against consumerism" (p.531).

Interestingly, in *The Maze Runner* Cranks were created by an evil organization that invested money to create a virus claiming to save half of the population of the world but forgetting to have a cure. For this, if we consider a capitalist view on their creation we are met with a relation of influence between zombies and a corrupted capitalist system, and this is discussed by Fehrle as she indicates "the zombie is created through one avenue of capitalist enterprise…and capitalism frequently collapses when the zombie-as-mobile-nature strikes"(p.532).Hence, there are several readings of zombies that could be

concluded while watching *the Maze Runner*, but the analysis is focused upon the use of the virus in that regard.

The virus is a lethal weapon that became a global pandemic, and we can see this through the way infected people behave. After the kids outrun Cranks, they find shelter in some dusted place in the desert surrounded by massive, wrecked buildings which only implies the collapse of civilization with the sun flares. Winston (Alexander Flores), the kid who has been infected by Cranks is now suffering from his injuries and he can barely walk. They move slowly continuing their search for the right arm, but Winston slows them down and they are obliged to carry him. At some point, Winston starts coughing black blood which is a sign of high infection, the kids know what is coming next after they see him that way. There is a scene where he reveals his stomach, and a dark ugly scare is formed all over his body. He asks them to leave him and let him die because he does not want to become one of those Cranks, Newt hands him a gun and they leave after that, feeling devastated by the loss of their friend.

The camera intentionally stops when Winston takes the shot, showing Thomas and his remaining friends on top of sand hill unable to look behind at his dead body. Winston took this decision because he was afraid of losing himself by becoming an undead creature that would eventually turn against his friends. The virus consumes its victims slowly and eats away their brains Cerqueiras (2021) explains the function of the Flare virus "after being infected by the Flare, the humans in *The Maze Runner* trilogy go through a decaying process. Just like the zombie, the Cranks rot and become walking bodies with no memories or cognitive capacity, ruled by their most primitive desires" (p.193

In this context, the zombie element combined with the creation of a virus to keep populations at bay is not a novel thing. In fact, if we consider the similarities between the

Flare virus and Covid 19 there are many things in common between them even if one is fictional and the other is  real. From a political perspective Foucault explains this notion of control in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978)

> For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death. In a formal sense, it derived no doubt from the ancient patria potestas that granted the father of the Roman family the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away (p.135)

According to Foucault's understanding of the invention of a global Pandemic, humans are conditioned to follow the rule of a sovereign power that could be harsh and manipulative in making decisions like in *the Maze Runner*. In the movies, the virus is spread through direct contact with Cranks, however, in the books it is airborne and highly contagious. WCKD discovered that young people are able to adapt to the virus and with time they become immune which explains their plan in experimenting on the kids in the maze and outside.

As an authoritative entity, WCKD had the power to manipulate populations and deploy science as a means to an uncertain end  which in turn falls under biopolitical factors that could be decisively derived from such attitudes. From a political point of view, *The Maze Runner* invites us to question our own realities and governmental systems asking the question how far governments are ready to sacrifice populations for the allegedly common good by using a bioweapon? In the light of this statement, one could not help but draw paralalls between fiction and reality.

When Covid 19 outbroke, people were terrified and in search of a cure. Thus, many conspiracy theories have occurred that the virus was manmade and a cold war between the US and China started to take shape for whom to take the blame. In order to

determine the origins of the pandemic, several claims were put forward, the U.S government accused China of releasing the virus from their labs. It also reflected the way president Trump was handling the pandemic, as many of his supporters sided with this theory despite not having evidence that the virus was man made. "The theory has been pushed by supporters of the President, including some congressional Republicans, who are eager to deflect criticisms of Trump's handling of the pandemic" (Campbell, et al 2020 para.3). This incident articulates with WCKD politics and the way they handled the spread of a pandemic using Orwellian methods.

The interference between biology and politics in *The Maze Runner* is one that could not go unnoticed, the way WCKD uses humans as test subjects and manipulate technology is a sign of universal anxieties *par excellence*. All these aspects indicate how dangerous the spread of these ideologies of power relations that the role of medicine and science in general is taking its own untransparent agenda. As Esposito (2020) indicates in his article, Epidemic Paradoxia

> The fact is that today anyone who has the eyes to see cannot deny the full unfolding of biopolitics. From biotechnology interventions on areas once considered exclusively natural such as birth and death, to biological terrorism, to the management of immigration and more or less serious epidemics, all current political conflicts focus on the relationship between politics and biological life (para.2).

Esposito's argument on how politics and science are intertwined can be read through WCKD's misuse of power and technology. Furthermore, biological weapons have been used through time as a means of defense despite being illegal and considered a crime. In 1979, a sudden anthrax outbreak occurred in the city of Sverdlovsk in the former Soviet Union killing more than 1,000, it was justified that the leak happened by accident but later on it was discovered that the outbreak was deliberate,and it was.

released in the air. This act was a violation of several treaties that were made that time to control any type of biological weaponizing (Gordin,1997 p. 449). These biological agents have been referred to as bioterrorism. According to the model emergency health powers act of October 23rd, 2001, the term bioterrorism refers to the intentional use of bioengineered microorganisms to cause death, disease, or other biological malfunction to influence government or intimidate civilian populations. (Gostin, 2001 p. 9)

As much as there are many bioterrorist attacks that could be mentioned, Hollywood successfully features biotechnologically engineered diseases that are usually released by evil organizations or corrupted governments, thus, this is enormously portrayed through SF American popular culture. One similar series to *the Maze Runner* is *12 Monkeys* (2015) composed of four seasons cornering around a time traveler from the future who embarks on a mission to save humanity from the break of a deadly pandemic that would eradicate humanity in the future. This virus was made by a group of terrorists who call themselves the army of 12 Monkeys and shows that the government is involved. Many other series and movies feature this aspect of a disease outbreak which invites us to think about the possibility of similar scenarios.

*The Maze Runner* also reminds us of the eugenic movement which was widely influential during the 19th century America. The government in *the Maze Runner* creates a virus to reduce population and keep only the strongest alive, this is exactly what eugenics aimed at. In the United States, several eugenic programs were conducted such as sterilization which happened in the form of several laws. In 1907 the state of Indiana passed the first sterilization law followed by several states, the aim was to allegedly purify the unfit population which is composed of minorities like blacks and immigrants. In fact, these sterilization programs were forcefully done on mostly black women from 1937 to 1966 in North Carolina, the forced program was performed on approximately

1,400 women in California prisons. Hence, doctors who performed these acts claimed that this is for the good of the public. (Stern, 2020 para 2, 3)

Similarly. in *The Scorch Trials*, there were other groups that have been under the same experiments. Thomas meets Aries, an immune kid who has been with an only female glade and he was to survive among them. This shows that WCKD is testing these kids according to different factors, as if they are trying to breed the fittest.

## 3.5 Humans as Biotechnological Lab Rats

Teenagers in *The Maze Runner* is subjected to different types of challenges by WCKD scientists who claim to have a higher purpose to save humanity from extinction playing God. In the first act, we meet Thomas and the kids who have been put in a Glade surrounded by giant walls and biomechanical creatures to keep them inside. The aim behind their imprisonment was to observe how their minds performance and oversee their decision making while they go through brutally stressful situations, like facing a Griever or losing their way in the maze, all because these scientists believe that the brain is the key to find a cure for the Flare.

After Thomas is confronted by Gally, he ends up stinging himself by a Griever's injection to remember his past, (Thomas entered the maze with his memory intact because he was part of WCKD scientists and after he rebelled against them, they put him in the experiment alongside the other teenagers. In the Glade, he stings himself purposely to recover his memories). When he wakes up in the morning after taking the grief serum (an antidote that arrived in a syringe with Theresa, this serum allows the patient to regain memories from the past after going through a phase called the changing). Now Thomas has his memories back, feeling lightheaded like he knows everything about WCKD. He reveals to his friends that this maze is not a prison like they thought "it's not a prison, it's a test and it all started when we were kids… they give us these challenges, they

151

were experimenting on us" (1:26). He explains to them that this evil organization is using

themas experiments for a reason and that he used to be one of them.

Experimenting on people has been a trending theme throughout SF

postapocalyptic movies, which invites us to think about how medicine and science in

general can easily transform from saving people's lives to be used for evil purposes.

Throughout history, science proved that the subject of humans as experiments is not

fiction but real and happened many times. In Nazi Germany, a so-called "cleansing"

campaign was carried by the government to experiment on Jews and other minorities

following Eugenics which was inspired by Darwin's evolutionary thinking in the 19th

century.

These unethical experiments were conducted for the sake of racial development

because they believed that the other races especially Jews are biologically unfit and must

be eliminated or purified to reach a higher race (Aryan race in Germany). The programs

carried, were mainly in the form of forced sterilization which resulted in a massacre,

Zeldman (2011) writes "There were approximately 400, 000 sterilized under the 1933

Nazi Sterilization law" (p.696). Children were also targeted in these biologically racist

programs, "It was calculated that 70 273 adult patients and thousands more children were

killed, primarily by gassing, starvation, or lethal injection" (p.696). what should be noted

is that many doctors believed in following the same scheme in their research and that it is

not harmful to use disabled and inmates for the sake of science.

In the US, experimenting on people had its own fair share of history. By the

second world war, a series of experiments were passed on innocent people by the

government and more than 1,000 people were intentionally infected with viruses that

caused hepatitis in Connecticut. They selected prisoners, disabled children, and people

with mental illnesses, and they put them under these tests to study the nature of the

disease. Thinking that it is okay to put people's lives at the stake for the sake of scientific knowledge. (Ledford, 2021 para. 2).

They also justified their acts saying that it is necessary for the public health to meet the modern ethos of science. Which only questions the morality of scientists. These incidents remind us of how WCKD used science as an alibi for their crimes and carried on working on finding a cure even if it were their idea to create a virus in the first place. Similar movies tackled the theme of experimenting on humans, *High Life* (2018), featuring a group of prisoners turned into astronauts as a part of an experiment in a futuristic setting, that shows the way scientists abused their power for making experiments like WCKD did to the kids in the maze. The movie resonates with significant incidents that occurred in real life, especially during the 19th century with the Eugenic movement. Another movie, where humans play God is *The Lazarus Effect* (2015), the film introduces a group of scientists investing their effort to experiment on the resurrection of the dead, claiming that everyone deserves a second chance, to live again. However, this experiment ends terribly. These movies play an imperial role on shifting our vision upon the world and humanity.

Using humans as Guinea pigs had occurred in multiple incidents during the 19th century America, in 1964, a hospital in Brooklyn New York well known of taking care of elderly people and those in need of long-term physical care was running tests on these people by injecting cancer cells in their bodies. The idea was initiated by a doctor called Chester Southam, who suggested infecting sick people to test a theory he was working on, "he was never prosecuted and only received a one-year probation" (Hornblum, 2013 para. 10). In an article, The Legacy of the CIA's Secret LSD Experiments on America, Maia Szalavitz (2012) narrates another shocking experiment that occurred during the cold war, the CIA unleashed a series of mind control projects, one of them was conducted

using a drug called LSD, which causes hallucinations. This drug was used on both civilians and targeted individuals "The LSD experiments were purportedly carried out because the U.S. believed that communist Russia, North Korea and China were using the drug to brainwash captured Americans. Consequently, the CIA didn't want to fall behind in developing and responding to this potentially useful technology" (para.2), by reviewing these real-life events, one cannot help but start looking at films with a political lens because what happens in fiction is not so far from happening.

In *the Maze Runner*, WCKD scientists directed their focus on the brain of the children and how it reacts to different situations which explains why they put them under severe hardships inside the Maze to monitor their cognitive attitudes. Thomas and his friends were working on a plan to decode the puzzle of the maze. Minho had already discovered new routes and he described them to Thomas in their secret place where they were studying the maze. The maze works as a puzzle, every time it changes, it reveals new ways for the runners to follow. For that to happen, these kids develop a high level of critical thinking and intelligence which is likely a positive thing for WCKD because they want their brains to evolve so that they extract a cure.

The third movie in the franchise, *The Death Cure* centers around Thomas following WCKD's tracks of where they took Minho, who has been kidnapped after Teresa's betrayal. Moreover, even if the kids succeeded in fleeing the maze, they are still treated as lab rats by WCKD which can be seen throughout the whole installment. The concept of lab rats is explored through Thomas's search for a refuge in the middle of this apocalyptic world, he is always fighting for his friends and for himself. The kids have been repeatedly tested, going through trials while facing cranks, fighting with the right arm's resistance and struggling with the harsh apocalyptic environment.

After Teresa sacrifices herself to save Thomas, the camera zooms in to Thomas lying down on the plane while his friends are inspecting his injuries. We also see the city behind them falling apart marking the end of WCKD and the last city. Later we see Thomas wakes up from his sleep in a place that looks like a cabin far away from civilization. It turns out that they are on an island with all the survivors (the immunes). This place looks like the haven they have been searching for. We also see the leader of the right arm giving a speech about what they have been through to be there saying, "welcome to the safe haven" (2:12). The end of the series invites viewers to ask questions about what was really achieved from experimenting on these kids because they haven't found a cure eventually. However, WCKD reached their goal by sending the kids to a new place, which is supposed to be their safe haven. Viewing the end of the series from a Darwinian perspective shows that the aim of finding the fittest has been achieved, not just Thomas alone but the whole community that survived the apocalypse are the fittest.

## 3.6 Conclusion

In comparison to other YA dystopias, *The Maze Runner* series has been dismissed from scholarly discourse. This may be due to the general assumptions made by fans and book readers about the genre's lack of innovation and redundancy. However, as much as the series has similarities with other YA dystopias, it has successfully maintained its uniqueness mainly by taking a post pandemic theme combined with the zombie genre.

The series is a valuable source of contextual cultural studies especially within the American political terrain. The trilogy resonates with sociopolitical anxieties and right wings ideologies both in the 19th century and the contemporary era. Therefore, what is interesting about the trilogy is the lack of reading these movies from an evolutionary perspective, and the way it represents a social Darwinian logic whereby the whole story

focuses on the creation of a master human race which is referred to as the fittest. The series invites us to ponder upon the possibility of similar scenarios in our real world. Though other dystopias like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* could be read similarly. Yet, they were mostly tackled with the way they address young generations as change makers with their rebellious actions. *The Maze Runner* focuses exceptionally on the notion of survival combined with evolutionary  genetic engineering which makes the series open to several interpretations and bound to no specific reading.

Furthermore, the series also offers a simulacrum for racial platitudes in relation to concepts such as the white man's burden and white savior complex, The trilogy failed in changing the issue of racial formation. It still follows a Hollywood tradition when it comes to highlighting a white hero spectrum despite the story taking place within a futuristic setting, the same vision on other races is provided, still the white race is the fittest and other races are merely given an important role in comparison.

*The Maze Runner* also offers a vision on the past and the future especially that of how science is an important aspect in our lives, while it can be a dangerous source of evil as it has been proven over time with programs like Eugenics in Nazi Germany and the 19th century America, and how would our world be like if a Darwinian law is applied. Additionally, the series provides an image on our current sociopolitical anxieties when governments play a role in directing power relations between individuals and a system that is supposed to protect and maintain their rights, instead of destroying them. The series articulates the notion of fear and anxiety from corrupted systems.

It also invites us to ask questions about how the old ideologies are  still circulating, for example WCKD is the embodiment of a Darwinian logic, this evil organization claims to save humanity by finding a cure that was created by them in the first place and using children as lab rats to harvest their brains. The use of Cranks and the

zombie element as examples of failure of the unfit and a sign of capitalist critique. They also articulate with the creation of a virus to control populations and spread a sense of terror among people which results in the law of survival of the fittest and the promotion of an immune human race, all these aspects invite us to think critically about political systems and power division with the element of technology as a driving force towards an unknown end and a terrifying future.

Chapter Four:

The Politics of the Capitol vs. the Districts: Contextualizing Totalitarianism, Colonialism and Media Wars in *The Hunger Games* Series

**Chapter Four: The Politics of the Capitol vs. the Districts: Contextualizing Totalitarianism, Colonialism and Media Wars in *The Hunger Games* Series.**

4.1 Introduction

    4.1.1 Background

    4.1.2 Narrative Summary

4.2 The Pragmatism of Katniss Everdeen

4.3 Consumerism and Entertainment in the Capitol

4.4 Panem: A Neocolonial Dystopia

4.5 A Propaganda War

4.6 Conclusion

## 4.1 Introduction

In the last few decades, dystopian Science Fiction dominated the film industry following series such as *The Maze Runner (2014), 2081 (2009), Atlas Shrugged II: the Strike (2012), Divergent (2014)* and many others, what is common between the above-mentioned films is the theme of authoritative regimes, corruption, individuals in pursuit of democracy and freedom, but mostly, the way they are set in an imaginary America. In 2012, the first movie in *The Hunger Games* trilogy was released by Lionsgate production, while the author of successful series Suzanne Collins herself contributed to its adaptation,

the trilogy became a franchise in the year it hit box office. It included four installments, *The Hunger Games (2012), Catching Fire (2013)*, *Mockingjay Part 1 (2014)*, *Mockingjay Part 2 (2015)* while a prequel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is expected to be released in 2023. It has been ten years since the series was launched, and it still remains among the best adaptations ever made, grossing more than $2.97 billion collectively worldwide (Boxoffice Pro 2020).

The series is known for themes of oppression and autocratic government, surveillance, and utilizing children for sadistic entertainment. While it is primarily directed to young adults, yet the series provide an in-depth vision about the world's issues including political agendas, ideologies and struggles of a particular moment in history, that it cannot be categorized as a kid's series but an eye-opening media text insofar.

This analysis will read the four parts in the trilogy and contextualize it as a collective text, which speaks to multifarious combination of colonialism and autocracy while including elements of power relations and political schemes as displayed in popular cinema. This contextualization will take into consideration the period of production the

series were being made following Kellner's diagnostic analysis (1995) "which uses history and social theory to analyze cultural texts and uses cultural texts in turn to illuminate historical trends, conflicts, possibilities, and anxieties" (p.125), by decoding the themes of colonial oppression and political manipulations, *The Hunger Games* will be discussed in relation to contemporary US society, while it taps to sociopolitical anxieties, it also reflects historically epitomized philosophies that marks American values such as pragmatism and materialism. The text will be guided by the following questions: How does *The Hunger Games* criticize American politics, and values and history? more precisely, in which ways, the series reflects political leaders in the US and their decision making affecting the world's nations, hence, what role media plays in this overall context.

This analysis attempts to scrutinize the impact of media texts on our daily lives, and how such movies should be read critically rather than taken as an apolitical site because they indeed have a message to deliver especially directed to the young generations.

Furthermore, by observing the series and the way they unfold a story of defiance, resistance and overthrowing authoritative regimes, *The Hunger Games* succeeded in inspiring viewers to overlook their realities, their governmental systems and mostly it sheds lights on how media can be controlled by corrupted political elites, and how the news can be biased to draw an image in people's minds, urging young adults in particular to analyze, and assess before consuming anything they see on TV. Thus, the series on the other hand gave the oppressed a chance to speak back to the oppressor, which is something rare in Hollywood, the impact of the movies on real life can be detected through the use of symbols and slogans from the films such as if "we burn you

burn with us" that was used in a protest after an 18-year-old unarmed boy Michael Brown was shot by a police officer (Bates & MailOnline, 2014), including other examples where references of the films occurred to symbolize defiance. As such, this chapter will argue that *The Hunger Games* is a unique media text that engages in political and social projects. It regards the series in their period of production transcoding the impact of Bush's administration in the US and the world.

## 4.1.1 Background

In scholarly discourse, *The Hunger Games* has been discussed as a master source of criticism. The series provided an allegory to social and political anxieties of the current age, it has also been discussed in regard to gender studies and feminism, following a young female protagonist as a change maker. Therefore, this media text situates an extensive site of sociopolitical and economic archetypes when it is read in relation to American politics. In the Political Message of the Hunger Games (2014) on *The Artifice*, the authors argue that series are open to a variety of contextualization, it taps to our realities more than it seems due to the depiction of individuals in clash with corrupted governments "the world of *The Hunger Games* is frighteningly similar to our world"(para.5) while it also provides a ground for change through a strong resilient character, it shows on the other hand a possibility of doing all that in vain if power is handed to the wrong persons. The series simply shows human's capability of deceit in search of power and control.

Nettles (2017) read the series while focusing on the role of mass media in affecting the games. In a similar vein, the first instalment in the series was discussed by James Keller (2013) as an allegory in itself, focusing on how the series changed the lives of the cast drastically, Kellner introduces us to the world behind the production of the

series, where Gary Ross opted for a very similar marketing strategy that of the Capitol when preparing tributes to fight in the arena, "the marketing efforts include rousing public interest in the actors' appearances and personal lives, a practice that parallels the promotion of the tributes in the fictional Game"(p.25). Moreover, Rickards (2018) contextualized the series collectively as a media text whereby he focused on issues of racial representations mainly white liberalism and conservatism through Katniss Everdeen. The series was also read in parallel with the history of the US, it invites us to observe issues of inequality and identity as represented in the trilogy when these elements generate geographic discourse and racial diversity.

Adding to the pre-existed body of work, this research intends to shed lights on the impact of media and Hollywood in general in providing a valuable source of criticism for a sociopolitical and economic anxieties the world is facing, this reading intends to provide a set of critical questions and assessments of real-life political issues that can be clearly seen through the movies. Therefore, the movies are categorized as a Young Adult dystopia. The focus on teenagers as consumers and encourage them to read movies in relation to politics. Thus, this analysis will aim to decode the meanings of the symbols, the signs and the narratives displayed in the series in relation to American culture, history and politics, hence, reading them in parallel with their time of production. The goal is to recognize these media artifacts as a rich source of criticism rather than subtle entertainments.

## 4.1.2 Narrative Summary

*The Hunger Games* trilogy is a four-parts film series, *The Hunger Games (2012), Catching Fire (2013), Mockingjay Part One (2014), and Mockingjay Part Two (2015),* the trilogy is originally a book series written by American author and screen writer Suzanne Collins. The film series narrates a story of a futuristic postapocalyptic America known as the country of Panem. This place was formed after a global catastrophe ended the whole world and only the north America remained, it established an authoritative regime where the Capitol, a small city in the heart of Panem runs this dictatorship.

Panem is divided into 12 districts, plus district 13 that was eliminated by the Capitol for its rebellion. These districts are divided according to their wealth while they all supply the Capitol with a specific good, district 1 is responsible for luxury items and fancy jewelries, they supply the Capitol with these fancy items and are considered among the wealthiest districts in Panem, their citizens are privileged compared to other poor districts. District 2 is responsible for masonry and weaponry; they are the Capitol's weapons manufacturers and also responsible for Peacekeepers training.

District 3 is known for technology, while district 4 is for fishing, therefore, district 5 is recognized for electricity, they produce the electricity that powers Panem. District 6 takes in charge transportation means. On the other hand, district 7 is the Capitol's source of lumber, known for its forests, whereas district 8 is responsible for textile and producing uniforms for the Capitol's army. Moreover, district 9 is known for its grain production, followed by district 10 which supplies the Capitol with animals and meat. District 11 which is considered among the poorest districts in Panem, is known for agriculture. District 12 is a coal mining area but after the rebellion of district 13 which was responsible for nuclear weapons, the mines of district 12 were shut down and the Capitol left the district to starve since they had no use of it. The Capitol enjoys the wealth

of the districts and consumes their supplies, while they are left impoverished and live in harsh conditions.

After the rebellion of district 13, which is supposed to be vacant land now, the Capitol decided to tame the districts from rising any attempted civil war in the future. Each year, the 12th districts are obliged to hand over two tributes a boy and a girl to combat in a gladiatorial vicious competition in which one survivor is supposed to come out alive. The kids are harvested through a tradition called the reaping, the Capitol hosts this event which is known as The Hunger Games annually to provide a spectacle for the wealthy Capitol's citizens and to remind the districts that they hold no power against the authority. Ironically, this event is televised, and each tribute is provided with the training materials during their stay in the Capitol's hold before the games initiates, they are compelled to maintain a composed cheerful persona for the audiences so that they can win their support inside the arena. The only survivor of the games is rewarded with status and wealth while expected to mentor other tributes in the coming years. The world of this series is set in an Orwellian society while experiencing a *Battle Royale* type of plot, everything is monitored in this world.

The first movie in the installment *The Hunger Games (2012)* starts with the 74th reaping ceremony in district 12. In a disturbing scene, we are introduced to the protagonist of the story Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) who sacrifices herself and volunteers as a tribute instead of her sister Primrose (Willow Shields), she is joined by the second chosen tribute Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), together they are sent to the Capitol accompanied by Haymitch (Woody Harrelson) their mentor victor, and the Capitol's representative Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks). Katniss struggles to fit in with the norms of the Capitol, she has been urged by her mentor to keep a smiley face in front

of the camera to win their support in the arena, she always refrained from keeping the appearances and struggled to maintain this façade.

Unlike the districts, people in the Capitol cherish this bloody sacrificial event, they assemble together to watch the tributes when they are presented on TV and even bet their money on who will win this game, Katniss meets her stylist Cinna (Lenny Kravitz) who is responsible on her outfits, make up and readies her for the games, therefore, she also meets President Snow (Donald Sutherland), the cold dictator who rules Panem and its citizens. Katniss enters the arena scared and horrified of what she might do to win these games, she ends up making friendships and alliances with the boy from her district and a girl from district 11. By the end of the movie, she and Peeta successfully remained alive with casualties, however the rule of one winner entails that one of them should kill the other, Katniss and Peeta decide to sacrifice both their lives and not give the Capitol a victor in an act of defiance. President Snow was obliged to approve them both as winners instead of one marking the end of the movie.

The second movie in the trilogy, *Catching Fire* follows Katniss and Peeta as the 74th Hunger Games victors, yet, instead of enjoying the promised wealth and safety the Capitol pledged for them, they are compelled to participate in the seventy fifth Quarter Quell. Another Hunger Games recreated by President Snow and participants are chosen from the victors instead of the civilians.

This Quarter Quell [4] is a message for Katniss and the other victors, that demonstrates the power of the Capitol and shows them that they are not safe. Katniss is

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[4] The Quarter Quell is also referred to as the 75th Hunger Games, it was held between the victors of each annual game, for the purpose of reminding the districts that even the Victors are not safe from the Capitol, and they cannot defy its rule, besides that, it was a message for Katniss and her defiance of the Capitol.

confronted by President Snow about her deceit in the games, when she faked her love interest in Peeta, she became aware that the Capitol will never let her free, and she has no choice but be part of this games again. President Snow threatened her and her family, in the coming scenes of the film, Katniss and Peeta are taken in a tour to visit the 12th districts of Panem. We are introduced to each district and how the games destroyed their families, Katniss is urged to maintain the same image in the 74th games, despite her conflicted emotions, Katniss obeyed. Thus, we are also given a glimpse of the instability in the districts, the violent disobedience and the public humiliation and execution the Capitol is in charge of. Katniss discovers that her act in the arena towards Rue from district 11, somehow ignited the fire of rebellion. Besides, Katniss makes friendships and potential alliances in the training sessions, she ends up conspiring with these tributes against the Capitol in the arena, instead of killing each other, they work on destroying the arena of the games. The film comes to an end with Katniss being saved by a hovercraft after she shattered the ceiling of the arena and turned the power off.

In *Mockingjay Part One*, we discover that Katniss was saved by a team led by Heavensbee (P.S Hoffman), the Capitol's Gamemaker who happens to be working against President Snow and worked as a counterspy for the rebellion. In this part of the series, Katniss is informed that district 13 is still operating, and it was not completely destroyed. Run by Alma Coin (Julienne Moore), district 13 is preparing for a second rebellion to overthrow the dictator President Snow. Therefore, the event of the story follows Katniss and her training to deliver a proper image for her propaganda campaign against the Capitol, while Peeta on the other hand, is held captive by the Capitol and tortured to taunt Katniss and compel her to surrender.

In *Mockingjay Part Two*, Coin sends a team to save Peeta and retrieves him to district 13 only to find him tortured and hijacked by a tracker jacker to distort his mental state and turn him against Katniss.

By the end of the movie, Katniss loses her sister Prim in an ambush orchestrated by the rebellion that was meant for the Capitol's army, the rebellion successfully disables the Capitol and capture President Snow. The ending scene shows Katniss holding her bow to execute the dictator Snow, but she ends up killing Coin (the supposedly future ruler of Panem), after she discovered her sinister plans in recreating another bloody tradition for the Capitol's kids. The narrative of the complete series follows the clash between individuals in the districts and a dictatorship in the Capitol. It successfully embodies a totalitarian society; it invites to consider the politics of the plots and the way media is used as an instrument of war.

## 4.2 The Pragmatism of Katniss Everdeen

Science fiction genre has always been a fascinating source of innovations, with futuristic themes that tackle topics of utmost significance, the genre provides a myriad of commentaries and allegories. Thus, the combination of science fiction with dystopia enriched the genre and helped in the creation of some other subgenres including, YA dystopias. What is interesting about Dystopian science fiction is that it covers central themes that have relevant connection to our current, past, and future imaginary realities.

*The Hunger Games* franchise, an adaptation of  Suzanne Collins' book series of the same name by American film director and screenwriter Gary Ross (director of the first movie) and later Francis Lawrence, became a franchise prominently known of its huge fanbase, and massive success as a Hollywood blockbuster. The series centers

around a young female protagonist named Katniss Everdeen, starred by (Jennifer Lawrence) who plays the role of a young female catalyst of change against a tyranny.

The film series has been tackled through multiple readings, but what is interesting about the trilogy is the way the series resonates with reality especially in America. For that, this analysis attempts to read the trilogy as a source of culture and media that articulates with themes such as democracy, freedom, and change. Following what Stewart Hall describes as the process of generating meaning, which in this case relies on reading these movies and giving them meaning in accordance with their cultural representations "It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" (Hall, 1997 p.17), for that, this reading aims at providing a meaningful representation of what the movies stand for, by decoding the meaning of the visual and verbal messages and their parallels in American thoughts taking a post structural approach whereby the focus is put upon "difference, subjectivity, culture, and politics" (Sinnerbrink, 2019 p.452).

*The Hunger Games* embodies a clash between individuals and the authoritative system they operate through which entails a complicated relationship, in other words, the series falls under a dichotomy of the oppressive and the oppressed. Individuals in *The Hunger Games* are divided into two categories, the people who reside in the Capitol (the autocratic regime), and the people who live in the districts (colonies). The protagonist of the story, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) is presented as a young teenager, with resilient traits, as her father passed away at an early age, Katniss became the sole provider of the family. What is important about Katniss, who later becomes a symbol of hope for the districts, and a trigger for revolution, is in the way she challenges the capitol and

grows tired of the corruption this totalitarian regime inflicts upon the poor people in the districts. Hence, the purpose is to explore the way *The Hunger Games* provides philosophical temperaments and to what extent, the series reflects  American philosophy of pragmatic thinking per se.

Pragmatism in America is known by the ideas of three classical leading thinkers, Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910) and John Dewy (1859–1952). The ideas of these philosophers contributed to the development of pragmatism in America, their principal thoughts "focused on theorizing inquiry, meaning and the nature of truth" (Legg et al, 2021, p.2). The philosophy passed through significant epistemological changes, however, the purpose here is to draw parallels between the representation of the movies following what is known as a pragmatic approach that reflects American values.

The core concern of the philosophy is to explore the notion of truth, despite earlier disputes between pragmatic thinkers about its realism, and if pragmatism "should conceive itself as a scientific philosophy holding monism about truth (following Peirce), or a more broad-based alethic pluralism (following James and Dewey" ( p.3), the analysis follows the general principles of American pragmatism without dealing with the differences it went through over time, it is rather to scrutinize the way  pragmatism mirrors American exceptionalism through the reading of the movies as political instruments as well.

The protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen demonstrates a pragmatic model, with her resilient nature and challenging attitude, despite her confusion and terror, she still acts as a change maker, sometimes unaware of her actions and their impact on others. For that, Katniss became the symbol of hope for the districts, as

pragmatic thinking entails the need to see truth in the way it operates through actions, Katniss made a difference by transforming a mere idea into reality. Before delving deeper into the analysis, it is worth mentioning that films as a medium are inclined to employ or allude to a philosophy, that emphasizes on certain issues and attempts to raise questions, thus it engages audiences to ask philosophical questions.

Wartenberg (2019) argues "the most widely acknowledged way in which a film can be philosophical is for it to present audiences with a philosophical problem or issue for them to reflect on" (p.494), in the case of *The Hunger Games*, the question that articulates with the philosophy of pragmatism is probably concerned with how is Katniss and the districts going to free themselves from an authoritative regime that exploits their resources, and enslaves them. Therefore, it is also deployed in the title of the series, *The Hunger Games*, the word hunger signifies a human trait that stresses upon survival, and games, is a symbol of entertainments, but together, they signify a political  message as Hall (1997) explains the purpose of these signs and link them to our understanding "they function as signs. Signs stand for or represent our concepts, ideas, and feelings in such a way as to enable others to 'read', decode, or interpret their meaning is roughly the same way that we do" (p.5). The way these two words are put together implies philosophical implications as well. In other words, the movies contain signs and symbols that suggest meanings that will be decoded and interpreted to show how pragmatism as a philosophy is illustrated.

In the first installment of the series, the opening scene introduces the context of the trilogy, explaining the Treaty of Treason which was signed between the Capitol and the citizens in the districts, after they started a rebellious act to set free from the unjust authoritarian regime, which ended in bad terms and was doomed with failure resulting in

severe consequences. The Capitol initiated a series of games that are hosted every year, whereby the citizens have no choice but to offer a tribute of two young male and female between the age of 12 to 18 from each district, who would compete against each other and only one winner would come out alive of the arena, as a replication of a Roman Gladiator tradition.

The aim is to remind the districts that the Capitol holds the power, also to entertain the wealthy residents of the Capitol and use humans as sport. These games are televised and streamed live for the districts to watch and for the Capitol to bet on their favorite contender. The interview in the opening between the host of the games Caesar Flickerman (Stanley Tucci) and the Game Maker Seneca Crane (Wes Bentley) indicates that the games are something that the Capitol is proud of, despite the painful deaths that comes with it because they see those children as animals to be sacrificed and not humans. On the other hand, we are introduced to Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) and her sister Primrose Everdeen (Willow Shields), who is afraid that she would be picked for this year's 74th Hunger Games. The Juxtaposition in these two blended scenes presents a significant message that raises the question of what truth is there to ponder upon in this movie.

The series follows Katniss's journey in the deadly arena, after she volunteered in her sister's place. At first Katniss is unaware of how the games are supposed to work, she only thinks of one thing which is to survive and win the games no matter what, since her family counts on her to survive. Katniss fits in with a pragmatic approach as William James reasons in his book *What Pragmatism Means* (1907) that "ideas become true…or at any rate become true instrumentally, just insofar as they help place us in more constructive, more effectual, more valuable relations with other parts of our

experience"(p.21), Katniss focused on one purpose which is to survive just like she survived when her father died, and she became the only provider of the family.

She saw the games in parallel with her previous experiences and maintained the same aim in the arena. The way Katniss's character allegorizes American values is also seen through her acts of defiance and sacrifice when she volunteered to take her sister's place in the games, when Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks) calls on Prim's name, the camera narrows down on Prim capturing her shocked reaction, Effie who wears a fancy custom while everyone is wearing either grey or white also identify the miserable state of district 12 compared to the wealthy Capitol staff members.

To Prim's dismay, Effie repeats her name again, and the shot is narrowed on her, while she takes her way slowly, everyone is staring at her with a mixture of terror and relief since they were not selected. The camera follows Katniss's movement when she declares that she volunteers as tribute, Effie announces her name to the crowd. This exact scene brings Katniss to the center of everything, she only cared about her sister and without a second thought, despite knowing that going to the arena means unmistakable death, she sacrificed herself. Seen from a pragmatic lens, Katniss's act of bravery and determination can be read through what Rogers (2011) describes it as "the idea of "the people" is also, and perhaps more importantly, an aspirational category a *community not yet in existence* that both in forms and conceals the political lifeworld of democracy and extends beyond electoral politics" (p.275).

Simply put Katniss's act of sacrifice is a seed of hope and step towards change and democracy, even though, she did not intend for it to be, at first, but with no denial, her act of protectiveness for her sister inspired the districts to have hope, and she became their voice. She is willing to fight and die in the arena which is also a sacrifice that could

be taken as a necessary "quest to transform the political landscape … that the legitimacy of democracy demands faith that sacrifice will be redeemed" (p.275).

Amount to the idea of sacrifice, faith is also key to reach democracy, Katniss made the sacrifice which is an action from a pragmatic approach, and the people had faith in her. It is through action, as Dewey's model of inquiry entails that when a problem occurs, a need of understanding is a must to find a solution, this idea develops to making progress by seeking an answer. It is therefore, seen through the way Katniss deliberately volunteered to rescue her sister, this also mirrors American values, actions are essential to resolve a problem. Sleeper (1988) denotes that it is similar to American constitution and the way Americans followed a pragmatic model "the key to power is action, and the key to the theory of power is the theory of action" (p.123).

Americans used pragmatic thinking to build a democratic nation as it has been stated in their constitution, it reflects their values following a sense of individuality and freedom through practice. Contextually speaking, this pragmatic experience is demonstrated with former US president Barak Obama, in his book *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), where he invites Americans to make change by "claiming that democracy, and its subsequent pluralism, allow us to view truth in a different way, as values that some hold and others do not" (Wells, 2012 p.29). Obama stresses on the notion of action and the optimism that made America an exceptional nation throughout history. This is a pragmatic feature that Americans value mostly in their politics and system of thoughts.

Katniss succeeded in her survival mission in the games because she was a reasonable person who remained true to herself despite the obstacles she encountered in the arena, she only killed when she was obliged to defend herself. One important aspect about Katniss's pragmatic experience is embedded in her moral ethics which fits

perfectly with what John Dewey calls it ethical experience within his moral theory" the purpose of moral theory is ultimately to provide constructive methods for addressing human problems of a particular kind: those in which we find ourselves unable to choose between equally valuable ends, with a dearth of salient habits with which to cross the breach" (Legg et al para.54).

There are many scenes where Katniss's moral conciseness articulated with her experience as a contender and a fighter for survival, in every situation where she was obliged to fight back, she always had a sense of morality, and rarely engaged in direct combat, for example when Katniss and the other victors were in the arena in the second act in the series *Catching Fire* (2013), Katniss retreats from killing other victors and maintains the strategy, she maintained in the first arena with Peeta.

In the last act *Mockingjay Part Two* (2015), Katniss lost her sister Prim in the ambush, president Coin (Julianne Moore) of district 13 orchestrated. We see Katniss walking towards the center of a massive space surrounded by the audiences just like a Roman arena, thus the camera moves to Coin, the future ruler of Panem and the replacement of former president Snow (Donald Sutherland), Katniss's role here is supposedly to execute the captured former president, she instead executes Coin, because she knew that she would be exactly the same tyrant president, especially that she was planning to relive the Hunger Games tradition on the Capitol's children as a part of a revenge plan. In this situation, Katniss deployed her sense of morality combined with her empirical experience with the capitol, she took the decision of ending a similar future where fear and terror would arise again. From Dewey's moral theory, Katniss crystallized her ethical thinking drawing from her past experiences reflecting the present situation. As Pappas (1997) explains this theory "for Dewey radical empiricism in ethics entailed a

radical contextualism in the sense that each situation constitutes a unique context… the attention and care that each situation deserves is the first imperative of Dewey's moral philosophy" (p.537).

Throughout the analysis of Katniss's character from a pragmatic approach, she can be read in parallel with American ideals of progress and individualism, she challenged the Capitol in the arena in the training rooms several times, she adapted the same regime the Capitol entails on the contenders, but mostly she never gave up her true self. Katniss sought to make change in Panem through the help of the citizens and her friends, she*,* resonates with American pragmatism which focuses on making change with action as Hawkins notes "Contingency and probability combined to open up a space for human action, to establish a social environment with room for reason and faith, causality and will" (p. 1546). In essence, these values Katniss exhibited in the arena are an indication that American pragmatism remains a cornerstone philosophy that best describes American way of thinking, followed by materialism in which it played and still plays a major aspect of Americans.

## 4.3 Consumerism and Entertainment in the Capitol

The materialistic world of *The Hunger Games* revolves around the vast gap between the residents of the Capitol, and those in the districts. It is due to the Capitol's autocratic regime, the wealth in Panem is not equally distributed. The Capitol enjoys an economic plethora by taking advantage of the goods of each district, on top of that, they are used as tribute suppliers for the annual Hunger Games tradition. The series demonstrates a personification of a what consumerism dystopia looks like, Panem is  a rich country *par excellence,* but the wealth is exclusive to the Capitol and its citizens. Significantly, the  series invites  us to ponder  upon similarities on how  the  world is

unfairly divided, and how consumerism is immensely prevalent in the core countries namely the United States, yet the periphery suffers from suppressive governments, low wages, wars, and famine. Typically, *The Hunger Games* demonstrates a society where mass consumption is widely spread whilst the districts live in harsh poverty.

The world of *The Hunger Games*, especially for those in the Capitol is heavily dependent upon material lifestyle and the supremacy of this plutocratic world ruled by president Snow, a dictator who believes the districts are merely a means to fulfill their needs for resources. The series director reincarnates Collins' world of politics, by visualizing material life. One lucid example of the impact of materialism on the Capitol is viewed through the character of Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks) and how she is dressed in the reaping ceremony, in the first part of the series, she wears a bright purple dress with heavy make up that covers all her face, and makes her look unhuman, the appearance of Effie provides viewers with an image on how the life in the Capitol is completely different than the colonies.

She keeps wearing similar customs throughout the series as a representation of wealth and indicates the outlandish society they have reached. Effie is an embodiment of a materialistic person who values material, shallow appearances including everything else in this, imperialistic world that regards children as a source of entertainment. This is evident in the reaction of the audiences in the Capitol when tributes fight to death in the arena, they are consumed by their own greed and ego that they lost their human's traits.

Furthermore, Katniss Everdeen who becomes the Mockingjay, a symbol of revolution for the districts is obliged to integrate herself within this strange, shallow society; it is evident when she first appeared with Caesar on TV, and before that when she made her entrance with Peeta while wearing a dress on fire, which earns her the name

"the girl on fire". Katniss articulates with conspicuous consumption; she has to do everything to gain support from the Capitol's audience. Caesar Flickerman (Stanely Tucci) calls on Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) to interview her before the games commence as a part of the Capitol's propaganda, Katniss walks to the stage while the camera narrows down on the audience, everyone is wearing colorful customs. Caesar, the host of the interview also wears a blue fancy suit with his hair dyed blue, Katniss does not look different than these people at this moment because she has been prepared by Cinna (Lenny Kravitz) her stylist, to look exactly like a citizen of the Capitol and not from the poorest district in Panem.

These elements of material life suggest a community of excessive buying and a culture of consumption. This could be seen in comparison to American lifestyle, how people value fashionable clothes, and are blinded by the material things they buy everyday as Kohl (1988) describes materialism in America as "to value and collect more material objects than most people would ever dream of owning. It also means they give higher priority to obtaining, maintaining, and protecting their material objects than they do in developing and enjoying interpersonal relationships" (p.11), the director focuses on Effie's character and how she first appeared without emotions, and all that matters for her was the way she looked, alluding to the impact of the society she is associated with, and invites us to observe how relevant her character, resembling our world's obsession with fashion and material things.

In *Catching Fire* (2013), Effie's character-building changes marking her psychological and emotional upgrading, she becomes more emotional and empathetic compared to her first appearance. As a product of a materialistic society, in the scene before the games commence, Katniss, Peeta and Haymitch meet Effie, dressed in a

colorful dress and a blond sparkly wig, she offers each one of them a golden gift, she gives Haymitch a golden bracelet and Peeta a golden medallion, while she already gave Katniss a pin before. This scene provides a vision on the type of world Effie Trinket comes from, she is used on expensive trophies, golden and sparkly jewelries because it is a part of the Capitol's consumer culture.

This focus on material life could be found in other science fiction movies, namely *The Island* (2004) mainly from a biological level, when technology is abused playing a role in the way human become greedy and unsatisfied trying to defy death by cloning people to use them as organ suppliers, the movie highlights human's ability in using money for sinister deeds just like in *The Hunger Games*, the Gamemakers spend countless resources, and expensive technology to provide the wealthy with a reality televised show.

Interestingly, in the first part of the trilogy, Katniss notices the differences between life in the Capitol and district 12, it was shocking for her to see bread accessible to everyone, when she used to spend a whole day hunting illegally in the woods to provide it for her family, in *Catching Fire* (2018), Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence), and Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) are invited to a feast held by the Capitol to celebrate the victors, both of them wear extravagant outfits with matching make up, while Effie is leading them to the center of the celebration, they are greeted by the guests, the close up shot shows diverse types of food surrounding them. Peeta and Katniss meet two guests who offer them food, Peeta says he is full, they both look at each other and the man offers him a light purple drink, Peeta asks what the substance is, and the man says "it is for when you are full" the woman follows with a wide smile "it makes you sick, so you can go on eating…. How else would you taste everything" (27: 50) Peeta excuses himself and

takes Katniss to the dance floor, the camera shows Peeta's frustrated expression when he says to Katniss "people are starving in twelve, here they are just throwing stuff…" (28:30). This scene precisely has a profound message in which the Capitol's mass consumption of food and luxuries undermined the districts to the extent that the people in the Capitol live in their own bubble, careless about the miserable state of the districts.

Contextually, this allegorizes the western world and the allocation of wealth mainly in America when the periphery endures food shortages and extreme poverty. The US is well known of dumbing food in the sea because of what is known of a "cult of perfection" as described by Suzanne Goldenberg (2016), she argues that the amount of food is endangering both the environment and contributes in the increase of hunger and poverty "From the fields and orchards of California to the population centers of the east coast, farmers and others on the food distribution chain say high-value and nutritious food is being sacrificed to retailers' demand for unattainable perfection"(para.2). Apparently, the US consumers are not easy to please that is why the big companies race towards perfection for providing the perfect products, it is similar to the Capitol's ideology in *The Hunger Games*, they provide the audience with the most luxurious items, and the most diverse food to please them, including a televised game where kids kill each other.

Furthermore, the series is also an allegory to the effect of materialism on American citizens, when the system plays a role in enforcing such differences between people, some are left homeless, without health insurance and some others have built giant wealth empires. During the Bush's administration, a report on Democratic Policy Committee (2007) highlights the outcomes of Bush's policy on the middle class whereby healthcare insurances increased "health insurance has skyrocketed 80.8 percent since

2000", and … "prices at the gas pump have jumped 90 percent from $1.47 per gallon the week President Bush took office in January 2001 to $2.96 in the latest week of energy price data" (para. 1.2) including other statistics that show the depth of damage this administration had on Americans let alone other countries.

This example is to provide an image on the role of the government in creating gaps between populations, like the Capitol's policy between the districts, when some districts are more important than others which implies a better treatment despite it being an authoritative regime that abuses power. Hence, the downside of consumerism is clearly evident because people lose themselves in this material world oblivious to the world around them, especially in the current age with the massive rise of mass consumption supported by political systems. The series invites readers especially Americans to witness life from the eyes of the poor unprivileged minorities.

## 4.4 Panem: a Neocolonial Dystopia

Set in a postapocalyptic world, *The Hunger Games* trilogy describes the struggle of individuals under a totalitarian regime combined with colonial tropes, this feature is deeply grounded within the genre of science fiction. As John Rider (2008) argues the genre flourished in a time when imperialism was at its peak, it became visible "in those countries most heavily involved in imperialist projects-France and England, and then gains popularity in the United States, Germany, and Russia as those countries also enter into more and more serious imperial competition" (p.3). The movies can be read within a dystopian Science Fiction tradition combined with colonial themes, the subjugation of former colonies, the manipulation of power by the Capitol, and the use of entertainment as a code for taming the population. By observing the way, the Capitol seizes control over the districts using their past as a sign of neocolonialism and political manipulation.

This could also be seen through significant other Science Fiction works, such as *the 100* by Kass Morgan which was later made into a series by Jason Rothenberg (2014), it describes the aftermath of an apocalypse that caused the destruction of half of the humanity, the rest took solace in space on board of a ship. The way the movies/books address the invasion of sky people and lay claim on it at the expanse of the ground people, highlighting colonial thinking; how it is engraved among humans. Similarly, *The Hunger Games* focuses on the totalitarian regime that the Capitol enforces on the districts.

The series embodies one among the many science fiction genre conventions by which the colonizer, and colonized stand at the core of the story (Rieder 2008). Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), a teenager girl from district 12, finds herself in a vicious, deadly game that serves as sport for the wealthy in the Capitol. She was obliged to take part as tribute and participate in the annual Hunger Games tradition instead of her sister Primrose Everdeen (Willow Shields). These games are an invention of colonial oppression, since district 13 rebelled against the autocratic regime, it was eliminated by the Capitol; and as a punishment, the other districts were forced to accept the annual Hunger Games. First, the Capitol is ruled by president Snow who came to power under suspicious circumstances, he established a draconic system that controls the population through the manipulation of wealth.

Each district supplies the Capitol with a raw material, then it constrains them to take part in the annual games to entertain the wealthy, and on another front, to remind the districts of the past as it is described by James Keller (2013) "a social ritual calculated to signify the submission of the once rebellious Districts in the dystopian society of Panem" (p.24). In the first part of the series *The Hunger Games* (2012), which shows the reaping

ceremony, the camera focuses on the screen displayed before the masses from district 12, it narrows down on the speech president Snow (Donald Sutherland) gives each year.

> Freedom has a cost. When the traitors were defeated, we swore as a nation we would never know this treason again. And so, it was decreed that, each year, the various districts of Panem would offer up, in tribute, one young man and woman to fight to the death in a pageant of honour, courage, and sacrifice. The lone victor, bathed in riches, would serve as a reminder of our generosity and our forgiveness. This is how we remember our past. This is how we safeguard our future (13:57).

The oppressive Capitol reminds the districts of their treason and what happened to the rebellion in district 13. Furthermore, the trilogy can be read through a neocolonial lens, given the history that links the districts to the Capitol, they are regarded as former colonies that are now ruled by the Capitol, the series embodies a dystopian state governed by an extreme capitalist tyranny where citizens have no choice but to obey this system and remain voiceless. *The Hunger Games* like some other young adult series including *Night Raiders* (2011), *The Fifth Wave* (2016), *Dune* (2021) has a tendency of amalgamating colonial themes with science fiction as an allegory to real life politics.

It also includes science fiction and postcolonial themes together addressing significant issues such as hegemony, power and oppression, Reid explains how science fiction and colonialism "reflects or contributes to ideological production of ideas about the shape of history, and how it might, in varying degrees, enact a struggle over humankind's ability to reshape it" (p.3), just like the way the trilogy provides a postcolonial futuristic world. Therefore, *The Hunger Games*, follows the same mainstream, it criticizes American society and American politics especially colonial and neocolonial practices of the US hegemony.

182

Panem was found after an ecological, global catastrophe destroyed the world leaving North America as the only remaining country on earth. With that the country restored an autocratic regime. Hence, the former colonies are slaves to this empire, working as its source of wealth and weaponry. To discuss *The Hunger Games* trilogy as a neocolonial dystopia, while reading it through the world system theory which was first introduced by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), an American theorist who is well known of his theory of the world system theory, he categorizes the capitalist world economy into three areas, the core countries that are the most advantaged areas including Europe and North America, the periphery, the least developed countries and are exploited by core countries, thus, the semi periphery, countries that exploits the periphery and are exploited by the core. (Elwell 2003, para.5 ), according to this theory, the capitalist world economy is divided into three categories, the core, the periphery, and the semi periphery. In *the Hunger Games*, the Capitol is the core country that exploits the periphery (the districts).

Depending on the nature of the relationship between the Capitol and the districts, the analysis will use the world system theory as an approach of neocolonialism. The economy of Panem depends on the districts to provide necessary materials.
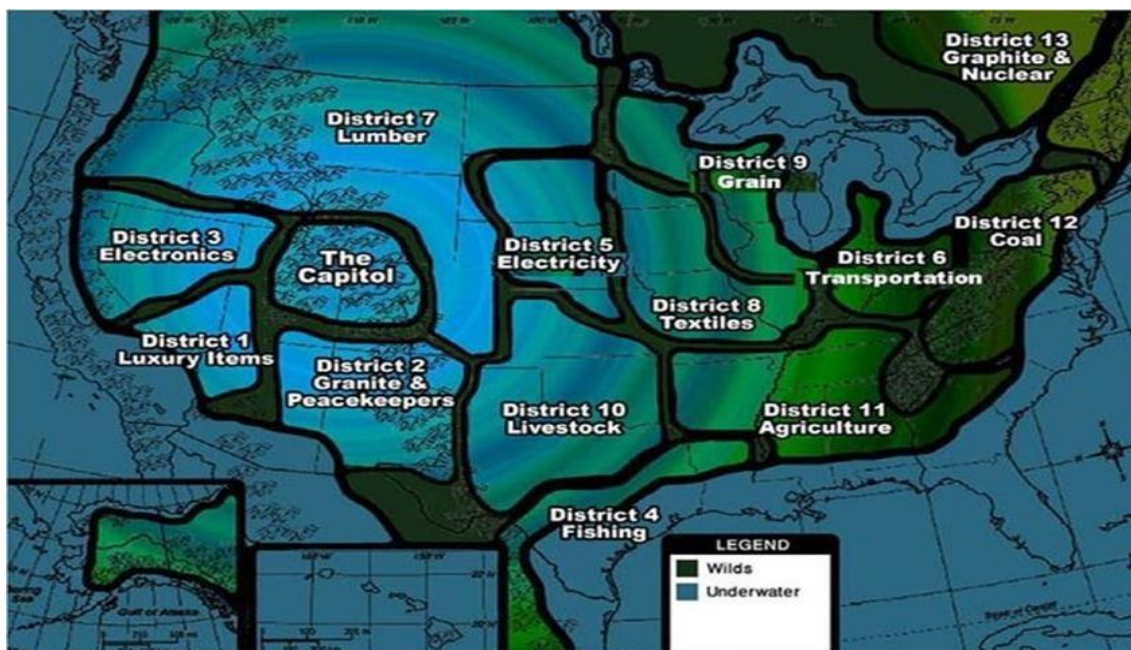
Figure 1: The Economic Division of Panem (Cleveland et tal, 2016)

The above figure shows an imagined map on the economic division of Panem. They are portrayed as good suppliers for the Capitol, and each district provides a specific good, the map shows future North America. District 12, which stands at the lowest scale among the districts, is merely a coal mining district, the Capitol disregards it because it was one of the districts that were heavily affected by the destruction of district 13.

In the first installment in the series, we are introduced to district 12 which is portrayed as a poor coal mining district, the scene shows a postapocalyptic atmosphere that resembles the aftermath of a world war, a woman is shown wearing shredded clothes holding a pot, men walking their path to the mines looking desperately remorseful. Kids hiding behind closed doors and an old man starving. Katniss runs walking to a restricted area that says, "District boundary, no access beyond this point", however Katniss crosses the borders to illegally hunt everyday (4:01). This horrendous state is a result of the Capitol's exploitation of the districts, the people in these colonies are not allowed to

emigrate to other wealthier districts, they are expected to starve to death than ask for the Capitol's help or other districts. Katniss on the other hand, plays the role of a father for her family, she takes risks by hunting illegally in the woods despite the jeopardy of being caught and killed. Garry Ross presents Katniss in the movies as a tough, resilient young lady who is ready to defy the odds of the games to ensure the safety of her family.

Another significant point is that these districts are not equally treated, for example district 1 is the wealthiest compared to the others, it is specialized in luxury items and jewelry. In *Catching Fire* (2018), Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson) is talking to Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), the winners of the 47th Hunger Games. The scene portrays Haymitch and the two winners Katniss and Peeta who have been forced by president Snow (Donald Sutherland) to participate in another deadly game to tame Katniss. Their mentor Haymitch tries to convince them to make allies in the arena so that they survive, when the game makers show the other contenders on the screen, we are introduced to each district's victor, the first ones are from district one, the wealthiest among the districts. Haymitch describes the contenders "Cashmere and Gloss, brother and sister district one, they won back the bad games, Capitol favorites, lots of sponsors, they will be lethal" (54:29).

This very scene indicates the discrimination between the colonies, some districts are distinguished than others which puts them in the closest spot to the Capitol, district 1 in particular is a valuable asset for the Capitol, the people in this district do not suffer from poverty like district 12 or 10. They are also able to provide necessary equipment for their contenders to be trained to participate in the Hunger Games, some theories suggest that the Capitol favors this district because they did not rebel against them before, this gives them an advantage to win the annual games.

The United States as a core country can be read in parallel with the Capitol, there are several instances that could be compared to the power vacuum of the United States, and its economic status in the world. Panem is a nation ruled by a dictatorship that depends on the profits the districts provide, some districts are wealthy, some are poor, including district 12 that is specialized in coal mining and ignored by the Capitol because of its poverty. Each year a young boy and a girl are taken as tributes to be part of an annual televised tradition called the Hunger Games. But, before that if they ever take food from the Capitol, their chances of being chosen to participate in the games get higher. Thus, to keep the people at the Capitol busy by the games that they have no doubts in the system that fulfils their grotesque desires in watching young people die, because they have been told that it is what they deserve.

Similarly, the Capitol employs its peacekeepers forces to hijack any rebellious act in the districts as a demonstration of power, and to remind the districts that they cannot revolt against this tyranny. Reading *The Hunger Games* as a media text that articulates with political and economic hegemony that of the United States specifically following Kellner's approach (1995). The trilogy could be read through what he calls a diagnostic critique which "reads films politically in order to analyze the opposing political struggles and positions and their relative strengths and weaknesses" (p.121). In this case, this chapter aims at reading the series politically by reflecting the images provided in the movies on American politics.

The US has a long history of international interventions in other nations. One lucid example could be the US manipulation of the world bank and international loans, in his book, *Super Imperialism the Origin and Fundamentals of U.S. World Dominance* (2003), Michael Hudson an American economist argues that most American believe that

their government provides economic assistance for poor countries as an act of solidarity. It is in fact a part of the government's imperialism, he writes.

> farm surpluses do not widely recognize the ways in which the United States has used food aid as a lever to dissuade foreign governments from achieving self-sufficiency in food to feed their populations. Yet what started out as a system of benevolent grants and loans to underdeveloped economies, at a real but moderate cost to the ample resources of America, has evolved into a strategy of international client patronage and dependency based on U.S (p.217).

In a similar vein, the people in the Capitol believe that the system provides aid for the people in the districts unaware or careless of the conditions the citizens of the districts. Hence, the United States expand its global economic hegemony just like how the Capitol handles the resources in the districts. This could be contextualized according to US policy with the World Bank, which is done through providing loans to developing countries, whereby these countries repay the debts with interests accumulating a de facto capitalist policy. Some statistics have been observed concerning this matter Hudson (2003) claims

> A recent study conducted by the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that during 1966–70 the World Bank took in  more funds from twenty of its less developed member countries than it disbursed. In other words, its collection of interest and principal from these countries exceeded the new loans extended to them (p. 203)

One example is the Philippines, since its independence in 1898, the country became heavily dependent upon the US private investment in the country. Seen from a world system theory, America as a core country uses the Philippines as a market for its profits whilst the country is burdened by food shortages, and poverty, class inequities and high debts. On another front, the country is also involved in corruption in which only the capitalist elites benefit from these ties with the US power.

Some other US hegemonic practices in the world includes the south ASEAN territory like stated before, the Philippines stands at the forefront. Interestingly, the US became more involved in other countries after 9/11 "American projection of a hegemonic rule began at the very onset of the anti-terrorism campaign… the recourse to ideas, such as that freedom and justice were at stake and that violence was justified, was the basis of American hegemony in the post-9/11 era" (Misalucha, 2011 p.220). The Philippines among other countries in the periphery provided a solid ground for the United States to spread its hegemony using multiple means such as aiding the poor, increasing loans for the economy, and lastly enforcing the military presence in the area especially during Bush administration, Misalucha (2011) argues.

> President Bush promised to ask congress to provide the Philippines an estimated $1 billion in benefit under the GSP, The US Department of Agriculture would also give $150 million to support the modernization of Philippine agriculture and fisheries.54 Bush likewise announced that he would seek $29 million for poverty alleviation in the Philippines, and that OPIC would extend a $200 million line of credit for private sector investment, particularly in the housing sector (p.221)

This US program known as the GSP (the Generalized System of Preferences) According to the Congressional Research Service (2022), "is a trade program that provides nonreciprocal, duty-free treatment for certain U.S. imports from eligible developing countries. The GSP is the largest such U.S program; there are other regional preference programs, including the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The GSP program expired on December 31, 2020" (para.1). Substantially, the US shifted its major support on the military "a tenfold increase in Foreign Military Financing from $1.9 million to $19 million for 2002; $10 million in goods and/or services to assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines; and an additional $10 million for counterterrorism and law enforcement assistance" (p.221). This was a strategic action by the United States, its

aim to aid in the area was first driven by the urge to combat terrorism and join forces to eliminate the threats and ensure security, second, to increase its influence in the area and undermine China, a potential rival to the United States (Banlaoi, 2002 p.307).

The Capitol on the other hand focuses on military might by maintaining its Peacekeepers alert in every district, and ready to eliminate threats, just like they eliminated district 12 in *Mockingjay part One.* The military presence in each district plays a vital role in maintaining this totalitarian dystopia, people are terrified to defy the Capitol and the military is there to remind them of the consequences of a rebellion. People in the districts spend their lives doing the same things till they die; they have no dreams and no future whatsoever. On top of that, the Capitol manipulates its power over them by planting seeds of fear and terror.

In the *Mockingjay Part One* (2014), President Snow gives a speech about the rebellious acts in the districts. The camera shows the president on a giant screen while people from different districts are assembled outside in the rain to watch and listen.

> Citizens, tonight I'll address all of Panem as one, since the dark days Panem has had an unprecedented era of peace, it is a peace build upon cooperation and a respect for law and order. In the past weeks you have heard of spiritic violence following the actions of few radicals in the quarter quell. Those who chooses a destructive path, your actions are based on a misunderstanding of how we have survived. Together, it is a contract, each district supplies the Capitol like blood to a heart, in return the Capitol provides order and security. To refuse work, it is to put the entire system in danger, the capitol is the beating heart of Panem, nothing can survive without a heart (17:09)

> President Snow's speech was intended to shake the rebellion in district 13 and prevent a revolution. The scene shows the Peacekeepers holding hostages who have been condemned to die because of their rebellious actions in the Quarter Quell following

Katniss. The Capitol refuses any act of defiance on the part of the districts and is always ready to act using violence by the Peacekeepers either by brutalizing the citizens in the streets or by executing them. He also indicates that the districts cannot survive without the Capitol in which he regards it as the heart of Panem and he calls the rebels radicals. Ironically, president Snow claims that he is the voice of peace and democracy, he believes that Panem cannot remain peaceful without this system. This is in fact a reflection upon political discourse in the new epoch, core countries maintain their political, and economic status through the manipulation of trade and resources in the periphery "In the New World Order, neocolonial power operates less through military force than through economic domination" (Koshy, 1999 p.2).

The United States on the other hand, uses its military bases around the world to ensure political influence which ensures its economic power as, it is like the Capitol's Peacekeepers forces. Hence, seen from a neocolonial lens, the US ideology of power is articulated "through a new universalist ethics of human rights, labor standards, environmental standards, and intellectual property right" (p.2).

Despite not being nearly the same as in the Capitol, the strategy of military presence is still a lucid example that could be of significance to the movies. In effect, this post-apocalyptic Science Fiction, is underlined by the element of an apocalypse, followed by an authoritative regime, and economic colonialism. With that, the series creates a speculative future by providing in part an imaginary assimilation of US foreign policy, militarism, and economic dominance over the periphery.

## 4.5 A Propaganda War

With its surreal themes and recurrent features, Science Fiction addresses different issues and often suggests scenarios that affect our realities from diverse aspects including politics. *The Hunger Games*, being a dystopian Science Fiction, offers an allegory for the power of media and propaganda in affecting individual's lives, and their futures. Citizens in the country of Panem which is an allegory for dystopian America, are constantly reminded of their past, for that, propaganda plays a key role in controlling people's minds and diverting power positions.

The films of *The Hunger Games* introduce us to the role of media, where propaganda is used as a war tool to infect people's minds and affect their opinions. Moreover, films are a media tool that are coded with images and signs that reflect reality as Kellner (2010) indicates "Films are an especially illuminating social indicator of the realities of a historical era…. Film creators tap into the events, fears, fantasies, and hopes of an era and give cinematic expression to social experiences and realities" (p.4).

The first part of *The Hunger Games* was released in 2012 marking the post Bush era and the beginnings of Obama's administration, yet the books were written during Bush's government and the war in Iraq. In fact, in an interview with the author and the screen writer of *The Hunger Games,* Suzanne Collins explained her inspiration about where the idea of the books came from, she says "I was flipping through the channels one night between reality television programs and actual footage of the Iraq War, when the idea came to me" (para.2). The movies can be read in parallel with the war in Iraq and the military presence of the United States in the middle east under the commend of George W. Bush. Throughout the series, both sides use propaganda as a technique of making statements of resistance and waging war i.e. a political tool. President Snow and Katniss Everdeen send each other's political messages using media mainstreams and live

broadcasting, both presents an image that holds an agenda, President Snow stands on the Capitol's throne and continuously threatens the districts to deprive them from their homes, while using old footages of the district 13, while Katniss challenges, resists and fires back using symbols of defiance and hope.

Citizens in the country of Panem are constantly reminded of their past, for that propaganda plays a primary goal in brainwashing people's minds. After Katniss was rescued from the arena in the Quarter Quell, we discover that district 13 survived the demolishment of the Capitol, and remained hidden underground preparing for a second rebellion, this district is known as a militarized society, it has been the source of weaponry for the Capitol which explains why the Capitol had to eliminate it once the rebellion started in the past. What is important is that Katniss became the image of resistance, a symbol of democracy and revolt as the Mockingjay[5]. She embodies a source of threat and disorder for the Capitol, she is to be eliminated or the Capitol would lose the order it established in the districts.

Returning to the idea of war using propaganda, the series presents us with political elements that serve a war agenda that deploys media artifacts as a method of conduct to mislead people and mobilize voices through signified symbols. For that, the aim is to read the trilogy in the context of their period, they are categorized as "Cinema Wars" (Kellner 2010, p.12). In other words, the analysis will transcode the series taking into consideration their time of production and other elements including the sociopolitical atmosphere that influenced the idea its making. As it was previously noted, *The Hunger*

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[5] During the war with districts, the Capitol initiated a program of breeding a species of birds called jabberjays, they were released for the purpose of spying on the districts to record and repeat the words they hear. According to the movies and the books, the Mockingjay is a combination of the mating between the female mockingbirds and jabberjays resulting in an entirely alien species of birds called the Mockingjays, they do not follow the Capitol's orders, they are a symbol of defiance and disarray.

*Games* were released in a postwar era that was characterized by horrific images of war, and instability which influenced the overall opinions.

Propaganda is known as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist." (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1986, p.7). It has often been a powerful weapon in waging wars, take for example patriotic propaganda following the United States in World War II through the repeated slogan of Uncle Sam "*I want you for U.S army*", the images of Uncle Sam helped in mobilizing people and convinced them to join the war.

Similarly, *The Hunger Games* establishes both a benevolent and a monovalent type of propaganda i.e., one that serves a dictator who has a primary goal, which is to eradicate the rebellion and regain control over the districts, whereas, the second propaganda is championed by Katniss Everdeen, the voice of the colonies and the revolution. Her aim is to free the citizens of Panem from this tyranny, Katniss as the voice of this revolution uses the same weapon President Snow is using to tame the districts which is embedded in the mastery of propaganda. President Snow employs an authoritative propaganda by manipulating the past of the districts as it is accumulated in the reaping scene.

People are assembled from every district including kids, a large screen is displayed in front of them showing images of the previous war, the camera reveals the voice of President Snow who narrates the story of the revolt of district 13 against the Capitol, the camera lens displays distorted flashbacks of the war that shows death and bombing while President Snow uses specific words, statements in his propaganda speech such as "upraising", "terrible war", he declares confidently that the Capitol regained

balance and peace, the screen shows a signed paper that indicates the Treaty of Treason which forbids any revolt against the Capitol, thus the treaty forces the districts to sacrifice two tributes, a young girl and a boy each year to compete against each other in a sport called the Hunger Games. Subsequently, this speech works as a strategy of planting seeds of fear and horror in the hearts of the districts, and the use of images through words coming from the dictator President Snow implies the power of the Capitol over these colonies. In this context, President Snow used the past of the districts as a tool to restrain their minds, in other words, his speech was to convince the colonies that whatever they do, the Capitol will always win, and any attempted revolt will be ceased.

In March 2003, the former US president George. W bush junior gave a speech about his intention of sending military troops to Iraq, in his speech he mentioned the threat of the Iraqi regime alluding that it has a relation to 9/11 terrorists attacks against the US, he mentioned this to trigger people's emotions, and persuade them of the legitimacy to wage this war. "The regime has a history of reckless aggression in the Middle East. It has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al Qaeda" (The Guardian, 2017 para.5). The speech serves as a propaganda vehicle to gain the public's support to invade Iraq, "Bush repeated the words Saddam Hussein and terrorism incessantly, mentioning Iraq as a "threat" at least 16 times, which he attempted to link with the September 11 attacks and terrorism" (Kellner, 2004 p.330). The point is that both the former US George W. Bush, and President Snow utilized propaganda as an instrument to mobilize people and gain their full support for an alleged noble cause. Besides, their control over the media sources helped in the spread of these messages and enforced them on the psyche of people.

What is interesting about *The Hunger Games*, is the fact that the story provides us an insight on the grave damage propaganda can bring to the masses if used by evil powers. Propaganda in the series was skillfully handled by the mastermind of the games Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman), after Seneca Crane (Wes Bentley) was eliminated by President Snow for his  miscalculations  of allowing two victors, Katniss and Peeta to come out alive from the arena. The New Gamemaker, Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman) had been working with the Capitol from the beginning as an inside man for district 13, he has been following Katniss in the arena and in her training sessions, he knew that she could be the symbol for the war against the Capitol due to her defying nature, and unfair of dying for the ones she loves. He contributed to the success of the revolution's propaganda against that of the Capitol.

Plutarch recruited Katniss to become the symbol of this revolution by manipulating the media and publicizing her image as the Mockingjay, a symbol of defiance, and the only hope for Panem to get rid of this oppressive regime. He even brought a special team to help Katniss deliver the best performance for the Capitol because it is a war spectacle that depends on media coverage and manipulating consent, especially that the new Gamemaker knows exactly the type of games the Capitol would play to win over, he is using the same games to overcome the enemy.

The media use in *The Hunger Games* whether by President Snow or by Katniss's rebellious team, is an indication to the effect of propaganda wars and the influence this instrument can inflict upon citizens, countries, and the future of nations. It is quite similar to the way Bush's administration framed many in the world and the US by convincing them that the war in Iraq was inevitable and imperative to eradicate terrorism, hence, the US media was biased to show what was really happening in Iraq and people were blind

on reality, only international media broadcasts provided some truths about the real intentions of this war "Al Jazeera and other Arab networks, as well as some European networks, talked of an "invasion" and an illegal U.S. and British assault on Iraq" (Kellner 2004,p.331). As noted by Kellner, the war against Iraq was seen as a heroic deed to fight evil, due to Bush's administration influence on the populations, the truth is that the war in Iraq was not supported by many in the world and was regarded as an invasion.

The media sources were mainly controlled by conservatism which provided a solid ground for the news to be biased, Kellner (2004a) argues in his article The Media and the Crisis of Democracy in the Age of Bush-2, that other media broadcasts were not allowed to oppose, and if so they will be accused of siding with the enemy, for that the war was a playground for conservatists to shape the views and gain control over the war "The result is that during war, the press and broadcasting institutions in the U.S. are little more than cheerleaders for the military effort and instruments of propaganda for the state"(p.7)

Similar to President Snow's strategy in manipulating the games and framing the truth, he always sought to manipulate his power using technology and media artifacts, and propaganda in order to send fear messages among the districts, and he was certainly not afraid to commit genocide against a whole district, just like the destruction of district 12 The bombing of Katniss's district was the trigger that made her succeed in the propaganda against the Capitol, she understood her part in this war and mastered it. In *Mockingjay Par one (2014)*, Katniss and her crew, are chased by the Capitol's airships, the enemy bombs a hospital full of children, women and unarmed civilians, Katniss runs towards the fire and her friend Gale(Liam Hemsworth) stops her, she is urged by Cressida (Natalie Dormer) the head of the propaganda crew, she tells Katniss to look at

the camera and say what she wants to say to the Capitol and the districts of Panem, Katniss stares at the camera while the fire is behind her "I have a message for president Snow, you can torture us and Bomb and burn our districts to the ground" she points to the fire and continues " But do you see that? Fire is catching, and if we burn you burn with us" (52:14).

In this scene, the movies try to send a message that implies the outcomes of war and propaganda is there to capture every single moment of it, it is similar to the war in the middle east, where children were killed and innocents' lives were lost, political leaders and commanders in chief accompanied by their media influence invested their money to whitewash the truth, a report on the Guardian provides a testimony of a Doctor in Iraq who witnessed the aftermaths of war and described the damage it had on children and families, with the use of chemical weapons by US and British forces, which caused the spread of cancer.

> In one five-month period, 41 per cent of the victims were civilians in civilian targets: villages, fishing jetties, farmland, and vast, treeless valleys where sheep graze. A shepherd, his father, his four children and his sheep were killed by a British or American aircraft, which made two passes at them. I stood in the cemetery where the children are buried and their mother shouted, "I want to speak to the pilot who did this." (para.3)

Ironically, this testimony among many indicates that the media hides the authentic truth and in case the truth leaks out, they refer to the deaths as collateral damage, President Snow kills civilians, sacrifices children, and pretend to do it for the general good. Children are intentionally targeted in *The Hunger Games,* and it is no difference than the death of children in Iraq for the sake of an allegedly good mission while the authorities never admit it.

197

The ethos of *The Hunger Games* embodies an allegory of modern America by highlighting political personas, mixed with media practices, and propaganda wars. In essence, the series implements a world where political leaders focus on mobilizing consents while spreading an agenda to serve selfish aims. President Snow and the leader of District 13, Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) both comprise two juxtaposed political agendas, when President Snow's aim is to protect the regime from falling apart by regaining power over the districts, Coin seeks revenge and has her own plan of making the people in the Capitol suffer by reliving the Hunger Games.

The series invites us to question political leaders' intentions, it insists on the power of media and propaganda in directing our views and affecting our perception upon worldwide events, catastrophes, and ultimately wars. It also invites us to question the news we are exposed, as it has been proven that the media mainstream is influenced by powerful elites which raises a question of democracy against corruption, which in the case of American politics implies the control of media by conservatives becoming an instrument of manipulation and help in backing up "corporate agendas" (Kellner, 2004a p.3). Hence, this dystopian series champions teenagers as heroes, it concludes with the idea that change can be achieved by young people.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In sum, *The Hunger Games* helps viewers imagine a future dystopia where neocolonialism and oppressive regimes take over the world. In fact, the trilogy encourages viewers to make critical commentaries and ask questions on the parallels between an imagined world and a real one, a world where colonialism is still recurrent in the far future. Furthermore, this cinematic work is regarded by audiences as a merely entertaining media text, yet it holds a meticulous account of the dangerous perils of

tyrannical system alongside the subjugation of a whole nation. In many ways, the text naturalizes significant cultural metaphors that recognize neocolonial practices through the demonstration of the individual vs. the system including unjust class division, resistance and defiance, the dehumanization of human beings, and media as an instrument to serve evil personas.

The series became a franchise as soon as they hit the box office with an identical success that was preceded after the publication of the books. When dystopia was at its peak, *The Hunger Games* followed by other Young Adults Science Fiction dystopias, became the most successful film adaptations due to the themes they tackled, therefore, the trilogy encompasses more than it seems. As an attempt to read this media text in its period of production resonating with the Bush era and the war in Iraq, the series invites viewers to contextualize the messages and symbols delivered, the grotesque images of war and the deceit political leaders can reach to fulfill their aims. The images of imperialism are addressed in the way individuals in the country of Panem are regarded as former colonies while their wealth is being harvested by an autocratic regime. Interestingly, the neocolonial aspect in the series is also highlighted with consumerism and material lifestyle, when the people in the districts starve to death, the Capitol is busy in mass consumption and excessive buying, the analysis attempts to read this in parallel with American lifestyle that of the modern era where consumption is a trademark that labels the economy of the country and reflects deeply rooted 19th century values.

Contextualizing this using a *mise en scene* theory, like camera angles, shades, and lighting, colors, these elements are observed with characters such as Effie Trinket, who represents a thorough vision of a futuristic neocolonial dystopia, to convey this neocolonial state, the series follow a dynamic system that follows the districts of Panem

and the Capitol as its supreme power. It also invites us to ponder upon schemes of propaganda wars and the role of media in diverting the views and perceptions of people. Besides that, throughout the whole series, the trilogy focuses on Katniss Everdeen featuring Jennifer Lawrence, a young change maker who is not afraid to defy this tyranny, all the while, she exhibits a pragmatic model to wreak havoc upon the Capitol and destabilize this totalitarianism, the aim to free the districts from the chains of this corrupted regime, helped her become a leader and a blossom of hope for the depraved districts. *The Hunger Games* is a valuable communicative media text that invites viewers to criticize current sociopolitical agendas and mainly works as an eye-opening account for young adults, and invite them to be change makers, but most of all it is a media text that holds a message loaded with sociopolitical concerns, it also warns us about the dangers of consumerism and human catastrophe.

# General Conclusion

## General  Conclusion

Reading films as media texts within their context is a challenging process that this thesis went through. First, the selected works enjoy a massive amount of popularity both in the literary world and academia. Besides, when much research has been conducted to deal with dystopia and young adult SF from different perspectives including psychology, environmental, economic. Yet, very few works dealt with YA dystopias(films) as political texts that can be read regarding their political orientations, which includes hypersensitive accounts in societies such as neoliberalism, racial issues, and discrimination. Significantly, dystopian themes have always been an interesting site of inspiration for cinematic releases despite its decay in the last few decades, thus a return to this genre is now recurring. This reoccurrence can be seen through new blockbusters such as the new sequel of *The Hunger Games, The Ballad of Songs and Snakes* in which it is expected in November 2023. Moreover, what is interesting about this genre, is its intertwinement with science fiction, and that includes new SF Dystopian series such as *Silo* (2023), *Snowpiercer* (2020) where themes of autocracy and isolation are key in the story, and of course with an emphasis on a corrupted political system. This appealing genre has now become a source of political rhetoric protest and a source of inspiration.

Before the Covid 19 era, we used to watch movies, series that featured the concept of global pandemics with the emphasis on the aspect of evil science, and human capacity of creating viruses to unleash them on populations. *Resident Evil* (2002), the famous series inspired by the video games *Resident Evil*. Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson is one of the most watched series that tackles this concept of a global pandemic, it revolves

around the release of a virus called T-virus, and a group of people embark on a journey to save the world to prevent the spread of this deadly virus. Other similar series includes *Colony* (2016), an American SF dystopian TV series which also highlights the notion of a corrupted regime and the use of science for sinister motives. Following the same genre another series that combines totalitarianism with the status of women is Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, a dystopian feminist novel that was adapted to the screen, it stresses on the subjugation of women in the far future; they are seen as reproductive machines and stripped from their civil rights. In fact, this series was a trigger for protest in the world. In 2019, the US vice president visited Philadelphia, and was greeted by a group of female protesters wearing similar costumes that appeared in the Handmaid's Tale adaptation, it was thus taken as a symbol of powerful feminist protest against oppression (Beaumont &Holpuch, 2018). Similarly, *The Hunger Games* trilogy inspired protests around the world in various settings. What could be noted is that this genre is coming back, and it continues to captivate audiences in the world of entertainment and academia as well. But more importantly though, is that dystopian themes are no longer ignored to be seen in our political climate.

Nevertheless, unlike the above-mentioned examples of dystopian series, the selected case studies were not fairly investigated from a political lens in comparison to Atwood's work for example. However, this does not make the chosen works less appealing or that they have less occurrent sociopolitical idea to deal with, they are in fact quite rich with problematic themes, and less obvious problematics when it comes to the popular vocabulary. For that the focus of this research was to address these media texts as political objects that tackle very sensitive matters such as colonialism, racial formation in Hollywood, white supremacy and so on.

The overall work focused on engaging two case studies instead of just one. Each chapter emphasized on a specific text, however together they make up a collective complementary critique of media texts. Reading these interventions collectively served the purpose of providing a broad, and rich account that investigates racial issues alongside other sociopolitical signifiers. Moreover, this study went through some limitations, perhaps the most pressing one lies in the poststructuralist epistemological lenses which it uses. The discourses read in this study are concerned with the interpretation of this, they are not authoritative nor absolute, they are among the several potential readings of the text under analysis. Therefore, the second pressing challenge this study undergone is dealing with Social Darwinism in cinema which was a struggle due to the lack of previous research in this area of studies,

Chapter two for example emphasized on finding Social Darwinist's trends in *The Maze Runner trilogy*, focusing on concepts of biological racism, and white supremacy in the context of American politics. More precisely conservatism with a slide mention of Hollywood's tendency of racial discrimination in selecting casts. This chapter also discussed the occurrence of Darwinian thoughts and their applications on society, despite it being a work of fiction, *The Maze Runner* showcased the impact of a Darwinian logic on populations. Chapter four focused on the politics of media, alongside colonialism which in the case of *The Hunger Games* includes a totalitarian regime while utilizing propaganda as a tool to trigger wars. To reflect upon the theoretical chapters, the analysis delt with the concept of Pragmatism as a purely American philosophy. Collectively, they create a frame which stresses the power of entertainment and how it can be read in parallel with authentic political ideologies. Reading these texts collectively helps to stipulate and locate deeply rooted philosophies including Social Darwinism, materialism, pragmatism alongside issues such as racism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

The selected works this research opted for, are all centered around the theme of survival, whether surviving an apocalypse, a manmade virus or an autocratic regime that exploits citizens, they all fall under the concept of survival. These themes are read in parallels with American history and contemporary politics in the US, hence, reading these media texts in relation to right wing politics and situating them in their time of production helps understand the crucial role media can play in providing meaning, it also helps us take movies and cinema more seriously rather than considering them subtle entertainment.

My interest in these selected works helped me better understand and scrutinize the possible politics that the films offer, besides that, the questions that initiated this research to take place are concerned with how Social Darwinism is still a predominate in the western world and Hollywood is no exception to its influence, second, how the concept of 'survival of the fittest' is highly influential in politics. Another question this thesis attempted to answer is the existence of both social Darwinian thoughts and American philosophies such as pragmatism and materialism(consumerism) in US society and politics, contextualized through the movies. Lastly, the ultimate question this thesis relied on is the way movies as media texts can be political instruments rather than mere entertainment. My hope for this analysis is to make readers decipher and contextualize such elements and try to read the narratives of movies within their contexts.

Nevertheless, although this work has attempted to investigate a myriad of themes, one prominent theme is recurrent throughout the whole project which is the notion of individuals against a corrupted system both in *The Maze Runner* and *The Hunger Games*, individuals are in constant clash with an unjust entity that controls their lives in multiple ways whether by using a Darwinian logic or economic hegemony. They are under this tyranny that exploits and controls their freedom while hypocritically claiming to do it for a greater good to maintain order. Thus, this idea resembles what politicians do to enforce power and spread their agendas. The ultimate goal was to give reference to American

society and politics in particular; however, the study provided some other instances such as the case of Germany during the post world war era.

In chapter one which stands as a historical background, the work introduced some important historical periods with figures that are essential in this study, a clear understanding of how Social Darwinism emerged and how it became an influential philosophy in American thoughts during the 19th century. Furthermore, since the study attempts to decipher the link between Darwinian trends and American society, mentioning the gilded age era is key, because after that Darwinism spread in America, alongside colonial thinking and other philosophies took place as well. The work opted for pragmatism and materialism due to their prevalence, both on the intellectual and political terrains in which this also helps to answer the question of how these philosophies are still recurrent nowadays. It also delt with concepts such as white supremacy, and its pervasiveness as a concept for racial projects by western powers, this term was linked to Darwin's ideas of biological discriminations towards non white peoples. The historical background was chronologically ordered to reflect the evolution of Darwinian thoughts on both science, religion and society. For that reason, this thesis focused on highlighting the most important concepts that followed this evolution.

The second chapter works as a literature review that contains definition of concepts and introduces the methodology followed in the analysis. Such concepts include dystopia, young adults and science fiction, these key concepts are essential to understand since the nature of the selected media texts fall under the same category. Moreover, this chapter also consists of the methodology followed in each chapter whereby an explanation to the poststructuralist method is given alongside the *mise en scene* theory. Furthermore, in the analysis, chapter three tackles *The Maze Runner* series in which an in-depth analysis is given to the characters and their interactions to signify the concept of 'survival of the fittest' and Social Darwinism overall, following Thomas the protagonist of the story

and how his survival's journey started, the analysis argues that the series implement a Darwinian logic wherein the fittest only survives.

In other words, the series manifests and highlights white supremacist ideals, and it is seen through the character of Thomas, how he managed to survive the odds of the maze and remain strong. Another significant component the series addresses is the way the cast is represented portrays a white savior complex that Hollywood movies are known of especially when featuring such survival movies. The film develops a false equivalency in which it holds the notion of white superiority despite the effort of delivering a diverse cast of actors. Nevertheless, the whole chapter revolves around the idea of Social Darwinian influence on both popular culture and in reality, through right wings US contemporary politics. It serves as an allegory to right wings political actions during the period of Trump's presidency and conservativism.

In the last chapter, the analysis focused on another popular YA dystopia text, *The Hunger Games* trilogy, in which a contextualization of authoritarianism and media in the form of propaganda are at the center. While exploring the characters of the story, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) embodies a pragmatic approach to ensure her survival against this totalitarian regime. Therefore, another aspect discussed in this chapter is material life and consumerism, as two prominent features that American lifestyle is known of, the focus was given to how characters in the Capitol demonstrate power through material things, especially residents of the Capitol unlike the districts. The purpose was to show the differences between two categories in an authoritative society, and thus, to draw parallels between the Capitol and the US society during the 19th century and the modern era, where consumerism is quite dominant in significant domains such as economy and so on. Moreover, the analysis focuses on the whole series as a complete media text, by transcoding messages, scenes, and the narratives of the films to decipher the hidden messages behind the film.

Propaganda is another theme explored in this chapter, whereby the Capitol practices all types of media deceit to control the districts and keep them at bay. This was read in parallel with the war in Iraq during George W, Bush junior and the reasons that lead the US to interfere in another country's business. This contextualization is indeed pertinent to understand that the film exposes a nexus between the power of media when used in politics.

Interestingly, YA dystopia is a unique genre that articulates with what is happening in our lives, it somehow draws similarities between an imaginary future and a potential one, the interest in this genre and SF is due to the themes they explore and the fundamental questions they raise, such as race, neoliberalism, colonialism and so on. These elements make YA dystopias a fascinating media text that can be read in multiple ways. Hence, the goal of this thesis was to understand the possible influence of some of the most controversial theories in history that of Darwin on Hollywood productions, and the way these theories are still circulating within a political mainstream. Seen through the movies, these questions are an investment to the future generations to help them see media and movies from different lenses and think of them critically. That said, as the new media is constantly released, it is essential for scholarship to continue questioning and politicize texts that might be deemed apolitical and dismissed as subtle entertainments.

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## Abstract

This research aims at contextualizing YA dystopias as powerful media agents that articulate our realities. The work opted for two case studies, *The Maze Runner* Trilogy and *The Hunger Games* series, both of which are categorized as Young Adult dystopian Science Fiction in which the emphasis of this thesis is given to the way these movies tap into the political landscape and precisely that of the United States. Hence, the research follows a poststructuralist approach and a semiotic contextual study. It examines concepts such as 'survival of the Fittest', white supremacy, biological tyranny, neocolonialism. All these concepts are analyzed within the films to reflect real-life issues. This thesis also explores the intersection of politics, film, and television, and examines how young adult dystopian media transcoded messages including, colonialism, capitalism which were circulating at the time. By reading two popular objects, the complete *Hunger Games* series and *The Maze Runner* Trilogy, this project suggests that these cultural artifacts, and the young adult dystopian genre, provides a space for exploring issues of concern in our own society.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى وضع ديستوبيا اليافعين في سياقها كعوامل إعلامية قوية تعبر عن واقعنا. وقد اختار العمل دراستي حالة، ثلاثية عداء المتاهة وسلسلة ألعاب الجوع، وكلاهما مصنفان ضمن أفلام الخيال العلمي البائس لليافعين الشباب، حيث يركز البحث على الطريقة التي تستفيد بها هذه الأفلام من المشهد السياسي وبالتحديد المشهد السياسي في الولايات المتحدة. وبالتالي، يتبع البحث منهج ما بعد البنيوية والدراسة السياقية السيميائية. ويتناول البحث مفاهيم مثل "البقاء للأصلح"، وتفوق العرق الأبيض، والطغيان البيولوجي، والاستبداد البيولوجي، والاستعمار الجديد. يتم تحليل جميع هذه المفاهيم داخل الأفلام لتعكس قضايا واقعية. تستكشف هذه الأطروحة أيضًا التقاطع بين السياسة والسينما والتلفزيون، وتدرس كيف أن وسائل الإعلام البائسة للشباب البالغين قد عبرت عن رسائل من بينها الاستعمار والرأسمالية التي كانت متداولة في ذلك الوقت. من خلال قراءة عملين شهيرين هما سلسلة ألعاب الجوع الكاملة وثلاثية عداء المتاهة، يقترح هذا المشروع أن هذه التحف الثقافية، والنوع الديستوبي للشباب البالغين ككل، توفر مساحة لاستكشاف القضايا التي تهم مجتمعنا.

## Résumé

Cette recherche vise à contextualiser les dystopies YA en tant que médias puissants qui articulent nos réalités. Le travail a opté pour deux études de cas, la trilogie *The Maze Runner* et la série *The Hunger Games*, toutes deux classées dans la catégorie de la science-fiction dystopique pour jeunes adultes. L'accent de cette thèse est mis sur la manière dont ces films s'inscrivent dans le paysage politique, et plus précisément celui des États-Unis. La recherche suit donc une approche poststructuraliste et une étude contextuelle sémiotique. Elle examine des concepts tels que la "survie du plus fort", la suprématie blanche, la tyrannie biologique, le néocolonialisme. Tous ces concepts sont analysés dans les films pour refléter les problèmes de la vie réelle. Cette thèse explore également l'intersection de la politique, du cinéma et de la télévision, et examine comment les médias dystopiques pour jeunes adultes ont transcendé les messages, y compris le colonialisme et le capitalisme, qui circulaient à l'époque. En lisant deux objets populaires, la série complète *Hunger Games* et la trilogie *The Maze Runner*, ce projet suggère que ces artefacts culturels, et le genre dystopique pour jeunes adultes dans son ensemble, offrent un espace pour explorer des questions préoccupantes dans notre propre société.