

"Mad Mad Fury Road," A Feminist
Analysis

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“Mad Max Fury Road” depicts a dystopian world in which the earth has run out of water. The fight for survival in the Australian wasteland is embodied through war, where “mankind has gone rogue,” (00:00:45) and where the only currencies are gasoline, breast milk, water, and bullets. It is a world of hyped-up vintage cars, imaginative weapons wielded by Cirque du Soleil actors, and an almost constant stream of violence. The film's plot revolves around the protagonist, Furiosa, and secondary character, Max, as Furiosa leads a daring mission to liberate a group of five women enslaved in a harem by the tyrannical dictator, Immortan Joe, and take them to the place of her birth: “The Green Place.” Although this film displays some scenes which may reinforce traditional gender roles and cater to the male gaze, the underlying messages are feminist: “Mad Max Fury Road” attempts to dismantle gendered thinking about issues of femininity, masculinity, and romance through blatantly exposing the atrociousness of patriarchy.

During our first glimpse of the hero, Furiosa, she is walking down a crowded dirt road, clutching a steering wheel in her prosthetic arm. Not only is the protagonist of this action movie a woman, but a woman who only has one arm. It soon becomes evident, the influence that Furiosa yields within the kakistocracy of Citadel. She drives a war rig, a large semi truck-like vehicle decked out with numerous weapons in addition to commanding a convoy of four other vehicles and many warriors called “War Boys.” It is unclear how she reached this position in a sexist society with no other notable female leaders and where women are continuously viewed as things. The leader,

Immortan Joe, an old, anemic looking male whose body is riddled with open wounds and who wears a breathing apparatus, gives a speech from his mountain palace, "Once again, we send off my war rig to bring back guzzoline from Gas Town and bullets from the Bullet Farm. Once again, I salute my imperator, Furiosa" (00.08.10). Being mentioned by name shows how much power Furiosa has within the regime. In this one light, the Citadel may be even more progressive than societies in which women of power often face scrutiny, even from men below them in rank. Before Furiosa's true mission is realized, she is treated in the highest esteem by Immortan Joe and the men she commands.

Furiosa's true mission in liberating the five women enslaved in a haram appears in a later scene when Immortan Joe storms into the women's chambers. On the floor and walls, in white paint, are the words, "Our babies will not be warlords," "Who killed the world," and "We are not things." Additionally, the women's caretaker, Miss Kitty, stands with a shotgun trained on Immortan Joe, yelling, "You cannot own a human being. Sooner or later someone pushes back" (00.14.35). This scene not only exposes the leader as a truly horrible human who uses his dictatorship to continuously rape women in attempts to produce offspring (intended to disgust the viewer), but it also brings into question one of the leading themes of the film: the concept of hope in general, but specifically being possible because of women. From the words, "Who killed the world," light is shed on the potential downfall of civilization, and how skewed power dynamics held in this society (in the clutches of men) caused its collapse, similarly to how the women were imprisoned by a man who attempted to diminish

every aspect of their autonomy. Additionally, from Miss Kitty's remark, we see a glimpse of hope in that tyranny is never permanent. This is the idea that when there are injustices, there will always be people fighting against them. Another scene intended to ignite disgust of the patriarchal society takes place in the barracks of the War Boys as they set a fleet of vehicles after Furiosa. Nox, a sickly looking War Boy is receiving a blood transfusion from Max, imprisoned as a human "blood bag." As people begin to rush past Nox, he asks about the commotion. A fellow War Boy responds "Furiosa, she took a lot of stuff from Immortan Joe... breeders, his prized breeders. He wants them back" (00.15.25). This scene not only has women described as "stuff" as if women are simply a commodity but also as "breeders." Describing women in such a manner: as objects rather than people aids in exposing the horror and violence associated with a male tyrannical dictator.

The next noteworthy scene occurs after an epic battle as Immortan Joe attempts to capture the women he enslaved. Max (being chained to the front of Nox's car) regains consciousness after crashing in the midst of a sand storm. Max has a cage around his face which connects to the shackle on Nox's arm with medical tubing transferring blood to Nox. With an unconscious Nox on his shoulder, Max catches up to Furiosa and the five women who are clad in diaphanous garments, hosing each other off. This scene, though clearly designated for the male gaze, offers a deeper struggle for some viewers. Yes, these women may appear for the male gaze, though they are only dressed a certain way because of Immortan Joe, a man who was already established as a disgusting, horrible and unattractive tyrant. If heterosexual male

viewers reach the understanding that the woman's appearance is only due to this man, and his treatment of women, it may strike an internal conflict between sexual desire and associating oneself with a rapist. Additionally, one of the women says, "We're not going back," (00.33.36) to Max just as another has her chastity belt cut off her body with bolt cutters. Not only is this act of defiance meant to be empowering for the women, but it accentuates the evilness of Immortan Joe, in that he attempted to make the women his sexual property. This certainly dampers the male gaze. Following, Furiosa and Max have a vicious fight (they view each other as threats) which challenges traditional thoughts about femininity both for Furiosa and Max. From the onset of their relationship, Max acknowledges how life-threatening Furiosa is, a fact which is continuously repeated throughout the film. It challenges traditional views on masculinity to see any woman as a threat, and it challenges views on femininity for a woman to continuously best men in acts of combat. After being aided by Nox, Max beats Furiosa and steals her vehicle which stops moving after a few paces. Furiosa had set a specific sequence so only she could drive her car. This is when the two teams up, both wanting to evade Immortan Joe.

Arguably one of the most disgusting lines in this film is uttered after three war parties: the Citadel, Gas Town, and the Bullet Farmers meet at a canyon impasse after exploded rocks block the way. One of the leaders, a man says, "All this for a family squabble: healthy babies" (00.52.54). This line only accentuates the failure of the male lead regimes both because it is being said (a sign of that man's ignorance), and because of its meaning. Enslaving and raping several women is certainly more

egregious and serious than just a “family squabble,” but very similar acts in history have occurred. For instance, before the 1970s in the US, marital rape was considered just that, a family issue. Something which should appear to be horrific to the viewer connects strongly to our history which has been dominated mainly by male leaders. Immortan Joe surpasses the rockfall in his large-wheel car, and catches up to Furiosa, offering another instance of patriarchal violence. “Splendid, that's my child. My Property,” Immortan Joe screams as one of the women, Splendid, leans out of the war rig to protect Furiosa with her body, her belly filled out with her baby. Again, the idea of men, but in this instance, the biological father having control over women and their children is critiqued. Essentially what Immortan Joe is saying is that he believes he owns the woman and her children, stripping them of their autonomy.

Traditional gender roles are challenged in regards to romance in a scene after Furiosa has escaped from Immortan Joe, losing Splendid in the process. Capable, another one of the women, discovers a crying Nox while taking her post as a lookout. He curled up atop the war rig after boarding, with the orders from Immortan Joe to kill Furiosa. This movie challenges traditional Hollywood romance in numerous ways. First of all, both Capable and Nox are secondary characters, and although Furiosa and Max have a complicated relationship throughout the course of the film, there is not a stitch of romance between them. Additionally, romance blooms between Capable, and Nox only when he opens up with his emotions, a very non-traditional characteristic for male characters who are often portrayed as stoic and emotionless. Nox is clearly sad, having not died heroically and gone into the afterlife. “I’d say it was your manifest destiny not

to" (01.03.17), Capable remarks as she lays down next to Nox. It is clear that she is attracted to him, but her attraction does not originate from a display of strength or skill (in fact, Nox is mediocre at everything throughout the film), an act of violence, or even his physical features (Nox is not conventionally attractive), but because he becomes vulnerable, and shows his emotions. It is this very mentality that has been lost by the other Citadel men. This is also a turning point in the movie when Nox joins Furiosa's team in reaching "The Green Place." To the viewer, Nox transitions from villain to hero when he has this interaction with Capable. Breaking down, and becoming vulnerable makes him a hero, while the villains of the piece continuously exercise extreme acts of violence.

One of the main examples of challenging patriarchal society and gender roles is through the ongoing instances of female aptitude. Furiosa continuously bests men in acts of physical combat, with her shooting, driving... One instance of her physical superiority occurs when her war rig gets stuck in the mud, and they are being pursued by a tank-like car. After missing twice with a large gun, Max gives the final bullet to Furiosa. "Don't breathe" (01.09.40), she whispers before resting the gun on Max's shoulder for stability then hitting her target. Max submits to Furiosa's shooting superiority without comment or the traditional flirtatious banter common in Hollywood films. This is just one instance of female superiority displayed in "Mad Max Fury Road." Many more instances surface when Furiosa's team joins a collective of all women bikers, the "Vulvani" or "The Many Mothers." While talking to Dag, another one of the women, a member of the Vulvaini, says, "I killed everyone I ever met out here,

headshots, all of them, right in the Medulla" (01.23.11). This woman's aptitude for shooting is yet another example of how the women of this film are portrayed as having superior skills. It is also important to mention the distinction between many attributes of this matriarchal collective and the patriarchal society which Furiosa and the women came from. The Vulvini succeed and thrive by rejecting most men, while the Citadel falls by the end of the movie due to the collective actions of its male leadership.

It is through a partnership with the Vulvani that a central theme re-emerges: hope. Not only hope for humankind but hope for the planet; this film places hope for the future in the hands of women. The same Vulvani shows Dag her most prized possession, a case full of seeds, "trees, flowers, fruit, back then, everyone had their fill. Back then there was no need to snap anybody" (01.23.49). In this instance, the women are literally the only hope for a better future. They preserved the past in attempts to safeguard the future, not to mention that women, specifically the original five are the only connection to a civilized world. "Mad Max Fury Road" deviates from many blockbusters in which the future of the world, the universe... is most often placed on a male protagonist. The future of the Citadel is placed in the hands of women after the group makes the decision to return to the city, blocking off the war parties at the canyon pass. They want to return to the only place with water and food for hundreds of days' rides. The most amazing feat of strength in this movie, in addition to challenging gender roles, is perhaps towards the end, when Furiosa kills Immortan Joe. After sustaining a stab to the abdomen she climbs aboard his car and tears off the bottom half of his face with a grappling hook. Although this is certainly a violent scene, it is also

a positive one. The viewers are meant to celebrate the gruesome death of a horrible misogynist. Contrary to many acts of grizzly violence in movies, this one is committed by a one-armed, non-sexualized woman. When they finally do reach the Citadel and reveal the body, cheers of "The Immortan Joe is dead" (01.50.32) erupt from the crowd as people rush to tear his body apart. Immortan Joe, the leader who held a cruel finger on the pulse of the Citadel is dead, and in his place, a glimmer of hope as Furiosa and the women ascend into the mountain place, and Max vanishes into the crowd.

When "Mad Max Fury Road" was released, the criticisms were extensive. Men who hadn't even seen the film were labeling it as feminist propaganda, clearly scared of the attention and popularity gained by such powerful messages, and a female protagonist who isn't sexualized and played by a South African actor. They should be scared. This film is a message to sexist and misogynists alike, that continuing to prioritize men and practice patriarchy is harmful to everyone. It simply isn't going to work. Alongside hateful reviews, were ones like "Sexists are scared of Mad Max because it is a call to dismantle patriarchies," (The Guardian) "Why 'Mad Max: Fury Road' is the feminist picture of the year" (New York Post), and "'Mad Max: Fury Road' Is the Feminist Action Flick You've Been Waiting For" (Vice). These are the accurate reviews which give justice to this amazing film which, among others things, challenges femininity through shows of female aptitude, masculinity through positive displays of emotions, and romance through the seemingly low-hanging fruit of a love affair

between Furiosa and Max evolving into nothing more than mutual respect and friendship by showcasing the deep flaws of patriarchy.

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