









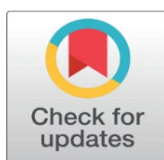
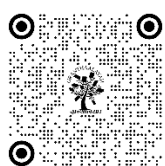
THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN *MAD MAX: FURY ROAD*: AN ECO-MARXIST ANALYSIS OF WATER CAPITALISM

Aishwarya U. ¹  , Nayanathara ¹  , Dr. Sreena K. ²  , Dr. Balakrishnan K. ³  

¹ Integrated MA English Language and Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India

² Assistant Professor (Sr. Gr.), Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India

³ Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita school of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India



ABSTRACT

This research paper presents an Eco-Marxist analysis of the commodification of water resources and environmental degradation as depicted in the film *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Focusing on the concept of water capitalism, the paper examines how the film portrays the control, exploitation, and unequal distribution of water within a dystopian society. The post-apocalyptic action movie depicts a world that has been devastated by nuclear war, where resources, including water, are scarce. This research paper aims to analyze the intersection of environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and inequality as depicted in the movie through the lens of eco-criticism and Marxist theory. It also demonstrates how the movie criticizes the exploitative practices of capitalism and the demand for a more fair and sustainable system through a detailed examination of the story, characters, dialogues, and ideas.

Keywords: *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Ecocriticism, Eco-Marxism, Water Capitalism, Environmental Degradation, Post-Apocalyptic Film

Received 01 April 2023
Accepted 29 July 2023
Published 03 August 2023

Corresponding Author

Aishwarya U.,
aishwaryaunnikrishnan24@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1SE.2023.506](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1SE.2023.506)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



1. INTRODUCTION

Water is a precious natural resource that sustains life and is essential for economic development. However, the privatization and commodification of water

resources have led to the emergence of water capitalism, which is characterized by the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, environmental degradation, and unequal access to water resources. In recent years, Eco-Marxist scholars have analysed the relationship between capitalism and environmental degradation. They argue that capitalism is inherently destructive to the environment as the pursuit of profit leads to the depletion of natural resources and the exploitation of the environment. This paper aims to provide an Eco-Marxist analysis of water capitalism in *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Mad Max: Fury Road is a 2015 post-apocalyptic action film directed by George Miller. It is the fourth instalment in the *Mad Max* franchise and stars Tom Hardy as Max Rockatansky, a former police officer in a world ravaged by environmental disaster and societal collapse. The movie depicts a civilization where the exploitation of natural resources for the sake of profit and power has created a water capitalism that is destructive to the environment and has a negative impact on society. It portrays the antagonist, Immortan Joe, having monopoly over water, and the protagonists, Max and Furiosa with a group of women fighting to reclaim control of the valuable resource.

Water capitalism has been a controversial issue, as it raises concerns about unequal access to water resources as private corporations or wealthy individuals often control the water supply and charge high prices for access to it, making it difficult for those who cannot afford to pay to obtain enough clean water for their basic needs. It has been criticized for its negative impact on the environment and for promoting social inequalities.

Eco-Marxism is an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationship between capitalism, social inequality, and the environment. Eco-Marxists view environmental crises, such as climate change, as symptoms of deeper structural problems within the capitalist system. In the case of water capitalism, Eco-Marxists argue that the commodification and privatization of water resources lead to unequal access to water and environmental degradation.

This paper uses a qualitative method to study water capitalism as portrayed in the film by paying close attention to the film's themes, characters, and settings through an Ecocritical Marxist analysis. This involves examining how the film represents water and how it portrays the impact of human activity on water resources. It also involves examining how the film represents the ownership and control of water resources, the exploitation of water resources for profit, and how it exposes the power dynamics involved in water distribution. An eco-critical Marxist analysis of water capitalism in the film helps to understand how the film portrays the relationship between water resources, society, and capitalist exploitation.

The research aims to examine how the ruling class uses control over water to maintain their power and how this exploitation affects the working class and the environment. The analysis could also explore the role of water as a means of resistance for the working class and the potential for collective action to challenge the ruling class's control over this vital resource. The urgency of the need for a more equitable and sustainable management of our natural resources, as well as the necessity to confront the underlying causes of environmental degradation and social injustice, are ultimately brought out by an ecocritical-Marxist study of water capitalism in *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The ecological crisis is an inevitable outcome of the capitalist system, where the drive for capital accumulation results in the depletion of natural resources and exploitation of the environment Löwy (2015). Some researchers have utilized Eco-Marxist principles to examine particular environmental concerns, like the commercialization of water. Vandana Shiva, in her book *Water Wars: Privatisation, Pollution, and Profit* contends that the commodification of water has resulted in inequalities and environmental degradation. She advocates for the recognition of water as a shared resource and advocates for the protection of the right to access clean water as a fundamental human right Shiva (2016) These works highlight how environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources are the results of capitalist systems.

Although there has been several literary works on the connection between ecological crisis and Marxism, there is only limited research on the intersections between Marxist analysis and ecocriticism in popular culture, particularly in the context of films. While there have been studies exploring eco-Marxism and film more broadly, there is a need for more specific research that analyses the exploitation of natural resources, such as water, in films from an eco-Marxist perspective. An eco-critical Marxist analysis of water capitalism in *Mad Max: Fury Road* could potentially shed light on the intersections between ecological concerns and capitalist exploitation of natural resources.

Mad Max: Fury Road depicts a world where water has become the most valuable commodity and its scarcity has led to a form of water capitalism where it is controlled by a few powerful individuals. The story is set in a world after an apocalyptic event, where resources are scarce, and water is a valuable commodity. The water source is controlled by a tyrannical warlord named Immortan Joe, who has constructed a fortress around it. Joe's followers worship him for his ability to provide them with water, and he exploits this to establish a system of water capitalism, where he has a monopoly on water and uses it to maintain his power and control over people. The concept of water capitalism is evident in the way Immortan Joe regulates access to water, limiting it to only his followers and utilising it as a means of coercion and dominance. For instance, when Joe discovers that Furiosa, the female protagonist of the movie, has taken his wives and is attempting to escape, he employs the threat of withholding water from his people unless they help him seize her. The scarcity of water has resulted in sickness and death among many people, and those without access to it are compelled to consume polluted water or trade their possessions for it. This creates a system where the influential have authority over a fundamental human necessity, leaving the less fortunate to endure its adverse consequences.

Nevertheless, the movie also depicts the power of revolt against water capitalism. Furiosa's insurrection against Immortan Joe and her search for the "Green Place," where water is plentiful and freely accessible. She, along with the wives of Immortan Joe and Max, resolve to go back and free the Citadel to restore their agency after learning that the Green Place no longer exists. This demonstrates that there is a path to liberate oneself from the oppressive system. The movie implies that access to water should be considered a fundamental human right rather than a commodity that can be controlled and traded for profit.

As the conflict over natural resources, which are finite and non-renewable, is becoming more prevalent, some ecological Marxists contend that the capitalist mode of production is the underlying cause of both ecological crises and social

injustices. They suggest that the only solution to ecological issues is to transform the capitalist production mode into a more sustainable and socially just alternative. In *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, it has been noted that the capitalist system's fundamental nature is to cause environmental destruction, requiring the establishment of a socialist alternative to tackling this problem [Foster \(2012\)](#). The concept of "Eco-Marxism" merges Marxist ideologies with environmentalism, asserting that environmental degradation often arises from capitalist exploitation. In the movie, the depiction of a world devastated by human actions, where water is scarce and controlled by a handful of individuals, exemplifies Eco-Marxist water capitalism. The privatization and commodification of water by a select group of powerful individuals have led to the degradation of the environment and the oppression of the impoverished. [A Hopeful Ecofeminist Ecology in Mad Max: Fury Road - Eve Cogan's Blog](#). [Eve Cogan's Blog - The Journey of Life. Aiming for the Stars. \(2022\)](#)

Immortan Joe, who dominates the water source, has now chosen to give a new name to water which is now referred to as "Aqua Cola". He represents the wealthy elite who have obtained total control over Earth's resources through capitalist exploitation. The movie illustrates how water capitalism is an expression of the capitalist system, whereby the powerful exploit their resources and authority to govern the fundamental necessities of life. In an online article titled "Seeds of Capitalist Destruction in *Mad Max*", it is observed that the real-life struggles that have taken place in the Amazon to resist Nestle's attempt to take over the water resources and the protest against Coca-Cola's pollution and depletion of a major aquifer in India, are reminiscent of Immortan Joe's monopoly on "Aqua Cola" [McArthur & Gomes \(2015\)](#). Moreover, the film depicts a society in which the underprivileged and socially excluded suffer from the consequences of environmental devastation and water capitalism. Those who reside outside the walls of Joe's stronghold are compelled to live in poverty and filth, while Joe and his loyalists relish in comfort, benefiting from access to clean water and other resources. This contrast in living standards is an outcome of the capitalist exploitation of resources, which in turn results in environmental degradation. In addition, the film portrays the disastrous outcomes of environmental destruction triggered by human actions. The barren and resource-deprived wasteland serves as a vivid representation of the aftermath of ecological exploitation. People are compelled to survive in severe circumstances, demonstrating the correlation between environmental degradation and human suffering.

Furthermore, certain dialogues in the movie also shed light on the issue of water capitalism. For instance, in one scene, Immortan Joe tells his followers, "Do not, my friends, become addicted to water. It will take hold of you, and you will resent its absence" [Miller \(2015\)](#). This dialogue can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the scarcity of water and the fear that people have of not having access to it. From an eco-Marxist perspective, this fear is exploited by water capitalists who use it as an opportunity to profit from the desperation of others. In another scene, one of Immortan Joe's Warboys exclaims, "We are not to blame!" when confronted about the scarcity of water" [Miller \(2015\)](#). This dialogue can be analyzed to demonstrate the ways in which the ruling class tries to deflect blame for environmental problems onto the working class. The warboy's statement implies that it is not their fault that they are forced to participate in a system that causes environmental destruction, but rather it is the fault of the ruling class who control the means of production and distribution.

Moreover, the film utilizes cinematography to visually portray the scarcity of water in the post-apocalyptic world. The scenes showing parched landscapes, dried-

up riverbeds, and characters desperately seeking water contribute to the cinematic representation of water scarcity in the movie. The visual contrast between the extravagant living conditions of the Immortan Joe and his followers, and the impoverished surroundings of the majority reflects the stark disparities and environmental degradation resulting from water capitalism. The design of Immortan Joe's Citadel, with its towering walls, water-pumping infrastructure, and the use of water as a display of power, visually further reinforces the concept of water capitalism and the ruling class's control over resources.

The movie's depiction of resistance against water capitalism and environmental degradation is in line with the principles of Eco-Marxism. Furiosa's revolt against Immortan Joe and her pursuit of a secure and plentiful water source is an illustration of the resistance against capitalist exploitation and the pursuit of environmental justice. The film suggests that a fairer and more sustainable world could be achieved by dismantling the capitalist system, where resources are exploited and monopolized by a select few, and establishing a system that prioritizes the welfare of the Earth and its inhabitants.

Throughout the film, there are several intense action sequences that depict the struggle for control over the water supply. Furiosa leads a group of women who have been held captive by Immortan Joe, and they steal a tanker truck filled with water and attempt to escape to a safe haven known as the "Green Place." Immortan Joe and his army pursue them, leading to a series of high-speed chases and battles. In the end, Furiosa and her allies with the help of Max, the male protagonist of the movie, are able to defeat Immortan Joe and his army and gain control over the water supply. They are able to distribute the water to the people who need it, bringing hope for a better future. The film ends with the implication that the fight for control over water is ongoing and that the struggle for survival in this post-apocalyptic world continues. Joe's power and influence derived from his control over vital resources, which aligns with capitalist principles. However, when Furiosa, Mad, and their allies come back and the milk mothers release the water to the population, they put an end to the scarcity of the resource and distribute it evenly among those in need. The notion of distributing resources equitably is a fundamental tenet of communism, therefore, the revolution against Immortan Joe can be seen as having a communist ideology. [Karl \(2016\)](#)

This analysis shows that the film offers a critique of the exploitative practices of capitalism and the commodification of natural resources, particularly water. This in turn perpetuates inequality by concentrating wealth and resources in the hands of the few while the rest of society struggles to access basic resources. This theme of power dynamics explored by the film resonates with issues such as systematic oppression, social hierarchies, and the abuse of power that exist in contemporary societies. The film's portrayal of a desolate wasteland and the consequences of environmental degradation can be seen as a reflection of the ecological challenges faced by our world today, thus drawing our attention to the potential consequences of resource exploitation, pollution, and climate change. [Kessous \(2016a\)](#)

3. CONCLUSION

An eco-Marxist analysis of *Mad Max: Fury Road* can enrich the understanding of water capitalism as portrayed in the film, it also offers insights into the intersection of environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and inequality in society. This analysis exemplifies the importance of Eco-Marxist principles in comprehending current environmental issues and their ties to social and economic systems. The film critiques the exploitative practices of capitalism and offers a warning of the

consequences of continuing to exploit natural resources for profit. *Mad Max: Fury Road* underscores the urgency of environmental justice and the need for a more equitable and sustainable world. One crucial step is to consider the development and implementation of comprehensive environmental policies that prioritize the sustainable management of natural resources. This involves creating regulatory frameworks that hold corporations accountable for their environmental impact and promoting practices that prioritize conservation, efficiency, and renewable alternatives. Education and awareness also play significant roles in fostering a collective understanding of the interconnectedness between our actions, the environment, and societal well-being. Promoting environmental literacy and encouraging sustainable practices from an early age can inspire individuals to become active participants in the quest for a more sustainable world. By prioritizing the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants, we can build a society where water access is not dependent on wealth or power.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- [A Hopeful Ecofeminist Ecology in Mad Max: Fury Road - Eve Cogan's Blog. Eve Cogan's Blog - The Journey of Life. Aiming for the Stars. \(2022, November 2\).](#)
- [Foster, J. B. \(2012\). Marx's Ecology : Materialism and Nature. Braille Jymico Inc.](#)
- [Karl, M. \(2016, December 18\). Ecologist. Climate & Capitalism.](#)
- [Kessous, S. \(2016a, April 3\). Imagining the End of the World in Fiction and Capitalism.](#)
- [Löwy, M. \(2015\). Ecosocialism : A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe. Haymarket Books.](#)
- [McArthur, E., & Gomes, F. \(2015, July 7\). Seeds of Capitalist Destruction in Mad Max. Socialist Alternative.](#)
- [Miller, G. \(Director\). \(2015\). Mad Max : Fury Road \[Film\]. Village Roadshow Pictures.](#)
- [Shiva, V. \(2016\). Water Wars : Privatization, Pollution, and Profit. North Atlantic Books.](#)