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Time's Up for a Change of Political Focus: Katniss Everdeen's Ecofeminist Leadership in *The Hunger Games* Film Series

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This article explores Katniss Everdeen's ecofeminist political agency in *The Hunger Games* film series (2012-2015) in the light of global social movements in the late 2010s. As a young destitute woman who defies the oppressive rules of an oligarchic and patriarchal totalitarian order, Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) represents the utopian potential of intersectional politics forged across class, gender, racial and geopolitical borders. In opposition to ecocidal and patriarchal conceptions of progress, Katniss's ecofeminist heroism is illustrative of the emergence of cosmopolitan political imaginaries that advocate sustainable, egalitarian collective futures constructed beyond the methodological frameworks of neoliberal globalisation and material dialectics. Contemporary with young activists like Greta Thunberg, one of the founders of the ecological movement Fridays for Future, Katniss can be taken as a cinematic representative of a new generation of utopian political actors for whom individual well-being is tied to ecosocial welfare and cosmopolitan inclusion.

Keywords: Katniss Everdeen; ecofeminism; *The Hunger Games* film series; cosmopolitan utopianism; global social movements; patriarchal culture

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Llegó el momento de cambiar de enfoque político: el liderazgo ecofeminista de Katniss Everdeen en la serie cinematográfica

Los juegos del hambre

Este artículo explora la agencia política ecofeminista de Katniss Everdeen en la serie cinematográfica *Los juegos del hambre* (2012-2015) en relación con los movimientos sociales globales de finales de la década de 2010. Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence), una mujer joven con escasos recursos que desafía las reglas opresoras de un orden social oligárquico y patriarcal, representa el potencial utópico de políticas interseccionales que trascienden las fronteras geopolíticas, de clase, género y raza. En contraposición a concepciones ecodidas y patriarcales del progreso, el heroísmo ecofeminista de Katniss evoca la aparición de imaginarios políticos cosmopolitas que abogan por futuros colectivos sostenibles e igualitarios, construidos al margen de los marcos metodológicos de la globalización neoliberal y el materialismo dialéctico. Contemporánea de jóvenes activistas como Greta Thunberg, una de las fundadoras del movimiento ecológico *Fridays for Future*, Katniss puede ser considerada una representante fílmica de una nueva generación de actores políticos utópicos para los que el bienestar individual está vinculado a la prosperidad ecosocial y la inclusión cosmopolita.

Palabras clave: Katniss Everdeen; ecofeminismo; serie cinematográfica *Los juegos del hambre*; utopismo cosmopolita; movimientos sociales globales; cultura patriarcal

I. INTRODUCTION

In the late 2010s, feminist and ecological movements such as the annual March 8 International Women's Strikes and the Fridays for Future student protests proliferated across the world. As happened with the 2011 Occupy movement, this recent ecofeminist wave of social activism is operating—on a global scale—through the networked structural paradigm that, according to sociologist Manuel Castells, characterises our technological Information Age ([1996] 2010, 2012). Coetaneous feminist movements like the Me Too online protests, the *Ni una menos* (Not one woman less) demonstrations held since 2015 in Argentina, Chile, Spain and other countries and the Women's Marches in the US are building argumentative and organisational ties to denounce cases of abuse and vindicate gender equality (Alcoff et al. 2017). The Global Climate Strike that took place from 20 to 27 September 2019, which gathered together 7.6 million demonstrators across 185 countries (The 350.org Team 2019), became a paramount example of the global outreach and cosmopolitan nature of numerous social movements of our day.

The intersectional and horizontal character of global activism is often highlighted in recent scholarship. Cinzia Arruzza et al. consider international women's strikes like the one held in Spain on March 8, 2018, which brought together 5 million marchers, as embodiments of a novel phase of intersectional struggle that overcomes the separation of identity and class politics and stresses the work that "social reproduction" involves (2019, 2-3, 8-15). In their view, a militant "feminism for the 99%" must look for transversal equality—economic, environmental and social—and build alliances with all the movements that fight for "the 99%" to solve the "crisis of society as a whole," which is deeply rooted in capitalism's exploitative logic (2019, 1-2, 11-13, 80-85). Likewise, Brinda Sarathy notes how contemporary social movements inscribe antiracist, anticolonial, anticapitalist and antioppression politics within a common frame of global inequality (2019). Jeanine M. Canty comments on a contemporary "movement of movements where the interlocking systems of social and ecological injustice are no longer parcelled out into single issue platforms" (2017a, x). Richard Grusin, for his part, notes how ecofeminism has pointed out "the structural homologies between patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and technoscience, each of which depends on enforcing hierarchical dualisms between dominant and oppressed entities, often on behalf of the mutual liberation of women and nature" (2017a, ix).

In a postrecession global warming context that exposed the nonsustainable foundations of neoliberal globalisation and the inefficiencies of national political paradigms, these social movements articulated repoliticised global networks of hope that deviated from the postpolitical and postutopian "civilizational despair" on which "homo oeconomicus" thrived, according to Wendy Brown (2015, 79, 221). The Occupy, ecological and feminist movements recovered a mobilising utopian drive (Langman 2013, 517; Tejerina et al. 2013, 383-85; Miller and Crane 2019a, 4) that is essential for transformative political theory and practice, since it prompts the exploration of lateral possibilities outside the status quo (Goodwin and Taylor [1982] 2009). These

movements are contemporary “levers of social change” (Castells 2012, 218) generating utopian political spaces that “keep society open to alternative practices and futures” (Levitas 2013, 205). Such social spaces of political dissent display the vitality of utopia as a critical form of systemic opposition (Tally 2013, 12) and forge inclusive sites where “the marginalized, the excluded and the indignant” can articulate “utopian visions of collective benefit” (Langman 2013, 516, 521). In this way, in a “cosmopolitanised” moment when “‘humanity’ and ‘world’ are not only thinkable, but unavoidable moral categories for humans the world over” (Beck 2012, 309), the global social movements of the 2010s manifest the budding consolidation of cosmopolitan political rationalities and imaginaries (Parvu 2017) built upon growingly inclusive and ecological cultures.

Contemporary films often articulate egalitarian imaginaries, horizontal strategies and environmental outlooks analogous to those enacted by the Occupy, ecological and feminist movements in the 2010s. Cooperative networks, female leaders and inclusive revolutionary processes have proliferated in the movies at the same time as networked world citizens have occupied squares, participated in international strikes and engaged in online activism. This article analyses the ecofeminist leadership that Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) embodies in *The Hunger Games* film series (2012-2015)—a franchise based on the highly popular literary trilogy by Suzanne Collins (2008-2010), who was also involved in writing the screenplay of three of the movies in the series. However, it must be noted that the analysis that follows does not deal with the adaptation of the novels into film. Instead, it focuses on the ecofeminist political potential that Katniss illustrates in the film franchise, paying particular attention to Lawrence’s performance, the films’ formal devices and the uses of cinematic space. In so doing, this article assumes that films based on literary works are, rather than “a matter of translation,” one of formal “reconstruction,” as film theorist Jean Mitry argued, since “the means of expression in being different [...] express different things—not the same things in different ways” (1971, 1-3).

In the film series, Katniss is a young woman who struggles to survive with her twelve-year-old sister and mentally unstable mother in one of the oppressed, deprived districts of Panem. Under the totalitarian control of the tyrannical President Coriolanus Snow (Donald Sutherland) and a police body of so-called Peacekeepers, the inhabitants of twelve segregated districts are forced to work in diverse productive areas for the benefit of an extractive elite that resides in a wealthy, high-tech city known as the Capitol. Following a civil war that took place seventy-four years before the start of the plot, a female and a male “tribute” from each of the districts that rebelled against the Capitol must compete in an arena until the death of all but one of them during the annual televised “Hunger Games.” From the moment Katniss volunteers to take the place allocated to her sister Prim (Willow Shields) in the 74th Hunger Games, and particularly following her joint victory with her district companion, Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), the protagonist becomes a revolutionary icon that rebel leader Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) schemes to exploit so that she can win the presidency of Panem.

Neither Snow nor Coin, however, succeed in bending Katniss's will to benefit their respective absolute power agendas. In opposition to the totalitarian ambitions and utilitarian dialectics that Snow and Coin represent in the franchise, Katniss embodies an ecofeminist alternative that articulates the political as a facet of the personal, reconceives heroic agency and advocates inclusive sustainable futures.

2. REBELLING AGAINST A PATRIARCHAL AND ECOCIDAL STATUS QUO

The Katniss Everdeen that made an impression on world audiences from 2012 to 2015—the worldwide box office for the first film in the series alone amounts to \$694,394,724 in 2012 (Box Office Mojo by IMDbPro)—is the rule-bending girl who manages to unsettle the foundations of a long-established patriarchal oligarchic status quo only with the help of a bow and a quiver full of arrows. Prior to her participation in the Games in the first movie of the series, *The Hunger Games* (Ross 2012), bold Katniss dares to shoot at an apple in the mouth of a roast piglet served to the all-male jury that is judging the tributes' killing abilities and sponsor value (44:18-47:02). The props in this scene have great symbolic value in gender, economic and ecological terms. The apple Katniss pierces with her arrow is reminiscent of the sinful fruit Eve prompted Adam to eat, thus bringing pain and mortality to the human species. The dead piglet holding the apple, for its part, alludes to the ecocidal effects of greedy extractive economics—that is, an ecological harm that, according to environmentalist groups like Stop Ecocide, should be treated as a crime against humanity (Londoño 2019). Gamemaker Seneca (Wes Bentley)—a godlike male authority figure that designs the living conditions for tributes in the Hunger Games—stands, together with the rest of the male judges being served by a female waiter, for oligarchic patriarchal elites that thrive on the scarcity and exploitation of the commons. By shooting at the infamous fruit of the Holy—patriarchal—Scriptures, the series's unruly protagonist hints at her intention to undo the gender prejudices and masculinised conceptions of power that, as Mary Beard argues in *Women and Power*, have dominated sociopolitical life and culture in the West since Classical Greece: “You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is coded as male; you have to change the structure. That means thinking about power differently. It means decoupling it from public prestige. It means thinking collaboratively about the power of followers not just leaders” (2017, 86).

Katniss's piercing statement for an inclusive conception of power in the scene described above is tied to the ecological concerns that her physical characterisation and performance bring to the fore throughout the series. Wearing no makeup and discarding any artifice in her demeanour or outfit, her frugal conduct, preference for natural places and cooperative solidarity in the Games result in a downsized ecological counterpoint to the lifestyle of the Capitol, which is characterised by extravagant costumes, affected etiquette and language, excessive consumption, concrete urbanisation and Darwinist individualism—the Games themselves being its clearest cultural exponent. Privileging

the protagonist's perspective, the series sees no utopia in "cornucopia"—a synonym of abundance that gives its name to the epicentre of the arena in the two editions of the Games Katniss is forced to take part in; a place full of goods and provisions essential for survival, but also a deadly encounter spot for the tributes that works as a metaphor for ecocidal consumption and brutally competitive neoliberal societies. In opposition to the Capitol's aversion for greenery, its inorganic decor and engineered landscapes, wild nature is the space where Katniss shines at her brightest—an unfenced, benevolent environment that provides her with vital resources and privacy, inspires her song lyrics and gives her the hopeful horizons and freedom she lacks anywhere else.

The opening of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (F. Lawrence 2013), the second film in the series, visually ties the protagonist's welfare and future to the sustainability of her natural habitat (00:38-01:12). A drone tracking shot of huge areas of burnt forest at dawn is followed by a shot of Katniss kneeling by a lake with her bow and arrows on her back while the feeble winter sun appears on the horizon. The camera approaches her slowly, replicating the direction in which it advanced over the woods, and then cuts to a close-up that displays her concerned frown and moist eyes as she observes the landscape. The subtle whistling melody of a Native American wind instrument contextualises the protagonist's budding heroics within a magnificent natural setting that has endured a history of brutal political genocide and ecocidal economic progress—the almost extinct Native American culture and endangered environment that the score, Katniss's outfit and the naked trees allude to. The protagonist's political cause, this scene suggests, is as much ecological as it is social—a cosmopolitan fight for ecosocial justice that seeks new open horizons away from its fratricidal ecocidal inheritance. Katniss's meditative gesture and moving gaze at the sunrise in this opening scene prompt critical reflection about the interconnected histories of oppression undergone by women and nature (Grusin 2017a; Arruzza et al. 2019; Sarathy 2019), as well as their connection with racial and ethnic domination narratives that occupy a subsidiary place to ecofeminist concerns in the film series.

As described above, rather than making explicit references to ecological issues in the lines that the protagonist delivers, the series conveys environmental concerns through formal cinematic resources such as *mise-en-scène*—like the piglet in the training session or the excessive meals in the Capitol—the use of spaces—Katniss's preference for wild nature as opposed to the Capitol's concrete urbanisation—the protagonist's performance—her frugal conduct and anticonsumerist ethics—and editing and framing choices that inscribe her heroism within open natural spatial frameworks of utopian possibility. These ecocritical formal strategies stress that the protagonist's heroic agency is significantly informed by her ecosocial context. While some scholars regard Katniss as a "reactive" hero who is empowered "merely on the surface"—a protagonist whose actions respond to external obligations and survival rather than following "active decisions" (Firestone 2012, 215-16)—I suggest that her heroism in the film franchise can be said to illustrate an alternative model of

empowerment where reacting to environmental circumstances and others' needs does not imply a lesser degree of agency. As Svenja Hohenstein argues in *Girl Warriors*, Katniss embodies a type of agency constructed outside individualist and patriarchal heroic canons (2019, 1-4, 72-79)—an ecofeminist heroism, this article contends, that is grounded in ecosocial responsibility, care ethics, cooperation and inclusion.

Feminism and gender roles are central topics in *The Hunger Games* franchise. Contrary to the movement-restricting tube skirts that tribute escort Effie (Elizabeth Banks) wears and her clumsy high-heeled steps on the gravel as she walks towards the stage to present the “reaping” ceremony in which Katniss and Peeta are selected for the Games (06:00-06:10), Katniss's flat boots and loose tomboy garments allow her to jump and run with agility in the forest (03:20-05:00). Unlike “a postfeminist neoliberal culture in which we are cued to undertake routine physical and emotional work on the self while cultivating imperviousness to the decline of social health, democratic institutions, and meaningful manifestations of citizenship” (Negra and Tasker 2014a, 25), the film series holds that Katniss's freedom is defined by her ability to determine, by herself, her conduct rules and existential aspirations outside consumerist, competitive market logics. She finds no allure in a mode of femininity defined by material empowerment and ignores female likeability standards despite the fact that “self-branding” garners sponsors during the Games. The protagonist's gender performance also departs greatly from the fragile, inactive role her mother plays at home. The latter's distorted face in an old mirror as she combs her daughter's hair before the reaping ceremony highlights Katniss's aloofness from the patriarchal housewife her mother represents (09:23-09:36). Both her mother's silent family-angel type and the high-pitched, entertaining, exotic female Otherness Effie parodies feel alien to self-governing Katniss. Running free in the woods, she challenges both the postfeminist aversion to “off-script” femininity and the idealised “hyperdomestic” type (Negra 2009, 152).

In the first film of the series, the low-angle close-up of Katniss's disgusted facial expression at the prospect of wearing a good-girl white dress for the reaping event (09:16-09:22), her reluctant performance of the girlish role as Peeta's fiancée that Snow compels her to play to minimise her rebellious public image (2:10:38-2:11:34) and the painful waxing and skin peeling beauty rituals she has to endure on a surgical metal bed before her participation in TV shows (29:01-29:45) stress the constructed, performative nature of femininity. The series's sustained foregrounding of gender concerns in such scenes revokes the “dismantling of feminism” that, according to Angela McRobbie, popular cultural texts such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire 2001) endorse, “a process which says feminism is no longer needed, it is now common sense, and as such it is something young women can do without” (2009, 8). As argued by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), the protagonist learns that one often *becomes* a woman by following others' expectations and through reproducing deep-seated cultural behaviours. Nevertheless, she insists on bending gender rules according to her will as she does with her own plait—sided

over one of her shoulders instead of straight down her back, for she prefers to comb it herself rather than having her mother style it.

Framing, mise-en-scène and Lawrence's performance in the series tend to reinforce the feminist values Katniss embodies. She occupies the same space as her male interlocutors in balanced shot compositions, wears identical outfits to those of her male partners—jumpsuits for the Games in the first two movies and military clothes in the last two, *Mockingjay – Part 1* and *Mockingjay – Part 2* (F. Lawrence 2014, 2015)—and plays leading roles in action scenes where men occupy secondary positions. Perhaps due to her noncompliance with normative femininity—albeit also replicating stereotypical representations of female shallow competitive relations in young adult dystopian literary fiction (Childs 2014, 199) and mainstream Hollywood films (Bechdel Test Movie List)—Katniss seems to prefer male friendship and, in contrast with Effie's "as usual, ladies first!" axiom, she dislikes any condescending treatment. A proficient hunter by necessity—she hunts to feed herself and others—she does not fit the part of prey in sexual terms either. Unlike the hypersexualised female leads of early 2000s action films like *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West 2001), *Catwoman* (Pitof 2004) and *Aeon Flux* (Kusama 2005) (Heldman et al. 2016), Katniss is hardly sexualised at all throughout the series, even in a bathing scene (09:06-09:15, *The Hunger Games*) and wearing tight fighting suits that would easily allow objectifying framing choices for an audience 40 percent of whom were male (Heldman et al. 2016, 10). This disrupts the passive/female-active/male binary of classical cinema theorised by Laura Mulvey ([1975] 2009). Physically, she features as an equally strong and equally vulnerable soldier to her male companions and she is the one that chooses her male lover between two options—Gale and Peeta—rather than waiting to be chosen.

As far as the love triangle plot is concerned, Katniss finally opts for Peeta—the humble baker, loving gardener and uncompetitive admirer of her shooting skills—over Gale (Liam Hemsworth)—the more handsome and taller of the two, a breadwinner, playfully patronising family protector and cold-blooded soldier. While Gale's condescending first line in the franchise—"What are you gonna do with that when you kill it?" (05:02)—makes Katniss lose the deer she has in her sights, Peeta acknowledges her superior survival skills in the Games from the start and follows her lead in the arena. When Katniss bends over Peeta and places her hand on his neck to kiss him in the first film in the series (1:52:52), when she handcuffs him after his mental highjacking until he relearns from her what is "real or not real" in *Mockingjay – Part 2* (1:23:48), and when she gets into his bed right before the conclusion of the franchise (2:02:40), viewers learn that, also in love issues, Katniss prefers to take the initiative regardless of gender conventions.

In this way, the series's formal choices and Katniss's characterisation and performance relate the protagonist's heroics to behaviours traditionally associated with both masculinity—risk-taking boldness, shooting skills, family provider roles—and femininity—nurturing social relations. Katniss's mixture of gender codes "gives her

increased agency as she has a wider range of responses at her disposal” (Pulliam 2014, 181). As Manohla Dargis argues, Lawrence’s character is not “locked into gender”; she “doesn’t shift between masculinity and femininity; she inhabits both, which may mean that neither really fits. [...] Katniss nurtures and she kills” (Scott and Dargis 2012). Her in-betweenness allows her to fit in multiple genre roles—“a western hero, an action hero, a romantic heroine and a teen idol”—outside the “mother, girlfriend, victim” types (Scott and Dargis 2012). The limited life options of these female cinematic types have been depicted in Hollywood movies from *The Reckless Moment* (Ophüls 1949), *The Stepford Wives* (Forbes 1975), *Thelma & Louise* (Scott 1991) and *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood 1995) to *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes 2008), *mother!* (Aronofsky 2017) and *Tully* (Reitman 2018), among others. As illustrated by the ill-fated protagonist in *mother!*, played by Lawrence herself, the perpetuation of patriarchal cultures is not only detrimental to women’s personal development as free individuals but also to society as a whole and to ecological sustainability, since the private-public divide in which the politics of patriarchy is grounded implies that care ethics are often constrained to the domestic sphere alone.

3. THE RESILIENCE OF PATRIARCHAL CULTURES

The series’s concluding scene, which takes place four or five years after the rebel districts overthrow Snow, Katniss kills self-proclaimed President Coin and Panem becomes a democratic republic, surprisingly remodels the protagonist’s look and environment, showing her as a married mother of two. With her back to the camera, Katniss appears on the right-hand side of the shot, sitting on a picnic blanket in the midst of a yellowish, sun-drenched green valley, while Peeta and their eldest son play in the sunny grass further away from the camera and birds chirp cheerfully around them (2:03:35). According to Kathryn Strong Hansen, the fact that Katniss decides to have offspring “demonstrates her faith that the world has changed enough to be a safe place for children” (2015, 176). The lush mise-en-scène displays the fertile future—in ecological and family terms—that lies ahead of Panem’s democratic conversion. In the medium shot that follows (2:03:44), Katniss looks ahead, with a slightly smiling but also cryptically pensive expression, holding her baby in her arms. Responding attentively to her whimpering, just as she does with Prim in the opening scene of the series, Katniss’s yellow flowery dress and loose hairdo radically depart from the braided Amazon outfits she used to wear to hunt in the woods. No longer androgynous, her look fits the conventional feminine standards that once disgusted her, as she calmly addresses the following final lines to her baby: “Did you have a nightmare? I have nightmares, too. Someday I’ll explain it to you, why they came, why they won’t ever go away, but I’ll tell you how I survive it. I make a list in my head of all the good things I’ve seen someone do. Every little thing I can remember. It’s like a game. I do it over and over. It gets a little tedious after all these years, but... there are much worse games to play” (2:04:00).

Given the consistent stylistic and lifestyle choices that Katniss makes throughout the series, her sudden aesthetic “locking,” drawing on Dargis’s term (Scott and Dargis 2012), into a long-established stereotype of maternal femininity enhanced by pastoral scenery makes the series’s conclusion look forced and artificial—almost as if it were one last propaganda clip that the protagonist has been coerced to star in, similar to those arranged previously by Snow and Coin (F. Lawrence 2014, 35:00), but now selling the virtues of nuclear family life. The mise-en-scène can be related to the “retreatist” postfeminist self-recovery narrative that Diane Negra describes as characteristic of early twenty-first-century popular fiction like the *Desperate Housewives* TV series (McDougall et al. 2004-2012), which “trades on a notion of feminism as rigid, serious, anti-sex and romance, difficult and extremist” to celebrate “the pleasure and comfort of (re)claiming an identity uncomplicated by gender politics” (2009, 2), often through a “romanticizing alibi” and a “hometown fantasy” that evades the pressing “social and economic realities” that disproportionately impact on women (46). If Katniss owns the discourse—she delivers the last lines in the series and shapes the historical narrative—and the privileged perspective—the camera stays by her while she observes Peeta playing with their older son—could she not have kept her customary androgynous style as a mother of two in a wilder setting closer to her prematernal preferences for the woods and her unruly personality?

This sudden aesthetic redefinition of the protagonist in the series’s epilogue does not, though, cancel out the ecofeminist discourses she embodies across the rest of the four films. As Peter Brooks states in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, it is in the middle part of a plot, not in the “quiescence” of its beginning or end, where “the narratable” happens—a prolific middle ground in which tensions and deviations from the norm can be explored before the final resolution takes place (1992, 103). Celestino Deleyto, for his part, argues against readings of romantic comedy that concentrate excessively on the happy ending convention while overlooking the “variety, contradiction and complexity” found in the middle of film narratives (2011). Drawing on Brooks and Deleyto, it is in the very long middle part of *The Hunger Games* series where the potential of Katniss’s ecofeminist agency develops and meets its obstacles—political opponents and moral choices—and then emerges as an alternative to material patriarchal political cultures, regardless of the more conventional pastoral finale. Moreover, the ending remains true to the the-personal-is-political premise that informs the protagonist’s politics all through the series. Katniss’s invocation of the harrowing past she has survived and the fact that she shares child-care duties with Peeta challenge depoliticised readings of the protagonist’s family life, such as those by Noah De Lissovoy et al. (2017) and Joe Tompkins (2018). Bringing up and educating children in egalitarian democratic values is a political task too—it is “the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals” in the society of the “homo oeconomicus,” as Brown puts it (2015, 106-107), or “the ground zero of revolution,” according to

Silvia Federici, who calls for a “politics that doesn’t separate the time of political organizing from that of reproduction” (2019, 196, 5).

On the other hand, the tension between the ecofeminist cosmopolitanism that Katniss embodies through the main body of the series and her aesthetic redefinition in the epilogue is illustrative of the sociocultural context of the series, one at the crossroads between the global emergence of inclusive, ecological, cosmopolitan politics—as articulated by the global social movements of the late 2010s—and the unyielding presence of long-standing patriarchal, neoliberal, nationalist politico-economic cultures—as shown in the discourses of world leaders like US former President Donald Trump. The two political trends respond differently to the global postrecession context and shared risks like climate change and the coronavirus pandemic, and they both lay bare—albeit in widely diverging ways—the close interconnection of gender and economics with distinct understandings of utopia and desirable futures. Lucy Sargisson explains the coexistence of a processual, dialogical, feminist conception of utopia with patriarchal, economicist, conservative forms of utopianism as follows: “for some, utopia is interpreted as desiring the death of politics and the end of change, in return for which it offers perfection. I have suggested that this can be read in terms of masculine economics of social exchange, and that the perfect gift of death which is the blueprint utopia be rejected in favour of the more difficult and slippery, open-ended vision which contemporary feminist utopianism represents” (1996, 230).

As far as gender politics is concerned, the Hollywood industry of the 2010s stood at this crossroads too. The decade witnessed the rise of collective antiabuse initiatives sponsored by women in the film industry like Time’s Up and #MeToo; projects like Geena Davis’s Institute on Gender in Media for research into women’s underrepresentation in the movies; public denunciations of unequal payment to female actors by stars like Lawrence herself (J. Lawrence 2015); and award speeches advocating gender inclusion by actors such as Patricia Arquette, Frances McDormand, Meryl Streep and Oprah Winfrey, among others. At the same time, self-governing female leads have notably proliferated across genres in cinematic texts—in science fiction movies like *Gravity* (Cuarón 2013), *Interstellar* (Nolan 2014), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller 2015) and *Arrival* (Villeneuve 2016); superhero and adventure titles like *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams 2015), *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins 2017) and *Captain Marvel* (Boden and Fleck 2019); action thrillers like *Lucy* (Besson 2014), *Atomic Blonde* (Leitch 2017) and *Red Sparrow* (F. Lawrence 2018); comedies like *The Heat* (Feig 2013), *Lady Bird* (Gerwig 2017) and *Long Shot* (Levine 2019); Disney films such as *Brave* (Andrews and Chapman 2012), *Frozen* (Buck and Lee 2013) and *Moana* (Clements and Musker 2016); teen dystopias like *Divergent* (Burger 2014) and *The Hunger Games* series itself; biopics such as *Denial* (Jackson 2016), *Hidden Figures* (Melfi 2016) and *Harriet* (Lemmons 2019); and dramas like *Phantom Thread* (Anderson 2017), *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (McDonagh 2017) and *Widows* (McQueen 2018). Independent female protagonists also star in many contemporary TV series, such as *Top of the Lake*

(Campion et al. 2013, 2017), *Fleabag* (Kirkby and Bradbeer 2016-2019), *Big Little Lies* (Vallée and Arnold 2017-2019), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Morano et al. 2017-), *Killing Eve* (Bradbeer et al. 2018-) and *Euphoria* (Fritzzell et al. 2019-).

Yet, as Helen Warner and Heather Savigny note, although the growing number of female-led top-grossing films might prompt celebratory readings, these movies “remain the exception” and their treatment in the press “reveals longstanding cultural anxieties and ambivalence towards women” (2015, 112-13, 128). According to “The Geena Benchmark Report: 2007-2017,” male leads vastly outnumbered female leads—71.3% to 28.8%—in the 100 top-grossing family films released in that decade, despite the fact that women represent half of the film-going population and greater gender diversity in films has been shown to translate into higher box office revenues (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2019a). In addition, women in the top-grossing films of 2014 and 2015 accounted for only roughly half of the speaking time of male characters (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media n.d.), and gender stereotypes prove to be resilient: female characters are six times more likely than male characters to be shown in revealing clothing—27.3% to 4.6%—while male characters are more likely to be shown as violent—44.0% to 24.5%—and criminal—29.9% to 17.0%—in the top-grossing films of 2018 (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2019b). As revealed by these figures, patriarchal culture continues to prevail in the movies, but the trend for gender parity is upward—female leads reached 39.1% and accounted for 36% of speaking time in 2018 (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2019b).

4. A NEW GENERATION OF UTOPIAN POLITICAL ACTORS

Within this cinematic panorama, the rebellious female character Katniss might be particularly apt to embody the intersectional egalitarian targets sponsored by Hollywood actors and social activists in the last decade. If Sigourney Weaver's Ripley in *Alien* (Scott 1979) and Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* (Cameron 1984) “were vessels of maternal rage, grown-ups weaponizing their protective instincts” (Scott and Dargis 2012), Katniss represents an awakening political actor that brings maternal and ecological care ethics into the public political terrain. In Dargis's view, Katniss is “an American Eve, battered, bruised and deeply knowing” who, unlike the optimistic and innocent “American Adam” national archetype, “scrambles through a garden not of her making on her way to a new world,” inhabiting “a new kind of frontier that is a dystopian nightmare but one that has its utopian moment [...] in that race and gender stereotypes have become seemingly irrelevant” (2012). Drawing on this idea, Katniss can be defined as a cosmopolitan secular Eve, rather than an American one, for the space of democratic possibility she helps bring forward in Panem traverses the imposed borders—geographic, political, gender, racial, economic—and breaks with a long-standing patriarchal legacy that situates women as vehicles for male-led religious, cultural and sociopolitical discourses and goals. Rather

than asking for an equal share of power in plutocratic ecocidal systems like the mature female leaders played by Julianne Moore, Jodie Foster, Patricia Clarkson and Kate Winslet in the dystopian worlds of *The Hunger Games*, *Elysium* (Blomkamp 2013), *The Maze Runner* (Ball 2014) and *Divergent*—all filmic representatives of “the equal opportunity domination” Arruzza et al. argue against (2019, 2-4)—Katniss embodies a renovated feminism tied to cosmopolitan imaginaries—ecological and egalitarian—that seeks to transform sociopolitical cultures.

Recent scholarship has noted the growing ecosocial awareness and political commitment enacted by young film protagonists like Katniss in the 2010s and how they target the sensibilities and utopian aspirations of new generations of viewers. For Elissa H. Nelson, “franchise teen films” like *The Hunger Games* series blend teen-movie conventions with the epic heroic journeys of high-concept blockbusters, casting coming-of-age heroes “needing to balance personal growth along with being saviours and the hope for a better world” (2017, 132-33). Analysing the franchise’s fairy-tale plot in relation to the post-2008 recession context, Dorothy Noyes explores how the series retrieves collective concerns and “models for action” that were central to nineteenth-century oral fairy-tales—i.e., those thought fit for “peasant cooperatives, unionization, and mass emigration”—but later declined in favour of individualist concerns—social mobility, free choice, self-fulfilment and recognition, among others—in the “mass-produced fairy tales” of capitalist and liberal Western societies (2015, 4, 10). Similarly, Mark Fisher reads the proliferation of political “Young Adult Dystopias” like *The Hunger Games* in the postcrisis years—and following the *Harry Potter* (Columbus et al. 2001-2011) magic and *Twilight* (Hardwicke et al. 2008-2012) vampire series—as indicative of a cultural shift experienced by a generation that was “asked to accept that its quality of life will be worse than that of its parents” but is now awakening to “revolutionary consciousness” (2012, 27-29). Whereas initially, Fisher argues, Katniss and Peeta “think like slaves, taking it for granted that the Capitol’s power cannot be broken,” the two protagonists’ threat of suicide in protest against the “one-victor” rule of the Games along with the districts’ resistance articulate the incipient emergence of a politically engaged “multitude” rising against the “Empire,” drawing on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s terms (2004). Fisher states that, in comparison to the “fatalism” of *Never Let Me Go* (Romanek 2010) and the utopian hesitation of the ending of *In Time* (Niccol 2011), *The Hunger Games* points at the insurrectionary world of solidarity that could be about to replace a decayed neoliberal dystopia (2012, 30-33).

If, as Noyes argues, the fairy tale—“the story of a young person who leaves a problematic home, encounters tests and obstacles, accomplishes a task, and is recognised, rewarded, and installed in a new home”—is “our touchstone for articulating the normative life course of the individual” (2015, 4), Katniss’s ecofeminist rebelliousness would address and speak of a youth for whom ecosocial welfare and egalitarianism are tied to personal growth and well-being. That is to say, a new generation of political agents emerging simultaneously in the social activist (Castells 2012; Mason 2012; Parvu 2017) and the

cinematic spheres (Fisher 2012; Noyes 2015; Nelson 2017)—young people who are unwilling to think, act, imagine or plan the future through an inherited politics of exclusion. Katniss’s political agency challenges the divides between identity and class politics, the personal and the political, the local and the cosmopolitan, the ecological and the social, the moral and the political. She is a young woman confronting a repressive patriarchal sociopolitical structure, but also a deprived low-class citizen exploited by the Capitol’s oligarchic elites. She is concerned with the well-being of her closest District 12 relatives and friends, but also cares for acquaintances made across borders, for natural habitats and for unknown citizens such as those she incites to rebellion against Snow. Her nonutilitarian political choices follow moral deliberations on the potential effects of strategies that, though pursuing a just end, put people’s lives at risk. “A creature as unquenchable as the sun,” as the *Mockingjay – Part 2* poster refers to the protagonist, Katniss defies a plethora of hegemonic sociopolitical paradigms at once in the name of intersectional conceptions of equality and justice similar to those defended by the global social movements of the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

In fact, drawing on the “symbiotic” relation between social performance and professional performance (Enelow 2016), Katniss’s self-reflection, solidarity, resistance and caring commitment to others’ well-being is reminiscent of the young ecological activist Greta Thunberg’s persona, who was named 2019 Person of the Year by *Time* magazine. Their Spartan relations with material goods—Katniss dislikes the Capitol’s excessive consumption in the same way as Thunberg censures polluting consumerism—and their voluntary downsizing—Katniss renounces the power of first-line politics while Thunberg has given up flying because of its contaminating effects—exemplify ecological values contrary to fossil capitalist growth. Their reserved behaviours differ from the bravado of male leaders like Snow and Trump, and their honest, succinct deliveries contrast with the pompous manipulative rhetoric of certain political leaders. Taken as “a barometer of cultural modes, themes, and ideas,” as Shonni Enelow proposes (2016), Lawrence’s restrained acting style in *The Hunger Games* series demonstrates, in ways similar to Thunberg’s speeches at international summits, anxiety about the inherited state of affairs, familiarity with lasting crises and wariness of unreliable political bodies whose games she is not willing to buy into. Still, rather than hopeless resilience, Katniss’s and Thunberg’s serious gestures, emotional courage and stubborn vindications convey the long-term resistance and determination necessary to make the world fairer, greener and more promising for future generations. Both can be said to fit the definition of what Sarah Hentges calls “Girls on Fire”: brave, intelligent “transformative heroines” that are “a cultural force to be reckoned with” and speak of “an optimism that shapes the future” (2018, 5). Holding their heads up and looking obstinately at brighter horizons ahead—as represented in film posters and magazine covers—these ecofeminist leaders call for a major shift of political focus that, like Kristen Visbal’s bronze *Fearless Girl* facing the *Charging Bull* sculpture by Arturo Di Modica in Manhattan’s financial district, directly defies the given patriarchal, ecocidal

establishment. However, unlike the corporate feminism that funded the *Fearless Girl* sculpture's installation the day before International Women's Day in 2017—it was commissioned by a financial services company to promote an index fund of companies with higher numbers of women on directing boards than usual (Nasdaq 2017)—Katniss and Thunberg call for an ecofeminist politics that renounces neoliberal reasoning.

5. CONCLUSION

As Sara K. Day et al. argue, in terms of rebellious adolescent womanhood in recent dystopian young adult literature, Katniss's "Future Girlhood" illustrates "the potential of liminality as a path to empowerment" that was embodied in the early twentieth century by the "New Woman" type with her transgression of gender norms and the personal-public divide (2014a, 2). Like her predecessors, the "Future Girl" aims to define her identity and agency beyond the social limitations attached to gender and age, but she also aims to "recreate" society, making it "more egalitarian, more progressive, and ultimately, more free" (Day et al. 2014a, 3). Katniss calls for the concomitant regeneration of patriarchal gender roles and ecocidal myths of progress that science fiction writer Joanna Russ argued for in her 1972 essay "What Can a Heroine Do?":

Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our speech, our economic organization, everything we have inherited, tell us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one's will—or other Men. This means ecological catastrophe in the first instance and war in the second. To be a Woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. The roles are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal. Women cannot write—using the old myths. But using new ones—? ([1972] 1995, 93)

Illustrating how much a twenty-first-century ecofeminist film heroine can do, Katniss's "Future Girl" ultimately represents the utopian potential of an intersectional cosmopolitan politics forged across social borders—class, gender, racial, geopolitical—and beyond the dialectics of exclusion and exploitation that have grounded patriarchal ecocidal progress thus far. Like climate change, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has revealed that, even if some of the most pressing challenges that humanity is facing concern the environment and operate on a global scale, many institutional bodies still act according to market- and state-based political paradigms, following leaders—male, for the most part—for whom individual liberties and economic growth are paramount, at the expense of collective interests and sustainability. In this context, global social movements like Fridays for Future, international feminist marches and cultural referents like Katniss illustrate the progressive consolidation of an alternative cosmopolitan political culture informed by ecology and equality. *The Hunger Games* film series's political resolution—an inclusive and democratic federal republic presided

by a black woman—suggests that hope resides in the transformation of neoliberal political systems ruled by rich extractive elites—the Capitol—and patriarchal actors—Snow, Gamemakers, Peacekeepers—through political paradigms other than those that are utilitarian and dogmatic—Coin’s totalitarian communism. The ecofeminist heroism that Katniss embodies aspires to just and sustainable cosmopolitan futures built outside the material dialectics that Snow and Coin represent. The protagonist’s political agency, which manifests itself as a dimension of the personal, seeks to reconcile the idea of progress with sustainability and inclusion, as well as the common good with the well-being of free, diverse individuals irrespective of their condition and origin.

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