

Fanny Felixine

Dr. Julie McCown

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“Hunger Games” : Work of Marxism and Postcolonialism theories

During the years 2012-2015, the world of cinema has witnessed what are considered to be the greatest dystopian films to have appeared. "Hunger games", "The Maze Runner" and "Divergent", created an intense wave of interest and subjugation. Featuring societies engaged in forever wars, characterized by extreme social and economic class divides, mass poverty, environmental devastation, anarchy, and loss of individuality, these films left their impression upon the audience. Notably with the Hunger games trilogy, which still today in 2023 has published its fourth book and film entitled "The Ballad of the song bird and the snake". The movie reached within 11 days of its release, \$100 million milestone at the domestic box offices (Debellis). These films portray, through critical theories, an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, challenging readers to think differently about current social and political climates. Therefore, this essay seeks to demonstrate how the Hunger Games films draw parallels with current and former societies, through the critical theories of Marxism and Postcolonialism. In order to do so, this paper examines President Snow's internal debate as a young man, leading to the creation of Panem society, which is a representation of both theories.

Suzanne Collins' book "The Hunger Games" came out in 2008. It was the first in a trilogy of the same name, which includes "Catching Fire" (2009) and "Mockingjay" (2010). More than 100 million copies of the series have been printed worldwide, and it has spent more than 260 consecutive weeks on the Times bestseller list. (The New York Times). In addition, the books have been adapted into four movies, including now five with "The Ballad of the Songbird and the Snake". As a result, it was given the time and influence to act on society, as dystopian works do to reflect on social problems.

The story is that the nation of Panem is divided into 12 districts, ruled by the Capitol. As punishment for a failed revolt, each district is forced to select two tributes, a boy and a girl aged between 12 and 18, who will fight to the death in the annual Hunger Games, until only one survives. However, when Katniss and Peeta are chosen among the reaping, everything changes and they become the two victors, subsequently leading to a revolution and victory over the Capitol. Throughout the first trilogy, President Snow plays a major role in the film. Consequently, a prequel on his story was released. In it, Coriolanus Snow is portrayed as a young man during the 10th Hunger Games. In order to get into his university, he is assigned a tribute and must do everything in his power to win. His tribute is Lucy Gray Baird, a young woman from District 12. As the story unfolds, they form a relationship that is ultimately destroyed by Snow's many misdeeds, bringing him to become the man known in the early stories.

In this prequel, Susan Collins wanted to explore the state of nature and nurture debate. An idea long debated in biology and society, about the relative influence on human beings of their genetic inheritance (nature) and the environmental conditions of their development (nurture), (Slater and Bremner). In this way, she wanted to question human nature, to find out how people acted when they were free of laws and rules. To do so, she confided that she

based her work on the three philosophers of this concept: Rousseau, Hobbes and Lockes, (The Book Leo). In the film's opening scene, Snow and his tigress cousin run through the war and see another man chopping the leg of another citizen, only for Snow to ask why he did it, feeling both shocked and dismayed. As an innocent child, he doesn't understand what's going on. This echoes the concept of tabula rasa: "The idea of individuals being born empty of any built-in mental content, so that all knowledge comes from later perceptions or sensory experiences." (Wikipedia). And finally his cousin explains that this man was hungry and this shows how far people are willing to go during time of war. And so here is one of Snow's first impressions, one that he would develop throughout his life. Through the movie Snow forms his own view of the world by his experiences. However, he is also influenced by different people in his life, who all represent different human nature and philosophical ideas: Sejanus Plinth, Volumnia Gaul, and Lucy Gray.

Referring back to Lockes, Sejanus Plinth fully addresses his idealistic vision. In the second of his "Two Treatises of Government" (1690), Lockes asserts that the state of nature is one in which men, though free, equal and independent, are obliged by the law of nature to respect each other's rights to life, liberty and property. Nevertheless, individuals agree to form a community in order to institute an impartial power capable of arbitrating disputes and repairing damages. (Editors of Britannica). In the life of Coriolanus, Sejanus is ultimately the voice of reason trying to highlight to him that there is no social class and that everyone is equal.

In a way, this is also what Lucy Gray Baird shows him, by questioning the actions of the Capitol. Agreeing with Rousseau, the young woman believes that the government ends up shackling people and asking them to give up their true freedom. In "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" (1755), the philosopher argues that in the state of nature, men are solitary but also healthy, happy, good and free, and that it was the act of coming together and creating

laws that gave rise to negative and destructive passions such as jealousy and pride, which in turn fostered social inequality and human vice. (Editors of Britannica). As Lucy Gray discusses before all this, the Coveys were free to move and perform anywhere, though without destroying anything, so if it hadn't been for the conditions in which the Hunger Games had placed her she would never have killed anyone.

Yet this is what Doctor Volumnia Gaul, the game's headmistress and ultimately Coriolanus Snow's mentor, rejects. She believes that man's true nature is, as Hobbes claimed, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". (Leviathan, 1651). Also in line with Frans de Waal's veneer theory, civilization is just a facade attempting to hide man's true nature. Moral tendencies are not part of human nature, they are a choice, one that can easily be broken, and human nature is war (Wikipedia). This is how Snow justifies his actions and murders throughout his evolution : It's human nature. Thus, in order to remedy it, it is necessary to create a social contract on the sole condition that the lives of citizens are safeguarded by sovereign power (Editors of Britannica).

Ultimately, this is how Snow ends up ruling. These ideas recur in his speech in "The Mockingjay- Part 1": "The capitol provides security." He uses violence to control people, an idea taken from Marxian and Colonialism. President Snow uses the Hunger Games to remind the districts of their impotence, while feeding his electorate's relentless appetite for entertainment. Nevertheless, during his quest he has been confronted with different visions, he has even been part of the districts and seen them up close. The question readers asked themselves at the end of the film was: *Did his unsuccessful love affair with Lucy Gray turn him into a villain? No, it was a choice.* For instance, as in the prequel, Katniss is influenced by those around her, including Peeta and Gale. Yet Susan Collins specifies that, although they appeared quickly, they were less two points in a love triangle than two perspectives in the just war debate: "Gale, because of his experiences and temperament, tends towards violent

remedies. Peeta's natural inclination is diplomacy. Katniss isn't just choosing a partner, she's determining her worldview." (The New York Times) Eventually Snow did it all himself. He created a Marxian society that led him to his own deprivation.

As a reference point, Marx affirms that the proletariat will eventually conquer the bourgeoisie in a violent revolution. Founded on the principle that "the history of every previously existing society is the history of class struggles", Marxian economics describes the capitalist production system as intrinsically unjust to workers. More precisely, the struggle is between the bourgeoisie, i.e. The Capitol, which controls the means of production by owning natural and human resources, and the proletariat, i.e. The districts, which provide the labor that enables the owners to make a profit. The stark contrast between poor District 12 and opulent Capitol is an excellent example of juxtaposition. This contrast is used to highlight the profound socio-economic inequalities within this fictional society, and that's exactly what Marxism is all about : To critically analyze and transform society by challenging established norms and hierarchies. It seeks to understand social inequalities and injustices, and to remedy them. For instance, even today, different locations in the USA are associated with a product, seafood, wine or technology. In the film *Hunger games*, there are twelve districts, each with its own characteristic, such as lumber in district 7, fishing in district 4, coal mines in district 12 and so on. These characteristics are all represented in the film, with the environment changing according to place. Author Susan Collins even confessed that it was a choice to reference real life: "I knew there were thirteen districts - it's a nod to the thirteen colonies (The New York Times)." And as much as there is this reference, both the book and the films fully address a postcolonial vision.

Embracing the idea of the Marxian society denouncing the bourgeoisie for profiting from the resources of the proletariat, it echoes the colonial exploitation that has been

widespread throughout the world, (Karengo). In *The Hunger Games*, it's the government itself that uses its own people in its own nation, yet it still touches on the concept of the colonized versus the colonizer. As in real life, what separates the colonizer and the colonized is race, skin color and features. In the films, this is demonstrated by accents, accessories and clothing color. While the people in the districts have American accents, the capitol has a British one. Regarding clothing, there's a contrast between the bright, vivid colors of the capitol, and the simple, neutral colors of the members of the districts. Moreover, Capitol citizens have their status simply because they were born in the Capitol, whereas on the contrary, there's no way for district members to rise in rank; they're stuck there forever, reflecting the colonized economy where the colonized can't become a colonizer. This underlines the social contrast between the citizens of the Capitol and the districts, as well as Homi-Bhabhas' concept of hybridity.

"Catching Fire" represents this through the victors' tour. Being a victor is an earned status, Peeta and Katniss had to earn it. They live in new homes, far from the other districts. Yet they are still subject to the double consciousness of being part of those districts, empathizing with them and being seen as members of those districts, they are not fully citizens of the Capitol and never will be. While the Capitol lives in urban luxury, as Peeta and Katniss' invitation to this "victory dinner" shows, the districts suffer. As mentioned in the book and film, the Capitol folks offer a drink, explaining that the purpose is to vomit and eat more food. The irony is they don't care about the fact these people are coming from District 12, they are so focused on themselves that they are unaware of what other groups think of them, or what they are going through. "All I can think of is the emaciated bodies of children on our kitchen table as my mother prescribes what the parent's can't give. More food. Here in the capital they're vomiting food for the pleasure of filling their bellies over and over again.", confesses Katniss, when she experiences this. These victors are a new creation, a mix

between the status of the Capitol and the districts. However, because of all these factors, they find it hard to navigate this new dimension, there's pressure on both sides, and they refuse to ignore the district part of their identity. Consequently, throughout this literary work, Suzanne Collins examines class division, inequality between citizens, government oppression, human suffering, corruption, destruction and obedience in the Hunger Games trilogy.

Finally, by analyzing Snow's history and drawing parallels between this narrative and Marxist and postcolonial theories, all these issues raised in the trilogy serve as bridges between today's modern world and the nation of Panem. These theories aim to reflect on both current and former societies in order to recognize the economic and cultural foundations of colonialism, to establish a classless society based on common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Indeed, similar concerns are expressed in many dystopian novels, such as "The Maze Runner" and "Divergent". The significance of this type of story is leading readers to reflect on both the past and the present, in order to establish a balance in human societies.

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