A World Destroyed
A Marxist Look into Suzanne Collin’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy

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B.A Thesis

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Abstract:

In Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008), the post-apocalyptic dystopian nation of Panem draws on a myriad of sources for inspiration, ranging from historical, contemporary and classical. Collins effectively employs these inspirations in the story of Panem and District 13 in this particular genre to shed light on the pattern and themes of dystopian fiction. Through the variety of sources, *The Hunger Games* touches on the fundamental themes of a totalitarian regime.

This thesis focuses on exploring from a Marxist viewpoint the different ways in which hunger and food are used as controlling mechanisms, the capitalistic and feudalistic ideals of Panem, the ritualized traditions of the games and the Reaping as a form of controlling the masses through fear and intimidation, the use of Panem’s history as a justification for killing children and the inspiration *The Hunger Games* draws from the historical and classical influence to portray the entirety of the games as crucial and an art form. In order to cast light on the matters, Collins ensures that *The Hunger Games* gives a detailed account of the events through the protagonist Katniss Everdeen. Through her unique experience as an adolescent from the poorest district, Collins creates an intriguing Young Adult dystopian fiction that covers a compelling message about strength and growth that transcends throughout the entire trilogy.
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1. Introduction

A utopia is defined as a perfect place or world, whereby its citizens live in harmony and together in unity. A great example of a utopian universe is *The Republic*, whereby Plato sets up a Socratic dialogue about the city of Kallipollis. In Kallipollis everyone works together towards the growth of the city. Everyone is divided within factions of producers, guardians and auxiliaries. The factions ensure that everyone is of equal value, and no one can move up the societal status because everyone has their own responsibilities that they dedicate their entire lives to. Unfortunately, perfection is not a concept an entire nation can achieve and thus laying ground for a dystopian society. Dealt by the same hand, dystopian societies have the same mindset as utopian societies. This is due to the fact that both believe in the perfect world. However, dystopian society uses a hierarchical approach, whereby the government uses totalitarian and tyrannical control over the citizens.

The dynamics of dystopian societies have thus made for an entertaining and compelling genre in literature. Dystopian literature has become a popular genre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with the introduction of Young Adult dystopian fiction skyrocketing in the markets. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *1984* by George Orwell, *The Time Machine* by H.G Wells, *A Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson are but a few of the classics that paved the way for what was later to come. Young Adult (YA) dystopian fiction continue to impact even the older generation as their stories are emotional, deal with social matters and connect with the audience through the reality of power, tradition and technology. These young adult novels include *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth and *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner.
Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* is an excellent example of young adult dystopian literature as she dives into a myriad of themes that define this genre. Collins demonstrates the dangers of tradition and the struggle for food in the districts of Panem. A similar concept is also seen in Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery*, whereby the people of the town engage in a deadly tradition in order to maintain a good harvest. This same notion is seen in *The Hunger Games* as the youngsters from the districts have to fight and kill in order to escape the life of starvation.

Henceforth, this essay will be examining the concept of tradition and ritualism in *The Hunger Games*. These concepts will be analysed through a Marxist viewpoint. Firstly, this essay will explore History as a concept of the present and discuss the consequences of living in the past. Secondly, this essay will analyse the notion of Hunger, Food and Harvest in *The Hunger Games* trilogy and their impacts on the overall plots of the story. Lastly, this paper will look at the themes of fear and authority to further explain the characters’ motivations and relationship dynamics in the books. The thesis will also examine the themes of history as a brainwashing mechanism and hunger, food and harvest as a eucharistic symbol as well as media as a form to control the masses.
2. Young Adult Dystopian Novels

Dystopian Young Adult genre reflects different universes underlying a futuristic theme. The genre has a varied audience, as young teenagers, late teenagers and adults connect with the underlying themes. Audiences also connect with dystopian literature as the protagonists go through a myriad of challenges and come out of them as heroes of society. The protagonists battle identity crisis, psychological issues, love trials family affairs and societal issues. These challenges are faced by everybody, thus making these protagonists relatable and in turn creating the overall relatability of the genre. A bildungsroman novel traditionally follows a character who “who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks relatable souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world” (Longrie 8-9). In that event, young adult readers see themselves in these books; their own challenges, struggles, fears and finally hope as they navigate the complex transition from childhood to adulthood depicted in the fictional universes. Hence, relating to the characters. Everything is meticulously detailed for the reader, creating the perfect imperfect universe (Hintz and Ostry 9).

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss has lived a difficult life. She comes from the poorest district, she lost her father at a young age, and her mother fell into a post-traumatic depression, leaving Katniss responsible for the family (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 10). However, she is well aware of her mistakes, as well as the societal arrangements that affect her life. Thence, Katniss stands out as a heroine. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 350) She acts at her own accord and resists the societal rules by following her own conviction. Katniss’ tough exterior and out of the ordinary character drives the story forward. Her toughness and courage lead her to volunteer as tribute in the position of her younger sister.
Primrose, despite knowing her likely death in the games (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 26).

In the arena, Katniss tries to fight according to her own terms. She injures instead of killing her opponents and only kills when necessary (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 418). Furthermore, Katniss does her best to survive on her own, forming no alliances like most tributes do. In her ultimate rebellious act, Katniss defies the Capitol as she pretends to eat the poisonous Night-lock berries with her partner Peeta (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 418). This act changes the dynamics of the games that have existed for decades, as they force the Game-makers to change the rules and declare both of them as winners. This action proves powerful as it shows that the games can be shaken and challenged. Most importantly, this is seen by everyone in the districts. Katniss offers the people of the districts something perilous for people in a dystopian society to acquire; hope. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss simultaneously takes on the role of victim and a revolutionary as her actions kindle a rebellion. As a result, making her a hero of the nation and President Snow’s biggest threat.
3. Destroying the Future by Destroying the Youth

A common theme in Young – Adult dystopian fiction is strict organization and order that leaves little room for individuality and growth. This form of control keeps people doing the government’s bidding, but also reveals the state’s disregard for individual citizens. In The Hunger Games, the peacekeepers keep the citizens in check and have the right to take life as they see fit (Ross The Hunger Games). The system of Panem allows for minimal childhood experience as from the ages of twelve. This is because once a youngster is twelve years of age, they are eligible for the hunger games lottery (Collins, The Hunger Games 18). This reality has made real childhood in Panem impossible. Furthermore, the games are broadcasted, and the youngsters could easily see what the future holds for them. An example is seen in Katniss’ sister Primrose, who constantly has nightmares due to the anxiety of her reality of being eligible for participating in the games. “She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping” (Collins, The Hunger Games 3). The Capitol does not seem to care about the condition of the children they send to the arena. Primrose Everdeen is not the only example of a weak and fragile tribute. Katniss takes on a friendship with the young Rue, a tribute from district eleven. Once placed in the arena, the society can agree that the odds would not be in her favour, as some of the career tributes are almost twice her size “I bite my lip. Rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the meadow. Rue. Primrose. Neither of them could tip the scale at thirty kilos soaking wet” (Collins, The Hunger Games 121).

Moreover, the slightly privileged youngsters from the career districts spend their childhood getting ready for the bloody ritual in order to escape the life of starvation: “You can see it in their bones, their skin, the hollow look in their eyes . . . The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment” (Collins, The Hunger Games 115).
Comparably, the children in Shirley Jackson’s dystopian short story, *The Lottery*, the children also experience gory and murderous situations during the stoning each year. The children also participate in the stoning by piling the stones for the ritual, as well as stoning the lottery winner (Jackson, *The Lottery* 1). All in all, the state of Panem controls and interferes in the youth’s growth by controlling their progress, thus controlling the future of the nation.
4. The Complex Reality of Blindly Following Ritualized Traditions

*The Hunger Games* trilogy deals with various types of ritualism, all of which work towards benefitting the Capitol of Panem and its elite. The games have existed long before the tributes were born (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). There is no way out because after all, it is a tradition-an annual tradition: “ritualism is a concept developed by American sociologist Robert K. Merton as a part of his structural strain theory. It refers to the common practice of going through the motions of daily life even though one does not accept the goals of values that align with these practice” (Crossman “Definition of Ritualism in Sociology” 2019). Accordingly, the people of the districts continue to partake in the annual ritual of the games without a word.

The actions of the members of the districts illustrate the dangers of blindly following ritualized practices and traditions, just as much as blindly following an unfair institution. The main ritual that Panem partakes in is the annual Hunger Games. The fight to the death ritual begins with the Reaping, whereby two members of each district are chosen through the “lottery system” of drawing a piece of paper from a pile of names (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 24). The gladiatorial battle to the death taking place in an Arena designed to produce more odds than fortunes, as the entire experiences are televised to the entire nation. This battle to the death and shedding the blood of over twenty youngsters, marking it as a sacrificial ritual for the wrongs committed during the rebellion (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). Furthermore, these deaths are committed by fellow youths, giving it a dark and ritualized concept to it. Despite these circumstances, the districts treat the Reaping with an attitude of deference and veiled trepidation. The formalities of the Reaping can also be seen to follow ritualistic patterns, with the rites of the annual tradition being stated by the mayor by alluding to the Dark days. The mayor referencing the Dark Days acts as an underscore for how the authority employs fear on
the districts into blindly accepting and following the ritualistic tradition rather than thinking for themselves (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). Furthermore, everyone dresses up for the ceremony and tries to look the most presentable they will ever look. Gale even suggests that Katniss wear something pretty, as her mother offers her own lovely dress instead. “I scrub off the dirt and sweat from the woods and even wash my hair. To my surprise, my mother has laid out one of her own dresses for me. A soft blue thing with matching shoes” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 17).

The ritual aspect of the Hunger Games also follows getting ready for it, as well as it being held at the highest importance. The Reaping takes place in the square, one of the few pleasant places in District 12. Furthermore, attendance is mandatory, “unless you are on death’s door” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 19). This goes further to show the importance of everyone playing a part in the ritual. Every year this similar process is repeated, the games were a tradition, and everyone had committed to it, whether they accepted it or not. To some extent, the citizens of the districts have not only accepted the Hunger Games ritual, but they also respect it. This aspect is represented in the characterization of the authority figures connected to the Hunger Games ritualistic tradition. The districts have come to accept characters such as Effie Trinket, who would be defined as loud, too bright and ridiculous (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 23). However, everyone in District 12 has accepted her due to her role in the Reaping. Therefore, no one questions her character or attire due to her high status.

These aspects of dialogue, characterization and allusion of the past can also be noted in Jackson’s *The Lottery*, whereby Mr Summers plays a similar role as that of the mayor. He controls and directs the lottery as he is the highest-ranking member of the town (Jackson *The Lottery* 1). This notion of characterization playing an essential role in
evoking the power needed to get lower-ranking people to follow blindly into whichever ritual is being played at hand, a recurring concept in dystopian literature.
5. **History as a Concept of the Present**

5.1 **Historical Influence:**

The reason for the games in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* trilogy is based on the history of Panem. Panem suffered tragically during the war, and as a reminder of the Dark-Days the games were introduced (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). This concept of history is repeated and distilled on each citizen as the games are an annual event. Furthermore, the reaping in each district begins with the mayor stepping onto the podium and telling the same story of the past. “He tells of the history of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was called North America” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). This reminder is playing on a role of justification for the gruesome reality of the Hunger Games, as they would rather have the youth killing each other in an Arena than the Dark Days. Furthermore, the Capitol has brainwashed the districts to believe that they deserve this treatment. Each district has lost all hope as they watch their children each year get sent to the Arena, without much of a thought. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 22). History as a concept of the present continues to be a significant notion as the entirety of the games is based on the history of Panem, and the Games are used to remind the districts of the history of Panem.
5.2 Classical Influence: Greek and Roman Mythology:

History as a concept also represents the motivation behind the details of the making of *The Hunger Games*. As Suzanne Collins states in an interview in 2008 when asked by the interviewer about how she came up with the idea, “It’s very much based on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, which I read when I was eight years old” (Margolis, “A Killer Story: An Interview with Suzanne Collins, Author of The Hunger Games” 2008). It is evident from early on that *The Hunger Games* series follow classical themes of ancient Rome and ancient Greek. Firstly, *The Hunger Games* follow on the idea of punishment similar to Greek mythology. In Greek mythology, King Minos is in rage due to the loss of his son Androgeous of Crete. Due to this reason, Athenians had to face the fury of the cruel and ruthless king. Similarly, the districts face punishment through the games due to the rebellion they set out in the past. In this case, president Snow takes on the part of King Minos (Strauss, “The Classical Roots of The Hunger Games” 2014).

Secondly, the concept of sending the youth to an Arena or Labyrinth is prominent in Greek mythology. King Minos’ punishment against the Athenians involves sending seven boys and seven maidens over to the Minotaur, a dangerous hybrid creature that is half-man and half-bull that resided in the Labyrinth. (Strauss, “The Classical Roots of The Hunger Games” 2014) Comparably, each district sends one boy and one girl to the Capitol to participate in the games. They are placed in an arena to fight each other until only one is left alive. Additionally, the game-makers would create obstacles such as fires and creatures of the hybrid nature. “The mutts are beginning to assemble. As they join together, they raise up again to stand easily on their back legs, giving them an eerily human quality” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 404).

There are further similarities between Panem and ancient Greek myths, such as Katniss and Theseus. Theseus, the Greek hero, defies oppressive and unfair laws of King
Minos. Katniss defies the rules of the Capitol, to the extent of starting a rebellion. Both overcome their obstacles and opponents and gain victory for themselves and their people. Through their fights, Theseus and Katniss become beloved amongst their people. From early on, they are both idolized and loved by the people. Katniss is paraded around as the “girl on fire”, and she is assigned the amazing designer Cinna, to cater to all her fashion needs. The Capitol immediately loves her and praises her bravery for volunteering in the position of her younger sister. "Katniss! Katniss! I can hear my name being called from all sides. Everyone wants my kisses". (Collins, The Hunger Games 86) Katniss ends up being the embodiment of freedom and hope, and that is considered threatening for the hierarchy, she is changing the order, and she is more than just a girl from district twelve. “Katniss, from a starving district – should be non-threatening but in the Arena, she is the girl on fire” (Margolis, “A Killer Story: An Interview with Suzanne Collins, Author of The Hunger Games Trilogy” 2008).

Besides ancient Greek influence, the influence of imperial Rome, especially in the political spectrum, can be seen in The Hunger Games. Just like imperial Rome, Panem was once a democratic republic of what was then North America. However, at the time of the novels, Panem is controlled by a tyrant. President Coriolanus Snow. Snow runs the country in the manner of a powerful Roman emperor. (Collins, The Hunger Games 445) Furthermore, both the emperor of ancient Rome and president Snow of Panem radiate wealth and luxury just by their presence and lifestyles. Both live in cities of the rich, with Snow surrounding himself with the wealthy Capitol members and the Roman Emperor surrounding himself with the lords and ladies of imperial Rome. Moreover, all of this happens while the people of Panem districts starve and the Roman provincials live in poverty (Margolis, “A Killer Story: An Interview with Suzanne Collins, Author of The Hunger Games” 2008).
Collins’ ancient Roman influence is further illustrated through the choice of names. The character names in *The Hunger Games* can be divided into two categories as the people in the districts follow one trend, while the Capitol citizens follow another. The people of the districts are named after earthy and natural items such as plants and flowers. This aspect represents their down to earth nature, as well as their simple living. Such names include Katniss, Rue and Primrose. However, the people in the Capitol have Roman names such as Seneca Crane, Cinna, Coriolanus Snow, Claudius Templesmith and Caesar Flickerman. The difference in names between the capitol and the districts further emphasizes the financial and social disparity. The Capitol names have an air of superiority to them, rather than bearing simple names of plants and flowers. This disparity also alludes to the imperial Roman social structure and hierarchy (Krule, “What’s with the Crazy Names in The Hunger Games” 2012).
6. The Dangers of a Capitalistic Ideology

*The Hunger Games* deals with hierarchical control that promotes the capitalistic ideals that encourage The Reaping. Firstly, *The Hunger Games* deals with an annual ritual and traditions that have existed long before most could remember. These rituals and traditions continue to hurt them but remain unrevised and unchanged, which would then enlighten the working class of the implications they are living under (Kosenko, “A Marxist-Feminist Reading of Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery” 27). This aspect further enlightens on the power structure that surrounds Panem as a nation. The districts work in order to keep the country going, whereas the Capitol manage and own the businesses. Comprising of twelve districts, Panem has divided the labour structure between each district in a manner that would seem decent, but the working class remains starving despite their efforts. Such a structure only promoting the ideals of a capitalistic society as the districts follow the laws laid out for them, as they work tirelessly to live another day under the tyranny of the capital.

Panem deals with extreme cases of capitalism as all their hard work is taken away by the Capitol, leaving the districts to starve as well as suffering from too much hard labour (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 4). The only value of the people in districts the lies on their production or as Martin Luther King Jr. put it about the dynamics of a capitalistic society “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people” (M. King, “Opinions Fifty Years Later, King’s Warning Still Resonates”). In Panem’s case, this aspect has led to the districts – the majority of the people are reduced to nothing but cheap labour. With the type of labour that is repetitive and dangerous such as spending long hours in the underground mines of District 12 (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 4). This form of exploitation is what Prof. Peter Barry called “alienation” in his analysis on Marxism, alienation is the situation that proceeds once a
worker has been “de-skilled and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp” (Barry 160). This hierarchy continues to play a role as the districts descend from District 1 to District 12. District 1 is known for the production of luxury items, thereby having the closest relationship with the Capitol. This trend continues as District 2 is known for masonry and District 3 for technology. As the district numbers ascend, the worse the labours get and thus their distant relations with the Capitol. In this case, District 12 is the least prestigious district as it is the last one on the line, as the coal manufacturers. Put simply; District 12 is the most neglected by the Capitol, with the struggles of malnutrition and health at the highest parameter. However, this is not without benefits “Maybe being the least prestigious, poorest, most ridiculed district in the country has its advantages. Such as being largely ignored by the Capitol as long as we produce our coal quotas” (Collins, The Hunger Games 245).

The Capitol is the financial and social centre of the country of Panem. Furthermore, being born in the Capitol guarantees a good life with luxury for the rest of your life. Being born in the Capitol also spares you from participating in the annual Hunger Games. Therefore, the prestige of being born in the Capitol is inherited – guaranteeing a good life. Likewise, the rest of the districts also inherit the social and economic status of their families. Being the most privileged district, District 1 earns a lifetime of food availability, making them stronger and most likely to win the games. They spend most of their childhood training for the games, making them better prepared than the rest of the districts.

Additionally, their enthusiasm for the games makes them more appealing to the citizens of the Capitol, which earns them more favour and sponsors while in the arena. Also, most the other districts work hard to align themselves with District 1 due to their
favour and advantageous skills. Comparatively, District 12 known for its financially low-ranking status would have its youth inherit these characteristics. Citizens of District 12 predominantly coal miners, afflicted with chronic food shortage. Long working hours and food scarcity make them scrawny, malnutritional and less able to fight in the games.

Similarly in Shirley Jackson’s novel, The Lottery is conducted at the village square “between the post office and the bank”, a symbol of importance that serves the villagers that are financially at the top of the pyramid (Jackson 1). Both Mr Summers and Mr Graves maintain significant jobs in the community that gives them an upper hand in the running of The Lottery. Sometimes the box was even stored on one of the shelves in Martin’s grocery store (Jackson 2). The running of The Lottery is vital for the three men, as it helps carve the villagers into the working class that promotes the businesses – capitalism. This aspect is giving them more money, and most importantly maintaining their power (Kosenko “A Marxist- Feminist Reading of Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery” 28-29). Furthermore, the rules of The Lottery reflect that of a capitalist society, as it reflects that a social hierarchy is being maintained. This is emphasized as no one wonders whether it is the Graves, the Summers or the Martins. The picking ritual takes on a method that relies on chance, as the lottery tickets are picked out of a box at random. This approach gives the entire tradition a democratic undertone to it, and through this “democracy” the purpose of The Lottery is obscured. The purpose of the three major families never being picked, but rather maintaining their power and growing their businesses, through a social division of labour (Kosenko “A Marxist- Feminist Reading of Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery” 28).
7. The Role of Wealth

In the nation of Panem, there is a significant disparity based on wealth and money between the districts and the Capitol. Firstly, the Capitol is the heart of Panem, due to its lavish and futuristic infrastructure “All the colours seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes, like the flat round discs of hard candy we can never afford to buy at the tiny sweet shop in District 12” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 72). Meanwhile, the districts depend on each other for raw materials and generally for all their wealth. However, the relationship between the districts is shaky as the economic disparity is evident between the career districts and the rest of the districts. Moreover, the career districts 1, 2 and 4 are financially capable of providing for their citizens and their youngsters in preparation for the reaping. This has resulted in the difference between the tributes from the wealthier districts and the tributes from the poorer districts. This difference varying from the knowledge of the games, the physical strength, knowledge on weaponry and the likelihood of getting a sponsor while in the arena. This difference is well noted in Katniss’ words, once she sees the richer tributes for the first time:

It’s the first time we’ve been assembled, on level ground, in simple clothes. My heart sinks. Almost all of the boys and at least half of the girls are bigger than I am, even though many of the tributes have never been fed properly. You can see it in their bones, their skin, the hollow look in their eyes . . . The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment. The tributes from 1, 2 and 4 traditionally have this look about them. It’s technically against the rules to train tributes before they reach the Capitol, but it happens every year. In District 12, we call them the
Career Tributes or just the Careers. And like as not, the winner will be one of them. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 115)

Just as Katniss’ words denote, the career tributes take pride and glory in being picked for the games. Meanwhile, the rest of the districts such as District 12 dread the day of the reaping, and it is a likely death sentence. The people of District 12 do not take the word tribute like the career tributes do, as this word connotes to death (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 27). This physical difference and the knowledge of the games is only prevalent due to the financial difference between the career districts and the rest of the districts. The Capitol uses this as a controlling mechanism as having poor districts scrawny, and weak promotes a bloody television show, as the strong kill the weak. Furthermore, the Capitol ensuring that there is a physical difference between the tributes, they ensure that the winners are predominantly from Districts 1, 2 and 4. At the same time, the other districts lose hope each year as they see their people slaughtered mercilessly in the arena. Thus, the games are a constant reminder of the more impoverished districts’ hopelessness and powerlessness against the Capitol and the government.
8. Media Control

The Capitol controls the districts via any means possible, including media. This is done by both the Capitol and District 13, through the manipulation of the media in order to secure their own power. The Capitol does this through the means of controlling the tributes identities, as they represent them to the nation in any way they see fit. Through the constant media coverage of Katniss’ life, Katniss becomes popular with masses. Since the beginning, the Capitol hopes to represent Katniss as a love-struck tribute from the poor district. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 340) Her actions are translated to portray love and romantic feelings for Peeta, rather than her toughness and desire to rebel against the Capitol. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 342) On the other hand, District 13 hopes to represent her as a fierce and rebellious leader who will inspire the rest of Panem to rebel against the Capitol (Lawrence *The Hunger Games: Mokingjay – Part 1*).

The Capitol and District 13 recognize the influence Katniss has on the people and thus manipulate her image television for their personal benefits of seeming as the ideal governing institution for Panem and its’ people. By using televised broadcasts, both the Capitol and District 13 show their awareness that the “continual repetition of stories… serves to define the world and legitimize a particular social order” (Gebner 44). The purpose is to threaten and scare Panem’s citizen in order to control and enslave them. In *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, the Capitol maintains a monopoly over any broadcasted content. However, District 13 slowly gains power that consequently disrupts the Capitol’s control over the media output. Despite the fact that the Capitol and District 13 have opposite aims, both these media powers have similar strategies for influencing Panem. The Capitol and District 13 have constructed their own versions of representing “reality” to the citizens of Panem. This shows the power behind media control. Therefore,
the books revolve around a battle for media control and thus for influence within and over
the nation of Panem. To achieve this control, District 13 and the Capitol rely on the
methods of framing and priming images of events in the society, as well as celebrity
figures such as Katniss. However, Katniss proves to be more intelligent than the average
District 12 tribute. Katniss defies what is required of her while in front of the camera. She
manipulates media moments to her own advantage while in the oppressive media powers’
spotlight. (Lawrence The Hunger Games: Mokingjay – Part I)
9. Hunger, Food and Harvest

Hunger, food and harvest are used as controlling mechanisms for *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Hunger as a notion can be seen as the central theme in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, with the first novel’s title further emphasizing it (Collins, *The Hunger Games*). The concept of hunger is made prevalent as early as the second page of the book, as the main character Katniss describes the cat her sister has taken refuge in. Katniss describes him to be scrawny with a worm filled swollen belly, announcing that “The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 4). Obviously, Katniss and her family can barely keep themselves fed, and this is true of most families in the districts. Through the starvation, a particular motivation and wish aspire in most kids in the districts in order to escape the life of starvation. Ultimately everyone is driven by the need to survive and the Capitol uses hunger and food to control the districts. The Capitol uses different tactics with the tributes, showing them how life would be if they won. The first step takes place after the reaping, in the train as the tributes and the former winners head to the Capitol. During this time, the two tributes from District 12 are flabbergasted by the amount of food available to just the four of them; Haymitch, Effie, Peeta and Katniss. “Throughout the meal, Effie Trinket keeps reminding us to save space because there’s more to come” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 54). The tributes had never seen so much food, and this is a taunting method from the Capitol as they are only being fed so that they could kill them later in the arena.

As the author Joseph Collins stated in his book *World Hunger 12 Myths*, “hunger has thus become for us the ultimate symbol of powerlessness” (J. Collins 3). This infamous quote applies more than anything the controlling aspects of the Capitol. The second step takes place upon the arrival of the arena, where all the food and weapons needed for the survival of the game are placed in the Cornocopia (Collins, *The Hunger
Games 179). The Cornucopia is the centre of the arena, and the first place the tribute arrive to as they ascend onto the arena. The food is placed in this area to provide bloody entertainment as the tributes fight to the death for food and weapons. The tributes could always have their sponsors send them food, but this was done if the sponsors so, please. Mostly, the sponsors would send food only if the tributes gave some kind of entertainment in return, further emphasizing the powerlessness of the tributes and the exploitation of the people through hunger. This is seen when Katniss and Peeta are starving in the cave when a package of a variety of foods is sent to them. The food in the package also happens to be Katniss’ favourite, as she had previously mentioned to the Hunger Games Caesar Flickerman. The food acts as a message that they were doing something right- something that the rich people of the Capitol enjoy. Katniss even hearing in her head “Yes, that’s what I’m looking for, sweetheart” (Collins, The Hunger Games 368).

Food is used by the Capitol to control the districts, and most importantly, the tributes in the arena. The tributes realize the power of food and the career tribute ally themselves to protect the food in the Cornucopia for themselves and starve the other districts. Katniss also uses the power of food to her advantage, as she blows up the Cornucopia in order to starve the career districts. This act is advantageous to the tributes from the starving districts such as Katniss and Peeta as they are used to hunting or scavenging for food. As a theme, food plays a significant role in The Hunger Games trilogy. This aspect is made more prevalent through the characters’ names: Peeta Mellark, the leading male character from district twelve. Peeta Mellark is the baker’s son in district twelve; he grew up baking bread in the local bakery (Collins, The Hunger Games 31). Accordingly, his name “Peeta” is seen to symbolize Pita bread, as he is mostly surrounded by bread during his shifts at his father’s bakery. Furthermore, Peeta saves Katniss from starving years prior. He purposefully overbakes the bread in order to throw it out for
Katniss to eat. Peeta as the notion of “pita bread”, he can be seen as the bread that gives life. Additionally, the character Greasy Sae also harbours a name that suits her. Greasy Sae is “the bony old woman who sells bowls of hot soup from a large kettle” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 13).

As the people of Panem continuously face the threat of hunger and starvation, they eventually become fixated on food procurement, leaving no room for anything else. Their lives become a battle for survival. However, there is never enough food, leaving most district members drained of energy and weak: “Starvation is not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn’t seen the victims? Old people who can’t work. …

Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It’s always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 33-34).

From a Marxist viewpoint, it is believed that progress becomes about “through the struggle for power between different social classes” (Barry 151). In *The Hunger Games*, societal growth and advancement would be reached through a “tug of war” between the government in the Capitol and the people of the districts. However, it is more advantageous for the government to maintain the current societal structure, thus creating a structure that is impossible for the districts to rise against. Food and hunger were becoming a rigorous controlling mechanism in order to maintain the status quo.
Conclusion

Using the Marxist viewpoint to analyse the themes of rituals, tradition, hunger and food reflect the trilogy’s dystopian genre, due to the themes of totalitarian government and hierarchical social structure. Suzanne Collins uses different inspirations, ranging from history to Greek and Roman mythology to modern dystopian novels such as Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery* to reflect on the dynamics of a totalitarian regime. She strategically employs history as a “justification” for the actions of the Capitol citizens to display the exploitation of the weak and the poor.

Suzanne Collins dives into the themes of ritualized traditions and the complex realities of always adhering to the regulations of these traditions. She illustrates Panem’s complex capitalistic ideology that also follows another one Karl Marx’s stages of history; specifically, feudalism. The protagonist Katniss likewise provides a detailed account of the social and societal structure of Panem. Through her unique perspective, the reader’s understanding of the proletariat’s place in Panem is made clear through the districts’ hierarchical structure. Due to the trilogy’s detailed and elaborate treatment of the analysed themes, the novels make for a compelling, thought-provoking and thrilling read. The trilogy is not only an excellent read but a reflection of some of the societies in the present day, such lies the trilogy’s greatest strength.


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