



A Study on National Identity in Dystopian Society of Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games Trilogy

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Abstract— *This article tries to explore the theory of nationalism and its significance in dystopian fiction through the study of Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games trilogy. It investigates how dystopian elements are linked to nationalism, as well as how frequently dystopian narratives blow warnings against nationalistic sentiment. In Collins' speculative narrative, the article examines the ambiguity of the belief that a liberalized economy, globalized media, and communication will lead to a perfect society in the future. Panem is a fine example of a dystopian nationalist country that deprives people of their rights and resources while being dominated by rulers that are only interested in money and power. The examination of The Hunger Games trilogy aims to highlight that national identity, as it is imposed on people, pushes the entire society into a dystopian reality.*

Keywords— *Nationalism, National Identity, Dystopian, Speculative fiction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Suzanne Collins, an American screenwriter, wrote The Hunger Games as a young adult novel in 2008. Two sequels, Catching Fire and Mockingjay were released after this book in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Between 2012 and 2015, the trilogy was turned into a series of films. This trilogy established a standard for dystopian fiction in the twenty-first century. Dystopian fiction is set in a gloomy future in which society has degenerated and people live in misery under the iron claws of a totalitarian regime. Panem is a dystopian future nation founded after a massive environmental disaster in North America. It was divided into 13 different districts. The Capitol is a tyrannical government that governs Panem's twelve districts. As revenge for their participation in a rebellion, District 13 was devastated by the government. The Hunger Games were created to punish the other districts, who were compelled to offer a boy and a girl between the ages of 12 and 18 each year, only to lose them in the game because the game was about killing other tributes to survive. If one

of the contestants survives, he or she will receive more food supplies for his or her district. Reaping is the process of selecting tributes from districts.

Katniss, the novel's protagonist, lives with her mother and sister in District 12, a poor mining district. Katniss' father perished in a mining accident, leaving her mother mentally ill and Katniss to stand by herself. Her father taught her how to hunt in the forests outside the Panem fence, and she perfected her hunting abilities after her father's death. Gale is a hunting companion who assists her.

Katniss volunteers at the reaping to save her sister Primrose, whose name was drawn in the lottery. Peeta, the district's male tribute, is the son of the baker who assisted her a long time ago by giving her a badly baked loaf of bread. Their trainer, Haymitch, the only victor from district 12, was often drunk, so the tributes had to struggle on their own in the games. Katniss and Peta win games, but their fake romance causes problems for President Snow, as they

both threaten the game makers with a double suicide, which will destroy the scene and force the game makers to reveal the two winners.

Snow saw Katniss and Peeta's suicidal attempt as a sign of rebellion and tried to put a stop to it by taking Peeta and Katniss on a tour of all the districts. Despite her attempts to be hostile, Katniss has become a symbol of revolution. Snow schemes once more by bringing tributes from previous Hunger Games winners to the 75th annual Hunger Games. To save Peeta and Katniss, the tributes try to work together as a team. Katniss demolishes the game arena, and they all flee the Capitol. The Capitol is upset with Katniss for initiating a revolution, an assumption that causes an actual revolution by people who think that she is a symbol of the rebels. The Capitol destroys District 12 while the revolutionists seek safety in District 13, which was long thought to be destroyed but is now hidden in the woods.

Mockingjay is the third book in the trilogy that tells the detailed story of the revolution and its victory. The revolutionists save Peeta from the Peacekeepers of the Capitol and go to assassinate Snow, but Prim, Katniss's sister, was killed in a bomb along with many other children. Later, she learned from Snow that it was Coin, the president of District 13, who had been leading the rebellion for so long, who had bombed and killed the children to invoke public rage against Snow. "Dead or alive, Katniss Everdeen will remain the face of this rebellion. If you ever waver in your resolve, think of the Mockingjay; in her, you will find the strength you need to rid Panem of its oppressors." (Coin 294) At the end of the novel, Katniss kills Coin instead of Snow and moves to District 12, where she lives with Peeta and their children, trying to forget the horrors of the wars.

Objectives

- To study the role of the theory of nationalism in speculative fiction.
- To examine the relevance of futuristic fiction to the current social and political communities.
- To explore the possible outcomes of nationalistic thoughts through dystopian fiction.
- To prove the realistic aspects of the predictions of dystopian fiction through the study of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*.

II. METHODOLOGY

The nationalism theory is used to investigate futuristic nationalistic ideas in dystopian novels. The broad term 'nationalism' will be narrowed through the lens of sociology as a suitable research method. The study uses a descriptive method and a critical textual analysis.

Nationalism

In sociology, nationalism refers to a political ideology that emphasizes individual loyalty to a nation over personal identity. The modern idea of nationalism was influenced by the French revolution, which declared that national identity and patriotism are more essential than one's individual life. Many theorists consider this sensation of oneness and belongingness to nationalism to be fictitious because the nuances of nationalism are temporary and always subject to change, and it hardly bring the prospects it promises to reality forever. In a post-truth world, nationalism is caught in a whirlwind of narratives that offer different types of nationalism and encourage people to adopt any one type of nationalism as their own.

Nationalism as a theory grabbed attention after the world wars, a situation that required questioning the intentions of nations and their limits. Capitalist powers moved toward globalism to enlarge their markets, which demanded a blurring of national borders. These factors may make nationalism fade while nationalism evolves continuously into the post-truth era of the twenty-first century. The theory of nationalism has a very thin possibility of functioning in a positive mode across time. There are several kinds of nationalism in political ideology that have different goals for their nations to achieve. Though their goals are different, their nature of functioning is the same. Modern nationalist ideas do not refer to the attachment to a particular geography, religion, language, culture, and race; rather, they are primordial and can jumble the causes to generate a new kind of nationalism (Jack Haywar, Brian Barry, and Archie Brown, 2003). It divides people based on dubious factors that are convenient for powerful people and basically against human rights. It divides people and labels them as good or bad without any valid reason. The interest of nationalism is beyond rational good and bad and focuses only on the advancement of the nation. Nationalism is different from patriotism, which sacrifices for the nation, whereas nationalism demands more sacrifices in the name of the nation. Orwell, in his essay, said that nationalism is dishonest at its basic level, obsessed with attaining the superiority of the power unit (that is, nationalism) and despises other things that come up as an obstacle. (Orwell, 1945). The rise of nationalism is an alarming factor that might affect future generations. Dystopian fiction particularly evokes the interest of nationalism in young readers and is naturally a good topic to associate with nationalism.

Dystopian fiction

The Hunger Games set a model for modern dystopian fiction. Dystopian fiction arose as a reaction to utopian fiction, both of which are science fiction

subgenres. Due to their extremely imaginative and strange qualities, they are often known as speculative fiction. Dystopian fiction is set in the near future with a deteriorating civilization and people living in misery under the iron fists of totalitarian rule. These stories are classified as political future fiction because they contain aspects related to contemporary politics and its future agendas. In anglophone literature, the genre of dystopian novel is not new. Other works in the genre include George Orwell's 1984, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Themes of pro-capitalism and pro-nationalism are prevalent in these dystopian works. Suzanne Collins adapted these ideas from a television reality show depicting the Iraq invasion and the story of Theseus from Greek mythology. Collins' father served in the Vietnam War, which aided her in creating the character Katniss. The book has been translated into 26 different languages.

Dystopia imagines a world where certain trends in contemporary society are taken to extremes to expose their underlying flaws. Dystopian fiction of the past, like 1984, proves that it is closer to the real world than a speculative one by portraying the chaotic nature of authoritarian nations. Two oppressive forces, a nation state and a capitalist entrepreneur, clasp hands in a dystopian nation, as shown in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The genre of dystopian fiction is not only a response to counter-utopian but also counter-nationalist sentiment. The beginning of the 20th century brought excitement and terror through technological advancement and warfare. Many people were terrified of the new situation and wondered where all of it would lead to. New political movements that came to power promised to eradicate social distinctions. Some of the movements promised to unite people under a mythical heritage, which resulted in lives passing under complete surveillance and death for not being a particular race. Writers who lived through these horrors imagined that in the future, free will and individuality would be erased. Today's science fiction follows the same tradition and simultaneously focuses on our contemporary crises such as inequality, climate change, government power, global epidemics, and corporate rule—all of which are tied to advanced technologies. *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *Divergent* trilogy, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Cloud Atlas* are some examples of dystopian fiction that cautions about how our rights can be simply given up during and after a crisis.

Dystopian fiction is typically anti-nationalist, emphasizing the unpleasant aspects of nationalistic ideals. It's a caution to the current generation about siding with collective authority that promises power but abuses individuals and their country. People are fixated on

identifying with a huge power unit, such as a country. Dystopian literature's purpose is to contrive an image of the future. It also tries to provoke reflection on the current state of society and to motivate action. Dystopian fiction addresses the loss of individualism, technological control over individuals, the sustainability of uniformity, and other topics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The theme of class struggle is prominent in novels. People in the Capitol live in luxury and are well-fed, whereas people in other districts live in abject poverty. Even though the district employees labor tirelessly to provide the Capitol with essential materials, they are denied access to the resources they generate. They live a hard existence since they have no choice but to give up their possessions for the sake of those further up the social ladder. Districts 11 and 12 are the lowest of all—District 11 is an agricultural district that sells its products to the Capitol. District 12 is a mining district populated by poor people. Most families in District 12 are living with hunger. In a dystopian society, high-class people have a better chance of survival than the poor. Districts 2, 3, and 4 of Panem prepare tributes exclusively for the hunger games because they have a sustainable source of food and sophistication that allows them to spare their time for training in war skills.

One of the most prevalent behaviors of a totalitarian administration is blaming internal enemies for losses while restricting journalists. They are constantly quick to manipulate the truth and change the facts to suit their needs. The readers, for example, are perplexed as to why the country was divided into districts. They simply accept the government's narrative of history. In Panem, ambiguities against the government are not tolerated.

The country was protected from the wild by fences. The peacekeepers punish anyone who tries to sneak through the fences. News will be disseminated to the public in the manner that the administration desires. The government has ultimate control over journalism. They broadcast their horrible implementation of the game, in which 24 youngsters were sent and had to kill each other to survive. This savagery promotes district pride, which implicitly and unintentionally enforces nationalism by celebrating the districts' powerlessness under the Capitol's imperial ruling structure. Jamey Heit wrote about President Snow in his critical book, "He sows fear in a way that frightens people from the very idea of political agency." In Panem, it is very easy to conclude that there simply isn't a choice to be made. The constant threat of his violent response is enough to subvert this foundational ability to

act. Oppression thrives when small decisions seem impossible. " (The Politics of the Hunger Games, 2015, p.16)

This novel depicts the Capitol's domineering attitude and the repercussions of its nationalism ideologies in considerable detail. Critics see the genre of political future fiction as a warning against a "blind, uncritical, and excessive type of nationalism." The tone, setting, and themes are all similar in dystopian fiction, such as *1984* by George Orwell, *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. All these books depict future catastrophes perpetrated by authoritarian governments. The Hunger Games trilogy continues this tradition by depicting the disparities between a nation's ideal and its actual existence. It highlights the detrimental consequences of populist nationalism as well as its long-term consequences. The trilogy depicts the effects of Panem's authoritarian rule on the working class.

The rulers kept people's economies at the lowest possible level and allowed them to starve because they had to induce terror as they needed control power and authority. When there is a sign of revolt, the administration does not hesitate to punish the citizens of the districts violently. Gale is publicly whipped for his illegal hunting outside the fences to show Katniss how much they can harm Katniss and the people around her. The threat of Katniss and Peeta's suicide in the game was interpreted by President Snow as a symbol of the rebels. As a result, he threatens to kill Katniss' family and Gale and demands she accompany Peeta on a victory tour to all 12 districts. At the end of *Catching Fire*, Peeta is taken prisoner by the Capitol to put Katniss in jeopardy. Katniss has consistently enraged the administration by functioning as a revolutionary symbol. Following his victory in the game and Snow's threat to kill his family, Finnick's entire life became a tragedy.

Finally, Katniss recognizes that not only is Snow evil incarnate and ravenous for more killing, but so is Coin, the president of District 13 and the current revolution's leader. Coin should restore the game with tributes from the Capitol rather than all the districts, as this will encourage the same heinous entertainment of killings. Katniss strikes Coin with an arrow that was given to kill Snow after discovering that the revolution had simply switched Coin for Snow with no other advancements.

Panem suffocates its people's ability to communicate clearly. Residents of Panem are not permitted to communicate with people from other districts. They have also been reminded of District 13's uprising and subsequent destruction to keep them in order. Journalism is no longer practiced. The ruling government's interpretation

of history is the only one available. Panem's residents are constantly aware that they are being monitored. People who break the laws and norms are watched and punished quickly by a tyrannical, supportive police force known as peacekeepers. The Hunger Games are also telecast under the authority of government-employed game designers. They transmit the game at their leisure and filter the voice and, on occasion, the visuals. One of the main characteristics of totalitarian nationalism is a decline in communication. It is yet another method of generating fear and separating people. Television and the media have sway over Panem and are linked to consumption. The tributes and winners are then turned into objects, which are fashioned and put up to appear as extravagant and entertaining as possible to attract an audience, particularly in the Capitol. Panem's fictional world has a terrifying mirror in which private lives are exploited for profit.

Inequality will be the result of nationalism since all forms of nationalism inevitably concentrate power on a single person or a single area. After a series of natural calamities, Panem is said to have been divided into 13 districts. The district division implements all kinds of divisions and rule policies. People are divided into districts based on economic factors. People are divided into districts for voting.

National identity plays a vital role in the blooming nationalism among ordinary people. Supporters and opponents of nationalism imagine a glorious future that will erase the imperfections of their current nation-state. Nationalists gather for their national identity and pride. They held their history, geography, and culture high while rebels opposed and invoked revolution with the belief that they would gain their freedom and have a glorious future. Both groups would become more than happy to sacrifice themselves and kill people for their cause. Panem has both kinds of fighters: the Capitol's supporters, who were nationalists, and the rebels who fought for their freedom. However, the common people, who confuse national pride and national sovereignty for national identity, surrender their beliefs to a leader who projects their thoughts on political grounds, which creates the most basic problem. The leader controls everything, and the lives of ordinary people depend on the leader's honesty. Panem's nationalistic facade offers an imaginary, glorious future and a manipulated, pressed present that oppresses the people and compels them to agree that it is an ideal country. It controls people and gives them a minimal supply of food and entertainment, but in return it expects complete obedience from them. Those who think differently or expose different ideals are hanged or silenced, a punishment that is considered appropriate for their misunderstanding.

Group identities in the present world are biased and will be carried into the future in a different form. The district division is not just a geographic division for administrative convenience. The districts closely reflect the present scenario of inequalities and racial discrimination. District 11, for example, was kept as an agricultural district that produced all the food needs of the country but was filled with black people. District 13 was full of economically poor people doing mining for a living with no other opportunities. The author makes it obvious that most of Panem's wealth benefits only a few who enjoy luxury. Luxurious ways of living in the Capitol drain resources from all the remaining districts. This hierarchically structured society keeps the beneficiaries closer to the rulers, which helps the government to continue their dictatorial way of ruling.

In dystopian societies, collective identity is celebrated so that people will deviate from the spreading, manipulated, and forced reality of falling personal identities. The irony of celebrating collective identities such as the district pride of Panem is that those who believe in democracy but are allied with the current dictatorial government and think that it is best for them will also be affected directly and indirectly since inhuman activities will be justified in the name of the nation and keep on-demand sacrifices from all the citizens (Orwell, 1945). This dystopian society is eerily like the old United States, which exploited the countries around it. It is organized into 12 districts based on socioeconomic and racial distinctions. As a result, the novel is not as futuristic as it appears on the surface. This work portrays all of nationalism's ills to its nadir, yet without the audience understanding it. In several instances, George Orwell's work *Notes on Nationalism* describes, categorizes, and explains the positive and negative aspects of nationalism. Although most aspects of nationalism are bad, Panem, as a nationalistic country, possesses all the characteristics described in Orwell's article.

Throughout the novels, the danger of radical nationalism is palpable. The inhabitants of Panem are always afraid that the Capitol will hurt them at any moment. Militant nationalism erupted in a blaze of glory after World War I, and it evolved further during World War II. According to populist national leaders, military backing is necessary. Panem's armed force is known as the "peacekeepers," which is ironic given that its mission is to suppress rebel signs. All the tributes, including Katniss, live in constant terror that their loved ones will be slain if they defy Panem's president. Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta's trainer and the only previous winner from District 12, is a living testament to the Capitol's ability to do great things. Control and Surveillance-"One of the few freedoms

we have in District 12 is the right to marry who we want or not marry at all. And now even that has been taken away from me." (Catching Fire, 381). Youngsters like Gale and Katniss want to change the ruthless power of the government and escape the oppression and poverty that they cannot control. So, they consider running away out into the woods, but cannot do that due to their families' safety.

A Utopian society aims to achieve a perfect society devoid of individual identity. It views social organization with a convenient law as being a perfect nation-state. On the other hand, dystopian ideology portrays a completely imperfect society in which everything is in chaos. A dystopian society is another side of a utopian society, showing how far a utopian Society can go wrong. It has no space for individual identity and focuses on acquiring more power and feeding its hunger for more power. In a dystopian society, individuals cannot relax because they are in a secure space within a nation. They may be concerned that they will be punished for something over which they have no control. The audience in the *Hunger Games* could not control or change the audience's perception of her as Peeta's crush or the way the game transformed her into a commodity that attracts an audience. In *Mockingjay*, Katniss feels powerless and desperate to die after she killed Coin and waited for execution. She could not help herself to be imagined as a lunatic. (*Mockingjay*, 377)

The *Hunger Games*, President Snow's glossy but terrifying offering, operates on a nationalist ideology. The Games are a punishment for all the districts, which must sacrifice a boy and a girl every year to commemorate the uprising led by District 13. The capital oversaw the conflict, and district 13 was demolished as a result. The games are a punishment for the remaining districts as well as a deterrent to any future uprisings. When all other variables are considered, the games fulfil nationalistic goals. It is sophisticated people's main source of enjoyment, while it also addresses the reality that most of the districts suffer from hunger and poverty, as well as all the other issues.

IV. CONCLUSION

The actual promises of democracy, such as individual identity, thinking, freedom, justice, equality, and economic stability, are continuously said to be present rather than practiced. The fiction presents a reflection of reality, especially of a nation that functions dubiously and can never come out of the cycle of power. As the globalized world marched toward addressing global issues such as climate change, poverty, and gender issues,

everyone should have focused on the common dangers humankind faces together instead of talking about ethnic purity, national identity, and linguistic pride of antiquity. The rise of a new nationalism after 2016: corporate prosperities are given priority by the power structures of the world for which false fears of external threats to the

nation are used. With the help of advanced science and technology, authorities in a dystopian world can manipulate everything and anything, even the natural order. Instead of controlling their feelings and emotions, people will no longer have any natural feelings or emotions. Disconnected from each other, individuals will be under the control of the ruling power both physically and mentally. Dystopia is the extreme negative vision of the present forms of nationalism.

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