

# Base and Superstructure in Suzanne Collins' Hunger Game

Muhammad Kiki Wardana, Wan Anayati

*Faculty of Language and Communication, Universitas Harapan Medan, Indonesia*

**Abstract:** - Marxist criticism in literature had been widely used to define the very basic of human's question; social justice. Social justice plays a pivotal role in the Marxist scene. Dystopian novel like the Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins highlights this notion very clear. The base defined in the novel is the Panem's ideology in mitigating the civil war ever took place in the nation which eventually has triggered Panem's Superstructure of various 13 labour districts segregated by the luxurious and exclusive capitol where the President snow resides along it's ubiquitous people. The social injustice cultured in this imaginary –american nation look like has sparked the unseen grassroots ideology to change their fate through a rebellion. This is aligned with the Marxism ideology offers a simple thought. Men since they proceeded to become thinkers had collected ideas, concepts and consciousness to survive.

**Keywords:** Marxist Criticism, Base and Infrastructure, Panem, The Reaping and Tribute, The Hunger Games

## I. INTRODUCTION

Venturing the elements of Marxism in Dystopia particularly in a selected American Dystopia novel would ignite possible inquiries: how do the historical elements in Marxism coexist with the futuristic elements of Dystopia? And what makes the elements of Marxism found in American Dystopia novel different from others? I realize that there were limited works alienate these two disciplines as Marxism seems to be very segregated though it is widely taught in political science and literature but still Marxism's spark has become very dim lately. Not to mention how Soviet Union crumbled and how people look at North Korea suspiciously contributed to the people's stream of thinking that Marxism is an epic failure while Dystopia genre which mushroomed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century requisitely postulates human's wild fantasy of imagined society at it best.

These two things are obviously polarized. Marxism ideology has been tested and proven but it seems not everyone content about it. The countries mentioned above are the real tangible of how Marxism ideology in some extents failed to get along with the pace of modern needs. Of course this raises the question if all of these predictions of Marxism about revolution never happened then why people still interested to talk and study about Marxism? To answer this, I may not suppose to have a mediocre answer; I furthermore deliberately quote Terry Eagleton lines in his preface in Marxism and literary criticism "Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them;

and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing academic about those struggles and we forget this at our cost" (Eagleton 12).

## II. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Channelling to what Eagleton said above, it is clear that Marxism is not trying to brag the grandiose ideology about how man shall live with all the justice system, in fact Marxism has been so widely accepted as the motor to think, talk and act about the predicament of oppressed classes that had to struggle amidst the unfortunate situations around them. Marxism in a way is sort of a tool to narrate the story of how class struggle becomes the main tenet of it and how the oppressed class has to endure the exploitation. Marxism envisages the progress in the emergence of power within social classes. The perception of seeing history in the point of view of class struggle (political dynasty as a continual process of attaining power) is ignited by the different spectrums such as the competition for economic, social and political advantage.

Then what is the aim of Marxism in literature? Does in the same way it represent the same ideology that Marx and Engels are trying to showcase? Even though Marxism is highlighted through its alienation of any kind of art due to the core beliefs of materialism which puts the weights only how man shall labour themselves to put what is best in fulfilling the basic needs and to think only the idea of classless society and to avoid to believe any affiliations of forces beyond natural world around us due to its firm beliefs on something which must have concrete, scientific, logical and observable foundations but still Marxism exemplifies the heights on historical point of view which in some clear ways is a classic form of narrating. "The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Marxism is a materialist philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world, or of forces, beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in" (Barry 150).

From the illuminative statement about, it could be inferred that man's basic social relationship with others is determined by its main economy production (forces). So man's prime activity in producing material life is the main

reason for them to establish other interrelated things in their surroundings, this is what we called as Base. “Taken together these ‘forces’ and ‘relations’ of production form what Marx calls ‘the economic structure of society’, or what is more commonly known by Marxism as the economic ‘base’ or ‘infrastructure’” (Eagleton 5). Hence the base or infrastructure has always been associated with man’s effort to survive that eventually brings a collateral effect that gives a rise to “superstructure”.

Superstructure then defines as anything that emerges from the man’s consequence in doing the survival mode. It could be anything from law, politic, religion, ethical, aesthetic or what we called as Ideology. Ideology according to Eagleton is the product of the concrete social relations into which men enter at a particular time and place; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated. Moreover, men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity- by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production (Eagleton, 6). To justify this, it is linear to say that man’s consciousness is virtually moulded by their social being and not the other way around. Man creates rules, law, ethic, and others things convened through the amalgamation of his basic needs. Once he completed earning the basic force to fulfil necessity in life then he will move to the stage where man will create something that comforts him as the real human being, something that could accommodate his feelings and thought, something the he believes is right but is not necessarily for others.

### III. PANEM

Dubbed as one of the most influential Dystopia literatures in contemporary America, Hunger Games has been widely accepted and recognized by all ages. Not only teenagers love the piece but adults also put their interest in reading this. Hunger Games is profoundly bringing the notion of how American society is going to look like hundred years from now. Interestingly, even though the target reader was supposedly teenagers, but grown up people also realized and thought that there was something to be noticed here. The crumbling American society in the future is so possible. Hence, Dystopia whose didactical value is to remind people that Utopia is hardly to be created and established, makes everyone thinks that if people become too careless to each hater, spread the despise, let the disparity widening, corrupt, and even invade to each other then the war will be inevitable.

The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen is just an ordinary poor girl that born and raised in one of the most abandoned and dilapidated districts in Panem. Collin herself specifically mentioned that Panem is precisely located in Northern America, referring to what is today’s United State of America. The name of Panem itself reminds us to Pan-Americanism a movement that seeks to create, encourage and organize relationships, associations and cooperation between the states of America, through diplomatic, political, economic,

and social means. Obviously, it is hard to define Pan-American but it is quite traceable. The development of 19<sup>th</sup> century left us with many historical terms like the variety of “Pan” as the result of growing nationalism. Various “Pan” movement that we know ranging from race, nation, language and even religious based such as Pan-Germanism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Celtism, Pan-Hispanism, and others. Obviously, these “Pan” movements belonged to the same roots of history and culture, they shared the same mutual interest and united by the hope of having a better life in the future together. Pan-Americanism, however, failed to meet the requirements of being the “Pan” due to the different definition of geographical separation and the historical elements.

Back to the fictional “Panem” nation in Hunger Games, it is not exaggerating if we link this fictional nation with what America was aspire to. It’s like a reflection that Pan-Americanism which emerged from the desire to unite all the states from north to south, was actually rising from the spirit of togetherness after the bitter experience of the exclusion from the rest of the world (Europe). Contrarily, here in the Hunger Games, “Panem” is described to be born from the ashes of civil war. “He tells the story of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storm, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained. The result was Panem, a shining capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. “Then came the dark days, the uprising of the districts against The Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The treaty of the treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the dark days must never be repeated, it gave us the hunger games” (Collins 19). That was a brief description from Katniss about his country when the mayor of her districts 13 gave an opening speech before the announcement of the tribute. It is clear that Panem in Hunger Games depicted as a nation that entrenched from not only a brutal war but also from natural disasters such as droughts, storms and fires. It was not sure what caused the war but it was firm that after the war and the calamities they agreed to build a new nation.

Katniss’s point of ‘view of Panem reflects through her opinion about the capital city of Panem called “The Capitol.” She inserts that The Capitol is shining. This presumable thought of Katniss leads us to the belief that Panem put only the wealth on the capital. Capital seems very glamorous and so does the people. Capitals weights on the definition of capitalism at it best. When the first time Katniss arrived in the city, she couldn’t hide her amusement yet there was critical and satirical tone there where she felt the capital and its people was too artificial.

Both Peeta and I run to the window to see what we have only seen on television, The Capitol, the ruling city of Panem. The cameras haven’t lied about its grandeur. If anything they have not quite captured

the magnificent of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of a hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved street, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the colours seem artificial, the pink too deep, the greens too bright. The yellow is painful to the eyes, like the flat round disks of hard candy we can never afford to buy at the tiny sweets shop in District 12 (Collin 59).

Her ideology is truly growing from her unfortunate situation. Katniss's father was a district 12 coal miner that tragically trapped and dead in a mining accident. This had led to the very severe living conditions of her family where poverty is their everyday's companion. Katniss becomes the back bone of the family, the one who brings the bacon home, the one who is responsible to feed everyone at home, though she was only 16 years old. The harsh life of Katniss Everdeen surely develops a mature mentality yet a rebellious ideology. Katniss whose skill is hunting with bow and arrow makes friend with another hunter boy named Gale. Most of the time they go hunting to fulfil their very basic need: eating. Poverty remains unsolvable in her district which specialized in Mining Industry, so the wood becomes the only place for them to find food. In her very young age, Katniss has had some strong stands that she is the only hope for her family after her fathers' death and her mother's inability to cope with her husband's death so she emotionally abandoned Katniss and her sister Prim. "The wood becomes our saviour, each day i went a bit further into its arms. It was slow-going at first, but i was determined to feed us. I stole eggs from nests, caught fish in net, sometimes managed to shoot a squirrel or rabbits for a stew, and gathered various plants that sprung up beneath my feet. Plants are tricky. Many are edible, but one false mouthful and you are dead. I checked and double checked the plants. I harvested with my father's picture. I kept us alive" (Collins 51).

Indeed, Katniss's life has no fanciness at all. The struggles she had to endure is relentlessly shaped the way how she think, especially toward the "Panem". Katniss knows always that Panem doesn't give the people justice. Even she realizes that Panem has control over everything including taking someone's life. She realizes that Panem Ideology or Superstructure is wrong. District 13 is considered as one of the most impoverished districts in Panem and it is actually the furthest from the capital. Hence to make people stay, the government makes a giant electrifying fence which they said to keep them from the flesh eaters or wild animals, but everyone know it's one of the capital's ways to oppress the people besides many other ways. Katniss once said that "district twelve, where you can starve to death in safety" (Collins 8). this indicates that the poverty is very dire. Ironically The Capitol built the fence to protect the people from the flesh eater or wild animals such as bears and tigers but did not provide adequate jobs for the people that eventually made the people into starvation. Katniss's point of view about the capita is also very critical. She always

mentions that she never understands why The Capitol keep fencing them and deploying many security guards to supervise the people not to cross the fence.

Panem's ideology after the calamities and the war might have changed. From what Katniss's depiction about the capital, it is justifiable if we say that this country had been imposing a totalitarian way. Something that interestingly opposed the economy system they believed in because it is so obvious that Panem, especially The Capitol had been so lavishly decorated the city with the latest technology that probably only The Capitol possesses it while other districts just see it from the television that aired throughout the country. Interestingly, capitalist system usually will let everyone to develop their own business and the meaning of success is defined by those who really want to work hard, but this nation collect all the wealth from in The Capitol instead, without letting the 12 districts to blossom. In fact they assign each district a specifically designed job such as district 12 is responsible to provide the capital need of coals and other minerals and district 1 is responsible to make all the luxurious things needed by the capital. It seems what Panem had applied in all their district is not other than Imperialism. "Imperialism is the ideology that recommends, furthers, and justifies colonial rule. It is the concept that proposes the conquest of newer regions for the sake of economic exploitation" (Nayar 5). The districts are their peripheries while The Capitol is the Metropole. It has also been strengthened and supported by the fact that the entire production base from each districts is actually transported to The Capitol and only very less share will be partially given to each districts. This is a truly depiction of Imperialism. As we know, Imperialism had taken its toll in many parts of the world. So probably would in Panem where the disparity caused by this system will inspire the youngsters to do the rebellion, the second rebellion

#### IV. THE REAPING AND THE TRIBUTE

One of the most intense parts of this novel is when The Reaping takes place. The Reaping is an annual ceremony throughout the 12 districts except The Capitol where each districts should be ready to present a couple of teen whom age ranging from 12- 18 years old to be contended in the most horrendous and hideous game called Hunger Games. For Katniss, the Reaping is one of the ways to keep her family alive because each year she would voluntarily put her name in the bail to get the *tesserae*. *Tesserae* is a supply of grain and oil for one person. Katniss does it not for the sake of pride but for keeping her family away from dire starvation. So each year started when she was 12, she had casted her name to the bail not only for herself but for her sister and mother, so each year she gets 3 *tesserae*. This also means the chance of her name being withdrawn from the bail is higher because if she is now 16 years old, she had put her name as many as twenty times, hence the possibility to be called as the tribute is open wide. Katniss is again very disappointed and angry toward the government about this

*tesserae*, she always thinks why does the government not just give it away without exchange it with the names to be put in the eligible box of the tribute which annually will be reaped in front of the public. Katniss believes that this system is unfair and makes the poor getting worst. She says:

The reaping system is unfair, with the poor getting the worst of it. You become eligible for the reaping the day you turn twelve. That year, your name is entered once. At thirteen, twice. And so on and so on until you reach the age of eighteen, the final year of eligibility. But here's the catch. Say you are poor and starving as we were. You can opt to add your name more times in exchange for tesserae. Each tessera is worth a meagre year's supply of grain and oil for one person. You may do this for each of your family members as well. So at the age of twelve, I had my name entered four times. Once because I had to, and three times for tesserae for grain and oil for myself, Prim, and my mother. In fact every year I have needed to this. And the entries are cumulative. So now, at the age of sixteen, my name will be in the reaping twenty times (Collins 14).

The reaping is one of the tangible evidences the government imposes their rule and power. Everyone in the district should attend the ceremony of the reaping, unless they are very ill or under the treatment of a doctor, otherwise prison awaits. All the activities in the district should be ended and the business should be closed at the day of the reaping. Families whose children had been eligible for the reaping are obviously jittering and worrisome. They would never know who would be reaped and it could be their child. Once their name's child being called, they would only have a very less time to say goodbye, because the tribute would be transported to the capital directly to be trained with other tributes from other districts. The reaping in every district is being telecasted throughout the country. So people from district 1 can watch the reaping procession in district 10 or in any other districts.

At the end of the reaping, families whose children are not taken away would celebrate the night fancily, knowing that they could spend and see each other for another one year till the next reaping comes, while the families whose children unfortunately reaped for The Hunger Games would be in their tormenting weeks ever knowing that their children would be slashed by another tribute if not being harshly killed by the nature forces that scientifically and intentionally designed to kill the tributes in the arena of Hunger Games. Katniss says "Tonight, after the reaping, everyone is supposed to celebrate. And a lot of people do, out of relief that their children have been spared for another year. But at least 2 families will put their shutters, lock their doors, and try to figure out how they will survive the painful weeks to come" (Collins 11).

Unjustly, children and teenagers from The Capitol are not included in the Hunger Games, in fact they are the ones who bet who is going to be the winner in the games. It's crystal clear that this system is similar with the ancient Greece had: *Gladiator*. Because the tributes will be battled till the last person remains and becomes the winner. For Katniss, being a tribute from district 12 is the only way for her to salvage her only sister, Prim, whose luck was bad because her name is being called in the reaping. So Katniss volunteered herself to replace her sister to be the tribute, because she knows Prim is not going to make it and even she realizes she will not make it as well. In other districts, being a tribute is such an honour. They would proudly volunteer themselves if their names are not being reaped. They are dubbed as *Career Tribute*. For them, being in the game is truly a blessing honour to defend their districts and to show the nationalism to the Panem. They have been trained since the early age, usually by the winner of the Hunger Games that comes from their district. Once one of them wins then their district will be showered by lavish *tesserae* while other districts might suffer from starvation especially in the most dilapidated district like district 12. "In some districts, in which winning the reaping is such a great honor, people are eager to risk their lives, the volunteering is complicated. But in district 12, where the word tribute is pretty much synonymous with the word corpse, volunteers are all but extinct" (Collins 23). Most of the time, these career tributes are the strongest amongst all, they are hard driven and willing to do anything to win and it is known that during the seventy four times The Hunger Games ever held, the winners are mostly coming from either from district 1, 2 or 3.

## V. THE HUNGER GAMES

If we position ourselves as the Panem's Capitol citizen then The Hunger Games is not more than the most awaited Reality Show of the year where we could see juveniles kill each others for the sake of survival mode, well different case for the the tribute careers whose intention is to bring the victory and proud to the respective districts, because there is only one rule in Hunger Games: "Kill or to be killed." The residence of The Capitol also could be the defining factor for a tribute to win this game by sending their favourite tribute a present during the game. They are called as "Sponsors." This present could be foods, medicines or even weapons to help a tribute survived in the game. That's why each tribute should be able to attract capitol's residence attention to be their sponsors. In this case, becoming everyone's darling is very important. The Hunger Games itself is actually set up by the government as the reminder for every district that their country is built based on the ashes of the war and rebellion. So every year the government has decided to create an unforgettable moment for its people that war isn't the answer and rebellion could lead to another war. As Katniss says

Taking the kids from our districts forcing them to kill one another while we watch-this is The Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy, How little

chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in district thirteen” (Collins 19).

This brief statement from Katniss shows us that how Hunger Games is actually a very arrogant and tyrannical way of government to terror its people. With a shielding reason to justify this is to remind people not to repeat the same mistake: rebellion. It is clear that behind the hunger games, there is actually an acute fear from the ruling government to lose the reign, so they create a tool as propaganda to make people bend on them. Totalitarian as it best. The rule of the hunger games is simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tribute, to participate. The twenty four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland.

Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to death. The last tribute standing wins. People in The Capitol are just hungry of Hungry Games. Every year they will celebrate the whole weeks of the month to bet who is the winner of the game, they themselves actually forget the reason behind the creation of hunger games that is a reminder of their bitter past. The Hunger Games is really showing how the totalitarian government imposes its power toward the oppressed districts that is by creating the fear throughout the country.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Marxism has always been associated with class division in the society, but marx himself obviously never defines or coins a very comprehensive meaning of class even in one of the chapter of Das Capital he never provides any righteous definition of class. By saying this, I may argue that there are actually a lot of theoretical foundations to interpret class, ranging from the theoretical aspect of the subject such as community or defining it based on the different strata in the society. Olin Wright, one of Marxism critics quoted Pahl.R.Es in his books on social class that few concepts are

more contested in sociological theory than the concept of “class.” In contemporary sociology there are scholars who assert that “class as a concept is ceasing to do any useful work in sociology” (57). This leads us the comprehension that class division has so much alienation with structural society.

In The Hunger Games, Panem is known to be divided into 12 districts with one district being abolished after the rebellion (district 13) and The Capitol as The Capitol city. What makes it interesting is, Panem divides the districts based on their signature commodities. These districts are responsible in producing the goods that barely needed by The Capitol. All of the districts are powerless toward The Capitol’s hideous rules and will and obviously they have no power politically and individually. One of the most distinctive things amongst these districts is they barely have contacts with each other as travelling between one district and another is forbidden. As the result, each of them possesses a unique culture and way of living. Economically and socially these districts are partly divided into high class, middle class and lower class districts. Mostly, districts that circled The Capitol within its proximity are relatively rich while the furthest ones are poor. Overall, The Capitol is the richest amongst all and the meanest as well. Moreover, the notion of class division in this novel is the division of the districts

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic, 2008. Print.
- [2]. Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley: U of California, 1976. Print.
- [3]. Lenin, Vladimir Il. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline*. New, Rev. Translation. ed. New York: International, 1939. Print.
- [4]. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. New York: International, 1948. Print.
- [5]. Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. Delhi, India: Pearson Longman, 2008. Print.
- [6]. Seife, Emily, and Suzanne Collins. *The Hunger Games Tribute Guide*. New York: Scholastic, 2012. Print.
- [7]. Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*. New York: Garland Pub., 1999. Print.
- [8]. Wright, Erik Olin. *Class, Crisis, and the State*. London: NLB, 1978. Print.