



From the Novel to the Screen: Exploring Individualism and Propaganda Through the Hunger Games Franchise

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Abstract

In the recent years the appeal of dystopian fiction gained massive attention from movie makers and authors as well, this literary hallmark created an evolution following books such as 1984 by George Orwell and many other novels that helped in this sudden appeal. On the other hand, Young Adult fiction captured the theme of dystopia in the last decades, featuring teenagers as heroes and change makers. This article addresses one of the recent franchises in the world of cinema and adaptation movies which is the Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne. This paper aims at addressing themes such as individual's struggle against corrupted systems and tackling the evolution from the book to the movie adaptation.

Article info

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1. Introduction

The world of literature noticed a set of changes over time and with these alterations appeared different genres and themes. Young Adult genre gained attention during the last few decades, stressing upon themes of democracy, freedom and revolution against totalitarian regimes. Cart (2001) explains that the emergence Young Adult fiction since the 90s started to grow more and it was no longer exclusive to the traditional age of 18 but it was pushed more to the age of 25, since it became utterly interesting (p95). Nowadays, this fiction is considered as one of the most appealing literary genres, due to its diverse themes, it also influences cinematic productions, in which most of the highly successful movies and tv series are inspired by literature and novels, as such the *Hunger Games* trilogy by *Suzanne Collins* 2008, *the Divergent* series, *the Giver* and many other.

Nevertheless, *the Hunger Games* is considered as one of the dystopian movies that grasped the attention of significant studies. The latter is considered as a successful franchise for its huge audience and mega fans, in fact, since 2008 when Collins published her first novel, people were eager to read more on the story, and later, the books were adapted into screen which added more popularity to this novel. Therefore, topics of war and human rights became a hallmark in Hollywood on screen movies more than before. *The Hunger games* which follow a story of a young 16-year-old teenager called Katniss living in dystopian post war United states and her quest for freedom against a corrupted regime that exceeds its control as a means of manifesting power. These themes are commonly articulated in today's novels and movies as well.

The theme of individualism on the other hand is quite essential in the novel, that highlights young people and their ability to become more independent at an early age due to several factors. Hence, alongside individualism comes capitalism as one of the utterly appealing discourses in the series. Suzanne Collins explained how her interest in post war themes influenced her writings, as in what she experienced during her childhood living in Vietnam and being able to witness the media coverage on wars also inspired her to include all these aspects in the books, creating a combination between the modern era conflicts and the ancient history myths. Thus, this paper will first discuss the popularity of Young Adult fiction as a genre nowadays and its sudden appeal to screen makers, moreover, the article will also highlight the theme of colonization and capitalism in the *Hunger Games* trilogy and the quest of individuals for freedom against totalitarian systems.

2. Young Adult Fiction

Young Adult fiction is a term used to describe the literature associated with young people during teenage hood, Ellis (1980) explains the connotation of Young Adult fiction in association with their everyday life , it actually gives an accurate exhibition of teenagers and their emotional , social and psychological struggles trying to prove themselves in a world ruled by adults (p5). there is no exact definition to the term young adult fiction Belbin (2011) illustrates that Dr Alison Waller a specialist in this field argued on the difficulty of placing an authentic definition to what is referred

to as Young Adult, hence, he also explains in his panel the Death of the Issue Novel, that this literature addresses serious topics from the point of view of a teenager, as such he mentioned a novel by Elizabeth Laird entitled *A Little Piece of Ground* which is a novel about a young Palestinian boy and the conflict of war and colonization. Young adult fiction usually deals with teenagers but with a mature perspective, whereby it tackles topics of war, alienation, and several serious matters in the society (p140).

Moreover, this literature is likely intended to solve issues young people face in real life such as identity alteration and reaching maturity Mccallum,2012 points out how Young Adult authors amplify the use of unique characters, in search of identity and meaning, that is usually in struggle with the society and the norms, he also discusses the literary techniques commonly used in such novels, using internal dialogue, and focusing on the psychological aspect, all these factors are used to reflect teenager's quest for identity and shows the conflict between the society and individuals (p67).

2.1 Cinematography through the Hunger Games.

According to Brown (2016) the term Cinematography is from Greek origins referring to writing with motion "Cinematography is more than just photography , it is the process of taking ideas, words ,actions, emotional subtext ,tone, and all other forms of nonverbal communication rendering them in visual terms"(p1). Therefore, cinematography adds a visual depth to the movie, it is necessary for the producers and cinematographers to insist on the quality of shoots and their production making up an understandable and realistic scene. In fact, it is necessary to create a world of visuals for the characters, which will allegedly influence the audience and give either a negative or positive impression, depending on the work of cinematographers.

Cinematography in the Hunger Games is also a very essential part in the success of the movie , In an article entitled *Tom Stem ASC AFC / The Hunger Games*, (2015) the authors describe the experience of Tom Stem who is the cinematographer of the series . The movie is an adaptation on *the Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, Gary Ross the producer of the film joined Collins and wrote the script, along with Stem as the visual art specialist with a prior experience in this field (Para 1). Stern explains his experience in working with Gary Ross as follows "Gary created a lot of pre-visualisation renderings which gave me insights into how he envisioned the story "(para 7). They also states that one of the difficulties faced by the Hunger Games team production is finding the right sets and making it look closer to what the author wrote in the book, "when we were shooting on set ,we had to emulate a realistic look for the environment where the scene was happening ", he adds "it was kind of contrasty light that felt a little oppressive ,which was the right look for people who were living in a totalitarian nation "(para.7)

Furthermore, the techniques of cinematography used in the Hunger Games such as the different angle shoots and point of view shots are all to portray themes like identity , survival and the struggle against a corrupted system, Besides, the role of the cinematographer is to attract the audience and bring vivid images that could make the viewers feel connected to the story .The use of close up

shots in the Hunger Games is used to show the struggle the people face , for example the scene of the reaping in the movie , Katniss the protagonist and her family are shown waiting for the first announcement for the 12th district tribute , the dread and frustration portrayed on the faces of the actors are all accomplished thanks to the way the camera follows every move by intention in order to bring more reality to the show.

Therefore, the adaptation of the story from the novel required the producer to add innovative ideas and marketing skills to the advertising of the movie Keller explains how Mr. Ross dedicated much time and effort to produce a successful adaption “Ross’s The Hunger Games , along with its promotional campaign , generates a lengthy analogue to the profession and industry of filmmaking” (2013,p24).Consequently, cinematography in the Hunger Games contributed to the success of the adaptation, with the use of CGI and 3D rooms adding more realistic images to the movie.

2.2 The Sudden Popularity of Young Adult Fiction

In the recent years, several Young Adult dystopian trilogies ranked as best teen choice, with the combination of dystopian themes, books such like *the Divergent* series, *the Hunger Games*, alongside many successful releases. This latter noticed a growing reputation not just in the literary world but in cinema as well. Scholes & Ostenson, argue that the sudden compelling of this literary style is due to its similarities with classical dystopian themes, in which totalitarianism and corrupted regimes stand in the path of individuals, making it more interesting by bringing young characters to play the role of heroes and protagonists. (2013, para 5).

Novels such as *the Hunger Games*, *the Giver*, *the Maze Runner* captivated the audiences’ views, and later their film adaptation added more recognition to it. Hence, this style of writing is rather called a fiction than a genre as Flanagan explains in an article, that considering Young Adult as a genre would limit its orientations, this fiction shares several traits with other genres, it is possible to find romance, horror, realism, science fiction.... All within this style of writing, that is why it is better to refer to it as a style because it could incorporate as many themes as possible and genres (2014, para 7).

The style of narrative also plays a role in its appeal to readers, Young Adult books are mainly told from the first-person point of view which best represents the characters and bring an accurate image of what is really happening inside their minds, Miller argues ‘ ’ it is about what is happening, right this minute, in the stormy psyche of the adolescent reader ‘(2010, para 7). This type of narration provides a direct connection between the reader and the author. Besides, the use of technology and science fiction themes also contributed to its utter popularity, Dystopian fiction also raises awareness to what the progress of technology could bring to humanity. Freedom is also highlighted in several novels just like the *Hunger Games*, freedom of choice is limited and monitored by a corrupted state which pushes individuals further to act and rebel against the system, searching for a better reality. hence, usually Young Adult Novels are a combination of science fiction themes and fantasy, the focus on technology is also a key element in the appeal of this literary style, the authors tend to bring futuristic plots and settings, and portraying youngsters as protagonists and heroes.

3. Katniss the Individual in the Hunger Games Arena.

The author of *the Hunger Games* trilogy Suzanne Collins focused on the notion of individuals in the arena, Katniss Everdeen who is the main character in the series is put in a deadly arena alongside other 11th contenders fighting for their lives. Each one of them is obliged to prove to the capitol that they are worth winning the games and they could survive. Collins' influence by the ancient history and Roman gladiators is clearly reflected in her writings, she stressed on the notion of survival in the arena Aitchison explains Collins' interpretation based on one of her interview "...she made explicit her debt to Spartacus's life narrative, pointing out how protagonist Katniss Everdeen follows the same arc from slave to gladiator to rebel" (2015,p254).

The series are centered around a 16th years old Katniss Everdeen, who comes from the poorest district in Panem, she is a fierce fighter and a skilled survivor. Katniss is the lone provider for her family, she learned to hunt with her father at a very young age. According to Collins (2008) "It was all going at first, but I was determined to feed us. I stole eggs from nests, caught fish in nets, sometimes managed to shoot a squirrel or rabbit for stew, and gathered the various plants that sprung up beneath my feet" (p51).

Besides, as an individual Katniss has always been alone, even if she had partners in hunt thus, she always relied on herself and never fully counted or trusted someone to provide for her and her family, she was always in a constant fear that if something happens to her, nobody could help her family Collins describes it as follows "what really scares me is what they might do to my mother and Prim, how my family might suffer now because of my impulsive"(2008,p103). That is why she found it hard to adopt when the games initiated and she found herself obliged to work with others, also the idea of going out of her comfort zone scares her, she grows up in the 12th district, one of the poorest districts, all what she dreamt of is to provide a shelter for her family. Her thoughts are disturbed and unstable when she entered the arena.

For the first time, I allow myself to truly think about the possibility that I might make it home. To fame. To wealth. To my own house in the Victor's village. My mother and Prim would live there with me. No more fear of hunger. A new kind of freedom. But then...what? what would my life be like on a daily basis? Most of it has been consumed with the acquisition of food. Take that away and I'm not really sure who I am, what my identity is. The idea scares me some (Collins,2008, p62).

In this quote Katniss thinks of what will happen after she wins the games, what would be her role without being the provider for her poor family, she is confused on how to continue existing without doing the exact same things, because the system made her believe that her place in the society is to work hard to provide food, no place for dreams. Katniss the protagonist of the story is presented as a rebellious character who challenges the rules of the capitol and makes her own. The trilogy takes a political position as well, individuals in the 12th districts are always in a constant struggle with the Capitol, abusive regime puts chains on their freedom "Collins depicts a

character who increasingly challenges the competitive individualism promoted by the Capitol, and with it , its power”(Hubler,2014,p239).

The Hunger Games trilogy is built on a world of different dichotomies, the poor against the rich, the system against individuals, power and survival, revolution and freedom, these aspects are considered the core of the series, all with the manifestation of the protagonist Katniss, as the heroin of the story, she exhibits her survival skills in the arena, she builds fake relationship to maintain a persona fulfilling the audiences’ hunger for a show. The novel is differently interpreted by critics, some considers it as a dystopian novel that does not really touch political matters directly as others may have, other critics argue against this idea proving that *the Hunger Games* genuinely addresses topics of classes and social injustice in a futuristic era, Aitchison discusses “Collins’s purpose, I argue, is to rescue certain bonds of care and affection once regarded as virtues, traditionally fostered at home, and utterly at odds with the competitive individualism demanded by the modern capitalist economy”(2015,p256).

3.1 Images of Capitalism and Dictatorship through the Hunger Games.

The hunger Games world is built on what was once the United States, Panem is all what remained after the collapse of civilization, it takes place in a dystopian society where humans are categorized based on their economic status. Therefore, the notion of capitalism is strongly emphasized throughout the novels, Katniss is described as a poor individual who cannot barely afford bread for her family, whereas others in the capitol enjoy the luxurious life on behalf of the weak and wretched in the districts.

The economy of Panem is based on the districts, the system takes advantage of the people and their labor, each district is specialized in serving a specific need for the Capitol. The author shows through her writings the differences between the districts, the people are obliged to work hard and sacrifice their lives for those in power, supplying all their needs, energy, raw materials and entertaining them in each year’s annual reaping. Besides, for the capitol to have supreme control over the slaves in the districts, they organized an annual event called the Hunger Games, whereby each district gives up two contenders to enter a vicious arena, they are expected to kill, starve and do anything to survive just like the Roman gladiators, and everything is televised and monitored for the audience to have a show of entertainment.

Nevertheless, Panem is centered around a capitalist system, with the fancy technology they developed, the advanced weapons and surveillance they rely on, the poor becomes even poorer and the rich gets wealthier. This has been done to maintain the ancient regime, there is no equal rights for those in the poor districts, whether you are from district 2 or 12 it is all the same, for the capitol, those in the 12th districts are no more than slaves. In the arena, they are no more than entertaining objects and they have no power to defy the games, they are obliged to follow what they dictate on them Katniss describes her feelings after her little friend Rue died in the arena, Collins (2008) points out “Rue’s death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict

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upon us. But here, even more strongly than at home, I feel my impotence. There's no way to take revenge on the Capitol. Is there!" (p263).

The law of capitalism can be analysed through the Capitol's exploitation of power over the helpless districts, therefore in order to understand how Capitalism functions in the Hunger Games, it is necessary to explain this economical ideology, Kocka refers to the term capital in economy as the utilization of resources in the present with the expectation of higher gains in the future ,including several factors that could assess the success of the failure of this system (2018,p73).Besides , the definition of the French socialist Louis Blanc as "the appropriation of Capital by some, to the exclusion of others 1.The assimilation to the Hunger Games society is apparently viewed through the misuse of fortune in the Panem , the justification of poverty in the districts as a punishment and fair justice sentenced by the Capitol. Moreover, the market in Panem is built upon the districts which is ironic because the world of Panem is made in the far future, and with all the resources it is supposed to be wealthier and technologically advanced.

The capitol makes Katniss look as a commodity, a product ready to be advertised for sponsors, she is not treated as a human, she is put through changes to please the colonizer and the system regardless of what she thinks,"... and so Katniss enters the arena not as a human being, but as a piece of meat prepared for consumption by those too self-involved to see her as anything other than entertainment "(Burke,2013, p59).The Capitols does not care about the people in the districts , the whole show is made for entertaining purposes ,also to show them that they are in power and they have all the means to destroy everything and everyone who does not obey . The contenders are put in harsh situations where their humanity is tested , they are in war between themselves because the arena has one law which is the law of survival , they either kill or be killed , Katniss had a hard time adapting to this , she always felt that if she gives in , she will loose herself within the process and that is what the capitol wants from them , to become emotionless and monsters , Katniss has been in a situation , that she could not do anything but watch another tribute die "I am ashamed I never tried to help her in the woods .That I let the Capitol kill the boy and mutilate her without lifting a finger . Just like I was watching the Games" (Collins, 2008, p85).

3.2. Propaganda and Entertainment in the Arena

The hunger games are an annual program broadcasted by the capitol as a means of power exhibition and supremacy, the games also stand as a show-off, the capitol exceeds in the use of technology and mass media, in fact the Hunger Games are televised on screen as a live show. They force each district to give up two other young people as tributes to be part of the deadly race towards survival. The selection is made randomly, known as the reaping. Therefore, the people in the districts have no choice but to accept this event, because they are condemned for the previous incidents in district 13, the mayor of district 12 declares as "it is both a time for repentance and a time for thanks "(Collins, 2008, p19). The districts are intimidated by the Capitol, and they have no choice but to obey." taking the kids from our district, 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 "(Collins, 2008, p18).

The game of propaganda and entertainment plays a very essential role in the series in general, the Capitol sets rules that each competitor should be watched through every step in the games, it is their duty to produce an appealing show Collins state "the audience in the capitol will be getting bored, claiming that these games are verging on dullness "(2008, p173).

The game makers restrain the arena with technology, they manipulate the environment and the tribute's chances of winning, Collins says" the flames that bear down on me have unnatural, a uniformity that marks them as human made, machine made, game makers made "(p137). The contenders are in constant danger, their chances of winning are not fully condemned by their performance in the arena, it is also interfered by the Game makers "the fireball crashes into the ground at my side, but not before it skids across my right calf "(p176).

Katniss as the protagonist of the story notices how important it is for the capitol to produce a show for the audience out there, her mentor explains to her how she could succeed if she plays intelligently. In 2008 Collins writes "It's all a big show, it's all how you're perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you're a heartbreaker Which do you think will get you enough sponsors" (p24)? Further, the show is sponsored by viewers, if they like her enough, they could bet on her which will set her chances of winning higher, it is a game of emotional, physical, psychological manipulation indeed. After she understood that she has to keep the show going, Katniss mastered the art of pretense, she attempted another reveal in the training room she explains again "without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Game makers" table, I hear shout of alarm as people stumble back, the arrow skewers the apple in the pig's mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief "(Collins, p102).

The event is annually hosted for the purpose of entertainment "a festivity, a sporting event" (Collins , 2008,p19) ,an event for dehumanizing the citizens in the districts, and reminding them of how little they have against the capitol, it is a festival for the rich people , they wear customs and celebrate this event like a happy anniversary whereas, people in the 12th districts people pray for their kids to not be selected .It also remains as a punishment and a means of hijacking power and control for the colonizer. The games are developed each year with a group of tech specialists in order to keep the audience entertained, they have the power to create creatures such as the mutts in the arena. The author states" Muttations, no question about it I've never seen these mutts, but they're no natural born animals" (Collins, p331).

On the other hand, the technology used in the Capitol does not exist in those poor districts, they are deprived of any means of technology, and it is considered a sin to attempt using it or trespassing the law. this reflects the totalitarian system the Capitol stands upon. Nonetheless, violence shown on screen is done on purpose, the contenders are put in situations where they find themselves trapped with hardship and their only way is to kill or be killed, as the law of the Capitol dictates.

4. *The Hunger Games, a successful adaptation.*

In March 2012, the first movie the Hunger Games was released based on the famous book series written by Suzanne Collins, the adaptation gained success as much the books did. In fact, the movies became a franchise providing a startling image at a post apocalyptic America. With a fascinating cast the series hit top ten Hollywood blockbuster movies. Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen, Josh Hutcherson as Peta and many others who contributed to the success of the adaptation.

The movie was produced by Lionsgate company in 2012, with a production of \$78million, which was cheaper compared to other big budget movies, therefore, according to the Box office statistics, the movie reached 4,137 theatres worldwide reaching \$700 million globally. In a New York Times article Dargis argues that Gary Ross the film director worked with other expert cinematographer among them Tom Stern and Clint Eastwood attempting to find the mystery in the forest , and creating a vivid image that matches the books ,focusing on the manifestation of adolescents and their quest for self realisation and maturity , also the movie insists on showing the struggle teenagers face while dealing with adults , he states “in the Hunger Games , the real enemies are adults, including ,of course the parents catching the show on TV”(2012,para 4). Additionally, the success of the movie counts on the producer and the company to prepare for an impressive release , and that is usually done through teasers and trailers Keller argues “As with Panem's Hunger Games, the public relations blitz for Ross's film is calculated and planned well in advance of the release, and it becomes increasingly visible as the premier approach”(2013,p25).

The movie focuses on Katniss’s character as a young fighter who paves her way in a world full of danger and hatred, she is not depicted as a weak female protagonist who needs a savior ,she is the savior of her own self .Additionally ,there were some utter changes were made ,making the movie more understandable and the plot catchy such as how Katniss sung the song twice instead of once ,first to her sister and second to Rue her competitor ,who reminded her of her sister , this act adds more emotional depth to the adaptation and strengthens the message the producer is trying to send which is family comes first .Nonetheless, the narration technique is also another successful factor in the appeal of this movie to the audience , Gary Ross tried to maintain Katniss’s first point of view using different cinematographic techniques yet it still does not reach how the books portrays the narration, because of the inconsistency and the role play of characters .The film indeed succeeded in delivering important messages that the author intended for, it put emphasis on war , freedom of choice and the struggle citizens experience with a totalitarian regime.

5. CONCLUSION

The world of Cinema lately noticed a remarkable success, and one of the reasons is due to the adaptation made on literary texts such as novels, poetry and even biographies. Thus, *the Hunger Games* a novel that was first published in 2008 by the American novelist and screen writer Suzanne

Collins, telling the story of a young teenager named Katniss Everdeen, who sacrificed her life for her sister in an annual event called the reaping, entering a deadly race called the Hunger Games, this latter is hosted by the Capitol of Panem, an autocratic government that uses all types of violence and humiliation for the sake of hijacking the people in the districts, and reminding them of what happened in the past with district 13, when the people there asked for freedom and revolted against the government.

Furthermore, the series were adapted into screen in 2012 by the Lionsgate production company, directed by Gary Ross. The adaptation gained massive attention by fans and lovers of the Dystopian Young Adult series. Hence, this article attempts to address significant themes in the franchise, such as the use of media and propaganda to influence people's minds, also as a means of showing off power and control. Also exploring the notion of individualism through the protagonist's manifestation in the arena and how her quest for freedom allowed her to test her abilities and eventually prove herself as a winner. Another aspect analysed is the effect of Capitalism as a political and economical ideology in *the Hunger Games*, stressing upon the distribution of resources in the society and the maltreatment of people in the districts, considering them as slaves.

As a result, this study proved several ideas on how Young Adult fiction plays a role in affecting and addressing very essential themes nowadays, therefore, moving from the novel to the movie, the adaptation created a rewarding result and helped in the widespread of the series, with the creative cinematography and visual scenes the cinematographer of the movie Stern deployed, giving the adaptation a realistic image for viewers.

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