

# THE EFFECT OF CAPITALISM IN SUZZANE COLIN'S NOVEL *THE HUNGER GAMES*

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## Abstract

This research is conducted to analyze the effects of capitalism in society through the novel *The Hunger Games* written by Suzanne Collins and to determine the negative effects that occur in society. According to Karl Marx capitalism is the production of value and surplus-value. It is an ideology that believes that the owner of production can do their effort to get the big profit. The negative effects that are analyzed in this study are: poverty, social stratification, and totalitarianism. Poverty as deficiency materials and services needed to achieve a decent life. Poverty is a condition where a person is unable to meet basic needs such as shelter, food clothing, decent health, and education. Social stratification is system of differentiation of individuals or groups in society, which placing it in social classes that differ hierarchically and provide different rights and obligations between individuals in one layer with another layer. Totalitarianism is meant to a government that is strong, powerful, lasting and all-encompassing and within the state; nothing outside the state; nothing against the state. This research uses descriptive qualitative method. It is applied to explain the negative impact of capitalism from quotations in the novel. This research finds that the three effects of capitalism: poverty, social stratification, and totalitarianism are found the novel.

**Keywords:** capitalism, class distinction, poverty, negative effects, social stratification, totalitarianism

## 1. Introduction

*The Hunger Games* is a novel by the American writer Suzanne Collins. *The Hunger Games* was published on September, 2008, in USA. *The Hunger Games* is a novel by the American writer Suzanne Collins. Suzanne Collins is an American author who published her debut book, *Gregor the Overlander*, the first of the five-part *The Underland Chronicles*, in 2003. In 2008, her first book of *The Hunger Games* series was published.

*The Hunger Games* was published on September, 2008, in USA. The writers analyze negative effects of capitalism in novel *The Hunger Games*. The author shows a cruel administration system. In this novel, Panem is a country which becomes the setting. In the past, Panem gets a rebellion until finally the rebellion finishes. The cruel one is that the capitalists do not give an apology to the districts which rebell against the country. In fact, they run a Hunger games. The capitalist oppresses the citizen. Other wickedness of this game is that it becomes an entertainment for the capitalist. That

game is a big oppression for the citizen. This condition makes *The Hunger Games* movie interesting for the writers. Respective data and theories are of high needs to support the whole study and presented in the literature review of this thesis. This research is focused on the negative effects of capitalism in the novel. Furthermore, this research, hopefully, might give significance contribution to the researchers themselves and the readers of this research.

## 2. Literature Review

Capitalism is the production of value and surplus-value (Marx, 2012: 15). He also states that capitalist societies are dehumanizing because the social relations of production prohibit men from achieving the freedom of self-determination that the advance of technology has made possible (Marx, 1973). Capitalist society is a society who oppresses the proletarian class (lower class). They are the owner of production and the employers of wage labor. The separation between the possessing class and the working class (labor/lower class) represent the same human alienation but bring different impact to the two classes. The possessing class feels satisfied as a sign of its own power. Then, the lower class feel destroyed and isolated in this alienation, so, they want to stand against as the result of the alienation and the oppression that is done by the capitalist society. This is in line with Berberoglu (1994: 156) who states that capitalist society is a society characterized by the principles of production relationship between wage labor and the owners of the means of production in capitalist system. According to Tucker in Tuduru (2008: 34), there are two main classes in capitalist society that relate to one another in the production sphere: the capitalist (bourgeoisie/the opposing class) and the waged labor (the proletarian/the working class). The first class possesses the means of production and accumulates capital through the exploitation of labor. The second class, the working class does not possess the means of production but instead uses their labor power to generate value for the capitalist as a condition for its survival. Furthermore, Drepper in Tuduru (2008: 102) states that the working class moves toward class struggle insofar as capitalism satisfies its economic and social needs and aspiration. There is no evidence that workers like to struggle again than anyone else; the evidence is that capitalism compels and accustoms them to do so. Based on the descriptions above it is seen that it is the capitalists who cause the working class or proletariat to do class struggle.

Capitalism might give some effects such as poverty, social stratification, and totalitarianism. Poverty is created when a stratified social and economic system breaks down or is replaced by another. One example supporting that is moving from feudalism to capitalism. A culture of poverty has resulted from imperial conquest, in which native, social, and economic structures are broken down, it may also occur in the process of detribalization. Meanwhile, Muin (2004: 48) states that social stratification is system of differentiation of individuals or groups in society by placing them in social classes that differ hierarchically and provide different rights and obligations among them in one layer with another layer.

Social stratification is the difference of population or society into classes in stage, manifested in high classes, medium class, and low class. The basis and core of the community stratification system is an imbalance in the distribution of rights and the responsibilities of each individual or group in a system (Sorokin, 1998: 36). On the other side, totalitarianism is meant to a government that is strong, powerful, lasting and all-encompassing and within the state; nothing outside the state; nothing against the

state (Staniforth, 2008: 1). Totalitarianism is the total rejection of the dominant ideology of liberalism and the political, social and economic freedom that has become the norm in the Western world. People do not have the right to be free to make decisions that are not in the interests of the state. In short, it means total control of all aspects of people's lives is under the state. Totalitarianism is a much more efficient and simpler form of government. All the decisions are made by one central power and this makes very fast and efficient decisions. It is a very short process to pass a law that requires the approval of only one or two people. This is much faster as compared to other forms of government that must go through several processes before being put into effect. This is in line with the ideas proposed by Baehr (2014: 18).

### **3. Research Method**

This research is accomplished by adopting qualitative design. The analysis and the findings are presented in the form of description. In other words, there is no statistical value applied in this research because the data of this research are in the forms of words, and quotations of the script of the novel. According to Neuman (2000: 123) that data of qualitative research are in the forms of words and images from documents, observations, and transcripts.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Result**

Negative effects of capitalism found in the novel are poverty, social stratification, and totalitarianism. It is proved by the people who live in the district 12. They are poor people who have to submit and obey the capitol government. They are given poor facilities of life, they do not have right to speak, and all of their activities are controlled by the capitol government.

### **4.2. Discussion: Negative Effect of Capitalism in the Novel**

#### **4.2.1 Class Distinction**

Class Distinction is a characteristic that is observed to differ based on social class in which the dominant class exploits subordinate groups for their interests in both the economic or political fields. Class Distinction causes people to be divided into two camps that compete with one another in sustaining life. Class Distinction will also cause social classes in the midst of society. It is undeniable in life that we often encounter social distinction. In the novel, it is very clear that there is a class of distinction that occurs. The class distinction can be seen as follows:

“You can see why someone like Madge, who has never been at risk of needing a tessera, can set him off. The chance of her name being drawn is very slim compared to those of us who live in the Seam. Not impossible, but slim. And even though the rules were set up by the Capitol, not the districts, certainly not Madge's family, it's hard not to resent those who don't have to sign up for tesserae” (Collins, 2008: 14).

The quotation shows that there is a difference between Madge, Gale and Katniss. There is less possibility for Madge to be taken in different collections from Gale and Katniss who live in seam, most likely their names come out at the time of

collection. Madge is a child of a Mayor while Gale and Katniss are just poor poachers.

“Gale knows his anger at Madge is misdirected. On other days, deep in the woods, I’ve listened to him rant about how the tesserae are just another tool to cause misery in our district. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and there by ensure we will never trust one another. “It’s to the Capitol’s advantage to have us divided among ourselves,” he might say if there were no ears to hear but mine. If it wasn’t reaping day. If a girl with a gold pin and no tesserae had not made what I’m sure she thought was a harmless comment” (Collins, 2008: 14-15).

Social class distinction is created by the Capitol for their benefit leading to a divided society. It appears from the quotation that shows Gale's anger towards Madge because Madge does not need to follow Tessera like them and her name will not come out at the polls because she is a mayor's daughter. It is clearly seen that there are differences in treatment between ordinary people and the daughter of a mayor.

#### **4.2.2 Human Exploitation**

The term exploitation is an act of exploiting or using something for any purpose. Human exploitation is related to the use of other people in a way that they want even very cruel and dangerous. The persons who are exploiting do not care about how other people are doing to achieve their desired goals. In the novel, it is clear that the government is Panem and the Capitol is exploiting the community for its sake. The quotation proves human exploitation that happens in the novel:

“To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others. The last tribute alive receives a life of ease back home, and their district will be showered with prizes, largely consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning district gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation (Collins, 2008: 19-20).

The quotation shows how the Capitol exploits humans by holding hunger games and the public must consider hunger games as a party that they must watch every year. While the games are only pitting each district and there will be a person to be killed and people have to witness that.

People in districts are exploited as severe labor by the Capitol. It can be seen from the standard fair. The safety standard is not secure and the working hours are not appropriate. It can be seen in the quotation below:

“Rue tell to Katniss, the people in districts 11 sometimes harvest through the night, where the torchlight does not reach they should use some glasses in the highest in the trees” (Collins, 2008: 203).

The quotation above describes the workers in district 11 who have to harvest through the night in the highest of the trees. It is one of forced labor because that is not suitable with working hours and safety standards. It is clearly seen in the quotation how

the Capitols are exploiting the people in district 11 for their own sake without thinking about the consequences of their policies which are detrimental and harmful to the people living in district 11.

#### **4.2.3 Poverty**

Poverty is the saddest condition where a person is very difficult to survive because of difficult economic conditions; it can have a bad impact. Poverty is a condition in which someone or a family experiences a difficult life. They find it difficult to fulfill their daily lives such as getting food, proper clothing and even the houses they live in. As explained in Chapter II in 2.2.1, poverty is a situation that is very difficult to deal with. It must be realized that it is very difficult to deal with poverty and even poverty can cause death because they do not have money to buy food. In the novel, the Katniss Everdeen family experienced a difficult life and even threatened their lives because of poverty they experienced. Their poverty is seen as follows:

"But the money ran out and we were slowly starving to death. There's no other way to put it. I kept telling myself if I could only hold out until May, just May 8th, I would turn twelve and be able to sign up for the tesserae and get that precious grain and oil to feed us. Only there were still several weeks to go, we could well be dead by then." (Collins, 2008: 27-28).

The quotation above shows that the Katniss families are very poor. They do not have money to buy food to eat every day. And this can even cause them to starve to death. Katniss is struggling to get money to buy food for his family to survive. From the quotation above it is clear how the Katniss family survive because of the poverty they experience and even have to bet their lives to fulfill their daily lives.

"On the eighth of every month, I was entitled to do the same. I couldn't stop hunting and gathering, of course. The grain was not enough to live on, and there were other things to buy, soap and milk and thread. What we didn't absolutely have to eat, I began to trade at the Hob" (Collins, 2008: 51-52)

To survive, Katniss must hunt in the forest, and the game will be exchanged with the basic needs of his family. Because life is difficult, at the age of 16 years, Katniss must be able to become the head of the family so that their needs are met. From the above quotation it is clear how Katniss struggles to meet the needs of her family, she is willing to risk her life by hunting in the forest.

#### **4.2.4 Social Stratification**

Social stratification is the categorization of society over its people into socioeconomic rankings based on factors such as wealth, income, race, education, and power. Social stratification shows differences in social class in society. In *The Hunger Games* novel, social stratification occurs when there are differences between districts in the Panem. Conditions that show social stratification are described as follows:

"For the opening ceremonies, you're supposed to wear something that suggests your district's principal industry. District 11, agriculture. District 4, fishing. District 3, factories. This means that coming from District 12, Peeta and I will be in some kind of coal miner's getup.

Since the baggy miner's jumpsuits are not particularly becoming, our tributes usually end up in skimpy outfits and hats with headlamps. One year, our tributes were stark naked and covered in black powder to represent coal dust. It's always dreadful and does nothing to win favor with the crowd. I prepare myself for the worst" (Collins, 2008: 65).

The quotation above shows the existence of social class differences between districts. The judges give different treatment to the twelve districts which are the last districts they consider to be the place of the poor. District twelve does not get the same treatment as district one, for district twelve, it is very difficult to find sponsors to finance their clothes and the costumes they wear are not as good as those in district one.

"The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers, 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, 2008: 94)

It shows there are exceptions to children in districts 1, 2 and 4 because they come from better districts and higher stratification. Therefore, they get special handling that is different from other districts. From the quotation above, it is clear that the class distinction between districts 1, 2, and 4 get special treatment because they come from districts where rich people live.

#### **4.2.5 Totalitarianism**

Totalitarianism is a political system in which the state, usually under the control of a single political person, faction, or class, knows no boundaries with its authority and seeks to regulate every aspect of public and private life in society. The public is also not given freedom of opinion or to behave as it is controlled by the government.

"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 the Thirteen District " (Collins, 2008: 19).

The quotation above shows totalitarianism that occurs in Panem carried out by the capitol authorities. Capital city has a lot of wealth oppressing the people in Panem especially in District 12 by holding a hunger game. The community has to sacrifice a pair of 12 year old children to be sacrificed in the hunger game arena. Hunger games are always held every year even though people do not like and they cannot oppose the administration of capitol.

"The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twentyfour 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 the death. The last tribute standing wins” (Collins, 2008: 19).

In the interest of the Capitol, the Panem community in each district must sacrifice one son and one daughter. The children from the district will be put into the arena and there they will compete to the death. The final participant who is still alive is the winner. That is how the Capitol tortures the Panem people and the decision made by the Capital government cannot be contested.

## 5. Conclusion

This research concludes that capitalism in a country gives negative effects to subordinate people who live in one region. This people might live in poverty and hard to survive because their life is controlled by the government as the capitalist. The subordinate people have no freedom either in individual or public matters. They might get tortured and suppressed by the government or the capitalist.

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