

# Beyond The Oppression In Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games: A Genetic Structuralism Analysis

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## **Abstract:**

Literary works are often connected as representation of socio-historical conditions that emerged within society. As members of the society, literary authors often express their analysis and experiences through literary works. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Game* is a popular dystopian novel that depicts oppression maintained by authoritarian government. This study aims to analyze the issue of class-based control conducted by the Capitol on the districts and connect it to real-world social conditions. This research seeks to examine the structure of class-based control in the novel, investigate its representation through socio-historical context of post-9/11 America, and to reveal Collins' worldview. This research utilizes Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism as its theoretical framework and uses descriptive qualitative method. This study combines textual data from the novel and social context data to identify structural similarities between the text and the social context. The findings found that the Capitol maintains its absolute authority by using poverty, hunger, social inequality, surveillance, fear of punishment, and loss of bodily autonomy. Similar social issues can be found in post-9/11 American society, where citizens burdened by prolonged tax, government surveillance, and hate crimes toward marginalized populations. The worldview of Collins' shows that she does not support the oppression and class-based control conducted by an oppressive government.

**Keyword:** oppression, control, genetic structuralism, War on Terror.

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## I. Introduction

Literary works have been long understood to be having a close and dynamic relationship with society because literary works are heavily influenced by the socio-historical condition and human experiences. As stated by Meirysa & Wardarita (2021) as members of their society, authors of literary works frequently represent their observation, moral values, and their experiences through literary work that they have written. This makes literary work do not only show positive values of society, but also highlights social issues such as injustice, inequality, exploitation, and oppression (Keerthika, 2018). Therefore, literary works function as a medium for promoting awareness of social issues that are experienced by individuals in certain communities.

One of the social issues that is often represented in literary works is class-based control, especially in the authoritarian societies where power and domination are centered and used to control the subordinated groups. According to Günenç (2022), author countries maintain its dominance by creating social divisions, assigned roles, and surveillance. In the novel *The Hunger Games*, this form of oppression is represented through the unequal power and relationship between the Capitol and the districts. In this research the novel that is used for my analysis is the novel titled *The Hunger Games*.

The novel *The Hunger Games* was released in 2008, it is a dystopian novel that shows an oppressive and authoritarian country that control its citizen by enabling poverty, hunger, fear, and social inequality. Stoner (2017) stated that the novel whole theme is relevant to dystopian literature characteristics. Since its publication *The Hunger Games* has gained popularity and critical attention for the story engaging narratives and the depiction of social and political issues within fictional society. The book had sold 26 millions of copies by 2012 worldwide as stated by Springen (2012). Through the clear division between the Capitol as the highest in ruling class and the districts that are ruled by the Capitol, the novel portrays class-based control maintained through exploitation, unequal power, and repression of resistance.

The novel set in fictional nation of Panem, *The Hunger Games* depict a society that is characterized by extreme inequality between the wealthy Capitol and the poor districts. In order to maintain its dominance, the Capitol controls the districts resources, monopolizing wealth, enabling surveillance, and hosts the annual deadly match called the Hunger Games. The Hunger Games itself serves not only as entertainment for the Capitol audiences, but is also used as a tool of social control by forcing every district to send their one boy and one girl

to participate in Hunger Games and televised the death of the tributes to enable fear and suppress collective rebellion coming from the districts. Through this depiction, the novel shows how powerful and dominant groups maintain their influence by exploiting and controlling the subordinated groups.

By analyzing the novel *The Hunger Games* by using the perspective of class-based control is crucial because the novel portrays how the Capitol maintains its power through enabling social inequality, hierarchy, and oppression. By depicting the class division, exploitation, and absolute control, the novel shows how the Capitol, who holds significant political power, maintains their power and authority by controlling the subordinated groups. Therefore, this research highlights on class-based control to examine the structure of oppression and class-based control within the narrative.

This research assumes that there is class-based control in the novel *The Hunger Games* that create social inequality and power imbalance between the Capitol and the districts. Therefore, this study analyzes how the Capitol preserve its domination by using oppression, social inequality, and control. The researcher centers on three research problems in this study. First, the researcher intends to examine how class-based oppression is represented in the structure of *The Hunger Games*. Second the researchers seek to investigate how 21<sup>st</sup> century society deals with exploitation. Third, the researcher intends to understand the author's worldview as it is shown through the depiction of class-based control and power relations in the novel. Therefore the aim of this study are to examine how exploitation is structured in the Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, exposing how 21<sup>st</sup> century society deals with exploitation in USA, and to understand the author's worldview as it is shown through the novel. In order to support the analysis and the significance of this study, it is important to review previous research related to *The Hunger Games*.

The first previous study written by F. C. Hasan & S. L. Hasan (2024) uses *The Hunger Games* as the research object. The study uses Foucault's Panopticon theory. This research stated that the Capitol sustains its domination through constant surveillance, punishment, and information control. This strategy is used to create fear and discipline the districts' citizen. Both previous study and my study analyze domination and control in Panem and using the same literary work. The difference exists on how the earlier study focuses on surveillance in order to discipline the district's citizens, while my study highlights on beyond oppression and class-based control. My research implement genetic structuralism framework to connect the novel's representation of oppression and control.

The second previous study by Thahir et al. (2018) analyzes *The Hunger Games* novel by using the approach of sociology of literature by highlighting on the representation of global capitalism as an oppressive system that exists within the narrative of *The Hunger Games*. This study explains how the Capitol maintains its authority through economic as political control. This results in social inequality within the districts. Both the previous study and my research analyze domination and social inequality by using *The Hunger Games*. While Thahir et al. (2018) focus on the global capitalism as a tool of oppression, my study highlights on class-based control that is maintained by authoritarian governmental system and examines it using the framework of genetic structuralism.

The third previous research written by Sakinah & Kusumayanti (2023). This study uses Goldmann's genetic structuralism theoretical framework in order to examine the topic of materialism in *A Little Princess* by Hodgson Burnett. The results of the third previous study finds that the novel represents social issues emerged in Victorian Britain era that the social issues such as class division, economic inequality, and child labor become normal. The research also finds that the author's expressing opposition to the materialistic values through her worldview. Both this previous study and my research implement genetic structuralism to examine the connection between literary books structure and real life social issues. The difference between this previous research and my study lies in their object and the social issues that are being examined. Sakinah & Kusumayanti (2023) focus on materialistic values that emerged in Victorian society, however my study analyzes class-based control and oppression in *The Hunger Games*.

## **II. Theory And Method**

Genetic structuralism according to Lucien Goldmann (1980) is an understanding that historical development is created by human beings instead of abstract structures alone. Even though structures shape human thinking and behavior, it is impossible to replace humans that work as active historical subjects. This view draws the distinction Goldmann from structuralist approaches that understood structure as an independent and detached system from the historical social context. In literary studies, this means literary works must always have connection to real subjects and social groups that are shaped by history. Separating literature from its historical and social framework would turn it into a conceptual or idealist object by explaining meaning through insight rather than analysis. Goldmann grounds genetic structuralism within basic human tendencies for example humans tend to act with meaning in response to adapt within their environment. Humans tend to seek coherence through wider structuring processes, and humans actions tend to be dynamic by means persistently

shaping and reshaping the structures that they exist in. This means it is important to remember that these principles are the foundation for understanding literary works as socio-historically social practices.

### **Human Facts**

The concept of human facts is one of the essential factors in Lucien Goldmann's Genetic Structuralism. According to Goldmann (1980) human facts refers to human actions and products that are shaped due to the social conditions. Human facts are caused by actions that are taken by subjects who try to improve their connections with the world around them. Humans convert reality by writing books, building roads, or institutions in order to get a better balance or adapt between themselves and their environment. According to Goldmann, humans have tendencies to adapt and respond to all their social conditions and problems in the environment in order to survive in society. Even though not fully conscious, within this perspective all human behaviour is considered meaningful and functional. These survival instincts later become shared patterns of behavior and thought of certain social groups.

### **Collective Subject**

In genetic structuralism, Lucien Goldmann views the author as a collective subject, meaning that the author is perceived as representative of certain social groups in society. Within this framework, the individuals who write literary works are not viewed as an isolated unit. Goldmann prefers to call them group consciousness that exists through individual consciousnesses. Goldmann stated that the social group shares similar experiences and goals that shape a worldview. According to Lucien Goldmann (1964) this group consciousness relates to shared trends or patterns of feeling, ambitions, and ideas that develop within members of specific social groups. The collective subject is known as trans-individual subject. It means the idea that literary works represent the collective consciousness of a social group or community rather than the individual experiences of the author alone.

### **Significant Structure**

Lucien Goldmann (1964) stated that literary works are directly connected to the social structures in which they are produced. According to him, literature is not created purely by individual authors, but rather developed from social groups' collective experiences and consciousness. Significant structure should not be interpreted as something fixed or completed, but as an evolving potential that exists in certain social groups. It usually functions as a meaningful structure that guides the actions, emotions, and actions of individuals that are structured toward. In literature, structure reflects how the way events, characters, meanings, and ideas are organized into a consistent whole. Structure gains meaning when every element supports the same main idea or worldview and to understand a structure, the reader does not analyze separate details, instead they analyze how some detail relates to one another and contributes to a coherent meaning. Humans convert reality by writing books, building roads, or institutions in order to get a better balance or adapt between themselves and their. Human behavior and social circumstances shape the structure and meaning of literary works. So it means when social structure change, literacy works also change

### **Worldview**

A worldview relates to a coherent framework by means of human beings understanding their relationships with other people and with their surroundings. It does not portray the final or exact thoughts of a sole individual, since individual awareness is often structurally disconnected and incoherent. A worldview works as a framework concept used to analyze consistent patterns of behaviour, emotions, and thought by a group. Even though a worldview is considered a theoretical construction, it is not groundless. It is grounded in concrete and observable structures of human thinking that develop from social and historical conditions. Lucien Goldmann (1980) stated that a worldview is a way of grasping a reality that represents the shared views of a certain social class. It means worldview is not subjective individual opinion and experience, but is actually a form of a collective consciousness that is shaped by diverse and also specific social conditions and historical lived experiences. It means literary works exist as an abstract concept and becomes manifested through cultural expression. A worldview gives coherence to concepts and reactions to primary human problems, allowing this response to create a significant and integrated structure rather than remaining isolated.

The collected data were analyzed by implementing Goldmann's genetic structuralism through dialectical method. Dialectical method aims to identify the structural homology between literary works and deep social structure that allows the text to be understood as representation of wider social representation and historical conditions. In applying dialectical method, the research starts with the recognition of binary oppositions between the texts. The analysis is conducted by identifying the binary opposition between the Capitol and the districts and investigating how class-based control is structured in the shape of social stratification, oppression, and unequal power relation in the novel. The textual and contextual data that were

obtained and classified are deemed appropriate to suggest the existence of human facts, collective subject, significant structure, and worldview regarding class-based domination. The data were then connected with the social and historical context of post-9/11 or War on Terror era in American history. This step is implemented to expose structural homologies between the text and the real life context. Lastly the relationship between the novel's structure and the social context analyzed to discover the author's worldview.

### **III. Oppression And Class-Based Control In Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games**

This novel depicts a country that is stratified between the wealthy Capitol that has the authority over the districts and the oppressed districts that are under the Capitol domination. Class-based control is maintained by using surveillance, unequal distributions of resources, punishments and the existence of Hunger Game itself.

#### **Oppression and Class-Based Control through Hunger, Poverty, and Social Inequality**

Oppression and class-based control are sustained by enabling hunger, poverty, and social inequality in the novel *The Hunger Games*. The narrative shows a clear binary opposition between the Capitol as the highest ruling class and the districts that are placed lower than the Capitol in social hierarchy, where the Capitol represents wealth and economic control, while the districts, especially District 12 are represented as poverty and resource scarcity. The unequal distribution of the economic resources is not unintentional, but a deep structured condition that influences the districts into dependence on Capitol regulations and manipulation as shown in quotation.

““I'd have thought, in District Eleven, you'd have a bit more to eat than us. You know, since you grow the food,” I say. Rue's eyes widen.

“Oh, no, we're not allowed to eat the crops.”

“They arrest you or something?” I ask.

“They whip you and make everyone else watch,” says Rue. “The mayor's very strict about it.”” (Collins, 2008:5)

From the quotation above, despite some districts producing their own resources or supplies that they are assigned with, the districts are not the ones who make decisions of the resources allocation. However, the Capitol is the one in control of the distribution of resources and food that the districts produce. Capitol aims for the district poverty, starvation, and inequality, as a result hunger and inequality is used as a mechanism of control, limiting the sources of the subordinated class or the districts and maintaining the Capitol dominance. In order to discover how the Capitol subjects District 12 and the other districts into submission, understanding the underlying reason behind the district's subordination is crucial for this study. Almost every poor people experience starvation due to the unequal distribution of resources in Panem, the main character, Katniss Everdeen, who is also coming from poor area of District 12 also experience hunger to the point that she is desperate to search for it:

“All forms of stealing are forbidden in District 12. Punishable by death. But it crossed my mind that there might be something in the trash bins, and those were fair game. Perhaps a bone at the butcher's or rotted vegetables at the grocer's, something no one but my family was desperate enough to eat. Unfortunately, the bins had just been emptied.” (Collins, 2008:27)

The quotation shows a severe level of poverty and hunger that is experienced by Katniss Everdeen as a citizen of District 12. Katniss searched through the trash bins for edible leftover food such as rotten vegetables and bones. This condition shows severe food deprivation, that means basic needs are very difficult to be fulfilled. However, this condition is not merely an occasional hardship, but a continuous issue that forces individuals to be very desperate. As mentioned before, starvation is a difficulty that District 12 went through, including the main character, Katniss Everdeen. Almost all poor people in District 12 experience hunger to the point that some individuals die of starvation. This poor condition is supported by the quotation below:

“Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. Straggling through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body. Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one.” (Collins, 2008:26)

The quotation shows that basic needs such as food are not guaranteed to the point that the survival rate of its citizens in District 12 is extremely uncertain due to the poverty. The quotation shows that death by starvation is normalized even by the citizens itself because of how common death by starvation itself is. In this quotation starvation impacts elderly, children, and injured workers. The cyclical death caused by lack of food or hunger reveals that the survival rate in District 12 is extremely low and strongly dependent on the social position and physical well-being to go to work. The quotation above claimed that even though many deaths are actually caused by structurally embedded starvation, they are officially reported as other diseases. This strategy

is an attempt to hide the real situation of structural poverty.

“Even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties, more people would risk it if they had weapons... Most of the Peacekeepers turn a blind eye to the few of us who hunt because they're as hungry for fresh meat as anybody is. In fact, they're among our best customers.” (Collins, 2008:5)

Poverty and hunger influence daily lives of District 12 to the point poaching that is perceived illegal to the law are trespassed by the citizens in order to survive the hunger. The Peacekeepers are in fact ignores the people who broke the law for poaching, it shows that hunger does not only affects the District 12 citizens, but also the representative of Capitol. The relationship between the hunters and the Peacekeepers shows that hunger is not exclusively experienced by the district citizens, but also impacts the representatives of Capitol at another level. The food resources deprivation shows how starvation and scarcity creates community-based survival systems that exist outside the official rules. Furthermore Katniss and Gale discusses about preferring dying by being shot over death by starvation, it shows how extreme the poverty and starvation in District 12. These conditions show how the Capitol preserve its control through unequal resources distribution that causes poverty and starvation.

The Capitol also reinforces social inequality between the districts, District 1 and District 2 are considered the more favorite districts compared to Districts 12. The District 12 position as the lowest in desirable aspect, shows a clear contrast compared to District 1 that the tribute is positioned as the favorite and favored by the audience. This internal stratification highlights that inequality in Panem works on multiple layers. Within this system, Capitol not only creates an unequal relationship between the Capitol and the districts, but also the stratifications within the district themselves. District 1 and 2 that are considered to be richer than the District 12 also have different views towards the Hunger Game, to them being chosen as tribute for the Hunger Game is a huge honor. However in District 12 being chosen as tribute means unavoidable death.

“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, 2008:90)

The quotations show how the Capitol sustains class-based control by using social inequality, poverty, and unequal access to proper resources. The presence of Career Tributes shows that the Hunger Game is not a fair competition due to the wealthier districts that have better access to good resources to train their kids to win the Hunger Games. This condition creates binary opposition not only between the Capitol and districts, but it also present between districts themselves. District 1 and 2 represent privilege and District 12 represents disadvantaged.

It is also analyzed from the data that the Capitol also keeps the poor districts remains impoverished and starving, for example the District 12 which is known for being the poorest district. This condition forces people to prioritize survival through tesserae systems.

“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 meager 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 do this. And the entries are cumulative. So now, at the age of sixteen, my name will be in the reaping twenty times. Gale, who is eighteen and has been either helping or single-handedly feeding a family of five for seven years, will have his name in forty-two times.” (Collins, 2008:12)

This passage indicates how the Capitol controls its districts' citizens by enabling severe poverty and hunger. The Capitol created a system where the poor can get temporary access to food which is a supply of grain and oil for one person by entering their name cumulatively in the Hunger Game's reaping entries. This quotation shows how Capitol maintains control by creating an unfair reaping system that placed the poor and the starved more vulnerable and at greater risk to get chosen as tribute or participant for the deadly match. Meanwhile, the richer citizens have slim chance of being chosen as tribute. This creates a binary opposition even between the rich and the poor citizens within the districts. This shows how the Capitol as the highest in ruling class uses economic issues to maintain control over the lower classes or the poorer citizens.

The social issues of poverty, hunger, and social inequality showed in *The Hunger Games* represents wider social issues in post-9/11 American society. Just like how the Capitol maintains its domination through unequal resource distribution and maintains its authority by controlling and monopolizing resources that result in conditions where poverty, hunger, and inequality affect the poorer districts' citizens. Similar problems can be found in the socio-historical context of post-9/11 American society, where the government decided to fund the War on Terror by financing through debt. This government decision affects the citizens

The War on Terror is a global military and political movement that is led by the United States after the

terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11). The series of suicide attacks happened when the Islamist extremist group named Al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and targeted vital locations that are including Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon, the main office of the United States Department of Defense in the United States. The suicide attacks result in 2977 people lost their lives, this outcome making the 9/11 tragedy as one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in modern history. After the incident, President George W. Bush declared the start of the “War on Terror” which intended to prevent future attacks by eliminating terrorist organizations. The campaign was also involved in stricter security policies, surveillance programs, and counterterrorism military operations (Jackson, 2026).

The War on Terror caused major long-term economic consequences as well. Since September 11 suicide attacks that killed almost 3000 people, the United States government significantly increased the allocation by trillions of dollars on war activities, counterterrorism operations, veterans’ care, surveillance systems, domestic security programs (Savage, 2021). The long-term engagement in wars makes the United States government need a huge amount of financial resources and the decision to spend economic resources on war-related activities contributed to national debt and long-term financial burdens. Consequently, large amounts of public funding were constantly focused on war and security regulations for several years.

Although unlike the previous conflicts where wars were funded through a mix of higher taxes and budget cuts (Bilmes, 2024), the post-9/11 wars were different because the United States government wars were funded almost entirely on debt or borrowing trillions of dollars to pay for the post-9/11 wars while the government implemented tax cuts (Peltier, 2020), the government still burden the United States’ citizens with long term debt, particularly those who are living in poverty, through prolonged taxation when the tax regulation takes a greater share of their low income than they can afford. The war was funded through public money eventually returned to taxpayers as debt, taxes, and declining public services.

From the framework of genetic structuralism, the economic conditions that are caused by the post-9/11 War on Terror can be associated with the social condition represented in *The Hunger Games*, especially about oppression and class-based control using poverty and hunger. The long-term economic strain that is caused by the government decision on the War on Terror, war funding, debt, and the prioritization of security regulations shows a circumstance where public resources are unequally distributed while most citizens have to constantly experience financial pressure and economic instability in order to pay off the War on Terror debts. The government, who has the domination over the citizens, prioritizes their decisions and needs in a war related aspect, although the war funds were paid off by borrowing and debts, the citizens are still the ones who have to pay off the war debts. Additionally, both textual and social context shows how the government has the authority to control the citizen in submission and obey the government policies in the favor for the highest stratification in the governmental system.

### **Oppression and Class-Based Control through Fear of Surveillance and Extreme Punishment**

This subsection discusses how the Capitol as the ruling and dominant class also maintains its authority through fear of surveillance, and extreme punishment that is created by the Capitol itself. *The Hunger Games* depicts a society where the citizens of the districts are living under constant surveillance and restrictions that are limiting their freedom of expression and actions in their daily life.

““District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety,” I mutter. Then I glance quickly over my shoulder. Even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you.” (Collins, 2008:5)

The quotation above shows the condition of fear of surveillance that is experienced by the citizens of District 12. Katniss' spontaneous reaction after criticizing District 12 shows that the citizens are used to being wary of surveillance that might overhear them criticizing the unfairness that is caused by the Capitol regulation.

“Peeta picks up on my hesitation. “Have you been on the roof yet?” I shake my head. “Cinna showed me. You can practically see the whole city. The wind’s a bit loud, though.”

I translate this into “No one will overhear us talking” in my head. You do have the sense that we might be under surveillance here. “Can we just go up?”” (Collins, 2008:76)

The chronic fear of surveillance is undergone by the tributes despite the fact that they are staying in the Capitol. Peeta’s remarks about the rooftop being unlikely to overhear implies that Katniss and Peeta are aware while also anxious about the possibility that their communications are being supervised. These circumstances demonstrate how the Capitol maintains a condition where people feel anxious in communicating and expressing themselves without restrictions.

Strict rules and extreme punishment in *The Hunger Games* points to Capitol’s attempt to enable their control to the districts. Any form of rules violation results in harsh punishments, that includes death execution. In this novel, extreme punishment is implemented in order to dominate the citizens by enabling intimidation and fear. This strategy is used as warnings in order to oppress and control the citizens’ behavior.

“At one o’clock, we head for the square. Attendance is mandatory unless you are on death’s door. This evening, officials will come around and check to see if this is the case. If not, you’ll be imprisoned.” (Collins,

2008:15)

The officials force citizens to gather at the square for the reaping and will imprison those who do not gather to the field for reaping. The quotation above demonstrates how the Capitol enforces obedience through enforced participation. The district's citizens are forced to attend the reaping despite their condition and absence will result in imprisonment.

“My father could have made good money selling them, but if the officials found out he would have been publicly executed for inciting a rebellion... Most of the Peacekeepers turn a blind eye to the few of us who hunt because they're as hungry for fresh meat as anybody is. In fact, they're among our best customers. But the idea that someone might be arming the Seam would never have been allowed.” (Collins, 2008:5)

The quotation above shows how the Capitol enables extreme punishment in order to repress any potential of resistance in the districts. Katniss talks about how her father is skilled in making weapons and it would bring good money with it, but the strict and oppressive regulation of the country itself made them unable to implement their skills to survive. Katniss also explains that her father could have been in danger of public execution for selling weapons to the citizens. This is because the Capitol views armed citizens as a threat to its domination and authority. The statement also shows that the Capitol controls both physical action and any possible attempt of the district citizens inciting rebellion.

““What's an Avox?” I ask stupidly.

“Someone who committed a crime. They cut her tongue so she can't speak,” says Haymitch.“

“She's probably a traitor of some sort. Not likely you'd know Her.”” (Collins, 2008:73)

The quotation describes how the Capitol enables severe punishment in order to prevent the Capitol's citizens escaping and silence those who are considered as threats to their oppressive and controlling system. The mutilation of body parts of the Avox girl's tongue represents the oppression of freedom of speech, showing how punishment is implemented in order to create obedience among the citizens.

Following the September 11 (9/11) attacks, the United States officials intensified its surveillance and security regulations via policies such as the USA PATRIOT Act so that it could strengthen the national defense and prevent future terrorism attacks. The Act expanded the government authority in monitoring the citizens communications and public behavior by using surveillance and information gathering (Duignan, 2026). During the post-9/11 period, the increased act of surveillance became normalized within American society. This act is permitted by the government, which is placed in the highest position in legal and political power, under the USA PATRIOT Act that works as an effort to counterterrorism. However, these policies sparked debates and criticism regarding privacy, individual freedoms, and government excessive control and domination over citizens as in reality the increased surveillance activities do not always go straight for terrorism act itself. Most of the time, the act of extended surveillance ended up affecting normal citizens' social life and caused social issues.

It is reported that the extended surveillance after 9/11 created anxiety, distrust, and self-restraint of expression among the United States citizens, especially within Muslim-American communities that became constantly related to the acts of terrorism suspicion and surveillance. According to the Costs of War (2010) during the post-9/11, where the extended mass surveillance and intensified police militarization were enabled as an act of counterterrorism, marginalized and racialized people such as Muslims, Arabs, Black and Indigenous communities to migrants are prone to abuse of human rights and civil liberties. Khan & Ramachandran (2021) stated that the government expanded its surveillance ability to be able to access the citizens' phone records, bank account records, and other personal information while it is also reported that due to the extended surveillance policies created situations where many Muslim-Americans felt anxious, lacked trust to their surroundings, and became cautious in expressing themselves even to their own communities because of the anxiety regarding the government monitoring and undercover informants that might exist within their communities.

People in Panem are afraid of being watched and overheard that can result in punishment for opposing the Capitol. Consequently, they become cautious in expressing their opinions and end up restricting their own thoughts to protect themselves. This condition is similar to the post-9/11 fear regarding surveillance done by the government where American citizens especially Muslim-Americans citizens become fearful and cautious of their own activities as it can result in suspicions of terrorism and danger. Both the post-9/11 social context and *The Hunger Games* shows the unequal power dynamic between the government and subordinated class citizens.

### **Oppression and Class-Based Control through Hunger Games**

This part shows how the Hunger Game is enabled by the Capitol as a tool of absolute control and oppression to the districts. Through Hunger Games, the Capitol forces children from all districts to participate as tributes in a brutal competition. By using this competition to oppress and control their districts, the Capitol, which is placed in the highest class of authority in the Panem, shows its dominance and reminds the districts that they are under the Capitol's mercy.

“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, 2008:17)

“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.” (Collins, 2008:18)

The quotations show that the Capitol established the Hunger Games as a mechanism of punishment, oppression, and social control in order to maintain its authority over the after the districts’ past rebellion. Capitol forces every district to send their two kids to participate the Hunger Game in order to enable fear and send the messages that rebellion will only result in severe punishment. The Capitol also treats the Hunger Games as public entertainment to humiliate the districts by transforming the Games into source of entertainment. This creates binary opposition, Capitol as the dominant ruler and the district as the controlled people.

“She zips back to the podium, and I don’t even have time to wish for Gale’s safety when she’s reading the name.

“Peeta Mellark.”

Peeta Mellark! Oh, no, I think. Not him. Because I recognize this name, although I have never spoken directly to its owner. Peeta Mellark. (Collins, 2008:24)

Oh, well, I think. There will be twenty-four of us.

Odds are someone else will kill him before I do. Of course, the odds have not been very dependable of late.” (Collins, 2008:31)

Katniss conflicted with Peeta as the male-chosen tribute. This means they have to kill each other. Katniss acknowledges that Peeta, as someone personally known to her, has also become part of the Hunger Games where they will be forced to kill each other and only one of them can survive and be the winner. These conditions show that the existence of the Hunger Games transforms normal human relationships by destroying them into forcing the tributes in a situation where they must perceive each other as enemies to survive from the deadly nature of the Hunger Games.

“For the first time, I feel a flicker of hope rising up in me. Surely, there must be one sponsor willing to take me on! And with a little extra help, some food, the right weapon, why should I count myself out of the Games?” (Collins, 2008:66)

The quotations above show that the Hunger Games is not only about battling until death or surviving in the arena, but also a place where the tributes are commodified and objectified by making up their looks, persona, and public image. Tributes that attract the attention of sponsors are having more advantage. As a result, survival also depends on the ability to show themselves as appealing tributes to the Capitol viewers. This circumstance shows how the Capitol dominates the tributes by indirectly forcing them to show themselves as public consumption for public entertainment.

“But we’re not star-crossed lovers!” I say.

Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall.

“Who cares? 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. Oh, oh, oh, how the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors?” (Collins, 2008:129)

The quotations of the novel above demonstrate how Katniss and Peeta, as the Hunger Game tributes, are forced to transform themselves into public entertainment that is valued on how they are viewed by the Capitol audience during the public interview that is usually used by the tributes to commercialize themselves in order to gain sponsors. Haymitch further explains how Katniss gains much attention and becomes more “desirable” after Peeta confesses his feelings for Katniss in the interview that is publicly broadcasted. Katniss and Peeta’s relationship is shaped into the persona of “star-crossed lovers”. The strategy is implemented because it catches the attention and sympathy from the Capitol audiences, which can result in more sponsors.

“And in my case — being one of the star-crossed lovers from District 12 — it’s an absolute requirement if I want any more help from sympathetic sponsors” (Collins, 2008:234)

Due to the controlling and oppressive nature of the Capitol, the Hunger Games make Katniss and Peeta lose their real identities. From the passage above, it can be interpreted that the relationship between Katniss and Peeta is no longer personal, but becomes a public performance that is shaped for the Capitol audience. However, from Katniss and Peeta’s side, the strategy to act as “star-crossed lovers” is another part of the strategy to survive the Hunger Games. This condition indirectly forces Katniss and Peeta to repeatedly play roles rather than expressing their own self naturally. However, the Capitol has always been in control of the tributes’ decision, as they have always been manipulating the condition of the Hunger Game to create certain situations that they deemed as exciting as the quotation below:

“It’s not hard to follow the Gamemakers’ motivation. There is the Career pack and then there are the

rest of us, probably spread far and thin across the arena. This fire is designed to flush us out, to drive us together. It may not be the most original device I've seen, but it's very, very effective" (Collins, 2008:165-166)

"...The attack is now over. The Gamemakers don't want me dead. Not yet anyway. Everyone knows they could destroy us all within seconds of the opening gong. The real sport of the Hunger Games is watching the tributes kill one another. Every so often, they do kill a tribute just to remind the players they can. But mostly, they manipulate us into confronting one another face-to-face. Which means, if I am no longer being fired at, there is at least one other tribute close at hand" (Collins, 2008:169)

The passage shows during the game where the game seems boring according to the Capitol audience. The Gamemakers inflict man-made fire to make Katniss meet Career packs to spark bloodbath between them and the Gamemakers stopped the fire when Katniss analysed that the gamemakers still don't want to kill her yet as they want the encounter of Katniss and the Career packs. The Gamemakers control the arena of Hunger Games to make the tributes confront each other in order to maintain the excitement that is coming from the Capitol viewers. From this condition, it can be analyzed that the tributes do not have control over their own decision making to survive the game due to the Gamemakers involvement with the arena. The Gamemakers capacity to determine how and when the tributes live or die represent the Capitol's oppression and control towards the tributes. The Capitol's manipulation toward the tributes does not end by creating certain situations that force tributes to engage in a situation that is considered entertaining for the Capitol, but also extends to rule change.

"A rule change! That in itself is mind bending since we don't really have any rules to speak of except don't step off your circle for sixty seconds and the unspoken rule about not eating one another. Under the new rule, both tributes from the same district will be declared winners if they are the last two alive. Claudius pauses, as if he knows we're not getting it, and repeats the change again. (Collins, 2008:231)

There's a small burst of static and then nothing more. I stare at Peeta in disbelief as the truth sinks in. They never intended to let us both live. This has all been devised by the Gamemakers to guarantee the most dramatic showdown in history. And like a fool, I bought into it. (Collins, 2008:328)

The Capitol and the Gamemakers manipulates the rules of the Hunger Game to increase entertainment. By allowing two winners from the same district and then revoking the new rules, the Capitol and Gamemakers are manipulating the tributes by giving them false hope for Katniss and Peeta. This situation shows binary opposition between control, that is presented by the Gamemakers and the controlled that is presented by the tributes.

The existence of the Hunger Game creates a situation where tributes lose their bodily autonomy by putting their bodies, identities, and lives under the control and entertainment of the Capitol. The tributes are treated as object and treated as source of entertainment. Similar concerns about the loss of bodily autonomy of the marginalized groups also existed in the socio-historical context of post 9/11 America. After the terrorist attacks, the American citizens became fearful and insecure resulting in discrimination to the point it results in hate crimes against individuals perceived as Islam or the Middle East

The United States also reported a major increase in hate crimes, discriminations, and hostility toward Arab-Americans, Muslim Americans, Sikhs, South-Asian Americans and any other individuals that are perceived to be related with the Middle Eastern or Islam (BBC, 2021). In the circumstances of anxiety and insecurity after the 9/11 attacks, many people in the United States linked Muslim and Middle East with terrorism. Due to the prejudice that is growing within the society, many people who were perceived as Muslim or the Middle East suffer from verbal harassment, workplace bullying, telephone, internet, message, direct threats, physical violence that includes dangerous weapons, and assaults resulting in death (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015).

The War on Terror also contributed to the legitimization of racial profiling and prejudice toward people who are perceived with Muslim-Americans and Middle Eastern attributes. The Costs of War (2010) also stated that post-9/11 counterterrorism programs heavily concentrated on so-called "foreign terrorist organizations" and racialized communities and ignoring the fact that the white supremacist attacks contributed to more attempted attacks compared to "foreign terrorist attack". These conditions show the mistreatment where Muslim-Americans and people who are perceived as the Middle Eastern were constantly judged with suspicion and danger. The rise of Islamophobia after 9/11 continues to be present in long-term circumstances within American society, resulting in power inequality between racially dominant groups and racially subordinated groups. Kishi (2016) reported that the hostility towards people who are perceived as Muslims-Americans and the Middle Eastern in 2015 reached similar levels to the years following the 9/11 attacks. This shows that the anti-Muslim assaults are ongoing long after the attacks itself. These circumstances show how U.S. citizens are socially divided due to the fear and hatred toward racialized groups.

From the genetic structuralist framework, these socio-historical conditions are significant to the representation of oppression toward the more subordinated class and social divisions in *The Hunger Games*. In the novel, the Capitol maintains its influence by creating social divisions and unfair treatment between the

districts and social groups. The citizens from poorer districts are perceived as inferior and less important compared to the richer districts and also compared to Capitol citizens. This social condition is similar to the post-9/11 context where certain groups are associated with danger and suffer from discrimination even from fellow citizens. It can be understood that both the post-9/11 social context and *The Hunger Games* show how fear and insecurity contribute to discrimination and reinforce unequal power dynamics between dominant groups and marginalized groups. In the post-9/11 United States, the fear of terrorism attacks and white supremacist attacks contributed to hate crimes toward citizens who are viewed as Muslim-Americans and the Middle Eastern. It is similar to the Capitol that enables unfair treatment towards the districts to weaken the solidarity of the districts in order to maintain control over the districts. From genetic structuralism perspective, the social division and inequality portrayed in *The Hunger Games* can be comprehended as representation of broader social issues, especially in post-9/11 American society concerning stigma, exclusion, and unequal power relations.

Suzanne Collins's worldview was influenced by her family military background, her father went to Vietnam war. Collins noticed how easy and blurred the line between a reality show and actual war footage that broadcasted on the television that may make people become desensitized to graphic images of war. (Thomas, 2014) While surfing through the television channel, Collins watched the Iraq war footage and reality shows during the post-9/11 era. Collins also stated that *The Hunger Games* was inspired by Greek mythology, a Roman gladiatorial performance where people were forced to fight until death by the government. *The Hunger Games* also inspired by Greek mythology of Theseus and Minotaur. The myth shows the punishment of past actions, Athens had to send seven boys and seven girls to Crete periodically. The children were thrown inside the labyrinth in order to be eaten by Minotaur (Collins, 2012).

From the analysis that I conducted, it is revealed that Collins's worldview rejects the idea of oppression, class-based control, social inequality, surveillance, and the normalization of violence by representing a fictional country where the ruling regime is oppressing and controlling its citizens with authoritarian system. *The Hunger Games* criticizes a social structure in which the highest ruling groups maintain dominance by oppressing and controlling the subordinated groups. Through the representation of the districts' sufferings, Collins also worries for marginalized populations that are living under oppressive country.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Through an analysis that has been carried out, this research found that how class-based control structured in the Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. The Capitol, as the authoritarian factions and the highest ranking in social stratification to oppress and control the district citizens, commit multiple human rights violations such as sharing unfair resources that result in poverty and hunger, oppress and control districts' citizen with surveillance and creating fear of punishment, and host the annual deadly competition, the Hunger Game that works as tool oppression and control for the district citizens to prevent another act of rebellion. The author portrays these issues by dialogues and narratives showing the oppression and class-based control that is also represented through social issues that emerge from the post-9/11 War on Terror period.

These social issues represent lower-class citizens, racialized groups, and marginalized groups in the United States during post-9/11 due to the counterterrorism programs run by the government in order to prevent future terrorist attacks. Due to the United States counterterrorism programs that result in invasion of other countries such as Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the government funds the war by borrowing the money which results in the citizens having to pay for the debt caused by the government for war. The post-9/11 war also caused extended surveillance on the citizens. The surveillance mostly targeted citizens who are perceived as Muslim-American and the Middle Eastern which result in fear and insecurity of the government monitoring and undercover informants. The hate crimes on people who are perceived as Muslim-American and the Middle Eastern also increased in America, making racialized and religious groups suffer from verbal and non-verbal harassment, bullying in the workplace, discrimination, and even become the target of violence that resulted in deaths

After the analysis that has been conducted, it is found out that the worldview of the author of *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins, does not encourage oppression and class-based control that is implemented by the highest group in the stratification class in regards of politics, in this context it is the government, she also does not support the hatred and hostility toward fellow citizens. Suzanne Collins highlights the oppression and class-based control faced by subordinated and marginalized groups. The novel *The Hunger Games* theme resonates with real-life occurrences, within this context it is the United States society during the post-9/11 war. In *The Hunger Games* novel where the lower and poorer district or people suffer from the oppression and class-based control by the Capitol, the social issues can be related to oppression and class-based control that experienced by United States citizens, particularly those people who are marginalized such as Muslim-American and citizens who looks like the South Easterners, it is reported that they experience more severe consequences and negative sides after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

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