CLASS STRUGGLE AS A CRITICISM TOWARD CAPITALISM SYSTEM 
REFLECTED IN SUZANNE COLLINS’S THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY 
(2008-2010)

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ABSTRACT
This study analyzes the class struggle reflected in Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy—The Hunger Games (2008), Catching Fire (2009), and Mockingjay (2010)—in Marxism’s perspective. This study belongs to the literary study. The technique of data collection is document analysis; meanwhile the technique of data analysis is descriptive technique. This study uses two data sources; they are primary and secondary data source. The primary data source of the study is Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy that consists of three novels; The Hunger Games (2008), Catching Fire (2009), and Mockingjay (2010). Meanwhile, the secondary data source of this study are taken from other sources such as literary books, previous studies, articles, journals, and also website related to the trilogy of The Hunger Games trilogy. This study is aimed to reveal how the class struggle reflected in the trilogy—the class differences, the cause of class struggle, power relation, the effect of class struggle, the type of class struggle—and why the class struggle is taken as the major issue in Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy. This study shows that the class struggle reflected in trilogy is seen as the vehicle to criticize the capitalism system.

Keywords: The Hunger Games, class struggle, capitalism, Marxism
INTRODUCTION

Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy narrates the post apocalyptic nation of Panem—the Capitol and its thirteen districts. The Hunger Games trilogy tackles several issues such as the totalitarian government, class differences, and media spectacle. The arc of The Hunger Games story is from gladiator game, to revolution, to war. The storyline is interwoven by action, adventure, mythology, sci-fi, romance, and philosophy. The readers, therefore, can view the trilogy differently, since not all readers command the same literary competence.

The study on Suzanne Collis’s The Hunger Games trilogy has been conducted by using different perspective in delving out the trilogy. In feminism perspective, Roberta (2014) and Loobek (2012) conduct their study focused on the main woman character—Katniss Everdeen—in The Hunger Games trilogy. In the core of Cultural Studies, Rebeca (2015) has put the chart in examining the trilogy by focusing on the character of Katniss Everdeen. All of these studies are focused on the major character of the trilogy. Some other studies have succeeded in viewing the trilogy by focusing on the Hunger Games. Chong (2013) and Nayar (2012) have conducted their studies in viewing the Games arena as the survival media. On the other side, Johansson (2013) puts his attention on the Games as the media representation; meanwhile Peterson (2012) views the Hunger Games as the social criticism. Furthermore in literary criticism, study on The Hunger Games has been conducted by Mc.Gunigal (2012) by focusing the themes of The Hunger Games trilogy. In order to give the different color for the studies on The Hunger Games trilogy, the present researcher conducts the class struggle analysis by focusing on the socio-economic and politic snapshot reflected in the trilogy.
CLASS STRUGGLE AND CAPITALISM

Marx's theory of the class first addresses to the core of the class consciousness. Class consciousness is the development of an awareness of belonging to a class, of that class's interest and its enemy. There are two stages of class consciousness; firstly, “class in itself,” where class identity is essentially passive, to being a “class for itself,” where class identity is conscious and active. For the proletariat class consciousness means revolutionary consciousness since only through revolution and the overthrow of capitalism can the true interests of the proletariat achieved (Walker and Gray, 2007, p. 56). Thus the class consciousness is both precondition and result of the class struggle, than can only be created by the working class itself (Schmitt, 1997, p. 154). Next, the theory addresses the class struggle. According to Schmitt (1997), classes develop in the course of class struggle, composed of groups of people who have similar economic condition, interest, culture, at least in some respects. The full development of classes takes place in the course of extended and complex process. First, small groups struggle locally over issues, of interest to them. Those struggles give rise to organizations that are initially quite ephemeral and only gradually manage to last (Schmitt, 1997, p. 151).

The importance of the concept of class struggle to Marxism is affirmed by its appearance in the very first line of the Communist Manifesto (1848):

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which it is built up, and from that which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling
and oppressed classes; That the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles (p. 8 & 9).

By this view, exploitation is the important term in the class struggle. For Marx, exploitation is the term that refers to the extraction of surplus value from one section to another section of the society by taking the form of a subordinate class producing surplus value that a dominant ruling class appropriates with the use or threat of force. In capitalist society the extraction of surplus value is more subtle with workers selling their labor power to the capitalists who then use this labor power to generate surplus value which they then own (Walker and Gray, 2007, p. 101). In Marx's sense, a person is exploited if he performs more labor than is necessary to produce the goods that he consumes. Meanwhile a person is an exploiter if he works fewer hours than are needed to sustain his consumption. However, capitalist exploitation rests on economic coercion, if the capitalist interferes with alternative employment opportunities for the workers (Elster, 1999, p. 80-82).

Relating to the class struggle, Elster (1999) insists “what makes a conflict into a class struggle is, first, that the parties involved are classes and, second, that the objects of the struggle are interests they have as classes, not as, say, citizens or ethnic groups" (p. 134). In Communist Manifesto (1848), Marx argues that "every class struggle is a political struggle". It determines that class struggle is the only source of revolutionary change. Political classes hold power in society by virtue of an extended range of institutions and organizations supporting the prevailing mode of production. Hence, major political, social, and economic
change is impossible without class struggle. The revolution will bring democracy which consists of equality for all members of the society (Schmitt, 1997, p. 171).

According to Elster (1999), the forms of class struggle are many and in vary. They variety from hidden manipulation to overt conflict; from direct confrontation between the two classes involved in a relation of exploitation or domination to complex alliance formation involving three or more classes. The interests of the parties may be implacably opposed or in concord in certain respects. The arena of class struggle can be an enterprise, a branch of the economy, or the political system; the stakes can range from wage increases to the creation of a wholly new set of relations of production. And Marx was mainly concerned with overt forms of the class struggle, opposing two or more organized classes to each other (Elster, 1999, p. 134 & 135).

Further, in Marx and Engels’s Selected Correspondence (1975), they explain if the working class as a class confronts the ruling classes and tries to constrain them from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt by strikes, etc., in a particular factory or even, a particular trade to compel individual capitalists to reduce the working day, is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force through an eight hour, etc., law is a political movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers, there grows up everywhere a political movement, it is a class movement (pg: 254-255).

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of this study is literary studies by using document analysis is collecting the data and descriptive technique in analyzing the data. The primary data source in this study is Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy that consists of three novels; The Hunger Games (2008), Catching Fire (2009), and Mockingjay (2010). Meanwhile, the secondary data source of this study are
taken from other sources such as literary books, previous studies, articles, journals, and also website related to the trilogy of *The Hunger Games* trilogy.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

1. **The Conflicted Classes**

   Historically, the nation of Panem is a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated (*The Hunger games*: 15).

   *The Hunger Games* trilogy mainly concerns upon the contest of exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes at the same time in the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem. The conflicted classes reflected in *The Hunger Games* trilogy are the Capitol as the ruling class and the twelve districts as the classes that are ruled.

   The Capitol represents the bourgeoisie Capitol who owns the means of production employs wage labor and controls the state, and constitutes the ruling class, meanwhile the districts represent the proletariat (the workers) which is defined as the class that does not own the means of production, and owns nothing other than its labor power.

   In depth explanation, the districts are classified into two different levels of welfare; the wealthier districts or the career districts and the poorer districts. Although the wealthier districts live under the Capitol’s mercy, they are not as wealthy as the Capitol people, and their status is similar with the poorer; the workers.

   The districts are locked in struggle with the Capitol which owns and controls the means of production. Hence the relation between the Capitol
and the districts reflects the relation between the capitalist and the workers in capitalist society.

2. The Causes of Class Struggle

The root of the problems between the Capitol and the districts is the idea of Panem et Circencess which is adopted by the Capitol as its political orientation—in return for full bellies and entertainment, the people have given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power. So that’s what the districts are for; to provide the bread and circuses for the Capitol (Mockingjay: 162).

By this orientation, the districts have the obligation to produce and procure their resources based on the quota of production—District 1; luxurious items, District 2; weaponry, District 3; electronic gadgets, District 4; fishing, District 5; power and electricity, District 6; transportation, District 7; lumber, District 8; factory, District 9; grain, District 10; beef and live stocks, District 11; agriculture, and District 12; coal—and the obligation to send their boys and girls to the death arena of the annual event Hunger Games.

The implementation of Panem et Circencess in economic realm brings the domino effects; from the forced labor, to the poverty and inequalities. Forced labor is any work or services which people are forced to do against their will under threat of some form of punishment. Lower waged labor and bonded labor contain some elements of forced labor.

In the mode of production, the Capitol employs the forced labor to both wealthier and poorer districts. In the wealthier districts, the Capitol employs bonded labor. Bonded labor performance can be seen in District 2 as one of the wealthier districts. In District 2, being the peacekeepers means that their debts are forgiven. Since many people are swamped in debt in the Capitol (Mockingjay: 65). Meanwhile, in the poorer districts, the Capitol employs
lower-waged labor. The performance of lower-waged labor is seen in several poorer districts. In District 8, all people have the obligation for four-hour shift at the factory that specialized in the Peacekeeper uniforms. In District 11, people grow food, but they are not allowed eating the crops. Everyone is needed during the harvest time; men, women, and children. Every hand is needed for collecting the crops (Catching Fire: 40). Although it is a school time for the children, during the harvest they are not allowed to be at school because everyone has to work (The Hunger Games: 142). And in District 12 is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift. The performance of lower waged labor, of course, is the major cause of poverty and starvation in the poorer districts. In District 12, for example, it is a common fate in District 12 to see people starving and straggling through the streets till the peacekeepers come to retrieve their body (The Hunger Games: 22). Poverty and inequalities can be seen by the existence of the wealthier and the poorer districts. The wealthier live with good living standard; meanwhile the poorer districts always deal with the starvation and poverty.

In order to control the districts in doing their obligation, the Capitol restricts the districts under its laws. Basically, the rules as well as the laws in Panem are set by the Capitol, and are referred to the districts. The Capitol persons have the law immunity, except those who are on districts' side in working out the uprisings. The laws engage all aspects of people's life. All the districts have to fulfill the quota of production. Activities that exclude procuring and producing are illegal. All illegal transactions like illegal markets are forbidden, including all forms of stealing are illegal. Trespassing the woods or going outside the fence is against the law. As well as travel between the districts is forbidden except for officially sanctioned duties (The Hunger Games: 31). One most phenomenal law made by the Capitol is the Hunger Games as the new laws to guarantee peace and, as the yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated. In punishment for the
uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins (The Hunger Games: 15).

In coercing the rules, the Capitol also employs violence through its peacekeepers. Public whipping, as well as public shot, is something common in the districts, especially in the poorer ones. The violence does not only deal with execution of the death, but also the most torturous; mutilation. The Capitol has no end of creative ways to kill people. One phenomenal is mutilating someone who committed a crime, and turning them into a mute servant called an Avox. Avox is someone who committed a crime. The Capitol cuts their tongue so they can’t speak (The Hunger Games: 56).

The overall explanation above is diagnosed as the cause of the class struggle between the districts against the Capitol. The districts, of course, demand their freedom from long lasting oppression, meanwhile the Capitol demands their power in ruling and dominating the districts.

3. The Power Relation

In order to maintain their power, the Capitol uses the political strategy which is similar with Roman Empire; divide and conquer. It can be seen how the Capitol arrogantly deliberated District 13 with its military force, and also the harsh law enforcement that associated with violence. Moreover, all the Capitol's rules are set in order to make the districts disunited, from the Hunger Games until the district boundary. The Capitol is fragile since it depends on the districts from foods until the peacekeepers, hence, if the districts are united and declare their freedom, the Capitol will collapse.

The Hunger Games trilogy depicts that the long lasting oppressions of the Capitol to the districts is mainly caused by the disunity of the districts.
Hence, the power relation of the districts deals with the development of class consciousness in the course of class struggle. Wherein, the districts as whole become aware of themselves as a single class with common interest and common enemy toward the Capitol. And this class consciousness is a vital prerequisite for revolution that manifests itself in a sense of solidarity based on class identity. For the districts, class consciousness means revolutionary consciousness through revolution and the overthrow of the Capitol.

_The Hunger Games_ trilogy depict that the revolution will not be achieved without political agent and the unity of the districts. Hence, District 13 that once was considered died comes as an agent of revolution to persuade the districts under the voice of revolution to overthrow the Capitol.

The goal of revolution is to form a republic where the people of each district and the Capitol can elect their own representatives to be their voice in a centralized government (Mockingjay: 66). District 13 aims to take over the districts one by one, ending with District Two, thus cutting off the Capitol’s supply chain. Then, once it’s weakened, they invade the Capitol itself (Mockingjay: 66). The war between districts and Capitol results the fall of the Capitol to the hand of the rebels (Mockingjay: 252). In time of the post-war period, Panem experience two presidential elections. The first election results elected Coin, and the latest election results elected Paylor. Under Paylor’s leadership, Panem is establishing a new government with democracy system

4. **The Effects of Class Struggle**

The class struggle between the Capitol and the districts reflected in _The Hunger Games_ trilogy results the structural change in government system from totalitarian to democracy. And the goal of revolution—forming a republic where the people of each district and the Capitol can elect their own
An emergency election was thrown together and Paylor was voted in as president ... Now we’re in that sweet period where everyone agrees that our recent horrors should never be repeated (Mockingjay: 272).

The structural change in government is also followed by the changes in society. After the war is over, people realize that something is significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children’s lives to settle its differences. Therefore, the Hunger Games arenas have been completely destroyed, the memorials built, there are no more Hunger Games (Mockingjay: 280). Furthermore, the district boundaries are totally banished, the fences are not charged anymore. People are allowed not only to travel around districts and the Capitol, but also to choose where they live after the war is over. The districts are united.

We land briefly in District 3 to drop off Plutarch. He’s meeting with Beetee to update the technology on the broadcast system (Mockingjay: 272).

"My mother’s not coming back. She's helping to start up a hospital in District Four (Mockingjay: 273)."

"Where did Gale go?"
"District Two. Got some fancy job there. I see him now and again on the television," she says (Mockingjay: 276).

The change in economic realm is also seen in the districts after the catastrophe. District 12, for example, after the mining coal is closed, people plow the ashes into the earth and plant food. Machines from the Capitol break ground for a new factory to make medicines. Although no one seeds it, the Meadow turns green again (Mockingjay: 279).

5. The Type of the Class Struggle

According to Marx and Engels (1975), every movement, in which the working class as a class confronts the ruling classes and tries to constrain them from without, or to force through an eight hour, etc., law is a political
movement. For instance, the attempt by strikes, etc., in a particular factory or even, a particular trade to compel individual capitalists to reduce the working day, is a purely economic movement (p. 254-255). By this view, the researcher argues that the type of class struggle reflected in the trilogy is classified as a political movement. The political movement reflected in the trilogy is characterized by two factors; struggle against the law and revolutionary action. Struggle against the law is defined when the districts confront the Capitol as the ruling class in order to get their freedom from the existing laws that oppress and weaken them in a long period of time. Meanwhile, revolutionary action is defined since the class struggle between the districts and the Capitol demands a structural change such as the change from the totalitarian system into democracy. And every revolutionary action is a political action.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher draws several conclusions. Firstly, this study shows that class struggle reflected in Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy is the class struggle between the Capitol and the districts. The Capitol maintains their power in order to keep their empire roll in, meanwhile, the districts demand their freedom from the long lasting oppression by the Capitol.

Secondly, the idea of Panem et Circencess as the Capitol’s political orientation is relates to the ideology of capitalism, since its implementation involves the districts to provide, produce and procure, in the mode of production. The capitalism system reflected in Panem et Circcencess results the forced labor—bonded labor in the career districts and lower waged labor in the poorer districts—and inequalities in the share of economic gains and the law enforcement.
Thirdly, this study reveals that the type of class struggle reflected in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy is classified as a political movement. According to Marx and Engel the working class as a *class* confronts the ruling classes and tries to constrain them from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt by strikes, etc., in *a* particular factory or even, a particular trade to compel individual capitalists to reduce the working day, is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force through an eight hour, etc., *law* is a *political* movement (pg: 254-255). The political movement reflected in the trilogy is characterized by two factors; struggle against the law and revolutionary action. Struggle against the law is defined when the districts confront the Capitol as the ruling class in order to get their freedom from the existing laws that oppress and weaken them in a long period of time. Meanwhile, revolutionary action is defined since the class struggle between the districts and the Capitol demands a structural change such as the change from the totalitarian system into democracy. And every revolutionary action is a political action.
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