

Tribhuvan University

Critique of Contemporary Popular Culture in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in English**

by

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Letter of Recommendation

Miss Shiksha Karki has completed her thesis entitled “Critique of Contemporary Popular Culture in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Game*” under my supervision. She carried out her thesis from 2072/12/20 B.S. to 2072/02/12 B.S. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Ms. Shiksha Karki entitled “Critique of Contemporary Popular Culture in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*” has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

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Abstract

The proposed research work denounces the theme of violence in reality shows and their extreme form of entertainment in future fictional society of Panem in order to warn the present generation on its nature of watching such shows where violence is the main focus. Thereby, condemning the real world of America (USA) or any other advanced capitalist society where profit and mechanism are implemented via the source of television culture. It is argued that how the so-called entertainment in Panem is in fact a medium to earn wealthy sponsors, divert the ones who have nothing to lose and works as a reminder of the utter powerlessness of the rest, eventually dominating them. Along with the criticism, it conveys a message as well as a warning to the readers, especially to the younger generations, who are in a right position to change the society for the better.

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Critique of Contemporary Popular Culture

The prime motif of this research centers to critique the contemporary popular culture i.e. the reality television show of the future fictional world of Panem in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* to condemn the current society of United States of America (USA); the country that is acclaimed most for the reality based television shows, yet disapproving any other modern societies that maintain a lifestyle where popular programming with needless entertainment are hyped more than the real life problems, in order to avoid the terrible vision of the future created in the text.

The researcher highlights that most of the reality shows today focus on violence and misery to attract the audiences, and the *Hunger Games* is an extreme version of such reality shows of today. This extreme form of cruelty is certainly a comment on the present, to warn if the popular shows today are heading in a direction which might eventually land the present world into Panem. Through the exaggerated description of the conflicts and the state of things in Panem, the researcher argues that the text is evidently condemning the actions and behavior of the present generation's popular culture. Everything that is wrong in Panem is in fact the actions of today's America, particularly in its obsession for the dreadful reality shows.

The reality television genre has been the topmost genre in the Western television industry, including America of course. Suzanne Collins, herself has explicitly expressed in an interview that the majority of audiences go for such shows instead of something more informative. Meanwhile in order to boost the viewer's rate as well as to make the show more interesting, the producers and makers focus more on tears and distress of participants, on the other hand, according to the author, even the audiences enjoy the show that uses emotion and drama. Apparently, in order to

attract viewers' attention and earn sponsors, the limits of the reality shows have been stretched by the television producers which in turn are turning increasingly brutal.

The researcher asserts that in both worlds, reality shows; or other shows alike, are consumed abundantly, which feeds violence as well as the control tactic to the both ignorant as well as suppressed audiences, desensitizing to the actual pressing events, ultimately leading to the critical consequences. The researcher argues how the so-called entertainment in the future Panem is actually a means to earn wealthy sponsors, divert the ones who have nothing to lose and works as a reminder of the utmost weakness of the rest, dominating all ultimately. Similar is the future imaginary show called *The Hunger Games*: it's a form of control mechanism as well as money making industry to maintain the uneven power balance by pacifying the people with bloodshed of innocent children. The show projects twenty four teenagers who have to kill each other until a single victor remains, for the so-called entertainment of others.

Hence, the commentary on the violent *The Hunger Games* stands out as a warning as well as a message to not let the world turned into an autocratic state like Panem. Thus, the responsibility to solve the key problem of the text, i.e. to stop the massacre in the name of amusement, is entrusted upon a sixteen year old girl Katniss, a youth who happens to be a major icon of rebellion, and of course a most desirable commodity to sell the show. Furthermore, with the demonstration of young protagonist, youth are aimed to grab the message, the only capable people in the society to change the future into the better place.

In Collins' *The Hunger Games*, entertainment is in absurd form; in extreme form, driving to the point of annual sacrifice of the youths. *The Hunger Games* being a multi-functional televised show and the main event of the year in Panem, the researcher condemns how in a live televised show, teenagers have to fight each other

to death. Moreover, it is a grim spectacle where violence is endorsed, and seen as the highlight of the show or it would be a huge flop. The Game makers who are in charge of the show attempt to create the ultimate television experience, full of drama, fashion, glamour to sugarcoat the bloodbath in the first stage; only to reveal shortly afterwards the central theme i.e. the suffering of the youth, so that the audiences stick to the television screens for more dramatic incidents to happen, especially only the bloodshed is enjoyed.

Nevertheless, the researcher explores that how severe people's need for entertainment may become by investigating the power of media in Panem which is presented very corrupted, and is mainly used to exercise strict autocratic regime through entertainment. The then government has taken full control of the media to provide the ultimate form of entertainment to its rich capital city called Capitol, on the other hand to punish the poor districts for their previous so-called uprising. As a result, *The Hunger Games* is produced, an extremely savage spectacle which is nothing more than an unnatural desire of the hunger for entertainment. Nonetheless, the text stands out as a warning to what could be our future, if the competition for the absolute form of entertainment continues without caution.

The Hunger Games, the show of the text is very similar to some of the American reality shows on television. For instance, there is a popular reality show called *Survivor*, a show where the viewer follows a number of people at an unknown location where they have to use their skills and knowledge to survive, but each week one contestants is voted off. Such reality shows always have to change to keep attention of the audiences. In case of *Survivor*, the places become more rough and remote, and the contestants are given very few luxury items to help them survive. In

parallel, *The Hunger Games* questions, how far are we ready to incline to be entertained?

Moreover, one of the key issues of the media in both future world of Panem and in contemporary America is to use violence in television. No other country in the world uses violence on television as much as in the United States of America, W. James Potter claims. In a similar manner, he argues that violence is a central issue that appears frequently in all genres of American television. Ranging from cartoons, video games for children to reality television, violence is an essential part in all programs. The way American media glorify the act of violence, it does not appear different from Panem, in fact it is one of the factors that make the American media resemble the *Hunger Games*. Potter advocates that one of the prime factors to create this massive stream of violence is that the people who are behind the production of television believe that violence attracts audiences, especially the younger viewers. The basic target group for advertising is eighteen to thirty-four years of age. According to Potter, the production teams behind the television shows and movies have created a formula to make a profit, violence and suffering. So, a good character is written which is pushed to a breaking point, eventually making the character fighting back against the villains. Potter asserts that the makers in the television industry believe that this simple structure attracts the audience, creating a buildup of suspense which later will be released. By repeating this formula, the producers can safely earn more income, and that is what their business is all about (*On Media Violence* 157).

Furthermore, the researcher claims that the violence in a television show needs to increase the level of it over time and again to satisfy the needs of the viewers, eventually turning the viewers into emotionless creatures, as the need for violent actions is definitely not a good sign. Similarly, in *The Hunger Games*, the Game

makers have placed themselves in this very situation, to keep the attention of the audience; they need to increase the amount of violence every year, eventually turning the show into a slaughterhouse, such that the trend has been moved towards more practical forms. Apart from this, the media and the shows in Panem use the fear of violence as a means to control the districts. Likewise, according to Potter, violence is more prevalent in American media than any other countries (*On Media Violence* 158).

While the loss of humanity is not just a risk for the contestants, but also for those who watch, Megan Whalen Turner argues. By concealing the reality, the researcher claims that the viewers of the *Hunger Games* (mainly those in the Capitol) are able to enjoy the killings without feeling sympathy for the children who are being murdered. Of course, they do not like it when the one they were cheering for dies, but it is more like when the suitor we like the best on the *Bachelor* show has to go home with a broken heart: that is too bad, but there are more to go.

Similarly, Tom Henthorne while analyzing the *The Hunger Games*, explores the strong likeliness of the reality shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *America's Next Top Model* with the brutal show of *The Hunger Games* (100). Obviously, the actual sufferings would not have the impact they should have since the reality shows are presented in such a way that real person's pains appear as an amusement, as the audience become numb to the serious and important concerns. The objectification and commodification of the human in reality shows are common in both of these two different world, the pre-game programming which transforms Katniss into a sexual object is itself seen as commentary on the reality shows. "Popular programming desensitizes people to violence and conflict", comments Henthorne (95), exactly the similar has happened in the Capitol and quite similar is the current scenario of the present America.

"There are no rules in the arena, but cannibalism does not play well with capitol audiences", Katniss informs how in one of the season of the show *Hunger Games* a tribute tried to eat the heart of another tribute he killed. Collins has pushed the limit to an extreme, in fact letting the audience consider themselves how much far they are going in order to be entertained. Lili Wilkinsion questions how many steps there are between the *Hunger Games* and the reality shows today (73)? Well, it seems to have few more steps to cross the ultimate line. Yet the shows such as *Survivor*, *The Bachelor* and *Big Brother* are not only accepted but very famous, where people starve, get their heart broken or either have sex for everybody to see. Before it is too late and the numbness completely governs the people, a limit should be drawn on what is acceptable and what is not or the only limit left might be cannibalism.

Moreover, the elites of the Capitol are the people most identical to the population of contemporary America. Nearly all of the people who are able to read *The Hunger Games* live in a society where they have access to food, shelter and free time. With the fulfillment of all the basic needs, there then remains a desire to fill the leisure with another activity which is considered engaging and entertaining. Television, especially the reality based programs has become one of the most common forms of leisure activity. The researcher critiques the way our modern society is heading for entertainment that features violence as a key formula. There are already reality television shows where contestants are allowed to do anything but physically hurt each other to survive, such as *Survivor*. Apart from reality shows, the popular pastime of twenty-first century also include sports where violence is featured as a highlight of the show, for instance professional boxing, mixed martial arts or others shows alike, where contestants are allowed to hurt each other but not kill him or her. Is the present society willing to combine the two? The hunger for

entertainment is great, also in the contemporary America, as every year the television producers there happen to find new ways of attracting the viewers, and the viewers do not miss to watch. In *The Hunger Games*, the theme of survival and conflict has been fused with the violence of sports, eventually compelling the tributes to kill each other for the entertainment of the audiences. The researcher argues that the future America can easily be the Panem, if the present is not taken care of.

The proposed research work investigates the violent nature of reality based television programming along with its negative sides in both present day America and the future fictional North America which is then called Panem, employing Neo-Marxism as a theoretical framework. Neo-Marxism claims that it is the culture that determines economy, consciousness, intellectuality, art and literature. Hence, on this account both rich and poor of Panem as well as the present day Americans are hegemonized by the popular culture of luxurious capitalism.

Drawing a concept from Antonio Gramsci, who in his *The Formation of Intellectuals*, states that the traditional intellectuals are administrators and apologists for traditionally existing institutions. They are religious institutions, bureaucracies, military and legal institutions; rather than constructing anything new, they merely follow the previously established systems. Moreover, they try to protect the traditional belief and power as they are closely associated with the dominant groups' ideology especially aristocracy. Apparently, traditional intellectuals are followers, supporters and protectors of aristocracy. Thus, the researcher aims at exploring the privileged minorities of Panem as the traditional intellectuals, as described by Gramsci, who rather than putting a ban upon the dreadful show of the nation, continue watching it with all the pleasure, in fact the show is more of a celebrated annual festival for them.

The popular culture is the prime strategy of Panem in order to control its people. Here, the government itself is autocratic; unjust and cruelty regime rules

majority with fear through games, whereas distracts the minority with the most desirable televised show along with various luxury. With introducing the most terrible show for the poor while very fascinating for the rest, the nation has eventually taught its people that the ultimate way to survive is to accept the culture of the *Hunger Games*. As a result, to the people in the Capitol, the *Hunger Games* has taken the role of distraction; they are so much into the artificial drama that plays out on a television that they pay almost no attention to the fact that their president is actually a dictator who attained power by murdering the innocent children. Eventually, the citizens of the Capitol have reached to the point of immorality and passivity. As long as the government provides you with what you need, food and entertainment, you do not need to care about anything else; that is the government's job, the deal you have entered into, Adrienne Kress points out (*The Inevitable Decline of Decadence* 72). As a result, the citizens of the Capitol have become more concerned with their appearance, food and of course, entertainment; the poor districts and their misfortune to die for others, and their political responsibilities are definitely considered beneath the *Hunger Games*. They are completely spoiled with the availability of so much luxury and the form of entertainment they are provided with; moderation and compassion towards other human beings is gone. Thus, the researcher claims, there is no moral concern about sending children to slaughter. That is to say, the people of the Capitol have abandoned their humanity and care for others in order to live a carefree life, where the most terrible thing for them is to be out of nail polish, whereas the actual dreadful things are not thought twice. Hence, the traditional intellectuals of Capitol have given up their rights to comment in politics and with their responsibility for their fellow human beings, eventually supporting the system. Therefore, in return they are provided with an abundance luxury and the ultimate form of entertainment: the *Hunger Games*.

Arguably, the citizens of Capitol represent the traditional intellectuals of Gramsci, they are blindly by the side of the state, accepting the show that features annual murder of children as an absolute form of entertainment rather than putting an effort to stop it. They are so caught up into the game that the annual slaughter of the children is not a bigger deal for them. Thus, as much as the government they are equally responsible for what has happened to the children in the *Hunger Games* over the years. The people of the Capitol are as guilty of the killings as the authorities that initiated *The Hunger Games* in the first place and those continue to arrange them. Passivity is not the same as opposition, it is more like silent approval and that is no different from direct action, Gale, a friend of Katniss confronts (*Mockingjay* 64). Through *The Hunger Games*, the leaders of Panem have introduced an ideology where fame and admiration should be desired no matter how bloody they are, despite the fact that the entertainment actually forces its participants to either be a victim or else a murderer.

However, the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen perfectly suitable in the Gramsci's definition of organic intellectuals who in spite of living under the Capitol's autocracy, possesses strong rebellious character, a symbol for the people of Panem who eventually wins the war against totalitarianism.

According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals do not repeat the beliefs, norms and values established in a community; they speak of something new officially unrecognized. He further adds that such intellectuals rise out of the membership in a social groups or classes, and are antithetical to established institutions and official power. He claims that they are also the products of the culture, yet they do not limit themselves to the traditional beliefs and system. Similarly, the researcher argues that Katniss is much the same person, she not only tries to liberate herself from

traditionally built systems, instead does her best to establish a new system, new culture, new power and absolutely no *Hunger Games*. Achieving the goal might sound impossible in the beginning; still the relentless determination of the organic intellectual does not fail in the end.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is used in the Capitol's games to generate fear in the people living in the districts; however, she begins to spark and eventually shines like an icon of rebellion. According to Sara Gadeken's argument that a strong element in literature written for the youth is the individual versus society, which later could evolve into a group of individuals who together form a group to take on society, which describes what is happening to Katniss in *The Hunger Games* (59). The researcher argues that not only does the society affect the individual, but the individual affects society too, and it is only possible through the choices of this individual makes that finally a society changes for better. Hence, the researcher claims, Katniss is indeed an organic intellectual as described by Gramsci, it is Katniss' choice to be a part of the rebellion that starts the revolution in Panem. Moreover, it is her choice over and over again that brings about the freedom for all the suppressed ones.

Similarly, Katniss represents the youth as the group of organic intellectuals who wants to deconstruct the established norms so that something new would be better for the people, she, in the book written for young readers is presented as one of the common teenagers through the first person narratives and the use of present tense in the text. Therefore, it aims to make the reader believe that since the protagonist is able to change the world, so can she/he. Through the strong portrayal of the youth in the text, Gramsci's organic intellectuals are indeed for change. Similarly, in the text, the responsibility of the youth is to not let their world turn into a horrible future like

Panem. Hence, it falls on them to make a change; they are encouraged as well as warned. In this manner, through following Katniss on her journey, the reader learns what kind of decisions she/he should make. The difference between the reader and Katniss is that the reader can rejoin the real world and prepare to solve the rapidly spreading problems of interests on violent shows.

However, Louis Althusser argues that the state uses ideology to repress people. He states that ideology from social and cultural practices, beliefs, etc. causes false consciousness. According to Althusser, ideology is part and parcel of society itself; i.e. ideology arises from the actual practices undertaken by institutions in society. As such, ideology forms the individual's consciousness and creates the person's subjective understanding of experience. Meanwhile, in *The Hunger Games*, the victims as described by Althusser are not merely the ones in the district but the ones of the Capitol as well, who do not have to participate in the dreadful Games, but enjoy the luxurious life. Apparently, people in the district do not protest as that would end up vicious death of them all; the only cause behind the silence is because they are aware of what their protest might cause. In this way state has repressed both the districts as well as the Capitol, both societies are under control through the *Hunger Games*.

Unfortunately, as Gramsci claims that the traditional intellectuals help the capitalist to create hierarchy and hegemonize the people. Here, Althusser agrees with him and states that in capitalistic state ideology, people are unaware of hegemony and get victimized in the name of consensus. When it comes to the people of the Capitol, *The Hunger Games* happens to be the television event of the year, and everybody is glued to the screens from the reaping to the final moment when just a single person is left in the arena. To get pleasure from such, it is obvious to wonder if they are in their

right minds. What has made them to accept the barbarism as such in the name of entertainment? Naturally, by abandoning their political rights to the government, and blindly being by the side of the state, the people of the Capitol seem to have turned dead to the massacre that happen year after year in the arenas.

Furthermore, the researcher argues that another reason for the way in which people of the Capitol respond to the Games is perhaps the tributes are viewed as subhuman, more like an animal. In order to enjoy the Games and the brutalities that happen there, the tributes are given a different status, not unlike the celebrities who are not seen after they die on television show, almost as if dying is like being voted off the show. The state has taught the Capitol that it is the show for amusement, for fun, while the rest are made aware that it's the way it is, nobody is supposed to point a finger. Ultimately, through different ideology the state of Panem is after all successful to exercise its power.

In addition, Althusser states that repressive state apparatus include government, police, army, administration, court, prison, etc. which the state uses to control people and rule them. It focuses on singularity, is organized, unified and centralized. He claims that it functions through repression and violence. Not different is the state of Panem, the fundamental system explored in *The Hunger Games* is the public spectacle of suffering in order to rule the entire nation. The show is pure entertainment and favorite pastime for the masses of Capitol; meanwhile they are turning more immune to the savagery of the Games along with gaining pleasure from the children's misery. However, the reason why the Capitol carries out something as horrible, expensive, and time consuming as the *Hunger Games* in the first place is to punish the districts for their previous so-called disobedience, uprising by the people many years ago. Executing twenty-four girls and boys where nobody could see them

was not the part of a plan for sure. Katniss points it out clearly why they made a show of it:

This is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. 'Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.' To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, sporting event pitting every district against the others. (*The Hunger Games* 22)

Likewise, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer state popular culture as easy pleasures and they claim that the consumption of these easy pleasures make people docile and content. Moreover, they argue, popular culture as a means for those in power to maintain their power over people. In line with them, the researcher argues, media, especially television culture is evolving rapidly. Television screens have come out of the people's homes, now they are all around; in restaurants, public vehicles and even in personal cars. Instead of focusing on the real world, a fake one on television screens are forced upon the people more and more, eventually making them desensitized to the daily events and more pressing problems occurring around.

"They are not evil or cruel. They are not even smart. Hurting them, it's like hurting children" (64), Katniss says in *Mockingjay*. With the line of this statement, the researcher further asserts that people in the Capitol have reversed back to being children, thus, not only do they have anything to complain or suggest in a society they live in, they happen to believe that they hold no responsibilities for what is happening. As Adorno and Horkheimer has claimed that the easy pleasures as programs on

television make people idle, the same is the outcome on the citizens of Capitol as the need for entertainment has become extremely huge that it no longer matters in what form the entertainment comes, or at what costs.

In the same manner, Sara Peterson argues that in the US today, it is apparent that entertainment shows, especially reality based programming; take more rooms on television than shows such as news programs and documentaries. Apparently, citizens of the US today know more about who won *American Idol*, rather than what new law has been passed (*The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins: Entertainment or Social Criticism* 7). Despite the fact that most of the shows on television today are reality shows, the people in the present still have the choice to change channels or turn it off, a choice that the people on the districts of Panem do not have.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, culture industry is the product of capitalism which falsifies and commodifies everything. It is influenced by three ideas: monopoly, production and technology. Culture industry technologically and mechanically produces art and culture and tries to create monopoly to dominate the people. Panem's ultimate form of entertainment which in fact is a medium to control its people is undoubtedly the capitalist's product, which has always been misleading the crowd, spreading monopoly indeed, as the games are highly advanced in technology and science. Tributes are sugarcoated, commodified before the slaughters, they are supposed to appear appealing to the crowd so as the good looking tribute does always guarantee to earn the sponsors. Through the means of the *Hunger Games*, the autocracy of Capitol is safely ruling, its monopoly is certainly the only reason behind the annual telecasted execution of the children. *The Hunger Games* deceives the people of Capitol as the full form of entertainment and murders the rest in the name of punishment of past uprising that was said to have happened seventy four

years earlier before the story began. Eventually, the whole population is falsified, some enjoy watching, and others forced to participate.

Similarly, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue on popular culture, the Latin phrase *Panem et Circenses* asserts in the same way. *Panem et Circenses*, as described by the poet Juvenal's satires which means that the people are able to give up their rights and political freedom to have panem et circenses, i.e. bread and circuses. This is precisely what the Capitol's citizen have done; they have given up their right to question the state in order to be entertained; easy pleasures indeed make people think of nothing sensible. The researcher questions, is this what is happening in America today? Have they forgotten their right to question the state as they are too much involved in watching the reality shows? It clearly appears so, as the author herself stated that the inspiration to write *The Hunger Games* came when she was watching reality show and war coverage side by side in her home in USA itself.

Furthermore, the researcher states that the tributes in the *Hunger Games* become celebrities, much like the stars of reality shows in our society. In spite of the fact that almost all the tributes are going to die, they are also treated as stars: "The people of the Capitol are going nuts, showering us with flowers, shouting our names, our first names, which they have bothered to find on the program" (70). These tributes were just ordinary people living in the districts until they were forced into the Games. This is, as Blasingame noted in an interview with the author of the text, a very popular concept in today's reality shows. The tributes are used by the Capitol for the benefit of capitalism. They are not seen as individuals as much they are seen for their value. Likewise, Adorno and Horkheimer stated that the popular mass culture rejects individuality: "In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because

of the standardization of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned” (154).

Furthermore, Adorno and Horkheimer write that “the stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers’ needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them, and even withdrawing amusement” (144). For the same reason, the researcher disapproves the popularity of popular culture of this generation, as reality shows is one thriving television culture at the moment which is claimed to be fabricated in order to grab the attention of the audiences, although real people are included, it is after all a show which needs sponsors and profits. Similarly, in the *Hunger Games*, the events and plots are upon the Game makers to decide, although the people appear are real. The Game makers attempt to enhance the entertainment value, often do it through dramatic fights that lead to horrible bloodbaths in order to entice more excitement to the show. The Game makers are able to control the arenas in such a way that they control the weather and induce the natural disasters. Once in the arena, Katniss is chased by a forest fire which she realizes as artificial:

The flames that bear down on me have an unnatural height, a uniformity that marks them as human-made, machine-made, Gamemakers-made. Things have been too quiet today. No deaths, perhaps no fights at all. The audiences in the Capitol are getting bored, claiming that these are verging on dullness. This is one thing the Games must not do. (173)

Much like the *Hunger Games*, the reality shows in today's society are not as much real, as they are controlled by the production company in order to make them more interesting so that they will attract more viewers and in turn generate greater profit. Adorno and Horkheimer argue:

Under monopoly, all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. (121)

Similarly, the *Hunger Games* is a very useful apparatus for the leaders of Panem. “*The Hunger Games* are their weapon and you are not supposed to defeat it” (358), Katniss confesses. The Games are the ultimate terror tactic as they are played with the lives of the innocents. However terrible the Games are, the state of Panem therefore every year give their citizens a show worthy of the name in order to strengthen their power and also to prove their dominance as stated earlier by Adorno and Horkheimer.

“When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can't eat money.”

The native's Americans saying mentioned above confirms that learning from history is important to prevent the same mistakes being repeated, as it is clear that the mistakes that have been made now have the impacts in the upcoming days, apparently *The Hunger Games* happens to have been produced out of the similar mistakes of today. As the introductory quote says, we might be oblivious to the extent of our mistakes before it is too late. Thus, the researcher highlights that we should start

learning sooner of what consequences our actions might bring, rather than later to avoid the situation like Panem.

In the beginning, the appearances and attitudes of the Capitol citizens appear as an unpleasant surprise and quite absurd. Nevertheless, it begins to look familiar with the Capitol's ways, the elements and descriptions put forward by Collins confirm that Panem is clear and extreme version of contemporary advanced societies of today that are driven by materialistic fondness, particularly entertainment. In a strikingly familiar ways of present day media, the Capitol also takes massive steps to make sure that the audience stays captivated and thrilled by their show, the Game makers use different kinds of devices and supplies to make *The Hunger Games* as entertaining as possible. Over a period of almost seventy-five years, the Capitol citizens no doubt have turned immune into watching children being butchered year after year, they are so desensitized by the regular bloodbath that the real-life slaughter cannot harm them anymore, they pleasure in the savagery and bloodshed of the Games. The researcher claims that this image of extreme need of entertainment, violence as well as commodity culture allows Collins to compare *The Hunger Games* with present day western countries and their popular programming of the date.

Additionally, the entertainment in *The Hunger Games* turns out to be a very extreme and twisted version of our own. Although watching people being killed for entertainment is not exactly something new, Sara Peterson argues, having been top entertainment in the Roman era, it is quite disturbing when the children have taken the role of gladiators in the future world of Panem. All the same, this form of entertainment is not at all common anymore, and it is doubtful that even the Romans would have found children gladiators entertaining. The most extreme forms of entertainment today are reality shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, which however

to some extent are known to be scripted as well as edited before broadcasting, yet the viewers can watch the contestants suffering in complicated situations and environments and disclose their innermost feelings for everyone. It has become a perverted form of pastime where people engage themselves in other people's lives instead of their own, Peterson claims. In the text, the residents of the Capitol have become completely desensitized to the horrible things that happen to the children in the arena. What if the same thing happens to us? The researcher questions again that how we engage ourselves in the lives of reality show stars, and thereby ignore the actual pressing problems. The difference between the two should never be blurred or the result would be in a state where one can no longer differentiate between acting and reality. The outcome can be just like the people in the Capitol and their numbness to the annual murder of the children, in the same way, the present generation of America or any other modern societies is becoming desensitized to the real sufferings of real people because the audiences have already seen something like it on a reality show.

Likewise, in American sports, violence is a prime element to make the game exciting and interesting. In his article "Viewer's Enjoyment of Violence in Televised Sports", Jennings Bryant presents some more factors that could explain why violence has become such a successful concept in entertainment. He interprets:

Sports violence offers viewers a golden opportunity to purge themselves of deconstructive energies by vicariously participating with their sports heroes who regularly perform aggressive acts under the guise of 'play'. This purgation is seen to provide relief, which is enjoyable. The more violence, the greater the relief, and the more intense the enjoyment. (281)

All the same, *The Hunger Games* criticizes the violence and those who are involved in it with glee and enjoy them are depicted negatively. Furthermore, the people of the Capitol, who see the violence as entertainment, are also depicted as dumb and lacking empathy.

Thereafter, the overemphasized practices of television culture, particularly entertainment in reality shows are gradually ruling the mind as well as the world around the modern countries. Antonio Gramsci states that the culture is base structure which determines everything including economy. He further adds that it's the culture that forms intellectuals in the society. Hence, the researcher argues that the citizens of the Capitol are traditional intellectuals; they are privileged ones in the nation yet do not function intellectually or the shows like the *Hunger Games* would not be the celebrated event of the year. Moreover, Katniss represents the true organic intellectual as described by Gramsci. Even under strict totalitarian regime, she rebels against the bloodbath, eventually turning into a strong symbol of rebel and lighting fire to the revolution.

Likewise, according to Louis Althusser, the state uses ideology to repress its people; ideology affects individual's notions of reality. Apparently, both in the districts and in the Capitol, people are repressed by the state of Panem. Moreover, the repressive state apparatuses functions through repression and violence, which according to Althusser is the main function of the Panem as well. Using the *Hunger Games* as a tool, the state of Panem represses its people.

Furthermore, Adorno and Horkheimer focus on the commercial media, they argue that, as a conscious industry, the media willingly manipulate a passive and irrational public, focusing attention on the great influence the media exert while setting the agenda of what should be thought about in society and also the way media

encourages people to think the way they want. Similar is the case of the media in Panem where the most popular television program i.e. the *Hunger Games* is the main control mechanism of the nation to rule its citizens, intending to turn them passive and docile.

Apparently, the author is not in the favor of the reality shows as the popular shows feature the suffering, pain and misery as fun, meanwhile acts to deaden the emotions of the normal human. In an interview, she has stated:

There's the voyeuristic thrill- watching people being humiliated, or brought to tears, or suffering physically- which I find very disturbing. There's also the potential for desensitizing the audience, so that when they see real tragedy playing out on, say, the news, it doesn't have the impact it should. (Interview by James Blasingame 1)

"I was surfing channel between reality TV programming and actual war coverage. The lines began to blur in this very unsettling way, and I thought of this story" (Interview by James Blasingame 2). Apparently, on the basis of author's discussion, the researcher argues that Collins gained inspiration for writing *The Hunger Games* from the society she saw around her, the society that understands suffering as entertainment. She describes Panem as being the result of natural disasters, possibly by human hands, and wars that destroyed "was once called North America" (*The Hunger Games* 21). Therefore, the researcher confirms that the society that is critiqued in *The Hunger Games* is indeed the United States of America. Since the circumstances that led to the destruction of North America in the text have counterparts in society today, this pretty short as well as seemingly unimportant background story precisely works to convey message to the reader, a message that all of us could be in the place of Katniss and her family. Katniss has a moment of

reflection in *Mockingjay*: "...our ancestors don't seem much to brag about. I mean, look at the state they left us in, with wars and the broken planet. Clearly, they didn't care about what would happen to the people who came after them." (99) Arguably, similar thoughts are present in societies of today as well. Although not implemented practically, such thoughts are often heard through politicians and researchers. All the same, public today are made aware that a change has to happen soon, before it is too late or the consequences could be harsh as Panem.

The researcher further argues with the line of Gramsci's notion of intellectuals that some of the most intense cruelty in this world has always been defended in the name of tradition. Not only the reality shows, but the so-called sporting events such as *Bull fights* and *Rodeos* also present cruelty as entertainment. Hence, people are very familiar to the brutal activities as something of a pleasure, be it a human or an animal, the difference is not much accepted, as the impact is similar. However, people such as Katniss appear in the meantime, seek to end cruel traditions, they do not risk losing their identity. They strengthen by demonstrating that culture cannot be measured by the repetition of practices stuck in time by values of the past.

Hence, condemning the society of Panem is in fact condemning the present society of America on the basis of its demand of the entertainment while complete ignorance over the political as well as social responsibilities. As the intended readers of the text are youth, the message as well as warning is obviously intended towards them, as they are in the perfect position to change the world for better. In the search of ultimate form of entertainment, the producers of television follow the demand of the audience. Through *The Hunger Games*, the researcher aims to criticize what the popular culture of the current generation i.e. media can do to a society. Furthermore,

how the readers must decide to control their hunger for entertainment in order to avoid deteriorating into a society like that of Panem.

Throughout the research, the themes of violence and reality television are combined with how the media is being used to control the population of Panem in *The Hunger Games*. In parallel to this, the American media and society are made visible as there are many similarities in how the media functions in both nations. With placing the media in such a society where bloodbath is celebrated, the researcher criticizes the way violence is being used in the contemporary American media to boost viewer rates. The focus is also upon the ethical aspect of having human battle each other for the entertainment of others, comparing the *Hunger Games* to the reality television shows of contemporary America. By gaining the perspective of one of the contestant of the show i.e. through the first person narration of the protagonist Katniss, the reader sees the competition from contestant herself, eventually learning about how the reality shows are fake, last but not the least how their suffering evolves into the prime matter of the show.

The Hunger Games also presents many examples of how television or the media relates to control apparatus and power. Firstly, for the media to be prosperous, it needs viewers, that is to say, it requires to be watched. The media of the *Hunger Games* utilizes the theme of television violence both to frighten the people, also to entice them into watching more. Apparently, producers of the *Hunger Games* have left some strong effects on the ideas of people of Panem, thus, the research raises the reader's awareness of the fact that the media holds the power to affect the people who watch. Hence, it is necessary to be careful of what we watch.

Over and above that, *The Hunger Games* presents a autocratic society of future where the popular culture is celebrated, no matter how many life it costs.

Although corrupted, the prime motif of it is to exercise its control tactic through entertainment. The government has taken over full control of the media, so it has provided the ultimate form of entertainment. *The Hunger Games* is an extremely brutal show which promotes violence to be enjoyed. The proposed research claims that the text stands out as both warning as well as a message to what could be our future, the dark lies in future if the brutalities exist in the entertainment. The author herself has hinted at how the development of violence in television is causing society to deteriorate.

Furthermore, the text raises the awareness of the popular television culture in USA, condemning the rapid progress of entertainment which utilizes the spectacle of violence in reality shows to attract a larger audience. In addition to this, Panem reads as an analogy of modern-day consumerist culture, in the exact words of Martin Luther King, JR., “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people” (M. King). At first, Panem appears bizarre and extreme, nonetheless, as the pages go on turning, the elements as well as details of Panem come as a strikingly extreme version of contemporary societies that are influenced and driven by the extreme fondness of entertainment than anything else.

While this elaborated yet twisted future world of Panem may at first seem purely fictional, it directly appears as an absolute criticism of western societies of date. The idea that such a totalitarian government may still exist in the far future is although frightening, it is not however impossible. The obsessed demand for entertainment and its extreme form of regulation is in fact exposing the drawbacks of the western societies especially USA. On the other hand, it has had a major impact on youth as well as adults in today’s society. Katniss has, as a strong young rebellion, inspired many to take actions against injustice and cruelty. She stands out as a true

organic intellectual. Katniss' critique of the society where television show is a mechanism to control its population, her character encourages many to examine their own society and react against the things they find unjust, particularly in terms of the excessive need for the entertainment no matter how violent it is. Finally, the researcher argues that *The Hunger Games* is an absolute hunger for games, for entertainment; more the violence, the better turns the show.

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