

The Hunger Games

Uğur DİLER¹

Abstract

The Hunger Games consist of a trilogy of novels that are set in the dystopian future written by Suzanne Collins. These novels include The Hunger Games, Mockingjay as well as Catching Fire. The stories therein are told in the first person voice by a 16 year old girl known as Katniss Everdeen. She lives in a nation referred to as Panem in North America. This nation came into existence after an unknown catastrophe hit the North American States at that particular time. The story is primarily based on the hardships that this girl along with her counterparts from various Districts of the country undergoes to raise to the challenges that they encounter.

Keywords: *Hunger Games, dystopia*

Özet

Açlık Oyunları Suzanne Collins tarafından yazılmış distopik (ütopyanın tersi) gelecekte geçen roman üçlemesinden oluşmaktadır. Bu romanlar Açlık Oyunları, Mockingjay ve yanı sıra Yangını Yakalamak romanlarını kapsar. Hikâyeler, burada Katniss Everdeen olarak bilinen 16 yaşındaki kız tarafından anlatılmaktadır. Katniss Everdeen Kuzey Amerika'da Panem olarak isimlendirilen bir halkın içinde yaşar. Bilinmeyen bir felaket nedeniyle o dönemde Kuzey Amerika Devletleri içinden bu halk ortaya çıkmıştır. Hikâye öncelikle ülkenin çeşitli merkezlerinden gelen onun akranları ile birlikte Katniss Everdeen'in karşılaştıkları zorlukları arttırmak için uğraşlarına dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Açlık Oyunları, distopya*

¹ Öğr.Gör. Uğur Diler İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Meslek Yüksekokulu, ugurdiler@aydin.edu.tr

Introduction

The name of the trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, reflects the annual traditional tournament that has been in Panem for approximately 74 years. These were established by the president of Panem, Snow as some form of punishment for the Districts that had tried but failed to overthrow the Capitol. In the tournament, a lottery randomly selects one girl and one boy aged between 12 and 18 years from each District. They engage each other in a battle that is televised in a live manner to the entire country. The winner is the person that is left alive at the conclusion of the match. The outdoor setting which is the battlefield is controlled by gamemakers on behalf of the Capitol.

In this particular match, one of the protagonists, Katniss Everdeen volunteers to be a participant in place of her sister, Prim who is chosen by the lottery randomly. She is to fight against Peeta Mellark, who is a former classmate of hers. The storyline therefore revolves around these two individuals, how they relate to each other, how they manage to survive the games and the role of the state in whatever happens to them.

This paper discusses the excessive power that the state has over its people. In particular, it discusses how the Capitol exhibits this power and how they use it to oppress the citizens. Further, it also analyses the feelings of the people about their governance. Finally, it discusses whether the people are willingly being ruled in this tyrannical manner or there is discontent due to the status of matters.

How power is manifested in Panem

The society that Katniss Everdeen described was made up of a ruling class which was based in the Capitol while the rest of the country's population lived in thirteen districts. The ruler of the country was known as President Snow. He ruled Panem with an iron fist. The Hunger Games were practiced under his tutelage as the ultimate entertainment for his people. The games were introduced 74 years before Katniss's story. They resulted as a form of punishment for some districts that had attempted the overthrow of the Capitol but had failed. This indicated that tyranny did not start with President Snow. It had been existing for nearly a century (Arrow, 2012).

In The Hunger Games, Katniss indicated that by taking children from the Districts and forcing them to fight to death as others watch was a way of the Capitol reminding them that they were at the rulers' mercies. It was also a way of warning them that if the people attempted to speak up against the actions of the Capitol, worse fate than that of the hunger games would befall them. The games in this sense acted as a control of the people against any rebellion that they might have been inclined to undertake.

The power of the state was also manifested in the manner in which the participants of the Hunger Games were chosen. The people had no say in the matter despite the fact it was either them or their children who were expected to participate in the same. The state had devised a form of lottery that randomly picked a participant.

On the first day of the games, Katniss indicated that there were approximately twenty men and women who were dressed in robes. They were to act as gamemakers and controlled the games. This was also another way for the rulers to show their power. The message that was sent to the people was that even though the contestants were expected to kill each other, they were to do it in a manner that was designated and prescribed by the Capitol. The citizens were treated as pawns of the state even in the tragic game that they were expected to participate unquestioningly. There was no regard for the wants or thoughts of the people.

The gamemakers also had the power to kill any of the participants (Arrow, 2012). Katniss tells the reader that every so often, one of the gamemakers killed a participant just to remind the others that they could. They did so by firing bullets at them. However, most of the gamemakers' time was spent manipulating the participants into a confrontation with each other. In fact, at the beginning of the game, there was a firing storm from the gamemakers to disperse the participants. This reinforced the view that the state wanted the participants to know that they were its pawns and they should never forget it.

The form of punishment that the state used against its people was also a manifestation of the tyrannical power that it wielded. Katniss at some points sought for a definition of something referred to as Avox to be explained to

her. Haymitch told her that it was some form of punishment that is meted to traitors. Their tongues are cut out so that they cannot speak. They are then subjected to servitude. This essentially rendered them unable to speak out against the state and create discord (Dunn and Michaud, 2012).

During the final broadcast of the games, the Capitol censored some parts of it. One of them was where Katniss placed flowers on the dead body of Rue, one of the participants. This depicted another way in which the Capitol wielded power against the people of Panem. The Capitol decided what broadcasts that the people would access. Censorship represents one of the main ways that a particular government controls its people. This was done through the limitation of the information that the people had access to.

In some severe case, the information was even distorted to suit the purposes of the government. The reason why this part of the games was omitted was because it displayed the humanity that Katniss had. She was showing the Capitol that Rue was a human being that deserved respect as well as dignity. The Capitol suspected that if aired, this might have caused the rest of the citizens to view each other as such. This would be contrary to how the Capitol treated the people. Further, the purpose of the games was so that the people would also lose their humanity and see the participants as a form of entertainment (Turner, 2008). Ultimately, it would have led to rise in rebellion as people sought to have the Capitol treat them in a humane manner.

The fact that the hunger games required that participants be chosen from each district also assisted in the creation of discord between the citizens. This meant that each member from the different districts had to put extra effort to kill the other participants to survive the game and emerge the winner. Therefore, there was continuing animosity among the districts to the extent that they could not come together and rebel against the Capitol. The members of one particular district were constantly at war with the other districts. This was the intention of the Capitol.

The fact that the Capitol televised the hunger games live also showed what little regard they had for the lives of the people. They sought to reinforce

the idea that the participants of the game had no choice but to give their lives for nothing more than what the Capitol perceived as entertainment. The rest of the country was also forced to watch the games to know the status of the participants from their Districts. This was also an indication of the power that the Capitol had on the people. It made them endure the live games in which there was a high probability that one of their children was going to die.

The manifestation of the power of the Capitol was also seen at the climax of the hunger games, Katniss described the creature that she was facing as having the face of a fox. However, upon further perusal, she discovered that it bore resemblance to one of the contestants from District nine with whom she had previously struggled for the possession of a backpack. These creatures were released by the gamemakers to fight with the still surviving contestants. The Capitol had genetically mutated the participants who had died during the battle into wolves with the purpose of releasing them to chase and devour the remaining participants. This indicated that the Capitol had used the power that they had to dehumanize the girls and the boys who had fallen during the battle by transforming them into animals. They did this to exhibit the purview of their power and that they could do anything to the people of Panem.

At the end of the trilogy, Katniss also showed the reader that the power of the Capitol also extended to the gamemakers. She indicated that even the gamemakers were not safe from the wrath of the Capitol. As the designated controllers of the games, the gamemakers had to ensure that there was a victor who was left standing after slaughtering the rest of the participants. Failure to ensure this, the entire games might have blown up in the faces of the gamemakers. If they dared fail in their duties to the Capitol, they might even have been executed before the cameras of the live broadcasts. This clearly indicated that the Capitol did not have any regard for anyone else but themselves. Not even the people who were implementing and overseeing their precious games.

The citizen's reaction to the tyranny of the state

The people of Panem lived in fear of the state. Nobody dared to speak out against the tyranny that the people lived under (Henthorne, 2012). They

all feared that they would have their tongues cut out and subsequently subjected to servitude. This is why for 74 years, they had endured the hunger games fully understanding that a contestant must die for the game to come to an end. However, during the 74th game, Katniss indicated that she noticed a shift in the nature of the people. Previously, she did not think that the people of District 12 cared about anything else but what would please the Capitol.

When she volunteered to take the place of her sister, Prim in the games, she experienced something akin to love from the people of District 12. She became precious to these people. This was displayed in the arena when the crowd performed an old gesture seen at funerals. They touched their three fingers of the left hand to the lips and then held them out for her. This was used to denote admiration and was a way of bidding adieu to a beloved person. The people used this to show the Capitol that even though it had tyranny on its side; the people also had their own power by coming together and supporting their own people. At this point is when Panem began to experience some form of hope towards redemption.

The survival tactics that Katniss employed in the games also affected the power that the state wielded on the people. In a conversation with Haymitch, Peeta Mellark indicated that Katniss has some form of effect on the people. There was renewed hope that if she can overcome the game that has been imposed on her by the Capitol, then the people could also overcome the tyranny of the state. Further, in Mockingjay, she made a conscious decision to join the rebels in an effort to overthrow the Capitol.

The actions of Peeta Mellark during the games also depicted a way in which the people of Panem decided to rebel against the power of the state (Henthorne, 2012). He told Katniss that he wanted to do something different in the games. He wanted to make the rulers of the country accountable for their action. Further, he wanted to show them that whatever they did or forced the citizens to do, there were parts of the participants that the Capitol could not own. He wanted the Capitol to understand that the participants were human beings and more than the pawns that they were supposed to be.

When Rue, one of the participants died during the games, Katniss went into the woods, picked some flowers and decorated Rue's body with them. This can be interpreted as a message to the Capitol that they might have been able to take everything from the people of Panem but their humanity remained intact (Pharr, 2012). It can also be interpreted to mean that despite the brutish actions that the participants were forced to engage in by the Capitol, they refused to let this define them.

In the last scene of the book, Katniss figured a way in which she could defeat the gamemakers. This was borne out of many years of witnessing the people of her country being mistreated by the Capitol. Even though it was not clear which action was finally undertaken by the last surviving participants, Katniss and Peeta, it was clear that Katniss was contemplating suicide. She believed, rightfully, that even the illusion of both of them committing suicide was enough to defeat the purpose of the games. This action was a powerful tool that showed the rest of the citizens that it was possible to perform acts that were contrary to the expectation of the Capitol.

Finally, when Haymitch told Katniss that the Capitol was very furious because Katniss had showed them up at the end of the games, all that Katniss did was to laugh delightful. She even asked Haymitch, "so what?" This meant that she did not care that she had caused the Capitol to be the laughingstock of Panem. This was an indication that the tyranny of the Capitol had pushed the citizens to a point that they did not care about the consequences of their actions. They only cared about standing up to the Capitol and proving that they were people who deserved respect. It also showed that the people had wised up to the tyranny of the Capitol and time was ripe when the people would not bear it any further.

Even though the story ends in a note that is uncertain, it is clear that there is a wind of change (Pharr, 2012). The next action, whether by the Capitol or by the citizens would determine if Katniss would be punished for her actions. If this did happen, there was likely to be uproar from the citizens who have just gained the courage to display small acts of courage.

It is no doubt that the key source of power within The Hunger Games is quite clear: it is the Capitol's totalitarian government. Since the capitol has

been holding much of Panem's wealth and resources, that government is in a position to dominate its citizens across all the districts within Panem. This is an ultimate indication of how a government can use its power to warn its people against any form of rebellion. Its citizens have merely been reduced into pawns in this game of death and life. Given that only a single teenage contestant can win, most tributes are compelled to murder teens coming from the remaining districts, with an aim of stopping them from joining some forces and also rebelling.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Hunger Games trilogy that was based in Panem, a country that came up after an unknown catastrophe hit North America displayed the power of the Capitol. It held most of Panem's wealth and used this status to control the citizens. The ultimate display of the power that the Capitol had was the display of the hunger games. At the same time, the Capitol also sought to discourage any person that harbored the thought of rebelling against it from doing so. The repercussions of doing so would be worse than the fate that the participants of the hunger games bore.

There are varieties of ways in which the Capitol wielded power in Panem. These included forcing teenagers to participate in a game whereby the winner was the person who managed to stay alive throughout the game. Further, the Capitol had cruel ways of torturing individual who attempted to speak ill of them which included cutting off their tongues. The Capitol also caused discord among the districts by forcing the teenagers from all the Districts in a cruel game of survival for the fittest. The people therefore lack the coordination and unity to rebel against the tyranny of the Capitol.

After suffering 74 years of tyranny, the people of Panem began displaying signs of fighting back the Capitol. They were in solidarity with the humane actions of Katniss of volunteering to take the place of Prim, her sister in the games as well as covering Rue's body when she was killed during the games. These small acts of defiance led to the conclusion that tyranny can be withstood for so long. At some point, the people who are being oppressed will not be able to bear the tyranny and will be find ways of rebelling against such rulers. The signs may be as small as the salute that was given to Katniss in the arena but they are very powerful.

Works Cited

- [1] Arrow, V. , (2012). The Panem companion: an unofficial guide to Suzanne Collin's Hunger games, from Mellark bakery to Mockingjay, 23 - 44, Smart Pop, Dallas.
- [2] Dunn, G. A. , Michaud N. (2012). The Hunger games and philosophy: a critique of pure treason. 190, Wiley. Hoboken, New Jersey.
- [3] Henthorne, T. ,(2012). Approaching the Hunger Games trilogy: a literary and cultural analysis, 33 – 130, McFarland and Co. Publishers. Jefferson, North California.
- [4] Pharr, M. (2012). Of bread, blood, and the Hunger Games: critical essays on the Suzanne Collins trilogy, 186 – 230, McFarland and Co. Publishers. Jefferson, North California.
- [5] Turner, M.W. (2008). The hunger games (Review. of the book The hunger games). Publishers Weekly, 255(44), 58.