

Post colonialism in the hunger games



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The Hunger Games, a blockbuster hit directed by Gary Ross explores a dystopian world set in North America. One in which a wealthy, central elite (the Capital) exploits bordering districts into producing goods and services for the Capital's consumption. The conditions surrounding the unrest in the Hunger Games can be extrapolated to real society, evidenced by the enormous amounts of violence and instability experienced by countries recovering from a similar colonial oppression.

Through the lens of Post-Colonial analysis, we can obtain a deeper understanding of societal issues within the twelve districts and their relationship with The Capital. And in turn, how those colonized in the districts respond in addressing the reversal of the effects induced by The Capital. In what was once North America is now divided into twelve districts under rule of The Capital. These districts are exploited by the wealthy of The Capital to produce goods. The Capital maintains their hold of power over the districts with the annual Hunger Games.

It is used as a reminder of the amount of control The Capital holds as well as punish them for the previous failed rebellion of district thirteen. This is a nationally televised event where each district is forced to select two tributes, one male and one female aged 12-18. The citizens then watch as these 24 children compete in a fight to the death last man standing competition. The film centers around district twelve citizen, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), and begins on the morning of the reaping of the 74th Hunger Games. In a horrid twist of fate, Primrose, Katniss' sister, is picked as the district twelve tribute. Katniss, overwhelmed with the instinct to protect her little sister volunteers to play in her place. Together with male tribute, Peeta

Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), the journey of the 74th Hunger Games begins. What follows is a series of events that transforms Katniss into a symbol of hope and revolution for the oppressed people of Panem and in turn, an enemy of The Capital. To first understand Post-Colonial analysis, one must first understand who it came to be. Colonialism refers to the control or governing influence of a nation over a dependent country, territory or people. Throughout history there are countless examples of colonialism. Post-Colonial analysis developed and mainly refers to the time after colonialism and was created as colonial countries became independent. While aspects of this can be found in history, politics, etc. it can also be implemented in approaches to culture and identity. Post-Colonial cinema stems from Empire Film used mainly post WWII era during the 1960s-80s in eastern Europe.

It was implemented as a mass media tool of European imperial projects, such production helped shape, enforce, and naturalize the relationship between the ruling group and dominated others. In addition, to magnify the role of foreign conquest in nation building and used to enhance national prestige. Post-Colonial cinema historically offers different lens from which we can see their visual codes and discover tensions and aporias. It was then quickly transported to colonies where it was influential on subsequent development films as resistance. In these films, Nostalgia, Memory, Amnesia, trauma, denial, repression, guilt, and humor are recurring traits. These films do not privilege a single history or central narrative. They were used to undo official and dominant accounts that exclude or marginalize subjects creating gender, racial, ethnic and linguistic differences. Next, we can think about

Post-Colonial through Cinema and other Dynamics that exceed this Post-Colonial Optic. This is the highly original form and rhetorical strategies filmmakers used in their projection of history, geography and subjects in their films. Used strategies such as playing with margins and marginality, framing, camera angles, editing, color, texture, the reaction between word and image, constitute a resistance that is at the same time aesthetic and political. Lastly, we look at the relationship between Post-Colonial cinema and Globalization. Globalization aspect seen through film industries such as Bollywood and Nollywood Post-Colonial cinema is about re-materializing and re-embodiment of these global flows and multiplication and diversification of audiences. The idea of orientalism is also a very prevalent aspect when analyzing films through a Post-Colonial lens. This is the historically continuing battle of West vs East. The West being defined as dominating, restructuring, having authority over others, and masculine. While the East is seen as exotic, mysterious, inferior, seductive, barbaric, criminal, dangerous and feminine. These adjectives clearly insinuating the dominance of the West with West as the masculine patriarchy of the metropolitans and Orient as rich and fertile which is feminine traits. While Panem and all its districts are a part of the same continent this principle is still extremely relevant. Replace the words West vs. East with, The Capital vs. the districts.

The Capital being seen as the wealthy, highly educated, attractive, and elite. While the districts are seen almost as indentured servants. Given horrible living conditions and barely enough rations to survive while expected to serve in producing goods for Capital consumption, reaping none of the benefits. With his idea of West vs East there are also effects seen in the

citizens regarding The Capital's ideology dominance. Roya Ghaffarpour also offers the idea of the change in identity of both the colonized and the colonizer, In the process of interaction, the identity of both colonizer and the colonized undergoes serious changes. The colonizer stereotypes the colonized, regarding them as the inferior, thoughtless beings. The colonized seeing them in power internalize what they say, perceiving themselves as backward and the colonizer as superior, sophisticated beings (Ghaffarpour 3). Being the inferior, by imitating the superior in the way of a parody, they strike a crack in the foundation of the dominance of the superior. But there is a price to this as it results in changes of the identities of both the colonized and the colonizer. By following the colonizers culture they are playing into their hands and pleasing them by being like them. There are numerous examples shown throughout the film of this. For example, the dressing of the tributes during the events leading up to the games. Each tribute is assigned a designer for the events that dress them in Capital fashion. This being very extravagant, colorful, and larger than life designs. Reflecting on how the Capital sees themselves. These designs help to excite the citizens watching. Similar to costumes in a movie or play, meant to draw the audience in. It is not just the physical look but also the psychological. In the beginning Katniss is remised to give the people what they want and because of that, they aren't excited by her and don't like her. One example being, when Katniss is uneasy about her big televised interview, Cinna and Haymitch attempt to calm her down by complementing her looks. They explain that this is how she will win over the people of The Capital. Cinna says: " The prep team adores you. You even won over the the Gamemakers. And as for the citizens of the Capitol, well, they can't stop talking about you. No one can help but

admire your spirit” (Ghaffarpour 6). This speaks to the morals of the citizens of The Capital. They don’t care who she actually is, as long as she is presenting herself in a way that they like. There is another scene in which Haymitch, Peeta and Katniss’ coach for the games, has a frank conversation with Katniss about this. He basically says if she doesn’t play a part interesting for the viewers, she will not survive. In order to survive, you must play the cards your dealt. If they like you this can increase your chances to win in many ways for example, sponsored care packages.

Viewers can pay to send tributes necessary items in order to give them an advantage. Ghaffarpour also includes that, with the changing their identity to appease The Capital, the characters ambivalence toward the amenity of the capital is revealed. He writes, Ambivalence is referred to an idea when two opposing feelings and actions happen simultaneously. This feeling is that of attraction and repulsion to an object or a person at the same time. What is meant by this is that the colonized is at the same time attracted toward the colonizer and repulsed from them as they have been suppressed and lost their freedom (Ghaffarpour 6). In one scene, Katniss and Peeta are on their way to Panem and get their first taste of the capital lifestyle. Although Peeta has hatred toward The Capital, he offers compliments about the delicious food. This infuriates Katniss as she cannot believe Peeta is complimenting the same Capital that is forcing them to go into an arena and kill one another and others. Peeta offers the excuse that this is their situation and they should make the best of it because it’s not like they are going to get to go home. As we see this feeling of ambivalence is targeted not just a person, but it might be a reaction that the colonized might have toward an object or

an action. Here the food is that object to which Peeta shows his enthusiasm. He both despises the Capitol and loves and admires their food. This is a huge theme in Post-Colonial analysis. In times of oppression such as these, people have that animosity toward the oppressor, but, are also struggling so much that if offered spoils, most would not turn it away. And in some cases, like the ones in Hunger Games, that can be a life and death decision. The choice of following your morals or protecting your own survival. The ideas first arose about postcolonial studies in the 1960s from third cinema. Third cinema wanted to separate itself from first cinema which was the economic dominance of Hollywood and second cinema in Europe that is nation based. This was revolutionary cinema that would focus on the masses and express their political goals through innovative cinematic reform, referring to its poverty of technical and financial means. Sought to naturalize the intersecting racial, class and gender orders of colonial domination. Infiltrates the psychology and political life of those colonized producing a society of self- alienated subjects.

It was an anti-imperialist cinema that was not focused on individual or the consumer. It rather generally advocated for class struggle and armed resistance. It also introduced the imperial gaze, E. Ann Kaplan has introduced the post-colonial concept of the imperial gaze, in which the observed find themselves defined in terms of the privileged observer's own set of value-preferences (Google). In the use of Post-Colonial analysis this would refer to the idea of the colonizer being incapable of identifying with the colonized. Most citizens, maybe with the exception of districts one and two, have never been to The Capital and never will. And in turn, citizens of

The Capital do not venture out to the districts. They know almost nothing of how they live and rather than care to find out, create stereotypes.

Specifically, in one scene Katniss is describing how the games suppress them by forcing the districts children to slay one another for entertainment pleasure. They even take it a step further by making it a celebration of sorts to increase the humiliation. It's like the championship game of a any sport. People even follow and bet on their favorite tributes. And the winner is showered with spoils from the capital. The Capital has cemented the districts identity as inferior. Meanwhile, the districts are the ones being forced to watch the brutal murders of their loved ones. It is yet another example of The Capital flexing their superiority. The Hunger Games is an action-packed dystopian film that when analyzed through the lens of Post-Colonialism can reveal historical and sociological aspects dealing with colonialism. While its setting is dystopian, there are numerous real-world connections to be made. The oppression by the wealthy elite is a tale as old as time and is extremely recognizable. In situations such as that, it is very common for the colonized to have feelings of hatred toward the oppressor but in the same turn are attracted to their lifestyle.

This is perfectly seen as Katniss and Peeta embark on the events leading up to the games. Imitating their identity from a place of curiosity as well as necessity. They need to connect with those types of people in order to come into their favor. This is a major internal conflict they have as they know its morally wrong but, it is necessary. This lends its hand toward their prevalent feeling of ambivalence toward the Capital. The despise The Capital and what they stand for, but being oppressed for so long, they also have involuntary

feelings of attraction to their lifestyle. Lastly, even given the barbaric stereotype by the elite of The Capital, the district citizens find a way to spin it in their favor. At the end of the movie, when Katniss and Peeta threaten suicide rather than kill each other, the game makers give in. This is the first sense of wavering we see from The Capital. This implies a crack in their foundation. Katniss and Peeta flip the script and turn it on The Capital forcing them to realize they need them, and they serve them. The push and pull between on the morals of these characters between the two cultures destroys any sense of home and therefore they cannot have a steady identity. Especially for tributes that are facing a one in twenty-four chance of survival. It is a tale of survival only for the strongest of hearted as the circumstances are beyond less than ideal. During times like these people are forced to make decisions that they may not believe are morally acceptable but are done out of necessity. Even after they win the games and return home their identity is forever damaged from these events and it will not end here. They have just gotten on a ferris wheel that isn't set to stop turning for a while. The Capital retains its dominance and it will take a revolution like none other before to shatter it.