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# The Dystopian State and the safeguarding of (Normalised) Childhoods: The Hunger Games

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This chapter considers

- The continuing relevance of the social class divide in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bourdieu (1997), Jones (2014), Walkerdine, (2014).
- Children's right to a protected Childhood; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), Ensalaco, M. and Majka, L.C. (2005).
- Why individuals should care about Neoliberal politics and the out-sourcing of responsibility for safeguarding children (Apple, 2014, Jones 2014).

## The Film

The Hunger Games was chosen as the basis for this chapter because the exaggerated, simplified, fantasy context of the film facilitates makes viewers feel shocked and upset by the actions of the state in violating children's rights. This helps us gain insights into the application of concepts of social class and political ideology liberated from the personal politics of 21st century society. The chapter explores the state's role in safeguarding and protecting children, a theme that is explored through an analysis of the tense relationship between Katniss and the state of Panem.

Following the success of The Hunger Games book trilogy by Suzanne Collins, the first of The Hunger Games films, released in 2012, also proved a huge international success. The film is set in Panem, a nation state located in a dystopian future world apparently created by a rise in global sea levels submerging some of the lowland geography of the continent. Panem is divided into subjugated

'districts', political power is centralised in the Capitol and the nation is socially stratified in the service of the Capitol's elite. While Panem is clearly not the contemporary USA, it does perhaps present an exaggerated caricature of contemporary divisions in US society, where decaying industrial areas such as Detroit are contrasted with high-tech media savvy centres such as Washington, DC. In the film, District 12 and the "Capitol" represent these contrasts. The Capitol asserts power over citizens by staging an annual reality TV show called the "The Hunger Games". This pitches twenty-four young district champions against each other in a protracted gladiatorial survival contest, a barbaric fight to the death between the twelve male and twelve female tributes.

In the early scenes Katniss Everdene, the central character of the film, is depicted as the key carer for her younger sister and mentally fragile mother. To make ends meet she skilfully, but illegally, hunts game in the forests surrounding her mining community home. Early in the film she is dramatically uprooted from her family when she takes her sister's place as one of the two randomly chosen District 12 tributes to The Hunger Games. The film charts her journey, as she prepares for and then participates in the 'games'.

The first part of the chapter guides readers through an analysis of social class archetypes linked to Katniss's home in "District 12" and the social values of "the Capitol". The film illustrates how a controlling social elite can exist out of phase with sectors of society; this resonates with Jones' (2014) analysis of the upper class elite in British society occupying key roles in media as well as law, business and politics. The analysis draws attention to the need to challenge deterministic stereotypes of a disadvantaged underclass and promote mutual understanding across social boundaries (Walkerdine, 2014).

The second part of the chapter examines children's rights to protection by the state from extreme poverty and participation in combat. The film highlights how childhood is not respected or recognised by Panem. The Hunger Games tournament section of the film is particularly challenging because it provokes a strong sense of injustice on behalf of the children forced into mortal combat. Readers are encouraged to reflect on the depth of feeling the film evokes about the need to protect children from a violent adult world. The chapter invites readers to consider what the protective duties of the state towards children should be?

The concluding section of the chapter draws attention to the underlying political commentary of the film, as a critique of centralised state control. It argues that the film romanticises the individual pioneer spirit and vilifies the state. Readers are encouraged to reflect on the rights and responsibilities of the citizen and the state.

### **Growing-up in District 12.**

The first scenes of the film introduce us to 'District 12', a community dependant on coal mining. The buildings and inhabitants are rundown, uniform, plainly dressed, shabby and functional. This a disadvantaged neighbourhood living in poverty, where the children go hungry.

### Scene 3 (9:45 -17.13 )

The downtrodden children of District 12 file into a heavily guarded compound and line up in rows, corralled by heavily armed guards. The location is a rundown bleak late industrial landscape. The people of district twelve wear garments reminiscent of 1930's, and 40's American workwear; dungarees, caps, homemade dresses. By contrast, the police guards from out of the district wear futuristic white Stormtrooper suits and helmets. The landscape and retro clothing of District 12 evokes periods of depression and hardship.

The children are assembled in an unnatural silence and compelled to watch a giant video screen that reminds them that they are assembled to select a male and a female tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> annual Hunger Games. Everyone is reminded that this is done as an assertion of power by the capitol who defeated the rebelling districts seventy years previously. The Hunger Games demands the sacrifice of the lives of two young people from each district. A piece of paper bearing Primrose Everdene's name is drawn from a glass bowl. When the name is read out, the children part around a terrified young girl, yielding her up to the waiting guards. A few silent seconds later, her elder sister Katniss screams out that she will volunteer. Everyone is surprised because, as the MC announces, this is the first volunteer from District 12 in seventy years. Guards move in to surround and escort Katniss up to the stage. She is clearly terrified and in shock at what she is doing. The crowd remains silent. The ridiculously dressed MC calls for applause, but the children remain silent and then unsettle the MC further by all kissing three fingers and raising them in a silent salute. Peeta Mellark, a baker's son, is then chosen as the male tribute; he walks resignedly up to the stage.

The scenes in District 12 summon up cultural archetypes not just of the hard masculine cultures and grinding poverty of industrial towns in the US, but also of family hardships connected with disaffected or absent father figures with undercurrents of alcohol abuse, domestic violence and neglect. The film uses these archetypes to portray working class societies as so difficult that there is little space for activity outside the bounds of work and where survival is the daily focus.

The so called American dream was created by migrants escaping the class-ridden societies of old Europe where one's station in life was fixed by the social position of the family you were born into and essential to one's character. While the Twentieth Century Europe saw a change from a rigid class based division of labour to a more meritocratic system, many sociologists suggest that education systems still favour certain social groups (Bernstein, 2000, Bourdieu, 1997, Giddens and Sutton, 2013). The once clearly defined boundaries between a labouring working class, the merchant /trading middle class and the property owning upper class, are now much more blurred in societies where nearly everyone attends school (Savage, 2015). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, even established educational sociologists acknowledged that the traditional labels of working, middle and upper class were dissolving. Bernstein (2000) acknowledges that social class groups were less clearly marked in contemporary society because the nature of work was shifting from one dominated by industrial, factory based labour to an information and service based economy. Though class might be less visible in contemporary society, Jones (2014) offers a helpful and persuasive analysis of how those from the former upper classes with wealth and power remain in control of politics, business, media and law. Jones argues that money still buys advantage in a meritocracy where attending particular private schools offers increased chances to access particular universities and then to progress into top jobs in politics, business, media and law. While only seven per cent of people attend fee-paying private schools in Britain they are disproportionately represented in top jobs; twenty-two per cent of pop stars, thirty-five per cent of MPs, fifty-five per cent of senior civil servants and fifty-four per cent of the top one hundred media jobs (Social Policy and Mobility Commission 2014). In contemporary British society, few jobs require no qualifications. As technology takes over mundane heavy labour tasks, many jobs require more technical or more sophisticated communication skills.

In contemporary British society, communities with a shared working class lifestyle, based around a single industry such as mining, are rare and decreasing but many communities in today's society are

still haunted by their industrial past, which can make it hard for some families to adjust to find work in the modern labour market (Walkerdine 2014). However, this idea of a working class fixed to a geographic area and a specific industry aligns with the population of District 12.

New accounts of social groups in society identify vulnerable low income groups sometimes called the 'precariat' at the bottom of a social order and then more complex middle layers varying by wealth and income; tastes, interests and activities; social networks friendships and associations (Savage, 2015). The precariat, has become a new archetype of disaffected families living on social housing estates divorced from more affluent communities and is becoming a common part of the narrative of contemporary news politics and fiction in Britain (Walkerdine 2015). In this archetype, class is not only marked by type of work but also by a limited engagement with social rules, conventions and the institutions of society. An underclass is identified, within the media, as poor, lacking in education, social manners and wider cultural awareness (Walkerdine 2015, Jones 2012). There are clear parallels to Katniss Everdene's situation.

This is a dangerous stereotype that casts people in a deterministic or self-perpetuating cycle where limited family social and cultural capital mean that children are likely to continue in a life of low paid work or worklessness (Vandenbroeck 2007, Walkerdine 2014).

*Studies of working class areas noted not only poverty and poor living conditions, but also a kind of moral economy which has been increasingly pathologised in the present, such that all opprobrium about chavs (a derogatory English word for working class youth; Jones, 2012), for example, is directed towards poor parenting styles and the need for their correction.*

*(Walkerdine, 2014 186)*

Walkerdine gives examples of how archetypes in the minds of society haunt communities creating self-fulfilling prophecies by those interacting with them who expect, see and reinforce certain behaviours. It is essential as childhood practitioners that we avoid a deterministic view of childhoods. To see children as trapped by the socio-cultural conditions, may fail to safeguard and encourage alternative futures, by setting low and limiting aspirations, judging their communities as failing and inadequate. Vandebroek (2009) illustrates the importance of a sensitivity and respect demonstrated through practitioners entering into genuine open non-judgmental dialogues with migrant families in order to facilitate their inclusion.

In scene two of *The Hunger Games*, we see Katniss is clever and resourceful in terms of hunting, tracking, archery and her knowledge of plants. She is very caring towards her sister but tough, self-reliant and independent. She is comfortable in her own company, natural, unaffected and plain speaking. She embodies strength and dignity in facing the difficulties and challenges of her district. As the film progresses we see that Katniss is not well educated by the state, she knows very little about culture, politics and life beyond her immediate circumstances.

The fantasy context of *The Hunger Games* film legitimates Katniss's law breaking because the state is so clearly unjust and because she acts to save her sister. If Katniss lived in an urban British disadvantaged neighbourhood, her transgression of the law would probably be vilified in the press as showing her to be 'out of control'. In the film, we see her from her community's viewpoint as something of a local hero for supporting her family and providing fresh meat to the local community. Another factor in her acceptability as a hero is that the values she displays do not conform to an underclass stereotype of uncouth, crass disregard for others and for social rules. She is presented as shy and awkward, aloof and unapproachable rather than sassy and antagonistic.



The focus of this chapter is on the state's role in safeguarding children however, safeguarding is not immediate protection from harm, and it is about looking to the longer-term wellbeing of children's futures. It has been argued that in contemporary society a problem in breaking the cycle that reproduces poverty in successive generations is a cultural expectation, supported by media and politicians that frequently reinforces stereotypes that demonise an underclass and in doing so increase the alienation and social exclusion of already disadvantaged children. For some children in contemporary societies the processes of education can demand a conformity to rules that fails to value the talents they have, so that they are ascribed labels of failure that mark their futures. This is a challenge for professionals to resist cultural stereotypes in their day-to-day practice.

### **The Capitol, cultural capital and the state's role in supporting social mobility**

As Katniss and Peeta are taken to the Capitol for training, we are introduced to three more social groups; the politicians, the media workers and the slaves. The media workers have employment but they live in a palpably different social world to the workers in district 12. They are well fed, elaborately, individually and expensively dressed they wear elaborate make-up and hairstyles. Their clothes are diverse fashion items, worn as much as a personal statement as for practicality. This is a consumerist society; it uses food, clothing, power and human resources to heighten experiences in the moment with little concern for future sustainability. The population of the Capitol talk in an elaborate way and expect outsiders to conform to their elaborate customs. The Capitolists are ill informed about what life is like in the distant districts, but, in their world, it does not matter. The Hunger Games alludes to the detached power of the political and media elite in contemporary Washington, DC and their distance from the production of the products, energy and food they consume. The slaves are those found guilty of crimes in the districts who have had their tongues removed rendering them voiceless and then been kept under constant surveillance as menial servants in the capitol.

The role of Katniss and Peeta's mentors, Haymitch and Effie is to introduce them to complicated social expectations, behaviours and knowledge of the Capitol. They are introduced to the language, artefacts and materials that are endorsed as valuable by the state for example the transport systems, technology, clothes, culture, food and rituals of the Capitol. In their first TV interview, they are presented as amusingly naïve, as an entertainment to be laughed at for their inept country manners.

#### Scene 10 and 11 (49:33- 56.56)

Katniss and Peeta are about to be interviewed by The Hunger Games' TV master of ceremonies for the first time in front of a live studio audience. We have already been introduced to extravagantly dressed, exotically made-up characters, but here we see over the scale of this extravagance. Katniss is initially stage-struck; when she misses the first interview question, the audience roar with laughter when she says simply "what?" The crowd are won over by her beautiful dress that shimmers with flames and her touching self-sacrifice for her sister but she is still something to be pitied not respected. Similarly, in scene 11, Peeta is laughed at in his interview for saying the showers in the Capitol are different and that he now smells of roses. He invites the MC to smell him. When the MC does this, he asks in return how he smells. Peeta says, "You smell better than me". The MC replies that because I have been here longer, the audience continues to laugh at Peeta as a country clown. Peeta, unlike Katniss, is comfortable to play to the crowd.

Peeta, in particular, rises to the challenge of adapting to the social rules and expectations of the Capitol demonstrating greater social adaptability than Katniss. Peeta is learning the rules of playing the game but Katniss wants to reject them.

Sociologists Bernstein (1996) and Bourdieu (1997) pointed to the role of language, social cultural awareness and social connections as implicit but important markers of difference that permit or deny access to different social spheres. Bernstein describes the restricted and elaborated codes of language

and culture existing in educational discourses that make it harder for working class children to fit in to the middle class discourse of schools. Bourdieu (1997) argued that the process of education is bound up with the transmission of cultural capital. He identified three forms of cultural capital; embodied cultural capital relating to the knowledge and skills located in the person and habitus of the individual; objectified cultural capital acquired through books, artefacts etc.; institutionalised cultural capital, the grouping of people by the processes of education they have undertaken that are marked by qualifications (Bourdieu 1997).

Bourdieu (1997) argued that the process of education, while seeming to offer families a route to increased cultural, social, and economic capital, conceals the propensity of education to reproduce existing societal stratifications because it rewards those who are already comfortable with the modes of communication endorsed by those in power, which are in turn valued in education. The concept of habitus as developed by Bourdieu and discussed in chapter 2. can also be helpful in moving beyond broad class labels towards a more refined analysis of individual values and dispositions.

*The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought. (Bourdieu 1993 86)*

Bernstein's and Bourdieu's models of the demarcations of participation in social groups are also helpful because they are not essentialist or deterministic (Connelly, 2003). This means that peoples' fates are not fixed at birth or even through their childhood as unchanging aspects of their identity. People always have the potential to revise their habitus although they may lack the opportunities to do so.

The emphasis that individuals and groups place on particular aspects of life and human activity can be more helpful in distinguishing them than the outward appearance of the objects they use in activity. A

criticism of some multicultural comparisons is that they focus too much on clothes and food (samosas and saris) rather than significant values and beliefs. For example, while the food in two countries might be very different and lead to differences in cooking and eating utensils the attitudes to food, cooking and eating might be more similar than different. The following table offers a summary of the contrasting values exhibited in District 12 against those exhibited in the Capitol. You are invited to compare these values to those of communities that you know.

| <b>Values</b> | District 12   | The Capitol  |
|---------------|---|--|
| Eating        | Food is simple, uncomplicated, people eat to live, eat what there is, there are no elaborate eating rituals | Food is extravagant, people eat to excess, taking pills to induce vomiting so they can eat more                              |
| Speech        | Communication of facts is more important than expression of ideas   | Spoken and visual messages are elaborated, carefully chosen and nuanced to demonstrate status and power                      |
| Education     | Practical skills are more important than educational qualifications   | Knowledge of customs, practice, language, social codes is essential to maintaining and progressing one's position in society |
| Community     | Collective survival is more important than individual survival  | People are less concerned about maintaining the society than maintaining their own position within cultural cliques          |
| Dress         | Clothes are practical and facilitate dirty work. They demonstrate conformity and community belonging        | Clothing is extravagant to demonstrate, individuality, status and fashion awareness.   |

|                     |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Work                | Working is essential for survival                         | Working is also pastime and a game that brings an overabundance of rewards                            |
| Personal appearance | Make-up and hair styling is minimal, plain and practical. | Make-up, hair style and body augmentation is important to status and to standing out as an individual |

In the film, it is not just being trapped in the District 12 community that denies any possibility of social mobility. Even for those gaining admission to Panem’s capital, the state’s systems continue to disadvantage those from other cultural backgrounds from breaking into and controlling the corridors of power.

“The educational market is strictly dominated by the linguistic products of the dominant class and tend to sanction the pre-existing differences in capital” (Bourdieu 1991 62).

In Panem the districts are haunted by the ghosts of defeat and subjugation, that is the function of The Hunger Games; they are intended to remind the districts they have been defeated by the Capitol and subject to humiliation. Panem does not seem to offer any way to improve one’s life circumstances, other than through the long odds and horror of The Hunger Games. The increasing sense of injustice provoked by Katniss performance in The Hunger Games troubles the President. He is keen to avoid Katniss providing others with any hope of beating the state. He recognises that every time she survives unbowed, her power to inspire rebellion grows.

In many contemporary societies, the apparently equitable offer of opportunity to pass from one class to another through the process of education, gives enough hope to maintain the status quo. However, in reality the journey from growing up in a disadvantaged district to gaining high paid work is more challenging. Hopelessness may lead to alienation if not revolution. We need to be able to see the

potential in the children that we support, to understand the challenges they face, to help make societies' codes more visible and accessible, to offer extra support when it is needed.

### **The Hunger Games and the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

As early as 1924 Egalntyne Jebb, the founder of the Save the Children Fund set out a declaration of the rights of the child (Ensalaco, 2005). However, it was not until 1989 that this was formally adopted by the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989). Every nation has now fully accepted the convention as a legal framework except for the USA. The CRC asserts that children under the age of 18 should have additional rights beyond the declared Universal Human Rights (1948). I would like to focus on two areas including five of the fifty-four articles that are at the heart of resistance to the USA fully ratifying the CRC.

#### **Material Welfare**

The fictional state of Panem fails in its responsibilities in relation to article 6, that all children have the right to life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily. Governments should also ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect children from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them (CRC Article 19). Governments should provide extra money for the children of families and need (CRC Article 26) and children have a right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The government should help families who cannot afford to provide this (CRC Article 27). In the USA, members of the Republican party have voiced concerns that by ratifying the treaty, a door will be opened that could allow lawsuits on behalf of those families let down by a lack of state provision and protection

From the first scene, we are introduced to the hard life that Katniss has led, in order to care for her sister, she has had to learn to be resilient and self-sufficient. Katniss Everdene's family is so poor that she has been forced by hunger to break the law by leaving the fenced borders of district 12 to hunt game in the surrounding forests. The back-story we are given for Katniss explains her family circumstances. Three flash back memory sequences appear at different points in the film that offer us important insights into her circumstances.

1:25:21 – 1:26:25, Katniss has been stung by venomous wasps and is hallucinating, we see a group of miners in a lift, the door closes and seconds later the doors explode. The explosion then rips through Katniss's home which shatters to fragments and then reassembles its self. We see a photograph of the some of the miners who were in the lift and then Katniss silently mouthing at her mother to snap out of it, Katniss is as she is now but we see a much younger girl through refracted glass. Katniss voice comes into focus imploring her mother to snap out of it.

We realise that this was Katniss's father being killed in a mining disaster and that her mother who has not recovered from this personal tragedy, was completely incapacitated by the loss of her husband and still struggles to meet the physical needs of her two daughters.

Two other memory flashbacks) feature the same encounter with Peeta prior to The Hunger Games (38.28-38.48): Katniss's is sitting in the pouring rain propped against a tree too tired and weak to carry on. Peeta appears on the porch of the bakery with a basket of stale loaves. His mother, presumably for spoiling the bread, chastises him. He tosses the loaves of bread into a pigpen. He catches sight of Katniss and tosses the final loaf into the giant puddle that is the main street for her to scavenge.

This scene from their shared past, which plays through both Peeta and Katniss minds, is not discussed until Peeta is gravely ill. Katniss says "you fed me once" and he immediately knows what she means and replies that he is sorry that he tossed the bread into the street. "I should have gone to you!"

he says. She is acknowledging that she owes him a debt but he asserts that this does not mean that she owes him her life.

In District 12 the community struggles to survive with limited resources, there is little support for Katniss's mother following the death of her husband. Ideally, the state would have the resources to support lone parents and thus reducing the need for young carers such as Katniss. In an ideal world Katniss would be encouraged and helped to maintain her studies potentially providing opportunities to achieve key qualifications and engage productively in society. Within the film, Panem first leaves Katniss to fend for herself and her family, then takes her away, leaving her sister and mother at even more risk. This is clearly a fictional caricature and the injustice of this situation is tangible. Sadly, many children around the world in positions of care receive no support. While in many countries the state may not have the resources to support every family in crisis, the CRC acknowledges that they should be striving to do this. Panem's policy seems to be deliberate in terms of not providing adequate food to the districts, contemporary states do not deliberately deny children resources, but sadly many nations do not have the resources to meet articles 6, 19, 26 and 27 effectively. In the real world, many nations are also reluctant to intervene in family matters to ensure good quality health care and food. The Chinese government for example which has demonstrated considerable power over the family through its one child policy is only just beginning to consider whether it has not just the resources but also the social will to intervene in family based abuse. The idea that children are not the property of parents (or the State) and have their own rights is a relatively recent concept. As citizens, we can support initiatives to hold governments to account on developing and addressing these issues. We can actively follow and support campaigns. We can inform ourselves about important issues and voice objections to our political representatives. We can protest our disagreement as policy changes are introduced.

**Protection from violence: children and combat**



Scene 13 (1.04.16- 1.07.45 )The final countdown to the games

The 24 participants are on circular plinths arranged in a wide arc around the cornucopia of weapons and survival packs. Haymitch has warned them not to enter the circle, so when the countdown ends Peeta runs away to hide. Katniss waits to see what she can grab, the taller, fitter, stronger combat trained tributes from the military districts quickly set to work with the first weapons that come to hand reducing the competitors by half, there is no hesitation or mercy as they cut down the younger weaker tributes. Katniss grabs a survival backpack but she is pushed to the ground. She is about to be struck with an axe when a knife instantly fells her assailant from behind. Nevertheless, this is not the help of an ally. A second knife thrown straight at Katniss is stopped only by the pack that she holds up as shield. She runs and does not stop running except for a collision with a girl similar to herself they pause for a moment and then run on. In the last moments of the scene, the camera shows us, one by one, the lifeless faces of the child corpses strewn over the field.

This shocking scene, where the faster, stronger, more aggressively trained volunteer tributes from district 1 and 2 kill as many of the weaker participants as they can in the first few minutes. The injustice of the state's neglect of Katniss followed by the removal of her liberty by the Capitol are magnified these few moments of screen time, offering a further insight into this state's callous disregard for human rights and how power can be gained and maintained.

We have become used to the deaths of children being reported as shocking incidents in high profile child abuse cases such as Maria Colwell and Victoria Climbié (Collins and Foley, 2008). The murders of innocent children provoke public outcries that can change state institutions. In the summer of 2015, the image of a young dead child washed up on a Mediterranean beach featured in the

newspaper and TV headlines around the world (Guardian 2015). This image created a shock wave that (at least temporarily) shifted European perceptions of the Syrian refugee crisis in a way that weeks of earlier reporting had not. The instinct to nurture, care and protect children is ingrained in our epigenetic nature. There are social rules or taboos against displaying the body of a child. There is an instinctive physical revulsion to certain acts, eating excrement, eating human flesh and incest (Goleman 1996). The word epigenetic implies that there is an inherited genetic response as well as a conditioned response to some events. While killing another person is a taboo, there are some circumstances where soldiers, executioners, people defending themselves are permitted to kill others, this is not taken lightly and is increasingly recognised as potentially linked to future psychological trauma. Killing a child is not permitted in any circumstance. Society is repulsed and outraged by crimes against children. What is shocking about The Hunger Games is that the government and society make children kill other children. Panem has done this for 74 years. Watching the broadcasts is compulsory; this is accepted as entertainment but it is also a visual and explicit demonstration of ultimate power. The climax of the film, it might be argued, is not end of The Hunger Games but the death of the youngest competitor, Rue, who has become Katniss' ally in the games,.

1:34:40- 1.40.16 Rue has not arrived at an agreed rendezvous and Katniss eventually finds her caught under a net. She cuts Rue free but one of the boys has been lying in wait with a spear, he steps out and launches a spear at Katniss. She steps aside and looses an arrow that kills the boy instantly. When she turns, the weapon is sticking out of a shocked Rue who stands for a moment before collapsing. Katniss kneels behind Rue and cradles her on her lap. She reassures her, Rue is scared but calm. Katniss sings a lullaby and we see the trees and sky fading to white. Katniss is distraught but harvests white flowers from a meadow to lay around Rue's body. This extenuates Rue's childhood innocence and the injustice of her death. As Katniss steps away, she senses where the camera is she looks up kisses three fingers in salute. Back in Rue's home district, the crowd is seen standing and watching the giant screens in rows surround by Stormtroopers. The crowd echo Katniss's salute then turn on the guards, the watchtowers and the food destined for the capital. It is not long before the reinforcement troops and water cannon arrive to quash the riot.

Emotion is a powerful thing and as practitioners, we need to understand and recognise the power of these emotional cognitive forces at work. To accuse someone of violence against a child is a serious and emotionally charged thing. People can be reluctant to take such a step particularly if they are not sure of their accusation. Regular child protection training, building professional confidence in logging and reporting possible indicators of abuse is vitally important. Equally, understanding that communities can be carried away by outrage and being ready to manage situations and establish facts fully and professionally with colleagues and families is important. At an individual level, managing personal emotional responses in supporting children and working with families where incidents of abuse have occurred or are occurring are also important. One does not want to convey horror and revulsion to a

survivor of abuse. One may equally be required to work with a perpetrator. Part of the practice leadership role is ensuring that staff have undertaken appropriate training opportunities so that they have had an opportunity to reflect on issues of abuse and think through how they will respond to them before they arise so that staff are more likely to present a considered and controlled response rather than an openly emotional one. Children who are survivors of trauma may need those supporting them to continue to respond in measured, non-judgmental and supportive ways for many years after periods of trauma have ceased as they work through the mental health implications of events (McMahon 2009).

It is our emotional responses to shocking events, such as those portrayed in the film, and our outrage at the way children are treated that underpins the political will to develop a set of additional human rights specific to children. Children's rights can also be justified rationally as an essential precursor to ensuring the next generation grow-up as healthy well-adjusted adults able and willing to contribute to society (Ensalaco and Make, 2005).

Article 38 states that Nations agree that children below the age of 16 should not be recruited into the armed forces and that child below the age of 18 should not be involved in combat. The children in The Hunger Games are effectively placed in a combat zone and unfortunately, this is as uncommon in the real world as we would like (Gsekey and Ensalco, 2005, Save the Children 2010).

Children are targeted for recruitment because they are cheap, easier to control and manipulate, and because they look to adults to protect them. Usually unpaid, they are used to do tasks adults do not want to do and may also be coerced into carrying out grotesque acts of violence.

(Save the Children 2009 p1)

The acceptance and enthusiasm of some of the children to participate in The Hunger Games is sadly not unbelievable. Examples of young people being drawn to participate in the conflict in Syria and the Middle East have featured in a number of prominent news stories in 2015. Children arouse less

suspicion; they can therefore be exploited for purposes such as spying, acting as couriers or carrying out acts of sabotage (Save the Children 2009 p1). Their involvement in terrorist incidents made this all too visible in 2015. From suicide bombings in Nigeria in January, to a series of knife attacks in Israel, including on the day that I wrote this draft, two Palestinian boys aged 12 and 13 alleged to have stabbed and wounded an Israeli security guard in East Jerusalem (BBC, 2015).

Fortunately, there are few states accused of violating this article, it is more often non-government forces who exploit children in this way. Globally, 250,000 children were estimated to be associated with armed forces and groups (Save the Children, 2010). "The majority of these children are aged between 14 and 18 years, but some are recruited and used from as young as seven (Save the Children 2009:1)". However, it is interesting to note that one of the reasons cited for US reluctance to ratify the CRC was that it might compromise defence policy in having young men ready to engage in battle as soon as they are 18, a concern also expressed by the British army (Gsekey and Ensalco, 2005). There is growing public pressure following the deaths of 18 year olds in Afghanistan and Iraq to delay the age of entry into front line conflict. It should also be remembered that in the D-day landings, Allied states deliberately deployed troops new to combat because they would continue to advance when experienced soldiers would not. Citizens need to encourage states to prosecute war crimes against children and to care for those scarred by conflict.

Article 38 states that children who have been neglected or abused in combat should receive special help to restore them.

Children recruited into armed groups are killed, maimed, abused and exploited in the most appalling ways. They may be forced to observe or take part in atrocities, including against their own families and communities, and may be profoundly disturbed by what they have

experienced. In some conflicts, particularly in West Africa, children have been drugged by their commanders before action. (Save the Children 2010 p2)

Children who have been recruited to armed groups have no access to formal education, making it hard for them to find work after the war has ended. Families and communities can view former child soldiers with fear and distrust because of atrocities. I have tried to illustrate in this part of the chapter that some of the issues raised by The Hunger Games are based in contemporary issues that highlight the value of Children's Rights; the concluding section of the chapter asks how individuals should engage with the state in respect of promoting these rights.

### **The individual and the state**

The first of the four Hunger Games films establishes the underlying message of the series, that the architecture of the state, not just the Capitol, but any state, is a potentially dangerous thing. Katniss is not seeking to be involved in politics; she is not campaigning for democracy. She becomes a symbol of rebellion, not by choice but by chance. She would like to be free from state interference; she wants to be free to hunt with her bow in the forests. The final section of this chapter argues that the absence of the state interference is not necessarily a good thing. One of the roles of the state, endorsed by the CRC, should be to safeguard children's rights and this requires services fit for this purpose. Citizens have a responsibility to hold states to account through political engagement. For citizens to disengage from politics is to invite danger.

The Hunger Games reflects aspects of new liberal or 'neoliberal' ideology. As Sue Aitken's chapter of this book explains, liberalism is a political philosophy dating back to the eighteenth century. Liberalism asserts and delineates the rights of the individual; it also defines the responsibility of the state to safeguard those rights and their responsibilities to the state. Neoliberalism calls for individuals

to be free from state interference to run their own lives at home and in their businesses (Cohen, Kennedy and Perrier 2013). Exley and Ball (2014) identify neoliberalism as a project to undermine the social welfare reforms to health, social care and education of the post-war era in order to allow private business and industry more scope to flourish

Jones (2014) traced the evolution of a *new liberal* ideology to Hayek and Friedman, who shortly after the end of second world war were writing against the prevailing international consensus of international cooperation to impose strong state controls over businesses and individuals to deliver a fairer more caring world. Through the 1950's, 60's and 70's these values drew strength from the cold war stand-off that existed between communist and capitalist ideologies because the USA and Western Europe were seen to prosper as they allowed private enterprise increasing freedom to generate growth and profits, while the communist stagnated economically and then collapse politically in the late 80's and 90's (Cohen, Kennedy, and Perrier (2013). The neoliberal free market ideology came to forefront in the 1980's with the election of Ronald Reagan as president of the United States and Margaret Thatcher as the Prime Minister of Britain (Jones, 2014). In the 1990's the worth of this ideology was apparently affirmed as communist governments began to crumble and to embrace more liberal models of trade, politics and individual freedoms. Even political parties that had championed the welfare state such as the Labour Party in Britain, formed governments (1997 to 2010) that followed neoliberal policies. Thus the logic of the neoliberal ideology is a part of the 'Western' political consensus asserting that there should be less state control, less taxation and business should be allowed to offer services in a market with minimal state control. This is the focal point of the debate about how nations can manage their social welfare debts. Since 2010, Western governments continued to liberalise trade and banking; to promote individuals' freedoms to choose services and to reduce tax burdens while at the same time seeking to reduce government spending on health, education and social care. 2016 witnessed a rise in increasingly nationalistic and protectionist voices in Europe and the USA challenging the neoliberal

internationalist consensus. Britain voting to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump reflect a popular view that neoliberal freedoms may be best defended by strong nation states unfettered by international regulations, bureaucracy, and migration.

In a contemporary context would Katniss, like many from the coal mining communities of Virginia have voted for Donald Trump in the Presidential Election of 2016? The Hunger Games promotes the idea that centralised state governance is a bad thing and that taxes paid to the capital are to the benefit of the do-gooder liberal elite is at the expense of those who do real work. This is very close to President Trump's election campaign and inauguration speech (20.1,2017).

For too long, a small group in our nation's Capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished – but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered – but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country.

Thus while Katniss might decide not vote for any presidential candidate, she has perhaps fuelled the political sentiment harnessed by the Trump and Brexit campaigns.

## **Conclusion**

Many governments in the first 15 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have sought to allow business markets to manage themselves, to allow money to circulate freely with few, if any, state imposed restrictions. Similarly, they have encouraged individuals and families to make their own decisions about health welfare and care; to pay for their own services rather than rely on state managed provision. This is also conducive to large businesses who would like to make money not just from dealing in foods, consumer goods, travel and entertainments but increasingly from running health, care, education and policing services. In our contemporary world reducing state “interference” is intended to translate into



taxation reductions that benefit all. The reality is that they often benefit the better off most and the poor least (Jones 2015, Savage 2015).

The concern is that policies purporting to offer greater choice may leave many children more vulnerable. If the state's primary role is to enforce the law when things have gone wrong, then protecting children from harm becomes a community and family role. We should be worried that children may be left at risk because communities are nervous to intervene without the authority, training or resources of the state. We should be concerned that parents are punished and children suffer when things go wrong instead of offering support before a crisis point is reached.

It is important to operate within the resource limits available, however, I have tried to argue that there is a need for a strong caring state that is both able and willing to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children and respect both the UNHCR and the CRC. Fortunately, Panem is a fictitious state, while I share Katniss's sense of injustice at her State, I do not share her isolationist libertarian perspective that the state should simply be a "night-watchman" (Nozick, 1974 27) responsible for policing law and order. In our world, it is important for citizens to work at interpreting the media messages they receive. They need to be active and participatory; monitoring, lobbying and voting for politicians who will work to create or maintain states that care, respect and provide for the planet's, human's and children's rights.

### **Questions for reflection**

Rights are sometimes said to be absolute, that they belong to everyone as part of a moral higher law: to what extent do you think this is true?

Do you think that poorer people have fewer rights than wealthier people and how do Neoliberal policies support and challenge equality with regard to rich and poor?

Who should safeguard the rights of children and at what point should they intervene?

Could education help to reduce poverty by addressing cultural capital more directly?

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