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THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON DYSTOPIAN HEROINES' CHOICES: A VINDICATION OF THEIR RIGHT TO DECIDE

LA INFLUENCIA DE LA CULTURA SOBRE LAS DECISIONES DE LAS HEROÍNAS DISTÓPICAS: DEFENSA DE SU DERECHO A DECIDIR

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Resumen: La popularidad de la ficción distópica juvenil, y en particular de las trilogías *Los Juegos del Hambre* y *Divergente*, ha ocasionado un intenso debate sobre la idoneidad de las protagonistas como modelos a seguir para la nueva generación y que considera tanto sus acciones como la crítica o aceptación por parte de las heroínas de las expectativas heteronormativas y patriarcales. Mi teoría es que se ha ignorado un factor clave: los valores culturales. Este estudio ofrece un análisis de las sociedades descritas en las novelas utilizando dos dimensiones culturales de Hofstede, feminidad/masculinidad y colectivismo/individualismo. Los resultados se debaten teniendo en cuenta el mito del viaje de la heroína de Murdock para explorar la influencia de la cultura sobre las decisiones de las heroínas.

Palabras clave: Juvenil. Distopía. Ficción. Género. Cultura. Hofstede. Murdock. Heroína.

Abstract: The popularity of young adult dystopian fiction, and particularly of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies, has also brought a heated debate over the protagonists' suitability as role models for the new generation, arguing over their actions and criticism or compliance with heteronormative and patriarchal expectations. I argue that a key factor has been completely ignored by previous research: cultural values. In this study, I provide an analysis of the societies described in the novels using Hofstede's dimensions of femininity/masculinity and collectivism/individualism in order to shed some light on this matter. The results are discussed in light of Murdock's journey of the heroine to explore how culture can shape heroines' decisions and their suitability.

Key-words: Young adult. YA. Dystopia. Fiction. Gender. Culture. Hofstede. Murdock. Heroine.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of decades, young adult fiction has obtained overwhelming popularity, engaging young readers through magic, vampires or heroines with a bow and arrows against the system. Targeting middle and late adolescents, the new wave of dystopian/science fiction reached unprecedented success with the publication of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins (2008, 2009, 2010). The trilogy's success and its film adaptations then paved the way for other works of the genre such as the *Divergent* novels, which were also notably well received.

Young adult dystopian fiction can be considered a global phenomenon whose popularity has been partly attributed to the mixture of romance and fantasy with a political undercurrent that allows adolescents and adults to enjoy the stories while identifying darker versions of some of the features of our systems and societies. Given the important influence that these novels may have on young readers, the popularity of this subgenre has fostered scholarly research on its themes and educational possibilities. One of the most interesting and contested issues is gender and feminism.

In this regard, some novels have been criticised for failing to provide a non-traditional heroine and, in particular, for the seemingly conservative endings. This study aims at offering a culture-based approach to these critiques, arguing that the protagonists are able to reach self-actualization and that their decisions are influenced by their feminine and collectivist cultures. To do so, I employ two theories: Hofstede's (2011) dimensions of culture and Murdock's theory of the journey of the heroine. Hofstede's theory offers a classification of societies depending on their cultural dimensions¹. I analyse the influence of two dimensions —femininity and collectivism— on heroines' decisions. Murdock's theory of the journey of the heroine to self-actualization offers an alternative route to the traditional journey of the hero (Campbell, 1949) taking into account women's interests rather than the masculine predetermined path to success. This theory is used to assess the protagonists' satisfaction with their choices and, thus, whether the ending is congruent with the narrative. To do so, I focus on two trilogies, which are allegedly the most popular of this wave: *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*.

The remaining of the article is structured as follows. First, the theoretical context offers a review of the literature on the different opinions on these novels'

¹ The six dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, femininity versus masculinity, long-term orientation versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint.

endings as well as on their protagonists' adherence to or challenge of traditional gender roles and nineteenth-century utopian endings. This section also includes an explanation of the methodology. Second, the results show the analysis of the societies of the novels from a cultural perspective. Third, the discussion applies the cultural insights provided by the analysis to the metaphorical journey of the heroines based on Murdock's (1990) theory. Finally, the implications and future research opportunities are discussed in the conclusions section.

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

One of the main topics of research on YA dystopian fiction is education. Over the last decade, scholars have stressed the suitability using dystopian fiction in the classroom to foster students' engagement with the texts and with the social issues narrated. In particular, Marshall (2014) suggests that YA dystopian texts can be used in class to foster English and Arts students' critical and analytical literacy skills. Simmons (2014) applied *The Hunger Games* to the classroom by encouraging students to make connections between the violence of the novels and the reality of their society and to actively participate in actions that could minimise that violence. Interestingly, Piotrowski and Rybakova (2015) include *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies among their choice of text to help students develop a healthy concept of gender by analysing these texts through the lens of feminism.

The popularity of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies among adolescents implies that they can influence their perception of gender roles and stereotypes. These stereotypes and perpetuation of gender roles have been recurrent in utopias of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this vein, Kolmerten (1994) deals with the ideas of work, motherhood and cultural values that oppressed women's agency. The author reviews some utopias written by women at that time and points out to work as a means to contribute to the community and to obtain a significant position in that society while enhancing women's self-esteem (Kolmerten, 1994: 115). According to Kolmerten, many of the women who wrote these feminist visions of a better future used the conventions of the romantic novel, which posed a problem when attempting to finish the novel while conserving the criticism of male privileges. Intelligent and strong female characters would typically sacrifice themselves and die for the greater good, or inexplicably accept marriage after having rejected it. These women would abandon their socially relevant positions in favour of marriage and motherhood. In this vein, the writers who deci-

ded to follow those conventions regardless of the tone of the novel used either marriage or death for the protagonist's ending. Thus, in novels like *San Salvador* (Tincker, 1892) or *A Woman for Mayor* (1909), the strong protagonists either die, as in the former, or accept submission and marriage as their happy ending as in the latter. A century later, the new dystopian fiction for YA with female protagonists may be facing the same problem, which I address in this article.

The protagonist of *The Hunger Games* is Katniss, a sixteen-year-old girl who volunteers as a tribute to save her sister from participating in the annual games organised by the authoritarian regime of Panem, whereby 24 children fight to death until only one is left. The district of the winner receives extra food parcels from the government. Together with the fight for her survival and her eventual role as leader of a rebellion against the system, Katniss has to deal with two suitors, her life-long friend and hunting partner, Gale, and Peeta, the other tribute from her district, who confesses having been in love with her since early childhood. The ending of the last novel surprised many readers who thought she would choose Gale given that he has a personality resembling Katniss'. Instead, she decides to share her life with Peeta and to give up any responsibilities in the new regime.

Much research has examined and interpreted her behaviour as challenging traditional gender roles, while other studies criticise the fact that social criticism fails to cover romance. Probably one of the most insightful works on gender and YA dystopian fiction is *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* (Basu, Broad & Hinz, 2013), which explores topics of this subgenre. In one of these essays, Broad (2013) argues that Katniss' role as a strong and able heroine is undermined by the reinforcement of heteronormativity. In Broad's opinion, Collins' novel is basically a love story and, by choosing Peeta instead of Gale, Katniss is assuming the story built by the Capitol. Not only that, but the author considers that Katniss' heroic stance is "highly limited and determined by their romance and by her idealised visions of family life" (Broad, 2013: 122). Broad concludes by stating that

One important way for YA dystopias to imagine social transformation that does more than reinsert female characters into conservative gender roles is therefore perhaps to start by complicating, subverting, or even downright rejecting the conventions of the romance plot that place women in such positions (Broad, 2013: 127).

Another comprehensive account of YA dystopian fiction is the essay collection *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (Day, Green-Barteet &

Montz, 2014). This collection of essays deals with *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* among other novels and examines topics such as agency, sexual awakening and female friendship. Here, Broad's representation of Katniss as a passive agent is challenged by Fritz (2014), who argues that:

Katniss's action [killing President Coin] is all the more significant because of Coin's exploitation of her as the Mockingjay whose influence helped Coin with the rebellion; by removing Coin from power (albeit in a violent way), Katniss demonstrates that she is capable of thinking and acting as an independent political entity (Fritz, 2014: 24).

Despite praise for Katniss as a new kind of heroine, and a positive role model for girls, plenty of studies depict Katniss as a figure that reinforces traditional gender roles or as the 'angel in the house' (Linstrom, 2015: 1); other scholars take the middle way and consider that Katniss embodies both typically masculine and feminine characteristics (Lem & Hassel, 2012: 118).

Pulliam (2014: 177) discusses the political influence on her behaviour as conforming to stereotypically feminine role of submission. According to the author, in YA fiction the character's culture plays a key role in defining that character's identity and his or her place in terms of access to power. Pulliam explores how the coaching of the tributes, including Katniss, is a mechanism of the Capitol to adapt their physical appearance and behaviour to the cultural standards of that society. Thus, the author hints at the influence of cultures, although without delving further into it.

Amongst the few who defend Katniss' choice of a partner, Myers (2012: 143) considers it to be logical and rational for a Stoic. The author states that Katniss chooses Peeta because "the alternative, choosing Gale, would mean a betrayal of one of her highest values: the preservation of innocent life". To Katniss, preserving innocent life is morally right; therefore, being with somebody (Gale) who did not respect this value would be a betrayal of her identity. Myers makes another interesting point. She argues that Katniss partially behaves like a Stoic, which, as per Marcus Aurelius, implies advocating "moderation, nonattachement and affirmation of the relationships that bind us to our fellow human beings and other living creatures" (Myers, 2012: 140). These qualities are reminiscent of the culture of District 12 as represented by Katniss and Peeta, and are drastically opposite to the values of the Capitol, based on greed, competition, overindulgence, etc. Therefore, this idea would suggest the influence of culture on the characters' set of values, which, in turn, defines their decisions and actions.

The protagonist of the *Divergent* trilogy is Tris, another sixteen-year-old girl who lives in an apparently utopian system based on the classification of people into factions depending on their choice and system of values. Tris' family is Abnegation, a faction oriented towards other people's needs and selflessness. She discovers that she has aptitudes for more than one faction: She is divergent. The divergent are persecuted, but they are also immune to manipulation and control through inoculations. During her training as a Dauntless initiate, Tris develops a romantic relationship with her trainer, Four. In the end, in order to save every citizen in Chicago, Tris stops the spreading of the memory-erasing serum, losing her life in the process. Although she has the ability to withstand most serums, it is decided that her brother, a non-divergent, should take the risk. Knowing that it would certainly be a death sentence for him, and that she had a small probability of surviving, Tris disregards her boyfriend's opinion and feelings and decides to sacrifice herself, emulating her parents' selfless deaths and honouring the values of her faction of origin, Abnegation.

Research on Tris' behaviour, though less extensive, includes criticism of her sacrifice. Jarvis (2015: 134) compares her to Bella, from *Twilight*, and to other female heroines and considers that these characters are masochist models for readers, rather than empowering figures. Similarly, following Kolmerten's argument that female protagonists who do not fit in the society by following the rules of what it means to be a woman are bound to die, Tris would meet this convention by providing protection through sacrifice. Since she did not follow the rules nor did she obey male characters' suggestions to yield her power to other agents, she needs to be erased from society to prevent alterations in the order of things.

The contradictions of some feminist critics are significant when addressing the issue of the empowerment of the female protagonist. One could argue that an action and its opposite are criticised for not being feminist enough, which leaves writers, as well as the female protagonists, at an impasse. This problem may arise from the fact that women and girls are reinventing themselves and the fiction that represents them in order to design a framework that encompasses their ideas (Day et al., 2014: 3). Particularly questionable is self-sacrifice, as this action is perceived differently depending on the gender of the protagonists.

Young adult and children literature usually presents a hero who fights evil forces. In fact, some well-known novels for children and adolescents present protagonists who put their lives in danger in order to save the world. In some cases, they give their life for the cause. In C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles* (1950-1956), Aslan teaches the young protagonists the value of self-sacrifice by offering his life for

the children's, echoing Jesus Christ's sacrifice. In *The Messenger*, the third novel of *The Giver Quartet* by Lois Lowry (1993), which is part of the utopian tradition, Matty sacrifices himself to heal the forest, thus saving his friends. More recently, in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the protagonist has to die — although temporarily — in order to kill Lord Voldemort. If we change the genre to superheroes, the greatest blockbuster in history of superhero films, *Avengers: Endgame*, ends with the tragic self-sacrifice of a lead character. In these cases, the protagonist of the sacrifice was a male character. These deaths have been regarded as heroic, and yet, research has criticised severely the sacrifices of the female protagonists of the novels analysed in this study.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' defiance of the Capitol by almost committing suicide or participating in actions that put her life in danger in order to save others has been categorised as a representation of heteronormativity (Fritz, 2014: 27), thus undervaluing the “honour” that is granted to male protagonists in the mentioned stories. On the other hand, Tris' ultimate sacrifice in order to save the city from having their memories erased has been considered representative of a martyr. This term is used to designate characters that reproduce the pattern of behaviour that female fictional characters are expected to follow in order to be “good” women (Jarvis, 2015: 141). While in my experience these ideas and the frustration with the endings for such potentially important female figures in their respective societies are reasonable, I argue that this criticism is not considering an important part of the information provided by the novels: the cultures represented in the dystopian societies.

3. ANALYSIS

Two important factors should be considered. On the one hand, both characters set out on a journey, from one culture, to another. Regarding Katniss, she forcefully moves from District 12 to the Capitol, where the Games take place. As to Tris, she willingly transfers from her faction of origin, the Abnegation, to the new faction, the Dauntless. On the other hand, while Katniss carries her culture with herself, opposing the Capitol's culture, Tris initially attempts to assimilate the new culture, only to try to go back to her roots in a process of self-learning. At this point, it is time to examine the differences between the cultures of departure and arrival. I will focus exclusively on two of Hofstede's 6 dimensions of culture: Feminine versus Masculine and Collectivist versus Individualist.

It is noteworthy to mention that these two dimensions are highly connected. For instance, Triandis et al. (1986: 258) define individualism as determined by four concepts: self-reliance, competition, emotional distance from members of one's own group such as family, and hedonism. Competition is intrinsic to masculinity as per Hofstede's classification, which would oppose cooperation, a feminine trait. Feminine cultures involve those where men and women should be modest and caring, as opposed to assertive and ambitious, which defines masculine cultures. Family takes priority over work and the opposite is true for masculine ones. Finally, people from feminine cultures feel sympathy for the weak, while the strong are admired in masculine societies. On the other hand, collectivists prioritise the collective to the individual; individualistic societies prioritise privacy and professional life instead of belonging, for instance.

In the following paragraphs I will analyse the four cultures described in the two trilogies of the corpus. For *The Hunger Games* trilogy I will analyse The Capitol and District 12. I will not analyse District 13's society given that not enough information is provided, and the character is too affected by her trauma to give a reasonably objective description of this society. For the *Divergent* trilogy I will analyse the culture of Abnegation and that of Dauntless. To do so, I employ the characteristics defined by Hofstede (2011) in order to identify the end of the dimensional scope that characterises a culture. The next sections present the feminine (masculine) or collectivist (individualist) traits of each culture, with a brief justification.

Regarding individualism versus collectivism, the results are mixed for District 12. District 12 has developed some typically individualistic attitudes. People tend to look after themselves or their immediate family members but not after the rest of the citizens or strangers. When Katniss was on the verge of starvation, she could not find help from anybody. However, it is important to consider the role of the system in preventing that help. As everybody is living hand to mouth, it is not surprising that people are not keen on running the risk of offering others what they can barely provide for themselves. Furthermore, as survival rates in District 12 are so low, the lack/absence of extended families is understandable. Despite this, the trilogy shows the reader that Katniss' mother helped those who were injured or physically punished by the peacekeepers, which suggests that there are perhaps more examples that are not described. Thus, this characteristic is ambiguous. Furthermore, privacy is stressed over belonging to a group. There are no clear collectives within the district aside from geographical ones (e.g., the Seam, downtown), but these are not collectives of affiliation for the citizens. People are not willing to be part of one or another group.

Nevertheless, individuals are classified as in or out of these geographical groups. Katniss identifies Gale as a fellow Seam inhabitant and Peeta as a privileged downtowner. All inhabitants receive an education regardless of their status within the district. Said education focuses on learning how to do rather than on how to learn. Acquiring philosophical knowledge is irrelevant for the life in District 12 and dangerous to the survival of the system. Rather, district citizens need to acquire skills that allow them to survive. In this fight for survival, relationships are more important than the task at hand. Although performance is necessary in order to survive, often, as in the case of Katniss, the reason behind their actions is the need to preserve their relationships or those people's wellbeing. This is also reflected in failure, as the transgression of social norms and expectations leads to shame. For Katniss, not being able to provide food for her family, and having to kill a fellow district member in the games would be shameful situations. She is concerned about others' perception of herself. If it were necessary to classify the society in one of the two categories, collectivism would suit it better. In my view, the strict control and constant threat of the authorities hinder any bonding among citizens.

In contrast with the complexity of the culture of District 12, the Capitol is a clearly individualistic society that shares the individualistic characteristics in District 12 and others: People are classified as individuals and they are valued based on their personal achievements and public personae. Thus, the task is more important than the relationship: everyone is expected to play their role in the system. Only those mistreated by the government accept helping the rebels, as in the case of Tigris, a rebel helper that we meet in *Mockingjay*.

On femininity versus masculinity, District 12 could be considered a highly feminine society. There are minimum emotional and social differences between men and women. In fact, Katniss and Peeta show some gender reversal: Katniss portrays a stereotypically male role (family provider, hunter, romantically detached), whereas Peeta represents a stereotypically female role (into arts, caring, romantically involved, peaceful). In this vein, both men and women are modest and caring: the characters are highly protective of their close ones and rarely brag about their skills. Although Katniss is proud of her hunting skills, she goes out of her way to praise Peeta's qualities and underscores her own. Because of the protective instinct, there is a balance between work and family. Although the extreme poverty suffered by the citizens of the Seam led some of them to work long hours in the mines, the characters in the trilogy tend to reserve some time for family. In *Catching Fire*, we learn that Gale has a day off that he reserves to spend with Kat-

niss. Again, the long shifts are enforced by the Capitol, it is not part of the district's culture. Furthermore, people have sympathy for the weak: after winning the games, Katniss donates as much as she can to those who need it most in her district. Regarding women's role and power, mothers decide the number of children: Katniss indicates how one of the few freedoms in District 12 is the possibility to marry whoever you want or not marry at all, which indicates that there is low or no pressure on women, thus granting them more agency over their bodies. Finally, there are no moralistic attitudes toward sex. The fact that Katniss appears prude to Capitol citizens is the only reference made to sex, but neither she, nor anybody from the district considers sex a taboo.

Conversely, the Capitol follows a seemingly masculine model. Although differences between sexes are minimised, the stereotypes are evident in that some tributes are coached to perform as delicate and sweet girls, but all girls are expected to follow the beauty procedures that are also prevalent in our society: the removal of body hair except for eyebrows, hair and eyelashes. Therefore, in comparison with District 12, the Capitol is more masculine and has more marked gender role differences. Both men and women are expected to be ambitious. Competition is omnipresent in the system, not only in the type of punishment for the districts (games) but also in the professional life of capitol citizens. Designers are typically assigned a poor district and use it as a stepladder to obtain a higher status, which is Katniss' original thought about Cinna. Following that line, strength is admired. Strong tributes become part of the career pack almost immediately and receive a positive mark before the games. In addition, when Katniss decides that she wants "weak" tributes as her allies her decision is not understood by Haymich and the others. Strength is valued over good judgement, loyalty or skills, which are more useful in indirect approaches as opposed to direct fight. Finally, as far as the readers know, there are no female politicians in the close circle of the president, which indicates that women have less access to power.

In *Divergent* both factions analysed, Abnegation and Dauntless, are characterised by collectivism. Dauntless and Abnegation stress the collective over the individual, thus prioritising the "we" consciousness. It is also evident that belonging is more important than the members' right of privacy. In the case of Dauntless, all initiates, girls and boys, share a dorm room. In the case of the Abnegation, expressing one's desire for privacy would be perceived as selfish. In this line, others are classified as belonging to a group or being excluded from it. Labels are common to describe other factions, particularly Abnegation members, who are called "Stiffs." Furthermore, the classification is reinforced by stressing the importance of detach-

ment from the previous faction, thus establishing a discourse of “us” and “them.” This is true for all factions. Partly because of the strength of the identification with the collective, transgression of norms leads to shame feelings. As the individual represents the group, behaviour that contradicts the factions’ standards is a source of shame for the group. For example, we see this when Tris is unable to behave like the children raised in Abnegation and when she does not feel brave enough and is criticised by Cara for her attitude as a Dauntless. Finally, the goal of education is practical: initiates learn how to behave like a faction member and acquire the necessary skills to do so. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while Abnegation shows a horizontal collectivism, the Dauntless model resembles vertical collectivism, whereby others are less important than the organization. Thus, individualism within the group ensues.

The femininity versus masculinity dimension marks an important distinction between Abnegation and Dauntless. Five feminine traits define Abnegation as a feminine culture. Social and emotional differences between men and women are not significant. Both of Tris’ parents work, although the father has a government position and the mother works in charity, which is a typically feminine role. Moreover, women and men should show modesty and caring attitudes in this faction. Modesty is the main value in Abnegation; citizens are completely other-oriented and attracting attention towards oneself is reason enough to be scolded as is, for example, using a mirror. Because it is very important to care for others, there is a balance between family life and professional life. The fact that members are able to pick their children from school and the time shared at home indicates that work is not the most important aspect of the Abnegation lifestyle. In the same vein, people are sympathetic towards the weak: The Abnegation implemented charity programs to help the factionless while some of the members help by distributing food and clothes. Furthermore, there is religion in Abnegation, but it focuses on other people. Although as mentioned in the novels, not all families are religious, Tris’ father prays to give thanks for friends. The only masculine trait is that faction members show moralistic attitudes about sex. For example, Tris is taught that interpersonal physical contact is very powerful and holding hands implies high intimacy, which leads her to avoiding it.

By contrast, Dauntless is defined as masculine as per three traits. Dauntless faction members must be assertive and ambitious. The ambition affects the relationship between the members as we see in the case of Tris and her best friend, who fight over taking credit for an achievement. Thus, it also derives that work is more important than family. In fact, family is secondary, the main organization or collec-

tive that members should identify with is the faction itself. This requirement defies the reality of human psychology, whereby people naturally integrate family as their most important collective. Finally, the strong are admired: Weakness and cowardice are cause enough to be expelled from the faction. Dauntless has only two characteristics of a feminine culture. In particular, sex is conceived as a natural thing and, as with the Abnegation, differences between genders are minimum: faction initiates fight one another indistinctively of their gender.

4. DISCUSSION: THE JOURNEY OF THE HEROINE

The Hunger Games and *Divergent* are good examples of character development as regards self-actualization. Murdock (1990) describes the heroine's journey as consisting of various stages according to which the woman detaches herself from the feminine to follow the masculine path of success only to later become aware of the emptiness it causes her, which leads her to the descent to the Goddess. This descent involves a recognition of the inner self, a discovery of the activities that make us feel fully satisfied. According to Murdock, this step follows the achievement of success defined in masculine terms and a decrease of the importance of esteem, that is, recognition by others. Furthermore, Murdock explains that being in a patriarchal society implies that the only model of success available is the masculine one. In this sense, she says:

women emulated the male heroic journey because there were no other images to emulate; a woman was either 'successful' in the male-oriented culture or dominated and dependent as a female. To change the economic, social, and political structures of society, we must now find new myths and heroines. This may be why so many women and men are looking to images of the Goddess and to ancient matristic cultures to understand modes of leadership that involve partnership rather than dominance and cooperation rather than greed (Murdock, 1990: 10).

What Murdock is expressing is a cultural inadequacy. In a feminine culture, there is higher equality among the sexes and the weak are protected. In a collectivist culture, collaboration and cooperation are the norm, while competition is not perceived as necessary. As per Murdock's ideas, collectivist cultures are more welcoming and suitable for women's fulfilment. However, it may be related at another level to the priorities that, according to Murdock, women have in comparison to men. In this regard, feminine cultures prioritise quality of life and personal and

professional life balance over professional success, while work takes the lead in masculine cultures' list of priorities. Therefore, a feminine and collectivist culture may be more suitable for the heroines in the corpus of novels to develop and find personal fulfilment.

In both novels, the protagonists undertake a physical intercultural journey that goes hand in hand with their psychological journey. In the case of *The Hunger Games*, Golban and Fidan (2018) analyse Katniss' case using Murdock's journey cycle. However, I believe that the approach is inaccurate and requires some revision and extension, given that they focus exclusively on the first novel. First of all, and on a general level, the authors use Murdock's model without any alterations, assuming that Katniss detaches herself from the feminine at the beginning of the journey. Specifically, the authors identify the separation from the feminine as her separation from her mother, who is typically the person with whom the heroine has the strongest relationship. Katniss does not willingly differentiate herself from her mother nor does she share any traits with her —physically nor psychologically— and definitely did not have the closest rapport with her. Instead, Katniss shared most of her time and personality traits with her father. Although she rejects her mother's vulnerability at the beginning, she does not reject all feminine traits as negative, nor does she approve only of masculine characters as judged by her admiration and adoration of her little sister, Prim, who has a caring nature and is stereotypically feminine. In fact, I argue that the opposite happens: Katniss has feminine values: she is connected to nature, she is a protector of her family and a mother figure for her sister, she feeds and takes care of them and they are her only task. Similarly, and as pointed out by Golban and Fidan (2018: 109), she "acts motherly when she sees Rue". However, unlike these authors, I argue that these qualities are not new to Katniss. She has the feminine traits of caring for the weak, which are those transmitted by the community where she lives and thus also shared by other members of the community, such as Peeta.

The fact that she associates the wilderness with avoiding the problems of society implies that she represents the bond between human beings and nature praised by the Romanticism in a world that pulls her into social constrictions, but also a connection with the feminine as described by Murdock. Katniss' attitude reflects the need to find the necessary agency in order to liberate herself from the Capitol's impositions and repression. Nature, as a space untouched by the human hand, becomes the perfect ground for her to develop. Furthermore, her detachment from greater issues such as the building of the new system, and her self-imposed isolation reinforce the idea of an independent character.

When she moves to the Capitol, she is faced with a masculine world, violence and extreme competition. Throughout her journey, she carries with her, and exposes, the feminine traits of compassion and collaboration as clearly demonstrated by her refusal to kill others —her strategy is to stay away from the battle— and her alliance with Rue. Again, Peeta also represents those cultural values in that he wishes he could avoid killing others because that is what the Capitol (opposed culture) wants. Golban and Fidan choose to focus only on the male characters surrounding Katniss during her journey as mentors and helpers, but fail to mention Rue, who has a decisive role in motivating her to win the games and is also representative of feminine cultural values, as she cures Katniss and collaborates with her instead of competing.

Regarding her self-actualization, her first stage, the process through which she becomes autonomous and excels in her job (householder), imbues in her the characteristics of the achiever that cannot say no. The masculine culture is imposed to the districts, with the impossibility of community collaboration, so she becomes the overachiever as a householder and accepts no criticism (e.g., she is deeply offended when she believes Peeta implied she needed people's help). Once the journey ends, with the fall of President Snow and President Coin, she refuses to be part of the new system, she refuses to continue achieving in favour of her well-being. Murdock explains in her book that women must learn to be autonomous and to “say no to superwoman standards [...] [in order to] acknowledge her human limitations” without it affecting her self-esteem (Murdock, 1990: 69).

The descent into the Goddess represents a moment of crisis for the heroine: she may get there after experiencing a loss, as in the case of Katniss. Given Golban and Fidan's exclusive focus on the first novel, they do not acknowledge the complete journey. In this case, after losing Prim and thus failing in her lifetime goal of protecting her sister, she retreats to her home —in the culturally feminine District 12— and close to nature. Unlike in the traditional view of the heroine's journey, Katniss did not replace feminine values with masculine ones during her quest and thus cannot be identified with the prototype. Nevertheless, the descent is based on a need to cure herself from the self-inflicted wounds and impositions of the superwoman, as explained before. Furthermore, her femininity is attacked by the masculine culture of the Capitol and District 13, which killed her sister. She is no longer the protector, no longer a motherly figure for Prim.

The descent and recovery start with the appearance of Buttercup, Prim's cat. The cat, Murdock explains, has been since time immemorial a representation of the feminine. In this regard, the return of the cat to Katniss after losing her sister

helps her get to terms with her pain and despair and finally express her repressed feelings, thus initiating the process of healing of the feminine. From that point, she is able to re-establish the damaged relationship with her mother. After losing Prim, she establishes a bond with her, derived from the fact that she understands how loss can affect one's emotions in the same way her mother was affected after losing her husband. Furthermore, she returns to a space connected with nature, the woods.

As in the myth of Innana and Ereshkigal, Katniss needs the assistance of a helper. Like Enki, Peeta is creative and empathetic and does not require Katniss to do anything, but he accompanies her in her mourning. She is no longer the leader of the rebellion nor the protector of her family and has lost the feminine support of her sister.

Golban and Fidan consider Peeta to be Katniss' masculine side or animus and argue that her physical healing of Peeta symbolises her acceptance of the "rules, logic and order." Associating Peeta with the masculine is at least questionable. Most research supports the idea of role reversal in that Katniss represents the typically impulsive masculine character, while Peeta acts as the logical and helpful female character. In fact, she acknowledges that not saving Peeta and going back as a victor would be unacceptable to her community, thus indicating the high importance given to feminine values here represented by Peeta. By saving Peeta she is saving her feminine side from the masculine influence of the Capitol and the maximum expression of the masculine culture of this system: The Hunger Games. On the other hand, based on the obvious fact that Katniss embodies the problem associated with femininity of prioritising others' needs to her own, in saving Peeta, she is saving the only person who sees her needs before she does and can thus help her recover autonomy and balance. In prioritising others to herself she damages and dismisses her need to become herself, to listen to herself. Therefore, after healing her feminine side, she needs to heal her ego, which is part of her masculine side. She does so by recovering her previous life routine: hunting. This choice takes her to nature and represents her self-actualization. However, she sacrifices her childhood and adolescence to satisfy safety and prevent hunger of her sister and mother, thus forgetting about other needs that could help her develop. Thus, once she is given safety and food in a community context and to the extent that she overcomes her grief, she seeks to develop a romantic relationship and have children. According to Murdock, women need a change in society in order to balance different parts of herself. Katniss's wielding of her feminine values against the difficult trials of the Capitol represents the heroic act of a woman trying to change the system to allow for all to be self-actualised. Like the hero, the heroine must overthrow

the system and create the community, which de facto means a colonisation of the Capitol by the districts and thus the cultural assimilation of feminine values of the district by the Capitol.

Beatrice Prior's transfer from Abnegation to Dauntless is different to Katniss' because Tris chooses to move and because of her simplified life in terms of relationships and responsibility. While Katniss' feminine cultural values were her armour during her journey, Beatrice cannot wait until she leaves her culturally feminine society for a culturally masculine one: Dauntless. Beatrice, who now calls herself Tris, feels inadequate in a society that does not allow her to focus on her own needs. By choosing to leave her family to acquire values that involve aggressiveness, vicious competition, and admiration for the strong, she represents the first stage of Murdock's journey of the heroine: the separation from the feminine. At Abnegation, Beatrice admired her parents and brother because they easily forgot about themselves to focus on the other person's feelings and how to comfort them. We see that she has a good rapport with her mother, who cuts her hair, but due to the cultural norms of detachment, they cannot share their emotions to the extent that would allow them to get to know one another better. During the next phase, the assimilation of masculine values at Dauntless takes place: she strives to excel at fighting and strategy skills and deprecates others' weaknesses. This stage also shows the same issue that Katniss experiences: the overachiever syndrome. However, unlike Katniss, Beatrice willingly adapts her values. For example, when she hears her friend Al crying every night in Dauntless because he despises violence, she shows contempt and a rejection of vulnerability, claiming that she cannot stand weakness. This reaction is completely opposite to what her parents taught her she should do.

The trial stage corresponds with the challenges of the initiation process and Tris must excel following the faction's parameters of success. In this case, Tris, has a guide: Tobias. For Tris, Tobias represents success in the masculine world of Dauntless, and she follows his advice as a mentor. In contrast to *The Hunger Games*, Tris does not have to protect anyone but herself, thus fostering her individualism. The extremely competitive behaviour also results in the eventual loss of her only female connection: her friend Christina. Furthermore, she reaches a point where she dismisses Tobias' advice and continuously risks her life.

All her illusory success as a divergent and leader of a rebellion is undone once the truth about the system is discovered. As she discovers the unreal nature of her life and the futility of her struggles, she starts the descent into the Goddess. Tris

questions her identity and realises the waste of lives and effort caused by the system she helped support. Not only did the faction system not satisfy her needs, but it also destroyed her family, depriving her from the feminine culture that she departed from when she left Abnegation.

The reading of her late mother's diary in *Allegiant* represents the healing of the mother-daughter split and gives her a connection with her original values. She learns about her heritage and the strength of her mother, who prioritised her relationship and future family's safety to her professional life as an agent of the Bureau. This process allows her to appreciate the fact that her brother, who nearly had her killed due to the influence of his faction leader, is her only remaining family connection. Her decision to leave behind the aggressive and impulsive behaviours learnt at Dauntless and to risk her life for her brother's and the future of the community exemplify the last stage, the integration of the masculine and the feminine, of leadership and duty on the one hand, and family, compassion and affection on the other hand.

Self-actualization, for Tris, is becoming part of the contribution of her family to the community, the integration of her skills and her desire to honour her family. Much unlike Katniss, Tris strives for the Meaningful Life, as per Seligman's conceptualization (2002), which involves becoming self-transcendent. In this sense, she becomes self-actualised not only through community recognition and the successful application of her skills but also by endorsing self-transcendence as a goal because she prioritises a greater cause and values to her individual needs and desires.

On the one hand, Tris, who begins the novel as idiocentric, completes the cycle by returning to her family's culture, which is feminine and collectivist. After losing both parents, she prioritises her collective (the family) to her personal needs and saves not only her brother but also her community. She protects the weak, in this case notably her brother, who is treated as a traitor and implicitly condemned to death. After satisfying more basic needs such as safety, affiliation, and respect from the community, she fulfils herself by orienting herself towards others, the community in this case. Beatrice's journey from individualism and selfishness to altruism is noteworthy. On the other hand, she contributes to weakening the system that created the experiment and that holds absolute control on the lives of the citizens of the society, allowing for a new, more peaceful and just society to be built. Thus, while Katniss challenges the system and retires to tend to her needs, Tris risks her life to do exactly the same, with the only difference that Tris' decision costs her life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study presents an analysis of the cultures described in *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies in order to aid the discussion of self-actualization of dystopian heroines with the help of Murdock's journey of the heroine. The objective was to offer an alternative and culture-based approach to the controversy regarding these protagonists' agency and their positive or negative influence as role models.

The analysis of the cultural traits of the described societies show that both protagonists move from feminine, collectivist societies to masculine societies that are individualist (The Capitol) or vertically collectivist (Dauntless). Both heroines return either physically or metaphorically to the departure cultures in order to feel complete and fulfilled. In Katniss' case, District 12 without the Capitol's influence represents a haven and a society where family is highly important, and people are free to preserve those values without fearing for their relatives' lives. On the other hand, Tris finally understands the values preached by her faction of origin whereby helping and caring about others is paramount. In both cases, the protagonists acquire the freedom to choose on their future once they complete the journey and without external influences.

While Tris becomes self-actualised by focusing on the greater good —the community— Katniss becomes self-actualised by satisfying hunger, safety and affiliation, that is, love and family, and returning to a natural environment. Both characters allow for the new systems to be built, but Katniss chooses not to become a political figure. Instead, she allows herself to relish in her feminine cultural values through a life centred on her new family and rebuilt district and the pleasures of leisure in nature, rather than on societal demands that caused her to develop the overachiever syndrome. In this regard, she embodies Murdock's idea that for heroines to thrive, there should be a change in the system of values towards cooperation rather than competition and greed. In fact, both heroines bring down the established system and set the ground for a better society to be built.

Finally, future research could apply the analysis of cultural dimensions and Murdock's journey of the heroine to other YA dystopian novels with female protagonists to ascertain whether feminine and collectivist cultures are considered more satisfying for them than masculine cultures. Furthermore, this idea could also be applied to dystopian societies from previous decades to evaluate a possible variation in the perception of the utopian culture.

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