

Social Class and Struggle in The Hunger Games (2012) Movie

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the portrayal of Social Class and Class Struggle in *The Hunger Games* (2012) through a Marxist lens. In *The Hunger Games*, Panem is depicted as having a dual-class social structure. The Capitol is the representative of the bourgeoisie, while District 12 is the representative of the proletariat. The Capitol, as the proprietor of the mode of production, possesses both wealth and power. The objective is to empower them to pursue their desired course of action. In action District 12, the lower classes are characterized by a state of profound destitution. These individuals are constrained in their ability to engage in meaningful work, and as a result, they are compelled to rely on the bourgeoisie for their subsistence. The use of this method qualitative descriptive method to analyze Social Class and Class Struggle in *The Hunger Games* (2012). This approach allows for detailed examination of visual elements, dialogue, character relationships, and narrative structure.

I. Introduction

Marxism, a theoretical framework developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), provides a critical lens for analyzing social structures through the lens of social class and class struggle. As posited by Marx, the prevailing socio-political environment is defined by incessant class struggles, a notion that continues to be instrumental in comprehending contemporary social dynamics. In capitalist societies, this struggle primarily manifest between two classes, the bourgeoisie, who possess the means of production and the proletariat, who possess only their labor power to sell. This exploitative relationship generates surplus value that benefits the ruling class while perpetuating the oppression of workers.[1]

The historical progression of all societies that have been documented is marked by a persistent class struggle. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. [2] This assertion is initially made in the opening of the seminal text, *the Communist Manifesto*, authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Despite the authors' demise hundreds of years ago, their legacy endures. Class conflicts are not merely a phenomenon of the past; they persist in the present. The ongoing conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, or the workers and the landlords, has rendered the issue of class struggle a salient problem in modern life.

Despite the substantial theoretical work on Marxist social class and class struggle, significant gaps remain in understanding how these concept manifest in contemporary popular culture, particularly in dystopian fiction. There is limited analysis of how modern cinematic narratives reflect and critique capitalist structures. Literature can serve as social critique. [3] Literature and film, as vehicle of human thought and social critique, provide distinctive avenues for exploring class dynamics that extend beyond the confines of Marx's predominantly economic focus.

The Hunger Games is a dystopian novel and film that explores class division, resource control, and systemic oppression. [4] *The Hunger Games* (2012) offers an exemplary case study for Marxist analysis due to its explicit portrayal of class division, resource control, and systemic oppression. The film's depiction of Panem's society, in which the Capitol elite exploit the labor and resources of the districts, provides a contemporary visualization of Marxist principles in action. This research aims to bridge the gap between classical Marxist theory and its representation in popular media by analyzing how *The Hunger Games* reflects, reinforces, or challenges traditional class struggle narratives.

The present study aspires to make a contribution to both Marxist literary criticism and film studies by demonstrating how dystopian cinema can serve as a vehicle for understanding persistent class inequalities. Dystopian cinema can serve as a vehicle for understanding persistent class inequalities. [5] By examining the film through a Marxist lens, this analysis will demonstrate how contemporary popular culture both reflects and potentially perpetuates the social class and class struggle. Marx identified over a century ago, providing insight into the enduring relevance of his theoretical framework in modern society

In this research, the researcher chose *The Hunger Games* (2012) by Gary Ross as the object of research. *The Hunger Games* (2012) movie is very relevant and strategic for the analysis of social class and class struggle through a Marxist perspective because it offers a clear and sharp representation of social stratification in a futuristic dystopian setting. *The Hunger Games* popularity as a global blockbuster makes it a perfect example of how popular literature can bring insightful social critique to a mass audience. Critique is a diverse and culturally specific social phenomenon in modernity, influencing history, capitalism, consumerism, media, and popular culture. [6] *The Hunger Games* addresses issues of Empire, border control, politics of fear, human rights, gender, ethnicity, refugees and global inequity, and appeals to a generation disaffected with current societal and political trends. [7] The movie manages to achieve a balance between commercial entertainment and substantial socio-political critique, proving that popular media can serve as a vehicle for progressive ideas and critical reflection on contemporary society.

To support this research, there are many of previous research as a reference of this course. Goziyah and Riezka Amelia (2021), from Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang, examines "Analyses of Capitalism in the film *The Hunger Games*." Published in the Riksa Bahasa Journal, this journal discusses how the capitalist system is represented in the film through the existence of unequal social classes between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Their study emphasizes the Capitol's dominance, reflecting modern feudalism, and how the power structure benefits the upper class. The authors also emphasize the impact of capitalism on individualistic behavior and dehumanization, in which each individual is driven to pursue their own interest at the expense of others. This research is similar to the author's in that both raise the issue of class inequality in *The Hunger Games* film. However, Goziyah and Riezka's research focuses more on analyzing capitalism's ideology, while the author's research uses a Marxist theoretical approach to explore social class and class struggle through narrative characters. The author's research highlights how lower-class resistance to oppression is central to the social conflict in the film.

Navita Fayola Rihangrahit (2022) from Surabaya State University, examines "Representation of Karl Marx's class theory in *The Hunger Games* Movie series." Published in the Kronik Journal. analyzed how the social conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is represented in *The Hunger Games* film series using John Fiske model of semiotics. The study highlights the depiction of social inequality between the Capitol and the districts through visual symbols, including setting, characters, and lighting. The research focuses on how ideological meanings and class realities are conveyed through semiotic elements in the film. This research is similar to the author's in that they both use Karl Marx's class theory and focus on the same object, the movie *The Hunger Games*. However, the main difference lies in the focus of the analysis. While Navita focuses on the visual and symbolic representation of class inequality, the author's research emphasizes the dynamics of class struggle as a historical and political process, how characters like Katniss Everdeen develop class consciousness, incite collective resistance, and challenge the Capitol's capitalist domination.

Fathiyyah Rifda Azizah (2023), from UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, examines “Faction as a Symbol of Social Stratification and Social Discrimination in the Novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth.” This thesis focuses on analyzing how factions in the novel represent social stratification and discrimination, using a qualitative descriptive method. The similarity between this thesis and the author's research is that both explore social divisions and their implications in dystopian narratives. However, the difference lies in the medium and focus, as this thesis examines a novel, while the author's research will focus on a film. The contribution of this thesis is its approach to analyzing social stratification, which can inform the discussion of class struggle in *The Hunger Games*.

The Hunger Games is a dystopian film series about a young girl's resistance against government control in a violent, bloody deathmatch. [8] *The Hunger Games* (2012), directed by Gary Ross and based on Suzanne Collins' best-selling novel, is a film set in a dystopian future. It vividly portrays a society deeply divided by class and power. Set in the fictional nation of Panem, the film explores the stark contrast between the opulent, authoritarian Capitol and the impoverished, exploited districts. *The Hunger Games* film represents two social classes: the government (represented as the Base) and the working classes (represented as the Superstructure), with the working classes being oppressed by the government and reacting through rebellion. [9] The present study aims to analyse how *The Hunger Games* represents class struggle, drawing on Marxist theory to examine the film's depiction of economic inequality, exploitation, and resistance. By exploring the dynamics between the Capitol and the districts, as well as the role of *The Hunger Games* as a tool of oppression, this study seeks to uncover the film's commentary on real-world socio-economic issues and its relevance to contemporary discussions of inequality and social justice.

II. Method

This research will use a qualitative descriptive method to analyze Social class and Class Struggle in *The Hunger Games* (2012). This approach allows for detailed examination of visual elements, dialogue, character relationships, and narrative structure. This study utilizes a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, this approach is characterized by its focus on “the process of research as it unfolds, the detailed description and analysis of the data, and the engagement of the researcher in the study. [10] Creswell emphasizes that qualitative research allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the subject matter, capturing the richness and complexity of social interactions and cultural contexts. The analysis in this study went through several steps. First, scene selection which by determining key moments in *The Hunger Games* that visually and narratively reflect the social class and class struggles of the characters in *The Hunger Games*. The selected scenes focused on the contrast between the Capitol and District. Furthermore, data analysis involved a detailed examination of the visual elements (such as costumes, set design, and color contrast) and narrative structure (including dialogue, character actions, and plot development), dialog, character actions, and plot development). These elements were analyzed to uncover patterns of inequality and oppression in the film. In order to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of this qualitative analysis, several strategies were employed. These strategies included triangulation through the use of multiple theoretical sources and film scenes to support interpretations, researcher reflexivity by acknowledging potential biases in interpreting visual and narrative elements, and systemic coding procedures to maintain consistency in data analysis. The researcher maintained detailed analytical notes throughout the process to enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings

Researchers made observations by watching the movie repeatedly and noting important things in each scene. This research collects data with the techniques of observation method. Researchers observe data from watching the movie repeatedly while noting down crucial scenes. This applied method will give a total understanding of the subject of the film. The data collection process will involve several steps. First, watching the movie to understand the movie. Second, watch the movie using observation method to get more understanding in each scene that depict social class and class struggle. Third, Identify scenes that can be described as social class and class struggle in *The Hunger Games*. Data are taken from the object of the research is Netflix movie *The Hunger Games* (2012). From 60 scenes that the author found in *The Hunger Games* (2012) there are 6 key scenes that author will analyze.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Social Class



Social Class
<div></div> <p><i>Figure 1 Nyman, 2015, 12.32</i></p> <p>Effie: “Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor!”</p> <p>Figure 1 shows The Hunger Games selection scene in district 12, where citizens mostly children and teenager line up in shabby clothes and dull colored garments, watched over by guards in white uniforms symbolizing the power of the Capitol. The dialogue, “Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor!” delivered in a formal and ironic tone by Effie Trinket reflects the deep systemic inequality between the ruling class and oppressed. (see figure 1)</p> <p>The stark contrast between the people and the Capitol apparatus reinforces Karl Marx’s symbolization of class relations, where the people of District 12 represent the proletariat who are forced to submit to the oppressive system created by the bourgeoisie (the Capitol). The narrative and visual elements oppress to maintain the dominance of the upper class, as well as show a form of false consciousness, where people are forced to accept The Hunger Games system as part of their normal lives.</p>
<div></div> <p><i>Figure 2 17.33</i></p> <p>Effie: Here we are, our tributes from District 12!</p> <p>In Figure 2, the scenes depict the moment of the selection of The Hunger Games contestants from District 12, when Effie Trinket cheerfully declares, “Here we are, our tributes from District 12” This scene was chosen because it clearly illustrates the social and cultural inequality that is the focus of the analysis. Visually, there is a stark contrast between Effie’s appearance who is dressed lavish, bright and ornate clothes, Katniss and Peeta who are dressed in simple dull colors and have tense expression. This reflects the class divide between the Capitol’s ruling class and the oppressed people of the districts.</p>

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the bourgeoisie class (Capitol), which holds the power, and the proletariat class (District 12), Who lives under oppression and is forced to submit to an unjust system. The rich class exploits the poor class for their needs and desires, while the proletariat is manipulated by the rich for the cost of labor. [11] Effie’s speech, while sounding friendly, is actually a form of irony that shows how power tries to cover up the cruelty of the system with formal language and entertainment. In this case, the choice of “tribute” is not an honor, but a form of exploitation packaged as tradition. It reflects the dominance of bourgeois ideology, which turn the suffering of the lower classes into a spectacle and a tool of social control. As such, this scene is a clear example of the class inequality and structural oppression that Marx described as the core of social conflict in capitalist society.

Table 2. Class Struggle



Class Struggle
<div></div> <p><i>Figure 3. 6.45-6.56</i></p> <p>Gale: “We could do it, you know? Take off, live in the woods. It’s what we do anyway.”</p> <p>Katniss: “They’d catch us. Cut out our tongues, or worse. We wouldn’t make it five miles.”</p> <p>Figure 3 shows a conversation between Katniss and Gale in the woods, a space that gives them a moment of freedom from the systemic oppression in their district. In the conversation, Gale says, “We could do it, you know? Go away, live in the woods. That’s what we do anyway.” But Katniss replies pessimistically, “They’d catch us. Cut our tongues out, or worse. We wouldn’t make it five miles.” This statement contains a profound meaning about the reality of oppression experienced by the working class in authoritarian social structures like the Capitol. Authoritarian hierarchical structures have resulted in oppression of workers due to the abuse of authority by those in power. [12]</p> <p>The dialogue shows that although the lower classes like Gale are aware of the oppression they experience, the system built by the ruling class is so strong and oppressive that any form of resistance or escape become almost impossible. In Karl Marx’s theory of class struggle, this reflects the condition of alienation, where individuals of the proletariat class are aware of their injustice, but lack the structural power to change the system. The early Marxian categories of alienation, ideology, and proletariat can help understand current forms of epistemic injustice. [13] The natural setting of the forest, which serves as a temporary escape, contrast with the opulent setting of the Capitol. The costumes that Gale and Katniss wear are simple and shabby, illustrating their economic limitations and their status as part of the oppressed class. This dialogue highlights the ideological dominance and oppressive power of the bourgeois class.</p> <div></div>

Figure 4. 46.44

Katniss: "Thank you for your consideration."

In Figure 4, Katniss Everdeen confronts the Capitol judges during the pre-game scoring session. After demonstrating exceptional skill but being overlooked by the judges because she's from district 12, Katniss symbolically "fight" the system by shooting an apple into the mouth of a roast pig, a symbol of the Capitol's luxury and indifference and then sarcastically says, "thank you for your consideration." (see figure 4) Reveals the class conflict between the proletariat (the people of the district) and the bourgeoisie (the Capitol) in a subtle yet powerful way. Katniss' actions are not merely personal, but symbolic of the structural tension between the oppressed and the ruling classes. She uses the survival skills (bow and arrow) she has acquired from the rigors of life in District as a form of symbolic resistance to systemic injustice.

Figure 4 emphasizes the sharp contrast between the dark lighting of the training arena (reflecting pressure and intimidation) and Katniss' calm yet assertive demeanor, reinforcing the narrative of social inequality. The black and red costume she wears denotes her status as a participant in the Capitol controlled game, while her bold actions and dialogue are a form of rebellion against the oppressive social hierarchy. From Karl Marx's perspective, the social system in *The Hunger Games* reflects a capitalist structure in which the ruling class (the Capitol) exploits and objectifies the lower class for entertainment and control. *The Hunger Games* represents the global capitalism system through the way the government of Panem controls the economic, market value, and political sides of the system. [14] Katniss' statement reflects a growing class consciousness, a condition in which individuals from the proletarian class recognize the injustice of the system and begin to challenge it.



Figure 5. 1.43.28

In Figure 5, where Katniss Everdeen gives a three-finger salute to the residents of District 11 after Rue's death, there is a clear manifestation of Karl Marx's concept of class struggle. This scene becomes an important symbol of class resistance, where Katniss's actions, coming from the oppressed, evoke an emotional response and collective solidarity from the citizens of District 11, who are also members of the proletariat. Katniss' three finger gesture, which the masses reciprocate with similar actions, including raising their hands in protest, represents a growing class consciousness. Visual elements such as the simple costumes, the bleak dystopian setting, and the characters' facial expressions and gestures are used to emphasize the deep divide between the oppressed (District) and the rulers (the Capitol). In terms of Marx's theory, this figure 5 reflects the beginning of the class struggle, where the proletariat class begins to realize their position in the social structure and shows the courage to resist against the systemic injustice that has oppressed them.



Figure 6. 2.08.45

Katniss: "Trust me."

In Figure 6, Katniss offers poisonous berries to Peeta while saying, "Trust me" is an important moment that reflect the essence of class struggle in Karl Marx's theoretical framework. In this scene, Katniss and Peeta, who are both from the lower class (District 12), refuse to submit to the capitol's rules that force them to kill each other for the sake of elite entertainment. Their act of choosing the possibility of dying together from poisonous berries is a form of symbolic resistance to the hegemonic power of the Capitol, which manipulates and exploits them as a means of entertainment and social control. In Marx's theory, this action reflects class consciousness and a moment of proletarian rebellion against the bourgeois structure of oppression. Class consciousness, according to Marx, is the point at which the proletariat becomes aware of its collective strength and potential for revolution, leading to communism. [15] Visual elements such as dark colors of the costumes, the blood on Katniss's hands, and the tense and intimate expressions between the characters reinforce the sense of tension and rebellion. The brief dialogue, "Trust me" (see figure 6) implies solidarity and trust between fellow oppressed classes, as well as a turning point in the Capitol dominated power dynamic. Figure 6 serves not only as a narrative climax, but also as a strong political statement against inequality and oppressive power, in line with the core of Marx's theory of class struggle.

IV. Conclusion

The Hunger Games offers a nuanced portrayal of social class dynamics and class struggle through visual and narrative elements, which are particularly evident in characters like Katniss Everdeen. Through a detailed analysis of key scenes and dialogue, this study explores how the film illustrates essential Marxist ideas. The stark economic divide between the opulent Capitol and the impoverished District 12 reflects material class relations. The Capitol's use of spectacle and propaganda illustrates the concept of hegemony, in which the ruling class maintains dominance through cultural control rather than force. The districts acceptance of their exploitation despite the obvious inequality demonstrates false consciousness, in which the oppressed internalize ideologies that work against their own interest. The transformation of human suffering into a commodity for entertainment reveals reification, in which social relationship become objectified as things to be consumed. *The Hunger Games* themselves are the ultimate expression of how capitalism reduces human life to exchange value by turning survival into a marketable spectacle. The film effectively uses visual contrasts, character experiences and narrative elements to highlight the systemic inequalities that characterize Panem's society.

Based on the analysis of *The Hunger Games* using the Marxist theoretical approach, it can be concluded that this work sharply reflects the reality of social inequality and class exploitation that occurs in the fictional society of Panem. The film depicts how the ruling class (Capitol) oppresses and exploits the working class, especially through the mechanism of *The Hunger Games*, which demonstrates power, reinforces hegemony, and normalizes violence against the lower class. Through several characters in *The Hunger Games*, particularly Katniss Everdeen, readers are introduced to the struggle of lower-class individuals against the oppressive system. Katniss symbolize resistance

to the unjust class structure and leads to class consciousness, which is important in Marxist theory. *The Hunger Games* is not only a dystopian story, but also serves as a social critique of economic inequality, ideological domination, and structural oppression that is still relevant in the context of contemporary society.'

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