

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the late 1870s, the Rust Belt was an area of the United States that began to develop as a center of manufacturing, coal production, and steelmaking, spanning several American states, including Ohio (Kropf, 2023). Ohio is a state in the Midwest and Northeast that became a center of American manufacturing. After that, in the 1980s, Feyrer (2007) notes that this industry experienced a rapid decline, leading to problems such as rising unemployment, increasing poverty, urban decay, and, ultimately, population decline. According to Vicari (2024), Ohio's economic and social system was still recovering in 2020. However, Ohio still faces challenges maintaining its economic growth rate, particularly as it transitions from a manufacturing to a modern service economy.

This study will use Marx's (1848) concepts, including historical materialism and class struggle. This is supported by Lukacs' (1923) theory of levels of consciousness, which resonates strongly with the social and economic conditions that shape society. Marx saw capitalism as always driven by capital accumulation and the search for surplus value. According to Nielsen (1985), Marxism views society through the framework of historical materialism, which holds that social structures and human consciousness are fundamentally conditioned by the means of material production.

This whole concept is depicted in *Holler* (2020), directed by Nicole Riegel and released on September 8, 2020, starring Jessica Barden, Becky Ann Baker, Pamela Adlon, etc. This teen life drama movie portrays conditions in Jackson, Ohio, an area generally known for its high poverty rate and dependence on the manufacturing sector, which has now collapsed. Jackson, part of the Rust Belt, has experienced economic decline, forcing the main character, Ruth Avery, to struggle to meet her needs and to feel confused about her future. The film depicts the bitter reality of Ruth, who often leaves school to work to survive. The situation becomes even more bitter when she is accepted into a university outside the city but cannot afford to attend, forcing Ruth and her brother, Blaze, to work at a dangerous junkyard to earn money. The young Ruth must struggle to earn money and choose between supporting her family and leaving to seek a better life at university.

By drawing on this research, the writer aims to examine how *Holler* (2020) portrays the Ohio Rust Belt as left-behind areas and reflect on the economic challenges faced by the lower class in the United States through a Marxist perspective. This study analyzes how the social and economic spaces depicted in the movie represent the impact of deindustrialization on the working class and how these conditions reflect structural inequalities in the American capitalist system. This analysis also shows that films serve not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a depiction that reveals the material consequences of post-industrial capitalism. This study reveals how economically disadvantaged spaces can shape identity and life choices, and how *Holler* (2020) highlights the structural inequalities faced by communities in Ohio's Rust Belt.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this study will be divided into three primary analyses:

1. How does the film *Holler* (2020) represent the conditions of deindustrialization in Ohio's Rust Belt through the framework of historical materialism?
2. How is the working-class struggle depicted in *Holler* (2020), particularly through the experiences of the main characters?
3. How does *Holler* (2020) depict the main characters' individual awareness in relation to the limits of class consciousness?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the following:

1. To analyze how *Holler* (2020) represents the conditions of deindustrialization in Ohio's Rust Belt through the framework of historical materialism.
2. To examine the depiction of working-class struggle in *Holler* (2020) by illustrating the exploitation experienced by the main character through a Marxist analytical framework.
3. To investigate how this film portrays the individual awareness and the limits of class consciousness of the main character in *Holler* (2020).

1.4 Scope of the Study

In this study, the author will examine the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the film *Holler* (2020) to answer three research questions. Intrinsically, the author analyzes the film's narrative structure, cinematography, setting, and characterization, particularly Ruth Avery as the protagonist and the symbolic representation of the Rust Belt environment. Extrinsically, the study focuses on three interrelated areas through a Marxist framework. First, the analysis examines how the film represents the material conditions of deindustrialization in Ohio's Rust Belt through historical materialism, which serves as the analysis's foundation. Second, the study analyzes the film's depiction of working-class struggle, examining how Ruth's experiences reflect the exploitation, economic despair, and lack of possible alternatives faced by the lower classes in post-industrial America. Third, the analysis explores Ruth's individual consciousness of the systemic capitalist exploitation of her circumstances. The author uses Marxist concepts of historical materialism, class struggle, and levels of consciousness to examine how the Rust Belt functions as a disadvantaged region due to the capitalist system, how Ruth's family represents working-class struggle, and how the film depicts the socio-economic realities of contemporary America. This study shows how the movie functions as a cultural medium to portray structural imbalance and as a social critique in contemporary American society.

1.5 Previous Studies

In analyzing the movie, the authors reviewed a few studies relevant to the research. Therefore, the main review will focus on the application of Marxist theory, particularly regarding class struggle and consciousness theory, across some films. The authors found six studies relevant to these two theories.

The first related study is by Felicia Jessica Kusen et al. (2012), entitled *Spectacle, Oppression, and Resistance: Class Struggle in Gladiator II through Marxist Criticism*. This paper analyzes the film *Gladiator II* through Marxist criticism, specifically class struggle theory, which explores structural inequality, labor exploitation, and the arrival of resistance in ancient Roman society. The primary theories employed are the commodification of labor, class consciousness, and historical materialism, as said by Karl Marx. This study revealed that the film serves as a cultural text for critiquing systemic oppression and reflects contemporary issues, including economic decline and corruption.

Based on *The Portrait of the Main Character's Struggle Against Capitalist Society in The Shawshank Redemption Movie by Frank Darabont* by Stephen Ali Barkah et al (2020). In this study, the author reveals how the main character's journey against the capitalist system is applied in prison. This prison presents problems related to class structures, including the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the exploitation of prisoners, and the main character's resistance through his intelligence. The primary theories used are those of class struggle, class consciousness, and alienation, as outlined by Karl Marx, which serve as a critique of capitalism. This study found that the capitalist position, namely prison guards,

triggers oppression of prisoners who are exploited as a means of production with higher value.

Next, there's Shatabdi Mishra's (2022) study, *A Marxist Analysis of Class Consciousness in Bong Joon-ho's Parasite*. This research examines the inequality between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat within a Korean family. The authors examine how the working class attempts to challenge class domination by stealth and disguise. The Marxist theory employed in this study is Georg Lukács's theory of class consciousness. This study argues that the film is a sharp satire on inequality and the abuse of power in a society where the rich grow richer, and the poor grow poorer.

The fourth study, taken from Fajar Bahar, U., & Fajar Basri, U. (2024) work, *Class Struggle Representation by Phineas Taylor Barnum in the Greatest Showman Movie*, examines the character of Phineas Taylor Barnum, a lower-class worker who built his business from the ground up amidst the dominance of the established American elite in the 19th century. The class struggle theory employed is French and Raven's (1959) five bases of power, which are further divided into manifestations of class struggle. This film depicts Barnum's struggle against elite power and dependence on expert power. This struggle is viewed from economic, social, and political perspectives.

More is *Class Struggle and Systematic Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of Social Inequality in "The Purge: Anarchy" (2014)* by Ravinda Syaiful Bustammi and Teguh Kasrabowo (2025). This work examines how class struggles and systematic exploitation function as social control in America, drawing on a

dystopian film theme. The concepts of class struggle and systematic exploitation are employed to support Marxist literary criticism in this film, which depicts character conflict, class divisions within the narrative, and reveals the mechanisms of institutional oppression. Systematic exploitation is illustrated through the power dynamics between social classes and government institutions that facilitate class-based violence.

The final study is *Social Class and Struggle in The Hunger Games (2012) Movie* by Fahmi Haidar Al Kahfi et al. (2025). This paper examines the representation of social class and class struggle in *The Hunger Games (2012)*, set in a country governed by a highly unequal social structure in which capitalist centers exploit poor districts. This research focuses on reflecting the real-world conflict between those in power and the oppressed. This study uses Marxist literary criticism, focusing on Karl Marx's theory of social class and class struggle. The researchers found that this film serves as a medium for criticizing the structure of capitalist society, which creates extreme inequality, and how this oppression continues to drive revolution.

The research conducted by this author is different from the six previous studies. Although this study shares the same subject as some of the studies mentioned above, the object of study is very different: Nicole Riegel's film *Holler (2020)*. While previous Marxist film studies predominantly emphasize overt class conflict and the emergence of class consciousness, limited attention has been given to cinematic representations of constrained agency and fragmented consciousness in post-industrial settings. *Holler (2020)* provides a distinct case by portraying class

struggle without collective resistance, thereby enabling an examination of the limits of class consciousness within contemporary capitalism. This study focuses on the journey of the main character, representing the lower class in a disadvantaged region of America, who must struggle to survive under unequal capitalism through a Marxist lens.

1.6 Method of the Study

1.6.1 Method of Research

This study will be conducted using a methodological approach based on a literature review. There are two sources of data: primary and secondary. Primary data is derived from the film *Holler* (2020) by Nicole Riegel. Secondary data is drawn from journals, books, and papers relevant to the topic.

1.6.2 Method of Approach

In analyzing the intrinsic elements of the film *Holler* (2020), the author employs M.H. Abrams' objective approach in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), which views a work of art as isolated from external factors. Consequently, the analysis treats the film as a self-contained entity and evaluates it according to criteria intrinsic to its existence. Furthermore, the author draws on the work of David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith in their book *Film Art: An Introduction* (2020) to analyze the cinematic elements that interact to create a film's meaning.

Moreover, in the context of extrinsic elements, the author will analyze class struggle and self-consciousness in the life of the main character in the film *Holler* (2020), set in a deindustrialized, underdeveloped region of America. The writer employs a Marxist approach to examine how the struggles of the working class and the emergence of individual consciousness are depicted. Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism will serve as the foundation for analyzing the background of the character's life in the former industrial region. Furthermore, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' theory of class struggle will be used to analyze the main character's working-class life in greater depth. Additionally, George Lukács' theory of self-consciousness will be applied to support the analysis of the main character's self-awareness. The author adopts a perspective that views these situations and conditions as the result of unequal capitalism in America. The author will use this approach to analyze the film *Holler* (2020) and how it represents the underdeveloped regions of modern America.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this thesis provides the background of the study, the research problem, the objectives of the study, previous studies, the scope of the study, the methods of the study, and the organization of the writing.

CHAPTER II INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter discusses the intrinsic theoretical framework. This chapter examines narrative elements and cinematography. In the narrative elements section, the author explains the film's theme, plot, characters, and setting. In the

cinematography section, the author provides a general definition and explains the imagery and sound used in the film.

CHAPTER III EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the author explains several expert theories that correlate with Marxism, forming the basis for analyzing this film. Furthermore, the researcher identifies extrinsic elements that shape the movie's overall story.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fourth chapter of this research presents the results and discusses the main findings of the thesis.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this thesis will discuss the conclusions drawn from the research.

