

SCORCH: A Screenplay Exploring the Effects of Capitalism to the Working People and Environment in a Dystopian World

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ABSTRACT

The planet is currently facing a crisis, and capitalism plays a part in it as it affects both the workers and the provider, nature. This paper aims to show the effects of capitalism to the working people and environment in a dystopian world where nature is on the brink of destruction, using screenplay as the creative medium, and dystopian genre. This creative work uses the theories of ecological Marxism and class struggle. Annie, an epitome of the working people in *Outside*, has to endure the exhaustion as capitalism run by the ruler of *Inside* leads to long working hours and product alienation, malnutrition due to the lack of food and water, as well as anxiety as her sister falls sick. The intense capitalistic production leads to resource depletion in the form of drought as well as the scorching heat. To make things worse, the *Outside* people are being treated unjustly, causing mass action.

Keywords: capitalism, dystopian, environment, injustice, screenplay

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the effects of capitalism on the working class as well as the environment. Capitalism refers to an economic system in which private owners freely determine prices in markets to best suit society's interests and own and control property according to their interests (Jahan & Mahmud, 2015). Workers, under capitalism, have the freedom to refuse employment and cannot be forced to work. However, the lack of means of production or resources leaves them with no other choice but to work to survive. Capitalists do own workers in a sense that they still have power over the workers' life. They possess what the workers need and dictate the workers' actions, ensuring the workers serve their interests (Arnold, 2016).

Uncontrolled capitalism in countries like the United States has caused damage on the planet like never before. Capitalism resulted in global warming, immense resource depletion, ecological degradation, as well as wealth inequality and labor exploitation (Rehman, 2022). The unsustainable practices of companies exploiting our resources are one of the causes of this planet's crisis condition. A research on capitalist companies used ESG (Environmental, Societal, and Corporate Governance) to determine a corporation's environmental, social, and corporate ethics (Rehman, 2022). The ranking uses ESG-risk score, and ESG-risk is defined as the risk to a company's economic value from the poor management of ESG factors. The ranking showed that the most capitalist and unsustainable companies are dominated by energy companies, such as oil, gas, and coal-based companies.

Despite the impact these companies have on our planet, they continue to exploit our resources and the practice is quite controversial in the eyes of environmentalism and climate change issues. Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperature and weather patterns (United Nations, n.d.). National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate also explained that there is an increase in global average surface temperature by roughly 1°C that has occurred since the pre-industrial era (1880-1900) (Lindsey & Dahlman, 2023). If we

fail to limit the increase before it reaches 1.5°C or 2°C, the planet will be hit with many disasters, such as extreme heat, drought, rising sea levels and melting glaciers, declining biodiversity, as well as health problems (Lieberman, 2021).

Despite the data presented and the undeniable effects of climate change, these energy companies fail to do what is necessary to help stop more damage being done to our planet. One company is even claimed to have committed to net-zero emission by 2050, but they also accelerate the exploration of additional resources and plan to grow their fossil fuel business by 20% in the coming years (Rehman, 2022). This shows that some companies may not care about making a positive change in the way they do their business, but they only aim for more profit. Capitalism not only causes environmental damage but also leads to income inequality. A recent study analyzing data from the 18th century reveals that the rate of return on investments often surpasses overall economic growth in contemporary economies. If this trend continues, the wealth of capital owners will increase more rapidly than wages. For example, in 2021, the wealth of the top 1% grew by 27%, while the American middle class saw a 26.6% decrease in their wealth (Rehman, 2022). In relation to economic inequality and climate change, poorer individuals are deemed to be more susceptible to be harmed by climate change for a variety of reasons, namely the lack of assets to help them recover from climate shocks and stresses (e.g., droughts, hurricanes, and floods) and their incomes that may depend on climate sensitive sectors (e.g., agriculture, forestry, fishing, pastoralism) or on low-paying jobs that may not protect them against climate-related employment disruptions (Leichenko & Silva, 2014).

This creative work comes in the form of a screenplay with a dystopian genre. Dystopia is not merely depicting what the future can be but also what can be felt today, exaggerated with some kind of dream or nightmare, hence it can also be considered a kind of surrealism (Robinson, 2020). Fear is expressed in dystopia as it is the expression of “the feeling of detachment and helplessness” (Robinson, 2020). The aim is to not only show what our future will look like but also to cause fear in the audience. Some of the dystopian works that influence this thesis include *The 5th Wave* (Blakeson, 2016), *The Hunger Games* series (Lawrence & Ross, 2012-2015), *In Time* (Niccol, 2011), as well as *Snowpiercer* (Bong, 2012).

To write a quality screenplay, we conduct secondary research on types of injustice and study dystopian works like *Snowpiercer* (Bong, 2012) and *In Time* (Niccol, 2011) for techniques. We also researched ecological Marxism, a theory that combines both ecocriticism, first coined by William H. Rueckert, as well as Marxism by Karl Marx. The combination of the theories proves to be suitable for designing this creative work as it discusses both economic and environmental issues. This creative work also uses the theory of class struggle to explore how people react to the hardship caused by capitalism.

In this creative work, we explore the effects of capitalism on the working class, the environment, as well as how people react to the injustice brought by the opposing side of the society, and we use the theories of ecological Marxism and class struggle. Marxism is closely related to capitalism. In capitalistic practice, those who own properties, the ones who control the means of production, are referred to as the bourgeoisie. Proletariat, on the other hand, are the workers controlled by the bourgeoisie, the ones who do labor to produce for the bourgeoisie's wealth (Dobie, 2011). Researchers have documented harmful effects of capitalism on the mental health and well-being of the working class since the beginning of the industrial revolution (Eisenberg-Guyot & Prins, 2022).

Friedrich Engels, a German philosopher, observed that laborers in industrial cities had lower life expectancy and higher mortality rates due to harsh working conditions with long hours. He argued that capitalist industrialization and urbanization degraded workers' social, work, and living conditions, causing boredom and depression among factory laborers due to

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repetitive, uncreative tasks (Eisenberg-Guyot & Prins, 2022). Marx and Engels highlighted how capitalism exploited women and children, causing health issues, namely exhaustion, malnutrition, respiratory diseases, injuries, and even premature death. They noted that capitalism leads to isolation and anxiety by depriving workers of meaningful work and leisure, neglecting their overall well-being, the same source explained. Furthermore, in capitalist society, workers do not own the products of their labor, resulting in a sense of alienation. This alienation occurs as workers' creative power and efforts are absorbed into the objects they produce, which are controlled by capitalists. Consequently, workers receive no personal satisfaction or sense of achievement from their labor, only monetary compensation (Yuill, 2005).

According to ecological Marxism, everything is connected, including economy and environment. Capitalist production advances the techniques and collaborative aspects of the social production process but simultaneously undermines the original sources of wealth—the land and the laborer. However, due to historical circumstances, Marx was largely unaware of ecology as a research discipline and the ecological crises, even though some of the issues now labeled as ecological were part of the proletarian hardships he astutely observed and described, such as malnutrition, environmental pollution, noise, deteriorating surroundings, and overpopulation (Skirbekk, 1994). Furthermore, ecological problems can be categorized into pollution, depletion of (renewable and non-renewable) resources, as well as population growth (Grundmann, 1991).

To include class struggle, we considered three kinds of class struggle, namely economic, ideological, and political struggle. The economic struggle happens because the working class demands for “better terms in the sale of their labor power” to the employers. They demand for a better living and working condition (Harnecker, 1981). Ideological struggle is referred to as a conflict between the ideologies of the exploited and exploiting classes, and it may take the form of television broadcasting of revolutionary orientation. As for political struggle, it involves the clash between classes as they compete for political power, aiming to seize control of state authority, and it may take the form of armed insurrection and popular war (Harnecker, 1981).

Considering all the theoretical framework, we designed a dystopian story of an Indonesian society in 2108, when the planet is scorching and damaged, where society is divided into two: the Inside and the Outside. The Inside is the bourgeoisie society; a place where wealthy people reside. The Outside, however, is the society of workers. In that area, a rare material was found, Eternesium, a versatile steel-like material. They begin exporting it to interested markets. Annie, the main character, is a part of the Outside where she lives with her sister, Grace. They have to work to survive because everything is rationed. When the government, led by Agung, scores an alliance with another country for more barter, Eternesium production is intensified, resulting in longer working hours. Annie has to suffer exhaustion because of that plus anxiety when her sister falls ill, rendering Annie helpless as the system prevents her from doing so. Every day, workers have sweat dripping down their foreheads as the scorching heat becomes too much to bear. If that is not bad enough, there happens to be a drought, affecting both sides of the society, but the Outside has to endure so much more with further ration on food and water. To make things worse, the Inside still manages to take their supply, and more often than not, with violence. Annie starts to feel overwhelmed, and it makes her join a rebel group to change the corrupt system. More and more Outside people also wish to participate in the mass action, striving for a change.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

Premise

When the nature is on the brink of destruction due to the continuous exploitation stemming from the capitalistic greed, an innocent, young woman, Annie, is forced to live a terrible life in the Outside as the people in the Inside live comfortably while the Outside people fear for their lives as the nature keeps hitting them with unexpected disasters that eventually push them to fight the injustice against the oppressive, downright cruel, and horrible capitalist Inside.

Creative Principle

Capitalizing on repetitive scenes, voice over, and montages, we want to show the protagonist's struggles she faces as days go by as a worker in a capitalistic society and the effects of the unexpected events caused by the damaged environment as well as the injustice done to her people that leads to mass action.

Pitch

- a. In a world controlled by capitalism and suffering from environmental damage, Annie lives in Outside with her sister, struggling to survive and provide for themselves while facing government oppression, especially when she wants to cure her ill sister but the system prevents her from doing so.
- b. The production demand challenges the survival of Annie and the Outside people, as Inside fails to help them when nature hits them with climatic events which causes them to see the corrupted system and plan to change it by forming a rebel group.
- c. When the rebel group can no longer tolerate the injustice and is almost ready to execute their plan, a disaster strikes and acts as an opening for Annie to change the system and she succeeds in changing it piece by piece despite previous struggles.

Synopsis

Capitalism and nature exploration persists causing the world to scorch. Annie, a young woman, lives in The Outside, working and providing for Inside and its ruler, Agung, by producing a rare material called Eternisium to be exported. The problems start to appear when Annie's sister falls ill and the production is intensified to fulfill a new barter deal, but the Outside people are lacking resources and the Inside still take more of them. The Outside are treated unjustly, and they cannot take it anymore, hence a rebel group is formed to fix the system; a group whose members include Indah, Steven, and Markus, an Insider who turns sympathetic to the Outsiders' plight; a group which Annie joins. The story comes into climax as a disaster strikes, leaving both classes overwhelmed, and the Outside takes this opportunity to execute their infiltration plan. Annie finds a way in. Their plan is cut short, but another comes up. Agung is captured, the system has gradual changes, and Annie can once again smile.

Characters

Main character:

- Anita (Annie) Santoso
Age: 18 years old

Annie is the oldest daughter of two. She is dark haired, but becomes a shade of reddish brown when the sun shines on her. She is very mature and nurturing. She works at the Eternesium facility, and she always does whatever she is told and works well. She is an optimistic person, most of the time, and she keeps trying to see the brighter side of things. She is the sister, as well as the mother figure of Grace. She takes care of people and always puts everyone first before her. It pains her to see her sister having to go through all of the pain, and she wishes she can take that pain and make it hers. She wants nothing more than to give her

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family the best that she can find in the already damaged world, so she tries to do whatever she is told and stay out of trouble as much as possible. As the problems start to get worse, Annie becomes slightly different. Grace has fallen ill, yet no help is done to heal her. Annie notices how unfair they have been treated and tries to stop it, resulting in her getting hurt. When she is approached by someone who also notices the injustice, Annie becomes hopeful, inspired. She is determined to change the corrupted system.

- Steven Hartanto

Age: 19 years old

Steven is a tall, lean man with dark brown hair. He is sympathetic, charismatic, loyal, as well as easy going. He recently befriends Annie as they meet at work as he helps Annie. They soon become close friends, more platonic than romantic kind of close friends. Steven is an orphan so he lives alone. His mother died due to the corrupted system at the hospital in which she was expecting to get a heart transplant. He also likes to help people, and that is one of the reasons why he and Annie bond so quickly. He notices what is truly happening between both societies, and he believes that the system must change. He knows how much it hurt when her mother failed to get the surgery due to the corrupted system, so he does not want people to go through it. He is the kind of person who observes and thinks about what he is doing, and he does not like to act carelessly. He is also an excellent judge of character, and he sees the potential in Annie.

Supporting Characters:

- Grace Santoso

Age: 13 years old

Grace is the younger sister. She is supposed to be going to school, but the Inside has made a new law that children over the age of 12 must work. She works in the field, mostly collecting and planting food. She is short-haired because her face is better framed that way. She has a contagious smile and is usually cheerful. Though, she has a hard time adjusting to the environment conditions. She is having trouble sleeping at night due to the heat. Moreover, working in the field increases the risk of getting diseases. She suffers from leptospirosis. She wants to stay strong but her body gives up. Luckily, she still manages to keep her smile because she does not want her family to worry.

- Indah

Age: 21 years old

Indah is the talker in the rebel group. She manages everything, yet she does not want to be called a leader. She is clear and decisive; she knows what she wants. She does not like to chit-chat as she is more straightforward. She has a kind heart but does not like to show it as she thinks it may show her weakness that can lead to people taking advantage of her. Although she is relatively still young, she is far more mature than people slightly older than her.

- Agung Bangkara

Age: 59 years old

Agung is the leader of the society, and he lives in the Inside. He is proud of what society has become. He is the person behind the New Era. The reason he stepped up to create the New Era is because he lost someone important to him, the previous leader, suspectedly because of a rebel attack. He made a promise to make the world a better place. He promised to protect and take care of his people, the important people. He created the New Era to ensure the safety of his people, and to continue the legacy. He also has plans to make his people, the Inside, thrive because he feels as though he owes that to the previous leader. Because he scores an alliance with Egron to export Eternesium, he becomes determined to intensify the production. He wants to meet the demands and he does what is possible to make that happen. He is not about to let the Outside ruin the chance of getting more, both alliances with other countries and profit in a way. Agung has a calm nature and he does not rush. Though, when provoked, he may get triggered and eventually explode.

- Markus

Age: 40 years old

Markus is the one in charge of the Outside. He is an Inside, but he sees the problem with the current system. He feels troubled because of his origin and he feels that he may not be accepted by the Outside people. He is soft, yet firm. He thinks about the others and does not base his actions solely on what will benefit him the most. He cares and listens, which may make him a better leader than Agung. He is a rule-follower at first, but he turns rebel as he cannot see another injustice being done to the innocent people of Outside.

Conflict

For the conflict, we incorporate three which include man vs. nature, man vs. society conflicts, as well as man vs. man. The term man versus nature refers to a conflicting state that exists between humans and their environment. Man fights nature to overcome and master it in situations caused by natural forces like desertification, hurricanes, rainstorms, and global warming, among others (Lamb, 2008 as cited in Folarin, 2015). Set in a nearly destroyed world due to climate change, Annie has to overcome the heat and the other disasters that follow. The environment acts as a catalyst to the mountains of problems the people already have with the opposing society.

Furthermore, the man versus society and man versus man conflicts are intertwined in this creative work. Man versus society conflict occurs when a person opposes an institution or set of customs that were created by man. These could include slavery, violations of human rights, and many more (Morell, 2009 as cited in Folarin, 2015). Meanwhile, man versus man conflict may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more persons (Nikolajeva, 2005 as cited in Folarin, 2015). This type of conflict does not always translate to the physical fight between people, but the feeling of hatred towards each other already underscores conflict (Folarin, 2015). As the story goes, Annie realizes that this system is faulty and unjust, and she wishes to change that. She feels betrayed by how she, along with the rest of the Outside people, live in poverty and danger, while the Inside people continue to take from them when they have nothing left. Annie is angry at how the other side of society fails to help the less unfortunate ones due to the corrupt system that they have; a system that benefits one and costs the other. This conflict brings her face to face with Agung, the leader of the society.

CONCLUSION

This paper designs a creative work exploring capitalism's effects on the working class and the environment, aiming to raise awareness about its toll on environmental problems and people's wellbeing. Set in a dystopian not-too-distant future, it highlights the urgency of these issues. The characters, mainly young adults, symbolize the future generation's struggle. The story follows Annie, a laborer in harsh conditions, working long hours in extreme heat with insufficient food and water. Her sister's illness and lack of medical care add to her stress. Capitalism's impact is shown through Annie's physical and mental decline. The environment in which Annie lives is also depicted as near destruction, with resource depletion and ecological problems. The working class lives in poor conditions, while the rich enjoy comfort. The rich take more and more from the poor, leaving the poor with little to nothing but suffering and anger. Annie's growing anger and sense of justice lead her to join a rebel group fighting the oppressive system. Through Annie's journey, the story illustrates how the working class reacts to injustice, ultimately leading to a successful revolt and hope for a better future.

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